2. Commission in Ancient Literatures

The commission stories of the apostolic Acts have antecedents in a large scale of ancient texts. In this chapter, we will survey five ancient literary circles: Egypt and the ancient Near East, Jewish literature, Greco-Roman biography, the ancient novel, and the canonical Gospels. The question as to how far these texts served as models for the apostolic Acts can be answered only later when we have accomplished a detailed analysis of the apostolic commission stories. This chapter serves to gain a broader perspective of the literary pattern of commission, and to establish a preliminary typology of the genre.

Egypt

The tomb of Rekhmire, vizier of Thutmose III, is decorated with reliefs and inscriptions depicting and narrating the vizier’s career. Rekhmire’s appointment is related in two narratives; one in the third, and the other in the first person. The third person narrative accompanies a relief that shows Thutmose III enthroned, and before him, in accordance with the statement of the inscription, Rekhmire appears for appointment. The third person narrative concentrates on the duties of the vizier. In the autobiographical passage, Rekhmire relates his commission in much detail. The autobiography first reports Rekhmire’s titles and noble descent, and then relates the two audiences

1. Rekhmire was vizier (prime minister, the highest official of the kingdom) under Thutmose III and Amenhotep II, c. 1470–1445 BC; Davies, *Rekh-mi-re’*, vol 1, 3. Baltzer, *Biographie der Propheten*, 137–57, discusses the commission of Rekhmire as a precursor of the commission of the prophets.
2. Davies, *Rekh-mi-re’*, vol 2, plates xiii-xvi. The figure of the vizier was erased, but its place and direction facing the king can be inferred from the titles above it; Davies, *Rekh-mi-re’*, vol 1, 16; Breasted, *Eighteenth Dynasty*, 267–8.
during which he received his commission. Talking about the first audience, he emphasises the fine clothes he wore, and the honour he received from the servants of the Pharaoh. He seems to have received the \textit{insignia} of the vizier and experienced a sort of transformation:

My ability was not as it had been (before); my yesterday’s nature had altered itself since I had come forth in the adornments (of the vizier, promoted) to be the priest of Ma’et. Thus praise of me was established in the midst of both tall and short. Everyone looked upon me as the sheen walls wrought with turquoise.

The actual charge of the vizier takes place at the second audience, when the Pharaoh entrusts Rekhmire with the ‘judgment of cases’ that should be in accordance with what the Pharaoh says. He also encourages the vizier to be strong and not weary. The other two-third of the autobiography tells how the vizier acted out his office.

Another text tells the commission story in the third person$^4$. It does not talk about the peripherals of the ceremony, but more accurately describes the task of the vizier. While the autobiography speaks in an enthusiastic tone, the third person narrative says that the office of the vizier ‘is not pleasant at all’ but rather ‘it is bitter as gall’. We can easily identify various elements of commission in these texts: audience, description of the task, act of appointment, encouraging form, and delineation of sphere of authority.

The first person narrative forms the central part of an autobiography. It contains several shorter episodes and describes a sequence of audiences that we can compare to different Jewish, Christian and Greco-Roman passages. The first audience scene relates a mystical experience, surprisingly similar to Apuleius’ account of Lucius’s appearance in the temple of Isis. Lucius tells the story in the first person, in an enthusiastic tone similar to Rekhmire’s. The detailed description of his attire, and the honour and admiration of the people play a major role in the passage$^5$. We also have a parallel in the Old Testament. Zechariah describes the appointment of the high-priest Joshua by the

\begin{footnotes}
5. Apuleius, \textit{Metamorphoses} 11.23–24. See esp. \textit{confluunt undique turbae} […] \textit{varii quisque me muneribus honorantes} and ‘\textit{repente velis reductis in aspectum populus errabat}.’ (‘Suddenly crowds flowed in from every direction […] to honour me with their various gifts’. Trans. J.A. Hanson, LCL)
\end{footnotes}
angel of Yahweh. His filthy clothes are removed, he receives a clean turban and a ‘festal apparel’, and the angel gives him Yahweh’s commands. In the court visions of Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1, the words of commission immediately follow the description of the heavenly scene. Shining raiment is an attribute of divine epiphanies in Hellenistic and early Christian tradition. Paul’s epiphany on the Damascus road is separated from the actual commission: it is a manifestation of God’s power, though not a court vision. Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Paul—unlike Rekhmire, Lucius, Zechariah, and Jesus—do not appear as exalted or glorified in these passages. The pattern of a visionary episode followed by a commission episode is found also in the apocryphal Acts.

Another interesting feature of the Rekhmire passages is the contrast between the first and third person narrations—although they are contained by two separate texts. Within one text we can find this opposition in the Lucan Acts. Paul’s commission is told in the third person in chapter 9 and in the first person in chapters 22 and 26. Also in Acts it is the third person narrative that talks about the ‘bitterness’ of the task: ‘I myself will show him, Jesus says, how much he must suffer for the sake of my name’. In sum, the autobiography of Rekhmire contains several of the structural elements of the commission pattern as found in the early Christian tradition.

Not only the vizier, but also the Pharaoh himself had his commission story. Thutmose III, the Pharaoh’s son from a mother not of the royal family, began his career as a humble priest. This is the way he tells about his ‘installation to be a prophet’: ‘(The god Ammon), my (father) is he; I am his son, whom he commanded that I should be

6. Zechariah 3.1–10
10. Acts 9.16
11. Breasted, Eighteenth Dynasty, 59–68, and idem, New Chapter. I also relied on Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, 446–7. The inscription was found in Karnak and is the introductory speech at an audience that Thutmose III gave on the occasion of the completion of one of his great additions to the Karnak temple of Amon.
upon his throne, while I was one dwelling in his nest’. Then comes the vision which the young priest saw in the temple:

He made heaven and earth festive with his beauty; he received the great marvels; [...] I prostrated myself in his presence. He set me before his majesty; I was stationed at the Station of the King [i.e. the Pharaoh’s place in the temple]. [...] (He opened for) me the doors of heaven.

The hero ascends to heaven as a hawk, where he sees ‘the glorious forms of the Horizon-God’. Re crowns him, gives him different titles, and assigns him power over the countries. His rule over both Upper and Lower Egypt is emphasised. He will do what the god requires of him and build him a temple in Karnak ‘as an eternal work’.

This commission story also forms part of a larger autobiographical narrative. There is a court vision in the temple, such as in Isaiah 6, and a father-son relation between god and king, as in Psalms 2. The commission story forms a turning point of an autobiographical narrative told in the first person. The honour and glory of the hero at the moment of commission is emphasised like in the narrative of the vizier. The task is especially defined in terms of the new titles that the Pharaoh-to-be receives. The text also describes the territory of his rule.

Another member of the dynasty, Thutmose IV, still as a young prince, was on the road at noon during a hunting expedition:

A vision of sleep seized him at the hour (when) the sun was in the zenith, and he found the majesty of this revered god speaking with his own mouth, as a father speaks with his son, saying, ‘Behold thou me! See thou me! my son, Thutmose. I am thy father, Harmakhis-Khepri-Re-Atum, who will give to thee my kingdom on earth at the head of the living’.

Then the text describes the parts of Egypt, which the Pharaoh is going to receive as his land, and finally we read the prince’s reaction. This is a vision on the road at noon, like Paul’s vision before Damascus. Its structure is more simple than that of the stories of Rekhmire and Thutmose III. The details of the vision are given less attention

13. For epiphany at noon, see p. 73, note 48 below.
than the act of commission itself. The relation of sender and hero (“as father and son”) and the description of the task receive major emphasis. Like the Jewish prophets, the hero is provided with instructions concerning the territory of the mission.

The hero is entrusted with a ‘kingdom’ also in the apostolic commission stories. Paul is sent to the ‘Gentiles and kings and the people of Israel’, Paul and Peter divide the world among themselves into ‘circumcision’ and ‘Gentiles’\textsuperscript{14}, and in the Acts of Thomas the apostles ‘portion out the regions of the world’, in order that each one ‘might go to the region that fell him by lot, and to the nation to which the Lord had sent him’\textsuperscript{15}. Not only in the Egyptian texts, but also in the ideology of Early Christianity the commissioned hero is the representative of the sender at the place where he is sent.

Finally, not only viziers and Pharaohs, but gods themselves had a commission in Egypt. In an interesting passage Re commissions Thoth\textsuperscript{16}:

\begin{quote}
Behold ye, I am in the sky in my (proper) place. Inasmuch as I shall act so that the light may shine in the Underworld and the Island of Baba, thou shalt be scribe there and keep in order those who are in them. […] Thou shalt be in my place, a place-taker. Thus, thou shalt be called: ‘Thoth, the place-taker of Re’.
\end{quote}

There is a hierarchical order of commission in these texts. Re commissions other gods and the Pharaohs, while the Pharaohs commission the viziers. The viziers, in turn, manage the life of the country. The commissioned persons always rule in a certain territory with full powers, but also in total obedience to their sender’s words. The sequence of commissions provides a hierarchical scheme of power, a universal structure. If somebody becomes commissioned, the life of that person is integrated into this order. In this way, biography is set into a cosmic (and mythological) perspective. The fact that the ‘Sports Stela’ of Amenhotep II almost repeats the story of Thutmose IV\textsuperscript{17}

\begin{flushright}
14. Acts 9.15 and Galatians 2.7–9, respectively.
17. Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, 448.
\end{flushright}
shows how well established such cognitive patterns were in that cultural milieu.

The commission of officials is a subject still found toward the end of dynastic Egypt. The last Pharaoh was Nectanebo II of the Thirtieth Dynasty, who ruled until 341 BC. He was the subject of various legends in Hellenistic literature, and the following episodes suggest that he was a devoted restorer of decaying Egyptian cults. A papyrus reports a vision of Nectanebo:

[He] is made witness to a carefully designed meeting between the goddess Isis and the god Onuris. The latter, characterised as a giant, approaches the goddess, who is installed upon a throne erected on a papyrus boat, complaining about the neglect of his sanctuary by Nectanebo and, specifically, about the unfinished work on the re-cutting of the obliterated hieroglyphs on the stone walls of the god’s sanctuary in Sebennytos.

After his vision, Nectanebo ‘sets aside a large sum’ and ensures that the work would be finished in a few days, because ‘it was the will of god’. Another story set under Nectanebo relates the commission of the scribe Nechautis. The papyrus, copied in the 2nd century AD, reports how the Pharaoh restored the cult of Imhotep, relying on data that he found in an ancient book. The Pharaoh’s scribe Nechautis, undertook the translation of the book at the command of the deity.

There are differences between the earlier and later commission stories. The biographies of the Eighteenth Dynasty are written on the hidden walls of magnificent tombs and suggest a static order of things established and maintained through the commission of kings and ministers. The texts from the late dynastic period stand on papyri and show decay, restoration, and changeability. The composition of the later stories and their circulation as late as the 2nd century AD suggest

18. For the ideological function of imitation in Egyptian art, see Frankfort, *Egyptian Literature*, 46–9, 59. For a comparable use of imitation in totalitarian systems in history, see Frye, *Double Vision*, 50ff.
20. Among others, he was thought to be the father of Alexander the Great.
22. Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1381, see pp. 236ff below.
that the Egyptian models of this literary pattern could find their way also to Hellenistic and early Christian literature. Trajectories between Egyptian commission narratives and the apostolic Acts can be established through the Greek novels, with which we will also deal below. Egyptian themes are abundant in these texts, and the protagonists of some novels are initiated as the priests of Egyptian cults. Jewish literature provided yet another way for the aforementioned motifs of commission to make their way into the plots of the apostolic Acts. One has to think not only of the call stories of the Hebrew Bible, which probably imitated Egyptian patterns, but also of Hellenistic-Jewish literature: the plot of Joseph and Aseneth, for example, plays in Egypt, and the heroine’s conversion (or better, initiation) to Judaism is the central theme of the narrative.

23. Kerényi, Romanliteratur, has particularly emphasised the influence of Egypt and the cult of Isis on the Greek novels. On the itinerary of the novels he noted (45): ‘Our Greek novels play likewise in a semicircle around Egypt, with this included as the centre’. He suggested that the plot of the novels is an imitation of the myth of Osiris and Isis (p. 229, cf. 58, 61, 127ff, 147ff.). Hägg, Novel, 98, rejects the idea, arguing that the earliest of these novels, Chariton’s one, contains no reference to Egypt, and is the least ‘oriental’ of all. He opposes B.P. Reardon and J.W.B. Barns who claimed that the first (but lost) Greek novels were written under the influence of Egyptian demotic stories (existing in Greek translation) and other narratives.


25. Baltzer, Biographie der Propheten, 148–9 suggests two possible contacts between Egyptian commission stories and Jewish literature. Either Israel took the model of the Pharaoh and the vizier directly from Egypt, and applied it to the relation between Yahweh and the prophet as ‘Vezier Gottes’ (cf. pp. 153–69), or the cultural traditions of Syria-Phoenicia mediated between Egypt and Israel.

26. Burchard, Der dreizehnte Zeuge, 59–87, compares Aseneth’s conversion to the commission of Paul in Acts 9. He finds several parallels (böse Absichten, göttliche Erscheinung, Fasten, Gebet, Heilung, Besuch des himmlischen Mannes/Ananias, Visionen, p. 86–7), but these can be understood, in my opinion, much better within the larger theme of commission than through assuming a direct dependence between the two texts in question.
Jewish Scriptures

Numerous stories of divine commission are found in the Hebrew canon\(^{27}\). In this section, I will compare four of them with four passages in *Acts*, suggesting that the Lucan texts—with or without the intention of the author—imitate them or their details. Such an imitation is all the more likely to occur, since *Acts* contains numerous direct quotations from the prophetic texts of the Jewish Scriptures\(^{28}\). The book ends with a passage from Isaiah’s commission\(^{29}\), a verbatim reproduction of the Septuagint text. Allusions to Isaiah’s call are also found in the second narration of Paul’s commission\(^{30}\). Luke’s literary technique makes a special use of intertextuality, by not only quoting passages of Jewish Scriptures and alluding to them, but also adapting (emulating) complete narrative cycles\(^{31}\). The texts discussed in this section are the commission of king Saul\(^{32}\), and the calls of the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Jonah.


The commission of King Saul betrays interesting structural parallels with the story of the Lucan Saul. Although in 1 Samuel 9–11 we have a longer narrative than in Acts 9, we can compare between the disposition of the episodes, the number and function of the characters, and many formal motives. The story of Saul, son of Kish, contains three shorter episodes: (1) Samuel, judge of Israel, recognises and anoints Saul as king. (2) Saul is proclaimed king by the people. (3) Saul defeats the Ammonites. These episodes are encapsulated by scenes where Samuel is the protagonist, and the theological evaluation of monarchy in Israel is the major issue. The text then describes the reign of Saul until his death in the rest of the book. Paul’s (Saul’s) commission in Acts 9 is bracketed by the deeds of Philip and Peter, where the problem of mission among the Gentiles is prominent. The themes and episodes of (1) Saul and Ananias, (2) Saul recognised by the disciples in Damascus and Jerusalem, and (3) Saul’s courageous action as an evangelist mirror the threefold division of the Old Testament narrative.

The story of the son of Kish has a fairy-tale beginning: Kish sends out his son to find lost cattle. Saul, accompanied by a slave, sets out on a journey. After passing through different ‘lands’ and looking for the donkeys in vain, they finally decide to visit ‘the seer’ (Samuel), give him a piece of silver, and ask him to tell where the donkeys strayed. Before their arrival, Samuel received a revelation in a vision. Thus the plot gets an unexpected twist, and the rest of the story is about Saul’s kingdom rather than his father’s donkeys. In Acts 9, Saul’s mission to collect the followers of Jesus from Damascus corresponds to this plot. The heavenly revelation on the Damascus road changes his plans, and Ananias is also prepared in a vision to make him a disciple.

In the Old Testament story, Saul and the slave participate in a sacred meal at the shrine where Samuel resides, and the next day Samuel anoints Saul. Then he sends them away and foretells three signs which will be fulfilled on their way home. The first one is that people will report to them on the way that the donkeys have already been found, and the last one that Saul will fall in trance with a group of

prophets and ‘be turned into a different person’\textsuperscript{34}. We should remember at this point the autobiography of Rekhmire, who fell into ecstasy and became a prophet: ‘my yesterday’s nature had altered itself since I had come forth in the adornments to be the priest of Ma’et’\textsuperscript{35}. In \textit{Acts} 9, the blinded Saul is sitting among fasting and prayers in Damascus, and sees a vision about Ananias coming to heal him. Ananias comes, and after laying his hands on him, his eyes open. Then he is baptised and takes food. Trance, sign, meal, and ritual act (baptism or anointing) are parts of the commission story here as well.

The second episode in the Old Testament tells how Saul was elected king by lot. It is unimportant for our present analysis that this episode must have come from a different tradition. In the text as we have it, it is the continuation of the donkey-story. The tool used here, casting a lot to get an oracle, is typical in Old Testament literature\textsuperscript{36}. It also appears in several of the apostolic Acts\textsuperscript{37}. A third variant of Saul’s election is told in \textit{1 Samuel} 11. Here he appears as a fearful warrior, tearing apart bulls in trance\textsuperscript{38}, and as the rescuer of the city of Jabesh. For the third time, he is elected king. The latter episodes evoke the naturalistic storytelling of \textit{Judges} and are not typically paralleled in the apostolic Acts. However, Saul in \textit{Acts} 9 also proves his charisma among the Damascus disciples, and is confirmed by the board of the apostles in Jerusalem.

The structure of both Saul narratives is based on three main features. (1) The texts combine an initial task (mission) and the actual commissioning. These are the donkey-story and kingship, and the persecution of the disciples and apostleship, respectively. (2) Both stories contain a sequence of smaller episodes where the legitimacy of the hero is questioned and reconﬁrmed. (3) There is an interplay of the commissioned hero, the helper ﬁgure and the community where the hero is going to perform his ministry. This main narrative framework is completed and supported by a series of standard elements: miracu-

\textsuperscript{34.} \textit{1 Samuel} 10.6 (NRSV).
\textsuperscript{35.} Pritchard, \textit{Ancient Near Eastern Texts}, 213, translates ‘Prophet of Maat’.
\textsuperscript{36.} For the sacred lots used in the Jewish Scriptures, called ‘urim and tum-mim’, see de Vaux, \textit{Israel}, 352. Lots also play an important role at a later point of Saul’s biography in \textit{1 Samuel} 14.41–2.
\textsuperscript{37.} See pp. 219–224 below.
\textsuperscript{38.} \textit{1 Samuel} 11.7. On Saul’s gigantic stature see 9.2.
lous sign, festive meal, ritual act, and, even more importantly, experiences of vision, trance, and transformation.

Our second example concerns a famous story of prophetic call: the Book of Jonah. There is also an apostolic parallel to this text, namely, Peter’s mission to Cornelius in Acts 10\(^{39}\). The main theme of both narratives is the reluctance of the prophet to preach to the Gentiles. Both the Assyrian city of Nineveh and the Roman centurion Cornelius represent oppressors of the Jewish people. The scandal for both prophets is that the hated Gentiles might convert to their faith and be saved. As the name of Jonah is emblematic of this problem in Jewish literature, Peter struggles with it the most among the apostles in Acts\(^{40}\).

The sending of the prophet becomes necessary in both cases because the fame of Nineveh or Cornelius, respectively, ‘ascended’ to God\(^{41}\). It is surprising that the narrative of Jonah is not discussed among the examples of the commission form in any of the studies known to us. The elements of epiphany, commission, protest and reassurance are obvious in the text. The occurrence of a miraculous ‘sign’, Jonah’s spending three days in the huge fish, is crucial to the narrative. The ‘sign of Jonah’ became a phrase also used by Jesus in the Gospels\(^{42}\). Peter, too, receives a sign in the form of a vision of unclean animals that he has to eat. The reluctance of both Jonah and Peter is marked by the repeated imperative: ‘Get up!’\(^{43}\). The converted Gentiles are pictured as outstandingly pious in both narratives.

As the name ‘Saul’ in the previous texts, also here we have ‘catchwords’ connecting the two stories. The city of Joppa is crucial for both narratives (this is where Jonah takes a ship and Peter sees the

40. Cf. Acts 15.7–11. In Galatians 2.11–4, Paul relates that Peter immediately turned his back to the non-Jewish Christians as soon as people from the circle of James arrived from Jerusalem. For the reluctance of Thomas, an important motif in his Acts, see pp. 120ff below.
41. The verb used is ἀναστάσιν both in Acts 10.4 and Jonah 1.2 (Septuagint).
43. The verbal forms ἀναστήσατε and ἀναστάς αὐτόν are repeated in Jonah 1.2 and 3.2; Acts 10 vv. 13 and 20.
vision). Peter is also known as the ‘son of Jonah’\textsuperscript{44}. We have to note that ancient readers were sensitive to names and their meanings. In sum, commission to the Gentiles is the major interest of both stories, and we find similar motifs in them which express the deep conflict inherent to this constellation: forceful protest of the hero, repeated command of the sender, miraculous sign to persuade the hesitant prophet, and the piety of the Gentiles.

The motif of ‘prophet on board’ will appear in several of the apostolic Acts. In the canonical \textit{Acts}, Paul’s sea voyage occupies the last chapters. It has been taken for a typical Hellenistic feature, or directly the marker of the influence of Greek novels on the book\textsuperscript{45}. Greco-Roman examples are in fact abundant, nevertheless we have to recognise the existence of the motif also in Old Testament literature. In other apostolic Acts, the sea voyage comes at the beginning, namely, the apostles reach their allotted missionary fields in this way. The \textit{Acts of John by Pseudo-Prochorus} relates a story that is close to that of Jonah\textsuperscript{46}. The apostle is first reluctant to travel to Asia, but Peter rebukes him\textsuperscript{47}. Then John and his companion Prochorus depart from Joppa and suffer shipwreck. All of the forty-six passengers reach the land near Seleucia with only John missing. The passengers fall upon Prochorus and accuse John to be a sorcerer who bewitched them. After forty days, Prochorus arrives at a field called Marmareon, where previously John commanded him to go. While sitting on the seashore, suddenly he catches a glimpse of a wave heaving from the sea with a great noise, which casts out John.

Our third example is the biography of Jeremiah. Rather exceptionally, this prophetic book contains much narrative material, and the story often takes turns similar to the apostolic Acts. As in many Acts, we have a lengthy report of the prophet’s imprisonment, but—as with Paul in \textit{Acts}—we do not learn about his death. For the book of Jeremiah, the theme of prophetic call is of major interest. The book

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{44.} In \textit{Matthew} 16.17 Jesus calls him \textit{Σύμων Βαριωνᾶ}. In \textit{John} 1.42 and 21.15–17 he is called ‘son of ’Ιωάννης’.
\item \textsuperscript{45.} Pervo, \textit{Profit with Delight}, 50–7.
\item \textsuperscript{46.} Zahn, \textit{Acta Joannis}, 5–14; cf. the Arabic \textit{Travels of John} in Smith Lewis, \textit{Mythological Acts}, 37ff.
\item \textsuperscript{47.} Cf. pp. 263f below.
\end{itemize}
begins with a commission episode, and the prophet laments the difficulties of his task in several passages. Controversy between the ‘true’ and the ‘false’ prophets, and Jeremiah’s faithfulness to his commission are central to the narrative chapters of the book. Almost with the same words as Paul in Acts 9, Jeremiah is explicitly sent to the Gentiles: ‘I appointed you a prophet to the nations. [...] See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms’. But in the biographical parts of the book we read about Jeremiah’s struggles with his own people rather than his mission among other nations, as in the case of Jonah.

Let us now turn our attention to Jeremiah’s imprisonment. Its story is found in Jeremiah 37.11–45.5, and we will compare it to Paul’s imprisonment in Acts 21.27–28.30. Both stories presumably narrate the end of their heroes’ lives, but we are left without information as to whether they survived the imprisonment. The historical situation as well as the characters and places of the two stories are similar. In both cases, Israel is occupied by a great empire: Babylon and Rome, respectively. Both prophets are imprisoned in Jerusalem. Later they are taken to a Gentile metropolis: Jeremiah to Tahpanhes, where the Pharaoh resides, and Paul to Rome, the capital city of the Roman emperor.

We can also draw parallels between the characters of the two narratives. The stories of Jeremiah and Paul are recorded by their faithful companions: just as Baruch, who was taken to Egypt with Jeremiah, Luke (the ‘I’ of the prologues and the ‘we passages’) accompanies Paul on the ship, as the ‘we’ of Acts 27.1–28.16 witnesses. Both Baruch and Luke play the roles of companion, witness and chronicler. In

48. Jeremiah 11.18–23, 15.10, 17.14–18, etc.
49. Jeremiah is lined up with Micah of Moreseth, a true prophet (Jeremiah 26.18–19), and the martyr Uriah (26.20–23). In ch. 28 he has controversy with the false prophet Hananjah, whom Yahweh ‘did not send’.
51. Jeremiah 43.9. In history, Tahpanhes was an Egyptian outpost in the Nile delta, where Psammetichos I located a garrison around 663 BC. There is no archeological evidence of a large scale palace at that place. Cf. Jones and Fiema, ‘Tahpanhes’; Keown et al., Jeremiah, vol 2, 257.
fact, to have travelling companions who are in a way subordinate to
the hero is typical in the apocryphal Acts. From non-Christian literary
parallels we can mention, for example, Damis in Philostratus’ Life of
Apollonius of Tyana, who also functions as an eyewitness and chronicler\(^52\).

While Jeremiah claims obedience to the Babylonian king Nebu-
chadnezzar, Paul appeals to the Roman emperor. Kings of Israel re-
cieve both heroes in audience and are benevolent to them: Zedekiah to
Jeremiah, and Agrippa to Paul. While the Babylonian king appoints
Gedaliah governor in the land, in Acts Paul meets two successive
governors: Felix and Festus. Both heroes are protected by officers:
Ebed-melech and the tribune Claudius Lysias. Jeremiah is constantly
accused by the Egyptian party, as Paul is by ‘the mob’ or ‘the Jews’\(^53\).
There is one accuser especially: Johanan ben Kareah, the leader of the
Egyptian party, in Jeremiah, and Tertullus in Acts. Both stories end in
the Jewish Diaspora, in Egypt and Rome, respectively.

The plots contain many similar details: Jeremiah was arrested
when he wanted to leave Jerusalem through the Benjamin Gate; Paul
was arrested in the Temple, and ‘immediately the doors were shut’\(^54\).
Jeremiah was beaten, and so was Paul. Right after his arrest, Jeremiah
is taken to prison, Paul to ‘the barracks’\(^55\). Both Jeremiah and Paul
immediately appeal to the authorities. Jeremiah speaks to the king and
Paul to the tribune. They also to speak to the public. Paul speaks from
the stairs and before the Sanhedrin. But their words bring about fur-
ther violence and a plot against them\(^56\). Jeremiah ends up in the cis-
tern. Now they find powerful patrons. Ebed-melech intervenes with
the king, while Lysias writes a letter to Felix. Then Jerusalem falls in
Jeremiah, and Paul is taken to Caesarea in Acts.

Here the second part of the story begins. Jeremiah has the good-
will of Gedaliah, and Paul defends himself before the governors Felix

\(^{53}\) Acts 21.35 and 22.30.
\(^{55}\) Jeremiah 37.15, Acts 21.34 (παραμβολὴ must designate here the Fortress
\(^{56}\) Jeremiah 38.4–6 and Acts 23.12–15.
and Festus, and King Agrippa. Although the two situations are parallel, there is not much textual similarity.

The third scene begins when the murderers of Gedaliah want to flee to Egypt, and Paul has to sail for Rome. Jeremiah’s travelling company consists of murderers; Paul’s companions are prisoners. But they both have with them a faithful friend, witness and chronicler: Baruch and Luke. On their journey, the heroes encourage the others in sermons, and communicate with God in prayers.57

Now we shift to the final act of the story. Jeremiah arrives in Tahpanhes, the city of the Pharaoh; Paul arrives in Rome. They both continue preaching, and they condemn the disobedience of Israel. God has sent his prophets to his people, but they did not listen. At this point, the biography ends. We have prophecies in Jeremiah 46–52, and the letters of Paul, but neither supply data about the end of the heroes’ biographies.

The broader narrative context of commission becomes visible in the Jeremiah narratives. The basic theme is faithfulness among sufferings to the original commission, and the struggle with the hero’s unbelieving and disobedient environment. Imprisonment and journey, the two major narrative elements of the apostolic Acts can be identified in this classical Jewish prophetic book. The stories of Jonah and Jeremiah show that sea journey, preaching in foreign lands, imprisonment, adventurous or miraculous escape from danger, are not necessarily Hellenistic features in the apostolic Acts. The commission of the apostles is the starting point of their ‘acts’ in which they prove their devotion to the divine call, and the same relation can be found between the call and biography of Jeremiah.

The fourth commission episode to be mentioned is the call of Isaiah.58 The vision begins with the description of Yahweh’s heavenly

57. See especially the use of the prophetic form ‘Thus says the Lord’ (many cases in Jeremiah, cf. Acts 27.24); the prediction of the danger of lives (Jeremiah 42.16, Acts 27.10); the call for obedience (Jeremiah 42.13,21 and Acts 27.21); the encouraging of the listeners to stay (Jeremiah 42.10 and Acts 27.31) with the grant of survival for the obedient and the prediction of death for others.

58. Isaiah 6. For a recent literary critical analysis of the passage see Landry, ‘Strategies’. The short narrative parts of the book provide little biographical context to Isaiah’s commission. Narrative sections are chs. 7 and 36–39, the latter
court: ‘I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him’. The scene reminds one of the commissions of Rekhmire and Thutmose III: ‘He made heaven and earth festive with his beauty’. When Luke describes Paul’s commission in Acts, he makes allusions to this text. This is especially clear in Acts 22, where the vocabulary of the narrative is thoroughly Jewish. Paul sees a vision in the temple, in which Jesus affirms that his testimony has been rejected in Jerusalem, and sends Paul to the Gentiles: ‘Hurry and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me. [...] Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles’. In the centre of Isaiah’s commission we also find the motif of confrontation with his people, summarised in the words about Israel’s obduracy, a passage that Luke selected as a conclusion to his book:

Go and say to this people: ‘Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand. Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed’.

Isaiah’s sending is to the people of Israel—although the book also contains prophecies against foreign nations. Paul quotes Isaiah’s judgment on Israel at the end of Acts as an argument for continuing his mission among the Gentiles. The narrative of Acts, however, contains a repeated scheme of the apostle’s turning away from his fellow Jews and then still going to them again. In this context, the last words of the book also cannot be taken as a final decision on the issue.

copied form 2 Kings 19–20. Some ‘autobiographical’ motifs of the book, for example, the name of Isaiah’s son in 8.1, are highly allegorical.

59. See Chapter 3, p. 74f.


61. E.g., Isaiah 13–21, 23.

62. As Landy, ‘Strategies’, 81–2, concludes, Isaiah himself suffers from the same barriers of understanding during his vision. This is made explicit in Isaiah 29.11: ‘And the vision of everything shall be for you like a sealed book’. It seems that Paul’s position in Acts is less ambiguous: from his commission in Acts 9, he is shown as ultimately superior to his fellow-Jews, and indeed, to his fellow-Christians.
Finally let us notice that the theme of individual and community—which is irrelevant for the cosmic hierarchy of the Egyptian texts—became important in the context of Jewish literature. Saul, the prophets, and the apostles alike are pictured as exclusive bearers of divine truth, who are always confronted with their communities. They are real ‘heroes’, struggling, winning, and suffering. Many of these heroes meet a tragic end, although their death or martyrdom in most cases is only suggested rather than explicitly reported. The relation of the prophet to other religions and people (Gentiles) is crucial to many of these stories, and constitutes a basic source of conflict first for the prophet himself, and then between the prophet and his community.

**Greco-Roman Literature**

In the previous chapter, we have dealt already with the idea of commission in Greek literature. Here we will add a few interesting examples that contribute to our understanding of the subject in the early Christian context.

Commission in Greco-Roman literature most often occurs as commission to philosophy. This is often coupled with a certain moment of conversion, similarly to Paul’s Damascus experience. As Nock argued, Greco-Roman antiquity did not expect from religion ‘anything more than cults’, and they ‘looked to philosophy for guidance in conduct and for a scheme of the universe’. Conversion therefore is most likely to occur within the context of an encounter with philosophy or famous philosophers. However, we remain interested in these stories only inasmuch as they talk about one’s call to practice philosophy, especially if this story appears as the turning point of a biographical narrative.

There are basically three ways of becoming a philosopher in the Greco-Roman tradition: (1) joining a school or a teacher, (2) being a self-made-man, and (3) receiving teachings from divine revelation. A number of anecdotal episodes, many of them preserved by Diogenes

63. Many of these texts are discussed by Gigon, ‘Berufung’ and Droge, ‘Call Stories’.
64. Nock, *Conversion*, 16.
Laertius\textsuperscript{65}, report how people joined a teacher or a school. Socrates is especially known for gaining new disciples by his sudden impact. Xenophon is told to have met Socrates in a narrow passage:

[Socrates] stretched out his stick and did not let him pass along, while he inquired where every kind of goods was sold. Upon receiving a reply, he put another question, ‘And where do men become good and honourable?’ When Xenophon was puzzled, Socrates said: “Then follow me, and learn”. From that time on, he was a student of Socrates\textsuperscript{66}.

It is interesting to compare Socrates’ resolute command with that of Jesus when calling his disciples\textsuperscript{67}. The rhetoric of Socrates is also similar to Jesus’ springing from one theme (fishing, burying the dead) to the necessity of following him. The totality of personal commitment involved by the conversion is also significant with Socrates’ disciples:

Aeschines said to him, ‘I am poor and have nothing else, but I give you myself’, and Socrates answered, ‘Nay, do you not see that you are giving me the greatest thing?’\textsuperscript{68}

The commission contains elements of conversion in the case of Polemon. As a young man, one day he ‘burst into the school of Xenocrates quite drunk, with a garland on his head’. Xenocrates, however, went on undisturbed with his lecture on self-control, and Polemon was gradually overcome\textsuperscript{69}. He repented, became a philosopher, and was later elected head of the Academy. The story appears

\textsuperscript{65}. Diogenes Laertius’ \textit{Lives}, written in the 3rd century AD, postdates most of the earlier Acts. It is, however, basically a collection of anecdotes that the author derived from earlier texts, and many of which had certainly circulated since several centuries. Cf. Runia, ‘Diogenes Laertius’, 603.

\textsuperscript{66}. Diogenes Laertius, \textit{Lives} 2.48.


\textsuperscript{68}. Diogenes Laertius, \textit{Lives} 2.34. Cf. Jesus’ advise to the rich man: ‘Go, sell what you own, and give it to the poor. […] Then come and follow me’ (Mark 10.27). A similar thought appears in the words of Peter to the lame man at the Beautiful Gate: ‘I have no silver and gold, but what I have I give you’ (Acts 3.6).

\textsuperscript{69}. Literally he was ‘hunted’, ἔθηπόθη.
also in the Church Fathers. The concept of discipleship and succession was typical, of course, also in Early Christianity. It has been suggested that the composition of Diogenes Laertius’ Lives of Eminent Philosophers, presenting succession in philosophical schools, relied on a pattern that existed from pre-Christian times, and was used also by the author of Luke-Acts. Succession becomes especially important in the later apostolic Acts, where the hero is identified as the disciple of an apostle: the Acts of Philip and the Acts of Barnabas are good examples of this.

Autodidacts belong to the second type of philosophical commission. Philosophers who are known in tradition as autodidacts include Heraclitus, Democritus, Socrates, and Epicurus. As for Heraclitus, there are two ways to understand his ἐδίξησαμην ἐμεωυτόν. This means either that Heraclitus was searching as an autodidact, ‘on his own’, or that he pursued introspection in the spirit of the Delphic ‘know thyself’. Diogenes Laertius means that ‘he was nobody’s student, but he claimed that he “inquired himself”, and learned everything from himself’.

Whereas historical evidence shows that Democritus was younger than Protagoras and certainly influenced by him, Epicurus makes up a story in which he turns their relation around. Protagoras was a slave, he says, who invented a new method of carrying a burden. On seeing him, Democritus recognised his talent and began to teach him philosophy. Making Democritus the master—rather than the pupil—of Protagoras, Epicurus probably wants to show him as an autodidact.

70. Diogenes Laertius, Lives 4.16. Polemon led the Academy from 314 to c. 276 BC. For a list of the patristic applications see Malherbe, Paul, 161, note 79.

71. Talbert, Literary Patterns, 127, describes the literary pattern in Diogenes Laertius as a composite of (a) the life of the founder, (b) the narrative about disciples and successors, and (c) the summary of the doctrine of the school. He argues (133) that works with a similar design existed at least since the second century BC, and (134) both Diogenes Laertios and the author of Luke-Acts followed this pattern.


74. Cf. Robinson, Heraclitus, 147; Marcovich, Heraclitus, 57.

75. Diogenes Laertius, Lives 9.5.

76. Epicurus, frag. 172 (Usener).
and thus create an example for himself. According to his own state-
ment, Epicurus had namely ‘no teacher’\textsuperscript{77}.

Tradition has it that Socrates had teachers\textsuperscript{78}, but then turned away
from natural philosophy and ‘his own conversation was ever of hu-
man things’\textsuperscript{79}. Whether or not his dialectic was actually influenced by
Zeno of Elea, and his ethics by Archelaus, Protagoras, or anyone else,
in the Socratic literature he appears as ‘the ignorant son of the stone-
mason and the midwife who can play with the greatest Athenians like
a cat with a mouse’\textsuperscript{80}. Plato lets him remark sarcastically at the begin-
ning of the \textit{Cratylus}:

If I had not been poor, I might have heard the fifty-drachma course of
the great Prodicus, which is a complete education in grammar and lan-
guage—these are his own words—and then I should have been at once
able to answer your question about the correctness of names. But, in-
deed, I have heard only the single-drachma course, and therefore I do
not know the truth about such matters\textsuperscript{81}.

Other philosophers received their teachings from divine revelation.
Aristoxenus reports that Pythagoras received most of his ethical doc-
trines from the Delphian priestess Themistocleia\textsuperscript{82}. According to the
Suda, his name expresses that ‘he reveals the truth not worse than the
Pythian’\textsuperscript{83}. The doctrines which Parmenides presents in his \textit{De rerum
natura} supposedly were revealed to him by a goddess\textsuperscript{84}. Diogenes
Laertius quotes the following epigram about Epicurus:

Ye toil, O men, for paltry things and incessantly begin strife and wars
for gain; but nature’s wealth extends to a moderate bound, whereas

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{77} Epicurus, frag. 123 (Usener).
\item \textsuperscript{78} Diogenes Laertius, \textit{Lives} 2.19, mentions Anaxagoras, Damon and
Archelaus.
\item \textsuperscript{79} Xenophon, \textit{Memorabilia} 1.1.16, περὶ τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων σκοπῶν.
\item \textsuperscript{80} Gigon, ‘Berufung’, 5.
\item \textsuperscript{81} Plato, \textit{Cratylus} 384b, trans. B. Jowett in Hamilton and Cairns (eds), \textit{Plato}.
\item \textsuperscript{82} Aristoxenos frag. 15, in: Wehrli, \textit{Die Schule des Aristoteles}, 12. The
fragment is preserved by Diogenes Laertius, \textit{Lives} 8.8. Porphyry, \textit{Life of
\item \textsuperscript{83} \textit{Suda} s.v. Πυθαγόρας ὁ Σάμιος (2).
\item \textsuperscript{84} Diels and Kranz, \textit{Vorsokratiker}, vol 1, 231.
\end{itemize}
vain judgments have a limitless range. *This message Neocles’ wise son heard from the Muses or from the sacred tripod at Delphi*.

Finally, Philostratus writes that Apollonius of Tyana ‘conversed with the gods, and learned from them what makes them rejoice on people and what makes them angry, and also about nature he taught what he had learned from them.*

As the case of Epicurus shows, philosophers might appear in different traditions with regard to their commission and their source of authority. Being self-taught and being taught by the gods are related ideas.* Xenophon reports that Socrates also received his teachings from Delphi:

First, then, for his attitude towards religion; his deeds and words were clearly in harmony with the answer given by the Pythia to such questions as ‘What is my duty about sacrifice?’ or about ‘cult of ancestors’. For the answer of the Pythia is, ‘Follow the custom of the state: that is the way to act piously’. And so Socrates acted himself and counselled others to act.*

Aristotle also connected Socrates’ wisdom to Delphi: according to him, Socrates turned to philosophy when he read the famous ‘know yourself’ on the temple of Apollo.* The idea that someone’s wisdom comes from God occurs also in early Christianity. In *Galatians* Paul seems to originate his knowledge about Jesus exclusively from divine revelation:

But when God […] was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me […].*

From the divine origin of their doctrines, it is only one step to the deification of the teachers themselves. Philosophers who allegedly descended from the gods, went through subsequent reincarnations, went

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88. Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.3.1, trans. O.J. Todd in LCL.
89. Aristotle, frag. 1–3 (Rose 3); Cf. Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 4.2.24.
90. *Galatians* 1.15–17 (NRSV).
down to the Hades, worked miracles, resurrected from the dead, and who were worshipped in cults, include Epimenides, Pythagoras, Empedocles, Epicurus, and Apollonius of Tyana. The heroes of the apostolic Acts also show superhuman abilities, but they always refuse any attempt to deify them. The discussion of this problem—clearly related to the appearance of ‘divine men’ in antiquity—exceeds the limits of this study.

Authors who promoted the image of the prophetic and divine philosopher at the time when the apostolic Acts were written include Philostratus, Diogenes Laertius, Porphyry, and Iambichlus. Greco-Roman philosophers are often told to have been called and commissioned by gods, similarly to the Jewish prophets. In a way they also seem to have fulfilled a similar role in relation to the (religious) value system of their communities as the Jewish prophets in Israel. Obedient to divine commission, they denounced moral corruption, appeared as cult reformers, promoted ways of perfect life, and envisioned the ideal state.

The portrait of Epimenides by Diogenes Laertius is a very instructive example. Epimenides, who lived on the edge of the archaic and classical times (probably 6th century BC), was known in Athens as well as in Sparta. Plato calls him a ‘divine man’, Plutarch one of the seven sages, the favourite of gods, and wise about the divine things. Apuleius praises him together with Orpheus and Pythagoras:

Others call those magicians who bestow unusual care on the investigation of the workings of providence and unusual devotion on their worship of the gods, as though, forsooth, they knew how to perform everything that they know actually to be performed (quasi facere etiam sciant quae sciant fieri). So Epimenides, Orpheus,Pythagoras, and Ostanes were regarded as magicians [...].

91. Already in Acts 14.8–18 we read an attempt to worship Barnabas and Paul as gods.
92. Cf. Cox, Biography, 34.
93. Dodds, Greeks, 142, proposed that Epimenides’ figure has Thracian colours; recently Bremmer, Afterlife, 37, (supporting Burkert’s view) suggests a Near Eastern influence. For ancient testimonies on Epimenides, see Diels and Kranz, Vorsokratiker, vol 1, 27–31.
94. Platon, Laws 1, 642d; Plutarch, Solon 12.
95. Apuleius, Apology 27, trans. H.E. Butler in LCL.
His ritual purification of Athens is reported already by Aristotle\textsuperscript{96}. The fullest version of the ‘Epimenides novel’ is found among Diogenes Laertius’ \textit{Lives}, and we will concentrate on this narrative\textsuperscript{97}. In a short introduction we are informed about Epimenides’ descent (son either of Phaestius or Dosias, or Agesarchus), his birthplace (Cnossus on Crete), and appearance (long hair untypical of Cretans). Then comes the commissioning episode\textsuperscript{98}:

Once he was sent into the country by his father to look for a stray sheep. At noon he turned aside from the way, and in the shelter of some cave he slept for fifty-seven years. After this he got up and went in search of the sheep, thinking he had been asleep only a short time. When he could not find it, he came to the farm. And when he found everything changed and another owner in possession, he went back to the town very puzzled. On entering his own house there, he fell in with people who asked who he was. Finally, he found his younger brother, now an old man, and learnt the truth from him. So he became famous throughout Greece, and was believed to be a favourite of the gods. (109)

This is immediately followed by the story of the Athenian pestilence. On the behest of the Pythia to purify the city, a ship was sent to Crete for Epimenides, who came to Athens in the 46th Olympiad (595–592). He purified the city, and stopped the pestilence:

He took sheep, some black and others white, and brought them to the Areopagus. There he let them go wherever they pleased, instructing those who followed them that where each sheep should be sacrificed to the local god where it may lay down, and thus the plague would be stayed. Hence even to this day anonymous altars can be found in different parts of Attica, which are memorials of this atonement.

According to another version the plague was stopped when two young men, Cratinus and Ctesibius, were put to death (110). Epimenides refused the money offered to him, and concluded a treaty of friendship and alliance between Cnossus and Athens. Then he returned home and soon afterwards died. By this the ‘novel’ is actually

\textsuperscript{96} Aristotle, \textit{Athenian Constitution} 1.1.


\textsuperscript{98} Trans. R.D. Hicks in LCL, adapted.
finished (111). We read still the list of works attributed to Epimenides (111–112) and a letter he wrote to Solon (113). The chapter concludes with miscellaneous information (114–115). For example, we are told about Epimenides’ claim that he went through many reincarnations, and about his body being guarded in Sparta.

Epimenides’ ‘life’ thus consists basically of two parts: a call narrative and a typical episode of his activity. The length and disposition of the material is similar to the autobiography of Rekhmire or the Acts of Titus. That Epimenides’ long sleep takes place in a Cretan cave suggests that the episode relates an initiation. The two parts of the bios are connected by the motive of the ‘sheep’. As with Saul’s commission in 1 Samuel, the call narrative contains a primary and a secondary ‘mission’. Both Saul and Epimenides were sent by their fathers to look for lost cattle: Saul for donkeys, and Epimenides for sheep. Before they could fulfil their task, both got involved in adventures that diverted them from it. Both went through a kind of initiation experience attesting to their divine election, and became leaders of their communities. As we have seen, the commission of Paul in Acts 9 has a similar structure, where the role of the first ‘sender’ is taken by the high priest, and the primary mission is a ‘police raid’ against heretics in Damascus.

The last example from Greco-Roman literature is the commission story of Dio Chrysostom. A contemporary of Paul and Luke, Dio gives in one of his speeches an autobiographical account of his call as a wandering philosopher. When banished under Domitian, he began to ponder whether exile is really a painful and unfortunate thing, or whether it can be also light and easy. He decided to draw an oracle from the god:

99. See pp. 26ff above and Chapter 9 below.

100. Cf. Dodds, Greeks, 142 and Bremmer, Afterlife, 37. Long sleep also occurs in Jewish and early Christian writings: Pareleipomena Jeremiou 5; Honi the circle drawer (Babylonian Talmud Taanith 23a and Palestinian Talmud Taanith 3.9); the Byzantine legend of the seven young men; cf. Herzer, Paralipomena Jeremiae 92–100. For encountering gods in (Cretan) caves see Rohde, Psyche, vol 1, 111–45; Faure, Caverns cretoises, 81–197. For long sleep in fairy tales, see Kahlner, Zauberschlaf.

And when I consulted him, he gave me an oracle which was strange and not easy to interpret. For he commanded me to do this very thing in which I am, with full zeal, as some honourable and useful activity, ‘until you go’, said he, ‘to the furthest part of the world’.

Thus our hero exhorted himself ‘neither to fear nor be ashamed’ of his action, ‘put on humble attire’ and set out on his journey. Some took him for a beggar, while others called him a philosopher. He won fame and many came to him and asked him to tell what he thought about good and evil. ‘Again, they invited me to stand in the middle and talk in the public’. The key motif in this commission story is again a divine oracle. It is ‘not easy to interpret’, and the hero also uses his knowledge of literary examples to understand the command. He is sent to the utmost parts of the world, as the apostles, and he leaves behind everything to fulfil his mission.

We should note that Dio is a solitary figure. He has no ‘helper’, no travelling companion. His friend Flavius Sabinus—mentioned at the beginning of the discourse—was executed at the same time as Dio was banished. The social structure of the text is thus different from the hierarchical world of the Near East as well as from the prophetic conflict between hero and community. We have a cosmopolitan hero, who goes wherever the god sends him, and preaches his message fearlessly to people at the ends of the world. Commission is here the exclusive business of the sender and the hero.

The Ancient Novel

The apocryphal Acts have often been claimed to stand close to the ancient novels. In the Greek novels, the dangerous journeys of the heroes frequently begin out of divine will. In the *Ephesian Tale* by

102. *Discourses* 13.9, trans. J.W. Cohoon in LCL, adapted. Compare Dio’s words ἐως δὲν ἐπὶ τὸ ὄσττον ἀπέλθης τῆς γῆς with *Acts* 22.21 (εἰς ἐθνή μακράν ἐξαποστέλλω σε), and especially 1.8 (ἐοιτε μοῦ μάρτυρες […] ἐως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς).


104. See p. 251 below.

Xenophon of Ephesus\textsuperscript{106}, the tribulations of hero and heroine are foretold by the following oracle\textsuperscript{107}:

Why do you long to learn the end of a malady, and its beginning? One disease has both in its grasp, and from that remedy must be accomplished. But for them I see terrible sufferings and toils that are endless; Both will flee over the sea pursued by pirates\textsuperscript{108}, They will suffer chains at the hands of men who mingle with the waters, And a tomb shall be the burial chamber for both, and fire the destroyer; And beside the waters of the river Nile, to Holy Isis The saviour you will afterwards offer rich gifts; But still after their sufferings a better fate is in store.

The characters of the novel immediately begin to interpret the oracle, and thus the oracle contributes to the development of the plot\textsuperscript{109}. It does not give, however, a very precise prediction of the events of the narrative\textsuperscript{110}. Trials are foretold by an oracle in the \textit{Wonders Beyond Thule}\textsuperscript{111}:

There, an oracle declared that they would go to Thule, and that they would see other homeland later but that first they would undergo trials and make atonement for their, albeit unintentional, irreverence towards their parents [...].

\textsuperscript{106} Probably mid-second century AD, Hägg, \textit{Novel}, 20; Reardon, \textit{Ancient Novels}, 5; Bremmer, ‘Novel’, 170.
\textsuperscript{107} Xenophon of Ephesus, \textit{Ephesian Tale} 1.6, trans. G. Anderson in Reardon, \textit{Ancient Novels}, 132.
\textsuperscript{108} \textit{λησοδιώκτος}, see Liddel-Scott, \textit{Supplement}, 196b.
\textsuperscript{111} Photius, \textit{Bibliotheca} 166.110a, trans. G.N. Sandy in Reardon, \textit{Ancient Novels}, 779–80. The novel dates from the 1st–2nd century AD, Sandy, \textit{ibidem}, 775.
A similar oracle is found in Heliodorus’ *Aethiopica*, promising hero and heroine ‘the great reward of virtuous life’, but not warning them of the sufferings. The elaboration of the episode deserves attention:112

Without more ado, we set off towards the temple, where the Thessalians had already made all the arrangements for the sacrifice. We had reached the altar, the priest had spoken the introductory prayer, the young man was on the point of commencing the ceremony, when from the inner shrine the voice of the priestess of the oracle rang forth.

One who starts in grace and ends in glory, another goddess-born:

Of these I bid you have regard, O Delphi!
Leaving my temple here and cleaving Ocean’s swelling tides,
To the black land of the Sun will they travel,
Where they will reap the reward of those whose lives are passed in virtue:
A crown of white on brows of black.

So spake the god, but the bystanders were completely nonplussed and quite at a loss to explain the meaning of the oracle. They each tried to extract a different interpretation from it; each understood it in a sense that matched his own wishes. As yet not one of them had discovered its real meaning, for by and large the interpretation of dreams and oracles depends on the outcome. In any case, the people of Delphi were in too much of a hurry; for they were highly excited at the prospect of this pageant for which such magnificent preparations had been made; no one took the time to investigate exactly what the oracle signified.

The author gives the oracle the form of an epiphany, describes the circumstances and the place (the Pythian games in Delphi), the amazement and obtuseness of the bystanders, and emphasises the opacity of the oracle—as in many stories that we already examined.

The deity sometimes gives orders to the hero in a vision. Apollo and Artemis appoint Calasiris as patron of Theagenes and Charik-

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An angel sends Apollonius, king of Tyre, to the temple of Diana, where he is reunited with his wife.

Divine oracles and commands thus play an important role in these narratives. The novels can assume various kinds of relations between the protagonists and the gods. The suffering of the protagonists is often the result of their offending the deity, but the gods also rescue them from the greatest perils. Furthermore, hero and heroine often experience divine appearances, or descend from a divine lineage, and people worship them. Kerényi claimed that the suffering and deliverance of the heroes imitate the myth of Isis and Osiris:

Reading a Greek novel with the knowledge of an initiate of the mysteries of Isis [...] meant to read it from the perspective of providence instead of the perspective of destiny.

The typical novel and the divine passion narrative [of Isis and Osiris] contain the same set of motifs. [...] One attains salvation in the holy quarter of the Isis temple by participating in the pain and bliss of that journey.

115. E.g., Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon* 2. ἐγὼ ταῦτα ἐν εἰδείην, ἢφη, τοσαύτας ὑβρεῖς ἔξ ἔρωτος σαθών. ‘How well I know it—for all the indignities Love has made me suffer’, these are the first words of the hero in the novel. In Xenophon’s *Ephesian Tale* 1.1, Habrocomes did not recognise Eros, because he thought he was more handsome and powerful: ‘Eros was furious at this’ (cf. note 117 below).
117. Xenophon, *Ephesian Tale* 1.1: ‘[The citizens] treated the boy [Habrocomes] like a god, and some even prostrated themselves and prayed at the sight of him’. As for the heroine Anthia, ‘often as they saw her [...] the Ephesians would worship her as Artemis’. Of Heliodorus’ heroine, the robbers think ‘she must be a god—the goddess Artemis, or the Isis they worship in those parts’ (*Ethiopian Story* 1.2). The hero is an offspring of Achilles (2.34). Apollonius’ wife is mistaken for Diana (*History of Apollonius King of Tyre* 48): ‘she radiated so much glittering beauty that they thought that she was the goddess Diana’. For other examples, see Kerényi, *Romanliteratur*, 95–9, 256ff.
The protagonists of some novels become priests. In Heliodorus’ novel, Charikleia is a priestess of Artemis at Delphi and Theagenes a priest of Apollo. At the end of the novel, both are initiated as the priests of the Egyptian gods Sun and Moon. Apollonius’ wife is a priestess of Artemis (Diana) in Ephesus. Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* relates Lucius’ initiation into the cult of Isis and Osiris. In the end, Lucius becomes a priest himself and he walks around proudly with his head shaven: ‘Then, once more shaving my head completely, neither covering up nor hiding my baldness, but displaying it wherever I went, I joyfully carried out the duties of that ancient priesthood, founded in the days of Sulla.’

We can conclude that divine destiny and guidance, as well as initiation into the mysteries belong to the central themes of ancient novels. How far these episodes can be regarded as commission narratives has to be decided in the larger context of our study.

**Commission Stories in the Gospels**

All four canonical gospels relate that Jesus collected disciples around himself by walking around and calling people to follow him. Many of these stories simply report Jesus’ words of call and how the to-be disciples follow him immediately. These narratives are rather similar to our first type of call to philosophy; namely, when someone joins a school or a teacher. Some of the call stories also include a miraculous act of Jesus, which is understood as divine epiphany by the disciples. Luke’s well-known episode relates that after they were fishing without result for a whole night, Jesus commanded the disciples to cast out the net once again, whereupon they ‘caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break’. Peter falls down at Jesus’ knees and says, ‘Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man’. According

119. Heliodorus, *Ethiopian Story* 1.22
121. *History of Apollonius King of Tyre* 48.
122. Cf. p. 27, note 5; p. 239 below.
124. *Mark* 1.16–20 and parallels; *Mark* 2.13–17 and parallels; *John* 1.35–51.
125. Cf. pp. 42f above; Droge, ‘Call Stories’ and ‘Call Stories (Gospels)’.
to John\textsuperscript{127}, when Nathanael comes to Jesus, the latter already knows that he is a ‘true Israelite’ and that he was sitting under a fig tree. In these narratives we can identify the following motifs: encounter with Jesus, miraculous act, astonishment, acclamation of Jesus as divine, words of call, and finally, the disciple’s following Jesus.

Other synoptic passages talk about the call of twelve disciples, whom Jesus sent out to proclaim the kingdom and to heal: ‘he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to have authority to cast out demons’\textsuperscript{128}. The narrative frame of these texts is simple: they state Jesus’ command and attach a list with the names of the twelve. In a Lucan variant of the story, Jesus sends out seventy disciples ‘in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go’\textsuperscript{129}. The \textit{Gospel of Matthew} ends with the ‘Great Commission’\textsuperscript{130}, in which Jesus commands the eleven disciples ‘to make disciples of all nations’. The text ends with the reassurance: ‘Lo, I am with you always, to the end of the age’. In the longer ending of \textit{Mark}, we find a somewhat different version of this passage, in which the reassurance clause contains a list of signs accompanying the believers\textsuperscript{131}.

One more passage has to be mentioned from the gospels, namely, the baptism of Jesus, which is reported in all four canonical gospels\textsuperscript{132}. Jesus goes to the Jordan, where John is baptising, and lets himself be baptised. In \textit{Matthew} and \textit{John}, there is a dialogue between Jesus and the Baptist. When Jesus is baptised, the heavens open and the Spirit descends on Jesus in the form of a dove. In the Synoptics, a voice is heard from heaven: ‘You are my beloved son, with you I am pleased’. This sentence has different variants in the other gospels\textsuperscript{133}.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{127} \textit{John} 1.47–51
\item \textsuperscript{128} \textit{Mark} 3.13–19, cf. \textit{Matthew} 10.1–4 and \textit{Luke} 6.12–16.
\item \textsuperscript{129} \textit{Luke} 10.1–20.
\item \textsuperscript{130} \textit{Matthew} 28.18–20. Hubbard, \textit{Matthean Redaction}, interpreted this passage in the context of Old Testament commission narratives.
\item \textsuperscript{131} \textit{Mark} 16.15–8.
\item \textsuperscript{132} \textit{Mark} 1.9–11, \textit{Matthew} 3.13–17, \textit{Luke} 3.21–22, \textit{John} 1.29–34.
\item \textsuperscript{133} \textit{Luke} 3.22 speaks in the third person: ‘This is my son […]’. In \textit{John} 1.34, the Baptist witnesses that ‘This is the son of God’. The Western textual tradition of \textit{Luke} 3.22 and the \textit{Gospel of the Ebionites}, frag. 3, follow \textit{Psalms} 2.7 and add ‘I have this day begotten you’. Cf. \textit{Gospel of the Hebrews} 2.
\end{itemize}
The commission episodes of the gospels have a relatively simple structure, usually combining one or two motifs. A biographical context can be found only in the baptism of Jesus. These gospel narratives are nevertheless interesting because they provide us with early Christian commission texts before the apostolic Acts were written.

A Preliminary Typology of Commission Narratives

This survey covered only a part of the extant passages about commission. We did not undertake a detailed historical study of the commission pattern, but rather pointed to texts which are representative of the main trajectories of this conspicuous literary structure. We have to omit the discussion of several interesting passages. A certain consistence of form, theme, and motifs is well discernable in the referred texts, but also substantial differences, first of all with regard to the social texture of the narratives.

I suggest a threefold typology of the social texture of commission narratives. The first type is called institutional and is exemplified in its purest form by the early Egyptian stories. Its main characteristic is that it integrates the hero into an institutional hierarchy. It reinforces and justifies the existing order of things, the social-cultural status quo. The hero becomes to represent and to defend this very order. The second type is called prophetic and is represented mainly by the prophetic call stories of Jewish Scripture. In these narratives the conflict between the individual and the community is the central problem. The prophet is in the paradoxical situation of being a member of his social environment but opposing its goals and beliefs. In the very moment that the prophet tries to escape this paradox, either by detaching himself from his environment or giving up his critical stance, he ceases to be a prophet. The third type is called philosophical. In a philosophical commission story, the hero is called to engage in an intimate relation

with his sender, leaving behind the world. The hero is alienated from his environment and becomes an outsider. If he exercises criticism, he does so from the position of a teacher of truth rather than as a suffering member of his own people.

At the same time, the three types of commission offer three biographical models, three modes of interpreting personalities, and three models for the individual to define his relation to society—in fact, to the rest of the world. We can ask to what extent a certain story promotes institutional integration, prophetic conflict with one’s social environment, or the detachment from the institutional frameworks and obedience to one’s own guiding spirit. On a more abstract level, we can speak of different strategies of finding one’s social identity: within the framework of the institutions, against the framework of the institutions, or outside the institutions.

These are not so much clear-cut alternatives, as rather basic components, which are necessarily mixed in most narratives, and in most human lives. They offer different perspectives that will help us to interpret the individual stories. Most of the commission narratives, whether Egyptian, Jewish, Greco-Roman, or early Christian, provide a synthesis of the three basic types.