

“ὦ ἀνόητοι καὶ βραδεῖς τῆ καρδία: Luke, Aesop, and Reading Scripture”

1. Introduction

There is no shortage of commentary on the pericope in Luke 24:13-35 in which Jesus accompanies two unwitting disciples on the walk to Emmaus.¹ These disciples recount the recent events of the crucifixion and express their disappointment that Jesus apparently could not have been “the one to redeem Israel” even though reports of his resurrection had already begun to circulate (vv. 21-24). Writ large in the scholarly discussion of this passage is its claim in v. 27 that all Scripture “concerns” Jesus (ἐν πάσαις ταῖς γραφαῖς τὰ περὶ ἐαυτοῦ). This *crux interpretum* follows Jesus’ stern rebuke of the disciples that implies their hermeneutical culpability for failing to read Scripture correctly:

καὶ αὐτὸς εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς· ὦ ἀνόητοι καὶ βραδεῖς τῆ καρδία τοῦ πιστεύειν ἐπὶ πᾶσιν οἷς ἐλάλησαν οἱ προφῆται (Luke 24:25)

And he said to them, “O foolish ones and slow in heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!”²

Amid the great amount of literature devoted to this passage, however, it appears that scholars have overlooked a literary parallel to the words of Jesus himself in this verse. This parallel is shared with the Greek literary tradition associated with Aesop, where it appears in two fables.³ The texts of interest are variations of *Fab.* 40 and 128 according to Chambry’s edition, where the phrase “O foolish one(s) and slow of heart!” occurs, just as in Jesus’ rebuke in Luke 24:25.⁴ In this article, therefore, we will examine the parallel and

¹ My thanks to Drs. John A. L. Lee, James K. Aitken, Jan Joosten, and Mr. Gregory R. Lanier for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article, and to Drs. Pat Easterling and Richard Hunter at the Faculty of Classics, University of Cambridge, for their assistance navigating the Aesopic material.

² All translations are the author’s unless otherwise noted.

³ I have thus far found no other scholar to have noticed this possible quotation, including Johann J. Wettstein, *Novum Testamentum Graecum Editionis Receptae* (2 vols.; Amsterdam: Ex Officina Dommeriana, 1751-52). Few articles interact with Aesopic influence in the NT, such as M. Pesce and A. Destro, “Footwashing Narratives in the ‘Gospel of John’ (XIII, 1-20), in Aesop’s ‘Fables’, and in the ‘Saturnalia’ of Macrobius (Exploring Rituals of Inversion and Discipleship in Graeco-Roman Banqueting Customs),” *Bib* 80/2 (1999) 240-249. More scholars discuss the influence of the *Life of Aesop* (1st-2nd centuries C.E.), for example David F. Watson, “The ‘Life of Aesop’ and the Gospel of Mark: Two Ancient Approaches to Elite Values,” *JBL* 129 (2010) 699-716; Scott S. Elliott, “Witless in Your Own Cause: Divine Plots and Fractured Characters in the *Life of Aesop* and the Gospel of Mark,” *R&T* 12/3-4 (2006) 397.

⁴ I will refer throughout to this shared wording as “the parallel” rather than “the quotation” to avoid unnecessarily implying literary priority in either direction. For the fables, see Aemilius Chambry, ed. *Aesopi Fabulae* (2 vols.; Paris: Société d’Édition “*Les Belles Lettres*,” 1925-1926) 1:104, 236. Available at “Aesopica: Aesop’s Fables in English, Latin & Greek,” n.p. [cited 20 April 2015]. Online: <http://www.mythfolklore.net/aesopica/chambry/>. Unless otherwise noted, by *Fab.* 40 and 128 I refer to the specific variants of these fables that are of interest to this inquiry, since their other variant versions, discussed below, either are not more precisely labelled or go by different numbers in the modern

overview the textual history of the Aesopic tradition generally, and of *Fab.* 40 and 128 in particular. Then, after briefly considering internal evidence, we will draw preliminary conclusions regarding the origin, influence, and purpose of the parallel.

2. *The Parallel in Two Aesopic Fables*

As is typical in Aesopic materials, both fables of interest deal with animals. In *Fab.* 40, a fox falls into a well and is unable to escape. A thirsty goat comes along and finds the fox, who tricks the goat into coming down for a drink of the delicious waters. The fox then informs the goat of their shared predicament and coaxes him into placing his forefeet on the opening to the well so that he can run up his back, escape, and then help the goat out. After escaping the well, however, the cunning fox breaks his word and, in response to the goat's protests, reprimands him for being so dimwitted. His reprisal is the punchline of the fable, in which the parallel with Luke 24:25 is quite clear:

καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐλάλει· Ὡ ἀνόητε καὶ βραδὺ τῆ καρδία, εἰ εἶχες φρένας ὡς ἐν πάγωνι τρίχας, οὐκ ἂν κατήεις, εἰ μὴ ἄνοδον ἦδεις. (lines. 7-10)

And he [the fox] said to him, ‘O foolish one and slow in heart, if you had as much wit as hair in your beard, you would not have come down unless you'd had a way out.’

Although the wording shared with Luke 24:25 is not identical, the grammar differs only slightly. This passage is a clear parallel to Luke and, depending on the direction of influence, perhaps even a quotation.⁵

The parallel also appears in *Fab.* 128, in which the sun is getting married in summertime and the frogs are noisily enjoying his magnificent banquet. Suddenly, one of the frogs cries out in lament. Again, the parallel to Luke is clear:

Ὡ ἀνόητοι καὶ βραδεῖς τῆ καρδία, εἰς τί βοᾶτε μεγάλα κεκραγότες ὡς ἐπ' ἀγαθῷ τινι προσδοκωμένῳ; (lines. 6-8)

“O foolish ones and slow in heart, why do you cry out screaming mightily as for some expected benefit?”

This insightful frog goes on to warn the others that if the sun alone dries up all their mud, they will suffer all the more when he marries and has children. Thus *Fab.* 128 also includes the parallel to Luke 24:25, but this time it is grammatically identical.

collections of Aesopic materials. Both these variants are alternatives to the “standard” Aesopic versions of the fables, as discussed in more detail below.

⁵ The 14th century C.E. codex Mb 205 reads βραδύς, a nominative masculine singular, making the language even more similar to Luke's βραδεῖς, a nominative masculine plural.

3. Textual History of the Aesopic Tradition

The critical question is one of dependence. Does Luke portray Jesus as quoting Aesop, or have the fables come in the course of time to reflect Luke? It is a difficult question to answer, owing in large measure to the “fiendishly complicated” Aesopic textual tradition and its scarce evidence.⁶ First, Aesop is traditionally thought to have lived in Delphi in the mid-6th century B.C.E., and although his actual existence is now contested,⁷ Greek authors as early as the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E. attribute fables to him (Aristophanes, *Vesp.* 566; *Av.* 471; Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.134-135).⁸ It has been said that “the range of what may rightly be called Aesopic, both by tradition and by kind, is so vast and so repetitious as not to be worth including, even if it were possible, within the compass of a single, necessarily monstrous and chaotic compilation.”⁹ Still, the modern critical volumes of the Aesopic corpus provide the necessary starting point to address the question of literary dependence.

The first written collection of Aesop was likely that of Demetrius of Phaleron, librarian at Alexandria in the late 4th century B.C.E. (cf. Diogenes Laertius, 5.80),¹⁰ although Nøjgaard contends that a written collection may have existed a century earlier.¹¹ While Demetrius’ collection is now lost, it is known to have existed into the 10th century C.E.¹² The earliest extant Aesopic manuscript, *P. Rylands* 493, dates to the 1st century C.E., and may constitute part of Demetrius’ text.¹³ The fables are mostly preserved in collections

⁶ Leslie Kurke, *Aesopic Conversations: Popular Tradition, Cultural Dialogue, and the Invention of Greek Prose* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011) 2-3.

⁷ See Ben Edwin Perry, “Review of Wiechers, *Aesop in Delphi*,” *Gn* 34 (1962) 620-622; Maria J. Luzzatto, “Plutarco, Socrate e l’Esopo di Delfi,” *ICS* 13 (1988) 427-445; Stefano Jedrkiewicz, *Sapere e Paradosso nell’ Antichità: Esopo e la Favola* (Rome: Edizioni dell’ Ateneo, 1989) 41-48, cited in Kurke, *Conversations*, 13 n. 39. Kurke proposes that the ancient testimonies about the figure “Aesop” circulated orally until he became a “cipher or ‘idologeme’” and thus “passed into the discursive resources of the culture, available as a mask or alibi for critique, parody, or cunning resistance by any who felt themselves disempowered”; *Conversations*, 12.

⁸ Jeffrey S. Rusten, “Aesop,” in Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth, eds., *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (3d ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 29. Henceforth *OCD*. Even earlier than that, Hesiod (*Op.* 202-12) records what appears to be an animal fable, although does not refer directly to Aesop, on which see Richard Hunter, *Hesiodic Voices: Studies in the Ancient Reception of Hesiod’s Works and Days* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 227-281. For criteria for classifying a “fable,” see Ben Edwin Perry, *Aesopica: A Series of Texts Relating to Aesop or Ascribed to Him or Closely Connected with the Literary Tradition that Bears His Name* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1952) ix.

⁹ Ben Edwin Perry, *Aesopica*, vii.

¹⁰ Albert B. Bosworth, “Demetrius (3), of Phaleron,” *OCD*, 448; Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus* (LCL 436; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965; repr., 1990) xiii.

¹¹ Morten Nøjgaard, *La fable antique* (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk, 1964) 1:471-75, cited in Kurke, *Conversations*, 44 n. 132.

¹² Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, xiii.

¹³ See C.H. Roberts, *Catalogue of the Greek and Latin Papyri in the John Rylands Library* (3 vols.; Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1938) 3:119-28. Perry notes that there is no way of telling “to what extent, if any, the *Aesop* of Demetrius was altered or revised or incorporated in other collections in the course of its transmission”; *Babrius and Phaedrus*, xiv.

dating between the 12th and 15th centuries C.E., whose manuscript evidence has been grouped into three or four main recensions.¹⁴ Of the medieval collections the oldest, called the Augustana Recension (I), dates to the second century C.E. or earlier, and likely preserves fables even older than that time frame.¹⁵ However fluid the contents of the Aesopic corpus were, then, this evidence affirms the antiquity of a written tradition and suggests that late manuscripts likely contain early Aesopic material. Certainly fables found in the extant textual evidence therefore could have been circulating during or even before the New Testament era in written and perhaps standardized form.

3.1 Textual History of *Fab. 40* and 128

Byzantine scribes often collected fables from various manuscript groups without providing further details, making tracing their individual textual history very difficult. Chambry records that *Fab. 40* appears in codex Mb (= Vaticanus Gr. 777), which dates to the 14th or 15th century C.E. and is the largest Aesopic codex that exists, containing two hundred forty-four fables.¹⁶ *Fab. 40* is a variant version of a fable in the Augustana Recension,¹⁷ and Chambry provides five further variants aside from the one in which the Lukan parallel appears, bringing the total number of variations of this particular fable to seven.¹⁸ While Perry does not present any variant versions of *Fab. 40*, he does highlight in general that variants are often of historical importance.¹⁹

Interestingly, *Fab. 128* has many of the same text-historical features. Most importantly, like *Fab. 40*, we find in Chambry's edition that the variant of *Fab. 128* of interest is attested in the Mb codex and nowhere else.²⁰ Chambry gives only one other

¹⁴ Manfred Landfester, ed. *Brill's Dictionary of Greek and Latin Authors and Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 2009) 20-22 (20). On these recensions see especially Ben Edwin Perry, *Studies in the Text History of the Life and Fables of Aesop* (Haverford, Pa.: American Philological Association, 1936) 71-228; idem., *Babrius and Phaedrus*, xvi-xix. Perry discusses the various manuscripts in the Aesopic tradition in *Text History*, 71 n. 1.

¹⁵ Rusten, "Aesop," 29. Cf. Perry, *Aesopica*, xii, who dates Augustana to "not later than the second century after Christ." The tenth century manuscript 397 in the Pierpont Morgan Library (cod. G) is closely related to Augustana, which was the parent text for three later recensions: Ia, II (Vindobonensis), and II (Accursiana or Planudean); Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, xvi.

¹⁶ Chambry, *Aesopi Fabulae*, 1:20.

¹⁷ Listed in Perry as *Fab. 9*, which is essentially the same as Chambry's first listed "*Fab. 40*" but with minor differences due to text-critical decisions. See Chambry, *Aesopi Fabulae*, 1:98-99; Perry, *Aesopica*, 325, cf. 321. *Fab. 9* is preserved in Codices G, Pb, Pg-(Pa, Ma)-(II, III, IV).

¹⁸ Chambry, *Aesopi Fabulae*, 1:99-104. These variant versions, all of which Chambry confusingly labelled "*Fab. 40Aliter*," mostly come from different codex families. The "*Fab 40Alit*," with the Lukan parallel, referred to throughout this article simply as *Fab. 40*, is, as noted above, on p. 104 in Chambry, *Aesopi Fabulae*. See Perry's index in the appendix in his *Babrius and Phaedrus*, 419-610, where he lists cross references to the equivalents in other editions, translations, and adaptations of his *Aesopica* fables.

¹⁹ *Aesopica*, xiii. None of the other variant versions of *Fab. 40* contain the parallel, but the variant that does also appears in Diaconus Ignatius's *Tetrasticha iambica* (9th century C.E.). See O. Crusius, ed., *Babrii fabulae Aesopeae* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1897) 264-296.

²⁰ Chambry, *Aesopi Fabulae*, 1:236. Labelled "*Fab. 128Aliter*."

version of the fable,²¹ which in Perry's *Aesopica* is listed under *Fab.* 314.²² This other version is also included in the extant evidence of Babrius' collection (*Fab.* 24),²³ found in the Athous (10th c.) and Bodleianus (13th c.) codices, and portions in the *Suda* (10th c.; cf. *παιάν* and *αὐήνας*).²⁴ In turn Babrius, a Hellenized Italian in Syria in the first- to second-century C.E., may have used Demetrius' collection of Aesop to compile his work.

The sparse attestation of the versions of *Fab.* 40 and 128 that contain the Lukan parallel, and the relative lateness of the codex that preserves them, surely suggest that these fable variants have come to reflect the Luke 24:25 quotation rather than *vice versa*. But this conclusion is not completely certain, as the medieval codices do not reliably preserve ancient Aesopic texts. That is to say, while the fables in medieval codices are not necessarily ancient, conversely the ancient fables are not necessarily in medieval codices. For example, C.H. Roberts believes that the oldest fragment of Aesop, *P. Rylands* 493, was part of Demetrius's text, yet it does not appear in medieval collections.²⁵ Given the existence of Demetrius's Aesop text into the period to which Mb dates, it is possible that these fables could have been drawn from it. Furthermore, both *Fab.* 40 and 128 are part of variant groups whose evidence is quite ancient – *Fab.* 9 in the Augustana Recension and *Fab.* 24 in Babrius, respectively. It appears, therefore, that finally deciding that the *Fab.* 40 and 128 variations are early or late is impossible given the extant evidence.

4. *Internal Factors for Assessing Dependence*

The state of Aesopic textual evidence commends considering internal evidence to help determine the direction of dependence of the parallel.

4.1. *The Absence of the Parallel in Other Greek Literature*

Perry notes that in the Hellenistic period fables were commonly used as “illustrations in a larger context” of poetry or prose.²⁶ It is therefore notable that the shared wording between Luke 24:25 and the fables appears as a climactic rebuke followed by an explanation in the literary contexts of both Luke and Aesop. This raises the question of the currency of the phrase in such contexts within Greek literature generally. Notably, *βραδύς* and *καρδία* rarely occur in proximity in non-biblical sources, appearing together most often in Galen's medical texts (e.g., *De causis pulsuum libri iv*, 9.183.15) and in Hippocrates

²¹ Chambry, *Aesopi Fabulae*, 1:235-36. Labelled simply “*Fab.* 128.”

²² 445-46. As with *Fab.* 40, Perry does not include the variant version of *Fab.* 128 of interest to this inquiry.

²³ I.e., *Fab.* 24 in Babrius = Perry's *Fab.* 314 = Chambry's *Fab.* 128, all of which differ slightly from the variant of *Fab.* 128 with the Lukan parallel that Chambry also provides. For Babrius' *Fab.* 24 see Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, 36-37 for the text and an English translation. See p. 482 in his appendix in the same volume for alternate versions.

²⁴ Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, xlviia, lix-lx. Babrius put the fables into iambic verse, and thus may be the referent of Quintilian's comment in his *Institutio Oratoria* 9.1 (approx. 96 C.E.); *ibid.*, 1.

²⁵ C.H. Roberts, *Catalogue*, 3:120.

²⁶ Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, xii-xiii.

(*Morb.* 1.26). Some other authors use the words together as well, but none of these in a way similar to the parallel in Aesop and Luke.²⁷

Remarkably, the phrase itself, ὄ ἀνόητε/ἀνόητοι καὶ βραδὺ/βραδεῖς τῆ καρδία, is not found independently in any other Greek source outside of Luke and the two Aesopic fables. While the meaning of the phrase is not difficult to construe, its absence elsewhere in Greek literature throws the parallel between Luke and the Aesopic fables further into relief. Some later writers use the phrase, but all who do so are clearly alluding to if not quoting the biblical text.²⁸ Since the phrase was apparently not one in widespread use in Greek sources, either literary or non-literary,²⁹ it is therefore unlikely that the shared wording occurred by chance.

4.2. The “Heart” in Biblical and Greek Writings

The uniqueness of the “slow of heart” (βραδεῖς τῆ καρδία) expression in the parallel commends its closer examination. In the Old Testament the “heart” (לב) refers broadly to the seat of emotion, volition, and reasoning. Accordingly, there is a wide variety of adjectives used to modify לב, often in constructions similar to that of the “slow of heart” expression.³⁰ In this sense, the expression itself is consonant with the language of the Hebrew Scriptures regarding the heart, giving the expression a Hebrew “ring” that seems unlikely to be original to a Greek tradition like that of Aesop. To a large extent, in Greek literature καρδία refers more specifically to “the seat of feeling and passion, as rage or anger” rather than the Hebrew sense implied in the parallel.³¹

²⁷ See, e.g., Eutecnius in I. Gualandri, *Eutecnii paraphrasis in Nicandri theriaca* (Milan: Istituto Editoriale Cisalpino, 1968) 59; Oribasius in J. Raeder, *Oribasii synopsis ad Eustathium et libri ad Eunapium* (Corpus medicorum Graecorum 6.3; Leipzig: Teubner, 1926 [repr. Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1964]) 3:6.28.2; Paul of Aegina, *Epitomae medicae libri septem* in J.L. Heiberg, *Paulus Aegineta* (2 vols.; Corpus medicorum Graecorum 9.1-2; Leipzig: Teubner, 1921-24) 2:38.5; Georgios Chortatzis, *Erofile*, 7.265; *T. Ab.* 6.17-18; Didymus, *Comm. Job* 39.1141.33; Cyril, *Comm. Isa.* 70.476.6; Hesychius, *In sanctum Antonium* 4.8.

²⁸ E.g., Barsanuphius and Johannes, *Epist.* 236.17 (βραδὺ τῆ καρδία); Nicetas David, *Homiliae septem*, 2.187 (καὶ τὸ βραδὺ τῆς καρδίας); Bartholomew of Edessa, *Confutatio Agareni*, 16.8 (Ἀνόητε καὶ βραδὺ τῆ καρδία). Some are direct quotations of Luke, as in Adamantius, *De recta in deum fide* in W.H. van de Sande Bakhuyzen, *Der Dialog des Adamantius Περὶ τῆς εἰς θεὸν ὀρθῆς πίστεως* (Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller 4; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1901) 198; Palladius, *Dialogus de vita Joannis Chrysostomi* in P.R. Coleman-Norton, *Palladii dialogus de vita S. Joanni Chrysostomi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928) 123.

²⁹ Aside from those texts listed above, according to a search using the “Thesaurus Linguae Graecae: A Digital Library of Greek Literature,” n.p. [cited 14 May 2015]. Online: <http://www.tlg.uci.edu>. Hereafter “TLG.” Non-literary sources, including papyri and inscriptions, were searched using “Papyri.info,” n.p. [cited 14 May 2015]. Online: <http://papyri.info/>, as well as the Packard Humanities Institute’s “Searchable Greek Inscriptions,” n.p. [cited 14 May 2015]. Online: <http://epigraphy.packhum.org/inscriptions/>.

³⁰ HALOT, s.v., לב.

³¹ LSJ, s.v., καρδία. Of course, in the Septuagint καρδία often refers to the same semantic domains as לב because it is the standard equivalent, along with διάνοια, which influences NT usage (e.g., Rom 2:5). Cf. “καρδία,” in T. Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Louvain: Peeters, 2009) 362-363; Marguerite Harl, *La Bible d’Alexandrie: La Genèse* (BdA 1; Paris: Les Éditions du CERF, 1986) 61.

Nevertheless, the word βραδύς, while fairly common in classical Greek literature, appears nowhere in the Greek Old Testament.³² Furthermore, among the many adjectives used to describe the heart in the Hebrew Scriptures, “speed” does not appear, whether slow or fast.³³ Therefore, while the “slow of heart” expression fits well with Biblical language, there is no clear OT text that Luke (or Jesus) may be adapting in Luke 24:25. What is more, just like the typical referent of לֵב, the word καρδία does occasionally refer to the mind or seat of intelligence in natural Greek usage, particularly in Homer (e.g., *Il.* 21.441; *Od.* 4.572; 5.389). Since this understanding of the “heart” is not strictly Semitic, then, it cannot totally be excluded that the καρδία phrase derives from independent Greek usage, and perhaps original to the Aesopic tradition.

4.3. *The Form of Fab. 40 and 128*

As Chambry presents them, *Fab.* 40 and 128 appear in iambic verse. While not common to all Aesopic fables, Phaedrus and Babrius were rendering fables into verse in the 1st-2nd centuries C.E. In the course of doing so, and with the addition of morals, these fables became “independent forms of writing” that often functioned as “raw material meant to be used in the making of literature, or orally.”³⁴ Still, iambic verse “ranks at the bottom of the hierarchy of poetic forms” and is “popular” in tone, although it took considerable skill to compose.³⁵ Thus, while we may do well to suspect that later, possibly Christian scribes may have reworked these versions of *Fab.* 40 and 128 to mimic the iambic form of Phaedrus and Babrius, because such forms existed in the Hellenistic period we again cannot say for certain. What is more, the typical function of iambic fables noted above fits well with the idea that Luke adopted Aesop for literary reasons. Without further textual evidence, then, the poetic form of these fables does not significantly clarify the question of dependence.

4.4. *Other Thematic Links*

As a final note, it is worth observing other thematic links between Luke and the Aesopic tradition. In particular, there is an intriguing amount of animal imagery employed in Luke-Acts. Although shared with Matthew, Luke records Jesus’ statement that “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (9:58//Matt 8:20). In Acts, there is the pericope in which Peter sees a great sheet coming down from the sky filled with animals of all kinds (10:9-16). More tantalizingly, Luke 13:32 records Jesus’ somewhat enigmatic moniker for Herod, “that fox” (ἀλώπηξ), the

³² LSJ, s.v. βραδύς. The related words βραδύνω (Gen 43:10; Dan 7:10; Isa 46:13; Sir 35:19), and βραδύγλωσσος (Exod 4:10) do appear, however. βραδέως appears in 2 Macc 14:17.

³³ OT “heart” imagery includes hardness (Ezek 11:19; Job 41:24), morality (1 Sam 17:28; Isa 44:20; 1 Kings 9:4), circumcision (Deut 10:16; Jer 9:26), and cultic purity (Ps 19:8; Pro 20:9), among others.

³⁴ Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, xii. The notorious “moral” of an Aesopic fable is known as “promythium” or “epimythium”; *ibid.*, xiv-xvi.

³⁵ Kurke, *Conversations*, 3-4.

main animal character in *Fab.* 40. While alone these thematic similarities between Luke and Aesop prove nothing, they are of some interest for the present inquiry.³⁶

5. Conclusions

The Gospel of Luke would have been familiar to practically anyone who could read or write in the medieval period. The parallel from 24:25 may have had a certain currency at least within the community from which the Mb codex of Aesop arose. Judging from the textual history of Aesop in general and the possibility that Byzantine scribes could have reworked Aesopic material into familiar iambic form, it seems most likely that the Aesopic tradition has come to reflect Luke 24:25. At what point it may have done so is unfortunately impossible to say with the evidence at hand. With the added weight of the Semitic-sounding “slow of heart” expression in the parallel, short of more textual evidence surfacing, our default conclusion must be that the Aesopic tradition has come to reflect Luke rather than *vice versa*. Thus, reading Scripture, in this case the Gospel of Luke, later influenced certain Aesopic fables.

Nevertheless, the arguments for that conclusion are all open to question. It is possible to some degree or another that the Mb codex preserves ancient Aesopic material, and that the “slow of heart” expression preserves one of the less common uses of καρδία in Greek to refer to the seat of intelligence rather than the passions. And while the parallel phrase between Luke and Aesop may have had some currency in the medieval period, it is striking that it occurs nowhere else in Greek literature.³⁷ That literature, moreover, does preserve iambic forms of Aesopic fables dating to the New Testament era like those in which the variants of *Fab.* 40 and 128 with the parallel to Luke occur. It is therefore worth considering the possibility, however slim, that Luke did adopt an Aesopic text for a literary purpose like many of his contemporary Greek authors.³⁸ It is reasonable to expect as much from a well-educated Jew in the Hellenistic period.³⁹ Invoking Aesop in the context of Luke 25 may have functioned as an ironic critique of those Jews who had read Israel’s Scriptures too much like the Aesopic tradition, so that Luke portrays Jesus as contrasting the reading strategies for the two literary genres in view. Put differently, Luke may be highlighting that the disjointed and moralistic nature of Aesop’s *Fables* differs drastically

³⁶ John A. Darr, *Herod the Fox: Audience Criticism and Lukan Characterization* (JSNTSup 163; Sheffield; Sheffield Academic, 1998) 98-100, discusses Luke’s cultural and literary milieu, and emphasizes that the “obvious fact that the LXX was a prominent feature of Luke’s extratext [*sic*] should not blind us to the important insight that the Greco-Roman culture” formed the “environment” in which Luke’s narrative was written and read (98). It is thus “to be expected that stereotypical characters, contrasts, type-scenes and common plot sequences” from “Homer, Aesop and other canonical sources” were part of the Hellenized context in which Luke wrote (99-100).

³⁷ It is, of course, also possible that the “slow of heart” expression was a known part of popular speech that is now lost from other Greek literature.

³⁸ See Perry’s many examples of this in *Babrius and Phaedrus*, xiii.

³⁹ For scholarship discussing Luke as an educated Hellenistic writer see Samson Uytanlet, *Luke-Acts and Jewish Historiography* (WUNT 366; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 12-21.

from Israel's Scripture, which in contrast tells a single and cohesive story about the person of Jesus (cf. Luke 24:27). Short of further textual evidence, however, this alternative assessment can only remain inconclusive.