

ENSLAVEMENT AND REDEMPTION: THE CENSUS OF AUGUSTUS AND THE BIRTH OF JESUS IN LUKE 2.1-7 CODEX BEZAE

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1. INTRODUCTION

It is some years now that I first discussed with Josep Rius-Camps the purpose of the census mentioned by Luke (Lk. 2.1-2) to introduce the birth of Jesus —most probably during one Christmas holiday that I spent in the warm and stimulating community of Reixac, when the eternal problem of matching the data of Luke concerning the nativity with what is known from other historical sources would have raised itself. On reading the passage in Codex Bezae, the few variant readings seemed to indicate that the narrator's intention was different from that of the text habitually used by commentators, exegetes and modern translators. Accustomed to finding that Bezan readings in Luke's work often drew on Jewish traditions —whether oral or written— and ways of thinking, I set about exploring with Josep the possible reference points in those traditions that could link the Roman census with the birth of the Messiah. We have since presented our conclusions in public lectures, and they appear in summary form in a note in the Catalan translation of Luke's work in Codex Bezae.¹ What I would like to do here is to set out systematically the thinking behind those conclusions, developing it and highlighting issues that could be fruitfully investigated further.

1. J. RIUS-CAMPS – J. READ-HEIMERDINGER, *Lluc. Demostració a Teòfil: Evangeli i Fets dels Apòstols segons el Còdex Beza*, Barcelona: Edicions Fragmenta, 2009, 66-67, n. 22.

2. THE TEXT

The starting point is the Greek text. Below is presented a comparison of the text as it appears in the current edition of the Greek New Testament² with that of Codex Bezae.³ A dotted line indicates alternative material (lexical items or grammatical constructions) and square brackets indicate a difference in word order (within a phrase or a sentence).

Lk. 2	Nestle-Aland 27 th edition	Codex Bezae, D05
1	Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις ἐξήλθεν δόγμα παρὰ Καίσαρος Αὐγούστου ἀπογράφεσθαι πᾶσαν τὴν οἰκουμένην.	Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις ἐξήλθεν δόγμα παρὰ Καίσαρος Αὐγούστου ἀπογράφεσθαι πᾶσαν τὴν οἰκουμένην.
2	αὕτη [ἀπογραφή πρώτη ἐγένετο] ἡγεμονεύοντος τῆς Συρίας Κυρηνίου.	αὕτη [ἐγένετο ἀπογραφή πρώτη] ἡγεμονεύοντος τῆς Συρίας Κυρηνίου.
3	καὶ ἐπορεύοντο πάντες ἀπογράφεσθαι, ἕκαστος εἰς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ πόλιν.	καὶ ἐπορεύοντο πάντες ἀπογράφεσθαι, ἕκαστος εἰς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ πατρίδα.
4	Ἀνέβη δὲ καὶ Ἰωσήφ ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας ἐκ πόλεως Ναζαρεθ εἰς τὴν Ἰουδαίαν εἰς πόλιν Δαυὶδ ἣτις καλεῖται Βηθλέεμ, [διὰ τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν ἐξ οἴκου καὶ πατριᾶς Δαυὶδ,	Ἀνέβη δὲ καὶ Ἰωσήφ ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας ἐκ πόλεως Ναζαρεθ εἰς γῆν Ἰούδα εἰς πόλιν Δαυὶδ ἣτις καλεῖται Βηθλέεμ, [ἀπογράψασθαι σὺν Μαρίᾳ τῇ ἐμνηστευμένη αὐτῷ, οὓση ἐγκύω
5	ἀπογράψασθαι σὺν Μαριάμ τῇ ἐμνηστευμένη αὐτῷ, οὓση ἐγκύω].	διὰ τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν ἐξ οἴκου καὶ πατριᾶς Δαυὶδ].
6	ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ εἶναι αὐτοὺς ἐκεῖ ἐπλήσθησαν αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ τεκεῖν αὐτήν,	Ὡς δὲ παρεγίνοντο ἔτελέσθησαν αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ τεκεῖν αὐτήν,

2. B. ALAND – K. ALAND *et al.* (eds), *Novum Testamentum Graece*, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 27th edn, 1993. The text adopted by N-A27 for this passage is consistently that of Codex Vaticanus (B03), except for the spelling of the name of the governor (B03 reads Κυριου). For these verses, the presence of most of the D05 readings is indicated in N-A27, though not always their form.

3. The continuous Greek text of Codex Bezae can be found in the edition mentioned in n. 1 above.

7	καὶ ἔτεκεν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς τὸν πρωτότοκον, καὶ ἐσπαργάνωσεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἀνέκλινεν αὐτὸν ἐν φάτνῃ, διότι οὐκ ἦν αὐτοῖς τόπος ἐν τῷ καταλύματι.	καὶ ἔτεκεν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς τὸν πρωτότοκον, καὶ ἐσπαργάνωσεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἀνέκλινεν αὐτὸν ἐν φάτνῃ, διότι οὐκ ἦν αὐτοῖς τόπος ἐν τῷ καταλύματι.
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In the first instance, the familiar, Alexandrian text will be examined (#III), in order to recap the nature of the difficulties (#III.1), and to present briefly the solutions that have been proposed (#III.2). The text of Codex Bezae will then be studied in order to elucidate its meaning (#IV).

3. THE ALEXANDRIAN TEXT

3.1. *The Historical Difficulties*

The historical problems surrounding Luke's mention of the Roman census at Lk. 2.1-2, by virtue of which the birth of Jesus took place in Bethlehem, are well known. The information the narrative provides is precise and as near to datable as anything in the New Testament, yet it does not square with what is known from elsewhere about the Roman practice of carrying out a census nor, indeed, other datable events in Luke's Gospel.

The facts relating to the census as stated by the N-A text can be taken in order:

- a) 2.1: At the time of the birth of John the Baptist (c. 6 BCE),⁴ the Roman emperor, Augustus Caesar (27 BCE – 14 CE), issued a decree for the whole of the 'inhabited world', generally taken to mean the Roman Empire, to be registered in a census;
- b) 2.2: the census was the first one that took place (or: the first census took place, or: the census first took place) when Quirinius was governor of Syria, 6 CE;
- c) 2.3: everyone had to travel to their ancestral town to be registered;

4. The date of John the Baptist's birth is generally identified as 5/4 BCE, working from Luke's assertion that Herod the Great was king of Judaea (or Judah, c. 40 – c. 4 BCE) when he was conceived (cf. Lk. 1.5-24) and that he began his ministry in the 15th year of Tiberius (3.1), i.e. c. 28 CE, before Jesus, who was about 6 months his junior (cf. 1.26), was «about 30» (cf. 3.23). It should be noted that this last figure in particular is likely to have more symbolic value (by analogy with the age when David began to rule as king of Israel, cf. 2 Sam. 5.4) than literal, so can certainly mean that Jesus was 'in his thirties' rather than exactly aged 30.

- d) 2.4: Joseph travelled from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judaea, being a descendant of David whose family was from the city (cf. 1 Sam. 16.1);
- e) 2.5: he went to be registered with Mary to whom he was betrothed and who was pregnant.

From a historical point of view, the difficulties are numerous and at times complex. They can be summarized as follows:

- a) There is no external historical evidence for an Empire-wide census, ordered by Augustus, especially not at the time of the birth of John the Baptist or of Jesus 6 months later (cf. Lk.1.36) during the reign of Herod the Great (died c. 4 bc; cf. Lk. 1.5).
- b) A Roman census would have been inappropriate while Herod as a Jewish client king was in power;
- c) Josephus attests to a census of Judaea carried out by Quirinius who became governor of Syria with jurisdiction over Judaea on the exile of Archelaus, son of Herod the Great in 6 CE (Josephus, *Ant.* 17.355; 18.1-2). However this was some 10 years after the death of Herod the Great;
- d) The Greek is ambiguous: αὕτη ἀπογραφὴ πρώτη ἐγένετο. Without the article, αὕτη would normally have the function of a pronoun, referring back to Augustus' edict (δόγμα) or, by attraction, anticipating the mention of ἀπογραφὴ. As such, it is the subject of the verb ἐγένετο with ἀπογραφὴ as the predicate and πρώτη an adjective related to it («This was/turned out to be the first census»). However, πρώτη may have the function of an adverb here; and/or the article before ἀπογραφὴ may have dropped out through haplography (the previous word ending with the same vowel);⁵
- e) The requirement for everyone to travel back to their ancestral town is questionable; it would have meant an impossible influx of people in Bethlehem.⁶ In a Roman census, people were registered in their place of usual residence;
- f) Galilee would not have been affected by a census in Judaea at the time of Quirinius, since Galilee was under the rule of Antipas, another of Herod the Great's sons;

5. A not inconsiderable number of important manuscripts read the article before ἀπογραφὴ (Ⲛ2 A C L W Ξ Ψ f1.13 33 Maj.), thus making αὕτη an adjective qualifying ἀπογραφὴ («This census...»).

6. J. D. G. DUNN, *Jesus Remembered: Christianity in the Making*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003, vol. I, 344; cf. E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, London: Penguin, 1993, 86; see also B. D. EHRMAN, *A Brief Introduction to the New Testament*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, 103.

- g) There is no evidence that all the members of the family had to be registered. The purpose of the Roman census as described by Josephus was to assess personal property in order to apply appropriate taxation, something that did not require a count of individuals.

3.2. *Solutions Proposed to the Difficulties*

There has been a great deal of discussion on the problems created by Luke's mention of the census, and a range of explanations has been put forward to justify the reliability of Luke as the narrator of the third Gospel and/or to account for the discrepancy, yet none has been unanimously accepted:

- a) Luke's information is derived from error or ignorance, despite his claim that he had followed everything closely and was setting things out for Theophilus in an orderly manner (Lk. 1.1-3). He would have been motivated by the desire to situate Jesus' birth in Bethlehem in order to show how the Scriptural prophecy relating to the birthplace of the Messiah (cf. Mic. 5.2) was fulfilled, putting greater store in this instance by theological symbolism than historical accuracy;⁷
- b) Luke is correct, and Jesus was born in 6 CE, when Quirinius was governor of Syria and not in the time of Herod the Great;⁸
- c) The census that caused Joseph and Mary to travel to Bethlehem would have been one of the censuses ordered at regular intervals by Herod and not Augustus at all, though it would have been while he was emperor. The purpose of the census would have been to establish a register of persons, who were required to pay taxes for Herod's grand building enterprises. These included taxes on individuals (*tributum capitis*) but not property, unlike the Roman taxation system, being an egalitarian system being more acceptable to Jewish people than a wealth tax. One such census could conceivably have been made in 7/6 BCE;⁹

7. R. E. BROWN, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke*, Anchor Bible Series; New York: Doubleday Dell, updated edition 1999, 413; W. D. DAVIES – E. P. SANDERS, «Jesus from the Jewish Point of View», in W. HORBURY (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol 3, *The Early Roman Period*, 1984, 618-677 (esp. 622-623); cf. J. D. CROSSAN, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991, 371-372.

8. J. DUNCAN – M. DERRETT, «Further Light on the Narratives of the Nativity», *NovT* 17 (1975), 81-108; M. SMITH, «Of Jesus and Quirinius», *CBQ* 62 (2000), 278-293; A. N. SHERWIN-WHITE, *Roman Law and Roman Society*, London: Oxford University Press, 1963, 168.

9. A. PUIG I TÀRRECH, *Jesús: Un perfil biogràfic*, Barcelona: Proa, 2004, 159-160; ÍD., *Jesús: An Uncommon Journey*, Tübingen: Mohr – Siebeck, 2010, 70-93.

- d) Quirinius possibly occupied a position of authority in Syria at two separate times. In 6 CE, he would have been of a higher rank than governor, being a consul sent by Caesar to take a census of the property in Syria and neighbouring Judaea, which was annexed to it (Josephus, *Ant.*, 324-344, 355). His time as governor that Luke mentions must therefore have been earlier, namely, during the reign of Herod the Great, though there is no attestation for it. It would have been then that he made a first census, the later one of 6 CE being that which was forcefully opposed by Jewish Zealots;¹⁰
- e) the Greek should be translated: «This was before the census while Quirinius was governor of Syria», taking *πρώτη* with the force of a comparative adverb;¹¹
- f) Augustus issued the decree while Herod was still king but it was not put into practice, or not finished, in Judaea until Quirinius was governor of Syria in 6 CE.¹²

4. CODEX BEZAE

Many scholars have pointed out that Luke's primary interest in mentioning the census is to bring out a theological truth first and foremost and this would be the position adopted by the majority of scholars today. The theological purpose would be to explain how the Messiah was born in Bethlehem in accordance with Miach's prophecy. In the text of Codex Bezae, the narrator's theological concern and his specific message are, indeed, clearly in evidence, but not in opposition to historical truth or accuracy but rather as an interpretation of, and reflexion on it.

4.1. *The Text*

The differences between the two texts are few and their importance at first glance is not obvious. Taking the comparison of the texts as set out in #II, the following variants may be noted:

10. The hypothesis that Quirinius twice occupied a position of authority in Syria is not new and was advocated by Theodore Beza; for a recent development of it, see S. Chabert d'Hyères, <http://codexbezae.perso.sfr.fr/selene/chapt/a7.html#3> (last accessed 25.10.2010).

11. I. H. MARSHALL, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC, Exeter: Paternoster, 1978, 104; PUIG I TÀRRECH, *Jesús*, 160. This is the translation of the New Testament in Catalan, *Bíblia catalana. Traducció interconfessional*, Barcelona, 31995. The word order of *Ν** lends itself especially to this rendering (*αὕτη ἀπογραφὴ ἐγένετο πρώτη*).

12. This was the view of Calvin. It is also tentatively suggested by MARSHALL, *The Gospel of Luke*, 104; and J. RIUS-CAMPS, *L'Èxode de l'Home lliure: Catequesi de Reixac sobre l'evangeli de Lluc*, Barcelona: Claret 1993, 28.

- 2.2 word order within the phrase, affecting the position of the verb ἐγένετο
- 2.3 alternative word: πόλιν or πατρίδα
- 2.4a alternative phrase: τὴν Ἰουδαίαν or γῆν Ἰούδα
- 2.4b-5 clause order: clauses of reason and purpose
- 2.5 alternative spelling: indeclinable Hebrew form Μαριάμ or declinable Greek form Μαρία
- 2.6a alternative clause of location: ἐγένετο [...] ἐν τῷ εἶναι αὐτοὺς ἐκεῖ or Ὡς [...] παρεγίνοντο
- 2.6b alternative word: ἐπλήσθησαν or ἐτελέσθησαν

4.2. *The Nature of the Census*

Leaving aside for the moment the variant reading in 2.2 relating to Augustus' census, the cluster of variants in 2.3-6 affecting the action of Joseph merits attention. Taking them in order, it is first said that each person travelled to their fatherland (πατρίς) to be registered (2.3 D05); Joseph also went up from Galilee from the city of Nazareth to the land of Judah (γῆ Ἰούδα), to the city of David which was called Bethlehem [i.e. not Jerusalem] (2.4 D05); he went to be registered with Mary¹³ who was betrothed to him and who was expecting a child (2.5a D05); they went there because he was from the house and lineage of David (2.5b D05).

There is a particular grouping of terms here that is reminiscent of an event described in the Torah, one that Luke appears to be using as a paradigm for the present event: it is the celebration of the Jubilee year, the rest of every fiftieth year once the people had entered the land of Canaan, for which the Lord gave detailed instructions to Moses on Mount Sinai during the final stage of the giving of the Law to the people of Israel (Leviticus 25). According to the Jubilee regulation was the order to leave the land fallow and untended during every seventh year; in particular, the vines must be left «undressed» (25.5, from the Hebrew root *nazar*, נָזַר, meaning 'uncut, cf. Num. 6.5). In the 50th year (7 x 7, cf. Lev. 25.8), liberty was to be proclaimed to all the inhabitants throughout the land, and each person would return to their property and to the land of their fathers (25.10, 13). Any land that a person had had to sell since the previous Jubilee would be given back to them (25.25-28), with various conditions governing the redemption of buildings (25.29-34). Any individual who had fallen

13. In Codex Bezae, the Greek form of her name is used consistently from the angel's visitation onwards (cf. Lk. 1.27 Μαριάμ; 1.30 D05, 34 D05, 38 D05, 39 D05, 41, 46 D05, 56 D05; 2.34 D05). The N-A27 text retains the indeclinable Μαριάμ except at 1.41. Rius-Camps interprets the choice of the Greek form as a reflection of the profound change that takes place in Mary as the future mother of the universal Messiah (see RIUS-CAMPS – READ-HEIMERDINGER, *Lluc*, 54, n. 13).

on hard times and had been having to work for one of his kinsmen was to be released in the Jubilee year, when he would return with his children to his family and ancestral property (25.41). The same would apply if anyone of the Israelites had been forced by circumstances to become a slave of a Gentile (a «resident alien», נגל, 25.47) from whom he was to be redeemed by his fellow Israelites in the Jubilee year. The Jubilee instructions close with the statement: «For it is to me that the Israelites are servants; they are my servants whom I freed from the land of Egypt, I the Lord your God» (25.55).

Several elements within these instructions find an echo in Luke's account of Joseph's visit to Bethlehem. First, there is his very name, Joseph, one that is not his real name but rather one that was assigned to him. As much is indicated at his first appearance (1.27) where he is presented as a man ὁ ὄνομα Ἰωσήφ. This formula (dative pronoun + ὄνομα) is but rarely used by Luke and at all other places it appears to designate a name that is not the real name (cf. Simeon, 2.24; Jairus, 8.41; Emmaus, 24.13 [not D05], Cleopas, 18 D05; Elymas Bar-Jesus, Acts 13.6 [not D05]).¹⁴ Whether the given name serves as a nickname or a pseudonym or a customary, familiar name is not always clear and the specific purpose may indeed vary. In the case of Joseph, and in the context of the Jubilee redemption, the unusual formula has the effect of drawing attention to the first character with that name in the Jewish Scriptures, Joseph the son of Jacob. Joseph, indeed, was reckoned as the first-born of the sons of Jacob in place of Reuben (1 Chron. 5.1-2). It was he who was sold into slavery in Egypt and in ancient Jewish tradition, it was Joseph who represented Israel in slavery, the hero *par excellence* who maintained his purity and faithfulness to the Lord despite living in a land belonging to foreigners and being their slave. It was in honour of God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt that the Jubilee year was to be enacted, and none better than a Joseph would illustrate that redemption in a contemporary setting.

In Luke's account according to Codex Bezae, each person went back to their 'fatherland', the same word as found in Lev. 25.10 for the place where those who had become slaves could return in the Jubilee year. Thus, Joseph returns to the land of Judah, the ancient name of the area that only became the province of Judaea when it was brought under direct Roman rule in 6 CE. The form of the name used at this point is exceptional (cf. Ἰουδαία, 1.65), underlining the Jewish ethnic dimension of the situation. In that measure, Joseph represents the return of Israel to their original homeland. And he goes with his family, including the unborn child (cf. Lev. 25.41), specifically to Bethlehem, the home of his ancestor David (cf. Lk. 1.27) and long associated with messianic expectation

14. The more common way Luke introduces a character by name is with the dative ὀνόματι. The dual terminology is discussed in J. READ-HEIMERDINGER – J. RIUS-CAMPS, «Emmaous or Oulammaous? Luke's Use of the Jewish Scriptures in the Text of Luke 24 in Codex Bezae», *RCatT* 27 (2002) 23-42.

(cf. Mic. 5.2; Lk. 2.11). The traditional association between the Messiah and the redemption (Lev. 25.54, in Greek λύτρωσις) of Israel from their enemies has already been firmly established in Luke's narrative by this point (cf. the use of λύτρωσις in the praise spoken by John's father, Zechariah, speaking of the house of David, Lk. 1.68; and again in that spoken by the widow Anna, speaking of Jerusalem, Lk. 2.38).

The theme of the Jubilee redemption will continue to be present in later parts of Luke's explanation of the Messiah to Theophilus, not least in his account of Jesus' own self-presentation of his mission in the synagogue of Nazareth (4.16-21), when he takes up Isaiah's depiction of the arrival the Messiah in terms of a Jubilee year (Isa. 61.1-2). The fact that the arrival of the Messiah was already connected with the Jubilee year in Jewish tradition would naturally facilitate the interpretation of Joseph's action as a celebration of the Jubilee leading to the birth of the Messiah.

In order to travel to Bethlehem Joseph, with Mary and the unborn child, left Galilee and the town where they lived, Nazareth (Ναζαρέθ, Lk. 2.4). After the birth of the child and after the completion of all the requirements of the Law, they returned once more 'to their own town of Nazareth' (2.39). At this latter reference in Codex Bezae the narrator makes the same comment as at Mt. 2.23, though the wording is not identical: καθὼς ἐρρήθη διὰ τοῦ προφήτου ὅτι Ναζωραῖος κληθήσεται (2.39 D05; cf. Mt. 2.23, ὅπως πληρωθῆ τὸ ῥηθὲν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν ὅτι Ναζωραῖος κληθήσεται).¹⁵ The prophecy in question is usually assumed to be Isa. 11.1, and the singular of Lk. 2.39 D05 would confirm the identity of Isaiah as *the* prophet. It is presumed that the connection with Nazareth is made via Isaiah's use of the Hebrew word *netser* (נֶצֶר) to refer to the flower/branch from the root of Jesse (the father of David) as a metaphor for the Messiah. The middle consonant נ (tsade) is sounded as 'ts', represented in Greek spelling of Nazareth with ζ (*zeta*), even though a sigma would normally have been used to transcribe *tsade* in Greek.¹⁶ It is true that in a language such as Hebrew where words are essentially derived from a limited number of three consonant roots, the name of the town Nazareth (where the final consonant is probably a feminine ending) very likely evoked similarly spelt words. However, an alternative possibility to the word *netser* exists, and it is found in the explanation for the Jubilee year where the Israelites are told to leave their fields <uncut> (*nazir*), where the middle consonant *zayin* corresponds more closely to the Greek *zeta*. The same term is used of the men and women who consecrated themselves to the Lord, taking a vow to abstain from, among other things, cut-

15. The differences in the wording between Lk. 2.39 D05 and Mt. 2.23 tell against the reading being a simple harmonization.

16. On the possible Hebrew/Aramaic origin and Greek transliteration of Nazareth, see the extensive quotations from the scholarly discussion in S. CARRUTH – J. M. ROBINSON (C. HEIL, ed.), *Documenta Q: The Data Base of the International 9 Project; Q 4:1-13,16, The Temptations of Jesus; Nazara*, Leuven: Peeters 1996, 402-417.

ting their hair (Num. 6.5). These people were known in Hebrew as «nazir» or Nazirites, no doubt an allusion to the hair that was left uncut but, at the same time and by a traditional type of pun, to a word with identical consonants, *nezer*, meaning sanctified or pure.¹⁷ The play on words comes out in the LXX translation of Numbers 6 where «Nazirite» is rendered with a noun or verb based on the Greek root for «purity/consecration» (ἀγν-; e.g. 6.2, 5). By virtue of the association of the theme of the undressed vines in the Jubilee year with the theme of consecration, there is thus a twofold reason to spell out the link of Jesus, God's anointed one, with a place whose name had the same consonants found in the keywords, the town of Nazareth. The parallel powerfully brings together the notion of redemption for Israel obtained through the Messiah and his own consecration to God.

To what extent the connection was already made in Judaism before Luke made it for Theophilus, or how the notions may be associated with Isaiah and his prophecies, are matters that would merit more detailed investigation. Whatever the case, in time Jesus would come to be known as the Nazarene (Ναζαρηνός) or the Nazorean (Ναζωραῖος), and his followers as the Ναζωραῖοι (cf. Acts 24.5). In Luke's writings, the two spellings are found alongside each other, the one a term designating a nationalistic, politically active Messiah (see, e.g. Lk. 4.34; 18.37 D05; 24.19 N01 B03), and the other adopted by Luke as a neutral term devoid of political connotations (used exclusively in Acts at 3.6; 4.10; 6.14; 22.8; 24.5; 26.9).¹⁸ The narrator's comment at Mt. 2.23 and Lk. 2.39 D05 indicates that in one form or another the term was already current in Judaism to refer to the Messiah before it was applied to Jesus. The first occurrence of one or the other in the mouth of the demon-possessed man in Capernaum before Jesus was only beginning to establish himself as a teacher (Lk. 4.34) tends to confirm this. In turn, it is an indication that the prime association of the messianic epithet was not the town of Nazareth, where no-one expected the Messiah to appear (cf. Jn 7.41-42, 52), but rather a Hebrew/Aramaic word. The present enquiry means that in addition to the possibilities generally suggested, of *netser* or even *natsor* («watch, protect»),¹⁹ the words of the Jubilee, *nazir* and *nezer*, should also be considered.

One further feature of Luke's account of Joseph's journey to Bethlehem resonates with the idea of dedication to the Lord. The term used to describe his

17. The assimilation of the two words and the concepts they express is seen in the LXX translation of Lev. 25.5, which renders «the grapes of your uncut (*nazir*) [vine]» with «the grapes of your sanctification (τοῦ ἀγιάσματός σου, *nezer*)».

18. The question of the dual terminology in Luke has been explored by J. RIUS-CAMPS, «“Nazareno” y “Nazoreo”, con especial atención al Códice Bezae», in R. PIERRI (ed.), *Grammatica Intellectio Scripturae: Saggi filologici di Greco biblico in onore di padre Lino Cignelli, OFM* (Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Analecta 68), Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press 2006, 183–204.

19. See H. KUHLI, «Ναζωραῖος», *EWNT*, II, cols. 1117-1121.

purpose, ἀπογράψασθαι, to be «registered» or «enrolled», is found only once more in the New Testament, at Heb. 12.23. As in the apocryphal literature (cf. *En.* 98.7,8; *Apocalypse of Paul*), it refers there to the names written by God in the book of life: the author is at pains to convince his addressees that they have gained access to a spiritual community, «an assembly (ἐκκλησία) of the first-born [πρωτοτόκων, cf. Jesus, Lk. 2.7] who are registered (ἀπογεγραμμένων) in heaven». The presence of the theme in the extra-biblical literature suggests that oral traditions had developed on which Luke may have drawn, implying in turn that Theophilus would have been familiar with them.

4.3. *The Link between Jesus' Birth and Augustus' Decree*

The next question is, of course, what is the connection between Joseph's journey to Bethlehem as an act of Jubilee celebration and the census of Augustus/Quirinius? Luke makes the link by writing in two different registers, which he intertwines in a way entirely typical of Jewish methods of exegesis of the Scriptures. What this means is that he begins his account with a reference to a literal, historical, earthly event and then transfers seamlessly to a reference to a spiritual, other-worldly event which is, in Jewish terms, just as real as the former, if not more so. He does exactly the same thing in his account of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2) when at times he is referring to a universal event that goes beyond the physical boundaries of the people actually present, the geographical boundaries of Jerusalem and the historical boundaries of the year the event took place. At other times within the same narrative he is, on the contrary, speaking of a localized event, involving the Jewish people who had come to Jerusalem that year for the Feast of Pentecost.²⁰ He will do it again when the word of God is given by Barnabas and Paul to the Gentiles in Antioch of Pisidia (13.44-49), describing on the one hand a localized event involving the people of the area and, on the other, an event of momentous and paradigmatic proportions as critical for the history of humanity as the giving of the Law to Israel at Sinai.²¹ Examples abound throughout Luke's two volumes, revealing a writer thoroughly at ease with communicating about the spiritual dimension as much as the earthly one.²² The difficulty for discerning them is that the clues to

20. For a fuller exploration of the two interwoven registers, see RIUS-CAMPS – READ-HEIMERDINGER, *The Message of Acts*, I, 152-164

21. The topic is treated in detail in RIUS-CAMPS – READ-HEIMERDINGER, *The Message of Acts*, III, 115-125.

22. The example of the story of Emmaus, in which the spiritual register only appears in the text that retains the name as «Oulammaous» (Codex Bezae), illustrates the nature of the problem (see my «Where is Emmaus?», in D. J. TAYLOR [ed.], *The Early Text of the Gospels and Acts*, Birmingham: Birmingham University Press, 229-44; and further, READ-HEIMERDINGER – RIUS-CAMPS, «Emmaous or Oulammaous?»).

the dual register have been all but lost in the text that came to dominate Church tradition, the one that characterizes the current editions of the Greek New Testament and therefore the modern translations.

The connection between the enrolment of Joseph in Bethlehem and the census carried out by Quirinius is one of contrast. There is an overall general principle in the Jubilee instructions, which is that of individual freedom and, consequently, of release or redemption from anything that would hinder that freedom. In so far as the Romans had occupied Israel since Pompey's invasion in 63 BCE, the Jews had been subject to them and, in an increasing measure, were oppressed by them. The Jewish opposition in response to this subjugation often resulted in armed attack led by a movement Josephus refers to as the Zealots (*Ant.*, 18.1), and culminating in the Great Revolt of 66–73 CE. One of the early attempts to fight against Roman control of the Jewish people was led by Judas of Galilee whom Luke has the Pharisee leader Gamaliel mention to the Sanhedrin (Acts 5.37) as a failure. The precise event that provoked his rebellion, carried out in the name of the Messiah, was the census administered by Quirinius (cf. Josephus *Ant.*, 18.10; BJ, 2.117). The negative response to the Roman census on the part of militant Jews is thus well attested and provides ample grounds for Luke to introduce another response, the divine response, which would counter the wider aims and ambitions of the conquerors in a more profound and ultimately more effective way.

From a textual point of view, the shift from the register of the Roman census to the celebration of the Jubilee year takes place without any hiatus. Lk 2.1 introduces the topic with a statement of the practice of drawing up registers of inhabitants across the Roman Empire during the rule of the emperor Augustus Caesar. Whether this was ever declared in a single decree or was rather a long-term policy, is for Luke's purpose irrelevant in so far as it represented a general intention. Luke would not have been privy to the exact nature of decisions and actions taken in Rome (in the way that later historians may have been or even present-day historians believe they are) but would have been dependent on the form in which information was transmitted. Under Quirinius, it is quite feasible that the census was presented to the people in Israel as the execution of the express command of the Emperor.

The second sentence, 2.2, is, in fact, a parenthesis, being introduced without any connective other than the demonstrative αὕτη. The position of the verb in the D05 text favours taking πρώτη adverbially, giving the word for word translation: «This became a census first when Quirinius was governor of Syria».²³ Thus the scene is set, giving a background of Jewish rebellion and armed opposition to the Gentile oppressors, led by one who claimed to be the Messiah; tak-

23. Sherwin-White suggests that Luke intended to refer only to a policy of universal registration promulgated by Augustus, and that this was first implemented in Judaea under Quirinius (SHERWIN-WHITE, *Roman Law*, 168-169).

ing account of the contemporary context in which Luke was writing, his readers would have been well aware that such opposition had led to ultimate defeat, with the death of other messianic pretenders and that also of many people dear to them. Indeed, a likely candidate for the addressee of Luke's work according to the text of Codex Bezae is Theophilus the High Priest of 37-42 CE, whose son Matthias was killed in the fighting in the Temple that took place in 66 CE, after a brief period as High Priest himself.

Following the parenthetic statement, Luke takes up his account of Augustus' decree by transferring into the spiritual register as he refers to people returning to the land of their fathers. With the conjunction *καί* placing the two pieces of information on the same level,²⁴ he sets in parallel the two purposes, that of Augustus to control the people he had conquered and that of God to release his people from slavery and dominion, «For it is to me that the Israelites are servants; they are my servants whom I freed from the land of Egypt, I the Lord your God» (Lev. 25.55).

The message is one of hope and joyous expectation, not of earthly freedom since that clearly had not been the outcome for Luke or his audience. Nevertheless, in the early chapters of the Gospel, written in a Semitic style and embedded in a traditionally Jewish application and interpretation of the Scriptures in a way that the subsequent chapters are not, there is room for ambiguity, with the Jewish aspirations presented as still intact at the time of the births of John and Jesus. It is only as the reception by the Jews of Jesus as the Messiah turns out not to be what it was meant to be that it becomes increasingly apparent that Luke is demonstrating to Theophilus that the Messiah was not a political, nationalistic figure but one who operated on a different level. That he can allow this kind of developments to take place within his narrative (and they continue right to the end of the second volume) illustrates the point made²⁵ with reference to Luke's work overall, namely that his aim was not to preach the gospel but to interpret the events of the recent past by relating them to the history of Israel and God's plan for his people.

4.4. *Levels of Reality*

Inevitably for today's readers there arises then a question about the reality of Joseph's journey to Bethlehem and the birth of the Messiah there. If the account

24. The function of *καί* to join information that is viewed as continuous, rather than new or different, is carefully examined in S. H. LEVINSON, *Discourse Features of New Testament Greek*, Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 2000, 71-93. With reference to D05 readings in Luke's work, see my *The Bezan Text of Acts: A Contribution of Discourse Analysis to Textual Criticism*, JSNTSup, 236; Sheffield: SAP 2002, 204-211j.

25. See RIUS-CAMPS – READ-HEIMERDINGER, *Lluc*, 19-21, and the subtitle of that edition of Luke's writing: *Demostració a Teòfil*.

is not written in a historical register at that point, we want to know if it really happened —literally, that is. The answer is yes, and no, because the question from a Jewish point of view is irrelevant. It is not quite right to think that the event did not take place literally, as if that means that it was «merely» figurative and, as such, not real in the sense we give the word today. In fact, according to a Jewish view of reality, it is the spiritual dimension that is more real than the earthly one.

We have become, collectively as Christian readers over the centuries, so unaccustomed to reading Luke's work in this way or to dealing with two registers at once that we fail to see it happening. Besides, Luke is so widely viewed as a historian in the Greco-Roman tradition, which we unwittingly re-interpret in any case according to post-Enlightenment models of writing history, that we do not even expect to find Luke dealing with events in this complex and profound manner where he delivers not only «the facts» but also interprets them, too. And interprets them, to boot, in terms of the history of Israel, seeking to relate them to the paradigm of the Torah in which all the history of Israel is contained. That Luke expected Theophilus to understand what he was doing, and it has to be assumed that he did unless he were writing simply to entertain himself, then Theophilus must have been as intimately familiar with Jewish traditions and ways of interpreting texts and explaining events as Luke was. Or to be more precise, Theophilus the addressee of the text of Codex Bezae must have been. For just as the dominant text, or at the very least its interpretation, has taken the narrative to the level of a straightforward factual account, albeit with an overriding theological intention, so Theophilus becomes a person who receives the work Luke dedicated to him in the same way. Quite how the change took place, when and where, are matters that cannot be investigated here. Suffice it to say that the application of intricate Jewish exegesis to the birth of the Messiah looks suspiciously like the earlier form of the story rather than the later one, though the weight of prejudice against Codex Bezae would prefer it to be otherwise.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, a summary of the main points will serve to highlight the thread of the argument.

When Luke's account of the census is read not in the familiar Nestle-Aland edition, where the difficulties are numerous and so far unresolved, but in the manuscript of Codex Bezae (D05), the issue of the census presents itself differently, with a correspondingly different interpretation that gives a new insight into the probable intention of Luke in associating the birth of the Messiah with a Roman census. While it can be agreed that the purpose of the reference to the census is to «place the birth of Jesus in the context of world history», it is distinctly not «to show that the fiat of an earthly ruler can be utilised in the will of God to bring his

more important purposes to fruition».²⁶ On the contrary, according to the Bezan text, Luke's purpose is to situate the coming of the Messiah within the overall history of Israel and to set the divine plan for the liberation of Israel *against* the plans of the human invaders to dominate and oppress the Jewish people. The narrative perspective is thus a thoroughly Jewish one, confirming evidence found elsewhere in the Bezan text of Luke's two volumes that the author was a Jewish Jesus-believer, writing to another Jew of high standing in order to consider Jesus the Messiah in the light of traditional Jewish expectations

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Resum

Els problemes històrics al voltant de la menció lucana del cens romà en Lc 2.1-2 són ben coneguts. La informació que forneix la narrativa és precisa, amb tot, no concorda gaire amb el que se sap d'altres llocs sobre la pràctica romana del cens, o fins i tot, amb altres fets datables de l'evangeli de Lluç. Han estat proposades diverses explicacions per justificar la fiabilitat de Lluç com el narrador del tercer Evangeli i/o entendre aquesta disconformitat, però no n'hi ha cap que s'hagi admès unànimement. Quan el text es llegeix seguint el manuscrit del Còdex Bezae (D05), el problema es presenta de manera diferent, amb la seva pròpia interpretació corresponent que aporta una nova comprensió de la probable intenció de Lluç. El propòsit de l'associació del naixement del Messies amb un cens romà hauria estat col·locar el pla diví per l'alliberament d'Israel contra els plans dels invasors humans de dominar i oprimir el poble jueu. En contrast entre el cens mundà i l'any jubilar de Levític 25, el narrador escriu des d'una forta perspectiva jueva, que confirma les evidències trobades a diversos llocs del text Beza, segons les quals l'autor dels dos volums de Lluç seria un jueu creient en Jesús, que escriu a un altre jueu benestant per tal de presentar Jesús com el Messies a la llum de les expectatives tradicionals jueves.

26. MARSHALL, *Luke*, 97-98.