Luke 14:31–32 in the Context of Ancient Diplomacy and Greco-Roman Historiographical Literature

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Abstract

Luke 14:31–32 tells a parable about a king going to war against another king but before engaging in battle the first king must decide if his army of 10 000 men can fight the second king's army of 20 000 men. If not, the first king is expected to send an embassy to make peace. Not many commentators engage with this parable in any detail. Even fewer commentators recognise its imperial background. This article fills the scholarly gap by arguing that the Lukan parable conveys intimate familiarity with ancient diplomatic customs and Greco-Roman historiographical literature. It further speculates that Polybius of Megapolis' passage in Hist. 3.15 is the most influential source for the parable, seemingly implying Luke's familiarity with Polybius. The article reinforces the position that Luke was formally trained in historiography and employed such motifs and standards in his Gospel so that his material would appeal to his prospective Greco-Roman audience. As such, it situates Luke as both the first Christian historian and a follower of classical models of historiography.

Keywords: Luke; Polybius; Greco-Roman; Imperial Historiography

Introduction

Scholarly debate continues over whether Luke portrays himself as a historian in his Gospel's prologue and whether Luke follows Greco-Roman historiographical standards in his Gospel (and Acts).[1] All relevant sides tend to assume that Luke was at least acquainted with the historiographical literature and standards of the time.

However, several scholars argue that Luke's prologue portrays the composition of something a physician would write rather than a historian due to its "technical" characteristics. Consequently, Luke may not have known classical historiographical standards nor followed them. Alexander (1993:102–47) bases one of her strongest arguments on the prologue's literary style, which, she contends, better fits the prologue of a technical treatise. This is based on the prologue's brevity, the lack of biographical information about Luke himself, and the abundance of commonplace compound words. Adams' (2006:181–3) response addresses some of these arguments: (i) Luke's prologue fits the length of several other prologues from Greek historians; (ii) Like Luke, ancient

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[1] Although I use masculine pronouns to refer to the author of Luke-Acts, I recognise that there is a question as to whether the original source of the "we" passages in Acts is male. See Taylor (2020:125–56).

historians such as Josephus and Plutarch do not identify themselves in their work; (iii) The prologue is written in excellent Hellenistic Greek matching that expected of an ancient historian, while the remainder of the work, beginning at Lk. 1:5, abounds in Hebraisms and Septuagintal Greek.[2] Dawson (2019:556) adds that Alexander (1993), in paying so much attention to the prologue's literary style rather than considering its content, commits a methodological misstep from the beginning. It is important in any genre of ancient writing to clarify the type of writing in the first few sentences of the work. Although it may be granted due to the recent work of Mills (2021:114–48) that certain aspects of Luke's prologue are in fact similar to the prologues of technical treatises, the overall content of Luke's prologue does not lend itself to a technical context; neither does the totality of Luke's Gospel – as will be discussed.

This article supplements the case for why scholars should accept that Luke follows classical historiographical standards in his Gospel by examining Lk. 14:31–32 as a case study, where his portrayal of being a Greco-Roman historian in the prologue corresponds with his actions in the Gospel.

The study begins by analysing his Gospel's prologue and how Luke repeatedly displays his overall indebtedness to Greco-Roman historiography. It then discusses the office of embassy (πρεσβεία) in antiquity. This dovetails into explaining the contextual narrative of Lk. 14:25–32. This section is about discipleship, the conditions thereof, and two parables that express the proper way to be a disciple of Jesus.

At this point, I examine the little scholarship available on the imperial background of vv. 31–32. Not only do few ancient commentators besides Cyril of Alexandria address the parable, but their interests are in directions different from those of a critical study of the text; many of the church fathers may have found it irrelevant to proselytising the Good News. Seemingly, only a handful of modern commentators – Kim (2008:176), Parsons (2015), and Zamfir (2024:7) – address the parable's Greco-Roman background and the implications this should have for what scholars think about the author's identity and knowledge. Yet Kim (2008) merely poses this as a question in a footnote, Parsons (2015) leaves much to the reader's imagination, and Zamfir (2024), although adequately considering a few possible sources, does not develop a detailed study on this question. Several commentators who wrote comprehensive studies on Luke's knowledge of the Greco-Roman world simply pass by this parable, including Adamczewski (2016:164). Others, arguing the predominance of Jewish rather than Greco-Roman influence, like Bovon (2002:392–3), look for Maccabean parallels in the Septuagint, but the suggested possibilities are too dissimilar to be considered. After reviewing the full breadth of interpretations of the Lukan parable and the numerous failures and omissions, I conclude that this leaves a sizable lacuna in the scholarship on Lk. 14:31–32.

Hence, this study aims to offer an original consideration about the literary source(s) informing this Lukan parable to better explain its imperial background as indicated by its particular use of πρεσβεία. When all context-specific information is removed, the most similar passage in Greco-Roman literature appears to be Polybius' *Hist*. 3.15. I note four parallels between Lk. 14:31–32 and *Hist*. 3.15. The second parallel is highly relevant in orchestrating Luke's intimate awareness of Greco-Roman historiographical motifs.

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[2]   An explanation for this linguistic disparity could be that Luke redacted an existing Hebrew infancy narrative about John the Baptist. Although this is not mentioned in favour of his argument, see McGrath (2024:178–83).

But the other three also contain a substantial amount of shared narrational content between Luke and Polybius that may indicate a Polybian source domain for Lk. 14:31–32.[3] If so, these findings should inspire scholars to examine other Lukan material while reflecting on potential Polybian parallels. Even if these do not point toward apparent Polybian influence, which is admittedly speculative, from a broader perspective these findings certainly elucidate Luke's redactional hand in the developing Jesus tradition. Luke wrote his Gospel (in part) to provide an amenable account of Jesus that would appeal to his Greco-Roman audience. Lk. 14:31–32 is a stellar, though often overlooked, lens through which to view this conclusion, as it crucially links the expectations of ancient diplomacy to the Lukan Jesus.

The paper concludes by briefly reviewing the scholarly debate on the dating of Luke's Gospel, arguing that the findings of this study better situate the composition after 70 CE. From this, it analyses the ancient practice of literary circles alongside Luke's Gospel to better contextualise Luke the author and his Gospel within the milieu of Greco-Roman elite culture. Literary circles are under-discussed in Lukan scholarship regarding ancient literary production and, in light of the findings here, should be considered more.

Luke the historian

A review of Luke's notoriously controversial prologue follows. There is insufficient space to discuss all the relevant debates, but several are addressed. The manuscript traditions lack significant variants, so discussion of these is also omitted. The passage reads:

> Many (πολλοὶ) have undertaken to draw up an account (διήγησιν) concerning the things fulfilled among us. Just as those who were eyewitnesses (αὐτόπται) and servants of the word (ὑπηρέται … τοῦ λόγου) from the beginning handed down these things to us, I also think that because I have closely followed (παρηκολουθηκότι) everything that I would write an orderly account (καθεξῆς) for you – the most excellent (κράτιστε) Theophilus, so that you may come to know with certainty (ἀσφάλειαν) the word you have been taught (κατηχήθης). (Lk. 1:1–4)

Much can be debated about the meaning of any of these words and their translations.[4] Depending on when one dates the other Gospels, πολλοὶ in 1:1 may go so far as to mean that, quite literally, "many" texts had been written. Consequently, Luke must be confidently sequenced to the late first century at the earliest.[5] Bernier (2022: 69–74),

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3   The speculation that Luke knew Polybius is actually not unprecedented. Recognising Polybian influence on specifically Luke's Greek was not uncommon among German scholars in the 16th and 17th centuries (North 2006:241–3). Several researchers today see a potential influence of Polybius on Luke's stylistic choices in the prologue, e.g. Moessner (2006:149–50); Charlesworth (2010:16); Peters (2020:45; 2022:191–9). Others may see Polybius elsewhere in Luke, but do not explicitly claim his influence on Luke (Bormann 2023:222–4). Perhaps also relevant for increasing the likelihood of Polybian influence on Luke is Morgan's (2022) argument that τεκμηρίοις in Acts 1:3 is a starkly Herodotean word (*Hist.* 9.100.2) and potentially displays Luke's familiarity with Herodotus' own writings.

4   All translations are mine unless otherwise stated.

5   See Peters (2022:13–27) on what documents Luke could have had in his purview and Luke's view of his own Gospel in the light of these earlier traditions.

who adopts an early date, thinks otherwise. Some take umbrage at the mention of αὐτόπται, literally "those who have seen for themselves", in Lk. 1:2. This leads Litwa (2019:194–209) and Walsh (2021:156, 164–9) to speculate about literary fictionalisation to establish credibility and the concoction of false witnesses, a common motif in ancient literature across genres. Others, such as Robinson (1920), Bauckham (2017), and Van de Weghe (2023), following the church fathers, take this statement at face value to indicate that Luke met and talked with eyewitnesses in and around Jerusalem to ensure that he produced an "orderly" account for Theophilus. Whether one accepts that Luke used eyewitness sources or not, what is evident here is that eyewitness testimony was considered essential for the authorisation of Greco-Roman historical texts. For instance, Thucydides (*P.W.* 1.22) emphasises the importance of interviewing more than one eyewitness to an event because, when multiple eyewitnesses corroborate a story, it is more likely to be historical. This standard could very well have influenced Luke's claim. By employing the plural αὐτόπται, Luke at the very least claims to have interviewed more than one eyewitness, thus snugly situating himself in the tradition of Greco-Roman historiography.

This claim is further borne out by Luke's employment of the perfect participle παρηκολουθηκότι. According to Fitzmeyr (1970:296), this single participle is the deciding factor in interpreting the entire prologue, extending to Luke's presentation as an ancient historian. I translated it above as "closely followed," though some prefer "carefully investigated" (NIV), or more forcefully, "having had a perfect understanding" (NKJV). My translation aims to strike a balance between the two and to explain how Luke could claim to provide certainty about the account of events he received and then taught to Theophilus. Doing so adds to the likelihood that, following Litwa (2019) and Meyers (2022:67), Theophilus was Luke's personal patron.[6] This would mean he funded the production of Luke's Gospel (and Acts).

There is little evidence in the ancient Greco-Roman world that patrons maintained a watchful eye over their clients to ensure their investments did not go to waste. Still, as Saller (1982:7–41; 1989:49–62) and Nichols (2014:9) argue, personal patronage was, in certain respects, a friendship between a client and a patron despite differences in the relative societal power of each party. That Luke and Theophilus may have shared a close partnership suggests that Theophilus would have been interested in viewing the final product of Luke's Gospel before publication, especially since the Gospel was apparently written at Theophilus' request, to bolster his own faith.

Unlike some personal patronage projects conducted at the request of a disinterested elite, Theophilus fervently desired to know more about the Christian kerygma than his existing knowledge which was perhaps initially learned orally (as κατηχήθης means in Acts 18:25; 21:21) but would now be learned through the written document of Luke's Gospel. That Theophilus wished the Gospel to be written for the edification of his faith does not contradict, but rather intersects, the practice of personal patronage in the context of furthering Roman interests and power. Braund (1989:137–52) claims this often played

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[6]   Alexander's (1993:191) hesitation appears to be motivated by her erroneous conclusion that Luke's prologue was a technical rather than historical composition, as patrons were far less common in the former.

a definitive role in patron-client relationships; the article will later argue that Luke's Gospel seeks to follow this trend.[7]

Whether Theophilus was in fact Luke's patron or not, Luke would have been seen as an unbecoming historian had he claimed certainty of the received account without claiming to have consulted eyewitnesses. This would likely have led to criticism from his contemporaries, as seen in the ancient historiographical polemic by Lucian (*T. Hist.* 1.3) against another historian over this very issue. Similarly, Polybius (*Hist.* 12.27) criticises another historian for inventing speeches rather than recording the actual words.[8] He stresses that one must personally investigate the matters at hand: "Eyes are more accurate witnesses than ears." But his standard was exceptional for the time, as Cicero (*Fam.* 5.12) encourages Lucretius to abandon the "laws of historiography" (*leges historiae*). Cicero clearly felt no fidelity to the pursuit of historical truth for its own sake. So, setting aside whether Luke historically drew from eyewitness accounts, his stress on the account's certainty clarifies that he (at least) claims to have made use of exclusive sources besides the common traditions already known to him, such as Mark's Gospel. This is the standard of precision an ancient historian was expected to follow. It is evident that Luke portrays himself as a reliable historian in his prologue.

After outlining the relevant context of the term πρεσβεία in antiquity, the study seeks to prove that Luke follows through on being a historian, by focusing on Lk. 14:31–32, where he transforms this portrayal into action by employing Greco-Roman historiographical motifs and standards and drawing on his knowledge of the diplomatic customs of the time.

Πρεσβεία in the ancient world

The noun πρεσβεία (or πρέσβυς; plural πρέσβεις) could refer to a group of individuals or one individual sent by a ruling body to another ruling body to petition for peace or help from an invading force.[9] Demosthenes (*F. Emb.* 19.4) provides a comprehensive generalisation of the behavioural responsibilities of a πρεσβεία. They are responsible firstly for the reports created; secondly for any advice they have offered; thirdly for observing what was asked of them; and fourthly for whether they have acted corruptly or with integrity. Failure to follow these guidelines was common, which is why they were written. Although this office often operated in the context of warfare, a fragmentary second-century BCE description noted by Battisoni (2009:89) states that a πρεσβεία arrived in Rome and recalled the close relationship between Rome and Delos. The role of a πρεσβεία may have been more ambiguous in some cases.

Whatever the exact role, the office of πρεσβεία was widespread in antiquity.[10] This is because wielding an active πρεσβεία was paramount for cities to maintain a positive relationship with the emperor. As Rives (2009:117) notes, this is confirmed in historical records and is especially evident in a first-century CE case in which a πρεσβεία was in

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[7]   See Williams (1982:3–28) for more on the political factor in ancient patronage practices involving literature.

[8]   Polybius may not be acquitted of the charge of inventing speeches; Gruen (2018:16) considers this an open, if unanswerable, question.

[9]   In other contexts, πρέσβυς/πρέσβεις can refer to an elder(s). Texts that indicate this meaning are not mentioned in this paper.

[10]   For more details about the various roles, see Kienast (1974); Bash (1997:58–9, 70–1); Breytenbach (2010:173–5).

fact not sent. At the time of the accession of Emperor Gaius, the Judaeans living in Alexandria decreed to him all possible honours as expected throughout the empire. However, since they were not permitted to send a πρεσβεία directly to Gaius, they took their decree to the prefect Flaccus, who promised to send it to Gaius. The Judaeans later discovered that he had not sent the decree to the emperor and were horrified, fearing that they would be seen as a force hostile to Gaius. According to Philo of Alexandria (*Flacc.* 97–102), Herod Agrippa I came to the aid of the Judaeans by sending the decree to Gaius and specifying the actual date on which the decree was passed. By doing so, he testified to the loyalty of the Judaeans and kept them in the emperor's good graces.

The ubiquity of the office in the historical record shapes the recurring use of the term πρεσβεία across all genres of Greco-Roman literature. Plato (*Rep.* 4.442d) develops a hypothetical case where a πρεσβεία is sent into "another city" (ἑτέραν πόλιν) to petition the ruler of that city to not go to war. Aeschines (*Ag. Ctes.*) mentions how Demosthenes sent a πρεσβεία for the ratification of peace "oaths" (ὅρκους). Plutarch (*Tim.* 2) explains how, when the Carthaginians came to Sicily, the Sicilian Greeks wished to send a πρεσβεία to Greece to ask for assistance from the Corinthians – not only because they trusted them but also because they saw the city as a "lover of freedom" (φιλελεύθερον) that hated tyrants. Plutarch (*Luc.* 30) describes how Lucullus received a πρεσβεία from the king of the Parthians inviting him into a friendly "alliance" (συμμαχίαν). Lucullus then sent a πρεσβεία back to the king.

The term is also employed in Greco-Jewish literature. Josephus (*Ant.* 14.35) relays an episode from Strabo the Cappadocian where a πρεσβεία came from Egypt bearing gifts. Even later Greco-Christian literature refers to this term: Basil of Caesarea (*Ep.* 82) and Eusebius of Caesarea (*Hist. Ecc.* 2.5). I argue that the use of πρεσβεία which is most relevant for Lk. 14:31–32 is found in Polybius. It reads:

> The people of Saguntum continued sending embassies to Rome, partly because they foreknew what was coming and feared for their own existence, and partly so that the Romans might be kept fully aware of the growing power of the Carthaginians in Iberia. For a long time (πλεονάκις) the Romans disregarded their works, but now they sent out some commissioners to see what had befallen them (ὑπὲρ τῶν προσπιπτόντων). At that time, Hannibal had finished the conquests he intended (προέθετο) to do in that season and was going into winter quarters at the New City again, which was the royal dwelling in Iberia.[11] There, he took hold of the embassy (πρεσβείαν) from Rome and granted them an interview and listened to the message they were appointed with. It was a strong command for him to leave Saguntum alone, as being under Rome, and to not cross the Iber … The Roman embassies (πρέσβεις), finding that there must clearly be a war, sailed to Carthage. (*Hist.* 3.15)

This pericope of the Second Punic War, which recounts events around 220 BCE, contains several pertinent details for a later comparison with the Lukan parable. First, the Saguntines of Saguntum, a small province on the border of Carthage, were expected to send embassies to Rome and continued to do so because they feared retaliation from the

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[11]   Polybius is known for regarding the cause of war as the psychological disposition of humans and the beginning of war as the first actual conflict; see Eckstein (1989:1–15).

emperor and because they would support Rome over the Carthaginians if any conflict arose between the emperor and Hannibal. Polybius does not specify what led the Romans to connect with the Saguntines, though it makes sense to suggest that they believed friendship with the Saguntines would undermine Carthaginian expansion. At some point before 220 BCE they had become allies. Second, Hannibal received the embassy from the Roman Senate and listened to the message entrusted to them. Polybius does not describe the interview's contents or much about the message. If Demosthenes' (*F. Emb.* 19) list of responsibilities aligns with the historical record, that embassy faithfully carried out the emperor's instructions. Third, Hannibal did not comply with the injunction, and when the embassy returned to Rome, Rome's ambassadors set sail to prepare for war. The historicity of Polybius' account and his motivations for portraying Rome in this exalted way are debatable.[12] A generally accurate picture is that the Romans provoked the invasion of Saguntum by enticing Hannibal and discovered the hard way that Hannibal would sooner fight than yield territory.

Examining the role of πρεσβεία in antiquity and its employment in contemporaneous literature has proven fruitful. Any educated Greek speaker in antiquity would have been aware of the term's roles and responsibilities, and also examples of its usage in such literature. The study will now demonstrate how Luke was no different.

Luke 14:31–32 in its Greco-Roman context

The broader context of Lk. 14:31–32 begins in v. 25. The scene starts with Jesus journeying towards Jerusalem, his final resting place. He is followed by "large crowds" (ὄχλοι πολλοί) whom he begins to instruct on the stringent conditions of discipleship. Throughout his Gospel, Luke often depicts the crowds around Jesus as neutral. For example, Lk. 4:42–43 edits Mk. 1:35–38 so that the people in the crowd, rather than "Simon and the others" who are individuals named as part of Jesus' circle, are the ones present to hear Jesus preach about the heavenly kingdom. Presumably, this is done to convey that outsiders are in a position to be convinced of Jesus' message.

The same is true here, meaning the people in the crowds are all potential disciples, but only if they accept the following conditions: They must "hate" (μισέω) their father, mother, brothers, sisters, and even their soul itself to be disciples. The verb μισεῖν and its cognates were not necessarily understood to carry the harsh connotation of the English word to "hate." As Pitre (2024:113–6) explains, the verb was often used to mean "love less" or perhaps "not love," implying there is something the person must love more than whoever they hate. On the other hand, the Double Tradition in Matt. 10:37 lightens the harshness to "love more than", not transmitting the μισεῖν-motif. This may indicate that Matthew did not believe the verb to carry such a hyperbolic connotation, so he omitted it. Jesus then says that, to be his disciple, one must carry their cross, that is, live as though they are condemned to die by crucifixion.

Having outlined these conditions, Jesus delivers two parables only found in Luke. Following Dinkler (2013:146–8), a parable in the Lukan context is a story within a story that conveys a purposefully ambiguous lesson meant to leave the hearer doubting what to make of it. Both parables have the structure of hypotheticals, where an analysis of existing resources is undertaken to determine whether the desired conclusion will be

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[12]   Contrast Walbank (1957:324) with Thorton (2013:324).

reached, and then what the outcome is when the available resources are not enough. When someone builds a tower, they are expected to estimate the cost to see if they have enough materials to build it because if they first lay a foundation yet cannot finish it, those who see it will ridicule (ἐμπαίζειν) them. However, the second is more radical as it, in the words of Emmrich (2013:65), intensifies the challenge by raising the stakes to the "national level" (though this is a bit anachronistic) and increases the danger of loss of material circumstances and life. The parable reads as follows:

> Or what king, going out to meet another king for war (πόλεμον) does not first, having sat down, consider if he is able with an army of ten thousand (δέκα χιλιάσιν) to oppose him with an army of twenty thousand (εἴκοσι χιλιάδων) – the one coming against him. But if not, while the other is still far away, he sends an embassy (πρεσβείαν) for the terms of peace (εἰρήνην). (Lk. 14:31–32)

Green (1997:566) skips over this parable in his commentary, noting only that one need not be a king to appreciate the second parable, and that Luke elsewhere indicates the presence of military personnel among those who hear Jesus. The former is quite vague and offers nothing substantive. The latter is true and relevant for framing this saying in its proper societal context.

In Lk. 3:14, John the Baptist tells soldiers, in response to their question, how they should act in order to be content. As Kyrychenko (2014:143–5) argues, Luke likely inserted soldiers into a tradition about John the Baptist to fit Luke's apologetic desire to portray the origins of the Jesus movement as not anti-Rome. In Lk. 18:18, a "certain ruler" (τις … ἄρχων) asks Jesus what he must do to inherit age-enduring life. Similar episodes are reported in Mk. 10:17 and Matt. 19:16, but only Luke specifies that the person is a ruler. Identifying this person as a ruler furthers Luke's imperial concern.[13] Like in Lk. 3:14, he can proudly show his readers that those who were part of the origins of the Jesus movement, in this radical case even Jesus himself, conversed with loyal Romans. Not providing the ruler's rank may also support Luke's apologetic purpose, since audiences far and wide can substitute their own ruler for this "certain" ruler, allowing them to personalise the narrative.

But it is essential not to take this argument too far. Lk. 20:25 retains the Markan (and Matthean) episode of Jesus being presented with a denarius and declaring that his tempters must render "the things of Caesar" (τὰ Καίσαρος) to Caesar and "the things of God" (τὰ … θεοῦ) to God. If Luke's sole apologetic intention was to uphold imperial power, presumably this fiery response limiting Caesar's domain of influence would have been omitted. Nevertheless, the fact that Luke portrays Jesus as interacting with Roman agents to deflect potential anti-Roman sentiment in the Christian movement, and consequently, that his Gospel was written in part to bolster Christian loyalty to the Roman Empire, is well supported.[14]

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[13]   See Wolter (2025:254–77) for a nuanced evaluation of arguments concerning Luke's pro-Roman or anti-Roman attitude. Wolter does not address Lk. 14:31–32, but this paper argues that the passage displays Luke's imperial bias.

[14]   This apologetic purpose reaches its zenith in the Lukan passion narrative. See Ahn (2006) and Kloppenborg (1992:106–20).

The parable in Lk. 14:31–32 stands out because there is no equivalent elsewhere in the New Testament or in other early Christian literature. Luke's Gospel has the most parables – at least 14. But even those parables appearing in none of the other Gospels often share similarities with other Jesus material in theme and theology. It is surprising that few ancient commentators discuss this abnormal parable in detail.

Origen of Alexandria's *Homilies on Luke*, the only extant Lukan commentary before Ambrose of Milan, bypasses chapter 14 altogether.[15] Ambrose (*Ex. Luke*) doesn't do much better, losing interest in the chapter after v. 24. Cyril of Alexandria (*Com. Luke*) is one of the few ancient figures to say anything on Lk. 14:31–32.[16] His interest is in connecting this with Eph. 6:12, among other texts, about conquering evil earthly and heavenly powers. Cyril's interpretation seems to have become the standard patristic interpretation in later centuries.

Modern commentators do not do substantially better. Thackeray (1913:393–9), as was typical for scholars of his day who had yet to recognise the interplay between Hellenism and Judaism, spends a great deal of time trying to link Septuagintal references and even references in Egyptian texts to the parable, but admits that these are tenuous. Johnson (1991:230) notes a thin parallel in Lk. 11:18–20, where Jesus says that, if the Adversary is divided against himself, he cannot stand. But the point made is very different in Lk. 14:31–32. Lk. 11:18–20 is not in a diplomatic context, and Lk. 14:31–32 is about calculating the chances of reaching a goal before starting, not avoiding destruction by being internally divided.

Funk and Hoover (1993:524), fellows of the Jesus Seminar, argue a parallel in *GThom.* 98, where Jesus describes the Father's imperial rule as a person who kills someone powerful by stabbing his sword into the wall of his own house. But once again, the message is very different in Lk. 14:31–32. Like Lk. 11:18–20, *GThom.* 98 is not in a diplomatic context, nor is it, as they claim, about considering the cost of discipleship before embracing discipleship like Lk. 14:31–32. The parable is concerned with the preparation of someone already undergoing discipleship (Gathercole 2014:555–6). If one is to look for a Gospel parallel to Lk. 14:31–32, Mk. 3:27 may be stronger, but it is best to view this Markan verse in dialogue with *GThom.* 35 rather than the Lukan parable.

Bovon (2002:392–3) views 1 Macc. 5:38–39 as an inspiration, as the context involves a battle between two sides and the verb πορεύω is used in both passages. But, as with several of the proposed parallels, the Maccabean passage is not in a diplomatic context. In addition to it playing out on and around water and not involving two kings, unlike the Lukan parable which presumably takes place over stretches of land and involves two kings, Judas the Maccabean sends spies to the other camp rather than diplomats. There is no sense here that Judas seeks to make peace. The word πρεσβεία isn't even used here.[17] Instead, this is one of several conflicts forming part of Judas' war campaign in the same chapter (1 Macc. 5:3, 21, 60, 65).

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[15]   The remaining fragments of (Pseudo?)-Eusebius of Caesarea's commentary on Luke contain no discussion of Lk. 14:31–32. The fragments jump from 14:18 to 17:3.

[16]   Gregory of Nyssa (*On Vir.* 18) mentions the prior parable without specifying its origin, but not Lk. 14:31–32.

[17]   In his entry on πρεσβεία, Spicq (1994) does not mention 1 Macc. 5:38–39, but he does note the presence of an embassy in 8:17; 14:21; 15:17. Spicq does not mention the Lukan parable anywhere, but it is worth clarifying that none of the Maccabean passages he mentions correspond with the context of the parable.

Young (2012:227–8) claims a Rabbinic parallel where Rabbi Jonathan describes an angry king who, having left his city, sends a man to his city to announce that the king will go even further from the city if they do not appease him. But there are issues with this: (i) The second king is missing from the parallel; (ii) There isn't any notion of armies warring against one another; (iii) The parallel isn't even in the explicit context of warfare.

Even fewer commentators discuss the parable's stark Greco-Roman background in a scholarly context where it would likely be expected. In a footnote in a paper about Paul's journey to Arabia, Murphy-O'Connor (1993:735) poses the possibility that the Lukan parable was influenced by the conflict between Herod Antipas and Aretas IV. However, he does not justify this speculation, nor does he explore any other conflicts in history from which Luke may have drawn. Wolter (2008:518–20), in his momentous German commentary on Luke's Gospel, where he seeks to provide a balance when examining Luke's Jewish and Greco-Roman influences, points out how Epictetus (*Diss*. 3.15.1) makes a very similar point on the parable in Lk. 14:28–30 about how one must plan well from the beginning to avoid ending up in shame. But regarding Lk. 14:31–32, he does not mention the parable's Greco-Roman background, only its Septuagintal language.

Adamczewski (2016:164), who wrote a commentary arguing that Luke portrays knowledge of many texts ranging from the Letter to the Galatians to the writings of Josephus, does not comment on the Greco-Roman background of the saying. Similarly, Lanier (2024), who wrote a more than 1 000-page book purportedly detailing all the noncanonical influences on the New Testament, with great attention to Greco-Roman influences, does not mention the imperial influence on this parable. Like Ambrose (*Ex. Luke*), he ends his commentary at Lk. 14:24.

Indeed, only a handful of researchers explicitly connect Lk. 14:31–32 with a Greco-Roman background. In a footnote, Kim (2008:176) seems to ask whether Luke is aware of imperial customs. This implies that Kim recognises the Greco-Roman background of the saying and that there should be an explanation as to why Luke would have this background knowledge. But he does not answer his own question. Parsons (2015) cites how the Roman poet Juvenal (*Sat*. 1.69–70) warns that, when a soldier's helmet is on, it is too late for the army to withdraw from the fight, but he does not explain how Luke would have such information on diplomatic customs nor any possible literary sources he may have been cognisant of in crafting the parable.

Zamfir (2024:7) adequately frames the Greco-Roman background of the saying and how it may, for instance, draw from Josephus (*Ant*. 18.5.1), who relays an alleged speech of Agrippa II to Jewish authorities. However, as she admits, this does not mention an entreaty of peace, which is fundamental to the parable's message. Although Zamfir (2024) does not consider a Polybian background for the Lukan saying, she may be forgiven for not studying the parable's background further, since doing so would be tangential to her thesis regarding the alleged pacifism of the author of Luke's Gospel.

The little recognition of the Greco-Roman background to Lk. 14:31–32 clearly indicates a gap in the interpretive lens. I argue that the most unambiguous indication of this background is the parable's use of πρεσβεία, a word used twice in the New Testament, both times in Luke-Acts.[18] The following is a chart comparing the narrative

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18   Luke 19:14 is the only other mention. Note 2 Cor. 5:20 and Eph. 6:20, which use the verb πρεσβεύω.

of Lk. 14:31–32 and Polybius' *Hist.* 3.15; in the latter case, all corresponding historical information is removed to render the narrative abstract.

Lk. 14:31–32	***Hist.* 3.15**
(1) A king is going into war against another king;	(a) One king kept sending ambassadors to another king because he knew war was coming;
(2) The king must first consider whether he can oppose with 10 000 men the other king coming against him with 20 000 men;	(b) For a long time, the first king disregarded the second king, but now he sent some commissioners to see what had befallen the second king;
(3) If the king decides he cannot do so, he will send an embassy while the other is still far away;	(c) The second king granted the embassy of the first king an interview;
(4) The embassy will convey that the king asks for peace.	(d) The message the embassy conveyed was to keep peace.

I strongly agree with Reece (2022:53, 64) that, given the features of Luke-Acts, Luke was knowledgeable about many Greco-Roman authors. Yet, I am not arguing that Lk. 14:31–32 consciously mimics *Hist.* 3.15. Macdonald's (2000; 2015) theory of *mimesis* relies on reading too much into literary parallels between the Gospels and texts like Homer. One can acknowledge that Homer was a "cultural inevitability" in the words of Macdonald (2000:8), as well as that the Gospels employ Homeric (and Platonic) motifs. But one need not conclude that the Gospels were purposefully written as literary fiction.[19] As Litwa (2014:33) writes, "To focus on pure similarity is parallelomania; to focus on difference is apologetics." A responsible commentator should find a middle ground between swearing off literary influence and turning toward it in every circumstance. Indeed, the argument here is that Luke, being well-read in contemporaneous historiographical literature (as seen in the Gospel's prologue), employs this knowledge in crafting a parable that seemingly recalls the passage in *Hist.* 3.15.

The parallels between Lk. 14:31–32 and *Hist.* 3.15 are unclear at first glance, but there are noteworthy similarities among the dissimilarities. The parallel between (1) and (a) is apparent enough: War is on the horizon. The dissimilarities between the two are also apparent: Luke's account is far briefer than that of Polybius, as it does not specifically provide the background information that the king was already sending ambassadors because he knew war was coming. Yet Bovon (2002:393) claims that this parable refers to only one battle in the context of a larger war, suggesting that the embassy here was implicitly one of many embassies sent by the king. This may also be explained by the fact that it makes sense for Luke to avoid prior information about a historical situation. Omitting historical circumstances makes the Lukan parable timeless, similar to how his redactional addition of τις … ἄρχων in Lk. 18:18, even putting aside

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[19]   Rather than writing literary fiction, what makes more sense is that the evangelists – as authors immersed in Hellenistic literary culture – recognize themselves as possessing the creative liberty to build on the perceived *hypothesis* or core narrative of Jesus' life with additional events and sayings, so long as those additional elements are not thought to damage the *hypothesis*. See Mills (2025).

its pro-Roman apologetic nature, opens the door for later generations to substitute their own ruler in the place of this "certain" ruler.

This aspect of timelessness coheres with Dinkler's (2013) earlier description of a Lukan parable as a story within a story that is purposefully ambiguous. A timeless parable is, by nature, applicable to the largest possible number of people and intensifies the ambiguity of the message. As Pope Benedict XVI (2007:1) states, "While civilizations have come and gone, these stories continue to teach us anew with their freshness and their humanity." Here Luke seems to employ the same theological move as in Lk. 18:18 by allowing future generations of Christians to substitute a contemporaneous situation of warfare into Jesus' parable to help them make sense of their situation. It is expected yet (perhaps) unintended that Cyril (*Com. Luke*) would interpret the verse in a "spiritual" rather than an "earthly" fashion, as this further fortifies the timelessness of the parable. It makes sense that Luke omits historical particularities because they distract from the crucial foreshadowing event, which is the king's preparation for war in both passages.

The parallel between (2) and (b) is non-existent. There is nothing substantial to connect them, at least from the writings of Polybius. However, what if, because Luke isn't directly mimicking the text of Polybius, he feels free to employ other sources that he is informed of as a historian? The Latin historian Livy is a possibility due to his abnormal frequency of citing an opposing force as numbering "twenty thousand" (*viginti milia*) soldiers in his early first-century BCE text *History of Rome* (by my count, around 26 times), which directly parallels εἴκοσι χιλιάδων in the Lukan parable. However, the immediate problem is that Luke was not versed enough in Latin to read Livy. If he knew any Latin, it would have been merely enough to communicate with a soldier passing by on his daily beat. This is analogous to how high school students in the United States may be able to describe their day in Spanish but not much else, despite living close to a Spanish-speaking country like Mexico; in a country with an increasing population of native Spanish speakers, few students can read *Don Quixote*, for instance.

As Reece (2022:45–7) shows, for the first three centuries of the current era Greek-speaking historians rarely cited Latin authors. This observation supports Cicero's (*Arch.* 23) claim: "Greek is read all over the world, Latin only within narrow boundaries." In the case of Livy, Plutarch (*Cam.* 6.3) was one of the only Greek historians who directly engaged with him. Furthermore, as recognised as far back as Cadbury (1920:156–8), Luke contains the fewest Latinisms of all the Synoptics, even changing many Latinisms in Mark's Gospel to better fit Greek. For example, the κεντυρίων in Mk. 15:39 becomes the ἑκατοντάρχης in Lk. 23:47. Many commentators following Cadbury (1920) cite this as an example of Luke not knowing Latin.

Gómez (2023:121–2) argues to the contrary that Luke may have been aware of the presence of these loan words because he seems to strategically eliminate them in his Gospel and add them in Acts (which contains around 12 Latinisms), especially in direct speech to Gentiles: Luke preserves Latinisms in the context of imperial power and the linguistic connections between those living in the Roman Empire. This is a topic for further study, but at this point, the evidence points to the conclusion that Luke didn't know Latin. The strength of this credence presumably leads Macdonald (2015:4) to hold on to the possibility that, for Luke to have so clearly mimicked Vergil (he argues), Luke may have been assisted by a native Latin speaker when composing Luke-Acts. Such a

momentous claim should be supported by robust data, but Macdonald does not develop his argument. So, Luke (even indirectly) paralleling Livy is unlikely.

What isn't unlikely is that Luke was versed in the Thucydidean historiographical standard of describing armies with large, rounded numbers and wished to demonstrate this in the parable. If Jesus was depicted as following this standard – a standard that later historians like Polybius, Plutarch, and Josephus picked up – this would resonate with Luke's readers who may have sought a more Roman Jesus. What would also resonate with Luke's readers is depicting a literate Jesus. This is in fact present in Lk. 4:16–30. The episode shows Jesus reading Isa. 61:1–2 (LXX) in a synagogue on the Sabbath. Regardless of its historicity, the fact that Luke (and only Luke) includes this episode is telling about his desired portrayal of Jesus.[20] That is to say, whether Luke received this account from eyewitnesses present at the scene (Lk. 1:2) or if Luke fabricated the episode out of thin air, the point is that he chose to include the episode for his audience. A Jesus who spoke and read as an ancient Hellenistic historian and as a marvellous Jewish Rabbi was more appealing than one who merely spoke and read as a Jewish Rabbi.[21] To Luke's readers, a Jesus who could read and speak as a Jewish Rabbi may even have been a Jesus who could read and speak as a Hellenistic historian.

The parallel between (3) and (c) is readily evident: Both passages involve a king sending an embassy and the other king receiving it. Luke's passage does not explicitly state that the other king receives the embassy, but it implies this is the goal, as is evident by conveying what the embassy says to the king later in the parable. Dissimilarity is also apparent: In Luke, the king sends an embassy while the other king is still far away as a means of ascertaining peace. Polybius does not mention the king as "far away" (πόρρω), but this is implicit. The king is not present with the embassy since he is in the territory he controls, so he is far away from the first king.

The parallel between (4) and (d) is straightforward yet noteworthy: Both passages feature a king seeking peace through his embassy, which serves as a mediator and messenger. According to Tacitus (*Hist*. 2.17), Roman peace, *pax Romana*, often involved taxes, tributes, and even enslavement for the defeated enemy. Peace is indeed impossible without war, according to Greek sources such as Thucydides (2.63.3) and Aristotle (*Nic. Eth*. 1177b), as cited by Reeder (2018:18). Polybius' account inarguably assumes this historical (and philosophical) view of warfare.

Luke seems to do the same, following a theme in other early Christian texts like Col. 1:15–20. In Lk. 14:33, he implies that the first king who sends the ἐρωτᾷ τὰ πρὸς εἰρήνην ("terms of peace") will have to give up everything if the second king accepts the agreement, which is analogous to how a disciple must give up everything to follow Jesus (Lk. 14:26, 33; Matt. 19:27; Mk. 8:34). Bovon (2002) and Edwards (2015) are right to pay attention to this Hebraism. The phrase is found in NA[28], but P[75] reads ἐρωτᾷ εἰρήνην, and B says ἐρωτᾷ εἰς εἰρήνην.

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[20]   A point rarely mentioned in connection with Lk. 4:16–30 is that it parallels second-century texts that portray a literate Jesus like the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*. Whether this can tell scholars anything about dating Luke's Gospel (and Jn. 7:15) has not been answered.

[21]   This episode also relates to Aryeh's (2024) argument that Luke links the Old Testament to his Gospel in his infancy narrative (1:5–25) by drawing on the motif of prophecy fulfilment. The same is done here, but more radically: Luke portrays prophetic texts about Jesus as actually being read by Jesus himself.

Zamfir (2024:9) claims that ἐρωτᾷ τὰ πρὸς εἰρήνην is the later text and the latter two are earlier, but this is unconvincing because it is unlikely that a Hebraism would be added into the text in the maturing manuscript tradition by scribes even more alien to the language of Judaea than the Gospel author. Her argument becomes even weaker when considering Marcion's *Evangelium*, which, at least according to Klinghardt's (2023:48–9) reconstruction of the text, likely conserves ἐρωτᾷ τὰ πρὸς εἰρήνην from Lk. 14:32.[22] Due to this Hebraism and its preservation in the *Evangelium*, it makes more sense to consider that Luke may have been aware of the *Testament of Judah*.

While reviewing the story of the sons of Esau in the context of war, Judah recounts how the sons of Esau asked for peace (τὰ πρὸς εἰρήνην), and it was granted. This is an exact linguistic parallel with Lk. 14:32 in NA[28]. Whether the text was originally Jewish or Christian, much of the textual tradition dates before the second century CE, and since it was in Greek but originated in Hebrew (or Aramaic), it could very well be a source Luke was familiar with in either its Greek or Hebrew (or Aramaic) recension.[23] An awareness of Hellenistic literature may even have inspired the tradition itself, as Hellenism was intertwined with Judaism by the second century BCE.

These parallels lead to the conclusion that Luke was intimately familiar with diplomatic customs in the Greco-Roman world and related historiographical literature. More speculatively, they suggest that *Hist* 3.15 was itself influential in forming Lk. 14:31–32. By my lights, no other passage corresponds so well with the parable. If this suggestion is at all near the mark, it indicates that Luke, when writing his Gospel, saw Polybius as an inspiration. While Hugo Grotius went too far in the 17th century when he said that "Luke loves to follow Polybius", it is unlikely that this is the only passage showing Polybian influence if his *vestigia* are present here.[24] Scholars should then be animated to examine more of the content exclusive to Luke's Gospel with Polybian parallels in mind. If Luke did not employ Polybius and these similarities can be explained away without invoking *Hist*. 3.15, the central conclusion is unaffected. Perhaps the exact inspirations Luke had for developing this parable are lost to time or otherwise unattainable today. Luke may have simply picked up something in the water. Whatever the case, it is clear that Luke placed a parable on the lips of Jesus that portrays Jesus as conscious of proper diplomatic behaviour and the literature that describes such behaviour. The Lukan Jesus was a dutiful Roman diplomat.

Luke as an imperial author

The author of Luke-Acts was highly educated and formally trained in Classical and Hellenistic Greek language and literature. In the words of Plato (*Leg.* 654d), he was a πεπαιδευμένος, someone who had a curricular education. Unlike Peter and John, who Luke refers to in Acts 4:13 as "unlettered" (ἀγράμματοί), Walsh (2021:116) and Reece

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22 It should be noted that Roth (2013:425), in his reconstruction, claims that Lk. 14:25–35 is "unattested" in Marcion's *Evangelium*. I concur with Klinghardt (2021:936–41) that this pericope was likely just passed over by Tertullian and was present in the *Evangelium*. To argue that it was removed seems to necessitate that the author would have had reasons for doing so. But none come to mind, especially since, as I argue, the Lukan parable has a predominantly Greco-Roman rather than Jewish background.

23 Early Christian writers were unafraid to rely on Jewish sources, as the *Didache* shows. If Luke reworked an earlier Jewish infancy story about John the Baptist, then his drawing on other Jewish documents like the *Testament of Judah* would be even more coherent with the evidence.

24 See North (2006:241–2) about Grotius and his contemporaries.

(2022:31) argue that Luke was one of the less than 20 percent of people in the Roman Empire who were literate. He was in fact more than literate; someone who could create an intricate historical-theological narrative with all the technical procedures associated with producing literature.

The tradition from Irenaeus of Lyon writing around 180 CE that states that Luke was a physician and part of Paul's ministry (if the Luke mentioned in Col. 4:44; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philem. 24 is even the same person) hardly meets this steep bar for authorship. Hansen (2024:82) claims that, since Luke's name is found only in inauthentic Pauline texts (if, as she extensively argues, Philemon should be seen as such) and not mentioned by Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, and others, this is an additional reason to doubt the Irenaean tradition. Assuming Philemon is authentically Pauline and so contains a historically accurate attestation of a companion named Luke, still does not on its own support this tradition. One might finally question why – if Luke was associated with Paul's ministry and seen as a physician at least several decades before Irenaeus – Marcion's *Evangelium* never refers to Luke's Gospel, despite it being a redaction of the Gospel. If the author of *Evangelium* knew who was said to have written the Gospel he redacted, surely, he would have mentioned the name instead of referring to it as the "Gospel of the Lord". This silence suggests that the author of the *Evangelium* did not know that "Luke" wrote the Gospel of Luke.[25]

Considering this alongside the findings of the present study that elucidate on Luke's knowledge of Greco-Roman diplomatic customs and historiographic literature and their linguistic, thematic, and literary textual markers, what does this mean for the dating of Luke-Acts? Many scholars grant without much debate that Luke's Gospel can be dated after 70 CE when the Second Temple in Jerusalem fell. However, Armstrong (2021) is a recent naysayer who dates Acts to the early 60s, which places Luke's Gospel before the Second Temple's destruction.

Earlier this study argued that Luke's Gospel was written in part to combat perceived anti-Roman sentiment in the Jesus movement by depicting Jesus as amicable toward Roman leaders and as a literate Roman diplomat. This could support the premise that the Gospel was written after 70 CE and refute Armstrong's viewpoint because, if Luke's Gospel was written after 70 CE, then Acts must necessarily have been written after this since it is the second volume as denoted in its prologue (Acts 1:1).

In addition, the view that Luke traces Jesus to Jerusalem to end his Gospel and Paul to Rome to end Acts is more convincing than the alternative hypotheses; the Gospel was spread from Jerusalem to Rome, from the home of the Jews to the home of the Gentiles. As Lk. 24:47 reads, "unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem". Besides the standard arguments for this claim, a point rarely mentioned is that in the *Testament of Judah*, the sons of Esau are journeying to Jerusalem. The same is true of the disciples of Jesus in Luke's Gospel. They end up in Jerusalem to see the risen Christ, whose journey while alive led him to be executed in Jerusalem. Future scholarship should study the links between the *Testament of Judah* and Luke's Gospel in more depth.

Placing Luke's Gospel after 70 CE still leaves much work to be done on its dating. The article now discusses what Luke's demonstrated awareness of historiographical

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[25] Mills (2025:164) notes how this silence also suggests a literary competitiveness between the author of the *Evangelium* and Luke. Like other gospel writers, the *Evangelium's* author sees Luke's Gospel as competition and so does not acknowledge his source text.

training and cognisance of relevant sources may tell scholars about a broader picture of Christianity's conversation with the Greco-Roman practice of literary circles and the situating of "Luke," the first Christian historian, and perhaps other early Christians in these circles.

In the ancient world, a literary circle comprised highly educated individuals who read and reviewed each other's writings to improve and capitalise on what their fellow compatriots had written. On the one hand, ancient literary circles resembled book clubs of the modern day, where a group of friends come together to read and discuss a book that they all decide upon. On the other hand, ancient literary circles allowed for more personal involvement since often the work being read was written by one of the circle's members. It was expected that those listening, having heard it read aloud, would analyse and critique the reading to help their interlocutor improve the material before publishing for the broader public.[26] One of the reasons this practice emerged was because reading silently was not, as Johnson (2010:14) states, "natural" to the ancients. Reading was always a social experience of some sort.

The organisational practice of literary circles was particularly widespread among societal elites. Even high-status physicians like Galen of Pergamum were involved. Pliny the Younger, whom Walsh (2021:110) quotes, describes his literary circle (*amici*) as a group of "friends dedicated to the literary enterprise … characterized by a reciprocity that recognizes common values". A surviving letter from Pliny (*Ep*. 3.18.4) indicates that he gave a recitation of his *Panegyricus* over three days, about 50 minutes per day. The practice of presenting a diatribe for extended periods was standard in ancient literary circles. The premise that Luke and his patron Theophilus shared a close partnership based on the latter's expressed interests in Luke's prologue (per my earlier suggestion), coheres with Pliny's description.

Furthermore, since Luke's Gospel includes many public speeches in which Jesus orates to a crowd of onlookers (such as Lk. 4:16–30; 6:20–49), this fits with Pliny's letter (*Ep*. 3). These onlookers, who are often portrayed as neutral in Luke's Gospel, as discussed earlier, may reflect Luke's own hope that, standing up in front of his literary circle while reciting his Gospel, he would convince them of its contents.

When standing in front of a crowd, one hopes that they are neutral at the onset to what one has to say. Another one of Pliny's letters (*Ep*. 1.13.5) even notes how routinely his literary circle was opened to those not involved, meaning that those hearing Pliny may often have been unknown to him. An unknown interlocutor is assumed to be more neutral than one's friends, just as the Lukan crowds could be swayed based on what Jesus said.[27] This contrasts with the Twelve's portrayal, who, like presumably those in Pliny's literary circle, already had preconceived ideas about the speaker (Jesus, in Luke's case) and his message. Moreover, despite Jesus later acting in the manner of a "prophet like Moses" (Deut. 18:15–22) in Lk. 11:20, Lk. 6:20–49 eliminates the Mosaic backdrop of Jesus delivering the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1–12) on an actual mountain (ὄρος). For Matthew, this setting means to recall Ex. 24:12-18 when Moses gave the Law on Mount Sinai. Luke's preferred setting may instead mirror the setting of his literary

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[26]   See Gamble (2012) on the role of private book trading, which was often done in the context of a literary circle.

[27]   Interestingly, this may parallel a motif in Josephus of depicting Jewish crowds as factionally agnostic if Rajak's (2002:83) analysis holds weight.

circle's meetings, which, presumably, were not on a mountain. Like Jesus, Luke doesn't need to stand on a higher elevation to preach the Good News.

However, not all literary circles were created equal despite these potential similarities. Pliny's literary circle would not have had the same interests as Luke's. Luke was a Christian who believed in Jesus as the Messiah, Pliny was not. Luke was also very learned in the Jewish Scriptures, which Pliny was not. As Smith (2024:118) writes, "It is difficult to overstate the extent of Luke's deep familiarity with Israel's scriptures." For instance, Luke assumes his readers are familiar with the Biblical narrative and Biblical themes, so much so that he feels comfortable citing Jewish Scripture without signalling that he is doing so: The parable of the tenants in Lk. 20:9–19 refers to Isa. 5:1–7, and the triumphal entry brings to life Zech. 9:9, but he does not feel he needs to quote the passages. Hence, Walsh (2021:108–9) may downplay the Jewishness of Luke's composition by focusing on what (at this point) known Greco-Roman literary circles spent their time reading and writing, rather than allowing Luke and his interlocutors to stand out against the background of literary clubs. Doing this underestimates his depth of knowledge; consequently, this limits the efforts of scholars who seek to reconstruct Luke's *Sitz im Leben*. If he was part of a literary circle, this would have made it one of a kind.

Future studies must recognise the Jewishness and Greco-Roman features of Luke's Gospel to better conceptualise the individuals with whom Luke would have been conversing leading up to its publication. Building on the framework of Walsh (2021), studies should also attempt to place Mark's Gospel and Matthew's Gospel in the context of imperial literary circles, and, while still recognising their divergences, to study parallels that may further inform scholars today about the authorship and dates of both texts. These studies must also account for enslaved scribes, a widespread phenomenon in ancient literary production that played a fundamental role in the writing of the New Testament.[28] Only when a holistic view of literary production in antiquity is taken into account can scholars responsibly reconstruct the earliest days of Christian literature.

I thus conclude that the Gospel of Luke was written after 70 CE by an elite Greco-Roman historian. "Luke" was very knowledgeable of the Jesus movement but desired to eliminate some anti-Roman elements in Christian circles while also pleasing the request of his learned patron, Theophilus. In developing his image of Jesus, he drew on textual motifs and standards known to others who were well-read in Greco-Roman literature. Lk. 14:31–32 offers a rare yet translucent glimpse of the Gospel author's identity by displaying Luke's informed familiarity with diplomatic customs and historiographical motifs in contemporaneous literature.

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[28]   See Moss (2024) for more on the role of enslaved scribes in writing the New Testament.

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