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Biography, History and the Genre of Luke-Acts*

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Genre looms large in contemporary Lukan scholarship. While many scholars are content to label Luke as biography and Acts as history, others argue that both volumes must belong to a single genre. This solution preserves the generic unity of Luke-Acts by shoehorning one or both volumes into ill-fitting categories; such a move only makes sense within an understanding of genre-as-classification. By exploring recent scholarship on genre and privileging ancient practice over ancient theory, we propose reading Luke-Acts as a unified narrative influenced by and modelled after a wide range of Greek prose narratives, rather than representing one genre in particular.

Keywords: Luke-Acts, genre, genre theory, history, biography

1. Introduction

In an oft-cited line, David E. Aune claims that 'Luke-Acts *must* be treated as affiliated with *one* genre'.[1] Convinced that Acts must be classified as history, Aune concludes that this generic label must apply to both volumes: Luke-Acts, then, is history.[2] Though agreeing with Aune that 'there needs to be generic compatibility

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1 D. E. Aune, *The New Testament in its Literary Environment* (LEC 8; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987) 80 (emphasis original).

 2 Aune, *New Testament*, 77.

between the Gospel and Acts', Stanley E. Porter takes the biographical nature of the Gospel as his starting point.[3] Hence, Porter identifies Luke and Acts as biography. A shared presupposition of 'generic compatibility' forms the basis for decisions about the genres of the two works, yet this common decision-making process yields contradictory judgements.

Faced with such an aporia, we might turn to Richard I. Pervo, who asks, 'Must Luke and Acts belong to the same genre?'[4] Pervo, like many scholars who question the narrative unity of Luke-Acts, answers with a whole-hearted 'no'.[5] Even some proponents of narrative unity echo this assessment.[6] When others affirm that narrative unity must include generic unity, their efforts to force the two volumes into one generic classification often result in an awkward pairing – one volume fits well enough, but the other resembles a round peg wedged into a square hole. Joseph Verheyden helpfully summarises the current scholarly stalemate: 'The search for the one genre that can unite Gospel and Acts is not finished yet, but it looks as if a solution or a consensus is not in sight, unless perhaps one is prepared to accept that Luke-Acts is a somewhat unique mixture of biography and historiography put at the service of a theological message; but what genre would this be?'[7] In effect, Verheyden's question assumes that the unfinished 'search for the one genre that can unite Gospel and Acts' functions as a quest to locate a pre-existing generic category into which Luke and Acts will both fit.

The literary critic Alastair Fowler has criticised both this view of genre-as-classification and corresponding attempts to squeeze literary works into generic 'pigeonholes': 'in reality genre is much less of a pigeonhole than a pigeon, and genre theory has a different use altogether, being concerned with communication and interpretation'.[8] This paper takes Fowler's distinction as its starting point. Instead of trying to pigeonhole the two Lukan volumes, we propose reading Luke-Acts as a unified narrative influenced by and modelled after a wide range of Greek prose narratives. We find support for this approach both in the work

3 S. E. Porter, 'The Genre of Acts and the Ethics of Discourse', *Acts and Ethics* (ed. T. E. Phillips; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2005) 1–15, at 9.

4 R. I. Pervo, 'Must Luke and Acts Belong to the Same Genre?', *SBLSP* (1989) 309–16.

5 Pervo, 'Must Luke and Acts Belong?', 316.

6 E.g. C. J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (ed. C. H. Gempf; WUNT 49; Tübingen: Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1989) 33; D. Marguerat, *Les Actes des Apôtres (1–12)* (CNT; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2007) 24; J. B. Green, 'Luke-Acts, or Luke and Acts? A Reaffirmation of Narrative Unity', *Reading Acts Today: Essays in Honour of Loveday C. A. Alexander* (ed. S. Walton, T. E. Phillips, L. K. Petersen and F. S. Spencer; LNTS 427; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2011) 101–19, at 112. Cf. W. Radl, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas: Kommentar (1,1–9,50)* (Freiburg: Herder, 2003) 17–18.

7 J. Verheyden, 'The Unity of Luke-Acts: One Work, One Author, One Purpose?', *Issues in Luke-Acts* (ed. S. A. Adams and M. Pahl; Piscataway: Gorgias, 2012) 27–50, at 37.

8 A. Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982) 37.

of contemporary classicists, such as John Marincola and Joseph Farrell, and in the example of ancient prose texts themselves, many of which defy categorisation. Throughout, we will show how reframing questions of genre can help us to describe and interpret Luke-Acts with greater freedom – and precision. We will refrain from trying to classify this two-volume work; there have already been too many efforts to cage this bird.

2. Questions of Genre in the Study of Luke-Acts

Questions of classification have dominated recent discussions of Lukan genre. Just four decades ago, the scholarly consensus held that the canonical gospels were *sui generis*, that Acts was a history, and that these truths were so self-evident as to obviate the need for further investigation.[9] Two major developments pushed questions of genre back into the limelight. First, the work of Charles H. Talbert, Richard I. Pervo, Richard A. Burridge and others has challenged the standard generic classifications of Luke as 'gospel' and Acts as 'history'.[10] As a result of these proposals, scholars of Luke-Acts now contemplate a full menu of options, including biography, epic, history and novel – as well as more gourmet choices such as 'collected biography' or 'apologetic historiography'.[11] This variety of possibilities has fuelled vigorous debate over how to classify the two volumes. Second, the coherence of these two volumes has been called into question, on literary, theological and reception-historical grounds.[12] Although the unity of Luke-Acts retains a dominant position within New Testament

9 R. A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004²) 3 notes that this twentieth-century consensus followed an earlier acceptance of the gospels as biographies. See e.g. H. F. von Soden, *Geschichte der christlichen Kirche 1. Die Entstehung der christlichen Kirche: Voraussetzungen und Anfänge der kirchlichen Entwicklung des Christentums* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1919) 73.

10 C. H. Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke-Acts* (Missoula: Scholars, 1974); R. I. Pervo, *Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?* (first edition published by Cambridge University Press in 1992).

11 For 'collected biography', see S. A. Adams, *The Genre of Acts and Collected Biography* (SNTSMS 156; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). For 'apologetic historiography', see G. E. Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition: Josephos, Luke-Acts and Apologetic Historiography* (NovTSup 64; Leiden: Brill, 1992). See other options in T. E. Phillips, 'The Genre of Acts: Moving Toward a Consensus?', *CBR* 4 (2006) 365–96.

12 R. W. Wall, 'The Acts of the Apostles in Canonical Context', *The New Testament as Canon: A Reader in Canonical Criticism* (ed. R. W. Wall and E. E. Lemcio; JSNTSup 76; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992) 110–28; M. C. Parsons and R. I. Pervo, *Rethinking the Unity of Luke and Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); C. K. Rowe, 'Literary Unity and Reception History: Reading Luke-Acts as Luke and Acts', *JSNT* 29 (2007) 449–57; P. Walters, *The Assumed Authorial Unity of Luke and Acts: A Reassessment of the Evidence* (SNTSMS 145; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); A. F. Gregory and C. K. Rowe, eds.,

scholarship, genre appears to be a weak point. The common generic designations of Luke (whether 'gospel' or 'biography') and Acts ('history') certainly offer little support to proponents of literary unity. Even a scholar convinced of the unity of Luke-Acts can admit that '[l]es deux tomes de l'œuvre à Théophile ne relèvent pas du même genre littéraire'.[13] Despite new proposals and challenges to the consensus, discussions related to the genre of Luke-Acts still revolve around questions of classification.

Though Fowler and others have criticised the common understanding of genre-as-classification, the cautions of literary critics still go unheeded in many quarters.[14] For instance, Marincola has called attention to the constricting impulse towards classification among his fellow classicists:

> ... scholars of ancient historiography nevertheless continue to work with a static conception of genre as comprising a set of formal and rather inflexible rules that govern the creation of a work of history. Historical works both Greek and Latin are regularly categorized by modern systems that have a slender or no basis in the ancient evidence, and in some cases can be shown to be at odds with the way ancient critics and historians looked at their works.[15]

Marincola's rebuke applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to many New Testament scholars, who wrangle over the generic classification of this or that work, yet fail to challenge the restrictive system of generic categorisation shared by competing advocates of 'history', 'biography' or 'epic'.

If systems of categorisation no longer provide the basis for investigation into the genre of Luke-Acts, then Verheyden's quest for that elusive category – one that comfortably contains both Lukan volumes – may be abandoned. Marincola argues instead for a view of 'genre as dynamic', and his work encourages scholars to consider taking a more exploratory route.[16] Craig S. Keener has signalled his willingness to pursue such a path, one that offers no predictable terminus, but that holds significant interpretive promise. Noting that many proposed generic classifications for Luke-Acts may possess 'an element of truth', Keener

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Rethinking the Unity and Reception of Luke and Acts (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010).

13 'The two volumes of the work dedicated to Theophilus do not belong to the same literary genre', Marguerat, *Les Actes*, 24. Earlier, Marguerat notes that Acts 'est une continuation de l'évangile de Luc' (17).

14 H. Dubrow, *Genre* (The Critical Idiom 42; London: Methuen, 1982) 106 also warns against viewing 'genres too deterministically'.

15 J. Marincola, 'Genre, Convention, and Innovation in Greco-Roman Historiography', *The Limits of Historiography: Genre and Narrative in Ancient Historical Texts* (ed. C. S. Kraus; MnemSup 191; Leiden: Brill, 1999) 281–324, at 281–2.

16 Marincola, 'Genre', 282.

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nevertheless suggests that, 'in the end, Luke probably mixed genres, as ancient literature often did'.[17] The notion of a 'mixed genre' may sound like scholarly capitulation to the complexities surrounding the genre of Luke-Acts, yet Keener's proposal reflects the reality of ancient literary activity. As Todd Penner observes, 'one major feature of the Hellenistic and Roman period is the melding of literary types'.[18] In what follows, we seek to demonstrate both the defects inherent in any ill-fated 'search for the one genre that can unite Gospel and Acts' and the advantages of a creative attempt to describe how 'Lukas' uses generic conventions to achieve his rhetorical purposes.[19] Such an attempt will be able to take advantage of the best in contemporary genre theory, which has moved away from the pigeonholing activity endorsed by modern scholars and ancient critics.

3. Ancient Genre Theory: A Red Herring

Regarding ancient genre theory, we know less than we sometimes think we know. Scholars have looked to the ancient handbooks for guidance in determining the genre of Luke-Acts, but these sources prove ill equipped to render assistance, largely due to the fact that ancient theorists of genre attended more to poetry than to prose.[20] Joseph Geiger reminds us that extensive reflection on poetic genres laid the foundations of ancient genre theory: 'Ancient literary theory in general, and the laws of the genres in particular, were developed in the first place for poetry.'[21] As early as Plato's *Republic*, we can observe an emerging recognition of the differences between epic, drama (both tragedy and comedy) and lyric poetry.[22] Aristotle's *Poetics* gives a much more detailed classification; as the

17 C. S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012–15) 1.52.

18 T. Penner, *In Praise of Christian Origins: Stephen and the Hellenists in Lukan Apologetic Historiography* (ESEC 10; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004) 135.

19 We follow Parsons and Pervo, *Rethinking*, 8 n. 31, in their useful distinction between an implied author 'Lukas' and the Gospel ('Luke') that he composed.

20 Though 'it is clear that ancient writers had a concept of genre and regularly theorised about it', this concept and related theory revolved around poetry, not prose, *pace* S. A. Adams, 'Luke, Josephus, and Self-Definition: The Genre of Luke-Acts and its Relationship to Apologetic Historiography and Collected Biography', *Christian Origins and Hellenistic Judaism: Social and Literary Contexts for the New Testament* (ed. S. E. Porter and A. W. Pitts; Leiden/Boston; Brill, 2013) 439–59, at 443.

21 J. Geiger, *Cornelius Nepos and Ancient Political Biography* (Historia Einzelschriften 47; Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1985) 12.

22 Plato, *Resp.* 3 (394c). For nuanced discussion of this passage, see T. G. Rosenmeyer, 'Ancient Literary Genres: A Mirage', *Oxford Readings in Ancient Literary Criticism* (ed. A. Laird; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 421–39. Rosenmeyer concludes that 'Plato is not … a literary theorist' (427).

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title of his treatise signals, however, he focuses on poetry.[23] While we find discussions of poetic genres in Plato, Aristotle, Philodemus, Cicero and Horace, sustained treatments of prose genres remain scarce.[24] Rhetoric serves as the lone exception to this general rule.[25] Regarding other prose genres, Isocrates shows himself aware of some common literary pursuits: compiling genealogies, studying the poets, writing histories of wars and composing disputations.[26] Still, he shows no interest in producing a systematic account of prose forms: 'It would, however, be no slight task to attempt to enumerate all the forms of prose (τὰς ἰδέας τὰς τῶν λόγων), and I shall take up only that which is pertinent to me, and ignore the rest.'[27] For centuries thereafter, ancient critics show little interest in picking up where Isocrates left off.

Only in the second century CE do we find multiple comments on βίος and ἱστορία in Plutarch's *Lives*, along with tongue-in-cheek instructions on *How to Write History* from Lucian of Samosata.[28] Before this time, we find only scattered hints. Quintilian serves as a witness to the state of genre theory in the first century CE. In a lengthy passage (*Inst.* 10.1.46–131), he lists famous Greek and Roman poets, historians, orators and philosophers, organised by their area of expertise. Only rarely do his subjects escape his neatly demarcated categories.[29] Like Lucian of Samosata, Quintilian appears to recognise poetry, oratory, philosophy and history as generically distinct. But aside from the division of oratory into sub-genres (e.g. forensic oratory), neither author sets forth a detailed taxonomy of prose narratives.

As much as we might desire to settle the question of genre by recourse to Aristotle or Quintilian, recent classical scholarship waves us away from the handbooks, encouraging us instead to investigate why Fowler condemns the grammarians' theorising as 'a venerable error'.[30] Joseph Farrell points to the 'essentializing tendencies' in ancient literary theory, such as the impulse to tie a work's genre to

23 For passing comments on history, see Aristotle, *Poet.* 9.2–3 (1451a–b).

24 For summaries of Aristotle, Philodemus, Cicero and Horace on poetic genres, see Adams, *Genre of Acts*, 27–44. According to Rosenmeyer, 'Ancient Literary Genres', 429, 'neither Aristotle nor his Alexandrian and Pergamene successors bothered much with formal subdivisions of prose literature'.

25 Aristotle identifies the three γένη of oratory – deliberative, forensic and epideictic – in his *Rhet.* 1.3.3 (1358b).

26 Isocrates, *Antid.* 45. Adams, *Genre of Acts*, 31–2 observes that Isocrates also catalogues various types of prose discourse in *Panath.* 1–2.

27 Isocrates, *Antid.* 46 (G. Norlin, LCL).

28 Relevant material from Plutarch will be discussed below. Lucian marks history off from encomium (*Hist.* 7), poetry (8) and philosophical texts (17). He does not manifest any awareness of βίος, other prose genres or discrete sub-genres within history.

29 Quintilian notes in the section on Greek historians that Xenophon will be treated with the philosophers (*Inst.* 10.1.75); Cicero is lauded as the orator *par excellence* (10.1.105), as well as a philosopher who could rival Plato (10.1.123).

30 Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, 37.

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its author's character.[31] On this view, some natural temperament moves a Homer to create epic, a Herodotus to compose history, a Plato to pen dialogues. But versatile authors such as Xenophon of Athens – whose works include history (*Hellenica*), an equestrian guide (*De equitandi ratione*), philosophical dialogue (*Oeconomicus*) and the impossible-to-classify *Cyropaedia*[32] – do not appear to be bound by this theoretical straitjacket. Likewise, the various works composed by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, ranging from history (*Roman Antiquities*) to literary treatises (e.g. *De compositione verborum*), confound such essentialist thinking. We cannot tie a work's γένος to its author's φύσις.

The vein of error runs deeper than failed efforts to slot authors into generic categories. Not only authors, but also many texts defy neat classification. Farrell laments the failure to acknowledge this reality:

> Ancient theorists and critics do not recognize generic ambiguity as an issue. They all share a certain confidence that poems do indeed belong unambiguously to one genre or another. They show no interest at all in generic indeterminacy, and do not even seem to recognize the possibility that the question of a poem's genre might be open for discussion.[33]

Some ancient theorists recognise generic anomalies, only to dismiss them. For example, Cicero acknowledges the possibility of mismatched generic features: 'So in tragedy a comic style is a blemish, and in comedy the tragic style is unseemly; and so with the other genres, each has its own tone and a way of speaking which the scholars recognize.'[34] Even as he admits such a possibility, the orator still affirms the importance of generic purity – again, with regard to poetry.

Consequently, scholars of Luke-Acts must abandon efforts to ground their work in ancient genre theory, given its preoccupation with poetry and its tendency towards essentialism. As Geiger concludes, ancient critics largely neglected to theorise about prose genres:

> Neither the divisions of the different genres of prose nor the *lex operis* were ever fixed with such painstaking exactness – with the exception of rhetoric, for which a highly sophisticated theory was developed – as those of the various poetic γένη. Even in the few instances where divisions of prose do occur in ancient

31 J. Farrell, 'Classical Genre in Theory and Practice', *New Literary History* 34 (2003) 383–408, at 383. For example, Aristotle describes poets as being motivated to write comedy rather than tragedy κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν φύσιν in *Poet.* 4.13 (1449a).

32 See D. L. Gera, *Xenophon's* Cyropaedia: *Style, Genre, and Literary Technique* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) 1. For Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the work can be classified as historical, though 'fitting to a philosopher' (*Pomp.* 4).

33 Farrell, 'Classical Genre', 386.

34 Cicero, *Opt. gen.* 1.1 (H. M. Hubbell, LCL).

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> discussions they do not, to my knowledge, go beyond a threefold division into history, rhetoric and philosophy.[35]

Beyond this general 'threefold division', then, we must venture only with great caution. Even with regard to ancient 'history' itself, classicist Christopher Pelling asserts that 'such a "genre" was not firmly established, and there were no firm rules'.[36] If a venerable genre like history operated without 'firm rules', then we might expect the same of other prose works.[37] Tomas Hägg confirms this suspicion with his comments about ancient βίοι: 'The more I have worked with these texts, the less I can see the point in drawing borders where the authors themselves so obviously moved over mapless terrain.'[38] As with biographies and histories, so with ancient novels: 'As is well known, classical antiquity had no generic rubric for complex prose fiction.'[39] In sum, while ancient theorists distinguished between history, oratory and philosophical dialogue, these broad categories give little guidance to those venturing deeper into the 'mapless terrain' of Greco-Roman prose. For further insight into the genre of Luke-Acts, we need to turn our gaze to the diversity within ancient prose works – and we need to focus our vision through a lens unclouded by essentialist presuppositions.

4. Genre and Ancient Greek Narratives

Returning to our avian metaphor, we may now begin our search for other birds of a similar feather. Given the wide variety of extant Greek and Latin literature, narrowing the scope of our search takes precedence. In discussions of the genre of Luke-Acts, historical and biographical works figure most prominently.[40]

35 Geiger, *Cornelius Nepos*, 12–13. In his efforts to trace the development of ancient biography, Geiger describes 'the reconstruction of ancient literary theory' as a 'futile path' (14).

36 C. B. R. Pelling, *Literary Texts and the Greek Historian* (London: Routledge, 2000) 85. See also Radl, *Evangelium*, 18, on the diverse practices of ancient historians: 'Es gibt keine allgemein verbindliche historiographische Theorie. Jeder Schriftsteller geht seinen eigenen Weg.'

37 A. Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, exp. edn 1993) 102 links the origins of biography with history, though C. W. Fornara, *The Nature of History in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) 184–5 reaches a different conclusion: 'Ancient biography developed outside the orbit of history, and its *physis*, or nature, cannot be understood except with reference to its origin in ethical preoccupations.'

38 T. Hägg, *The Art of Biography in Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) xi; cf. Rosenmeyer, 'Ancient Literary Genres', 432.

39 D. L. Selden, 'Genre of Genre', *The Search for the Ancient Novel* (ed. J. Tatum; Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1994) 39–64, at 43. Selden goes on to remark that 'there is no evidence that before the modern era the range of texts that we have come to call the "ancient novel" were ever thought of together as constituting a coherent group' (43).

40 Although comparing Luke-Acts to epic or novel can be a useful enterprise, very few scholars assign Luke-Acts to one of these categories. K. O. Sandnes, '*Imitatio Homeri?* An Appraisal of Dennis R MacDonald's "Mimesis Criticism"', *JBL* 124 (2005) 715–32 argues trenchantly against

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As we have noted, some scholars seek to fit the two volumes into one of these generic categories. Aune categorises Luke-Acts as history; Porter, as biography.[41] However, others complicate the situation; David L. Balch rightly observes that 'the line between history and biography is not so easily drawn'.[42] After evaluating the evidence for attempts to draw such a line, we will examine the works of Diodorus Siculus, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Flavius Josephus, and Eusebius of Caesarea. Incorporating insights from modern genre theory, our investigation of ancient prose will demonstrate the permeability of this hypothetical generic borderline – a permeability that endures throughout centuries of Greek historiography – and explore the implications for the study of Luke-Acts.[43]

Among the defenders of the boundary between history and biography stands classicist Charles W. Fornara, who calls the first-century BCE Latin writer Cornelius Nepos as first witness for the defense.[44] Nepos begins his life of Pelopidas with the following clarification: 'I am in doubt how to give an account of his merits; for I fear that if I undertake to tell of his deeds, I shall seem to be writing a history rather than a biography'.[45] For Nepos, biography (*vita*) is about an individual's 'merits' (*virtutes*); history (*historia*), about 'deeds' (*res*). For any who doubt this distinction, Plutarch offers corroborating evidence:

> It is the life of Alexander the king, and of Caesar, who overthrew Pompey, that I am writing in this book, and the multitude of the deeds to be treated is so great that I shall make no other preface than to entreat my readers, in case I do not tell of all the famous actions of these men, nor even speak exhaustively at all in each particular case, but in epitome for the most part, not to complain. For it is

efforts to read Homeric influence into New Testament texts. And though his early work compared Acts with Greco-Roman novels, R. I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009) 15 affirms that 'Acts is a history'.

41 Aune, *New Testament*, 77; Porter, 'Genre of Acts', 9, 15.

42 D. L. Balch, 'ΜΕΤΑΒΟΛΗ ΠΟΛΙΤΕΙΩΝ: Jesus as Founder of the Church in Luke-Acts: Form and Function', *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan Narrative and Greco-Roman Discourse* (ed. T. Penner and C. Vander Stichele; Atlanta: Scholars , 2003) 139–88, at 143. See also the similar comments in Aune, *New Testament*, 30–1; C. G. Müller, 'Διήγησις nach Lukas: Zwischen historiographischem Anspruch und biographischem Erzählen', *Historiographie und Biographie im Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt* (ed. T. Schmeller; NTOA/SUNT 69; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009) 95–126, at 110; and T. Penner, *In Praise of Christian Origins: Stephen and the Hellenists in Lukan Apologetic Historiography* (ESEC 10; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004) 6, who considers such lines not only 'fluid' but also 'somewhat artificial'.

43 Adams, *Genre of Acts*, 57, observes that 'the ancients, though prescriptively restricting the mixing of genres, actively mixed genre features in their literary works'. Cf. Penner, *In Praise of Christian Origins*, 135.

44 Fornara, *Nature of History*, 185.

45 Cornelius Nepos 16.1 (J. C. Rolfe, LCL).

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> not Histories that I am writing, but Lives (οὔτε γὰρ ἱστορίας γράφομεν, ἀλλὰ βίους); and in the most illustrious deeds there is not always a manifestation of virtue or vice, nay, a slight thing like a phrase or a jest often makes a greater revelation of character than battles where thousands fall, or the greatest armaments, or sieges of cities.[46]

Again, we see a line drawn between the action-chronicling history (ἱστορία) and the character-revealing biography (βίος). By taking the comments of Nepos and Plutarch as programmatic statements defining two distinct genres, Fornara can now proceed to sort Herodotus, Thucydides, Polybius and Tacitus into one category (history), and Suetonius, Nepos, Plutarch and Marius Maximus into another (biography).[47]

However, we must not neglect the context of the passage where Plutarch makes his famous distinction between 'histories' and 'lives'. Some are tempted to read Plutarch as attempting to make a statement about prose genre theory. Timothy E. Duff criticises this 'mistaken' interpretation of Plutarch's prologue to *Alexander*.[48] Following Duff, Hägg encourages us to look at how Plutarch typically introduces his paired accounts. The prologues typically address problems of composition related to the subjects under consideration.[49] Hence, we should attend more to the earlier part of the *Alexander* quotation, which acknowledges 'the multitude of the deeds to be treated' and makes a plea for leniency from readers, since so much material must be omitted. Plutarch makes similar apologies about missing material in other prologues; Burridge concludes that 'the omissions, and the explanations for them found in the prefaces, are less to do with biographical theory than with constraints of space and material available'.[50] In short, Plutarch is making an excuse, not formulating a theory.[51]

While a βίος may be expected to reveal the character of the subject, this common function does not define a genre. Some biographies do not elucidate

46 Plutarch, *Alex.* 1.1–2 (B. Perrin, LCL).

47 For a similar approach, see P. L. Shuler, *A Genre for the Gospels: The Biographical Character of Matthew* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982). After reviewing Polybius (*Hist.* 10.21.8), Cicero (*Fam.* 5.12.3), Lucian (*Hist.* 7), Cornelius Nepos (16.1) and Plutarch (*Alex.* 1.1–3), Shuler points out 'the dichotomy implicit in the above references' (40). For critique of Shuler's argument, see Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?*, 61.

48 T. E. Duff, *Plutarch's Lives: Exploring Virtue and Vice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 17. For an illuminating overview of 'The Programmatic Statements of the *Lives*', see pp. 13–51.

49 Hägg, *Art of Biography*, 269.

50 Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?*, 62. While Burridge objects to using Plutarch's confessions as evidence of 'a clear literary theory of βίος distinguished from other genres', he remains committed to βίος as a recognisable genre.

51 C. B. R. Pelling, 'Plutarch's Adaptation of his Source-Material', *JHS* 100 (1980) 127–40, at 135 insists that Plutarch makes 'one of his clearest programmatic statements' in *Alex.* 1.1–2. Yet he admits that Plutarch did not adhere to his own standard: 'A writer's programmatic statements can sometimes be a poor guide to his work' (139).

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character to any great extent, and many histories, including those treated below, devote extensive attention to the vices and virtues of the participants.[52] Moreover, just as ἱστορία can contain material appropriate to the βίος, Plutarch elsewhere blurs the boundaries by reminding us that his βίοι are composed of ἱστορία.[53] If history is, as Hägg puts it, 'no opposite to biography, but rather the substance that makes up the Lives', then we should hesitate to pursue a system of classification that will house the two in separate categories.[54] After all, not only did history serve as the 'substance' for βίος, but βίος could also return the favour.[55] In the second century BCE, Polybius disparages Theopompus' 58-volume *Philippica*: 'Surely it would have been much more dignified and fairer to include Philip's achievements in the history of Greece than to include the history of Greece in that of Philip.'[56] This sort of 'biographical history' grew more popular over time.[57] For instance, Suetonius' *Lives of the Caesars* appear in the form of a collected biography, yet they tell the story, or the history, of the early Roman Empire. Whether we characterise the so-called 'line' between history and biography as shifting, porous or non-existent, trying to situate Luke-Acts on one side or the other seems to us a fruitless exercise.

Having set the taxonomic project aside, we can survey the 'mapless terrain' of ancient prose narratives in search of relevant evidence for our description of Luke-Acts. Most notably, we find a flock of other narratives that combine biographical and historical material. Though each of the narratives examined below falls unequivocally under the general heading of 'history', rather than oratory or philosophical dialogue, a close reading of each work reveals a rich

52 On 'Lives' that are more historical than biographical, see Pelling, 'Plutarch's Adaptation', 139. See also Duff, *Plutarch's Lives*, 20–1. On the ethical and didactic nature of historical writing in authors such as Diodorus Siculus, see W. Eckey, *Die Apostelgeschichte: Der Weg des Evangeliums von Jerusalem nach Rom (Apg 1,1 – 15,35)*, vol. 1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2011²) 33; cf. also Penner, *In Praise of Christian Origins*, 166.

53 See Plutarch, *Aem.* 1.1. In his LCL volume, B. Perrin has moved this opening chapter to the beginning of *Timoleon* to introduce the pair.

54 Hägg, *Art of Biography*, 272. Duff, *Plutarch's Lives*, 17 observes that, in the prologue to *Alexander*, '[t]he term ἱστορία, here used in a particular sense of "large-scale" history, could be used in a general sense to mean any kind of narrative'. Plutarch also refers to ἱστορία in his *Cim.* 2.5; *Cor.* 38.3; *Dem.* 2.1; *Per.* 13.12; and esp. *Thes.* 1.1–2.

55 P. Stadter, 'Biography and History', *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography* (ed. J. Marincola; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011) 528–40, at 528 affirms that 'it is often quite difficult to distinguish history from biography, even with the most careful analysis, nor did the ancients do so consistently'.

56 Polybius, *Hist.* 8.11.3–4 (W. R. Paton, LCL).

57 For a treatment of 'biographical history' starting with Theopompus' *Philippica*, see T. J. Luce, *The Greek Historians* (London: Routledge, 1997) 116–18. See also D. Dormeyer, 'Die Gattung der Apostelgeschichte', *Die Apostelgeschichte im Kontext antiker und frühchristlicher Historiographie* (ed. J. Frey, C. K. Rothschild and J. Schröter; BZNW 162; Berlin: de Gruyter) 437–75, esp. 461.

variety of content.[58] These four chosen narratives span a wide chronological range: two written before Luke-Acts, one a rough contemporary, and one dating from a few centuries later. In each case, we will show how a self-identified 'history' integrates extensive biographical content without compromising narrative and generic unity.

4.1 *Diodorus Siculus*

Explicitly identified as 'universal history' (1.1.1), the forty books of Diodorus Siculus' *Library of History* (first century BCE) include ancient legends, early wars and the story of the inexorable spread of the Roman Empire. Diodorus claims that he has travelled extensively in Asia and Europe to see various sites 'with [his] own eyes' (1.4.1), accessed the best records available in Rome (1.4.2), and adopted a plan that encompasses all of human history, starting with the earliest accounts of 'both Greeks and barbarians' (1.4.5). The fragmentary remains of books 7–10 suggest that he may have treated some material with a biographical focus; figures such as Aeneas, Romulus, Solon, Croesus and Pythagoras feature quite prominently.[59] Book 11 adopts a more annalistic format, marking time with regular references to the Athenian archon and Roman consuls of the respective year. This structure continues through the following five books, although book 16 dwells at great length on the life and death of Philip of Macedon. As he concludes book 16, Diodorus announces that the following book will focus on Philip's son Alexander, attempting 'to include all of his affairs (ἁπάσας αὐτοῦ τὰς πράξεις) in one book' (16.95.5). Book 17 opens with a transitional prologue (17.1.1–2), but before Diodorus identifies the Athenian archon and Roman consuls of 335/334 BCE, he sketches out the auspicious ancestry of Alexander (17.1.5). Throughout the remainder of book 17, the spotlight remains trained on the young Macedonian prodigy. While campaigns and political manoeuvres continue to occupy much of the narrative, Diodorus also shows interest in the character of the conqueror. He highlights Alexander's 'mercy' (ἔλεος), 'benevolence' (φιλανθρωπία) and 'kindness' (ἐπιείκεια) to the Persian royal family following the defeat of Darius (17.37.3–38.6), a virtuous

58 Penner, *In Praise of Christian Origins*, 122–9 *et passim* seeks to demonstrate and illuminate the close relationship between oratory and history.

59 One fragment of book 10 preserved in a Byzantine collection includes the claim that 'the writing of the lives (τῶν βίων) of the men who have come before us (τῶν προγεγονότων ἀνδρῶν) … profits the common life (τὸν κοινὸν βίον) in no small way' (10.12.1); see T. Büttner-Wobst, *Excerpta historica iussu Imp. Constantini Porphyrogeniti confecta*, vol. II.1: *Excerpta de virtutibus et vitiis* (ed. U. P. Boissevain, C. de Boor and T. Büttner-Wobst; Berlin: Weidmann, 1906) 224. However, the excerpts preserved in this tenth-century CE collection – a collection explicitly devoted to virtues and vices – seem to be more paraphrase than quotation.

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response also highlighted by the biographer Plutarch (*Alex.* 21.1–3).[60] Diodorus closes by narrating the Macedonian's death – and informing the reader that the following books will take up 'the affairs (πράξεις) of his successors' (17.118.4).

More than a century before the composition of Luke-Acts, we find a Greek author who prizes eyewitness testimony (cf. Luke 1.2–3), records noteworthy πράξεις ('Acts') and provides clear chronological notices (cf. Luke 1.5; 3.1–2).[61] Additionally, this author presents the virtuous life of an individual in one book, following with a book about that leader's successors. We are not aware of any classicists who question the narrative or generic unity of the *Library of History*.

4.2 *Dionysius of Halicarnassus*

Like Diodorus Siculus, Dionysius of Halicarnassus (first century BCE) self-identifies as a historian and shows familiarity with the tradition of κοινὴ ἱστορία (*Ant. rom.* 1.2.1). Unlike Diodorus, however, Dionysius chooses to focus on the early history of Rome, with a particular emphasis on the renowned city's founders and their accomplishments:

> they shall have learned from my history (ἱστορία) that Rome from the very beginning, immediately after its founding, produced infinite examples of virtue in men whose superiors, whether for piety or for justice or for life-long self-control or for warlike valour, no city, either Greek or barbarian, has ever produced.[62]

Like Plutarch and other biographers, Dionysius will instruct his contemporaries by examining the virtuous lives of famous men. Moreover, for Dionysius, this ethical interest forms a critical part of historiography. In his *Letter to Gnaeus Pompeius*, Dionysius praises Theopompus of Chios as a model historian who possesses the unique ability

> to examine even the hidden reasons for actions and the motives of their agents, and the feelings in their hearts (which most people do not find it easy to

60 For another close parallel, compare Diodorus Siculus 17.54.4–5 and Plutarch, *Alex.* 29.4. For other examples of Alexander's ἐπιείκεια, see Diodorus Siculus 17.66.6; 69.9; 73.1; 76.1; 91.7.

61 L. Alexander, *The Preface to Luke's Gospel: Literary Convention and Social Context in Luke 1.1–4 and Acts 1.1* (SNTSMS 78; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) argues that the form of Luke's preface aligns more closely with ancient Greek technical treatises than with ancient Greek historiography. She thus warns against reading the 'following text in terms of Greco-Roman historiography' (200). On the other hand, M. Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium* (HNT 5; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008) 60 acknowledges the formal parallels, yet claims that the content of Luke 1.1–4 makes clear to readers of the Gospel 'dass sie ein historiographisches Werk vor sich haben'. See Penner, *In Praise of Christian Origins*, 219–21 for a more detailed rebuttal of Alexander's argument.

62 *Ant. rom.* 1.5.3 (E. Cary, LCL). See also 1.6.4.

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> discern), and to reveal all the mysteries of apparent virtue and undetected vice.[63]

If Plutarch's *Lives* sometimes veer into historical terrain, Dionysius praises the historian Theopompus for similarly usurping the biographer's task.

Like Theopompus, Dionysius examines motives, emotions and virtues in his own historical writing. In book 1 of the *Roman Antiquities*, he narrates the miraculous birth and secretive upbringing of Romulus and Remus. Book 2 tells of Romulus' military prowess, courage and wisdom, promising to narrate the 'political and military affairs' of the founder, as is fitting in a 'history' (2.7.1). This mention of ἱστορία reminds us that Dionysius understands his work as 'history', even while devoting page after page to the life of Romulus. The historian explicitly notes that the founder's piety is 'worthy of inclusion in a history' (ἱστορίας ἄξια; 2.21.1).[64] After narrating the political and military affairs of Romulus, Dionysius offers various accounts of the founder's death (2.56.1–7).[65] Near the outset of his ἱστορία, Dionysius has included a full βίος of Romulus, from divine birth to portentous death.

Dionysius does not merely dabble in biography on this one occasion; his history continues in the form of a succession narrative, chronicling the lives of the kings of Rome: Numa Pompilius (*Ant. rom.* 2.58.2–76.6), Tullus Hostilius (3.1.1–35.6), Ancus Marcius (3.36.1–45.2), Lucius Tarquinius Priscus (3.46.1–73.4), Servius Tullius (4.1.1–40.7) and Lucius Tarquinius Superbus (4.41.1–85.4). Dionysius gives no sign of abandoning his historical enterprise, yet his 'lives' closely resemble other works classified as biography. For example, Burridge used computer analysis of verb subjects in ancient Greek βίοι to show that 'a distinguishing feature' of such works was 'the concentration on one person as subject, reflected even in the verbal syntax'.[66] Burridge finds that, in Tacitus's *Agricola*, the protagonist is the subject of 18.1% of the verbs; comparably, Jesus is the subject of 24.4% of the verbs in Mark, 17.2% of the verbs in Matthew, and 17.9% of the verbs in Luke.[67] Not only does Dionysius' account of Lucius Tarquinius Superbus' life feature content similar to biographical works, but Balch also finds that the king serves as the subject of 24.7% of the 'sentences and major phrases' in 4.41–85.[68] Surely, if the rest of the *Roman Antiquities* were lost, and only a fragment containing 4.41–85 survived, scholars would

63 *Pomp.* 6 (S. Usher, LCL).

64 This interest in historically appropriate material recurs in 2.30.1.

65 Plutarch also describes the political and military accomplishments of Rome's founder in his *Romulus*; see e.g. *Rom.* 13.1–16.4; 17.1–20.2. Compare also the multiple accounts of Romulus's death in *Rom.* 27.3–8 with Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. rom.* 2.56.1–7.

66 Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?*, 131.

67 Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?*, 315, 318–20.

68 Balch, 'ΜΕΤΑΒΟΛΗ ΠΟΛΙΤΕΙΩΝ', 143.

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classify the work as an early βίος. Yet again, we find evidence that ancient prose authors could combine biographical and historical content in a multi-volume work; like Diodorus, Dionysius does not seem to have been concerned about rupturing the narrative or generic unity of his history.

4.3 *Flavius Josephus*

Approximately one hundred years after Dionysius of Halicarnassus published the *Roman Antiquities* in twenty volumes, Flavius Josephus (first century CE) composed the twenty books of his *Jewish Antiquities*.[69] Josephus opens by situating himself among his fellow historians (*A.J.* 1.1), and he refers to the present work as both ἀρχαιολογία (1.5) and ἱστορία (1.8). The familiar terminology in the preface shows that Josephus consciously locates his *Antiquities* in the realm of Greco-Roman historiography, despite the unusual content of his history. Near the conclusion of this massive undertaking, Josephus notes that his account includes events 'from the first creation of a human being up to the twelfth year of the reign of Nero' (20.259). He also mentions that he will add a brief account, describing both his lineage and 'the events of my life' (τῶν κατὰ τὸν βίον πράξεων), to the longer work (20.266).

This shorter work, the *Life* of Josephus, remains 'the fullest surviving example of Roman autobiography before Augustine'.[70] He begins by detailing his lineage (*Vita* 1–6), as promised in *A.J.* 20.266. He then moves on to a description of his education (8–12), and his embassy to Rome (13–16). His involvement in the Jewish revolt and its aftermath constitutes the bulk of the work. When he finishes narrating the events 'of his whole life' (διὰ παντὸς τοῦ βίου), which offer insight into his 'character' (ἦθος), he announces that he has completed the 'entire account of the Antiquities' (τὴν πᾶσαν τῆς ἀρχαιολογίας ἀναγραφήν), clearly associating the (obviously biographical) *Life* with the larger (historical) *Antiquities* (430). Josephus makes no attempt to disguise any generic rift between what some would consider to be the distinct categories of history and biography. His ancient readers see an integrated whole, rather than a biographical appendix pasted onto a historical work. For instance, Eusebius of Caesarea's *Ecclesiastical History* cites a passage from Josephus' *Life* (*Hist. eccl.* 3.10.8–11 // *Vita* 361–4). Though he has quoted from Josephus' *Life*, Eusebius claims that he is quoting from a section 'at the end of his Antiquities' (*Hist. eccl.* 3.10.8). As Steve Mason concludes, 'Eusebius, who used Josephus' works extensively,

69 H. St. J. Thackeray, *Josephus: The Man and the Historian* (New York: Jewish Institute of Religion, 1929) 56–8 proposed that Josephus used the *Roman Antiquities* of Dionysius as a model. Similarities in title, structure and content support Thackeray's contention that Josephus could be called 'a second Dionysius' (56).

70 S. Mason, ed., *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary*, vol. IX: *Life of Josephus* (Leiden: Brill, 2001) xii.

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evidently did not know the *Life* as a separate book'.[71] Alone, the *Life* could stand as biography; nevertheless, it was published as part of a history.[72]

4.4 *Eusebius of Caesarea*

Though written some 200 years after the *Jewish Antiquities*, Eusebius' early fourth-century *Ecclesiastical History* serves as a fitting bookend for our analysis. Like Luke-Acts, the *Ecclesiastical History* resists generic classification; its combination of historical narrative, biographical profiles, martyr acts and other literary elements has attracted a wide range of generic labels.[73] Eusebius, however, makes his purpose clear from the beginning: 'to record in writing the successions (διαδοχάς) of the sacred apostles, covering the period stretching from our Savior to ourselves'; in so doing, he will tell the 'history of the church' (ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ἱστορία).[74] Eusebius notes that he intends to bring unity to the scattered source material by giving it a 'historical treatment' (ὑφήγησις ἱστορική).[75]

While writing his history, Eusebius does not shy away from biographical content. Just as Diodorus Siculus devotes book 17 to the life of Alexander the Great, so Eusebius structures book 6 of the *Ecclesiastical History* around the life of the great Christian intellectual, Origen of Alexandria. Within book 6, Eusebius covers familiar territory: childhood, career, character and death.[76] He sometimes diverges from the life of Origen to introduce character-portraits of other prominent people in Origen's lifetime.[77] Throughout, Eusebius gives no indication that he is doing something new or inventive by weaving in and out of 'biography' and 'history'. The *Ecclesiastical History* testifies yet again to ancient authors' freedom to merge historical, biographical and other materials together within a single literary work.

4.5 *Rethinking Genre in Ancient Prose*

In summary, we have seen that ancient texts do not bear the imprints of a rigid system of generic classification. Diodorus Siculus, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Josephus and Eusebius of Caesarea freely describe their works as

71 Mason, *Life of Josephus*, xv.

72 We might also note that, in *Vita* 413, Josephus notes that he is omitting details about his military career and Roman captivity, since he has already treated these events in his *Jewish War*. He does not exclude this material on account of its 'historical' nature; rather, he wishes to avoid repeating himself.

73 For a recent contribution to the debate over the genre of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, see D. J. DeVore, 'Genre and Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History:* Toward a Focused Debate', *Eusebius of Caesarea: Tradition and Innovations* (ed. A. Johnson and J. Schott; Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2013) 19–49.

74 Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 1.1.1. All translations of Eusebius are from K. Lake, LCL.

75 *Hist. eccl.* 1.1.4.

76 On Origen's childhood, see *Hist. eccl.* 6.1.1–6.2.15; on his career, see 6.3.1–9; 6.23.1–4; 6.30.1; on his torture and death, see 6.39.5 and 7.1.1.

77 E.g. the short portrait of Bishop Narcissus in *Hist. eccl.* 6.8.7–6.11.3, or of Julius Africanus in 6.31.1–3.

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'histories' without feeling constrained by such labels. As discussed above, ancient writers and readers understood history, oratory and philosophical dialogue as distinct genres. But Thomas G. Rosenmeyer explains Greco-Roman composition practices as being formed by authorial models rather than generic templates:

> From the very start of recorded literature, authors generally disregarded Quintilian's admonition (10.2.21–2) to stay timidly within the perimeters set by the traditions. The Hellenistic manhandling of genres, that is to say, the remodeling of the great ancestors' achievements, carries forward an old Greek pastime. What results is not a *Kreuzung der Gattungen*, a hybridizing of genres, but an exercise in the freedom of *aemulatio*.[78]

Rosenmeyer labels this approach 'model criticism' rather than 'genre criticism'.[79] While we are not inclined to follow Rosenmeyer in abandoning 'genre criticism' altogether, we heed his caution against assigning too large a role to generic strictures in the process of composing ancient narratives. Furthermore, his emphasis on 'models' in place of rigid parameters dovetails nicely with our focus on pigeons in place of pigeonholes.

5. Genre and Luke-Acts

Rosenmeyer's reflections on *aemulatio* encourage us to look at precursors and models for Luke-Acts. We might take a moment to emphasise that we are not looking for earlier examples of works that 'belong' to the same genre as Luke-Acts. As we seek to plot this bird's flight over 'mapless terrain', we will heed Derrida's counsel: 'un texte ne saurait appartenir à aucune genre. Tout texte participe d'un ou de plusieurs genres, il n'y a pas de texte sans genre, il y a toujours du genre et des genres mais cette participation n'est jamais une appartenance'.[80] With Derrida, we affirm that all texts 'participate in one or more genres'. We particularly appreciate his emphasis on 'participation' rather than 'belonging'; this distinction seems to parallel Fowler's contrast between genre-as-pigeon and genre-as-pigeonhole. We are not seeking to cast Luke-Acts as the 'texte sans genre', but as a text that indeed participates in (and whose author emulates) multiple literary traditions of the ancient Mediterranean world. The emphasis on 'participation'

78 Rosenmeyer, 'Ancient Literary Genres', 436.

79 Rosenmeyer, 'Ancient Literary Genres', 435. Rosenmeyer overstates his case when he claims that, 'with the exception of Plato and Aristotle, the ancient critics exhibited no interest in exploring genres' (437). Yet he could have appealed to the fact that Quintilian populates his categories with *authors* rather than *texts* (see *Inst.* 10.1.46–131).

80 '… a text cannot belong to no genre … Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging', J. Derrida, 'La loi du genre', *Glyph* 7 (1980) 176–201, at 185; trans. A. Ronell, 'The Law of Genre', ibid., 202–29, at 212.

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frees us from the problem of choosing one rigid generic category for Luke-Acts; Parsons and Pervo rightly diagnose the drawbacks of such an endeavour:

> The unity of Luke and Acts is not a hypothesis requiring generic identity, and insistence upon such unity may well obscure the valuable insights to be gained from investigation of aretalogies, novels, apocryphal acts, various types of monographs, different modes of historical writing, biographies of diverse kinds, and other 'gospels'. Precisely because no analogy can fully suffice, particularly with regard to Acts, and most proposals have shed light upon the texts, the requirement for a single genre may impose unwelcome restrictions.[81]

While traces of a 'genre-as-pigeonhole' understanding compromise Parsons and Pervo's assessment, we affirm their exhortation to explore a wide array of literary influences on Luke-Acts. If we are to chart a place for Luke-Acts on 'mapless terrain', we will need to investigate the sorts of sources listed by Parsons and Pervo.

As we map out a course for future study of genre and Luke-Acts, we recommend moving beyond the somewhat facile question, 'What is the genre of Luke-Acts?' Instead, inspired by Rosenmeyer, we would recommend two questions focused on the elusive Lukas and his authorial aims. First, which sources did Lukas strive to emulate in his composition of two volumes for a certain Theophilos? And, second, how does his use of these sources illuminate his rhetorical purposes? As Gregory E. Sterling has noted, 'Luke-Acts does not have a direct literary parallel'.[82] Hence, bearing Parsons and Pervo's counsel in mind, we endorse current efforts to expand our repertoire of comparative material, from Sean A. Adams' work on collected biography to DooHee Lee's investigation of tragic elements in the historiographical tradition.[83] With Marius Reiser, we can appreciate what it might mean to read Acts along with other works that bear 'die Form einer historischen Monographie mit stark biographischer Ausrichtung'.[84] We expect that further comparative study of Luke-Acts and other Greco-Roman narratives will continue to pay interpretive dividends.

But the dominant Greco-Roman focus of current scholarship on the genre of Luke-Acts requires a sharp corrective.[85] In our study of Luke-Acts, we must keep

81 Parsons and Pervo, *Rethinking*, 43.

82 Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition*, 350.

83 Adams, *Genre of Acts*; D. Lee, *Luke-Acts and 'Tragic History': Communicating Gospel with the World* (WUNT II/346; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013).

84 'The form of a historical monograph with strong biographical orientation', M. Reiser, *Sprache und literarische Formen des Neuen Testaments: Eine Einführung* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2001) 111.

85 Early in his influential monograph on the genre of the Gospels, Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?*, 21 announces that he will 'concentrate for the rest of this study upon Graeco-Roman literature'.

in mind that, on the one hand, there is no decisive evidence that Lukas was acquainted with the corpus of any one particular Greco-Roman author. On the other hand, we know that Lukas knew the Septuagint, and most agree that he knew Mark's Gospel.[86] Hence, we should attend to the efforts of scholars such as Samson Uytanlet, who appropriately seeks to position Luke-Acts on the landscape of Jewish historiography.[87] Uytanlet observes – and seeks to counteract – a scholarly tendency to 'examine Luke's theology in light of Jewish writings and the Lukan writings in comparison with Greco-Roman literature'.[88] One should compare Lukan style to both non-Jewish and Jewish writings. For instance, drawing on the work of Alfred Wifstrand, Loveday Alexander likens Lukan imitation of Septuagintal style to non-Jewish use of atticising style, identifying such usage as a 'prestige code'. Whereas a non-Jewish author might atticise to set a certain tone, Lukas intentionally deploys 'heightened, formal, religiously-charged language' shaped by the Septuagint in his account of God's continued salvific intervention in the story of the people of God.[89] Whether Lukas knew Homer or Josephus can be debated; that he sought to continue the biblical history is widely accepted and worthy of greater attention.[90]

If Lukas strove to emulate the literary style and theological outlook of the Septuagint, while also drawing on Hellenistic Jewish and contemporary Greco-Roman prose conventions, then our scholarly studies should reflect similarly variegated avenues of inquiry. Our pigeon's plumage may be as vibrant as a peacock's; in such a situation, monochromatic comparisons between Luke-Acts and one particular (sub-)genre have limited value. Instead of seeking to classify Luke-Acts as a whole, we might attend to F. Gerald Downing's call to abandon the 'attempt to discern importantly distinctive *genres*', an endeavour that he labels 'mistaken and misleading'.[91] We have highlighted the problems with classifying

86 As Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition*, 352, affirms, '[i]t is universally acknowledged that the author of Luke-Acts knew the LXX'.

87 S. Uytanlet, *Luke-Acts and Jewish Historiography: A Study on the Theology, Literature, and Ideology of Luke-Acts* (WUNT II/366; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014). Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition*, 363–9 also evaluates possible links between Luke-Acts and particular Jewish historians. Cf. also B. S. Rosner, 'Acts and Biblical History', *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting*, vol. I: *The Book of Acts in its Ancient Literary Setting* (ed. B. W. Winter and A. D. Clarke; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 65–82.

88 Uytanlet, *Luke-Acts and Jewish Historiography*, 255.

89 L. Alexander, '*Septuaginta, Fachprosa, Imitatio*: Albert Wifstrand and the Language of Luke-Acts', *Die Apostelgeschichte und die hellenistische Geschichtsschreibung: Festschrift für Eckhard Plümacher zu seinem 65. Geburtstag* (ed. C. Breytenbach, J. Schröter and D. S. du Toit; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2004) 1–26, at 26.

90 E.g. J. Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (KEKNT; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998) 78.

91 F. G. Downing, 'Contemporary Analogies to the Gospels and Acts: "Genres" or "Motifs"?', *Synoptic Studies: The Ampleforth Conferences of 1982 and 1983* (ed. C. M. Tuckett; JSNTSup 7; Sheffield: JSOT, 1984) 51–65, at 51.

Luke-Acts – and other ancient prose works – in categories smaller than 'history', 'oratory' or 'philosophical dialogue'. We can accept a broad label for Luke-Acts, such as 'history' or 'prose narrative'. Then, within that large canopy, we might go on to look for various 'features' or 'motifs' shared by Luke-Acts and other Greek prose works.[92] This fine-grained analysis would make possible a fuller account of Lukas' literary technique by allowing a wider range of comparative material to remain 'in bounds'.[93]

6. Conclusion

The debate over the genre of Luke and Acts has been tainted by certain scholarly misconceptions. For instance, recourse to ancient genre theory has proved to be a stumbling block, given its essentialist tendencies, its emphasis on categorisation and its overwhelming focus on poetic genres. Freed from the futile attempt to fit Luke-Acts into a particular pre-existing ancient category, we can also avoid the tail-chasing debate over βίος vs ἱστορία. Luke-Acts is neither a biography nor a collected biography. As a two-volume work, it might loosely be classed with other ἱστορίαι, but not aligned with any sort of strict Thucydidean tradition. In short, we might say that Luke-Acts constitutes a unique, creative fusion of Jewish and Greco-Roman elements that stands alone as a two-volume literary unity.

Luke-Acts is unique. To our knowledge, there are no other two-volume Greek prose works that tell the life story of a founding figure in the first volume (cf. Acts 1.2), and that describe the spread of that figure's teaching and dominion (βασιλεία; cf. Acts 1.3; 28.31) throughout the known world in the second. Efforts to fit this work into a specific pre-existing generic category appear doomed from the start. No generic label will miraculously reveal to us the hitherto-hidden purpose of this two-volume work; trying to identify the genre of Luke-Acts in order to unveil its purpose requires putting the cart before the horse.

This conclusion may suggest that we believe Luke-Acts to be *sui generis*, yet Luke-Acts is no extraterrestrial wanderer lost in a first-century world.[94] Lukas wrote in a Greek prose readily understandable to educated elites, whether Roman or Jewish (or both). Lukas may not have set up a copy of Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities* or Diodorus Siculus' *Library of History* as his exemplar, but

92 Downing, 'Contemporary Analogies', 52 focuses his study on 'motifs'. Penner, *In Praise of Christian Origins*, 103 calls for further inquiry into particular 'features of composition'.

93 Note Alan J. Bale's warning against 'binary classification' in his *Genre and Narrative Coherence in the Acts of the Apostles* (LNTS 514; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015) 93.

94 That is, while we endorse the uniqueness of Luke-Acts from a taxonomist's perspective, we are not at all aiming at the sort of 'ontological' or 'superlative' claim that Jonathan Z. Smith has warned against in his *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990) 36–53. We are grateful to James Hamrick for drawing Smith's work to our attention.

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he tells a story in chronological order that incorporates elements of ἱστορία while telling the βίος of Jesus, as well as certain incidents in the lives of Jesus' followers. Lukas appears primarily motivated to tell his 'narrative about the things that have been fulfilled among us' (διήγησιν περὶ τῶν πεπληροφορημένων ἐν ἡμῖν πραγμάτων, Luke 1.1), not to fit this narrative into a pre-existing template.

Is Luke-Acts, then, a 'generic unity'? To our mind, if Dionysius' *Roman Antiquities* can be considered a generic unity, then Luke-Acts can be considered a generic unity. But this answer relies much more on the prior conclusion that Luke-Acts is a literary unity. If Luke-Acts is recognised as a literary unity (which the author of Acts 1.1–2 seems to expect), then these two volumes belong together on the 'mapless terrain' of ancient Greek prose. Matthew and Mark, of course, stand nearby, and John remains at no great distance. Understanding these first-century texts is not a matter of divining a suitable label. Instead, we need to explore and track the many connections between these texts and the great cloud of witnesses surrounding them.