

tians” those who believed that Jesus had been raised by God. Those who made that claim in the first century continued to affirm that they were Jews (e.g., Paul and Peter [according to Acts]).

These brief reflections help clarify new perspectives of Judaism, the Gospel of John, Jesus, and the advent of “Christianity.” Not only are the new methodologies and perspectives more attuned to Jesus and his Judaism, but both open avenues of communication with Jews who have been miscast, castigated, and even murdered because of poor biblical exegesis and hermeneutics. Perhaps with renewed honesty in biblical research and a living out of the command of love, as evidenced by the man from Nazareth, those who are abandoning the institution called “the church” for religious and spiritual reasons may hear the echo of *quo vadis*.

Turning Water to Wine: Re-reading the Miracle at the Wedding in Cana

Carsten Claussen

Over the centuries the question of “what actually happened”¹ has led most critical interpreters of the Gospel of John, from David Friedrich Strauss and Ferdinand Christian Baur onwards, to radical skepticism. Already in the early third century CE Clement of Alexandria characterized its significance as “a spiritual Gospel.”² Unlike the Gospels of Mark and Luke,³ which the author of the Fourth Gospel probably knew, this later account may be regarded as “the Evangelist’s meditations on significant words and deeds of Jesus,”⁴ tempting one to affirm Martin Kähler’s verdict against the

1. Leopold von Ranke, *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1494 bis 1514* (Sämtliche Werke 33/34; Leipzig: Duncker und Humblot, 1874 [2nd ed.]), p. vii.

2. *Apud* Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.14.7: “But John, last of all, perceiving that what had reference to the body in the gospel of our Savior, was sufficiently detailed, and being encouraged by his familiar friends, and urged by the spirit, he wrote a spiritual gospel” Translation follows: *Eusebius’ Ecclesiastical History: Complete and Unabridged* (trans. C. F. Cruse; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1998).

3. Jörg Frey, “Das Vierte Evangelium auf dem Hintergrund der älteren Evangelienliteratur: Zum Problem: Johannes und die Synoptiker,” in *Johannesevangelium — Mitte oder Rand des Kanons? Neue Standortbestimmungen* (QD 203; ed. T. Söding; Freiburg: Herder, 2003), pp. 60-118; for an overview of the discussion concerning the relationship between John and the Synoptics, see: D. Moody Smith, *John Among the Gospels* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001 [2nd ed.]).

4. James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (CM 1; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 167; Martin Hengel, “Das Johannesevangelium als Quelle für die Geschichte des antiken Juden-

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search for the “so-called historical Jesus.”⁵ Therefore, on one hand one may call John’s Gospel the least historical of the four Gospels.

However, this seems to be only one side of the coin. For instance, it has been frequently observed that the author of John contributes a number of accurate details about the geography of first century CE Palestine, about Jewish customs, and about certain historical personalities.⁶ Archaeological findings support John’s knowledge of Palestine and Jerusalem, such as the Pools of Siloam⁷ and of Bethesda (or Bethzatha; John 5:2-9),⁸ stone vessels (cf. John 2:6),⁹ and the outdoor paving stones near the Antonia Fortress which may have been part of the Roman Praetorium in Jerusalem (John 19:13).¹⁰ His itinerary and chronology of Jesus’ ministry and death are taken by some interpreters to be more reliable than those of the Synoptics.¹¹ The debates and trials on the way to

tums,” in *Judaica, Hellenistica et Christiana: Kleine Schriften II* (WUNT 100; ed. *idem* in collaboration with J. Frey and D. Betz with contributions by H. Bloedhorn and M. Küchler; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), pp. 293-334, here p. 334: “Vielleicht könnte man bei seinem Werk von einem mit christologischer Leidenschaft erfüllten relativ frei ausgestalteten ‘Jesus-Midasch’ sprechen.”

5. Martin Kähler, *Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche, biblische Christus* (ed. E. Wolf; Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1953); ET *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* (ed. C. E. Braaten; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964).

6. Hengel, “Johannesevangelium,” pp. 297-334. However, there is a geographical mistake in the narrative between John 5:1 where Jesus is said to be in Jerusalem and 6:1 where he “went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.”

7. Etgar Lefkovits, “2nd Temple pool found,” *Jerusalem Post*, June 10, 2004, p. 5, reports the find of the Pool of Siloam by Eli Shukrun of the Israel Antiquities Authority and Dr. Roni Reich of the University of Haifa.

8. Hengel, “Johannesevangelium,” pp. 308-16.

9. See Roland Deines, *Jüdische Steingefäße und pharisäische Frömmigkeit: ein archäologisch-historischer Beitrag zum Verständnis von Joh 2,6 und der jüdischen Reinheits-halacha zur Zeit Jesu* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1993).

10. See J. H. Charlesworth, “Jesus Research and Near Eastern Archaeology: Reflections on Recent Developments,” in *Neotestamentica et Philonica: Studies in Honor of Peder Borgen* (ed. D. E. Aune, T. Seland, and J. H. Ulrichsen; NovTSup 106; Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 37-70, esp. pp. 51-2; John F. Wilson, “Archaeology and the Origins of the Fourth Gospel: Gabbatha,” in *Johannine Studies: Essays in Honor of Frank Pack* (ed. J. E. Priest; Malibu, Calif.: Pepperdine University, 1989), pp. 221-30.

11. For a balanced judgment see, e.g., Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews: A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity* (New York: Knopf, 1999), pp. 28-34, 197-214; she remarks (p. 290): “Given what we know about Jesus, the sort of itinerary that John presents makes much more sense than the one-year, one-way itinerary in Mark (followed by

Jesus’ execution seem to provide a better representation of what happened. Thus, on the other hand, John’s Gospel appears to provide historical data complementing our knowledge of the historical Jesus and even proving more accurate.¹²

Therefore, at the heart of the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel we end up with a largely paradoxical situation. In some respects John’s Gospel seems the least historical of the four NT gospels, but nevertheless provides a number of historical details we cannot gain from any other sources.¹³ As a consequence of this tension, authors like C. H. Dodd (1965)¹⁴ and J. Louis Martyn (1968)¹⁵ have made a strong case that one finds not only theology in John (which certainly no one should doubt) but also historical information (which is sometimes too easily overlooked). While the earlier “quests” for the historical Jesus largely neglected the Fourth Gospel, more recently a growing number of authors are taking John’s evidence into account.¹⁶ Of particular interest for such an examination are the texts unique to John, for here we may find information about the historical Jesus that is

Matthew and Luke) that itself so much obliges Mark’s distinctive theology. I do not defend the historicity of particular words, phrases, or the exact details of John’s itinerary per se. As all the conflicting erudition shows, the evidence is simply too problematic to yield any unarguable conclusions.”

12. Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *Der historische Jesus: Ein Lehrbuch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001 [3rd ed.]), p. 51.

13. R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel and the Letters of John* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), p. 15.

14. Charles Harold Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

15. J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003 [3rd ed.]).

16. Theissen and Merz, *Jesus*, p. 51; Hengel, “Johannesevangelium,” pp. 293-334; Paula Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Jesus* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 19-26, 198-99; Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth*; Derek M. H. Tovey, *Narrative Art and Act in the Fourth Gospel* (JSNTSup 52; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997); Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity, 1996); Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Bruce Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 2000); Francis J. Moloney, SDB, “The Fourth Gospel and the Jesus of History,” *NTS* 46 (2000): 42-58; John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 3 vols. Vol 1: *The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1991), pp. 41-55; James H. Charlesworth, “Jesus Research,” pp. 42-43.

otherwise unavailable. Among the seven miracles of Jesus reported in the Gospel of John, only two are completely without any parallel material in the other NT gospels. These are the gift miracle¹⁷ of the replacement of the water with wine (2:1-11) and the raising of Lazarus (11:1-44). While there are other reports about raisings in the New Testament,¹⁸ the miracle at a wedding in Cana has no analogue in the Synoptic tradition.¹⁹ As Jesus' first public act (2:11) in John's Gospel, his appearance at a community celebration in Cana of Galilee is obviously important. The Fourth Gospel reminds its readers of this miracle again in 4:46 and mentions Cana two more times (4:46; 21:2), while it is never mentioned in the Synoptics. Why does John put so much emphasis on this Galilean miracle, which the other Evangelists either did not know or did not care to mention?

In addition to this question, one may wonder whether a wedding presided by a head steward (2:9) with huge amounts of wine (2:6) seems to be somehow out of place in a mostly unknown Galilean village. Many interpreters find this kind of production of enormous amounts of wine simply unnecessary. David Friedrich Strauss thus called it "a miracle in the service of luxury."²⁰ These are a few of the most puzzling questions that have vexed interpreters of this story over the centuries.²¹ While there are numerous theological interpretations²² of this miracle, any attempt to ask for the his-

17. Gerd Theissen, *Urchristliche Wundergeschichten: Ein Beitrag zur formgeschichtlichen Erforschung der synoptischen Evangelien* (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998 [7th ed.]), pp. 112-13.

18. Mark 5:21-43/Matt 9:18-26/Luke 8:40-56; Luke 7:11-17; Matt 11:5/Luke 7:22; Acts 9:36-43; 20:9-12.

19. Cf. Robert T. Fortna, *The Fourth Gospel and Its Predecessor: From Narrative Source to Present Gospel* (Philadelphia: Polebridge, 1988), p. 52.

20. David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (trans. M. Evans, from the 4th German ed.; New York: Calvin Blanchard, 1860), vol. 2, p. 585.

21. Birger Olsson, *Structure and Meaning in the Fourth Gospel: A Text-linguistic Analysis of John 2:1-11 and 4:1-42* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1974), p. 18: "one of the most mysterious texts in the NT"; Howard Clark Kee, *Miracle in the Early Christian World: A Study in Socio-historical Method* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1983), p. 230, calls it an "enigmatic account." Karel Hanhart, "The Structure of John I 35-IV 54," in *Studies in John: Presented to Professor Dr. J. N. Sevenster on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (NovTSup 24; Leiden: Brill, 1970), pp. 22-46, here: "a most puzzling narrative. It reads like an act in a play." Hartwig Thyen, *Das Johannesevangelium* (HNT 6; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), p. 151: "höchst rätselhafte Erzählung."

22. For a number of different theological interpretations see Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Das erste Wunder Jesu (Joh. 2,1-11)* (Freiburg: Herder, 1951), pp. 11-30.

toricity of the features of the sign's setting is tormented by John's specific type of *anamnesis*.²³ Much current exegesis of this pericope seems occupied with the question of where the author may have received his *Vorlage* to write this story.

The still dominant view argues in favor of a Dionysiac background,²⁴ while others look for an Old Testament or an ancient Jewish origin.²⁵ Finally, some take the story as if the narrator invented it "word by word."²⁶ These basic interpretive directions need to be considered before we can begin setting John 2:1-11 into its historical framework.²⁷ We need to keep in mind that both Jesus' and John's different contexts must be taken into

23. Cf. Peter Stuhlmacher, "Spiritual Remembering: John 14.26," in *The Holy Spirit and Christian Origins: Essays in Honor of James D. G. Dunn* (ed. G. N. Stanton, B. W. Longenecker, and S. C. Barton; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), pp. 55-68, esp. pp. 60-67.

24. Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (trans. George R. Beasley-Murray, Rupert W. N. Hoare, and John K. Riches; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), pp. 118-19. Cf. similar views in Eta Linnemann, "Die Hochzeit zu Kana und Dionysos, NTS 20 (1974): 408-18; Walter Lütgehetmann, *Die Hochzeit von Kana (Joh 2,1-11): zu Ursprung und Deutung einer Wundererzählung im Rahmen johanneischer Redaktionsgeschichte* (BU 20; Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1990), pp. 277-82; Ingo Broer, "Noch einmal: Zur religionsgeschichtlichen 'Ableitung' von Joh. 2,1-11," SNTSU.A 8 (1983): 103-23; idem, "Das Weinwunder zu Kana (Joh 2,1-11) und die Weinwunder der Antike," in *Das Urchristentum in seiner literarischen Geschichte: Festschrift für Jürgen Becker zum 65. Geburtstag* (BZNW 100; ed. U. Mell and U. B. Müller; Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), pp. 291-308; Jürgen Becker, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes: Kapitel 1-10* (ÖTK 4/2; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn/Würzburg: Echter, 1991 [3rd ed.]), p. 132; Michael Labahn, *Jesus als Lebensspender: Untersuchungen zu einer Geschichte der johanneischen Tradition anhand ihrer Wundergeschichten* (BZNW 98; Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), pp. 146-60; Peter Wick, "Jesus gegen Dionysos? Ein Beitrag zur Kontextualisierung des Johannesevangeliums," *Bib 85* (2004): 179-98.

25. So, e.g., Heinz Noetzel, *Christus und Dionysos: Bemerkungen zum religionsgeschichtlichen Hintergrund von Johannes 2,1-11* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1960), p. 39; Roger Aus, *Water into Wine and the Beheading of John the Baptist: Early Jewish-Christian Interpretation of Esther 1 in John 2:1-11 and Mark 6:17-29* (BJS 150; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), pp. 1-37; Martin Hengel, "The Interpretation of the Wine Miracle at Cana: John 2:1-11," in *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament: Studies in Christology in Memory of George Bradford Caird* (ed. L. D. Hurst and N. T. Wright; Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), pp. 83-112; however, for Aus (cf. pp. 34-37) and Hengel (cf. pp. 111-12) there is no strict opposition between "here Dionysus, there old Israel and Judaism" (Hengel, p. 112), as motifs of Hellenistic wine gods had influenced Judaism since early antiquity.

26. Thyen, *Johannesevangelium*, p. 151.

27. Dunn, "John," pp. 311-14.

account. Neither is it sufficient to read the Fourth Gospel as a report of Jesus' life in the 20s and 30s of the first century CE,²⁸ nor to read this Gospel through the later spectacles of early church fathers,²⁹ Mandaeism and later Gnostic systems,³⁰ or rabbinic literature.³¹ Such attempts unduly separate questions of theology and interpretation from the recognition of historical tradition. One need also to recognize that an author at the end of the first century CE encountered tradition with what Gadamer calls a "fusion of horizons" (*Horizontverschmelzung*).³²

For the most part, John's Gospel does not allow for reliably recon-

28. This is the impression one sometimes gets in Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel: Issues & Commentary* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), pp. 17-22, 56-57.

29. See the excellent summary and discussion by Adolf Smitmans, *Das Weinwunder von Kana: Die Auslegung von Jo 2,1-11 bei den Vätern und heute* (BGBE 6; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1966).

30. See, e.g., Bultmann, *John*, pp. 7-9; James M. Robinson, "The Johannine Trajectory," in *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (ed. James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), pp. 232-68; Luise Schottroff, *Der Glaubende und die feindliche Welt: Beobachtungen zum gnostischen Dualismus und seiner Bedeutung für Paulus und das Johannesevangelium* (WMANT 37; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970); Siegfried Schulz, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (NTD 4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972 [12th ed.]), pp. 28, 211.

31. See, e.g., Klaus Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium: 1. Teilband: Kapitel 1-10* (THKNT 4, 1; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2000), pp. 19-28.

32. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Ges. Werke 1; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1986), p. 311; Franz Mussner, *Die johanneische Sichtweise und die Frage nach dem historischen Jesus* (QD 28; Freiburg: Herder, 1965), pp. 14-17; Ferdinand Hahn, "Sehen und Glauben im Johannesevangelium," in *Neues Testament und Geschichte: historisches Geschehen und Deutung im Neuen Testament: Oscar Cullmann zum 70. Geburtstag* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag/Tübingen: Mohr, 1972), pp. 125-41; here pp. 140-41. Cf. Takashi Onuki, "Zur literatursoziologischen Analyse des Johannesevangeliums — auf dem Wege zur Methodenintegration," *AJBI* 8 (1982): 162-216; here pp. 193-95; idem, *Gemeinde und Welt im Johannesevangelium: Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach der theologischen und pragmatischen Funktion des johanneischen "Dualismus"* (WMANT 56; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984), p. 34 *et passim*; Christina Hoegen-Rohls, *Der nachösterliche Johannes: Die Abschiedsreden als hermeneutischer Schlüssel zum vierten Evangelium* (WUNT 2/84; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), pp. 27-28; Jörg Frey, *Die johanneische Eschatologie*, 3 vols. Vol. 1: *Ihre Probleme im Spiegel der Forschung seit Reimarus* (WUNT 96; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), pp. 339-40, 456-65, esp. 463-64; idem, Vol. 2: *Das johanneische Zeitverständnis* (WUNT 110; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), pp. 133, 249; idem, Vol. 3: *Die eschatologische Verkündigung in den johanneischen Texten* (WUNT 117; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), pp. 10, 115.

structing the historical events supposedly behind the text.³³ However, scholars have examined Gospel texts for inferences concerning ancient Judaism as Jesus' historical context. One of them, Paula Fredriksen, describes the situation as follows:

Academic attention has refocused on the gospels, examined not for individually authentic or inauthentic statements but for such inferences as can be drawn from the light of relevant historical knowledge — of Judaism, of first century Palestine, of Roman legal procedure and colonial policy, and so on.³⁴

Fredriksen is well aware of Martin Kähler's, Rudolf Bultmann's and their followers' objections against any attempt to reconstruct the historical Jesus, and she takes them seriously. She goes on:

The intuition of earlier scholars was sound: 'what really happened' during Jesus' ministry is not recoverable from the evangelical descriptions of what happened. But by examining these descriptions in light of our knowledge of Jesus' historical context, we can establish with reasonable security what *possibly* happened, what *probably* happened, and what *could not possibly* have happened.³⁵

Likewise, while absolute certainty must elude us, by considering material previously thought irrelevant we will seek new interpretive possibilities or even probabilities.

Thus, after discussing a possible background of John 2:1-11, this paper attempts two kinds of readings of this text. First, we shall look for potential historical data from the text. Second, we shall approach the text by reading it in light of John's theology. This will finally lead us to review our thesis of an inseparable fusion of history and theology in the Fourth Gospel.

33. Hengel, "Interpretation," p. 90, rightly concludes: "The time is past for attempts to 'reconstruct' the historical event."

34. Fredriksen, *Jesus*, pp. 96-97. Fredriksen calls this type of approach "The Second Reading" as opposed to "The First Reading," which is "distilling an outline of Jesus' story as given in the gospels and, necessarily to a lesser degree, in Paul, recalling *grosso modo* the evangelists' own interpretation of these events. Such an outline is extremely hypothetical, depending as it does ultimately on Mark, who freely constructed the narrative framework of his story for his own purposes" (p. 94).

35. Fredriksen, *Jesus*, p. 97 (ital. original).

Searching for the Background and the Context

The origin of this story of Jesus at Cana is shrouded in mystery. While for a long time most interpreters followed Rudolf Bultmann's contention for including the miracle in a supposed signs source,³⁶ others have argued in favor of a "Two-Signs-Hypothesis," containing John 2:1-11 and 4:46-54 (and maybe 21:1-14).³⁷ Today the signs source theory has lost most of its acceptance.³⁸

Nevertheless, at present there are two main approaches seeking a *Vorlage* for the production of this particular miracle story. They can be divided into those who favor the story of the god Dionysus and those who favor an Old Testament background, such as the prophet Isaiah or the book of Esther with its early traces of the feast of Purim.

The Dionysus Tradition and the Wine Miracle

Much of the interpretation of the miracle at Cana is guided by the argument of Rudolf Bultmann that the story seemed to be influenced by pagan tradition. He writes:

There can be no doubt that the story has been taken over from heathen legend and ascribed to Jesus. In fact the motif of the story, the changing of the water into wine, is a typical motif of the Dionysus legend.³⁹

36. See the bibliographies in Jürgen Becker, "Wunder und Christologie: Zum literarkritischen und christologischen Problem der Wunder im Johannesevangelium," *NTS* 16 (1969/70): 130-48, here p. 132 n. 1; W. Nicol, *The Semeia in the Fourth Gospel* (NovTSup 32; Leiden: Brill, 1972), p. 12 n. 1; cf. the seminal study by Robert T. Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs: A Reconstruction of the Narrative Sources Underlying the Fourth Gospel* (SNTSMS 11; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 1-109.

37. Sydney Temple, "The Two Signs in the Fourth Gospel," *JBL* 81 (1962): 169-74; Hans-Peter Heckerens, *Die Zeichen-Quelle der johanneischen Redaktion: Ein Beitrag zur Entstehungsgeschichte des vierten Evangeliums* (SBS 113; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1984), adds John 21:1-14 to such a source.

38. Gilbert van Belle, *The Signs Source in the Fourth Gospel: Historical Survey and Critical Evaluation of the Semeia Hypothesis* (BETL 116; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994), *passim*, has shown that meanwhile the critique of this hypothesis outweighs the acceptance. Cf. the literature in Udo Schnelle, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (THKNT 4; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2000 [2nd ed.]), p. 14 n. 60.

39. Bultmann, *John*, pp. 118-19. Cf. n. 24 for the argument in favor of a Dionysiac background of John 2:1-11.

Jesus' wine miracle is thus merely characterized as a christianized Dionysiac tradition. Although Bultmann was not the first to publish this interpretation,⁴⁰ his commentary helped to support its broad acceptance.⁴¹ Most commentators who follow this line of argumentation interpret John 2:1-11 as a missionary story, presenting Jesus as greater than Dionysus.⁴²

There can be no doubt that the worship of Dionysus was familiar in the Ancient Near Eastern and in the wider Mediterranean cultures. Dionysus was not only associated with wine but also with fertility and vegetation in general. In the Greek world the cult became firmly established as early as the seventh century BCE. In Palestine the Seleucids tried to impose formal worship of Dionysus, together with Zeus, in the Hellenistic reform of 167 BCE, which failed due to the resistance of the Maccabees.⁴³ Nevertheless, this opposition to such formal worship of Dionysus does not exclude the possibility that Dionysiac motifs were adapted and (re-)integrated in Judaism from early antiquity onwards.⁴⁴ Such Hellenistic influence was

40. For a list of earlier representatives of this interpretation, see Carl Clemen, *Religionsgeschichtliche Erklärung des Neuen Testaments: die Abhängigkeit des ältesten Christentums von nichtjüdischen Religionen und philosophischen Systemen* (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1924 [4th ed.]).

41. See, among many others who read John 2:1-11 against a Dionysiac background: Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), pp. 25, 120; C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978 [2nd ed.]), pp. 211-12; Joachim Jeremias, *Neutestamentliche Theologie: Erster Teil: Die Verkündigung Jesu* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1988 [4th ed.]), p. 92; Lütgehetmann, *Hochzeit*, pp. 261-82; and more recently: Margaret Davies, *Rhetoric and Reference in the Fourth Gospel* (JSNTSup 69; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), p. 88; Theissen and Merz, *Jesus*, p. 115; Dodd, *Tradition*, pp. 224-25, sees a possibility "that the transformation of water into wine may have been adapted to Christian use without any consciousness of its pagan associations" (p. 225); against any dependence on Dionysiac tradition argue: Noetzel, *Christus*; cf. also Schnelle, *Johannes*, p. 61; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (WBC 36; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999 [2nd ed.]), p. 35; John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, vol. 2: *Mentor, Message, and Miracles* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1994), pp. 1021-22, n. 255.

42. See, e.g., Lütgehetmann, *Hochzeit*, p. 282; Labahn, "Jesus," pp. 159-60. Wick, "Jesus," pp. 179-98, goes even further. He argues, "The gospel of John as a whole disputes in an implicit way the worship of Dionysos" (p. 198). However, this seems to be an over-interpretation of the evidence.

43. Cf. 2 Macc 6:7; 14:33.

44. Hengel, "Interpretation," pp. 108-11, esp. p. 111; Morton Smith, "On the Wine God in Palestine," in *Salo Wittmayer Baron Jubilee Volume* (ed. S. Lieberman; Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1975), pp. 815-29; Sean Freyne, "Jesus the Wine-Drinker: A

even more likely in the Diaspora of Asia Minor. In Ephesus, where John's Gospel may have been written, the Dionysus cult had a very strong presence. This definitely allows for a "Dionysus-reading" of John 2:1-11.⁴⁵

The questions that arise, however, are how closely such supposed traditions parallel the wedding-at-Cana story and how early they may have been available to the author. A careful survey of the evidence⁴⁶ reveals that close parallels to the changing of water into wine are considerably rare and of these only three or four are from pre-Christian times.⁴⁷

The earliest extant reference to the changing of water into wine appears in a fragment of Sophocles (497/6-406 BCE). It reads:

So Achelous runs with wine in our place (οἶνω πάρ' ἡμῖν Ἀχελῶος ἄρα νῆ)⁴⁸

The reference is to the river Achelous⁴⁹ in western Greece, which for some unknown reason is said to run with wine instead of water. The river god of the same name, known for having fathered the sirens, is not linked to wine. However, Achelous can also stand for freshwater.⁵⁰ Sophocles may be using some kind of euphemism, calling freshwater wine. To take this fragment as evidence for the concept of changing water into wine would be an overinterpretation.

A second supposed reference appears in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*:

Friend of Women," in *Galilee and Gospel: Collected Essays* (WUNT 125; ed. S. Freyne; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), pp. 274-79.

45. Sjef van Tilborg, *Reading John in Ephesus* (NovTSup 83; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), pp. 95-98, esp. p. 98.

46. A large number of supposed Hellenistic parallels to John 2:1-11 can be found in Udo Schnelle, in collaboration with Michael Labahn and Manfred Lang, *Neuer Wettstein: Texte zum Neuen Testament aus Griechenland und Hellenismus: Band I/2: Texte zum Johannes-evangelium* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), pp. 87-131; see also: Klaus Berger and Carsten Colpe, *Religionsgeschichtliches Textbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Texte zum Neuen Testament/NTD 1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), pp. 151-52.

47. So, e.g., Broer, "Weinwunder," pp. 302-7. Broer rightly concludes that other examples from pre-Christian times and from the first century CE are even further remote from the motif in John 2:9. Cf. Diodorus Siculus (1st c. BCE) 3.66.2; Horace (65-8 BCE) *Carm.* 2.19.9-12; Silius Italicus (26/35 — ca. 100 CE) *Punica* 7.186-194.

48. Sophocles *Athamas* frg. 5 (Lloyd-Jones, LCL).

49. Today this river, which is by far the greatest river in Greece, is called Megdova and also includes the lower reaches of the Aspropotamos or Aspros.

50. Hans-Peter Isler, "Acheloos [2]," *DNP* 1 (1996): 72.

But to my daughters Liber gave other gifts, greater than they could pray or hope to gain. For at my daughters' touch all things were turned to corn and wine and the oil of grey-green Minerva, and there was rich profit in them.

Dedit altera Liber femineae stirpi voto maiora fideque munera: nam tactu natarum cuncta mearum in segetem laticemque meri canaeque Minervae transformabantur, divesque eart usus in illis.⁵¹

Liber Pater,⁵² an ancient Roman god of nature, fertility, and wine, is to be identified with Dionysus/Bacchus. Ovid informs us that Liber bestowed on the daughters of Apollo's son, the Delian priestly king Anios, the gift to turn "all things" into corn, wine, and olive oil. These girls were well known in later Greek mythology as the *oinotrophoi*, the "winemakers." Their suggestive names Oino, Spermo, and Elais clearly confirm that they were responsible for more than producing wine. Although this is truly a concept of transformation, it does not indicate water is involved. On the contrary, the mythographic handbook *Βιβλιοθήκη* (attributed to Apollodorus, *180 BCE, but certainly later)⁵³ says: "Dionysus granted them the power of producing oil, corn, and wine from *earth*."⁵⁴ This early interpretation of this special gift suggests a special blessing to produce a rich harvest. A more differentiated interpretation appears, however, in Servius' early fifth century CE commentary on Vergil's *Aeneid*. Here one finds the interpretation that the *oinotrophoi* were able to convert water into wine and everything else into grain and olive oil.⁵⁵ However, this understanding probably originated through the Dionysian tradition itself. Thus Ovid's reference cannot be taken as an early allusion to changing water into wine.

A third author who supposedly references this motif is Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History*. Listing a number of miraculous types of waters, he includes

51. Ovid *Metam.* 13.650-54 (F. J. Miller, LCL). However, Miller translates "Liber" as "Bacchus."

52. The earliest known occurrences are: *CIL* I 2.563 (4th c. BCE); I 2.381 (3rd/2nd c. BCE).

53. Cf. Franco Montanari, "Apollodorus 7, aus Athen," *DNP* 1 (1996): 857-60, esp. p. 859.

54. Apollodorus *Library Epitome* 3.10 (J. G. Frazer; LCL), italics mine; the text was attributed to Apollodorus.

55. Servius, *Verg. Aen.* 3.80.

Water flowing from a spring in the temple of Father Liber on the island of Andros always has the flavour of wine on January 5; the day is called God's Gift Day.

Andro in insula, templo Liberi patris, fontem nonis Ianuariis semper vini sapore fluere; . . . dies Θεοδοσία vocatur.⁵⁶

Again, Liber Pater is linked to some kind of wine miracle. Even the date seemed to support the link to early Christian interpretation: Wilhelm Bousset pointed out that the Christian feast of Epiphany, celebrated on January 6, was meant to contrast the Epiphany of Christ with that of Dionysus.⁵⁷ However, the history of the Christian feast of Epiphany is extremely complicated.⁵⁸ A connection between the story of the miracle at Cana and this feast cannot be verified until the fourth century CE.⁵⁹ And even if some elements of the Dionysiac tradition should have been relevant for the later understanding of John 2:1-11, the differences between the miracle story at Cana and Pliny's account are significant. The type of liquid flowing from the spring is not even termed wine; it just tastes like wine (*vini sapor*). It also remains unknown whether this spring usually runs with water or may be dry altogether. A parallel account is not much closer to a changing-of-water-into-wine miracle.⁶⁰

At Andros, from the spring of Father Liber, on fixed seven-day festivals of this god, flows wine, but if its water is carried out of sight of the temple the taste turns to that of water.

Andre e fonte Liberi patris statis diebus septenis eius dei vinum fluere, si auferatur e conspectu templi, sapore in aquam transeunte.

Although much in this passage remains mysterious, there is a connection of water and wine, even if the reported change is the other way around. We should note, however, that again it is the taste that turns from water into

56. Pliny the Elder *Nat.* 2.231 (H. Rackham, LCL).

57. Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: Geschichte des Christusblaubens von den Anfängen des Christentums bis Irenaeus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1921 [2nd ed.]), pp. 62, 270-74.

58. Smitmans, *Weinwunder*, pp. 165-86.

59. Noetzel, *Christus*, pp. 29-38, esp. p. 38.

60. Pliny the Elder *Nat.* 31.13 (W. H. S. Jones, LCL).

wine. Does this suggest that this special liquid coming from the spring during a special time is not wine, but rather water that tastes like wine?

A fourth example actually mentions the miraculous activity of Dionysus, whereas the above texts simply imply such divine activity. The Greek historian Memnon of Heraclea, probably first century CE,⁶¹ wrote a history of Heraclea Pontica. Here one finds notice of the following tradition:⁶²

He [i.e. Dionysus] filled the spring from which Nicaea used to drink when she was exhausted from hunting, with wine instead of water.

πληροῖ τοίνυν τὴν κρήνην, ἀφ' ἧς εἴωθεν Νίκαια πίνειν, ἐπειδὴν ἀπὸ τῆς θήρης κοπωθεῖη, ἀντὶ τοῦ ὕδατος οἴνου.

The story concerns Dionysus being rejected by the water nymph Nicaea. However, after she drinks from the spring, whose water had been replaced by the god with wine, she gets drunk and falls asleep. Dionysus then takes advantage of her, thereby fathering Satyrus and other sons. While this may be the closest earlier parallel to the changing of water into wine in John 2:9, there are still significant differences between both miracles. First, while the six stone water jars are filled (γεμίζω) with water (John 2:7) which then miraculously turns into wine (John 2:9), here Dionysus fills (πληρώω) a spring with wine instead of water. Thus Dionysus does not change water into wine but rather replaces one with the other. Second, the special quality of the wine is noted in John 2:10, as is the special taste in some of the texts discussed above. The wine consumed by Nicaea, probably in large amounts given the reason and result, seems to taste no different from the ordinary fresh water usually running from this spring. Otherwise, Nicaea would have noticed the difference and the whole plot would not have worked. The similarities between both stories are not very close.⁶³

In summary, none of the scant supposed parallels from Hellenistic sources displays a changing of water into wine. The parallels are not close

61. A dating until the second century CE is possible. Cf. Klaus Meister, "M(emnon) aus Herkleia," *DNP* 7 (1999), pp. 1205-6.

62. Only a compressed account of books 9-16 has survived in Photius' *Bibliotheca*. See *Bibliotheca* 224; Memnon of Heraclea quoted after *FGH* 434 frg. 1. Translation mine.

63. A bit closer is the much later parallel account in Nonnos (5th c. CE) *Dionysica* 16.252-54, where the yellow color of the water (!) and the sweetness of the stream turned into wine are mentioned.

enough to explain the origin of the tradition behind John 2:1-11. This does not, however, exclude the possibility that later hearers, readers and interpreters have noted a connection between the Dionysus tradition and the changing of water into wine at Cana. At a time much later than the composition of the Fourth Gospel, at the end of the second century CE, Pausanias in his *Description of Greece* tells the following story:

Three pots are brought into the building by the priests and set down empty in the presence of the citizens and of any strangers who may chance to be in the country. The doors of the building are sealed by the priests themselves and by any others who may be so inclined. On the morrow they are allowed to examine the seals, and on going into the building they find the pots filled with wine. . . . The Andrians too assert that every other year at their feast of Dionysus wine flows of its own accord from the sanctuary.⁶⁴

Although at first glance this later story looks like a much closer parallel to the Cana miracle, even here the pots are empty; again, one cannot speak of a changing of water into wine.

It is simply unjustified to regard the Dionysus tradition as a generic source for John 2:1-11. This has been demonstrated looking carefully at all relevant pre-Christian and first century CE sources. Craig Koester is right to conclude that the legends of Dionysus “probably tell us little about how the story of the first Cana miracle originated, but they do help us understand how the story could *communicate* the significance of Jesus to Greeks as well as Jews.”⁶⁵

64. Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 6.26.1-2 (W. H. Jones, LCL); cf. the parallel traditions in Ps-Aristotle, *Mirabilia* 123; Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 15.34a.

65. Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), p. 81; cf. Willis Hedley Salier, *The Rhetorical Impact of the Semeia in the Gospel of John* (WUNT 2/186; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), pp. 64-70, here p. 69, who considers the impact “that the account in John 2 might have made on readers familiar with the Dionysian stories.” Glen W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity: Thomas Spencer Jerome Lectures* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1990), shows the prominence of the Dionysus tradition in post-Constantine times.

The Wine Miracle and Old Testament and Jewish Traditions

While the Dionysiac tradition does not provide a *Vorlage* for the wine miracle at Cana, we are still left to consider a supposed Old Testament or Jewish background for the story.

Heinz Noetzel, a strong critic of Dionysiac influence on John 2:1-11, argues that abundance of wine is a marker of the messianic time of salvation.⁶⁶ He highlights this passage in the *Apocalypse of Baruch*:

The earth will also yield fruits ten thousandfold. And on one vine will be a thousand branches, and one branch will produce a thousand clusters, and one cluster will produce a thousand grapes, and one grape will produce a cor of wine.⁶⁷

In addition, rabbinic interpretations of Gen 49:11-12 express hope for high quality wine in the messianic age.⁶⁸ However, Noetzel concedes that the motif of the changing of water into wine does not have any parallels in ancient Jewish literature.⁶⁹

Rogers Aus draws our attention to a number of parallels between John 2:1-11 and the book of Esther.⁷⁰ He argues “that the author [of the Fourth

66. Noetzel, *Christus*, p. 45. He mainly refers to the rabbinic exegesis of Gen 49:11-12: Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he washes his garments in wine and his robe in the blood of grapes; his eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk.” Cf. also Joel 3:18; Zech 14:8; Isa 30:25. Cf. already Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus als Weltvollender* (BFCT 33/4; Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1930), pp. 28-29, who relates the expectation of wealth of wine in the messianic age to Gen 9:20; 49:11-12; Num 13:23-24; Mark 14:25; John 2:1-11; 15:1-8.

67. 2 Bar. 29:5; cf. 1 En. 10:19. According to Josephus one “cor” is about 400 liters (*Ant.* 15.314); cf. Luke 16:7.

68. Noetzel, *Christus*, p. 46; cf. Amos 9:13; Jer 31:12.

69. Edmund Little, *Echoes of the Old Testament in The Wine of Cana in Galilee (John 2:1-11) and The Multiplication of the Loaves and Fish (John 6:1-15): Towards an Appreciation* (CahRB 41; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1998), pp. 8-35, presents a helpful investigation on “Wine in Scripture” (pp. 17-35), but cannot provide any ancient Jewish evidence for the changing of water into wine either. Unlike Noetzel, he does not exclude Dionysian influence in John (pp. 34-59); reference to the “Sinai Screen” by Olsson, *Structure*, pp. 102-9, appears mainly in the frame (“third day” in 2:1; δόξα in 2:11); Charles Harold Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), pp. 298-99 referred to Philo leg. 3.82 (“Melchizedek shall bring forward wine instead of water”). But this does not refer to a changing of water into wine.

70. Aus, *Water*, pp. 1-37; see also idem, “The Release of Barabbas (Mark 15:6-15 par.;

Gospel] has very creatively adapted for his own purposes Judaic haggadic traditions on the feast(s) of Ahasuerus in Esther 1:1-8." The book of Esther may go back to the late fourth or early third century BCE and its final form emerged by the second century.⁷¹ It concerns the deliverance of the Jews from threatened genocide during the Persian Empire. The story's historicity, however, is rather doubtful. As the book now stands, it serves as an etiology for the festival of Purim (Esth 9). Josephus mentions the festival at the end of the first century.⁷² Thus, Palestinian Jews certainly already observed Purim in the first century.

If one looks for miracles as signs (cf. John 2:11), it is striking that more than any other biblical book, Esther could be described with the term sign (Hebrew: **אֵי**; Aramaic: **ܐܝܢܐ**).⁷³ Parallel to the mentioning of the third day (John 2:1), Esther approaches the king on the third day after three days of fasting (Esth 4:16; 5:1). The link between weddings and the Esther story is also quite obvious as the LXX interprets the feast in Esth 1:3-5 as a wedding: "When the days of the wedding (αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ γάμου) were completed."⁷⁴ Wine in large quantities and of excellent quality is also a motif that appears in both John 2:9-10 and Esth 5:6; 7:2. Although these are striking parallels, the book of Esther does not provide any reference to a changing of water into wine, which is central to John 2:1-11 and, of course, the rabbinic interpretations are much later than John's Gospel.⁷⁵

To sum up: neither the pagan nor the Jewish sources provide any evidence for the motif of changing water into wine.⁷⁶ There is no indication

John 18:39-40), and Judaic Traditions on the Book of Esther," in idem, *Barabbas and Esther and Other Studies in the Judaic Illumination of Earliest Christianity* (SFSHJ 54; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), pp. 1-27.

71. Carey A. Moore, *Esther: Introduction, Translation and Notes* (AB 7B; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971), pp. lvii-lx.

72. *Ant.* 11.295. Cf. "Mordecai's day" in 2 Macc 15:36.

73. Cf. Aus, *Water*, p. 3; *b. Meg.* 13b; 14a; 15b; *Tg. Esth.* I 9.26, 29; *Tg. Esth.* II 2.6, 11; 4.13; 6.11; 7.10; 9.26, 29.

74. Cf. Esth 2:18.

75. Aus, *Water*, pp. 20-23, refers to a changing of drinking cups (Esth 1:7) and "becoming like lead" in rabbinic interpretations of Esth 1:7. cf., e.g., *b. Meg.* 11b (Soncino Talmud pp. 65-66); 12a on Esth 1:7 (Soncino Talmud p. 70); *Pirqe R. El.* 49. But these interpretations report a different kind of transformation and it is totally unknown whether the author of the Fourth Gospel knew the book of Esther, considering, e.g., it is the only OT text not present in any Qumran document.

76. Noetzel, *Christus*, p. 47.

the author of the Fourth Gospel took a story from another context and transformed it into a story about Jesus.⁷⁷ Some commentators⁷⁸ ignore the question of possible sources or traditions behind the story. However, such abstinence does not seem to be warranted. After a careful investigation into the religious background of the text we are left with a number of details that locate the story in a certain geographical, religious and cultural setting in history. These details, which we shall now turn to, suggest this miracle story goes back to a local tradition during the time and life of Jesus.⁷⁹

Searching for "Historical Data"

By a number of issues this story is rooted in history. It takes place in Cana in Galilee "on the third day" (2:1). By referring to Jesus' mother (2:1, 3-5, 12), brothers (2:12) and disciples (2:2, 12) the story is connected to earlier references to his home in Nazareth (1:45-46), the calling of the first disciples, and implicitly also his father Joseph (1:45). The description of the wedding may allow a comparison to Jewish wedding customs of that time. Finally, the stone jars may be similar to those found at a number of sites by modern day archaeologists.⁸⁰ In contrast to the high Christology of the prologue (1:1-18), for example, we are here presented with the geographical and social context of the historical Jesus. All of these features prompt a historical investigation.

77. So, e.g., Olsson, *Structure*, p. 98: "There is no indication in the text that he [the Evangelist] himself does not regard it as historically accurate. It is presented as an occurrence in Jesus' historical situation which is a sign of something else."

78. Thyen, *Johannesevangelium*, p. 151.

79. Cf. Hengel, "Interpretation," p. 108: "There is no doubt that the narrative has a Jewish-Palestinian background and this is clear on the basis of its location and circumstances."

80. Deines, *Steingefässe*; Jonathan L. Reed, "Stone Vessels and Gospel Texts: Purity and Socio-Economics in John 2," in *Zeichen aus Text und Stein: Studien auf dem Weg zu einer Archäologie des Neuen Testaments* (TANZ 42; Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 2003), pp. 381-401.

Cana in Galilee

Jesus' first miracle is located at a Jewish wedding in Cana.⁸¹ The Fourth Evangelist locates the historical Jesus and the people around him at a number of places. John the Baptist and his ministry are situated in "Bethany across the Jordan" (1:28) and Aenon near Salim (3:23). The disciple Philip stems from Bethsaida (1:44) and Nathanael from Cana (21:2). Jesus travels three times to Jerusalem for Passover (2:13, 23; 6:4; 11:55). He goes into the Judean countryside (3:22), from Judea back to Galilee through Samaria (4:3-4), enters the city of Sychar (4:5), performs another miracle at Cana in Galilee (4:46) and one beside a pool "in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate" (5:2), and later heads "to the other side of Galilee" (6:1; cf. 7:1). Jesus twice visits Mary, Martha and their brother Lazarus at Bethany (11:1; 12:1). He comes to a garden "across the Kidron valley" (18:1), finally carries his cross to Golgotha (19:17) and is entombed in a nearby garden (19:41). These localizations may reflect concrete examples of native tradition. Stories were remembered in connection with certain geographical data. In any case such geographical details are employed to support the Evangelist's credibility.

The mention of Cana frames the pericope in John 2:1 and 11 and also Jesus' early ministry in Galilee.⁸² Archaeologists have searched for Cana, also referenced by Josephus (*Life* 86), at several places in Galilee and southern Lebanon,⁸³ but most scholars now identify it with Khirbet Qana.⁸⁴ This site is situated on a hill on the northern side of the Beth Netofa Valley at Wadi Yodefat, about 13 km south of Nazareth Illit. It was occupied from the Neolithic to the Ottoman periods. By the sixth century

81. For an overview of the site, see James F. Strange, "Cana of Galilee," *ABD* 1 (1992): 827.

82. Cf. Cana again in 4:46; cf. Luke 4:14-16 who, unlike the other Synoptics, also reports Jesus' early ministry in the Galilean hill country in the area of Nazareth.

83. See Richardson, "Cana," p. 100; Charlesworth, "Jesus Research," pp. 55-56.

84. See Charlesworth, "Jesus Research," p. 56; Douglas R. Edwards, "Khirbet Qana: From Jewish Village to Christian Pilgrim Site," in *The Roman and Byzantine Near East* (ed. J. H. Humphrey; *JRASS* 49; Portsmouth, R.I.: JRA, 2002): vol. 3, pp. 101-32; Peter Richardson, "Khirbet Qana (and Other Villages) as a Context for Jesus," in *Building Jewish in the Roman East* (ed. idem; Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2004), pp. 55-71; idem, "What Has Cana to Do with Capernaum?" in idem, *Building Jewish*, pp. 91-107. [Also see, P. Richardson, "Khirbet Cana (and Other Villages) as a Context for Jesus," in *Jesus and Archaeology*, edited by Charlesworth (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), pp. 120-44. This note was added by the Editor.]

it had become a popular pilgrimage destination.⁸⁵ Comparing it with Capernaum, Peter Richardson, involved in excavating the site, describes Khirbet Qana as follows:

Capernaum was fishing based and Cana was agriculturally based, but in other respects they were similar, with similar developments from the early Roman through early Byzantine periods. Both were small peasant villages, each within sight of a capital of Galilee; both were associated with Jesus and with events of the First Revolt. Both may have had early Jewish-Christian communities, though evidence for this is slender and later. The character of the housing is similar, though Khirbet Qana's seems more varied. The presence of a synagogue is similar; though Khirbet Qana's is still uncertain. The evidence of social and religious life is somewhat similar, though there is more evidence of observant Judaism at Khirbet Qana than at Capernaum (*mikvaoth*, stoneware, Hasmonean coinage, *columbaria*).⁸⁶

The archaeological excavations at Khirbet Qana have enlarged our knowledge of Galilee as Jesus' geographical setting, a prominent feature of recent Jesus Research.⁸⁷ The presence of somehow "observant Jewish inhabitants

85. Richardson, "Cana," pp. 100-101, summarizes the main references in pilgrim literature.

86. Richardson, "Cana," p. 106.

87. See among others: Séan Freyne, *Galilee, Jesus, and the Gospels: Literary Approaches and Historical Investigations* (Philadelphia, 1988); idem, *Galilee and Gospel: Collected Essays* (WUNT 125; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000); idem, *Jesus, a Jewish Galilean: A New Reading of the Jesus-Story* (London: T&T Clark International, 2004); Richard A. Batey, *Jesus and the Forgotten City: New Light on the Urban World of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991); Richard A. Horsley, *Galilee: History, Politics, People* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity, 1995); idem, *Archaeology, History, and Society in Galilee: The Social Context of Jesus and the Rabbis* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity, 1996); Douglas R. Edwards and C. Thomas McCullough, *Archaeology and the Galilee: Texts and Contexts in the Graeco-Roman and Byzantine Periods* (SFSHJ 143; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997); Eric M. Meyers, ed., *Galilee Through the Centuries: Confluence of Cultures* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999); Jonathan L. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus: A Re-examination of the Evidence* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity, 2000); Halvor Moxness, "The Construction of Galilee as a Place for the Historical Jesus — Part I," *BTB* 31 (2001): 26-37; Part II, *BTB* 31 (2001): 64-77; Mordechai Aviam, *Jews, Pagans and Christians in the Galilee: 25 Years of Archaeological Excavations and Surveys: Hellenistic to Byzantine Periods* (LG 1; Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2004); Peter Richardson, *Building Jewish*. [Esp. see *Jesus and Archaeology*, edited by Charlesworth. Ed.]

across a range of status levels⁸⁸ concurs with the use of large and expensive stone vessels for ritual purity (John 2:6).

The Third Day

The dating of the wedding “on the third day” (τῆς ἡμέρας τῆς τρίτης) has discouraged many interpreters from looking for a historical meaning. An ancient Jewish wedding seemingly lasted seven days.⁸⁹ However, “the third day” clearly does not refer to a certain day of the wedding festivities. Rather, what is meant is the day when the celebration started. From later rabbinic sources we are informed that virgins were married on the fourth day of the week, while widows were married on the fifth day.⁹⁰ This practice may have been common already in first century Palestine. There is, however, no ancient evidence that “the third day” was a preferred day for weddings in early times.⁹¹

While other elaborate explanations, especially symbolic ones,⁹² may seem more attractive, the simplest, most obvious meaning of “the third day” is a temporal connection with the gathering of Jesus’ first disciples.⁹³ If we take ἡ ἡμέρα ἐκείνη in John 1:39 as the first day, ἐπαύριον in John 1:43 as referring to the second day, then τῆς ἡμέρας τῆς τρίτης may simply mark the last link of a chain of events.⁹⁴ Thus, the Evangelist connects the wedding

88. Richardson, “Cana,” p. 106.

89. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 29; New York: Doubleday, 1966), p. 98 cites Judg 14:12; Tob 11:19; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2003), vol. 1, p. 496 n. 37, also cites *Jos. Asen.* 21.8 (OTP 2:236)/21.6 (Greek); *Sipra Behuq.* p. 5.266.1.7; *b. Ketub.* 8b; *p. Meg.* 4.4, §3; *Ketub.* 1.1, §6; *Judg* 14:17; *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 28.9; *Lam. Rab.* 1.7, §34.

90. *M. Ketub.* 1.1; *b. Ketub.* 2a; *p. Ketub.* 1.1, §1; *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 26.2.

91. See, e.g., Pinchas Lapide, *Ist die Bibel richtig übersetzt?* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1986), vol. 1, p. 89; Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11* (NAC 25A; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), p. 153, who both argue for an identification of the “third day” with the modern practice of Jewish weddings on Tuesdays.

92. For the various attempts cf. Dodd, *Interpretation*, p. 300; Smitmans, *Weinwunder*, pp. 64–153; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium 1–4* (HTKNT IV/1; Freiburg: Herder, 1979 [4th ed.]), pp. 341–44; Hengel, “Interpretation,” pp. 83–112, here: pp. 86–90; Frey, *Eschatologie* 2, pp. 192–95.

93. So, e.g., Meier, *Marginal Jew*, vol. 2, p. 938.

94. For a similar chain of events cf. ἐπαύριον in Matt 27:62 and the “third day” as the day of the resurrection in Matt 27:63–64.

story “with the gathering of the first disciples in general and with Jesus’ promise to Nathanael in particular.⁹⁵ This interpretation, however, does not preclude the attempt to regard “the third day” as referencing a literary scheme of six days in John 1:19–2:11,⁹⁶ or even seven days in John 1:1–2:11 suggesting a new creation week (cf. Gen 1:1–2:4a).⁹⁷ In any case the text does not provide us with a historical dating, as the *terminus a quo* is not clear.

Jesus, His Disciples, His Brothers and His Mother

Jesus is accompanied at the wedding by his disciples and by his mother (2:1, 3–5). From John 2:12 we learn that his brothers had also been present at the celebration.

We know surprisingly little about the mother of Jesus. Our earliest evidence comes from the apostle Paul, who identifies her as a Jewish woman (Gal 4:4) but does not even mention her name. According to Mark’s Gospel, she had other children beside Jesus: four sons, named James, Joses, Judas and Simon, and also daughters whose names are not reported (Mark 3:32; 6:3). Jesus’ family does not support his ministry; instead, believing him to be mad, they attempt to restrain him (Mark 3:21).⁹⁸ While Mark suggests a considerable distance between Jesus and his mother (3:21, 31–35), John portrays this relationship quite differently. The Fourth Evangelist never uses her name, calling her instead “the

95. So, e.g., Meier, *Marginal Jew*, vol. 2, p. 938. Bultmann, *John*, p. 114, n. 3, sees the dating as “perhaps only intended to bring out the sequences, as in 1:29, 35, 43.”

96. See already Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 6.258–59; cf. Olsson, *Structure*, pp. 21–25, 102–4; Barrett, *John*, p. 190.

97. Heinrich Lausberg, “Der Johannes-Prolog: Rhetorische Befunde zu Form und Sinn des Textes,” *NAWG* 5 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), pp. 189–279; idem, “Der Vers J 1,27,” *NAWG* 6 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), pp. 281–96, here p. 284; idem, “Der Vers J 1,19 (im Rahmen des ‘redaktionellen Kapitels’ J 1,19–2,11: Rhetorische Befunde zu Form und Sinn des Textes),” *NAWG* 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), pp. 9–19, here p. 11; idem, “Die Verse J 2,10–11 des Johannes-Evangeliums. Rhetorische Befunde zu Form und Sinn des Textes,” *NAWG* 3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), pp. 113–25, here pp. 122–25.

98. For an excellent survey and discussion of the entire material see Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), pp. 3–5 *et passim*.

mother of Jesus" (John 2:1, 3) and "his mother" (2:5, 12; 19:25-26) and "woman" (2:4; 19:26; cf. 20:13, 15), but this is not a sign of disrespect. While in Matthew and Luke Mary figures primarily in the birth and infancy stories of Jesus,¹⁰⁰ in the Fourth Gospel her two appearances span his whole ministry, from his first miracle in Cana (2:1-11) to the cross (19:25-27).¹⁰¹ Mary is thus depicted as showing special faith in her son (2:5) from the beginning of his ministry onwards, and still present when he receives a final drop of wine (19:29-30).

A Jewish Wedding

The Synoptic Gospels never show Jesus attending a wedding feast.¹⁰² However, Jesus uses wedding imagery in some of his parables, such as the "Wedding of the King's Son" (Matt 22:1-14), the "Ten Virgins" (Matt 25:1-13), and the "Waiting Servants" (Luke 12:35-36).¹⁰³ The wedding ceremony in John 2:1-11 is sparsely characterized by a (probably large) number of guests (John 2:1-2), the consumption of large amounts of wine (2:3, 6-10) and by the presence of the bridegroom (2:9), a number of servants (2:5, 9) and even a chief steward (ἀρχιτρικλινος; 2:8-9). The reader is left wondering why Jesus, his friends, and family were invited, and about the identification of the bridegroom and the bride, who are not even mentioned.

Wedding celebrations usually lasted seven days.¹⁰⁴ Many friends and family of the couple may have stayed for the whole celebration, and perhaps most of the village joined in. It comes as no surprise, then, that a shortage of wine occurred, although employing a chief steward should have prevented such an embarrassment. In any case the presence of a num-

99. Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 17.74: Pheroras, who has great affection for his wife, nevertheless addresses her as "Woman."

100. Matt 1:16, 18, 20; 2:11; Luke 1-2; cf. 11:27-28.

101. Cf. Mary with the apostles in Jerusalem following the crucifixion (Acts 1:14).

102. For the ritual of an ancient Jewish wedding cf. Ruben Zimmermann, *Geschlechter metaphorik und Gottesverhältnis: Traditionsgeschichte und Theologie eines Bildfeldes in Urchristentum und antiker Umwelt* (WUNT 2/122; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), pp. 230-48; Keener, *John*, vol. 1, pp. 498-501.

103. This is not sufficient reason to suggest, as Dodd, that "the traditional nucleus of this *pericopé* may have been a parable" (*Tradition*, p. 227).

104. See, e.g., Judg 14:12; Tob 11:19; *t. Ber.* 2.10; 4Q545 line 6; Brown, *John*, vol. 1, pp. 97-98; Keener, *John*, vol. 1, p. 499.

ber of servants and even an ἀρχιτρικλινος¹⁰⁵ reveals considerable wealth.¹⁰⁶ The reader may be puzzled by this wedding's apparent luxury in a small peasant village like Cana.

Six Stone Vessels

When the wine is lacking at the wedding, Jesus orders six stone jars to be filled with water. Such vessels were required by Jewish purity regulations. The water they contained was used for ritual cleansing of the hands.¹⁰⁷ Since stone did not contract uncleanness, stone vessels seemed most appropriate. Archaeologists have found such jars at many Jewish sites in Palestine, Judea, Galilee, and the Golan. They appear during the reign of Herod the Great and quickly disappear after 70 CE. While they are widespread in Palestine, they are almost absent in the Diaspora.¹⁰⁸ Recently, a few small vessels have also been found at Khirbet Cana.¹⁰⁹ The jars mentioned in John 2:6-7 can be identified with large vessels, which were turned on a lathe. They could contain about 100 liters each. The Mishnah calls them *kallal*.¹¹⁰ Jonathan L. Reed rightly stresses that, due to their sophisticated production technique, they were "luxury items." Such luxurious jars are virtually absent in peasant villages like Capernaum, but rather frequent in rich urban sites like Sepphoris.¹¹¹ The reader is again impressed by this rather luxurious wedding feast, crowned by an incredible 600 liters of wine, of excellent quality, in rather expensive stone vessels.

Historical Data and Theological Tendencies

The historical details in this story, such as the peasant village of Cana in Galilee, the relationship of Jesus with his mother, the sparse description of

105. Apart from this passage, this term appears elsewhere in Jewish and Greek literature only in a work by Heliiodorus (3rd c. CE).

106. Ps-Demosthenes, *Erotici* 7.27.

107. Cf. Mark 7:3-4.

108. Reed, "Stone Vessels," p. 384.

109. See the reference to the finds by Douglas Edwards in Reed, "Stone Vessels," p. 391.

110.

110. *m. Parah* 3.3.

111. Reed, "Stone Vessels," p. 395.

the wedding feast, and the six stone vessels, comport with what we know about the wider ancient Jewish context. Our “second reading” of John 2:1-11 has suggested a number of details plausible within the life of the historical Jesus and unknown from the Synoptic Gospels.

However, these historical details are not just bits and pieces of a historical biography of Jesus; we have not yet reached an appropriate interpretation of the text. More than the other Evangelists, the author of the Fourth Gospel makes us suspect he uses such details to serve his theological purposes.¹¹² Such an agenda is obvious in mentioning “the third day” (John 2:1), which is not a historical date but a literary device; it potentially alludes to the biblical tradition of God coming on Sinai on the third day (Exod 19:11, 16) and of the resurrection on the third day (John 2:4, 19-20). Likewise, Cana is not simply a geographical reference. In John’s Gospel, Cana serves as Jesus’ base, perhaps as a counterpart to Peter’s Capernaum which is far more prominent in the Synoptics. Jesus is not present at an ordinary wedding, but at what seems to be a luxurious event. In line with Johannine tendency, this attempts to present Jesus at home in wealthier circles of society.¹¹³ Theologically, the wedding imagery has eschatological overtones, becoming most obvious in John 3:29, when Jesus is identified as the (true) bridegroom.¹¹⁴ Finally, the stone vessels are not only indications of a wealthy household, but refer to Jewish ritual purity. Does the changing of water into wine suggest Jesus fulfills the old ritual order, replacing the ritual means of the old covenant with wine, as an indication of the new life he is going to bring about (cf. John 15:1a)?

A careful look at the historical details in John 2:1-11 reveals the fusion of horizons of historicity and theology in John. In its final form John 2:1-11 is firmly integrated into the broader context of Johannine eschatology. The reader is informed that Jesus’ “hour has not yet come” (2:4c). But then, puzzlingly, a miracle nevertheless follows at once, revealing Jesus’ δόξα and even resulting in faith in the disciples (2:11). An informed “re-reader” may have already guessed that the context of this miracle is actually the hour of the resurrection, i.e. the third day (cf. 2:1 and 2:19). Charles H.

112. For a more extensive interpretation of the Johannine theological background of John 2:1-11, which is beyond the scope of this article, cf., e.g., Schnackenburg, *Johannes-evangelium*, pp. 342-44.

113. Cf. John 3:1-21 in conversation with the Jewish leader Nicodemus; 4:43-54 meeting a royal official; 18:15: a disciple of Jesus with personal contacts to the high priest.

114. See John 2:16; cf. Mark 2:19 par.; Matt 22:2; Rev 19:7-9.

Giblin has shown that John 2:1-11 follows a narrative pattern of “suggestion” (2:3), “negative response” (2:4b), and “positive action” (2:7-8); this pattern is not only typical for miracle stories (John 4:46-54; 11:1-44), but also the story about Jesus at the feast of Tabernacles.¹¹⁵ As this pattern is thus not limited to one specific form, we should attribute it to the Gospel’s author and not to any sources. This pattern underlines the paradoxical narratological situation of John 2:1-11: On the “historical” side of the story Jesus’ hour is not yet present (2:4c). However, as the author looks back from a time after the resurrection, already the miracle reveals the beginning of Jesus’ δόξα. Therefore *in nuce* John 2:1-11 is another example of the typical Johannine tension between “the hour is coming” and “is now here” (John 4:21, 23; 5:25, 28).¹¹⁶ John 2:1-11 illustrates the Johannine “fusion of horizons” of the “perspective of the time of Jesus” on the one hand and of the “perspective of the Johannine addressees” on the other.¹¹⁷

Conclusion

In sum, our historical investigation has demonstrated a number of details from John 2:1-11 fit well into the context of first century CE Galilee. They reveal possible and even probable details of the life of the historical Jesus. However, none of these features seem to be included merely to present historical information to the reader. As always, the historical details in John’s Gospel carry theological significance when read in the context of John’s theology. The “fusion of horizons” of historical context and Johannine theology does not allow for separating the two aspects. We cannot simply determine that these historical data appear, on the one hand, because they were part of some source, or on the other hand, because the final author included them for theological purposes. This may leave us only with possibilities and probabilities of what “really” happened (Fredriksen), but rather appropriately represents what, in the eyes of the author, “actually” (Ranke) happened.

115. Charles H. Giblin, “Suggestion, Negative Response, and Positive Action in St John’s Portrayal of Jesus (John 2:1-11; 4:46-54; 7:2-14; 11:1-44),” *NTS* 26 (1980): 197-211, here pp. 202-4.

116. Cf. Frey, *Eschatologie*, vol. 3, pp. 2-4 *et passim*; idem, *Eschatologie*, vol. 1, p. 418. Frey rightly suggests “the σημεῖον-stories . . . need to be taken into account as texts of fulfilled expectation” (trans. mine); cf. idem, *Eschatologie*, vol. 2, pp. 224-26.

117. Frey, *Eschatologie*, vol. 3, p. 282.

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