

FIRST-PERSON CLAIMS
IN SOME ANCIENT HISTORIANS AND ACTS

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Various ancient historians used third- and first-person designations for themselves in different ways, and sometimes even employed various usages within their individual works.¹ William Sanger Campbell offers a useful survey of some of these usages, correctly observing that ancient writings, in contrast to most modern ones, ‘refer to their narrators in first (singular and plural) and third person for both event- and narrator-level narration’.² Although his survey of usages is quite helpful, his reservations concerning Luke’s usage of the first person for eyewitness historical testimony must be qualified.³

1. I am adapting material here that is also addressed in the forthcoming third volume of my Acts commentary (*Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* [4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012–]). Howard M. Jackson, ‘Ancient Self-Referential Conventions and their Implications for the Authorship and Integrity of the Gospel of John’, *JTS* 50 (1999), pp. 1-34, which I discovered too late to engage properly in my John commentary, offers an important contribution on this subject. In the 1990s (but finally published in 2003), I argued that ‘Third-person authorial claims appear in antiquity alongside first-person ones’, in Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), p. 105, citing examples in Thucydides, Xenophon and Polybius.

2. William Sanger Campbell, ‘The Narrator as “He,” “Me,” and “We”’: Grammatical Person in Ancient Histories and in the Acts of the Apostles’, *JBL* 129 (2010), pp. 385-407 (389). I focus on the article rather than his larger book (*The “We” Passages in the Acts of the Apostles: The Narrator as Narrative Character* [SBL SBL, 14; Atlanta: SBL, 2007]) because *JBL* offers a much wider audience. Although Josephus is the only historian of Campbell’s three from the period of the early empire, other historians of this period did make use of a narratorial ‘I’ (cf., e.g., Tacitus, *Hist.* 1.51, 59; 2.8, 17, 27; 5.2, 10, 19).

3. Although the genre of Acts is sometimes debated, the majority of scholars view it as ancient historiography; see Martin Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles* (ed. H. Greeven; trans. M. Ling; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons,

'We' as a First-Person Historical Claim?

Classicist Arthur Darby Nock contended that Luke's 'we' should be read like 'we' in other ancient historians: a claim that included the author himself.⁴ By contrast, one of the chief conclusions for which some cite Campbell's article is his argument that broader historiographic usage tells us little about Luke's use of 'we' as an eyewitness claim.

Questioning 'We' as a Historical Claim

Campbell acknowledges that the majority of scholars view Luke's 'we' as an eyewitness claim (whether from the author or his source).⁵ Nevertheless, he draws on his study of three ancient historians (Thucydides, Polybius

1956), pp. 123-37; Henry J. Cadbury, *The Book of Acts in History* (London: A. & C. Black, 1955); Eckhard Plümacher, 'Luke as Historian' (trans. Dennis Martin), *ABD*, IV, pp. 398-402; Plümacher, *Lukas als hellenistischer Schriftsteller: Studien zur Apostelgeschichte* (SUNT, 9; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972), pp. 33-38, 137-39; Plümacher, *Geschichte und Geschichten: Aufsätze zur Apostelgeschichte und zu den Johannesakten* (WUNT, 170; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), pp. 1-32; Plümacher, 'Cicero und Lukas: Bemerkungen zu Stil und Zweck der historischen Monographie', in Joseph Verheyden (ed.), *The Unity of Luke-Acts* (BETL, 142; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1999), pp. 759-75 (772-73); Plümacher, 'Die Apostelgeschichte als historische Monographie', in Jacob Kremer (ed.), *Les Actes des Apôtres: Traditions, rédaction, théologie* (BETL, 48; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1979), pp. 457-66; Kremer, 'Stichwort: Lukas, Historiker', *ZNW* 9 (2006), pp. 2-8; Darryl W. Palmer, 'Acts and the Ancient Historical Monograph', in Bruce W. Winter and Andrew D. Clarke (eds.), *The Book of Acts in its Ancient Literary Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 1-29; Daryl D. Schmidt, 'Rhetorical Influences and Genre: Luke's Preface and the Rhetoric of Hellenistic Historiography', in David P. Moessner (ed.), *Jesus and the Heritage of Israel: Luke's Narrative Claim upon Israel's Legacy* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999), pp. 27-60 (59); Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 3rd ed., 2004), p. 133; David L. Balch, 'ΜΕΤΑΒΟΛΗ ΠΟΛΙΤΕΙΩΝ—Jesus as Founder of the Church in Luke-Acts: Form and Function', in Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele (eds.), *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan Narrative and Greco-Roman Discourse* (SBLSymS, 20; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), pp. 139-88 (141-42, 149-54); Balch, 'The Genre of Luke-Acts: Individual Biography, Adventure Novel, or Political History?', *SwJT* 33 (1990), pp. 5-19 (11-19). See also my argument more fully in Keener, *Acts*, I, pp. 51-361.

4. Arthur Darby Nock, *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World* (ed. Zeph Stewart; 2 vols.; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. 827-28 (against a fictitious 'we').

5. Campbell, 'Narrator', p. 386.

and Josephus) in an attempt to neutralize the traditional argument that ‘we’ reflects eyewitness presence.⁶ He does concede that his argument ‘does not mean that the author or his source could not have been an eyewitness’, only that this is not the primary point of the first-person usage.⁷ Whatever Luke’s other literary intentions, however (and I am not here challenging Campbell on these points), a first-person claim in historical sources does indicate the narrator as the subject of the verbs in question—in this case verbs that claim the narrator’s presence.

Campbell recognizes that, based on Polybius’s usage, Luke’s ‘we’ passages ‘place the narrator character at the scene, an eyewitness to and a participant in the events narrated’. Nevertheless, he balks at the expected conclusion, protesting that in light of Acts’ anonymity ‘we’ simply establishes characterization, not historical information.⁸

The evidence that Campbell assembles, however, does not support this case, which instead rests on inferences unrelated to the data he cites, inferences that not all scholars would accept as legitimate. The narrator does not emphasize his presence, Campbell contends, because he ‘does not say that at these points he has entered events personally, nor does the story itself suggest that this is the case’.⁹ This claim is surprising, especially because Campbell himself notes that ancient writers could shift from third to first person or first person singular to plural at times without warning.¹⁰ When an ancient writer attributes action in the narrative to a first-person actor and is not quoting another’s speech, the writer by that very attribution normally claims to enter events personally. In such cases, we do not expect the writer to offer a further level of affirmation explaining that he intends to convey what readers would normally infer that his words communicate.

Ultimately, Campbell’s principal reason for denying that Acts’ narrator claims to be present rests not on the analysis of other ancient historians, but on Campbell’s contention that Luke differs from these historians.¹¹

6. The first-person usage is thus ‘not chiefly a historical marker indicating the presence of the actual author of Acts or one of his sources’ (Campbell, ‘Narrator’, p. 407, emphasizing a narrative role; the latter, however, need not be incompatible with a historical marker, since Luke is writing a history).

7. Campbell, ‘Narrator’, p. 406.

8. Campbell, ‘Narrator’, p. 406.

9. Campbell, ‘Narrator’, p. 386.

10. Campbell, ‘Narrator’, pp. 389, 396, 399, 401.

11. Aside from the major reason addressed below, Campbell also contends (p. 387) that it is problematic to suppose that the narrator traveled with Paul because

Acts' Anonymity?

Campbell's argument against the author claiming to be present depends especially on his repeated suggestion that Luke's anonymity makes him different from the other historians surveyed; Luke's first-person usage therefore does not refer to an identity claim earlier in the narrative.¹² Of the four works (two by Josephus and one each by Thucydides and Polybius) that Campbell investigates, three do indeed name their authors in the beginning of their works. Such naming was, however, neither the exclusive nor the necessary practice of ancient sources, as one may easily note by surveying prefaces in other histories¹³ and biographies.¹⁴ In fact, Campbell himself observes that in one of the four works he treats, Josephus's *Antiquities of the Jews*, the author does not name himself within the work.¹⁵ Works did not always explicitly identify their authors. Lack of such identification thus no more makes Luke's work necessarily 'anonymous' for his real audience than does lack of intrinsic authorial identification in other ancient works make all of them functionally

the narrator's perspectives differ significantly from those in Paul's letters. Many scholars do share Campbell's concern at this point, and it is not my point to address it here; I address it more fully in Keener, *Acts*, I, pp. 226-57, esp. 250-57.

12. Campbell, 'Narrator', pp. 387, 404-406. Campbell does recognize that the first-person singular usage in the Lukan prefaces associates the narrator with the 'anonymous' author (p. 405).

13. The earlier historian Herodotus names himself in the third person (1.1.0), but this was not a universal standard. For a survey of prefaces only, some historical prefaces identify their authors only by speaking in the first person singular (Livy 1.pr; Arrian, *Anab.* 1.pr; Tacitus, *Ann.* 1.1; *Hist.* 1.1; Herodian, *Hist.* 1.1.1-6); the 'Foreign Wars' (part of *Hist. rom.*) attributed to Appian identifies him as the author (pref. 15), but his *Bell. civ.* does not; Tacitus, *Germ.* 1 does not name the author (though the first-person singular in, e.g., *Germ.* 2, 46 implies that he is known); cf. also Xenophon, *Anab.* 1.1.1 (though Xenophon appears as an actor later in the work); Sallust, *Bell. cat.* 1; *Bell. jug.* 1.

14. Among biographical prefaces, Diogenes Laertius does not name himself, nor does Tacitus, *Agr.* 1-3 (though his first-person singular usage in *Agr.* 1, 3, and mention of Agricola as his father-in-law in *Agr.* 2 are plain enough); Suetonius cites the testimony of his father, whom he names (*Otho* 10) in a biography that does not open by identifying himself (*Otho* 1).

15. Campbell, 'Narrator', p. 400, noting that Josephus identifies himself there only as author of the *War*. This identification, however, confirms that Josephus's audience knew his identity.

anonymous for Luke's contemporaries.¹⁶

An ancient work could be anonymous in terms of explicit intrinsic claims and yet not be anonymous for its real audience. As relevance theory demonstrates, some information in communication is implicit or assumed;¹⁷ readers of the *Antiquities of the Jews* knew that Josephus was the author, and Luke's ideal audience undoubtedly knew who the 'I' of his preface was. Simply because modern scholars often argue that we cannot know who Acts' author was does not mean that Luke's original audience in the first century suffered the same deficiency. Luke names at least one member of his intended audience (Theophilus; Lk. 1.3; Acts 1.1), and presumably takes for granted that Theophilus knows his identity. When dedicatees are named in ancient works, the dedicatees normally knew the authors' identity; any exceptions to this practice would have been rare.¹⁸ For that matter, if we do not know the author's identity, we cannot even argue with much certainty that Luke does not name himself in the third person at points in the narrative (if, say, he was Silas or Timothy).¹⁹

What Historians Meant by 'We'

Campbell emphasizes that the use of the first person dominates at the narrator level and is rarer at the event level.²⁰ This observation is true (and for other purposes helpful), but the primary issue for evaluating

16. One might respond that these historians or biographers did not participate in action in the books (perhaps questionable in some sense at times, e.g. Tacitus, *Hist.* 1.1), but that observation would lack bearing on the question of whether a work that fails to name its author in the preface is thereby an anonymous work, since there are no other reasons for asserting Luke's anonymity. Extended to other genres (to broaden the base of evidence), it is clear that authors not naming themselves in prefaces, or in fact anywhere in their work, does not make their works anonymous. If one protests that the author was already known, is implied in first-person usage, or was identified in a title on the outside of a scroll, one could offer the same hypotheses, if one wished, for Acts.

17. See discussion in, e.g., Keener, *Acts*, I, p. 23; Ernst-August Gutt, *Relevance Theory: A Guide to Successful Communication in Translation* (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics; New York: United Bible Societies, 1992), pp. 27, 33; Margaret Gavin Sim, *Making Thought and Talk in New Testament Greek: New Light from Linguistics on the Particles ἵνα and ὅτι* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), ch. 2.

18. On dedications, see discussion in Keener, *Acts*, I, pp. 653-57; on Theophilus as a real person (as dedicatees virtually always were), pp. 657-58.

19. This is admittedly not my preferred solution, since Luke's 'we' appears in particular locations and does not always follow Silas and Timothy.

20. Campbell, 'Narrator', p. 406.

what Luke means by ‘we’ is not how often the author uses first person within the narrative but what he *means* when he uses it. Historians varied among themselves as to which of them ever included themselves in the narrative in the first person.²¹ No rule, therefore, prohibited Luke from including himself in the first person, even if, as is likely (see discussion below), he minimizes his role as actor more than many other actor/narrators minimized their own. Despite the value for literary analysis of observing authors’ differences in usage for the level of the narrator and presence within the narrative, these differences affect only frequency of first-person usage within the narrative, *not* whom the first-person usage identifies.

What is critical when asking who is included in Luke’s first-person usage is whether historians referred or did not refer to themselves when they used the first person. Here the resounding answer of Campbell’s own evidence is that they did intend themselves, whether individually (in the first person singular) or as part of a group (in the first person plural).

Thus one may note Josephus’s use of the first person plural in *Antiquities of the Jews*: ‘The first person singular in *Antiquities* often serves to distinguish the author/narrator individually from first person plural references close at hand that associate him with the Jewish people’.²² That is, Josephus speaks in his ‘we’ passages as part of a group.²³ Campbell rightly concludes that in Luke–Acts, as in other works, first-person plural usage shows the ‘narrator’s personal knowledge as eyewitness or researcher and, therefore, his credentials for telling the story accurately as Luke claims in Luke 1:3-4’.²⁴

Authors employ the first person plural in various ways, sometimes including the addressees and sometimes excluding them, and occasionally as a collective or authoritative replacement for the first person singular;²⁵

21. Sometimes for aesthetic reasons, as is explicit in Polybius (36.12.2-5; Campbell, ‘Narrator’, pp. 395-96), and as Campbell, ‘Narrator’, p. 402, allows as possible for Josephus’s *Antiquities*.

22. Campbell, ‘Narrator’, p. 400. The connection with Josephus’s people is explicit in *Ant.* 1.4; 20.259-260. Josephus does not appear at the event level in the *Antiquities* (Campbell, ‘Narrator’, p. 400).

23. Campbell, ‘Narrator’, p. 402, also allows that Josephus’s somewhat greater variation of usage in this work might also be partly explained by literary aesthetics.

24. Campbell, ‘Narrator’, p. 405. His observation of this function of the first person plural in Acts 16.17 (Campbell, ‘Narrator’, p. 407) is reasonable; certainly it has this effect.

25. See, e.g., discussions in David E. Aune, ‘First-Person Plural,’ in *The Westminster Dictionary of New Testament and Early Christian Literature and*

yet ‘we’ nearly always includes the speaker. On a literary level, it states the obvious to point out that in Luke’s usage, the first person includes the speaker, just as other writers’ usage did; that was the point of *using* the first person plural. Whatever the genre of Luke’s work, speakers within his narratives include themselves in first-person plural claims.²⁶ Why should readers suddenly interpret the expression differently when the narrator is the one speaking?

Relevant analogies in ancient historians, therefore, are not limited to the uses of the first person (and still more narrowly, the first person plural) at the event level. Dividing narratorial and event-level uses of the first person reduces the evidence admitted for discussion, but on the point in question (that is, whether the first-person usage is self-referential) there is no significant difference between the narratorial and event levels.²⁷ Campbell’s article does not claim that any of his examples involve a fictitious ‘we’; rather, it argues that first person appears more often at the narratorial level. One cannot use this observation to construe Luke’s ‘we’ as narratorial, however, since it invariably appears with verbs at the event level. If the ‘we’ is not fictitious, it must be taken as a claim to participation, just as readers elsewhere would construe it where it occurs, on whatever level, in primarily factual writings.

Likewise, the historian’s first-person usage in these cases includes himself whether the usage is singular or plural.²⁸ Some historians, such

Rhetoric (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), pp. 184-85; Jackson, ‘Conventions’, p. 12; David Filbeck, ‘Problems in Translating First Person Plural Pronouns in 2 Corinthians’, *BT* 45 (1994), pp. 401-409; Paul Ellingworth, “‘We’ in Paul”, *BT* 56 (2005), pp. 226-32. For an example of ‘we’ meaning ‘I’, see Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Dem.* 58; probably also Euripides, *frg.* 1066 (from Stobaeus 4.29.40).

26. Far more than one hundred times, occasionally very generally for humankind (Acts 17.28), but normally as part of a people (e.g. Lk. 1.74; 3.8) or any other group (e.g. Lk. 3.10, 12, 14; 4.23, 34; 5.5, 26; Acts 2.32, 37). This is also the case when Paul refers to himself and one or more of his ministry companions (Acts 13.32, 46; 14.15; 15.36; 16.28), fellow believers (14.22), or fellow travelers (26.14; 27.26).

27. Although undoubtedly not deliberate in this case, the introduction of categories irrelevant to the point of the discussion is a logical fallacy frequently deployed in contemporary scholarship to reduce evidence supporting a position that the scholar wishes to dispute. In this case, the categories are relevant to some of Campbell’s discussion but not to his doubt that Luke’s ‘we’ necessarily implies the narrator’s presence.

28. As noted above, Campbell, ‘Narrator’, p. 400, notes this group usage (on the level of narrator) in Josephus’s *Antiquities*, and elsewhere, e.g., the corporate perspective in Tacitus, *Agr.* 46. This is technically true even when the inclusion is

as Diodorus Siculus, often use first-person plural narration, perhaps even preferring it to the singular.²⁹ Although dividing the first-person evidence into singular and plural uses may suggest patterns of usage distinctive to particular authors, not all the authors make the expected distinctions in usage. The division into singular and plural effectively minimizes the evidence being discussed, allowing one to complain that little evidence is available for the plural examples.

Luke, however, has a very clear reason for preferring the plural of the first person: he identifies his presence only as part of a larger group, not as a primary actor within the narrative. A singular pronoun would require a statement of action distinct from one concerning the group. That is, Luke uses the plural because he belongs to a group, just as Josephus sometimes uses the plural because he belongs to a group.

Use of 'We' instead of Author's Name

An important question separate from what Luke *means* by 'we' is why he uses it. The narrator's mention of himself within the narrative using the first person plural contrasts with the frequent historiographic practice of naming oneself as a participant only in the third person. Thucydides occasionally, and Polybius and Josephus usually, use first person at the narrator level.³⁰ In Acts, however, the narrator's first-person plural verbs appear not at the narrator level but within the narrative (16.10-13, 16; 20.6-8, 13-15; 21.1-8, 10, 12, 14-17; 27.1-5, 7-8, 15-16, 18, 27, 29; 28.1, 10-14, 16).

Other Meanings of the First Person Plural?

Campbell suggests that if Luke wished to communicate his presence, he should have followed the example of Thucydides, Polybius and Josephus

merely a matter of editorial courtesy to diminish offense, as possibly in the corrected 'we' of Tacitus, *Hist.* 1.1 (cf. *Agr.* 2).

29. I have not surveyed all of Diodorus, but he fairly often narrates in the plural (see, e.g., Diodorus Siculus 11.56.1; 11.58.4; 11.59.1, 3, 4; 11.64.3; 11.89.1; 11.90.2, 3; 13.1.1; 13.104.8; 13.114.3; 14.2.3-4; 14.63.2; 16.5.4; 16.26.6; 16.40.4; 16.46.5; 16.50.8; 16.60.5; 16.64.3; 16.65.9; 16.93.3; 16.95.5; 17.1.2, 5; 17.5.1, 3; 17.6.3; 17.47.6; 17.63.5; 17.118.4; material after 10.18.6) and sometimes in the singular (16.26.1). This includes not only narration but on a rare occasion a statement that suggests his active presence and research, as in 17.52.6. We should not expect to see him much as an actor on the event level.

30. Campbell, 'Narrator', p. 402.

in using the third person.³¹ Yet the setting in which Luke uses the first person is what determines what he communicates with it.

First-person plural usage, Campbell suggests, need not indicate presence. To support this claim he notes that Josephus's first-person identification with his ancestors cannot really 'signal Josephus's historical presence among his Jewish ancestors'.³² But although Josephus is not making a claim of historical presence, he is identifying himself as part of the people, a claim that virtually no one disputes. That is, he is included in his 'we'. Luke's usage differs not in whom the 'we' includes but in the action or identification described; in both cases the first person includes the author.

Campbell may be right to conclude,

In the histories analyzed, referring to the author/narrator as 'we' gives a sense of corroboration to the narrative eyewitness's version of the story... Similarly, the effect of first person plural grammatical style in Acts is to cast the narrator character as a narrative eyewitness and participant in Paul's mission and, in so doing, to emphasize his version of events.³³

At the same time, Campbell argues, this usage 'qualifies the narrator's involvement by characterizing him as part of a broader eyewitness group'.³⁴ As I argue below, this is indeed true on one level. Campbell's argument that Luke's first person plural invites his audience into the narrative³⁵ is possible but not certain, and here Campbell's own distinctions become significant: an editorial or narratorial 'we' may invite audience participation, but does a narrative 'we' at the event level necessarily do so, if the audience recognizes most members of the group in question? Whether or not Campbell is correct here, however, is not germane to the historiographic question about the narrator's presence, since a narrator's claim to be present historically is not in principle incompatible with an additional literary purpose such as reader identification.³⁶

31. Campbell, 'Narrator', p. 406.

32. Campbell, 'Narrator', p. 406.

33. Campbell, 'Narrator', p. 406.

34. Campbell, 'Narrator', p. 406.

35. Campbell, 'Narrator', p. 407.

36. As many today recognize, historical and literary approaches need not be incompatible; see, e.g., Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke-Acts in its Mediterranean Milieu* (NovTSup, 107; Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 14-15; William S. Kurz, *Reading Luke-Acts: Dynamics of Biblical Narrative* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p. 173; Todd Klutz, *The Exorcism Stories in Luke-Acts: A Sociostylistic*

Returning to the question of historical presence, what is more critical here is to note that we have no reason to believe (and Campbell does not specifically claim) that ancient historians introduced such an invitation to audience participation fictitiously. Since the actions Luke's 'we' depicts involve participation in the narrative's events rather than narration, it remains a claim of genuine presence, for which the interpretive options are that it is either accurate or fictitious.

This observation in a sense holds true not only for ancient historiography but for ancient writings in general: if a writer claims to have been present, the claim is either true or false. If we deem it false, it is either because we expect it to be so, based on its presence in a work the genre of which does not make many historical claims (such as a novel), or because we have sufficient reason to believe that the author in question is lying in this case.³⁷ There is not sufficient reason to believe that Luke is lying, given his relatively rare, inconspicuous, and geographically consistent use of the first person, and given the consistency with the epistolary Paul on the points one would expect for a writer other than Paul.³⁸

Usage Varied

Why would Luke use first person within the narrative when most historians used especially third person there? First, we may note that not all authors identified themselves within narratives only in the third person, even in some of the works on which Campbell's study focused; there was

Reading (SNTSMS, 129; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 16.

37. Even a third-person historical narrator could 'lie or exaggerate' (Jackson, 'Conventions', p. 25); the point is that the norm and expectation for truth claims in factually-based genres was that they be true (see, e.g., Aristotle, *Poet.* 9.2-3, 1451b; Josephus, *Apion* 1.26; Pliny, *Ep.* 7.17.3; 7.33.10; 8.4.1; Lucian, *Ver. hist.* 8-9, 40; see further discussion in Keener, *Acts*, I, pp. 116-47, esp. regarding Polybius on 124-26). The exceptions are in *ethopoiia*, which is relevant in speeches but not in historical writing, or in a hypothetical 'I' (such as 1 Cor. 13.1-3), again not relevant to historical writing (except where Israel speaks in the first person in some speeches, e.g. Deut. 2.26-29; 26.5, again not relevant to the present case).

38. See, e.g., Adolf von Harnack, *The Acts of the Apostles* (trans. J.R. Wilkinson; New Testament Studies, 3; New York: Putnam's Sons; London: Williams & Norgate, 1909), pp. 264-74; Thomas H. Campbell, 'Paul's "Missionary Journeys" as Reflected in his Letters', *JBL* 74 (1955), pp. 80-87 (87); Talbert, *Mediterranean Milieu*, pp. 201-206; Rainer Riesner, 'Die historische Zuverlässigkeit der Apostelgeschichte', *Zeitschrift für Neues Testament* 9 (2006), pp. 38-43 (41-42); Keener, *Acts*, I, p. 226-57, esp. 250-57.

some room for author variation (in contrast to what appears to be a fairly uniform absence of a fictitious ‘we’ claim in ancient historiography).³⁹ Campbell’s own evidence shows that occasionally Polybius, for example, used the first person at the event level.⁴⁰

Furthermore, most historians did not directly participate in events and therefore could not mention themselves within the story’s events *per se*. Nevertheless, they could mention their activity involving research, inquiries or eyewitness testimony of monuments. In these cases, they speak not simply as narrators but as those who *acted* in a way that is briefly narrated. This was already true of Herodotus, for example,⁴¹ when acting in concert with others, he could also speak of what ‘we’ did in the first person plural.⁴² Dionysius of Halicarnassus notes that he acquired some information orally from learned men, ‘with whom I associated’.⁴³ Occasionally Diodorus Siculus could also mention himself at the level of presence and research.⁴⁴

Writing in a work that covers some of the same historical ground as his *The Jewish War*, Josephus’s *Life of Josephus* employs the first person lavishly;⁴⁵ other forms of biographic works also did not object to it.⁴⁶ Suetonius, for example, casually includes self-reference in the first

39. Campbell, ‘Narrator’, p. 403, particularly underlines author variation on the use of person at the *narrator* level, contrasting Thucydides and Polybius, although the differences are probably partly chronological. But some variation also exists at the event level within narratives, as noted above.

40. Campbell, ‘Narrator’, pp. 394-95 (on Polybius 36.11.1-4; 39.8.1).

41. Herodotus sometimes notes his personal inquiry about or reception of accounts from his informants (e.g. 1.20; 1.51.3-4; 1.92.2; 1.105.3; 2.104.1; 3.55.2; 7.114.2), or suggests other research he did or when he himself was an eyewitness (e.g. 2.99.1; 2.127.1; 2.147.1; 2.148.1; 4.81.2; 4.195.2; 5.59; 6.47.1; negatively, 2.73.1). In most of these cases Herodotus’s use of first person does indicate his action and not simply his narrative perspective.

42. ‘We measured’ in Herodotus 2.127.2; at the narratorial level, cf. 1.95.1; 6.55.

43. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. rom.* 1.7.3 (LCL I, p. 23). He does have far more occasion to mention himself at a purely narratorial level (e.g. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. rom.* 1.1; 1.5.1; 1.6.5; 1.7.1; 1.8.1; 1.90.2; 2.47.3; 9.60.1; 9.71.4).

44. Diodorus Siculus 17.52.6.

45. Campbell, ‘Narrator’, p. 398; see Josephus, *Life* 1-3, 5-6, 8-17, 19-21, 27, 30-31, 41, 62-65, 68-70 etc. Here Josephus sometimes identifies himself as part of a group or its experience with a first person plural (e.g. *Life* 15, 63); sometimes it may simply speak politely of Josephus himself in *Life* 22, 27-28).

46. E.g. Tacitus uses the first person in mentioning his relationship with his father-in-law, as noted. On biographies as historically-related genres (because of their heavy

person where it explains a source for his information.⁴⁷ When Philostratus uses ‘we’ or ‘us’ (in his *Vit. soph.* 2.21.604) for students of Proclus of Naucratis, it is because he himself was among the students (2.21.602). Many other factually-oriented works also seem to have lacked reticence to employ the first person.⁴⁸

Because Luke’s marked citations are mostly from Scripture, it is the one source that we can be most certain that Luke and his ideal audience shared. Biblical historians do not usually claim their presence in the narrative, but exceptions appear in Ezra (chs. 8–9, alongside third-person usage in chs. 7 and 10)⁴⁹ and Nehemiah (1.1-6 and throughout, alongside third person in 1.1; 8.9; 10.1; 12.26, 47); these writers can shift to the plural ‘we’ when traveling as part of a group (Ezra 8.31-32) or in some other group activities (e.g. Neh. 2.17-20; 4.1, 4, 6, 9). First-century Jews viewed Deuteronomy, one of the most widely cited works at Qumran and in early Christianity, as Mosaic. This work introduces Moses speaking in the third person (Deut. 1.5), as we might expect from sources sampled above, but then allows Moses to elaborate a lengthy historical prologue in the first person singular (1.6–3.29). Where the plural occurs, it is not limited to Moses but includes him as part of a group,⁵⁰ including his participation on journeys (Deut. 1.19; 2.1, 8, 13-14; 3.1, 29).

The book of Isaiah introduces the prophet in the third person (Isa. 1.1), but he appears thereafter in both the first and third person;⁵¹ whatever

dependence on information that was believed to be historical), see the sources noted in Keener, *Acts*, I, p. 56.

47. See Suetonius, *Aug.* 7; *Cal.* 19; *Otho* 10; *Dom.* 12. In this case he was not risking self-commendation, since he was not an actor within the narrative.

48. See, e.g., Aulus Gellius 1.4, 11, 13, 15, 18, 21, 22, 23, 26; 2.2, 6, 7, 12, 13, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21; 8.sum.10; 14.sum.2; 15.sum.25; etc. When Aulus Gellius was traveling with others in a group, he does not shy away from speaking of the group with the first person plural (*nostros*, 2.21.4).

49. Ezra 7.1, 6, 10-11; 10.1-2, 5-6, 10, 16. In this case, the first-person material could reflect a source, but first-century hearers probably would not assume this; at the same time, the mixed usage of Polybius could be relevant for the composition of Ezra, and is even more relevant for how a first-century audience would have heard the work.

50. In these cases Moses speaks as part of Israel, even in cases where he or some other individuals may not have specifically acted as a warrior (e.g. Deut. 2.33-36). Moses nevertheless remains part of the group that acted corporately; in the case in Acts, the ‘we’ narrator would not be part of the group that travels (especially given his sporadic mention of himself) unless he actually traveled with them.

51. For the first person, see Isa. 6.1, 5-8, 11; 8.1, 3, 5, 11, 16-18 (a continuation of the same material that included third person in 7.3); possibly 24.16; 25.1; for the

this book's editorial history, people in Luke's day read it as a unified work. Likewise, the book of Jeremiah introduces Jeremiah in the third person (Jer. 1.1-3), but he appears thereafter in both the first and third person.⁵² Ezekiel appears in his book in the first person, except once in Ezek. 1.3.⁵³ Other Jewish literature sometimes uses the first person for a narrator's involvement in narrative, whether pseudonymously (in pseudonymous literature)⁵⁴ or in the name of the genuine author. This is the case, for example, in *1 (Ethiopic) Enoch*,⁵⁵ and also in the Christian book, Revelation, where the narrator participates on the level of events.⁵⁶

It thus makes sense that Luke, writing at a fairly popular level to a biblically literate audience, would have seen no problem including first-person factual narration.

Keeping the Focus on Paul

Why does the narrator appear only as part of a group? Luke's specific use of 'we' allows him to avoid entirely the risk of self-commendation (one

third person, Isa. 2.1; 7.3; 13.1; 20.2; and the lengthy narrative unit in chs. 37–39.

52. For the first person, see, e.g., Jer. 1.4, 6-7, 9, 11-14; 4.10; 5.4; 6.11; 10.23-24; 11.5-6, 9, 18-20; 12.1, 3; 13.1-3, 5, 8; 14.11, 13-14; 15.1, 10, 15-18; 16.1 etc.; for the third person, see, e.g., 7.1; 11.1; 14.1; 18.1; 19.14; 20.1-3; 21.1, 3; 25.1-2 etc. While one cannot rule out the involvement of different editorial hands, it is possible that the author simply lacked concern for consistency, or even preferred variety. The most narrative portions may prefer third person, but even Jeremiah hearing from God is technically narrated on the event level.

53. First person in, e.g., Ezek. 1.1, 4, 15, 24, 27-28; 2.1-3, 9-10; 3.1-4, 10, 12-16. Daniel appears in much of the Book of Daniel in the third person, but in later sections appears as narrator, with the two sometimes explicitly identified (Dan. 8.1, 15, 27; 9.2; 10.2, 7; 12.5), even in some contexts introduced in the third person (10.1). Cf. also the speaker in Ecclesiastes (e.g. Eccl. 1.12-17), though introduced in the third person (1.1-2).

54. Acts, which does not name its author, and whose author was presumably known to Theophilus, cannot be easily construed as pseudonymous.

55. E.g. *1 En.* 1.2-3; 12.3; 13.3-4, 6-10; 14.2-4, 7-10, 13-16, 18-19; 21.1; 22.1; 23.1; 24.1; 41.1; 44.1; etc. Enoch is first introduced in the third person in 1.1-2 and named with the 'I' in 12.3; 19.3; 106.13; Enoch also appears in the third person in 12.1; 13.1; etc. The work is composite.

56. Rev. 1.9-10, 12, 17; 4.1-2, 4; 5.1-2, 4, 6, 11, 13; 6.1-3, 5-9, 12; 7.1-2, 4, 9, 13-14; 8.2, 13; 9.1, 13, 16-17; 10.1, 4-5; 10.8–11.1; 12.10; 13.1-3, 11; 14.1-2, 6, 13-14; 15.1-2, 5; 16.1, 5, 7, 13; 17.3, 6-7, 15; 18.1, 4; 19.1, 6, 9-11, 17, 19; 20.1, 4, 11-12; 21.1-3, 6, 9, 15, 22; 22.1, 6, 8-10. John is twice identified with the first person (1.9; 22.8).

of Polybius's concerns with using first person in the narrative, 36.12.3).⁵⁷ If some writers used the third person to evade charges of drawing undue attention to themselves, even though readers knew that the authors spoke of themselves, Luke actually shifts attention away from any personal activity on his part even more by using the first person plural. Luke does not use first-person narration often;⁵⁸ when he does use it, although he is present as an actor, he never contributes individually to the narrative action. He thus would have no need to highlight or name himself, and describing his individual activity separately would have drawn attention to his activity rather than his historical function as a (limited) witness.

Whereas some authors may have avoided the first person to avoid the appearance of self-promotion (sometimes even while obviously promoting themselves, as in Caesar's case), Luke avoids self-promotion even more fully by blending his presence into the group of which he was at times a part. Luke is not using a conventional literary plural distinct from the singular only on the level of the convention; he has to use plural because he is part of a group.

The reason that he does not depict himself as actor in narrative individually is because he is not writing about himself, but about (primarily, in these sections) Paul and his mission.⁵⁹ Luke minimizes mentioning himself more by including himself in 'we' than by mentioning himself even in third person; he is present but never the focus of action. To mention himself more explicitly in the third person would require narrating an action of which he was the sole subject, unless he were to simply name each member of the group. As it is, he both indicates his eyewitness presence at some key events, particularly involving Paul's controversial Roman custody, and keeps himself from the focus

57. See Campbell, 'Narrator', pp. 395-96. In view of cultural distaste for explicit self-commendation, George Lyons, in his discussion of Pauline autobiography, notes that 'Then, as now, in numerous instances where the self-assertive first person singular pronoun "I" might have been expected, the plural "we" appears instead' (*Pauline Autobiography: Toward a New Understanding* [SBLDS, 73; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985], pp. 68-69, quotation from p. 69).

58. Often Luke also uses first-person plural pronouns, perhaps for emphasis (in the nominative: Acts 20.6, 13; 21.7, 12; in other cases, 16.9-10, 15-16; 20.5, 7, 14; 21.1, 5, 11, 16-18; 27.1-2, 6-7, 10, 18, 20, 27; 28.2, 7, 10, 15).

59. Campbell, 'Narrator', p. 407, suggests that the narrator 'presents himself as a major influence in the determination' in Acts 16.9-10, which overstates the narrator's role. But Campbell rightly goes on to qualify this statement by noting that the full group participates in the decision.

of activity. In this way, he affirms his role as reliable narrator without detracting from his focus on Paul.⁶⁰

Conclusion

Campbell's study has brought to the attention of scholars some useful features of first-person usage in ancient historians, especially of the prevalence of first-person singular usage more on the level of the narrator than on the level of narrative action. Nevertheless, first-person usage does appear at times within historical narratives, including in the style of biblical narratives familiar to both Luke and his audience. Where it occurs, its meaning in such cases is normally unambiguous. It is not Campbell's evidence from his survey of three ancient historians that prevents him from drawing his conclusion regarding Luke's usage, but other common inferences, which must be judged on their own merits. I argue above (against Campbell's primary reason for treating Luke differently from other historians) that the author was likely known to Acts' first real audiences. I have argued elsewhere at greater length that the author's alleged unfamiliarity with or misrepresentation of Paul is overstated.

The simplest solution is frequently the best, and the most obvious solution is sometimes the simplest. Historians most frequently depicted their participation within narratives in the third person, but when first-person claims occur, whether on the narratorial or the event level, they do include the author. In Acts, these claims note the narrator's participation. Luke does not restrict (or, beyond his prefaces, use) the first person for his narratorial voice; the verbs in the 'we' narratives depict the narrator within the narrative.

Although Luke includes notice of his participation, however, his use of the first person plural minimizes focus on it far more than even third-person usage would have done. He avoids needing to mention himself separately (by name, title or first-person singular pronoun) by simply including himself in group actions. The narrator reports no separate actions of his own, even though he apparently did share in the ministry (Acts 16.10, 17). His focus remains on Paul and, to a lesser extent, Silas, with a few other named characters.

60. Campbell would likely agree on this point (Campbell, 'Narrator', p. 40).