

It is remarkable that two men called Sergius Paulus are described in very similar terms by two physicians who wrote in Greek, the one a heathen, the other a Christian.

The heathen writer is Galen. He speaks of his contemporary as a man interested and well versed in philosophy.

The Christian writer is St. Luke, who tells us here that the governor of Cyprus was a “prudent” man, who “desired to hear the Word of God.” This governor seems to have been of a candid and inquiring mind; nor will this philosophical disposition be thought inconsistent with his connection with the Jewish imposter, whom Saul and Barnabas found at the Paphian court, by those who are acquainted with the intellectual and religious tendencies of the age.

For many years before this time, and many years after, impostors from the East, pretending to magical powers, had great influence over the Roman mind. All the Greek and Latin literature of the empire, from Horace to Lucian, abounds in proof of the prevalent credulity of this skeptical period. Unbelief, when it has become conscious of its weakness, is often glad to give its hand to superstition. The faith of educated Romans was utterly gone. We can hardly wonder, when the East was thrown open – the land of mystery, the fountain of the earliest migrations, the cradle of the earliest religions – that the imagination both of the populace and the aristocracy of Rome became fanatically excited, and that they greedily welcomed the most absurd and degrading superstitions. Not only was the metropolis of the empire crowded with “hungry Greeks” but “Syrian fortune tellers” flocked into all the haunts of public amusement. Athens and Corinth did not now contribute the greatest or the worst part of the dregs of Rome; but (to adopt Juvenal’s use of that river of Antioch we have lately been describing) “the Orontes itself flowed into the Tiber.”

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