\*\*Published in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 134.4 (2015): 791–811.

The Oddity of the Reference to Jesus in Acts 4:13b

Chris Keith

chris.keith@stmarys.ac.uk

St Mary’s University, Twickenham

ABSTRACT: This essay argues that Luke’s strong association of Jesus with the manual-labor class in Acts 4:13b, and specifically with the disciples’ “illiteracy” and “unlearnedness,” is out of step with a sustained redactional strategy in his Gospel, whereby he consistently removed the Gospel of Mark’s associations of Jesus with the manual-labor class and offered an alternative image of Jesus as a scribal-literate teacher. This redactional strategy is particularly clear in Mark’s and Luke’s different portrayals of Jesus as a synagogue teacher. Acts 4:13b may constitute a Lukan cameo of the Markan Jesus, but, regardless of this possibility, Acts 4:13b presents a moment of discontinuity between Luke’s Gospel and Acts that has been overlooked. The primary purpose of this article is to articulate the oddity of Luke’s interpretive choice in Acts 4:13b in light of his other images of Jesus and his portrayal of the Spirit in Luke-Acts. The essays closes with a possible solution: Luke has, in his Gospel, portrayed Jesus in *imago Pauli*.

Previous scholarship on Acts 4:13 has focused primarily upon the Sanhedrin’s references to Peter and John as “illiterate” (ἀγράμματοι) and “untrained” (ἰδιῶται) men. This essay will shift the focus of critical interpretation to the neglected second half of Acts 4:13 where Luke notes that, on the basis of Peter’s speech and the disciples’ illiteracy, the Jewish leadership recognized them as companions of Jesus. Scholars almost universally have taken this statement concerning Jesus and his disciples as a straightforward and obvious deduction on the parts of the Jewish leaders in the narrative world of Luke-Acts and the audience of Acts engaging that world as readers. In contrast, I will here argue that the Lukan comment that the Sanhedrin recognizes Peter and John as companions of Jesus on the basis of their illiteracy, unlearnedness, and rhetorical performance is far from straightforward and is, in fact, contrary to at least one interpretive agenda that Luke has worked carefully to forward in his Gospel.

Precisely which Lukan narrative agenda the reference to Jesus in Acts 4:13b seems to run against depends upon whether Luke indicates that the Sanhedrin recognized Peter and John as companions of Jesus as a result of their illiteracy and unlearnedness because (1) Jesus himself was illiterate and unlearned or (2) irrespective of Jesus’ status, he was known to have followers who were illiterate and unlearned. If the first possibility reflects Luke’s thoughts, Acts 4:13b constitutes, I will argue below, a Lukan cameo of the Markan Jesus and thus an overlooked instance of Luke’s dependence upon Mark’s Gospel. If the second possibility reflects Luke’s thoughts, Acts 4:13b indicates Luke’s deliberate choice not to apply to Jesus the same *pneuma* apologetic that he applies to Peter and John in Acts 4:8, 13.[[1]](#footnote-1) It should be acknowledged upfront that neither Luke’s Greek nor the larger narrative context offers clarity concerning which option is more likely, and my purpose here is not to enter into the minefield of authorial intention and decide between the two. Rather, I argue that either possibility raises the critical interpretive question of why Luke chose to portray Jesus as a scribal-literate Scripture authority in his first volume, the Gospel of Luke. To my knowledge, the following argument is original, and thus my primary purpose is to articulate clearly the oddity of the reference to Jesus in Acts 4:13b. I will, however, also venture a possible explanation for Luke’s authorial choices. This essay will thus break into (1) an interpretation of Acts 4:13 and brief review of previous scholarship, (2) an argument that the portrayal of Jesus in Acts 4:13b runs counter to Luke’s sustained narrative strategies, and (3) a possible solution.

1. *The Interpretation of Acts 4.13b*

According to the narrator in Acts 4:13, the Sanhedrin responded to Peter’s speech before them with a combination of surprise and familiarity: “Upon seeing the boldness (παρρησίαν) of Peter, as well as John, and upon perceiving that they were illiterate (ἀγράμματοι) and untrained (ἰδιῶται) men, they were amazed (ἐθαύμαζον) and recognized them; that they were with Jesus” (Acts 4:13).[[2]](#footnote-2) For present purposes, the most important aspects of the interpretation of Acts 4:13b are the meanings of ἀγράμματος and ἰδιώτης in Acts 4:13a, the fact that the narrative dynamics in the broader context of Acts 4:13 reflect continuity with narrative dynamics in Luke’s Gospel, and the fact that previous interpretations of Acts 4:13b generally reflect the narrative accurately.

*1.1 Peter and John as “Illiterate” and “Laymen”*

With the exception of studies that focus upon Peter’s παρρησία (for example, the essays of van Unnik and Hilton’s Yale PhD dissertation),[[3]](#footnote-3) previous scholarly consideration of the significance of Acts 4:13 has been limited and focused predominantly upon the correct translation of the references to Peter and John as ἀγράμματοι and ἰδιῶται.[[4]](#footnote-4) Kraus is correct that the terms have overlapping but distinct referents.[[5]](#footnote-5) The former term means (as its constituent parts would suggest) “unlettered” or “illiterate” while the latter term means more specifically “amateur” or “untrained.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Stated otherwise, the former term refers to the lack of educational status while the latter term refers to the lack of professional status. Glosses of the terms as “unstudierte Leute” and “Laien,” respectively, are thus correct.[[7]](#footnote-7) More importantly, however, Kraus rightly notes that both words function as terms of contrast to another group, and thus interpreters must rely upon the context of the terms in order to attribute to them more specificity concerning which letters (and in which language) are not known, and in what skills the individual in question is an amateur.[[8]](#footnote-8)

In light of this last important point, one may note the inaccuracy and, furthermore, irrelevance of previous scholarly attempts to deny for ἀγράμματος the obvious meaning of “illiterate.” This attempt is often based on the claim that an elementary education was widely available to first-century Jews:

It is wholly misleading to apply the word ‘illiterate’ to Peter and John . . . and the term ‘ignorant’ . . . falls under the same condemnation. . . . A knowledge of the conditions of education during the first century in Palestine, and of the New Testament information about the apostles, leads to the view that they had as much education as was then customary among the Jews. Peter and John had not been trained in the rabbinical schools at Jerusalem, nor had they been ordained by the rabbis to teach. This was noted in their trial before the Sanhedrin.[[9]](#footnote-9)

This scholar is alone neither in claiming that Acts 4:13 cannot mean that Peter and John were illiterate because they would have gone to elementary school[[10]](#footnote-10) nor in claiming that Acts 4:13 refers primarily to (and thus denies only) advanced rabbinic education.[[11]](#footnote-11) In addition to the fact that the adjective “rabbinic” suffers from the same lack of a clear referent in first-century Judaism as the noun “rabbi,”[[12]](#footnote-12) both aspects of this interpretation are in need of correction in light of more recent studies in Jewish education and literacy. The ancient world in general and Roman Palestine in particular knew nothing like a widespread publicly-funded elementary education system that provided literate education (that is, reading and writing) to the populace, which is distinctly a phenomenon of modern industrialized cultures.[[13]](#footnote-13) Likewise, there is no firm evidence of first-century synagogue literate education.[[14]](#footnote-14) Clearly, this reality does not indicate that no Second Temple Jews received a literate education (see Sir 51:23). Rather, it indicates that those Jews who received any literate education at all were typically in the privileged scribal-elite minority. “Formal education was restricted to the well-to-do.”[[15]](#footnote-15) In other words, the tidy distinction between a public elementary literate education that was easily accessible for everyone (or at least boys) and a more select advanced rabbinic education that the block quotation above assumes can no longer be maintained as reflective of first-century Palestinian Judaism. Those students who proceeded to advanced pedagogical levels consisted of an especially narrow and privileged group that emerged from a group that was narrow and privileged to begin with. As a result, one cannot, without further evidence, concede that Peter and John received no advanced training but maintain that they received an elementary education.

Furthermore, such an argument is perhaps irrelevant for the interpretation of Acts 4:13. Perhaps the disciples could sign their names (signature literacy) or read directional signs or ossuary inscriptions, but these are not the “letters” that the Sanhedrin assumes the disciples are without as ἀγράμματοι. They are surprised that Peter speaks with παρρησία specifically vis-à-vis interpretation of the Scriptures (Acts 3:12–26). The Sanhedrin’s comment thus does not assume a lack of any literate skills at all in any language. It quite specifically assumes “daß die Apostel . . . keine *schriftgelehrte* Ausbildung genossen haben,”[[16]](#footnote-16) and thus that Peter’s abilities (whatever they may be) were insufficient to read and interpret Hebrew (or Greek) holy scrolls. I have elsewhere referred to these abilities as scribal literacy—“literate skills that allow some educated individuals to function as authoritative interpreters of texts.”[[17]](#footnote-17) In first-century Palestinian Judaism, this form of literacy belonged to authoritative readers, copyists, and interpreters who had received a scribal-literate education.[[18]](#footnote-18) And it is this group—from which the Sanhedrin draws its membership—that serves the contrastive function for ἀγράμματος and ἰδιώτης. The Jewish leadership, according to Luke, thinks that Peter and John are not professional, scribal-literate interpreters of the Hebrew Scriptures such as themselves.[[19]](#footnote-19) More importantly, it is on this basis—the lack of scribal literacy and lack of professional status that it implies—that the Sanhedrin recognizes Peter and John as companions of Jesus.

*1.2 Acts 4 and Continuity with Luke’s Gospel*

Before proceeding to how this image of Jesus fits oddly in Luke-Acts, it is important to note briefly that Luke offers this narrative portrayal in a section that draws upon narrative frameworks that he first employed in his Gospel. Immediately before Acts 4:13, the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem has arrested Peter and John for preaching the resurrection of Jesus and held them overnight (4:1–3). Just as Jesus was arrested and appeared the next day before the Sanhedrin (συνέδριον) in Luke 22:66, Peter and John also appear the day after their arrest before the Sanhedrin in Acts 4:5–22 (identified as συνέδριον in 4:15). The Sanhedrin places Peter and John “in the midst” (ἐν τῷ μέσῳ) of the group for interrogation in Acts 4:7 just as Peter appeared “in (the) midst” (ἐν μέσῳ) of a group of questioners during his “trial” in the Lukan passion narrative (Luke 22:55). From the narrator’s standpoint, Peter performs better in the second interrogation than he performed in the first, which resulted in his thrice denial of Jesus.

The Sanhedrin then asks the disciples, “By what power (δυνάμει) or by what name have you done this thing?” just as the Jerusalem leaders asked Jesus, “By what authority (ἐξουσίᾳ) do you do these things, and who is it who gave to you this authority?” in Luke 20:2 (//Mark 11:27//Matt. 21:23). Although the subtle difference between the Jewish leadership’s question about Jesus’ ἐξουσία in Luke 20:2 and the Sanhedrin’s question about the disciples’ δύναμις in Acts 4:7 may appear to exhibit a degree of discontinuity, the vocabulary shift actually reveals all the more the narrative cohesion between Luke’s first and second volumes. For, Acts 1:8 introduced δύναμις as the “power” the disciples receive from the Holy Spirit, which is poured upon them at Pentecost in Acts 2. During that event, Peter’s sermon claims that the Pentecost happenings fulfill the prophecy of Joel concerning the Day of the Lord when God will pour out his Spirit upon human beings (Acts 2:17//Joel 2:28 [LXX 3:1]) and save those who call upon his “name” (Acts 2:21//Joel 2:32 [LXX 3:5]). Peter contributes christologically to the salvation-historical story by claiming that the “name” upon which they must call is not necessarily the tetragrammaton (יהוה) or אדון/κύριος but “the name of Jesus Christ” (2:38). In this way, by the time the Jewish leadership asks in Acts 4:7 by which “power” and which “name” the disciples “have done this,” the narrative of Acts has already answered it in a manner that demonstrates the salvation-historical results of what transpired after they asked Jesus the similar question in Luke 20:2.

Luke’s strategic usage of narrative frameworks from his Gospel in Acts continues in the immediate context of Acts 4:13. Peter cites Psalm 118:22 as scriptural support for the reception of Jesus in Jerusalem (Acts 4:11), as had Jesus himself in Luke 20:17. Additionally, in Acts 4:13, Luke uses θαυμάζω in order to describe the amazement that the disciples elicit as public teachers, as he did similarly for the amazement that Jesus elicited as a public teacher in his Gospel (4:22; 9:43; 11:14, 38; 20:26; cf. 24:12, 41).[[20]](#footnote-20)

This point concerning the narrative continuity between Acts and Luke’s Gospel is not novel and is even presented to introductory students in textbooks.[[21]](#footnote-21) But it is important for the remainder of this essay to note that Luke develops his narrative strategies in the immediate context of Acts 4:13 in continuity with the narrative strategies of his Gospel because I suggest below that his reference to Jesus in 4:13b disrupts this continuity.

*1.3 Previous Assessments of Acts 4:13b*

The second half of Acts 4:13 contains the narrator’s claim that the Sanhedrin identified Peter and John as companions of Jesus *on the basis* of their status as illiterate and untrained men. This connection is clear from the linking of the compound main clause “they were amazed and recognized them” to the syntactically prior subordinate clauses via circumstantial participles, θεωροῦντες (“seeing”) and καταλαβόμενοι (“perceiving” in middle voice): the Jewish leadership recognized the disciples as companions of Jesus only *upon* observing Peter’s παρρησία and understanding that Peter and John were illiterate and untrained.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Prior scholarship on Acts 4:13b has rightly observed precisely this dynamic of the text. Longenecker claims, for example, “Their judges could not but wonder at such ordinary men having such a mastery of biblical argumentation. . . . So they had to fall back on the only possible explanation—‘these men had been with Jesus,’ who despite his lack of rabbinic training, taught ‘as one who had authority’ (Mark 1:22).”[[23]](#footnote-23) Larkin is even more direct: “Their Lord also lacked credentials yet handled the Scriptures in the same effective way.”[[24]](#footnote-24) Similarly, Johnson says, “They can see the apostles do not have learning, yet they speak with boldness, so ‘they recognized they had been with Jesus’!”[[25]](#footnote-25)

It is not necessary to stack more quotations upon these in order to demonstrate that commentators generally interpret this verse rightly.[[26]](#footnote-26) My claim is not that they have misread Luke. Rather, my claim is that, in reading Luke rightly, they have overlooked the degree to which this association of Jesus with the manual-labor non-scribal class fits awkwardly with Luke’s broader image of Jesus. Interesting along these lines is the ease with which some scholars enlist portraits of Jesus from outside the world of Luke-Acts in order to provide further illustration of the Jesus of Acts 4:13b. Some scholars note the similarity with John 7:15, which portrays “the Jews” as responding to Jesus with the question “How does this man know letters (γράμματα οἶδεν) when he has never been taught?”[[27]](#footnote-27) This comparison is correct because, in both cases, it is the combination of assumed lack of scribal-literate education with oral teaching that is indicative of scribal literacy that prompts the response of astonishment among the Jewish leadership.[[28]](#footnote-28) (John even uses θαυμάζω, as does Luke.) In addition to John 7:15, and especially intriguing for the current topic, are Bruce’s and Longenecker’s appeals to Mark 1:22 while discussing the Jesus of Acts 4:13b.[[29]](#footnote-29) These appeals to Mark 1:22 are intriguing for at least two reasons. First, Luke knows and repeats Mark 1:22 in Luke 4:32, but with an important modification that may reveal why these scholars appeal to Mark 1:22 instead of Luke 4:32 (see further below). Second, and strongly related, *pace* Longenecker and Larkin, Luke’s Jesus does not lack a scribal-literate background or scribal-literate credentials. Stated otherwise, scholars must go outside Luke-Acts to find examples of the non-scribal Jesus on display in Acts 4:13b because he otherwise does not exist in Luke-Acts.

1. *The Oddity of Jesus in Acts 4:13 in Light of Luke’s Image of Jesus*

More accurately, scholars must go outside Luke-Acts to illustrate further the Jesus of Acts 4:13b because Luke has otherwise purposefully eliminated the non-scribal Jesus from Mark’s Gospel and replaced him with a Jesus who is a scribal-literate Scripture authority. This sustained Lukan interpretive agenda, which I will demonstrate below, renders the appearance of a Jesus strongly associated with the non-scribal class in Acts 4:13b an oddity in Luke-Acts in one of two possible ways, as aforementioned. First, if Luke intends to indicate that Jesus himself was, like Peter and John, illiterate and unlearned, the Jesus of Acts 4:13b may be a Lukan cameo of the Markan Jesus, whereby Luke has failed to redact Mark’s Jesus in a manner that he otherwise redacts him in the Gospel of Luke. Second, even if Luke intends to indicate only that Peter and John were illiterate and unlearned, with no comment upon Jesus, both his sustained re-categorization of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke and his comments in Acts 4:13b illustrate his unwillingness to apply to Jesus a particular apologetic function of the Spirit that he applies to Peter in Acts 4:8. Either of these two interpretive possibilities raises the interesting question of why Luke chose to portray Jesus vis-à-vis scribal-literate authority in the Gospel of Luke in the manner that he did. I consider each possibility in turn before offering a possible explanation for this interpretive conundrum.

*2.1 A Lukan Cameo of the Markan Jesus*[[30]](#footnote-30)

Luke’s re-classification of Jesus from outside the scribal-literate class to inside the scribal-literate class is clear in traditions that he redacts from Mark’s Gospel as well as traditions that are unique to his Gospel.[[31]](#footnote-31) In the former category of texts, each of which deals with Jesus’ status as a synagogue teacher, Luke either removes Mark’s identifications of Jesus as outside the scribal-literate class or outright attributes to Jesus scribal literacy. In the latter category of texts, he enhances the image of Jesus as a scribal-literate teacher.

*2.1.1 Luke’s Modifications to Markan Tradition*

Following the order of Mark’s narrative, the first clear example of Luke’s redactional impulses occurs in his usage of Mark 1:22. In Mark 1:22, Jesus appears in the Capernaum synagogue and the narrator tells readers that he astonished the crowd, “for he was teaching them as one who had authority and not like the scribes.” The narrator here may very well be drawing the reader’s attention to a stylistic difference between teachers who appeal to previous rabbis and Jesus,[[32]](#footnote-32) or even differences of opinion between Jesus and scribes.[[33]](#footnote-33) The important point at present, however—which is not mutually exclusive with these other options—is the core reality that the narrator explicitly contrasts Jesus with Jewish teachers who possessed scribal literacy. Jesus was “not like the scribes,” and this is not the only time that Jesus’ differences with other teachers will elicit astonishment in a Galilean synagogue in Mark’s Gospel.

Before getting to that issue, however, we must observe that both Matthew and Luke repeat this narratorial explanation for Jesus’ effect as a synagogue teacher. Matthew moves it outside the synagogue context and after the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 7:28–29) while Luke leaves it in the Capernaum synagogue, but places it after Jesus’ trip to Nazareth (Luke 4:32) rather than before, as in Mark. Each Gospel author uses ἐκπλήσσω to describe the crowd’s astonishment, διδαχή for Jesus’ “teaching,” and ἐξουσία for the “authority” that characterizes it. Luke, however, fails to repeat the claim that Jesus was unlike scribes.

Mark 1:22: “And they were astounded (ἐξεπλήσσοντο) at his teaching (διδαχῇ),

for he was teaching them as one who has authority (ἐξουσίαν),

and not as the scribes.”

Matt. 7:28–29: “The crowds were astounded (ἐξεπλήσσοντο) at his teaching (διδαχῇ),

for he was teaching them as one who has authority (ἐξουσίαν),

and not as their scribes.”

Luke 4:32: “They were astounded (ἐξεπλήσσοντο) at his teaching (διδαχῇ),

because his speech was in authority (ἐξουσίᾳ).”

In light of Luke’s clear dependence upon Mark for the vocabulary of this narratorial explanation, as well as Luke’s verbatim repetition of the first clause, one cannot consider Luke’s failure to repeat the entire final clause—Mark’s contrast of Jesus and scribal-literate teachers—as mere happenstance.[[34]](#footnote-34) In offering an explanation, Schweizer posits that this statement was omitted because scribes “were no longer so important in the time of Luke.”[[35]](#footnote-35) Likewise, Fitzmyer posits, “The Christians for whom he writes are not those preoccupied with opposition from the rabbis and their interpretation of the OT.”[[36]](#footnote-36) In a similar vein, Lagrange proposes that the omission was a concession to Luke’s Gentile readers: “Luc n’ajoute pas «et non comme les scribes» car cette comparaison eût plutôt posé une question à des lecteurs non juifs.”[[37]](#footnote-37) Lagrange does not clarify precisely what question the phrase would have raised, but one may note against all these suggestions that Luke clearly assumes substantial knowledge of Jewish history and customs for his readers (whoever they may be) and that “scribes” otherwise appear in Luke-Acts *seventeen* times.[[38]](#footnote-38) If Luke engaged in removing references to scribes for the sake of his current readership, he was a uniquely incompetent ancient author. I here suggest instead that this failure to follow Mark’s Gospel is simply the first in a sustained pattern of Lukan redaction whereby Luke aligns Jesus with the scribal-literate class of Scripture authorities in terms of the authoritative and educational basis from which their respective teachings derive.

Following the order of Mark’s Gospel, the next example in this pattern is Luke’s substantial reshaping of Jesus’ rejection in the Nazareth synagogue, occurring in Mark 6 and Luke 4 (also Matt 13). Luke follows Mark in claiming that Jesus taught in his hometown, was rejected there, and claimed that prophets have no honor in their hometowns, as does Matthew (Mark 6:4//Matt 13:57//Luke 4:24). Luke does not follow Mark in explaining why Jesus was rejected, however. According to Mark, Jesus is rejected as a synagogue teacher specifically on the basis of his identity as a carpenter/artisan (τέκτων), a claim that corroborates Mark’s earlier statement that Jesus was “not like the scribes” (Mark 1:22).[[39]](#footnote-39) Luke, however, removes the reference to Jesus as a carpenter just as he removed the contrast with scribes from Mark 1:22. In Luke, Jesus’ hometown instead identifies him as “Joseph’s son” (4:22; cf. John 6:42).[[40]](#footnote-40) Luke also alters the source of their anger. The source of their anger in Luke is the content of Jesus’ teaching—which goes unmentioned in the Markan version—and specifically the fact that he initiates conflict by stating that he will not perform miracles in his hometown (Luke 4:23–27).

Two further aspects of Luke 4 confirm that Luke rejects the Markan notion that Jesus was not qualified to be a synagogue teacher. First, Luke attributes to Jesus the scribal-literate skills of publicly reading a scroll of Isaiah and teaching upon it, even claiming that Jesus unrolled the scroll and found a particular reading (4:17). In order to understand the significance of this Lukan addition to the tradition, and its diametrical opposition to the claim of the Markan Nazareth audience that Jesus was a manual laborer, one must note that the distinction between these two images of Jesus, as well as the distinction between the Sanhedrin and the disciples in Acts 4:13, is fundamentally one of social class. The Markan audience is surprised at Jesus for the same reason that the Sanhedrin is surprised that Peter can speak eloquently concerning the Hebrew Scriptures: they are not from the scribal-educated stratum of Palestinian society. Although members of the scribal-literate class could of course participate in manual labor if they desired or needed,[[41]](#footnote-41) members of the manual-labor class could not necessarily participate in activities that required scribal literacy, such as the public reading of the law or copying scrolls of it. This fundamental disjunction between the educated scribal elite and manual laborers appears in various ways in Second Temple sources. Sometimes, as in Mark 6:3 (//Matt 13:55), it is stated explicitly. Sirach (second century BCE) praises the scribe by contrasting him with manual laborers of all sorts, including the carpenter/artisan (τέκτων), precisely the same word that the Markan Nazareth audience uses to designate Jesus:

The wisdom of the scribe depends on the opportunity of leisure.[[42]](#footnote-42) Only the one who has little business can become wise. How can one become wise who handles the plow, and who glories in the shaft of a goad, who drives oxen and is occupied with their work, and whose talk is about bulls? . . . So it is with every artisan (τέκτων) and master artisan who labours by night as well as by day. . . . So it is with the smith. . . . So it is with the potter. . . . All these rely on their hands, and all are skillful in their work. Yet they are not sought out for the council of the people, nor do they attain eminence in the public assembly (ἐκκλησίᾳ). . . . How different the one who devotes himself to the study of the law of the Most High. He seeks out the wisdom of all the ancients, and is concerned with prophecies; he preserves the sayings of the famous and penetrates the subtleties of parables. (Sir 38:24–39:2, NRSV)[[43]](#footnote-43)

Particularly noteworthy in this regard is the shared opinion between the Markan Nazareth synagogue audience and Sirach that a carpenter (τέκτων; Sir 38:27) does not attain prominence in the synagogue (ἐκκλησία; Sir 38:33).[[44]](#footnote-44)

Sometimes the disjunction between the scribal-literate class and manual laborers emerges in the ancient evidence in less explicit manners. For example, and related directly to the topic at hand, one may note that outside Mark 6:3 (//Matt 13:55), there is not a single example in the entire historical record of someone identified as a manual laborer actively teaching in a synagogue.[[45]](#footnote-45) In this light, Jesus’ rejection in Nazareth on this basis is unsurprising. Depictions of synagogue teaching in the Second Temple period identify whose who break from their labor as sitting and listening to the law read and taught by others (priests, elders), not reading it themselves.[[46]](#footnote-46) Public reading of the Scripture was a specialized skill acquired in scribal-literate education. Not even all the Qumranites had mastered it (4Q266 5.2.1–4).

The disjunction between the manual-labor class and scribal-literate class evident in these sources does not indicate that no member of the manual-labor class ever accessed scribal-literate education at any point in Second Temple Judaism. There may very well have been exceptions.[[47]](#footnote-47) These sources indicate, however, just how exceptional such a case would be, the individual having accomplished something that Sirach believed all but impossible. For the vast majority of Second Temple Judaism, manual labor and scribal literacy dwelled in mutually exclusive social categories, and this reality is precisely what the charge against Jesus in Mark 6:3 reflects. Furthermore, Luke clearly reads the text in exactly this manner. In order to attribute to Jesus the skills of public reading and teaching in the synagogue, he removes the reference to Jesus as a carpenter. Luke thereby moves Jesus from scribal-illiterate status to scribal-literate status, from being “not like the scribes” (Mark 1:22//Matt 7:29) to being like them, which is most likely why he also does not repeat the final clause of Mark 1:22 in Luke 4:32.

The next example of Lukan redaction of Mark’s Jesus deals once more with exactly this complex of issues and is the second aspect of Luke 4 that demonstrates Luke’s rejection of the Markan portrayal of a Jesus who was unqualified to be a synagogue teacher. In both Mark’s and Matthew’s Gospels, Jesus never again sets foot in a synagogue after being rejected in his hometown. Mark 10:1 thus describes Jesus’ pedagogical habit as teaching crowds as they gather around him: “And the crowds were again gathering to him, and he again began teaching them, as was his custom (ὡς εἰώθει).” In contrast, the Lukan Jesus not only teaches in synagogues after his rejection in Nazareth (Luke 4:44; 6:6; 13:10) but does so in the very next pericope (Luke 4:31–37). Consistent with this difference between Mark and Luke, and in contrast to Mark 10:1, Luke 4:16 describes Jesus’ pedagogical habit as teaching and reading in the synagogue: “And he went, according to his custom (κατὰ τὸ εἰωθὸς αὐτῷ) on the Sabbath day, into the synagogue and he stood in order to read.” This text is more significant than may first appear and I will return to it at the end of this essay. For present purposes, it will suffice to observe that, whereas Mark’s carpenter Jesus is exposed as an imposter to the role of synagogue teacher in his hometown and never attempts to function as one thereafter, Luke’s Jesus is regularly in a synagogue, reading and teaching on Scripture.

*2.1.2 Material Unique to Luke’s Gospel*

We have already considered one unique Lukan addition to his Gospel that establishes Jesus as a scribal-literate authority instead of a manual laborer: Luke’s attribution of public reading of Isaiah in a synagogue to Jesus. Other uniquely Lukan traditions are not quite as explicit in affirming Jesus’ status as a scribal-literate teacher, but are consistent with it.

First, only in Luke’s Gospel does the child Jesus appear among scribal-literate authorities in the temple in Jerusalem (Luke 2:41–52). Given that Luke here presents the young Jesus in the temple and, furthermore, “in the midst of the teachers” (2:46), readers should conclude that Jesus is here participating in a discussion of the Scriptures with scribal-literate authorities. Bovon is correct to note that Luke portrays Jesus as an equal participant in the discussion, not as a pupil: “Er sitzt nicht wie ein Jünger zu den Füßen dieser Lehrer. . . . Seine Position ist eher die des Lehrers.”[[48]](#footnote-48) Despite his age, Luke affirms that Jesus belongs in scribal-literate discussion of the law, accentuating this point by attributing his parents’ surprise to a lack of understanding (Luke 2:48, 51).

Second, only in Luke’s Gospel does Jesus, on the road to Emmaus, interpret the entirety of Moses and the prophets (24:27) for two disciples, prompting them to acknowledge that Jesus “opened the Scriptures” for them (24:32). Jesus later joins the collected group of disciples and tells them that his actions have fulfilled “all that is written in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms” (24:44), after which Luke tells his readers that Jesus “opened their minds in order to understand the Scriptures” (24:45).

Third, only in Luke’s Gospel is Jesus connected in familial terms to the priesthood. John the Baptist’s father is a priest who displays a limited ability to write (1:63), and his mother is also from the line of Aaron (Luke 1:5). Likewise, only Luke’s Gospel identifies the Baptist’s mother as a kinswoman of Jesus’ mother (1:36). This point may seem trivial, but in Jewish tradition there is a longstanding connection between scribal-literate skills and the priesthood.[[49]](#footnote-49) Regardless of Luke’s intentions for connecting Jesus to the priesthood, one may note that this interpretive move coheres with placing him in the scribal-literate class.

*2.1.3 Summary*

In each of the previous Lukan texts, Luke either explicitly attributes to Jesus scribal literacy or aligns Jesus—in terms of his pedagogical status—in some way with the class of scribal-literate Scripture authorities, whether by including traditions not found in Mark or altering Markan traditions. If, therefore, Acts 4:13b means that the Sanhedrin recognized Peter and John as companions of Jesus on account of the fact that Jesus, too, was an “illiterate” and “unlearned” teacher,[[50]](#footnote-50) this portrayal of Jesus stands at odds with Luke’s otherwise consistent rejection of the Markan portrayal of Jesus as someone who is “unlike” scribal-literate authorities and is not a proper scribal-literate synagogue teacher. Under this scenario, I propose that Acts 4:13b constitutes a Lukan cameo of the Markan Jesus, a hitherto unnoticed confirmation of the majority opinion that Luke knew and used Mark’s Gospel.

*2.2 Withholding the* Pneuma *Apologetic*

Luke’s interpretive strategy concerning the scribal-literate Jesus in his Gospel is clear. Whether he intends in Acts 4:13 to describe Jesus *himself* as “illiterate” and “unlearned” is less clear. Luke possibly intends to indicate only that Jesus was known to have illiterate and unlearned followers, with no specific comment upon Jesus himself. Luke has affirmed as much regarding the disciples by stating that Peter and John both came from the manual-labor stratum of society as fishermen (Luke 5:1–11). But even this knowledge—that Luke certainly indicates that Jesus’ followers were illiterate and unlearned—proves intriguing in light of Luke’s interpretive strategy for Jesus in his Gospel.

The reason it proves intriguing is that “the two Apostles’ lack of learning is stressed to make their παρρησία the more astonishing.”[[51]](#footnote-51) And their boldness of speech—“naturlich nur für studierte und sachkundige Leute”[[52]](#footnote-52)—is astonishing in the narrative precisely not as their work but “als Geschenck des Geistes”[[53]](#footnote-53) and thus “enabled by God.”[[54]](#footnote-54) Luke is purposeful in this respect, noting that Peter was “full of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 4:8) while giving his speech before the Sanhedrin. Luke thus applies a *pneuma* apologetic to the disciples—the Holy Spirit provides gravitas for Peter’s ability that a scribal-literate education obviously could not since he had not received one as an ἀγράμματος. “In place of a rhetorical production appears a speech which is due to the work of the Spirit.”[[55]](#footnote-55) Hilton plausibly identifies this verse as an early instance of a Christian apologist defending Christians against charges of illiteracy by appealing to the Spirit.[[56]](#footnote-56) The strategy of Luke and other Christian apologists (on Origen, see below) was simply to acknowledge the general accuracy of the charge of illiteracy and then ameliorate its implications by asserting that their accomplishments (Peter’s παρρησία in this instance) prove the reality of divine assistance and thus divine approval.

But a critical problem remains that Hilton, as well as every other interpreter of Luke-Acts that I have been able to consult, overlooks. With such a *pneuma* apologetic obviously available to Luke, and Luke’s obvious willingness to deploy it, why does he not extend this apologetic to Jesus in his Gospel? Why has Luke gone to the trouble of rewriting Mark’s manual-labor Jesus with outright claims for Jesus’ scribal literacy when he could have allowed Jesus to remain in the manual-labor class and attributed his effectiveness to the Spirit? I must stress emphatically that this is precisely what Luke has done with Peter and John in Acts 4:8–13.

This question is even more acute for interpreters of Luke in light of two further realities. First, Luke *does* attribute to Jesus’ teaching the power of the Holy Spirit. He even uses δύναμις for this “power” as he does in Acts 1:8: “And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power (δυνάμει) of the Spirit. . . . And he began teaching in their synagogues” (Luke 4:14–15). Clearly, Luke believes that Jesus taught under the same “power” of the Spirit in Luke 4 as did the post-Pentecost Peter and John in Acts 4.[[57]](#footnote-57) In this sense, one may note Adams’s argument that Acts 4:13 functions as a narrative fulfilment of Jesus’ claim in Luke 6:40 that “the one who is fully trained will be like his teacher.”[[58]](#footnote-58) The earlier observations concerning the continuity between Luke’s narrative techniques in his Gospel and in Acts would reinforce this point. But one must also note, *pace* Adams, that the continuity between Jesus and the disciples as non-scribal teachers exists solely within Acts 4:13, not between the disciples and the scribal-literate Jesus of Luke’s Gospel. Luke does not allow the Spirit to compensate for scribal-illiterate status in the case of Jesus in the Gospel as he does in the case of Peter and John (and possibly Jesus) in Acts 4:13.

Second, other early Christian apologists apply this *pneuma* apologetic to Jesus’ disciples while *also* accepting the charge that Jesus himself was outside the educated class. Origen states that Jesus “had no general education” and “received no serious instruction from men.”[[59]](#footnote-59) He then later applies the *pneuma* apologetic to the disciples:

I also affirm . . . these men [Jesus’ apostles] taught Christianity and succeeded in bringing many to obey the word of God by divine power. For in them there was no power of speaking or of giving an ordered narrative by the standards of Greek dialectical or rhetorical arts which convinced their hearers. It seems to me that if Jesus had chosen men who were wise in the eyes of the multitude, and who were capable of thinking and speaking acceptably to crowds, he might on very good grounds have been suspected of making use of a method similar to that of philosophers. . . . The truth of the claim that his teaching is divine would no longer have been self-evident. . . . If anyone saw fisherfolk and tax-collectors who had not had even a primary education . . . and who with great courage not only spoke to Jews about faith in Jesus but also preached him among the other nations with success, would he not try to find out the source of their persuasive power? For it is not that which is popularly supposed to be power.[[60]](#footnote-60)

One should not uncritically read Origen in the third century onto Luke in the first century. But in this case the question persists because both authors are dealing with the combination of lack of education, manual labor, the Spirit, and the reception of Jesus and his disciples among the educated elite. Why does Luke withhold the *pneuma* apologetic from Jesus in his Gospel while applying it to his disciples in Acts?

1. *A Possible Explanation: Remembering Jesus in* Imago Pauli

Either of the aforementioned possibilities concerning Luke’s authorial intentions in Acts 4:13b raises important critical questions for interpreters of Luke-Acts. Since these questions, and the oddity of Luke’s strong association of Jesus with the scribal-illiterate class in Acts 4:13b, have gone unnoticed in scholarship, the primary goal of this essay has been to articulate them. Nevertheless, it is necessary to venture a possible explanation by way of conclusion.

One possible solution to why Luke failed to continue in Acts 4:13b an interpretive agenda for Jesus that he executed in his Gospel is that Acts 4:13b is an example of what Goodacre (following Goulder) describes as “editorial fatigue,” whereby a Gospel author reveals his familiarity with an underlying source that he otherwise modifies.[[61]](#footnote-61) Perhaps, in an effort to “make the best” of the disciples’ illiteracy and unlearnedness and underscore the disciples’ similarity to Jesus as a teacher, Luke has enlisted the non-scribal Markan Jesus as reinforcement in Acts 4:13b while failing to consider the degree to which this move goes against his sustained efforts to re-present Jesus as a scribal-literate teacher in the Gospel of Luke.

Alternatively, it is possible that this is not a case of “fatigue” on the part of Luke as author and redactor at all, but rather a conscious decision that he made with no real concern about the degree of continuity between the images of Jesus in Acts 4:13b and the Gospel of Luke. This possibility is certainly more strained in light of the fact that Luke otherwise consistently carried out a re-envisioning of Jesus in his Gospel, but it would be little different than modern scholars who revise their perspectives in later works in light of the points that they then wish to make. Such a conscious decision on Luke’s part would not fit our scholarly desires for a nice and tidy solution to the critical problem, but it would not be unfamiliar.

Perhaps the more important question that this essay raises, therefore, is not what accounts for Luke’s possible “slip” in Acts 4:13b but rather what accounts for his protracted rejection of Mark’s scribal-illiterate Jesus and thus his rewriting of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. Here it is important to note an issue that this essay has otherwise demonstrated only implicitly here: Luke, as a historian, is captive to both the past he inherits and the present in which he conceptualizes that past afresh.[[62]](#footnote-62) In this case, the Jesus that Luke receives from Mark’s Gospel provides the foundation for his own narrative, as is clear in his usage of Mark’s Gospel and (so I have argued) an example like Acts 4:13b that betrays his knowledge of Mark’s Jesus. Yet Luke’s modifications to Mark’s Gospel indicate that Luke’s indebtedness to the Jesus(es) he receives does not amount to slavish following of previous sources. Luke’s own conceptualization of Jesus in the present impacts his deployment of those received traditions along narrative lines that Luke himself dictates.

I propose here that one factor in Luke’s present as he constructed his Gospel could have caused him to rewrite the scribal-illiterate image of Jesus the rejected synagogue teacher that he found in Mark’s Gospel: the apostle Paul. Regardless of whether Luke was a companion of Paul, as early Christian tradition[[63]](#footnote-63) and the first-person plurals beginning in Acts 16:11 claim, he clearly considered Paul a scribal-literate Scripture authority who taught in synagogues. These claims appear throughout Acts, as Luke presents Paul as a Pharisee (Acts 23:6; 26:5; see also Phil 3:5) who studied with a recognized rabbi (Acts 22:3) and taught frequently in synagogues (Acts 9:20; 13:5; 13:14–41, 44–47; 14:1; 17:1–2, 10, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8; cf. 22:19; 24:12; 26:11). Of course, according to Luke, Paul was rejected in synagogues after his Damascus Road experience by some Jews on multiple occasions (Acts 13:45, 50; 14:2, 5; 17:5; 18:6–7; cf. 9:29). Those rejections were not, however, a result of a lack of qualifications or Paul being in the wrong social class.[[64]](#footnote-64) Regardless of whether Paul’s letters were available to him,[[65]](#footnote-65) Luke may also have known that Paul was capable of writing to some degree in Greek (1 Cor 16:21; Gal 6:11; Phlm 19; cf. Col 4:18; 2 Thess 3:17), undoubtedly a rare skill among Second Temple Jews and indicative of advanced literate training.[[66]](#footnote-66)

In addition to these convictions, Luke was convinced that Jesus was greater than Paul. Indeed, Luke considered Jesus not just a scribal-literate Scripture authority, but the scribal-literate Scripture authority *par excellence*, as it is Jesus who truly “opens the Scriptures” for his followers (Luke 24:32, 45).[[67]](#footnote-67) Similar to Matt 23:8, Luke considers Jesus the “one teacher” for his followers, who stands above and beyond all other teachers, including Paul.

I suggest that these two convictions—(1) Paul was a scribal-literate Scripture authority and synagogue teacher and (2) Jesus was the Scripture authority *par excellence*—led Luke to reject Mark’s non-scribal carpenter Jesus. Luke accepted that Jesus was rejected in his hometown, as claimed Mark, but denied Mark’s further claims that Jesus was rejected *on the basis* of being a manual laborer and “not like the scribes.” Luke thus rewrote the Markan Jesus into a fully scribal-literate authority whose rejection in his hometown was for reasons wholly unrelated to pedagogical qualifications. As part of this rewriting, Luke dismissed the idea that Jesus’ custom was to teach as crowds gathered around him after being rejected in the synagogue in Nazareth (Mark 10:1), as well as the Greek phrase that Mark used to indicate this custom (ὡς εἰώθει). Luke instead asserted that it was “according to custom” (κατὰ τὸ εἰωθός) for Jesus to read and teach in synagogues on the Sabbath (Luke 4:16) precisely because he considered it “according to custom” (κατὰ τὸ εἰωθός) for Paul to teach in synagogues on the Sabbath (Acts 17:2; cf. also 18:4). Significatly, Luke 4:16 and Acts 17:2 are the only two places in Luke-Acts where Luke uses the phrase κατὰ τὸ εἰωθός or any cognate of εἴωθα.

This proposal also accounts for why Luke withheld the *pneuma* apologetic from Jesus but willingly extended it to Peter and John. The notion that the disciples were inferior teachers to Paul, in terms of qualifications, was acceptable; the notion that Jesus was inferior to Paul, in terms of qualifications, was not. Thus, although the Spirit characterizes Jesus’ teachings and synagogue activities (Luke 4:14) as much as it characterizes Peter and John’s appearance before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:8) and Paul’s post-Damascus teaching in synagogues (Acts 9:17–20), it does not compensate for a lack of scribal literacy in the cases of Jesus and Paul whereas it does in the cases of Peter and John.

If the thesis that Luke narrates Jesus’ scribal-literate status in his Gospel in *imago Pauli* is correct, it provides an important counter-example to scholarly convictions that Luke patterns the narrative of Paul’s life on the basis of his convictions about Jesus.[[68]](#footnote-68) This example does not disprove that theory, which is clear in a host of other examples with Paul and others,[[69]](#footnote-69) but it suggests that the reality of Luke’s handling of early Christian tradition as a historian was more complex than a unidirectional theory of narrative composition might suggest. In some cases, the past that Luke inherited provided him with a narrative pattern. In other cases, Luke’s own convictions in the present provided him with a narrative pattern.[[70]](#footnote-70) On at least one issue, namely scribal-literate authority as a teacher, Luke consistently narrated the life of Jesus based on his convictions about Paul. Or, to be more accurate, he narrated Jesus’ life based on these convictions consistently with one exception—Acts 4:13b.

1. For the sake of clarity, my claim is not that Luke does not apply the Spirit to Jesus (he clearly and consistently does), but that he does not apply a particular apologetic function of the Spirit to Jesus in the Gospel that he applies to Peter and John in Acts 4:8, 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. All translations are the author’s unless otherwise stated. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. W. C. van Unnik, “The Christian’s Freedom of Speech in the New Testament,” *BJRL* 44.2 (1962): 477–8; “Luke’s Second Book and the Rules of Hellenistic Historiography,” in *Les Actes des Apôtres: Tradition, Rédaction, Théologie* (ed. J. Kremer; BETL 48; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1979), 51; Allen R. Hilton, “The Dumb Speak: Early Christian Illiteracy and Pagan Criticism” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1997); respectively. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Sean A. Adams, “The Tradition of Peter’s Literacy: Acts, 1 Peter, and Petrine Literature,” in *Peter in Earliest Christianity* (eds. Helen K. Bond and Larry W. Hurtado; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming), n.p.; C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994, 1998), 1.233–4; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (SP 5; Collegeville: Liturgical, 1992), 78; Thomas J. Kraus, “‘Uneducated’, ‘ignorant’, or even ‘illiterate’? Aspects and Background for an Understanding of AGRAMMATOI (and IDIWTAI) in Acts 4:13,” in Ad fontes*: Original Manuscripts and Their Significance for Studying Early Christianity—Selected Essays* (TENTS 3; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 149–70; repr. from *NTS* 45 (1999): 434–49; Richard N. Longenecker, *Acts* (EBC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 102; Brian Rapske, “Opposition to the Plan of God and Persecution,” in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (eds. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 248; Unknown author, “Comparative Translation: Acts 4:13. A Study in Modernizing the English Bible,” *The Biblical World* 23.1 (1904): 49n.1. For Hilton’s discussion of these words, see “Dumb Speak,” 2–46. Somewhat surprisingly, there is no reference to Acts 4:13 in Peter Müller, *„Verstehst du auch, was du liest?”: Lesen und Verstehen im Neuen Testament* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft), 1994. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Kraus, “Uneducated,” 152–67. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. BDAG defines ἀγράμματος as “uneducated, illiterate” and ἰδιώτης as “1. layperson, amateur; . . . 2. one not in the know, outsider.” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Jacob Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (17th ed.; KEK 3; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 179; Rudolf Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte: 1. Teilband, Apg 1–12* (EKKNT 5.1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1986), 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Kraus, “Uneducated,” 152–3, 156–7. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Unknown, “Comparative,” 49n.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. L&N, 329 (§27.23): “Some persons have assumed that ἀγράμματος in Ac 4.13 means ‘illiterate’ in the sense of not being able to read or write, but this is highly unlikely in view of the almost universal literacy in NT times, and especially as the result of extensive synagogue schools. Evidently, ἀγράμματος in Ac 4.13 refers to a lack of formal rabbinic teaching.” Cf. also F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (3d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 152–3; C. S. C. Williams, *The Acts of the Apostles* (2d ed.; BNTC; London: Adam & Charles Black, 1964), 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Bruce, *Acts*, 153; Longenecker, *Acts*, 102; L&N, 329 (see quotation in footnote 10 above). In contrast, Haenchen, *Acts*, 218n.1: “It is very doubtful that Luke is here thinking of lack of legal knowledge”; as well as Oscar Cullmann, *Peter: Disciple, Apostle, Martyr* (trans. Floyd V. Filson; Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011), 24: “[Peter] had not ‘studied’ either by Jewish or by Greek standards.” [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Bruce Chilton et al., “Rabbi as a Title for Jesus,” in *A Comparative Handbook to the Gospel of Mark: Comparisons with Pseudepigrapha, the Qumran Scrolls, and Rabbinic Literature* (eds. Bruce Chilton et al.; NTGJC 1; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 560–61, 565; Martin Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers* (ed. John Riches; trans. James C. G. Greig; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981), 42–43; Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An Investigation into Economic and Social Conditions during the New Testament Period* (trans. F. H. Cave and C. H. Cave; 3d ed.; London: SCM, 1969), 236; Hershel Shanks, “Is the Title ‘Rabbi’ Anachronistic in the Gospels?” *JQR* 53.4 (1963): 339–41. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. For the ancient context, see the now standard William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989). For Roman Palestine, see Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine* (TSAJ 81; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 40–68, 496–504. See also Meir Bar-Ilan, “Illiteracy in the Land of Israel in the First Centuries CE,” in *Essays in the Social Scientific Study of Judaism and Jewish Society: 2* (eds. Simcha Fishbane, Stuart Schoenfeld, A. Goldschlaeger; New York: Ktva, 1992), 55; “Writing in Ancient Israel and Early Judaism Part Two: Scribes and Books in the Late Second Commonwealth and Rabbinic Period,” in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (ed. Martin Jan Mulder; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 33–34; David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 111–73; Lester L. Grabbe, “Scribes and Synagogues,” in *OHBS* 366; Chris Keith, *Jesus’ Literacy: Scribal Culture and the Teacher from Galilee* (LHJS 8/LNTS 413; London: T&T Clark, 2011), 72–110; *The* Pericope Adulterae*, the Gospel of John, and the Literacy of Jesus* (NTTSD 38; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 53–94; Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 1–8. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Hezser, *Jewish Literacy*, 40–68. *Contra* L&N, 329. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 24. Thus, one must take Josephus’s claim for universal Jewish literacy (*Ag. Ap.* 2.25 §204) as “exaggerated apologetic” (James L. Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel: Across the Deadening Silence* [ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1998], 6). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Pesch, *Apostelgeschichte*, 167 (emphasis added). Johannes Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles* (rev. by William F. Albright and C. S. Mann; AB 31; Garden City: Doubleday, 1967), 34, is thus correct to interpret the Sanhedrin’s description of Peter and John as “unlearned in the Law,” as is Barrett, *Acts*, 1.234, to interpret it as “without scribal training in the law.” [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Keith, *Jesus’ Literacy*, 110. Thus, when I refer here to “scribal” authority, status, or class, I refer to possessors of scribal literacy, not necessarily scribes (γραμματεῖς) in particular, though they also, obviously, possessed scribal literacy. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Keith, *Jesus’ Literacy*, 110–11. Hezser argues that Jewish primary education focused upon Torah-reading abilities with writing reserved for later specialized training for scribes (Hezser, *Jewish Literacy*, 88; Catherine Hezser, “Private and Public Education,” *OHJDL* 471). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Commentators who describe the disciples hyperbolically as “rude and barbarous creatures” or “mere country bumpkins” in the eyes of the Sanhedrin are thus not entirely distant from the correct sentiment (Richard I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary* [Hermenia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009], 117; Gerhard A. Krodel, *Acts* [ACNT; Minneapolis: Ausburg, 1986], 111; respectively). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Luke elsewhere uses ἐξίστημι (Luke 2:47) and ἐκπλήσσω (Luke 2:48). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament* (3d ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 193: “Events in Acts clearly parallel those of the Gospel.” [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Barrett, *Acts*, 1.234, aptly notes that here Luke says two things ([1] the Sanhedrin recognized the disciples and [2] recognized that they were companions of Jesus), which grammatically “he runs into each other.” [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Longenecker, *Acts*, 102. Similarly, Bruce, *Acts*, 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. William J. Larkin Jr., *Acts* (IVPNTCS 5; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Johnson, *Acts*, 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Cf. Pesch, *Apostelgeschichte*, 167–8, who, instead of noting a shared social status between the disciples and Jesus in Acts 4:13b, takes the verse to indicate their sharing in his authority: “Mit der Bemerkung, daß die Apostel als (frühere) *Begleiter* Jesu . . . wiedererkannt werden, ist angedeutet, daß sie die Sache Jesu vertreten und nicht in eigenem Namen auftreten und reden” (emphasis original). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Bruce, *Acts*, 153 (who also appeals to Mark 1:22); Kraus, “Uneducated,” 154; Unknown, “Comparative Translations,” 49n.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. See further Chris Keith, “The Claim of John 7:15 and the Memory of Jesus’ Literacy,” *NTS* 56.1 (2010): 44–63. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Bruce, *Acts*, 153; Longenecker, *Acts*, 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. This section draws upon Keith, *Jesus’ Literacy*, 124–46. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Here and throughout I assume Markan priority. When Luke redacts texts that appear in both Mark’s Gospel and Matthew’s Gospel, whether he is primarily reflective of one over the other has no bearing upon my present argument. I will thus focus upon the manners in which he differs from and agrees with Mark’s Gospel. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1963), 12; also, Norval Geldenhuys, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 169, in reference to the Lukan parallel (Luke 4:32). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Luke also repeats the periphrastic ἦν διδάσκων (“he was teaching”; Mark 1:22//Matt 7:29) but moves it to the prior sentence (Luke 4:31). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News according to Luke* (trans. David E. Green; London: SPCK, 1984), 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I–IX* (AB 28; Garden City: Doubleday, 1981), 544. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. M.-J. Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Luc* (7th ed.; *EBib*; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1948), 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Luke 5:21, 30; 6:7; 9:22; 11:53; 15:2; 19:47; 20:1, 19, 39, 46; 22:2, 66; 23:10; Acts 4:5; 6:12; 23:9. An eighteenth occurrence of γραμματεύς occurs in Acts 19:35, but not in reference to a Torah scribe. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. On the diversity of possible meanings for τέκτων, see Keith, *Jesus’ Literacy*, 130–32. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. In a similar move away from direct identification as a carpenter, Matt 13:55 has the audience identify Jesus as “the son of the carpenter.” P45 substitutes the Matthean reading at Mark 6:3. The sixth-century Palestinian Syriac tradition removes the reference to τέκτων altogether (Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* [2d ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2000], 76). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. For Paul, the Pharisee, see 1 Thess. 2:9; Acts 18:3; cf. Acts 20:34. Josephus, *Ant*. 15.11.2 §390, mentions priests who were trained as carpenters and other artisans. See also Philo’s descriptions of the Essenes in *Prob.* 12.81–82; *Hypoth*. 11.6–9; as well as *m. ʾAbot* 2.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. See also Josephus’s reference to the leisure necessary to write his history of the Jewish war in *Ag. Ap.* 1.9 §50. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Sirach was not the only ancient author who contrasted the scribal class with the manual-labor class. See Chris A. Rollston, “Ben Sira 38:24–39:11 and the *Egyptian Satire of the Trades*: A Reconsideration,” *JBL* 120 (2001): 131–9. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Although scholars have doubted whether synagogues existed prior to and during the first century CE, the most recent research on synagogues indicates unquestionably that they did (Anders Runesson, Donald D. Binder, and Birger Olsson, *The Ancient Synagogue: From Its Origins to 200 C.E.: A Source Book* [Leiden: Brill, 2010]). On ἐκκλησία as a synagogue term in Second Temple Judaism generally, and here in Sirach particularly, see Ralph John Korner, “Before ‘Church’: Political, Ethno-religious, and Theological Implications of the Collective Designation of Pauline Christ-Followers as *Ekklēsiai*” (Ph.D. diss., McMaster University, 2014), esp. 114–29. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Jesus, of course, teaches successfully in other Galilean synagogues before his rejection in Nazareth (Mark 1:21–28, 39; 3:1–6), but he is not here identified as a carpenter. Mark thus portrays Jesus as able to convince other Galileans of a status as synagogue teacher that he cannot convince his hometown. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.17 §175; Philo, *Hypoth.* 7.12–13; *Prob*. 12.81–82; *Spec.* 2.62. Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 16.2.3 §43. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Later rabbinic literature presents possible exceptions in the figures of Hillel, Shammai, and Akiba. See the discussions in Hyam Maccoby, *Jesus the Pharisee* (London: SCM, 2003), 181; Azzan Yadin, “Akiba (Aqiva),” in John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow, eds., *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 315–6. The usefulness of rabbinic texts as sources for the NT period is heavily debated. Even if the rabbinic texts could be shown to depict the first-century synagogue setting accurately, this would not disprove the present point—that, for the most part, those born into the manual-labor class did not have the leisure time or financial ability to become scribal-literate Torah authorities who could access the Hebrew Scriptures for themselves. It is significant, for example, that, according to tradition, Akiba is able to access scribal education,and thus rise above his origins as an *ʿam hāʾāreṣ*, only by marrying into wealth (b. Ned. 50a; b. Ketub. 62b–63a). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. François Bovon, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas (Lk 1,1 – 9,50)* (EKKNT 3.1; Zürich: Benziger, 1989), 157. *Contra* Fitzmyer, *Gospel according to Luke I–IX*, 442; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 127–8. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. 2 Chron. 17:7–9; Neh. 8:1–9; Sir. 45:17; *T. Levi* 13.2//4Q213=4QAramiac Levia 1.1.9, 12; *Jub.* 45.15; 4QDa 14.6–8; Josephus, *Life* 1 § 1–6. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Thus, Sean A. Adams, *The Genre of Acts and Collected Biography* (SNTSMS 156; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 188, 212–3; Bruce, *Acts*, 153; Longenecker, *Acts*, 102; Larkin, *Acts*, 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Haenchen, *Acts*, 255. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Jervell, *Apostelgeschichte*, 179. See further Hilton, “Dumb Speak.” [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Pesch, *Apostelgeschichte*, 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. John T. Squires, *The Plan of God in Luke-Acts* (SNTSMS 76; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 99n.110. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Conzelmann, *Acts*, 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Hilton, “Dumb Speak,” 137. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Luke Timothy Johnson, *Among the Gentiles: Greco-Roman Religion and Christianity* (AYBRL; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 150–51. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Adams, *Genre*, 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Origen, *Cels*. 1.29 (Chadwick). [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Origen, *Cels.* 1.62 (Chadwick). Similarly, see Pseudo-Clement, *Recognitions* 1.62. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Mark Goodacre, “Fatigue in the Synoptics,” *NTS* 44 (1998): 45–58; *The Synoptic Problem: A Way through the Maze* (London: T&T Clark, 2001), 71–76; Thomas *and the Gospels: The Case for* Thomas*’s Familiarity with the Synoptics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 90, 115; M. D. Goulder, *Midrash and Lection in Matthew: The Speaker’s Lectures in Biblical Studies 1969–71* (1975; repr., Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 35–36; Goulder, *Luke: A New Paradigm*, 2 vols., JSNTSup 20 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 109–10. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. For a methodological emphasis on the intertwining of the past and the present in early Christian historiography, see Jens Schröter, *Von Jesus zum Neuen Testament* (WUNT 204; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), esp. 9–77, 223–46. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Irenaeus, *Haer*. 3.1.1; 14.1; Tertullian, *Marc*. 4.2, 5; Muratorian Canon 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Note also that Luke characterizes Apollos as “being powerful in the Scriptures” before mentioning that he taught in the synagogue in Ephesus (18:24, 26). [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. See Bruce, *Acts*, 52–53; Schröter, *Von Jesus*, 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. On Greek education for Jews, see Hezser, *Jewish Literacy*, 90–94. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Cf. Luke’s portrayal of Paul at the end of the Acts, also explaining the law and prophets (Acts 28:23). [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Johnson, *Among*, 151, notes that one way Luke shows continuity between the ministries of Jesus and his apostles (he cites Peter, John, Philip, and Paul) “is by describing their powerful deeds, which mirror those performed by Jesus”; see also his *Acts*, 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. A particularly clear case is the portrayal of Stephen’s stoning (Acts 7:54–60) using narrative patterns from Jesus’ trials and crucifixion (Luke 22:66–23:49). [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Similarly, A. J. Mattill, “The Jesus-Paul Parallels and the Purpose of Luke-Acts: H. H. Evans Reconsidered,” *NovT* 27.1 (1975): 37: “Luke has . . . painted his heroes in Acts with the image of Jesus and his ministry, passion, death, and resurrection hovering before his eyes. But . . . there was also an influence from Acts to Gospel, from Paul to Jesus.” See also Peder Borgen, “From Paul to Luke,” *CBQ* 31 (1969): 182. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)