

LOVEDAY C. A. ALEXANDER: LUKE-ACTS IN ITS ANCIENT LITERARY CONTEXT

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INTRODUCTION

The focus of Reverend Canon Professor Loveday C. A. Alexander's work has been, as we will see, on "the literary talents of Luke" as she examined his prefaces, his historicity, and discussions of genre surrounding his works. But she has also examined questions regarding the development of Christianity, the passing on of traditions about Jesus using practices comparable to Hellenistic schools, and stories of Paul that look similar in some ways to Greek novels. Insights into Luke's ecclesiology become relevant for both scholarly reconstructions and church life today. This chapter will address these studies in topical fashion after a brief look at Professor Alexander's life and non-academic contributions.

BIOGRAPHY

Professor Alexander's life has crossed many of the boundaries often erected between scholarship and the rest of life. She was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, on August 15, 1947, but she grew up in the north

of England and still enjoys walking in the hills and by the sea. She has two children and two grandchildren and is married to Philip Alexander, Emeritus Professor of Jewish Studies at the University of Manchester. Her career has successfully crossed between the disciplines of classics and biblical studies and the responsibilities of academia and the church, which have offered both their gifts and their demands.

Alexander completed her first degree in classics at Somerville College, in the University of Oxford; she then went on to complete her D.Phil. in the Faculty of Theology. Her classical background provided her with expertise in ancient languages and a wide familiarity with non-biblical Greek texts. Hellenistic schools and Greek technical writing have become part of her approach to the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles.

Loveday Alexander was appointed Canon Theologian at Chester (2003–2014) and Chichester Cathedrals (2011–2016), and her many publications for lay and clergy readership demonstrate her commitment to sharing the fruits of her academic research with the church. She continues this work today as a member of the Church of England's Faith and Order Commission (2008–2022).

Alexander has published a *Guide for Reflection and Prayer* on the Book of Acts.¹ She engaged discussions about church offices with “Are There Any Bishops in the Bible?” which was the Canon-Theologian's Chester Cathedral Lecture, 2012,² and she reminded readers about the “reticence of the Creeds” to define more than is necessary in “Homosexuality and the Bible: Reflections of a Biblical Scholar.”³ Furthermore, she continues to engage with both academic and confessing communities with lectures such as the 2016 Clark Lecture at Duke Divinity School, “Is Luke a Historian? Writing the History of the Early Church,” and a Bible Talk at Chester Cathedral, in March 2021, “‘Love bade me welcome’: George Herbert and Nicholas Ferrar.”

These examples, and those discussed below, demonstrate the breadth of her writing abilities, from her thorough engagement

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1. Published in the UK in The People's Bible Commentary series by Oxford: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2006 and in the Daily Bible Commentary series by Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006 in North America.
 2. See also Loveday Alexander and Mike Higton, eds., *Faithful Improvisation? Theological Reflections on Church Leadership* (London: Church House Publishing, 2016).
 3. Loveday Alexander, “Homosexuality and the Bible: Reflections of a Biblical Scholar,” in *Grace and Disagreement: Shared Conversations on Scripture, Mission and Human Sexuality*, ed. by The Archbishops' Council (London: The Archbishops' Council, 2014), 24–51.

with Greek in *The Preface to Luke's Gospel*, to her French article on intertextuality,⁴ her student-level chapter on the importance of (and cautions about) using Greco-Roman literature and culture for New Testament studies,⁵ and two very similar articles on the topic of biblical interpretation and application, one more accessible (“This is That”), and one more academic (“God’s Frozen Word”).⁶ Although the discussions below focus primarily on Alexander’s academic work as opposed to her ministerial, it occasionally becomes difficult to separate the two.

PREFACES AND HISTORICITY

This section covers the beginning of Alexander’s academic inquiries, her thesis comparing the prefaces of Luke’s Gospel and the Book of Acts with those of various other ancient Greek works. While she distances Luke’s style of preface-writing from ancient Greek historiographies, she points out that such a determination does not affect conclusions about the historicity of Luke–Acts. As we will see, Alexander looks at the name of the recipient of the dedication, Theophilus, and concludes that he was likely a real person and perhaps a patron who provided space for Christian teachers to perform their works. The trials of Luke–Acts offer evidence for the dating of the works to the reign of Claudius. The preface to Acts is judged to be like that of the Gospel, differing only in its reference to the other work. However, Alexander concludes that the two books should be read as one two-volume work since several scenes and references at the end of Acts mirror the beginning of Luke’s Gospel.

While some previous scholars had classified the Gospels within the genre of historiography, Alexander concluded that the preface to Luke’s Gospel is shorter, barely mentions sources, methodology, subject-matter, or usefulness, nor does Luke introduce himself or write in a sufficiently high literary register to qualify as an attempt

4. Loveday Alexander, “L’intertextualité et la question des lecteurs : Réflexions sur l’usage de la Bible dans les Actes des Apôtres,” in *Intertextualités: La Bible en échos*, ed. D. Marguerat and A. Curtis (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2000), 201–14.

5. Loveday Alexander, “The Relevance of Greco-Roman Literature and Culture to New Testament Studies,” in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 109–26.

6. Loveday Alexander, “‘This is That’: The Authority of Scripture in the Acts of the Apostles,” *PSB NS* 25 (2004): 189–204; Alexander, “God’s Frozen Word: Canonicity and the Dilemmas of Biblical Studies Today,” *ExpTim* 117.6 (2006): 237–42.

to mimic historians' prefaces.⁷ Rather, it more likely participates in a register she sometimes refers to as "scientific tradition" but prefers to call *Fachprosa*, "a range of technical handbooks in subjects as diverse as engineering, rhetoric, and medicine."⁸ In comparing the preface of the Third Gospel to other prefaces in the ancient world, including Jewish writing, Greek rhetoric, Greek histories, and Greek technical writing, Alexander notes the following frequent characteristics of technical writing: a mention of the author's decision to write, with qualifications and methodology; the subject matter and its nature; a recipient of a dedication addressed in the second person; and a mention of other authors who have written on the same topic.⁹ The Greek employed usually consists of periodic sentences, rhetorical devices such as litotes and alliteration on the p-sound, distinctive vocabulary (particularly on the topics of presentation, evaluation of the contents and author qualifications), and verbal periphrasis and compound verbs.¹⁰

In an appendix to *Preface*, Alexander analyzes the structures of four of these prefaces along with Luke 1:1–4. While Alexander engages with them in Greek, I list them here in English translation:

Diocles to King Antigonus. Since you happen to have become the most cultured of all kings and to have lived longest and to be experienced in all intellectual activity and to be a frontrunner in the sciences, I thought that the learning and theoretical study of matters related to health would be a royal and appropriate intellectual activity. I am therefore writing to you [about the question] whence diseases in human beings originate and what signs precede [them], and how one might be successful in treating them. For just as a storm does not at any time come about in the atmosphere without certain signs preceding it, which sailors and people with much experience attend to, likewise an affection does not originate in the bodily nature of a human being at any time without some sign occurring prior to it. If you are persuaded by our words, you

7. Alexander notes in particular the work of Meyer, Toynbee, van Unnik, and Barrett; *Preface*, 2.

8. Loveday Alexander, *The Preface to Luke's Gospel: Literary Convention and Social Context in Luke 1.1–4 and Acts 1.1*, SNTSMS 78 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 102–103; Loveday Alexander, "On a Roman Bookstall: Reading Acts in its Ancient Literary Context," in *Acts in Its Ancient Literary Context: A Classicist Looks at the Acts of the Apostles* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 1–20, here 3.

9. For a definition of technical writing, see below.

10. Alexander, *Preface*, 67–101.

will attend to the accurate [indications] about them. (Diocles of Carystus, *Letter to Antigonus* 1–10, fourth/third century BCE)¹¹

According to the theory that governs epistolary types, Heraclides, (letters) can be composed in a great number of styles, but are written in those which always fit the particular circumstance (to which they are addressed). While (letters) ought to be written as skillfully as possible, they are in fact composed indifferently by those who undertake such services for men in public office. Since I see that you are eager in your love to learn, I have taken it upon myself, by means of certain styles, to organize and set forth (for you) both the number of distinctions between them and what they are, and have sketched a sample, as it were, of the arrangement of each kind, and have, in addition, individually set forth the rationale for each of them. (I do so), partly assuming that this pleases you too, since you will know that you are making your splendid life surpass others, not in banquets, but in professional skills, and partly believing that I shall share in the praise that will properly (redound to you). (Demetrius, *Formae Epistolicae* 1–8, 1 BCE)¹²

The investigation of the properties of Atmospheric Air having been deemed worthy of close attention by the ancient philosophers and mechanists, the former deducing them theoretically, the latter from the action of sensible [i.e., able to be apprehended by our senses] bodies, we also have thought proper to arrange in order what has been handed down by former writers, and to add thereto our own discoveries: a task from which much advantage will result to those who shall hereafter devote themselves to the study of mathematics. We are further led to write this work from the consideration that it is fitting that the treatment of this subject should correspond with the method given by us in our treatise, in four books, on water-clocks. For, by the union of air, earth, fire and water, and the concurrence of three, or four, elementary principles, various combinations are effected, some of which supply the

11. Translation by Philip J. van der Eijk, *Diocles of Carystus: A Collection of the Fragments with Translation and Commentary*, vol 1: *Text and Translation* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 310–13.

12. Translation from Abraham J. Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*, SBLSPS 19 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 31. Note that in this case the preface continues as the author explains that he designed his words for older people just as much as for youths; Alexander, *Preface*, 215.

most pressing wants of human life, while others produce amazement and alarm. (Hero of Alexandria, *Pneumatica* 1. 1–5, first century CE)¹³

Many having more extensively considered the theory of wounds, I myself considered it necessary to be more descriptive and to work these topics out according an outline, thus intending this matter to be well enumerated and easily understood for those approaching the discipline for the first time. It is simple, and comparatively easily dealt with after relatively simple apprehension as indeed it has readily been found to be by many. Now one must begin. (Galen of Pergamon, *De Typis* 1–6, second century CE)¹⁴

Alexander offers the following translation of Luke's Prefaces:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken the task of compiling an account of the matters which have come to fruition in our midst, just as the tradition was handed down to us by the original eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed everything carefully and thoroughly, to write it all up for you in an orderly fashion, most excellent Theophilus so that you may have assured knowledge about the things in which you have been instructed. (Luke 1:1–4)¹⁵

The previous treatise which I wrote, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and to teach. (Acts 1:1)¹⁶

In these prefaces, Alexander notes the regular occurrences of causal clauses; mentions of other writers; description, nature, and methodological treatment of subject-matter, the author's decision to write as the main verb; a rhetorical address, and the results for the dedicatee or the readers.¹⁷ Furthermore, since the style of Luke's writing shifts immediately after the preface to a register more in line with biblical

13. Translation from Bennet Woodcroft, *The Pneumatics of Hero of Alexandria: From the Original Greek* (London: Taylor, Walton and Maberly, 1851), 1. This preface, too, contains an additional sentence not included in Alexander, *Preface*, 215.

14. Translation from Zachary K. Dawson, "Does Luke's Preface Resemble a Greek Decree? Comparing the Epigraphical and Papyrological Evidence of Greek Decrees with Ancient Preface Formulae," *NTS* 65.4 (2019): 552–71, here 559.

15. This is a compilation of her translations in *Preface*, 107, 116, 125, 136.

16. Alexander, *Preface*, 142.

17. Alexander, *Preface*, 213–16.

Greek, Alexander proposes that Luke wrote the preface he did because such a style seemed normal to him, “what one does when one writes a preface.”¹⁸ Luke’s Greek fits within the middle level of craftsman, artisans, and practitioners.¹⁹

Alexander was careful, in this comparison, to anticipate arguments motivated by concerns about historical reliability, pointing out that historiography itself had rules that differed from those of our own historians. One way to check for the truth of a text is to compare it to outside historical events. But there are two other ways. The first has to do with a subjective evaluation of how likely the events described are to have happened. The second has to do with genre.²⁰

It has often been assumed that if Acts is an ancient history, then it was presenting itself as a reliable account of events. But that correlation does not always hold in the ancient world. Furthermore, classifying Acts as another genre does not necessarily destroy its truth claims. Greek and Roman historiographers and biographers, to be sure, speak in the third person and carefully distinguish between what they themselves have seen and therefore know to be true, and things told to them by others which can be questioned. Thus, they present an aura of objectivity. However, the reporting of the tales or experiences of others often brackets reports of fantastic fictions that were related to hold the attention of readers. This practice contributed to the reputation of historiographers, geographers, and biographers as liars.

Thus, one cannot prove the facticity of Acts simply by categorizing it as a historiography. With its variations of ethnicities and far-flung geographies, Acts opens the door to the possibility that its tales are inventions. On the other hand, the thoroughly Roman settings, the lack of a happy ending, and the businesslike preface all suggest facticity.²¹ “Acts is a narrative which both implies and creates the presumption of a shared religious experience: and that is some-

18. Loveday Alexander, “Luke’s Preface in the Pattern of Greek Preface-Writing,” *NovT* 28 (1986): 48–74, here 64–66. Alexander also goes through 2 Macc. 2:19–32; Eccles. 1–36; *Letter of Aristeas*; Philo of Alexandria; and Josephus. She finds “a diverse group of Jewish writers whose prefaces plug into Greek literary convention in different ways”; *Preface*, 166. ~~Note that Luke’s Greek fits within the middle-level Greek of craftsman, artisans, and practitioners; *Preface*, 171, 174–75.~~

19. See Alexander, *Preface*, 184–86, for Luke’s attitude towards epics, manual labor, and orality that also support this conclusion.

20. Loveday Alexander, “Fact, Fiction, and the Genre of Acts,” *NTS* 44 (1998): 380–99, here 380.

21. Luke’s characterization of Felix and the arrival of Bernice and Agrippa (Acts 23–26) coheres with other reports of the time; Loveday Alexander, “Acts,” in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, ed. John Barton and John Muddiman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1028–61, here 1057–58.

thing difficult to accommodate within the standard fact/fiction grid of Greek literature.”²² While those who know other Jewish writings might recognize the genre from the LXX, those familiar only with Greek writings might legitimately be confused.²³

Issues of facticity come up again with regard to Luke’s dedicatee, Theophilus. It is possible that Theophilus was a colleague of Luke’s, the patron of a house church who provided a space in which Luke could perform his oeuvre. Alternatively, Alexander points out that his name was common among the Jewish diaspora.²⁴ This suggests that, rather than a powerful Roman, he might be part of the Jewish community in Rome, perhaps, “(let us hypothesize), . . . a prominent and amenable representative of the same Jewish community in Rome to which Luke has Paul make his last impassioned plea for hearing in Acts 28.”²⁵ If Luke were writing to a Jewish diaspora community, his frequent references to the LXX would need no apology or explanation. Whether this seems plausible or not, Alexander notes that the book of Acts provides a history of Paul’s life which gives a backdrop to his letters. Christianity or at least our conception of its origins would look quite different if John, or James, or Peter had had an associate similarly interested in taking notes.

Alexander also analyzes the speeches in Acts and compares them to later Roman discussions about prosecuting Christians (Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96–97).²⁶ The Roman judicial system required a judge (but for capital cases, one needed a governor who was often rarely available), a prosecutor, the accused (who could give a defense in some cases; Acts 25:16), and a verdict (which governors sometimes decided idiosyncratically). In general, the motives for accusing Christians (*odium humani generis*, “latent political disobedience,” or a loss in temple sacrifices) were different from the charges: “disorder . . . , disloyalty . . . , illegal assembly . . . , atheism.”²⁷ Alexander looks at these elements in the various trials in Acts and draws the following conclusions:

22. Alexander, “Fact,” 399.

23. Alexander, “Fact,” 397.

24. Loveday Alexander, “What if Luke Had Never Met Theophilus,” *BibInt* 8 (1999): 161–70, here 165.

25. Alexander, “What if Luke,” 165.

26. Loveday Alexander, “Silent Witness: Paul’s Troubles with Roman Authorities in the Book of Acts,” in *The Last Years of Paul: Essays from the Tarragona Conference, June 2013*, ed. Armand Puig i Tàrrach, John M. G. Barclay, Jörg Frey, and Orrey McFarland, WUNT 352 (Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 153–73.

27. Alexander, “Silent Witness,” 158.

1. Paul's troubles occurred not because the authorities apprehended him contravening the law but because locals prosecuted him. This presentation of Paul's history could be attributed to Luke's desire to exonerate Paul, but it also fits with Roman behavior.
2. The locals are identified as immigrants or tradespeople, but not slaves.²⁸ They are often motivated by financial concerns; they see Paul as a competitor who would further impoverish them.
3. Those adjudicating his case are often motivated by a fear of being unable to keep the peace.
4. There is also, and this became a stronger motivating force in later Christian persecutions, the Roman fear of diminishing respect for the gods.²⁹

Comparing these conclusions to the situation at the time of Pliny, Alexander points out that by then Christians are seen as clearly separate from Jews. Christianity has gone from an annoyance to a threat, and to simply call oneself a Christian has become a crime.³⁰ If G. E. M. de Ste. Croix is correct that these changes occurred after 64 CE (after the persecution of Christians as responsible for the great fire in Rome), Alexander's analysis of the conflicts in Acts places them under the reign of Claudius, i.e., 41–54 CE.³¹

What about the preface to the book of Acts? Multi-volume works in the ancient world often started with a sentence of recapitulation, as does Acts. Luke's care to alert his readers to the existence of his Gospel might suggest that he saw the two works as integral. Consonances with the preface to Luke's Gospel also suggest that Acts is not a second work or a different genre.³² However, recapitulations do not always refer to the first half of the work in progress but sometimes to another of the author's works. Luke's recapitulation (Acts 1:1), then, tells us little about the way he conceived of the two volumes.

28. Alexander, "Silent Witness," 169.

29. Alexander, "Silent Witness," 171.

30. Alexander, "Silent Witness," 172.

31. Alexander, "Silent Witness," 172; G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?" *Past and Present* 26 (1963): 6–38, here 8.

32. Loveday Alexander, "The Preface to Acts and the Historians," in *History, Literature and Society in the Book of Acts*, ed. Ben Witherington III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 73–103, here 82–100.

Alexander initially thought the idea of Luke intentionally composing a two-volume work unlikely given the lack of references in the Gospel to Acts as a continuation of the story.³³ However, in her chapter, “Reading Luke–Acts from Back to Front,” she uses Genette’s concept of paratext to note some of the ways that the end of Acts resumes themes and references from the beginning of the Third Gospel.³⁴ The Gospel and Acts generally focus on Jerusalem and specifically in the transition from one to the next leave out any of the references to Galilee found in Matthew, Mark, and John. This helps the reader move smoothly from the ascension in Luke to the ascension in Acts. However, Acts does not end in Jerusalem but in Rome, and in the Gospel, the birth of Jesus is framed in a Roman construction of time (Luke 2:1). Moreover, the discussion with the Jews at the end of Acts mirrors the discussion with Simeon at the beginning of the Gospel, and “the rare septuagintal word σωτήριον” occurs in both of these passages (Luke 2:30; Acts 28:28) and also in Luke’s Isaiah quotation describing John the Baptist (Luke 3:6). These are three out of only five occurrences of this word in the New Testament.³⁵ Isaiah 6:9–10 seems to have been quite constitutive for early Christianity.³⁶ Luke includes only a shortened quotation when he takes over the Parable of the Sower from Mark (Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10). He waits until Acts 28:26–27 to offer a longer version in his final explanation of the general (although never complete) rejection of the gospel by the Jewish leaders, thus tying the two works together.

The ending of Acts focuses on Paul and his act of proclamation, described as “testifying to the kingdom of God” and “persuading them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and also from the Prophets” (28:23; cf. 28:31). The beginning of Luke’s Gospel, too, ~~Alexander points out,~~ focuses on prophets and prophecy (Mary, Zechariah, Anna, and Simeon).³⁷ John the Baptist’s story is told all at once in Luke, unlike in

33. On Alexander’s reluctance to come to this conclusion, see Loveday Alexander, “Reading Luke–Acts from Back to Front,” in *Acts in Its Ancient Literary Context*, 207–29, here 224; reprinted from *The Unity of Luke–Acts*, ed. Joseph Verheyden, BETL 142 (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), 419–46.

34. Alexander, “Reading Luke–Acts,” 209–10.

35. Alexander, “Reading Luke–Acts,” 220. Alexander says σωτήριος occurs “only four times,” but the word can also be found in Eph. 6:17 and Titus 2:11 (that last is possibly disputed).

36. It is cited in Mark 4:12 (and parallels); 8:17–18; John 12:39–40; Alexander, “Reading Luke–Acts,” 216.

37. Note that kingdom (Luke 1:33) and the Law of Moses (2:22) feature at the beginning of Luke’s Gospel as well, and John the Baptist also seeks to persuade people about Jesus (3:15–18).

the other Gospels, foregrounding him as a prophet (1:76). In this way, both the beginning of the Gospel and the end of Acts highlight those who proclaim Jesus.

Then, too, the opening of Luke's Gospel slowly ushers its listeners from everyday life into the world of the narrative, one with angelic appearances and a miraculous conception. Similarly, the ending of the book of Acts brings us from the miraculous (28:1–10) "back to the everyday world where the rest of us live, a world where prophets and angels have receded back into a mythical past, but where the more mundane and open-ended tasks of teaching and persuasion continue 'unhindered.'"³⁸

These similarities between the beginning of the Third Gospel and the end of Acts would not allow a reader or hearer to foresee the end of Acts from the Gospel's beginning. Still, ancient readers like Theophilus (Luke 1:4) would have already been taught what happened to Paul, and these texts would have been read not just once but many times. In this way, the resonances between the beginning of the Gospel and the end of Acts would emerge. The mirroring of themes from the beginning of Luke's Gospel at the end of Acts suggests to Alexander that Luke intends from the beginning of his Gospel to communicate the tragedy of the closed ears of Israel (Luke 1:16–20, 54–55, 67–79; 2:28–38; Acts 28:23–30). The two volumes are one book.³⁹

LUKE–ACTS AND GENRE

While Alexander's studies regarding historiography have already been discussed, this section will describe her further work on the topic. She dismisses the genre of epic for both volumes, and the genre of *apologia* for Acts, and she argues instead that once Luke gets into the narratives proper his style is most like that of the LXX. Furthermore, although Alexander notes similarities with ancient biographies, she suggests that Luke's work fits that genre only as a broad umbrella term. Functionally, Luke–Acts provides grounds for the emerging Christian teaching

38. Alexander, "Reading Luke–Acts," 229.

39. For a summary of *Preface* with echoes of "Reading Luke–Acts," see Alexander, "Formal Elements and Genre: Which Greco-Roman Prologues Most Closely Parallel the Lukan Prologue?" in *Jesus and the Heritage of Israel*, vol. 1: *Luke's Narrative Claim upon Israel's Legacy*, ed. David P. Moessner, Luke the Interpreter (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1999), 9–26.

and for the self-understanding of Christianity as a development of God's revelation in the Jewish Scriptures.

In a 1998 book chapter, Alexander recounts a classroom exercise in which she asked students to compare battle scenes in the writing of Thucydides and the Septuagint.⁴⁰ Her students noticed that Greek writers went into more detail, included more characters, and constructed more complex narratives. They used direct speech less, but the speeches themselves were longer. The ethical behavior of combatants was important to both kinds of authors, but most evident in the biblical accounts. Biblical narratives included women, while Greek war stories did not. Also, Greek histories were expected to deal with events of importance to the largest number of people and nations, which often meant war. The topic of Luke–Acts was not likely to be considered noble or important to Greek readers.

Greek authors inserted authorial comments into their writing, guiding their readers through what they themselves saw or experienced and what they only heard. The biblical author however is mostly invisible. In biblical narratives, God is one of the characters, and miracles occur often.⁴¹ In Greek histories, the supernatural is not frequently mentioned and when it is, it is often subject to skepticism. Thus, Greek historians deployed the authorial voice to bolster the truth of their words and yet were generally perceived to be liars. Students, as opposed to ancient readers, found the Greek histories more reliable than the biblical stories, perhaps because of their bias towards objectivity, a bias which is satisfied by the seemingly objective authorial voice. Furthermore, students were more entertained by the Greek histories because they include details and amusing side bars that kept them interested, as opposed to the “war bulletin” style of the biblical story.⁴²

Which of these two approaches does Luke follow? “What seems to emerge clearly from this survey is that where there is a significant difference between the two traditions, Luke follows the biblical approach to historiography almost every time.”⁴³ Acts is shorter; it uses less characters, although it includes women; and Luke's narrative style

40. Loveday Alexander, “Marathon or Jericho? Reading Acts in Dialogue with Biblical and Greek Historiography,” in *Auguries: The Jubilee Volume of the Sheffield Department of Biblical Studies*, ed. David J. A. Clines and Stephen D. Moore, JSOTSup 269 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 92–125.

41. Alexander, “Acts,” 1034, 1042.

42. Alexander, “Marathon,” 115.

43. Alexander, “Marathon,” 119; cf. Alexander, “Acts,” 1043.

is “straightforward and concise.”⁴⁴ Except for the prefaces, Luke does not take an authorial voice; he frequently comments on the narrative, but through the prayers of the characters.⁴⁵ His speeches are unequal in length and his storytelling often occurs as anecdotes.⁴⁶ Thus, while Alexander characterizes Luke’s prefaces as written in a technical register appropriate for *Fachprosa*, the bulk of Luke’s narrative follows the model of the Septuagint.

In 2003, Alexander continued her discussion of genre responding to some scholars, such as Marianne Palmer Bonz and Dennis MacDonald, who argued that Luke–Acts and Mark were modeled on ancient epics.⁴⁷ She begins by defining an epic, noting that the word can be used casually to mean a long, important foundational narrative, but when used specifically as an ancient genre it includes: “verse narrative” of some “length [and] complexity,” having “a certain grandeur” and heroism.⁴⁸ It is true that within the Hebrew Bible we might find some narratives comparable to epic works; however, that is not the case in the New Testament. And while Acts might be a foundational narrative, construing it as epic in that casual sense does not imply that it is epic as to genre as well. Even if the New Testament shows awareness of Homer and Virgil, those stories were retold outside of the poetic form in the ancient world, so texts could echo the stories without imitating the genre. Indeed, when *lexis* (“ . . . diction, . . . accidence and syntax, . . . rhythm and metre”) is taken into account, Alexander shows that the book of Acts is imitating biblical Greek, rather than Homer or Virgil.⁴⁹ The importance of *lexis* also brings into question the validity of the concept of a “prose epic.”⁵⁰

Some passages in Acts reward comparison, however. Just as Aeneas’s arrival at the site where Rome would be founded is described

44. Alexander, “Marathon,” 120.

45. Alexander, “Acts,” 1034.

46. Alexander, “Marathon,” 121.

47. Marianne Palmer Bonz, *The Past as Legacy: Luke–Acts and Ancient Epic* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000); Dennis R. MacDonald, *The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); MacDonald, *Does the New Testament Imitate Homer? Four Cases from the Acts of the Apostles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

48. Loveday Alexander, “New Testament Narrative and Ancient Epic,” in *Acts in Its Ancient Literary Context*, 165–82, here 167; reprinted from “New Testament Narrative and Ancient Epic,” in *Raconter, interpreter, annoncer: Parcours de Nouveau Testament. Mélanges offerts à Daniel Marguerat pour son 60^e anniversaire*, ed. Emmanuelle Steffek and Yvan Bourquin, Le Monde de la Bible 47 (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2003), 239–49.

49. Alexander, “New Testament Narrative,” 172. Note, however, Acts 27:41 where Luke uses Homeric language to describe the grounding of the ship; Alexander, “Acts,” 1060.

50. Alexander, “New Testament Narrative,” 173.

as a homecoming even though he has never been there, the welcoming party for Paul (Acts 28:15) gives his arrival in Rome the feeling of coming home even though it is his first visit.⁵¹ Occasionally, such as with the Socratic allusion (καὶνὰ δαιμόνια; Plato, *Apol.* 24b, DL 2.40) in Paul's trip to Athens (ξενὰ δαιμόνια; Acts 17:18) and the nautical language in Acts 27:2–5, Luke changes his register to aid his literary allusions.⁵² The epic symbolism of the storm at sea as an unruly mob is used by Luke, as well: Paul is not only more composed than even the sailors because of his *pietas*, but the unruly sea alludes to Paul's troubles in various ports of call (e.g., Acts 19:28–41), as well as the Psalms that mention the nations who do not obey God (e.g., Ps. 46). However, Luke's realistic portrayal of events is a far cry from Virgil's eloquence.⁵³ Luke's orderly account is also nothing like Virgil's flashbacks and his prophecies about the future which refer to Virgil's present day. There might be value in comparisons with ancient epics, but the genres are not the same.

Another genre which has been proposed for the book of Acts is that of *apologia*.⁵⁴ However, Alexander points out that ancient *apologiae* constructed dramatic situations in which the defendant must present an oral defense before judges and spectators.⁵⁵ Setting up the drama in this way puts the narrator in the persona of the defendant and provides the opportunity for those listening to place themselves in the drama as part of the gallery. However, this clear setting of a dramatic trial is missing for the book of Acts, which immediately puts its categorization as an *apologia* into question. Acts, in fact, is not the narrative of a trial, but rather a narrative that contains accounts of several trials. “[I]t is the characters, not the narrator, who make these apologetic speeches, and . . . the narrator never intervenes in his own person to drive home the

51. Alexander, “New Testament Narrative,” 174.

52. Loveday Alexander, “Acts and Ancient Intellectual Biography,” in *The Book of Acts in Its Ancient Literary Setting*, ed. Bruce W. Winter and Andrew D. Clarke, BAFCS 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 31–63, here 59; Alexander, “New Testament Narrative,” 175. For more on Socratic allusions, see below.

53. Alexander, “New Testament Narrative,” 178.

54. Loveday Alexander, “The Acts of the Apostles as an Apologetic Text,” in *Acts in Its Ancient Literary Context*, 183–206; reprinted from “The Acts of the Apostles as an Apologetic Text,” in *Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Christians*, ed. Mark Edwards, Martin Goodman, Simon Price, and Christopher Rowland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 15–44.

55. Alexander, “The Acts of the Apostles,” 187–88. For Romans, the defense would be given by an advocate discussing the defendant in the third person.

point to the text's inscribed audience."⁵⁶ What these speeches in Acts do offer, however, are multiple opportunities to demonstrate how to turn trials into opportunities for gospel witnessing, and to show how "the gospel story . . . changes and adapts to different cultural contexts."⁵⁷ For example, in Acts 25–26, Paul's *apologia* before Festus allows Luke to show "that Christian practice is not contrary to Roman law," nor to Jewish traditions, and that, in fact, following Christ is obedience to God.⁵⁸ Furthermore, in Acts the speeches and the narratives mutually reinforce one another as the addresses both repeat the narrated events and explain them with references to the Jewish Scriptures.⁵⁹

Delving more deeply into distinguishing Acts from the language both of ancient epics and of ancient historiography, Alexander sets forth and defends a series of propositions regarding Luke's language and some sociological conclusions to which they point.⁶⁰ These propositions build on works by Albert Wifstrand and Eduard Norden. According to Norden, "Luke consistently adapts Mark in the direction of a more refined and elegant Greek."⁶¹ Wifstrand, similarly, shows that "Luke's Greek is consistently more refined and elegant than Mark's," whether in original compositions or in his editing.⁶² Norden had thus concluded that "Luke was an Atticist in his Greek."⁶³

At this point in the argument, Alexander distinguishes between several Greek varieties: Attic Greek which spread from Athens from the fifth century BCE; *koine* Greek which was the vernacular written and spoken from the fourth century BCE; classicism, the higher registers of literary Greek in the first century CE; and Atticism which was

56. Alexander, "The Acts of the Apostles," 194.

57. Alexander, "What if Luke," 161; Alexander, "Acts," 1034.

58. Loveday Alexander, "Luke's Political Vision," *Int* 66.3 (2012): 283–93, here 287, 289, 290–91.

59. Alexander, "The Acts of the Apostles," 203. This practice of interpreting experiences using the resources of Jewish Scriptures will be seen again in Alexander's article, "This is That" (below).

60. Loveday Alexander, "Septuaginta, Fachprosa, Imitatio: Albert Wifstrand and the Language of Luke-Acts," in *Acts in Its Ancient Literary Context*, 231–52; reprinted from "Septuaginta, Fachprosa, Imitatio: Albert Wifstrand and the Language of Luke-Acts," in *Die Apostelgeschichte und die hellenistische Geschichtsschreibung: Festschrift für Eckhard Plümacher zu seinem 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Cilliers Breytenbach and Jens Schröter (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 1–26.

61. Eduard Norden, *Antike Kunstprosa vom VI. Jahrhundert v. Chr. bis in die Zeit der Renaissance*, cited in Wifstrand (below) and in Alexander, "Septuaginta," 232n6.

62. Alexander, "Septuaginta," 233; Albert Wifstrand, "Luke and Greek Classicism," in *Epochs and Styles: Selected Writings on the New Testament, Greek Language and Greek Culture in the Post-Classical Era*, ed. Lars Rydbeck and Stanley E. Porter, trans. Denis Searby, WUNT 179 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 17–27; Wifstrand, "Luke and the Septuagint," in *Epochs and Styles*, 28–45.

63. Alexander, "Septuaginta," 234.

a literary Greek different from Attic but aspiring to imitate it, popular among the *litterati* in the second century CE.⁶⁴

Based on these distinctions, Alexander restates Norden's conclusion: "Luke operates towards the high (H) end of the linguistic spectrum."⁶⁵ She points out that "'Classicism' [was] a broader and earlier phenomenon than the high Atticism of the second century."⁶⁶ And, with Wifstrand, notes that "Luke's language is a direct continuation of standard Hellenistic prose (SHP), which was untouched by classicism but was itself significantly more 'Attic' in character than everyday spoken Hellenistic Greek."⁶⁷ This dialect, "SHP, though it may have belonged originally to the H code, had moved down the scale by the 1st century CE under the emergent influence of classicism."⁶⁸

This discussion leads Alexander to the following conclusions:

1. "Luke, in contrast to the other synoptics, gives his language a more elevated and dignified style associated with the peculiar style of Greek prevalent in the Greek Bible."⁶⁹
2. "Luke's use of biblical Greek represents a form of *imitatio* analogous with the use made of the literary classics by Greek and Roman authors."⁷⁰
3. "Within the Jewish communities of the Greek-speaking Diaspora, 'biblical Greek' functioned as a prestige H-code."⁷¹

64. Besides Alexander, "*Septuaginta*," this discussion can also be found in Sean A. Adams, "Atticism, Classicism, and Luke-Acts: Discussions with Albert Wifstrand and Loveday Alexander," in *The Language of the New Testament: Context, History, and Development*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts, Linguistic Biblical Studies 6 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 91–111, here 92–93 and 101–102. Following Alexander, I have called the "initial phase of Atticism," classicism.

65. Alexander, "*Septuaginta*," 239. Alexander proposes a culture of diglossia, a language situation where the higher-status elite speak one language or dialect (H) and the lower-status population speaks another (L). This proposition depends on Ferguson, "Diglossia," *Word* 15 (1959): 325–40.

66. Alexander, "*Septuaginta*," 239.

67. Alexander, "*Septuaginta*," 240.

68. Alexander, "*Septuaginta*," 242.

69. "The paper thus presents a succinct and forceful statement of a position now widely accepted in Lukan studies, namely that 'Luke, in contrast to the other synoptics, sought to give his narrative a more elevated and dignified style by consciously and deliberately associating it with the peculiar style of Greek prevalent in the LXX which, so often reflecting the phraseology of a different language, had acquired a sacred status in the eyes of Hellenized Jews and proselytes as well as of the first Christians'; Alexander, "*Septuaginta*," 242; Wifstrand, "Septuagint," 41.

70. Alexander, "*Septuaginta*," 244. The language of the Greek Bible is, in fact, quite close to the SHP, except for the Hebraisms.

71. Alexander, "*Septuaginta*," 245. In "L'intertextualité," 208–209, Alexander had argued for Luke's register as an *imitatio* of the Greek Bible, but in "*Septuaginta*," 246–49, she broadens this model to "biblical Greek." See also Adams, "Atticism," 104.

4. “But in the wider world of Greek culture, ‘biblical Greek’ would rank with SHP, lower down the code spectrum than Atticizing Greek.”⁷²

Alexander notes that we cannot tell from Luke’s use of SHP whether classical Greek was part of his repertoire. But it is possible that SHP was the only dialect available to him as a member of “the bureaucratic circles educated to use Greek for administrative, business and professional purposes.”⁷³ Luke’s deployment of biblical Greek, somewhat similarly, shows that he had access not just to the Greek OT but to a broader range of Jewish Greek works.⁷⁴ Alexander concludes, then, that “it seems . . . reasonable to suggest that we are dealing with a prestige code of heightened, formal, religiously-charged language deployed at the very least in the preaching and the liturgy of Greek-speaking Diaspora communities.”⁷⁵ This study dovetails with Alexander’s previous works, demonstrating that Luke chose a technical dialect with which to begin his volumes but then wrote the rest of his work in language congruent with literate Greek-speaking Jews.

With this nuanced distinction in place, we come back to the topic of genre. In 1992, Richard A. Burridge published *What Are the Gospels?* where he argued that the Gospels are Greco-Roman biographies, or *bioi*.⁷⁶ Alexander is appreciative in her review, although she notes that by placing the Gospels in this genre, Burridge has not said very much because the genre is so broad.⁷⁷ In her 1993 article, “Acts and Ancient Intellectual Biography,” Alexander interacts with Charles Talbert’s proposal that Luke–Acts is likely modeled on the same kinds of source documents as those used by Diogenes Laertius in his *Lives of the Philosophers*.⁷⁸ Talbert focuses attention on the “intellectual biog-

72. Alexander, “*Septuaginta*,” 245.

73. Alexander, “*Septuaginta*,” 251.

74. Alexander, “*Septuaginta*,” 245.

75. Alexander, “*Septuaginta*,” 251–52.

76. Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

77. Loveday Alexander, “What Are the Gospels: A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography,” *EvQ* 66 (1994): 73–76.

78. Loveday Alexander, “Acts and Ancient Intellectual Biography”; Charles H. Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes and the Genre of Luke–Acts* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1974); Talbert, *What is a Gospel?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977); Talbert, “Biographies of Philosophers and Rulers as Instruments of Religious Propaganda in Mediterranean Antiquity,” *ANRW* II.16.2 (1978): 1619–51; Talbert, “Biography, Ancient,” *ABD* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:745–49.

raphies” of thought leaders rather than political leaders.⁷⁹ He develops five functions for these biographies, but Alexander notes the importance of two of them: “To validate and/or provide a hermeneutical key to a teacher’s doctrine” and “[t]o provide the readers with a pattern to copy.”⁸⁰ The first of these fits especially well with Acts’ description of Paul’s life. The second supports the conception of early Christianity along the model of a Hellenistic school.⁸¹

When Alexander compares the stories of Paul in Acts to Diogenes Laertius’s fifth book (on Aristotle), however, the topics are similar but important differences emerge. Luke’s voice only appears in the preface whereas Diogenes steps in often to draw attention to the identity or existence of his sources and to differences between them when they occur. Luke offers complete narratives and characterizations through speeches. Diogenes keeps his narrator at a distance from events and describes philosophers without committing himself to any one school. Although we perhaps see Luke’s voice emerge in the “we-passages,” Alexander argues that this is not an authorial voice but rather “the narrator there simply (and oddly) becomes a temporary character in his own narrative.”⁸²

These differences lead Alexander to conclude that “intellectual biography . . . fails to provide a clear literary model for Acts.”⁸³ However, the elements and ordering they provide, if taken as evidence of expected features of a biography, do cohere in some ways with Luke’s telling of Paul’s life, particularly as we see them expressed in various retellings of the life of Socrates.⁸⁴ This framework allows the story of Paul to reach ancient readers as a familiar tune in a new key, and it gives scholars today the tools to classify a structure that looks unfamiliar within a known framework.⁸⁵

79. Alexander, “Acts and Ancient Intellectual Biography,” 34.

80. Alexander, “Acts and Ancient Intellectual Biography,” 35.

81. Both of these topics will be explored further in the next section.

82. Alexander, “Acts and Ancient Intellectual Biography,” 48.

83. Alexander, “Acts and Ancient Intellectual Biography,” 56.

84. Alexander, “Acts and Ancient Intellectual Biography,” 58–62. These common features include: “The divine call”; “The mission”; “The daimonion” (Acts 16:6–10 and especially 17:18); “Tribulations”; “Persecution”; “Trial”; “Prison”; “Death.” Although Paul’s death is not explicitly narrated, his stated willingness to face death (Acts 20:22–24) and the presence of women and children at the tearful farewell (21:5, 12) provide Socratic parallels. See also Paul’s determination to go to Jerusalem; Alexander, “Acts,” 1054.

85. Alexander, “Acts and Ancient Intellectual Biography,” 63. Note that in her 2001, “*Ipse dixit*” (see below), Alexander draws no conclusions about genre; Alexander, “Acts,” 1029.

HELLENISTIC SCHOOLS AND MEMORY

The topics discussed so far led into (and emerged from) Alexander's interest in Hellenistic schools. Alexander's thorough knowledge of Hellenism gives her plenty of resources for discussing the practices of ancient manuscript copying and circulation. She dedicates several articles to those topics, frequently connecting their focus on orality and their emphasis on creative repetition with the episodic nature of Luke-Acts. Thus, although the repeated retellings of events in Acts include variations uncomfortable to modern ears, they would have fit comfortably within ancient practices.

The dissemination of the Gospels has sometimes been thought to depend on patrons, such as Theophilus. However, we cannot assume that patronage included an obligation to create copies of an author's work in an ancient version of publication. Rather, patronage in the ancient world usually meant providing a social setting where the works could be performed.⁸⁶ Besides this oral dissemination "the two books which Luke dedicated to Theophilus could have become part of his library, available to the church which met in his house, and ultimately becoming the nucleus of that church's library."⁸⁷ The Gospels have sometimes been compared to the lives of philosophers. The lives were concerned with passing on the teachings of the philosophers. Biographical anecdotes were primarily compiled to back their teachings with stories of their conduct. In fact, the book of Acts would function this way for the letters of Paul, reporting not only his life but also passing on some of his speeches.⁸⁸

The dissemination of these works occurred as private owners copied texts and traded for texts they did not yet own. Lecture notes were sometimes circulated without the author's name and then used for oral performances by new orators, only slightly revised, if at all. Social networks among early Christians would have provided a natural avenue for such exchanges. Also, Christian works were written on codices, long before they became an accepted format for literary compositions. This reticence among the *litterati* may be related to a

86. Alexander, *Preface*, 195–96.

87. Alexander, *Preface*, 198.

88. Alexander, "What if Luke," 168; Alexander, "Acts and Ancient Intellectual Biography," 35–36; Alexander, "Luke's Preface," 68–69.

prejudice that connected the codex with draft copies, schoolwork, household expenses, and tax records.⁸⁹

This setting where texts and ideas were exchanged would have looked to an outsider much like Jewish synagogues and philosophical schools.⁹⁰ Galen, in fact, critiques some schools for relying too much on faith, calling them just like “the school of Moses and Christ,” thus demonstrating his perception of the similarities among these gatherings.⁹¹ Alexander elucidates:

- Plato founded what we might call a school whose traditions were based on his written dialogues and their exegesis in oral teachings in an academy. These were taught by a local Platonist teacher to philosophy students in a class in the *polis*.⁹²
- Similarly, Hippocrates founded what we might call a school whose traditions were based on his *Corp. Hipp.* and their exegesis in oral teachings at the Cos school. These were taught by a local medical teacher to medical apprentices or *philiatroi* (lay advisors or practitioners) in a master’s house, or at a lecture or in a professional guild in the *polis*.
- Moses, too, founded what we might call a school whose traditions were based on Torah and their exegesis in oral Torah at the Great Synagogue. This was taught by a local rabbi or synagogue leader to *talmids* or any Jews in the rabbinic “academy” or synagogue in the Jewish community.⁹³
- And finally, Christ founded what we might call a school whose traditions were based on Scripture and their exegesis in the oral word of the Lord among the disciples who were rhetorically constituted as a family. These were taught by an apostle, prophet, or teacher to apprentices or any Christian in the

89. Loveday Alexander, “Ancient Book Production and the Circulation of the Gospels,” in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard J. Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 71–111.

90. Alexander, “Acts and Ancient Intellectual Biography,” 39.

91. Loveday Alexander, “Paul and the Hellenistic Schools: The Evidence of Galen,” in *Paul in His Hellenistic Context*, ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 60–83, here 65. She notes in this article Galen’s use of the phrases “the school of Moses and Christ” (Μωσοῦ καὶ Χριστοῦ διατριβή) and “the followers of Moses and Christ” (οἱ ἀπὸ Μωσοῦ καὶ Χριστοῦ).

92. These sentences describe Alexander’s chart in Loveday Alexander, “*Ipse dixit*: Citation of Authority in Paul and in the Jewish and Hellenistic Schools,” in *Paul Beyond the Judaism-Hellenism Divide*, ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 103–27, here 106.

93. Alexander, “*Ipse dixit*,” 106.

“school of Paul” or at an *ekklēsia* in the Christian community.⁹⁴ And just as the lives of the philosophers legitimated these traditions, so the Gospel of Luke could have functioned to legitimate Christian teachings, and the stories of Paul’s life in Acts might have legitimated the “school of Paul.”⁹⁵

Despite these similarities, Christian gatherings differed in their preaching locations.⁹⁶ Some philosophical schools would have had access to public spaces in towns and cities while others were precluded from spaces belonging to the public (i.e., the *polis*). Christianity would likely not have had access to public spaces either and thus would have needed to (1) attempt to share Jewish spaces (synagogues) and when that did not work (2) meet in spaces provided by patrons—likely houses that were, in Roman fashion, open to the public.⁹⁷

Luke describes the preaching there, what he calls the teaching of the apostles (Acts 2:42) or the service of the word (6:2), in terms of witnessing to Jesus, an activity that brings us to a discussion of memory and tradition.⁹⁸ Using Birger Gerhardsson’s work on memory within rabbinic schools as a backdrop, Alexander shifts her focus to Hellenistic practices.⁹⁹ She starts with Justin’s name for the Gospels: the ἀπομνημονεύματα (memoirs) of the apostles. But this Greek word includes three aspects of the passing on of tradition, two of which are often not included in English translations. First, it refers to the

94. Alexander, “*Ipse dixit*,” 106.

95. Alexander, “What if Luke,” 168; Alexander, “Acts and Ancient Intellectual Biography,” 35–36; Alexander, “Luke’s Preface,” 68–69. For more on the legitimation of texts, see Loveday Alexander, “Canon and Exegesis in the Medical Schools of Antiquity,” in *The Canon of Scripture in Jewish and Christian Tradition: Le canon des Écritures dans les traditions juive et chrétienne*, ed. Jean-Daniel Kaestli and Philip S. Alexander, Publications de l’Institut Romand des Sciences Bibliques 4 (Lausanne: Zèbre, 2007), 115–53. For the importance of memory in Hellenistic schools and the way that affects our understanding of the transmission of the Gospel stories, see Loveday Alexander, “Memory and Tradition in the Hellenistic Schools,” in *Jesus in Memory: Tradition in Oral and Scribal Perspective*, ed. Werner H. Kelber and Samuel Byrskog (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 113–54.

96. Alexander, “Paul and the Hellenistic Schools,” 73–76.

97. For more on the negotiation of these spaces, see Loveday Alexander, “Foolishness to the Greeks’: Jews and Christians in the Public Life of the Empire,” in *Philosophy and Power in the Graeco-Roman World: Essays in Honour of Miriam T. Griffin*, ed. G. Clark and T. Rajak (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 229–49.

98. Loveday Alexander, “Memory and Tradition,” 113–54.

99. Gerhardsson’s work was originally published in 1961. See today Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity with Tradition and Transmission in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

“memories of the apostles”; it can refer to the “anecdotes of the apostles,” and finally, as mentioned, the “memoirs of the apostles,” i.e. the texts themselves.¹⁰⁰ These different glosses for ἀπομνημονεύματα each have counterparts in the enactment of memory in the Hellenistic world.

Starting with the last, Alexander notes that memory can be embodied in a text. Xenophon writes his *Apomnemonemata Xenophontis* in which his memories of Socrates are written down, “already molded by the literary forms and expectations of the larger society.”¹⁰¹ Memories circulated in stories, but then were written down and gathered together. These compilations could become collections of sayings, collections of anecdotes, sometimes organized by topic. Their roots in orality are evidenced by the way the same report will show up in more than one collection or attributed to a different teacher. Thus, it is not self-evident that these collections would ever be compiled into a fully narrated biography.

Memory could be performed, as well, in short anecdotes, attributed *chreia*, or anonymous aphorisms.¹⁰² These memories and their settings became important as exemplars of virtue, which were thought to be more easily imitated than mere definitions.¹⁰³ They were also used to attack or defend one school or another according to the congruity between the teacher’s life and teaching. Thus, life settings and stories about a founder were important as moral examples, rather than as biographical material.

Memory was practiced within a variety of genres. Histories were read, as other genres were, for both their content and their style. Students memorized the content, in fact, before approaching the texts. Later in the students’ progression, passages became models for imitation and themes for compositions.¹⁰⁴ It was understood that texts could demand that readers acquire the necessary background information to fill in gaps in expected knowledge.¹⁰⁵ Luke, similarly, presupposes knowledge of the Gospel story and elements of the history of the

100. Alexander, “Memory and Tradition,” 119.

101. Alexander, “Memory and Tradition,” 121.

102. Alexander, “Memory and Tradition,” 126–32.

103. Alexander, “Memory and Tradition,” 145.

104. Alexander, “L’intertextualité,” 205–206.

105. Alexander, “L’intertextualité,” 212–13, 210–11.

Hebrew people by simply referring to characters or concepts without explanation, thus grounding his story in tradition (Acts 1).¹⁰⁶

Memory performed in texts and in oral performance both grounds and is grounded in memory as tradition.¹⁰⁷ Bits of wisdom were crafted expressly for the purpose of easy memorization, and memorization itself was highly valued and trained, and its use throughout life displayed one's *paideia*. Students first learned passages by heart and later "worked and reworked" them in their own words, thus building both "stability and fluidity . . . into this model."¹⁰⁸ Empiricists and Epicurians were especially dedicated to this process, and Alexander notes a repetition of narrative patterns with variations throughout Acts.¹⁰⁹ Personal connections with the founder were not emphasized, only embeddedness in the tradition.¹¹⁰

All of this means that there was a general culture of memory in the ancient world, in Hellenistic schools as well as in rabbinic ones, which legitimated one's tradition by grounding it in the past.¹¹¹ Knowing the way traditional learning worked helps us understand Luke when he "states that his gospel provides written confirmation (*ἀσφάλεια*) of the oral instruction Theophilus has already received (*κατηχήθης*)—a term from the medical schools that was already gaining currency for Christian instruction."¹¹² Irenaeus describes the transmission of the gospel with the same balance of memorable content and exemplary way of life.¹¹³

Thus, it is not so much the written tradition but the practice of tradition in all its modes that schools transmit: "Someone once told Diocles the doctor that he would not need any more teaching because he had bought a medical book. Diocles responded: 'For those who have studied, books are reminders, but for the unlearned, they are tombs.'"¹¹⁴ Written texts thus simply "captur[e] a fleeting moment

106. Alexander, "L'intertextualité," 211–12.

107. Alexander, "Memory and Tradition," 132–41.

108. Alexander, "Memory and Tradition," 135, 146.

109. Alexander, "Acts," 1033, 1043, 1054–55.

110. Alexander, "Memory and Tradition," 141.

111. Alexander, "L'intertextualité," 213; Alexander, "Memory and Tradition," 142.

112. Alexander, "Memory and Tradition," 146. See an overview of Gospels and transmission practices in Loveday Alexander, "What is a Gospel?" in *The Cambridge Companion to the Gospels*, ed. Stephen C. Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 13–33.

113. Alexander, "Memory and Tradition," 147.

114. Alexander, "Memory and Tradition," 148.

between performance and re-oralization.”¹¹⁵ The four Gospels, too, are not the end or the goal of a previously oral process. They are a moment in time, and Jesus stories continued to be told and condensed and reused in new configurations even after they were written down. Stories told in the third person that foreground disciples (of Diogenes as well as of Jesus) invite those who listen to join the circle.¹¹⁶ Alexander thus grounds her study of Luke–Acts within her broader understanding of instruction and oral transmission in the first century CE.

GREEK NOVELS AND THE BOOK OF ACTS

Alexander’s wide knowledge of texts outside of those commonly used in comparisons with the New Testament allows her to engage in several unusual studies. This section will summarize her comparison of the book of Acts to the Archive of Theophanes and her suggestion that one possibility for the we-passages and the redundant details of the travel narratives in Acts could be that it was constructed based on the travel notes of one of Paul’s companions. Still within the context of Paul’s travels, Alexander notes the way, on the one hand, Acts turns Greek approaches to the world upside-down, constructing the east as familiar and the west as barbarian. On the other hand, however, as we have discussed already, the final scene in Acts when Paul is welcomed on his way into Rome by a group of brothers and sisters (28:15) “has almost an air of homecoming.”¹¹⁷ One of the most intriguing comparisons Alexander makes is between the scattered nodes of the ancient ἐκκλησίαι and today’s internet.

In “The Pauline Itinerary and the Archive of Theophanes,” Alexander explores the archive of Theophanes, the records of a journey from the fourth century CE.¹¹⁸ Her conclusions are, first, that these archives show that records of Paul’s journey could also have existed and then

115. Alexander, “Memory and Tradition,” 149. For more on the importance of orality, see Loveday Alexander, “The Living Voice: Scepticism Towards the Written Word in Early Christian and in Greco-Roman Texts,” in *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield*, ed. David J. A. Clines, Stephen E. Fowl and Stanley E. Porter, JSOTSup 87 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990), 221–47.

116. Alexander, “Memory and Tradition,” 153.

117. Alexander, “Reading Luke-Acts,” 214.

118. Loveday Alexander, “The Pauline Itinerary and the Archive of Theophanes,” in *The New Testament and Early Christian Literature in the Greco-Roman Context: Studies in Honor of David E. Aune*, ed. John Fotopoulos, NovTSup 122 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 151–65.

been used as sources for the book of Acts. Second, one could acquire information about an upcoming journey from circulating recommendations, and this was likely true in the first century CE as well. Also, some of Theophanes' records of expenses use various pronouns including first person plural, such as when wine is bought "for us."¹¹⁹ This might provide an explanation for the we-passages in Acts. However, Theophanes' records contain no redundant place names and no verbs, particularly vivid seafaring verbs such as we find in Acts.¹²⁰ Thus, these records do not answer all the questions Alexander raises. Still, they remind us that narratives were not the only written texts documenting ancient travel.¹²¹

The possibility that someone kept Paul's records and receipts becomes more likely when one attends to one of Alexander's important insights:

Paul himself . . . describes his experiences of sea-travel in lurid terms scarcely bettered by the novelists (2 Cor. 11), and carefully avoids drawing attention to the practicalities of his journeys. Like a presidential candidate on the campaign trail, the apostle travels from venue to venue without having to think about the means of travel at all, relying on his team to study the timetables and make the reservations. For the narrator of Acts, by contrast, sea travel is a matter of consuming interest.¹²²

Alexander examines two Greek novels in which journeys feature prominently, *Chaereas and Callirhoe* by Chariton and *Ephesiaca* by Xenophon of Ephesus.¹²³ In Acts, Paul's voyages are not clearly demarcated one from the other. Furthermore, they feature Jerusalem as Paul's departure point and end goal. However, as Acts progresses, the center shifts so that by the end of the narrative, Jerusalem is on "the eastern edge of a westerly voyage which follows the sea-routes more familiar to

119. Alexander, "The Pauline Itinerary," 160, 164.

120. See also Alexander, "Acts," 1046.

121. Alexander, "The Pauline Itinerary," 165.

122. Loveday Alexander, "In Journeying Often: Voyaging in the Acts of the Apostles and in Greek *Romans*," in *Luke's Literary Achievement: Collected Essays*, ed. C. M. Tuckett, JSNTSup 116 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 17–49, here 36. Note that Alexander also compares 1 Corinthians 11 to Greek novels; see Loveday Alexander, "Better to Marry than to Burn?: St. Paul and the Greek Novel," in *Ancient Fiction and Early Christian Narrative*, ed. Ronald F. Hock, J. Bradley Chance, and Judith Perkins (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 235–56.

123. Alexander, "In Journeying Often." In this essay in particular, Alexander retells the novels' plots quite humorously. For more on Acts and Greek novels, see the chapter in this volume on Richard Pervo.

the Greek reader than to the Bible.”¹²⁴ In the passages that emphasize seafaring, notable for their first-person plural pronouns, Paul displays confidence and competence beyond that of captain or crew.¹²⁵ While in the novels, Rome is the center of the world, Greece rules the sea, and everything else is barbarian, in Acts, Paul comes from the east, which is the center of the narrative, and ultimately conquers Greece and the sea with his wisdom and knowledge.

In “Narrative Maps,” Alexander delves into this topic even more extensively and lays out the primary toponyms which describe where the characters go, secondary toponyms which come from other characters’ reported journeys, and tertiary toponyms which come from other narrative references.¹²⁶ She also pays attention to the repetition of some place names. This allows her to create maps that reflect not the actual geographical space but rather the mental maps created by the story. Acts, as opposed to the Greek novels, has more interior place names and constructs the east as home and Athens as foreign. Yet Paul, while refusing even more emphatically than Callirhoe to worship other gods, strides across the Mediterranean with “the inexorable progress” of Jesus just as Callirhoe did for Aphrodite.¹²⁷

Picking up again on the feeling of coming home as Paul arrives in a city where brothers come out to welcome him (after a voyage through barbarian lands), Alexander looks at Eusebius’s descriptions of Paul.¹²⁸ Eusebius is concerned to show a tight succession (as with the philosophers) from Jesus, radiating out from Jerusalem, that eventually reaches the real center of power, Rome. As he continues his history, one notices another mental map, one that conforms to Roman

124. Alexander, “In Journeying Often,” 32.

125. Alexander, “In Journeying Often,” 38. Alexander notes that in this passage “Jonah’s situation is reversed.”

126. Loveday Alexander, “Narrative Maps: Reflections on the Toponymy of Acts,” in *The Bible in Human Society: Essays in Honour of John Rogerson*, ed. M. Daniel Carroll R., David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies, JSOTSup 200 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 17–57.

127. Loveday Alexander, “The Virgin and the Goddess: Women and Religion in Greek Romance,” in *Women and Gender in Ancient Religions: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll, Paul A. Holloway, and James A. Kelhoffer, WUNT 263 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 11–37, here 34. Alexander notes in this essay, too, that women’s prayers and women’s agency find their counterparts in Luke–Acts as in Greek romances, although the independence of the women is quickly hidden in reception history if not in Paul.

128. Loveday Alexander, “Mapping Early Christianity: Acts and the Shape of Early Christianity,” *Int* 57 (2003): 163–73. For the term “barbarian,” see the use of βάρβαροι in Acts 28:2, usually translated ‘islanders’; Alexander, “Mapping Early Christianity,” 164.

provinces: local churches with authority over all the other churches in their region.

This localization of power mirrors the connection between Jerusalem and the diaspora Jews, with their שליחים (*šēlīḥîm*, sg. שליח *šālīaḥ*), who were commissioned with letters from authorities in Jerusalem, at least until the destruction of the temple.¹²⁹ In contrast, Luke does not depict the apostles as authoritative. Instead, Acts presents a rather loose network of churches, each with autonomy, but connected through Paul and the other apostles. There may, in fact, have been several networks, such as Pauline, Johannine, and Petrine, in larger cities where greetings and information were exchanged. Alexander suggests that “the communication superhighways of the Internet—a polycentric and infinitely expandable network with no clear authority structure” might provide a relatable model for churches in our post-modern world.¹³⁰

ECCLESIOLOGY AND THE BOOK OF ACTS

Ecclesiology is another topic of interest to Alexander, one that bridges her academic and practical responsibilities.¹³¹ She notes both continuity and diversity between Luke’s Gospel and Acts. She describes the way Luke repeatedly constructs the early believers’ reliance on the Jewish Scriptures (usually in Greek translation) to explain the Holy Spirit’s activity. On issues of authority and leadership, she concludes that Acts relies on a balance of charismatic leading and traditional explanations, of local leadership with trans-local communication. Many Christian denominations, of course, rely on Acts to justify their polity even though, for Luke, “ecclesiology as such plays a relatively minor part.”¹³² Still, Alexander also notes that the New Testament and

129. Alexander, “Mapping Early Christianity,” 167–68.

130. Alexander, “Mapping Early Christianity,” 171.

131. Further reflections include Loveday Alexander, “Women as Leaders in the New Testament,” *Modern Believing* 54 (2013): 14–22. [Note](#), too, her review of Twelftree’s *People of the Spirit* where she notes that he suggests that while contemporary churches preach the gospel to themselves and work for social justice in the world, the early church preached the gospel to the world and worked for social justice within the church; Loveday Alexander, “People of the Spirit: Exploring Luke’s View of the Church,” *Theology* 114.1 (January 2011): 56–57.

132. Loveday Alexander, “Community and Canon: Reflections on the Ecclesiology of Acts,” in *Einheit der Kirche im Neuen Testament: Dritte europäische orthodox-westliche Exegetenkonferenz in Sankt Petersburg, 24.–31. August 2005*, ed. Anatoly Alexeev, Christos Karakolis, and Ulrich Luz, WUNT 218 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 45–78, here 46.

even the Gospels teach ecclesiology even when they do not mention it as such.¹³³

Luke's Gospel focuses on hospitality, so that discipleship is about encounter, repentance, the renunciation of wealth and privilege, and suffering.¹³⁴ The call begins with Israel and the twelve, but extends to women, the seventy, and the world. But Luke also picks up Mark's emphasis on the renewal of God's kingdom. Through the Holy Spirit, disciples are brought in, listen to the Word, learn the tasks of healing and restoration, and then are sent out as apostles. Disciples and apostles encounter suffering and endure with hope, centering their faithfulness on the remembrances of Jesus. While Matthew adds a tension between present hospitality and future judgment, and disciples (as prototypical church leaders) humbly exercise both care and oversight, Luke focuses less on the prototypicality of the disciples in his Gospel and instead saves most of his ecclesiology for Acts.

Alexander recognizes the difficult gap between the story of the early church as it happened and the story as Luke tells it. However, it is the latter that became constitutive for the church so, without ignoring the former, she focuses on Luke's text.¹³⁵ She points out that the book of Acts exhibits both continuity with and distinctiveness from the synoptic Gospels, as one might expect. On the one hand, the disciples stop focusing on the end times, but also Jesus is now in heaven and the disciples take over the proclamation of the kingdom by the power of the Spirit Jesus sends.¹³⁶

Luke's usage of the term usually translated church, ἐκκλησία, refers to "the body of God's people in a given place," rather than any conception of a universal church.¹³⁷ It is not a fragment of some larger entity, but rather "a locally-grounded instantiation of something bigger which is the church of God."¹³⁸ Only when Luke has described the believers in Syria and Cilicia (15:41) does he begin to use the plural form. Luke's lack of further specificity allows for unity and diversity among churches from their beginnings.

133. Loveday Alexander, "The Church in the Synoptic Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles," in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecclesiology*, ed. Paul Avis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 55–98.

134. For this whole paragraph, see Alexander, "The Church."

135. Alexander, "Community," 50–51; Alexander, "The Church," 57.

136. Alexander, "The Church," 80.

137. Alexander, "Community," 52–53. Luke uses terms that echo the people of God language from the Jewish Scriptures ("The Church," 87).

138. Alexander, "Community," 53.

For Luke, the unity of the church starts with the believers in Jerusalem, constituted by Jesus and the Holy Spirit now sent by him from heaven.¹³⁹ Initially, this Jerusalem-centered community was able to grow into the immediate environs while remaining unified through the travels of the apostles, a unity of heart and soul, the sharing of food, prayer (sometimes but not always formal prayers), teaching, and a fellowship that prioritized the sharing of goods.¹⁴⁰

Luke describes diversity in the church, as well. The shift from twelve disciples of one Lord to twelve apostles following the Holy Spirit built diversity into the leadership of the church from the beginning. And although Luke shows the primacy of the Holy Spirit, it is that very Spirit who multiplies their ministries and practices, as the apostles (in imitation of Jesus) travel and preach. Acts describes some of the leaders giving up their oversight in the distribution of food, too, and those who continue that ministry are not confined to their new tasks.¹⁴¹ As ministry moves out from Jerusalem, the apostles' authority (including Paul's) remains grounded in the Spirit whose presence signals the restoration promised by God.¹⁴² Furthermore, Luke tells us little about the elders in Jerusalem which has the effect of creating an "empty centre."¹⁴³

Yet the church does have what Alexander calls "a catholicity of *κοινωνία*-in-diversity."¹⁴⁴ She points out that the church in Antioch shows no appearance of submission to Jerusalem as it got started, nor even of intentional planning. Rather it came about simply by refugees from persecution "gossiping the gospel" (Acts 11:19–20).¹⁴⁵ The book of Acts describes various patterns for conversions, moreover. They always include repentance, baptism, forgiveness, and the gift of the Spirit, but there is no prescribed order.¹⁴⁶ As the center disappears, Luke is not eager to replace it. Even when Antioch sends out Paul and Barnabas, the ministry crosses back and forth between Jews and

139. Alexander, "Community," 54; Alexander, "The Church," 58, 84–85; Alexander, "Acts," 1042. The way the early community explains their experiences with Jewish Scriptures will be discussed below.

140. Alexander, "Community," 56–59.

141. Alexander, "Community," 60.

142. Alexander, "The Church," 85–86.

143. Alexander, "Community," 65.

144. Alexander, "Community," 67; Alexander, "The Church," 87.

145. Alexander, "Community," 68.

146. Alexander, "The Church," 86; Alexander, "Acts," 1032.

Gentiles across the northeastern Mediterranean, and Antioch does not become authoritative.

At the council, charismatic Antioch, led by “prophets and teachers” (13:1), and tradition-centered Jerusalem, led by “apostles and elders” (15:4, 22), come together.¹⁴⁷ Elders in Jerusalem and in Paul’s churches exercise organizational leadership, but apostles’ commissions come from Jesus. James has some sort of authority but only “as *primus inter pares*,” and he gives “due weight to the testimony of Peter and Paul” and adds the “authority of the Jewish scriptures.”¹⁴⁸ Only after listening carefully to one another do they come to a decision.¹⁴⁹ As a result, the only ones who are shut down are those who wanted “to impose uniformity of practice on a far-flung constituency.”¹⁵⁰

In an ecclesial setting where itinerancy is common, practices of hospitality carried great importance. Alexander writes about Luke 10:38–42 and points out that categorizing Mary as good and Martha as bad seems to liberate women by allowing them to become disciples.¹⁵¹ However, that interpretation delegitimizes a life of acts of service. Alexander suggests that instead we categorize the story as one about good and better. The story is principally about Martha. Mary is a background character. Martha is doing all the things considered good in the Gospel except that she worries. For women as for men, the lesson is not that hospitality or active service is bad, but rather that hospitality should not mean that chores get more attention than the guest, especially when the guest is Jesus.

Israel’s Scriptures also continue to function within these new communities (e.g., Acts 1:20).¹⁵² Alexander locates the authority of Scripture in an interpretational practice that searches for the explanation of God’s present revelation in God’s past revelatory acts, depending on the Holy Spirit and navigating a multiplicity of meanings.¹⁵³ The results,

147. Alexander, “Community,” 72.

148. Alexander, “Community,” 74.

149. Alexander, “Community,” 75. Note that this conclusion in 2008 corrects her earlier statement about the authority of the Jerusalem council; Alexander, “Acts,” 1047.

150. Alexander, “Community,” 76.

151. Loveday Alexander, “Sisters in Adversity: Retelling Martha’s Story,” in *Women in the Biblical Tradition*, ed. George J. Brooke, Studies in Women and Religion 31 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1992), 167–86.

152. Alexander, “This is That,” 189–204; Alexander, “God’s Frozen Word,” 37–42; Alexander, “Acts,” 1031.

153. Alexander, “This is That,” 191–93.

for Luke, are then judged against “the fundamental canon . . . the person of Christ himself.”¹⁵⁴

RECEPTION

One of the challenges of Alexander’s work is the nuanced nature of her study and its conclusions.¹⁵⁵ Darryl Palmer, for example, suggests that “one of the main problems” regarding the nature of Acts is “the discrepancy between the technical features of the Lucan preface and the biographical and historical content of Luke and Acts.”¹⁵⁶ Daryl D. Schmidt also notes some confusion between these two elements which Alexander “seeks to clarify” in “Formal Elements and Genre” and later further discusses in “*Septuaginta*.”¹⁵⁷ Gerald Downing builds on Alexander’s insights, noting that in the first reading of Luke–Acts, the preface would let the auditors know what genre they were ~~not~~ going to hear but not what they ~~would~~ hear.¹⁵⁸ Alexander, in fact, draws no firm conclusion about genre in her 2009 entry on “Acts” in the *Oxford Bible Commentary* but looks instead at its affinities with histories (both Greek and biblical), biographies (particularly philosophical biographies), novels, and apologetic texts.¹⁵⁹ The importance of Alexander’s initial work was in spurring discussions about the relationship of *Fachprosa* to Attic and Koine Greek.¹⁶⁰

154. Alexander, “This is That,” 194–95.

155. For a summary of initial reviews, see David E. Aune, “Luke 1.1–4: Historical or Scientific Prooimion?” in *Paul, Luke and the Graeco-Roman World*, ed. Alf Christophersen, Carsten Claussen, Jörg Frey, and Bruce Longenecker, JSNTSup 217 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 138–48, here 138–39. Note that Alexander’s initial hesitancy to connect Luke and Acts together, which Marshall called “carrying a proper scholarly caution to excess,” was criticized. As we have seen, her later studies led her to different conclusions. See I. H. Marshall, “Acts and the ‘Former Treatise,’” in *The Book of Acts in Its Ancient Literary Setting*, 163–82; Alexander, “Reading Luke–Acts from Back to Front.”

156. Darryl W. Palmer, “Acts and the Ancient Historical Monograph,” in *The Book of Acts in Its Ancient Literary Setting*, 1–29. Cf. Adams’s concern that Alexander only compares the length of Luke’s preface to that of Thucydides (183) with Alexander’s discussion in *Preface*, 30, 103; Sean A. Adams, “Luke’s Preface and Its Relationship to Greek Historiography: A Response to Loveday Alexander,” *JGRChJ* 3 (2006): 177–91, here 183. See similar concerns in Dawson, “Luke’s Preface,” 554, who reproduces Adams’s critique without addressing Alexander’s other examples.

157. Daryl D. Schmidt, “Rhetorical Influences and Genre: Luke’s Preface and the Rhetoric of Hellenistic Historiography,” in *Jesus and the Heritage of Israel*, 27–60; Alexander, “Formal Elements.”

158. F. Gerald Downing, “Theophilus’s First Reading of Luke–Acts,” in *Luke’s Literary Achievement*, 91–109, here 97–98.

159. Alexander, “Acts,” 1029–30.

160. Aune, “Luke 1.1–4,” 141. See also Stanley E. Porter, “Thucydides 1.22.1 and Speeches in Acts: Is There a Thucydidean View?” *NovT* 32.2 (1990): 121–142, here 124–27.

David Aune, however, points out the speculative nature of Alexander's conclusions given the paucity of evidence of prefaces (many more works are known to have existed than have survived) and her failure to address "the function of prefaces in scientific literature" and the disconnect apparent between Luke's use of a scientific preface for a work that is clearly not scientific in its genre.¹⁶¹ Aune's strongest critique comes when he compares Luke 1:1–4 to Plutarch's *Septem sapientium convivium* which parodies a report of a symposium. The twelve similarities he finds between the two, some of which Alexander noted in scientific prefaces, do not disprove her argument that Luke had the latter model in mind but do problematize categorizing *Fachprosa* as an isolated register.¹⁶²

John Moles responds to Alexander's work and concludes that Luke's preface resembles a Greek decree.¹⁶³ Zachary K. Dawson refutes Moles but also characterizes Alexander's work as "claim[ing] that the whole work of Luke–Acts should be read as a technical or scientific work."¹⁶⁴ This seems to go beyond Alexander's proposal that "the biographical content of the Gospel and Acts is by no means an insuperable obstacle to viewing Luke as a writer set firmly within the context of the scientific tradition," and that Luke's "situation in presenting his Gospel in written form must have been in some important sense like the situation of other writers who used the same sort of preface."¹⁶⁵ Vernon K. Robbins extends Alexander's insights to argue that the prefaces rhetorically line up auditors' expectations with a narrative grounded in the stories and practices of nascent Christianity.¹⁶⁶ Stanley E. Porter approaches the issue of genre from the perspective of ancient discourses on ethics and brings attention back to biographies.¹⁶⁷ Sean A. Adams extends the discussion and argues that the broad biographical genre can be narrowed by focusing on collected biographies.¹⁶⁸ Adams also

161. Aune, "Luke 1.1–4," 143–44.

162. Aune, "Luke 1.1–4," 144–47. See also Porter, "Thucydides," 125.

163. John Moles, "Luke's Preface: The Greek Decree, Classical Historiography and Christian Redefinitions," *NTS* 57.4 (2011): 461–82.

164. Dawson, "Luke's Preface," 554.

165. Alexander, "Luke's Preface," 70; Alexander, *Preface*, 174.

166. Vernon K. Robbins, "The Claims of the Prologues and Greco-Roman Rhetoric: The Prefaces to Luke and Acts in Light of Greco-Roman Rhetorical Strategies," in *Jesus and the Heritage of Israel*, 63–83.

167. Stanley E. Porter, "The Genre of Acts and the Ethics of Discourse," in *Acts and Ethics*, ed. Thomas E. Phillips (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2005), 1–15.

168. Sean A. Adams, *The Genre of Acts and Collected Biography*, SNTSMS 156 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

points out that to simply compare the life of Paul to ancient biographies is to leave out the first half of the book of Acts.¹⁶⁹

Another critique of Alexander's work centers on her discussion of αὐτόπτης (eyewitness or "first-hand experience").¹⁷⁰ She argues that while the *concept* of first-hand experience was important for historians, it is not always represented by the word αὐτόπτης. Thucydides uses the concept but not the word, and Herodotus uses the word but in the context of geographical knowledge.¹⁷¹ It is a common word among Empiricists, however, and Alexander posits that they influenced Polybius (and from him, Josephus).¹⁷² Grounding Luke's use of the word in *Fachprosa* instead of in histories, then, suggests that Luke was gathering information from those with personal experience with Jesus and the developing tradition just as, within school traditions, practice and oral tradition superseded written knowledge.¹⁷³ Similarly, "for Justin, the key 'proofs' of the gospel message are supplied by the prophets, not the 'eyewitnesses.'"¹⁷⁴ Clare K. Rothschild, however, by looking at the importance of eyewitnesses throughout Luke-Acts, problematizes the conclusion that Luke in his preface was differentiating between the two.¹⁷⁵

Sean A. Adams agrees that trustworthy sources are important to historians. He, too, cites Thucydides's concerns and Herodotus's geographical use of the word αὐτόπτης. He discusses its uses in Polybius and Josephus, but not their possible connection to Empiricists nor dependencies between them. Therefore, noting that Luke's use is unique in the New Testament, he concludes that "Luke borrowed this word from Greek historians in order to associate his work with that genre."¹⁷⁶ Dawson, citing Adams, further suggests that Alexander's argument is "a case of special pleading."¹⁷⁷ He argues, too, that

169. Adams, *The Genre*, 21.

170. Alexander, *Preface*, 123. See further discussion in John J. Peters, "Luke's Source Claims in the Context of Ancient Historiography," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 18 (2020): 35–60, here 36–42.

171. Alexander, *Preface*, 34–41.

172. Alexander, *Preface*, 80–82, 87, 40.

173. Alexander, *Preface*, 120, 123–24.

174. Alexander, "Memory and Tradition," 141. Schmidt echoes Alexander; "Rhetorical Influences," 29.

175. Clare K. Rothschild, *Luke-Acts and the Rhetoric of History*, WUNT 2/175 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 225; cf. 213–90. For her other substantial critique of Alexander, see 68n31.

176. Adams, "Luke's Preface," 188; cf. 187–90. See also Adams's extension of Alexander's work already cited, "Atticism."

177. Dawson, "Luke's Preface," 556.

a way forward might be to categorize all prefaces as one genre, in which case the similarities Alexander discovered would be reasonable when compared both with “shorter historiographical *and* scientific prefaces.”¹⁷⁸ Schmidt looks more broadly at historiography and concludes that Luke was “a writer of ‘historical’ narrative, but not necessarily a ‘historian.’”¹⁷⁹ He, like Alexander, notes the imitation of Jewish as well as Hellenistic Greek models.

Such distinctions, those between the genre of a work and the register of its preface and the possibility of *imitatio* in each, should be maintained. Moreover, this discussion as well as the debates about the style of prefaces, it seems to me, might benefit from considering Umberto Eco’s category of “cultural units.”¹⁸⁰ Eco’s semiotics recognizes the way words reference meanings in a variety of cultural frames. He thus provides tools for bridging textual and cultural contexts. The use of a word such as ἀυτόπτης would raise (for listeners aware of them) only the broader conversations in which the specific word was used, even if other authors referred to that concept. Yet it is the immediate textual context that guides the listener through the cultural possibilities.

Alexander’s descriptions of Hellenistic schools provide an important backdrop, particularly for the repetition of events in Acts’ speeches and Luke’s concern for passing on not only the activities of the early church but also the contents of Peter and Paul’s speeches. Alexander’s work often suffers from a lack of attention to recent approaches, for example in the rare mention of the Roman presence either in the world or in the texts. However, because she grounds her work in dialogue with scholars with deep roots in the classics and ancient Greek, her work provides an important bridge between the approaches to Luke–Acts from the past and in contemporary studies. Her scholarship continues to provide fruitful material with which to engage and will continue to do so with her upcoming work on discipleship in the Gospels and Acts, and leadership and authority in the Pauline Letters.¹⁸¹

178. Dawson, “Luke’s Preface,” 556, emphasis mine.

179. Schmidt, “Rhetorical Influences,” 59.

180. Laura J. Hunt, *Jesus Caesar: A Roman Reading of the Johannine Trial Narrative*, WUNT 2/506 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 53–55.

181. Loveday Alexander, “Discipleship and the Kingdom in the Gospels and Acts,” in *Discipleship: Then and Now*, ed. Stephen Cherry and Andrew Hayes (Norwich: SCM Press, 2022); Alexander, “Paul the Apostle: Leadership and Authority in the Pauline Letters,” in *Oxford Handbook of Pauline Studies*, ed. Barry Matlock and Matthew Novenson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).