

Introduction

Acts of the Apostles

Authorship

- Traditional accepted as Luke
- Attested by Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons ca 180CE where Luke is accepted as the author of both Luke and Acts
- Referring to the “we” passages (Acts 16:10–17, 20:5–15, 21:1–18, and 27:1–28:16), Irenaeus writes: “Being present in all these events, Luke carefully set them down in writing.” (*Against Heresies* 3.14.1)

Authorship

- Irenaeus also adds support from Paul’s letters: “That he was not only a follower, but also a fellow-labourer of the apostles, and above a of Paul, Paul himself made clear in the epistles.”
- See Phlm 24; 2 Tim 4:9-10; Col 4:14

Dating

- Early 60s CE

Destination

- Theophilus
 - A person of high rank “most excellent” – a term used elsewhere in reference to Felix and Festus (Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:25)
 - Received previous instruction regarding Christian faith
 - Further instruction now given in Luke’s gospel

Genre

- Important to consider genre as it affects our interpretation
- Some proposals:
 1. Acts as epic
 2. Acts as ancient novel
 3. Acts as history
 4. Acts as a historical monograph

Genre: Epic

- Epic – different form history as epic does not make truth-claims that can be checked
- In the tradition of Homer and Virgil.
- Marriane Palmer Bonz, *The Past as Legacy: Luke-Acts and Ancient Epic* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).
 - Modelled after Virgil's *Aeneid*, where the Roman epic was written to validate the legacy of Romans by positing their origins back to ancient past, so is Acts as foundational epic for Gentiles looking to strengthen their identity

Genre: Epic

- “Just as Virgil had created his foundational epic for the Roman people by appropriating and transforming Homer, so also did Luke create his foundational epic for the early Christian community primarily by appropriating and transforming the sacred traditions of Israel’s past as narrated in the Bible of the diasporan Jewish communities, the Septuagint.” (p. 26)

Genre: Epic

- Dennis MacDonald, *Does the New Testament Imitate Homer? Four Cases from the Acts of the Apostles* (New Haven: Yale, 2003)
 - Compares to the epics of Homer, particularly *Iliad*.
 - “(Luke) created each of these stories as fictions to imitate or emulate famous stories in the *Iliad* and without the benefit of preexisting traditions...He not only wrote up stories; he made up stories in the interest of advancing his understanding of the good news of Jesus Christ.” (p,146-47)

Genre: Ancient Novel

- Richard Pervo, *Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).
 - A motif of adventure including incarceration, persecution, intrigue, riots, trials, shipwreck and travel.
 - Purpose is to entertain.
 - Luke is not so much concerned to be faithful to the past but rather use the past in order to create a future for his community. Luke is creating history rather than recording it.

Genre: History

- F. C. Baur and E. Haenchen – view Acts as history but dismiss the historical reliability of Acts. Acts contains errors and fabrications

Genre: Historical Monograph

- 2 Types: History that is concentrated on a particular subject and a limited time period; and universal histories.
- The purpose is often reflected in the prologue of the narrative, highlighting what others have done, and what the author is attempting to do, and how this is differentiated from the rest.

Genre: Historical Monograph

- Polybius 1.4:
 "A historian should likewise bring before his readers under one synoptical view the operations by which she (Fortune) has accomplished her general purpose. Indeed it was this chiefly that invited and encouraged me to undertake my task; and secondly the fact that none of my contemporaries have undertaken to write a general history...As it is, I observe that while several modern writers deal with particular wars and certain matters connected with them, no one, as far as I am aware, has even attempted to inquire critically when and whence the general comprehensive scheme of events originated and how it led up to the end."

Genre: Historical Monograph

- Roman historian Sallust's historical monographs: *War with Catiline* and *War with Jugurtha*. -> length of time in historical period, focussing on one or two individuals, containing large amount of direct speeches

Genre: Historical Monograph

- 2 Maccabees 2:19-32:
 The story of Judas Maccabeus and his brothers, and the purification of the great temple, and the dedication of the altar, ²⁰ and further the wars against Antiochus Epiphanes and his son Eupator, ²¹ and the appearances that came from heaven to those who fought bravely for Judaism, so that though few in number they seized the whole land and pursued the barbarian hordes, ²² and regained possession of the temple famous throughout the world, and liberated the city, and re-established the laws that were about to be abolished, while the Lord with great kindness became gracious to them— ²³ all this, which has been set forth by Jason of Cyrene in five volumes, we shall attempt to condense into a single book.

Genre: Historical Monograph

- 2 Maccabees 2:19-32:
²⁴ For considering the flood of statistics involved and the difficulty there is for those who wish to enter upon the narratives of history because of the mass of material, ²⁵ we have aimed to please those who wish to read, to make it easy for those who are inclined to memorize, and to profit all readers. ²⁶ For us who have undertaken the toil of abbreviating, it is no light matter but calls for sweat and loss of sleep, ²⁷ just as it is not easy for one who prepares a banquet and seeks the benefit of others. Nevertheless, to secure the gratitude of many we will gladly endure the uncomfortable toil, ²⁸ leaving the responsibility for exact details to the compiler, while devoting our effort to arriving at the outlines of the condensation.

Genre: Historical Monograph

- 2 Maccabees 2:19-32:
²⁹ For as the master builder of a new house must be concerned with the whole construction, while the one who undertakes its painting and decoration has to consider only what is suitable for its adornment, such in my judgment is the case with us. ³⁰ It is the duty of the original historian to occupy the ground, to discuss matters from every side, and to take trouble with details, ³¹ but the one who recasts the narrative should be allowed to strive for brevity of expression and to forego exhaustive treatment. ³² At this point therefore let us begin our narrative, without adding any more to what has already been said; for it would be foolish to lengthen the preface while cutting short the history itself.

Genre: Historical Monograph

- Josephus
- Cf. to Luke's prologue

Luke's Prologue

- See Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-2
- Cf. Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1.1; 2.1

Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1.1

I SUPPOSE that by my books of the Antiquity of the Jews, most excellent Epaphroditus, have made it evident to those who peruse them, that our Jewish nation is of very great antiquity, and had a distinct subsistence of its own originally; as also, I have therein declared how we came to inhabit this country wherein we now live.....

Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1.1

.....However, since I observe a considerable number of people giving ear to the reproaches that are laid against us by those who bear ill-will to us, and will not believe what I have written concerning the antiquity of our nation, while they take it for a plain sign that our nation is of a late date, because they are not so much as vouchsafed a bare mention by the most famous historiographers among the Grecians.

Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1.1

I therefore have thought myself under an obligation to write somewhat briefly about these subjects, in order to convict those that reproach us of spite and voluntary falsehood, and to correct the ignorance of others, and withal to instruct all those who are desirous of knowing the truth of what great antiquity we really are.

Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1.1

As for the witnesses whom I shall produce for the proof of what I say, they shall be such as are esteemed to be of the greatest reputation for truth, and the most skillful in the knowledge of all antiquity by the Greeks themselves. I will also show, that those who have written so reproachfully and falsely about us are to be convicted by what they have written themselves to the contrary.

Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1.1

I shall also endeavor to give an account of the reasons why it hath so happened, that there have not been a great number of Greeks who have made mention of our nation in their histories. I will, however, bring those Grecians to light who have not omitted such our history, for the sake of those that either do not know them, or pretend not to know them already.

Josephus, *Against Apion*, 2.1

IN the former book, most honored Epaphroditus, I have demonstrated our antiquity, and confirmed the truth of what I have said, from the writings of the Phoenicians, and Chaldeans, and Egyptians. I have, moreover, produced many of the Grecian writers as witnesses thereto. I have also made a refutation of Manetho and Cheremon, and of certain others of our enemies.

Josephus, *Against Apion*, 2.1

I shall now therefore begin a confutation of the remaining authors who have written any thing against us....

Genre: Historical Monograph

Summary:

- Acts is in line with ancient writing style of historical monograph
- Encourages the readers to view the events narrated as historical
- Invites us to expect the author to be an eyewitness/interviewer of those who participated in the events narrated (autopsy – cf. Like 1:2 “eyewitness” - αὐτόπται)

Genre: Historical Monograph

Summary:

- Recognises the use of literary convention prevalent in the Greco-Roman period – use of hyperbole (Acts 2:5; 43-44 – use of “every”)
- Compresses information for theological effect
- Materials are selective
- Summarises events by epitomising – abridgement of longer works, speeches, etc

Purpose

- Both Peter and Paul are apostles par excellence, emphasising the legitimacy of Paul’s apostleship

Purpose

- Mission of the church in bringing the gospel to regions in which Jesus the Messiah has yet to be proclaimed, including the gentiles.

Purpose

- Gentiles who are followers of Jesus the Messiah are part of God's plan, and they are the people of God. There is no favouritism on God's part.
 - Cornelius event

Purpose

- The identity formation of the early Christ movement
 - The struggles for the Jewish leaders to accept the gentile inclusion
 - Jerusalem Council
 - Acts 22 – the Jewish leaders from Asia Minor instigating riot against Paul

Purpose

- The tension of the early Christ movement with Roman empire
 - Contra earlier scholarship that argues for political harmony between the early Christ movement and Rome (see H. J. Cadbury, F. F. Brice, Johannes Weiss), and this argument remains popular in many popular commentaries.