CHAPTER 3

Accommodation, Opposition or Other?  

*John Moles*

This contentious topic needs working assumptions.  

Written ca 100,3 *Luke-Acts* covers the life, death and alleged resurrection of Jesus (ca 30 CE) and the Jesus movement until two years after Paul’s arrival in Rome (A. 28.30–31), culminating in his trial and death in 64 (narratively foreshadowed). While the term ‘Christian’ is controversial, the fact that *Acts* uses it twice (11.26; 26.28) and once transitonally—employed by Romans but acceptable to Christians (11.26)4—sufficiently justifies it here. The crucifixion of Jesus, Jewish riots in Rome under Claudius (occasioning expulsions of Christians), widespread Jewish hostility, Neronian and Domitianic persecutions, and general Roman and Greek antagonism, both elite and popular, generated considerable Christian anxiety.5 The antagonism originated in Jesus’ conviction as pretender king of a Roman province, which labeled his followers quasi-revolutionaries. Christian mission produced incomprehension and hostility as well as conversion.

The Roman capture of Jerusalem and destruction of the Temple in 70 accelerated Christians’ detachment from Judaism.6 *Luke-Acts* traces the progressive

---

* I thank all at Odense, the Editors, John Barclay, Manfred Lang, Tony Spawforth, Francis Watson and Bill Telford. Space restrictions and endless bibliography dictate economy and selectivity. Textual paraphrase implies neither historical nor theological reliability. This paper has local overlaps with others but remains substantially independent. Translations are mine.

1 Talbert 1974; Tannehill 1986, 1990.
2 Plummer 1913: xviii.
4 See below p. 95.
5 Crook 2010.
failure of the Jewish mission and assumes a largely Gentile future, although envisaging the Jews’ eventual ‘healing’. The audience/ readership includes Christians and (still) Jews. Are there others? ‘God-fearers’ (Gentile followers of Judaism who had not converted), surely. Other Gentiles are targeted at a remove, because Luke provides Christians ‘fair copies’ for key situations (addressing superstitious pagans [A. 14.15–17] and philosophers [A. 17.18–31]; defending oneself before Roman governors, emperors, or client kings). But a text aiming for the Christianisation of the world (A. 1.8) should address it directly.

Although Luke’s language—basically functional, ‘professional’ Greek—is straightforward, his literary merits include verbal economy and creativity; intertextual allusiveness, explicit or implicit, both to biblical and classical material; vivid story-telling and scene-painting; psychological realism; sustained imagery; elaborate narrative patterning; and density and intensity of effects. This Greek-Christian-Jewish text has Classical pretensions, attracted ‘Classical’ readers from the second century, and resonates challengingly with the Classical texts considered elsewhere in this volume.


Luke is well-informed about Roman provincial government, legal procedures, army officers, the geography of the Roman East and Greece, and Rome’s topography, and has some acquaintance with Roman literature. But Rome is not merely the inevitable or neutral historical background: she looms large, characteristically in charged contexts far beyond the crucifixion narrative. Why?

---

7 Moles 2011a: 159–64.
9 See below p. 90.
11 Since Acts foreshadows Paul’s trial in Rome (p. 99), Paul’s various ‘apologies’ (19.33; 22.1; 24.10; 25.8, 16; 25.1, 2, 24) anticipate his ‘apology’ before Nero; Still 1923: 11.
13 Alexander 2006/7: 231–52.
14 Pervo 1987; MacDonald 2003; Moles 2006b; 2011a; 2011b; 2013; Alexander 2006/7; Lang 2008.
15 Moles 2011a: 121; also 123 for knowledge of the Passion at Nero’s court.
16 Wallace & Williams 1993.
17 E.g. Res Gestae (p. 87), Livy’s Preface (p. 84) and Aeneid (p. 100).