

## BERNICE: JEWESS, ROMAN CITIZEN, CONCUBINE AND PROTECTOR OF CHRISTIANS (ACTS 25:13–26:32)

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**Abstract:** *Luke is the only New Testament author who mentioned Bernice and appreciated her advice on tolerance (Acts 25:13–26:32). Bernice and Titus ensured in an exemplary manner that in Rome Paul and the Christians were tolerated and both are also models for transcending limits. For the reconstruction of Bernice's personality, I employ feminist hermeneutics. Bernice was the eldest daughter of the Jewish king Herod Agrippa I (10-44 CE) and was born one year after her brother Agrippa II, in the year 28 CE (Jos. Ant 132). At the age of 16, she married her uncle Herod, the king of Chalcis and got the title Queen. After his death, Agrippa II followed, and Bernice moved in with him. According to Acts 25, during the interrogation of Paul by Festus in the year 60 CE Agrippa I and Bernice were still up together. Tacitus indicated that Bernice had begun a relationship with Titus in the year 67, although she was 11 years older. In the year 75 CE Bernice appears in Rome. For the readers of Acts, Agrippa II and Bernice guarantee in the fictitious trial the unhindered proclamation of the Christian message. As the official partner of Titus and officious 'Caesareess' from 75-79 and unofficial Augusta from 79-81, Bernice could have effectively guaranteed the freedom of speech of Christians at the time the Lukan narrative was written.*

**Key Words:** Acts of Apostles; Bernice; Hellenistic Judaism; Jewish; Greeks; Flavius Josephus; Tolerance.

### Introduction

For the reconstruction of Bernice's personality, I employed feminist hermeneutics.<sup>1</sup> Hildegard Temporini-Gräfin Vitzthum published the anthology, *The Empresses of Rome. From Livia to Theodora*,<sup>2</sup> on

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<sup>1</sup> E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her. A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Helmut Castritius, "Die flavische Familie: Frauen neben Vespasian, Titus und Domitian," in *Die Kaiserinnen Roms. Von Livia bis Theodora*, ed. Hildegard Temporini-Gräfin Vitzthum (München: C.H. Beck, 2002), 164-187.

which I base my work. But the editor avoids the term feminist hermeneutics, although, she works with it:

The interpretation of the surviving texts, written exclusively by men, is particularly difficult on our subject... It is the task of the historian, taking into account all the prerequisites - the literary topic as well as the ideological and other time-related subjectivities – to methodically work out the ‘true’ traits to the best of one's ability.<sup>3</sup>

It is about working out their role at the time from the women's perspective. The extent to which this perspective is relevant for the reader-oriented communicative process of pragma-linguistics or action theory is dealt with in section 3.

Section 2 is about the critical-feminist reconstruction of Bernice's biography. It is an excellent example of lived interreligiousness.

## **Biography of Bernice**

### *Childhood and Adolescence*

The name Bernice (Greek Βερ[ε]νίκη), is the Macedonian form of Φερηνίκη and it means ‘bearer of victory.’<sup>4</sup> The eldest daughter of the Jewish king Herod Agrippa I (10-44 CE) bears this name. Agrippa I grew up in Rome. In the years 24–35 CE he commuted between Rome and the Near East (Jos. Ant. 18, 132 - 237). Bernice was born, one year after her brother Agrippa II, in the 28 (Jos. Ant. 132). In the year 37, her father received in Rome the northern Galilean tetrarchy of the deceased uncle Philip and the tetrarchy of Abilene from Lysanias (Jos. Ant. 18, 237-239; cf. Lk 3:1). Then Agrippa I again moved his place of residence to Palestine and Egypt. In the year 38 CE, Galilee, the tetrarchy of Herod Antipas (Jos. Ant. 18, 248-252), was added to his dominion. Until 10 years of age, Bernice lived in constant movement (Jos. Ant. 18, 143-160), while her older brother Agrippa was brought up like his father in Rome at the imperial court (Jos. Ant. 19, 360) and there he learned Greek and Latin.

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<sup>3</sup> Hildegard Temporini-Gräfin Vitzthum, *Die Kaiserinnen Roms. Von Livia bis Theodora* (München: C.H. Beck, 2002), 17f.

<sup>4</sup> R. Rauschenbach, “Bernice/Bernike,” *Neues Bibel-Lexikon*, ed. Görg von Manfred und Bernhard Lang (Düsseldorf – Zürich: Benziger, 1991), I: 271.

Josephus lists the siblings as survivors after the sudden death of Agrippa I: “He left behind a seventeen-year-old son Agrippa and three daughters, of whom the sixteen-year-old Bernice was married to her uncle Herod” (Jos. *Ant.* 19:354). Because Agrippa I died in 44 (Acts 12:20-23), the year 28 CE can be calculated as Bernice's date of birth. Even before the union with the uncle in 44, Bernice was briefly married to Mark, a son of the wealthy Jewish alabarch (tax collector) Alexander Lysimachus in Alexandria.

Agrippa I had close ties with the Jewish and Gentile Greeks in Alexandria. He and his children were from the founder of the Herod dynasty, the Idumean Antipater (100-43 BCE), representatives of Hellenic Judaism and a Roman citizenship holder.

Bernice primarily learned the Greek language. Later, at the beginning of the uprising against Rome in year 66, she spoke soothingly to the people in Jerusalem, so she should also have mastered Aramaic. Her first husband Markus died very early: “Alexander's son then married Agrippa's daughter Bernice. Later, when her husband Marcus, the son of Alexander, died, Agrippa I gave her to his brother Herod and asked Claudius to give him the kingdom of Chalcis” (Jos. *Ant.* 19.277). Chalcis was in the 1<sup>st</sup> century an autonomous small kingdom within the Roman province of Syria (Jos. *Bell.* 2:217). From 44 CE onwards, Herod's uncle was given the title ‘king,’ and Bernice received the title ‘queen’ through her marriage at the age of 16. She had risen to become a wealthy member of the Jewish-Hellenistic upper class.

### *Agrippa II and Bernice (The Younger)*

After the death of Agrippa I (44 CE), Claudius incorporated all parts of Palestine, including the formerly autonomous tetrarchies, back into the Roman province of Syria, since Agrippa II at “seventeen years” was still too young to be an autonomous ruler (Jos. *Ant.*, 19, 360-363).

The authority over the temple, however, remained with Agrippa II's uncle, Herod of Chalcis. After his death (48 CE) Agrippa II was appointed king of Chalcis by Claudius and took over the control of the

temple (Jos. *Ant.* 20, 9-16).<sup>5</sup> Bernice retained the title of "Queen" and her possessions. She had borne Herod two sons who in 48 were still minors (Jos. *Ant.*, 20,104). The sources are silent about their further life. Bernice moved in with her brother and jointly administered the estate (Jos. *Vit.*, 48-49.180-181.343.355). After four years, in 52, Claudius took the kingdom of Chalcis away from Agrippa II. and gave him Ituraea, the former tetrarchy of the deceased Herod Philippos with Batanea and Trachonitis and also Abilene (Jos. *Ant.* 20, 138); Nero added Tarichea and Tiberias in Galilee and Abila and Julias in Perea under the procurator Felix (52-59 CE; cf. Jos. *Bell.* 2.252). However, Samaria, Judea and a large part of Galilee continued to be a Roman procuration within the province of Syria. Agrippa II, therefore, only regained a small part of the empire of his father Agrippa I and great-grandfather Herod I as an autonomous region. But the power to dispose of the temple and the extended dominion increased Agrippa II's prosperity.

### *Bernice, Polemon II and Gessius Florus (64-66 CE)*

Josephus dedicates a biographical anecdote to Bernice for the time after the death of her second husband Herod of Chalcis until the start of the Jewish uprising:

As for Bernice, she lived a long time after the death of Herod, who had been both her husband and her uncle time in widowhood. But when it was rumored that she was in a sinful relationship with her brother, she persuaded Polemon, king of Cilicia, to accept circumcision and to marry her;<sup>6</sup> for in this way she believed that she could get rid of all slander most safely. Polemon agreed, chiefly for the sake of wealth; however, the marriage did not last, as Bernice soon separated from Polemon again, it was said, out of incontinence. After the dissolution of the marriage, Polemon no longer followed the customs and statutes of the Jews (Jos. *Ant.* 20:145-146).

Marriage according to Jewish law with Polemon II (12/11 BCE – 68 CE), the king of Pontus and Cilicia (Cass. *Dio* 60,8,2), came about between the years 48-66. Polemon lost Pontus in 63 and Cilicia in 68;

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. the authority of the Herodians over the temple Julia Wilker, *Für Rom und Jerusalem, Die herodianische Dynastie im 1. Jahrhundert n. Chr* (Studien zur alten Geschichte 5; Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Antike, 2007), 205-319.

<sup>6</sup> Izates II of Adiabene (36-59/60), a vassal king of the Parthians, and his mother Helena also voluntarily converted to Judaism in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

both areas were incorporated into the Roman province of Galatia by Nero. Since Josephus only uses the title ‘King of Cilicia’ for Polemon II, he could mean the period between 63, the loss of Pontus, and 66, the beginning of the Jewish uprising, for the marriage and divorce, i.e. the years 64/65.<sup>7</sup> According to Acts 25, during the interrogation of Paul by Festus in year 60 Agrippa I and Bernice were still up together. Both adhere to the Jewish law with reservations.

Preceding the Jewish uprising 66-70 CE, Bernice tried to win with gifts of the goodwill of the last Roman Prefect Gessius Florus for the Jewish population. After unsuccessful attempts, she supported the protest of the Jerusalemites at Cestus, the legate in Syria, with a letter and in a public speech (Jos. *Bell.* 2:310-314:333). To discourage the Jerusalemites from revolting, Agrippa II delivered a long exhortation from the Hasmonean palace; beside him stood Bernice; but they are driven out of Jerusalem and Judah by the insurgents (Jos. *Bell.* 2, 344-402, 403-407).

### *Bernice, Titus and Vespasian*

Tacitus reports in the *Histories* about Bernice's encounter with Titus (39-81 CE), son of Vespasian, the later leader of all three legions during the Jewish rebellion: “Some believed that he was out of longing for Queen Bernice vice versa. And really, in his youthful heart he was smitten with Bernice, but that was no obstacle to his energetic action” (Suetonius, *Vesp* 4:5-6). First, the 28-year-old son Titus was appointed legate of one legion.

After Galba had been proclaimed emperor by the Senate in June 68 and Vespasian had received the news of why he was in Judea, he sent Titus to Rome to pay homage to the new princeps (Suet., *Tit.* 5:1); but along the journey in Corinth Titus heard about Galba's murder in January 69 and decided to return to Judea (Tac. *Hist.* 2,1). In this context, Tacitus indicated that Bernice had begun a relationship with Titus from year 67, although she was 11 years older.

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<sup>7</sup> Roland Deines, “Berenike,” in *Calwer Bibelllexikon*, ed. Otto Betz, Beate Ego, Werner Grimm (Stuttgart, Calwer Verlag, 2003), I:172; Flavius Josephus, *Aus meinem Leben (Vita)* ed. and comment Folker Siegert, Heinz Schreckenberg and Manuel Vogel (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 200.

She also supported the decision of Vespasian to profile himself as a candidate for emperor against Otho (emperor from 15.1-16.4.69) and to proclaim himself anti-emperor in July 69 against Vitellius (April-December 70 emperor):

Even before the fifteenth of July all Syria had sworn the same oath of allegiance...Soon Agrippa, summoned from the capital by secret messengers of his people, hastened to him before Vitellius found out about it. And the Flavian party was supported with no less sympathy by Queen Bernice, a young, beautiful figure, who also found favor with the aged Vespasianus thanks to her magnificent gifts (Tac. *Hist.* 2,81).

Bernice supported with her wealth Polemon II – king of Cypress and former husband – the oppressed Jews with a vein bribe of Gessius Florus and finally the Flavians against the rebellious Jews. In addition, with her beauty and wealth, she won over the son and father of the future ruling family.

### **Bernice in Rome**

After mentioning the “sixth consulship of Vespasian and the fourth of Titus,” which follow the year of Caenis' death that took place in the year 75, Cassius Dio reports the appearance of Bernice in Rome:

Bernice was then at the peak of her power and therefore came to Rome with her brother Agrippa. And while he was decorated with the dignity of the praetor, she was allowed to reside in the palace and have intercourse with Titus. She was counting on marrying him and already pretended in everything to be his wife; but when Titus noticed that the Romans did not agree, he dismissed her (Cass. *Dio* 65,15,1.4).

Sueton confirms the promise of marriage and the mutual involuntary separation after the enthronement:

His propensity for debauchery did not lessen because of whole crowds of prostitutes and eunuchs and his unprecedented love for Queen Bernice, whom he is said to have even promised to marry... He immediately sent Bernice away from Rome, involuntarily and also against her will (Suet. Tit. 7,1-2).

Not until the death of Caenis – the concubine of Vespasian – did Titus allow Bernice to come to Rome with a promise of marriage and Agrippa II is allowed to accompany her.

Bernice becomes a member of the Imperial Consilium, the highest legal advisory body. Quintilian, who introduces himself in the preface to the fourth book of the *Institutionis Oratoriae* as Domitian's commissioned educator of his sister Domitila's grandchildren (Quint. *Inst.* IV Preface), negotiates with his appearance before this Consilium as an example of the activity of Judges on their own behalf (*suorum rerum iudices*): "There have also sometimes been judges on their own behalf... and I too have spoken for Queen Bernice before her" (Quint. *Inst.* IV 1,19). Quintilian defended a matter (*res*) of Bernice before the imperial judges, although the person concerned was present as a judge. The legal case will have been a financial matter of Bernice's possessions. Castritius states: "In any case, in terms of factual influence, she had reached a position at this point in time that can be compared with the exceptional situation of imperial women in the time of the reign of Caligula or Claudius."<sup>8</sup> Nero with Poppäa can be added.<sup>9</sup>

But there was strong resistance from the Roman people and senate against Bernice as the future Augusta (Cass. *Dio* 65,15, 1.4). Cassius Dio reports on the incident according to which two philosophers incited the Roman people against Bernice in a theatre

Because in addition to all the other gossip, some sophists of the Cynic tendency had somehow gained access to the city at that time, and Diogenes went in first the crowded theatre and attacked the couple in a lengthy diatribe; for this he was flogged. Assuming that no harsher punishment would befall him, Heras then uttered a mass of senseless insults in the manner of a Cynic and atoned for it with his head. (Cass. *Dio* 65,15,1.5).

He had insulted the imperial authority (*crimen laesae majestatis*). While Suetonius remains silent about the reasons for the involuntary separation, his contemporary and satirist Juvenal (60-127) become

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<sup>8</sup> Castritius, "Die flavische Familie," 167.

<sup>9</sup> W. Eck, "Die iulisch-claudische Familie: Frauen neben Caligula, Claudius und Nero," in Temporini-Gräfin Vitzthum, *Die Kaiserinnen Roms*, 156-159.

more talkative. Both experienced the rule of Titus as children or adolescents, but not as critical adults:

In the month of the winter solstice, however, when the merchant Jason has already/ been served and the white booth stands in front of the armed sailors/ mighty vessels made of rock crystal are purchased, then again/ huge vases made of fluorspar, then a highly famous diamond/ which became even more valuable because Berenice wore it on her finger. It was given to her/ by the barbarian Agrippa/ that his incestuous sister/ should wear it there, where the kings honor the Sabbath festival with bare feet/ and traditional mildness allows the pigs to grow old. (Juv. *Sat.* 6,156-160 about Adamietz)

The attack on Bernice starts with a picture of a winter market in Rome. According to Adamietz, it is the multi-day market on the Field of Mars in December with stalls made of white canvas. Jason and the Sailors allude to the Argonauts depicted in a mural of the Porticus Agrippa near the market. The diamond refers to the high position and wealth of Bernice and Agrippa II: private jewelry from Bernice fetches a higher price than usual. Now the sale of the diamond is a fiction. This should lead to the conclusion that Bernice had to leave Rome and sell assets because she had to give up her official position as ‘Caesaress.’

The keyword for line 158 ‘barbarus’ polemically introduces the allegations against the siblings: barbarism, incest (*incesta*), crude cults for kings on the Sabbath festival, and foolish refusal of pork. Apart from the ban on eating pork, none of the allegations is true. Agrippa II (27-92/93) was brought up at the Roman imperial court (Jos. *Ant.* 19.360). So, he belonged to the educated Romans with Roman citizenship and was in no way a barbarian. The incest was an unproven rumour aimed at equating the royal siblings with the Egyptian Ptolemies and morally degrading them. And the fact that the precious gift from the royal brother is mentioned at the beginning, but the gifts from Titus remain unmentioned, is probably intended to underpin the rumour of incest, and make the reader forget the love affair between Titus and Bernice. Moses steps on holy ground with bare feet (Exod. 3:5). But since the destruction of the Temple in 70 there is no longer a temple with the holy ground, which incidentally in the holiest part of the temple only priests, but not kings, were allowed to enter during daily cult and not only on the Sabbath. The Sabbath celebrations in Rome from 70 CE no longer have anything to do with the holy ground and bare feet.

Cassius Dio and Juvenal make it clear that the Judaism of the royal siblings was the reason for the hate speech against Bernice. Horace, who lived three generations before Juvenal (65 BCE - 8 CE), satirically characterized the Jews in Rome: “We (the verse makers) are in the majority, and like the Jews, we will force you to join our sect as soon as possible” (Horace, *Sat.* I,4,141f.). The Jews, who since the conquest of Judea by Pompey in 63 BCE had settled in Rome, showed themselves openly in the city of million and actively wooed proselytes and the godly. Without being explicitly known and named, biblical texts could become intertexts in the textual universe of the early imperial period in Rome and spread misunderstandings and prejudices about the Sabbath, temples, and prohibitions on food. Added to this were the deviating lifestyles of the Jews, such as circumcision, Sabbath rest and rejection of foreign god cults.

Titus acted against those who slandered Bernice with the harshness of the law: foreigners without Roman citizenship could be scourged and sentenced to death if they trespassed the majesty of Caesar; the Passion of Jesus of Nazareth is one example among many others. But Titus bowed, but involuntarily (*invitus*; cf. Suet. *Tit.* 7,2), to the pressure of the people and the senate. The sources do not reveal exactly how long Bernice ruled as Titus' partner. In chapter 7 of his biography of Titus, Suetonius describes the style of rulership of Titus after his ascension to the throne (Suet. *Tit.* 7,1). The immediate (*statim*) separation from Bernice would have to have taken place shortly after the death of Vespasian on June 23 of the year 79 (Suet. *Vesp.* 24). Cassius Dio, on the other hand, places the dismissal of Bernice before the death of Vespasian (Cass. Dio 66,17, 1). Suetonius is more reliable as a contemporary than Cassius Dio from the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century. In addition, Suetonius' time specification fits better Cassius Dio's initiation of the reign of Titus as Augustus: “After his ascension to the throne, Titus neither murdered nor embarked on amorous adventures, but, despite conspiracies, showed himself to be an upright, self-possessed man; but Bernice found herself again in Rome (Cass. Dio 66,18,1)”.

After the separation, Bernice must have resided in Italy in the second half of 79 which allowed her to visit Rome at will and to live with her brother. It was true that she no longer lived together with Titus, but Titus also remained without a new partner.

In the meantime, Titus had also appointed his 18-year-old daughter Julia as Augusta. But he could still use the advice of the much more experienced Bernice. The early death of Titus on September 13, 81 finally ended the relationship (Suet. *Tit.* 11). From Rome Agrippa II was allowed to continue to administer the rule in Ituraea, Batanea, Trachonitis and Abilene (Jos. *Ant.* 20.138; Lk. 3.1) as well as cities in Galilee and Perea. Coinage confirms his rule until 93 CE. Bernice also retained her possessions. Sources are silent about how the relationship continued.

## **Bernice and Paul**

In the NT, Bernice is only mentioned by Luke, in Acts 25:13–26:32.<sup>10</sup> The new prefect and procurator, Porcius Festus, arrives in his capital city of Caesarea and finds Paul in captivity (Acts 24:27). Festus then travels from Caesarea to Jerusalem to meet the Jewish authorities of the prefecture in their capital. In Jerusalem he received a complaint against Paul from the high priest and the high council but left the trial in Caesarea (Acts 25:1-5), where his predecessor Felix had already investigated Paul (Acts 24). Festus opens the trial after returning to Caesarea showing his intention to transfer it to Jerusalem; Paul then appeals to Caesar (Acts 25:6-11). Finally, Festus confers with his council (*symboúlion*; Latin *consilium*), which is said to be present at every trial of an imperial judge. The absence of a council from the Jesus trial was permitted because Jesus was a provincial. For a Roman citizen like Paul, the presence of a council was obligatory. The council and Festus agree to grant the appeal. Since Paul's life was in jeopardy and the Sanhedrin would not consent to his release, turning the case over to Caesar was the most convenient resolution (Acts 25:12).<sup>11</sup>

King Agrippa II and his sister Bernice arrive in Caesarea to greet Festus (Acts 25:13). He uses the encounter to include them in his circle of advisors and to present the case of Paul. After Festus' speech, Agrippa II wishes to hear Paul personally (Acts 25:13-22). The following day, Agrippa II and Bernice “with great pomp” enter the courtroom, and there they met the leaders of cohorts and the chief men of

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<sup>10</sup> D. Dormeyer and F. Galindo, *Die Apostelgeschichte. Ein Kommentar für die Praxis* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2003), 360-369.

<sup>11</sup> Dormeyer and Galindo, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 356-359.

the city. Paul is presented. Festus asks Agrippa II and the whole assembly for help in writing the letter to the emperor about the appeal (Acts 25:23-27). Agrippa II now takes charge of the interrogation and gives Paul the opportunity. He holds a long apology (Acts 26:1-23).

Festus interjects with the polemical charge that Paul is “out of mind;” Paul rejects the accusation and turns to King Agrippa II: “For the king knows these things, to whom I speak boldly” (Acts 26:24-27). Speaking frankly (*παρρησιάζομαι/παρρησία*) is a keyword of philosophy. It is about the freedom of philosophical thoughts and criticism in public (Xen. *Ages.* 11.5; Jos. *Ant.* 16.377).<sup>12</sup> Agrippa II responds with benevolence: “In a little while you will persuade me to make (me) a Christian.” Paul then wishes Agrippa II and all those present to become Christians (Acts 26:28-29). A deliberation of the council concludes the entire process: “And (there) rose up the king, and the governor, and Bernice, and those who were seated with them, and going away they spoke to one another, saying: This man does nothing worthy of death or chains. But Agrippa said to Festos, “This man might have been dismissed if he had not called on Caesar” (Acts 26:30-32).

The historicity of the Lukan description will not be investigated in this context.<sup>13</sup> However, the theological importance that Luke attaches to Agrippa II and especially to Bernice becomes visible. The depiction of Festus’ interrogations, trials and deliberations about an appeal are realistically told and at the same time largely fictitious. The appearance of Agrippa II and Bernice refers to the author's situation and will also be fictitious. However, their membership in the council of Festus will be historical, but not their involvement in the trial of Paul.<sup>14</sup>

The final sentence of the Acts of the Apostles reads: “And he (Paul) received all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness (*παρρησία; parresía*), without hindrance” (Acts 28:31). Luke indirectly appeals

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<sup>12</sup> Walter Bauer and Kurt Aland, *Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988), 1274

<sup>13</sup> Haenchen considers Paul's appeal to the emperor against a decision of the prefect Festus to be historical; see Ernst Haenchen, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (KEK.NT III; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 641-642.

<sup>14</sup> Haenchen, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 639-645.

to his readers to freely proclaim faith in God and Christ with the boldness of the philosopher throughout the Roman Empire, just as Paul taught with all boldness for two years (Acts 28:30).

Agrippa II and Bernice guarantee in the composition time of the Lukan narrative the unhindered proclamation of the Christian message. For in the fictitious trial Agrippa II and Bernice did not contradict Paul's apology; they showed benevolence towards faith in Christ and left Paul's wish for future conversion unchallenged. In the judgment of the council, Bernice is then expressly named as a companion. Because as the official partner of Titus and officious 'Caesaress' from 75-79 and unofficial Augusta from 79-81, she could have effectively guaranteed the freedom of speech of Christians at the time the Lukan narrative was written. What happened in Caesarea according to Acts happened not only in one 'corner' of the kingdom but could be repeated in any part of the kingdom, especially in Rome (Acts 26:26).

The image of Bernice in Acts corresponds to the public opinion of Rome and the rest of the empire of her: Jewish petty queen, fond of pomp, shrewd adviser, the constant companion of her royal brother Agrippa II and later of the ruling Caesar Titus; the incest rumor, however, remains unmentioned as unproven and disturbing.

After the death of Titus, Bernice loses her position as the princess's most important adviser, but the new prince Domitian continues to be generous towards Josephus (Jos., *Vita* 428f.) and not hostile towards his patrons Agrippa II and Bernice.

Josephus emphasizes in his criticism of Justus of Tiberias' historical account that he, Josephus, had excellent contact with the rulers Vespasian and Titus and with Agrippa II during his lifetime and with his family, including Bernice, and therefore before 20 years more correctly than Justus reported about the Jewish war (Jos., *Vita* 358-360); Agrippa II received the books about the war and confirmed to him, Josephus, the 'truth' of his reports (Jos., *Vita* 361-364). Since *Bellum iudaicum* was completed around 73 at the earliest, the date of the *Vita*

is 20 years later, i.e. after 93; Agrippa II had meanwhile died around 92/93 (Vita 359f.).<sup>15</sup>

The author of the Lucanian double work does not have to have lived in Rome but could have heard of Bernice's public reputation anywhere in the empire and portrayed her and her brother as the most powerful promoters of Christians even in the time of Domitian. They have achieved a repressive tolerance for the Godfearers and Christians to speak freely of their dissenting beliefs with all boldness.

## **Communication Process and Methods of Pragmalinguistics**

### *Downfall of Hellenistic-Judaism*

The Septuagint and the New Testament are written in Greek. They are the result of Jew-Hellenistic and Gentile-Hellenistic writers. The Jewish rebellion of 66 CE and its suppression resulted in the downfall of Hellenistic Judaism in the eastern half of the empire and in Rome. A canon was also established for the Hebrew Tanakh from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. All Greek writings on LXX are discarded as non-canonical or not included, like the New Testament. Only the Hellenistic communities of Christians transmitted the Septuagint with 2–4 Maccabees and Judith originally Greek, and the Greek intertestamental literature. The Greek and modern readers constantly have to mediate between original Hebrew thinking and current Hellenistic understanding.

### *Intercultural Communication and Perfect Models*

Our project is about the intercultural communication process with the decoding of the syntax, semantics, and pragmatics of a text.<sup>16</sup> The methods of historical-critical exegesis remain valid. The emphasis on pragmatics is new. A distinction is made between the empirical or real reader and the implicit reader. The author develops his 'own narrative strategy' and uses it to create his 'model reader:' "He is called 'ideal' because he fully and correctly understands the meaning of the text and

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<sup>15</sup> Flavius Josephus, *Aus meinem Leben (Vita)* ed. and comment Folker Siegert - Heinz Schreckenberg - Manuel Vogel (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 180.

<sup>16</sup> D. Dormeyer and M. Grilli, *Gottes Wort in menschlicher Sprache. Die Lektüre von Mt 18 und Apg 1-3 als Kommunikationsprozess* (SBS 201; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2004), 30-34

answers appropriately.”<sup>17</sup> The reader must thus construct a past cultural world and dialogue with it. For example, in syntax, speech acts, etc. and in semantics, figures/characters, etc. call for dialogue.

The reader's answers belong to pragmatics. They become complex when the reader must confront, connect, or reject two or more different cultures, his own culture, that of the first reader and the cultures of the many readers from the past and present.

Feminist hermeneutics also helps to understand the past and present readers in their social environment and to bring them into mutual dialogue with perfect models.

In our time women, and also men seek possibilities to speak freely of their dissenting feelings, experiences and beliefs. They need repressive tolerance for their dissenting way of life. Intercultural perfect models could be Paul and Bernice. Bernice and Titus ensured in an exemplary manner that in Rome Paul and the Christians were tolerated and both are also models for transcending limits. Titus as Caesar and Emperor practised homosexuality and proclaimed expressly ‘clemency.’ Bernice was loyal to him, though the Jewish Law forbade marriage to a homosexual man and a pagan. Clemency for the defeated Jews and the split Christians weighs more than outdated cultural norms, which had demanded the circumcision of the previous husband Polemon II without true conversion. Learning different cultural models makes it sensible for permanently revising their own standpoint.

## Reception

“Fall through the chairs” is a well-known proverb. Bernice lost the heavy struggle against the Jewish rebellion. After the crackdown by the Romans, the defeated Jews considered her a traitor. The Hellenists and Romans forgot her and the whole Jewish-Hellenistic people and their writings.

The Christians missed the conversion. She remained an unbelieving Jew. Luke in New Testament and later Christian authors mentioned

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<sup>17</sup> Dormeyer and Grilli, *Gottes Wort in menschlicher Sprache*, 36f.

Bernice and appreciated her advice on tolerance. The high intercultural importance of Bernice and Titus should be rediscovered. Mozart succeeded in updating this with his last *opera seria* ‘La clemenza di Tito’ (1791).

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