

UNIVERSITÄT BASEL

Dining with John

Communal Meals and Identity Formation in the
Fourth Gospel in its Historical and Cultural Context

Esther Kobel

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For my husband
and
all the other members of my family

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List of Abbreviations

Journals

ABR	Australian Biblical Review
AbrN	Abr-Nahrain
AJA	American Journal for Archaeology
AJT	American Journal of Theology
AnSoc	Ancient Society
APB	Acta patristica et byzantina
AuC	Antike und Christentum
BA	The Biblical Archaeologist
BASOR	Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
Bib.	Biblica
Bibl. Interpr.	Biblical Interpretation
BibRev	Bible Review
BiTr	Bible Translator
BR	Biblical Research
BTB	Biblical Theology Bulletin
BZ	Biblische Zeitschrift
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
CJT	Canadian Journal of Theology
Daed.	Daedalus
DSD	Dead Sea Discoveries

EJT	European Journal of Theology
EtB	Études Bibliques
EThL	Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses
ETR	Études théologiques et religieuses
EvQ	Evangelical Quarterly
ExpTim	Expository Times
HTR	Harvard Theological Review
HUCA	Hebrew Union College Annual
IEJ	Israel Exploration Journal
IkaZ	Internationale katholische Zeitschrift
Interp.	Interpretation
ITQ	Irish Theological Quarterly
JAC	Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JBR	Journal of Bible and Religion
JECS	Journal of Early Christian Studies
JEH	Journal of Ecclesiastical History
JHS	Journal of Hellenic Studies
JJS	Journal of Jewish Studies
JQR	Jewish Quarterly Review
JRS	Journal of Roman Studies
JSJ	Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and

	Roman Period
JSNT	Journal for the Study of the New Testament
JSP	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha
JSSt	Journal of Semitic Studies
KuI	Kirche und Israel
LQ	Lutheran Quarterly
LTP	Laval théologique et philosophique
LuthBei	Lutherische Beiträge
MGWJ	Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums
MGWJ.NF	Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums N.F.
Neot	Neotestamentica
NovT	Novum Testamentum
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum, Supplements
NTS	New Testament Studies
PaP	Past and Present. A Journal of Scientific History
Partisan Rev	Partisan Review
PRS	Perspectives in Religious Studies
PTL	PTL. A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature
PzB	Protokolle zur Bibel
Quest. Lit.	Questions Liturgiques/Studies in Liturgy
RA	Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale
RB	Revue biblique

RdQ	Revue de Qumran
ResQ	Restoration Quarterly
RevExp	Review and Expositor
RevQ	Revue de Qumrân
RRef	Revue réformée
RSR	Recherches de science religieuse
SDHI	Studia et Documenta Historiae et Iuris
SHTh	Scottish Journal of Theology
SJT	Scottish Journal of Theology
SOC SCI INFORM	Social Science Information
StLi	Studia liturgica
StTh	Studia theologica
TG	Theologie und Glaube
ThD	Theology Digest
Theol.	Theology. London
ThPh	Theologie und Philosophie
ThStKr	Theologische Studien und Kritiken
ThZ	Theologische Zeitschrift
TJ	Trinity Journal
TLZ	Theologische Literaturzeitung
TynBul	Tyndale Bulletin
VigChr	Vigiliae Christianae

WW	Word and World
ZAW	Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
ZE	Zeitschrift für Ethnologie
ZKTh	Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie
ZMiss	Zeitschrift für Mission
ZNT	Zeitschrift für Neues Testament
ZNW	Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche
ZWTh	Zeitschrift für Wissenschaftliche Theologie

Series

ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
AbrNSup	Abr-Nahrain Supplement Series
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AGSU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Spätjudentums und Urchristentums
ALGHJ	Arbeiten zur Literatur und Geschichte des hellenistischen Judentums
AncB	Anchor Bible
ANRW	Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
AThANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments

BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BETHL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum theologiarum Lovaniensium
BHTh	Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
Bibl.-Interpr.S	Biblical Interpretation Series
BIWL	Bibliographies and Indexes in World Literature
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
BSGRT	Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana
Budé	Collection des Universités de France
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BzA	Beiträge zur Altertumskunde
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche
CB	Coniectanea biblica
CRI	Compendia rerum iudaicarum ad novum testamentum
CSJH	Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism
CUFr	Collection des universités de France
EBib	Etudes bibliques
EBibNS	Etudes bibliques. Nouvelle série
EPRO	Etudes préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain
FBBS	Facet Books. Biblical Series
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen

	Testaments
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte
HBS	Herders biblische Studien
Hermeneia	Hermeneia. A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible
Hist.E	Historia. Einzelschriften
HKAW	Handbuch der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft
HNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
HO	Handbuch der Orientalistik
JCPS	Jewish and Christian Perspectives Series
JSHRZ	Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit
JSJ.Sup	Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplements
JSNT	Journal for the Study of the New Testament
JSNT.S	Journal for the study of the New Testament. Supplement Series
KAV	Kommentar zu den Apostolischen Vätern
KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament
KIT	Kleine Texte für Vorlesungen und Übungen
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LD	Lectio divina
MdB	Le monde de la Bible
ML.B	Museum Lessianum. Section biblique

Mn.S	Mnemosyne. Supplementum
MSSNTS	Monograph Series. Society for New Testament Studies
NCB	New Century Bible
NIC.NT	The New International Commentary on the New Testament
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum, Supplements
NTA	Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen
NTA.NF	Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen. Neue Folge
NTL	New Testament Library
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et orbis antiquus
OCD	Oxford Classical Texts/Scriptorum classicorum bibliotheca Oxoniensis
OECT	Oxford Early Christian Texts
PTS	Patristische Texte und Studien
QD	Quaestiones disputatae
RGRW	Religions in the Graeco-Roman World
RGVV	Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten
SA	Studia anselmiana
SANT	Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
SBB	Stuttgarter biblische Beiträge
SBG	Studies in Biblical Greek
SBLAB	Society of Biblical Literature Academia Biblica
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series

SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLRBS	Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SC	Sources chrétiennes
SCA	Supplementum codicis apocryphi
SGRR	Studies in Greek and Roman Religion
SHR	Studies in the History of Religions
SIJB	Schriften des Institutum Judaicum in Berlin
SIJD	Schriften des Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum
SJ	Studia Judaica
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
Str-B	Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch / Hermann L. Strack und Paul Billerbeck
SUC	Schriften des Urchristentums
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
SVigChr	Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae
SVTP	Studia in Veteris Testamenti pseudepigrapha
ThHK	Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament

ThKNT	Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
ThZ	Theologische Zeitschrift
TNTC.NS	Tyndale New Testament Commentary. New series
TrGF	Tragicorum Graecorum fragmenta
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum
TSAJ	Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism
UALG	Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
WUNT II	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament. Reihe 2

Preface

This book is a revised version of my doctoral thesis, which I submitted to the University of Basel's Faculty of Theology in 2010. I am very grateful for the support I received from a number of people and institutions. First of all, my thanks go to my dissertation advisors, Prof. Dr. Ekkehard W. Stegemann (University of Basel, Switzerland) and Prof. Dr. Adele Reinhartz (University of Ottawa, Canada), two scholars with different backgrounds and perspectives who, individually as well as together, were invaluable professional guides and academic mentors. They both supported me with their judicious insights, scholarly enthusiasm and great devotion.

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1. Introduction

Imagine a group of people in the late first century, somewhere in the lands near the eastern coast of the Mediterranean. They have gathered for a communal meal. What brings this group together is their belief in Jesus. All of those dining together believe that some decades ago, the Son of God came into the world. And whenever these Christ-believers meet they tell stories of the man they regard as their founder. Several of these stories are about meals that their founder shared with his disciples, and these stories would have been especially meaningful when told at the meals the Christ-believers themselves were sharing. Indeed, these people may well have felt that they too were at the table dining with Jesus and his disciples.

1.1. Hypothesis Statement

Communal meals were a central locus for the formation of community and group identity in antiquity, and historical investigations suggest that Christianity spread primarily through the practice of these communal meals. In the narrative world of the Gospel of John, accounts of communal meals and the metaphorical use of food and drink language play an exceptionally important role. What do the Fourth Gospel accounts tell us about the role of communal meals in the life of the “Johannine community?”¹ To address this question, the present study first explores the literary strategies of the Johannine use of food, drink and meal narratives and discourses. It then undertakes exercises in historical imagination, reconstructing the world of the real readers by taking the text as an indicator of the historical world. This move from John’s internal literary world to the world outside the text is based on the observation that the Gospel reaches out beyond

¹ On the “Johannine community,” cf. below pp. 52-59.

its narrative borders directly to address its implied readers. While the implied readers are a literary-critical construct, it is possible, with imagination, to see them as a bridge to an extra-textual audience. It is plausible that the meal gatherings were the *Sitz im Leben* of the Johannine meal stories, for meals were the prime occasions on which groups in the ancient world met and conversed. If a real meal of a certain group of Christ-believers formed the *Sitz im Leben* of the Johannine meal accounts, the very accounts of meals would have given them a significance that surpassed the intake of calories, and contributed to the formation and strengthening of the community's identity in its historical and political context. The accounts of Jesus and the community that heard, told and retold the stories would have mutually influenced each other. Furthermore, the Johannine meal stories can be read against various backgrounds that were vivid in the hybrid context from which the Gospel evolved and within which it was received. A socio-rhetorical analysis of the Johannine food, drink and meal narratives and discourses allows for imagination of the demographic composition of the community and its historical context, but not of specific events in its early history.

1.2. Line of Argumentation

A broad range of scholars from various fields including history, social history, sociology, cultural anthropology, and, not least of all, biblical studies have explored the phenomenon of communal dining from different perspectives. There is one basic insight upon which all agree: communal meals play a decisive role in the formation of a group's identity. There are good, practical reasons for eating in company. For example, the sometimes laborious provision and preparation of comestible goods are more efficiently organized by and for a group rather than individually. Satisfying the fundamental human need for nourishment, when done in a group, also functions to

create, negotiate, redefine, and solidify community. Communal dining is a carefully crafted cultural phenomenon, a place of negotiation of social relationships, and a medium or vehicle for transporting values, symbols and beliefs. In other words, “The main rules about eating are simple: If you do not eat you die; and no matter how large your dinner, you will soon be hungry again. Precisely because we must both eat and keep on eating, human beings have poured enormous effort into making food more than itself, so that it bears manifold meanings beyond its primary purpose of physical nutrition.”²

Biblical literature often addresses food and communal dining. In the canonical Gospels, including the Gospel of John, accounts of meals play a decisive role. It is reasonable then to assume that these accounts of communal meals, as well as the various discourses including food and drink as central motifs, speak somehow to the lives of their addressees. In the case of the Gospel of John, the presumed addressees are a group of people who believe in (the Johannine Gospel’s interpretation of) Jesus as the Christ, and are generally referred to in Johannine scholarship as “the Johannine Community.” In the Gospel of John’s Jesus-story the portrayal of communal meals, as well as the metaphorical use of food and drink, play a distinct role. It will be argued that for Jesus’ believers, who dwell on earth as physical human beings, the Johannine accounts of communal dining, as well as the discourses including food and drink, are a crucial source of significance. Accounts of meals and discourse involving food and drink in the Gospel of John speak to the Johannine community’s lived experience.

As I hope to show, these texts as stories and as textured language link the physical act of eating to meanings that surpass the mere consumption of calories. It will be argued that these

² Margaret Visser, *The Rituals of Dinner: The Origins, Evolution, Eccentricities, and Meaning of Table Manners* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991), 2.

accounts offer real people who gathered for real meals a real meaning to their food intake. Because the Gospel reaches out beyond its narrative borders directly to address an extra-textual audience, analysis of the food, drink and meal narratives and discourses can provide insight into the meanings of those meals and their significance for the community's identity.

This analysis shows that narratives and discourses about food, drink, and meals are an important vehicle for achieving the Gospel's overall purpose, which is to create and strengthen belief in Christ and adherence to his group of followers. The post-Easter Johannine community likely related to the accounts about food and drink in particular when the community itself gathered for communal meals. The communal intake of food and other rituals if performed at such gatherings would likely have been highly influenced by meanings that the Johannine accounts of communal meals and the discourses on food and drink imply. The overall approach to be used in the present study is best described as socio-rhetorical.

1.3. Socio-Rhetorical Methodology

In biblical studies, the socio-rhetorical approach is associated most prominently with Vernon Robbins. The term "socio-rhetorical," which was coined by Robbins himself, stands for a relatively new and still developing set of methods.³ It is derived from the approach to texts developed by Umberto Eco and other literary critics and requires the interpreter to read and reread the text from different angles. Underlying the socio-rhetorical approach is the presupposition that a

³ Robbins notes: "In 1984, I introduced the term 'socio-rhetorical' ... to describe a set of integrated strategies that would move coherently through inner literary and rhetorical features ... into a social and cultural interpretation of its discourse in the context of the Mediterranean world." Cf. Vernon Kay Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society an Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1996), 3. This work provides the theoretical basis of socio-rhetorical criticism, whereas practical instructions in using this set of methods are found in Vernon Kay Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996).

text only truly becomes text when someone reads it. Until then, it is merely a conglomeration of words, symbols, and a web of signification. When read by a real person, the text's world of meaning interacts with the reader's world of meaning: "Thus, socio-rhetorical criticism approaches the inner texture of a text as an interactive environment of authors and readers. Authors create texts in their world; readers create a world of the text in their own world. Socio-rhetorical criticism interactively explores the world of the author, the world of the text and the world of the interpreter to interpret the inner texture of a New Testament text."⁴ The model of textual communication developed by Vernon Robbins can be illustrated as in the following figure:⁵

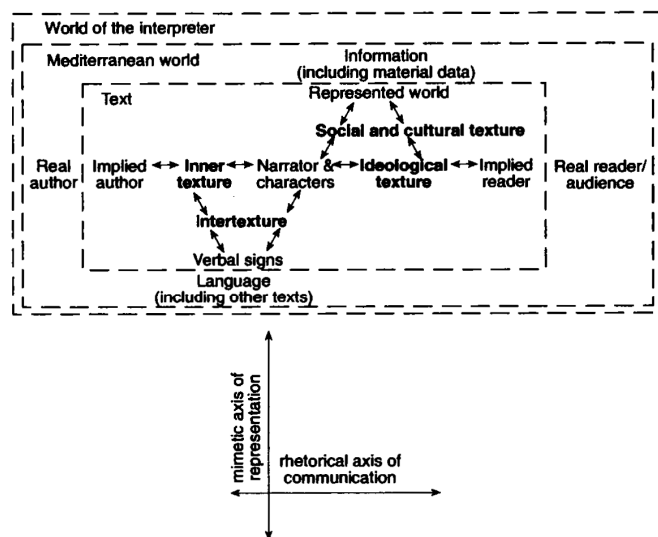


Figure 2.1 Socio-rhetorical model of textual communication

Robbins distinguishes between “innertexture” and “intertexture.” A close analysis of the “innertexture” serves to explore the verbal signs in the text, such as repetition, progression,

⁴ Ibid., 30.

⁵ Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse*, 21.

narration, opening-middle-closing, argumentation, and aspects of sensory-aesthetic.⁶ The analysis of “intertexture” distinguishes among “social and cultural texture,” “ideological texture,” and “sacred texture”⁷ and addresses the phenomena of recitation, recontextualization, reconfiguration, narrative amplification, and thematic elaboration. Thus, an “intertextural” analysis explores the various manners in which language that exists elsewhere is used in the text under scrutiny.⁸ “Language” is understood in a very broad sense here and may include other Scriptures, both canonical and non-canonical, inscriptions, and works of Greek poets or Roman politicians among other sources of the Greco-Roman milieu. The overall goal of the socio-rhetorical approach is to explore how signs and codes possibly speak to historical readers by evoking a textual form of social, historical and cultural reality.⁹ While I adopt the methodological approach laid out by Robbins, I retain the more established labels of literary and narrative criticism for what he describes as the analysis of the “innertexture.” For “intertexture” in Robbins’ method, I employ the more familiar terms of intertextuality, history, social history, social science and cultural anthropology.¹⁰

As a first step, I am interested in reading the Gospel as a literary document. In doing so, I acknowledge that the Fourth Gospel is a narrative with a plot, told by a narrator who comments on the story in explicit as well as implicit ways. I consider the Gospel to be an instrument of communication from implied author to implied reader. Inherent in the Gospel is the intent to have

⁶ Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 36.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁰ For a good introduction to these approaches, cf. the recent studies on methodology (in relation to texts of the Old Testament) included in LeMon, Joel M. and Kent Harold Richards, eds., *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen*, SBLRBS, vol. 56 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009). On the need of terminological clarifications, see Stanley Porter, “The Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament,” in *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals*, eds. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

an effect on the real reader. Positions and characteristics, innertextual references and motifs of communal meals and their participants analyzed according to their function within the narrative of the Gospel of John. Symbols and clusters of words adhering to the various pericopes of interest will be singled out and explored in their intertwined relationships. In a further step these clusters and themes will be explored with regard to their role in the narrative as a whole.¹¹

These insights and observations are interesting and highly valuable in themselves but not satisfactory for those interested in reading the Fourth Gospel as a document addressing an actual historical circle of people and having a distinct meaning for this original audience. Just what such a meaning may look like requires investigation from the perspectives of intertextuality, history, social history, and cultural anthropology. For the present study, this means exploring the complex issues of values, symbols, and practices in the contexts surrounding the Gospel and to address possible relationships and interactions between them. I am therefore concerned with the “hybrid” context from which the Gospel evolved:¹² the worlds of thought, beliefs, rituals, history – issues “around the table” in the context of the so-called Johannine community. Such an analysis includes comparing intertextual allusions, images and motifs as well as exploring political and historical issues of the Fourth Gospel’s milieu.

In this study, intertextuality is therefore understood in its post-modern sense. It refers to the infinite connections that a reader may make between a given text and other texts, concepts and traditions. Texts in and of themselves do not contain meaning; it is the reader who finds meaning

¹¹ Cf. the approach of R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

¹² In its most basic sense, “hybridity” refers to mixture. The term “hybrid” as it is used in the following was introduced by the Postcolonial Studies scholar Homi K. Bhabha. Bhabha insists that hybridity is not a static state of being but an ongoing process. As such it undermines any claims to pure cultural identities. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge Classics (London: Routledge, 2006).

in relationship to other texts or traditions.¹³ As Jonathan Culler observes, “Intertextuality thus becomes less a name for a work’s relation to prior texts than a designation of its participation in the discursive space of a culture.”¹⁴ My interest here lies in exploring the intertextual space of the Gospel of John by taking inventory of the cultural codes within which this Gospel operates and of which it is a manifestation.

Doing so requires a close look at the ways in which the Gospel quotes, alludes to or echoes other texts, practices, ideas and symbol systems that existed in its historical, social and cultural milieu. Here some consideration of terminology and definitions will be helpful. The terminology of quotation, allusion and echo (and other terms) is used in different ways by various literary theorists and biblical scholars.¹⁵ It is, therefore, necessary to clarify the definitions that will be used in the present study. Generally speaking, most scholars agree that a quotation is the most explicit of references between texts, while an allusion is less explicit and an echo is the least explicit. “Text” will be used in a broad sense in this study, referring to written documents but also to concepts and traditions.¹⁶

¹³ Tilottama Rajan, “Intertextuality and the Subject of Reading/Writing,” in *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*, eds. Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 61–74: 62.

¹⁴ Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (London: Routledge, 1981), 103.

¹⁵ Cf. e.g. Porter who notes on the issue: “The range of terminology used to speak of the way that a New Testament writer may use the Old Testament or a related text is simply astounding. Without attempting to be comprehensive, at least the following terms have been used with some regularity or in important works on the topic: citation, direct quotation, formal quotation, indirect quotation, allusive quotation, allusion (whether conscious or unconscious), paraphrase, exegesis (such as inner-biblical exegesis), midrash, typology, reminiscence, echo (whether conscious or unconscious), intertextuality, influence (either direct or indirect), and even tradition, among other terms. Sometimes all instances that are not direct quotation are subsumed under one of the above (or another) terms. Other times fine distinctions in meaning are made between many of the above terms.” Porter, “The Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament,” 80.

¹⁶ Cf. Ben-Porat’s note that: “‘Text’ is the obvious term to describe the closed recorded (almost always verbal) system which is activated by a literary allusion.” The reader, however, needs to bear in mind the analogies between literary texts and other “texts” or media, such as e.g. musical pieces or paintings. Ziva Ben-Porat, “The Poetics of Literary Allusion,” *PTL* 1 (1976), 107–108, n. 5.

Richard Hays was among the first to introduce the search for intertextual references into biblical studies. According to Hays, quotations are direct, overt and explicit citations and they are confined to texts. An allusion depends on the author's intention and, on the side of the reader, the ability to recognize the source of the allusion. An echo, the least explicit of intertextual references, is subliminal and does not depend on conscious intention.¹⁷ These categories are helpful for understanding the range and degrees of intertextual references. They do not, however, provide satisfactory means of assessing whether a particular word, phrase or passage is an allusion or an echo. The identification of intentionality or lack thereof on the side of the author is not possible to any certain degree and thus a problematic criterion.¹⁸

The term "allusion" has been defined and redefined by literary theorists throughout the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁹ It has been suggested that an allusion is "a device for the simultaneous activation of two texts."²⁰ An allusion occurs when some aspect of the alluding text (called a "marker") has a dual reference: when it signifies something in the alluding text and, at the same time, points toward another text. Ben-Porat describes four stages in the interpretation of a literary allusion:

1. The recognition of a marking element in the alluding text. This identification does not depend on formal identity with the alluded text.
2. The identification of the evoked text. This need not be a single source and the allusion does not depend on formal identity. The marker causes the reader to recollect another text.

¹⁷ Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 14–21. Methodologically Hays relied on John Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After*, Quantum Books (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

¹⁸ On the difficulty of intentionality, see e.g. Sylvia Keesmaat, "Exodus and the Intertextual Transformation of Tradition in Romans 8:14-30," *JSNT* 16, no. 54 (1994), 32.

¹⁹ For comprehensive bibliography until 1986, see Udo J. Hebel, *Intertextuality, Allusion, and Quotation: An International Bibliography of Critical Studies*, BIWL, vol. 18 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989).

²⁰ Ziva Ben-Porat, "The Poetics of Literary Allusion," 107.

3. A modification of the initial interpretation. Such modification is the result of the interaction between the two texts. The evoked text differs from the alluding text because of its different context. This changes the meaning. The reader contributes to this change by bringing certain elements of the evoked text to bear on the alluding text.
4. Activation of the evoked text as a whole. The alluding and the evoked text form a connection and are both activated. Further thematic patterns in the texts that previously did not seem related emerge at this point and come into play. They enrich the reader's understanding of the marker as well as the alluding text as a whole. Thus, an allusion does more than simply recall another text. Rather it brings the evoked text into relationship with the alluding text in a way that influences the interpretation of both texts.²¹

It is, therefore, important always to keep in mind that "Allusions do not merely reiterate past texts but use them to see new situations in light of the past. Cultural conventions may be incorporated but also transformed through allusion."²² In his socio-rhetorical methodology, Vernon Robbins distinguishes reference from allusion. According to his definition: "A *reference* is a word or phrase that points to a personage or tradition known to people on the basis of tradition. An interpreter will be able to find various texts that exhibit meanings associated with a reference. An *allusion* is a statement that presupposes a tradition that exists in textual form, but the text being interpreted is not attempting to 'recite' the text. With both reference and allusion, the text interacts

²¹ Ziva Ben-Porat, "The Poetics of Literary Allusion," 107–16. It is important to point out that "Even the use of the adjective 'literary' to describe a phenomenon which is not limited to literature can be justified once we study the literary allusion as a literary device." Ziva Ben-Porat, "The Poetics of Literary Allusion," 107.

²² Susan Hylen, *Allusion and Meaning in John 6*, BZNW (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 68.

with phrases, concepts, and traditions that are ‘cultural’ possessions that anyone who knows a particular culture may use.”²³

In effect this means that “references and allusions do not ‘recite’ any actual text of a story, nor do they recontextualize, reconfigure, elaborate, or amplify it. References simply ‘point’ to a personage, concept, or tradition, and allusions ‘interact’ with cultural concepts or traditions. Various texts rather than one text lie in the background, with the result that interpreters regularly may disagree over whether or not a particular text lies in the background.”²⁴ For Robbins, the difference between an allusion and a reference is that an allusion evokes a written text whereas the reference points to a source that does not necessarily exist in writing. This distinction is problematic, however, as it is not possible to know for certain whether a marker in the alluding text evokes a written text or rather an oral tradition. For this reason, the distinction will not be adopted in the following.

The final form of recalling a tradition to be discussed here is the echo. An echo is considered the most subtle and indirect form of referring to another text or tradition. According to Robbins, “An ‘echo’ is a word or phrase that evokes, or potentially evokes, a concept from cultural tradition. In other words, echo does not contain either a word or phrase that is ‘indisputably’ from only one cultural tradition. An echo is subtle and indirect. One person may hear it while another does not, and the speaker may or may not have directly intended the echo to be there. The result is that interpreters regularly will debate the presence or absence of a particular echo in the text under consideration.”²⁵ The difference between an allusion (or reference) and an echo, according to Robbins’ definitions, supposedly lies in the “disputability” or “indisputability” of a marker’s

²³ Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 58, emphasis in original.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

reference to cultural tradition. This distinction again, however, lacks a solid criterion. It is impossible for a modern scholar to decide to any certain degree that a text indisputably referred to another. For lack of convincing criteria to distinguish between allusion, reference and echo, these three terms will be used interchangeably in the present study.

There is yet another reason to refrain from distinctions between different forms of intertextual references (other than quotations). Scholarly definitions of such intertextual references often take the perspective of the author of a text. They ask whether the writer(s) of a text was/were familiar with a text, personage, concept or tradition. A socio-rhetorical investigation, however, is reader-oriented rather than writer-oriented. The focus lies primarily on the receiving end of a text. Obviously, this complicates matters in terms of distinguishing between allusions, references and echoes to the degree of impossibility. For modern readers it is impossible to determine for certain whether the Johannine readers had written documents at their disposal, or whether the Gospel disputably or indisputably evoked such traditions. We are confined to level of likelihood.

Identification of any type of reference less explicit than direct quotations, therefore, requires the participation and judgment of the reader. While no set of rules is suitable for every case, Hays offers seven useful “criteria for testing claims about the presence and meaning of scriptural echoes.”²⁶ These criteria include:

1. Availability: Was the proposed source available to the intended readers?
2. Volume: On the one hand, volume is a factor of how explicit the repetition of patterns or words is. On the other hand it is a matter of the prominence of the alluded text.

²⁶ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 29.

3. Recurrence: This criterion asks how often the alluding text refers to the alluded source. The greater the number of occurrences, the greater the likelihood that the original reader would pick upon connections to other texts.
4. Thematic coherence: This addresses to what degree allusions fit within the message of the alluding text. Does the alleged echo fit into the line of argument that the text as a whole develops?
5. Historical plausibility: Could the “author” have intended the alleged meaning effect? How likely are the original readers to have understood it?
6. History of interpretation: Have other interpreters heard the same echoes?
7. Satisfaction: Does the proposed reading make sense?²⁷

Hay’s criteria will not be used explicitly but they will implicitly undergird the exegetical judgments in the discursive explorations of the present study.²⁸

1.4. Brief Outline of the Chapters

This study is based on the fundamental assumption that meals are important for community identity. On the presumption that the Gospel addresses a particular community that really existed in the past, it is safe to assume that the community ate meals together at least on occasion, and that these meals were important for creating, reinforcing, and developing their community identity. In other words, these meals had a meaning beyond the physical nourishment.

²⁷ Ibid., 29–32.

²⁸ Dennis L. Stamps, e.g., agrees broadly with Hays’ definition of a quotation and his criteria for an allusion and echo. Stamps, however, merges allusion and echo into one category, defined as implicit, indirect and informal citations. Dennis L. Stamps, “The Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament as a Rhetorical Device: A Methodological Proposal,” in *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter, McMaster New Testament Studies (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 14–23. For a critique of Hays’ definitions and criteria, see Porter, “The Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament.”

The present thesis will explore the significance of these meals, that is, the meanings that surpass the intake of calories. The first two chapters establish the foundation on which the thesis is based. Chapter 1 discusses presuppositions regarding the Fourth Gospel by addressing authorship, date, location, integrity, addressees, the nature and purpose of the Fourth Gospel, and identity theory. Chapter 2 discusses previous scholarship on both the sociological importance of meals in community formation and the role of meals, food, and drink in biblical studies in general and in the Fourth Gospel in particular. It identifies the gap in scholarship regarding the understanding of communal meals and discourses of food and drink in the Fourth Gospel.

SECTION I (chapter 3), explores the role of communal meals and food and drink discourses in the narrative of the Fourth Gospel. An overview of the relevant passages establishes the corpus at stake. These passages are discussed individually regarding their content, their function in the overall Gospel narrative and their relation to the main Gospel message. The study then proceeds to explore in detail recurrent elements and motifs in meal scenes and related discourses, their intertwined relationship and how they mutually explain each other. In some cases, the meaning is assigned explicitly by the narrator, whereas the implicit symbolism around what is consumed and by whom calls for more interpretation on the side of the reader. Throughout the Gospel, meals and related discourses appear as decisive occasions to join and leave Jesus and are thus a locus for inclusion and exclusion. The identity of people participating in meals with Jesus as well as community experiences tied to the meal scenes will be addressed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of a number of theological or spiritual motifs and their relationship to meal scenes.

SECTION II (chapters 4–8) of this study exposes selected themes of the narrative analysis to the world from which the Gospel evolved and in which communal dining played an important

role in community formation. For this reason, this part begins with an analysis of meals as a construction site of identity in antiquity. Chapter 4 compares portrayals of several groups from the Greco-Roman world that are more or less contemporary to the Fourth Gospel. The comparison includes Jewish groups as well as groups of Christ-believers that historically existed at some point or that are depicted as existing. For each group, the importance of communal meals to the identity of the community, and their surplus meaning exceeding mere nourishment, will be discussed. The subsequent discursive chapters draw on the sociological insight that meals are of prime importance in community formation and identity.

The study proceeds to expose motifs of the Johannine meal scenes or food and drink discourses, which have been developed on the narrative level, to a range of discursive worlds of the milieu in which the Fourth Gospel was written and told. Each discursive chapter takes up a particular issue or motif and exposes it to a particular discursive world. It is clear from the outset that the Gospel of John is deeply embedded in Jewish traditions and worlds of thought.²⁹ Besides the Gospel's obvious Jewish roots, it also adopts many non-Jewish ideas from the hybrid environment from which it evolved and within which it was received. The meal scenes and discourses will, therefore, be read against traditions of early Christ-believers, themes evolving in notions from Mystery Cults, *topoi* from other pagan milieus, and sources from the Greco-Roman

²⁹ The Gospel's opening words for example clearly recall the opening words of the first book of the Hebrew Bible. The parallel between these two texts continues in the shared themes of creation and of light and darkness. The Fourth Gospel throughout includes many explicit quotations from the Hebrew Bible, introduced by a citation formula (e.g. γεγραμμένον ἔστιν ἢ γέγραπται; Jn 2:17; 6:31; 6:45; 8:17; 13:34; 12:14; 15:25). Furthermore the Gospel refers to Jewish festivals in a number of instances and that frequently figure as the time reference (e.g. Passover: Jn 2:12, 23; 6:4; 11:55; 12:1; 13:1; Festival of Booths: Jn 7:2; the Festival of the Dedication: Jn 10:22). In its symbols and chronology it remains within a Jewish world of thought while engaging in polemics with the Jews and the Jewish elite.

A number of commentaries, both older and very recent, make a point of stressing the Gospel's Jewish roots and its embeddedness in Jewish traditions, e.g. Charles Kingsley Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (London: SPCK, 1955); Klaus Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2000–2001); Hartwig Thyen, *Das Johannesevangelium* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

world testifying to the political environment and historical situation. Of course, not every scene can be read against every possible background. The discursive and historical chapters, therefore, present a selection of such readings. More and different readings are always possible.

Chapter 5 explores the manner in which eucharistic language is present in the Fourth Gospel, in particular in John 6 by means of allusion, and the way in which it is replaced by the footwashing in John 13. It will be shown that, from a socio-historical point of view, the placement of the footwashing during the meal rather than at its beginning is anomalous and therefore demands a symbolic interpretation.

Chapter 6 explores John 6 against the backdrop of mystery cults of Demeter and Dionysus. The explorations into these traditions unfold striking parallels. The peculiarly graphic language of John 6:51-58 in particular allows for the comparison of Johannine “Jesuphagy” and Dionysian theophagy and beliefs in the mutual indwelling of both human and god. The symbolic “satanophagy” by Judas will be discussed as the inversion of the symbolic theophagy in an excursus.

Chapter 7 explores the graphic language of John 6:51-58 from yet another angle. It discusses the proposal that the passage relates to reproaches of cannibalism against early Johannine Christ-believers. Groups in the Greco-Roman world that are believed ritually to consume flesh and blood in order to establish or consolidate their group’s bonds are discussed as an alternative tradition in light of which the passage can fruitfully be illumined. Furthermore, this investigation pays tribute to the tensions between literal and metaphorical understandings of the text, particularly in John 6.

Chapter 8 concludes the second section. It addresses the motif of betrayal tied to meal scenes and explores the possibility of historical correspondence to the depiction in the narrative.

For this purpose, the possibility of persecution of Christ-believers by Jews is addressed first, and then the motif is explored against the background of the recurring Roman prohibition of voluntary associations.

Finally chapter 9 addresses the conclusions and some implications to be drawn from this investigation. The socio-rhetorical method applied in the study of Johannine passages allows for some speculation about the nature of the implied audience of the Fourth Gospel and what conclusions might be drawn about the real audience.

An appendix discusses the motif of the abstemious Johannine Jesus against the tradition of divine messengers in Jewish scriptural sources and addresses implications for Christology.

This study claims that the narration of meal accounts and their respective discourses spoke to the lived experience of early Christ-believers and served to edify the “historical” Johannine community gathered for meals.

1.5. Presuppositions

1.5.1. Gospel of John

The questions of authorship, date, location, integrity and addressees of the Fourth Gospel have been highly disputed topics in Johannine scholarship. In this chapter, each of these issues will be addressed briefly in order to clarify the presuppositions on which the present study is based.³⁰ The

³⁰ Readers who are interested in investigating these issues in depth should focus their attention on the discussions that can be found in virtually all leading commentaries on the Fourth Gospel. See esp. Raymond Edward Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, ed. Moloney, Francis J.; *ABRL* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 40–89, 189–219. The following discussion of presuppositions is based largely on this work. This volume contains the edited version of the respective chapters in Raymond Edward Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, AncB (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966–1970), XXV–CIV. Other leading commentaries with elaborate discussions of their presuppositions include e.g.: Folker Siegert, *Das Evangelium des Johannes in seiner ursprünglichen Gestalt: Wiederherstellung und Kommentar*, SIJD, vol. 7 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 15–181; Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to*

main thesis developed here is fundamentally compatible with the majority of recent views regarding the authorship, date and location of the Gospel. The question concerning the addressees, however plays a more decisive role and therefore receives more attention.

1.5.1.1. Authorship

The question of authorship pertains to the person or people responsible for the composition of the body of the Fourth Gospel. The traditional view that the present twenty-one chapters of the Gospel were written by a single person has been disputed by many scholars.³¹ Modern scholarship posits a more complex process of composition, involving an editor in addition to the initial writer, and very likely contributions by others as well. The initial writer and the author are not necessarily identical, since in antiquity, authorship is often attributed to someone other than the person who actually wrote down the words. The author may have been an individual person or a group of disciples who carried on the thought of their leader after his death and attributed their work to the already deceased.

In the case of the Fourth Gospel, additional problems affect the matter of authorship. The Gospel identifies the figure of the “disciple whom Jesus loved” (Jn 21:20) as the one who “is testifying to these things and has written them” (Jn 21:24).³² Among the Gospels, the character of the “Beloved Disciple” is unique to John. The “Beloved Disciple” may be the authority behind the

Saint John, BNTC, vol. 4 (London: Continuum, 2005), 1–91; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 2 vols. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 81–232; Dwight Moody Smith, *John*, ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 21–45; Francis J. Moloney and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of John* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 1–31.

³¹ For the following, cf. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, 189–199, 215–216.

³² On the identification of the Beloved Disciple with the evangelist, see Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, 192–194.

Fourth Gospel's tradition but he need not necessarily be its writer.³³ Often, the existence of a Johannine school is proposed.³⁴ This is thought of as a group of disciples of the "Beloved Disciple," themselves not eyewitnesses, who bore the traditions and acted as writers. "School" need not mean a group of formally trained disciples, but may refer to "a special group (all of them disciples of the BD) who preached to the community, helped to vocalize what their experiences meant in terms of salvifically understanding Jesus, and then committed this to writing as a guide to other believers (especially Johannine) for encountering Jesus and receiving life in his name."³⁵

In this study, the question of authorship is of little importance since the main thesis is in line with all the proposed suggestions. It is important to note that henceforward the term "John" refers to "the Gospel of John," that is, the text as it stands, and not a specific individual behind the text.

1.5.1.2. Date

Scholarly opinions about the date of the written composition of the Fourth Gospel are diverse.³⁶ Dates range from as early as 65 CE to as late as 170 CE.³⁷ The majority of scholars view the last decade of the first century CE as the most likely date of redaction, with 100-110 CE as the latest

³³ The identity of the Beloved Disciple cannot be determined with certainty. He may be the author of the Fourth Gospel; cf. e.g. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, 192–194. While one cannot rule out the possibility that he is a fictitious figure, most scholars believe him to have been a historical person.

³⁴ For the origination of the theory of the Johannine school, see R. Alan Culpepper, *The Johannine School: An Evaluation of the Johannine-School Hypothesis Based on an Investigation of the Nature of Ancient Schools*, SBLDS, vol. 26 (1974; reprint, Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975).

³⁵ Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, 196–197, quotation 197.

³⁶ For the following, cf. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, 206–215, 217–218.

³⁷ At the extremes, for early dating e.g. Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough, "John a Primitive Gospel," *JBL* 64, no. 2 (1945); George Allen Turner, "The Date and Purpose of the Gospel by John," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 6, no. 3 (1963); Klaus Berger, *Im Anfang war Johannes: Datierung und Theologie des vierten Evangeliums* (Stuttgart: Quell-Verlag, 1997).

For late dating, cf. e.g. Joseph Turmel, *La quatrième Evangile*, vol. 5 (Paris: Rieder, 1925), 42; Emanuel Hirsch, *Das vierte Evangelium in seiner ursprünglichen Gestalt verdeutscht und erklärt* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1936), 92.

plausible date. Defenders of a late dating argue on the basis of the Gospel's high level of theological development, the lack of evidence that this Gospel was used by early second-century writers, or the possible dependence of the Fourth Gospel on the Synoptics. Nothing in John's theology, however, clearly rules out a first century date for the final redaction.

The lack of direct evidence for John in the first half of the second century has led many to speculate about whether the Gospel was known to writers of this period. The silence of our sources does not permit an answer to this question. Further, the thesis that John is dependent on the Synoptics is far from undisputed.³⁸ The strongest argument against a late dating is the existence of an impressive number of copies of John that circulated in Egypt in the second half of the second century. The dating of some of them to the mid-second century is widely accepted.³⁹ If the Gospel was composed outside of Egypt, which is the majority view, one would have to allow some time for the Gospel to have reached Egypt and to have come into circulation there.

Arguments in favour of an early dating posit an independent tradition and development. If the descriptions of places, situations and customs are correct in John, they point to an early dating of these traditions. Nevertheless, several decades may have elapsed between pre-70 traditions that underlie the Gospel and the final redaction. Some scholars who favour an early date have used comparative theology as support.⁴⁰ Examples include the lack of the institution of the Eucharist or the absence of the tradition of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. These characteristics may well be, however, the author's conscious choice rather than ignorance of these traditions. In sum, it is possible that the Fourth Gospel reached its final form around the turn of the first to the second

³⁸ For "The Question of Dependence on the Synoptic Gospels," cf. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, 94–104.

³⁹ Rylands Papyrus 457 (p⁵²), published by C. H. Roberts in 1935, and Papyrus Egerton 2. On this and other slightly later papyrus evidence, cf. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, 209–210.

⁴⁰ E.g. Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough, "John a Primitive Gospel."

century. Any closer specification on the date requires a greater level of speculation and is unnecessary at this point. The central thesis of this study is generally compatible with virtually any of these proposals for the final date of redaction of the Fourth Gospel.

1.5.1.3. Location

Similarly unclear is the provenance of the Gospel.⁴¹ Traditionally the Gospel is located in Ephesus, a view that is still held by many scholars.⁴² Ephesus was first identified as the place of the Gospel's origin by Irenaeus: "Later John the Lord's disciple, who reclined on his bosom, himself published the Gospel while staying at Ephesus in Asia" (*Adversus Haereses*. 3.1.1).⁴³ Several other factors point to this location: the Gospel itself mentions the Greeks in John 7:35 and 12:20 which points to Greece or Asia Minor; and Philip, whose role is also emphasized in the Fourth Gospel, is closely linked to Ephesus in Church tradition. Furthermore, Ephesus was a major centre of Diaspora Judaism.⁴⁴

Alternatives to Ephesus have emerged from examinations of the internal evidence of the Gospel on the one hand, and from the way in which the Gospel is used in antiquity on the other. Candidates include Alexandria, the Northern Transjordan, and Syria with Antioch as a likely locus.

⁴¹ For the following, cf. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, 199–206, 216–217.

⁴² E.g. Siegert, *Das Evangelium des Johannes in seiner ursprünglichen Gestalt*, 46–62; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*, NIC.NT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 54–55; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, Grand Rapids: Intervarsity Press; Eerdmans, 1992), 86–87. Disputing the Ephesus hypothesis, e.g. Klaus Wengst, *Bedrängte Gemeinde und verherrlichter Christus: Ein Versuch über das Johannesevangelium*, 4th ed. (1981; reprint, München: Chr. Kaiser, 1992), 157–60.

⁴³ Irenaeus, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, ed. Grant, Robert MacQueen, *The Early Church Fathers* (London, New York: Routledge, 1997), 124. Cf. Latin: "Postea et Iohannes discipulus domini, quis et supra pectus eius recumbat, et ipse edidit evangelium, Ephesi Asiae commorans." Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses: Griechisch, lateinisch, deutsch*, ed. Brox, Norbert, *Fontes Christiani* (Freiburg, Basel: Herder, 1993–2001), 3:24.

⁴⁴ Emil Schürer and Géza Vermès, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ: (175 B.C.-A.D. 135)*, 3 vols. in 4 parts (Edinburgh: Clark, 1973–1987), 3:17–18, 22–23.

Arguments supporting the Alexandria hypothesis draw on the wide circulation that is well attested by the papyri. The relative abundance of Egyptian witnesses may, however, be simply due to the fact that the Egyptian climate was more favourable for the survival of papyri than conditions in other centres of Christ-believers.⁴⁵

The most popular alternate suggestion is that the Fourth Gospel originates from the general region of Antioch. The arguments for Syria draw on the Gospel's affinities with Mandaean and Gnostic ideas, the letters of Ignatius from Antioch, and the Odes of Solomon. Defenders of this opinion seek support in the opposition against the Jews and the polemics against the followers of John the Baptist inherent to the Gospel. Ignatius of Antioch also draws on John, and among Latin writers, he is widely considered to be a disciple of John.⁴⁶

Indications for the Northern Transjordan, more specifically Gaulanitis, Batanea and Trachonitis or the southern part of the kingdom of Agrippa II, draw on the argument that the Johannine community must have consisted mostly of Jewish-Christians, that its language was Greek, and that it must have lived in an ethnically mixed environment, dominated by Jews who held the political power, as would be the case for this area.⁴⁷ This theory rightly describes and takes into account the conflictual situation of emerging Christianity over against Judaism. This,

⁴⁵ Supporters of Alexandria, e.g. W. H. Brownlee, "Whence the Gospel According to John?" in *John and Qumran*, ed. James Hamilton Charlesworth, and Raymond Edward Brown (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1972), 166–194; Marco Frenschkowski, "Ta baïa tôn phoinikôn (Joh 12,13) und andere Indizien für einen ägyptischen Ursprung des Johannesevangeliums," *ZNW* 91, no. 3–4 (2000).

⁴⁶ Supporters of Antioch or Syria, e.g. Charles Fox Burney, *The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922); James Hamilton Charlesworth "Qumran, John and the Odes of Salomon," in *John and Qumran*, ed. James Hamilton Charlesworth, and Raymond Edward Brown (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1972), 107–136.

⁴⁷ Supporters of Northern Transjordan, e.g. Oscar Cullmann, *Der johanneische Kreis: Sein Platz im Spätjudentum, in der Jüngerschaft Jesu und im Urchristentum; zum Ursprung des Johannesevangeliums* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1975); Günter Reim, "Zur Lokalisierung der johanneischen Gemeinde," *BZ* 32, no. 1 (1988); Wengst, *Bedrängte Gemeinde und verherrlichter Christus*.

however, does not necessarily point to Palestine, but would have characterized every location in which Christ-believers come into tension with Jews who do not believe in Christ.

Given the paucity of incontrovertible evidence it is impossible to move beyond relative grades of plausibility. All in all, the Ephesus hypothesis seems the most convincing. Major colonies of Jews existed in most major cities of Asia Minor, and the fierce anti-synagogue motif makes sense in this region. The polemic against the disciples of John the Baptist points to Ephesus, for this is the only place outside the Palestine region where the baptism of John the Baptist is mentioned (Acts 19:1-7). Furthermore, the available external sources by Irenaeus and other early Christian writers point to this location. Brown has a good point: “The question of the exact locale of the Gospel’s final writing is not extremely important, for the Gospel’s appeal to believers in 20:30-31 transcends place and perhaps even time. Yet in my judgment the Ephesus region fits the internal evidence of John best of all the proposals, and is the only site that has ancient attestation.”⁴⁸

Since the issue of location is not germane to this study it suffices to state that the Fourth Gospel was written somewhere in the Eastern Mediterranean, in a place with Jewish influence and certainly somewhere in the Roman Empire.

1.5.1.4. Integrity

The Fourth Gospel contains a large number of literary and textual problems.⁴⁹ These problems have led some scholars to identify multiple sources and/or multiple editions.⁵⁰ Scholars have

⁴⁸ Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, 206.

⁴⁹ For the following, cf. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, 40–89.

⁵⁰ The prime exponent in the 20th century is of course Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971). Other early defendants include e.g. Wilhelm Wilkens, *Die Entstehungsgeschichte des*

searched for tensions, inconsistencies, or “aporias” that suggest the existence of separate layers of material, or strains, in the text. Undertaking a number of source- and redaction-critical moves, Bultmann identifies five different sources within the Gospel.⁵¹ He claims to have distinguished the presence of a lost Signs Gospel on which John, alone of the evangelists, depended. “Form criticism,” of which Bultmann has been the most influential exponent, served as his basis for solving some of the problems of the Gospel and led to the rearranging of entire chapters, individual verses, and even parts thereof.

Growing out of a careful and detailed study of earlier source theories, particularly the work of Bultmann, Robert Fortna undertakes a source-critical analysis of the Fourth Gospel. He searches the Gospel for tell-tale contextual traces testifying to an author’s annotations or supplements to an earlier text.⁵² Fortna proposes a two-layer hypothesis that distinguishes between a “*Grundschrift*” (primarily discovered in the narrative portions) and a later redaction and elaboration.

Adopting a theory of multiple editions, Raymond E. Brown suggests that multiple authors wrote the Gospel in stages. He distinguishes four stages of development: traditions connected directly with the apostle, partial editing by his disciples, synthesis by the apostle, and additions by a final editor.⁵³ Some approaches of literary reconstruction remain in vogue in certain newer currents of Johannine scholarship.⁵⁴ All along, however, some scholars have strongly defended the

vierten Evangeliums (Zollikon: Evangelischer Verlag, ca. 1957); Marie-Émile Boismard, “Saint Luc et la rédaction du quatrième évangile (Jn 4:46-54),” *RB* 69, no. 2 (1962).

⁵¹ Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*.

⁵² Robert Tomson Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs: A Reconstruction of the Narrative Source Underlying the Fourth Gospel*, SNTSMS, vol. 11 (Cambridge: University Press, 1970).

⁵³ Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, esp. XXXIV-XXXIX.

⁵⁴ E.g. Urban C. von Wahlde, *The Earliest Version of John’s Gospel: Recovering the Gospel of Signs* (Wilmington: Glazier, 1989); Marie-Émile Boismard and Arnaud Lamouille, *Un évangile pré-johannique*, EBibNS (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre; J. Gabalda, 1993); Ismo Dunderberg, *Johannes und die Synoptiker: Studien zu Joh 1–9*, *Annales Academiae*

integrity of the Fourth Gospel.⁵⁵ Nowadays, not least because of the influence of contemporary approaches to literary criticism, it is customary to read the text as we have it.⁵⁶

For most scholars who take the Gospel as it now stands as the basis of their investigation, this does not rule out the possibility of redaction. For methodological reasons, however, they abstain from speculative rearrangements that run the risk of changing the original meaning of a passage and resist the temptation to smooth out apparent inconsistencies.⁵⁷ This is the approach adopted in this study. Whatever the sources for the exact process of composition and redaction, the Fourth Gospel eventually reached a final form. At some point in time a person or a group of people made the decision that the Gospel was finished and began circulating it within the surrounding early community of Christ-believers. The only manuscripts known to us have survived in this form.⁵⁸

This study assumes that it is possible to identify a strong narrative unity across the Fourth Gospel. Socio-rhetorical criticism is interested in the text as we have it and in how the editor and

scientiarum Fennicae. *Dissertationes humanarum litterarum*, vol. 69 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1994); Siegert, *Das Evangelium des Johannes in seiner ursprünglichen Gestalt*.

⁵⁵ Esp. Eugen Ruckstuhl and Martin Hengel, *Die literarische Einheit des Johannesevangeliums: Der gegenwärtige Stand der einschlägigen Forschungen* (Freiburg (Schweiz), Göttingen: Universitätsverlag; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987); Eugen Ruckstuhl and Peter Dschulnigg, *Stilkritik und Verfasserfrage im Johannesevangelium: Die johanneischen Sprachmerkmale auf dem Hintergrund des Neuen Testaments und des zeitgenössischen hellenistischen Schrifttums*, NTOA, vol. 17 (Freiburg (Schweiz), Göttingen: Universitätsverlag; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991). More recently e.g. Hartwig Thyen, "Das Johannesevangelium als literarisches Werk," in *Studien zum Corpus Iohanneum*, ed. Hartwig Thyen (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 351–369.

⁵⁶ This includes Jn 21.

⁵⁷ The first ending Jn 20:30-31 with its summary and explanation of the Gospel's purpose suggests that, at some stage, it concluded with these verses and that Jn 21 was added to the existing body at a later stage. Brown has discerned minor stylistic details that he judges to betray a different author than the one who wrote the rest of the Gospel. All extant Gospel manuscripts, however, include chapter 21. There are no signs in the textual traditions that the Gospel ever circulated without this chapter. Cf. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1077–1082; Victor Salmon, *Histoire de la tradition textuelle de l'original grec du quatrième évangile: Avec 64 illustrations (papyrus et manuscrits accompagnés d'une transcription complète)* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1969).

⁵⁸ The only exception to this is the account of the adulterous women (Jn 7:53-8:11) because this pericope is absent in some manuscripts and placed elsewhere in the Gospel in others (after Jn 7:36 or at the end of the Gospel). For discussion, see Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 335–336; Moloney and Harrington, *The Gospel of John*, 259; Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 735–736; Siegert, *Das Evangelium des Johannes in seiner ursprünglichen Gestalt*, 45–46.

his early Christ-believing audience may have perceived that entire text as a unit. Thus, the entirety of the Gospel, without any imposed rearrangements, will serve as the basis for the present investigation.⁵⁹

1.5.1.5. Nature and Purpose

The Fourth Gospel is a narrative text with a plot, characters and the other features of narratives.⁶⁰ A plot “in a dramatic or narrative work is constituted by its events and actions, as these are rendered and ordered toward achieving particular artistic and emotional effects.”⁶¹ The plot of the Fourth Gospel may be defined and described in a number of ways.⁶² Culpepper has convincingly suggested that the central focus of the plot is Jesus' fulfilment of his mission to reveal the Father and authorize the children of God.⁶³ According to Culpepper, the specific mode of plot development in John is the repeated recognition or lack of recognition of Jesus' identity and mission.⁶⁴ As a result, each episode not only further reveals Jesus' identity but also recapitulates the plot of the Gospel as a whole.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ The Greek text used is the standard text of *Novum Testamentum Graece* by Nestlé-Aland, now in its 27th edition.

⁶⁰ R. Alan Culpepper has devoted an entire chapter to the question of plot in John, Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 79–98.

⁶¹ Meyer Howard Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, with the collaboration of Geoffrey Galt Harpham, 8th ed. (Australia: Thomson, 2005), 233. Culpepper draws on Abrams for his own work and offers an overview and discussion of a number of further definitions including Aristotle's *Poetics*. *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 79–82.

⁶² For a critical examination of a number of approaches to the plot of the Gospel in Johannine, see Fernando F. Segovia, “The Journey(s) of the Word of God: A Reading of the Plot of the Fourth Gospel,” *Semeia*, no. 53 (1991), 26–31.

⁶³ “What, then, is the plot of the Fourth Gospel? The beginning, ending, repeated material, tasks of the characters, and nature of the conflicts all provide clues.... The prologue not only introduces Jesus as the divine *logos* but also provides clues to the gospel's plot. John 1:11-12 has often been regarded as a summary of the gospel: ‘He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.’ Verse 14 characterizes the significance of Jesus' ministry: ‘And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory....’... The revelation of the Father seems to be the distinctive Johannine contribution which has been imposed on the traditional interpretation of Jesus' role (taking away sin).... The plot of the Gospel of John, however, revolves around Jesus' fulfilment of his mission to reveal the Father and authorize the children of God (τέκνα θεοῦ).” Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 87–88.

⁶⁴ “The plot is a plot of action in the sense that Jesus achieves his goals while his fortune apparently changes for the worse.... All that is essential to his character is revealed to the reader before Jesus ever makes his appearance in the

1.5.1.5.1. Two Stories: Tale of Jesus and Cosmological Tale

The Fourth Gospel's very first verse indicates that this Gospel not only tells a "historical" tale about the life of Jesus dwelling on earth among humankind, but that this story is embedded in a meta-tale about the world. This meta-tale may be referred to as the "cosmological tale."⁶⁶

Jesus' origins are set within his cosmic relationship to God. Before the world was even created, the logos dwells in God or at least with God (Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. Jn 1:1). The prologue (Jn 1:1-18) outlines the cosmological narrative that will give the historical tale a theological freight: at some point in time this divine logos becomes flesh and enters the world in order to provide the means through which human beings may become children of God. This is equal to attaining salvation. Upon completion of his task, the logos returns to the Father (implied in Jn 1:1-18). The historical and cosmological tales intersect at a number of points throughout the Gospel and remain in some tension. The discourses that follow in the main body of the Gospel develop and elaborate the prologue's sketch of the cosmological drama.

1.5.1.5.2. Reaching out to the Real Reader

narrative, but his identity is repeatedly demonstrated, confirmed, and given richer tones by the signs and discourses. Plot development in John, then, is a matter of how Jesus' identity comes to be recognized and how it fails to be recognized." Ibid., 88.

⁶⁵ "Not only is Jesus' identity progressively revealed by the repetitive signs and discourses and the progressive enhancement of metaphorical and symbolic images, but each episode has essentially the same plot as the story as a whole.... The story is repeated over and over. No one can miss it. Individual episodes can almost convey the message of the whole; at least they suggest or recall it for those who know the story." Ibid., 88–89.

⁶⁶ Adele Reinhartz, *The Word in the World: The Cosmological Tale in the Fourth Gospel*, SBLMS, vol. 45 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), esp. 16–28. Cf. Adele Reinhartz, *Befriending the Beloved Disciple: A Jewish Reading of the Gospel of John* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 34–36.

The Gospel of John tells stories on different levels, the historical and the cosmological. At the same time, there is internal evidence that suggests the Gospel reaches out beyond its narrative directly to address the implied readers and through them extra-textual readership.

One such marker is found in John 2:22: “After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.”⁶⁷ This verse indicates that time has elapsed between the miracles Jesus worked and the time in which a real reader reads the text about the miracle. The disciples remembered Jesus’ deeds, told and retold them. Another marker is found in the narrator’s comments on Jesus’ exhortation to drink, addressed to those believers who are thirsty: “Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (Jn 7:39). This comment refers to the coming of the Spirit which will happen after Jesus’ glorification. Thus, a later time is explicitly in view at this point.

Frequently the narrator reaches out to his readers by translating foreign, i.e. other than Greek, words and by explaining customs and providing information that does not strictly belong to the narrative.⁶⁸ In some pericopes, it is Jesus himself who reaches out to his post-Easter readers. Jesus announces the Paraclete whom the Father will send for the support of Jesus’ disciples after his departure (Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:7). It is the Paraclete who will teach the disciples everything and who will remind them of all that Jesus has said (Jn 14:26). The notion of the Paraclete who teaches those left behind after Jesus’ death shows that the Gospel distinguishes between the time of Jesus’ earthly deeds and the time that follows his death. Jesus’ death marks the beginning of the time in which the disciples are left with their memories of Jesus and need to continue without his physical

⁶⁷ English translations of bible passages rely on the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) if not otherwise indicated.

⁶⁸ E.g. Jn 1:38; 2:6; 7:2; 9:7; 19:17, 42; 20:16.

presence among them. The implied and real readers of the Gospel live at a time after Jesus' departure.⁶⁹

The most explicit indicators that the Gospel is reaching out to its extra-textual readers are the occasions on which the narrator directly addresses his readers. After the soldier has pierced Jesus' side and liquids flow out of the body, the narrator tells the addressees that "He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth" (Jn 19:35). The plural form of "πιστεύ[σ]ητε" indicates that the narrator addresses a plurality of readers.⁷⁰

The same pattern is found again at the Gospel's first ending. The narrator states: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name" (Jn 20:30-31). This is a clear statement that the Gospel is a selective compilation of Jesus' deeds and that he performed many others. Most important, the passage emphasizes that the signs that *are* included in the Gospel explicitly serve the purpose of telling an extra-textual readership about the Messiah Jesus. The intention and thus the purpose of the Gospel are to create or deepen belief among the extra-textual readership. This intent of creating belief, expressed using the second person plural, is repeated in the Gospel's first

⁶⁹ Note that: "the implied reader exists only in the mind of the real reader and, in the case of the Fourth Gospel, may be identified with, or identical to, the narratees, the party to whom the narrator is addressing his or her words. The implied readers may be reconstructed from the text as those who are capable of understanding the text, its language, its devices, and its message. Hence the implied reader may be defined as the image of the intended reader which a real reader constructs in reading the text." Reinhartz, *The Word in the World*, 7. Reinhartz refers to Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 208.

⁷⁰ The aorist subjunctive active of πιστεύω has the broader geographical support, while the subjunctive present active depends on the earliest manuscripts.

ending: “ἵνα πιστεύ[σ]ητε” (Jn 20:31).⁷¹ This internal evidence demonstrates that the Gospel reaches out to a readership living at a time well beyond the events recorded in the Gospel.

1.5.1.5.3. Purpose of the Fourth Gospel

Many investigations into the Fourth Gospel have sought to define its purpose. The various attempts at defining the purpose of the Fourth Gospel may be divided into five different categories:⁷²

1. The Fourth Gospel serves as a missionary document for Jews in the Diaspora
2. The Fourth Gospel has its roots in a dialogue with the synagogue. Its primary purpose is to support believers and those on the fringe of Christ-believing communities.
3. As a secondary purpose of the Fourth Gospel, an anti-docetic polemic was added at a late stage of its composition.
4. Mission among the Samaritans significantly shaped the theology and themes of the Fourth Gospel.
5. The Fourth Gospel’s purpose is to transcend its immediate context. Its intent is to address Christ-believers from various milieus.

Culpepper has summarized the discussion over the purpose of the Fourth Gospel as follows: “Put most simply, the question is whether John was written as a missionary document for non-believers, a community document for believers, or a theological document for the church at large.”⁷³

⁷¹ See note 70 above.

⁷² Cf. Robert Kysar, *The Fourth Evangelist and his Gospel: An Examination of Contemporary Scholarship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1975), 147–65.

⁷³ Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 212.

In line with customary Greek rhetoric, the Fourth Gospel contains a prologue. As a formal preface to the Gospel, this introductory passage introduces but does not expound at any length the main points of the Gospel and thereby disposes the audience favourably to what follows in the rest of the work. Thus, the prologue is “likely to reveal something of the author’s purpose, intentions and interest.”⁷⁴ The Prologue states that the logos and true light came into the world (Jn 1:9). John (the Baptist) came as a witness to testify to this light so that all might believe through him (Jn 1:7). What will be further elaborated throughout the Gospel is outlined here: the cosmological logos entered the world; the Gospel is a testimony of this, and by telling the story of Jesus, it seeks to move the readers from the earthly level of physical existence to the cosmological level of eternal life. The means by which this happens is belief. The Gospel’s first ending reiterates this idea explicitly: “But these [signs] are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name” (Jn 20:31). John’s intent is to create persevering faith. The goal is to address believers of different levels of discipleship and to invite them to persevere as true disciples of and believers in Jesus.

1.5.1.6. Johannine Community, Two-Level Reading Strategy, and the Expulsion Theory

It is not possible precisely to identify the earliest intended audience. The consensus is that the Fourth Gospel was originally written for the so called “Johannine community.” J. Louis Martyn explains: “That is to say, it was written for a community of people who had a shared history and who in the course of that history developed a highly symbolic language with numerous

⁷⁴ Eldon Lay Epp, “Wisdom, Torah, Word: The Johannine Prologue and the Purpose of the Fourth Gospel,” in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation*, ed. Merrill Chapin Tenney, and Gerald F. Hawthorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 128–146: 128–129. Quoted from Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 338.

expressions which *they* would easily understand as referring to their shared history. In short, to a large extent the Gospel is written in the language of a community of initiates. It follows that those who would be historians of this community must not only engage in literary archaeology, but must also make at least a partial entry into this symbolic language.”⁷⁵

In this study, “Johannine community” will refer to the group within which and for which the Johannine Gospel was written. Its existence cannot be proved, either by archaeological remains or by explicit references in ancient sources. There are, however, valid reasons for assuming the existence of a Johannine community. The narrator’s comment in John 20:30-31 strongly indicates that the Gospel is directed at a plurality of addressees (πιστεύ[σ]ητε). Also, for example, Jesus twice addresses the royal official, who presumably comes to Jesus unaccompanied, with plural verbs (ἐὰν μὴ σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα ἴδῃτε, οὐ μὴ πιστεύσητε, Jn 4:48). Furthermore, the troubles and struggles of a community in the process of establishing itself in the Greco-Roman world are reflected in the account.⁷⁶

According to Culpepper, the Johannine community was basically a school, similar to ancient Greco-Roman schools. The strongest connection to these schools is that of a foundational figure – the Beloved Disciple in the case of the Fourth Gospel.⁷⁷

Oskar Cullmann has suggested that the Johannine community was, from its very beginning, a group of people on the margin between Judaism and Hellenism: heterodox Jews and believers.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ J. Louis Martyn, “Glimpses into the History of the Johannine Community: From its Origin through the Period of Its Life in Which The Fourth Gospel Was Composed,” in *L’Évangile de Jean: Sources, rédaction, théologie*, ed. Marinus de Jonge, and Marie-Émile Boismard, BETHL (Gembloux, Leuven: J. Duculot; University Press, 1977), 149–175: 150 (emphasis in original).

⁷⁶ Adele Reinhartz, “Love, Hate and Violence in the Gospel of John,” in *Violence in the New Testament*, eds. E. Leigh Gibson and Shelly Matthews (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 109–123: 110.

⁷⁷ Culpepper, *The Johannine School*.

⁷⁸ Cullmann, *Der johanneische Kreis*. For a critical acclaim of Cullmann’s work and particularly the “Johanneische Kreis,” see Adele Reinhartz, “Oscar Cullmann und sein Beitrag zur Johannes-Forschung,” in *Bibelauslegung und*

This group was grounded not in an evolving Christology, but rather in a profound fidelity to the historical Jesus and to the Beloved Disciple's understanding of him.

In his highly influential work, Martyn reads the Gospel of John as a "two-level drama" in which all participants originate in the same Jewish community.⁷⁹ Martyn suggests that, on one level, the Gospel presents the deeds, conflicts and teachings of Jesus; on the other level it reflects the experiences of the Johannine community. Martyn links the growth of Johannine Christology to the lived experience of a particular group of Christ-believers as it experienced a definitive breach with the synagogue. He sees the Johannine community as a Jewish-Christian group which had been a messianic sect of Christian Jews until some time before the writing of the Gospel. Martyn takes John 9 as his point of departure. He reads John 9 as a drama of the Johannine community that occurs behind the Gospel. Because of their missionary success among other Jews, Christ-believers were expelled from the synagogue and even subjected to persecution and death at the hands of Jews.

Martyn connects the expulsion passages (Jn 9:22; 12:42; 16:2) to the *birkat ha-minim*, a Jewish "blessing" (read: *curse*) of heretics, and claims that this prayer played a decisive role in the process that led to the separation of Johannine Christ-believers from their fellow Jews. The group's teaching was perceived as false and as a threat to monotheism. The rejection became paradigmatic for the Gospel's negative and hostile attitude towards "the Jews" and towards the

ökumenische Leidenschaft: Die Beiträge des Wissenschaftlichen Symposiums aus Anlass des 100. Geburtstags von Oscar Cullmann, eds. Rudolf Brändle and Ekkehard W. Stegemann, ThZ (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt, 2002), 221–231: esp. 226–229.

⁷⁹ J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 3rd eds; The New Testament Library (1968; reprint, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003). The 2003 edition is a reprint of the second revised and enlarged edition published in 1979. The first edition was published 1968. On the two-level reading strategy see also: Martyn, "Glimpses into the History of the Johannine Community: From its Origin through the Period of Its Life in Which The Fourth Gospel Was Composed," 149–175; J. Louis Martyn, *The Gospel of John in Christian History: Essays for Interpreters* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).

world.⁸⁰ The expulsion caused the elevation of the community's Christology and led to the final breach.

Raymond E. Brown agrees with Martyn that the Johannine community originated in the synagogue and that the Gospel reflects the expulsion and persecution triggered by the group's high Christology. The persecution of members of the Johannine community may have involved the denunciation of the excommunicated group to the Roman authorities, rather than direct execution. Brown constructs a sequential history of the community's development, discerning four phases. The first phase was the pre-Gospel era, involving the Johannine community's origins in and relation to mid-first-century Judaism. The second phase was the life-situation of the Johannine community at the time that the Gospel was composed and it particularly reflects the place of the Johannine followers of Jesus in a pluralistic world of non-believers and believers. In the third phase, the time the letters of John were written, the Johannine community split into two groups. In the fourth phase, after the Letters, the two Johannine groups were dissolved.⁸¹

Klaus Wengst situates the Johannine believers, most of whom are of Jewish origin, in the region of Gaulanitis, Batanea and Trachonitis, the southern part of the kingdom of Agrippa II.⁸² Rather than claiming the existence of a single Johannine community, Wengst depicts the group as a series of small scattered groups. According to his reconstruction, political and military power

⁸⁰ Many scholars have observed the fact that the term "οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι" appears significantly more frequently in John than in the other gospels and in a more hostile manner. Different solutions have been proposed to the question of how John uses the term and how it should be translated most adequately; e.g.: "the Jews," "Judeans," "Jewish authorities." For the purpose of this study, it is not necessary to define precisely John's usage of the term "οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι." It suffices to state that John depicts "οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι" as the enemies. For discussion of the notion of "οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι," see e.g. Adele Reinhartz, "'Jews' and Jews in the Fourth Gospel," in *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Reimund Bieringer, Didier Pollefeyt, and Frederique Vandecasteele-Vanneuville (Louisville, London, Leiden: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 213–227; Steve Mason, "Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History," *JSJ* 38, no. 4–5 (2007).

⁸¹ Raymond Edward Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

⁸² Wengst, *Bedrängte Gemeinde und verherrlichter Christus*.

was in the hands of the Jews. When some of them started believing in Jesus as Christ, they suffered hostility and expulsion and, in face of this, many became apostates.

For several decades, beginning in 1968, the expulsion theory was so widely embraced that its hypothetical character was close to being buried in oblivion. More recently, however, critiques by a number of scholars have mounted and the role of the *birkat ha-minim* has been dismantled.⁸³ Due to this as well as other problems, the expulsion theory, along with the problematic hermeneutical approach of understanding the Fourth Gospel as a direct window into the Johannine community, can no longer be taken as axiomatic.⁸⁴ Nevertheless there are still a number of

⁸³ Reuven Kimelmann, “Birkat Ha-Minim and the Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer in Late Antiquity,” in *Aspects of Judaism in the Graeco-Roman Period*, ed. Ben F. Meyer, and Edward Parish Sanders, Jewish and Christian Self-Definition (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 226–244, 391–403; Pieter W. van der Horst, “The Birkat Ha-Minim in Recent Research,” *ExpTim* 105, no. 12 (1994); Steven T. Katz, “Issues in the separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 CE: A Reconsideration,” *JBL* 103, no. 1 (1984). A summary of the *birkat ha-minim* as a fallacy in scholarly consensus is found in Raimo Hakola, *Identity Matters: John, the Jews and Jewishness* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 45–55.

⁸⁴ E.g. Reinhartz: “The theory that the Fourth Gospel directly reflects a traumatic experience of the Johannine community suffers at three points: (1) the lack of external evidence for a formal expulsion; (2) the overlooking of other models within the Gospel of the relationship between Jesus’ followers and the synagogue; (3) the lack of evidence that the intended audience read the Gospel as a story of their particular historical experience. The alternative reading suggested here argues that the Gospel reflects the complex social situation of the Johannine community but not the specific historical circumstances which gave rise to that situation. The largely negative portrayal of Jews and Judaism within the Gospel must therefore be grounded not in a specific experience but in the ongoing process of self-definition and the rhetoric which accompanies it.” Adele Reinhartz, “The Johannine Community and its Jewish Neighbors: A Reappraisal,” in *What is John?: Readers and Readings of the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia, SBLSymS (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 111–138: 137. In this and other articles Reinhartz has cogently demonstrated on the basis of internal evidence that the expulsion theory does not fit the rhetoric of the Gospel as a whole. Cf. Reinhartz, *Befriending the Beloved Disciple*, 42–53; Reinhartz, “‘Jews’ and Jews in the Fourth Gospel,” 213–227. For an overview of the decline of the expulsion theory, see Robert Kysar, “The Expulsion from the Synagogue: The Tale of a Theory,” in *Voyages with John: Charting the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Robert Kysar (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2005), 247–245. Note also that even the late Brown himself repudiates any connection between any formal Jewish decree and the expulsion of Johannine Christ-believers. *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, 213.

The image of the “window” has been widely adopted for the two-level approach proposed by Martyn who himself speaks of “glimpses” into the history of the Johannine community (cf. Martyn, “Glimpses into the History of the Johannine Community: From its Origin through the Period of Its Life in Which The Fourth Gospel Was Composed,” 149–175). On window-imagery cf. also Murray Krieger, *A Window to Criticism: Shakespeare’s Sonnets and Modern Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 3–4; Norman R. Petersen, *Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics*, GBS (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 19.

According to Painter, e.g., the institution of the *birkat ha-minim* is “the only situation known to us which makes sense of the Johannine data....” John Painter, “John 9 and the Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel,” *JSNT* 28 (1986), 39 (emphasis in original). According to Culpepper, “The process [of expulsion] was probably similar to the use of the

scholars who uphold the expulsion theory, some of them relying on, others neglecting the *birkat ha-minim* theory.⁸⁵

However varied the reconstruction of the precise character and development of the Johannine community, these approaches share the conviction that there was a distinct group of Jesus followers for whom the Gospel was composed.⁸⁶ This common sense view has been challenged by Richard Bauckham, who claims to have laid the groundwork for a paradigm shift.⁸⁷

Bauckham refutes the general assumption that each Gospel was written for a specific community or group of communities, the so-called Matthean, Markan, Lukan and Johannine communities respectively. He considers those groups to be merely a scholarly construct for which there is little convincing evidence. Bauckham raises doubts as to the existence of local groups of Christ-believers and suggests that the Gospels were addressed to a very broad readership and intended to circulate broadly among them. For most scholars, however, it seems more plausible that each Gospel reflects a position that is attuned to a particular local audience for which it is written.⁸⁸ More likely than not, someone writing a Gospel would respond directly to the needs of a

Birkath ha-Minim or twelfth benediction but prior to its adoption at Jamnia." R. Alan Culpepper, "The Gospel of John and the Jews," *RevExp* 84, no. 2 (1987), 281.

⁸⁵ In a recent article, Joel Marcus defends the basics of Martyn's reconstruction of the *birkat ha-minim* while nuancing the extent of rabbinic control. Marcus suggests that the original of the *birkat ha-minim* may have been a Qumranian curse on the Romans. Joel Marcus, "Birkat Ha-Minim Revisited," *NTS* 55, no. 4 (2009).

⁸⁶ Cf. e.g. Meeks "It [sc. the Gospel of John] could hardly be regarded as a missionary tract, for we may imagine that only a very rare outsider would get past the barrier of its closed metaphorical system. *It is a book for insiders*.... One of the primary functions of the book, therefore, must have been to provide reinforcement for the community's social identity, which appears to have been largely negative. It provided a symbolic universe which gave religious legitimacy, a theodicy, to the group's actual isolation from the larger society." Wayne A. Meeks, "Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *JBL* 91, no. 1 (1972), 70, emphasis added EK.

⁸⁷ Bauckham, Richard J., ed., *The Gospels for all Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998); Richard J. Bauckham, "For Whom Were Gospels Written?" in *The Gospels for all Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard J. Bauckham (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 9–48. This approach also guides the more recent study by Bauckham's student: Edward W. Klink, *The Sheep of the Fold: The Audience and Origin of the Gospel of John*, SNTSMS, vol. 141 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁸⁸ For detailed critiques of Bauckham's theory, see Philip Francis Esler, "Community and Gospel in Early Christianity: A Response to Richard Bauckham's Gospels for All Christians," *SHTH* 51, no. 2 (1998); David C. Sim, "The Gospels for all Christians? A Response to Richard Bauckham," *JSNT* 84 (2001); Margaret M. Mitchell,

relatively specific audience. After all, ancient rhetorical training was geared toward attuning communication to an immediate audience. It is the immediate audience that shapes the rhetoric, even if the message may also be universal.⁸⁹

The historical and social realities are, for the most part, only accessible to us through the texts that have survived. Doubts have been raised about the possibility of reconstructing contexts behind ancient text, and according to Judith Lieu, such reconstructions can never be more than an exercise in imaginative recreation and are always subject to challenge. We have access only to the world of the text and not to the world behind the text, since “we can catch partial, but only partial, glimpses of a wider range of social experience than that directly represented by the texts.”⁹⁰ As far as we know, however, texts played a key role in the struggles of emerging Christianity. Early communities of Christ-believers were formed through their texts and specific formative texts lay at the heart of these communities. While these formative texts provided a decisive influence on the self-understanding of a community, there are limits to their reliability for reconstructing social communities. Texts sometimes *construct* rather than *reflect* realities. It is, therefore, important to distinguish carefully between textual *constructions* and socio-historical *reconstructions*. Lieu suggests speaking about “textual communities.” A “textual community” refers to an interpretative

“Patristic Counter-Evidence to the Claim that ‘the Gospels Were Written for All Christians,’” *NTS* 51, no. 1 (2005); Philip Francis Esler and Ronald Allen Piper, *Lazarus, Mary, and Martha: Social-Scientific Approaches to the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 5; Adele Reinhartz, “Gospel Audiences: Variations on a Theme.”

⁸⁹ Cf. investigations into rhetoric; e.g., George Alexander Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism*, SR (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984). Kennedy notes that “Among the persons involved, the most important are often those who make up the audience. The critic needs to ask of what this audience consists, what the audience expects in the situation, and how the speaker or writer manipulates these expectations. There may be both an immediate and a universal audience, especially in a written work.” *Ibid.*, 37.

⁹⁰ Judith M. Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 9.

community but it is also a social entity.⁹¹ This seems a helpful concept for thinking of the community behind the Fourth Gospel.

The present study will operate with the assumption that the Fourth Gospel was written for and directed to a specific section of the Christ-movement, a “textual community” which I will call the “Johannine community.”⁹² While the Fourth Gospel is not a direct window into a historical Johannine community, it does speak to the context, living environment, and practices of the Gospel’s addressees and/or authors.

1.5.2. Identity

Before turning to the role of meals in community formation and social identity it is necessary at least briefly to address and define the concept of identity as used in this study.⁹³ “Identity” is a complex issue and difficult to define. In its simplest form it refers to the personhood or character of a human being. In a transferred sense it can be applied to groups and movements, in which case “identity” refers to a recognizable social profile. It asks questions such as: “Who are *we*?” “What distinguishes us from other groups in this society?” “Where do we draw the lines (or boundaries) between our group and others?”⁹⁴ Such group identity is in itself a concept that has called for a lot of scholarly discussion and diversification in recent decades and it is nuanced differently in

⁹¹ Ibid., 28–29. Lieu draws on Brian Stock, *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past*, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), esp. 140–158, “Textual Communities: Judaism, Christianity, and the Definitional Problem.”

⁹² For a recent overview of scholarly views on the character of the Johannine community, see also Lance Byron Richey, *Roman Imperial Ideology and the Gospel of John*, The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2007), 1–25. Richey’s own reconstruction of the history of the Johannine Community defines Asia Minor as the Gospel’s location. There is an increasing Gentile presence within the community and a persistence of Jewish hostility.

⁹³ The subject of group identity is, of course, much more differentiated than can be presented here. For an overview of recent approaches, see J. C. Turner, “Some Current Issues in Research on Social Identity and Self-Categorisation Theories,” in *Social Identity: Context, Commitment, Content*, ed. Naomi Ellemers (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 6–34.

⁹⁴ Cf. Philip A. Harland, *Dynamics of Identity and Early Christianity: Associations and Cultural Minorities in the Roman Empire* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 6.

different scholarly strands.⁹⁵ I will continue to use this term since it is the standard expression. In order to avoid the complex discussion of various interpretations of “identity,” however, and to make it clear from the beginning, throughout the present study I concentrate on the notion of “identification” when speaking of “identity.” In doing so I follow Scholliers, who defines the term in some more detail:

Identification is more than just sharing the common characteristics of a group or an ideal; it is a never-ending process of construction, or even a ‘fantasy of incorporation’. In this view, identification operates through language and practice, or more appropriately because of the interconnection between language and practice, through discourse (as used by M. Foucault) and narratives (in the sense of how people think, tell and write about [their] lives). Through language, people internalise the attitudes of a group, and they integrate and explain experiences, memories and expectations.⁹⁶

Identity as used in the present study basically refers to the way in which a person or group define themselves in terms of their individuality and difference from others. Identity usually consists of a conglomeration of various features such as norms, ideals and manners, to name only a few. Group

⁹⁵ For a range of approaches and topics within the field of New Testament studies, see recent compilations: Bengt Holmberg, “Understanding the First Hundred Years of Christian Identity,” in *Exploring Early Christian Identity*, ed. Bengt Holmberg, WUNT (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 1–32; Holmberg, Bengt, ed; *Identity Formation in the New Testament*, WUNT, vol. 227 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

For social identity theory, see e.g.: Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Henri Tajfel, *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations*, European Studies in Social Psychology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Henri Tajfel and J. C. Turner, “The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behaviour,” in *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, eds. William G. Austin and Stephen Worchel. 2nd ed. The Nelson-Hall Series in Psychology (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Publishers, 1986), 7–24; Abrams, Dominic, and Michael A. Hogg, eds; *Social Identity Theory: Constructive and Critical Advances* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990); Maykel Verkuyten, *The Social Psychology of Ethnic Identity*, European Monographs in Social Psychology (Hove: Psychology Press, 2005).

⁹⁶ Scholliers, Peter, ed; *Food, Drink and Identity: Cooking, Eating and Drinking in Europe Since the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 6; with references to Stuart Hall, “Introduction: Who Needs ‘Identity’?” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 1–17: 2; Paul Du Gay, *Consumption and Identity at Work* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996), 29; G. Valentine, “Eating in: Home, Consumption and Identity,” *The Sociological Review*, 495–96.

identity specifically refers to the ways in which a group demarcates itself and distinguishes itself (“us”) from others (“them”). The distinction between insiders and outsiders depends on boundaries, or differences with others.⁹⁷ Difference and similarity reflect each other across a shared boundary, and “At the boundary, we discover what we are in what we are not, and *vice versa*.”⁹⁸ A boundary between groups can, therefore, be described as the “dialectical synthesis of internal thesis and external antithesis: the identity is constituted by important senses of this boundary.”⁹⁹

Identity is always manifold. It forms a dynamic and hybrid conglomerate or synthesis of various categories. It is never fixed but fluid, a moving target. The features, cultural symbols, characteristics and even organization of a group can change and be transformed, but fundamentally boundaries need to be maintained. Nevertheless, as Shaye Cohen argues, “It is not the boundary that makes the group; it is the group that makes the boundary. Hence a study of identity needs to focus not just on boundaries but also on the territory that it encircles.”¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that individual as well as group identity is never “given” or just “out there.” Identity always needs to be interpreted, adapted or rejected according to a person’s or group’s needs, means and intentions. Moreover, identities, including even ethnic and national ones, have no objective and verifiable reality. They exist only because a number of people want

⁹⁷ Hall, “Introduction: Who Needs ‘Identity’?” 1–17: 4–5.

⁹⁸ Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity*, 3rd ed. Key Ideas (1996; reprint, London: Routledge, 2006), 103, emphasis in original.

⁹⁹ Mikael Tellbe, “The Prototypical Christ-Believer: Early Christian Identity Formation in Ephesus,” in *Exploring Early Christian Identity*, ed. Bengt Holmberg, WUNT (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 114–138: 121.

¹⁰⁰ Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties*, Hellenistic Culture and Society, vol. 31 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 6.

them to exist and believe that they exist. Benedict Anderson emphasizes this phenomenon by suggesting that we always speak of an “imagined community.”¹⁰¹

1.6. Contribution

The goal of this study is to explore a number of ways in which themes, signs and codes inherent in the Fourth Gospel’s meal, food and drink narratives and discourses possibly spoke to the imagined community of historical readers by evoking a textual form of social, historical and cultural reality. The study will shed light on how these Johannine narratives and discourses spoke to the Johannine community and in what ways they may be related to community identity formation. This task entails an historical imagination of the world of real readers by taking the text as indicator of their historical world. The study contributes to a better understanding of the significance of the Johannine meal scenes and metaphors with regard to the lived experience of the community.

¹⁰¹ Benedict Richard O’Gorman Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (1983; reprint, London: Verso, 1991).

On the debate on nation, ethnicity and group identity, see also the recent and diligent contribution by Steve Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History.”

On identity, see also Holmberg, “Understanding the First Hundred Years of Christian Identity,” 1–32. Regarding identity in a historical work, Holmberg holds that: “In historical work, identity cannot be grasped by definition in the ontological arena of what things, persons, movements ‘really are,’ somewhere deep inside. The ‘identity’ of a group or a movement is better approached and provisionally described as a social reality, i.e. as a recognizable social reality about who ‘we’ or ‘they’ are and how we and they typically behave. The developments and fluctuations of a group are reflected in the identity formation process as well. Both insiders and outsiders think about identity and discuss it, and therefore identity is constantly ‘negotiated.’ It is not a static character, nor the essence, or the ‘soul’ of a group, but an ongoing, relational process of self-understanding and self-categorization, often with a strongly ideological perspective (‘ideology’ here meaning a theoretical legitimizing of existing power relations).” *Ibid.*, 1–32: 28–29.

2. The State of the Question

2.1. Sociological Importance of Meals in Identity and Community Formation

Sociologists, historians and anthropologists view communal dining as a highly important locus for the formation of group identity. Eating is more than a biological act, especially when done in company.¹⁰² It is an act in which food moves from a position of being “outside” of a person to “inside.”¹⁰³ This “incorporation principle” affects the very nature of the individual and is, at the same time, the basis of group identity.

Scholarly discussions about the importance of how, what, where, when and with whom humans eat began to emerge in the field of anthropology in the 1960s.¹⁰⁴ Influenced by theories of structural linguistics, Lévi-Strauss sought to understand food as a cultural system. Lévi-Strauss recognised that “taste” is culturally shaped and socially controlled.¹⁰⁵ He considered the basic operations of cookery to be peculiar to humankind and thus a factor that distinguished human beings from animals. He links this insight to the difference between culture and nature.¹⁰⁶ Lévi-Strauss’s famous “culinary triangle” is a diagram that depicts the way in which the cooked is a cultural transformation of the raw, while the rotten is a natural transformation of either the raw or

¹⁰² E.g. Claude Fischler, “Food, Self and Identity,” *SSI* 27, no. 2 (1988), 279–82; Visser, *The Rituals of Dinner*, 2. The importance of this often claimed relationship of food and personal identity has been doubted by Alan Warde. He stresses the functional aspects of food and questions the place and importance of food as a prime identity builder. According to him, food is only one of many ways in which humans express identity, moreover a minor one. Alan Warde, *Consumption, Food, and Taste: Culinary Antinomies and Commodity Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 199–200.

¹⁰³ Claude Fischler, “Food, Self and Identity,” 279.

¹⁰⁴ For a good overview of the precursors, see Jack Goody, *Cooking, Cuisine and Class: A Study in Comparative Sociology* (1982; reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 10–17.

¹⁰⁵ The newly introduced term “gusteme” is an analogue in the field of taste to the phonemes of language. It refers to the constituent elements of the cuisine in society. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale* (Paris: Plon, 1958), 99.

¹⁰⁶ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Le cru et le cuit*, *Mythologiques*, vol. 1 (1964).

the cooked.¹⁰⁷ Despite critique by later scholars,¹⁰⁸ Lévi-Strauss's work has become highly influential, particularly his contention that food is not only "good to eat" but also "good to think with" ("bonnes à penser").¹⁰⁹

Searching for a code or "grammar" in the understanding of food, the French semiologist Roland Barthes suggests that wherever there is a meaning, there is a system: "Substances, techniques of preparation, habit, all become part of a system of differences in signification; and as soon as this happens we have communication by way of food."¹¹⁰

Influenced by Barthes and Lévi-Strauss, although not accepting their work uncritically, British anthropologist Mary Douglas has become highly influential in the study of food and eating. In her pioneering and often cited work, *Purity and Danger*, Douglas considers food prohibitions, laid down in Leviticus, which form the basis of Jewish dietary law.¹¹¹ Drawing upon anthropological work on classification, Douglas seeks to show that certain animals (pigs, for example) were forbidden to the Israelites because they were creatures considered to be anomalous under a given system of classification based upon chewing cud and cloven-footedness, and therefore impure or polluting. She explains Jewish food laws on the basis of the conception of holiness based on wholeness. In some of her later work, Douglas focuses on British food and the

¹⁰⁷ Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Culinary Triangle," in *Food and Culture: A Reader*, ed. Carole M. Counihan. 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008).

¹⁰⁸ E.g. Goody, *Cooking, Cuisine and Class*, 17–27. The basis of Goody's criticism is that an understanding of "culture" must include social and individual differences, as well as considerations of biology, climate, and other external factors which act as constraints on social action.

¹⁰⁹ This often cited expression appears first in Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Le totémisme aujourd'hui*, Mythes et religions, vol. 42 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), 128.

¹¹⁰ Roland Barthes, "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption," in *Food and Culture: A Reader*, ed. Carole M. Counihan. 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, *Annales*, 5 (1961), 977–986), 28–35: 30.

¹¹¹ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo*, Routledge Classics (1966; reprint, London, New York: Routledge, 2002).

constitution of a meal.¹¹² Here, Douglas demonstrates how meals are highly coded rituals. She argues that it is possible to discover the social boundaries which food meanings encode according to their position in series such as a single day, a week encompassing the Sunday dinner, an annual series including holidays and fast days, and a life cycle series, from christening to funeral. Her analysis illuminates cultural views, not only on what constitutes food, but how we eat it.

The more “static” approaches of the 1960s and 1970s were challenged in the 1980s by scholars who took into account the dynamic character of meals: the fact that they change over time. The most influential exponent in this period was Jack Goody.¹¹³ Goody asked why it is that some cultures develop an *haute cuisine* while others do not by taking into account the so far neglected internal social differentiation within societies as well as external socio-cultural influences and material elements.

Margaret Visser has explored various aspects of food through history and geography.¹¹⁴ Investigating table manners through time and space, Visser asks simple questions such as who invites whom, who prepares the food, what the sequence of courses is, what utensils are used and what kinds of concepts of purity are at stake. She thereby demonstrates that every aspect of a meal is influenced by the context within which it is held. Food and eating are metaphors for a human being’s sense of (his or her) self, of social and political relations and of cosmology.

Over the past two decades, scholars have also researched and theorized about social dining.¹¹⁵ Growing attention has been given to food and drink within their contemporary and

¹¹² Mary Douglas, “Deciphering a Meal,” in *Implicit Meanings: Selected Essays in Anthropology*, ed. Mary Douglas. 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, Daedalus 101 (1972), 61–81), 231–251.

¹¹³ Most importantly: Goody, *Cooking, Cuisine and Class*.

¹¹⁴ Visser, *The Rituals of Dinner*. See also Margaret Visser, *Much Depends on Dinner: The Extraordinary History and Mythology, Allure and Obsessions, Perils and Taboos of an Ordinary Meal* (New York: Collier Books, 1988).

¹¹⁵ Teuteberg, Hans Jürgen and Eva Bärlösius, eds., *Essen und kulturelle Identität: Europäische Perspektiven* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1997); Claude Grignon, “Commensality and Social Morphology: An Essay of Typology,” in *Food*,

historical social contexts. Scholars have focussed on eating and drinking as acts of identification, differentiation and integration. In the field of food studies, social sciences and humanities have converged in their interests and approaches to the subjects of how, when, where, why and with whom humans ingest edibles. Eating and drinking as practices have been explored as important elements in a number of diverse private and public social behavioural processes. They have been considered as signifiers for group culture and cohesion. It has become commonplace that communal eating and drinking are constituent elements in the creation and reproduction of identity. In the words of Thomas M. Wilson:

Food and drink are the lifeblood of social cohesion, integration and differentiation, and are active ingredients in humans' perceived ties to the sacred and the supernatural. Both food and alcohol build and enhance peoples' senses of belonging and becoming, the twin bases to social identity. Food and drink are integral to most if not all definitions of identity as either put forward by the subjects of analysis or by the analysts themselves. The importance of drinking and eating to identity matters is apparent in all places and walks of life, regardless of whether one chooses to see identity as a set of relatively fixed personal and social attributes, largely immutable over time and space, or sees it as behavioural and symbolic responses to multiple social stimuli, wherein aspects of status, role and social meanings combine to create and constrain complex and always changing notions of self and notions of identification with larger and wider social entities. Food and drink are building blocks in the construction of all social identities.¹¹⁶

Drink and Identity: Cooking, Eating and Drinking in Europe Since the Middle Ages, ed. Peter Scholliers (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 23–33; Thomas M. Wilson, "Food, Drink and Identity in Europe: Consumption and the Construction of Local, National and Cosmopolitan Culture," *European Studies* 22 (2006). For a global look at the social, symbolic and political-economic role of food, see Counihan, Carole M., ed., *Food and Culture: A Reader*, 2nd ed. (1997; reprint, New York: Routledge, 2008). In its "Foundation" section this volume contains reprints of some of the groundbreaking articles published in the field of food studies.

¹¹⁶ Thomas M. Wilson, "Food, Drink and Identity in Europe: Consumption and the Construction of Local, National and Cosmopolitan Culture," 15.

Several scholars of the Bible have used the approaches and methods from other disciplines of the humanities as well as of the social sciences in order to investigate the role of food, drink and communal meals in Scripture, predominantly in the New Testament. The main and central point upon which scholars agree is that the importance of communal meals, characteristic of virtually any community at any given time or place, applies even more so in antiquity. In societies of the Mediterranean two millennia ago, communal meals were the prime, some would argue virtually only, locus of community and identity formation. In other words, as Hal Taussig puts it: “The meal was a construction site for identity in the Hellenistic Mediterranean.”¹¹⁷

2.2. Communal Meals in New Testament Scholarship

In surveying the range of literature on meal issues in the ancient world in general and the eastern Mediterranean in particular, it quickly becomes evident that research on communal dining has become a prime field of interest for biblical scholars, particularly those interested in the New Testament.¹¹⁸ Scholars aimed to explore its origins and significance, and to investigate meal-

¹¹⁷ Hal E. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal: Social Experimentation & Early Christian Identity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 182.

¹¹⁸ There has been significantly less interest in food, drink and communal meals in the Hebrew Bible and the LXX, although recently the topic has started to gain attention, e.g. Nathan MacDonald, *Not Bread Alone: The Uses of Food in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Geiger, Michaela, Christl Maier, and Uta Schmidt, eds., *Essen und Trinken in der Bibel: Ein literarisches Festmahl für Rainer Kessler zum 65. Geburtstag* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2009).

Scholars of ancient history have also discovered the topic: John M. Wilkins and Shaun Hill, *Food in the Ancient World, Ancient Cultures* (Oxford, Malden: Blackwell, 2006). Wilkins and Hill attempt to review the diet of the great majority of ancient Greeks and Romans who did not belong to the elite. While the study deals with particular types of foods, its primary focus lies in a comparison of Greek and Roman practice. The ancient authors Galen, Pliny and Athenaeus figure as the most important sources for this. Wilkins and Hill conclude that the similarities between Greek and Roman practices are surprisingly high. For a number of studies into various specific issues of the social context of communal meals in the Hellenistic and Roman period, see also Nielsen, Inge, and Hanne Nielsen, eds. *Meals in a Social Context: Aspects of the Communal Meal in the Hellenistic and Roman World* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1998).

Information on various aspects of the ancient symposium as well as comprehensive bibliographies can be found in compilations of essays offered by classicists and historians, e.g. Murray, Oswyn, ed. *Symptica: A Symposium on the Symposium* (Oxford England, New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1990); Slater,

related aspects of liturgy. In an earlier phase, interest lay predominantly in issues around the Eucharist: its origins, significance and the development of its liturgy.

Lietzmann offered an early and highly influential study entitled *Mass and Lord's Supper: A Study in the History of the Liturgy*.¹¹⁹ In this study, Lietzmann traces numerous eucharistic forms from the later period back to certain primitive types, and from there back to their roots. By comparing these with contemporary literary records, Lietzmann aims to penetrate to the liturgical practice of the apostolic age and of the Jerusalem community of disciples and thereby to cast new light upon the much disputed problem of the origin and significance of the so-called Last Supper. Lietzmann argues that there are two basic forms of eucharistic liturgy. Accordingly there is a double origin to the Eucharist and there is no continuity between the table fellowships of the historical Jesus and the practice of the Eucharist in the first communities of the early church. Jesus' table fellowship led to the daily breaking of the bread in the early church while the celebration of the Eucharist grew out of Jesus' last supper.

Another highly influential work focussing on the last supper is that of Hans-Josef Klauck: *Herrenmahl und hellenistischer Kult: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum ersten Korintherbrief*.¹²⁰ Strongly influenced by the "religionsgeschichtliche Schule," Klauck was the first scholar to offer a thorough investigation of holy meals in the world of early Christianity. Klauck attempts to overcome the often claimed discrepancy between Jesus and Palestinian Judaism on the one hand, and Hellenism on the other. He draws a supposed line of development

William J. ed. *Dining in a Classical Context* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991). These compilations cover the symposium and common meals as religious and social rituals as well as their relation to Greek and Latin art and literature.

¹¹⁹ Hans Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper: A Study in the History of the Liturgy*, Translation with appendices by Dorothea H. G. Reeve (1926: Messe und Herrenmahl; reprint, Leiden: Brill, 1979).

¹²⁰ Hans-Josef Klauck, *Herrenmahl und hellenistischer Kult: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum ersten Korintherbrief*, NTA, vol. 15 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1982).

from Jesus to the understanding of the meal in 1 Corinthians and offers a comparison on the phenomenological level with various types of meals in the early Christian surroundings. Klauck explores meals connected to sacrifices, meals in voluntary associations, meals commemorating the dead (Totengedächtnismahl), meals in mystery cults, and mystery meals in Judaism and in Gnosticism. This background serves as the basis for Klauck's interpretation of the Lord's Supper (Herrenmahl) as portrayed in 1 Corinthians 11. Klauck suggests that the various conceptions of Hellenistic cultic meals known to us offer sufficient analogies to the Lord's Supper to show that they served as a model for Christian meal celebration. Klauck identifies meals of voluntary associations and meals commemorating the dead as the closest analogies to the Lord's Supper with regard to structure and performance. On the other hand, mystery cult meals offer the closest analogy in terms of conception: the institution of the meal by a divine act that is reproduced by imitation, the expectation of salvation, and the notion of dining in communion with the cult god.

Despite these analogies, however, Klauck stresses the Lord's Supper's independence and the creativity inherent in its development and form. He claims that its special form has its roots in a Jewish festive meal framework. Becoming more and more isolated and being intensively re-interpreted, Jesus' historical farewell dinner eventually became merely a cultic act whose practice is portrayed in 1 Corinthians. In conclusion, Klauck stresses that the Lord's Supper's original elements were Jewish while claiming that Hellenistic mystery cult meals strongly influenced the Corinthian meal practice to the extent that the latter could not have developed without the former.

The anthropologist Gillian Feeley-Harnik uses the Lord's Supper as an entry point to an understanding of meals in the New Testament. In *The Lord's Table: The Meaning of Food in*

Early Judaism and Christianity,¹²¹ Feeley-Harnik analyzes the nature and significance of the eucharistic meal as one of the central symbols of a Jewish sect. Exploring a wide range of Jewish texts, she considers why and how sectarians in the intertestamental period used dietary rules and other eating practices to address major ethical questions of identity and affiliation in radically changing circumstances. Feeley-Harnik traces how God's word became identified with Torah in the intertestamental period and how the laws on food eventually represented the entire Torah. She identifies food and the acts of feeding, eating, starving, and fasting as a form of powerfully concentrated "language" in Judaism to describe relations among human beings and between God and human beings as well as for debating moral-legal issues. Meals, she suggests, symbolize proper behaviour among social groups in relation to one another and in relation to God. The question of who may eat what with whom is a direct expression of social, political, and religious relations. Feeley-Harnik explores the use of this food language in early Christianity to explain the legitimacy of Jesus and the novelty of his message. In her view, the Last Supper binds relations between human beings and God in a way that differs from Scripture and from other sectarians. She considers the meal as a redefinition of sacrifice. Finally, Feeley-Harnik explores the Eucharist's significance and its relationship with Passover. She notes the gap between textual and socio-historical studies of the role of food and meals in community formation. It will be one aim of the present socio-rhetorical study to address this gap. It aims to bring together observations that are gained from a literary and narrative approach with the actual social milieu in which these texts were read.

¹²¹ Gillian Feeley-Harnik, *The Lord's Table: The Meaning of Food in Early Judaism and Christianity* (1981: *The Lord's Table: Eucharist and Passover in Early Christianity*; reprint, Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994). This work was first published in 1981 with the subtitle "Eucharist and Passover in early Christianity."

Yet another study that inquires into the historical origin of the manifold versions of early Christian cultic meals in order to better explain the origin and understanding of the Eucharist has been offered by Bernd Kollmann. In *Ursprung und Gestalten der frühchristlichen Mahlfeier*, Kollmann investigates a wide range of texts on meals in the New Testament as well as in apocryphal texts and texts by the apostolic fathers (until Justin).¹²² Departing from the distinction between sacral and sacramental meals as well as from Lietzmann's concept of the double origin of early Christian meals, Kollmann traces the meals back to a single origin and qualifies them all as cultic meals. According to Kollmann, the one and only origin of early Christ-believers' meals is to be located in the open table practice of the historical Jesus, marked by its focus on the Kingdom of God. This practice was later influenced by Hellenistic cult meals and the Mystery cults. Eventually, Kollmann suggests, Jesus' presence as the host of a meal was transformed into his being present within the elements of that meal. Kollmann argues that the words of institution in the New Testament were never uttered by Jesus but were formulated in the course of the "hellenization" of Christ-believers' meals. Therefore, they stand not at the beginning of the development, but mark the final and culminating point of a long lasting and complex history of development of communal meals that continued the original table fellowships of the historical Jesus. The only meal from the Fourth Gospel considered as "cultic" by Kollmann is the feeding miracle in John 6. In contrast to the Pauline and Synoptic accounts, Kollmann finds here a very self-contained conception of a cultic meal.¹²³ This supports his general suggestion that besides the meal that contained the words of institution in the Pauline and Synoptic versions, there existed at the same time many other forms of meals which had the same function in their respective

¹²² Bernd Kollmann, *Ursprung und Gestalten der frühchristlichen Mahlfeier* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990).

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 131.

communities. Kollmann stresses that early Christ-believers' meals were always marked by their communal character, but does not explore the significance of this point.

As its title indicates, Bruce Chilton's *A Feast of Meanings: Eucharistic Theologies from Jesus Through Johannine Circles*¹²⁴ is similar to Kollmann's work in its focus on the meaning of eucharistic meals. Chilton traces the "stages of development by which eucharistic practices were transformed from declarations of purity within Judaism to declarations of independence from Judaism...."¹²⁵ He takes the meanings assigned to actions as productive forces rather than as inert matters. Consequently, eucharistic texts are products of interaction and, from stage to stage, meaning was generated afresh. Chilton distinguishes six steps in the development of the meals, each of which has a distinct meaning. While mirroring the group's self-understanding, these steps also reflect its increasing distance from Judaism. This is particularly the case for Johannine meals. According to Chilton they stand at the sixth step of the process: "Johannine theologies both alleviate evident tensions and change the key of eucharistic practice by linking what is consumed to the miraculous provision of food to Israel in Exodus and to the lamb which was at the center of Israel's sacrificial worship. After six stages of development, then, those who join in eucharist are more a new Israel than they are defined within Israel...."¹²⁶ Chilton argues this on the grounds that in the Gospel of John, bread and wine are identified as the flesh and blood of Jesus and defined as supra-natural food and drink. While the steps as such seem somewhat artificial and without strong support in the primary texts, Chilton's approach of rooting the meanings of meals in the social reality of a group is, in principle, deserving of consideration.

¹²⁴ Bruce Chilton, *A Feast of Meanings: Eucharistic Theologies from Jesus Through Johannine Circles*, NovTSup, vol. 72 (1994).

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, IX.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, X.

One particular social reality that had been left unaddressed in biblical meals research was finally taken into account in the early nineteen nineties by Kathleen E. Corley: it was Corley's work that brought gender relations into the discussion of Greco-Roman meal customs. Furthermore, Corley was one of the first to focus on communal dining in general as portrayed in the Synoptics and not to limit investigation to the Eucharist. In her monograph entitled *Private Women, Public Meals: Social Conflict in the Synoptic Tradition*,¹²⁷ Corley challenges the assumption that the supposedly unique egalitarianism in early Christianity was obliterated by influences of Hellenistic patriarchy. She suggests that at the time of early Christianity, Greco-Roman meal customs were undergoing changes which affected Christianity, Judaism, as well as other religious and philosophical groups. Corley demonstrates that the Synoptic Gospels reflect such fluctuations in Greco-Roman meal etiquette and points to the Gospel writers' awareness that a social mix of women and men at meals differed from Greco-Roman propriety. When compared to each other, the Synoptics offer differing positions on the issue of gender-inclusive table fellowship. Mark shows the least concern for the impropriety of portraying women in the narrative; Luke, somewhat surprisingly, upholds the traditional submissive role of Greco-Roman women more strongly, as women (and sinners) are not found reclining with Jesus for meals in this Gospel; Matthew's is the only Gospel in which women are said to recline for meals with men. Corley concludes convincingly that inclusive table fellowship is not uniquely Christian and certainly not a Christian invention. Instead, the Synoptic Gospels' portrayals of such meal customs reflect the social innovation that affected Greco-Roman society at large and at a basic level: women from various social strata began to be present at public meals. Such behaviour was

¹²⁷ Kathleen E. Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals: Social Conflict in the Synoptic Tradition* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993).

formerly associated with women from a lower class (slaves and prostitutes).¹²⁸ Even though Johannine meal scenes are excluded from Corley's study, her work is relevant to this study in a number of ways. First, Corley pays tribute to the literary character of the Gospel accounts but does not shy away from relating them to their social background. Second, although not addressing questions of identity formation of communities, Corley asks the highly important questions of who is included in a community of diners, who is left out, and for what reasons. In the present study, this latter notion will form an important focus for identifying the community formation process in the narrative of the Fourth Gospel. Corley's book is one of a number of studies that reflect a change in interest and that have introduced a substantial shift in scholarship. For a long time, research into New Testament and early Christ-believers' meal issues had mainly been interested in the Eucharist in its various aspects.

Since the 1990s, research on early Christ-believers' meals has enlarged its scope by considering the form and dynamics of various groups of the Greco-Roman world that gathered for meals, as well as the material culture related to meals. This shift was introduced by the seminal works of Matthias Klinghardt and Dennis E. Smith.¹²⁹ In their studies respectively entitled *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft: Soziologie und Liturgie frühchristlicher Mahlfeiern* and *From Symposium to Eucharist*, Klinghardt and Smith independently and almost simultaneously applied socio-historical methods to the study of early Christ-believers' meals. Their work has established firmly that meals of early Christ-believers have grown out of the broad

¹²⁸ This is the reason why all women who participated in public meals, regardless of social status, were labelled as prostitutes or as being promiscuous.

¹²⁹ Their studies are foundational to the work of the ongoing seminar "Meals in the Greco-Roman World" within the Society of Biblical Literature. Over the years, meals have been explored as a window into social and religious life in the Greco-Roman world.

Cf. http://www.philipharland.com/meals/GrecoRomanMealsSeminar.htm#About_the_Seminar (02.09.11).

Greco-Roman meal tradition.¹³⁰ According to both scholars, pagan-Hellenistic, Jewish and early Christian communal meals are very similar in their form, organisation and self-understanding. Christ-believers' meal gatherings are thus not unique in character but part of a much larger phenomenon: the Greco-Roman banquet or symposium. Klinghardt's and Smith's discoveries of a large corpus of literary as well as epigraphic materials and archaeological evidence enabled them to argue for a common pattern of behaviour at meals and meaning of meals throughout the first century Mediterranean world.

Both scholars identify the main outlines of social dynamics of communal meals in the Greco-Roman world. They characterize the social significance of meals as being one of idealization. Despite the many similarities in these two scholars' works, each of these two major studies deserves to be further addressed individually.

Klinghardt attempts to answer the seemingly simple question of why early Christian communities of various forms and in geographically distant locations all gathered for communal, cultic meals. His prime interest, therefore, lies on the phenomenological level. The goal is to draw a coherent line of development from the earliest communal meals in Christianity through to the mass celebrations in the early church.¹³¹ According to Klinghardt's analysis, the form of a meal remained constant over a period of about a thousand years whereas the specific theology of a meal changed. Klinghardt claims that the various and changing theologies connected to meal gatherings rationalized in a retroactive manner the processes that were originally primarily social. The social

¹³⁰ Matthias Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft: Soziologie und Liturgie frühchristlicher Mahlfeiern* (Tübingen, Basel: A. Francke Verlag, 1996); Dennis Edwin Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003). Smith's book grew out of and draws together a number of studies that he had published elsewhere over the two decades prior to the publication of this book. For bibliographical information on previous studies, cf. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, IX–X.

¹³¹ "Altkatholisches Messeformular": the oldest of which, the so called "Clementine Liturgy," dates from the 380s CE and is described in book 8 of the Apostolic Constitutions; cf. Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*, 495.

background for his investigation is that of voluntary associations in the Greco-Roman world. Klinghardt demonstrates how meals played a significant role in the shaping of a person's place in Greco-Roman society, and his identification of social values helps to rethink the role of meals in the formation of community and identity. Drawing out a number of striking parallels, Klinghardt demonstrates that local communities of early Christ-believers as a socio-cultural phenomenon, as well as Jewish synagogue communities, functioned as voluntary associations just like any other association in the Greco-Roman world of the first century. Likewise, differences between Hellenistic-pagan and Hellenistic-Jewish are mere matters of detail. Klinghardt claims that these differences are limited to groups which he considers to be non-representative special groups such as the Therapeutae, the Essenes and the Qumran community. Voluntary associations met for meals and these meal gatherings were the prime occasion for socializing. More pointedly, Klinghardt sees the meal gatherings as the virtually exclusive occasion for conviviality: „Communal life in Hellenistic-Roman antiquity is perforce that of a meal community, groups existed in their *syssitia* and *symposia* ... – the meal *is* the communal life.”¹³² Klinghardt is convinced that the more or less uniform pattern of *symposia* in the Greco-Roman world with their clearly articulated order of events and persons reflects a direct connection to a set of particular social values expressed and consolidated in the meal. The central values of the meals are identified as *koinonia* (community), *isonomia* and *philia* (equality and friendship), and *charis* (grace/generosity/beauty), expressed as utopian political values.¹³³ Klinghardt's stress on the *koinonia*/community as the prime value and

¹³² “Gemeinschaftsleben ist in der hellenistisch-römischen Antike grundsätzlich Mahlgemeinschaftsleben, Gruppen existieren in ihren *Syssitien* und *Symposien*.... – das Mahl *ist* das Gemeinschaftsleben.” *Ibid.*, 524, Trans. Esther Kobel, emphasis added.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 153–174.

decisive category of meal gatherings emphasizes the already established importance of meals as a prime location for the formation of community and identity.

Rather than focusing on the more or less static values of meals, as does Klinghardt, Dennis E. Smith pays somewhat more attention to the dynamic character of meals. According to Smith, the following five aspects are affected by communal dining: social boundaries, social bonding, social obligation, social stratification and social equality. Hellenistic meals, therefore, not only exhibit social values, but are dynamic and tensive loci for bonding on the one hand, and for setting boundaries on the other; occasions for stratification on the one hand, and for becoming equal on the other.

From Symposium to Eucharist offers the summary of over two decades work of Smith's studies on the character of ancient symposia and their relationship to early Christ-believers' meal practices. Smith asks why early Christ-believers met for meals and what kind of meals they celebrated. His principal thesis is that meals of early Christ-believers developed from the model of the Greco-Roman banquet. Smith claims that all the various forms of communal meals, such as everyday meals, symposia, funerary banquets, sacrificial meals, mystery meals, everyday Jewish meals, Jewish festival meals, as well as the Christian agape and Eucharist, are rooted in a common banquet tradition and that they were mere adaptations to various settings. Consequently, it makes sense to talk about a banquet tradition as according to Smith this tradition cuts across social, ethnical and religious boundaries and provides a model for the study of meals in the Greco-Roman world. Like Klinghardt, Smith suggests that the Greco-Roman banquet was basically the one and only social institution in that time and place: "Early Christians met at a meal because that is what

groups in the ancient world did. Christians were simply following a pattern found throughout their world.”¹³⁴

Smith’s investigations focus on the general tripartite structure of banquets consisting of the (nourishing) meal, the libation, and the symposium, and also on their conventions and traditions. The tripartite structure is common to all meals in the Greco-Roman world. Only on the next level do these meals distinguish themselves in terms of content. Smith identifies several subcategories or types of the banquet: the philosophical banquet, the sacrificial banquet, the club banquet, and the Jewish banquet.

The philosophical banquet is primarily a literary product, and functions as an ideal for social reality. *Koinonia* (sharing), friendship and pleasure are the defining categories. The sacrificial banquet is an integral part of every sacrificial ritual, and is conducted in the precincts of the temples. According to Smith, “the sacrificial meal was indistinguishable from other manifestations of the Greco-Roman banquet. And it utilized the common meal symbols of celebration, community, and equality as constituent parts of its religious definitions and developed rules of social obligation based on that idealization of the meal.”¹³⁵ Meals of voluntary associations were the central activity and served primarily to provide social intercourse and cohesion among its members.¹³⁶

Jewish meals too, Smith suggests, were greatly influenced by the Greco-Roman banquet tradition. Particularly in this section, Smith discusses the important role that meals played in the formation of community cohesion and identity. The dietary restrictions included in the Torah marked off observant Jews from the rest of society and functioned in a precise and specific way to

¹³⁴ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 279.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 88, 124.

define boundaries: “Various Jewish groups who organized as separate sects within Judaism tended to celebrate their separateness and cohesiveness by holding special meals together.” Nevertheless, Smith holds that the “meals functioned within Judaism in ways quite similar to what we have found in the Greco-Roman society at large. That is to say, when they gathered for a banquet, Jews, like their Greek and Roman counterparts, reclined at a meal that was characterized by rules of etiquette and ethical values and was organized into courses in exactly the same form as banquets in the rest of the Greco-Roman world.”¹³⁷ This holds true even for decidedly Jewish meals such as the Passover meal or for the vision of an eschatological banquet.

The topos of the eschatological banquet has its roots in the Isaian description of joyous banquets that are characterized by an abundance of food and to which the elect are invited to participate (Isa 26:6-8). The messianic meal is by and large qualified as a literary idealization and in its essence is a mythological meal.¹³⁸ It forms the Jewish version of the “philosophical banquet.”¹³⁹ Smith stresses that the meals serve to define group identity not only over against Gentiles, but also within Judaism. Through their particular table practices, various groups (Smith addresses Essenes, Habermim and Therapeutae) distinguish themselves from the rest of Judaism.

In the second part of the monograph, Smith applies his findings to New Testament texts. He demonstrates how early Christ-believers’ meals engaged in a practice that was common to all sectarian groups in the ancient world and adapted according to the particular needs of the respective group. This insight rules out the possibility that these meals originate in a particular event or a single and specific type of meal like the Jewish Passover meal or any particular Greco-

¹³⁷ Ibid., 133–134.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 166–171.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 143.

Roman tradition, such as the mystery cult meal. Rather, Christian meals simply grew out of the widespread custom that groups gathered at table.

Regarding Paul, Smith discusses the way in which Paul utilizes banquet ideology in order to stress the meal's significance for creating social bonding; the meal is characterized as a symbol of social obligation within the community. Paul draws on traditional arguments from Greco-Roman meal ethics for his own definition of social ethics and community identity. The meal of the community is supposed to realize all community members' equality before God. In this respect, Paul is challenged by the dichotomy of social stratification versus social equality in his teaching.

As for meals in the Gospels, Smith claims that the Greco-Roman banquet tradition is consistently reflected therein. The reclining motif (even outdoors) is only one example. Smith claims that "it is the table where social boundaries are drawn and a new community is in process of formation."¹⁴⁰ He argues that Jesus' representation at meals in the Gospels is an idealisation of Jesus as hero. The banquet seems to have been a useful motif for defining different heroic aspects and to have become a stock literary motif serving the individual Gospel writers' interests, and was used to enhance communal meals in their respective communities. Smith rejects the assumption that Jesus' practice of "open commensality" as portrayed in the Gospels is the typical marker of the historical Jesus' deeds. Instead, he stresses the literary character of these meal scene portrayals and points out that meals gained great significance among groups of Christ-believers only after Jesus' death and resurrection. The narratives, however, make rich use of the literary motif of the banquet. While we cannot be sure of the rituals conducted and practices performed in the communities behind the Gospels, it is "highly likely that the Gospel communities did celebrate

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 276.

meals together and that those meals were significant moments for the formation of community identity.”¹⁴¹

Smith is certainly correct in pointing out the complex character of these materials: social reality and narrative world are intertwined, and it is hard clearly to distinguish between the reality and social world of the storyteller and that of the historical Jesus. He suggests that: “The presentation of Jesus at table in the Gospels must be understood in relation to the overall plot of each Gospel. Each of the Gospel writers imagines the table where Jesus dined according to a particular idealized model, one that is consistent with the overall picture of Jesus presented in their particular stories.”¹⁴² This specific presentation of meals and of Jesus in these settings is, however, only very briefly outlined for the Gospel of John by Smith.¹⁴³

The works of Klinghardt and Smith demonstrate the strong social significance that meals had in the Hellenistic Mediterranean. Their studies have established a picture of Hellenistic meals as a major practice of the era and have shown that the socially coded significance of reclining and dining in a defined group functioned as a way of elaborating and experimenting with social status. Once the social coding of meals in the Greco-Roman world is acknowledged, the standard elements become dynamics of social negotiation and experimentation. Meals appear as a place for intense social construction of meaning, often in an idealized manner. From Klinghardt’s and Smith’s work it is, therefore, clear that meals are a locus for the negotiation of community on various levels, and an occasion for the formation of identity. Just how these social effects were determined is not explained in their studies.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 276.

¹⁴² Ibid., 220.

¹⁴³ Smith suggests that the use of the literary motif of the banquet in John generally follows and continues along the same lines as have first been developed in Mark, who portrays Jesus as the hero at the table with the table symbolizing the kingdom. Ibid., 272–277.

Attention to this very issue has been at the centre of the growing and still developing research on meals. The focus now has shifted from the meal itself to the groups that gathered for communal dining on the one hand, and who laid down their perception of their meals in literary form on the other.

In a volume entitled *Herrenmahl und Gruppenidentität*, The Munich Seminar for New Testament studies, under the guidance of Martin Ebner, has published a compilation of essays that have emerged from a major research project devoted to identity formation connected to meals.¹⁴⁴ The central role of meals in community formation is addressed through a number of questions: What are the conditions of participation in a meal? What are the strategies and elements that create and stabilize the social bond among participants? How does the communal meal function within the process of the formation of a group's identity?

Adopting approaches drawn from cultural anthropology and the sociology of religion, the authors of this compilation address the role of the Lord's Supper under the paradigm of group identity. The aim is to describe the construction of identity that grows out of the celebration and conception of the Lord's Supper. The exegetical section of the compilation places the Lord's Supper under scrutiny within the framework of meal traditions of the Greco-Roman Mediterranean. It seeks to define the role of the Lord's Supper in the construction of identity of early Christ-believers. Philo's description of the Therapeutae in *De Vita Contemplativa* is taken as a paradigm for the expression of group identity by means of description of communal dining. Likewise, New Testament authors are considered to describe their respective ideals within meal depictions.

¹⁴⁴ Ebner, Martin, ed., *Herrenmahl und Gruppenidentität*, QD, vol. 221 (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2007).

The intention of the Munich group's research is to shed new light on the early Christ-believers' celebrations of communal meals with regard to their role in community process. A theological commentary is added to these sociological data and findings of cultural anthropology. Along with this, the scholars attempted to revive the ecumenical debate regarding the Eucharist, which is currently at a stalemate. From the outset, this book is devoted to traditional Christian theological positions, thereby limiting the scope of its research.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, this publication introduces a notable shift in focus from research on the structural issues of meals to the meal as the place where identity is negotiated and formed.

The focus on the self-understanding of Christ-believing groups celebrating communal meals is shared by Hans Joachim Stein.¹⁴⁶ In his study entitled *Frühchristliche Mahlfeiern*, this German scholar explores the connection between this self-understanding and the liturgical form of early Christ-believers' communal meals. He asks what these groups explicitly or implicitly reveal about their identity simply by eating and drinking together in a particular manner. Stein follows the approach outlined by Klinghardt and Smith, identifying the Greco-Roman banquet as the paradigm of ancient meal practices. He focuses on the specifics of the meals of voluntary associations,¹⁴⁷ specifically mystery cults, in order to then explore the peculiarities of Jewish communal meals, especially those of the Therapeutae.

For the backdrop of this socio-historical research, Stein approaches the epistolographic texts on meals, consciously excluding the narrative texts. His focus lies on the epistles because they were written for and read during meal gatherings of early Christ-believing communities.

¹⁴⁵ Another deficiency lies in the fact that virtually no non-German scholarship on the topic is taken into account.

¹⁴⁶ Hans Joachim Stein, *Frühchristliche Mahlfeiern: Ihre Gestalt und Bedeutung nach der neutestamentlichen Briefliteratur und der Johannesoffenbarung*, WUNT, vol. 255 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

¹⁴⁷ In particular, Stein explores the associations of Zeus Hypsistos in Philadelphia/Fayum, of Diana and Antinous in Lanuvium, of the Iobachai in Athens and of Aesculap and Hygia in Rome.

Thus, the communities in Corinth, Rome, Thessalonica, and Kolossae come into focus as well as the audiences addressed in 1 Timothy, Judas, and, furthermore, the Book of Revelation. In his analysis of these texts, Stein discusses theological insights, connecting them to insights of the study of liturgy. His overall aim is to explain how various communities of early Christ-believers related to Jewish and pagan precedents: what did they adopt and in what respects did they depart from their respective customs and understandings? The organizational (preparatory) and structural aspects of proceedings during meals receive attention, as well as their interpretation within and for the group that holds the meals. Stein argues that the outward appearance of a meal, i.e. its organizational and structural aspects, mirrors the self-understanding of a community that gathers for meals.

The meal with its various aspects reveals the identity of a particular community. Such identity can be described in terms of its sociological as well as theological meanings. The intertwined relationships of outward appearance and inner self-understanding provide at its core the “einheitsstiftende Mitte” of the variegated meal practices of early Christ-believers.¹⁴⁸ Stein suggests that the function of early Christ-believers’ meals lies primarily in the constitution of a community. The community identity has its roots in these meal gatherings and is qualified through theological self-understanding.¹⁴⁹ The community presents and consolidates itself through its self-understanding, and at the same time erects boundaries against the meal gatherings of other communities, and the meal serves as the occasion during which the people who gather enact and

¹⁴⁸ Stein offers this summary: „Die äußere Gestalt der Mahlfeier ist demnach Spiegel des Selbstverständnisses der feiernden Mahlgemeinschaft. Im Ritus des Mahls manifestierte sich nicht einfach nur die allgemein antike Mahlkultur, sondern die Identität einer konkreten Gemeinschaft. Die Organisation und äußere Gestalt des Mahls ist demnach durchsichtig für ein inneres Selbstverständnis, das sich sowohl soziologisch als auch theologisch beschreiben lässt. In diesem Ineinander von äußerer Gestalt und innerem Selbstverständnis liegt die einheitsstiftende Mitte der vielfältigen frühchristlichen Mahlpraxis.“ Ibid., 328.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. „Die Funktion der frühchristlichen Mahlfeiern bestand also primär in der Konstitution einer theologisch qualifizierten Gemeinschaft.“ Ibid., 345.

perceive this self-understanding. Organizational and structural aspects are not isolated elements but serve to express the notion of community identity. Stein argues that Christ-believers' meals were peculiar in that they ranked communication higher than food consumption, which he argues, becomes obvious in the fact that Christ-believing communities defined themselves not only on a horizontal but also a vertical level. The horizontal, or social, community of those gathered was perfected by the vertical community with Jesus Christ. Only if both the vertical as well as the horizontal community were present could these gatherings be aptly called "Mahlgemeinschaft."¹⁵⁰

For Paul, the *proprium* of such gatherings – such "Mahlgemeinschaft" – lay in the unity of the community. The ritual counterpart to this was the breaking and eating of a loaf of bread and the drinking from a shared cup, through which the community received the body of Christ and itself became the body of Christ. Colossians and 1 Timothy continued in this line in self-contained manners. The utopian character of the body of Christ is emphasized in Colossians, while 1 Timothy emphasizes the association's very earthly character in its search for its specific identity in prayer and missionary teaching. Judas testifies to a community that gathered in love and fear of God. The notion of gathering in love and fear of God forbids believers to understand their gatherings as occasions of self-display. "Mahlgemeinschaft" in Revelations is qualified by those who resisted Roman imperial cults and modestly await the Lord.

Stein's thesis is important to the present study in a number of ways. First, it draws together a number of scholarly approaches, many of which will prove important in the investigation of the Gospel of John. This includes socio-historical research and aspects addressed by the "religionsgeschichtliche Schule." Second, Stein acknowledges the literary character of the New Testament documents under scrutiny and pays close attention to their "Sitz im Leben" as well as to

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 346.

their rhetorical function. Third, Stein convincingly demonstrates that several communities of early Christ-believers developed their individual understanding and interpretation of what it means to be a community in Christ, a notion that is enacted and put into practice in the actual meals of early Christ-believers. What Stein has developed with regard to New Testament epistolography can be adapted and applied to the specifics of studying narrative texts for the purpose of this study.

In a study undertaken at the same time as Stein's, Valeriy Alexandrovich Alikin attempts to reconstruct the history of early Christ-believers' gatherings.¹⁵¹ His aim is to describe their origin within the culture of the Mediterranean world during the first century CE, and to reconstruct the development of these gatherings during the first two and a half centuries. Alikin supports the well-established thesis that gatherings of early Christ-believers were part of the banquet tradition. Christ-believers followed the bipartite structure of *deipnon* followed by a *symposium*, as practised by pagans and Jews alike in the Greco-Roman world. Alikin contends that certain features of Christ-believers' gatherings have their roots within a Jewish context but he strongly objects to the idea that the Christ-believers' meal can be derived from any specific Jewish meal or meeting. According to Alikin's reconstruction, Christ-believers' meals were held weekly on Sunday evenings from as early as the 30s or 40s of the first century. He explains it as a new institution alongside Jewish Sabbath gatherings, and not in any sense a continuation.

Furthermore, Alikin challenges the thesis that Christian morning gatherings with Eucharist celebrations were the result of a process during which the Eucharist broke away from the Sunday evening meal. He sees these morning gatherings as having developed from a practice of various other groups which held morning meetings. In their early phase, Christ-believers met on Sunday

¹⁵¹ Valeriy Alexandrovich Alikin, "The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering: Origin, Development and Content of the Christian Gathering in the First to Third Centuries" (Dissertation, Universiteit Leiden, 2009).

mornings to sing hymns to Christ. Soon the custom spread to the other weekdays. From the middle of the second century onward, the gatherings came to include a simple form of meal which was, like the evening meal, called the Eucharist and was accompanied by prayers and blessings. Eventually the Sunday morning Eucharist gained importance at the expense of the Sunday evening gathering. Thus, according to Alikin, the reduction from a simple but proper meal to a purely symbolic ritual is supposed to have gradually taken place no earlier than the mid-third century CE. This left the Sunday evening meal as a charity meal. Alikin's study elucidates the role of the reading of Scripture in Christian gatherings.¹⁵²

The custom of reading Scripture at gatherings has its roots in the tradition of reading aloud during the symposium. Accordingly, preaching originates in the customs of delivering homilies and speeches at the Greco-Roman symposium.¹⁵³ While Alikin's study does not focus explicitly on the matter of identity formation, it contributes to the issue in an important way. The study establishes the central role of reading authoritative texts during meal gatherings. The reading of Gospels at Christ-believers' gatherings is considered self-evident in the second century and is thought to date to the late first century. This insight supports the hypothesis underlying the present study with regard to the *Sitz im Leben* of the Gospel of John. It seems logical to suggest that the Fourth Gospel not only talks about communal meals in many passages, but that it also played a central role during the gathering of Johannine Christ-believers, who would have read and

¹⁵² Particularly in the chapter dedicated to this very issue: "The Reading of Scripture in the Gathering of the Early Church." Alikin, "The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering: Origin, Development and Content of the Christian Gathering in the First to Third Centuries," 135–67.

¹⁵³ Alikin, "The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering: Origin, Development and Content of the Christian Gathering in the First to Third Centuries," 169–261. Further elements, such as prayers, the singing of hymns, the holy kiss, the laying of hands, footwashing, anointing, collections of money and offerings of food, liturgical acclamations, exorcisms and healings can likewise be traced back to the symposia held by the gatherings of various groups in the Greco-Roman world. Alikin, "The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering: Origin, Development and Content of the Christian Gathering in the First to Third Centuries," 169–261.

discussed this Gospel as a source that influenced the group's identity and became foundational and authoritative.

This is also one of the central insights that has grown out of the research undertaken by Hal Taussig. Taussig published the results of two decades of research on ancient meals in a monograph entitled *In the Beginning Was the Meal*.¹⁵⁴ In this work, Taussig examines the social practices of early Christ-believers. His focus challenges the long-held view – or “master narrative,” as he calls it – that belief and theology played the prime role in the beginnings of Christianity. Taussig convincingly demonstrates that social practices are at least equally as important, and this examination of social practice offers an alternative to the exclusive master narrative that pure Christian belief was handed down from Jesus to his disciples and to Church Fathers and producers of creeds. It allows for thinking about Christian beginnings in terms of relationships, culture, social dynamics, ideologies and politics.

Drawing on the seminal works of Klinghardt and Smith, Taussig identifies early Christ-believers' communal meals as a prime social practice. Rigorous investigations of social practices serve to enhance theological analysis of texts: “Here, the creative interaction of meals and key early ‘Christian’ ideas becomes apparent. The ideas and meal dynamics indeed often turn out to be complementary.”¹⁵⁵ Meals are a central locus for all participants to negotiate an array of key issues in human experiences. As Taussig suggests, “Especially in dialogue with early Christian texts narrating or coming from the meal paradigm, meals appear to have been a quasi-conscious method

¹⁵⁴ Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*.

For the relationship of meals and literature of first century Christ-believers, cf. the subchapter entitled “The Pervasive Place of Meals in the First Hundred Years of Christian Literature.” *Ibid.*, 36–40.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 175.

for participants to sort through and make sense of...pivotal experiences.”¹⁵⁶ Meals, therefore, provide opportunities for “societal visioning.”¹⁵⁷ Taussig regards early Christ-believers’ meals as rituals, understood as “a broader set of human behaviors” rather than something “esoteric and cultlike” and as the way in which groups approach problematic realities of their lives.¹⁵⁸ He demonstrates the impact of the formulaic behaviour at Hellenistic meals (as identified by Smith and Klinghardt) on both social stability and social experimentation. Taussig agrees with Klinghardt that early Christ-believers’ communal meals were characterized by community, equality and friendship, grace, generosity, and beauty, and Taussig emphasizes the dynamic character of these values. They are perpetually performed, negotiated, agreed upon and disagreed with. Because of their dynamic character, meals are prime locations for social, spiritual and political experimentations.

For a better understanding of meals’ social dynamics and a description of the formation of social identity in meals, Taussig introduces methods of ritual analysis. Drawing primarily on the work on ritual theory proposed by Jonathan Z. Smith, Taussig considers the meals as occasions for “thinking about” problematic experiences:

Recent ritual theory provides a lens through which to see how meals furnished the larger Hellenistic society with ways to think about, experiment with, and negotiate its social structures, personal relationships, and identity formations. The semiprivate, constructed setting of the Hellenistic meals provided a stable and

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 175.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 178.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 56.

protected setting in which participants could ‘perfect’ (J. Z. Smith) the structures and relationships under more contingent construction in Hellenistic society itself.¹⁵⁹

Meal dynamics are thus considered “a source of Christian expression, behavior, reflection, and belief.”¹⁶⁰

Taussig’s approach convincingly demonstrates how the social practice of communal dining makes meaning of human experience, particularly of problematic and pivotal experience of a certain time and place. The narrative of Jesus’ death is not exclusively a story about the particular experience of being crucified: experiences in the lives of meal participants, such as taxation, imprisonment, execution, conscription, and harassment could be interpreted into and represented in ideas and stories about Jesus’ death.¹⁶¹ This dynamic can go so far as to create new identities, since “the meals enacted the new social alternatives so vividly that the meal participants experienced themselves as actually a part of a new social order. Both as groups and as individuals, many of those at the meal felt as if they were living in a different world.”¹⁶²

The relationship between meals and literature in nascent Christianity is manifold. First of all, early Christ-believers’ documents contain a vast amount of references to and accounts of meals. Second, and perhaps at least as important, meal gatherings formed the prime occasion for reading these texts. These texts were read aloud due to the fact that at the time the great majority was illiterate. Taussig argues,

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 67–68. J. Z. Smith’s major work on rituals is *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*, CSJH (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

For further bibliography on Smith’s research into rituals, cf. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 213, n. 23.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 181.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 179.

¹⁶² Ibid., 53.

Again, there is little dispute in scholarship that the writings of the first hundred years were read primarily at the meals of these communities. It is just that scholarship has not noticed that this location for reading the early Christian literature both confirms the social significance of the meals and frames in an important way the meaning of the writings themselves.¹⁶³

The numerous hymns that have been identified in New Testament writings, up until recently as a pure matter of literary study, had their *Sitz im Leben* in communal meals.¹⁶⁴ The symposium was the occasion during which hymns or songs would have been sung.¹⁶⁵ It is undisputed that (for example Paul's) letters were directed at communities that met for meals and that these letters were read aloud at meal gatherings. This insight that texts now found in the New Testament were read at meal gatherings of early Christ-believers applies not only to the letters but also to the Gospels:

As Klinghardt and Smith's research paints the clear picture of early Christian hymns and performances at meals, the creative role of meals in the composition of the gospels opens up. This comes into focus through several research lenses. First of all, of course, it coheres with the larger picture of the Hellenistic meal in which different individuals bring a variety of stories, sayings, songs, and speeches during the *symposion*. Second, when one asks the question where early Christian gospels were read, the meals are the most plausible location. The same rationale applies to the gospels as to the letters and instruction manuals – that is, since these documents were obviously written for a broad spectrum of people, including a very substantial percentage of poorer people who did not themselves know how to read, the regular meal gathering of the various early Christian communities became the main place for the audience to hear the gospels. This was all

¹⁶³ Ibid., 36.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 37.

¹⁶⁵ See Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*, 106–109; cf. 1 Cor. 14:26 to be understood in the context of a symposium: “When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation.”

more the case since the porous boundaries of the meals also allowed for some people beyond the core meals community to hear the gospel stories, and at least some parts of the gospels display an interest in an audience beyond the primary community membership.¹⁶⁶

The Gospels are, therefore, considered as narratives for the construction of identity, primarily of course in the figure of Jesus:

Knowing who one was through the inclusivity of being ‘in Christ’ or by following Jesus through conflict-filled scenes in the gospels offers a dynamic and complex identity very similar to attendance at an early Christian meal. The literature and the meals of early Christianity delighted in a shifting and complicated identity.¹⁶⁷

In summary, meals in antiquity have captured the attention of a broad range of scholars and they have been explored from various angles and approaches: historical, liturgical, theological, eucharistic, and in regard to their role and function in societies (i.e. groups, associations, assemblies, etc.). For many decades, the Eucharist lay exclusively at the centre of attention, and the search for its origin and meaning was the predominant and long pursued focus. The Eucharist was interpreted in terms of liturgy and of the history of liturgy. Research undertaken by scholars of the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* established the influence of the pagan milieu on the Eucharist, while anthropological approaches made it clear that meals function as “food language” and that they are a central means of explaining the legitimacy of Jesus and the novelty of his message.

Eventually, the relatively narrow focus on the Eucharist opened up somewhat and a number of studies began to address other early Christian accounts of communal meals. Many use

¹⁶⁶ Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 38.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 184.

insights from socio-historical research, and scholars adopting these approaches have explored the circumstances and the milieu in which early Christ-believers' meal gatherings are rooted. A shift in paradigm occurred when scholars plausibly argued that the meal gatherings of early Christ-believers were by no means unique in terms of their structure and proceedings, but that they participated in the Mediterranean-wide tradition of the ancient banquet or symposium.

Very recently, the focus has shifted from meals themselves and their structure to the people present at meals. Meals have been identified as a central locus for the formation of identity of those participating in them. Furthermore, attention to the dynamic interrelation of New Testament texts and the formation and cohesion of a group and its identity has grown. It has become clear that early Christ-believers' documents were read and further developed within meal settings. This insight not only accounts for the epistles but also for the narrative texts of nascent Christianity. It is plausible, therefore, to regard the Gospel of John as being read within meal gatherings and very likely also as being influenced by the dynamics of meal gatherings of its first audience. The book and the audience at meal gatherings very likely had a mutual influence on each other.

2.3. Food Issues in Johannine Scholarship

The first study to address dining issues in the Fourth Gospel in an explicit and thorough manner was Judith McKinlay's doctoral thesis entitled *Gendering Wisdom the Host: Biblical Invitations to Eat and Drink*.¹⁶⁸ McKinlay traces motifs related to communal eating in Scripture, specifically invitations to eating and drinking, and to the roles of host and guest. With an explicit gender focus, McKinlay investigated the development of the invitation motif in Proverbs 9, Ben Sira 24, and

¹⁶⁸ Judith E. McKinlay, *Gendering Wisdom the Host: Biblical Invitations to Eat and Drink* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

John 4. In her comparison, she demonstrates how a shift of gender takes place within this tradition: the once female hostess of Hebrew Scripture becomes a male host in the Fourth Gospel. McKinlay suggests that this had an effect on the perceived roles of women in this Gospel. Already, the fact that the prologue of John announces that Jesus is Logos rather than Wisdom points in the direction that the rich imagery associated with female Wisdom (Sophia) is to be met in a male guise in what follows: the Johannine Jesus carries traces of the hosting Wisdom and other scriptural motifs and persons such as Moses and the patriarchs so that feminine and masculine traditions are mixed and mingled. Since McKinlay's study has traced a specific motif through a tradition within Scripture, the focus on one specific passage leaves aside the Gospel's other meal scenes with their variegated aspects.

The challenge of considering all Johannine passages containing meal scenes and food issues has been met by Jefferey H. Hodges in a doctoral thesis entitled *Food as Synecdoche in John's Gospel and Gnostic Texts*.¹⁶⁹ Hodges explores the ingesting images in various religious traditions including Gnosticism. To date, this is the most comprehensive study of Johannine food imagery and its symbolic interpretation. Hodges suggests that basically all food passages explored are to be understood as eucharistic. Hodges also identifies a synecdochical use of food in the Gospel of John, according to which food signifies and is part of the heavenly as well as earthly realms. This dualism related to food is then compared to dualisms in Gnostic texts and texts of late-antiquity Judaism and Early Christianity. Although there are obvious parallels between John's food-related dualism, and the respective dualism found in Gnostic texts, Hodges affirms that the latter significantly differ from the former. The Johannine understanding presupposes an ethical

¹⁶⁹ Jeffery Horace Hodges, "Food as Synecdoche in John's Gospel and Gnostic Texts," (Ph.D. Thesis, University of California, 1996).

dualism: a righteous God and a world that has grown sinful. The Gnostic texts, however, presuppose the dualism to be ontological: a perfect spiritual realm, versus the evil, material world. Thus, Hodges suggests, there is a different meaning to Jesus' avoidance of food different from the abstention revealed in Gnostic texts. Drawing on his investigation into early Jewish traditions, Hodges suggests that vinegar symbolizes the corrupted world. By accepting the earthly vinegar at the crucifixion, Jesus synecdochically consumes the entire world, and thereby eliminates its sinfulness. The fact that this happens willingly points to an irreconcilable difference when compared with Gnostic thinking. Johannine uses of food, Hodges argues, derive not from Gnosticism (despite the obvious parallels) but from Jewish traditions.

Another study interpreting Johannine meal scenes in light of Jewish Scripture has been presented by Edmund Little, who searches for literary motifs in his doctoral thesis, is entitled *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*.¹⁷⁰ In this work, Little offers two individually conducted synchronic studies on these two food miracle stories in John. The two studies are linked by approach and theme. The goal is to demonstrate the Old Testament background of these passages. Pagan influences are not negated altogether, but are not investigated in a thorough manner.

Little's leading assumption in both investigations is that the Gospel's audience was as similarly versed and familiar with the use of allusions to Hebrew Scripture as the author. This implies that particular words and phrases would recall themes, people and events in those Scriptures to the readers. Against purely Hellenistic interpretations, Little stresses the scriptural

¹⁷⁰ 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* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1998).

roots of the Cana miracle and traces the transformation of water into wine back into its Old Testament tradition. Nevertheless, the Gospel author's use of a pagan myth to assert Christ's superiority is acknowledged. Little's second study traces the eucharistic significance of the feeding miracle in John 6:1-15. This second food miracle is argued to be John's version of the eucharistic institution, foreshadowing the sacrificial death of Christ. Little's study offers a close synchronic reading of two select passages that are relevant to the present study. Various intertextual allusions to Jewish Scripture are addressed in detail and prove that the Fourth Gospel is firmly rooted in Jewish tradition. The suggestion that the influences of pagan traditions on the Fourth Gospel are only marginal will be addressed in more detail and challenged in SECTION II.

Yet another study has addressed the food theme against a Jewish background, particularly against the Old Testament. Adopting an approach of narrative criticism, Jane Webster's doctoral thesis, entitled *Ingesting Jesus: Eating and drinking in the Gospel of John*, investigates the use of food language and symbolism in the Fourth Gospel.¹⁷¹ Webster explores all Johannine passages that either feature ingesting language or take place within the setting of a meal. Drawing on the literary theory of Freedman, the focus of this investigation is firmly fixed on the use of ingesting language as a literary motif.¹⁷² Webster extends the limits of the ingesting motif beyond the more obvious pericopes by including passages from the Gospel that have not previously been addressed as ingesting language, such as "tasting death" and "being consumed." Thereby the relationship between eating and drinking and the death of Jesus become more obvious.

Webster argues that the ingesting motif serves as a vehicle to convey the Gospel's overall soteriological message. Accordingly, the Johannine use of ingesting language offers a possibility

¹⁷¹ Jane Suzanne Webster, *Ingesting Jesus: Eating and Drinking in the Gospel of John*, Academia Biblica (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003).

¹⁷² William Freedman, "Literary Motif: A Definition and Evaluation," *Novel* 4 (1971).

to present the role of Jesus on the one hand and that of believers on the other. The role of Jesus is the incarnate flesh that has to die so that others may live. The role of the believer is to eat and drink Jesus which is a metaphor for believing in him. The question of whether John's use of food language and meal portrayals is to be considered eucharistic or not, is very briefly addressed in some concluding remarks. To undergird her hypothesis about the role of ingesting language as a vehicle for the Gospel's soteriology, Webster considers ideas and words in the text that were certain to have influenced the Gospel of John, namely texts from the Old Testament that are directly or indirectly cited or alluded to. Other sources such as Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Jewish Historiography and Qumran material as well as Greco-Roman literature, however, are only marginally taken into account.

The most recent study on Johannine dining issues has been presented by Michael A. Daise and is committed to the exploration of the Johannine portrayal of feasts: *Feasts in John: Jewish Festivals and Jesus' "Hour" in the Fourth Gospel*.¹⁷³ Assuming that the Fourth Gospel was, in its early stages, written from a perspective that is knowledgeable about Judaism, Daise uses the lens of the Second Temple Jewish festal protocol to look at the Johannine portrayal of feast. Adopting the inversion of John 5 and 6 – a questionable move – Daise suggests that in John 6:1-15 there is a calendrical violation implied by the fact that barley is consumed prior to Passover. He further suggests that the Passover in question in John 6 could be the so-called "Lesser Passover" (or "Second Passover"), as prescribed in Numbers 9, and not the "First Passover" as prescribed in Exodus 12.

¹⁷³ Michael A. Daise, *Feasts in John: Jewish Festivals and Jesus' "Hour" in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Jörg Frey, WUNT II, vol. 229 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

Daise discerns a larger scenario for the feasts in the narrative that seems to yield a more fundamental purpose for which they were designed. He argues further that in an earlier stage of the Fourth Gospel's development (when chapters 5 and 6 were supposedly reversed) the feasts fundamentally functioned to accentuate Jesus' "hour" by quantifying its imminence until it arrived. Daise contends that, "alongside their other functions, feasts also clocked the coming of Jesus' "hour." Though that task is hidden from view in the final form of the text, it can be glimpsed through a modicum of diachronic criticism."¹⁷⁴

2.4. Conclusion: Demonstration of Gap and Definition of Question

The present overview has shown that there has been considerable scholarly interest in different aspects of dining issues in the Bible in general and in the Gospel of John in particular. In many investigations the interest in better understanding the Eucharist, its origin and its development persists, be it on the level of its theological meanings or with regard to liturgical proceedings. Other aspects of early Christ-believers' meal gatherings have increasingly received attention.

Chronology shows how interest has grown and changed from structural elements of Christ-believers' meal gatherings to a more recent focus on social identity, and has shifted from the meal as such to those participating in the meal. The present study follows this more recent approach. Against the backdrop of the various insights from previous scholarship, it is reasonable to assume that the Gospel of John was read at gatherings of the Christ-believing audience. Also, we can assume that these gatherings further shaped the Gospel's contents. It is clear that the various approaches of previous scholarship must be drawn together in order to adequately explore the role

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 172.

and meaning of meals as well as discourses about food and drink within the Gospel of John and the interrelationship of this Gospel with its assumed audience.

The importance of the role of food, drink and meals in the Gospel of John is well established. The predominant interest so far lies in the Gospel's metaphorical use of ingesting language. Most studies remain focused on the synchronic level and choose methods of literary criticism to approach the Gospel. With the exception of Hodges' study and its investigation into Gnostic traditions, studies on food issues in John take Jewish traditions as the primary, if not exclusive, background against which scriptural allusions are identified. To date, there has neither been a study that has addressed the role of communal dining in the Fourth Gospel specifically, nor a study that has investigated how its meal scenes and discourses about food and drink function within the overall Gospel narrative and how they may have spoken to the lived experience of the original audience, the Johannine community that gathered for meals. This study intends to fill these gaps.

Building on previous scholarship and on the well-established importance of food, drink and dining in the Gospel of John, this study intends to take the investigation a step further. It shifts the focus from food as such in the Gospel to the people who partake of it, and it extends the purely literal level to a socio-rhetorical investigation. The goal is to bring into consideration the way in which the Gospel may have been perceived by its original audience. The present study acknowledges the hybrid character of the Greco-Roman world; it will prove fruitful to take into account other influences besides Jewish Scripture, particularly pagan traditions.

In summary: To the present day, there has not been any systematic study dedicated to the role of communal meals in the Gospel of John from a socio-rhetorical perspective. The present

study intends to fill this important gap and thereby to contribute to a better understanding of the significance and role of the Fourth Gospel for the original audience in its historical world.

PART I: Narrative

3. Role of Meal Scenes and Discourses on Food and Drink in the Narrative of the Fourth Gospel

3.1. Introduction

The New Testament seemingly provides little concrete information about what, when, and how much people ate. Nevertheless, thirst, hunger, food purity, meals and other dining issues play an important role in all canonical Gospels.¹⁷⁵ Dennis E. Smith has stated that “The presentation of Jesus at table in the Gospels must be understood in relation to the overall plot of each Gospel. Each of the Gospel writers imagines the table where Jesus dined according to a particular idealized model, one that is consistent with the overall picture of Jesus presented in their particular stories.”¹⁷⁶ This is true not only for the figure of Jesus but also for the accounts of meal gatherings.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. „Die Tischgemeinschaften Jesu sind im Neuen Testament von großer Bedeutung. Einige statistische Angaben können dies bereits belegen. So finden sich in den Evangelien 12 Gastmahl-Geschichten, in denen immerhin etwa 30 Wunder berichtet werden. Ein Fünftel des Lukasevangeliums befaßt sich mit den Tischgemeinschaften Jesu und seinen Gastmahlgleichnissen. Dabei sind die Parallelen, die Apostelgeschichte und die Briefe noch nicht einmal mitgerechnet! Neunzig Prozent des Vorkommens des Verbs ἐσθίειν ‚essen‘ stehen in Beziehung zu Jesus und seinen Tischgemeinschaften, achtzehnmal kommt das Verb in den Synoptikern vor, so mit seinem Imperfektstamm, und zweiundvierzigmal mit der Form des Verbstammes φάγειν. Letzteres Verb findet sich im Johannesevangelium zehnmal und das Verb τρώγειν ‚essen, kauen‘ sechsmal. Das sind insgesamt 76 Stellen in den vier Evangelien. Zum Vergleich findet sich διδάσκειν ‚lehren‘, welches ein wichtiger theologischer Begriff ist, in den vier Evangelien nur vierundfünfzigmal.“ János Bolyki, *Jesu Tischgemeinschaften* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 1.

Of course, communal dining plays an important role in a number of epistles too. The epistles will not be considered in the following however, because they are not narrative texts and thus not relevant for the question addressed in this chapter.

¹⁷⁶ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 220.

In the Synoptics, there are various accounts of Jesus at table with tax collectors, sinners, and Pharisees.¹⁷⁷ The question of who may share the table is central, as is the purity of food in various passages. A number of parables are set within meal scenes.¹⁷⁸ Jesus' last meal with his disciples serves as the occasion to narrate the institution of the Eucharist.¹⁷⁹ None of this is the case in the Fourth Gospel. Clearly each Synoptic Gospel features these scenes and themes in a distinct and individual way and according to their respective plot and theology. There are, however, far more similarities among the three Synoptic Gospels than there are between any one Synoptic Gospel and the Gospel of John.

The Fourth Gospel recounts a number of gatherings during which eating and drinking take place. Food and drink are mentioned within scenes of communal dining, and significant metaphors about perishable and non-perishable foods can be identified. In the present chapter, I will discuss the Johannine meal scenes and the metaphors about food and drink in the overall narrative. All relevant passages will be addressed briefly in the order of their appearance in the Fourth Gospel. Next, the question of who partakes in these meals will be addressed. Finally the symbolism forming these passages will be explored with regard to their interdependence and dynamic development within the Gospel narrative.

¹⁷⁷ Jesus' dining with the "others" (sometimes called "outcasts" in scholarship) is an important topic in the Synoptic Gospels. All Synoptics include accounts of Jesus reclining with tax collectors and sinners (μετὰ τῶν τελωνῶν καὶ ἁμαρτωλῶν, Mt 9:10-13 [additional reference in Mt 11:19; the "Son of Man" who is "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners"]; Mk 2:15-17; Lk 5:29-32, reference 15:1-2). Accounts of Jesus dining with the Pharisees are unique to the Gospel of Luke (Lk 7:36-50; 11:37-54; 14:1-24).

¹⁷⁸ Mt 13:31-32,33; 15:13; 16:6-12; Mk 4:30-32; 8:15; 9:50; Lk 12:1; 13:18-21; 14:34.

¹⁷⁹ Mt 26:20-30; Mk 14:17-26; Lk 22:14-39; words of institution Mt 26:26-29; Mk 14:22-25; Lk 22,15-20.

3.2. Meal Scenes Punctuate the Johannine Narrative

In the following chart, all of the pericopes in the Fourth Gospel are listed.¹⁸⁰ The accounts of communal meals and the passages containing metaphors of food and drink are highlighted:

Chapter 1	1:1-18	The Word Became Flesh (Prologue)
	1:19-28	The Testimony of John the Baptist
	1:29-34	The Lamb of God
	1:35-42	The First Disciples of Jesus
Chapter 2	2:1-12	The Wedding at Cana
	2:13-25	Jesus cleanses the Temple
Chapter 3	3:1-21	Nicodemus Visits Jesus
	3:22-30	Jesus and John the Baptist
	3:31-36	The One Who Comes from Heaven
Chapter 4	4:1-42	Jesus and the Woman of Samaria
	4:43-45	Jesus Returns to Galilee
	4:46-54	Jesus Heals an Official's Son
Chapter 5	5:1-18	Jesus Heals on the Sabbath
	5:20-29	The Authority of the Son
	5:30-47	Witnesses to Jesus
Chapter 6	6:1-15	Feeding of the Five Thousand
	6:16-21	Jesus walks on the Water
	6:22-71	The Bread from Heaven
Chapter 7	7:1-9	The Unbelief of Jesus' Brothers
	7:10-25	Jesus at the Festival of Booths

¹⁸⁰ I follow the pericope headings suggested by the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

	7:26-31	Is This the Christ?
	7:32-36	Officers Are Sent to Arrest Jesus
	7:37-39	Rivers of Living Water
	7:40-44	Division among the People
	[7:45-8:11]	[The Woman Caught in Adultery] ¹⁸¹
Chapter 8	8:12-20	Jesus the Light of the World
	8:21-30	Jesus Foretells His Death
	8:31-38	True Disciples
	8:39-59	Jesus and Abraham
Chapter 9	9:1-12	A Man Born Blind Receives Sight
	9:13-34	The Pharisees Investigate the Healing
	9:35-41	Spiritual Blindness
Chapter 10	10:1-21	Jesus the Good Shepherd
	10:22-42	Jesus is Rejected by the Jews
Chapter 11	11:1-16	The Death of Lazarus
	11:17-27	Jesus the Resurrection and the Life
	11:28-37	Jesus Weeps
	11:38-44	Jesus Raises Lazarus to Life
	11:45-57	The Plot to Kill Jesus
Chapter 12	12:1-8	Mary Anoints Jesus' Feet
	12:9-12	The Plot to Kill Lazarus
	12:13-19	Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem
	12:20-26	Some Greeks Wish to See Jesus
	12:27-35	Jesus Speaks about His Death
	12:36-43	Summary of Jesus' Teaching

¹⁸¹ For sound textual reasons and non-Johannine vocabulary the account of the woman taken in adultery (Jn 7:53-8:11) is considered as a non-Johannine interpolation.

Chapter 13	13:1-20	Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet
	13:21-30	Jesus Foretells His Betrayal
	13:31-35	The New Commandment
	13:36-38	Jesus Foretells Peter's Denial
Chapter 14	14:1-14	Jesus the Way to the Father
	14:15-31	The Promise of the Holy Spirit
Chapter 15	15:1-17	The True Vine
	15:18-16:3	The World's Hatred
Chapter 16	16:4-15	The Work of the Spirit
	16:16-24	Sorrow Will Turn into Joy
	16:25-33	Peace for the Disciples
Chapter 17	17:1-26	Jesus Prays for His Disciples
Chapter 18	18:1-11	The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus
	18:12-14	Jesus before the High Priest
	18:15-18	Peter Denies Jesus
	18:19-24	The High Priest Questions Jesus
	18:25-27	Peter Denies Jesus Again
	18:28-37	Jesus before Pilate
Chapter 19	18:38-15	Jesus Sentenced to Death
	19:16-19:30	The Crucifixion of Jesus
	19:31-37	Jesus' Side Is Pierced
Chapter 20	19:38-42	The Burial of Jesus
	20:1-10	The Resurrection of Jesus
	20:11-18	Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene
	20:19-23	Jesus Appears to the Disciples
	20:24-29	Jesus and Thomas
	20:30-31	The Purpose of this Book

21:1-14	Jesus Appears to Seven Disciples
21:15-19	Jesus and Peter
21:20-25	Jesus and the Beloved Disciple

This chart shows that the chronological sequence of the Gospel narrative is punctuated regularly by meal scenes and metaphors of food and drink. The passages that figure in this latter category are set at crucial points in the Gospel and are important to its overall narrative.

3.3. Brief Discussion of Each Meal Scene

3.3.1. The Wedding at Cana, John 2:1-12

The first meal scene in the Fourth Gospel is the account of the wedding at Cana, which is unique to John's Gospel. Jesus and his followers go to Cana of Galilee "on the third day" (Jn 2:1) to attend a wedding. The mother of Jesus is also present at this festive occasion, and when she tells her son that there is no wine (Οἶνον οὐκ ἔχουσιν. Jn 2:3), Jesus replies: "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come" (Jn 2:4). Despite Jesus' apparent refusal to act, Jesus' mother instructs the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them. Following Jesus' command, the servants fill the six stone jars to the brim with water, then draw some of it and bring it to the chief steward. Upon tasting the wine into which the water has turned, the chief steward tells the bridegroom that everyone serves the good wine first and the inferior wine only when people have become drunk, and that he disobeyed this rule. The scene ends with the narrator stating that the happenings in Cana are the first of Jesus' signs.

3.3.2. Jesus and the Woman of Samaria, John 4:1-42

The next scene related to food, drink and dining appears in John 4, when Jesus crosses Samaria on his way back to Galilee. Tired from travelling, Jesus rests at the well of Jacob at the sixth hour. He is alone, as the disciples have gone to the city to buy food. When a Samaritan woman comes to draw water, Jesus addresses her and asks for a drink (δόξ μοι πείν, Jn 4:7), and in reply, she asks how it can be that a Jewish man asks her, a woman from Samaria, for a drink. Jesus and the woman enter into a discussion about the gift of God and Jesus' ability to provide the water of life. The woman questions how Jesus would draw this living water (τὸ ὕδωρ τὸ ζῶν, Jn 4:11), given that he has no bucket to draw water from the deep well. She finally asks him for his living water so that she will never be thirsty again and will not need to come to draw water anymore.¹⁸²

Jesus then engages the woman in a discussion about her marriage situation. This conversation culminates in the woman's exclamation that Jesus is a prophet, which is followed by a discussion about the place where people should worship. The high point is Jesus' statement that God is Spirit, and that those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth (πνεῦμα ὁ θεός, καὶ τοὺς προσκυνῶντας αὐτὸν ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ δεῖ προσκυνεῖν. Jn 4:24). At the moment just before the disciples return from their shopping trip, the woman realizes that Jesus is the Messiah, the one who is to come.

The disciples ask Jesus why he is speaking to the woman, while the woman returns to the city to recruit people to follow her and meet Jesus. In the meantime, Jesus refuses the food offered to him by his disciples and states that his food is to do the will of the one who sent him and to

¹⁸² The theme of literal (mis-)understanding is recurrent in the Fourth Gospel. Like Nicodemus in the previous chapter, the Samaritan woman understands another meaning than the one that Jesus is talking about. For discussion of the misunderstanding, see e.g. Moloney and Harrington, *The Gospel of John*, 117.

complete his work. He speaks about harvesting and concludes by saying that the disciples are sent to reap that for which they did not labour. The narrator then shifts the focus back to the Samaritans, saying that many of them believed in Jesus because of the woman's testimony.

The scene at the well in Sychar is not a scene of communal dining as such, but it is nevertheless highly relevant to the present study. The very basic and physical need of water (be it "true" for Jesus or not) initiates a discussion between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. A number of elements tie the encounters at the well at Sychar to the Gospel's main message. The woman's acknowledgement that the Messiah is coming is an example of the Prologue's assertion that "the world did not know him" (Jn 1:10). In contrast to many of the Jews elsewhere in the Gospel (Jn 6:36; 8:45, 46, 10:25-26, 38; 12:37, 39), a great number of Samaritans believe in Jesus (Jn 4:39, 41). Those who believe in him have the chance to attain eternal life, and thus belong to Jesus forever, allowing them to be considered "children of God."

3.3.3. The Feeding of the Five Thousand, John 6:1-15

Shortly before Passover, Jesus returns to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. There he is followed by a large crowd of people (ὄχλος πολὺς, Jn 6:2; πολὺς ὄχλος, Jn 6:5). This is the setting for the next meal scene (Jn 6:1-15). When Jesus sees the crowd, he asks Philip where they are to get food to feed all these people. Philip answers that six months' wages would not suffice to feed them all and Andrew tells Jesus about a little boy who has five barley loaves and two fish.¹⁸³ Jesus then orders the disciples to make people recline on the grass. Jesus says a blessing over the bread and distributes the food himself (εὐχαριστήσας διέδωκεν, Jn 6:11), until those reclining are satiated,

¹⁸³ The specification of the bread being barley bread is unique to John among the Gospels. Note that: "Wheat bread was more common; barley loaves were cheaper and served for the poor." Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 233.

about five thousand in all. The disciples receive the order to gather the fragments (συναγάγετε τὰ περισσεύσαντα κλάσματα, Jn 6:12) so that none would be lost (ἵνα μή τι ἀπόληται, Jn 6:12). They fill twelve baskets with the fragments of the barley loaves. In response to “the sign,” the crowds now want to make Jesus king.¹⁸⁴ When Jesus realizes that the crowds see him as a prophet he flees from them for fear of being made king.

3.3.4. The Bread of Life Discourse, John 6:22-71

The next day in Capernaum, a series of discussions arises between Jesus and several different groups of people: the crowds in Capernaum (Jn 6:22-40), the Jews in the Capernaum synagogue (Jn 6:41-59), then Jesus’ disciples (Jn 6:60-66), and finally the “Twelve” (Jn 6:67-71). Each of these groupings reacts in different ways. In the first discussion between Jesus and the crowds that have been following him, he claims people’s interest in him is due to the fact that they had been fed rather than to his signs (Jn 6:26). This statement shows that the ensuing discussion and discourse are to be understood in close relation to the feeding miracle that took place on the previous day. Addressing the crowds, Jesus admonishes people not to work for the food that perishes (τὴν βρώσιν τὴν ἀπολλυμένην, Jn 6:27), but for the food that endures for eternal life (τὴν βρώσιν τὴν μένουσαν εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον, Jn 6:27). In reply, the crowds want to know how they can do the works of God. Jesus informs them that they should believe in the one whom God has sent. The crowds challenge Jesus by asking what sign he will do so they will believe him. They argue that, according to Scripture, their fathers have eaten the manna in the desert. Jesus counters that it was the Father and not Moses who had given them the true bread from heaven. He adds that

¹⁸⁴ It is not entirely clear to which sign the narrator is referring. It could refer to the miracle of the multiplication of food, or it may refer to the sign of gathering the leftovers that are filled into twelve baskets. In either case, the sign that people have seen leads them to call Jesus the prophet who is to come into the world.

it is the bread of God that has come down from heaven and that gives life to the world. The crowds now ask for this bread.

For the first time, Jesus states that he is the bread of life (Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ἄρτος τῆς ζωῆς, Jn 6:35) and that whoever comes to him will never be hungry and whoever believes in him will never thirst again. Jesus adds that even though they have seen him they do not believe. Jesus continues to say that he receives everything that the Father gives him, and that he will not drive away anyone who comes to him, for he has come down from heaven to do the will of the one who has sent him. The Father's will is that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him will have eternal life and that Jesus will raise them on the last day.

The next discussion is between Jesus and the Jews.¹⁸⁵ Here, the Jews complain about Jesus because he has called himself the bread that has come down from heaven. The Jews now inquire as to the identity of Jesus and seek to reconfirm that he is the son of Joseph whom they know. The Jews wonder how Jesus can claim to have descended from heaven. Jesus tells them not to grumble among themselves, and adds that nobody can come to him unless he is drawn by the Father. On the last day, he will raise those drawn by the Father, and he undergirds this by referring to Scripture. Jesus adds that only the one who is from the Father has seen the Father. Then Jesus starts to repeat himself, elaborating on themes he has already introduced: whoever believes in him will have eternal life, he is the bread of life, the Jews' fathers have eaten the manna in the desert and they

¹⁸⁵ There is a somewhat abrupt change of addressees here (Jn 6:41): until now the reader has been left to believe that Jesus is addressing the crowds. At this point, however, it is the Jews who react. This means that either the Jews are to be identified with the crowds, or that indeed there is a shift to "the Jews" as a particular group within "the crowds," or even a shift to another group of addressees besides "the crowds" that is distinct from them. The latter option would suggest a shift of location too: from somewhere not more precisely specified in Capernaum to the synagogue in Capernaum. For discussion of the sets of dialogue and different addressees in this passage, see Webster, *Ingesting Jesus*, 75.

died. What Jesus offers, however, is the bread that has come down from heaven. Whoever eats from it will not die, and he himself is this bread.

Jesus then further develops the motif of the bread. The bread is his flesh that he will give for the life of this world. Jesus tells his addressees that eating the flesh of the Son of Man and drinking his blood is the precondition for having eternal life. He qualifies his flesh as the true food, and his blood as the true drink. The necessity of chewing the flesh and drinking the blood is reformulated once again, this time with the nuance that Jesus and the one chewing and drinking mutually remain in each other (ὁ τρώγων μου τὴν σάρκα καὶ πίνων μου τὸ αἷμα ἐν ἐμοὶ μένει καὶ γὰρ ἐν αὐτῷ. Jn 6:56). Many of the disciples complain that Jesus' teaching is difficult, and they wonder who can accept it (Σκληρός ἐστιν ὁ λόγος οὗτος· τίς δύναται αὐτοῦ ἀκούειν; Jn 6:60). Jesus asks them whether it offends them (Τοῦτο ὑμᾶς σκανδαλίζει; Jn 6:61) and what would happen if they saw the Son of Man ascending to where he was before.

After repeatedly stressing the necessity of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, Jesus' next statement comes somewhat as a surprise: he states that it is the Spirit (τὸ πνεῦμα, Jn 6:63) that gives life, and that the flesh is useless; Jesus points out that the words that he has spoken are Spirit and life. He then states that among them, i.e. among the disciples, there are some who do not believe. This leads up to Simon Peter's confession of Jesus as the Holy one of God (Jn 6:69-70).

The discursive passage of John 6 makes elaborate use of food language. It is closely tied to the main message of the Gospel. The motif of the bread of life is in essence one great metaphor for Jesus coming to humankind. The Jews reject his message, and even among his disciples there are many who leave. Clearly, it is an incident confirming that "his own people received him not" (Jn 1:11). The group of believers is smaller in number after the events of John 6. But those who believe in Jesus will have eternal life.

3.3.5. Rivers of Living Water, John 7:37-39

The last day of the Festival of Booths is the first occasion on which Jesus speaks publicly again after the bread of life discourse. The only reported content of his speech is an utterance using words from the semantic field of food/drink language: “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water’” (Jn 7:37-38). The narrator explains that Jesus is talking about the Spirit (περὶ τοῦ πνεύματος, Jn 7:39). Those who believe in Jesus receive this Spirit, and Jesus holds that this Spirit is not yet available because he has not yet been glorified. In the main message of the Gospel, there is a clear-cut distinction between those who receive Jesus and those who do not. Jesus offers his message of eternal life to anyone who is ready to listen. Clearly, however, it is received only by some and rejected by others.

3.3.6. The Meal in Bethany, John 12:1-11

The next meal scene is set in Bethany, six days before Passover. Jesus comes to the home of Lazarus who had been raised from the dead (Jn 12:1-11). A meal is served for “him” (ἐποίησαν οὖν αὐτῷ δεῖπνον, Jn 12:2).¹⁸⁶ Martha and Mary both have an active role in the scene. Martha serves (διηκόνει, Jn 12:2), while Lazarus is reclining with Jesus. Mary takes a pound of nard oil, anoints Jesus’ feet and wipes them with her hair. As a result, the house is filled with the fragrance of the perfume. Judas Iscariot starts to complain and acts as the “trouble maker” in the scene. He claims that the oil should rather be sold and the money given to the poor. The commentator disqualifies Judas’ apparent concern about the poor (Jn 12:6) and Jesus defends Mary’s doings.

¹⁸⁶ Whether “he” is Jesus or, alternatively, Lazarus, is not specified.

3.3.7. Jesus' Last Meal with his Disciples, John 13-17

Jesus' final meal before his death takes place in an unknown location. The meal scene consists of two major parts: the meal as such, during which Jesus washes his disciples' feet, and the farewell discourses growing out of and following the events in John 13.¹⁸⁷ Among the canonical accounts of Jesus' last meal with his disciples, the footwashing is unique to John, as is the subsequent discursive section that is placed in the meal setting (Jn 14-17). The scene opens with an elaborate introduction by the narrator (Jn 13:1-3), who introduces the themes that will appear repeatedly throughout the meal scene in its narrative part, and in the extensive discourses that follow the narrative section. John 13-17 contains little logical argumentation. Instead, it repetitively develops the major themes in their dynamic reciprocal relationship. The themes can be identified as: the relationship between Jesus and the Father, Jesus' imminent departure, the evil world, love and the relationship between Jesus and the disciples.

During the meal, Jesus gets up, takes off his outer robe, girds a towel around himself and washes his disciples' feet (Jn 13:3-11).¹⁸⁸ Simon Peter expresses astonishment and Jesus qualifies his question as lack of understanding. Jesus tells Peter that he needs to be washed by him in order to have a share in him (ἐὰν μὴ νίψω σε, οὐκ ἔχεις μέρος μετ' ἐμοῦ. Jn 13:8). Peter's lack of understanding becomes apparent in his wish to have his entire body washed. The misunderstanding gives Jesus the occasion to explain to the disciples that he is demonstrating to them by example what they ought to do for each other (Jn 13:12-20). Jesus announces that "The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me" (Jn 13:18), and states that this has to happen

¹⁸⁷ On the missing of the institution narrative and the placing of the footwashing instead, cf. the detailed discussion "Footwashing as a Replacement of the Eucharist in Jesus' Last Meal (John 13)", below, pp. 243-248.

¹⁸⁸ The Greek term "δείπνου γινομένου" (Jn 13:2) allows for both interpretations: during the meal or at its end.

in order for the Scripture to be fulfilled. Finally he explicitly announces his betrayal to the disciples: “Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.” (Jn 13:21). There is uncertainty among the disciples as to whom Jesus is speaking of. Jesus tells them that it is the one to whom he will give “this morsel” after having dipped it in the dish. He performs this action and hands the morsel to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. When Judas receives the morsel, Satan enters him (εἰσῆλθεν εἰς ἐκεῖνον ὁ σατανᾶς, Jn 13:27), and Jesus tells Judas to quickly do what he is going to do. None of the disciples understands the meaning. Judas immediately leaves the location and goes out into the night (Jn 13:31).

Once Judas leaves, Jesus launches into an extensive series of discourses and a prayer (13:32-17:26). He is concerned with his disciples’ attitudes, feelings, and beliefs about his departure from life in this world. Though Jesus gives a new commandment to the disciples, i.e. the commandment of mutual love, and talks about the difficulties they will face in the future, these issues are subsumed into their understanding of the present circumstances, and in their reaction to them.

At one point during the farewell discourses Jesus exhorts the disciples to rise and be on their way (Jn 14:31). This seems to mark a conclusion, but it is not, for Jesus continues to speak for another three chapters. Chapters 15-17 should, therefore, still be read in the context of the meal. Jesus calls himself the true vine and the Father the vine grower who tends the vine (Jn 15:1-17). After talking about his imminent death and persecution, Jesus announces that sorrow will turn into joy (Jn 16:16-33). Jesus offers consolation in that, although he will depart, he will come again.

A prayer from Jesus to his Father in heaven forms the last section of the discourses in this setting of the last meal prior to Jesus’ death (Jn 17:1-26). It summarizes all of the topics that have

been introduced at the outset of the meal scene (Jn 13:1-3) and that have been developed at various stages of the discourse. The relationship of Jesus with the Father and Jesus' relationship with the disciples respectively are closely linked and related to Jesus' departure. Jesus' departure implies the sending of a helper, the Spirit of truth, the Paraclete, who will continue to support the disciples in the names of Jesus and the Father. The disciples shall rejoice, for the presence of the Spirit of truth ought to be preferable to Jesus' own physical dwelling among the disciples. The unit of John 13-17 is characteristically marked by the repetition of its themes. Each theme is remoulded and the relationship between the different themes is worked out. These themes will be addressed in their own right below.

3.3.8. Jesus' Drink on the Cross, John 19:28

While hanging on the cross, in order to fulfil the Scripture, Jesus states that he is thirsty (Jn 19:28). Jesus immediately receives a sponge soaked with sour wine on a branch of hyssop (σπόγγον οὖν μεστὸν τοῦ ὄξους ὑσσώπῳ, Jn 19:29) to his mouth, exclaims that "it is finished" (τετέλεσται, Jn 19:29), and dies. Jesus' death on the cross is the result of the fact that "his own people received him not" (Jn 1:11).

3.3.9. The Meal on the Shore of the Sea of Tiberias, John 21

The Gospel's last chapter offers a final account of a meal that takes place on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias (Jn 21). Jesus reveals himself to a small group consisting of merely seven of Jesus' disciples.

Initially, the story is concerned with the provision of food. The disciples go fishing but do not catch anything. After daybreak, Jesus speaks to the disciples, who have not yet recognized him, and he tells them to cast their net on the right side of the boat. This time the disciples' catch is

overabundant. At this moment, the disciple whom Jesus loves says to Simon Peter “It is the Lord!” (Jn 20:7). Simon Peter immediately dresses and jumps into the sea. The other disciples follow in the boat, dragging the fish. Upon arriving on the shore they see a charcoal fire with fish on it and bread. Jesus tells the disciples to bring over some of the fish they have caught. Peter hauls the net containing 153 large fish ashore, and despite the abundance of fish, the net is not torn. Only when Jesus invites the disciples to have breakfast (δεῦτε ἀριστήσατε, Jn 21:12) do they dare to ask who he is. Jesus takes the bread, gives it to the disciples and does the same with the fish. After breakfast but presumably still in the meal context, a dialogue between Jesus and Simon Peter concerning leadership arises (Jn 21:15-19). Jesus asks Peter about his love for him and commissions him to look after his fold.

3.4. Meanings and Motifs

After the brief exploration of the individual meal passages within the overall narrative of the Fourth Gospel, it is now possible to focus on their meanings and on a number of related themes and motifs. The food, drink and meal narratives have discourses attached or integrated into them: a short discourse in Cana, and longer discourses at the well in Samaria and after the feeding of the fivethousand, with two more after the footwashing and the breakfast on the lake shore. In these discourses in particular, the surplus meanings of food, drink and communal dining are elaborated in terms of their significance for the characters in the text as well as for the extra-textual readers of the Fourth Gospel.

Throughout the Gospel one can distinguish between different kinds of meanings. On the one hand, there are explicit meanings assigned to the meal scenes by the narrator. On the other

hand, there is implicit symbolism that permeates the Gospel. Both will be discussed in the following.

The first section addresses the Johannine Meal-Inclusio: the fact that Jesus' earthly deeds are framed by accounts of miraculous provisions of food. The second section explores symbolism relating to what is consumed, that is, the function and meaning of liquids and solid food as concrete physical elements as well as symbolic nourishment. The third section will address the group around Jesus, those hosted by him. It will discuss how the formation of Jesus' group of "guests" changes as the narrative evolves, and the explicit meaning that the narrator attributes to a number of the meal scenes. The fourth section addresses the experiences of the community that gathers for meals with Jesus. Presumably spiritual signification is crucial to the group's experience of the meal. Therefore, in the fifth and final section, a number of theological and spiritual motifs will be discussed. These include belief, eschatological imagery, eternal life, Jesus' death and its meaning for the group, and the notion of mutual indwelling, which appears in close relation to the motif of love.

3.4.1. The Johannine Meal-Inclusio

In the first and last meal accounts of his Gospel – the wedding at Cana and the miraculous catch of fish – the narrator offers explicit declarations of meaning, and in both cases comments on the significance of the scene. These two meal scenes constitute the first and last occasions for Jesus to reveal himself, both times within an account of a miraculous provision of drink or food.

The narrator informs the reader that what Jesus did in Cana of Galilee is the first of his signs, and that by this sign Jesus reveals his glory (ἐφάνηρωσεν τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, Jn 2:11). As a result, his disciples believe in him. The explicit meaning of the Gospel's last meal is, again, the

epiphany of Jesus. The narrator introduces this meal account by stating that Jesus showed himself again to the disciples (ἐφανερώσεν ἑαυτὸν πάλιν, Jn 21:1). In the same verse, the narrator emphasizes the revelatory aspect by repeating the announcement (ἐφανερώσεν δὲ οὕτως. Jn 21:1). This aspect is further emphasized by the narrator's comment framing the scene: "It was the third time that Jesus showed himself to the disciples after having been raised from the dead" (τοῦτο ἤδη τρίτον ἐφανερώθη Ἰησοῦς τοῖς μαθηταῖς ἐγερθεὶς ἐκ νεκρῶν. Jn 21:14). The Fourth Gospel thus presents the first and last epiphanies of Jesus to humankind within the first and last meal accounts of the narrative.

The Gospel's last meal scene corresponds to its opening one. In both stories, the narrator points out that the scenes are occasions for the epiphany of Jesus, the two accounts situated at the beginning and the very end of John's account of Jesus' dwelling on earth. The first account demonstrates that Jesus takes care of people's needs by providing wine in abundance. As a result, many believe in him and start following him. The second account shows that Jesus takes care of his followers even after his death, for it becomes clear that from this scene onward, the disciples need to organize themselves without Jesus' physical presence among them. This dialogue forms Jesus' last call to discipleship, and now a new leadership among the disciples is needed for the remaining followers of Jesus. Jesus supports this by commissioning Simon Peter as the new shepherd of his flock.

3.4.2. Symbolism around what is Consumed

It comes as little surprise that consumable goods, that is liquids such as water and wine, and solid food such as bread and fish, usually appear in meal scenes. Despite the numerousness of those scenes in the Gospel of John actual food or drink is only portrayed in the passages that talk about

miraculous provisions of food (Jn 2,1-11; Jn 6:1-15; Jn 21,1-14). Drink and food, however, are central figures in metaphorical discourses by Jesus. Their appearance and probable significance will be addressed in what follows.

3.4.2.1. Liquids

In the Fourth Gospel, water (ὕδωρ) appears on a number of occasions apart from the meal scenes.¹⁸⁹ It is, however, emphasized and discussed most strongly in John 2 and John 4.¹⁹⁰ Water miraculously turns into wine at the wedding in Cana, and Jesus offers living water (ὕδωρ ζῶν, Jn 4:10, 11; πηγή ὕδατος ἀλλομένου εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον, Jn 4:14) that quenches thirst forever and provides for eternal life to the Samaritan woman.

Wine, in the narrower meaning of the word (οἶνος), only appears in the Cana episode. There, it is the central product of the sign performed by Jesus (Jn 2:3, 9, 10; reference back to this in Jn 4:46). In the farewell discourses, Jesus resumes the motif of wine in that he equates himself to the true vine (Jn 15:1, 5), the vine being the plant from which wine originates. Finally, sour wine (ὄξος) appears within the crucifixion scene where Jesus receives a sponge full of this drink (Jn 19:30).

Blood appears for the first time in the prologue: “But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God” (Jn 1:12-13). Here, blood clearly carries negative connotations. Being born of God is opposed to being born of blood or the will of man. While blood appears once in the prologue and in a negative manner, the Johannine use of blood

¹⁸⁹ Water is connected to baptism (Jn 1:26, 31); it appears in the discussion with Nicodemus (Jn 3:5), in the healing of a sick man (Jn 5:7), in an outcry by Jesus about the believer’s heart being the source of living water (Jn 7:38), in the footwashing (Jn 13:5), and finally on the cross as water flows out of Jesus’ pierced side (Jn 19:38).

¹⁹⁰ 9 of the 21 occurrences of water (ὕδωρ) appear in Jn 4 alone; 3 occurrences are found in Jn 2.

clearly clusters in the bread of life discourse and receives a positive connotation. Here, it is mentioned four times within four verses (Jn 6:53, 54, 55, 56). Jesus' blood is a means for attaining eternal life, along with Jesus' flesh, and true believers are required to consume this rather peculiar drink. Apart from the prologue and the cluster in John 6, blood is mentioned only once more when it comes out of Jesus' side as the soldier pierces him.

The overview of the occurrence of liquids in the Fourth Gospel demonstrates that they cluster in the meal scenes and in metaphorical speech about drink. Both water and blood are closely related to eternal life in this metaphorical speech. It is interesting to note that, at the crucifixion, all three liquids are drawn together in one single scene: blood, water and (a derivate of) wine (ὄζος) appear connected to Jesus' body at the crucifixion. Jesus is handed the sour wine, and only moments later, blood and water, previously defined as providers of eternal life, flow from his side. This water may be considered as a fulfillment of the water promised during the Festival of Booths (Jn 7:37-38), the water that springs from the κοιλία.¹⁹¹

3.4.2.2. Solid Food

Like liquids, solid foods also appear in meal scenes and food discourses. In some instances, actual food is in view; in others the food is understood in a metaphorical sense. The first instance is John 4, where the disciples exhort Jesus to eat but he rebukes them on the grounds that his food is to do the will of the one who has sent him. In John 6, actual barley bread and fish are multiplied and suffice to satiate a great number of people, while in the bread of life discourse, the elaborate sequel to this scene, bread and manna are compared to each other in a metaphorical manner. John 6 is the

¹⁹¹ The reference to the κοιλία in Jn 7:38 is ambiguous: it could pertain to the stomach of either Jesus or of the believer: ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμέ, καθὼς εἶπεν ἡ γραφή, ποταμοὶ ἐκ τῆς κοιλίας αὐτοῦ ρεύσουσιν ὕδατος ζῶντος. The context allows for both interpretations. Cf. with further references: Webster, *Ingesting Jesus*, 56, n. 13.

passage, in which solid food, especially bread, is most strongly emphasized and elaborated on. In John 13 those gathered very likely enjoy a full meal, even if we only hear about a morsel, very likely a piece of bread.¹⁹² The resurrected Jesus provides fish and bread in abundance to the disciples, thus providing food even after his death.

Whenever actual solid food is mentioned it is only bread or bread accompanied by fish. Bread, therefore, seems to be important, if not the most important solid food in the Gospel. The literal meaning of bread as physical nourishment is contrasted with its metaphorical meaning. The manna that the addressees' ancestors ate in the desert is qualified as inferior to the bread from heaven that Jesus can provide. The crucial difference is that the ancestors' manna did not prevent them from dying, while the bread that has come from heaven provides eternal life. In effect, this statement renders the manna the Jewish ancestors ate in the desert as useless, even though it once saved their lives. The next passage that is of importance in terms of solid food needs is the meal preceding Jesus' death. Description of food is notably absent in this meal. A single morsel of bread, however, plays a crucial role in the scene. Judas receives this morsel from Jesus, and is thereby designated as the betrayer. On the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, Jesus serves bread and fish.

3.4.2.3. Food and Drink in Abundance

In a number of passages, abundance of food and drink plays a distinct role. At the wedding of Cana it is the wine that is provided in abundance (Jn 2:1-8), while at the feeding of the multitudes

¹⁹² This morsel (ψωμίον, Jn 13:26-27, 30) is not more closely defined in the Greek text. Many translations freely refer to a "piece of bread." The qualification of the morsel as being one of bread cannot be drawn from the text itself but seems very likely as it can be inferred from the other scenes where actual food is mentioned (Jn 6 and Jn 21). It is furthermore indicated by socio-historical evidence: bread was the prime staple food. Cf. e.g. Klaus Berger, *Manna, Mehl und Sauerteig: Korn und Brot im Alltag der frühen Christen* (Stuttgart: Quell-Verlag, 1993). Unconvincing is the suggestion by Str-B that the morsel could refer to the bitter herb used in a Passover meal, since, unlike the Synoptics, John does not portray the last meal as a Passover Seder. Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Exkurse zu Einzelnen Stellen des Neuen Testaments: Abhandlungen zur Neutestamentlichen Theologie und Archäologie*, 6th ed.; 2 vols.; Str-B (1922-1974; reprint, München: Beck, 1975), 64.

Jesus provides more fish and bread than needed to feed the hungry crowd (Jn 6:1-14). At the Festival of Booths, Jesus refers to the rivers of living waters that flow from the stomach/heart (ἐκ τῆς κοιλίας, Jn 7:38), the rivers standing for abundance. After Jesus' death the disciples catch 153 big fish, more than they can easily haul ashore, and on shore Jesus has already prepared food for them.

The motif of abundant food and drink is familiar from Scripture. In the Hebrew Bible, abundant food and drink usually includes bread or manna, quails, olive oil, wine, water and/or milk and honey.¹⁹³ Basic foods such as fish and bread, and basic drinks such as wine and water, are prominent images for the bestowal of life in the sense of eternal life or immortality.¹⁹⁴ The image of the grape and its products symbolizes and anticipates the messianic age as well as the bounty of the Promised Land.¹⁹⁵ Abundant food and drink, especially when connected to afterlife or end-time, is reminiscent of the scriptural motif of the “eschatological banquet,” sometimes called the “messianic banquet.”¹⁹⁶ The divine banquet is the primary messianic banquet motif. It

¹⁹³ Bread/manna/wheat: Gen 27:28; Ex 16; Num 13:23; Dtn 8:8, 9; Neh 9:15; 2 Ki 18:32; Ps 78:24, 105:40, 132:15; Isa 36:17; Joel 2:19; 2:24.

Quails: Ex 16:13; Num 11:31-32; Ps 105:40. Olive oil: 1 Ki 5:25; 17:14; 17:16; 2Ki 4:7; 2 Ki 18:32; Jer 31:12; Joel 2:19, 24.

Wine/vine: Gen 27:28; Dtn 33:27-28; Num 13:23; 2 Ki 18:32; Prov 3: 10; Isa 25:6; 36:17; 55:1; Jer 31:12; Joel 2:19, 22, 24.

Milk & honey: Ex 3:8, 17; 13:5; 33:3; Lev 20:24; Num 13:27; 14:8; 16:13f; Dtn 6:3; 11:9; 26:9, 15; 27:3; 31:20; Josh 5:6; Isa 7:22; Jer 11:5; 32:22; Ezek 20:6, 15; Milk (with no mention of honey): Isa 60:16; Joel 4:18; Honey (with no mention of milk): Dtn 8:8; 2 Ki 18:32; Prov 5:3.

¹⁹⁴ Examples: “living water of eternity” (wa-□^ejau b-majja □ajjê □a-l-‘ā) in Od. Sol. 6:18; the “river of the water of life” (ποταμὸν ὕδατος ζωῆς) in Rev 22:1, 17; the honeycomb of eternal Spirit (κηρίον ἐστι πνεῦμα ζωῆς) in JosAs 16:14; and the “blessed bread of life” (ἄρτον εὐλογημένον ζωῆς) in JosAs 15:5. On the fish, Smith notes: “The widespread fish symbolism that occurs in Jewish and Christian art as well as in the New Testament has been interpreted to signify fish as a numinous or eschatological food, an idea developed at least partially from the Leviathan myth.” Cf. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 168.

¹⁹⁵ Webster, *Ingesting Jesus*, 40–41.

¹⁹⁶ A definition: “The term refers to the use of the symbols of food and a festive meal to signify immortality and the joys of the end time or afterlife. The terms ‘eschatological banquet’ and ‘apocalyptic banquet’ are more correct for the general phenomenon, while the term ‘messianic banquet,’ technically speaking, refers primarily to traditions that make specific reference to the presence of the Messiah.” Dennis Edwin Smith, “Messianic Banquet,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4, 788–791: 788.

has its roots in myths that tell of a great battle in the divine sphere. Upon victory, the gods assemble to celebrate it with a great banquet.¹⁹⁷ Basic motifs associated with the messianic banquet include: “victory over primordial enemies (e.g., death), eternal joyous celebration, abundance of food, the presence of the Messiah, judgment, and the pilgrimage of the nations.”¹⁹⁸

While a number of Old Testament passages hint at the idea, Isaiah 25:6-8 offers the classic depiction of the banquet of the end-time. The prophet describes how God will host a feast of rich food and well-aged wine for all nations on a mountain. The eschatological banquet is in essence a mythological meal and functions as an idealization of the apocalyptic consummation.¹⁹⁹ On the day of the eschatological banquet, God will “swallow up” (אָפֶטֶט), that is to say *rule out*, death forever (Isa 25:8). Significantly, the banquet describes the future age as universal. All nations are invited to this table. Sometimes, the Messianic banquet is depicted as a wedding banquet and related to the motif of “sacred marriage.”²⁰⁰ Imagery related to the messianic banquet may well be alluded to in the miracle at the wedding in Cana.

3.4.3. Jesus’ “Guests”: Group Identity of Jesus and his Disciples

The present section will consider symbolism in terms of group formation. It will take into account the receivers of physical nourishment as well as the addressees of the metaphorical food and drink offered by Jesus.

The food, drink and meal narratives and discourses are highly crucial scenes in the dynamic development of the group around Jesus, and they play a decisive role in identity formation. Important aspects of these scenes pertain to the composition, size and nature of the

¹⁹⁷ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 168, references in n. 151.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 168–169.

²⁰⁰ This is a widespread motif in Near Eastern myth and ritual. *Ibid.*, 169. Scriptural sources include e.g. Isa 54:5-55:5.

group that witnesses or partakes in the meal and to the explanations of the symbolism by the narrator. These aspects will be addressed in their various passages according to chronological appearance.

As soon as Jesus has gathered a small number of disciples, he reveals himself to a presumably large number of people at the wedding in Cana (Jn 2:1-11). This scene that implicitly includes a festive meal is set at the beginning of the earthly deeds of Jesus as accounted by John. The choice wine is presumably offered to all guests present. While a full guest list is not provided, Jesus' mother is there, as are some of his disciples (μαθηταί). Following the narrative of John 1, it can be assumed that there must yet have been only a small number of disciples following Jesus (perhaps 5: an unnamed disciple, Andrew, Simon Peter, Philip, Nathanael). At the wedding, the narrator refers to servants (διάκονοι), the chief steward (ἀρχιτρικλινος), and the bridegroom. It seems safe to assume that there is also a bride, and a number of other guests. Very likely the reader is to imagine the wedding as a festive occasion attended by many guests, perhaps even more than had been expected. After all, the wine runs out. The impression created is that the wine provided by Jesus is offered to all present.

The narrator spells out the central importance of the Cana story in John 2:11. This sign is defined as an occasion for Jesus to reveal his glory (ἐφάνηρωσεν τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, Jn 2:11). The δόξα is part of Jesus' identity. The narrator's comment specifically relates the sign at Cana to other signs or miracles of Jesus and to the beginning of Jesus' deeds while he dwells on earth. What Jesus has to offer is principally offered to everyone. It is of higher quality than that provided by the original host. The choice wine that Jesus miraculously provides for all people present serves as an invitation to believe in Jesus. A number of disciples followed Jesus earlier on and accompanied him to the wedding, but according to the narrator, it is only after they have witnessed this first

miracle that they really believe in him (ἐπίστευσαν εἰς αὐτὸν οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ, Jn 2:11). The believing disciples continue to travel with Jesus, now also in the company of Jesus' mother and siblings who, until this point, had not been mentioned.

The next occasion on which the number of believers is greatly increased is the scene at the well in Samaria. Jesus initially offers the living water to an individual person who is a woman and a stranger of another ethnicity, convincing her of the worth of the living water. Through the conversation about living water, Jesus reveals himself to her as the one to believe in. The discussion between the woman and Jesus occasions the revelation of Jesus as the Messiah. This, and the continuation of the discussion, leads the woman to believe in Jesus. Through her testimony, the Samaritan woman brings many others from the city of Sychar to Jesus. As the Samaritans arrive and stay with Jesus, many more believe because of his word (καὶ πολλῶ πλείους ἐπίστευσαν διὰ τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ, Jn 4:41). What Jesus offers to the woman in metaphorical food language is in principle open to everyone. Nobody is excluded from this offer; it is open to men and women alike, regardless of their ethnic affiliation. The woman functions as an agent for this offer. The crowd of people who believe in Jesus obviously grows: while the first people to come are the ones the woman has talked to in the city (Jn 4:30), there are “many” (πολλοὶ, Jn 4:39) Samaritans from that city who believe and “many more” who believe because of his word (πολλῶ πλείους, Jn 4:41). Jesus' offer of eternal life through “the water of life” directed at the Samaritan woman eventually reaches a large number of people and creates many believers. This is the second occasion on which belief is created by offering drink: choice wine in Cana, and the metaphorical living water in Samaria.

After drink, Jesus offers physical food to an immense crowd of people in the miraculous feeding of the five thousand (Jn 6:1-15). The crowds continue to follow Jesus because they have

been fed, even as Jesus scolds them. It seems these followers have not truly understood the deeper significance of the feeding. Jesus encourages a deeper understanding of the feeding as a sign. But it is not enough merely to recognize Jesus as a doer of signs; the addressees must also do the works of God. In effect, this is what belief in Jesus means.

Jesus explains the significance of the bread that he offers, which is to provide eternal life. This claim, along with the exhortation to consume Jesus' flesh and blood, introduces the turning point in the continuously growing crowd that follows Jesus: the fact that Jesus equates himself to the bread of life and that he asks of the audience to chew his flesh and drink his blood, triggers a decisive break in the so far uninterrupted growth of the group around Jesus. The eating of Jesus' flesh and drinking of his blood appear as the precondition of true belief in Jesus. Only those who dare to eat his flesh and drink his blood are truly his followers. This demand is offensive to many among the audience. Furthermore, Jesus adds that it is because there are some who do not believe what he has told them that no one can come to him unless it is granted by the Father (Jn 6:65). "Because of this" (Ἐκ τούτου, Jn 6:66), many of Jesus' disciples (πολλοὶ [ἐκ] τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ, Jn 6:66) turn away and no longer follow him.

Jesus then turns to the twelve specifically, asking them whether they too intend to leave him. Jesus' demand for belief in him, explicated by means of ingesting language, forces followers to make a conscious decision. They shall either truly and fully believe in Jesus, and thus chew his flesh and drink his blood, or they may leave. This metaphorical food talk leads to a distinction between true followers of Jesus and others, and as such it is highly crucial to the development of the group surrounding Jesus. At this point, the audience grows smaller and smaller, and the number of people at meals with Jesus is dramatically reduced. There are no more large meals. The company around the table is reduced to the true followers, those who believe in him. Nevertheless,

one figure remains within the inner circle of true believers who is different from the others: Judas, who is the “devil” (διάβολός ἐστιν, Jn 6:70).

Jesus’ outcry during the Festival of Booths in Jerusalem (Jn 7:37-38) causes yet another division among the audience: some see a prophet, others the Messiah, another group denies this possibility, and some even want to lay hands on him, but do not do so (Jn 7:40-44). Jesus’ outcry provokes people to clarify their position. Are they for him, that is, do they believe in him? Or are they against him? As non-believers, the Pharisees are against Jesus (7:45-53). Only Nicodemus, one of them, holds that according to the law, everyone deserves a hearing.

It is not entirely clear who attends the meal at the house of the Bethany siblings. Only Jesus, Lazarus and his sisters, and Judas are mentioned explicitly. Presumably it is a smaller group than in the previous meal scenes, given that the meal is set in a house. The crowds only come to see Jesus when they learn about the rising of Lazarus from the dead.

The last meal prior to the passion and crucifixion of Jesus appears to be limited to the close followers of Jesus, possibly the Twelve. Here the group appears to be narrowed down once more. Judas is among them up until the moment where Jesus openly designates him as the betrayer. Jesus hands Judas the morsel and Judas takes it. Whether or not Judas swallows it is not expressed. It is clearly stated, however, that the moment Judas takes the morsel is the moment the devil enters into him. Whereas the believers, the children of God, consume the bread offered by Jesus (Jn 6), the bread of life, and by extension have God entering into them, Judas has the devil inhabit him. As a consequence of his designation as the betrayer, Judas is formally and factually excluded from the group in the course of the last meal prior to Jesus’ death. From the beginning it is clear to Jesus and to the reader (because of the narrator’s comments) that Judas is the betrayer. Only now, however, do the disciples realize this.

During the farewell discourses, Jesus exhorts his disciples several times to believe in him and/or in his Father and in their mutual indwelling (Jn 14:1, 10, 11, 12, 29). All of the things that Jesus announces before they occur shall prompt the disciples to believe when they actually occur in the future (Jn 14:29). Jesus refers to the already existing faith of the disciples (πεπιστεύκατε, Jn 16:27) and finally the disciples themselves affirm that they believe Jesus has come from God (Jn 16:30). Jesus asks them plainly whether or not they believe now (Jn 16:31), and in his prayer to the Father, Jesus envisions that the disciples' belief in him will spread from the disciples to others through their word (Jn 17:20).

The Gospel's last meal scene (Jn 21) following Jesus' passion, death and resurrection, however, portrays an even smaller group gathering for a meal. The continuous reduction of the group gathered for meals with Jesus culminates in the portrayal of a last meal at the Gospel's end. The scene is introduced by the author's comment that Jesus shows himself once more to the disciples (ἐφάνερωσεν ἑαυτὸν πάλιν ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Jn 21:1). A total of only seven male disciples is mentioned: Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others (Jn 21:2).²⁰¹ In the Fourth Gospel, therefore, a dynamic development of the people gathered for meals can be discerned. Meal scenes serve as an occasion to distinguish between true believers and non-believers.

While communal dining and metaphorical talk about food and drink are not the exclusive occasions on which the formation of the community around Jesus undergoes significant changes, they are certainly crucial ones. In the early chapters Jesus reveals himself to a great range of people in connection to meal scenes and through metaphors of food and drink. The promise of

²⁰¹ On the Johannine "strategy" of making women invisible, cf. McKinlay, *Gendering Wisdom the Host*, 235.

eternal life that is closely related to such metaphorical talk is offered to a broad range of people. Participation in meals with Jesus, and the reception of food/drink messages develop from the broadest possible number of people (Jn 2, 4, 6), to the decisive point of true confession to Jesus by means of chewing his flesh and drinking his blood (Jn 6). This becomes an even smaller group of closer followers (Jn 12), leading to the very inner circle of Jesus' followers (Jn 13) that are eventually freed from the betrayer, and finally culminating with a handful of followers in need of a new leader (Jn 21).

3.4.4. Community Experiences Tied to Meal Scenes

The following section will discuss a number of community experiences. The focus will be on notions of insecurity and fear, provoked through the intertwined motifs of betrayal, persecution, hatred and apostasy. While similar such experiences are found throughout the Gospel narrative, others appear closely tied to food, drink and meal scenes and discourses.

The bread of life discourse is the first account in the established corpus of meal, food and drink passages that rouses a great deal of hostile reactions. The Jews begin to complain (Ἐγόγγυζον οὖν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, Jn 6:41) and quarrel among themselves (Ἐμάχοντο οὖν πρὸς ἀλλήλους οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, Jn 6:52). The narrator comments that there are even some among the disciples who do not believe, pointing out that Jesus knew from the start which ones did not believe, and in particular the one who would betray him (ἦδει γὰρ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ὁ Ἰησοῦς τίνες εἰσὶν οἱ μὴ πιστεύοντες καὶ τίς ἐστὶν ὁ παραδώσων αὐτόν, Jn 6:64). This is the first time where John mentions the betrayal of a disciple, foreshadowing what will soon happen. Jesus states that one of the twelve is a devil (οὐκ ἐγὼ ὑμᾶς τοὺς δώδεκα ἐξελεξάμην; καὶ ἐξ ὑμῶν εἷς διάβολός ἐστιν. Jn 6:70), and the narrator adds that Jesus is speaking of Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, for he, though

one of the twelve, is going to betray him (οὗτος γὰρ ἔμελλεν παραδιδόναι αὐτόν, Jn 6:71). From this point on, the reader is aware of the betrayer's identity.

The bread of life discourse strongly nourishes this already existing opposition and consolidates the plan of the Jews to kill Jesus.²⁰² It concludes with the information from the narrator that Jesus leaves for Galilee and no longer goes about in Judea because the Jews are looking for an opportunity to kill him (ἐζήτουν αὐτόν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι ἀποκτείνειν, Jn 7:1).

The entirety of chapter 6, portraying a major communal meal and a metaphorical interpretation of Jesus' provisions of food, narrates the divisive aspect of sharing food and discussing it. It is in the context of this food talk and of a division among the listeners that, as stated above, the betrayal motif is introduced in the Gospel narrative. Jesus, the narrator, and the reader are aware of the betrayer's identity. But, despite this knowledge the betrayer remains among them. Thus, even after the schism reduces those around the table to the true believers, the betrayer is part of the in-group. The non-believers, that is "the Jews," are not merely people who fail to believe in Jesus. Rather, they are actually opposed to the believers and are characterized by their evil desire to kill Jesus. As a reaction to Jesus' outcry at the Festival of Booths, there is a

²⁰² The mention of Jesus' persecution by the Jews is found as early as Jn 5:16 (ἐδίωκον οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι τὸν Ἰησοῦν), and repeatedly appears throughout the rest of the Gospel. The first reason given for this is that Jesus, on a Sabbath, had healed a man who had been ill for thirty-eight years. The intent to persecute is reinforced only two verses later by the notion that the Jews wanted to kill Jesus (ἀποκτείνειν, Jn 5:18), not only because he was breaking the Sabbath, but also because he called God his own Father and thereby made himself equal to God (Jn 5:18). Aside from Jn 5:16, the term "διώκω" only appears twice in Jn 15:20 and pertains to the future persecution of the disciples. The same idea, however, is expressed in other terms, most prominently in the term "ἀποκτείνειν" (Jn 5:18; 7:1; 7:19; 7:20; 7:25; 8:22 ["suicide"]; 8:37; 8:40; 11:53; 12:10; 16:2 [pertaining to the disciples]; 18:31). Furthermore, the intent to arrest Jesus, "πιάζω" in the sense of "arrest," appears repeatedly: Jn 7:30; 7:44; 8:20; 10:39; 11:57. Barnabas Lindars calls the persecution of Jesus a "constant theme, reverberating through the Gospel." Barnabas Lindars, "The Persecution of Christians in John 15:18–16:4a," in *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament: Studies Presented to G. M. Styler by the Cambridge New Seminar*, eds. William Horbury and G. M. Styler (London, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 48–69: 48–49.

division in the crowd (σχίσμα οὖν ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ ὄχλῳ δι' αὐτόν· Jn 7:43). Some want to arrest Jesus (πιάσαι αὐτόν, Jn 7:44), but nobody lays a hand on him.

At Bethany (Jn 12,1-8), the betrayer is among those who are present at the meal. The narrator, the reader, and Jesus (cf. Jn 6:64) are aware of it. The narrator reminds the reader that Judas is the one who is about to betray Jesus (ὁ μέλλων αὐτόν παραδιδόναι, Jn 12:4). On the surface, the wasteful use of nard oil appears as the central problem of this meal scene; however, the greatest problem of the situation is the fact that the betrayer is among those assembled. Following the meal scene, the narrator informs the reader that the chief priest plans to put Lazarus to death as well, since it is on his account that many of the Jews are deserting and believing in Jesus (Jn 12:10-11). This is the only occasion in which killing (ἀποκτείνω) is explicitly mentioned in connection with a meal scene.

By this time, the betrayal has been announced to the reader several times before it is developed in John 13, where the motif is emphasized from the outset of the scene. (cf. Jn 6:64, 70; 12:4). In the scene's introduction, the narrator informs the reader that the devil has already “put it into the heart of Judas” to hand Jesus over (τοῦ διαβόλου ἤδη βεβληκότος εἰς τὴν καρδίαν ἵνα παραδοῖ αὐτόν Ἰούδας Σίμωνος Ἰσκαριώτου, Jn 13:2). According to the narrator, Jesus is aware that the Father has given all things into his hands, and that he has come from God and is going to God (Jn 13:3). Thus, Jesus, the narrator, and the readers are aware of the impending betrayal, and they know the identity of the betrayer. Only during the course of this meal gathering, however, is Judas openly designated as the one who will hand Jesus over and thus revealed as the betrayer to the characters in the story, those gathered for Jesus' last meal.

Jesus tells the disciples, “One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you” (Jn 13:10). The narrator points out

that Jesus is hereby hinting at the betrayer (Jn 13:11). Finally, Jesus verbally announces the betrayal to his disciples. He declares that what is going to happen will happen in order to fulfil the Scripture: “The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me” (Jn 13:18; referring to Ps 41:9). In a troubled state of mind, Jesus repeats the betrayal and states that one of them (i.e. one of the people present, one of the disciples, thus one of the inner circle) will betray him (Jn 13:21). When asked the name of the person he is speaking of, Jesus answers: “It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish” (Jn 13:26). Thereafter Jesus dips a morsel and gives it to Judas in order to designate him as the betrayer (Jn 13:26).

It is interesting to note that the designation of the betrayer is not only set within a meal, but also happens by means of a morsel of bread. Jesus hands the piece of bread to Judas. While in Jn 6 Jesus has promised that the bread that he provides leads to eternal life, in this case the sheer opposite happens: when Judas takes the morsel, the devil enters him. Judas leaves the community at the table and goes out into darkness.

In the farewell discourses, the motif of persecution (διώκω) is developed in connection to hatred (μισέω). The world hates Jesus before it hates the disciples. The world stands in opposition to love (Jn 15:18-16:4) and hates those who do not belong to the world. Jesus urges the disciples to keep in mind that if people persecuted him, they will also persecute them (Jn 15:20). It is on account of Jesus that they will do so, and it is because they do not know the one who sent him. Thus, hatred against Jesus is, at the same time, hatred against the Father (Jn 15:23). This is to fulfil the scriptural word that “They hated me without a cause” (Jn 15:24-25).

The things that Jesus tells the disciples in the farewell discourses shall prevent them from stumbling. In this context, and for the third time in the Gospel (cf. Jn 9:22, 12:42), the expulsion from the synagogue is announced, this time in a direct speech by Jesus. Jesus develops this notion

into martyrdom: “They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God. And they will do this because they have not known the Father or me” (Jn 16:2-3). The disciples must, therefore, expect a difficult time. Jesus tells the disciples this on the verge of his own death so they may remember when it is their own turn (Jn 16:4-5). Even if the disciples are troubled by this, Jesus assures them that it is to their advantage that he will go away. In the world, they face persecution, but shall not despair because Jesus has conquered the world (Jn 16:32-33).

Jesus is ready to return to the Father and will no longer protect the disciples as when he was among them. He therefore asks the Father to protect (τηρέω) the disciples from the evil one while they remain in the world, and for them to be sanctified (Jn 17:10-19). The antithesis of the relationship between Jesus and his disciples on the one hand, and the world around them on the other, reaches a climax: “They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world” (Jn 17:14, 16).

In John 18-19, the betrayal finally takes place. Judas hands Jesus over to the Jews and Jesus is crucified. Even after Jesus’ resurrection, however, the betrayal motif is not forgotten. In the context of the meal served by the resurrected Jesus, the narrator reminds the reader of the betrayal when he refers to the beloved disciple: the beloved disciple is identified as “the one who had reclined next to Jesus at the supper and had said, ‘Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?’” (Jn 21:20).

The notion of distrust and of future persecution of the disciples is also mentioned in the context of the meal with Jesus on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias. When the resurrected Jesus asks Peter for the third time whether he loves him he adds: “Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow

old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go” (Jn 21:18). The narrator explains that this is to indicate the kind of death by which Simon Peter would glorify God (Jn 21:19).

The fact that Jesus three times repeats his question and command to feed and to tend the sheep reveals a notion of distrust. Jesus’ triple question to Peter also ties back to the passion story where Simon Peter denies knowing Jesus three times (Jn 18:17, 25, 27). The notion of distrust, expressed through Jesus’ question about Peter’s love, and the announcement of martyrdom reveal an atmosphere of insecurity. Peter is not a betrayer in the same way as Judas, but he will have to face martyrdom. This is underlined when Jesus mentions Judas. The betrayer is now missing among the followers of Jesus, but he is still remembered.

From this overview of the passages that talk about persecution, betrayal, hatred, fear and insecurity, some interesting observations emerge. The intent of the Jews and/or high priests to kill Jesus appears frequently throughout the Gospel, and is only sometimes directly related to meal scenes. The pattern of the betrayal motif, however, is strikingly different. Apart from the actual betrayal which introduces the passion (Jn 18:2, 5, 30, 35, 36; 19:11, 16, 30), the betrayal motif appears exclusively connected to meal scenes and metaphorical food talk (παράδιδωμι, found in Jn 6:64, 71; 12:4; 13:2, 11, 21; 21:20).

It is interesting to note that Judas, while possibly expected to be present on other occasions as well, is mentioned by name only in these very scenes, and in each case he is qualified as the betrayer (Jn 6:71; 12:4; 13:2, 26, 29).²⁰³ The community gathered for those meals is thus endangered by the presence of Judas, for Judas delivers Jesus to his death. In striking contrast to the betrayal associated with Judas, the footwashing in John 13 serves as an example to the other

²⁰³ The Judas that appears in 14:22 is identified as being “not Iscariot.”

disciples and is an act of love and friendship. Its significance is spelled out a little later: martyrdom forms the ultimate act of love and friendship (Jn 15:3).

The themes of martyrdom and persecution in the farewell discourses reveal the feelings of insecurity arising due to dangers from the outside. The community of friendship and love is furthermore endangered from the inside, as Judas the betrayer is present among the meal community. The danger coming from the outside, that is the hatred and aim to kill Jesus on the side of the Jews, corresponds to the betrayal from the inside. Judas, an “insider,” collaborates with those outside. In contrast to this, the act of ultimate friendship and love, prefigured symbolically in the footwashing (Jn 13), is to give up one’s own life for the sake of others (Jn 15:13). In the course of the narrative, Jesus himself exemplifies this behaviour by protecting his disciples (Jn 18:8-9) and giving up his life for the sake of others.²⁰⁴

3.4.5. Theological or Spiritual

In the following, a number of motifs of theological or spiritual character that are tied to meal scenes will be addressed.

3.4.5.1. Belief

The notion of belief permeates the entire Gospel. A search for various forms of πιστεύω reveals no less 98 instances distributed throughout the Gospel. Chapters 15, 18 and 21 are the only chapters in which πιστεύω does not appear at least once. As has been demonstrated in the section on those who receive or reject the food offered by Jesus, belief is a decisive element addressed in these passages. Jane Webster has convincingly demonstrated that ingesting language functions as a

²⁰⁴ This motif is also found in Jn 10: Jesus presents himself as the good shepherd who is willing to put his life at risk for his sheep (Jn 10:11).

literary motif, and she finds two kinds of ingesting language: 1. references to concrete food and drink and 2. metaphors that describe Jesus as the host as well as the one who is incarnate and must die in order that others may eat and live. Ingesting language is a significant literary motif in the Fourth Gospel that is related to and intertwined with both belief and the hope for salvation implied therein. Ingesting language, in sum, is used metaphorically to express belief in Jesus, and serves as a vehicle for Johannine soteriology.²⁰⁵

3.4.5.2. Eternal Life

The notion of eternal life (ζωὴ αἰώνιος) appears frequently in the Fourth Gospel. It is mentioned for the first time in the discussion between Jesus and Nicodemus, and again in the discourse of John the Baptist (Jn 3:15, 16, 36). It is the Son who gives life (Jn 5:21). Furthermore, eternal life is not attained through Scripture (Jn 5:39), but rather, it is granted to the person who hears the word of Jesus and who believes in the one who has sent him (Jn 5:24). Those who do good will have the resurrection of life (Jn 5:29). Jesus provides for eternal life (Jn 10:28), and only those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life (Jn 12:25). God's commandment is eternal life (Jn 12:50).

The notion of eternal life clusters around meal scenes and metaphorical talk about food and drink. It is one of the central ideas in the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the well in Sychar. The water that Jesus is able and willing to provide is water that gushes up to eternal life (Jn 4:13b-14): "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." Subsequently, the woman at the well asks Jesus for this

²⁰⁵ Webster, *Ingesting Jesus*.

living water. In this setting, Jesus also uses the metaphor of food stating that fruit can be gathered for eternal life (Jn 4:36).

Life, a term which is used interchangeably with eternal life, is one of the central motifs in the discourses about the bread of life (Jn 6:27, 35, 40, 47, 48, 51, 53, 54, 63, 68). While the Jews' ancestors received manna in the desert, they nevertheless eventually died. The bread from heaven that Jesus can exclusively provide, however, provides eternal life to believers. Jesus claims to be this bread himself. People need to eat of it in order to attain eternal life. Jesus, though, is subordinate to the one who has sent him, and it is necessary to be drawn by the one who sent Jesus. The precondition of attaining eternal life is spelled out in even more detail: it is necessary to chew the flesh of Jesus and to drink his blood. Partaking of Jesus is the crucial and decisive moment. Simon Peter exclaims that only Jesus has the words of eternal life (Jn 6:68).

At the Festival of Booths Jesus again picks up the motif of eternal life, symbolized by living water, when he proclaims that rivers of such living waters shall flow out of the believer's heart/stomach (Jn 7:38). In the farewell discourses the motif of eternal life is present as well. Jesus asserts that God has given his Son the authority to give eternal life to those entrusted to him (Jn 17:2). Eternal life stands for the knowledge of the Father, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, sent by the Father (Jn 17:3).

This overview demonstrates that life and eternal life appear on a number of occasions throughout the Gospel. It is not exclusive to meal scenes and metaphorical food talk, but is clearly emphasized and explored most strongly in these very passages. Jesus can provide the water of eternal life. The Son has been sent down from heaven as bread of life, and believers need to eat from it and drink Jesus' blood in order to attain eternal life. Eternal life is a gift that the Father provides to humankind through his Son.

3.4.5.3. Death

In most meals scenes, an implicit or even explicit relation to Jesus' death can be discerned. Jesus' statement that his hour has not yet come very likely points forward to his imminent death, and subsequent glorification (οὐπω ἤκει ἡ ὥρα μου. Jn 2:4). From the first meal scene on (wedding at Cana), the reader is aware of Jesus' imminent death. This is confirmed by the fact that, immediately prior to the passion, the narrator states that Jesus knows his hour has come to depart from this world and to go to the Father (ἰδὼς ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὅτι ἦλθεν αὐτοῦ ἡ ὥρα ἵνα μεταβῆ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου πρὸς τὸν πατέρα, Jn 13:1). Jesus himself later expresses that his hour has come (ἐλήλυθεν ἡ ὥρα, Jn 17:1).

John 6 contains implicit and explicit references to death. A first subtle hint is found in John 6:4, where the narrator states that Passover is near. As the reader learns later, Jesus is crucified on the day of preparation for the Passover. This is the day when lambs are slaughtered for the feast. Another implicit reference is found in the narrator's comments on the impending betrayal that leads up to Jesus' crucifixion (Jn 6:64, 71). In this scene, Jesus' death is also announced explicitly: as a result of the feeding miracle and the subsequent discourses, Jesus avoids the Galilee because the Jews are looking for an opportunity to kill him.

The meal scene at Bethany is permeated by the notion of death. It takes place only six days before Passover, which establishes an implicit relation to Jesus' impending death. Further, the narrator comments on the presence of Lazarus at this meal, who has been raised from the dead. The announcement of Judas' betrayal in this scene foreshadows Jesus' death, and Jesus explicitly qualifies the anointment of his feet by Mary as a preparation for the day of his burial. Finally, the betrayal that will lead up to Jesus' death is referred to again by the narrator. When mentioning Judas in this scene, the narrator qualifies him as the one who is about to betray Jesus. The narrator

informs the reader that, as a result of the raising of Lazarus from the dead and the creation of believers through this sign, the chief priests plan to put Lazarus to death as well. Belief in Jesus now no longer only endangers Jesus, but Lazarus as well.

The extensive scene of Jesus' last meal with his disciples should be read entirely in the context of Jesus' imminent death. Jesus knows that his hour has come to depart from this world and to go to the Father. Jesus induces his death by designating the betrayer in front of the disciples. The subsequent farewell discourses are set within the perspective of Jesus' departure. Jesus starts talking about his going away, thus about his death, and tells the disciples that they cannot go where he is going. In the prayer introducing the last section of the farewell discourses, Jesus utters again that his hour has come, and thereby points forward to his imminent death.

Even after Jesus' resurrection, the last meal account briefly refers to death. In the narrator's framing comment, the reader is informed that it is the third occasion that Jesus appears to his disciples after his death. Death is, therefore, a notion that permeates the meal scenes.

3.4.5.4. Mutual Indwelling and Love

While mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son are not peculiar to the meal scenes, the notion of mutual indwelling of Jesus and the disciples clusters in meal scenes, particularly in the farewell discourses. Love (*ἀγάπη*) appears almost exclusively in meal scenes and is so closely related to the motif of mutual indwelling that an isolated discussion of this motif would appear artificial.²⁰⁶ This mutual indwelling is further spelled out and expressed as mutual love.

²⁰⁶ The noun *ἀγάπη* clusters in meal scenes nearly exclusively: Jn 13:35; 15:9, 10, 13; 17:26. The exception to the rule is found in Jn 5:42. The same is true for the verb *ἀγαπάω*, the majority of whose instances is found in meal contexts: Jn 13:1; 13:23; 13:34; 14:15, 21, 23, 24, 28, 31; 15:9, 12, 17; 17:23, 24, 26; 21:7, 15, 16, 20. Instances outside this corpus include: Jn 3:16, 19, 35; 8:42; 10:17; 11:5; 12:43; 19:26.

The motif of mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son is introduced in the Gospel's very first verse. The eternal Logos not only was with God (πρὸς τὸν θεόν, Jn 1:1), but God himself is equated to the Logos (θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος, Jn 1:1). This Logos becomes flesh and lives among humankind (Jn 1:14). The identification of the Father and the Son are most clearly expressed in Jesus' statement to the effect that he and the Father are one (ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ πατήρ ἓν ἐσμεν. Jn 10:30).

Alongside the identity of the Logos with the Father, the two can be distinguished from each other. This is indicated in the numerous passages that declare that the Logos Jesus is sent by the Father.²⁰⁷ The Son declares what he has seen in the Father's presence (Jn 8:38). He does nothing on his own but speaks as the Father has instructed him (Jn 8:28; 10:18; 12:49, 50). The close relationship between the Father and the Son is marked by the notion of mutual knowledge (Jn 10:15). Despite the possibility of distinction, the two remain inseparably connected. The Father is in Jesus and Jesus is in the Father (ἐν ἐμοὶ ὁ πατήρ καὶ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ, Jn 10:38). The mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son is thus introduced at the outset of the Gospel. The Johannine tradition has developed a unique usage of “ἐν,” “μένειν ἐν,” and “εἶναι ἐν.”²⁰⁸ The idea of the close relationship and mutual indwelling between Jesus and the disciples comes into focus and is developed elaborately in metaphorical speech about food and drink and in discourses within meal

²⁰⁷ The sending is spoken of in different ways. It appears in forms of the verb πέμπω: Jn 4:34; 5:23, 24, 30, 37; 6:37, 38, 39, 44; 7:16, 18, 28, 33; 8:16, 18, 26, 29; 9:4; 12:44, 45, 49; 13:20; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5; and of ἀποστέλλω 3:17, 34; 5:36, 38; 6:29, 57; 8:42; 10:36; 11:42; 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25; 20:21. Furthermore the descent is found in καταβαίνω – as the Son of Man John 3:13; the bread from heaven 6:33, 38, 41, 42, 50, 51, 58 – both of which are metaphors for Jesus.

For a discussion of the two Words of Sending used for Jesus in the Gospel of John, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples According to the Fourth Gospel: With Implications for the Fourth Gospel's Purpose and the Mission of the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 97–110.

²⁰⁸ Scholtissek has thoroughly investigated these expressions. His theology of “immanence” centres on a detailed analysis of Jn 1:1-18; 6; 13:31-14:31; 15:1-17; 10 and 17, and the epistles. Klaus Scholtissek, *In ihm sein und bleiben: Die Sprache der Immanenz in den johanneischen Schriften*, HBS, vol. 21 (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2000).

scenes. Those who eat his flesh and drink his blood abide in Jesus, and he in them (Jn 6:56). By means of eating Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood, the disciples incorporate Jesus (6:57).

The motif of love is introduced at the outset of Jesus' last meal with his disciples prior to his death: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (Jn 13:2). The close relationship between Jesus and his disciples is very strongly expressed in Jesus' statement that only those will have a share with him are those whose feet he washes (Jn 13:8). Subsequent to the footwashing, Jesus gives the disciples a new commandment. He tells them to love one another just as he has loved them. Those who receive anyone whom Jesus has sent, receive Jesus also (Jn 13:20). Mutual love is the sign of true discipleship of Jesus. The quality of the relationship that ought to exist among the disciples is expressed by the notion of love. The disciples shall love one another just as Jesus has loved them (Jn 13:34-35).

Jesus claims: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him" (Jn 14:6-7). Whoever has seen Jesus has seen the Father also (Jn 14:9). Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in him (ἐγὼ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ καὶ ὁ πατήρ ἐν ἐμοί ἐστιν, Jn 14:10) and the Father dwells in Jesus (ὁ δὲ πατήρ ἐν ἐμοὶ μένων, Jn 14:10; cf. Jn 14:11).

The close relationship between Jesus and the disciples is elaborated in terms of love. The love that the disciples have for Jesus ought to be expressed by following his commandment to show love to each other (Jn 14:15). In return for the disciples' keeping of his commandment, Jesus will ask the Father to send another helper (ἄλλον παράκλητον, Jn 14:16) to remain with them forever. This is the Spirit of truth, and the world cannot receive it because it neither sees nor knows it. The disciples, however, know the Spirit of truth and it abides in them; that is, inhabits them (Jn 14:17). Jesus promises to keep up the relationship with the disciples: he will come back.

Because he lives, the disciples too will live (Jn 14:18-19). The talk about belonging together and mutual indwelling culminates in Jesus' prophetic statement for that day in the future: "I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (Jn 14:20).

When Jesus is asked how he will reveal himself to them but not to the world, Jesus again develops the theme of love between the disciples and himself, and also between them and the Father. The helper, the Spirit of truth sent by the Father in the name of the Son, shall teach them everything and remind them of everything that Jesus has said, thereby solidifying his memory (Jn 14:26-31). Jesus promises to give the disciples peace and reminds them not to be troubled or afraid (Jn 14:27). This passage repeats and slightly amplifies the initial and introductory verse of the chapter. In fact, if they truly love Jesus, the disciple should rejoice that Jesus is going away because he is going to the Father who is greater than he is himself (Jn 14:28). This verse repeats the theme of departure, reverses it into a promise of return, and then asserts the relationship of Jesus with the Father.

The metaphor of the vine in John 15 serves to emphasize the theme of Jesus in relation to the Father, and particularly the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. Again, the motif of mutual indwelling appears: "Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me" (μείνατε ἐν ἐμοί, καὶ γὰρ ἐν ὑμῖν, Jn 15:4).²⁰⁹ Jesus further develops the image by calling the disciples the branches. Only those who abide in Jesus can bear fruit while the others perish (Jn 15:5-7). Just as the branches of a vine need the trunk to abide in, the disciples also need to abide in Jesus. Thus, Jesus' word will also abide in them, and when they become disciples, they thereby glorify the Father (15:8).

²⁰⁹ Redaction criticism stresses the similarity of themes and motifs in Jn 14 and 15-16. Some come to the conclusion that the passages may be two separate versions of Jesus' farewell discourse. The present socio-rhetorical study, however, is interested in the text as we have it and how it may have been perceived by its earliest audience as a unit.

The relationship of love between the Father and Jesus and between Jesus and the disciples, and also the love among the disciples, is further elaborated (Jn 15:9-11). Mutual love is the one great commandment that Jesus gives his disciples. The greatest attestation of this love is to lay down one's life for a friend (Jn 15:13). Jesus thereby qualifies what he himself is going to do for his friends, the disciples, as the ultimate expression of love. Since the disciples now know all there is to know and what Jesus has heard from the Father, they are his friends, by Jesus' choice.

Jesus' imminent departure is the cause of the disciples' sorrow and thus the reason for consoling them. His departure, however, is the precondition for the helper to come to the disciples and to prove the world wrong about sin, righteousness and judgment (Jn 16:6-11). When the Spirit of truth guides the disciples in truth, it will assure their relationship to Jesus, for it does not speak on his own but speaks whatever it hears and thereby glorifies Jesus (Jn 16:12-15). The disciples will be scattered and they will leave Jesus by himself; Jesus will not be alone, however, because the Father is with him.

So far, two sets of dual relationships that are marked by mutual indwelling have been discussed: the relationship between Father and Son and that between Jesus and his disciples. The reciprocal immanence of Father and Son is paralleled by that of Jesus and his disciples. The Father's love for the Son extends to the disciples through the Son, and the disciples confirm this love by their love for one another. While the first set permeates the Gospel, the notion of mutual indwelling between Jesus and his disciples is peculiar to meal scenes. Meal scenes are also the place where these two dual relationships are connected.

This connection of the two dual relationships is subtly hinted to already in the bread of life discourse: whatever the Father gives Jesus will come to him and, also, whoever comes to Jesus will never be driven away (6:37). The elaboration of the theme, however, is found only in the later

course of the narrative, specifically in the farewell discourses, after the betrayer has left. At the outset of the farewell discourses, Jesus claims that there is no way to the Father except through himself (Jn 14:7) and whoever has seen Jesus has seen the Father also. The mutual relationship of Father, Son and the disciples is announced for “that day” in the near future when the Spirit of truth will come to the disciples: On that day the disciples will know that “I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you” (Jn 14:20).

This mutual indwelling is furthermore expressed through the motif of love: “They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them” (Jn 14:21; cf. Jn 14:23, 24). True love of Jesus from the side of the disciples leads to joy that Jesus is going to his Father whom the Son loves (Jn 14:28, 31). Just as the Father has loved his Son, so has the Son loved the disciples, and they should, therefore, remain in his love (Jn 15:9). The notion of “remaining/abiding” plays a central role.

While occurring at other points in the Gospel, “remaining/abiding/dwelling” is specifically mentioned several times in John 14 (Jn 14:10, 17, 25) and clearly clusters in the following chapter in which Jesus talks about himself as the true vine (15:4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 16).²¹⁰ The mutual indwelling of Jesus and the disciples is equated to the vine and its branches. It is then developed further in the love theme, and finally brought down in a connection of the two dual relationships: Just as the Father has loved Jesus, so has Jesus loved them. The disciples shall remain in Jesus’

²¹⁰ Of the 40 occurrences of the lemma “μένω,” a number express not simply a physical remaining (such as in Jn 1:38, 39; 2:12; 4:40; 7:9; 8:35; 10:40; 11:6, 54; 12:24; 14:25; 19:31; 21:22, 23) but rather one of spiritual kind: the Spirit remains on Jesus (Jn 1:32, 33); the word does not abide in the Jews (Jn 5:38) but the disciples are candidates for continuing Jesus’ word; there is food that endures for eternal life (Jn 6:27); those who eat the flesh of Jesus remain in him (Jn 5:56); Jesus remains forever (Jn 8:35); sin remains (Jn 9:41); the Messiah remains forever (Jn 12:34); believers shall not remain in darkness (Jn 12:46)

love just as he has kept the Father's love (15:9-10). Jesus assures the disciples that the Father himself loves them because Jesus has loved them and because they have believed that he has come from God and is returning back to him (Jn 16:26-28). In Jesus' prayer to the Father at the end of the farewell discourses (Jn 17), the combination of the motifs of love and of mutual indwelling are expressed again and drawn together even more closely.

Jesus has glorified the Father and now asks to be glorified himself in the glory that he had before the world came into being (Jn 17:1-10). He has completed his task in that he has taught those who have come from the world to him and who now know that everything comes from the Father. They have received the Father's word through Jesus, they know where Jesus has come from, and they believe that the Father has sent Jesus. It is on their behalf that Jesus speaks to the Father. Jesus expresses the connection of himself, the Father and the disciples by stating, "All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them" (Jn 17:10). He expresses the wish that the disciples may be one as he and the Father are one. Later, the notion of truth also comes into the relationship: Jesus sanctifies himself so they may be sanctified in truth (Jn 17:19). The aim is to have all believers, current and future, as one.

The mutual indwelling of Father, Son and disciples becomes the central focus and culmination of Jesus' prayer (Jn 17:21-26): as the Father and Jesus are mutually in each other, so also the disciples may all be one, and one with the Father and Jesus (Jn 17:22). Jesus has given the disciples the glory that he himself has been given by the Father: "I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (ἐγὼ ἐν αὐτοῖς καὶ σὺ ἐν ἐμοί, ἵνα ὧσιν τετελειωμένοι εἰς ἓν, ἵνα γινώσκῃ ὁ κόσμος ὅτι σὺ με ἀπέστειλας καὶ ἠγάπησας αὐτοὺς καθὼς ἐμὲ ἠγάπησας. Jn 17:23). Jesus concludes by stating: "Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know

you; and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them” (Jn 17:25-26). In this concluding verse, Jesus ties himself, the disciples, the Father and the theme of love together.

The mutual indwelling of the Father, Son and disciples expresses itself in mutual love and is the aim and goal of all things. This is one of the central notions that appears in meal scenes and metaphorical talk about food and drink. In the Gospel’s last dialogue, after the breakfast on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, the love motif appears once again. Jesus asks Simon Peter three times whether he loves him. Simon Peter replies with an affirmation and adds that Jesus knows this already. Each time, Jesus tells Peter to tend or feed his sheep. Jesus’ repeated order to Peter to look after the sheep demonstrates a concern for leadership in the community. Again, it is around the motif of love that the dialogue evolves. The motif of love ties back into the great commandment that Jesus demonstrates to the disciples during this last meal: mutual love, demonstrated by the act of washing their feet, is further developed in the discourses following this act.

3.5. Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the importance and role of communal meals and food and drink discourses in the Fourth Gospel. A very brief comparison with the Synoptics has demonstrated that the particular depiction of meal scenes in the Gospel of John and metaphorical talk about food and drink is peculiar to this Gospel. An overview of the Fourth Gospel’s pericopes has identified the relevant passages establishing the corpus at stake. The meal scenes and related discourses permeate the Gospel and demonstrate that communal dining and metaphorical talk about food and drink play an important role in the Fourth Gospel.

The discussion of the individual passages has suggested that the ideas conveyed in the meal scenes and the metaphorical food and drink discourses are in line with the Gospel's main message. In these passages, John repeatedly expresses that Jesus provides food for his believers. By accepting this food and partaking in it, the disciples know Jesus. These passages carry multiple meanings: in some cases, the meal's meaning or significance is assigned explicitly by the narrator; in others, the meaning is more implicit and symbolic. The narrator explicates the meanings of the first and last Johannine meal scenes that frame Jesus' earthly deeds by qualifying them as occasions for the revelation of Jesus' glory.

It is not surprising that food and drink appear in meal scenes. In the multiplication miracles Jesus provides earthly food in abundance. Furthermore, he offers water of life that quenches thirst forever and heavenly bread that provides eternal life to those who believe in him. In order to attain eternal life, true believers need to chew the flesh of Jesus and drink his blood, as Jesus claims at the end of his bread of life discourse. With the exception of John 12, Jesus appears as the true host and provider of drink and food. At the crucifixion, all three liquids (water, wine and blood) that had previously appeared are drawn together in one scene, in which Jesus dies so that others may live.

The exploration of Jesus' guests has revealed interesting aspects regarding the formation and development of the group around Jesus. While other signs, healings for example (Jn 4, 5, 9, 11), are also important for creating belief in Jesus and gathering followers, the meal scenes and metaphorical drink/food talk are decisive in this respect. They are occasions for distinguishing between true believers and non-believers. The focus around which all meal scenes are portrayed, and around whom the community is formed, is Jesus. Meal scenes serve as occasions for the revelation of Jesus' identity and are crucial in the dynamic development and identity of the group

around Jesus. The criterion for belonging to this group is belief in Jesus. Eternal life that is metaphorically related to food and drink is offered to a broad range of people. Those who eat and drink Jesus' flesh and blood are the true believers.

Ingesting language is used for expressing the notion of belief. Meals and related discourses throughout the Gospel appear as decisive occasions for the group. They are thus a locus for inclusion and exclusion. Each of the first three scenes reveals something important about Jesus to a large group of people. The crowd that gathers for meals or listens to metaphorical talk about food, however, is gradually narrowed down during the course of the narrative. John 6 functions as the turning point of this development. From that point on, the community sharing meals with Jesus shrinks continuously. This development is closely related to community experiences that can be traced in the meal scenes.

The experience of the community tied to the meal scenes is marked by insecurity. While the aim (for the outsiders, for the Jews) to kill Jesus permeates the Gospel of John, the announcement of betrayal is exclusively connected to meal scenes. A morsel of bread serves to designate Judas as the betrayer, whom the devil enters immediately. This act is a point of no return and eventually leads to Jesus' death. The notion of Jesus' imminent death marks virtually all meal scenes in the Fourth Gospel. In the meal scene prior to Jesus' death, the morsel has the opposite function of the bread that is offered in the bread of life discourse.

Judas' evil intent, inscribed into his heart through Satan, has its correspondence in the Jews that persecute Jesus. Fear and threat of death are not restricted to meal scenes, but culminate in them in that the outside threat has a corresponding threat from inside. The table fellowships in the central part of the Gospel are threatened from the outside (hatred and the aim to kill) and from the inside (the betrayer) who collaborates with the outside. The farewell discourses – held within a

meal scene – reflect this as well. John portrays Jesus as predicting persecution, as warning of the danger of apostasy as a consequence of persecution, as stressing the importance of their remaining closely bonded with him, and as stressing the importance of their mutual love. Ultimately, the sacrifice of one's life (martyrdom) is an act of love for the community.

Jesus promises the inner circle that remains around him after the betrayer has left that they will continue to be protected after his departure. His departure (his sacrificial death) is necessary so that others may live. The new commandment that Jesus gives to his disciples who remain in the evil world is to live in mutual love. This includes the possibility of giving up one's life for the sake of the others. Jesus himself subsequently exemplifies such friendship by willingly confessing his identity, "so that they let the others go" (Jn 18:8), and thereby protecting them. Giving up one's life figures as the highest expression of love towards others and assures their security.

Imminent danger and fear are addressed through and alongside assurances of support and protection. The coming of the Spirit of truth will bring remembrance to the disciples, thus confirming Jesus' words. It is in the same setting in which the betrayer has been identified that now, once the betrayer has left, Jesus also announces support. In the enclosed setting of the meal, Jesus assures the disciples of his return, his remaining presence with the community, and the sending of the helper/Paraclete/Spirit of truth who will protect the community from difficulties. Insecurity and fear on one side, and hope and assurance on the other, are closely intertwined.

Through their belief in Jesus, who has been sent to them by the Father, the disciples remain in Jesus and he in them. This is a state of mutual love which is related back to the Father. Father, Son and believing disciples form a relationship that is marked by mutual indwelling. Those who remain in this relationship of love will have the continued protection through the Spirit of truth.

The setting of the communal meal renders the group more cohesive than any other setting. But only after the departure of Judas Iscariot does the cohesion truly become tight; only once the betrayer has left is true community possible. Obviously, there is a strong distinction between those who remain with him and those outside. Jesus encourages them to continue to live as a group in solidarity and mutual love despite imminent dangers. The Spirit of truth shall empower them to overcome any dangers. The notion of and invitation to mutual indwelling of the disciples, Jesus, and his Father can be considered a metaphor for the notion in the main message of the Gospel: “he gave them power to become children of God” (Jn 1:11).

The discussion of the meal scenes and related discourses has revealed that communal meals are situated at crucial points of the narrative. Meal scenes with miraculous provisions of drink and food mark the beginning and the end of Jesus’ earthly doings, and serve as first and last occasions for the epiphany of Jesus. These two meal scenes in John 2 and John 21 correspond to one another and, therefore, frame the earthly doings of the incarnate Logos. In between, a number of meal scenes and passages containing metaphorical talk about drink and food permeate the Gospel.

The most elaborate meal scenes with the longest discourses evolving out of them are contained in John 6 and John 13-17. These two passages appear as pivotal points in the narrative of the Gospel. The first passage introduces the turning point in the development of the number and quality of meal participants while the other frees the inner circle from the betrayer and makes possible the true community that is marked by mutual indwelling of the disciples with Jesus even after his death. The correspondences between chapters 6 and 13 and their intertwined character allow them to be identified as the nucleus, the “core,” of the meal themes in the Fourth Gospel.

PART II: MEAL ACCOUNTS AND DISCOURSES ABOUT FOOD AND DRINK IN THE LIFE OF THE JOHANNINE COMMUNITY

4. Meals as Construction Sites for Identity in the Hellenistic Mediterranean: Comparison with Other Groups

4.1. Introduction

The present chapter addresses the role of meals in both community formation and group identity within portrayals of various groups approximately contemporary to the events depicted in the Fourth Gospel. Evidence of the importance of communal meals for community identity can be found with regard to many historical and/or fictional communities. The present chapter addresses Jewish and Christ-believing groups as depicted in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Josephus, Philo, Rabbinic sources, the Pauline epistles, the book of Acts, and the Didache.²¹¹ The Synoptic Gospels each address a community of readers but do not portray a community as such in a prescriptive or descriptive way. For this and the following reasons they will not be addressed in their own right at this point: some central aspects have already been discussed in the narrative part and their accounts of the “Eucharist” will be addressed in the respective chapter later in this study.

The literary sources on the groups under scrutiny and the amount of archaeological evidence that testifies to their existence are, in some cases, somewhat disparate. Nevertheless, it is possible to distinguish a range of meanings that are attributed to meals and that surpass the

²¹¹ The “pure” narratives, such as other Gospels, including their depiction of communal meals, are exempt from this comparison, for they do not speak about particular communities. A more detailed study and discussion of these communities and the formation of identity connected to meals can be found in the appendix of this study.

physical level of eating. The exploration of the sources on a range of ancient groups will focus on the role of communal meals beyond their function of physical nourishment. In each case, I will discuss in what way the importance of meals is visible in the sources and I will discuss evidence for meanings that surpass the mere intake of nourishment.

4.2. Qumran Community / Essene Community

4.2.1. Introduction

In the past several decades, the meals in Qumran and the Essene community (or communities) have been a subject of great interest in scholarship.²¹² The Dead Sea scrolls, 1QS 6:2-25 and 1QSa 2:17b-22, contain prescriptive information on meal practices in the Qumran community. This information is supplemented or contrasted by archaeological findings. The Essenes are described primarily in Josephus' *Bellum Judaicum* 2.119-161, with a discussion of meals in 2.128-134, and in Philo's *Quod omnis probus liber sit* 75-91.

Because of the many similarities between the description of the Essenes by Hellenistic authors and the evidence in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Essenes were linked to and identified with

²¹² Karl Georg Kuhn, "The Lord's Supper and the Communal Meal at Qumran," in *The Scrolls and the New Testament*, ed. Krister Stendahl (London: SCM Press, 1957), 65–93; Johannes van der Ploeg, "The Meals of the Essenes," *JSS* 2, no. 2 (1957); M. Delcor, "Repas culturels Esséniens et Thérapeutes, Thiasés et Haburoth," *RdQ* 6, no. 3 (1968); Moshe Weinfeld, "Grace after Meals in Qumran [4Q434]," *JBL* 111 (1992); Philip R. Davies, "Food, Drink and Sects: The Question of Ingestion in the Qumran Texts," *Semeia*, no. 86 (1999); Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*, Chapter 9: "Mahl- und Gemeindeorganisation in Qumrantexten," 217–249; Per Bilde, "The Common Meal in the Qumran-Essene Communities," in *Meals in a Social Context: Aspects of the Communal Meal in the Hellenistic and Roman World*, eds. Inge Nielsen and Hanne Nielsen (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1998), 145–166; Jodi Magness, "Communal Meals and Sacred Space at Qumran," in *Debating Qumran: Collected Essays on its Archaeology*, ed. Jodi Magness (Leuven: Peeters Press, 2004), 81–112; Russell C.D. Arnold, *The Social Role of Liturgy in the Religion of the Qumran Community*, STDJ, vol. 60 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), Chapter 3: "Feasts and Fasts," 81–105.

the community behind the scrolls soon after their discovery.²¹³ In recent years, doubts have been raised as to this Qumran-Essene hypothesis of similarity. Scholars have denied the identification of the Essenes as the community behind the Scrolls by stressing the contradicting information about both groups.²¹⁴ Recently, the question has also been virulently debated among archaeologists.²¹⁵ It is not within the scope of this study, nor is it necessary to make a decision on this issue. It is important, however, to keep in mind that the accounts of Philo and Josephus on the one hand, and

²¹³ For the position that the Qumran community is the same as the Essenes, see Schürer and Vermès, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, 2:555–590; cf. Bilde, “The Common Meal in the Qumran-Essene Communities,” 145–166: 148; Per Bilde, “The Essenes in Philo and Josephus,” in *Qumran Between the Old and New Testaments*, eds. Frederick H. Cryer and Thomas L. Thompson, Copenhagen International Seminar (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 32–68: 32.

For support of the identification of the Essenes as the authors of the scrolls found in Qumran, see André Dupont-Sommer, *Die essenischen Schriften vom Toten Meer* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1960), 44–74; Todd S. Beall, *Josephus’ Description of the Essenes Illustrated by the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Hartmut Stegemann, “Qumran Essenes: Local Members of the Main Jewish Union in Late Second Temple Times,” in *The Madrid Qumran Congress: Proceedings of the International Congress on the Dead Sea Scrolls, Madrid 18–21 March, 1991*, eds. Julio Trebolle Barrera and Luis Vegas Montaner, STDJ (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 2, 83–166; Géza Vermès and Martin Goodman, *The Essenes According to the Classical Sources*, Oxford Centre Textbooks, vol. 1 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989); James C. VanderKam and Peter W. Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their Significance for Understanding the Bible, Judaism, Jesus, and Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002).

There is an ongoing debate as to the authorship of the Qumran scrolls. For the argument that the scrolls were written by many different groups of Jews and then smuggled out of Jerusalem’s libraries before the Roman siege of 70 CE, see Norman Golb, *Qumran: Wer schrieb die Schriftrollen vom Toten Meer?* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1994), esp. 127–151; Yizhar Hirschfeld, *Qumran in Context: Reassessing the Archaeological Evidence* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 45–48.

²¹⁴ Schiffman argues that the Qumran community belonged to the “Zadokites,” a movement close to that of the Sadducees. Lawrence H. Schiffman, “Origin and Early History of the Qumran Sect,” *BA* 58, no. 1 (1995).

For arguments against the Qumran-Essene hypothesis, see also: Lena Cansdale, *Qumran and the Essenes: A Re-Evaluation of the Evidence*, TSAJ, vol. 60 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997).

²¹⁵ The Qumran-Essene hypothesis, in line with the first excavator Roland de Vaux, is strongly defended by Jodi Magness (with some modifications to his arguments) and followed by the majority; Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002); Roland de Vaux, *Archaeology and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, The Schweich-Lectures of the British Academy, vol. 1959 (1961; reprint, London: 1973). Against this stands the alternative scenario by Yizhar Hirschfeld who has examined the site from the earliest to latest forms and seeks to revise the possibilities of viewing Qumran in the context of its region. Hirschfeld’s points of reference are the material culture of Qumran as well as the economic structure and history of the region. Hirschfeld, *Qumran in Context*.

It has been assumed for a long time that the Dead Sea Scrolls were written by and for a community that lived in Qumran. This opinion has been challenged by scholars who point out the diversity among the manuscripts and who argue that a sect as small as the Qumran community could not possibly have such a wide range of scrolls. Golb argues that the Qumran scrolls were the work of several different groups and that they were brought out of Jerusalem before the Roman siege of 70 CE Golb, *Qumran*, 127–151. Cf. Hirschfeld, *Qumran in Context*, 29–48.

of the Dead Sea Scrolls on the other, not only stem from different centuries, but also represent different literary genres. The Scrolls have been written by a community for internal use.

Philo and Josephus do not belong to the communities that they describe, and their presentation of the groups is a summary aimed at a non-Jewish world.²¹⁶ The Scrolls, the archaeological evidence from Qumran, and the literary sources on the Essenes will be discussed separately.

4.2.2. Meals in the Community behind the Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls contain two direct references to meals. One is in the Rule of the Community, 1QS 6.2-6 (see also 6.16-17. 24-25), also referred to as The Manual of Discipline, and the other is in The Messianic Rule, 1QSa 2.17b-22, also known as The Rule of the Congregation. 1QSa once formed part of Scroll 1QS, and is related in subject and script.²¹⁷

It is not entirely clear to whom the Rule of the Community and the Rule of the Congregation were directed.²¹⁸ Some scholars claim that they were written for the internal use of the Qumran community exclusively.²¹⁹ Others have claimed that the documents are directed to the broader Essene movement.²²⁰ The regulations in the document allow for the assumption that

²¹⁶ Bilde, "The Essenes in Philo and Josephus," 32–68: 67.

²¹⁷ James Hamilton Charlesworth, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts with English Translations*, Rule of the Community and Related Documents, vol. 1 (Tübingen, Louisville: Mohr Siebeck; Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 108.

²¹⁸ Arnold, *The Social Role of Liturgy in the Religion of the Qumran Community*, 86–87.

²¹⁹ If I speak of community (singular), this does not deny the possibility of more than one unified group but several groups. Cf. Charlotte Hempel, "Community Structures in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Admission, Organization, Disciplinary Procedures," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment*, eds. Peter W. Flint and James C. VanderKam (Leiden: Brill, 1998–1999), 67–92: 67.

²²⁰ A. R. C. Leaney, *The Rule of Qumran and its Meaning: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, NTL (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966); Michael A. Knibb, *The Qumran Community*, Cambridge Commentaries on Writings of the Jewish and Christian World 200 BC to AD 200, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 115; Jörg Frey, "Licht aus den Höhlen?: Der 'johanneische Dualismus' und die Texte von Qumran," in *Kontexte des Johannesevangeliums: Das vierte Evangelium in religions- und traditions-geschichtlicher Perspektive*, eds. Jörg Frey and Udo Schnelle (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 117–203: 143.

Qumran meals were held in the way that they are described and, at the same time, could have been addressed to a wider audience in order to ensure that meals outside of Qumran maintained the character of the Qumran meals.²²¹

Discussions on the nature and significance of meals in Qumran revolved mainly around the questions of whether they should be considered “sacred,” “cultic,” “holy,” or “sacramental”; whether they replace the sacrificial cult of the Temple in Jerusalem; and what their relation to the Eucharistic practice of early Christianity might have been. Many scholars have drawn parallels to the meals held at the Jerusalem Temple during pilgrimage festivals: the same priestly acts are required in Qumran as those which are performed in the Temple in Jerusalem. Thus, the communal meals in Qumran have been regarded as a possible substitution to Temple sacrifices.²²² Others have compared the meals in Qumran to the descriptions of the Eucharist in the New Testament.²²³

Lawrence Schiffman contends that the meals certainly had messianic overtones, but argues strongly that they were not sacral but eschatological in nature. The meals did not substitute for the Temple sacrifice, but rather represented some kind of preparation for (future) messianic banquets, from which sinners were excluded.²²⁴

²²¹ Arnold, *The Social Role of Liturgy in the Religion of the Qumran Community*, 87.

²²² Hartmut Stegemann, *The Library of Qumran, on the Essenes, Qumran, John the Baptist, and Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Leiden: Eerdmans; Brill, 1998), 191–92; M. Delcor, “Repas culturels Esséniens et Thérapeutes, Thiases et Haburoth,” 406–406.

²²³ E.g. Kuhn, with the claim that the Markan Last Supper is a cult meal similar to that of the Essenes: “The Lord’s Supper and the Communal Meal at Qumran,” 65–93. Cf. James C. VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today* (Grand Rapids, London: Eerdmans; SPCK, 1994); see also for the argument that meals were ritual but not sacramental: Stegemann, *The Library of Qumran, on the Essenes, Qumran, John the Baptist, and Jesus*.

²²⁴ Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Sectarian Law in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Courts, Testimony and the Penal Code* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1983), 191–200; Lawrence H. Schiffman, “Communal Meals at Qumran,” *RdQ* 10, no. 1 (1979). cf. Johannes van der Ploeg, “The Meals of the Essenes”.

4.2.2.1. 1QS

The prescriptions in 1QS 6.2-6 indicate strongly that the community behind the scrolls held communal meals. The frequency of such meals is unclear. 1QS 6.2-3 possibly represents instructions for daily gatherings.²²⁵ Whenever ten members met, there had to be a priest among them (1QS 6.4). It was the priest's role to preside over the meal.²²⁶ He was the first one to send his hand and to bless the bread and the new wine before the meal began (1QS 6.5).²²⁷ Where there were ten members there must have been a man who studied the Torah day and night (1QS 6.6).

It remains unknown what the menu consisted of. The reference to bread and to the new wine is probably symbolic of a meal that included other food and drink since bread was a staple food.

Access to the community's meals was strongly restricted. Information on the process of initiation is found in 1QS 6:13b-23, and includes regulations on access to the table.²²⁸ Possible candidates for membership in the community were people who freely offered themselves to Israel (1QS 6.13), who suited the discipline of the community (1QS 6.14), and who were ready to turn to the truth and depart from all deceit (1QS 6:15). Candidates had to go through a process of

²²⁵ Note Josephus' and Philo's descriptions of Essenes' meals as a daily happening, *BJ* 2.129 and *Hypothetica* 8.11.11.

²²⁶ For discussion of leadership and authority structures, see Hempel, "Community Structures in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Admission, Organization, Disciplinary Procedures," 67-92: 79-84.

²²⁷ Note the difference in leadership of other Jewish table fellowships in which this is the task of the *pater familias*. M. Delcor, "Repas culturels Esséniens et Thérapeutes, Thiases et Haburoth," 411.

²²⁸ Cf. also CD 15:5b-16:1a. For general discussion on the admission process, see Hempel, "Community Structures in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Admission, Organization, Disciplinary Procedures," 67-92: 70-73; Moshe Weinfeld, *The Organizational Pattern and the Penal Code of the Qumran Sect: A Comparison with Guilds and Religious Associations of the Hellenistic-Roman Period*, NTOA, vol. 2 (Fribourg, Göttingen: Editions Universitaires; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 43-44. For a discussion of the differences between the depictions of admission in the two scrolls in particular, see e.g. Philip R. Davies, "Who Can Join the 'Damascus Covenant'?" *JJS* 46 (1995).

admittance that included several steps and lasted two years, and had to pass a questioning by the counsel of the Many.²²⁹

Only after a year of probation was the candidate allowed to touch “the purity of the Many” (טהרה הרבים, 1QS 6.17-18, cf. 1QS 6.25, 7.3, 16, 19). The exact meaning of this access to the “purity of the Many” remains unclear. It is usually interpreted as a reference to the food of the community.²³⁰ Ritual baths are mentioned in 1QS 5:13. These are regularly considered to have taken place before the meal.²³¹ A second year of initiation was required before the candidate was allowed to touch the “drink of the Many.” Again, he had to pass a questioning before being admitted to drink. Like the “purity of the Many,” the “drink of the Many” (משקה הרבים, 1QS 6.20) is also subject to interpretation. It is usually interpreted as the new wine which is consumed during

²²⁹ Summarized: „Nach 1QS VI 13-21 ist der Eintritt in die Gruppe mit einer zweijährigen Probandenzeit genau geregelt: (1) Aufnahmeantrag an den *paqid*.- (2) Katechumenat bzw. vorläufige Unterweisung durch den *paqid*. - (3) Erste Dokimasie: Vorläufige Entscheidung über den Aufnahmeantrag durch die Vollversammlung.- (4) Erstes Jahr der Probandenzeit als vorläufige Mitgliedschaft, ohne Kontakt der ‚Reinheit der vielen‘ und ohne Besitzgemeinschaft.- (5) Zweite Dokimasie durch die Vollversammlung.- (6) Entrichtung der Eintrittsgebühr zur treuhänderischen Verwaltung durch den *m^ebaqer*, noch kein Kontakt zum ‚Getränk der Vielen‘.- (7) Dritte Dokimasie und endgültige Entrichtung der Aufnahmegebühr an den ‚Reinheiten‘ und Getränken. Wann der Initiationseid geleistet werden muß, geht aus diesem Reglement nicht hervor. Die Promotion des Initianden läßt sich also ablesen an der graduellen Entrichtung der Aufnahmegebühr und an der schrittweisen Annäherung an ‚Reinheiten‘ und Getränke.“ Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*, 242.

²³⁰ E.g. *ibid.*, 243. Alternative interpretations associate the purity of the Many with the communal meal as opposed to food in particular: mid-level initiates had access to the communal meal but they were excluded from the liquids. This could, however, have been a possible source of defilement for the full members, even if the mid-level initiates sat at the rear end of the room according to their rank. The purity of the Many can also be understood as a reference to levels of purity, possibly even “the whole life of correct handling of food, vessels and contacts with persons.” Quotation from John Pryke, “The Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion in the Light of the Ritual Washings and Sacred Meals at Qumran,” *RdQ* 5 (1966), 544; cf. Arnold, *The Social Role of Liturgy in the Religion of the Qumran Community*, 90–92; Friedrich Avemarie, “‘Toharat ha-Rabbim’ and ‘Mashqeh ha-Rabbim’ – Jacob Licht Reconsidered,” in *Legal Texts and Legal Issues: Proceedings of the Second Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies Cambridge 1995*, ed. International Organization for Qumran Studies, STDJ (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 215–229.

Finally, some have interpreted the purity of the Many as access to the bath of purification. This is supported by the practice of the Essenes: according to Josephus’ *BJ* 2.138 the initiates get access to the purification baths after the first year of initiation. Against the identification of the purity of the Many with the baths stands 1QS 5.13-14, according to which “entering into the water” is a prerequisite to touch the purity of the Many. The purity of the Many and the purification bath are thus two different things. Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*, 243.

²³¹ Charlotte Hempel, *The Laws of the Damascus Document: Sources, Tradition, and Redaction*, STDJ, vol. 29 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 85; Philip R. Davies, “Food, Drink and Sects: The Question of Ingestion in the Qumran Texts,” 161; Magness, “Communal Meals and Sacred Space at Qumran,” 81–112: 107. Support is found in Josephus *BJ* 2.129.

the meal.²³² The fact that candidates were only gradually admitted to the food and then the drink of the Many points to a great concern for purity. Liquids were obviously considered to be more susceptible to impurity than solid foods, and contract and transmit impurity more easily than solids.²³³ Those accepted into the community gave their possessions and property to the Community (1QS 6.17, 21).²³⁴

Those who were afflicted with any of the human un-cleannesses or who were physically handicapped were not allowed to enter the community (1QSa 2:4-9).²³⁵ This restriction, by extension, must also have applied to the community's meals.

1QS 6.24-7.25 lists the community's penal code. It describes a series of transgressions and offenses and their respective penalties consisting of exclusion from the purity of the Many (1QS 6.25, 27) and reductions of the person's food ration (1QS 6.25).²³⁶ In certain cases, there is a

²³² Klinghardt argues that the "drink of the Many" cannot refer to the drink mentioned in 1QS 6.5 because of practical reasons in the framework of concerns for purity. He doubts that mid-level initiates would, on the one hand, be allowed to eat at the communal meal, and, on the other hand, be excluded from the new wine. Klinghardt suggests that the "drink of the Many" refers instead to the Symposium, which follows the Syssition. According to Klinghardt this explains why the meal itself is only mentioned briefly: the central event for the life of the community was the counsel of the Many and had to be protected, Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*, 244–249.

²³³ Cf. Schiffman, *Sectarian Law in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 161–165. Oil seems to be a transmitter of defilement too: 4Q159 = 4Qorda, Frg. 13; cf. CD 12.16 and 11QT 49.11-12 (cf. *BJ* 2.123). See also Joseph M. Baumgarten, "Liquids and Susceptibility to Defilement in New 4Q Texts," *JQR* 85, no. 1/2 (1994).

²³⁴ For a discussion of communal ownership of property, see Hempel, "Community Structures in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Admission, Organization, Disciplinary Procedures," 67–92: 74–75. For a different interpretation denying communal ownership, cf. Matthias Klinghardt, "The Manual of Discipline in the Light of Statutes of Hellenistic Associations," in *Methods of Investigation of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Khirbet Qumran Site: Present Realities and Future Prospects*, ed. Michael Owen Wise, *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1994), 251–270: 255.

²³⁵ For a detailed discussion of excluded persons, see Cecilia Wassen, *Women in the Damascus Document*, SBLAB, vol. 21 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 144–54.

²³⁶ Cf. 1QS 8.16: A member of the community who strays from the ordinances deliberately is excluded from the pure-food; and 4QS265 1 i. Herrmann points out the interesting fact that: „Wiederholt findet sich die Kürzung der Essensration um die Hälfte (!) in 4Q265 (z.B. 4 i,5.8.10). Interessanterweise gibt es in den Strafbestimmungen von CD und 4QD^{a,b,d,e} dagegen keinen einzigen Beleg für eine solche Strafe.“ Randolph Herrmann, "Die Gemeinderegeln von Qumran und das Antike Vereinswesen," in *Jewish Identity in the Greco-Roman World*, ed. Jörg Frey (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 161–203: 199.

differentiation between exclusion and punishment, the character of which is unknown (1QS 6.27, 7.2-3, 4-5, 15-16).²³⁷

1QS 6.2-3 contains the regulations according to which members of the community shall eat together, bless together and take counsel together (ויחד יואכלו ויחד יברכו ויחד ייעצו).²³⁸ It is not entirely clear whether these three things took place in one “meeting,” or whether the community met separately for each. Some scholars argue that the community met separately for the meals, for prayers/benedictions, and again on another occasion for consultations.²³⁹ Klinghardt compares the information available from the Qumran texts with gatherings of voluntary associations and points out the structural similarities and analogies.²⁴⁰ He therefore claims that all three activities took place in one and the same meeting. Klinghardt argues that the communal eating, blessing and holding counsel parallels the three parts of any Hellenistic voluntary association’s meeting, which consisted of a meal, libations with hymns, and finally the symposium, which included drinking, counselling, conversation and teaching, and took place only periodically.²⁴¹ From this he deduces that the meals in Qumran must have taken place only periodically. This latter conclusion is not entirely convincing: similar patterns of structure do not necessarily imply that the Qumran community could not have met for meals more often, or even on a daily basis.²⁴² If, however, the

²³⁷ Herrmann suggests that, in fact, in 1QS 6-7 there is no more difference between exclusion and punishment. In 4QD^a 10 ii,12-13 the case is different, for a number of days is attributed to each one: to the exclusion as well as the punishment. *Ibid.*, 161–203: 200.

²³⁸ Some understand יחד as a *terminus technicus*, as the name of the community („Einungsgemeinde“) and not as “together”; Johann Maier, *Die Texte vom Toten Meer*, 2 vols. (München, Basel: Ernst Reinhardt, 1960), 24; followed by Wilfried Paschen, *Rein und unrein: Untersuchung zur biblischen Wortgeschichte*, SANT, vol. 24 (München: Kösel Verlag, 1970), 105.

²³⁹ E. g. Lawrence H. Schiffman, “Communal Meals at Qumran,” *Sectarian Law in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 191.

²⁴⁰ Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*, 217–249. For summary, see 245–249. Cf. also: Hans Bardtke, “Die Rechtsstellung der Qumran-Gemeinde,” *TLZ* (1961); Herrmann, “Die Gemeinderegel von Qumran und das Antike Vereinswesen,” 161–203.

²⁴¹ Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*, 227–244, 261–262.

²⁴² Cf. Herrmann, “Die Gemeinderegel von Qumran und das Antike Vereinswesen,” 161–203: 176–177.

community met separately for benedictions, this indicates that these benedictions were different from the ones said at the beginning of the meal. This would point in the direction of a separate prayer service, a precursor of the “mischnisch-rabbinischen ‘Wortgottesdienstes’ mit den Bestandteilen Gebet, Lektion und Predigt.”²⁴³

During the Session of the Many, each person took a place according to his rank. The priest ranked first, then the eldest and then the rest of the community (1QS 6.8-9; cf. 6.4). It is not clear whether these instructions for the seating applied only to the Session of the Many, or whether they also applied to the communal meal in 1QS 6.2-5.²⁴⁴ Fasting is hardly mentioned in the Qumran scrolls. This is conspicuous since fasting becomes important in the time of the Second Temple.²⁴⁵

4.2.2.2. 1QSa

1QSa was not only once physically attached to 1QS, but also shows significant similarities in terms of hierarchical organisation. The meal described in 1QSa is a special one. When God sends the Messiah to be with them (1Qsa 2.11), the community shall hold a feast.²⁴⁶ People shall enter in a prescribed order - first the priest, then his brothers, the Sons of Aaron, the priests, the men of the name - and then arrange the table of the community to eat and drink new wine (1QSa 2.12). There is a strict order for the seating: each member of the community according to his rank/importance/glory (1QSa 2.14-17).²⁴⁷ The order in which they partake is equally regulated:

²⁴³ Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*, 229.

²⁴⁴ In favour of this: Weinfeld, *The Organizational Pattern and the Penal Code of the Qumran Sect*, 28.

²⁴⁵ For discussion, see the “Excursus on the role of fasting at Qumran” in Arnold, *The Social Role of Liturgy in the Religion of the Qumran Community*, 101–105.

²⁴⁶ The manuscript text is corrupted and thus subject to interpretation, esp. 1QSa 2.11-12. For different conjectures and discussion, see Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*, 225.

²⁴⁷ The ranking is based on a yearly examination and (re)ranking according to the members’ knowledge and deeds (1QS 5:23-24). Note the difference between 1QS 6.4 (וְאִישׁ כְּחַכְּמוֹ יָשָׁב לְפָנָיו) and 1QSa 2.13-14 (וְיִשְׁבוּ לְפָנָיו אִישׁ לְפִי כְבוֹדוֹ). Charlesworth opts for “glory” as the most appropriate translation in the context of the messianic feast at the end time. Cf., *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 117, n. 70.

first the priest blesses the (produce or first-fruits of the) bread and the new wine, then the Messiah of Israel partakes, and after that all the congregation of the community (1QSa 2.18-21). The members of the community shall act according to the instructions for the feast of the council when as many as ten men meet together (1QSa 2.21). 1QSa 2:21-22 indicates that the statutes concerning the participation of a priest apply for every meal in which at least ten men are gathered.

From the text, it remains unclear how the presence of the Messiah is understood. Frank Moore Cross defines the meal as a “liturgical anticipation of the Messianic banquet.”²⁴⁸ The text allows for the assumption that this meal is enacted “as if” the Messiah were already here. The community expects the future Messiah to join their already existing table fellowship, and messianic participation adds nothing supplementary to their already ongoing practice. This implies that the community considers itself as already living according to the rules that they expect to be obeying in the future messianic age. 1QSa, differing from 1QS, presumes a community consisting of men, women and children (1QSa 1.4).²⁴⁹ The priest’s priority over the Messiah is noteworthy. He is the first to bless the meal and to begin eating.

4.2.2.3. Archaeological Evidence

Archaeological findings in Qumran complement the literary sources of the Dead Sea Scrolls, on the condition, however, that one supports the hypothesis that the archaeological remains and the

²⁴⁸ Frank Moore Cross, *The Ancient Library of Qumran and Modern Biblical Studies*, Haskell-Lectures, vol. 1956/57 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1958), 65. Charlotte Hempel claims that 1QSa was an account of regular meals of the (Damascus) community. Cf. idem “The Earthly Essene Nucleus of 1QSa,” *DSD* 3 (1996); cf. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 171.

²⁴⁹ On the role of women in Qumran cf. Wassen, *Women in the Damascus Document*. See also Jodi Magness, “Women at Qumran,” in *Debating Qumran: Collected Essays on its Archaeology*, ed. Jodi Magness (Leuven: Peeters Press, 2004), 113–149; Eileen Schuller, “Women in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment*, eds. Peter W. Flint and James C. VanderKam (Leiden: Brill, 1998–1999), 117–144.

Scrolls stem from the same community.²⁵⁰ Archaeological evidence points to the existence of at least one dining room.²⁵¹ The main dining room (L 77) was centrally located and separated from the rest of the site by *mikva'ot* that may have served for purification before the meals. The dining room was equipped with drainage and means for easy cleaning. The absence of evidence for benches that functioned as dining couches suggests that the participants in the communal meals of the Qumran community ate sitting and not reclining, following the biblical Jewish custom of sitting as opposed to the Greco-Roman custom of reclining.²⁵² Bones buried in Qumran indicate that the community probably consumed meat.²⁵³

A great number of vessels consisting largely of undecorated cups, bowls and plates for dining have been discovered. The small size of the dishes indicates that each member ate from an individual plate. Two kilns seem to have existed throughout the existence of the settlement. The presence of a potters' workshop close to these two kilns indicates that the community likely produced its own pottery to ensure its purity.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁰ The assumption that the scrolls and archaeological findings stem from the same community is widely held. For a refutation, see Hirschfeld, *Qumran in Context*, 45–48.

²⁵¹ For details and discussion of the archaeological evidence of dining rooms, see the section “Archaeological evidence for communal meals at Qumran” in Magness, “Communal Meals and Sacred Space at Qumran,” 81–112: 91–107.

²⁵² Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 126.

²⁵³ Jodi Magness suggests that this was the case but, as usual in antiquity, meat would not have been consumed often. Possibly the remains stem from the annual feast of the renewal of the covenant. *Ibid.*, 118, 121.

²⁵⁴ To this argument, Magness adds: “This accords with Josephus’s testimony that each member received an individual plate with a serving of food, in contrast to the usual custom of sharing common dishes.” Magness, “Communal Meals and Sacred Space at Qumran,” 81–112: 88–89. Cf. e.g. Lawrence H. Schiffman, “Communal Meals at Qumran,” 51.

4.2.3. Meals in the Essene Community/Communities

A number of literary sources refer to the Essenes. The most elaborate testimonies are those by Philo and Josephus.²⁵⁵ Josephus includes the major share of the information available on the Essenes' meals. Some supplementary information is found in Philo's *Hypothetica*, which has been handed on in Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica*.

4.2.3.1. Philo: *Quod omnis probus liber sit*

According to Philo's *Quod omnis probus liber sit* (Every Good Man is Free) 75-91, the Essenes were Jewish groups with high moral standards who lived a perfect and very happy life. They lived in villages, avoided cities because of the lawlessness of their inhabitants, and were characterized as a community with a high level of social fellowship, a common economy and communal meals.²⁵⁶ They did not offer animal sacrifices, but instead presented their own minds as a spiritual sacrifice (*Prob.* 75).²⁵⁷ There was not a single slave. Rather, they were all free, aiding one another (*Prob.* 79). The seventh day was accounted as sacred, and on that day, the Essenes abstained from work, went to sacred places called synagogues and sat in a prescribed order (*Prob.* 81).

²⁵⁵ For a comprehensive collection of antique sources on the Essenes, see Alfred Adam and Christoph Burchard, *Antike Berichte über die Essener*, 2nd ed.; KIT, vol. 182 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1972). For a general comparative study of the Essenes as portrayed in Philo and Josephus, see Bilde, "The Essenes in Philo and Josephus," 32-68. For discussion of the portrayal of the Essenes in Hippolyt, see Christoph Burchard, "Die Essener bei Hippolyt," *JSJ* 8 (1977); Roland Bergmeier, "Die Drei Jüdischen Schulrichtungen Nach Josephus Und Hippolyt Von Rom: Zu den Paralleltexen Josephus, B.J. 2,119-166 und Hippolyt, Haer. IX 18,2-29,4," *JSJ* 34, no. 4 (2003).

²⁵⁶ Expenses were common, the garments belonged to all of them in common and they shared the table. No member of the Essenes had a house absolutely of his own (*Prob.* 85-86).

²⁵⁷ The information regarding the offering of animal sacrifices by the Essenes is unclear at the least, if not contradictory, when compared to Josephus. While Philo clearly states that the Essenes did not offer animal sacrifices (*Prob.* 75), Josephus seems to refer to animal sacrifices offered by the Essenes (*Ant.* 18.19). Most scholars deny the existence of sacrifices in Qumran. They suggest that the bones found in Qumran are not remainders of ritual sacrifices because there is no altar in Qumran on which they would have been sacrificed. Neither is there a clear indication in the Scrolls that the community offered animal sacrifices outside the Jerusalem Temple. Magness suggests that the meals in Qumran functioned as a substitute for participation in the Temple cult. Thus the animals consumed at these meals had to be handled in an analogous manner to the Temple sacrifice even if they were not technically sacrifices; Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 118-120.

4.2.3.2. Josephus: *Bellum Judaicum*

The most extensive and informative passage on the Essenes is found in Josephus' *BJ* 2.119-161, in a discussion of meals in 2:128-134.²⁵⁸ According to Josephus' description, meals took place at the fifth hour, and again in the evening, thus presumably twice a day. The Essenes clothed themselves in white veils and then bathed in cold water prior to the meal. After this act of purification, they met in an apartment of their own into which only people of the community were allowed to enter. Then they entered a dining room. Josephus describes this moment as though the people entered into a holy precinct (καθάπερ εἰς ἄγιόν τι τέμενος, *BJ* 2.129). He thus explicitly draws a parallel between the dining place and the Temple. It has been taken for granted by many, especially in earlier scholarship, that the communal meals described by Josephus were holy, sacramental, cultic or sacred banquets.²⁵⁹ The baker served the loaves and the cook brought a single plate of food and set it before every member (*BJ* 2.130).²⁶⁰ The process of eating is not described, but the order in which people received their food was strictly dictated by their rank. The baker served the bread and the cook the food in separate dishes. What the "food" consisted of remains unknown; however, Josephus characterizes it as simple (2.151). The Essenes seemed to sit (καθισάντων, *BJ* 2.130) during their meals instead of reclining.²⁶¹ A priest said a benediction before the meal,

²⁵⁸ *Ant.* 18.18-22 offers a further short description of the Essenes. Minor accounts include *BJ* 1.78 (= *Ant.* 13.311-13), *BJ* 2.113 (= *Ant.* 17.346-348), *Ant.* 15.373-379, *BJ* 2.567, *Vita* 10-11, *Ant.* 13.171-73, cf. Bilde, "The Essenes in Philo and Josephus," 32-68: 47-49. Bergmeier offers a source-critical analysis of Josephus' accounts of the Essenes: Roland Bergmeier, *Die Essener-Berichte des Flavius Josephus: Quellenstudien zu den Essenertexten im Werk des jüdischen Historiographen* (Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1993).

²⁵⁹ E.g. Wilhelm Bousset and Hugo Gressmann, *Die Religion des Judentums im späthellenistischen Zeitalter*, HNT, vol. 21 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1926), 461; Marie-Joseph Lagrange, *Le Judaïsme avant Jésus-Christ* (Paris: Gabalda, 1931), 324, cf. 327, n. 3; Schürer, *Geschichte des jüd. Volkes*, 4. Aufl., Bd. II, 663 (the statement of the sacrificial character, however, is omitted in the English translation! Schürer and Vermès, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, 2.570).

²⁶⁰ This is contrary to the common practice in the Greco-Roman world where people usually ate from a common dish. Magness, "Communal Meals and Sacred Space at Qumran," 81-112: 91.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 81-112: 106.

before which no one was allowed to eat. After the meal, the same priest said another benediction, then they laid aside their garments and went back to work until they returned for another meal in the evening (*BJ* 2.131-132). Josephus notes that the Essenes' silence during the meal must appear as a tremendous mystery to an outsider (ὡς μυστήριόν τι φρικτὸν, *BJ* 2.133).²⁶² He ascribes the silence to the sobriety and modesty of the Essenes, but points out that the food and drink they received was abundant and sufficient for them (*BJ* 2.133).²⁶³

The Essenes were obedient to their superiors (*BJ* 2.134, 146). Josephus gives information on who could be part of the community and its meals, and who was excluded. Only members who had gone through the procedure of admittance were permitted to partake in the communal meals. A person who wanted to join the sect was not immediately admitted (*BJ* 2.137). Only after having proved that he could observe the group's continence could he partake of the waters of purification (*BJ* 2.138). After two more years, and if the person was considered worthy, he had to take tremendous oaths (*BJ* 2.139) before being allowed to touch the common food.²⁶⁴ The procedure by which one entered the Essene order was, therefore, organized around food regulations. Only after three years of preparation and testing could the candidate participate in the common food of the community (*BJ* 2.139). Permission to participate in the common meal was the culmination of the process. It indicated full membership and required obligations and restrictions on the side of the attendant.

If a member of the community was caught committing heinous sins, the community cast him out of its midst; he was forced to eat grass and to starve his body (*BJ* 2.143). This means that

²⁶² Klauck suggests that Josephus undoubtedly takes the Greek mysteries as points of reference. Klauck, *Herrenmahl und hellenistischer Kult*, 174.

²⁶³ Among the Essenes there is no appearance of poverty or excess of riches. Possessions are totally communal and stewards take care of the common affairs (*BJ* 2.122-123).

²⁶⁴ This depiction of gradual admission is strongly reminiscent of 1QS 6:13b-23.

he was bound to starve since he remained bound to the oath and customs of the community, without being allowed to partake of food elsewhere (*BJ* 2.144).²⁶⁵ Sometimes, out of compassion, the community readmitted people who were punished in this manner and who were on the verge of death, for they had suffered sufficiently (*BJ* 2.144). The Essenes were strict in their observation of the seventh day, preparing their food the day before (*BJ* 2.147). Josephus points out that the members of the Essene community would not eat food that was forbidden to them, even if tortured by the Romans (*BJ* 2.152).

Participation in the communal meal is a clear marker of a new identity. The admittance in the community transformed a person, taking him to a different state in which he remained for the rest of his life with his body and soul. Once admitted to the communal meal, the most inner circle of the community, the now full-fledged member of the community was not at liberty to leave it.

4.2.3.3. Philo's *Hypothetica* in Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica*

In his *Praeparatio Evangelica* (8.6.1.-11.18), Eusebius includes two passages from a lost work of Philo, *Hypothetica*. In the second of these two passages, Philo describes the lives of the Essenes, and briefly mentions their daily communal meals (*Hypothetica* 8.11.11) and their love of frugality. The treasurer was in charge of buying food in abundance (*Hypothetica* 8.11.10). In terms of communal meals, *Hypothetica* adds little to the previously discussed sources.

4.2.4. Conclusion

In the Dead Sea Scrolls, supported to some extent by archaeological evidence, and in the ancient Hellenistic sources on the Essenes, the respective communities' meals emerge as the central

²⁶⁵ The distinction here is not between Jew and non-Jew but between Essenic Jews and other Jews. Albert I. Baumgarten, "Finding Oneself in a Sectarian Context: A Sectarian's Food and its Implications," in *Self, Soul and Body in Religious Experience*, ed. Albert I. Baumgarten, SHR (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 125–147: 132.

expression of full membership. Whoever participated in the meals belonged to the most inner circle of the community. The Essenes' meals are characterized as being strikingly similar to the meal references in the scrolls, while some differences remain.²⁶⁶

The few passages about meals in the Dead Sea Scrolls portray a highly organized and hierarchic community. The community's ordinary meals, referred to in 1QS 6.2-6, and the celebration enacting the arrival of the Messiah, described in 1QSa 2, correspond closely. The meals were marked by strict seating arrangements, and they were presided over by a priest (or by priests) who said blessings. The meals were limited to those who aligned themselves with the strict rules of the community and had gone through a process of initiation that lasted two years and involved a number of steps. Admittance to partaking in solid food was granted at one stage, and admittance to the communal drink only at the next and later stage. Full participation in the communal meal including the drink was the last step of initiation and the most restricted and protected activity. These restrictions reflect a great concern for purity, with archaeological findings supporting the literary evidence of the community's anxiousness surrounding purity. Participation in the meals depended upon moral and behavioural conditions with misdeeds and offenses of various kinds punished by means of cuts to the food rations, or by exclusion from the table of the community.

The communal meal is a very strong and visible sign of being included in the community and a manifestation of its purity and "priestly stamp."²⁶⁷ At the same time, the communal meal

²⁶⁶ Cf. Kuhn, "The Lord's Supper and the Communal Meal at Qumran," 65-93: 70; Bilde, "The Common Meal in the Qumran-Essene Communities," 145-166: 161-163. For discussion of differences, cf. Bilde, "The Common Meal in the Qumran-Essene Communities," 145-166: 159.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 145-166: 162.

reinforces the community's social structure.²⁶⁸ Admittance into the community transformed a person to a different state in which he remained for the rest of his life with his body and soul. Table fellowship signified the end of the inclusive process. Meals were not the place of negotiation of membership, but its visible symbol. The common meal "manifested the congregation as the only legitimate expression as the 'true', 'pure', 'holy' chosen people."²⁶⁹

Hellenistic literary sources portray the Essenes' meals as very similar to those in Qumran in a number of ways. The meal was highly structured. Food was distributed by a baker and a cook according to people's ranks. A priest said the benedictions. The meals were highly exclusive in character and held in silence. Only those having gone through a process of initiation that included several steps were admitted. Once admitted to the meal, a member was no longer at liberty to leave the community.

4.3. Therapeutae

4.3.1. Introduction

In his treatise, *De Vita Contemplativa*, Philo describes a peculiar Jewish community called Therapeutae.²⁷⁰ Scholars often deal with this community on the periphery of investigations into the

²⁶⁸ Arnold, *The Social Role of Liturgy in the Religion of the Qumran Community*, 100.

²⁶⁹ Bilde, "The Common Meal in the Qumran-Essene Communities," 145–166: 163.

²⁷⁰ This name is sometimes translated as "devotees [of God]," cf. Joan E. Taylor and Philip R. Davies, "The So-Called Therapeutae of *De Vita Contemplativa*: Identity and Character," *HTR* 91, no. 1 (1998), 4–10. The only other ancient source on the Therapeutae apart from Philo is Eusebius from Caesarea's *Historia Ecclesiastica II* 16-17, from the 4th century CE. Eusebius is clearly dependent on Philo's treatise in his portrayal and even explicitly refers to Philo as his own source (*Hist. Eccl. II* 16.2 and throughout the passage), for which reason his testimony will not be discussed further in the following. On the Philonic authorship cf. the respective excursus by Conybeare in Philo, *About the Contemplative Life*, ed. Conybeare, F. C. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895), 258–358.

Essene movement, and most often consider it as one peculiar group of a greater Essene movement.²⁷¹

Whether Philo's treatise is fictional or describes reality remains an insolvable scholarly dispute, although the majority accepts the historical existence of a Jewish group called Therapeutae.²⁷² The Therapeutae lived a very solitary life. Their communal gatherings for meals and prayers were the only occasions on which they met.

4.3.2. Philo's "De Vita Contemplativa"

Philo describes the Therapeutae as a widespread movement that fled the cities in order to live in solitude (*Cont.* 19-20). The group was especially numerous in Egypt, particularly around Alexandria, on the shores of the Mareotic Lake (*Cont.* 21-22). Each one of the very plain houses in the settlement contained a sacred room (ἐν ἐκάστη δέ ἐστιν οἴκημα ἱερόν, ὃ καλεῖται σεμνεῖον καὶ μοναστήριον, *Cont.* 25) and was set apart from the next house in order to assure solitude. Before joining the Therapeutae, candidates relinquished their belongings to their families and friends (*Cont.* 13), and thereafter devoted their life entirely to contemplation. The Therapeutae spent six days of the week in these buildings, occupying themselves with contemplation and the composition of psalms and hymns (*Cont.* 29), never leaving them or even looking out (*Cont.* 30).

²⁷¹ Philo himself explicitly links the Therapeutae to the Essenes at the beginning of the treatise by stating that he now turns to the Therapeutae after having dealt with the Essenes (*Cont.* 1). For the relationship between the Therapeutae and Essenes, see Schürer and Vermès, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, 2:595–297; cf. Bilde, "The Common Meal in the Qumran-Essene Communities," 145–166: 154; Bilde, "The Essenes in Philo and Josephus," 32–68: 65.

²⁷² For the debate, see Siegfried Wagner, *Die Essener in der wissenschaftlichen Diskussion: Vom Ausgang des 18. bis zum Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Eine wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Studie, BZAW, vol. 79 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1960), 194–202; Ross S. Kraemer, "Monastic Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Egypt: Philo Judaeus on the Therapeutrides," *Signs* 14, no. 2 (1989), 347.

They held communal meals connected with worship on the seventh day, and a special festal gathering every seven weeks.²⁷³ There was a communal building (κοινὸν τοῦτο σεμνῆλον, *Cont.* 32) in which the Therapeutae regularly met for meals and worship. If the Therapeutae met for the described gatherings only, and they spent the rest of their time in solitude, then, the meal and celebration gatherings were possibly the only occasion in which the community's structure and hierarchy was visible at all. Philo's description of these meal gatherings takes up a great portion of his short treatise. During the week, some of the Therapeutae fasted for three days, others for even six (*Cont.* 34-35). They refrained from eating until sunset, and then only consumed simple foods and never more than necessary to sustain their bodies, always avoiding satiety (*Cont.* 37).

When they gathered on the seventh day, they sat down (καθέζονται) in an orderly fashion: women on one side, men on the other, all of them holding their hands inside their garments, the right one between the chest and the dress, and the left hand down by the side, close to the flank (*Cont.* 30). Women and men were separated into two enclosures from where they could hear but not see each other (*Cont.* 32-33). The seating order was according to members' age (*Cont.* 30). Age, and thus precedence, was not determined by the individual's biological age, but was defined by the time that a person had spent in the community (*Cont.* 67). Entrance into the community erased status markers that were otherwise important within society at large, the duration of membership overriding them. Entrance into the community could therefore be considered as some kind of rebirth. The seating order mirrored the social hierarchy of the Therapeutae. The order was

²⁷³ For brief descriptions of the Therapeutae's meals, cf. Johannes van der Ploeg, "The Meals of the Essenes," 174; Bilde, "The Common Meal in the Qumran-Essene Communities," 145-166: 154-158; Schürer and Vermès, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, 2.591-593. More elaborately: Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*, 183-216. Klinghardt claims that the only difference between the weekly gathering and the festal gathering is the fact that in the latter a nightly celebration (Pannychis) follows (191). For the interpretation that the festal gatherings included two meals, cf. Joseph Heinemann, "Therapeutai," in *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, eds. Georg Wissowa and Wilhelm Kroll (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1893-1980), V A, 2 (= 2. Reihe, Tb. 10), 2321-2346: 2332.

divided along gender lines, even segregating them into different rooms so that women and men could only hear, but not see, each other.

Even if all Therapeutae were “equal,” there was the new, if flatter, hierarchy defined by age. The eldest (ὁ πρεσβύτατος, *Cont.* 31) who was at the same time the chief doctrinal expert, conducted the events of the seventh day’s gathering and gave a lecture on the precise meanings of the law. Philo emphasises the fact that the Therapeutae consisted of men as well as women, and that they had equal deliberation and decision in the community (*Cont.* 32).²⁷⁴ Although both sexes are represented among the Therapeutae, they led their lives in celibacy. Philo points out that most of the women were elderly virgins (γηραιὰὶ παρθένοι, *Cont.* 68).²⁷⁵

The Therapeutae basically consumed as little as possible, and when they did consume, the food consisted of plain bread and a seasoning of salt, sometimes hyssop, and the drink, spring water (*Cont.* 37). Philo explicitly states that the Therapeutae avoided consumption of things that bore blood, such as meat, as well as wine (*Cont.* 73-74). Those who could fast three or six days a week did so and only ate at the meeting on the seventh day. Interestingly, the consumption of food that took place after a period of non-consumption was a communal event. Despite its frugal

²⁷⁴ For further reading on women members of the Therapeutae, see Ross S. Kraemer, “Monastic Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Egypt: Philo Judaeus on the Therapeutrides”; Peter Richardson, “Jewish Voluntary Associations in Egypt and the Roles of Women,” in *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World*, eds. John S. Kloppenborg and Stephen G. Wilson (London: Routledge, 1996), 226–251; Holger Szesnat, “‘Mostly Aged Virgins’: Philo and the Presence of the Therapeutrides at Lake Mareotis,” *Neot* 32, no. 1 (1998); Joan E. Taylor and Philip R. Davies, “The So-Called Therapeutae of *De Vita Contemplativa*: Identity and Character”; Joan E. Taylor, “Virgin Mothers: Philo on the Women Therapeutae,” *JSP* 12, no. 1 (2001); Joan E. Taylor, *Jewish Women Philosophers of First-Century Alexandria: Philo’s ‘Therapeutae’ Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), esp. 227–264.

²⁷⁵ Virginité is defined by an admiration for love and wisdom, rather than by preservation of chastity. The Therapeutrides seem to have been unmarried if they were not actually virgins. Possibly they were simply post-menopausal as argued by Ross S. Kraemer, “Monastic Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Egypt: Philo Judaeus on the Therapeutrides,” 353. Joan Taylor points out that women philosophers such as the women Therapeutae could be seen as dangerously sexual and that they were a rhetorical problem for Philo. Taylor argues that Philo’s insistence on women Therapeutae’s virginité and, at the same time, maternal and thus feminine qualities, serves to ensure that they were seen as good. Joan E. Taylor, “Virgin Mothers: Philo on the Women Therapeutae.”

character, the intake of food, therefore, played an important role in the community's weekly gatherings (*Cont.* 34-35). Philo continues to describe the festal meetings by contrasting them to the fooleries (φλυαρία, *Cont.* 64) of Gentiles' banquets.²⁷⁶

The festal meetings of the Therapeutae took place every seven weeks.²⁷⁷ The Therapeutae dressed in white robes, stood in a row, raised their eyes and hands to heaven and began their meeting by a common prayer (*Cont.* 66). Still in the same order, they sat down in rows: the men on the right, the women on the left, not on costly cushions but on rugs made of coarse material, or on simple couches (*Cont.* 69).²⁷⁸

Since the Therapeutae despised slavery, the young free men (οἱ νέοι, *Cont.* 70-72) provided service. They were probably younger members of the community. The president (ὁ πρόεδρος), who directed the festal gatherings, discussed a passage of the Scriptures allegorically.²⁷⁹ According to Philo, women were equal members in the community. The leadership roles, however, during the ceremonial parts of the community's gatherings seemed to lie in the male realm.

The presbyter seemed to be the "oldest" person of the community, with a special role but not a different status. He seemed to be a "primus inter pares." The response to the president's

²⁷⁶ In an elaborate passage on Gentiles' convivial meetings, Philo emphasizes their gluttony, drinking and noise (*Cont.* 40-63).

²⁷⁷ Some scholars identify these feasts with Shavuot/Pentecost: Ross S. Kraemer, "Monastic Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Egypt: Philo Judaeus on the Therapeutrides," 345; M. Delcor, "Repas culturels Esséniens et Thérapeutes, Thiases et Haburoth," 415.

²⁷⁸ Klinghardt points out that the seating order is an order of reclining: „Ganz wichtig ist, daß diese Regelungen zur Sitzordnung natürlich genau genommen eine Gelageordnung sind (κατάκλισις § 69): Die wöchentlichen Versammlungen und das Hauptfest sind Gelage; die Beschreibung der Klinen in § 69 – Holzgestelle mit Polstern aus Papyrus und Lehen – läßt daran keinen Zweifel.“ Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgesellschaft*, 194.

²⁷⁹ On this also, cf. Klinghardt: „Auch die Darstellung des Vortrages (§ 75-79), den der Vorsteher im Liegen hält, bewegt sich vollständig im Rahmen dessen, was oben (S. 128f) zur sympotischen Tischunterhaltung ausgeführt wurde: Es handelt sich entweder um Schriftauslegung oder um die thematische Erörterung eines Problems, das von einem der anderen aufgeworfen wurde.“ *Ibid.*, 196.

speech was applause, followed by a first round of singing (*Cont.* 78-79). After that, one person rose and started singing a hymn, either of his own composition or by some other poet of the past. Others rose and joined in the chant (*Cont.* 80). Thereafter, the young men brought in the table with the most holy food (τὸ παναγέστατον σιτίον, *Cont.* 81), consisting of bread seasoned with salt and hyssop. In terms of menu, the festal meals, therefore, resembled the weekly gatherings. The members were not satiated by this food, but they got “drunk” during the festal gatherings, not by alcohol, however, but because of the nightly celebrations. The chants were thus considered a valuable replacement, or an even better “drink” than the wine that was consumed during the meetings of most groups in antiquity.

The gatherings seem to have been very joyful events, and the feast continued until the early morning (τὴν ἱερὰν ἄγουσι παννυχίδα, *Cont.* 83). The members all stood up and sang hymns. At first they were divided into two choirs, men and women singing separately, and finally all of them joined together and formed a mixed choir. Philo associates this singing with the chants at the Red Sea in old times (*Cont.* 83-87). At dawn the Therapeutae stood facing the east, and when the sun rose they stretched their hands to heaven and said a prayer before each one returned to their own sanctuaries and studies. Philo describes the state of mind that the Therapeutae reached during these nocturnal celebrations as a drunkenness in which there is no shame (τὴν καλὴν ταύτην μέθη, *Cont.* 89), and mentions that the Therapeutae were even more awake at the end than when they started the celebration.

4.3.3. Conclusion

The Therapeutae are described in ancient literature as a Jewish community living separately from the rest of society. It consisted of men and women who lived a celibate and ascetic life. The diet of

the Therapeutae was strictly vegetarian. Fasting was a central marker of identity of this community, and the more a member fasted, the better. Communal meals were held regularly, and according to the sources, appear as the exclusive occasion on which the members of the community met for a highly modest meal of bread, hyssop, salt and water. The meal was the occasion for them to sing and to interpret the Scripture. These meals were structured by a strict hierarchy that became visible in the order in which participants were seated. Determined not by their biological age, however, but by the duration of their membership in the community.

The identity of this group formed itself exclusively around meal gatherings. It was marked by a segregate character, asceticism, a certain degree of gender equality, and hierarchy according to the duration of membership.

4.4. Haburoth

4.4.1. Introduction

The sources about ancient Jewish *haburoth* include several scattered passages in the *Mishna*, the *Tosefta* and the *Talmud*.²⁸⁰ According to Neusner, a *habura* was “fundamentally a society for strict observance of laws of ritual cleanliness and holy offerings. This was, indeed, all it might have been.”²⁸¹ In the following, I understand *haber* as a term that denotes a member of such a society or order, or of a union of people for the purpose of carrying out the observations of the laws of

²⁸⁰ The first thorough investigation into the *haberim* was undertaken by Jacob Neusner, “The Fellowship (הבורה) in the Second Jewish Commonwealth,” *HTR* 53, no. 2 (1960).

For early secondary literature on the *haberim*, cf. also Solomon J. Spiro, “Who Was the Haber?” *JSJ* 11, no. 2 (1980), 186, n. 1.

For an overview of the different contexts in which the root ‘*hbr*’ appears in the *Mishna* and the *Talmud*, see Arnold S. Rosenberg, “The Last Supper of Jesus and the Anti-Havurah Meal,” *Mehqerei Hag* 11 (1999), 19–20.

²⁸¹ Jacob Neusner, “Qumran and Jerusalem: Two Jewish Roads to Utopia,” *JBR* 27, no. 4 (1959), 289; cf. Baumgarten, Albert I.; ed., *Self, Soul and Body in Religious Experience*, SHR, vol. 78 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 251.

“purity” and “impurity” to their fullest possible development. *Haburoth* existed in the first century CE, and possibly earlier than that.²⁸²

There is no scholarly consensus as to whether the *haberim* and the Pharisees were two distinct entities or rather two different names for the same group of people, possibly a self-designation used by the Pharisees.²⁸³ In pursuit of their aims, the *haberim* did not isolate themselves from society or create special centres for themselves, nor did they form an organized group with officeholders having particular functions.²⁸⁴ Detailed *halakhoth*, however, regulated relations between them and their environment in all spheres of life.

²⁸² TSanh 3,4 from the time of the second temple, describes groups of *haberim* and groups of *amme ha'aretz* who eat different things. Whereas the *amme ha'aretz* would eat the second tithe, the *haberim* would not do so. Strack and Billerbeck take this passage as evidence that the *amme ha'aretz* and the *haberim* were seen as two distinct groups even before 70 CE. Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Das Evangelium nach Markus, Lukas und Johannes und die Apostelgeschichte erläutert nach Talmud und Midrasch*, 6th ed; Str-B, vol. 2 (1974), 504–07.

²⁸³ Rivkin has dedicated an entire article to the question of the definition of Pharisaism and argues that the Pharisees and the *haberim* are not identical. Ellis Rivkin, “Defining the Pharisees: The Tannaitic Sources,” *HUCA* (1970). On the matter, see also: Jacob Neusner, “Qumran and Jerusalem: Two Jewish Roads to Utopia,” 285, 287; Jacob Neusner, “The Fellowship (הבריה) in the Second Jewish Commonwealth,” 128; Aharon Oppenheimer, *The 'Am ha-Aretz: A Study in the Social History of the Jewish People in the Hellenistic-Roman Period*, ALGHJ, vol. 8 (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 119; Edward Parish Sanders, *Paulus und das palästinische Judentum: Ein Vergleich zweier Religionsstrukturen*, SUNT, vol. 17 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), 144–45; Tal Ilan, “Paul and Pharisee Women,” in *On the Cutting Edge: The Study of Women in Biblical Worlds*, eds. Jane Schaberg, Alice Bach and Esther Fuchs (New York: Continuum, 2004), 82–101: 87–92; Mary Ann Beavis, *Jesus & Utopia: Looking for the Kingdom of God in the Roman World* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2006), 69.

²⁸⁴ The social character of the *haburoth* has been addressed by a number of scholars. According to Jacob Neusner, the *haburoth* did not have articulate structures as did other parallel communities. Their common bond was the meticulous observance of food laws, Jacob Neusner, “The Fellowship (הבריה) in the Second Jewish Commonwealth,” 126; cf. Baumgarten, who points out the complete absence of rabbinic sources regarding “any registration of property, any supervisor, or any central administration of the \square aburah.” Baumgarten, *Self, Soul and Body in Religious Experience*, 251.

Solomon Spiro suggests that the *haberim* were a class of people, a council of administrators that dealt with the collection of taxes. He argues that the body of evidence including rules and regulations suggests that the *haberim* formed a sect, but that this assumption is flawed by the absence of historical indications of its existence as such. According to Spiro, the *haber* is thus a member of a “strictly religious group” but, at the same time, is a “regular functionary of the community” in that he is in charge of the administration of tithes. His duty is to collect and distribute the tithes. Solomon J. Spiro, “Who Was the Haber?” (Quotation 186).

It seems likely that the *haburah* is more like a social “status” than a tight-knit association; cf. Richard Samuel Sarason, “Mishnah-Tosefta Demai,” in *The Law of Agriculture in the Mishnah and the Tosefta: Translation, Commentary, Theology*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Handbook of Oriental Studies (Leiden: Brill, 1979 (Leiden: Brill)), 2, 803–1103: 810.

4.4.2. Mishna Demai 2 and Tosefta Demai 2

Elaborate passages about *haberim* are found in *Mishna Demai 2* and *Tosefta Demai 2*, both discussing regulations regarding foods and issues related to the process of becoming a *haber*.²⁸⁵

4.4.2.1. Mishna Demai 2

A highly important topic is the handling of liquids and fresh fruit. The two pericopes of *Mishna Demai 2:2-3* first define the criteria for trustworthiness (*ne'eman*) in the matter of tithing, and then the criteria for being an associate (*haber*). In each case, four rules must be followed. One who wanted to be reliable tithed what he ate, what he sold, and what he purchased, and did not accept the hospitality of an *am ha'aretz*. Rabbi Jehuda also added that he should not raise small cattle and should not be profuse in making vows or be addicted to laughter, and he should not defile himself for the dead; but he should, however, minister in the house of study. One who undertook to be a *haber* (second pericope) did not sell wet or dry produce to an *am ha'aretz*, and he did not purchase from him wet produce, nor did he accept the hospitality of an *am ha'aretz*. He did not receive the *am ha'aretz* as his guest while the *am ha'aretz* was wearing his own clothes. The status of both the *ne'eman* and the *haber* was defined in contrast to that of an *am ha'aretz*. An *am ha'aretz* was assumed to separate the *terumah*, but not to tithe, and not to observe the purity laws.

Mishna Demai 4:2 discusses the case of a man who compels his fellow by a vow to eat with him and the fellow does not deem him trustworthy regarding tithes. This fellow may eat with him during the first week if he states that he has tithed food, even if he does not deem him

²⁸⁵ These two passages slightly differ from each other in certain points. Most likely, the latter is a commentary on the former: *Ibid.*, 2, 803–1103: 898.

trustworthy. On the second Sabbath, however, he may not eat with him until he has given tithe, even if the other vowed to derive no benefit from him if he did not eat with him.

According to *Mishna Demai* 6:6, the school of Shammai rules that olives should only be sold to a *haber* (for otherwise they could be defiled because they contain liquid), whereas the school of Hillel allows it for anyone who pays tithes. The most scrupulous of the school of Hillel followed the ruling of Shammai. Rulings like this may have had significant influence on the economy between *haberim* and *amme ha'aretz*.

Mishna Demai 7:1 deals with the case of an invitation. If someone is invited by his fellow to eat with him and his fellow does not deem him trustworthy regarding tithes, on the eve of the Sabbath he may say:

Of what I shall set apart tomorrow let part be Tithe with the rest of the [First] Tithe adjoining it; let what I have made Tithe be Heave-offering of Tithe for the whole, and let the Second Tithe be to the north or south of it and rendered fit for common use by [the setting aside of its redemption] money.

4.4.2.2. Tosefta Demai 2

Tosefta Demai 2:2-3 offers lengthy passages discussing *Mishna Demai* 2:2-3.²⁸⁶ The *Tosefta* cites the *Mishna* at the outset, and then illustrates and develops the *Mishna*'s principle in a series of cases. The first discussion regards initiation requirements and procedure (*Tosefta Demai* 2:3-8). Becoming a *haber*, thus being admitted to a *haburah*, included several steps. Neusner

²⁸⁶ Cf. Jacob Neusner, "Qumran and Jerusalem: Two Jewish Roads to Utopia," 287–88.

differentiates three steps.²⁸⁷ Each step introduced a new concern and served to educate the candidate as to his obligations, as well as to govern the candidate's behaviour.

The first step concerned tithing: the candidate had to give all the required tithes and heave-offerings. When he did so, he reached the status of "reliable" or "trustworthy" person (*ne'eman*).²⁸⁸ The second step added to this the concern for ritual purity of the candidate's own food, the cleanness of hands, and later the cleanness of ritually-sacred foods. Any food produce that he consumed had to be in a state of ritual purity. The last step concerned the food of the novice's domain and the purity of his clothes. Now he had to guard all food from defilement, both at home as well as in commerce. This meant that he did not sell any food at all to an outsider; nor did he purchase food that had been wet from that outsider.²⁸⁹ He also had to see that the clothes of an outsider did not touch his foodstuffs.

It is highly interesting to note that the *haberim* cared about food before it reached the table, from tithing until consumption. Furthermore, it was the food itself that could get defiled, and such defilement needed to be prevented. The novice also refrained from interaction with outsiders in terms of hospitality: he could neither accept an outsider as a guest, nor could the *haber* himself be a guest of an outsider.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁷ Jacob Neusner, "The Fellowship (הבִּוּרָה) in the Second Jewish Commonwealth," 129; Jacob Neusner, "Fellowship through Law: The Ancient Havurah," in *Contemporary Judaic Fellowship in Theory and in Practice*, ed. Jacob Neusner (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1972), 13–30: 18–19.

²⁸⁸ The difference between *ne'eman* (trustworthy) and *haber* (associate) is usually defined by the fact that the *ne'eman* follows the rules of tithes and that the *haber* additionally follows the Levitical laws of purity. This interpretation has been challenged by Solomon Spiro who claims that the *haber* and *ne'eman* are two different classes, the former concerned with tithes, and the latter with purity; Solomon J. Spiro, "Who Was the Haber?" 187–88.

²⁸⁹ The principle that food can become susceptible to impurity if wetted is not unique to the *haberim* and has biblical roots. In an extension of the provisions in Lev 11 which concern the susceptibility of wetted foods to the impurity of swarming creatures to corpse uncleanness, rabbinic *halacha* devotes an entire tractate of the *Mishna* to the theory of susceptibility (מכשירין). Cf. Joseph M. Baumgarten, "Liquids and Susceptibility to Defilement in New 4Q Texts," 91–92.

²⁹⁰ Jacob Neusner, "The Fellowship (הבִּוּרָה) in the Second Jewish Commonwealth," 134.

Tosefta Demai 2:9 discusses whether those who had to leave the *haburah* can be readmitted or not.²⁹¹ *Tosefta Demai* 2:10-11 elaborates on whether a candidate who has observed the laws previously is accepted immediately or after a certain period of time during which he is educated regarding the laws: 30 days regarding liquids and 12 months regarding garments (Shammai), or equally 30 days regarding both of them (Hillel). Upon completion, the novice can be accepted fully as a *haber*. This means that there are no more barriers between him and other *haberim*: all other *haberim* may buy food from him and he can come into contact with their food and ritually contaminable belongings without mutual fear of defilement.

According to *Tosefta Demai* 2:11, the rinsing of hands was the first obligation of a *haber*.²⁹² *Tosefta Demai* 2:13-14 states that admittance into the *haburah* required a declaration in front of the *haburah*. What the declaration consisted of remains unknown. *Tosefta Demai* 2:14-19 discusses household relations in terms of the status of *haber*. It is clear that membership in a *haburah* was open to men, women, children and slaves alike and on an individual basis: women could be members even if they were married to an *am ha'aretz*, and children could be members even if their parents were not. Membership in a *haburah* could, thus, cut across family ties.²⁹³

Tosefta Demai 2:16 rules that those who come into the house of a *haber* (wife, slaves) have to adopt the laws. *Tosefta Demai* 2:17 rules that a woman or a slave who goes into the house of an *am-ha'aretz* remains in the status of the *haber* until (i.e. unless) doubts are raised. Violation of the laws of purity and the oath to follow these laws resulted in expulsion from the *haburah*.

²⁹¹ On readmittance, cf. bBekh 31a.

²⁹² On the obligations of a *haber*, cf. bBekh 30b.

²⁹³ Jacob Neusner, "Qumran and Jerusalem: Two Jewish Roads to Utopia," 287; Jacob Neusner, "The Fellowship (הבירה) in the Second Jewish Commonwealth," 127-28.

Tosefta Demai further discusses various cases of problematic interactions between *haberim* and *amme ha'aretz*, most of which pertained to food. A number of cases shall be discussed.

Sarason argues that *Demai's* rulings especially represented the logic of the *haberim*:

The central and generative ruling is that one who wishes to be deemed trustworthy must tithe all produce which he sells or gives to another, with the result that common folk also will be eating produce properly tithed by him. This indicates that \square *haberim* see themselves responsible for the status of food eaten by all Israel. They wish all Israelites to tithe their produce properly, and to behave like \square *haberim* as regards the cleanness of foodstuffs. These larger issues lie behind rulings on the tractate's narrower subject, which is the resolution of doubts in various situations having to do with tithing obligations. The problem of doubtfully tithed produce arises only when a particular group within Israelite society resolves to follow a more stringent tithing procedure than that observed by its countrymen.²⁹⁴

Tosefta Demai 2:20 prohibits a *haber* to ask an *am ha'aretz* to bring a loaf and give it to another *haber* because *haberim* do not send foodstuffs that require conditions of purity by the agency of an *am ha'aretz*. 2:21 prohibits a *haber* to send a loaf to an *am ha'aretz*, because *haberim* do not give foodstuffs requiring conditions of cleanness to an *am ha'aretz*.

Tosefta Demai 3:1 states that food requiring conditions of cleanness cannot be prepared for an *am ha'aretz* while *Tosefta Demai* 3:2 deals with the case of someone who accidentally ate the heave-offering of an *am ha'aretz*.

Tosefta Demai 3:3 addresses the case of a *haber's* heave-offering that got mixed together with that of an *am ha'aretz*. *Tosefta Demai* 3:6 prohibits a *haber* to serve at a banquet of an *am ha'aretz* unless everything has been tithed under his supervision. This passage indicates that, under certain circumstances, *haberim* would participate in a meal shared with *amme ha'aretz* under the

²⁹⁴ Sarason, "Mishnah-Tosefta Demai," 2, 803–1103: 810.

condition that the laws of tithing were properly observed. At the same time, the passage indicates that it might have been easy in theory for the *haberim* to separate themselves from the *amme ha'aretz*, but not in real life.²⁹⁵

Tosefta Demai 3:7 shows that even if a *haber* or a son of a *haber* partook in a banquet, this was not a warrant that the food had been tithed. *Tosefta Demai* 3:8 rules that if an *am ha'aretz* and a *haber* own a shop together, this is sufficient warrant that the produce that they sold had been tithed.

Tosefta Demai 3:9 deals with the case where one person working in a business was a *haber* and the other an *am ha'aretz*. The food in a *haber's* shop was still considered pure even if an *am ha'aretz* worked there. An *am ha'aretz* who worked in a *haber's* store presumably respected his employer's scruples. *Tosefta Demai* 3:9 further addresses the case of a husband who was a *haber* while his wife was not. In this case, another *haber* would have been allowed to buy food at the *haber's* store, but not to accept hospitality because he could not rely on the purity of the food prepared by the non-*haber* woman. If, however, the woman was part of a *haburah*, a *haber* could dine in her house but he could not buy from her non-*haber* husband. If a slave or a child of an *am ha'aretz* affirmed the purity of the food in their house despite their master/father being an *am ha'aretz*, a *haber* may have been a guest in that house.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁵ Cf. Strack and Billerbeck, *Das Evangelium nach Markus, Lukas und Johannes und die Apostelgeschichte erläutert nach Talmud und Midrasch*, 511.

²⁹⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 511.

4.4.3. Further Rabbinic Sources on Haburoth

Further rabbinic sources undergird the notion developed in *Mishna* and *Tosefta Demai* that the status of a *haber* was defined through issues of purity as regards the Levitical laws connected with food.

Tosefta Sanhedrin 3:4 discusses that an *amme ha'aretz* would eat lesser holy things but not second tithe, while the *haberim* would eat neither lesser holy things nor second tithes.

Tosefta Ma'asseroth 3:13 states what food (grapes, olives) could be sold to *haberim* exclusively for fear of defilement through an *am ha'aretz*, and what might have also been sold to an *am ha'aretz* (wheat) even at the risk of defilement. A *haber* should only give his food to a neighbour if he knew that this neighbour removed the dough-offering and prepared the food in purity. The same passage also shows that Levites did not automatically qualify as trustworthy in terms of purity: a Levite should not have been given tithes unless it is known that he had prepared his food in purity.

Mishna Shebi'ith 5:9 states that a woman could lend a sifter, a sieve, hand-mill or oven to her neighbour even if the latter was suspected of transgressing the Seventh Year law, but she was not allowed to winnow or grind with her. The wife of a *haber* may lend a sifter or sieve to the wife of an *am ha'aretz* and she could winnow, grind or sift corn with her. But as soon as she poured water over the flour, she could not draw near to her, since help could not be given to someone who was committing transgression.

bGittin 61b states that someone who brought his wheat to a miller who was a Samaritan or an *am ha'aretz* could assume that the state of the cereal regarding tithe was preserved, i.e. that it had not been substituted by untithed produce, but he could not assume the same regarding purity: to be certain that the wheat remained pure, he could not bring it to an *am ha'aretz* miller. *Tosefta*

Demai 4:27, however, states the opposite: someone who mills at the mill of an *am ha'aretz* or a Samaritan, need not scruple with regard to impurity (i.e. that the wheat will be wetted down and rendered susceptible, and then made impure by the *am ha'aretz* or Samaritan). He has to scruple, however, if he brings his wheat to the mill of a Gentile.

bBerakhot 43b lists six things that are unbecoming for a *haber*, one of which is to take a meal in the company of an *am ha'aretz*. The reason why the *haber* should refrain from dining with an *am ha'aretz* is that, perhaps, he will be drawn into their ways.

Tosefta Aboda Zarah 3:9-10 discusses the case of the marriage between the daughter of a *haber* and an *am ha'aretz*. While Rabbi Meir categorically prohibited the marriage of the adult daughter of a *haber* and only allowed for the marriage of a *haber's* daughter who was not of age to an *am ha'aretz*, the majority allowed both cases on the condition that she did not have to prepare foods requiring conditions of purity while subject to his supervision.

Regulations like these examples show that the status of a *haber* had many consequences for everyday life.²⁹⁷ Whether or not *haburoth* regularly held communal meals cannot be argued with certainty. The suggestion that they took place regularly every Friday afternoon remains a scholarly extrapolation.²⁹⁸ Some communal meals, however, likely took place. This is indicated for example

²⁹⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 501–519. and Jacob Neusner, “The Fellowship (הבִּירוּה) in the Second Jewish Commonwealth,” for more examples and discussion.

²⁹⁸ Oesterley, for example, suggests that the *haburoth* met regularly on Friday afternoons in private houses in order to “partake of a social meal” in a “distinctly religious atmosphere.” W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Jewish Background of the Christian Liturgy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), 167-170, quotation p. 167. His argument is not very strong, however, since he fails to adduce sources to undergird his hypothesis. Oesterley’s position is adopted by Ismar Elbogen, *Der jüdische Gottesdienst in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, 4th ed. (Leipzig 1913; reprint, Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1962), 107; cf. M. Delcor, “Repas culturels Esséniens et Thérapeutes, Thiases et Haburoth,” 422–23. Rosenberg argues that: “The *□averim* lived together in groups. They ate meals together in a dining room, and it is known that they ate a portion of the tithes they collected, just as the priest did.” Arnold S. Rosenberg, “The Last Supper of Jesus and the Anti-Havurah Meal,” 25. Cf. Rosenberg: “If Spiro is correct in his theory that the *□avurot* described in *Mishnah Demai* were groups of tithe collectors, it is plausible to conclude that they ate regular meals together from what they collected, not just on special occasions.” Arnold S. Rosenberg, “The Last Supper of Jesus and the Anti-Havurah Meal,” 35–36. See also: Johannes van der Ploeg, “The Meals of the Essenes,” 174.

by *Mishna Erubin* 6.6's discussion of whether each of five *haburoth* assembled in the same hall needs its own *Erub* or whether one *Erub* suffices for all of them.

4.4.4. Passover Haburah

Apart from *Mishna Demai* and *Tosefta Demai*, *haburoth* are discussed in *Mishna Pesahim*. *Demai's* strict regulations and requirements for the status of a *haber* are absent for the most part in *Pesahim*. According to Rosenberg, "The year-round *haverim* were the arm of the Second Temple in the towns and villages of Israel."²⁹⁹ Participation in a *Pesah haburah*, however, is open to anyone in whose name a paschal offering has been brought to the Temple in Jerusalem.

The rules regarding membership and structure of Passover *haburoth* are very much practical ones, intended to structure the crowds, to keep order and prevent conflict. Each person could eat only one portion, and only of the roasted lamb assigned to his *haburah*. Aharon Rosenberg has convincingly argued that the same word, *haburah*, is used for two different institutions. It thus makes sense to differentiate between "Passover *haburah*" versus "tithing *haburah*," or simply "*haburah*," as the term is used in this study.³⁰⁰

4.4.5. Conclusion

The terms *haburah/haburoth* refer to a movement within Judaism that was closely related to the Pharisees, but not necessarily identical to them. A year round *haburah* was distinct from the ad hoc *Pesah haburah*.

²⁹⁹ Arnold S. Rosenberg, "The Last Supper of Jesus and the Anti-Havurah Meal," 37.

³⁰⁰ Rosenberg notes: "The shared word \square *avurah* reflected a shared quality of ritual purity acquired or preserved by the members of the group through their observance of prescribed ritual. The paschal sacrifice and meal were necessary to avoid further impurity. That is why ritual purity was not required of the participants." Arnold S. Rosenberg, "The Last Supper of Jesus and the Anti-Havurah Meal," 33.

The life conducted by the “class” of the *haberim* was marked by their strict observance of Levitical law, a great concern for purity issues, tithing and heave-offerings. These concerns become manifest in agricultural, commercial, personal and social relationships. The laws and regulations regarding foodstuffs show that the status of a *haber* entailed many consequences in everyday life. The purity of food was a potent means of creating identity among the *haberim*.

The status of a *haber* was granted after a period of education and probation. Men and women, even children and slaves were treated differently. The grant of status of a *haber* was largely connected to issues related to food. The process of admittance entailed increasingly strict observance of purity regulation. This means that members were subject to increasing restrictions in their ability to eat and generally interact with non-members. Basically, a *haber* could dine with other *haberim*, but could not accept an outsider’s hospitality, and he could only accept this outsider into his home if he put on ritually clean garments.

By strictly following the laws, the *haberim* created a barrier between members and outsiders, between themselves and the people called *am ha-aretz*. Interaction with an *am ha-aretz* was always a possible source of defilement. Since the *haberim* did not separate themselves physically from the greater society by moving elsewhere, but observed strict rules regarding interaction with *amme ha-aretz*, this caused several issues that complicated their living together. The rules and regulations served to distinguish between *haberim* and *amme ha-aretz*.

The meticulous observation of the laws of *terumah* (heave-offering) and *ma’aser* (tithing), as well as the regulations regarding impurity and purity, were identity markers for the *haberim*. The *haberim* regarded themselves as responsible for the status of food eaten by all of Israel. The

aim was for all Israelites to follow the laws of purity like the *haberim*. Living the life of a *haber* meant to follow an “alternative ... road to Utopia.”³⁰¹

4.5. Pauline Communities

4.5.1. Introduction

Among many other topics, Paul, whose task it is to be the apostle to the Gentiles, and who is eager to build and support Christ-believing communities, addresses meal gatherings in various places in his letters: 1 Cor 8-11; Gal 2; Rom 14. Paul’s epistles form the earliest direct evidence of Christ-believers’ gatherings including meals. They are letters to specific communities and as such *ad hoc* writings, dealing with particular events and problems arising within these groups.

4.5.2. Corinth

1 Corinthians addresses the question of consumption of food offered to idols. In the community of Christ-believers in Corinth, some members obviously still participate in meals in the pagan temples (1 Cor 8:10, 10:20-21), while others are invited to meals where the food served has been offered to idols (1 Cor 10:27-32). This creates conflicts among the Christ-believers.³⁰²

³⁰¹ Jacob Neusner, “Qumran and Jerusalem: Two Jewish Roads to Utopia,” 285.

³⁰² For a thorough study of the several specific conflicts, the internal dynamics and the relationship between Paul and the members of the community, cf. Panayotis Coutsoumpos, *Paul and the Lord’s Supper: A Socio-Historical Investigation* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005). Coutsoumpos argues that the conflict at the Lord’s Supper is rooted primarily in some of the members’ difficulty in adapting to their new social and religious community.

For an attempt to read 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1 against the specific social context of the letters with a reconstruction of the immediate occasion of the letter and the wider situation, see Peter David Gooch, *Dangerous Food: 1 Corinthians 8-10 in its Context*, ed. Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1993).

For an even more thorough investigation on the wide range of cults in Corinth in search for evidence of sacrificial food consumed in cults present at the time of composition of 1 Corinthians, see John Fotopoulos, *Food Offered to Idols in Roman Corinth: A Social-Rhetorical Reconsideration of 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1*, WUNT, vol. 151 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

Some among the addressees seem to claim superior knowledge including the notion that idols are really nothing (1 Cor 8:4). Paul himself is not equally as convinced that the many gods and many lords are truly nothing (1 Cor 8:5), but he concedes that they are nothing in the sense recognized by Christ-believers that only the one God is true (1 Cor 8:6). There are some in Corinth, whom Paul calls the weak, who fail to share this conviction.³⁰³ They thus participate in idolatry against their own faith, and thereby defile their weak conscience (1 Cor 8:7). Such an offence is to be avoided; thus the addressees should, for the sake of the others, refrain from eating food offered to idols.

From 1 Cor 8 it is clear that idol food is a source of conflict since people are of different opinions as to whether Christ-believers can eat it or not. The conflict around idol food indicates that food is more than nourishment for the body. Some consider it as a carrier of defilement; it is related to higher powers, to which it has been sacrificed. The intake of such food has an effect on the person who believes in its defiled status and defiling potential. Such an understanding highly influences the communal intake of food. Diverse interpretations of the potential of idol food disturb and even endanger the unity of the community.

Paul addresses the issue of food offered to idols again in 1 Cor 10:1-22. He offers a theological critique of eating idol food, at least when done on the ground of a pagan temple. His addressees ought to flee from idol worship (1 Cor 10:14). The primary focus of Paul's instructions seems to be idol food eaten in pagan temples. By placing idol food before statues of pagan deities

For an investigation with a particular focus on the rhetorical aspects of 1 Corinthians as a document of "semi-official and a semi-public character," see Joop Smit, *'About the Idol Offerings': Rhetoric, Social Context and Theology of Paul's Discourse in First Corinthians 8:1-11:1* (Leuven: Peeters Press, 2000).

³⁰³ For a thorough discussion of the strong and the weak, see Volker Gäckle, *Die Starken und die Schwachen in Korinth und in Rom: Zu Herkunft und Funktion der Antithese in 1Kor 8,1-11,1 und in Röm 14,1-15,13*, ed. Jörg Frey, WUNT II, vol. 200 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).

at temple meals, diners seem to have believed that the gods participated in the meal with them. Consequently, those Corinthian Christ-believers who partook of such meals and ate idol food were guilty of idolatry. Paul then defines the cup of the blessing as the community (κοινωνία) of the blood of Christ, and the bread as the community of the body of Christ. He equates the participants to one loaf of bread, to one body. The one bread and body symbolically represent those who partake together (10:16-17; cf. 12:12). Table fellowship is thus a binding covenant. Participation in the communal meal unites Christ-believers with Christ and among themselves. The communal cup stands for the community with Christ who has died, and the bread stands for the community of believers. Paul does not want his addressees to be in community with demons. The table of the Lord and the table of demons are irreconcilable (1 Cor 10:21).

Paul expresses his interest in a peaceful community undisturbed by inner queries by giving practical instructions on how to proceed in cases of doubt (1 Cor 10:25-28). The principle is simple: “All things are lawful, but not all things are beneficial. All things are lawful, but not all things build up” (1 Cor 10:23). The guideline is to seek not one’s own advantage and conscience but that of others (1 Cor 10:24, 29, 32), to give offense to neither Jews nor Hellenes, nor to the Assembly of God. Thus, the Corinthians are free to buy and eat food from the market without investigating its origin, or partake in a meal offered by a non-believer. If, however, someone points out that the food has been offered to idols, then the believers should avoid eating it out of consideration for the one who informed them, and for the sake of conscience. The overall guideline of behaviour remains to do everything for the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). Paul concludes his argument by appealing to his own example (1 Cor 10:33-11:1).

From 1 Cor 11:17-34, we can deduce that Christ-believers in Corinth gathered for a communal meal, which Paul defines as the “Lord’s Supper.” Paul reminds the Corinthians of what

he has previously told them to do. He directly addresses the factions that exist between Christ-believers in Corinth (σχίσματα ἐν ὑμῖν ὑπάρχειν, 1 Cor 11:18; cf. 1 Cor 1:10, 12:25; δεῖ γὰρ καὶ αἰρέσεις ἐν ὑμῖν εἶναι, 1 Cor 11:19), and criticizes their meals for lacking the character of a Lord's supper (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον, 1 Cor 11:20). Social differences are visible in that everyone goes ahead with their own supper,³⁰⁴ and as a result, some remain hungry while others get drunk. Paul suggests that they should dine in their homes so that the poor do not get humiliated. Paul's letter to the Corinthians mirrors community tensions that arise from issues around table fellowship. Granted that, in antiquity, fellowship essentially took place at the table, Paul's advice to eat at home implies that the prime occasion of socializing is ruled out. The communal meal is a locus for the creation of the identity of Christ-believers. Consequently, it is also the place where any dysfunction in the community becomes obvious. Table fellowship can work both ways: It can create identity and community, but it can easily work the other way.

Paul continues to recount what had happened during the night when Jesus was handed over and repeats what he claims to have received from the Lord, then handed on to the Corinthians:³⁰⁵ the blessing over the bread, the qualification of the bread as the "body for you," and the exhortation to do the same in his memory. It is safe to assume that Paul was aware of Passover context of this meal (cf. 1 Cor 5:7-8).³⁰⁶ After supper, Jesus also blesses the cup, calls it the new

³⁰⁴ Keener notes: "They treat the Lord's meal like any association's banquet, which means that, despite the Greek and biblical ideals of equality, their seating and treatment highlighted their social stratification." Craig S. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 96.

³⁰⁵ That Paul "received" and "handed on" (11:23) is conventional ancient language for carefully transmitted tradition (e.g., Josephus *Ant.* 13.297, 408). Although Paul might mean he received the revelation directly from Christ (cf. Gal 1:12, 16), more likely he refers to the Jesus tradition (as in 7:10); when later sages claimed to have "received" words from "Sinai," everyone understood that the words had been mediated through tradition (often explicit, e.g., *m. Pe'ah* 2:6; *Ed.* 8:7; *Yad.* 4:3). *Ibid.*, 98.

³⁰⁶ Keener notes: "Although blessings over bread and wine belonged to every Jewish meal, the redemptive interpretation of the elements in a Passover setting provided the context for the sacrificial interpretation of Jesus' death Paul notes here (11:24-25; cf. 10:18-21; Mk 14:22-24)." *Ibid.*, 97.

covenant in his blood, and again exhorts listeners to do this in his memory each time they drink it. Paul qualifies the eating of this bread and the drinking of the cup as a proclamation of the Lord's death until he returns. From this comes the notion, according to Paul, that "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor 11:27).

Participation in the Lord's Supper is steeped in surplus meaning. It is performed in memory of the crucified Lord and calls into mind the covenant. The Lord's Supper is bound to moral/ethical prerequisites. Only upon self-examination are the Corinthians allowed to partake. If they eat the bread and drink from the cup without discerning the body, they eat and drink judgment against themselves. Again, Paul concludes by giving some very practical advice: When the Corinthians come together to eat they shall wait for one another. Whoever is hungry shall eat at home so that when they gather, it is not for their condemnation. Paul, thus, vituperates the schisms that appear during the gatherings of Christ-believers connected to the Lord's Supper. Social inequalities come forth in this context. The unity of the community as the body of Christ is threatened by these social inequalities.

4.5.3. Galatia

In Galatians 2:11-13, Paul deals with issues of ethnicity and the table fellowship of Christ-believers from Jewish origins with those from Gentile origins. Paul addresses a communal meal in Antioch at which Peter/Kephas partook as a guest among Christ-believers who had earlier participated in the Greco-Roman cult and are, therefore, not Jews. This is in accordance with Paul's own teaching, but perhaps not with Jewish traditions. When the people from James arrive,

Peter backs out of table fellowship with the Gentile Christ-believers fearing censure from those from the circumcision.³⁰⁷

Paul tells the Galatians that he has admonished Peter for having ceded under pressure from those accompanying James. Obviously, Peter has neglected the Christ-believers' foundational principles: eating in community as the body of Christ. Communal dining is the occasion for the community's unity and identity to become most visible. Hypocrisy is not the core problem, but rather the possible consequence of Peter's behaviour. In avoiding table fellowship with Gentile Christ-believers, Peter threatens the unity of the community; he sets an example for other Christ-believers of Jewish origin. If all Jewish Christ-believers follow Peter's example, this means that the unity of the body of Christ is broken. According to Paul, Christ-believers faced the choice between body unity and Jewish purity.³⁰⁸

4.5.4. Rome

Romans 14 echoes problems that Paul had already dealt with in 1 Corinthians. While 1 Corinthians deals with idol meat, knowledge and interaction with non-Jews, the discussion in Romans 14 is "more Jewish" in that it involves purity and impurity as well as the observance of the Sabbath. Paul addresses the behaviour of the "strong" and the "weak" of the community.³⁰⁹ The addressees of the letter are to welcome those who are weak in faith. The weak are characterized as those who eat only vegetables. Others, i.e. the strong ones, dare to eat anything.

³⁰⁷ The identity of those "ἐκ περιτομῆς" is an issue of discussion. Cf. e.g. Ben Witherington, *Grace in Galatia: A commentary on St Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 154–56.

³⁰⁸ Cf. "'Separate but equal' really meant inherently unequal and certainly not united.... In Paul's view one would have to choose between Jewish purity or body unity.... Even if a Jewish Christian chose to be law-observant he or she should not withdraw from fellowship with Gentiles. The truth of the Gospel involved Jew and Gentile united in Christ. In other words, Paul is arguing that the 'truth of the Gospel' is the only real basis for true unity in the Christian church." Ibid., 158–159.

³⁰⁹ Cf. again Gäckle, *Die Starken und die Schwachen in Korinth und in Rom*.

The strong shall be considerate of the weak and not force them to do anything, for if the weak eat anything that they cannot eat in good faith, they defile their consciences. By stating twice that no food is impure in and of itself Paul places a stronger emphasis on this issue.³¹⁰ Nevertheless, according to Paul, it is good to abstain from meat and wine and from doing anything that makes fellows stumble (Rom 14:21). This can hardly be interpreted as a recommendation of strict vegetarianism or complete abstention from wine. Rather, it means that if a strong person shares table fellowship with a weak person, the strong should abstain from any behaviour that might offend others rather than risk causing a weak person to stumble or even lose faith. And if the consumption of bread and wine is a problem for the weak, then the strong shall renounce it for the sake of the table fellowship. If no wine or meat is on the table, there are no grounds for the weak to take offence. As William S. Campbell argues,

Paul's intention is to promote harmony *within* diversity rather than to remove the diversity – otherwise what would be the significance of saying 'Let everyone be fully convinced in his own mind' or 'whatever is not of faith is sin'?³¹¹ Not the different lifestyles as such are the problem, but the attitudes about them are: Paul has no quarrel with those who continue to observe the law so long as they do not seek to compel others to live like them! Gentiles must not regard observance of the Jewish law as incompatible with Christian faith, and Jews must not regard it as essential to Christian faith.³¹²

The advice to the Romans demonstrates that Paul recognizes the social importance of food matters. He is concerned with inculcating behaviours that unite rather than divide the weak and the

³¹⁰ Witherington and Hyatt note: "One may suspect that Paul is so adamant here, almost swearing an oath, because he had often been challenged on this view, for it meant a sharp break with one of the crucial and distinctive aspects of early Judaism, and in this case he is doing the rhetorically apt thing by forestalling any challenge to this view by any of the 'weak' in the audience." Ben Witherington and Darlene Hyatt, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 338, n. 49.

³¹¹ William S. Campbell, "The Rule of Faith in Romans 12.1–15.13," in *Pauline Theology: Romans*, eds. David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson, *Pauline Theology* (1995), 259–286: 272.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 259–286: 283.

strong. Nevertheless, there are things that are even more important and Christ-believers should rather concentrate on these. The Kingdom of God is about things superior to earthly issues such as food and drink (Rom 14:17). It is preferable to abstain from behaviours that might offend others and that cause fellow believers to stumble or even lose faith (Rom 14:19-21).

4.5.5. Conclusion

Paul addresses several issues related to communal dining and food. These passages demonstrate that communal dining is an important locus for the formation of community among Christ-believers, but also as a source of division. Table fellowship can work both ways: it can create identity and imperil community.

Whether or not idol food is defiling is one of the central dividing issues. In Paul's view, food is never defiled ontologically. But as soon as a person believes that demons exist, and that the food offered to them is thus defiled, this person cannot consume the food. If food offered to idols is believed to be idol food, then it actually defiles the person that believes it. The issue over idol food demonstrates that food, along with its consumption, is essentially more than mere nourishment. Christ-believers shall be considerate of each other and not let issues of food lead to factions. Paul stresses the importance of behaviour that makes for peace and that leads to the up-building of fellow Christ-believers. While all things are lawful, not all are beneficial. The guideline is to seek not one's own advantage and conscience but that of others (1 Cor 10:24, 29, 32); to make no offense to neither Jews nor Hellenes, nor to the Assembly of God.

Paul writes about the Lord's Supper as an act of remembering Jesus in which moral and ethical purity is a precondition for participating in this meal. Paul criticizes the schisms in the

community's gatherings connected to the Lord's Supper because through them social differences become apparent and threaten the unity of the community in the body of Christ.

The events in Antioch led Paul to address ethno-religious problems of table fellowships in his letter to the Galatians. If Christ-believers of Jewish origin avoid table fellowship with Christ-believers of Gentile origin, the unity in the body of Christ is disturbed. Ethnic distinctions are a threat to the unity in Christ that is expressed through table fellowship. Paul's epistles reflect awareness of the importance of communal dining as a locus for community and identity formation. Every dining issue addressed in his epistles demonstrates that there is a surplus meaning that exceeds the mere intake of calories. Communal dining should serve the unity of the community members with each other and with the body of Christ.

4.6. Communal Meals in the Acts of the Apostles

4.6.1. Introduction

The Acts of the Apostles narrates the events in the early Christ-believing movement after the death of its founder. The main theme throughout this narrative is the building of a worldwide Christ-believing community.³¹³ The first chapters are set in Jerusalem and discuss Jesus' resurrection, the great commission, Jesus' ascension, the beginning of the apostles' ministry, and the day of Pentecost. The final chapters portray Paul's conversion, his ministry and imprisonment. Throughout the Acts of the Apostles, there are several accounts of communal meals.³¹⁴

³¹³ As opposed to the Gospel of Luke which narrates the deeds, death and resurrection of Jesus. The purpose of Acts is highly disputed. For an overview, see Robert F. O'Toole, "Why did Luke write Acts (Lk-Acts)," *BTB* 7, no. 2 (1977).

³¹⁴ For recent research and bibliography on meals in the Acts of the Apostles, see Eugene LaVerdiere, *The Breaking of the Bread: The Development of the Eucharist According to the Acts of the Apostles* (Chicago IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 1998); John Paul Heil, *The Meal Scenes in Luke-Acts: An Audience-Oriented Approach* (Atlanta:

The Acts of the Apostles was probably written toward the end of the first century CE, and is usually attributed to the author of the Gospel of Luke.³¹⁵ The long-held view that the document was primarily addressed to an audience of Christ-believers has been challenged in recent years, and the Jewish character of the book has been stressed.³¹⁶

4.6.2. Acts 2:42-47; 6:1-7; 9:9, 18-19

The first account of meals in Acts includes a large crowd. Those who welcomed Peter's message were baptized, about 3,000 every day (Acts 2:41), and as a result, they devoted themselves to the teachings of the apostles (προσκαρτεροῦντες τῇ διδασκίᾳ τῶν ἀποστόλων, Acts 2:42), to the fellowship (τῇ κοινωνίᾳ, Acts 2:42), to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers (τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου καὶ ταῖς προσευχαίς, Acts 2:42). Those who were gathered believed and were said to have had all things in common. They gathered daily and spent much time together in the temple, and they broke bread at home and rejoiced in their hearts when eating the food and praising God (Acts 2:46).³¹⁷ This fellowship attracted many newcomers: day by day their numbers increased (Acts

Society of Biblical Literature, 1999); Reta Halteman Finger, *Of Widows and Meals: Communal Meals in the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

³¹⁵ Cf. e.g. Jacob Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 17th ed. KEK, vol. 3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 79–86, with detailed discussion on alternative dates. The place of the origin of Acts remains unknown.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 89–90 with discussion and references. Bock has proposed a brief summary on the purpose of Acts: “In sum, Luke, a sometime companion of Paul, put the content of tradition into his own words. He did this in order to indicate how a new movement emerging out of Judaism came to incorporate Gentiles into the community of God. At the core of the activity and preaching stands the work of God through the now exalted Jesus, who in turn distributes the Spirit as a sign that the new era and salvation have come to both Jews and Gentiles.” Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 24.

³¹⁷ The breaking (κλάω, κλάσις and derivatives) of bread appears several times in Acts (2:42, 46; 20:7, 11; 27:35). Scholars are divided over the question of the character and significance of this act. Many argue that “breaking the bread” refers to the celebration of the Eucharist, e.g. Bauernfeind, Otto, and Gerhard Kittel, eds. *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1949–1973), 729; Ian Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC.NS, vol. 5 (Leicester: Intervarsity Press, 1980), 83; Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Acts*, Social-Science Commentary (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 144. Doubtfully: Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Carlisle: Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1998), 160–61. For the claim that the breaking of bread may simply refer to an ordinary meal, especially in view of the fact that the act of breaking bread regularly opened the

2:47). All who believed and were together had all things in common. Private possessions were sold and the proceeds distributed to those in need (Acts 2:44; cf. 4:32-35).

The existence of communal meals is also implied in Acts 6:1-7.³¹⁸ The Hellenists complained to the Hebrews that their (the Hellenists') widows were neglected in the distribution of food.³¹⁹ The twelve called together the whole community to solve the problem.³²⁰

Food issues are mentioned with regard to Paul's auditory vision. After the auditory experience of the Lord, in which a voice asks Saul why he persecuted him, the blinded man neither ate nor drank for three days (Acts 9:9). Ananias gave Saul his sight back. Paul received baptism, took food, regained strength and remained with the disciples in Damascus for several days (Acts 9:18-19).

4.6.3. Acts 10:1-11:18

The account in Acts 10:1-11:18 discusses table fellowship between Jews and Gentiles. First, Peter is hungry and has a vision in an altered state of consciousness (Acts 10:10-16).³²¹ Peter sees a sheet replete with all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air being lowered

Jewish meal, see, e.g.: Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 155; Bock, *Acts*, 150–151. See also: Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 772–773.

³¹⁸ Through an analysis of the pattern in the story of the Hebrews and the Hellenists in Acts 6:1-7, Tyson suggests that the author conceives of a communal meal as a symbol for peace, unity, and well-being of the early Christian community. Tyson shows how this peace is threatened and restored in Acts 6:1-7. According to him, the appointment of the Council of the Seven serves to preserve the communal meal. Joseph B. Tyson, "Acts 6:1–7 and Dietary Regulations in Early Christianity," *PRS* 10, no. 2 (1983).

³¹⁹ On the major problem of identification of the Hellenists, see the classification and discussion of various options by Everett Ferguson, "The Hellenists in the Book of Acts," *ResQ* 12, no. 4 (1969).

³²⁰ In reconstructing the social world of Acts 2:42-47 and 6:1-6, Reta Halteman Finger suggests a redefinition of *diakonia*. She argues that *diakonia* can refer either to service received or service done. In 6:1-6 the widows are deprived of their role as servers, a major and honourable role for women in the Hellenistic world. Finger further argues that the Jerusalem believers were of necessity a consumption and production community and that every household member participated in the communal meal. Finger's interpretation of 5:42–6:6 argues that meals were communal and not a service to the poor. Finger, *Of Widows and Meals*.

³²¹ On "alternate states of consciousness," see Malina and Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Acts*, 185–187.

from an opening in heaven to the ground. A voice orders him to kill and eat, but Peter refuses because he has never eaten any food that was common or unclean (κοινὸν καὶ ἀκάθαρτον, Acts 10:14), implying that the edible creatures in the sheet are unclean.³²² The voice tells Peter not to call common what God has made clean (ἃ ὁ θεὸς ἐκαθάρισεν, σὺ μὴ κοίνου, Acts 10:15). Later, Peter explicitly states that, while it is common knowledge that Jews do not share table fellowship with Gentiles, these regulations are now overcome, for God has shown him that he should not call anyone profane or unclean (Acts 10:28). This idea is reasserted in the next passage of that account.

After his vision in Joppa, Peter receives the people sent by the centurion Cornelius (Acts 10:23) as guests. Cornelius has earlier been described as a devout man who feared God, and along with him all members of his house (Acts 10:2).³²³ The next day, Peter accepts Cornelius' invitation, goes to his house in Caesarea, and receives hospitality (Acts 10:24).³²⁴ Once there, as mentioned above, Peter declares that God has shown him that he should not call anyone profane or unclean (Acts 10:28). Behind this lies the custom that people who observe laws concerning food do not share table fellowship with those who do not observe these rules. Table fellowship with Cornelius and his household appears possible only because Peter has had a vision in which all food has been declared clean. By extension, therefore, the vision pertains not only to the actual purity of food, but also to the relationship between different people. Finally, this is expressed

³²² Malina/Pilch doubt that Peter's vision is really about food, but rather about profane and unclean people. Food laws, however, replicate the rules concerning people. *Ibid.*, 77; cf. Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, 3rd ed. rev. and expanded (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 161–80.

³²³ Malina/Pilch suggest that Cornelius qualifies as a "God-fearer" and, as such, "he is not very different from totally assimilated Hellenistic Israelites." Malina and Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Acts*, 76.

³²⁴ On the question about what Luke means when referring to "God-fearers," cf. the chapter "A Closer Look – Gentile God-fearers – The Case of Cornelius" in Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 341–346.

explicitly when Peter says that God has shown him not to call anyone common or unclean (Acts 10:28b-29).³²⁵

When Peter addresses Cornelius and his household in a speech (Acts 10:34-43), he first stresses that God shows no partiality (οὐκ ἔστιν προσωπολήπτης ὁ θεός, Acts 10:34), and that whoever fears him and does what is right is acceptable to God.³²⁶ Two characteristics are required of a person from any nation: fear of God and performance of righteousness. This implies that ethnic differences shall be transcended and that it is no longer necessary to belong to the Jewish ethnos. Its basic norms, however, must be observed by all, thus pointing to the development of a hybrid identity. In his speech, Peter refers back to the table fellowship witnessed and experienced by those who have eaten and drunk with the risen Christ (Acts 10:41). Jesus is remembered as the one who commanded how to preach, the one about whom the prophets testify, and the one through whose name all believers receive forgiveness for their sins.

At Cornelius' house, Peter rhetorically asks whether there should be any reason not to baptize those people (i.e. the pagans, τὰ ἔθνη, that are hearing his speech, Acts 10:45) since they too have received the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44-47), and then orders them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. They immediately invite Peter to stay at their house for several days. When, upon Peter's return to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticize him for going to the uncircumcised, and for eating with the uncircumcised (Acts 11:3), Peter repeats the account of his vision. Acts 10-

³²⁵ Malina/Pilch call this “the real significance of Peter’s vision.” Malina and Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Acts*, 78.

³²⁶ Partiality as being absent from God is mentioned several times elsewhere the New Testament, including: Rom 2:11; Eph 6:9; Col 3:25.

11 stresses the idea that food cannot be unclean. Peter, therefore, seems to proclaim the end of all dietary restrictions.³²⁷

4.6.4. Acts 15

The issue of purity is dealt with differently at the council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-33). James rules authoritatively that the Gentiles who are turning to God should not be troubled, but that they should receive a letter containing the minimal rules they need to follow (Acts 15:18-19). They need to abstain (ἀπέχεσθαι) from things that are polluted by idols (τῶν ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων),³²⁸ from fornication (τῆς πορνείας),³²⁹ from whatever has been strangled (τοῦ πνικτοῦ),³³⁰ and from blood (τοῦ αἵματος).³³¹ This ruling is written down similarly in the apostolic decree by James and the elders of Jerusalem (Acts 15:23-29), in a letter from the brothers to the nations.³³² The decree states that it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to the apostles in Jerusalem not to impose upon addressees further burdens than the very essential ones, which are

³²⁷ In her argument, that the Lukan Jesus followed the customary Jewish dietary laws, A.-J. Levine suggests that “the point of the story is that Peter believed the dietary regulations to be still valid.” Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007), 25–26, quotation 26.

³²⁸ The “things polluted by idols” may refer to meat that was butchered in the temple, to meat consumed at pagan cultic meal or to meat butchered in a profane way. Matthias Klinghardt, *Gesetz und Volk Gottes: Das lukanische Verständnis des Gesetzes nach Herkunft, Funktion und seinem Ort in der Geschichte des Urchristentums*, ed. Jörg Frey, WUNT II, vol. 32 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988), 201. Cf. Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 396. Note the difference to Paul (1 Cor 8:1-13, 10:28-31; Rom 14:1-13, cf. discussion above) who does not consider the consumption of meat offered to idols as idolatry.

³²⁹ “πορνεία” (fornication, unchastity) is variously understood as breaches of the Jewish marriage law (Lev 18:6-18) or illicit sexual intercourse. In the NT it is often connected to “εἰδωλατρεία.” Klinghardt argues that the prohibition of πορνεία and εἰδωλατρεία served to prevent Christ-believers from converging with pagan day to day philosophy: Klinghardt, *Gesetz und Volk Gottes*, 166–169, 201–202.

³³⁰ “What has been strangled” refers to a method of slaughter by which the blood was not drained but remained in the meat. Ibid., 202–204.

³³¹ This could refer to either the shedding of blood or to blood consumption. In the context only the latter makes sense. Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 397.

³³² This is sometimes translated as “believers of Gentile origin.” According to Malina/Pilch the phrase refers to “assimilated Israelites living among majority non-Israelite populations” and is more appropriately translated “brothers of non-Israelite regions or populations;” Malina and Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Acts*, 110.

abstention from what has been sacrificed to idols, from blood, from what is strangled, and from fornication (ἀπέχεσθαι εἰδωλοθύτων καὶ αἵματος καὶ πνικτῶν καὶ πορνείας, ἐξ ὧν διατηροῦντες ἑαυτοὺς εὖ πράξετε. Acts 15:29).³³³ These regulations regard the living together of Gentiles and Jews in general. The way in which these prohibitions are declared here suggests strongly, however, that the communal meal is particularly in view.³³⁴

It becomes clear through apostolic ruling that the revisions in terms of food purity as portrayed in Peter's vision (10:10-16) are not wholesale, and that not all regulations are abolished. The decree might serve the purpose that those Christ-believers from Jewish origin might feel comfortable to share table fellowship with those from Gentile provenience.³³⁵ It seems unlikely, however, that the ruling is pragmatic only. The apostolic decree is distinctly normative. The norms are rooted in Jewish tradition. The requirements in the apostolic decree contradict to some degree Peter's claim that there is no impure food. They mesh well, however, with the two requirements that are singled out in the same context: the fear of God and the performance of righteousness (ὁ φοβούμενος αὐτὸν καὶ ἐργαζόμενος δικαιοσύνην, Acts 10:35). Spelled out in its consequence for everyday life, the fear of God may well refer to abstention from food offered to idols since this may be regarded as the worship of idols.

Both stories (Acts 10-11 and Acts 15) have the admission of Gentiles into the Christ-believing fellowship at their core. The most crucial occasion of fellowship is the communal meal.

³³³ Note the differences to Acts 15:20: a) εἰδωλοθύτων instead of ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων, and b) blood and fornication have swapped places.

³³⁴ Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 401.

³³⁵ Cf. "They must not give Jews in the Diaspora the opportunity to complain that Gentile Christians were still practicing idolatry and immorality by going to pagan feasts even after beginning to follow Christ." Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 463; cf. "Moreover, it is recognized that what is being asked is a *burden*, even if it is a *necessary* one for the sake of harmony between Jews and Gentiles." Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 270: italics in original; cf. also Bock, *Acts*, 506.

The author of Acts seems to suggest that even if Christ-believers from Jewish origin gradually accept the validity of the mission to the Gentiles, the issue of food is an impediment to the latter's admission.

4.6.5. Acts 16:14-15, 26-34; 20:7-12; 27:33-38

A meal follows the baptism of Lydia, a worshipper of God and purple cloth dyer from Thyatira.³³⁶

When Lydia and her household have been baptized, she immediately asks Paul and his followers to stay at her house (Acts 16:14-15).³³⁷ This sequence of a Gentile being baptized followed by a meal occurs a number of times throughout the Gospel.³³⁸ It is the case again in Acts 16:30-34, when Paul and Silas are imprisoned. One night there is an earthquake which opens the prison doors and unfastens everyone's chains (Acts 16:26). The frightened jailer realizes that the prisoners are still there, asks them how he can be saved, and learns that he has to believe in Jesus. The jailer takes Paul and Silas, washes their wounds, and immediately afterwards receives baptism, along with his entire family (Acts 16:33). Then the jailer brings them into his house, sets food before them, and he and his house rejoice that they have become believers in God (Acts 16:34).

³³⁶ As a "worshipper" of God (σεβομένη τὸν θεόν, Acts 16:14), Lydia falls into the same category as the God-fearing Cornelius (Acts 10:2). Malina/Pilch note: "The God in question, of course, is the God of Israel, indicating that the designation would include those assimilated Israelites who neglected circumcision and/or did not observe the Torah in its entirety. Lydia (and quite likely her household) are non-[fully]-observant Israelites." Malina and Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Acts*, 117.

³³⁷ Malina/Pilch argue that the invitation "completes the informal dyadic contract again typical of Mediterranean societies. She offers them hospitality." *Ibid.*, 117.

³³⁸ Exceptions are: the baptism of men and women and Simon in Acts 8:12-13; Philip baptizes a eunuch in Acts 8:36-38; Crispus, the official of the synagogue, becomes a believer and is baptized together with his entire household and many of the Corinthians in Acts 18:8; the last account of Paul's conversion with exhortation to be baptized after hearing the Lord's voice, Acts 22:16. In a ritual analysis of accounts of baptism in documents of nascent Christianity, Richard de Maris comments, "In the case of Acts, it [sc. baptism] appears without fanfare at regular intervals in the narrative, always at points when individuals, families or groups join the ranks of believers." Richard E. DeMaris, *The New Testament in its Ritual World* (London: Routledge, 2008), 15.

Acts 20:7-12 tells of a gathering on the upper floor of a house in Troas where Paul talks to the people present. The account begins with a reference to the breaking of bread, and takes place on the first day of the week.³³⁹ During the course of Paul's long speech, a young man by the name of Eutychus, who sits on the windowsill, falls through the window. Paul, however, announces that Eutychus is still alive. After breaking the bread and eating, Paul continues to speak and then leaves. The meal scene acts as a framework for portraying Paul as a teacher, and for the miracle that Eutychus is alive. The teaching clearly takes place in the context of a gathering that included intake of food.

A final meal scene in Acts occurs during Paul's journey at sea towards Rome (Acts 27:33-38). His fellow passengers have not eaten for fourteen days, and Paul urges them to take some food for their survival.³⁴⁰ Paul himself takes bread, breaks it and eats it in front of everybody, which encourages them to take some food in order to be saved.

4.6.6. Conclusion

Meal scenes and discussions regarding the purity or impurity of food appear frequently throughout the book of Acts. Table fellowship plays an important role in the apostles' mission to the Gentiles. In many cases, a communal meal follows a baptism, reinforcing and consolidating the bond that has previously been expressed by the baptism. Purity of food and, in connection to this, the

³³⁹ This can mean either Saturday or Sunday. For discussion, see Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 143. On the breaking of the bread, cf. comment above.

³⁴⁰ Abstention from food and drink is mentioned on other occasions in Acts: Through his vision (Acts 9:3-6) Saul is blinded and neither eats nor drinks for three days. Later it is said that Saul and other "prophets and teachers" (Barnabas, Simon, Lucius from Cyrene and Manean) fast and worship in Antioch (Acts 13:1-3). More than forty Jews joined a conspiracy and bound themselves to an oath neither to eat nor drink until they had killed Paul (Acts 23:12-14).

possibility of table fellowship between Jewish and non-Jewish Christ-believers is an important theme in Acts, and appears as one of the core problems of the mission to the Gentiles.

Within Acts, there are different approaches and notable tensions between the apostles with regard to purity of food. Peter declares all food as pure, thus abolishing the concept of the purity and impurity of food completely. The apostolic decree, however, states what is minimally prohibited for all believers. Believers from non-Jewish backgrounds have to abstain from eating what has been sacrificed to idols, from meat that contains blood or has been strangled, and also from sexual immorality. The ambiguity in the treatment of food purity in Acts hints at the issue that the topic is still very much a core theme in the communities involved. Discussions on the purity of food and accounts of meals are saturated with meaning beyond mere nourishment of the body. In communal meals, membership becomes visible, and bonds among Christ-believers are created and reinforced.

4.7. Didache Community

4.7.1. Introduction

The *Didache* is an anonymous writing addressing the detailed process by which Christ-believers from non-Jewish origin were to be prepared for full membership in the community.³⁴¹ It gives prescriptive descriptions of communal meals (Did 9-10, 14) including the prayers spoken. It

³⁴¹ Originally the *Didache* did not have a title, but was eventually called “Διδαχή κυρίου διὰ τῶν δώδεκα ἀποστόλων τοῖς ἔθνεσιν”, or, in short “Διδαχή.” (“The Training of the Lord Through the Twelve Apostles to the Gentiles”). Whether the title is original is an issue of debate. For a claim of its originality, cf. Jonathan A. Draper, “Ritual Process and Ritual Symbol in *Didache* 7–10,” *VigChr* 54, no. 2 (2000), 121–22. For denial of the title’s originality, see Kurt Niederwimmer, *Die Didache*, KAV, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 81–82. For the Greek text and an English translation of the *Didache*, see Aaron Milavec, *The Didache: Text, Translation, Analysis, and Commentary* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2004). For an overview of research on the *Didache*, see Jonathan A. Draper, “The *Didache* in Modern Research,” in *The Didache in Modern Research*, ed. Jonathan A. Draper, AGJU (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 1–42.

provides hints about fasting (Did 1:3, 7:4, 8:1) and abstention from idol food (Did 6:3), some details on baptism as a prerequisite for partaking in the communal meal (Did 9:5), and the sustenance of prophets and giving of first fruits (Did 11-13). The *Didache* encapsulates information on the lived practice of one branch of early Christ-believers, as well as their characteristics and self-perception.

While recognizing an historical growth of the *Didache* and the probability of editorial actions taken by a writer (or writers) at one stage or another of the transcription, the present investigation is based upon the final text.³⁴² The *Didache* dates from sometime between the mid-first and the beginning of the second century.³⁴³ The location of the *Didache*'s composition is uncertain, and the only evidence is internal to the text. Close connections to the Gospel of Matthew point to an origin in the same region and environment. Antioch is a plausible

³⁴² For an argument of the unity (and independence) of the *Didache*, see Milavec, *The Didache*, xiii; Aaron Milavec, *The Didache: Faith, Hope, & Life of the Earliest Christian Communities, 50–70 C.E* (New York: Newman Press, 2003), xiii. One has to keep in mind, however, “that, while the prayer material in chapters 9 and 10 may well be very ancient and authentic, its layout in the *Didache* is later and completely artificial and so tells us nothing at all about the structure of primitive eucharistic celebrations. It certainly does not require us to think that the meal must have been eaten before prayers over the cup and bread were said and the eucharistic elements distributed, for once the direction in 10.1 is eliminated, the presence or absence of a meal either before or after the prayer becomes an entirely open question.” Paul F. Bradshaw, “Yet Another Explanation of Didache 9–10,” *StLi* 36, no. 1 (2006), 128.

³⁴³ For an early dating, e.g. Jean-Paul Audet, *La Didachè: Instructions des apôtres*, EBib (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1958); Milavec, *The Didache*; Michelle Slee, *The Church in Antioch in the First Century CE: Communion and Conflict*, JSNT, vol. 244 (London, New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003). For a later dating, e.g. Niederwimmer, *Die Didache*, 79; Willy Rordorf and André Tuilier, *La doctrine des douze apôtres*, SC, vol. 248bis (Paris: Cerf, 1998). Some claim that it is “evolved literature,” that it was in use over many years as a community rule and continuously edited, e.g. Robert A. Kraft and George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Early Judaism and its Modern Interpreters*, The Bible and its Modern Interpreters, vol. 2 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986); Jonathan A. Draper, “Social Ambiguity and the Production of Texts: Prophets, Teachers, Bishops, and Deacons and the Development of the Jesus Tradition in the Community of the Didache,” in *The Didache in Context: Essays on its Text, History and Transmission*, ed. Clayton Nance Jefford, NovTSup (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 284–312.

suggestion.³⁴⁴ Whether or not the *Didache* is independent from or dependent on other early Christian writings is highly disputed.³⁴⁵

4.7.2. The Meal in *Didache* 9-10

Didache 9-10 offers a liturgical formula for the celebration of meals of Christ-believers.³⁴⁶ It starts by giving the blessings of the cup and the bread word for word (Did 9:2-4).³⁴⁷ Between the first and the second prayer stands the prohibition for anyone who is not baptized in the name of the Lord (εἰς ὄνομα κυρίου, Did 9:5) to eat or drink from the Eucharist. The reason given is that the addressees of the *Didache* ought not give to the dogs what is holy (μὴ δώτε τὸ ἅγιον τοῖς κυσί, Did 9:5, cf. Mt 7:6). The second prayer follows after people have been satiated (μετὰ δὲ τὸ ἐμπλησθῆναι, Did 10:1), implying that a satiating meal is consumed.

The two prayers in *Didache* 9 and 10 each reveal a tripartite structure that is combined with a pattern of refrains. Before and after the meal, there are two thanksgiving strophes that end with

³⁴⁴ Slee, *The Church in Antioch in the First Century CE*; Jonathan A. Draper, “A Continuing Enigma: The ‘Yoke of the Lord’ in *Didache* 6:2-3 and Early Jewish-Christian Relations,” in *The Image of the Judaeo-Christians in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature*, ed. Peter J. Tomson, WUNT (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 106–123.

³⁴⁵ For a compilation of studies discussing possible relationships and interdependence between the *Didache* and the Gospel of Matthew because of shared words, phrases and motifs, cf. van de Sandt, Huub, ed; *Matthew and the Didache: Two Documents from the Same Jewish-Christian Milieu?* (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2005). Arguing for independence from New Testament writings, e.g.: Jonathan A. Draper, “The Jesus Tradition in the *Didache*,” in *The Jesus Tradition Outside the Gospels*, ed. David Wenham, Gospel Perspectives (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1984), 269–287; Niederwimmer, *Die Didache*, 71–77; Milavec, *The Didache*, 693–739. Arguing for dependence, e.g. John M. Court, “The *Didache* and St Matthew’s Gospel,” *SJT* 34, no. 2 (1981); C. M. Tuckett, “Synoptic Tradition in the *Didache*,” in *The Didache in Modern Research*, ed. Jonathan A. Draper, AGJU (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 92–128. Recently Garrow has argued on the basis of redaction-critical analysis that Matthew is dependent on the *Didache*. Alan John Philip Garrow, *The Gospel of Matthew’s Dependence on the Didache*, JSNT.S, vol. 254 (London: T&T Clark, 2004).

³⁴⁶ Issues related to these two chapters remain among the most difficult problems of the research on the *Didache*. For an overview of research on the “Eucharist” in the *Didache*, see Draper, “The *Didache* in Modern Research,” 1–42: 26–31.

³⁴⁷ The *Didache*’s order of wine first and bread second has been considered as unusual and hard to explain since it contradicts the order familiar from the accounts of Jesus’ last meal as well as the order known from Qumran texts. Possibly, however, the *Didache* is not all that strange, for it might simply follow the order of a Jewish meal at which the first cup is served and each member speaks a benediction over it. Niederwimmer, *Die Didache*, 181.

the words: "...to you is the glory forever." Each petitionary prayer ends with the words: "...because yours is the power and the glory forever."³⁴⁸ The text of the prayer concludes by calling upon the God of David, an invitation for those who are holy to come, and for conversion for those who are not yet holy (Did 10:6).³⁴⁹ Before moving on to the next subject, the Didache orders its addressees to turn to the prophets so they can "eucharistize" as much as they wish (Did 10:6).³⁵⁰

While many scholars eagerly identify the prayers in *Didache* 9-10 as representing a Eucharist of sorts, many others have pointed out the proximity of these texts and known Jewish prayers. They consider *Didache* 9-10 as modified Jewish prayers, either designed for ordinary community meals or for a particular meal before the Eucharist.³⁵¹ They view the *Didache's* Eucharistic prayers as Christianized forms of after-meal prayers known from rabbinic sources: the *birkat ha-mazon* that concludes Jewish meals.³⁵²

The nature of the meal(s) referred to in *Didache* 9-10 is also highly disputed in the research on the *Didache*.³⁵³ For a long period of time it was in fashion among scholars to distinguish between a (non-Eucharistic) satiating meal that they called "agape," or "love-meal," and a

³⁴⁸ Milavec, *The Didache*, 355–356. Cf. the daily petitionary prayer that ends with the same words, Did 8:2.

³⁴⁹ "Come, grace [of the kingdom]! and pass away, [Oh] this world! Hosanna to the God of David! If anyone is holy, come! If anyone is not, convert! Come Lord [maranatha]! Amen!" (Did 10:6). According to Niederwimmer Did 10:6 belongs to the category of "Kultrufe" and is distinct from the prayers. Niederwimmer, *Die Didache*, 201.

³⁵⁰ On these prayers by the prophets, see Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*, 451–464.

³⁵¹ Arguments include: the lack of identification of bread and wine as body and blood of Christ; the Eucharist described here has no words of institution that link it to the last meal that Jesus held with his disciples; Jesus' death is nowhere mentioned. Audet, *La Didachè*, 372–398.

³⁵² E.g. "Did 9:2-3 is close to the Jewish table blessing (see Mber 6:1), while the supplication in 9:4 resembles the tenth benediction of the *Tefilla* (= Shemoneh Esreh or Amidah). Most scholars nowadays agree that the text in Did 10 evolved from the Jewish Grace after meals (or the Birkat Ha-Mazon), that is, the prayer that concludes the Jewish ritual meal." Huub van de Sandt, "Was the Didache Community a Group within Judaism?: An Assessment on the Basis of its Eucharistic Prayers," in *A Holy People*, ed. Marcel Poorthuis (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 85–107: 88. See also the references in Huub van de Sandt and David Flusser, *The Didache: Its Jewish Sources and its Place in Early Judaism and Christianity*, CRI, vol. 5 (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2002), 312, n. 122. and Garrow, *The Gospel of Matthew's Dependence on the Didache*, 17–19.

³⁵³ For scholarly positions and discussion cf. Niederwimmer, *Die Didache*, 176–180.

eucharistic meal following it.³⁵⁴ In these interpretations, *Didache* 10:6 is seen as the transition from the proper meal to the Eucharist.³⁵⁵ Precisely the *Didache* served as crown witness for the claim of early Christ-believers' celebrations of "agape-meals," although the *Didache* does not employ such a term anywhere. The text does, however, explicitly refer to the Eucharist (εὐχαριστία, Did 9:1). In order to argue for the sequence of a (non-sacramental) satiating meal and a (sacramental) Lord's supper, one has to argue that εὐχαριστία here is not yet limited to the sacrament. Thus, εὐχαριστεῖν in *Didache* 9:1 and 10:1 refers simply to prayers of benediction that are spoken at a communal celebration. This, according to some, fits the "archaic character" of the liturgy.³⁵⁶ Others argue that the words εὐχαριστία and εὐχαριστεῖν in the *Didache* are technical terms referring to a Eucharist in the proper sense.³⁵⁷ Many scholars understand the exclamation in *Didache* 10:6 addressed to the "holy ones" as an invitation to receive communion after the meal. This, however, creates difficulties for those who interpret the meal as Eucharistic. On the other hand, the restriction of the Eucharist to the baptized (Did 9:5) seems to imply that the whole meal is Eucharistic.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁴ E.g. R. H. Connolly, "Agape and Eucharist in the Didache," *Downside Review* 55 (1937).

³⁵⁵ Johannes Betz, "The Eucharist in the Didache," in *The Didache in Modern Research*, ed. Jonathan A. Draper, AGJU (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 244–275: 248; Niederwimmer, *Die Didache*, 179.

³⁵⁶ Niederwimmer, *Die Didache*, 179–180. It has also been suggested that the Greek verb εὐχαριστεῖν may have been commonly used in Hellenistic Judaism as a designation of "to bless the table," e.g. van de Sandt, "Was the Didache Community a Group within Judaism?: An Assessment on the Basis of its Eucharistic Prayers," 85–107: 89–90; with references to Rom 14:6; 1 Cor 10:30; 1 Tim 4:3–4; and Philo, *De Specialibus Legibus* 2,175.

³⁵⁷ van de Sandt and Flusser, *The Didache*, 298–304.

³⁵⁸ Betz has summarized the various possible interpretations of the meal(s) in Did 9-10: "a) a simple, even though sacral, meal (agape); b) a sacramental eucharistic meal; c) both in one, so that the enjoyment of a meal in the community is also experienced as a sacramental eucharist. d) A more nuanced exegesis rightly finds in the cultic meal of *Didache* 9-10 a combination of a fellowship meal (9:1-10:5) with the sacramental Lord's Supper (10:6), and indeed in the order of agape-eucharist mentioned above. e) Meanwhile, by rearranging 10:6 before 9:5, one idiosyncratic theory finds the succession of eucharist (9:2-4; 10:6) followed by agape (10:1-5). f) Finally the opinion has also been expressed that the texts as we have them in *Didache* 9-10 today, are simply table prayers utilized in ascetic circles, although reworked out of originally eucharistic prayers. This large number of interpretations shows the uncertainty of the state of the research, the hypothetical character of the explanations and the difficulty of the question." Betz, "The Eucharist in the Didache," 244–275: 247.

The reference to baptism (Did 9:5) is central with regard to the identity of those who share a meal. Only through baptism is a candidate granted full membership within the community. This membership is visible and experienced in the communal meal. The warning that only the baptized shall partake is underscored by the statement that “what is holy should not be given to the dogs” (Did 9:5, cf. Mt 7:6).³⁵⁹ This latter statement also introduces the concept of “holiness.” If it is forbidden to give what is holy (τὸ ἅγιον) to the dogs, it follows that holy food cannot be given to the un-baptized.³⁶⁰

Clearly, there is a strong awareness of holiness and exclusiveness in the community, visible in the fact that the Eucharist is reserved for those who are purified through baptism: “While washing establishes a state of separate ritual community or holiness, it is above all eating and drinking together which expresses it.”³⁶¹ Since the character of the meal under debate is not clear and since there is no explicit distinction between the “eucharistic” and the “ordinary” meals it is possible that the un-baptized were excluded from any form of commensality, not just from a ritual or sacred meal.³⁶²

³⁵⁹ The saying in Did 9:5 is verbally identical with the first part of the dual saying in Mt 7:6; the contexts in which the statements are situated are different, however. See Huub van de Sandt, “‘Do Not Give What is Holy to the Dogs’ (Did 9:5D and Matt 7:6A): The Eucharistic Food of the Didache in its Jewish Purity Setting,” *VigChr* 56, no. 3 (2002). Dogs, like swine, are regarded as particularly unclean animals. Cf. e.g. 1 Enoch 56:5; bMeg 15b; GenR 81:3; LevR 5:6; MidrPss 4:11. On the impurity of dogs, see Joshua Schwartz, “Dogs in Jewish Society in the Second Temple Period and in the Time of the Mishnah and Talmud,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 55, no. 2 (2004).

³⁶⁰ τὸ ἅγιον in Did 9:5 likely refers to sacrificial food. This is suggested by the usage of τὸ ἅγιον in the LXX Ex 29:33; Lev 2:3; 22:6.7.10-16; Num 18:8-19; Ezra 2:63 and par. Neh. 7:65; cf. Huub van de Sandt, “‘Do Not Give What is Holy to the Dogs’ (Did 9:5D and Matt 7:6A): The Eucharistic Food of the Didache in its Jewish Purity Setting,” 231–33.

³⁶¹ Jonathan A. Draper, “Ritual Process and Ritual Symbol in Didache 7–10,” 134.

³⁶² It has been pointed out that this high level of exclusiveness and holiness is combined with a rather unclear position of leadership, and the tasks and roles of the individual members are vague. Gerard Rouwhorst, “Didache 9-10: A Litmus Test for the Research on Early Christian Liturgy Eucharist,” in *Matthew and the Didache: Two Documents from the Same Jewish-Christian Milieu?*, ed. Huub van de Sandt (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2005), 143–156: 148; Jonathan A. Draper, “Social Ambiguity and the Production of Text: Prophets, Teachers, Bishops, and Deacons and the Development of the Jesus Tradition in the Community of the Didache” , 284–312: 285–294.

The first prayer addresses community formation in a metaphorical way. Just as the broken bread scattered over the hills was gathered together and became one, thus the community shall be gathered from the ends of the world into the Father's kingdom (Did 9:4). The notion of the unity of the bread calls for an interpretation of this as a symbol for the eschatological unity of the community. The use of the word κλάσμα (broken pieces, 9:3, 4) instead of ἄρτος is peculiar.³⁶³ The terms for dispersing and gathering (διασκορπίζειν and συναγειν, Did 9:4) are not usual agricultural terms, but are used in the Jewish diaspora as the gathering of Israel. This allows for the interpretation of the eucharistic bread as a foretaste of the anticipated unification at the end of time. At the same time, the bread represents the already existing unity of the community that shares it.³⁶⁴ The eschatological unification of those who are separated is, therefore, closely connected with the meal celebration. Just as the community eats the bread in unity, such will be the unification at the end of time (συναχθὲν ἐγένετο ἓν, Did 9:4).

The idea of dispersion and other formulations of the meal prayers, specifically in *Didache* 9:4 and 10:5, have led to the argument that the separation between the Christ-believing *Didache* community and Judaism has already happened. In a comparison with other Hellenistic texts, van de Sandt argues that the motif of return of the dispersed in the eucharistic prayer in this case has

³⁶³ The word “κλάσμα” is found in Did 9:3 (in the genitive case) and 9:4 in the Jerusalem Manuscript (H). Many scholars argue, that κλάσμα is secondary, replacing the original ἄρτος, e.g. Niederwimmer, *Die Didache*, 185–186. One has to take into account, however, the text-critical principle of the *lectio difficilior*: a development of κλάσμα into ἄρτος is quite intelligible but the reverse is not very likely. It seems to imply that the bread has been broken before the prayer rather than after it which is unusual. Betz has pointed out that the expression κλάσις τοῦ ἄρτου expresses either the combined general meal and sacramental cult or that it refers to the nucleus of the celebration only, the sacramental-eucharistic act. Betz, “The Eucharist in the *Didache*,” 244–275: 260.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 244–275: 273. Cf. Draper: “At its sensory pole, bread in the cultural context of the ancient Near East signifies basic food, the stuff of life, what sustains and nourishes at the most fundamental level. It is baked and served at a meal in the form of a single loaf which is broken and shared by everyone at the table. Thus it also signifies sharing at its most basic and everyday level. It calls to mind both the uniting of grains of wheat into flour and the uniting of the community by eating what is broken. At an extended level, bread calls to mind the process of sowing wheat, harvesting it, grinding and baking it into one loaf. Thus not only scattering in sowing but also gathering in harvest. All of these significata are taken up here.” Jonathan A. Draper, “Ritual Process and Ritual Symbol in *Didache* 7–10,” 151.

not a material but rather a spiritual sense. The supplications in the *Didache* do not mention the “physical land of Judaea and the tangible city of Jerusalem,” and thus do not reflect a Jewish but a Christian longing.³⁶⁵ The gathering of the dispersed does not include the Jewish hope for the restoration of Jerusalem and Israel. Rather, it is a gathering into the kingdom. This estrangement from the tangible historic Jewish setting is found in various other early Christian writings. *Didache* 9:4 and 10:5 show the longing to be gathered from the four winds into the kingdom, and possibly reflect the actual situation of heterogeneity of these Christ-believers and their surroundings. The idea of gathering from the four winds and from the ends of the earth is familiar from the Gospels. In no Jewish text do the dispersed people of God carry the designation of ἐκκλησία. Huub van de Sandt argues that the prayer for the political restoration of Israel in the third benediction of the *birkat ha-mazon* has turned into a prayer for the gathering of the church. His conclusion is that the texts in *Didache* 9:4 and 10:5 reflect a community of Christ-believers that has already distanced itself from Judaism.³⁶⁶ Draper, however, suggests that the community behind the *Didache* still sees itself within the broad and diverse Diaspora Judaism, while resisting the Pharisaic party that is becoming dominant. He argues that all positions adopted on the Torah relate to first-century debates between and within parties of Israel.³⁶⁷

The reference to David in the blessing to the Father over the cup for the “holy vine of David” made known through Jesus ‘your son/servant’” (παλς, Did 9:2), as well as the reference in the second prayer (Did 10:6), reflect a Davidic Christology. Even if the “vine of David” is

³⁶⁵ van de Sandt, “Was the Didache Community a Group within Judaism?: An Assessment on the Basis of its Eucharistic Prayers,” 85–107: 93.

³⁶⁶ He sees the social make-up of the Didache community as one that originates in Judaism and over the years sociologically becomes a community of Gentile Christ-believers. *Ibid.*, 103–104.

³⁶⁷ Jonathan A. Draper, “The Holy Vine of David Made Known to the Gentiles through God’s Servant Jesus: ‘Christian Judaism’ in the Didache,” in *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered: Rethinking Ancient Groups and Texts*, ed. Matt A. Jackson-McCabe (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2007), 257–283: 258. Cf. Jonathan A. Draper, “The Apostolic Fathers: the Didache,” *ExpTim* 117, no. 5 (2006).

perceived in a christological sense, David remains a symbolic figure of Israel.³⁶⁸ The messianic salvation through Jesus fulfils the promise given to David.³⁶⁹ The vine thus functions as a symbol of shared identity in that “the Gentile Christians who are the addressees of the text are associated with Israel in some way, which stops short of full incorporation, since they do not become the vine but come to know it. This, in my opinion, relates to the admission of Gentiles to community meals without requiring full conversion to Judaism and circumcision; that is, they do not have to ‘be perfect’ and ‘take upon themselves the full yoke of the Lord’ (6:2).”³⁷⁰ Nevertheless, to “be perfect,” full observance of the Torah is necessary, even if the Gentiles’ submission to the Law could be postponed to the future, when the Lord would establish his kingdom. The depiction and use of the symbol of the vine recalls John 15:1-11, where Jesus says of himself that he is the vine and his father is the vine grower.³⁷¹

4.7.3. The Meal in Didache 14

Didache 14 again deals with gathering for a communal meal.³⁷² It is held on the day of the Lord, usually identified as the Sunday.³⁷³ According to divine institution, those who are gathered shall

³⁶⁸ Jonathan A. Draper, “Ritual Process and Ritual Symbol in Didache 7–10,” 147.

³⁶⁹ Betz, “The Eucharist in the Didache,” 244–275: 267.

³⁷⁰ Draper, “The Holy Vine of David Made Known to the Gentiles through God’s Servant Jesus: ‘Christian Judaism’ in the Didache,” 257–283: 272–273.

³⁷¹ Likewise, the addressees of John figure as branches of the vine (Jn 15:5) and are, therefore, organically connected to Jesus, the vine of David. In the *Didache*, however, the addressees are associated with but not equated to the vine: “Gentiles are not the ‘vine of David,’ but only come into association with it, ‘come to know it through Jesus God’s servant/son.’ They fulfil the prophecy that Gentiles will associate themselves with Israel in the eschatological age.” Ibid., 257–283: 272–273. For an analysis of terminological agreements between Did 9-10 and the Gospel of John, see Betz, “The Eucharist in the Didache,” 244–275: 255.

³⁷² Scholarship has proposed three options for relationships between Did 14 and Did 9-10: a) Did 9-10 and Did 14 refer to different meal celebrations; b) 14 refers to the meal already described in Did 9-10 and is, therefore, a duplication by the author; c) 14 refers to the same meal as in 9-10 and is not a duplication but simply refers the same meal in the context of instructions for repentance. Cf. Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*, 403–404.

break a loaf and give thanks after having confessed their failings in order that the sacrifice might be holy/pure (ὅπως καθαρὰ ἡ θυσία ὑμῶν ᾗ, Did 14:1). Those in conflict with a companion shall not join the celebration until they have been reconciled in order that the sacrifice may not be defiled (ἵνα μὴ κοινωθῆ ἡ θυσία ὑμῶν, Did 14:2). The *Didache* then adduces a quotation attributed to the Lord, in which he requires a pure sacrifice because he is a great king and because his name is wondrous among the Gentiles (Did 14:3).

In order to participate, members of the community have to acknowledge their sins so that the sacrifice will not be defiled. Thus, the confession of sins purifies participants and is a precondition for partaking in the celebration. Those who are entangled in fights are excluded temporarily. Controversies among community members are obviously a source of defilement for the celebration of the communal meal. Holy food needs to be protected from contamination.³⁷⁴ It is interesting to note that moral sins figure as a source of impurity, and that there is no sharply drawn dividing line between ritual and moral impurity. Ritual impurity is internalized, and the purity required is not attained primarily through ablutions, but has shifted to the realm of moral blamelessness with regard to mutual reconciliation and confession of sins.³⁷⁵

³⁷³ According to Tidwell the expression is a Semitism and refers not to Sunday but to Yom Kippur. He sees the opening expression of Did 14:1 as an indication for a Jewish-Christian observance of Yom Kippur. Neville L. A. Tidwell, "Didache XIV:1 (KATA KYRIAKHN DE KYRIOY) Revisited," *VigChr* 53, no. 2 (May, 1999).

³⁷⁴ Gentile converts are not required to be circumcised in order to become full members of the *Didache* community. They are, however, required minimally to strictly abstain from any food offered to idols. If they can bear more, i.e. if they can manage to observe more of food laws, they are to do so (Did 6:1-3).

This solution is close to the ruling of the Jerusalem Apostles in Acts 15:20, 29; cf. Draper, "The Holy Vine of David Made Known to the Gentiles through God's Servant Jesus: 'Christian Judaism' in the *Didache*," 257–283: 262.

³⁷⁵ Note that this development might well be earlier than the early church, since already in the Hebrew Bible there is evidence that impurity is contracted by the performance of sin; cf. Huub van de Sandt, "'Do Not Give What is Holy to the Dogs' (Did 9:5D and Matt 7:6A): The Eucharistic Food of the *Didache* in its Jewish Purity Setting," 243. The Qumran community quite likely considered sin to be ritually defiling; cf. Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Jonathan Klawans, "The Impurity of Immorality in Ancient Judaism," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 48 (1997); Eric Ottenheim, "Impurity between Intention and Deed: Purity Disputes in First Century Judaism and in the New Testament," in *Purity and Holiness: The Heritage of Leviticus*, eds. Marcel Poorthuis and Joshua J. Schwartz, JCPS (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 129–147. For a critique of the association of

4.7.4. Fasting, *Didache* 1:3; 7:4; 8:1

Fasting is mentioned several times in the *Didache* (Did 1:3, 7:4, 8:1). The addressees are told to fast for those who persecute them (Did 1:3). Fasting is a prerequisite in the preparations for baptism (Did 7:4), and able members of the community fast in solidarity with the candidate (Did 7.4).³⁷⁶

A harsh warning follows this command. The addressees' fasting shall not be with the "hypocrites," not on the second and fifth day of the week, but on the fourth day and on the preparation day (Did 8:1).³⁷⁷ The *Didache* does not give any reason for its instructions to fast on the fourth day and on the day of preparation. The instruction is possibly directed against some Christ-believers who fasted on the second and fifth days, and thereby showed solidarity with the practice of (other) Jewish groups.³⁷⁸ The *Didache's* fasting is analogue to the fasting of those called hypocrites, identified as (pious) Jews in general by the majority,³⁷⁹ or as the Pharisees in particular.³⁸⁰ The fierce polemic against the "hypocrites" and the need to fast on different days in order to distinguish themselves from these individuals suggests that, on the one hand, there is still

impurity and sin in the Qumran Scrolls, see Martha Himmelfarb, "Impurity and Sin in 4QD, IQS, and 4Q512," *DSD* 8 (2001).

³⁷⁶ The baptismal instructions specify four things: instruction in the two ways prior to baptism (this includes the rules on the 'yoke of the Lord,' food and idols, Did 6:1-3), prebaptismal fasting of the candidate and the baptizer, recital of the name of the trinity or of the Lord over the baptized, and on the use of ritually pure "living" water. Notably absent are references to the death and resurrection of Christ and any mention of sins.

³⁷⁷ The days of the week are labelled according to Jewish fashion. Did 8:1 is the oldest testimony for Christian fasting on the fourth day and the preparation day. Niederwimmer, *Die Didache*, 166.

³⁷⁸ The choice of fourth day and the day of preparation instead of the second and fifth day could well be at random, only to create a distinction from the practice of others. The choice might, however, have been influenced by the use of the solar calendar that was used e.g. in Qumran and in which the fourth day and the day of preparation have a certain prominence; van de Sandt and Flusser, *The Didache*, 293.

³⁷⁹ Audet, *La Didachè*, 367–368; van de Sandt, "Was the *Didache* Community a Group within Judaism?: An Assessment on the Basis of its Eucharistic Prayers," 85–107: 85–86; Klaus Wengst, *Didache (Apostellehre): Barnabas. Klemens. Zweiter Klemensbrief. Schrift an Diognet*, SUC, vol. 2 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1984), 29–30; Niederwimmer, *Die Didache*, 166.

³⁸⁰ Jonathan A. Draper, "Christian Self-Definition: Against the 'Hypocrites' in *Didache* 8," in *The Didache in Modern Research*, ed. Jonathan A. Draper, AGJU (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 223–243: 233.

relatively close contact between the Christ-believing addressees and their Jewish environment.³⁸¹ On the other hand, the polemic might also point to the community's separation from Judaism that was happening here or had happened already.³⁸² It has thus been argued that this is not an intramural struggle between different factions of first-century Judaism, but rather an attempt to define the community of Christ-believers as distinct from Judaism.³⁸³

4.7.5. Sustenance of Prophets and the Giving of First-Fruits, Didache 11-13

Didache 11 gives instructions on how to treat wandering prophets: every apostle who comes to the addressees shall be received as the Lord (Did 11:4), but shall remain only one day (Did 11:5), or one more day if needed (Did 11:6), and shall receive nothing else than one loaf when leaving (Did 11:7). Any attempt from prophets to stay for a period longer than a few days and to live off the community's goods suggests that they are not genuine prophets. *Didache* 12 sets the rules for hosting craftsmen, and *Didache* 13 contends that true teachers are worthy of their food just as a labourer would be. The first-fruits shall go to the prophets. If there are no prophets, the beggars shall receive the first-fruits. The giving away of first-fruits applies also, in analogy, to other foods such as bread-dough, wine or oil (Did 13:5-6), and also to non-edible goods, such as silver and clothing (Did 13:7).

³⁸¹ Draper argues that the choice of days serves to mark off the *Didache* community from the Pharisees but, at the same time, to locate it specifically *within* the broader social context of Judaism. *Ibid.*, 223–243: 233–235. He also argues that the intention of fasting on two other days is to create a public differentiation. *Ibid.*, 223–243: 234.

³⁸² Niederwimmer, *Die Didache*, 166; Milavec, *The Didache*, 253.

³⁸³ The argument runs along the lines that the term “hypocrites” is not, as in Matthew, directed at the Pharisees in particular but at Judaism in general. Did 8:1-3 does not attempt any kind of explanation for the accusation which can be a further indication of the community's growing distance from its Jewish roots, the irreversible process of moving away. Cf. van de Sandt, “Was the *Didache* Community a Group within Judaism?: An Assessment on the Basis of its Eucharistic Prayers,” 85–107: 86–87; cf. Niederwimmer, *Die Didache*, 166; Milavec, *The Didache*, 253.

4.7.6. Eschatological Gatherings, *Didache* 16

The *Didache's* final chapter talks about gatherings (Did 16). The addressees shall gather frequently (πυκνῶς δὲ συναχθήσεσθε, Did 16:2). These gatherings are not explicitly categorized as meal gatherings. Since, however, meals appear as the central occasion for the community to gather, the gatherings referred to in *Didache* 16 may well be referring to meal gatherings, and thus this chapter's information needs to be considered in the present analysis.

The ethical admonition to gather is closely followed by the eschatological warning of a time envisioned as one of crisis and trial before the end. The addressees are warned to be watchful over their lives, and to be prepared, for they do not know the hour in which the Lord comes (Did 16:1). When they gather, they shall seek the things that pertain to their souls since the time of faith is only of use if in the end time they have been perfected (16:2). Love will be turned into hate when betrayers and persecutors will come from within the community, as indicated by the image of sheep turning into wolves (Did 16:3-4). Apocalyptic material further develops this sense of foreboding. The sense of evil emerging from inside the community is conveyed by the description of the "world-deceiver," manifested "as a son of God," and performing "signs and wonders" to lead the world astray (16:4). In any case, the time of crisis appears as a time of testing that demands endurance (16:5). The signs of truth will appear, the third of which will be the resurrection of the dead (16:6), not of all dead, but only the holy ones (Did 16:7), and the world will see the Lord coming atop the clouds of heaven (Did 16:8).

From the verses in the *Didache's* last chapter, it is possible to draw information on the self-understanding of the community. It seems to see itself as a community of love. This community of love, however, is endangered from the inside, as its own members may possibly turn on each other. The strict regulations on the admission of candidates to the community's meals, and the

moral prerequisites for actual members, do not guarantee the group's security. The many prerequisites for partaking in meal gatherings do not guarantee that members remain within the required state of holiness and purity.

4.7.7. Conclusion

The *Didache* contains materials collected from the catechesis of Gentile converts, and includes material on communal meals. Participation at communal meals is reserved for those who have been purified through baptism, which is preceded by a pre-baptismal preparation including catechism and fasting. The process points to a combination of tight community coherence and exclusiveness.³⁸⁴ Baptism may establish a state of holiness, but it is above all the communal eating and drinking which express it.

The concept of holiness within the *Didache's* meal context can refer either to the food or to the communal celebration. Whichever is meant needs to be protected from defilement by those who are not pure: that is, those who are not baptized, but also those among the baptized who are currently in a state of moral impurity. Moreover, no one involved in a conflict with a fellow is allowed to partake without having resolved the conflict beforehand.

The process of identity formation connected to food issues also appears prominently in the instructions not to fast on the second and fifth days of the week like the (Jewish, perhaps Pharisaic) hypocrites, but on the fourth day and on the preparation day. The fierce polemic points to the vicinity of the groups, but at the same time to a process of separation.

³⁸⁴ Cf. Gerard Rouwhorst, "Table Community in Early Christianity," in *A Holy People*, ed. Marcel Poorthuis (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 69–84: 76–77.

Bread and vine function as metaphors for the community. Just as members experience the unity of their community in sharing the bread, this symbolically anticipates the unification of the believers in the end time. The vine of David figures as a metaphor to express adherence to the community, and references to the vine of David associate but do not equate the Gentile addressees with the vine. It may symbolize that they are connected to Israel's tradition of David, but not fully incorporated into it.

Whether or not the *Didache* reflects an intramural struggle of a faction of Judaism with others (most likely and prominently the Pharisees), or whether or not it reflects a breach, a breaking away of the *Didache* community from Judaism that has already happened, remains a question of interpretation.

The eschatological gatherings referred to in the *Didache's* final chapter are possibly meal gatherings. The eschatological warnings reveal notions of danger and insecurity, and include exhortations to gather frequently and to be watchful. Betrayers and persecutors are expected to emerge from within the community. These warnings reveal awareness that the community can be protected to a certain degree by certain rules (for example baptism and moral purity as prerequisites for partaking) but that, at the same time, betrayal of the community can emerge from within the inner circle.

The community behind the *Didache* likely gathered for meals. From the prescriptive material on the meals of the *Didache* community it is possible to describe matters of its identity. Meals are the occasions in which their community experienced its identity as an *ekklesia* of a highly exclusive character, the communal intake of food being saturated with surplus meaning. The meal prayers give testimony to the *Didache* community's Jewish roots, especially visible in the Davidic messianic tradition. In the *Didache*, this is developed into a Davidic Christology

which is central to the community's self understanding. Those who are admitted to the meal are pure in more than one way. They have been ritually purified by baptism and they are morally pure. If not, they shall not partake of the meal. Broken bread functions as a metaphor for the community. Just as the broken bread that is scattered over the hills and will again form one loaf, so will the community be gathered.

4.8. Conclusion

The survey of various groups' food issues and information on communal meals allows for a number of conclusions. In each community, the communal intake of food plays a central role. Food, drink and their intake are always more than just the consumption of calories and liquid. In the various groups food issues are addressed in particular ways, and meaning is attributed to food and its consumption. In a number of cases, a long process of preparation precedes participation at the community's meals. In communities with such a preparatory process, table fellowship represents full membership in the community. In these communities, the communal meal is meticulously protected, controlled and highly exclusivist in character.

There are distinct differences in the groups' dealings with their outsiders. The great difference between the Qumranites/Essenes and the *haberim* for example lies in the fact that the *haberim*, while taking pains in separating themselves from the *amme ha-aretz*, live in the cities and remain within the greater society, whereas the Qumranites/Essenites (and also the Therapeutae) retreat to live a solitary life. Purity and defilement of food is an issue in virtually every community. Each group treats issues around food purity differently. The Pauline epistles testify to communities that live in hybrid environments which include pagan temples. While Paul's advice implies that food in itself cannot ontologically be defiled, it is one of the *haburoth's*

primary goals to protect not only the community but also the food itself from impurity. In the Didache also, there is the idea that food itself needs to be protected from impurity as does the community.

Food can serve as a metaphor for expressing communal relations: the broken bread, the bread loaf and the vine of David represent the community. While prerequisites are necessary for membership (for example fasting, abstention from idol food, baptism, moral purity, correct tithing, no contact with outsiders), the communal meal is the place where membership becomes visible and is experienced.

The exploration of the communal meals of Christ-believers' has demonstrated that they relate to Jesus Christ (even if other terms such as "the Lord" are employed). The Pauline Lord's Supper (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον) as well as the communal meals in Acts, especially those following conversional baptisms, and the Didache-meals are held in community with other believers and commemorate Jesus in different ways. While little can be said about the exact form of meals and the rituals performed in these groups, it is obvious and a scholarly commonplace that they are all related to Jesus. Here lie the roots of what later developed into "the Eucharist." Little can be said about the exact ritual, and by the end of the first century its shape was not yet fixed. "Eucharist" may serve, however, as the term that denotes Christ-believers' meals, including its surplus meaning that consists in the believers' relationship to the "founder" Jesus Christ. The next chapter, therefore, will explore in detail traces of the "Eucharist" in John.

5. Discursive I: John and “the Eucharist”

5.1. Introduction

The Johannine community would have consumed edible and potable goods at their communal meals, and it is highly likely that bread and wine were on the menu. Bread and wine were staple products, and, at least for members of the group with Jewish roots, a blessing over the bread would have been expected (Jn 6:11, 23).

Whether or not the community performed a ritual containing bread and wine, possibly after the meals, cannot be discerned. The Fourth Gospel lacks an account of the so-called Lord’s Supper as well as the words instituting the “Eucharist.”³⁸⁵ Instead, the Gospel of John offers its own characteristic account of a last meal taking place before Jesus’ crucifixion. This Johannine account of Jesus’ last meal differs from its Synoptic parallels in a number of ways, including chronology and content.³⁸⁶ Instead of an institution of the Eucharist the Fourth Gospel portrays Jesus washing his disciples’ feet.

The absence of the words of institution raises the question of whether or not John talks about the Eucharist at all, and, if so, in what way. The reasons for the lack of the eucharistic institution during Jesus’ final meal with his disciples could be, first, that John was totally unfamiliar with the Eucharist tradition. Other possibilities are, second, that John consciously left out a specific account of the Eucharist, or that, third, he presupposes the Eucharist without

³⁸⁵ While the verb *εὐχαριστέω* appears three times in John (Jn 6:11, 23, 11:41), the corresponding noun “Eucharist” (*εὐχαριστία*) is absent in both John and the Synoptics. The use of the term “Eucharist” is nevertheless widely spread in New Testament scholarship and will be used in the following discussion. Retaining the term is a way of expressing that there is something more to the consumption than just the intake of calories. This does, however, by no means imply that there was a ritual with a fixed form that corresponded to the term at the time that the Gospel of John was written.

³⁸⁶ While the Synoptics have Jesus’ meal on the first day of Passover, the Fourth Gospel has it on the day before.

mentioning it.³⁸⁷ In order to explore this question, I will undertake a comparative analysis at the semantic and narrative level and discuss it against the backdrop of socio-historical evidence. I will investigate each Johannine meal passage, exploring whether any words, objects, phrases or behaviours are reminiscent of the Eucharist. The Synoptic accounts of Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples and, particularly, the words of institution in their Synoptic (Mt 26:26-29; Mk 14:22-25; Lk 22:15-20) and Pauline versions (1 Cor 11:23-26), will serve as the prime points of reference.

The availability of texts of reference, the first of Hays' criteria of intertextual assessments, needs to be addressed at this point.³⁸⁸ The availability to John of written sources about the Eucharist, i.e. the Synoptic accounts of the institution, can neither be affirmed nor denied with certainty. For this discussion, it is not necessary to presuppose that John knew the Synoptics or the letters of Paul in a written form. Whether or not the author of the Fourth Gospel was familiar with the very accounts of the institution of the Eucharist as worded by the Synoptics remains uncertain. But the fact that as early a text as 1 Corinthians (stemming from the mid-first century) offers an account of the institution, strongly suggests that some form of eucharistic ritual was practiced in early communities. This undergirds the claim that the author of the Fourth Gospel was at least familiar with some kind of eucharistic tradition and that he deals with it in his writing.³⁸⁹ Furthermore, all of the Gospels obviously share common traditions. A number of accounts are found in all of the canonical Gospels, including for example, the accounts of the cleansing of the

³⁸⁷ Cf. Silke Petersen, "Jesus zum 'Kauen'?: Das Johannesevangelium, das Abendmahl und die Mysterienkulte," in *"Eine gewöhnliche und harmlose Speise?": Von den Entwicklungen frühchristlicher Abendmahlstraditionen*, ed. Judith Hartenstein (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2008), 105–130: 106.

³⁸⁸ Cf. p. 20-21.

³⁸⁹ This has been doubted by Kysar who claims that: "the johannine community did not know the institution narratives in any form." Kysar, *The Fourth Evangelist and his Gospel*, 259. See also: Craig R. Koester, "John Six and the Lord's Supper," *LQ* 4 (1990), 433.

temple and the feeding of the multitudes. It is thus possible to presuppose that John shares with the Synoptics the tradition of Jesus' last meal even if John departs from the Synoptics in notable ways.

What follows is an attempt to discuss markers in the Johannine text that, for the original readers of the Fourth Gospel, may have been reminiscent of texts, concepts, or traditions of the Eucharist in their cultural surroundings. John 13 is the chapter in which a reader who is even only vaguely familiar with Pauline and/or Synoptic traditions would normally expect the Eucharist. The Eucharist, however, is not present in John 13 in a form similar to the Synoptics. As has been demonstrated in the analysis of the narrative, there is a close connection between John 13 and John 6 on the narrative level, and many scholars have pointed out possible eucharistic allusions in John 6. The discussion of eucharistic references in John, therefore, will begin with John 6 and then turn to John 13. From there, the search for eucharistic allusions is undertaken in the remaining Johannine meal scenes and food/drink talk passages in order of their appearance in the Gospel.

5.2. Eucharistic Allusions in Jn 6: Feeding of the 5000 and the Bread of Life

Discourse

The following division of John 6 into smaller sequences is undertaken only for the sake of creating more manageable units. It is clearly not the intention to separate them from one another, for the miracle account and the subsequent discourse are intertwined and depend upon one another.³⁹⁰

³⁹⁰ On the need to read the chapter in its entirety, cf. Gary A. Phillips, "'This is a Hard Saying, Who Can be Listener to It': Creating a Reader in John 6," *Semeia*, no. 26 (1983).

On reading the Gospel in its entirety and in its present order, cf. Charles Harold Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (1953; reprint, Cambridge Eng.: University Press, 1963), 289–91; Paul N. Anderson, "The Sitz im Leben of the Johannine Bread of Life Discourse and its Evolving Context," in *Critical Readings of John 6*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper, *Bibl.-Interpr.S* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 1–59: 4–8.

For proposals of structures that retain the unity of the chapter, see Johannes Beutler, "The Structure of John 6," in *Critical Readings of John 6*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper, *Bibl.-Interpr.S* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 115–127: 126; Francis J. Moloney, "The Function of Prolepsis in the Interpretation of John 6," in *ibid.*, 129–148.

5.2.1. John 6:1-14

In the feeding of the multitude Jesus blesses bread and distributes it to the crowds shortly before Passover.³⁹¹ Jesus takes the bread (ἔλαβεν ... τοὺς ἄρτους, Jn 6:11), gives thanks over it (εὐχαριστήσας, Jn 6:11), and distributes it (διέδωκεν, Jn 6:11). John 6:11 contains the key words for a possible eucharistic interpretation of the passage. These key words recall the action and words of institution in the Synoptics as well as in Paul:

- ἔλαβεν: the action of Jesus taking the bread is expressed in the same wording as in 1 Cor 11; the Synoptics use the same lemma but in a different form: λαβῶν (Mt 26:26; Mk 14:23; Lk 19). There is, however, a difference in the amount of bread that is taken: whereas in the words of institution the bread is in the singular form, Jesus takes multiple “breads” (plural) in the feeding of the multitude.
- εὐχαριστήσας: John 6:11 uses the same form and lemma for the blessing as is found in the Pauline and Lukan blessings over the bread (Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24); Luke additionally uses εὐχαριστήσας for the blessing over the wine (Lk 22,17).
- Matthew 26:26 and Mark 14:22 use εὐλογήσας for the blessing over the bread. Both Matthew 26:27 and Mark 14:23, however, have εὐχαριστήσας for the blessing over the wine.
- διέδωκεν: is a derivate of δίδωμι, of which the form ἔδωκεν is found in Mark 14:22 and 22:19. Matthew 26:27 likewise mentions ἔδωκεν, but only for the wine and not for the bread.

³⁹¹ With regard to the accounts of the feedings of the multitude, the connection to Passover is peculiar to John.

All of these expressions may echo the words of institution in their Pauline or Synoptic versions.

Some further observations and possible references include the following:

- People recline for the meal (because Jesus tells the disciples to make people recline: ποιήσατε τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἀναπεσεῖν, Jn 6:10). This gives the impression that it is a proper meal in the manner of a symposium at which people normally recline, possibly like Jesus' last meal with his disciples in the Synoptic accounts.
- The fact that Jesus himself, presumably without help from the disciples (and differing from the Synoptic accounts in this respect), distributes food to the crowd can be read as alluding to the accounts of institution in which Jesus himself distributes the bread.³⁹²
- The leftovers, the κλάσματα (Jn 6:12-13), may also allude to the eucharistic institution since this is the noun drawn from the same lemma used by all Synoptics and by Paul for the action of the breaking of the bread: ἔκλασεν (Mt 26:26; Mk 14:22; Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24).

This comparison of the Johannine account of the feeding of the multitude with the Synoptic and Pauline words of institution reveals possible allusions to eucharistic traditions despite some differences in action and wording.³⁹³ The key words discussed in John 6:11 are strong evidence for this possibility, even if the blessing in John 6:11 may also be read as a customary Jewish blessing

³⁹² The action of distribution is missing in the Pauline account.

³⁹³ When compared to its parallel accounts the Johannine account of the feeding of the five thousand differs from the Synoptic accounts in wording and action in some peculiar ways:

- In the Synoptics, Jesus looks up to the sky. This action is missing in the Johannine account.
- While in the Johannine version the term for the blessing over the bread is εὐχαριστήσας, the Synoptics use εὐλόγησεν (different lemma and different form).
- In Jn 6 Jesus takes the bread and says a blessing. No breaking is mentioned, only distribution.
- Unlike the ἰχθύες in the Synoptic accounts of the feeding of the multitude, John uses ὀψάρια for the designation of the fish.

In the other accounts of the feeding of the multitude (feeding of the four thousand in Mt 15:32-39 and Mk 8:1-10), however, the blessing is worded εὐχαριστήσας, which is the same lemma and same form as in Jn 6:11.

that would have been said over bread before a meal in any case, and therefore it would not necessarily allude to a eucharistic tradition.³⁹⁴

5.2.2. John 6:15-24

As in the Synoptics, the Johannine account of the feeding of the multitude is followed by Jesus retiring to a mountain, the storm on the Sea of Tiberias, and Jesus' walking on the water.³⁹⁵ What is interesting, in terms of possible eucharistic markers, is that the location, in which the crowd searches for Jesus, is identified as being near the place in which they (the crowd) had eaten the bread after the Lord had blessed it (ἐγγύς τοῦ τόπου ὅπου ἔφαγον τὸν ἄρτον εὐχαριστήσαντος τοῦ κυρίου, Jn 6:23). Two notions are to be pointed out. First, the blessing prior to eating is mentioned explicitly. The blessing and the eating define the location. Second, only the bread is mentioned, not the fish.

5.2.3. John 6:25-51a

When the crowds find Jesus on the other side of the sea, Jesus scolds them for having searched for him not because they have seen signs, but because they have sated themselves on bread. Again, only the bread is mentioned, and the fish is ignored. There are no obvious allusions to the accounts of institution here. The motif of satiation (Jn 6:35), however, may echo the opposite issue in Paul's epistle to the Corinthians: Paul is aware of those who are hungry and tells the Corinthians to hold their meals at home in order not to humiliate those who have nothing (1 Cor 11:21-22).

Subsequently a dialogue between Jesus and the crowds evolves. It concerns perishable and nonperishable foods and the work of God, which is to believe in Jesus. In this conversation, Jesus

³⁹⁴ The term "blessing" is used here in the sense of "giving of thanks."

³⁹⁵ The geographical problems will not be discussed here.

claims that he is the bread of life, the living bread that has come down from heaven. He promises that whoever eats of this bread will live eternally. The fact that bread is mentioned repeatedly in John 6 (21 times in the whole of chapter 6, the great majority of which occur in the discourse section) can itself be understood as alluding to the Eucharist, since in the words of institution, bread is one of the two central (physical) elements, the other being the wine.

5.2.4. John 6:51b-58

In this passage, Jesus orders that his listeners consume bread, blood and body. He identifies the bread that he will give for the life of the world with his flesh. Jesus declares that, in order to have eternal life, they must eat (φάγητε) the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his (Jesus') blood (Jn 6:53). This is further elaborated in the explanation that the one who chews (τρώγων, Jn 6:54, 56, 57, 58 same form and lemma in all occurrences) his flesh and drinks his blood will have eternal life.³⁹⁶ Believers will be raised on the last day. Jesus' flesh is the true food (ἀληθής ἐστιν βρώσις, Jn 6:55) and his blood the true drink (ἀληθής ἐστιν πόσις, Jn 6:55).

In terms of possible allusions to the Eucharist within the bread of life discourse, John 6:51-58 needs special attention. These verses contain what are possibly the strongest allusions: Jesus states that the bread that he will give is his flesh – for them and for the life of the world: ὑπὲρ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου ζωῆς (Jn 6:51). The notion that Jesus gives his body for others strongly alludes to the eucharistic institution: τοῦτό μου ἐστιν τὸ σῶμα τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν (1 Cor 11:24); ἕνοχος ἔσται τοῦ σώματος καὶ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ κυρίου (1 Cor 11:27); τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ σῶμά μου. (Mt 26:26; Mk

³⁹⁶ On the meaning of τρώγειν see below, 225–227.

14:22; Lk 22:19).³⁹⁷ Despite the obvious parallels there is an equally obvious difference in wording. While the Synoptics and Paul use the lemma σῶμα, John uses σὰρξ (καὶ ὁ ἄρτος δὲ ὄν ἐγὼ δώσω ἢ σὰρξ μου ἐστίν, Jn 6:51; repeated in different forms in the rest of the discourse, Jn 6:52, 53, 53, 54, 55, 56, and again in 6:63).

- The blood (αἷμα), which is to be drunk (Jn 6:53), is the same term as is used in the words of institution (Mt 26:28, Mk 14:24, Lk 22:20, 1 Cor 11:25, 27). In the latter texts, the cup or its content, which is presumably (1 Cor 11:25) or explicitly (Mt 26:27, Mk 14:25, Lk 22:18) wine (or at least a product of the vine: τοῦ γενήματος τῆς ἀμπέλου), is equated with Jesus' blood. In John 6, the blood comes without previous reference. There is no mention of a cup, or of wine, or any other drink. Nevertheless, it is obvious that as a parallel to the connection between bread and body, the blood could easily have been associated with the wine and its ritual function.
- The action of eating is mentioned both in the Johannine discourse as well as in the words of institution. Again, however, there is a notable difference in wording in the peculiar Johannine use of τρώγων.³⁹⁸ Paul and the Synoptics use various forms of the more common lemma ἐσθίω to express eating in the words of institution. The Johannine use of τρώγων is judged by some as a deliberate emphasis on the reality of physical eating.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁷ This has been suggested by, Günther Bornkamm, "Die eucharistische Rede im Johannes-Evangelium," *ZNW* 47 (1956), 162. However, his notion that ὑπὲρ is found in all accounts of institution is not correct: Mt 26:28 has περὶ in the place in which the other accounts have ὑπὲρ. Besides that, ὑπὲρ pertains only to the body in 1 Cor 11:24 and Lk 22:19 whereas it is used only for the wine in Mk 14:24. Lk 22:20 uses ὑπὲρ for the second cup.

³⁹⁸ In terms of verb tenses Burge notes: "If it [sc. τρώγειν] was 'a popular substitution for ἐσθίω' (BDF, §51), it is curious that John, who does not use ἐσθίω at all (but employs ἔφαγον 15 times), does not distribute the present tense throughout his Gospel. Compare the ratio of presents to aorists in the following: Matthew, 11 to 13; Mark, 11 to 17; Luke 12 to 21 (all of which exhibit equal distribution)." Gary M. Burge, *The Anointed Community: The Holy Spirit in the Johannine Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 183 n. 150.

³⁹⁹ E.g. Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, 21. Aufl., KEK, vol. 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 176.

The change of verb can be understood as a linguistic means of emphasizing the intention of the passage. According to this interpretation, from John 6:51c onward, eating does not mean taking on Jesus' self-presentation through faith but taking it on by means of physically eating, i.e. eating the Eucharist.⁴⁰⁰

While there are numerous parallels and allusions to the institution of the Eucharist, some central elements of these accounts are absent.⁴⁰¹ In John 6:

- there is no mention of community *κοινωνία* (cf. 1 Cor 10:16ff.);
- there is no mention of any covenant *διαθήκη* (Mk 14:24; Mt 26:28) or new covenant *καινή διαθήκη* (cf. 1 Cor 11:25; Lk 22:20);
- the notion that the eating and drinking shall be repeated in remembrance of Jesus is missing (cf. 1 Cor 11:24-26; Lk 22:19);
- there is no connection to unworthiness (cf. 1 Cor 11:27);
- the words in the discourse supposedly are not accompanied by any action (taking and breaking of bread, taking of cup); as opposed to the Pauline and Synoptic scenes of the institution of the Eucharist, it is a mere speech;
- no wine is mentioned; the blood, however, may well be read as referring to wine; the association of wine and blood is well known from biblical as well as pagan traditions.⁴⁰²

Despite such missing elements John 6 has a notable eucharistic theme. This is strongly indicated by the above discussed allusions: a) in the feeding of the multitude, most strongly in the use of the

⁴⁰⁰ Bauernfeind and Kittel, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, 236–237.

⁴⁰¹ As Petersen has noted it is not in the account of institution but nevertheless in a eucharistic context.

⁴⁰² Cf. e.g. the whore of Babylon who gets drunk from blood, Rev 17:6; wine as the blood of grapes: Gen 49:11; Dtn 32:14; Achilles Tatius 2.2.4.

key words of Jesus' taking the bread, blessing it and distributing it; b) in John 6:51b-58, in which Jesus orders the consumption of bread, blood and body, and relates these elements to himself.

It comes as little surprise that there has been a great deal of scholarly dispute over the issue of possible eucharistic allusions or sacramental meanings in John 6. This is the case for the chapter as a whole and for vv. 51-58 (or, variously, 51b-58, 51c-58 or 52-58) in particular. Despite the amount of scholarly attention to this problem, it remains an unsolved, indeed, unsolvable, issue.⁴⁰³

John 6:51c-58 has been called the "Herrenmahl."⁴⁰⁴ It has been considered the direct parallel to the words of institution by many.⁴⁰⁵ MacGregor notes that "Generally speaking Catholic expositors, followed by the modern critical school, have interpreted the chapter sacramentally, while conservative Protestants have denied all reference to the Sacrament."⁴⁰⁶

An affiliated question needs to be addressed at the outset. There has been profound dissent over the question of whether John 6:51c-58 is originally Johannine, or whether these verses are a redactional interpolation by a later editor; and if the latter is the case, whether there is a conflict with the preceding verses. It is safe to say that „Joh 6 ist ein Testfall für die Literarkritik: Wer hier von der Einheitlichkeit des Textes ausgeht, tut es auch für den Gesamttext des Johannesevangeliums. Und wer hier sekundäre Zusätze annimmt, glaubt auch insgesamt an ein

⁴⁰³ Charles H. Cosgrove, "The Place Where Jesus Is: Allusions to Baptism and the Eucharist in the Fourth Gospel," *NTS* 35, no. 4 (1989); James D.G. Dunn, "John 6: A Eucharistic Discourse?" *NTS* 17, no. 3 (1971); Craig R. Koester, "John Six and the Lord's Supper"; Barnabas Lindars, "Word and Sacrament in the Fourth Gospel," *SHTH* 29 (1976); G. H. C. Macgregor, "Eucharist in the Fourth Gospel," *NTS* 9, no. 2 (1963).

⁴⁰⁴ Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, 174.

⁴⁰⁵ Aland's synopsis can stand as an example for this: Jn 6:51-58 is noted as the parallel to the Synoptic and Pauline words of institution. Kurt Aland, *Synopsis of the Four Gospels: Greek-Engl. ed. of the synopsis quattuor evangeliorum completely rev. on the basis of the Greek text of Nestle-Aland 26th ed. and Greek New Testament 3rd ed. The Engl. text is the 2. ed. of the rev. standard version United Bible Societies* (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1976), 284. See also e.g. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1:285.

⁴⁰⁶ G. H. C. Macgregor, "Eucharist in the Fourth Gospel," 114.

literarkritisches Modell der Textlektüre.“⁴⁰⁷ Whatever the answer, the question remains unprovable, or in other words: “Literary studies which have attempted to set apart this passage (along with trying to identify a uniform ‘Johannine style’) have run aground, while the authentic character of 6:52-58 has all but been confirmed.”⁴⁰⁸ And: “Even if we disagree with Brown as to the origin of the section, it is clear that the author (either John or a redactor) has either created a

⁴⁰⁷ Petersen, “Jesus zum ‘Kauen’?: Das Johannesevangelium, das Abendmahl und die Mysterienkulte,” 105–130; drawing on Jürgen Becker, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, 2nd ed. (Gütersloh, Würzburg: Gerd Mohn; Echter, 1984–1985), 1:219.

On the basis of an analysis in redactional criticism, Bultmann considers 6,51b-58 as a later interpretation inserted into the “original” text by a later editor: Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, 174.

In a thorough investigation on the unity of the Gospel of John, Ruckstuhl has argued for the coherence: Ruckstuhl and Hengel, *Die literarische Einheit des Johannesevangeliums*, 220–271.

This caused Jeremias and Schweizer to reconsider their earlier argument for Jn 6,51ff. as being secondary: Joachim Jeremias, “Joh 6,51c–58 – redaktionell?” *ZNW* 44 (1952/53); Eduard Schweizer, “Das joh. Zeugnis vom Herrenmahl,” *Neot* (1963).

Dunn suggests that the passage is not all that distinct and that the efforts to argue for a distinction are exaggerated: James D.G. Dunn, “John 6: A Eucharistic Discourse?” 329.

Brown claims that the passage is a Johannine interpolation and that it is in conformity with its context. *The Gospel According to John*, 1:1286-1288.

Peder Borgen has convincingly demonstrated homiletic forms that are made use of in Jn 6 and, therefore, argues for the unity of Jn 6. Peder Borgen, *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo* (Leiden: Brill, 1965).

For an overview of the question of unity and disunity of Jn 6, see also Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 48–69.

An attempt to demonstrate a “growing consensus” among the various more recent approaches to Jn 6 has been made by Robert Kysar. In his analysis, however, he demonstrates the opposite: Robert Kysar, “Source Analysis of the Fourth Gospel: A growing Consensus?” *NovT* 15, no. 2 (1973).

Commenting on a collection of essays on Jn 6, Culpepper argues that one of its chief contributions is to have reversed the long-held view that considers Jn 6:51c-58 as a later redactional insertion.

With surprising unanimity, various contributors argue for a strong continuity of theme and language throughout the whole chapter and claim that this passage should be read as an integral part of the discourse: R. Alan Culpepper, “Current Research in Retrospect,” in *Critical Readings of John 6*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper, *Bibl.-Interpr.S* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 247–257: 253; cf. e.g. Anderson’s and Kysar’s contributions in this compilation: “The ‘eucharistic’ interpolation in John 6 is neither.” Anderson, “The Sitz im Leben of the Johannine Bread of Life Discourse and its Evolving Context,” 1–59: 5. According to Kysar “the passage exhibits a unity as it stands,” regardless of whether verses 51b-58 were a later addition or not. Robert Kysar, “The Dismantling of Decisional Faith: A Reading of John 6:25-71,” in *Critical Readings of John 6*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper, *Bibl.-Interpr.S* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 161–181: 169, n. 17.

⁴⁰⁸ Burge, *The Anointed Community*, 183. See here also for further literature on the question of authenticity and coherence of Jn 6:51-58.

doublet or so fully adopted ‘Johannine language’ as to make linguistic analyses perilously subjective.”⁴⁰⁹

Regardless of the authenticity and coherence of John 6:51b-58, the question of its possible eucharistic allusions can be discussed. In fact, while there is greater doubt in scholarship about the earlier verses of John 6, the general consensus for John 6:51b-58 is that, in some form, eucharistic language has been employed.⁴¹⁰ In the following, I will give an overview of the scholarly positions in favour of such a eucharistic interpretation, followed by intermediate and critical positions.

A majority of scholars suggest a eucharistic interpretation of John 6:51-58. In their view, Jesus’ exhortations for his flesh to be eaten and his blood to be drunk indicate, or at least hint at, the elements to be consumed by participants in the Eucharist.

Peder Borgen claims that the discourse necessarily includes a eucharistic passage, for 6:52-58 explains the term “φάγειν,” which is used earlier in the chapter and is, according to Borgen’s judgment, naturally connected to the Eucharist. Borgen suggests that 6:58 is a concise homiletic summary.⁴¹¹ It is important to note that here, and in many other investigations, the passage is not interpreted in isolation from the rest of the discourse. The eucharistic meaning has also recently been extended to the whole discourse by, for example. P. Maritz and G. Van Belle: “Due to the correspondence between 6:22-27 and 6:52-59 with 6:35 as point of focus in the discourse (6:22-

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 183. Later, however, Burge comes to the conclusion that the discourse is coherent: “We have found that the discourse should be viewed as a unified whole, that the eucharist motif surfaces only in 6:52-58, and that *σάρξ* in the final dialogue of vv. 60-65 refers back not only to the wisdom section (vv. 35-51) but equally to the offensiveness of the realistic language in 6:52-58. We have thereby also ruled out the objection of Bultmann and Bornkamm that 6:52ff. is a departure from Johannine theology by virtue of its supposed stress on sacramental grace. On the contrary, to argue that the discourse is unified is alone a cogent plea against this view: 6:60-65 then forms a corrective to the very sacramental error these scholars seem to have located in the text.” Ibid., 186.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 181.

⁴¹¹ Peder Borgen, “The Unity of Discourse in John 6,” *ZNW* 50, no. 3-4 (1959), 277-78.

59), it can be determined that the whole discourse stands in service of Christology and Eucharist.”⁴¹²

John Perry claims that “The meaning of John 6.51b-58 is decidedly, even stridently Eucharistic.”⁴¹³ He argues that “originally the eucharistic memorial for the Johannine Community was of an earliest Jewish Christian type that celebrated the Resurrection of Jesus and his anticipated return in glory without memorializing his passion and death. The early church’s choice of Sunday, not Friday, as the day when the Eucharist was universally celebrated is seen by Cullmann as an indirect confirmation that originally it was Jesus’ Resurrection and not his death that was commemorated at the Lord’s Supper. He reminds us, in addition, that the purely eschatological eucharistic celebration described in the *Didache* is ancient extrabiblical testimony to this earliest form of the Lord’s Supper (Did 9.1-10.7). At a later stage in the Johannine community’s history, a different eucharistic practice (somewhat akin to that discussed by Paul in 1. Cor 11.23-6) was introduced which explicitly commemorated the death of Jesus along with his Resurrection and expected Parousia (cp. John 6.54 to 1 Cor 11.26). When this later tradition was combined with the earliest one, telltale literary seams and theological discrepancies resulted.”⁴¹⁴

Jeffery H. Hodges argues that the evangelist’s characterization of Jesus’ flesh and blood (in John 6:55) intends a realistic and eucharistic meal.⁴¹⁵ He also suggests that in John 6:51c-58 the author explicitly employs the Eucharist, thereby giving the feeding miracle a eucharistic

⁴¹² P. Maritz and G. Van Belle, “The Imagery of Eating and Drinking in John 6:35,” in *Imagery in the Gospel of John: Terms, Forms, Themes and Theology of Johannine Figurative Language*, ed. Jörg Frey (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 335–352: 336.

⁴¹³ John M. Perry, “The Evolution of the Johannine Eucharist,” *NTS* 39, no. 1 (1993), 22.

⁴¹⁴ John M. Perry, “The Evolution of the Johannine Eucharist,” 22–23.

⁴¹⁵ Hodges, “Food as Synecdoche in John’s Gospel and Gnostic Texts,” 15, 96–97.

understanding, a notion which has been hinted at by the double mentioning of Jesus having blessed the bread and giving it to the crowd.

Bruce Chilton suggests that “The Gospel according to John (6:1-15) signally develops the eucharistic and paschal aspects of the feeding of the five thousand within the Hellenistic catechesis. Together with the discourse concerning the bread of life in John 6:22-59, the entire complex (which includes the feeding and the crossing of the sea of Tiberias in vv. 16-21) amounts to coherent guidance for the Johannine community regarding the nature of eucharist.”⁴¹⁶

Maarten J. Menken, on the other hand, argues that even though it is reasonable to suppose that eucharistic language, and particularly a version of the institution, has influenced John 6:51c-58, this by no means implies that the passage is *about* the Eucharist, for “σάρξ and αἷμα can refer to the eucharistic elements, but this is by no means the usual way of using these words in Early Christianity.”⁴¹⁷ Menken suggests that the σάρξ probably refers to Jesus as a dying human being.⁴¹⁸ He claims that the supposed eucharistic language influencing the text explains the non-hostile use of the expressions of eating flesh and drinking blood.⁴¹⁹ This latter claim, however, is to be questioned on the grounds of the immediate reaction to the speech, where many of Jesus’ disciples call his words hard (σκληρός ἐστιν ὁ λόγος οὗτος, Jn 6:60). According to Menken, there is no reason to doubt the existence of eucharistic celebrations among Johannine Christ-believers, or that John 6:51c-58 uses eucharistic language, but the primary emphasis of the passage is christological.⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁶ Chilton, *A Feast of Meanings*, 132–133.

⁴¹⁷ Maarten J. Menken, “John 6:51c-58: Eucharist or Christology,” in *Critical Readings of John 6*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper, *Bibl.-Interpr.S* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 183–204: 189.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 183–204: 190.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 183–204: 188.

⁴²⁰ As a result, this passage is considered an integral part of Jn 6.

James D.G. Dunn sees in this speech the Johannine attempt to deal with docetism, which had possibly, but not certainly, been adopted by the community.⁴²¹ More certainly, according to Dunn, a literalistic interpretation of the Eucharist over-emphasizing the physical act had arisen. The discourse, therefore, addresses both erroneous interpretations. Dunn argues that “the ‘eucharistic overtones’ of the passage are secondary and negative in import. The eucharistic language describes not the effect of the sacrament as such, but the union of the ascended Jesus with his believing followers through the Spirit.”⁴²² He claims that the reason for John’s silence about the institution of the Eucharist does not lie in a *disciplina arcanorum*.⁴²³ He locates the reason for the silence in John’s intent to criticize the importance of the ritual act. Dunn undergirds his argument by pointing to the fact that the only handling of the elements during Jesus’ last meal with the disciples causes Satan to enter Judas. It is the Spirit that gives life. One does not gain life through eucharistic elements, which do no good, but through the words of Jesus.⁴²⁴

Craig Koester argues that the word τρώγειν shows that John 6 is not to be connected with the supper: “In 6:54-58 Jesus promised that the one who ‘eats’ would abide in him and live forever, but at the last supper the word ‘eat’ is used only for Judas, who was united with Satan, not Jesus (13:18,26-27), and who found destruction rather than life (17:12).”⁴²⁵

Thus, a number of scholars generally deny a eucharistic meaning for John 6 as a whole and for John 6:51b-58 in particular. Despite this, however, they contend that there is some kind of eucharistic language in its background. It seems hardly possible to argue otherwise.

⁴²¹ The anti-docetic notion has been criticized e.g. by Menken who argues that the passage, as the entire Gospel, has to be read in its context: “as a discussion with a Jewish point of view concerning Jesus’ death.” *Ibid.*, 183–204: 199.

⁴²² James D.G. Dunn, “John 6: A Eucharistic Discourse?” 337.

⁴²³ The origin of John’s silence in the *disciplina arcanorum* has been suggested i.e. by R. M. Ball, “Saint John and the Institution of the Eucharist,” *JSNT*, no. 23 (1985), 65.

⁴²⁴ James D.G. Dunn, “John 6: A Eucharistic Discourse?” 337.

⁴²⁵ Craig R. Koester, “John Six and the Lord’s Supper,” 433.

An intermediate position is taken by Raymond E. Brown. Rejecting theories that the entire discourse is either referring solely to Jesus' teaching or solely to the Eucharist, Brown suggests that "The combination of 'flesh' and 'blood' in 6:53-56, and the use of the realistic verb *trōgō* ('to feed on'), are other eucharistic indications. Thus we must see both doctrinal and eucharistic themes in Jn 6."⁴²⁶ Brown finds further eucharistic elements in the introduction to the discourse, particularly in Jesus' instruction not to labour for perishable food which he considers as referring to v. 12 (collection of the fragments so nothing will perish); and he suggests that in New Testament times manna was treated as a eucharistic symbol.⁴²⁷

Brown's conclusions regarding John 6 are that: "(a) there are Eucharistic overtones throughout the chapter; (b) vv. 35-50 have primarily a sapiential theme; (c) the Eucharistic reference in vv. 51-58 is much clearer than that of the rest of the chapter, and is the primary sense of the passage; (d) there is a certain abrupt shift of emphasis between the two sections of chap. 6 (35-50 and 51-58); (e) vv. 60ff. refer more directly to 35-50 than to 51-58; (f) there is no account of the institution of the Eucharist in the Johannine narrative of the Last Supper; (g) there may be a strong liturgical influence of a Christian Passover ritual on Jn 6."⁴²⁸

Craig Keener argues that eucharistic language in the background of John 6 cannot be missed, but that it is not clear what to make of it. Even if bread and wine are mentioned, this does not necessarily have eucharistic connotations. Furthermore, Keener points out, wine is not mentioned anywhere. He argues that the usual eucharistic term for body is *σῶμα*, and not *σάρξ* as used by John. This could, however, indicate the author's desire to emphasize Jesus' having

⁴²⁶ Raymond Edward Brown, "The Eucharist and Baptism in John," in *New Testament Essays*, ed. Raymond Edward Brown (Garden City: Image Books, 1965), 77-95: 82.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, 77-95: 83-84.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, 77-95: 91-92.

become flesh (1:14; 1 John 4:2; 2 John 7) and the sacrificial connotations. This emphasis may serve to strengthen the Johannine notion of Jesus' death being the real Passover. Keener suggests that in moving the Passover from the Last Supper to the crucifixion, the Johannine use of eucharistic language pertains directly to Jesus' death. The author's intention is an invitation to look at Jesus' death itself rather than at the symbols that point to it. The way to partake in Jesus is through faith and Spirit (6:27-29, 35, 63).⁴²⁹

5.2.5. John 6:60-71

The disciples react negatively to Jesus' "hard" saying (σκληρός ἐστὶν ὁ λόγος οὗτος, Jn 6:60), leading Jesus to ask whether they have taken offence (τοῦτο ὑμᾶς σκανδαλίζει; Jn 6:61). In John 6:63, Jesus adds some clarification to his enigmatic discourse.⁴³⁰ He now states that only the Spirit gives life (τὸ πνεῦμα ἐστὶν τὸ ζωοποιῶν). The flesh is of no use whatsoever (σὰρξ οὐκ ὠφελεῖ οὐδέν). It is the words which he has said that are the Spirit and the life (τὰ ῥήματα ἃ ἐγὼ λελάληκα ὑμῖν πνεῦμά ἐστιν καὶ ζωὴ ἐστὶν, Jn 6:63). Thus, the true ingestion of Jesus is belief in him. The idea of consuming flesh and blood that is recalled here echoes the eucharistic institutions, during which Jesus designates his blood as being poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins (Mt 26:28), or as being poured out for the disciple for the covenant (Mk 14:24), or new covenant (Lk 22:20).

There is obviously some kind of contradiction or at least ambivalence between the exhortations in John 6:51-59 on the one hand and John 6:63 on the other. In the former passage there are highly positive statements about the eating of Jesus' flesh and the drinking of his blood.

⁴²⁹ Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 689–691.

⁴³⁰ Usually Jn 6:63 is understood as referring, at least primarily, to vv. 51-58. Brown, however, suggests that Jn 6:63 pertains to Jn 35-50. *The Gospel According to John*, 1:300.

The notion that it is necessary to consume Jesus' flesh and blood in order to have eternal life is strongly emphasized. In the latter passage, however, Jesus clearly states that only the Spirit gives life. Opposing attitudes towards the σάρξ are found within a range of only 10 verses. The positive portrayal, even the salvific necessity, of consuming Jesus' flesh and blood as means of attaining eternal life (ἐὰν μὴ φάγητε τὴν σάρκα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ πίνητε αὐτοῦ τὸ αἷμα, οὐκ ἔχετε ζωὴν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς, Jn 6:53) seems, at first sight, to be strongly contradicted by the subsequent notion that it is only the Spirit that gives life, that the flesh is useless since the Spirit makes life, and that Jesus' spoken words are Spirit and life (τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν τὸ ζωοποιοῦν, ἡ σὰρξ οὐκ ὠφελεῖ οὐδέν· τὰ ῥήματα ἃ ἐγὼ λελάληκα ὑμῖν πνεῦμά ἐστιν καὶ ζωὴ ἐστιν, Jn 6:63).

A closer investigation, however, suggests that John 6:63 is most likely not there in order to contradict 6:53: the ways in which σάρξ is employed in those two verses do not belong to the same categories. First, the combination of words differs: πνεῦμα/σάρξ in John 6:63 and σάρξ/αἷμα in John 6:53. Second, the σάρξ in 6:51-56 within the bread of life discourse is always qualified as Jesus' σάρξ (μού in vv. 51, 54, 55, 56, [αὐτοῦ] v. 52, τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου' v. 53). In all other occurrences in the Fourth Gospel, σάρξ (without an article), is not qualified as *the* flesh but established as flesh as such and as the opposing pole to the Spirit (πνεῦμα). John 6:63, therefore, does not refer to 6:53 in order to create ambivalence but rather belongs to the framework of opposition as is familiar from the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus for example (τὸ γεγεννημένον ἐκ τῆς σαρκὸς σὰρξ ἐστιν, καὶ τὸ γεγεννημένον ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος πνεῦμά ἐστιν. Jn 3:6).⁴³¹ The eating of the flesh and the drinking of the blood is not the end. John 6:63 emphasizes

⁴³¹ The parallels between Jn 6:63 and Jn 3:6 are not confined to the parallel wording of the opposition between flesh and Spirit: "Hier wie dort ist das Thema die Erlangung des ewigen Lebens. Hier wie dort begegnet die gleiche Begründung. Dort (c. 3) wird der Geist als die Kraft der Wiedergeburt und des ewigen Lebens verstanden und diese -

that it is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh is ultimately useless. The words that Jesus speaks are the goal of the discourse.

In John 6:64, the narrator points out that Jesus knows those who believe in him and who is the one to betray him (Jn 6:64), and he calls that person a devil (Jn 6:70). Who it is – Judas – is explicitly added a little later (Jn 6:71). The designation of Judas as the betrayer appears in the Synoptic accounts of the institution of the Eucharist, and the betrayal is referred to by Paul's words of institution (1 Cor 11:23).⁴³² The notion in 6:64 can, therefore, be heard as an allusion to the Eucharist.⁴³³

The betrayal is not only an allusion to the eucharistic accounts outside the Gospel. As has already been demonstrated in the chapter on the narrative, the betrayal by Judas is also one of the central links between John 6 and John 13. John 13 is the meal scene in which one would expect the institution of the Eucharist.

5.3.Excursus: Reading John 6 against Jewish Traditions

While searching for eucharistic elements in John 6 is a legitimate approach, other allusions are possible too. The chapter's many allusions to Jewish traditions, in particular, cannot go unnoticed. Two examples shall be addressed in the following.

für uns besonders wichtig - mit dem Geheimnis der Herabkunft und des Aufstiegs des Menschensohnes begründet (6,62; 3,13f.). Und beidemal wird der Offenbarungscharakter der Rede durch eine Sentenz unterstrichen, die Fleisch und Geist, natürliche und göttliche Möglichkeit schroff gegeneinander stellt. Beidemal wird endlich in geheimnisvoller, die Unverständigen abwehrender Rede die paradoxe Zusammengehörigkeit von Jesu Herabkunft und Erhöhung verkündet.“ Günther Bornkamm, “Die eucharistische Rede im Johannes-Evangelium,” 166–67.

⁴³² For detailed discussion of the connection of betrayal and Eucharist, see below the discussion of eucharistic notions in Jn 13.

⁴³³ While Petersen has correctly pointed out the fact that the eucharistic discourses in Jn 6 are in the context of table fellowship in Jesus' ministry – as has been suggested by many to be the historical reality – her claim that they have nothing to do with his death and the Last Supper prior to it needs to be questioned. Petersen, “Jesus zum ‘Kauen’?: Das Johannesevangelium, das Abendmahl und die Mysterienkulte,” 105–130: 116.

5.3.1. Traces of Rabbinic Traditions

In a famous, often cited and highly influential study, Peder Borgen has investigated the topos of the manna in John 6:31-58 (along with Philo *Mut.* 258-260; *Leg. all. III*, 162-168 and *Congr.* 170.173-174) in light of scriptural manna traditions.⁴³⁴ Borgen argues that John and Philo both interpret and expound the Old Testament pericope on manna, the bread from heaven (Ex 16). He discusses how Philo and John paraphrase words from Exodus in their exposition and how they interweave them with haggadic material on the manna. Borgen argues this by adducing arguments of structure. He suggests that John puts the paraphrase into a homiletic framework forming a homiletic pattern. The pattern consists of an Old Testament quotation followed by an exegetical paraphrase that determines its exposition. The Old Testament quotation identified by Borgen is Exodus 16:4, 15.

The study's intention is to show that behind John 6 lay various midrashic methods: a scriptural question is linked with a sentence from the Haggadah; there are contrasts, philological corrections of the Old Testament texts, a paraphrasing exegesis of the Old Testament quotations, different readings of the Masoretic text and a replacing or supplementing of words. If the Palestinian midrashic and the Philonic patterns are taken seriously, a translation of John 6:31b-32 into Hebrew suggests that John intends to provide the correct and authoritative rendering of the Old Testament quotation in contrast to the inaccurate rendering of it.⁴³⁵ The Midrash given in the following verses builds on this authoritative rendering. Borgen considers vv. 32-48 as a skilful interpretation of the scriptural quotation: ἄρτον ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς. (Jn 6:31).

⁴³⁴ Borgen, *Bread from Heaven*.

⁴³⁵ Thyen criticizes Borgen's definition of the pericope. He argues that the discourse opens earlier, namely with the double amen in v. 26. Limiting the investigation to vv. 31-58 appears as an arbitrary means of making the pericope fit the "homiletic pattern" that Borgen has discovered in Philo and Palestinian Midrashim. Thyen, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 353-354.

Subsequently, vv. 49-58 interpret φαγεῖν following the same principles derived from analyses of ExR 25:2, 6; MekEx 16:4; Philo's *Vita Mosis* I, 201-202; II, 267 and other sources.

Borgen's formal analysis of John 6:31-58 demonstrates with a high degree of probability that, a) John follows a midrashic pattern which is recognizable as such, and b) the pattern's elements are followed throughout. This weighs heavily against viewing vv. 51-58 as an interpolation.⁴³⁶ Philo's handling of the manna tradition in *Leg. all.* 162-168 and *Mut.* 253-263 is distinctly different from John's. This practically rules out that one is dependent on the other. The link between them is more likely a relatively fixed tradition of homiletic teaching, the Palestinian Midrash, according to Borgen. While Borgen's thesis that John 6:31-58 is a homily on the manna from Exodus 16 is very convincing, his interpretation of its context falls short.

Borgen understands the homily in terms of certain ideas: the identifications of Wisdom with Torah and of manna with Torah, and the belief in Israel as the nation who "sees" God. The last point serves as the basis for Borgen's theory that John 6 is related to *Merkabah* mysticism. Borgen argues that the passage at stake functions as a polemic against gnosticizing tendencies that distinguish sharply between the eternal and the spiritual sphere. According to Borgen, John is influenced by a docetic Christology and opposes this tendency. Furthermore, the Gospel of John is written in Greek, assumingly for a primarily Greek speaking audience. Borgen does not hesitate in any way, however, to translate this Greek text into Hebrew and to interpret it against unvocalized Hebrew texts from the Rabbis. While not impossible, this implies quite a leap.⁴³⁷ Also, Borgen's limitation to vv. 31-58 does not take into account that the discourses are closely related to the

⁴³⁶ Cf. discussion above.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, 354.

feeding miracle; consequently, he also misses the chapter's reference to Passover that forms the framework for the entire chapter.

Maarten Menken has challenged Borgen's assumption that the manna topic developed in John 6 is a Midrash on Exodus 16:4, 15. He tackles the issue by re-examining in minute detail the different possible scriptural sources to which John 6:31 may be referring.⁴³⁸ Furthermore, Menken examines the meaning of the quotation in its Johannine context, particularly the conception about Moses and the manna. Menken argues that the deviations of John 6:31 from Psalm 78(77):24 in the LXX version are more easily explicable than those from Exodus 16. The former, therefore, is the more likely candidate for the source of John 6:31 than the latter.

5.3.2. Traces of Wisdom Tradition

Many scholars have suggested reading John 6 against the background of wisdom traditions.⁴³⁹ Angelika Strotmann has recently proposed a reading of John 6 in line with Sophia-traditions in Proverbs and the Wisdom of Ben Sira.⁴⁴⁰ In Proverbs, Sophia appears as the provider of food, the tree of life and the generous host. In the Wisdom of Ben Sira the personified wisdom appears as the provider of food. A number of parallels can be drawn between these scriptural traditions and the Gospel of John. Sophia/wisdom and Jesus offer things that need to be consumed in order to be effective. The effect consists in partaking in the divine character of Sophia (for example: wisdom, insight) or in Jesus' divine character respectively (for example: faith, doing the will of God,

⁴³⁸ Maarten J. Menken, "The Provenance and Meaning of the Old Testament Quotation in John 6:31," *NovT* 30, no. 1 (1988).

⁴³⁹ E.g. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 269, 273-274; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium* (Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 1965-1984), II 59; André Feuillet, *Etudes johanniques*, ML.B, vol. 4 (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1962), 77-79; Delbert Royce Burkett, *The Son of the Man in the Gospel of John*, JSNT.S, vol. 56 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 129-130; see 130-134 for a reading of John on the background of Isa 55:1-3, 10-11.

⁴⁴⁰ Angelika Strotmann, "Die göttliche Weisheit als Nahrungsspenderin, Gastgeberin und sich selbst anbietende Speise," in "Eine gewöhnliche und harmlose Speise?": *Von den Entwicklungen frühchristlicher Abendmahlstraditionen*, ed. Judith Hartenstein (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2008), 131-156.

accepting God's teaching). The first and foremost effect is attaining (eternal) life. Regardless of whether someone eats Sophia's fruit (Prov 8, Sir 1:11-20; 24:16-22) and understands her as the tree of life that bears fruit (Prov 3:13-20, Sir 1:11-20; 14:20-27; 24:12-22), or whether someone is invited to a great feast (Prov 9:1-6, Sir 15:1-6), Sophia offers them long life or a life that is not dominated by death.

In all three traditions, Sophia/wisdom and Jesus are those who offer food to their audience in a direct manner. The transition from bread to flesh in John 6:51-58 recalls the reverse transition in Proverbs 9. Here, Sophia prepares meat for her visitors (Prov 9:2) but subsequently invites her guests for bread (Prov 9:5). In the proverbial as well as the Johannine context the consumption leads to eternal life.

Sirach 24:21 offers an even more striking parallel to John 6. In both texts Sophia and Jesus respectively not only appear as providers of food but subsequently also offer themselves as food and drink (οἱ ἐσθίουντες με ἔτι πεινάσουσιν, καὶ οἱ πίνοντές με ἔτι διψήσουσιν, Sir 24:21; cf. Jn 6:35). The shift from providing food to offering oneself as food is, therefore, not a Johannine invention. Sophia and Jesus do not act on their own will but have both been sent by God. While Jesus is sent by the Father, Sophia has emerged from God's own mouth (Sir 24:3) and has taken housing on Zion. Sophia and the Johannine Jesus reveal a further similarity in that they both emphasize their person by repeating "ἐγώ" in their speeches (Sir 24:3, 4, 16, 17; Jn 6:35, 41, 48, 51).

Based on these parallels, Strotmann argues that there is a direct line from Wisdom the host in Proverbs and from the Wisdom of Ben Sira to the figure of Jesus in John 6.⁴⁴¹ While the

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 131–156.

parallels are striking, there are also differences that need to be taken into account. While John 6:35 stresses the one-time satisfaction of hunger, Sir 24:23 puts it quite differently: wisdom is identified with Torah, and the eating and drinking of wisdom shall indeed create unquenchable thirst and hunger for this nourishment (Sir 24:23).⁴⁴²

5.4. Footwashing as a Replacement of the Eucharist in Jesus' Last Meal

(John 13)

John 13 contains the account of Jesus' last meal with his disciples. The reader is immediately reminded of the Synoptic Last Supper scenes, despite the significant differences between them and the Johannine account. The Synoptics give their accounts of Jesus performing symbolic actions with bread and wine and words of institution, while the Johannine account contains neither. Instead, Jesus is portrayed as washing his disciples' feet.⁴⁴³ The institution of the Eucharist and the footwashing are two very different sets of actions. The fact that the accounts of Jesus' last meal with his disciples differ in terms of date could indicate that John and the Synoptics are not talking about the same evening or the same meal at all.⁴⁴⁴ It has never been seriously doubted, however, that John 13 is the meal that parallels the Synoptic accounts of Jesus' last meal with his disciples. There are a number of similarities relating John 13 to the Synoptic and Pauline accounts of institution, the betrayal being an important one.

⁴⁴² Cf. Burkett, *The Son of the Man in the Gospel of John*, 129.

⁴⁴³ It has been argued by R. M. Ball that while the words of institution are omitted in the Johannine account they are still present in a veiled way. He sees the reason for this in the arcane discipline and suggests that "the mystery of the eucharist was reserved to the initiated, and should not be publicly proclaimed in a gospel.... The evangelist has given enough clues to show that εἰς τέλος ἠγάπησεν αὐτούς means that Jesus instituted the eucharist. The initiated would understand." R. M. Ball, "Saint John and the Institution of the Eucharist," 65.

⁴⁴⁴ All four Gospels refer to Passover but the dating differs. While the meal is a Passover meal in the Synoptics, Jn notes clearly that the event at stake takes place prior to Passover (Πρὸ δὲ τῆς ἑορτῆς τοῦ πάσχα, Jn 13,1). The connection of the Last Supper to Passover is only found in the Gospels; no such notion is found in the Pauline account of the Lord's Supper.

All canonical accounts of Jesus' last meal include a prediction, or the notion that one of Jesus' followers will betray him (εἷς ἐξ ὑμῶν παραδώσει με, Mt 26:21; οὗτός με παραδώσει, Mt 26:23; εἷς ἐξ ὑμῶν παραδώσει με ὁ ἐσθίων μετ' ἐμοῦ, Mk 14:18; τοῦ παραδιδόντος, Lk 22:21; τοῦ διαβόλου ἤδη βεβληκός εἰς τὴν καρδίαν ἵνα παραδοῖ αὐτὸν Ἰούδας Σίμωνος Ἰσκαριώτου, Jn 13:2; εἷς ἐξ ὑμῶν παραδώσει με, Jn 13:21), or has betrayed him (παρεδίδετο, 1 Cor 11:23). There are differences in how the betrayal is told within the narrative, but all the same, each Gospel contains this central element that parallels John 13 with the Pauline words and Synoptic accounts of Jesus' last meal.

At the outset of John 13, only Jesus, the narrator and the reader know who is going to betray Jesus (Jn 13:2-3). In the footwashing scene, the narrator once more reminds the reader of the prospective betrayal (Jn 13:11). Jesus finally announces that one of the disciples will betray him (εἷς ἐξ ὑμῶν παραδώσει με, Jn 13:21). Simon Peter makes a sign to the Beloved Disciple who is reclining next to Jesus exhorting him to ask Jesus who the betrayer is. The Beloved Disciple asks, and Jesus answers that it is the one for whom he will dip the morsel and give it to.

The details of how the betrayer is designated vary in the different accounts: in Matthew and Mark, Jesus declares that the one “dipping with me” (ὁ ἐμβάψας μετ' ἐμοῦ, Mt 26:23; ὁ ἐμβαπτόμενος μετ' ἐμοῦ, Mk 14:20; βάψω and βάψας, Jn 13:26; same lemma in all cases but different forms) is the one who will betray him. In Mark and Matthew, the dipping precedes the Eucharist, whereas the designation of the betrayer follows the words of institution in Luke (with no mention of dipping). Common to all four Gospels is the question of who this (i.e. the betrayer) might be (ἤρξαντο λέγειν αὐτῷ εἷς ἕκαστος· μήτι ἐγώ εἰμι, κύριε; Mt 26:22; ἤρξαντο λυπεῖσθαι καὶ λέγειν αὐτῷ εἷς κατὰ εἷς· μήτι ἐγώ; Mk 14:19; καὶ αὐτοὶ ἤρξαντο συζητεῖν πρὸς ἑαυτοὺς τὸ τίς ἄρα εἶη ἐξ αὐτῶν ὁ τοῦτο μέλλων πράσσειν. Lk 22:23; ἔβλεπον εἰς ἀλλήλους οἱ μαθηταὶ

ἀπορούμενοι περὶ τίνος λέγει, Jn 13:22; and in Jn 13:25 the Beloved Disciple asks Jesus directly who it is: κύριε, τίς ἐστίν;). John 13 is the only text that not only announces a symbolic action by which the betrayer is designated, but also explicitly recounts that Jesus performs the action: Jesus dips the morsel and gives it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Judas takes the morsel and, after this, the reader learns from the narrator that Satan enters Judas.

Jesus tells Judas to quickly do what he has to do. The other disciples do not understand, or rather, misunderstand what this means. The symbolic feeding has to take place in order to fulfill Scripture (Jn 13:18, quoting Ps 40:40: καὶ γὰρ ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς εἰρήνης μου ἐφ’ ὃν ἤλπισα ὁ ἐσθίων ἄρτους μου ἐμεγάλυνεν ἐπ’ ἐμὲ περνισμόν; note, however, the change from the LXX ἐσθίειν to Johannine τρώγειν in this quotation).

After having taken the morsel, Judas leaves the place and goes into the night. That there are strong allusions here to the Eucharist has also been claimed by Hodges. Hodges argues that “in dipping the ψωμίον and handing it to Judas, Jesus is – in the evangelist’s interpretation – proffering the eucharist.”⁴⁴⁵ Hodges further suggests that even with the word τρώγων alone (Jn

⁴⁴⁵ Hodges argues that:

- the reference to Ps 40(41):10 identifies the ψωμίον as ἄρτον, and adds that this is linked to the ἄρτος ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ (Jn 6:50) which is identified as Jesus’ flesh which has to be eaten.
- the fact that Satan possesses Judas “certainly fulfils any Pauline-induced expectations concerning the consequences suffered by one eating the eucharist unworthily (cf. 1 Cor. 11:27-32).”
- in a rabbinical tradition on Ruth 2:14 (which Jn alludes to by talking about a morsel) Ruth ate and was nourished by merely a morsel, and this would contrast with what happened to Judas.
- the verbs λαμβάνει καὶ δίδωσιν (Jn 13:27), when Jesus takes the morsel and gives it to Judas, recall Mt 26:26 (λαβὼν ... καὶ δοῦς) and Lk 22:19 (λαβὼν ... καὶ ἔδωκεν) – the same words used by all Synoptics for describing how Jesus takes and distributes the eucharistic bread.
- there is a close parallel in time-line constraints: Judas’ acceptance of the morsel between the mention of the “dipping” and the end of the meal parallels Mt 26:23-28 and Mark 13:20-24 where the same order is followed.
- the ψωμίον alludes to the image of the κλάσμα (considered as synonym to ψωμίον), the breaking of the eucharistic bread in the Synoptics (cf. ἔκλασεν - Mt. 26:26; Mk. 14.22; Lk. 22:19).
- the liquid into which Jesus dips the morsel can very well be interpreted as wine for it would balance the ἄρτον better than any other liquid.

13:18, paralleling 6:51c-59), the certainty of eucharistic allusion can be claimed. The consequences that Judas suffers fit precisely what is to be expected when someone eats the Eucharist unworthily.⁴⁴⁶ The identification of the morsel with eucharistic bread has led Burge to note that “It is interesting that in John 13 the only mention of ‘eucharistic bread’ being given refers to Judas. In the very act of receiving it (13:27) the devil enters into him. Thus for Judas, the only literal communicant in this Gospel, this eating became a communion not with Jesus but with Satan.”⁴⁴⁷

In summary, there are at least three obvious and direct parallels between the Synoptic accounts of the Eucharist and the Fourth Gospel’s last meal:⁴⁴⁸

- All four Gospels include a scene of a last meal on the night prior to Jesus’ crucifixion (Jn 13; Mt 26:20-30; Mk 14:17-26; Lk 22:14-39 [Lk’s account of the last meal includes the dispute about greatness among the disciples and the prediction of Peter’s denial and is therefore significantly longer than Mt and Mk]). John 13 is the parallel story to the Synoptic and Pauline accounts that include the institution of the Eucharist.

Hodges, “Food as Synecdoche in John’s Gospel and Gnostic Texts,” 514-574; quotation p. 574.

⁴⁴⁶ Hodges, “Food as Synecdoche in John’s Gospel and Gnostic Texts,” 572-74.

⁴⁴⁷ Burge, *The Anointed Community*, 187.

⁴⁴⁸ A further minor parallel linking the Johannine to the Lukan account can be found in the question about who is the greatest (μείζων): When among the disciples a discussion arises as to which one among them is the greatest (τὸ τίς αὐτῶν δοκεῖ εἶναι μείζων, Lk 22:24), Jesus reacts to this in a rhetorical question: the one at the table or the one who serves (τίς γὰρ μείζων, ὁ ἀνακείμενος ἢ ὁ διακονῶν; οὐχὶ ὁ ἀνακείμενος; Lk 22:27). The answer is immediately given by Jesus himself: The greatest is the one who is among them as one who serves (ἐγὼ δὲ ἐν μέσῳ ὑμῶν εἰμι ὡς ὁ διακονῶν. Lk 22:27). The conclusion to be drawn from this is, of course, that Jesus is the greatest.

John likewise includes the question of greatness – Jesus’ greatness – in his account but elaborates this further than Lk. Simon Peter’s reaction in Jn 13:6 clearly shows that here the master is the one serving and that there is something unusual about that. When the act of the footwashing is completed Jesus explains its meaning and therein comments on the question of greatness. He points out that the servant (δοῦλος, Jn 13:15) is not greater (μείζων, Jn 13:16) than his master nor are messengers than the one who has sent them. When compared to the Lukan notion, here Jesus’ greatness over against his disciples is not questioned. It is, however, put into the greater context of the one who has sent Jesus, and thereby differentiating his own status of greatness somewhat more.

In the question about greatness one can therefore find a parallel between the Johannine and the Lukan meal accounts.

- All four Gospel accounts include within this meal the notion of betrayal, the question of the identity of the betrayer and some description of how he is designated.
- Jesus institutes a ritual that is to be performed in the future by his disciples. While it is clear that John is talking about the same meal as that in which the Synoptics include the institution of the Eucharist, this ritual is excluded in the Johannine version of Jesus' last meal. Instead, the Johannine Jesus institutes the footwashing.

Numerous interpretations of the Johannine footwashing have been offered. John Christopher Thomas divides the manifold interpretations into seven categories, one of which is the "Footwashing as a Symbol of the Eucharist."⁴⁴⁹ The primary source of evidence for this understanding is the footwashing's setting or context: "Since Jesus' actions in John take the place of the institution of the eucharist as recorded in the Synoptics, it is often assumed that the author of the Fourth Gospel is drawing attention to a connection between the two stories."⁴⁵⁰ Basically there are two ways to interpret this: a) the footwashing is an additional act to that of the Eucharist, which is Thomas' view. As for the conjunction of footwashing and Eucharist, he suggests that the footwashing probably took place in the context of a meal, perhaps an Agape meal, together with the Eucharist. If this is the case, then the footwashing would have preceded the Eucharist, since Jesus joins the meal again in v. 12, and v. 27 records that the meal comes to its end. Thomas argues that the footwashing signifies the cleansing of believers from post-conversion sin and that it

⁴⁴⁹ The other categories identified by Thomas are footwashing as: an example of humility; a symbol of the eucharist; a symbol of baptism; a symbol of (post-baptismal) forgiveness of sin and/or cleansing; a sacrament separate from baptism and the Eucharist; a soteriological sign; and a polemic against baptism or ritual purification; John Christopher Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 11–17. Thomas here draws on and expands the surveys on the history of the interpretation of the footwashing by the two German scholars: Wolfram Lohse, "Die Fusswaschung Joh 13, 1–20: Eine Geschichte ihrer Deutung" (Dissertation 1967); and Georg Richter, *Die Fusswaschung im Johannesevangelium: Geschichte ihrer Deutung* (Regensburg: F. Pustet, 1967).

⁴⁵⁰ Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community*, 13.

was practised by the Johannine community, the existence of which is taken for granted.⁴⁵¹ The other option is that b) the footwashing in John 13 is accounted here as a replacement of the Eucharist.

In order to assess these two options, the sequence of events in the Johannine last meal will be assessed in comparison to the order in the respective Synoptic accounts.⁴⁵² I will outline the order of events of the Johannine last meal and first compare it to Luke, for this is the most elaborate account, and then to Mark and Matthew.

The sequence (setting aside for the time being the comments by the omniscient narrator) in John is as follows: During the course of the meal (δείπνου γινομένου, Jn 13:2),⁴⁵³ Jesus gets up from the meal (ἐγείρεται ἐκ τοῦ δείπνου, Jn 13:4), takes off his clothes and ties a towel around his waist, pours water into a basin, washes his disciples' feet, and wipes them with the towel that was around his waist. This is followed by the discussion between Jesus and Peter. When Jesus is finished with the washing and has put his clothes back on, he reclines again (ἀνέπεσεν πάλιν, Jn 13:12). This suggests that the meal is still in course; perhaps the δείπνον is over and the συμπόσιον is about to begin. Jesus enters into a speech explaining his actions and after this announces the betrayal. The disciples wonder who will betray him, and Jesus designates Judas by means of dipping a morsel into the bowl, handing it to Judas and telling him to do quickly what he is going to do. Judas leaves into the darkness, then Jesus once again speaks and gives the disciples the

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 184–185.

⁴⁵² Apart from the words of institution, the Pauline account does not give any more detail on what happened that night.

⁴⁵³ The variant readings do not alter the fact that the footwashing takes place during the meal, for they both demonstrate the same point: “Despite some strong support for δείπνου γενομένου (‘when supper had ended’) δείπνου γινομένου is preferred as the original reading. This judgment is based upon (1) slightly better external evidence (⌘* B W it^d syr^{pal} arm) and (2) internal coherence, for it is obvious from the context (v. 26) that the meal continues after the footwashing episode is complete.” Ibid., 83, n. 2. Cf. also Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament* (London: 1971), 239; G. M. Behler, *The Last Discourse of Jesus* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1965), 27.

command to show love to each other. In summary: the meal takes place, Jesus performs a symbolic action during its course, and then the announcement of the betrayal occurs.

The order of events in John 13 reveals close parallels to the order of events in the Lukan account. Jesus reclines with the disciples (Lk 22:14) and announces that he wants to eat the Passover with them (Lk 22:15-16). Then, during the course of the meal, he institutes the Eucharist; Jesus blesses the wine first and tells the disciples to share it (Lk 22:17-18), then he goes on to the bread, blesses, breaks, and distributes it (Lk 22:19). When the meal is over, Jesus makes a blessing over yet another cup. In Luke's account, the mention of two cups causes difficulties regarding their identification: which of the two Lukan cups is the eucharistic one? For this matter it is necessary to consider the Pauline and the two other Synoptic accounts. These three accounts unanimously suggest that the institution of bread and cup take place together, one following the other immediately. In Luke, the blessing over the bread is immediately preceded by the blessing over the first cup, while the second cup is isolated from the institution of the bread. The blessing over the second cup takes place only after the meal (καὶ τὸ ποτήριον ὡσαύτως μετὰ τὸ δεῖπνῆσαι, Lk 22:20).

If one identifies the first cup as the eucharistic one, this leads to a reverse order as compared to the Pauline, Markan and Matthean accounts in which there is first the blessing over bread and then over the cup. A further argument from textual criticism may be adduced in order to underpin the likelihood that the first cup is the eucharistic one. Verses 19b and 20 are probably an interpolation, for they are missing in many manuscripts, particularly in the oldest sources.⁴⁵⁴ The

⁴⁵⁴ For a detailed discussion of the issue that concludes, however, in an unconvincing judgement of the evidence in order to argue for the second cup as being the eucharistic one, cf. "Special Note on the Text of Vv. 19b and 20," William F. Arndt, *Bible Commentary: The Gospel according to St. Luke* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 439–40.

principle that the more difficult reading is the preferable one underpins the identification of the first cup as the eucharistic one.⁴⁵⁵ Identifying the first cup as the eucharistic one is more difficult in that it departs from the other Synoptics' order of events.

In summary: In the Lukan order, the events during the last meal begin with the blessing over the cup, then over the bread. This is followed by the announcement of the betrayal and the question among the disciples of who the betrayer may be.

The comparison of the order of events in the course of the meal scenes has revealed that the Johannine order is similar to that of Luke. In John, when the meal has started, Jesus gets up and performs the footwashing instead of instituting the Eucharist. The footwashing is indeed found at the place in which Luke places the institution (in which the first cup, and the bread that follows immediately thereafter, are identified as the eucharistic elements). Both symbolic actions, the Lukan institution and the Johannine footwashing, are followed by the announcement of the betrayal and the subsequent question of who the betrayer may be. The fact that the Johannine footwashing is found at exactly the point in the meal at which Luke places the institution indicates that the Johannine footwashing very likely replaces the Lukan Eucharist.

Mark and Matthew share an order of events which differs slightly from Luke and John. When they eat (ἐσθιόντων δὲ αὐτῶν, Mt 26:21; Mk 14:18) Jesus announces the betrayal, followed by the question of who the betrayer may be. Jesus declares that the one who will dip with him in the bowl is the betrayer. Jesus finally speaks the words of institution.

The Johannine order differs from Matthew and Mark in that the Johannine announcement of the betrayal follows the main symbolic action (footwashing), while Matthew and Mark have the

⁴⁵⁵ For an argument of the opposite view, see Pierson Parker, "Three Variant Readings in Luke-Acts," *JBL* 83, no. 2 (1964), 665–67.

announcement first and place the words of institution only at the end of the meal scene. Nevertheless, in the narrator's comment in John 13:2, the motif of betrayal also immediately precedes the symbolic action. As the narrator tells the reader, Jesus knows that the devil has entered into Judas' heart to betray him, which establishes a sequence resembling that in Matthew and Mark, even if the explicit words about the betrayal uttered by the Johannine Jesus are after the footwashing. It can be concluded that the footwashing, which is instituted at the last meal that Jesus takes with his disciples before his death, likely replaces the Eucharist in terms of the symbolic action.

Two further arguments may be adduced in support of this suggestion. The first one concerns further parallels of Jesus' utterings during the meal. The Johannine Jesus orders his disciples to follow his example and to continue what he has shown them and performed on them (Jn 13:14-17). This is reminiscent of the Pauline notion that they (namely the disciples whom Jesus supposedly was speaking to) should perform the action and do it in his memory (twice in 1 Cor 11:24-25). Thus, in both cases, there is an action that is demonstrated and which the disciples are instructed to repeat in the future. The second, and more important, argument concerns the point at which the footwashing is placed in the course of events. Feet are normally washed before a meal and not during its course or at its end. The Johannine account runs counter to all other evidence of footwashing in antiquity.

5.4.1. Footwashing in Antiquity

From a socio-historical perspective it is highly unusual that in John 13 the footwashing takes place during the meal and not before it begins. Feet were generally cleaned very often. Firm footwear was not worn due to the general warmth in the Mediterranean and, therefore, feet got very dirty

from the dust.⁴⁵⁶ For that reason, footwashing was done often. It became such an expected part of personal hygiene and an act of preparation for specific tasks, experiences, or relationships in the 1st century CE, that the expression “with unwashed feet” came to carry the meaning of “not adequately prepared.”⁴⁵⁷

In his study on the Johannine footwashing, Thomas has compiled and discussed a comprehensive catalogue of citations about footwashing in antiquity, first addressing footwashing in the Old Testament and early Judaism, and then in the Greco-Roman world at large as well as the New Testament.⁴⁵⁸

5.4.1.1. Footwashings in the Old Testament and Early Judaism

In *Footwashings in the Old Testament and Early Judaism*, Thomas distinguishes three categories:

1. cultic settings, 2. domestic settings for personal hygiene and comfort, and 3. domestic settings devoted to hospitality.

1. *Cultic settings*. Texts of this category deal with priestly rites. Priests were obliged to ritually purify themselves, that is to wash their hands and feet for a variety of sacred activities such as entering into the tabernacle and temple and offering a sacrifice. In Exodus 30:17-21 Moses receives the respective commands; in Exodus 40:30-32 these instructions are carried out; 1 Kings 7:38 and 2 Chronicles 4:6 elaborate on the provisions for entering the Solomonic Temple; Josephus’ *Antiquities* 8:87 mentions a sea available for priests to wash hands and feet before entering the Temple; the passages in *Mishnah Yoma* 3:2-4, 6; 4:5; 7:3 document that the High

⁴⁵⁶ Bernhard Kötting and D. Halama “Fußwaschung,” in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum: Sachwörterbuch zur Auseinandersetzung des Christentums mit der antiken Welt*, ed. Theodor Klauser (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1972), 8, 743–777: 743.

⁴⁵⁷ Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community*, 34.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Chapter 3: “Footwashing in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman Environment,” pp. 26–60.

Priest was required to wash his hands and feet on the day of atonement; Exodus 29:4 seems to portray an initiatory bath: whereas the body as such seems to be purified for life, hands and feet needed to be purified regularly because of their exposure; Philo conveys a similar idea when he mentions footwashing as aspects of preparation for soul and body in *Quaestiones in Exodum* 1:2 and *Vita Mosis* 2:138.

2. *Domestic settings for personal hygiene and comfort.* The act of footwashing is ordinarily performed by the individual him/herself: in 2 Samuel 11:8-11 David instructs Uriah to “wash his feet;”⁴⁵⁹ in 2 Samuel 19:24 Mephibosheth “does not care for his feet” (וְלֹא-עָשָׂה רְגְלָיו) the meaning of which most likely is that he did not wash his feet; in Song of Songs 5:3 the beloved tells her lover that she has washed her feet and asks if she needs to soil them again.

3. *Domestic settings devoted to hospitality.* The majority of footwashings mentioned fall into this category. When in Genesis 18:4 the three men come to Abraham, they are offered water for footwashing before a meal is served to them;⁴⁶⁰ in Genesis 19:2 the same men are offered water by Lot in order for them to wash their (own) feet; Genesis 24:32 has Laban offering water to Eleazar and his associates for a footwashing; in Genesis 43:24, Joseph’s brothers receive water to wash their feet, which is soon followed by a meal; Judges 19:21 mentions a footwashing followed by a meal; in 1 Samuel 25 Abigail expresses her willingness to wash the feet of David’s servants when they convey to her David’s proposal to marry her; this idea of the host performing the footwashing himself is also found in the Testament of Abraham 3:9 according to which Abraham

⁴⁵⁹ Thomas suggests that, in this instruction, David is simply ordering Uriah to go home and make himself comfortable. Drawing on Holy War regulations (cf. 1 Sam 21:5, Dtn 23:10-15; Num 31:1-24), two different interpretations have been offered: a) “wash your feet” here means that Uriah can have intercourse with Bathseba and thereby loses purity for Holy War, or b) David tells Uriah to have intercourse with Bathseba, thereby putting himself in an impure state, and to perform the footwashing afterwards in order to regain purity for the Holy War. Cf. *ibid.*, 32.

⁴⁶⁰ It remains unclear, however, whether the men washed their feet themselves or if this task was fulfilled by Abraham’s servants.

washes his angelic visitor Michael's feet before he reclines; in Joseph and Aseneth 7:1 Joseph's feet get washed, presumably by slaves, when he comes to Pentephres' house. Again, this action is a hospitable gesture that immediately precedes a meal. Aseneth then asks God in a prayer for the opportunity to serve as Joseph's servant, which includes washing his feet (JosAs 13:15); before the banquet in Aseneth's father's house takes place, Aseneth performs the action, thereby expressing her deep love for Joseph.

In all these sources, the footwashing, which is often accounted in relation to a meal, clearly takes place prior to the meal.

5.4.1.2. Footwashing in the Greco-Roman World

In his survey of evidence in the Greco-Roman world at large, Thomas applies very similar categories: 1. Footwashing in Ritual Settings, 2. Footwashing and Hygiene, and 3. Footwashing and Hospitality.⁴⁶¹ In general, evidence of washings that are ritual in nature is numerous in the Greco-Roman world. The washing of feet in particular, however, appears rather infrequently. The majority of these sources are found in connection with a meal or banquet, preceding it in every one of these cases. The act is usually performed by a slave, and thus footwashing comes to be used as a synonym for slavery.

5.4.1.3. Footwashing in the New Testament

Apart from the prime evidence of footwashing in John 13, the motif of footwashing occurs rather infrequently in the New Testament. In the Lukan account of the anointment of Jesus' feet (Lk 7:36-50), the woman who performs this action wets Jesus' feet with her tears and dries them with

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 42–55.

her hair. In the discussion with Simon the Pharisee in whose house the scene takes place, Jesus justifies the woman's actions to which Simon has taken offence. Jesus blames Simon for not providing water for him to wash his feet. Jesus obviously would have expected this as an act of hospitality from Simon.⁴⁶²

Footwashing is further mentioned in 1 Tim 5:9, 10. It is the only instance in the New Testament in which footwashing is mentioned in a list of duties and responsibilities. The meaning of this footwashing is difficult to discern. It is possibly considered as the widows' task, due to the generally subordinate social position of widows in antiquity. Widows, however, appear to have some prominence in the community.⁴⁶³

5.4.2. Meaning of the Footwashing in John 13

In light of the evidence of footwashing from Jewish and non-Jewish sources in the Greco-Roman world and their categories, an interpretation of the meaning of the footwashing in John 13 can now be undertaken.

Seeing that the Johannine footwashing is connected to a meal, it is obvious that the evidence from the category of hospitality is of great interest. From both the Jewish and the non-Jewish sources, it can be concluded that footwashing was an act of welcoming a guest into the house, an act that was performed as a preparation for the meal. The host or hostess offered this hospitable act but it was generally the servants' responsibility to perform it, although sometimes

⁴⁶² Thomas likewise includes the parallel anointment scene in Jn 12:1-8. In my opinion, however, this is overstretched and not a footwashing because there is no mention of washing in this scene: no tears, no water, and no notion of water that should have been provided by the hosts. What Lazarus' sister Mary wipes in the Johannine account with her hair is clearly the nard oil. The Lukan account departs from the parallel Synoptic accounts in that the anointment is performed on the feet instead of the head. The insertion of the washing of the feet prior to the anointment is also peculiar to him, and not found in Jn 12:1-8 even if this scene parallels Luke's account in that it is Jesus' feet that get anointed and not his head. I therefore suggest that, whereas the Lukan anointment scene is about footwashing as well, this is not the case in Jn 12:1-8.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., 58.

the guests washed their own feet. In cases of extreme devotion or deep love, a host might perform the footwashing himself, thereby demonstrating extreme affection or servitude, or both. Highly significant is the fact that in all these examples footwashing is done as a preparation for a meal and therefore takes place beforehand.⁴⁶⁴ Peculiarly, the Johannine footwashing only takes place when the meal is well under way. This certainly indicates that it is not performed merely as a hospitable act to clean off dust and dirt, for it would make no sense to do this after everybody has reclined.

The fact that the footwashing is performed during the meal rather than before, suggests that it is symbolic in nature. This is further underpinned in Jesus' explanations of his actions. The peculiarity from a socio-historical point of view, that the Johannine footwashing takes place during, and not before the meal, fits in well with the hypothesis that the footwashing replaces the Eucharist in Jesus' last meal. As already discussed, it seems unlikely that John was unaware of the Eucharist. Thus it seems more likely that this is a matter of choice. Why, then, does John replace the Eucharist by the footwashing? A possible answer is that the Eucharist already has its place within the account of the feeding of the multitude as well as in the discourse of the bread of life in John 6, not expressly but by means of allusions.

The footwashing obviously has a meaning that exceeds mere hospitality. This is indicated by the fact that it takes place during the course of the meal. The original readers of John would certainly have noticed this immediately. The other indication for a surplus meaning of the footwashing is found in Peter's reaction. Peter is astonished by Jesus' intent to wash his feet. Jesus explains the significance of the footwashing to Peter by opposing the "now" to "later." Peter does not understand at this point but he will eventually (Jn 13:6-7). The footwashing appears as a

⁴⁶⁴ The only other exception is Lk 7:36-50 where the footwashing takes place during the meal as well. I suggest that in this case this is due to the addition of the actual washing into a scene that was previously without the washing (cf. Mk 14:3-9 and Mt 26:6-13 following Mk more closely than Lk).

preparatory act not for the meal but for the future that Jesus elaborates in the farewell discourses. Rather than for a single event, the footwashing is preparatory for a different state, for the time during which Jesus will no longer be among the disciples. In the evolving discussion with Peter, Jesus explains the significance of the footwashing further. The footwashing is necessary for having a share in Jesus (ἐὰν μὴ νίψω σε, οὐκ ἔχεις μέρος μετ' ἐμοῦ, Jn 13:8). Jesus explains that, with the exception of one, all of the disciples are clean (καθαρός, Jn 13:10). Regarding this statement, the narrator points out to the reader that Jesus knew who was to betray him and that this is the reason not all of them are clean (Jn 13:11). Betrayal is thereby designated as an act of impurity.⁴⁶⁵

The footwashing in John 13 is necessary for the disciples to have a share in Jesus. Only those whose feet he washes are truly and entirely clean (καθαροὶ ὅλος, Jn 13:10). The necessity of the physical act in order to attain a desired spiritual state is familiar from John 6. There, Jesus emphasizes that it is necessary to eat his flesh and drink his blood in order to have eternal life. Later, however, he rules that nothing but the Word is effective (λόγος, Jn 6:63). The interpretation of the partaking of Jesus' body remains somewhat ambivalent in contrast to the necessity of the footwashing. As for the footwashing, Jesus demonstrates it himself and then institutes it for the disciples. He has set an example for them that they should do as he has done (Jn 13:15). The act of

⁴⁶⁵ John refers to purity explicitly only rarely elsewhere. Aside from Jn 13:11, purity (καθαρισμός/καθαρός/καθαρίνω) explicitly appears only three more times: 1) in an editorial note referring to and explaining the purpose of the vessels as pertaining to the Jewish rites of purification (Jn 2:6); 2) in a discussion between the disciples of John the Baptist and a Jew, without any closer explanation (Jn 3:25); and finally 3) in Jn 15:3 where Jesus tells the disciples that they are all clean. This is addressed to all those who are present after Judas has left. Here, Jesus points out to the disciples, "You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you" (Jn 15:3). The other passage in which purity plays a role is the healing of a man in the pool Bethesda (Jn 5:1-18). The healing is expressed by the term ὑγιής (Jn 15:6, 9, 11, 14, 15; reference to this healing in Jn 7:23). The man who is made well from his sufferings is ὑγιής. According to his understanding, he needs to immerse himself into the pool but he cannot get there himself and has no one to help him to get there in time (Jn 5:7). Jesus tells the man to pick up his mat and walk. He does so. The man is healed by Jesus' word. In the end, immersion into the pool is unnecessary.

footwashing, instituted in the place where one would expect the Eucharist, is defined as indispensable.

5.5. *Further Eucharistic Allusions in the Gospel of John*

Having discussed John 6 and 13, I return to exploring possible eucharistic allusions in the remaining Johannine passages in the order of their appearance. In addition to the meal scenes and metaphorical speeches about food and drink, some additional passages will be included since they have been suggested to be allusive of the Eucharist by other scholars.

5.5.1. John 2

The first element that may allude to the Eucharist in the Fourth Gospel is the wine served at the wedding at Cana. Wine is one of the main elements for the celebration of the Eucharist, and wine is the key feature of the performance of Jesus' first miracle. The lack of wine is stated twice (ὑστερήσαντος οἴνου...οἶνον οὐκ ἔχουσιν, Jn 2:3). Aside from the wine, which as such may be a eucharistic allusion, the reference to the hour may be read as an echo. Jesus states that his hour has not yet come (οὐπω ἦκει ἡ ὥρα μου, Jn 2:4), alluding to the hour that comes at Jesus' last meal prior to his death (εἰδὼς ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὅτι ἦλθεν αὐτοῦ ἡ ὥρα, Jn 13:1). The Lukan account of Jesus' last meal also includes the notion of the hour shortly before the words of institution (Καὶ ὅτε ἐγένετο ἡ ὥρα, Lk 22:14). It is therefore possible to find eucharistic echoes in the wine as well as in the reference to the hour.

Scholarly discussion on the question of eucharistic allusions in John 2 is divided into two camps. On the one hand there are those who see the Cana pericope as a strongly eucharistic passage, and, on the other, those who vehemently deny it. Scholars opting for eucharistic allusions

in this passage usually do so not by looking at Cana as an isolated passage, but rather by building their arguments through the claim that John 6 (either the feeding miracle or the bread of life discourse, or both) is eucharistic.⁴⁶⁶

It has been argued by Hodges that after having sufficiently proven that John 6 generally presupposes the Eucharist (with vv.51-58 holding a very “realistic” interpretation of bread and wine as Jesus’ flesh and blood), it becomes possible to interpret the wine at Cana as “yet another sign of the eucharist, for just as in John 6, the evangelist draws upon the tradition of wisdom as nourisher, conflating this sapiential role with that of the messiah as the bringer (initiator?) of the time of God’s fullness.”⁴⁶⁷ Hodges suggests that “Though the fourth gospel never explicitly states that the wine provided at Cana gives eternal life – nor that in drinking it, one was drinking Jesus’s blood – much circumstantial evidence confirms that he [the author of the Fourth Gospel] intended his readers to interpret this wine as the eucharist.” As proof, Hodges adduces “Jesus’s mother, the hour, the jar(s), water-wine (-blood), witness(es), belief, ‘glory,’ and the Passover.”⁴⁶⁸

While in general convincing, his argument seems overstretched when he claims, for example, that the water jars in John 2 refer to Jesus’ death by alluding to the jars in John 13 and to some eucharistic cup. Of course there are vessels in the Cana miracle, namely the six λίθινοι ὑδρίαί,⁴⁶⁹ big water jars made of stone, and there are vessels in the accounts of the last meal prior

⁴⁶⁶ E.g. 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)*, 2.

⁴⁶⁷ Hodges, “Food as Synecdoche in John’s Gospel and Gnostic Texts,” 98.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁴⁶⁹ A ὑδρία would most likely have served in the first place as a water jar, as suggested by its name ὑδρία, derived from water (ὔδωρ). The use of ὑδρία for water is indicated in Jn 2:6 and Jn 4:28 and is well attested elsewhere; cf. Gen 24:14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 43, 45, 46 and Philo commenting on this Genesis passage: Post 1:132 (4*), 136, 137 (2*), 140, 146, Fug 1:195, and further Philo Mos 1:187. Interestingly, however, a ὑδρία can also serve as a container: for torches (λαμπάδας) in Jdg 6:16 (2*), 19, 20; for wheat flour in 1 Ki 17:12, 14, 16; in 1 Ki 18:34 Elija tells the crowd to fill the ὑδρίαί – specifying to fill them with water. If ὑδρίαί were only used for storing water then this specification might have been omitted. The same can be said for Jos *Ant* 8:341 where water is to be poured from ὑδρίαί. In Ecc 12:6

to Jesus' death,⁴⁷⁰ but the crucial one, the vessel used for the blessing and for the words of institution, is referred to as the ποτήριον in all the Synoptic accounts as well as in the Pauline version (1 Cor 11:25). It seems more realistic to assume that this was simply a drinking cup rather than a big water jar in which water was stored and thus the echo is extremely subtle at most. Hodges' argument that διακονεῖν is to be understood as eucharistic appears as similarly overstretched. Drawing on the assumption that διακονεῖν ought to be understood in a eucharistic way in Luke, Hodges argues that "when John 2:5-9 shows διακόνους/διάκονοι serving the miraculous wine Jesus provides, the late first-century *Sitz im Leben* would suggest the church office and the serving of the eucharistic wine. And this wine, indeed, *is* good wine."⁴⁷¹

Hodges claims that the first-century believer, just as the modern exegete, would ask whether the wine at Cana was eucharistic. He does not doubt that both would affirm it. Hodges argues that just as the metaphorical bread from heaven is identified with the bread of the miraculous feeding, the reader would expect to find the eucharistic wine in the drinking miracle at Cana, "particularly since John 6:53-56 pairs up Jesus's flesh and blood as the true food and true drink that give eternal life, yet John nowhere outside of the Cana episode shows Jesus providing the cup of wine of his new covenant."⁴⁷² According to Eisele as well, the Cana account contains eucharistic significance. He claims that, in analogy to the Greek god Dionysus, Jesus is not only

a ὕδρια is mentioned in connection with a πηγή, a source of water. Likewise in Philo's *Mos.* 1:211 the ὕδρια are explicitly filled with water.

⁴⁷⁰ For the footwashing in Jn 13 a νεπηρ is used. According to Brown, this *hapax legomenon* in the NT means a pitcher, a utensil regularly used for a meal; Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 551. Thomas, however, convincingly suggests that a νεπηρ is rather a foot basin or washbasin, since a) most artistic depictions portray large water pots and water that is poured upon them, and b) archaeology has unearthed round basins with a support in the centre for the feet to rest on; Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community*, 89.

The bowl used for the dipping indicating the betrayer is neither a ὕδρια nor a νεπηρ. Rather it is called τὸ τρίβλιον in the two Synoptic accounts in which this incidence is mentioned (Mk 14:20; Mt 26:23).

⁴⁷¹ Hodges, "Food as Synecdoche in John's Gospel and Gnostic Texts," 180.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, 177.

the provider of the wine but he himself is the vine. The eucharistic meaning is not self-evident but becomes plausible through John 6, where Jesus is the giver of bread and is identified with the bread. The multiplication story in John 6 only satisfies one of the eucharistic elements: the eating. Wine that quenches thirst is proleptically offered in abundance in the Cana pericope. Thus, it needs not be repeated in John 6.⁴⁷³

The arguments denying a eucharistic meaning in the Cana episode run along the claim that such an interpretation is a later construction and not the intention of the Gospel's author. Rather, according to McGregor, "the author is chiefly concerned to set forth typically the transforming of the stagnant water of Judaism into the two miracles of chapters ii and vi as sacramental counterparts. But this is a later construction, and for John himself the Eucharistic intention of ii. 1-11 is not at any rate primary."⁴⁷⁴ Any reference to the Eucharist is considered by him to be "at the best somewhat far-fetched."⁴⁷⁵ Doubts have been expressed that what later readers understand as eucharistic might not have been recognised as such in John's own day.⁴⁷⁶ Lindars is correct in pointing out the problematics of identifying references. What cannot be proven may nevertheless be possible.

5.5.2. John 4

The scene of the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman is neither a meal scene as such nor does it carry obvious allusions to the Eucharist. There is neither wine, nor bread, nor a blessing. Nevertheless, echoes of the Eucharist can be distinguished in this passage. The most

⁴⁷³ Wilfried Eisele, "Jesus und Dionysos: Göttliche Konkurrenz bei der Hochzeit zu Kana (Joh 2,1-11)," *ZNW* 100, no. 1 (2009), 7.

⁴⁷⁴ G. H. C. Macgregor, "Eucharist in the Fourth Gospel," 111.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁶ Barnabas Lindars, "Word and Sacrament in the Fourth Gospel," 52.

likely marker in John 4 is the living water that quenches thirst forever and is necessary for eternal life. It is provided by Jesus, just like the bread of life in John 6. Similar to John 2, the identification of a eucharistic echo in John 4 depends on a similar interpretation of John 6. If the bread of life in John 6 is considered eucharistic, the living water that parallels the bread of life may carry eucharistic overtones. Unlike the “bread of life” in John 6, however, the “living water” in John 4 is not equated to Jesus himself. Jesus is merely its provider (Jn 4:10-14).⁴⁷⁷

Hodges argues for a eucharistic interpretation of John 4. He claims that the Eucharist is not only a proleptic eschatological meal, but that it also points to the crucifixion. Likewise, he argues that John 4 recalls the crucifixion scene by stating the arrival of the sixth hour in John 4:6.⁴⁷⁸ Hodges further claims that the water in John 4 alludes to the blood in John 6, and suggests that the blood as well as the water signify the eucharistic drink.⁴⁷⁹ Hodges suggests that the water jar left behind (John 4:28) is intended “to point to the role of the eucharist as a central means of providing Spirit, for just as the eucharist supplies both spiritual and physical needs, so did the ‘living water’ Jesus offered the Samaritan woman to satisfy her physical thirst even as it provided her with spiritual life.”⁴⁸⁰ Again, Hodges seems to push the interpretation. The fact that the Samaritan woman leaves her cup behind may simply be interpreted as a symbol that the woman does not need to draw any more water, because Jesus has provided living water for her.

Hodges claims that Jesus’ statement equating himself to the bread of life and promising eternal quenching of hunger and thirst in John 6:35 refers back to the promise in John 4:14. He argues that the evangelist therefore must have identified the blood (6:53-56) with the ‘living

⁴⁷⁷ On this cf. also G. H. C. Macgregor, “Eucharist in the Fourth Gospel,” 111.

⁴⁷⁸ Hodges, “Food as Synecdoche in John’s Gospel and Gnostic Texts,” 297.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 300.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 304.

water.⁴⁸¹ A connection between John 6:35 and 4:14 is obvious, for both verses speak of thirst which will be quenched forever. But this does not necessarily mean that the water is immediately identified with the blood. Hodges goes as far as to claim that the water, wine and blood “weave together into a common eucharistic fabric,” for the living water in John 4 “stands identified both with the ‘water having become wine’ of chapter 2 as well as with the ‘blood that is the true drink’ of chapter 6” and providing the soteriological notion.⁴⁸²

In the account of the meal in Bethany I have not been able to distinguish any eucharistic allusions and I will therefore proceed to John 15.

5.5.3. John 15

In John 15:1, Jesus states that he is the true vine. The mention of the vine may be read as an allusion to the eucharistic drink.⁴⁸³ It has been argued that the metaphor of the vine in John 15 is a direct reference to the eucharistic wine.⁴⁸⁴ The vine, however, is a popular image in Judaism at large, and only the vine (the plant), but no wine (the drink), is mentioned.⁴⁸⁵ This does not, however, rule out the possibility that the original audience may have heard echoes of the Eucharist in this passage.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 376.

⁴⁸² Ibid., 201.

⁴⁸³ E.g. Macgregor; he claims, “Apart from the allegory of the Vine the whole of the Farewell Discourse, delivered as it is at the Last Supper, breathes a sacramental air.” G. H. C. Macgregor, “Eucharist in the Fourth Gospel,” 112.

⁴⁸⁴ This position is taken i.e. by Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*, SBT (London: SCM Press, 1953), 111–13; Bjørn Sandvik, “Joh 15 als Abendmahlstext,” *ThZ* 23, no. 5 (1967).

⁴⁸⁵ Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 2:669-572. Cf. Bultmann: „Es ist nun für das Verständnis entscheidend, daß die Rede den Weinstock nicht in den Blick faßt hinsichtlich seiner Frucht, hinsichtlich des Weines, den er spendet, sondern nur als den Baum mit seinen Ranken, die von ihm mit Lebenskraft durchströmt werden, von ihm ihre Kraft zu Wachstum und Fruchtbringen erhalten und getrennt von ihm verdorren: der Weinstock ist der Lebensbaum.“ Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, 407.

5.5.4. John 19:34

It has been suggested by Moloney that the blood and water flowing out of Jesus' wound, caused by a soldier piercing Jesus' side with a spear (Jn 19:34), alludes to eucharistic wine. Moloney even goes so far as to suggest that this verse is one of the two major eucharistic texts in the Gospel, the other one being 6:51-58. He claims that in these two texts a significant response is offered to a troubled community in that the Eucharist is understood as "presence," and is intended to bridge the sense of distance from the saving events of Jesus' life and death.⁴⁸⁶ How this works, however, is not obvious, and Moloney gets trapped in a hermeneutical circle: the claim that the sacraments of Eucharist and baptism create the presence of the otherwise physically absent Jesus does not undergird the claim that 19:34 is eucharistic.

5.5.5. John 20

On the first day of the week after his death, the risen Jesus encounters his disciples (Jn 20:19-29). It has been suggested that there is a eucharistic significance to this.⁴⁸⁷ Suggit argues that the notion of the shut doors points to the Eucharist, and to its exclusivity for the believers.⁴⁸⁸ Suggit further suggests that the command to receive the Holy Spirit (λάβετε, Jn 20:22) alludes to the words of institution. He himself notes, however, that this is not a very strong argument, for λάβετε is a word that appears often, in any case, and regularly in connection with the reception of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸⁹ Despite the weakness of his arguments, Suggit claims that the passage is "full of eucharistic

⁴⁸⁶ Francis J. Moloney, *A Body Broken for a Broken People: Eucharist in the New Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: HarperCollins Religious; Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 116–17.

⁴⁸⁷ John N. Suggit, "The Eucharistic Significance of John 20.19-29," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 16 (1976); Mary L. Coloe, *Dwelling in the Household of God: Johannine Ecclesiology and Spirituality* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2007), 171–81.

⁴⁸⁸ John N. Suggit, "The Eucharistic Significance of John 20.19-29," 53–54.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

allusions.”⁴⁹⁰ He suggests that these allusions are in line with the rest of the Gospel and that they are deliberately used as the climax of the Gospel.⁴⁹¹ The argument seems somewhat farfetched, but it cannot be ruled out that the earliest Gospel readers may have heard eucharistic echoes in this scene. John 20 is not certainly a meal scene, however, and will not be explored in more detail here.

5.5.6. John 21

The account of the resurrected Jesus’ appearance on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, including the catch of 153 great fish and Jesus cooking breakfast for the disciples, offers some possibility in terms of eucharistic allusions, similar in kind to, as has been demonstrated above, the feeding miracle in John 6, especially in John 6:11. The key words for possible allusions are λαμβάνει and δίδωσιν, found in John 21:13.⁴⁹² If the feeding miracle in John 6 is allusive of the eucharist, which is likely the case as has been argued above, then John 21 may also echo the Eucharist. There are a number of similarities in the stories of John 6 and 21:

- Both accounts (and at that they are the only ones) take place on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias.
- There is the question of the availability of food to feed people. In Jn 6:5, Jesus worries about this in asking Philip; in Jn 21:5, Jesus shows concern about the disciples by inquiring if they have food (παιδιά, μή τι προσφάγιον ἔχετε; Jn 21:5) – and in both cases initially there is no food.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 58.

⁴⁹¹ They serve to teach the church that “the Eucharist celebrated on each Lord’s day is no mere liturgical rite, but the setting forth of God’s glory and his gracious revelation in Christ.” Ibid., 59.

⁴⁹² ἔρχεται Ἰησοῦς καὶ λαμβάνει τὸν ἄρτον καὶ δίδωσιν αὐτοῖς, καὶ τὸ ὄψάριον ὁμοίως. Jn 21:13. Cf. the more detailed analysis for Jn 6:11 above.

- While no drink is mentioned, food is miraculously provided by Jesus and people are fed.
- In both cases the menu consists of bread (ἄρτος) and fish (ὀψάριον): John 6:9 specifies that they have five loaves of barley bread (πέντε ἄρτους κριθίνους) whereas John 21:9 simply mentions bread. In John 6, δύο ὀψάρια are served whereas in John 21 simply ὀψάριον is mentioned.

It is likely that the food miracle described in John 21 reminded readers of the respective miracle in John 6 and that readers distinguished eucharistic echoes therein.⁴⁹³ A difficulty in paralleling the two accounts and in claiming eucharistic allusions for both is that a blessing over the food is curiously absent in John 21. Furthermore, there is no mention of the breaking of bread or drinking of wine.⁴⁹⁴ Nevertheless, the similarities of the feeding accounts in John 21 and John 6 have led some scholars to very confident judgments affirming its eucharistic references.⁴⁹⁵ An intermediate position is argued by Culpepper “The fish on the fire in John 21:9, therefore, can represent the eucharist, Christ, who nourishes the believer, or a meal in which Christians ate bread and fish, with or without the eucharist.”⁴⁹⁶ If the eucharistic character of John 6 is acknowledged, then, by extension, this can also be claimed for the Gospel’s final meal.

⁴⁹³ Raymond Brown holds that there is no doubt that readers were reminded of it. Additionally he points out the resemblance between Jn 21 and the meal described in Lk 24:30-31, 35, the account in which Jesus appears to the disciples on their way to Emmaus. The disciples only recognize Jesus when he breaks the bread – an act that is usually taken as a eucharistic teaching. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1099–1100.

⁴⁹⁴ Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1231.

⁴⁹⁵ For example: “We doubt, then, that a meal so similar to the multiplication meal could be described in John xxi without reminding the Johannine community of the Eucharist.” Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1099–1100.

⁴⁹⁶ R. Alan Culpepper, “Designs for the Church in the Imagery of John 21:1–14,” in *Imagery in the Gospel of John: Terms, Forms, Themes and Theology of Johannine Figurative Language*, ed. Jörg Frey (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 400.

5.6. Conclusion

The present chapter has addressed the question of whether the Eucharist is present in the Fourth Gospel despite the absence of an institution narrative and whether the Gospel may have informed the Johannine community's habits or rituals and their understanding thereof. This entailed a search for intertextual markers (allusions/references/echoes) that call into mind the Eucharist as portrayed in the Synoptics and in Paul. The search has been undertaken first in John 6 and allusions to the Eucharist were identified in the account of the feeding miracle as well as in the subsequent bread of life discourse. The vast amount of secondary literature on this chapter has been critically taken into account.

While the consumption of body and blood is valued highly in the bread of life discourse, the true way to partake in Jesus is through faith and Spirit (6:27-29, 35, and especially 63). The allusive presence of eucharistic elements and the emphasis on faith and Spirit invite the audience to focus on Christ's death, the salvific revelation of God in Jesus, and not just to the symbols that point to it.⁴⁹⁷ Nevertheless, there is a physical act that is necessary for being a true member of the Jesus group, as becomes obvious in John 13.

A comparison of the sequence of events during the last meal as portrayed in John 13 with the Synoptic parallels has revealed that the Johannine footwashing is found in exactly the place where one would expect the institution of the Eucharist. It seems more than plausible, then, to say that the footwashing replaces the institution of the Eucharist in John 13. Insights from social history and comparisons with other accounts of footwashing have revealed that the Johannine account is highly peculiar. It is singular in placing the footwashing in the course of the meal rather

⁴⁹⁷ Cf. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 689–691.

than before its beginning. The meaning of the footwashing, therefore, needed to be addressed in more detail. Jesus' servile act surpasses the notion of hospitality and calls for a symbolic interpretation. The footwashing prepares the disciples for a state that comes later. It is an act of love and renders the washed pure. Jesus relates his act of love to his betrayal; there is one among the disciples who is not clean. The physical act of footwashing is necessary for being part of Jesus, and mutual footwashing, as demonstrated by Jesus to his disciples within a meal scene, renders the washed pure. Such purity is required for truly belonging to Jesus.

The investigation of other passages in John has revealed further eucharistic references. Allusions in other passages largely depend on eucharistic interpretations of the feeding miracle and the bread of life discourse in John 6. Whether the original audience would have picked up on these echoes remains unknown.

Whether or not the Johannine community celebrated a Eucharist, that is a ritual including wine and bread, and whether or not they replaced this ritual by the performance of footwashing cannot be inferred from the Gospel with certainty. Both, however, would likely have been laden with meanings such as the ones developed and discussed in this chapter, if and whenever they were performed, and informed by the Gospel narrative. The footwashing would have been especially meaningful for the relationship of the disciples among each other and would have provided a bonding experience between the members of the group. In addition to enacting this horizontal relationship, it would have always commemorated Jesus who instituted the rite. If the Johannine stories about meals and the Johannine community's dining habits mutually influenced each other in some way, the handling of the "Eucharist" could have taken on quite a distinct form.

6. Discursive II: Mystery Cults

6.1. Introduction

The Johannine community, living somewhere in the Mediterranean area, was affected and shaped by its Jewish roots as well as by the more recent and highly formative beliefs in Christ. It is important to keep in mind, however, the richly hybrid context from which the Gospel emerged and within which the Johannine community existed. Hybridity was a characteristic shared by all Mediterranean lands in antiquity. This fact suggests that the Gospel accounts and the Johannine community's readings of these accounts may have been influenced by non-Jewish, non-Christ-believing traditions. The present chapter, therefore, addresses the question of meanings that may have been associated with the world of mysteries by a first or second century audience hearing or reading John 6. This issue is at the core of the present investigation.

In the Greco-Roman world of antiquity many people participated in various mystery cults, and it seems adequate to assume that people were familiar with the main ideas of the various mystery cults.⁴⁹⁸ The term “mysteries” derives from the annually celebrated “Mysteria,” the festival of Demeter and Kore/Persephone at Eleusis. The name of the festival eventually became a technical term with unclear etymology and was applied to a range of cults.⁴⁹⁹ Characteristics

⁴⁹⁸ The following introductory notes draw on Fritz Graf, “Mysterien,” in *Der neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike*, eds. Manfred Landfester, Hubert Cancik, and Helmuth Schneider (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2000), 8, 615–626, cf. http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/uid=1973/entry?entry=bnp_e814910; Internet; accessed 02.09.11.

⁴⁹⁹ The term mysteries “appears to be related to the verb attested already in Mycenaean Greek as my(s)- (myjomeno in Pylos, presumably ‘initiated’, by the local chieftain, PY Un 2,1, cf. Greek μύω/myéō), while the derivation from the Greek μύω/myō (‘to close the eyes or the mouth’) was a secondary development from the injunction to secrecy known since the Homeric hymn to Demeter 478f.) Fritz Graf, *Mysteries*; available from http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/uid=1973/entry?entry=bnp_e814910; Internet; accessed 02.09.11. Graf refers to Monique Gérard-Rousseau, *Les mentions religieuses dans les tablettes mycéniennes*, *Incunabula Graeca*, vol. 29 (Roma: Ateneo, 1968), 146; Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 15.

common to all cults include secrecy, a ritual of initiation through which the initiates became members and felt part of a particular group, a contrast to the religion of the polis, an individual decision to join motivated by personal gain, and the need for propaganda. According to Walter Burkert, “Mysteries are a form of personal religion, depending on a private decision and aiming at some form of salvation through closeness to the divine.”⁵⁰⁰

In the case of John 6, two particular mystery cults are of interest: the mystery at Eleusis, devoted to Demeter, and the cult of Dionysus. The former had a stable and permanent centre at Eleusis. The cult of Dionysus had no fixed location and was practised all over the Mediterranean area during the Hellenistic period, especially at the borders of the Greek world, i.e. Asia Minor.⁵⁰¹ Both cults were very old, well known and widespread, and both flourished in the Greco-Roman world in the first century CE.

The importance of mystery cults as a “religionsgeschichtliche” reference for New Testament studies, and particularly to the Last Supper tradition, has carefully and thoroughly been argued and researched by Hans-Josef Klauck.⁵⁰² He applies his findings, however, almost exclusively to the Pauline Last Supper tradition. In a recent essay on the Last Supper tradition in the Gospel of John, Silke Petersen offers an intelligent but brief attempt to fill this gap.⁵⁰³ The present chapter draws on their works and seeks to take their insights a step further with regard to reading John 6 against the backdrop of these cults and exploring meanings that were possibly associated by its original audience.

⁵⁰⁰ Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 12.

⁵⁰¹ Franciszek Sokolowski, *Lois sacrées de l'Asie Mineure*, Travaux et mémoires des anciens membres étrangere de l'école et de divers savants, vol. 9 (Paris: Boccard, 1955), 125.

⁵⁰² Klauck, *Herrenmahl und hellenistischer Kult*.

⁵⁰³ Petersen, “Jesus zum ‘Kauen’?: Das Johannesevangelium, das Abendmahl und die Mysterienkulte,” 105–130.

6.2. *Demeter Traditions*

6.2.1. Sources and Introductory Notes

The Eleusinian mysteries are the earliest to be recorded. They are attested archaeologically from the 8th century BCE and in literature from the mid-7th century BCE in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter.⁵⁰⁴ As do other Homeric hymns, this long hymn to Demeter tells the story and epiphany of the Goddess to whom it is addressed. The hymn celebrates the Goddess's power and her rescue of her daughter Persephone from the underworld. It depicts the disguised Demeter's interactions with mortal women at Eleusis, culminates with the founding of the Eleusinian mysteries, and closes with the promise to initiates (both female and male) that they will experience a different lot in life and death.

Another important source is the Orphic Hymn to Demeter.⁵⁰⁵ The date of composition of the Orphic hymns is an issue of scholarly dispute, with opinions ranging from the sixth century BCE to the Byzantine period at the extremes, and with a vacillating tendency toward the first four centuries CE.⁵⁰⁶ Likewise, the places of origin and use of the Orphic hymns are matters of conjecture.⁵⁰⁷ It is very likely that these hymns were used by voluntary associations.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁴ This hymn was created during the period between Homer and Hesiod (probably 650-550 BCE). It was written by an anonymous author (or authors), and is attributed to Homer because it is composed in the same style and traditional epic meter (dactylic hexameter) as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The text derives from a single mutilated manuscript of the early 15th century discovered in Moscow in 1777, and is supplemented by papyrus fragments. Helene P. Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Translation, Commentary, and Interpretive Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 28–31. Further sources on Demeter include “the archaeological evidence from the sanctuary buildings, inscriptions, representations on reliefs and vases, and references in literary sources.” *Ibid.*, 65.

⁵⁰⁵ Orpheus, *The Orphic Hymns*, ed. Athanassakis, Apostolos N.; vol. 4, *Graeco-Roman Religion Series* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977).

⁵⁰⁶ Orpheus, *The Orphic Hymns*, vii.

⁵⁰⁷ The appearance of divinities such as Mises, Hipta and Melinoe, unknown or hardly familiar in mainland Greece, points eastwards to Asia Minor, where these very names appear in inscriptions. Orpheus, *The Orphic Hymns*, viii. For the suggestion that Pergamon is the birthplace of the Hymns, see Otto Kern, “Das Demeterheiligtum von Pergamon und die orphischen Hymnen,” *Hermes* 46, no. 2 (1911).

6.2.2. Parallels Between John 6 and the Myth of Demeter

A comparison between the Gospel of John and the myth of Demeter according to the Homeric and the Orphic Hymns to Demeter reveals a number of parallels.⁵⁰⁹ Throughout the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, the goddess is praised as the provider of food and life. To let the earth sprout and be fruitful, or to cause it not to produce anything and let humankind suffer from hunger, lies in Demeter's will. Demeter is addressed very explicitly as the provider of food in the Orphic Hymn to Demeter as well. The beginning reads:

Deo, divine mother of all, goddess of many names,
august Demeter, nurturer of youths and giver of prosperity
and wealth. You nourish the ears of corn, O giver of all,
and you delight in peace and in toilsome labor.
Present at sowing, heaping and threshing, O spirit of the unripe fruit,
you dwell in the sacred valley of Eleusis.
Charming and lovely, you give sustenance to all mortals, and you were the first to yoke the ploughing ox
and to send up from below a rich and lovely harvest for mortals.
Through you there is growth and blooming, O illustrious companion of Bromios
and, torch-bearing and pure one, you delight in the summer's yield.
From beneath the earth you appear and to all you are gentle,
O holy and youth-nurturing lover of children and of fair offspring.
(*Orphic Hymn to Demeter* 40.1-12)⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁸ Orpheus, *The Orphic Hymns*, ix.

⁵⁰⁹ Cf. Petersen, "Jesus zum 'Kauen'?: Das Johannesevangelium, das Abendmahl und die Mysterienkulte," 105–130: 123–124.

⁵¹⁰ English translation by Apostolos N. Athanassakis, Orpheus, *The Orphic Hymns*, 57; the translation is based on the Greek text edition: Orpheus and Wilhelm Quandt, *Orphei hymni* (Berlin: [s.n.], 1962). For the highly complex issues regarding the reconstruction of this text, see also Fritz Graf, *Eleusis und die orphische Dichtung Athens in vorhellenistischer Zeit*, RGVV, vol. 33 (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1974), 151–58.

The motif of the goddess who has the power to feed humankind is heavily emphasized by virtually every word. Jesus' feeding of the multitudes and the other Johannine feeding miracles parallel this godly power. The food that is multiplied in John 6 is in itself an allusion to the cult of Demeter. John repeatedly specifies that the bread multiplied in the feeding of the five thousand is barley bread (ἄρτους κριθίνους, Jn 6:9, 13). This is noteworthy because in all Synoptic accounts of the feedings of the multitude, the bread is simply called bread, and is not defined any further. Barley plays a distinct role in the myth of Demeter. The "kykeon" (κυκεών), a mixture of barley, water and herb, is the only drink that the grieving goddess accepts:⁵¹¹

Seated there, the goddess drew the veil before her face.
For a long time she sat voiceless with grief on the stool
and responded to no one with word or gesture.
Unsmiling, tasting neither food nor drink,
she sat wasting with desire for her deep-girt daughter,
until knowing Iambe jested with her and
mocking with many a joke moved the holy goddess
to smile and laugh and keep a gracious heart –
Iambe, who later pleased her moods as well.
Metaneira offered a cup filled with honey-sweet wine,
but Demeter refused it. It was not right, she said,

⁵¹¹ The "kykeon"/ "κυκεών" stems from a time preceding the art of fine grinding and baking but represents a progressive stage of the panspermia (entire grains). The name κυκεών draws on the fact that this drink needed to be stirred (κυκᾶν) before it could be drunk because otherwise the solids would remain at the bottom of the drinking vessel. Sometimes there are other, additional ingredients: The maid in the Iliad adds wine, honey, onions, barley flour and goat cheese (Il 11,624-641); the witch Kirke uses the same mixture to which she adds poison (φάρμακα) (Od 10,234-236). Cf. Klauck, *Herrenmahl und hellenistischer Kult*, 99–100.

for her to drink red wine; then she bid them mix barley
and water with soft mint and give her to drink.
Metaneira made and gave the drink [κυκεών] to the goddess as she bid.
Almighty Deo received it for the sake of [ἰσότης ἔνεκεν] the rite.
(*Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 197-211)⁵¹²

The drinking of the kykeon is very likely part of an instituted rite in the mysteries at Eleusis, as is indicated by “ἰσότης ἔνεκεν” (v. 211). The existing rite is legitimized by the goddess’s acts. She is the one who founded the rite and who enacted it first. The initiates then copied this act as well as the preceding fast by the goddess and her abstinence from wine.⁵¹³ Whether or not the Johannine specification of the bread as being made of barley consciously intends to allude to the Demeter cult, in which barley plays a central role, cannot be determined. It is likely, however, that a Johannine audience familiar with mystery cults would have picked up on the allusion.

The emphasis on the necessity to participate in the mystery of Demeter, obvious in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, has a parallel in the Johannine Jesus’ stress on the necessity of eating the bread from heaven (Jn 6:50-51), chewing his flesh and drinking his blood (Jn 6:53-58), without which humankind cannot attain eternal life. According to the Homeric hymn to Demeter, initiation into the mystery clearly makes a difference for a mortal’s fate after life:

Blessed is the mortal on earth who has seen these rites,
but the uninitiated who has no share in them never
has the same lot once dead in the dreary darkness.

⁵¹² Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 12.

⁵¹³ Klauck, *Herrenmahl und hellenistischer Kult*, 95–96.

(*Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 480-482)⁵¹⁴

It is noteworthy that initiation into the Demeter cult is indispensable for escaping darkness. Those who are not initiated remain in dreary darkness (ὕπὸ ζόφῳ εὐρώεντι, 482). This is strongly reminiscent of the language in John, who frequently uses the binary opposition of darkness and light, the former for the unbelievers, and the latter for believers. John 6:51-59 repeatedly speaks of the necessity to eat Jesus' flesh and drink his blood in order to attain eternal life. Believing in Jesus is indispensable for having life.

The parallels between John 6 and Demeter are striking, and it is likely that they would have been noticed by the original audience of the Gospel of John. A notable difference between Jesus and Demeter needs to be addressed as well, however. While the Johannine Jesus equates himself to the bread, the food that is consumed by the believers, the parallel claim is absent in the Demeter cult. The kykeon merely imitates the goddess's actions, thereby creating a union between her and believers, but the goddess herself is not believed to be materialized in the drink. Thus, the Johannine believers who eat the bread representing Jesus participate even more directly than the initiates of the Demeter cult.⁵¹⁵

⁵¹⁴ Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 26.

⁵¹⁵ Cf. Petersen, "Jesus zum 'Kauen'?: Das Johannevangelium, das Abendmahl und die Mysterienkulte," 105–130: 124.

6.3. *Demeter and Dionysus*

Demeter is often closely related to Dionysus.⁵¹⁶ In the *Bacchae*, the two are mentioned together as providers of food and drink:

the goddess Demeter – she is Earth but call her either name you like – nourishes mortals with dry food. But he who came next, the son of Semele [i.e. Dionysos], discovered as its counterpart the drink that flows from the grape cluster and introduced it to mortals. It is this that frees trouble-laden mortals from their pain – when they fill themselves with the juice of the vine – this that gives sleep to make one forget the day’s troubles: there is no other treatment for misery. Himself a god, he is poured out in libations to the gods, and so it is because of him that men win blessings from them. (*Bacchae* 275-285).⁵¹⁷

Dionysus not only offers a parallel to Demeter but also to Jesus as providers of food. The Fourth Gospel alludes to the traditions of Dionysus in a number of other ways, as will be discussed in what follows.

6.4. *Dionysus*

6.4.1. Sources and Introductory Notes

Dionysian mysteries were heterogeneous in character. The known literary sources about the mysteries of Dionysus date to the early fifth century BCE (Herodotus, *Historiae* 4.79) and reach

⁵¹⁶ Cf. e.g. Euripides, *Bacch.* 275-279; the Romans often worshipped Liber/Dionysos together with Liberia/Kore and Ceres/Demeter as a triad. Peter Wick, “Jesus gegen Dionysos? Ein Beitrag zur Kontextualisierung des Johannesevangeliums,” *Bib.* 85 (2004), 190, n. 51.

⁵¹⁷ “Δημήτηρ θεά – Γῆ δ’ ἐστίν, ὄνομα δ’ ὀπότερον βούλη κάλει· αὕτη μὲν ἐν ξηροῖσιν ἐκτρέφει βροτούς· ὅς δ’ ἦλθ’ ἔπειτ’, ἀντίπαλον ὁ Σεμέλης γόνος βότρους ὑγρὸν πῶμ’ ἤϊρε κάσημέγκατο θνητοῖς, ὃ παύει τοὺς ταλαιπώρους βροτούς λύπης, ὅταν πλησθῶσιν ἀμπέλου ῥοῆς, ὕπνον τε λήθην τῶν καθ’ ἡμέραν κακῶν δίδωσιν, οὐδ’ ἔστ’ ἄλλο φάρμακον πόνων. οὗτος θεοῖσι σπένδεται θεοῦ γεγώς, ὥστε διὰ τοῦτον τάγαθ’ ἀνθρώπους ἔχειν.” Euripides, *Bacchae*, ed. Kovacs, David, vol. 495, *LCL* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 34–37.

well beyond the Hellenistic period. The richest literary source for the Dionysian mysterycult is Euripides' play the *Bacchae*, probably written around 407 BCE.⁵¹⁸ In Livy's report on the "Bacchanalian affair," Bacchic mysteries are accused of forming a conspiracy with the aim to control the state (Livy, *Ab urbe condita* 39).⁵¹⁹ The account testifies to the notion that Bacchic mystery cults form another people, a different "ethnos" (Livy, *Ab urbe condita* 39.13).⁵²⁰ From this account, it is clear that the cult in Rome was expanding rapidly.

Iconographies of the Roman period give clues to the initiation rites. The Villa Farnesina and the Villa dei Misteri in Pompeii, from the era of Caesar, with frescos around the walls, are the most striking surviving visual representations of a mystic initiation. According to grave-finds, the initiated individuals were mainly women. Communal ecstatic rites at Olbia (Hdt. 4.79), as well as a special burial-ground at Cumae, point to the existence of fixed groups. Archaeological findings also include bone tablets from the mid-fifth century BCE found in Olbia; lamellae of the late fifth century BCE from Hipponium, of the fourth century BCE from Thessalia, and of the second century BCE from Crete; as well as inscriptions from c. 460 BCE from Cumae.⁵²¹

Inscriptions form a special and highly important category of evidence of Dionysian cults in the Roman Empire. About two hundred inscriptions, almost all in Greek, have been found in various places of the empire, especially in Asia Minor. They stem from a period of seven centuries (third century BCE – fourth century CE), predominantly the first through fourth centuries CE, and lack homogeneity. They frequently mention mystic initiates or fellow mystic initiates (μύσται;

⁵¹⁸ Thomas Paulsen, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 2004), 131. For an investigation into the literary and epigraphical evidence for Dionysian cults, see Hendrik Simon Versnel, *Ter unus: Isis, Dionysos, Hermes*, Three Studies in Henotheism, SGR, vol. 6, 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 134–46.

⁵¹⁹ Titus Livius, *Book XXXIX*, ed. Walsh, P. G; vol. 4, *Classical Texts* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1994).

⁵²⁰ "alterum iam prope populum," Livius, *Book XXXIX*, 34–35. Here, the expression is translated as: "virtually a second citizenry."

⁵²¹ For photos of the bone tablets from Olbia, see Martin Litchfield West, *The Orphic Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), first page of appendix.

συνμύσται/συμμύσται).⁵²² Epigraphical evidence is predominantly concerned with rules and regulations of private associations, recognition of activities, and donations by wealthy members.⁵²³ Public inscriptions do not, however, reveal the secret beliefs of those who participate in the Dionysian mysteries.⁵²⁴ The multi-faceted mysteries of Dionysus are linked to Orpheus and Orphism, along with the *Lamellae Orphicae*. The collection of the surviving eighty-seven anonymous “Orphic Hymns,” probably composed in the second century CE to be used by a band of initiates somewhere in western Asia Minor, may also shed some light on Dionysian associations.⁵²⁵ Dionysus is the most prominent of the numerous gods that are mentioned in the hymns.

6.4.2. Previous Scholarship on Relations between the Dionysian and Johannine Traditions

Much scholarly research has been done on possible relationships between the Gospel of John and Dionysian traditions. In particular, the miracle of the wine at Cana (Jn 2:1-11) has received a lot of scholarly attention with this focus.⁵²⁶ In a recent essay, Peter Wick has convincingly demonstrated

⁵²² Richard Seaford, *Dionysos, Gods and Heroes of the Ancient World* (London: Routledge, 2006), 66.

⁵²³ From these sources grows the impression that “The cult combined relatively sophisticated organization (including economic resources) with secrecy, and with *individual choice* be initiated (rather than adherence dictated by locality, family, patronage, tradition, authority, and so on), all of which was outside the control of the political authorities.... Individual choice seems to have been from the earliest evidence for mystery-cult a feature that distinguished it from many other rituals.” *Ibid.*, 60.

⁵²⁴ Susan Guettel Cole, “Voices from beyond the Grave: Dionysus and the Dead,” in *Masks of Dionysus*, eds. Thomas H. Carpenter and Christopher A. Faraone, Myth and Poetics (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 279.

⁵²⁵ While a close relationship between Dionysian and Orphic traditions has long been doubted, Graf has convincingly argued that in the light of new evidence the long-held scholarly distinctions between Dionysian, Pythagorean, and Orphic doctrines can no longer be upheld. Fritz Graf, “Dionysian and Orphic Eschatology: New Texts and Old Questions,” in *Masks of Dionysus*, eds. Thomas H. Carpenter and Christopher A. Faraone, Myth and Poetics (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 239–258.

⁵²⁶ Most recently: Wilfried Eisele, “Jesus und Dionysos: Göttliche Konkurrenz bei der Hochzeit zu Kana (Joh 2,1–11).“ For an overview, see Peter Wick, “Jesus gegen Dionysos? Ein Beitrag zur Kontextualisierung des Johannesevangeliums,” 179–83. Rudolf Bultmann claims that Jn 2:1-11 represents an epiphany of Dionysus: Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, 83 and n. 3. Heinz Noetzel strictly denies any Dionysian influence: Heinz

that not only the Cana account, but very likely the entire Gospel of John, engages in a sub-textual discourse with Dionysian traditions.⁵²⁷ Drawing on the work of scholars of Classics and the History of Religion, Wick argues that the general importance and influence of Dionysus cannot be overestimated for the Greco-Roman world.⁵²⁸ He claims that, in an implicit way, the Gospel as a whole disputes the worship of this god by depicting Jesus as the true Son of God who is superior to Dionysus in every possible respect. The Gospel's author is, according to Wick, a Scripture-rooted Jew who argues from within a Hellenistic milieu, and aims to strengthen his community's identity.

In a very recent article, Wilfried Eisele has cogently explored John 2 anew along the lines drawn out by Wick.⁵²⁹ Eisele adduces archaeological evidence, such as the Dionysus Mosaic in Sepphoris and coins from Nysa-Skythopolis, to demonstrate that John 2 responds to Dionysian motifs and that it depicts Jesus as the winning, rival competitor of the Greek god of wine.⁵³⁰ What is important for the present study is the way in which Eisele demonstrates and develops the parallels between the Jesus and Dionysian traditions. Dismissing Bultmann's narrow definition of the miracle of water turned into wine as the pericope's sole motif of importance with regard to

Noetzel, *Christus und Dionysos: Bemerkungen zum religionsgeschichtlichen Hintergrund von Johannes 2,1–11* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1960). Edmund Little demonstrates that the pericope has its roots in Old Testament traditions while not denying Dionysian influence: 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)*. Smith and Hengel show the familiarity of Dionysus in Palestine: Morton Smith, "On the Wine God in Palestine," in *Studies in the Cult of Yahweh*, eds. Morton Smith and Shaye J. D. Cohen, RGRW (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 227–237; Martin Hengel, "The Interpretation of the Wine Miracle at Cana: Jn 2:1–11," in *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament: Studies in Christology*, eds. L. D. Hurst, N.T. Wright, and George Bradford Caird (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 83–112. Labahn highlights the Dionysian imagery: Michael Labahn, *Jesus als Lebensspender: Untersuchungen zu einer Geschichte der johanneischen Tradition anhand ihrer Wundergeschichten*, BZNW, vol. 98 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), 158–159, 166–167, see p. 149, n. 155 for further sources that assume Dionysian influence. Some recent commentaries tend to simply not address the question of Dionysian influence or to deny it: Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 1:98; Thyen, *Das Johannesevangelium*.

⁵²⁷ Peter Wick, "Jesus gegen Dionysos? Ein Beitrag zur Kontextualisierung des Johannesevangeliums."

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, 183–88.

⁵²⁹ Wilfried Eisele, "Jesus und Dionysos: Göttliche Konkurrenz bei der Hochzeit zu Kana (Joh 2,1–11)".

⁵³⁰ See *ibid.*, 26–28.

Dionysus (a motif that is hard to isolate in the Dionysian tradition), Eisele investigates and develops other motifs of the Cana story that correspond to well attested motifs in the Dionysus tradition. Apart from the wine, this includes the wedding, the mother and the disciples. The wedding, with Jesus as the true bridegroom, alludes to Dionysus as bridegroom, visible for example in the image of Dionysus' wedding with Ariadne.⁵³¹ The mothers, i.e. Semele, as well as nymphs who take over mothering functions for Dionysus, and the mother of Jesus, play important roles in their sons' lives.⁵³² Finally, the disciples' departure from the wine-filled wedding party alludes to Dionysian processions.

The parallels are striking. Nevertheless, some weak points of Eisele's argument need to be addressed. First, there is the fact that only the coins stem from the same era as the Gospel of John, whereas the mosaic is significantly later (100-150 years) than the Fourth Gospel. Second, Eisele presupposes that the Cana story, which he attributes to the Semeia source, originates in the very town of Cana, identified with a Galilean village only a few kilometres from Sepphoris. The first demur may be neglected on the grounds that Eisele, by adducing further coins from the first century CE, manages to demonstrate that the cult of Dionysus was widely spread in the area under discussion. Geographically fixing the tradition of John 2 in Galilee, however, remains problematic since it is impossible to prove with factual evidence. Eisele's approach to search for more intertwined allusions rather than only direct parallels will nevertheless prove fruitful in the present exploration of Dionysian motifs in John 6. Unlike Eisele, I will draw primarily, although not exclusively, on literary sources rather than archaeological evidence.

⁵³¹ Eisele also discusses the motif of Jesus as the true bridegroom in Jn 2 in relationship with the bridegroom metaphor in Jn 3:22-29: *Ibid.*, 8-9.

⁵³² This motif is absent on the mosaic but well known from other sources, the most important ones of which in this case are the images of the nymph Nysa cradling the baby Dionysus.

Some scholars have already attempted to read John 6 against Dionysian traditions, but none in much detail. In his brief section on this chapter, Wick discusses biblical as well as Dionysian traditions associating wine and blood, and he points out that the notions of Dionysian *sparagmos* and *omophagy* can easily come to mind with the words about the chewing of Jesus' flesh.⁵³³ Drawing primarily on the work of Hans-Joseph Klauck, who applies his findings to the Pauline letters, Silke Petersen explores some aspects of John 6 with regard to associations of the Dionysian tradition, but remains brief in her discussion.⁵³⁴

In the present study, I adopt these scholars' approaches in order to read John 6, with a particular focus on vv. 51-58, in light of Dionysian traditions. In John 6:51-58, Jesus demands the consumption of bread, blood and body, and relates these three things to himself by saying: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (Jn 6:51). This idea is amplified in the verses that follow. Jesus' listeners need not only eat his flesh but also drink his blood (Jn 6:53). Some observations on the vocabulary of John 6:51-58 are in order. The graphic nature of the language is underscored by two terms: the term for "eating" and the term for "body."⁵³⁵ The verb τρώγειν means: to munch, gobble or chew food, to eat loudly and with gusto.⁵³⁶ This nuance is

⁵³³ Peter Wick, "Jesus gegen Dionysos? Ein Beitrag zur Kontextualisierung des Johannesevangeliums," 190–92.

⁵³⁴ Klauck, *Herrenmahl und hellenistischer Kult*; Petersen, "Jesus zum 'Kauen'?: Das Johannesevangelium, das Abendmahl und die Mysterienkulte," 105–130: 124–125.

⁵³⁵ Notably, John does not employ a peculiar term for the drinking. The terms καταρροφέω or ἀναρροιβδέω that express slurping or sipping would have been possible options.

⁵³⁶ Cf. e.g. Frederick William Danker, Walter Bauer and William F. Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1019; cf. Goppelt: „τρώγω heißt eigtl nagen, zerbeißen, (hörbar) zerkauen u erhält dann die abgeschliffene Bdtg fressen, essen, zunächst von pflanzenfressenden Tieren Hom Od 6, 90, aber auch von Menschen hdt I 71, 3 u bildhaft Aristoph Eq 1077. In späterer hell Zeit wird das Wort in der Umgangssprache wohl vom Ionischen aus vielfach statt ἐσθίω als Praes zum dem Aor ἐφαγον gebraucht.“ Goppelt, „τρώγω,“ in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, eds. Otto Bauernfeind, and Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1949–1973), VIII, 236–237: 236. The term τρώγω signifies "gnaw," "nibble," "munch" and is used primarily for herbivorous animals in the sense of the German "fressen" but

usually lost in English translations. It is possible, of course, that τρώγειν is used here as a synonym for ἐσθίειν. Nevertheless, it may be suggested that original audiences would have been aware of and struck by its particular nuances given its meanings in Greek. Although this word does not appear frequently in the New Testament or in Hellenistic-Jewish literature, it is well attested in classical Greek literature and again in the colloquial language of the late Hellenistic period.⁵³⁷

My suggestion, therefore, is that the Johannine use of τρώγειν here is not just a variant, but a deliberate emphasis on the reality of physical eating.⁵³⁸ What is more, instead of the otherwise frequently employed σῶμα,⁵³⁹ John uses σάρξ in this passage.⁵⁴⁰ While σῶμα is usually translated as “body” – referring to either a corpse or a living body⁵⁴¹ – σάρξ is usually the flesh, the material that covers the bones of a (human or animal) body.⁵⁴² The idea of physically eating Jesus’ flesh is,

also for humans. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968). Translations of τρώγω further include: “to bite or chew food,” “eat” (audibly); Danker, Bauer and Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 1019. Apart from the four uses in Jn 6 (vv. 54, 56, 57, 58) this lemma appears only twice in the NT: in Jn 13:18 and Mt 24:38 and nowhere in LXX or Philo or Josephus. The repeated use of τρώγειν in Jn 6 instead of the commonly used ἐσθίειν, draws attention to the reality of the physical eating.

⁵³⁷ Bauernfeind states that while τρώγειν is missing in literature of Hellenistic Judaism it becomes popular in early Christian literature and ἐσθίειν becomes less frequent. Bauernfeind and Kittel, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, 236. Cf. Goppelt, “τρώγω,” VIII, 236–237: 236.

⁵³⁸ Cf. Bultmann: „Andrerseits wird in V. 54 der Anstoß dadurch gesteigert, daß das φάγειν durch das stärkere τρώγειν ersetzt ist: es handelt sich also um reales Essen, nicht um irgendeine geistige Aneignung.“ Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, 176.

⁵³⁹ E.g. in the words of institution (τὸ σῶμά μου, Mt 26:26; Mk 14:23; Lk 22:19 and τοῦ σώματος, 1 Cor 11:27).

⁵⁴⁰ καὶ ὁ ἄρτος δὲ ὃν ἐγὼ δώσω ἢ σάρξ μου ἐστίν, Jn 6:51; and repeated in the rest of the discourse in different forms, Jn 6:52, 53, 53, 54, 55, 56, and later again in 6:63.

⁵⁴¹ Danker, Bauer and Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 983.

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*, 914–915. In the Fourth Gospel, the word “σῶμα” occurs in five instances, in four of which it clearly signifies the dead body/corpse of Jesus (on the cross: 19:31, 38, 40; in the tomb 20:12). The only possibly ambiguous occurrence of σῶμα is in Jn 2:21 when the narrator informs the readers that Jesus is talking of the temple of his body (ἐκεῖνος δὲ ἔλεγεν περὶ τοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ. Jn 20:12). From the context it is obvious, however, that σῶμα is a reference to the dead body, the corpse that will be resurrected after three days.

therefore, emphasized in this passage and culminates in v. 57, where Jesus states that whoever eats or chews Him will live through Him.⁵⁴³

This passage's peculiar vocabulary will be discussed in detail against Dionysian traditions. In order to undergird the argument that this passage is allusive of Dionysian traditions and likely not the result of chance, the discussion then addresses the entire Gospel and adduces further striking parallels between the Johannine Jesus and Dionysus.

6.4.3. Dionysus' Attributes

Of all the Greek gods, Dionysus is the most visible. He is present in myth, literature and art, and has a polymorphous nature. Many attributes have been made to Dionysus' name.⁵⁴⁴ Dionysus "frequently appears in myth as a shape shifter or a master of disguise.... To put it simply: Dionysus is a god who, by his very nature, is disposed to wear different masks, and who was known to reveal himself in different ways at different times to his worshipers."⁵⁴⁵ While the characteristics of Dionysus are manifold, he is best known as the god of wine.

6.4.3.1. God of Wine

The earliest certain evidence of Dionysus' association with wine is in the oldest surviving Greek poetry, dating from the eighth and seventh centuries BCE. The most abundant evidence of

⁵⁴³ The incarnatory aspects of Jesus as in flesh and blood appear also in the works of Ignatius. In Tral 8:1 Ignatius relates the renewal of faith to the flesh of the Lord and love to the blood of Christ (ἀνακτήσασθε ἑαυτοὺς ἐν πίστει ὃ ἐστιν σὰρξ τοῦ κυρίου καὶ ἐν ἀγάπῃ ὃ ἐστιν αἷμα Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, Tral 8:1). In Rom 7:3 he states that he desires the bread of God, the heavenly bread, the bread of life, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; and that he desires to drink of God, namely his blood, which is incorruptible love (ἄρτον θεοῦ θέλω ὃ ἐστιν σὰρξ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ... τοῦ ἐκ σπέρματος Δαυεὶδ καὶ πόμα θέλω τὸ αἷμα αὐτοῦ ὃ ἐστιν ἀγάπη ἄφθαρτος, Rom 7:3).

⁵⁴⁴ Otto Kern, "Dionysos," in *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, ed. Georg Wissowa (München: Alfred Druckenmüller, 1958–1980), 1008–1046: 1026–1033.

⁵⁴⁵ Thomas H. Carpenter and Christopher A. Faraone, eds. *Masks of Dionysus, Myth and Poetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 2.

Dionysus as the god of wine is found in Athenian vase-painting.⁵⁴⁶ Dionysus is associated with the production and consumption of wine and, as early as the fifth century BCE, he is even identified with wine.⁵⁴⁷ Dionysus is the one who grows the rich-clustered vine for mortals (*Bacchae* 651). He has given mortals the wine that puts an end to pain (*Bacchae* 772), and the juice of the vine serves as means to forget troubles and as a treatment for misery. Dionysus is also the provider of wine at the festive meal of the gods (*Bacchae* 383).⁵⁴⁸ According to Teiresias, Dionysus is responsible for the gift of wine to humankind.⁵⁴⁹ “Himself a god, he is poured out in libations to the gods, and so it is because of him that men win blessings from them” (*Bacchae* 284-285).⁵⁵⁰

This source – along with others – also indicates that Dionysus is envisioned as inhabiting the wine. Similarly, Bacchus is present within the wine and he gets poured into a cup (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 6.488-489) and drunk.⁵⁵¹ Odysseus gives the Cyclops the god Βάκχιος to drink (Euripides, *Cyclops*, 519-520).⁵⁵² The idea that this god inhabits the wine and gets poured out in libations is obviously widespread.⁵⁵³ Cicero ridicules the idea that someone could believe in

⁵⁴⁶ Seaford, *Dionysos*, 16.

⁵⁴⁷ “Wine poured in honor of the god was regarded as a type of sacrifice (thusia). Drinking of the new wine in the *khoes* at the *Anthesteria* fulfilled the function of a consecrated sacrificial meal. As a result, the ritual complex of blood sacrifice was transferred to the labors or the wine maker and the pleasures of the wine drinker. Hand in hand with this process went the identification of Dionysus himself with wine, an identification attested as early as the fifth century B.C.” Dirk Obbink, “Dionysos Poured Out: Ancient and Modern Theories of Sacrifice and Cultural Formation,” in *Masks of Dionysus*, eds. Thomas H. Carpenter and Christopher A. Faraone, Myth and Poetics (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 65–86: 78. For the equation of Dionysus with wine and further sources for this idea in antiquity, see Walter Burkert, *Homo necans: Interpretationen altgriechischer Opferriten und Mythen*, De Gruyter Studienbuch (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 248–249, esp. n. 42.

⁵⁴⁸ Euripides, *Bacchae*.

⁵⁴⁹ Note the parallel to Demeter who is responsible for the gift of grain.

⁵⁵⁰ “οὗτος θεοῖσι σπένδεται θεὸς γηγῶς, ὥστε διὰ τοῦτον τὰγάθ’ ἀνθρώπους ἔχειν” Euripides, *Bacchae*, 36–37. Cf. also the parallel in Pauline literature: “I am poured out, as a sacrifice” (σπένδομαι ἐπὶ τῇ θυσίᾳ, *Philippians* 2:17).

⁵⁵¹ “*et Bacchus in auro ponitur*,” Ovidius, *Metamorphoses*, eds. Frank Justus Miller and George P. Goold, vol. 42-43, *LCL* (1928-1929; reprint, London: Heinemann, 1960–1964), 322–323. Note the English translation here: “wine in cups of gold,” avoiding the image of Bacchus being poured into the cup by translating “Bacchus” with “wine.”

⁵⁵² “Κύκλωψ, ἄκουσον’ ὡς ἐγὼ τοῦ Βακχίου τούτου τρίβων εἶμι, ὃν ἐγὼ πιεῖν ἔδωκά σοι.” Euripides, “*Cyclops*,” in *Euripidis fabulae*, ed. James Diggle, *OCD* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 1, 3–29.

⁵⁵³ „Wenn in der Libation, der in der ganzen Antike üblichen Weinspende der Menschen vor den Göttern, der Gott Dionysos selbst den anderen Göttern als Opfer dargebracht wird, dann heißt das nichts anderes, als dass Dionysos mit

consuming a god, and calls this person brainless (*amens*, *De natura Deorum* 3.41).⁵⁵⁴ Such strong opposition indicates that this very idea must have been widely known.⁵⁵⁵

Grapes and wine are the means of Dionysus' epiphany to mortals.⁵⁵⁶ The idea of vine, wine and grapes representing Dionysus is clearly not simply a metaphor, but rather a way in which humans experienced this god. Dionysus is believed to theomorphize into the substances that he invented.⁵⁵⁷

Wine is frequently associated with blood. The notion of calling the juice of grapes blood is well known in many traditions, Jewish and pagan alike (for example: Gen 49:11; Dtn 32:14; Rev 17:6; *Achilles Tatius* 2.2.4). Unsurprisingly, wine also appears as the blood of Dionysus (Timotheos Fragment 4).⁵⁵⁸ The idea of Dionysus being torn apart and pressed into wine appears in songs that are sung when grapes are pressed (for example: Clement of Alexandria, *Scholia in protrepticum et paedagogum* 2.3).⁵⁵⁹

dem Wein des Trankopfers identifiziert wird. Diese Vorstellungen sind in der Antike so allgemein verbreitet, dass man sie bei jedwelchen Dionysosverehrnern ohne Weiteres als bekannt und akzeptiert voraussetzen kann und muss.“ Wilfried Eisele, “Jesus und Dionysos: Göttliche Konkurrenz bei der Hochzeit zu Kana (Joh 2,1–11),” 6.

⁵⁵⁴ “*Cum fruges Cererem vinum Liberum dicimus, genere nos quidem sermonis utimur usitato, sed ecquem tam amentem esse putas, qui illud, quo vescatur, deum creadat esse?*” Cicero, *De natura Deorum* 3.41; Marcus Tullius Cicero and Ursula Blank-Sangmeister, *De natura deorum: Lateinisch/Deutsch*, Reclams Universal-Bibliothek, vol. 6881 (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 1995), 310.

⁵⁵⁵ Wilfried Eisele, “Jesus und Dionysos: Göttliche Konkurrenz bei der Hochzeit zu Kana (Joh 2,1–11),” 6, n. 12.

⁵⁵⁶ Cf. e.g. the story according to which Dionysus appears on the ship of Tyrsenean pirates, lets vines grow atop the sail and frightens the pirates by appearing to them as a lion (Homeric Hymn to Dionysus 7). Diane Rayor, *The Homeric Hymns: A Translation, with Introduction and Notes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 87–88. (See section on Dionysus' epiphany below.)

⁵⁵⁷ Cf. Obbink, “Dionysos Poured Out: Ancient and Modern Theories of Sacrifice and Cultural Formation,” 65–86: 79.

⁵⁵⁸ “*αἶμα Βακχίου*,” Timotheos Fragment 4. Denys Lionel Page, *Poetae melici Graeci: Alcmanis, Stesichori, Ibyci, Anacreontis, Simonidis, Corinnae, poetarum minorum reliquias, carmina popularia et convivalia quaeque adespota feruntur* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962). See also Obbink, “Dionysos Poured Out: Ancient and Modern Theories of Sacrifice and Cultural Formation,” 65–86: 78–79. Obbink points out that the wine drunk as the blood of this god does not imply the sacrifice of this god.

⁵⁵⁹ “*ἀγρουκικὴ ᾠδὴ ἐπὶ τῷ ληνῷ ἄδομένη, καὶ αὐτὴ περιεῖχεν τὸν Διονύσου σπαραγμόν.*” Clemens Alexandrinus, *Scholia in clementem alexandrinum (scholia recentiora partim sub auctore Aretha): Scholia in protrepticum et paedagogum*, with the collaboration of Ursula Treu, 3rd ed. GCS, vol. 12 (1905; reprint, 1972).

Parallels to the Fourth Gospel are obvious. Just as Dionysus has brought wine to humankind, Jesus is the provider of wine at the wedding in Cana in John 2. When the wine runs out, Jesus orders that water vessels be filled, and when the steward (ἀρχιτρικλινος, Jn 2:9) tastes the liquid, the water has turned into wine.⁵⁶⁰ A very striking parallel is certainly Jesus' discourse in John 15:1-8 where Jesus says of himself that he is the vine (Ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ἄμπελος ἡ ἀληθινή, Jn 15:1, cf. 15:5). Just as Dionysus is the personification of the vine and is present within the wine, Jesus is the vine. He is not just any given vine, however, but the true vine.

While John 6 does not speak of wine, but only of bread, in the last section of the discourse on the bread of life, the Johannine Jesus presents the drinking of his blood and the eating/chewing of his flesh as a necessary act for attaining eternal life. When flesh and bread are associated with each other and blood shall be drunk along with the flesh, then it is not a great leap to associate the blood with wine. Just as the blood corresponds to the flesh, wine corresponds to bread even if it is not mentioned in this specific passage.

6.4.3.2. Dionysus as a Bull

Dionysus was associated not only with the vine and other plants,⁵⁶¹ but also with animals.⁵⁶² Identifying Dionysus with a bull was the most important association and identification of this type

⁵⁶⁰ For scholarly discussion of relationship of this passage to the tradition and cult of Dionysus, see discussion and bibliography above, p. 223, n. 30.

⁵⁶¹ "Dionysus is Dendrites, Tree-god, and a plant-god in a far wider sense. He is god of the fig-tree, Sykites; he is Kissos, god of the ivy; he is Anthios, god of all blossoming things; he is Phytalmios, god of growth." Jane Ellen Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, 3rd ed. Mythos (1903; reprint, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 426. See also James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion* (London: MacMillan, 1988), 385–92; Edgar Reuterskiöld, *Die Entstehung der Speisesakramente*, Religionswissenschaftliche Bibliothek, vol. 4 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1912), 126; Martin Persson Nilsson, *Griechische Feste von religiöser Bedeutung mit Ausschluss der attischen* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1906), 261–62; Seaford, *Dionysos*, 22–23.

⁵⁶² Dionysus e.g. turns himself into a roaring lion, a many-headed snake, or a leopard. Seaford, *Dionysos*, 23–25.

(for example: *Bacchae* 100, 618-622, 920-921, 1017, 1159;⁵⁶³ Plutarch, *Moralia* 299 B;⁵⁶⁴ *Orphic Hymn to Dionysus* 30.4⁵⁶⁵). Dionysus' followers imitated the appearance of their god as bull by wearing bulls' horns on their heads (Lycophron, *Alexandra* 1236-1237).⁵⁶⁶ Strabo speaks of mimickers that bellow like bulls in Dionysian celebrations (Geography 10.3.16).⁵⁶⁷

What is of particular interest for investigating John 6:51-58 is the ritual of eating bull's flesh. This seems to have been a widespread custom in Dionysian mysteries as well as in other mystery cults.⁵⁶⁸ A bull (or at times other animals) was sacrificed in a peculiar ritual that included tearing apart the living animal (*sparagmos*), and subsequently a feast of raw flesh (*omophagy*). This ritual shall be discussed in the following section.

6.4.4. Sparagmos and Omophagy

Sparagmos, the ritual dismemberment of a living creature (animal or human) by tearing it apart, and *omophagy*, the eating of raw flesh, are both associated with Dionysus and his followers in various forms.⁵⁶⁹ In the *Bacchae*, the chorus praises Dionysus as the god who himself drinks blood

⁵⁶³ Euripides, *Bacchae*.

⁵⁶⁴ “βοέω ποδὶ παραγίγνεσθαι;” (Moralia 299C); Plutarch, *Plutarch's Moralia: In Sixteen Volumes*, ed. Frank Cole Babbitt, LCL (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927–2004), 4:216–217.

⁵⁶⁵ “ταυρωπόν” and “ταυρομέτωπε;” Orpheus, *The Orphic Hymns*, 42–43, 62–63.

⁵⁶⁶ “κερασφόρους γυναικας” “porteuses de cornes;” Lycophron, *Alexandra*, eds. André Hurst, and Antje Kolde, vol. 468, CUFr (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2008), 71. Evidence for the two-horned Dionysus: “[Διόνυσου] ... δικέρωτα;” *Orphic Hymn to Dionysus* 30.3, Orpheus, *The Orphic Hymns*, 42–43.

⁵⁶⁷ “ταυρόφθογγοι μίμοι;” Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo: In Eight Volumes*, eds. Horace Leonard Jones, and John Robert Sitlington Sterrett, vol. 49-50 ; 182 ; 196 ; 211 ; 223 ; 241 ; 267, LCL (London, Cambridge: Heinemann; Harvard University Press, 1954–1970), 5:106-107. Cf. “ταυρόφθογγοι” in Aeschylus fragments 27.8; Aeschylus, *Agamemnon, Libation-Bearers, Eumenides, Fragments: The Appendix Containing the More Considerable Fragments Published since 1930 and a New Text of Fr. 50*, ed. Hugh Lloyd-Jones, vol. 146, LCL (London: Heinemann, 1963). Statues of Dionysus were widespread among the Greeks. E.g. “Ἀργείοις δὲ βουγενῆς Διόνυσος ἐπίκλην ἔστιν;” Plutarch, *Moralia* (De Iside et Osiride) 364F; Plutarch, *Plutarch's Moralia: In Sixteen Volumes*, 5:84-85.

⁵⁶⁸ Cf. Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 110. Dionysus himself is called a bull-eater by Sophocles (Fragmenta, 668.1). “Διονύσου τοῦ ταυροφάγου;” Sophocles, *Fragments*, ed. Lloyd-Jones, Hugh, vol. 483, LCL (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1996), 320–321.

⁵⁶⁹ The *sparagmos* is known from other instances. It appears prominently e.g. in the myth of the Egyptian Osiris. G. R. H. Wright, *As on the First Day* (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 139.

and eats raw flesh (*Bacchae* 135-139).⁵⁷⁰ Later in the play, the messenger reports to Pentheus that he and his companions have only just escaped being torn into pieces by the raging Bacchantes who, instead, are tearing apart an animal (*Bacchae* 735-747).⁵⁷¹ In doing so, the Bacchantes imitate their founder god.⁵⁷² The Bacchantes kill Pentheus by means of a *sparagmos* (*Bacchae* 1125-1143).⁵⁷³ In effect, this is Pentheus' sentence for having failed to recognize the god Dionysus in his human disguise. Various sources support the idea that the ecstatic nocturnal ritual of the Bacchantes involved the eating of raw flesh. Plutarch reports that during the festivals and sacrifices, tumultuous gatherings, people ate raw flesh (*Moralia* 417C).⁵⁷⁴

In a fragment, Euripides gives some information on the Dionysian ritual:

⁵⁷⁰ Euripides, *Bacchae*, 22–23.

Other sources also refer to a carnivorous Dionysus who himself ingests raw flesh, e.g. in a fragment by Alcaeus: “τόνδε κερήλιον ὠνύμασ[α]ν Ζόνυσσον ὠμήσταν;” (Alcaeus Fragmenta 129.9); Alcaeus, *Fragments*, ed. Liberman, Gauthier, vol. 392, *CUFr* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1999), 61–62.

In his tractate on abstinence, Porphyrius refers to Euelpis of Karystos and reports that it is custom in Chios as well as in Tenedos to offer a human sacrifice to Dionysus Omadios: “Ἔθουον δὲ καὶ ἐν Χίῳ τῷ Ὠμαδίῳ Διονύσῳ ἄνθρωπον διασπῶντες, καὶ ἐν Τενέδῳ, ὡς φησὶν Εὐέλπις ὁ Καρύστιος.” (On abstinence from killing animals, II.55) Porphyrius, *De l'abstinence*, 3 vols. Budé (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1977–1995), 2:118.

Porphyrius mentions the human sacrifice of Chios specifically and thereby expresses that this custom is exceptional. On human sacrifices in honour of Dionysus, see Friedrich Schwenn, *Die Menschenopfer bei den Griechen und Römern*, RGVV, vol. 15.3 (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1915), 71–75.

Normally the sacrifice in the omophagies would have been animals. The attribute “Omadios” to Dionysus is not singular in this source and can be translated as the “eater of raw flesh.” Cf. e.g. “[Διόνυσον] ... ὠμάδιον,” *Orphic Hymn to Dionysus* 30.5, Orpheus, *The Orphic Hymns*, 42–43. The designation “omadios” is also used by Euelpis of Karystos: Ἔθουον δὲ καὶ ἐν Χίῳ τῷ Ὠμαδίῳ Διονύσῳ ἄνθρωπον διασπῶν διασπῶντες (FHG IV 408), quoted from Kern, “Dionysos,” 1008–1046: 1033.

Claudius Aelianus knows of a Dionysus who himself tears humans apart at Tenedos (*De Natura Animalium*, 12.34.23). “Τενέδιοι δὲ τῷ ἀνθρωπορραϊστῇ Διονύσῳ τρέφουσιν κύουσαν βοῦν, τεκοῦσαν δὲ ἄρα αὐτὴν οἷα δήπου λεχὼν θεραπεύουσιν τὸ δὲ ἀρτιγενὲς βρέφος καταθύουσι ὑποδήσαντες κοθόρνους.” Quoted from: Schwenn, *Die Menschenopfer bei den Griechen und Römern*, 72.

Plutarch mentions the carnivorous Dionysus to whom Themistocles is asked to sacrifice three young prisoners of war: “ὠμηστῇ Διονύσῳ;” (Themistocles 13.3.5); Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives: Themistocles*, ed. Bernadotte Perrin, vol. 2, *LCL* (1914; reprint, Cambridge, London: Heinemann, 1985), 40–41.

⁵⁷¹ Euripides, *Bacchae*, 80–81.

⁵⁷² Klauck, *Herrenmahl und hellenistischer Kult*, 110.

⁵⁷³ Euripides, *Bacchae*, 120–123. Near the end of the drama, Agave refers back to this: “We caught the beast with our bare hands and tore him limb from limb” (*Bacchae* 1209-1210) Euripides, *Bacchae*, 132–133.

⁵⁷⁴ “ὠμοφαγία” (*Moralia* 417C); Plutarch, *Plutarch's Moralia: In Sixteen Volumes*, 5:390-391.

Pure is the life I have led since I became an initiate of Idaean Zeus and a servitor of night-ranging Zagreus, performing his feasts of raw flesh; and raising torches high to the mountain Mother among the Curetes, I was consecrated and named a celebrant. (Euripides, *Fragments* 472:9-15)⁵⁷⁵

According to this fragment, the act of *omophagy* is not restricted to the initiation ritual. The plural form (ὠμοφάγους δαίτας τελέσας) indicates that the *omophagy* was performed by all celebrants.

Finally, a *sparagmos* of Dionysus himself appears in the famous myth about Dionysus Zagreus. Zagreus, “the great hunter,” son of Zeus, may originally have been a distinct god, but he was soon identified and merged with Dionysus.⁵⁷⁶ According to this myth, the Titans, ancestors of humans, killed the infant Dionysus by luring him away from his toys and tearing him apart limb by limb.⁵⁷⁷ Some versions of the myth add that the Titans then cooked and ate the limbs.

Also, a scholion on Clement of Alexandria on Protrepticus connects the Dionysus Zagreus myth with Dionysian *omophagy*:

...since those devoted to Dionysus ate raw flesh [*omophagy*], as a sign of initiation into the laceration [*sparagmos*] that Dionysus had suffered from the Maenads. (*Scholia in protrepticum et paedagogum* 119.1)⁵⁷⁸

The scholiast reports that those being initiated to Dionysus ate raw meat to imitate the tearing apart of Dionysus by the Maenads. Evidence from an inscription from Miletus referring to ὠμοφάγιον

⁵⁷⁵ “ἀγνὸν δὲ βίον τείνομεν ἐξ οὗ Διὸς Ἰδαίου μύστης γενόμεν καὶ νυκτιπόλου Ζαγρέως βούτης τὰς ὠμοφάγους δαίτας τελέσας, Μητρὶ τ’ ὀρεῖα δᾶδας ἀνασχῶν μετὰ Κουρήτων βᾶκχος ἐκλήθη ὀσιωθεὶς.” ‘Mountain Mother’ here probably refers to Rhea, Zeus’ own mother, merged with Cybele, an original Phrygian fertility goddess. Euripides, *Fragments: Aegeus-Meleager*, ed. Collard, Christopher, vol. 504, *LCL* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 538–539.

⁵⁷⁶ Kern, “Dionysos,” 1008–1046: 1014; Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, 479.

⁵⁷⁷ Sarah Iles Johnston, “The Myth of Dionysos,” in *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife: Orpheus and the Bacchic Gold Tablets*, eds. Fritz Graf and Sarah Iles Johnston (London: Routledge, 2007), 66–93.

⁵⁷⁸ “ὠμὰ γὰρ ἦσθιον κρέα οἱ μούμενοι Διονύσω, δείγμα τοῦτο τελούμενοι τοῦ σπαραγμοῦ, ὃν ὑπέστη Διόνυσος ὑπὸ τῶν Μαϊνάδων.” Greek text quoted from Klauck, *Herrenmahl und hellenistischer Kult*, 111. My own translation.

suggests that participants actually performed the ritual of eating raw flesh. According to this inscription, no one was allowed to lay the ὠμοφάγιον down before the priestess.⁵⁷⁹

In summary, *sparagmos* and *omophagy* appear in a number of sources and in different variations in Dionysian tradition. Dionysus is a god who can take on the form of an animal and enjoys eating raw flesh. There is also evidence of the dismemberment of Dionysus himself, with his followers appearing as eaters of raw flesh. These followers dismember living animals, cutting Dionysus' *locum tenens* into pieces and serving them as a meal. By cutting up the sacrificial animal into pieces and eating raw bits of its bloody flesh, they believe that they substantially absorb the god. *Sparagmos* and *omophagy* are the vehicles through which the believers appropriate the living power of the god who is present within the victim. The boundaries between god, human and sacrifice blur.⁵⁸⁰

Whether or not the followers of Dionysus in fact performed omophagy or whether this is more a myth than an actual ritual remains an issue of dispute, and there is no need for an ultimate decision on this matter for the purpose of the present study.⁵⁸¹ It suffices, but at the same time is important, to state that the ritual eating of raw flesh appears in several sources over a long period of time within several areas of the Greco-Roman world and that, therefore, both the author(s) and original audience of the Gospel of John are very likely familiar with this idea. With regard to John

⁵⁷⁹ E.g. H. Jeanmaire, *Dionysos: Histoire du culte de Bacchus*, Bibliothèque historique (Paris: Payot, 1951), 264–65. Klauck suggests that the meat referred to in this inscription consisted of small pieces of raw flesh that were distributed to the celebrants, commemorating the bloody *sparagmos* that was not actually performed any longer. The original wild proceedings were reduced to a tame ritual. Klauck, *Herrenmahl und hellenistischer Kult*, 112. Henrichs argues against the idea that this inscription refers to actual performances of *omophagy*. He suggests instead that it was not the Maenads who received the animal or its raw flesh as food but Dionysus himself who is known as the eater of raw flesh. Albert Henrichs, "Greek Maenadism from Olympias to Messalina," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 82 (1978), 151. On the inscription, see especially *ibid.*, Sokolowski, *Lois sacrées de l'Asie Mineure*, 123–125.

⁵⁸⁰ Cf. Klauck, *Herrenmahl und hellenistischer Kult*, 111.

⁵⁸¹ Cf. e.g. Obbink, "Dionysos Poured Out: Ancient and Modern Theories of Sacrifice and Cultural Formation," 65–86: 68–72.

6, this implies that the author(s) of the Fourth Gospel as well as its original audience likely possess some familiarity with the notions of *sparagmos* and *omophagy* in the sense of theophagy.

6.4.5. Dionysian Theophagy

“Theophagy” can be understood as the ritual, or at least the idea, according to which the divine is ritually consumed and incorporated. The notion of ingesting Dionysus is inherent to the consumption of wine, which represents the blood of this god, and to the consumption of the raw meat of a bull that has been torn apart and represents Dionysus. According to historians of religion, Dionysus’ followers believed that by killing the bull, they killed the god himself, and then they ate his flesh and drank his blood. Communion with the god is achieved by means of eating the raw flesh of an animal that was possibly dismembered by a ritual *sparagmos*. Thus they perform theophagy.⁵⁸²

According to Jane Harrison’s analysis of the Bacchic cult, the Maenads’ “sacrifice is a sacrament, that the bull or goat torn or eaten is the god himself, of whose life the worshipers partake in sacramental communion.”⁵⁸³ This view is supported by E. R. Dodds: “I accept Gruppe’s view that the *ὀμοφαγία* was a sacrament in which God was present in his beast-vehicle and was torn and eaten in that shape by his people.”⁵⁸⁴ Some scholars, however, reject the idea that Dionysian *omophagy* comes down to theophagy, but they fail to adduce convincing arguments. Edgar Reuterskiöld, for example, claims: “Daß sie [women in Dionysian cults] von dem Gotte

⁵⁸² Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 390.

⁵⁸³ Jane Ellen Harrison, *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion*, 2nd ed. (1912; reprint, London: Merlin Press, 1977), 119.

⁵⁸⁴ E. R. Dodds, “Maenadism in the Bacchae,” *HTR* 33, no. 3 (1940), 166. Dodds refers to Otto Gruppe, *Griechische Mythologie und Religionsgeschichte*, HKAW, vol. 5. Section 2 (Muenchen: Beck, 1906), 732.

oder von göttlicher Speise zu essen glaubten, ist nur eine moderne Annahme... .”⁵⁸⁵ As the above mentioned examples of the Dionysus cult prove, Reuterskiöld is clearly mistaken in his claim that the notion of eating and drinking a god is absolutely unheard of among the Greeks.⁵⁸⁶

On a different level, Dirk Obbink, in a recent article, concedes that “people consumed Dionysus himself;” yet he objects to the idea that Dionysus is actually sacrificed: “I am suggesting that there was a ‘consumption’ (rather than ‘sacramental’) ritual, distinctive to Dionysus, in which the substance consumed was stylized in ritual as the blood of the god or hero, and yet the consumption did *not* imply that the god or hero was ritually sacrificed.”⁵⁸⁷ Obbink criticises the presupposition that the sacrifice is equated to the divinity. He argues that we cannot be sure that the Greeks understood the sacrifice to represent divinity.⁵⁸⁸

As has been demonstrated, however, it seems clear from the sources that Dionysus is not merely associated with wine/grapes and the bull (as well as with other animals), but that he is identified with them. The idea of theophagy, in this case in the form of raw flesh and wine poured as a libation, is clearly present in the Dionysian tradition. This is true even if the god or the elements representing him are not actually sacrificed. It is hard to believe that, when the participants killed the bull and indulged in the peculiar menu of raw flesh, they would not have thought of killing and consuming the god that the bull represented.⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁵ Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Der Glaube der Hellenen*, 2 vols. (Basel: Schwabe, 1956), 2:67.

⁵⁸⁶ „...dass man einen Gott essen und trinken könne, ist ein Gedanke, der in der griechischen Ideenwelt keinen einzigen Anknüpfungspunkt besaß.“ Reuterskiöld, *Die Entstehung der Speisesakramente*, 133. For a further critical voice concerning the idea of theophagy in Dionysian tradition, see Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 111.

⁵⁸⁷ Obbink, “Dionysos Poured Out: Ancient and Modern Theories of Sacrifice and Cultural Formation,” 65–86: 79.

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 65–86: 66–67.

⁵⁸⁹ Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 390.

6.4.6. Johannine “Jesuphagy”

This is where the associations that may be evoked through the peculiar formulation in John 6:51-58 come back into the discussion. John 6, according to which true followers of Jesus need to chew his flesh and drink his blood in order to attain eternal life, may well be alluding to the idea of Dionysian theophagy. The Johannine Jesus exhorts his audience to eat/chew (τρώγειν, not ἐσθίειν/φάγειν) his flesh (σάρξ, not σῶμα) and drink his blood. In the same speech, Jesus equates himself to bread that his believers should eat. Those who believe in Jesus need to *eat Him* (Jn 6:57).

Whereas Dionysian followers are believed to actually consume raw flesh that represents the god, be it in reality or merely in literary depiction, John takes the idea of eating the divine on earth to a more abstract level.⁵⁹⁰ In the same discourse in which he exhorts his audience to chew Him and to drink His blood, Jesus also equates himself to bread (ὁ ἄρτος δὲ ὃν ἐγὼ δώσω ἢ σὰρξ μου ἐστίν, Jn 6:51). Those who chew the *bread* eat Jesus, and this is the sign of true belief in Him.

It seems likely that the very graphic language of the passage may have been allusive of Dionysian practices and beliefs of theophagy. Theophagy is a cultic motif, and as such, it does not pertain to the divinity’s *locum tenens*, i.e. an animal, but rather pertains to the god himself, who is assumed to be present. In John 6:51-58, however, the drastically plain-spoken language of chewing flesh breaks the metaphor. The Johannine essentialization undermines the metaphorical language. At the same time, the shift to the bread as the carrier of the essence represents a new metaphorisation.

⁵⁹⁰ Cf. Petersen: „Durch die Überspitzung und Konkretion der johanneischen Formulierung fallen die Übereinstimmungen mit dem Dionysoskult hier mehr auf als bei anderen frühchristlichen Mahl-Texten.“ Petersen, “Jesus zum ‘Kauen’?: Das Johannesevangelium, das Abendmahl und die Mysterienkulte,” 105–130: 125.

What the reasons were exactly for the Johannine choice of wording at the end of the bread of life discourse and whether or not allusions to Dionysian traditions were intended remains speculative. There are, however, a number of further parallels in the Gospel of John that support rather than negate the suggestion that John may be allusive of Dionysian traditions. A number of similarities and parallels between Dionysus and the Johannine Jesus as he appears beyond John 6 will now be discussed in support of the idea that the Fourth Gospel hints at traditions of this Greek god. The topics addressed include the epiphanies of Dionysus and Jesus, their dazzling interplay of divinity and humanity, aspects of eschatology, and the negative reactions to followers on the side of the Roman authorities.

6.4.7. Epiphanies and the Interplay between Divinity and Humanity

6.4.7.1. Dionysus

In contrast to Jewish tradition, the Greek gods regularly appeared as anthropomorphic characters. Of all Greek deities, it was Dionysus who revealed himself most often among humankind.⁵⁹¹ He was the god who was most immediately present, the *deus praesentissimus*, so to speak.⁵⁹² In other words, Dionysus is a god of epiphany: “Le Dionysos des Bacchantes est un dieu qui impose ici-bas sa présence impérieuse, exigeante, envahissante: un dieu de ‘parousie’. Sur toutes les terres, dans toutes les cités qu’il a décidé de faire siennes, il s’en vient, il arrive, il est là. Le premier mot

⁵⁹¹ Cf. Seaford, *Dionysos*, 39–48. See also older literature on the topic: Otto devotes two chapters entitled “Die Mythen seiner Epiphanie” (71-75) and “Der kommende Gott” (75-81) to Dionysus who displays his power and his mobility in his epiphanies. Walter Friedrich Otto, *Dionysos: Mythos und Kultus*, Frankfurter Studien zur Religion und Kultur der Antike, vol. 4 (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1933), 71–81. Detienne develops Dionysus’ epiphanic presence among humans although he prefers to speak of parousia instead of epiphany. He emphasizes the regional characteristics and the dual nature of Dionysus’ epiphanies. Marcel Detienne, *Dionysos at Large*, Revealing Antiquity, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989). See also: Versnel, *Ter unus*, 165–167.

⁵⁹² Albert Henrichs, “‘He Has a God in Him’: Human and Divine in the Modern Perception of Dionysos,” in *Masks of Dionysus*, eds. Thomas H. Carpenter and Christopher A. Faraone, Myth and Poetics (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 13–43: 19.

de la pièce, c'est hêkô: 'Me voilà, je suis venu.'... Il veut se faire voir dieu, être manifeste comme dieu aux mortels, se faire connaître lui-même, se révéler, être connu, reconnu, compris."⁵⁹³

Dionysus is the god who "manifests his greatness by the miracles that accompany his presence and by his magnificent gifts to humanity."⁵⁹⁴ Epiphanies of Dionysus are frequent and appear abundantly in myth and literature over several centuries.

The Homeric *Hymn to Dionysus* 7 (eighth – sixth centuries BCE), for example, is one great and polymorphous epiphany. First of all and importantly, the god appears in the shape and dress of a human.⁵⁹⁵ Only the helmsman recognizes the divinity of the captive because the pirates cannot manage to bind him, and the helmsman asks them: "Mates, who is this strong god you've nabbed? Our well-built ship cannot carry him. He's either Zeus or Silverbow Apollo or Poseidon. He does not look like mortal men, but far more like the Olympian gods."⁵⁹⁶

Centuries later, the *Bacchae* adds a further dimension: On the one hand, Dionysus appears among humankind in human disguise; on the other hand, Pentheus fails to recognize Dionysus' divinity and has to die.⁵⁹⁷ Dionysus appears as a human being to the mortals, and at the same time, his divine identity is emphasized throughout this play.⁵⁹⁸ Dionysus basically masks his divinity,

⁵⁹³ Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Le Dionysos masqué des Bacchantes d'Euripide," in *Mythe et tragédie en Grèce ancienne*, eds. Jean-Pierre Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet, Textes à l'appui, histoire classique (1986), 237–270: 247.

⁵⁹⁴ Versnel, *Ter unus*, 165.

⁵⁹⁵ Homeric *Hymn to Dionysus* 7.2-5, Rayor, *The Homeric Hymns*, 87.

⁵⁹⁶ Homeric *Hymn to Dionysus* 7.17-21, *Ibid.*, 87.

⁵⁹⁷ Different from Euripides' Pentheus, Ovid's Acoetes feels the presence of divinity despite Dionysus' human disguise: "*specto cultum faciemque gradumque:/ nil ibi, quod credi posset mortale, videbam*" (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3.609-610). Ovidius, *Metamorphoses*, 1:166-167. Acoetes later calls Dionysus the most present of gods, for there is no god more surely near than he: "*nec enim praesentior illo est deus*" (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3.658-659). Ovidius, *Metamorphoses*, 170–171. Cf. the affirmation of Dionysus' presence in Euripides, *Bacchae* 500-502.

⁵⁹⁸ "The *Bacchae* is the tragedy of a continuous *epiphaneia*, in the double sense of that word: the divine presence (epiphany) and the miracles by which that presence manifests itself." Versnel, *Ter unus*, 165. For an analysis of epiphanic motives in myth, including a comparison of *Hymn. Hom. 7* and Euripides' *Bacchae*, see Hans Oranje, *Euripides' Bacchae: The Play and its Audience*, Mn.S, vol. 78 (Leiden: Brill, 1984), 121–23. On Dionysus' epiphanies in the *Bacchae*, see esp. *ibid.*, 131–142. Cf. also Vernant, "Le Dionysos masqué des Bacchantes d'Euripide," 237–270: 247–255.

his “true self,” behind a deceptively human face. Right at the beginning of the *Bacchae*, Euripides has Dionysus state that he is the son of Zeus and of Semele, a daughter of Cadmus. Dionysus is thus the offspring of the highest Greek god as well as of a human mother. Euripides’ Dionysus changes his divine form for a mortal one and appears on earth in order to demonstrate to Pentheus, who fights the Dionysian worship, and to all the Thebans, that he is a god (*Bacchae* 1-5.46-56). While Dionysus appears as a human being, he remains a god; that Dionysus is a god, a god in the full sense, is repeated throughout the drama. Pentheus fails or even refuses to recognize the god Dionysus in his human disguise, and because of this, Pentheus dies. Throughout the *Bacchae*, Euripides emphasizes Dionysus’ divine character. Further evidence of Dionysus’ divinity can be found for example in Horace’s *Odes*.⁵⁹⁹ Dionysus hides his divine side, his true face, behind a human mask. But even when he appears in human disguise, thereby concealing his divine identity, he remains divine.

Dionysus is already close to humankind through his presence among them. Aside from that, he shares a very central characteristic with humankind. In fact, the resemblance transcends even the most crucial distinction between humankind and deity: Dionysus dies. He is killed in a gruesome way, and even has a grave in Delphi.⁶⁰⁰ Paradoxically, Dionysus has the ability to die even though he was generally imagined to be immortal.⁶⁰¹ In the end, his immortality is

⁵⁹⁹ Horace poses himself as a believer of Dionysus and claims that he has seen the god: “*Bacchum in remotis carmina rupibus / vidi docentem – credite posteri – / nymphasque discentis et auris / capripedum satyrorum acutas*” (*Odes* 2.19.1-4; emphasis added EK). Quintus Horatius Flaccus, *Odes and Epodes*, ed. Rudd, Niall, vol. 33, *LCL* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 134. The intention of the vision (vidi!) is to confirm to the audience the Dionysian creed (credite!). Horace’s avowal to Dionysus/Bacchus testifies to the perception of Dionysus as an epiphanic god.

⁶⁰⁰ Seaford, *Dionysos*, 85.

⁶⁰¹ According to Dinarchus of Delos (fourth century BCE), Dionysus fled from Lycurgus, came to Delphi and died there. Philochorus seems to draw on this account when he reports that an inscription on a tomb in the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi reads: “*Ενθάδε κεῖται θανὼν Διόνυσος ἐκ Σεμέλης*,” “Here lies, dead, Dionysus, son of Semele” (Philochorus 328 FGrH F7). This inscription implies permanent death. West, *The Orphic Poems*, 151.

confirmed: after dying at the hands of the Titans, his life is restored.⁶⁰² In one tradition, Rhea-Demeter fits his limbs together, while in another, Zeus feeds his heart to the ignorant Semele, and Dionysus is thereby conceived anew.⁶⁰³ According to Firmicus, Zeus made an image of Dionysus out of gypsum and placed the heart in it.⁶⁰⁴ The Orphic version has Athena saving Dionysus' living heart from which his life is restored.

Probably due to Dionysus' many epiphanies among humankind and to his closeness to humanity, scholarship has emphasized this side of his identity. Consequently, the divine side of this ambiguous character has received somewhat less attention. It needs to be remembered, however, as Albert Henrichs has pointed out, that Dionysus is a god in the full sense: "For the vast majority of the Greeks from Homer to Longus, Dionysus was neither a figure of the imagination nor a projection of the human psyche. He was instead a supernatural being whose existential status was not only superior to that of mortals but also independent of it – he was a god."⁶⁰⁵ As a god, and perceived as such in antiquity, Dionysus shares the "cohesive conglomerate of three qualities: immortality, superhuman power, and the capacity for self-revelation, which is an inherent correlate of the anthropomorphic appearance of the Greek gods."⁶⁰⁶

Henrichs elaborates this further: "While the shared human form minimizes the physical separation of gods and mortals, the existential distance between them is maximized by the god's immortality and power. In the case of Dionysus, however, each of these divine prerogatives takes on a special significance because it defines the divinity of Dionysus, exceptionally and paradoxically, in terms of his apparent humanity. What distinguishes Dionysus' epiphanies is not

⁶⁰² Henrichs, "'He Has a God in Him': Human and Divine in the Modern Perception of Dionysos," 13–43: 26.

⁶⁰³ West, *The Orphic Poems*, 162.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁶⁰⁵ Henrichs, "'He Has a God in Him': Human and Divine in the Modern Perception of Dionysos," 13–43: 15.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 13–43: 18.

only ‘their physical immediacy’..., but also their deceptive human quality, which exceeds the normal expectations of Greek anthropomorphism.”⁶⁰⁷

6.4.7.2. The Johannine Jesus

A number of striking parallels between Dionysus and the Johannine Jesus emerge. Without entering into the entire scholarly dispute about Jesus’ humanity and/or divinity in this Gospel, it is clear that a) Jesus is of divine origin,⁶⁰⁸ b) that there are clear testimonies to his divine status but also to the fact that he is incarnated, and c) that he is *σάρξ* and that he appears in human form among human beings. Other passages, while not denying Jesus’ divine descent, indicate that he is not a full divinity by stressing the notion of Jesus as a divine agent, more like a messenger of God than a divinity himself.⁶⁰⁹ Of course, he is also incarnate, has become flesh, a human being. Notwithstanding the ambiguity of the Johannine portrayal, it is striking that the Gospel begins and ends with confessions of Jesus as God, and this is probably the important message.

6.4.7.3. Comparing Dionysus and the Johannine Jesus

The Johannine notion of a god appearing on earth and interacting with humans is not new at all, as has been demonstrated from the Dionysian traditions. Even the idea of a divine figure that dies and comes back to life is not peculiar to the Gospels. Jesus and Dionysus share the intermingled correlation of “murder victim” and “immortal mortal.” Just as Dionysus is an immortal mortal who has experienced human death and whose life is restored by the power of the gods, Jesus is killed and resurrected through the power of God. Through this resurrection, the “ultimate immortality

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid., 13–43: 18.

⁶⁰⁸ Testimonies to Jesus’ divinity include e.g.: Jn 1:1, 18; 3:16; 5:18; 10:30; 14:9; 20:28.

⁶⁰⁹ E.g. Jn 5:19; 7:28; 12:49; 13:20; 17:3; 20:17.

confirms his divine status.”⁶¹⁰ Furthermore, both Jesus and Dionysus have a divine father and a human mother.⁶¹¹

What Henrichs has cogently stated about Dionysus can thus be adopted nearly word by word for the Johannine Jesus: to accept Jesus was tantamount to being in the presence of God, “whether by a stretch of the imagination or by the leap of faith.”⁶¹² His divine status is inseparable from the ability of his worshipers to recognize him not only in his human form, but also behind the particulars of his other manifestations – the bread that he calls the bread of life.⁶¹³

In his bread of life discourse, Jesus suggests that he is particularly manifest in the bread. Not only is he among the disciples at the very moment of this speech, but he is present within the bread. The Johannine Jesus asks of his believers that they recognize and accept him not only in his physical human form, but also in his manifestation among them in the form of bread. The bread represents his flesh, and those who believe in him shall eat of it, and thereby ingest Jesus. Likewise, they shall drink his blood. In this way, Jesus is present among those who eat and drink, and from this eating and drinking believers gain eternal life.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., 13–43: 27. Cf. also Maria Daraki, *Dionysos* (Paris: Arthaud, 1985), 65.

⁶¹¹ Dionysus is the offspring of the Olympian Zeus and the human Semele; Jesus is the Son of God (ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, Jn 1:13). While a human father appears nowhere in the Gospel, a human mother does. It needs to be noticed, however, that of all Gospels it is John who deemphasizes most of all the role of Jesus’ human mother.

The topos of double descent is known also from Greek genealogies. In Homer’s *Iliad*, for example, Aeneas is born as the son of the divine Venus and the human prince Anchises (Hom. *Il.* 2.819-821; 5:311-313). Homer, *Iliad*, eds. William Frank Wyatt and Augustus Taber Murray, vol. 170–171, *LCL* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999–2001), 120–123, 228–229.

Also, Caesar prides himself on his divine descent. He dedicates a temple to Venus Genetrix as the mother of Aeneas, considered the ancestor of the *gens Julia* to which Caesar himself belongs. Ethelbert Stauffer, “Antike Madonnenreligion,” in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung*, eds. Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase, ANRW (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1972–1998), 17.3, 1425–1499.

⁶¹² Henrichs, “‘He Has a God in Him’: Human and Divine in the Modern Perception of Dionysos,” 13–43: 40.

⁶¹³ Henrichs’ statement about Dionysus reads: “Throughout antiquity, to accept Dionysus was tantamount to being in the presence of god, whether by a stretch of the imagination or by the leap of faith. His divine status is inseparable from the ability of his worshipers to recognize him not only in his human form, but also behind the particulars of his other manifestations – for instance, his sacred plants or animals, his mythological entourage, or his special gift to mortals, the wine.” Ibid., 13–43: 40.

6.4.8. Eschatology

Besides the interplay of humanity and divinity that is shared by the Johannine Jesus and Dionysus, the two traditions share eschatological ideas. In the case of the Fourth Gospel, it has been demonstrated in the narrative analysis of this study that, particularly in the scenes including drink and food (water in Jn 4, bread, body and blood in Jn 6), there is a strong connection with eschatological ideas. Eating the bread that represents Jesus is a precondition for attaining eternal life. Jesus repeatedly promises the gift of life to those who feed on his flesh and drink from his blood (Jn 6:50-58). In Dionysian tradition also, eschatological hopes are well testified to and play a decisive role.⁶¹⁴ Not only is Dionysus the god who manifests himself among humans and is most associated with exuberant life, he is also the one (apart from Hades) most associated with death.⁶¹⁵ He has power over death, which makes him a saviour for his initiates in the next world. In graves of dead followers of Dionysus, the so-called Pelinna gold tablets have been found.⁶¹⁶ These gold tablets belong to Bacchic initiates who have undergone a special rite of purificatory character. Purification aims to secure a better lot after death, and these rites seem to have functioned as a reminder of the initiation to the cult and promised protection after death.

⁶¹⁴ For sources on and discussion of eschatological hopes in mysteries, see Christoph Riedweg, *Mysterienterminologie bei Platon, Philon und Klemens von Alexandrien*, UALG, vol. 26 (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1987), 27-28, 53. On eschatological hopes in the Dionysus cult in particular, very briefly Hans Kloft, *Mysterienkulte der Antike: Götter, Menschen, Rituale*, Beck'sche Reihe, vol. 2106. Wissen (München: Beck, 1999), 30-31, and extensively on Orphic and Dionysian eschatology, Graf, *Eleusis und die orphische Dichtung Athens in vorhellenistischer Zeit*, 79-150 (Die Jenseitsdichtung); Graf, "Dionysian and Orphic Eschatology: New Texts and Old Questions," 239-258; Fritz Graf and Sarah Iles Johnston, eds.; *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife: Orpheus and the Bacchic Gold Tablets* (London: Routledge, 2007).

⁶¹⁵ "His connection to death is already alluded to by Heraclitus, who says 'Hades is the same as Dionysos' (DKI 22 B 15). The Anthesteria – one of Dionysus' oldest festivals and one that was celebrated all over the parts of Greece influenced by Ionia – included rituals designed to insure that the dead were happy in the afterlife." Johnston, "The Myth of Dionysos," 66-93: 73.

⁶¹⁶ Cf. Fritz Graf, "Dionysiac Mystery Cults and the Gold Tablets," in *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife: Orpheus and the Bacchic Gold Tablets*, eds. Fritz Graf and Sarah Iles Johnston (London: Routledge, 2007), 137-164.

In the city of Olbia, a number of small bone plates have been found.⁶¹⁷ Three of them are dated as early as the fifth century BCE. These bone plates appear to be tokens testifying to the initiation into the mystery cult. They carry various inscriptions, including the name of Dionysus and a range of binary oppositions such as “life – death,” “peace – war,” and “truth – falsehood.”⁶¹⁸

The sets of life/death, and light/darkness found in the Dionysian evidence are prominent in the Fourth Gospel as well: Jesus as life is most explicitly expressed in John 11:25, 14:6, cf. 6:48 et al; Jesus as light is most prominent in John 9:5; light opposing darkness appears for example in John 1:5, 3:19; the combination of life and light is found prominently in the Prologue in John 1:4. The claim of truth is another notion that Jesus shares with Dionysus, most prominently in John 14:6, although further examples include John 6:55, 7:18, 8:14; 8:26. The Dionysian and Johannine traditions thus share eschatological hopes and offer means and rituals responding to these hopes. The Johannine Jesus insists on the reality of his flesh and his blood. But even if eternal life is promised on the seemingly rigorous condition of consuming Jesus’ flesh and blood (repeatedly in 6:50-58), believing in Jesus is relevant in the main body of the discourse vv. 35-50. “Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life” (Jn 6:47; cf. Jn 6:63-64: “It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But among you there are some who do not believe”). In the end, Jesus insists on the necessity of belief for attaining eternal life.

⁶¹⁷ For a wide-ranging survey of funerary inscriptions of followers of Dionysus, see Cole, “Voices from beyond the Grave: Dionysos and the Dead.” Cole criticizes approaches that confine eschatological beliefs of the initiates of Dionysian mysteries and suggests that such beliefs should be attributed to all devotees of the god.

⁶¹⁸ Seaford, *Dionysos*, 51–52.

6.4.9. Experiences of Followers

A final parallel to be addressed is the repression against the followers of Dionysus and the Johannine notion of the persecution of Jesus-followers.⁶¹⁹ As has been demonstrated in the narrative analysis of this study, the Gospel addresses the future persecution of believers in Jesus (esp. Jn 16). Persecution has also been experienced by followers of Dionysus. At the end of the first century CE, the cult of Dionysus was widespread and well acknowledged, but this had not always been the case. The Bacchic cult was subject to drastic measures on the side of the Roman authorities. The well-being of the Roman state was based on and depended upon discipline and the performance of cultic rituals. Roman “religion” was inclusive in that new additions to the Roman pantheon were possible. Their legitimacy, however, depended on their official acceptance by the ruling elite. The Bacchanalia (Bacchic worship) apparently escalated into wild orgies until the senate set an end to them. The senatorial decree against Bacchanalia offers valuable insight into the mechanisms of control over “religious” activities by the Roman Senate.⁶²⁰ Two important documents testify to the Roman suppression of the Bacchanalia. One is the elaborate narrative by Titus Livius, *Ab urbe condita* 39.8.3-19.19.7, dated to 20-15 BCE.⁶²¹ The other is an inscription from Tiriolo (Calabria), dated to 186 BCE, testifying to the *senatus consultum de bacchanalibus*.

Titus Livius describes the attractiveness of the cult of Bacchus in detail. Thanks particularly to excessive wine consumption, sexual debaucheries and other excesses, the nightly

⁶¹⁹ Cf. Jeanmaire, *Dionysos*, esp. 454–459.

⁶²⁰ Sarolta A. Takács, “Politics and Religion in the Bacchanalian Affair of 186 B.C.E.,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 100 (2000), 302.

⁶²¹ Livius, *Book XXXIX*. For the dating: Hubert Cancik, “Der Diskurs Religion im Senatsbeschluss über die Bacchanalien von 186 v.Chr. und bei Livius (B. 39),” in *Griechische und römische Religion*, eds. Hubert Cancik, Hermann Lichtenberger, and Peter Schäfer, *Geschichte - Tradition - Reflexion* (1996), 77–96: 86.

Aside from these sources, Valerius Maximus, *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium libri IX* 1.3.1; 6.3.9 also mentions the Bacchanalian scandal but does not provide any information beyond what is known from Titus Livius.

celebrations had attracted great numbers of followers. When the scandalous happenings were discovered and reported to the Senate, more than 6,000 women and men associated with the Bacchanalia were prosecuted.⁶²² The inscription of Tiriolo gives account of the *senatus consultum* containing ordinances about the Bacchanalian gatherings.⁶²³ The Senate therein prohibited all rights that were otherwise granted to associations, such as the election of a directorate and the keeping of a common treasury. Secret gatherings were also expressly prohibited. Rituals attended by five people or more were subject to senatorial authorization.

The regulations emphasized that any cultic or organizational aspect was moved from the private to the public sphere. Ordinances indicate that the Senate regarded cultic associations as a threat to the state. The *senatus consultum* testified to stately supervision and control of “religion,” in this case of a “religious group or movement.” Through these regulations, the Senate sought to take full control over Bacchanalian gatherings. Characteristically, “religion” was perceived only in its public aspects and issues relevant to administrative law. In his assessment of the reasons for these senatorial measures, Sarolta A. Takács argues that:

In Livy’s narrative, the cult of Bacchus represents disorder and madness while the state represented by the (all male) Senate stands for order and sanity. The account stresses moral and even sexual debaucheries committed by Bacchants. If we had only Livy’s narrative we would conclude that the Roman Senate feared and reacted against the cult for the same reasons as Euripides’ Pentheus. The inscription from Tiriolo, however, points to a political reason: the Senate wanted control over the cult and demonstrated its political power over all of Italy. In Rome, where politics and religion were intertwined, such control belonged traditionally to the ruling elite and in the case

⁶²² According to Burkert, “there is nothing comparable in religious history before the persecutions of Christians,” Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 52.

⁶²³ Leonhard Schumacher, *Römische Inschriften: Lateinisch/deutsch*, Universal-Bibliothek, vol. 8512 (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 1988), 79.

of Bacchic worship senatorial control over the cult needed to be established. There was a desire to curb Hellenistic influences on public life, a zeal to subdue, bring into line, and structure a ‘foreign’ cult. Or, in terms of power, Rome reigned supreme over her immediate neighbors and allies. The high number of executions leaves me with the feeling, though, that in 186 B.C.E., as it happens too often in human history, religion served as a smoke-screen. That those who were singled out for undermining the ruling authority, Rome, were executed not for their participation in a cult but so that a political order could prevail.⁶²⁴

The two sources, the profuse account by Livy and the dry juridical text of the *senatus consultum*, are two texts of different genres written 170 years apart. However, they strongly converge when it comes to their conception of state and religion, and the manifold interrelationships between state and religion in Roman culture.⁶²⁵

Dionysus’ followers who participated in the Bacchanalia suffered repression and, at times, even persecution. The notion of persecution is clearly expressed in the Fourth Gospel. The Johannine Jesus and Dionysus share the identity of being rejected, expelled and combated as Son of God.⁶²⁶ In contrast to Dionysus, however, the Johannine Jesus has not yet succeeded triumphantly in the world. Jesus foretells of his disciples’ persecution, possibly to death. Jesus himself dies on the cross, accused of self proclamation as God.⁶²⁷

⁶²⁴ Sarolta A. Takács, “Politics and Religion in the Bacchanalian Affair of 186 B.C.E.,” 310.

⁶²⁵ Cancik, “Der Diskurs Religion im Senatsbeschluß über die Bacchanalien von 186 v.Chr. und bei Livius (B. 39),” 77–96: 94.

⁶²⁶ Ekkehard W. Stegemann, *Christus und Dionysos: Die Suche nach der Figur im Teppich des Johannesevangeliums*, Evangelisch-Theologische Fakultät, Lehrstuhl für Exegese und Theologie (Bochum: Ruhr Universität Bochum), 8–9.

⁶²⁷ Pilate does not find Jesus guilty for having caused public insurgence and points out to the accusers the humanity of the accused: “ἴδου ὁ ἄνθρωπος” (“Here is the man!” Jn 19:5). This statement triggers the accusation on the side of the Jews that Jesus proclaimed himself God (τι υἱὸν θεοῦ ἑαυτὸν ἐποίησεν, Jn 19:7). The fear that this statements creates in Pilate seems rather numinous compared with that of the Jews. Pilate has not shown any fear before. It is more likely a fear of being punished for having failed to recognize the Son of God in the accused, just as Pentheus once failed to recognize Dionysus and paid for this failure with his life. Apparently Pilate senses that Jesus somehow surpasses humanity even if he has the ability to die. Stegemann, *Christus und Dionysos*, 10. Cf. also the sources adduced here: Philostrat, *Vita Apollonii* 4.43.

6.5. Conclusion

The exact make up of the Johannine community remains unknown as does its location. While the Gospel is rooted in a Jewish thought-world and is perfused by Christ-believers' traditions, it was also exposed to other traditions of high profile in the surroundings of the Johannine community. This implies that the Johannine community's understanding of meals may well have been influenced by other traditions such as those derived from mystery cults.

Mystery cults were established and well known throughout the Greco-Roman world. This chapter has sought to explore John 6 particularly against the backdrops of the traditions of Demeter and Dionysus. Allusions inherent to John 6 were traced to these two cults. The exploration proceeded to undergird the likelihood that these allusions are not a fluke by extending the search for parallels between the Johannine and Dionysian traditions to the entire Gospel.

Demeter and Jesus both appear prominently as food providers. Furthermore, the Johannine version of the feeding of the multitudes is the only one in which Jesus multiplies bread specifically described as barley bread. Barley plays an important role in the composition of the *kykeon* in the myth of Demeter. Initiation into her cult is deemed necessary to attain eternal life, and correspondingly in John 6, adhering to Jesus' teachings, believing in him, and demonstrating this belief by the consumption of his flesh and blood are the precondition for attaining eternal life.

The locally stable and ancient cult of Demeter was closely related to the cult of Dionysus, also an old but locally unfixed cult. Dionysus was a god with many attributes, the best known being his association with wine. He was not only associated with wine, but was even equated to it and believed to inhabit it. The same god is closely related to a bull and frequently represented as such. His followers believed that their god appeared to them in the form of a bull during their celebrations. The bull is said to have been ritually dismembered (*sparagmos*), and subsequently its

blood dripping flesh was consumed raw by his followers (*omophagy*). If a god was the bringer of wine and was believed at times to even inhabit it, and if the same god was very closely associated with an animal that is ritually killed and consumed during the celebrations along with wine, the participants were likely to understand the ritual as an act of theophagy. By consuming the animal's raw flesh along with wine, both of which represent the deity, followers shared in the vital forces of their god. They substantially ingested the god and his powers, blurring the borders between divinity, humanity and sacrifice.

Reading John 6:51-58, which contains strikingly peculiar and graphic vocabulary, in light of these traditions proves to be allusive of these motifs. Whoever chews Jesus' flesh and drinks his blood and therein demonstrates belief in Jesus, is said to attain eternal life. It is a post-Easter community to whom these words about Jesuphagy/Christophagy are addressed. The allusions of theophagy as known from Dionysian tradition may well function as a means of reasserting to believers that Jesus is present among them, even within them, and provides life for them even after his own death. Further parallels with the Gospel undergird the significance of these parallels. Such allusions would have been particularly meaningful for those members of the Johannine community who had formerly participated in mystery cults.

Dionysus and Jesus share other commonalities which support the suggestion that Dionysian traditions may have been on the radar of the Gospel's earliest audience. Among all other deities in the Greek pantheon, Dionysus was the god who is said to manifest himself most often among humans. He was the one who appeared on earth in human disguise, but even in his human disguise he remained a god in the full sense. Dionysus and Jesus share the complicated and intermingled relationship of being divine or of divine descent, and of appearing human among humans. Both of them die and come back to life: they share the notions of being "murder victims" and "immortal

mortals.” Eschatological hopes are vivid among the followers of Jesus, just as they are among followers of Dionysus. Followers of Dionysus turn to him and get initiated into his cults in hope of a better lot after death. The followers of Dionysus were originally rejected by their surroundings. Over the centuries, however, and certainly by the time of the Gospel’s origins, the cults had established themselves on a large scale, and Dionysian followers no longer feared persecution on the part of the Roman authorities.

These parallels suggest that Johannine readers may well have heard allusions to the Greek god in a number of Gospel passages. Some scholars have claimed that Jesus is depicted as superior to Dionysus in all possible respects.⁶²⁸ If this is correct, the Gospel may have served a missionary purpose. It is possible, however, that the allusions of the Johannine Jesus to Dionysus do not lie on the level of competition but on a level of comparison.⁶²⁹ If Jesus and Dionysus were to be understood as rivals, why would the text discuss the rivalry or Jesus’ supposed superiority in an encoded manner and not address the issue plainly?

The Dionysian attributes that John adopts for his depiction of Jesus may not be there to express that Jesus surpasses Dionysus. It is possible, and perhaps more likely indeed, that the allusions function to support the interpretation of Jesus as the true Son of God. This, of course, again raises the question of why John would allude to Dionysus in a hidden way rather than express the issue in a straightforward manner. The reason may lie in the difficulty of drawing on pagan tradition.⁶³⁰ Dionysus is a clearly pagan deity and, as such, likely a taboo for Christ-believers. A pagan deity could hardly serve as a direct point of reference however much the early

⁶²⁸ Peter Wick, “Jesus gegen Dionysos? Ein Beitrag zur Kontextualisierung des Johannesevangeliums”; Wilfried Eisele, “Jesus und Dionysos: Göttliche Konkurrenz bei der Hochzeit zu Kana (Joh 2,1–11.)”.

⁶²⁹ Thus the main argument proposed by Stegemann, *Christus und Dionysos*.

⁶³⁰ Thyen, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 151.

Christ-believers' movement was heterogeneous in character. Just as Dionysus had to fight for his acceptance among humankind and just as his followers suffered prosecution, thus also the followers of Jesus suffer. The allusions to Dionysus may function as a means of consolation for fearful followers to remain with Jesus, the true Son of God.

6.6. *Excursus: Satanophagy*

This excursus addresses the scene in which Jesus hands Judas a morsel in order to designate him as the one who will betray him (Jn 13:18-30). The morsel functions as a means of revealing the identity of the betrayer, and at the same time, it has a profound effect on Judas and on Jesus himself. Plainly speaking, the morsel of bread in John 13:26-27 brings death. It initiates the Passion of Jesus, leading up to his crucifixion. At the very moment in which Jesus hands Judas the morsel of bread, Satan enters Judas. Satan is typically not the unknown but the intimate enemy.⁶³¹ Judas takes the morsel and goes out into the night. Considering the Gospel's frequent use of binary oppositions, night evokes the notion of darkness which figures on the same scale as death that opposes life.

In the introduction to the chapter, the narrator has already informed the reader about the devil's doings.⁶³² He has already put into Judas' heart to betray him (Jn 13:2). The events have also been announced previously after Jesus' bread of life discourse: He states that one of the twelve is a devil (διάβολος). It is not until Judas receives the morsel that Satan enters into him. What has been in view from the outset of the Gospel, the death of the life-giving Jesus, is now

⁶³¹ Elaine Pagels, *The Origin of Satan* (New York: Random House, 1995).

⁶³² The devil is otherwise referred to as διάβολος in all other instances of his appearance in the Fourth Gospel: 6:70; 8:44; 13:2. Only in Jn 13:27 is he called σατανᾶς. There is no reason to doubt that both terms refer to the same entity; the interconnection of Jn 13:2 and 13:27 indicates this clearly.

introduced by a morsel of bread. It is the point of no return. Judas takes the morsel and thereby ingests Satan who, like darkness and death, figures on the negative scale of the binary oppositions.

The Gospel states that Satan enters Judas (εἰσῆλθεν εἰς ἐκεῖνον ὁ σατανᾶς. Jn 13:27). The way in which this is expressed suggests that Satan physically interpenetrates Judas. Peculiarly, the means by which this happens is a morsel of bread, this morsel has been considered eucharistic bread.⁶³³ This assumption has led Burge to note that

It is interesting that in John 13 the only mention of ‘eucharistic bread’ being given refers to Judas. In the very act of receiving it (13:27), the devil enters into him. Thus for Judas, the only literal communicant in this Gospel, this eating became a communion not with Jesus but with Satan.⁶³⁴

In Greek Christianity ψωμίον is indeed used to describe the eucharistic bread.⁶³⁵ Brown, however, argues that it is unlikely that the writer expected readers to identify the morsel with the Eucharist when there is no institution.⁶³⁶ In any case, this bread leads to death. Bread that Jesus provides otherwise is the bread of life for believers, as the Johannine Jesus asserts repeatedly in the bread of life discourse.

The bread from heaven represents being identified with Jesus, and by chewing it, believers ingest Jesus. As has been demonstrated in the chapter on the possible allusions to Dionysian traditions, this may well have been understood as “Jesuphagy” (or Christophagy), in analogy to Dionysian theophagy. By analogy, it would be appropriate to call the incident in John 13 an act of “Satanophagy.” This is an inversion of the theophagy alluded to in the bread of life discourse. In

⁶³³ E.g. Burge, *The Anointed Community*, 187.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁶³⁵ Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 575.

⁶³⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 575.

the narrative, Jesus consciously hands Judas the morsel so that Satan will enter him in order to fulfil Scripture. In the end, the power which Satan is allowed is a confirmation of Jesus' own power.

7. Discursive III: Chewing the Flesh of Jesus

7.1. *Introduction*

It has been demonstrated thus far that John 6, verses 51-58 in particular, alludes to manifold traditions in the Johannine community's context. In the analysis of the development of the group of people around Jesus, through following the meal scenes in the Fourth Gospel on the narrative level, an interesting picture has emerged: the group surrounding Jesus at mealtimes grows smaller and smaller as the story unfolds. At the beginning of the Gospel, a presumably large crowd is present for the wedding in Cana. The feeding of the multitude in John 6 implies the presence of an even larger group of people. The discourse following this meal, however, triggers protest by the Jews, and it also provokes a number of Jesus' own followers to desert. From that point on, the group at the table shrinks: presumably, the group hosted by Mary and Martha at Bethany is far smaller than the crowd on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and only Jesus and his immediate circle of disciples are present at Jesus' last meal. Finally, after Jesus' resurrection, there are only seven disciples present at the breakfast he serves them on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The group sharing table fellowship therefore becomes closer and more tightly knit as the story goes on. The turning point is John 6, specifically the bread of life discourse, culminating with the very graphic description of chewing Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood (for John's use of *σάρξ* instead of *σῶμα*, and *πρῶγειν* instead of *ἐσθίειν*).

Aside from the echoes to eucharistic or Dionysian traditions that have been discussed in previous chapters, the graphic language in John 6:51-58 raises the uncomfortable possibility that the Johannine Jesus is inviting his listeners to engage in "cannibalism." This is an interpretation, however, that very few commentators care to discuss; if they mention the idea at all, it is merely to

dismiss the language as mere metaphors with no correspondence to real life.⁶³⁷ I would like to suggest, however, that the original audience would not necessarily have heard and understood this passage in an exclusively metaphorical manner. Rather, the original audience may well have heard in these words allusions to cannibalistic behaviour in the literal sense.

7.2. *Cannibalism and Immorality in Connection with Meals among Early Christ-Believers*

7.2.1. Accusations against Christ-Believers

Several sources from the early centuries CE accuse Christ-believers of performing ritual murder, followed by consumption of human flesh and incestuous intercourse.⁶³⁸ These behaviours are sometimes associated with Thyestes and Oedipus.⁶³⁹ Oedipus was the famous king who killed his father and slept with his mother. Thyestes was a hero of Greek mythology who was the subject of

⁶³⁷ E.g. Thyen, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 365–366.

⁶³⁸ Over the last century, several attempts have been made to interpret the sources from the first few centuries CE concerning the reproach of Thyestean feasts and Oedipal incest. The most important are: Jean Pierre Waltzing, “Le crime rituel reproché aux Chrétiens du II^e siècle,” *Bulletins de la classe des lettres de l’Académie Royale Belge* (1925); Elias Bickermann, “Ritualmord und Eselskult,” *MGWJ.NF* 35, no. 171–187; 255–264 (1927); Franz Joseph Dölger, “Sacramentum Infanticidii: Die Schlachtung eines Kindes und der Genuß seines Fleisches und Blutes als vermeintlicher Einweihungsakt im ältesten Christentum,” *AuC* 4 (1934); Wolfgang Speyer, “Zu den Vorwürfen der Heiden gegen die Christen,” *JAC* 6 (1963); Rudolf Freudenberger, “Der Vorwurf ritueller Verbrechen,” *ThZ* 23 (1967); A. Henrichs, “Pagan Ritual and the Alleged Crimes of the Early Christians: A Reconsideration,” in *Kyriakon: Festschrift Johannes Quasten*, eds. Patrick Granfield, Josef Andreas Jungmann and Johannes Quasten (Münster: Aschendorff, 1970), 18–35; Robert MacQueen Grant, “Charges of ‘Immorality’ against Various Groups in Antiquity,” in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions: Presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, eds. Roelof van den Broek, Maarten Jozef Vermaseren, and Gilles Quispel, *EPRO* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 161–170; M. J. Edwards, “Some Early Christian Immoralities,” *AnSoc* 23 (1992); F. Gerald Downing, “Cynics and Christians, Oedipus and Thyestes,” *JEH* 44, no. 1 (1993); Andrew McGowan, “Eating People: Accusations of Cannibalism against Christians in the Second Century,” *J ECS* 2 (1994).

⁶³⁹ It is only in the mid-second century CE that the label “Thyestean” as such appears explicitly for the first time: In Athenagoras’ *Legatio Pro Christianis* (*Leg.* 3.1). Athenagoras, *Legatio pro Christianis*, ed. Miroslav Marcovich (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990).

a tragedy by Seneca.⁶⁴⁰ Thyestes carries on a lifelong rivalry with his brother Atreus, and Seneca's tragedy ends with a banquet at which Atreus serves his brother Thyestes a feast consisting of the flesh of Thyestes' own sons. The heads of the decapitated sons are later presented to the shocked father on a platter.⁶⁴¹ This is not the place for engaging in an in-depth analysis of all cases that have been discussed in detail in scholarship.⁶⁴² Nevertheless it is worthwhile to briefly describe the nature of the reproaches of Thyestean meals and their sources, and to get the idea of their historical development.

From Tacitus we learn that Christ-believers were already hated in Nero's time for their crimes (*flagitia*, *Annales* 15.44).⁶⁴³ Tacitus also refers to this new movement as destructive superstition (*exitiabilis superstitio*, *Annales* 15.44), and he mentions its hatred of humankind (*odium humani generis*, *Annales* 15.44). This notion has been interpreted as pertaining to Christ-believers' meals, in which cannibalism is allegedly performed by some.⁶⁴⁴ The earliest more

⁶⁴⁰ Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Seneca's Thyestes*, ed. Richard John Tarrant (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985). The plot of the story is as follows: Tantalus' son Pelops banishes his own sons Atreus and Thyestes for having murdered their half-brother Chrysippus with a curse. They and their offspring shall perish by each other's hands. When Pelops dies, Atreus returns and takes possession of his father's throne. Thyestes who also claims the throne of Mycenae is forced to flee into exile after having seduced his sister-in-law Aërope (i.e. Atreus' wife). Atreus plans revenge: On false pretence he lures Thyestes to his home and serves him a banquet consisting of the flesh of Thyestes' own sons. The father devours the flesh of his sons, a fact that he is later confronted with when the heads of the decapitated sons are presented to him.

⁶⁴¹ Hence the term "Thyestean," an expression that is, in fact, more appropriately employed for the period at stake than the more familiar term "cannibalistic" that has its roots in a malapropism by Christopher Columbus. The term cannibalism was created by Columbus who corrupted the name of the Carib people, of whom he learnt performed horrendous practices, into "Cannibales." The Carib people were accused by their Arawak neighbours of eating people, looking like dogs and visiting an "Amazon" for sex. W. Arens, *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 45–49.

⁶⁴² E.g. Henrichs, "Pagan Ritual and the Alleged Crimes of the Early Christians: A Reconsideration," 18–35; Stephen Benko, "Pagan Criticism of Christianity," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung*, ed. Hildegard Temporini, and Wolfgang Haase, ANRW (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), II.23.2, 1055–1118; M. J. Edwards, "Some Early Christian Immoralities"; Andrew McGowan, "Eating People: Accusations of Cannibalism against Christians in the Second Century."

⁶⁴³ Tacitus, Tacitus in Five Volumes: *The Annals Books XIII-XVI*, ed. John Jackson, Cambridge MA, 1991, 282–285.

⁶⁴⁴ The first scholar to interpret this allusion as a reference to cannibalism was Hans Achelis. Hans Achelis, *Das Christentum in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* (Leipzig: 1912), 294. Waltzing follows this interpretation although suggesting that Tacitus is actually referring to rumours: Jean Pierre Waltzing, "Le crime rituel reproché aux Chrétiens

certain source of reproaches against Christ-believers for performing ritual meals of a forbidden kind is found in Pliny the younger's famous letter X.96 to the emperor Trajan.⁶⁴⁵

In this letter dating from 112 CE, Pliny notes that the accused gather together "to take food, ordinary enough and harmless" (*ad capiendum cibum, promiscuum tamen et innoxium*, X.96.7). It is widely held that this passage refers to rumours about murderous actions connected to meals. The appended qualification of Christ-believers' meals being ordinary and harmless – notably added by the accused without Pliny asking for it – suggests that the accused themselves feared such a reproach. They took pains here to emphasize that their meals were ordinary and harmless. It can be conjectured that these Christ-believers were aware of rumours about their meals, which led them to combat them.⁶⁴⁶

The reproaches of incest, ritual murder and cannibalism originally appeared separately from each other only to be linked in the course of time, and eventually to become inseparable. Justin, for example, was aware of the accusation of perverse fornication following Christian services (1 *Apologiae* 26), but the reproach of cannibalism was not yet linked with the murder and consumption of infants. Tatian denied in 176 CE that cannibalism was practised among Christians, and assured the adversaries that those among them who assert such a thing have been suborned as

du IIe siècle," 210. Lanzillotta, however, has recently argued that *superstitio* and *odium humani generis* were normally attributed to the Jews and that this seems to suggest that Tacitus considered Christians to be a Jewish sect. Consequently their attributes have the same characteristics, namely that the Christians are violent, conflictive and troublesome. Lanzillotta argues that Tacitus would have mentioned accusations of anthropophagy explicitly if that had been the issue at stake: Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta, "The Early Christians and Human Sacrifice," in *The Strange World of Human Sacrifice*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer, Studies in the History and Anthropology of Religion (Leuven: Peeters Press, 2007), 81–102: 83–84.

⁶⁴⁵ Gaius Caecilius Secundus Plinius, *Letters and Panegyricus in Two Volumes*, ed. Betty Radice, vol. 55, 59, *LCL* (London, Cambridge: Heinemann; Harvard University Press, 1969).

⁶⁴⁶ Stephen Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 70.

false witnesses.⁶⁴⁷ It is in Athenagoras' *Legatio*, dating from 177 CE, that the threefold charge of atheism, Thyestean meals and Oedipal intercourse appeared in its familiar form for the first time.⁶⁴⁸ The threefold charge also appeared explicitly in the letter from the Greek-speaking Christ-believers of Vienne and Lyons to those in Asia and Phrygia concerning the martyrdoms.⁶⁴⁹ This letter contains the clearest proof of accusations against Christ-believers of child sacrifice and cannibalism.

Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch, refuted all pagan accusations against Christ-believers: allegations of having wives in common and of making promiscuous use of them, incest with sisters, and the “most impious and barbarous” of all – that they ate human flesh (*Ad Autolycum* 3.4, cf. 3.15).⁶⁵⁰ Origen (c. 185-253/54 CE) addressed the charge according to which Christ-believers offered an infant in sacrifice and ate of its flesh. He rejected the accusation that Christ-believers, wishing to do the works of darkness, extinguished the lights and had sexual intercourse with whichever woman they met (*Contra Celsum* 6.27).⁶⁵¹

⁶⁴⁷ “παρ ἡμῖν οὐκ ἔστιν ἀνθρωποφαγία ψευδομάρτυρες οἱ πεπαιδευμένοι γέγονατε;” (*Oratio ad Graecos* 25.3); Tatianus, *Oratio ad Graecos*, ed. Molly Whittaker, *OECT* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 48.

⁶⁴⁸ *Legatio* 3.1; Athenagoras, *Legatio pro Christianis*, 26.

⁶⁴⁹ Eusebius has preserved this testimony in which persecutions of the Christians 177 CE are recorded: *Hist. Eccl.* 5.1.3-63; Eusebius, *Die Kirchengeschichte*, eds. Friedhelm Winkelmann, and Eduard Schwartz (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1999), 403–427. The document states that some of the pagan slaves were seized and being urged by the soldiers to falsely accuse the Christians of Thyestean banquets and Oedipal intercourse (“κατεψεύσαντο ἡμῶν θυέστεια δειπνα καὶ Οἰδιποδείους μίξεις;” *Hist. Eccl.* 5.1.14). In the testimony of Bibis, a Christian woman, the charge of child murder and cannibalism is clearly implied, for she asks how those to whom eating the blood of irrational beasts is not allowed could eat children (“πῶς ἂν παιδία φάγοιεν οἱ τοιοῦτοι, οἷς μηδὲ ἀλόγων ζώων αἷμα φαγεῖν ἐξόν;” *Hist. Eccl.* 5.1.52).

⁶⁵⁰ “φασκόντων ὡς κοινὰς ἀπάντων οὔσας τὰς γυναικάς ἡμῶν καὶ ἀδιαφόρῳ μίξει ζῶντας, ἔτι μὴν καὶ ταῖς ἰδίαις ἀδελφαῖς συμμίγνυσθαι, καὶ, τὸ ἀθρόωτον καὶ ὠμότατον πάντων, σαρκῶν ἀνθρωπίνων ἐφάπτεσθαι ἡμᾶς;” (*Ad Autolycum* 3.4); Theophilus, *Ad Autolycum*, ed. Grant, Robert MacQueen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970). Theophilus' work was completed after the death of Marcus Aurelius on Mar. 17, 180: J. Tixeront, *A Handbook of Patrology* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co; 1920), 45. For this early church father, see also Rick Rogers, *Theophilus of Antioch: The Life and Thought of a Second-Century Bishop* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2000).

⁶⁵¹ Origenes, *Contra Celsum: Libri VIII*, ed. Marcovich, Miroslav, vol. 54, *SVigChr* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 404–405.

The fully developed portrayal of felonious Christian rituals of initiation with all the necessary preparations and disgusting details is found in the works of the apologists Tertullian (c. 150-230) and Minucius Felix (second to early third century CE). Both authors responded to charges not only of murder and cannibalism, but also of killing and eating infants as part of an initiatory rite.⁶⁵²

The similarities in their testimony suggest either a common source, or a dependency of one author on the other.⁶⁵³ Tertullian addressed the crimes alleged to Christians since the time of Nero in an ironical way (*Ad nationes* 1.7). He offered a description of a ritual of initiation into Christianity according to which the candidate was required to bring an infant to be offered as a sacrifice, and a piece of bread to be broken and dipped in the baby's blood. Initiates were also required to bring candle-holders, which would be lit, and then knocked over by a pack of dogs tied together after they had been incited by scraps of meat thrown at them. Initially, this part of the ritual may seem harmless enough, but the point is, that the lights need to be extinguished, presumably, for the incestuous acts to begin. (*Ad nationes* 1.7.23).⁶⁵⁴ Tertullian's description of the initiation includes the manner in which the infant was to be killed (*Ad nationes* 1.7.31-33).

Later in the same work, Tertullian observed that pagans had a grotesque record regarding infanticide. He ironically compared the Christians' alleged infanticide with the pagans' doings, and stated that there was no real difference between the two, and that the pagan version, alas, was even crueller (*Ad nationes* 1.15.2). In *Apologeticum* 7-9 also, Tertullian discussed various vices

⁶⁵² For a complete list of parallels between the two, see Marcus Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, Budé (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1964), liv–lv.

⁶⁵³ This has been discussed in early modern scholarship and remains a matter of controversy. Cf. F. Wilhelm, "De Minucii Felicis Octavio et Tertulliani Apologetico," *Breslauer philologische Abhandlungen* 2, no. 1 (1887); Jean Pierre Waltzing, "Le crime rituel reproché aux Chrétiens du IIe siècle," 209–38; Henrichs, "Pagan Ritual and the Alleged Crimes of the Early Christians: A Reconsideration," 18–35: 25–26.

⁶⁵⁴ Tertullianus, *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani ad Nationes libri duo*, ed. Janus Guilielmus Philippus (Leiden: Brill, 1929).

attributed to Christians by pagans. He explicitly refuted the threefold charge of infanticide, the eating of the killed babies, and incest following the banquet (*Apologeticum* 7.1).⁶⁵⁵ He finally sought to turn the charges against the accusers themselves.⁶⁵⁶ Throughout his defence, Tertullian revealed a high degree of ironic sarcasm.⁶⁵⁷

Yet another portrayal of felonious Christian rituals of initiation is found in the work of Minucius Felix (*Octavius* 9.5-7).⁶⁵⁸ Caecilius, with whom Octavius is debating, refers to secret and

⁶⁵⁵ “*Dicimur sceleratissimi de sacramento infanticidii et pabulo inde, et post convivium incesto, quod eversos luminum canes, leones scilicet tenebrarum, libidinum impiarum in verecundiam procurant.*” (*Apologeticum* 7.1); Tertullianus and Marcus Minucius Felix, *Apology*, LCL, vol. 250 (London: Heinemann, 1966), 36.

⁶⁵⁶ Early examples of polemic writings from the hands of Christians raising the possibility that others commit crimes include: Justin, *Apology*, 1.26.7; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.25.3-4; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 3.2.10.1; Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 2.13.7, 4.7.9-11. In the fourth century the Christian polemics are addressed mainly at the Montanists: Cyrill of Jerusalem, *Catech.* 18.8; Epiphanius of Salamis, *Pan.* 48.14.5-6; Philaster, *Haer.* 49; Augustine, *Haer.* 26.7; Isidore of Pelusium, *Ep.* 1.242; Jerome, *Ep.* 41.4.1; Theodoretus of Cyrrhus, *Haer. fab. comp.* 3.2. Epiphanius of Salamis reports on horrific procedures alleged to the Phibionites, *Pan.* 25.5.5-6.

After the eighth century the accusations of child sacrifice are directed towards the Jews. E.g. Laudatio Andrae from the 9th or 10th century; Max Bonnet, *Acta Andrae cum laudatione contexta et Martyrium Andrae [Graece], Passio Andrae [Latine]*, SCA, vol. 2 (Lipsiae: 1894), 309–52. The legend of ritual murder as a concealed narrative appears first in the Vita of St. Wilhelm of Norwich and from then on flourishes throughout the middle ages. Cf. the chapter “Sakrallegenden und Verschwörungsvorstellungen,” in: Johannes Heil, ‘*Gottesfeinde*’ – ‘*Menschenfeinde*’: *Die Vorstellung von jüdischer Weltverschwörung (13. bis 16. Jahrhundert)*, Antisemitismus: Geschichte und Strukturen, vol. 3 (Essen: Klartext, 2006), 225–72.

⁶⁵⁷ For example, he words his invitation to initiation: *Veni, demerge ferrum in infantem nullius inimicum, nullius reum, omnium filium, vel, si alterius officium est, tu modo adsiste morienti homini antequam vixit, fugientem animam novam expecta, excipe rudem sanguinem, eo panem tuum satia, vescere libenter. Interea discumbens dinumera loca, ubi mater, ubi soror; nota diligenter, ut, cum tenebrae ceciderint caninae, non erres. Piaculum enim admiseris nisi incestum feceris. Talia initiatus et consignatus vivis in aevum. Cupoi respondeas, si tanti aeternitatis.* (*Apol.* 8.2). Translation: “Come! plunge the knife into the baby, nobody’s enemy, guilty of nothing, everybody’s child; or if that is the other man’s job, do you just stand by (that is all), by this human creature dying before it has lived; watch for the young soul as it escapes; catch the infant blood; steep your bread with it; eat and enjoy it. Meanwhile, as you recline on your couch, reckon the places where your mother, your sister, may be; make a careful note so that, when the darkness of the dogs’ contriving shall fall, you can make no mistake. You will be guilty of a sin, unless you have committed incest. So initiated, so sealed, you live forever. I wish you to answer: Is eternity worth it?” (*Apol.* 8.2); Tertullianus and Minucius Felix, *Apology*, 42–43.

⁶⁵⁸ Marcus Minucius Felix and Bernhard Kytzler, *Octavius: Lateinisch-deutsch* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1993). Minucius Felix recreates a dialogue between Octavius and Marcus Cornelius Fronto. Many scholars argue that Fronto, a Roman orator who lived between 100 and 166 or 176, played an important role in the development of the tale about human sacrifice among Christians; e.g. F. J. Dölger, “*Sacramentum infanticidii*,” *AuC* 4 (1934), 200; Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians*, 60–68.

Supposedly Fronto had held a speech against the Christians. Some scholars speculate that it contained accusations that may have had their origin in peculiar practices of various splinter groups; e.g. Wolfgang Speyer, “Zu den Vorwürfen der Heiden gegen die Christen”; Henrichs, “Pagan Ritual and the Alleged Crimes of the Early Christians: A Reconsideration,” 18–35: 25, 26 n. 40, 29.

nocturnal rites performed by Christians. According to Minucius Felix, Christians faced the accusation of initiating converts by tricking them into killing an infant hidden in meal or flour. The spilt blood and the divided limbs are then consumed. Furthermore, he describes that after the Christians' evening feasts, the dogs were let loose to turn over the chandeliers, extinguishing the lights, and that in the dark the abominable and incestuous lust could involve them in the uncertainty of fate (*Octavius* 9).⁶⁵⁹ The involvement of a major public figure like Cornelius Fronto indicates that the charges against Christ-believers were of notable character at this point and taken seriously.⁶⁶⁰

After the third century, the accusations of cannibalism decreased. Possibly, the gap between perception and reality had become too great to remain credible. Or it may be that Christ-believers no longer fit the characteristics leading to the application of the "label" of cannibals. Nevertheless, it seems that for a long time these allegations were taken seriously. After all, the allegations seem to have been of importance in specific trials and persecutions.⁶⁶¹

The sources discussed here convey an interesting picture. Most of the ancient sources on "Thyestean banquets" and "Oedipal intercourse" stem from the second and third centuries CE. This kind of rumour, however, is likely to have been around in the first century CE. In the first century, reproaches against Christians, containing conjectured accusations of cannibalism, are found in works by pagan authors. Within only two centuries, allegations and accusations grow from unspecific crimes reported by Tacitus to detailed descriptions of ritual infanticide in the

⁶⁵⁹ "Details of the initiation of neophytes are as revolting as they are notorious. An infant, cased in dough to deceive the unsuspecting, is placed beside the person to be initiated. The novice is thereupon induced to inflict what seem to be harmless blows upon the dough, and unintentionally the infant is killed by his unsuspecting blows; the blood – oh, horrible – they lap up greedily; the limbs they tear to pieces eagerly; and over the victim they make league and covenant, and by complicity in guilt pledge themselves to mutual silence" (*Octavius* 9); Tertullianus and Minucius Felix, *Apology*, 336–339.

⁶⁶⁰ Andrew McGowan, "Eating People: Accusations of Cannibalism against Christians in the Second Century," 421.

⁶⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 421.

works of Tertullian and Minucius Felix. The testimonies of “Thyestean meals” and “Oedipal intercourse” became linked over time and eventually turned inseparable. Interestingly, such allegations appear almost exclusively in apologists’ works, presumably responding to pagan accusations.⁶⁶²

7.2.2. Anthropological Considerations about “Cannibalism”

Eating and death are both fundamental and important human experiences. The notion of eating dead people’s flesh and drinking their blood evokes emotions as well as responses in societies in which such actions are taboo. In more recent anthropological discussions about “cannibalism,” a number of issues have been discussed. Questions have been raised as to the anthropological concept of differentiating between “exo-” and “endo-” cannibalism, depending on whether the person eaten is an outsider or a member of the group that performs the anthropophagy.⁶⁶³ Doubts have also been expressed as to the existence of matter-of-fact occurrences of anthropophagy. In many if not most cases, anthropophagy is not actually practised, but entirely a myth.⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁶² Cf. the recent article on “The Early Christians and Human Sacrifice” by Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta in which he attempts a reconsideration of the issue of accusations of human sacrifice and addresses their slanderous character. Lanzillotta first reviews the sources containing accusations against Christians. He critically judges that the existence of such charges is more firmly grounded in Christian apologetics whereas the basis in pagan sources is thin. Lanzillotta then asks if there is a connection between pagan charges and Christian accusations of heterodox groups while paying attention to the various hypotheses explaining the accusations’ origin and the sources upon which they rely. Lanzillotta points out the very interesting fact that most “scholars take actual Gnostic practices as the origin of the slanders. This explanation is certainly striking since it seems to obviate the fact that later on, the same or very similar accusations would be extended against the Jews. In the case of the medieval blood libel against the Jews, which practices, and performed by whom, were the origin of the slanders? But the most remarkable thing about this explanation is that while no single scholar gives credit to the charges when they are pressed against mainstream Christians, most investigators do tend to believe them when told about heretics.” Lanzillotta argues that a new approach to the topic is needed. He himself, while giving a good overview of previous studies, does not live up to that scope. Lanzillotta, “The Early Christians and Human Sacrifice,” 81–102 (quotation 99).

⁶⁶³ On the distinction of endo- and exo-cannibalism, cf. e.g. Visser, *The Rituals of Dinner*, 12.

⁶⁶⁴ This is argued e.g. throughout in Arens, *The Man-Eating Myth*.

Mary Douglas has convincingly argued that bodily symbolism serves as a means of presenting the situation of a society.⁶⁶⁵ Anthropophagy is one version of bodily symbolism, and increasing attention has been paid to the phenomenon of discourse about it. Some societies talk about anthropophagy without performing it. While accusations of anthropophagy cannot be used as credible evidence of the menu of a certain group, it is a very useful source for determining the relations between the accused and their accusers.

In this line, M. J. Edwards argues that “Thyestean banquets and Oedipodean conjugations were maliciously inferred from that disdain for social usages which, though it was not peculiar to the Christians, was in the most ostentatious, and was expressed in two most public shows of abstinences – from the altar and from the bed.”⁶⁶⁶

James B. Rives also claims that the charges against the Christians should be placed and read in the wider context of Greco-Roman discourse about civilization and religion. Rives suggests an understanding of “the stories told about Christians not as distorted accounts of an actual practice, but as accurate if metaphorical accounts of the Christians’ place in Greco-Roman society.”⁶⁶⁷ Rather than reports of actual happenings, tales of human sacrifice and anthropophagy are a sign within discourses of civilization versus barbarity, and of pious versus “superstitious” behaviour. Following the trend in this field, I will consider the charges as expressions of social relations using the symbolic stereotype of anthropophagy as a slanderous label.

⁶⁶⁵ Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

⁶⁶⁶ M. J. Edwards, “Some Early Christian Immoralities,” 75.

⁶⁶⁷ James B. Rives, “Human Sacrifice among Pagan and Christians,” *JRS* 85 (1995), 66.

7.2.3. Reproach of Anthropophagy Reflected in John 6?

Accusatory language alluding to Thyestean banquets would have been recognized and understood immediately in the Greco-Roman milieu.⁶⁶⁸ With regard to the Gospel of John, Albert Harrill has recently explored this topic in an article entitled “Cannibalistic Language in the Fourth Gospel and Greco-Roman Polemics of Factionalism (Jn 6:52–66).”⁶⁶⁹ According to Harrill, “The charge of the cannibal in ‘our’ midst signalled for ancient audiences a recognizable Greek and Roman condemnation of domestic rebels and internal conspirators.”

Harrill demonstrates how “anthropophagy functioned in ancient polemics to brand an opponent or faction in terms of the Other who overturned not only the state but also the norms of language itself.” He argues, “We should interpret the cannibalistic language in John 6:52–66 in the social context of this firing back and forth of invective between the synagogue authorities and the sectarian Johannine community,” and he claims that “the Johannine author revaluated the cultural taboo of cannibalism in positive terms as a means of self-definition for his community, to throw outsiders off the scent and to weed out those insiders ‘who did not believe’ (6:64).”⁶⁷⁰ Following the footsteps of J. Louis Martyn and many others, Harrill reads the Fourth Gospel as a two-level drama, and thus as a window into the historical Johannine community.⁶⁷¹

In his argument, Harrill presupposes that there are accusations of cannibalism against the Johannine Christ-believers, and that these charges come from the Jews.⁶⁷² I agree with Harrill’s

⁶⁶⁸ Bradly S. Billings, “The Disputed Words in the Lukan Institution Narrative (Luke 22:19b–20): A Sociological Answer to a Textual Problem,” *JBL* 125, no. 3 (2006), 516.

⁶⁶⁹ Lanzillotta, “The Early Christians and Human Sacrifice,” 81–102.

⁶⁷⁰ J. Albert Harrill, “Cannibalistic Language in the Fourth Gospel and Greco-Roman Polemics of Factionalism (John 6:52–66),” *JBL* 127, no. 1 (2008), 156, 136.

⁶⁷¹ Cf. the ground-breaking work by J. Louis Martyn, now in its third revised edition: Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*. Many scholars have adopted this hermeneutic.

⁶⁷² “The charge of cannibalism was a commonplace in polemics against factionalism, and the synagogue authorities who faced the religious dissent of what would become the Johannine community likely Othered such messianic

argument that John 6 is about factionalism; it is necessary to doubt, however, that the Fourth Gospel is responding to Jewish accusations of Christian cannibalism at the time of the Gospel's writing. The text of the Gospel lacks supporting evidence for this claim. As an alternative, I suggest reading the passage under scrutiny against another backdrop: that of groups in the Greco-Roman world whose members engaged in human sacrifice followed by the drinking of the sacrificial blood and eating of sacrificial flesh. The members of the Johannine community would have been familiar with this kind of food related ritual. Given that the bonding over blood and body was a widespread topos in antiquity, the members of the Johannine community would easily have recognized allusions to such practices when they heard or read John 6 at their communal meals.

7.3. Bonding over Blood and Body

7.3.1. The Topos in Enclaves in the Greco-Roman World

Sources about communal consumption of human blood and body in order to attain or solidify a bond among participants reach back to the first century BCE. Diodorus of Sicily mentions how Apollodorus, who aimed at tyranny, invited a young man, one of his friends, to a sacrifice, slew him and offered him to the gods (*Universal History*, XXII.5.1).⁶⁷³ In order to create a bond, a conspiracy in this case, Apollodorus gave his fellows the victim's vitals to eat and blood to drink.⁶⁷⁴ This source testifies to the existence of the idea of drinking blood, here mixed with wine,

sectarians as 'cannibals.'" J. Albert Harrill, "Cannibalistic Language in the Fourth Gospel and Greco-Roman Polemics of Factionalism (John 6:52-66)," 150.

⁶⁷³ Diodorus of Sicily, *Fragments of Books 21-32*, ed. Francis R. Walton; vol. 409, *LCL* (London: Heinemann, 1957).

⁶⁷⁴ Conspiracies and assassinations were part of Roman history from its very beginning. In her important study on conspiracy narratives in the Roman Empire, Emma Pagán defines and explains conspiracy as "a paradoxical phenomenon, for it can be identified and named as such only once it has been brought to light. Disclosing a secret plot

and eating from the corpse in order to secure the bond among members of a group of people, a group with a common interest and a common enemy. The slaughtered victim is designated as “one of his friends,” thus not a stranger or an enemy of the bonding group.

From near the end of the first century, at a time roughly contemporary to the Gospel of John, there are three sources in which members of an enclave deal with human blood ritually, and touch, or even consume parts of a human corpse in order to seal or renew their group’s bond.

Plutarch reports (75 CE) that youths came to confer with the Aquilii and that “it was decided that all the conspirators should swear a great and dreadful oath, pouring in libation the blood of a slain man, and touching his entrails” (*Publicola* 4.1).⁶⁷⁵ The participants met in secret in an unfrequented building but were witnessed in their doings by a slave named Vindicius who happened to be in the building by chance, hidden behind a chest. Vindicius witnessed how the fellows planned to kill the consuls, and their ritual that served to bind themselves together with an

and calling it a ‘conspiracy’ gives substance to the covert event, enabling it to be narrated. In this sense, conspiracy resides in the space between concealment and revelation, between silence and speech. This interstitial nature is manifested fundamentally in the vocabulary of conspiracy.” In several conspiracies in the Roman Empire, the sacrifice of a human being and the subsequent drinking of blood and devouring the flesh play a decisive role. Victoria Emma Pagán, *Conspiracy Narratives in Roman History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), quotation 10–11.

The Greeks seem to have renounced the use of blood for their acts of fraternization at a very early stage, and sources are therefore sparse in the classic period. Nevertheless traces appear in Aeschylus’ *Septem Contra Thebas* 42–46. Even though the blood is not drunk, it still serves as a means to bind the leaders to the oath. Aeschylus, “*Septem Contra Thebas*,” in *Aeschyli septem quae supersunt tragoedias*, ed. Denys Lionel Page, *OCD* (Oxonii: Clarendon Press, 1972), 45–87. Cf. Karl Kircher, *Die sakrale Bedeutung des Weines im Altertum*, *RGVV*, vol. 9, Heft 2 (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1910), 78–80.

For the use of blood in fraternizations in various cultures, see Hermann Leberecht Strack, *Das Blut im Glauben und Aberglauben der Menschheit: Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der “Volksmedizin” und des “jüdischen Blutritus”*, *SIJB*, vol. 14 (München: Beck, 1900). Herodotus describes the Scythian way of sealing an agreement. They dip weapons in a mixture of blood and wine and then those swearing to the agreement drink the blood together with the most honourable of the followers after solemn curses (Herodotus, *Historiae*, IV.70.1); Herodotus, *Histories: Books III and IV*, vol. 118, *LCL* (1982), 266–269. Scenes showing two Scythians drinking from the same vessel are found on plaques from Kul’Oba (*Hermitae inv.* KO 41), Solokha (*Hermitage inv.* Dn 1913 1/42) and Berdjansk (*Gold der Steppe*, cat. no. 100g), as well as a on a diadem from Sakhnovka (Kiev, MIDU inv. DM-1639 = *Gold der Steppe*, cat. no. 99); cf. David Asheri et al.; *A Commentary on Herodotus, Books I–IV* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 631.

⁶⁷⁵ Plutarch, *Plutarch’s Lives: Publicola*, ed. Bernadotte Perrin, vol. 1, *LCL* (1914; reprint, Cambridge, London: Heinemann, 1993), 510–511.

oath. As in other sources, blood and parts of a dead body serve the purpose of binding the participants together with an oath. Differing from all other examined sources, in this case the members of the ritual are not said to drink the blood and eat the flesh. Rather, the participants pour a libation with the blood of the slaughtered man and they touch the entrails. The identity of the victim remains unknown. Also, it is unclear who murdered the victim, though he has presumably been murdered by the participants of the ritual.

Publius Papianus Statius reports that Charops' wife offered her son, whose blood served to seal an oath (*Thebaid* V.159).⁶⁷⁶ The participants girded themselves for action and broke the victim's wondering breast with steel. They greedily stretched their hands from every side at once, presumably in order to touch the victim's body and blood, and it is said that they bonded in the sweet crime "in living blood" (*ac dulce nefas in sanguine vivo coniurant*, *Thebaid* V.159). When they "greedily stretch their hands," this could mean that they dipped their hands in the blood. It is also possible that the aim of this action was to drink the blood and eat from the corpse. The latter is strongly suggested by the phrase that she (i.e. "umbra," the shadow, the new ghost, born through death) hears the snaps of bites (*audit concurrere morsus*, *Thebaid* V.159). It is noteworthy that, in this case, the group devours the flesh and blood of a family member, thus of an in-group member.

Josephus reiterates various ridiculous slanders concerning the Temple of Jerusalem in his defence of Judaism against Apion (*Contra Apionem* 2.91-96). Human sacrifice appeared as the worst of all calumnies of which the Jews were accused. The narration goes that Antiochus finds a man on a couch in the Temple with a table filled with a feast. The man begs Antiochus to set him free and explains that he is a Greek who has been kidnapped by strangers who brought him to the

⁶⁷⁶ Publius Papinius Statius, *Thebaid*, Books 1-7, ed. David Roy Shackleton Bailey, vol. 2, *Statius* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003). Life dates: * c. 40 in Naples, † c. 96 *ibid*.

Temple. The slaves have told him of an unmentionable law of the Judeans according to which they annually capture a Greek foreigner, fatten him up over a year, kill him in the woods, sacrifice his body according to the rites, then eat from his innards, and swear to nurture hostility towards the Greeks.⁶⁷⁷ Different from the previous sources, this one does not mention blood, but exclusively the consumption of the human flesh of a victim who is specified as a Hellene. The Jews in this account are thus said to ritually consume a member of a particular other ethnos in order to affirm their hate against them. The sacrifice and eating from the corpse function as a ritual that serves to annually renew a group's – here an entire ethnos' – bond over against "the Others."⁶⁷⁸

Aside from Apion, as reported by Josephus, the only other Greek writer known to us who maintains that Jews practise ritual slaughter of foreigners is the historian Damocritus. His own work is lost, but Suda, claiming that he was the author of a book about the Jews, reports on him. Suda states that Damocritus wrote about the Jews that they used to worship an asinine golden head, and that every seventh year they caught a foreigner and sacrificed him. They killed him by cutting his flesh into small pieces.⁶⁷⁹ Although there is a description of the method of killing, there is no direct indication of consuming the flesh and drinking the blood of the slaughtered man.

⁶⁷⁷ *"et comprahendere quidem Graecum peregrinum eumque annali tempore saginare et deductum ad quandam siluam occidere quidem eum hominem eiusque corpus sacrificare secundum suas sollemnitates et gustare ex eius uisceribus et iusiurandum facere in immolatione Graeci, ut inimicitias contra Graecos haberent, et tunc in quandam foueam reliqua hominis pereuntis abicere"* (*Contra Apionem* 2.95); Flavius Josephus, *The Life / Against Apion: With an English Translation*, ed. H. St. J. Thackeray; *LCL* (London: Heinemann, 1976), 330.

⁶⁷⁸ In another instance, Josephus reports on cannibalism performed by Ptolemy and his consorts in villages of Judea after their victory. Josephus explains that this behavior served to frighten those who had fled from the battle so that they might assume that their enemies are cannibals (σαρκοφάγους); (*Ant.* 13.345-347).

⁶⁷⁹ "Δαμόκριτος, ιστορικός. Τακτικά ἐν βιβλίοις β', Περὶ Ἰουδαίων· ἐν ᾧ φησὶν, ὅτι χρυσὴν ὄνου κεφαλὴν καὶ κατὰ ἑπταετίαν ξένον ἀγρεύοντες προσέφερον καὶ κατὰ λεπτὰ τὰς σάρκας διέξαινον, καὶ οὕτως ἀνήρουν." *De Iudaeis*, apud: Suda, s.v. Δαμόκριτος – Adler = F60T = *F. Gr. Hist.*, III, C739, F1; Quoted from: Menahem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, 3 vols.; *Fontes ad res Judaicas spectantes* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974), 531.

A collection of papyri from the second half of the second century BCE contains the fragments of a novel by Lollianus. The novel includes the description of the sacrifice of a child or servant, a communal feast of the entrails of the victim and a sacrificial oath binding the newcomers into the group (*PColon* 3328, B1 recto, lines 9-21).⁶⁸⁰

Sometime around the turn of the second to the third century CE, the bonding over a human sacrifice, including the consumption of body parts, appears again in the work of Cassius Dio (*Roman History*, 71.4.1). The Egyptian people, called the Bucoli, rose against Rome during the reign of Marcus Aurelius. Arrayed in women's garments, they deceived a Roman centurion. They gave him gold as a ransom for their husbands, and struck him down. They also sacrificed the centurion's companion, and after swearing an oath over the entrails, they devoured them.⁶⁸¹ Again we find the topos of a defined group, the ethnos of the Bucoli in this case, that captures, kills and devours the innards of a victim that is not a member of the group. Part of the ritual is the swearing of an oath over the inner parts of the body before these are consumed by the participants.

Yet another group that used human blood and flesh in order to create a bond among the fellows is that of Catiline and his fellow conspirators. Catiline was one of Cicero's main political opponents in Rome during the Republican era (in the 60s BCE). The accounts about Catiline are a

⁶⁸⁰ “παρέρχεται ἄλλος γυμνὸς περιζ[ω]μα περὶ ἑαυτῶν] ἔχων φοινικοῦ[ν, καὶ β]αλὼν τὸ σῶμα ὑπτιον τοῦ παιδὸς τυ[θέντος ἀνατέμνε]ι. καὶ τὴν [κ]αρδίαν ἐξείλεν καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ πυρὸς κατέθηκεν. ἔπε[ιτα τὴν ὀπτημένην] ἀνελόμενος ἀποτέμνει αὐτῆς ἕως ἐφ’ ἡμισυ. ἐς τὸ ἄκρον [δὲ τῶν τόμων ἄλφιτ]α ἐπέπασεν καὶ ἐλαίωι ἔδευσεν καὶ ὡς μετρίως ἐσ[κ]εῦαστο, [ἔδωκεν αὐτοῦς τοί]ς μουμένοις καὶ ἔχοντας ἐν τῶι αἵματι] τῆς καρ[δί]ας ὁμόσαι ἐκέλευσεν ...]κισην μῆτε ἐγκαταλείψειν μῆτε [αἵ]ματι τῆς καρ[δί]ας ὁμόσαι ἐκέλευσεν...]κισην μῆτε ἐγκαταλείψειν μῆτε π[ρο]δώσειν μη[δὲ ἂν εἰς τὸ δεσμοτήριον] ἄγωντ[αι] μηδὲ ἂν βασανίζων[τα]ι μηδὲ ἂν ἐξορύττω[νται] ...]ησαν τὸ μὲν ἡμισυ [τῆς καρ]δίας τὸ λοιπὸν [...] π[...τὸ]ν δὲ Ἄνδρό[τ]ιμο[ν...]]ταν καὶ τοὺς α[.]σου [...]...]] πίνοντα καὶ [...] πιεῖν ε[.]ι καὶ [...]λλοσκ[.]ς ἔφερον ἅπαντα ἐκε[.]νος ἀνθρώπων [.]εδοκει.” (*PColon* 3328, B1 recto, lines 9-21); Susan A. Stephens and John J. Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels: The Fragments*, Introduction, Text, Translation, and Commentary (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 338–41.

⁶⁸¹ “πρῶτον μὲν ἐν γυναικείοις στολαῖς τὸν ἑκατόνταρχον τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἠπατηκότες ὡς δὴ γυναῖκες τῶν Βουκόλων καὶ χρυσία δώσουσαι αὐτῷ ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀνδρῶν προσιόντα σφίσι κατέκοψαν, καὶ τὸν συνόντα αὐτῷ καταθύσαντες ἐπὶ δε τῶν σπλάγγνων αὐτοῦ συνώμοσαν καὶ ἐκεῖνα κατέφαγον” (*Roman History*, 71.4.1-2). Cassius Dio, *Dio's Roman History: In Nine Volumes*, ed. Earnest Cary, vol. 3, *LCL* (London, Cambridge: Heinemann; Harvard University Press, 1960–1990), 16–19.

great example of the development of a legend and of growing exaggeration in the course of the tradition.⁶⁸² The accusations against the conspirator Catiline (c. 108-62 BCE) grew from a drink of blood mixed with wine in the earliest sources into human sacrifice, and eventually to the killing of a young person, possibly infanticide, in the later sources. Gaius Sallustius Crispus (86-35/34 or 27 BCE) was the first to tell the legend about the drink of human blood (*De coniuratione Catilinae* 22).⁶⁸³ According to Sallustius, Catiline made his fellows drink a mixture of wine and blood, wishing to bind them in guilt by being mutually conscious of their atrocity. Catiline handed around a cup with human blood mixed with wine. When all of the accomplices had drunk from it, which according to Sallustius was usual in sacred rites, Catiline disclosed the design. While the blood is explicitly said to be from a human, Sallustius leaves open whether or not the human victim had to be killed beforehand in order to obtain the blood.

The Roman historian Lucius Annaeus Florus also conveys information on this act (Florus' work dates to the period of the reign of Trajan and Hadrian). Florus lists the participants as members of important families and high senatorial distinction, and then goes on to describe their ritual (*Roman History* 2.12.4 [Bellum Catilinae]).⁶⁸⁴ Human blood, no longer mixed with wine, was handed round in bowls. According to Florus, this drink was used as a pledge to bind the participants together. Plutarch (45-125 CE, i.e. about contemporary to Florus) offers a description

⁶⁸² For a thorough investigation of this particular conspiracy as well as others in Roman History, see Pagán, *Conspiracy Narratives in Roman History*.

⁶⁸³ “*Fuere ea tempestate qui dicerent Catilinam, oratione habita, quom ad iusiurandum popularis sceleris sui adigeret, humani corporis sanguinem vino permixtum in pateris circumtulisse; inde cum post execrationem omnes degustavissent, sicuti in sollemnibus sacris fieri consuevit, aperuisse consilium suom atque eo dictitare fecisse quo inter se fidi magis forent, alius alii tanti facinoris conscii.*” Gaius Sallustius Crispus, *De Catilinae coniuratione*, ed. Dieter Flach, *Althilologie* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2007), 56.

For more information on Sallustius' account of Catiline's conspiracy, see the respective chapter in Pagán, *Conspiracy Narratives in Roman History*, 27–49.

⁶⁸⁴ “*Additum est pignus coniurationis sanguis humanus, quem circumlatum pateris bibere: summum nefas, ni amplius esset, propter quod biberunt.*” Lucius Annaeus Florus, *Epitome of Roman History*, ed. Edward Seymour Forster, vol. 231, *LCL* (1929; reprint, Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press; Heinemann, 1984), 262–263.

that develops the story, as opposed to the earlier and contemporary sources, by reporting that the participants “gave various pledges to one another, one of which was the sacrifice of a man and the tasting of his flesh” (*Life of Cicero* 10.3).⁶⁸⁵ Not only is the human sacrifice an established fact, but the act of anthropophagy is also explicitly stated. The drinking of blood, however, has disappeared. The identity of the victim is unknown.

Cassius Dio (c. 163-229 CE) took the story yet another step further. He states that Catiline sacrificed a boy, took an oath and consumed the boy’s vitals with his fellows (*Roman History* 37.30).⁶⁸⁶ Whether “παῖς” refers to an infant or simply to a child or young person is unclear. It is clear in this case, however, that it is Catiline who sacrifices this human being.

This series of accounts about the Catilinarian conspiracy demonstrates not only the growing cruelty in the story, but also the growth of what is at first marked a rumour into a story claiming historicity.⁶⁸⁷ The ritual over human body parts, regardless of whether it merely involves the drinking of blood mixed with wine or proximity to a corpse, serves to enforce the bond between those people who take an oath. They create, or rather reinforce, an already existing bond among themselves.

Seeing that a similar set of actions appears in different sources in the Greco-Roman world over a period of several centuries, we can speak of a topos. In each of these sources, it is a particular group of people that kills a person, or at least takes a dead body or parts thereof and performs actions of a ritual character over it. Sometimes this group is referred to as an entire

⁶⁸⁵ “πίστεις ἀλλήλοις ἔδοσαν καὶ καταθύσαντες ἄνθρωπον ἐγεύσαντο τῶν σαρκῶν,” (*Life of Cicero* 10.4), in Plutarch, *Plutarch’s Lives: Cicero*, ed. Bernadotte Perrin, vol. 7, *LCL* (1919; reprint, Cambridge, London: Heinemann, 1986), 106–107.

⁶⁸⁶ “παῖδα γὰρ τινα καταθύσας, καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν σπλάγχνων αὐτοῦ τὰ ὄρκια ποιήσας, ἔπειτ’ ἐσπλάγγνευσεν αὐτὰ μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων.” (*Roman History* 37.30.3) Cassius Dio, *Dio’s Roman History: In Nine Volumes*, 148–149.

⁶⁸⁷ F. J. Dölger, “Sacramentum infanticidii,” 208–09.

people, in others as a smaller group, but in each case, the ritual expressly serves to seal or renew an oath or binding purpose. The topos of consuming blood and parts of a dead body appears in accounts of groups that seal a bond, or it appears as a practice repeated periodically in order to consolidate an existing group and to renew its boundaries against outsiders.

7.3.2. Johannine Bonding over Flesh and Blood

In light of these sources, there are striking parallels between John 6, in which the consumption of Jesus' flesh and blood is the precondition for being a member of Jesus' group, and the topos of practices attributed to certain rings of people in the Greco-Roman world. As has been demonstrated on the narrative level of the Fourth Gospel, those who dare to eat the flesh and to drink the blood of their leader and founder eventually form an exclusivist group, a faction that distinguishes itself from "the Jews."

The evidence discussed in this chapter suggests that John 6:51-58 is not an answer to interpolated reproaches from the side of the Jews, as Harrill presupposes. Rather it may be the other way around: the provocative speech triggers the desertion of "many disciples" (Jn 6:66), and the decision by "the Jews" to kill Jesus (7:1, cf. 5:18).⁶⁸⁸ The eating of Jesus' flesh and drinking of his blood – whatever the corresponding ritual may actually have entailed – creates and reinforces a tightly knit group of Jesus' followers. Jesus is a murder victim; it is "the Jews," according to John, who are responsible for this crime. Jesus' murder welds his followers together. Those who partake of Jesus are part of him, just as he is part of the Father, and thereby they gain life. Those who do not partake leave the group, perhaps as traitors, just as Judas does, who collaborates with Jesus'

⁶⁸⁸ Cf. J. Albert Harrill, "Cannibalistic Language in the Fourth Gospel and Greco-Roman Polemics of Factionalism (John 6:52-66)," 135.

murderers and eventually leaves during the meal in John 13 after being designated as the traitor by means of a morsel of bread.

Alongside these parallels, however, there is also an obvious difference between John 6 and the descriptions of enclaves in the various sources. In John, unlike the majority of the adduced sources, the victim on whose flesh and blood the group shall feast is not a foreigner or an enemy. Rather, he is an in-group member, in fact, the leader himself, Jesus – the ultimate sacrifice. This difference, however, does not invalidate the argument presented. That the person or character around which a group structures itself, and with whom the group identifies, can be the source of flesh and blood is also a familiar topos. The idea of salvific consumption of the founder, even if he is killed by others, is known from the earliest traditions of Christ-believers.

In 1 Corinthians 11, for example, in the mid-first century, Paul states that the customs that he has taught Christ-believers, according to the traditions that have been handed down to him, are alive and well (1 Cor 11:2, 23).⁶⁸⁹ In Paul's account, the bread and body, wine and blood, are directly related to Jesus. Paul's addressees are requested to commemorate Jesus whenever they perform the ritual. Thus, the positive connotation of a commemorative act of eating and drinking a murdered founder is not a Johannine invention. John's account is, however, more than just a replication of this notion. By employing very graphic language, including σάρξ instead of σῶμα, and τρώγειν instead of ἐσθίειν, John illustrates the ritual much more clearly. He does not necessarily reply to interpolated reproaches of cannibalism, but likely draws on the familiar topos of consumption of human flesh and blood in certain circles of people. By employing this very

⁶⁸⁹ Cf. the passages in subchapter „Corinth,“ above pp. 186-190.

graphic language, John alludes to their ritual and employs this motif in the form of a positive reevaluation.

The literal meaning may well be understood as alluding to enclaves that consumed human blood in order to consolidate their group identity or that ate the flesh of their founder, thus creating union with their founder and attaining eternal life. John alludes to the bonding function of the communal devouring of flesh and blood and positively reevaluates the fact that the victim is the group's founder, an idea which he is familiar with from the earliest traditions of Christ-believers.

Chewing the flesh of Jesus ultimately serves to distinguish those who have the courage to join and to remain in Jesus' group as described by John, and those who do not. In this light, John 6 may be declaring that the true followers of Jesus are those who chew the flesh of Jesus and drink his blood in order to attain eternal life. They are the ones who dare to demonstrate audibly and visibly that they belong to Jesus' group.

7.3.3. A Case of Johannine Irony?

The overdrawn characterisation of the chewing of Jesus' flesh and drinking of his blood, and the subsequent negation of its importance, raises the issue of whether this might be another example of Johannine irony. The signal for this would be found in John 6:63, where Jesus states: "It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life." First, John depicts the group of Jesus' followers as a tight-knit group bonding around their leader by consuming his flesh and blood. But in the end Jesus holds that the flesh is useless and that, truly, it is the spirit that gives life. Ultimately, it is the words that count; only the words provide

for eternal life; it is the spirit that gives life. With John 6:63 in mind, the previous verses can be read as carrying an ironic tone.⁶⁹⁰

Conceding this leads the interpreter back full circle to the question of whether John 6 should be understood literally or metaphorically. The analysis of the literal meaning in light of accounts about Roman enclaves demonstrates that, ultimately, this very passage indeed calls for a metaphorical understanding, according to which Jesus does not in fact encourage followers to indulge in anthropophagy, but ultimately stresses the importance of the spiritual level. Irony lies in the fact that the evangelist reveals the true meaning by first concealing it.⁶⁹¹ The proposed interpretation of this chapter, however, also demonstrates that if one chooses to ignore the literal meaning to begin with, one misses the allusions to these enclaves. More important than the exact definition of irony and its employment in this passage is another aspect: the ironic ambiguity in this chapter serves as a means to distinguish the one and only true understanding of Jesus' message. John 6:63 indicates that, yet again, as throughout the bread of life discourse, the true disciples understand Jesus and the Jews are those who do not understand.

7.4. Conclusion

The present chapter has explored several issues arising in the interpretation of John 6, particularly verses 51-58. On the narrative level of John 6, the discourse functions as a turning point in the development of the group of Jesus' followers who share his food. From then on, the group at the

⁶⁹⁰ On irony in the Fourth Gospel, see e.g. Paul D. Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985); Gail R. O'Day, *Revelation in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Mode and Theological Claim* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), Chapter "The Essence and Function of Irony," pp. 11-32; R. Alan Culpepper, "Reading Johannine Irony," in *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith*, eds. R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 194-205.

⁶⁹¹ Cf. Gail O'Day's claim that "irony conceals in order to reveal, hides in order finally to make visible." O'Day, *Revelation in the Fourth Gospel*, 31.

table shrinks. This turning point is triggered by the provocative words in Jn 6:51-58. It has been suggested that this speech reflects reproaches of cannibalism on the part of the Jews. Such accusations became widespread in the second and third century, but are likely to have been around in the first century. The Johannine text, however, does not lend itself readily to the presupposition of a reproach on the part of the Jews.

The topos of enclaves in the Greco-Roman world that bond by eating human flesh and drinking human blood proved to be a valid alternative context for interpretation, and challenges the interpolated reproach of cannibalism. A literal reading of the passage allows us to distinguishing such allusions. Chewing the flesh of Jesus and guzzling his blood become the decisive preconditions for attaining eternal life, a means of being an in-group member of the Jesus-crew.

In the greater discourse, the use of such language has a number of possible implications. John may well be addressing an audience that has already distanced itself from Judaism, or that comes from a different background, i.e. pagan, altogether. The allusions would have been picked up primarily by an audience that was familiar with the topos of bonding over human flesh and blood. This does not, however, imply that they actually ingested human blood or flesh. The bread and wine that are associated with Jesus may well have served as placeholders; after all, Jesus equates himself to the bread that has come down from heaven. The discourse may serve to assure those who are already part of the group of those who “chew the flesh of Jesus” that they are doing the right thing, and that it is important that they continue bonding around their leader. In the narrative, the failure to understand the true meaning of Jesus’ discourse rouses aggression on the side of the Jews. It remains to be discussed whether or not this and other tense issues evolving

from discourses about food and drink between the Jesus-followers in the narrative had a historical correspondence.

8. Historical Context: Betrayal at Table

8.1. *Introduction*

The present study has thus far explored communal dining and issues around food and drink on the narrative level and in light of a number of traditions from the context of the Fourth Gospel. It has been demonstrated that the texts serve as a vehicle for surplus meanings. They carry multilayered meanings that were potentially highly significant for the Johannine community's understanding of its communal meals. One interesting aspect pertaining to a number of meal scenes needs yet to be addressed: the motif of betrayal related to meal scenes.

The narrative analysis of this study has brought attention to the aim of killing Jesus and to the motif of betrayal. Both notions appear in several passages. It has been demonstrated that the aim to kill Jesus permeates the Gospel. The notion of betrayal (παράδιδωμι), however, is tied to meal scenes exclusively, naturally with the exception of when Judas actually hands over Jesus. Judas' appearances before the actual betrayal are limited to meal scenes. The first designation of the betrayer – information provided by the narrator and addressed exclusively to the reader – follows the bread of life discourse. The second announcement by the narrator is found in the meal scene in Bethany, and is again addressed only to the reader. Finally, the designation of the betrayer to the story characters is found in the meal scene prior to Jesus' death in John 13. The betrayal motif in John marks the meal scenes as endangered situations.

The Jews' intent to kill Jesus has a corresponding collaborator in Jesus' in-group: Judas. The socio-rhetorical approach of this study seeks to link literary and historical criticism. It needs to ask, therefore, in what way the motif of betrayal in the literary Gospel text may have spoken to the

real lives of the original historical Johannine audience. With regard to the betrayal motif, the question arises as to whether there is evidence indicating that the notion of fear and insecurity related to the betrayal motif in John has a correspondence in history, or whether it is an entirely literary motif. The literary motif of betrayal has already been explored in the narrative analysis section of this study.

This chapter addresses the betrayal motif in the Fourth Gospel from a historical perspective and discusses how the motif of betrayal inherent to many meal scenes may have corresponded to experiences of the Johannine community.

The social significance of betrayal in antiquity cannot be overestimated.⁶⁹² Betrayal by a friend was considered “far more heinous than any insult by an enemy. The deeper the level of intimacy, the more that trust was a duty, and the more terrible its betrayal.”⁶⁹³ Any betrayal, any breach of a covenant of friendship was considered treachery. The context of a meal, however, rendered the betrayal even more abominable since communal meals represented the prime and most important bond of kindness. The people with whom one shared food and drink were normally considered trustworthy and participants at a communal meal shared a common bond.

Keener notes:

Injuring or slaying those who had eaten at one’s table was a terrible offense from which all but the most wicked would normally shrink; such behaviour was held to incur divine wrath. Those who eat together at a table should also not even betray friendship by slandering one another.⁶⁹⁴

⁶⁹² Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 912–913.

⁶⁹³ *Ibid.*, 912–913.

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 913.

The betrayal of Jesus, the host who sets aside his own honor in order to wash his guests' feet, must even more so be seen as an excruciating act. In the Fourth Gospel's narrative, as in the other canonical Gospels, Judas acts as the betrayer and hands Jesus over to "the Jews." The Gospels unanimously depict a subsequent trial, in which the innocent victim, Jesus, becomes the "play ball" of Jewish enemies who collaborate with the Roman governor Pilate.⁶⁹⁵ Historically, however, the Romans killed Jesus with the Roman method of crucifixion. This tension needs to be addressed with regard to its significance for the original audience that hears this betrayal account, possibly when gathering for a meal. Both sets of actors in the narrative, the Jews and the Romans, need to be placed under scrutiny. I will first discuss the possibility that the Jews historically persecuted Christ-believers, then, will explore the motif of betrayal against the Roman imperial social background. The periodic prohibitions of voluntary associations in particular will be discussed as a historical backdrop against which the betrayal motif in John can be illuminated.

8.2. *Jewish Persecution of Christ-Believers?*

Since the Johannine narrative depicts the Jews as the prime enemies, the possibility of historical Jewish persecution of Christ-believers will be addressed first. The strength and vitality of Jewish communities in the Diaspora, and in particular in Asia Minor, are obvious from Patristic sources. These sources often date back only to the third century CE and beyond, but it is very likely that in some cities strong Jewish communities had established themselves much earlier.⁶⁹⁶

⁶⁹⁵ Of all versions John's depicts Pilate most explicitly as a functionary of the Jewish will with no will or power of his own. Ekkehard W. Stegemann, "Wie im Angesicht des Judentums historisch vom Tod Jesu sprechen?: Vom Prozess Jesu zu den Passionserzählungen der Evangelien," in *Wie heute vom Tod Jesu sprechen?: Neutestamentliche, systematisch-theologische und liturgiewissenschaftliche Perspektiven*, ed. Katholische Akademie der Erzdiözese Freiburg, Tagungsberichte der Katholischen Akademie der Erzdiözese Freiburg (Freiburg i.Br.: Verlag der Katholischen Akademie der Erzdiözese Freiburg, 2002), 23–52.

⁶⁹⁶ Paul Raymond Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

As Paul Trebilco argues, “Consequently, Christians would often be forming and preserving their identity in a context in which significant Jewish communities were visible and attractive. These Christians would be confronted with Jews in their own cities who would be rival interpreters of the Jewish tradition which Christians now claimed as their own.”⁶⁹⁷

Many scholars have addressed the question of whether there is a kernel of truth to the Fourth Gospel’s depiction of fear of the archetypal Jewish opponents. The ἀποσυνάγωγος-references (Jn 9:22; 12:42; 16:2) serve as the main source. J. Louis Martyn’s key claim in reading the Fourth Gospel with a two-level strategy is that the ἀποσυνάγωγος-references are anachronistic with regard to Jesus’ earthly ministry and rather reflect an event that could not have occurred until many decades later. He associates the allusions to the expulsion of Christ-believers from the synagogues with the rewording of *birkat ha-minim* under Gamaliel II, so as to create an effective means for detecting heretic belief in Christ.⁶⁹⁸ This long-held theory has become subjected to critique but is still supported by many. Some scholars do not defend the *birkat ha-minim* theory, but still hold that the ἀποσυνάγωγος-passages reflect the immediate experience of the Johannine community or at least parts thereof – even if it remains difficult to know the extent of Jewish actions.

Stephen Wilson, for instance, comes to the conclusion that “There is sufficient evidence, from different periods and different places, to suggest that Jews did oppose Christians in a number of different ways and that this led to death and corporal punishment (rarely), expulsion, rumour-mongering, and the like.”⁶⁹⁹ In Wilson’s opinion, this remains true even if some writers of ancient

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid., 189.

⁶⁹⁸ Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 65.

⁶⁹⁹ E.g. Stephen G. Wilson, *Related Strangers: Jews and Christians, 70–170 C.E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 175.

and modern times tend to exaggerate the incident and their significance. Just as important as this claim, however, is the effect that the perceptions had on the attitudes of Christ-believers:

What was seen by Jewish authorities as disciplinary action may have been seen by Christians as persecution, so that it is not only what happened but also what was perceived to have happened that was important. How the reality was received, remembered, and manipulated has as profound an effect on the Christian communities as the reality itself. And thus while the conclusion that Jews did harass and obstruct Christians is significant, it may not be the most important thing that we have to consider.⁷⁰⁰

A number of scholars have severely criticized the claim that, historically, the Jews persecuted the Christ-believers.⁷⁰¹ Douglas Hare has explored the disparate sources of Jewish persecution of Christ-believers.⁷⁰² He suggests that it is not feasible, that a historical experience of killing by the hands of Jews lies behind the ἀποσυνάγωγος-passage in John 16:2. Rather, John adopts the widespread tendency toward exaggeration. Jesus' reference to future killings hardly reflects Jewish practice at the time of the Gospel. It is more likely that they are extrapolations.

According to Micha Brumlik, the ἀποσυνάγωγος-passages reflect a traumatising event in the experience of the Johannine community. He denies, however, the likelihood of the fear of active persecution of Johannine Christ-believers by Jews in the period of 70-135 CE, neither in Judaea nor the Diaspora. Brumlik argues that the Jews themselves were hard-pressed by the

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid., 176.

⁷⁰¹ E.g. Douglas R. A. Hare, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel According to St Matthew*, SNTSMS, vol. 6 (Cambridge: University Press, 1967); Micha Brumlik, "Johannes: Das judenfeindliche Evangelium," *Kul* 4, no. 2 (1989); Stegemann, "Wie im Angesicht des Judentums historisch vom Tod Jesu sprechen?: Vom Prozess Jesu zu den Passionserzählungen der Evangelien," 23–52: esp. 32.

⁷⁰² Douglas R. A. Hare, "Relationship Between Jewish and Gentile Persecution of Christians," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 4, no. 3 (1967); Hare, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel According to St Matthew*. Cf. Margaret Davies, *Rhetoric and Reference in the Fourth Gospel*, JSNT.S, vol. 69 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 299–300.

Romans and hardly had the power to persecute other groups and that there is no valid evidence in the socio-political reality of the Fourth Gospel.⁷⁰³

Ekkehard W. Stegemann agrees with Brumlik that the experience of persecution and killing of Jewish Christ-believers at the hands of Jews is not or no longer a present one for the Johannine community.⁷⁰⁴ Statements of this kind, and expressions of hostility on the side of the Jews, however, likely reminded the original addressees of the possibility that these bounds of tolerance could break. Even if Jewish reactions never went beyond insults or curses of Christ-believers it is possible that public utterances of such statements led to repercussions by the Romans and thus functioned as denunciations. It is likely, therefore, that the fear of betrayal by the Jews was vivid and strong in the Johannine community.⁷⁰⁵ The repeated ἀποσυνάγωγος-motif for confessing Jesus as the Messiah, in particular, supports this view. But the fear of the Jews alone could hardly have caused as hostile projections as those present in the Fourth Gospel.⁷⁰⁶

Thus, we need to address the possibility that the fear of the Jews in the narrative encapsulates a fear of the Romans. The phenomenon of fear tied to Johannine meal scenes will be investigated in relation to sources testifying to gatherings of early Christ-believers and reflecting Roman imperial measures. Meals of associations in the Greco-Roman world will be explored as historical correspondences to the Johannine meal scenes.

⁷⁰³ Micha Brumlik, "Johannes: Das judenfeindliche Evangelium," 107–08.

⁷⁰⁴ Ekkehard W. Stegemann, "Die Tragödie der Nähe: Zu den judenfeindlichen Aussagen des Johannesevangeliums," *Kul* 4, no. 2 (1989), 115.

⁷⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 116–17.

⁷⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 118.

8.3. Roman Persecution of Christ-Believers?

8.3.1. The Nature of Gatherings in the Greco-Roman World

For a long period in scholarship, it has been commonplace to characterize congregations of early Christ-believers and gatherings of Judeans/Jews as sects, a category drawn from modern social studies.⁷⁰⁷ Biblical scholars who adopt this sociological typology with regard to emerging Christianity emphasize a number of supposed foundational differences between synagogues and congregations and the rest of ancient society.⁷⁰⁸ Among these scholars the notions of separation and distinction predominates the discourse. Others have challenged and criticized the usefulness of the category “sect.” The problem of the “sectarian approach” is not just the typology as such, but the tendency to overemphasize exclusivity and separations from society at large, and the lack of attention to evidence indicating a more complex situation in terms of group-society relations.⁷⁰⁹

The value of comparing synagogues and gatherings with contemporary associations has been rediscovered.⁷¹⁰ Over the past decades, the phenomenon of associations has received

⁷⁰⁷ Bryan Ronald Wilson, *Patterns of Sectarianism: Organisation and Ideology in Social and Religious Movements*, Heinemann Books on Sociology (London: Heinemann, 1967); Bryan Ronald Wilson, *Religious Sects: A Sociological Study*, World University Library (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970); Bryan Ronald Wilson, *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Bryan Ronald Wilson, *The Social Dimension of Sectarianism: Sects and New Religious Movements in Contemporary Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

⁷⁰⁸ Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, 2nd ed. (1983; reprint, New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2003), 75–84. Cf. Wayne O. McCready, “Ekklēsia and Voluntary Associations,” in *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World*, eds. John S. Kloppenborg and Stephen G. Wilson (London: Routledge, 1996), 59–73: 63–64, 70. McCready affirms that in general terms *ekklēsiai* were structured and organized like associations but he maintains that a number of characteristics set Christians apart nevertheless.

⁷⁰⁹ For a discussion, see e.g. Philip A. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 177–95.

⁷¹⁰ The study of associations in the Greco-Roman world received attention in the late nineteenth century. The focus then lay predominantly on types of groups, terminology, internal structures and organisation, and legal issues. Jean Pierre Waltzing, *Etude historique sur les corporations professionnelles chez les Romains: Depuis les origines jusqu’à la chute de l’Empire d’Occident* (1895–1900; reprint, Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1970); Erich Ziebarth, *Das griechische Vereinswesen: Erich Ziebarth* (1896; reprint, Wiesbaden: [s.n.], 1969); Franz Poland, *Geschichte des griechischen Vereinswesens* (1909; reprint, Leipzig: Zentralantiquariat der DDR, 1967).

considerable attention within the fields of Greek and Roman studies and biblical studies alike.⁷¹¹

There is much evidence that groups of Judeans/Jews and Christ-believers participated in the common modes of identity construction and negotiation of antiquity. It has been demonstrated that synagogues and congregations had very much in common with other associations on various levels since they shared the same civic settings.⁷¹²

Initial attempts at comparing congregations of Christ-believers with such groups were undertaken: Edwin Hatch, *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches: Eight Lectures Delivered Before the University of Oxford, in the Year 1880* (London: Rivingtons, 1881); G. Heinrici, "Zum genossenschaftlichen Charakter der paulinischen Christengemeinden," *ThStKr* 54 (1881). Likely due to ideological and theological assumptions regarding the uniqueness of Christianity, however, the investigations into associations did not rouse the interest of a greater range of biblical scholars. Cf. John S. Kloppenborg, "Edwin Hatch, Churches and Collegia," in *Origins and Method: Towards a New Understanding of Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Bradley H. McLean, JSNT.S (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 212–238: 224–225; Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*, 210.

⁷¹¹ The most recent of the numerous works on associations in the field of Greek and Roman studies include: Imogen Dittmann-Schöne, *Die Berufsvereine in den Städten des kaiserzeitlichen Kleinasien*, Theorie und Forschung. Geschichte, vol. 10 (Regensburg: S. Roderer, 2001); Carola Zimmermann, *Handwerkervereine im griechischen Osten des Imperium Romanum*, Monographien / Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum. Forschungsinstitut für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, vol. 57 (Mainz: in Kommission bei Dr. Rudolf Habelt, 2002); Ulrike Egelhaaf-Gaiser, *Religiöse Vereine in der römischen Antike: Untersuchungen zu Organisation, Ritual und Raumordnung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002); Sophia Aneziri, *Die Vereine der dionysischen Techniten im Kontext der hellenistischen Gesellschaft: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte, Organisation und Wirkung der hellenistischen Technitenvereine*, Hist.E, vol. 163 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2003); Jonathan Scott Perry, *The Roman Collegia: The Modern Evolution of an Ancient Concept* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Stefan Sommer, *Rom und die Vereinigungen im südwestlichen Kleinasien (133 v. Chr. – 284 n. Chr.)*, Pietas, vol. 1 (Hennef: Claus, 2006).

Scholars of the Bible and early Christianity include e.g. Robert L. Wilken, "Collegia, Philosophical Schools and Theology," in *Early Church History: The Roman Empire as the Setting of Primitive Christianity*, eds. Stephen Benko and John J. O'Rourke (London: Oliphants, 1972), 268–291; Robert L. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Klauck, *Herrenmahl und hellenistischer Kult*; Weinfeld, *The Organizational Pattern and the Penal Code of the Qumran Sect*; Kloppenborg, "Edwin Hatch, Churches and Collegia," 212–238; John S. Kloppenborg; and Stephen G. Wilson, eds.; *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World* (London: Routledge, 1996); Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*; Peter Richardson, "Early Synagogues as Collegia in the Diaspora and Palestine," in *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World*, eds. John S. Kloppenborg and Stephen G. Wilson (London: Routledge, 1996), 90–119; Richard S. Ascough, "Voluntary Associations and Community Formation: Paul's Macedonian Christian Communities in Context," (Ph.D. diss; Toronto School of Theology, 1997); Richard S. Ascough, *Paul's Macedonian Associations: The Social Context of Philippians and 1 Thessalonians*, ed. Jörg Frey, WUNT II, vol. 161 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*; Eva Ebel, *Die Attraktivität früher christlicher Gemeinden: Die Gemeinde von Korinth im Spiegel griechisch-römischer Vereine* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004); Harland, *Dynamics of Identity and Early Christianity*.

⁷¹² E.g. Harland: "In broad terms, associations, synagogues, and congregations were small, non-compulsory groups that could draw their membership from several possible social network connections within the polis. All could be either relatively homogeneous or heterogeneous with regard to social and gender composition; all engaged in regular meetings that involved a variety of interconnected social, religious, and other purposes, one group differing from the next in the specifics of activities; all depended in various ways on commonly accepted social conventions such as benefaction for financial support (e.g. a meeting place) and the development of leadership structures; and all could

Voluntary organizations of various types began to establish themselves in the Hellenistic period as early as the 5th century BCE. Our knowledge of them depends largely on inscriptions, papyri, and accounts from classical authors.⁷¹³ Associations included a large number of chronologically and geographically diverse groups and classifying them proves to be exceptionally difficult.⁷¹⁴ Lists of known associations amount to between 1200 and 2500. There is a wide range of both Greek and Latin terms to designate them and a great lack of consistency in the way ancient authors use these terms.⁷¹⁵ In the following, I will refer to these groups collectively as “associations,” for this term most comprehensively captures the wide range of these phenomena.⁷¹⁶ I will use the term as defined by Philip Harland, according to which “association” designates:

engage in at least some degree of external contacts, both positive and negative, with other individuals, benefactors, groups, or institutions in the civic context.” Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*, 211.

⁷¹³ B. W. R. Pearson, “Associations,” in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, eds. Ginny Evans and Craig A. Evans (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 2000), 136–138: 138. For collections of inscriptions, cf. Waltzing, *Etude historique sur les corporations professionnelles chez les Romains*. For an historical investigation, see Poland, *Geschichte des griechischen Vereinswesens*. For an investigation focusing on legal aspects, see Francesco Maria de Robertis, *Storia delle corporazioni e del regime associativo nel mondo romano* (Bari: Adriatica editrice, 1971). A good summary and critique of the latter is found in Volker Weber, “Zur Geschichte des römischen Vereinswesens,” *Klio* 59, no. 1 (1977).

⁷¹⁴ A taxonomy based on the profile of membership, rather than function, seems preferable, since the actual functions of various associations overlapped significantly. Cf. John S. Kloppenborg, “Collegia and Thiasoi: Issues in Function, Taxonomy and Membership,” in *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World*, eds. John S. Kloppenborg and Stephen G. Wilson (London: Routledge, 1996), 16–30: 22–23.

⁷¹⁵ They include: ὀργεῶνες, θιασῶται, ἔρανισταί, συνθῦται, θυσιασταί, θεραπευταί, θρησκευταί, μύσται, συμβιωταί, συνήθεις, ρράτορες, φίλοι, ἑταῖροι, ἀδελφοί, ὁμοτάφοι, σπείρα, τάξις, φυλή, αἵρεσις, διάζωσμα, πυξίον, στέμμα, κολλήγιον, σώματειον, συναγωγή, σύλλογος, συντέλεια, συνέδριον, σύστημα, σύνοδος, κοινόν, πλήθος, ὄξλος, κοινωνία, συσσίτιον, τέχνη, and – rarely – ἐκκλησία. Cf. Wilhelm Liebenam, *Zur Geschichte und Organisation des römischen Vereinswesens: Drei Untersuchungen* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1890), 63–158; Ziebarth, *Das griechische Vereinswesen*, 133–190; Poland, *Geschichte des griechischen Vereinswesens*, 5–172. See also: Harland, *Dynamics of Identity and Early Christianity*, 27.

⁷¹⁶ “Voluntary” is employed by many scholars in order to distinguish these associations from other institutions such as state, city or family, where membership comes not by choice but by birth, as well as from official *collegia* and sacred sodalities run by the state. However, since membership in a synagogue or trade guild may have been more or less obligatory, the distinction between voluntary and involuntary associations cannot be too rigid. Stephen G. Wilson, “Voluntary Associations: An Overview,” in *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World*, eds. John S. Kloppenborg and Stephen G. Wilson (London: Routledge, 1996), 1–15: 1.

social groupings in antiquity that shared certain characteristics in common and that were often recognized as analogous groups by people and by governmental institutions. Associations were small, unofficial ('private') groups, usually consisting of about ten to fifty members (but sometimes with larger memberships into the hundreds), that met together on a regular basis to socialize with one another and to honour both earthly and divine benefactors, which entailed a variety of internal and external activities.⁷¹⁷

Associations of various kinds were significant for the social and societal life of antiquity. In the life of associations, communal eating and drinking was a recurrent feature, and for some of the associations even the chief reason for their existence.⁷¹⁸ Besides conviviality, other aspects such as politics, economics and education could be important motivations to participate. The meetings of voluntary associations served not only to encourage fellowship, but also as occasions to collect money from its members,⁷¹⁹ and they were opportunities to demonstrate piety.⁷²⁰ They included rites for imperial gods, sacrifices made to them, and mysteries, all of which were significant components within many associations. All these doings, as well as the motifs and notions

⁷¹⁷ Harland, *Dynamics of Identity and Early Christianity*, 26.

⁷¹⁸ Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*; Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*.

⁷¹⁹ One of the basic features of most voluntary associations was the concern for mutual support. Some of them guaranteed a proper burial for their members, thus functioned – at least in part – as burial societies. This led to the identification of “funerary associations” (*collegia tenuiorum*) as a distinct type of association: Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 31–47. This classification, however, has to be questioned, since many groups that would not fall into this category were nevertheless concerned and involved in the burial when one of their members died. Kloppenborg, “Collegia and Thiasoi: Issues in Function, Taxonomy and Membership,” 16–30: 20–22. For further reading on the history of scholarship on funerary associations with a focus particularly on how contemporary events, ideologies and institutions have shaped scholarly work on the ancient Roman *collegia*, see Perry, *The Roman Collegia*.

⁷²⁰ Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*, 115–132. For a critique of the modern assumption that personal experience constitutes the real essence of religion and that corporate ceremonies were nothing but “empty shells,” cf. *ibid.*, 132, based on Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, 19–39. For further reading on religion and rituals from the perspective of anthropologists, see Clifford Geertz, ed.; *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics and Power* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1988). The role of religion in antiquity was very much a part of life that was inextricably intertwined with the social and political world and there was a strong bond between fellowship, group identity, and communal worship within the life of associations. In all associations, with the exception of Judean and Christian groups, the shared meals involved an offering to the gods. This could be a full animal sacrifice or simply a libation. James B. Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire* (Malden: Blackwell, 2007), 127.

underlying them, would most often be intertwined. Many of today's scholars claim that groups of Christ-believers from the first century CE would not only have been looked upon as associations, but also considered themselves as such.⁷²¹

Associations were widely spread in antiquity and formed the principal setting of meetings that surpassed family events. At times, however, there were restrictions on the formation and existence of voluntary associations inflicted by Roman politics. In her investigation into the development of *collegia* and their restrictions under Roman law from 64 BCE to 200 CE, Wendy Cotter points out that the prohibition of voluntary societies and their dissolution was an unquestioned right and a frequently employed policy of Roman emperors. She argues that belonging to an unrecognized association implied a "very real danger."⁷²² Thus, two questions arise: (1) Did Roman restrictions of associations endanger meal gatherings of early Christ-believers in general? (2) Can this be reflected in the Johannine betrayal motif in particular?

8.3.2. Roman Prohibition of Voluntary Associations

At the time of the Roman Republic, associations organized themselves rather freely.⁷²³ They were formed by private persons and served private ends. As such, they were situated under private

⁷²¹ Edwin Arthur Judge, *The Social Pattern of the Christian Groups in the First Century: Some Prolegomena to the Study of New Testament Ideas of Social Obligation* (London: Tyndale Press, 1960), 45; Kloppenborg, "Edwin Hatch, Churches and Collegia," 212–238: 228; Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*, 524; Peter Richardson, "Building 'An Association (Synodos) ... and a Place of Their Own'," in *Community Formation in the Early Church and in the Church Today*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 36–56: 36; Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*, 211. For an opposing view, cf. Hans-Josef Klauck, *The Religious Context of Early Christianity: A Guide to Graeco-Roman Religions*, Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 53–54. Klauck adduces Philo's argument (*Flacc.* 136f.) to suggest that Jewish groups differed from others.

⁷²² Wendy Cotter, "The Collegia and Roman Law: State Restrictions and Voluntary Associations, 64 BCE–200CE," in *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World*, eds. John S. Kloppenborg and Stephen G. Wilson (London: Routledge, 1996), 74–89: 88.

⁷²³ *Ibid.*, 74–89: 75.

law.⁷²⁴ Other than the philosophical and public religious associations that were legal at all times within the Roman Empire, voluntary associations were technically prohibited under various Roman laws as early as 184 BCE.⁷²⁵

At the end of the Republic, Claudius lifted the ban on voluntary associations and used them as instruments for his own seditious plans, which led to public disturbances and reached a climax with the civil war in Rome.⁷²⁶ Associations served to mask revolutionary activities. For this reason, in 64 BCE, the Senate dissolved and abolished all associations that appeared to conflict with public interest.⁷²⁷ All voluntary associations were subject to strict regulation from that time onward. Associations with political interest, aiming to gain public influence, were considered as *collegia illicita* during the Principate and were not licensed.⁷²⁸

In 58 BCE, during the First Triumvirate, associations were permitted. Only two years later, however, in 56 BCE, political clubs were dissolved again by further decrees of the Senate. At an uncertain date (sometime between 49 and 44 BCE), Julius Caesar issued the *Lex Iulia*, the exact wording of which is no longer extant. The *Lex Iulia* prohibited all voluntary associations empire-wide. Exempt from this prohibition, also empire-wide, were those associations that met the three prerequisites of venerable age, approval by Augustus through the Senate, and obligation for public

⁷²⁴ This is because they were regarded as a group of individuals, never as a single entity. In contrast, the large state organizations were granted identity as a public corporation and could take on the identity of a 'juristic person'. As such they were located under public law, meaning that these public corporations were perceived as a single entity. *Ibid.*, 74–89: 75.

⁷²⁵ Richard S. Ascough, "Greco-Roman Philosophic, Religious, and Voluntary Associations," in *Community Formation in the Early Church and in the Church Today*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 3–19: 12.

⁷²⁶ Wilfried Nippel, "Policing Rome," *JRS* 74 (1984), 28.

⁷²⁷ "*senatus consulto collegia sublata sunt, quae adversus rem publicam videbantur esse*" (Asconius, *In Senatu contra L. Pisonem* 8), quoted from Cotter, "The Collegia and Roman Law: State Restrictions and Voluntary Associations, 64 BCE–200CE," 74–89: 76.

⁷²⁸ The Republic began with the overthrow of the Roman monarch and lasted over 450 years. It was followed by the Principate, extending from the beginning of the reign of Caesar Augustus to the crisis of the third century. The Principate was replaced by the Dominate.

service.⁷²⁹ Judaism met all three criteria, and thus qualified for the status as a *religio licita*.⁷³⁰ Caesar proclaimed this by writing letters to the major cities around the Mediterranean.⁷³¹ All other associations that did not meet the prerequisites were dissolved.⁷³² In particular, the Augustan legislation granted Judaism a “preferred” status.⁷³³ The law against associations fell into abeyance during the civil wars and was re-enacted by Octavian/Augustus, again excluding Jewish associations from the prohibition.⁷³⁴

From this brief survey of the prohibition of associations a pattern emerges: “in times of factionalism and strife *collegia* tended to be permitted, but in times when reconstruction and consolidation were important, *collegia* were restricted.”⁷³⁵ Despite the prohibition by the authorities, associations remained important in public life during the Principate.⁷³⁶ They could no

⁷²⁹ This ensured the conservative character and public loyalty to Augustus’ administration. *Ibid.*, 74–89: 78.

⁷³⁰ The term as such is first used by Tertullian *Apol.* 21.1, but the issue which it designates is, of course, much older and thus it can still be used here.

For the claim that the concept of Judaism’s recognition as a “legal religion” is a problematic scholarly idea and an argument that a Roman charter for the Jews never existed, see Tessa Rajak, “Was There a Roman Charter for the Jews?” *JRS* 74 (1984).

⁷³¹ Cotter, “The *Collegia* and Roman Law: State Restrictions and Voluntary Associations, 64 BCE–200CE,” 74–89: 75–77. She notes that “Josephus records one of these letters written to the peoples of Parium where Jews were given the right to observe ‘their national customs and sacred rites ... to collect contributions of money ... [and] to hold common meals’ (*Ant.* 14.214–15).” *Ibid.*, 77, emphasis by Cotter.

⁷³² “*cuncta collegia praeter antiquitus constituta distraxit*” (*Suet. Divus Iulius* 42.3); Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, *Divus Iulus Caesar*, ed. Harold Edgeworth Butler (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), 19–20.

⁷³³ Richardson, “Early Synagogues as *Collegia* in the Diaspora and Palestine,” 90–119: 93. Cotter notes that Jewish communities were permitted to perform their religious practices but were forbidden to assemble. Cotter, “The *Collegia* and Roman Law: State Restrictions and Voluntary Associations, 64 BCE–200CE,” 74–89: 80. According to Suetonius, they were also censured for their disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus (“*Iudaeos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantis Roma expulsi*.” Suetonius, *Claudius* 25.4); Suetonius, *Suetonius*, ed. John Carew Rolfe, *LCL* (1914; reprint, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 52–53.

⁷³⁴ Cotter notes: “The *collegia* are required to receive approval for their convocation from Augustus via the Senate (‘*senatus coire cogi convocari permisit*’). Second, they must accept responsibility for providing public service (‘*ludorum causa*’). The total of three requisites – venerable age, approval by Augustus through the Senate, and the obligation for public service – ensured that the voluntary/private societies were conservative in character and *publicly* loyal to Augustus’ administration.” Cotter, “The *Collegia* and Roman Law: State Restrictions and Voluntary Associations, 64 BCE–200CE,” 74–89: 78.

⁷³⁵ Richardson, “Early Synagogues as *Collegia* in the Diaspora and Palestine,” 90–119: 93.

⁷³⁶ Alfred Reese, “Die Bürger und ihr Kaiser: Die plebs urbana zwischen Republik und Prinzipat” (Inauguraldissertation, Ruhr-Universität Bochum, 3. Februar 2004), 103–04. Cf. Wilfried Nippel, *Public Order in*

longer be activated for the service of an aristocrat, but still seem to have played a certain role in the conflicts between the *plebs* and the *princeps*. The various laws on associations and the inherent mistrust of the state organs against any formation of the *plebs* suggest the persistence of their political doings. Roman authorities were suspicious of any kind of gathering of people that did not take place in plain public sight, regardless of the activity its members performed. This is made obvious by the simple fact that Roman laws needed to address the situation time and again.

Christ-believers started holding gatherings and soon appeared as a distinguishable entity.⁷³⁷ As for Rome, there is evidence that the *Christiani* were viewed as a distinct group with a distinct name as early as the time of Nero. Tacitus mentions that there were people whom the crowd called *Christiani* according to their founder *Christus* (*Annales* 15.44).⁷³⁸ While Judaism was exempt from Roman prohibitions of associations, this was not the case for Christ-believers. Like the Jews, this new group avoided celebrations of Roman deities, and refused to offer sacrifices to the gods or to make other offerings because this stood against their monotheistic beliefs. They did not participate in communal rituals of the cities, and rejected the standard modes of honoring the emperor.⁷³⁹ In the eyes of pagan Romans, such refusal was tantamount to atheism, and Christ-

Ancient Rome (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 89; Ramsay MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order: Treason, Unrest, and Alienation in the Empire* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 175.

⁷³⁷ Benjamin Isaac notes: "The Christians were not a people, even if there existed a tendency, among some of their authors, to describe themselves as a people. Thus, while the Christians were, at best, 'a kind of man' (*genus hominum*), the Jews were always called 'a people' (*gens*), even by those who disliked them. The status of the Jews and of the Christians in the empire is thus immediately connected with problems of ethnicity and of group status." Benjamin H. Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 484.

⁷³⁸ Calling a group by a name derived from its founder's name was customary; e.g. Bacchus/Bacchanals, Dionysus/Dionysiasts, Aphrodite/Aphrodisiasts; cf. Harland, *Dynamics of Identity and Early Christianity*, 27. Even if *Christiani* was probably a slander in the beginning, it was eventually adopted as a self designation; cf. Kloppenborg, "Edwin Hatch, Churches and Collegia," 212–238: 228.

⁷³⁹ G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?" *PaP* (1963), 26.

believers were considered by them as subversive and disloyal.⁷⁴⁰ Through their behaviour, i.e. failure to participate in state cults, Christ-believers, to a certain extent, made themselves outcasts from society by rejecting its traditional markers of piety. Unlike the Jews, Christ-believers of pagan origin could not even justify their behaviour with their ancestral traditions.

Tacitus (*Annales* 15.44) and Suetonius (*Nero* 16.2) show that Christ-believers were a good target for blame and were considered by both as harmful, hideous, superstitious and shameful.⁷⁴¹ Nero had Christ-believers arrested and killed for supposedly having laid a fire in Rome. The fire incident, however, was only a pretext. It is for their membership in the group of *Christiani* that these Christ-believers were condemned. According to Roman law, persons were liable for their actions, but not for professing a name.⁷⁴² In the case of early Christ-believers, however, adherence to the *Christiani* was considered as a crime, and thus the *nomen ipsum* became criminal.⁷⁴³

As for the provinces, associations were hardly ever approved of during the Principate.⁷⁴⁴ The *Lex Iulia* or *senatus consulta* appeared less as the legal sources than as *mandata* of the emperor. The most important source for this is the correspondence between Emperor Trajan (98-

⁷⁴⁰ Vittinghoff, Friedrich, ed. *Europäische Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte in der römischen Kaiserzeit*, Handbuch der europäischen Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte (1990), 267; Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire*, 198. For further reading on the reproach and label of “atheism,” see *ibid.*, 183.

⁷⁴¹ For Tacitus’ judgments, cf. above. Suetonius only refers to the *Christiani* as a ‘*genus hominum superstitionis novae ac maleficae*,’ a new and harmful superstition (*Nero* 16.2). It is obvious that neither of them believes or intends to suggest that the “*Christiani*” are guilty of having laid the fire which Nero accused them of. According to Isaac, this incident is the “earliest indubitable information on persecution of the Christians in Rome.” Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, 485.

⁷⁴² Cotter notes that: “Christians are very conscious of such a breach in Roman law, but one wonders how other unknown collegia fared in Neronian times. Nero’s treatment of Christians shows the power of Imperial dictates and the precarious character of any collegium.” Cotter, “The Collegia and Roman Law: State Restrictions and Voluntary Associations, 64 BCE–200CE,” 74–89: 82.

⁷⁴³ “Roman views of other peoples practicing their ancestral religion, such as the Jews, varied from admiration to highly critical and could contain elements of prejudice or proto-racism. There was, however, no doubt as regards their legitimacy, while Christianity was definitely regarded as an illegitimate religion without proper historical roots.” Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, 491.

⁷⁴⁴ Theo Mayer-Maly, “Der Rechtsgeschichtliche Gehalt der Christenbriefe von Plinius und Trajan,” *SDHI* 22 (1956), 324.

117 CE) and Pliny the Younger. In 111 CE, Pliny the Younger was appointed governor of the province Bithynia-Pontus on the northern coast of Asia Minor.⁷⁴⁵ The primary reasons for this mission were to inspect the cities and to oversee their financial woes as well as to tend to political unrest and factionalism. In all likelihood, one of Trajan's directives to Pliny was to dissolve any "clubs" or "associations" (political or not) for the sake of order in the province.⁷⁴⁶

The correspondence between Governor Pliny and Emperor Trajan contains evidence of Roman dealings with associations.⁷⁴⁷ When Pliny was unsure how to deal with issues, he made use of his *ius referendi*, the right and duty to inquire with the emperor on how to proceed in the situation of doubt.⁷⁴⁸ Three pairs of letters deal with the issue of associations: X.33/34, X.92/93 do so explicitly, and X.96/97 implicitly.⁷⁴⁹ The last pair of letters addresses Pliny's proceedings with Christ-believers. On his visits to the coastal cities of northern Pontus in the fall of 112, Pliny was

⁷⁴⁵ Pliny the Younger is the adopted nephew of Pliny the Elder. For more on Pliny's life cf. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 1–30.

⁷⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁴⁷ Between 111 and 113 CE Pliny sent some sixty letters to Trajan, reporting on his doings and asking the emperor for advice. These are collected in Book X of Pliny's letters.

⁷⁴⁸ Cf. *Letters*, X.96.1. The *ius referendi* is of special importance to Pliny because his peculiar position in the province comes close to that of a *legatus ad corrigendum statum* and as such was more dependent on Trajan's instructions. As *mandata*, these instructions have the quality of binding legal sources. Pliny sometimes publishes them, and thereby they become edicts. Cf. Theo Mayer-Maly, "Der Rechtsgeschichtliche Gehalt der Christenbriefe von Plinius und Trajan," 313. On the issue of *mandata* becoming edicts, see Schwind, *Zur Frage der Publikation im römischen Recht* (1940), 166–67.

⁷⁴⁹ In the first pair of letters, the occasion is the request to form a fire fighting organization in Bithynia's capital city Nicomedia. A large fire has ravaged the city, destroying many buildings, including a large temple to Isis. Had there been a fire fighting organization, Pliny assumes, the damage would have been much smaller. Therefore, it seems to him that the most reasonable action after the fire is to organize a *collegium fabrorum*, an association of fire fighters. Pliny sends a letter (X.33) to Trajan requesting permission to form a fire brigade limited to 150 members, consisting of professional workmen only, with no privileges granted. The emperor, however, disagrees and turns down Pliny's request because *hetaeria* could grow from a fire brigade and the formation of such political clubs is to be avoided in any case, even though Pliny has suggested a close supervision. Trajan's decision is immediately turned into an edict and published. In a second pair of letters (X.92/93) Trajan reinforces the point. Amisus, a city in Pontus, wants to establish *erani*, associations devoted to charity. Since Amisus is a free city approved by Rome, Trajan tells Pliny to follow its constitution and allow what is permissible. Trajan nevertheless tells him to be wary of disorder and illegal gatherings and finally states that he would have all such associations prohibited in cities that fall under Roman law.

approached by locals who complained about Christians in their vicinity.⁷⁵⁰ The precise content of the complaint is not mentioned in X.96. From several hints in the letter, however, it can be inferred that merchants, and perhaps butchers and others involved in the process of slaughtering animals, were approaching Pliny because business had dropped since people were not making sacrifices any more.⁷⁵¹

Pliny was obviously not very familiar with “Christianity” and had never attended examinations of Christ-believers – at least not in an official function.⁷⁵² Pliny put those people who were accused of being Christ-believers on trial. If they insisted they were Christ-believers after having been asked three times, they were executed right away, unless they were Roman citizens. In that case, Pliny sent them to Rome for trial. Their crime was, therefore, inherent to being a “Christian,” and not to any act whatsoever associated with this status.⁷⁵³

Pliny’s correspondence with Trajan offers a valuable source for demonstrating the illegality of the *nomen ipsum*, and therefore the actual danger of confessing Jesus as Christ.⁷⁵⁴ The accused who denied that they were (or ever had been) Christ-believers had to confirm this by giving clear proof of their change of heart. They had to repeat, after Pliny, a formula of invocation to the gods

⁷⁵⁰ For the chronology of the correspondence between Pliny and Trajan, see L. Vidman, “Etude sur la correspondance de Pline le jeune avec Trajan,” *Rozpravy českolovenské akademie věd* 70 (1960).

⁷⁵¹ Towards the end of the letter and after having successfully dealt with the problem, Pliny proudly states that flesh of sacrificial victims was selling again.

⁷⁵² “*Cognitionibus de Christianis interfui numquam*,” (X.96.1) These “cognitiones” refer to persecutions during the reign of Domitian. Theo Mayer-Maly, “Der Rechtsgeschichtliche Gehalt der Christenbriefe von Plinius und Trajan,” 314.

⁷⁵³ In his reply, Trajan confirms that being a Christian is itself a crime: if they are accused and found guilty they are to be executed (*si deferantur et arguantur, puniendi sunt*, X.97.2); Plinius, *Letters and Panegyricus in Two Volumes*, 290.

⁷⁵⁴ Vittinghoff, *Europäische Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte in der römischen Kaiserzeit*, 267.

and were further required to make offerings of wine and incense to an imperial statue that had been brought for this very purpose. Lastly, they had to revile the name of Christ.⁷⁵⁵

Pliny offers Trajan an account by the accused regarding the details of their service. This is depicted as a gathering that took place before dawn on a certain day of the week. People assembled for chants dedicated to Christ, who is like God.⁷⁵⁶ The accused claimed that what they were doing was not a crime, but rather a vow to keep certain moral standards.⁷⁵⁷ After this vow, it used to be customary to separate and gather again later on for a communal meal, an ordinary and harmless meal.⁷⁵⁸ After describing their communal practices and stressing their harmlessness, the accused added that they had stopped having these communal meals after Pliny's edict, following Trajan's *mandatum* that forbade all *hetaeria*. The accused seemed to have provided this additional information unasked, probably in order to prevent the different but not less dangerous accusation of violating the prohibition of *haeteria* in advance.

Pliny judged these Christians and their meetings harmless because they seemed to do nothing but a) chant verses to honor Christ as a god, b) bind themselves by oath, not for any criminal purpose but to abstain from theft, robbery and adultery, to commit no breach of trust and not to deny a deposit when called upon to restore it, and c) reassemble later to eat food of an ordinary and harmless kind, a practice which they had given up, however. In his answer, Trajan approved of Pliny's procedure, but reminded him of prudence and moderation: he was neither to hunt them, nor to accept pamphlets with names of Christians circulating anonymously. Accused

⁷⁵⁵ It has been argued furthermore that Roman trials such as the ones set up by Pliny form a far more plausible context for interpreting the Johannine letters than the long held anti-heretic interpretations. Stegemann suggested this in an investigation on the context of 1 Jn with a focus on 1Jn 5:14-21. Ekkehard W. Stegemann, "'Kindlein, hütet euch vor den Götterbildern,'" *ThZ* 41 (1985).

⁷⁵⁶ "*carmenque Christo quasi deo dicere;*" (X.96.7).

⁷⁵⁷ "*non in scelus aliquod obstringere, sed ne furta, ne latrocinia, ne adulteria committerent, ne fidem fallerent, ne depositum appellati abnegarent;*" (X.96.7).

⁷⁵⁸ "*Quibus coeundi ad capiendum cibum, promiscuum tamen et innoxium;*" (X.96.7).

Christians were to be required to offer prayers to the gods. This act should be proof enough of their innocence.

Even if some scholars have doubted that groups of Christ-believers were legally regarded as unlawful associations and prosecuted as such, the Christ-believers' statements before Pliny imply that these Christ-believers more than likely fostered fears of being regarded as illegal associations, and that they would have had to face the consequences.⁷⁵⁹ Even though Pliny's letter is not *about* such *collegia illicita*, he deals with the issue in his letter: not "as the prime ground of the accusation and condemnation, but as a subsequent discovery."⁷⁶⁰ And if the *nomen ipsum*, the confession to Christ as such, was a danger, then even more so would the gatherings for communal meals as a principal activity of most associations have been a source of danger and fear. Participation in such meals demonstrated membership and is likely to have been visible and therefore an additional source of danger. Stressing the fact that these communal meals, formerly held but now abandoned, were ordinary and harmless, points to a possible and already popular reproach in those days of celebrations of *thyestia deipna* and *oidipodeiai mixeis*.

Pliny seems not to have attended prosecutions himself, but to have been clearly aware of their occurrence elsewhere, and he seems to have been confident enough on how to proceed with the Christ-believers even before receiving a reply from the emperor.

⁷⁵⁹ G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?" 17; Theo Mayer-Maly, "Der Rechtsgeschichtliche Gehalt der Christenbriefe von Plinius und Trajan," 324–25; Francesco Maria de Robertis, *Il diritto associativo romano: Dai collegi della Repubblica alle corporazioni del Basso Impero* (Bari: Laterza, 1938), esp. 371–374. Their argument is supported by the fact that there are no sources that explicitly define groups of Christ-believers as *collegia illicita*.

⁷⁶⁰ Adrian Nicholas Sherwin-White and Plinius, *The Letters of Pliny: A Historical and Social Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 779. Pliny states: "*quod ipsum facere desisse post edictum meum, quo secundum mandata tua hetaerias esse vetueram;*" (X.96.7).

8.3.3. Johannine Fear against the Backdrop of Roman Prohibition of Associations

The letters of Pliny and Trajan postdate the Fourth Gospel by about two decades, but they can still count as evidence of the danger inherent to gatherings of Christ-believers and this danger can be projected retroactively to earlier decades: as demonstrated above, the prohibition of associations was much older, as were the suspicion and antipathy towards Christ-believers, and therefore it is possible that Johannine Christ-believers experienced situations similar to those the Christ-believers did during the time of Pliny.

The correspondence between Pliny and Trajan is only the tip of the iceberg of a long-held policy. It would, however, be inadequate to assume that Christ-believing groups were systematically searched for and their gatherings persecuted. The mode of operation against Christ-believers was not a police action on its own initiative and, in any case, a police force in the modern sense did not exist at all at that time.⁷⁶¹ Rather, the mode of operation was through private delation. Trials of Christ-believers required an accusation. Only upon such an accusation did the

⁷⁶¹ Nippel, in his investigation into Roman policing, points out that police forces as such are a modern invention, since “the establishment of a specialized law-enforcement apparatus only took place during the (eighteenth and) nineteenth century. The institutionalization of a professional police force represents a fundamental change in societal as well as individual attitudes towards and demand for public order. It may easily be overlooked that the indisputable gain in security and public order had to be paid for with a considerable loss of flexibility in the interaction between rulers and ruled (which was now mediated by a bureaucratic organization), and with an intensification of control and discipline in the everyday life of most members and strata of society.” As far as the city of Rome is concerned, but only there, there was something similar to a police force: “During the Principate, the praetorian guards and the *cohortes urbanae* could always be employed when the Emperor believed his position to be challenged. These units represented a new means of policing the capital. One should, however, avoid precipitate equations with modern police forces, especially since the decision to make use of these forces to quell riots was of a highly discretionary character.” Wilfried Nippel, “Policing Rome,” 20, 29. Cf. also: Nippel, *Public Order in Ancient Rome*. Regarding the provinces, apart from a few cities such as Lyons, Carthage, and Alexandria, the municipal authorities provided only a most rudimentary police force. Sherwin-White and Plinius, *The Letters of Pliny*, 777.

magistrate hold a *cognitio* in the presence of both parties. If there was no delator, then the case could automatically be quashed.⁷⁶²

There is evidence from western Asia Minor that diverse voluntary associations, including some synagogues and assemblies of Christ-believers, led a fairly tranquil and unproblematic life, one next to the other, in the Roman polis and that variegated relationships between the diverse groups existed.⁷⁶³ Nevertheless, believing in Jesus as Christ was dangerous at times, as has been demonstrated, and in some instances even subject to Roman persecution, especially when there was a delator. No definitive empirical proof can be established to the effect that John consciously responds to such realities of Roman rule, but particular elements in John's Gospel have congruence with practices utilized by the Romans in their dealings with Christ-believers.

It is possible that John intended to strengthen his readers against any looming Roman persecution. Besides the parallels of betrayal from within the meal community in the Fourth Gospel and the measures taken by Pliny against Christ-believers in Bythinia-Pontus, there is further evidence in the Fourth Gospel that corroborates the claim for its interaction with the Romans.

8.3.4. The Gospel of John against Roman Imperial Ideology

Fear of the Romans is expressed quite bluntly in John 11:48. The chief priests and the Pharisees discuss how to deal with Jesus who performs many signs, which, in their eyes, is a danger. They

⁷⁶² Ibid., 778–779.

⁷⁶³ Philip Harland demonstrates this in his investigation into social and cultural life in that region. Specifically, he offers an assessment and comparison of Ephesus as a place of diverse associations, synagogues, and assemblies within the framework of the Greek city, or polis, under Roman rule in Asia Minor. His particular focus lies in the significance of imperial cults, honors, and connections in the external relations and internal life of these groups. On the evidence of extensive epigraphic material and artefacts, Harland argues that the often claimed tensions and conflicts ought to be seen in perspective and thus offers a critique of scholars' tendency to stress tensions, conflicts and separation while neglecting other aspects of group-society relations. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*.

decide that: “If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation” (Jn 11:48). The worry is not about Jesus directly, but about the Romans. The Jewish authorities fear the negative consequences that can possibly be imposed on them by the Romans if they let Jesus go on performing signs which may rouse Roman suspicion. In recent research on the Fourth Gospel, the milieu and role of the Roman Empire has received increasing attention.⁷⁶⁴

According to Richey, the Romans, among a number of threats outside the Johannine community, were possibly the greatest.⁷⁶⁵ Richey discusses the Gospel in terms of Augustan imperial ideology. Christ-believers did not participate in it, but unlike the Jews, they could not profit from any legal exemption because, according to his interpretation, a breach with Judaism had already taken place. This is seen in the aposynagogos motif. Richey also claims that John shares key words concerning the power and divinity of Jesus with imperial terminology, such as “saviour of the world” and “Son of God.” The use of such vocabulary serves to transfer terms of Augustan imperial language and to attribute them to Jesus Christ.

Richey considers the Gospel’s prologue as a counter-ideology that contrasts Christ with Caesar. He demonstrates that each of the four sections identified in the Prologue (1:1-5, 6-8, 9-13, 14-18) challenges the cosmological, prophetic, political, and doxological elements of Augustan ideology. Emphasis falls on contrast and the superior distinctiveness of Christ (pre-existent, divine, and creative, prophesied and legitimated, powerful, unique, preeminent). Richey claims that the passion narrative should be read as an anti-imperial narrative rather than an anti-Semitic

⁷⁶⁴ Most recent monographs include: Richey, *Roman Imperial Ideology and the Gospel of John*; Warren Christopher Carter, *John and Empire: Initial Explorations* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008). The topic had previously been tackled by Richard J. Cassidy, *John’s Gospel in New Perspective: Christology and the Realities of Roman Power* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992).

⁷⁶⁵ Richey, *Roman Imperial Ideology and the Gospel of John*, 189.

diatribe. His argument draws on several passages that show “fundamental oppositions between Christ and Caesar, and between the Johannine Christians and their Roman persecutors.”⁷⁶⁶

It has been claimed earlier by Cassidy that John is concerned with depicting Jesus’ identity and mission in a way that was particularly significant for Christ-believing readers who faced Roman imperial claims and any who were in fear of Roman persecution. Titles such as “Saviour of the World,” “Lord,” and “Lord and God” attributed to the Johannine Jesus are identical to those used with reference to the Roman emperors. Cassidy suggests that this intentional mode of narrative construction is also reflected in John’s farewell discourses, in the portrayal of the Roman trial of Jesus, as well as in the encounter of the risen Jesus with his disciples. The evangelist’s intent behind it is, according to Cassidy, to strengthen Johannine Christ-believers in their struggles to abide in Jesus and to worship in his community in the face of Roman persecution.⁷⁶⁷

8.4. Conclusion

Betrayal was considered a heinous act in antiquity, particularly when it involved the people with whom the betrayer had shared a meal. In the Fourth Gospel, the notion of betrayal and fear connected to this is closely related to the meal scenes. Judas, identified publically as betrayer in a meal scene, sells Jesus to the Jews. This act brings together the growing tensions throughout the Gospel between Jesus (along with his followers) and the Jews. The present chapter has inquired into possible historical correspondences to the fear of betrayal and persecution in the context, and thus the experience of the Johannine community.

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid., 156. The passages adduced are: (1) Jn 18:36: “My kingdom is not from this world.” (2) Jn 19:12: “From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, ‘If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.’” And (3) Jn 19:15: “Pilate asked them, ‘Shall I crucify your King?’ The chief priests answered, ‘We have no king but the emperor.’”

⁷⁶⁷ Cassidy, *John’s Gospel in New Perspective*.

The Johannine community with its distinct identity would have distinguished between insiders and outsiders. This is suggested by the narrative development of the group and supported by the Gospel's use of dualisms and absolute claims. Interactions between members of the Johannine community and outsiders may have been influenced by such claims and they likely provoked tensions. A betrayal from inside the community could create a bridge to the outsiders, thereby disturbing the stability of the community.

Some scholars suggest that there is plausible evidence for several kinds of Jewish harassment of Christ-believers. There is, however, a lack of historical sources that persuasively testify to the historicity of Jewish measures against Christ-believers. Even if it is not highly plausible that the Jews had the authority to persecute in their own right, however, the Johannine Christ-believers may still have had reason to be afraid of them.

It is possible that tensions between Christ-believers and Jews led the former to fear relations to the Romans by the latter. Over the past decades, a number of scholars have come to accept the view that periodic gatherings of voluntary associations best explain early Christ-believers' gatherings. These were at times prohibited by the Roman authorities. Punishment depended on denunciation, i.e. betrayal, to the Roman authorities. Trials were held upon accusation, thus the Roman system depended heavily on betrayers. An example of such betrayal and the consequences for the accused is portrayed in Pliny's letter X.96 to Trajan. This letter postdates the Gospel of John only by a few years, and is written in the Mediterranean Diaspora from which the Fourth Gospel likely originates. The existence of real danger for early Christ-believers cannot be claimed with certainty, and certainly not for every place and time. Nevertheless, the socio-political environment developed in this chapter throws into relief the motif

of betrayal, especially the betrayal connected to meals, and appears as a plausible historical correspondence.

If the Roman Empire was threatening for Christ-believers it remains to be asked why the Gospel depicts the betrayal and fear not as fear primarily of the Romans but as fear of the Jews. One way to argue is that the Fourth Gospel's depiction reflects that Johannine Christ-believers did in fact experience collaboration between Jews and the Roman authorities to their disadvantage. Thus it is a retrojection into the time of Jesus. Or the entire motif is fictional and needed for the narrative plot of the Gospel. In this case, Judas takes over the necessary link between the Jews as the evil doers in the narrative and the Roman authorities of history who had the power. The Jews, the unbelievers in John's view, are consequently associated with the negative pole in the Gospel's dualistic worldview.

The historical relationship between the Johannine community and "the Jews" can only be extrapolated. The Gospel of John was composed in a period in which Jews and Christ-believers were still close but the Gospel indicates that they had already passed a certain breach. Quite likely, the closest neighbours appeared to the early Christ-believers as their greatest enemies. The blaming of the Jews may reflect the ongoing separation process between Johannine Christ-believers and Jews. Perhaps Judaism was still an attractive option for Gentiles or Christ-believers and formed a reason for the evangelist to stress that Jesus exclusively brings salvation.⁷⁶⁸ Or maybe John is simply extrapolating in order to justify that his community of Christ-believers has nothing to do with the Jewish community that lacks belief in Jesus as the Messiah.

⁷⁶⁸ Cf. the chapter "Gentile Attraction to Judaism in the Roman Empire" in Michele Murray, *Playing a Jewish Game: Gentile Christian Judaizing in the First and Second Centuries CE*, Studies in Christianity and Judaism / Études sur le christianisme et le Judaïsme, vol. 13 (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2004), 11–27.

The betrayal by Judas in the meal scenes may have been known to John from tradition, or it is simply a literary motif. The literary character of John's Gospel prohibits that its narrative be equated exclusively to historical realities. What happened historically in John's days cannot be definitively decided from the text, but certainly the Jews served as welcome actors for the plot of the story. It remains possible that John created alienation from surrounding Jews and Romans more than he reflected a historical situation. In either case the Johannine Christ-believers that read the story when gathering for a meal, would likely have heard it as speaking to their own lives. There is hardly anything more unifying than a common enemy. The enemy or enemies in the story, visible in the meal scenes, could well have had this effect.

9. Conclusion

It is time to return to the community imagined at the outset of the study. The community has gathered for a meal and, in accordance with the customs of the world in which it lived, the gathering would have included not only the consumption of food and drink but verbal contributions as well, perhaps in an organized manner in the form of a *symposium* following the *deipnon*. The stories of the Fourth Gospel were told, retold, and eventually written down in order to preserve the memory and meaning of the life of Jesus, the Messiah, for all time. These stories and the community that heard and retold them would have mutually influenced one another. Whenever the community members heard the discourses relating to meals, it would have been particularly easy for them to identify with the characters in the Gospel.

The present thesis has explored the role of communal meals and discourses about food and drink in the Fourth Gospel using a socio-rhetorical analysis, and has addressed the meanings of these stories and their significance for the original audience. The Gospel has its own unique descriptions of food, drink, and meals, and its own unique way of placing these descriptions in the overall narrative. John 6 and John 13-17 have emerged as the nucleus with regard to this topic, complemented by the accounts and discourse in John 4 and 12, with the whole Gospel articulately framed by the two mutually corresponding meal scenes at the beginning and at the end of Jesus' earthly deeds as occasions for his epiphanies (Jn 2 and 21).

The Johannine menu consisting of water, wine, fish, and (barley) bread appears rather modest. In addition to the earthly food that is provided in abundance, however, Jesus offers his followers food and drink of a different kind: the water of eternal life, the wine transformed from water, and bread from heaven. The bread and wine are equated to Jesus' flesh and blood, which

need to be consumed by followers in order to attain eternal life. The Gospel calls for imagination as to the literal or metaphorical meanings of elements that are fundamental for every human being's existence. Real food consumed during the meal gatherings of the Johannine community likely related to the food in the stories and discourses, and to their metaphorical meanings.

The comparison of sources pertaining to a number of groups in the Greco-Roman world that were approximately contemporary to the Johannine community demonstrated that food and meals played a highly significant role in each of these communities' everyday life, in their self-understanding, and in their self-definition. Issues around food and participation in meals were decisive for the definition of the boundaries of these respective groups. Food, communal dining and traditions that were passed on during communal meals served as vehicles for conveying values and meanings for participants.

Modern readers may speculate as to the effect and significance of the Johannine meal stories and discourses and the identity of those gathered for meals in antiquity. The characters in the story depend on the food that is offered to them through miracles operated by Jesus. At the same time they need to consume the true food offered to them, the belief in Jesus as the Messiah. While the original audience of the Fourth Gospel needed to care for itself with regard to its earthly food, it is precisely this "heavenly" food that was continuously offered to them in the Johannine texts and that brings them into relationship with Jesus, the founder of this particular community. The meal scenes and discourses function as a ladder between the believers on earth and the resurrected Christ who has returned to the Father (Jn 1:50-51).

In many instances the meal scenes and discourses speak to the main message of the Gospel: that the logos Jesus came into the world but his own did not accept him (Jn 1:11). The scenes discussed in the present thesis provide many occasions for people to join or leave. The Jews as the

archetypal opponents of Jesus and his followers in the narrative not only fail to accept Jesus' offer, but are repelled by Jesus' claims and his request to chew his flesh and drink his blood to the degree that they solidify their decision to kill him. Those who believe in Jesus, however – those who consume him by means of flesh or living bread as place holders for him – can be sure to attain eternal life.

In the narrative, the group that gathers for meals becomes more exclusive as the story unfolds. The participants come to Jesus through offers of food and drink, but many of them leave because of the offence inherent in Jesus' request that they chew his flesh and drink his blood. The meal scenes play a decisive role in the formation of the group of Jesus' followers in the story. An effect of the meals and food discourses is that they distinguished between those who come and remain with Jesus and those who leave. Those who remain with him are his true followers. These stories may have offered a point of reference for those historically gathering for a meal and hearing these stories. It is expected of those who gathered that they share the foundational conviction that Jesus, around whom they bond and whom they commemorate, is the Son of God.

With regard to the meanings and significance of the meal accounts and discourses, special attention has been paid to John 6, particularly verses 51-58. This is one of the most elaborate chapters, containing an actual meal scene as well as metaphorical material on food and drink in the bread of life discourse related to it. Furthermore this has been indicated by the nucleus character that this chapter forms together with John 13 with which it is in a thematically intertwined relationship. Reading John 6 (with special reference to verses 51-58) against a number of different backdrops, and understanding its thematically intertwined relationship with John 13 as the nucleus of the Gospel, has proved very fruitful. Allusions to eucharistic traditions have been identified and echoes of motifs from mystery traditions have been singled out. The same passage may be read

against alleged reproaches of cannibalism or it can be exposed to the topos of anthropophagic behaviour in the Greco-Roman world at large, and striking correspondences emerge from sources about enclaves bonding over the consumption of human flesh and blood.

A number of possible implications can be drawn from these various approaches. On the one hand, the modern reader must remain highly critical and cautious with regard to claiming validity, i.e. the “truth,” of his or her interpretation. This study has proved once again that the Fourth Gospel very readily lends itself to all kinds of different interpretations and conclusions drawn from them. All of these interpretations are possible and plausible to some degree, but none of them can claim for itself to be the one and only true one, and clearly there remains room for even more interpretations than developed in the present thesis. Aside from this rather deflating insight, however, more positive valuations of this phenomenon may also be singled out. What may be frustrating (or amazing!) for modern biblical scholars may in fact have had an integrating effect on the original audience. Whichever background the people who gathered at the table would have come from, be it Jewish or pagan, they would have had the opportunity to associate markers in the text with one or more ideas, traditions and concepts familiar to them from other, perhaps earlier, affiliations. The multi-faceted character of the Gospel of John in terms of its manifold intertextual relationships suggests that the Gospel has the quality and ability to address people from pagan backgrounds as well as such from Jewish ones. As for those from a Jewish background, however, some additional and special conclusions can be drawn.

The way in which the Gospel depicts the outsiders of the table community, with growing hostility between Jesus and his followers on the one hand and the Jews on the other, suggests that members of the Johannine community from a Jewish background would have worked in a direction of conscious distancing from “the Jews,” i.e. those who did not believe in Jesus as the

Messiah. Some kind of conscious break with the “ethnos” of the Jews, perhaps even declared in some way, would probably have been initiated, for it is hardly likely that Jesus-followers from Jewish origin would have wanted to associate with the “evil” Jews that threatened the community table in the Fourth Gospel. The conflicts between the insiders of the meal scenes and the outsiders points to a community of original addressees behind them that is at an important point in its development. It is likely that a certain distancing has already taken place but, as in many cases, the closest neighbour is the greatest enemy and, therefore, needs to be vilified. This would be an explanation for the hostility against the Jews.

The betrayer plays a decisive role. The notion of the possible existence of a betrayer in the midst of the meal community would have been a constant reminder that the believers were still exposed to the threats of this world, perhaps experienced in occasional delations to the authorities and the measures or consequences that grew out of these delations. Whether or not this hostility on the side of the Jews in the narrative had a historical correspondence, that is whether or not the historical Johannine community gathering for meals had reason to fear the Jews, or the Romans with whom the Jews of the narrative collaborate, cannot be definitively proved. Regardless of how this historical question is decided, the stories about the enemy outside would have had the effect of strengthening the bond of the Johannine believers gathered for communal meals.

In the narrative, true mutual indwelling between the disciples and Jesus and the Father are only possible once the betrayer has left. The meal community needs to be freed from the betrayer in its midst. Only then are the group members truly pure and ready to receive the announcement of the Paraclete.

The Paraclete that comes to the community after Jesus’ departure assures the continuity of the relationship with Jesus, thus guaranteeing the “vertical” mutual indwelling. The mutual

indwelling of the Father and Son is in principle already present in the pre-Easter signs performed and teachings spoken by Jesus. The mutual indwelling of Jesus and his disciples is expressly a post-Easter reality and accessible to the community of the readers only through post-Easter knowledge. The post-resurrection gift of the Paraclete is crucial for this knowledge and ensures the continuation of the horizontal mutual indwelling of the disciples in the post-Easter community. This “vertical” perspective brings into view the mutual indwelling of Jesus-followers on the one hand, and that between Jesus and/or God on the other: it connects the community on earth with the Father and his Son in Heaven.

If the Gospel’s overall purpose is to create and strengthen belief in Christ and cohesion amongst his group of followers, then accounts and discourses about food, drink and meals are an important vehicle for achieving this goal. The believing audience thus participates in the cosmological community, that is, the community of people who belong to Jesus and through him to God. The Gospel’s readers are meant to make the move from the “historical” to the “cosmological” level of understanding and the meal accounts and discourses help them to do this. The footwashing – perhaps practised in the Johannine community – symbolically prefigures the state that the community will and shall attain after the betrayer has left the community at the table. Whenever bread and wine are consumed, the stories and discourses containing these elements would have been alluded to. The ingestion of the elements may likely have functioned for the believers as a means of creating a union with the divine Jesus. At the same time, the communal devouring of these elements, laden with meanings and associations shared by the participants, would have aided greatly in defining their group identity and reinforcing their bond.

10. Appendix: Jesus on a Diet? The Abstemious Jesus

10.1. Introduction

The appendix takes under scrutiny the figure of Jesus and complements this study's focus – which lies primarily on those who gather around Jesus receiving his earthly and heavenly food – with the issue of Jesus' abstemiousness regarding earthly food. The appendix will discuss its implications for the question of Jesus' physical nature and its interplay with Jesus' divine nature. The way chosen to do so is to first explore the Johannine Jesus' behaviour around food and drink: his role as a host who himself does not partake. In behaving this way, the Johannine Jesus demonstrates his distinctness over against his Synoptic counterparts. Next, the Gospel's portrayal of Jesus' relationship to food and drink is read in the context of Jewish literature prior to or contemporary with the Fourth Gospel. The aim is to discern the associations which may have informed the Gospel's depiction of Jesus as a figure who abstains from food and drink. Finally, some implications for Johannine Christology will be considered.

10.1.1. Jesus' Behaviour around Food and Drink

10.1.1.1. Jesus, the Host that Rejects Food

In a number of meal scenes, Jesus acts as the host by providing food and drink for others. At the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-12), Jesus' mother draws his attention to the fact that the wine has run

out. In providing the wine, Jesus becomes the host, the true bridegroom, a transformation that reveals his glory to his disciples (ἐφάνερωσεν τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, Jn 2:11).⁷⁶⁹

Jesus also plays the host in the multiplication of loaves and fishes in John 6:1-14. In contrast to the Synoptics, the Johannine Jesus does not recruit the disciples to distribute the food (they are only to ask the crowd to recline) but, like a good host, he blesses the bread, and then serves the food himself.

In the bread of life discourse, Jesus equates himself with the “bread of life”/“living bread” (Jn 6:35, 48, 51) and repeatedly declares that the believers need to consume his flesh in order to attain eternal life.⁷⁷⁰ Jesus not only provides physical food as in the feeding miracle but he also offers himself as “food” to the believers.⁷⁷¹

In the meal prior to his final Passover, Jesus again takes on the role of host (Jn 13). Strikingly, this passage, in contrast to the Synoptic accounts of the Last Supper, does not emphasize eating and drinking. Whether Jesus, or, indeed, anyone, eats or drinks at either meal is not mentioned. Nevertheless, Jesus acts as the host by demonstratively washing the disciples’ feet.

The final scene where Jesus hosts a feast occurs in John 21:1-14, in which the resurrected Jesus appears to the disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Only with Jesus’ instruction to cast the net on the right side of the boat do they manage to catch anything. By the time the

⁷⁶⁹ Cf. e.g. Jean-Bosco Matand Bulembat, “Head-Waiter and Bridegroom of the Wedding at Cana: Structure and Meaning of John 2:1–12,” *JSNT* 30, no. 1 (2007); Webster, *Ingesting Jesus*, 39–42; Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John: Text and Context* (Boston: Brill, 2005), 139, commenting on Adeline Fehribach, “The ‘Birthing’ Bridegroom,” in *A Feminist Companion to John*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 104–129; for the patristic interpretation of Jesus as the bridegroom, see Adolf Smitmans, *Das Weinwunder von Kana: Die Auslegung von Joh 2,1–11 bei den Vätern und Heute* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1966), 207–17; referred to by Moloney and Harrington, *The Gospel of John*, 73.

⁷⁷⁰ On the peculiar use of τρώγειν, see discussion, pp. 225–227.

⁷⁷¹ A similar idea is conveyed in John 15:1–17, in which Jesus describes himself as the true vine and the disciples as the branches. The branches cannot put forth fruit by themselves; they are dependent on the vine to “nourish” them. It is, therefore, a double dependency: the grapes depend on the branches and the branches depend on the vine. Jesus, as the vine, supports the branches, and through them, provides the sweet fruit that others will consume.

disciples return to shore with their bountiful catch, Jesus has already prepared grilled fish and bread for their breakfast.⁷⁷²

Thus, from Jesus' first sign until after his physical death, Jesus is the generous host who provides abundant nourishment to his followers. In none of these stories is Jesus described as eating or drinking. The same is true for the dinner that Martha hosts for Jesus and others in Bethany (John 12:1-12).⁷⁷³ The details – such as the menu, the guest list, even the occasion – are not specified.

Perhaps the most ambiguous set of Johannine passages related to the provision of food and drink is found in John 4. Jesus' request for a drink from the Samaritan woman implies that Jesus is not only tired but also thirsty at this point in his journey. But the story continues without specifying whether he received the drink and, if so, whether he consumed it. Instead, Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that, in contrast to the water she periodically has to draw from the well, the water that he will provide will quench thirst forever. The ensuing discussion demonstrates that Jesus in fact has no need whatsoever of the drink he had requested: he himself is capable of providing water that is far superior to the water of mundane existence. In this case, Jesus' initial request for water seems to have been but a pretext through which he could engage the woman in conversation and offer her the water of eternal life.

A second scene in John 4 adds to the ambiguous picture of Jesus' intake of food and drink. While Jesus and the Samaritan woman are discussing living water, Jesus' disciples have gone to

⁷⁷² Jesus asks the disciples to bring some of the fish they have just caught and Simon Peter hauls the full net ashore. Yet one gets the impression that the food that Jesus has prepared does not consist of the fish Peter had brought to shore, for Jesus immediately tells the disciples to come and eat and he distributes the readily prepared bread and fish, John 21:10-12.

⁷⁷³ The text (ἐποίησαν οὖν αὐτῷ δεῖπνον, John 12:2) suggests that this meal is prepared in honour of either Jesus or Lazarus, who has been raised from the dead.

the city to buy food (Jn 4:8). When they return, they urge Jesus to eat. Instead of complying, however, Jesus proceeds to explain that he has food to eat of which they do not know. The disciples take this statement literally and wonder if someone else has brought Jesus food. Their surprise may imply that he customarily does indeed consume the food and drink that they provide for Him. At this point, however, Jesus is concerned only with the metaphorical meaning of food. He declares that his food is to do the will of Him who has sent Him, and to complete his work. The fact that Jesus has no need of food – physical, earthly, perishable food – is established in this rejection of food provided by the disciples. In both conversations – with the Samaritan woman and with the disciples – the references to physical nourishment, that is, to the substances required to sustain corporeal life, soon give way to talk of spiritual nourishment, through a metaphorical redefinition of water and food. The passages discussed depict Jesus as the one who provides earthly nourishment for others as well as the nonperishable food and drink that leads to eternal life.

10.1.1.2. Jesus' One and Only Drink

Jesus makes one single exception to his own abstinence: at the moment before his death. In John 19:27-29, Jesus is on the cross and close to death; he expresses thirst, takes the sour wine (ὄξος) offered to him, and expires.⁷⁷⁴

Jesus' expressed desire for a drink recalls his earlier remark to Peter: "Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?" (Jn 18:11). In this rhetorical question, the "cup" which Jesus aims to drink refers metaphorically to Jesus' imminent death; the statement as a whole expresses

⁷⁷⁴ The ὄξος is to be identified with the Latin *posca*, an economic everyday drink based on vinegar, heavily diluted with water and infused with herbs. It was used in the army and by the urban poor. Initially the Greek-speaking East was not familiar with *posca*. This explains why ὄξος, "vinegar," is used in the narratives of the crucifixion: in Greek there was simply no more precise equivalent to the Latin *posca*. Cf. Andrew Dalby, *Food in the Ancient World, from A to Z* (London, New York: Routledge, 2003), 270.

Jesus' acceptance of his fate.⁷⁷⁵ The metaphorical meaning is made literal in Jesus' imminent death on the cross. This move from the metaphorical to the literal contrasts with other occasions in which the Gospel begins with the literal meaning and then moves to the metaphorical level.

In John 6 Jesus' metaphorical talk of the consumption of his body follows the literal sharing and eating of food. Likewise, the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4) moves from a literal to a metaphorical understanding of water. There are further contrasts between the two scenes, in that Jesus requests the water but only as a pretext to initiate a conversation in which he can offer the water of eternal life to the woman. On the cross, however, he requests the sour wine and takes it for himself. Knowing that all is finished, and in order to fulfil scripture, Jesus expresses his thirst. This time, on the verge of death, Jesus needs the drink for himself, and drinks like a corporeal human being.⁷⁷⁶

Some commentators appear to be uncomfortable with the idea that Jesus was thirsty at this climactic moment. Hodges suggests that the sour wine functions as a poison and that Jesus, by drinking the ὄζος, synecdochically takes upon himself the sin of the world.⁷⁷⁷ This explanation, however, is not convincing, for the Gospel claims that crucifixion – not poison – is the cause of

⁷⁷⁵ Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 813; Webster, *Ingesting Jesus*, 126.

⁷⁷⁶ On the question of whether Jesus' thirst in John 19:28 is literal or figurative, cf. Leonard Theodor Witkamp, "Jesus' Thirst in John 19:28-30: Literal or Figurative?" *JBL* 115, no. 3 (1996); Stephen D. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 159–70.

⁷⁷⁷ This is the overarching hypothesis in Hodges' dissertation. The argument runs that Jesus as a heavenly creature is poisoned by consuming an earthly substance – somewhat analogous to Gnostic revealers. Hodges claims this on the grounds of the narrative sequence in John 19:28-30 and because of the reference to Scripture. As many others do, Hodges identifies the Scripture as Ps 69:22. According to his disputable interpretation (drawing on Semitic parallels), the vinegar mentioned there is poison. Hodges, "Food as Synecdoche in John's Gospel and Gnostic Texts." See also Jeffery Horace Hodges, *'Ethical' Dualism of Food in the Gospel of John* (1999); available from <http://catholic-resources.org/SBL/JnLit-1999-Hodges.html>; Internet; accessed 02.09.11; Jeffery Horace Hodges, *Gift-Giving Across the Sacred-Profane Divide: A Maussian Analysis of Heavenly Versus Earthly Food in Gnosticism and John's Gospel* (1999); available from <http://catholic-resources.org/SBL/JnLit-1999-HodgesA.html>; Internet; accessed 02.09.11.

Jesus' death.⁷⁷⁸ Others argue that, because Jesus' death paradoxically enables life for those who believe in him, the wine is in actual fact live-giving.⁷⁷⁹ Under any interpretation, however, the passage draws attention to Jesus' corporeality.⁷⁸⁰ Jesus' one and only unambiguous and explicit act of consumption is the immediate prelude to the most fundamental testimony to his corporeality, namely, his death.⁷⁸¹

The narrative analysis has elaborated that the Johannine Jesus has a peculiar way of dealing with earthly food. While he acts as the host in many scenes and provides abundant food and drink for others, he himself is never portrayed as actually eating. When the disciples offer earthly food to Jesus, he rejects it with a reference to his own food which is to do the will of the Father. The exception to the pattern is the one and only drink that Jesus receives on the cross moments before his death.

Perhaps the Gospel's silence with regard to Jesus' own consumption of food and drink simply means that during his earthly life Jesus ate and drank like any other human being. But the absence of references to his partaking of physical nourishment, and the focus on food and drink as metaphors for the faith that leads to eternal life, suggest that Jesus, the Son of God, does not require earthly food, because he subsists entirely on the will of the one who has sent him. In other

⁷⁷⁸ This has been pointed out by Webster, *Ingesting Jesus*, 127. However, the verses that she adduces as proof for her argument (Jn 20:20, 25, 27) function less to underscore the cause of Jesus' death. Rather they are a means of establishing the belief in identity between the risen and the previously crucified (and therefore dead) Jesus.

⁷⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁷⁸⁰ There are only a few other passages that address Jesus' corporeality: Jesus is said to be tired from travelling (κεκοπιακῶς, Jn 4:6) and arguably Jesus' weeping (ἐδάκρυσεν, Jn 11:35) at the death of Lazarus can be understood not only as an emotional but also a bodily movement if tears are shed. It has been suggested that only Jesus' tears allow for the interpretation of an "entirely natural human emotion." The many other incidents of Jesus' emotions supposedly have both human as well as divine dimensions. Stephen Voorwinde, *Jesus' Emotions in the Fourth Gospel: Human or Divine?*, Library of New Testament Studies (London, New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 268–269, quotation p. 269.

⁷⁸¹ The infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke include the only other profound experience of corporeality, namely, Jesus' birth.

words, Jesus is on a very special diet, one that is dictated by the Father and not by the normal corporeal needs of mortal beings.

10.2. Comparing the Johannine Jesus' Eating Behaviours to the Synoptics

The motif of an abstemious Christ is unique to John's among the Gospels, even if a number of passages in the Synoptics draw attention to food avoidance by Jesus. When spending 40 days in the desert, Jesus fasts (νηστεύσας, Mt 4:2) or "does not consume food" (as Lk 4:2 puts it), and as a result is famished (ἐπείνασεν). During the Passover meal, as death draws nearer, the Synoptic Jesus declares that he will not again drink the fruit of the vine until the day when he drinks it in his Father's kingdom (Mt 26:29; Mk 14:25; slightly different in Lk 22:16: until the kingdom of God comes).⁷⁸²

For the most part, however, the Synoptics portray Jesus as partaking freely in food and drink on numerous occasions. Matthew and Luke insist that the Son of Man came eating and drinking (ἤλθεν / ἐλήλυθεν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐσθίων καὶ πίνων, Mt 11:19, Lk 7:34). When Jesus' antagonists describe him as a glutton and drunkard (ἄνθρωπος φάγος καὶ οἰνοπότης, Mt 11:19, Lk 7:34), they also attest to his corporeal enjoyment of meals on other festive occasions.⁷⁸³ And, after his resurrection, eating is the best proof that Jesus can provide that he has truly risen from the dead (Lk 24:33-43). Indeed, in the Lukan account, it is only after he eats broiled fish in their presence (λαβὼν ἐνώπιον αὐτῶν ἔφαγεν, Lk 24:43) that the disciples believe that it is Jesus

⁷⁸² The Lukan Jesus adds that he will not eat the passover (any more) until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God (Luke 22:15-16).

⁷⁸³ This remains true even if the historicity of Jesus' habit of dining with the outcast has been doubted. Smith argues that this is but a literary motif and historically inauthentic: Dennis Edwin Smith, "The Historical Jesus at Table," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1989 Seminar Papers*, ed. David Lull (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989). For John Dominic Crossan, who represents the majority of voices on the question, the historicity of Jesus' table fellowship is still central for his reconstruction of the historical Jesus: John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991).

in the flesh who is appearing to them in Jerusalem. Jesus demonstratively consumes food in order to affirm his identity and his post-resurrection corporeality.

The fact that the Synoptic Jesus eats and drinks suggests that the abstemious Jesus, as described in detail in the narrative analysis of this study, is a Johannine innovation. This diet may be unusual but it is not unique to Jesus, for Jesus is not the only being in the literature of this period to abstain from food and drink.⁷⁸⁴ Indeed, Jesus' avoidance of food is similar an entire category of biblical beings, namely divine messengers, supra-humans often referred to as "angels."⁷⁸⁵

⁷⁸⁴ The motif of food rejection fits into a docetic interpretation of Jesus. Jeffery Horace Hodges, in an investigation on food avoidance and acceptance in John (Jn 4:31-34 and 19:28-30), considers the idea that the Johannine dichotomy is Gnostic. In the Mandaean Gnostic story from the Ginza revealer Hibil-Ziwa refuses food offered by the children of darkness. And in the "Hymn of the Pearl" the prince, a Gnostic revealer, makes the mistake to accept food and falls into a deep sleep. Jesus, however, unlike the Gnostic revealers, does not try to avoid the world but intentionally mixes himself with it, an idea that does not fit with Gnostic thinking. According to Hodges, the sour wine symbolizes the world that has gone bad. The vinegar in John 19:29 is not just a symbol of the world but a *pars pro toto* of it. By consuming it, Jesus takes upon himself the sin of the world. Hodges concludes that the author of the Fourth Gospel neither presents Jesus as a Gnostic revealer, nor does he presuppose a substance dualism. The dualism in John belongs to the family of ethical dualisms and not Gnostic ones. Jeffery Horace Hodges, *'Ethical' Dualism of Food in the Gospel of John* (1999); available from <http://catholic-resources.org/SBL/JnLit-1999-Hodges.html>; Internet; accessed 02.09.11.

⁷⁸⁵ The original meaning of the Hebrew מַלְאָכִים as well as of the respective Greek ἄγγελος is "messenger," "messenger of God," also "heavenly messenger," "envoy," "a supernatural being who acts as messenger," "guardian," "mediator," and generally "a servant of God." Cf. Ludwig Köhler et al; *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 1994–2000), 2:585; Danker, Bauer and Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 8–9.

In Jewish literature, especially in apocalyptic texts, there is a variety of intermediary figures that stand between God and humanity. This includes not only the descent of divine figures to earth, but also the ascent of humans to heaven. Men transformed into angels appear in a large and diverse range of literature (ranging from Ezekiel and Enoch to the Testament of Moses, Philo and passages in rabbinic literature). Both, the descending as well as the ascending figures, accomplish a mediating task between the two spheres. Cf. Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 48–71.

10.3. Food Consumption and Avoidance by Supra-Humans in Jewish Scripture

10.3.1. Angels' Food

A number of Jewish sources mention food of angels.⁷⁸⁶ Psalm 78:23–25 refers to the manna eaten by the Israelites in the desert as the bread of the mighty/angels.⁷⁸⁷ Wisdom of Solomon 16:20 praises God for providing his people with the “food of angels.” In Joseph and Aseneth, the man from heaven gives Aseneth a honeycomb to eat, saying that all the angels of God, all the chosen of God, and all the sons of the Most High eat of this comb (JosAs 14:3, 16:14). Further examples include The Life of Adam and Eve (4:1–2); Pseudo Philo, Biblical Antiquities 19:5; Testament of Abraham Recension B (Short Recension) 4:14–5:1.⁷⁸⁸ In these examples, humans partake of angelic food.

10.3.2. Angels' Abstemiousness

Other sources reveal the reverse pattern: angelic figures appear on earth and are confronted with earthly food. In Genesis 18:8, the three “men” visiting Abraham eat the food he sets before

⁷⁸⁶ For the following I draw on the chapter “Do Angels Eat?” in Hodges, “Food as Synecdoche in John’s Gospel and Gnostic Texts,” 308–52. Cf. also David Goodman, “Do Angels Eat,” *JJS* 37, no. 2 (1986); Leutzsch, “Essen Engel?: Über das Ernährungsverhalten himmlischer Wesen,” in *Essen und Trinken in der Bibel: Ein literarisches Festmahl für Rainer Kessler zum 65. Geburtstag*, eds. Michaela Geiger, Christl Maier, and Uta Schmidt (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2009), 254–268. The sustenance of humans leaving earthly boundaries and transgressing into heavenly realms cannot be discussed in detail here. This question has been briefly addressed in a passage entitled “Do Men on ‘Heavenly Journeys’ Eat?” in Hodges, “Food as Synecdoche in John’s Gospel and Gnostic Texts,” 339–43.

⁷⁸⁷ לֶחֶם אַנְגֵּלִים אֵשׁ (Ps 78:25). אַנְגֵּלִים can be translated as close in meaning to מַלְאָכָיו בְּרִי in Ps 103:20 which allows for the translation of this term as “angels.” This is also supported by the LXX wording: ἄρτον ἀγγέλων ἔφαγεν ἄνθρωπος (Ps 77(78):25); cf. Hodges, “Food as Synecdoche in John’s Gospel and Gnostic Texts,” 308–12.

⁷⁸⁸ For discussion see Hodges, “Food as Synecdoche in John’s Gospel and Gnostic Texts,” 311–13.

them.⁷⁸⁹ The majority of sources, both canonical and extracanonical, however, insist that divine messengers do not consume food or drink while sojourning among humankind.

The judge Gideon prepares meat and unleavened cakes for the divine messenger who visits him (Judg 6:20–21). But instead of eating it, the messenger merely touches the food with the end of his staff and fire consumes the food. Similarly, the divine messenger visiting Manoah and his unnamed wife in Judges 13:15–20 explicitly refuses their offer of food (Judg 13:16) and requests that Manoah prepare a whole offering instead.⁷⁹⁰

The tendency to stress that the heavenly visitors do not consume earthly food is particularly strong in later interpretations and translations of Genesis 18:8. One such example is the angel Michael's visit to earth in the Testament of Abraham. Michael is identified as one of the visitors to Abraham. In the version recounted in Recension A (Long Recension), God sends Michael down to Abraham and tells him to eat whatever Abraham eats and sets before him (Test Ab 4:7). The angel responds that as a noncorporeal spirit, he cannot consume the earthly and perishable foods (Test Ab 4:9). God addresses the problem by promising to send an "all-devouring spirit" who will eat instead of Michael. In this way, Michael himself will not consume but will nevertheless appear to be eating (Test Ab 4:10).

In a further elaboration in Testament of Abraham Recension A (Long Recension), 6:4–5, Sarah informs Abraham that the slaughtered calf got up after the meal, thereby implying that the angels did not truly eat. Similarly, Philo and Josephus, contemporaries of John, explicitly deny

⁷⁸⁹ On the problematics of the ambiguous identity of these men, Hodges notes: "This difficult verse [Gen 18:8] becomes even more difficult when one consults its context, for the 'they' of verse 8 variously means 'three men' (18:2 *שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים*), the 'Lord' (18:1 *יְהוָה*), and 'two angels' (19:1 *שְׁנֵי הַמַּלְאָכִים*). However one might reconcile these numbers and identities, the passage definitely calls at least two of the 'men' (*אֲנָשִׁים*) who sup with Abraham the title of 'angels' (*הַמַּלְאָכִים*)." Hodges, "Food as Synecdoche in John's Gospel and Gnostic Texts," 310. Evidence undergirding the argument that angels eat is found in Gen 19:3: The two angels go into Lot's house and eat what Lot sets before them:

מִשְׁתָּהּ וּמִצֹּחַהּ.

⁷⁹⁰ Hodges, "Food as Synecdoche in John's Gospel and Gnostic Texts," 314–16.

that the angels visiting Abraham consumed anything in Gen 18:8. Philo notes that it is a marvel that, even though the angels did not eat or drink, they gave the appearance of both eating and drinking (τεράστιον δὲ καὶ τὸ μὴ πίνοντας πινόντων καὶ τὸ μὴ ἐσθίοντας ἐσθιόντων παρέχειν φαντασίαν. *On Abraham* 1:118). Josephus likewise holds that the angels only give the impression of eating: οἱ δὲ δόξαν αὐτῷ παρέσχον ἐσθιόντων ἔτι, *Ant.* 1:197.⁷⁹¹

Perhaps the most striking example of a nonconsuming supra-human dwelling on earth is the divine messenger Raphael in the book of Tobit.⁷⁹² This apocryphal book tells the story of a man named Tobit, from the tribe of Naphtali, who lives with his wife Hannah and son Tobias in Nineveh under Assyrian occupation. Tobit takes pains to provide proper burial for fallen Israelites. One evening, after burying a man murdered on the street, Tobit falls asleep outside and bird droppings fall in his eyes. Tobit goes blind and, in his despair, prays for death. In preparation for death, Tobit reveals to his son Tobias that many years earlier he had deposited ten silver talents with Gabael in Rages of Media. He dispatches his son to Media in order to retrieve the money. Tobias is accompanied and protected by the divine messenger Raphael, who appears on earth disguised as a human being by the name of Azariah. On their travels to Media, Tobias follows Raphael's detailed instructions for catching fish. The fish is later roasted and consumed (Tob

⁷⁹¹ Further sources from a later time that follow along the same lines include: Targum Onkelos to Genesis 18:5–8, 19:1; Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis 18:8; Baba Metzi'a 86b–87a; Genesis Rabbah 48:14 (to Gen 18:8), Jubilees 16, Targum Neofiti 18:8. Rabbinic sources indicate that rabbinical tradition claims that angels do not need to eat at all but subsist exclusively upon God's Shechinah; Hodges, "Food as Synecdoche in John's Gospel and Gnostic Texts," 325–35.

⁷⁹² Tobit is commonly dated to the period between 225 and 175 BCE, and usually located within Palestinian Judaism; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Tobit* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 50–54. The original language of the book has been a matter of dispute and debate for centuries. Claims for a Semitic language as well as for Greek have been made. Likely, Tobit is originally an Aramaic composition and the other languages a translation of that; *ibid.*, 18–28. The Greek text is known in three recensions: a short recension (GI), a long recension (GII), and an intermediate recension (GIII). The long recension (GII) is usually considered as the more original and the short recension (GI) as a modification thereof; *ibid.*, 4–6.

6:5).⁷⁹³ In Media, Tobias meets his kinswoman Sarah, liberates her from a demon and marries her. Eventually Tobias, Sarah and Raphael return to Nineveh. Tobias cures his father's blindness, and also apparently his death wish, much to the consolation of his mother. Raphael finally reveals his true identity and name, and as a confirmation of his angelic identity, emphasizes that he has never eaten nor drunk at all; it is only by means of a vision that he has appeared to them as eating: "Take note that I did not eat (or drink) anything; what you saw was a vision."⁷⁹⁴ Raphael then ascends back to heaven. Thus, while dwelling on earth, Raphael has the appearance of an ordinary young man, and also appears to engage in normal human behaviour. But, as the story's conclusion indicates, Raphael is in fact a noncorporeal being who does not need the sustenance of food the way that humans do.

The parallels to the Johannine Jesus are obvious. But the similarities do not end with their abstinence from human food and drink. First, John portrays Jesus as being sent by the Father; he descends from heaven and ascends back to heaven after the completion of his earthly mission.⁷⁹⁵ Similarly, Raphael has descended from heaven and, as he announces after revealing his identity, he will ascend back to the one who sent him (ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἀναβαίνω πρὸς τὸν ἀποστείλαντά με, Tob

⁷⁹³ Tobias eats this fish dish. Manuscripts differ, however, on whether Raphael joins him in this repast; both the singular "ἔφαγεν /he ate" as well as the plural "ἔφαγον /they ate" are attested, and one group of manuscripts omits the mention of eating altogether. In versions that include the singular, Tobias apparently eats alone; the reader is not told what Raphael does in the meantime. In versions that include the plural form, it is reasonable to assume that Raphael is eating with Tobias. The omission of eating in the later texts is understandable in light of the story's conclusion, in which Raphael finally reveals his true identity and heavenly name (Tob 12:19).

⁷⁹⁴ ἔθεωρεῖτέ με ὅτι οὐκ ἔφαγον οὐθέν, ἀλλὰ ὄρασις ὑμῖν ἔθεωρεῖτο. Tob 12:19, long recension (GII), Christian J. Wagner, *Polyglotte Tobit-Synopse: Griechisch – Lateinisch – Syrisch – Hebräisch – Aramäisch*, Mit einem Index zu den Tobit-Fragmenten vom Toten Meer (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 144. Translation: Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, 286.

⁷⁹⁵ The sending is apparent in πέμπω, Jn 4:34; 5:23, 24, 30, 37; 6:37, 38, 39, 44; 7:16, 18, 28, 33; 8:16, 18, 26, 29; 9:4; 12:44, 45, 49; 13:20; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5 and in ἀποστέλλω, Jn 3:17, 34; 5:36, 38; 6:29, 57; 8:42; 10:36; 11:42; 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25; 20:21. The descent is found in καταβαίνω – as the Son of Man in Jn 3:13; as the bread from heaven Jn 6:33, 38, 41, 42, 50, 51, 58 – both of which are metaphors for Jesus. The ascent appears as ἀναβαίνω – as the Son of Man, Jn 3:13; 6:62; 20:17.

12:20).⁷⁹⁶ Second, Raphael and Jesus provide earthly food for others to consume. Both give instructions for a successful catch of fish (Tob 6:3; Jn 21:6), on which their followers – Tobiahs and the disciples respectively – are fed (Tob 6:5; Jn 21:13). Finally, both of these divine agents have their words and deeds recorded for others to read. Immediately before he ascends to heaven, Raphael tells Tobit and his family to record in a book all that has happened to them (γράφωτε πάντα τὰ συντελεσθέντα εἰς βιβλίον, Tob 12:20). The double ending of the Gospel of John similarly refers to the recording of Jesus’ experiences while in the world (γράφειν and βιβλίον, Jn 20:30-31; 21:24-25).

The parallels between Raphael and the Johannine Jesus are clear. While it cannot be stated with certainty that John knew and consciously drew on Tobit, the close parallels suggest that the fourth evangelist was familiar with the tradition that divine agents do not consume earthly food even when they appear in the guise of human beings. In evoking this motif, the Gospel therefore asserts that, like Raphael, Jesus was a divine and noncorporeal being who descended from above and will ascend again.⁷⁹⁷ There is, however, one crucial difference between the nonconsuming divine messenger Raphael and the Johannine Jesus who subsists on the Father’s will: the one occasion on which Jesus does, in fact consume by mouth. As has been discussed in the narrative

⁷⁹⁶ Skemp argues: “Such language, which occurs in the Fourth Gospel at 7:33 (cf. 13:36), is best understood as an echo within cultural intertexture; it is an aspect of complex Johannine Christology, the vocabulary of which has roots in revelatory texts such as Tob 12:20 where a supernatural being turns to God’s heavenly court.” Vincent Skemp, “Avenues of Intertextuality Between Tobit and the New Testament,” in *Intertextual Studies in Ben Sira and Tobit: Essays in Honor of Alexander A. Di Lella, O.F.M.*, eds. Jeremy Corley and Alexander A. Di Lella (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2005), 43–70: 54.

⁷⁹⁷ Whether or not the parallel offers enough evidence to account for an oral-scribal intertexture or should be counted in the category of cultural intertexture with a shared cultural allusion to Tobit by John, need not be discussed at this point. For details and criteria of the distinction between conscious mimesis and coincidental shared cultural echoes, cf. *ibid.*, 43–70: 44–47. Skemp draws on Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 40–62. For a brief insight into intertextual relationship between Tobit and New Testament texts concerning “Angels as Mediators and Intercessors,” and the suggestion that the similarities in the motif of ascent and descent, shared by Raphael and the Johannine Jesus, are “echoes within intercultural texture,” see Skemp, “Avenues of Intertextuality Between Tobit and the New Testament,” 43–70: 53–58.

analysis of this study, the drink of ὄξος offered to Jesus as he is hanging on the cross is the only occasion on which Jesus is explicitly portrayed as consuming by mouth.⁷⁹⁸ The question that must now be addressed concerns the relevance of this portrayal – Jesus’ abstinence from food and drink except in his last moments – for the Gospel’s Christology.

By having Jesus drink on the cross, the Gospel of John emphasizes Jesus’ human side. His susceptibility to death differentiates him from Raphael and other similar divine messengers. In contrast to Raphael, who appears human but is in fact noncorporeal, the pre-existent Jesus not only descends from heaven but also becomes corporeal, as his one and only drink, followed by his death, demonstrates.

The Johannine portrayal of Jesus’ corporeality is, therefore, far from straightforward. On the one hand, Jesus is depicted as a quasi-divine figure who subsists on heavenly food, and on the other hand, the drink before death points to his corporeality and humanity.

10.4. Corporeality and Christology

The presence and nature of Jesus’ corporeal humanity has been a matter of discussion from the ancient period to our own.⁷⁹⁹ Missing from this debate has been a consistent and sustained

⁷⁹⁸ Cf. “Jesus’ One and Only Drink,” pp. 370-373.

⁷⁹⁹ Already in the early patristic period, docetic groups denied Jesus Christ’s humanity. Against them stood those who claimed that Jesus was born a human: Adoptionists held that Jesus was born fully human and was only adopted as God’s Son with a special task, while Arianists claimed that Jesus ranked above ordinary humans but belonged to the created order. The first council of Nicaea (325 CE) ratified the doctrine of the trinity including the “homoousios,” the notion that Jesus is of one essence with God and the true self-revelation of God, and thereby rejected theologies that denied the humanity of Christ entirely. What followed was a heated “Christological debate” about the precise nature of Jesus’ identity that lasted more than a century. In this debate, the various parties tried to make sense of the interplay of the human and divine in the person of Christ while upholding the doctrine of the trinity. The fierce dispute was somewhat resolved through the confession of the dualistic nature of Christ at the Fourth Council of Chalcedon (451 CE). The Chalcedon creed affirmed that Jesus Christ had two natures: a fully divine and a fully human nature joined in one person in hypostatic union; Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church, The Pelican History of the Church* (1967; reprint, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969); Rowan Williams, “Jesus Christus II. Alte Kirche,” in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, eds. Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Müller (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), 16, 726–745. While

examination of the narrative indicators of Jesus' corporeality. A major indicator of this type is comprised of the references to physical nourishment, in the form of food and drink.

The Gospel's discussion of food and drink contrasts nonperishing food with earthly food, and the water that quenches thirst forever with ordinary water that slakes thirst only temporarily. The first element of each pair is provided solely by Jesus, and only on the condition of the recipient's belief in him. This dichotomy between earthly and heavenly/spiritual food, however, is disturbed in several ways: Jesus acts as the host for others and provides choice wine as well as bread and fish in plenty at the outset of his ministry (Jn 2), in the middle of his ministry (Jn 6), and even after his death (Jn 21). These acts emphasize Jesus' role as a host and provider not only of

this Christological debate drew from numerous sources, the Fourth Gospel was central to the discussion. Gerald O'Collins, *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

For the modern debate of Johannine Christology, cf. the useful summary in Voorwinde, *Jesus' Emotions in the Fourth Gospel*, 5–13; also the chapter "Some Approaches to Johannine Christology in Contemporary Writing" in Raymond Edward Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 197–204.

In the modern period, the conviction that Jesus was entirely human has been argued most vigorously by Rudolf Bultmann. The key verse for his argument is Jn 1:14: "And the word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." Bultmann emphasizes that in becoming flesh and "tabernacling" among us, the Word has become fully human and devoid of divinity. Bultmann argues that "the Revealer is nothing but a man," and that "It is in his sheer humanity that he is the revealer." Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 62, 63.

Against this view, Bultmann's former student, Ernst Käsemann, using the very same verse, claims the opposite: that the Johannine Jesus is fully divine, a "God walking on the face of the earth." Käsemann argues this by putting the strong emphasis on the second half of the verse, the glory that is revealed in the Father's son: "Does the statement 'The Word became flesh' really mean more than that he descended into the world of man and there came into contact with earthly existence, so that an encounter with him became possible? Is not this statement totally overshadowed by the confession 'We beheld his glory', so that it receives its meaning from it?"; and "John is to our knowledge, the first Christian to use the earthly life of Jesus merely as a backdrop for the Son of God proceeding through the world of man and as the scene of the in-breaking of the heavenly glory. Jesus is the Son of Man because in him the Son of God comes to man." Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17*, The New Testament Library (London: S.C.M. Press, 1968), quotations 9-10, 13; cf. pp. 8-9, 12-13, 27, 73.

Marianne Meye Thompson, in her defence of the Johannine Jesus' humanity, challenges Käsemann's interpretation that a truly human Jesus would need to be compassionate, merciful, kind and exposed to the pain and suffering of the world; Marianne Meye Thompson, *The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988). Instead of these "modern" criteria, Thompson investigates the elements that differentiate human beings from animals on the one hand, and from God, on the other: birth, family, life activities and death. Thompson claims that Jesus fulfils and shares these elements with the rest of humanity, arguing that: "In the language and thought of the Fourth Gospel, these categories correspond to Jesus' human origins and flesh, which together describe his relationship to other human beings and the realities of this material world; his 'signs,' which constitute the focal point of his activity in this world; and the passion narrative, where the end of his life is related." *Ibid.*, 7–8.

heavenly, but also of earthly food and drink. Jesus is present at all meal scenes, during most of which his consumption of food or drink is not mentioned. During the other scenes, he downplays earthly food by rejecting provisions offered to him by his disciples. In one, final exception, he thirsts and then consumes an earthly drink before his death.

If this ambiguous depiction does not sit well with the Gospel's black-and-white treatment of other issues, it nevertheless is an important element of Johannine Christology.⁸⁰⁰ While John 1:14 has been used to argue that Jesus is solely human, as well as the opposite position, namely, that Jesus is solely divine, the ambiguous depiction of corporeal matters in terms of food and drink supports a more nuanced perspective. There is every indication that the logos incarnate maintains his divine nature throughout his sojourn in the world. Nevertheless, unlike other supra-human beings who descend from heaven, Jesus assumes the fundamental corporeality specific to human existence. The one sip of liquid makes it poignantly clear that Jesus is fully, physically human at the moment his of death. The drink of sour wine serves as a literal means of accentuating Jesus' ability to die. It is, in fact, his death that finally and definitively establishes his corporeality. From the moment that he is "made flesh" and dwells among humankind, Jesus has a human body that can be touched (the anointing in Jn 12:3, for example) and he does human things such as walk, talk, and even show emotion (weeping for Lazarus in Jn 11:35, for example). Nevertheless, the full corporeal state only becomes visible at the cross, when Jesus consumes the ὄξος by mouth and dies. Only in death, introduced by a drink handed to him, does Jesus' full corporeality and,

⁸⁰⁰ In many instances, the Gospel uses sharply polarized categories and binary oppositions. Throughout, the Fourth Gospel employs mutually opposing metaphors, which can be divided in two sets: "One set consists of metaphors that describe contrasting states of being, such as light/darkness, life/death, from above/from below, being from God/not from God. The other set comprises contrasting activities, such as believing/not-believing, accepting/not accepting, doing good/doing evil, loving/hating. The first element of each pair is associated with Jesus. The second element of each pair is associated with the forces that oppose and reject Jesus or, more precisely, the claim that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." The Johannine use of "rhetoric of binary" opposition in the Fourth Gospel has been discussed by Reinhartz, *Befriending the Beloved Disciple*, 67.

therefore, full humanity, become visible. It is a state which he retains even after his resurrection, as indicated by his invitation to Thomas to touch his wounds (Jn 20:27).⁸⁰¹

That one and only drink is the paradoxical prerequisite and narrative indication that allows the Johannine Jesus finally to fulfil the will of the one who has sent him.

10.5. Conclusion

The appendix has explored the motif of the abstemious Jesus addressing the question: why does the story never portray Jesus consuming food in its several meal scenes? A comparison to the Synoptics has revealed that the Johannine portrayal is unique among the Gospels. The motif of avoidance of earthly food by supra-humans dwelling on earth, however, is familiar from Jewish literature. Specifically, the parallels between the angel Raphael in Tobit and the Johannine Jesus are intriguing: descent, disguise as human, instructions and rescue, and ascent, with specific commentary on food avoidance.

Jesus' avoidance of food until the moment before his death has raised questions with regard to his humanity. While Jesus takes on human shape with his incarnation, it is the drink on the cross that introduces Jesus' death. The act of drinking and the subsequent death indicate Jesus' full corporeality and humanity and allows him to complete his mission of doing the will of his Father. This full acceptance of his humanity also constitutes a narrative consummation of his fully

⁸⁰¹ But cf. Keener's note on Jn 20:9, where Jesus apparently stops Mary Magdalene from touching him: "In the context, 'touch' probably refers to 'embrace'; it is difficult to envision Mary, under such circumstances, merely poking a suspicious finger at Jesus' arm (cf. 20:25) or grabbing his right hand for an ancient promise of fidelity.... Jesus' prohibition here is a present imperative with μή, which most often would be read as, 'Stop touching me,' or perhaps, 'Stop attempting to touch me,' rather than simply, 'Do not touch me.'" Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1193 with selected references in n. 245. Cf. Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 2:286. For an argument for the traditional interpretation, see David C. Fowler, "Meaning of 'Touch me not' in John 20:17," *EvQ* 47 (1975). See also Adele Reinhartz, "To Love the Lord: An Intertextual Reading of John 20," in *Labour of Reading: Desire, Alienation, and Biblical Interpretation*, eds. Fiona C. Black and Robert C. Culley (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 53–69.

paradoxical nature. On the one hand he dies, which is only possible for a human being; on the other, he has been sent by the Father: he came down from heaven and returned there, and this testifies to his divinity. It is around – and below – this figure, the Jesus Christ who wavers between heavenly and earthly foods, that the Johannine community bonds, and it is also this figure on whom they focus their meals, their stories, and their theological discourse.

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