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ACTS 27–28

THE CEREBRAL SCARS OF SHIPWRECK

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Summary

Conclusions drawn from recent studies on memory and trauma shed light on the vividness and immediacy of Acts 27:1–28:15. First, trauma catalyses enduring recollection. Subsequent memories can be visualised as ‘cerebral scars’ left by first-hand traumatic experiences. Second, shipwreck survival creates a plausible scenario for the formation of such memories. After analysing four possible approaches to Acts 27:1–28:15, this article concludes that the passage captures the cerebral scars of an eyewitness experience and ought to be approached accordingly.

1. Introduction

On 7 April 1993, a female university student recognises McKinley Cromedy from across the street; within thirty minutes, she identifies Cromedy from behind a two-way mirror as the perpetrator who robbed and raped her on 28 August 1992. Her recollection is vivid and, according to her own assertion, inerrant. Fingerprint samples do not correspond; hair fibres found on her body do not match. Nevertheless, upon her eyewitness testimony in a cross-racial identification Cromedy is convicted without corroborating evidence. Found guilty of third-degree aggravated criminal sexual contact, third-degree terrorist threats, second-degree robbery, third-degree burglary, and aggravated sexual assault, he serves five of his sixty-year sentence only to be exonerated by DNA evidence and released on 8 December 1999. His case is but one of 300 post-conviction exonerations recently catalogued

by the Innocence Project. Of these, 75 percent involve eyewitness testimony.¹

1. Studies in Memory Recollection

Can eyewitness recollection ever provide a vivid and faithful rendering of the past? Several thousand published studies now weigh into this discussion.² Variables undermining true recollection include weapon focus, high-stress environment, inadequate duration of experience, poor lighting, far distance, memory decay, unconscious transference, adolescence or old age, intoxication, and cross-racial identification.³ Additional studies highlight the potential for memory manipulation through police procedure, subsequent reporting, and personal influences that distort and/or create false memories.⁴

Other findings confirm the potential reliability of memory. McIver relates an incident in British Columbia wherein thirteen eyewitnesses to a violent crime were questioned concerning a range of seventeen to ninety-five details. The average accuracy during the initial police interviews was 82 per cent but this dropped only 1 per cent over a period of three months. Significantly, false information distributed through media outlets did not impact accuracy of recollection, nor did several misleading questions create false memories.⁵ Augustine of Hippo and William James intuited that certain experiences create vivid, long-lasting recollections; the former noted that deeply emotional experiences ‘clung to [his] memory’ while the latter remarked that certain experiences – deep, emotional, significant – could be visualised

¹ Amy Trenary, ‘State v. Henderson: A Model for Admitting Eyewitness Identification Testimony’, *University of Colorado Law Review* 84.4 (Fall 2013): 1256-303, esp. 1259.

² Gary Wells et al., ‘From the Lab to the Police Station: A Successful Application of Eyewitness Research’, *American Psychol.* 55 (2000): 581 note that more than 2000 articles had been devoted to the study of eyewitness recollection by turn of the millennium.

³ Trenary, ‘State v. Henderson’, 1274-80.

⁴ Trenary, ‘State v. Henderson’ 1264-74; Julie Shaw, *The Memory Illusion: Remembering, Forgetting, and the Science of False Memories* (London: Random House, 2017); J. Redman, ‘How Accurate Are Eyewitnesses?: Bauckham and the Eyewitnesses in the Light of Psychological Research’, *JBL* 129.1 (2010): 177-97, esp. 185; Robert McIver, ‘Eyewitnesses as Guarantors of the Accuracy of the Gospel Traditions in the Light of Psychological Research’, *JBL* 131.3 (2012): 529-46, esp. 530-33.

⁵ McIver, ‘Eyewitnesses’, 534-35.

as ‘scars upon the cerebral tissues’.⁶ Subsequent case studies confirm their intuitions.

A 2017 publication assessed the flash-bulb memories (FBMs) of 291 persons who received the news of the 13 November 2015 Paris attacks.⁷ FBMs are defined as ‘vivid recollections for the circumstances of discovering surprising and consequential events’.⁸ The study showed a direct correlation between the recall of FBMs with the following factors: rehearsal, surprise, novelty, and – especially – negative emotion.⁹ Nevertheless, Loftus, Miller, and Burns note limitations of FBMs in retrieving accurate renderings.¹⁰ Further, although Bauckham highlights the significance of emotion to memory recollection, he insightfully stresses the difficulty of treating it independently due to its intrinsic connections to other relevant concepts in memory recollection such as significance and uniqueness.¹¹ Therefore in this study we prefer ‘traumatic’ to ‘emotional’, since ‘traumatic’ combines the concept of negative emotion with other pertinent concepts such as personal significance and salience.

Particularly relevant in this regard is the distinction made by Pillemer between memories of significant second-hand reports versus memories of significant first-hand experiences.¹² Neisser et al. gathered recollections of the 1989 San Francisco earthquake, famous in the USA for delaying the baseball World Series.¹³ Recollections were gathered first within days and then again after eighteen months. Additionally,

⁶ Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* 10.30; William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: H. Holt & Co., 1890): 670. Quoted by S. Porter and A. Birt, ‘Is Traumatic Memory Special?: A Comparison of Traumatic Memory Characteristics with Memory for Other Emotional Life Experiences’, *Appl. Cognit. Psychol.* 15 (2012): 101-17, esp. 102.

⁷ M. Gandolphe and M. El Haj, ‘Flashbulb Memories of the Paris Attacks’, *Scandinavian Journal of Psychol.* 58 (2017): 199-204.

⁸ Megan Julian, John Bohannon III, and William Aue, ‘Measures of Flashbulb Memory: Are Elaborate Memories Consistently Accurate?’, *Flashbulb Memories: New Issues and Perspectives*, eds O. Luminet and A. Curci (New York: Psychology Press, 2009): 102.

⁹ Gandolphe, ‘Flashbulb’, 197-99.

¹⁰ E. Loftus, D. Miller, and H. Burns, ‘Semantic Integration of Verbal Information into a Visual Memory’, *Journal of Experimental Psychol.* 4 (1978): 19-31.

¹¹ See Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (2nd edn; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2017): 331.

¹² David Pillemer, ‘“Hearing the News” Versus “Being There”’ in Luminet and Curci, *Flashbulb*, 125-38.

¹³ U. Neisser et al., ‘Remembering the Earthquake: Direct Experiences Vs. Hearing the News’, *Memory* 4 (1996): 337-57.

samples were taken from both first-hand participants of the earthquake and those who heard the reports second-hand. Differences were ‘dramatic and revealing’.¹⁴ Although FBMs of second-hand reports were inconsistent, FBMs of traumatic first-hand experiences were remembered accurately and vividly for months and years with recall being ‘essentially at ceiling’.¹⁵ Neisser et al. conclude: ‘recall can be accurate, even if it takes an earthquake to make it so’.¹⁶

Trauma catalyses enduring recollection. A 2001 study of 306 university students required each participant to relate their most pleasant and most traumatic life experiences, and the latter were consistently rehearsed more vividly.¹⁷ Against prior assumptions, high-stress situations typically aid rather than hinder remembrance. For example, studies of kidnapped children, witnesses to homicide, concentration camp survivors, and survivors of a ferry sinking suggest that trauma can facilitate unimpaired, coherent recollection for extended periods.¹⁸ Concerning the abiding sting of such memories, Fivush, Bohanek, and Sales write: ‘Intriguingly only negative emotion associated with highly aversive events is recalled consistently over time.’¹⁹

To sum up, it is apparent that accurate, vivid recall can occur despite influences of time and manipulation. Particularly, FBMs create vivid impressions, but much more salient are the ‘cerebral scars’ left by first-hand traumatic experiences.

¹⁴ Pillemer, ‘Hearing’, 135.

¹⁵ Neisser, ‘Remembering’, 345.

¹⁶ Neisser, ‘Remembering’, 356.

¹⁷ Porter and Birt, ‘Is Traumatic Memory Special?’, 112.

¹⁸ L. Terr, ‘Chowchilla Revisited: The Effects of Psychic Trauma Four Years After a School-Bus Kidnapping’, *American Journal of Psychol.* 140 (1983): 1543-50; J. Yuille and J. Cutshall, ‘A Case Study of Eyewitness Memory of a Crime’, *Journal of Applied Psychol.* 71 (1986): 291-301; J. Thompson, J. Morton, and L. Fraser, ‘Memories for the Marchioness’, *Memory* 5 (1997): 615-38; W. Wagenaar and J. Groeneweg, ‘The Memory of Concentration Camp Survivors’, *Applied Cognitive Psychol.* 4 (1990): 77-87.

¹⁹ R. Fivush, J. Bohanek, K. Marin, and J. Sales, ‘Emotional Memory and Memory for Emotions’ in Luminet and Curci, *Flashbulb*, 179.

2. Shipwreck and Cerebral Scarring

Acts 27:1–28:15 provides the most lengthy and vivid account therein (six percent of its overall length).²⁰ Reiser, in drawing a comparison with accounts from Lucian (*Nav.* 7–9), Plutarch (*Dio.* 25:1–11), and Aelius Aristides (*H.S.*, 4:32–36), goes further and regards it as the most thorough and historically accurate shipwreck account of antiquity.²¹ Part of a ‘we’ section (see below), it is often the subject of speculation concerning origin, aim, and genre. Hemer and Gilchrist highlight two features that support its reading as eyewitness recollection.

First, it bears the marks of what Hemer compares to the rough texture of newly deposited stones upon a beach.²² Rather than the smooth, tempered details the author gives in other sections of Acts, this account bears features that seem comparatively unrefined (e.g. extensive *hapax legomena*, names of insignificant islands and ports, etc.); indeed, the author mentions sixteen place names in Acts 27:1–28:15 from a total of eight-five in Acts (i.e. although six percent of its length, it contains over eighteen percent of its place names).²³ Gilchrist likens these features to those of a specimen under a microscope, the significance of its larger shape being lost in the minutia of detail.²⁴ In other words, although sharp detail permeates Acts 27:1–28:15, its comparable significance for the overarching narrative is unclear; Gilchrist indeed regards the account – along with the other ‘we’

²⁰ T. Troftgruben, ‘Slow Sailing in Acts: Suspense in the Final Sea Journey (Acts 27:1–28:15)’, *JBL* 136.4 (2017): 949–68, esp. 949.

²¹ Marius Reiser, ‘Von Caesarea nach Malta: literarischer Charakter und historische Glaubwürdigkeit von Act 27’, *Ende des Paulus: historische, theologische und literaturgeschichtliche Aspekte* (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2001): 51. For a historical treatment of Lucian’s account, see Lionel Casson, ‘The Isis and Her Voyage’, *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 81 (1950): 43–56; for a sceptical assessment, see Graham Anderson, ‘Some Notes on Lucian’s *Navigium*’, *Mnemosyne* 30.4 (1977): 363–68.

²² Colin Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, ed. Conrad Gempf (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1990): 389.

²³ For *hapax legomena*, see footnote 67. For references to hope/survival, see 27:20,22,31,34,43; 28:1,4. Place names include: Appii Forum (28:15), Claudia (27:16), Cnidus (27:7), Crete (27:7), Cyprus (27:4), Lasea (27:8), Lycia (27:5), Melita (28:1), Myra (27:5), Puteoli (28:13), Rhegium (28:13), Salmone (27:8), Sidon (27:3), Syracuse (28:12), Fair Havens (27:8), and Three Taverns (28:15).

²⁴ J. Gilchrist, ‘The Historicity of Paul’s Shipwreck’, *JSNT* 61 (March 1996): 29–51, esp. 37.

sections – as a seeming parody of Acts itself.²⁵ Although eyewitness recollection cannot be established from vividness alone, the immediacy and coarseness of the account weighs toward this conclusion.

Second, some details are so striking as to discourage any reading other than eyewitness recollection. These include:

1. Accurate sailing times compared to distances toward ports, directions of sailing, and relevant meteorological factors.²⁶
2. Correct naming of villages minor and irrelevant to the narrative but confirmed by early documentary sources in local dialect, sometimes despite incorrect locations in extant geographical works (e.g. Καῦδα, cf. Ptolemy and Pliny).²⁷
3. Nautical jargon, such as εὐρακύλων (27:14) and σκάφη (27:16), now confirmed as likely Greek transliterations of Latin descriptive terms.²⁸
4. The presence of superfluous detail concerning even significant nautical manoeuvres of which the author-participant appears to be aloof.²⁹

These features form a cohesive historical picture. A ship from Adramyttium sailing for ports along Asia Minor would naturally find shelter to the lee of Cyprus to avoid strong north-westerly winds (27:4) and a grain ship from Alexandria (27:6) sailing in frustration from

²⁵ Gilchrist, 'Historicity', 37, yet Gilchrist fails to highlight the vividness of the detail/length of Acts 27:1–28:15 in comparison to other 'we' sections (see Troftgruben, 'Slow Sailing', 964).

²⁶ See J. Smith, *The Voyage and Shipwreck of St. Paul* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1856): 95-124; R. White, 'A Meteorological Appraisal of Acts 27:5-26', *The Expository Times* 113.12 (September 2002): 403-407. The author significantly notes that *the wind* drives them to the south of Crete (βραδυπλοοῦντες καὶ μόλις, γενόμενοι κατὰ τὴν Κνίδον, μὴ προσεῶντος ἡμᾶς τοῦ ἀνέμου, 27:6-7), a detail even William Ramsay, 'Roads and Travel', *Hasting's Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Scribner's, 1904): 375-402, overlooks; he attributes the southern route alongside Crete to a lack of northern harbours (380), but Casson ('The Isis,' n.16) undermines Ramsay and reveals him to be an exemplar of 'armchair navigation' the Acts author avoids.

²⁷ Cauda, an island approximately twenty miles south from the west of Crete (referred to in various MSS in Acts 27:6 as Καῦδα or Κλαῦδα), is a prime example. The author notes its location accurately, confirmed by two early fragments (*I. Cret.* 2.7.1, 92, third century BC.; *I. Cret.* 4.184, second century BC); Pliny the Elder places it too close to the western end of Crete (*NH* 4.12.62), while Ptolemy places its location ninety miles east (*Geog.* 3.17.1). For further detail, see Colin Hemer, 'First Person Narrative in Acts 27–28', *TynBul* 36 (1985): 79-109, esp. 99.

²⁸ An African twelve-point wind-rose bears the term εὐρακύλων in Latin only, 30 degrees N of E; σκάφη is a likely transliteration from the Latin *scapha* (cf. *Caes. B.G.* 4.26.4), as later Greek usage in Plutarch and Strabo, etc., prefers ἔφολχος or ἔφολκυον (see Hemer, 'First Person', 98-100; Reiser, 'Von Caesarea', 64).

²⁹ Hemer, 'First Person', 105.

Myra to reach Rome with its cargo would tempt the impending dangers during the eve of the ancient Mediterranean sailing season (27:9).³⁰ A contextually appropriate (late) date for ‘the Fast’ (Acts 27:9) would place this account in AD 59, corresponding with additional chronology markers in Acts.³¹ The Alexandrian ship would be pledged to the emperor, therefore amenable and subject to a centurion of the Imperial Regiment (Acts 27:1,11), but privately owned and operated by Roman sailors.³² Nautical language and local names, therefore, might well contain the Latinised jargon present in Acts 26:1–28:15, reflective of the language of this Italian crew. The late sailing season explains the hard sailing (27:7), the disagreement of Acts 27:10-12, the fierce northeaster, and the terror also noted by Plutarch of being run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis (*Dio.* 25:9; cf. Acts 27:17).³³ A fourteen-day journey with a heavy north-east wind driving a sizable ship on the starboard tack would take them the 476.6 miles from Cauda to Point Koura on the trajectory described.³⁴ The presence of similar vividness in Pliny the Elder’s account of Spanish goldmining is enough to conclude the presence of eyewitness testimony, although Pliny’s account completely lacks the literary first-person indicators present in Acts 27:1–28:15.³⁵

³⁰ A NNE sailing from Alexandria alongside Cyprus in journeying toward Rome is mirrored in Lucian’s *Navigium* (cf. Casson, ‘The Isis’, 44-48); ‘Sailing Directions for the Mediterranean IV’ (US Navy Hydrographic Office, No. 154A, Washington, DC: 1942): 32-33 confirms that wind patterns in the Mediterranean would explain this trajectory.

³¹ Yom Kippur landed around 5 October in AD 59, whereas neighbouring years would place it earlier. This conforms with Gallio’s proconsulship of Achaia in AD 51–52 (Acts 18:12-17) and the accession of Festus as procurator in AD 59 (Acts 24:27).

³² Hemer, ‘First Person’, 93.

³³ Eckhard Schnabel, ‘Fads and Common Sense: Reading Acts in the First Century and Reading Acts Today’, *JETS* 54.2 (2011): 251-78, esp. 255, claims the comparison between Dion’s shipwreck and Acts 27 is closer ‘than anything we find in fictional literature’; nevertheless, it lacks the superstitious glosses of Plutarch’s account (*Dio.* 24.4-10).

³⁴ Smith, *The Voyage*, 120-24. This location is not beyond dispute, but Smith and Hemer argue convincingly that navigational, literary, and geographical factors weigh in its favour. See A. Acworth, ‘Where Was Paul Shipwrecked? A Re-examination of the Evidence’, *JTS* ns 24.1 (April 1973): 190-93; Colin J. Hemer, ‘Euraquilo and Melita’, *JTS* ns 26.1 (1975): 100-111.

³⁵ David Bird, ‘Pliny’s Arrugia: Water Power in Roman Gold-Mining’, *Mining History* 15.4 (2004): 59-60.

What explains the vividness of this account, its uncanny accuracy, its disproportionate length, and its emotional colour? Contemporary analysis of shipwreck and trauma offer a unique solution.

Is shipwreck survival a plausible scenario for the creation of the kind of traumatic memory regarded by Pillemer as generating recall 'essentially at ceiling'? Three relevant studies support an affirmative response. First, Taiminen and Tuominen analysed psychological responses to the sinking of the car ferry *Estonia* on 28 September 1994.³⁶ As it sailed from Tallinn to Stockholm it was overwhelmed by a Baltic storm and, due to an electric failure, sank without a functioning loudspeaker system. Of those of board, 900 perished by drowning or freezing, while only 138 survived. In the aftermath, 38 survivors were psychologically assessed in the Turku University Central Hospital in Finland, with the majority showing symptoms of trauma, anxiety, and hypervigilance, with six patients showing acute specific situational phobias.³⁷ These factors were present although none but two patients had lost loved ones; significantly, a 1995 study found that a lack of personal bereavement did not negate the lasting significance of survivors' trauma.³⁸

Second, a 2001 publication detailed post-traumatic stress symptoms among survivors of a disaster aboard a Norwegian naval ship that led to one death and nine injuries among a crew of one hundred and fourteen persons.³⁹ These survivors were redeployed several weeks later and monitored throughout the following year. The study concluded that even individuals with military training experienced acute stress symptoms, confirmed by a parallel study of twelve members of a submarine crew who, after experiencing several submarine accidents, showed an increase in post-traumatic stress symptoms compared to a control group as measured by a PTSS-10.⁴⁰

³⁶ Tero Taiminen and Taina Tuominen, 'Psychological Responses to a Marine Disaster During a Recoil Phase: Experiences from the Estonia Shipwreck', *British Journal of Medical Psychology* 69 (1996): 147-53, esp. 148.

³⁷ Taiminen and Tuominen, 'Psychological Responses', 150.

³⁸ Taiminen and Tuominen, 'Psychological Responses', 151.

³⁹ J. Eida, B. H. Johnsen, and J. F. Thayer, 'Post-traumatic Stress Symptoms Following Shipwreck of a Norwegian Navy Frigate: An Early Follow-up', *Personality and Individual Differences* 30.8 (June 2001): 1283-95.

⁴⁰ PTSS-10 is a Norwegian questionnaire that measures ten common features of post-traumatic stress. See Jarle Eid and Bjorn Helge-Johnson, 'Acute Stress Reactions after Submarine Accidents', *Military Medicine* 167.5 (2002): 428.

Most relevant is a detailed investigation into coping behaviour after shipwreck by Henderson and Bostock.⁴¹ In October 1973, a small cargo boat, the *Southern Star*, sank off the coast of Tasmania, Australia. Its ten-member crew, all males, drifted for nine days on an inflatable raft before reaching shore; they were rescued on the thirteenth day. Two men died from delirium on the beach; a third had perished on the open seas. A positive feature of this study is that every survivor was found and interviewed within days of rescue and subsequently within one to two years. From the seven survivors, five had developed psychiatric disorders in the interim. Likewise, catalogued responses from each but one survivor showed an increase in marital problems, a decrease in life enjoyment, and an overarching sense of morbidity.⁴² Henderson and Bostock further summarised several themes in coping behaviour recalled by each survivor. These included: 1) drive to survive, 2) modelling behaviour by a leader, 3) prayer, and 4) hope. Each theme sheds light on the Acts recollection. The author places emphasis on steps taken to persevere (27:16-18,28-32); *Southern Star* survivors, likewise, spontaneously emphasised this drive for survival.⁴³ Second, each survivor recalled the influence of one man's modelling behaviour. This man, who eventually died on the beach from delirium, was credited as being their anchor of focus and hope (cf. Acts 27:30-35). Third, all but one *Southern Star* survivor reported praying to God, although none were previously pious or prone to prayer (cf. 27:29). These themes add plausibility to a crew finding solace in the spiritual leadership of a central figure (cf. 27:21-26). The last coping mechanism was hope, which was recorded as an overwhelming fixation – the hope to be saved, the possibility of rescue, etc. Interestingly, Praeder has noted the unique emphasis on safety/salvation in the Acts narrative.⁴⁴

To sum up, it is apparent from contemporary shipwreck survivor accounts that the kind of memories that could be retained with vividness and accuracy – personal, traumatic, and enduring – could

⁴¹ S. Henderson and T. Bostock, 'Coping Behaviour After Shipwreck', *British Journal of Psychiatry* 131.1 (1977): 15-20.

⁴² Henderson and Bostock, 'Coping Behaviour', 18.

⁴³ Henderson and Bostock, 'Coping Behaviour', 17.

⁴⁴ This emphasis is typical of ancient shipwreck accounts (cf. Plutarch, *Dio.* 24.1–25.11), yet Susan Praeder, 'Acts 27:1–28:16: Sea Voyages in Ancient Literature and the Theology of Luke–Acts', *CBQ* 46.4 (1984): 683-706, esp. 704, notes it as a special concern of 27:9–28:10.

certainly be created by the trauma of shipwreck. Indeed, enduring trauma is the common feature among shipwreck survivors. Furthermore, these studies illuminate our reading of Acts 27:1–28:15. The immediacy of this account, containing insignificant details confirmed by epigraphical and documentary sources, supports the reading of this text as the cerebral scars of an experienced shipwreck.

3. Alternative Readings

But is such a reading the most plausible? Indeed, various approaches to this passage have been suggested, centring around the author's usage of the first-person plural. Campbell helpfully organises the possibilities under four headings: 1) author-as-eyewitness, 2) source-as-eyewitness, 3) fictional eyewitness, and 4) conventional eyewitness.⁴⁵ We will follow his headings and consider these options in reverse.

3.1 *Conventional Eyewitness*

Robbins argued in the 1970s that the first person plural of the 'we' sections in Acts was not a necessary indicator of eyewitness presence but acted as a known literary convention for ancient sea voyages.⁴⁶ This created a renewed interest in the assessment of Acts 27:1–28:15; indeed, it was this thesis that prompted Hemer's analysis of its historicity.⁴⁷ Further publications have criticised Robbins' theory on several points. First, not all ancient sea voyages occur in the first-person plural.⁴⁸ Robbins has responded to this contention, however, by stating that his argument stipulates only that ancient 'we' narratives in this literary motif begin on sea.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, first-person plural passages in Acts both begin and progress through land travels (cf. esp. 16:10,13-17; 20:7–21:1). Beyond this, as noted by Porter, Robbins'

⁴⁵ William Campbell, 'The Narrator as "He," "Me," and "We": Grammatical Person in Ancient Histories and in the Acts of the Apostles', *JBL* 129.2 (2010): 385-407, esp. 386.

⁴⁶ Vernon Robbins, 'We-Passages in Acts and Ancient Sea Voyages', *Biblical Research* 20 (1975): 5-18.

⁴⁷ Hemer, 'First Person', 81-85.

⁴⁸ Susan Praeder, 'The Problem of First-Person Narration in Acts', *NovT* 29.3 (1987): 193-218, esp. 210-12; Hemer, 'First Person', 80-82.

⁴⁹ Vernon Robbins, *Sea Voyages and Beyond: Emerging Strategies in Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018): 82-84.

research base lacked relevance to Acts, covering usage too linguistically and geographically remote for significant comparison.⁵⁰

Following Robbins, Pervo and Macdonald have read the Acts account as the pinnacle of an ancient romance or epic.⁵¹ Yet, although linguistic commonalities occur with ancient fictions (cf. Chariton's *Callirhoe*, Sallust's *Catiline*, etc.), Acts lacks common romantic features like pirates (Xenophon, *Anthia* 1:13:1–1:14:5), a heroine and *eros* theme (Chariton, *Call.* 1:14; 3:3-12; Heliodorus, *Aeth.* 1:22:4, 1:5:2), or an authorial voice.⁵² Conversely, Acts is concerned with real-world geography (e.g. Malta *contra* Greek claims of the 'Electrides' – islands that do not exist, cf. Pliny E., *Nat.* 3:152; Strabo, *Geo.* 5:9:1). MacDonald attempted to draw suggestive parallels between Acts and the *Odyssey*, but such parallels are weak and amount to a few potential allusions (Homer, *Od.* 5:333-53; cf. Acts 27:23-24, 27:41; cf. *Od.* 9:546, ἐπέκειλαν τὴν ναῦν).⁵³ Additionally, Acts lacks common features of epic storm scenes, e.g. the swelling of waves to the sky and their sinking to the depths of the sea.⁵⁴ Indeed, against common assumption, shipwrecks are not typical of ancient romance or epic.⁵⁵ Positively, Acts 27:1–28:15 shares commonalities with historiographical parallels like Josephus' *Vita* (14–16) and even ancient *peripli* like the *Voyage of Hanno the Carthaginian* (1–18); these contain close syntactical parallels to both Robbins' alleged motif and Acts 27:1–

⁵⁰ Stanley Porter, 'The "We" Passages' in *The Book of Acts in Its Graeco-Roman Setting*, eds David Gill and Conrad Gempf (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994): 545-74, esp. 554.

⁵¹ Richard Pervo, *Acts* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 2008): 647-48; Dennis MacDonald, 'The Shipwrecks of Odysseus and Paul', *NTS* 45 (1999): 88-107.

⁵² See Richard Pervo, 'Direct Speech in Acts and the Question of Genre', *JSNT* 28.3 (2006): 285-307; Craig Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (4 vols; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2015), vol. 4: 3561, 3617, 3662; Osvaldo Padilla, *The Acts of the Apostles: Interpretation, History and Theology* (London: Apollos, 2016): 60. *Callirhoe* may be the closest parallel if Acts were a novel, being approximately contemporaneous and the earliest extant example of the 'historical novel'; nevertheless, its *eros* theme is pervasive, even central (see Edward Phinney, 'Kernal Fantasy in Chariton's Romance, "Chaereas & Callirhoe"', *Pacific Coast Philology* 14 [1979]: 68-75).

⁵³ K. Cukrowski, 'Paul as Odysseus: An Exegetical Note on Luke's Depiction of Paul in Acts 27:1–28:10', *Restoration Quarterly* 55.1 (2013): 24-34, makes a strong case for the Homeric allusion in 27:41. MacDonald also sees an allusion to Troy in 27:2, but this is dubious; see A. Wedderburn, 'The "We"-Passages in Acts: On the Horns of a Dilemma', *ZNW* 93.1-2 (2002): 78-98, esp. 93.

⁵⁴ Praeder, 'Acts 27:1-28:16', 694.

⁵⁵ Praeder, 'Acts 27:1-28:16', 695.

28:15, but neither can be classified as romance or epic.⁵⁶ It was *Hanno's Periplus* that, by Robbins' own admission, prompted his investigation into a literary motif for ancient sea voyages; significantly, although contemporary scholarship is sharply divided on its authenticity, Herodotus (*Hist.* 4:196), Pliny the Elder (*Nat.* 2:169), and Arrian (*Indica* 43:10-13) all appear to have read extant accounts of *Hanno* as historical accounts.⁵⁷

3.2 Fictional Eyewitness

A plausible alternative is that the first-person verbal forms are authorial insertions meant to falsely communicate the impression of a historical eyewitness.⁵⁸ Concerning the 'we' sections, Ehrman writes that 'the first-person pronoun was used selectively to place the author in the company of Paul, thereby authenticating his account'.⁵⁹ Yet aside from the outrage such falsification would be met with by ancient historians (e.g. Lucian, *Hist. Conscr.* 40–41, Polybius, *Hist.* 12:1-3), one wonders what motive the writer of Luke–Acts would possess to gather and compile such a meticulous account only to deceive, since he would lack even the name recognition prized by ancient writers for their efforts.⁶⁰ Further, Hanson applied this hand of radical scepticism

⁵⁶ Keener, *Acts*, vol. 4, 3563; Robbins (*Sea Voyages*, 59) refers to *Hanno* as a 'precise parallel' to the Lukan 'we' passages.

⁵⁷ Paul Hair, 'The "Periplus of Hanno" in the History and Historiography of Black Africa', *History in Africa* 14 (1987): 43-66 is critical of its historical value; Edward Bunbury, *A History of Ancient Geography Among the Greeks and Romans* (London: Murray, 1879), 332-33, writing a century prior, says 'The authenticity of the work may be considered as unquestionable.'

⁵⁸ H. Conzelmann and A. Lindemann, *Arbeitsbuch zum Neuen Testament* (2nd ed.; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1976): 272–73; Gary Miles and Garry Trompf, 'Luke and Antiphon: The Theology of Acts 27–28 in the Light of Pagan Beliefs about Divine Retribution, Pollution, and Shipwreck', *Harvard Theological Review* 69.3–4 (1976): 259-67, esp. 259. Plümacher, 'Wirklichkeitserfahrung und Geschichtsschreibung bei Lukas Erwägungen zu den Wir-Stücken der Apostelgeschichte', *ZNW* 68 (1977): 2-22, cited by Praeder, 'First-Person Narration', 208.

⁵⁹ Bart Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery: The Use of Literary Deceit in Early Christian Polemics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013): 266.

⁶⁰ R. Mellor, *The Roman Historians* (New York: Routledge, 1999): 5 comments 'We greatly underestimate the difficulties of writing history without libraries, reference works, reliable sources, editorial principles, and even commonly accepted standards for evaluation of earlier material. We need to examine carefully the motives which drove men to take on the immensely difficult and lonely task of writing history.' Armin Baum, 'The Anonymity of the New Testament History Books: A Stylistic Device in the Context of Greco-Roman and Ancient Near Eastern Literature', *Novum Testamentum* 50.2 (2008): 120-42, esp. 133, notes that ancient historians primarily

equally to Thucydides' journey of Nicias (Thuc. 6:1-61) and concluded that such an approach would render even this esteemed historical account as a piece of creative fiction. The problem remains that no classical historian believes this to be the case and that Acts 27:1–28:15 exceeds Thucydides' account in vividness and accuracy of minute detail.⁶¹ Keener also notes several oft-neglected aspects. The 'we' sections contain greater detail than other portions of Acts: a natural pattern if the author were reporting first-hand accounts, but unlikely if all of Acts were equally fictional.⁶² These 'we' passages also contain a chronological/geographical connectivity throughout the narrative (16:10-18, Troas to Philippi; 20:4–21:19, Philippi to Jerusalem; 27:1–28:15, Caesarea to Rome). Further, the tendential but overwhelming corroboration of Acts by the Pauline Epistles is a pattern wholly absent from any work of fiction in the ancient world.⁶³

3.3 *Source-as-Eyewitness*

Porter posited an alternative reading of the first-person plural as the remnant of the source material the author used for this account (the source being an actual participant in Paul's journey).⁶⁴ Yet it is difficult to see why the author is so stealthy in the use of his sources elsewhere, seamlessly integrating these with subtlety and ease, only to leave such a clumsy artifact of his source material in Acts 27:1–28:15. Porter argues that the presence of considerable *hapax legomena* in this section is suggestive of another hand. But if one removes *hapax legomena* explained by the unique circumstances otherwise engendered by the account itself, it contains no more *hapax legomena* than other portions of Acts.⁶⁵

wrote for fame and were eager to attach their names even to works toward which they made minor contributions.

⁶¹ R. Hanson, 'The Journey of Paul and the Journey of Nicias: An Experiment in Comparative Historiography', *SE* 4 (1968): 315-18, cited by Hemer, *The Book of Acts*, 330.

⁶² Keener, *Acts*, vol. 1, 208.

⁶³ Keener, *Acts*, vol. 1, 240. It is doubtful the author had access to the Pauline epistles (cf. Keener, *Acts*, vol. 1, 233-40; Hemer, *The Book of Acts*, 206).

⁶⁴ Porter, 'The "We" Passages', 569.

⁶⁵ Of the 315 *hapax legomena* in Acts, 53 occur in 27:1–28:15. Following is a list of these terms which might otherwise naturally occur only here in Acts, including terms like 'to sail slowly', 'captain', 'wintering', 'south', 'like a whirlwind', '*Euraquilo*', 'small island', etc.: διαπλέω, ἐμβιβάζω, βραδυπλοέω, ἐπισφαλής, ναύκληρος, παραγεμιασία, λίψ, ὑποπνέω, τυφονικός, εὐρακύλων, νησίον, ὑποτρέχω, ὑποζώννυμι, χειμάζω, ἐκβολή, σκευή, ἀσιτία, ἄσιτος, κουφίζω, ζευκτηρία, ἀρτέμων, διθάλασσοσ,

3.4 *Author-as-Eyewitness*

The best-evidenced position remains the reading of Acts 27:1–28:15 as the vivid recollection of an experienced event. Bale and Wedderburn find two main faults with this possibility: first, the apparent disjunction between Pauline and Lukan theology; second, the coy usage of the first-person plural, unparalleled in ancient historiography.⁶⁶ Much has been made of the former objection, but three comments are warranted.

First, even if the disparity between Paul and Acts is conceded, the overwhelming attestation of the early church to its authorship by Luke the companion of Paul still overwhelms the weight of this objection (cf. Irenaeus, *Her.* 3:1:1; 3:13:3; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 5:12; P⁷⁵). Wetterburn concedes this difficulty; remarkably, it led renowned classist Arthur Nock to confess that he believed Luke to be the author of Luke–Acts despite ‘formidable’ objections.⁶⁷ Second, the recent work of Rowe in areas of Lukan Christology and Lukan perception of the Pauline mission forces an assessment of greater potential harmony in areas previously assumed irreconcilable.⁶⁸ Keener, likewise, makes a helpful contribution toward delineating what disparities actually exist and how they might reasonably be explained.⁶⁹ Third, the very tension between the Pauline corpus and Acts actually provides a further basis for affirming the natural reading of Acts as the result of partial investigation and partial eyewitness experience. Since the tension highlighted supports the majority opinion that the author of Acts did not have access to the Pauline Epistles, one is left to conjecture why Acts, time after time, corroborates incidental facts also found in the Pauline Epistles and vice versa.

What remains is to discuss the problem of the ‘we’ sections as highlighted by Campbell, Bale, Wedderburn, and Praeder. A survey of

ἐπικέλλω, ναῦς, ἐρείδω, ἐκκολυμβάω, διαφεύγω, κολυμβάω, ἀπορίπτω, σάνις, φρύγανον, θέρη, πίμπρημι, δυσεντέριον, ταβέρνα. This removes 35 *hapax legomena* from consideration, leaving 18. This is 5.7 percent of 315, almost identical with the passage’s 6 percent correlation to the overall length of Acts.

⁶⁶ Alan Bale, *Genre and Narrative Coherence in the Acts of the Apostles* (LNTS; London: T&T Clark, 2015): 23-25; Wedderburn, ‘The “We”-Passages’, 78-98.

⁶⁷ Wedderburn, ‘The “We”-Passages’, 85; Arthur Nock and Zeph Stewart, *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972); Nock is cited by Keener, *Acts*, vol. 1, 412.

⁶⁸ C. K. Rowe, ‘Acts 2:36 and the Continuity of Lukan Christology’, *NTS* 53 (2007): 37-56; C. K. Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁶⁹ Keener, *Acts*, vol. 1, 250-57.

their studies suggests the central problem to reside in the author's manner of first-person attribution.⁷⁰ Several issues revolve around this. As Campbell highlights, it was the third-person singular and not the first-person plural which was the preferred vantage point for objective historiography in the ancient world.⁷¹ Aside from a few significant passages in Polybius (36:11:1-4; 36:12:1-5; 39:8:3-8), there are no clear historiographical parallels for the author's alternation between third-person and first-person perspective. Further, and in disjunction to ancient historiographers, the author offers no narrator-level comment to prepare the reader for his entry into the event-level, which is strange for someone striving to highlight the ancient historiographical ideal of 'autopsy'.⁷²

This, too, deserves several comments. First, any objection against the absence of this feature in historiography must be balanced by the observation that it is also completely lacking in otherwise non-historical, non-eyewitness accounts.⁷³ Second, and as noted by Gilchrist, the subtle change between third-person plural and first-person plural would readily apply to the kind of situation described in Acts 27–28.⁷⁴ Third, the author's coy usage of the first-person plural could be accounted for by either religious or secular factors that may have influenced the author of Acts but would not have influenced other ancient historiographers.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Campbell, 'The Narrator as "He," "Me," and "We"', 385-407; Bale, 'Genre and Narrative Coherence', 23-25; Wedderburn, 'The "We"-Passages', 80-82; Praeder, 'First-Person Narration', 193-218.

⁷¹ Campbell, 'The Narrator as "He," "Me," and "We"', 391.

⁷² Praeder, 'First-Person Narration', 198, 209.

⁷³ Campbell, 'The Narrator as "He," "Me," and "We"', 388; Praeder, 'First-Person Narration', 210.

⁷⁴ Gilchrist, 'Historicity', 36.

⁷⁵ For a possible religious influence, Baum has argued that the narrative writers of the NT patterned themselves after LXX authors in their anonymity due to their 'deep conviction concerning the ultimate priority of their subject matter' ('Anonymity', 142). For a possible secular influence, if the traditional view that Luke the Physician authored Luke-Acts is considered plausible, it may be relevant that subtle patterns of abrupt shift from third-person plural to first-person plural in the event-level also appear in Hippocrates (*Epid.* 5.45-47; cf. Pliny E., *Nat.* 29.9-11).

4. Conclusion

In sum, out of the possibilities of reading Acts 27:1–28:15 as 1) author-as-eyewitness, 2) source-as-eyewitness, 3) fictional eyewitness, and 4) conventional eyewitness, author-as-eyewitness remains the most plausible category in light of the studies on memory and trauma previously surveyed. These studies shed light on the account's length, vividness, immediacy, and accuracy as features reflective of the cerebral scars of an eyewitness experience.