

CHAPTER 38

THE GEOGRAPHY OF GALATIA

Gal 1:2; Act 18:23; 1 Cor 16:1

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KEY POINTS

- Galatia is both a region and a province in central Asia Minor.
- The main cities of north Galatia were settled by the Gauls in the third century BC.
- The main cities of south Galatia were founded by the Greeks starting in the third century BC.
- Galatia became a Roman province in 25 BC, and the Romans established colonies in many of its cities.
- Pamphylia was part of Galatia in Paul's day, so Perga and Attalia were cities in south Galatia.

GALATIA AS A REGION

Galatia is located in a basin in north-central Asia Minor that is largely flat and treeless. Within it are the headwaters of the Sangarius River (modern Sakarya) and the middle course of the Halys River (modern Kızılırmak). The capital of the Hittite Empire—Hattusha (modern Boğazköy)—was in eastern Galatia near the later site of Tavium. The name Galatia derives from the twenty thousand Gauls

and their families who migrated from Thrace in 278 BC. They had been invited by Nicomedes I of Bithynia to serve as mercenaries in his army. The Galatians were notorious for their destructive forays, and in 241 BC the Pergamenes led by Attalus I defeated them at the battle of the Caicus. The statue of the dying Gaul, one of antiquity's most noted works of art, commemorates that victory.¹ The three Galatian tribes settled in

1. For the motif of dying Gauls, see Brigitte Kahl, *Galatians Re-imagined: Reading with the Eyes of the Vanquished* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 77–127. For a Roman copy of the original



these cities in Galatia: the Tolistobogii at Pessinus, the Tectosages at Ancyra, and the Trocmi at Tavium (Livy, *History* 38.16.10–12). The Romans became active in Galatia in the second century BC, and in 65 BC Pompey defeated the Pontic king Mithradates VI Eupator, thereby removing his hegemony over the region. A council and tetrarchs ruled until 63 BC when Deiotarus killed his fellow tribal kings and assumed the sole monarchy. Other leaders followed until Rome took direct control of the region in 25 BC after the death of the Galatian king Amyntas (reigned 36–25 BC).²

MAIN CITIES IN NORTH GALATIA³

Pessinus (modern Ballhisar) was situated in western Galatia on the west side of sacred Mount Dindymus. In the third century BC the Tolistobogii, the westernmost Galatian tribe, made Pessinus their capital. The city was famous for its shrine of the Phrygian mother goddess Cybele. According to Diodorus Siculus the Phrygian king Midas founded the temple in the eighth century BC (3.59.8). Its priests called Galli were notorious for being eunuchs; however, castration for Romans was forbidden by the Roman Senate and later outlawed by Domitian (Suetonius, *Life of Domitian* 7.1).⁴ Cybele's

statue from Pergamum, see the website of the Musei Capitolini in Rome, "Statue of 'Capitoline Gaul,'" http://www.museicapitolini.org/en/collezioni/percorsi_per_sale/palazzo_nuovo/sala_del_gladiatore/statua_del_galata_capitolino.

2. A detailed discussion of Galatia's geography and history can be found in Stephen Mitchell, *Anatolia: Lands, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 1:13–58.

3. For a more detailed discussion of these cities, see chapter 46, "Peter's Communities in Asia Minor."

4. This practice has been cited as a background for Paul's comment that those agitating the Galatians should castrate themselves (Gal 5:12); see Susan M. Elliott, *Cutting Too Close*

cult stone was believed to have fallen from heaven (compare the Ephesian Artemis, Acts 19:35). In 204 BC the Romans brought the black meteorite stone to Rome as a talisman in their fight against Hannibal (Livy, *History* 29.10.4–29.11.9). In 191 BC it was installed in a temple erected on the Palatine Hill to honor the Great Mother (Magna Mater).

Ancyra (modern Ankara) was founded, according to one myth, by the Phrygian king Midas. Situated on a rocky acropolis, it was at the junction of seven key routes. Ancyra became the second metropolis of Phrygia after Gordium. Around 265 BC the Galatian tribe, Tectosages, made Ancyra its capital after receiving the site from the Pontic kingdom.

Tavium (modern Büyüknefes) and its two mounds show continuous occupation since prehistoric times. Around 232 BC the Trocmi, the easternmost Galatian tribe, made it their primary settlement. Tavium sat at an important junction of four highways with an orientation toward Cappadocia and the Euphrates River Basin.

GALATIA AS A ROMAN PROVINCE

In 25 BC a hostile Pisidian tribe killed Rome's client king Amyntas, and Augustus then annexed the province of Galatia (Dio Cassius 53.26.3). He made Ancyra its capital. The new province included not only geographic Galatia but also Pisidia, eastern Phrygia, Lycaonia, Isauria, and Pamphylia. In 6 BC Paphlagonia and in 3/2 BC Pontus Galaticus were also added. Around 22–21 BC Galatia's three

northern cities became Roman colonies: Ancyra—Sebasteni Tectosages Ancyrani; Pessinus—Sebasteni Tolistobogii Pessinuntii; and Tavium—Sebasteni Trocmi Taviani. An imperial cult temple for Augustus was started between 10 BC–AD 10 and completed around AD 19/20 by Tiberius. Perhaps the most famous Roman inscription from antiquity—called the “Queen of Inscriptions”—is found on its walls: the bilingual (Greek and Latin) *Monumentum Ancyranum*, or *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* (“Deeds of the Deified Augustus”). Before his death on August 19, AD 14, Augustus composed an account of his personal achievements during his reign. While the original bronze tablets upon which it was engraved in Rome are lost, it is preserved almost in its entirety on the Ancyra tem-



Portion of the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*

ple.⁵ At the Roman colony of Pisidian Antioch (modern Yalvaç) fragments of the Latin text were found at the entrance of the Augustus temple built in the early first century AD, while fragments of the Greek version were discovered in Apollonia (modern Uluborlu).⁶ On the temple's southern wall another Greek inscription lists twenty high priests of the Galatian assembly (*κοινόν, koinon*) who served during the reign of Tiberius. Further imperial cult activity is evident in Pessinus where a Corinthian imperial cult temple (Sebasteion) was built during the reign of Tiberius (approximately AD 25–35). Tavium hosted games related to the imperial cult that were sponsored by the provincial assembly (*koinon*).

BIBLICAL CITIES IN THE PROVINCE

To contain the hostile Homanadenses in their strongholds in the Taurus Mountains, Augustus founded thirteen colonies with military veterans after 25 BC including Pisidian Antioch and Lystra. In 6 BC he built the *Via Sebaste* from Perga to connect these colonies. Pisidian Antioch was its *caput viae* (roadhead) because it was the apex of the Pisidian triangle.⁷ Pacification of southern Galatia was completed by AD 6 by Quirinius (Tacitus, *Annales* 3.48),⁸ and

the strategic value of a remote site like Lystra began to decrease.

Pisidian Antioch⁹ (modern Yalvaç) was one of sixteen cities founded by the Seleucid ruler Antiochus I. It is situated on a plateau in the foothills of the Sultan Mountain range (Sultandağı). The Anthius River (Yalvaç Çay) flows below the acropolis' eastern face. Called Colonia Caesarea Antiochia, it was settled by approximately three thousand veterans of Legions V Gallica and VII and their families, suggesting a total population of around ten thousand. The city was strategically located on the common, or southern, highway that ran from the Cilician Gates to Ephesus. The *Via Sebaste* provided a link to the Mediterranean coast at Pamphylia.

Iconium (modern Konya) was founded as a Phrygian settlement on the western edge of a vast fertile plain. The city became a Roman colony under Augustus; however, the Greek polis was allowed to exist alongside the colony until the time of Hadrian (approximately AD 135) when the Roman colony absorbed the polis. Around AD 41/42 during Claudius' reign the city received the honorific title Claudiconium. Iconium was a major transportation node in south-central Galatia with six roads branching in every direction to major cities.

5. See page XXX for an image of a replica with part of the inscription. Alison E. Cooley, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1–13.

6. Cooley, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, 13–18.

7. Barbara Levick, *Roman Colonies in Southern Asia Minor* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), 29–55.

8. This is the same Quirinius mentioned in Luke 2:2; see D. S. Potter, "Quirinius," *ABD* 5:589.

9. The site was situated in Phrygia and not Pisidia, therefore it is incorrect to say "Antioch in Pisidia" or "Antioch of Pisidia"; Phrygian Antioch is geographically correct. Strabo identifies it as the Antioch "toward [πρός, *pros*] Pisidia" (*Geography* 12.8.14). Luke uses the adjectival form in Acts 13:14 to distinguish it from the other Antioch (Syrian) in his narrative.



Peutinger Map: Location of Iconium. Note the six roads branching out from the city.

Lystra was twenty-one miles (34 km) southwest of Iconium in the hill country of Lycaonia. It was located on a small rise in a fertile river valley. The initial settlement consisted of approximately one thousand retirees from two Roman legions; the colony's estimated size including women and children was approximately three thousand. Its full name was *Colonia Iulia Gemina Felix Lystra*. The colonists intermarried with locals as the mixed parentage of Timothy, whose home was Lystra, testifies (Acts 16:1).

Derbe (modern Ekinözü) was a border town in eastern Lycaonia southwest of Mount Boratinon (modern Karadağ). In 36 BC Amyntas defeated Antipater and added Derbe to his realm. Upon the death of this client king in 25 BC, Derbe became part of the province of Galatia. Around AD 41/42 during Claudius' reign the city

received the honorific title *Claudioderbe*. It was located on a branch road that ran southeastward to the Cilician Gates. Laranda was the major town in the region fourteen miles (22 km) to the southwest. In AD 70 the province's boundaries were radically changed by Vespasian, and for military reasons Galatia was then joined to Cappadocia to form a new double province.¹⁰

NORTH GALATIANS AS THE AUDIENCE FOR PAUL'S LETTER

Patristic interpreters understood the audience for Galatians as located in north Galatia. Regarding the provincial reorganization in AD 297, F. F. Bruce writes:

The province of Galatia was thus reduced to North Galatia, and when the church fathers, in their study of our epistle, read of "the church of Galatia", they

10. Mustafa Adak and Mark Wilson, "Das Vespasiansmonument von Döşeme und die Gründung der Doppelprowenz Lycia et Pamphylia," *Gephyra* 9 (2012): 17-21.

understood “Galatia” without more ado in the sense familiar in their day.¹¹

Jerome (*Commentary on Galatians*, Preface to Book II) saw the schisms in Ancyra of his day as counterparts to the heresies with which Paul struggled in the same region.

In his commentary on Galatians, J. B. Lightfoot localized the audience at Ancyra, Pessinus, Tavium, and perhaps Juliopolis. He posited a brief visit by Paul in north Galatia on the second journey to recuperate from illness, then a longer visit while traveling to Ephesus on his third journey. Lightfoot viewed Paul’s letter as written on the third journey probably from Ephesus.¹²

For the second journey Robert Jewett projected a route from Iconium running north of the Sultan Mountains to Philomelium rather than south through Pisidian Antioch, for they were “prevented from traveling on the main highway west into Asia.” At Philomelium they turned into north Galatia visiting Pessinus, Germa, and Ancyra where they “apparently missionized for a considerable period of time while being detained by illness (Gal. 4:13–14).”¹³

Jerome Murphy-O’Connor holds a

modified view, accepting that Pisidian Antioch was revisited on the third journey but that Paul, because of illness, turned northeastward to reach Pessinus where he preached to pilgrims coming to the shrine of Cybele.¹⁴ In summary, those holding the north Galatian view suggest that Paul made an unplanned visit to one or more cities in north Galatia during either his second or third journey (or both) probably for reason of illness.

SOUTH GALATIANS AS THE AUDIENCE FOR PAUL’S LETTER

The book of Acts shows Paul establishing and visiting churches only in south Galatia (Acts 13:14–14:23; 16:1–4). During these journeys he passed through several regions in the province: Pisidia (Acts 14:24), Lycaonia (Acts 14:6, 11), and Phrygia (16:6; 18:23). Ramsay initially favored a north Galatian perspective because of the influence of German scholarship. However, as he began to travel and conduct fieldwork in Asia Minor, especially in the cities visited by Paul on his first journey, he became an ardent advocate of the south Galatian view.¹⁵ Many other scholars have come to agree with Ramsay that Paul vis-

11. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 6.

12. J. B. Lightfoot, *Epistle to the Galatians*, rev. ed. (Andover: Draper, 1870), 27–32. He concedes interestingly: “It is strange that while we have more or less acquaintance with all the other important Churches of St. Paul’s founding,—with Corinth and Ephesus, with Philippi and Thessalonica,—not a single name of a person or place, scarcely a single incident of any kind, connected with the apostle’s preaching in Galatia should be preserved either in the history or the Epistle” (p. 28).

13. Robert Jewett, “Mapping the Route of Paul’s ‘Second Missionary Journey’ from Dorylaeum to Troas,” *TynBul* 48 (1997): 5; Jewett, *Dating Paul’s Life* (London: SCM, 1979), 59–60.

14. Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 161–62; 191–93; for a map see 187 fig. 4.

15. William M. Ramsay, *A Historical Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians* (New York: Putnam, 1900), 1–11; then passim.

ited only the cities of south Galatia.¹⁶ The cities of ethnic north Galatia were reached with the gospel, not by Paul but by Peter and his coworkers. Galatians is often dated as Paul's first letter written from Antioch after his first journey but before the Jerusalem council.¹⁷ However, not all who hold a south Galatian perspective ascribe to its early dating. Keener is one who holds that Galatians was written after the council in Jerusalem.¹⁸

Several references in Galatians suggest a possible scenario for its composition. After returning to Antioch, Paul and Barnabas announced the results of their preaching mission among the south Galatian cities (Acts 14:27). Later Paul received "news of people who had visited his Galatian mission-field and were persuading his converts there to accept a different form of teaching from that which he had given them."¹⁹ These troublemakers (Gal 1:7; compare 5:10) and agitators (Gal 5:12) knew which cities to visit because of Paul's report in Antioch. That the Galatians had so quickly deserted (*ταχέως μετατίθεσθε*; *tacheōs metatithes- the*; Gal 1:6; compare 2 Thess 2:2) suggests that only a brief time had passed since his visit.²⁰ Hans Dieter Betz aptly notes that Paul's use of *tacheōs* "would make little sense, to be sure, if a considerable length of time had passed since the founding of

the church" and that the "time reference seems to be the founding of the churches." Paul probably learned about the visit of his opponents from a representative of the Galatian churches who had traveled to Antioch (see 1 Cor 1:11; 16:17). These agitators thus replayed Paul's first missionary journey to preach a "different gospel" to the same churches.

Recent inscription finds have added a new wrinkle to the discussion. A commonly held view has been that Claudius made Lycia and Pamphylia a joint province in AD 43, so Paul's entry to Perga (Acts 13:13) and exit from Attalia (Acts 14:25–26) were from the province of Pamphylia. Boundary lines reflecting this provincial configuration are found in all classical and Bible atlases. Two inscriptions found in Perga suggest otherwise. Burrus and Praesens are named as governors of the joint province *Galaticae et Pamphyliae*. They governed in the late 40s to early 50s, the same time that Paul was evangelizing the area.²¹ Pamphylia was therefore part of Galatia during this period. Paul returned to Perga to evangelize at the end of the first journey, and his efforts probably resulted in a church being planted there (Acts 14:25). These believers in south Galatia were probably also part of the audience for his letter. This revised provincial alignment sug-

16. See, for example, Bruce, *Galatians*, 8–18; Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 2–6.

17. For example, Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (Dallas: Word, 1990), lxxxviii.

18. Craig Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 2:2116.

19. Bruce, *Galatians*, 19.

20. Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 47–48.

21. For a discussion of these and other inscriptions that reflect Lycia as a separate province, see Mark Wilson "The Denouement of Claudian Pamphylia-Lycia and its Implications for the Audience of Galatians," *NovT* 60 (2018): 5–7.



Galaticae et Pamphyliae
Inscription from Perga

gests that a new geographical nomenclature is required for ongoing discussion. Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe were actually middle Galatian churches with Perga and possibly Attalia the true south Galatian churches.²²

NORTH VERSUS SOUTH GALATIA

Although visits to north Galatia are not recorded in Acts, textual support

is sometimes garnered from the translations of Acts 16:6 and 18:23 pointing to a geographic rather than a provincial sense. Luke's language is enigmatic: *tēn Phrygian kai Galatikēn chōran* (τὴν Φρυγίαν καὶ Γαλατικὴν χώραν, Acts 16:6) and *tēn Galatikēn chōran kai Phrygian* (τὴν Γαλατικὴν χώραν καὶ Φρυγίαν, Acts 18:23). Translators understand an adjectival form such as "Galatian region" or "Galatian area," so English versions commonly translate the two phrases as "the region of Phrygia and Galatia" and "the region of Galatia and Phrygia."

²³ However, Asterius, bishop of Amasia (died AD 410), was an early commentator who understood these texts to mean that Phrygia was a region and that Galatia was not used by Paul in a geographic sense (*Homily 8*). Recently discovered Greek and Latin inscriptions sustain Luke's use of the Greek *Galatikē* (Γαλατικὴ) and the Latin *Galatica* for the province of Galatia. These are linked with the synonymous terms *eparcheia* (ἐπαρχεία) and *prōvincia* in each of these inscriptions. According to Adak and Wilson, Luke has in mind "obviously the entire greater province of Galatia with all its landscapes united in this administrative unit."²⁴ So a preferred translation for 16:6 is "the Phrygian region of the province Galatia" and for 18:23 "the territory of the province Galatia and its Phrygian region."²⁵ As Mitchell observes, "It is hardly con-

22. Wilson, "Denouement of Claudian Pamphylia-Lyca," 17–23.

23. The lexicon BDAG (s.v., Γαλατικός) also suggests such a meaning: "Here probl. the district, not the Rom. Province, is meant."

24. Adak and Wilson, "Das Vespasiansmonument von Döşeme," 9. Original German: "offensichtlich die gesamte Großprovinz Galatien mit allen in dieser Verwaltungseinheit vereinigten Landschaften."

25. William M. Ramsay, *The Cities of St. Paul* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1907), 194; compare Glen L. Thompson and Mark Wilson, "The Route of Paul's Second Journey in Asia Minor: In the Steps of Robert Jewett and Beyond," *TynBul* 67 (2016): 223–24.



ceivable that the Γαλατικὴ χώρα [Galatikē chōra] mentioned here is the region of north Galatia.”²⁶ To propound a north Galatian view and cite these verses from Acts is not consonant with Luke’s Greek nomenclature.

On their second journey Paul and Silas added Timothy in Lystra, and the decision of the Jerusalem Council was also announced in Iconium (Acts 16:1–5). But did they visit Pisidian Antioch before the prohibition was received? Paul’s purpose for the journey was articulated in Acts 15:36: to revisit the believers in the cities where they had preached during the first journey. From the perspective of Luke’s narrative, a visit to Pisidian Antioch was presumed, so a visit directly from Iconium into north Galatia runs contrary to Luke’s intention. In Acts 18:23 no specific city names are mentioned. Paul’s

natural route to Ephesus would have followed the southern highway through the Cilician Gates. He would then revisit the Lycaonian cities of Derbe and Lystra in the province of Galatia, then the province’s two Phrygian cities, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch. That the upper, or interior, regions (τὰ ἀνωτερικὰ μέρη, *ta anōterika merē*) of Acts 19:1 must refer to north Galatia, as W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson did, is a geographical stretch.²⁷

A final argument against north Galatia is the paucity of Jewish communities there. Paul’s *modus operandi* in Acts was to visit the synagogue, if one existed, in the cities where he evangelized. In north Galatia no archaeological evidence for Judaism exists from the first century AD. Although literary texts mention Jews and Christians in Galatia in later centuries, “Jewish monuments are rare in

26. Mitchell, *Anatolia*, 2.3.

27. Mark Wilson, “The ‘Upper Regions’ and the Route of Paul’s Third Journey from Apamea to Ephesus,” *Scriptura* 117 (2018): 3–5.

Galatia.”²⁸ Granted, an unplanned visit because of sickness or illness would obviate the intentionality seen in Paul’s visits to cities with Jewish communities. However, this is only postulated, and Acts mentions only one such medical evacuation: to Derbe (Acts 14:19–20).

CONCLUSION

Whom did Paul address in his letter to the Galatian churches? Was it the ethnic Gauls in north Galatia or the residents of provincial south Galatia? The north Galatian theory continues to have advocates; however, it is saddled with several inherent weaknesses. First, the Jewish population there was minimal. As Mitchell observes, “Jews are hardly attested in any of the cities before the 4th century.”²⁹ With no known synagogues, there was no religious attraction for Paul to travel there. Second, travelers coming from Syrian Antioch through the Cilician Gates to Ephesus would typically pass south of the three main north Galatian cities. While a diversion northward is possible, this hypothesis is conjectural. Third, the book of Acts never describes Paul traveling in north Galatia. Instead it shows the apostle journeying twice through southern Galatia and four times through central Galatia. Fourth, there is evidence that the north Galatian cities were evangelized, but more probably by Peter or his representatives (1 Pet 1:1). Finally, new inscriptional evidence shows that Pamphylia was part of Galatia at the time of Paul’s visit. This suggests that the audience of Galatians extended

southward rather than northward, thereby including the church in Perga founded on the first journey. This conclusion accords with Mitchell’s assessment, “There is virtually nothing to be said for the north Galatian theory.”³⁰

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28. Philip Niewöhner, “Germia and Vicinity: Western Galatia during the Roman and Byzantine Period,” *Araştırma Sonuçları Toplantısı* 28 (2010): 55. He shows an inscribed stele with menorah, dating from Late Antiquity, that was recently found near Pessinus (p. 65 fig. 13).

29. Stephen Mitchell, “Galatia,” *ABD* 2:871.

30. Mitchell, *Anatolia*, 2:3.

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