

“Lydia: Paul’s Cosmopolitan Hostess is a highly readable, comprehensive, and absorbing introduction to a fascinating figure within the community supporting Paul. This small jewel of a book provides substantial access to the most recent research into the social web of relations that characterized the Pauline network, focusing in particular on the roles women could and did play, and the shape of the domestic and public spaces they inhabited. Ascough does an excellent job of presenting multiple sources and background information, thus allowing readers to come to their own conclusions. This book is a marvelous addition to the study of Paul and will be an essential resource in a variety of contexts where people are studying Paul and the world he inhabited.”

—*Mary E. Hess*
Associate Professor of Educational Leadership
Luther Seminary
St. Paul, MN

“Richard Ascough’s *Lydia* is a marvelous work of erudition and clarity, which uses the little-known figure of Lydia to elaborate important aspects of the social world of the earliest Jesus movement. We learn about mobility, life in a Roman colony, Mediterranean family structures, slavery, the nature of marriage, civic values, private patronage, household piety, and the public and private roles of women. Ascough deftly sketches the Mediterranean world of ancient Christianity through the eyes of one woman of Philippi.”

—*John S. Kloppenborg*
Professor and Chair
Department & Centre for the Study of Religion
University of Toronto

“Richard Ascough’s in-depth knowledge of history and Scripture guide his disciplined imagination to create a thick description of the woman named Lydia. Her two cameo appearances in the Acts of the Apostles leave contemporary readers yearning for more. Readers of *Lydia: Paul’s Cosmopolitan Hostess* will come away with a focused and detailed rendering of first-century lifeways in Philippi, the place of women within the world of the Roman Empire, and an appreciation of how the message of Jesus took hold and grew. Lydia, thanks to Ascough’s careful research and reading, emerges as a deeply spiritual and worldly wise figure relevant to 21st-century women and men. This book will intrigue all sensitive and curious readers of the New Testament.”

—*Dr. Peter Gilmour*
Professor Emeritus
Loyola University
Institute of Pastoral Studies

Paul's Social Network: Brothers and Sisters in Faith

Bruce J. Malina, Series Editor

Lydia

Paul's Cosmopolitan Hostess

Richard S. Ascough



A Michael Glazier Book

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PREFACE

Human beings are embedded in a set of social relations. A social network is one way of conceiving that set of social relations in terms of a number of persons connected to one another by varying degrees of relatedness. In the early Jesus group documents featuring Paul and coworkers, it takes little effort to envision the apostle's collection of friends and friends of friends that is the Pauline network.

This set of brief books consists of a description of some of the significant persons who constituted the Pauline network. For Christians of the Western tradition, these persons are significant ancestors in faith. While each of them is worth knowing by themselves, it is largely because of their standing within that web of social relations woven about and around Paul that they are of lasting interest. Through this series we hope to come to know those persons in ways befitting their first-century Mediterranean culture.

Bruce J. Malina
Creighton University
Series Editor

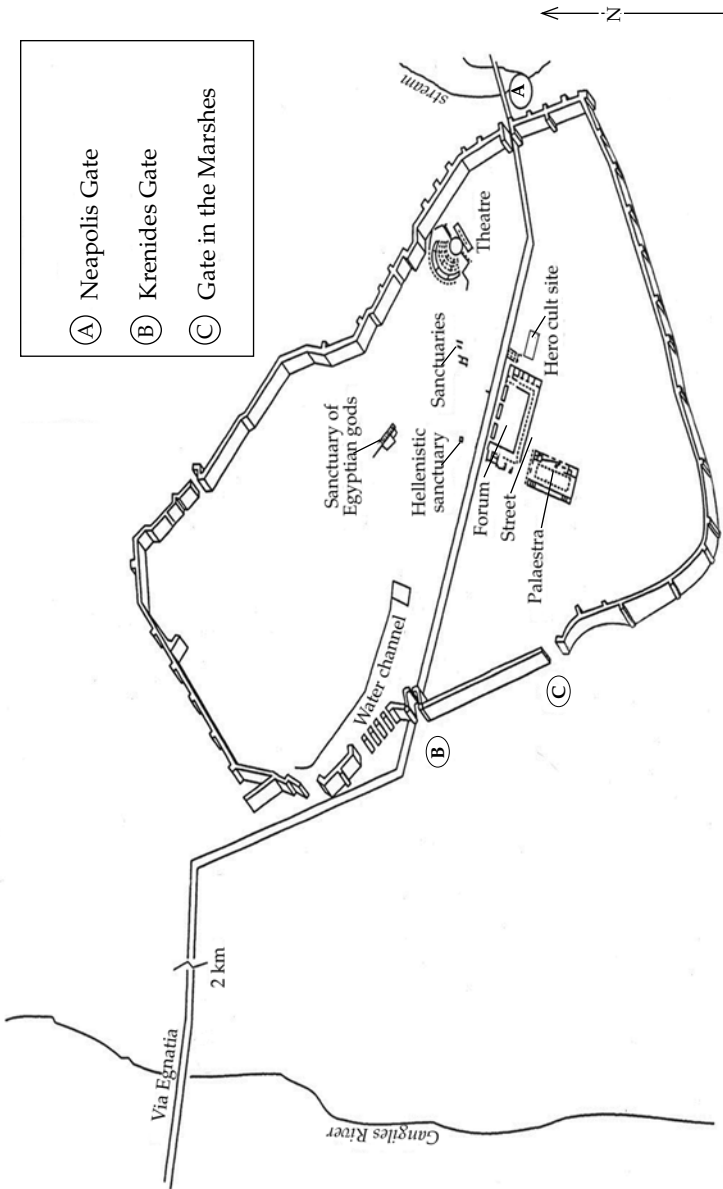


Figure 1. Plan of Philippi

INTRODUCTION

Who Is Lydia?

Not much is known about Lydia beyond what Luke narrates in three verses—Acts 16:14-15, 40. She appears nowhere else in the New Testament, not even a mention in the letter Paul sent to Philippi, the urban center in which Lydia was the first to come to believe in Jesus. Unlike the case of other women in the New Testament, women such as Mary Magdalene and Elizabeth, the later traditions about Lydia are few. Even the rather hefty third edition of *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* has no entry on “Lydia,” which is indicative of the marginalization of the role she played. Yet Lydia was the host and patron of the first community of Jesus followers established in the land mass that would later be known as Europe, and she was the nexus for the network of Jesus believers in and around Philippi. Paul’s letter to the Philippians suggests that even at its early stages this Jesus group was a vibrant and thriving community, one that filled Paul with joy (Phil 1:3-4; 4:1). Without Lydia there may well have been no Philippian Jesus community. She was a key player in Paul’s social network—one of the pivotal sisters in the faith.

Luke's Narrative

Luke's account of the travels of the change agents responsible for the formation of early Jesus groups places Paul and Silas in the Roman province of Macedonia during Paul's second journey. Philippi became their gateway into Macedonia (the northern region of modern Greece), having already traveled through Galatia and Asia Minor (located in the central and western regions of modern-day Turkey). They had attempted to go north to the province of Bithynia, on the coast of the Black Sea, but were prevented by "the Spirit of Jesus" (Acts 16:7), who apparently had other plans. Having rerouted to the coastal city of Troas in the northwest of Asia Minor, Paul lay down for a restful night. It was not to be. Luke writes, "During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us'" (Acts 16:9). In the morning new plans were laid, and the traveling companions set sail across the top of the Aegean Sea.

At this point in Luke's narrative we find a grammatical oddity. The narrator's voice switches suddenly from the third person ("*they* did such-and-such") to the first person ("*we* did such-and-such"). This is the first of several passages narrated in the first person, which are known as the "we passages." Curiously, the first of these passages begins with the travelers leaving Troas and sailing for Philippi (Acts 16:11). It concludes just as suddenly following the story of Lydia and at the opening of a story about a demon-possessed slave girl (Acts 16:17). The next "we passage" occurs some chapters later but is again associated with Troas and Philippi: "They went ahead and were waiting for us in Troas; but we sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we joined them in Troas, where we stayed for seven days" (Acts 20:5-6). From here the narrative remains in the first person for much, but not all, of the voyage by ship along the coast of Asia Minor and across the Mediterranean to Jerusalem (Acts 10:5-15; 21:1-18), switching back to third person until Paul is sent to Rome in chains and is again

joined by our unnamed “we” narrator, who experiences with Paul the shipwreck on Malta (Acts 27:1–28:16).

We do not want to pause too long here for lessons in grammar or a full discussion of the peculiarities of the narrative styles of ancient literary genres. For our purposes, however, it is well worth noting that the first-person narration of the story of Lydia has raised the possibility for some scholars that an eyewitness was present to observe, and later record, the events. Some suggest it was the writer of Acts himself, which later tradition associates with the name “Luke.” Certainly the writer of Acts has no problem injecting his own voice into his document since he does so in Acts 1:1 and in Luke 1:3. Others have suggested that the writer of Acts was not himself present but had access to some source material written by someone who was—a distinct possibility since Luke admits to the use of sources for his two-volume work (Luke 1:1-4; cf. Acts 1:1). Still others discount the eyewitness nature of the narratives, attributing the use of the first person to Luke’s creative writing style.

I find myself drawn to the conclusion that Luke is using a first-person source in these passages. Although in modern writings we would expect the use of sources to be properly footnoted, this was not the case in antiquity, and Luke’s switch of pronoun is sufficient to indicate that a source has been incorporated into the narrative. Nevertheless, like many other students of the New Testament, I do not think Luke has used this source without at least some heavy-handed editing. When we compare Luke’s narrative of Jesus in the gospel to one of Luke’s primary sources, the Gospel of Mark, we find a writer who is willing to follow his source for many of the details but to adjust, nuance, delete, and supplement them when it becomes necessary, usually in order to present more clearly Luke’s own theological and social concerns. There is no reason to expect he has done any differently in writing Acts, although we do not, unfortunately, have any independent sources with which to compare it. Modern scholars are left with the task of sorting out what in Acts comes from the sources and traditions at Luke’s disposal, what is from

the hand of Luke (and thus is “redactional”), and what, if anything, is historical.¹ The framework of Acts is secondary and Luke has compressed into one account incidents that may have happened on separate visits to a city, yet many of the incidents themselves may reflect reliable data. It remains to be seen what if anything can be viewed as reliable data for Lydia, and this will occupy some of our attention in the following chapters. First, however, we must look briefly at the passage itself.

In Acts 16:11-15 Luke narrates the travel of Paul and his cohort to Philippi and their subsequent encounter with a group of women gathered at a riverside outside one of the gates of Philippi:

We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.” And she prevailed upon us.

There then intervenes a rather lengthy narrative in which Paul and Silas run afoul of a slave owner, who has them incarcerated. A well-timed earthquake, seemingly localized just at the jailer’s house-jail, results in the two companions gaining their freedom. At this point, Luke returns ever so briefly to Lydia: “After leaving the prison they went to Lydia’s home; and when they had seen and encouraged the brothers and sisters there, they departed” (Acts 16:40).

A number of elements of Lydia’s background and social position can be gleaned from both the explicit and implicit information Luke provides in the narrative of Acts:

- Her name is Lydia.
- She is a businesswoman—a dealer in cloth dyed purple and/or purple dye itself.²
- She comes from the city of Thyatira (which is in Asia Minor).
- She owns a house in Philippi.
- She has oversight of a household.
- She has particular cultic commitments as a “worshiper of God.”
- She gathers, perhaps regularly, with other women.
- Their gathering takes place at a “place of prayer” on a riverbank.

As Paul and his companions sit and talk with the women, Lydia comes to believe in Jesus and is baptized. Here we learn a little bit more about Lydia:

- She is receptive to the spiritual realm.
- She is hospitable.
- She opens her home as a meeting place for others.

The details given for Lydia are in stark contrast to Luke’s description of Paul’s work in the other major Macedonian cities of Thessalonica and Berea (Acts 17:1-17), suggesting that for Philippi there is good reason to trust the veracity of the account. Nevertheless, Luke’s proclivity for presenting men and women of substance as founding members of Jesus groups means this presentation of Lydia must be used with caution.

We can proceed based on the evidence in Acts by assuming that the foundation of the Philippian Jesus group might well have been a house-based group, the patron of which was an independent businesswoman named Lydia. Nevertheless, each

aspect as presented in the above list is not without challenging interpretive problems and deserves close study, which will be our task in the remainder of this book. Two other issues bear initial comment, however. The first issue concerns Paul's role in the passage, since it is central to Luke's narrative, although of only passing interest to us in our study of Lydia. As is the case throughout Acts, Paul functions in the Lydia story as a change agent—a person who communicates a message about an innovative social movement or product and seeks to influence others toward adopting this innovation. Only some of the seven typical tasks of a change agent are present in the story, but others are implicit.³ As a change agent Paul needs to influence the leadership of the riverside meeting toward accepting the need for change, which is likely why Lydia is singled out to become the first adopter. He also must establish a relationship of information exchange, which again Paul does up front, not by preaching, but by sitting down alongside the gathered women and speaking with them (Acts 16:13). As a change agent Paul must create cognitive dissonance between the present beliefs and practices of the women and their desire for a particular kind of engagement with the divine realm. This, in turn, creates a desire for change. In the Acts narrative, however, credit for this task is shared between Paul and God, who “opened her [Lydia's] heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul” (Acts 16:14). This eagerness is translated into action when Lydia chooses baptism for herself and her household as a symbolic ritual of change. Before change agents can move on to new areas they must ensure that the new behaviors of their clients have been firmly grounded, which is why Paul returns to Lydia's house to see and encourage the brothers and sisters there (Acts 16:40). Once assured, Paul departs east toward Thessalonica.

The second issue needing comment concerns Lydia's name. Some scholars suggest that the name “Lydia” may be an ethnic appellation that designates her place of origin, as Luke indicates she was originally from Thyatira, a city in the area called Lydia. If it is an ethnic appellation it would indicate that at one time

Lydia was a slave who had been freed. A number of inscriptions suggesting that several people involved in the purple trade were ex-slaves might imply that she was herself a freed slave. However, two first- or second-century inscriptions attest to women of status who used the name Lydia, making the assumption of former servile status somewhat conjectural. Her status as a free person, either freeborn or freed slave, is indicated by her control over a household and a house. At the same time, it is doubtful that Lydia was a Roman citizen, as she is associated with her work, rather than the name of her family.⁴

Civic Contexts

At the beginning of this introduction we noted some key issues in coming to know Lydia and the help that can be offered by a close examination of Acts using the tools that come from a method called historical criticism. This method has served scholars well for generations and has led, and continues to lead, to some interesting and stimulating results. Nevertheless, the range of questions it can answer and conclusions it can draw is limited, and new methods have been developed that broaden our understanding of New Testament documents. Different methods yield different results. As the human sciences have developed in disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and psychology, New Testament scholars have come to recognize that the documents we read are more than simply words. They reflect specific social systems of real people in real social and historical contexts. Biblical documents are “multidimensional phenomena” and are open to a variety of methods of interpretation, including ones that attempt “to identify the social and cultural world portrayed in the text as well as try to identify the various actors’ motives for action.”⁵

Social-scientific approaches to New Testament documents were pioneered by the work of Bruce Malina, Jerome Neyrey, John Pilch, John Elliott, and other members of the Context Group, an

ongoing gathering of biblical scholars. Their methodological insights inform the dominant approach in our study of Lydia as we employ historical-critical study and sociological-anthropological methods and theories in what is increasingly becoming an interdisciplinary approach to the New Testament. Our study of Lydia is an attempt to balance an understanding of the *typical* behaviors of first-century circum-Mediterranean peoples through the use of social science modeling with an analysis of the idiosyncrasies and distinctive behaviors found in particular times and places through literary and archaeological studies. Whether or not we can determine the historicity of the details in the narrative about Lydia, or even if there was a historical Lydia, these methods allow us to gauge what Luke's readers would have assumed about Lydia and, more important, they help us see Lydia as representative of a type of female believer active in the network of Paul's coworkers in the early Jesus groups.

We want to begin with one of the fundamental assumptions about persons in antiquity that we will have in mind throughout our study of Lydia, namely, her own self-understanding. There are a variety of ways in which people are aware of the self, ranging from a sense of being unique and independent (individualism) to a sense of sharing most things in common with a kinship group or subgroup (collectivism). Modern North American society is dominated by individualism, in which the personal goals of the individual are given priority, whereas the first-century Mediterranean world was characterized by collectivism, in which the goals of the group were prioritized. This difference affects how we understand the documents we read and the actions of the characters therein. Mediterranean persons

were all group-oriented selves, very concerned to adopt the viewpoints of the groups (their in-groups) whose fate they shared. They would never have considered Jesus as a personal Lord and Savior or as a personal Redeemer. If anything, Jesus was the church's (the group's) Lord and

Savior, and it was by belonging to the church (the group) that one experienced the presence of the Lord.⁶

In this type of context persons rely on others to form opinions about themselves, particularly the most important person in their social network, usually coming from within their immediate kin group. Such people are not individualists but “dyadics” or “doublists.” They are outwardly, or publicly, oriented rather than internally oriented and give little attention or significance to individual consciousness and thought; they have an “anti-introspective self.”⁷

As with individualism, collectivism is something that one is socialized into from birth—in such a culture it is rare to find anyone who can conceive of it differently, at least not without significant emotional and intellectual effort. The following chart describes differences between individualism and collectivism as they are generally conceived. It is framed in such a way that the reader can put checkmarks in all that apply to her or him personally. It is likely that those who are predominantly formed within Western contexts (e.g., North America, Western Europe) will find they have more checkmarks in the individualism column. Those formed in non-Western contexts (e.g., China, Africa, Middle East) will find they have more checkmarks in the collectivism column. Nevertheless, there may be times when the reader checks a box that is in the atypical column or, at the very least, when the reader puzzles for a while about which side to check. This reveals, in a small way, a core methodological issue with social-scientific modeling—the models deal with generalities not specifics. Due to the influence of travel, communication, and intercultural contact, modern persons are formed by multiple factors, which means any one of us may not fit completely into one side or the other. The same is true, albeit to a much lesser degree, for those living in the circum-Mediterranean in antiquity. Nevertheless, as a general guide, those of us living in the West today are most like individualists, while those living in the ancient Mediterranean world were most like collectivists.⁸

	Individualist	Collectivist
Primary Responsibility	Looks out for oneself first and perhaps one's immediate family. One's responsibility for others is quite loose.	Part of a strong cohesive ingroup from birth (extended family, village members, friends, etc.) to which one must remain unquestionably loyal, and from which one receives protection. Self-sacrifice and subordination of one's interests to those of the group are required.
Identity	Defines oneself in terms of personal attributes. Individual uniqueness and self-determination are valued. One promotes self-expression, individual thinking, and personal choice.	Defines oneself in terms of group attributes. Conformity to the group norms is valued. One promotes adherence to norms and respect for authority and/or elders and works toward group consensus.
Goals	Prioritizes one's personal goals. Self-satisfaction or "actualization" is primary.	Personal goals are subsumed into the goals of one's ingroups. Group flourishing is primary.
Social Encounters	More likely to prejudge people based on obvious personal attributes.	More likely to prejudge people based on group identity.
Social Interaction	Bluntly honest with others and will tackle tough issues head-on in order to get at the truth or the correct answer.	Avoids blunt honesty and sensitive issues, sometimes exhibiting a self-effacing humor, in order to preserve social harmony.

	Individualist	Collectivist
Friendships	A wide range of social friends with whom one can interact, sometimes on a very occasional basis. Many friendships are a means to a particular end.	Few interpersonal relationships, but those one has are stable and long lasting and involve loyalty, obligations, and commitment.
Definition of Success	Self-made and can make up own mind; shows initiative and works well independently.	Works well within the group context, negotiates and even bends to the will of the majority.
Values	Believes that there are universal values that should be shared by all people.	Open to accepting that different groups have different values. One's own group is primary and thus sets the standard for moral values.
Child Rearing	Fosters independence in children by training them to think for themselves and by allowing them to make their own choices in many areas.	Fosters the development of group identities by teaching a child communal sensitivity and cooperation, and advising a child on all important matters.
Social Mobility	Values egalitarian relationships and flexibility in roles and recognizes that upward mobility should be available to all individuals.	Values stable hierarchical roles that are often dependent on gender, family background, age, and social rank.

	Individualist	Collectivist
Possessions	Values private property and individual ownership.	Recognizes shared property and group ownership.
Cultural Context	Lives in a low-context culture in which things are explicitly and concisely spelled out and one can depend on what is actually said or written. One is responsible to remain current in one's knowledge base and informal networks.	Lives in a high-context culture in which communication assumes a great deal of common knowledge and views. Much is communicated indirectly without being explicitly spelled out.

As a collectivist person Lydia was embedded in the wider society and cultural contexts in which she lived. In order to get to know her better we need to become familiar, not only with the details of her brief biography, but also with the relationships that she shared. In order to do this, we will look at key features of various aspects of Lydia's social world: the characteristics of the city in which she lived (chap. 1), the expectations and responsibilities she had as a householder (chap. 2), the perceptions that surrounded her whenever she entered into the public sphere of the marketplace (chap. 3), her networks as a businesswoman (chap. 4), and the religious roles she would have expected and been expected to play (chap. 5). With links to two urban centers (Thyatira and Philippi), and as a person who straddled two dominant cultures (Greek and Roman), not to mention her inscribed status as a woman who was working outside the home in the realm of men, Lydia was a "cosmopolitan" woman in the core sense of that word's meaning: one who is at home in diverse contexts. In examining these contexts we will not only come to understand Lydia better, she will provide for us a window into the lives of ancient Mediterranean women more generally. As

such, we will discover a particular “sister in the faith” from the early Jesus groups, but, perhaps more important, we will discover typical characteristics of the many different women who comprised a significant part of Paul’s social network.⁹

CHAPTER 1

Lydia in the Kolōnia

Like many women and men in antiquity (and also today), Lydia inhabited two civic worlds. She was born and bred in the Asian city of Thyatira (in modern Turkey), but had moved at some point in her life to the Roman colony of Philippi (in Greek, *kolōnia*). And, like many immigrants, Lydia would have maintained aspects of her home culture, largely Greek and Eastern in nature, while adapting to and adopting many aspects of her new host culture, which was largely Roman—an irony, given that Philippi was in the northern part of the Greek-language homeland. In order to understand Lydia, we need to know a bit about her native and adoptive homes. Since she was living in Philippi at the time of her encounter with Paul, we will give more attention to the makeup of that particular city. In so doing, we are interested in forming generalizations, rather than outlining specific details, although some details will be important. We are aiming to understand what inhabitants of each city had in common.

Both Philippi and Thyatira were urban centers during the mid-first century. One thing is clear from studies of ancient life: urban centers were very different from rural locales, although

how exactly urban centers were defined is difficult to determine. Richard Rohrbaugh points out that we have very little ancient evidence on which to draw for how the city was conceived among ancient persons. Pausanias, writing in the late second century CE, questions the status of Panopeus as a “city” by noting “if indeed one can give the name of city to those who possess no public buildings, no gymnasium, no theater, no market-place, no water descending to a fountain, but live in bare shelters just like mountain huts on the edges of ravines” (*Description of Greece* 10.4.1). Thus, public buildings rather than size of population define for Pausanias what constitutes a city. “By contrast, in his instructions for preparing an encomium to praise a city Menander Rhetor (*Epideictic Discourses*, Treatise I, 346–51) places far more emphasis on a city’s ‘origins, actions, and accomplishments’ than he does on its location, size, or physical appearance.”¹ It is the reputation of a city—its honor—that counts, which is confirmed by the inscriptional finds from many cities in which their own honor is proclaimed boldly for all to read.

It is also clear that the growth of cities in the late republic and early imperial periods reflected a shift in the relationship between cities and the surrounding rural areas. They were mutually dependent for their survival, with the countryside providing food for the city, and the city providing a market for rural produce. Nevertheless, urban inhabitants increasingly focused their attention inward to the status of their city, becoming ambivalent about the countryside. Ownership of the rural lands became concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy inhabitants of the city and as such provided these individuals with the economic means to display publicly their honor in the city. They may have built a large villa on their rural estates, but these functioned as extensions of the city, as owners would retreat there with a full entourage of family and slaves, and often entertained guests in the manner of civic banquets. Many rural folk remained on the land, but increasingly so as tenant farmers, or perhaps even slaves. Those who could not maintain such residency often joined the Roman military, becoming part of the apparatus that

was meant to protect the empire, by which was largely meant the cities. Thus, despite the mutual dependency of one on the other, the urban centers had both the physical and social advantages.

Thyatira

In Acts 16:14 we learn that Lydia is from the city of Thyatira. No indication of when she moved to Philippi is given, although Luke does note that she is a merchant, which is a likely reason for her immigration to the city (see chap. 4). Her home city of Thyatira is located in an area in Asia Minor called Lydia (which may, as we noted above, be reflected in Lydia's name). Little is known about the city during the first century CE since few archaeological remains have been found at the site, much of which lies under the modern town of Akhisar. Archaeological evidence does show that the site was inhabited from around 3000 BCE, although of more interest is its coming under Greek influence through Alexander the Great at the end of the fourth century BCE. Subsequent control of the city was taken by the Seleucids, who refounded the city and settled it with Macedonian soldiers, making it a military outpost. Thyatira later came under the rule of the Pergamene kingdom, and thus came under Roman rule shortly after 133 BCE, when Attalus III bequeathed his kingdom to the Romans. Thus, the inhabitants were, like so many cities in the empire, truly Greco-Roman insofar as both cultures had impacted their local urban life. Many in Thyatira would, however, have traced their roots to Macedonian ancestors.

The city itself was situated at the crossroads of the major roads leading to and from the cities of Pergamum, Sardis, Magnesia, and Smyrna. This naturally caused the city to become an important center of trade and industry, with much commercial activity taking place. Evidence from inscriptions reveals the existence of a number of trade guilds, including bakers, potters or ceramists, tanners, leatherworkers, shoemakers, coppersmiths, and



Figure 2. The Scant Remains of Ancient Thyatira (photo by the author)

blacksmiths. The city was a particularly important center for the textile industry, as evidenced in a number of inscriptions mentioning wool workers, linen weavers, fullers, and dyers in and around Thyatira, guilds of the latter occupation being attested more than any others.²

Few architectural remains have been found at the site, but inscriptions show an active civic, social, and religious life during this period. Mention of shrines to Apollo Tyrimnaeus and Artemis Boreitene, to Helius, and to Hadrian give a sense of the deities worshiped. There also existed three gymnasiums full of statues, along with a large forum. During the Roman period the city was particularly prosperous, bolstered by its trade. Residents also took their marketing skills elsewhere, perhaps particularly with respect to the purple dye for which the region was justly famous (see chap. 4). Thus, we find in Thessalonica an inscription that names Menippus as a purple dealer from Thyatira,

and we have the example of Lydia at Philippi. That a Jesus community developed at Thyatira is shown by the letter sent to the Jesus group there through the writer of the book of Revelation. Although they are praised for their love, faith, devotion, and good works, they are also censured for and called to repent from following the false teachings of “Jezebel,” eating idol food, and engaging in immoral sexual practices (Rev 2:18-29).

Philippi

Although Thyatira was under Roman control and thus had a somewhat Roman cultural flavor to it, Philippi was much more of a Roman cultural center. According to Acts 16:15 Lydia had been settled in the city for some time, to the point of purchasing her own house (see chap. 2), which means that she was not a transient worker. As such, she would not only have carried with her customs from her home city but would very likely have adopted customs at Philippi itself. Since many commentators are convinced that the story of Lydia is historical, at least in broad outline, it is worth learning a bit more about the characteristics of her adopted city, and thus the cultural characteristics that she too would have needed to adopt in order to be enculturated into the city and succeed in her business venture there.

Philippi was located on the eastern border of what became the Roman province of Macedonia, strategically placed between the Strymon River to the west and the Nestos River to the east. A larger river, the Gangites, lay just over two kilometers from the city center, close to a commemorative arch, which marked the western edge of the sacred boundary of the city. Only sixteen kilometers (ten miles) inland from the Aegean Sea, Philippi was available as a frequent port of call for cargo ships.³ The city was originally founded as Krenides by an Athenian exile named Callistratus, who brought with him a number of settlers from the island of Thasos (Strabo, *Geography*, VII, frags. 41, 42; Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, 16.3.7). Soon afterward, in 356

BCE, Philip II, the father of Alexander the Great, seized the city because of the gold and silver mines of Mount Pangaeus and renamed it after himself (Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, 16.3.6; 16.8.6-7). He increased the size of the city and settled a number of new inhabitants in it. He also seized Neapolis, a city likewise colonized by the people from nearby Thasos, to serve as the port for Philippi.

After the death of Alexander the Great in 332 BCE, political stability was never fully achieved in Macedonia until the arrival of the Romans in the mid-second century BCE. The Romans had begun to distrust the Macedonians and were attempting to block their expansion and meddle in their internal affairs. This led to a long and fierce battle between Perseus and the Romans. However, the Romans defeated Perseus at the Battle of Pydna in 168 BCE and gained control of the three important cities of Beroea, Thessalonica, and Pella. The area was not immediately annexed because the Senate decided that the Macedonians should be free, "so that it should be clear to all nations that the forces of the Roman people brought not slavery to free peoples but on the contrary, freedom to the enslaved" (Livy, *History of Rome*, 45.18.2, LCL). However, along with this "freedom" came an annual tribute paid to Rome, removal of all foreign possessions, and, most significantly, the division of Macedonia into four districts (Strabo, *Geography*, VII, frag. 47; Livy, *History of Rome*, 45.29.5-9). Each district was organized and governed autonomously, with a capital city in each. Land could not be sold across the boundaries and marriage was prohibited between people of different districts.

In 149 BCE Rome incorporated Macedonia into its empire by transforming it into a Roman province. The fourfold division of the area remained, as did the general laws already in place, but each part was treated as a single unit, with a Roman governor, and accompanying legions, permanently installed at Thessalonica. Many Roman veterans were settled in the regions where they had fought and many chose to remain there after demobilization. Organized colonization began after Julius Caesar, with the first cities being Kassandrea and Dion (43/42 BCE), followed

by Philippi shortly thereafter. Under Augustus Macedonia was made a senatorial province.

In the civil unrest that followed the murder of Julius Caesar, the climactic battle between the forces of Brutus and Cassius and the forces of Octavian and Antony took place on the plain to the west of Philippi (42/41 BCE), with Octavian and Antony emerging as victors. Antony settled his veterans there and re-named the city *Antoni Iussu Colonia Victrix Philippensium* to commemorate his victory. Eleven years after their battle with Brutus and Cassius, Octavian defeated Antony at the Battle of Actium, and there was a fresh influx of immigrants into Philippi. This was a mixture of Octavian's own veterans along with Italian supporters of Antony who had to give up their Italian lands to supporters of Octavian (Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 51.4.6). The new name of the city was *Colonia Iulia Augusta Philippensis*, indicating its new status as a Roman colony.

During the *pax Romana* (the Roman peace) new cities were founded in Macedonia, especially under Augustus and Tiberius. These included settlements of Roman veterans (*coloniae*) and native settlements granted urban autonomy (*municipia*). At that time, older cities were remodeled following new plans, and grand building projects were undertaken, including agoras, temples, altars, and funerary buildings, all with accompanying inscriptions. A detailed history of Macedonia during the imperial period is not well known. A number of emperors passed through the province on their way to or from some eastern campaign, and it continued to be an important political stronghold in the third century CE and through the time of Constantine the Great.

As a Roman colony Philippi was granted the honor of *ius italicum*, the "Italian law," which meant that it was treated as if it were on Italian soil. This gave it equal status with other Italian cities, and it was governed by Roman law and was free from any kind of direct taxation on its lands or citizens. The city's constitution would have been modeled on the municipal constitution of Rome, and it had two collegiate magistrates governing it, a fact reflected in Luke's use of *stratēgoi* (equal to *duo uiri* or *duumvirs*,

Acts 16:35, 36, 38). Even the pattern of the city and the style and architecture of the buildings were copied from Rome. Not only Roman in law and in style, it was also Roman in ethos, since many of the residents at Philippi were veterans, presumably from Italy.

When the writer of Acts notes that Philippi was a Roman colony, using the transliterated Latin term *kolōnia*, he is entirely correct. Not so is his designation of Philippi as a “first city of the district of Macedonia” (16:12). As we noted above, Macedonia was a Roman province, not a “district,” and the capital city, or “first” city, of the province was Thessalonica, wherein the proconsul resided. The Greek manuscripts for this verse reflect the problem and attest to different attempts to provide a correction for Luke’s mistake. Even the recent editions of the Greek New Testament make an emendation to the text, with no basis at all in the manuscript tradition, in order to make Luke’s description conform to the historical situation and read “a city of the first district of Macedonia.” The lack of evidence for this reading has caused some to maintain the most widely attested reading—“a first city of the district of Macedonia”—and find an alternative explanation. Drawing on a wide range of evidence for expressions of intercity rivalry and civic pride, I have argued in detail elsewhere that by referring to Philippi as a first or leading city Luke’s eyewitness source writer is expressing his pride in what is likely his hometown.⁴ It may not be historically accurate, but it expresses a common sentiment in an honor/shame culture, one that finds analogy today in the expression at sporting events when fans of a team call out “NN is number one,” when the city of NN is neither the federal nor state capital (and more often than not is not even in first place in that particular sport!).

During the republican period the Romans built a major road, the Via Egnatia, across Macedonia from the Adriatic coast to the Aegean Sea, over eight hundred kilometers in length. It served as a main artery for military and civilian traffic through the province and led to a resurgence of the economic life in Macedonia during the Roman period. This highway was the main



Figure 3. Overview of the Forum at Philippi (photo by Rachel McRae, used with permission)

thoroughfare for people, goods, and troops moving between Rome and its eastern provinces, and it ran through the center of Philippi, bringing to the inhabitants there many of the same goods that were produced by and for Rome. Coming up to the city from the port of Neapolis, Paul would have entered the city through the so-called Neapolis Gate on the east side of the city, having passed through the east cemetery. It was likely through one of the gates on the other side of the city, however, that Paul sought the “place of prayer” (Greek *proseuchē*), near a small stream just outside the western wall, but not as far as the Gangites River a few kilometers further west (see site plan, fig. 1).⁵

The city grid and the architectural style of the buildings at Philippi were copied from Rome, although admittedly most of the archaeological finds date from the second century CE or later. Latin was the official language of the colony during the Julio-Claudian period, and most of the inscriptions found to date

are in Latin. Yet this was the public face of the city, and Greek remained the language used for common communication,⁶ as was the case in many Roman cities in the eastern part of the empire. Overall, the historical and architectural background point to the distinctive Latin character of Philippi, where Roman culture predominated. This will become a key issue when we examine the type of behavior and attitudes that would have been expressed by and about Lydia, as a resident of the city.

Writing in the early part of the second century CE, Aulus Gellius commented that Roman colonies

were transplanted from the State and have all the laws and institutions of the Roman people, not those of their own choice. This condition, although it is more exposed to control and less free, is nevertheless thought preferable and superior because of the greatness and majesty of the Roman people, of which those colonies seem to be miniatures, as it were, and in a way copies. (*Attic Nights* 16.13.8-9)

As Hellerman notes, “the comments are particularly apropos for Philippi, since epigraphic data demonstrates unequivocally that the colony was administrated by Romans in a decidedly Roman fashion.”⁷ Although archaeological excavations have turned up Hellenistic streets under the currently exposed Roman streets in some areas of the city, during the mid-first century the city would have been quite Roman in ethos. Both Augustus and Claudius had introduced building programs that changed the face of the city, although today much of their building has been obliterated by the building projects of later emperors Antoninus Pius and Justinian. During Paul’s time the central forum contained statues of the emperor Augustus and his family, along with monuments to other members of the imperial family. The city witnessed the establishment of the cult of Augustus and his adopted sons Gaius and Lucius Caesar, and the cult of Livia, wife of Augustus and mother of Tiberius. Numismatic and archaeological evidence from the founding of Philippi as a colony explicitly identify Philippi with Augustus and the empire he

had begun to construct. Further, “inscriptions left by the veteran colonists consistently attest to their loyalty to Rome and her emperor, and also to the pride taken by these soldiers in their former positions of honor in the army.”⁸

The social makeup of the population of Philippi developed over the course of three stages: “initial occupation of land by the colonists; spread of colonial land to distant parts of the territory; concentration of land ownership.”⁹ Land became concentrated in the hands of a few persons, since land ownership was the main indicator of wealth, causing the majority of the population to move to the city, where power and benefaction by the elite predominated. The general pattern of development suggests that by the mid-first century the majority of the population of the town was probably neither Romans nor citizens and the overall proportion of veterans was negligible. Most likely there was a proportion of 30% Romans to 50% non-slave Greeks overall in the first-century city. Of these, the term “Romans” represents all citizens and their families, while the term “Greeks” subsumes all Greek-speaking persons such as Thracians, Macedonians, Asians, and the like—in other words, noncitizen Greek speakers. Another 20% of the population was comprised of Greek slaves, who were largely the property of the Romans.¹⁰

Using population density data from other cities in the empire and relating it to the urban area and the surrounding countryside under its control, Oakes estimates the population of Philippi at around fifteen thousand in the mid-first century CE.¹¹ The resulting distribution of the population of the city during the middle of the first century gives a picture of a very small percentage of the population with the status of Roman elite, perhaps 1.5–5%, with another 7% representing the slaves of this group. Commuting peasant colonists, half of them land owners and half renters, represented 20–30%, with an additional 5% for their slaves. By far the largest social level was represented by the service groups, at 30–45%, three-quarters of them Greek, the others Roman. The Romans in this category would have also had slaves, comprising about 8%. Finally, the urban poor comprised about 15–30% of

the population, with Greeks occupying about 70% of this rank and Romans filling in the remaining 30%. Using Oakes' notional figures for the city, we get the following distribution of the total population:

<i>Percentage Distribution of Population of Philippi</i>			
	Romans	Greeks	Slaves of
Roman Elite	3%	0%	7%
Commuting Peasant Colonists	10%	10%	5%
Service Groups	9%	28%	8%
Poor	6%	14%	0%
<i>Total (of 100%)</i>	<i>28%</i>	<i>52%</i>	<i>20%</i>

<i>Numeric Distribution of Population of Philippi</i>			
	Romans	Greeks	Slaves of
Roman Elite	450	0	1,050
Commuting Peasant Colonists	1,500	1,500	750
Service Groups	1,350	4,200	1,200
Poor	900	2,100	0
<i>Total (of 15,000 persons)</i>	<i>4,200</i>	<i>7,800</i>	<i>3,000</i>

The percentages need not be exact, and the numeric distribution numbers would be smaller had we used Pilhofer's smaller population estimate, but these charts give us a general picture of the overall distribution of the social ranks at Philippi, and we can see that Lydia would have fit into the largest of these social ranks, Greek-speaking workers in the service industry: 28% of the population, or around 4,200 persons.

As the city of Philippi was colonized and grew, previous local landholders were displaced from their land by elite landowners who lived in the city. As a consequence, those who stayed in the area, of which there were quite a number, moved to the city.

Peasant colonists, rather than locals, were employed by the new elite Roman landowners in order to work the land. As for the local Greek elite, there is no evidence for their persistence beyond the time of colonization, suggesting that they either lost their status or moved to other cities.¹² The native population of non-Romans, those in the city and those displaced from the countryside, would have then become the core of the service industries in Philippi, a need for which increased substantially with the arrival of the colonists. An increase in the construction of luxury items such as monuments attests to the increase in wealth among the new elite, and a desire to expend that wealth on displays of honor, which would have necessitated more and more service personnel, not only slaves, but also day workers and contract workers. "One effect of this demand, particularly in the area of specialist luxury goods such as purple, was the drawing in of further merchants and craftspeople from other regions, in particular Asia."¹³ Thus, we discover in the study of the demographic changes in the city a plausible reason why we find Lydia and her household in Philippi at the time of Paul's visit.

Clearly, Lydia was neither a veteran nor even a Roman, being an immigrant from the city of Thyatira, and thus likely of Greek background. Nevertheless, as we have seen, her hometown was impacted by the presence of Rome in the land, as was her adopted home, to an even greater degree. As Hellerman sums up of Philippi, "Though a numerical minority, the Romans remained an ideological majority, particularly where issues of honor, status, and social values were concerned, since the dispossession of local landholders by Roman veterans ultimately determined not only the social hierarchy, but also the social values, of the reconstituted settlement."¹⁴ How and why this Romanization of Philippi took place we will examine in the next chapter, giving particular attention to the impact that it would have had on women such as Lydia. This generalized picture will allow us to draw some conclusions about the economic and marital status of Lydia herself.