

2. THE GOSPEL OF JOHN AND ITS ORIGINAL READERS

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INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of John is not an easy text to assign to a specific group of intended readers. Some words are explained in full, which might therefore hint at a group not familiar with Jewish terminology or customs. For example, names and even the theological title Messiah are translated (e.g. Σιλῳάμ in 9:7; Μεσσίας in 1:41, Μεσσίας in 4:25) and certain activities take place ‘according to the custom of the Jews’ (e.g. καθὼς ἔθος ἐστὶν τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις in 19:40; compare also John 2:6). These observations have often been used to argue that the addressees were from a non-Jewish community.¹ Other things from a similar context, however, which might be thought to need an explanation are not explained. This leads to the conclusion that the implied author has an expectation of a model-reader who is familiar with certain terms but not others.² This assumed knowledge

¹ Cf. for example Udo Schnelle, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, 3rd edn. (ThHKNT 4. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2004), p. 8 n. 39, 64.

² On potential readers of John, see Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1-11* (The New American Commentary 25A. Nashville TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), p. 51 and Richard A. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel. A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia PA: Fortress, 1983), p. 212; the latter should be read with Staley’s caution in mind that ‘Culpepper is primarily indebted to Prince, Rabinowitz, and Iser for his description of the “readers” in the Fourth Gospel. But because he does not clarify the differences or overlapping areas of their respective theories, his own discussion of the narratee becomes quite confused.’ (Jeffrey L. Staley, *The Print’s*

has in consequence led to problems in the ancient translations of some passages, where the references were no longer understood. It seems possible to show that even early translators of the Gospel of John were in some cases lacking specific knowledge which the original addressees were assumed to possess. The aim of this research project is therefore to collect those instances where the special knowledge assumed of the intended readers seems to have resulted in inaccuracies or problems in either the Latin or the Coptic tradition of John's Gospel. Furthermore, if it is possible to demonstrate that there are some areas of knowledge which are more prone to be lacking from the translations, this might give additional insight into the question of the original addressees of this narrative, whose identity is still a puzzle.³

THE CURRENT STATE OF RESEARCH

For a long time the addressees of John's Gospel were supposed to have come from a mostly non-Jewish environment. Wellhausen argued forcefully – focussing especially on the occurrence of the Greek word ἀποσυνάγωγος, whose three occurrences in the New Testament are all within this Gospel (John 9:22; 12:42 and 16:2) – that the group which is addressed by the author of the Gospel of John has already fully broken with the synagogue.⁴ In the scholarly literature of the last two decades, a tendency to a new or at least a newly accented interpretation can be observed. The argument found in Wellhausen's publications is taken into consideration by Hengel and Schnelle⁵ who argue that the addressees are

First Kiss. A Rhetorical Investigation of the Implied Reader in the Fourth Gospel. SBLDS 82. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988, p. 43.)

³ Cf. Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*. (Sacra Pagina 4. Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), p. 16.

⁴ Julius Wellhausen, *Evangelienkommentare. Mit einer Einleitung von Martin Hengel*. (Berlin et al.: de Gruyter, 1987), p. 127.

⁵ Schnelle, *Evangelium*, p. 8: 'Beeinflusst und geprägt wurde die überwiegend heidenchristliche Gemeinde des Evangelisten im Verlauf ihrer Geschichte durch die Auseinandersetzung mit Anhängern Johannes d. Täufers, den Juden und doketischen Irrlehrern innerhalb der joh. Schule.' Cf. also *ibid.* 9: 'Zweifellos gab es in der Geschichte der joh. Schule Auseinandersetzungen mit der jüdischen Umwelt, die sich auch in den Texten des Johannesevangeliums als einer Vita Jesu niederschlugen (vgl. z. B. Joh. 5; 9; 16,1–4; 19,38). Bestimmend für die aktuelle Situation der joh. Schule z. Z. der Abfassung des Johannesevangeliums ist diese Auseinandersetzung aber nicht mehr.'

mostly of Hellenistic (i.e. non-Jewish) origin.⁶ These authors, however, dedicate extensive passages to the question of the relationship of the Gospel of John to Judaism. Hengel also brings the old age of the author into consideration, drawing attention to the late date of the composition of this Gospel. His conclusion is that the Johannine community has already distanced itself from the synagogue.⁷

A contrasting argument can be found in the publications of Wengst, who argues that the author of this Gospel focusses on a Jewish audience who found themselves in a minority position compared with other Jews in their immediate environment.⁸ For Wengst, the question of the exclusion from the synagogues, and therefore the use of the Greek word ἀποσυνάγωγος, is a discussion taking place during the composition of the Gospel.⁹ This is directly opposed to the way in which scholars like Schnelle interpret the situation but is, however, supported by Ashton.¹⁰ The fear of the parents of the man born blind (John 9:22) to express an opinion concerning Jesus and his mission is seen by Wengst as exactly the situation in which the addressees of John's Gospel find themselves: were they to confess they would be denied community with their fellow Jews.¹¹ Needless to say, the hypothesis proposed by Wengst attracted criticism. Hengel's critique focusses on the reconstruction of the historical situation in which the Gospel had been composed, and argues that ἀποσυνάγωγος in John 16:2 is a reminiscence of an earlier time when the separation had already taken place.¹² This hypothesis of a strongly Hellenistic environment,

⁶ Martin Hengel, *Die johanneische Frage. Ein Lösungsversuch. Mit einem Beitrag zur Apokalypse von Jörg Frey* (WUNT 67. Tübingen: Mohr, 1993), p. 300; Schnelle, *Evangelium*, pp. 8–9.

⁷ Hengel, *Johanneische Frage*, p. 298: '... daß der Alte Johannes, seine Schule und die sie umgebenden kleinasiatischen Gemeinden sich schon längst von der Synagoge getrennt haben. Die 'Ausstoßung' bzw. Trennung liegt lange zurück, und sie hat sich vermutlich auf unterschiedliche Weise und sukzessive vollzogen.'

⁸ Klaus Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 2nd edn. (ThKNT 4.1. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2004), p. 30.

⁹ Wengst, *Johannesevangelium*, p. 27.

¹⁰ Schnelle, *Evangelium*, pp. 9–10, contrasted with John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*. 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), p. 111.

¹¹ Wengst, *Johannesevangelium*, pp. 26–7.

¹² Hengel, *Johanneische Frage*, pp. 291–3; see also Keith Hopkins, 'Christian Number and its Implications.' *J ECS* 6 (1998) pp. 185–226.

however, made it necessary to ‘reclaim’ the Gospel of John as a text which is deeply rooted in ‘Scripture’ (in this context denoting the Septuagint as well as the Hebrew Bible).¹³ This is one of the reasons why scholars caution against the overinterpretation of the word ἀποσυνάγωγος.¹⁴ One possible solution would be to explain the difficulties (and inconsistencies) throughout the Gospel as evidence for the widely-held hypothesis of an evolution of the Johannine community.¹⁵

In summary, it is obvious that the text of John’s Gospel can be (and has been) used to support different interpretations of the addressees and the historical situation of the time when this Gospel was written. These proposed settings can be mutually exclusive. What is more, no agreement has been reached as to the interpretation of the data. One could even argue that some of the scholars try to pacify both parties in the discussion, which leads to contradictory theories and in consequence to the suggestion that the question is in need of further research.¹⁶

¹³ For the sources of the Gospel, see Ruben Zimmermann, ‘Jesus im Bild Gottes. Anspielungen auf das Alte Testament im Johannesevangelium am Beispiel der Hirtenbildfelder in Joh 10.’ In: Frey and Schnelle (eds), *Kontexte des Johannesevangeliums. Das vierte Evangelium in religions- und traditions-geschichtlicher Perspektive*. (WUNT 175. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), pp. 81–116, especially p. 86: ‘Die konkreten Zitate zeigen, daß Johannes die LXX gekannt hat, aber ebenso ‘eine intime Bekanntschaft mit dem hebräischen Text’ zu erkennen gibt. Er benutzt also die LXX und/oder den MT als Quelle.’

¹⁴ E.g. Philippe Roulet and Ulrich Rugg, ‘Etude de Jean 6. La narration et l’histoire de la redaction’ in Kaestli, Poffet and Zumstein (eds), *La Communauté Johannique et son Histoire. La trajectoire de l’évangile de Jean aux deux premiers siècles*. (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1990), p. 244.

¹⁵ E.g. Raymond E. Brown, *Ringens um die Gemeinde. Der Weg der Kirche nach den Johanneischen Schriften*. (Salzburg: Müller, 1982), p. 22.

¹⁶ One example of such contradiction is Michael Theobald, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes. Kapitel 1-12*. 4th edn. (Regensburger Neues Testament. Regensburg: Pustet, 2009), p. 69, who sees the Gospel of John as ‘Katalysator ... im ungeklärten Trennungsprozess von Kirche und Synagoge, von dem man ja noch nicht wusste, wohin er führen sollte ...’ but states on p. 154 that: ‘Nimmt man die stereotype Rede von Festen der Juden hinzu (2,13; 5,1; 6,4; 7,2; 11, 55; 19,42; vgl. auch 2,4) – in der Regel Wallfahrtsfeste, zu denen viele Juden aus der Diaspora nach Jerusalem kamen –, dann wird die Entgrenzung des Terminus hin zu einer gewöhnlichen Bezeichnung für die Mitglieder der synagogalen Religionsgemeinschaft insgesamt deutlich. Der so gebrauchte Terminus gibt – wie z.B. in 1 Makk, wo er im Mund

THE METHOD: COMBINATION OF TEXTUAL CRITICISM AND COLLOCATION ANALYSIS

The intention of this project is to combine two methods in order to achieve a better understanding of the addressees of John's Gospel. The first method to be used may be called collocation analysis, while the second is textual criticism. In this context, collocation means the occurrence of one sort of term in close proximity to another which might convey specific information.¹⁷ If this information is different from the information conveyed by a term which – on principle – belongs to a similar group and is collocated with different terms in a statistically significant way, this is of importance for the identification of the intended reader of the text since it presupposes a special knowledge in certain areas. In other words, collocations in the Firthian sense, who spoke of 'an order of mutual expectancy', can be interpreted as empirical statements about the predictability of word combinations.¹⁸ Any disruption of this predictability in certain groups of words is therefore highly significant.

EXAMPLE: THE TREATMENT OF JEWISH FEASTS

Different Jewish celebrations are collocated with information concerning time and/or place (e.g. John 2:13; 6:4; 11:55). On the other hand, the names of places – which, by collocation, are part of the information conveyed about the celebrations – are very often translated or explained (e.g. John 5:2 or 19:17). This combination leads to the somewhat contradictory conclusion that the reader seems to be expected to know and to understand how the Jewish liturgical year functions and the meaning and content of the different feasts, but is not expected to understand the meaning of certain

von Nicht-Juden begegnet, während die Juden selbst von Israel sprechen (anders in 2 Makk) – die Außenperspektive wieder (vgl. auch oben S. 66f.).'

¹⁷ See Matthew B. O'Donnell, *Corpus Linguistics & the Greek of the New Testament*. (New Testament Monographs 6. Sheffield: Phoenix, 2005), pp. 331–6; Maria Iliescu, 'Kollokationen in den romanischen Sprachen' in Dietrich, *Lexikalische Semantik und Korpuslinguistik* (Tübingen: Narr, 2006), pp. 189–208.

¹⁸ John R. Firth, 'A Synopsis of Linguistic Theory 1930–1955' in *Studies in Linguistic Analysis*. (Special vol. of the Philological Society. Oxford: Blackwell, 1962) pp. 1–32: 'Collocations of a given word are statements of the habitual or customary places of that word in collocational order but not in any other contextual order and emphatically not in any grammatical order. The collocation of a word or a 'piece' is not to be regarded as a mere juxtaposition, it is an order of mutual expectancy' (pp. 12–13).

Hebrew terms for places (or even persons; e.g. John 1:42). This in principle, would point to a very specific group of readers which knew the Jewish liturgy but not Hebrew.¹⁹ As for the specific feasts mentioned, it is noteworthy that the Dedication of the Temple and Tabernacles only occur in John, whereas Pesach appears in all four Gospels. However, neither the meaning of the names of these feasts nor any indication of the content is given in John, not even for the transliterated Pesach which all three other Gospels implicitly or explicitly explain as the feast of ‘unleavened bread.’²⁰

It seems that the meaning of the feasts mentioned in the Gospel of John was not always grasped by the translators. In John 10:22, the Dedication of the Temple is treated differently in Latin and Sahidic traditions. The Sahidic translates ἑγκαίνια correctly as $\chi\iota\ \lambda\epsilon\iota\kappa$, which may be translated literally as ‘to receive consecration’. This circumlocution is required because a direct equivalent obviously did not exist in Sahidic. The *Vulgate* of the New Testament, which seems to be more literal than the *Vetus Latina*, has a transliteration of this Greek word, as do certain *Vetus Latina* manuscripts.²¹ In contrast to the Sahidic version, the word is here treated as a name.²² The most probable interpretation of this is that the Greek word was not understood by some of the Latin translators. Jerome chooses a transliteration rather than an idiomatic translation, one of the characteristics of his translation of the Gospel of John which Burton would characterise as ‘merely competent’.²³ However, Jerome’s practice could pose problems for those not familiar with the content of the transliterated word

¹⁹ Cf. however, Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (I-XII)*. (Anchor Bible Commentary 29. New York: Doubleday, 1966), p. lxxiv: ‘[I]t is not impossible that the first edition of John was directed to the Palestinian scene and the subsequent edition(s) adapted for an audience living outside Palestine. Nor, since we believe that the Gospel was also directed to Gentiles, is it impossible that some of these explanations were included for Gentile readers.’

²⁰ Matthew 26:17; Mark 14:1 and 12; Luke 22:1 and 7.

²¹ On the literalism of the Vulgate, see Philip Burton, *The Old Latin Gospels. A Study of their Texts and Language*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), p. 192; Rebecca R. Harrison, “Jerome’s Revision of the Gospels.” (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1986), p. 16.

²² Cf. Franz Wutz, *Onomastica Sacra. Untersuchungen zum Liber Interpretationis Nominum Hebraicorum des Hl. Hieronymus. 1. Hälfte Quellen und System der Onomastika*. (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1914), p. 413.

²³ Burton, *Old Latin Gospels*, p. 199.

because they did not possess the same linguistic expertise as Jerome which would have enabled them to understand a Greek word in a Latin text. This impression is strengthened by the fact that there is high variation in the spelling of this ‘name’ (for example *enkennia*, *enchenia*, *incenia*, *inchenia* and so on).²⁴ The Latin word *dedicatio* is, however, the technical term used in the Latin translation of the Old Testament for ἐγκαίνια. This shows that the translators of John had problems with the ‘name’ – or rather with a Greek word which they perceived to be a name. Since the first translations into Latin were probably made in the latter part of the second century, this shows that even by this time the term was not understood by the rather well trained specialists translating the Gospel. The reader, of course, had similar problems with newly created names derived from a foreign language or a new meaning added to a commonly known word. Jerome’s practice of calquing carries with it the risk of mistranslation and/or misunderstanding.²⁵ Some Old Latin manuscripts use *dedicatio* as equivalent of the Greek term, translating in accordance with the Latin version of the Old Testament (cf. also *renouatum est* for ἐνεκαινίσθη at 1 Macc. 4:54).

We may therefore observe that the term used in the Greek text of John 10:22 to denote the feast of the Dedication of the Temple might be one which might require explanation even for a reader of the original. The confusion of the trained second-century Latin translators indicates that this word and its meaning in the given context might not be common knowledge, but rather a special knowledge. However, as no explanation is given, the writer of the Gospel clearly expects the reader to know what he describes. This corresponds to the treatment of Jewish feasts in John in general: an understanding of the feast is presupposed among the intended readers but not knowledge of the geography of the Holy Land or of Hebrew. In addition, the feast is used to locate the time of year at which an event occurred, in this case winter. This appears to contradict the commonly-held opinion concerning John 10:22, that it indicates a community of readers which is not Jewish. Culpepper, for example, comments: ‘A Jewish reader would hardly need to be told when the festival was celebrated, since it occurs at the same time every year.’²⁶ The lack of

²⁴ For the fluctuations of proper nouns, see Harrison, “Jerome’s Revision”, p. 159.

²⁵ On calques (or ‘loan translations’), see Burton, *Old Latin Gospels*, p. 195.

²⁶ Culpepper, *Fourth Gospel*, pp. 220–1.

explanation of the name of the feast, however, suggests that the readers may have been Jewish.

The same conclusion may be drawn from the treatment of the feast of Tabernacles in John 7:2. All Latin and Coptic traditions simply transliterate the Greek term. The Latin translators of the Old Testament used *tabernacula* – the plural of *tabernaculum* – to translate σκηνοπηγία.²⁷ In a similar way, one might suggest that the transliteration in the New Testament of the word for ‘unleavened bread’ (*azymos*) is a further example of this phenomenon. Here, however, there is an important difference in that this is also transliterated in the Latin version of the Old Testament, and the combination *panis azymus* becomes a technical term for unleavened bread.²⁸ A comparable development may be seen in *encenia*, the word used in John 10:22 instead of the Latin term *dedicatio*. By the time of Egeria, this has become a fixed term for the dedication of a church: it seems most likely that she knew this word from her versions of the Bible.²⁹ Church Fathers such as Isidore of Seville and Augustine even explain the word in John from its Greek origins.³⁰

CONCLUSION

The results of this first application of a combination of textual criticism and collocation analysis are promising. The Gospel of John provides less explanation of the Jewish feast Pesach than the other canonical Gospels. At the same time, it mentions more feasts than the other Gospels. The names of these feasts seem already to have been problematic for the translators of

²⁷ See further Wutz, *Onomastica Sacra*, p. 431.

²⁸ See Georgij Avvakumov, *Die Entstehung des Unionsgedankens. Die lateinische Theologie des Hochmittelalters* (Veröffentlichungen des Grabmann-Institutes 47. Berlin: Akademischer Verlag, 2002), p. 35.

²⁹ Egeria, *Itinerarium* 48.1f., 49.1ff. See further Antonius A. R. Bastiaensen, *Observations sur le vocabulaire liturgique dans l'itinéraire d'Égérie*. (Academisch Proefschrift. Nijmegen/Utrecht: Dekker, 1962), pp. 119–121.

³⁰ Isidore of Seville, *De officiis ecclesiasticis* 1.36.1; Augustine, *In evangelium Johannis tractatus* 48.2: *Encaenia festivitas erat dedicationis templi. Graece enim καινὸν dicitur novum. Quandocumque novum aliquid fuerit dedicatum, Encaenia vocantur*. Nonetheless, in the prayer over the dedication of a church the word is also glossed with a Latin explanation: *Praesta quaesumus Domine, ut haec basilica, cuius hodie nunciamus incenia, quae tua dedicatione subsistit solemnis, tua semper fiat habitatione praeclara*. (Benedictio ecclesiae novae; cod. Vindob. theol. 277; PL 138, col. 1040a).

the second and third centuries. Therefore, caution must be adopted in using the mention of these feasts as an indication that the intended readership of the Gospel was not Jewish. It is also possible, if not probable, that the mention of the feasts was intended as a way of measuring time, with the reader being expected to connect the feasts with the different times of the year. This, however, would point to a model-reader quite familiar with Jewish life (or rather with the Jewish structuring of the year) while it seems quite obvious that the reader is not assumed to know the geography of the Holy Land or Jerusalem. At this stage of the research, however, it is not yet possible to propose sound conclusions on the basis of these preliminary results.