

Herod Antipas' Hearing in Luke 23.8

The phrase *dia to akouein peri autou* in Luke 23.8 is rendered in a variety of fashions by modern English translations, for example:

1. "having heard about him" (*NEB*);
2. "he had heard about him" (*JB*);
3. "Because he had heard about him" (*RSV, TEV, and R. Lattimore*¹);
4. "because he had been hearing about him" (*NAS*);
5. "From what he had heard about him" (*NIV*);
6. "From the reports about him" (*NAB*).

This article argues that *dia to akouein peri autou* should be translated differently from all of the ways listed above in order to communicate the proper nuance of Luke's thought.

There is no literal way to translate the preposition + accusative articular infinitive (*dia to akouein* = "because of the to hear") into good English. The articular infinitive has the character of a substantive, yet it retains the function of a verb.² Here, *to akouein* is the accusative object of the preposition *dia* which itself has a causal force ("because"),³ and the articular infinitive *to akouein* is modified by the prepositional phrase *peri autou*, "about him." There are at least three grammatically defensible ways to render *dia to akouein peri autou*. The phrase may be rendered as in *RSV, TEV, Lattimore*, and (in part) *NEB*, "because he had heard about him." This translation takes the *present* articular infinitive in a *perfect* sense.⁴ Or one may translate the phrase, as does *NAS*, "because he had been hearing about him," taking the *present* articular infinitive with the force of an *imperfect*.⁵ Both translations have the value of preserving the verbal function of the articular infinitive.

There is, however, a third way to render *dia to akouein peri autou*, namely, "because of what he had heard about him." This reading emphasizes the substantive quality of *to akouein*⁶ and, therefore, is preferable simply because it is the content of the hearing (see *toiauta* in 9:9) rather than the hearing *per se* that motivated Herod Antipas to seek to see Jesus (again, see 9:9 *ezētei idein auton*). The translators of the *NIV* and *NAB* understood the phrase in a similar, substantive fashion. Yet, neither of these translations has fully captured the intention of Luke's statement. Both *NIV* and *NAB* render *dia* as "from", in the sense of "through" – as if the articular infinitive were genitive (?). This decision is questionable since it gives a reading that loses the causal force of *dia* in the construction "*dia* + *accusative* articular infinitive." Moreover, it is almost

¹ R. Lattimore, *The Four Gospels and the Revelation* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1979) 169.

² H. W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1920) #2025.

³ Smyth, *Grammar* #1685.

⁴ Smyth, *Grammar* #1886.

⁵ M. Zerwick & M. Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, rev. ed. 1981) 275–76.

⁶ Smyth, *Grammar* #2025.

impossible to understand why the NIV translators elected to relate the phrase *dia to akouein peri autou* to the following words (*kai ēlpizen ti sēmeion idein hup' autou ginomenon*), since they are connected by the conjunction *kai* into a compound position.

This comparison of Luke's Greek text with several prominent modern English translations argues that none of them has captured the real turn of Luke's phrase. The best translation of Luke's text would be, "because of what he had heard about him", as in E. V. Rieu's 1952 Pelican translation of the four gospels. Confirmation for this translation is found first in recognizing the possibility of this interpretation through grammatical analysis of Luke's Greek text, and second in recognizing that Luke 9.9, a statement by Herod that it was the *things* about Jesus which he heard (*tis de estin houtos peri hou akouō toiauta;*) that motivated him to attempt to see Jesus, is the exact statement in regard to which 23.8 must be interpreted. Moreover, there is an observable pattern in Luke's use of *dia* + accusative articular infinitive that also supports this translation. The construction occurs seven times in Luke's Gospel. In five of these occurrences (at 2.4; 8.6; 11.8; 18.5 and 19.11) Luke supplies either an accusative subject or an accusative object for the accusative articular infinitive, and in each of these cases the articular infinitive should be translated to emphasize the verbal force. But in two instances (at 9.7 and 23.8) no accusative subject or object is supplied – rather the accusative articular infinitive is modified by a prepositional phrase (*peri autou* in 23.8 and *hupo tinōn* in 9.7). In these two cases the articular infinitives are of verbs of hearing and saying and they appear to connote the substantive quality of what is said or heard rather than the act per se.

MARION L. SOARDS

REVIEW

John A. Abercrombie. **Computer programs for literary analysis**. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984. v + 205 pages, no price stated.

Just a few years ago, a book such as Abercrombie's would not have been considered relevant or important enough to readers of this journal to warrant review in these pages. It was generally assumed that only someone with a great deal of computer knowledge and access to a large "mainframe" computer would be concerned about writing programs as an aid to studying ancient biblical texts. However, two factors have resulted in a new interest in the use of computers. First, a more realistic view of the actual potential of the computer has tempered the extravagant claims regarding the ability of a computer to do the translator's work for him. On the other hand, translators recognize that, when the limitations of a computer are kept in mind, there is much that a computer can do to assist a translator in his work. The second factor is the ready availability of the microcomputer with increased storage capacity and greater flexibility.

Abercrombie's book may be just the manual that is needed to enable the owner of a computer to get the most out of his equipment, as an aid to textual and literary studies. The book is "the first in a series of textbooks on computer