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ROMANS 16 AND THE TENT MAKERS

Dr. George K. Barr

The Study of trade and tentmaking in the first century provides a possible scenario for the movements of Aquila and Priscilla which are suggested by references in the Book of Acts and by greetings in the Pauline epistles. It also provides a reason for Paul's appeal for unity in Romans, his warnings, and his greetings in Romans 16 to so many friends in a city which he had not previously visited.

The construction of the Epistle to Romans

The initial stimulus for this study is found in the surprisingly long list of greetings to members of the congregation in Rome which is found in Romans 16. Added to that are the puzzling movements of Aquila and Priscilla which are reflected in greetings to or from them in other Pauline epistles.

Regarding the general construction of Romans, C.K. Barrett in his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* summarises the positions occupied by the Grace and the Doxology. The Grace occurs variously at 16:20b and at 16:24 but is omitted in some important texts. The Doxology may be found in various texts at the end of chapters 14, 15 or 16. Barrett is content to show how permutations of the sections represented by 1-14, 15 and 16 produced the different forms which are found in the various MSS. T.W. Manson in *To the Romans - And Others* (Essay in *The*

Romans Debate, ed. by Karl P. Donfried, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1977, pp.1-16) considered the possibility that an original corresponding to 1-15 had been sent to Rome, and a further copy with the greetings of Chapter 16 added, sent to the congregation in Ephesus. Further versions represent intermixtures of these types of text with Marcion's version which ended at 14:23. Manson thus attempts to explain Paul's greetings to so many people whom he could hardly be expected to know in Rome.

Scalometric analysis shows clearly that the prime pattern representing the material which Paul dictated in one operation covers Chapters 1-14, and that Chapters 15 and 16 may be regarded as afterthoughts. Fig. 1 compares the graphs of the sentence sequences of 1-14 with that of a computer model derived from two characteristic features of Pauline works, firstly the cyclic pattern of groups of long and short sentences, and secondly the contrast between the opening high scale portion (usually greetings and theological material) and the latter low scale portion (usually ethical material). Fig. 1 also gives the graphs of 15 and 16, with the Doxology showing clearly at the end of Chapter 16 (See also "Scale and the Pauline Epistles", *IBS* 17, Jan. 1995, pp. 22-41).

The problems posed by Chapter 16 are the long list of greetings to people in a community which some scholars assume Paul did not know, and the admonition concerning those who provoke divisions which may not be appropriate in the Roman situation. Manson's attempt to solve these problems was a literary solution, but one which paid little attention to other circumstances pertaining to these times. This present study considers some of these circumstances, but as evidence in some important areas is scanty, the best that can be done is to outline a plausible scenario from the facts that are available.

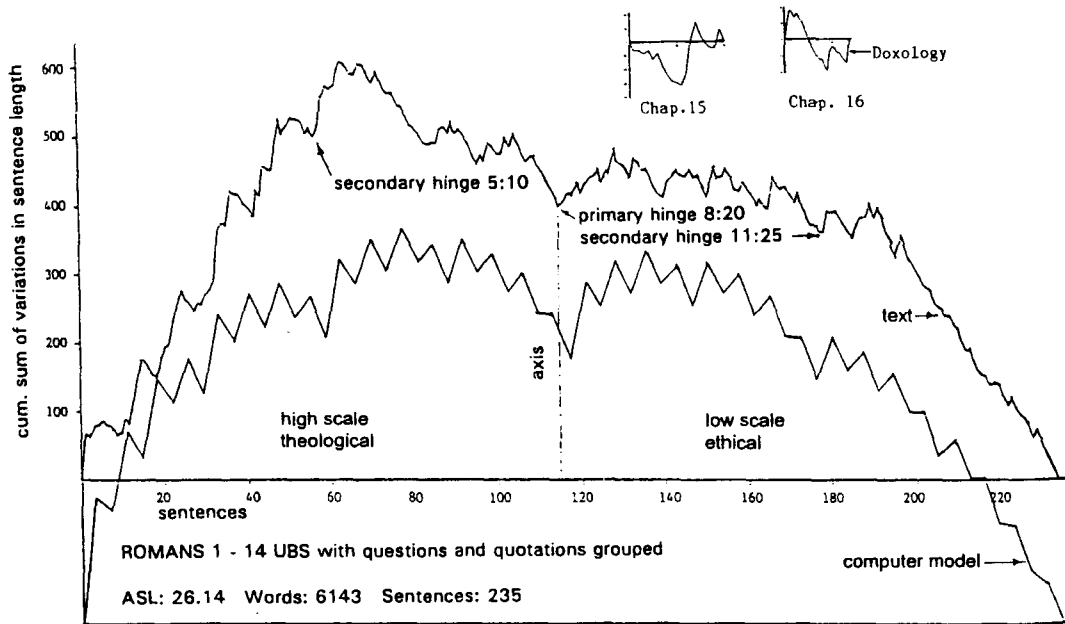


Fig. 1 Cumulative sum graph of Romans 1-14 compared with computer model. These chapters represent the first stage in the writing of the epistle and consist of a high scale theological first half matched by a low scale ethical second half. Each half has a similar number of sentences but with a substantial difference in the average sentence length. Similar "prime patterns" are found in each of the thirteen Pauline epistles. Chapters 15 and 16 have "afterthought" patterns.

Aquila and Priscilla

The movements of Aquila and Priscilla reflected in the texts of the various epistles require an explanation. They were apparently expelled from Rome during the “Chrestus” riots in the time of Claudius. Most scholars accept a date of AD 49, though Murphy-O’Connor would relate the occasion to another incident in AD 41. They worked with Paul in the craft of tent-making in Corinth and then went with Paul to Ephesus; Paul includes greetings **from** them in 1 Corinthians. In the Epistle to Romans Paul includes greetings **to** them (in Rome, or if Manson is correct, in Ephesus). In 2 Timothy Paul sends greetings **to** them in Ephesus. In Corinth Paul worked with Aquila and Priscilla in the craft of tent-making or leather-working which had been the craft of the latter in Rome.

The crafts of tent-making using a cloth of goat’s hair (*cilicium*) and working in leather and linen appear to have been carried out by the same artisans. The reconstruction of the Tabernacle in Exodus indicates that tents might be covered by either tent-cloth or skins. This raises some interesting questions. Was it possible for Paul to earn a living during his missionary journeys by tent-making? What were Jewish tentmakers doing in Rome? Who were their customers there? Lietzmann (*History of the Early Church* 1, 80) indicates that Jews in the Dispersion took with them considerable skills in weaving and dyeing but regrets that we have no records concerning the economic rôle of the Jews in Rome.

Were Aquila and Priscilla more than tentmakers - possibly textile importers? C.H. Dodd (1959, p.15) suggests that as they had a church in their house they were people in a large way of business who travelled widely. Aquila came from Pontus and may have opened branches in Ephesus and Corinth. When he and Priscilla

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were expelled from Rome they needed only to appoint a non-Jewish *procurator* to continue the business there. The priority given to Priscilla in many references may suggest that she belonged to a Roman family of some note. Findlay (1934, p.26) suggests that she may have been 'a great Roman lady or a freedwoman of the "gens Prisca" who had taken the name of that ancient and honourable house'. The most important customers in Rome must have been the Roman army with a large annual requirement of tent coverings and the Roman navy with a substantial annual requirement of sailcloth. It is plausible to imagine Aquila as a young Jewish entrepreneur married to a girl from a family of wealthy and influential traders supplying the needs of the Roman army and navy. It may be noted that Aquila and Priscilla are not to be directed, as Paul directed Timothy or Titus, but are free agents combining the responsibilities of their business with their service to the Christian community.

Supplies of *Cilicium*

The most important source of *cilicium* was indeed Cilicia, of which Tarsus, Paul's home town was the major city with a tradition in weaving and dyeing. Cilicia became a Roman province in 67 BC and became noted for the export of goat-hair cloth used in tent-making - hence *cilicium* (a cloth of goat's hair used by soldiers and seamen), *cilicarius* (a maker of hair coverings) and *cilicinus* (made of hair cloth and associated with *tentoria*). It is unclear, however, to what extent *cilicium* was used in the manufacture of tents for the Roman army. Fragments of leather tents have been found by archaeologists in England. It cannot be assumed, however, that such tents were typical of those issued to the rank and file throughout the Empire. Haircloth does not survive to be found in archaeological excavations as leather does. It is unlikely that linen

was used for army tents though it may have been used in sailcloth. Curiously, Murphy-O'Connor refers to linen awnings and leather tents (1996, 85-89) but makes no reference to *cilicium*.

To keep tents in repair for twenty eight legions which had a large measure of mobility would require an annual supply of some 80,000 square metres of material, skins or goat-hair cloth (based on a tent of ten by ten Roman feet for eight men and the replacement of sections on a five to six year cycle). While supplies at the boundaries of the Empire were usually obtained by requisitions placed upon cities, substantial quantities were required in the vicinity of Rome.

The mobility of the legions was astonishing. When trouble arose in Britain, for example, legions were brought in from the Rhine. This involved daily route marches, each soldier carrying up to sixty pounds weight of equipment including personal arms, bedding, rations and sundry implements. For each section of eight men, a beast of burden (pony, mule or camel) carried a tent and millstones. At the end of each day's march a camp was established, always laid out on exactly the same lines with a temporary defensive turf wall and ditch. The secret of this mobility lay in the constant repetition of the same routines with which all soldiers were familiar. The tent was a vital part of the system which allowed flexibility in controlling the boundaries of the Empire.

Trade Routes

Antioch in Syria, the third city of the Empire and from 64 BC the eastern capital, was the point at which the Silk Route met the established trade route to Rome. The Silk Route, bringing jade and silk some 4,000 miles from Xi'an to exchange for wool, gold and silver from Rome, involved a hazardous journey and business was probably speculative. The trade routes within the Empire, however,

were comparatively secure and allowed the movement of materials by contract. The trade route from Antioch to Rome corresponds with part of Paul's so-called third journey, from Antioch through Cilicia, across Asia Minor to Ephesus which was the major port at the mouth of the Cayster River, and thence by sea to Cenchreae and Corinth and so on to Rome. The alternative route was to strike north from Pisidian Antioch through Phrygia and Bithynia to the Bosphorus, and thence by the Egnatian Way to Apollonia or Dyrrhachium on the Adriatic. The short crossing to Brundisium took the traveller on to the Appian Way which led to Rome. Bulk supplies of *cilicium* were brought by caravan to Ephesus where an agent and storage facilities were needed until shipment could be arranged to Corinth. Similar facilities were also required in Corinth for the shipment of materials to Rome.

If Aquila and Priscilla were engaged in such contract work they would have had depots at Corinth and Ephesus. Expulsion from Rome by Claudius meant expulsion from the city, but not necessarily from the country. Nevertheless they may have found it more convenient to retire with their associates along the trade route to their next depot in Corinth to continue their work there, leaving a *procurator* to look after their interests in Rome.

The Roman Church

The Early Church spread through families and through groups of friends. It also spread through trade associations which were common both in Jewish and Roman societies. In Tarsus, the Cilician capital, the linen weavers banded together to fight for equality with freemen. The Roman *collegium* united groups of craftsmen, businessmen, priests or soldiers in a cult organisation with an emphasis on social obligation. Carpenters' and builders' were the most numerous, followed by leather-workers', dyers' and

fullers'. Tentmakers did not work in isolation; they were part of a community of weavers, dyers, cord makers, carpenters etc. In Rome the congregation may well have consisted of such a network of business associates, Aquila and Priscilla being important members. This network may have comprised several families, amounting to a few dozen persons initially, all of Jewish origin and forming a close-knit community held together by Christian fellowship and by business ties. The edict of Claudius would apply to them all and they may have held together and retired en masse to the depot at Corinth in AD 49.

There Paul met Aquila and Priscilla, and possibly the other members of the Roman congregation, and worked with them at their common craft. These members of the Roman congregation would have been in Corinth through at least part of the period of Paul's Corinthian correspondence (which may be dated between Spring AD 54 and autumn AD 56) and would be familiar with the contents of 1 Corinthians. They were able to return to Rome to resume business there after the death of Claudius (AD 54) and before the writing of the Epistle to Romans (possibly Spring AD 56).

Paul and Tent-making

The SKENOPOIOI or tentmakers of Acts 18:3 were the makers of tents, tabernacles, or any temporary shelter, using *cilicium*, leather or linen. The word covers a variety of manual skills. The tents with which Paul would be most familiar would be the goat-hair tents of the nomadic tribes, a form of the black tent which is ubiquitous from Morocco to eastern Tibet. In the nomadic tribes the tent covering is woven on a ground loom in strips a cubit wide, joined together into sections about two metres wide. The material is like a

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very heavy blanket and not at all like modern lightweight duck. The size of a tent is reckoned in camel loads and the covering is divided into sections accordingly. Indeed it was the domestication of the dromedary and the Bactrian camel which made nomadic tent-dwelling life possible.

St. Paul did not have a camel, and in view of the outlay and transport required it is unlikely that he engaged in the making of new tents during his missionary journeys. Tent-making cannot be done as simply as knitting a sock, but requires considerable outlay, transport and the co-operation of others in the craft. The references to Paul supporting himself and his colleagues through his manual work (1 Cor. 4:12f, 9:6-18, Acts 20:33,34) probably refer to more general labours and repairs using his manual skills. Only when he came to Corinth and met with Aquila and Priscilla and their friends did he have the opportunity to engage in tent-making. There, as 2 Cor. 11:9 shows, Paul did not appear to receive payment for his labours as he was supported by the brethren from Macedonia.

Murphy-O'Connor (1996, 86f) imagines that Paul chose tentmaking as a means of livelihood during his stay in Damascus where he became conscious of his need to be self-sufficient during a mobile ministry. He does not consider the possibility that Paul's family may have been involved in the craft in Tarsus which was a centre for the production of *cilicium* and the crafts associated with weaving, and that Paul may have acquired skills as a boy. Did Paul's father receive his Roman citizenship in recognition of services rendered in supplying *cilicium* to the Roman forces?

Gaps in the Evidence

The greatest difficulty lies in the fact that the writing classes who left records of Greek and Roman life considered manual labour and trade generally to be unworthy and consequently there are immense

gaps in the record of commercial life. Land-owning which produced wealth was considered honourable; trade which produced wealth was generally considered dishonourable, except perhaps for some luxury trades like purple dyeing which was acceptable if it made the participant wealthy enough. There is simply no record telling who, for example, produced the 200,000 sq. ft. of sailcloth needed for the two hundred triremes which the Athenians built after 483 BC or who produced the sailcloth for Roman vessels of up to a thousand tonnes burden. From the first century, African pottery was distributed widely throughout the Mediterranean but this immense commercial enterprise is never mentioned in any ancient literary source. Some army supplies in the later period (including weaving and purple-dyeing plant for large scale state contracts during Diocletian's tetrarchy between 284 and 305) were produced by state factories, but in the first century these were generally obtained by requisitions laid upon cities in the remoter parts of the Empire or by contract in the vicinity of Rome. The extent of the use of skins and *cilicium* in the manufacture of Roman tents is unknown. Rome itself required enormous quantities of materials annually, including about 200,000 tonnes of wheat per year, Sicilian corn, African oil and Spanish fish sauce. The goods needed to sustain Rome were obtained by negotiated public contracts and by taxation throughout the Empire. The *publicani* (the Biblical publicans) who acted as agents often became ship-owners and wholesalers but their activities are seldom recorded.

A Scenario

The first century saw an increase in the surplus produced in the Mediterranean basin and a great increase in the amount of coinage in circulation. There were exceptional opportunities for entrepreneurs among whom we might expect to find Jews of the

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Dispersion. As transport was comparatively expensive, most produce was consumed locally. Rome, however, required vast quantities to sustain her population and her army. Factories were known in Greek times but only in the later Roman period are factories found to produce significant quantities of goods for the army. As trade was not an acceptable social occupation, even the largest economic developments go unrecorded. A degree of standardisation found in Roman armour and equipment in the first century suggests that contracts were governed by specifications given to suppliers.

It is suggested that Aquila and Priscilla were more than simple tentmakers, and were in fact involved in the importation of *cilicium* to Rome and the manufacture of tents for the Roman army. They gathered a congregation round them in Rome, consisting initially of Jews associated with them in the various crafts which were involved in tent-making. In AD 49, when Claudius dealt with riots by expelling the Jews, Aquila and Priscilla and their Christian friends who were also colleagues in their craft, left Rome and retired to Aquila's depot at Corinth leaving a non-Jewish *procurator* in charge of their interests in Rome.

In Corinth they continued in business, receiving *cilicium* from the Tarsus area, manufacturing tents and forwarding them to Rome. Paul joined them and worked with them for a time. Then he went to Ephesus. Aquila and Priscilla accompanied him as they already had a depot in Ephesus where *cilicium* was stored ready for the sea passage to Corinth. A Christian congregation was associated with their premises there. The Christians from Rome must have formed a considerable proportion of the Corinthian congregation, and would have remained there through at least part of the period of Paul's Corinthian correspondence (c.AD 54-55). They took part in the troubles which engendered that correspondence. In 1 Cor. Paul

conveys to them the greetings of Aquila and Priscilla and the church that met in their premises in Ephesus.

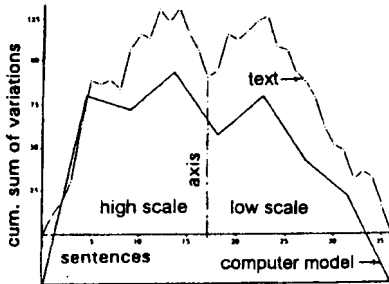
After the death of Claudius in AD 54, the way was clear for Aquila and Priscilla and their Jewish colleagues to return to Rome. **This event provided the occasion for the writing of the Epistle to Romans**; Paul wanted to be sure that the members from Rome had left the Corinthian troubles behind and were soundly established in faith. And so when Paul writes his epistle to Romans in AD 55 or 56, he not only sends his greetings to Aquila and Priscilla, but names the many members of the congregation with whom he had worked in Corinth. As he writes Romans, Paul's mind goes back to the troubles which had arisen when these friends were in Corinth. In 1:10ff he tries to be conciliatory. His appeal for unity in Chapters 12 and 15 may reflect the divisions he had to deal with in the Corinthian congregation and which are referred to in 1 Corinthians. The Corinthian correspondence points to some of the problems experienced by new Christians in a pagan world, but also hints at the growing conflict with the Judaisers which developed possibly from AD 52 and with which Paul dealt in detail in his epistle to Galatians (Murphy-O'Connor AD 53, Kümmel AD 54-55). It is not surprising in view of that recent development, that Paul should include in his letter to Romans, the sharp admonition in 16:17-20 referring to Jewish food laws. The members of the Roman church who had spent time in Corinth also knew about the collection for Jerusalem mentioned in Romans 15:31. Paul writes the letter in Greece during his three month stay there in AD 55-56 (Acts 20:3) and sends it by the hand of Phoebe, a member of the congregation in Cencreae who is going to Rome.

In due course, Paul himself arrived in Rome, and wrote to Timothy who had been left in charge in Ephesus to do his best to salvage a bad situation there. Scalometric analysis shows that the

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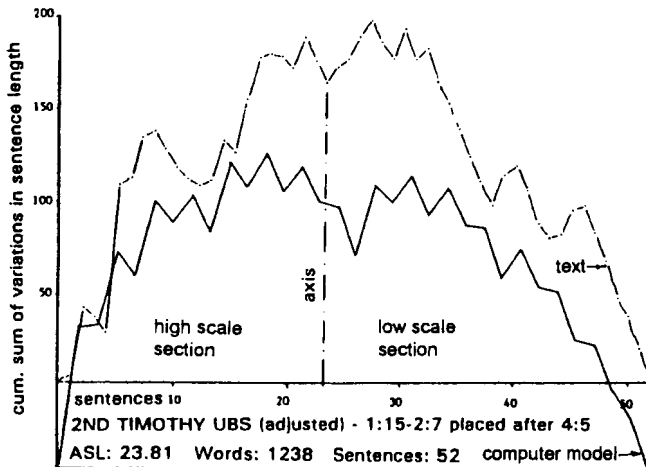
two letters to Timothy require slight adjustment to reveal the Pauline characteristics of the construction. Fig. 2 shows the prime patterns of the two epistles compared with the same computer model which was employed in the comparison with Romans in Fig. 1 but in this figure the model is shown at less complex levels; however, the characteristics underlying each level of the model are identical. The prime pattern of 1 Timothy ends at 5:7, the remainder constituting afterthoughts. 1 Tim 3:1-13, which like the parallel passage in Titus refers to qualities required in church leaders, is probably a marginal second century addition which has subsequently been incorporated in the text and should be removed. It does not belong to the prime pattern; neither do verses 14-16. The passage concerning bishops has misled many scholars into thinking that 1 Timothy is a pseudonymous second century work, but if it is excised, then a more primitive church order is revealed in the remaining text. 2 Tim. 1:15-2:7 is misplaced and should be located after 4:5; this is a matter of one page being displaced. These minor adjustments restore the Pauline prime patterns. At the time when Paul wrote 2 Timothy, Aquila and Priscilla were visiting their depot in Ephesus and were in touch with the associated house church there. Paul, being aware of their plans through the Christian community in Rome, included greetings to them in Ephesus.

With such a scenario, Romans 16 is seen to belong to the original epistle, and the movements of Aquila and Priscilla suggested by the greetings in other epistles fall into place. Chapters 15 and 16 do not, however, form part of the prime pattern which comprises the material which Paul first thought through and dictated in one operation. Rather they are in the nature of afterthoughts, added to the epistle a short time later. Some academics are perhaps too ready to expect perfection of construction and complete continuity in an epistle such as Romans.



1ST TIMOTHY Souter (adjusted) 1:1-5:7 with 3:1-16 omitted

ASL: 21.97 Words: 791 Sentences: 36



2ND TIMOTHY UBS (adjusted) - 1:15-2:7 placed after 4:5

ASL: 23.81 Words: 1238 Sentences: 52 computer model

Fig. 2 Cumulative sum graphs of 1 and 2 Timothy compared with computer model. These epistles correspond to less complex versions of the model than that appropriate to Romans. Nevertheless, all three levels are based on exactly the same mathematics.

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That can not be expected in an epistle written in three distinct sessions as Romans was, and it is not unreasonable to find epistolary conclusions to these afterthoughts at 15:33 and 16:20ff.

One must also remember the change in the nature of meetings conducted by Paul over these two critical years from AD 54-56. The confrontations with traditional Jews which had often ended in disorder and violence had become diets of worship with fellow Christians. The sermon had taken the place of debate, and the doxology had taken the place of disorder. It is entirely plausible that Paul, on the last of these three sessions in writing his epistle to the Romans, should fill the remaining space in his parchment with his friends' greetings and conclude the epistle with an ascription of glory like those which he had become accustomed to using in worship with his fellow Christians. With a scenario such as this, it appears likely that the original form of the epistle to Romans was in fact the form in which we now have it.

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