DANIEL B. GLOVER

Patterns of Deification in the Acts of the Apostles

Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe 576

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To 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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Ooltewah, TN, July 2022 Daniel B. Glover

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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.[1] 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.[2] 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.[3]

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[1] These acclamations occur in 8:9–25; 10:23–26; 12:20–23; 14:8–20; and 28:1–10.

[2] 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.I.1.a.

[3] 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.[4] 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

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).

[4] See the literature cited in Chapters 4 and 5.

place in each acclamation, which addresses different concerns, whether historical, literary, or theological.[5] 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).[6]

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.[7] 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."[8] Neither does "pagan" or "gentile" adequately describe Cornelius, who falls be-

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[5] "Assumption" is appropriate here because no one, save perhaps Stenschke, discussed below, sufficiently argues the point.

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

[7] 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.

[8] 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.[9] 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 (εὐσεβὴς καὶ φοβούμενος τὸν θεόν) with all his house" (10:2).[10] 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."[11]

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*.[12] 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.[13] Simon's Samaritanism, even if Luke

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[9] On Cornelius's prostration (προσκύνησις) as "worship," see section 4.2.1 in Chapter 4 below.

[10] 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.

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

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

[13] 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.[14] 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 ἀνθ᾽ ὧν in 12:23).[15]

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.[16] 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."[17] 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

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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.

[14] 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.

[15] 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.

[16] 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.

[17] 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.[18] 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.[19] 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."[20] Luke and his version of Paul are essentially strict monotheists,

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[18] Jipp, *Divine Visitations*. For a closer review of Jipp's work, see section 5.1 (pp. 273–77) of the present study below.

[19] On disguised deities, see section 1.2.6 below.

[20] 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.[21] What is emphasized here is difference. Conversely, one might emphasize the similarity between Christianity and Greco-Roman religion.[22] As Luke Timothy Johnson remarks: "Christians were religious pretty much in the same way that Gentiles [i.e., "pagans"] were religious."[23] 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.[24] A more helpful path to follow in our study of the deification scenes

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[21] 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).

[22] See section "5.4. 'Paganism': A Brief Note on Terminology" below for an expansion of these points.

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

[24] 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, *Iesus 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).[25] My emphasis on locating the interpretation of the narrative in

[25] 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.[26] 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.[27] 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.[28] 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"?

[26] 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."

[27] 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.

[28] 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.

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