

LUKE'S PREFACE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO GREEK  
HISTORIOGRAPHY: A RESPONSE TO  
LOVEDAY ALEXANDER<sup>1</sup>

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Loveday Alexander expresses the opinion that Luke's preface (1.1-4) is not similar to classical Greek historical prefaces, but is more akin to scientific prefaces.<sup>2</sup> She states that Luke's preface does not conform to the formal characteristics of a historical work in the areas of author's name, dedication, themes, sources and preface length.<sup>3</sup> In particular, Alexander expresses that Luke deviates from the typical Greek historical pattern, especially that which is emulated by Thucydides. I disagree with this conclusion because there are a large number of parallels that Luke has with the historical preface writings of the classical and Hellenistic eras, specifically in the areas of style, personal introduction, preface length, dedications and common themes. I will discuss each of these in turn.

*Alexander's Understanding of a Scientific Preface*

It is rather difficult to come to an overarching definition of what an ancient scientific preface looked like, because of the fact that most of the scientific works of the Hellenistic era are lost. As a result of this, modern

1. This essay won the student essay prize of The Canadian Society of Biblical Studies for 2006.

2. Loveday Alexander, 'Luke's Preface in the Context of Greek Preface-Writing', *NovT* 28.1 (1986), pp. 48-74 (60).

3. Loveday Alexander, *The Preface to Luke's Gospel: Literary Convention and Social Context in Luke 1.1-4 and Acts 1.1* (SNTSMS, 78; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 26-34.

scholars are forced to deal with a limited corpus that may or may not adequately represent the genre as it occurred in ancient times.

Loveday Alexander attempts to define the nature of the scientific preface in her book, *The Preface to Luke's Gospel*. It is important to note that the ancient category of 'scientific' is not parallel to our modern understanding, such as distinguished from the arts or humanities, but is related to technical, professional or specialized prose.<sup>4</sup>

Alexander provides a list of what she believes are the characteristic elements of a scientific preface. Regarding structure and content, Alexander states that a typical scientific preface will include: the author's decision to write, the subject or content of the book, a dedication in a second person address, the nature of the subject matter, a reference to others who have written on this subject matter, the author's qualifications and general remarks on methodology including sources.<sup>5</sup> Not all of these aspects need to be present, but the more instances help confirm the nature of the work to be scientific.

In addition to these content features, style plays an important role. Historical prefaces are typified by more formal language with well-constructed sentences. Alexander submits that scientific prefaces are characterized by a less refined structure and less sophisticated vocabulary.<sup>6</sup> Included in style features is the nature of personal introduction. Alexander posits that historical writers are characterized by their self-introduction in the third person and that scientific prefaces are distinguished by the use of first and second person. Themes are another stylistic feature included within the preface that Alexander wishes to differentiate

Another key feature that Alexander proposes for scientific prefaces is brevity of preface length. Alexander claims that scientific authors employ an abridged preface style because they consider the preface to be of lesser importance than the remainder of the work.<sup>7</sup> By contrast, historical writers hold the preface in high regard and see it as a foundational part of the work. Accordingly, these authors elongate their preface and expend a great amount of energy on it, in order that the volume might be properly introduced.

4. Alexander, *Preface to Luke's Gospel*, p. 21.

5. Alexander, *Preface to Luke's Gospel*, pp. 69-91.

6. Alexander, *Preface to Luke's Gospel*, pp. 94-101.

7. Alexander, *Preface to Luke's Gospel*, p. 103.

This overview is rather brief, but provides a general framework of Alexander's understanding of the nature of scientific and historical prefaces. With this foundation laid, the remainder of the paper will be dedicated to evaluating Luke's preface in light of these characteristics, and to determine if Luke's preface is, in fact, scientific or historical.

### *Style*

Luke's prologue is characterized by its use of formal literary language.<sup>8</sup> In Luke's Gospel there is a sharp break in the style of Greek between what is in the preface and what is in the rest of his work. The prologue is written in excellent Hellenistic Greek, whereas the remainder of his work is full of Hebraisms.<sup>9</sup> The fact that the prologue is written in such an elevated style, compared to the rest of the work, is similar to the tradition of Greek historiographers, who opened their works with elevated formal Greek, but settled into a less formal style once they began their history.<sup>10</sup> In addition to other stylistic features, the type of vocabulary used also elevates Luke's preface style. Words such as ἐπειδήπερ, ἐπιχειρέω, ἀνατάσσω, παραδίδωμι, διήγησις and κράτιστε are all paralleled in Hellenistic writers.<sup>11</sup> By imitating these literary techniques, Luke is associating himself and his work with the Greek history genre of his day and is informing his readers that his work should be read in a particular manner.

In addition to stylistic similarities there is also an important structural similarity. Luke's prologue has a very balanced form in which the pro-

8. W.C. van Unnik, 'Remarks on the Purpose of Luke's Historical Writing (Luke 1.1-4)', in *Sparsa Collecta: The Collected Essays of W.C. van Unnik* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973), pp. 6-15 (7).

9. I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1970), pp. 37-38.

10. Donald J. Sneen, 'An Exegesis of Luke 1:1-4 with Special Regard to Luke's Purpose as a Historian', *ExpTim* 83 (1971), pp. 40-43 (40); W.C. van Unnik, 'Once More St Luke's Prologue', *Neot* 7 (1973), pp. 7-26 (8).

11. For an excellent discussion regarding the use of these words and their utilization and reference in other Greek historical works, see H.J. Cadbury, 'Commentary on the Preface of Luke', in F.J. Foakes-Jackson and K. Lake (eds.), *The Beginnings of Christianity* (5 vols.; London: Macmillan, 1922-1933), I, pp. 489-510 (492-510); Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke* (AB, 28; Garden City: Doubleday, 1981), pp. 287-89; Unnik, 'Remarks', p. 7.

tasis (vv. 1-2) and the apodosis (vv. 3-4) contain three parallel phrases:<sup>12</sup> the contrast between the ‘many’ and the ‘I too,’ between ‘compiled in an orderly account’ and ‘put systematically in writing’ and between the subordinate clauses in the protasis and the apodosis.<sup>13</sup> This structure is created from one large sentence, which is typical in high classical Greek, which placed a high value on large intricate sentences that still maintained a sense of order and balance.<sup>14</sup>

### *Personal Introduction*

According to Alexander, it is customary for a historian, at the onset of his work, to introduce himself and his origin. Alexander concedes that, although common during earlier Greek times, this practice gradually disappeared in other forms of literature, but remained as a distinguishing mark of the historical genre.<sup>15</sup> It is true that historians such as Thucydides (‘Thucydides, an Athenian, wrote the history of the war between the Peloponnesians and the Athenians’, Θουκυδίδης Ἀθηναῖος ξυνέγραψε τὸν πόλεμον τῶν Πελοποννησίων καὶ Ἀθηναίων; 1.1) and Herodotus (‘This is the display of the inquiry of Herodotus of Halicarnassus’, Ἡροδότου Ἀλικαρνησέος ἱστορίας ἀπόδεξις ἦδε; 1.1) and Hecataeus open their respective works with a third person introduction. However, Plutarch in *Theseus* introduces his work ‘so in the writing of my Parallel Lives, now that I have traversed those periods of time which are accessible to probable reasoning and which afford basis for a history dealing with facts, I might well say of the earlier periods’ (οὕτως ἐμοὶ περὶ τὴν τῶν βίων τῶν παραλλήλων γραφὴν, τὸν ἐφικτὸν εἰκότι λόγῳ καὶ βάσιμον ἱστορίᾳ πραγμάτων ἔχομένη χρόνον διελθόντι; 1.1), Josephus in *Antiquities* says, ‘Those who undertake to write histories, do not, I perceive, take that trouble on one and the same account, but for many reasons, and those such as are very different one from another’ (τοῖς τὰς ἱστορίας συγγράφειν βουλομένοις οὐ μίαν οὐδὲ τὴν αὐτὴν ὁρῶ τῆς σπουδῆς γινομένην αἰτίαν, ἀλλὰ πολλὰς

12. Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St Luke* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1906), p. 11.

13. Fitzmyer, *Gospel according to Luke*, p. 288; Darrell L. Bock, *Luke. I. 1.1–9.50* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), pp. 183-84.

14. Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison to Graeco-Roman Biography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 188.

15. Alexander, *Preface to Luke’s Gospel*, pp. 26-27.

καὶ πλεῖστον ἀλλήλων διαφερούσας; 1.1) and again in his *Contra Apion* says, 'I suppose that by my books of the Antiquity of the Jews, most excellent Eraphroditus' (ἱκανῶς μὲν ὑπολαμβάνω καὶ διὰ τῆς περὶ τὴν ἀρχαιολογίαν συγγραφῆς, κράτιστε ἀνδρῶν Ἐπαφρόδιτε; 1.1)—all are examples of works that fail to open with a third-person, self introduction. In addition to this, important Greek historians such as Xenophon, Diodorus Siculus, Dionysius of Halicarnassus and others, not only fail to commence their work with a third person opening, but do not even mention their name throughout their entire work.

These examples show that, within the historical genre, there was not a rigid obligation on the author to introduce himself in order to be included within this literary genre. Earl claims that there is variation within the historical preface and that the omission of the author's name was an accepted practice within the historical genre.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, Luke is well within the literary range when he chooses to leave out his name and, as a result, is wrongly excluded by Alexander when she attempts to impose a firm personal introduction requirement on Greek historical prefaces.

### *Preface Length*

Length is another important characteristic of a preface. Luke's preface is one large sentence containing forty-two Greek words and has been labeled as comparatively short by a number of scholars.<sup>17</sup> The question is, how does it compare proportionally with prefaces to other historical works? Alexander states that Luke's preface is simply a short, detached passage in which the author stands briefly aside and explains what he is doing, who he is doing it for and why he is doing it.<sup>18</sup> She believes that this is a characteristic of scientific prefaces, whereas historical prefaces are marked by greater length.<sup>19</sup> As a result, Alexander claims Luke is not writing a history by comparing his length of preface to that of Thucydides, who has a twenty-three chapter preface consisting of sentences about four times as long as Luke's.<sup>20</sup>

16. Donald Earl, 'Prologue-Form in Ancient Historiography', *ANRW* 1.2 (1972), pp. 842-56 (843).

17. Unnik, 'Once More St Luke's Prologue', p. 8.

18. Alexander, 'Luke's Preface', p. 54.

19. Alexander, 'Luke's Preface', pp. 59-60.

20. Alexander, 'Luke's Preface', p. 50.

The issue here is that Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War* is not representative of the typical preface size in Greek histories. In fact, Thucydides breaks the ancient maxim on preface writing expressed by Lucian, by refusing to be brief.<sup>21</sup> By comparing Luke only with Thucydides, Alexander is misrepresenting the typical preface length for a Greek historian and is wrongfully excluding Luke on this basis.

A survey of preface length in relationship to the overall size of the work finds: Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War*, which has a total of 160,949 words,<sup>22</sup> has a preface length of 3,490 words, Herodotus's *Histories* consists of 675 words for his 201,500 word work, Plutarch in *The Rise and Fall of Athens* has a 176 word preface for his 74,834 word literary work (and in his *Age of Alexander*, Plutarch does not include a preface at all). Diodorus Siculus's mammoth 488,790 word *Bibliotheca Historica* has a 1,652 word preface, Polybius in his *The Histories*, which totals 340,318 words, has a preface length of 429. Xenophon in his total works<sup>23</sup> with an overall word count of 237,550, has a small combined preface length of only 29 words. Josephus has a total preface length of 1,174 words spread over his corpus of 444,545 words.<sup>24</sup> This information is compiled in the following table (Table 1) and used to calculate the relative percentage of a work that is dedicated to the preface by Greek historians.

21. Lucian, *De Hist. Conscr.* 23, 55; Cadbury, 'Commentary on the Preface of Luke', p. 490; Earl, 'Prologue-Form', p. 844.

22. Total word counts for Thucydides, Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus and Polybius were taken from Luci Berkowitz, *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae: Canon of Greek Authors and Works from Homer to A.D. 200* (Costa Mesa: TLG Pub., 1977). All other total word counts were acquired from Gregory Crane (ed.), *Perseus Digital Library* [www.perseus.tufts.edu](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu) June 18, 2005. Preface totals were counted personally.

23. Xenophon's works include: *Anabasis*, *Cyropaedia*, *Hellenica* and *Memorabilia*.

24. Josephus's corpus includes: *The Life of Flavius Josephus*, *Antiquities of the Jews* and *The War of the Jews*. This does not include *Contra Apion*.

<i>Work</i>	<i>Total words</i>	<i>Preface words</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Diodorus, <i>Bibiloteca Historica</i>	488,790	1,652	0.338
Herodotus, <i>The Histories</i>	201,500	675	0.335
Josephus, Cumulative Works	444,545	1,174	0.264
Plutarch, <i>Rise and Fall of Athens</i>	74,834	176	0.235
Polybius, <i>The Histories</i>	340,318	429	0.126
Thucydides, <i>History of the Peloponnesian War</i>	160,949	3,490	2.168
Xenophon, Cumulative Works	237,550	29	0.012
<i>Gospel of Luke</i>	19,518	42	0.215

Table 1: Preface Percentages

This table shows that the general range of a preface percentage is about 0.126% (Polybius) to 0.338% (Diodorus). With a percentage of 0.215%, Luke falls comfortably within this range. Notable exceptions are Xenophon, who was clearly reluctant to make major use of the preface, and Thucydides, whose preface percentage is almost 6.5 times the next largest percentage.

In comparing Luke to the above historians, the size of the preface in relation to the length of the work is comparable and well within the ratio of other Greek historians, with the notable exception of Thucydides. As a result of this, Alexander is mistaken when she eliminates Luke's preface by comparing it only to that of Thucydides.

### *Dedications*

Luke dedicates his work to Theophilus ἔδοξε κάμοι παρηκολουθηκότι ἄνωθεν πᾶσιν ἀκριβῶς καθεξῆς σοι γράψαι, κράτιστε Θεόφιλε (Lk. 1.3). Although we do not know who he is, there is an indication that this is a popular name in that period and there is little evidence of any dedication to imaginary people during this time.<sup>25</sup> Alexander broaches this topic by stating that dedicating a work was not a customary practice among classical historians.<sup>26</sup> She believes that the

25. Alexander, *Preface to Luke's Gospel*, pp. 73-75; F. Gerald Downing, 'Theophilus's First Reading of Luke-Acts', in C.M. Tuckett (ed.), *Luke's Literary Achievement: Collected Essays* (JSNTSup, 166; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 91-109 (91); Fitzmyer, *Gospel according to Luke*, pp. 299-300.

26. Alexander, *Preface to Luke's Gospel*, p. 27

classical third-person style, originated by Herodotus and Thucydides and other foundational authors, did not facilitate direct address used in a dedication.

Alexander makes a bold statement when she expresses the opinion that dedications are not the norm within historical prefaces. Aune makes an important point when he states that only a fraction of historical works have survived and to make a normative statement regarding dedication use is not statistically supportable.<sup>27</sup> When Alexander states that dedications are not normal, she is placing dedicated works outside the acceptable boundary of a historical work. However, this wrongly narrows the characteristics of the genre. In this case Alexander is prescriptively defining the genre, without taking into consideration the number of instances where different historians use dedications within the historical genre.

There are a number of dedication examples that illustrate that Luke was not unique in this practice. First, Plutarch, in his opening line of *The Rise and Fall of Athens*, ‘Just as geographers, O Socius Senecio’ (ὥσπερ ἐν ταῖς γεωγραφίαις, ὦ Σόσσιε Σενεκίων; 1.1), addresses Socius Senecio who, as consul between CE 98 and 107, was an influential and wealthy person within Rome. There is also some evidence of dedications within Dionysius of Halicarnassus’s *Roman Antiquities* (1.4.3) when he speaks of histories written to please Hellenistic monarchs.<sup>28</sup> Other examples can be found in Josephus’s works. In *War of the Jews* Josephus dedicates his work by stating ‘I have been at great charges, and have taken very great pains [about this history], though I be a foreigner; and do dedicate this work, as a memorial of great actions, both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians’ (κἀγὼ μὲν ἀναλώμασι καὶ πόνοις μεγίστοις ἀλλόφυλος ὢν Ἕλλησί τε καὶ Ῥωμαίοις τὴν μνήμην τῶν κατορθωμάτων ἀνατί-θημι; 1.16). The dedication that has the most similarities to Luke can be found in *Contra Apion*, where there are a number of very strong parallels. In the very opening of his work ‘I suppose that by my books of the Antiquity of the Jews, most excellent Eraphroditus’ (ἰκανῶς μὲν ὑπολαμβάνω καὶ διὰ τῆς περὶ τὴν ἀρχαιολογίαν συγγραφῆς, κρά-τιστε ἀνδρῶν Ἐπαφρόδιτε; 1.1), Josephus uses the vocative to address Eraphroditus, but in addition to

27. David E. Aune, ‘Luke 1.1-4: Historical or Scientific *Prooimion*?’, in Alf Christophersen, Carsten Claussen, Jörg Frey and Bruce Longenecker (eds.), *Paul, Luke and the Graeco-Roman World: Essays in Honour of Alexander J.M. Wedderburn* (JSNTSup, 217; New York/London: T. & T. Clark, 2002), pp. 138-48 (142).

28. Alexander, *Preface to Luke’s Gospel*, p. 28.



this he also includes κράτιστε 'most excellent' as a title (also used by Luke).

As a result of this, the inclusion of a dedication within Luke, although rarer within the history genre, should not dismiss it from historiography, seeing that Luke is not anomalous and that there are other similar instances in historical works.

### *Themes*

Although the above characteristics are part of the historical style, it is the themes that place a work firmly within historiography. Alexander states that,

most important of all, Thucydides sets the tone for the succeeding tradition: on the one hand, with his high-minded insistence on truth, accuracy (so far as either was possible) and careful investigation; and, on the other hand, with his view of a work as a 'possession for all time.'<sup>29</sup>

Luke, in his preface, embodies these ideals by expressing to Theophilus that his motivation for writing is to teach him and others, through the historical events of Jesus' life. Luke is careful to state that he has been thorough in his investigation and has searched everything from the beginning in order that he might find the truth. Luke uses the word ἀσφάλειαν, translated 'certainty' in the NIV, but could also be translated 'truth', implying a gaining of knowledge through teaching.<sup>30</sup> This search for truth is one of the main themes in historical works and is a key feature of other historical prefaces.

Historians typically discuss the value of history for those who are coming after them, and they see history as a means of teaching and enlightening further generations. Diodorus Siculus (1.1.1–1.2.8) is an example of this as he compares the usefulness of history against other subjects.<sup>31</sup> Thucydides also expresses that 'it will be enough for me, however, if these words of mine are judged useful by those who want to

29. Alexander, *Preface to Luke's Gospel*, p. 24.

30. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2nd edn, 1957), p. 423.

31. Daryl D. Schmidt, 'Rhetorical Influences and Genre: Luke's Preface and the Rhetoric of Hellenistic Historiography', in David E. Moessner (ed.), *Jesus and the Heritage of Israel: Luke's Narrative Claim upon Israel's Legacy* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999), pp. 27-60 (46-47).

understand clearly the events which happened in the past' (ποτέ αὐθις κατὰ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον τοιούτων καὶ παραπλησίων ἔσεσθαι, ὠφέλιμα κρίνειν; 1.22). However, beyond the usefulness of a work, the key theme of historians is the quest for truth. They are interested in dates, people, geographical locations, battles, decisions, speeches and episodes, all of which influenced the outcome of events. The truth is important because it, itself, is the teacher.

The quest for truth can be seen in a number of Greco-Roman historical works.<sup>32</sup> Thucydides in his preface is consistently stating that the transmission of truth in his book is his chief goal and that he has gone to great lengths in order to acquire factual information. He specifically mentions that he made it a principle to not accept the first story, but to evaluate it with others (ἀλλ' οἷς τε αὐτὸς παρῆν καὶ παρὰ τῶν ἄλλων ὅσον δυνατὸν ἀκριβεῖα περὶ ἐκάστου ἐπεξεληθῶν; 1.22). Herodotus states that one of his goals in his work was to point out 'who in actual fact first injured the Greeks' (τὸν δὲ οἶδα αὐτὸς πρῶτον ὑπάρξαντα ἀδίκων ἔργων ἐς τοὺς Ἕλληνας; 1.5). In addition to this, Herodotus also expresses this at various times when he is relying on hearsay (4.16), once again expressing the importance of factual information. In his *The Rise and Fall of Athens*, Plutarch states that after writing his *Parallel Lives* he has 'reached the end of those periods in which theories can be tested by argument or where history can find a solid foundation in fact' (οὕτως ἐμοὶ περὶ τὴν τῶν βίων τῶν παραλλήλων γραφήν, τὸν ἐφικτὸν εἰκότι λόγῳ καὶ βάσιμον ἱστορία πραγμάτων ἐχομένη χρόνον διελθόντι; 1.1). In his *Antiquities*, Josephus also expresses the value of truth and that those who love truth are compelled to commit it to writing (1.1). Dionysius of Halicarnassus also praises the value of truth in preparing against the future (καὶ πάντων μάλιστα τοὺς ἀναγράφοντας ἱστορίας, ἐν αἷς καωθιδρῦσθαι τὴν ἀλήθειαν ὑπο-λαμβάνομεν ἀρχὴν φρονήσεως τε καὶ σοφίας οὖσαν; *Rom. Ant.* 1.1.2).

Josephus, however, in *Contra Apion*, has the closest parallels to Luke, in that he is writing his work to a specific person in order that that he might know the truth of specific historical events (ἰκανῶς μὲν ὑπολαμβάνω καὶ διὰ τῆς περὶ τὴν ἀρχαιολογίαν συγγραφῆς, κρᾶτιστε ἀνδρῶν Ἐπαφρόδιτε, τοῖς ἐντευξομένοις αὐτῇ πεποιηκέναι φανερόν περὶ τοῦ γένους ἡμῶν τῶν Ἰουδαίων; 1.1). All of these

32. Unnik, 'Remarks', p. 9.

examples follow the theme of the importance of truth in a historical work. Luke subscribes to this model and, consequently, expresses a deep concern for the preservation of the truth of Jesus' life in his preface ἵνα ἐπιγνῶς περὶ ὧν κατηχήθης λόγων τὴν ἀσφάλειαν (Lk. 1.4).<sup>33</sup>

### *Sources*

Authenticity is an important aspect of a historical work. A common theme found in a large majority of ancient historical works is the use of sources as a basis of reliable information. Alexander agrees with this and expresses that 'the importance of having proper sources of information, and of verifying and testing the information received from tradition or from hearsay, was recognized in Greek historiography at least from the time of Herodotus'.<sup>34</sup> Luke expresses in v. 2 that his information was handed down to him by those who, from the first, were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Not uncommon in scholarship today, these references are used to reassure the reader that the information supplied was not fabricated by the author, but has been critically examined and evaluated for truthfulness.

Thucydides was one of the first historians to place a high premium on the dependence of sources in order to compile an accurate account of events. In his preface (1.20-22) he makes a number of references to his methodology of interviewing people who were at events, having people recall speeches given and remembering his own experiences. This methodology placed a prime value on seeing for oneself, or, failing that, relying on eyewitnesses.

Herodotus, who, although he did not explicitly mention his sources within his preface, alluded to their importance throughout his history, also helped establish this tradition. A fine example of this can be found at 4.16 where he expresses that for the next section of his history he unfortunately has not found anyone who claims to have actually seen this location. However, through careful inquiry he will write about this locality and include it in his history.

Following these examples are a number of historians who outline their sources and explain how they received their information. Josephus in his preface to *Antiquities* states that his information regarding the history of the Jewish people comes directly from the Jewish scriptures (μέλλει γὰρ

33. Unnik, 'Remarks', p. 9.

34. Alexander, *Preface to Luke's Gospel*, pp. 32-34.

περιέξειν ἅπασαν τὴν παρ' ἡμῖν ἀρχαιολογίαν καὶ διάταξιν τοῦ πολιτεύματος ἐκ τῶν Ἑβραϊκῶν μεθρημηνευμένην γραμμάτων; 1.5). Plutarch in *The Rise and Fall of Athens* (1.1) expresses to his readers that he is now writing about people who lived so long ago that there are no people who have factual information about them, but he must now rely on 'prodigies and fables'. A biblical parallel to Luke can be found in 2 Macc. 2.23 where the writer expresses that the information which he is writing about was compiled by Jason of Cyrene in his five-volume work (ὑπὸ Ἰάσωνος τοῦ Κυρησαίου δεδηλωμένα διὰ πέντε βιβλίων πειρασόμεθα δι' ἐνὸς συντάγματος ἐπιτεμεῖν). When citing his sources Luke expresses that they are reliable because of their participation in and witness of certain events. Luke views his sources as reliable and worthy of use.<sup>35</sup> Luke is well within the historical tradition when citing that he gained his information from outside sources that were eyewitnesses and participators in the events that he was writing about.

In addition to his focus on sources, Luke uses *αὐτόπτης* in his preface, which is a key historical word and is important in the discussion of different sources. This is the only example within the New Testament, which suggests that Luke borrowed this word from Greek historians in order to associate his work with that genre.<sup>36</sup> This word is typically translated as 'eyewitness' with the meaning, 'seeing, or having seen something for oneself'.<sup>37</sup> Loveday Alexander acknowledges the importance of this word; however, she wishes to define it in a different light. She states that in today's culture the term eyewitness has a forensic characteristic associated with it, implying that a person literally witnessed an event. She contrasts that definition with the idea that in ancient times it would imply a person with firsthand experience or those who knew the facts firsthand.<sup>38</sup>

35. Vernon K. Robbins, 'The Claims of the Prologues and Greco-Roman Rhetoric: The Preface to Luke and Acts in Light of Greco-Roman Rhetorical Strategies', in Moessner (ed.), *Jesus and the Heritage of Israel*, pp. 63-83 (75).

36. Cadbury, 'Commentary on the Preface of Luke', pp. 498-99; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), p. 42.

37. Wilhelm Michaelis, 'αὐτόπτης', in Gerhard Kittel (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (vol. 1; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1968), p. 373.

38. Alexander, *Preface to Luke's Gospel*, pp. 120-22; Schmidt, 'Rhetorical Influences and Genre', p. 29.

Herodotus has three uses of *αὐτόπτης* in his *Histories* (2.29.1; 3.115.1 and 4.16.1). Each of these uses of *αὐτόπτης* is similar in that it relates to a person who has literally seen, in these cases, a certain geographical region for themselves. The mention in 2.29.1 is related to the geography of Egypt and his personal eyewitness of Elephantine. The use in book three is also related to geography expressing that he has met no one with first hand experience of a sea North-West of Europe. In the final citation, Herodotus states that he never encountered anyone who claims to have visited a certain region.

Two other notable examples are Polybius's *The Histories* and Josephus's *Contra Apion*.<sup>39</sup> Polybius states that he was 'not only an eyewitness of most events, but in some cases a participant and even a director of others' (διὰ τὸ τῶν πλείστων μὴ μόνον αὐτόπτης, ἀλλ' ὧν μὲν συνεργὸς ὧν δὲ καὶ χειριστὴς γεγονέναι; 3.4.13). Josephus likewise claims to be not only an eyewitness, but also an actor in important events. Both of these examples support the literal interpretation of actually seeing and witnessing an event ὅτι δεῖ τὸν ἄλλοις παράδοσιν πράξεων ἀληθινῶν ὑπισχνούμενον αὐτὸν ἐπίστασθαι ταύτας πρότερον ἀκριβῶς ἢ παρηκολουθηκότα τοῖς γεγονόσιν ἢ παρὰ τῶν εἰδόντων πυνθανόμενον; 1.53-54).

There are a few instances where Thucydides 1.22 is translated 'eyewitness'. Although *αὐτόπτης* was not specifically used in this instance the importance of a person witnessing the event is expressed. Thucydides states that he went to people who had actually witnessed events, speeches and battles in order that he might gain knowledge of events from people who experienced them firsthand (1.22). He also speaks of being present at events and relying on his own experiences in his writing.

Luke, in his use of *αὐτόπτης*, refers to people who were actually eyewitnesses of Jesus and his ministry.<sup>40</sup> These might have been the apostles or other disciples from the time of Jesus' ministry. It would be difficult for Luke to say that he carefully investigated everything from the beginning, if he did not speak to the disciples who were taught by Jesus. Cadbury agrees with this and states that 'the close association of *αὐτόπται* and *ὑπηρεταί* is further justified when we appreciate that

39. Alexander, *Preface to Luke's Gospel*, pp. 38-39.

40. John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20* (WBC, 35A; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1989), p. 7.

Luke is following a convention of historians in urging the intimate connection of himself and his associates with the facts themselves'.<sup>41</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Loveday Alexander in her works attempts to downplay the connections and similarities between Luke's preface and those of the Greek historians. She compares Luke to Thucydides and states that there are a number of differences between them in the areas of length, dedications, introductions, the use of third person and the use of αὐτόπτης. However, when comparing Luke to the spectrum of Greek historians, we find that Thucydides is atypical in a number of categories. And although Luke's preface does not always follow the majority in certain criteria such as dedication and personal introduction, he is not anomalous in these categories and there are examples of accepted Greek historians who are more extreme than Luke.

Overall, Alexander does not adequately compare Luke to the whole of Greek historical work and as a result mislabels Luke's preface as non-historical. With her specific focus on Thucydides as the archetypal historiographer, she does not realize that Thucydides usually does not fall near the centerline of the spectrum, but is towards the extremes, especially in preface length. Earl makes an interesting observation when outlining the influence that Thucydides had over the centuries on his fellow historians. Earl states that only for a brief period after his 'history' was published did it enjoy fame, and, as a result, failed to establish a lasting reputation or influence.<sup>42</sup> It was only during the time of Cicero that he returned to influence, and impressed his style on the current historians.<sup>43</sup>

Going beyond v. 4 and evaluating the preface in light of Luke as a whole, it is difficult to see how a scientific preface captures the essence of Luke. In fact, Alexander admits that the text of Luke/Acts is not written in using the scientific treatise form, and that it is difficult to see it as anything other than a historic work.<sup>44</sup> With this in mind, it is difficult to state that Luke's preface prepares the reader for a scientific work and then changes to historical. It is more likely that the preface criteria in

41. Cadbury, 'Commentary on the Preface of Luke', p. 498.

42. Earl, 'Prologue-Form', p. 854.

43. Earl, 'Prologue-Form', p. 855.

44. Alexander, 'Luke's Preface', p. 69.

ancient times were fluid, without such rigid conditions and that Luke was well within the accepted practice of his day.

It is important to say that during this time there was not a set criteria for determining a historical work, although there were certain typical characteristics. As a result, there was a spectrum of accepted styles in which a writer could work. In conclusion, there are many parallels between Luke's preface and the prefaces of the Greek historians and Luke falls well within the accepted spectrums of style and content for Greek prefaces.