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"Do You Understand What You are Reading?": A Literary Critical Reading of the Ethiopian (Kushite)[1] Episode (Acts 8:26-40)

In his recent article "Philip and the Ethiopian," F. F. Bruce suggests that Acts 8:26-40 is an isolated and unconnected episode;[2] in fact, he adds: "if it were removed, there would be nothing to indicate that anything of the kind had ever stood there."[3] Bruce's source critical reading, while commendable for its goal of reconstructing the history of early Christianity, may be amended however, in light of a literary critical reading of the text. What I propose to do is to show that Acts 8:26-40 is a necessary rhetorical sense unit within Lk-Acts, a two-volume work following the general conventions of the popular ancient Greek novel.

At the outset, two words are in order about the limitations of my purposes. First, my reading is not an attempt to disparage historical critical studies. In fact, I consider myself to be an historian, but one tempered with a "New Historicist" valence.[4] That is, I seek to read texts using many of the reading and listening conventions in vogue at the time of composition. Second, my literary critical perspective, largely an audience-ori

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[1]Following the nomenclature of classicists, I will use the term "Ethiopian" when citing texts about this group from Greek, Roman and early Christian literature. While Luke used the LXX, a text which translates the ancient term "Kushite" as Ethiopian," I will use the term "Kushite" when I cite First Testament texts. See F. Snowden, *Before Color Prejudice: the Ancient View of Blacks* (London: Harvard University, 1983), 3. On Luke's use of the LXX, see J. Fleming, " The N.T. Use of Isaiah," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 11(1968): 89-103.

[2]F. F. Bruce, "Philip and the Ethiopian," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 34 (1989): 378.

[3]*Ibid.*

[4]New Historicism is "the theory that social and cultural phenomena are historically determined." See Ian Hocking, "Two Kinds of 'New Historicism' for Philosophers," *New Literary History* 21 (1990) : 343-364.

ented one,[5] assumes that all genres have a social function, that is, they seek to create or re-create a vision of reality necessary for the resolution of the exigence that brought them into being. With these prolegomena stated, the course of this article will develop along the following lines: 1) a generic reading of Luke-Acts and 2) rhetorical readings of Acts 8:26-40 within the architectonic structure of its context in Acts.

I
A Generic Reading of Luke-Acts

While one may agree with Thomas L. Brodie that Lk-Acts cannot be cast into a single generic category,[6] affinities between Luke-Acts and the ancient Greek novel (a.k.a. "the ancient Greek romance")[7] remain and cannot be dismissed. Both Lk-Acts and the ancient novels depict familiarity with the same geographical setting, that is, the eastern Mediterranean;[8] both are full of religious concerns and themes;[9] both are stylistically

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[5]My audience-oriented model of reading is based on the pragmatic theories of P. Rabinowitz and S. Mailloux. P. Rabinowitz, *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions of the Politics of Interpretation* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1987); S. Mailloux, *Interpretive Conventions: The Reader in the Study of American Fiction* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University, 1982).

[6] T. Brodie, "Luke the Literary Interpreter: Luke-Acts as a Stystematic Rewriting and Updating of the Elijah-Elisha Narrative in 1 and 2 Kings" (Ph.D. diss., Angelicum University, 1981), 100.

[7]A number of scholars view the ancient Greek novel as the prototype for the gospels and Acts. On the ancient Greek novel as a prototype for the gospels, see M. A. Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 59,62. On the novel as a prototype for Acts, see R. Pervo, *Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); S. Praeder, "Luke-Acts and the Ancient Novel," in *SBL Seminar Papers* 1981, ed. K. Richards (Chico, California: Scholars, 1981); D. Edwards, "Acts of the Apostles and Chaiton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe*" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1987); S. Schierling and M. Schierling, "The influence of the Ancient Romances on the Acts of the Apostles," *Classical Bulletin* 54 (1978) : 81-88; Helmut Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament*, Vol. 2, *History and Literature of Early Christianity*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 51, 316. While some scholars classify Lk-Acts as history, I contend that genre's consistent use of periodic subordination, hyperbaton and atticized speeches does not reflect the generally popular character of all of the New Testament narratives, including Lk-Acts. For a generic reading that construes Lk-Acts within the conventions of political history, see D. Balch, "The Genre of Lk-Acts: Individual Biography, Adventure Novel, or Political History," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 33 (1990) :5-19.

[8]B. P. Reardon, "The Greek Novel," *Phoenix* 23 (1969) :292-93; Praeder, 284.

[9]T. Haegg, *The Novel in Antiquity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 101-4; Pervo, 25.

and linguistically simple;[10] both tie various elements of their plots together with recapitulations and "recognition scenes" (that is, scenes revealing the true identity or fate of characters);[11] both allude to figures in previous narrative worlds to make sense of the status reversals (sufferings and triumphs) of the characters in their own narrative worlds;[12] both are heavily packed with irony;[13] both mediate the motifs and constitutive features of earlier genres for popular consumption;[14] and both are saturated with adventurous travel.[15]

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[10]Schierling and Schierling, 82; Pervo, 13. I am now speaking of the non-Sophistic Greek novels (Chariton, *Chaereas and Callirhoe* and Xenophon of Ephesus, *An Ephesian Story*). The most likely dates for these works are the 1st century BCE and the 1st century CE, respectively. See Haegg, *The Novel in Antiquity*, 6,20.

[11]On recapitulations, see E. Haight, *Essays on the Greek Romances* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat, 1943), 30; T. Haegg, *Narrative Technique in Ancient Greek Romances: Studies of Chariton, Xenophon Ephesius and Achilles Tatius* (Stockholm: Acta Instituti Atheniensis Regni Sueciae, 1971), 287; Pervo, 131-133. On recognition scenes, see Aristotle, *Poetics*, 11.4; Haegg, 75-76; cf. Robert Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1986), 35; Tolbert, 75; Praeder, 269. On recognition scenes as organizational links between the various parts of ancient narratives, Sheila Marnaghan has asserted that ". . . the Odyssey's plot of the Hero's return in disguises and recognition is an artificial device through which the poem organizes and contrasts the celebration of its hero Odysseus." Sheila Murnaghan, *Disguise and Recognition in the Odyssey* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1987), 53.

[12]*Ibid.*, 280. On status reversals, see Chariton, *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, 3.6.3-4; Xenophon, *An Ephesian Tale*, 2.10.3-4. According to D. Martin, ". . . The heroine of Chariton's novel, compares her fate to that of Cyrus [Chariton, *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, 2.9.5;2.4.8.], who, according to popular tradition, overcame his servile origins to become the Persian emperor." D. Martin, *Slavery As Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University, 1990), 29. On Luke's dependence on the LXX for character scripts (especially, the exodus and suffering prophet typologies mediated through Second Isaiah), see P. Williams, "The Poems About Incomparable Yahweh's Servant in Isaiah 40-55," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 11 (1968): 73-87; J. Sanders, "Isaiah in Luke," *Interpretation* 36 (1982): 144-155.

[13]G. Schmeling, *Xenophon of Ephesus* (Boston: Twayne, 1980), 120; B. E. Perry, "Chariton and his Romance," *American Journal of Philology* 51 (1930): 93-134; B.E. Perry, The *Ancient Romances: A Literary-Historical Account of their Origin* (Berkeley: University of California, 1967), 135; Pervo, 59-61.

[14]From historiographical literature, the ancient Greek novels drew their historiographic frames. See M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. M. Holquist, tr. C. Emerson and M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas, 1981), 89. Of course, these frames need not be totally accurate. See Haegg, *The Novel in Antiquity*, 17. On the historiographical forms in Lk-Acts (e.g.; the historical prefaces and the genealogy), see D. Aune, *The New Testament and its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 120-131. From epic and drama, the ancient Greek novels drew their substance (journey motifs, episodic plot, turning points and recognition scenes). See Haegg, *The Novel in Antiquity*, 110-112; Tolbert, 63.

[15]Pervo, 107. Of course, most of the extant ancient Greek novels are erotic type adventure stories, and thus, the adventure motif is also tied to a love-separation-reunion framework. See Tolbert, 63.

While a comprehensive generic reading of Lk-Acts would give considerable attention to several or all of these affinities, space and time limitations will only allow sustained emphasis on one, that of adventurous travel. Adventurous travel is particularly important because both volumes of Luke-Acts are replete with travel imagery, and more importantly, because the two volumes, like the novels themselves, are strategically arranged with heroic journeys[16] to depict the ever-widening influence of the heroes'(and heroines') divine patron.[17] To understand the relationship between the travel of the protagonists and their deity's power, however, a few words are in order about the dynamics of power as they functioned in the ancient world and as they were generically expressed in the ancient Greek novels and in Luke-Acts.

Two factors influenced the power dynamics of Luke's time. The first was a system of mediated social relations intended both to organize the channels of power and beneficence sent from the imperial patron to his clients and to guarantee the reciprocal praise from those clients to the emperor or to medi-

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[16]As C. Schlam asserts "The epic journey, in which the hero, or both the hero and heroine, undergo all sorts of misfortunes, became a standard narrative pattern in the novels. The Odyssey is often explicitly invoked as the model. Perilous journeys, albeit of diverse extents, are part of virtually all the [Greek and Latin] romances." See C. Schlam, *The Metamorphoses of Apuleius* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1992), 19,20. On the journey motif as a literary device for arranging the macrostructural levels of ancient genres, see F. Segovia, "The Journey(s) of the Word of God: A Reading of the Plot of the Fourth Gospel," *Semeia* 53 (1991): 33.

[17]While the plots of the ancient Greek novels often incorporated historiographic form, the use of geographical locations (as well as characters and historical and political events) should not suggest the incorporation of realism in the modern sense. As Haegg has noted: "Our distinction between myth and history is not shared by the Greeks; for earlier times the two flow together, and there is no difference in principle between such subject-matter as may fill an epic like the *Odyssey* and what a historian like Herodotus may narrate." Haegg, *The Novel in Antiquity*, 112; cf. Tolbert, 74; J. Bradley Chance, Fiction in Ancient Biography: An Approach to a Sensitive Issue in Gospel Interpretation," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 18 (1991): 125-142.

ating brokers in-between.[18] The second was the prevalence of a feeling of aloneness and helplessness against which individuals sought security in clubs, nomic structures (i.e., magic, philosophy) and powerful gods and god-like heroes.[19] Naturally, emperors would be praised among these heroes, and praise for an emperor like Augustus would reach meteoric proportions, for in the eyes of the Romans, he initiated a new era of peace, both by terminating Rome's civil conflicts and by extending the borders of the empire to the limits of the *oikumene*.[20]

Thus, in that context of power relations, the travel of heroes and heroines in the ancient Greek novel becomes a dramatic medium displaying to the "authorial audience"[21] the power of the deities.[22] Gods, like imperial patrons, extend their influence throughout the *oikumene* and are reciprocated with worship at each shrine to which the protagonists travel.[23] The gods force

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[18]On the channeling of power to distant imperial regions, see H. Moxnes, "Patron-Client Relations and the New Community in Luke-Acts," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts. Models for Interpretation* ed. J. Neyrey (Peabody, MA: Hedrickson, 1991), 244; P. Vanderbroeck, *Popular Leadership and Collective Behavior in the late Roman Republic (ca 80-50 BC)* (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1987), 50. On the reciprocity ethic, see P. Garnsey and R. Saller, "Social Relations," in *From Augustus to Nero: The First Dysnast of Imperial Rome*, ed. R, Mellor (East Lansing, MI: Michigan, 1990), 347; R. Macmullen, "Personal Power in the Roman Empire," *American Journal of Philology* 107 (1986) :521; cf. Seneca, *On Benefits*, 1.10. On mediating brokers, see Moxnes, 246; Garnsey and Saller, 348.

[19]On security sought through clubs, see A.H.M. Jones, "The Hellenistic Age," *Past and Present* 27 (1964) :21. On security sought though gods and god-like heroes, see G. Corrington, "Power and the Man of Power in the Context of Hellenistic Popular Belief," in *1984 SBL Seminar Papers*, ed. K. Richards (Chico: Scholars, 1984), 258.

[20]For more on Augustus' self-praise (best seen in his *Res Gestae*) and the praise others offered to him, see E. Rammage, *The Nature and Purpose of Augustus' "Res Gestae"* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1987); C. Nicolet, *Space, Geography, and Politices in the Early Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1991), 15. Also, note that like Augustus, other emperors (Claudius, Trajan, Septimeus Severus) sought to extend the boundaries, for they viewed it as a way of gaining prestige for themselves and for Rome. See J. Campbell, *The Emperor and the Roman Army*: 31 BC-AD 235 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), 138,141.

[21]The authorial audience is the audience deemed likely to have been imagined by a work's author at the time of composition. See P. Rabinowitz, "Truth in Fiction: A Reexamination of Audience," *Critical Inquiry* 4 (1977): 126. For an excellent discussion of the degree to which modern audiences can participate in the authorial audience of an ancient text, see Tolbert, 52-53.

[22] Cf. Pervo, 107.

[23]D. Edwards has convincingly shown how both Luke and Chariton used the travel motif to demonstrate the power and influence of a particular venerable cult as the characters traveled to various centers of that cult throughout the *oikumene*. See D. Edwards, "Acts of the Apostles and the Graeco-Roman World: Narrative Communication in Social Context," in *1989 SBL Seminar Papers*, ed. D. Lull (Atlanta: Scholars, 1989), 367-371.

the plot, vouchsafe the protagonists' fidelity or reunion, and propel the leading characters—often through a series of *agones* (conflict scenes)[24]—among successively greater networks of power.[25] In the final excursion, moreover, the gods bring the travelers through an horrendous *agon*, an agon in which the heroic prowess and true identity of the heroes (heroines) are dramatically revealed.[26]

In Luke-Acts, then, the travel notices are neither historically realistic nor dramatically vestigial. Read within the conventions of the ancient Greek novel, the notices suggest that Luke-Acts strategically casts leading characters like Jesus, Stephen, Peter and Paul in a series of adventurous agones which herald their deity's claim to be the universal patron or benefactor. These leading positive characters are stereotyped as gracious "cosmic power brokers"[27] vis-a-vis their stylized opponents (e.g., rulers of synagogues, Pharisees, scribes, chief priests and elders in the Gospel of Luke and a number of Jewish and Roman officials in Acts) who seek to limit access to power to a select, exclusive few.[28] Through the journeys of the heroes, the good news of free access to God's power is taken beyond the exclusive control of the Jewish nationalistic power brokers to every region within reach. Moreover, the journeys provide settings for contact with increasingly more significant figures and for dramatic demonstrations of God's influence as displayed in the powerful words and deeds of the protagonists.[29]

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[24]I am presently developing a longer study which treats the *agon* convention in tragedy, comedy, and ancient Greek novels as a key to understanding Lk-Acts. Following B. Reardon's lead [*Form of the Greek Romance* (Princeton: Princeton, 1991), 104] that the ancient Greek novels adopted and extended the conventional *agon* of the earlier genres, I suggest that the contest between the devil and the Spirit-filled Jesus (Lk 4:1-13), a scene anticipating Jesus' later struggles with human opponents, is similar to the *agones* of tragedy and comedy, now mediated through the ancient novels for popular consumption. For more on the types and functions of agones, see P. Arnott, *Public and Performance in the Greek Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1989), 105-116.

[25]Edwards, "Acts of the Apostles and Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe*," 123.

[26]*Ibid.*, 128.

[27]I owe the term "cosmic power brokers" to D. Edwards.

[28]Cf. Moxnes, 256.

[29]Cf. Edwards, " Acts of the Apostles and the Graeco-Roman world," 371, 372. As we shall soon see, however, the narrator has a paradoxical understanding of power, an understanding turning the conventional perception of power on its head.

II
Rhetorical Readings of Acts 8:26-40 within its Architectonic Structure

Given the power dynamics of ancient Greek novels, what is the function of Acts 8:26-40? Rhetorically, what does the narrator communicate to the authorial audience by including the episode within the narrative? Within the series of *agones* in Lk-Acts, Acts 8:26-40 is a part of a missionary excursion in 8:1b-12:25, the whole of which illustrates the enlightening and ever-expanding power of the deity despite the increasing persecution of the church, even of its principal apostles like James and Peter.[30] Yet, to see the strategic character of the episode, we must carefully assess all of the rhetorical sense units within 8:1b-12:25, and then, evaluate the special functions of 8:26-40 within the architectonic development of the excursion.[31]

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[30]While I cannot give the full details of my overall analysis of Lk-Acts in this article, I must give an abreviated sketch of the movement of Acts, Luke's second volume, with respect to the first one. While the first volume features the *agones* of Jesus, along with his vindication through resurrection and exaltation, the second one (following a brief introduction, Acts 1:1-11), places the witnesses in a series of missionary excursions, each of which builds intensely toward a climactic *agon*, i.e., a death or a near-death escape.

In the first excursion (limited to Jerusalem, 1:12-8:1a), the apostles are spared from the violent hands of the council, but Stephen, one of he seven and the one believer in all of the early chapters who speaks most vehemently against a parochial and nationalistic brand of Judaism, is stoned (5:33; cf. 7:5f4), thus bringing the first excursion and its escalating violence to a deadly end.

In the second excursion (in and around Judea and Samaria, 8: 1b-12:25;cf. 1:8), persecution abounds from beginning to end, but notice is given of the deity's ability to affect persons and places at all levels of society from all parts of the world (8:1b-11:26). Climactically, the excursion virtually ends with the daring angelic rescue of Peter near the Passover season and the equally angelic destruction of Herod Agrippa I--a stark contrast between the Divine patron's response to the humility and supplication of some and to the *hubris* and self-aggrandizement of another (12:1-23).

Finally, in the third excursion (13:1-28:31) Saul (Paul) takes over the leadership not only from Barnabas in the initial scenes, but also from the Jerusalem hegemony in the rest of the story. Envious opponents dogging his steps cause Paul to suffer throughout Asia Minor, Europe and Asia in ways similar to the other heroes (Jesus, Stephen and Peter), and in the closing scenes that take him from Jerusalem to Rome, the hand of God leads Paul from one adventure after another-- imprisonment, trials and even a shipwreck.

[31]Studies of architectonic development, while never definitive, are important when analyzing texts from the Greco-Roman world, for writings from that era were strongly influenced by an oral/aural orientation. Writing was vocalized and public or private readers read aloud, as in the case of the Ethiopian (Acts 8:28-30). For an excellent treatment of the oral/aural environment of late Western antiquity, see P. Achtemeier, "Omne Verbum Sonat: The New Testament and the Oral Environment of Late Western Antiquity," *JBL* (1990): 3-27.

A.
A Rhetorical Reading of Acts 8:1b-12:25

From the beginning of Acts to 8:1a, the narrator has vividly brushed onto the narrative canvas a set of ideologically opposed images of power—gifted, yet unassuming, disciples willing to pay any cost to share the good news of the deity's power[32] versus inept, and tyrant-like, authorities incessantly seeking to muzzle the witnesses' paradoxical refrain of Jesus' death and resurrection;[33] an inclusive and virtually idyllic community of gracious power-brokers[34] versus a hoarding brood of inhospitable and violent officials.[35] The stark contrasts show that for the narrator true power is not based on conventional "deference-entitlement properties" (e.g., social standing, gender, race);[36] instead, it is based on a recognition of one's ultimate dependence upon God.

Yet, not withstanding all of the splendid oratory and spectacular deeds of the protagonists, their efforts occur solely among the Jews and only in Jerusalem. With 8:1b-12:25, however, the stakes are raised, a wider net of inclusion is cast, and before the excursion ends, important symmetrically structured reversals signal the power of the divine patron over a variety of mediating power brokers.

Architectonically, Acts 8:1b-12:25 is divided into two units (8:1b-11:26 and 11:27-12:25), and within the former, two smaller subunits (8:4-40 and 9:32-11:18) directly affect our in-

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[32]Note that the witnesses, despite their own participation in dramatic displays of power, quickly defer the honor, power and responsibility to the Holy Spirit or Jesus, who, for the narrator at least, is the ultimate cosmic power broker (cf. acts 2:22;3:12;5:3-4,9).

[33]The inept nature of the authorities is demonstrated in the prison escape episode in 5:17-25. the scene is highly ironic, moreover, for although the Council's Sadducees do not believe in angels (as we later learn in Acts 23:8), the narrator specifically indicates that an angel secured the deliverance for the apostles (5:19).

[34]The inclusive nature of the community is clearly shown in Joel's prophecy (2:17-21, esp. 2:17), Peter's interpretation of the prophecy (2:39) and some of the narrative summaries (1:12-14;2:41-47;4:32-37).

[35]See Pervo's discussion of the escalating violence of the Council in Acts 3-7 (Pervo, *Profit with Delight*, 18-21).

[36]For more on deference-entitlement properties in the ancient world, see L. Thompson, *Romans and Blacks* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma, 1989), 143.

terpretation of the Ethiopian episode. The first unit, 8:1b-11:26, casts the figure Saul in three pivotal sections of the second excursion—the beginning (8:1b-3), the middle (9:1-31) and the end (11:19-26), with the middle one featuring two recognition scenes (Saul's recognition of the true identity of Jesus, 9:1-9:17-19; and Ananias' recognition of Saul's true fate as a suffering witness to the people of Israel and the Gentiles, 9:10-15).[37]

Framing 9:1-31 are two series of episodes (8:4-40;9:32-11:18)[38] with a similar configuration. Each series begins by casting a leading character (Philip or Peter) on a journey away from Jerusalem (8:5;9:32),[39] and each virtually ends with an allusion to Caesarea (8:40;11:11ff.)[40] Furthermore, while each series begins with a report of a protagonist's mighty miracles(8:6-8;9:32-41), each also treats prominent patrons or mediators, with the

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[37]We should note that in Luke's subsequent recounting of these earlier scenes (Acts 22:1-21;26:1-23), Paul, himself highlights his mission of bringing "Light to the Gentiles" (22:21;26:17,20,23). That same role, based on an Isaianic text (Is 49:6), is previously linked to Jesus (Lk 2:32). For the authorial audience, however, even as early as the second excursion, Saul's role among the Gentiles is confirmed, and with the symmetrical reversal of his actions at the beginning and ending of this initial unit, the authorial audience is assured that the deity is powerful enough to change the heart and fate even of the movement's most unrelenting opponent. For another confirmation of Paul's role as "a light to the Gentiles," see Acts 13:47.

[38]Though Acts 8:4 continues to relate the scattering (*diasparentes*) of the disciples, the *men . . . de* construction holds both 8:4 and 8:5 together as the beginning of a new section. Cf. Acts 11:19,20. T. Haegg, commenting on this type of construction in the ancient novels, asserts that "a men clause, usually summarizing retrospectively the preceding action, is coupled with *a de* clause, which starts the new action" (Haegg, *Narrative Technique*, 314, 315). Moreover, we should remember the observation of Tolbert (drawn form Lucian in *De Conscribenda Historia*, 55) that ancient rhetorical sense units often overlapped each other "at the edges." See Tolbert, 109.

[39]It is curious that Luke places Peter in the story of the Samaritans' conversion, particularly to give them the Holy Spirit. It is more curious, however, that the narrator repeatedly links dramatic displays of the Spirit's involvement with reports of the Jerusalem mission (8:14;11:1), someone legitimated by the Jerusalem hegemony reports the Spirit's validation of the mission. Where they do not hear about it, no dramatic bestowals of the Holy Spirit are necessary. Thus, when the narrator does not narrate the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Ethiopian (8:26-40) or Lydia (16:14) or the Philippian jailer and his family (16: 33-34) or to the Athenians (17:4), the narrator is not denigrating their conversions. Instead, in the case of the Ethiopian's conversion, the narrator ironically is suggesting how the Jerusalem hegemony does not have as much power as it thinks. Jerusalem has no control over the conversion of the Ethiopian, and later, even before Peter finishes preaching and before Cornelius and his family are baptized, the Holy Spirit comes upon them (10:44-48).

[40]In 8:40, Caesarea is the destination of Philip (whom the narrator mentions again only in 21:8). In 11:5-17, Peter recalls his earlier journey to Caesarea.

last patron being a foreign representative in the Land of Israel. Moreover, the episodes featuring the foreign representatives give central attention to the theme of illumination: in 8:26-40, the illumination of a Gentile[41] about the true identity and fate of Jesus,[42] and in 10:1-11:18, the illumination of Cornelius, Peter and the Jerusalem hegemony[43] about the true nature of the deity, that is, a nature of beneficence toward all, including Gentiles.[44]

The second unit, 11:27-12:25, though smaller, is not itself without symmetry and frames. Framed by episodes of Christian benefaction (the disciples' determination to send relief to Jerusalem, 11:27-30, and the report of the completed mission,12:24-25), a highly ironic middle section bespeaks the consequences of presumed greatness.[45] He who kills at the beginning dies ignominiously at the end; he who is imprisoned near the beginning escapes wonderfully near the end. The two fates,

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[41]That illumination of the Ethiopian is a key issue in 8:26-40 is clearly signaled in the paronamasia or play on words in 8:28-32. The initial reference to "reading" occurs rather straightforwardly. While returning from worship, the Ethiopian "was reading" (*aneginosken*) from the prophet Isaiah (8:28). Yet, as the following quotation (8:30-32) indicates, more is at stake than just "reading" the prophet Isaiah: "Philip ran up to it [the chariot] and heard him reading (*anaginoskontos*) the prophet Isaiah. He asked, 'Do you understand (*ginoskeis*) what you are reading (*anaginoskeis*)?.' And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. Now the passage of the scripture he was reading (*aneginosken*) was this . . .".

[42]While some see the Ethiopian as a convert to Judaism, I agree with Tannehill (*Narrative Unity*, vol 2, 109) that the audience would assume the Ethiopian to be a Gentile, not a Jew. We must remember, moreover, that worship in the Temple (in the court of the Gentiles) was not limited to Jews or converted Jews alone. See H. Cadbury, "The Hellenists" in *The Beginnings of Christianity: Part I: The Acts of the Apostles*, ed. F. F. Jackson and K. Lake (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1966), 69.

[43]On dreams or dream-oracles as a form of illumination in the ancient narratives, including the Greek novels, see G. Schmeling, Chariton (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1974), 109;C. Anderson, "The Dream-Oracles of Athena, *Knights* 1090-95," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 121 (1991): 149-155.

[44]Among the other parallels between the Ethiopian and Cornelius episodes are the emphases on divine intervention and on hindrance. In both 8:26-40 and 10:1-11:18, note how angels steer the plot--one angel, by directing Philip on the road to Gaza (8:26) and another, by instructing Cornelius to send for Peter (10:3;11:13). Likewise, a voice offstage appears in both--the Holy Spirit, commanding Philip to join the Ethiopian's chariot (8:29) and the voice in Peter's dream-oracle, ordering Peter to go with Cornelius' envoys (10:19-20). With respect to the hindrance theme, note both how the Ethiopian episode virtually closes on this note (8:36), and how this theme connects Peter's speech in Caisarea (10:47) to his speech in Jerusalem (11:17). For more on divine intervention, see D. Dockery, "Acts 6-12: The Christian Mission Beyond Jerusalem," *Review and Expositor* 87 (1990): 427-428.

[45]Pervo, *Luke's Story of Paul* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 43.

moreover, are not isolated incidents. An angel of the patron is involved in each case. Clearly, then, the second unit's radical reversals resound the deity's power over the feigned and presumed greatness of an imperially appointed ruler over all of the Land of Israel, namely Herod Agrippa I.[46]

Altogether, then, the various elements of the two units abound in illumination and recognition scenes, an emphasis on the inclusion of Gentiles, and an emphasis on the power of God's paradoxical order, an order capable of overcoming the most virulent and violent persecution, through the changed fate of Saul and the death of Herod Agrippa I. The effect on the authorial audience is that it is assured of the all-powerful nature of the deity and it is prepared for a shift of focus toward Gentiles, a shift which will receive its greatest force in the next excursion by Paul (13:1-28:31). The two units of the second excursion, then, may be outlined as follows:

8:1b-11:26

A	8:1b-3	Saul and the scattering of the church
B	8:4-40	Journeys to Samaria and Gaza
C	9:1-31	Saul's conversion and persecution
B'	9:32-11:18	Journeys to Joppa, Lydda and Caesarea
A'	11:19-11:26	The scattering of the church and Saul

[46]That Herod Agrippa I ruled all of Palestine is noted by Josephus (*Jewish Antiquities*, 19.274-5), and symbolically, Agrippa I's demise is likely a clue to the authorial audience that the narrative is shifting from a virtually exclusive Jewish front to provincial areas beyond.

11:26-12:25

A	11:27-30	Saul and Barnabas sent on a mission
B	12:1-23	Persecutor Herod Agrippa I overpowered
A'	12:24-25	Saul and Barnabas return from mission

Since the Ethiopian episode falls within the first unit (8:1b-11: 26), a more detailed reading of each series of episodes (8:4-40 and 9:32-11:18) in that unit could reveal both the function of the relatively similar speeches made to the Ethiopian and to Cornelius and the force of each series' shift from Israelite to Gentile patrons. To see the function of the two speeches, we must note the relatively similar images given about Jesus in the Isaiah quotation in 8:32-34 and in the speech of Peter to Cornelius, his family and friends in 10:34-43. In each case, the image of Jesus is given in the familiar paradoxical refrain previously echoed in the first excursion (Acts 1:12-8:1a), that is, the image of a man of power, humiliated in death, and subsequently vindicated and raised to life by God.[47]

Similar images of status reversals provided the basic "structural form" for the whole of most ancient novels,[48] and

[47]Here, I follow Tannehill's translation of 8:33: "his condemnation was taken away." As Tannehill states, "In spite of some uncertainty in details, the quotation seems to fit the interpretation of Jesus' death and exaltation according to Scripture in the preceding speeches in Acts, broadening the base of Scripture quotations that support this interpretation." Tannehill, *Narrative Unity*, vol. 2, 111-112. For a similar translation, see E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A commentary*, tr. B. Noble and G. Shinn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 312.

[48]According to R. Hock, the basic structure of he novels "entails humiliation of the novels' protagonists and then their exaltation at the end. A summary of the plot of these novels will point out their structure: hero and heroine come from aristocratic families but after they fall in love they lose their status and become slaves. In addition to the psychological humiliation of being treated as a slave they endure assorted physical hardship, usually as a result of their maintaining fidelity to their beloved. But in the end they are raised up to their former status by the aid of some gracious deity, after which they live happily ever after." See R. Hock, "The Greek Novel," in *Greco-Roman Literature and the New Testament*, ed. D. Aune (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988), 134. Cf. Pervo, *Profit with Delight*, 80.

recapitulations of the image reminded the audiences of the novels of the inevitable triumph of the heroes and heroines and their deities.[49] In the case of Luke, moreover, responses to the image, now just as before, relate the ideological position of a character or character-group for or against the Christian movement. That is, in the first excursion (1:12-8:1a), characters opposed to the paradoxical refrain of Jesus' death and resurrection are largely drawn in a dysphoric shade. They hoard power and authority; they are inhospitable and even violent; they are tied to conventional understandings of power. The Ethiopian and Cornelius, to whom the same refrain is given, however, remain receptive throughout their tenure with the witnesses.[50]

Thus, both speeches function not only to signal the deity's inevitable control, but also to relate the distance or closeness which the authorial audience should have with certain characters. In the case of both the Ethiopian and Cornelius, then, the authorial audience would easily identify with them because their submission to the witnesses' order symbolically demonstrates their ideological acceptance of the witnesses' way of understanding power, that is, that true power, far from being linked to conventional deference--entitlements, is linked rather to the recognition of one's ultimate dependence upon the deity.

To see the force of each series' narrative shift from an Israelite patron to a foreign one, we must carefully note Luke's comparison and contrast between the two types of characters. For the authorial audience, the deity's ability to influence Simon Magus toward belief and repentance is important because Simon is a man of means and power. In Samaria, he is known for his power (*dynamis*) and for his ability to astonish others (8:9), and

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[49]*Ibid.*, 80.

[50]Note that the hospitality of the Ethioiopian, first demonstrated in his invitaiton for Philip to travel with him in his chariot (8:31b), does not stop once the Ehiopian learns the truth about Jesus. Instead, the two (and others) continue to travel together, and eventually, the powerful Ethiopian even submits himself to baptism (8:36-39). Likewise, Cornelius' hospitality, initially signaled by his gesture of deference (10:25), persists, for, after Peter's speech, Cornelius and his household implore Peter to continue with them for a few days (10:48).

yet through the deity's power-broker, Philip, even Simon, the astonisher, is astonished (8:13).[51] The extent of the deity's power, however, is not limited to a patron in Samaria, for the same deity influencing Simon influences the Ethiopian *eunouchos*,[52] a foreign mediating broker, who, aside from being a man of means (as is attested by his ability to travel great distances simply to worship, and in a chariot at that),[53] is acclaimed indeed as a *dynastes* in charge of all of Candace's treasury.[54] His prestige is not of a local variety, but he is from a distant land, Ethiopia (or Nubia),[55] and is the power-broker of a queen.[56]

Likewise for the authorial audience, the deity's ability toheal Aeneas and to raise the charitable (*eleamosunon*, 9:36) patron Dorcas from the dead is a significant indication of the movement's power (9:32-43). Again, however, the parameters of the deity's power will not be limited. Even the charitable (*eleamosunas*,10:2,4,31) and wealthy centurion,[57] a power-broker

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[51]Note, however, that the narrator draws Simon in dysphoric shades to show that his conventional understanding of power (as something one can buy with money) is not just inappropriate, but wicked and sinful (8:18-24).

[52]The similarities and contrasts between Simon and the Ethiopian largely form the basis of Thomas Brodie's analysis of Acts 8:9-40. Using the background of II Kings 5, he suggests that both story complexes emphasize washing and money. Moreover, he contends that Naaman's desire for greatness and Gehazi's money-mindedness are fused into one in Simon's character. On the other hand, he asserts that "the value of openmindedness, half-hidden in Naaman, comes to the fore in the figure of the Ethiopian." T. Brodie, "Towards Unraveling the Rhetorical Imitation of Sources in Acts: II Kings 5 as One Component of Acts 8:9040," *Biblica* 67 (1986): 41-67.

[53]Furthermore, the Ethiopian is riding in a servant-driven chariot (cf. 8:28,38).

[54]The term "Candace" is the Latin form of the Meroitic term "Kandake" (i.e., queen mother).

[55]Ancient Nubia was composed of two parts, "Lower Nubia, extending from the First to the Second Cataract [waterfall], and Upper Nubia, stretching southward from the Second Cataract to the area in the vicinity of Meroe, situated about halfway between the Fifth Cataract and present-day Khartoum." Snowden, 3.

[56]As L. Thompson has noted, "The powerful black eunuch and 'minister in charge of all the treasures' of the Meroitic Candace (queen or queen mother) mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles (8:27ff.) was admittedly a visitor of some distinction from a foreign land, and not a resident in Roman social space, but he displayed some of the symbols acknowledged in Roman society as symbols of high status: Literacy (probably in Greek), possession of a carriage and horses, attendance by personal servants." Thompson, 150.

[57]That the wealthy centurion has a number of servants attests to his wealth. Moreover, at this time, centurions were well paid and highly respected. On their wealth, see Campbell, 102.

of the emperor—indeed one whose network of power was more extensive than the little towns of Lydda and Joppa—is persuaded by the Christian movement.

These two observations suggest, then, that the development of both units is identical. The deity, while tied to Jerusalem, is seeking a much more extensive rule, not only over ostensibly powerful figures from within the Land of Israel, but over great foreigners as well. A wider net of inclusion is cast. The ante is raised even higher!

B.
A Rhetorical reading of 8:26-40

From our previous discussions, I have argued that Acts 8:26-40 is a small rhetorical subunit within a larger unit encompassing 8:1b-11:26. Juxtaposed to 8:1b-8:25, 8:26-40 functions to dramatize the power of the deity to influence not only powerful Simon, a native of Samaria, but even a powerful Ethiopian official. My final rhetorical reading, then, must seek to add clarity to those conclusions by showing 1) the importance of the episode as a re-enactment of elements from the Gospel of Luke and 2) the importance of the conversion of a particular foreigner, an Ethiopian, as a demonstration of the deity's prestige.

While some scholars have noted the allusions in Acts 8:26-40 to the closing recognition scenes in the Gospel of Luke,[58] what has escaped notice is the degree to which Acts 8:26-40 echoes the recognition scenes at both the beginning and ending of Jesus' ministry.[59] In Acts 8:26-40, the mention of the prophet

[58]R. O'Toole, "Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:25-40)," *JSNT* 17 (1983) :25; C. Lindijer, "Two Creative Encounters in the Work of Luke," in *Miscellanea Neotestamentica*, ed. T. Baarda, A. Klijn and W. Van Unnik (leiden: Brill, 1978), 77-85; J Grassi, "Emmaus revisted (Luke 24:13-35 and Acts 8:26-40)," *CBQ* 26 (1964) : 463-467. In the closing scenes of the Gospel of Luke, where the eyes or minds of two sets of disciples are opened (Lk 24:31,45), the narrator carefully links the disciples' recognition of Jesus' true identity and fate to meal settings. The link between meal settings (or some other form of hospitality) and recognition was a conveniton initially developed in Homer's *Odyssey*. See Murnaghan, 91-117.

[59]Note that although the Nazareth worshippers in 4:16-30 fail to recognize Jesus (thus, producing an anti-recognition scene), the scene is carefully developed to anticipate all of 18:31-24:53, a series of episodes in which many characters fail to recognize the true identity (and fate) of Jesus until the closing scenes when at last he opens the eyes of his disciples with the scriptures.

Isaiah, the act of reading, the presence of the Spirit, the use of a book, the emphasis on foreigners—all remind the authorial audience of the Nazareth scene where the Spirit-filled Jesus reads from Isaiah the prophet and announces a ministry of beneficence toward all persons, including Gentiles (Lk 4:16-30).

What, then, are the purposes of the allusions to both parts of Jesus' ministry. First, they recast Philip in the image of Jesus—as one directed by the Spirit, able to interpret the prophets and willing to take the gospel to someone from outside the Land of Israel. Second, they aid in contrasting ready Philip to reluctant Peter, especially because the latter is only able to share the good news with someone from a foreign land[60] after a series of visions, special divine interpretation, and not a little time to think the matter over.[61] Thus, Philip's ready willingness to take the gospel to someone from outside of Israel bespeaks both his submissiveness to the deity and his desire to extend the power of the deity. Peter's reluctance bespeaks his initial misunderstanding, but his eventual submission intimates the ultimate power of the deity to prevail over all, even the initial chief spokesman for the movement. Indeed, God, alone--not the witnesses--is ultimately in charge of the movement!

Picked from the list of foreigners who could conceivably have been listed in this missionary excursion is a black-skinned

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[60]Some scholars have suggested that Peter is similar to the prophet Jonah who likewise was reticent about a mission to foreigners, namely, the Ninevites. R. Sugirtharajah ["Luke's Second Volume and the Gentiles," *The Expository Times* 100 (1989): 178] asserts that "The Cornelius incident is often dubbed as Peter's Damascus road. In reality it was his Nineveh. It was a bitter reminder to Peter, just as it was to Jonah at Nineveh, that it is God who has the last say and that Peter had no right to determine what God had already cleansed." Cf. R.Wall, "Peter, 'Son' of Jonah: The Conversion of Cornelius in the Context of Canon," *JSNT* 29 (1987): 79-90.

[61]Peter's speech in Acts 10:34-43, like that of Philip's, is strongly reminiscent of both the beginning, note the Nazareth allusions (the opening of the mouth to speak; Jesus' anointing by the Spirit; and even the emphasis on the release or forgiveness of sins, cf. Lk 4:16-30). With respect to the ending, note the repeated emphasis on witnesses (Acts 10:39,41,42,43; cf. Lk 24:48); the reference to the forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:42; cf. Lk 24:47); and the reminders about the meal scenes (Acts 10:40-41; cf. Lk 24:30-31,35,41-42) Cf. R. Tannehill, "The Functions of Peter's Mission Speeches in the Narrative of Acts," *New Testament Studies* 37 (1991): 412.

African from Ethiopia, one of the ends of the earth.[62] That Luke singles out this figure--and not another--could be based, as we shall see, on the Greco-Roman proverbial ranking of the Ethiopians as wealthy, wise and militarily mighty.

Nubia's great wealth was not a secret. J. De Weever asserts that its notoriety for gold mines extends "from Pharaonic times until the late Middle Ages,"[63] and F. Snowden notes the interest of the Ptolomies in the Nubian gold mines.[64] Moreover, the Greek source behind the Latin translation of the Alexander romance gives witness to the wealth of Candace.[65] Not only does she live in a palace laden with onyx columns, gold couches and ivory tables, but her gifts to Alexander (e.g., a hundred bricks of gold and 1500 ebony rods) are equally impressive.[66]

That Acts itself bears witness to this view of the Ethiopian has previously been noted. Simon, Dorcas, and Cornelius are all persons of means, and the Ethiopian's ability to travel, to have a servant-driven chariot and to be in charge of a queen's treasury marks him also as a wealthy individual.

The Alexander romance also features the foresight and wisdom of Candace: e.g., when Alexander thinks his identity remains hidden, she reveals it to his utter surprise and dismay.[67] Diodorus calls Meroe "the civilizers of ancient Egypt"[68] and Josephus asserts that the Queen of Sheba (whom he claims was ruler of both Egypt and Ethiopia) was "thoroughly trained in wisdom."[69]

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[62]Note that C. Martin in her dissertation and in a recent *Semeia* article on Acts 8:26-40 impressively asserts that Lk's predecessors and contemporaries knew that Ethiopians were black-skinned and that Ethiopia was considered to be the "southern" end of the earth. Thus, for her, Acts 8:26-40 is in one respect a fulfillment of Acts 1:8. C. Martin, "The Function of Acts 8:26-40 within the Narrative Structure of the Book of Acts: The Significance of the Eunuch's Provenance for Acts 1:8c," (Ph.d. diss., Duke University, 1985); Clarice Martin, "A Chamberlain's Journey and the Challenges of Interpretation for Liberation," *Semeia* 47 (1989): 105-135.

[63]J. De Weever, "Candace in the Alexander Romances: Variations on the Portrait Theme," *Romance Philology* 43 (1990): 533.

[64]Snowden, 28; cf. Diodorus, 1.37.5.

[65]According to De Weever, the romance of Alexander was written ca. 200 BCE in Greek, but was later translated in the first third of the 4th century CE. The Greek source unfortunately is no longer extant, but that is no reason to doubt the work's content.

[66]De Weever, 530-532; *Historia Alexandri Magni*, 3.22-23.

[67]For more on her wisdom at a later period of time, see Thompson, 90.

[68]Diodorus, 3.2-3.7. Cf. Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, 2.80.189.

[69]Josephus, *Antiquities*, 8.165.

The insight of the Ethiopian is also noted in Acts. Both the Ethiopian and Cornelius exhibit the character of persons who are the best candidates for gaining insight, that is, persons, who, though already intelligent, take on the posture of humility in order to learn more or to be saved.[70] The Ethiopian, a literate man, able to read Greek and to speak the best kind of Greek[71] gives him a mark of distinction in the same way that Cornelius is distinguished because he belonged to a professional group receiving an excellent education.[72] Yet, both the Ethiopian and Cornelius take on a disposition of humility, the former by admitting that he does not understand a text that he is able to read (8:30,31) and the latter by falling before Peter (10:25) and suggesting that he, his family, relatives and friends are ready to receive instructions (*prostetagmena*,10:33) from Peter.

Herodotus, Diodorus, and Pliny attests to the great military power of the Nubians.[73] Moreover, whereas Strabo gives a pro-Roman picture of Gaius Petronius' invasion of Napata and Meroe[74] and the subsequent peace settlement at Samos (20 BCE), several historians[75] suggest that the absence of a full Roman

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[70]Note how the centurion (Lk 7:1-10) in the first volume also takes on a posture of humility. The centurion, while clearly aware of his own authority to give orders to his soldiers, also recognizes that he is "set under authority" (*exousia tassomenos*, 7:8), and thus, he asserts that he neither deserves a visit from Jesus nor is worthy to go to Jesus (7:6,7). Deferring to Jesus, he says: "Say the word (give the order) and my servant will be healed" (7:7).

[71] E. Haenchen, who notes the Ethiopian's use of the optative (8:31), suggests that "Luke makes this high official (a finance minister!) speak in a very educated fashion." Haenchen, 311.

[72]See Campbell, 103; K. Hopkins, "Conquest by Book," in *Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series*, ed. J. Humphrey (Ann Arbor, MI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1991), 138.

[73]Herodotus, 7.69-70; Diodorus, 3.2.4;3.3.1;Pliny, Naturalis Historia, 6.35.182. While Heliodorus' *Aethiopika*, an ancient Greek novel, surely attests to the continuing significance of the Ethiopians, its late date (ca. 4th century CE) places it beyond the parameters of our study's purview.

[74]The two kingdoms of ancient Nubia were the Napatan Kingdom (ca. 750-300 BCE) and Meroitic Kingdom (ca. 300 BCE to 350 CE.). Snowden, 3.

[75]Snowden, 30; E. Huzor, "Augustus, Heir of the Ptolomies," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Romischen Welt*, 10.1, ed. H. Temporini, (Berlin: W. De Gruyter, 1988), 364-365; M. Speidel, "Nubia's Roman Garrison," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Romischen Welt*, ed. H. Temporini, (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1988), 770; D. Braund, *Rome and the Friendly King: The Character of the Client Kingship* (London: C. Helm, 1984), 63-64; Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible, ed. , s.v. eunuch by D. Margoliouth.

garrison at Egypt's border,[76] and the remission of Augustus' phoros payment,[77] which itself could have been a payment of indemnity, not one of tribute,[78] is "less testimony to Rome's threat than a political concession to Nubia for its right of independence as long as it did not bother Egypt."[79] So aggressive were the Nubians and so opposed to Rome's military expeditions (or explorations) that the peace secured in 20 BCE continued for more than three centuries.[80]

Luke does not clearly suggest that the Ethiopian is a military figure, but the mention of the Candace along with the Ethiopian and the parallel episode about the conversion of the centurion Cornelius and his network of support, could suggest to the authorial audience that it should think of two groups of people known for their military prowess.

Of course, some may contend that this proverbial ranking of Ethiopian's wealth, wisdom and military might may have been based on an "intellectual wonderland vogue" or on educated Greeks and Romans' appreciation for the cultural benefactions of the Napata-Meroitic civilization[81] as opposed to the view of others that the proverbial ranking in some respect reflects reality,[82] but this debate among the classicists need not disturb our discussion. What adds weight to the acceptance of the proverbial image for Luke's authorial audience is that the LXX, the basic text from which Luke drew the typological mold for characters, also portrays Africans in general, and Kushites (Ethiopians) in particular, as wealthy, wise and militarily mighty.

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[76]Huzor, 775. Egypt's border stopped at Syene (modern Aswan), but outposts of the garrison there were strategically stationed below it at Talmis, Pselkis, and H. Sykaminos. See Speidel, 771.
[77]Braund, 64.
[78]*Ibid.*, 63.
[79]Speidel, 768.
[80]Hazor, 364-365.
[81]This is largely the position taken by Thompson, though he thinks that the military image is not a fixed one until "the middle of the 3rd century CE." See Thompson, 92-93.
[82]Snowden, 57-58.

Repeatedly, the LXX casts the Kushites as wealthy. Deutero-Isaiah alludes to the "wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of Kush"(45:14) and the writer of Daniel refers to the "treasures of gold and silver, and all the precious things of Egypt and the Libyans and the Kushites" (11:43). The most memorable of such texts, however, is Ps. 68:29-36, a text alluding to the tribute and worship brought to God in the Jerusalem sanctuary: "Egypt will bring bronze and Kush will stretch out her hands," i.e., bring her possessions or the products of her hands, as Mitchell Dahood suggests.[83]

The veneration of African wisdom is quite evident in the visit of the Queen of Sheba in I Kings 10. As Randall Bailey has noted,the queen's validation of Solomon as wise would only make sense to a reader if Israel *a priori* considered the queen and African wisdom to be exceptional.[84] That Luke shares this evaluation of African wisdom is seen not only by the reference to the Queen of the South in Luke 11:31, where Luke casts her to validate the wisdom of Solomon and the even greater wisdom of Jesus, but also in Acts 6:8, where Stephen's wisdom proves to be too powerful for several foreign Jews, including those from Africa (Cyrene and Alexandria).

Similarly, the military prowess of the Kushites resounds in the LXX. A Kushite is found in David's army (2 Sam 18:21ff.); and in a text designed to show God's punishment of Israel with African warriors,[85] Kushite mercenaries are numbered among the troops of Shishak, the Egyptian Pharaoh who invaded Judah during Rehoboam's reign (2 Chron 12:2-3; par. 1 Kings 14:25). Zerah's army of a million men, though defeated, is nevertheless depicted as militarily powerful, indeed so powerful that the reader

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[83]M. Dahood, *Psalms II: 51-100: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* AB (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 151.

[84]R. Bailey, "Beyond Identification: The Use of Africans in Old Testament Poetry and Narratives," in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Cain Hope Felder (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 181-182. On Sheba as a part of Africa, see Bailey, 172.

[85]*Ibid*, 182.

of 2 Chron 14:9-15 would have to regard the conquering power of God as even greater.[86] Isaiah acclaims the Kushites as "a nation tall and smooth, a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering" (Is 18:1,2), and Nahum, looking back to years before, recalls Kush as the strength of Thebes, the fallen Egyptian city.[87]

Clearly, then, Luke's authorial audience, having at least a general knowledge of the LXX, would have based their view of the Kushites (and other Africans) on the consistent typological portrait of this nation as one to be revered for its wealth, wisdom and military prowess.

Before I conclude this analysis, however, some final remarks must be made about the term *eunouchos*, for its meaning has been the subject of debate. The issue is whether the term *eunouchos* indicates physical castration or some official capacity. If the authorial audience would have thought of Isaiah 56, as Tannehill suggests, then, the Ethiopian could have met two conditions of persons to receive the benefits of God's new order--a foreigner and a eunuch.[88] On the other hand, one need not limit the meaning of the term to castration, for in the Septuagint, it covered a variety of official capacities, including that of a military figure.[89] Accordingly, the audience's familiarity with the Septuagint, along with the text's inclusion of Candace and the

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[86]Indeed as Bailey notes, the point of the story is to show that "belief and reliance upon YHWH are all that is needed." *Ibid*, 182-183.

[87]Josephus likewise notes the military prowess of the Kushites, mentioning, among others, Shishak (Isokus), Zerah (Zaraios) and Tharsikes (Taharqua). See Snowden, 53-54. See Josephus, *Antiquities*, 8.254,292-294;10.15-17.

[88]It is clear, of course, that there could be a number of other foreign "castrated" eunuchs besides those in Nubia. Thus, Tannehill's view that *eunouchos* means "castrated" obviates the narrator's interest in a specific kind of foreigner--a Nubian. For Tannehill's view, see *Narrative Unity*, vol. 2, 109; cf. H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, Hermeneia, tr. J. Limburg, T, Kraabel and D. Juel, ed. E. Jay Epps with C. Matthews (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 68.

[89]See Haenchen, 311; cf. W. Willimon, *Acts, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988), 71. The term *eunouchos*, need not have exclusively or emphatically indicated castration. In the Septuagint, the word *eunouchos* was a designation for several roles (jailers, Gen 39:2; chief bakers and cupbearers, Gen 40:2,7; chamberlains, keepers of harems, Esther 2:3; and military officials, II Kings 25:19; Esther 2:3).

parallel episode about the centurion could conceivably intimate a military designation for the *eunouchos*.[90]

Perhaps too much attention has been placed on the testicles, however, and so, I would like to offer a third interpretation, which transcends the debate between the contenders for the more conventional interpretations. What I think is overlooked is the extent to which both the *eunouchos* (regardless of the meaning) and the centurion are royal representatives: one, the servant of a queen, with a wide-ranging extent of power, and the other, that of Caesar, whose power extends over the *oikumene*. Moreover, each belongs to a stereotyped figure notoriously cast as one with better access to royal power than the average citizen.[91]

Thus, the larger issue for me is that these figures who already have access to power humble themselves before the deity's representatives, take on the quality of powerlessness, the same image associated with Jesus in the parallel speeches in 8:32-33 and10:34-43. This image is the good news spoken to the *eunouchos* (8:35) and the words of instruction given to Cornelius (cf. 10:33). For in the narrator's understanding of power, God's paradoxical order demands submission of the ostensibly powerful in order that they might share in the truer powerful order of the ultimate patron. Moreover, for the authorial audience, if the deity can persuade such conventionally influential figures to leave their own networks of power to become a part of the deity's paradoxical order, then, those in the ranks of the authorial audience are assured that the religion represented in the narrative is surely the right one for them.

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[90]Conzelmann's suggesiton that the term *eunouchos* does not suggest the office because that role is assigned to the term *dynastes* (Conzelmann, 68) is not solid because the term *eunouchos* in other literature could symbolize an office [e.g., of a treasurer, Plutarch, *Lives* (Demetrius, 25.5)] and the term *dynastes* sometimes replaces *eunouchos* as the translation for the Hebrew *saris* [cf. Jer 34:19 (LXX)], and at other times, simply indicates generally the great power of the person in question (cf. the cognate form *dynatoteros* used to describe Artaxates, the eucuch, in Chariton, *Chaereas and Callirgoe*, 5.2.2).

[91]J.B. Campbell asserts that soldiers were better able to get a rescript from Caesar than the average citizen. Campbell, 269-270. For an example of one of these rescripts, cf. Pliny, *Epistles*, 10.107. On the access of *eunouchoi* in Persian and Roman times, see Keith Hopkins, "Eunuchs in Politics in the Later Roman Empire," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 9 (1963): 66,77.

Thus, Acts 8:26-40 cannot be seen as an isolated and unconnected episode. As we have seen through this careful literary critical reading, the Ethiopian episode has at least four functions. For one, the episode is used to contrast Philip's readiness with Peter's reticence in taking the gospel to someone not simply outside of Jerusalem, but even to persons from outside of the Land of Israel. Second, within a network of connecting recapitulations and recognition scenes throughout Luke-Acts, the episode is one reminder among many of the deity's desire to illumine foreigners. Third, in a narrative ambience of persecution, the episode's scriptural allusion to the fate of Jesus assures the authorial audience of the inevitable ability of the deity to extend beneficence, despite the presence of opposition lurking in the shadows. Fourth, within a context of travel among foreigners, the episode dramatizes the movement of Christianity to figures whose power is expressed in their own wealth and wisdom and in the military might of the groups they represent, and yet these figures choose to submit themselves to the authority of Luke's ultimate patron deity.