

'I Must Also See Rome' (Acts 19:21)

Eyewitness Discourse in Luke and Acts

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Abstract

This article discusses eyewitnessing as a literary motif in Luke and Acts. Both writings position themselves within a scientific-historiographical tradition which conceives of eyewitness testimony as the most reliable source of knowledge. Hence, both Luke and Acts bolster the trustworthiness of their contents by presenting it as going back to eyewitness testimonies by e.g. the shepherds in Luke 2 and the women and disciples in Luke 24. Aside from this inclusio of eyewitnesses, the repeated expression 'what we/you/they have seen and heard' embodies the centrality of eyewitnessing in Luke's and Acts's accounts. The second section of the article connects the development of an eyewitness perspective in Acts with notions of space and memory. In that section I argue that the combination of spatial description and autopsy language in Acts serves to create literary memories of David's tomb, the Areopagus, and the city of Rome.

Keywords: autopsy, Luke, Acts, memory, space, travel

Autopsy, or seeing for oneself, is a powerful experience. Reading or hearing about a particular location is one thing; you only get to know a place when you visit, see, and 'get a feel of' it. A similar thing goes for events and the laws of nature: if we reconstruct what happened at a certain moment we often rely on eyewitnesses, and experiments are key to obtaining scientific knowledge. Small wonder, therefore, that already in the Hellenistic and early Roman imperial eras, autopsy was generally considered a reliable

source of knowledge.¹ Its importance can be perceived in this passage in the *Odyssey*:

You I honor with praises, Demódokos, over all mortals; it was the Muse, Zeus' daughter, who taught you, or even Apollo. For indeed in due order you sing the Achaians' adventures – what the Achaians achieved, what suffered, and what were their labors – as if you had yourself been there or had heard from another.²

The praise Odysseus heaps on the singer Demódokos for narrating the history of the Achaians as if he had been present himself or heard about it from eyewitnesses confirms the importance of eyewitnessing as a path to knowledge. Throughout the Hellenistic and Roman periods, autopsy would remain a key way to access information, and a 'convention of *autopsia*' developed amongst Hellenistic and Roman historiographers.³

In this article, I explore the way in which the concept of autopsy functions in Luke and Acts.⁴ As I intend to show, eyewitness motifs in these writings are not restricted to the use of the terms *ἀτοψία* or *ἀτόπτῆς* (which in the New Testament feature only in Luke 1:2), but involve more intricate

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This is not to say that Greek *ἀτοψία* carries the same connotations as our terms for 'eyewitnessing'. As L. Alexander points out, the Greek term lacks the forensic meaning of our term 'eyewitness', but has to do with first-hand experience and 'knowing the facts at hand': *The Preface to Luke's Gospel: Literary Convention and Social Context in Luke 1.1-4 and Acts 1.1*, Cambridge 1993, 120.

2 Hom., *Od.* 8.487-491, trans. R. Merrill, *The Odyssey*, Ann Arbor 2002, 187.

3 On this 'convention of *autopsia*' see G. Schepens, *L'autopsie dans la méthode des historiens grecs du V^e siècle avant J.-C.*, Brussel 1980; Alexander, *Preface*, 34-41; J. Marincola, *Authority and Tradition in Ancient Historiography*, Cambridge 1997, 63-86; G. Schepens, 'History and *Historia*: Inquiry in the Greek Historians', in J. Marincola (ed.), *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography*, Malden, MA, 2007, 39-55. Marincola, *Authority and Tradition*, 76-80 observes that Roman historians are less explicit in their adherence to *autopsia* as the most reliable source of historical knowledge, but seem to embrace it nonetheless.

4 In this article, I will treat Luke and Acts as separate, but related works. I am convinced that Acts was composed consciously as a sequel to Luke, but not necessarily by the same author. For a survey of the current debate on the unity of Luke and Acts, see M.F. Bird, 'The Unity of Luke-Acts in Recent Discussion', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29 (2007), 425-48.

literary developments of pre-existing motifs.⁵ In both Luke and Acts, autopsy serves as an epistemological warrant for the reliability and accuracy (*ἀκριβεία*) of these writings. Moreover, Acts can be seen at times to develop an eyewitness perspective to draw the readers into the narrative and invite them to inhabit the spaces depicted in this work.

Autopsy as epistemological warrant

The 'convention of *autopsia*' in ancient historiography entailed, in Loveday Alexander's words, the 'claim that the best history was written on the basis of personal experience'.⁶ Should personal experience prove impossible, the next most reliable source of knowledge – as in the *Odyssey* quotation above – would be oral reports by eyewitnesses. Yet ancient historians were well-aware of the problems involved in relying on eyewitnesses. Thucydides, for one, complains that the eyewitness reports he had received differed between them. In order to arrive at 'the facts of the occurrences of the war,' therefore, these reports – as well as Thucydides's own observations – must be subjected to the critical mind of the historian (1.22.2-3).⁷ Later historians would generally follow Thucydides in their approach towards eyewitness testimony. Confronted with dispersed and biased reports as well as the limits of their own experiences, these historians would subject their eyewitness accounts to critical examination geared towards accuracy – the ultimate goal of the historian's enterprise.⁸

This convention was not a mere methodological one. In their enquiries, historians would alter and rearrange the information that they derived from autopsy.⁹ Writing history, as Eve-Marie Becker reminds

5 My presentation differs from Alexander, *Preface*. Although she points out that '[t]he name [autopsy, PBH] (...) should not be taken to mean that the Greek word lies behind every instance of the convention' (34), she nevertheless focuses her discussion on the Greek term. Contrast Marincola, *Authority and Tradition*, 63-86, who offers a broader discussion of eyewitness language in Greek historiography.

6 Alexander, *Preface*, 34.

7 Trans. C. Forster Smith (LCL). On autopsy in Thucydides, see Schepens, *L'autopsie*; Marincola, *Authority and Tradition*, 67-69.

8 On 'accuracy', taken as 'correspondence with external reality', see Schepens, *Autopsie*, 113-46; Marincola, *Authority and Tradition*, 68; Schepens, 'History and *Historia*', 40.

9 Cf. Lucian, *Hist. conscr.* 47. Lucian's work, replete with irony as it is, cannot be used uncritically to reconstruct the mindset of ancient historians. See C.K. Rothschild, 'Irony and Truth: The Value of *De historia conscribenda* for Understanding Hellenistic and Early Roman Period Historiographical Method', in J. Frey, C.K. Rothschild, J. Schröter (ed.), *Die*

us,¹⁰ involves a transformation of one's own visual experiences or the oral reports of others into a written historical narrative. The historian's interference in this process turns eyewitness statements into narrative memory. History becomes story.¹¹ This holds true not just for the contents of eyewitness observations, but equally for claims to autopsy made by historians. Such claims were 'historical as much as literary'.¹² Thus, by claiming that their narrative goes back to eyewitness reports, authors bolster their own authority and lend credence to their particular presentation of events.¹³ In line with this observation, my focus will be on Luke's and Acts's literary portrayal of eyewitnesses rather than the historical questions as to who may have served as eyewitnesses for Luke as he composed his gospel or how the author of Luke may have transformed their testimonies.¹⁴

Luke

The gospel of Luke taps into several historiographical conventions, including that of autopsy.¹⁵ Luke underscores the importance of eyewitnesses by means of an *inclusio*.¹⁶ According to Luke 1, writing a history of the early

Apostelgeschichte im Kontext antiker und frühchristlicher Historiographie, Berlin 2009, 277-92. Rothschild's point is well-taken, but Lucian's suggestion that the historian 'should not assemble [the facts themselves] at random, but only after much laborious and painstaking investigation (*ἀνακρίνω*)' (trans. K. Kilburn, LCL) does correspond closely with the methodology reflected in the work of ancient historians. Cf. Luke 1:3 'I (...) decided, after investigating (*παρακολουθῶ*) everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you'.

10 E.-M. Becker, *The Birth of Christian History: Memory and Time from Mark to Luke-Acts*, New Haven 2017, 1-33.

11 Cf. S. Byrskog, *Story as History – History as Story: The Gospel Tradition in the Context of Ancient Oral History*, Leiden 2002; idem, 'When Eyewitness Testimony and Oral Tradition Become Written Text', *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 74 (2009), 41-53; Becker, *Birth*, 12-15.

12 Becker, *Birth*, 27.

13 See M.D. Litwa, 'Literary Eyewitnesses: The Appeal to an Eyewitness in John and Contemporaneous Literature', *New Testament Studies* 64 (2018), 343-61.

14 These historical questions have been amply debated; see most notably R. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, Grand Rapids 2006; M. Hengel, 'Der Lukasprolog und seine Augenzeugen: Die Apostel, Petrus und die Frauen', in S.C. Barton, L.T. Stuckenbruck, B.G. Wold (ed.), *Memory in the Bible and Antiquity: The Fifth Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium (Durham, September 2004)*, Tübingen 2007, 195-42. See the overview in R. Riesner, 'Die Rückkehr der Augenzeugen: Eine neue Entwicklung in der Evangelienforschung', *Theologische Beiträge* 38 (2007), 337-52.

15 Cf., however, Alexander's observation (*Preface*) that the formal features of Luke's prologue resemble those of prologues of scientific treatises rather than those of historiographical works.

16 Cf. Bauckham, *Jesus*, 89-90 who points to an *inclusio* of the women around Jesus in Luke. Note that page numbers refer to the electronic edition of the book as available at EBSCO Academic Books.

Jesus movement must be based on the testimony of 'those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses (*αὐτόπται*) and servants of the word' (Luke 1:2).¹⁷ Basing himself on these eyewitnesses as well as his own accurate enquiries (*παρηκολουθηκῶτι (... ἀκριβῶς)*), Luke sets out to offer 'an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us' (1:1) so as to provide his readers certainty (*ἀσφάλεια*; 1:4).¹⁸ The importance of eyewitnesses for Luke's project also shines through in Luke 24, where the women, Peter, the two disciples travelling to Emmaus, and the eleven become eyewitnesses of the empty tomb and the risen Lord. For the women, the testimony of their eyes is confusing at first: upon seeing the empty tomb, they do not immediately remember Jesus's predictions of his resurrection. Only after the two disciples recall Jesus's words do the women conclude that their Lord must have risen. In their turn, Peter, the disciples travelling to Emmaus, and the eleven fail to believe the message of the risen Lord when they hear it, accepting it only after seeing with their own eyes the empty tomb (24:12), Jesus breaking the bread (24:30-31), or Jesus's wounded body (24:36-43).

The picture Luke paints in chapter 24 differs from that in the other synoptic gospels.¹⁹ Mark originally ended in silence: after seeing the empty tomb and hearing about Jesus's resurrection, the women 'said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid' (16:8). Whereas Luke's final chapter depicts an emerging tradition of eyewitnesses and so bolsters Luke's claim to base his narrative on their testimony, the women's testimony in Mark comes to an emphatic halt.²⁰ Matthew proceeds into yet another direction: he does

17 Translations from the Bible follow NRSV.

18 Space prevents a lengthy discussion of the Lukan prologue. A classic treatment is Alexander, *Preface*; see also D.P. Moessner, *Luke the Historian of Israel's Legacy, Theologian of Israel's 'Christ': A New Reading of the 'Gospel Acts' of Luke*, Berlin 2016, 68-123.

19 I leave out John, as space precludes a full discussion of that gospel. Suffice it to say that John shares an interest in autopsy as a means of gaining knowledge which often resembles Luke's. In the resurrection story, it has both the women and two disciples (Peter and John) see the empty tomb with their own eyes (20:1-10) and present itself as the work of an eyewitness close to Jesus (21:24-25). See the excellent discussion in R. Zimmermann, '„Augenzeugenschaft" als historisches und hermeneutisches Konzept – Nicht nur im Johannesevangelium', in S. Luther, J. Röder, E.D. Schmidt (ed.), *Wie Geschichten Geschichte schreiben: Frühchristliche Literatur zwischen Faktualität und Fiktionalität*, Tübingen 2015, 209-51; also Bauckham, *Jesus*, 88-89; Litwa, 'Literary Eyewitnesses'.

20 For this reason, I find it difficult to accept the *inclusio* in Mark 1:16 and 16:7 as an 'inclusio of eyewitness testimony', as argued by Bauckham, *Jesus*, 86-87. See S. Byrskog, 'The Eyewitnesses as Interpreters of the Past: Reflections on Richard Bauckham's *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*', *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 6 (2008), 157-68 (158) for a similar critique. Mark's secondary ending does have the women proclaiming what they saw.

portray a transmission of the message of the risen Lord, but lacks Luke's stress on autopsy as a means of gaining knowledge. In Matt 28, the women who visit the tomb do not actually see the tomb: before they can enter, an angel tells them that Jesus was raised and instructs them to tell the disciples to travel to Galilee (28:57). On their way back, Jesus appears to them, giving them the same instruction (28:8-10). The disciples, after going to Galilee (28:16), are the first to see Jesus. In Matthew, therefore, the message of the risen Lord is transmitted primarily through revelation and conversation, not eyewitness testimony. Hence, the *inclusio* in Luke 1 and 24 is a Lukan invention, geared specifically towards framing Luke's account as eyewitness testimony.

The central role of eyewitnesses for Luke is also evident in the body of his narrative. To begin with, Luke retains passages in Mark or Q that fit his stress on autopsy as a means of gaining knowledge. In Luke 7:22 (par. Matt 11:4), Jesus implores John's disciples, who had come to enquire whether Jesus really is the Messiah, to tell their master 'what [they] have seen and heard'. And in Luke 10:23-24 (par. Matt 13:16), Jesus praises his disciples' eyes:

Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.

Luke also shares with the other synoptics the idea that the connection between seeing and believing is not an automatic one. Building on antecedents in the Jewish Scriptures such as Isa 6:9 (quoted with variations in Luke 8:10; Matt 13:14; Mark 4:12; Acts 28:26-27) and Hab 1:5 (quoted in Acts 13:41), Luke and his colleagues emphasise that in order to understand the true import of Jesus's ministry one needs to see in a particular way. Consider e.g. Luke 8:10 (cf. 10:23-24 quoted above):

To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but to others I speak in parables, so that 'looking they may not perceive (*βλέποντες μὴ βλέπωσιν*), and listening they may not understand' (Isa 6:9).

The addition of this new ending is presumably meant to account for the survival of the message of the risen Lord. Even so, this new ending lacks Luke's stress on autopsy: as in Matthew, revelation and conversation are the two means through which the message spreads.

In Luke's discourse, this notion serves as a *raison d'être* for angelic explanations of the experiences of eyewitnesses, e.g. in Luke 2 (the shepherds) and 24 (the women). On a different level, however, it also justifies the historian's activity as both a transmitter and an examiner of eyewitness testimonies. Hence, only when the testimony of eyewitnesses is reliably transmitted and explicated (by an angel or by the historian) can it inspire faith.

Luke builds on this idea in the two instances where he introduces eyewitnesses into the narrative who are absent in that capacity from the other gospels. The first are the shepherds. When the angel tells them that the Messiah is born, the shepherds set out to 'see this thing that has taken place' (2:15). Arriving at the stable, they 'see' (2:17) Joseph, Mary, and the child and narrate the angel's message to them. As they leave, they praise God 'for all they had heard and seen' (*πᾶσιν οἷς ἤκουσαν καὶ εἶδον*; 2:20). The shepherds' initiative after they hear the angel's message squares with the historiographical convention that things that one hears must, as far as possible, be checked against autopsy.²¹ For both ancient historians and for the shepherds, seeing for oneself is the best source of knowledge. The expression 'what they have seen and heard' brings to mind Luke 7:22, where John's disciples are instructed to convince their master of Jesus's Messiahship by telling him 'what [they] have seen and heard'. At the same time, the message of the angels mediates what the shepherds see with their own eyes and reveals the true significance of the scene they perceive. This turns them into eyewitnesses and witnesses of Jesus's status as the Messiah, just like John's disciples in Luke 7.²²

The second eyewitness of Lukan invention is Herod. Luke 9:7-9 (par. Matt 14:1-5; Mark 6:14-16) relates how Herod hears about Jesus's deeds. Yet whereas in Mark and Matthew Herod concludes that Jesus must be John risen from the dead, Luke depicts the tetrarch as being perplexed by the

21 Luke's depiction of the shepherds differs from Matthew's portrayal of the *magoi*. Whereas the former's response after seeing the angel is to go and see for themselves, the latter, after seeing the star, set out not to 'see', but to 'venerate' (*προσκυνέω*; Matt 2:2) the new king.

22 So also K.A. Kuhn, 'Beginning the Witness: The *αὐτόπται καὶ ὑπηρέται* of Luke's Infancy Narrative', *New Testament Studies* 49 (2003), 237-55, who plausibly argues that the shepherds are amongst the 'eyewitnesses and servants of the word' (1:2) on whose testimony Luke claims to base his account. See also H. Klein, *Das Lukasevangelium*, Göttingen 2006¹⁰, 140-41. Bauckham, *Jesus*, 104 criticises Kuhn for saying 'nothing about how Luke could have received traditions from these persons'. I am not sure this is Luke's point in this passage. Even if it is, the shepherds do tell Joseph and Mary about their experiences in the field (Luke 2:17); hence Jesus's family may be implied to be the source for Luke's account.

different opinions about Jesus. Luke's Herod wonders 'who is this about whom I hear such things?' (9:9) and expresses a wish to see Jesus for himself. This wish is granted in 23:1-12, where Pilate sends Jesus to Herod after realising he is from Galilea. Herod, writes Luke, 'had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign' (23:8). No sign is performed, however, and Herod mocks Jesus and sends him back to Pilate. Herod here serves as a contrast to the shepherds: he sees Jesus, but fails to see his true significance.²³ Whereas the shepherds, aided by an angelic revelation and the prediction of 'sign' (*σημεῖον*; 2:12), see Jesus and believe, Herod, by lack of a sign (*σημεῖον*; 23:8) fails to acknowledge Jesus for what he is. This dual presentation of the shepherds and Herod as eyewitnesses drives home Luke's point that autopsy is a trustworthy way towards knowledge, but needs to be reliably mediated in order to bring out the true import of the events unfolding before the historian.

Acts

In the book of Acts, seeing with one's own eyes remains the prime mode of gaining knowledge, but the procedure functions differently from autopsy in Luke. Composed as a sequel to Luke's gospel, Acts lacks a distinct prologue, and Luke's preface – with its focus on eyewitness testimony – serves as a prologue to Acts too.²⁴ The inclusion of the 'we-passages' (16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16) depicts Acts as going back to eyewitness narratives and illustrates the importance of eyewitnesses in the literary world of its author. It is on the basis of these passages that the author of Acts has traditionally been identified with Luke, apparently a close companion of Paul's.²⁵ The hotly debated question whether these we-narratives represent genuine eyewitness accounts or must be considered literary fiction moves beyond the interests of this article.²⁶ However we decide on that issue, the inclusion of these passages shows that the author of Acts, like the author of Luke's gospel, aimed to present his account as preserving eyewitness observations.

23 Cf. F. Bovon, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas (Lk 1,1-9,50)*, Zürich 1991, 464: 'Herodes (...) ist ein Mann, der zu fragen weiß, legitim sehen möchte, sich aber Johannes und dann Jesus gegenüber aus Unglauben falsch verhält.'

24 So Bovon, *Lukas*, 32; Klein, *Lukasevangelium*, 72-73.

25 Cf. Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:11; Phil 24.

26 See on this question, as well as its broader relevance for Luke as a historian of Paul's travels, C.-J. Thornton, *Der Zeuge des Zeugen: Lukas als Historiker der Paulusreisen*, Tübingen 1991.

Instead of a full-fledged prologue, Acts sets in with Jesus's ascension (1:1-2, 4-11). As Matthew Sleeman has pointedly shown, the ascension story is not a mere preliminary, but governs the plot of the entire book of Acts.²⁷ It affects how Acts speaks about autopsy, casting Jesus's disciples in a double role. On the one hand, they serve as eyewitnesses to Jesus's deeds and speak about 'what [they] have seen and heard' when Jesus walked the earth (4:20). On the other hand, with Jesus having taken his place in heaven, the apostles now serve as Jesus's counterpart on earth. Just as the pre-ascension Jesus performed miracles, so do his disciples, who testify to God's plans through their miraculous deeds. And just as Jesus's deeds – if perceived for what they are (Acts shares Luke's idea that seeing does not automatically lead to believing) – can lead those who see them to join the Jesus movement, so the apostles' deeds can convince those who witness them to join the Way (3:9²⁸, 16; 8:13; 9:32-25; 13:12; 14:11²⁹). In Acts, therefore, the circle of eyewitnesses broadens from those close to Jesus to include those who see the deeds performed by his disciples.

The expression 'what we/you/they have seen and heard' plays a conspicuous role in the characterisation of eyewitnesses in Luke and Acts. Syndetic combinations of the verbs *ἀκούω* and *ὁράω* with a relative pronoun occur comparatively frequently in Luke and Acts, but are not unique to these writings. Elsewhere in the New Testament, the formula supports the authoritative claims to autopsy of those to whom the formula applies. Thus in John 3:31, Jesus features as an eyewitness of heavenly mysteries, which 'he has seen and heard'. In other cases, the formula bolsters apostolic authority. 1 John 1:1-4, for instance, uses the phrase to present itself as the work of one of Jesus's disciples. Luke does not apply the term to Jesus's disciples, but does use it to portray the shepherds (2:20) and John's disciples (7:22; the

27 M. Sleeman, *Geography and the Ascension Narrative in Acts*, Cambridge 2009.

28 This verse merely says that 'all the people saw [the beggar healed by Peter and John] walking and praising God', but the reaction of the priests and Sadducees, who sought to keep the 'notable sign' done by Peter and John 'from spreading further among the people' (4:16-17), implies the success of this miracle.

29 The miracle performed by Paul leads the Lystrians to attribute divine authority to him. They are misguided for equating Paul with Hermes, however, and need Paul's speech to understand that he represents 'the living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them' (14:15). Even so, the episode remains open-ended and we cannot be sure how successful Paul's Lystra visit is supposed to have been. On the local colour of this passage see P.B. Hartog, 'Joodse reizigers in het Romeinse Rijk: Tussen globaliseren en zelfbehoud', *NTT Journal for Theology and the Study of Religion* 74 (2020), 23-38, 34-35.

parallel in Matt 11:4 has *βλέπω*) as eyewitnesses of Jesus's deeds. In Acts, the formula does feature in connection with the apostles' proclamation (4:20).

Acts also applies this formula to Paul, who in 22:15 summarises Ananias's words to him as: '[Y]ou will be [God's] witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard'. This signifies that Paul, in Acts, joins the ranks of the apostles and becomes an eyewitness to Jesus.³⁰ This move is remarkable, seeing that Paul had not been part of the group of twelve disciples that accompanied Jesus when he walked the earth. As the context of 22:15 makes clear, the ground for Paul being included amongst the apostles is what could be called his 'visionary autopsy'. Whilst the twelve served as eyewitnesses to the pre-ascension Jesus, Paul, through the vision he saw on his way to Damascus, joins their ranks as an eyewitness to Jesus ascended and a witness to the message of the Way.

This idea of visionary autopsy – becoming an eyewitness to a visionary experience rather than an earthly reality – was not unknown outside the New Testament. In a Greek magical papyrus, the person who seeks to see a god is implored to say a 'prayer for seeing for oneself' (*λόγον αὐτοπτον*) and ask from the deity to 'know beforehand' (*[προ]γνώναι*).³¹ The parallel between these terms sheds light on the logic behind this procedure: visionary autopsy discloses knowledge imperceptible to the human eye. Through visionary autopsy deities reveal knowledge to humans. Consider also what Philostratus, a sophist from the early third century CE, writes on Pythagoras:

[T]hey say that he had of a certainty social intercourse with the gods, and learnt from them the conditions under which they take pleasure in men or are disgusted (...). For he said that, whereas other men only make conjectures about the divinity and make guesses that contradict one another concerning it, – in his own case he said that Apollo had come to him acknowledging that he was the god in person (...). And the followers of Pythagoras accepted as law any decisions laid down by him (...). For many were the divine and ineffable secrets which they had heard (...).³²

The purpose of visionary autopsy therefore did not differ from 'regular' autopsy: in both cases, seeing with one's own eyes served as an epistemological

30 Cf. how Acts speaks of Paul as an apostle in 14:4, 14. See also F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts: Revised Edition*, Grand Rapids 1988, 417-18; Hengel, 'Lukasprolog', 269-70.

31 PGM III 699, ed. and trans., K. Preisendanz, *Papyri graecae magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri*, vol. 1, Leipzig 1928, 30-63 ('das Gebet fürs leibhaftige Sehen', 'Vorherwissen').

32 Philostr., *VA* 1.1.

warrant. The only difference is that, in the case of visionary autopsy, the object of one's perception is a vision revealing something to do with the divine, which cannot be observed with the naked eye. In Acts, it is the revelation that Paul received that qualifies him as one of the apostles and makes him join the ranks of the eyewitnesses.

The topos of autopsy thus permeates the narratives of both Luke and Acts. The Greek term *autoptes* may feature only in Luke 1:2, but the idea that seeing with one's own eyes is the most reliable source of knowledge underlies the agendas of both writings.³³ At the same time, Luke and Acts share the notion that seeing does not automatically lead to believing: what eyewitnesses see with their own eyes must be mediated reliably – by angels or historians – to understand the full implications of Jesus's deeds. This bolsters the authority of the author(s) of Luke and Acts as enquirers and examiners of eyewitness testimony (cf. Luke 1:3), which they incorporate into their own narratives.

Autopsy, space, and memory

The task of ancient historiographers, as we have seen, involved intricate engagements with memory, which they transmitted and (re)invented in narrative form. By so doing, historians create literary memory spaces (*lieux de mémoire*): literary writings that represent and inform collective memory – in this case that of the early Jesus movement.³⁴

One powerful procedure to communicate such memories is the combination of spatial description and autopsy language.³⁵ In her *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture*,³⁶ Laura Nasrallah shows how

33 As the contributions to this thematic issue testify, the idea that autopsy is the most reliable path to knowledge is by no means unique to these two works. See also e.g. Sir 34:9-13 and E. Uusimäki, 'Itinerant Sages: The Evidence of Sirach in its Ancient Mediterranean Context', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 44 (2020), 315-36.

34 On *lieux de mémoire* see P. Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire*, 3 vols., Paris, 1984, 1986, 1992. Nora's work has been widely influential; see e.g. A. Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses*, Munich 1999; Becker, *Birth*.

35 On ekphrasis and spatial description see also Susanne Luther's contribution to this issue: "As You Go Up to Mount Coryphum You See by the Road an Olive Tree (...)": Ekphrastic Depictions of "Real" and "Fictive" Landscapes in Ancient Literature, in 'Views on the Mediterranean', ed. P.B. Hartog, E. Uusimäki, special issue, *Journal for Theology and the Study of Religion* (2021), 229-47.

36 L. Nasrallah, *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture*, Cambridge 2010.

Greek writings from the early Roman Empire (including Acts) construct literary ‘memory theatres’ (a term Nasrallah adopts from Susan Alcock³⁷) in response to the visual memory theatres of Roman hegemony (e.g. statues, inscriptions) on display throughout the empire.³⁸ As I intend to show, spatial descriptions in Acts often inscribe previous Jewish, Greek, or Roman memories attached to the localities described whilst also adding new layers of memory to these places. In this way Acts provides its readers with ‘Thirdspaces’ – or ‘lived spaces’ – which they are invited to inhabit and in which they can orient themselves in both familiar and novel ways.³⁹ Such spatial descriptions often correlate with the development of an eyewitness perspective. By combining spatial descriptions with language of seeing and perception, Acts’s author draws his readers into the narrative. The author attaches meaning to the spaces described in the narrative and invites his readers, as it were, to share the eyewitness perspective created by the author and to see these spaces for themselves.⁴⁰

I give three examples of this procedure. In Acts 2:29-31, Peter illustrates his comment that ‘our ancestor David (...) both died and was buried’ by drawing his hearers’ attention to a visual reminder of David’s death: his tomb, which ‘is with us (*ἐν ἡμῖν*) to this day’. This ‘with us’ stresses the proximity of this monument to Peter’s audience: the apostle’s hearers would be familiar with David’s tomb and lay eyes on it when they walked the city. This use of second person verbs parallels in others writings and is geared towards ‘involving (...) narratees as eyewitnesses’.⁴¹ In his speech, Peter connects this tomb with Ps 16:10 (15:10 LXX): ‘[Y]ou will not abandon

37 S.E. Alcock, ‘The Reconfiguration of Memory in the Eastern Roman Empire’, in S.E. Alcock, T.N. D’Altroy, K.D. Morrison, C.M. Sinopoli (ed.), *Empires: Perspectives from Archaeology and History*, Cambridge 2001, 323-50.

38 On *memoria* as a project that includes written sources, see also Becker, *Birth*, 1-33.

39 The term ‘Thirdspace’ is taken from E. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Cambridge 1996, 53-82, 106-44, and *passim*. ‘Lived space’ and ‘Thirdspace’ are not the same (see Soja, *Thirdspace*, 67-70), but for my purposes they are sufficiently similar to be equated. On the use of Soja’s theories to understand space in ancient Jewish literature see also P.B. Hartog, ‘Space and Travel in Philo’s *Legatio ad Gaium*’, *Studia Philonica Annual* 30 (2018), 71-92 (with references).

40 For a brief discussion of David’s tomb and the altar to an unknown god as *lieux de mémoire* see P.B. Hartog, ‘Acts of Memory’, in M. Matthias, R. Roukema, G. van Klinken (ed.), *Erinnern und Vergessen – Remembering and Forgetting: Essays über zwei theologische Grundvollzüge: Festschrift für Hans-Martin Kirm*, Leipzig 2020, 21-24.

41 J.R. Morgan, ‘Longus’, in I.J.F. de Jong (ed.), *Space in Ancient Greek Literature: Studies in Ancient Greek Narrative*, Leiden 2012, 537-555, 539, who points to the use of a similar technique in Longus’s *Daphnis and Chloe*.

my soul to Hades or give your devout to see corruption.⁴² Seeing that David – the author of Ps 16 – *has* died, the apostle concludes, these verses must apply not to the poet, but to the Messiah, Jesus. Through this combination of monumental landmark and scriptural testimony, Acts's Peter alters the significance of David's tomb as a memory space.⁴³ It no longer serves only as a reminder of David's deeds and death, but also points to Jesus's resurrection and his Messiahship. This location, which Peter's hearers could see every day, thus becomes a lasting reminder of the claims of the early Jesus movement.

A second example is the altar dedicated to 'an unknown god', which Paul encounters on his visit to Athens. At the start of this episode, Paul features as being 'deeply distressed to see that the city was full of idols' (17:16). This theme recurs in the speech that Acts's Paul delivers in front of the Areopagus, where he addresses his audience as being 'extremely religious' and calls attention to the altar. See Acts 17:22-23:

Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god'. What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

In the remainder of the speech, Paul equates 'the God who made the world and everything in it' (17:24) with the unknown god of the altar as well as with Aratus's Zeus.⁴⁴ In this way, Paul transforms the significance of the altar as a memory space, just as Peter did with David's tomb. Instead of an altar devoted to an otherwise unfamiliar deity, it becomes a lasting symbol of the God whom Paul proclaims. The implication is that the Athenians, whenever they walk across their city and see the altar, would be reminded of Paul's God. The emphasis on Paul's seeing, combined with Acts's overall portrayal of Paul as a prototypical follower of the Way,⁴⁵ encourages Acts's

42 Trans. New English Translation of the Septuagint, <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/nets/edition/24-ps-nets.pdf>, accessed 23rd of March 2021.

43 David's tomb in Acts must not be equated with the site nowadays known as the tomb of David, whose tradition postdates Acts. See O. Limor, 'The Origins of a Tradition: King David's Tomb on Mount Zion', *Traditio* 44 (1988), 453-62.

44 See more elaborately P.B. Hartog, 'Where Shall Wisdom be Found? Identity, Sacred Space, and Universal Knowledge in Philostratus and the Acts of the Apostles', in P.B. Hartog, S. Laderman, V. Tohar, A.L.H.M. van Wieringen (ed.), *Jerusalem and Other Holy Places as Foci of Multireligious and Ideological Confrontation*, Leiden 2020, 131-49.

45 See e.g. D. Marguerat, *Paul in Acts and Paul in His Letters*, Tübingen 2013, 36-37 (focusing on Paul's encounter on the road in Acts 9).

readers to follow the apostle's gaze and perceive the altar in their minds, connecting it with the God Paul proclaimed.

As a final example, I turn to the phrase that provides the title for this article. In 19:21, Paul plans his future travels, resolving to travel to Macedonia and Achaia, but after that, he adds, 'I must also see Rome'. This intention shows the importance for Acts's Paul of seeing the city for himself. Once Paul arrives in Rome, however, we do not get pointed descriptions of the city or its monuments, but are drawn to the image of Paul's preaching to the Jews from his own home (28:15-30). This final episode is characterised by the Jews' half-hearted reaction to Paul's message, illustrated by a quotation of Isa 6:9, and Paul's proclamation that 'this salvation of God has been sent to the gentiles; they will listen'. As I read it, this passage does not imply a general rejection of the Jewish people; yet it does call on Acts's readers to choose between accepting or rejecting the book's message.⁴⁶ This decision takes place at the centre stage of the empire: the city of Rome. Paul's remark in 19:21 points to Rome as the *telos* of the Acts narrative: it is there that the apostles' proclamation arrives at the centre of the empire and the decision to accept or reject it reaches a critical point. For that reason, Paul has to see the city for himself: upon the apostle's arrival Rome becomes a memory space not only for Roman power, but also for the message of the Jesus movement entering the centre of the *oikoumene*.

Conclusion

In the early Roman Empire, seeing for oneself served as a vital access to knowledge. Continuing an earlier tradition attested already in the *Odyssey*, historians in this period would rely on autopsy or, if that proved impossible, eyewitness statements to draft their historical accounts. As they did, they would investigate their sources with an eye to accuracy, altering them as they incorporated them into their own narrative. Luke and Acts testify to this notion of autopsy as an epistemological warrant. The prologue and

⁴⁶ The end of Acts has been subject to a variety of interpretations, which cannot be discussed at length here. The still-common idea that Acts 28 envisions a move towards the gentiles away from the Jews seems problematic in view of 28:24: 'Some were convinced by what he had said, while others refused to believe.' Rather, this chapter appears to describe two groups of Jews: those who accept and those who reject Paul's message. Cf. e.g. 17:32-34, where Acts describes two groups of non-Jews in similar terms. The point of this presentation, as I see it, is to encourage Acts's readers to take a stance.

final episode of Luke constitute an *inclusio* that emphasises the centrality of autopsy in the memory and transmission of Jesus's deeds, and this image is confirmed by portrayals of the shepherd and Herod as eyewitnesses in the body of Luke's gospel. Acts shares Luke's stress on autopsy as a means of accessing knowledge, but goes its own way by including Paul in the ranks of eyewitnesses to Jesus's deeds. Moreover, Acts's author combines spatial description with eyewitness language in his construction of memory spaces for the Jesus movement. Three such memory spaces are David's tomb in Acts 2, the altar devoted to an unknown god in Acts 17, and Rome, as evidenced by Paul's exclamation in Acts 19. In this way, Acts's readers are invited to share the apostles' gaze and look at their familiar surroundings with new eyes.

About the author



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