

THE SYNOPTIC PROBLEM STALEMATE, LUKE–ACTS, AND ANCIENT HISTORIOGRAPHY¹

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Introduction

At the conclusion to their edited book *The Synoptic Problem: Four Views*, Stanley Porter and Bryan Dyer repeatedly raise the question of whether Synoptic source criticism has become locked in a stalemate. After summarizing the history of the seemingly intractable situation, they admonish the guild to seek new developments and avenues of inquiry, while admitting they do not know which new avenues should be pursued. I agree that a stalemate exists and with their concomitant conclusion that “progressive discussions are necessary.”² In order to promote progressive discussions, a goal of the following essay will be to show a problem underlying the prevailing source theories involving Luke–Acts and the Synoptic Gospels is that they have been formulated upon questionable presuppositions, such as the one-source-at-a-time hypothesis, which leading classics scholars have either abandoned or seriously impugned.

By framing the approach to the source-critical stalemate in this way, I take a stand on the principle, well expressed by Jens Schröter, that dialogue with the broader guild of historians must play a necessary role in the formulation of methodological and epistemological presuppositions for Jesus re-

1. I wish to thank James Barker, John M. Duncan, Luuk van de Weghe, and Nathan Nadeau for providing valuable feedback and criticism to this paper. I also received valuable feedback on shorter versions of this paper given at SBL in Boston and CBA in Chicago. All errors that remain are my own.

2. Porter and Dyer, eds., *Synoptic Problem*, 177.

search, which encompasses the source analysis of New Testament texts.³ Through demonstrating the inadequate state of dialogue with the broader guild of historians, I intend to initiate a progressive discussion within New Testament source criticism consisting of extensive interaction with the primary and secondary literature of the ancient historians. The discussion below will focus primarily on the source analysis of the author of Luke–Acts.

Overview of the Problem

In order to discuss properly the Synoptic Problem and source criticism in dialogue with the broader guild, it is necessary to set the stage by providing a brief survey of the general situation of Synoptic source theories. In an important collection of essays entitled *New Studies in the Synoptic Problem*, Christopher Tuckett surveyed the “Current State of the Synoptic Problem,” in a chapter bearing that title.⁴ Tuckett begins his analysis observing,

The Synoptic Problem is (a very small) part of a much broader endeavor: this is the attempt to explain the whole development of the Jesus tradition, starting with the person of Jesus himself, going through a period prior to the time of the synoptic gospels themselves, on into later history when traditions about Jesus probably continued to circulate independently but with written texts/gospels also circulating and being copied, and then into the time when we have for the first time direct concrete evidence in the form of manuscripts of the gospels in the 3rd century CE and beyond.⁵

For those tempted to overestimate the importance of Synoptic source theories, Tuckett contextualizes the limited role such theories play within a broader historical enterprise. This framing of the issues may also serve as a subtle corrective to the belief that research on the Synoptic Problem consists primarily in *objective* comparisons of texts as opposed to *subjective* historical conjectures about past events. Evaluating the sources of information used by the authors of the Synoptic Gospels is not simply a literary or textual exercise but transpires within a larger framework of historical analysis.

3. Schröter, “Criteria of Authenticity,” 50.

4. Tuckett, “Current State.”

5. Tuckett, “Current State,” 15.

Underscoring the historical nature of the task, Tuckett demonstrates that inquiry of these texts inherently involves scholars from the start in a preexisting network of historical assumptions and conjectures. He points out, for example, that all Synoptic source theories postulate “the existence of a number of different sources and traditions at various points in the overall model of the origin and development of the tradition.”⁶ Moreover, scholars’ theories necessarily “involve appeal to a whole range of sources or traditions insofar as they are seeking to explain the development of the tradition as a whole.”⁷ Along with the work of postulating sources for each Synoptic author, scholars also deploy “a set of assumptions, presuppositions, and/or deductions, about how each evangelist operated with his source(s).”⁸ If Tuckett is correct that analyzing the relations between the Synoptic Gospels is “a very small” part of a “a much broader endeavor,”⁹ as I believe he is, then that broader historical endeavor must always remain in view when seeking explanations for such things as the similarities between Luke’s Gospel and other Gospels.

These and many other methodological issues have been debated in relation to the Synoptic Gospels for well over a century. Unfortunately, Tuckett notes, “The situation today is in one way very similar to the situation 100 years ago in that there has been no dramatic shift in scholarly opinion as a whole in relation to what the majority of scholars think is the most likely solution to the Synoptic Problem.”¹⁰ I consider below some philosophical reasons for the lack of progress. Nonetheless, Tuckett does identify some positive contributions from the last five decades of debate including: (1) it brought issues of methodology to the fore; (2) it has shown the weaknesses in each of the various theories; and most importantly, (3) the debate has shown “the inherent uncertainty and provisional nature of all theories and

6. Tuckett, “Current State,” 17.

7. Tuckett, “Current State,” 17.

8. Tuckett, “Current State,” 17.

9. Restating the matter in more technical terms, Tuckett (“Current State,” 15) writes, “‘The Synoptic Problem’ is part of a continuum involving aspects of historical Jesus study, form criticism (broadly conceived), source criticism, tradition criticism, redaction criticism, reception history and textual criticism.”

10. Tuckett, “Current State,” 18–19. He immediately avers, “This does not mean that nothing happened in the last 100 years and that the debates generated have produced nothing but hot air” (19).

‘conclusions’ in this area of study.”¹¹ While (2) could be entailed by (3), the importance of (3) cannot be overstated.

The notions expressed in (3) relate directly to other revealing statements by Tuckett, such as, “At the end of the day, one is thus weighing relative probabilities and comparing the relative plausibility of competing global explanations. Such comparisons will inevitably be subjective, debatable and can never be final.”¹² He also concludes,

Although there has been no dramatic shift in overall solutions which have commanded widespread assent in the last 100 years, the recent debates about the Synoptic Problem, and the detailed defences of alternatives to the 2DH [Two-Document Hypothesis], have highlighted the provisional nature of any ‘solutions’ which are proposed.¹³

A distinguishing feature of Tuckett’s chapter is the pronounced emphasis on the tentative nature of source-critical theories for the Synoptic Gospels.

In the same book, Andrew Gregory also stresses that the results of source critical inquiry are tentative rather than proven.¹⁴ From the “fact that scholars disagree on the nature and direction of the literary dependence that we hypothesize in order to account (at least in part) for the pattern of similarities and differences between these texts,” Gregory concludes, “No proposed solution is proven.”¹⁵ Regarding the direction of influence between the Synoptic Gospels, he asserts, “There is no knock down proof; advocates of each hypothesis rate the different but often intertwined parts of these cumulative cases in different ways, but none can point to a single argument on which there is consensus that a particular hypothesis stands or falls.”¹⁶ Later, Gregory observes,

The fact that advocates of the Two Document Hypothesis, Farrer Hypothesis and Two Gospel Hypothesis each find evidence of what they take to be evidence for the knowledge or use of redactional material from the earlier source gospel(s) in the gospel(s) that they take to be later and dependent on an earlier gospel or gospels . . . indicates that

11. Tuckett, “Current State,” 19.

12. Tuckett, “Current State,” 22.

13. Tuckett, “Current State,” 22.

14. Gregory, “What Is Literary Dependence?”

15. Gregory, “What Is Literary Dependence?” 89.

16. Gregory, “What Is Literary Dependence?” 108.

much of the data may be interpreted in different ways and used in support of different and mutually exclusive hypotheses.¹⁷

This statement deserves extra attention, especially the observation that the very same data can be “used in support of different and mutually exclusive hypotheses.”¹⁸ As will be seen below, similar observations appear in the classics scholars’ critiques of traditional source criticism.

Lastly, in the final two sentences of his chapter, Gregory reiterates the tentative nature of the entire source critical enterprise, writing,

There is no knock-down argument or any probative test that will determine the direction of literary dependence between the synoptic gospels; decisions about the direction of such dependence must be made on the basis of cumulative arguments that can account for as much data as possible. Such conclusions, however, at least on the evidence and methods available at present, can only establish relative probability; they cannot offer incontrovertible proof.¹⁹

Both Tuckett and Gregory are at pains to stress the uncertainty and tentative nature of traditional attempts to discern both the sources and the use of those sources, that is, the direction of influence, from one Synoptic Gospel author to another.

Prior to these contributions, Robert Derrenbacker also sought to undermine excessive confidence in the prevailing source theories in his 2005 book, *Ancient Compositional Practices and the Synoptic Problem*. He memorably opens the book writing, “The Synoptic Problem remains precisely that: *a problem*. While a few Synoptic scholars have argued with great confidence that particular solutions to the Synoptic Problem are ‘assured findings’ and no longer theory but ‘fact,’ the Synoptic Problem has not been solved.”²⁰ In this way, Derrenbacker pushes back on scholars who had become overconfident in one or another Synoptic source theory failing to recognize that each still had significant weaknesses. In order to counter such overconfidence, he suggests that each theory should be viewed “as a mere

17. Gregory, “What Is Literary Dependence?” 112–13.

18. The statement echoes earlier observations regarding the traditional source criticism of ancient historians made by the classical scholar Luke Pitcher, discussed below.

19. Gregory, “What Is Literary Dependence?” 114.

20. Derrenbacker, *Ancient Compositional Practices*, 1 (italics original).

heuristic device” rather than as “a model that depicts what *actually* happened.”²¹ One of the more prominent and valuable contributions of Derrenbacker’s book is he showed that all of the source theories were beholden to anachronistic views regarding the methods ancient authors employed when writing their works. In some respects, this essay could be seen as expanding upon Derrenbacker’s basic insight but with a focus on the sources and methods of ancient historians.

It is fair to say that the source-theory conversation took a new turn in 2016 with the concluding remarks of Porter and Dyer in *The Synoptic Problem: Four Views*.²² What Tuckett, Gregory, and Derrenbacker view as benign realities—i.e., the tentative theses, lack of progress, and mutually exclusive theories perennially coexisting—Porter and Dyer view as real problems. In short, they interpret these features as evidence that fundamental problems exist with the traditional source-critical approaches. Framing this critique in terms of Luke–Acts, I would argue that the perennially contradictory results of source-critical theories applied to Luke and Acts do not inspire confidence and may serve instead to indicate the existence of more fundamental problems within the approaches themselves.

The lack of progress and firm results prompt a direct confrontation with the guild in their concluding remarks. Porter and Dyer list the relevant historical facts that the Two-Document Hypothesis dates back to the nineteenth century, that the Two-Gospels Hypothesis goes back even further to Johann Griesbach, if not to Augustine, and that the Farrer Hypothesis dates back to the 1955 essay “On Dispensing with Q.” In light of these facts, they ask in

21. Derrenbacker, *Ancient Compositional Practices*, 6 (italics original). He follows, in this view, Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q*, 51, who states, “Even though the 2DH best accounts for the relationships among the gospels, it should not be confused with a *description* of ‘what happened.’ Hypotheses are heuristic models intended to aid comprehension and discovery; they do not replicate reality.” In actual practice, then, a heuristic model appears to be simply a tentative “*description* of ‘what happened.’”

22. Porter and Dyer, eds., *Synoptic Problem*. The scholars involved in this collection of essays and responses are leading advocates for each of their respective source-critical theories. Mark Goodacre defends the Farrer Hypothesis, Craig Evans defends the Two-Source Hypothesis, David Peabody defends the Two-Gospels Hypothesis, while Rainer Riesner defends an orality and memory hypothesis.

the penultimate section to the book: “Has a stalemate been reached?”²³ This question surprises readers. Then again, they have just endured dense and complicated presentations by top scholars featuring the strongest points for each hypothesis, which are subsequently contradicted by the next presentation, and the next, and the next. Although the question of a stalemate is not an idea with which most readers begin the book, Porter and Dyer’s framing of the question at the very end carries significant force. The inability of one proposal to refute decisively the others suggests that certain problems may exist at the more foundational level of the presuppositions making up the competing source-critical hypotheses.

There is value in presenting the concluding remarks of Porter and Dyer since they reflect in many ways the critiques of classicists against the traditional source criticism of ancient historians. They write,

By any reckoning, there have been at least these . . . theories of the Synoptic Problem on the table for consideration for a minimum of fifty years and quite possibly a minimum of one hundred years, if not far longer for at least some of them. And yet we are still seriously debating the fundamental plausibility of the various proposals, with most of the essential arguments being the same ones that have been used over and over during this same period of time.

This situation raises the question of whether we have reached a stalemate in the study of the Synoptic Problem. In other words, after using the same arguments that have been used over the last fifty or more years regarding these issues, what are the results of such debate? One or more of the positions may claim to be making progress in relation to the other, and no doubt there are strong advocates of each position who perceive that their arguments are beginning to have an effect and to convince others to join their ranks. Those of the other positions are no doubt less inclined to see such positive results from others’ apologetic efforts. This situation brings us back to the question of whether we have reached a stalemate in the study of the Synoptic Problem.²⁴

This section is followed by a paragraph that slightly attenuates the blunt force of these remarks, and then exactly five more sentences conclude the book. While Porter and Dyer offer some mitigating comments like “We are

23. Porter and Dyer, eds., *Synoptic Problem*, 176.

24. Porter and Dyer, eds., *Synoptic Problem*, 176–77.

optimistic that the impasse is not unbreachable” and “We believe that there is still potential for further developments,” they also strongly declare, “We do not know what form any new developments will take, but we are firm in our belief that such progressive discussions are necessary.”²⁵ I am sympathetic with these views and will argue that (1) dialogue on source criticism with the broader guild of historians must play a necessary role in the progressive discussions they recommend; and that (2) dialogue with the primary and secondary literature of the ancient historians carries significant potential to alter the default settings of the source analysis of Luke–Acts, and possibly all of the Synoptic Gospels, as it has been understood for roughly two centuries.²⁶

While Porter and Dyer succeed in characterizing the status quo as problematic, there is value in considering the situation from a more philosophical perspective by asking the question: How can it be the case that mutually exclusive source theories can be held simultaneously by rational scholars analyzing the exact same evidence? This type of problem is certainly not unique to the study of New Testament texts. As we will see, classics scholars have encountered similar, if not the very same, dilemmas involving traditional source criticism of the ancient historians. Having provided a brief review of the state of New Testament source criticism, I move now to strengthen the case for the importance of dialogue with the primary and secondary literature of the ancient historians for the source analysis of Luke–Acts.

25. Porter and Dyer, eds., *Synoptic Problem*, 177.

26. A question I will pursue in a future essay is this: If Synoptic source theories are only a small part of the larger project of historical research on Jesus and his movement and these theories are tentative by nature, is it even necessary to postulate a specific source theory when analyzing Luke–Acts as a historical source? For now, I will register my agreement with Arnal (“Synoptic Problem,” 239) when he writes that “no necessary relationship emerges between one’s synoptic source theory and one’s portrait of Jesus” and with Joseph (*Jesus*, 20) when he declares, “Jesus Research does not depend on source-critical solutions to the complex literary relationships between the Synoptic Gospels. Jesus Research does not depend on the existence of Q. There were multiple ‘sources’ circulating in the early Jesus movement (cf. Luke 1:1) and it does not *always* matter which particular Synoptic solution we adopt when reconstructing Jesus.”

*Historiographical Methods Must be Formulated in Dialogue
with the Broader Historical Guild*

In general agreement with Porter and Dyer, I contend that multiple conflicting source theories for Luke–Acts is a problem which should be a cause for concern among scholars.

I am convinced that a key to progress in several debates in New Testament scholarship, including the source analysis of Luke–Acts, begins with taking seriously the historiographical advice of Schröter. In a seminal essay discussing historical method and Jesus research, Schröter stresses that research methods in New Testament scholarship must “be formulated in dialogue with the basic principles of historiographical method” as they are practiced in the broader guild of historians.²⁷ He writes,

Despite the great diversity in interpretation and historical arrangement of various traditions and historical developments, there is in current scholarship a far-reaching consensus: Jesus research is a historical enterprise whose methodological and epistemological presuppositions have to be formulated in dialogue with the basic principles of historiographical method.²⁸

Although scholars may agree with this idea in principle, Schröter’s essay demonstrates that New Testament scholarship often has not adhered to it in practice. Applying this maxim to the source criticism of the Synoptic Gospels and Acts, I contend that the methodological and epistemological presuppositions of New Testament source criticism must be formulated in dialogue with the principles of source criticism and historiographical method as they are practiced by other historians, especially those dealing with texts analogous to the Gospels.²⁹

Schröter further argues that New Testament scholars should be concerned (1) whenever their assumptions and methods find little or no connec-

27. Schröter, “Criteria of Authenticity,” 50.

28. Schröter, “Criteria of Authenticity,” 50.

29. A noteworthy recent example of New Testament scholars fostering dialogue with the broader historical guild on source criticism is the 2023 book Verheyden et al., eds., *On Using Sources*. Unfortunately, this book entirely avoids discussing or engaging the prominent attacks of classicists on source criticism, which are the focus of the current article.

tion with the assumptions and methods used in the broader historical guild, as is the case with the “criteria of authenticity”; and (2) when their assumptions and methods have effectively been abandoned by other historians, as is the case with traditional source criticism.³⁰ While the origins of Synoptic source criticism were distinctly shaped in response to the posthumous publications of Reimarus, it remains the case that research on New Testament and classical texts occurred in close dialogue in the nineteenth century. “Indeed,” as George Kennedy puts it, “there was no differentiation of the two disciplines until sometime in the nineteenth century when classical scholarship . . . shut its eyes to Christian writing and New Testament studies in large part.”³¹ It is the case, then, that the basic presuppositions and methods used for identifying “sources” in classical and New Testament texts emerged around the same time and were more or less shared by scholars. A very different situation exists today between the two guilds. For example, in recent years many classics scholars have trenchantly attacked central tenets of nineteenth-century source criticism, yet I am unaware of any New Testament scholar who has taken account of these critiques.

Dialogue with the broader guild of historians demonstrates that the prevailing approaches in New Testament source criticism remain rooted in presuppositions and methods that many classics scholars now reject. Since the nineteenth century, the texts generally considered to be the most appropriate analogs for comparison with the Synoptic Gospels and Acts have been those of the Greco-Roman historians.³² While the value of these texts as comparanda for the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John is open to debate, Luke—

30. Pushing back on Alexander Wedderburn’s effort to downplay the value of this type of theoretical analysis for historians, Schröter (“Criteria of Authenticity,” 60n35) writes, “In general, it has to be emphasized against Wedderburn’s rather strange and old fashioned verdict that it is by no means a superficial endeavor to ask for the methodological and epistemological foundations of historical research . . . To the contrary, this is a sound and necessary part of serious historical scholarship.”

31. Kennedy, “Classical and Christian Source Criticism,” 126.

32. Kirk (*Q in Matthew*, 59) observes, “All ancient writers, regardless of cultural, social, or occupational niche, were bound by common media conditions, particularly the scroll format, to a baseline set of utilization practices. This is what gives the source-utilization practices of Greco-Roman historians their capacity to inform Synoptic source-critical enquiry.”

Acts's status as a form of Greek historiography makes the ancient historians, especially those who reported about contemporary events, arguably the most appropriate analogs for illustrating the sources and methods used when researching and writing texts.³³ Consequently, in the next couple of sections I will argue that challenges to the source criticism of ancient historians has direct relevance to the source criticism of Luke–Acts.

Preliminary Considerations for Source-Critical Analysis

Any cursory survey of New Testament introductions and commentaries on Luke or Acts demonstrates that identifying the specific texts entailed by Luke's reference to "many" prior accounts remains an unsettled issue.³⁴ Effectively, each theory of Synoptic development determines for its adherents certain texts subsumed under Luke's reference to the "many." Each hypothesis, then, represents an attempt to penetrate Luke's wall of silence and disclose information the author chose to withhold (at least in the preface). Although scholars have believed for centuries that they can overcome Luke's silence on the matter, the lack of definitive results suggests such a belief may be unwarranted.

Source criticism, or *Quellenforschung*, has generally been understood as the attempt to identify within a text the use or influence of prior texts, while some scholars endeavor further to identify oral sources an author may have used in writing. When discussing the idea of written texts that may have functioned as "sources" for ancient historians, it is necessary to distinguish between a larger category of written documents, including letters, inscriptions, treaties, oracles, well-known literature, etc., and a smaller category of written sources, by which I mean specifically a narrative account of past events that is somehow incorporated into a new narrative. While the latter

33. Moving beyond historiography, Kirk (*Q in Matthew*, 79–92) explores the analysis of sources in the composition of florilegia and anthologies seeking to illuminate Matthew's use of sources. Additionally, the 2019 Leuven Centre for the Study of the Gospels conference that produced Verheyden et al., eds., *On Using Sources* explored the use of sources in a variety of ancient texts outside of historiography.

34. Though not widely recognized, the one written account of events that we can identify with certainty as among the "many" is the letter of Lysias referenced in Acts 23:25–30.

category necessarily counts as written documents, it is clear that not all written documents a historian engaged or used when writing an account functioned as a “source,” which in this context means a “source of information.”

To illustrate the point, the many references and allusions to Homer by Herodotus and Thucydides count as examples of using written documents, even if they quoted them from memory; they do not count as examples of relying on Homer as a source of information for their narratives. The references of Herodotus and Thucydides to Homeric texts do not function as “sources (of information)” because those texts could not have provided information regarding the primary subject of their accounts, namely the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars. Stated simply, no one in antiquity thought that the *Iliad* functioned as a “source of information” for Thucydides’s account. While it is true that he imitated the style of Homer and alluded/referred to his writings, it is false to say that they were a “source” for Thucydides’s history proper. Thus, I regard it as a mistake to refer to any and all texts which an ancient historian engaged or knew as “sources.”

As for Luke’s handling of documents in Luke–Acts, this category distinction means that references to the Septuagint/Hebrew Bible do not count as “sources (of information)” but rather count as instances of imitating, engaging, referring, or alluding to well-known literature, that is, written documents. To describe “Luke’s sources” as including his allusions to well-known literature, such as the Septuagint or First Enoch, produces unnecessary confusion.³⁵ I would argue further concerning the author of Luke–Acts’s handling of documents that he has no intention that the audience believe Lysias’s letter (Acts 23:25–30) functioned as a source of information for his narrative of these events. To the contrary, he refers to it *not* in order to indicate it was a “source (of information)” for his account, since his own account blatantly disagrees with it, but rather to expose this official report as a flawed retelling of events. Anyone seeking to identify traces of prior written accounts in Luke’s text will do well to keep these distinctions in mind.³⁶

The source-critical research which has exercised the most influence upon the source criticism of Luke–Acts and the Synoptic Gospels has been that conducted by classics scholars on the ancient historians. Texts and authors which have garnered the most attention from New Testament scholars are

35. Pervo makes this error in *Dating Acts*, viii.

36. For further discussion of these matters, see Peters, *Luke*.

the *Roman Antiquities* of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Jewish Antiquities* of Josephus, the *Historical Library* of Diodorus Siculus, the *Lives* of Plutarch, and Arrian's *Life of Alexander*. Countless appeals to examples from these works have been used to explain how Luke, Mark, and Matthew composed their narratives. Nevertheless, a strong case can be made that these texts are inappropriate as analogs for explaining Luke's historical method since the primary subject for these accounts is non-contemporary events while Luke claims to have reported about contemporary events, that is, "the events accomplished among us" (Luke 1:1). Central to this case is the critical insight, which also directly affects source analysis, that in antiquity a stark contrast existed between the sources and methods claimed by historians who reported about contemporary events and those claimed by authors who reported about non-contemporary events. Reckoning with this divide among historians over claims to sources and methods impacts directly the assessment of Luke-Acts's sources of information.

One of the leading authorities on ancient historiography, John Marincola, speaks to the contrast in sources and methods that existed.³⁷ He especially stresses the critical role which Thucydides played in establishing autopsy and eyewitness testimony as the proper sources for writing contemporary history.³⁸ While subsequent ancient authors added to this approach, on the whole contemporary historians followed "fairly carefully to the Thucydidean approach."³⁹ Polybius, for example, famously emulated and expanded upon Thucydides's historical method. Marincola explains that for Polybius personal "eyewitness of events is far and away the most superior form of knowledge; but as it is impossible for one person to be present at all important events, inquiry of participants is the next best thing."⁴⁰ Nevertheless, a historian could not inquire of just anyone, Polybius stressed, but needed to find reliable informants and especially those who had played leading roles in the events under consideration.⁴¹ Speaking to the reception and influence of Thucydides's historical method, Marincola concludes, "Over the many centuries that Greeks and Romans wrote history, this remained at bottom their methodology, at least for contemporary history.

37. See Marincola, "Source-Citations."

38. Marincola, *On Writing History*, xxxviii.

39. Marincola, *On Writing History*, xxxix.

40. Marincola, *On Writing History*, xxxix.

41. Marincola, *On Writing History*, xxxix.

Documents, archives and records, even when they existed, were used sparingly.”⁴² By contrast, the sources and methods used for writing non-contemporary historiography were an entirely different matter. These authors wrote explicitly on the basis of prior texts and implicitly, though sometimes explicitly, rejected the methodological constraints of Thucydides and Polybius.

It is important to underscore that when authors wrote about non-contemporary events, by definition, they had no access to eyewitnesses and participants, and thus their accounts necessarily derived either from earlier writings or what oral tradition had passed down. Marincola compares the differing historical methods that existed when observing

that the ancients established a hierarchy of historical investigation is hardly to be doubted . . . For contemporary history autopsy was paramount and was followed by personal inquiry of those who were themselves eyewitnesses. For non-contemporary history there was no unanimity, and one was forced to rely on the tradition. . . . Indeed, the question of how to deal with what tradition had handed down was a difficult one . . . Tradition could not be ignored; too often it was all that one had. And if one chose not to treat contemporary history—as many did—it was necessary to come up with some way of understanding or explicating the past. The realm of non-contemporary history was never subject to a single methodology.⁴³

The primary and secondary literature of the ancient historians demonstrate unequivocally that ancient historians used very different sources and methods depending on whether they were reporting on recent or distant events. Consequently, if it is a scholarly virtue to assess an author on his or her own terms and if the author of Luke–Acts explicitly represents the account as a historiography of contemporary events, then the source and method claims of the historians of recent events have a special importance for understanding the compositional mode of the author of Luke–Acts.⁴⁴ Whether or to what degree the contemporary historians’ claims should im-

42. Marincola, *On Writing History*, xxxix.

43. Marincola, “Rethinking Isocrates,” 55–56.

44. As a result, I argue that the proper source critical comparisons for the author of Luke–Acts should come from the ancient historians who reported about contemporary events. See Peters, “Luke’s Source Claims”; *Luke*, 38–192.

pact the assessment of other Gospel writings lies outside the scope of this essay.

Not only do judgements regarding the contemporary or non-contemporary status of an ancient historiographical text significantly condition scholars' expectations for the types of sources and source claims they should expect to find in a text (i.e., oral testimony from eyewitnesses as opposed to rewriting of prior texts) but they also establish the most appropriate examples that should function as analogies for illuminating an author's compositional method. To summarize: (1) assessing the author of Luke–Acts on his own terms means assessing him as an ancient historian; (2) assessing an author as an ancient historian in turn requires a decision about whether he composed a contemporary or non-contemporary account; and (3) determining whether an author composed a contemporary or non-contemporary account largely determines the sources and source/method claims scholars should expect to find in the text as well as the comparative texts to be used to illustrate the results of the inquiry.⁴⁵

This section has laid important groundwork by delineating what I mean by sources (sources of information vs documents used) in source criticism and establishing the crucial distinction between the sources and methods used by ancient historians of contemporary versus non-contemporary events. The next section continues the dialogue more directly with classics scholars who have questioned traditional source criticism.

Critique of Traditional Source Criticism

We turn now to consider classics scholars' critiques of source criticism as it has traditionally been applied to historiographical texts. As will be seen,

45. As an aside, scholars dealing with New Testament texts seem regularly tempted by the idea that the Gospels may be *sui generis* and therefore inherently resistant to comparison with other groups of texts. Even if that were somehow shown to be true, it would not change (1) the fact that the author of Luke–Acts represents the account as a history of contemporary events which entails that the ancient historians of contemporary events provide highly relevant analogies for understanding the source and method claims regarding its composition; and (2) that dialogue with the broader guild of historians must play a necessary role in formulating the methodological and epistemological presuppositions in the source criticism of at least Luke–Acts.

these critiques also illuminate the methodological and epistemological pre-suppositions that undergird the source criticism of Luke–Acts and the Synoptic Gospels.

In his book *Timaeus of Tauromenium and Hellenistic Historiography*, Christopher Baron questions the efficacy of attempts through source criticism (1) to divine “implicit or unnamed fragments” of sources within extant Hellenistic texts and (2) to assess lost sources/texts on the basis of either named or unnamed fragments.⁴⁶ He observes,

Although nearly all the historical works written in the Hellenistic period did not survive antiquity, some of them were major sources for later authors . . . Writers such as Diodorus, Strabo, and Plutarch based their works on their readings in the Hellenistic historians, and even where they do not cite those sources by name, much of what they wrote must consist of compilation, paraphrase, or copying of earlier texts.⁴⁷

Baron affirms that for these non-contemporary historical works a direct relationship exists with earlier texts that are now lost; namely, these texts functioned as written sources of information for the authors.

Despite knowing that some historians compiled, paraphrased and even copied earlier accounts, the problem remains that because ancient authors did not employ a standard system of citation, “exact knowledge of those sources escapes us.”⁴⁸ This obvious limitation, however, “has not prevented scholars since the early nineteenth century from attempting to recover the details of extant authors’ use of lost source material.”⁴⁹ Baron notes that in its heyday “*Quellenforschung*—constituted the primary activity of scholars interested in ancient historical writing.”⁵⁰ Although not the primary activity of scholars today, in New Testament scholarship source criticism remains prominent and accounts for a substantial amount of research and publication.

46. Baron, *Timaeus*, 14.

47. Baron, *Timaeus*, 12.

48. Baron, *Timaeus*, 12.

49. Baron, *Timaeus*, 12. On this subject, see also, Baron, “Use and Abuse”; “Delimitation”; Brunt, “On Historical Fragments.”

50. Baron, *Timaeus*, 12.

A pre-condition for the emergence of what Baron calls “old-fashioned source criticism”⁵¹ was a confident belief that scholars knew the working methods ancient historians employed when composing their accounts. Such confidence led nineteenth-century German scholars to formulate “laws” concerning the methods used when composing book-based histories, such as the *lex Geffcken* and *lex Volquardsen*.⁵² Regarding the latter, the work of Christian August Volquardsen was instrumental in establishing a premise on which the practice of source criticism came to rest; namely, he argued, “Diodorus relied on only one source at a time when composing his work: when he had finished narrating an event or describing a situation, he switched to another source in order to move on to the next topic.”⁵³ Marincola laments that the application of Volquardsen’s doctrine led scholars since the nineteenth century to depict Diodorus as “a ‘scissors-and-paste’ historian, one who, page after page, blithely and uncritically transcribed his sources, even when they contradicted one another.”⁵⁴ While the one source at a time hypothesis of Volquardsen has been widely challenged in classics in recent decades, it remains largely unchallenged among New Testament scholars and so remains firmly in place as an explanation for Luke’s compositional method.⁵⁵

A second major premise upon which the older source-critical paradigm rests is the belief that book-based historians, such as Diodorus or Plutarch, preserve aspects of the content, style, and viewpoint from their source texts. In recent decades this assumption has also endured withering criticism to the point that it no longer can be asserted without significant qualifications.

51. Baron, *Timaeus*, 13.

52. Named respectively for Geffcken, *Timaioi’ Geographie* and Volquardsen, *Untersuchungen*. For discussion, see Baron, “Use and Abuse,” 1–16; Meister, “Role of Timaeus”; Dudziński, “Diodorus’ Use of Timaeus,” 43–76.

53. Baron, *Timaeus*, 13.

54. Marincola, “Universal History,” 1:177.

55. The one-source hypothesis is extensively advocated by New Testament scholars B. H. Streeter, F. Gerald Downing, and Robert Derrenbacker, among others. Other scholars who affirm it include David Aune, Richard Bauckham, Craig Keener, John Kloppenborg, Michael Goulder, and Mark Goodacre. I know of only two scholars dealing with New Testament texts who challenge the premise. See Barker, “Ancient Compositional Practices”; “Use of Sources”; Bolton, “Source-Utilization Movement,” 61.

However, when these premises were ascendant, scholars felt assured to divide Diodorus's text into discrete fragments of Timaeus, Ephorus, and Hieronymus and these putative fragments were believed to reflect the content and viewpoint of the earlier (lost) texts.

Not surprisingly, scholars have identified serious problems with these two premises. Regarding the one-source hypothesis, Marincola asks rhetorically, "What if Diodorus used a primary source for long parts and consistently referred to one or more *secondary* sources?"⁵⁶ Diodorus certainly could have employed this method, and in the vast majority of cases there would simply be no way to determine the details of his compositional method since most of the source texts are lost. As for the second premise, Marincola raises the obvious problem of deciding whether the evaluative judgments in the *Historical Library* are those of Diodorus or his sources.⁵⁷ More generally, Baron criticizes the traditional approach to Diodorus for "its inherent circularity" and its descriptions of historians' working methods that have "severely oversimplified matters."⁵⁸ These attacks by leading scholars on the framework of assumptions undergirding the source criticism of Hellenistic historians suggest that inherent problems may also exist with the framework of assumptions undergirding the source criticism of the Hellenistic historian Luke.

Despite what appear to be rather obvious flaws in the older source critical approach, theories incapable of falsification have a tendency not to go away. For example, Lionel Pearson in *The Greek Historians of the West* writes,

Not everyone is willing to believe that it was the practice of Diodorus to follow one source at a time, i.e., Timaeus for his account of Sicilian events in Books XI–XIV, Ephorus for events in Aegean Greece in these books, Cleitarchus for the history of Alexander, and Hieronymus for the twenty years after Alexander's death. Some scholars think it more probable that he regularly used more than one source at a time.⁵⁹

56. Marincola, "Universal History," 1:177 (italics original).

57. Marincola, "Universal History," 1:177.

58. Baron, *Timaeus*, 13.

59. Pearson, *Greek Historians*, 135.

It deserves to be noted that all of the works Pearson references here are lost, except for Diodorus's text. Pearson continues:

A lengthy discussion of Diodorus' method cannot be undertaken here, but if a consistent picture of Timaeus' work emerges by supposing that Diodorus used him as his main source for Sicilian history in Books XI–XIV, it must be recognized that the "one-source" hypothesis cannot be discarded lightly for these books.⁶⁰

In response to such dubious reasoning Baron observes, "Even within this one sentence, the very thing that needs to be proven—that Diodorus used only one source at a time—is taken as the starting point for that proof."⁶¹ Regardless of the flaws in Pearson's approach, it remains in the marketplace because ultimately it cannot be falsified.

New Testament scholars who discuss source criticism largely take for granted the one source at a time hypothesis apparently unaware of the trenchant attacks on its validity by classics scholars. Perhaps the fullest expositions of the hypothesis have come from the writings of B. H. Streeter, F. Gerald Downing, and Robert Derrenbacher. Before engaging those authors directly, I provide here a brief survey of representative examples who presuppose the notion. Mark Goodacre writes that "observation of the way the ancients proceeded, tending to utilize one source at a time and avoiding word-by-word conflation, is—as Michael Goulder has pointed out—quite consistent with the Farrer Theory's insistence that Luke treated his two sources in blocks."⁶² Craig Keener appears to favor the one-source hypothesis for understanding Luke's working method when he writes some New Testament scholars "argue that, like Greek writers, Luke mostly follows one source at a time, at least in his Gospel, where he incorporates a large block of Q material into Mark; both he and Matthew make Mark the backbone and supplement this material from other sources."⁶³ Similarly, David Aune declares, "Generally ancient historians followed one source at a time, though they often supplemented their primary source by inserting material from

60. Pearson, *Greek Historians*, 135.

61. Baron, *Timaeus*, 13. Marincola ("Universal History," 177) cites some scholars who "give an unqualified yes" to the "one source" hypothesis approach to Diodorus, including Stylianou, *Historical Commentary*; Hornblower, *Hieronymus*.

62. Goodacre, "On Choosing and Using Appropriate Analogies," 239.

63. Keener, *Acts*, 45–46.

other sources where amplification or more detail was desirable.”⁶⁴ Later he applies the one-source hypothesis to Luke’s account explaining, “One very important model and source was the Gospel of Mark, which Luke modified in four significant ways . . . Following the Hellenistic convention of using one source at a time, he intercalated a large section of Jesus’ teaching from another source Q into the middle of Mark (9:51–18:14).”⁶⁵

The source criticism of Diodorus has functioned as the paradigm example which supposedly demonstrates the validity of the one source hypothesis. This explains why Diodorus features prominently in most of the attacks on traditional source criticism. Regarding the historian from Sicily, Baron writes, “Since, according to the ‘lex Volquardsen,’ Diodorus used only one source at a time, this means that once we have identified a lost author’s fingerprint, we should be able to slice up Diodorus’ text into neatly shaped blocks of Ephorus, Timaeus, Hieronymus, Duris, and so on.”⁶⁶ Disbelieving this view, Baron argues that the supposed “laws” of composition oversimplify how authors actually wrote. As a result, he rejects the belief that scholars are somehow able to identify unreferenced fragments of the lost history of Timaeus in Diodorus, writing,

Without any direct evidence for Timaeus’ work, let alone a large enough sample with which to detect patterns in his narrative technique, any endeavor along these lines remains purely subjective and open to individual interpretation. Indeed, nearly a century of scholarship produced inconclusive, if not self-contradictory, findings and little or no agreement among scholars on even the most fundamental points.⁶⁷

Baron’s conclusions here are reminiscent of the earlier comments by Porter and Dyer regarding the inconclusive and self-contradictory state of Synoptic source theories.

Luke Pitcher is also skeptical of traditional source criticism, observing,

Once one admits the possibility that the historian one is analyzing might himself be discriminating between sources, combining different accounts, putting his own slant upon narrative and interpretation, and

64. Aune, *New Testament*, 83.

65. Aune, *New Testament*, 139.

66. Baron, *Timaeus*, 13.

67. Baron, *Timaeus*, 13–14.

possibly inserting plausible material of his own devising, the whole enterprise becomes an order of magnitude more complicated, and the “results” it produces a lot more provisional. The temptation to keep things neat by excluding this possibility is therefore an obvious one.⁶⁸

Abandoning the one-source hypothesis and taking seriously alternative modes of composition, Pitcher embraces a more open and variegated view of the writing methods of ancient historians. The strength of these critiques of traditional source criticism lies primarily in a warranted skepticism of scholars’ knowledge claims about the working methods of the ancient historians.

Taking the critique further, Baron impugns specifically the attempts of scholars to recover lost texts through the “divining” of unreferenced fragments. He explains, “In my opinion, it is pointless to search for traces of Timaeus where he is not explicitly named until we can be positive that we have a proper understanding of his historiography.”⁶⁹ However, Baron adds, “Even then, I personally remain unconvinced that we can ever develop a secure method of divining implicit or unnamed ‘fragments’ of Timaeus or any other lost historian.”⁷⁰ Baron rejects as effectively worthless for historical research any attempt to discover “not explicitly named” fragments of lost works in extant historiographical texts. He does not reject a belief that extant historical works often have some type of dependent textual relationship with lost texts, but rather that modern historians are able somehow to identify unnamed fragments of those lost works without any explicit indicators.

Pitcher is also skeptical of efforts to divine lost sources, writing,

Confidence that a particular statement in an extant historian can be chased down to its original source when that source is lost and the extant historian does not name it is often misplaced. It is a regrettable fact of scholarship on ancient historiography that these dubious premises *have* sometimes been assumed . . . It has produced some notable excesses.⁷¹

68. Pitcher, *Writing Ancient History*, 89.

69. Baron, *Timaeus*, 14. All of Timaeus’s writings are lost, except for various explicit quotations in extant texts.

70. Baron, *Timaeus*, 14n56.

71. Pitcher, *Writing Ancient History*, 78 (italics original).

He later cautions, "It is wise not to be too sanguine about how much of a lost source can reasonably be excavated on the basis of its traces in later texts, even when there are several of them to act as controls on one another."⁷² The main point underlying the comments of Baron and Pitcher is an epistemic one: while fully acknowledging that lost texts often played a role in the composition of the extant works of historians like Diodorus, they want scholars to embrace appropriate epistemic limitations on what can be claimed to be known about texts they cannot see on the basis of texts they can see.

The abstract nature of these kinds of source critical questions leads Pitcher to consider broader philosophical issues involved in historical inquiry and the formulation of theories. Like Gregory above, he observes that the limited amount of ancient data enable situations in which contradictory hypotheses can coexist. He writes,

On the basis of what we *can* see about the texts we have, we can form theories and models to explain why they are the way they are. The problem we then encounter is that, in the dearth of evidence, multiple models may well turn out to fit the data at our disposal equally well . . . The mere fact that a model fits the available evidence does not guarantee that other models do not.⁷³

I am convinced that these remarks shed light not only on problems that have plagued the source criticism of ancient historians but also on why contradictory theories happily coexist in the source criticism of the Synoptic Gospels.

As with the ancient historians, Synoptic scholars (1) wish that they had more evidence to illuminate the circumstances which produced these ancient texts and (2) it appears the limited data enable unfalsifiable theories about Synoptic origins perpetually to coexist. Under these conditions, it is tempting to think that if scholars just had more evidence or sufficient evidence then the perennial problem of contradictory source theories could be resolved or would naturally go away. That may be a possibility, but it is not necessarily the case. History and experience teach us that more evidence does not invariably dissuade adherents of a particular theory from abandoning it. Once again, we can formulate the problem in the form of a paradox:

72. Pitcher, *Writing Ancient History*, 84.

73. Pitcher, *Writing Ancient History*, 88 (italics original).

how can it be the case that mutually exclusive source theories can be held simultaneously by rational scholars analyzing the exact same evidence?

Although the lack of data certainly increases the difficulty of obtaining answers about the ancient past, the lack of data is not necessarily the primary condition enabling contradictory theories to coexist. We know this because even in circumstances where data and evidence are abundant, it still remains the case that perfectly rational people, even professional academics, confronted with exactly the same data arrive at alternative conclusions. This forces us to consider a larger philosophical reality that Pierre Duhem and later W. V. O. Quine famously demonstrated, which is that for any theory and any evidence there are in principle an infinite number of different hypotheses that can be made consistent with that evidence, an argument sometimes called the “underdetermination of theory by evidence.”⁷⁴

There are lots of examples where the data and evidence for problems are abundant and readily available yet there continue to exist perfectly consistent alternative hypotheses and rational individuals who hold them. This is just a fact of human intellectual existence. No one, as the philosopher John Searle likes to point out, is ever forced to the conclusion that the earth is round. Certainly, the evidence for its roundness is overwhelming, but people can always invent alternative hypotheses that will account for the evidence. A particularly dramatic example demonstrating this point is the modern flat earth movement.⁷⁵ Now, I suppose it is possible that a group of Synoptic scholars could believe so strongly in their theory of Synoptic development that they become tempted to characterize their opponents as the intellectual equivalents of “flat earthers.” However, in view of the strong arguments, observed above, of Tuckett, Gregory, and Derrenbacker stressing the uncertainty and tentative nature of source theories, such a move seems unlikely.

Returning to the critique of source criticism, I note another classicist who challenges traditional source criticism. Charles Muntz argues, in several articles and a 2017 book, against the older approach that “Diodorus mechanically copied a single source for a particular period.”⁷⁶ Recognizing this view was the prevailing orthodoxy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Muntz notes that recent scholarship reveals an “increasing recognition that

74. See Stanford, “Underdetermination.”

75. For a fascinating and disturbing presentation of the flat earth movement, see *Behind the Curve*.

76. Muntz, *Diodorus Siculus*, 15; “Sources”; “Diodorus Siculus.”

the assumptions underlying much of the scholarship involving *Quellenforschung* as it is applied to Diodorus are at best simplistic.”⁷⁷

From yet a different angle, Marincola questions the effort to assess lost works based on fragments from extant texts, whether those fragments are explicitly named or not. He writes, “The use of fragments to determine the nature of a lost work is haphazard at best.”⁷⁸ To illustrate, he appeals to the work of Dominique Lenfant who through examining the quotations and paraphrases of Herodotus in later authors demonstrated “how skewed our notion of Herodotus’ work would be if we relied only on quotations in later authors.”⁷⁹ Pitcher speaks further to this issue, noting, “The processes by which historical ‘fragments’ have been transmitted to the present day not only rob them of their immediate context but . . . can make it perilous to assume that any particular fragment is necessarily representative of its author’s oeuvre.”⁸⁰ The scholars surveyed in this section represent an important sample from the chorus of critiques that have been raised against traditional source criticism in the study of the ancient historians.

At this juncture, it is worth highlighting some implications of the critiques which appear to be directly relevant to the debate over identifying texts among the “many” of Luke. While accepting that a direct textual relationship involving compilation, paraphrase, and copying often existed between the lost texts of Hellenistic historians and extant historical texts, some classicists remain skeptical not only of scholars’ ability to “divine” unreferenced fragments of lost authors but, in Baron’s case, that scholars “can ever develop a secure method of divining implicit or unnamed ‘fragments’” of lost historical texts.⁸¹ If this perspective were adopted in New Testament scholarship, it would call into question the entire enterprise to identify and assess the lost source commonly referred to as Q. Taking Baron’s more conservative approach would result neither in denying that a text like Q ever existed nor that Luke consulted an otherwise unknown text. Rather, his approach effectively denies that scholars are capable of knowing about lost texts on the basis of fragments never named in an ancient text. Marincola,

77. Muntz, *Diodorus Siculus*, 18.

78. Marincola, *Greek Historians*, 17.

79. Marincola, *Greek Historians*, 17; Lenfant, “Peut-on Se Fier Aux ‘fragments’ d’historiens?”

80. Pitcher, *Writing Ancient History*, 149.

81. Baron, *Timaeus*, 14.

Pitcher, and Muntz reinforce this perspective by questioning scholars' abilities to assess both putative source texts and their use by later authors purely on the basis of named or unnamed fragments.

The underlying issues of circularity of reasoning, overly simplistic depictions of the working methods of historians, and divining of unnamed fragments from extant texts all remain potential problems with which source critical theories must reckon, be they in the classics or New Testament. Taking a more skeptical approach to tenets like the one-source hypothesis and the divining of unreferenced fragments could have a profound impact on the future of New Testament source criticism. For example, a skeptical approach toward the *lex Volquardsen* might lead scholars to conclude, on the one hand, as Muntz does with Diodorus, that "the assumptions underlying much of the scholarship involving *Quellenforschung* as it is applied to Synoptic Gospels are at best simplistic," and on the other hand, like Baron that "any endeavor along these lines remains purely subjective and open to individual interpretation . . . [and] nearly a century of scholarship produced inconclusive, if not self-contradictory, findings and little or no agreement among scholars on even the most fundamental points."⁸² Perhaps taking a skeptical perspective toward these presuppositions might enable progress beyond the current Synoptic Problem stalemate. Be that as it may, any vision of progress must also be conditioned by an awareness that multiple source theories could fit the available data equally well and that there exists at present no epistemological high ground from which the source theories can be definitively falsified.

This section has shown that dialogue with the broader guild concerning source criticism could embolden scholars to take a more skeptical stance toward the validity of the one-source hypothesis as a model for explaining the compositional method of the author of Luke–Acts. Listening to the broader guild has also made us aware that circular reasoning, overly simplistic depictions of the working methods of historians, and divining of unnamed fragments from extant texts remain potential problems in the practice of source criticism. Finally, dialogue with the broader guild has provided greater understanding for why mutually exclusive source theories can be held simultaneously by rational scholars analyzing the exact same evidence;

82. Baron, *Timaheus*, 13–14.

this is owing to the fact that multiple models designed to explain a text can turn out to fit the data equally well.

Critique of New Testament Source Criticism

This section critiques representative examples of New Testament source criticism in dialogue with the primary and secondary literature of the ancient historians. We will see how the analysis of the works of ancient historians has provided an important, if not primary, scholarly framework for understanding the development and composition of the Synoptic Gospels. When it comes to analyzing the New Testament Gospels and ancient writing conventions, few scholars have published more on the topic than Streeter, Downing, and Derrenbacker. The works by these scholars have been very important to discussions of source criticism in New Testament and it is to their conclusions that scholars, such as Aune, Bauckham, Keener, Kloppenborg, and Goodacre, appeal when endorsing notions like the one source at a time hypothesis. Starting with Streeter, I will cross-examine these three scholars' portraits of ancient compositional method focusing especially on their handling of Luke–Acts.

We turn now to evaluate the substantial contribution of Streeter. Derrenbacker identifies Streeter as “perhaps the most influential advocate of Markan priority and Q in the first half of the twentieth century.”⁸³ Kloppenborg calls Streeter’s *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins*, “the classic British formulation of the two-document hypothesis.”⁸⁴ Tuckett comments, “*The Four Gospels* . . . has become almost a mini-‘Bible’ for English-speaking scholarship on the Synoptic Problem.”⁸⁵ In Part 1, Streeter considers the “Manuscript Tradition,” in which he assesses the text critical status of the Gospels at the time of publication. Today, the book is probably more well-known for Part 2, in which he proposes a fundamental solution to the “Synoptic Problem.”

To open Part 2, Streeter provides a brief synopsis of the chapters and their sections. The bullet-point synopsis begins,

83. Derrenbacker, “‘External and Psychological Conditions,’” 439n12.

84. Kloppenborg, *Formation of Q*, 17.

85. Tuckett, “Theological Issues,” 12.

Historians and their Sources

The conception of “copyright”—a consequence of the invention of printing—has entirely changed the conditions under which it is legitimate for authors to make use of previous writers. Ancient historians frequently reproduce almost verbatim considerable portions of the work of their predecessors.⁸⁶

This last sentence is misleading at best. In particular, it is misleading to suggest that almost verbatim copying occurred frequently among ancient historians when the very origins of history writing with Herodotus and Thucydides indicate unequivocally that the proper sources for writing about contemporary events did not consist in simply copying prior texts but rather in the author’s autopsy, oral inquiry of eyewitnesses, and travel.

This is an early indication that Streeter lacked awareness that ancient historians reporting about contemporary events claimed very different sources and methods than historians recounting non-contemporary events. An equally large problem involves Streeter’s assertion that the printing press “entirely changed the conditions under which it is legitimate for authors to make use of previous writers” since this implies that copying other writer’s work without acknowledgment, or plagiarism, was not considered an ethical violation in the ancient world.⁸⁷

In chapter 7, entitled “The Fundamental Solution,” Streeter offers his account of “Historians and Their Sources.”⁸⁸ To begin, he reflects on modern writing practices, observing, “The mechanical invention of printing has reacted on the methods and conventions of authorship itself in more ways than we are apt to imagine. When books were copied by hand, copyright had no commercial value; no kind of injury could be done either to author or publisher by anyone who made and sold copies. But in the setting up of a printed book capital is sunk.”⁸⁹ Streeter’s main point that the printing press changed the world of authors, publishers, and books is valid and important to the discussion. Nevertheless, it is demonstrably false to say that in the ancient world “no kind of injury could be done . . . to an author” through theft or misrepresentation of another’s work as one’s own, even if Streeter’s pri-

86. Streeter, *Four Gospels*, 151.

87. Streeter, *Four Gospels*, 151.

88. Streeter, *Four Gospels*, 155.

89. Streeter, *Four Gospels*, 155.

mary meaning was that “no kind of financial injury could be done.”⁹⁰ Thus, a major misstep for Streeter is his attempt to argue that copying other people’s work, or what we would call plagiarism, was by and large not considered an ethical violation in the ancient world.⁹¹

Two points on which Streeter lays great stress are that the printing press changed the “manner and conditions under which it is legitimate to make use of what others have written” and that this “change is one which affects historical more than any other kind of writing.”⁹² Broadly speaking, what he wants to argue is that prior to the printing press it was more or less legitimate for historians “to make use of what others have written” without asking permission or acknowledging one’s debt to an earlier text or author.⁹³ This conclusion is partially true. Streeter’s discussion of the printing press is intended to provide a sort of *longue durée* perspective with which to contrast modern history writing practices with ancient ones. What is critical to note is that this discussion of the ancient historians and their sources provides the comparative framework which Streeter will use to formulate his “fundamental solution” to the Synoptic Problem. Consequently, it follows that if Streeter’s analysis of the ancient historians is inaccurate and flawed, then the framework he uses to illustrate the compositional methods of the authors of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke is likely also to be inaccurate and flawed.

90. While the context suggests “financial injury” is what he probably means, the literal statement, “no kind of injury could be done,” cannot stand the weight of the ancient data.

91. See McGill, *Plagiarism*. Incidentally, a search of Streeter’s text on Google Books finds the word “copying” commonly employed to describe the use of Mark by Matthew and Luke (see, e.g., 170, 213, 270, 288, 429, etc.). By contrast, the words “plagiarism,” “theft,” “steal”/“stole,” “appropriation,” “cribbing,” “lifting,” “infringement,” and “borrowing” do not occur.

92. Streeter, *Four Gospels*, 155.

93. The demonstrably false assumption that verbatim copying of another author’s work without attribution—i.e., plagiarism—was acceptable in the ancient pervades much of Synoptic scholarship. Ehrman (“Apocryphal Forgeries”) appears to have been the first to identify this problem in Synoptic scholarship while Richards (“Was Matthew a Plagiarist?”) largely agreed and expanded the discussion.

Concerning the historians, Streeter declares, “Whenever a historian is not an actual eye-witness of the events he records, or the first to write down a living tradition, he is bound to depend to a large extent on the works of previous historians.”⁹⁴ This assertion is ambiguous in several different ways. First, it is unclear whether Streeter intends it to be received as a sort of universal axiom for the practice of history writing for all time or if he intends it to apply more narrowly as a particular description of the practices of ancient historians. Second, it is unclear if Streeter is saying one of two things: Anyone aspiring to write a history of events to which he was not an eyewitness or the very first person to record the testimony of eyewitnesses to those events is (a) inevitably bound, that is, constrained (somehow) to depend to a large extent on the works of previous historians, or (b) will inevitably be bound, that is, will probably depend to a large extent on the works of previous historians. If Streeter means the former, then we have to ask, what on earth would have constrained any historian from going straight to the available eyewitnesses, recording their testimony, and incorporating that testimony into a new account? If Streeter means the latter, then there is ample evidence from the ancient historians that completely invalidates this assertion, specifically with respect to the historians of contemporary events. Put simply, both (a) and (b) suggest Streeter’s views on the methods of ancient historians are problematic.

The evidence from the ancient historians indicates that failing to be “an actual eyewitness of the events” and failing to be “the first to write down a living tradition” did not prevent historians of recent events from writing new accounts that directly conflicted with prior histories published by actual eyewitnesses. Josephus attests to this reality at the start of his *Jewish War*:

The war fought by the Jews against the Romans was not only the greatest war of our time but could well be one of the greatest collisions between states or nations of which word has come down to us. The historians of this war fall into two categories: those who had no part in the events have gathered from hearsay a random collection of inconsistent stories and made a rhetorical exercise of them; whereas the participants distort the facts either to flatter the Romans or out of

94. Streeter, *Four Gospels*, 155–56.

hatred for the Jews, and in their writings you will find denunciation here, glorification there, but historical accuracy nowhere.⁹⁵

So, Josephus, an eyewitness and participant, writes his account in order to challenge several existing accounts, some of which were written by eyewitnesses and participants and others written on the basis of hearsay and contradictory stories. The historian Polybius also wrote in a context of competing accounts.

Well after Josephus published his work, Justus of Tiberias published yet another account which attacked Josephus's eyewitness account of the *Jewish War*. Subsequently, Josephus responded to Justus's account, in his autobiographical treatise *Life*, by repeatedly stressing that Justus was not an eyewitness at key events in the war in which he (Josephus) was both an eyewitness and participant. Even if Justus was not an eyewitness nor the first to write down these events, as Streeter emphasizes, the evidence indicates that Justus had access to eyewitnesses as he was a close confidant of Agrippa II, the last Judean monarch.⁹⁶ As part of Agrippa's inner circle, Justus would undoubtedly have had access to lots of eyewitnesses, participants, and knowledgeable informants to the events and would have represented these as sources of information for his account, rather than, as Streeter presupposes, *the works of previous historians*.

In fact, had Justus claimed to rely simply on prior texts to write his account, it is certain that Josephus would have mocked him for it, exactly as one of his great models, Polybius, mocked Timaeus for relying on books.⁹⁷ More than any other extant historian, Polybius was at pains to contrast the Thucydidean method of history writing with the method of "library histori-

95. *War* 1.1–2 (Goodman). All subsequent quotations of Josephus (*War*) are from this translation unless otherwise noted.

96. Mason discusses the evidence and concludes, "It appears from both Photius' notice and the evidence here in the *Life* that Iustus based his authority as a historian on his close connection with Agrippa II. He had undeniably been a member of Agrippa's inner circle" (see Josephus, *Life*, 136n1371). Milikowsky thoroughly reevaluated the fragmentary data on Justus, and concludes, "I think we can conclusively affirm that Justus was an accomplished scholar of both Jewish and Hellenistic learning" ("Justus of Tiberias," 126).

97. Eckstein ("Josephus and Polybius") convinced scholars of Polybius's direct and significant influence on Josephus. Gruen ("Polybius and Josephus on Rome," 152) reaffirms this conclusion.

ans” who neither participated in the events they recount, nor travelled to speak with eyewitnesses. Those authors, instead, took “the pleasanter, but inferior route” (*Hist.* 12.27 [Waterfield]) of simply rewriting the accounts of prior authors. In a famous attack on the historian Timaeus, Polybius (*Hist.* 12.27–28 [Waterfield]) declares,

We are naturally endowed with two instruments, so to speak, to help us acquire information and undertake research. Of the two, sight is, as Heraclitus says, much more reliable, eyes being more accurate witnesses than ears. For his research, however, Timaeus took the pleasanter, but inferior route—which is to say that he completely avoided making use of sight and worked entirely through hearing. But there are two kinds of hearing-based research, and although Timaeus was a very meticulous reader, he behaved in a slipshod manner when it came to questioning informants, as I have already mentioned. It is not difficult to see why he chose this research method. Book-based research is free of risk and hardship—or at least it is if you ensure that you find yourself either a city where there are plenty of historical works available, or a nearby library. Then all you have to do is recline on a couch while carrying out your research and collating the statements of earlier writers, and there is no hardship involved in that. But although investigative work involves a great deal of discomfort and expense, it has a great deal to offer in return; in fact, it is the most important thing a historian can do. . . . Not that Timaeus cared about any of this in the slightest. No, he lived his entire life away from home in a single place [i.e., Athens], almost as if he deliberately avoided any active involvement in war and politics, or any personal experience of travel and sight-seeing It easy for me to prove Timaeus’ reliance on books, because he admits it.

In this one quote, we can see both that some historians did rewrite and incorporate, perhaps verbatim, content from prior accounts and that other historians disdained such an approach, especially when it involved reporting about recent events.⁹⁸ The contrast in sources and methods Polybius em-

98. As an aside, any account of the “verbatim” use of prior texts, or copying, in the ancient world needs to balance the discussion, on the one hand, with the rhetorical schools teaching students to creatively rewrite texts as opposed to slavishly copying them, and on the other hand, the accusations of theft, or plagiarism. Although New Testament scholars have neglected the latter subject, a number have

phasizes corresponds largely to the divide among ancient historians between those who followed the tradition of Herodotus and Thucydides of reporting about contemporary events and those who rejected that tradition and wrote about non-contemporary events on the basis of books and oral tradition. The evidence is clear that both Josephus and Polybius ridiculed authors who wrote about the past by simply rewriting the earlier accounts of historians.⁹⁹ While many more passages could be provided from the ancient historians, these examples are sufficient to expose the inadequacy of Streeter's claim that "whenever a historian is not an actual eye-witness of the events he records, or the first to write down a living tradition, he is bound to depend to a large extent on the works of previous historians."¹⁰⁰

The next passage from Streeter reveals further questionable assumptions concerning how ancient historians composed their accounts. Streeter writes,

In antiquity . . . and in the Middle Ages, only the writings of a few outstanding men like Thucydides are wholly original; more commonly the historian pursued what we should call a method of "scissors and paste." Without any acknowledgment, he will copy page after page from his source, omitting passages that for his purpose seem irrele-

realized in view of the rhetorical schools that it is not the differences between the Synoptic Gospels which need an explanation, but rather the high amount of agreement. See Downing, "Redaction Criticism" 33; Kloppenborg, "Variation," 101–12; Gregory, "What Is Literary Dependence?" 89; Derrenbacker, "Ancient Literacy," 84; and Bauckham, "Gospel of John," 660–63.

99. With respect to Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities*, it must be noted that he represents this work as a "translation" of the ancient Hebrew writings rather than a "non-contemporary history." Feldman (*Judean Antiquities*, 3n3) notes the similarities between *Antiquities* and non-contemporary histories but concludes that Josephus's stated method was different than non-contemporary historians, writing, "The similarity is a superficial one . . . his method differs in that his task is not to rearrange and criticize ancient memories but to transmit texts unaltered." He further highlights the role of "translation" in *Antiquities* noting the same verb Josephus uses in the preface (1.5) to describe his translation work of the *Antiquities* is the same verb used to describe the translation of the LXX (*Ant.* 12.20, 48). Moreover, lest readers forget his role as translator, he reminds them midway through *Antiquities* that he was "only translating the books of the Hebrew into the Greek tongue, promising to report their contents without adding anything of my own to the narrative or omitting anything there-from" (10.218).

100. Streeter, *Four Gospels*, 155–56.

vant, adding here and there material from some other authority. What he copies he frequently gives almost word for word, but he will often abridge, and occasionally paraphrase, in order to elucidate some difficulty or to preclude what he would regard as a false impression which the language of the original might convey.¹⁰¹

If one wishes to examine the basis for these conclusions, Streeter only offers the following explanation: “This kind of editorial adaptation of earlier sources can be traced in all the historical books of the Old Testament, and in many classical and mediaeval writers.”¹⁰² We briefly encountered the “scissors and paste” view of ancient historians above with respect to depictions of Diodorus’s method and noted classicists who dispute the adequacy of that description. Leaving that point aside, I have presented enough primary and secondary literature on the ancient historians to establish that Streeter badly misrepresents the tradition of Greek history writing to which Luke aligned his work, namely, contemporary history writing.¹⁰³ Although the tradition of non-contemporary history writing was vulnerable, as we have seen, to the charge of simply rewriting prior texts, which I suppose could be construed by modern scholars as a “scissors and paste” method, contemporary history writing was definitely not characterized by rewriting texts, but rather by autopsy, personal inquiry, speaking with eyewitnesses, and travel.

As noted above, one of the main premises that led to the scissors-and-paste portrait of ancient authors is the one source at a time hypothesis. It is also perhaps worth noting that Streeter’s discussion and application of the one-source hypothesis occur almost exclusively in his exposition of the author Luke. For example, when identifying his tendencies, Streeter writes, “Luke in his use of Mark and Proto-Luke differs from Matthew in three ways. (1) He *as a rule* avoids conflating his sources. (2) He usually gives

101. Streeter, *Four Gospels*, 156.

102. Streeter, *Four Gospels*, 156.

103. Scholars who argue that Luke emulated the tradition of Herodotus and Thucydides include Plümacher, “Stichwort”; “Eine Thukydidesreminiszenz”; Moles, “Luke’s Preface”; “Accommodation”; Müller, “Διήγησις nach Lukas,” 102; Dormeyer, *New Testament*, 243; Schröter, “Zur Stellung der Apostelgeschichte,” 41; Peters, *Luke*; and Morgan, “Prophetic Historiography.”

them in approximately their original order. (3) He has a tendency to follow one source at a time.”¹⁰⁴

This is the first explicit indication in the book that Streeter presumes Luke more or less copied one source at a time. Also worthy of highlighting is that for these three tendencies Streeter presumes Luke’s “sources” of information were written texts, as opposed to eyewitnesses or knowledgeable informants. Elsewhere Streeter stresses Luke in relation to the one-source hypothesis:

The observation that Luke in general seems to follow one source at a time and to reproduce it in its original order has proved a valuable clue. But a generalization of this kind must not be made a fetish. There is always an incalculable element in the working of the human mind; and there is no reason to suppose that in following one source at a time Luke was adhering to a consciously formulated principle. It was merely that he refrained from rearranging or conflating sources where there was no special reason for doing so.¹⁰⁵

At the time of writing, Streeter may have been able to appeal to a scholarly consensus among classics scholars to defend the one-source hypothesis as an explanation for how the author composed Luke–Acts. As the scholarly landscape has shifted significantly since that time, appeal to the one-source hypothesis to explain Luke–Acts’s composition lacks support. The above passage also reinforces the view that Streeter assumed that Luke relied entirely, or primarily, on “written sources” when composing Luke–Acts.

Streeter next addresses certain data that he believed were problematic for his portrait of the author Luke. His dilemma can be expressed in the following question: If Luke was following and primarily copying Mark’s text, as Streeter argues, then why did he omit the long section of Mark 6:48–8:26 from his account? Streeter’s response to this issue is to assert, without any historical or textual support, that Mark 6:48–8:26 “did not stand in the copy of Mark used by Luke.”¹⁰⁶ It is hard to discern why Streeter believed such a questionable conjecture was necessary, other than he seems convinced that

104. Streeter, *Four Gospels*, 275 (italics original). While Weiss (*Die Quellen*) had earlier concluded that Luke probably worked with one source at a time, Streeter shows no awareness of this work; “Zur Entstehungsgeschichte.”

105. Streeter, *Four Gospels*, 285.

106. Streeter, *Four Gospels*, 290.

the omission threatened his portrait of Luke's compositional method. This conjecture, however, is only the first of several tenuous assumptions Streeter would have us believe regarding Luke's method.

In Streeter's view, it seems that Luke's scissors needed to have some restraints to ensure that everything he excised from Mark was safely pasted elsewhere. As a result, Streeter adds a provision to his conjecture, namely that it is unlikely scissors and paste authors would be capable of making drastic excisions to their source texts. He writes,

If one supposed that Luke was capable of leaving out over 70 continuous verses in one source, he would be capable of making drastic excision in another. Apart, however, from this one passage, Luke's omissions—as distinct from substitution of parallel versions—of material found in Mark are on a very small scale.¹⁰⁷

In other words, Streeter appears to conclude that we can be confident the disputed section must have been missing from the Gospel of Mark, because if we were to suppose “that Luke was capable of leaving out over 70 continuous verses in one source” then we would be opening the door to the further possibility that “he would be capable of making [other] drastic excision[s].” In view of what appears to be special pleading or at least somewhat arbitrary moves to keep things neat, perhaps it is worth recounting the earlier observations of Pitcher:

Once one admits the possibility that the historian one is analyzing might himself be discriminating between sources, combining different accounts, putting his own slant upon narrative and interpretation, and possibly inserting plausible material of his own devising, the whole enterprise becomes an order of magnitude more complicated, and the “results” it produces a lot more provisional. The temptation to keep things neat by excluding this possibility is therefore an obvious one.¹⁰⁸

I would argue that the temptation to keep things neat has unduly affected Streeter's analysis.¹⁰⁹

107. Streeter, *Four Gospels*, 290.

108. Luke Pitcher, *Writing Ancient History*, 89.

109. One example where the analysis is less neat is the following: “We return to the examination of those passages in Luke's great blocks of Q which have no sort

In the end, Streeter's portrait of the author of Luke–Acts is founded upon at least four highly questionable assumptions: (1) the historian employed a scissors and paste approach to the Gospel of Mark; (2) he rewrote or copied one source (text) at a time; (3) his copy of Mark did not contain Mark 6:48–8:26; and (4) he was either averse to or incapable of making drastic excisions to a source text. While all of these suppositions are vulnerable to scrutiny, the one source hypothesis and scissors and paste portraits of ancient historians have received the most criticism.

In the influential article "Compositional Conventions and the Synoptic Problem," Downing declares rather confidently, "We are in a position to tell with a considerable degree of certainty what compositional procedures for making use of existing writings would have been readily available in the first century."¹¹⁰ The basis for Downing's confidence are classic scholars who advocate the one source at a time theory. Citing with approval Jane Hornblower's assessment of Diodorus Siculus, Downing provides the following quote from her claiming that Diodorus "merely paraphrased or extracted, without addition or interpretation, except of the simplest kind . . . He followed his single main source, supplemented by additions which could, in principle, be distinguished."¹¹¹ Downing then interweaves his own parenthetical comment with a Hornblower quote, writing, "(as opposed to any notion that he might have 'spliced his sources together . . . into a framework of his own construction')."¹¹² He next suggests that Streeter provided an antecedent to his own argument, commenting, "The sort of procedure envisaged by, for instance, B. H. Streeter, in his *The Four Gospels*, is of this kind."¹¹³ Downing is correct that Streeter did envisage the same sort of procedure for the Gospel. Downing, however, is not correct when he

of equivalent in Matthew. But we cannot assume that all of them stood in Q . . . [Lk. 14:34-35] probably stood in Q followed immediately by xiv. 26-27. If so, then we have evidence that Luke (or the compiler of Proto-Luke) sometimes allowed himself to interpolate into a Q section highly appropriate matter (e.g. xiv. 28-33) from L. That shows that, on occasion, he would break away from his general rule of following one source at a time" (Streeter, *Four Gospels*, 289).

110. Downing, "Compositional Conventions," 70.

111. Downing, "Compositional Conventions," 72. Hornblower, *Hieronymus*, 280.

112. Downing, "Compositional Conventions," 72.

113. Downing, "Compositional Conventions," 72.

asserts that alternatives to the one-source thesis for understanding ancient historians are “quite without contemporary exemplar.”¹¹⁴ For his part, Downing appears unaware of the distinction among the ancient historians between authors who reported about contemporary events on the basis of autopsy and eyewitness testimony and authors of non-contemporary accounts writing on the basis of texts and oral traditions.

Downing believes that Livy, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and Plutarch also employed the same one source at a time procedure as Diodorus, and declares that “these classical scholars’ reconstructions of compositional conventions in late antiquity are entirely borne out by Lucian’s critical essay *How to Write History*.”¹¹⁵ Convinced that the one source at a time method characterized all ancient history writing, Downing concludes, “On this basis, the Two-Document hypothesis (Mark and ‘Q’ used independently by Matthew and by Luke) fits snugly in the known cultural context of the time.”¹¹⁶ The impact of Downing’s argument can be seen in the development of his insights by, among others, Derrenbacker, Kloppenborg, and Licona.¹¹⁷

Before concluding this section, I would like briefly to highlight the significant work of Derrenbacker. His published dissertation *Ancient Compositional Practices and the Synoptic Problem* disabused scholars of several anachronistic and inadequate views regarding the compositional techniques of ancient writers generally and the authors of the Gospels in particular.¹¹⁸ One unfortunate conclusion he retained and endorsed in this and subsequent publications is the view that ancient authors relied primarily on one source

114. Downing, “Compositional Conventions,” 72.

115. Downing, “Compositional Conventions,” 73. It also appears that Downing does not realize Lucian’s *How to Write History* is satirical and designed to lampoon historians.

116. Downing, “Compositional Conventions,” 70. The thesis is also reflected in “Actuality versus Abstraction” and “Common Ground.”

117. Derrenbacker, *Ancient Compositional Practices*; Kloppenborg, “Variation”; Licona, *Why Are There Differences?*

118. See also the important analysis of Barker qualifying and challenging several of Derrenbacker’s conclusions in “Ancient Compositional Practices” and “Use of Sources.”

at a time when composing their narratives.¹¹⁹ In this way, he develops the perspective inherited from Streeter and Downing. Nevertheless, Derrenbacker appears to lay less stress on the one source hypothesis than his predecessors and foregrounds a whole variety of other compositional techniques that were available to ancient authors thereby offering a more balanced picture of the ancient world.

His most thorough exposition of the one source thesis occurs in chapter 3 of *Ancient Compositional Practices* at the end of which he concludes, “The above authors tend to follow one source at time.”¹²⁰ Several years later, he reiterates the same conclusion in “The ‘External and Psychological Conditions under Which the Synoptic Gospels Were Written’: Ancient Compositional Practices and the Synoptic Problem.”¹²¹ It is important to note that while Derrenbacker’s depictions of ancient authors are more nuanced and diversified than Streeter’s and Downing’s depictions in showing a range of compositional techniques (including oral transmission), his work also confirms that the one-source hypothesis remains prominent as an assumption in New Testament scholarship. Also worthy of note is that Derrenbacker lacks awareness that ancient historians followed two very different compositional approaches regarding sources and methods depending upon whether their subject was contemporary or non-contemporary events.

The representative examples of New Testament source criticism surveyed in this section confirm that the guild remains beholden to a view of the author of Luke–Acts firmly rooted in *old-fashioned source criticism*. The prevailing portraits for the compositional method of Luke–Acts were cross examined in light of the primary and secondary literature of the ancient historians. I demonstrated, among other things, that the one source at a time hypothesis remains firmly in place among the scholarly portraits of Luke’s mode of composition. Taking seriously the critiques of classics scholars should, I hope, cause New Testament scholars to question the use of this construct in explanations for how Luke composed his account. At a

119. Derrenbacker, *Ancient Compositional Practices*; “Greco-Roman Writing Practices”; “External and Psychological Conditions”; “Ancient Literacy.” I intend to engage Derrenbacker’s valuable contributions in this area more fully in a future essay.

120. Derrenbacker, *Ancient Compositional Practices*, 116.

121. The reference to the one-source hypothesis occurs at Derrenbacker, “External and Psychological Conditions,” 440.

minimum, this section and the larger essay have demonstrated that taking seriously the primary and secondary literature on the ancient historians directly affects the assessment of the sources used in writing Luke–Acts and how scholars depict the compositional model of the author.

Conclusion

This essay began by agreeing with Porter and Dyer that the source criticism of the Synoptic Gospels is locked in a “stalemate” of contradictory theories and that progressive discussions are necessary. To that end, I stressed the guidance of Schröter that dialogue with the broader guild of historians must play a necessary role in formulating the methodological and epistemological presuppositions in Jesus research, which encompasses source criticism of the Synoptic Gospels and Acts. A survey of the current state of the Synoptic Problem showed Tuckett, Gregory, and Derrenbacker stressing “the inherent uncertainty and provisional nature of all source theories and ‘conclusions’ in this area of study.”¹²² I agree with those, like Porter and Dyer, who view the lack of progress and mutually exclusive theories perennially coexisting as evidence that more fundamental problems exist in the traditional source critical approaches.

From Luke–Acts’s status as a form of Greek historiography, I then argued that the ancient historians, especially those who reported about contemporary events, provide the most appropriate analogs for understanding the sources and methods used when researching and writing Luke–Acts. The importance of contemporary history writing was emphasized since there existed in antiquity a stark contrast between the sources and methods claimed by historians who reported about contemporary events and those claimed by authors who reported about non-contemporary events.

Next, I turned to survey the classics scholars’ critiques of source criticism, for instance, against depictions of Diodorus as “a scissors-and-paste” historian and the one-source-at-a-time hypothesis of Volquardsen and demonstrated that these critiques illuminate the presuppositions undergirding the source criticism of Luke–Acts and the Synoptic Gospels. The critiques also stress that circularity of reasoning, overly simplistic depictions of the working methods of historians, and divining of unnamed fragments

122. Tuckett, “Current State,” 19.

all remain potential problems with which source critical theories must reckon, be they in the classics or New Testament.

As the strength of these critiques lies in skepticism toward knowledge claims about the working methods of the ancient historians, I argued that New Testament scholars taking a more skeptical approach to the same tenets, such as the one source hypothesis and the divining of unreferenced fragments, would have a profound impact on the future of New Testament source criticism. Dialogue with the broader guild of historians demonstrates that the prevailing approaches in New Testament source criticism are rooted in presuppositions and methods that many classics scholars now reject. At the very least, this discovery should embolden scholars to question the validity of the one source hypothesis as a model for explaining the compositional method of the author of Luke–Acts.

The final section critiqued examples of New Testament source criticism in dialogue with the primary and secondary literature of the ancient historians. It confirmed that the analysis of ancient historians has for at least a century provided a framework for scholars to illustrate the sources and methods of composition for the Synoptic Gospels. More specifically, I showed that Streeter's and Downing's flawed portraits of the ancient historians and their sources directly provide the comparative framework upon which they formulate their solutions to the Synoptic Problem.

New Testament source criticism dealing with Luke–Acts is especially ripe for dialogue with the primary and secondary literature of the ancient historians. The publication from the 2019 Leuven Conference for the Study of the Gospels represents a positive step toward broader engagement with the guild of historians on the subject of source criticism generally, even though they did not engage any of the critiques of source criticism highlighted in this article. In the end, despite demonstrating that the prevailing New Testament approaches to source criticism are rooted in presuppositions and methods now largely rejected by classics scholars, it remains to be seen whether gospel scholars will engage anew the primary and secondary literature of ancient historians in order to reevaluate the default settings that have governed the practice for nearly two centuries.

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