

JAMES A. KELHOFFER

The Diet of  
John the Baptist

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen  
zum Neuen Testament*

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**Mohr Siebeck**

# Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

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176





James A. Kelhoffer

# The Diet of John the Baptist

“Locusts and Wild Honey”  
in Synoptic and Patristic Interpretation

Mohr Siebeck

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*almis parentibus:*

*Janet Elsie Kelhoffer*

*Daniel Jay Kelhoffer*



## Acknowledgments

On one stifflingly hot August evening in St. Louis, I was walking the dogs when a large insect buzzed past. The dogs wanted to chase it—whether for amusement or an evening snack (or both), I do not know. The next morning I noticed the same (or at least a very similar) insect lying dead on the ground. I looked closer and saw that it was a locust. My stomach turned as I thought of John the Baptist. “Who would ever want to eat *that*?” I mused.

The question remained with me throughout the day. With syllabi prepared for the coming term but classes not yet in session, I spent a few hours in the library to put an end to the query. Over the next couple of days, I searched several dozen commentaries on Mark and Matthew and monographs on the Baptist. In the secondary literature I read then (and in much I have encountered since), I was dismayed not to find a satisfying answer. I was, in fact, astonished to see the same half-dozen or so references to locusts in Greco-Roman antiquity recycled in one discussion after another without reflection on what such passages reveal about the Baptist’s diet. I thus decided then that an article on John as a locust eater would be part of my research in Fall 2002.

Soon thereafter, my attention was drawn to patristic interpretations of John’s diet, which take on a life of their own in construing John as a non-locust eating ‘vegetarian’ and model of ascetic simplicity. Since a systematic treatment of these assorted interpretations had also not been done, I made a mental note to return to these materials when my work on the historical John was done. Two articles.

As fall slowly gave way to winter, it became apparent to me that two separate examinations of the historical Baptist and the patristic literature would leave certain gaps in the analysis. What to do with the Synoptic tradition, in particular Matthew’s expanding upon Mark’s claim about the Baptist’s diet and, moreover, Luke’s omission of it? Is it conceivable, as Matt 3:4c asserts, that John could have survived on *only* “locusts and wild honey”? During the 2002 SBL Meeting in Toronto, I was encouraged in conversations with potential publishers that a monograph on the subject would be a welcome contribution. It is hoped that the present study accomplishes its purposes of adding to our understanding of the historical Baptist, his presentation in the Synoptic gospels, and early Christian biblical interpretation.

Without the help and encouragement of many people, the timely completion of this study would not have been possible. I would first like to thank Professor Dr. Jörg Frey for encouraging me to publish this work in WUNT, for suggesting that I include a chapter on the Baptist’s “wild honey,” and for



offering constructive feedback on each chapter. Paul A. Patterson was my research assistant in 2002–04 and offered invaluable help on this project from inception to completion. I am also grateful to Clare Komoroske Rothschild and Matthew A. Gilbertson for reading the entire manuscript and offering numerous helpful suggestions. Additionally, Charlotte M. Ridley, a nutritionist on faculty at Saint Louis University, was of great help in suggesting resources pertinent to the analysis of the nutritional aspects of “locusts and wild honey” in chapter 4. A number of other friends and colleagues, including Wendy Love Anderson, Bernhard (Ben) A. Asen, François Bovon, Sebastian Brock, Robert Matthew Calhoun, Phuichun Richard Choi, Ronald W. Crown, Robert I. Curtis, Frederick W. Danker, Rich Garella, Cornelia B. Horn, Brett A. Huebner, F. Stanley Jones, Laura Ann Lewellyn, Clarence H. Miller, Michael G. Morony, William L. Petersen, Jill Rasmussen-Baker, Mark Reasoner, George J. (Jack) Renard and James V. Smith, have also offered suggestions, feedback or assistance with various parts of this work. My thanks are also due to Mary L. Boles and Linda R. Ritter, who have shared their laser printer with me more times than any of us can count.

Portions of this study were presented at meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature, the North American Patristics Society, the Chicago Society of Biblical Research, and the Early Christian Studies Workshop at the University of Chicago; my thanks to those in attendance, whose responses helped sharpen the arguments offered here. Part of chapter 1 appeared in *Currents in Biblical Literature*, and parts of chapters 2 and 3 have been accepted to appear, respectively, in *Dead Sea Discoveries* and *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*; these preliminary studies have been reworked, corrected and augmented for this monograph. I am grateful for the feedback that I received from the editors and blind reviewers of these journals. Once more I am indebted to Ilse König for overseeing the production of my book, and to others at Mohr Siebeck, with whom I am honored to be publishing again. Any remaining errors or infelicities in this work are, of course, my own.

This book is dedicated to my parents, Janet and Daniel Kelhoffer. Their devotion to family and commitment both to each other and to their children’s happiness and dreams are an inspiration to me, and to my sisters and their husbands.

St. Louis, December 2004

James A. Kelhoffer

# Table of Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i> .....	VII
------------------------------	-----

<i>Abbreviations</i> .....	XVII
----------------------------	------

<b>Chapter 1: Introduction and the <i>status quaestionis</i> concerning the Diet of John the Baptist</b> .....	<b>1</b>
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<b>A. Introduction: The Baptist's Diet in Synoptic Tradition</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1. The Problem .....	1
2. "Locusts and Wild Honey" in Mark 1:6 and Matt 3:4 .....	4
3. Other Synoptic Traditions Pertaining to John's Diet .....	7
a) The Question about Fasting (Mark 2:18 par.) .....	7
b) Q/Luke 7:31–35 and Q/Matt 11:16–19: John and Jesus .....	9
c) John the Nazirite (L/Luke 1:15b) in Relation to Q/Luke 7:31–35 and Q/Matt 11:16–19 .....	10
d) Synoptic Traditions Pertaining to John's Diet: The Case against Harmonization .....	10

<b>B. The <i>status quaestionis</i> (<i>si autem est quaestio</i>) concerning John the Baptist's Diet</b> .....	<b>12</b>
1. Preliminary Observations concerning Locusts as Human Food: Erasmus, Wettstein, Bochart, Alford, Zahn, and Strack and Billerbeck .....	13
2. Form Criticism and John as Prophet: Dibelius (and Others) .....	16
3. John as Ascetic: McNeile, Gnilka, Pesch (and Others) .....	17
4. A 'Vegetarian' Historical Baptist? (Pallis, Kieferndorf and Eisler) .....	19
5. 'John within Judaism' as a Wilderness Dweller (Lohmeyer) or an Authoritative Hellenistic Herald (Windisch) .....	21
6. The 'No Significance' Interpretation: Kraeling, Yamasaki and Juel .....	24
7. Marxsen's Alternate Reconstruction of Tradition History .....	26
8. John and the Cuisine at Qumran: Filson, Davies and Charlesworth .....	27
9. John's Diet as a Recognized Problem: Andersen, Scobie, Vielhauer, Boismard and Böcher .....	28
10. John's 'Natural' Food: R. H. Smith, E. F. Lupieri and J. E. Taylor .....	32
11. Ulrich Luz on the History of Interpretation of Matt 3:4 .....	33
12. John's 'Liberationist' Diet? (M. E. Boring, W. Carter and E. LaVerdiere) ..	33
13. Summation .....	34

<i>Chapter 2: Locust/Grasshopper Eating in Ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman Antiquity</i> .....	36
A. Introduction .....	36
B. Prolegomena: What is a ‘Locust’? .....	37
C. From Leviticus to Moses Maimonides: Locust Eating in Jewish Literature and the Ancient Near East .....	40
1. Overview: “Locusts” in the Hebrew Bible .....	40
2. The Prescription in Leviticus 11 .....	43
3. Locust Eating in the Ancient Near East .....	46
4. <i>Are</i> Locusts Permitted? Lev 11:20–23 and Deut 14:19 .....	49
5. The <i>Letter of Aristeas</i> and Philo of Alexandria: Locusts as a Recognized Food in the Egyptian Jewish Diaspora .....	51
6. Conditional Affirmation of Locust Eating in the Dead Sea Scrolls .....	52
7. Locusts in the Mishnah: Like Fish, But Not Quite Fowl .....	54
8. Locust Eating in Later Jewish Literature: Midrashim and Maimonides .....	56
<i>Excursus: Al-Damīrī on Locust Eating and Islam</i> .....	59
9. Summation: Locust Eating in Jewish Literature .....	59
D. <i>Locustae classicae</i> : Depictions of Locust Eaters and Locust Eating in Greco-Roman Antiquity .....	60
1. Early References to Locusts/Grasshoppers .....	62
2. Herodotus: Historian and Ethnographer of Locust Eaters .....	62
3. Aristophanes: The Humor of Grasshopper Eating .....	62
4. Locusts as Bird Food and Fish Bait .....	63
5. Locusts as a Food for Poor People: Alexis and Aesop .....	64
6. Aristotle: Philosopher, Acridologist and Locust Eater .....	65
7. Ethnographic Depictions of Locust Eaters: Diodorus Siculus, Strabo and the Elder Pliny .....	67
a) Diodorus Siculus, Agatharchides and Aristophanes of Byzantium .....	68
b) Strabo: Reworking Traditional Ethnographic Material .....	71
c) Pliny the Elder’s Rendition of This Locust-Eating People .....	72
8. Additional Expressions of Aversion to Locust Eating: Plutarch, Athenaeus, Galen, Dioscorides, Pseudo-Dioscorides, Oribasius, and a Later Fable of Aesop .....	74
a) Plutarch’s Aversion and Dio Chrysostom’s Apology .....	74
b) Athenaeus’s Aversion .....	74
c) The Use of Locusts for Medicinal Purposes (Rather than Regular Human Food): Galen, Dioscorides, Pseudo-Dioscorides and Oribasius ...	75
d) A Later Fable from the <i>Fables of Aesop</i> .....	77
9. Tertullian on the Delight of Marcionite Christians in Locusts as Food .....	77

10. The Witness of Jerome to a Plurality of Sentiments about Locust Eating ....	78
11. Conclusion: Locust Eating during the Classical and Hellenistic Periods, and the Aversion to Locust Eating that Began with the Roman Period .....	79
<b>Chapter 3: The Baptist’s “Wild Honey”</b> .....	81
A. Prolegomena: Defining “Honey” .....	81
B. “Honey” Produced by Bees .....	83
1. Introduction: The Late Arrival of Apiculture in Palestine .....	83
2. Cultivated Bee Honey in the Hebrew Bible? .....	84
3. The Proscription against Bee Eating at Qumran .....	85
4. Philo of Alexandria: Explaining the Uncleaness of Bees .....	86
5. Honeys in Josephus and the Mishnah .....	88
6. The Potential Dangers of Consuming ‘Wild Honey’ .....	88
a) Xenophon and Ps. Aristotle: Hapless Honey .....	89
b) Strabo: “Maddening Honey” .....	89
c) Pliny and Columella: “Maddening Honey” and Third-Rate ‘Wild Honey’ .....	90
7. <i>Is Bee Honey a ‘Food’?</i> .....	92
C. “Honey” Derived from Trees .....	93
1. Plentiful “Wild Honey” in a Pleasing Beverage: Diodorus and Pliny .....	93
2. Early Witnesses to Designating Tree Sap as ‘Honey’ .....	94
3. Additional References to ‘Honey’ from Trees: Euripides, <i>Aristeas</i> , Virgil, <i>Sibylline Oracles</i> 3 and 5, <i>Second Enoch</i> , Aelian and Galen .....	95
D. Conclusion: The Baptist’s “Wild Honey” .....	97
<b>Chapter 4: “Locusts and Wild Honey” in the Synoptic Interpretation: The Historical Baptist, Mark, Matthew (and Luke)</b> .....	100
A. The Historical Baptist’s “Locusts and Wild Honey” .....	100
1. Introduction: Present-Day Locust Eaters .....	101
2. Locust Eating in the Great Basin of North America and Elsewhere in Our World Today .....	101
3. The Collection and Preservation of Locusts .....	104
<i>Excursus: Why Not Eat Locusts Today?</i> .....	107

4. The Nutritional Value of “Locusts and Wild Honey” .....	108
a) Approximating What John Needed to Sustain Life in the Wilderness ...	108
i) Prolegomena .....	109
ii) Estimating John’s Nutritional Needs .....	109
b) The Caloric and Nutrient Contents of “Locusts and Wild Honey” .....	112
i) Locusts and Protein .....	112
ii) ‘Wild Honeys’ and Carbohydrates .....	113
a’) Bee Honey .....	114
b’) Date Honey .....	115
c’) Fig Honey .....	116
d’) Honey-Water .....	116
e’) Conclusion: ‘Wild Honeys’ and Carbohydrates .....	116
iii) The Risk of Scurvy: Vitamins and Minerals in “Locusts and Wild Honey” .....	117
c) Summation: John’s Diet in Light of Empirical Data on Human Nutrition .....	117
5. The Historical Baptist’s Likely Response to His Commemoration in Mark 1:6  Matt 3:4c .....	118
<b>B. John as Wilderness Herald: Mark 1:6c .....</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>C. John as a Bonafide Wilderness Survivor: Matt 3:4c .....</b>	<b>124</b>
1. From Mark’s Wilderness Confirmation to Matthew’s (and Luke’s) Wilderness Assumption(s) .....	124
2. Matt 3:4c and Reports of Other Judean Wilderness Survivors .....	125
a) The Survival of Judas Maccabeus and Others in the Wilderness .....	125
b) The Survival of “Isaiah” and Other Prophets in the Wilderness .....	126
c) Bannus’s Natural Wilderness Clothing and Food .....	126
3. Conclusion: Why Matthew Thus Edited Mark 1:6c .....	127
<b>D. Luke’s Omission of Mark 1:6: The Baptist, Jesus and Elijah .....</b>	<b>129</b>
1. The Return of Elijah: John or Jesus? .....	129
2. An Explanation for Luke’s Omission of Mark 1:6 .....	130
<b>E. Summation: ΑΚΡΙΑΔΕΣ ΚΑΙ ΜΕΛΙ ΑΓΡΙΟΝ in Synoptic     Interpretation .....</b>	<b>132</b>
 <i>Chapter 5: John’s Diet as ‘Vegetarian’ and a Model of     Asceticism: ‘Locusts,’ Wild Honey and the <i>imitatio Iohannis</i>     in Patristic and Subsequent Christian Interpretation .....</i>	 <i>134</i>
<b>A. Models of Interpretation .....</b>	<b>135</b>
1. Overview .....	135
2. Complementary Tendencies .....	136

B. Early Interpretations of the Baptist's Diet .....	137
1. Justin Martyr: A Matthean Characterization of John's Diet .....	137
2. The 'Vegetarian' Depiction of John's Diet in the <i>Gospel of the Ebionites</i> ..	139
C. Tatian's <i>Diatessaron</i> : An Additional Second-Century 'Vegetarian' Depiction of the Baptist's Diet? .....	141
1. Īšo'dād of Merv's Witness to the <i>Diatessaron</i> ("Honey and Milk") .....	141
2. Bar-Ṣalibi's Witness to the <i>Diatessaron</i> ("Milk and Honey") .....	142
3. Bar-Hebraeus's and Ibn at-Ṭayyib's Witnesses to the <i>Diatessaron</i> ("Milk and Honey") .....	143
4. Analysis: The <i>Diatessaron</i> and the Baptist's "Milk" .....	144
a) Analogous Characterizations of Meat Eating as Evil: Aratus and Tatian ..	145
b) Did the <i>Diatessaron</i> Originally Attribute to John a Diet of "Honey and Milk"? .....	147
D. Figurative and Allegorical Interpretations of John's Diet .....	148
1. Origen: The Distinctiveness of John's Diet and Its Meaning .....	149
2. Other Figurative Interpretations of John's Diet: Cyril of Jerusalem, Hilary of Poitiers, Arnobius the Younger and Peter Chrysologus .....	150
3. Analysis: Unity and Diversity among Figurative Interpretations .....	152
E. Eastern Witnesses to John's Diet as a Model for Others .....	153
1. Clement of Alexandria: John's Temperance Prepares the Way for Jesus' Followers .....	153
2. Methodius of Olympus: John's Purity and Distinction "among Those Born of Women" .....	154
3. Cyril of Alexandria: John as Prophet Calling Others to Repentance .....	155
4. Gregory Nazianzen: Following Elijah and John into the Wilderness .....	157
5. Basil of Caesarea: Summoning a Plethora of Biblical and Early Christian Precedents for Wilderness Habitation .....	158
6. Gregory of Nyssa: Following the Example of "Paul's" Hermeneutics .....	160
7. Didymus the Blind: Identifying the Baptist in Psalm 28 (LXX) .....	161
8. John Chrysostom: Linking the Baptist's Diet to Eschatology and Virginity ...	162
9. The Variety of Interpretations Attributed to Pseudo-Chrysostom(s) .....	164
10. Hesychius of Jerusalem: The Simplicity of Eating Raw Locusts .....	165
F. Western Witnesses to John's Diet as a Model for Others .....	165
1. Ambrose of Milan and Chromatius of Aquileia .....	166
2. Augustine: The Potential Temptation of Yearning to Eat Meat .....	167
3. Jerome's Witness to Those Who Imitated John and Instructions to Others Who Should .....	168

G. ‘Vegetarian’ Interpretations of John’s ‘Locusts’ .....	171
1. Athanasius of Alexandria: A Proof-text for (Re)interpreting ΑΚΡΙΣ .....	172
2. Isidore of Pelusium: Imitating the ‘Vegetarian’ John .....	173
3. The Baptist’s ‘Vegetarian’ Diet in Syriac Christianity .....	174
4. The Possible Syriac Roots of “Roots” in Slavonic Josephus .....	176
5. Disparate Interpretations in Theophylactus of Ochrida’s Commentaries on Matthew and Mark .....	177
6. Euthymius Zigabenus: A Debate Decided in Favor of a ‘Vegetarian’ Interpretation of John’s ‘Locusts’ .....	178
<i>Excursus</i> : From Elijah’s Angelic Visitor to John’s Eucharistic Provision: The Vision of Mechthild of Magdeburg .....	179
7. Meletios Pigas: The Wilderness Habitation and ‘Vegetarian’ Diet of Silvestros, a Sixteenth-Century Patriarch of Alexandria .....	180
8. Alexis, Origen and J.-P. Migne: Emendations of Classical and Patristic Texts Mentioning “Locusts” .....	181
H. Why a ‘Vegetarian’ Baptist, a Model of Asceticism, or Both? ΠΑΙΔΕΙΑ and Early Christian Biblical Interpretation .....	183
I. Later Reactions and Protests to Construing John as ‘Vegetarian’ or an Exemplar .....	186
1. John Calvin: The Baptist’s Natural, Non-ascetic Food .....	187
2. Affirming that John Ate Actual Locusts/Grasshoppers: Bochart and Browne .....	188
J. The Tenacity of ‘Vegetarian’ Interpretations: Alexander Ross and Ellen Gould Harmon White .....	189
K. Summation: The Baptist’s “Locusts and Wild Honey” in Patristic and Later Interpretation .....	191
 Epilogue: “Locusts and Wild Honey” in Retrospect: ΠΑΙΔΕΙΑ and Early Christian Biblical Interpretation .....	195
A. Summation of Chapters 1–5 .....	195
B. Methodological Observations: Implications of the Present Inquiry for New Testament and Early Christian Studies .....	199
1. The Ongoing Need for Philological Refinement .....	199
2. Argument and Elucidation .....	200
3. Method and Eclecticism .....	200

<b>C. Avenues for Future Inquiry</b> .....	201
1. The Historical Baptist and the Historical Jesus .....	201
2. John the Baptist in Patristic Interpretation .....	202
3. Scripture Construed as a Source of Early Christian ΠΑΙΔΕΙΑ .....	203
4. Food, Culture and Theology .....	204
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	207
<b>Indices</b> .....	235





## Abbreviations and References

The Greek New Testament is cited from *Novum Testamentum Graece*, the Nestle-Aland 27<sup>th</sup> Edition. Abbreviations used in this work correspond to those listed in *The SBL Handbook of Style* (1999); the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (<sup>3</sup>1996); Liddell, Scott, Jones, McKenzie, *A Greek-English Lexicon*; and G. W. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, and include the following:

1 Clem.	1 Clement
1 En.	1 Enoch
2 En.	2 Enoch
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	D. N. Freedman (ed.), <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
AbrN	<i>Abr-Nahrain</i>
ACNT	Augsburg Commentaries on the New Testament
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
Ael., NA	Aelian, <i>De natura animalium</i> ( <i>On the Characteristics of Animals</i> )
Ael., VH	Aelian, <i>Varia historia</i> ( <i>Miscellany</i> )
Aesch.	Aeschylus
Agathar., <i>De mar. Eryth.</i>	Agatharchides of Cnidus, <i>De maris Erythraei</i> ( <i>On the Erythraean [Mediterranean] Sea</i> )
AJP	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
AJT	<i>American Journal of Theology</i>
AnBib	Analecta biblica
ANF	Ante-Nicene Fathers
AnOr	Analecta orientalia
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
Apocrypha	<i>Apocrypha: Revue internationale des littératures apocryphes/ International Journal of Apocryphal Literatures</i>
Apul., <i>Met.</i>	Apuleius, <i>Metamorphoses</i>
Ar., <i>Ach.</i>	Aristophanes, <i>Acharnenses</i> ( <i>Acharnians</i> )
Ar. Byz.	Aristophanes of Byzantium
Aratus, <i>Phaen.</i>	Aratus Solensis, <i>Phaenomena</i>
Arist., <i>Aud.</i>	Aristotle, <i>De audibilibus</i> ( <i>On Things Heard</i> )
Arist., <i>GA</i>	Aristotle, <i>De generatione animalium</i> ( <i>On the Generation of Animals</i> )
Arist., <i>HA</i>	Aristotle, <i>Historia animalium</i> ( <i>History of Animals</i> )
Arist., <i>PA</i>	Aristotle, <i>De partibus animalium</i> ( <i>On the Parts of Animals</i> )
As. Mos.	<i>Assumption of Moses</i>
Asen.	<i>Joseph and Aseneth</i>
ASTI	<i>Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute</i>
Ath., <i>Deip.</i>	Athenaeus, <i>Deipnosophistae</i> ( <i>The Learned Banquet</i> )

<i>AThR</i>	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
August., <i>Conf.</i>	Augustine, <i>Confessiones</i> ( <i>Confessions</i> )
August., <i>De cons. evang.</i>	Augustine, <i>De consensu evangelistarum</i> ( <i>On the Harmony of the Gospels</i> )
b.	born
<i>b.</i>	Babylonian Talmud
<i>BA</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BDAG	W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (32000)
BDF	F. Blass, A. Debrunner and R. W. Funk, <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i>
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum lovaniensium
BHT	Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</i>
BMI	Body Mass Index (= kg/m <sup>2</sup> )
<i>BN</i>	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
<i>BR</i>	<i>Biblical Research</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca sacra</i>
<i>BT</i>	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
BWA(N)T	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten (und Neuen) Testament
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche
c.	century
<i>c.</i>	<i>circa</i> (approximately)
<i>CAD</i>	I. J. Gelb et al. (eds.), <i>Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
CD	Damascus Document
CGTC	Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary
CGTSC	Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges
<i>CH</i>	<i>Church History</i>
Clem., <i>Paed.</i>	Clement of Alexandria, <i>Paedagogus</i>
Clem., <i>Str.</i>	Clement of Alexandria, <i>Stromateis</i>
CMG	Corpus medicorum Graecorum
CNT	Commentaire du Nouveau Testament
ConBNT	Coniectanea biblica: New Testament Series
<i>CQ</i>	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
CSEL	Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum
<i>CurTM</i>	<i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i>

d.	died
DDD	K. van der Toorn et al. (eds.), <i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i>
Din.	Dinarchus
Dio Chrys., <i>Or.</i>	Dio Chrysostom, <i>Orationes (Discourses)</i>
Diod. Sic.	Diodorus Siculus
Diss.	Dissertation (unpublished)
DNP	H. Cancik and H. Schneider (eds.), <i>Der Neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike</i>
DUJ	<i>Durham University Journal</i>
ÉBib	Études bibliques
EKKNT	Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>Ep(p).</i>	<i>Epistula(e) (Letter[s])</i>
Epiph.	Epiphanius
<i>EpRev</i>	<i>Epworth Review</i>
<i>EstBib</i>	<i>Estudios biblicos</i>
ET	English translation
ETR	<i>Etudes théologiques et religieuses</i>
ETS	Erfurter theologische Studien
Eur., <i>Bacch.</i>	Euripides, <i>Bacchae</i>
Euseb., <i>Demonstr. evang.</i>	Eusebius of Caesarea, <i>Demonstratio evangelica (The Proof of the Gospel)</i>
Euseb., <i>Hist. eccl.</i>	Eusebius of Caesarea, <i>Historia ecclesiastica (Church History)</i>
Euseb., <i>Praep. evang.</i>	Eusebius of Caesarea, <i>Praeparatio evangelica (Preparation for the Gospel)</i>
<i>EVie</i>	<i>Esprit et Vie</i>
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
FC	Fathers of the Church
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
FS	Festschrift
Gal., <i>De alim. fac.</i>	Galen, <i>De alimentorum facultatibus (On the Properties of Foodstuffs)</i>
Gal., <i>De loc. aff.</i>	Galen, <i>De locis affectis (On the Affected Parts)</i>
Gal., <i>De simp. med. temp.</i>	Galen, <i>De simplicium medicamentorum temperamentis ac facultatibus (On Temperaments)</i>
Gal., <i>In Hipp. aph.</i>	Galen, <i>In Hippocratis aphorismos (On Hippocrates's Aphorisms)</i>
Gal., <i>Nat. fac.</i>	Galen, <i>De naturalibus facultatibus (On the Natural Faculties)</i>
Gal., <i>UP</i>	Galen, <i>De usu partium (On the Usefulness of the Parts [of the Body])</i>
GCS	Die griechische christliche Schriftsteller der ersten [drei] Jahrhunderte
Gk.	Greek
<i>Gos. Bart.</i>	<i>Gospel of Bartholomew</i>

<i>Gos. Eb.</i>	<i>Gospel of the Ebionites</i>
<i>Gos. Nic.</i>	<i>Gospel of Nicodemus</i>
<i>Greg</i>	<i>Gregorianum</i>
<i>Haer.</i>	<i>Adversus haereses (Against Heresies)</i>
<i>Heb.</i>	Hebrew
<i>Heph.</i>	Hephaestion
<i>Herod.</i>	Herodotus
<i>HeyJ</i>	<i>Heythrop Journal: A Quarterly Review of Philosophy and Theology</i>
<i>Hippol., Ref.</i>	Hippolytus of Rome, <i>Refutatio omnium haeresium (Refutation of All Heresies)</i>
<i>HNT</i>	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
<i>HNTC</i>	Harper's New Testament Commentaries
<i>Hom., Il.</i>	Homer, <i>Iliad</i>
<i>Hom., Od.</i>	Homer, <i>Odyssey</i>
<i>HSem</i>	Horae Semiticae
<i>HTKNT</i>	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUT</i>	Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie
<i>IBC</i>	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
<i>ICC</i>	International Critical Commentary
<i>IDB</i>	G. A. Buttrick (ed.), <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>ISBE</i>	G. W. Bromiley (ed.), <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>
<i>ITQ</i>	<i>Irish Theological Quarterly</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JECS</i>	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
<i>Jer., Adv. Iovin.</i>	Jerome, <i>Adversus Iovinianum (Against Jovinian)</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>Jos., Ant.</i>	Josephus, <i>Antiquitates Judaicae (Jewish Antiquities)</i>
<i>Jos., B.J.</i>	Josephus, <i>Bellum judaicum (Jewish War)</i>
<i>Jos., Vita</i>	Josephus, <i>Vita (The Life)</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JSNTSup</i>	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
<i>JSSSup</i>	Journal of Semitic Studies: Supplement Series
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>Jub.</i>	<i>Jubilees</i>
<i>Justin, Dial.</i>	Justin Martyr, <i>Dialogus cum Tryphone (Dialogue with Trypho)</i>
<i>Lampe</i>	G. W. Lampe, <i>A Patristic Greek Lexicon</i>
<i>Lat.</i>	Latin

LCC	J. Baille et al. (eds.), Library of Christian Classics
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
<i>Let. Aris.</i>	<i>Letter of Aristeas</i>
LSJ	Liddell, Scott, Jones and McKenzie, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i>
Lyd., <i>Ost.</i>	Joannes Laurentius Lydus, <i>De ostentis et calendaria graeca</i> ( <i>On Portents and the Greek Calendar</i> )
<i>m.</i>	Mishnah
<i>Mart. Ascen. Isa.</i>	<i>Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah</i>
MS(S)	manuscript(s)
NAC	New American Commentary
NAS	National Academy of Sciences
NCB	New Century Bible
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
<i>NHL</i>	J. M. Robinson (ed.), <i>The Nag Hammadi Library</i> , Revised Edition
NHS	Nag Hammadi Studies
<i>Nic., Ther.</i>	Nicander, <i>Theriaca</i>
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum, Supplements
NPNF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
NTAbh	Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen
<i>NTApo</i>	W. Schneemelcher (ed.), <i>New Testament Apocrypha</i> , Revised Edition
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i> OCD</i>	Hornblower and Spawforth (eds.), <i>Oxford Classical Dictionary</i> ( <sup>3</sup> 1996)
OECT	Oxford Early Christian Texts
<i>Or.</i>	<i>Oratio</i> ( <i>Oration</i> )
<i>Or., Mat. Cat.</i>	Origen, <i>Catenis in Matthaeum</i> ( <i>Catenas on Matthew</i> )
<i>Or., Luc. Hom.</i>	Origen, <i>In Lucam homiliae</i> ( <i>Homilies on Luke</i> )
<i>OrChr</i>	<i>Oriens christianus</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>OTP</i>	J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), <i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i>
Palladius, <i>De vet. med.</i>	Palladius, <i>De veterinaria medicina de insitione</i> ( <i>On the Veterinary Medicine of Grafting</i> )
<i>PG</i>	J. Migne (ed.), <i>Patrologia graeca</i>
Philo, <i>Det.</i>	Philo, <i>Quod deterius potiori insidari soleat</i> ( <i>That the Worse Attacks the Better</i> )
Philo, <i>Fug.</i>	Philo, <i>De fuga et inventione</i> ( <i>On Flight and Finding</i> )
Philo, <i>Leg.</i>	Philo, <i>Legum allegoriae</i> ( <i>Allegorical Interpretation</i> )
Philo, <i>Opif.</i>	Philo, <i>De opificio mundi</i> ( <i>On the Creation of the World</i> )
Philo, <i>Praem.</i>	Philo, <i>De praemiis et poenis</i> ( <i>On Rewards and Punishments</i> )

Philo, <i>Spec.</i>	Philo, <i>De specialibus legibus (On the Special Laws)</i>
Philostr., <i>VA</i>	Philostratus, <i>Vita Apollonii (Life of Apollonius)</i>
<i>PL</i>	J. Migne (ed.), <i>Patrologia latina</i>
Pl., <i>Phdr.</i>	Plato, <i>Phaedrus</i>
Pl., <i>Ti.</i>	Plato, <i>Timaeus</i>
Plin. (E), <i>HN</i>	Pliny (the Elder), <i>Naturalis historia (Natural History)</i>
Plut., <i>Amat.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Amatorius (Dialogue on Love)</i>
Plut., <i>De soll. an.</i>	Plutarch, <i>De sollertia animalium (On the Cleverness of Animals)</i>
Plut., <i>Quaest. conv.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Quaestiones convivales (Table Talk)</i>
Plut., <i>Sulla</i>	Plutarch, <i>Sulla</i>
PO	Patrologia orientalis
Porph., <i>De antr. nymph.</i>	Porphyry, <i>De antro nympharum (On the Cave of the Nymphs)</i>
<i>Prot. Jas.</i>	<i>Protevangelium of James</i>
Ps. Arist., <i>Mir. ausc.</i>	Ps.-Aristotle, <i>De mirabilibus auscultationibus (On Marvellous Things Heard)</i>
PW	Pauly-Wissowa, <i>Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertums-wissenschaft</i>
<i>RAC</i>	T. Klauser (ed.), <i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>Rust.</i>	<i>De re rustica (On Agriculture)</i>
SANT	Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testaments
SBB	Stuttgarter biblische Beiträge
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SC	Sources chrétiennes
<i>ScoJIT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
Sen. (Y)	Seneca (the Younger)
<i>Sib. Or.</i>	<i>Sibylline Oracles</i>
<i>SIDIC</i>	<i>SIDIC (Journal of the Service internationale de documentation judéo-chrétienne)</i>
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
SL	The Scribner Library
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SNTSU	Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt
Soph.	Sophocles
SP	Sacra pagina
SPCK	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
<i>ST</i>	<i>Studia Theologica</i>
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
<i>StPatr</i>	<i>Studia patristica</i>
StudBT	Studia Biblica et Theologica
Tatian, <i>Or.</i>	Tatian, <i>Oratio ad Graecos (Oration to the Greeks)</i>
TB	Theologische Bücherei: Neudrucke und Berichte aus dem 20. Jahrhundert
<i>TBI</i>	<i>Theologische Blätter</i>

TDNT	G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (eds.), <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
Tert., <i>Adv. Marc.</i>	Tertullian, <i>Adversus Marcionem (Against Marcion)</i>
Theoc., <i>Id.</i>	Theocritus, <i>Idylls</i>
Theophr., <i>Sens.</i>	Theophrastus, <i>De sensibus (On the Senses)</i>
TLZ	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i>
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TPI	Trinity Press International
TPINTC	Trinity Press International New Testament Commentaries
TSK	<i>Theologische Studien und Kritiken</i>
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
TZ	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
UF	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
VC	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
VCSup	Supplements to <i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
VD	<i>Verbum domini</i>
Verg., <i>Ecl.</i>	Virgil, <i>Eclogues</i>
Verg., <i>Georg.</i>	Virgil, <i>Georgics</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	<i>Vetus Testamentum Supplements</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WC	Westminster Commentaries
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
Xen., <i>An.</i>	Xenophon, <i>Anabasis</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZDPV	<i>Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>
ZKG	<i>Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>





## Chapter 1

# Introduction and the *status quaestionis* concerning the Diet of John the Baptist

“Insects are an important element in human diet in many parts of the world, but they have long been taboo in European civilizations.”<sup>1</sup>

### A. Introduction: The Baptist’s Diet in Synoptic Tradition

#### 1. *The Problem*

Why do two NT authors present John the Baptist as eating “locusts and wild honey” (ἀκρίδες καὶ μέλι ἄγριον, Mark 1:6c||Matt 3:4c)? Satisfactory explanations for this attribution with regard to the historical Baptist, the author of Mark and the author of Matthew have yet to be given. The present study seeks an answer not only for the historical John and the Synoptic tradition, but also for the patristic literature, much of which reflects a fascination with John’s diet, as well as the desire to emulate John as an example of simplicity.

Much scholarly attention has been devoted in the modern period to four actions attributed to John the Baptist in the NT gospels—most famously, his baptizing in the Jordan River, but also his preaching a message of repentance, having disciples and wearing clothing made of camel’s hair. Considerably less consideration has been devoted to the peculiarities of another deed credited to John, namely his eating “locusts and wild honey” (Mark 1:6c||Matt 3:4c). John’s diet has been largely or completely overlooked in many fine monographs<sup>2</sup> and articles<sup>3</sup> on the Baptist, as well as in commentaries on Mark

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<sup>1</sup> Marston Bates, “Insects in the Diet,” *American Scholar* 29 (1959–60): 43–52; here, 43.

<sup>2</sup> Any number of studies of John or exegetical analyses of the Markan or Matthean passages, including the following monographs, have little or nothing to say on this issue: Knut Backhaus, *Die “Jüngerkreise” des Täufers Johannes: Eine Studie zu den religionsgeschichtlichen Ursprüngen des Christentums* (Paderborner Theologische Studien 19; Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1991); Jean Daniélou, *The Work of John the Baptist* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966); Carl R. Kazmierski, *John the Baptist: Prophet and Evangelist. Metaphor and Social Context in Matthew’s Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996); Marcus L. Loane, *John the Baptist as Witness and Martyr* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969); Heinrich

1:6 and Matt 3:4.<sup>4</sup> Given this omission in so many prominent studies, it is understandable not to find mention of John's diet in reviews of scholarship on

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Peter, *Johannes der Täufer in der urchristlichen Überlieferung* (Marburg: H. Bauer, 1911), 11–14, 60–7; Adolf Schlatter, *Johannes der Täufer* (ed. W. Michaelis; Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt, 1956); Roland Schütz, *Johannes der Täufer* (ATANT 50; Zurich/Stuttgart: Zwingli, 1967), 28–30, 40–5; Jean Steinmann, *Saint John the Baptist and the Desert Tradition* (New York: Harper, 1958); Robert L. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet: A Socio-Historical Study* (JSNTSup 62; Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), 51–2; cf. Michael Hartmann, *Der Tod Johannes des Täufers: Eine exegetische und rezeptionsgeschichtliche Studie auf dem Hintergrund narrativer, intertextueller und kulturanthropologischer Zugänge* (SBB 45; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2001); Christoph Gregor Müller, *Mehr als ein Prophet: Die Charakterzeichnung Johannes des Täufers im lukanischen Erzählwerk* (Herders biblische Studien 31; Freiburg: Herder, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> For example, Ernst Bammel, "John the Baptist in Early Christian Tradition," *NTS* 18 (1971–72): 95–128; Colin Brown, "What Was John the Baptist Doing?" *BBR* 7 (1997): 37–50; Knox Chamblin, "Gospel and Judgment in the Preaching of John the Baptist," *TynBul* 13 (1963): 7–15; idem, "John the Baptist and the Kingdom of God," *TynBul* 15 (1964): 10–16; Michael Cleary, "The Baptist of History and Kerygma," *ITQ* 54 (1988): 211–27; Anthony C. Deane, "The Ministry of John the Baptist," *The Expositor* 8 (1917): 420–31; Eberhard W. Güting, "The Relevance of Literary Criticism for the Text of the New Testament: A Study of Mark's Traditions on John the Baptist," in: *Studies in the Early Text of the Gospels and Acts: The Papers of the First Birmingham Colloquium on the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (ed. D. G. K. Taylor; Text-critical Studies 1; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 142–67; Paul W. Hollenbach, "Social Aspects of John the Baptizer's Preaching Mission in the Context of Palestinian Judaism," *ANRW* 2/19/1 (1979): 850–75; idem, "John the Baptist," art. *ABD*, 3.887–99; Archie W. D. Hui, "John the Baptist and Spirit-Baptism," *EvQ* 71 (1999): 99–115; S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., "The Message of John the Baptist," *BSac* 113 (1956): 30–6; James L. Jones, "References to John the Baptist in the Gospel according to St. Matthew," *ATHr* 41 (1959): 298–302; Edgar Krentz, "None Greater among Those Born from Women: John the Baptist in the Gospel of Matthew," *CurtTM* 10 (1983): 333–8; Jan Lambrecht, "John the Baptist and Jesus in Mark 1.1–15: Markan Redaction of Q?" *NTS* 38 (1992): 357–84; John P. Meier, "John the Baptist in Matthew's Gospel," *JBL* 99 (1980): 383–405 (but see idem, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* [Vol. 2: *Mentor, Message and Miracles*; New York: Doubleday, 1991], 2.46–9); J. Ramsey Michaels, "Paul and John the Baptist: An Odd Couple?" *TynBul* 42 (1991): 245–60; John W. Pryor, "John the Baptist and Jesus: Tradition and Text in John 3.25," *JSNT* 66 (1997): 15–26; John A. T. Robinson, "The Baptism of John and the Qumran Community," reprinted in: idem, *Twelve New Testament Studies* (SBT 34; Naperville, IL: A. R. Allenson, 1962), 11–27; cf. 28–52, 61–6; D. Brent Sandy, "John the Baptist's 'Lamb of God' Affirmation in Its Canonical and Apocalyptic Milieu," *JETS* 34 (1991): 447–59; A. H. Snyman, "Analysis of Mt 3.1–4.22," *Neot* 11 (1977): 19–31; Wolfgang Trilling, "Die Täufertradition bei Matthäus," *BZ* 3 (1959): 271–89; Jeffrey A. Trumbower, "The Role of Malachi in the Career of John the Baptist," in: *Gospels and the Scriptures of Israel* (eds. C. A. Evans and W. R. Stegner; JSNTSup 104; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 28–41; Christian Wolff, "Zur Bedeutung Johannes des Täufers im Markus-evangelium," *TLZ* 102 (1977): 857–65.

<sup>4</sup> The following commentaries on Mark 1:6 have little or nothing to say about John's diet of "locusts and wild honey": Paul J. Achtemeier, *Invitation to Mark: A Commentary* (Doubleday NT Commentary Series; Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1978), 34–5; idem,

the Baptist.<sup>5</sup> The same omission is evident in an important study of the Baptist in (mostly Western) art through the centuries.<sup>6</sup> The disinterest of so many

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*Mark* (Proclamation Commentaries; Philadelphia: Fortress, <sup>2</sup>1986); Edwin K. Broadhead, *Mark* (Readings: A New Biblical Commentary; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 21–3; Larry W. Hurtado, *Mark* (New International Biblical Commentary; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 16–18; August Klostermann, *Das Markusevangelium nach seinem Quellenwerthe für die evangelische Geschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1867), 22–3; Paul Lamarche, *Évangile de Marc: Commentaire* (ÉBib n.s. 33; Paris: Gabalda, 1996), 38–9; Dennis E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St. Mark* (Pelican Gospel Commentaries; New York: Seabury, 1968 [1963]), 61; Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker, <sup>2</sup>1966), 156; C. H. Turner, *The Gospel according to St. Mark: Introduction and Commentary* (London: SPCK, 1928), 12; Julius Wellhausen, *Das Evangelium Marci* (Berlin: G. Reimer, <sup>2</sup>1909), 4–5; Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 73. Similarly, concerning the relative lack of attention given to John's diet in commentaries on Matthew: James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Vol. 1: *The King and His Kingdom: Matthew 1–17*; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 49; Margaret Davies, *Matthew* (Readings: A New Biblical Commentary; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 41–2; David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the First Gospel* (Reading the NT; New York: Crossroad, 1993), 33; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1993), 1.48–9; Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox, 1993), 18–20 (but see idem, *Mark* [Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996], 15); Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* (SP 1; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 51; Albert Kirk and Robert E. Obach, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (New York: Paulist, 1978), 37–9; Daniel Patte, *The Gospel according to Matthew: A Structural Commentary on Matthew's Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 48; Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975), 46–7; Donald Senior, *Matthew* (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 52–4.

<sup>5</sup> E.g., Gösta Lindeskog, "Johannes der Täufer: Einige Randbemerkungen zum heutigen Stand der Forschung," *ASTI* 12 (1983): 55–83; Jerome Murphy O'Connor, "John the Baptist and Jesus: History and Hypotheses," *NTS* 36 (1990): 359–74; John Reumann, "The Quest for the Historical Baptist," in: *Understanding the Sacred Text* (ed. J. Reumann; Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1972), 181–99. Given that Mark 1:6c||Matt 3:4c has been overlooked by such a great number of exegetes, it is perhaps not surprising that ὀκρίϛ was not deemed to be of sufficient theological significance to merit inclusion in G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76). There is also no entry for "locust" in the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (ed. Joel B. Green et al.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> Alexandre Masseron's study, *Saint Jean Baptiste dans l'art* (Paris: Arthaud, 1957), Figures 4, 12, 15, 16, 56, 60, etc., contains any number of paintings and statues of John's hairy clothing, but none of his 'locusts' or 'wild honey.' This does not detract from the importance of Masseron's work, however. As is discussed in chapters 2 and 5, the common omission among artists is perhaps not surprising, because this diet was unremarkable in an ancient Near Eastern context and perceived as either extravagant or unpalatable by so many Christian interpreters through the centuries. Additionally, more recent studies highlight the scarcity of artistic depictions of Mark 1:6c||Matt 3:4c: Friedrich-August von Metzsch, *Johannes der Täufer: Seine Geschichte und seine Darstellung in der Kunst* (Munich: Callwey, 1989), 102, fig. 93; cf. 189; E. Weis, "Johannes der Täufer (Baptista), der Vorläufer

fine scholars in John's food does not, of course, dismiss the value of their studies. It does, however, show that Mark 1:6c||Matt 3:4c is a commonly overlooked biblical passage.

Various passages in the NT gospels offer additional anecdotes about the diet of John the Baptist.<sup>7</sup> This monograph focuses in particular on Mark 1:6c||Matt 3:4c, according to which John's food regularly included (ἦν ὁ Ἰωάννης . . . ἐσθίων, Mark 1:6) or was comprised of (ἡ δὲ τροφή ἦν αὐτοῦ, Matt 3:4) "locusts and wild honey." The remainder of this chapter surveys these assorted Synoptic passages on John's food before reviewing the secondary literature on Mark 1:6c||Matt 3:4c.

## 2. "Locusts and Wild Honey" in Mark 1:6 and Matt 3:4

As already mentioned, Mark 1:6 and Matt 3:4 present John in peculiar clothing and eating a particular diet of "locusts and wild honey."

Mark 1:6	Matt 3:4
καὶ ἦν ὁ Ἰωάννης ἐνδεδυμένος τρίχας καμήλου καὶ ζώνην δερματίνην περὶ τὴν ὀσφῦν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐσθίων ἄκριδας καὶ μέλι ἄγριον.	αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ Ἰωάννης εἶχεν τὸ ἔνδυμα αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τριχῶν καμήλου καὶ ζώνην δερματίνην περὶ τὴν ὀσφῦν αὐτοῦ, ἡ δὲ τροφή ἦν αὐτοῦ ἄκριδες καὶ μέλι ἄγριον.

John's *clothing* is readily understood as an allusion by Mark (or his source) to the OT prophet Elijah.<sup>8</sup> Despite the attempts of certain scholars, a connec-

(Prodromos)," art. *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie* (ed. Engelbert Kirschbaum et al.; Rome/Freiburg: Herder, 1968–76), 7.164–90; here, 170.

<sup>7</sup> The primary sources to be surveyed in this chapter are preserved in the Synoptics: Mark 1:6c||Matt 3:4c; Mark 2:18||Matt 9:14||Luke 5:33; Q/Luke 7:31–35||Matt 11:16–19; Luke 1:15b. The descriptions of John the Baptist in Josephus (*Ant.* 18.5.2 [§§116–119]) and the Fourth Gospel (John 1:6–8, 15, 19–42; 3:22–30; 4:1–3; 5:32–33; 10:40–41) make no mention of John's food.

<sup>8</sup> Compare Mark 1:6b with 2 Kgs 1:8 (LXX): ζώνην δερματίνην περιεζωσμένος τὴν ὀσφῦν αὐτοῦ. Additionally, Zech 13:4 assumes clothing like that described in Mark 1:6a||Matt 3:4a as prophetic garb: "On that day the prophets will be ashamed, every one, of their visions when they prophesy; they will not put on a hairy mantle (ἄγριον ἴματιον) in order to deceive." On this point see Eve-Marie Becker, "'Kamelhaare... und wilder Honig': Der historische Wert und die theologische Bedeutung der biographischen Täufer-Notiz (Mk 1,6)," in: *Die bleibende Gegenwart des Evangeliums* (FS Otto Merk; ed. R. Gebauer and M. Meiser; Marburger Theologische Studien 76; Marburg: Elwert, 2003), 13–28; here, 15–20; Paul Joüon, "Le costume d'Elie et celui de Jean Baptiste," *Bib* 16 (1935): 74–81; Philipp Vielhauer, "Tracht und Speise Johannes des Täufers: Bisher unveröffentlicht," in: idem, *Aufsätze zum Neuen Testament* (TB 31; Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1965), 47–54; here, 48–53; cf. Eberhard Nestle, "Zum Mantel aus Kamelshaaren," *ZNW* 8 (1907): 238. In the patristic literature, the connection between John's clothing and Elijah is recognized already by Clem., *Str.* 3.53.5; Or., *Mat. Cat.* 39.

tion with Elijah or, more broadly, a 'biblical' origin for John's *diet* is not as readily discerned.<sup>9</sup>

A subtle but significant difference between Mark 1:6c and Matt 3:4c, alluded to above, has been overlooked in previous studies of John's diet. On the one hand, in Mark 1:6 the imperfect ἦν forms a periphrastic with the perfect participle ἐνδεδυμένος and the present participle ἐσθίων. Accordingly, Mark 1:6 claims simply that "John had been clothed (ἦν . . . ἐνδεδυμένος) with hair from a camel" and that he "was in the habit of eating (ἦν . . . ἐσθίων) locusts and wild honey."<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, Matthew's version of this Markan material makes the more far-reaching claim that John ate *only* such things: "And his food consisted of (ἦν) locusts and wild honey."<sup>11</sup> Matthew takes over the verb ἦν from Mark, but the subject of this verb in Mark 1:6c and in Matt 3:4c is different. In Mark 1:6c, the subject is John (ὁ Ἰωάννης), but in Matt 3:4c it is his food (ἡ δὲ τροφή . . . αὐτοῦ). With Matthew's deletion of Mark's ἐσθίων, the claim attains the level of exclusivity in Matthew. Studies of Matt 3:4 have noted the parallelism achieved by Matthew's stylistic editing of

<sup>9</sup> Against Catherine M. Murphy, *John the Baptist: Prophet of Purity for a New Age* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 129; R. Alan Cole, *The Gospel according to Mark: An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC 2; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, <sup>2</sup>1989 [1961]), 107–8; Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *Hearing Mark: A Listener's Guide* (Harrisburg, PA: TPI, 2002), 14–15 (emphasis added): "[A]lthough this [Mark 1:2–8] is a very short section, we hear a bit about what John wears—camel's hair and a leather belt—and what he eats—locusts and wild honey. . . . [John] dresses like Elijah. . . . *he eats like Elijah*. . . . *he eats like Elijah*, and we know that Elijah is coming before the end time (Malachi 4:5)." Additionally, Josef Ernst, *Johannes der Täufer: Interpretation, Geschichte, Wirkungsgeschichte* (BZNW 53; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989), 6, initially seems to favor a symbolic interpretation of John's diet and a connection to Elijah: "Die Wüste (V. 4) und die absonderliche Kleidung und die Speise (V. 6) erhalten einen symbolischen Sinn. Markus illustriert am Beispiel des Johannes erzählend das Dogma des Elias redivivus." Elsewhere, however, Ernst seems less sure of a symbolic connection of all of Mark 1:4–6 with Elijah: "Die Angaben über Kleidung und Speise des Johannes erzählen also von den außergewöhnlichen Lebensformen eines Mannes, der um seine hohe Sendung wußte. Ob und in welchem Maße der Elias redivivus-Komplex mitschwingt, ist schwer zu sagen" (9; cf. 8).

<sup>10</sup> See BDF §353 and Mark 1:22, 33; 2:18; 10:22; 13:25; John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark* (SP 2; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 63: "The periphrastic ἐν . . . ἐσθίων (lit. 'was eating') is used of customary action."; C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (CGTC; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1959), 47: "The force of the imperfect here is to indicate habitual action."; Erich Klostermann, *Das Markusevangelium* (HNT 3; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], <sup>5</sup>1971 [1919]), 7.

<sup>11</sup> Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 119, is notable for construing correctly the assertion of Matt 3:4: "[L]ocusts sweetened with honey constituted John's *entire* diet" (emphasis original). So also R. T. France, *The Gospel according to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 91: "His diet, though limited, was nutritious and readily available in the wilderness."

Mark 1:6.<sup>12</sup> Yet much as Augustine did,<sup>13</sup> scholarship has overlooked the different claim made in Matt 3:4c, as compared with that of Mark 1:6c. In this reorganization of Mark's syntax, the author of Matthew is to be seen as playing a rather active, and not a passive, role.<sup>14</sup>

As a result, Mark 1:6c and Matt 3:4c offer not one but *two* different claims about John's diet. These claims merit analysis in connection with depictions of locust eaters in Jewish and Greco-Roman antiquity (chap. 2), ancient conceptions of "wild honey" (chap. 3) and the significance imputed to John's diet in the Synoptic gospels (chap. 4). Additionally, the history of interpretation of Mark 1:6c||Matt 3:4c is arguably as interesting as these two Synoptic passages. A peculiarity stemming from Mark 1:6c||Matt 3:4c concerns early Christian reflections on John's (alleged) asceticism and, sometimes, 'vegetarianism.' Chapter 5 assesses the assorted patristic (and later) interpretations of John's "locusts and wild honey," including the following persons and works: the *Gospel of the Ebionites* (*Gos. Eb.*), several witnesses to Tatian's *Diatessaron*, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, John Chrysostom, Jerome,

<sup>12</sup> E.g., Karl L. Schmidt, *Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu: Literarkritische Untersuchungen zur ältesten Jesusüberlieferung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969 [1919]), 22: "Der Parallelabschnitt aus dem Mt Ev (3. 1–6) ist in der Sache und in der Form im ganzen mit der Mk-Fassung identisch. . . ."; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 1.296: "For Mark's καὶ ἐσθίων Matthew has substituted 'the food of him was'. This makes for better parallelism between [Matt 3:]4a and [3:4]b. The final four words are from Mark, with the necessary adjustment in case ending."; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, <sup>2</sup>1994), 45: In Matt 3:4, "'He had his clothing from hair' replaces Mark's 'was clothed with hair.' The replacement prepares for parallelism (a characteristic of Matthew's style) between 'clothing' and 'food.'" So also Alan H. McNeile, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew* (London: Macmillan, 1915 [= Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980]), 25–6; Gerd Häfner, *Der verheissene Vorläufer: Redaktionskritische Untersuchung zur Darstellung Johannes des Täufers im Matthäus-Evangelium* (SBB 27; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1994), 22: "Die mk Conjugatio periphrastica . . . wird in eine substantivische Konstruktion umgewandelt, die zwei parallele Hauptsätze ergibt (εἶχεν τὸ ἔνδυμα αὐτοῦ . . . ἢ δὲ τροφή ἣν αὐτοῦ); so wird der Notiz ein größeres Gewicht verliehen als in der Fassung des Mk." Häfner is on the right track in noting that in Matt 3:4 the statement has "a larger weight" than in Mark 1:6, but he does not make the case that the parallel construction is the reason for the heightened statement in Matthew. Indeed, Häfner's analysis of Matt 3:4 (22–3) and excursus on John's "hairy mantle" (23–31) otherwise ignore John's diet.

<sup>13</sup> August., *De cons. evang.* 2.12 (2.25), on Matt 3:4c: "Mark also gives us this same statement almost in so many words. But the other two evangelists omit it."

<sup>14</sup> Against Hans Windisch, "Die Notiz über Tracht und Speise des Täufers Johannes und ihre Entsprechungen in der Jesusüberlieferung," *ZNW* 32 (1933): 65–87; here, 67: "Die entscheidenden Bezeichnungen sind aber identisch. . . ."; Vielhauer, "Tracht und Speise," 47, that Mark 1:6 "ist bei Matthäus (3,4) stilistisch geglättet, aber sachlich unverändert erhalten" (47).

Gregory of Nyssa, Chromatius of Aquileia, Hilary of Poitiers, Peter Chrysologus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodore of Pelusium, the Karshuni *Life of John*, the Slavonic additions to Josephus, and Theophylactus of Ochrida. A brief epilogue on the Baptist's deed of eating "locusts and wild honey" as a witness to the historical John and on early Christian biblical interpretation and conceptions of asceticism completes this volume. The remainder of this chapter surveys other Synoptic traditions about John's diet and assesses the history of scholarship on this subject.

3. Other Synoptic Traditions Pertaining to John's Diet

a) The Question about Fasting (Mark 2:18 par.)

Since Mark 1:6||Matt 3:4c is commonly discussed in relation to other Synoptic passages that touch upon John's diet, a few comments about these passages will offer some clarification (and, hopefully, justification) for the assessment of scholarship to be given below. Elsewhere in the gospel of Mark, which is followed by both Matthew and Luke, one learns that John's disciples practiced fasting:

Matt 9:14	Mark 2:18	Luke 5:33
<p>Τότε προσέρχονται αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ Ἰωάννου λέγοντες· διὰ τί ἡμεῖς καὶ οἱ Φαρισαῖοι <u>νηστεύομεν</u> [πολλά], οἱ δὲ μαθηταὶ σου οὐ νηστεύουσιν;</p>	<p>Καὶ ἦσαν οἱ μαθηταὶ Ἰωάννου καὶ οἱ Φαρισαῖοι <u>νηστεύοντες</u>, καὶ ἔρχονται καὶ λέγουσιν αὐτῷ· διὰ τί οἱ μαθηταὶ Ἰωάννου καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ τῶν Φαρισαίων <u>νηστεύουσιν</u>, οἱ δὲ σοὶ μαθηταὶ οὐ νηστεύουσιν;</p>	<p>Οἱ δὲ εἶπαν πρὸς αὐτόν· οἱ μαθηταὶ Ἰωάννου <u>νηστεύουσιν</u> πυκνὰ καὶ δεήσεις ποιῶνται ὁμοίως καὶ οἱ τῶν Φαρισαίων, οἱ δὲ σοὶ ἐσθίουσιν καὶ πίνουσιν.</p>

The question in Mark and Matthew is predicated upon John's disciples' and the Pharisees' discipline of fasting, as compared with the lack of such a practice on the part of Jesus' disciples. Mark again uses a periphrastic construction of an imperfect form of εἶμι with a present participle to describe dietary practice (ἦσαν . . . νηστεύοντες, Mark 2:18; cf. 1:6). Yet in Mark's account it is not clear whether those who "come" (ἔρχονται) to Jesus are from John's disciples, the Pharisees, both groups, or some other group.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Cf. A. Schlatter *Johannes der Täufer*, 88: "Markus [2:18] hat ein ganz unbestimmtes Subjekt." The NRSV attempts (in my view, implausibly) to clarify Mark 2:18 by inferring yet a third group in addition to John's disciples and the Pharisees: "and people came and said to him." So also C. H. Turner, *Mark*, 19 (emphasis original): "they came: not John's



Matthew and Luke clarify the Markan ambiguity in different ways. In Matt 9:14, the dropping of Mark's periphrastic (cf. Matt 3:4) is not nearly as remarkable as Matthew's clarification that it was John's disciples who asked Jesus the question about fasting. In Luke 5:33, however, the subject of εἰπῶν is not John's disciples but rather "the Pharisees and their scribes" (Luke 5:30; cf. mention of only Pharisees in Mark 2:16||Matt 9:11). Despite these differences, the depictions of the diet of John's disciples in Mark 2:18 par. may be seen as complementary (*pace* the different claims made in Mark 1:6c and Matt 3:4c [no Lukan parallel]).

Taken as a whole, this pericope (Mark 2:18–20 par.) trumpets the superiority of the bridegroom Jesus to those who practice fasting. This presumed preeminence explains why John's disciples fast and Jesus' do not (or at least did not during Jesus' lifetime). Such an underlying motivation does not, however, cast doubt upon the pericope's central claim that John's disciples, like the Pharisees (and many other pious Jews), fasted.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, that embarrassment could have arisen from Jesus' disciples' abstinence—whenever and for whatever reason—from fasting (*pace* *Did.* 8.1) adds to the credibility of this testimony concerning John's disciples' habit of fasting. Since this practice is assumed for the Baptist's disciples, it may plausibly be inferred for John as well.

For the present study, it is noteworthy that the testimony of Mark 2:18||Matt 9:14||Luke 5:33 neither sheds any light on nor is to be connected to Mark 1:6c or Matt 3:4c. The one witness involves the consumption of particular foods (Mark 1:6 par.), and the other mentions occasional refraining from all foods (Mark 2:18 par.). Because the two Synoptic testimonies neither support nor refute one another, they *should not be harmonized*.<sup>17</sup>

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disciples, nor those of the Pharisees, but 'people came.' Mark is fond of this impersonal plural. . . ."

<sup>16</sup> With Michael Tilly, *Johannes der Täufer und die Biographie der Propheten: Die synoptische Täuferüberlieferung und das jüdische Prophetenbild zur Zeit des Täufers* (BWANT 7/17; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1994), 49; E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM/Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 92: "[John] and his disciples fasted, while Jesus and his disciples did not (Mark 2.18f. and par.). Jesus was known as 'a wine-bibber and a glutton' (Matt. 11.19 and par.), and his mission was to include sinners (ibid.). While it is possible that these contrasts have become schematized, there is no particular argument to be brought against any of them, and they probably point to remembered differences between the two men. . . ."

<sup>17</sup> Against Tilly, *Johannes der Täufer*, 48–51; here, 48, who offers "Die Fastenfrage (Mk 2,18) als Beleg für die Authentie von Mk 1,6." Nor should one infer, e.g., that John or his disciples fasted (Matt 9:14) because they needed a break from constantly eating "locusts and wild honey" (as Matt 3:4c might suggest)!

## b) Q/Luke 7:31–35 and Q/Matt 11:16–19: John and Jesus

A third Synoptic passage concerning John's diet stems from Q/Luke 7:31–35. This Q saying condemns “(the people of) this generation” (Luke 7:31||Matt 11:16) for listening to neither John nor Jesus, despite these two individuals' different *modi operandi* with regard to food and drink:

Q/Luke 7:32b–34	Q/Matt 11:17–19a
ηὐλήσαμεν ὑμῖν καὶ οὐκ ᾠρχήσασθε, ἐθρηνήσαμεν καὶ οὐκ ἐκλαύσατε. ἐλήλυθεν γὰρ Ἰωάννης ὁ βαπτιστῆς μὴ ἐσθίων ἄρτον μήτε πίνων οἶνον, καὶ λέγετε· δαιμόνιον ἔχει. ἐλήλυθεν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐσθίων καὶ πίνων, καὶ λέγετε· ἰδοὺ ἄνθρωπος φάγος καὶ οἰνοπότης, φίλος τελωνῶν καὶ ἀμαρτωλῶν.	ηὐλήσαμεν ὑμῖν καὶ οὐκ ᾠρχήσασθε, ἐθρηνήσαμεν καὶ οὐκ ἐκόψασθε. ἦλθεν γὰρ Ἰωάννης μὴτε ἐσθίων μήτε πίνων, καὶ λέγουσιν· δαιμόνιον ἔχει. ἦλθεν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐσθίων καὶ πίνων, καὶ λέγουσιν· ἰδοὺ ἄνθρωπος φάγος καὶ οἰνοπότης, τελωνῶν φίλος καὶ ἀμαρτωλῶν.

Jesus' “eating and drinking” is contrasted with John's refraining from the same. In both Luke 7:33 and Matt 11:18, John's abstinence is attributed to his possessing power from a demon (δαιμόνιον ἔχει); it is not specified whether this is a result of some affliction or, perhaps, by a shaman's or magician's cunning.

As noted with Mark 1:6c and Matt 3:4c, the depictions of John's diet in this Q material, as preserved in Luke 7 and Matthew 11, are to be differentiated. Q/Luke 7:33 makes the historically plausible claims that John refrained from food(s) (ἄρτον; cf. כֶּמֶן) eaten by most (Palestinian) Jews and that the Baptist did not partake of alcoholic beverages (οἶνον). By contrast, Matthew (again) makes a more far-reaching claim about the Baptist: Jesus ate and drank like other Judeans, but John did not eat or drink *anything* (Matt 11:18–19).

However desirable, the attempt to reconstruct the original content of this Q saying may not be possible. By analogy to the heightened claim of Matt 3:4c over against Mark 1:6c, one could infer that an analogous redactional principle governed Matthew's heightening the claim of Q/Matt 11:18.<sup>18</sup> The

<sup>18</sup> But see Maurice Casey, *An Aramaic approach to Q: Sources for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (SNTSMS 122; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2002), 105–45; here, 132: “I have supposed that Matthew's μήτε ἐσθίων μήτε πίνων reproduces his Greek source. . . . Luke expanded this because it could not be true if interpreted too literally.” So also I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC 3; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 301; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 28; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981–85), 1.678; K. Backhaus, *Die “Jüngerkreise” des Täufers Johannes*, 68–9, who likewise maintain that ἄρτον and οἶνον were not present in Q but added by Luke as a clarification. Cf. Luke 5:33 (that Jesus' disciples ἐσθίουσιν καὶ πίνουσιν), instead of οὐ νηστεύουσιν (Mark 2:18||Matt 9:14).

discussion will return to this Q material after considering briefly a final Synoptic passage, Luke 1:15b.

*c) John the Nazarite (L/Luke 1:15b) in Relation to Q/Luke 7:31–35 and Q/Matt 11:16–19*

Attempts have sometimes been made to interpret the Q material discussed immediately above (Luke 7:33||Matt 11:16–19) in light of Luke 1:15b, according to which John “must never drink wine or beer.”<sup>19</sup> Such interpreters take the Q material as an example of John’s Nazarite asceticism. This interpretation does not satisfy for several reasons:

1. The quasi-Nazarite vow imputed to John prior to his birth (Luke 1:15b) stipulates abstinence from alcohol but no other dietary restriction. By contrast, Q/Luke 7:33 highlights John’s refraining not only from alcoholic beverages but also from the type(s) of food commonly eaten by other Judeans.
2. The Nazarite vow, taken by adults (!), was temporary and not a life-long commitment.<sup>20</sup> Whatever *may* have been expected of the unborn John would not necessarily have remained in practice during John’s adult life.
3. Like virtually all of Luke 1–2, Luke 1:15b is peculiar to this gospel and was thus either composed by this evangelist or drawn from special Lukan tradition (L). It is thus tenuous at best to interpret Q/Luke 7:33 in light of a different tradition that was either composed by Luke or drawn from L (not “Q,” since Matthew reflects no interest in John’s birth).

Given that Luke 7:31–35||Matt 11:16–19 differs also from the Markan passages examined above (Mark 1:6c par.; Mark 2:18 par.), it follows that the two versions of this Q saying must also be interpreted independently of other Synoptic traditions pertaining to John’s diet.

*d) Synoptic Traditions Pertaining to John’s Diet: The Case against Harmonization*

The flawed tendency in scholarship toward the harmonization of two or more of these Synoptic passages (Mark 1:6c||Matt 3:4c; Mark 2:18||Matt 9:14||Luke 5:33; Luke 7:31–35||Matt 11:16–19; Luke 1:15b) cannot be over-

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<sup>19</sup> Gk.: οἶνον καὶ σίκερα οὐ μὴ πίη. Concerning the translation of σίκερα, Danker, BDAG, 923, calls attention to a cognate Akkadian term for “barley beer” and notes, “It is not possible to determine whether σ[ίκερα] was considered any stronger than wine; the rendering ‘strong drink’ (in so many versions) may be misleading.” Cf. Lev 10:9; Num 6:2–5; Judg 13:4–7; 1 Sam 1:11 (LXX); 4QSam<sup>a</sup> 1:3.

<sup>20</sup> With E. Schweizer, *Luke*, 22; J. P. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.48, against a Nazarite interpretation of John’s diet: John is never depicted “abstaining from cutting [his] hair, perhaps the single most striking sign of a nazarite.”

# Index of References

## 1. Hebrew Bible

Gen		13:27	84 n.19
1	44–45	14:8	84 n.19
3:1	52	16:13–14	84 n.19
27:5–17	56	21	160
27:33	56		
43:11	82 n.5		
		Deut	
Exod		6:3	84 n.19
3:8, 17	84 n.19	8:8	82 n.5
10:3–20	38–39, 40 n.11	11:9	84 n.19
10:19	105	14:19	49–50, 51, 53, 59 n.72, 118, 196
13:5	84 n.19	26:9, 15	84 n.19
16:15	87	28:38	38, 40 n.12, 42 n.20
16:31	82 n.5	31:20	84 n.19
16:31c (LXX)	139	32:13	85
33:3	84 n.19		
		Judg	
Lev		5:6	84 n.19
2:11	86–87	6:5	40 n.14
10:9	10 n.19	7:12	40 n.14
11	121, 196	13:4–7	10 n.19
11:9–12	43	14:8–9	85
11:13–23	43		
11:13–19	43, 156	1 Sam	
11:20–23	13 n.25, 16, 41, 49–50, 51, 53, 58, 59–60, 87, 118, 121, 156, 167–168, 179	1:11 (LXX)	10 n.19
		14:25	85
11:21–22	51–52	1 Kgs	
11:21	44	8:37	40 n.12
11:22	43–46, 67 n.96	18:30–45	122 n.86
11:22 (LXX)	41, 52 nn.48–49	19:1–8	126
11:24–42	43	19:4–8	123, 179
20:24	84 n.19	19:4, 15	122 n.86
		2 Kgs	
Num		1:8 (LXX)	4 n.8, 26, 97, 121, 122 n.85, 132, 133
6:1–21	29		
6:2–5	10 n.19		
11:8c (LXX)	139		

2	130	Zech 13:4	4 n.8, 122 n.84
2:1, 11	129		
2:11–12	132	Mal	
2:12–15	129 n.100	3:1	120 n.80, 121, 123, 124, 130
18:32	84 n.19	3:11	40
21:1–18	126	3:23–24	129
Isa		3:23	120 n.80
33:4	40 n.15	Pss	
40	18, 22, 26, 120, 121–122, 125, 129, 132	19:10	82 n.5
40:3	27, 98, 120 n.80, 121, 122–123, 131, 132, 154, 183, 197	28:3 (LXX)	162
40:22	44	28:7–8 (LXX)	161–162
Jer		78:46	29 n.121, 40 n.12
11:5	84 n.19	81:16	85
41:8	82 n.5	105:34	40 n.12
46:20–23	40 n.14	109:23	40 n.16
51:14, 27	40 n.14	119:103	82 n.5
Ezek		Job	
3:3	82 n.5	1:1, 8 (LXX)	165 n.104
16:13, 19	82 n.5	2:3 (LXX)	165 n.104
20:6, 15	84 n.19	20:17	84 n.19
27:17	84–85 n.19, 95 n.52	30:7 (LXX)	91 n.42
Hos 2:14–15	123	39:19–25	40 n.15
Joel		Prov	
1:4	40 n.12, 41	5:3	82 n.5
2:18–27	42 n.20	24:13	82 n.5
2:25	40 n.12, 41	25:16	81 n.2, 82 n.5
Amos 4:9, 7:1	40 n.12	25:27a	81, 82 n.5
Nah 3:15–17	40–41	27:7	82 n.5
		30:24, 27	41
		Song 4:11	82 n.5
		Ecc 12:5 (LXX)	172–173
		Dan 1:8–21	185
		2 Chr 6:28, 7:13	40 n.12

## 2. Other Jewish Sources (Pre-Modern)

Artapanus	40 n.11	10.10.2 (§190)	185
		14.7.4 (§124)	82 n.5
<i>Assumption of Moses</i>		18.5.2 (§§116–	
10.3–4	120 n.80	119)	4 n.7, 117 n.67
		<i>B.J.</i>	
<i>b. Hullin</i>		1.9.1 (§184)	82 n.5
63b (II.10.B)	57 n.62	2.7.2 (§110)	176 n.150
65a (IV.1.A)	57, 119–120	2.7.3 (§111)	176 n.150
	n.78	2.8.8 (§143)	54 n.54
65a (IV.2.B)	58	4.8.3 (§468)	28 n.115, 88,
65a–66a (IV.3.C–			97–98
IV.5.C)	58	4.9.7 (§536)	42–43 n.20
66a–67a (V.1–2)	57	<i>Vita</i> 2 §11	23 n.89, 33
			n.135, 126–128,
			133, 183 n.172,
			185, 198
Baruch			
1:20	84 n.19		
5:7	120 n.80		
		<i>Jubilees</i>	
3 <i>Baruch</i> 16.3	42–43 n.20	1.7	84 n.19
		48.5	40 n.11
1 <i>Enoch</i>			
1.6	120 n.80	Judith 2:20	40 n.14
90.31	129		
2 <i>Enoch</i>		<i>Letter of Aristeas</i>	45, 53, 56, 60,
8.1–4	96, 98 n.62		196
8.5–6 (J)	96 n.55	109	95 n.51
22.8–9 (J)	96	112	95, 97 n.59
		128–172	51
		144b–146a	51, 52, 107
2 <i>Esdras</i>			n.28, 119
2:19	84 n.19		
4:24	40–41 n.16	<i>Lives of the Prophets</i>	
		4:14	185
Ezekiel the Tragedian		2 <i>Maccabees</i>	
144–146	40 n.11	5:21–27	183 n.172, 185
4 <i>Ezra</i> 6.26	129	5:21–26	125–126
		5:27	126, 133, 174,
			176 n.148, 198
<i>Joseph and Aseneth</i>			
16.8–23	88 n.31	<i>Martyrdom and</i>	
		<i>Ascension of Isaiah</i>	
Josephus		2:7–11	183 n.172
<i>Ant.</i>		2.7–10	126
2.6.5 (§118)	82 n.5	2.11	126, 133, 142
2.14.4 (§306)	40 n.11, 42 n.20		n.31, 198
3.1.6 (§28)	82 n.5		



Sirach		<i>Testament of Solomon</i>	
11:3	81	26.5 (§129)	49
43:17	40 n.15		
46:8	84 n.19	Wisdom of Solomon	
48:1–10	129	16:8–9	40 n.11
48:24	120 n.80		

## 3. Greco-Roman Sources

Aelian		8.76.101	97 n.58, 98 n.62
<i>NA</i>	59		
1.9–11	84 n.17	Agatharchides of Cnidus	68–69
1.20	65 n.90, 66–67 n.95	<i>De mar. Eryth.</i>	
1.59–60	84 n.17	5.59 (5.58)	70 n.107, 104 n.16
2.53, 57	84 n.17		
3.12	42 n.20, 63 n.83	Alexander of Aphrodisias	
3.35, 38	65 n.90	<i>In Aristotelis meta-</i>	
5.9, 13	65 n.90	<i>physica commentaria</i>	
5.10–13	84 n.17	535.35	52 n.48
5.42	84 nn.16–17, 118 n.69	Alexis	75
6.19	65 nn.89–90	<i>Fr.</i> 167.13 (162.13)	64, 79 n.128, 101 n.3
8.6	63 n.83		
10.13	38 n.8	Anaxandrides	
10.44	65 n.89	<i>Fr.</i> 42.59 (41.59)	64 n.85, 79 n.128, 101 n.3, 181–182
11.26	65 n.90		
11.27	42 n.20	Apicius	
11.35	84 n.17	<i>De re coquinaria</i>	80 n.132
15.7	97, 98 n.62	Apuleius, <i>Met.</i> 1.5	84 n.16, 118 n.69
17.19	42 n.20	Aratus Solensis	136, 186, 192
17.37	84 n.17	<i>Phaen.</i>	
VH 4.22.4	62	96–136	185
Aeschylus, <i>Frr.</i>		105–114	145–146 n.44
10.D.100	62 n.77	115–128	146 n.45
36.B.402	62 n.77	129–136	146
<i>Aesop's Fables</i>		Aristonicus Alexandrinus	
184 (183)	66 n.95	<i>De sig. Il.</i> 9.324.1	63 n.83
241 (224)	67 n.97, 77	<i>De sig. Od.</i>	
397	77, 79 n.129, 183–184 n.173	4.285–289	40 n.13
Aëtius of Amida			
<i>Iatricorum</i>			
3.166.1–8	97 n.58, 98 n.62		
8.50.179	97 n.58, 98 n.62		



Aristophanes		8(9).40 (626B–627A)	84 n.16, 118 n.69
<i>Ach.</i>			
149–152	42 n.19		
870–871	62–63, 79 n.128, 101 n.3	10.6 (637B)	66 n.93
1114–1117	62–63, 79 n.128, 101 n.3	<i>PA</i> 4.6 (683A)	44 n.25
1130	82 n.5	Athenaeus, <i>Deip.</i>	196
<i>Av.</i> 588–589	42 n.20	4.132F–133F	74–75
		4.133B	65 n.90, 79 n.129, 101 n.3, 183 n.173
Aristophanes of Byzantium, <i>Epit.</i>	68–69	8.345E	75 n.116
1.20	66		
1.139	65 n.90	Cato, <i>Rust.</i>	
2.57–58	68 n.102	76–84	84 n.17
2.57.1	104 n.16	76	84 n.16, 117 n.69
2.57.4	69 n.104, 104 n.16	106	105 n.21
2.57.7	69 n.105	111	105 n.21
2.58.1–2	69, 104 n.16	157	185 n.177
Aristotle	84, 91, 196	Columella, <i>Rust.</i>	
<i>Aud.</i> 804A	65 n.90	9.2–16	84 n.17, 118 n.69
<i>GA</i>		9.4.7	84 n.16, 91–92
1.16 (721A)	66 n.93		
3.10 (760A)	84 n.15		
3.10 (760B)	84 n.16, 118 n.69	Cyranides	
<i>HA</i>		1.15.12–14	42 n.20
4.7 (532B)	65	3.33.9–12	40 n.13
4.9 (535B)	65 n.90		
5.19 (550B)	65 n.89, 66 n.93	Dinarchus, <i>Fr.</i> 6.3	40 n.14
5.22 (533B)	84 nn.15–16, 118 n.69	Dio Chrysostom	136, 192
5.22 (554A)	114 n.55	<i>Disc.</i>	
5.22 (554B)	84 n.16, 118 n.69	1.61–62	186
5.28–30 (555B–556B)	66 n.93	4.70	186
5.30 (556B)	65 n.90, 66–67, 79 n.128, 101 n.3	13.10–11	186
5.42	89 n.34	60.7–8	186
8(9).6 (612A)	52 n.48, 66 n.92	<i>Or.</i>	
8(9).40 (623B, 626A–B, 627B)	84 n.15	6.12	186
8(9).40 (626B)	91 n.41	55.10–11	74
		Diodorus Siculus	68–69, 165, 196
		<i>Hist.</i>	
		1.87.6	40 n.13
		3.29.1–6	69–70, 79 n.128, 101 n.3, 104 n.16, 106, 121, 122, 165 n.105

19.94.1–10	93–94, 98, 197 n.5	Herodotus	28
19.94.10	96	<i>Hist.</i> 4.172	62, 68, 79 n.128, 101 n.3
Dioigenes Laertius, <i>Lives</i>		Hesiod	146 n.46
6.9.102	23 n.88	Homer	
8.1.19	23 n.87	<i>Il.</i> 21.12	62, 69 n.106, 105 n.21
Dioscorides Pedanius	196	<i>Od.</i> 4.287–288	40 n.13, 62
<i>De mat. med.</i>		<i>Life of Aesop</i> 99	64–65, 77, 79 n.128, 101 n.3
2.51–52	76, 79 n.129, 101 n.3, 183–184 n.173	Lucretius	146 n.46
Euripides, <i>Bacch.</i>		Menander Protector	
704–711	95	<i>Fr.</i> 108	40 n.14
Galen	168	Nepualius	
<i>De alim. fac.</i>		31	51 n.47
470–471	114 n.53	86	42 n.20
739–742	97	Nicander, <i>Ther.</i>	
<i>De loc. aff.</i>		801–805	42 n.19
1.4.8.391–392	75	Nicophon, <i>Aphr.</i> 1.2	63
2.5.8.406	75 n.118	Oribasius, <i>Ecl. Med. Fr.</i> 196	
6.2.7.507–509	75 n.118	63.5 (64.5)	76, 79 n.129, 183–184 n.173
6.3.7.512	63 n.83, 75–76	Pausanias, <i>Descr. Gr.</i>	
<i>De simp. med. temp.</i>		1.24.8	42 n.20
11.13.312	75–76, 79 n.129, 101 n.3, 183–184 n.173	Palladius, <i>De vet. med.</i>	
<i>In Hipp. aph.</i>		2.18	84 n.16, 118 n.69
1.9.57	42 n.20	3.27	84 n.16, 118 n.69
<i>Nat. fac.</i>		5.7	84 n.17, 118 n.69
11.115–118	114 n.53	6.8	84 n.17, 118 n.69
<i>UP</i> 3.2	65–66	7.7, 11	84 nn.16–17, 118 n.69
<i>Geoponica</i>		11.13, 14	84 nn.16–17, 118 n.69
1.8, 10	42–43 n.20	12.8	84 n.17, 118 n.69
7.1–2	42–43 n.20		
7.8.1–2	105		
15.2–9	84 n.17, 118 n.69		
15.7	84 n.16		
17.19	75 n.118		
20.32, 44	64		
Hecataeus of Abdera			
<i>Fr.</i> 25.(1427.)87.6	63 n.83		
Hephaestion 1.20–21	42–43 n.20		

PColZen 114m 6	42–43 n.20	21.45.77	90, 98 n.60, 197 n.4
Philostratus <i>VA</i> 1.8	136, 192 185–186	30.21.68	76, 79 n.128, 101 n.3, 104
Phylarchus, <i>Fr.</i> 4b.2	62 n.77	Plutarch	136, 192, 196
Plato		<i>Amat.</i> 767D	66–67 n.95
<i>Phdr.</i>		<i>De soll. an.</i>	
10 (230C)	65 n.90	962D	43 n.21
10 (259A–D)	65 n.90	976D	63 n.83, 74, 79 n.129, 183 n.173
<i>Symp.</i> 203B	31 n.130	<i>Quaest. conv.</i>	
<i>Ti.</i> 59E–60B	94–95, 98 n.62	2.3 (636E, 637B)	67 n.98
Pliny (the Elder), <i>HN</i>	14, 28, 68, 80, 196	4.1 (660F)	66 n.95
6.35.178–197	72–73, 122	8.7.3 (727A)	64 n.84, 185 n.176
6.35.195	79 n.129, 80 n.131, 101 n.3, 183 n.173	8.7.3 (727E)	63–64, 74 n.114, 79 n.129, 183 n.173, 184–185
11.4.11– 11.23.70	84 n.17, 90, 118 n.69	<i>Sull.</i> 7.6	63 n.83, 74 n.114, 185 n.177
11.9.19	90–91	Porphyry	
11.13.32	91 n.40, 114 n.55	<i>De antr. nymph.</i> 16	31 n.130
11.14.34–35	91	Posidonius	
11.14.36–37	91	<i>Fr.</i> 66.7 (80.8)	42 n.20
11.15.38–40	91 n.40	Pseudo-Aristotle	
11.15.41–45	91	<i>Mir. ausc.</i>	
11.15.41	97–98	16–22	84 n.15
11.19.59	91 n.42	18	89, 98 n.60, 197 n.4
11.32–33	84 n.16, 118 n.69	22	93 n.45
11.32.92	72 n.112, 79 n.128, 80 n.131, 101 n.3, 104	139	67 n.96
11.35.101	105 n.20	176	67 n.96
11.35.103	105	Pseudo-Dioscorides	
11.35.104–106	42 n.20	<i>De mat. med.</i>	
11.35.106	72, 79 n.128, 80 n.131, 101 n.3, 104	2.115 (2.109)	76, 79 n.129, 183–184 n.173
15.7.32	93, 98 n.62	PTebt 772.1–3	42 n.20
21.43.73–76	91 n.40	Seneca (the Younger)	
21.44.74–75	98 n.60, 197 n.4	<i>Ep.</i> 6.5	195
21.44.74	90	Sophocles, <i>Fr.</i> 716	62 n.77
21.44.75	90 n.36		

Strabo, <i>Geog.</i>	14, 28, 68, 74, 165, 196	<i>Fr.</i> 174.3–4 <i>Sens.</i> 84	65 n.89 95, 98 n.62
12.3.18	89–90, 98 n.60, 197 n.4	Timaeus, <i>Fr.</i>	
13.1.64	40 n.13	43a.5–6, 19, 23	65 n.90
15.1.20–21	90 n.35	43b.5, 14, 32	65 n.90
16.1.14	90 n.35		
16.4.4–14	71	Varro, <i>Rust.</i>	
16.4.12	71–72, 79 n.129, 101 n.3, 104, 122, 165 n.105, 183 n.173	3.16.2–38	84 n.17, 118 n.69
		3.16.13–14	84 n.16
		3.16.24	88 n.30
17.3.10	71 n.110	3.16.26–28	84 n.16
Theocritus, <i>Id.</i>		Virgil	146 n.46
1.45–56	64 n.85	<i>Ecl.</i>	
1.52	79 n.128, 101 n.3	4.29–30	96, 98 n.62
5.34	65 n.90	5.74–8	66 n.95
5.108–111	42 n.20	<i>Georg.</i> 1.31	96 n.53
7.41	65 n.90	Xenophon, <i>An.</i>	
Theophrastus		4.8.20–21	89, 98 n.60, 197 n.4
<i>Enquiry into Plants</i>			
1.11.2	179 n.158		

## 4. New Testament

Matt		1:3a, 4a	141, 162
2:13–18	175	1:5	106, 162
3:1–6	124–128	1:5a	117 n.67
3:4	4–7	1:6	4–7, 166, 197 n.7
3:4ab	134 n.3	1:6ab	73, 121, 132, 134 n.3,
3:4c	70, 82–83, 87, 108–109, 116, 124–128	1:6c	82–83, 87, 106, 120, 121–123
9:14	7–8, 10–11	1:9–11	123, 132
11:11	154–155	1:9	106
11:16–19	9–11	1:13	123, 133
11:18–19	25, 205 n.25	1:22, 33	5 n.10
13:54–58	131	2:18	5 n.10, 7–8, 10–11, 117, 205 n.25
16:13–14	131, 197 n.6		
17:10–13	130, 197 n.6		
Mark		6:1–6a	131
1:2–8	70, 121–123, 183	6:14–29	110, 130
		6:14–15	131, 197 n.6
1:2–3	166	7:1–23	24 n.91, 60

8:27–28	131, 197 n.6	1:21	123, 132 n.112
9:9–13	123 n.89	1:23	26
9:11–13	130, 197 nn.6–7	1:28	106
10:22	5 n.10	3:22–30	4 n.7
11:32	117 n.67	3:25–27	117
13:25	5 n.10	3:25–30	138
16:19	131–132	4:1–3	4 n.7
		5:32–33	4 n.7
		5:39	150
Luke		10:40–41	4 n.7
1:15	10–12, 24, 29, 32, 205 n.25	10:40	106
1:17	130–131, 197 n.7	Acts	
1:24–26	110 n.37	1:2, 11, 22	132 n.110, 197 n.6
1:76	130–131, 197 n.7	10	154
1:80	124, 143 n.34, 149 n.53	18:25	117
3:2	124	1 Cor	
3:4	124	1:12–17	123 n.90
3:15	149	4:16	135 n.6
3:23	110 n.37	7:7–8	135 n.6
4:16–24	131	10:9–11	160–161
4:25, 26	130, 197 n.6	10:27b	100
5:33	7–8, 10–11	10:33	135 n.6
7:11–16	131, 197 n.6	11:1	135 n.6
7:24–27	130–131, 197 n.7	Gal	
7:24	117	2:11–14	120 n.79, 205
7:28	154–155	4:12	135 n.6
7:31–35	9–11	1 Thess 1:6–7, 2:14	135 n.6
7:33	9–12, 24, 31, 205 n.25	2 Tim 3:16	135, 205
9:7–8	131, 197 n.6	Heb 6:12, 12:1–2, 13:12–13	135 n.6
9:18–19	131, 197 n.6	1 Pet 2:21	135
24:42	31 n.130	Rev	
24:51	132 n.110, 197 n.6	9:1–11	40 n.15
		9:3, 7	42–43 n.20
John			
1:6–8, 15, 19–42	4 n.7		
1:19–21	130 n.102		
1:20	138		

## 5. Other Christian Literature

- |                            |                                |                          |  |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Ambrose of Milan           | 166, 192                       | Bar-Ṣalibi               | 141, 142–143,<br>144, 147, 192         |
| <i>De helia et ieunio</i>  |                                |                          |  |
| 3.4 (537B)                 | 166–167                        |                          |  |
| 11.40 (547D)               | 138 n.15, 167<br>n.110, 200    | Basil of Caesarea        | 153, 157, 161,<br>192, 193, 198        |
| <i>Ep.</i> 39(14).29       | 166–167                        | <i>De ieunio</i> 1.9     | 159                                    |
| <i>Expositio Euangelii</i> |                                | <i>Ep.</i> 42.5          | 158–159                                |
| <i>secundum Lucam</i>      |                                | <i>Hom.</i> 8.7          | 42–43 n.20                             |
| Prol.3                     | 166–167                        |                          |  |
| 1.36                       | 166 n.108                      | Chromatius of Aquileia   | 166, 192                               |
| 2.69–70                    | 166 n.108                      | <i>Tractatus in</i>      |  |
|                            |                                | <i>Matthaeum</i> 9.1     | 166–167                                |
| Aphrahat the Persian       | 179 n.159                      |                          |  |
| <i>Demonstration</i> 6.13  | 174 n.139                      | <i>1 Clement</i> 47:1–6  | 120 n.79                               |
|                            |                                |                          |  |
| Arnobius (the Elder)       |                                | Clement of Alexandria    | 28, 137, 191,<br>192, 193, 198,<br>202 |
| of Sicca, <i>Adv.</i>      |                                | <i>Paed.</i>             |  |
| <i>Gentes</i> 1.3–13       | 42–43 n.20                     | 2.1                      | 28 n.117                               |
|                            |                                | 2.11                     | 153–154                                |
| Arnobius the Younger       | 150, 191, 192,<br>198          | 2.16.1                   | 135, 153<br>nn.65–66, 154,<br>176, 186 |
| <i>Exposit. in Matt.</i> 3 | 151, 152–153                   | 2.112.1                  | 135, 151, 186                          |
|                            |                                | <i>Str.</i>              |  |
| Athanasius of              |                                | 1.21                     | 154 n.67                               |
| Alexandria                 | 171, 175, 179,<br>192, 198 n.8 | 3.53.5                   | 4 n.8                                  |
| <i>Ep. virg.</i> 1.7–8     | 160 n.87                       |                          |  |
| <i>Fragmenta in</i>        |                                | Cyril of Alexandria      | 153, 178, 179<br>n.159, 192            |
| <i>Matthaeum</i>           |                                | <i>De incarnatione</i>   |  |
| 7                          | 172 n.126                      | <i>Domini</i> 821B       | 155–156, 197<br>n.3                    |
| 8A                         | 172–173                        | <i>Fr.</i> 143           | 155–156                                |
| 8B                         | 172 n.126                      |                          |  |
| Augustine                  | 166, 179 n.159,<br>192, 202    |                          |  |
| <i>Civ. Dei</i> 3.31       | 42–43 n.20                     | Cyril of Jerusalem       | 191, 192, 198                          |
| <i>Conf.</i> 10.46–47      | 19 n.64,<br>167–168            | <i>Catecheses ad</i>     |  |
| <i>Contra Faustum</i>      |                                | <i>illuminandos</i> 3.6  | 136 n.8,<br>150–151,<br>152–153        |
| <i>Manichaeum</i> 16.31    | 168                            |                          |  |
| <i>De cons. evang.</i>     |                                | <i>Didache</i> 8.1       | 8                                      |
| 2.12 (2.25)                | 6, 129                         |                          |  |
| Bar-Hebraeus               | 141, 143–144,<br>147, 192      | Didymus the Blind        | 153, 192                               |
|                            |                                | <i>Commentary on the</i> |  |
|                            |                                | <i>Psalms</i>            |  |

- |  |                              |  |
|--|------------------------------|--|
| 255  | 162 n.90                     | 135, 137, 138,                           |
| 256  | 161–162                      | 139–141, 142                             |
| Ephrem   |                              | n.28, 147, 164                           |
| <i>Commentary on the</i>   |                              | n.102, 171, 181,                         |
| <i>Diatessaron</i>   |                              | 183–186, 192                             |
| 3.17, 9.4  | 141                          |  |
| <i>On Hermits and</i>  |                              |  |
| <i>Desert Dwellers</i>   |                              |  |
| 37–52  | 169 n.118                    |  |
| Epiphanius   | 13–14, 192                   |  |
| <i>Ancoratus</i> 115.3   | 140 n.22                     |  |
| <i>Panarion</i>  |                              |  |
| 30.13.2  | 140                          |  |
| 30.15.3–4  | 140 n.23                     |  |
| 30.13.4–5  | 13 n.29,                     |  |
|  | 139–140                      |  |
| 30.16.1  | 140                          |  |
| 30.16.4–5  | 140 n.23                     |  |
| 30.19.2–3  | 140 n.22                     |  |
| 30.22.4  | 140 n.23                     |  |
| Eusebius of Caesarea   |                              |  |
| <i>Demonstr. evang.</i>  |                              |  |
| 3.5 (118B)   | 154 n.68                     |  |
| 9.5 (430B–D)   | 11 n.22                      |  |
| <i>Hist. eccl.</i>   |                              |  |
| 2.23.4–6   | 23 n.90                      |  |
| 4.29   | 154 n.67                     |  |
| 4.29.1–3   | 146 n.47                     |  |
| 5.11   | 154 n.67                     |  |
| <i>Praep. evang.</i>   |                              |  |
| 8.11.8   | 29, 31 n.130                 |  |
| Eustathius of Thessalo-<br>nica, <i>Commentarii</i><br><i>ad Homeri</i><br><i>Odyssæam</i> 1.293.3 | 73                           |  |
| Euthymius Zigabenus  | 177, 180, 192                |  |
| <i>Comm. in</i><br><i>Matthæum</i> 3   | 178–179, 197<br>n.3          |  |
| <i>Gospel of Nicodemus</i><br>15:6   | 132 n.112                    |  |
| <i>Gospel of the Ebionites</i>   | 13, 26, 29<br>n.118, 30, 80, |  |
|  |                              | 153, 161, 179<br>n.159, 192, 193,<br>198 |
| Gregory Nazianzen  |                              |  |
| <i>Carmina moralia</i><br>2.10   | 157 n.81                     |  |
| <i>Carmina historica</i><br>1.88   | 157 n.81                     |  |
| <i>Carmina theologica</i><br>2.2   | 157 n.81                     |  |
| <i>Ep.</i> 26  | 66–67 n.95                   |  |
| <i>Or.</i><br>14.4   | 157                          |  |
| 33.10 (228A)   | 157, 159                     |  |
| 39.15 (353A)   | 157, 159                     |  |
| 43.29 (536B)   | 157–158, 159,<br>203         |  |
| 43.75 (597A)   | 157–158, 159                 |  |
| Gregory of Nyssa   | 153, 179 n.159,<br>192, 193  |  |
| <i>De virginitate</i><br>6.1.Pref  | 160                          |  |
| 6.1.1  | 160                          |  |
| Hegesippus   | 23                           |  |
| Hesychius of Jerusalem   | 153, 192                     |  |
| <i>Hom.</i> 16.3   | 104 n.16, 165                |  |
| Hilary of Poitiers   | 150, 192, 198                |  |
| <i>Commentarius in</i><br><i>Matthæum</i> 2.2  | 151, 152–153,<br>197 n.3     |  |
| Hippolytus, <i>Ref.</i><br>8   | 154 n.67                     |  |
| 8.9  | 146 n.47                     |  |
| 10.14  | 146 n.47                     |  |
| 13   | 154 n.67                     |  |
| Hyperechius, <i>Adhortatio</i><br><i>ad monachos</i> 48  | 158 n.83                     |  |

Ibn at-Ṭayyib	141, 143–144, 147, 192	<i>Life of Paul, the First Hermit</i> 1	169 n.118
Ignatius of Antioch <i>Smyr.</i> 1:1	137 n.9	<i>Life of S. Hilarion</i> 3–4, 11	169–170 n.119
Irenaeus, <i>Haer.</i> 1.28 1.28.1 3.11.7	137, 154 n.68 154 n.67 146 n.47 140	Joannes Laurentius Lydus <i>Ost.</i> 56 (194C–D)	42–43 n.20
Isidore of Pelusium	172, 179, 192, 193, 198	John Cassian <i>Adv. Nest.</i> 7.5	42–43 n.20
<i>Epp.</i> 1.132 5	173, 197 n.3 173–174	John Chrysostom	33, 153, 179 n.159, 192, 193, 202
Īsoʿdāq of Merv <i>Commentary on the Gospels</i>	141–142, 143, 144, 147, 152, 156 n.73, 174 n.139, 176 n.148, 189, 191, 192, 197 n.3, 198	<i>De laudibus sancti Pauli</i> 1.14 (136) <i>De virginitate</i> 79.1–2	164 n.98 163–164, 177
Jacob of Serugh (Yaʿkub al-Saruji)	174–175, 192, 198 n.8	<i>Homilies on Matthew</i> 68.5 <i>In Joannem</i> 16.1 <i>In Matthaeum</i> 10.4–5 10.5	156 n.73 163 n.94 162–164 135, 163, 180 n.161
Jerome	14, 28, 166, 174, 192, 193	Justin Martyr	137–139, 154 n.68
<i>Adv. Iovin.</i> 1.3 2.7  2.15	146 n.47 13 n.28, 78, 101 n.3, 168–170, 187 n.182, 204 66 n.91, 78–79, 91, 101 n.3, 168–170, 173, 181, 198	<i>Dial.</i> 88.6–7	138, 183, 200
<i>Epp.</i> 22.36 38.3 58.6.1–2 107.3 121.1 125.7 130.4.1–2	78, 170 n.120 78, 170–171 169–170 78, 170 170 78, 170 171	<i>Life of John</i> (Karshuni) <i>Life of Peter the Iberian</i>	24–25, 143 n.34, 175, 181, 192, 193, 198 176, 192
		Methodius of Olympus <i>De resurrectione</i> 1.59.6 <i>De vita</i> 8.1	153, 192 155 154–155
		Michael Psellus	42–43 n.20
		Michael the Syrian	42–43 n.20
		Nilus Ancyranus <i>Ep.</i> 3.153	173 n.134



- |   |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|
| Origen  | 148, 167, 191,<br>192, 198, 202              | Pseudo-Clementines                             |  |
| <i>Commentary on<br/>    John</i>                                   | 137  | <i>Hom.</i> 9.10                               | 140 n.23   |
| <i>Luc. Cat.</i> 54   | 149 n.53                                     | <i>Rec.</i> 1.60                               | 138  |
| <i>Luc. Hom.</i>  |  | The <i>Shepherd</i> of Hermas                  |  |
| 11.5  | 149, 167 n.110                               | <i>Vis.</i> 4.1.6                              | 40 n.15  |
| 25.2  | 149, 167 n.110,<br>167 n.112, 200            | Sulpicius Severus                              |  |
| <i>Mat. Cat.</i>  |  | <i>On the Life of St.<br/>    Martin</i> 10    | 158 n.83   |
| 39  | 4 n.8  | Tatian   |  |
| 41  | 150, 152–153,<br>156, 167 n.110,<br>178, 182 | <i>Diatessaron</i>                             | 15, 80, 135,<br>137, 141–148,<br>152 n.62, 171,<br>176 n.148, 181,<br>184–185, 192 |
| <i>Peri Pascha</i>  |  | <i>Oratio</i> 23.1–2                           | 145–146  |
| 1.36–37   | 149 nn.54–55                                 | Tertullian                                     | 137, 154 n.68  |
| <i>Philocalia</i> 26.4  | 138, 149–150,<br>183, 200                    | <i>Adv. Marcionem</i>                          |  |
| Pantaleon, <i>Orationes</i> 1                                       | 176, 192, 197<br>n.3                         | 1.17   | 77, 79 n.128,<br>101 n.3, 137<br>n.10  |
| Peter Chrysologus   | 150, 191, 192,<br>198                        | <i>De anima</i>                                |  |
| <i>Sermons</i> 167.9  | 151–153                                      | 15.2   | 77–78 n.124, 79<br>n.128, 137 n.10   |
| <i>Protevangeliium of James</i>                                     |  | 32.353   | 105  |
| 8:1   | 175 n.144                                    | Theodore of Mopsuestia                         | 141, 189, 192  |
| 22:3  | 175  | Theophylact Simocatta                          |  |
| 23:1–24:4   | 175  | <i>Ep.</i>                                     |  |
| Pseudo-Chrysostom   | 153, 192                                     | 14   | 79 n.127   |
| <i>De eleemosyna</i> 791  | 164 n.100                                    | 41   | 42–43 n.20   |
| <i>De ieiunio</i> 1   | 164 n.100                                    | Theophylactus                                  |  |
| <i>De poenitentia</i> 1.3   | 164 n.101,<br>182–183                        | of Ochrida                                     | 28, 179, 192,<br>198 n.8   |
| <i>Ecloga de virtute et<br/>    vitio</i> 26                        | 164 nn.100–101                               | <i>Enarratio en<br/>    Evangelium Marci</i>   |  |
| <i>In laudem<br/>    conceptionis S.<br/>    Ioannis Baptistæ</i> 1 | 164 n.101                                    | 175  | 177–178  |
| <i>In praecursorem<br/>    Domini</i> 1                             | 164 n.99                                     | <i>Enarratio en<br/>    Evangelium Matthæi</i> |  |
| <i>In saltationem<br/>    Herodiadis</i>                            | 164 n.102                                    | 16   | 177–178, 197<br>n.3  |
| <i>On the Birth of John<br/>    the Baptist</i> 6                   | 164 n.102                                    |  |  |

## Index of Modern Authors

- Achebe, Chinua, 101–102 n.5  
Achtmeier, Paul J., 2 n.4  
Albright, W. F., 15 n.36  
Alford, Henry, 13–14, 82 n.7  
Allegro, John M., 27 n.108, 50 n.45  
Allison, Jr., Dale C., 6 n.12, 18, 82 n.7, 129 n.101  
Altaner, Berthold, 182 n.169  
Andersen, F. I., 28–29, 32, 54 n.54, 82 n.7, 88 n.31, 96 n.55, 134  
Anderson, Hugh, 18  
Andiñach, Pablo R., 42 n.19  
André, Jacques, 79–80  
Angel, J. Lawrence, 110 n.38  
Arbesmann, Rudolph, 184 n.174  
Arnott, W. Geoffrey, 181  
Arrington, L. R., 44 n.25  
Aubert, H., 66 n.94  
Aune, David E., 199 n.9  
Avigad, Nahman, 48 n.38, 49  
Aynard, J. M., 47 n.34
- Baarda, Tjitze, 144  
Backhaus, Knut, 1 n.2, 9 n.18, 202 n.16  
Balme, D. M., 66 n.94  
Bamberger, Bernard J., 50 n.43, 58 n.68  
Bammel, Ernst, 2 n.3  
Bates, Marston, 1 n.1, 36 n.1  
Beavis, Ian C., 37 n.4, 42 n.20, 60 n.73, 61 n.75, 66 n.94, 75 n.117  
Becker, Eve-Marie, 4 n.8, 22, 118 n.68, 122 nn.85–86  
Behr, John, 184 n.174  
Bequaert, Joseph C., 36 n.1, 101 n.5, 107 n.28  
Beza, Theodore, 180–181, 187  
Billierbeck, P., 15, 54 n.55, 82 n.6  
Bloch, R. Howard, 183 n.171  
Blomberg, Craig L., 18  
Blum, Robert, 84–85 n.19  
Bochart, Samuel, 13–14, 79 n.127, 139, 177 n.152, 179 n.157, 187, 188–189, 192
- Böcher, Otto, 11 n.21, 28, 31, 32, 98 n.61, 168 n.114  
Bodenheimer, Frederick S., 39 n.9, 42–43 n.20, 43–44 n.22, 49 n.41, 74 n.114, 101 n.5, 102 n.8, 117 n.65  
Böhlemann, Peter, 128 n.97  
Boice, James M., 2–3 n.4  
Boismard, M. É., 28, 30–31, 32  
Boring, M. Eugene, 33–34, 48 n.36  
Borowski, Oded, 47, 48, 112 n.46  
Bottéro, Jean, 46 n.31, 47 n.34  
Bovon, François, 11 n.21, 180 n.162  
Brakke, David, 160 n.87, 171 n.124, 184 n.174  
Broadhead, Edwin K., 2–3 n.4  
Brock, Sebastian, 134, 141 n.27, 142, 148 n.50, 152 n.62, 172, 172–173 n.129, 174–176, 184 n.175, 189  
Brodsky, Harold, 42 n.19, 43–44 n.22  
Broshi, Magen, 36 n.1, 54 n.55, 58 n.65, 61 n.76, 79–80  
Brothwell, Don R., 46 n.31, 103 n.12, 112 n.46, 117 n.64  
Brothwell, Patricia, 46 n.31, 112 n.46, 117 n.64  
Brown, Colin, 2 n.3  
Brown, K. S., 112 n.46  
Browne, Sir Thomas, 187, 188–189, 191, 192  
Brownlee, William H., 33 n.136  
Budd, Philip J., 43–44 n.22  
Bukkens, Sandra G. F., 101 n.5, 102 n.7, 102 n.9, 103 n.11, 108 nn.31–32, 112 nn.45–46, 117 n.65  
Bultmann, Rudolf K., 26 n.102  
Burkitt, F. C., 143 n.37  
Burstein, Stanley M., 68, 70 n.108, 103 n.12
- Calhoun, Robert Matthew, 145–146 n.44  
Calvin, John, 24 n.92, 33, 187–188, 191  
Carter, Barbara J., 107 n.29  
Carter, Warren, 33–34, 48 n.36  
Casey, Maurice, 9 n.18

- Castelli, Elizabeth A., 135 n.6  
 Chamblin, Knox, 2 n.3  
 Charlesworth, James H., 27, 50 n.45,  
 53–54, 82 n.7, 85–86  
 Cheikho, L., 144  
 Chouliara-Raïos, Hélène, 83 n.10, 83  
 n.12  
 Clark, Elizabeth A., 148 n.52, 149 n.54,  
 184 n.174  
 Clausen, Lucy W., 38 n.7, 42 n.19  
 Cleary, Michael, 2 n.3  
 Cohen, Martin S., 43–44 n.22, 45  
 Colbert, Don, 108 n.30  
 Cole, R. Alan, 5 n.9  
 Comby, Bruno, 112 n.45, 112 n.47  
 Condit, Ira J., 116 n.62  
 Conring, Barbara, 171 n.122  
 Cowan, Frank, 42–43 n.20, 66 n.94, 102  
 n.7, 102 n.9  
 Cramer, Friedrich, 134, 179  
 Crane, Eva, 81–82, 83 n.11, 84 n.13,  
 84–85 n.19, 114 n.56  
 Cranfield, C. E. B., 5 n.10  
 Croy, N. Clayton, 121 n.83  
 Curtis, Robert I., 103 n.12
- D’Aluisio, Faith, 107 n.29  
 Dabeck, P., 129 n.101, 132 n.111  
 Dalby, Andrew, 19, 61 n.75, 64 n.85, 82  
 n.7, 92–93, 98  
 Dalman, Gustaf, 30, 82 n.7  
 Danby, Herbert, 55 n.56  
 Daniélou, Jean, 1 n.2  
 Danker, Frederick W., 10 n.19, 15 n.39,  
 82 n.7, 199  
 Daube, David, 41 n.18  
 Davies, Malcolm, 42 n.20, 60 n.73, 61,  
 62 n.78, 63 nn.81–82, 70 n.108, 103  
 n.12  
 Davies, Margaret, 2–3 n.4  
 Davies, S. L., 27, 50 n.45  
 Davies, W. D., 6 n.12, 18, 82 n.7  
 Deane, Anthony C., 2 n.3  
 DeFoliart, Gene R., 86 n.21, 100, 101  
 n.5, 102 n.7, 102 n.9, 103 n.11, 107  
 n.29, 108 n.31  
 Dellinger, Samuel C., 103 n.11  
 Diamond, Cora, 184 n.174  
 Dibelius, Martin, 16–17, 21–24, 120  
 n.81
- Dittmeyer, Leonhard, 66 n.94  
 Donahue, John R., 5 n.10  
 Douglas, Mary, 44 n.25  
 Driver, S. R., 42 n.20, 43–44 n.22, 105
- Eason, James, 189 n.184, 190 n.187  
 Edwards, James R., 15, 22 n.79, 23 n.84,  
 122 n.86, 123 n.91  
 Eisler, Robert, 20–21, 23 n.82, 55 n.58,  
 173 n.133  
 Elliott, James K., 140 n.23  
 Elpel, Thomas J., 107 n.29  
 Erasmus, 13–14, 191  
 Ernst, Josef, 5 n.9, 16 n.44, 120 n.81,  
 122 n.86, 140 n.23  
 Escott-Stump, Sylvia, 117 n.66  
 Essig, Edward O., 107 n.27  
 Evans, C. F., 11 n.21, 129 n.101, 132  
 n.111  
 Evans, Howard Ensign, 102 n.10
- Faienstein, Morris M., 129 n.101  
 Faure, Jacob C., 38 n.7  
 Fehrle, Eugen, 105 n.21  
 Feichtinger, Barbara, 171 n.123  
 Filson, Floyd V., 27  
 Fiore, Benjamin, 203  
 Firmage, Edwin, 43–44 n.22, 84 n.18  
 Fitzmyer, Joseph A., 9 n.18  
 Four Winds Food Specialists, 112 n.47,  
 113 n.51, 117 n.65  
 France, R. T., 5 n.11, 21 n.70  
 Fraser, H. Malcolm, 83 n.10, 84 n.15, 91  
 n.39  
 Freedman, David Noel, 115 n.57  
 Frerichs, W. W., 43–44 n.22  
 Frey, Jörg, 54 n.54  
 Friesen, Steven J., 111 n.41  
 Frizzell, Lawrence, 129 n.101, 131 n.106
- García Soler, María José, 61 n.75  
 Garella, Rich, 103  
 Garland, David E., 2–3 n.4, 30 n.126  
 Garnsey, Peter, 42 n.20, 103 n.12, 111  
 n.41  
 Geddert, Timothy J., 22 n.79, 123 n.91  
 Gelb, I. J., 47 n.33  
 Gemoll, Wilhelm, 105 n.21  
 Gerstenberger, Erhard, 45  
 Gibson, John C. L., 177 n.151

- Gilbert, Allan S., 38 n.8  
 Gilula, Dwora, 63 n.81  
 Gnilka, Joachim, 18  
 Gordon, David George, 107 n.29  
 Gorman, Frank, 44–45, 49 n.41  
 Gossen, Hans, 15 n.39, 42 n.20, 60, 67  
     n.99, 79 n.127, 80 n.131  
 Gould, Ezra P., 22 n.79, 82 n.6, 123  
     n.91  
 Gowers, Emily, 103 n.12  
 Graf, Georg, 144 n.41  
 Grant, Robert M., 146 n.47, 147 n.48  
 Green, Joel B., 3 n.5  
 Grégoire, Henri, 134, 174 n.138  
 Griffith, Sidney H., 148 n.50  
 Guelich, Robert A., 31–32 n.131, 98  
     n.61  
 Gundry, Robert H., 6 n.12, 18, 22, 123  
     n.91  
 Güting, Eberhard W., 2 n.3  
  
 Häfner, Gerd, 6 n.12  
 Hagner, Donald A., 2–3 n.4  
 Hall, Christopher A., 134 n.11  
 Hänsler, Heinrich, 81 n.3  
 Hare, Douglas R. A., 2–3 n.4, 22, 123  
     n.91  
 Harrington, Daniel J., 2–3 n.4, 5 n.10  
 Harris, J. Rendel, 142, 143, 144 n.39,  
     148  
 Harrison, Roland K., 43–44 n.22, 46, 94  
 Hartley, John E., 43 n.22, 44 n.23  
 Hartmann, Michael, 1–2 n.2  
 Hehn, Victor, 20 n.66, 179  
 Heinrici, C. F. Georg, 182 n.169  
 Hendel, Ronald, 40 n.11  
 Hentschel, Georg, 129 n.101  
 Hertz, J. H., 58  
 Hess, J. J., 30  
 Hill, David, 11 n.21  
 Hirschfeld, Yizhar, 19 n.63  
 Hjelt, Arthur, 144 n.39  
 Hogg, Hope W., 144 n.39  
 Hollenbach, Paul W., 2 n.3, 25 n.95  
 Holt, Vincent M., 100, 107  
 Hooker, Morna D., 28 n.114  
 Horsley, Richard A., 201 n.11  
 Houtman, C., 129 n.101  
 Hudson, Nicola A., 63 n.81  
 Hui, Archie W. D., 2 n.3  
  
 Hünemörder, Christian, 60 n.73  
 Hurowitz, Victor A., 42 n.20  
 Hurtado, Larry W., 2–3 n.4, 11 n.21  
  
 Isman, Murray B., 43–44 n.22, 45  
 Israel, Richard J., 84 n.18, 84–85 n.19,  
     95 n.52  
  
 Jackson, F. J. Foakes, 176 n.150  
 Jacob, Irene and Walter, 115 n.59  
 Jeremias, Joachim, 129 n.101, 131 n.106  
 Johnson, Sherman E., 15  
 Johnson, Jr., S. Lewis, 2 n.3  
 Jones, James L., 2 n.3  
 Joosse, Peter, 143 n.38  
 Joüon, Paul, 4 n.8  
 Juel, Donald H., 25  
  
 Kamminga, Johan, 106 n.26  
 Kaplan, Aryeh, 43–44 n.22, 58 n.65  
 Karla, Grammatiki A., 64 n.86  
 Kathirithamby, Jeyaraney, 42 n.20, 60  
     n.73, 61, 62 n.78, 63 nn.81–82, 70  
     n.108, 103 n.12  
 Kazmierski, Carl R., 1 n.2  
 Keener, Craig S., 5 n.11, 19, 82 n.7, 123  
 Kelhoffer, J. A., 31 n.128, 132 n.110,  
     137 n.10, 178 n.155  
 Keller, Otto, 60 n.73, 63 n.81, 63 n.83,  
     65 n.89  
 Khalifé, Louis, 50 n.44  
 Kieferndorf, Philipp, 20, 23 n.82, 55  
     n.58  
 Kirk, Albert, 2–3 n.4  
 Klauck, Hans-Josef, 140 n.23, 175 n.142  
 Klijjn, A. F. J., 139  
 Klostermann, August, 2–3 n.4  
 Klostermann, Erich, 5 n.10, 17, 182  
 Koester, Helmut, 137–138 n.13, 138, 201  
     n.13  
 Kraeling, Carl H., 12 n.24, 22 n.79, 24,  
     82 n.6, 88 n.31, 123 n.91  
 Krauss, Samuel, 42–43 n.20, 58 n.65, 81  
     n.3  
 Krentz, Edgar, 2 n.3  
 Kuény, G., 83 n.10  
 Kutsch, Ernst, 42 n.20  
  
 Lagrange, M.-J., 15, 82 n.6  
 Lake, Kirsopp, 176 n.150

- Lamarche, Paul, 2–3 n.4, 123 n.87  
 Lambrecht, Jan, 2 n.3  
 Lane, George, 143 n.38  
 Lane, William L., 22 n.79, 123 n.89, 123 n.91  
 LaVerdiere, Eugene, 33–34, 48 n.36  
 Layton, Bentley, 165 n.105  
 Ledger, John, 38 n.7, 42–43 n.20, 101 n.5, 103 n.13, 107 n.29  
 Leeming, H. and K. Leeming, 176–177 n.150  
 Lenski, R. C. H., 82 n.7  
 Lerner, Berel Dov, 43–44 n.22  
 Levine, Daniel B., 146 n.46  
 Leyser, Conrad, 184 n.174  
 Lindeskog, Gösta, 3 n.5  
 Loane, Marcus L., 1 n.2  
 Lohfink, Gerhard, 132 n.110  
 Lohmeyer, Ernst, 21–23, 27 n.107, 123 n.91  
 Löhr, Hermut, 184 n.174  
 Loisy, Alfred, 15, 82 n.6  
 Louis, Pierre, 66 n.94  
 Lührmann, Dieter, 17  
 Lupieri, Edmondo F., 32–33, 82 n.7, 128 n.96, 137 n.10, 137 n.12, 169 n.118, 202 n.16, 202–203 n.17  
 Luther, Martin, 29 n.121, 181 n.166  
 Luz, Ulrich, 33, 128 n.98, 169 n.117
- Macina, Robert, 129 n.101  
 Madsen, David B., 106, 112–113, 132  
 Mahan, L. Kathleen, 117 n.66  
 Malbon, Elizabeth S., 5 n.9  
 Malek, Jaromir, 48 n.37  
 Mann, C. S., 15, 21 n.70  
 Manson, T. William, 23 n.84  
 Marchiori, Antonia, 75 n.116  
 Marcus, Joel, 15, 39 n.10, 55 n.58  
 Marmardji, A.-S., 144 n.39  
 Marshall, I. Howard, 9 n.18, 32  
 Martlew, Holley, 83 n.11  
 Marx [no first name listed], 20 n.68, 23 n.82  
 Marxsen, Willi, 26–27, 140 n.24  
 Mason, Steve, 128 n.96  
 Masseron, Alexandre, 3 n.6  
 Mayor, Adrienne, 84 n.13, 89 n.32, 90 n.37
- McGowan, Andrew B., 146–147 n.47, 184 n.174  
 McNeile, Alan H., 6 n.12, 17–19, 21 n.73, 128 n.97  
 Meier, John P., 2 n.3, 10 n.20, 22, 29 n.121, 31 n.131, 54 n.54, 123 n.91, 201 n.13  
 Meinardus, Otto F. A., 129–130 n.101, 202 n.17  
 Meineke, August, 181 n.167  
 Menzel, Peter, 107 n.29  
 Metzger, Bruce M., 146 n.47  
 Meyer, Heinrich August Wilhelm, 13 n.29, 82 n.8, 98 n.61  
 Michaelis, Wilhelm, 82 n.6, 82 n.9  
 Michaels, J. Ramsey, 2 n.3  
 Milgrom, Jacob, 43 nn.21–22, 47 n.35  
 Miller, Janette Brand, 112 n.47  
 Miller, Robert J., 129 n.101, 131 nn.106–108  
 Migne, Jacques-Paul, 20 n.68, 182–183  
 Mingana, Alphonse, 175  
 Molin, Georg, 129 n.101  
 Moloney, Francis J., 19  
 Moran, William L., 50  
 Morony, Michael G., 42–43 n.20  
 Morris, Leon, 11 n.21, 82 n.7  
 Moskala, Jiri, 45 n.26  
 Müller, Christoph G., 1–2 n.2, 202 n.16  
 Müller, Ulrich B., 22, 82 n.7  
 Mulvaney, John, 106 n.26  
 Murphy O'Connor, Jerome, 3 n.5
- Nagy, Gregory, 65 n.88  
 Nestle, Eberhard, 4 n.8  
 Neufeld, Edward, 83 nn.10–11, 84 n.18  
 Nevo, David, 49 n.41, 58 n.65  
 Nineham, Dennis E., 2–3 n.4  
 Nolan, Mary Lee, 169 n.118  
 Nolland, John, 11 n.21  
 Noth, Martin, 43 n.22
- Obach, Robert E., 2–3 n.4  
 Oden, Thomas C., 134 n.4  
 Öhler, Markus, 122 n.85, 129 n.101, 131 n.106, 131 n.108  
 Osborne, Catherine, 184 n.174  
 Ott, Jonathan, 89 n.32  
 Ozimek, L., 86 n.21

- Palacios, Miguel Asín, 177 n.151  
 Pallis, Alexandros, 19–20, 55 n.58  
 Palmoni, Y., 43–44 n.22, 46 n.31  
 Patte, Daniel, 2–3 n.4  
 Pattie, James O., 104 nn.17–18  
 Peck, A. L., 65 n.89, 66 n.94  
 Perry, Ben Edwin, 64 n.86, 66 n.95, 67 n.97, 77 n.122  
 Pesch, Rudolf, 18  
 Peter, Heinrich, 1 n.2  
 Petersen, William L., 15 n.33, 137 n.10, 141 n.25, 145, 147 nn.48–49, 148  
 Pierre, Marie-Joseph, 142 n.30  
 Pigas, Meletios, 180–181, 187, 193, 198  
 Plummer, Alfred, 17, 82 n.6  
 Potheary, Sarah, 72  
 Powell, J. Enoch, 13 n.25, 140 n.24  
 Pryor, John W., 2 n.3  
 Purcell, Nicholas, 61 n.74
- Quasten, Johannes, 162 n.91, 169 n.118
- Rackham, H., 91 n.39  
 Rawlinson, A. E. J., 18, 82 n.6  
 Reim, Helmut, 102 n.6  
 Reumann, John, 3 n.5  
 Rhoads, David M., 201 n.11  
 Richter, Georg, 130 n.102  
 Robinson, John A. T., 2 n.3, 129 n.101, 131 n.107  
 Ross, Alexander, 187, 189–190, 191, 192  
 Rothschild, Clare Komoroske, 130 n.105, 202 n.14  
 Roubalou, Maria, 169 n.118
- Sabbatucci, Dario, 184 n.174  
 Sacks, Kenneth S., 69 n.103  
 Saller, Richard, 63 n.81  
 Sanders, E. P., 8 n.16  
 Sandy, D. Brent, 2 n.3  
 Sauma, Assad, 143 n.38  
 Schlatter, Adolf, 1 n.2, 7 n.15  
 Schmidt, Karl L., 6 n.12, 26 n.102  
 Schnackenburg, Rudolf, 18, 22 n.79  
 Schochet, Elijah Judah, 54 n.55  
 Schonfield, Hugh J., 175 n.142  
 Schuster, Mauriz, 82 n.6  
 Schütz, Roland, 1–2 n.2  
 Schweizer, Eduard, 2–3 n.4, 10 n.20, 14 n.30
- Scobie, Charles H. H., 28, 29, 32, 54 n.54, 140 n.23  
 Senior, Donald, 2–3 n.4  
 Sewter, E. R. A., 42–43 n.20  
 Shaver, Brenda J., 129 n.101  
 Shaw, Brent D., 68 n.100  
 Shaw, Teresa M., 19 n.65, 168, 184 n.174  
 Sheridan, Susan Guise, 110 n.38, 111 n.39  
 Shutt, R. J. H., 51 n.46, 95  
 Sickenberger, Joseph, 182 n.169  
 Silberman, L. H., 81 n.3  
 Simonetti, Manlio, 134 n.4  
 Simonsen, D., 81 n.3  
 Simoons, Frederick J., 184 n.174  
 Smith, Robert H., 32  
 Snyman, A. H., 2 n.3  
 Sokol, Moshe, 58 n.65  
 Soler, Jean, 44 n.25  
 Sparkes, B. A., 103 n.12  
 Staubli, Thomas, 15 n.39  
 Steedman, Alison, 38 n.5, 38 n.7, 39 n.9, 42 n.20, 64 n.85, 105 n.23  
 Steinmann, Jean, 1–2 n.2  
 Strack, H. L., 15, 54 n.55, 82 n.6  
 Sutton, Mark Q., 37 n.4, 102–106, 117 n.65, 132  
 Svartvik, Jesper, 24 n.91  
 Swanson, Reuben J., 20 n.67  
 Swanton, John R., 104 n.17  
 Swete, H. B., 15, 17 n.49, 82 n.7
- Tatum, W. Barnes, 19 n.63, 82 n.7  
 Taylor, Joan E., 25 n.95, 32–33, 82 n.7, 120 n.80  
 Taylor, Ronald L., 36 n.1, 37 n.4, 101 n.5, 102 nn.6–7, 102 n.9, 107 n.27, 107 n.29, 117 n.65  
 Taylor, Vincent, 2–3 n.4, 82 n.6  
 Thackeray, H. S. J., 176 n.150  
 Thackston, Jr., W. M., 177 n.151  
 Thompson, Dorothy, 75 n.115  
 Thompson, John A., 42 n.20, 43–44 n.22, 48 n.37  
 Tilly, Michael, 8 nn.16–17, 17, 32, 98 n.61  
 Tinambunan, E. R. L., 202–203 n.17  
 Trilling, Wolfgang, 2 n.3

- Trocme, Étienne, 22 n.79, 29 n.120, 33 n.135, 123 n.91
- Trublet, Jacques, 45 n.26, 50 n.44
- Trumbower, Jeffrey A., 2 n.3
- Turner, C. H., 2–3 n.4, 7 n.15
- Tzedakis, Yannis, 83 n.11
- Uvarov, Boris P., 38, 109 n.35, 112 n.46
- Valantasis, Richard, 184 n.174
- Van Buren, Elizabeth Douglas, 48
- Van der Meer, W., 42 n.20
- Van Leeuwen, Cornelis, 42 n.20
- Vielhauer, Philipp, 4 n.8, 6 n.14, 28, 30, 32
- Von Metzsch, F.-A., 3 n.6, 175 n.144
- Von Tischendorf, Constantin, 13 n.29, 20 n.67
- Vööbus, Arthur, 146–147 n.47, 169 n.118
- Wakefield, Elmer G., 103 n.11
- Walker Bynum, Caroline, 179–180
- Walsh, Jerome T., 129 n.101
- Ward, Bernard, 108 n.30
- Washburn, David L., 53 n.51
- Webb, Robert L., 1–2 n.2, 140 n.23, 176 n.150
- Weis, E., 3–4 n.6
- Weiss, Bernhard, 18, 82 n.8, 98 n.61, 128 n.97
- Wellhausen, Julius, 2–3 n.4
- Wettstein, Johann Jakob, 13–14
- Whitby, Michael and Mary Whitby, 79 n.127
- White, Ellen Gould Harmon, 187, 190–191, 192
- White, K. D., 103 n.12
- White, Jr., Jonathan W., 114
- Whiting, John D., 42–43 n.20, 103–104, 107 n.27
- Wilkins, John, 63 n.81
- Williamson, Jr., Lamar, 22 n.79, 123 n.91
- Wimbush, Vincent L., 184 n.174
- Wimmer, F., 66 n.94
- Windisch, Hans, 6 n.14, 21, 23–24
- Wink, Walter, 11 n.21, 130, 132 n.111
- Witherington III, Ben, 2–3 n.4
- Wolff, Christian, 2 n.3
- Wordsworth, Christopher, 13 n.28
- Wucherpennig, Ansgar, 137 n.11
- Yamasaki, Gary, 24–25
- Young, Frances M., 134, 148 n.52, 186, 201 n.11, 203–204
- Young, Richard A., 20 n.69
- Zahn, Theodor, 14–15, 82 n.7
- Zeitlin, Solomon, 176 n.150

## Index of Subjects

- Aesop, 64–65, 77  
Africa, 14, 39, 58, 77, 90, 101, 105  
Ahab, 126  
Akkadian, 10 n.19  
Alexander the Great, 67  
Allegory, 52 n.48, 67 n.97, 135–136,  
148–153, 164, 177–178, 182,  
191–192  
Antiochus IV (Epiphanes), 125, 185  
Apiculture (beekeeping), 83–88, 90–91  
Apollinaris of Laodicea, 161 n.89  
Apollonius of Tyana, 185–186  
Aristomachus of Soli, 90, 91 n.39  
Asceticism, 17–19, 34, 135–136, 145,  
147, 150–151, 153–154, 155, 160,  
162, 165, 168–169, 171, 173–174,  
175, 177 n.151, 181, 183–186, 187  
Ashurbanipal, 46  
Assyria, 28, 46–48, 108, 196  
Australia, 46 n.30, 102, 106 n.26  
  
Babylon, 40 n.14, 42 n.20, 48, 56,  
83–84, 94 n.47  
Bannus, 23, 29, 126–127  
Bedouins, 14, 30 n.124, 33, 196  
Body Mass Index (BMI), 109–111  
  
Cassianus Bassus, 105 n.21  
Central America, 102  
Chastity (Celibacy), 155, 163, 164, 170  
n.120, 171, 177  
Council of Constantinople, 154  
Curetonian Syriac (sy<sup>c</sup>), 143  
  
Democritus, 105  
Diogenes the Cynic, 186  
  
Ebionites, 134, 139–140, 184  
Egypt, 38–39, 40, 43 n.20, 74, 75 n.115,  
83, 98  
Elijah, 126, 129–132, 133, 155, 159,  
202–203 n.17  
— And Jesus, 123, 129–132, 133  
— And John the Baptist, 4–5, 22,  
25–26, 122–123, 129–132, 133, 158,  
160–161, 180, 197  
Encratism, 146–148, 154, 168 n.115  
Elisha, 155  
Essenes, 27–28, 29, 31 n.130, 86, 87  
n.26  
Eustathius of Thessalonike, 181  
  
Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)  
of the United Nations, 115 n.60  
Form Criticism, 14, 16–17  
  
Globalization, 204  
Great Basin, 101–106, 112  
  
Heracleon, 137  
Herod Antipas, 110, 131  
Historical Baptist, 1, 14–15, 19–21, 30,  
68, 72, 81, 92, 96, 99, 100–107,  
108–120, 127–128, 150, 160,  
201–202  
— Clothing of, 1, 4–5, 18, 21–22,  
24–26, 30, 32–34, 72–73, 121,  
123–124, 125, 127, 130, 132, 133,  
135, 149, 150, 151, 153, 154–155,  
157–158, 159, 162–163, 165, 166,  
170–171, 174, 175, 177 n.151, 186,  
190, 191, 202  
Historical Jesus, 120, 150, 160, 201–202  
Honey, 28, 29, 31–32  
— Types and Ambiguity, 15 n.35, 24  
n.93, 31–32, 81–83, 113–114, 156,  
179, 197  
  
Islam, 59, 177  
  
The Jesus Seminar, 19, 82 n.7  
Jezebel, 126  
Jose b. Joezer of Zereda, 54–55  
Judas Maccabeus, 126–127



- Kashrut, 13 n.25, 27 n.111, 43–44 n.22, 51, 53, 55, 58 n.68, 59–60, 128 n.96, 140 n.24, 196
- Literary Criticism, 25, 200, 201 n.11
- Locusts/grasshoppers
- As human food, 13–14, 19, 20–21, 46–49, 60–61, 101–107, 108–113, 165
  - Characteristics of, 37–39, 52–53
  - Classification, 37–39, 65 n.89, 109
  - Desert Locust, 38, 41
  - Drowning, 104–105
  - Ethnic Designations, 67–73, 104, 106
  - Moroccan Locust, 39
  - Nutritive Value, 5 n.11, 52, 108–113, 198
  - Nymphs, 106–107, 165
  - Phase Theory, 38
  - Sudan Plague Locust, 39
  - Translation of Terms for, 39
  - Tree Locust, 39
- Manasseh, 126
- Mandaeans, 137
- Manicheans, 168 n.115
- Matthew, Apostle, 154
- McDonalds (restaurant), 204
- Mechtild of Magdeburg, 179–180
- Medicine, Ancient, 75–77
- Menedemos, 23
- Mesopotamia, 46 n.31, 47, 48 n.37, 84, 98, 142
- Methods of Study, 108 n.34, 199–201
- Mishnah, 54–56, 88, 119
- Monasticism, 78–79, 158–159, 165 n.105, 168–170, 173, 174, 175, 180–181, 187, 193, 202
- Muḥammad ibn Mūsā al-Damīrī, 59, 196 n.2
- Nabataeans, 93–94, 98, 197
- National Academy of Sciences (NAS), 109–112, 113, 117
- Native Americans, 102–107, 112–113, 200
- Nazarite Vow, 10, 29
- Nigeria, 101–102 n.5
- NRSV, 7 n.15, 44 n.24
- Paideia*, 134, 162–163, 174, 183–186, 193, 203–204
- Paul, Apostle, 120, 160–161, 203, 205
- Philiscus of Thasos, 90–91
- Physical Activity Level (PAL), 111
- Pompey, 89
- Pythagoras, 23, 185 n.177
- Q (Sayings Source), 9–11, 31, 130
- Redaction Criticism, 5–6, 26, 124–132, 133
- Rufinus of Aquileia, 138 n.17
- Septuagint, 4 n.8, 10 n.19, 26, 41, 51, 52 nn.48–49, 91 n.42, 97, 121, 122 n.85, 132, 133, 139, 151, 161–162, 165 n.104, 172–173, 188, 190
- Seventh Day Adventists, 190
- Silvestros, Patriarch of Alexandria, 180–181
- Slavonic Josephus, 7, 25, 176–177
- Source Criticism, 68–69
- South America, 102
- South Asia, 184 n.174
- Southeast Asia, 102
- Synoptic Problem, 30–31, 32
- Thomas à Kempis, 135
- Total Energy Expenditure (TEE), 111 n.41
- United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), 114, 117
- USDA Nutrient Database, 114, 115 n.59, 115 n.61, 116 nn.62–63, 117 n.66
- Ute (“Grasshopper Indians”), 104
- Vegetarianism, 6, 12, 15, 19–21, 24–25, 27, 29 n.118, 32–33, 34–35, 55, 74, 126, 134, 135–136, 140, 141, 144–147, 154, 164, 171–186, 187, 190–192
- Vitamin C (Ascorbic Acid), 108–109, 117–118, 127, 132, 198
- Vulgatization, 143, 147–148
- World Hunger, 112 n.45
- Yemenite Jews, 58

# Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

## *Alphabetical Index of the First and Second Series*

- Ádna, Jostein*: Jesu Stellung zum Tempel. 2000. *Volume II/119*.
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- see *Hengel, Martin*.
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- Kleinknecht, Karl Th.*: Der leidende Gerechtfertigte. 1984, <sup>2</sup>1988. *Volume II/13*.
- Klinghardt, Matthias*: Gesetz und Volk Gottes. 1988. *Volume II/32*.
- Koch, Michael*: Drachenkampf und Sonnenfrau. 2004. *Volume II/184*.
- Koch, Stefan*: Rechtliche Regelung von Konflikten im frühen Christentum. 2004. *Volume II/174*.
- Köhler, Wolf-Dietrich*: Rezeption des Matthäusevangeliums in der Zeit vor Irenäus. 1987. *Volume II/24*.
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- Korn, Manfred*: Die Geschichte Jesu in veränderter Zeit. 1993. *Volume II/51*.
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- Kwon, Yon-Gyong*: Eschatology in Galatians. 2004. *Volume II/183*.
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- Lambers-Petry, Doris*: see *Tomson, Peter J.*
- Lange, Armin*: see *Ego, Beate*.
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- Luomanen, Petri*: Entering the Kingdom of Heaven. 1998. *Volume II/101*.
- Luz, Ulrich*: see *Dunn, James D. G.*
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- see *Dimitrov, Ivan Z.*
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- Sato, Migaku*: Q und Prophetie. 1988. *Volume II/29*.
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- Schnelle, Udo*: see *Frey, Jörg*.
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*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament*

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- Wilk, Florian*: see *Walter, Nikolaus*.
- Williams, Catrin H.*: I am He. 2000. *Volume II/113*.
- Wilson, Walter T.*: Love without Pretense. 1991. *Volume II/46*.
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- Wucherpfennig, Ansgar*: Heracleon Philologus. 2002. *Volume 142*.
- Yeung, Maureen*: Faith in Jesus and Paul. 2002. *Volume II/147*.
- Zimmermann, Alfred E.*: Die urchristlichen Lehrer. 1984, <sup>2</sup>1988. *Volume II/12*.
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- Zimmermann, Ruben*: Christologie der Bilder im Johannesevangelium. 2004. *Volume 171*.
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