Paul is one of the most important characters within the New Testament, however, there is still much debate surrounding his life, ministry and theology. One of the key pieces of historical background that would shed light on the understanding of Paul is the understanding of his citizenship. Although not mentioned within his letters, Luke reports in the book of Acts that Paul was a Roman citizen in addition to being a Hellenistic Jew born in Tarsus. Determining if Paul was a Roman citizen is an important step in uncovering the Paul behind the letters and the Paul in Acts. In this paper, I will first outline the nature and development of Roman citizenship within the ancient world and its importance for the bestowing of rights and privileges to its holder. This will be followed by a discussion of the historical veracity of Acts and its story. Finally Paul’s citizenship will be evaluated including the role of dual citizenship in the ancient world and the incident of Acts 22:22–29 and the possible ramifications of making a false claim of Roman citizenship.

Roman Citizenship

Citizenship, at the very beginning of Rome’s development, was relatively limited to people who lived within Rome and the surrounding area. However, as their influence and power increased it became more desirable to have Roman citizenship. Originally, people could only become citizens in three ways: birth, manumission or special concession.\(^1\) Citizenship by birth does not require much explanation except

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that in the case that there is a marriage between a Roman citizen and a non-citizen, the child would take the citizenship of the father.\textsuperscript{2} One of the unique aspects of Roman citizenship was that it was conferred upon slaves at the time of manumission. This policy was quite opposite to the practice of the Greeks, who did not grant citizenship to freed slaves. The third criterion, special concession, is quite complicated and to outline the various possibilities is not within the scope of this paper. However, some of these would include the founding of Roman colonies, outstanding service to Rome, military service, etc.\textsuperscript{3}

Between the fifth and the third centuries BC there were only a few minor changes to the understanding of Roman citizenship. Although there was very little expansion preceding the Latin Wars (340–338 BC), after 338 BC the Romans began to seriously stretch the boundaries of their territories through colonizing the surrounding areas.\textsuperscript{4} In addition to this, the Romans also added to their territory through the conquest of neighbouring tribes and cities. Some of these municipia were fully incorporated into Roman citizenship, however, a number of them were given partial status, half-citizenship, for a time until being later included. This helped relieve the pressure on Rome to incorporate all conquered cities immediately into the Roman state as well as successfully integrate these cities and peoples into the Republic, and later the Empire.\textsuperscript{5}

In the late second century BC there was a general movement by the Roman elite to restrict Roman citizenship for all foreigners, including the Latins and Italians.\textsuperscript{6} Attempts to appease the Latins and Italians by Marcus Flaccus in 125 BC and Gaius Gracchus in 122 BC were

\textsuperscript{2} The right to have such a mixed marriage, called connubium, existed between patricians and plebeians and was also granted to Latins. Livy 4.1.

\textsuperscript{3} In the case of colonies, its founding would be sanctioned by a lex colonica, which would indicate the number of people being sent as well as the fact that the colony would retain the full Roman franchise as part of the populus Romanus. See Goodfellow, Roman Citizenship, 10–25 for a detailed explanation of the various methods and issues that surrounded the acquiring and distribution of Roman citizenship during the Republic.


\textsuperscript{5} Goodfellow, Roman Citizenship, 13–15. Sherwin-White (The Roman Citizenship, 38–58) has an excellent discussion regarding the nature of the municipia, how they were organized and differed between cities, as well as their importance for the development of imperial citizenship which secured the success of the Roman Republic.

\textsuperscript{6} This was a result of the abuse of the ius migrationis by the Latins, who were allowed to gain Roman citizenship if they moved to Rome. Livy 39.3; 41.8–9.