

From Disaster to Disclosure: The Shipwreck in the Book of Acts in Light of Greco-Roman Ideology

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*También se le ocurrió que los hombres, a lo largo del tiempo,
han repetido siempre dos historias:
la de un bajel perdido que busca por los mares mediterráneos
una isla querida,
y la de un dios que se hace crucificar en el Gólgota.*

*It did also occur to him that humans, throughout the times,
have always retold two tales again and again:
the tale of a forlorn ship crossing the Mediterranean
in search of an island eagerly longed for,
and the tale of a god who has himself crucified on Golgotha.*

Jorge Luis Borges¹

Weighing Existence: Shipwreck as *condicio humana*

“What is a ship? (τί ἐστὶ πλοῖον)” Hadrian, the traveling emperor, is said to have asked Secundus the Silent this question. And since this Cynic was a silent one, he wrote his answer down:

Tottering thing, house without fundament, tomb already prepared, cubical piece of timber, voyage ruled by winds, prison hovering through the air, fate in fetters, sport of storms, doom fully rigged, wooden poultry, marine horse, open weasel trap, rescue most unsure, lurking death, wanderer through waves. (*Secundi philosophi Taciturni vita ac sententiae* 14)²

¹ “Evangelio según Marcos,” 128–29. I owe the reference to this short story to Alexander 2007b, 118–19. I have discussed the subject of this paper in greater length and with further relevant literature in my book *Religion als Reise*, ch. 3, pp. 173–240, parts of which are incorporated into this article; see also Backhaus 2015. All translations are mine, with the exception of biblical literature, which is quoted from the New Revised Standard Version. I am gratefully indebted to Dr. Joseph Sanzo (Hebrew University/LMU Munich), who patiently and carefully revised my English.

² Ἐπίσαλος πρᾶξις, ἀθεμελίωτος οἰκία, ἤρμοσμένος τάφος, κυβική σανίς, ἀνέμων ὁδοιπορία, ἀνιπαμένη φυλακή, συνδεμένη μοῖρα, ἀνέμων παίγνιον, ἐπιπλέων μόρος, ὄρνεον ξύλινον,

Hadrian, as the legend tells, added a further question: “What is a sailor? (τί ἐστὶ ναύτης)” Again, the philosopher’s *sententia* proves to be less than encouraging:

One who rides on waves, mounted messenger at sea, windy tracking dog, companion of winds, alienated from civilization, deserter of the earth, hostile to the winter storm, gladiator at sea, unsure about his rescue, next door to death, a lover of the sea. (*Secundi philosophi Taciturni vita ac sententiae* 15)³

These impressions represent the common view of ancient Mediterraneans, who do not seem to have been “lovers of the sea.” As long as the Romans stood on the shore they would proudly speak of the *mare nostrum*, but as soon as they found themselves on the high sea, they felt at the mercy of its tremendous powers.

In Aratus’s *Phenomena* this experience has found vivid (or deadly) expression:

Similar to seabirds diving into water, we will often sit timidly gazing at the sea from our ships and longing for the shore. But it is far away behind the waves. And only a thin plank of timber separates us from Hades. (*Phen.* 296–99)⁴

The Jewish Book of Wisdom, probably originating from the great harbor city Alexandria, communicates a similar feeling: “People trust their lives even to the smallest piece of wood” (Wis 14:5). Nevertheless, the wise will take this risk as an amazing sign of trust in God’s fatherly providence (cf. Wis 13:18; 14:1–8). It is without this particular trust that Juvenal gives his caustic advice: “Go then and commit your soul to the winds! Put your trust to a hewn piece of wood! May spruce timber part you from death by its breadth of four fingers or maybe, if it is especially thick, seven” (*Sat.* 12.57–59).⁵

Dedicated to loved ones who were drowned, the *epigrammata* often give a melancholic echo of the experience of the sea being the all too permeable frontier between life and death.⁶ Propertius, in a moving elegy on a friend who has fallen prey to a shipwreck, sighs: “Whatever you may build – it belongs to the

πελάγιος ἵππος, ἠνεωγμένη γαλεάγρα, ἄδηλος σωτηρία, προσδοκώμενος θάνατος, ἐγκύματος ὀδοιπόρος. The Greek text follows the edition by Ben Edwin Perry (1964).

³ Κυμάτων ὀδοιπόρος, θαλάσσιος βερεδάριος, ἀνέμων ἰχνευτής, ἀνέμων συνοδευτής, οἰκουμένης ξένος, γῆς ἀποστάτης, χειμῶνος ἀνταγωνιστής, διαπόντιος μονομάχος, ἄδηλος ἐπὶ σωτηρία, θανάτου γείτων, θαλάσσης ἐραστής.

⁴ ... ἴκελοι δὲ κολυμβίσιν αἰθνήσιν / πολλάκις ἐκ νῶν πέλαγος περιπατῶντες / ἤμεθ' ἐπ' αἰγιαλοῦς τετραμμένοι οἱ δ' ἐτι πόρσω / κλύζονται· ὀλίγον δὲ διὰ ξύλον αἰδ' ἐρύκει.

⁵ *i nunc et ventis animam committe dolato / confisus ligno, digitis a morte remotus / quatuor aut septem, si sit latissima, taedae.*

⁶ Cf., e.g., *Anthologia Graeca* 7.263–79, 282–88, 291–92, 494–503. For the crude reality of traveling by sea in Roman times, see Casson 1994, 149–62; André and Baslez 1993, 419–47. For an impressive collection of testimonies about sea traveling as a risk and a liminal situation, see Rahner 1984, 291–94; Wachsmuth 1967, 431–34.

winds. No ship will ever grow old. Even the harbor will betray your trust!" (*Eleg.* 3.7.35–36).⁷

As a matter of fact, many of the epic heroes suffer shipwreck: the Argonauts, Ulysses, Aeneas.⁸ The subject attracts Greek tragedians, Roman poets, philosophers, rhetoricians, fabulists, satirists, historians, biographers, autobiographers, and private or official letter writers.⁹ In a particular manner, it occupies novelists¹⁰ as well as the novel-like apocryphal Acts of the Apostles.¹¹ Hence, it is hardly surprising that the Bible, being part of the Mediterranean culture, is deeply committed to this subject as well. In the Hebrew Bible the scope ranges from Leviathan, the crocodile-like embodiment of the monstrous powers of the sea,¹² to the prophet Jonah, who survives his very individual sea storm in a rather unusual vessel (cf. *Jonah* 1:3–2:11). As God manifests his power by taming Leviathan, Jesus in the New Testament conquers the chaos on the Sea of Galilee¹³ – labelled as *θάλασσα* by the first Christians (not without some exaggeration, to be sure, but without any alternative as far as seamanship background is concerned).¹⁴

In sum, for Greco-Romans, for Jews, and for early Christians sea traveling was the liminal situation *par excellence*, and both in documentary and fictional

⁷ *ventorum est, quodcumque paras: haut ulla carina / consenuit, fallit portus et ipse fidem.*

⁸ Argonauts: Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argon.* 2.1097–122; 4.1223–249; Valerius Flaccus, *Argon.* 1.608–58; Ulysses and his comrades: *Od.* 3.286–300; 5.291–463; 7.248–55, 270–82; 9.67–84; 12.401–50; Aeneas: Virgil, *Aen.* 1.81–156; 3.192–208; 5.8–25.

⁹ For examples, which are representative of the respective groups and literary types, see Euripides, *Hel.* 400–13; Horace, *Carm.* 1.3.9–24; Propertius, *Eleg.* 3.7; Phaedrus, *Fab.* 4.23.9–25; Lucanus, *Bell. civ.* 9.319–47; Josephus, *Vita* 14–15; Dio Chrysostomus, *Or.* 7.2, 31–32 (cf. Aelius Aristides, *Or.* 45.33–34); Plutarch, *Dion* 25.3–11; Arrian, *Peripl. M. Eux.* 3.2–5.3; Apian, *Bell. civ.* 5.88–90; Aelius Aristides, *Or.* 48 (*Sacri sermones* 2): 12–14, 65–68; Lucian of Samosata, *Merc. cond.* 1; *Nav.* 7–9; *Tox.* 19–20; *Ver. hist.* 1.6, 9–10; Diogenes Laertius, *Vit. phil.* 7.4–5 (Zeno); Synesius of Cyrene, *Epist.* 5.69–174, 195–227.

¹⁰ Chariton, *Callirhoe* 3.3.10–12; Xenophon of Ephesus, *Anthia & Habrocomes* 2.11.10; Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe & Clitophon* 3.1–5; Longus, *Daphnis & Chloë* 1.30.1–31.1; Heliodorus of Emesa, *Aethiopica* 1.22.21–29; 5.27.1–45; *Historia Apollonii regis Tyri* 11–12. For details, see the instructive study by Börstinghaus 2010, 69–118; for the travel motif in the early novels in comparison with Acts, see Alexander 2007a; 2007b, esp. 101–17.

¹¹ *Ps.-Clem. hom.* 12.16.3–17.4; *Acts John Pro.* ed. T. Zahn pp. 8–9, 50–51; *Acts Phil.* 3.10–12 (33–34). For the motifs of sea storm and shipwreck in the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, see Söder 1969, 48; Börstinghaus 2010, 237–45.

¹² *Pss* 74:14; 104:26; *Isa* 27:1; cf. *Job* 38:8–11.

¹³ Cf. *Mark* 4:35–41 parr.; 6:45–52 par.; *John* 6:16–21.

¹⁴ I use the term “Christianity etc.” for the sake of convenience. However, I am aware of the fact that Judaism and Christianity were not clear-cut religions in the era of Second Temple Judaism and some decades thereafter. For a methodological discussion of the selection and comparative evaluation of “parallel” texts, see Backhaus 2014, 2–16. For the intertextual and intracultural background of Acts 27–28, see first of all Börstinghaus 2010, esp. 13–277. Also helpful: Plümacher 1972, 14–15; Praeder 1980, 227–45; Pervo 1982, 50–51, 156 nn. 182, 189; Thimmes 1992, 40–80; Talbert and Hayes 1999. For the cross-cultural profile of the narration, see Hummel 2000.

literature, sea storms and shipwrecks do not only occur extensively but also serve as a test case of character, of philosophy, and of religion. If there is a *conditio humana*, nothing is more suitable for illustrating it than exactly this type of story.

Changing the Maps: Paul's Sea Passage and the Cultural Passage of the Gospel (Acts 27:1–28:16)

It is in this liminal space above the numinous deep that “Luke,” the ostensible author of the Third Gospel and the Book of Acts, places his revealing narrative picture of Christianity as it enters the center of the Empire (Acts 27:1–28:16).¹⁵ Notwithstanding its polycentric setting, Luke’s two-volume work, as a whole, is designed along the axis Jerusalem – Rome (periphery – center).¹⁶

The narration starts in Jerusalem as the omphalos of the world. Thus, in the first two chapters of his gospel, the evangelist – who, according to the old legend,¹⁷ was often depicted as a painter – draws a completely “Hebrew Bible scenery” before our eyes: Jerusalem, temple, priest, sacrifice, pilgrimage, angels, prophets, scribes, barren woman, unexpected hero boys, psalms prayed. These motifs are styled in semantic imitation of the Septuagint. Luke leaves no doubt in his readers’ minds: the (Christian) Messiah is born on the venerable ground of Israel’s Holy Scripture; the Christian “way” takes as its point of departure the time-honored biblical foundation invoked by this imagery. By contrast, in the last two chapters of Luke’s two-volume work, this master of *mimesis* changes the literary colors completely: now he leaps into the urbanity of sea travels, sea storms, and shipwreck, so familiar to the cultural encyclopedia of each pagan around the Mediterranean. He does not only change the subject but also the way to present it. To put the matter pointedly: where before there has been “Bible,” there is now “novel.”

¹⁵ To be sure, there were obviously already Christians in the city (cf. Acts 28:15); however, what we find in Acts 27–28 is the spirit-guided advent of the gospel to Rome as its divine destination.

¹⁶ Alexander (2003, esp. 170–73) warns against a centrist view of early Christianity that does not represent the more fluid Lukan model of loosely connected Christian communities. According to her, it is to be taken seriously that the main characters in Acts are neither “itinerant bishops” nor “local church leaders” but travelers on a way that mirrors a web of social and communicative networks. However, it seems hard to deny that the axis Jerusalem – Rome (periphery – center) in fact dominates the Lukan road map as a whole, and this obviously with the purpose of revealing the course of historical change guided by God’s plan. For detailed argumentation, see Schäfer 2012.

¹⁷ This legend, which may go back to the sixth century, was popular since the eighth century, see Belting 1991 70–72; Bacci 1998, esp. 33–96.

His last and most adventurous journey leads Paul, the prisoner, from the East to the West, from the margins to the center, from Caesarea Maritima to Rome.¹⁸ He faces many dangers, some of which are rather novelistic in character, on a sea voyage extending from Sidon, Myra, Syracuse, and Rhegium to Puteoli. The disaster – a tempest of fourteen days and an odyssey between Crete, Syrtis and “Adriatic Sea” – occurs between the port of Fair Havens and Malta.¹⁹

Off the island of Malta, Paul and his company eventually suffer shipwreck and encounter “philanthropic barbarians.” As a result, they spend the winter on the island. Paul, Luke’s prototypical Jew, who circumcised Timothy in the central part of Acts (16:1–3), is now portrayed as the travel companion of Julius, the – again “philanthropic” – centurion of the Augustan Cohort, who saves Paul’s life as he is likewise saved by Paul. At the end of the day, the messenger of the God of Israel reaches the Italian shore from the Gentile island on board an Alexandrian ship under the protection of the Dioscuri (cf. Acts 28:11).

We may wonder why the sea storm and the shipwreck – which in no way propel the plot forward – are so important to Luke that he dedicates one of his most extensive and detailed stories to this very subject. Loveday Alexander has called this sort of narrative retardation “slow motion filming.”²⁰ No feature of the conventional tales of sea storms and shipwrecks seems to be left out.²¹ Luke, who omits years of development and skips months of Paul’s last journey, is suddenly indulging in sailor’s parlance (and *hapax legomena*): “to sail slowly” (βραδυπλοέω, Acts 27:7), “northeaster” (εὐρακύλων, 27:14), “to take soundings” (βολίζω, Acts 27:28), “steering-oars” (πηδάλια, Acts 27:40), “to hoist the foresail to the wind” (ἐπαίρω τὸν ἀρτέμωνα τῆ πνεύουση, Acts 27:40), etc. Having started with pious legends in the milieu of the Jerusalem temple, Luke now comes to his conclusion by spinning a sailor’s yarn. What is going on?

He is spinning his yarn, as it were, from east to west, or, more exactly, from the Galilean margins of the Roman Empire to its very center. This extensive narrative marks the caesura between the first Christian epoch, which takes place on the familiar ground of the biblical world, and the Mediterranean culture, in which the readers live their lives.²² It was of vital importance for the

¹⁸ For interpretation, see Pervo 1987, 50–57; Klauck 1996, 127–33; Pervo 2009, 639–78; see also the monographs by Praeder 1980, and Börstinghaus 2010, esp. 279–444.

¹⁹ There has been some dispute about the isle Μελίτη; for a comprehensive and reliable discussion, see Börstinghaus 2010, 432–44.

²⁰ Alexander 2007b, 118.

²¹ Untimely departure, treacherous winds, distressing darkness, helpless nautical maneuvers, the superior knowledge of the special passenger, his being guided by dreams, the lightening of the ship by throwing cargo overboard, the lowering of the dinghy, the sinking hope, again and again the wooden ship planks – sometimes rescuing the shipwrecked, sometimes not – swimmers, who save their comrades, and – as an encouragingly frequent pattern – helping natives. For reference material, see Backhaus 2014, 194–95.

²² For the epochal break marked by the narrative device of the sea storm episode, see Wolter 2009, 277–78.

“functional memory” to have an ancient and venerable past in order to legitimize Christian identity. In this view, “Moses” is the “*mos maiorum*” of the Christians.²³ Nevertheless, it was of equal importance to the Christian historian to be on a par with contemporary Greco-Roman culture.

And it is this culture, in particular, which the sea storm narrative puts into a quasi-visual effect created by the rhetorical technique of *ἐνάργεια* (“vivid illustration”).²⁴ The subject as such, the setting, the motifs and *topoi*, the semantic inventory, lines, and colors together serve the rhetorical function of placing the gospel in a new world. The reader will mentally grasp that the cognitive cartography has changed. Although the gospel is rooted in the biblical world of old, it has now reached the center of the contemporary Roman world. It is not only the last journey of the individual Paul that is told in Acts 27–28 but a dramatic change of historical spotlight, of cognitive maps, of cultural orientation. Our travel narrative builds “the moving bridge between the mysterious scene of Christian origins and the awesome power of the Roman forum.”²⁵ What these concluding chapters focus on – in the narrated world but also by the conventional mode of narration – is nothing less than the key experience of nascent Christianity: reaching the shores of the “here and now.”²⁶ The tale of the disaster turns out to be the *ekphrasis* of a transition, as violent as a sea storm, as dangerous as a shipwreck, and as necessary and secure as this particular passage guided by God’s providence.

Plato once remarked that the Greeks lived between the Pillars of Hercules and the Black Sea like frogs about a pond (cf. *Phaedr.* 109). On a more modest level, we may say that Luke considers the narrated world, in which the first followers of Jesus lived, as a frog-like existence about the shores of the Sea of Galilee. While he is the first evangelist to call the Lake of Gennesaret λίμνη, that is to say a kind of pond, he reserves the noun θάλασσα for the Mediterranean, thereby indicating that it has become the *mare nostrum* of the developing Christian οἰκουμένη (“universal culture”).²⁷ The Mediterranean puts dramatically into effect that “[b]ig events happen on a big stage.”²⁸ The gospel requires the world stage – nothing less will suffice.

Thus, what is first and foremost disclosed by this narrated disaster is the cultural claim of nascent Christianity and its changing self-definition. No longer

²³ For detailed discussion (and relevant literature), see Backhaus 2007.

²⁴ Cf. Backhaus 2014, 40–45, 63, 192, 202; for the rhetorical strategy of *ἐνάργεια* in Acts 27, see now also Neumann 2015.

²⁵ Miles and Trompf 1976, 259.

²⁶ Cf. Jipp 2013, 28–30. The “cognitive cartography” of Luke-Acts, esp. Acts 27–28, was insightfully explored by Loveday Alexander in two important contributions: 2007a esp. 75–86; 2007b, esp. 108–19. For the divine plan in Paul’s sea adventure, see Talbert and Hayes 1999, esp. 278–80.

²⁷ Cf. Alexander 2007a, 81.

²⁸ Thus (in regard to the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles) Spittler 2013, 372.

were demons expelled, but waves were conquered. Lukan Christians are no longer content with the “hidden transcripts” of cultural underdogs. Instead, these believers are becoming familiar with the urbane Mediterranean map visualized from Homer to Chariton by sailing through storms and surviving shipwrecks. The culmination of this development was reached with Synesius of Cyrene (ca. 370–413 CE). We owe this highly learned philosopher-bishop a late but delectable eyewitness report (*Epist.* 5.296–97 [ed. Garzya]). His fifth epistle has left us an extensive and valuable description of two sea storms, which illustrates that *autopsia* and fiction do in no way exclude each other: sea storms are always similar (cf. *Epist.* 5.198–200), but they may be shaped to be an entertaining δράμα ἐκ τραγικοῦ κωμικόν, a “comedy woven from a tragic event” (cf. *Epist.* 5.296–301).²⁹

With a twinkle in the eye, Synesius intimates that such stories might appear, for sophisticated readers, somewhat conventional or even overused. Indeed, already the satirical writers of the first and second centuries like to jump into the genre of the *poetica tempestas* to take an ironical bath in it: *omnia fiunt / talia, tam graviter, si quando poetica surgit / tempestas* (Juvenal, *Sat.* 12.22–24).³⁰

We have, of course, reason to believe that the early Christians were less than sophisticated readers, and they may have found both entertainment and edification even in a “literary mass-product item.”³¹ By offering a popular form of entertainment, Luke shows himself able to keep pace with contemporary literature. The elaborate maritime story indicates that nascent Christianity is on its way to emerge from the phase of (semi-)orality and to claim its equal footing with the dominant literary culture. Luke may even embrace the cliché, for how else should he demonstrate that he shares common social values?

However, the point is that our author, while using the traditional shipwreck narrative, lends some of its motifs and *topoi* a particularly Christian color. He baptizes, as it were, the cliché in order to transform the conventional disaster into a theological disclosure so that an existential border experience between life and death, separated by a “tottering thing,” reveals who the Apostle Paul is, what sort of gospel he delivers, and how his God works.

Revealing the Truth: The Disaster as Disclosure of Character

It is *in extremis* that we may see how truthful a person is and how genuine his or her convictions really are. Hence, sea storms and shipwrecks provide the narrator with the opportunity of disclosing what is in a character. It is therefore

²⁹ For a detailed discussion of Synesius’s report, see Börstinghaus 2010, 253–77.

³⁰ “It always happens in this way, so gravely, when once the poetical storm has risen.” Cf. also Juvenal, *Sat.* 1.9, 14; 12.81–82; Lucian of Samosata, *Merc. cond.* 1; *Tox.* 19; *Ver. hist.* 1.1–4.

³¹ Cf. Börstinghaus 2010, 142–43.

not by accident that the first downright characterology, Theophrastus's *Χαρακτῆρες ἠθικοί*, unmasks one of its most telling types – i.e., the coward – by placing him aboard a vessel (cf. *Char.* 25.1–2). In particular, philosophers as well as political leaders often passed their “trial by fire” above water: “Tell me how they behave in disaster and I will tell you how much their view of life is worth.”³²

The “Stoic in the sea storm” is an attractive subject. After all, it is the Apostle Paul himself who, in a hardship (*peristasis*) catalog, refers to his experience of suffering shipwreck as proof of his apostolic character: “Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea” (2 Cor 11:25–26).

It is sufficient to offer only one example, not too remote from Luke's time. The satirist Lucian of Samosata (ca. 120–190 CE) takes obvious pleasure in revealing the true character of his antihero Peregrinus, a Cynic and for some time a Christian prophet-celebrity: Peregrinus, who is a master of an eye-catching contempt of death, proves to be excessively timid in the eye of a sea storm: “We were shaken up during the night in the middle of the Aegean. Dark storm-clouds came up and a tremendous sea rolled in. And, behold, this right admirable gent, who appeared to be superior to death, broke into wailing along with the women” (*Peregr.* 43).³³ Although Peregrinus survives the tempest, his philosophy suffers shipwreck!

It goes without saying that the Lukan Paul, in contrast, reveals himself to be a first-class sea hero. He is the one who warns against putting out to sea (Acts 27:10–11, 21), thereby displaying more nautical expertise than the centurion, the skipper, and the ship-owner. He is the only one keeping calm amid the tempest, between all the hectic activities on deck during that odyssey of two weeks; eventually we even see him taking over the command.

This leads us to another feature of our travel narrative, which may be called “The special passenger”: the lay expert who proves himself more competent in seamanship than the professional sailors. The prototype is, of course, the indefatigably lamenting Aelius Aristides.³⁴ Philostratus's Apollonius of Tyana is probably the closest parallel to Luke's Paul. Nonetheless, his fellow passengers are doomed to suffer shipwreck; only Apollonius and his friends survive by

³² Cf. Plutarch, *Caes.* 38.2–4; Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 19.1; Augustine, *Civ.* 9.4.29–71.

³³ ὡς ἐπεὶ παραχθείημεν τῆς νυκτὸς ἐν μέσῳ τῷ Αἰγαίῳ γνόφου καταβάντος καὶ κῶμα παμμέγεθες ἐγείραντος ἐκώκυε μετὰ τῶν γυναικῶν ὁ θαυμαστός καὶ θανάτου κρείττων εἶναι δοκῶν. For interpretation, see Börstinghaus 2010, 176–78, who also elucidates the contrast to Paul, the “sea hero” (cf. *ibid.* 181–82).

³⁴ Cf. *Or.* 48 (*Sacri sermones* 2): 67–68; *Or.* 50 (*Sacri sermones* 4): 33–36; Synesius of Cyrene, *Epist.* 5.57–71. For a detailed discussion of Aelius Aristides, see Börstinghaus 2010, 44–59.

timely changing the vessel (cf. Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 5.18). In contrast, no lesser than God above grants safety to Paul's travel party, obviously for the sake of Paul's errand (cf. Acts 27:22–25).

Perhaps the most appropriate means of characterizing one's hero is to describe what the special passenger does while the world around him is on the verge of sinking down. In his twelfth satire, Juvenal describes his friend Catullus, who finds himself in a deadly sea storm, with all its dangers and horrors, which, by the way, are very similar to those experienced by Paul in Acts 27–28 (cf. *Sat.* 12.10–82). The central hull is already flooded when Catullus decides to throw overboard *quae mea sunt ... cuncta* (*Sat.* 12.37) – a business to which Juvenal dedicates no less than 25 verses. Eventually, even the ship's mast is lowered: “The danger is extreme when we take refuge to such means that make the ship smaller” (*Sat.* 12.55–56).³⁵ Throwing off the ballast is, of course, a common emergency measure in distress at sea as well as a common motif in sea storm narratives. However, in this case the motif illustrates Catullus's character: in telling contrast to the legacy hunters, whom Juvenal wishes to unmask, his friend is prepared to part decisively with all his possessions in order to save his life. It is the last minute that makes the man!

Let us contemplate for a while another hero's “last minute.” We remain close to Luke – not only as far as the dating but also as far as the special passenger's behavior is concerned (although, at first glance, this may seem rather doubtful). In his *Satyrica*, Petronius Arbiter (died 66 CE) depicts a sea storm off the Italian coast with the typical elements we know from Acts 27–28 (*Sat.* 114.1–115.5): the play of winds, darkness, the dinghy lowered, the mast cracked, timber planks on the roaring sea. Once again, the ship runs on a cliff; once again, local people turn out to be “philanthropic” helpers; once again, the catastrophe throws light on a character. In this case, it is the peculiar poet Eumolpus, whom the narrator Encolpius finds wholly absorbed in his poetic activities in the midst of disaster:

We hear an odd murmuring, a sort of groaning under the skipper's cabin as if some beast is trying to escape. So we follow up the sound and find Eumolpus sitting there and scribbling verses on an immense scroll of parchment! We are taken by surprise that he finds leisure to engage in poetry being in the neighbourhood of death (*in vicinia mortis*). We pull him out although he is screaming and adjure him to get his senses back. This guy, however, enraged because he is interrupted, cries: “Let me complete this sentence! My poem might grow bad in the end!” (*Sat.* 115.1–4)³⁶

³⁵ *discriminis ultima, quando / praesidia adferimus navem factura minorem.*

³⁶ *audimus murmur insolitum et sub diaeta magistri quasi cupientis exire beluae gemitum. persecuti igitur sonum invenimus Eumolpum sedentem membranaeque ingenti versus ingerentem. mirati ergo quod illi vacaret in vicinia mortis poema facere, extrahimus clamantem iubemusque bonam habere mentem. at ille interpellatus excaudit et « sinite me » inquit « sententiam explere; laborat carmen in fine. »*

Although in satirical distortion, the scene implies a serious message: in the *vicinia mortis*, the neighborhood of death, the truth of a life is revealed. What is not worth dying for is neither worth living for.

Notwithstanding the obvious difference in literary genre, the “special passenger” Paul bears some resemblance to Eumolpus. Like Eumolpus, Paul is described as acting normally when in *vicinia mortis*: the stable pole in the middle of the storm, he speaks to his fellow passengers about σωτηρία (“salvation”), a noun that acquired theological connotations since having been proclaimed in the nativity story in view of the expected Messiah (Luke 1:69, 71, 77; cf. 2:30).

Salvation is more than sea rescue, and it may be found not beyond, but amidst the disaster: after having raised the morale of his 275 fellow passengers, Paul “took bread; and giving thanks to God in the presence of all, he broke it and began to eat. Then all of them were encouraged and took food for themselves” (Acts 27:35–36).³⁷ Of all the conventional narrative elements, this feature catches the eye. As it is salvation that shines through rescue, it is the Christian Eucharist that shines through this act of reinforcement.³⁸ Thus, Luke borrows elements from the broader Mediterranean world and makes them acceptable narrative forms for the Christian gospel.³⁹

This leads us to the last way in which narratives of sea storms and shipwrecks contribute to characterization. In particular, these motifs address the overlapping concerns of what really matters to a human being and what he or she has made of himself or herself. It is again the *vicinia mortis* that demonstrates what is of remaining value for a person. Catullus, Juvenal’s friend, for instance, wisely puts – in contrast to the voracious Roman legacy hunters – all his eggs in one basket when he decides to throw overboard all his belongings because he knows that life is his only real property.⁴⁰ The Roman author Vitruvius reports that the Socratic philosopher Aristippus, when he was stranded on the Rhodian shore, learned an important lesson:

³⁷ εἶπας δὲ ταῦτα καὶ λαβὼν ἄρτον εὐχαρίστησεν τῷ θεῷ ἐνώπιον πάντων καὶ κλάσας ἤρξατο ἐσθίειν. εὐθυμοὶ δὲ γενόμενοι πάντες καὶ αὐτοὶ προσελάβοντο τροφῆς.

³⁸ Read against a pagan background, a certain closeness to the *votum in tempestate* might have been observed; for this form of prayer in distress at sea, see Wachsmuth 1967, 435–39. Acts 27:35–36 may allude to the Eucharist; for discussion on this question, see Klauck 1996, 128–29; Pervo 2009, 664. In *Acts Pet.* 5, the Apostle Peter uses the time of a calm to baptize the skipper and to share the Eucharist with him.

³⁹ For the relationship between literary convention and innovation in ancient sea storm narratives, see Thimmes 1992.

⁴⁰ Juvenal illustrates what he means by a drastic image from wildlife: *imitatus castora, qui se / eunuchum ipse facit cupiens evadere damno / testiculi: adeo medicatum intellegit inguen* – “He imitates the beaver that makes himself a eunuch by forgoing his testicles in order to escape: Clearly enough he understands the abdomen’s healing power” (*Sat.* 12.34–36). The beaver was said to shake off the hunter by biting off and throwing away his own testicles, which putatively contained valuable remedies. Similarly, the sea passenger who is hunted by storms saves his life by throwing away his belongings. For the interpretation of Juvenal’s twelfth satire, see Adamietz 1993, 417–21.

Only such belongings and provisions for the journey should be delivered to the young people that may be rescued from a shipwreck. For only those things may help us to live which may not be harmed by the changeful tempest of fate nor by political overthrow nor by the devastation of war. (Vitruvius, *De architectura* 6 praef. 1–2)⁴¹

When Paul suffered shipwreck on the Maltese shore, he was left with nothing but his fellow passengers, the gospel, and the spirit. As he continued the voyage aboard the Alexandrian vessel ΔΙΟΣΚΟΥΡΟΙ three months later, he had all that he needed. Like Zeno, the founder of the Stoic school, he could have said: *Bene navigavi, cum naufragium feci* – “I have navigated well when I have suffered shipwreck” (Diogenes Laertius, *Vit. phil.* 7.4; cf. Seneca, *Tranq.* 14.3). The old Mediterranean tale of the shipwreck provided Luke with the image he needed to demonstrate the new beginning “beyond the Sea.” Indeed, for Luke the traditions, labors, and struggles of the past sink without any trace. He does not explain the paradigmatic shift; rather, he paints a picture of it in a genre that is familiar to his readers. There is a fresh start in Rome, an open end, and a new story to be told by subsequent Christians in other books.

Fathoming the Deep: The Disaster as Disclosure of the Divine

The sea with its *tremendum et fascinosum* is a natural medium of disclosing divine sovereignty and guidance. We observe the Argonauts, Ulysses, and Aeneas crossing not only the sea but also the stories of classical gods and goddesses. The names given to ships in Hellenistic and Roman times may remind us of the index of a theological handbook (*Clementia, Concordia, Constantia, Fides, Iustitia, Pax, Pietas, Providentia, Salus, Salvia*), but also of the “who’s who” of Mount Olympus (*Aphrodite, Artemis, Asclepius, Athena, Demeter, Apollo, Dionysus, Hercules, Isis, Parthenos, Poseidon, Eleutheria, Castor, Pollux, Dioscuri*).⁴² Such names reveal a bit of the existential insecurity of seafarers but also imply that those who go on an errand will always cross boundaries, even those separating the earthly from the transcendent.

We have seen that the historical Paul was shipwrecked three times and drifted at sea for a night and a day (2 Cor 11:25). That may sound a bit fictitious. Ulysses, after all, suffers a very similar fate – not without cogent theological reasons, to be sure.⁴³ However, the boundaries between fact and fiction are porous. Jose-

⁴¹ *eiusmodi possessiones et viatica liberis oportere parari, quae etiam e naufragio una possent enare. Namque ea vera praesidia sunt vitae, quibus neque fortunae tempestas iniqua neque publicarum rerum mutatio neque belli vastatio potest nocere.* In his magisterial work *Schiffbruch mit Zuschauer*, Hans Blumenberg refers to this anecdote in the thought-provoking chapter “What the shipwrecked person is left with” (12–27; English version: 10–26).

⁴² See Casson 1973, 354–60; for a list of ancient ship names, see *ibid.* 439–41; for theophoric or soteriological ship names, see Wachsmuth 1967, 98–100.

⁴³ Cf. *Od.* 5.388–89: ἔνθα δὴ οὐκ ἔκτασ δὴ οὐ τ’ ἤματα κύματι πηγῶ / πλάζετο, πολλὰ δὲ οἱ κραδίη

phus, in his autobiographical report on his embassy to Rome, which was at the very least meant to be documentary, tells the same story. He was traveling, probably aboard a large Alexandrian grain freighter, from Caesarea Maritima to Italy, when fate – or, as we shall see, providence – struck:

After our vessel had sunk in the middle of the Adriatic Sea, we – being about 600 passengers in number – kept ourselves above water, swimming through the entire night. At daybreak, by God’s providence a Cyrenaic ship appeared so that I and a few others, setting the rest behind, were picked up aboard, all together about eighty people. (*Vita* 15)⁴⁴

When a man is to be praised, Cicero remarks, one should tell of great and incredible events that have occurred to him, most of all when such events seemed to be caused by divine intervention.⁴⁵ It is by divine intervention (κατὰ θεοῦ πρόνοιαν) that Josephus is saved: after all, only eighty out of six hundred passengers are saved. Josephus is obviously chosen by God in order to reach the destination that providence has reserved for him in Rome and Jerusalem. Likewise, Paul is saved because he has a place reserved for him in Rome, as the angel tells him with the typically Lukan “divine δεῖ” (“must”): “Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before the emperor; and indeed, God has granted safety to all those who are sailing with you” (Acts 27:24; cf. 19:21; 23:11). Luke uses the verb διασώζειν / διασώζεσθαι – “to save someone *through*” to indicate God’s hand in this sort of “religious escapism.”⁴⁶ The disaster results not from coincidence, but from God’s sovereign plan.

Thus, what is at stake here is the legitimacy of the very transition Paul’s last journey dramatically visualizes. This legitimacy implies that Paul is innocent regardless of what the emperor will decide. Here Luke is touching a far-reaching conviction in Greco-Roman ideology: those whom the gods wish to punish, they punish at open sea. Those whom the gods wish to exonerate, they spare or rescue from distress at sea. We know this act-and-consequence connection best from the Book of Jonah.⁴⁷ The role this connection played in Greco-Roman

προτιόσσειτ’ ὄλεθρον – “In this way, he drifted around on roaring waves for two nights and two days; often his heart saw doom ahead.”

⁴⁴ βαπτισθέντος γὰρ ἡμῶν τοῦ πλοίου κατὰ μέσον τὸν Ἀδρίαν, περὶ ἑξακοσίους τὸν ἀριθμὸν ὄντες, δι’ ὄλης τῆς νυκτὸς ἐνηξάμεθα, καὶ περὶ ἀρχομένην ἡμέραν ἐπιφανέντος ἡμῖν κατὰ θεοῦ πρόνοιαν Κυρηναϊκοῦ πλοίου, φθάσαντες τοὺς ἄλλους ἐγὼ τε καὶ τινες ἕτεροι, περὶ ὀγδοήκοντα σύμπαντες, ἀνελήφθημεν εἰς τὸ πλοῖον. For interpretation, see Mason 2001, 23–24; Börstinghaus 2010, 35–37.

⁴⁵ *si quid cui magnum aut incredibile acciderit maximeque si id divinitus accidisse potuerit videri* (*Part. or.* 82).

⁴⁶ Cf. Luke 7:3; Acts 23:24; 27:43, 44; 28:1, 4.

⁴⁷ The Rabbinic tradition provides an impressive counter-story: Titus, the destroyer of the Jerusalem temple, fell into blasphemous boasting but was spared from shipwreck and survived a tempest. However, soon enough he found himself vexed by some gnat in his brain – eventually swollen to the size of a bird (*Git.* 56b; cf. *Gen. Rab.* 10.7). For the motif of pious Jews being saved from sea storm and shipwreck by divine intervention in Rabbinic narratives, see Hezser 2011, 262–64.

culture was so significant that it could even be employed in lawsuits: suffering shipwreck or being spared from shipwreck is treated as evidence in cases of murder⁴⁸ and impiety.⁴⁹

To demonstrate that the whole passage – and thereby the transition it illustrates – is guided by God, Luke makes use of the conventional elements of a sea travel story. The apparition of an angel, presumably in a dream, prepares the special passenger for the perils ahead.⁵⁰ Once again – now from the perspective of the Maltese Gentiles – the divine will is disclosed. After Paul and his company have been rescued (Acts 28:1–6), a viper bites the holy man at the fire kindled by the “philanthropic barbarians.” The logic of retribution seems obvious: someone who has just managed to escape from a deadly peril only to fall prey to another one has doubtless incurred divine wrath: “This man must be a murderer; though he has escaped from the sea, justice [viz., Δίκη, which also may refer to the goddess of justice] has not allowed him to live” (28:4).⁵¹ The viper exe-

⁴⁸ Miles and Trompf 1976, esp. 261–63 refer to the oration *Περὶ τοῦ Ἡρώδου φόνου* by the Athenian logographer Antiphon (ca. 480–411 BC). The defendant was accused of having killed and removed a fellow traveler named Herodes on a passage to Aenus. The defense made clear that impure passengers had often perished at sea taking the lives of their fellow passengers, even the innocent ones, with them. In the present case, however, all the passengers had enjoyed a favorable voyage so that the defendant’s innocence seemed to be established (*De caed. Herod.* 82–83). The analogy to the case of Paul, for whose sake the fellow passengers were saved, is obvious (cf. Acts 27:22–24, 34, 44). Sure enough, this passage is somewhat remote from Luke’s times and culture. Its heuristic value lies in illustrating a common Greco-Roman *ideologoumenon*, which reaches from the punishment of Ulysses’s comrades for the slaughter of Helios’s cattle (*Od.* 12.127–41, 260–446) to Lactantius (cf. Miles and Trompf 1976, 263–64).

⁴⁹ A relevant source text from the forensic milieu of classical Athens is contributed by Ladouceur 1980, esp. 436–41. In 399 BC, the orator Andocides was accused of ἀσέβεια. In this case, not only the speech for the defense but also the prosecution speech has come down to us (in the corpus of Lysias’s orations). Both sides concentrated on the fact that Andocides had survived several sea journeys without any harm. On the one hand, the prosecution allowed that the gods had saved the blasphemer, but only for the official punishment (Pseudo-Lysias, *Contra Andociden* 19–20, 26–28, 31–32). On the other hand, Andocides was not reluctant to emphasize how dangerous his journeying had been in so uncertain a time. He who was spared by the gods was not to be judged by humans: ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν, ὦ ἄνδρες, ἡγοῦμαι χρῆναι νομίζειν τοὺς τοιούτους κινδύνους ἀνθρώπινους, τοὺς δὲ κατὰ θάλατταν θεῖους – “I for my part, gentlemen, hold that this sort of dangers (viz., the risks of a lawsuit) are to be considered only human, whereas the dangers at sea are to be considered divine in nature” (*De mysteriis* 139; cf. 137–39). Again the analogy is obvious: if God was on Paul’s side in the drama at sea, it did not matter what Nero was about to do in Rome. As Ladouceur himself stresses (1980, 441), we again have to take into account the temporal and cultural remoteness from the first century CE. Therefore, he adds further evidence (e.g., Virgil, *Aen.* 1.39–45; Horace, *Carm.* 3.2.26–30; 1980, 441–43). For the concept of shipwreck or ἀπλοια because of impiety, see Wachsmuth 1967, 265–71; for the complementary idea of εὐπλοια, see *ibid.* 272–76.

⁵⁰ Acts 27:23–26; cf., e.g., Aelius Aristides, *Or.* 48 (*Sacri sermones* 2): 12–14.

⁵¹ Without retributive character: the shipwrecked, who has managed to escape to the shore, is bitten by a venomous snake (*Anthologia Graeca* 7.290) or killed by a wolf (*Anthologia Graeca* 7.289, 550). Cf. Amos 5:19: “as if someone fled from a lion, and was met by a bear;

cutes the divine judgement. In Heliodorus's novel *Aethiopica* the rascal Thermuthis discloses his character by dying in an appropriate way:

Thermuthis laid down to sleep, and so he fell into a sleep that was his last and a deadly one caused by the bite of a venomous snake. Perhaps it was the counsel of the Moirai that he found his end in a way that was not unsuitable to his character. (Heliodorus, *Aethiopica* 2.20.13–16)⁵²

Observing that Paul has not only survived the shipwreck but also the bite of the snake, the Maltese barbarians change their mind entirely: the stranger is not a murderer but a god (Acts 28:5–6). Luke, who is not normally prepared to allow the confusion of man with god (cf. Acts 12:20–24; 14:8–20), does not seem to have any problem with such a questionable theology. For, in this case, even in terms of a pagan framework, Paul is on the right side. Whatever might happen in front of the emperor's court in Rome, providence has passed its judgement!⁵³

And so we come finally to the Dioscuri, in whose sign (Acts 28:11: παρασήμῳ Διοσκουρίοις) and, apparently, under whose protection the gospel reaches its destination port.⁵⁴ The Twin Brothers belong to the usual cast of seafarer stories, and they create a marine milieu that is, as we have seen, so important to Luke. Sure enough, the inconspicuous detail of the ship's name and sign may have come down to Luke from his tradition. Nevertheless, even in this case we may wonder why, of all details, he considers this one important enough to be told. In a rather widespread tradition of Greek and Roman mythology, Castor and Pollux were the patrons of sailors and helpers to those in distress at sea.⁵⁵ Ever since the time of the late Republic they symbolized Rome's expansive claim on the world. Particularly in the early Empire they were also venerated as patron gods of the city of Rome and as role models in the emperor cult and ideology. The reason for this veneration was not least due to the cultivated remembrance of

or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall, and was bitten by a snake." A variant with a retributive seal is offered in *Anthologia Graeca* 9.269 (Antipatros of Thessalonike).

⁵² πρὸς ὕπνον τραπεῖς ὁ Θέρμουθις χάλκεόν τινα καὶ πύματον ὕπνον εἴλκυσεν, ἀσπίδος δῆγματι, μοιρῶν τάχα βουλήσει, πρὸς οὐκ ἀνάρμοστον τοῦ τρόπου τὸ τέλος καταστρέψας.

⁵³ For interpretation of Acts 28:1–6, see Ladouceur 1980, 448–49; Klauck 1996, 129–31; Talbert and Hayes 1999, 272–75; Kauppi 2006, 107–12; Pervo 2009, 673–75; Jipp 2013, 257–64.

⁵⁴ For mythographic evidence, see Diodorus Siculus, *Bibl. hist.* 6.6.1; *Apollodori Bibliotheca* 1.67, 111, 119; 2.63; 3.117, 126–28, 134–37, 173; Hyginus, *Fab.* 77; 80. As always, there are numerous variants: sometimes Zeus is not the father of both twins; often human origin is attributed to Castor, and he is regarded as mortal. For an overview of the myth, the religious and political significance, and the iconography of the Twin Brothers, see Bethe 1903; Kraus 1956, 1122–133; Poulsen 1994; Geppert 1996; Scheer and Ley 1997. The relationship between the Twin Brothers and Acts 28:11 is discussed in Ladouceur 1980, 443–49; Backhaus 2015.

⁵⁵ That is why Theophrastus's coward does well to check if someone aboard is not initiated, when the sea is getting up (cf. *Char.* 25.1–2). The lily-livered passenger probably thinks of the Samothracian mysteries of the Cabiri, which were, on a popular level, often identified with the Dioscuri. Of course, he is eagerly interested in good relationships with those gods who are "in charge of the sea"; cf. Ladouceur 1980, 442.

their deeds as saviors and messengers of the good news of victory in Rome's legendary past.⁵⁶ Such distinctive features doubtless belonged to the cultural encyclopedia of Luke's readers. Therefore, we do not go too far when we transfer this symbolic system of meaning to the traveler Paul: he is depicted as the pre-destined messenger of the good news of God's victory in the city of Rome, claiming the world both for the gospel and for the true σωτήρ ("savior") and βασιλεύς ("king/emperor").

Let us add a virtue of the Dioscuri that correlates with Dike's function: the Dioscuri were regarded as guardians of oath and verity.⁵⁷ They punished the wrongdoers and saved the innocent at open sea. To be sure, Luke, as a Christian, does not "believe" in these functions (cf. Acts 14:11–17; 17:16–34), but he is – at least, to a certain measure – accommodating towards popular piety. The subtle symbolism of the detail "Dioscuri" lies in the field of connotation and enculturation, not meaning and message. For Luke, the Twin Brothers are a culturally adaptable indicator of the "good star" and universal claim, under which the gospel's journey to the end of the world takes place. But the God of Israel remains in control.⁵⁸ It is human disaster that opens space for his disclosure – not yet at the end of the world, to be sure, but at the end of an adventurous journey and at the world's very center. Hence, there is one insight – probably one insight only – that connects Luke's shipwrecked hero Paul to Petronius's shipwrecked fool Encolpius, who sits, after all, at the shore and who has come to his wisdom: *si bene calculum ponas, ubique naufragium est* – "If you draw the right conclusion, there is shipwreck everywhere" (*Sat.* 115.16).

⁵⁶ Cf. Geppert 1996, 19–28, 32–35. In Christian times, Paul as well as the Apostle Peter adopted important functions of the Twin Brothers, e.g., as patrons of the city of Rome and helpers of the sailors; cf. Ladouceur 1980, 448.

⁵⁷ Cf. Ladouceur 1980, 445–46, who refers to the function of the Twin Brothers as warrantors of oaths, which is demonstrable for the first century CE. The self-description of the Dioscuri in the conclusion of Euripides's *Electra* is much older, but extraordinarily clear: *ὡ δ' ἐπὶ πόντον Σικελὸν σπουδῆ / σφόντε νεῶν πρόρας ἐνάλους, / διὰ δ' αἰθερίας στείχοντε πλακὸς / τοῖς μὲν μυσαρῶϊς οὐκ ἐπαρήγομεν, / οἷσιν δ' ὅσιον καὶ τὸ δίκαιον / φίλον ἐν βιότῳ, τούτους χαλεπῶν / ἐκλύοντες μόχθων σφύζομεν. / οὕτως ἀδικεῖν μηδεὶς θελέτω / μηδ' ἐπιόρκων μέτα συμπλείτω* – "We two must now hurry over the Sicilian Sea to rescue the ships floating in its waves. As we stride through the regions of the air, we will not give help to those who are polluted. But those who are attached to piety and justice in their lives we will save and deliver from grave hardships. Hence, make sure that no one does wrong or joins perjurers when they go to sea" (*El.* 1347–355; cf. Isocrates, *Or.* 10.61; Libanius, *Or.* 57.24). The warning against sharing a ship with perjurers sources from the concern that the fellow passengers will have to share the punishment at open sea (cf. the sarcastic anecdote in Diogenes Laertius *Vit. phil.* 1.86).

⁵⁸ For interpretation, see Klauck 1996, 132–33; Kauppi 2006, 112–17. For a critical overview of the motif of Paul's "innocence" in Acts 27–28, see Jipp 2013, 7–12. Paul is not only "innocent," he is God's empowered messenger; compare Börstinghaus 2010, 449, 451; Jipp 2013, 11–12, and, comprehensively, Labahn 2001, 89–91. Thus, Paul's innocence is but one aspect within the comprehensive theme of God's plan with the transition of the gospel from the margins to the center; compare Alexander 2007a, 74; Börstinghaus 2010, 452–53.

Drawing the Right Conclusion: “There is Shipwreck Everywhere”

The “right conclusion” takes us back to Secundus the Silent: shipwreck is not the worst illustration of our *condicio humana*. Nor is it the worst illustration of the *condicio Lucana* of early Christianity. Ever since John the Baptist, the prophetic desert nomad, the followers of Jesus formed an itinerant movement as part of a religion that formed an itinerant people ever since Abraham and Moses. Luke, however, was the first Christian author who made, in literary form and clearness, of this pragmatic necessity a program of self-affirmation, thereby transforming a style of life into a style of spirituality.⁵⁹ Remarkably enough, he chooses the genre of a travel report in order to explain a religious journey. Christianity in its beginnings – or, as Luke calls it, “The Way” (ἡ ὁδός) – is itinerant by definition.

In the particular case of sea storm and shipwreck, we have worked out how Luke uses the conventional forms of a Mediterranean narrative to transform the *topos* of the final disaster into an image of the decisive transition. Paul’s last journey demonstrates that Christianity has reached both (intradiegetically) the cultural and political center of the Roman empire and (in the “real world”) the level of contemporary literature. By means of μίμησις (“imitation”) and ἐνάργεια (“vivid illustration”), Luke creates a narrative atmosphere in which this change is conjured up before the eye of the mind. Intended readers are “at home” between the philanthropic centurion Julius, Dike, and the Dioscuri; they face this liminal situation at the side of the special passenger Paul, whose privileged knowledge and theological bird’s eye view they share. In this way, the readers get, so to speak, a first-hand experience of the decisive transformation of Christianity: the passage from the epoch of Judean origins to the epoch of the “here and now,” from the biblical ancestry to the pagan culture, from the Sea of Galilee to the *mare nostrum*. The dramatic story of a complicated passage legitimizes the (similarly complicated) passage from a Christianity that is centered on its Jewish descent to a Christianity that is on a par with the dominating society. So, first of all, our travel narrative reveals the direction of the course of history. For Luke, the conventional plot and narrative strategies provided the opportunity to connect this lesson in salvation history with a lesson about the character of the protagonist Paul: he is the calm force in the eye of the storm; he is the upright Jewish hero and the saving companion of Gentiles. If Nero’s court condemns him, the heavenly court obviously does not. Instead, the plot affirms the passenger Paul to be God’s distinguished messenger – eventually taking over

⁵⁹ Accordingly, the third gospel, Luke’s bios of Jesus, describes its hero as a wanderer proclaiming God’s kingdom as a message on the way and for the way; see the contribution by Reinhard Feldmeier in this volume: “The Wandering Jesus: Luke’s Travel Narrative as Part of His Hermeneutical Strategy of ‘Double Codification,’” pages 343–353.

the role of the Dioscuri as deliverer of good news to Rome. At the end of the day, what is disclosed is God's guiding hand in the course of history. Thus, Paul's dramatic sea travel ends where journeying will always end: it does not matter to be elsewhere; it matters to be someone else.

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