

DANIEL B. GLOVER

# Patterns of Deification in the Acts of the Apostles

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen  
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*

576

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**Mohr Siebeck**

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Patterns of Deification  
in the Acts of the Apostles

Mohr Siebeck

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Το Anna.

ἐὰν εἰδῶ τὰ μυστήρια πάντα καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν γνῶσιν,  
ἀγάπην δὲ μὴ ἔχω, οὐθέν εἰμι.



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I recall that once, as an undergraduate student, I read from a book by one of my teachers. In the preface, he claimed that you never really finish a book; instead, you eventually just stop writing it. I rolled my eyes at this thought back then. How could the writing process possibly be that drawn out? After months of researching, writing, rewriting, editing, formatting, and rewriting some more, I am sure I see its truth clearly now. I am, therefore, obliged to acknowledge my gratitude and debts to those who helped me begin this project as well as bring it to a close.

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## Chapter 1

# Introduction

### 1.1 Problems to be Addressed

Five times through the course of Luke's narrative in Acts, an individual character is identified as (a) god.<sup>1</sup> The goal of this study is chiefly to answer the question, "Why?" There is a short and a long answer to this query. The short answer is simple, "For different reasons." The long answer is more complex, and it comprises the remainder of this study.

According to my reading, there is no single pattern of deification in the Acts of the Apostles – that is, there is no single, overarching purpose for which Luke employs the five deification scenes that occur throughout its narrative. There are, rather, *patterns* of deification, discrete literary units which cohere with repeated occurrences of a single motif but which are employed for different purposes with different results and to address different problems.<sup>2</sup> This interpretation runs against the grain of decades of scholarship, which has almost universally taken the series of deification scenes to make a single theological point: Luke uses deification scenes to critique the mythology, superstition, or naivete of polytheistic "paganism," whose religious system – in contrast to Judaism and Christianity – allows for humans to be (wrongly) perceived as gods. By contrast, Luke's own theological program is far more sophisticated. Gone are mythological categories. Humans are not gods, for there is only one God. This theologoumenon, many suggest, is inherited by Luke's Christianity from strictly monotheistic Judaism, and reproduced in his two volumes.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These acclamations occur in 8:9–25; 10:23–26; 12:20–23; 14:8–20; and 28:1–10.

<sup>2</sup> I take for granted here the definition of "motif" as provided in Chris Baldick, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), *s.v.*: "A situation, incident, idea, image, or character-type that is found in many different literary works, folktales, or myths; or any element of a work that is elaborated into a more general theme." It does not matter, in my opinion, whether we refer to this recurrent phenomenon as a motif or theme (or even leitmotif), so long as we recognize that the idea of deification recurs in Acts several times, that the idea as an elemental literary structure occurs elsewhere and is therefore comparable to those manifestations, and that its employment may not serve the same purpose or engender precisely the same effect at each occurrence. Likewise, on "pattern(s)" see *OED*, *s.v.* A.1.1.a.

<sup>3</sup> On Luke's purpose in identifying Christianity as the natural outgrowth of Judaism and as Judaism, see the now-classic work of Burton Scott Easton, *Early Christianity: The Pur-*

Rarely have scholars read these deification scenes within their narrative and historical settings with sufficient care. As regards the narrative setting, scholars working on the deification scenes tend to take one or another of the deification scenes (usually 14:8–20 but sometimes also 10:23–27) as normative and read the remaining acclamations in light of a particular interpretation of that one pericope. As we shall see, however, such reading strategies run aground when they arrive at the final acclamation (28:1–10), which breaks the exegetical bow of the interpretive ship. One may wonder, perhaps with some skepticism, whether, like Paul and his companions (Acts 27), this interpretation will wash ashore and find firm footing once more. With regard to scholarly inattention given to the historical context of the acclamations, the noticeable lack of discussion of the various conceptions of divinity assumed in these acclamations has had the effect of flattening out the distinctiveness of each acclamation, thus forcing all to conform to a singular pattern and purpose. But when one attempts to hear the acclamations of Acts with “ancient Mediterranean ears,” a quite different picture emerges. With distinctive concepts of divinity at work, discrete purposes may also be perceived, and it is my contention that such differences in concept and purpose serve to upend some common interpretations of Acts, especially in relation to its characterizations of Peter and Paul.

## 1.2 Review of Recent Scholarly Trends on the Deification Scenes

Although many of the passages in Acts which contain a deification scene have been well-worked many times over no full-length study of all the deification scenes in Acts has appeared to date. This lacuna has created a problem that resonates through the interpretation of all the acclamations because the scholarly tendency over the last century or so has been to take one (usually Acts 14:8–20) or perhaps two (Acts 10:25–26 and 14) as the interpretive matrix through which to judge all the acclamations.<sup>4</sup> The result of such effort has been a homogenization of the acclamations manifest in the assumption that all the acclamations must be addressing the same thing or same sorts of things, when, in fact, something much more complex appears to be taking

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*pose of Acts and Other Papers*, ed. Frederick C. Grant (Greenwich, CT: Seabury, 1954), 41–57 and more recently David P. Moessner, *Luke the Historian of Israel's Legacy, Theologian of Israel's Christ: A New Reading of the Gospel Acts of Luke*, BZNW 182 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016). One outworking of this tendency can be found in the excellent study of Isaac W. Oliver, *Luke's Jewish Eschatology: The National Restoration of Israel in Luke-Acts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> See the literature cited in Chapters 4 and 5.

place in each acclamation, which addresses different concerns, whether historical, literary, or theological.<sup>5</sup> The following review discusses in broad strokes how the answer scholars tend to give regarding the presence and purpose of the acclamations are inadequate and beckon further consideration. Each chapter naturally engages with relevant scholarship in greater depth.

A pervasive tendency in scholarship dealing with the deification scenes in Acts is to associate the acclamations with “paganism” or with gentiles. Take, for instance, Ute Eisen’s comments on Cornelius’s *proskynēsis* in Acts 10:26:

Petrus deutet diese Proskynese als göttliche Verehrung und weist sie imperativisch zurück (Act 10,26). Solche Missverständnisse werden in den Acta im Zusammenhang der Begegnung der ZeugInnen [sic] mit HeidInnen [sic] mehrfach berichtet. So etwa werden auch Paulus und Barnabas in Lystra für Götter gehalten (Act 14,11ff.) oder Paulus, nachdem er einen Schlangenbiss überlebt hat (Act 28,3–6).<sup>6</sup>

The reigning assumption behind this claim and many others like it is that such groups (identified collectively as “pagans”) are more likely to believe a human to be a god than Jewish groups. As the second chapter of this study demonstrates, that assumption is tenuous at best. Ancient Judaism was far more diverse than many New Testament scholars admit. Several streams of ancient Judaism allowed for the worship of beings beside, in addition to, or *as* Yahweh.

Furthermore, the observation that the acclamations in Acts occur in gentile areas or with gentile characters often distorts more than it illumines. Herod is Jewish, and yet he is a self-deifier.<sup>7</sup> Simon is a Samaritan, and, although Samaritan theology was different than “mainstream” Palestinian Judaism, Samaritans shared much in common with their Palestinian neighbors (cf., e.g., John 4:16–26) and can scarcely be regarded as “pagan” or “gentiles.”<sup>8</sup> Neither does “pagan” or “gentile” adequately describe Cornelius, who falls be-

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<sup>5</sup> “Assumption” is appropriate here because no one, save perhaps Stenschke, discussed below, sufficiently argues the point.

<sup>6</sup> Ute E. Eisen, *Die Poetik der Apostelgeschichte. Eine narratologische Studie*, NTOA 58 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 178 (emphasis added).

<sup>7</sup> On the issue of Herod’s life and Jewish identity, see Josephus, *J.W.* 2.214–22; *Ant.* 19.292–352. That the delegates from Tyre and Sidon are thought by scholars to be entirely pagan also assumes what is not said in the narrative. By contrast, archaeological evidence suggests that Jews, too, were residents of Tyre and Sidon, even if they remained, in the main, a minority. On evidence for Jews living in Tyre and Sidon, see Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 2:1958–60, noting Josephus, *J.W.* 2.478–79; *Ant.* 17.324.

<sup>8</sup> On Samaritans as Jews in Luke/Acts, see especially Jacob Jervell, “The Lost Sheep of the House of Israel: The Understandings of the Samaritans in Luke-Acts,” in *Luke and the People of God: A New Look at Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), 113–32.



fore Peter's feet in worship.<sup>9</sup> Luke describes him in generous terms as righteous and worthy (10:2, 22). His activity (10:2–4), if not his ethnicity, places him very near the people of God, all of whom respect him (10:22). He is described as “devout and God-fearing (εὐσεβῆς καὶ φοβούμενος τὸν θεόν) with all his house” (10:2).<sup>10</sup> Whether φοβούμενος τὸν θεόν constitutes a *terminus technicus* in antiquity for a group of uncircumcised but otherwise Torah-observant gentiles lies beyond the present concern. What this phrase does indicate, however, is that Cornelius is not labeled δίκαιος in vain. His obedience to the Torah and fear of God have made him a righteous man, whose prayers and almsgiving are received by God as a sacrifice. The term “pagan,” therefore, is ill-suited to describe Cornelius's character or his “pattern of religion.”<sup>11</sup>

In spite of these problems, many nevertheless endeavor to read the deification scenes as manifestations of “paganism,” a semi-homogenous entity, set up in contrast to Jewish monotheism. Luke opposes and critiques this “paganism” in the deification scenes. Chief among such works of scholarship stands Christoph Stenschke's massive study of pre-converted gentiles in the Lukan *Doppelwerk*.<sup>12</sup> Because Stenschke argues that, for Luke, all humans (but especially gentiles) are in need of salvation, which includes a deliverance from their current epistemic condition, Stenschke tends to view the problem common to gentiles as “paganism” – a term he never defines. But by categorizing Simon and Herod as gentiles/pagans and associating the deification scenes with their pagan point-of-view, Stenschke faces two exegetical problems. First, as I have mentioned, Simon and Herod are not gentiles, and it is hard to describe them as “pagans” either.<sup>13</sup> Simon's Samaritanism, even if Luke

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<sup>9</sup> On Cornelius's prostration (προσκύνησις) as “worship,” see section 4.2.1 in Chapter 4 below.

<sup>10</sup> Unless otherwise marked, translations of biblical texts in this study are my own. In addition, the Greek text of the NT quoted in this work and serving as the basis for my translations is taken from the standard hand-edition, NA27. The text of Acts and the Catholic Epistles have been checked against the recent *Editio Critica Maior* fascicles for those texts, but I have found the text-critical method employed for that edition problematic in some respects – on which, see Daniel B. Glover, “The Promises Fulfilled for Whose Children? The Problem of the Text of Acts 13:33 in Contemporary Debate,” *JBL* 139 (2020): 789–807. A more wide-ranging critique of the method may be found in Stephen C. Carlson, “A Bias at the Heart of the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method (CBGM),” *JBL* 139 (2020): 319–40. Gratefully, most text-critical disputes concerning those texts take place away from those passages that are our primary concern.

<sup>11</sup> I take this term from E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 12–18.

<sup>12</sup> Christoph W. Stenschke, *Luke's Portrait of Gentiles Prior to Their Coming to Faith*, WUNT 2/108 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Stenschke makes some analytically problematic associations with the terms “gentile” and “pagan” (both *Heiden* in German), an association frequently found in German-

views Samaritans as other than Jewish, is still perceptibly distinct, from a Lukan perspective, from “paganism” and a gentile identity.<sup>14</sup> Herod, too, was a well-known Jew, but Stenschke avoids this issue by attributing the acclamation to an exclusively gentile audience and eliding the issue of Herod’s assent to the acclamation, which results in his death, with the result that this reading downplays Herod’s complicity against the grain of the Lukan text (n.b. the ἄνθ’ ὧν in 12:23).<sup>15</sup>

While Stenschke’s attributions of the deification scenes in 8:9–10; 10:25; and 12:22 to “paganism” are exegetically problematic, his exegesis of Acts 14:8–20 is questionable (see Chapter 4 below), and his reading of Acts 28:1–10, shared by many others, creates a conundrum.<sup>16</sup> Luke’s reliance upon traditional mythology in Acts 14:8–20 – widely acknowledged but insufficiently appreciated in contemporary exegesis – shifts the interpretation away from a strong critique of “paganism” or the Lystrans. And if, as is claimed, Luke so abhors “pagan” ascriptions of divinity, why is the one in Acts 28:1–10 conspicuously left “uncorrected”? Stenschke’s explanation is that “neither acclamation nor intention and/or preparation to worship is mentioned as in Acts 12:22 or 14:11.”<sup>17</sup> But such an explanation is hardly sufficient: it both begs the question that the acclamation was not vocalized – in contrast to the inceptive sense of ἔλεγον in 28:6 – and seems to countervail the generally positive

language scholarship. But to be ethnically non-Jewish need not imply that one is polytheistic, even in the ancient world. A strong monotheistic strain was already prevalent among Greek philosophers even if they were “outwardly” polytheistic. See the collection of essays in Polymnia Athanassadi and Michael Frede, eds., *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) as well as the more recent collection, Stephen Mitchell and Peter Van Nuffelen, eds., *One God. Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), which offers an exciting debate on the issue of “monotheism” in the (non-Christian) Roman world.

<sup>14</sup> See Stenschke, *Luke’s Portrait of Gentiles*, 68–69 on Samaritans as non-Jews. See also 2 Kings 17; Sir 50:25–26; 2 Macc 6:1–2; Josephus, *Ant.* 9.288–91; 11.302–12, 340–47; 12.257–64. On the contested relationship between Jews and Samaritans, see Josephus, *J.W.* 2.232–46, 255–57; *Ant.* 18; Tacitus, *Ann.* 12.54. Cf. Luke 10:25–37. The similarity between Jewish and Samaritan religious outlook is, perhaps ironically, most clearly perceptible in John 4:1–42. The impression left by these sources is that, while earlier “purist” Jewish sources preferred to deny the Jewish heritage of Samaritans, while later sources (e.g., Josephus) vacillate, and all evince some hostility between the groups. Hostility among Jewish groups, however, are nothing foreign to Jewish history, as the cases of the Dead Sea scrolls and the Jewish community at Elephantine reveal with utmost clarity.

<sup>15</sup> As I have already pointed out, the entirely gentile audience in 12:20–23 is no more than an assumption. See Stenschke’s discussion in *Luke’s Portrait of Gentiles*, 71, 73–74.

<sup>16</sup> Joshua W. Jipp has already detailed these problems extensively. See his *Divine Visitations and Hospitality to Strangers in Luke-Acts: An Interpretation of the Malta Episode in Acts 28:1–10*, NovTSup 153 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 1–58.

<sup>17</sup> Stenschke, *Luke’s Portrait of Gentiles*, 97. See also Ben Witherington, III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 779.

characterization of the Maltese as hospitable and open to receiving the gospel (see especially 28:9–10).

Hoping to address the ostensible disparity between Luke’s rejections of deification scenes as misdirected praise and the apparently “accepted” acclamation of Acts 28:1–10, Joshua Jipp’s much-needed study fills a noticeable gap.<sup>18</sup> His solution proposes that the hospitality shown by the Maltese figures their characters positively, and so we should hesitate to read their divine ascription of Paul as the butt of the joke or to depict them as ignorant barbarians. In at least one significant way (φιλανθρωπία), they represent the best of Greco-Roman culture. Jipp, thus, attempts to read the deification scene in Acts 28:1–10 within the broader context of hospitality and divine visitation known to the ancient Mediterranean. He concludes that Paul’s visit represents a “theoxeny,” or the visitation of a foreign god. As we shall see, however, Jipp’s category, as represented in the *comparanda* that he discusses, essentially reflects the ancient concept of a “disguised deity,” but this is not what he wishes to convey.<sup>19</sup> He insists that we read Acts 28:1–10 in light of his interpretation of Acts 14:8–20, according to which Paul rejects any ascription of divinity. While his focus on the acclamation in Acts 28:1–10 is commendable for attempting to take seriously the apparently Lukan perspective reflected in the Maltese’s response, the problem with Jipp’s study is essentially that it is guided by the same questionable interpretation of Acts 14:8–20 as Stenschke and others by positing that Luke’s depiction of the rejection of the divine honors offered to Paul and Barnabas represents a Lukan criticism of “paganism.”<sup>20</sup> Luke and his version of Paul are essentially strict monotheists,

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<sup>18</sup> Jipp, *Divine Visitations*. For a closer review of Jipp’s work, see section 5.1 (pp. 273–77) of the present study below.

<sup>19</sup> On disguised deities, see section 1.2.6 below.

<sup>20</sup> The most recent example of this reading is Brittany E. Wilson, *The Embodied God: Seeing the Divine in Luke-Acts and the Early Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 42–53. This otherwise brilliant volume follows the same exegetical trends just outlined. Wilson claims not only that “Luke uses idolatry rhetoric to critique the notion that the gods of the Greco-Roman pantheon could descend in human form” (p. 42) – a claim based solely on the term μάταιος in 14:15 – but also asserts (without argument) that “Luke does not so much criticize anthropomorphic representations of the divine but ‘polytheism’ more broadly construed” (p. 44). This, Wilson suggests, may be observed as “part of a larger pattern in Acts” (p. 50; and again on p. 51) that involves the deifications of Simon (Acts 8:9–10) and Herod (Acts 12:20–23) as well as the prostration of Cornelius before Peter (Acts 10:25–26). Paul’s deification in Malta, of course, breaks this supposedly singular “pattern,” and Wilson appeals to Jipp’s work to explain that the reader must have, by this point, known that this identification was incorrect based on the foregoing pattern. My argument that these acclamations comprise not a pattern but several patterns complicates this argument considerably, but her reading of God’s embodiment in Jesus and the manner of his shared power through the Spirit is quite consistent with how I read Luke’s characterization of Paul as a *theios anēr*.

so, while the Maltese correctly perceive divine power at work in Paul, they, like the Lystrans, are ultimately wrong to call him a god.

While the studies overviewed here by no means offer a comprehensive look at the issue, they reveal a persistent problem – trying to identify a single, theological purpose that explains the presence of the deification scenes. That purpose is almost always thought to be a criticism of “paganism.”

The issue with this solution, however, is that, at most, “paganism” as an analytical category *negatively* describes the religion of the Lystrans (14:8–20) and perhaps also of the Maltese (28:1–10) – that is, their mode of religiousness is Greco-Roman “religion” (= “paganism”) and is defined only as something distinct from Judaism and, therefore, Christianity.<sup>21</sup> What is emphasized here is difference. Conversely, one might emphasize the similarity between Christianity and Greco-Roman religion.<sup>22</sup> As Luke Timothy Johnson remarks: “Christians were religious pretty much in the same way that Gentiles [i.e., “pagans”] were religious.”<sup>23</sup> Johnson later shows how each of his taxonomical categories of “ways of being religious” or ways of “mediating divine power” in the ancient Mediterranean finds expression in the New Testament. Thus, discussions of “paganism,” “polytheism,” “superstition,” and the like, when set in contrast to the theologies and religious practices as outlined in the New Testament, prove to be of little analytical value.

The essentialism in which these discussions are frequently engaged also proves fruitless. Essentializing “paganism” as the belief that there were many gods will not be useful in discussing New Testament authors who seem to have thought the same thing (e.g., 1 Cor 8:5–6; 10:20; cf. LXX Ps 95:5) whereas essentializing “paganism” as the superstitious belief that gods may be encountered in human form will only obstruct historical description when one considers how the New Testament authors frequently employ Greco-Roman religious and mythological categories to describe the human Jesus as (a) God.<sup>24</sup> A more helpful path to follow in our study of the deification scenes

<sup>21</sup> The religion or religious patterns of the Maltese is never described. All that Luke describes of these “barbarians” is that they were surprisingly hospitable and were amazed by Paul’s superhuman resistance to the venomous snake to the point that they acclaimed him a god. “Barbarian” did not connote any specific religious practice, and the apparent belief in Dikē as a personified heavenly being was known also to Hellenistic Judaism (Wis 1:8; 4 Macc 18:22; Josephus, *J.W.* 1.84).

<sup>22</sup> See section “5.4. ‘Paganism’: A Brief Note on Terminology” below for an expansion of these points.

<sup>23</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *Among the Gentiles: Greco-Roman Religion and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), ix.

<sup>24</sup> On this point, see especially Charles H. Talbert, *What Is a Gospel? The Genre of the Canonical Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977); *idem*, *Reading Luke-Acts in Its Mediterranean Milieu*, NovTSup 107 (Leiden: Brill, 2003); *idem*, *The Development of Christology During the First Hundred Years and Other Essays on Early Christian Christology*, NovTSup 140 (Leiden: Brill, 2011); M. David Litwa, *Jesus Deus: The Early Christian Depic-*

in Acts is to determine the ways in which Luke adopts, rejects, and/or transforms the ancient divine concepts at work in these acclamations. How, in other words, does Luke conform to, or resist, already-set patterns of deification in the ancient world?

### 1.3 The Argument of This Study

The argument of the present study is that the deification scenes exhibit not one pattern of deification but several. By drawing on different concepts of divinity, various characters throughout the narrative of Acts deify themselves or are deified by the divine acclamations of others. These deifications and self-deifications, rather than reflecting a uniform “pagan” polytheism, actually draw on conceptually distinct notions of divinity. These concepts of divinity are not unique to “paganism” or to “polytheism” but are shared by Jewish and Christian writers during the centuries surrounding our period. The concepts used in Acts to deify oneself or another range from the claim that the individual is the eternal, uncreated creator-God to the claim that certain, specific eternal gods have appeared in the appearance of humans to the claim that one is a god because he is a benefactor to the claim that one is a *theios anēr*. Some of the deifying claims made are set up in competition with the religious message or ideology advocated by Luke’s writings. Giving attention to the different divine concepts at work in each of these acclamations will help contemporary readers recognize with greater clarity the theological claims that are made in each Lukan pericope.

In the succeeding chapters, I argue that the Lukan claims are as follows: 1) Simon’s and Herod’s self-deifications discredit them both. Simon’s self-deifying, on the one hand, serves to immunize the Lukan audience against the competitive religious claims of nascent Simonism, while Herod’s manipulative self-aggrandizing serves to rebuke the self-centered and manipulative system of imperial benefaction. This criticism of Herod is contrasted with 2) Peter’s denial of divinity, which, like Paul’s denial in Acts 14:14–18, serves to magnify Peter’s honor. Cornelius’s acclamation of Peter as a divine benefactor brings to the fore the issue of the equality of gentiles within the growing Christian community. Even Peter, the first leader of the Jerusalem church, placed himself on par with the gentile Cornelius, a worthy and deserving recipient of salvation. This passage at once magnifies Peter’s honor as a philosopher, who renounces excessive honors, and uses that characterization to make a point about the equality of the Jew and the Greek.

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*tion of Jesus as a Mediterranean God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014); Richard C. Miller, “Mark’s Empty Tomb and Other Translation Fables in Classical Antiquity,” *JBL* 129 (2010): 759–76.

Paul's denial of divinity similarly fits the apostle to the gentiles within the framework of a philosopher. What he denies here, however, is not divinity in the abstract; rather, he and Barnabas are identified with Zeus and Hermes, and their refusal involves restraining the crowds from sacrificing to Zeus. I argue that even if Paul were thought by Luke to be divine, contemporary philosophical discourse would typically preclude an honorable philosopher from accepting such praise. That level of divinity, to put it simply, was off-limits to human beings. To entertain it was hubris, and to claim it, treacherous (cf. Acts 8:20). By contrast, Paul is depicted as an ideal philosopher, whose proclamation about the God he serves refuses identification with Zeus in particular. This double denial – that Paul and Barnabas are not Zeus and Hermes as well as that the God he proclaims is, in contrast, the “true and living God” – suggests an element of religious competition between the worship of Paul's God – the God of Israel – and Zeus, an element discernable in other passages in Acts (e.g., 16:17).

Finally, 3) Luke has the Maltese acclaim Paul as a god once more. This time, however, neither Paul, the narrator, nor some other character deny their claim. Since this claim is presented to Paul's credit and since the Maltese are, by all accounts, characterized in a surprisingly positive light, denying the divine claim on Luke's behalf as contemporary readers does not appear to be such an easy task as many interpreters have supposed. Rather, several elements in the narrative have prepared Luke's audience for precisely this identification. This final deification scene, thus, serves as the culmination of Luke's portrayal of Paul as a *theios anēr*. Regarding Paul as a *theios anēr* is consistent with the other divine acclamations and their responses through the Book of Acts, and such a portrayal likely serves Luke's interest in legitimizing the Christian proclamation embodied in (Luke's version of) Paul's message for his second-century audience. Rather than a simple critique of one thing (“paganism”), then, Luke's deification scenes address several different problems and serve different purposes.

## 1.4 Methodology

My central questions concern the Lukan perspective so far as it can be gleaned from the narrative as it would have been understood by Acts' earliest audiences, and I utilize a comparative-literary approach to address them. My interests reside, therefore, on both the literary and historical levels by asking how (a) Luke has shaped his narrative (b) to be understood by his particular audience(s).<sup>25</sup> My emphasis on locating the interpretation of the narrative in

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<sup>25</sup> This is another way, of course, of asking, “What was Luke's intent?” without wading too far through the slough of debate about knowing intention or reading minds. This de-

the religious and literary context of the ancient Mediterranean might lead one to consider this approach a kind of reader-response, which is concerned above all with Luke's *primary* audiences.<sup>26</sup> Because the interpretive game takes place between both author and audience, we should not privilege one to the exclusion of the other without expecting to miss the goalposts entirely.<sup>27</sup> To keep my description direct: My method asks about both composition and reception, by drawing on comparable texts, inscriptions, and concepts from across the ancient Mediterranean to illuminate author, audience, and the storyworld presented by the text.<sup>28</sup> My hope is that, by asking such questions, we

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bate, begun in large measure in the work of Beardsley, Wimsatt, Barthes, and Foucault, has borne little exegetical fruit. As a recent example of this debate, see, for instance, Sandra Heinen, "Exegesis without Authorial Intention? On the Role of the 'Author Construct' in Text Interpretation," in *Biblical Exegesis Without Authorial Intention? Interdisciplinary Approaches to Authorship and Meaning*, ed. Clarissa Bleu, *BibInt* 172 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 7–23. Perhaps the easiest way to express my goal without denying entirely Barthes's and Foucault's advocacy for the ubiquity of ambivalence and polysemy in interpretation is to inquire what are the kinds of readings that Luke, given what we can know historically, may have expected his earliest readers/hearers to produce or readings that, though not necessarily expected by Luke, would nonetheless conform to Luke's patterns of thinking and living. On this last point, see helpfully Umberto Eco, "Between Author and Text," in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 67–88. What, in other words, is on Luke's "horizon of expectation"?

<sup>26</sup> One might think of Mark Allan Powell's discussion of an "author-oriented narrative criticism" and its similarity to certain approaches to reader-response criticisms, claiming the two approaches are "almost identical reading strategies." See his "Narrative Criticism: The Emergence of a Prominent Reading Strategy," in *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Kelly R. Iverson and Christopher W. Skinner (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2011), 19–44 (esp. 26–32), quoted at 39. I would note that all narrative critics follow a similar procedure of privileging this kind of "reception" when they attribute any verb of interpretation, understanding, or knowing to the subject "implied reader."

<sup>27</sup> On language (i.e., communication) as "game," see esp. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958); *idem*, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte, 4th rev. ed. (West Sussex: Wiley, 2009). Wittgenstein's discussion of analogical inference plays an important role in my own conceptions of author, audience, purpose, and meaning.

<sup>28</sup> By "reception," I do not mean *Wirkungsgeschichte*, though this is not excluded from the start. I mean, rather, an interpretation that could conceivably derive from an ancient Mediterranean hearer or reader, confirmed when possible or available by appeals to actual ancient interpretations. Rick Strelan, *Strange Acts: Studies in the Cultural World of the Acts of the Apostles*, *BZNW* 126 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004), 7–8 is helpful in this regard. As regards drawing comparison, it is important to keep Smith's words and warning in mind: "In the case of the study of religion, as in any disciplined inquiry, comparison, in its strongest form, brings differences together within the space of the scholar's mind for the scholar's own intellectual reasons. It is the scholar who makes their cohabitation – their 'sameness' – possible, not 'natural' affinities or processes of history." See Jonathan Z.

will be able to illumine the narrative, history, and message of each deification scene in Acts.<sup>29</sup>

## 1.5 Presuppositions

This study, as with any other, makes several interpretively significant assumptions. Mine concern the Book of Acts, its author and audience, appropriate *comparanda*, and the terminological problems associated with the reigning solution for the problems of the deification scenes in Acts, all of which must be noted as readers proceed. While each supposition could be an essay unto itself, here I will give only the supposition and some reasons I find convincing for it. We need not here miss the forest for fixating upon just a few trees.

### 1.5.1 *The Date of Acts*

The date of the Book of Acts is a difficult issue to pin down, but it is requisite for studying the deification scenes as well as many other interpretive issues. In this study, although the scholarly “consensus” dates Acts into the last quarter of the first century (usually ca. 80–90 CE), I presuppose a second-century dating of Luke/Acts.<sup>30</sup> Unlike the prevailing scholarly consensus, the evidence for a second-century dating is strong.<sup>31</sup>

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Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparisons of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 51–53, quoted at 51.

<sup>29</sup> My readers are reading well should they perceive the influence of Charles Talbert’s approach here. See his *Reading Acts: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), xiv; *Reading Luke-Acts in Its Mediterranean Milieu* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 14–18: “Sometimes, starting with the question, ‘How would the authorial audience have heard this text,’ leads to a conclusion about what the author of the text probably intended” (17). See too J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 42.

<sup>30</sup> This consensus date (80–90 CE) is usually presumed on the basis of the so-called “we-passages” in Acts: if Luke were a companion of Paul, so the argument goes, he cannot have been writing too much later than the 60s, when Paul was executed. Most recent scholarship on the we-passages, however, suspects Luke’s use of a source or, alternatively, a literary convention. See Stanley E. Porter, *The Paul of Acts: Essays in Literary Criticism, Rhetoric, and Theology*, WUNT 115 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 10–46, arguing these passages are a singular source used by Luke but predating him. More discussion of a relevant we-passage in Acts 28:1–10 is discussed in Chapter 5 below. I speak of a “consensus” on the basis of the number of commentators on Acts and writers of New Testament introductions who argue (more often assume) a first-century date. The tide, however, appears to be shifting towards locating Acts in the second century.

<sup>31</sup> The consensus view has already been taken to task by Knut Backhaus, “Zur Datierung der Apostelgeschichte. Ein Ordnungsversuch im chronologischen Chaos,” *ZNW* 108,



The first certain references to the book of Acts are by Justin Martyr, probably writing not earlier than ca. 150 CE, thus providing a *terminus ante quem*.<sup>32</sup> Since it is likely that Acts followed the composition and publication of the Gospel of Luke, and since Luke uses the Gospels of Mark and – here I depart from another longstanding but deteriorating scholarly consensus – Matthew, we can date the Gospel of Luke no earlier than ca. 85–95 CE, a date established in part on the assumption of Markan priority and in part upon echoes of Matthew’s Gospel throughout the Ignatian epistles.<sup>33</sup> A narrower date may be achieved by observing that the author of Acts depends in several instances upon Josephus’s *Antiquities of the Jews*.<sup>34</sup> Since Josephus’s work

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no. 2 (2017): 212–58. He observes arguments for the standard dating are “surprisingly weak” (*überraschend schwach*). The motivation to date Acts before the end of the first century is based almost entirely upon conceiving Luke as a companion of Paul and reading the “we-sections” in Acts as his own eye-witness testimony. As Joseph Fitzmyer (*The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 31 [New York: Doubleday, 1998], 54) himself admits, “there is no real proof for it [a date of ca. 80–85].” See Backhaus, “Zur Datierung,” 213–24 for discussion of the consensus issues with extensive bibliography.

<sup>32</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 1:30–48 provides and extensive listing of all data. Andrew Gregory (*The Reception of Luke and Acts in the Period before Irenaeus: Looking for Luke in the Second Century*, WUNT 2/169 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003]) argues that we cannot be certain that Justin knows Acts; rather, he claims, the first certain reference to Acts is found in Irenaeus. If, however, Justin, *1 Apol.* 50.12 is not evidence of a dependence upon a narrative very much like that of Acts, I find it difficult ever to make any claim about literary dependence in the ancient world without express confirmation from the author.

<sup>33</sup> On Acts following Luke’s Gospel, see Charles H. Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke-Acts*, SBLMS 20 (Missoula, MT: SBL Press, 1976), *passim*. I. Howard Marshall, “Acts and the Former Treatise,” in *The Book of Acts in Its Ancient Literary Setting*, ed. Bruce W. Winter and Andrew D. Clarke, vol. 1 of *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, ed. Bruce W. Winter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 163–82 is also worth consulting, though his primary focus is on the narrative unity of Luke and Acts. On Lukan dependence on Matthew, see Michael Goulder, *Luke: A New Paradigm*, 2 vols., JSNTSup 20 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1989); Mark Goodacre, *The Case against Q: Studies in Markan Priority and the Synoptic Problem* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002), 152–69 and *passim*; Mikeal C. Parsons, “Hearing Acts as a Sequel to a Multi-form Gospel: Historical and Hermeneutical Reflections on Acts, Luke, and the ΠΙΟΛΛΟΙ,” in *Rethinking the Reception and Unity of Luke and Acts*, ed. Andrew Gregory and Kavin Rowe (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010), 128–52. On Matthean echoes in the letters of Ignatius, see W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols., ICC (London: 1988–97), 1:130.

<sup>34</sup> Not including many close parallels between the Gospel of Luke and Josephus, see, e.g., Acts 2:1–7 (*J.W.* 2.117–18; *Ant.* 18.1–5); 3:1–2 (*J.W.* 2.215; *Ant.* 18.237; 20.138); 3:10–14 (*Ant.* 18.117); 3:19 (*Ant.* 18.109–19); 5:36–37 (*Ant.* 20.97–102); 8:26–39 (*Ant.* 20.44–46); 13:7 (*Ant.* 1.143; 20.141–43); 11:27–29 (*Ant.* 20.101); 12:20–23 (*Ant.* 19.343–52); 19:11–27 (*Ant.* 17.222–342); 19:23–38 (*J.W.* 7.42–62; no parallel with *Antiquities*);

was not published until ca. 94 CE, it is unlikely Luke would have had the opportunity to acquire, read (or, perhaps, hear), and utilize this document as a source until the early second century, leaving ca. 100 CE as the *terminus post quem* for Acts.<sup>35</sup> This *terminus post quem* finds strength from the supposition that Luke made use of the *Corpus Paulinum*, which most scholars since

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21:23–24 (*Ant.* 19.294); 21:30–33 (*J.W.* 2.11; no parallel with *Antiquities*); 21:38 (*J.W.* 2.261–63; *Ant.* 20.169–72); 23:12–35 (*Ant.* 15.282–91); 24:24 (*Ant.* 20.141–43); 25:13, 23 with 26:30 (*Ant.* 20.145–46); 25:23–26:32 (*Ant.* 16.29–57). (Many of these parallels are cited by Carl R. Holladay, *Acts: A Commentary*, NTL [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016], 6 n. 33, drawing from Pervo, cited below.) Scholars have long observed these parallels; most consider that Lukan dependence upon Josephus is the best explanation. Consequently, most scholars working on the specific question of Luke’s relation to Josephus date Acts or Luke and Acts in the second century as a result. See Paul W. Schmiedel, “Theudas,” *Encyclopaedia Biblica: A Critical Dictionary of the Literary, Political and Religious History, the Archaeology, Geography, and Natural History of the Bible*, 4 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1899), 4:5049–57 (here 5054–56); F. C. Burkitt, *The Gospel History and Its Transmission* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1906), 105–10; Morton Scott Enslin, *Christian Beginnings* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1938), 422–24; John Knox, *Marcion and the New Testament: An Essay in the Early History of the Canon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), 128–29, 136–37; Joseph Klausner, *From Jesus to Paul*, trans. William F. Stinespring (London: Allen & Unwin, 1944), 225–27; Barbara Shellard, *New Light on Luke: Its Purpose, Sources, and Literary Context*, JSNTSup 215 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 31–34; Richard I. Pervo, *Dating Acts: Between the Evangelists and the Apologists* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2006), 149–200; Steve Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 251–95; Joseph B. Tyson, *Marcion and Luke-Acts: A Defining Struggle* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2006) 14–15. The parallels, both individual and structural, drawn by Mason in particular are difficult to explain apart from Lukan dependence on Josephus, and not the other way round. For my more extensive argument in favor of Lukan dependence upon Josephus, see Daniel B. Glover, “‘For That Is What His Name Means’ (Acts 13:8): Luke’s Etymology of Elymas the Magician,” *CBQ* 84 (2022): 609–26.

Having just cited Pervo, I should note at the outset that his work is occasionally cited and engaged in this study (especially in Chapters 4 and 5) because several arguments he made are relevant to our subject matter, and failure to attribute the origination of such information would, of course, be plagiarism – or at least misleading. The guild of New Testament scholarship of an earlier period, too, was rife with anti-Semites (e.g., Kittel); nevertheless, the work of such figures is occasionally relevant to the task at hand. Engagement with the work and arguments of Pervo and other persons of low moral standing should in no way be understood as an endorsement of their lives or characters, which could be both flawed and disturbing; neither should citation of any scholar here be so regarded.

<sup>35</sup> For the date of the *Antiquities*, see Daniel R. Schwartz, “Many Sources but a Single Author: Josephus’s *Jewish Antiquities*,” in *A Companion to Josephus*, ed. Honora Howell Chapman and Zuleika Rodgers, Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World (Oxford: Wiley, 2016), 36–58, here 36, as well as the literature he cites on the possibility of a second edition of the *Antiquities* published somewhat later.

Goodspeed believe to have been compiled and circulated only at the tail end of the first century.<sup>36</sup>

Some scholars have looked to Luke's purpose in writing as a way to narrow down the date of Acts. In this vein, Joseph Tyson attempts to read Acts as a second-century document. In doing so, he concludes that Acts (alongside canonical Luke) is a response to the Marcionite controversy. Although many date Marcion's rise to the 140s CE, Tyson dates it earlier to ca. 120–25 CE.<sup>37</sup> Tyson, therefore, dates Acts (and canonical Luke) to this same period.<sup>38</sup> Tyson's attempt to redate Marcion, depending in no small measure on the work of Joseph Hoffmann, has not been well-received by patristic scholars, so if one should follow Tyson, he or she will find it necessary to date Acts as late as the fifth decade of the second century.<sup>39</sup>

More convincing approaches have been spearheaded by Knut Backhaus and Laura Nasrallah. Backhaus argues forcefully that the external evidence (that is, Luke's use of datable sources and datable sources' use of Luke/Acts) cannot be determinative in dating Acts more precisely than the broad range ca. 100–150 CE.<sup>40</sup> The best approach, in his estimation, is to assume this

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<sup>36</sup> On Lukan use of the Pauline letters, see Ryan Schellenberg, "The First Pauline Chronologist? Paul's Itinerary in the Letters and in Acts," *JBL* 134 (2015): 193–213; Richard I. Pervo, *The Making of Paul: Constructions of the Apostle in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 23–61, 190–302. On the development of a Pauline letter collection, Pervo concludes: "[The] data support the view that the first relatively complete edition of Pauline letters was made in Ephesus c. 100" (*Making of Paul*, 60). See also Harry Y. Gamble, *The Textual History of the Letter to the Romans: A Study in Textual and Literary Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 115–22.

<sup>37</sup> Tyson, *Marcion and Luke-Acts*, 24–31. Tyson, in many ways, follows in the steps of his predecessor and teacher, John Knox, *Marcion and the New Testament*, 114–39, as does John T. Townsend, "The Date of Luke-Acts," in *Luke-Acts: New Perspectives from the Society of Biblical Literature Seminar*, ed. Charles H. Talbert (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 47–62.

<sup>38</sup> Tyson's source- and text-critical argument, building upon the earlier observations of Knox, that the abbreviated portions of Marcion's Gospel are found precisely where Luke's editorial hand is most easily identifiable is interesting but not ultimately compelling. The majority of the abbreviations happen at the infancy and resurrection narratives, which is precisely where we would expect Marcion to edit Luke's Gospel. In any case, Tyson's arguments about the origin of Ur-Luke and the Gospel of Luke do not necessarily play a strong factor in the dating of Acts, which could still have been written a few decades after to address, in part, Marcionite readings of Luke's Gospel and Paul's epistles.

<sup>39</sup> See C.P. Bammel, review of *Marcion: On the Restitution of Christianity. An Essay on the Development of Radical Paulinist Theology in the Second Century*, by R. Joseph Hoffmann, *JTS* 39 (1988): 227–32. Justin's apparent knowledge of Acts, though disputed by some, would make a date this late difficult to maintain.

<sup>40</sup> Knut Backhaus, "Zur Datierung der Apostelgeschichte. Ein Ordnungsversuch im chronologischen Chaos," *ZNW* 108, no. 2 (2017): 212–58.

broad date, though he prefers (with only a little justification) the earlier side of that range.

Nasrallah, on the other hand, attempts to identify the socio-cultural and discursive assumptions evinced by Luke that can be dated specifically to intellectual and literary periods of Roman history.<sup>41</sup> She points to Hadrian's (117–38 CE) "ecumenical" outlook, evinced most prominently by his Panhellenion, as just one such socio-cultural ideology reflected by Luke's portrayal of Paul's journeys and by the geography of Acts more generally. In my opinion, Nasrallah's study is, to date, the most persuasive attempt to move beyond the ostensible impasse of the 100–150 CE range established by the external evidence. This study, thus, presupposes a date of ca. 120–30 (give or take about five years) as a reasonable date, for which both internal and external evidence offer support.<sup>42</sup> This date raises the possibility that Luke might have been educated and participated in circles associated with the so-called Second Sophistic, which opens up a world of relevant *comparanda* that have often been dismissed for reasons of chronology.<sup>43</sup>

### 1.5.2 The Author and Audience of Acts

The presuppositions we bring to bear about the author and audience of Acts will inevitably guide our assumptions about *their* presuppositions. If we suppose our author and/or audience to be Jews of a certain stripe, and if we associate Judaism with monotheism, we might expect every deification scene to be intended and heard as a denunciation of the foolishness of polytheism. If we presuppose our author and audience is Greek, however, we might presume something quite different.

The truth is, we know (and, at present, can know) very little about the author or the intended/earliest audience(s) of Acts, and most of our knowledge comes from the text itself. We know that the author was highly-enough educated in Greek and rhetoric to produce his "orderly narrative," whose Greek varies from the "barbarous" Septuagintal style of the early chapters to a more elegant, Attic style as Paul progresses away from Jerusalem.<sup>44</sup> We know that our author has studied the Jesus-movement and associates himself with it in some way. We know that our author believes the primary figureheads of this

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<sup>41</sup> Laura Nasrallah, "The Acts of the Apostles, Greek Cities, and Hadrian's Panhellenion," *JBL* 127 (2008): 533–66.

<sup>42</sup> See Backhaus, "Datierung," 216 n. 10 for an extensive catalog of scholars arguing in this favor and the variety of more specific dates proposed within this frame.

<sup>43</sup> For a recent attempt to read Acts within the literary-cultural world of the Second Sophistic, see Ryan Carhart, "The Second Sophistic and the Cultural Idealization of Paul in Acts," in *Engaging Early Christian History: Reading Acts in the Second Century*, ed. Ruben R. Dupertuis and Todd C. Penner (New York: Routledge, 2014), 187–208.

<sup>44</sup> Henry J. Cadbury, *The Book of Acts in History* (New York: Harper, 1955), 34.

movement to be Jesus, the twelve apostles of whom Peter is head, James, and Paul. We know that he views this movement essentially as a new philosophy that exists in greater continuity with Judaism than certain other schools (such as the Sadducees; Acts 23:6–10). The author seems to assume that his audience will know something of Greek philosophy (Acts 17:16–34) and poetry/drama (Acts 14:8–13; 17:28; 26:14) as well as some of the Jewish scriptures and traditions (e.g., Acts 1:6). If we assume that his more subtle literary allusions and echoes to each are expected to be understood by his audience, then his audience was probably a cultured lot.<sup>45</sup> The generic and narrative similarities between Luke/Acts and biographies of philosophers and philosophical succession narratives alone may support this claim.<sup>46</sup> But the occasional awkwardness of our author's grammar and syntax steers us away from concluding that either he or his intended readers were among the highest rungs of the literati.<sup>47</sup>

Perhaps the most we should presume is that our author, whom I call "Luke" out of convenience, and (some of) his earliest audience were adequately familiar with many Jewish texts and traditions as well as philosophical and poetic texts and traditions from the broader Greco-Roman world to understand or recognize most of the quotations and allusions throughout the narrative of Acts.<sup>48</sup> This brings us to the question of relevant *comparanda* – what ideas and texts can we reasonably expect Luke and his audience to know and engage with?

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<sup>45</sup> As Robyn Faith Walsh has convincingly argued, "Careful consideration of ancient Mediterranean writing practices suggests that authors did not necessarily write with a broad and amorphous audience in mind; their most formative social networks consisted of fellow writers." See her "*Satyrical* and the Gospels in the Second Century," *CIQ* 70 (2020): 356–67, here 359. See further her *Origins of Early Christian Literature: Contextualizing the New Testament Within Greco-Roman Literary Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 105–33.

<sup>46</sup> See Charles H. Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke-Acts*, SBLMS 20 (Missoula, MT: SBL Press, 1976), 125–40; *idem*, *Reading Acts*, xvi–xxvi.

<sup>47</sup> The possibility always remains that our author imagined or hoped he was writing to and for those far more educated or talented than he. Assuming, with Martin Dibelius ("The First Christian Historian," in *The Book of Acts: Form, Style, and Theology*, Fortress Classics in Biblical Studies [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004], 25), that the book of Acts would have been of some interest to many literate persons beyond Christians may also support this suggestion.

<sup>48</sup> Through the remainder of this study, "Luke" refers variously to the Third Gospel that bears the title KATA ΛΟΥΚΑΝ as well as to the author of the Third Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, whom I take to be one person and whose name and identity cannot be determined with certainty. Although I doubt that our author was the Luke discussed in Phlm 1:24; Col 4:14; or 2 Tim 4:11, I adopt this traditional ascription for convenience.

### 1.5.3 Relevant Comparanda

One will notice that many texts from classical antiquity are cited throughout this study to illuminate Luke's narrative and his audience's ways of thinking about it. He or she may then object that neither Luke nor, presumably, his audience could be expected to know the kinds of texts, traditions, and ideas that are found in these *comparanda*. As Cadbury states, his own quotations of philosophers and poets for the purposes of illuminating Acts and its world "is no evidence that either Paul or the writer of Acts had wide or first-hand knowledge of Greek literature. Probably many college undergraduates today have read more of it."<sup>49</sup> Such a perspective, however, is outmoded. Luke's intellectual and literary milieu is properly located within the literary elite, and many of those elite were his audience. It was they, after all, who could read.

We should not, therefore, presume too narrow an audience. Luke could have, and probably did, write for multiple audiences – Christian and non-Christian, non-educated and elite, and so forth. But we should be looking particularly to the elite to discern what Luke and the other Gospel writers are going on about. As Robyn Walsh has convincingly demonstrated, since Luke and the other Gospel writers evidently had a rhetorical education and that other Greco-Roman authors with such an education wrote for a group of literate, elite peers,

It stands to reason that the gospel authors were similarly trained and positioned, working within cadres of fellow, cultural elites. Some of their associates may or may not have even had an understanding of being "in Christ"; the act of writing itself was the principle and guiding sphere of influence. In such a historical context, the gospel writers are not the "founding fathers" of a religious tradition – at least not in their historical moment. They are rational agents producing literature about a Judean teacher, son of God, and wonder-worker named Jesus. This particular subject matter offered numerous possibilities for employing literary techniques and motifs in conversation with other writings (and writers) of the milieu – including discourses on gods, Judean practices, philosophy, politics, and paradoxography. In short, the gospels [and Acts] represent the strategic choices of educated Greco-Roman writers working within a circumscribed field of literary production. It is this social network of literary cultural producers that we should examine in our scholarship, aiming for descriptions that are both practical and plausible given the kinds of social engagement and expertise we know to be typical of such specialists.<sup>50</sup>

These are the cultural and literary waters in which Luke swam, and our knowledge about grammatical and rhetorical education as well as literary production in antiquity does not cease soon as we open the pages of the New Testament. Reading the New Testament well, and the Book of Acts in partic-

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<sup>49</sup> Cadbury, *Book of Acts*, 46.

<sup>50</sup> Walsh, *Origins of Early Christian Literature*, 6. On Lukan rhetorical education, see Mikeal C. Parsons and Michael Wade Martin, *Ancient Rhetoric and the New Testament: The Influence of Elementary Greek Composition* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018) and their one-room schoolhouse model for Hellenistic *paideia*.

ular, requires such contextualization. Luke wrote for, among, and as one of the cultural elite.

Through increasing our awareness of Luke's historical, literary, and educational context, relevant *comparanda* are, thereby, expanded to include especially works of second-century philosophy, history, romance, and paradoxography, among writers of which Luke apparently positions himself. If we ask whether the writings of Lucian, Plutarch, Dio Chrysostom, Diogenes Laertius, or Philostratus, or tales relating the wisdom of Socrates or some other widely-regarded philosopher, or paradoxographical accounts of unusual phenomena and divine miracle workers really shed much light on Acts, we must answer unequivocally, "Yes!" Knowing what we now know about textual production in the ancient world, we can no longer subscribe to the wrong-headed scholarly distinction between *Kleinliteratur* (among which the New Testament was usually counted) and *Hochliteratur*.

#### 1.5.4 "Paganism": A Brief Note on Terminology

New Testament and classical scholars alike tend to employ the term "paganism" as though it has analytical value for describing religious practices or beliefs.<sup>51</sup> Unfortunately, the term is much more problematic than often recognized. While, on the one hand, certain scholars, such as prominent classicist Robin Lane Fox, strip "paganism" of belief per se, most New Testament scholars, on the other hand, use the term primarily with respect to competing theological (as opposed to practical) claims, particularly when reading the denials of divinity in Acts.<sup>52</sup> Learning the history of the term offers insight into the utility of the term, and Christopher P. Jones has helpfully performed this service for us.<sup>53</sup> The term originates only as early as the fourth century, and it was primarily used as an etic designation from a Christianizing perspective rather than as a term of religious-historical description. In his own words,

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<sup>51</sup> This language has been in the disciplines now some time now. One study of particular relevance for New Testament scholars remains Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (London: Viking, 1986). Unfortunately, the study's attempt to differentiate between what is "pagan" and "Christian" simply does not fit all the data. "Christianity" and even many parts of Judaism could look nearly identical to Fox's "paganism," and indeed fit his description. As he describes it, paganism is essentially practice of Roman *religio* (*Pagans and Christians*, 31–32), but even this description falls short of his analysis once he includes non-Roman sources.

<sup>52</sup> "Pagans performed rites but professed no creed or doctrine. They did pay detailed acts of cult, especially by offering animal victims to the gods, but they were not committed to revealed beliefs in the strong Christian sense of the term" (Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 31).

<sup>53</sup> Christopher P. Jones, *Between Pagan and Christian* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 5.

The word “pagan,” when used by modern scholars of Christian history to designate those who were neither Christian nor Jew, is therefore inappropriate insofar as it borrows a Latin term used primarily by an in-group to denote an out-group, when the modern observer stands outside either group. This is even more of a drawback when applied to those whom Greek-speaking Christians called “Hellenes,” since now it lumps into a single class people so different as Roman aristocrats fondly cherishing the religion and antiquities of their ancestral city, and Arabs and Germans worshipping gods outside the Greek and Roman pantheon. “Polytheist” might appear a possible alternative, but has the disadvantage of blurring the wide range of conceptions that “pagans” had about the divine: some are indeed polytheists, but others come close to monotheism, and yet others have a conception of a supreme being to whom all others are subservient or inferior (so-called “henotheism”). “Hellenism” has the advantage of being a word commonly used by Greek-speaking Christians to designate pagans, but has the disadvantage of ambiguity mentioned above, and is not applicable in the Latin West.<sup>54</sup>

Jones, thus, concludes rightly that “‘Paganism’ is potentially misleading.” He nevertheless continues to use the term for heuristic purposes, but in doing so he demonstrates the many ways in which “paganism” and Christianity were very much alike.<sup>55</sup> Although New Testament scholars often appeal to classical scholars as justification for their continued use of the term, the term remains elusive and very misleading indeed, especially since classical scholars frequently carry into their analyses unjustified assumptions about the nature or essence of Judaism or Christianity as the study of these religions often lies outside their expertise.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Jones, *Between Pagan and Christian*, 6.

<sup>55</sup> In this sense, Jones’s study is essentially the opposite of Lane Fox’s.

<sup>56</sup> See, e.g., C. Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 14–15, listing Peter Brown, Ramsay MacMullen, Mary Beard, Glen Bowersock, Robin Lane Fox, Fergus Millar, John North, and Simon Price, who, Rowe claims, employ the term without religious bias to defend his use of the term. The problem is the term is laden with “religious bias” (or, at least, colonialist bias). One can neither escape nor avoid that problem. More recently in defense of the term and concept “pagan,” see Alan Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). We should note carefully, however, that Cameron’s argument only demonstrates the continued existence of “paganism” (understood as traditional Roman *religio*) after the rise of Christendom. Fredriksen’s recent defense of the terms use as mirroring the Hebrew גויִם also fails to persuade. “Pagan” does not bear the distinctively ethnic elements that Fredriksen seeks to find in it; Greeks, Romans, Germanic tribes, and Arabs have all been identified as “pagans.” To Jones’s point, the term transcends ethnicity and religious expression. See Paula Fredriksen, *Paul: The Pagans’ Apostle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), esp. 34–35. Deconstructing the Judaism/Christianity-Pagan divide within the first two centuries CE, see Matthew Novenson, “The Universal Polytheism and the Case of the Jews,” in *Monotheism and Christology in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, ed. Matthew Novenson, *NovTSup* 180 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 32–60; M. David Litwa, *Jesus Deus: The Early Christian Depiction of Jesus as a Mediterranean God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 16–18; Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 54–84.



Both classical and New Testament scholars, however, could benefit from interaction with religious studies scholars dealing with religious theory, many of whom have argued that the category “religion,” when used to encompass the broader phenomenon of “world religions,” is at best a Platonic ideal and never something that occurs in history. “Paganism” often functions in the same way “religion” does in such discourse, as a catch-all term for several different kinds of belief as well as several different ways of relating to that belief.<sup>57</sup> It is a problematic category, to be sure, but what is equally, or perhaps more, problematic is the observation that, when studied as religious phenomena, Judaism, Christianity, and “paganism” share many of the same ways of being religious – that is, they share the same ways of negotiating divine power.<sup>58</sup> This should surprise no scholar of this period who knows that the self-definition of Christianity and Judaism took place over centuries, as did Christianity and “paganism.”<sup>59</sup> Instead, it is better to taken a phenomenological approach when dealing with these ancient religious texts, which assumes neither the compatibility nor insularity of a given text, only their comparability.<sup>60</sup> In this study, therefore, I avoid the concept “paganism” as an explanatory category, keeping the term always in scare quotes when engaging its presence in the arguments of others. As Walsh reminds us in another context, “If scholars fail to recognize the ideological or conceptual baggage that can attend categories like these, it inevitably leads to imprecision and assumption.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> On this sort of colonialism in contemporary religious studies, see Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>58</sup> On this score, see the magisterial study by Johnson, *Among the Gentiles*.

<sup>59</sup> Judaism’s engagement with “the nations” is a bit more complex, involving the questions of the origin of “Judaism” vis-à-vis Israelite religion, which I cannot entertain here.

<sup>60</sup> Arguing differently, Smith proposes that New Testament scholars have been far too preoccupied with genealogical models of comparison (see his *Drudgery Divine*, 47–53). Later, remarking on the question of comparison and the postulation of “uniqueness,” he writes: “Much will depend on the framing of the issue. The traditional vague terminology of ‘Early Christianity,’ ‘Jewish,’ ‘Gentile,’ ‘Pagan,’ ‘Greco-Oriental,’ etc. will not suffice. Each of these generic terms denotes complex plural phenomena. For purposes of comparison, they must be disaggregated and each component compared with respect to some larger topic of scholarly interest” (117). Hence, comparing “wholes to wholes” inevitably produces pithy statements of difference, but it is infrequently of much analytical worth.

<sup>61</sup> Walsh, *Origins of Early Christian Literature*, 25.

## 1.6 Plan of Study

This study unfolds over five chapters. The first two chapters are dedicated to answering the question, “What did an ancient person see when he or she saw a god?” Put otherwise, what are the concepts of divinity that are available to the typical ancient workaday man or woman, often as described, justified, or satirized by the literary and philosophical elite, that allow one to see a human being and say or believe, “That person is a god”? These two chapters are divided along the lines of Greco-Roman and Jewish contexts, each dedicated to disaggregating ancient Mediterranean concepts of divinity, especially as they appertain to the identification of human beings as gods (Chapter 1), and to answering how these and similar concepts manifest in the deification of humans in Second Temple Judaism (Chapter 2).

One theme running through Chapter 2 is that the theology and religious beliefs of Judaism are not insulated from the theology and religious beliefs of the broader Mediterranean world. This seemingly innocuous claim is again and again overlooked or ignored in the secondary literature on such topics as Jewish monotheism, the relation of “Christianity” to “Judaism” in terms of Christological development, as well as questions about the “Hellenic” character of New Testament theology and anthropology. The distinctive “monotheistic” uniqueness of Judaism, which is so often used, as Smith argues, apologetically as a way to guard against “pagan” influence, turns out to be greatly overstated when conceived in a strict sense.<sup>62</sup> Many (perhaps most) Jews were theistic in precisely the same ways as their gentile counterparts, though typically Jews were distinctively monolatrous. Of course, from the vantage of historical description rather than prescriptive theology, this monolatry does not prohibit certain, or perhaps many, Jews from endorsing the worship of other gods or humans, as we shall see in our discussion of Artapanus and the material evidence of synagogues such as the one at Sepphoris, not to mention the Jews at Elephantine.<sup>63</sup> As it turns out, many Jews, as represented in and by the Jewish texts and artefacts preserved for us, deified human beings using the same concepts of divinity and literary devices as their gentile neighbors. Since later Christians do the same with Jesus, it should not surprise us that something similar happens with certain of Luke’s apostles.

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<sup>62</sup> On uniqueness, see Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 39–40. On the apologetic, insulating function of Judaism as a category in New Testament scholarship, see *Drudgery Divine*, 83. In his words: “Judaism has served a double (or, a duplicitous) function. On the one hand, it has provided apologetic scholars with an insulation for early Christianity, guarding it against ‘influence’ from its ‘environment’. On the other hand, it has been presented by the very same scholars as an object to be transcended by early Christianity” (83).

<sup>63</sup> On which, see, e.g., Collin Cornell, “Cult Statuary in the Judean Temple at Yeb,” *JSJ* 47 (2016): 291–309.