

Genre and Method in Luke-Acts Research

The question of which genre the author of Luke-Acts selected as the medium for his composition continues to fuel discussion among New Testament scholars. Since the significant work of Henry Cadbury,¹ many scholars have viewed Luke and Acts as a two-volume collection, especially on the basis of the historical profile of the preface form found in the Gospel (Luke 1:1–4) and its recapitulatory link in Acts 1:1. This has become a significant factor for those desiring to affirm Luke as history since it seems more suitable to maintain a unified genre for both volumes.² Since scholars often identify Acts as history,³ they should do so for Luke as well—or, so the argument goes.⁴

This analysis has not gone uncontested, however. In addition to questioning the literary unity of Luke and Acts, contemporary New Testament scholars have now put a range of potential literary antecedents for the genre(s) of Luke-Acts on offer. In the vein of scholars like C.W. Votaw, Charles Talbert, Philip Shuler, Albrecht Dihle, Richard Burridge, and Justin Smith,⁵ many adopt a

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- 1 Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts* (London: S.P.C.K., 1968).
 - 2 Cf. S.E. Porter, “The Genre of Acts and the Ethics of Discourse,” in *Acts and Ethics*, edited by Thomas E. Phillips (NTM 9; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2005), 1–15.
 - 3 Thomas E. Phillips, “The Genre of Acts: Moving toward a Consensus?” *CBR* 4 (2006) 365–96 (384–85) argues for consensus that views Acts as some form of history; for a more recent review of Luke-Acts as history, see Sean A. Adams, *The Genre of Acts and Collected Biography* (SNTSMS 156; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2013), 5–23.
 - 4 David Aune, *The New Testament and its Literary Environment* (LEC 8; Philadelphia, 1987), 77. Charles Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke-Acts* (Missoula: Scholars, 1987), moves in the opposite direction. Committed to the biographical nature of the Third Gospel, Talbert insists that both Luke and Acts are intellectual biography. See also, Loveday Alexander, “Acts and Ancient Intellectual Biography,” in *Acts in its Ancient Literary Context: A Classicist Looks at the Acts of the Apostles*, by Loveday Alexander (ECC; LNTS 289; New York: T&T Clark, 2005 [orig. 1993]), 43–68. 31–63. Most recently, Adams, *Genre of Acts*—for similar reasons—identifies Luke-Acts as collected biography.
 - 5 C.W. Votaw, ‘The Gospels and Contemporary Biographies’, *AJT* 19 (1915): 45–73, 217–49; C.H. Talbert, *What Is a Gospel?: The Genre of the Canonical Gospels* (London: S.P.C.K., 1978); P.L. Shuler, *A Genre for the Gospels: The Biographical Character of Matthew* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982); Albrecht Dihle, ‘Die Evangelien und die biographischen Traditionen der Antike’, *ZTK* 80 (1983): 33–49; R.A. Burridge, *What are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (3rd 25th Anniversary Edition; Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2018 [orig. Cambridge, 1992]) (I cite the third edition unless otherwise noted); J.M. Smith, *Why βίος?: On the Relationship between Gospel Genre and Implied Audience* (LNTS 518; London: T&T Clark, 2015).

biographical thesis for the genre of the Third Gospel. In recent years, Stanley Porter, BurrIDGE, and Sean Adams have enlisted similar arguments for viewing Acts as biographical discourse,⁶ though a large contingent still holds out for Luke-Acts (or at least Acts) as history.⁷ Some seek to situate one or both volumes among the epics and/or novels of the ancient world⁸ while other recent work remains skeptical as to whether meaningful genre distinctions may be drawn between the βίος and other genres.⁹ All of these studies seem to proceed from the assumption that genre similarities provide a sound basis for establishing genre identification.

Perhaps this accounts for the current *impasse* in literary analysis of Luke-Acts. If genres are understood mainly in terms of literary similarities, then BurrIDGE only needs to accentuate Lukan commonalities with the βίος to advance his case for a biographical reading of Luke-Acts. Aune only needs to show the inclusion of symposia, genealogy, speeches, travel narratives, first person interjection, letters, identification of sources, historical prefaces, etc., in Luke-Acts can likewise be identified among the historians.¹⁰ And Smith and Kostopoulos can recruit a convincing range of family resemblances shared by the history and the biography to establish their appeal for genre blending.¹¹

6 S.E. Porter, 'The Genre of Acts and the Ethics of Discourse', in T.E. Phillips (ed.), *Acts and Ethics* (NTM 9; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2005), 1–15; R.A. BurrIDGE, 'The Genre of Acts Revisited', in Steve Walton (ed.), *Reading Acts Today: Essays in Honour of Loveday C.A. Alexander* (LNTS 472; London: T&T Clark, 2011), 3–28; S.A. Adams, *The Genre of Acts and Collected Biography* (SNTSMS 156; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

7 E.g. D.A. Aune, *The New Testament in its Literary Environment* (LEC 8; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 77–115; G.E. Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition: Josephos, Luke-Acts, and Apologetic History* (NovTSup 64; Leiden: Brill, 1992); D.P. Moessner, *Luke the Historian of Israel's Legacy, Theologian of Israel's 'Christ'* (BZNTW 182; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016). So also B. Shellard, *New Light on Luke: Its Purpose, Sources, and Literary Context* (JSNTSup 215; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 18–23 and C.K. Rothschild, *Luke-Acts and the Rhetoric of History: An Investigation of Early Christian Historiography* (WUNT 2.175; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 16–23, who both view Luke-Acts as a branch of rhetorical history. For a recent review of Luke-Acts as history, see Adams, *Genre*, 5–23; cf. also T.E. Phillips, 'The Genre of Acts: Moving toward a Consensus?' *CBR* 4 (2006): 365–96.

8 E.g. R.I. Pervo, *Profit with Delight* (Philadelphia, Penn.: Fortress, 1987) and D.R. MacDonald, 'The Breasts of Hecuba and Those of the Daughters of Jerusalem: Luke's Transvaluation of a Famous Iliadic Scene', in J.A.A. Brant, et al. (eds.), *Ancient Fiction: The Matrix of Early Christian and Jewish Narrative* (SymSBL 32; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 239–54.

9 E.g. D.L. Smith and Z.L. Kostopoulos, 'Biography, History, and the Genre of Luke-Acts', *NTS* 63 (2017): 390–410.

10 Cf. Aune, *New Testament*, 120–31, for a convenient survey.

11 E.g. Smith and Kostopoulos 'Biography', 390–410.