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in Luke 1.1-4 and Acts 1.1

Loveday Alexander

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Luke–Acts contains two short formal prefaces unlike anything else in the New Testament, and this is a study of the literary background of these prefaces. After surveying the different types of preface in ancient Greek literature, Dr Alexander concludes that the closest parallels to Luke's are to be found in Greek scientific and technical manuals of the hellenistic and Roman periods. This has important consequences for our understanding of the literary genre of Luke's Gospel and Acts, and casts new light on the social context of the author and the book's first readers.

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# The preface to Luke's Gospel

Literary convention and social context in  
Luke 1.1-4 and Acts 1.1

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The refinement of our historical sense chiefly means that we keep it properly complicated. History, like science and art, involves abstraction: we abstract certain events from others and we make this particular abstraction with an end in view, we make it to serve some purpose of our will. Try as we may, we cannot, as we write history, escape our purposiveness. Nor, indeed, should we try to escape, for purpose and meaning are the same thing. But in pursuing our purpose, in making our abstractions, we must be aware of what we are doing; we ought to have it fully in mind that our abstraction is not perfectly equivalent to the infinite complication of events from which we have abstracted. I should like to suggest a few ways in which those of us who are literary scholars can give our notion of history an appropriate complication.

Lionel Trilling, *The Sense of the Past* (1970), p. 194

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This book originated in a thesis which was awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Oxford in February 1978 (Alexander, 1978); a brief summary of its findings appeared in *Novum Testamentum* in 1986. The reasons for the delay in publishing the thesis were partly practical, partly personal: practical, in that the original thesis relied on the presentation of a substantial proportion of the evidence in the original Greek, which raised problems for publication; and personal, in that I was pre-occupied with personal and family concerns for a number of years after the thesis was finished. Revision has been proceeding at intervals during most of the intervening years; adepts of redaction criticism will no doubt be able to spot some of the redactional seams, but I trust that the finished text nevertheless has its own coherence. The chief difficulty in this prolonged gestation lies in the area of bibliography. The study of the social world of the New Testament, and particularly of Luke–Acts, has developed out of all recognition since I began my research in 1971; the production of a thesis naturally entails a complete bibliographical search in its preliminary stages, but I have made no attempt at a corresponding completeness during the later process of revision.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless the encouragement of colleagues in the field, and my own reading, have satisfied me that there is a gap in Lucan studies which this monograph may hope to fill: seventy years after Cadbury, there is still no substantial study of the literary conventions employed in the Lucan preface and their social significance. This is the area I have attempted to explore in this book.

<sup>1</sup> One recent publication should, however, be mentioned here. Stanley Porter's *The Language of the New Testament: Classic Essays (JSNT Supplement Series 60; Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 1991)* includes, alongside a number of important essays, a new translation of a section of Rydbeck's *Fachprosa* (Rydbeck, 1967), previously unavailable in English.



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I shall argue in the study which follows that the fact that a statement is conventional does not necessarily entail that it is untrue. Whether those arguments are accepted or not, my readers are asked to take it on trust here that my prefatorial thanks, however conventional, are sincerely meant. Professor Dennis Nineham, as supervisor and mentor, has been unfailingly patient and encouraging, as were my two examiners, Professor G. B. Caird and Dr. Oswyn Murray. Friends and colleagues in Oxford, Manchester and Sheffield (and elsewhere) have listened, argued, threatened and cajoled over the years on the many occasions when it seemed that the work would never see the light of day: I am grateful to them all and especially, for patience above and beyond the call of duty, to Professor Graham Stanton. Philip, Anne and Thomas Alexander have put up with the pains of revision with remarkable forbearance and will be as pleased as I am to see 'Theophilus' finally brought to birth. My thanks are due to Dr Margaret Thrall and to all the staff at Cambridge University Press who have helped me reduce a complicated manuscript to some sort of order. But my dedication (following English rather than Greek convention) symbolically discharges a debt of even longer standing. This book is dedicated to those who first encouraged my fascination with the classical world – to my parents, Anne and Jack Earl, and to the memory of Eric Cumbers, classics master extraordinary at the Herbert Strutt School, Belper.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

References to scientific prefaces follow the forms set out in Appendix B. Other references to classical authors use the abbreviations found in LSJ. Papyri are listed according to the standard forms as given in E. G. Turner, 1968, pp. 157–71.

- ABD* *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Doubleday, New York, 1992)
- ANRW* *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, eds. H. Temporini and W. Haase (de Gruyter, Berlin, 1972–92)
- BAG* *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 4th edn, translated and adapted W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich (University of Chicago Press and Cambridge University Press, 1957)
- BC* *The Beginnings of Christianity*, Part I, vols. I–V, eds. F. J. Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake (Macmillan, London, 1920–33)
- BDF* *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament*, F. Blass and A. Debrunner, translated and revised R. W. Funk (University of Chicago Press and Cambridge University Press, 1961)
- CBQ* *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
- CIL* *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*
- CMG* *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum* (Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin)
- CPJ* *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*, 3 vols., eds. V. A. Tcherikover, A. Fuks and M. Stern (Cambridge, Mass., 1957–64)
- CQ* *Classical Quarterly*
- DK* *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, ed. H. Diels, 9th edn W. Kranz, 3 vols. (Weidmann, Berlin, 1959)

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- FGH*      *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, ed. F. Jacoby, 3 vols. (Brill, Leiden & Weidmann, Berlin, 1923–58)
- GCS*      *Die griechischer Christlicher Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte* (Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Kirchenväter-commission)
- GGA*      *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen* (Göttingen, Akademie der Wissenschaften)
- GGM*      *Geographi Graeci Minores*, ed. C. W. L. Müller (Didot, Paris, 1855–61)
- GRBS*      *Greek, Roman & Byzantine Studies*
- HTR*      *Harvard Theological Review*
- JBL*      *Journal of Biblical Literature*
- JSNT*      *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
- JTS*      *Journal of Theological Studies*
- KP*      *Der Kleine Pauly*, eds. K. Ziegler and W. Sontheimer, 5 vols. (Druckenmüller Verlag, Stuttgart, 1964)
- LCL*      Loeb Classical Library
- LSJ*      *A Greek–English Lexicon*, H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, 9th edn revised H. S. Jones (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1940)
- MM*      *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament Illustrated from the Papyri and other Non-literary Sources*, eds. J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1914–29)
- NTS*      *New Testament Studies*
- OCD*<sup>2</sup>      *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 2nd edn, eds. N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1970)
- PG*      *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. J. P. Migne
- PGM*      *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, ed. K. Preisendanz and others, 2 vols. (Teubner, Stuttgart, 1973–4); English version ed. H.-D. Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, vol. I (University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1986)
- PIR*<sup>2</sup>      *Prosopographia Imperii Romani saec. I. II. III.*, eds. E. Groag, A. Stein, L. Petersen, 2nd edn
- PLRE*      *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, eds. A. H. M. Jones, J. R. Martindale, J. Morris, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1971–80)

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<i>RE</i>	Pauly–Wissowa–Kroll, <i>Realenzyklopädie</i>
<i>SBLDS</i>	Society of Biblical Literature, Dissertation Series
<i>SBLMS</i>	Society of Biblical Literature, Monograph Series
<i>SBLBS</i>	Society of Biblical Literature, Sources for Biblical Study
<i>SNTSMS</i>	Society for New Testament Studies, Monograph Series
<i>TWNT</i>	<i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament</i> , ed. G. Kittel and others (Kohlhammer, Stuttgart, 1933–72)
<i>ZNTW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZWTh</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie</i>