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“That You May Know” The Preface to Luke’s Gospel (Lk 1:1–4)

“Abyś się mógł przekonać” Przedmowa do Ewangelii według św. Łukasza (Łk 1,1–4)

Abstract. The preface to Luke’s Gospel (cf. Lk 1:1–4) has been the object of extensive debate, especially since the publication of the thesis of L. Alexander who maintained that the preface should be treated not so much as historiographic but scientific. For years, therefore, the discussion has been focused on the literary genre of the preface. This article seeks to explore the question, recalling, briefly, the research of the twentieth century up to the present day. It starts out with Cadbury, examines Alexander’s volume, reviews the positions of her critics, and concludes that, although the Oxford scholar highlighted a series of important texts for comparison, her neat opposition between historiographical and scientific prefaces does not stand up to critical control. At this point, there is a re-examination of the ancient examples, comparing them with Luke. Then, Luke’s preface is analysed according to the criteria of narrative analysis, highlighting the text’s many semantic and syntactical ambiguities. A careful philological study shows that many of the preface’s terms and expressions are ambiguous since they support at least two different interpretations. Proceeding as if on shifting sand, the reader has more questions than certainties, but, ironically, he is brought to recognise the truth of the element of faith into which he has been initiated. Why, then, does Luke choose to begin his work in such an ambiguous way? What is the effect on his reader of an initial frame that is so deliberately obscure? The various questions find their complete answer only in the episode of the Emmaus disciples (cf. Lk 24:13–35) where the same logic re-emerges: the reader is brought from lack of recognition to the effective recognition of Jesus in the form of faith.

Streszczenie. Przedmowa do Ewangelii według św. Łukasza (por. Łk 1, 1–4) jest przedmiotem szeroko zakrojonych debat, zwłaszcza od czasu publikacji tezy L. Aleksander, która twierdzi, że należy ją traktować nie tyle historiograficznie, ile naukowo. Dlatego od lat dyskusja koncentruje się na gatunku literackim przedmowy. W artykule podjęto próbę zgłębienia tej kwestii, przypominając pokrótce badania od XX wieku do dnia dzisiejszego. Autor rozpoczyna od studium Cadbury’ego, analizuje pracę autorstwa

Aleksander, rozpatruje stanowiska jej krytyków i dochodzi do wniosku, że chociaż badaczka z Oksfordu zwróciła uwagę na szereg ważnych tekstów do przeprowadzenia analizy porównawczej, jej zgrabne przeciwstawienie historiograficznych i naukowych wstępów nie wytrzymuje krytycznej kontroli. W kolejnym podrozdziale autor przeprowadza ponowną analizę starożytnych przykładów wstępów, porównując je z Ewangelią św. Łukasza. Następnie przedmowa Łukasza jest badana według kryteriów analizy narracyjnej, podkreślając liczne niejasności semantyczne i syntaktyczne tekstu. Dokładne studium filologiczne pokazuje, że wiele terminów i wyrażen przedmowy jest niejednoznacznych, ponieważ wspierają one co najmniej dwie różne interpretacje. Poruszając się jak na ruchomym piasku, czytelnik ma więcej pytań niż pewników, ale, jak na ironię, zostaje zmuszony do rozpoznania prawdziwości elementu wiary, w który został wtajemniczony. Dlaczego więc Łukasz decyduje się rozpocząć swoją Ewangelię w tak niejednoznaczny sposób? Jaki wpływ wywiera na czytelnika początkowa rama, która jest tak celowo niejasna? Poszczególne pytania znajdują pełną odpowiedź dopiero w opisie drogi uczniów do Emaus (por. Łk 24,13–35), z którego wyłania się ta sama logika: czytelnik zostaje przeprowadzony od braku rozpoznania do rzeczywistego rozpoznania Jezusa poprzez wiarę.

Keywords: Luke 1:1–4; Luke 24:13–35; Narrative Criticism; Historiography; Preface.

Słowa kluczowe: Łk 1,1–4; Łk 24,13–35; krytyka narracyjna; historiografia; przedmowa.

In 1922 H.J. Cadbury expressed himself in the following manner:

In the study of the earliest Christian history no passage has had more emphasis laid upon it than the brief preface of Luke. It is the only place in the synoptic gospels where the consciousness of authorship is expressed, containing as it does the only reference outside the gospel of John to the origin or purpose of the evangelic record. It has naturally been repeatedly treated in special monographs, as well as in introductions and commentaries, and has been cited in connection with every problem of early Christian literature. This importance, together with the difficulties which its terse and ambiguous language raises, justifies a somewhat extended commentary, especially in connection with a work like Acts which is written by the same author and addressed to the same person.¹

¹ H.J. Cadbury, "Commentary on the Preface of Luke," in P.J.F. Jackson – K. Lake (ed.), *The Beginnings of Christianity: Part I. The Acts of Apostles. Vol. II. Prolegomena II. Criticism*, Macmillan, London 1922, 489–510: 489.

Almost a century later, Cadbury's observations retain their great relevance and outline the map of the problems in tackling critically what has been described as the most perfect period in the New Testament.²

The classic rivers of ink have been poured out over Luke's preface. The path we intend to follow is the one of narrative analysis. Having given an account of the state of the question and then of the critical discussion on the literary genre of the Lukan preface, we shall set out a close comparison with the texts of antiquity and then tackle the complex philological problems of the text in order to highlight the strategies employed by the narrator.

1. State of the Question

A word must be spent on Cadbury's essay, a simple *Appendix* within his monumental volumes, *The Beginnings of Christianity*.³ The American scholar intended to analyse the significance of the words of Luke's preface in the light of the literary texts and the new lexical knowledge which had been acquired at that time. The exegesis which he put forward is a very detailed comparative examination from which it emerges that the form of the preface to the Gospel recalls a series of conventions typical of Hellenistic literature, revealing Luke's intention to present his work to the public at large. Thus, the evangelist's purpose is not so much to write an apology for Christianity as to offer a brief introduction to his two volumes according to the rules typical of antiquity.⁴ Moreover, Cadbury noted, the preface to the first volume applies also to the second and was composed when the Gospel and Acts had already been finished. The analysis of every word in the preface is carried out by means of comparison with the Greek literature. The authors most cited are Xenophon, Thucydides, Plutarch and Josephus. Here emerges one of Cadbury's basic ideas, namely, that the author of the Third Gospel and of Acts belongs to two cultural worlds: on the one hand, Luke is a Greek who thinks in that language and writes with Atticizing taste for an educated Hellenistic readership; on the other hand, he is indebted

² The description goes back to E. Norden, *Agnostos Theos. Untersuchungen zur Formengeschichte religiöser Rede*, Teubner, Leipzig-Berlin 1913, 316, n. 1: "Ich benutze die Gelegenheit zu einer Bemerkung über die Einleitungsworte des Evangeliums des Lukas. Es ist nämlich, soviel ich weiß, noch nicht darauf hingewiesen worden, daß diese Periode, die allgemein als die beststilisierte des ganzen N.T. gilt, in ihre Gedanken- und Formenstruktur derjenigen nahe verwandt ist, die die *Σοφία Σειράχ* eröffnet."

³ Cf. Cadbury, "Commentary on the Preface of Luke," 489–510.

⁴ Cf. Cadbury, "Commentary on the Preface of Luke," 490, where he cites Lucian, *Quomodo historia conscribenda sit* 23 and 2 Mac 2:32.

to the *Septuagint* whose style he deliberately adopts. His masters are Herodotus and Thucydides, but also the books of Chronicles and the Maccabees.⁵ The preface reveals Luke's debt to the great Greek historiographers whose style he imitates while he does not neglect to allude to the biblical tradition as it circulated in the Hellenistic Jewish environment. All subsequent commentators have taken up Cadbury's study to some degree; the texts recalled by him and his related observations in connection with the preface have become the *opinio communis* of exegetes.⁶

The monograph that has left the greatest mark on critical discussion of the Lukan preface is the Oxford thesis of L. Alexander which was published in 1993.⁷ This work was able to arouse deep discussion over the critical consensus concerning the Lukan prefaces. At the basis of the study lies the question as to whether they follow (or not) the literary conventions of the Greek historiographical tradition, as was then commonly maintained. The author's thesis denies the traditional position, claiming, instead, that the third evangelist was inspired by prefaces of the so-called scientific works. The results for the interpretation of Luke's two volumes are important.

Alexander begins her study with an objective description of the form, syntactic structure, the topics and the style of the preface so as to establish a comparison with other ancient works. Next, she considers the prefaces of the historiographical texts, analysing them from the point of view of the form (author's name, dedication, subject, length), the topics (breadth of the subject, purpose and importance of the history, sources of information), concluding with a discussion on the theme of ἀποψία, namely attestation or experience. Alexander

⁵ Cf. H.J. Cadbury, *The Style and Literary Method of Luke* (HThS 6), Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1920 (reprinted: Wipf & Stock, Eugene, OR 2001); Id., *The Making of Luke-Acts*, Macmillan, London 1927 (reprinted: Hendrickson, Peabody, MS 1999).

⁶ Cf. J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke (I-IX): Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AncB 28), Doubleday, New York et al. 1981, 287-302; F. Bovon, *L'Évangile selon saint Luc (1,1-9,50)* (CNT 3a), Labor et Fides, Genève 1991, 32-44. There is no lack of critical opposition. For example, T. Callan, "The Preface of Luke-Acts and Historiography," *NTS* 31 (1985) 576-581, criticises Cadbury's idea of seeing in Luke's work an attempt to correct the ill-informed Theophilus with regard to Christianity.

⁷ Cf. L. Alexander, *The Preface to Luke's Gospel: Literary Convention and Social Context in Luke 1.1-4 and Acts 1.1* (SNTSMS 78), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1993. The thesis was presented in 1978; the author published a summary article before the publication of the thesis as a whole: Ead., "Luke's Preface in the Context of Greek Preface-Writing," *NT* 28 (1986) 48-74. A presentation which focuses more carefully on methodology is found in Ead., "Formal Elements and Genre: Which Greco-Roman Prologues Most Closely Parallel the Lukan Prologues?," in D.P. Moessner (ed.), *Jesus and the Heritage of Israel: Luke's Narrative Claim upon Israel's Legacy*, Trinity Press International, Harrisburg, PA 1999, 9-26.

then offers a list of twenty-one scientific treatises.⁸ She studies their prefaces, highlighting a certain number of contrasts with the preface to the Third Gospel. In the first place, the single period of Luke's preface is much shorter than the shortest prefaces in the historiographical works and hardly comparable to them with regard to content because Luke does not reveal clearly the precise subject of his text. Moreover, the evangelist does not supply his own name whereas the Greek historians normally record it. Thirdly, the dedication to Theophilus is quite unusual in that the historians avoid mentioning their distinguished addressees. Finally, Luke uses the first person by contrast with the much more impersonal use of the third person by the Greek historians. These differences lead Alexander to claim that the closest parallels to the Lukan preface are found in the prefaces of the scientific tradition, namely, the tradition of technical or professional prose (*Fachprosa*, in German), developed from the fourth century B.C. It includes treatises on medicine, philosophy, mathematics, engineering, botany, rhetoric and many other subjects.

Alexander's study has undoubtedly renewed the attention given to a series of minor works of Greek literature which have been completely neglected by biblical scholars in their discussions. Thus, the merit of her monograph lies precisely in having attempted a comparison with texts that have too often been forgotten. However, a comparison like this raises a thorny question about Luke's Gospel which, clearly does not belong to the genre of a scientific or technical treatise: how can a non-scientific work have a scientific preface?

The importance of the Oxford scholar's study is attested by the numerous articles which debate her positions. While all recognise the value of Alexander's research, only a handful share her thesis *in toto*. It is worth gathering together some of the many observations of the various critics.

Firstly, scholars have expanded the comparison undertaken by Alexander, analysing other texts which she did not consider. D.E. Aune,⁹ for example, has compared the preface to the Third Gospel with that to a moral work by Plutarch, *Septem sapientium convivium*. The Greek writer declares:

⁸ For some of the prefaces to the scientific treatises, she supplies the Greek text and an English translation (cf. Alexander, *The Preface to Luke's Gospel*, 213–216); for all the authors studied, she presents some summary tables with references to texts, editions and dates (cf. pp. 217–229).

⁹ Cf. D.E. Aune, "Luke 1.1–4: Historical or Scientific Prooimion?," in A. Christophersen et al. (ed.), *Paul, Luke and the Graeco-Roman World: Essays in Honour of Alexander J.M. Wedderburn* (JSNTS 217), Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield 2002, 138–148, especially 144–148.

Certainly the passing of time will contribute a great deal of obscurity and uncertainty to events, Nikarchos (ὁ Νίκαρχε), since already patently false fabricated accounts about new and recent events have gained credibility. For the symposium did not include, as you (ὕμεῖς) have heard, the Seven alone, but more than twice as many (among whom I myself was one, since I was a close friend of Periander because of my trade and I was also Thales' host, for he stayed with me by Periander's arrangement). Whoever relayed the details (ἦν ὁ ὑμῖν διηγούμενος) to you did not remember the conversations correctly, for it appears that he was not among those who were actually present. Since I now have a lot of free time, and old age is not trustworthy enough to delay telling my story (τοῦ λόγου), I will recount everything to you from the beginning (ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἅπαντα διηγήσομαι), since you are eager to listen (*Moralia* 146B–C).¹⁰

The comparison between the two texts reveals a series of similarities: in both cases, the author does not name himself; there is a dedication marked by a vocative; Plutarch's preface is written in the first person and Luke too refers to himself; as in other historical prefaces, the term *πολύς* is employed; the author is an eye witness of the symposium where the sages invited by the tyrant, Periander, met together and writes on the basis of his personal experience (by contrast with Luke); Plutarch employs the verb *διηγέομαι* to mark the decision to write an account of what happened while Luke uses the substantive, *διήγησις*; the Greek author records the existence of an erroneous account composed by someone who was not present at the symposium whereas the evangelist mentions those who wrote before him; Plutarch promises to set down "everything from the beginning (ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἅπαντα)," as Luke also claims with regard to the witnesses: both texts refer to a "we"; the two prefaces have a vague and general flavour so that the reader has to wait for other parts of the narrative to be informed about the characters. Aune concludes: "Plutarch's *prooimion* is essentially a cliché, that is, a pastiche of elements that the ancient reader would reflexively recognize as an explanatory *prooimion* whose primary function would be to bolster the claim that the following account is the truth and nothing but the truth."¹¹ That is, we are in the presence of a strategy to render a fictitious account credible.

The most extensive study of the ancient prefaces had been conducted by A.D. Baum.¹² The German scholar takes his cue from Alexander's thesis but poses two questions which then, in fact, guide his research: "Zunächst muss

¹⁰ Aune, "Luke 1.1–4: Historical or Scientific *Prooimion*?" 145.

¹¹ Aune, "Luke 1.1–4: Historical or Scientific *Prooimion*?" 147.

¹² Cf. A.D. Baum, "Lk 1,1–4 zwischen antiker Historiografie und Fachprosa. Zum literaturgeschichtlichen Kontext des lukanischen Prologs," *ZNW* 101 (2010) 33–54.

im Detail überprüft werden, wie es sich mit den Übereinstimmungen zwischen dem Lukasprolog und den antiken Historikerprologen verhält. Dieser Frage ist Alexander nicht mit der gleichen Intensität nachgegangen wie dem Vergleich des Lukasprologs mit den Prologen der antiken Fachprosa.¹³ He analyses the syntactic structure as well as the terminology of the prefaces of some historiographical works.¹⁴ He notes that all the prefaces are made up of a long period with a protasis and an apodosis; usually, in the apodosis, the author sets out his intention in writing while, in the protasis, he mentions the activities of his predecessors. The terminology employed turns out to be very varied: *πράγμα*, *πρᾶξις*, *ἔργον*, *διήγησις*, *διήγημα*, and so on. On the other hand, the various prefaces differ in length: Luke’s is only 42 words, undoubtedly one of the shortest, but not without parallels. Next, considering the *topoi* of the historiographical works, Greek and Latin, Baum offers a useful table in which he gathers together the different characteristics concerning the author (*dedication*, *motivation*, presentation of himself, declaration of modesty, relation to his own time), the work (content, *material*, *sources*, *predecessors*, *narrative*), and the reader (*advantages*, *truth*, brevity or length). In the Gospel preface, a good eight *topoi* (marked in italics) are utilised: Luke is, therefore, a full part of the ancient historiographical tradition. At this point, however, Baum carries out a second step consisting of the analysis of the *topoi* as well as of the syntactic structure and terminology of the prefaces to the so-called scientific works (the *Fachprosa*).¹⁵ The prefaces to these texts also contain many formal characteristics shared with the prefaces to the historiographical prefaces concerning the author (*dedication*, presentation of himself), the work (content, *material*, *sources*, *predecessors*, *narrative*), and the reader (*advantages*, brevity): the comparison with Luke’s preface is pretty obvious. Baum concludes: “Der Lukasprolog ähnelt demnach in seiner periodischen Satzstruktur nicht nur den Prologen der Fachschriftsteller, sondern auch den Prologen der Historiker und anderen Prologen der antiken Literatur.”¹⁶

¹³ Baum, “Lk 1,1–4 zwischen antiker Historiografie und Fachprosa,” 34–35.

¹⁴ These are the texts examined: Polybius, *Historiæ* 1,4,3–4; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates romanæ* 1,6,1–3; *Aristeæ epistula* 1–2; 2 Mac 2:19–25.

¹⁵ He analyses the prefaces of Diocles of Carystus (cited by Paul of Ægina, *Epitomæ medicæ* 1,100,1–6); Demetrius, *Formæ epistolicae* 1,1–15; Hero of Alexandria, *Pneumatica* 1,2,1–8; Galen of Pergamon, *De typis* 7,463,1–7; Dioscorides, *Materia medica* 1,3,4–7; Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 1,47.55.

¹⁶ Baum, “Lk 1,1–4 zwischen antiker Historiografie und Fachprosa,” 53.

The value of these contributions to the subject lies in their having produced an addition to the research on the texts of antiquity,¹⁷ revealing that the distinction between historical and scientific prefaces, which was stressed by Alexander, is actually a false dichotomy¹⁸ which does not stand up to critical examination.¹⁹

Still in dialectic with Alexander, we also find D.D. Schmidt who intended to underline another detail,²⁰ namely, the biblical inspiration of the Lukan preface. This scholar provides a notable and debated examination both of the Lukan preface and of a series of ancient texts, placing the emphasis on the rhetorical dimension of these texts. He claims: “The consensus among historiographers seems to be that ‘history’ was not a narrowly defined genre in ancient Greek writing, but rather was on a wide spectrum of prose writing styles.”²¹ He then

¹⁷ The fluidity of the form of the prefaces of the historiographical works of antiquity had already been emphasised in the panoramic work, D. Earl, “Prologue-form in Ancient Historiography,” in H. Temporini (hrsg.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung. Teil I. Von den Anfängen Roms bis zum Ausgang der Republik. Zweiter Band*, De Gruyter, Berlin–New York 1972, 842–856.

¹⁸ Cf. Aune, “Luke 1.1–4: Historical or Scientific Prooimion?,” 148 and Baum, “Lk 1,1–4 zwischen antiker Historiografie und Fachprosa,” 54. The same opinion is also shared by M. Wolter, “Die Proömien des lukanischen Doppelwerks (Lk 1,1–4 und Apg 1,1–2),” in J. Frey – C.K. Rothschild – J. Schröter (hrsg.), *Die Apostelgeschichte im Kontext antiker und frühchristlicher Historiographie* (BZNW 162), De Gruyter, Berlin–New York 2009, 476–494, especially 477–478.

¹⁹ Along still more radical lines, cf. S.A. Adams, “Luke’s Preface and Its Relationship to Greek Historiography: A Response to Loveday Alexander,” *JGRChJ* 3 (2006) 177–191, which provides an analysis of the style, the presence of the author, the length, the dedication, the themes and the sources of the ancient historiographical prefaces. He observes: “She [Alexander] compares Luke to Thucydides and states that there are a number of differences between them in the areas of length, dedications, introductions, the use of third person and the use of αὐτόπτης. However, when comparing Luke to the spectrum of Greek historians, we find that Thucydides is atypical in a number of categories. And although Luke’s preface does not always follow the majority in certain criteria such as dedication and personal introduction, he is not anomalous in these categories and there are examples of accepted Greek historians who are more extreme than Luke” (p. 190). Then he concludes: “It is important to say that during this time there was not a set criteria for determining a historical work, although there were certain typical characteristics. As a result, there was a spectrum of accepted styles in which a writer could work” (p. 191).

²⁰ Cf. D.D. Schmidt, “Rhetorical Influences and Genre: Luke’s Preface and the Rhetoric of Hellenistic Historiography,” in D.P. Moessner (ed.), *Jesus and the Heritage of Israel: Luke’s Narrative Claim upon Israel’s Legacy*, Trinity Press International, Harrisburg, PA 1999, 27–60.

²¹ Schmidt, “Rhetorical Influences and Genre,” 51.

studies the connection between the style of the preface and the style of the infancy narrative – notoriously close to the *Septuagint* – concluding that Luke's aim is to convince his reader by means of an account which alludes to the biblical events. The fact that Luke is writing a historical narrative does not imply that he is a historian, precisely because the root of the evangelist's prose is two-fold, deuteronomist and Hellenistic.

Historiographical enquiry is also a feature of the work of J. Moles²² who gathers up the results of the debate aroused by Alexander's work and formulates his own hypothesis thus: "[G]ranted that Luke 1.1–4 is a formal preface of a common general type and that it announces a work of Greek historiography, the single type of writing that it resembles most is the Greek decree."²³ There are three key elements for recognising a decree: the *ἐπεὶ/ἐπειδὴ* clause, the expression *ἔδοξέ μοι* and the purpose (*ἵνα*), all elements present in the Lukan preface. Moles examines various texts and notes not a few differences, but he also identifies some internal parallels within Luke's own work, namely, Acts 15:28 and Lk 2:1. This imitation of the decree implies a series of consequences: the need for memorisation, authoritativeness, the public nature, utility, permanence and monumentality of the work. That, in particular – and here lies the novelty of Moles's perspective –, signifies that Christianity was being regarded as a *politeia*, both in parallel with and in contrast to the Jewish *politeia* and the Roman Empire. Such a suggestion becomes explicit in the face of the apostolic decree (cf. Acts 15:6): here, the phraseology recalls the Roman juridical formula, *videre de* (*ιδεῖν περὶ*); the term *ἄρεσις* is employed in connection with the Christian faith (cf. Acts 24:5,14); and doctrine is described as *δόγμα* (Acts 16:4). The same observation arises from the comparison between the preface and the beginning of the infancy narrative (cf. Lk 2:1–5): on the one hand, there is an imperial decree which concerns all the inhabitants of the earth subject to Augustus; on the other hand, Luke's "decree" which is shown to be superior to that of the emperor. Moles emphasises a final aspect: the reader is led to choose, that is, to accept Jesus or reject him. Thus, the decree has the purpose of avoiding the risk of dissidence.

Moles's thesis seems to be unconvincing.²⁴ Undoubtedly, the attention paid to the poles of Israel and the empire is fundamental. In fact, Luke shapes the story of Christian origins by structuring it on the restoration of Israel and on

²² Cf. J. Moles, "Luke's Preface: The Greek Decree, Classical Historiography and Christian Redefinitions," *NTS* 57 (2011) 461–482.

²³ Moles, "Luke's Preface," 464.

²⁴ He is also attacked head-on with a demonstration of the inconsistency of his arguments in Z.K. Dawson, "Does Luke's Preface Resemble a Greek Decree? Comparing the

a civilising expansion of the entire *oikoumene*. In other words, according to Luke, the relationship between Judaism and Christianity cannot be assessed by setting up the drastic alternative between radical rupture or substantial continuity, but rather within an unresolvable tension between the two poles, a tension which invalidates both the thesis of replacement theology and that of continuity pure and simple. Luke's Christianity is the fully-fledged heir of Israel and open to Roman universalism.²⁵ That is, there is a twofold focus, both on the roots (Israel), and on the space for the spread of the new faith (the empire). It appears that, instead of joining the three issues together (Church, Israel, pagans), Moles's thesis risks, instead, setting them in opposition.²⁶

2. The Prefaces in Ancient Works

From the literary point of view, Luke's preface²⁷ is constructed in a very polished way. It is a single period, harmonious and balanced, masterfully structured according to the rules of ancient rhetoric. It is not difficult to grasp the

Epigraphical and Papyrological Evidence of Greek Decrees with Ancient Preface Formulae,
NTS 65 (2019) 552–571.

²⁵ Cf. S.D. Buttica, *L'identità de l'Église dans les Actes des apôtres. De la restauration d'Israël à la conquête universelle* (BZNV 174), De Gruyter, Berlin–New York 2011, 52–53. I permit myself to refer also to M. Crimella, "Gli Atti degli Apostoli fra storia e teologia," in Id. (a cura di), *Atti degli Apostoli* (PaVi 5), Messaggero, Padova 2013, 27–57, especially 54–57.

²⁶ We also recall the thesis which places Luke–Acts within Hellenistic–Jewish historiography, recognising its apologetic value for defining the Christian identity (cf. G.E. Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition: Josephos, Luke-Acts and Apologetic Historiography* [NT.S 64], Brill, Leiden–New York–Köln 1992, 311–389).

²⁷ The work of D.E. Smith, "Narrative Beginnings in Ancient Literature and Theory," *Semeia* 52 (1990) 1–9 which analyzes the different ways of beginning a literary work in antiquity is also fundamental. The author identifies four possibilities: the *proemium* or *preface*, the *prologue*, the *incipit* and the *virtual proemium*. The *proemium* (in Greek, προίμιον or προίμιον and in Latin, *exordium*) is closely linked to the literary genre of the work to which it belongs and expresses the purpose of the work in question; it is found in rhetorical discourses, scientific treatises and historiographical works. The *prologue* often presents facts prior to those being presented to enable a better understanding of events. The *incipit* is a brief phrase, introducing a series of documents by marking the beginning. Finally, the *virtual proemium* (or *proemium in potentia* [δυνάμει προίμιον] according to Lucian, *Quomodo historia conscribenda sit* 23.52) is typical of something that begins *in medias res*. Smith asserts: "The Gospel of Luke uses a formal preface and has often been analyzed in comparison with ancient prefaces" (p. 1).

constitutive elements of a preface: the circumstances of the work, its content, the referent or the sources, the authorial decision, the research undertaken, the writing proper, the dedication and the purpose of the work. Syntactically, what we have here is a protasis (vv. 1–2) and an apodosis (vv. 3–4) of which we would like to highlight some correspondences:²⁸

ἐπειδήπερ πολλοὶ ἐπεχείρησαν	ἔδοξεν κάμοι
ἀνατάξασθαι διήγησιν	ἀκριβῶς καθεξῆς σοι γράψαι
περὶ τῶν πεπληροφορημένων ἐν ἡμῖν πραγμάτων,	πᾶσιν
ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς	παρηκολουθηκότι ἄνωθεν
καθὼς παρέδοσαν ἡμῖν	ἵνα ἐπιγνῶς

By means of four subordinate clauses linked to the main statement (ἔδοξεν κάμοι), Luke describes, successively, the context of his work (v. 1), his subject matter (v. 2), the characteristics of his writing (v. 3) and its purpose (v. 4).

The preface has its own well-defined place in ancient rhetoric.²⁹ According to Cicero, it should leave the reader “benevolent, biddable and attentive (*benevolum... facere et docilem et attentum*)” (*De oratore* 2,80). For Lucian, on the other hand,

Whenever he does use a preface, he will make two points only, not three like the orators. He will omit the appeal for a favourable hearing and give his audience what will interest and instruct them (*Quomodo historia conscribenda sit* 53, ET Kilburn, LCL).

²⁸ F. Blass – A. Debrunner, *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch*, Bearbeitet von F. Rehkopf, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2001¹⁸, § 464, n. 4, declare: “Lk 1,1–4 mäßige Länge der Glieder und schönes Verhältnis zwischen dem dreifach gegliederten Vordersatz und dem entsprechenden Nachsatz; denn es entsprechen sich πολλοὶ und κάμοι, ἀνατάξασθαι und γράψαι, καθὼς ... und ἵνα ... usw., so daß auch das letzte, dem vollständigen Gedanken noch angehängte Glied wenigstens durch die stilistische Entsprechung gefordert wird.“

²⁹ Cf. H. Lausberg, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik. Eine Grundlegung der Literaturwissenschaft*, Steiner, Stuttgart 1990³, §§ 263–288.

Taking one's cue precisely from these rhetorical works, it is possible to collect a series of information on the content of the prefaces, setting up a comparison between the ancient texts and Luke. The basic elements are:³⁰

- a) The author indicates a previous presentation of the same subject and places his own work alongside it (πολλοί ... ἔδοξεν κάμοί, vv. 1.3). Among the very many examples which we could cite, we record only two texts; first of all, the *Antiquitates romanæ* of Dionysius of Halicarnassus: "For these reasons, therefore, I have determined (ἔδοξέ μοι) not to pass over a noble period of history which the older writers left untouched" (1,6,3). In addition, Josephus observes:

The war of the Jews against the Romans – the greatest not only of the wars of our own time, but, so far as accounts (διηγήματα) have reached us, well-nigh of all that ever broke out between cities or nations – has not lacked its historians. Of these, however, some, having taken no part in the action, have collected from hearsay casual and contradictory stories which they have then edited in a rhetorical style; while others, who witnessed the events, have, either from flattery of the Romans or from hatred of the Jews, misrepresented the facts, their writings exhibiting alternatively invective and encomium, but nowhere historical accuracy. In these circumstances, I [...] propose to provide the subjects of the Roman Empire with a narrative of the facts, by translating into Greek the account which I previously composed in my vernacular tongue and sent to the barbarians in the interior (*Bellum judaicum* 1,1–3, ET Thackeray, LCL).

- b) Previous authors are often lumped together under the category of the πολλοί (v. 1). Once again, an example from Josephus is illuminating:

To narrate the ancient history of the Jews, the origin of the nation and the circumstances of their migration from Egypt, the countries which they traversed in their wanderings, the extent of the territory which they subsequently occupied, and the incidents which led to their deportation, would, I considered, be not only here out of place, but superfluous; seeing that many Jews before me have accurately recorded the history of our ancestors (ἐπειδήπερ καὶ Ἰουδαίων πολλοὶ πρὸ ἐμοῦ τὰ τῶν προγόνων συνετάξαντο μετ' ἀκριβείας), and that these records have been translated by certain Greeks into their native tongue without serious error (*Bellum judaicum* 1,17, ET Thackeray, LCL).

³⁰ M. Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium* (HNT 5), Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2008, 58–59, provides an exhaustive list of parallel texts belonging to both the "scientific" (as Alexander highlighted) and to the historiographical tradition.

Thucydides does the same in his account of Pericles: "On the one hand, many... but it seemed to me (οἱ μὲν πολλοὶ... ἐμοὶ δὲ... ἐδόκει)" (*Bellum peloponnesiacum* 2,35,1).

- c) Predecessors' activity is indicated by the term ἐπιχειρήσις, "initiative, undertaking, attempt, plan, intention". Diodorus of Sicily expresses himself thus: "They have undertaken to write (ἐπιχειρήσαν ἀναγράφειν)" (*Historia romana* 1,3,2). Sometimes, the author indicates his own work with this term as a sign of modesty. In this vein, Josephus expresses himself: "And now I have undertaken (ἐγχεχέρισμαι) this present work in the belief that the whole Greek-speaking world will find it worthy of attention; for it will embrace our entire ancient history and political constitution, translated from the Hebrew records" (*Antiquitates judaicæ* 1,5, ET Thackeray, LCL).
- d) The author indicates the difference between his own work and that of his predecessors (v. 3). As his distinctive mark, he can evoke greater objectivity or closer relation to the subject he is treating, noting his ἀκρίβεια and αὐτοψία. Once again, we can cite Josephus:

In fact, the work of committing to writing events which have not previously been recorded and of commending to posterity the history of one's own time is one which merits praise and acknowledgement. The industrious writer is not one who merely remodels the scheme and arrangement of another's work but one who uses fresh materials and makes the framework of the history his own (*Bellum judaicum* 1,15, ET Thackeray, LCL).

On some occasions, the author claims to be summarising what others have said at greater length. This is the case with the preface to 2 Maccabees: "All this was written down by Jason of Cyrene, in five scrolls; and we shall endeavour to abridge it (ἐπιτεμεῖν) into a single volume. For seeing the large number of accounts, and the difficulty that exists for those who wish to be drawn into the historical narrative because of the abundance of material..." (2:23-24, ET King).

- e) The author records the usefulness of his work (v. 4). 2 Maccabees is, again, a typical case: "We have made it our aim to provide delight (ψυχαγωγίαν) for those who wish to read, and easy work (εὐκοπίαν) for those who are minded to commit it to memory, and profit (ὠφέλειαν) to anyone who happens upon it" (2:25, ET King). But Thucydides also records the usefulness of his own work:

It may be that the lack of a romantic element in my history will make it less of a pleasure to the ear: but I shall be content if it is judged useful by those who will want to have a clear understanding of what happened — and, such is the human condition, will happen again at some time in the same or a similar pattern. It was composed as a permanent legacy, not a showpiece for a single hearing (*Bellum peloponnesiacum* 1,22,4, ET Hammond, LCL).

f) The author formulates a dedication (v. 3), here embellished with the adjective κράτιστε. Josephus expresses himself in the same way at the beginning of the *Contra Apionem*: “Most excellent Epaphroditus (κράτιστε ἀνδρῶν Ἐπαφρόδιτε)” (1,1). Within Greek historiography, the dedication of a work to an individual reader is unusual. It is not found among the great historians, and is lacking in Sallust, Livy and Tacitus as well. Instead, one finds the name of the one who has financed the research. This seems to be the case with Lucian who addresses himself to one such, Philo (cf. *Quomodo historia conscribenda sit* 1 and 4). We cannot rule out that, in ancient works, the dedication is fictitious.

The identification of these stylistic elements of structure enables us to recognise that Luke’s preface belongs fully to the Hellenistic prefaces, without laying down further distinctions, something that has now been made more difficult by the critical discussion of Alexander’s thesis; moreover, it introduces a narrative of events and not a treatise, as is clear from the elements provided by the narrator. Thus, the reader knows nothing else about the book which is opening before him. However, first of all, the interpretation of the text has to tackle not a few philological problems.

3. An Ambiguous Text

Luke chooses to begin his Gospel with a period full of *hapax*,³¹ but, above all, characterised by an impressive series of ambiguities which raise more questions than answers for the reader.³² In this article, it would be pointless to go

³¹ Four terms are absolute *hapax legomena* in the New Testament (ἐπειδήπερ, ἀνατάσσομαι, διήγησις and αὐτόπτης); a further three are attested only in the work of Luke: ἐπιχειρέω (cf. Acts 9:29; 19:13), καθεξῆς (cf. Lk 8:1; Acts 3:24; 11:4; 18:23) and κράτιστος (cf. Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:25).

³² Cf. P. Létourneau, “Commencer un évangile : Luc,” in D. Marguerat (éd.), *La Bible en récits. Lexégèse biblique à l’heure du lecteur. Colloque international d’analyse narrative des textes de la Bible, Lausanne (mars 2002)* (MoBi 48), Labor et Fides, Genève 2003, 326–339.

into every word in the preface;³³ it is better to focus on those expressions which are problematic (from the semantic and/or syntactical point of view), showing how the various solutions point the interpretation of the whole passage along ways that are significantly different. In other words, it is a question of assessing the ambiguous or polysemic expressions not only from the philological point of view (a step which is absolutely fundamental and basic) but also from the narrative point of view.³⁴ We recall that, in narratology, polysemy (or voluntary lack of precision) must be considered very carefully, not rejecting one solution in favour of another, but enquiring about the effect it has on the reader. In this connection, D. Marguerat and Y. Bourquin observe: "Deux effets sont essentiellement recherchés. Soit l'ambiguïté se lève plus tard, en cours de récit, soit l'ambivalence demeure. Et si le lecteur est contraint d'opérer des choix, il garde en mémoire les interprétations qu'il a écartées mais qui demeurent possibles."³⁵

The ambiguity begins with the mention of the predecessors who are indicated with a vague πολλοί (v. 1). The reader does not know the identity of these narrators; he is not aware of their number, still less their quantity, the quality of their accounts and their form (written and/or oral). Clearly, the existence of some narratives is at the basis of Luke's decision to write his own work, but he does not claim to have used these texts as sources of information for his two volumes. Not a few commentators ask about these πολλοί; their answer to this question reveals preunderstandings and/or the membership of various schools. If, for example, one accepts the theory of the two sources, one recalls that behind the Third Gospel are Mark's Gospel, the so-called Q source and the *Sondergut*.³⁶ From the narrative point of view, however, it is necessary to respect the narrator's lack of precision because it is an essential part of his communicative strategy directed at the reader.

³³ For this, we refer to the most important contributions: Cadbury, "Commentary on the Preface of Luke," 492–510; Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke (I–IX)*, 290–301; Alexander, *The Preface to Luke's Gospel*, 106–141; Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 61–68.

³⁴ Cf. J.-N. Aletti, *L'art de raconter Jésus Christ. L'écriture narrative de l'évangile de Luc* (ParDi 27), Seuil, Paris 1989, 217–233.

³⁵ D. Marguerat – Y. Bourquin, *Pour lire les récits bibliques. Initiation à l'analyse narrative*, Cerf – Labor et Fides, Paris–Genève 2009⁴, 159.

³⁶ This is the opinion, for example, of M. Hengel, "Der Lukasprolog und seine Augenzeugen. Die Apostel, Petrus und die Frauen," in S.C. Barton – L.T. Stuckenbruck – B.G. Wold (ed.), *Memory in the Bible and Antiquity: The Fifth Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium (Durham, September 2004)* (WUNT 212), Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2007, 195–242, especially 210–214.

The verb ἐπιχειρέω is also ambiguous: it can indicate the fact of “undertaking” the narration of a series of events, bringing it to its conclusion with success,³⁷ or else, much more negatively, it can allude to the “attempt” to put into writing what happened, without, however, succeeding adequately.³⁸ Origen, for example, commenting on the preface, interpreted the verb in a negative sense, as if to express Luke’s distancing himself from his predecessors;³⁹ it is also employed in *malam partem* in the parallels in Acts (cf. Acts 9:29; 19:13). It follows that the reader is presented with two interpretative possibilities which increase the ambiguity still further: in fact, it is not clear whether Luke is expressing a negative judgement on the “many” or keeping his distance from them.

Another expression which is not at all clear is πράγματα which the evangelist describes as πεπληροφορημένα ἐν ἡμῖν. The term πράγματα is rather vague and does not make clear the theme of Luke’s writing. Does it indicate the “events”, the *res gestæ*, or else what is described as the *kérygma*? More radically, it appears that the narrator is frustrated with the obvious questions of the reader: where did the things happen? When did they take place? Who are the protagonists? What does the narrative intend to speak about? There is no reply to these questions, given that not even the name of Jesus is mentioned.

The syntagma ἐν ἡμῖν does not solve the problems: who are those whom the narrator associates with these “we”? Is it Theophilus, the “many”, the “witnesses”, the “ministers of the word”? Létourneau observes: “Il est manifeste que les termes ἡμῖν et πράγματα se répondent et se déterminent mutuellement, comme deux variables d’une même formule, et dans le cas présent, comme deux inconnes dans une équation à solutions multiples”.⁴⁰

³⁷ This is how the verb is understood by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates romanae* 1,7,3: “I received orally from men of the greatest learning, with whom I associated; and the rest I gathered from histories written by the approved Roman authors. [...] With these works, which are like the Greek annalistic accounts, as a basis, I set about the writing (ἐπεχειρήσα) of my history” (ET Cary, LCL).

³⁸ This is the case with Josephus, *Vita* 338: “Justus, for instance, having taken upon (ἐπιχειρήσας) himself to record the history of this war, has, in order to gain credit for industrious research, not only maligned me, but even failed to tell the truth about his native place” (ET Thackeray, LCL).

³⁹ From the text of his *Homilia I super Lucam*, we have some Greek fragments as well as the Latin version of Jerome (cf. Origenes, *Werke. Neunter Band. Die Homilien zu Lukas in der Übersetzung des Hieronymus und die griechischen Reste der Homilien und des Lukas-Kommentars*, hrsg. M. Rauer [GCS 49], Akademie, Berlin 1959, 4): “These words, ‘have tried (ἐπεχειρήσαν/coniati sunt)’, contain a hidden accusation against those who have leapt into writing gospels without the grace of the Holy Spirit.”

⁴⁰ Létourneau, “Commencer un évangile : Luc,” 331.

The participle *πεπληροφορημένα* is crucial. In his commentary, Lagrange already discussed the meaning of this verb with extraordinary breadth, referring to the papyri:⁴¹ in relation to things and people, it means "fill completely" (cf. Qoh 8:11; 2 Tim 4:5); when used of the mind, in the passive, the verb means: "to be fully convinced" (cf. Rom 4:21); in connection with the will, on the other hand, it means "to be satisfied, to show oneself pleased". Is this rare verb a synonym of *πληρώω*, as it is attested in the *koiné*,⁴² or does it have its own specific meaning? We should not pass over the fact that, in indicating the effect of the action, the perfect makes a clear decision in this regard more difficult. The alternative is, therefore, the following: on the one hand, the verb could be introducing the salvific logic of promise/fulfilment; on the other hand, be referring only to the events which the evangelist and his predecessors have narrated. Wolter, for example, maintains the second version of the solution, arguing from the difference in the subject. He writes: "Für diese Interpretation spricht vor allem, dass Lukas hier vom πληροφορεῖσθαι von πράγματα spricht und nicht von der ‚Erfüllung‘ von λόγοι, ῥήματα, ἐπαγγελία oder der γραφή, was er immer dann tut, wenn er ein Ereignis als heilsgeschichtliches Erfüllungsgeschehen kennzeichnen will (vgl. Lk 1,20; 4,21; 24,44; Apg 1,16; 3,18; 13,27.32f; 26,6f)."⁴³ Wolter's arguments are not to be undervalued. However, in our opinion, there is a point which has been rather passed over by the eminent German exegete, and that is the fact that *πεπληροφορημένα* is a passive perfect. Thus, if the perfect marks the effect of an action the results of which are still there in the present, the (divine) passive could be offering a theological nuance.⁴⁴ It is necessary to add that Luke uses the verb (συν)πληρώω a good 28 times

⁴¹ Cf. M.-J. Lagrange, *Évangile selon saint Luc* (EtB), Gabalda, Paris 1948⁷, 3–4. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke (I–IX)*, 292–293, also devotes extensive space to the interpretations of the verb, providing an excellent *status quaestionis*.

⁴² Cf. Alexander, *The Preface to Luke's Gospel*, 111.

⁴³ Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 62.

⁴⁴ Cf., along these lines, C. Spicq, *Lexique théologique du Nouveau Testament. Réédition en un volume des Notes de lexicographie néo-testamentaire*, Presses Universitaires de Fribourg – Cerf, Fribourg–Paris 1991, 1253–1255, especially 1255, where he states: "Les événements décisifs du salut ont été menés à leur terme, parachevés par le Christ. Il y a peut-être une référence à l'accomplissement parfait des Écritures, la plénitude de la réalisation est aussi celle d'un achèvement." The same opinion can be found in P. Tremolada, "Il proemio al vangelo di Luca (Lc 1,1–4)," *PSV* 43 (2001) 123–137, especially 127: "Il participio *peplēroforēmēna* (Lc 1,1), che rimanda al verbo *plēroforeîn*, contiene l'idea del compimento in relazione diretta con l'opera divina. Negli avvenimenti riguardanti Gesù Dio è chiamato direttamente in causa, come mistero di grazia che agisce nella storia decidendosi per una iniziativa di salvezza e mantenendosi ad essa fedele."

in the *corpus* of Luke-Acts:⁴⁵ the choice of a different verb at the beginning of his work gives the impression of wishing to play with his cards up his sleeve by intensifying the ambiguity. Once again, the reader is faced with a fork in the road: is it God who has ensured that the events of the past have reached their fulfilment, or else is the reference simply to a series of historical events without any theological significance?

Another *quæstio disputata* concerns the expression οἱ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς αὐτόπται καὶ ὑπηρέται γινόμενοι τοῦ λόγου (v. 2). Already, Cadbury asked: "Are these two classes of persons or one?"⁴⁶ Three different interpretations are possible.⁴⁷ The first goes like this: "Those who were witnesses from the beginning and those who were ministers of the word." The order of the substantives and the use of the conjunction καί appears to favour this interpretation where there would be two separate groups: on the one hand, the witnesses, on the other, the ministers.⁴⁸ Then, there is a second possibility: "Those who were witnesses from the beginning and became ministers of the word;" here, the participle γινόμενοι assumes its primary sense ("become") so that αὐτόπται and ὑπηρέται designate a single group which has undergone a transformation.⁴⁹ The final interpretation runs: "Those who from the beginning were witnesses and ministers of the word." Here too, there is a single group without any stress being placed on the progression of witnesses who became ministers.⁵⁰ The third reading is, essen-

⁴⁵ Cf. Lk 1:20; 2:40; 3:5; 4:21; 7:1; 8:23; 9:31,51; 21:24; 22:16; 24:55; Acts 1:16; 2:1,2,28; 3:18; 5:3,28; 7:23,30; 9:23; 12:25; 13:25,27,52; 14:26; 19:21; 24:27.

⁴⁶ Cadbury, "Commentary on the Preface of Luke," 498.

⁴⁷ Cf. K.A. Kuhn, "Beginning the Witness: The αὐτόπται καὶ ὑπηρέται of Luke's Infancy Narrative," *NTS* 49 (2003) 237–255, especially 237–239.

⁴⁸ C.F. Evans, *Saint Luke*, SCM Press, London 2008², 126, states: "If the emphasis is on *ministers* as belonging naturally with *of the word*, then *eyewitness* does not prepare for this, and 'eyewitness of the word' hardly makes sense."

⁴⁹ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke (I–IX)*, 294, explains: "[T]he single art. *hoi*, which governs the whole construction, the position of the ptc. *genomenoi*, 'becoming,' which separates not the two nouns but the noun *hypēretai*, 'ministers,' from the prep. phrase 'of the word,' and the position of the other prep. phrase *ep' arches*, 'from the beginning,' would seem to favor the view that the two phrases are a double description of one group." The same arguments are also made by R.J. Dillon, "Previewing Luke's Project from His Prologue (Luke 1:1–4)," *CBQ* 43 (1981) 205–227, especially 215.

⁵⁰ J.B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT), Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge 1997, 41–42, observes: "Luke's reference to 'servants of the word' calls to mind the absolute use of 'the word' in Acts, as well as its use in the phrases 'word of God' and 'word of the Lord.' 'The word' is often 'the Christian message, the good news' [...]. Acts 1:21–22 suggests that the people Luke has in mind are those who were disciples of Jesus already in Galilee and to whom he appeared following his resurrection."

tially, a variant of the second, perhaps less convincing in that it passes over the clarification indicated by ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς. It appears, in fact, that the double designation, οἱ ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς αὐτόπται and ὑπηρετάι... τοῦ λόγου, is underlining two different periods of time: the beginning of Jesus’ activity up to his death and resurrection (cf. Acts 10:36–41) and the time of the Easter proclamation (cf. Acts 10:42–43).⁵¹ In other words, Luke is creating a link between the eye-witnesses and the preachers, that is, between the historical account and the proclamation. Basically, many were eye-witnesses of what had happened but only some had become preachers. It is the same logic which emerges in the events surrounding the election of Matthias (cf. Acts 1:21–22): he begins to become a member of the group of the Twelve, guaranteeing the firmness of the faith. However, this approach, which has recourse to Acts for interpreting the text of the Gospel, creates more than one problem from the narrative point of view. We must not forget that a fundamental rule of narrative analysis is that the order in which the narrator relates things has to be respected. It follows that, at this point in the account, the reader does not yet possess elements with which to determine the sense of the expression. Thus, ambiguity still reigns supreme.

Further discussion surrounds the verb παρακολουθέω (v. 3). Many commentators recall that, normally, the verb has the sense of “follow”, then, later, that of “search, investigate, be informed”.⁵² However, when the verb is constructed with the dative of the thing, it does not indicate an additional enquiry but is to be understood in the sense of “relying on something or on an exposition, following carefully, following with the mind, being completely familiar with a question”.⁵³ This is the nuance which is also understood by the Latin ver-

⁵¹ Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 63, observes: “Die Sandwich-Stellung des Partizips γενόμενοι zwischen ὑπηρετάι und τοῦ λόγου zeigt an, dass es nur auf diese Bezeichnung und nicht auch auf οἱ ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς αὐτόπται zu beziehen ist. [...] Auf der anderen Seite bleiben sie natürlich „Augenzeugen von Anfang an“, auch nachdem sie „Diener des Wortes“ geworden sind.“

⁵² A summary survey is provided by Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke (I–IX)*, 296: 1. follow (physically), accompany (at one’s side); 2. follow with the mind (as a speech, a teaching, a rule); 3. follow, result from (logically); 4. follow closely, keep in touch with (as some event or movement); 5. follow up, trace, investigate, inform oneself about (past events) (cf. also Alexander, *The Preface to Luke’s Gospel*, 128–130). Fitzmyer concludes: “[H]aving traced, investigated? [...] It seems to be the preferable sense, although this choice does not rule out Luke’s being contemporary with some of the events” (p. 297).

⁵³ Cf. D.P. Moessner, “The Appeal and Power of Poetics (Luke 1:1–4): Luke’s Superior Credentials (παρηκολουθηκότι), Narrative Sequence (καθεξῆς), and Firmness of Understanding (ἡ ἀσφάλεια) for the Reader,” in Id. (ed.), *Jesus and the Heritage of Israel: Luke’s Narrative Claim upon Israel’s Legacy*, Trinity Press International, Harrisburg, PA 1999,

sions (*adsecuto*).⁵⁴ However, the problem is to understand what *πᾶσιν* is referring to: if it is masculine, it could be referring to the witnesses or to those who composed narratives before Luke; if, on the other hand, it is neuter, it would be referring to *πράγματα*,⁵⁵ facts and/or events.

Again: is the adverb *καθεξῆς* linked with the verb *γράψαι* or the participle *παρηκολουθηκότι*? In the first case, the emphasis would fall on the order of the exposition within the narrative; in the second, it would refer to the precise investigative research carried out by the third evangelist. Also, *καίμοι* could have a double sense: on the one hand, interpreted in an associative sense (“to me also”), so that the narrator is associating himself with those who have already tried to narrate something about Jesus; on the other hand, it could have an adversative sense (“but also to me”), underlining the qualitative difference between the work for which Luke is preparing himself and that of his predecessors.

Verse 4 reveals a series of problems. It does not seem so crucial to understand the construction *περὶ ὧν*⁵⁶ as to assess the value of the verb *κατηχέω*. It can indicate the “arranging of information” (cf. Acts 21:21,24) but also “instructing” even “offering Christian instruction” (cf. Rom 2:18; 1 Cor 14:19; Gal 6:6).⁵⁷ Is the reader being provided with initial Christian initiation or just

84–123, especially 85–97. Moessner gives a whole series of examples drawn from Polybius, Theophrastus, Strabo, Apollonius of Citium, and Josephus.

⁵⁴ The *Vulgate* renders: “visum est et mihi, adsecuto a principio omnibus, diligenter ex ordine tibi scribere, optime Theophile.” The *Vetus latina* employs the same verb. Indeed, the verb *adsequor* also has this sense: “to grasp with the mind, think of, understand, appreciate” (cf. *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1968, 187).

⁵⁵ In the article devoted to this question (cf. D.P. Moessner, “‘Eyewitnesses,’ ‘Informed Contemporaries,’ and ‘Unknowing Inquiries:’ Josephus’ Criteria for Authentic Historiography and the Meaning of ΠΑΡΑΚΟΛΟΥΘΕΩ,” *NT* 38 [1996] 105–122, especially 108–110), the scholar cites and discusses a text of Josephus: “Surely they ought to recognize that it is the duty of one who promises to present his readers with actual facts first to obtain an exact knowledge of them himself (ἀκριβῶς ἢ παρηκολουθηκότα τοῖς γεγονόσιν), either through having been in close touch with the events, or by inquiry from those who knew them” (*Contra Apionem* 1,53). However, this quotation does not resolve the problem of *πᾶσιν*. Wolter, “Die Proömien des lukanischen Doppelwerks,” 487, also underlines the ambiguity of *πᾶσιν*.

⁵⁶ Already, W. Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (ThHK 3), Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, Berlin 1964³, 45 observed: “Das Buch verfolgt den Zweck, dem Theophilus und mit ihm natürlich allen, denen er es vermittelt, Gewißheit zu geben in bezug auf die „Worte“, d.h. Ereignisse, über die er unterrichtet worden ist (περὶ ὧν κατηχήθης λόγων = περὶ τῶν λόγων κατηχήθης oder: τῶν λόγων περὶ ὧν κατηχήθης τὴν ἀσφάλειαν).“

⁵⁷ H.W. Beyer, “κατηχέω,” in G. Kittel (hrsg.), *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament. Dritter Band*, Kohlhammer, Stuttgart 1938, 638–640, especially 640, wrote: “Um-

simple information? In other words: (beyond the complex problem as to who he is)⁵⁸ has Theophilus already received Christian instruction or has he only a vague knowledge of the message?

The last term to which we shall draw attention is the final one, and its emphatic position has not escaped the commentators. Traditionally, it has been identified within the semantic field of the term ἀσφάλεια, the idea of "absolute certainty", recognising that this is not merely an intellectual conviction but also security, solidity and stability.⁵⁹ What is debated is not the semantics of the term but rather its use here: the study of some ancient treatises shows that it indicates a style that is moderate, careful, balanced, invulnerable in the face of contradiction, far from extravagance.⁶⁰

stritten ist die Frage, ob Lk 1, 4 in der Widmung des Evangeliums an Theophilus und der Zweckbestimmung des Buches [...] das κατηχεῖν den allgemeineren oder den besonderen Sinn habe. Im ersten Fall müßte man übersetzen: „damit du bezüglich der Geschichten, von denen du Kunde erhaltetest, ihre Zuverlässigkeit erkennst“, im anderen Fall: „damit du bezüglich der Lehren, in denen du unterrichtet worden bist, sichere Gewißheit erhältst“. [...] Sprachlich ist beides möglich, und der Verfasser von Lk und Ag kennt beide Bedeutungen.“

⁵⁸ The debate is open. There is a good description of it in D. Marguerat, *Les Actes des apôtres (1-12)* (CNT 5a), Labor et Fides, Genève 2007, 37: "Selon Lc 1,4, Théophile est un chrétien ou un sympathisant de la communauté ; il est aussi une figure du lecteur à qui le narrateur destine son récit." A different opinion is offered by E. Nodet, "Théophile (Lc 1,1-4 ; Ac 1,1)," *RB* 119 (2012) 585-595, according to whom Theophilus is the typical Pauline disciple who seeks to cover the written life of Jesus. On the other hand, C.K. Rothschild, *Luke-Acts and the Rhetoric of History: An Investigation of Early Christian Historiography* (WUNT 2.175), Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2004, 125, n. 85, holds: "[T]he qualifier κράτιστε with the dedicatee's name in Lk 1:1 commends the account to audiences not by dignifying any one addressee, but every listener – every 'lover of God'."

⁵⁹ Cf. Spicq, *Lexique théologique du Nouveau Testament*, 220-227, especially 224. W.C. van Unnik, "Remarks on the Purpose of Luke's Historical Writing (Luke I 1-4)," in Id., *Sparsa Collecta. Part One: Evangelia, Paulina, Acta* (NT.S 29), Brill, Leiden 1973, 6-15, has observed that Luke was very careful in using the term ἀλήθεια: "Thus it is a feature of the ἀσφάλεια that it gives certainty to that which is generally accepted and recognised" (p. 14). He notes the difference between Lk 1,4 and 2 Mac 2:25 A. Giambone, "'So that You May Know the Truth' (Luke 1:4): Luke 1-2 and the Lying Historians," in S. Buttica et al. (éd.), *Le corpus lucanien (Luc-Actes) et l'historiographie ancienne. Quels rapports ?* (Théologie biblique 2), Lit, Berlin et al. 2019, 135-157, especially 156: "The epitomizer's appeal for good will thus stops short of guaranteeing truthfulness, content to cover only the last two of Lucian's three historiographical objectives: utility and pleasure. [...] The Third Evangelist, by contrast, explicitly takes upon himself the responsibility of confirming the reliability (ἀσφάλεια) of what others had already propounded and his readers had already heard."

⁶⁰ Cf. R. Strelan, "A Note on ἀσφάλεια (Luke 1.4)," *JSNT* 30 (2007) 163-171. He examines the treatises of Dionysius and Demetrius which are usually little considered.

This philological analysis of Luke's text has opened up not a few questions. It is now a matter of understanding how these function within the narrative strategy set in motion by the narrator in his preface, that is, within the initial frame of his first volume.

4. A Process of Verediction

Like a picture,⁶¹ the narrative is enclosed within a frame which marks its edges and separates it from real space.⁶² B. Uspensky has shown convincingly that it is as if the reader is being accompanied in entering within a particular world, a world that is characterised by a place and a time, by an ideological system and by precise patterns of behaviour. In relation to this world, the reader assumes the position of an alien spectator, one who is necessarily an outsider. Then, however, “[g]radually, we [the readers] enter into it, becoming more familiar with its standards, accustoming ourselves to it, until we begin to perceive this world as if from within, rather than from without.”⁶³ The transition from the real world to the narrative representation, or, to use different language, from the external to the internal point of view, is effected by the literary frame. The literary frame is, therefore, a “place” of interaction between text and reader. At the beginning of the narrative, the reader begins to listen to a voice. The narrative strategy implemented by the voice leads him in a certain direction and makes him carry out a series of choices. A similar, symmetrical procedure happens at the end of the work in the act of signing off the narrative. Here too, the narrator fields some strategies in order to implement the transition between the world of the narrative and the world of the reader, not without important consequences for the comprehension of the entire weave of the narrative. The narrator's communication to the reader functions as instruction with regard to the

He notes that the latter praises Xenophon's style, observing that “the end of the period gives the effect of a cadence that is stable and secure (ἑδραία γὰρ τιμὴ καὶ ἀσφαλεῖ)” (Demetrius, *De elocutione* 1,19).

⁶¹ Here, I am taking up and developing what I argued in M. Crimella, “Veridizione e verità nel racconto di Luca,” *BibAn* 7 (2017) 235–250, especially in 236–240.

⁶² Cf. M.C. Parsons, “Reading a Beginning/Beginning a Reading: Tracing Literary Theory on Narrative Openings,” *Semeia* 52 (1990) 11–31, especially 13–18.

⁶³ B. Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition: The Structure of the Artistic Text and Typology of a Compositional Form*, University of California Press, Berkeley–Los Angeles–London 1973, 137.

conditions of access to the text so that the text can reshape his experience.⁶⁴ In other words, at the beginning and end of a narrative, there are elements which are not limited to being informative but also have a character that is explicitly performative.⁶⁵ In the frame, the narrator communicates to the reader *what* he ought to expect from the account and *how* he ought to understand it. In narrative terms, the preface has the job of establishing between the narrator and the addressee a real literary pact which is absolutely necessary for the exploration of a text which the reader does not know with the aim of avoiding misunderstandings by pointing him in the right direction for exploring it.

In the face of our philological analysis which highlighted many of the ambiguities of expression in the preface, what are the effects on the reader? The fact that the narrator keeps his cards up his sleeve and is reticent over many aspects leads the reader to keep many questions open. There is, however, a series of fixed points. Firstly, the reader perceives the reliability of Luke's project. Precisely because the narrator's judgement on the work of his predecessors is not clear since he remains very vague about it and them, nevertheless he too has been able to gather the evidence of the eye-witnesses, and the writing which is about to begin is intended to provide exact information, the fruit of a scrupulous work of research. Whether or not this is by contrast with those who have gone before is an open question, but it does not affect the reliability of Luke's own work.

Secondly, frustrated as to the specific object of the work before him, the reader, nevertheless, is aware of its purpose, that is, to carry out a process of verediction.⁶⁶ In other words, Theophilus is being invited to verify the basis of something he already knows. It is clear that the ambiguity with regard to the situation of the addressee (has he already been catechised or just informed? Is he a pagan, a Jew or already a Christian?) does not affect the substance of this. Aletti observes: "Le récit n'a donc pas seulement pour fonction d'informer –

⁶⁴ Cf. P. Ricoeur, *Temps et récit. I. L'intrigue et le récit historique*, Seuil, Paris 1983, 144–146.

⁶⁵ Cf. U. Eco, *Sei passeggiate nei boschi narrativi. Harvard University, Norton Lectures 1992–1993*, Bompiani, Milano 1994, 18–19; Id., *Lector in fabula. La cooperazione interpretativa nei testi narrativi* (Studi 22), Bompiani, Milano 1979, 56–59.

⁶⁶ Aletti, *L'art de raconter Jésus Christ*, 226, explains: "Si, comme il l'annonce dans sa préface, son récit doit être un processus de verediction, avec pour terme la conjonction de l'être e de l'apparaître, deux possibilités lui sont offertes : soit partir de l'agir et de l'enseignement de Jésus (l'apparaître), pour voir ensuite comment ils reflètent son identité de Messie, de Saveur et de Fils, soit au contraire partir de l'être secret de Jésus et montrer alors comment la reconnaissance s'opère progressivement, à la faveur des signes de tous ordres offerts aux autres acteurs du récit. Luc a manifestement choisi cette deuxième voie."

d'autres l'ont déjà fait avant lui –, mais de manifester la vérité d'un vécu. Le récit n'a pas encore commencé, et le lecteur sait déjà qu'il sera un long processus de *véridiction*.⁶⁷ It is not the *quid* (the “what”) of the narrative of which Luke is going on to speak but only the *quomodo* (the “how”).

It follows that Luke does not remain on the purely historical level but intends to pursue a theological purpose. In the background, there probably lies the difficult situation of Christians in the late apostolic period. They no longer know any of those who encountered Jesus. That is why Luke refers to the tradition which precedes him. However, if his account is in continuity (even also dialectic) with that tradition – to the point that the author is even silent about his own name,⁶⁸ as if to underline that he is part of that current – nevertheless, it stands out from it in that, on the one hand, it is woven together with the fundamental Christian proclamation (the *kérygma*), on the other hand, he shapes it precisely as a narrative. By assuring the transmission of the tradition by means of a narrative, Luke, a man of the Church, takes a double path: one goes backwards, deepening the reliability of what he has received; the other leads forwards, rebuilding the memory of Jesus, rereading the tradition within his own situation.⁶⁹ Thus, Luke does not at all intend to separate the story and

⁶⁷ Aletti, *L'art de raconter Jésus Christ*, 221.

⁶⁸ M. Hengel, *Die vier Evangelien und das eine Evangelium von Jesus Christus. Studien zu ihrer Sammlung und Entstehung* (WUNT 224), Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2008, 87–95, has carefully analysed papyri, codices, writings of the Fathers and ancient versions and shown that, already in the second century, the practice was widespread of giving a title to the four small volumes which we today call “gospels”. The *inscriptions* (placed at the head of the work) or the *subscriptions* (placed at the end) are in agreement: in the case of the Third Gospel, the words used are εὐαγγέλιον κατὰ Λουκᾶν, that is, “Gospel in the version of Luke”. Such a title (common also to Matthew, Mark and John) distinguishes these four texts from the other ancient writings, which are usually marked by the name of the author in the genitive and by the title of the work (as is the case with the Catholic Letters). The unusual *inscriptio* indicates that the evangelists do not intend to appear as “biographical” authors, like others, but, through their work, wish to offer a witness to the announcement of Jesus’ salvation.

⁶⁹ Cf. F.G. Brambilla, “I molti racconti e l’unico Gesù. La memoria Iesu principio di unità e diversità nelle narrazioni evangeliche,” in G. Angelini et al., *Fede, ragione, narrazione. La figura di Gesù e la forma del racconto* (Disputatio 18), Glossa, Milano 2006, 47–93. Along the same lines, with greater attention to historiography, cf. E. Norelli, “Gli Atti degli Apostoli sono una storia del cristianesimo?,” *RiScR* 12 (2015) 13–50, especially 34–35, where he claims: “[L]a menzione dei *servitori della parola* che si situano all’inizio della παράδοσις e quella della catechesi, al cui servizio si pone l’opera in questione, mostrando che il “noi” non designa solo una comunità di lettura, ma una comunità in cui i πράγματα menzionati all’inizio hanno segnato una ἀρχή, costituendo un punto di rottura e di partenza o operando una trasformazione, la quale prosegue sino alla scrittura del testo e oltre” (p. 35).

his interpretation, as if they were two distinct things. The series of events he recounts is a kerygmatic story; his work is a testimony of confession where God is at work. At the origin of the tradition stand not only eye witnesses but "ministers of the word": this is an important clarification because it concerns the very nature of tradition and of the narrative dependent on it, based, in its turn, on the process of verediction.⁷⁰

As we have observed, the verb *πεπληροφορημένα* is one of the terms most discussed but also one of the most crucial: for some, it introduces the theological logic of promise/fulfilment; for others, it is a unique announcement of the events that have taken place. If the verb has a polysemic significance, the reader can understand it in its first or second meaning, but, as we have already pointed out, the possibility rejected can always be held in reserve. However, there is a point where the theological intention of the preface emerges clearly: the final frame. If the reader has gathered many elements from Luke's narrative, in the final frame, there emerges once again the mechanism of verediction, the theological logic of the fulfilment of the Scriptures, and the interpretation of the events within the divine plan.

The narrative dynamics of the account of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (cf. Lk 24:13–35) reproduces the model of the drama as classified by Aristotle in his *Poetics*: "In every tragedy, there is one part which is the complication (*δέσις*) and another which is its denouement (*λύσις*)" (18,1455b 24). Still according to Aristotle, dramatic art is successful where it employs two procedures that are subtly superimposed: the "reversal" and the "recognition". The dynamics of the two Emmaus disciples go in the direction of recognition (cf. v. 35); that is, the evangelist shows that the story which he has recounted is divided into two great parts where recognition and upheaval correspond, representing the resolution of the complication. Everything, that is, is in perfect accord with Aristotelian orthodoxy.⁷¹ All the elements of the action before the change, that is, everything which happened along the road, represent the com-

⁷⁰ Hengel, "Der Lukasprolog und seine Augenzeugen," 208, observes: "Wesentlich ist auch, daß ‚Augenzeugen von Anfang an‘ und ‚Diener am Wort‘ in einem Atemzug genannt werden. Beide Gruppen sind identisch. [...] Es gibt weder für sie [Mark and Matthew] noch für Lk eine legitime ‚neutrale‘ Berichterstattung über Jesus im Sinne einer bloßen Zuschauerhaltung. Die Wahrheit der Jesusgeschichte als ‚Heilsgeschehen‘ ist nur für die durch den Glauben geöffneten Augen und Ohren erkennbar, und es ist Gottes Geist, der die Augenzeugen dazu drängt, das Gesehene und Gehörte als Heilsbotschaft zu verkündigen“.

⁷¹ Cf. The magisterial study of J. Dupont, "Les disciples d'Emmaüs," in Id., *Études sur les évangiles synoptiques. Tome II* (BETL 70B), University Press – Peeters, Leuven 1985, 1153–1181.

plication. When the road ends (cf. v. 28), the change has begun; the breaking of the bread enables the recognition (cf. v. 31) which gives rise to the resolution.

While the narrator stores up information at the expense of the reader or a character in the story, this produces an imbalance which assigns a privilege to one and a penalty to the other, thus generating a phenomenon of opacity.⁷² In other words, the reader is aware of something the characters cannot see, or *vice versa*. The Emmaus episode is played out entirely on precisely these differences. At the beginning of the account, the narrator provides the reader with information which is withheld from the two travellers (cf. vv. 15b–16): they do not know the identity of the mysterious pilgrim whereas the reader is well aware of it. The reader knows more than the characters. This creates a situation of real dramatic irony at the expense of the characters: this arises from the contrast between the partial or erroneous perception on the part of the characters and the real perception of the reader. In what follows, however, the situation is turned on its head. The mysterious pilgrim “explained to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning him” (v. 27). The privileged become the penalised and *vice versa*: the characters now know more than the reader. The reader is deprived of knowledge which is available to the characters. What did the Risen One say to the two travellers? The omniscient narrator carefully avoids making this explicit. The awareness of not knowing something will tend to create an expectation which is directed towards the information that is lacking, in the form of curiosity. As soon as the travellers arrive at Emmaus (cf. v. 28), reader and disciples are on the same plane.

In its dynamics, this story is completely orientated towards the recognition of Jesus in the form of faith. At the beginning of the Gospel, the evangelist had declared his intention: “to make known” the truth of the words in which Theophilus had been instructed/catechised. That is, the reader had been invited to verify in person the truth of the teachings he had received in his first, basic initiation (or catechesis). At the end of the work, by means of the process of identification mediated by the account (where, incidentally, one of the two disciples is anonymous), the episode of the Emmaus disciples seeks from the reader the transition from the lack of recognition to the real recognition of Jesus and indicates how it comes about: the path of faith.⁷³

⁷² Cf. Marguerat-Bourquin, *Pour lire les récits bibliques*, 159–162.

⁷³ Opinions differ about this. For example, A. Giambrone, “Eyewitnesses from the Beginning: Apologetic Innovation and the Resurrection in the Autopsy of Luke-Acts,” *RB* 124 (2017) 180–213, especially 213, writes: “For Luke it is clear. Testimony to the resurrection exposes the limits of historiography. No amount of accreditation can secure the conclusion. The evidence of history is like the empty tomb, a footprint inviting judgment. In the end,

In the light of the episode of the Emmaus disciples, we understand the studied ambiguity of the initial frame precisely as a means of raising questions which the reader can answer by working his way through Luke's first volume. It follows that the choice of polysemic terms is not intended to confuse but rather to arouse interest, triggering a gnoseological process which is absolutely necessary so that Theophilus is able to recognise the truth of the elements of the faith in which he has been initiated. Thus, the preface cannot be understood solely in a literary or historical sense, despite the fact that there is clear evidence of serious work of historiographical research. Nor, still more, can it be interpreted only in a theological sense although there are elements which press one in this direction.⁷⁴

In this way, the preface acts precisely like the initial frame of the text.⁷⁵ If the textual frame is actually a device whose value is both informative and performative, its main task is precisely that of establishing communication with the reader in order to instruct him with a view to understanding the narrative itself. In Luke's case, the preface assigns the reader the task of recognising the truth of the teachings he has received; this programme reaches its climax with the recognition of the Emmaus disciples concurrent with the Christological fulfilment of the history of salvation which is deliberately alluded to precisely in the preface itself in a way that is ambiguous but not vague. Historiographical value and theological necessity are melded together in a *unicum* addressed to people whose convictions have to find greater security.

the Gospel witness cannot be accepted by any human power of assent, but only by a direct operation of God." A different opinion is found in M. Bauspieß, *Geschichte und Erkenntnis im Lukanischen Doppelwerk. Eine exegetische Untersuchung zu einer christlichen Perspektive auf Geschichte* (ABIG 42), Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, Leipzig 2012, 218: "Theophilus weiß um das Christusgeschehen, das auch der Inhalt der Vorgängerwerke ist. Es bedarf aber offensichtlich der Explikation dieses Inhaltes, die ihm in seiner Situation die ‚Gewissheit‘ dieses Geschehens erkennen lassen kann. Indem er erkennend daran partizipiert, kann ihm verständlich werden, in welcher Weise er in das Geschehen, um das er weiß, involviert ist und wie es sein gegenwärtiges Leben prägt."

⁷⁴ This conclusion is also reached by N. Siffer-Wiederhold, "Le projet littéraire de Luc d'après le prologue de l'évangile (Lc 1, 1-4)," *RevSR* 79 (2005) 39-54.

⁷⁵ Cf. the interesting reflections of A. Reginato, "Che il lettore capisca!" (*Mc 13,14*). *Il dispositivo di cornice nell'evangelo di Marco* (StRi), Cittadella, Assisi (PG) 2009, 41-107.

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