

BOOK REVIEW

Reece, Steve. *The Formal Education of the Author of Luke–Acts*. LNTS 669. London: T. & T. Clark, 2022. xii + 276 pp. Hbk. ISBN 9780567705884. \$143.95.

The study of Luke and Acts from the perspective of classical history has a rich tradition, but it seems rarer today than in the past for a career classical scholar to publish a monograph on these New Testament texts. Reece's book, *The Formal Education of the Author of Luke–Acts*, is the work of such a scholar and is a welcome addition both to the Library of New Testament Studies and to the field.

Reece's book can be segmented into three parts: (1) the introduction (ch. 1); (2) background considerations on the person of the author of Luke–Acts ("Luke") and his education (chs. 2–4); and (3) examination of Greek authors in Luke–Acts (chs. 5–10).

In chapter 1, Reece introduces both himself and the project he is beginning in this book (to include a second volume on Paul's letters? [p. v]). On Reece's part, he is a classicist, having received a PhD in the field and having worked as a professor for thirty years at the time of writing. His project is to identify classical influences on the text of the New Testament. Reece indicates that this formally began with a close reading of the New Testament in Greek—marking apparent allusions, echoes or unnamed citations—moved forward on the basis of searches in databases—the list on p. 8 will be helpful to explore for any students unfamiliar with them. He then synthesized data found in the later chapters. Even from his introduction, it is clear that Reece comes with outside expertise—one does not often see dactyls and spondees and other metrical symbols alongside extracts of New Testament texts! By the end of the introduction, Reece has basically laid out the landscape of various positions on the New Testament in its cultural context—emphasizing the importance of the Hellenistic world and its authors—and has given a taste of what is to come.

Chapter 2 is of interest mainly as a survey of the historical traditions about Luke. Interaction with classic works in New Testament studies about the author of Luke–Acts—like those by Conzelmann, Haenchen, Marshall or Jervell—might have helped to flesh out comments made throughout the book about Luke’s purposes, yet for his project it is mainly important to show what Reece does, that Luke is *Greek* by dint of culture and education. While there is no discussion of Theophilus, he offers many comments about Luke’s ‘readers’ throughout.

Chapters 3 and 4 are some of the most helpful in the book, discussing the possible education of someone like Luke. Reece suggests that Luke was a *πεπαιδευμένος* (‘educated person’) having gone through at least the first two stages of the *ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία* (‘curricular education’) (pp. 27, 30). In ch. 3, Reece’s summary of the three levels of education will be helpful for anyone interested in the potential education of New Testament figures like Luke or others. His use of school-level texts via images is engaging, and his warning that the usual sense of representation—of how much more ubiquitous Homer is than all others—ought to be tempered with the realization that school hands of a higher level may be indistinguishable from other actual fragments *is well-taken*: those higher-level texts would not bear the marks of a learner that beginner texts do (and Homer was used from the first while some others come later) (pp. 58, 60).

In ch. 3, Reece also treats the question of Luke’s potential knowledge of Latin, stating, ‘the simple answer is “no”’ (at least beyond a rudimentary level) (p. 45). The fuller answer is summarized as follows: ‘while Greek was regularly taught to young children in the schools of the Latin-speaking western Roman Empire, Latin never became part of the school curriculum of Greek speakers in the East’ (p. 50). The exception for the populace in the east was in military roles—where Vergil was especially popular. This is worth saying since, if true, Luke would in all likelihood be unable to have any direct access to even well-known Latin works such as the *Aeneid*, which some have nonetheless supposed, with varying degrees of creativity (e.g. Marianne Palmer Bonz, *The Past as Legacy: Luke–Acts and Ancient Epic* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000]; Dennis R. MacDonald, *Luke and Vergil* [Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015]).

Chapter 4 is also of interest, as Reece seeks to determine what might have been the mental (or actual) library and reading list of Luke. Reece quadrangulates the possibilities by surveying (1) the authors recommended by grammarians and rhetoricians; (2) authors in the literary remains of Hel-

lenistic Egypt; (3) school curricula; and (4) citations in Greek-language authors of Luke’s day (Plutarch, Philo, Josephus and Chariton). He shows extensive overlap between these categories and emerges with a plausible collection of key authors. On the fourth area, the comparison with the novelist Chariton hints at the complexity of the genre question since it is potentially a fruitful literary comparison. But Luke is doing a kind of historiography and not novel writing (as Reece acknowledges, p. 71). A classicist’s discussion on the possibilities (or not) of distinguishing narrative history from fictional narrative generically would be of interest.

These chapters do not only furnish New Testament scholars with helpful reference information but also demonstrate that, while Luke probably did not have advanced rhetorical education, he nonetheless would have had access to most of the authors/works surveyed in the chapters that follow: Homer, Aesop, Euripides and Plato (the case of Epimenides is not as clear).

In ch. 5 (‘Luke and Homer’), Reece charts a middle way between the work of Dennis MacDonald, who supposes a vast and programmatic mimesis of Homer at work in Luke–Acts, and scholars who note some potential similar wordings between Luke and Homer and nothing more. His critique of MacDonald (pp. 92–99) is unsparing: his incredulity is clear as he points out straightforward errors in addition to curious parallels (see below). Followed up by an extensive comparison with Homer, this chapter will attract most readers to his presentation over MacDonald’s.

Regarding the critique, Reece condemns MacDonald’s ‘practice of collecting a plethora of individual words that appear in common between two texts and then organizing these words neatly into two columns in order to highlight the commonalities of the two texts’ as ‘the piling on of more and more commonly shared but insignificant vocabulary’ that ‘does nothing to improve his argument; it only results—to use a Vergilian metaphor—in burying any potential gold deeply in the dung’ (p. 97). But there is gold, Reece maintains. He discusses, perhaps most importantly, a clear Homeric allusion in Acts 27.41 in the phrase *ἐπέκειλαν τὴν ναῦν* (‘they ran the ship aground’). Many commentators have pointed out that the verb *ἐπικέλλω* and the noun *ναῦς* both occur in Acts and Homer and likely show Homeric influence, with which Reece concurs. But why is this collocation considered a Homericism and not an instance of insignificant common vocabulary? It is because (1) the use of *ναῦς* is demonstrably uncharacteristic of Luke; it is essentially a synonym for *πλοῖον*—the only term Luke uses otherwise for boat/ship in Luke–Acts (used 27 times in total; one occurrence coming soon

after the use of *ναῦς* in 27.44). That is, the word is characteristic of poetic and literary texts; (2) *ἐπικέλλω* is a hapax legomenon in the New Testament and only occurs in poetry and only in dactylic hexameter verse; and (3) the collocation of these two words—unusual for Luke—is only found in Homeric poetry.

On its own, this does not make the case for Homeric mimesis, even while it is superior to MacDonald's. But Reece brings other compelling evidence for the position. For example, in the near context, there is a full verse in dactylic hexameter (*οὐδενὸς ... ὑμῶν θριξὶ ἀπὸ τῆς κεφαλῆς ἀπολείται*, '[for] the hair of not one of you shall be lost from your head', Acts 27.34), and in this verse, the four main words appear in the same metrical position as they are found elsewhere in poetry.

What are the implications? Reece sees Homeric influence in Luke's sea voyage account to the point that, in 27.9-10, 'the narrative undergoes a transformation from a mundane travelogue to an exciting tale of adventure' (p. 100) and culminates in an Odyssean speech given by Paul in the midst of the storm that 'lacks verisimilitude as a historical account' stating finally that it 'is not simply a record of an actual event; it is a literary topos' (p. 103). He indicates this while he is elsewhere quite clear that Acts is a history produced by an author with the requisite education to do so (p. 71)—e.g. he says that Luke ought to be given credit as a competent historian and person (p. 79 n. 31) and that 'Acts is not an epic in any meaningful sense of the term' (p. 93). That both can be true is important to recognize. Yet here, again, I find it unfortunate that Reece does not deal with the question of the nature of history genres and the nature of history within other genres since his perspective on the issue would be welcome. Nor does he offer reflection on the impact that extensive historical verisimilitude of the voyage and shipwreck of Paul could otherwise have for his view (e.g. in James Smith traditionally). There is at least one more position than the view that the section is either an artless report or it is a literary topos: it can be an artful report. Such would seem to be the nature of narrative historiography. In any event, Reece's overall argument and especially his comparisons with Luke's Paul and Odysseus are compelling (pp. 112-17).

In sum, it cannot be denied that Luke is influenced by and refers to Homeric poetry in his sea voyage account—Reece's presentation should be the new reference point for the subject going forward (Reece ends up validating MacDonald's project in many ways and could have made more of an effort to indicate that). Overall, however, I prefer literary 'elevation' to

Reece's claim of narrative 'embellishment'—especially in light of the presentation of Paul—since elevation can do justice both to a new emphasis on literary influence (as Reece makes) and to the sense of Luke's overall straightforward discourse in general and of his preface in Lk. 1.1-4.

The connection between Luke and Aesop (ch. 6) is similarly maintained, with a focus on Luke's Gospel. The Emmaus reference to Aesop in Luke 24 is interesting since, if one analyzes the subject matter of the units before and after, it is the only section that does not have the physicality of Christ's resurrection body as a main subject or in a place of prominence. The possibility of influence at that place may further indicate something unique about its fit in the narrative (was it written separately?).

The discussion about Paul's speech in Athens and the citation of poets there is the subject of ch. 7. Reece maintains here (as elsewhere) a view of the speeches of Acts that is common (but not necessarily the consensus) in the tradition of scholarship: that is, they are Luke's free composition. The Thucydidean question has loomed large in studies on the speeches (see Dibelius, especially), but Thucydides is unfortunately not even mentioned in Reece's book. Yet, in pointing out that this is the only place in the New Testament that formally cites (anonymously) Hellenistic authors and that the case for Luke's familiarity with Epimenides is more speculative than the other authors treated in the volume, one wonders if this might not hint at wording originating with Paul's own words. Given the connection between the Acts 17.28 citation and Paul's in Tit. 1.12—and the plausibility of a variant reading in Acts 17.28 of Paul saying 'our poets' (instead of 'your poets')—the case might be compelling. But then the whole question of speeches in historical narratives seems very relevant; again—not discussed (at least concerning Thucydides).

Chapters 8 and 9 are the most extensive of Reece's treatments of authorial influence (by Euripides). Reece's treatment of Luke's exposure via the theatre is compelling, and his general case for access and some quotation/allusion (e.g. the well-known case in Acts 26.14) is likewise. Regarding ch. 9, the connection between Paul and Dionysus, while interesting, enjoys very little of the magnetism that the earlier comparison with Odysseus does.

Chapter 10 treats Luke and Plato and serves, as it were, as the conclusion of the book. Here Reece sees Jesus, Peter and Paul as Socratic figures, which speaks to at least one proposal as to the genre of Luke–Acts (that they are collected biography—understandably not addressed by Reece). Paul gets the most space, and in this, it is too bad that Daniel Marguerat's

treatment of the very same subject was not included. Regarding Paul, Reece sticks close to Acts 17, so it would have been interesting to see him interact with Marguerat's proposals for Socratic influence behind Paul in Ephesus in Acts 19, Paul in Lystra in Acts 14 or Marguerat's more speculative interpretation of Socratic influence behind the status of the Torah in Acts.

Two appendices (one introducing P75—the earliest witness to Luke's Gospel—and one on 'Latin literary texts preserved on documents contemporary with Luke') close out the book before a full bibliography and indices. Appendix 2 serves as a complement to the question, asked in ch. 3, about Luke's potential knowledge of Latin.

This book will doubtless serve its turn in the field if given due attention by students and scholars of Luke–Acts; it will be most useful for the extensive background knowledge about education that it provides. Especially on Homeric influence—Homer is a specialty area for Reece—this book should now be the first place to start for considering the case for the influence of Hellenistic authors on the texts of Luke–Acts.

A number of final considerations are in order. The documentation is good and, since this is not a critical introduction to Luke–Acts, some of the works on authorship, historicality, genre, date, etc. that are commonly expected by those within the New Testament Studies guild are unsurprisingly left out. The preface and introduction set the stage for an important project, so the lack of a conclusion was a disappointment. The work is well-written, and no errors were glaring or jumped out, but one comment made about resurrection (p. 153) that generalizes the skepticism of the philosophers in Acts 17 to 'ancient Greeks' in general is curious since numerous publications have evidenced resurrection beliefs (even physical) among Greeks and Hellenized people, even if not among some philosophers.

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