

11. Retrospects and Prospects

Which literary models did apostolic commission stories follow? What is the biographical ideal that these stories promote? What are the problems and conflicts that these narratives address at the individual, social, historical, cultural, and anthropological levels? In this last chapter we will try to give a tentative answer to these questions.

The Literary Models of Apostolic Commission

Whereas Chapters 1 and 2 attempted to survey a large circle of commission texts in various literatures, I will now establish fewer but more concrete connections between apostolic commission stories and their literary environment. It is not my intent to cover all possible scribal-intertextual aspects of these texts (echoes, allusions, citations, reframings, etc.)¹, but rather to survey the major literary patterns that the apostolic commission stories possibly borrowed from previous literature. I will rely on the discussion of the individual passages and motifs earlier in this book.

That narratives of the Jewish Scriptures influenced the commission of Paul in the Lucan *Acts* is beyond dispute². Although the parallels extend to all the three versions, they use different traditions. The portrait of the young Saul and his commission story in *Acts* 9 draw on the appointment of King Saul in *1 Samuel* 9–11, borrowing a typically institutional concept of divine commission. The narrative of Paul's trial makes use of the biography of Jeremiah, and *Acts* 22 alludes to

1. 'Scribal intertexture' delimits the problem of intertextuality to the connection between written texts. 'Oral-scribal intertexture' was introduced by Robbins, *Tapestry*, 97.

2. Chapter 1, pp. 33–42ff; Chapter 3, pp. 69–77 and 86ff; Windisch, 'Christusepiphanie', 1–9, 19–23.

the temple vision of Isaiah, both focusing on the conflict between the prophet and his community. *Acts* 26 contains fragmented allusions, rather than a systematic imitation of any passage of the Jewish Scriptures.

Knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures cannot be automatically assumed with all of the apostolic Acts. For example, there is no reference to them in the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve*, and the *Acts of John* contains only a few allusions³. P. Lalleman called attention to three possible points of contact⁴: John's character is drawn with allusions to the figures of Moses and Elijah; the language of *Wisdom (Sapientia Solomonis)* can be detected at several points in chapters 94–102 and 109; and a typically Jewish speech about God is found in chapters 18–86, 106–8, and 110–5. There are numerous references to the Jewish Scriptures in the *Acts of Thomas*⁵ and the *Acts of Philip*⁶. Because of their date and place of origin, one may assume knowledge of the (Greek) Christian canon with the *Acts of Barnabas* and the *Acts of Titus*, although the former does not refer to any specific passage of the Jewish Scriptures. In the *Acts of Titus*, the 'Book of the Hebrews' is the means of Titus' conversion, and a programmatic prophecy is de-

3. Junod and Kaestli, *Acta Iohannis*, vol 2, 891, list altogether four citations of Jewish Scriptures in the main text of the *Acts of John*: *Exodus* 33.23 (ch. 90), *Psalms* 62.13 (ch. 113), *Proverbs* 62.13 (*ibidem*), *Wisdom* 15.3 (ch. 109). If we deduct the passages from *Psalms* and *Proverbs*, both probably quoted after *Matthew* 16.27 or *Romans* 2.6, we are left with two instances. One is ἀφορῶν εἰς τὰ ὀπίσθια (ch. 90) perhaps alluding to ὄψη τὰ ὀπίσω μου (*Exodus* 33.23); the other one is ῥίζα τῆς ἀθανασίας (ch. 109) possibly quoting ῥίζα ἀθανασίας in *Wisdom* 15.3. The first passage is found in the context of the gospel section. The parallel between *Acts of John* 90 and *Exodus* 24 and 32–4, proposed by Fossum (cited in Jakab, 'Actes de Jean', 312) is probably due to the connection of both texts with the transfiguration scene of the gospels (*Matthew* 17.1–13 and parallels).

4. Lalleman, *Acts of John*, 142–4, who does not assume knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures in the community of the *Acts of John*, concludes that the similarities stem from the vocabulary of early Christian communities.

5. Cf. Drijvers, 'Acts of Thomas', 405–11. In chapter 10, for example, 'Christ is named with names generally taken from the Old Testament' (Klijn, *Acts of Thomas*, 181). The summary of *Acts of Thomas* 32 covers *Genesis* 1–6 and events of *Exodus*.

6. Cf. Amsler, *Actes de l'apôtre Philippe*, 295–8.

rived from Deutero-Isaiah⁷. In the apostolic commission stories we can identify the following narrative patterns of Jewish Scriptures: the idea of ‘lots’ appears in the *Acts of Thomas* and the *Acts of Philip*⁸; and John Mark’s rushing to Barnabas after his night vision may imitate the visions of the child Samuel who asked the priest Eli about their meaning⁹. The sequence of commission, protest, and reassurance occurs most clearly in the *Acts of Thomas*; it is alluded to in the *Acts of Philip*, and perhaps in *Acts 22* and *26*¹⁰. The apostolic Acts apply this motif rarely as compared to its regular appearance in the commission stories of the Jewish Scriptures. In sum, substantial dependence on the Jewish Scriptures is demonstrable in the Lucan *Acts*, whereas it is limited to a few cases in the other apostolic commission stories.

A number of scholars have favoured the idea of a close relation between the apocryphal Acts and the Greek novels¹¹. This thesis has been extended to the Lucan *Acts* as well¹². Opinions divide, however, what this relation actually means¹³. Did the novels exert an influence, in particular, on the literary pattern of commission in the apostolic Acts? We have seen that the novels often talk about the gods’ wrath, their protection, commands to the heroes, and the heroes themselves are deified¹⁴. Do these motifs add up to a story of man’s salvation (as Kerényi and Merkelbach suggested¹⁵), or is the ‘divine apparatus’ of

7. *Acts of Titus* 1 quotes *Isaiah* 41.1 and 45.17 verbatim from the Septuagint: ἐγκαινίξεσθε πρὸς με νῆσοι [πολλάι ...] Ἰσραὴλ σὺξεται ὑπὸ κυρίου σωτηρίαν αἰώνιον. This programmatic quote is to be compared with *Acts* 1.8. For oracles with a similar function in the novels, see pp. 51f above.

8. *Acts of Thomas* 1–3, *Acts of Philip* 8.1–3; cf. pp. 120–125, 143f, 222 above.

9. *Acts of Barnabas* 3–4, *1 Samuel* 3.2–18.

10. *Acts* 22.17–21 and 26.16–7, cf. Chapter 3, pp. 76 and 82.

11. For a survey, see Schneemelcher, ‘Second and Third Century Acts’, 78–82.

12. Pervo, *Profit with Delight*, 137, concludes that *Acts* belongs to the genre of the ‘historical novel’. On p. 122, Pervo identifies also the apocryphal Acts as specimens of that genre.

13. In her much quoted book, *Die apokryphen Apostelgeschichten*, R. Söder found a ‘close relationship’ (181), but also concluded that her findings ‘speak against the origin of the apocryphal Acts from the novel, almost excluding it’ (185). Bremmer, ‘Apocryphal Acts, 175, claims that ‘the authors of the *A[cts of] J[ohn]* and *A[cts of] P[aul]*, at least, had read the contemporary novels and taken from them part of their inspiration’.

14. Cf. pp. 50–54 above.

15. Cf. p. 53 above.

the novels ‘a literary device to give the plot a sense of direction, purpose, and eventual closure, rather than a statement of belief intended to instruct its readers in the ways of god?’¹⁶

This is not the place to undertake a thorough investigation of such a complex subject. It is important to notice that the two approaches are not wholly incompatible. That which is a model of divine salvation from the religious point of view, is realised as a literary device of plot motivation in the actual text¹⁷. Commission, however, implies more than the general theme of providence and salvation; it presupposes that the hero is called to the service of a deity. This can be isolated in the novels as the motif of the protagonist’s becoming a priest. Two types of this motif can be immediately identified. To the first group belongs priesthood as a temporary duty of the protagonist, possibly as a measure to shelter the heroine until she can be reunited with the hero. Chariclea and Theagenes’ priestly service is a temporary duty¹⁸, and Apollonius’ wife quits priesthood when she is reunited with her husband¹⁹. The second group comprises episodes where the protagonist is initiated as the final act of the novel. This sort of conclusion is found in Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* and Heliodorus’ *Aethiopica*.

In the apostolic Acts, commission always means a call to a permanent service, the appearance of a new and final goal in the protagonist’s life. Only the latter form of priestly service in the novels can be compared to this, where Apuleius and Heliodorus’ protagonists are initiated into a life-long service of the deity. A basic difference yet remains with regard to the place of commission within the narrative. In the apostolic Acts, commission normally stands at the beginning of the plot, and it launches, rather than concludes, the story. Whereas in the novels initiation into a cult means a stage of completion and stability, the apostolic commission stories generate, handle, and institutionalise conflict rather than resolve it. In sum, the narrative function of commission (if one calls the initiation of Lucius and similar epi-

16. Morgan, ‘Heliodorus’, 350–1, discussing the *Ethiopian Story*.

17. For the Lucan *Acts* see especially Moessner, ‘Script’, 222 and Squires, *Plan of God*, 26–36.

18. Heliodorus, *Ethiopian Story* 1.22.

19. *History of Apollonius King of Tyre* 49.

sodes by that name) is quite different in the apostolic Acts than in the ancient novels.

We will now turn to the connections between the apostolic Acts and Greco-Roman philosophical tradition. We have used two types of texts in our study; first, biographies and texts with a biographical character, and then, theoretical treatises. The connection between the apostolic Acts and the philosophers' biographies has received little attention in previous scholarship²⁰. We found that in *Acts* Luke drew on the Cynic ideal of divine call, which was formulated also by Epictetus, and Luke possibly alluded to Plato's *Apology* in presenting Paul's trial²¹. When narrating Paul's commission story, he used philosophical models especially in *Acts* 26. Here, in addition to parallels with Epictetus, Luke uses motifs which we detected with Livy, Plutarch, Dio Chrysostom, and Diogenes Laertius. In the same passage he probably quotes Euripides²². John's commission story in the *Acts of John* 88–9 and 113 probably drew on Plato's *Symposium*, and contains considerable similarities with Plotinus' *Enneads*. I argued that the *Acts of John* (at least the relevant chapters) were written under the influence of emerging Neo-Platonism in Alexandria at the beginning of the third century. Finally, the *Acts of Titus* uses a structure similar to Diogenes Laertius' *Lives*, and applies the standard topoi of ancient biography. The connection between the apostolic Acts and the above-mentioned philosophical traditions raises the question of the educational level and (consequently) the social location of the authors and readers of those texts. The problem is complex, and its discussion requires a thorough examination of the texts rather than the analysis of select passages, as in our study.

That the apostolic Acts were 'für das Volk bestimmt'²³ is an old generalisation that is no longer tenable. Texts written (just to talk

20. Cf. Junod, 'Les vies de philosophes', whose conclusions are generally negative (see pp. 210, 214, and 218). Van Kampen, *Apostelverhalen*, 267–9, confirms him.

21. See pp. 11–23 above.

22. Cf. p. 82, note 72 above. Van der Horst, 'Drohung und Mord', 265, suggests that in *Acts* 9.1 Luke also cites Greek authors.

23. Söder, *Die apokryphen Apostelgeschichten*, 186, 'written for the lower classes'. At the same time, Söder (*ibidem*) maintained that the novels were written for educated readers.

about the ‘major’ Acts) in as distant places as Rome, Asia Minor, Syria, and Alexandria²⁴, by and for Christians speaking different languages and living in different cultural contexts, can hardly be anchored to a stereotypical social location. If one takes into account all the texts that we discussed in this book, it is even more imperative to look for specific social and cultural contexts in each case. The texts are also different from each other in terms of literary quality. Again, concentrating on the major Acts, one finds that the style of the *Acts of Andrew* (excluding the *Acts of Andrew and Matthias*) is ‘well educated’, whereas the rest of the (major) apostolic Acts is mostly ‘simple’ and ‘unsophisticated’. Even at their best they are lacking rhetorical skill and do not meet the classical standards of syntax²⁵. Stylistic observations alone, however, provide an unstable ground for describing the social context of the apocryphal Acts, because most of these texts came down to us fragmentarily and through a complicated transmission, including translations, rearrangements and epitomisation.

Another possibility to establish the social setting of these texts is literary analysis. Studies of the social worlds of the major apostolic Acts suggest that the upper class is widely represented in them²⁶. Shall we situate then these writings (despite their stylistic defects) in an upper class milieu? Without attempting to resolve this dilemma completely—a problem that involves the whole issue of the social setting(s) of early Christianity—we suggest that a non-elite authorship and an elite narrative world are not necessarily irreconcilable. Already Pervo demonstrated Luke’s strong ambitions to depict Paul as an equal partner of the higher class, portraying him as a ‘VIP’, by which the author embodied the ambitions rather than the actual social

24. Diversity characterises the history of research. Recently Bremmer, ‘Apocryphal Acts’, 152–9 argues that all of the major Acts except the *Acts of Thomas* were written in Asia Minor.

25. Warren, ‘Greek’, 122–4; cf. Zachariades-Holmberg, ‘Philological Aspects’, 140.

26. For Luke, see Malherbe, *Paul*, 150; Pervo (below); Neyrey (below). For the apocryphal Acts, see Bremmer, ‘Women’, 53–4; ‘Acts of Peter’, 5–6; ‘Apocryphal Acts’, 164–70.

standing of himself and his implied readers²⁷. We may add that Christians regarded their movement as one of ultimate historical importance. Most early Christian narratives, beginning with the gospels, tell stories about emperors, kings, and governors, and this tradition is continued in the apostolic Acts. It is therefore not improbable that the elevated social milieu of the Acts often reflects political fiction rather than social reality.

These examples may illustrate the complexity of the issue. Again, the best strategy seems to be to avoid generalisations as far as the cultural and social location of the apostolic Acts is concerned. Consequently, differentiation is desirable when we approach the question of which Greek literary sources the authors of these texts could use. On the basis of his commission narratives, we can conclude that Luke was acquainted with many Cynic *topoi* (represented in the texts of Epictetus, Dio Chrysostom, and the later compilation of Diogenes Laertius), and a few elements of rhetorical composition. Obvious sources of such knowledge were the Cynics themselves whose speeches he probably attended. Stories of moral conversion (the one we quoted from Livy) and divine call may have come from the same source as well as from Christian tradition.

The fact that Luke imitated the compositional techniques of historians²⁸, using prefaces²⁹ and *prosopopoeiae* (speeches written for historical personages³⁰) indicates that he read classical texts at least at

27. Pervo, *Profit with Delight*, 32–4, 77–81. He calls the Lucan style ‘propagandistic fiction’, and finds that ‘the achievements of Paul coincide with the fondest social aspirations of the “petite bourgeoisie” of that time’. Recently Neyrey, ‘Social Location’, 278, provides a thorough analysis of Paul’s social standing in *Acts*, and concludes that ‘Luke perceives and presents Paul as a person of considerable honour and social status’. Neyrey does not comment on the rhetorical purpose of this presentation. Cf. Robbins, ‘Social Location’.

28. Van Unnik, ‘Luke’s Second Book’; McCoy, ‘Thucydides’.

29. Alexander, *Preface*, compares the Lucan prologues with prologues in different ancient genres. Idem, ‘Preface to Acts’, 103, concludes that ‘Luke is fully at home in the broad tradition of technical prose, and much less so among the historians, who have a well-recognized repertoire of preface-topics which Luke does not use’.

30. Kennedy, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 23; 114–5. McCoy, ‘Thucydides’, 12–6.

the level of the grammar school³¹. In this educational context, one can also expect knowledge of the trial of Socrates³². It is more difficult to talk about the education of the author(s) of the *Acts of John*. We found an appropriate setting for the philosophical thoughts of the book in Alexandria. Eusebius in his *Church History* provides us with some detail about the intellectual life of Alexandrian Christians at the beginning of the third century³³. He mentions not only that Origen studied with Ammonius Saccas (6.19.6)³⁴, the founder of Neo-Platonism, but also that he gave catechesis (in addition to his work as *grammaticus*), and these lectures were attended also by non-Christians, many of whom converted and became martyrs (6.3 and 18)³⁵. Eusebius (6.19.12–14) quotes a letter by Origen, where Origen himself reports that he had listeners who were versed in Greek philosophy³⁶. In that milieu, it is not difficult to situate the author of *Acts of*

31. In Hellenistic primary schools pupils learned writing and reading on the texts of Homer and Euripides. In the grammar school, they read mainly Homer, Euripides, Menander, and Demosthenes, but also historians: Herodotus, Xenophon, Hellanicus, and, above all, Thucydides. Latin texts were first used under Augustus: Virgil, Cicero, Sallust, Terence (Marrou, *Education*, 153, 162–4; Barrow, *Education*, 80). Morgan, *Literary Education*, 90–151, provides an inspiring study of how literature was actually read at school. In his exercises for the ‘grammar school’, Theon of Alexandria (1st century AD), *Progymnasmata* 86ff, takes many examples from Herodotus and Thucydides, and prescribes the composition of *prosopopoeiae* (115.12–118.6). Cf. Cribiore, *Gymnastics*, 178–80; 192–205; 225–38; Hezser, *Jewish Literacy*, 90–109.

32. Scholars have often remarked that Luke alludes to Socrates when he reports Paul’s debates with the philosophers in Athens (*Acts* 17); O’Neill, *Theology of Acts*, 160–71. Lucian, *Passing of Peregrinus* 12, reports that the Christians (whom he depicts as rather single minded) called Peregrinus, when he was in prison, ‘the new Socrates’. For Socrates with the second and third century Fathers, see Döring, *Exemplum Socratis*, 143–61. For the imitation of Socrates in Eusebius’ *Life of Origen* 6.3.7, see Cox, *Biography*, 87.

33. We also have an important source regarding the end of the second century: Clement of Alexandria, *Instructor* 2–3, provides us with substantial information about the everyday life of the rich Christians of Alexandria; cf. Jakab, *Ecclesia alexandrina*, 257–292.

34. Cf. p. 117 above.

35. Cf. Jakab, *Ecclesia alexandrina*, 157–8; 162–9.

36. Origenes’ asceticism (philosopher’s life, φιλοσοφεῖν) provoked much admiration (6.8), not to talk about his self-castration. The latter ideal might have played a role in the Johannine tradition, cf. p. 110, note 78.

John 88–9 and 113, who could have visited the schools of Origen and Ammonius Saccas at the same time. The composite (and fragmentary) character of the text warns us against extending this hypothesis to the rest of the book. The narrative parts of the *Acts of John* could have been composed at a different place (in Asia Minor?³⁷) in a different educational milieu. As for the *Acts of Titus*, its author, a Cretan cleric of the fifth century, was well acquainted with the biographical patterns used by the then already numerous hagiographic texts. He could easily mould whatever he found and invented into a tidy *bios* of his hero.

Next we consider the mutual dependence among the apostolic Acts. This is a very complex issue, which is tied up with the problem of the dating of these texts. As was the case with the use of philosophical passages, it is often impossible to decide whether an author used a specific text as a primary source, or was influenced by it through one or more intermediary stages. Sometimes one cannot decide which of two texts used the other one; often a hypothetical common source provides a further alternative. In addition to that, many texts were lost, and the textual relations of the extant witnesses are often uncertain. Rather than citing the controversial results of previous scholarship³⁸, I will depart from the (more or less) undisputed premises, and focus comparison on the commission narratives themselves. Initially I assume that any of the Acts could use any other that was written before it. Therefore, the first task is to sketch the plausible temporal sequence of the books. No one ever challenged the premise

37. Cf. p. 118, note 101 above.

38. The chart of MacDonald, 'Which Came First', 32, depicts the following relations: The *Acts of Paul* used *Acts*; the *Acts of Peter* used both; the *Acts of John* used the *Acts of Paul* and the *Acts of Peter*; the *Acts of Andrew* used the *Acts of Peter* and the *Acts of John*; finally, the *Acts of Thomas* used the *Acts of Peter*, the *Acts of John* and the *Acts of Andrew*. Stoops, 'Peter, Paul', 233 and 'Acts of Peter', 83, suggests the priority of the *Acts of Peter* over the *Acts of Paul* (but cf. Rordorf, 'Acts of Peter'). Pervo, 'Response', 55 (cautiously) as well as Lalleman 'Relation', 168 and *Acts of John*, 106, propose that the *Acts of Peter* used the *Acts of John*. For his suggestion of the *Acts of John* using *Acts*, see below. Most recently Bremmer, 'Apocryphal Acts', 152, endorsing the priority of the *Acts of John*, suggests the following order: '*AJ*, *AP*, *APt*, *AA* and *ATh* within a period stretching from about AD 150–230'. For a summary of earlier research, see Jones, 'Principal Orientations', 486–91.

that the Lucan *Acts* was the first in this series. Therefore, all of the other apostolic Acts may have used it as a source³⁹. The temporal sequence of the five ‘major’ Acts has not yet been definitively established. Therefore, we can depart from the premise that any of them could use any other of them⁴⁰. We examined three of the later Acts in this book: the *Acts of Philip* (fourth century), the *Acts of Barnabas* (fifth century) and the *Acts of Titus* (fifth to seventh century)⁴¹. The position of the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* is ambiguous. Some date it as early as the second century⁴², whereas we concluded that in its present form it dates from the middle of the fourth century, being approximately a contemporary of the *Acts of Philip*.

In the commission of John in his Acts, we find two motifs of the Lucan *Acts*: the heavenly voice on the road, and John’s blindness and healing⁴³. Both motifs may have come independently from other sources as well. The *Acts of Thomas* makes no self-evident use of earlier apostolic commission stories. One may mention that it begins with the gathering of the apostles in Jerusalem, which is described also by Luke, and I assumed that it was the first of the apostolic Acts that related the division of the missionary fields⁴⁴. The *Acts of Philip* probably used the Lucan *Acts* in depicting the relation of Philip and the other apostles and drew on the *Acts of Thomas* in reporting the division of the world among the apostles⁴⁵. With the *Acts of Peter and*

39. Consider, however, the puzzle of the Western text of *Acts*, especially as preserved in *Codex Bezae*. The substantial textual variations of *Acts* either imply a second edition by the author, or otherwise they witness a remarkable fluidity of the text of this book in the second century. For the former, see Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 260–4; for the latter, Birdsall, ‘Three Centuries’ xvii–xviii. Strange, *The Text of Acts*, 186–9, suggests that both the Western and ‘non-Western’ versions were edited from the unpublished (and unfinished) Lucan text as late as the second half of the second century. For some possible connections between the Western text of *Acts* and the *Acts of Paul*, see Czachesz, ‘Acts of Paul’.

40. Except perhaps for the *Acts of Thomas*, which was likely the last of the ‘major’ Acts, dated unanimously to the third century; cf. p. 119, note 1 above.

41. Cf. p. 136, note 1; pp. 172 and 197.

42. Schenke, ‘Acts of Peter and the Twelve’, 414.

43. *Acts of John* 18, lines 6–10, cf. *Acts* 9.3–7; 22.6–10; 26.12–6; *Acts of John* 113, cf. *Acts* 9.8–18 and 22.11–13. Based on a broader comparison, Lalleman, *Acts of John*, 97–8, concluded that the *Acts of John* used the Lucan *Acts*.

44. Cf. *Acts of Thomas* 1 and *Acts* 1.12–2.13; pp. 222f above.

45. Cf. pp. 136f and 223 above, respectively.

the Twelve it shares the motif of the apostles' commission to heal people, which is symbolised in both texts by an 'unguent box' that Jesus gave the apostles⁴⁶. The *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* otherwise did not use elements of the commission narratives of other apostolic Acts. The *Acts of Barnabas* and the *Acts of Titus* are indebted to the Lucan Acts. Both elaborate on episodes of the Lucan book, and pay much attention to the relations of the commissioned hero and the apostles. One important result of this brief survey is that none of the commission stories in the books examined is a direct imitation or emulation of an earlier apostolic commission story. This does not mean that the authors of the individual Acts did not know earlier commission stories. They applied this genre, however, with considerable freedom. The development of commission stories in the given texts is due to the creative combination of the inherited motifs and the use of different literary models.

Finally, a number of other literary traditions contributed to the development of commission narratives in our texts. Egyptian examples certainly exerted an (indirect) influence on the idea of divine commission in the apostolic Acts⁴⁷. This includes elements as the institutional and hierarchical structure of commission, as well as a god striking the hero with illness. Similar motifs of cultic legends appear in the Zoilus letter and the preface of Nechautis, and may have influenced the commission narratives of the *Acts of John* if it was revised in Alexandria. Further, the *Acts of Philip* perhaps relied on the *Gospel of Mary* when depicting the figure of Mariamne. However, it could derive the character from other texts as well⁴⁸. Early monastic literature shaped the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve*⁴⁹. In the case of the later Acts, one cannot neglect the growing number of Christian biographies. The use of bibliomancy in the *Acts of Titus* probably comes from that literary tradition⁵⁰.

In sum, the apostolic Acts did not take the pattern of commission narrative from a single source. The concept was influenced by differ-

46. Cf. pp. 167ff above.

47. Cf. pp. 31ff above.

48. Cf. p. 147 above.

49. Cf. pp. 158–167 above.

50. Cf. pp. 208ff above.

ent literary models, which were themselves interconnected by a variety of intertextual aspects. The latter applies to the relation of the apostolic commission narratives. Instead of counting with a single linear tradition, we have to assume that the apostolic Acts were influenced by earlier Acts as well as other literary models. None of them relied exclusively on the commission stories of the previous Acts.

Apostolic Commission Stories as Biographical Models

An important function of ancient biographies was that they served as examples and models. They were examples and models in a twofold sense. First, often explicitly declared by the author, they were lessons for posterity, positive examples to be imitated, or negative ones to be avoided⁵¹. Second, rather implicitly, they represented actual concerns of a person or a community. These two aspects were interrelated. The problems and interests of an author or the author's community motivated the selection of a given genre and hero. In this last section of our study, we will sum up and organise what we have already told to a great part on this subject in connection with individual texts and the sujet of apostolic commission.

Let us begin with the observation that the apostles as biographical heroes first emerged in a stage of advanced institutionalisation of the Church. The earliest apostolic commission story preserved is that of Paul in the Lucan *Acts*. Especially if we compare *Acts* 9 with Paul's autobiographical account in *Galatians* 1 and 2, it becomes clear that Luke (or his sources) added an elaborate institutional backdrop to the original story as communicated by Paul. We can come to a similar conclusion if we compare *Acts* 9 to the remaining two versions in the Lucan book, which are reported as Paul's recollections in the story. To do justice to Luke, it cannot be excluded that already Paul himself changed his story during his lifetime. Precisely the analysis of *Galatians* shows that he had—or better, he felt he had—reasons to define himself and his call more and more independently from the Jerusalem church and its hierarchy. The last version of his call in *Acts*

51. Dihle, *Biographie*, 20; Talbert, 'Biographies', 1620–5; Cox, *Biography*, 13–4; Kurz, 'Narrative Models', 176–85; cf. p. 5, note 14 above.

resembles Paul's own story much better than the first one⁵². This does not change the fact that the first apostolic commission story of early Christian literature is similar to an Egyptian commission narrative, the purpose of which was to integrate the hero into a universal hierarchy. Therefore, the Lucan commission stories of Paul offer a dynamic biographical model. While biblical scholarship has often regarded the Lucan *Acts* as a literary manifesto of *Frühkatholizismus*⁵³, the analysis of the commission narratives suggests that its protagonist proceeds on a path of emancipation from the Christian institutional hierarchy presented by Luke.

Can we read the Lucan account as mirroring an actual problem of his time, the end of the first century AD? One should not overlook the warning of social-science criticism, that the personality of early Christians, like Mediterranean persons of the time, was basically group-oriented. We would read the Lucan narrative anachronistically if we populated his church with freelance Christian intellectuals. The Lucan Paul—similarly to the Paul of the epistles—finds his identity in his divine call to the Gentiles, in other words, as a founder and acknowledged leader of Christian churches in Asia Minor and the Aegean region. Jesus' disciples do not reach the utmost borders of the οἰκουμένη in *Acts*, notwithstanding the theological program of the author⁵⁴. As Pervo remarked, 'none of the audience of *Acts* 1.8 came any closer to Rome than Caesarea Maritima'⁵⁵. This also corresponds to the division of the missionary fields between Paul and Peter as described by Paul in *Galatians* 2.9. The Lucan *Acts* witnesses a division within Christianity, or better, a vivid interaction between groups

52. Cf. Hirsch, 'Die drei Berichte', 309.

53. The term 'Frühkatholizismus' (early catholicism), introduced by Käsemann, 'Neutestamentliche Fragen', 20, is rarely applied to Luke since the seventies; cf. Plümacher, 'Acta-Forschung', 158–60. Nevertheless, many commentators characterise Luke in a similar vein. Dunn, *Acts*, xii, suggests that the book makes 'a deliberate attempt to underline *the unity of the expanding movement*' by 'emphasizing the centrality and oversight of the Jerusalem church [...] and of the apostles' and 'drawing a discrete veil over the tensions provoked by "the Hellenists" and Stephen, not to mention those involving Paul' (Dunn's italics). Cf. Johnson, *Acts*, 15–6.

54. *Acts* 1.8, 'you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (ἕως ἑσχάτου τῆς γῆς).

55. Pervo, *Profit with Delight*, 129.

rather than the emergence of a single institutional body. The book concentrates so strongly on Paul that it is very likely the author regarded this figure as a paradigm. The three versions of Paul's commission can be read as an expression of the changing self-definition of Lucan Christians; initial identification within existing institutional frames, and then a continuous realisation of the group's own divine call, that is, its independence as a stream of Christianity. A more detailed analysis of *Acts* would be needed to say more about the identity of this group.

In the commission stories of the *Acts of John* and the *Acts of Thomas*, institution does not appear as a central problem. The heroes of these Acts do not seek their legitimacy from other apostles. Nevertheless, both texts depict an apostolic community, to which the hero belongs. John is presented as superior to his fellow apostles. The commission story of *Acts of John* 88–9 is unique among the apostolic Acts as far as it reports Jesus' call of John as a disciple, similarly as the synoptic gospels do. He is privileged by an especially intimate relation with Jesus, which culminates in the revelation of the cross of light. Consequently, the community of the *Acts of John* traces back its origins to John's pre-Easter experience. Or, to put it more consistently with the thought-world of the *Acts of John*⁵⁶, the commission stories of the apostle identify an ideal Christianity that originated with John's call as Jesus' disciple, was legitimated through the intimate relation of John to Jesus, and its position did not change essentially with Jesus' ascent to heaven.

In the *Acts of Thomas*, the role of the other apostles is reduced to a plain list of names. Thomas does not have any interaction with them. The text narrates Thomas' protest as a conflict between him and Jesus. We can conclude that the group of the *Acts of Thomas* understood itself as an equal partner of other Christian streams, and its relation to them did not play a major role in its self-definition.

In the *Acts of Philip*, the hero appears as a somewhat marginal figure among the apostles, first seeking their confirmation, and then rebelling against his allotted missionary field. This ambivalence is apparent also in his identity. He is an amalgam of Philip the disciple

56. In the *Acts of John*, there is no incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Cf. Chapter 4, pp. 98f, esp. note 33.

and Philip the Hellenist. It is remarkable that, beside other apostles, he is supported by the female figure of Mariamne, who had a leading role in Gnostic tradition. As we concluded, Mariamne is an alter ego of Philip. Mystical and speculative elements are not missing from his commission story. It is enough to think about Jesus' appearance to Philip in the form of an eagle, or his cosmological explanations to him. The group of the *Acts of Philip*, therefore, may have understood itself as an eccentric stream marginally related to an established institutional church. Whereas it seeks the proximity of what it accepts as unquestioned apostolic authority, it retains a mystical and speculative tradition.

Hitherto, we have found only Thomas and Philip rebelling against their allotments. It is interesting to quote Pseudo-Prochorus, who provides a similar picture of John. According to this episode⁵⁷, the apostles cast lots and John received Asia. He 'suffered this ill'⁵⁸, he 'sighed three times'⁵⁹, 'wept', then 'fell on his face, and prostrated himself (προσεκύνησεν) before all the apostles'. This self-humiliation of John before his fellow apostles is rather surprising when we compare it to the assumed superiority of the protagonist in the *Acts of John*. Even Philip in his Acts, who seeks legitimacy from the apostles, does not prostrate himself before them. Pseudo-Prochorus dissolves the tension immediately. Peter reproaches John, but he does this by reminding John of his distinguished position among the apostles: 'We all regard you as our father'. John repents, and returns the compliment by calling Peter 'father'⁶⁰. This small scene shows that in some traditions John was not elevated above the other apostles, but rather his status was subject to negotiation⁶¹. The episode preserved the stamp of an elaborate interaction between different streams of Early Christi-

57. Zahn, *Acta Ioannis*, 5–7; cf. *Acts of Peter and Andrew* 1.

58. Zahn, *Acta Ioannis*, 5, line 13, βαρέως ἦνεγκεν περὶ τούτου. Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 308, give instances for βαρέως φέρειν followed by the accusative or ἐπι with dative.

59. Zahn, *Acta Ioannis*, 5, line 13–4, στενάξας τρίτον.

60. John is addressed as 'father' in *Acts of John* 81. Barnabas in *Acts of Barnabas* 8–9 uses addresses Paul repeatedly as πάτερ Παῦλε, but Paul does not return this. The title is frequent in the later Acts. Cf. Lampe, *Dictionary*, 1050.

61. The Arabic version of the story completely eliminates the self-humiliation of John, see Smith Lewis, *Mythological Acts*, 38.

anity, and provides an adjustment to the picture gained from the *Acts of John*.

Although the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* represents the apostles as a close-knit group, almost as a collective person, it nevertheless contains an episode that shows John as Jesus' intimate, in the role of a mediator⁶². This Johannine reminiscence—especially if we attribute the passage to the final redactor of the text—can be important for the reconstruction of the group behind the book. A further affinity can be discovered between the way of perfection that is described in metaphorical terms in both writings. However, the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve*—at least in its present form—stresses the unity of the 'twelve' rather than depicting their mutual relations. This only confirms our proposal that it is the document of a coenobite (Pachomian) monastic community.

A twofold purpose characterises the commission stories of the later apostolic Acts, represented in our book by the *Acts of Barnabas* and the *Acts of Titus*. On the one hand, they endow a given territorial church (that of Cyprus or Crete, respectively) with as much apostolicity as possible. On the other hand, they claim as much independence for themselves as possible. This is not achieved, however, through a combination of institutional and mystical elements, as in the *Acts of Philip* and partly in the *Acts of John*. Their strategy is rather to manipulate institutional relations. If we labelled the *Acts of Titus* as 'political fiction', the same is true, although to a lesser degree, of the *Acts of Barnabas*. The difference between them is the scale of political operations. Whereas the *Acts of Titus* lets the Roman political elite engage in the life of primitive Christianity, the *Acts of Barnabas* elaborates on Church political conflicts of the same period. Both efforts gained much inspiration from the Lucan *Acts*.

The *Acts of Titus* resourcefully balances the subordinate position of its hero to Paul and the apostles by presenting him as an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry and death. The leaders of Crete were, the text suggests, Jesus' followers, and Titus was commissioned by God and supported by the local hierarchy long before any Christian missionary set his foot on the island. The *Acts of Barnabas* interestingly inverts the succession of Barnabas and Paul, presenting the latter as an older per-

62. *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* 11.3–5, cf. pp. 169f above.

son and a higher authority. It is in line with the plan that I have suggested above. For Cyprus, it pays to subordinate Barnabas to Paul, who has a higher stance in the hierarchy of the saints. It is not their purpose to undermine the authority of Paul, but rather to prove that he acknowledged Barnabas as an equal and approved of his mission to Cyprus. Barnabas, in turn, becomes the mentor of John Mark, his faithful companion and chronicler. I have already analysed their mutual relation, and suggested that the *Acts of Barnabas* used Marcan tradition to enhance Barnabas' reputation.

The apostolic commission stories served as models for the self-definition of their respective communities. They provided aetiological explanations of the norms, values, and theological systems of those groups. This was a complex phenomenon. Traditions were reread and rewritten by different communities and later generations. As this happened, the new readers interpreted their situation with the help of the traditions handed down to them, whereas their own problems left their imprints on the texts. The narratives also meant biographical models for the individual. The life of the members of those groups was based on a combination of group loyalties and individuality, of institutional ties and mystical (speculative) elements of thought. How these interests are reflected in the texts, or better, how the texts served to cope with such situations, is difficult to say. We certainly cannot apply the above-mentioned patterns automatically to the lives of the individuals. The text did not necessarily mean the same for the individual as it meant for the community as a whole. As Christians reread these stories later in their own frames, they drew on the (sub)cultural and anthropological levels of the texts (rather than the actual social and historical ones), and read them in their own ways as biographical models, assigning to them new social and historical references⁶³.

The sujet of the commission narratives, described in the previous chapter, belongs to the cultural and anthropological layer of the texts that offered possibilities of social and historical actualisations of the stories from time to time. At the same time, the use of commission narratives as biographical models was certainly predetermined by the political and sociological themes inherent in the narratives. The sujet

63. This line of thought proceeds from the notion of intertextuality sketched in the Introduction, pp. 3ff.

of commission offered patterns to channel the basic conflicts of human life. Whereas the *sujet* describes a general thought-pattern, the actual ways of conflict-handling vary between the different texts. The mystical Christians of the *Acts of John* followed life-strategies different from the ambitious middle-class of the Lucan *Acts*, or the Pachomian monks of the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve*. Yet our texts witness a recurring biographical pattern in all those Christian groups, namely, the pattern of divine commission. Within the limits of that general *sujet*, people found variations that corresponded to the aetiological traditions⁶⁴ of their communities.

Since we have already analysed the narratives in much detail, a few examples suffice to illustrate the idea. Lucan Christians (the term designates at this time readers who found the Lucan text appropriate to reflect on their problems) thought about themselves as converted from darkness to light, wounded and healed by God, sent out as engaged missionaries to the world, and established as loyal members of the apostolic Church. They probably found their Ananias or Barnabas to help them integrate into the Church. They may have ambitiously tried to find their ways in Roman society, and became increasingly conscious of their own assigned task in the world. Johannine Christians emphasised, in turn, their call to spiritual growth in an intimate relation with Jesus. They valued the ideal of chastity, and experienced conflicts regarding their sexual desires. They remembered that Jesus struck John with blindness for his disobedience, but he also healed him, and gave him a higher vision of reality. Further, Thomasine Christians may have thought about themselves as rebels against the will of Jesus, who captured them as slaves, and sent them out to the world as his representatives or twin brothers. They were also called to spiritual growth, but this implied a more active role than the ideal of the Johannine stream. Their active life-strategy was symbolised by the work of an architect.

Finally, we can observe that the apostolic commission stories rarely promote a prophetic world-view. They do not demand the hero to confront his community. On the level of a social-historical reading, this suggests that these texts were not the documents of revolutionary

64. By 'aetiological traditions', I mean traditions that explain the origins, goals, and *raison d'être* of a community.

movements. Their groups either went along with the given social frameworks, or withdrew into isolation. They may have been reformists, who hoped to exert an influence on society, but they were not revolutionists attempting to turn it upside down. Perhaps the only exception is Paul's commission story in *Acts* 22, where he is opposed by his fellow Jews, and—in the larger narrative context—his conservative fellow-Christians. It would be a mistake, however, to generalise this finding in view of the apostolic Acts. First, because the three types of institutional, prophetic, and philosophical commission are always represented in combinations rather than in isolation. Second, because a study of the social rhetoric of the apostolic Acts must be built on the analysis of the texts in their entirety.

General Conclusions

It is time to draw the general conclusions of our study of apostolic commission narratives. Divine commission is a literary pattern that presented itself in different cultural contexts. It probably has anthropological roots, which we did not explore in this study. Thus, commission narratives in early Christian literature did not arise in isolation, nor did they follow only patterns of the Jewish Scriptures. Rather they combined elements of Jewish literature, Greco-Roman biographies, philosophical traditions, novels, cultic legends, gospel traditions, and the emerging Christian biographies. Egyptian and Near Eastern traditions influenced them mainly with the mediation of Jewish literature, Greek novels, and cultic legends. Later apostolic Acts derived motifs from earlier ones, but this did not assume the form of direct imitation.

During an initial survey of commission in various literary traditions, we could establish a threefold social typology of commission narratives: institutional, prophetic, and philosophical. In Paul's commission in the Lucan *Acts* we could clearly identify all the three types. This author made the most extensive use of Jewish Scriptures. He also drew substantially on the tradition of divine call in contemporary Cynic philosophy. The subsequent appearance of the threefold typology in the commission stories of this text can be interpreted as a witness to the formation of a new group within Early Christianity. The commission stories of the apostolic Acts from the second to the fourth

centuries attest a broad plurality of Christian formations. In these texts, the interactions of the hero with the other apostles symbolise the links that the respective groups maintained with other Christian groups. In all those texts, there is an element of mysticism, which in some cases can be associated with the influence of Platonic texts or Gnostic writings. The commission stories of the heroes provide a combination of these institutional and mystical elements. In the *Acts of John*, we could identify an imitation of Plato's *Symposium*, used as a program of spiritual perfection. This urges a subtle investigation of the social and cultural milieu of the early apocryphal Acts, and a careful application of the traditional labels 'popular' and 'uneducated'. The *Acts of Philip* and the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve*, although scholarly tradition excluded them from the circle of the 'major Acts', belong to the same literary and cultural milieu, as far as it can be judged from the study of their commission narratives. Whereas the *Acts of Philip* otherwise draws substantially on the earlier Acts, its commission stories are genuine compositions, reflecting the ideal of a pluriform Christianity. The *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* originated in the milieu of coenobite monasticism. All of the Acts from the second to the fourth centuries contain a mystical model of Christian self-definition. The Acts of the fifth century, of which we examined the *Acts of Barnabas* and the *Acts of Titus*, concentrate rather on institutional themes, both using the Lucan *Acts* as a model. They provide political propaganda for local churches, in a twofold effort to establish their authority in apostolic tradition on the one hand, and maintain their independence on the other hand. The *Acts of Titus* makes use of the topoi of the Christian biographies, as well as of Greco-Roman biographical tradition.

In addition to the social-historical perspective, we analysed the use of the commission narratives on a social-anthropological level. We delineated the sujet of commission, suggesting that it provided a narrative framework of self-definition for early Christians. We suggested that commission stories describe the interaction of the five agents of sender, helper, authority, hero, and addressee, together with their negative counterparts. An episodic description of the sujet showed how commission serves to generate and handle conflict. The local variations of this model provided a biographical system of coordinates for the members of different Christian communities.

Many questions have been raised in this study that await further investigation. These include the textual history of the *Acts of John*, the cultural settings of several apostolic Acts, the intertextual relations of the texts, and a broader analysis of the narrative pattern of commission in late antiquity and beyond. Whereas my primary purpose was to give a literary analysis of commission narratives in the apostolic Acts, I have often engaged in historical-critical issues. In literary criticism, alternative readings are possible, and indeed, desirable. They can coexist peacefully even within the same book. In historical issues, on the contrary, alternative solutions most often completely exclude each other. Therefore, the suggestions that I made in connection with the textual reconstruction and historical setting of texts will probably be subject to more intense criticism than my literary critical interpretations. We have to realise, however, that historical explanations and literary interpretations are strongly bound to each other. For example, my literary examinations of the *Acts of John* and the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* necessarily prompted new theories with regard to their historical settings. I hope that this study will provoke not only critical remarks on individual points, but also complex literary and historical interpretations of the apostolic Acts.

