

## Some Notes on Ears in Luke-Acts, especially in Lk. 4.21

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Both in the gospel according to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles some remarkable references about ears<sup>1</sup> can be found. The question, however, arises whether these are idiomatic phrases or theological figures.

Some ear passages in the third gospel are due to the Marcan tradition: The *Weckformel* Lk. 8.8 (as a *Wanderlogion* in 14.35)<sup>2</sup> is already found in Mk. 4.9. This set phrase is not treated in this essay.

In the story of Jesus' arrest the Marcan *ὠτάριον* (14.47) is changed by Luke to *οὖς* (Lk. 22.50). Not only a rather enigmatic answer to the disciples [Lk. 22,51a,b] but also the healing of the soldier's ear (*ὠτίον*) cut off by one of Jesus' disciples is related (Lk. 22.51c an addition to Mk. 14.47). Jesus seems to be (like) the one who »planted the ear« and who therefore grants human requests (Ps. 94.9a)<sup>3</sup> as shown in Jesus' answer to the co-delinquent in Lk. 23.43.

The second passion announcement (cp. Mk. 9.30-32) in Lk. 9.43b-45 is considerably redacted. The Lucan Jesus introduces the actual announcement by the challenge: »Put into your ears these words: ...« (v. 44) – instead of the plain imperative *ἀκούετε*.<sup>4</sup> The verb *τιθέναι* can also be used with *ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ* (Lk. 1.66) and *ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις* (Lk. 21.14) in a similar sense. Heart and ear belong together in receiving the divine word as is mentioned in Acts 28.27 quoting Jes. 6.10.

Lk. 12.3b is borrowed from Q (cp. Mt. 10.27): *ὁ πρὸς τὸ οὖς ἐλαλήσατε ἐν τοῖς ταμείοις κηρυχθήσεται ἐπὶ τῶν δωματίων* (italics for Lucan wording). Luke improves the frequently used (semitic) prepositional expression *εἰς τὸ οὖς* in Q (and also in Mt.) with *πρὸς* although he himself leaves this, but with the plural *ὄτα*, in an other

<sup>1</sup> Lk. 1.44; 4.21; 8.8; 9.44; 12.3; 14.35; 22.50; Act. 7.51,57; 11.22; 28.27 (*bis*): *οὖς/ὄτα*; Lk. 22.51 *ὠτίον* (cp. Mt. 26.56; Jn. 18.26); the diminutive term *ὠτάριον* (Mk. 14.47; Jn. 18.10) is lacking in Luke-Acts (also already in the Septuagint).

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Rev. 2.7,11,17,29; 3.6,13,22 and 13.9.

<sup>3</sup> Cp. Ps. 40.7; Prov. 20.12.

<sup>4</sup> Cp. Ex. 17.14 (*διδόναι εἰς τὰ ὄτα*).

tradition (1.44) and in an own text (9.44; cp. Act. 11.22). And he keeps Q's (also in classical Greek occurring<sup>5</sup>) λαλεῖν altered by Matthew to ἀκούειν (cp. Act. 11.22) and he adds ἐν τοῖς ταμείοις, another antonym to ἐπὶ τῶν δωμάτων. It's not about the rather banal fact people hear by means of the ears, but about the disciples' task: to confess privately (12.3) and publicly (12.11,12).

In adopted texts (from Mk. and Q) Luke obviously handles the ear motif deliberately.

The *Antrittspredigt* in Lk. 4.16-30 is one of the most important texts in the gospel. Jesus recites the *haftara* Jes. 61.1,2 adding Jes. 58.6.<sup>6</sup> Only the initial sentence of his sermon is related (Lk. 4.21): »Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your ears.«<sup>7</sup> A rather peculiar expression – and somewhat surprising, for the preceding sentence refers to the audience's *eyes* turning to Jesus. What is the meaning of this ear-fulfilment? Does »in your ears« paraphrase an *adverbiale temporis* meaning »now« or »in your presence«?<sup>8</sup> But then there is a certain redundancy putting »now« and »today«<sup>9</sup> side by side. – Ulrich Busse suggests that only »die endzeitliche Verwirklichung des Schriftwortes« by Jesus' words is at stake and Jesus' deeds are not.<sup>10</sup> But the latter ones are touched by the *haftara*, and v. 23d proves the deeds of Jesus

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<sup>5</sup> E.g. Euripides, *Orest* 616-617; Sophokles, *Aias* 148-149 in the sense »to whisper (directly) into somebody's ear« (J. HORST, οὐς: ThWNT 5, 1954, 543-557: 544).

<sup>6</sup> Cp. Act. 13.27: The *haftaroth* read in the synagogue service and Jesus.

<sup>7</sup> Jesus' words and the fulfilment of scripture are combined also in Lk. 24.44.

<sup>8</sup> HORST, οὐς 546 n. 31. Joseph A. FITZMYER comments by »as you sit listening« (The Gospel According to Luke [I-IX], *AncBib* 28, Garden City/NY 1981, 534); but why this solemn formulation in Luke instead of a simple *genitivus absolutus* as the Septuagint translates שָׁמַעְתְּ in Gen. 23.10 (see below at n. 16) and as Luke likes to write (W. RADL, *Das Lukas-Evangelium*, EdF 261, Darmstadt 1988, 19)?

<sup>9</sup> σήμερον is expressive in Luke in conjunction with faith and salvation (2.11; 13.32,33; 19.5,9; 23.43).

<sup>10</sup> U. BUSSE, *Das Nazareth-Manifest Jesu. Eine Einführung in das lukanische Jesusbild nach Lk 4,16-30*, SBS 91, Stuttgart 1978, 37; cp. E. SCHWEIZER, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, NTD 3, Göttingen 1982, 58 (»daß Menschen das Wort Jesu als Heil erfahren können« [italics Schweizer's]) and W.J. HOUSTON, »Today, in Your Very Hearing«: Some Comments on the Christological Use of the Old Testament: L.D. HURST/N.T. WRIGHT (eds.), *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament. Studies in Christology in Memory of George Bradford Caird*, Oxford 1987, 37-47: 47 (»it was fulfilled as it was read« [performative]).

have already changed into words (ὅσα ἠκούσαμεν γενόμενα).<sup>11</sup> – François Bovon characterizes Jesus' Nazareth sermon as the audible fulfilment, Jesus' baptism (Lk. 3.21-22) as the visible fulfilment.<sup>12</sup> But why this partition? – Bart-J. Koet in his thorough essay on the *Antrittspredigt* reduces the ear motif to »a sign of openness to God's Word«. <sup>13</sup> But what is the very idea of that? The audience, nevertheless, is found to be not open for the divine word (v. 28-29). – All these scholars understand the phrase »in your ears« as a restriction.<sup>14</sup>

In what way is this phrase of any importance? Does it define Jesus (Busse and Bovon) or rather his audience (Koet)?<sup>15</sup> Considering that the wording ἐν τοῖς ὠσίν is a characteristically Lucan Septuagintism – as a literal translation of the Hebrew שְׁמָעוּ<sup>16</sup> – we have a clue to an answer. This syntagm evokes at least three connotations: According to Jdc. 17.2; 2Sam. (Reg.) 18.12; 2Kgs. (4Reg.) 18.26; Iob 33.8; Jer. 26 (33).<sup>11</sup>, it denotes ear witness(es) or less to the point somebody's presence (1.). Combined with ἀκούειν the phrase ἐν τοῖς ὠσίν sometimes refers to God's laws in Dt. 5.1, his great deeds in Ps. 44 (43).<sup>2</sup>, or to his promises in 2Sam. (2Reg.) 7.22 (cp. 1Chr. 17.20) – both are also treated in the Lucan *Antrittspredigt* (2.). And finally the phrase

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<sup>11</sup> Note that the Baptist's disciples are called to inform John of what they have seen as well as heard (Lk. 7.22b).

<sup>12</sup> F. BOVON, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (Lk 1,1-9,50), EKK 3/1, Zürich and Neukirchen-Vluyn 1989, 213. Cp. M. RESE, *Alttestamentliche Motive in der Christologie des Lukas*, StNT 1, Gütersloh 1969, 147: »Das beschriebene Heil wird im Predigen Jesu offenbar; im Predigen, denn diese Schriftstelle wird ἐν τοῖς ὠσίν ὑμῶν erfüllt, über das Sehen wird ... geschwiegen«.

<sup>13</sup> B.-J. KOET, »Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your ears«. Jesus' explanation of Scripture in Luke 4,16-30: *Bijdr.* 47, 1986, 368-394: 380 (reprinted in his *Five Studies on Interpretation of Scripture in Luke-Acts*, SNTA 14, Leuven 1989, 24-55: 38).

<sup>14</sup> Manfred Korn, finally, understands the fulfilment as »an das anredende und treffende Wort gebunden, das durch Jesus ermöglicht wird«; thus the »Historisierung und Verobjektivierung« of the σήμερον is excluded (M. KORN, *Die Geschichte Jesu in veränderter Zeit. Studien zur bleibenden Bedeutung Jesu im lukanischen Doppelwerk*, WUNT 2,51, Tübingen 1993, 79).

<sup>15</sup> Gabriel Kyo-Seon Shin similarly distinguishes two possibilities of understanding: with emphasis either on the »Heilsanbruch« or on »die Betroffenheit und Entscheidung der Menschen« (G. K.-S. SHIN, *Die Ausrufung des endgültigen Jubeljahres durch Jesus in Nazaret. Eine historisch-kritische Studie zu Lk 4,16-30*, EHS.T 378, Bern u.a. 1989, 189).

<sup>16</sup> P. JOÛON, *Notes de Lexicographie Hébraïque: Mélanges de la Faculté orientale* (Université Saint-Joseph Beyrouth) 6, 1913, 160-212: 160-162.

ἐν τοῖς ὧσιν expresses even the revelation – God addressing man directly – as in 1Sam. (Reg.) 3.17 (3.).<sup>17</sup>

It's these aspects – and in particular the latter two – Luke wants to be heard: The obvious parallel Lk. 24.44 mentions Jesus' former association with the disciples (ἐτι ὦν σὺν ὑμῖν).<sup>18</sup> Lk. 4.21 (by the phrase ἐν τοῖς ὧσιν ὑμῶν) is pointing also to the audience's presence and association with Jesus (1.). But in addition to that simple fact – that is the gist of the present paper – in the service at the Nazareth synagogue Jesus' contemporaries have heard Jesus' words about his own deeds (2.) quoting scripture and qualifying both as divine (3.). Jesus is indeed the man in whom the Lord's spirit is (v. 18a), and who preaches the gospel to the poor (v. 18c). The Nazarenes thus acknowledge – at first – Jesus' words to be οἱ λόγοι τῆς χάριτος (v. 22a). And also Theophilus as the addressee and first reader of Luke's διήγησις (Lk 1.1,3) and all Christians will in their services in Rome and elsewhere hear ›in their ears‹ Jesus' words and deeds as scripture in which salvation actually will happen.<sup>19</sup> The solemn wording of Lk. 4.21 leads readers to an insight into Jesus' divine dignity.

An instructive example proving the present interpretation of the *Antrittspredigt* is the Council's reaction to Stephen's vision of the open heaven and the Son of Man standing at God's right hand Acts 7.57: The ear witnesses of Stephen's words »stopped their ears« and similar to the Nazarenes who tried to harm Jesus (Lk. 4.28-29), they stoned Stephen (Act. 7.58-59).

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<sup>17</sup> Cp. Is. 22.14 (but different in the Septuagint); Ez. 9.1; 40.4. The phrase ἐν τοῖς ὧσιν and the verb ἀναγιγνώσκειν (like Lk. 4.16!); 2Kgs. (4Reg.) 23.2 (cp. 2Chr. 34.30); Neh 13.1; Jer. 36 (43).6b,10,14; Bar 1.3-4 (with εἰς Jer 29 [36].29; 36 [43].6a,15).

<sup>18</sup> SHIN, 70-71.

<sup>19</sup> Similar W. ELTESTER, Israel im lukanischen Werk und die Nazarethperikope: E. GRÄSSER/A. STROBEL/R.C. TANNEHILL (eds.), Jesus in Nazareth, BZNW 40, Berlin 1970, 76-147: 140-141 (with reference to Origen's explanation in his homilies on Luke [32.181-184]); cp. KORN 79-80: »Das ›Heute‹ des Heils in der Synagoge von Nazareth ist im Sinne des Lukas die grundsätzliche Ermöglichung eschatologischer Heilserfüllung in der christlichen Gemeinde.«