

ACTS

AN EXEGETICAL
COMMENTARY

VOLUME I

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INTRODUCTION  
AND 1:1–2:47  
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To Dr. Médine Moussounga Keener,
French and history professor,
researcher in African
and African-American women's history,
and mentor to her students;
former refugee in the Congo;
my friend of many years;
my colleague;
and my beloved wife

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The bibliography and indexes for this volume may be found on the enclosed CD-ROM.

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A Bibliographic Note

The commentary was written as a cohesive work keyed to the bibliography. Circumstances of publication have, however, required its release in successive volumes. The publisher therefore is providing for the users of each volume the current working bibliography for the entire work, as well as the indexes for this volume, on the accompanying CD-ROM, but the final volume will contain the final hard-copy bibliography and indexes.

Craig S. Keener
Pentecost 2008



INTRODUCTION



PROLEGOMENON

Initial Considerations for Reading This Commentary

1. The Focus of This Commentary

I offer some introductory words about the commentary here. Because the eighteen chapters that follow compose this commentary's introduction to Acts, and because the introductory words here are too extensive for a preface (this chapter's original title), I have simply called this introduction to the commentary a "prolegomenon."

Most readers, and especially most users of reference works, give little attention to the prolegomena. For such readers, I simply note that this commentary is primarily academic, with a heavy emphasis on social and historical context (in addition to the necessary attention to Acts itself, of course). Such observations would be obvious, in any case.

Those who wish a more detailed description will find it following, primarily along these lines: the commentary's academic and social-historical emphasis; its explicit limitations; the legitimacy of a particularly social-historical approach; the legitimacy and methodology of investigating questions concerning historical understanding and reliability; my approach to the sources used in this commentary; the commentary's genre; and my use of nomenclature in this work.

2. Academic and Social-Historical Emphasis

A reader who scans this commentary will quickly perceive that it is more an academic than a popular commentary, although I have tried to make it accessible (e.g., using English rather than Greek where feasible) for less academic readers who are at least proficient enough to know what material to skip or skim. An academic reader would also note that it is, in a less thoroughgoing way, more consistently social-historical than literary (in terms of modern literary approaches),¹ although I do regularly (and must inevitably) emphasize literary connections within Luke-Acts.

I offer this observation to define the primary character of this commentary, not to diminish the importance of other audiences or approaches. I have written

1. For one example of the latter, cf. the detailed semiotic approach (using the methodology of A. J. Greimas) in Martin, *Lecture sémiotique*. While I respect such approaches, they stand outside my purview.

commentaries and other works on a less detailed level,² and because of space constraints, a greater proportion of their content was literary-theological than here.³ Because of my years of research on the environment of Luke-Acts—information to which most readers would otherwise not have ready access without duplicating that effort—I have invested more space in conveying this knowledge than in insights that many other readers would arrive at without this commentary.

Frequent readers of book reviews recognize that some reviewers critique commentaries for not adhering to the reviewer's primary interest (e.g., literary, historical, social-historical) or ideology (e.g., conservative, critical, sacramental, antisacramental), even when commentators specify the limitations of their works. Especially for large publications, some reviewers address only a work's introduction,⁴ which can be helpful when an introduction sets a work's tone but less helpful when (as often in a commentary) the introduction must devote much space to disposing of topics that cannot be treated in detail with each recurrence in the commentary.

Nevertheless, I hope that this commentary will prove useful even to those who would have preferred a different focus or different conclusions on various matters. Whatever their particular focus, most scholars recognize the relevance of how Acts would have sounded to its first audiences (insofar as we can reconstruct this meaning to a sufficiently useful degree of accuracy). Grappling with ancient sources, I endeavor, where possible, to offer fresh literary insight on texts (such as on the mission sign function of tongues and the inverted charges in the narrative of Stephen's martyrdom) and their social-historical setting (such as the meaning of Asiarchs as Paul's patronal "friends" in Acts 19:31 or ancient understanding of the fever in 28:8 or the forensic strategies in Paul's defense speeches);⁵ and I highlight patterns in Acts (such as commenting on the apologetic inversion of the charges that Paul disturbed the peace and periodically citing philosophic parallels to Paul to develop Luke's implicit comparison of Paul with Stoic philosophers beyond the often-noted case in 17:16–34).⁶ Likewise, in the abundant cases where my contributions accord more closely with past research, I hope that scholars will find valuable the frequently new supporting documentation (e.g., for figurative voting in 26:10).⁷

This commentary's primary focus is what the text meant to its first audience. Its primary contributions lie in often providing further documentation for, and sometimes further elaboration of, the social and historical framework in which Acts was first written, read, and heard. Many of the sources I cite inevitably overlap with previous discussions, but (as the indexes should attest) much of the primary material

2. E.g., Keener, *Corinthians*; idem, *Revelation*; idem, *Matthew* (1997); idem, *Romans*; in contrast to my heavier academic works such as *Matthew*; *John*; and *Historical Jesus*. Some complain about scholars writing too widely in the NT (cf. one response in Bird and Keener, "Generalist Scholars"), but I believe that demonstrated facility both with other NT narratives and with Paul can be useful when one approaches Acts. It would be odd if, emphasizing the necessary contexts of early Judaism and broader Greco-Roman settings for reading Luke-Acts, we neglected the particularly close context of early Christianity.

3. Pelikan rightly notes that "commentary" is a time-honored genre for theological reflection (*Acts*, 25); evident in Origen, it was widespread by the late fourth century (Gaca and Welborn, "Receptions," iii).

4. A complaint offered also by other commentators, e.g., France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1; Das, *Debate*, xi.

5. See also Keener, "Inverted Guilt"; idem, "Tongues"; idem, "Asiarchs"; idem, "Fever"; idem, "Rhetorical Techniques." I address various historical questions relevant for genre also in, e.g., "Official"; idem, "Athens"; idem, "Plausibility"; idem, "Troops"; and engage more social-science approaches in, e.g., "Possession"; idem, "Comparisons"; to a degree in idem, "Case."

6. On Luke's apologetic for Paul, see, e.g., Keener, "Apologetic." Gentiles in Luke's audience would have understood Paul partly as a philosopher (see, e.g., Wilken, "Christians," 107–10; idem, "Social Interpretation of Apologetics"), though the biblically literate among them (the center of Luke's ideal audience) also had access to the "prophet" category.

7. See also Keener, "Vote."

referenced here has not been applied to Acts before. Biblical readers and expositors, and the scholars who serve them, may observe some basic literary themes with or without detailed aids (although often through methodological advances and observations pioneered by literary critics). Most modern students are not, however, as conversant in the contexts of the ancient sources, which help us better resonate with how an ancient audience would have heard the text. Hence I have focused special attention on this task.

Still, because Acts is a literary text, it is impossible to properly expound it without attention to literary questions, besides those related to its social context. Ancient readers themselves understood implicit rules of genre, such as using the entire narrative of a historical work to provide meaning for the ideas in such a work.⁸ Moreover, because the implicit genre of Acts appears to be some form of ancient historical monograph, its literary function within its Greco-Roman context invites not only more direct questions of “theological” application but also discussions about questions of historical accuracy and verisimilitude (by the broader standards of ancient, as opposed to modern, historiography). For modern interests, such questions include examining where in the range of historical monographs Acts lies in accomplishing the purposes for which most historians composed such monographs. Thus, even while engaging contemporary discussions of the broader social context that Luke-Acts first addressed, I must broach some current discussions of literary and historical issues.

3. Limitations of This Work

My minimal employment of some methods is not intended as disrespect for those methods but merely reflects my own limitations and specialized focus, especially in view of the danger of making this work even larger than it already is. While seeking to provide a commentary of some general value, I have concentrated on areas where I believe my own research’s contributions will be the most useful. One must circumscribe the task in order to keep a work’s size under control—a constraint that has limited even the detail I can devote to the primary questions to which I address this commentary. As the Greek historian Polybius pleaded with his critics long ago, “A good critic should not judge authors by what they omit, but by what they relate.”⁹

As noted above, whereas I have sometimes drawn on the insights of technical literary approaches that are not my focus, my use of them (apart from a holistic approach to Luke-Acts) has been restrained. Had I focused on them, I could afford less attention to other aspects of Acts study. (This does not mean that I have ignored literary dimensions of the text itself; without attention to these, even historical “context” would be meaningless, since a commentator would not know which elements of the vast ancient context were relevant.) The following are valuable areas of research to which I give much less detailed attention than I could.

a. A Broad Sweep

First, this commentary is social-historical and, in some sections, rhetorical in its focus and does not focus as much attention on lexical or grammatical details (a matter

8. Witherington, *Acts*, 59, following Mellor, *Tacitus*, 70.

9. Polyb. 6.11.7–8 (LCL, 2:294–95); he advises historians not to focus on what others have treated sufficiently (15.36.10).

treated adequately by a number of other works). Particularly because, after this commentary's completion, my publisher graciously titled it "exegetical" (not my original title), I must qualify what sort of "exegesis" my commentary actually involves. (The English term can involve simply "explanation" or "interpretation," though some employ it more narrowly.) A social-historical commentary on a relatively large narrative text such as Acts cannot pause to discuss the full semantic range of particular words except where those meanings are necessary for understanding the flow of thought in the passage (e.g., σωφροσύνη, for 26:25). A few reviewers disapproved of the lack of extensive treatment of grammatical and lexical details in my thousand-page commentary on Matthew, though generally appreciating the social and historical background less available elsewhere.¹⁰

Such basic lexical information is, however, readily available on a basic level through computer searches that put at the reader's fingertips not only the LXX and NT grammar but the vocabulary of nearly all extant Greek literature and papyri. To duplicate such information here would easily more than double the size (and, unfortunately, therefore increase the publishing cost) of this commentary. I would be depending on the same excellent resources (especially the most thorough of them all, the *Thesaurus linguae graecae* and Duke University's papyrology database)¹¹ as anyone else working through the Greek text.¹² Most exegesis students already have available electronic parsing, the repetition of which here seems tedious. Of course, many useful sources do offer important help choosing among lexical options and unraveling many of Luke's sentences,¹³ but there are also some commentaries that, despite liberal appearances of Greek words, offer no information that a student could not have acquired from standard reference works.

While valuing all of these important works, I have chosen instead to focus more often (though not exclusively) on conceptual parallels to provide the reader what she or he would find elsewhere only with greater difficulty (i.e., by working through the various ancient sources for many years). Even here I have often simply listed in footnotes a variety of ancient texts, though originally collected laboriously in their contexts by reading through ancient literature, instead of commenting extensively on each of these sources; the latter approach, though of interest to specialists, would have required me to write books on chapters in Acts rather than a commentary on the whole.

In some cases I have elaborated points more extensively. Some of these were points where modern interest in the question invited exploration (such as the nature of the experiences often discussed in other disciplines with respect to Acts 2:4 and Acts 2:17–18). More frequently, where my own reading of ancient literature yielded particularly abundant material differing from modern cultural practices, organizing and deploying this material invited more detailed treatment, sometimes in excursuses (e.g., at Acts 3:2; 8:27; 12:13; 17:18; 18:3; and hospitality in 16:15).

10. Noting the lack of grammatical and lexical focus, see, e.g., Doriani, "Review," 34.

11. *Thesaurus linguae graecae*, described online: <http://www.tlg.uci.edu>; *Duke Papyrus Archive*, online: <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/papyrus> (including the Duke Databank of Documentary Papyri).

12. These are the sorts of activities some professors at more prestigious institutions might safely assign to research assistants or graduate seminars (neither of which have I had available during the writing of this commentary, apart from students I earlier hired to type my own earlier handwritten research). Nevertheless, even supervising such a project would be highly labor-intensive, just as my own approach to research has proved in its different way. I am not able to master both approaches in the years allotted to this project, though others building on this generation of work will, it is hoped, do so.

13. In addition to some of the stronger general commentaries on the Greek text (such as Barrett and Bruce, among others), note Parsons and Culy, *Acts*, focusing especially on this contribution.

b. Text Criticism

Second, although I do not neglect textual questions at necessary points, I have provided far less attention to text-critical details than would be possible (or desirable) for a commentary the focus of which was text-critical.¹⁴ The disparity between commentaries focused and those not focused on textual issues may prove especially evident in commentaries on Acts, a book whose textual problems appear particularly problematic. (The Western text is a significant problem,¹⁵ since it constitutes virtually a distinct recension; see the discussion below.)

Ancient critics, like modern ones, asked text-critical questions. Ancient commentators debated the wording of some lines in earlier texts (e.g., Aul. Gel. 1.21). Some ancient teachers edited their versions of Homer, thinking to correct them (Plut. *Alc.* 7.1).¹⁶ Polybius, for example, allowed a conjectural emendation of “twice” for the text’s “thrice” in Hom. *Od.* 12.105 to conform the text to the geography of his day (Polyb. 34.3.11). In one possibly apocryphal account from about the third century B.C.E., when Aratus asked Timon how to find the reliable text of Homer, Timon instructed him to find an ancient copy without all the modern “corrections” (Diog. Laert. 9.12.113). Likewise Virgil was found in different forms; Aulus Gellius (Aul. Gel. 6.20) claims that Virgil changed an earlier reading to the later one and explains the reason. Amoraim claimed (long after the temple’s destruction) that scrolls could be corrected by being checked against the scroll in the temple (*y. Sanh.* 2:6, §3).¹⁷ Some ancient (e.g., Origen), medieval (e.g., Bede), and Renaissance humanist (e.g., Erasmus) Christian scholars engaged in text criticism.¹⁸

Still, because the focus of this commentary is not on lexical or syntactical details but on the larger level of broader cultural connections to the ideas or customs alluded to in the text (and to a lesser extent the macrolevel of literary patterns in Luke-Acts), minor textual variants will prove less important here than in some other commentaries (especially those with a heavier lexical focus). Although my primary focus in the commentary is not text-critical, however, I must provide some general comments about the text here. The book of Acts provides perhaps the thorniest text-critical

14. For brief annotated bibliographies for those exploring this discipline further with regard to Luke-Acts, see, e.g., Green and McKeever, *Historiography*, 85–88; Jervell, *Apostelgeschichte*, 12–15; discussion in Schröter, “Actaforschung 2”; Grässer, *Forschungen*, 137–39, 157–79 (esp. 157–60). For older studies, see Mattill and Mattill, *Bibliography*, 95–121, §§1182–1560; Martini, “Tendances”; Bammel, “Text”; Grässer, *Forschungen*, 89–96; briefly, Wikenhauser, *Apostelgeschichte*, 23. For some recent studies, see those in Nicklas and Tilly, *Acts as Church History*; also Dupont-Roc, “Tradition textuelle”; for a discussion of recent perspectives, see Bovon, *Studies*, 24–26; for brief discussions, see, e.g., Weiser, *Apostelgeschichte*, 41–44; Eckey, *Apostelgeschichte*, 4–7; Marguerat, *Actes*, 30–31. Some take into account theological factors when approaching text criticism (see Schmid, “Eklektische Textkonstitution”). Research continues with new discoveries (Bethge, “Fragmenta biblica Cantabrigiensis”) and critiques of the neglect or misuse of some lines of evidence (Kyrychenko, “Old Slavonic Acts”).

15. After surveying various theories, Delobel concludes that the “Western” text remains “the most complicated matter in the field of New Testament textual criticism” and that there is no consensus today (“Text,” 106). One approach working through the Western variants appears in the work of Rius-Camps and Read-Heimerdinger, e.g., “Readings XIV”; “Readings XV”; “Readings XVI”; “Readings XVII”; “Readings XVIII.”

16. In Lucian’s parody *True Story* 2.20, the protagonist asks Homer in the afterlife if he wrote the lines that earlier grammarians bracketed as interpolations; Homer says that he did. On correction of Homer, see also the discussion in Maclean and Aitken, *Heroikos*, xli, xlix–l.

17. Copying mistakes were frequent (e.g., Symm. *Ep.* 1.24). Josephus insists that no nation was as careful in copying and preserving its records as Israel was (*Ag. Ap.* 1.28–36). Niehoff, “Exegesis in Alexandria,” suggests that some Alexandrian Jews practiced text criticism on Scripture the way scholia did on the *Iliad*. The rabbis may have allowed that earlier scribes made some emendations (*Gen. Rab.* 49:7; Lieberman, *Hellenism*, 28–37, but cf. esp. 47); rabbis’ copying from memory was forbidden (*Gen. Rab.* 36:8).

18. On Bede, see Martin, “Introduction to Bede,” xviii–xx; see also Ambrosiaster *Commentary on Paul’s Epistles* (CSEL 81:169–79; Bray, *Romans*, 142).

situation in the NT; indeed, some scholars contend that “from the earliest times several, or at least two, editions of the book were in currency.”¹⁹ This state of affairs may stem from perhaps the publication of Acts by someone other than the author²⁰ (due to the author’s death,²¹ imprisonment, or other reasons), or from revisions by the author’s circle, or simply from a wide perception that the book was unfinished and (for that reason or because it was not primarily about Jesus) safer to expand than a Gospel.²² Most works unfinished at an author’s death simply did not survive (as Pliny notes in *Ep.* 5.8.7), but some unfinished works circulated (see Quint. *Inst.* 1.pref. 7–8), and an important work might be published with only minor editing in its unfinished form, inviting some further attempts by others to complete elements that were perceived as missing (Suet. *Vergil* 41).

C. K. Barrett suggests that scribes may have exercised this textual freedom longer in Acts than in most narrative books ultimately accepted in the NT because it took longer for this book to be treated as canonical.²³ The second-century church’s frequent ambivalence about Acts might reflect the genre confusion that persists to this day: neither gospel nor epistle, Acts did not fit expectations for the conventional “canonical” genres.²⁴

Some scholars also suggest that Acts is cited only rarely before John Chrysostom because Luke’s interests were rarely those of early patristic theologians and the controversies they faced; it may well have been such “relative obscurity” that “allowed a major second-century revision of Acts, namely, the Western text, to develop unchecked and without correction.”²⁵ This so-called Western text consists primarily of expansive additions (and a few omissions) and diverges frequently from the likely earliest sources.

Despite the misnomer, the Western text does not appear geographically only in the west;²⁶ further, it may be attested as early as Irenaeus, although this suggestion is disputed.²⁷ F. F. Bruce points out that readings of the Western text appear “in versions as apparently independent of each other as the Old Latin and the Old Syriac, both of which go back to the later decades of the second century,” and argues that “it appears in patristic citations” even earlier than the Alexandrian text does. Nevertheless, he concludes on the basis of internal evidence that the Alexandrian text remains more reliable on the whole.²⁸ Where it is longer than the Alexandrian text, the added ma-

19. Harnack, *Acts*, 48. Our general assurance that we have essentially the right text (e.g., Stanton, *Gospel Truth?*, 33–48) is thus more open to dispute in Acts. If one simply writes off the Western text, of course, the level of certainty is high, though lower than in the Gospel (Morton in Morton and MacGregor, *Structure*, 16).

20. Harnack, *Acts*, 48. Authors also altered texts for new editions (see Heyworth and Wilson, “Variants”; the discussion in ch. 1 on publication, below).

21. Strange, *Problem*, 189, argues that Acts, like many ancient works, was published posthumously in its unfinished draft form; Luke’s editors were his earliest interpreters. Cf. also Rackham, *Acts*, l–lv. Strange contends that both the “Western and non-Western texts represent versions of a text left unedited by Luke” (*Problem*, 186); some of the Western material may derive from the author’s own annotations, which the non-Western editing mistrusted.

22. Ancient teachers sometimes corrected their students’ editions of Homer (Plut. *Alc.* 7.1), as already noted; such a tradition of text criticism naturally facilitated tendencies toward scribal emendation. The abrupt ending of Mark as we have it also invited expansion.

23. Barrett, *Acts*, 29, 2:xix–xxiii, lxix.

24. *Ibid.*, 2:lxix–lxx. One wonders if the later appearance of apocryphal acts may have further compounded such perceptions (although apocryphal gospels also circulated).

25. Witherington, *Acts*, 172–73; cf. similarly Dibelius, *Studies in Acts*, 84–92; Powell, *Acts*, 23.

26. Barrett, *Acts*, 2:lxix. Its readings may influence the Eastern *Acts of Paul* (Pervo, *Acts*, 3).

27. Bruce, *Acts*³, 74, allows that the Western text may even reflect an early second-century revision, which is sometimes as accurate as the Alexandrian text. From discourse analysis, Read-Heimerdinger, *Bezan Text*, even contends that the skilled literary cohesiveness of Bezae (D) points to a text earlier than most Alexandrian manuscripts (though others might use the cohesiveness to argue the opposite).

28. Bruce, *Acts*³, 72.

terial is usually secondary, often reflecting the sort of expansions characteristic of later lectionaries or obvious glosses.²⁹ In effect, the Western text may constitute the oldest extant commentary on Acts.³⁰

Our text of the book of Acts has roughly 5 percent fewer words and 10 percent fewer lines than the Gospel of Luke, which it closely parallels; although this is well within symmetrical range, one could argue that Acts should contain a slightly more expansive text, that is, something like the Western text. (Then again, later “western” editors might have expanded the text of Acts to fill as much of a standard-length scroll as the Gospel does.) Complicating the problem further, its expansions and paraphrases often reflect a Lukan style; one could contend that this stylistic assimilation suggests a later revision by the author himself.³¹ While such a position is not impossible, however, in the final analysis arguments for Lukan style in the Western text are not compelling evidence for Lukan authorship.³² The interpretive editors or copyist(s) may have simply employed a style they had learned by immersing themselves in Acts.³³

Barrett and Bruce prefer an eclectic method: the accurate text tradition, standing to some degree behind both the Western and Alexandrian traditions, may sometimes turn up in either of these traditions.³⁴ Still, despite significant dissent, a fairly broad consensus exists among a majority of scholars that the Western text is usually later.³⁵ Although in some cases the Western reading may preserve the original wording³⁶ or, much more frequently, reflect at least accurate tradition, most studies suggest that it is mainly secondary. Scholars often argue that the Western variants frequently betray theological bias, especially in an anti-Judaic direction.³⁷ Many have also noted an antifeminine bias that is perhaps uncomfortable with Luke’s more positive vision:

29. *Ibid.*, 72–73, listing as examples “amplifications of our Lord’s name (cf. Ac. 1:21; 2:38; 7:55; 13:33), added references to the Spirit (cf. 15:7, 29, 32; 19:1; 20:3), and an increase in phrases such as ‘in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ’ (cf. 6:8; 14:10; 18:8).”

30. Jervell, *Apostelgeschichte*, 61 (“der älteste Kommentar zur Apostelgeschichte”). It may have been circulating already by the time of Irenaeus (Gregory, “Reception of Acts,” 63).

31. Bruce, *Acts*³, 75, attributes this view to F. Blass and T. Zahn and notes among its contemporary defenders M.-E. Boismard and A. Lamouille. Few today, however, hold this view (see the full argument against it in Head, “Texts,” esp. 420–42). Jean Leclerc proposed the idea in 1685 and “was also the first person to repudiate” it (as Pervo, *Acts*, 4, puts it; cf. also Head, “Texts,” 416). In one detailed form, Delebecque, *Actes*, contends that Luke the physician (Col 4:14) authored the original text, substantially our Alexandrian text, as a draft in 62, and revised it into what became the Western text in 67 (see esp. 373–96). Given the existence of drafts and multiple editions (see ch. 1 of this introduction), I would find the argument more persuasive if not for instances in the Western text (such as its anti-Judaic elements) that seem inconsistent with the earlier version.

32. Cf. Geer, “Lucanisms.”

33. See Witherington, *Acts*, 67; Barrett, *Acts*, 26–28. Strange, *Problem*, 189, suggests that both versions reflect some “Lucan traits, but neither of which is Lucan in all its readings”; it appears unlikely, however, that our non-Western text was so unfinished that Luke could not have finished its dedication to Theophilus and sent it to him (see Witherington, *Acts*, 66).

34. Barrett, *Acts*, 2:xix–xxiii; Bruce, *Acts*³, 73–76. Cf. Powell, *Acts*, 23: “Even if the Western text is a redaction, the manuscripts used by the redactors were probably older than any available to us today.”

35. See esp. the discussion in Head, “Texts.” This is the opinion also of, e.g., Porter, “Comment(ary)ing”; idem, “Developments”; Talbert, *Acts*, xxix; Parsons, *Acts*, 11–12. For the lack of consensus, see again Delobel, “Text,” esp. 106. Dibelius, *Studies in Acts*, 88, doubted that scholars should accept the Alexandrian text as readily in Acts as elsewhere; but (84–87, esp. 87) he also rejected the priority of the Western text with some isolated exceptions.

36. E.g., C. Williams, *Acts*, 229–30, concurs with A. C. Clark’s preference for the Western reading at Acts 20:4.

37. See Epp, *Tendency*; followed by others, e.g., Conzelmann, *Acts*, xxxiv–xxxv; Bruce, *Acts*³, 75. Because I argue that the church’s view of itself as a non-Jewish entity postdates our extant first-century documents (Keener, *John*, 195–98; cf. also 198–214; idem, *Matthew*, 46–50), I am all the more inclined to concur that these signs in the Western text are late. Some, however, support its antiquity, finding its emphasis on Israel’s rejecting the gospel more coherent than the Alexandrian text (where less reason is given for Israel’s judgment; cf. Faure, “Mystère”); or future hope for Israel’s conversion remains in the Western text, whereas the

the Western text tradition sometimes moves Aquila's name before Priscilla's; in contrast to the Alexandrian text, it applies nobility to both genders in Acts 17:12; and it omits Damaris in 17:34.³⁸ Some other expansions may reflect early second-century "harmonizing details and 'gossip'" meant to attract the sort of audience that soon after came to show interest in apocryphal gospels and acts.³⁹ That the Western text appealed to many church fathers does not guarantee its antiquity.⁴⁰ The "fuller" version of any work typically prevailed (hence the preference for Matthew over Mark and the preservation of the longer text of Ignatius); it would not be surprising if the same proved true for the longer recension of Acts.

Critics of the Western text's priority note four groups of stylistic peculiarities: (1) anti-Jewish elements, (2) a more universalist emphasis, (3) an augmentation of Luke's emphasis on the Spirit, and (4) honorary expansions of Christ's name.⁴¹ In the case of inadvertent changes, either text tradition might reflect the earlier readings (although the Western text's expansive tendencies may make it less careful even in such cases); deliberate changes characteristic of the Western text, however, probably simply underline that tradition's peculiarities.

Yet even when Western readings are historically speculative (in contrast to when they reflect demonstrable bias, e.g., anti-Judaism), they may often prove helpful. It is likely that they sometimes reflect surmises that are more historically plausible than our own would be, because they stem from the author's ancient Mediterranean context. It is possible that some of the "gossip" even reflects genuine traditions from members of ancient Mediterranean churches who heard Luke or his colleagues elaborate his stories orally.⁴² Oral retellings may use different language to recount the same substance, possibly even of written texts.⁴³ In a few cases, then, I provide comments on these traditions (e.g., at 19:9). There is, however, no need to duplicate here what has been done better by others.⁴⁴ Thus, as in some other standard commentaries,⁴⁵ I will not give Western variants the laudable attention they receive in Barrett and elsewhere, although I mention them periodically.

Alexandrian text's ambivalence betrays signs of revision (Faure, *Pentecôte*, 493–94, arguing on 495 that the Western text is Luke's text).

38. E.g., González, *Acts*, 12 (esp. n. 19); Witherington, "Anti-Feminist Tendencies"; idem, *Acts*, 506, 567n22; Malick, "Contribution"; Schulz, "Junia"; Kurek-Chomycz, "Tendency."

39. C. Williams, *Acts*, 49, though he dates the apocryphal gospels to the same period; Pervo, *Acts*, 3, sees this text tradition as something of "a transition between the mentality (and theology) of the canonical Acts and its apocryphal successors." Others also suggest that the Western text may preserve some plausible data, though they need not go back to Luke (Witherington, *Acts*, 68–69).

40. Pelikan, *Acts*, 33.

41. Bruce, *Acts*³, 75, noting that because the fourth characteristic is less emphatic than in the Apostolic Fathers, Menoud thinks it earlier than the Apostolic Fathers and hence contemporary with Alexandrian text. For a judicious comparison of the portrayal of Rome in Alexandrian and so-called Western traditions, see Omerzu, "Darstellung."

42. Nock, *Essays*, 827, suggests plausibly that the individual behind much of the Western text "may well have belonged to the author's own circle and have thought of himself as doing a service to the book by removing difficulties and preserving stray fragments of tradition." If the companion behind the "we" material accompanied Paul to Rome, some in the western empire may have known him well; movement between east and west (e.g., between Corinth and Rome) was frequent in any case.

43. Dewey, "Oral-Aural Event," 157–58, noting that storytellers could also expand or abridge depending on audience response.

44. For standard text-critical discussion see Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 259–503; it will also be some time before Barrett's text-critical comments (Barrett, *Acts*, passim) are superseded. For introductory discussions from various perspectives, see C. Williams, *Acts*, 48–53; Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 66–79 (including bibliography on 73–79); Barrett, *Acts*, 2–29.

45. E.g., Dunn, *Acts*, xi, in his case justifying this procedure broadly because he believes that the Western elaborations "do not belong to the original text," although they may reveal "how Acts was received and used within early Western Christianity."

The recognition that the later Byzantine text merits even less attention does not require much argument.⁴⁶ First attested in the fourth century and not identifiable in the first few centuries of patristic literature, the Byzantine text represents a revision combining elements of earlier text traditions.⁴⁷ Although even the Byzantine text may reflect the earliest form of the text on some occasions,⁴⁸ these cases prove the rare exception rather than anything close to the rule.

c. *Social History and Social Science*

Third, my contextual approach is primarily social-historical rather than social-scientific, although I have sometimes drawn on insights of social-scientific commentators on Acts.⁴⁹ (Where available and where I believe relevant, however, I have drawn on insights from traditional non-Western societies that offer a different approach to the text.)⁵⁰ Social-scientific approaches are especially helpful⁵¹ when, lacking concrete ancient data, we must extrapolate by analogy or at least ask questions beyond those assumed by our traditional cultural perspectives, but they are best employed heuristically.⁵² As one scholar points out, these methods “provide an alternative lens. . . . But they certainly do not serve as substitutes for evidence.”⁵³ A wide range of scholars have offered similar warnings, concerned that models from some kinds of societies not be imposed on quite different ancient cultures.⁵⁴ Some have employed particular

46. As exemplified also in copies of Homer, the politics of admission into the Byzantine imperial library affected what would become a “majority” text (see Finkelberg, “Regional Texts”).

47. Bruce, *Acts*³, 70.

48. Bruce, *ibid.*, 70, 154, 358, suggests Acts 4:17; 16:13.

49. E.g., Malina and Pilch, *Acts*. As of 1998, there were, apparently, relatively few; Barton, “Sociology,” notes especially Neyrey, *Social World*, and P. Esler, preferring the former approach but learning from both. For such approaches applied widely in the NT, see Esler, *Worlds*; applied to Paul, see, e.g., Barton, “Approaches”; Malina and Pilch, *Letters*; most commonly, in studies of Jesus and the Gospels, e.g., Stegemann, Malina, and Theissen, *Setting*; Geysler, “Uitgangspunte” (cf. also *idem*, “Methodologies vooronderstellingen”); Aarde, “Methods.” Some have critiqued NT social-scientific interpreters for lack of methodological precision (e.g., regarding Luke-Acts, Lindboe, “Samfunnsvitenskapene,” regarding Neyrey, *Social World*), but eclectic methodology, which is often needed, may sometimes sacrifice such precision (even if the identification of particular tools can be helpful). For valuable approaches and surveys, see, e.g., Horrell, *Approaches*; Osiek, *Saying*; for OT, Wilson, *Approaches*.

50. Although I have not participated in anthropological “field studies,” I have limited “field experience” (of nearly one year altogether) in some African settings (the majority of it living with Africans) and, more important, have been able to consult regularly with my wife, who is African and a historian and who spent most of her life in Africa (in both rural and urban settings), for an “inside” perspective on how these texts could sound. Thus, although scholars will need to count our firsthand observations of traditional African life as merely anecdotal, I have sometimes cited them where they have expanded my interpretive horizons and where such observations can supplement the cultural perspectives that usually inform Western scholars’ interpretive approach.

51. See, e.g., the emphasis in Adeyemi, “Approach”; for a survey of research a quarter century ago, Scroggs, “Present State” (cf. also Keck, “Ethos”). Gager, “Review” (esp. 175–77, 179), insists rigorously on the distinction between “social” and “sociological,” though allowing the value of each.

52. See, e.g., the caution in Pizzuto-Pomaco, “Shame,” 61. David Fraser, a sociologist conversant with biblical studies’ applications of the data (and for several years my university’s provost), and Marla Frederick, an anthropologist at Harvard also knowledgeable about biblical studies, have emphasized to me the importance of a heuristic approach. For one specific example of questions concerning some applications of social-scientific approaches (while remaining largely favorable), see Keener, “Review of *Windows*,” 226.

53. Harland, *Associations*, 15.

54. See, e.g., cautions in Malherbe, *Social Aspects*, 11–13; Winter, *Left Corinth*, xiii; Harrison, *Grace*, 14–15, 22–23; Stanton, *New People*, 85; Hemer, *Letters*, 211; Brown, *Death*, 21; Collins, “Apocalyptic Literature,” 362; also sources cited in Schnabel, “Reading Acts,” 267 (Osiek, “Handmaid,” 278; Sawicki, *Crossing Galilee*, 5–6, 37, 65–67; Jensen, *Antipas*, 30–34); see esp. Holmberg, *Sociology*, 145–57 (as cited in Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1:16n15). Some writers note such a caution (e.g., Crossan, *Jesus*, 159) yet, in my mind, do not attend to it adequately. For a discussion of the meaning, use, and variety of models in social science, see Elliott, “Criticism,” 3–9; Holmberg, “Methods,” 267–68.

modern approaches as a grid without cultural sensitivity.⁵⁵ I have thus tried to focus on as wide a range as possible of hard data from antiquity.

I believe that the evidence often points to some general patterns in ancient Mediterranean culture, especially urban Mediterranean culture during the empire. Honor-and-shame issues are much closer to those found in modern Mediterranean and Middle Eastern societies than in, for example, dominant forms of British and North American culture. Nevertheless, extrapolations from modern Mediterranean societies⁵⁶ and, still more, from modern societies in other locations must be employed with much more caution than evidence closer in time and geography to the subject itself.

I have tried to make special use of contemporary parallels for phenomena where analogies are abundant in many cultures, including frequently researched anthropological topics such as kinship, spirit possession, and, to a lesser extent, healing and health practices. (I find such studies, drawn from a wide variety of cultures, more helpful than the particular parallels some have offered to Melanesian cargo cults.) Developing the approach of some other scholars,⁵⁷ I will also (esp. in ch. 9 below) attempt to compare modern “divine healing” claims with those in Acts, partly as a control on modern speculations about what ancient witnesses “could” have claimed. It seems inconsistent to treat as symbols or old legends healing reports in Acts (concerning signs workers who, for the most part, would have understood literally prior biblical traditions about signs) while at the same time treating in a radically different way (whether as charlatans, therapeutically helpful people of faith, gullible persons, or a combination of such) all signs workers today with analogous biblical understandings. (I hope that readers who often first peruse bibliographies of works, as I often do, will recognize that I cite popular sources at many of these points because I am making comparisons with popular religion; scholars of religious history, of popular religion, and of global religion regularly treat such works as primary sources attesting popular beliefs.)⁵⁸

Because of space constraints and to limit the potential excesses of “comparative religions” approaches that neglect a movement’s distinctiveness, I have limited much of the focus regarding miracle claims (albeit not regarding spirit possession, given the much wider range of anthropological literature available on that topic) to monotheistic movements, especially to those sharing the widest possible range of premises (such as biblical authority) with our subjects in Acts.⁵⁹ Even so, using these phenomena to help us understand the motives, intentions, and ideals of people two millennia ago, much less to interpret the content of the phenomena, is precarious, and they must be employed only cautiously, as heuristic tools. I address these questions most frequently in chapter 9 below, where the texture diverges from that of this commentary elsewhere due to the different character of the questions addressed. (I address these questions most fully in my book on miracle narratives.)⁶⁰

55. This has been true, in the past, of some psychologizing approaches (see critiques in Stein, “Reading”; Malina and Neyrey, *Portraits*, 14–15; Malina and Neyrey, “Personality,” 68), though the tide may be currently shifting in favor of more nuanced psychological approaches (see, e.g., Charlesworth, “Psychobiography”).

56. See the caution in King, “Anthropology.”

57. Especially Yale social historian Ramsay MacMullen (*Christianizing*, 7); for first-century Christian sources, note, e.g., discussions in Ashton, *Religion*, 32–40; Eve, *Miracles*, 357–59; Klutz, *Exorcism Stories*, 196–97.

58. I use academic sources for these comparisons where possible; but popular literature treats the subject far more abundantly, and I am comparing popular-level approaches in both eras.

59. Thus I draw heavily on studies of global Christianity, on the now-flourishing academic discipline of studies on Pentecostalism, and on other academic studies as well as much of the popular literature that is often studied in such research.

60. Keener, *Miracles*; cf. also idem, “Case.”

d. Modern Secondary Literature

Fourth, my goal is not primarily to survey modern opinion on a passage or subject. Although I have cited more secondary sources than many Acts commentaries do, summarizing secondary literature is not my object, and I make no claim to be exhaustive.⁶¹ Researchers seeking fuller bibliographic information have access to databases of journal abstracts (which I have used, though mostly in hard copy over the years), dissertation abstracts, the standard bibliographic tools for Acts study, and a variety of other resources; on these I do not hope to improve.⁶² Mattill and Mattill, *Bibliography*, alone contains 6,646 entries; were my intention to be bibliographically expansive, I could expand my bibliography by simply reproducing their citations at numerous relevant points; but given that work's date, the reader should note that my bibliography overlaps only fairly rarely in proportion to the number of our respective sources. Thus there is yet more available for an interested researcher in these other resources, and the bibliography in a work such as this one could easily have been doubled.

Conversely, I have made abundant use of *New Testament Abstracts* in endeavoring to survey contemporary research and opinion for my notes.⁶³ I have drawn from such resources because I want to be as fair as possible by including as many scholars as possible who have published on these subjects, although detailed interaction would have been more helpful in these many cases had I had further time and space. Given the increasing access to data, those focusing on particular passages can work through much of this information in greater detail. Though giving preference to technical sources, I (like *New Testament Abstracts* and other resources) have often cited less technical ones, since scholars have sometimes offered their arguments in both forms.⁶⁴

Providing secondary literature is not my primary agenda, however. Anyone can access these sources specifically on Acts, supplementing what this and other commentaries have done. By contrast, most scholars and students researching passages in Acts will not have time to read through a wide range of ancient primary sources, and I have therefore focused especially on providing this information.⁶⁵ Even in my use of secondary sources, I have tried to move often beyond what researchers would

61. As Pliny the Elder noted nearly two millennia ago, his discipline was too large for any single authority to cover fully (*N.H.* 3.1.1–2). Rowe, *World*, 11, is right to emphasize the need to prioritize the text over the massive volume of secondary literature.

62. See esp. Mattill and Mattill, *Bibliography* (1966); the update for 1962–84 in Mills, *Bibliography on Acts* (1986; updated in Mills, *Acts* [1996]), with a thousand more articles (cf., comparably on the Gospels, Mills, *Index*); also Wagner, *Bibliography*, 331–550 (to 1981); for 1991–2003, see Marshall, “Current Study”; Bovon, *Studies*, 19–37 (cf. idem, “Studies”; idem, “Études”); Grässer, *Forschungen*; most accessible but much more selective (for many, a helpful trait), see Powell, *Acts*; Green and McKeever, *Historiography* (they also list some bibliographies, 15–18); for Polish Lukan studies of 1986–99, Kiedzik, “Bibliografia”; for the state of research, also Flichy, “État des recherches”; with attention to some recent key works, Schröter, “Actaforschung 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6”; a concise survey in Anthony, “Saying.” With a focus on methodology, see Penner, “Madness”; for a historical survey of views (esp. regarding history versus or plus theology), see Jáuregui, “Panorama.” One particularly helpful topical bibliography in a commentary is Jervell, *Apostelgeschichte*, 9–48 (esp. 15–41).

63. Given the progress in electronic technology, one might soon hope to provide one's own abstracts by accessing all articles online and reading their conclusions (barring cost constraints), but *NTA* is useful not only for its abstracts but also for the great breadth of sources from which it draws.

64. Particularly in ch. 9, I have also used some nonacademic sources as primary sources to popular religion, as is the common practice in church history and other disciplines that study popular experience, as noted earlier.

65. Someday scholars will probably be able to scan in current commentators' references and pull up full citations in both primary and secondary literature with little effort. I hope that in critiquing the work of their predecessors, they will remember that our tasks were more tedious (just as our generation has advantages—of translations, papyri collections, and word-processing programs—that some of the remarkable scholars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries lacked).

uncover were they searching only publications on Acts itself, in order to make available additional material that would be more difficult for most students of Acts to acquire without digressing from their focus.

With the rarest exceptions (nearly all as additions to existing footnotes), I can interact little with sources published after the completion of my pre-edited work (mid-2007) and should pause to note here some particularly unfortunate omissions necessitated by the publication dates of other works. I am unable to interact fully, or as fully as deserved, with several excellent commentaries on Acts because they were published too far along in the publication process of my own or because they remain forthcoming at the time of this commentary's publication.

Among the commentaries reported to be forthcoming of which I am aware is Steve Walton's commentary for the Word series; among other strengths, this work will surely interact thoroughly with the secondary literature. Among the most thorough narrative analyses will undoubtedly be Joel Green's commentary for the New International Commentary on the New Testament series, which will undoubtedly offer many insights from which the reader will profit. As in my work here, we should expect special sensitivity to the Greco-Roman context in the commentaries of both Loveday Alexander (Black's New Testament Commentaries) and Stanley Porter (New International Greek Testament Commentaries); Porter also will attend to lexical and syntactical details far more than is possible in a commentary such as mine. Although undoubtedly none of us would agree with every other commentator on all points (despite concurring on many other points), I write with appreciation for their work. Undoubtedly, many other works will emerge from which I would have profited but that I inadvertently failed to find or that were published too late for my use.

e. Early Reception History

Finally, I will not attend in nearly as much detail to the valuable ancient and medieval interpretations of Acts, although the index will reveal that I do include a range of samples from these writings.⁶⁶ This relative omission does not imply a thoroughgoing or necessary preference for dominant modern critical readings against the longer history of interpretation that preceded them (modern views, too, reflect the influence of their own historically conditioned philosophic context).⁶⁷ I simply had to limit the scope of my inquiry. My primary purpose is not engagement with secondary scholarship—ancient or modern—and so I have not pursued bibliographic questions in the same detail one would expect from scholars whose focus is the compilation of resources regarding scholarship on Acts.

But to the extent that I have engaged other commentators, I have given much greater attention to modern scholarship. This is primarily because most modern scholars expect commentaries to respond to critical questions debated today, even if these have not always been the most relevant questions for readers over a wider range of

66. For pre-Reformation scholarship, see the survey in Stuehnenberg, "Reformation"; more recently, see, e.g., the historical survey of Baptist scholarship in Barr, Leonard, Parsons, and Weaver, *Acts*. I have drawn on John Chrysostom's and Bede's commentaries and also extensively on the useful collection in Martin, *Acts*; many specialized studies are also useful (e.g., Müller, "Rezeption"). Pelikan, *Acts*, also helpfully collects many historical perspectives, although a range of reviewers have observed that this valuable work often reads theological reflections into Acts instead of providing commentary from the perspective of Luke's own theology (see Behr, "Church"; Daley, "Confessions"; Rowe and Hays, "Commentary"). Some specialists in other ancient texts also address their reception history; see Roberts, "Reception," and other articles in the same issue of *Classical Bulletin*.

67. For a critical survey of modern critical scholarship, see Gasque, *Criticism*, who rightly concludes (306–9) that many of the critical views before contemporary narrative criticism have proved unduly speculative.

history. Modern, like ancient, commentators write for specific contexts, and modern academic commentators are expected to write especially for a modern academic context. Similarly, the careful Catholic scholar Joseph Fitzmyer, confronted with space limitations, complained that he could interact with few sources before 1900.⁶⁸

This limitation is not intended to minimize the value of such earlier voices; it would seem curious to exclude patristic commentators from the conversation about the text yet include modern commentators, whose language and culture are further removed from Luke's. I have therefore surveyed John Chrysostom's homilies on Acts and some other patristic sources and made use of Francis Martin's helpful collection of relevant patristic comments.⁶⁹

To welcome earlier interpretive voices is not, however, to accord them "canonical" status in evaluating how Luke's first audience would have heard him (the goal emphasized in this commentary).⁷⁰ I note this caution for the sake of both those who would have preferred more patristic comments and those who would have preferred fewer. A small but vocal circle of scholars appears to want to use the views of patristic commentators to serve as an essential criterion for evaluating interpretations of earlier biblical texts (although most who value patristic sources employ them more critically).⁷¹ The diversity of views within the patristic corpus itself precludes their supplying a monolithic interpretive grid, in any case.⁷²

The greater proximity of the church fathers to Luke in language and culture is valuable, but does not always cause them to yield answers to our modern exegetical and historical questions. Many of them were homileticians more than exegetes, emphasizing contemporary rhetorical strategies.⁷³ And the extant range of their opinions sometimes differed from ideas suggested by our extant sources for the first century. Factors of historical distance that sometimes could have led patristic writers to interpret first-century Christian texts in a manner different from their earliest settings may include, among others, the prior rise of the Second Sophistic, with its atticizing rhetorical tastes;⁷⁴ the increasing dominance of Middle Platonism as over against the Stoicism more dominant in the first century;⁷⁵ many of the Fathers' more elite backgrounds compared with NT writers; the greater anti-Jewish and androcentric bias of

68. Fitzmyer, *Acts*, xiii.

69. Martin, *Acts*.

70. Studying these later sources in their own right is a valuable task, but I wish to avoid confusing that study—or the study of other secondary literature cited—with understanding the text of Acts in its first-century context. Hearing the earliest (primary) sources first before secondary commentators is an important and widely observed historiographic principle (cf., e.g., Noll, *Rise*, 138).

71. Historically, the Western church had often lacked access to such sources; only in the twelfth century did Peter Lombard's *Sentences* provide the Western church reader access to material from the authorities starting to be identified as "the Fathers" (see Evans, *Wycliffe*, 109). Some used returning to the Fathers, especially in original languages and entire contexts (as with Scripture), to challenge (rather than simply to reinforce) some inherited traditions of subsequent eras.

72. One might take, e.g., Justin, Origen, and the Eastern Fathers on free will (combating determinist philosophy involving fate; see Justin *Dial.* 141; *1 Apol.* 43; Tatian *Or. Gks.* 11; excursus on fate and free will at Acts 2:23) and predestinarian ideas dominant in thinkers such as the later Augustine (both of which viewpoints left their mark clearly on subsequent theological traditions).

73. Cf. Martin, "Introduction to Acts," xxii–xxiii: despite their strengths, the Fathers could use proof-texts against heresies and sometimes were (p. xxii) "more interested in moral exempla" for the purpose of "praise or blame."

74. Hence, e.g., their concern with the rhetorical status of the Lxx. Technically, the expression "Second Sophistic" derives from Philostratus in the early third century, but he applies it to many sophists of the previous two centuries (Anderson, "Second Sophistic," 339).

75. Cf. also Pelikan, *Acts*, 192. Although Platonism influenced Alexandrian Judaism in this era (see, e.g., Wisdom of Solomon and esp. Philo), that Platonists were of far less importance in Luke's circle is clear from Acts 17:18. Some later Fathers' knowledge of the schools in 17:18 appears secondhand (so Martin, *Acts*, 215, on Bede).

their era;⁷⁶ decreased sensitivity to the ancient Jewish context of earliest Christianity;⁷⁷ the increasing valuing of sexual asceticism in late antiquity;⁷⁸ new challenges such as Gnosticism⁷⁹ and Manichaeism; new charges against Christians;⁸⁰ and the evolution of later church offices and customs to meet new circumstances.⁸¹ That is, extant reception history is itself historically conditioned;⁸² though a welcome and valuable conversation partner (including in this commentary), it is not designed to substitute for careful exploration of the first-century setting of our documents.

I offer these caveats not to diminish the value of earlier voices but merely to insist that they, too, had a historical context that was not identical with Luke's own. Nevertheless, in general, the church fathers were closer to the culture and certainly the language of Luke than are modern commentators, and they do constitute an invaluable source of wisdom on our earliest Christian texts for those who explore them.

In choosing not to focus on the matters noted above (or on some literary approaches noted below), I am not demeaning their importance but limiting this work to the issues where I believe it can advance the greatest contributions. Although I have not neglected all of these matters altogether, some colleagues will inevitably disagree with my decisions on what to include and what to omit. In such cases, I can only request their indulgence, especially in view of the already massive size of this work, hoping that they will find profitable much of what I have included.

4. The Legitimacy of Social-Historical Inquiry

Although it may surprise readers in some circles, in the wake of deconstruction not all readers today accept the value (or sometimes even the legitimacy) of social-historical questions. More commonly, scholars may accept the legitimacy of questions concerning how Acts' earliest audiences would have understood the work, but they may consider those audiences' understandings simply one set of possible contexts among a potentially infinite array. That is, they accept as legitimate yet ultimately of relatively marginal importance the question of the earliest audiences' understanding.

76. Some were more anti-Jewish in their rhetoric than others. High-status roles for women in the church became an apologetic problem for some church fathers (see the accusations in Cook, *Interpretation*, 166–67), and texts on women were applied selectively (Clark, *Early Church*, 15–16), though we should not oversimplify (cf. perspectives in Clark, *Women in Antiquity*, 139–41; Swan, *Desert Mothers*, passim).

77. Cf. also Hays, *Conversion*, 43. They vary among themselves; 2 *Clement* and even Justin are closer to Judaism than some others, and Hegesippus and Jerome knew Jewish sources (cf. Diaspora Jewish influence on Cyril of Alexandria in Wilken, *Judaism*). With Latin writers, one must sometimes factor in even distance from Greek (Augustine, e.g., never mastered Greek, in contrast to modern NT exegetes); later Bede, despite his interest in historical context, lacked a wide range of ancient sources (Martin, "Introduction to Bede," xxxi, argues that he knew only Josephus and Pliny directly, knowing other classical works indirectly through Isidore and others).

78. E.g., Keener, "Marriage, Divorce," 713–14. This appears at least as early as Musonius (so Valantasis, "Musonius"; some of the ideas predate him, as in Gaca, "Technology"; in Philo, Sterling, *Ancestral Philosophy*, 216–17), but especially flourished in the second century and later (Deming, *Celibacy*; cf. Glenn, "Continence").

79. Thus Irenaeus's application of the Fourth Gospel to combat Gnosticism (see discussion in Keener, *John*, 161–69) instead of reading it as an intra-Jewish polemic, a reading probably more consistent with its origin (171–232).

80. On the accusations to which they responded, see, e.g., Cook, *Interpretation*.

81. Their interests are often homiletic, and the prevailing intellectual milieu among many philosophers encouraged the use of allegorization (although more in some schools, such as Alexandria, than in others). Some interpreters, such as John Chrysostom and often Bede (cf. Martin, "Introduction to Bede," xviii–xxi, though Bede often allegorizes), tended to approach Acts more literally than many others.

82. For the warning that extant reception history tends to preserve the perspectives of the "winners," see Ehrensperger, *Power*, 5; cf. the emphasis on distinguishing between the text and its reception history in idem, *Encouraged*, 177.

But while chronological priority need not dictate theological priority, the very use of an ancient Mediterranean text, composed in Greek and presupposing particular cultural assumptions, invites our attention to the text in the contexts that generated both it and the signs it employs (insofar as these contexts can be reconstructed from the interplay between the text and what we know of Greco-Roman antiquity). Understanding the text in its earliest general cultural context is fundamental in some sense for those subsequent readings for which a major objective remains hearing the text (again, as a collection of signs generated and most directly intelligible in a particular milieu). This approach contrasts with that of some scholars who (at the extreme) are not interested in the basic text of Luke-Acts as it stands (written in Greek and presupposing an ancient context), who simply wish to exploit “canonical” texts to attach canonical status to their own readings or those of their interpretive community.⁸³ Such readers do not, apart from that conferred status, in fact need these particular texts to communicate the different ideas they prefer to emphasize.⁸⁴

By contrast, the history of subsequent readings from various social locations is a useful historical and sociological study in its own right and, at the same time, useful for critiquing interpreters’ various inherited biases. It also offers clues for translating and recontextualizing the text’s message to various modern audiences (especially for those whose interpretive communities find some authority in these subsequent readings). By evoking analogous responses, such approaches sometimes help readers to appreciate the significance such texts held in their earliest interpretive communities.

Even this useful enterprise differs, however, from our chosen task here, namely, reconstructing (to the fullest extent we are able) how the text would have functioned as a communication between the first author(s) and the historically likeliest sort of audiences for which the author(s) published works. Although I highly value and in my other work regularly emphasize learning from the perspectives of readers in a variety of cultures, our common basis for discussion across cultures is the text and (as best we can reconstruct it) how this text would have been heard by the audience for which its author(s) constructed it with ancient vocabulary, idioms, and cultural assumptions.

Our goal in interpretation shapes the approach we will take to it. To those for whom the earliest text is foundational (or even canonical), the production of readings (however recontextualized) somehow analogous to those most plausible to the text’s ideal audience⁸⁵ or at least general first-century culture⁸⁶ will be vital and so demand careful attention to the earliest contexts. For others, antiquity remains at

83. Aryan rereadings of biblical texts to subvert their use for the Nazi cause (see, e.g., discussion in Head, “Nazi Quest”; Poewe, *Religions*, passim; Bernal, *Athena*, 1:349; Theissen and Merz, *Guide*, 163) offer an extreme example that nearly all interpreters today would censure (not least because of the cause for which the texts were exploited). Contrast helpful culturally diverse readings, e.g., Keener and Carroll, *Readings*.

84. This transfer of “canonical” status from the text to the interpreter, when performed by a rhetorical sleight of hand (rather than merely as allusive and as a recognized rhetorical device), resembles the “transfer” persuasion technique (not unethical in all its forms, but capable of being employed deceptively; cf. Bremsback and Howell, *Persuasion*, 235; McLaughlin, *Ethics*, 76, 146–47). In this limited space, one cannot enter into dialogue with the ethics of radical philosophic deconstruction or its results (especially since many of its advocates would regard the ethical claims as themselves relative and subject to deconstruction). Deconstruction does offer some useful insights (such as that no texts are fully consistent, as also noted in Dio Chrys. *Or.* 52.7; on such inconsistencies in ancient narratives, see, in more detail, Keener, *John*, 38–39, 901), including the contingency of all readings. My objective in this commentary, however, is to offer historical reconstructions as responsibly as possible (given the limits of the evidence and our own horizons) rather than to discount the value of such a course simply because it cannot be perfectly achieved.

85. Admittedly, not all critics will agree with language such as “ideal audience” (as Aune, *Dictionary of Rhetoric*, 229, notes, some prefer “authorial audience” as more concrete historically).

86. Or whatever premises we can reasonably infer that the author likely shared with the ideal or authorial audience; see the discussion of relevance theory below in this chapter.

least the generative context for the text's signs, and hence is a necessary context for understanding the text. For yet others, the sense of the work in its earliest, generative context remains at least one historic reading of the text.

a. The Connection between Historical and Literary Questions

Although contemporary literary criticism and historical criticism were once often at odds (primarily because the former was responding to a traditional overemphasis on the latter), most scholars now accept the value of both.⁸⁷ The most common approach today is to focus on literary questions in Luke-Acts as a whole, without excluding historical questions.⁸⁸ Sharing literary criticism's contemporary dissatisfaction with hypothetical source reconstructions, I follow this emphasis on reading any part of Luke-Acts in light of other parts despite the limitations of my primary focus.

Many observers think of critical scholarship until the mid-twentieth century as primarily historically oriented, followed by a shift toward interest in rhetorical (persuasive) techniques in the texts.⁸⁹ Yet this contrast may be overblown at times: even earlier approaches to Acts scholarship often attended to Luke's distinctive perspective and approach,⁹⁰ and historical interests remain alive and well today.⁹¹ Although this commentary addresses historical questions in the traditional historical-critical sense,⁹² its focus is on reconstructing how an ideally informed first-century audience would have heard the book's message. This is a historical question, but one that is both inseparable from literary questions and distinct from the question of "historical reliability."

One fruitful blending of historical and literary approaches reads "texts using many of the reading and listening conventions in vogue at the time of composition."⁹³ Use of ancient rhetorical principles is therefore one means that contemporary scholars often emphasize and to which we give attention as a literary approach sensitive to Luke's milieu.⁹⁴ Some methods today that emphasize first-time hearers can be supplemented by taking into consideration written works that would have been read on multiple occasions. Although few members of Luke's ideal audience would have had access to (or competence to handle) personal copies of Luke-Acts, the work may have been read repeatedly in house churches, thus allowing its ideal hearers to pick up nuances and repeated themes not available to first-time hearers. (Ancient readers recognized the value of rereading a document as often as necessary to catch the main themes and subtleties.)⁹⁵

87. McKnight and Malbon, "Introduction," 18; Donahue, "Redaction Criticism," 45–48; Byrskog, "History," 258–59, 283; Peterson, *Acts*, 41; Padilla, *Speeches*, 10–11.

88. Pervo, "Perilous Things," 40, calls Cadbury "the prototype" of this approach.

89. See Tyson, "History to Rhetoric," 23.

90. *Ibid.*, 25–30.

91. *Ibid.*, 30–31. For one recent survey of "background" approaches to Acts, see Baslez, "Monde"; for sample collections of relevant background, see, e.g., the useful works of Evans, *Texts*, 373–78; Boring, Berger, and Colpe, *Commentary* (because these sources are now readily available, I have not sought to duplicate their information in this commentary, although I will have unintentionally overlapped with it).

92. That is, exploring the degree of correspondence between Acts and its sources and between these sources and events they purport to recount. This task requires more space than most others, especially on controversial questions, and also dominates much of this introduction. It is not, however, my overall focus or this commentary's primary distinctive contribution (even were it distinctive).

93. Smith, "Understand," 48.

94. See, e.g., Penner, "Reconfiguring" (emphasizing the *progymnasmata*; these should be supplemented with reported real and model speeches from antiquity). For a more recent grammatical-rhetorical approach, see Martín-Asensio, *Foregrounding*.

95. For speeches, see, e.g., Quint, *Inst.* 10.1.20–21. Ancients also could recognize the reapplication of ancient quotations in (conspicuously) new ways (e.g., Brutus's quote of Eurip. *Med.* 332 in Appian *Bell. civ.* 4.17.130;

Questions from the broader historical context are inescapable if we concern ourselves with how ancient audiences, whose language and culture the text plainly presupposes, would have heard various passages. For example, Luke does not explicitly mention that Tarsus is in Cilicia until Acts 21:39, but this does not mean that his ideal audience (which did not necessarily include every individual first-century hearer) would have missed the connection with Saul's homeland in 6:9 (in light of 9:11) or 15:23. His ideal audience would recognize that Tarsus was in Cilicia, because this was common knowledge among even moderately culturally literate urban hearers in the eastern Mediterranean world. Insofar as modern literary theory focuses on communication (a primary purpose of texts), it indicates that "texts display not only internal reference (in relation to structures within the text itself), but also external reference (in relation to circumstances outside the text); they tacitly presuppose the entire cultural knowledge of the period."⁹⁶

Although some current theories of literary interpretation reject the priority of the author's historical intention as the "intentional fallacy,"⁹⁷ most do not rule out the validity of this historical question,⁹⁸ recognizing the author's intention as at least one level of meaning, especially for readers with historical interest.⁹⁹ The modern objection that the author's intention is unrecoverable, though strictly speaking true with regard to attaining sophisticated levels of certainty, raises the bar too high for historical inquiry. All historical endeavor is necessarily conditioned by probability, and scholars often make probable inferences about the *implied* author from the text's literary strategies in their originating context.¹⁰⁰ (Even Wimsatt and Beardsley, in their widely cited seminal work against authorial intention, applied their critique only to aesthetic, poetic texts; they viewed communication as successful only insofar as readers accurately inferred authorial intention.)¹⁰¹

Writers such as Luke sought "to communicate with intended readers," and this purpose helped shape the text as we have it, regardless of how we utilize the text for

Virgil in Sen. E. *Suas.* 3.5–7; 4.4–5), and so writers sometimes used them for rhetorical display rather than for the authority of their original sense; but quotations used out of context to justify wrong behaviors could call for censure (as in Alciph. *Paras.* 20 [Thambophagus to Cypellistes], 3.56, ¶2). Speeches were deliberately designed so as to invite hearers to follow the flow of thought (Theon *Progymn.* 2.149–53).

96. Klauck, *Context*, 2; cf. Osborne, "Hermeneutics," 391–95. On the importance of recognizing the texts' ancient context, see also discussions in Malina, *Anthropology*, 153–54; idem, *Windows*, xi–xiii; cf. Spencer, "Approaches," 399.

97. Although I will emphasize the other side of interpretation, some ancient interpreters also affirmed polyvalence, especially rabbis approaching their sacred texts (Edwards, "Crowns," employing *b. Menaḥ.* 29b; cf. Driver, *Scrolls*, 550). Rabbis were not alone in presenting multiple views (Starr, "Flexibility") (some presenters of multiple views, however, critiqued others whom they thought erroneous, e.g., Porph. *Ar. Cat.* 59.4–14, then affirming the "correct" interpreters in 59.15–19). The widespread ancient approach of allegory could lend itself to such claims, but some approaches tended to prevail in particular schools.

98. For "the return of the author," see, e.g., Brown, *Communication*, 69–72 (emphasizing that the contemporary approach is more nuanced than earlier authorial approaches). Brown also notes that authorial activity functions differently in different sorts of texts; it is more prominent in "transmissive" communication (such as letters) than in more "expressive" communication (such as poetry), with narratives (e.g., Acts), which evoke a narrative world, between (75–76).

99. Burrige argues that "the purpose of the author is essential to any concept of genre as a set of expectations or contract between the author and the reader or audience" (*Gospels*, 125; cf. also, e.g., Shuler, *Genre*, 32; Allison, *Moses*, 3; Ashton, *Understanding*, 113). The classic defense of authorial intention is Hirsch, *Validity*, though the discussion has shifted since that time; for a brief discussion of this hermeneutic, see Osborne, "Hermeneutics," esp. 390–91; Meyer, *Realism*, 35–41.

100. This language, too, has invited criticism, although most recognize narrative strategies (see "Implied author," in Aune, *Dictionary of Rhetoric*, 228).

101. Hays, *Echoes*, 201n90 (citing Wimsatt and Beardsley, "Intentional Fallacy," 3, 5). Talbert, *Mediterranean Milieu*, 17, cites Hays approvingly. Vanhoozer, *Meaning*, 96n167, also distinguishes Wimsatt's original and reasonable objection in other respects from some subsequent applications of the essay.

subsequent purposes foreign to these authors.¹⁰² How one defines “meaning” depends mainly on one’s goal in interpretation, but its originating historical level, in which a writer sought to communicate content in a socially shared system of signs, cannot be ruled out as a valid inquiry.

b. Ancient Approaches

For those with historical interest, the question is not anachronistic: contrary to some modern suppositions, ancient writers were not shy about debating intention, whether regarding the actions of someone on trial or the purpose of legislators.¹⁰³ Indeed, many current literary approaches resemble ancient antecedents,¹⁰⁴ although not all correspond as closely to their alleged ancient analogues as is sometimes supposed.¹⁰⁵ Contrary to what some modern writers have opined, historical interests are not a purely modern concern limited to an Enlightenment mentality; just as the Renaissance emphasized classical learning, the Enlightenment¹⁰⁶ emphasis on historical context harks back to classical models.¹⁰⁷ Readers approach texts for various purposes, but at least one goal with which many readers approach ancient texts is to reconstruct how these texts were heard by their first audience in their ancient setting.

Ancient writers, like modern ones, could assume a degree of shared knowledge on the part of their readers.¹⁰⁸ The readers could examine a writer’s meaning in a text based on that writer’s usage elsewhere.¹⁰⁹ They could also take into account an earlier writer’s historical context; thus, for example, when Dionysius of Halicarnassus

102. See Kurz, *Reading Luke-Acts*, 173, also noting the extrinsic reality of this author and audience, regardless of our ability to reconstruct them. On the importance of the rhetor’s goal in modern rhetorical criticism, see, e.g., Brock and Scott, *Criticism*, 412.

103. For the actor’s intention, see Hermog. *Issues* 49.9–14; 61.16–18; 67.6–8; 72.14–73.3; Quint. *Decl.* 274.8 (for a divine actor); 281.1–3; 289.2; 311.8; 373.12; Libanius *Topics* 2.1; also Robinson, *Criminal Law*, 16; cf. Cicero *Fin.* 3.9.32; Seneca *Controv.* 10.1.9; *y. Ber.* 2:1; for legislative intention, see Aeschines *Ctes.* 33; Lysias *Or.* 31.27, §189; *Rhet. Alex.* 1, 1422b.20–25; Hermog. *Issues* 40.6–19; 60.13–14; 66.12–13; 80.4–13; 82.4–5, 13–18; 83.20; 86.4–5; 91.9–13; Quint. *Decl.* 248.9; 249.3–5, 8; 251.2–3; 252.8; 274.9; 277.2; 297.8; 308; 317.9; 329; 331.3; 350.2, 6; esp. 317.2. Thus it was frequent to pit laws against each other; e.g., Quint. *Decl.* passim (e.g., 251 intro; 274 intro; 277.5; 299 intro; 303 intro; 304 intro; 304.1; 315 intro; 366 intro; esp. 304.1; 315.8). When useful for the case, however, one will play down the importance of the actor’s (e.g., Quint. *Decl.* 302.3; 314.6) or legislator’s (313.5–6) intention; laws should state qualifications (Arist. *Rhet.* 1.1.7, 1354a; Philost. *Vit. soph.* 2.33.628), or one must define them (Hermog. *Issues* 65.1–8), citing implicit exceptions (Seneca *Controv.* 9.4, passim). One’s goal in the case determines whether one appeals to intention or wording (Hermog. *Issues* 40.6–19).

104. See Pogoloff, “Isocrates.” Qoheleth rightly observed that nothing new is under the sun (Eccl 1:9).

105. E.g., cf. Aristotle’s *μῦθος* and modern plot (Belfiore, “Plots”); cf. also his conception of imitation (Rollinson, “*Mythos* and *mimesis*”). On his development of *mimesis* as an aesthetic approach, particularly for poetry and music, see, e.g., Butcher, *Theory*, 121–62.

106. The postmodern emphasis on multiculturalism, although often focusing on reading texts from various modern contexts, can also highlight the importance of reading texts from a particular language and culture with cultural sensitivity. But while I emphasize cultural sensitivity, I was surprised to learn that my emphasis on ancient cultural context was viewed by one generally favorable reviewer as unduly “postmodern” (cf. O’Grady, “Review,” 633)!

107. Classical influence was widespread. Cf. the influence of ancient historians on modern political theory in Fontana, “Historians”; on modern theater in Schröder, “History.”

108. Sometimes this assumption is made explicit; e.g., Dion. Hal. *Isaeus* 14 assumes that his readers/students have read Isaeus’s speeches on which he comments. Although we think primarily of Luke’s “audience” rather than “readers,” Polybius could speak (Polyb. 9.2.6) of his “readers” (though presumably among aristocratic intellectuals). Maxwell, “Audience,” addresses some assumed audience knowledge and even suggests that authors may omit some information to augment audience participation.

109. E.g., Sen. *Y. Ep. Lucil.* 108.24–25, who interprets the use of *fugit* in Virg. *Georg.* 3.284 in light of Virgil’s use elsewhere; so also Dion. Hal. *Demosth.* 46 (on Demosthenes’s speeches); Philost. *Hrk.* 11.5 on Hom. *Od.* 18.359, using Hom. *Il.* 21.197; cf. Galen *Grief* 23b–26.

practices rhetorical criticism on Thucydides, he complains that the latter employs a style not used even in his own time (*Thuc.* 29).¹¹⁰ Ancient writers might likewise note that older texts have grown less intelligible because words and customs have changed, and urge reading these texts in light of the original wording and customs (Aul. Gel. 20.1.6, on Rome's early laws).

Writers regularly alluded to situations that they did not need to state explicitly¹¹¹ because their ideal audiences shared this knowledge; being outside these ideal audiences, we sometimes find ourselves in the dark as to the precise referent of the allusion (e.g., Luke 13:1–4; 2 Thess 2:5).¹¹² Writers sometimes respond to interlocutors clearly enough that we understand the question (e.g., Sen. *Y. Ep. Lucil.* 68.1; 74.1; 75.1); at other times, however, we cannot reconstruct the question (e.g., 72.1).

c. *The Value of the Ancient Contexts*

Although most scholars today accept a range of both historical- and literary-critical approaches, as already noted, some do not. For example, Charles Talbert, then editor of the Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series, observed that others had criticized him for not using the form of literary criticism in vogue when he was writing.¹¹³ Talbert responded that his research was directed toward a particular goal that the dominant approaches did not address.¹¹⁴ He elsewhere points out that the society's Luke-Acts Group and Luke-Acts Seminar have often focused on setting Acts in its broad Mediterranean context.¹¹⁵ Following one line of literary criticism, he is concerned with "the authorial audience,"¹¹⁶ as reconstructed not only from the text but from the cultural world "in which the text was produced."¹¹⁷

Other scholars, interested in addressing the needs of philologists, have developed the text-analytical approach to specific intertextuality, which allows for authorial intention in deliberate associations between texts and their pre-texts.¹¹⁸ As Andreas Bendlin points out, "The intention of the author and the unity of the transmitted text have not lost their appeal for classical philologists. Here, intertextuality, mostly in its restricted text-analytical form, is employed in analyzing the use of Greek precursors and models in Latin literature."¹¹⁹

110. Cf. also, e.g., Libanius *Maxim* 3.9 (on Demosthenes). Although Heraclitus often simply allegorizes, sometimes (as in Heracl. *Hom. Prob.* 79.8) he appeals to circumstances in the narrative world to explain a character's speech.

111. E.g., Xen. *Cyr.* 7.2.15 (alluding to the well-known Delphic oracle; cf. Hdt. 1.46–48); Phaedrus 5.10.10.

112. Elsewhere in ancient sources, e.g., Phaedrus 3.1.7; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 34.3, 10. Sometimes writers even deliberately obscured their meaning to outsiders (e.g., Nicholson, "Confidentiality"; less persuasively, Callaway, "Reflections").

113. His literary focus was ancient literary forms and motifs.

114. Talbert, "Chance," 236, 238–39, also complaining that the methods that are dominant tend to change from one decade to the next, in any case. Among approaches he judged merely temporarily fashionable was structuralism, which has indeed gone out of vogue. Many today might concur with his verdict on that point (noting its ahistorical approach, see, e.g., Kee, *Miracle*, 290–91; Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 128).

115. Talbert, *Mediterranean Milieu*, 11–12. The focus is not on borrowing but on how the early audience for which the text was produced in a particular cultural framework would have understood it (16).

116. *Ibid.*, 14–15 (citing Peter J. Rabinowitz and Hans Robert Jauss). See also Aune, *Dictionary of Rhetoric*, 229, as noted above.

117. Talbert, *Mediterranean Milieu*, 15 (distinguishing this approach from W. Iser's "implied reader," who is inferred solely from the text). Cf. Lang, *Kunst*, 56–89 (on "Textlinguistik als Rezeptionsästhetik").

118. See Bendlin, "Intertextuality," 873–74.

119. *Ibid.*, 874 (worded in light of further personal correspondence with Prof. Bendlin, Sept. 7, 2011). For intertextuality in ancient historians, one may observe Tacitus's allusions to and transformation of Augustus's *Res gestae* (see discussion in O'Gorman, "Intertextuality," 231–33, though contrasting this on 233 with Tacitus's more explicit reference to some other earlier works).

Those who reject the value of trying to reconstruct how Luke's first audience may have heard his text, how the ideal author sought to communicate through this text,¹²⁰ or the use of social history in trying to better answer these questions ignore the implicit genre of the text as it would have been understood in the first-century Mediterranean world, which was the setting in which Luke's Greek vocabulary, syntax, and so forth made the most sense (and for which they were designed).¹²¹ William Kurz, citing speech-act theories, notes that narratives normally occur

in a context of communication. The writer of Luke and Acts was not merely amusing himself by doodling on papyrus or parchment but was attempting to communicate with intended readers through his written text. The key participants and factors of this act of communication are objective (extramental) realities, not figments of readers' imaginations, as some might deduce from certain forms of literary criticism. Thus the writer of Luke existed as a historical individual, whether or not we can identify him today. If there had been no writer, there would be no text.¹²²

Explaining sociostylistic interpretation, Todd Klutz notes that, "like rhetorical criticism, . . . this type of stylistics assumes that the communicative force of a text's style usually has something to do with the goals of the text's producer, whose conformity to expectations of relevance normally entails that the assumed audience and situation are implied in the text itself."¹²³ In contrast to formalism's focus on aesthetic "properties of texts," "sociostylistics and related linguistic methods pay just as much attention to the extratextual conditions, causes, motives and effects of texts as they do to the aesthetic qualities of the texts themselves."¹²⁴

To read the text as a whole, we must read it in light of not only the intrinsic data throughout the text but also the extrinsic data that the original communication presupposes.¹²⁵ At a minimum, this includes the language in which the text was written (without which the extant alphabetic characters become nothing more than random marks)¹²⁶ and the cultural, theological, and literary assumptions that are shared by author and audience without needing to be made explicit. Often the real author and audience also shared knowledge of a more particular situation, although this specific knowledge often eludes us secondary readers (far more than anticipated in the confident assumptions that informed some of an earlier generation's redaction-critical excesses).

120. The later "Neo-Aristotelian" "Chicago school" critics, e.g., Booth, differ from the New Critics in emphasizing the communication between writer and reader.

121. Even apparently purely intrinsic literary approaches themselves arise in particular historical and social contexts (see, e.g., Malina and Pilch, *Acts*, 3–5, noting esp. Prickett, *Origins of Narrative*). (For their plea for taking into account the original social contexts, see also Malina and Pilch, *Letters*, 5–9.)

122. Kurz, *Reading Luke-Acts*, 173; on speech-act theory, see also, e.g., Brown, *Communication*, 32–35. See the extensive theoretical reflection on texts as communicative acts (218–29) and authors as communicative agents (229–40) in Vanhoozer, *Meaning* (including Searle's speech-act theory, 243); for implications, see 240–65. As one critic suggests, "Every text, even the most elementary, implies information that it takes for granted and doesn't explain. Knowing such information is *the* decisive skill of reading" (Hirsch, *Literacy*, 112).

123. Klutz, *Exorcism Stories*, 16.

124. *Ibid.*, 17, emphasizing "the sociocultural facet of stylistics . . . developed . . . by the British linguist Roger Fowler" as a form of "linguistic criticism."

125. With, e.g., Dunn, "Reconstructions," 296 (though cf. qualifications, 309–10). For the necessity of taking into account cultural context even in translation, see, e.g., Wendland, *Cultural Factor*.

126. See, e.g., Vanhoozer, *Meaning*, 242 (noting that reference to the author's language necessarily implies reference, on some level, to an author's intention). Thus not only idioms but even lexemes and smaller symbolic units (such as letters) depend on a shared cultural history for their meaning; even language is a facet of culture, so denying the relevance of cultural context for reconstructing a communication is naive.

One particularly helpful current approach, grounded in cognitive neuroscience and empirical study of how human communication functions, is relevance theory.¹²⁷ This theory observes that a communicator can leave some information implicit¹²⁸ because it may be inferred from the social context that the anticipated audience shares with the communicator. Where such information cannot be inferred, the communication fails. Such failure is especially a risk in secondary communication, where we interpret texts not addressed to us, particularly when they were not originally addressed even to our own social or linguistic contexts.¹²⁹ Because so much communication depends on inference, Gutt notes that the intended sense “is recoverable not in just any context, but *only in a context where the requirements of optimal processing are fulfilled*, that is, where there are adequate contextual effects, without unnecessary processing effort.”¹³⁰

I acknowledge the value of many approaches but cannot pursue them all in one commentary. If Luke authored his literary work to communicate a message to an audience, historical information that helps us reconstruct that audience can prove useful in our study of his work and (I believe) foundational to other uses of his work.

In contrast to scholars who avoid extratextual approaches for methodological reasons, some may avoid them because they recognize that they have limited expertise in such areas; such avoidance is, at least, better than pretending expertise they lack. Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer, whose expertise in the ancient sources should be self-evident, rightly warn that many NT scholars show little acquaintance with the ancient sources and that their deficiency proves particularly conspicuous in work on Acts that sometimes collapses into “completely uninhibited ahistorical speculation.”¹³¹ Such theories tend to arise in artificial vacuums: scholars too often explain away all the historical evidence that we do have, then create arguments from the silence that remains—“a radical form of criticism” that uncritically ignores the only extant sources we have “in order to make room for its own fantastic constructions.”¹³² When scholars offer historical judgments regarding Acts, therefore, it is important that they are well-grounded.

d. Other Purposes for Historical Inquiry

My historical interests overlap with literary ones, for my primary concern is how Luke’s contemporaries would have heard his message. Literary questions about Acts’ themes (hence perhaps Luke’s emphases and interests) are paramount for interpreters, and knowledge of ancient customs helps inform how such themes would have sounded to ancient audiences.

127. For some relevant seminal works, see, e.g., Sperber and Wilson, “Précis”; idem, *Relevance*; Wilson and Sperber, “Outline”; idem, “Representation”; I owe these citations to Gutt, *Relevance Theory*, 77–79. For biblical studies, see, e.g., Green, “Pragmatics”; idem, “Interpretation”; “Metarepresentation”; Jobes, “Relevance Theory”; Brown, *Communication*, 35–38; Sim, “Relevance Theoretic Approach,” ch. 2. For its compatibility with speech-act theory (despite the different emphases), see Brown, *Communication*, 35n16, 46–47.

128. Communication within a shared framework always leaves some information implicit, economizing language (Gutt, *Relevance Theory*, 33).

129. See further, e.g., *ibid.*, 27; Sim, “Relevance Theoretic Approach,” ch. 2.

130. Gutt, *Relevance Theory*, 28; “context” here involves the hearer’s “cognitive environment” (21–22). Thus some messages cannot be communicated without background information for the speaker’s original context (35, 63–68, 71–74).

131. Hengel and Schwemer, *Between Damascus and Antioch*, ix. For some, such ahistoricism permits their privileging of their scholarly tradition’s hypothetical constructs of early Christianity over the probably better-informed (albeit no less perspectival) reconstruction of Luke. In view of reception history, Schnabel, “Reading Acts,” 257, notes that dehistoricized readings tend to become speculative, often driven by current interpretive fashion.

132. Hengel and Schwemer, *Between Damascus and Antioch*, ix.

But historical details may also serve supplemental functions much less central to grasping much of Luke's message. For example, modern readers are often interested in other questions from antiquity, such as how Luke's first audience, familiar with ancient Mediterranean culture, might have envisioned the scenes that Luke depicts. Such questions are sometimes of interest to illustrators of books, film producers, and other small circles that serve much larger audiences. They are also of interest to many preachers who, desiring to retell biblical stories, are happy to supplement imaginative storytelling with concrete data from antiquity. They may be most widely of interest, however, to many Bible readers simply wondering how to visualize such events more concretely. (The lay reader who would tackle a commentary of this length is admittedly a special one.) A close reading of a story, entering into the narrative world, invites imaginative consideration of details even when we cannot resolve all the questions they raise (and Luke's first audience, and sometimes Luke itself, may not have resolved them).

Also, those interested in the history of early Christianity depend necessarily and often extensively on Acts,¹³³ and so this commentary is meant partly to supply much fodder for their research.¹³⁴ Traditional questions of historical reliability occupy significant space in this commentary primarily because the secondary literature and the amount of space needed to explore such questions demand extensive discussion if I treat these issues at all. Some recent commentators, such as Richard Pervo, have raised the question of Luke's reliability in such a way that commentaries published soon afterward, such as this one, must necessarily address it.

Although my interests lie more in Luke's message than in questions of historical reconstruction, these subjects are not as readily separated as some modern writers assume. In addition to its moralistic or propagandistic value, ancient historiography also made claims about past events that differentiated it from other genres that communicated ideas differently (see our discussion of genre in this introduction, chs. 2–5, especially ch. 2 below).

Reliability questions are thus of interest not only because of modern attention to Christian origins but because the work's genre would invite such questions from an ancient audience: given the genre of Acts as a historical monograph (specifically of a probably apologetic and perhaps ethnographic variety), sympathetic readers would assume some degree of correspondence between Luke's reports and the events they depict.¹³⁵ By contrast, a significant lack of such correspondence might militate against a "sympathetic" reading and hence would affect how an ancient audience (in this case more informed than he would wish) would read Luke's work. Historical claims were part of Luke's explicit agenda (Luke 1:1–4)—a central feature of his "message" (cf. Acts 1:21–22). I will return to these questions regarding historical reliability in a special section further below.

Exploring questions of historical reliability (which are not always easily settled, especially at a remove of two millennia), however, does not exhaust the relevance of Luke's employment of a historical genre. The historical questions in fact invite precisely literary ones, if only (for a "pure" historian) the question, noted above, of

133. Not all grant equal weight to its evidence, but most will question the arguments of those who reject out of hand all our earliest narrative evidence and then create new hypotheses, which they argue mainly from the silence that remains. With such speculative approaches, one could create virtually any scenario.

134. My PhD at Duke University was in "New Testament and Christian Origins"; in keeping with my training, I am interested in both the NT documents and the history of earliest Christianity.

135. This is not to claim that ancient historians wrote history the way modern ones do; everyone allowed them a range of rhetorical liberty in telling their story (see ch. 5 below).

how the first audience most likely construed the work. Although many readers today find history uninteresting and irrelevant, ancient historians sought to teach moral, apologetic, and political values through the ways they reported history. Their own agendas thus bring us back to many of the questions that literary critics ask when they approach these texts.

e. This Commentary's Sociorhetorical Approach

This commentary employs an approach most conveniently designated as sociorhetorical (represented in Acts studies, e.g., by Ben Witherington's commentary¹³⁶ and earlier introduced in Gospels studies especially by Vernon K. Robbins¹³⁷).

As noted above, this approach is not precisely sociological; although it sometimes includes, where relevant, extrapolations from sociological models (e.g., in noting patterns characteristic of urbanization or population movements),¹³⁸ these extrapolations are best grounded in solid historical data wherever these are available. As one scholar warns, "Just as modern sociological studies test their hypotheses with field trials, so too New Testament sociological studies must assemble all the available extant data that literary and nonliterary sources yield, along with archaeological evidence."¹³⁹ My method is thus primarily social-historical rather than social-scientific, as valuable as the latter methods are (especially for filling lacunae in our knowledge and organizing data).

Rhetorical approaches likewise supplement social-historical ones. Except when addressing speeches (especially those later in Acts), more of my space is devoted to social-historical observations than to rhetorical ones in the narrowest sense, but the latter are quite valuable in a general sense. Rhetorical handbooks do not provide much information on historical writing per se; at the same time, they often do address narrative composition techniques.

Although rhetoric focused on orality, many ancient historical works were written by rhetoricians or their imitators.¹⁴⁰ Rhetorical training provided the primary disciplinary influence that shaped how elite historians composed their narratives, and it could not but influence even popular literary works composed in an urban milieu.¹⁴¹ Educated audiences—the sort of people with most ready access to texts the length

136. Witherington, *Acts*. For a brief history of modern sociorhetorical criticism (esp. 1980s–1990s), see Robbins, "Test Case," 164–71. Rhetorical criticism of the NT more generally has a long history (see, e.g., Classen, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 8–16, 99–177; idem, "Rhetorik"; idem, "Rhetoric"; idem, "Analyse"; Peterson, *Eloquence*, 7; Thurén, "Chrysostom"; Black, *Rhetoric of Gospel*, 1–22).

137. Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher*.

138. As noted, I have also drawn, at points, on literature about, or firsthand observations of, traditional or transitional societies, which, though not at all identical with NT cultures, offer similarities at many points that seem foreign to modern (or postmodern) Western postindustrial societies. Likewise, experience of house churches, Pentecostal movements, minority or sectarian religious movements, etc., can also offer some parallels to NT experiences that seem foreign to many traditional Westerners. In all these instances, I seek to learn respectfully from these cultures and movements (to at least some degree perhaps aided by my marriage into an African family) without using the parallels to supplant hard data from Greco-Roman antiquity. (As mentioned above, I sometimes cite my wife's firsthand observations of traditional African life where they have expanded my interpretive horizons.)

139. Winter, *Left Corinth*, xiii. For analogous cautions, see, e.g., Harrison, *Grace*, 14–15, 22–23; the warning against treating texts more suspiciously than models in Freyne, "Archaeology," 69 (following Sawicki, *Crossing Galilee*, 64–67); warnings of bias in Levine, "Theory."

140. See chs. 4–5 (esp. 5) below; and note much more thoroughly, e.g., Rothschild, *Rhetoric of History*.

141. In contrast to elite historians like Tacitus and Suetonius, Luke would not have had tertiary training in rhetoric. Nevertheless, anyone who attended civic assemblies (if Luke was a citizen of a city) or listened to speakers in the market would know the basic conventions; rhetoric was the more popular and publicly employed of the two major advanced disciplines, and those communicating effectively with an urban audience would reflect its influence.

of Luke-Acts¹⁴²—expected rhetorical conventions with which they were familiar, especially in speeches, which were pervasive in such histories. Written works were not speeches, and literature differed from rhetoric. But Greco-Roman advanced education usually focused on rhetoric (or, less often, on philosophy),¹⁴³ not on purely “literary” techniques. Ancient literary texts thus typically betray a variety of rhetorical techniques (varying according to genre and the respective skills of their authors).¹⁴⁴ Later historians sometimes critiqued earlier historians not only with respect to correspondence to truth (as in Polybius’s assaults on Timaeus) but also for their rhetorical style (according to the standards in vogue with the critic, as is evident in Dionysius of Halicarnassus’s critiques of Thucydides and others). In the most general sense, rhetorical examination involves recognizing Luke’s persuasive narrative strategies, an approach helpful for discerning the message he endeavored to communicate.

What consequences should such a recognition have for a social-historical commentary’s use of literary approaches? A variety of literary approaches exist, the full spectrum of which would also extend the scope of this commentary beyond its proper proportions. I have focused on those that relate to my primary concern for social and historical context, and I made some use, though less explicit, of others that are nevertheless necessary to elucidate the text. Although I have not highlighted some other literary approaches, I have emphasized ancient ones; in particular, where possible, I make explicit comparisons with ancient rhetorical techniques. In so doing, I do not assume that Luke knew the terms for such techniques (which sometimes varied even among ancient rhetoricians) but only that observing techniques prominent in the literature of his era is apt to bring us closer to his approach more often than a purely ahistorical method would.

5. Questions of Historical Reliability

My primary interest is the meaning of the text for the likeliest general first-century audience we can reconstruct for Luke. Yet this question cannot be completely divorced from the question of historical representation, since Luke’s genre would invite his audience to consider claims of historical facticity.¹⁴⁵ By their very controversial

142. Although it was short by the standards of histories composed by elite historians, we should remember that the affordability of such works probably meant that even the minority of people who could read it could not own a copy. Those who could not read it could still hear it, but the author necessarily represents, and especially appeals at least partly to, a more educated circle that could help circulate the work. Acts is “popular” by the standards of the elite, but even popular works, e.g., most extant novels, probably presuppose a level of education beyond that available to the majority of people in Greco-Roman antiquity (cf. Bowie, “Readership,” 452–53; Stephens, “Who Read Novels?,” 415).

143. Hock, “Paul and Education,” 204; Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 8–10; Satterthwaite, “Acts,” 340–41; Townsend, “Education,” 149, 151–52; Heath, *Hermogenes*, 11–12; Stamps, “Children,” 198; Christes, “Education/Culture,” 833; Burridge, “Gospels and Acts,” 510; Kennedy, “Survey of Rhetoric,” 18–19; cf. Quint, *Inst.* 2.2.1, 3; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 18.1–2, 5, 18–19; Tac. *Dial.* 34–35. Some may have even received some rhetoric at the grammar stage (Suet. *Gramm.* 4).

144. Cf. Satterthwaite, “Acts,” 342; Dowden, “Narration”; Kennedy, *Art of Rhetoric*, 378–427, esp. 385; Scodel, “Drama and Rhetoric,” 489–504; in speeches in novels, see, e.g., Anderson, “Second Sophistic,” 347–49; in Ovid’s poetry, Auhagen, “Rhetoric”; in Seneca the Younger’s essays and even letters, see Wilson, “Rhetoric”; for some interaction with Roman satire, see Hooley, “Rhetoric” (with appropriate qualifications); for rhetorical influence on a range of written forms, cf. Fox, “Rhetoric,” 370 (for whom the distinction between rhetoric and literature is partly anachronistic; cf. 380). The nature of rhetoric’s contribution varies; among epics, its influence is far more pervasive in Lucan than in Virgil (Narducci, “Rhetoric,” 382).

145. Albeit not in the way that modern readers expect it in modern historiography, since (as noted below) ancient historians were concerned with producing cohesive and instructive narrative, not simply recitation or discussion of bare information.

character, such questions will require in this commentary a proportion of space I might consider inordinate were it not required by the voluminous secondary literature on the subject.¹⁴⁶ Those who consider such questions uninteresting (of whom I am not one) may feel free to simply ignore them.

a. The Value of These Questions

As noted above, this work also addresses historical questions about early Christianity. Although such questions remain secondary to the question of the text's meaning, they are not entirely removed from it. Because Acts fits an ancient historical genre (see chs. 2–9, esp. ch. 3 below), the task of exploring its meaning also invites consideration of how accurately Luke fulfills the general promise of historical writing implicit in Acts' genre. (At the least it invites a consideration of what kind of history Luke's audience would have inferred from his narratives; each succeeding narrative could negotiate and nuance the reader's expectations further.) My doctoral work at Duke University was in NT and Christian origins (i.e., in ancient Christian history as well as ancient Christian literature), and I share historians' interest in the historical questions.

Commentators on ancient historians such as Thucydides, Tacitus, and less reliable authors such as Livy and Valerius Maximus regularly compare the texts of their authors with other ancient sources, and it is reasonable to expect some commentaries on Acts to do the same. For historians interested in earliest Christianity after Jesus, Acts is the only concrete extended source we have and, to the extent that it provides accurate information, sometimes offers the only concrete contemporary framework for other first-century Christian evidence that allows us to connect Jesus with the second-century church. In contrast to a fairly small minority of commentators who regularly put Luke's historical and moral reliability in the worst light possible (frequently substituting suspicion for evidence, often even with a touch of sarcasm), I believe that we should grapple as thoroughly as possible with whatever hard data Luke provides, to see what sense is best made of them before proceeding to conclusions. If nothing else, this approach has heuristic value in disciplining us to examine the story in its ancient setting as carefully as possible. It also reduces speculatively second-guessing a source that almost certainly had access to more information than we do.

Not all scholars agree on the extent of Luke's reliability, and even if such unanimity existed, Luke's purpose was not to chronicle the entire history of early Christianity but to focus on its expansion in a way that grounded the church of his day (including its Gentile members) in the story of Jesus and the history of Israel. Luke's own narrower purpose thus limits the work's value for modern historians' broader interests, as do other historical works with similarly limited scope or perspective. But because Acts is the best source we have, historians of early Christianity cannot avoid using it, although we must also supplement it and often ask questions that Luke did not design his work to answer. This commentary therefore endeavors to serve the historical quest as well as the literary-theological one, although the latter is more readily available to us, less punctuated with lacunae, and more to the primary point of any commentary on the complete text of Acts (including this one).¹⁴⁷

146. Similarly, Lincoln's commentary on John (*John*, 2) notes that historical reliability is not a primary focus, yet by virtue of the shape of critical scholarship, he is compelled to devote extensive attention to it (cf. Keener, "Review of Lincoln").

147. My primary literary interest concerns its first-century context, but this remains a question of meaning and not simply an evaluation of historical accuracy. Because I focus on the setting of Acts, some critics may be tempted to dismiss the value of all literary insights in this commentary. I would urge them to keep in mind

When we test Luke's historical accuracy, it should be admitted at the outset (at least once we have surveyed the range of writings included in the genre of ancient historiography) that Luke and his contemporaries exercised more liberty in details than we would grant modern historians, although we employ (perhaps slightly anachronistically) the same term for both the ancient genre and its modern counterpart. Ancient historians were concerned with producing cohesive and instructive narrative, not simply recitation of available events or discussion of bare information. At times I will wade as imaginatively as possible into Luke's story world, asking questions that the text does not answer but to which his ideal audience, sharing his biblically informed, culturally informed eastern Mediterranean milieu, might have accepted a particular range of potential answers. I do this both to hear his text from a literary standpoint available to, as closely as I can approximate, the text's ideal audience and to raise historical questions where appropriate.

When we probe the text, Luke's presentation will normally reflect his general environment, which helps us hear what the earliest audience may have heard and envision the images that Luke's narration may have triggered. We can better evaluate the character of Luke's historiography when, in our general probing, we also find points where Luke's presentation resembles, or diverges from, not merely the general milieu but the specific settings about which he writes. Ancient historians without specific information often settled for verisimilitude in elements of their narration, and a popular ancient historian with specific information could still choose to recount it in ways most culturally intelligible to his audience (e.g., the roof tiles in Luke 5:19; contrast Mark 2:4). But comparing the reports in Luke's narrative with contemporary information can give us a basic approximation of the kind of historian he endeavored to be. (In anticipation of my argument, I can note my high respect for his historiographic interest and skill.)

b. Historical Probabilities

In offering historical reconstructions, a historian can offer only probabilities. Much historical reconstruction is speculative, and improbabilities grow cumulatively as one speculation is built upon another. At the same time, this commentary follows the principle that an educated guess is better than an uneducated one—that is, if some speculation is inevitable in historical reconstruction, the informed historian is responsible for providing criteria to help readers evaluate which speculations among their contemporaries are more plausible than others.

Throughout the commentary (and especially in the Pauline chapters, where we have the greatest ability to check Luke against primary ancient reports of the same events),¹⁴⁸ I try to provide some means of controlling speculation by evaluating the probabilities involved in such reconstructions. One would wish that the English language (or at least historians' specialist language) provided a better way of grading probabilities than the somewhat ambiguous expressions I have chosen, such as (in descending order of likelihood) "very probable," "probable," "more probable than not," "plausible," "improbable," "quite improbable," and "implausible."¹⁴⁹ But to provide,

the size of the commentary and so recognize that even if my work on Luke's internal themes and cohesiveness does not take up much of the space in the commentary proportionately, there remains, if extracted, enough for a smaller book.

148. I believe that this commentary's historical orientation makes it somewhat stronger in the Pauline sections (esp. Acts 13–28), where the texture of Luke's account changes (moving beyond Judea and probably vaguer tradition into more concrete material in a broader Mediterranean framework).

149. Others have also suggested terminology for gradations of historical likelihood—e.g., Broadhead, "Priests," 125. For the importance of degrees of probability in epistemology, see Polanyi, *Knowledge*, 31–32; Licona, *Resurrection*, 120–25.

for example, concrete percentages of probabilities would require a sort of precision even more difficult to achieve, and so I have tried to content myself with offering such vague evaluations of my and other scholars' reconstructions. Nevertheless, I am well aware of the limitations of such categories and understand that, in many cases, the discovery or application of some data I have missed would shift probabilities.

c. Common Ground for Historiography

Historical questions overlap with theological questions far more than some scholars (such as mid-twentieth-century existential critics) allowed; nevertheless, they are not the same. Many of us appreciate the biblical theology movement's quest for God's acts in history in biblical texts; but the biblical text is not solely a narration of such acts, nor does it purport to be a complete recitation of all such acts.

Even further from pure questions of contemporary theology is the sort of historical methodology that historical scholars of varying religious persuasions can use as a minimal common ground and language for dialogue. Some who write for audiences sharing their assumptions do not feel the need to limit themselves to the assumptions entailed in such broadly accepted academic methodology. Whatever our respective theological commitments, however, historical scholarship and interdisciplinary dialogue cannot proceed across theological and philosophic lines without initially appealing to such a minimal common ground; we scholars differ among ourselves in our philosophies of history; philosophies of science, nature, and religion; and so forth.¹⁵⁰

Few who offer arguments from this minimalist common ground thereby claim that nothing other than this common ground may be affirmed (still less, that nothing other than this common ground historically happened).¹⁵¹ But sufficient agreement exists on basic rules of evidence to allow (at least in principle, leaving aside human egos and attachment to traditions, whether ecclesiastical or academic) open discussion and consequent shifting of opinion in academic circles.

Having worked through Acts from basic and accepted criteria for historical reconstruction, I believe that I can affirm that Luke was an acceptable and responsible historian by the standards of his contemporaries, although he wrote for a more popular audience than some of his more elite colleagues would have appreciated.¹⁵² (This introduction will discuss more fully this question of historical "subgenre" adjusted for audience; see chs. 3–5 below.) That he had agendas does not distinguish him from his contemporaries; his belief in miraculous or divine activity also appears commonly enough in ancient historians (although Luke betrays greater interest in them than most because they are more central to his subject). Where extant evidence from other ancient sources is available, I believe that it supports, rather than casts doubt on, Luke's basic portrayal of events¹⁵³ in the large majority of cases (see the survey in chs. 6–7 below) and rarely proves strongly compelling against his portrayals.

At the same time, the ancient historical genre differs in some respects from the usual modern approaches to history, and we should not read modern expectations

150. Thus, e.g., many confessional scholars doubt the common antisupernaturalism often presupposed by secular historical critics and vice versa. A level public playing field methodologically would privilege instead a more agnostic methodological approach that neither affirms nor rejects a priori such claims in given cases. See discussion on signs in ch. 9 below.

151. See discussion in Theissen and Merz, *Guide*, vii; Charlesworth, "Jesus, Literature, and Archaeology," 178; Tucker, *Knowledge*, 240.

152. Among the implications of this is Luke's greater proportionate interest in dramatic action scenes than, e.g., Polybius, who, while reporting actions, elaborates them less extensively than lengthy speeches and is more interested in events of public, political consequence.

153. It is usually events, rather than details, that we can test from external sources.

into Luke-Acts, which was meant to address questions often different from those that modern historians ask. (For example, we are more inclined to focus on different kinds of events and require either summaries of speeches or verbatim reports rather than summaries or reconstructions worded from a narrative standpoint as if they were quotations.) When we ask modern questions, therefore, we must acknowledge that this approach differs from merely asking Luke's meaning in its historical setting. Luke's historical reliability is a question raised by his work's genre, but it is not the only issue with which Luke was concerned. Thus I count exploration of Luke's historical claims as a separate and subsidiary (though important) purpose of this commentary, even though by its nature it demands a larger proportion of the space than it might otherwise receive.

6. The Question of Sources

Although a biblical commentary of limited size cannot comment on the relative value, or explain the full context, of each ancient extrabiblical reference cited, I am fully cognizant of the debates concerning such sources and have read the sources in their own contexts. But scholars examining social and historical questions often differ as to which sources to employ, and so I must comment briefly on my eclectic approach in this commentary.

a. Early Jewish Sources

New Testament scholars probably have engaged the debate about sources most often in terms of early Jewish ones. There are problems with various bodies of writings on which we draw for our information.¹⁵⁴ Josephus, one of our most useful historical sources, has biases shaped in part by his elite Hellenistic-Roman audience (see the discussion of Josephus in chs. 5 and 6 below). Philo is essentially a Jewish philosopher, using Middle Platonism (sometimes mixed with Stoic and other thought) in the service of his hermeneutics and apologetics; he moves at a philosophic level generally foreign to Luke (though cf. Acts 17:22–31). Most scholars date the Qumran scrolls to the relevant period, but the Scrolls reflect a particular sectarian understanding of Judaism. And rabbinic literature often reflects a particular side of Judaism and is later than the NT period.¹⁵⁵

Likewise, various Diaspora Jewish sources are incomplete (inscriptions, for example, are often difficult to date and, like most sources, usually reflect only one side of ancient life). Although some documents in the amorphous collection called the Pseudepigrapha are clearly pre- and non-Christian (such as *Jubilees* and most of *1 Enoch*), some sources are debated (e.g., the Similitudes of Enoch,¹⁵⁶ the *Testaments of*

154. Cf. Keener, *John*, xxix–xxx.

155. I argued, *ibid.*, 185–94, that rabbinic literature is nevertheless useful, especially when it is all we have to work with (some others go further than I did; e.g., Batch, “Littérature tannaïtique”). I neglected to mention there various studies arguing for correspondences with the Qumran scrolls (addressed by, e.g., Baumgarten, “Qumran Studies,” 256; linguistically, cf. Wieder, “Notes”), lack thereof (e.g., Neusner, “Testimony”; Marcus, “Scrolls,” 27), or some of each (e.g., Schiffman, *Law*, passim, e.g., 36; Mandel, “Exegesis”). For a much more thorough and nuanced treatment of dating rabbinic literature than I provided, see esp. Instone-Brewer, *Traditions*, who has applied to many texts the methodology developed by Jacob Neusner.

156. Despite the consensus on the date of the rest of *1 Enoch* (300–200 B.C.E.; Charlesworth, “Consensus”), the Similitudes have been thought pre-Christian (*idem*, *Pseudepigrapha and New Testament*, 18, 44), post-Christian (Sanders, *Paul and Judaism*, 347–48), Jewish Christian (sources in Longenecker, *Christology*, 13, 83–84, esp. J. T. Milik), anti-Christian (Jas, “Hénoch”), early second century C.E. (Hindley, “Date”), medieval (Black, “Parables”), or mostly finished by 50 B.C.E. (Bampfylde, “Similitudes”); but the majority

the *Twelve Patriarchs*,¹⁵⁷ and the *Testament of Abraham*¹⁵⁸). Some are clearly later, and some either are Christian works or at least have significant Christian interpolations. Gentile philosophers and historians are usually easier to date, though even there each reflects only a portion of the relevant data (e.g., Roman politics or a particularly sectarian perspective in a wider range of ideas).

Most material that is relevant to the eastern Mediterranean Jewish Diaspora and that overlaps with Acts is later than Acts, but historians of the ancient world must reconstruct history with whatever clues we have available, even when the sources are chronologically or geographically removed.¹⁵⁹ (Naturally, nearer sources are preferable, but they are not always available.) Thus, if our only available source relevant to a passage in Acts is later, then (as Irina Levinskaya observes) we should accept Acts as an earlier attestation of the same idea or custom, “in accordance with the routine practice of ancient historians.”¹⁶⁰ This practice is of course precarious when Christian influence on the document is evident (as in many gnostic sources), but otherwise seems generally increasingly safe where evidence supporting a distinctive custom appears quite similar in independent sources.

How do we evaluate whether a particular source probably reflects broader thought rather than simply an idiosyncratic reading? In reconstructing which Jewish ideas in the first century were sufficiently widely known to have informed Luke’s ideal audience, T. L. Donaldson’s typology is helpful: one can use “a kind of ‘criterion of multiple attestation,’” testing whether an idea appears “in more than one sociological strand of Judaism” and in periods both before and after that which one is examining.¹⁶¹ For this reason, I depend on a range of sources, not simply on the “critical minimum” of sources that are completely secure chronologically and geographically (though naturally preferring more widely circulated and pre-Christian sources). The latter standard is almost impossible to meet at the remove of two millennia, when the extant evidence is necessarily sporadic and illustrative rather than comprehensive.

do see it as non-Christian and pre-70 (see Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha and New Testament*, 89; idem, *Jesus within Judaism*, 39–40; McNamara, *Judaism*, 85; contesting one argument for dating, see Ehro, “Nature”). Other ancient works cited Enoch literature, although sometimes not our edition of *1 Enoch*, suggesting texts no longer extant (*Test. Sim.* 5:4; *Test. Levi* 10:5; *Test. Benj.* 9:1; *Test. Dan* 5:6).

157. Despite clear Jewish affinities and origins (for Qumran parallels, see Chevallier, *Esprit et le Messie*, 116–20) and some early Hebrew versions at Qumran (see McNamara, *Judaism*, 82, 89–90; Grelot, “Notes sur Testament,” esp. 406; cf. Milik, “Testament de Lévi”), it is, in its present Greek form, a Christian work (so de Jonge, though now allowing a Jewish stage; Collins, “Testamentary Literature,” 272; Daniélou, *Theology*, 14–15) or (the majority view) Jewish with Christian interpolations (Charles, “Testaments,” 282; Grant, *Judaism and New Testament*, 86; Bickerman, “Date,” 260; Charlesworth, “Self-Definition in Additions,” 35–41; idem, *Pseudepigrapha and New Testament*, 38–39; idem, *Pseudepigrapha and Research*, 211–13; see the survey in Collins, “Testamentary Literature,” 268–72). The dual emphasis on Judah and Levi might not sound like the early Christianity with which we are most familiar, but it appears in a Christian interpolation in *Test. Jos.* 19:11.

158. E.g., Davila, “Pseudepigrapha as Background” (NT scholars cannot depend on its priority); Turner, “Testament of Abraham,” 220–21, who thinks that it is mostly non-Christian with Christian redactions; Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha and New Testament*, 42, who dates it to the late first or early second century; for works with various perspectives, see Nickelsburg, “Review.” Certainly, apparently Christian elements abound (e.g., few being saved via a narrow gate; most obviously, the trinitarian benediction). On the recensions, see Nickelsburg, “Eschatology”; Schmidt, “Recensions,” 65–83; Martin, “Syntax Criticism”; Kraft, “Reassessing”; some (e.g., Ludlow, “Recension”; Laws, *James*, 73) think that rec. A preceded rec. B, but both may reflect an earlier text. There may be some Semitic idioms (Turner, “Testament of Abraham,” 222–23); Martin, “Syntax Criticism,” 96, suggests that rec. B is more Semitic but that both reflect an earlier Semitic original. Clearly, however, the current *Testament of Abraham* reflects various Hellenistic motifs (see Allison, “Calf”; idem, “Tree”).

159. See Levinskaya, *Diaspora Setting*, ix–x.

160. Ibid., 16–17 (using the example of rabbinic sources); cf. p. x.

161. Donaldson, *Paul and Gentiles*, 51; cf. Gathercole, *Boasting*, 24–26.

b. Greco-Roman Sources and Archaeology

I have followed the same general procedure for non-Jewish Greco-Roman sources.¹⁶² Instead of supposing a single hypotext,¹⁶³ I have drawn from as wide a range of ancient sources as possible to illumine Luke's larger social world. Among ancient rhetoricians, I have noted classical Athenian orators and earlier Hellenistic handbooks (e.g., *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum*)¹⁶⁴ as well as Roman sources (e.g., *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Cicero's rhetorical essays, and Quintilian's *Institutes of Oratory*), earlier atticizing writers (e.g., Dionysius of Halicarnassus), and later works reflecting the influence of the Second Sophistic (e.g., Hermogenes and Menander Rhetor).

I have not done so in ignorance of the limitations of these various kinds of sources but in recognition of the small amount of evidence that would remain if we compared Luke only to first-century Aegean writers producing popular historiography in Greek. When a rhetorical custom is attested both before and after Luke's time, in both Greek and Roman sources, I regard it as probably widespread. When it is more narrowly attested yet remains consistent with larger patterns, I regard it as at least illustrative of the sort of thinking available to rhetorically astute people in Luke's world. Of course, where a source appears unique and not consistent with larger patterns of thought, it is reasonable to suggest that it may be idiosyncratic, in which case a single parallel with Luke may represent coincidence rather than even a broad way of thinking in the milieu.¹⁶⁵

Although Luke writes in Greek and (probably, in my view) for an audience in the Greek East, his interest in colonies suggests (again in my view) that residents of Roman colonies belong to his ideal audience (see the discussion of Luke's audience in ch. 12 below). If this observation is correct, Roman background, as well as Greek, will be of value, although the linguistic milieu of Luke's audience is undoubtedly primarily Greek. In Corinth, for example, many people, including much of the Corinthian church, spoke especially Greek even though the colony's official language was Latin (see the discussion at Acts 18:1–3, 12). But even resident Jews and Greeks in the city cannot have been oblivious to Roman culture, and Roman and Greek culture affected each other extensively in such locations. Although resident aliens from the East such as Lydia were primarily Greek-speaking, Philippi (which we shall suggest must be close to the heart of Luke's ideal audience) was also a thoroughly romanized city.

162. Recent years have witnessed the publication of many useful works on the Greco-Roman context of Acts, most notably the multivolume *Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, published by Eerdmans and Paternoster.

163. The dominant approach in, e.g., most of Dennis MacDonald's works so far, including *Imitate Homer*. Although one cannot a priori rule out the possibility of a Homeric hypotext, most critics so far, after examination, have found the theories unconvincing (see Mitchell, "Homer," on MacDonald, *Epics*; Sandnes, "Imitatio"; Johnson, "Imitate"; less negatively, Harstine, "Imitate"; I have profited here from dialogue with Professor Carsten Claussen of the University of Munich, who brought these sources to my attention); especially problematic are "a search for the hypotext" (Mitchell, "Homer," 255; cf. Johnson, "Imitate," 490, on the more proximate sources influenced by Homer), an emulation that is "not recognized" (Sandnes, "Imitatio," 725), and (in these works) neglect for "the OT intertextuality that is broadcast in this literature" (732). Having offered these reservations, I must nevertheless express admiration for Professor MacDonald's brilliance, and appreciation for his highlighting one important potential aspect of Luke's literary milieu. He is working on LXX intertextuality as well, which his previous work, while not focusing on it, did not reject.

164. This is merely a sample; like Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (Anderson, *Rhetorical Theory*, 41–49; Poster, "Affections," 35n20), which Aristotle directed toward his students (Clayton, "Audience"), *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* apparently was not widely in use in our period (Anderson, *Rhetorical Theory*, 96). When taken together with a wider range of rhetorical sources, however, it often reflects more common ideas in ancient rhetorical traditions and thus serves our general purposes.

165. I have offered only samples, though I would not mind excluding some less relevant suggested backgrounds from consideration (with, e.g., Cadbury, *Acts in History*, 28, on mystery cults; I note them, but they are less central to Luke's ideal audience than, e.g., the LXX, rhetoric, or basic acquaintance with philosophic sects).

Archaeology is, in some ways, more concrete than extant manuscripts copied and recopied from ancient originals; it provides physical evidence and sometimes (especially through burial inscriptions) the “underside” of society less apt to be preserved in literary sources. Nevertheless, it too has its limitations, not least the “muteness” of stones apart from interpretive grids often provided, at least in part, by literary sources.¹⁶⁶ We further possess only a sample of even the possible physical remains, merely a portion of which have been excavated and only some of the excavations published;¹⁶⁷ thus we sometimes have chance finds confirming literary records that previously were unconfirmed by such data.¹⁶⁸ Some of the archaeological data and the interpretations of them for particular sites noted in this commentary will therefore undoubtedly require revision because archaeological information is always partial and open to reinterpretation when new evidence is found. I nevertheless prefer to include, where possible, current information in the hope that enough will prove representative of the surviving material.

c. Modern Sources

I must offer a brief word concerning references to secondary sources. I often cite other commentators even for matters that could be deemed common sense, although some readers would undoubtedly prefer less cluttered pages and less documentation for matters of reasoning that should be common property. I do this for two reasons. First, what often seems common sense to many is nevertheless often contravened by others (or will be), and it is helpful to summarize at least a sample of scholarly opinions. Second, I would rather acknowledge too many debts than risk failing to acknowledge enough.¹⁶⁹ In numerous cases, I came to conclusions independently but nevertheless cite other scholars whose conclusions I find to be similar, for the sake of propriety.¹⁷⁰

In the end, however, the vastness of contemporary scholarship precludes full discovery and citation of all possible sources; even where one has come up with what one thinks a new idea, almost invariably someone has proposed something like it before,¹⁷¹ yet it is not possible to survey everything written on the subject in the past two millennia. I apologize profusely in advance to scholars whose works I have failed to find; my honest desire has been to recognize everyone who has written on the subject, understanding that it is disappointing when one’s labors do not prove useful to other scholars. But I must frankly confess that I have not been able to read anything close to everything ever written on the subject, and my criteria for where to look first have often left out valuable sources (as I often realize when I discover additional works). I nevertheless believe that this commentary’s contribution will be valuable even to those whose works I unintentionally failed to discover.

166. Interpretation and biases can be just as involved in reading archaeological evidence as in reading literary evidence (cf. Tiwald, “Archäologie”).

167. E.g., Yamauchi, *Stones*, 146–57 (developing Lapp, *Archaeology*, 83–84); McRay, *Archaeology*, 22.

168. E.g., Kent, *Inscriptions*, no. 57 (inv. 2414) (p. 57, an inscription confirming a claim in Paus. 2.4.6). Likewise, scholars have often doubted the existence of thirteenth-century Dibon (cf. Num 21:30; 32:3, 34; 33:45–46), on the basis of the lack of archaeological evidence at the expected site, but explicit Egyptian epigraphic evidence proves its existence (Kitchen, *Reliability*, 195).

169. Avoiding the charge of being insufficiently thorough also motivated some ancient writers in choosing what to include (e.g., Hermog. *Progymn.* 10, “On Ecphrasis,” 23).

170. Where ideas are now common property, I am generally more concerned to provide samples of those who hold them than to trace the historical lineage of these views, interesting as that exploration would be. Many ideas can be traced in literature long before their appearance in twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholarship.

171. E.g., my first publication coincided with similar yet independent observations by a rabbinic scholar published the same year (Keener, “Heavenly Court”; Lachs, *Commentary*, 92, 94).

7. This Commentary's Genre

As noted above, this commentary, like my commentary on the Fourth Gospel, will be especially valuable for scholars, professors, advanced students, and other academic audiences. Nevertheless, I have tried to keep it more readable than my earlier academic works so that other readers may find it useful. As in earlier works, I depend on the Greek text for my own analysis but, where possible, offer my own English translations in the text for the sake of these other readers.¹⁷² Less academic readers with the time and interest to use a commentary like this one should employ their discretion to screen out material less relevant to their interests.

a. Fresh Research

Scholars write commentaries for different audiences, and readers should take these genre differences into account. Some reviewers critique heavily documented academic commentaries for being too inaccessible to nonscholars. Others fault popular-level commentaries for not including fuller documentation, as if to begrudge nonscholars the utility of an accessible work or to imply that those who accommodate such audiences are inventing what they write.

Because the markets for such diverse kinds of commentaries often differ, they each serve important purposes. Lest it be assumed that I disrespect other forms of commentary writing, it should be noted that elsewhere I have written in both academic and popular commentary genres and have also offered several in between.¹⁷³ Some readers may wonder why I expend space to point out what to them appears obvious. My reason is that some reviewers have critiqued academic commentaries, including my own, for excessive documentation¹⁷⁴ and popular commentaries, including one of my own, for minimal documentation.¹⁷⁵ (Happily, others have affirmed the same choices in these cases.) It is thus important to reiterate this commentary's primary purpose.

As I have noted, my focus here is on reading Acts in its first-century Greco-Roman setting, and as in other works of this nature, I endeavor to provide, where possible, fresh insights into this way of reading the text (in addition, of course, to building on what others have done).¹⁷⁶ As will become quickly evident to one surveying commentaries, they frequently recycle the primary sources used by earlier commentators (some references appear regularly in many contemporary Acts commentaries; some

172. My focus is broadly cultural more than lexical, but it is difficult to avoid some explicit use of Greek, given the widely varying ways a given term may be translated. (Note that although I use also cognates in my lexical approach to some terms, I seek to do so cautiously, i.e., only where cognates recall some of the semantic range of the term in question.) Nevertheless, some reviewers have appeared to suppose that commentators who include minimal Greek in the text of their commentaries are unfamiliar with the language. Especially in view of word programs today easily able to insert the Greek text (even if the commentator possessed only minimal knowledge), such a supposition of academic incompetence on the basis of sparse display of Greek seems remarkable.

173. Thus, e.g., I intended Keener, *Matthew*, to be useful to advanced-level expositors and advanced students as well as to scholars. My New Cambridge Bible Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians (Keener, *Corinthians*) is at a more basic but still middle-range level. Keener, *John*, by contrast, is written specifically for scholars and advanced students, though of value to others who know how to find what they need there. Those who demand a popular treatment of some of the same material (specifically, the background) would find the survey version in Keener, *Background Commentary*.

174. As I have noticed in reviews complaining that I offer too much documentation (for just one example, *Regent's Reviews* 23 [spring 2004]: 9, though in a very positive and fair context).

175. Reviewers who complained that Keener, *Background Commentary*, did not provide enough documentation (e.g., Stoutenburg, "Review," 153; Brug, "Review," 238; more understandingly and positively, e.g., Starner, "Review," 175; Lanier, "Review," 96) are partly responsible for my citing so much of my documentation in my academic works.

176. This means that, wherever possible, I draw on sources outside the usual range of immediate NT scholarly training so as to provide the optimum new benefits.

of these same references also appear in nineteenth-century commentators).¹⁷⁷ Many commentators (whether because of the target audience, space limitations, time limitations, or other reasons) cannot afford to infuse a large amount of “new” data into discussions (although scholars often do so in journals and monographs).

Whenever more academic commentaries infuse new data into the discussion, the process often starts over again, with select new references proliferated in a new generation of commentaries and with a few reviewers (despite most commentaries’ use of indexes) apparently oblivious to the difference between those attempting to introduce much new information and those attempting to interpret it for target audiences (an important but different task). (As I have already noted, some even critique these more detailed commentaries for excessive documentation or size when the commentators explicitly define the scope of their work.)

New major commentaries ignore previous scholarship only at their own peril; they, too, must be indebted to previous research. But I believe that it is valuable for at least some major scholarly commentaries periodically to offer an infusion of “new” data—or at least data not yet widely incorporated into standard commentaries. These works provide ready fodder for future commentators to mine. They also provide numerous references the expansion of which space and cost prohibit but that offer fodder for students and researchers to develop.¹⁷⁸

Although I have thus followed other scholars at many points (and cited them accordingly), I have focused more on ancient sources than on modern ones (and, among the latter, often on those focused on ancient sources). Except where otherwise noted, the vast majority of the ancient references derive from my reading through the ancient sources in their own literary context. I trust that scholars studying particular passages will be able to make good use of the new data (the majority of my primary data) where I have provided it. I offer this hope recognizing that, given average human longevity, this work is likely to constitute my largest and most detailed commentary.¹⁷⁹

b. Utility for Christian Believers

Some commentaries focus on applying the principles suggested in or behind the text.¹⁸⁰ Affirmations about the natural world in ancient texts are dated, but many

177. Naturally, many references will overlap simply because they are the only, or the most obvious, references in our extant sources addressing a subject, but when many such references are available and many commentators cite the same ones, it may be inferred that, in these instances at least, there is a good chance that they have followed earlier commentators rather than collected these particular references while directly reading through the primary sources. Any casual observer of commentaries will recognize that this practice is so common as to constitute a typical practice. I am not complaining here about the practice (when earlier commentators have found helpful sources, I too am ready to use them) but about reviewers who do not recognize when some scholars have in fact read through the ancient sources and offer ancient sources not previously applied to Acts. (Anyone reading works by a number of NT scholars [e.g., D. Aune, W. Cotter, D. Instone-Brewer, A. Malherbe, E. P. Sanders, G. Sterling, and C. Talbert, as a small sample among too many others to name] can recognize that they have devoted decades of attention to primary sources and offer fresh insights.)

178. Thus many chapters could have been expanded into books of their own by my spelling out in greater detail the particulars of ancient references I have only been able to list in footnotes. I trust that some will follow up these references in greater detail, including some who have told me that they never cite commentaries, though they cite the references that they find in them—a practice that has always bewildered me.

179. Because of the way I approached my research in ancient sources, I have material to write heavily academic commentaries on most of the NT, and at the private and public urging of some colleagues to make the research available, I am writing as quickly as my abilities and time constraints allow. But having written different forms of commentaries, I recognize that heavy academic commentaries such as this one take years of basically full-time work to produce, limiting my options for future publication if I assume an average longevity.

180. This approach can, if used carefully, help us to appreciate the ancient texts more, rather than less, sensitively. When reapplication is analogous, in a new cultural setting, to the function of the secondary

readers interested in history or philosophy may learn ethical principles or discover early predecessors of modern concepts from ancient philosophers and rabbis.¹⁸¹

Christian readers for whom works such as Luke-Acts are canonical have an even greater desire to learn from these texts, whether as a matter of heritage, because of their belief that God has spoken in them, or both. As Margaret Mitchell has pointed out regarding a different matter of historical research, “*It is simply a fact (whether allowed, welcomed, discouraged, or encouraged) that a major audience of this scholarship . . . is Christian believers seeking to understand their present in relation to their (reconstructed) past, and their sacred texts which mirror, embody, and sometimes challenge the cultural norms and expectations of their day*” (emphasis hers).¹⁸²

I have written other books with this kind of focus, and other scholars have produced such works specifically on Acts, emphasizing application or contextualization for various cultural settings today.¹⁸³ This commentary does seek to identify Luke’s message and on occasion provide generally brief sample hermeneutical comments on how modern readers might recontextualize this message (bridging the horizons) for their own audiences.¹⁸⁴ But because application is culture-, group-, and even person-specific (as well as temporally limited)¹⁸⁵ and because those who know their receiving culture and how to contextualize are usually able to make the appropriate connections if they have access to the ancient contexts of the text, the focus of this commentary is the text in its ancient cultural setting. Nevertheless, I focus on the ancient meaning with both the expectation and the hope that some readers will use this research to make such connections; I do so myself in my preaching and seminary teaching far more than this commentary, with its specialized focus, can reveal. Users of the commentary for historical purposes, however, will find more immediate relevance to their interests here.

communication’s point in its original setting, such reapplication can be helpful in evoking its sense for hearers in the new setting (Gutt, *Relevance Theory*, 68–70).

181. Those teaching about other ancient texts also sometimes interest students in the viable messages of those texts (see, e.g., Newlands, “Ovid”).

182. Mitchell, “Family Matters,” 346; cf. similarly Meeks, “Why Study?,” 167, urging in his Society for New Testament Studies address that NT scholars stay relevant to this audience; Agosto, “Publics”; Westerholm, “Introduction,” 2–3; Horrell and Adams, “Introduction,” 42. For reading from the vantage point of faith, see, e.g., Hays, *Conversion*, 190–201. In my own case, I was interested in Greco-Roman history and culture generally when I was an atheist, but acquired an interest in Acts only as a Christian believer (though, of course, others, e.g., Lüdemann, can have interest in Acts without personal religious connections to it).

183. See, e.g., contextual-application commentaries by González, *Acts*; Fernando, *Acts*; Miller, *Empowered for Mission*; Wagner, *Acts*; Williams, “Acts”; primarily North American applications in Allen, *Preaching*; Gangel, *Acts*; Hughes, *Acts*; Willimon, *Acts*; Yrigoyen, *Acts*; also preaching in Jacobsen and Wasserberg, *Preaching*; Green, *Word*; genre-sensitive preaching in Krentz, “Down”; my own popular-level approach in Keener, *Acts Studies* (though some of my own material was edited out and some applications that I did not write were added in); for another praxis-oriented approach, see Dormeyer and Galindo, *Apostelgeschichte*; outside the commentary genre, cf. also the useful thematic application of Acts in Green, *Thirty Years*; Keck, *Mandate*; González, *Months*; Fryer, “Congregational Renewal”; for meditative readings, e.g., Gargano, “*Lectio divina*.” See, e.g., Kanyoro, “Mission,” for the relevance of Acts for an African context, both for the empowerment of the Spirit and for proclaiming justice.

184. The piecemeal application of paragraphs to personal felt needs of hearers, characteristic of some modern Western preaching, says as much about us as about Luke: that was not his purpose. We can recontextualize his point, but in so doing, we ought to be careful not to forget his point.

185. For which reason Porter, “Comment(ary)ing,” is mostly skeptical of the value of application commentaries. When I do illustrate how texts have been applied, I have sometimes looked to concrete historical models (including patristic sources). At times this also includes what were then new movements (on at least a sociological level, analogous to some features of the early Christian movement), including examples from new, widespread religious movements traditionally underrepresented in academia of their era (e.g., early Mennonites or Methodists or, increasingly cited in academic works, today’s global Pentecostalism).

c. Further Research

The notes often mention additional resources that interested students and scholars working on a passage can develop more fully. These include especially primary sources but often also secondary sources, which themselves cite many further works that I have not; for example, each article in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* concludes with a bibliography, often offering students entire books on matters I have mentioned merely in passing in a footnote.¹⁸⁶ As noted above, exploring the thousands of sources in bibliographies on Acts (e.g., Mattill and Mattill, *Bibliography*) could expand the range of conversation partners further. With other important resources such as the *Thesaurus linguae graecae*,¹⁸⁷ students can delve much further into the lexicography and background of texts. Even such work is, however, more time consuming and tedious than might at first appear.

A team of scholars could thus easily multiply the documentation in this commentary by simply following up the bibliographies of the reference articles cited, documenting far more articles (even though I have made abundant use of *New Testament Abstracts*, I have been selective, especially for earlier years) and word studies based on the *Thesaurus linguae graecae* (or even the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*). This work is not, then, comprehensive; it is, in a sense, merely scratching the surface of what could be done. I have tried to think innovatively, offering a fresh reading through hundreds of ancient writings¹⁸⁸ and also from some recent scholarly approaches, both to establish new lines of inquiry and to develop some current ones. Whereas databases can provide lexical parallels (a necessary task), conceptual parallels still require reading through ancient literature, and this is the service that I (like some others) have sought to provide. Again, any new work will inevitably confirm and build on much of what has come before, but it can also supplement and offer further directions.¹⁸⁹

I collected research for this commentary both after and concurrent with my other research over more than two decades (some of it as a student), and the writing consumed most of seven years, not including subsequent work checking editing or indexing. Unless my editors work much faster than I can, it will be difficult for the commentary to prove up-to-date on all new publications. Nevertheless, I trust that it will prove valuable to subsequent researchers.

8. Nomenclature

Because nomenclature shifts and sometimes affords a cause for anachronistically criticizing earlier works, I offer a few comments here for those who might desire them.

186. Whenever possible, I cite the *OCD* and other articles by authors' names, even when the dictionary does so only by abbreviation, from the conviction that crediting authors whenever possible is important.

187. My focus is more broadly social-historical than lexical and hence entailed more reading through ancient sources in their entire contexts than performing computer searches. Work with the *TLG* would necessarily concentrate on verbal more than conceptual parallels; given the availability of verbal searches to other scholars I have tried to focus in most cases on the conceptual parallels. But lexicography is important, and my work could easily be vastly supplemented, especially through extensive use of the *TLG* and papyrological databases.

188. I have focused more on concepts than on words, because that is a distinctive service my commentary can offer; but of course one cannot access concepts in texts without the words that convey them. In the many cases where I do offer verbal parallels, scholars working from the *TLG* could offer more. I explored mostly classical (as well as early Jewish) works in their original contexts to see where they would lead, so as to avoid simply duplicating what work could be accomplished as readily by others with different time constraints. Those working from computer searches will naturally find more references; although this approach is of enormous benefit, scholars should not abandon inductive reading of ancient texts to learn whatever may be found there.

189. That is, I am more interested in following where the data appear to lead than in offering proposals that are merely "novel" but that I think improbable.

The use of nomenclature in this work reflects what appear to be current, conventional designations within the range of disciplines with which I am working. Such language is often in flux, quickly dating the terminology of reference works. For example, a range of works conflate “patronage” (when used strictly, a Roman custom) with Greek benefaction and even reciprocity; does one follow here technical ancient usage or academic convention (and common English usage)? I thus want to acknowledge some variations in usage. The reasons for most of my terminological choices are based on what I understand continues to be common usage, and I do not invest such choices with political significance. Were I writing a decade from now, my nomenclature would undoubtedly differ at points, reflecting the usage conventional at that time.

a. Religious Labels

Although I use expressions such as “Christianity” and “Judaism” because they are most intelligible to the widest range of commentary users, such expressions are generally anachronistic for the NT period. I certainly do not intend them as mutually exclusive categories.¹⁹⁰ Members of the Jesus movement were labeled “Christians” by some outsiders (see comment on Acts 11:26),¹⁹¹ but it is not certain that the former had widely owned the label for themselves even by Luke’s day. And—more important—modern notions of distinct religions should not be read into a first-century setting; many of Jesus’s followers, even Gentile converts, probably viewed themselves as a sect (albeit the right one) within Judaism until long after Luke’s day.¹⁹² (Except when context dictates otherwise, most references to “Jewish” and “Judaism” in this commentary also refer to ancient Jewish thought and practice, not the views and practices these elements have developed into two millennia later. Although readers will mostly take it for granted, I use “Greek” and “Roman” for peoples and especially cultures in antiquity rather than today.) Even “church” carries too much traditional baggage for the average user of the term, but I have retained it for convention’s sake (rather than sought some less standard designation such as “God’s community,” which highlights the original theological claim).

I have never accepted the labels “Old Testament” and “New Testament” as accurate designations, since in neither body of texts are the covenants simply identified with the body of texts that report them.¹⁹³ Yet apart from “Tanakh” and some cumbersome designation such as “early Christian Scripture written after Jesus’s coming,” I have no better way

190. See, e.g., the warnings in Horsley, “Assembly,” 373, 375; Pilch, “Jews and Christians”; Eisenbaum, “Polemics”; against essentialist readings of such diverse movements, also Stern, “Limitations”; Nanos, “Judaism” (esp. 156). Even describing early Christians as a “new religious movement” (Watson, *Gentiles*, 86) can sometimes reduce to sectarianism (cf. 87–93); for definitions, see, e.g., Keener, *John*, 149–50. I most often use “Jewish” ethnically (hence including Paul and other early leaders in the Jesus movement; religious self-identification would have also included them). An increasing number of scholars are shifting the use to “Judean” (cf., e.g., Cromhout and van Aarde, “Judean Ethnicity”; Elliott, “Israelite”; Malina and Pilch, *Acts*, 2–3; cf. idem, *Letters*, 29; Elliott, *Arrogance*, 16; particularly helpfully, Mason, “Jews”); although the vast majority of first-century Jews (technically “Judahites”) lived in the Diaspora, Gentiles did often view them as unassimilated “Judeans,” rendering such language potentially useful (for whatever other reasons it may or may not be helpful; several writers go too far in separating modern Jewish ethnicity from ancient Judaism; note esp. the important concerns in Levine, *Misunderstood Jew*, 160–65). Nevertheless, this recent approach seems problematic for historical reasons (see Das, *Debate*, 59) as well as practical ones: because this usage renders more difficult semantic distinctions between Jewish residents of Judea and Diaspora Jews and because those distinctions are important in a book in which much of the action hinges on interchange between Judean and Diaspora followers of Jesus, I have retained more traditional usage here.

191. Notations such as “see comment on Acts 11:26” refer to comments in this commentary ad loc.

192. See Keener, *John*, 215, 226–27; idem, *Matthew*, 48–49; Saldarini, “Conflict”; idem, *Community*; Overman, *Crisis* (e.g., p. 10).

193. Cf., e.g., Keener, *Background Commentary*, 827; idem, *Corinthians*, 168.

to describe them, and thus I retain the traditional designations. Language communicates through accepted social convention; although we regularly adapt such convention, I have tried to balance the interests of usage and accuracy for the sake of communication.

Likewise, I do not attach to the terms “pagan” or “pagans” the pejorative connotations that ultimately developed, but employ the sense later used by some of the Roman Empire’s polytheists.¹⁹⁴ Essentially, it is used here as shorthand for those who were not religiously monotheistic (at that time, mostly Jewish or Christian) and lacked a religious heritage in Israel. Given current sensitivities,¹⁹⁵ the usage may well (and probably should) shift, but in the first decade of the twenty-first century, this title remains the most common description (no other designation yet having become standard and widely intelligible).

b. Geographic Labels

This commentary uses the term “Palestine”¹⁹⁶ in the same way as standard reference works on the Levant in this era.¹⁹⁷ Neither with this title nor with “Israel” (for the people, historically) do I make a political statement. (Lest anyone think me overly cautious in explicitly offering such a caveat, note a reviewer of one of my earlier works: “One wonders whether, by using this anachronistic terminology [of ‘Palestine’], Keener is attempting to exercise some kind of political influence.”)¹⁹⁸

One can define in various ways the cultural spheres on which the book of Acts touches directly. If we think of continents in the traditional Western sense of this designation (categories originally devised by the Greeks to distinguish themselves from peoples to their east and south), Luke’s narrative begins in Asia, with an Asian religious movement; its first Gentile convert is from Africa (see discussion at Acts 8:27); and its mission reaches Europe. That is, it touches all three “continents” known to Luke’s world.¹⁹⁹

But Luke’s goal for the mission is Rome not because of continental divisions,²⁰⁰ which are not even explicit in his narrative, but because Rome is the heart of the empire

194. Cf. use by classicists, e.g., R. MacMullen (*Paganism*); two of J. Gager’s works (*Moses; Anti-Semitism*); one by J. N. Sevenster (*Anti-Semitism*); the 1996 work by L. M. White (*Origins of Architecture*, vol. 1); one 2003 translation of H. J. Klauck (*Magic*; “paganism” in the title translates the German *Heidentum*, with the same associations); also in Ehrman, *Prophet*, 56. With Rowe, *World*, 14, I use it not to denigrate but “because of the lack of workable alternatives.”

195. Today’s pejorative usage makes the label problematic (Remus, “Paganism,” preferring “polytheism,” though noting its inadequacy as well). Yet some scholars note problems in viewing polytheism as the sole alternative to Jewish and Christian religion (Choat and Nobbs, “Formulae”; cf. Fürst, “Monotheistische Tendenzen”). The terminology also appears in anthropological studies of newer religions (e.g., Poewe, *Religions*, 86, 160, 173; sometimes it is a self-designation).

196. Some ancients depicted the entire land as “Palestine” in this period, but its official Roman designation as such may be later (so Müller, “Palaestina”). Although Jacobson intriguingly links the title with Jacob the “wrestler” (“Palestine and Israel”; idem, “Palestine Meant Israel”), Josephus’s link with the Philistines remains the dominant connection (“Palestine” or “Palestinian” appears more than a hundred times in Josephus, usually in connection with the Philistines except when quoting outsiders, e.g., *Ag. Ap.* 1.169, 171). But the term did at least sometimes apply to the post-Philistine coastal region before the second century; cf. the brief discussion in LaSor, “Palestine,” 632–33, citing Hdt 1.105; 2.104, 106; 3.5; 7.89 (followed in *Jos. Ag. Ap.* 1.171; cf. *Ant.* 1.145; 8.260).

197. E.g., Odeberg, *Gospel* (1929; repr. 1968); Belkin, *Philo* (1940); Bonsirven, *Judaism* (1950; trans. 1964); Lieberman, *Hellenism* (1962); *JPFC* passim (1974–76); Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* (1974); Sanders, *Paul and Judaism* (1977); Theissen, *Sociology* (1978); McNamara, *Judaism* (1983); Bauckham, *Acts in Setting* (1995); Ilan, *Women* (1995–96); Hanson and Oakman, *Palestine* (1998).

198. Stoutenburg, “Review,” 153.

199. See also Keener, “Official”; idem, “Asia and Europe.”

200. The Roman Empire’s cultural sphere (extending over southern Europe, western Asia, and northern Africa) should be distinguished from the northern European civilization that laid claim to its heritage (addressed in Usry and Keener, *Religion*, 41–44). The Hellenistic East also differed much from the latinized West.

of which Judea is a part. Although Luke might at least once imply traditional Greek continental divisions (possibly portraying an “Asian” missions movement invading Europe in a reversal of Western [Roman] colonialism, to use modern postcolonial language; see comment on Acts 16:8–10),²⁰¹ the primary spheres in Luke’s concern are Jewish/Gentile in every geographic location.

Some widely spread cultural traits in the later Mediterranean world, a portion perhaps due to Roman influence, also invite many scholars to speak of a “Mediterranean” culture. Past generations of Western interpreters appropriated the Greco-Roman mantle for European civilization (although it was a geographically Mediterranean culture with only limited influence from northern Europe), but now other interpreters are appropriating the Greco-Roman heritage differently. “Greco-Roman,” currently the most common designation for the culture in literature from our discipline,²⁰² aptly defines most of the larger cultural sphere in which Luke’s narrative moves in Acts, but the Greco-Roman world encompassed various local cultures, sometimes as an urban veneer over local rural traditions. Judean culture blended the heritage of ancient Israel, the larger traditional Middle Eastern culture, and Hellenistic culture; it also reflected significant influences from farther east, from Parthian Jewry and the royal house of Adiabene, along with other Diaspora influences (including from Asian and Egyptian Jewish communities).

Because language is socially defined, nomenclature changes as the needs of its users do. I am simply employing the language currently conventional in my discipline, not endorsing a permanent vocabulary.²⁰³ I recognize that those explaining the same historical information in different cultural contexts may prefer different nomenclature. To stray too far from conventional language is to risk unintelligibility; to adopt conventional language without qualification is to risk miscommunication (hence the qualifications here). As with the valuable rise of inclusive language in the past generation, greater accuracy in language need not invite anachronistic prejudice against earlier writers who employed the only (or at least overwhelmingly dominant but not necessarily pejorative) language conventions at their disposal.

Conclusion

In this introductory chapter I have tried to define my primary approach and limitations. This commentary’s primary focus is on the social, historical, and rhetorical dimensions of the text; it also seeks to examine (in view of Acts’ apparent genre) the degree to which Luke’s depiction of events coheres with the real world of the

201. Also my “Asia and Europe.” Given traditional Greek boundaries between “Europe” and “Asia” at the Hellespont (although Ionian colonization, hellenization, and finally the empire had obliterated most such boundaries in practical cultural terms), some Greeks in Luke’s day could have viewed the early Jesus movement as an Asian movement encroaching on their culture (see comment on Acts 16:8–9; Keener, “Asia and Europe”). Romans, too, often expressed xenophobic hostility toward Eastern cults (such as the ethnic religion of Judeans) invading their culture (cf., e.g., Keener, *Paul*, 140–42; further comment at Acts 16:20–21). Postcolonial readings highlight the presence of the empire (e.g., Joy, “Transitions”), which is indeed pervasive in Acts. Particular approaches vary among interpreters, often with differing sociopolitical locations (see discussion in Samuel, *Reading*, 14–34; cf. idem, “Mission,” 27–28; for examples in biblical studies, see also Moore and Segovia, *Criticism*; e.g., Niang, *Faith*; Stanley, *Apostle*; the warning in Moore, “Empire,” 21–23).

202. E.g., Neusner, *Christianity*; Fine, *Interaction*; Gager, *Moses*; Goodenough, *Symbols*; Ilan, *Women*; Jeffers, *World*; Sampley, *Paul*; Stowers, *Letter Writing*; OCD passim; DNTB passim; Cook, *Interpretation*; Taubenschlag, *Law of Egypt*; Danker, *Benefactor*; Aune, *Literature*; Penner and Vander Stichele, *Contextualizing Acts*.

203. Similarly, abbreviations and style guides changed even between the beginning of my work on the commentary and its completion.

periods he depicts. Likewise, although no attempt to forestall criticism will prove comprehensive, I have sought to answer in advance especially the objections to which responses to previous publications have accustomed me. I offer this work in the hope that a range of readers will find the information and at least some of the perspectives contained herein useful to their studies.