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Luke and *Progymnasmata*: Rhetorical Handbooks, Rhetorical Sophistication and Genre Selection

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In dialogue with the progymnasmatic works of Theon and others, as well as modern studies on Luke, this chapter seeks to revisit the enigma of Luke's education and the effect of that education on the Lukan writings. Identifying Luke's educational influences is an important endeavour in its own right, as it provides a conceptual background when approaching Luke and Acts. The goal of this article is much more modest in that it seeks to examine the placement of the *progymnasmata* in literary education and its corresponding influence on assertions regarding the genre of Luke and Acts and Luke's rhetorical sophistication. Towards this end, this article will respond to two recent publications in *NTS* that discuss Luke's rhetorical training and competency with a particular eye towards identifying genre.¹

Overall, this article posits that the progymnastic handbooks in the first century CE were not rigidly assigned to one particular educational tier, but rather were part of both the secondary and tertiary levels. This placement is vital for understanding the possible limits of Luke's rhetorical training, his level of education and his corresponding selection of genre. Second, this article will discuss briefly Luke's use of initial rhetorical features with a particular focus on δῆγησις and how it is employed in the handbooks. Finally, this article provides an extended challenge to M. W. Martin's claim of Luke's rhetorical sophistication and argues that Luke's use of *synkrisis* is not as advanced as Martin posits nor was it Luke's model for the Third Gospel.

¹ O. Padilla, 'Hellenistic παιδεία and Luke's Education: A Critique of Recent Approaches', *NTS* 55 (2009): 416–37; M. W. Martin, 'Progymnastic Topic Lists: A Compositional Template for Luke and other *Bioi*?', *NTS* 54 (2008): 18–41.

1. Education in the ancient world

The standard scholarly configuration of the education system, championed by H. I. Marrou and S. F. Bonner, presents a tripartite model with three tiers of schooling: primary, secondary and tertiary.² While a number of scholars still work from this organizational model, there is a growing recognition that rigid divisions between the different levels are unsupportable.³ Consequently, there is an implicit understanding of variation and nuance between geographic locales and time periods, as is expressed by Raffaella Criboire: ‘The picture that emerges is one of great variety. Its outlines depended on several factors: not only educational stages, but also urban education versus education in the country, economic and social status of the pupil, and purely situational circumstances.’⁴

In light of this diversity, Teresa Morgan proposes a holistic ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία education model that is partitioned into ‘core’ and ‘periphery’.⁵ According to Morgan, this ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία is the basic outline of education and consists of reading, writing, grammar, literature, geometry, astronomy, music and basic rhetoric; although history, advanced oratory and philosophy are excluded.⁶ In this model, those students who have Greek parents or prior access to Greek culture will be able to excel at the core material and be privileged with exposure to a wider range of authors which will assist in later differentiating the lowly educated from the cultural elite.

Morgan bases her theory on papyrological evidence, ‘sociological established preference for competition’, and the means by which a person gained entry into the dominant Greek and Roman cultural elite.⁷ While her theory has merit, it lacks supporting evidence of Greco-Roman authors in their discussions of ancient education. Morgan claims that this is due to their lack

² H. I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (trans. G. R. Lamb; London: Sheed and Ward, 1956), pp. 142–216; S. F. Bonner, *Education in the Roman World: From the Elder Cato to the Younger Pliny* (Berkeley: University of California, 1977), pp. 34–75; R. Criboire, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2001), p. 2.

³ R. A. Kaster, ‘Notes on ‘Primary’ and ‘Secondary’ Schools in Late Antiquity’, *TAPA* 113 (1983): 323–46.

⁴ Criboire, *Gymnastics*, p. 18.

⁵ T. Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (CCS; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 71–3.

⁶ Morgan, *Literate Education*, pp. 35–6, 42–3, 190–3.

⁷ Morgan, *Literate Education*, p. 88.

of sociological interest;⁸ however, one should not be so quick to dismiss these writers who not only went through the system, but also influenced later educators in how the system should be developed and maintained.⁹

Within both of these models, the final level of education is the most specialized with a number of different avenues of study (rhetoric, philosophy, medicine, etc.), typically divided between ‘lower’ *techne* and ‘higher’ literary streams.¹⁰ Even here, our understanding of educational material is slim, particularly regarding medical training, as well as the amount of overlap (if any) between these streams. Though all these fields warrant individual attention, this chapter will focus solely on rhetoric, specifically the *progymnasmata*.

2. The location of the Progymnasmata in the education system

One of the initial challenges for understanding rhetorical handbooks is that there is disagreement over when in the educational process these exercises would have been taught. *Progymnasmata*, according to some, are considered the preliminary exercises given to boys between the ages of 12 and 15 in order to prepare them for the training of declamation in the rhetorical schools, which suggests that they were provided prior to formal rhetorical training.¹¹ Accordingly, a number of scholars have suggested that it was part of the secondary level of education.¹² Criboire, Morgan, and Hock and O’Neil, however, suggest that the *progymnasmata* were part of the rhetorical teaching of the tertiary/final level and thus not part of training prior to rhetorical school.¹³ A key issue with this debate is that nearly all scholars place the

⁸ Morgan, *Literate Education*, p. 89.

⁹ Morgan’s quick dismissal of other possible explanations for the papyrological evidence undermines her position. See Morgan, *Literate Education*, p. 70.

¹⁰ For example, Seneca, *Ep.* 88; Lucian, *Somn.* 12; Padilla, ‘Hellenistic παιδεία’, p. 436. On the differentiation between rhetoric and oratory along with educational references, see C. Steel, *Roman Oratory* (NSC 36; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), esp. pp. 64–5.

¹¹ Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, x; Criboire, *Gymnastics*, p. 56.

¹² ‘The *progymnasmata* were the exercises taught in the second level of education to train students for public discourse’, J. H. Neyrey, ‘Encomium verses Vituperation: Contrasting Portraits of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel’, *JBL* 126 (2007): 529–52, 531.

¹³ Criboire, *Gymnastics*, pp. 56, 221–30; Morgan, *Literate Education*, pp. 190–2; R. F. Hock, ‘The Educational Curriculum in Chariton’s *Callirhoe*’, in *Ancient Fiction: The Matrix of Early Christian and Jewish Narrative* (eds J.-A.A. Brant, C. W. Hedrick and C. Shea; SBLSymS 32; Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 15–36, 24; *The Chreia and Ancient Rhetoric: Classroom Exercises* (eds R. F. Hock and E. N. O’Neil; WGRW 2; Atlanta: SBL, 2002), p. 1; R. Webb, ‘The *Progymnasmata* at Practice’, in *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity* (ed. Y. L. Too; Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 289–316, 297. ‘The *progymnasmata* were a central part of the rhetorical instruction in the curricula of post-secondary

progymnasmata exclusively in one educational tier and rarely discuss the possibility that the exercises may not have been exclusively contained in a single level.

The primary exception is Bonner, who suggests that the placement of *progymnasmata* was subject to social pressures.¹⁴ Originally they were a well-established part of tertiary rhetorical training, but that by the first century AD there was disagreement about where the *progymnasmata* would be taught. With the growing prestige and opportunities afforded to rhetoricians there was a downward pressure on providing rhetorical exercises earlier and to younger students. As a result, progymnasmatic exercises began to become part of the grammatical training of the second level.¹⁵

This perspective parallels discussions among the ancients, particularly Quintilian, for whom the teaching of rhetorical exercises at lower educational levels was not palatable. Rather, Quintilian (*Inst.* 2.1.2-3) believed that this was a disfavour to the rhetorical art and considered it a dereliction of duty on the part of the Roman teachers of rhetoric. Although he could not entirely reverse the trend, Quintilian proposed that not all of the *progymnasmata* be left in the hands of the *grammatici*, but that they could retain only the very preliminary of exercises (*chreia*, maxims, fables and narrative, *Inst.* 1.9.3). A similar trend is lamented by Suetonius who claims that, though grammar and rhetoric have become distinct subjects, some grammarians ‘introduce certain kinds of exercises suited to the training of orators, such as problems (*problemata*), paraphrases (*paraphrasis*), addresses (*allocutiones*), character sketches (*ethologias*) and similar things’ (*De Gramm.* 4). It is apparent from both of these comments that some rhetorical exercises were practised prior to entering rhetorical school. However, it is also clear from these comments that only select exercises, not the entire handbook, were taught prior to rhetorical education proper.¹⁶

Along this line of argument, Morgan contends that there is documentary

education in the Roman Empire’, D. F. Watson, ‘Rhetorical Criticism’, in *Blackwell Companion to the New Testament* (ed. D. E. Aune; Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), pp. 166–76, 171.

¹⁴ Bonner, *Education in the Roman World*, pp. 250–2.

¹⁵ It is important to note at this point that there were substantial differences between the Latin and Greek educational system. Though in both systems there was pressure to teach the *progymnasmata* to younger and younger students, it was primarily the Latin schools that were most influenced by it.

¹⁶ Cf. Strabo’s (*Geog.* 14.1.48) statement that his grammar teacher taught him grammar and some rhetoric.

evidence to support the idea that the most basic progymnasmatic exercises were incorporated within the primary and secondary education levels.¹⁷ The best example is P. Bouriant 1.141-68 in which five *chreiai* are provided in a format most convenient for beginner readers. Other examples that date back to the first century AD are provided by Hock and O'Neil, which provide further confirmation of more widespread use.¹⁸ However, though *chreiai* were taught at the primary level of education, it is highly unlikely that their rhetorical significance and impact were taught at this time. Rather, as is plain from the format of P. Bouriant 1, it is the form and the words that are in focus at this initial stage; their rhetorical nature was left to discussion at a later date.

Nevertheless, there is evidence that some students did know something of rhetoric prior to commencing rhetorical education proper. This appears to be the case especially in the later Roman Empire as witnessed in Libanius's comments that some students had received rhetorical preparation prior to entering his school. For example, when testing his new students, Libanius found that one had already memorized large quantities of Demosthenes (*Ep.* 1261.2), and another was also familiar with Libanius' own discourses (*Ep.* 768.3). It is important to note, even at this time in which rhetoric and oratory were dominant, that these examples are the exception rather than the norm.

These ancient examples support the idea that rhetoric was not limited solely to tertiary education, but are themselves insufficient to claim that the entire range of rhetorical exercises were taught at an early stage. This suggests that Quintilian's lament should be taken seriously and that some, but not all, of the rhetorical exercises were taught prior to studying under the rhetorician. This leads us to the natural question: If the *progymnasmata* were in fact divided between the second and third levels, which exercises would have been taught prior to entrance into the rhetorical school? Though there is no consistent demarcation from the ancient authors – and it is probable that there was no uniformity in this division – it is most likely that it would be divided around the level of 'refutation'.¹⁹ Such a view is hinted at by Kennedy, who states, 'Up to this point, the exercises only required a student to describe, paraphrase,

¹⁷ E.g. gnomic and *chreia*. Morgan, *Literate Education*, p. 123.

¹⁸ E.g. P.Mich.inv. 25; P.Mich.inv. 41; P.Oslo III 177; P.Berol.inv. 21258V; P.Mil.Vogl. VI 263; SB I 5730; O.Wilck. 1226 and 1330. Hock and O'Neil, *Chreia*, pp. 5–49.

¹⁹ Though this is a natural break within the curriculum, it is complicated by the fact that Theon discusses 'refutation' and 'confirmation' in relationship to 'narrative' (93-96; Patillon 57-61). This,

or amplify the material assigned by the teacher.²⁰ Beginning with refutation, greater responsibility is placed on the students and their ability to think for themselves. Accordingly, with this division the secondary student would have had training in *chreia*, maxim, fable and narrative with possible (although increasingly less likely) exposure to the more advanced exercises.

Understanding the location of the *progymnasmata* within the educational system is fundamentally important for determining the likeliness that Luke (or any other author) had formal rhetorical training. For example, if the *progymnasmata* are completely restricted to the tertiary level of education, then claiming that Luke made extended use of rhetorical devices suggests that he had an advanced education. Conversely, if the *progymnasmata* are not entirely restricted to the third educational tier, but were partially or wholly accessible to a student in the secondary tier, then the level of education claimed for Luke may be more conservative when identifying basic rhetorical forms in a work. Accordingly, authors who only show knowledge of and competence in initial rhetorical exercises and fail to show substantial knowledge of tertiary educational material may be considered to only have received a secondary education; whereas evidence of later rhetorical exercises provides a stronger indication that the author had some tertiary education.²¹

It is necessary, moreover, to differentiate between the possible existence of a rhetorical stratagem within a work and the quality of its use. Just because an author employs a rhetorical device does not mean that it was used well. Even within antiquity ancients recognized gradients of uses among authors. In each case the quality of the author's employment may also indicate the level of education. Excellent employment supports the claim of higher rhetorical training; whereas mediocre employment suggests (but does not guarantee) a less thorough education. This criterion will be further discussed in the critique of Martin below.

Further complicating this picture is the claim by a number of scholars that individuals who did not have a rhetorical education would have developed cultural conceptions about rhetorical discourse due to its permeation within

however, is not the case with the other extant *progymnasmata* textbooks, which separate narrative from refutation and confirmation.

²⁰ G. A. Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1994), p. 204.

²¹ Naturally this is not a rigid division and so should not be applied uncritically. Rather, variations in location and time force one to use this criterion with discretion.

the culture.²² Although the claim that an uneducated audience could identify rhetorical devices or recognize a speech that lacked rhetorical flair is probable (especially within an important metropolis), it is questionable whether a person from that same audience would have the skills to construct a literary work that utilized the same rhetorical tools that they could identify. Accordingly, the identification of rhetorical features within a work lends greater support for that writer's education than to the idea that rhetoric was 'in the air' and was therefore assimilated.²³ There is little doubt that a person could have learned a phrase of Isocrates or Demosthenes by listening to a declaiming sophist. However, the ability to consistently and elegantly utilize such knowledge would have been nearly impossible without a thorough knowledge of classical authors. Moreover, the extreme speciality of rhetoricians, indicated by the amount of extra schooling needed for this profession, mitigates against the idea that a marginally educated person would have been able to use advanced handbook exercises well without training.

Having discussed the possible placement of the *progymnasmata* in the educational timeline and some additional considerations, we now turn our attention to how this might affect recent proposals regarding Luke's use of rhetorical devices and his selection of genre.

3. Luke-Acts, rhetoric and genre

One of the most recent studies to evaluate Luke's education in light of his narratives is that of Osvaldo Padilla. Through the evaluation of intertextuality (to classical Greek authors) and elaborate speeches in Acts, Padilla concludes

²² G. A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1984), p. 5; M. C. Parsons, *Acts* (Paideia; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 19–20; M. C. Parsons, 'Luke and the *Progymnasmata*', in *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan Narrative and Greco-Roman Discourse* (eds T. Penner and C. Vander Stichele; SBLSymS 20; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), pp. 43–63, 46; K. Maxwell, *Hearing Between the Lines: The Audience as Fellow-Worker in Luke-Acts and its Literary Milieu* (JSNTSS 425; London: T&T Clark, 2010), pp. 126–7.

It is possible that Luke, or any other writer in the ancient world who did not have a full rhetorical education, could have had access to and read the *progymnasmata* and so have gained knowledge of the higher-level exercises. However, there is a notable difference between personal reading and a full formal rhetorical education, as is emphasized by Dionysius (*Comp.* 25–26) and Cicero (*Ad Fam.* 7.19).

²³ This is not to suggest that an ancient could not have learned rhetoric through this manner, but that the writer acquired these tools through formal education is much more likely. For ancients who suggested that all the citizens of a city 'share in the study as by a vapour' and so would have recognized rhetoric, see Libanius, *Or.* 11.192; Aristides, *Panath.* 46.

that the passages in which previous scholars identified rhetorical training for Luke can be better understood in terms of his relationship to Jewish literature and his education in the primary and secondary tiers.²⁴ As a result, it is not possible to claim that Luke had a rhetorical education as the typical educational markers are absent. Rather, Luke's work exhibits signs of only primary and secondary literary education.²⁵

Though I generally agree with Padilla's findings, I would like to nuance and advance his conclusions based on the aforementioned understanding that the *progymnasmata* were not entirely restricted to the tertiary level of education.²⁶ Padilla's claim that Luke's work does not provide firm evidence that he attended higher literary education is compelling. However, though Luke's work does not exhibit the later stages of progymnasmatic training, it is still possible to identify some of the initial levels, specifically those of *chreia*, fable and narrative.

Although the first two sets of Theon's exercises (*chreia* and fable) have been identified as forming specific parts of the Lukan narratives,²⁷ it is primarily his comments about narrative that are most intriguing for evaluating Luke's work as a literary whole. In his third section, 'On Narrative', Theon describes a narrative (διήγημα) as 'an account of matters that have happened, or as though they have happened' (78.16-17; Patillon 38).²⁸ Furthermore, Theon claims that a διήγησις is comprised of six elements (στοιχεῖα): 1) the person; 2) the action done by the person; 3) the place of the action; 4) the time of the action; 5) the manner of the action; and 6) the cause of these things (78.17-21; Patillon 38). This perspective is echoed in the other *progymnasmata*, although there is some disagreement over how the sub-categories are to be divided.²⁹ In later handbooks (e.g. Libanius) examples could be drawn also from fictitious events and characters, not limited exclusively to those based in history.³⁰

²⁴ Padilla, 'Hellenistic παιδεία', pp. 421-34.

²⁵ Padilla, 'Hellenistic παιδεία', p. 435.

²⁶ Although Padilla knows and discusses this formulation it does not noticeably influence his discussion. Padilla, 'Hellenistic παιδεία', p. 419.

²⁷ For examples, see Parsons, 'Luke and the *Progymnasmata*', pp. 48-50.

²⁸ Although I use the standard Spengel numbering for Theon's *Progymnasmata*, the critical text use is *Aelius Théon: Progymnasmata* (eds M. Patillon and G. Bolognesi; Budé; Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1997).

²⁹ For a brief discussion, see *Libanius's Progymnasmata: Model Exercises in Greek Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (ed. C. A. Gibson; SBLWGRW 27; Atlanta: SBL, 2008), p. 9.

³⁰ Out of the 41 examples of διήγησις provided in Libanius' *Progymnasmata* 37 are mythological, while four are drawn from biographies or histories.

These opening exercises were important for the development of the rhetorician; however, it is clear from their scope that they are too restrictive to influence and function on the macro-level of genre. In fact, when attempting to relate Luke's rhetorical training to the understanding and selection of genre, narrative (διήγημα) is the only one of these initial exercises that could function on this level. This would be potentially helpful in light of Padilla's (and others') view of the genre of Acts as history and the strong relationship between history and rhetorical training.³¹

The debate over determining the genre of (Luke-)Acts, I will argue, is not helped by invoking the rhetorical handbooks. Theon's *Progymnasmata* does not attempt to delineate genre forms or limit generic options, nor does it present the exercises as genre possibilities. Rather, selections from a variety of genres are used as examples for specific rhetorical examples. For instance, Theon first references διήγησις in relationship to 'history' and 'fable' (60.3-4; Patillon 2), stating, 'for the one who has expressed well and in a versatile way a narrative (διήγησιν) and fable will also compose a history (ιστορίαν) well ...' It is clear from this passage that for Theon there is some differentiation between 'narrative' and 'history' with history being a further development of skills gained at previous levels.

There is some confusion, however, as to what Theon is referencing with the term ιστορία. Though it is clear that Theon understands ιστορία as 'the combination of narratives' (60.6; Patillon 2), it is not clear whether Theon understands this word exclusively in terms of historiography. An evaluation of the term ιστορία within Theon's *Progymnasmata* provides some clarity; rather than specifically referencing history proper, Theon's use of ιστορία distinguishes between prose and poetry.³² Certainly Theon includes history as (at least) a subcategory of ιστορία, but it is not possible to restrict Theon's use of ιστορία to *only* history writing. Accordingly, a greater number of generic options are possible.

³¹ Padilla is correct when he notes that prose narrative was taught later in the educational curriculum. However, arguing that Luke did not have a tertiary education undermines some of the confidence we can have that Luke modelled his work on Greek histories. Cf. O. Padilla, *The Speeches of Outsiders in Acts: Poetics, Theology and Historiography* (SNTSMS 144; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 237-40.

³² The references, conveniently provided by Patillon (p. 199), are: 60.4, 6; 67.4; 70.3, 6, 12; 77.15; 80.17; 81.2, 7; 83.25, 31; 87.23; 91.15; 121.2; 122.30; and 123.1 [17]. Parsons ('Luke and the *Progymnasmata*', p. 53 n. 30) suggests that ιστορία in Theon is not restricted to history, but rather is used to differentiate prose from poetry.

It appears, moreover, that διήγησις could also be used for almost any type of prose genre.³³ Most importantly for this investigation are the examples provided by Theon, which exhibit a broad genre range, from Homer's *Iliad* (80.4) to Demosthenes's *Against Aristocrats* (81.19-20) and from Thucydides's *History* (84.4) to Palaiphatus the Peripatetic's treatise *On Incredulities* (96.4-6). Similarly, Ps.-Hermogenes (*Prog.* 4) relates διήγησις to Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (so also Aphthonius, *Prog.* 22) as well as the histories of Thucydides and Herodotus (so also Nicolaus, *Prog.* 12). Especially enlightening for our discussion is the opening remark of Nicolaus that 'After fable should come narrative, as being more argumentative than fable, but simpler than all the other exercises' (*Prog.* 11). That Nicolaus views narrative as being the easiest of the rhetorical exercises is informative and should provide a needed check on Luke's literary claim in Luke 1.1, if in fact Luke is using the handbooks as a literary guide.

This diversity of works associated with διήγησις has led scholars to despondency. L. Alexander states that διήγησις is 'exact but not technical: "narrative" is appropriate for a Gospel ... The word is not found in the scientific prefaces.'³⁴ Talbert states that, 'The problem with this category is that it is as broad as the modern terms "account" and "narrative" ... A narrative/account could encompass a letter of sorts, a novel, a history, or a biography – maybe more.'³⁵ As a result, it is not possible for the *progymnasmata* at this point to assist in the selection of genre for Luke-Acts and so we must look elsewhere for answers. Though maxims, fables and *chreiai* are too limited in their scope to shape a work as large as Luke-Acts generically, διήγησις appears to be too broad a term to do anything but limit Luke-Acts to a work of prose narrative; something that was apparent from the beginning.

Overall, recognizing that some of the rhetorical exercises were located in the second tier of education further supports Padilla's argument. This perspective allows for some leniency regarding the occurrence of smaller,

³³ Cf. *Let. Arist.* 1, 8, 322; 2 *Macc.* 2.32; *Sirach* 39.2; *Lucian, Hist.* 55; *Polybius, Hist.* 3.36.1, 4; 4.28.4-6; *Dionysius Halicarnassus, Hist.* 2.48.1; *Aristotle, Poet.* 19, 1456b11; *Theophrastus, Char.* 3.1.1; *Philo, Spec.* 2.39 (regarding the Law); 3.49; *Pot.* 133; *Abr.* 20; *Ios.* 28, 94; *Praem.* 61; *Plutarch, Art.* 11.1.

³⁴ L. C. A. Alexander, *The Preface to Luke's Gospel: Literary Convention and Social Context in Luke 1.1-4 and Acts 1.1* (SNTSMS 78; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 111.

³⁵ C. H. Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel* (rev. edn; Macon: Smyth and Helwys, 2002), p. 2. Büchsel (*TDNT* 2.909) opines that one is not able to provide a specialized meaning for διήγησις.

basic rhetorical features, but undermines their impact in arguing for Luke receiving a full rhetorical education. From this standpoint, Padilla's argument regarding Luke's education is more fully established. The potential challenge with this understanding of Luke's (lack of) education is that it weakens the claim that (Luke-)Acts is a history. The study of history was largely, if not exclusively, limited to the highest educational tier. If Luke did not reach this tier then it is less likely that ancient Greek historiography would have been his literary model. Other prose genres, such as biography, may, therefore, have provided a more ready genre model.

4. Critique of M. W. Martin's 'Progymnastic topic lists'

M. W. Martin, in his article 'Progymnastic Topic Lists', attributes an advanced form of rhetoric to Luke's genre selection, and attempts to revitalize Shuler's theory that the Gospels show broad similarities to 'encomium biographies' and the topic lists of the *progymnasmata*.³⁶ With a focused investigation on the *synkrisis* between Jesus and John the Baptist, Martin contrasts Luke's comparative writing with that of Plutarch and Philo to support his claim that Luke fully completed the study of the *progymnasmata* and that he 'employs the skills of describing and comparing a life topically with no less rhetorical sophistication than any of the other biographers surveyed, including Plutarch and Philo'.³⁷ Martin continues by stating that Luke 'displays more rhetorical sophistication in his handling of *synkrisis* than most of the biographers surveyed, Philo included'.³⁸

In claiming that Luke made use of *progymnasmata*, Martin asserts that Luke had a complete, formal training in the rhetorical handbooks, but is silent regarding Luke's possible completion of tertiary education, though his claim of rhetorical sophistication might imply such a perspective. If Luke did utilize formal *synkrisis* for the structure of the Gospel of Luke, then it would be easier to consider Luke to have had greater exposure to the rhetorical handbooks. As discussed above, *synkrisis* occurs later in the rhetorical handbooks and so

³⁶ Martin, 'Progymnastic', pp. 18–41; P. L. Shuler, *A Genre for the Gospels: The Biographical Character of Matthew* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).

³⁷ Martin, 'Progymnastic', 41.

³⁸ Martin, 'Progymnastic', 41.

would likely fall in the tertiary level of education. However, Martin's use of latter progymnastic exercises, without determining the possibility of Luke's educational level, is potentially problematic. As we will discuss below, it is not just straight comparisons that show rhetorical sophistication, rather, other features are also needed.

First, although Martin compares Luke's Gospel with Plutarch and Philo, it is unclear what his perspective is on the relationship between Luke and Acts. It might be assumed that he understands these two works to be separate, though his citation of Acts 1.6-11 as an important aspect of Luke's portrayal of Jesus blurs this distinction.³⁹ If Martin's use of the progymnastic topic lists forms the foundation for Luke's portrayal of Jesus, what is to be made of Acts? Or, if Acts is not attached to Luke's Gospel, how can it fulfil the topic of events after Jesus' life, which is an important component of rhetorical encomium? It is possible that Martin could limit his discussion to Luke and have Luke 24 satisfy the 'events after death' category; however, his citations of Acts raise questions.

Another issue with Martin's theory is the relationship asserted to exist between biography and rhetoric. At certain times in the article Martin claims that an author included various biographic topics (such as nurture and training) 'per progymnastic requirements'.⁴⁰ More specifically, Martin asserts that 'progymnastic topic lists are employed in *bioi* generally and Luke specifically as a compositional template, guiding the narrative in its overall structure and content'.⁴¹ Statements such as this one imply that biographical features/*topoi* are included in a work because the author is following a predetermined list dictated by rhetorical handbooks. The issue with this claim is that the inclusion of such *topoi* was standard within biography writing *prior* to their incorporation into rhetorical topic lists.⁴² Rhetorical handbooks did not gain ascendancy until the latter part of the Hellenistic era; whereas biography and encomium were established genres well before that time.⁴³

³⁹ Martin, 'Progymnastic', pp. 30, 34, 38.

⁴⁰ Martin, 'Progymnastic', p. 26.

⁴¹ Martin, 'Progymnastic', pp. 19–20.

⁴² See, for example, the discussion of earlier authors in R. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (2nd edn; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004). Cf. also, S. A. Adams, *The Genre of Acts and Collected Biography* (SNTSMS 156; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), appendix 1.

⁴³ Adams, *Genre*, pp. 68–115.

Accordingly, Martin's statements that an author includes topics because of rhetorical requirements fails to acknowledge, not only the fact that these topics were standard features within *bioi* apart from rhetorical handbooks, but that it is quite possible that the rhetorical handbooks included these topics in their lists because of their requisite nature in biography.⁴⁴ All the examples used by Martin are *bioi*, so it is no wonder why all follow, for the most part, the topic lists. As a result, there is substantial ambiguity regarding where the author derived his topic list; one possibility being that Luke did not consult the handbooks at all.⁴⁵ This observation undermines a major pillar of Martin's argument – that the progymnastic topic lists were *the* model for Luke's composition.

Furthermore, even if we were to grant that Luke drew his *topoi* from lists in rhetorical handbooks, this does not speak to his rhetorical sophistication. In this instance Martin's claim that Luke is more rhetorically sophisticated than Philo and equal to Plutarch in his use of *synkrisis* potentially goes too far. Adherence to a list along with the inclusion of comparison/parallelism and needed *topoi* do not in themselves indicate level of rhetorical training or sophistication. Rather, the manner of employment needs to be taken into account to determine whether or not the author adhered to what we understand to be the most important components of syncretic comparison.

Turning to Martin's proposed comparison between Jesus and John it is clear that he is right to identify specific parallels between these two characters. Those of greatest importance are the strong similarities in miraculous birth (complete with angelic foreshadowing, etc.) and certain aspects of their public ministry (time in the desert, gaining and teaching disciples). The issue with these parallels is that they are limited to the first part of the Gospel narrative and so do not work on the macro scale of the work. After Luke 3 the narrative is one-sided; John the Baptist only appears in a small portion of the Gospel and is essentially omitted after Luke 7.⁴⁶ So much of the narrative is taken

⁴⁴ Martin, 'Progymnastic', pp. 34–5.

⁴⁵ This is not to say that there was no connection or overlap between biography and rhetoric, clearly there was, as is evident from the handbooks. The issue in Martin's article is the assumption/insinuation that Luke could *only* have gotten his topic list from the handbooks and there was not a regularized set of biography genre-features that Luke could have used.

⁴⁶ Though John is spoken well of, especially in 7.28, it is clear from the narrative context that Jesus is still the character in primary focus. See also, Luke 11.1; 16.16; 20.4–7.

up with Jesus' life, ministry and death that by the end of the Gospel narrative John is all but forgotten. He has fulfilled his role and is now offstage.

In addition to this disproportionate presentation, there is no extended, formal *synkrisis* (i.e. comparison) in which the two characters are contrasted; there is no 'parallel *scrutiny* of goods or evils or persons or things' (Nicolaus, *Prog.* 60). True, there is discussion regarding who Jesus is and John the Baptist is proposed as a comparator (Lk. 9.7-8, 19). However, he is not the only option (Elijah, one of the prophets of old), nor is there any extended discussion as to the relationship between the two in which their qualities and actions are evaluated and compared. Rather, this discussion focuses exclusively on Jesus and who he is; John is brushed aside and his execution mentioned only by report (9.9). That Luke completely omits John's death narrative – recounted in detail in the other Synoptics (Mk 6.14-29; Mt. 14.1-12) – is even more problematic for Martin's case as this would have afforded a golden opportunity for Luke to build the parallelism between Jesus and John. That he intentionally omits John's death narrative suggests that this was not his focus and that Jesus is the only real protagonist of his Gospel.⁴⁷

In fact, evaluating Luke's Gospel in light of Theon's *progymnasmata*, Luke's comparison of Jesus and John the Baptist broke the first and most important rule of *synkrisis*: 'Comparison should be of likes and where we are in doubt which should be preferred because of no evident superiority of one to the other' (112.30-113.2; Patillon 78).⁴⁸ In Luke 3.16, immediately before their first interaction, John the Baptist explicitly states that he is not the Christ and that he is inferior to Jesus. Similarly, John is framed throughout the narrative as a great prophet, but always in a subordinate relationship to Jesus (Lk. 3.4-6; 7.20). Though Martin is right that Luke does make multiple comparisons between Jesus and John, it is essentially characterized as a comparison of un-equals, which fundamentally contradicts Theon's understanding of *synkrisis*.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ The inclusion of the death of a minor character was not required in ancient *bioi*; however, the death of the main protagonist was a requisite component of individual biographies. Clearly, Luke did not have to include John's death, but the discussion of the manner of death and how the person faced it was a classic topic of comparison. Cf. Hermogenes, *Prog.* 19.

⁴⁸ This statement is not to imply that Theon could not have had a concept of comparison of un-equals in his rhetorical system (although it is not stated), or to be overly rigid about applying this criterion (there was room for variation), but rather that Luke clearly digressed from Theon's suggested approach. Hermogenes (*Prog.* 19) and Nicolaus (*Prog.* 59) are not as rigid and suggest that comparison of those who are unequal can take place.

⁴⁹ It is worth noting that other ancients might not have seen this comparison as clear-cut as Luke did

In contrast, a great example of a sophisticated use of *synkrisis* is that of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* in which the *synkrisis* forms an important structural component of the *Lives* by providing a clear ending to each pair.⁵⁰ This formal feature reinforces the connection between the two lives and indicates to the reader the importance of reading and interpreting these lives in tandem.⁵¹ Accordingly, the interpretation of each life is affected by its close reading with its partner: the first life sets a pattern which is then exploited and varied in the second.

The function and content of the *synkrisis* for Plutarch is distinct as the material in the *Lives* is often re-appropriated by Plutarch in his moral evaluation. An action that was positively interpreted in the *Life* may be reconsidered negatively in the *synkrisis*. For example, Pericles in his *Life* is praised by Plutarch for his building projects on the Acropolis (*Per.* 12.1-13.13); however, this same building programme is denigrated in the *synkrisis* when compared to the real work of a statesman, that of virtue (*Comp. Per. Fab.* 2.1).⁵²

Where the narrative allows for multiple interpretations of an event, Plutarch may select only one for the *synkrisis* and exclude all others. Such an action occurs in *Comp. Sol. Pub.* 4.1 where Plutarch, in contradiction to *Sol.* 8.1-11.1, denies Solon any part in the war with Megara. This difference should not be considered ignorance or carelessness on behalf of Plutarch, but rather can be accounted for by the rhetorical demands of the moment which lead him to argue different sides of the same coin.⁵³ In light of these examples, it is clear that the *synkrisis* are not simply summaries of the preceding narratives, but something more.

The role of the *synkrisis* is also not exclusively to demonstrate the superiority of one character over another. Following Theon's programme for *synkrisis* outlined in his *Progymnasmata*, Plutarch generally avoids making particular claims of superiority. Rather, he hedges his statements and allows his readers

(cf. Clement, *Recognitions*, 1.54).

⁵⁰ This is in addition to the general parallelism by which he organized his *Lives*. T. E. Duff, *Plutarch's Lives: Exploring Virtue and Vice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 283.

⁵¹ This formal *synkrisis* is found at the end of all but four pairs: *Themistocles-Camillus*, *Pyrrhus-Marius*, *Phocion-Cato Minor*, and *Alexander-Caesar*.

⁵² See also the depiction of Antony's death, which in *Antony* is negatively portrayed against that of Cleopatra (*Ant.* 77.1-4; 85.1-4), whereas in the *synkrisis* it is to be preferred over Demetrius' (*Comp. Dem. Ant.* 4.2).

⁵³ Duff, *Plutarch's Lives*, p. 267.

to come to their own conclusions.⁵⁴ The primary role of Plutarch's *synkrisis*, therefore, is to invite the reader's renewed attention to moral questions that have been raised in the *Lives* and to raise new and even more challenging ones. Rather than providing trite moral certitudes, Plutarch reframes moral and ethical questions in ways that challenge culturally assumed answers.⁵⁵

In light of such nuanced applications of *synkrisis* that adhere to Theon's most basic tenet (from a person we know successfully traversed the entirety of literary and rhetorical education), Luke's comparison between Jesus and John seems one-dimensional and abridged. Not only does the Third Gospel lack the nuance of Plutarch's employment of *synkrisis*, it fails to uphold Theon's principle of comparison of equals. Even if we were to grant that some later handbooks allow for comparison of un-equals – moving from the lesser to the greater – this is part of the discussion of *topos* for Theon and is used primarily in an explicit argument (*Prog.* 108). At best, Luke appears to flout Theon's convention and apply it to a new category, at worst, he failed in the most basic component of *synkrisis*. Some might prefer to say 'Luke creatively employed a convention and adapted it to his needs.' This is possible, but it raises the difficult question of how one determines a creative adaptation from a deviation in literary prescription?

All of these challenges (disproportional representation, Luke's *topoi* as taken from biography not rhetorical handbooks, and deviation from Theon's tenet) undermine Martin's claim, not only of Luke's high rhetorical sophistication in his use of *synkrisis*, but also of Luke's use of the handbook as his primary literary model. Rather, it appears that Luke could have solely used existing biographies for his *topoi* and for modelling his instances of comparison. This begs the question: how much comparison is needed to employ the term *synkrisis*? Is there a critical mass needed, or can any comparison assume that label? Martin is no doubt correct when he defends the position that Luke (or any other author) is not required to have a formal, discrete *synkrisis* such as found in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*.⁵⁶ However,

⁵⁴ This equality is epitomized in *Comp. Cim. Luc.* 3.6: 'The result is that, if one looks at all sides of the argument, it is difficult to judge between them ...' Some comparisons, however, are less subtle, cf. *Comp. Thes. Rom.* 6.7.

⁵⁵ Duff, *Plutarch's Lives*, 245. cf. also S. Swain, 'Plutarchan Synkrisis', *Eranos* 90 (1992), pp. 101–11, 104–106.

⁵⁶ Cf. Nicolaus, *Prog.* 62.

removing such a discrete formal feature as a form-determinant creates substantial ambiguity for applying the label of *synkrisis*, especially if the term is absent in the work in question.

5. Conclusion

Based on the proposed placement of *progymnasmata* in the educational system of the first century AD, namely that it straddled the gap between the secondary and tertiary tiers, it is likely that Luke would have had preliminary exposure to the initial exercises (e.g. fable, maxim and narrative). However, as my questions of Martin's theory regarding *synkrisis* suggest, it is not certain that Luke would have completed the *progymnasmata* and/or acquired a tertiary education in rhetoric.

When attempting to interpret the genre of Luke(-Acts) in light of these rhetorical exercises, as was attempted by Martin, the most natural pairing would be that of δῆγησις, as the author of the Gospel of Luke appears to indicate (Lk. 1.1). However, it is apparent upon closer inspection that the term δῆγησις, as used by Theon and other rhetoricians/authors, is not restricted to one particular genre, but encompasses nearly the full spectrum of literary prose, history and biography included. Therefore, due to the pliable nature of δῆγησις it is not possible to provide a specific genre label to Luke's work using this rhetorical category.

In looking forward, there are a number of implications in locating the *progymnasmata* between the second and third levels of schooling. First, it recognizes that the handbooks are not rigidly held together, but were used in a flexible manner which changed over time and between different geographic regions. Second, it limits the availability of formal rhetorical training within the education system to the tertiary level. Third, and most importantly, it highlights that occasional examples of rhetoric use (e.g. *chreia*, maxims) in a work are insufficient for claiming rhetorical training and sophistication for the work's author. It is important to note that this does not eliminate the possibility of using rhetorical tools to evaluate the Lukan narratives nor negate the insights that rhetorical investigations bring to the interpretation of Luke-Acts. Rather, this chapter suggests that the *progymnasmata* taught in the secondary level do not assist in providing

generic boundaries for Luke-Acts as a whole besides the unhelpfully large one of prose narrative.

Finally, this chapter raises important questions regarding the use of the terms *synkrisis* and encomium (in contrast to comparison and biography) and the manner by which they are employed in scholarly works. It highlights the relationship(s) between biography and rhetorical categories and the incorporation of genre-determinative features in the handbooks. This relationship is challenging and requires further investigation.