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## Socrates' Triple Accusation in Plato's *Apol.* 24b–c as a Source of Jesus' Triple Accusation in Luke 23.2

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### Abstract

The article presents evidence for a direct, both formal and contentual, dependence of Jesus' triple accusation in Luke 23.2 upon Socrates' triple accusation in Plato's *Apol.* 24b–c.

**Keywords:** Luke; Jesus; Plato; Apology; Socrates; accusation; imitatio Socratis

The Gospel of Luke<sup>1</sup> relates how chief priests and scribes bring Jesus before Pilate and accuse him: τοῦτον εὐράμεν διαστρέφοντα τὸ ἔθνος ἡμῶν καὶ κωλύοντα φόρους Καίσαρι διδόναι καὶ λέγοντα ἑαυτὸν χριστὸν βασιλέα εἶναι (Luke 23.2). Such a triple accusation appears only in Luke.<sup>2</sup>

Dennis R. MacDonald, in his *Luke and Vergil. Imitations of Classical Greek Literature* (2015), is the only scholar so far to propose Socrates' triple accusation in Plato's *Apology* 24b–c: Σωκράτη φησὶν ἀδικεῖν τοὺς τε νέους διαφθείροντα καὶ θεοὺς οὐς ἡ πόλις νομίζει οὐ νομίζοντα, ἕτερα δὲ δαιμόνια καινά, as the source of Luke 23.2. MacDonald, however, did not subject the similarities between these passages to either philological or contextual analysis, limiting himself to juxtaposing them.<sup>3</sup> Having earlier accepted the seven criteria by which one can determine that a text is probably dependent upon another text (among them: criterion [3] of density and criterion [4] of order),<sup>4</sup> MacDonald concluded that ‘the parallels between Plato's account of Socrates' trial in the *Apology* and Luke's depictions of the trials of Jesus and Paul surely are sufficiently dense and sequential to satisfy criteria 3 and 4’.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, we can only conjecture that by the parallels between ‘Plato's account of Socrates' trial in the *Apology*’ and ‘Luke's depictions of the

<sup>1</sup> For arguments in favor of the Lukan (Col 4.14; 2 Tim 4.11; Phlm 24) authorship of Luke–Acts, see esp. J. M. Kozłowski, ‘Resurrection in the Intertext: Pagan Sources in Paul's Areopagus Speech (Acts 17.22–31)’, *Hellenism, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity Transmission and Transformation of Ideas* (eds. R. Fialová, J. Hobblik and P. Kitzler; *Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte* 155; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022) 51–67, at 51.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Matt 26.60–1; Mark 14.58; John 18.29–30.

<sup>3</sup> D. R. MacDonald, *Luke and Vergil: Imitations of Classical Greek Literature* (Lanham/Boulder/New York/London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015) 75.

<sup>4</sup> ‘3. Density: Simply stated, the more parallels one can posit between two texts, the stronger the case that they issue from a literary connection. 4. The criterion of order examines the relative sequencing of similarities in the two works. If parallels appear in the same order, the case strengthens for a genetic connection’ (MacDonald, *Luke and Vergil*, 13).

<sup>5</sup> MacDonald, *Luke and Vergil*, 117.

trials of Jesus and Paul', we should also understand *Apol.* 24b–c and Luke 23.2 since MacDonald compared the material from 'Plato's *Apology* and *Crito*' (without giving specifics) with that of Luke-Acts (alongside Luke 23.2 MacDonald lists: Acts 16.6–8; 17.18; 17.22; 19.24–9; 19.29; 20.1; 21.34; 24.5–6; 24.18; 24.19–21; 26.12–16a).<sup>6</sup> Thus, the parallels between Luke 23.2 and *Apol.* 24b–c were presented by MacDonald, on the one hand, in a hasty and confusing manner, and, more significantly, the conclusion about the dependence of one passage on the other was not based on any argumentation. It is not surprising then, that MacDonald's conclusion was ignored by scholars who considered the question of parallels between Luke-Acts and Plato's *Apology*.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, MacDonald's intuition that a direct relationship exists between the passages in question is correct. Below, we will present evidence in favour of the thesis that there is a reference to *Apol.* 24b–c in Luke 23.2.

Formal similarities between the two texts can immediately be seen. In both cases, the accusation is composed of three parts. In either case, they can be divided as follows: A1 διαστρέφοντα τὸ ἔθνος ἡμῶν A2 καὶ κωλύοντα φόρους Καίσαρι διδόναι A3 καὶ λέγοντα ἑαυτὸν χριστὸν βασιλέα εἶναι and: B1 τοὺς τε νέους διαφθείροντα B2 καὶ θεοὺς οὓς ἡ πόλις νομίζει οὐ νομίζοντα, B3 ἕτερα δὲ δαιμόνια καινά. In both accusations, all three elements are consecutively expressed by present active participles in the accusative: A1 διαστρέφοντα / B1 διαφθείροντα; A2 κωλύοντα / B2 οὐ νομίζοντα; A3 λέγοντα / B3 (scil.) νομίζοντα. At each of these points, the two texts are analogous in form. In A1 and B1, one finds verbs of similar meaning, beginning with the prefix δια- (δια-στρέφοντα / δια-φθείροντα). The meaning of A2 and B2 is analogously negative (κωλύοντα / οὐ νομίζοντα). In both A3 and B3, there are verbs belonging to the category of *verba sentiendi et dicendi* (λέγοντα / [scil.] νομίζοντα). In both cases the corresponding participles appear in the same sequence.<sup>8</sup>

The analogies, however, go much further. Let us juxtapose the content of these two accusations:

A1 διαστρέφοντα τὸ ἔθνος ἡμῶν / B1 τοὺς τε νέους διαφθείροντα

In both cases, the local community (τοὺς νέους / τὸ ἔθνος ἡμῶν) is the complement of the verb which denotes disturbance (δια-φθείροντα / δια-στρέφοντα). Note also the explanation of Jesus' accusation, which appears a moment later: οἱ δὲ ἐπίσχυον λέγοντες ὅτι ἀνασειεὶ τὸν λαὸν διδάσκων καθ' ὅλης τῆς Ἰουδαίας, καὶ ἀρξάμενος ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας ἕως ᾧδε (Luke 23.5). It is precisely Jesus' teaching (διδάσκων) which is the cause of the social unrest. This brings Jesus even closer to Socrates, whose corrupting of youth consists in his 'teaching' (διδάσκων).<sup>9</sup> In both cases, the accusation is false.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> MacDonald, *Luke and Vergil*, 117–19. The matter is further complicated by the fact that even earlier, MacDonald, within the synopsis 'Passages in Luke-Acts with Proposed Imitations' (on page 8), juxtaposed Luke 23.2 (calling this passage 'Jesus' Crimes and Accusers') with *Apol.* 17a–24c.

<sup>7</sup> We mean first of all: S. Reece, 'Echoes of Plato's *Apology* of Socrates in Luke-Acts', *NovT* 63 (2021) 177–97 and S. Reece, *The Formal Education of the Author of Luke-Acts*, *The Library of New Testament Studies* 669 (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2022) 209–30 [chapter 'Luke and Plato'].

<sup>8</sup> For comparison, it is difficult to find analogous far-reaching formal parallels between Luke 23.2 and Xenophon, *Mem.* 1.1., another text where Socrates' triple accusation appears: ἀδικεῖ Σωκράτης οὓς μὲν ἡ πόλις νομίζει θεοὺς οὐ νομίζων, ἕτερα δὲ καινὰ δαιμόνια εισφέρων· ἀδικεῖ δὲ καὶ τοὺς νέους διαφθείρων.

<sup>9</sup> καὶ ἐπειδὴν τις αὐτοὺς ἐρωτᾷ ὅτι ποιῶν καὶ ὅτι διδάσκων, ἔχουσι μὲν οὐδὲν εἰπεῖν (*Apol.* 23d) and, first of all: λέγε ἡμῖν, πῶς με φῆς διαφθεῖρειν, ὦ Μέλιητε, τοὺς νεωτέρους; ἡ δὲ ἄρα δὴ ὅτι κατὰ τὴν γραφὴν ἦν ἐγράμω θεοὺς διδάσκοντα μὴ νομίζειν οὓς ἡ πόλις νομίζει, ἕτερα δὲ δαιμόνια καινά; οὐ ταῦτα λέγεις ὅτι διδάσκων διαφθεῖραι; (*Apol.* 26b).

<sup>10</sup> As for Socrates, this follows not only from the entire context of the *Apology* but also from what Socrates explicitly says: εἰ γὰρ δὴ ἔγωγε τῶν νέων τοὺς μὲν διαφθείρω τοὺς δὲ διέφθορακα, χρῆν δὴπου, εἴτε τινὲς αὐτῶν πρεσβύτεροι γενόμενοι ἐγνώσαν ὅτι νέους οὖσιν αὐτοῖς ἐγὼ κακὸν πάποτέ τι συνεβούλευσα, νυνὶ

A2 κωλύοντα φόρους Καίσαρι διδόναι / B2 θεοὺς οὓς ἡ πόλις νομίζει οὐ νομίζοντα

In both cases, we are dealing with a false accusation. Questioned by the spies sent by the scribes and chief priests on whether to pay taxes to Caesar or not, Jesus answers: ἀπόδοτε τὰ Καίσαρος Καίσαρι καὶ τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ τῷ θεῷ (Luke 20.25). Socrates, on the other hand, concludes his response to Meletus' accusation by saying: ἀλλὰ γάρ, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, ὡς μὲν ἐγὼ οὐκ ἀδικῶ κατὰ τὴν Μελήτου γραφήν, οὐ πολλῆς μοι δοκεῖ εἶναι ἀπολογία, ἀλλὰ ἰκανὰ καὶ ταῦτα (*Apol.* 28a). We can also observe a certain analogy between the content of the two accusations: both Jesus and Socrates are falsely accused of undermining the social fabric, of which tax collection and official state worship were inalienable parts.

A3 λέγοντα ἑαυτὸν χριστὸν βασιλέα εἶναι / B3 ἕτερα δὲ δαιμόνια καινὰ

In both cases, the content of point 3 (A3 / B3) is related to the content of point 2 (A2 / B3), so we are actually dealing with one accusation consisting of two complementary parts. In *Apology*, not only does Socrates not worship the gods that are recognised by the polis, but he also introduces ἕτερα δαιμόνια καινὰ instead (this is emphasised by the particle δέ). It is similar to Jesus. To make oneself king is to deny Caesar's authority. In the Gospel of John, we read: πᾶς ὁ βασιλέα ἑαυτὸν ποιῶν ἀντιλέγει τῷ Καίσαρι (John 19.12). This idea, however, also appears in Luke-Acts. After Paul and Silas preach the gospel to the Jews in Thessalonica, the Jews denounce the Roman authorities, shouting: οὗτοι πάντες ἀπέναντι τῶν δογμάτων Καίσαρος πράσσουσι, βασιλέα ἕτερον λέγοντες εἶναι Ἰησοῦν (Acts 17.7). There is also a direct analogy between the ἕτερα δαιμόνια καινὰ of Socrates in *Apol.* 24c and the Lukan Jesus, since we read in Acts that Paul, in the eyes of the Athenians, ξένων δαιμονίων δοκεῖ καταγγελεὺς εἶναι, ὅτι τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ τὴν ἀνάστασιν εὐηγγελίζετο (Acts 17.18). This is a clear reminder to readers of Socrates' accusation (see below): the adjectives ξένος and καινός are, in this context, synonyms.<sup>11</sup>

In all Greek literature prior to Luke, there is no passage more similar to Luke 23.2 than *Apol.* 24b–c, in both form and content. Recently, Steve Reece has argued convincingly that the author of Luke-Acts referred to Plato's *Apology* in Acts 5.29 (*Apol.* 29d) and Acts 17.18–20 (*Apol.* 24b–c),<sup>12</sup> drawing an analogy between the fate of the Athenian philosopher and that of Peter, John and Paul. We can, therefore, conclude that Luke intentionally used the formula of Socrates' accusation in *Apol.* 24b–c as a matrix, into which he inserted the accusation of Jesus before Pilate, thereby drawing an analogy between the fate of Socrates and that of Jesus.

Socrates was the 'paradigmatic martyr'<sup>13</sup> of Greco-Roman culture. Especially where the death of an outstanding man, such as a religious leader or a philosopher, was described, associations with Socrates often appeared.<sup>14</sup> In Christian martyrological literature too, the

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αὐτοὺς ἀναβαίνοντας ἐμοῦ κατηγορεῖν καὶ τιμωρεῖσθαι (*Apol.* 33c–d). Likewise with Jesus. The people he is allegedly inciting protect him from the Jewish leaders: καὶ ἦν διδάσκων τὸ καθ' ἡμέραν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ. οἱ δὲ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς ἐζήτουν αὐτὸν ἀπολέσαι καὶ οἱ πρῶτοι τοῦ λαοῦ, καὶ οὐχ εὗρισκον τὸ τί ποιήσωσιν, ὁ λαὸς γὰρ ἅπας ἐξεκρέματο αὐτοῦ ἀκούων (Luke 19.47–8); καὶ ἐζήτησαν οἱ γραμματεῖς καὶ οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς ἐπιβαλεῖν ἐπ' αὐτὸν τὰς χεῖρας ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ ὥρᾳ, καὶ ἐφοβήθησαν τὸν λαόν (Luke 20.19); καὶ οὐκ ἴσχυσαν ἐπιλαβέσθαι αὐτοῦ ῥήματος ἐναντίον τοῦ λαοῦ (Luke 20.26).

<sup>11</sup> E.g. Σωκράτης μὲν ξένα παρεισάγων δαιμόνια δίκην τοῖς Ἀθήνησιν ὠφλίσκανε συκοφάντας (Plutarch, *Alex.* 328d).

<sup>12</sup> See Reece, 'Echoes' and Reece, *The Formal Education*, 209–30.

<sup>13</sup> G. Sterling, 'Mors philosophi: The Death of Jesus in Luke', *HTR* 94 (2001), 383–402, at 401.

<sup>14</sup> E.g. Plutarch, *Cat. Min.* 68.2; 70.1; Seneca, *Ep.* 24.6–8; Tacitus, *Ann.* 16.34–5; see Sterling, 'Mors philosophi', 387–90; E. Wilson, *The Death of Socrates: Hero, Villain, Chatterbox, Saint* (London: Profile Books Ltd, 2007) 119–40.

*imitatio Socratis* motif is strongly present:<sup>15</sup> νῦν πάντες Ἄνυτοι καὶ Μέλητοι, the martyr Pionius says (*Mart. Pion.* 17.2). Steve Reece's recent publications have shown that the *imitatio Socratis* motif appears in Acts with regard to the apostles (see above). The present discovery takes the matter further: *imitatio Socratis* relates also to the Lukan Jesus himself.

**Competing interest.** The authors declare none.

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<sup>15</sup> See L. S. Cobb, 'Polycarp's Cup: Imitatio in the Martyrdom of Polycarp', *JRH* 38 (2014) 224–40, at 229–30; G. Roskam, 'The Figure of Socrates in the Early Christian Acta Martyrum', *Martyrdom and Persecution in Late Ancient Christianity: Festschrift Boudewijn Dehandschutter* (ed. J. Leemans; Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 241; Leuven: Peeters, 2010) 241–56.

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