

## HERMOGENES' *PROGYNASMATA*: HOW LUKE TRANSFORMED A JEWISH PROPHET INTO A GREEK HERO

### OS *PROGYNASMATA* DE HERMÓGENES: COMO LUCAS TRANSFORMOU UM PROFETA JUDEU NUM HERÓI GREGO

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#### **Abstract**

Relying on the historical-critical method, I propose an analysis of the nature of the *Gospel of Luke* and its possible dependency on Greek rhetorical conventions. Taking into account the highly literate nature of this Gospel, this paper puts forward the case that its author has been educated in the Greek rhetorical exercise of encomion, as documented in Hermogenes' *progymnasmata*. Empowered by his knowledge of encomion, Luke probably used the *Gospel of Mark* as a template to compose a eulogy of Jesus of Nazareth. In light of this, I suggest a list with the correspondence between Hermogenes' encomiastic topics and the pericopae used by Luke in his Gospel. Considering the hypothesis that the *Gospel of Luke* is best understood as an encomion, I propose an assessment of its implications to the reconstruction of the historical Jesus.

**Keywords:** *Gospel of Luke*, *Progymnasmata*, encomion, Greek rhetoric, historical Jesus.

#### **Resumo**

Apoiando-me no método histórico-crítico, o que proponho neste artigo é uma análise da natureza do *Evangelho de Lucas* e a sua possível dependência de convenções retóricas gregas. Tendo em conta o caráter literário deste Evangelho,

este trabalho postula que o seu autor foi educado no exercício de Retórica grega de encómio, tal como documentado nos *Progymnasmata* de Hermógenes. Empoderado pelo conhecimento deste tipo de composição, Lucas provavelmente usou o *Evangelho de Marcos* como modelo para escrever um elogio de Jesus de Nazaré. À luz disto, sugiro uma lista com a correspondência entre os tópicos encomiásticos de Hermógenes e as perícopes usadas por Lucas no seu Evangelho. Considerando a hipótese que o *Evangelho de Lucas* é mais bem compreendido como um encómio, proponho uma avaliação das suas implicações para a reconstrução da figura histórica de Jesus Cristo.

**Palavras-chave:** *Evangelho de Lucas*, *Progymnasmata*, encómio, retórica grega, Jesus histórico.

### **Hellenistic *paideia*, rhetoric, and early Christian literature**

One fundamental element that was ubiquitous in Greek *paideia* strikes us for its absence from contemporary curricula: rhetoric. Should we follow Henri-Irénée Marrou's levels of Hellenistic education as presented in *A History of Education in Antiquity*, it is when we reach the pinnacle of higher education that we find the teaching of this subject. Rhetoric, alongside or in competition with philosophy, represented the gold standard that determined how cultivated a man actually was.<sup>1</sup> Marrou goes as far as saying that "Hellenistic culture was above all things a rhetorical culture."<sup>2</sup> Among the various rhetorical exercises performed by Hellenistic students we find the encomion. This practice can be defined as a praise to a "person, living or dead, real or mythical."<sup>3</sup> Initially used in funeral orations, it was later expanded to include high officials in Rome, the most important of which the emperor.<sup>4</sup> Far from being a goal in themselves, these preliminary exercises in rhetoric informed the composition of different literary genres. As advanced by George A. Kennedy, "progymnasmatic forms were often combined in different ways to create epics, dramas, histories, and the genres of lyric poetry."<sup>5</sup> He further acknowledges that the writings of both Greeks, Romans, and Christians, including the Gospels, "were moulded by the habits

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<sup>1</sup> Marrou 1956: 267.

<sup>2</sup> Marrou 1956: 269.

<sup>3</sup> Marrou 1956: 272.

<sup>4</sup> Kennedy 1994: 205.

<sup>5</sup> Kennedy 2003: ix.

of thinking and writing learned in schools.”<sup>6</sup> Effectively, Christian writers such as the author of the *Gospel of Luke* “were familiar with some Greek literature, and used devices of classical rhetoric freely.”<sup>7</sup>

### **What is the *Gospel of Luke*?**

Before addressing the question in the heading, it is important for me to declare the presuppositions my argument on the composition of the *Gospel of Luke* relies on. The first assumption is methodological and has to do with compliance with the historical-critical method. The second one is hypothetical and pertains to my position on the synoptic problem. Like the majority of New Testament scholars, I am persuaded that the *Gospel of Mark* was the first of the synoptic Gospels to be composed.<sup>8</sup> However, I do not find the existence of a Q source persuasive, as arguing from a document we have no physical record of undermines scientific rigour. With this in mind, the position of scholars such as François Bovon who goes as far as defending that Luke, in addition to the *Gospel of Mark* and Q, even had access to a special source called (L)<sup>9</sup> seems difficult to sustain from a historical standpoint. When it comes to the synoptic problem, the proposal I find most compelling is the one positing that the *Gospel of Luke* came second, as argued by Robert MacEwen<sup>10</sup> and Bartosz Adamczewski.<sup>11</sup> If this hypothesis is correct, the synoptic problem would be solved with literary dependency between the three Gospels in the following order: *Gospel of Mark*, *Gospel of Luke*, *Gospel of Matthew*.

Luke's competence as a historian is occasionally praised in academic circles. Arguments such as the elevation of his Greek or his knowledge of names and titles of ancient rulers are often used in defence of this position. However, a close examination of this Gospel should give us some pause for reflexion. If one wishes to assess if the evangelists are writing History or not, relying on the word ‘Gospel’ does not provide much help. This designation does not signal any genre, as it simply means “good news”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Idem.

<sup>7</sup> Kennedy 1994: 258.

<sup>8</sup> Ehrman 2014: 70.

<sup>9</sup> Bovon 2002: 7.

<sup>10</sup> MacEwen 2015: 2.

<sup>11</sup> Adamczewski 2010: 173.

<sup>12</sup> Crossan 2014: 16.

or “announcement.”<sup>13</sup> In addition to that, ‘Gospel’ was never part of the original title of the book, having been associated with it only around 180 CE by Irenaeus of Lyon. In Lk 1:1, the author tells us that *polloi epecheirēsan anataxasthai diēgēsīn*<sup>14</sup> and that he too had decided to write *akribōs kathexēs*.<sup>15</sup> It is thus plausible to conclude that Luke’s intention was to write a *diēgēsīn* as did others before him. The term *diēgēsīn* is rather broad in scope and can be defined as a “language descriptive of things that have happened or as though they had happened.”<sup>16</sup> As such, from this term alone, it is not possible to determine whether the author of Luke is writing History or any other genre. In assessing Luke’s level of education, Sean Adams specified the rhetorical exercises this author seems to have been exposed to, namely chreia, fable and narrative.<sup>17</sup> Encomion, possibly the most evident of them all, is strangely absent. As a standard exercise in the teaching of rhetoric, Marrou places the encomion at the level of higher education.<sup>18</sup> In light of this, positions such as that of Osvaldo Padilla, who suggests that “Luke does not display some of the basic distinctive marks of a rhetorically educated individual”<sup>19</sup> concluding that “he was not highly educated in the literate tradition,”<sup>20</sup> seem hardly tenable. Equally incomprehensible is William Kurz’s position on the influence of encomion on Luke, going as far as saying that epideictic, rhetoric of praise or blame, “is least important for Luke-Acts and can be mentioned in passing.”<sup>21</sup> Although Kurz dismisses some of the progymnasmata as schoolboy exercises,<sup>22</sup> this is far from the case. As conveyed by Marrou when addressing the nature of encomion:

...it was much more than a school exercise... it was also a literary genre in its own right, and one that was often practised.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Mason 2013: 8.

<sup>14</sup> Lk 1:1.

<sup>15</sup> Lk 1:3.

<sup>16</sup> Kennedy 2003: 28.

<sup>17</sup> Adams 2016: 144.

<sup>18</sup> Marrou 1956: 267.

<sup>19</sup> Padilla 2009: 435.

<sup>20</sup> Idem.

<sup>21</sup> Kurz 1980: 190.

<sup>22</sup> Kurz 1980: 186.

<sup>23</sup> Marrou 1956: 272.

As we've seen earlier, whenever ancient authors engaged in literary activity, they could do so in the form of fictional narratives. A brief recollection of other narratives enlightens us in terms of the intentions of their authors. When referring to Dionysus of Halicarnassus' *On Literary Composition*, George Kennedy stresses that "although it preserves some valuable information derived from earlier sources, it is chiefly remarkable as an example of rhetorical amplification in historiography."<sup>24</sup> Prose composed in the Augustan Age such as Livy's *History of Rome* "continues to resemble writings of Cicero in its inclination to amplification."<sup>25</sup> The deployment of rhetoric is also present in historians such as Tacitus, whose use of declamation permeates a number of his works.<sup>26</sup> We must keep in mind that progymnasmata, i.e., preliminary exercises in rhetoric, were fundamental to the teaching of declamation in schools.<sup>27</sup>

Focusing on the Gospels, Philip Shuler informs us that we are in presence of "a narrative form which was not composed primarily for the purpose of recording events."<sup>28</sup> If we take the *Gospel of John* as proxy, we learn that this type of narratives were written to persuade people of the Christian message.<sup>29</sup> In his comprehensive commentary on the *Gospel of Luke*, Bovon seems to concur by stating that the author "would rather persuade than instruct."<sup>30</sup> Put in these terms, the goal of the evangelists seems to reflect William Kurz's remark about the *raison d'être* of rhetorical argument: its objective "is not to provide epistēmē, it is rather to provide persuasion."<sup>31</sup> Philip Shuler reinforces the point:

Their narratives [those of the synoptic Gospels] may be properly understood as examples of the 'encomium' type with the qualification that they are written to accomplish more than admiration, namely, faith.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Kennedy 1994: 161.

<sup>25</sup> Kennedy 1994: 173.

<sup>26</sup> Kennedy 1994: 174.

<sup>27</sup> Adams 2016: 139.

<sup>28</sup> Shuler 1975: iv.

<sup>29</sup> Jn 20:31.

<sup>30</sup> Bovon 2002: 5.

<sup>31</sup> Kurz 1980: 175.

<sup>32</sup> Shuler 1975: 303.

In my view, William Farmer's argument about the *Gospel of Matthew* could be equally applied to the *Gospel of Luke*:

Hellenistic rhetoric provided the evangelist [Matthew] with the knowledge of what to include in his gospel if he were to succeed in eliciting and evoking praise and emulation of Jesus.<sup>33</sup>

This opens up the prologue of Luke to the possibility of a different interpretation, that could potentially depart from the common view holding it as historiography. While addressing the use of *kathexēs* by the author of Luke-Acts in Acts 11:4, Michael Parsons builds the bridge to Luke's prologue and its use of the same word:

Peter (and in a larger sense the narrator) is seeking to present the events in a manner that his audience will find convincing. For Luke, then, *kathexēs* here has rather everything to do with a rhetorically persuasive presentation that displays the virtue of clarity. That was what Peter was attempting to do in Acts 11, and it is what Luke purports to do in his preface as well as throughout the rest of his narrative.<sup>34</sup>

Once more, persuasion seems to be the target this evangelist was aiming at. Writing a compelling account of the life of Jesus should thus be kept in mind as the main driver for the composition of the *Gospel of Luke*. However, if we wish to make the case for the exposition of its author to progymnasmata, we need to deepen our analysis. A one-to-one comparison between the progymnasmata topic lists and specific passages in Luke would be required. A similar study has been performed by Michael Martin, who concluded that Luke "displays a close conformity in several regards to progymnastic topical instruction, and in this respect it is no different from other *bioi* of its time."<sup>35</sup> Having also seen the resemblance of these lists with the composition of Luke, Philip Shuler states that this "gospel is a *bios* of the 'encomium' type which has been composed to occupy the central and pivotal position in Luke's account of salvation history."<sup>36</sup> All these elements pertaining to the literary profile of Luke suggest that "the

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<sup>33</sup> Farmer 1975: 45.

<sup>34</sup> Parsons 2004: 52-53.

<sup>35</sup> Martin 2008: 41.

<sup>36</sup> Shuler 1975: 298.

author's roots are in one of the higher strata of society, and that the author had a good education encompassing Greek rhetoric."<sup>37</sup> We see thus some agreement in scholarship that the *Gospel of Luke* bears similarities with rhetorical exercises, the encomion in particular.

### Evaluating Luke's knowledge of Hermogenes' progymnasmata

Our knowledge of the teaching of progymnasmata relies on the work of four rhetors: Theon of Alexandria, Hermogenes of Tarsus, Aphthonius of Antioch, and Nicolaus the Sophist. As we will see later on, I will argue that, of all these traditions, it was the one associated with Hermogenes that informed the composition of the *Gospel of Luke*. For the sake of clarity, I'm not suggesting that its author was trained by Hermogenes himself, but that he had access, in written or oral form, to a topic list similar to one put forward by him. I hereby propose a chronological framing of Luke and Hermogenes.

I find the hypothesis advanced by Steve Mason that Luke-Acts has literary dependency with the *Antiquities of the Jews* (93-94 CE) rather compelling. If he is right, this would place the writing of Luke-Acts at 95 CE or later.<sup>38</sup> If we take 95 CE as the lower limit and allow for the natural dissemination of Josephus' work across the empire, a second century dating for Luke would be more probable. Bearing in mind that Hermogenes lived in the second half of the second century,<sup>39</sup> the writings of both authors are historically close. As I'm not arguing for direct dependency, the chronological framing serves only the purpose of stressing the contemporaneity of both authors. In actual fact, we have good reasons to believe that progymnasmata is a long-standing Greek tradition, that can be traced all the way back to Aristotle.<sup>40</sup> It is likely that the principles he laid out in *Rhetoric* were developed and refined throughout the Hellenistic period. Theon's progymnasmata, generally dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE,<sup>41</sup> shows evidence of this continuity, not to mention the similarities of his encomiastic topic list<sup>42</sup> with that of Hermogenes.<sup>43</sup> The author of Luke-Acts was probably

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<sup>37</sup> Bovon 2002: 8.

<sup>38</sup> Mason 1992: 225.

<sup>39</sup> Lindberg 1997: 1979.

<sup>40</sup> Aristot. *Rh.* 1.5.

<sup>41</sup> Milette 2008: 66.

<sup>42</sup> Kennedy 2003: 50-51.

<sup>43</sup> Kennedy 2003: 82.

exposed to the rules of rhetoric taught in Hellenistic schools and his works naturally bear the mark of progymnasmata, as William Kurz<sup>44</sup> and Robert Simmons<sup>45</sup> have respectively argued.

### **Dating Hermogenes' progymnasmata**

Evidence of the encomion tradition in Greek culture is already present in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. In spite of some nuances specific to each rhetor that came after him, it is possible to see a common thread all the way up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE with Hermogenes' progymnasmata (table 1). For the sake of presentation, I have proceeded in the following manner in the referenced table. I have retained the most salient aspects of Hermogenes' encomion in the right-hand column.<sup>46</sup> Then, I have listed the common elements found in the encomion of the other two authors in the columns to the left. Occasional differences do occur such as in the following examples: magnificence and happiness in old age (present in Aristotle but absent in Theon and Hermogenes), deep feeling and political regime (present in Theon but absent in Aristotle and Hermogenes), and marvellous occurrences at birth and oddities at death (present in Hermogenes but absent in Aristotle and Theon). To Aristotle, encomion was a practice that had more to do with achievements than with intrinsic virtues. In spite of the fact that it is one's character that propitiates those actions, the object of the praising were the exceptional deeds.<sup>47</sup> Good birth, education, courage and wisdom were some of the virtues that were expected to be listed in the praise of an exceptional man. It goes without saying that Aristotle (4<sup>th</sup> century BCE) was one of the most influential philosophers from antiquity. It is not surprising then that when Theon of Alexandria (1<sup>st</sup> century CE) compiled his own list of rhetorical exercises, he relied heavily on the Aristotelian tradition. A perusal of Theon's encomion<sup>48</sup> is sufficient for one to connect the dots. There are elements of discontinuity, or more accurately specification, as Theon presents a detailed list of actions that are expected from the praised individual.

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<sup>44</sup> Kurz 1980: 172.

<sup>45</sup> Simons 2006: 19-20.

<sup>46</sup> The full list can be found in table 4, page 100.

<sup>47</sup> Aristot. *Rh.* 1.9.

<sup>48</sup> *Rhet. Gr.* 2.109-110.

Aristot. <i>Rh.</i> 1.2, 1.5-6, 1-9, 2.17, 2.22	<i>Rhet. Gr.</i> 2.109-110	Kennedy, <i>Progymnasmata</i> , 82
Aristotle’s encomion [4th century BCE]	Theon’s encomion [1st century CE]	Hermogenes’ encomion [2nd century CE]
Marvellous occurrences at birth		
Good birth (race, state, family) Many/good friends Wealth Education Beauty Strength Athleticism Justice Temperance Wisdom Courage Good actions	Noble birth, native city, family Friends Wealth Education Beauty Strength Vitality Justice Temperance Wisdom Courage Good actions	National origin (nation, city, family) Relatives, friends Wealth Nurture, education Beauty Strength Size, swiftness Justice Temperance Wisdom Braveness Good deeds, accomplishments
Manner of death Oddities at death Culprits for death Post-death events Comparison		

Table 1: Similarities in the practice of encomion [4th century BCE - 2nd century CE].

Some examples include: ‘timely action’, ‘original action’, ‘performed alone’ and ‘superior to others.’ Although Aristotle’s presentation is more general, similar actions are implicit in his expectation virtue/

action mentioned above. In extension of the same tradition, Hermogenes (2<sup>nd</sup> century CE) preserves most of the Aristotelian rhetorical elements, complementing them with six others: marvellous occurrences at birth, manner of death, oddities at death, culprits for death, post-death events, and comparison.<sup>49</sup> One should avoid assuming that just because Hermogenes' list is only documented in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the additional rhetorical elements therein were absent from the tradition that preceded it. In fact, we find elements of this type of encomion in the stories conveyed about fictional and historical Greco-Roman figures. Marvellous occurrences are documented in the births of Romulus,<sup>50</sup> Alexander the Great,<sup>51</sup> and Caesar Augustus.<sup>52</sup> Both the deaths of Heracles<sup>53</sup> and Caesar Augustus<sup>54</sup> were accompanied by reports of unusual events. The element of comparison of the praised individual to other figures can be seen in the description of Moses by Philo of Alexandria<sup>55</sup> and in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, as argued by Michael Martin.<sup>56</sup> This evidence seems to suggest that eulogies including elements documented in Hermogenes' list were standard currency in the writings of ancient authors from the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE. The fact they are only physically attested in the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century is explained as the simple action of documenting a set of rhetorical conventions that were already in use before.

### **The *Gospel of Luke* as encomion**

Few topics have generated such intense discussion in New Testament studies as the literary genre of the Gospels. From Michael Licona classifying the Gospels as Greco-Roman biographies,<sup>57</sup> to Paula Fredriksen defending that they are "theological proclamation,

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<sup>49</sup> Kennedy 2003: 82.

<sup>50</sup> Liv. 1.4.

<sup>51</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 3.

<sup>52</sup> Suet. *Aug.* 94.

<sup>53</sup> Diod. Sic. *Βιβλιοθήκη Ιστορική* 4.38.4-39.1.

<sup>54</sup> Suet. *Aug.* 100.

<sup>55</sup> Philo *De Vita Mosis* 2.12.

<sup>56</sup> Martin 2008: 25-26.

<sup>57</sup> Licona 2010: 34.

not historical biography,<sup>58</sup> the hypothesis vary in number and degree. Another scholar, Philip Shuler, has even suggested a somewhat hybrid category: "the encomion biography."<sup>59</sup> If the Gospels were to carry the label of ancient biography, they would have to be comparable to other works of similar nature produced around that time. Let's assume Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* provides a good template for this genre. One perusing some of his works, *Alcibiades* or *Alexander* for instance, soon realises one fact. There are indeed some embellishments in these narratives, but most of the material does carry a certain level of plausibility. Can we say the same thing about the canonical Gospels? If we look at the first chapter of the *Gospel of Mark*, the one with the lowest Christology, what we see is a sequence of implausible events that are hardly reconcilable with a historically accurate narrative. At Jesus' baptism, Heaven is torn open<sup>60</sup> and the Holy Spirit descends upon him.<sup>61</sup> A voice from Heaven declares Jesus' divine filiation.<sup>62</sup> He is then taken in spirit to the wilderness.<sup>63</sup> He is tempted by a metaphysical agent named Satan.<sup>64</sup> When he sees two men by the Sea of Galilee and asks them to follow him, they drop everything and do as they're told (no persuasive speech nor miracle required).<sup>65</sup> Jesus heals a man with an impure spirit,<sup>66</sup> Simon's mother,<sup>67</sup> and many others with diseases and demons.<sup>68</sup> On another occasion, a man with leprosy is healed at the mere touch of Jesus' hand.<sup>69</sup> In a book with only sixteen chapters, the first one alone contains ten implausible events, nine of which miraculous in nature. If we add all the other healings, the calming of the storm, the feeding of two multitudes, the walking on water, the transfiguration and, most importantly, the resurrection, this narrative starts shaping into something else. A similar analysis could be performed for the

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<sup>58</sup> Fredriksen 2000: 4.

<sup>59</sup> Shuler 1975: iii.

<sup>60</sup> Mk 1:10.

<sup>61</sup> Idem.

<sup>62</sup> Mk 1:11.

<sup>63</sup> Mk 1:12.

<sup>64</sup> Mk 1:13.

<sup>65</sup> Mk 1:16-18.

<sup>66</sup> Mk 1:25-26.

<sup>67</sup> Mk 1:31.

<sup>68</sup> Mk 1:34.

<sup>69</sup> Mk 1:41-42.

other three canonical Gospels, but this is to illustrate one point: the high frequency of miraculous passages seems inconsistent with what we are used to seeing in Greco-Roman biographies.

In the beginning of this paper, I have declared one of the pre-suppositions of my argument related to the synoptic problem: Mark was the first Gospel to be written, Luke came second and is literarily dependent on Mark. In order to assess Luke's intention in redacting Mark, I propose an analysis of the pericopae that he removed, retained, and added to it (tables 2 and 3). Before a deep dive on the relationship between Mark and Luke, it is helpful to clarify what is our point of departure: the *Gospel of Mark*. Compared to the other Gospels, Mark is literarily simple, succinct, and apocalyptic in nature. These arguments lead scholars to argue that this was effectively the first Gospel to be written. So compelling were these arguments that they formed a consensus which has proven to be stable in scholarship. Another important element of Mark is its low Christology. In this account of the life of Jesus, he appears to be adopted by God at baptism<sup>70</sup> and only exalted at the resurrection.<sup>71</sup> It is possible to argue that in this Gospel Jesus is a Jewish prophet fashioned in the style of Moses or Elijah. In my view, the preponderance of evidence seems to indicate who the Jesus of Mark was: an exalted Jewish prophet.

Moving on to the engagement of Luke with Mark, I suggest splitting the result of this interaction in three different actions: what Luke removed, what he retained and what he added to Mark. Some elements are more significant than others so I will be selecting a sample that, in my view, illustrates the goal the author of Luke was trying to achieve with his narrative. The removal of Marcan elements serves different purposes. The first one is to eliminate clutter that does not advance the narrative ('crowds follow Jesus'). The second one is to take out passages that call into question his elevated status, be it his mental state ('family accuses him of insanity', 'curses a healthy fig tree') or his ability to perform miracles ('failure to heal a blind man at the first try'). The third one is to filter the elements of the message of Jesus that might contradict his own view of the movement ('Syrophoenician woman', i. e., ostracization of gentiles, and 'the day and hour', inconsistent with his theological view).

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<sup>70</sup> Mk 1:11.

<sup>71</sup> Mk 16:6.

Gospel of Mark		Gospel of Luke		
With original ending @ 16:8		Removals	Retentions	Additions
-	-	-	-	Prologue
-	-	-	-	Annunciation of John's birth
-	-	-	-	Annunciation of Jesus's birth
-	-	-	-	Mary visits Elizabeth
-	-	-	-	John's birth
-	-	-	-	Jesus's birth
-	-	-	-	Baby Jesus in the temple
-	-	-	-	Boy Jesus in the temple
John prepares the way	-	John prepares the way	-	-
Baptism	-	Baptism	-	-
-	-	-	-	Genealogy
Temptation	-	Temptation	-	-
Calling of disciples	-	Calling of disciples	-	-
Healings (imp. spirit #1, many, leper, paral.)	-	Healings (imp. spirit #1, many, leper, paral.)	-	-
Levi, eating with sinners	-	Levi, eating with sinners	-	-
Fasting	-	Fasting	-	-
Lord of the Sabbath	-	Lord of the Sabbath	-	-
Crowds follow Jesus	Crowds follow Jesus	-	-	-
Appointing of the 12	-	Appointing of the 12	-	-

Gospel of Mark		Gospel of Luke		
With original ending @ 16:8		Removals	Retentions	Additions
Accusation by family		Accusation by family	-	-
Jesus and Beelzebul		-	Jesus and Beelzebul	-
Jesus' mother and brothers			Jesus' mother and brothers	-
-				Sermon on the plain Centurion's faith Healings (widow's son) John the prophet Jesus the Messiah The sign of Jonah
-		-	-	
-		-	-	
-		-	-	
-		-	-	
Parables (Sower, Lamp, Seed)		-	Parables (Sower, Lamp, Seed)	-
Calming the storm		-	Calming the storm	-
Healings (demon, dead girl, sick woman)		-	Healings (demon, dead girl, sick woman)	-
Prophet without honour		-	Prophet without honour	-
Commission to the 12		-	Commission to the 12	-
Beheading of John		-	Beheading of John*	-
Feeding of five thousand		-	Feeding of five thousand	-
Walking on water		Walking on water	-	-

Gospel of Mark		Gospel of Luke		
With original ending @ 16:8		Removals	Retentions	Additions
What defiles a man	-	-	What defiles a man*	-
Syrophoenician woman	Syrophoenician woman	-	-	-
Healings (deaf and mute)	Healings (deaf and mute)	-	-	-
Feeding of four thousand	Feeding of four thousand	-	-	-
Yeast of Pharisees	-	Yeast of Pharisees*	-	-
Healings (blind #1)	Healings (blind #1)	-	-	-
Peter declares the Messiah	-	Peter declares the Messiah	-	-
Death prediction #1	-	Death prediction #1	-	-
Way of the cross	-	Way of the cross*	-	-
Transfiguration	-	Transfiguration	-	-
Healings (impure spirit #2)	-	Healings (impure spirit #2)	-	-
Death prediction #2	-	Death prediction #2	-	-
-	-	-	-	Samaritan opposition
-	-	-	-	Cost of following Jesus
-	-	-	-	Commission to the 72
-	-	-	-	Parables (Good Samaritan)
-	-	-	-	Martha & Mary

CONTINUES

\*Redacted

Table 2: Mark's pericopae with Luke's removals, retentions and additions (1/2).

The elements Luke decided to keep are those consistent with his overall message, even if requiring adjustments. The image of Jesus that emerges from these passages is that of a Jew who, once baptised and tempted, began a ministry of itinerant preacher. He comes for those on the margins of society (sinners, tax collectors) and takes a hard stance against the local authorities. He is presented in continuation of the Jewish prophetic tradition but promotes a more empathetic understanding of the Law.

## CONTINUED

Gospel of Mark	Gospel of Luke		
With original ending @16:8	Removals	Retentions	Additions
Against us/for us	-	Against us/for us*	-
What causes someone to stumble	-	What causes someone to stumble*	-
Divorce	-	Divorce*	-
Little children, rich man	-	Little children, rich man	-
Death prediction #3	-	Death prediction #3	-
James and John's request	James and John's request	-	-
Healings (blind #2)	-	Healings (blind #2)	-
-	-	-	Lord's prayer
Entrance in Jerusalem	-	Entrance in Jerusalem	-
Tumult in the temple	-	Tumult in the temple	-
Cursing of the fig tree	Cursing of the fig tree	-	-
Jesus' authority questioned	-	Jesus' authority questioned	-
Parables (Tenants)	-	Parables (Tenants)	-
Paying taxes	-	Paying taxes	-
Marriage & resurrection	-	Marriage & resurrection	-

Gospel of Mark		Gospel of Luke		
With original ending @16:8		Removals	Retentions	Additions
The greatest commandment		-	The greatest commandment*	-
The Messiah, son of David		-	The Messiah, son of David	-
Teachers of the law		-	Teachers of the law	-
-		-	-	Warnings and encouragements
-		-	-	Parables (Rich Fool)
-		-	-	Peace/division
-		-	-	Healings (crippled woman)
-		-	-	Narrow door
-		-	-	Sorrow for Jerusalem
-		-	-	Jesus at the Pharisee's house
-		-	-	Parables (Great Banquet)
-		-	-	Parables (Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, Prod. Son)
-		-	-	Parables (Shrewd Manager)
-		-	-	Enforcement of the law
-		-	-	Parables (Rich Man & Lazarus)
-		-	-	The slave's duty
-		-	-	Healings (ten lepers)
-		-	-	The coming of the Kingdom of God

Gospel of Mark		Gospel of Luke		
With original ending @16:8		Removals	Retentions	Additions
-		-	-	Parables (Widow, Pharisee & Tax Collector)
-		-	-	Zacchaeus, the tax collector
-		-	-	Parables (Ten Minas)
Widow's offering		-	Widow's offering	-
Temple destruction, end times		-	Temple destruction, end times	-
Day & hour unknown		Day & hour unknown	-	-
Anointing of Jesus		-	Anointing of Jesus	-
Judas agrees to betray Jesus		-	Judas agrees to betray Jesus	-
Last supper, prediction of Peter's denial		-	Last supper, prediction of Peter's denial	-
Gethsemane, arrest, Sanhedrin, Peter's denial		-	Mt. Olives, arrest, Sanhedrin, Peter's denial	-
Jesus before Pilate		-	Jesus before Pilate*	-
-		-	-	Jesus before Herod
Soldiers mock Jesus		-	Guards mock Jesus	-
Crucifixion, death, burial		-	Crucifixion, death, burial*	-
Resurrection		-	Resurrection*	-
-		-	-	Road to Emmaus
-		-	-	Appearance to the disciples
-		-	-	Ascension

\*Redacted

Table 3: Mark's pericopae with Luke's removals, retentions and additions (2/2).

Jesus must suffer at the hands of the ruling authorities, be crucified, killed and be raised from the dead. This was the template Luke started from to tell his own story of Jesus. He probably found Mark's narrative had potential and that he could improve it, making it more appealing to the Hellenistic world. According to Theon of Alexandria, credibility is the most important feature of a narrative.<sup>72</sup> If the author of Luke wanted to create an account of the life of Jesus that would persuade the Greeks, he had to appeal to *topoi* (commonplaces) familiar to them. In the words of Hermogenes:

"It is called commonplace because (what we say) applies to every temple robber or every war hero."<sup>73</sup>

As we will see in our analysis of the third interaction of Luke with Mark, the additions, this is precisely what the author has done: embellish Mark with *topoi* consistent with those of a typical Greek hero, creating thus a eulogy of Jesus Christ. What Luke seems to be doing is filling the gaps of the story he inherited from Mark. The pericopae he added, along with the ones he reworked from Mark, have the purpose of elevating the status of Jesus who starts as a demigod, stoically suffers a painful death, rises from the dead, appears to his followers, and ascends to Heaven. These *topoi* enabled Luke to build a character he considered to be Saviour, Messiah and Lord and, consequently, worthy of praise. Drawing from his education in Greek rhetoric, most likely Hermogenes-style progymnasmata, he was able to create a hero that would appeal to a Hellenistic audience. The correspondence between Hermogenes' rhetorical exercises and the pericopae of Luke is demonstrated in table 4.<sup>74</sup> Of the twenty-eight encomiastic topics identified in Hermogenes, we can find twenty-one as pericopae in the *Gospel of Luke*, a 75% match rate. If we were to exclude the physical elements (far from being the focus of Luke, who seems more interested in depicting Jesus as a philosopher), the rate would increase to 83%. However, in order to capture the full scope of Hermogenes' encomion, we will take the complete list as reference. As far as literary dependency goes the level

<sup>72</sup> Kennedy 2003: 29.

<sup>73</sup> Kennedy 2003: 79.

<sup>74</sup> In his paper *Progymnastic Topic Lists: A Compositional Template for Luke and Other Bioi?*, Michael Martin covers in detail the similarities between Hermogenes' encomiastic topics and the *Gospel of Luke*. Whereas his emphasis is on syncretism between Jesus Christ and John the Baptist, I propose a focus on Jesus himself.

of agreement is significant. If we imagine for a minute that the *Gospel of Luke* was an assignment to create an encomion of Jesus based on that list, it would have been a rather successful one. We should not overlook the fact that, as we've seen earlier, Luke is writing in the form of *diēgēsin*, which is not necessarily an account relating events that have actually happened. Regardless of the type of narrative this Gospel falls under, the level of correspondence of this work with the progymnasmata topics demonstrates, conclusively in my view, that we are in presence of an encomion. If in addition to that one wishes to explore what type of narrative this Gospel is according to Greek canonical standards, it would surely be a worthy exercise. However, not one that would supersede its encomiastic nature, but rather complement it. Hermogenes informs us of four different types of narrative: mythical, fictitious, historical, political/private.<sup>75</sup> As this falls outside of the scope of the present exercise, we will not be exploring the classification of Luke according to these categories. Notwithstanding that, the mimetic relationship of Luke's Gospel with Hermogenes' encomion does raise an important question, which we will be addressing next.

<b>Hermogenes' progymnasmata</b> <i>(Kennedy, Progymnasmata, 82)</i>	<b>Gospel of Luke</b> <i>(New International Version)</i>
Nation	Sent for the salvation of Israel (Lk 2:29-32)
City	Born in Bethlehem, birthplace of King David and of the coming Messiah (Lk 2:4)
Family	Righteousness of Mary and Joseph (Lk 1:28,30,42,46-55; 2:4,21-24,39,41)
Marvellous occurrences at birth (dreams, signs)	Annunciation (Lk 1:30-33) Born of a virgin (Lk 1:27; 2:6-7) Born a demigod (Lk 1:35) An angel appears to shepherds (Lk 2:8-9) Angels descend from Heaven (Lk 2:13-15)
Nurture	Circumcised (Lk 2:21) Presented to God (Lk 2:22) Offering of sacrifices (Lk 2:24)

<sup>75</sup> Kennedy 2003: 75.

Hermogenes' progymnasmata (Kennedy, <i>Progymnasmata</i> , 82)	Gospel of Luke (New International Version)
Education	Grows in wisdom (Lk 2:52) Filled with wisdom and grace of God (Lk 2:40) Amazes teachers with understanding and answers (Lk 2:46-47)
Strong	Grows and becomes strong (Lk 2:40) Grows in stature... in favor with God (Lk 2:52) Releases power (Lk 8:46)
Large	-
Swift	-
Beautiful	-
Just	Social justice speech against Pharisees and lawyers (Lk 11:37-54) Parable of the unjust judge (Lk 18:1-8)
Temperate	Exhortation to temperance (Lk 21:34-36) Parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32)
Wise	Sermon on the plain (Lk 6:20-49) Lord's prayer (Lk 11:2-4) All parables (Lk 8:1-8; 20:9-19)
Brave	Begins ministry of itinerant prophet alone (Lk 4:14-44) Stands up to Pharisees and lawyers (Lk 11:37-54) Stoically accepts his suffering, rejection and death (Lk 9:22)
Type of life (philosopher, orator, general)	Jesus is an itinerant philosopher concerned with social justice (see elements 'Just', 'Temperate', 'Wise', and 'Brave') Selects disciples (Lk 5:1-11)
Deeds	Healing of a man with an impure spirit (Lk 4:31-36) Healing of a woman with a blood flux (Lk 8:43-48) Resurrection of Jairus' daughter (Lk 8:49-56)
Accomplishments	Brings salvation to Israel (Lk 1:67-79) Light of revelation to the Gentiles (Lk 2:32) Is exalted to divine status, apotheosis (Lk 24:6,51)
Relatives	Zechariah and Elizabeth righteous before God (Lk 1:5-6) John strong in spirit (Lk 1:80)

<b>Hermogenes' progymnasmata</b> <i>(Kennedy, Progymnasmata, 82)</i>	<b>Gospel of Luke</b> <i>(New International Version)</i>
Friends	-
Possessions	-
Servants	-
Luck	-
Lifespan	Brought salvation to Israel and revelation to the Gentiles (see element 'Accomplishments') with no need for a long lifespan (~30 years-old)
Manner of death	Betrayed by one of his disciples (Lk 22:54) Abandoned by everyone at his arrest except Peter (Lk 22:4-6) Disowned by his lead disciple Peter (Lk 22:54-62) Mocked and beaten by guards (Lk 22:63-65) Painful death by crucifixion (Lk 23:33) Stoic attitude (Lk 23:28,34,42-43,46)
Oddities at death	Darkness over the land (Lk 23:44) Curtain of the temple torn in two (Lk 23:45) Centurion recognizes Jesus' righteousness (Lk 23:47)
Culprits for death	Accused by the council of the elders (Lk 22:66-71) Ridiculed and mocked by Herod (Lk 23:8-11) Crowd asks for crucifixion (Lk 23:18-20) Pilate delivered Jesus to be crucified (Lk 23:24-25)
Post-death events	Resurrection (Lk 24:6) Two men in gleaming clothes appear to women (Lk 24:4-5) Jesus appears to two disciples (Lk 24:15) Jesus appears to Simon (Lk 24:34) Jesus appears to the disciples (Lk 24:36) Ascension, apotheosis (Lk 24:51)
Comparison	Unborn John recognizes Jesus (Lk 1:41) Jesus mightier than John (Lk 3:15-16) John prophet, Jesus Messiah (Lk 7:18-35)

Table 4: Equivalence between Hermogenes' Progymnasmata and the pericopae in the Gospel of Luke.

## The *Gospel of Luke* and the historical Jesus

The *Gospel of Luke* stands out for its portrayal of Jesus as a demigod capable of achieving things hardly likely for the average human being. Three aspects are particularly salient in this regard: the performance of miracles, the recasting of Jesus as a Hellenistic philosopher, and the omniscience of the narrator. What follows is an analysis of each of these elements.

Starting with the miracles reported throughout Luke's narrative, I propose addressing the issue from the angle of historical criticism. One familiar with the historical-critical method will surely recall one of its presuppositions: analogy. In a nutshell, the principle of analogy posits that events from the past have unfolded in a similar way to those of the present. Its corollary is that things which do not happen today, did not happen in the past either.<sup>76</sup> This takes us to a category of events which, although profusely present in the Gospels, appears to be absent from our contemporary experience: miracles. Although many attempts have been made at defining the concept of miracle, David Hume seems to have captured its essence:

A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined.<sup>77</sup>

The scientific method being the most reliable tool for understanding the intricacies of the world, we are yet to see a violation of these laws that has been convincingly demonstrated by it. We must then reasonably conclude that if oracles from angels, instantaneous healings, and bringing dead people back to life are not part of our current horizon of possible occurrences, we should also dismiss them as explanations for events from our distant past. The same principle is applicable to all other supernatural occurrences documented in the *Gospel of Luke*.

We shall now move on to Luke's portrayal of Jesus as a Hellenistic philosopher. This is not meant to negate that, to a large extent, the Jesus of Luke preserves some of the pericopes also found in other Jewish prophets. When Jesus brings the widow's son back to life in Nain<sup>78</sup> we are reminded

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<sup>76</sup> Law 2012: 21.

<sup>77</sup> Hume 1900: 120.

<sup>78</sup> Lk 7:11-16.

of the passage where Elijah performed a similar miracle with a widow's son in Zarephath.<sup>79</sup> When Luke identifies Jesus with the Son of Man, he does not shy away from evoking as parallels of the destruction to come those which had taken place in the times of Noah and Lot.<sup>80</sup> However, if we analyse the profile of the historical Jesus, we should in principle be able to determine how likely it would be for him to have been in a position to pronounce the ethical teachings ascribed to him in Luke. In this Gospel, Jesus of Nazareth proclaims a concise and articulate speech on ethics (Sermon on the Plain), teaches his followers how to pray (Lord's prayer), and instructs crowds with clever parables (Good Samaritan, Prodigal Son). Would this behaviour be consistent with that of the historical Jesus? Our earlier Gospel, Mark, says nothing about Jesus' education. In Mk 1:21, Jesus teaches in the Synagogue but the text fails to mention that he read from the scroll. Jesus was born in rural Galilee (Nazareth) and preached in small villages (Capernaum, Gennesaret, Bethsaida). Mk 6:3 informs us he was a carpenter by trade. How likely would it be for a labourer from a non-urban area such as Galilee, to have had the opportunity to learn how to read and write, let alone preach ethics and use figures of speech? The evidence doesn't seem to add up. We can go a step further and investigate the expected literacy rate in the region where Jesus was born and preached. As referenced by Catherine Hezser in *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine*, Meir Bar-Ilan suggested an average literacy rate of 3% among Palestinian Jews at the time.<sup>81</sup> According to Hezser, literacy was mostly present in urban areas to accommodate the needs of the elites, further arguing that "village-dwellers, who mostly worked in agriculture as labourers, tenants, lessees, and small freeholders, will have rarely needed writing."<sup>82</sup> It would thus be unlikely for Jesus of Nazareth to be a literate person and, consequently, to have been able to proclaim ethical speeches or elaborate parables.

The last challenge to the historical nature of some of Luke's passages is the omniscience of the narrator. Although present in other instances of the narrative, this would be mostly applicable to the genealogy unit (Lk 3:23-38). If Jesus was a labourer from Galilee, what are the chances that any family records would have been kept, let alone the ones connecting him

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<sup>79</sup> 1 Kgs 17:17-24.

<sup>80</sup> Lk 17:26-29.

<sup>81</sup> Hezser 2001: 496.

<sup>82</sup> Idem.

directly to God? Even in the unlikely event they existed, in which format were they available, bearing in mind the unaffordability of parchment and papyrus in economically deprived areas? If Luke was writing somewhere in the Roman Empire sometime in the second century CE, what access would he have had to the family records of a Jew from Galilee who lived one hundred years before him? I will retain thus the omniscience of the narrator as evidence that, at least in this pericope, Luke is not narrating a historical event.

A few paragraphs above I have laid out the case for Luke's knowledge of Mark. Given Mark's dating (~70s CE), its rudimentary use of Greek, and its lower Christology, we have good grounds to affirm his account is closer to the historical Jesus than Luke's. This is not to say that the *Gospel of Mark* represents a historically accurate account, but rather that its depiction of the life of Jesus contains fewer problematic passages from a historical standpoint. Mark's Jesus is a charismatic Jewish prophet who gathered a following in Galilee through the proclamation of social justice to the outcast. The crowds who followed him, and probably the tumult he generated in the temple, drew the attention of the Roman authorities who had him crucified for insurrection. An empty tomb and a vision of a young man announcing his resurrection scare three of his female followers, who run away keeping the message to themselves. The implausibility of the Roman authorities allowing for a convicted insurrectionist to be buried in a dedicated tomb should give any historian pause for reflexion. Likewise, granting as historical fact that a man can be dead for three days and come back to life would be hardly reconcilable with the principle of analogy. A dedicated study of Mark would be required for a rigorous assessment of its contribution to the reconstruction of the historical Jesus. However, leveraging our previous analysis of Luke's interaction with Mark (removals, retentions and additions), we will assess the evidence and determine which conclusions can be drawn in terms of the historical Jesus.

As we have seen, the decision of Luke to remove material from Mark was essentially predicated on the construction of a fluid narrative, that preserved his own view of who Jesus was. As such, not only does he take out redundant passages but, more importantly, he also removes portions of the narrative that might lead some to doubt Jesus' unquestionable status. What Luke removed from Mark cleaned Jesus' slate in order for him to start his narrative afresh. The material Luke preserved from Mark is that which is probably consistent with his overall view of Jesus. He has nonetheless

redacted important passages such as Jesus' baptism<sup>83</sup> and crucifixion.<sup>84</sup> Other textual units however have been left fairly unchanged like the healing of the woman with a blood flux<sup>85</sup> and the payment of taxes to Caesar.<sup>86</sup> In this regard, Philip Shuler's comment on the resurrection in the *Gospel of Matthew* can shed some light on Luke's intention with the same pericope:

Thus, Matthew, by elaborating and amplifying, successfully transforms for his readers the lowliest form of death in the Greco-Roman period into a victorious glorification of Jesus.<sup>87</sup>

Notwithstanding that, Luke's most significant and revealing engagement with Mark's work was the material he added to the narrative. Pronouncement of oracles,<sup>88</sup> semi-divinity,<sup>89</sup> post-death appearances,<sup>90</sup> and apotheosis<sup>91</sup> are typical *motifs* in the portrayal of Greco-Roman heroes. A complete list of these elements can be seen in tables 2 and 3, whereas the ones dependent from Hermogenes' encomiastic topics are listed in table 4. The intention of Luke's engagement with Mark is to develop Jesus' character in three different ways:

- **Removals:** withdraw to prevent demotion
- **Retentions:** rework to generate elevation
- **Additions:** create to produce exaltation

As a number of these elements either violate the principle of analogy (historical-critical method) or are inconsistent with its socio-cultural context (literacy rate), they should be excluded from the historical reconstruction of the life of Jesus. Consequently, we should look for other explanations<sup>92</sup> that account for how this material found its way into the *Gospel of Luke*.

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<sup>83</sup> Lk 3:21-22.

<sup>84</sup> Lk 23:26-43.

<sup>85</sup> Lk 8:43-48.

<sup>86</sup> Lk 20:20-26.

<sup>87</sup> Shuler 1975: 205.

<sup>88</sup> Lk 1:30-31.

<sup>89</sup> Lk 1:35.

<sup>90</sup> Lk 24:36.

<sup>91</sup> Lk 24:51.

<sup>92</sup> Law 2012: 21.

A case could be made for the exclusion of all pericopae in table 4 from the life of the historical Jesus, but I don't think this is a black and white determination. In my view, it's more reasonable to look at them individually in light of the above two criteria and assess if it's more likely that they represent historical events or not. If it is historically plausible that Jesus was courageous in starting a career of itinerant prophet on his own (encomiastic topic 'Brave'), the same can't be said about him being born of a virgin. Likewise, if it is conceivable that he preached social justice to those on the margins of society (encomiastic topic 'Just'), it is improbable that an illiterate labourer would have proclaimed an elaborate philosophical speech like the Sermon on the Plain. Given this caveat, one can resume the process of historical reconstruction. So close is Luke's adherence to the encomion script represented by Hermogenes' tradition, that the following question is entirely justified. What is more likely? That Luke was narrating events as they had happened or that he was writing a eulogy of his Lord Jesus Christ that departs from the historical record? One persuaded of the first hypothesis would have to conclude that the miraculous passages of Luke,<sup>93</sup> examples of which are also ascribed to other Greco-Roman persons/gods, only by coincidence match Hermogenes' encomiastic script. One persuaded of the second hypothesis will look at Hermogenes' progymnasmata and see it as the template used by Luke to compose a fictional praise of Jesus Christ. Bearing in mind Luke appears to follow Hermogenes' encomiastic topics one by one (table 4), dependency from this tradition is thus more plausible than to simply assert that "Luke could have solely used existing biographies for his *topoi*."<sup>94</sup> The carbon copy treatment of progymnasmata by ancient authors has been noticed by Michael Martin, for whom the "biographical treatment of individual topics follows closely if not exactly actual examples of the same in the progymnasmata."<sup>95</sup> In spite of Martin's comprehensive comparison of progymnasmata topics with the composition of Luke,<sup>96</sup> he falls short of assessing the implication of his analysis to the reconstruction of the historical Jesus. Which of Luke's pericopae can be traced back to the itinerant preacher from Galilee? Which ones can be reasonably considered fictional? Martin draws no conclusion in this regard. In my view, Luke's

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<sup>93</sup> Annunciation, virgin birth, born a demigod, resurrection, appearances and ascension.

<sup>94</sup> Adams 2016: 152.

<sup>95</sup> Martin 2008: 24.

<sup>96</sup> Martin 2008: 36-41.

transformative effort resulted in the sublimation of Jesus of Nazareth, giving it a completely different flavour: that of a Greek hero. It is no surprise then to see in the Jesus of Luke simultaneously echoes of Socrates and hints of Heracles. However, Luke's admirable effort does not come without a cost. Effectively, the more divine he was rendering Jesus, the less historical he was becoming. I argue that the effect of Luke's engagement with Mark resulted in a remarkable piece of literature that, to a certain extent, ended up departing from historical reality. This is not to say that we can be certain this was the case. Making judgements about the historicity of events from Antiquity should always go hand in hand with a good dose of humility. Notwithstanding that, the preponderance of evidence seems to indicate that Luke's main purpose in writing his Gospel was not to report events as they have actually occurred. As a highly literate author, he leveraged his training in Greek rhetoric to create an encomion of Jesus, thus making him more appealing to a Hellenistic audience. The case for this connection becomes evident by presenting Hermogenes' encomiastic topics next to the Lukan passages that derive from them (table 4). Should this hypothesis be correct, it would be reasonable to exclude a number of Luke's passages from the reconstruction of the life of the historical Jesus, classifying them as renditions of encomiastic topics. The passages that have not been retained did not meet the criteria to a satisfactory level, and are thus inconclusive from a historical perspective. My assessment of these pericopae resulted in the below list, where I indicate the elements that are probably not historical, specifying the *topoi* used by Luke (Hermogenes' encomion, table 4) and the respective criteria for exclusion (analogy or literacy):

- **Annunciation (Lk 1:30-33):** miraculous events at birth, analogy
- **Born from the line of David (Lk 2:4):** miraculous events at birth, analogy
- **Born of a virgin (Lk 1:26-27; 2:6-7):** miraculous events at birth, analogy
- **Born a demigod (Lk 1:35):** miraculous events at birth, analogy
- **Royal and divine genealogy (Lk 3:23-38):** miraculous events at birth, analogy
- **An angel appears to shepherds (Lk 2:8-9):** miraculous events at birth, analogy
- **Angels from Heaven (Lk 2:13-15):** miraculous events at birth, analogy

- **Jesus amazes teachers (Lk 2:46-47):** wisdom, literacy
- **Sermon on the plain (Lk 6:20-49):** wisdom, literacy
- **Lord's prayer (Lk 11:2-4):** wisdom, literacy
- **Parables (Lk 10:25-37; 15:11-32):** wisdom, literacy
- **Healings (Lk 13:10-17; 17:11-19):** deeds, analogy
- **Stoic death (Lk 23:28,34,42; 43:46):** manner of death, analogy
- **Darkness over the land (Lk 23:44):** oddities at death, analogy
- **Temple curtain torn in two (Lk 23:45):** oddities at death, analogy
- **Resurrection (Lk 24:5-6):** post-death events, analogy
- **Post-death oracles (Lk 24:4-6):** post-death events, analogy
- **Appearance to disciples (Lk 24:15,34,36):** post-death events, analogy
- **Ascension (Lk 24:50-51):** post-death events, analogy

The association of these specific *motifs* with the life of Jesus is no novelty in scholarship. As an example, Luke Timothy Johnson notes that stylistic choices such as portents and predictions at the births of both John the Baptist and Jesus cast them as the typical heroes in Hellenistic literature.<sup>97</sup> Johnson highlights this point by realizing that Jesus, when confronted with the accusation of befriending sinners and tax-collectors, is depicted by the evangelist with the “standard medical imagery of the Hellenistic philosopher.”<sup>98</sup> He is not alone in establishing these parallels. Dennis MacDonald’s analysis brings to light that “Jesus’ teachings and those of his followers are similar to those of philosophers, especially Socrates and Plato... his sufferings resemble those of Heracles.. and his ascension into the sky finds analogies in the ascensions of several Greek gods.”<sup>99</sup> Far from putting forward a convoluted hypothesis, what contemporary scholars defend is only an echo of what even Christian apologists who were witnesses to the early movement were advancing as well. One of them, Justin Martyr, conveyed it more emphatically than anyone else:

Τῷ δὲ καὶ τὸν λόγον, ὃ ἐστὶ πρῶτον γέννημα τοῦ θεοῦ, ἄνευ ἐπιμιξίας φάσκειν ἡμᾶς γεγενῆσθαι, Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν τὸν διδάσκαλον ἡμῶν, καὶ τοῦτον

<sup>97</sup> Johnson 1991: 35.

<sup>98</sup> Johnson 1991: 99.

<sup>99</sup> MacDonald 2015: 4.

σταυρωθέντα καὶ ἀποθανόντα καὶ ἀναστάντα ἀνεληλυθέναι εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, οὐ παρὰ τοὺς παρ' ὑμῖν λεγομένους υἱοὺς τοῦ Διὸς καὶ νέον τι φέρομεν.<sup>100</sup>

“When we affirm that the Logos, God’s first-born, begotten without a sexual union, namely, our teacher Jesus Christ, was crucified, died, rose, and ascended to heaven, we are conveying nothing new with respect to those whom you call the sons of Zeus.”<sup>101</sup>

## Conclusion

The assessment of the nature of the Gospels is complex and requires the participation of multiple disciplines. I hope this paper provides a fresh contribution that departs from the traditional categorisation of the Gospels as historiography or ancient biographies. If this hypothesis is correct in classifying the *Gospel of Luke* as an encomion, it will shed some light into the intention of ancient authors in composing this literature. It is difficult to determine conclusively if Luke was intending to narrate events as they have actually happened or not. In other words, was he doing the work of a historian or not? Given his conviction about the salvific benefit of Christ’s death on the cross, the answer is probably somewhere between fact and faith. Daniel Marguerat looks at the issue from an interesting angle. When writing about Luke’s second volume, *Acts of the Apostles*, he advances that maybe we are in presence of “une histoire prophétique, ou mieux: une histoire kérygmatische.”<sup>102</sup>

Getting closer to what these narratives represented to their authors and their respective audiences will only be possible with continuous engagement in academic dialogue. The interaction of Luke with Mark as laid out in this paper can potentially open new avenues for the understanding of the literary activity of other evangelists. The continuous study of the influence of rhetoric on the composition of the Gospels should be encouraged as I’m confident it will bring positive results. The determination of who was the historical Jesus requires not only the contribution of the perspectives of each evangelist, but also the consideration of unexplored angles. As our methods are refined and the academy diversifies, I trust that we will become at least marginally closer to the historical truth.

<sup>100</sup> Justin, *I Apol.* 21.

<sup>101</sup> Miller 2015: 1.

<sup>102</sup> Marguerat 2019: 26.

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