STYLE AND THE TEXT OF ACTS 4:25(A)

L V LE ROUX

ABSTRACT

The problems concerning Acts 4:25(a) are reflected in the variety of MSS and in later verdicts on the text. It is argued that the position of τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν is impossible and that διὰ dropped out before στόματος. The criticism is due to the fact that the style of the passage is largely ignored. The author used a hyperbaton, a zeugma construction and an expanded chiasmus to emphasise the fact that the Holy Spirit was already present when God spoke through David in earlier times. The passage is compared to Acts 1:2 where two of these stylistic features are employed also in connection with the Holy Spirit.

The uncertainty which exists regarding the text of Acts 4:25(a) can be observed in the diversity of manuscripts and in viewpoints expressed in this respect. For the sake of convenience the UBS text (third corrected edition) with its apparatus is given here:

25 ὁ τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν διὰ πνεύματος ἀγίως στόματος Λαβίδ παιδὸς σου εἰπὼν ἐδώ.

1 CRITICISM OF THE TEXT

Dibelius (1973:90) calls the passage 'one of the most impossible clauses in the entire Book of Acts.' According to Torrey (quoted by Wilcox 1965:146), the text is 'not merely untranslatable — an uncoherent jumble of words', but of such a nature that 'no simple emendation of the Greek will...render the clause intelligible.' Hanson (1978:80) writes: 'The verse as it stands, is wholly ungrammatical, and must be either corrupt or unfinished.'

Clark (1933:11) summarises criticism aimed at the grammar of the passage as follows: 'The position of τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν (i.e David) is impossible, and διὰ is required before στόματος.' It is significant that Codex D
omits τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν and inserts διὰ τοῦ before στόματος to produce the following reading: δὲ διὰ πνεύματος ἁγίου διὰ τοῦ στόματος λαλήσας Δαυιδ παιδός σου. (See the critical apparatus above).

2 EXPLANATIONS FOR THE CONDITION OF THE TEXT
The confusion in the manuscripts, according to Clark (1933:340), can be attributed to two 'roving variants', διὰ πνεύματος ἁγίου and τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν. Haenchen (1971:226) regards both as interpolations. He is of the opinion that τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν was added to Δαυιδ παιδός σου, but that it has ended up in the wrong position in the sentence. In turn the διὰ πνεύματος ἁγίου was inserted before διὰ στόματος but simultaneously the second διὰ dropped out.

H W Moule (quoted by Bruce 1970:126,127) ascribes the form of the text to a copyist. It seems that the writer made some alterations to his sentence, but that the copyist misunderstood his symbols for omission and insertion and joined together words which were in fact alternatives. Torrey (quoted by Wilcox 1965:146) is of the opinion that the confusion resulted from a misinterpretation of a relative clause in an Aramaic source. Metzger (1971:323) successively mentions the views of Lachmann, Hort and Westcott: The first-mentioned relates the problems of the verse to the later insertion of πνεύματος into the text. Hort is of the opinion that τοῦ πατρὸς was originally τοῖς πατράσιν. Westcott contends that word displacement and omission in the text resulted from sentences ending in like manner and leading to a reading error. C F D Moule (1966:21l describes the passage containing the verse as 'undoubtedly liturgical' and regards it as a typical Jewish form of prayer. Conzelmann (1987:34) describes the Δέσποτα of verse 24 as a 'Hellenistic form of address in prayer.' Williams (1957:85) believes that the style of the passage was influenced by the Septuagint. Dibelius (1973:90) says that someone wished to include the Holy Spirit as the source of all inspired speech.

The above-mentioned viewpoints rest on the supposition that the reading of the UBS text does not satisfy. It is accepted that changes were made to the original text and that these led to faulty grammar, insertions, omissions and displacement of words.

3 STYLISTIC CONSTRUCTION OF THE TEXT
There is no doubt that Luke (the issue of authorship is not discussed in this article) constructed a complicated sentence which could have led to different readings of the text (see the critical apparatus above) and criticism of its form. The question should however be asked whether he did not deliberately write like this in order to achieve a particular effect (which will be discussed later). In the process he employed certain stylistic features which regularly occur in classical rhetoric. The important role played by rhetoric in the curricula of the time is indeed an established fact. In my opinion, the problems with, and criticism of the text rest on insufficient attention to its stylistic construction.

One of the most significant stylistic features employed by Luke is that of disturbance of word order or hyperbaton. The placing of τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν
early in the sentence away from Δαυιδ which should be read together with it, is strange. The separation of the article ὅ from the participle εἰπὼν is also significant.

The omission of the expected διὰ before στόματος needs not be ascribed to poor grammar. In my opinion Luke here used a zeugma construction where the διὰ should be read twice in the text in spite of occurring only once; first in conjunction with πνεῦματος ἀγίου and then again with στόματος Δαυιδ.

Both the stylistic features (the hyperbaton and the zeugma construction) achieve the same effect. Due to the unusual syntax resulting from these features and its unexpected nature the reader is forced to concentrate more intensely should he hope to understand it. In this way the important semantic content of the passage is highlighted. The fact which Luke wished to emphasise is that in previous centuries God had already been working through the Holy Spirit when He announced what He intended to do for his people in the face of the attacks of his enemies. When God spoke, not only the human agent, David, was involved, but also the divine, namely the Holy Spirit.

In support of the above argument, one can refer to Acts 1:2 where the same kind of stylistic features occur, also in connection with the Holy Spirit. The zeugma construction (possibly a sullepsis) here implies that the words διὰ πνεῦματος ἀγίου should probably be applied to two verbs namely ἐνεπιλήμενος and ἔξελέξατο. (See Riekert 1981:184,185). The selection of the apostles and the allocation of their missions occurred in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. The involvement of the Holy Spirit is therefore strongly emphasised.

A hyperbaton is also employed in this passage. One has only to look at the disturbance of word order caused by the positioning of διὰ πνεῦματος ἀγίου. The relative clause οὖς ἔξελέξατο is separated from τοῖς ἀποστόλοις which goes with it. The reader is forced to more profound concentration in order to bring full relief to the passage concerning the actions of the Holy Spirit.

Another stylistic feature in Acts 4:25(a) through which the author strove to focus on the contents of the passage is an expanded chiasmus or ring composition. Schematically it can be represented as follows:

```
Determiner
Characterisation of David
(in terms of people)
The divine agent
(the Holy Spirit)
The human agent
(David)
Characterisation of David
(in terms of God)
Determined
```

```
δὲ τοῦ πατρὸς ἡµῶν
diὰ πνεῦματος ἀγίου
(διὰ) στόµατος Δαυιδ
παιδὸς σου
eἰπῶν
```

Reproduced by Sabinet Gateway under licence granted by the Publisher (dated 2010).
The outer section of the chiasmus is formed by the article ὅ as the deter-
miner and the participle εἰςμόν as the determined. The ὣ...εἰςμόν refers to
God. After this David is typified, first in terms of people (compare τοῦ
πατρὸς ἡμῶν) and then in terms of God (compare πατρὸς σου). The chiasmus
contains a contrasting central point. The divine agent (the Holy Spirit)
is set off against the human agent (David). It is possible that particular
emphasis is placed on the Holy Spirit since He is mentioned in the very
middle of the chiasmus. He is further brought into full relief by the fact
that He is mentioned only once, while David is referred to three times.

4 CONCLUSION
By the chosen stylistic features the author strove to draw the attention
of the reader to the semantic content of Acts 4:25(a), namely that the Ho-
ly Spirit had been involved in the communication of God in earlier centu-
ries. Long ago the Holy Spirit was already employed to speak to man
through David. The emphasis laid on this fact is appropriate in a book
dealing so prominently with the Holy Spirit.

It would appear that there is no real reason to question the authenti-
city and the quality of Acts 4:25(a).

WORKS CONSULTED
Metzger, B M 1971. A textual commentary on the Greek New Testament. Lon-
don: United Bible Societies.
Black.
Riekert, S J 1981. Stillistiese moontlikhede en werklike of vermeende teks-
probleme in die proloog van die Handelinge. NGIT 22, 179-187.
Adam & Charles Black.

Dr L V le Roux, Department of Greek, University of the Orange Free State,
P O Box 339, BLOEMFONTEIN, 9300 Republic of South Africa.