The idea that early Christian texts can be correlated with specific Christian communities is popular in New Testament studies. Yet, in the case of the Acts of the Apostles, its original literary context (the subject of chapter 3 below) and its reception in early Christianity (the subject of this chapter) provide little support for such a correlation—whether such a community behind Acts is considered Pauline or not. The Gospel according to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles are first specifically identified as such by Irenaeus in his writing against heresies. Prior to Irenaeus, the text known to him as the Gospel according to Luke is attested as part of Marcion’s collection of scripture. Marcion probably used an edited form of the text of Lk for his lone gospel.
Justin probably knew the text of Lk as well. On the other hand, the circulation of the text of Acts prior to Irenaeus is obscure. Irenaeus is the first writer explicitly to take up the text of Acts, dispelling the fog of possible allusions to and dependence on Acts that characterizes the earlier reception of the text. Consequently, his comments concerning Lk and Acts are important for locating the reception of these texts in the social and literary context of early Christianity.

Irenaeus

In book 3 of Adversus haereses, after having exposed in books one and two what he considers to be the perversity of the teachings of the heretics, Irenaeus begins his proofs against the heretics from scripture. These proofs are in defense of the life-giving Gospel.

Call to mind, then, the things which I have stated in the two preceding books, and, taking these [proofs from scripture] in connection with them, you will have from me a very copious refutation of all the heretics; and faithfully and strenuously you will resist them in defense of the only true and life-giving faith, which the Church has received from the apostles and imparted to her children. For the Lord of all gave to his apostles the power of the Gospel, through whom also we have known the truth, that is, the doctrine of the Son of God; to whom also did the Lord declare: “The one who hears you hears me; and the one who despises you, despises me, and him who sent me.”


4 O’Neill (The Theology of Acts in Its Historical Setting, pp. 29–44) has argued that Justin knew only a precursor to the text of Lk. O’Neill’s thesis is too conjectural to gain unqualified support, but points out the difficulty of placing the text of Lk prior to Marcion. Papias, e.g., is silent about Lk. On the other hand, the longer ending to Mk, Mk 16:9–20, probably makes use of Lk 24.


6 Eusebius (Hist. eccl. 5.7) cites the title of this work as ἐκλέγοντων και ἀνατροπῆς τῆς ψευδονύμου γνώσεως (Refutation and Overthrow of Knowledge Falsely So-Called; often referred to in English by the shortened title Against Heresies).

7 Adv. haer., preface to book 3. Translations adapted from the English translation printed in the Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1. The text was originally written in Greek, but