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Pieter B. Hartog

Acts of the Apostles—A Celebration of Uncertainty? Constructing a Dialogical Self for the Early Jesus Movement

Abstract: In the ancient world, travel was often a source of anxiety and uncertainty. This uncertainty pertained both to the practical aspects of traveling and to the experience of being away from one's own land and culture. This chapter explores how the latter type of uncertainty can inspire new formulations of self and identity. Employing the modern-day psychological notion of the dialogical self and paying particular attention to the apostolic meeting in Acts 15, I aim to show how the development of the Way, as Acts of the Apostles describes it, evoked uncertainty among its members. As a response to this uncertainty, the book of Acts suggests overarching categories to describe the Way as a movement that is both familiar and new.

Among the many experiences that travelers in the first centuries of our era may have had, uncertainty can perhaps claim pride of place. Its most tangible expression concerned the practicalities of travel. On the roads, robbers were a constant risk (cf. Luke 10:25–37), and pirates posed a threat at sea.¹ Nature also often caused trouble: heat or cold could make overland travel a tricky business, while changing winds could put sea travelers in peril—the winter season was particularly notorious in this regard.² As a result, traveling was often a communal effort, and ancient travelers depended on others—fellow travelers and facilitators—to ensure the success of their journeys.³

1 On robbers and bandits see Brent D. Shaw, “Bandits in the Roman Empire,” *PaP* 105 (1984): 3–52. On pirates and the image of the Romans as putting an end to piracy in the Mediterranean see David Braund, “Piracy under the Principate and the Ideology of Imperial Eradication,” in *War and Society in the Roman World*, ed. John Rich and Graham Shipley (London: Routledge, 1993), 195–212; Philip de Souza, *Piracy in the Graeco-Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

2 Veg., *Mil.* 4.39. See also Philo, *Legat.* 190, where wintery sea storms symbolize the storms Gaius has in store for the Judean people.

3 Cf. Vernon K. Robbins, “By Land and By Sea: The We-Passages and Ancient Sea Voyages,” in *Perspectives on Luke-Acts*, ed. Charles H. Talbert (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1978), 215–42, who argues that this communal aspect of travelling provides the socio-cultural background to the use of first person speech (often in the plural) in sea voyage narratives. Those who facilitated travel have often escaped the attention of scholars, but see the insightful analysis of Laura Nasrallah, “Imposing Travelers: An Inscription from Galatia and the Journeys of the Earliest Christians,” in *Journeys in the Roman East: Imagined and Real*, ed. Maren R. Niehoff, Culture, Religion, and Politics in the Greco-Roman World 1 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 273–96.

Uncertainty did not end there, though: their dependency made ancient travelers vulnerable, and inn keepers, boat captains, and unknown others on the road had to be greeted with healthy suspicion.⁴ The omnipresent risks of travel were well-known and made lasting impressions in ancient literature across cultural and ethnic boundaries: no desert journey narrative is complete without a lack of water, no ancient novel without pirates, and no sea travel episode without shipwreck.

Aside from these “obvious and practical hardships of travel,” writes Steven Muir, travelers faced yet another type of uncertainty. This second sort of anxiety “has to do with how one’s social identity becomes precarious when one is separated from the primary social groupings of family and fellow citizens.”⁵ What is more, the exposure to novel cultural and ethnic groups on one’s journeys—facilitated in the Roman period by the construction of substantive road and waterway networks⁶—triggered travelers to rethink their own senses of belonging. As an increasing number of scholars has come to realize, the Roman world witnessed several developments reminiscent of the modern globalized West, such as sudden increases in connectivity and growing intercultural and transcultural awareness among its inhabitants.⁷ As a result, cultural and ethnic self-presentations in the first centuries CE—as they are expressed in literary writings from these periods—often reflect what Jan Nederveen Pieterse has called a “diversification and amplification of ‘sources of the self.’”⁸ This proliferation of a range of sources of the self offers valuable new opportunities for individuals in globalized contexts to forge multi-level-

4 See e.g. Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Travel in Antiquity*, TSAJ 144 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 89–119, who describes how Jewish travelers would often rather spend the night with fellow Jews than in public hostels.

5 Steven Muir, “Religion on the Road in Ancient Greece and Rome,” in *Travel and Religion in Antiquity*, ed. Philip A. Harland, Studies in Christianity and Judaism/Études sur le christianisme et le judaïsme 21 (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011), 29–47 (30).

6 On the prominence of travel in the Roman world see Lionel Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1974); Jean-Marie André and Marie-Françoise Baslez, *Voyager dans l’Antiquité* (Paris: Fayard, 1993), 77–166.

7 See Robert Witcher, “Globalisation and Roman Imperialism: Perspectives on Identities in Roman Italy,” in *The Emergence of State Identities in Italy in the First Millennium BC*, ed. Edward Herring and Kathryn Lomas (London: Accordia Research Institute, University of London, 2000), 213–25; Andrew Gardner, “Thinking about Roman Imperialism: Postcolonialism, Globalisation and Beyond?” *Britannia* 44 (2013): 1–25; Martin Pitts and Miguel John Versluys, eds., *Globalisation and the Roman World: World History, Connectivity and Material Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). See also Susanne Luther’s contribution in this volume.

8 Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange*, 3rd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 74.

elled identities for themselves.⁹ In this contribution, I draw attention to processes of developing what I shall call “dialogical selves,” which are triggered by the anxiety faced by travelers to manage the variegated sources of the self with which their journeys bring them into contact.

Theorizing Uncertainty Through Dialogical Self Theory

To approach this topic, I have found the methodological framework of Dialogical Self Theory particularly helpful. Developed by Dutch psychologist Hubert Hermans, Dialogical Self Theory approaches the human mind as consisting of a variety of self-positions (cf. Nederveen Pieterse’s “sources of the self”), which are in dialogue with each other and between which the self can alternate.¹⁰ These self-positions are both internal and external; they incorporate the social context of the self into the self, so that the self takes the shape of a micro-society. In other words, the self, for Hermans, is not unchanging over time, but is “*extended* in space and time” and affected by the various contexts in which it finds itself.¹¹ As a result, dialogues between different self-positions take place at the levels of both communal and individual selves.

In the study of New Testament literature, the notion of the dialogical self has been used most fruitfully to account for processes of self-formation that those who joined the early Jesus movement underwent. Kobus Kok and Dieter Roth offer the example of a student “who is an executive in a large consulting firm in Pretoria,” but “has to take part in ‘pagan’ African rituals in the rural area of Natal where his father is a traditional African chief.” This example, Kok and Roth propose, may be illustrative of the tensions that those who joined the Jesus movement experienced: on the one hand they adopted a new self-understanding grounded in their faith, on the other they remained closely tied to their previous cultural ties and practices. “In

9 I have argued elsewhere that such multi-levelled identities can be recognized in the book of Acts and other writings from the early Roman empire. See Pieter B. Hartog, “Where Shall Wisdom be Found? Identity, Sacred Space, and Universal Knowledge in Philostratus and the Acts of the Apostles,” in *Jerusalem and Other Holy Places as Foci of Multireligious and Ideological Confrontation*, ed. Pieter B. Hartog et al., *Jewish and Christian Perspectives* 37 (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 131–49.

10 Hubert J. M. Hermans and Harry J. G. Kempen, *The Dialogical Self: Meaning as Movement* (San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 1993); Hubert J. M. Hermans and Agnieszka Hermans-Konopka, *Dialogical Self Theory: Positioning and Counter-Positioning in a Globalizing Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

11 Quote from Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, *Dialogical Self Theory*, 82.

such a negotiation,” Kok and Roth conclude, “the separation between ‘Christianity’ and previous socio-cultural identities may not have been as definitive and clear-cut as once thought.”¹²

In this example, the student’s education and working environment provide him with novel self-positions, which interact with those with which he was familiar from his upbringing. This results in a dialogical self, in which these various self-positions interact in complex ways and work together to inspire a rich self-image. In similar vein, the notion of a dialogical self illustrates the nexus between travel and self-formation—a role travel has played throughout much of ancient and less ancient history.¹³ As individuals find themselves in new contexts as a result of their journeys, their selves obtain access to novel self-positions. Through this amplification of self-positions these selves gain in breadth and depth.

Applied to the literary level, travel motifs in ancient literature are excellently suited to construct layered and multi-faceted dialogical selves for the protagonists of the narratives in which these motifs occur. This is indeed what we see happening in the book of Acts, as well as in contemporaneous travel narratives. What is more, these individual dialogical selves often serve as exemplars of group identity. In the book of Acts, for instance, Peter and Paul—the book’s main protagonists—exemplify the ethos of the Way as a movement in which Jews and non-Jews are united.¹⁴ Ascribing dialogical selves to these protagonists—in particular Paul, who features as a seasoned traveler—therefore promotes a dialogical understanding of the group to which they belong.

The experience of uncertainty rarely appears explicitly in studies on the dialogical self in ancient literature. Yet in Hermans and Hermans-Konopko’s account

¹² All quotation from Jacobus Kok and Dieter T. Roth, “Sensitivity towards Outsiders and the Dynamic Relationship between Mission and Ethics/Ethos,” in *Sensitivity towards Outsider: Exploring the Dynamic Relationship between Mission and Ethics in the New Testament and Early Christianity*, ed. Jacobus Kok et al., WUNT 2/364 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 1–23 (7). Cf. how Gerd Theissen evokes the dialogical self to account for Paul’s ongoing engagement with different strands of Judaism after joining the Jesus movement: Gerd Theissen, “The Letter to the Romans and Paul’s Plural Identity,” in *The Making of Christianity: Conflicts, Contacts, and Constructions: Essays in Honor of Bengt Holmberg*, ed. Magnus Zetterholm and Samuel Byrskog, ConBNT 47 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 301–22.

¹³ See, e.g., Karlpeter Elis, ed., *Bildungsreise—Reisebildung* (Vienna: LIT, 2004); Christian Fron, *Bildung und Reisen in der römischen Kaiserzeit: Pedaideumenoi und Mobilität zwischen dem 1. und 4. Jh. n. Chr.*, UALG 146 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021).

¹⁴ See Acts 20:17–38, where Paul sets aspects of his previous life as an example to the recipients of his message. More broadly see Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986, 1990), 2:328, who writes: “Heroic figures (like Paul in Acts) inevitably become models of behavior, and Paul’s farewell to the Ephesian elders (20:18–35) indicates awareness that Paul could be an effective model for the later church.”

of the dialogical self, this experience plays a central role. In the process of developing a dialogical self, these authors stress, uncertainty is unavoidable. They distinguish four aspects of such uncertainty:

(i) *complexity*, referring to a great number of parts (of self and society) that have a variety of interconnections; (ii) *ambiguity*, referring to a suspension of clarity, as the meaning of one part is determined by the flux and variation of the other parts; (iii) *deficit knowledge*, referring to the absence of a superordinate knowledge structure that is able to resolve the contradictions between the parts; and (iv) *unpredictability*, implying a lack of control of future developments.¹⁵

For Hermans and Hermans-Konopko, this uncertainty is not necessarily a negative experience, provided it is carefully managed and reduced. In those cases, uncertainty can provide a stimulus to engage in new contacts and modes of cooperation or serve “as a definitive farewell to the dogmas and ideologies of institutions that restricted and confined the self in earlier times.”¹⁶ Yet it can also cause serious problems when those who experience such uncertainty are unable to reduce it. Reductions can take place in different ways, but Hermans and Hermans-Konopko present the option of “going into this uncertainty rather than avoiding it” as the most preferable option.¹⁷ In this way, they argue, one deals with the uncertainty which modern-day globalized spaces may evoke in a truly dialogical fashion, that is, by incorporating a wide range of self-positions into a coherent yet open whole. Hence, “certainty does not result from avoiding uncertainty but from *entering it*.”¹⁸

In what follows, I intend to show that one purpose of the book of Acts is to reduce the uncertainty that comes with the development of the Way as a novel, multi-ethnic and trans-ethnic, movement.¹⁹ To do so, I analyze Acts’ account of the apostolic council (Acts 15:1–35) from the perspective of Hermans and Hermans-Konopko’s description of uncertainty, wondering how in this episode the four aspects of this type of uncertainty are upheld and reduced.

15 Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, *Dialogical Self Theory*, 3 (cf. 28) (italics theirs).

16 Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, *Dialogical Self Theory*, 28.

17 Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, *Dialogical Self Theory*, 46, 77 (italics omitted). Other ways of reducing uncertainty are “a reduction of the number and heterogeneity of positions in the repertoire”; “giving the lead to one powerful position that is permitted to dominate the repertoire as a whole”; “sharpening the boundaries between oneself and the other”; “adding instead of diminishing the number of positions in the self.” See Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, *Dialogical Self Theory*, 44–47.

18 Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, *Dialogical Self Theory*, 28 (italics theirs).

19 On the book of Acts as negotiating the novelty of the Way see also Pieter B. Hartog, “Noah and Moses in Acts 15: Group Models and the Novelty of The Way,” *NTS* 67 (2021): 496–513.

The Apostolic Council: A Celebration of Uncertainty?

Acts' description of the apostolic council occupies a central place in the narrative, occurring in the middle of Paul's first (Acts 13–14) and second (Acts 15:36–17:22) missionary journeys.²⁰ In the chapters leading up to Acts 15, Jesus' prediction that his disciplines should bear witness "in Jerusalem, in the whole of Judaea and Samaria, and until the end of the earth" (1:8) begins to be realized, as "Judaean from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5), Samaritans (Acts 8:4–8, 14–18, 25), and individuals and groups from various *ethnê* (Acts 8:26–40, 10–11, 13–14) come to join the Jesus movement. Thus, beginning from Jerusalem the disciples' forced (Acts 8:1–4) and voluntary (Acts 13:1–3) travels made sure that the circles of those who joined this new movement grew wider and wider.

Encouraging as these developments may be, they are paired with increasing uncertainty about the character of the Jesus movement. In Hermans and Hermans-Konopka's terms, the first chapters of Acts display an increase in complexity and ambiguity. As a varied assemblage of non-Judaeans join the Jesus movement, the range of self-positions available to this movement—as it were²¹—increases. This creates the type of complexity in which "a great number of parts (of self and society) that have a variety of interconnections" must be managed.²² Seeing that these potential self-positions are intrinsically related to one another through their common acceptance of the apostles' message, the multiplication of these self-positions breeds ambiguity about the terms by which they should go together.

This type of complexity and ambiguity, Hermans and Hermans-Konopka point out, results in deficit knowledge about "a superordinate knowledge structure that

20 Cf. how Hermann Wolfgang Beyer, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1932), 91 describes the apostolic meeting as Acts' "Herzstück." Beyer is quoted with approval by Charles K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, ICC (London: T&T Clark, 1994, 1998), 696.

21 As a psychological notion, the concept of the dialogical self is not straightforwardly applicable to a societal group instead of an individual human being. At the same time, in its conception of the self as a "micro-society" in which a range of self-positions is in dialogue with one another, Dialogical Self Theory draws an explicit parallel between dialogical society and the dialogical self. If what happens in society happens on a micro-level in the self, the reverse may also be true: what we see happening in individuals reflects broader societal developments. Applied to the topic of this paper, the dialogical selves of Peter and Paul as Acts constructs them can be taken as symbols for the type of group the book wishes to promote. On the self as a micro-society see, e.g., Hubert J. M. Hermans, "Dialogical Self Theory in a Boundary-Crossing Society," in *Moral and Spiritual Leadership in an Age of Plural Moralities*, ed. Hans Alma and Ina ter Avest (London: Routledge, 2019), 27–47.

22 Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, *Dialogical Self Theory*, 3.

is able to resolve the contradictions between the parts.”²³ Providing such a structure, I would argue, is one of the key purposes of the book of Acts. The only New Testament writing to employ the term “the Way” as a self-designation,²⁴ Acts sets out to build a self-understanding for this novel movement in which its various self-positions are in a healthy dialogue with one another. At the same time, the overarching structures Acts proposes are nowhere fully fledged, and a certain amount of uncertainty and unpredictability—Hermans and Hermans-Konopka’s fourth characteristic of uncertainty—remains.

The apostolic council illustrates the tension between reducing and upholding uncertainty, which runs throughout the book of Acts. The decree that results from the apostolic meeting has often been taken to serve a legislative function, providing a list of minimum requirements which non-Jewish members of the Way would have to fulfil (cf. Acts 15:5, 20).²⁵ Yet such a legislative reading of the decree is not self-evident. To begin with, the terms of the decree do not amount to clear-cut regulations. The two versions of the decree (Acts 15:20, 29) differ in the order and formulation of their terms, and the exact meaning of the individual terms remains disputed, as the history of interpretation evidences.²⁶ Second, Acts 15 has apparently undergone a process of redaction, with Acts’ author including an earlier source (or sources)—probably reflected in Acts 15:29 (par. 21:25)—into his narrative. In that case, while the original source may have served some legislative purpose, in the hands of Acts’ author, it becomes a token of identity for the Way.²⁷ Third, the letter that communicates the apostles’ decision explicitly acknowledges its limited geographical validity

23 Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, *Dialogical Self Theory*, 3.

24 Though the term may have its roots in Luke’s gospel. On the term see Paul Trebilco, *Self-Designations and Group Identity in the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 247–71; Pieter B. Hartog, “Reading Acts in Motion: Motion and Globalisation in the Acts of the Apostles,” in *Mediterranean Flows: People, Ideas and Objects in Motion*, ed. Anna Usacheva and Emilia Mataix Ferrándiz, *Contexts of Ancient and Medieval Anthropology* 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 96–110 (100–102).

25 See, e.g. Markus Bockmuehl, “The Noahide Commandments and New Testament Ethics: With Special Reference to Acts 15 and Pauline Halakhah,” *RevB* 102 (1995): 72–101 (93); Richard Bauckham, “James and the Gentiles (Acts 15.13–21),” in *History, Literature, and Society in the Book of Acts*, ed. Ben Witherington, III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 154–84 (154); Jürgen Wehnert, *Die Reinheit des »christlichen Gottesvolkes« aus Juden und Heiden: Studien zum historischen und theologischen Hintergrund des sogenannten Aposteldekrets*, *FRLANT* 173 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997); John van Eck, *Handelingen: De wereld in het geding* (Kampen: Kok, 2003), 317–37, esp. 327–31.

26 Space does not permit a full discussion; see Hartog, “Noah and Moses,” 501–7 for references.

27 On the literary history of Acts 15 see, e.g., Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 455–72; Gerhard Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte: II. Teil* (Freiburg: Herder, 1982), 174–77, 187, 189–92; Wehnert, *Reinheit*, 33–55; Lutz Doering, *Ancient*

to Jesus followers “in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia” (Acts 15:23).²⁸ Finally, the four requirements in the decree are rather one-sided as a legislative program: three of the four requirements (idols, blood, and strangled things) appear to have a cultic background, while only one term (sexual misconduct) governs human interaction. It appears, therefore, that Acts’ story about the apostolic meeting is not so much about what members of the Way should *do*, but about how they should *understand* the movement to which they now belong. The central question this chapter (and, by extension, the entire book of Acts²⁹) seeks to answer, is: what type of movement is the Way?³⁰

As I have argued elsewhere,³¹ Acts 15 answers this question in two ways. First, the decree’s terms *πορνεία* and *αἷμα*, as well as the command to abstain from idolatry—if that is what *ἀλίσηγμα* in Acts 15:20 means—seem to evoke commandments associated with Noah in Gen 8–9, which are to govern human life after the flood. Second, the terms *πορνεία*, *ἀλίσηγμα*, and *πνικτόν* suggest a connection between the decree and laws pertaining to the *gerim* as they feature in the Levitical Holiness Code (Lev 17–26). In both cases, the universalist appeal of the group model involved—the laws in Gen 8–9 apply to all human beings who are to inhabit the earth anew, those alluded to from Lev 17–26 to Israelites and *gerim* together—makes these models well-suited to characterize the Way, in which Jews and non-Jews from a broad range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds come together.

At the same time, neither the connection with Noah-related commandments nor that with the Holiness Code are spelled out explicitly and in full. The background of most terms in the decree remains highly ambiguous, and the names of

Jewish Letters and the Beginnings of Christian Epistolography, WUNT 298 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012) 464–65.

28 Cf. Helmut Löhr, “Unzucht’: Überlegungen zu einer Bestimmung der Jakobus-Klauseln im Aposteldekret sowie zu den Geltungsgründen von Normen frühchristlicher Ethik,” in *Aposteldekret und antikes Vereinswesen: Gemeinschaft und ihre Ordnung*, ed. Markus Öhler, WUNT 280 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 49–64.

29 Cf. Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, xxxvi, who describes how the purpose of Acts 15 symbolizes that of Acts as a whole.

30 For readings of Acts 15 that emphasize the chapter’s identity-constructive rather than legislative purposes see Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, SaPaSe 5 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 270; Burkhard Jürgens, *Zweierlei Anfang: Kommunikative Konstruktionen heidenchristlicher Identität in Gal 2 und Apg 15*, BBB 120 (Berlin: Philo, 1999); Roland Deines, “Das Aposteldekret—Halacha für Heidenchristen oder christliche Rücksichtnahme auf jüdische Tabus?” in *Jewish Identity in the Greco-Roman World: Jüdische Identität in der griechisch-römischen Welt*, ed. Jörg Frey, Daniel R. Schwartz, and Stephanie Gripenotrog, AJEC 71 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 323–95; Markus Öhler, “Das Aposteldekret als Dokument ethnischer Identität im Spiegel antiker Vereinigungen,” in Öhler, *Aposteldekret und antikes Vereinswesen*, 341–82.

31 Hartog, “Noah and Moses.”

Noah and Moses are absent as sources for the decree's contents.³² The literary effect of this play between aligning the Way with and distancing it from the generation of human beings after the flood and the legal unity of Israelites and *gerim* in some of the regulations from the Holiness Code is to portray this movement at the same time as a group reminiscent of earlier groups in Israel's history and as something fundamentally new. In Hermans and Hermans-Konopka's terms, therefore, Acts 15 both reduces uncertainty—by offering models by which to make sense of the complexity and ambiguity that surrounds the Jesus movement—and fosters it—by not fully aligning the Jesus movement with these models. Throughout Acts, an amount of unpredictability persists.

This unpredictability plays out on the literary level as well. As I pointed out, Acts 15 offers an interlude in between Paul's unabated travels. As Paul's journeys continue in Acts 16 and take a turn to Macedonia (Acts 16:6–10), Acts allows for the possibility of discovering new self-positions and, in their wake, new overarching structures in which they fit. This is not merely a hypothetical possibility, as Paul's speech in Athens (Acts 17:16–34) demonstrates. In that speech, Paul portrays the Way not in terms of post-flood humanity or a group of Israelites and *gerim*, but—through an Aratus quotation—as the offspring of God/Zeus, the father of all (Acts 17:25–28). In this particular case, Paul's acquaintance with a new group he encounters on his journeys triggers him to find a new conceptual framework to make sense of the type of group that the followers of the Way constitute.

Ultimately, Paul's travels take him to Rome, and this is where the book of Acts ends off (Acts 28:11–31). As several scholars have argued, Acts' sudden end captures the openness of the book as a whole.³³ If Acts reads as a search for categories to make sense of the early Jesus movement, its final sentence about Paul proclaiming God's kingdom in Rome reads as an invitation to Acts' readers to continue that search. Seeing that the book of Acts was written quite some time after Paul's alleged

32 Moses is mentioned in Acts 15:21, but not as inspiration for the terms of the apostolic decree. Noah is entirely absent from Acts. On the background of the terms of the decree see—from different perspectives—Terence Callan, "The Background of the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25)," *CBQ* 55 (1993): 284–97; Friedrich Avemarie, "Die jüdischen Wurzeln des Aposteldekrets: Lösbare und ungelöste Probleme," in Öhler, *Aposteldekret und antikes Vereinswesen*, 5–32.

33 See most notably Daniel Marguerat, *The First Christian Historian: Writing the "Acts of the Apostles"*, SNTSMS 121 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 205–30. See also Pieter B. Hartog, "Ioudaioi and Migrant Apostles in the book of Acts," in *Migration und biblische Theologie: Positionen und theologische Herausforderungen aus Perspektive der alt- und neutestamentlichen Wissenschaft*, ed. Benedikt Hensel and Christian Wetz, *Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2023), 479–94 (488–90). For a survey of different views see Karl L. Armstrong, "The End of Acts and the Jewish Response: Condemnation, Tragedy, or Hope?" *CBR* 17 (2019): 209–30.

arrival in Rome,³⁴ the end of the book opens up a space for readers to reflect on the development of the Way after Paul—a development of which they themselves have been a part. In the ongoing development of the early Jesus movement and the related move towards a dialogical self-understanding, Paul's arrival and proclamation in Rome inaugurates a new episode. Only this episode has not finished, and Acts' readers are exhorted to reflect on and take their place within the Way.

To sum up, the experience of uncertainty that accompanies ancient travelers finds literary expression in the book of Acts, where the spread of the apostles' message results in an increase of complexity and ambiguity within the Jesus movement. The apostolic meeting in Acts 15 addresses this complexity and ambiguity and reduces uncertainty by offering humanity in the time of Noah and joint legislation for Israelites and *gerim* as frameworks for understanding the Way. At the same time, Acts 15 does not fully resolve the uncertainty that shines through in Acts' earlier chapters, in that none of the groups models this chapter offers is fully developed. Thus the chapter sets the stage for the journeys that follow and, eventually, for Acts' open end, which exhorts it readers to reflect on and take their place within the Way.

Constructing Group Identity Through Travel Narratives

As I have sought to show, Acts of the Apostles testifies to the transformative potential of travel narratives for the construction of both personal and communal identities. This transformative potential results from the uncertainty that accompanies one's travels. As Hermans and Hermans-Konopka argue, one can react in various ways when one finds themselves in a situation of a sudden proliferation of self-po-

34 The date of Acts is a notorious point of contention among New Testament scholars. Not only do many scholars consider the dates of Luke and Acts in tandem, therefore tending to deny a late date for the latter writing, but even those scholars who take Acts on its own differ greatly in their datings. Arguing for a date in the 2nd century are the contributions to Rubén R. Dupertuis and Todd Penner, eds., *Engaging Early Christian History: Reading Acts in the Second Century* (Oxford: Routledge, 2013). Arguing for an early date is Karl L. Armstrong, *Dating Acts in its Jewish and Greco-Roman Contexts*, LNTS 637 (London: T&T Clark, 2021). Arguing for a middle position because of Acts' alleged reflection of Roman imperial policies is Drew W. Billings, *Acts of the Apostles and the Rhetoric of Roman Imperialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). I tend to agree with Matthias Klinghardt's argument that Acts serves as an *Integrationstext*; this would suggest a later rather than earlier date, though perhaps not as late as Klinghardt proposes. See Matthias Klinghardt, "Das Aposteldekret als kanonischer Integrationstext: Konstruktion und Begründung von Gemeinsinn," in Öhler, *Aposteldekret und antikes Vereinswesen*, 91–112; Hartog, "Noah and Moses."

sitions. For some individuals, such situations can result in a loss of self and a painful process of recovering a sense of self. A better reaction, write the two authors, is to embrace the uncertainty, manage and reduce it, and so arrive at a new selves in which old and new self-positions are in dialogue with one another.

The Roman empire facilitated travel in unprecedented fashion, and it is no surprise that processes similar to the ones described by Hermans and Hermans-Konopka and featuring in Acts of the Apostles can be recognized in literary writings from the first centuries of our era. In the Hellenistic and Roman periods, study journeys and touristic travels were well-known phenomena among the societal elites and aided those who undertook them to gain in knowledge, wisdom, and a deepened sense of belonging in the world.³⁵ One representative of this phenomenon is Pausanias (2nd century CE), who offers an account of his journey across Greece in his *Periegesis Hellados*. Yet Pausanias' Greece is, as Jaś Elsner remarks, "a fantasy."³⁶ Pausanias' depiction of Greece turns the territory into a symbol of what once was, reviving those aspects of the past which Pausanias deems fitting for his own understanding as a Greek author living under Rome.³⁷ In this way, Pausanias' travel account offers fruitful opportunities for constructing Greekness. In Elsner's words, "[Pausanias'] collection of *hellenika* . . . makes every object or event, as Pausanias meets it in his time, into a direct channel to the myths and histories in which Greek identity is represented as inhering for all time."³⁸

Another witness to travel as a source of constructing cultural identity is Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*. Philostratus (2nd–3rd century CE) writes not about his own journeys, but about those of Pythagorean philosopher-cum-wonder-worker Apollonius, who lived in the first century CE. A prolonged journey to India occupies a central place in Philostratus' narrative (V A 2–3).³⁹ India, for Philostratus

³⁵ On educational journeys see André and Baslez, *Voyager dans l'Antiquité*, 297–315. On tourism see André and Baslez, *Voyager dans l'Antiquité*, 317–72; René Bloch, *Andromeda in Jaffa: Mythische Orte als Reiseziele in der jüdischen Antike*, Franz-Delitzsch-Vorlesung 2015 (Münster: Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum, 2017).

³⁶ Jaś Elsner, "Structuring 'Greece': Pausanias' *Periegesis* as a Literary Construct," in *Pausanias: Travel and Memory in Roman Greece*, ed. Susan E. Alcock, John F. Cherry, and Jaś Elsner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3–20 (18).

³⁷ On Pausanias' project see Maria Pretzler, *Pausanias: Travel Writing in Ancient Greece* (London: Duckworth, 2007); Janick Auberger, "Pausanias le Périégète et la Seconde Sophistique," in *Perceptions of the Second Sophistic and Its Times—Regards sur la Seconde Sophistique et son époque*, ed. Thomas Schmidt and Pascale Fleury, Phoenix Supplementary Volume 49 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 133–45.

³⁸ Elsner, "Structuring 'Greece'," 19.

³⁹ For a more elaborate analysis of Apollonius' visit to the Brahmins see Hartog, "Where Shall Wisdom be Found?" 135–42.

tus, counts as the zenith of wisdom and Apollonius' journey there is the final step in reaching the status of sage. Yet Philostratus' India is an ambiguous place. On the one hand, it represents Greek culture, as all individuals Apollonius encounters on his journeys speak Greek, and king Phraotes of Taxila practices sports "in the Greek way" (VA 2.27) and offers a meal reminiscent of Greek symposia (VA 2.27–28). To an extent, India here "serves only to comment on Greek practice and enhance the superlative Greekness of Apollonius."⁴⁰ On the other hand, India remains a distinctly non-Greek place. Phraotes, for all his Greek behavior, apologizes for having been born a barbarian (VA 2.27); the Brahmins explicitly criticize Greek wisdom (VA 3.18, 3.25); and Philostratus makes a point of India's location beyond the river Hyphasis—the traditional eastern border of the Hellenistic empire.⁴¹ The literary effect of this ambiguous portrayal of India and Greekness is the promotion of a new understanding of what it means to be culturally Greek. As Janet Downie argues, "one of the central concerns of the *Life of Apollonius* [is]: what is the nature and value of Hellenism in a cosmopolitan, imperial world?"⁴² The outcome of Apollonius' quest is a dialogical sense of Greekness, in which the wisdom of a wide range of cultural traditions which Apollonius encountered on his journeys is in dialogue with one another. The phrase "to a wise man Greece is everywhere" (VA 1.35)—sometimes taken as the motto of the *Life of Apollonius*—aptly captures this dialogical understanding of Greekness: if Greekness can be found everywhere, all localities, vice versa, have something to contribute to Greekness as an overarching dialogical category.

A final example is Philo of Alexandria, a Judaeon philosopher and politician, who lived in 1st-century CE Alexandria. In his *Legatio ad Gaium*, Philo narrates how he travelled to Rome to plead the case for the Alexandrian Judaeans. The cause for this embassy was the riots that had broken out in Alexandria in 38 CE between Judaeon and Greek inhabitants of the city. Philo's account of these riots and his journey to Rome are, just as Pausanias' Greece, a fantasy that serves specific goals. As I have shown elsewhere, the *Legatio* offers an understanding of the *Ioudaios ethnos* as upholding traditional Roman values (that is, values that characterized the rule of the first emperors Augustus and Tiberius) at a time when the entire

⁴⁰ Kendra Eshleman, "Indian Travel and Self-Location in the *Life of Apollonius* and the *Acts of Thomas*," in *Journeys in the Roman East: Imagined and Real*, ed. Maren R. Niehoff, Culture, Religion, and Politics in the Greco-Roman World 1 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 183–201 (191).

⁴¹ See Arr., *Anab.* 5.28.1–29.1.

⁴² Janet Downie, "Palamedes and the Wisdom of India in Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*," *Mouseion* 13 (2016): 65–83 (65).

empire is under threat as a result of young Caligula's reckless actions.⁴³ This notion of Judeans as faithful Romans bolsters the rationale for the embassy in which Philo partakes: as he journeys to Rome, Philo participates in the structures of the Roman empire, just as loyal inhabitants of that empire would.⁴⁴

In these three examples, literary depictions of travel serve to promote particular constructions of identity. Pausanias' journey to Greece revives the Greek past as Pausanias understood it; Apollonius' travels across and beyond the Roman empire embody a cosmopolitan, dialogical understanding of Greekness; and Philo's journey to Rome enables him to portray the *Ioudaios ethnos* as a guardian of Roman values. The book of Acts thus fits the literary culture of the first centuries of our era: its emphasis on travel enables its author to construct the Way as the realization of eschatological predictions in Israel's Scriptures, which had foreseen the joining together of Jews and non-Jews at the end of times.⁴⁵ Thus, in Acts too, travel motifs offer fruitful opportunities to construct group identity and position one's group within the globalized Roman empire.

Conclusion

In the ancient world, travel was often a source of anxiety and uncertainty. Employing the modern-day psychological notion of the dialogical self, I have attempted to show how narrated travel experiences can also inspire new or altered constructions of personal and group identity. In the book of Acts, the apostles' journeys and the consequent spread of their message raises the question how the early Jesus movement should be understood. Acts as a whole, but especially chapter 15, can be read as an attempt to reduce that uncertainty, while also leaving some uncertainty and appealing to its readers to take their position within the Way. As it employs travel

⁴³ Pieter B. Hartog, "Contesting *Oikoumene*: Resistance and Locality in Philo's *Legatio ad Gaium*," in *Intolerance, Polemics, and Debate in Antiquity: Politico-Cultural, Philosophical, and Religious Forms of Critical Conversation*, ed. George van Kooten and Jacques van Ruiten, TBN 25 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 205–31.

⁴⁴ This Roman portrayal of the Judeans may correlate with a broader development in Philo's thinking. In her intellectual biography of Philo, Maren Niehoff argues that the journey to Rome had a lasting impact on his thinking, as is evident not only from the *Legatio* and *In Flaccum*, but also from other writings that stem from the later stages of Philo's life. See Maren R. Niehoff, *Philo of Alexandria: An Intellectual Biography*, AYBRL (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 25–46.

⁴⁵ Acts' indebtedness to these predictions is evident from the central place that eschatologically oriented quotations from Israel's Scriptures occupy in the Acts narrative. See, e.g., quotations from Joel 3:1 in Acts 2:28 or Amos 9:11–12 in Acts 15:16–17. Cf. Hartog, "Reading Acts in Motion," 107–10.

experiences, coined in literary writing, to promote a particular sense of belonging in the world, the book of Acts can be seen to join the ranks of other writings from the Roman imperial period, both Jewish and other.

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