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REDAKTION: SABRINA TATZ

ANSCHRIFT DER REDAKTION:  
F. J. DÖLGER-INSTITUT, OXFORDSTRASSE 15, D-53111 BONN  
TELEFON 00 49-(0)228-73 61 78 · TELEFAX 73 61 81 · E-MAIL: statz@uni-bonn.de  
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Migration

Rhetoric and reality in Late Antiquity

XVIII International conference on Patristics studies,  
Oxford 22. August 2019

## WHERE DID JOHN BAPTIZE?

### From Bethany to Bethabara and back again\*

The toponym »Bethabara beyond the Jordan« once materialized the exegetical and territorial ambitions of late ancient Christian scholars, monks, and emperors. Informed by nineteenth-century textual scholarship, however, critics today generally affirm that »Bethany« is the appropriate appellation for the place beyond the Jordan where, according to tradition and scripture, John once baptized (Joh. 1,28). The twined pilgrimage sites at Qasr al-Yehūd and Al-Maghtas concretize this shift in nomenclature, with both the National Park and the UNESCO World Heritage Site claiming to be »Bethany«. Yet the name Bethabara endures: Employing an alternative etymology from that of Origen of Alexandria, archaeologists now associate Bethabara with an Aramaic term for »the place of the crossing«, locating it along the Roman road from Jericho to Livias. In Christian antiquity, Origen's etymological rationale was also dropped though the reading Bethabara was repeatedly affirmed in Greek contexts and places were constructed to carry this name. It is now impossible to cross the Jordan at the ancient ford and, outside of the Greek Orthodox tradition, Bethabara has been erased or forgotten. Still, the migration of these twinned toponyms in and out of manuscripts and monuments points to a larger truth: textual and territorial infrastructures must be repeatedly refreshed if they are to maintain their illusion of permanence. Eccentric behaviors settle into patterns that make what is odd or strange seem static or inescapable. Rivers, however, are unpredictable, change is inevitable, and what seems to be stable is only a temporary condition.

An obstruction to travelers and migrants, the Jordan River is currently employed as a national boundary between Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. During Christian antiquity, however, the Jordan was not a border but a feature within an imagined Roman-Christian inheritance that required the River to be crossed. A theory of biblical lots (κλήροι) and a Romanitas that emanated from a unified (but actually fragmented) empire presupposed the importance of movement across the River<sup>1</sup>. In this context, a place (or a no-place) at the ford along the Roman road from Jericho to Livias became, in Christian nomenclature, »Bethabara beyond the Jordan«, a toponym that Origen of Alexandria recommended as the more accurate etymological and geo-

\* The author would like to thank András Handl, Leuven, and Samuel Cohen, Sonoma, for their substantive feedback on earlier drafts of this essay. She is also grateful to Annabel Wharton, Duke University, for her helpful comments. Without Beatrice Leal, University of East Anglia, and her recent reappraisal of the Madaba Mosaic, a great deal would have been missed. Maroun El Houkayem, also of Duke University, has dedicated time and expertise to this project, checking for errors and deepening the discussion of the reception of the Bethany/Bethabara question in

Syriac. Tommy Wasserman, Sweden, has helped her better understand the Latin tradition and reviewed the text critical arguments. She is also indebted to the extremely helpful suggestions of the anonymous peer reviewers. Remaining errors and infelicities are her own.

<sup>1</sup> As J. Z. SMITH puts it, imagined Christian territory was carved out like a palimpsest onto the existing landscape (*To take place. Toward a theory in ritual* [Chicago 1987] 79). Also see JOHNSON 2010, 20/2.

graphical designation for the »house« beyond the Jordan where John the Baptist was dwelling (Joh. 1,28)<sup>2</sup>. In Greek exegesis, Origen's etymological rationale was dropped but the place name endured. Textual and territorial infrastructures conspired to claim habitations for John on both sides of the River and along the Jordan's banks<sup>3</sup>. Repeat performances at the Jericho-Livias ford scaffolded the territorial dreams of Christian emperors and ecclesiastical leaders alike, even when emperors and their Christian subjects were at odds<sup>4</sup>. By the late sixth century, the River and its crossings had become what, for a time, they had always seemed to be: concrete demonstrations of the extent of a Roman-Christian domain granted by the Scriptures, claimed by the Baptist, maintained by monastic foundations, and regularly refreshed by festal observances and visits by travelers from afar.

Such permanence is fleeting. People, rivers, and texts rarely stay still, as the toponym Bethabara illustrates. The term itself repeatedly migrates in and out of copies of the Gospel of John<sup>5</sup>. The place also migrates: some sources situate Bethabara on the eastern bank and some on the west, others identify it with the ford itself and still others doubt it ever existed. For two millennia local inhabitants participated in – and have been impacted by – the ideological, theological, territorial, and material maneuverings that are refracted through the Bethabara toponym<sup>6</sup>. Survival tactics, however, leave fewer traces on books and stones. Among the detritus of ancient and medieval literary remains and architectural monuments, it the place itself migrates.

<sup>2</sup> Orig. in Joh. comm. 6,204/6 (SC 157,284/8).

<sup>3</sup> On the important role of monks in populating the Jordan with holy habitations, see B. HAMARNEH, *Between hagiography and archaeology. Pilgrimage and monastic communities on the banks of the river Jordan: Pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Journeys, destinations, experiences across times and cultures*, Conference Jerusalem 2017 (Heidelberg 2020) 43/56.

<sup>4</sup> I have been inspired here by the work of E. A. PEÑA. For more than a century, the twin cities of Laredo, Texas (USA) and Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas (Mexico) have maintained cross-border communication and collaboration by means of a shared celebration of George Washington's birthday. As she shows, repeated cultural performances negotiate complex borderland social relations, exemplifying the lived quality of territory and the failure of national theories of sovereignty to attune to local practices. See her ¡Viva George! Celebrating Washington's birthday at the US-Mexico border (Austin 2020).

<sup>5</sup> Origen's emendation and related variants βῆθαβαρά, βιθαβαρά, βῆθεβαρά made their way into a number of manuscripts, both as the copied text and as a correction, and »Bethabara« became the de

facto Byzantine reading. The NA<sup>28</sup> apparatus lists: βῆθᾶνιᾶ P<sup>66</sup> N\* it, βῆθαβαρά C<sup>2</sup> K T Ψ<sup>2</sup> 083 f<sup>1.13</sup> 33 pm sy<sup>s.c</sup> sa<sup>mss</sup>; Or, and βῆθαβαρά N<sup>2</sup> 892<sup>vl</sup>. (sy<sup>hmg</sup>) sa<sup>mss</sup> (= E. NESTLE / B. ALAND et al. [ed.], *Novum Testamentum Graeca*<sup>28</sup> [Stuttgart 2012] 294).

<sup>6</sup> This is a cautious guess; archaeological remains and literary evidence do not readily reveal the impact of Christian *loca sancta*, Roman provincial districting, and imperial law on the actual residents of the wadis, caves, and villages at or near the ford. See B. WARD-PERKINS, *Land, labour and settlement: A. Cameron / B. Ward-Perkins / M. Whitby (ed.), Late Antiquity. Empire and successors, AD 425/600* [Cambridge 2008] 315/54. As K. BOWES and C. GREY have shown in another context, peasant »lifeways« were local, particular, and functional in ways that cannot be generalized (including, presumably to the »peasant« residents of Palaestina I). The Republican early imperial era peasants they studied did move, however, and often; they were also quite adept at exploiting and adjusting to changing circumstances (Conclusions. The Roman peasant reframed: K. Bowes [ed.], *The Roman peasant project 2009/14. Excavating the Roman rural poor* [Philadelphia 2020] 617/39).



## 1. A river runs through it

Rivers are poor political borders. They flood. They change their banks. They fail to conform to the ›rational‹ principles which, in theory at least, compartmentalize authority into ›natural‹ territorial units, both linearly and politically defined<sup>7</sup>. The Jordan River is no exception: despite overuse, environmental degradation, and conscription as an international border, the Jordan flows on, a fluid site of friction, contestation, and collaboration<sup>8</sup>. Situated within or without of imagined territories, the Jordan has sometimes been cast in the role of a watery edge; more often, however, it has been open for crossing by residents and visitors alike. Indeed, as RACHEL S. HAVRELOCK demonstrates, the River rarely served as a formal dividing line and, prior to the colonial period, the Jordan was not a national border at all<sup>9</sup>. Open or closed, as a fluid source of both water and myth-making, the Jordan has inspired theories of divinely given promised lands and stories about transition and transformation throughout recorded history. Still, »[t]here is not one Promised Land between the Jordan and the Mediterranean«; instead »homeland, Holy Land, and a string of proper nouns like Canaan, Palestina, Israel, [and] Palestine« are »variations«, instantiations of amalgamated concepts that, like the river itself, change their banks<sup>10</sup>.

Among late ancient Christians, connectivity and movement were elite affairs; even so, it was the River's crossings that mattered. Romanitas presupposed the importance of travel for some (armies, embassies, exiles, and certain pilgrims and monks) while seeking to curtail the movement of others<sup>11</sup> and thus the presence of a road with

<sup>7</sup> K. GOETTLICH, The rise of linear borders in world politics: *European journal of international relations* 25 (2019) 208: »Rivers have width and change their courses ... Intergovernmental organizations have been founded in response to these unavoidable gaps between the simple ideal of fixed linear borders and complex realities such as riverine topography«. The Rio Grande, which has been an international border for less than two centuries, offers an illustrative example; see R. SKOWRONEK / B. L. LOVETT, *Coahuiltecas of the Rio Grande region*: id. / J. L. González / R. Bacha-Garza / R. Skowronek (ed.), *Native American peoples of South Texas* (Edinburgh, Texas 2014) 13/8; A. L. BAUMGARTNER, The line of positive safety. Boarders and boundaries in the Rio Grande Valley, 1848/80: *The Journal of American History* 101 (2015) 1106/22; J. KROPP, Working on the levees. The Rio Grande rectification project, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and the making of the US-Mexico border: *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Environmental Studies* 11 (2016) 1/18.

<sup>8</sup> I. FISCHHENDLER, Ambiguity in transboundary environmental dispute resolution. The Israeli-Jordanian water agreement: *Journal of Peace Research* 45 (2008) 91/109; F. DE CHÂTEL, Baptism in the Jor-

dan river. Immersing in a contested transboundary watercourse: *WIREs Water* 1 (2014) 219/27.

<sup>9</sup> R. S. HAVRELOCK, *River Jordan. The mythology of a dividing line* (Chicago 2011). As Y. LEVIN points out, the Jordan was portrayed as a symbolic boundary of the Promised Land in a number of biblical texts and yet other texts envision the Jordan as within Israel. Prior to the Sykes-Picot agreement at the end of World War I, the Jordan was crossed with ease; see his *The Jordan river in biblical geography. From boundary to allegory*: *ARAM* 29 (2017) 221/34.

<sup>10</sup> HAVRELOCK 2011 cit. (n. 9) 4.

<sup>11</sup> On ›imperial habitus‹, see P. VAN NUFFELEN, Introduction. From imperial to post-imperial space in late ancient historiography: id. (ed.), *Historiography and space in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge 2019) 4f. Wandering monks and wandering in general was subjected to increasingly restrictive legal constraints; see D. CANER, Wandering, begging monks. Spiritual authority and the promotion of monasticism in Late Antiquity = Transformation of the classical heritage 33 (*Berkeley* 2002) 12/6. 206/46 and M. DIETZ, Wandering monks, virgins, and pilgrims. Ascetic travel in the Mediterranean world A.D. 300/800 (*University Park* 2005) 36/42.

a ford does not necessarily indicate that just anyone could cross over<sup>12</sup>. Still, in the Christian imaginary the Jordan ran straight through God's territory, it did not divide it. Beginning in the fourth-century, Roman imperial redistricting subsumed the River within Palaestina I and II, as part of the larger administrative diocese of Oriens<sup>13</sup>. Christian exegesis supplemented the picture, transforming the Jordan's banks into the inheritance (κληρος) of the Baptist and his forerunners Elijah and Elisha<sup>14</sup>. Once named, the designation Bethabara as the place of the baptism stuck. Affirmed as the correct topographical and textual toponym in the context of Greek Gospel exegesis, Greek Orthodox Bibles print Bethabara at Joh. 1,28 to this day<sup>15</sup>. Bethabara was also depicted on the Madaba mosaic map, a sixth- or early seventh-century cartographical vision of the empire that stretches from the eastern coast of the Mediterranean to Madaba and beyond<sup>16</sup>. Identified in an inscription that surrounds a small, square church, Bethabara is named as the location of John's baptizing activities (Βεθαβαρα τὸ τοῦ ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ βαπτίσματος)<sup>17</sup>.

Among contemporary scholars, however, Bethabara is more often remembered as a mistake. Erased by a historical concatenation of Latin receptions, late ancient doctrinal controversies, New Testament textual criticism, and modern international politics, the former baptismal site is identified as Bethany beyond the Jordan both within the pages of critical editions of the New Testament and at the contemporary baptismal monuments at Qasr al-Yehūd (administered by Israel but located within the Palestinian West

<sup>12</sup> As I. ROLL points out, Roman roads were constructed to accommodate the movement of officials of the imperial administration and for the transport and command of military units; see his *The road in Roman-Byzantine Palaestina and Arabia*: Piccirillo/Alliata 1998, 109/13, here 110. Still, some did cross: *eulogia* from Jerusalem have been found at a number of sites »beyond the Jordan«, suggesting that locals from places like Madaba visited, at least occasionally.

<sup>13</sup> After Diocletian (AD 284/305) the region was subdivided into three Palestines (Palaestina I, II, and Salutaris [later, III]), and Arabia. The specific boundaries of these provinces shifted considerably over the course of the fourth century, but the Jordan River remained within Palaestina I and II. Christian sources often fail to confirm precisely to official administrative terminology; see W. D. WARD, »In the province recently called Palestine Salutaris«. Provincial changes in Palestine and Arabia in the late third and fourth centuries C.E.: *ZsPapEpigr* 181 (2012) 289/302. The recognition of a patriarchal see at Jerusalem at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 re-organized ecclesial administration, creating a disjuncture between the Roman administrative system, which placed the diocese of Oriens under the control of the *comes Orientis* in Antioch, and made the archimandrite of Jerusalem responsible for the monks and clerics within the three Palestines (overview in H. KENNEDY, *Syria, Palestine, and Mesopotamia*: Cameron/Ward-Perkins/Whitby 2008 cit. [n. 6] 590/95).

<sup>14</sup> JOHNSON 2010, 5/25. The discussion here is limited to receptions of the Gospel of John's portrayal of John the Baptist and his activities along the Jordan. For recent overview of the question of the evangelist's own possible intentions, see J. E. TAYLOR, *John the Baptist on the Jordan River. Localities and their significance*: ARAM 29 (2017) 365/83.

<sup>15</sup> Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, Ἡ Καινὴ Διαθήκη ἐργάσει τῆς Μεγάλης τοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἐκκλησίας (Constantinople 1904). For a history of this edition, see I. KARAVIDOPOULOS, *The Ecumenical Patriarchate's 1904 New Testament edition and future perspectives*: *Sacra Scripta* 1 (2012) 7/14.

<sup>16</sup> Discovered in 1897, the Madaba mosaic map has been a subject of numerous studies (more detailed discussion of below). Basic bibliography includes: AVI-YONAH 1954; G. W. BOWERSOCK, *Mosaics as history. The Near East from Late Antiquity to Islam* (Cambridge 2006); LEAL 2018, 123/43; PICCIRILLO/ALLIATA 1998; PICCIRILLO 1993. I follow B. LEAL's reconstruction of the placement and orientation of the map in its initial context.

<sup>17</sup> Throughout this essay, I depend upon E. ALLIATA's transcriptions, *The legends of the Madaba map*: Piccirillo/Alliata 1998, 47/101. The small stature of the building and its sloping red-tiled room matches depictions of churches in other locations on the map; see AVI-YONAH 1954, 23.

Bank) and Al-Maghtas (a UNESCO World Heritage Site located within the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan)<sup>18</sup>. In Late Antiquity, the precise location of Bethabara also varied, with Eusebius of Caesarea placing it on the eastern bank and the Madaba map to the west, albeit at the same ford in the River<sup>19</sup>. When nineteenth-century New Testament textual critics revisited the Bethabara-Bethany puzzle in search of the »original text of John«, they further muddied the waters. Turning to their own forms of etymological speculation, they noted that the Aramaic word Bethabara more closely means »the place of the crossing«; Origen's appellation, they therefore argued, probably referred to a ford in the river not to a village or »house« at all. The place identified by the evangelist John was Bethany beyond the Jordan, not Bethabara<sup>20</sup>.

The rediscovery of Madaba mosaic map in 1897 was key to these renewed efforts to pinpoint the exact location of Bethabara and/or Bethany beyond the Jordan to the west, east, or at the ford. As MICHELE PICCIRILLO recounts, in 1899 the map led Father Féderlin of the White Fathers of St. Anne in Jerusalem to search for sanctuaries not only in the west, where a site was already known, but to the east of the river where, it was now suspected, additional monastic and ecclesial foundations may be located<sup>21</sup>. Féderlin recognized a monastic *laura* (a collection of separate cells where monks pursue ascetic discipline in relative isolation) in the traces of walls, shards, and scattered mosaic tesserae found there<sup>22</sup>. But where was Bethabara? And should this name be associated with the ford, a church on the western bank, or the *laura* depicted on the map on the eastern bank and made freshly visible by Father Féderlin? Assessing the evidence in 1932, FÉLIX-MARIE ABEL warned that pinpointing the precise location of the earliest Church of the Prodromos would be difficult, despite all of the recent discoveries; the ambiguity of the sources and the capricious unpredictability of the River itself, he argued, make it extremely difficult to identify either the location of the initial church or the true location of the evangelist's Bethany beyond the Jordan; even so, he preferred to place the Byzantine church on the eastern side, to identify the term Bethabara with a ford, and to remain open to the possibility that the actual location of Jesus's baptism had yet to be discovered<sup>23</sup>. PICCIRILLO's more recent and compre-

<sup>18</sup> As an international border, this section of the river is impassible at what are rival sites, the Israeli Qasr al-Yehūd in the Palestinian West Bank and Al-Maghtas in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, each of which vies for the status as »the very place« where Jesus was baptized (see further below). Depleted by overuse, the Jordan River at this location is only meters wide.

<sup>19</sup> Eus. onomast. 290 (GCS N. F. 24,71): Βηθαβαρα (Joh. 1,28).

<sup>20</sup> Origen's etymology defined Bethabara as »house of preparation« (see further below). The revised etymology was endorsed in the late 1870s by Lieutenant C. R. CONDER, the topographer who contributed to identifying the borders of what became British Palestine; see id. / H. H. KITCHENER, The survey of Western Palestine. Memoirs of the topography, orography, hydrography, and archaeology 2. Samaria, ed. E. H. Palmer / W. Besant (Lon-

don 1882) 90. T. ZAHN also defended the »place of the ford« proposal (Zur Heimatkunde des Evangelisten Johannes: NKirchlZs 18 [1907] 266/71) and, as RIESNER 1987, 31 and id., Bethanien jenseits des Jordan. Topographie und Theologie im Johannes-Evangelium = BiblArchZ 12 [Basel 2002] 50/2). Also see HUTTON 2008, 305/28 and WIEFEL 1967, 72/82.

<sup>21</sup> PICCIRILLO 2016, 139.

<sup>22</sup> PICCIRILLO 2016, 140.

<sup>23</sup> F.-M. ABEL, Mélanges 1. Exploration du sud-est de la vallée du Jourdain: RevBibl 41 (1932) 237/57. He also expressed little confidence that any of these purported sites were the true »Bethany beyond the Jordan« mentioned by the Evangelist, however, regarding each of them as mere instantiations of sites of memory rather than secure identifications of places where the historical Baptist carried out his work (ibid. 251f).

hensive review of the evidence takes a stronger position: the monastic complex on the Jordanian eastern shore is, he argues, the best candidate for the Johannine site, Bethany beyond the Jordan, and Bethabara must refer to the ford<sup>24</sup>. By contrast, both YIZHAR HIRSCHFELD and MIKHAEL AVI-YONAH conclude that the original church was constructed on the western bank, as the Madaba map affirms and as medieval and more recent monastic habitations suggest<sup>25</sup>. Today both sites claim to be Bethany beyond the Jordan, not Bethabara<sup>26</sup>. These shifts in terminology track changes in archaeological interpretation and biblical exegesis; they also highlight the material consequences of the multiple human projects that saturate this site with sanctity but not permanence<sup>27</sup>. The highly militarized international border now located at the twin sites Bethany beyond the Jordan clarifies and upholds the functioning authority of two modern nation-states. Bethabara beyond the Jordan, however, was more suited to another form of imagined territory, albeit one equally laden with topographical desires, infrastructural embellishments, and on-going performances of, in this case, Roman-Christian dominion.

## 2. Bethabara

In a well-known albeit rare instance of the application of formal correction (διόρθωσις) to the Gospels, Origen recommended that the reading »Bethany beyond the Jordan« at (modern) Joh. 1,28 be remedied to state »Bethabara beyond the Jordan« instead<sup>28</sup>. The evangelists, Origen assumed, could not make a geographical error on the order of claiming that Bethany was »beyond the Jordan«. »No one of the evangelists errs or lies«, he observed<sup>29</sup>. The evidence of his own experience – by then he was living in Caesarea – had also convinced him that there is no town called Bethany in a region beyond the Jordan<sup>30</sup>. Since he assumed that place names in the Gospels are never accidental<sup>31</sup>, the correct identification of Bethany/Bethabara was therefore a crucial scholarly and theological task; we must not »despise precision concerning names« (τῆς

<sup>24</sup> A strong argument to this effect is put forward in M. PICCIRILLO, *The sanctuaries of the baptism on the East Bank of the Jordan river*: J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *Jesus and archaeology* [Grand Rapids 2006] 433/43. Adopting the scholarly consensus, he further concluded that Bethabara refers to a ford.

<sup>25</sup> HIRSCHFELD 1992, 16. 254<sup>49</sup> and AVI-YONAH 1954, 37. PICCIRILLO 2016, 135 also notes that, at some point, Qasr al-Yahud became the »topographical point of reference« for the location of the baptismal sanctuary.

<sup>26</sup> This monastery has been claimed both for the West Bank in Palestine, at Qasr el-Yehūd (currently administered by Israel) and for the Al-Maghtas site in Jordan.

<sup>27</sup> I am inspired here by A. J. WHARTON, *Selling Jerusalem. Relics, replicas, theme parks* (Chicago 2006). As WHARTON shows, the ways in which the sanctity of Jerusalem has been »sold« have changed

significantly over the centuries, from the initial infusion of superabundant sanctity by means of site, fragment, gift, and relic to the immaterial illusion of Holy Land theme parks.

<sup>28</sup> Orig. in Joh. comm. 6,204/6 (SC 157,284/8; trans. *Fathers of the Church* 80,224f).

<sup>29</sup> Orig. in Joh. comm. 6,171 (SC 157,258; trans. *Fathers of the Church* 80,217).

<sup>30</sup> Orig. in Joh. comm. 6,204 (SC 157,204/6; trans. *Fathers of the Church* 80,224f): »But since we have been in the places, so far as the historical account is concerns, of the footprints of Jesus and his disciples and the prophets, we have been convinced that we ought not to read ›Bethania‹, but ›Bethabara‹.«

<sup>31</sup> Orig. princ. 4,3,11, cited and discussed by C. M. CHIN, *Grammar and Christianity in the late Roman world* (Philadelphia 2008) 74f. Also see B. STEFANIW, *Allegorical exegesis in late antique Alexandria*: *RevHistRel* 224 (2007) 231/51.

περὶ τὰ ὀνόματα ἄκριβείας), he pointed out, »if we wish to understand Holy Scriptures perfectly«<sup>32</sup>. Though he acknowledged the counter-evidence – »nearly all the copies« (σχεδὸν ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς ἀντιγράφοις) and even the ›heretic‹ Heracleon read Bethany at this place in John – he could not believe that Bethany was correct. He therefore proposed a solution suitable to his own understanding of the problem: since he was unaware of a town called Bethany beyond the Jordan and since the word Bethabara means »house of preparation«, the correct reading must be Bethabara.

Within a century, Origen's textual conjecture had become an actual place. In his *Onomasticon*, Eusebius of Caesarea states:

Bethabara: Where John was baptizing, across the Jordan. The place is pointed out in our own day and is where many of the brothers are even now honored to receive the rite of baptism<sup>33</sup>.

Eusebius may simply be honoring Origen by naming this site Bethabara. As DENNIS GROH has argued, the *Onomasticon*'s literary and apologetic focus makes it an unreliable guide to fourth-century Palestine<sup>34</sup>. Still, visits to the Jordan River soon became a regular feature in a pilgrim's itinerary and, by the fifth-century, hermits were also living there<sup>35</sup>. By the mid- to late-sixth century, Bethabara was quite literally on the map. The Madaba mosaic map – found some forty kilometers away in what was a bustling late ancient metropolis – depicts an *oikoumene* that locates named cities, villages, and monuments within a lush countryside and with Bethabara situated on the western bank<sup>36</sup>. Eusebius located Bethabara on the eastern bank but the map situates it to the west, across from a site labeled »Aenon now Sapsaphas«, a fifth-century monastic *laura* also mentioned in the early seventh century by John Moschos<sup>37</sup>.

In Late Antiquity, then, Bethabara was a known destination. Still, discrepancies involving sites associated with the Baptist along the Jordan persisted: Latin pilgrims did not give the baptism site a name; Jerome preserved »Bethany beyond the Jordan« when translating the Gospel into Latin but later, when translating Eusebius's *Onomas-*

<sup>32</sup> Orig. in Joh. comm. 6,207 (SC 157,286; trans. Fathers of the Church 80,225). The study of the accuracy of names was a central occupation of the Alexandrian grammarians; see L. PAGINI, *Pioneers of grammar. Hellenistic scholarship and the study of language*: F. Montanari / L. Pagini (ed.), *From scholars to scholia. Chapters in the history of ancient Greek scholarship* (Berlin 2011) 21.

<sup>33</sup> *onomast.* 290 (GCS N. F. 24,71; trans. J. K.): Βηθαβαρά (Joh. 1,28). »ὄπου ἦν Ἰωάννης βαπτίζων«, »πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου«. καὶ δείκνυται ὁ τόπος, ἐν ᾧ καὶ πλείους τῶν ἀδελφῶν εἰς ἔτι νῦν τὸ λουτρὸν φιλοτιμοῦνται λαμβάνειν.

<sup>34</sup> The work accomplishes spatially what Eusebius's »Chronicon« does temporally and the first edition of the »Ecclesiastical History« narratively, »namely, bring biblical, Roman, and Christian realities together in such a way that Christianity is his own day

can be seen to be the success or of the biblical realities of the Roman world« (D. GROH, *The Onomasticon of Eusebius and the rise of Christian Palestine*: *StudPatr* 18 [1985] 23/31, here at 29).

<sup>35</sup> P. MARAVAL, *The earliest phase of Christian pilgrimage in the New East (before the 7<sup>th</sup> century)*: *DumbOPap* 56 (2002) 63/74 and E. D. HUNT, *Holy Land pilgrimage in the later Roman empire*, A. D. 312/460 (Oxford 1982). Cf. A. JACOBS, *The remains of the Jews. The Holy Land and Christian empire in Late Antiquity* (Stanford 2004) 139/76. On *laurae* located in and around the Jordan, see HIRSCHFELD 1992, 213/20.

<sup>36</sup> For a thorough appraisal of the possible date of the map, see A. M. MADDEN, *A new form of evidence to date the Madaba mosaic map*: *LibAnnStudBibl-Franc* 62 (2012) 495/513.

<sup>37</sup> Joh. Mosch. *prat.* 1 (PG 87,3, 2852).

*ticon*, he accepted his predecessor's opinion<sup>38</sup>; and only the Madaba map preserves both toponyms Bethabara and [Sap]saphas. A village or a no-place near the Dead Sea where the Roman road from Jericho to Livias forged the River, Bethabara weathered centuries of political, textual, and administrative change, whether or not the name was used.

### 3. Bethabara not Bethany

Having determined that Bethany beyond the Jordan was actually Bethabara, Origen was able to deepen his observations about John the Baptist and his ›house‹: a solid, calm house is a »spiritual structure which consists in proclamation and written characters, as it were« (λογικὴ ὡς ἐν ἀπαγγελίᾳ καὶ γράμμασιν οἰκοδομή)<sup>39</sup>. One must therefore endeavor to build the spiritual ›house‹ to the parapet by »trusting in God who enriches us in all speech and knowledge«<sup>40</sup>. After entering the house of preparation, the believer »draw[s] from the river« whatever spiritual help is required<sup>41</sup>. Moreover, since in his view the term Jordan means »their descent«, the River itself also stands for the »Word of God which became flesh and dwelt among us«, and is distributed like a saving river throughout the world<sup>42</sup>. John therefore baptized beyond the Jordan in order to anticipate the movement of the Word into the world and the crossing of the soul from death to life<sup>43</sup>. The spiritual, etymological, and geographical necessity of Bethabara was clear.

As a container for geographical knowledge and textual expertise, Bethabara remained the preferred reading among Greek writers and scholars. Epiphanius of Salamis was highly critical of Origen, but he also argued that Bethabara is correct<sup>44</sup>. Condemning yet another group of heretics, in this case those who do not accept the Gospel of John (the ›Alogi‹), he quoted the verse as »these things happened in Bethabara« (ταῦτα ἐγένετο ἐν Βηθαβαρά), noting that other, less reliable copies read »in Bethany« (ἐν Βηθανίᾳ)<sup>45</sup>. Preaching in Antioch, John Chrysostom went further in confirming Bethabara: »How, then, did the Evangelist note the place?« he asked. Citing the Gospel, he read the verse »these things took place at Bethany beyond the Jordan« in the lection for the day, but then added a clarification: »Some more accurate copies say (ὅσα δὲ τῶν ἀντιγράφων ἀκριβέστερον ἔχει) ›in Bethabara‹, for Bethany was not ›beyond the Jordan‹, or in the desert, but somewhere near Jerusalem«<sup>46</sup>. Origen's

<sup>38</sup> Hieron. onomast. 290 (GCS N. F. 24,71\*): *Bethabara trans Iordanem, ubi Ioannis in paenitentiam baptizabat, unde et usque hodie plurimi de fratribus, hoc est de numero credentium, ibi renasci cupientes vitali gurgite baptizantur.*

<sup>39</sup> Orig. in Joh. comm. 6,2 (SC 157,128; trans. Fathers of the Church 80,168).

<sup>40</sup> Orig. in Joh. comm. 6,7 (SC 157,130; trans. Fathers of the Church 80,169).

<sup>41</sup> Orig. in Joh. comm. 6,251 (SC 157,318; trans. Fathers of the Church 80,236): Διόπερ θεοπρεπέστερον νοήσαντες τὸν Ἰορδάνην καὶ τὸ ἐν αὐτῷ λουτρὸν καὶ τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐν αὐτῷ λουόμενον καὶ τὸν »τῆς κατασκευ-

ῆς οἴκον«, ὅσον δεόμεθα τῆς τοιαύτης ὠφελείας ἀπὸ τοῦ ποταμοῦ ἀρυσώμεθα.

<sup>42</sup> Orig. in Joh. comm. 6,217/20 (SC 157,294/8).

<sup>43</sup> Orig. in Joh. comm. 6,221 (SC 157,298).

<sup>44</sup> On Epiphanius's critique of Origen's exegesis, see B. STEFANIW, Straight reading. Shame and the normal in Epiphanius's polemic against Origen: *JournEarlChristStud* 21 (2013) 413/35.

<sup>45</sup> Epiph. haer. 51,13,1; trans. F. WILLIAMS, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis. Books 2 and 3, De Fide* (Leiden 1994) 37.

<sup>46</sup> Joh. Chrys. hom. in Joh. 17 (PG 59,107; trans. Fathers of the Church 33,162).

implied (but possibly invented) minority of copies with the reading Bethabara became in Chrysostom's homily »the more accurate« of the textual witnesses.

Later Greek Christian writers made similar claims: According to Cyril of Alexandria, John met Jesus in »Bethabara beyond the Jordan, adding this too as a kind of sign of an accurate and painstaking record«<sup>47</sup>. In other words, the name Bethabara provided a further certification of the validity of the Evangelist's geographical expertise. The tenth-century *Souda Lexicon*, a compendium of Byzantine knowledge gathered from centuries of Greek scholarship, also endorsed the Bethabara reading<sup>48</sup>:

A city of Palestine; but what John the evangelist says, »these events took place in Bethany«, is written erroneously. For Bethany is on the near side of the Jordan; but Bethabara, »where John was baptizing«, is »beyond the Jordan«. So it should rightly be written thus: »these events took place in Bethabara«, but not in Bethany<sup>49</sup>.

The eleventh-century poet-orator John Mauropous was so confident that the Evangelist meant Bethabara that he employed its example as an illustration of mistakes resulting from erroneous correction: »The more experienced and wise of our teachers say outright that we must not write Bethany, but Bethabara«<sup>50</sup>. If such a mistake can be made even in the Gospels, he argued, a similar error could also be made in copies of Gregory of Nazianzus's »Orations«, the actual topic of the letter<sup>51</sup>.

These accumulating re-affirmations of the rectitude of the Bethabara reading, though far removed from Origen's earlier commentary, attest to an on-going Greek pedagogical principle: prior to interpretation, a grammarian should evaluate avail-

<sup>47</sup> Cyrill. Alex. in Ioh. comm. 1,10 (165 PUSEY); trans. D. R. MAXWELL / J. C. ELOWSKY, Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on John (Downers Grove 2013) 74. As PUSEY notes in the apparatus, some copies of Cyril's commentary preserve what he takes to be the less reliable reading of Cyril's own words: »Bethany beyond the Jordan«.

<sup>48</sup> An overview of the *Souda* can be found in E. DICKEY, Ancient greek scholarship. A guide to finding, reading, and understanding scholia, commentaries, lexica, and grammatical treatises from their beginnings to the Byzantine period (New York 2007) 90f. P. MAGDALINO has offered a recent reappraisal of the place of the *Souda* within the encyclopedic interests of the ninth and tenth centuries; see his Byzantine encyclopaedism of the ninth and tenth centuries: J. König / G. Wolf (ed.), Encyclopaedism from antiquity to the Renaissance (Cambridge 2017) 219/58. Later Byzantine scholars also defended the Bethabara reading; see Georgios Kedrenos, Compendium historiarum 1,329,15 (11<sup>th</sup> century) and Gennadius Scholarius, Responsioniones aliquorum quaestionum in scripturam 4,330,9 (16<sup>th</sup> century; citing Chrysostom).

<sup>49</sup> Βηθανία: πόλις Παλαιστίνης· ὃ δὲ λέγει ὁ εὐαγγελιστὴς Ἰωάννης, ὅτι ταῦτα ἐν Βηθανίᾳ ἐγένετο, ἐσφαλμένως γέγραπται. ἡ γὰρ Βηθανία ἔνθεν ἐστὶ τοῦ Ἰορδάνου· ἡ δὲ Βηθαβαρά, ὅπου ἦν Ἰωάννης βαπτίζων, πέραν ἐστὶ τοῦ Ἰορδάνου. γραπτέον οὖν ὁρθῶς

οὕτως· ὅτι ταῦτα ἐν Βηθαβαρᾷ ἐγένετο· ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐν Βηθανίᾳ. Greek text with English translation by C. ROTH available at the Suda Online: <http://www.stoa.org/sol/>; 1,469 ADLER.

<sup>50</sup> John Mauropous, ep. 18,98/115: »This passage has suffered what the common folk call »a mistake resulting from correction« (ἐκ διορθώσων σφάλμα). That this could have happened is clear since »this kind of innovation appears to have been made a bold bid even against the untouchable and unapproachable Scriptures«, as the emendation »Bethany beyond the Jordan« shows. »Bethany is situated not across the Jordan but in the vicinity of Jerusalem, somewhere in the outskirts of the city, as you would agree, having seen those places there yourself.« A. KARPOZIOS (ed.), The letters of Ioannes Mauropous, Metropolitan of Euchaita. Greek text, translation, and commentary (Salonika 1990) 86f (comm. at 215).

<sup>51</sup> *Catena* (»chains«) of biblical commentary surrounding Gospel manuscripts also affirm this correction, as did Euthymios Zigabenos in the twelfth century; J. A. CRAMER, *Catena* in Evangelia S. Lucae et S. Joannis ad fidem Codd. mss. (Oxford 1841) 191, also noted by KARPOZIOS 1990 cit. (n. 50) 215. Euthymios Zigabenos in his »Commentary on the Fourfold Gospels« offers what was by then established opinion: the most accurate copies read Bethabara (1,28 [PG 129,1132]).

able copies for his students, identify the correct reading, and then offer appropriate commentary<sup>52</sup>. As the second-century grammarian Apollonius Dyscolus put it, the facts of written Greek must be consulted both when correcting texts and »determining the application of words«<sup>53</sup>. Origen's focus on the etymological significance of Bethabara, appropriate both to this age and to his interpretive sensibilities, was dropped from later exegesis<sup>54</sup>. The concern for geographically accurate correction only deepened, however, solidifying the designation Bethabara long after widespread condemnation of Origen and his commentaries<sup>55</sup>. Byzantine manuscript witnesses affirm this adjustment: a number of late ancient and early medieval scribes corrected Bethany to read Bethabara, albeit with variant spellings<sup>56</sup>. Still, the alternative reading Bethany was not forgotten; present in some manuscripts and re-iterated whenever John Chrysostom's homilies on the Gospel of John were read or proclaimed, Byzantine readers and writers were aware of the Bethany beyond the Jordan problem even as they continued to repeat what was by then the majority opinion: the text often reads Bethany but should be emended to Bethabara<sup>57</sup>. In Jerusalem, the Bethabara tradition

<sup>52</sup> A late antique commentator on Dionysius Thrax's *Τέχνη Γραμματική*, explains the procedure: »Before the student would begin to read, the *corrector* (διορθωτής) would take the book and *correct* it (διορθοῦσθαι) so that he [the student] would not read it wrong and thus fall into a bad habit. Afterward, the student would take the book, as *corrected* (διορθοῦσθαι), to a reading-teacher (ἀναγνωστικός) who was supposed to teach him how to read according to the correction-work (διόρθωσις) of the *corrector* (διορθωτής)«. A. HILGARD, *Scholia in Dionysii Thracis Artem Grammaticam* (Leipzig 1901) 12. Translated and discussed by G. NAGY, *Traces of an ancient system of reading Homeric verse in Venetus A: C. Dué / M. Ebbott* (ed.), *Recapturing a Homeric legacy. Images and insights from Venetus A* (Cambridge 2009) 133/58, here 134f. Also see F. H. COLSON, *The grammatical chapters in Quintilian I,4/8: ClassQuart 8* (1914) 33/47, here at 35. The authenticity of Dionysius Thrax's work has been called into question; V. LAW / I. SLUITER (ed.), *Dionysius Thrax and the Technē Grammatikē* (Münster 1998), esp. R. H. ROBINS, *The authenticity of the Technē. The status quaestionis: ibid.* 13/26; and J. LALLOT, *Grammatici certant. Vers une typologie de l'argumentations pro et contra dans la question de l'authenticité de la Technē: ibid.* 27/40. DICKEY 2007 cit. (n. 48) 77/80, offers a helpful introduction to this work in Ancient Greek.

<sup>53</sup> Apollon. Dyc. synt. 60; F. HOUSEHOLDER, *The syntax of Apollonius Dyscolus. Translation and commentary* (Amsterdam 1981) 42f.

<sup>54</sup> Origen was interested in the potential allegorical significance not only of Bethabara but also Gergesa, another important textual emendation with Greek exegetical and geographical consequences. Gerasa is a mistaken appellation for Gergesa, Origen con-

cludes, since Gergesa means »the lodging of those who have been cast out« (ἐρμηνεύεται δὲ ἡ Γεργεσα »παροιμία ἐκβεβλητότων«) a prophetically significant designation of the refusal of the owners of the swine to recognize the divinity of the Savior (Orig. in Joh. comm. 6,211 [SC 157,288/90]; trans. *Fathers of the Church* 80,226). Origen employs his previous work on the *Hexapla* to draw out his scientific investigations: as he showed there, discrepancies in the names of various Hebrew figures are best solved on the basis of the meanings each name preserves (ibid. 6,214 [SC 157,292]). On etymology as a Greek grammatical and literary practice, particularly that of Philoxenus, see J. LALLOT, *L'Étymologie chez les grammairiens grecs. Principes et pratique: RevPhil 65* (1991) 135/48. As ibid. 140 observes, the »community of sense« was the common thread that constrained etymological analysis.

<sup>55</sup> The best discussion remains E. A. CLARK's *The Origenist controversy. The cultural construction of an early Christian debate* (Princeton 1992).

<sup>56</sup> An overview of these spellings and their witnesses can be found in WIEFEL 1967, 72f.

<sup>57</sup> For example, working to correct *Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus* (C 04) in the ninth or tenth centuries, a scribe substituted Bethabara (spelled Βιθαβερα) for Bethany while also adding liturgical notes appropriate to the celebration of Easter at the Great Church (Hagia Sophia). This corrector thereby ensured that the »right« text would be read during on the Monday of Holy Week. The conformity of this corrector's liturgical annotations to the liturgical calendar of the Great Church, complete with the weekday readings, seems to confirm VON TISCHENDORF's and LYON's conclusion that he added his corrections and annotations in the ninth or tenth centuries; R. W. LYON, *A re-examination of Codex*



was also secure: the Georgian translation of the Jerusalem typicon names Bethabara as the place beyond the Jordan where Jesus met John<sup>58</sup>.

#### 4. Territory

In the opening episode of »The Spiritual Meadow« (*Pratum spirituale*), John Moschos offers an explanation for the founding of a monastic *laura* to the east of the Jordan: When John, an elder at the monastery of Abba Eustorgius, was asked by the Archbishop of Jerusalem to take on the role of *hegoumen* (»abbot«) there, he replied that he would rather pray at Mount Sinai. Since the Elder would not be dissuaded, the Archbishop permitted him to travel there so long as he agreed to accept the office upon his return. The Baptist, however, had other plans. On the far side of the Jordan, before they reached even the first mile-post, the Elder became very ill and sought refuge in a cave. After three feverish days, the Baptist appeared to him in a dream, urging him to make this cave his permanent home: »Many times did our Lord Jesus Christ come in here to visit me«, the Baptist revealed, and so »this little cave is greater than Mount Sinai«<sup>59</sup>. Obeying with joy, the Elder, »made the cave into a church and gathered a brotherhood there«. The place is now called »Sapsas«, John Moschos added, and is near to the »Wadi Chorath to which Elijah the Tishbite was sent during a drought«<sup>60</sup>.

This charming origin story encapsulates a characteristically Christian geographical imaginary, as SCOTT F. JOHNSON describes it: The site was already ›owned‹ by a saint, apostle or prophet; this site (and the region surrounding it) is therefore the inheritance (κληρος) of the Christians who occupy it on the apostle's or prophet's behalf<sup>61</sup>. John the Elder's dream disclosed what was, from this perspective, already true: the land to the east of the Jordan was a possession of – and possessed by – John the Baptist and the former prophet he resembled, Elijah, making the Baptist a forerunner not only of Jesus but also of the monks who joined him there. The cave-shrine John the Elder erected at a place called Sapsas (or on the Madaba mosaic map Sapsaphas) was therefore a fulfillment of a divinely designed allocation of »lots« (also κληροι), geographical

Ephraemi Rescriptus, PhD St. Andrews (1959) 24/6; C. VON TISCHENDORF, *Codex Ephraemi Syri Rescriptus sive Fragmenta veteris Testamenti e Codice Graeco Parisiensi Celeberrimo Quinti ut Videtur post Christum Seculi* (Leipzig 1845) 25/8.

<sup>58</sup> CSCO 188/Iber. 9,20; Latin trans.: *ibid.* 188/Iber. 10,24. As PICCIRILLO 2016, 135 observes, according to the Georgian calendar, three separate liturgical celebrations were held on both banks of the River and at the monastic Church of the Prodromos on the occasion of the feast of Epiphany.

<sup>59</sup> Joh. Mosch. prat. 1 (PG 87,3,2852; trans. WORTLEY 1992, 4f): ἔστιν δὲ ὁ τόπος ὁ ἐπιλεγόμενος Σάψας. Τούτου ἐξ εὐωνύμων προπαράκειται ὁ χεῖμαρρος

Χωρὰθ, εἰς ὃν ἀπεστάλη Ἡλίας ὁ Θεσβίτης ἐν καιρῶ τῆς ἄβροχίας, ὁ ἐπὶ πρόσωπον τοῦ Ἰορδάνου. For discussion of the monastery, see HIRSCHFELD 1992, 119. 211; J. PATRICH, Sabas, leader of Palestinian monasticism. A comparative study in eastern monasticism, 4<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> centuries (Washington, D.C. 1995) 204f. On the context, composition, and transmission of »The Spiritual Meadow«, see B. L. IHSEN, John Moschos's Spiritual Meadow. Authority and autonomy at the end of the antique world (Burlington 2014) 1/17.

<sup>60</sup> Joh. Mosch. prat. 1 (PG 87,3,2852; trans. WORTLEY 1992, 4f).

<sup>61</sup> JOHNSON 2010, 20f.

regions based in scriptural precedents<sup>62</sup>. John the Elder fulfilled a plan that John the Baptist had already initiated during the lifetime of Jesus.

Built up over the course of the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries, structures, habitations, and accommodations for monks, local visitors, and Latin pilgrims attest to the success of this endeavor: as archaeological excavations of the area have shown, the complex came to include two churches, a shrine honoring Elijah's ascent, multiple hermit caves, and a baptismal pool<sup>63</sup>. The initial *laura* at Sapsas was likely founded at the Jordan while Elias was Archbishop of Jerusalem (494/513 CE)<sup>64</sup>. An additional *coenobium* (a walled complex where monks pursued a shared communal life) was built nearby at what was believed to be the site of Elijah's ascension:

With the assistance of the grace of Christ our God, the entire monastery was completed under Rhetorios, the most divinely beloved Elder and *hēgoumon*. God the savior grant mercy to him<sup>65</sup>.

Thanks to enterprising monks, sites honoring the prophets Elisha, Elijah, and John lined the road from Jericho, past Elisha's spring and ›Twelve Stones<sup>66</sup>, on through the River and the place of the baptism, onward to the place of Elijah's ascent, and then

<sup>62</sup> As JOHNSON 2010, 15/21 notes, early hagiographical accounts imagine that various regions of the world were granted to various apostles by lot. The Greek term κληῖρος can mean both »lot« and »inheritance«, in the sense of »an inherited estate«.

<sup>63</sup> HAMARNEH suggests that these monastic habitations grew to accommodate a »popular expectation« that continued after the Arab conquest (cit. [n. 3] 41f. 51). This site is now a UNESCO World Heritage destination; see The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Baptism Site Commission, Nomination of the Baptism Site Bethany Beyond the Jordan »Al-Maghtas«. For inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List, January 2014: <https://whc.unesco.org/document/169168> (26.04.2022). Archaeological excavations were undertaken beginning in 1997; see further for example: M. WAHEEB, Wadi al-Kharrar (al-Maghtas): AmJournArch 102 (1998) 601; id., Tell el-Kharrar: ibid. 103 (1999) 514f; Wādī Al-Kharrār archaeological project. The monastery: AnnDeptAntJord 43 (1999) 549/57; and id./BALA'AWI/AL-SHAWABKEH 2011, 177/98.

<sup>64</sup> Suggested by WORTLEY 1992, 232.

<sup>65</sup> Τῆς χάριτος συνηργισίας[ης] Χ[ριστο]ῦ τοῦ Θε[ο]ῦ ἡμ[ῶν], ἐπὶ Ἱητωρίου τοῦ θεοφιλ[εστατο]ῦ πρεσβ[υτέρου] κ[αί] ἡγ[ουμένου] γέγον[ε] τὸ πᾶν ἔρ-

γ[ον] τῆς μον[ῆς]. δό. η αὐτῶ ἔλεος ὁ Θε[ο]ς ὁ Σ[ωτ]ήρ. Transcription by D. FEISSEL: id. / P.-L. GATIER, Syrie, Phénicie, Palestine, Arabie: BullÉpig 121 (2008) 751 (no. 560). Discussion by R. MKHJIAN, Preliminary report, Rhetorius monastery, Bethany beyond the Jordan: AnnDeptAntJord 49 (2005) 403/10. Also see WAHEEB 1998 cit. (n. 63) and B. MACDONALD, Pilgrimage in early Christian Jordan. A literary and archaeological guide (Oxford 2010) 98f. Translation my own. MKHJIAN dates the monastery to the fifth century; FEISSEL/GATIER cit. suggest that the inscription is better placed at some later point, after the fifth century (»la forme des lettres suggère une date postérieure au V<sup>e</sup> s., époque présumée de sa foundation«).

<sup>66</sup> Or Gilgal (Galgala), the place where the tribes of Israel erected stones to commemorate their entrance into Canaan. According to Eus. onomast. 309. 311 (GCS N. F. 24,48. 49), »the stones that they brought from the Jordan« are still shown in Gilgal (Γάλγαλα). According to Jerome, Paula viewed these stones and Elisha's Spring prior to reaching the Jordan (Hieron. ep. 108,12 [CSEL 55,321; trans. WILKINSON 2002, 87]). Theodosius reports that he traveled to Gilgal and the Twelve Stones and then to Elisha's Spring (itin. 1 [CCL 175,115]).

from there to Mount Nebo<sup>67</sup>, passing Sapsas and Livias<sup>68</sup> on the way. Throughout Late Antiquity, monks filled the Byzantine provinces of Palaestina and Arabia with *loca sancta*, verifying that this land had been divinely bequeathed to them, sometimes at the expense of others<sup>69</sup>.

The view that the Baptist frequented this entire area, realized infrastructurally from the late fifth to the early seventh centuries, was anticipated by John Chrysostom. Like Origen, Chrysostom presupposed that place names in the Gospels should correspond to what can be materially verified; as he observed, the Evangelists incorporated geographical details into their Gospels with precision and care, preserving accurately the testimony of »witnesses of those who had been present and seen [the events in question]« and »drawing proof from the very names of the places«<sup>70</sup>. Chrysostom, like other late ancient Christian writers, also assumed that the Gospels cannot disagree<sup>71</sup>. To him, the geographical and temporal significance of Bethabara beyond the Jordan satisfied both of these a priori exegetical demands, first by illustrating the sequential character of Gospel writing (John only added what was left out by Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and second by verifying the activities of the Baptist on both sides of the River. Since the Evangelist recorded entirely different encounters between Jesus and John at the River, his Gospel does not contradict the testimony of Matthew, Mark, and Luke<sup>72</sup>. Instead, John's Gospel recounts how the Baptist »took up his stand beside the River«

<sup>67</sup> Thought to be the site where Moses viewed the Holy Land. Eusebius identifies Mount Nebo (Ναβαῦ) as the mountain where Moses died. »Even now the site is pointed out«, he reports: Ναβαῦ (Dtn. 34,1). ὄρος ὑπὲρ τὸν Ἰορδάνην ἀπέναντι Ἱεριχοῦς ἐν γῆ Μωάβ. ἐνθα ἐτελεύτησε Μωϋσῆς. καὶ δείκνυται εἰς ἔτι νῦν ἀπὸ ἔκτου σημείου Ἰεσβοῦς εἰς δυαμάς (Eus. onomast. 727 [GCS N. F. 24, 176]). Ege-ria reports visiting Mount Nebo while on her pilgrimage (peregr. 12 [CCL 175,52/4]), as does Theodosius (itin. 20 [ibid. 121]) and the Piacenza Pilgrim (PsAnton. Plac. itin. 109 [ibid. 134]). On the monastery and churches located there, see A. MICHEL, *Les églises d'époque byzantine et umayyade de la Jordanie, V<sup>e</sup>/VIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Typologie architecturale et aménagements liturgiques* (Turnhout 2003) 328/39; PICCIRILLO 1993, 144/51.

<sup>68</sup> The place where Moses brought water from a rock. Theod. itin. 19 (CCL 175,121; trans. WILKINSON 2002, 111): »The city of Livias is across the Jordan ... This Livias is where Moses struck the rock with his staff, and the water flowed«.

<sup>69</sup> In addition to Sapsas, HIRSCHFELD 1992, 16 identifies four memorial churches constructed the route from Jerusalem to Jordan. Other monasteries included the *laura* of Gerisimos (ibid. 28f) and the Cells of Choziba (36f). The transformation of a fourth-century synagogue into a church in nearby Gerasa, seventy-six kilometers north of Bethabara, offers one example of the costs of this transformation to others. In the sixth century, this synagogue was appropriated and transformed into a church

by covering over the original mosaics and reversing the orientation of the sanctuary. For discussion, see E. DVORJETSKI, *The synagogue-church at Gerasa in Jordan. A contribution to the study of ancient synagogues: ZsDtPalVer 121* (2005) 140/67 and A. LICHTENBERGER / R. RAJA, *From synagogue to church. The appropriation of the synagogue of Jerasa/Jerash under Justinian: JbAC* (2018) 85/98. <sup>70</sup> Joh. Chrys. in Joh. theol. 17 (PG 59,107f; trans. Fathers of the Church 33,162). Late antique and medieval etymology pursued metaphysical truth, not linguistic precision; see D. DEL BELLO, *Forgotten paths. Etymology and the allegorical mindset* (Washington, D.C. 2007).

<sup>71</sup> As Origen put it, »For those [evangelists] whose records differ have not, as some think, reported about the same things, as if they remembered inaccurately each of the things which were said or happened« (in Joh. comm. 6,170 [SC 157,258]; trans. Fathers of the Church 80,217).

<sup>72</sup> Orig. in Joh. comm. 6,162. 170/2. 258/63 (SC 157,250/2. 258. 324/8). Origen argues that any apparent discrepancies can be solved once readers recognize that these statements were made over the course of three days (6,258) and that the evangelist's accounts complement one another (6,260/3). Chrysostom, however, claims that Matthew, Mark, and Luke were describing an entirely different, non-sequential encounter (hom. in. Joh. 17 [PG 59,107f]). RIESNER 1987, 45/7 offers an overview of various exegetical proposals regarding the sequence of events in Bethany/Bethabara.

(ἀλλείσθηκει παρὰ τὸν ποταμόν) waiting for Christ to come so that »the Lamb« could be pointed out when he arrived (περιμένων ἐλθεῖν αὐτὸν καὶ δεῖξαι παραγενόμενον). Watching Jesus approach the Baptist declared, »Behold, the Lamb of God«, announcing the purification that Christ eternally offers by taking away the sins of the world<sup>73</sup>. »Caring little for the necessities of life« (τῶν βιωτικῶν βραχὺ φροντίζοντες τότε) while dwelling in the Jordan wilderness, John and his disciples prepared for Christ's arrival<sup>74</sup>. Following the lead of the Evangelist, Chrysostom also extended the Baptist's desert territory to include the entire region: John baptized at the Jordan, stayed on the far side of the River, and, prior to his arrest, continued his work at the spring of Aenon (Joh. 3,23; Joh. Chrys. hom. in Joh. 29). John the Elder's fifth-century encounter with the Baptist at the cave of Sapsas built upon and materialized this type of exegesis, transforming a cave into a shrine commemorating »the very spot« where Jesus habitually visited his prophetic cousin.

### 5. Scaffolding<sup>75</sup>

At about the same time that John the Elder met John the Baptist in the Jordan wilderness, the Emperor Anastasios I also founded a monastery at the Jordan, probably on the western bank (the location is disputed). The Latin pilgrim Theodosius described this place in his sixth-century account:

There is also the Church of Saint John the Baptist, which was constructed by the Emperor Anastasius. It stands on great vaults which are high enough for the times when the Jordan is in flood. The monks who reside at this Church each receive six shillings a year from the Treasure for their livelihood. Where my Lord was baptized there is on the far side of the Jordan the little hill called Hermon (*Armona*) – Mount Tabor is in Galilee – where Saint Elijah was taken up<sup>76</sup>.

This church with »great vaults« has been identified by contemporary Jordanian archaeologists as a basilica located on the eastern banks of the Jordan<sup>77</sup>. HIRSCHFELD, however, concluded that the monastery was on the western bank, at the site now known

<sup>73</sup> hom. in Joh. 18 (PG 59,116; trans. Fathers of the Church 33,177).

<sup>74</sup> hom. in Joh. 18 (PG 59,116f; trans. Fathers of the Church 33,178f). The view that John the Evangelist simply filled in what the others had left out develops over the course of the fourth to the seventh centuries; see J. W. KNUST / T. WASSERMAN, *The wondrous Gospel of John. Jesus's miraculous deeds in late ancient editorial and scholarly practice*: M. Tellbe / T. Wasserman (ed.), *Healing and exorcism in second temple Judaism and early Christianity* (Tübingen 2019) 182/90.

<sup>75</sup> I am borrowing this term from PEÑA, who employs it as a metaphor for the »maintenance and polishing« of the Port of Laredo as a site, border, habitation, and gateway by means of infrastructure, performance, repetition, and play (cit. [n. 4] 19/21).

<sup>76</sup> itin. 20 (CCL 175,121f; trans. WILKINSON 2002, 112): *ibi est et ecclesia sancti Iohannis Baptistae, quam fabricavit Anastasius imperator, quae ecclesia super cameras maiores excelsa fabricata est pro Iordane, quando implet; in qua ecclesia monachi morantur, qui monachi senos solidos per annum de fisco accipiunt pro uita sua transigenda. Ubi Dominus baptizatus est trans Iordanem, ibi est mons modicus, qui appellatur Armona; [mons Tabor in Galilaea est] ibi sanctus Helias raptus est.*

<sup>77</sup> Baptism Site Commission 2014 cit. (n. 63) 36. 79. 85. This claim contradicts the earlier suggestion of WAHEEB/BALA'AWI/AL-SHAWABKEH 2011, 188 that the church and monastery were located on the western side, built because the older church on the eastern banks was already in ruins.

as Qasr al-Yehūd<sup>78</sup>. In apparent agreement with HIRSCHFELD, the Madaba map places Bethabara on the western side of the River.

Wherever the monastery was constructed, the Emperor's monastery-church gave the crossing a more thoroughly imperial stamp. When Urbicius, *praepositus sacri cubi-culi* (»senior palace officer«) in Constantinople, visited Palestine and Syria in 505 CE, he traveled throughout the imperial diocese of Oriens (of which Palaestina I was a part) making donations to churches in Amida and Edessa in an effort to compensate these cities for the high price of Persian-Roman conflicts<sup>79</sup>. The southern Jordan River Valley had escaped recent battles – the cities, towns, and villages of Armenia and Mesopotamia bore the brunt of the raids and the extraction of resources required by the Byzantine and Persian armies encamped in their territories – but, as FIONA K. HAARER speculates, the six *nomismata* per head, *per annum* endowment for the monks at Anastasios's Jordan monastery was likely distributed at this same time. Perhaps the Emperor hoped that a funded monastery dedicated to the Prodomos could help to compensate the wider region while also alleviating tensions between his Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian subjects. Heir to a fragile doctrinal and ecclesiastical compromise brokered by the Emperor Zeno and the Archbishop of Constantinople known as the Henotikon (482 CE), throughout Anastasios's tenure Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian tensions were at a fever pitch<sup>80</sup>. As Prodomos and second only to Mary in his acknowledgement of the divinity of Christ, however, John the Baptist was a saint everyone could agree upon<sup>81</sup>.

If this was the Emperor's rationale, the gambit failed; the monks dwelling in the numerous *coenobia* and *laurae* populating the Judean wilderness and the Jordan Valley were active participants in intensifying not quelling the controversy. Sabas, for example, the pro-Chalcedonian founder of the Judean desert *laura* Mar Saba, refused to permit the Armenian monks residing there to sing the *trisagion* in their native language; much to his dismay, they were employing the longer, imperially endorsed ›mianphysite‹ version of the hymn, albeit in an Armenian translation. »Rightly indignant«, Cyril of Scythopolis reports, Sabas »ordered them to chant this hymn in Greek accord-

<sup>78</sup> HIRSCHFELD 1992, 16. 254<sup>49</sup> claims the monastery for the western bank based on the testimony of the pilgrim Theodosius (following the description of Elijah's ascent, Theodosius mentions viewing El-isha's spring and tomb), a judgement shared with AVI-YONAH 1954, 37.

<sup>79</sup> HAARER 2006, 64. J. MORALLE, It's in the water. Byzantine borderlands and the village war: *Humanities* 7 (2018) 1/14.

<sup>80</sup> As GREATREX 2011, 70 puts it, in »the best tradition of diplomatic solutions, it was, in essence a fudge« that avoided mentioning Chalcedon at all. PsZechariah preserves Zechariah the Rhetor's text of the *Henotikon* at 5,8 (199). For a more granular discussion of the complexity of the Emperor's position, see J. DIJKSTRA / G. GREATREX, Patriarchs and politics in Constantinople in the reign of Anastasius (with a reedition of O. Mon. Epiph. 59): *Millen-*

*ium* 6 (2009) 223/64; also see HAARER 2006, 136/45. 240/2.

<sup>81</sup> The importance of John the Baptist the Prodomos to both Chalcedonian and the non-Chalcedonian Christians cannot be overstated. Anastasios I gifted one of his own residences in Constantinople as a church in the Baptist's honor (HAARER 2006, 239). Procopius credits the Chalcedonian-sympathizing Emperor Justinian with erecting a shrine to John the Baptist in Constantinople (aed. 1,8). In later Byzantine art, John in his role as Prodomos often flanks Christ, with Mary as Theotokos on the other side; examples in A. EASTMOND, The heavenly court, courtly ceremony, and the great Byzantine ivory triptychs of the tenth century: *DumbOPap* 69 (2015) 71/115. For an overview, see A. WEYL CARR, The face relics of John the Baptist in Byzantium and the West: *Gesta* 46 (2007) 159/787.

ing to the ancient tradition of the catholic Church<sup>82</sup>. Such tensions continued after Anastasios's death; when his successor Justin I imposed Chalcedonian orthodoxy instead, those unwilling to conform went into exile rather than give up their claim to an apostolic ecclesiastical past<sup>83</sup>. According to John of Ephesus, monks from Arabia and Palestine were included among this number though, as VOLKER MENZE points out, persecutions and expulsions in the three Palestines seem to have been less intense than at Edessa and Amida<sup>84</sup>.

A recipient of what was now Chalcedonian-sympathetic imperial largess, the (formerly non-Chalcedonian?) *coenobium* at Bethabara survived intact. According to Procopius, among other donations, the Emperor Justinian improved the monastery of John at the Jordan by adding a well<sup>85</sup>. Procopius's »On Buildings« may not be a trustworthy guide to Justinian's actual contribution but, written some thirty years after the pilgrim Theodosius's visit, the work can verify both the continual occupation of the monastery and Procopius's own preoccupation with the Emperor's water-related projects<sup>86</sup>. Presumably, any remaining non-Chalcedonian ascetics dwelling along the River either departed to join their brothers elsewhere, or adopted the »two natures« Chalcedonian formula, or remained quiet about their theological and ecclesiastical sympathies<sup>87</sup>. Neither the Chalcedonian *laura* at Sapsas nor the *coenobium* at Bethabara are listed among the monastic establishments that attended the pro-Chalcedonian Synod of Jerusalem in 536 CE, yet both sites endured<sup>88</sup>. Resident monks dwelling on the western and eastern sides of the River welcomed local visitors and hosted pilgrims at *xenodochia* well into the Muslim period<sup>89</sup>.

## 6. Mapping

According to Jerome, the late fourth-century Latin pilgrim Paula did not ford the River herself but she did gaze across it, contemplating »how the priests went dry-shod across the river-bed; and how the waters made way, and stood to right and left at the com-

<sup>82</sup> Cyrill. Scythop. vit. Sab. 32 (TU 49,2,118; trans. R. M. PRICE, *Lives of the monks of Palestine by Cyril of Scythopolis* [Kalamazoo 1991] 127). On Sabas's trip to Constantinople on behalf of Elias, Patriarch of Jerusalem, see PATRICH 1995 cit. (n. 59) 304f. 311/3. Initially, Sabas was well received by Anastasios though relations soured once the Emperor's patronage began to favor the non-Chalcedonian party.

<sup>83</sup> V. MENZE, *Justinian and the making of the Syrian Orthodox Church* (Oxford 2008).

<sup>84</sup> MENZE 2008 cit. 7/9. 109f. 123f.

<sup>85</sup> Procop. aed. 5,9: εἰς τὸ τοῦ ἁγίου Ἰωάννου ἐν τῷ Ἰορδάνῃ φρέαρ.

<sup>86</sup> The work is dated ca. 559 CE: J. PICKETT, *Water and empire in the De aedificiis of Procopius: DumbOPap 71* (2017) 95/126. Speculations about Procopius's literary intent and the reliability of his account are beyond the scope of this essay; for further discussion, however, see: A. KALDELLIS, *Procopius of Caesarea. Tyranny, history, and philosophy*

at the end of antiquity (Philadelphia 2004) and A. CAMERON, *Procopius and the sixth century* (Berkeley 1985).

<sup>87</sup> Bitterly recalled by Zechariah Rhetor and the anonymous chronicler who preserves his account, the expulsion of non-Chalcedonian monks from the eastern provinces may have included monks who came from the regions around the Jordan, though they are not explicitly listed. Zach. chron. 8,5. R. PHENIX / C. B. HORN: *Greatrex 2011*, 305/8, discussed by GREATREX: *ibid.* 70.

<sup>88</sup> On the Synod of 536, see F. MILLAR, *Rome, Constantinople and the Near Eastern church under Justinian. Two synods of C.E. 536: JournRomStud 98* (2008) 62/82 (72/6).

<sup>89</sup> On hospices at the site of Jesus's baptism, see L. DI SEGNI, *Epigraphical evidence for pilgrimage to the holy places, in pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Journeys, destinations, experiences across times and cultures, Conf. Jerusalem 2017* (Heidelberg 2020) 25f.

mand of Elijah and Elisha; and how by his Baptism, the Lord cleansed the waters which had been fouled by the flood and stained by the extermination of the human race<sup>90</sup>. Arriving after the establishment both of the *coenobium* and the *laura*, the Piacenza Pilgrim (ca. 570 CE) did cross the River, viewing the »little hill of Hermon« where Elijah made his ascent and the »spring where Saint John used to baptize«; »the whole valley is full of hermits« he reports<sup>91</sup>. The seventh-century pilgrim Arculf, Adomnanus writes, »swam the river both ways«, viewing a pillar topped with a cross at the very spot where Jesus was baptized (a pillar that is also mentioned by Theodosios and the Piacenza Pilgrim)<sup>92</sup>. These Latin-speaking visitors failed to provide names for either Bethabara or Sapsas but, from the sixth century, pilgrims presupposed the existence of both.

The Madaba mosaic map has the distinction of being the only source to mention both Bethabara and Sapsas in a single work, assuming that by »Sapsaphas« the cave *laura* at Sapsas was meant (fig. 1).

When discovered in the nineteenth century, this mosaic was interpreted as an adornment to a church pavement that preserved a hodological pilgrimage guide based on the *Onomasticon*<sup>93</sup>. More recent reappraisals have called these initial proposals into question. LEAH DI SEGNI's close comparison of the *Onomasticon* to the map itself, for example, enumerates multiple differences between them. Not only is the depicted space much larger than what Eusebius described, many designations are just as likely to be derived from a common well of tradition as from a literary source. Even when the map »follows Eusebius in single entries«, she further clarifies, »the whole picture it produces does not directly derive from the *Onomasticon*«<sup>94</sup>. The ecclesial context of the work has also been challenged, in this case by BEATRICE LEAL. The map's focus is on administrative districts, urban networks, geographical allotments, and local jurisdictions, she points out, and is therefore more »secular« than ecclesiological in character<sup>95</sup>. If LEAL's alternative analysis is correct, the map should be regarded not as a late ancient re-presentation of »the Christian Holy Land« as the bishops and monks

<sup>90</sup> Hieron. ep. 108,12 (CSEL 55, 321; trans. WILKINSON 2002, 86f).

<sup>91</sup> PsAnton. Plac. itin. 9 (CCL 175,133f; trans. WILKINSON 2002, 135): *Deinde uenimus in loco, ubi Dominus de quique panibus quinque milia populos saciavit, extensa campania, oliueta et palmeta. Ex hoc uenimus in loco, ubi baptizatus est Dominus noster. In ipso loco transierunt filii Israhel; ibi et filii prophetarum perdidderunt securem et ex ipso loco adsumptus est Helias. In ipso loco est mons Hermon modicus, qui legitur in psalmo ... In illa parte Iordanis est fons, ubi baptizabat sanctus Iohannes, ad Iordane milia duo. In ipsa ualle Helias inuentus est, quando ei portabat coruus panem et carnes. In circuitu uallis illius multitudo heremitarum.*

<sup>92</sup> Adamn. loc. sanct. 2,16 (CCL 175,213); Script. Lat. Hibern. 3,86f. Adamnanus may have invented Arculf; see T. O'LOUGHLIN, Adomnán and the holy places. The perceptions of an insular monk on the locations of the biblical drama (London 2007); K. B. MOORE, Adomnán's On the holy places. Pilgrimage manuscripts and architectural translation from Jerusalem to Europe: Art in translation 10 (2018)

11/29. But see R. G. HOYLAND / S. WAIDLER, Adomnán's »De locis sanctis« and the seventh-century Near East: EnglHistRev 129 (2014) 787/807.

<sup>93</sup> Overview by AVI-YONA 1954, 9/18; also see PICCIRILLO 1993, 50/132. Unfortunately, the portion of the mosaic that likely depicted Madaba has not survived. On the discovery of the map, see Y. MEIMARIS, The discovery of the Madaba map. Mythology and reality: Piccirillo/Alliata 1998, 24/34 and PICCIRILLO 2016.

<sup>94</sup> L. DI SEGNI, The »Onomasticon« of Eusebius and the Madaba map: Piccirillo/Alliata 1998, 118. DI SEGNI does suggest, however, that the designers depended on earlier, now lost maps.

<sup>95</sup> »Markedly different« from the mosaics that decorate other churches in the area, the map »called for the visualization of particular ideas – land and its divisions, the urban basis of political power, the legitimacy of judgement and its written expressions« and was therefore more suited to »the audience hall of a successful merchant or local official« or, more probably, a »judicial hall« (LEAL 2018, 43. 146f).



fig. 1. The Madaba mosaic map showing the Jordan River spilling into the Dead Sea with Bethabara on the western bank (Βεθαβαρά τὸ τοῦ ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ βαπτίσματος) and Ainon, now called Sapsaphas, on the eastern bank (Αἰνὼν ἐνθα νῦν ὁ Σαπσαφᾶς) and the ford from Jericho to Livias (Photo: Sean Leatherbury/Manar al-Athar, <http://www.manar-al-athar.ox.ac.uk>, see Madaba-Church of St George).



fig. 2. The Madaba mosaic map showing the Jordan River with Ainon near Salem which is also Saloumias (Αἰνὼν ἢ ἐγγὺς τοῦ Σαλήμ [ἢ κ(αί)] Σα[λουμίας]), also in the Jordan Valley, and Ainon, now called Sapsaphas (Αἰνὼν ἐνθα νῦν ὁ Σαπσαφᾶς) (Photo: Tiffany Chezum/Manar al-Athar, <http://www.manar-al-athar.ox.ac.uk>, see Madaba-Church of St George).



of the province of Arabia envisioned it but rather as an instantiation of a distinctively Madaban vision of Romanitas<sup>96</sup>. A majority of scholars remain convinced by the initial placement of the mosaic within a late ancient church context<sup>97</sup>. Nevertheless, as LEAL has pointed out, the map's cartographical scheme tends toward an inclusion of multiple, contested names and places, a feature that also characterizes the multiple sites associated with the Baptist.

The decision of the map's patrons and designers to include Bethabara, Sapsaphas, and also a second »Aenon, near Salem which is also Saloumias« (Αἰνῶν ἢ τοῦ Σαλημ [ἢ κ(αί)] Σα[σλουμίας]) points to the hybrid character of the map's cartographical vision. In addition to the Bethabara church, two Aenons appear, both of which are identified with the activities of John the Baptist, but differently:

1. According to the Gospel, John was baptizing »in Aenon near Salem« (ἐν Αἰνῶν ἐγγυς τοῦ Σαλείμ) prior to his arrest ([modern] Joh. 3,23)<sup>98</sup>.
2. According to Eusebius, Aenon »near to Salem« (Αἰνῶν. »ἐγγυς τοῦ Σαλείμ«), is a place where John was baptizing. This is a village in the Jordan Valley, he clarified, »at the eight milestone from Scythopolis [and] is called Salumias«<sup>99</sup>.
3. In a homily on John's Gospel, John Chrysostom stated that the Baptist carried out his work »in Aenon«, but without specific reference to Salem or any other locale (ἦν δὲ καὶ Ἰωάννης βαπτίζων ἐν Αἰνῶν)<sup>100</sup>.

The Madaba Map conflates these traditions, depicting two Aenons and three baptismal sites (fig. 2).

The map's inscriptions give the two springs (Aenon simply means »spring«) more complete names: »Aenon, now called Sapsaphas« and »Aenon, the one of Salem, which is also Saloumias«. In »The Spiritual Meadow«, John Moschos did not specifically affiliate John the Elder's *laura* with a Gospel toponym like Aenon; he simply observed that »this is the place that is now called Sapsas« (ἔστιν δὲ ὁ τόπος ὁ ἐπιλεγόμενος Σάψας)<sup>101</sup>. The map's designers, however, incorporated three separate baptismal sites within a single cartographical plan, each of which could serve as a location for commemorating the Prodigios and his salvific activity. In the process, any potential contestation over these sites was glossed over. Like John the Baptist's head, which according to various traditions was preserved in Emesa, Constantinople, and Damascus, the Prodigios inhabited all of these places at once, dwelling within an all-encompassing locative map where every place has a name<sup>102</sup>. The Pilgrim assumed a similar scenario during his

<sup>96</sup> Also see BOWERSOCK 2006 cit. (n. 16) 7/10.

<sup>97</sup> In addition to older scholarship, see MADDEN 2012 cit. (n. 36).

<sup>98</sup> For the passage from John, I am employing the NA<sup>28</sup> (cf. n. 5).

<sup>99</sup> Eus. onomast. 190 (GCS N. F. 24,49; trans. J. K.): Αἰνῶν (Joh. 3,23). »ἐγγυς τοῦ Σαλείμ«, ἐνθα ἐβάπτιζεν Ἰωάννης ὡς ἐν τῷ κατὰ Ἰωάννην εὐαγγελίῳ. καὶ δείκνυται εἰς ἔτι νῦν ὁ τόπος ἀπὸ τῆς σημείων Σκυθοπόλεως πρὸς νότον πλησίον Σαλείμ καὶ τοῦ Ἰορδάνου. ALLIATA 1998 cit. (n. 17) 50 has reconstructed this »Aenon« inscription on the basis of the onomast. 815 [GCS N. F. 24,200]: Σαλήμ. πόλις

Σικίμων, ἥτις ἐστὶ Συχῆμ ὡς φησὶν ἡ γραφή. ἔστι δὲ καὶ ἄλλη κώμη· εἰς ἔτι καὶ νῦν πλησίον Αἰλίας ἐν τοῖς δουτικοῖς αὐτῆς, κείται δὲ ἄλλη Σαλωμία ἐν τῷ πεδίῳ ὡς ἀπὸ τῆς σημείου ἀπὸ Σκυθοπόλεως, ὁ Ἰωάννης δὲ λέγει ταύτην εἶναι τὴν Σαλήμ, ἥς ἐβασίλευσεν ὁ Μελχισέδεκ, ἦν ὕστερον Ἰεροσόλυμα καλεῖσθαι.

<sup>100</sup> Joh. Chrys. hom. in Joh. 29 (PG 59, 167).

<sup>101</sup> Joh. Mosch. prat. 1 (PG 87,3,2852; trans. WORTLEY 1992, 4).

<sup>102</sup> According to Pseudo-Zecharias, the head of John the Baptist miraculously protected many in the city of Emesa from the plague that ravaged the eastern Empire during Justinian's reign (10,9;

sixth century trip to the Holy Land: he visited not only the place at the River where the Lord was baptized but also the Baptist's »spring«, two miles east of the River's banks (*in illa parte Iordanis est fons, ubi baptizabat sanctus Iohannes, ad Iordane milia duo*<sup>103</sup>). Proliferation of names shored up a dream of a harmonious ecclesial-imperial landscape that could contain multiple churches, sites, monasteries and pilgrimage destinations.

## 7. Dominion

The most persuasive witnesses »to a locative, imperial world-view«, JONATHAN Z. SMITH has argued, are the products of »well organized, self-conscious scribal elites« with »a deep vested interest in restricting mobility and valuing place«<sup>104</sup>. The history of Bethabara highlights the merit of SMITH's observations. Thoroughly dedicated to the production of a Christian form of scholarship that could surpass the Alexandrian grammatical and philosophical education he had received, Origen of Alexandria dedicated himself tirelessly to the production of a set of Christian-Jewish scriptures capable of demonstrating the integrity of Christian claims. John Chrysostom was a »scribal elite« of a different sort: as bishop of Antioch and (for a brief time) of Constantinople, he was both at the center of a developing Christian-Roman political regime and responsible for educating the Christians in his care. From the fourth century, Greek scholars like Chrysostom remained invested in Bethabara beyond the Jordan even as they dropped Origen's initial reasoning: Bethabara mattered not because it was the »house of preparation« but because it could demonstrate the excellence of a Christian scholarship capable of identifying and emending scribal errors.

A millenia and a half later, Protestant Christian scholarship finally erased Bethabara from (most) contemporary scripturalizing mythologies, including the sites on the Jordan River<sup>105</sup>. The Latin Vulgate had always read Bethany beyond the Jordan at what became Joh. 1,28 but, for a brief window of time, Bethabara was introduced to Protestant Northern Europe as well. Restored to the Greek text of John by Erasmus on the basis of the Byzantine manuscripts available to him, Bethabara became the preferred reading in Gospel books favored by Protestants, though already in the sixteenth-century THEODORE BEZA wondered if »Betania« might not be the correct reading<sup>106</sup>.

GREATREX 2011, 415). By contrast, Sozomen claims that the Baptist's head was brought to Constantinople during the reign of Theodosius I (h. e. 8,21 [GCS 50, 377/9]). According to Ali ibn Muḥammad al-Rabaʿī, in the seventh century the Baptist's head was discovered in a cave and placed in a pillar during the building of the Great Mosque of Damascus, Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Rabaʿī, Faḍāʾil al-Shām wa-Dimashq, 33, translated and discussed by N. KHALEK, Damascus after the Muslim conquest. Text and image in early Islam (Oxford 2011) 113.

<sup>103</sup> PsAnton. Plac. itin. 9 (CCL 175,133f).

<sup>104</sup> J. Z. SMITH, Map is not territory. Studies in the history of religions (Leiden 1978) 293.

<sup>105</sup> On scripturalizing, see V. WIMBUSH, Talking back: id. (ed.), Theorizing scriptures. New critical orientations to a cultural phenomenon (New Brunswick 2008) 67: »That we sometimes think of »scriptures« as free-floating, as having independent existence, as something to out there or here to be grasped, to be touched, to be manipulated, to be strictly adhered to or rejected is a measure of the occluding, obfuscating power of the phenomenon of center-ing that takes the form of scripturalizing«.

<sup>106</sup> As the »Amsterdam database of NT conjectural emendation« records, T. BEZA preferred Bethabara on the witness of Chrysostom but conjectured that Βαταναία may be a better reading in one edition of

When the *Textus Receptus* was overturned in the nineteenth century, Bethabara was relegated to a textual apparatus, if it was printed at all<sup>107</sup>. From the perspective of modern New Testament textual criticism, the ›original‹ or ›initial‹ text of John reads »Bethany beyond the Jordan« not »Bethabara«<sup>108</sup>.

This form of scholarship (inadvertently?) contributed to a territorial imaginary of a different sort, one that has wanted a boundary and not a crossing. In the late 1870s while on a mission for the Palestine Exploration Fund, Lieutenant CLAUDE R. CONDER set out on a quest for Bethabara among other sites<sup>109</sup>. Summing up CONDER's results in 1903, WILLIAM SANDAY, Lady Margaret professor of divinity and canon of Christ Church, reported that Bethabara had been »satisfactorily identified by Col. Conder with a ford ›Araba on the Jordan, slightly NE of Beisân (Scythopolis)«, though neither the Exploration Fund nor SANDAY believed that Bethabara was the place of Jesus's baptism<sup>110</sup>. SELAH MERRILL, army chaplain, professor of divinity, archaeologist with the American Palestine Exploration Society, and three-time U.S. Consul to Palestine (1882/85, 1891/94, 1898/1907) confirmed this opinion<sup>111</sup>; he was pleased to report to an American audience that the English party had located a ford, ›Abara, that may be the Bethabara known of old<sup>112</sup>.

Adopting the text critical preferences appropriate to their contexts, these nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholar-adventurers concurred: the label »house of preparation« was a conjectural emendation that should be rejected as a Gospel reading. Origen was not completely mistaken, however, or so these topographical pronouncements also argued; ›Araba was a ford, a place misidentified by tradition but accurately described nonetheless<sup>113</sup>. From the perspective of modern textual criticism and cartographical practice, the Bethabara problem had been resolved. Even

his New Testament; see his *Novum D. N. Iesu Christi testamentum*, siven *Novum Fordus* (Geneva 1582) cited and discussed by J. KRANS / B. J. LIETAERT PEERBOLTE et al. (ed.), *The Amsterdam database of NT conjectural emendation* (<http://ntvnr.uni-muenster.de/nt-conjectures> [26.04.2022]).

<sup>107</sup> K. LACHMANN did not include the reading in his very limited notes, but simply printed »Bethany« (*Novum Testamentum Graece* [Berlin 1831] 166). F. H. A. SCRIVENER's 1877 edition of the New Testament, which prints the *Textus Receptus* as a base and compares it to editions by BEZA, STEPHANUS, LACHMANN, VON TISCHENDORF, and TRAGELLES in an apparatus, offers a helpful overview of the situation during his own time; see his *Ἡ κωννη διαθηκη*, *Novum testamentum. Textus Stephanici A.D. 1550; accedunt variae lectiones editionum Bezae, Elzevirii, Lachmanni, Tischendorfii, Tragellesii* (Cambridge 1877) 218. Scrivener's text reads Bethabara but, in his apparatus, he notes that Lachman, Tischendorf, and Tragelles prefer Bethany. For a discussion of this history, see J. KNUST, *Editing without interpreting. The museum of the bible and New Testament textual criticism*: J. Hicks-Keeton / C. Concannon (ed.), *The museum of the bible. A critical introduction* (London 2019) 145/70 and id., *On textual*

*nostalgia*. Herman C. Hoskier's collation of ›*Evangelium 604*‹ revisited: G. V. Allen (ed.), *The future of New Testament scholarship*. From H. C. Hoskier to the editio critica maior and beyond (Tübingen 2019) 79/102.

<sup>108</sup> B. METZGER, *Textual commentary on the greek New Testament*<sup>2</sup> (Stuttgart 1994) 171, offers a standard account: »The committee responsible for the production of the fourth revised version of the united bible societies' Greek New Testament favored Bethany over Bethabara on the basis of the age and distribution of the evidence as well as the lack of an adequate reason to replace Bethabara with Bethany if Bethabara had been in the text originally«.

<sup>109</sup> CONDER/KITCHENER 1882 cit. (n. 20) 90.

<sup>110</sup> W. SANDAY, *Sacred sites of the Gospels*, with illustrations, maps and plans (Oxford 1903) 34.

<sup>111</sup> This summarizes the account of MERRILL's career by SH. GOLDMAN, *Appropriated. The careers of Selah Merrill, 19<sup>th</sup> century hebraist, Palestine explorer, and U. S. Consul in Jerusalem: American Jewish History* 85 (1997) 157/92.

<sup>112</sup> S. MERRILL, *East of the Jordan* (Princeton 1881) 363.

<sup>113</sup> HUTTON 2008, 320 summarizes this perspective succinctly: »The toponym ›Bethabara‹ – whether

so, Bethany beyond the Jordan remains contested and contemporary pilgrims are encouraged to take sides: Is the very site of Jesus's baptism at Al-Maghtas or at Qaṣr al-Jehūd? Is Anastasios's monastery on the western or eastern bank? Which of these sites is truly ›Bethany‹? Published in 1967, the very same year as the Six Day War, WOLFGANG WIEFEL anticipated the problem. Reporting what was known in his day to the ›German Society of the Exploration of Palestine‹, he assessed recent archaeological surveys of Wādi Ḥarrār, concluding that the ›actual place‹ of John's baptism at the ›Transjordan Bethany is mere speculation‹<sup>114</sup>. By contrast, the site on the western bank, Qaṣr el-Yehūd (WIEFEL's spelling), has the advantage of being the more heavily trafficked by pilgrims reluctant to make what he judged to be an impossible crossing and is therefore the more likely locale<sup>115</sup>.

What has been lost to much of modern biblical scholarship, however, is an acknowledgement that both late ancient and the medieval crossings and more recent divisions have been fundamental to upbuilding specific locative imperial world-views. Whatever the Evangelist intended, the late ancient Christians who received the Gospel as their own found in his words a warrant for treating the entire Jordan Valley as their specific ›lot‹ (κλήρος)<sup>116</sup>. Their chosen toponyms reflected their exegetical understandings, topographical analyses, and territorial fantasies. Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian Christians alike were determined to fill the Valley with monastic habitations, sometimes with the assistance of imperial patronage and sometimes at the specific cost of local residents, who were displaced as a result<sup>117</sup>. For a time, the eccentric behavior of these late ancient Christians and the Romanitas they both participated in and occasionally resisted settled into a pattern, into a territory. The current impossibility of a twinned Bethabara/Bethany presents its own eccentric stalemate, manufactured by two centuries of colonial and post-colonial occupation. Movement across the Jordan at Bethabara-Sapsaphas was once a common occurrence, at least in theory. Now it is not. Yet rivers, texts, and territories may change their banks once again.

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original or the result of phonological metathesis motivated by etiological misanalysis – did not refer to a settlement per se, but rather specifically to the fords over the Jordan River (hence, the plural form τὰ Βηθαβαρά given by Origen (in Joh. comm. 6,40, 205), currently spanning about 2 km of river length from el-Maghtas (the current location commemorating the baptism near St. John's Convent and Qaṣr al-Yahūd) to the Maḥādat Ḥaḡla (the formerly recognized site of the baptism ca. 1,5 km further south) ... [T]here was no settlement Bethabara to which that name referred«.

<sup>114</sup> WIEFEL 1967, 81: »So bleibt es vorerst nicht mehr als seine Vermutung, daß hier der eigentliche Wirkungsort des Täufers, das transjordanische Be-

thanien zu suchen sei, der erst später durch das in der Nähe des Jordan-Übergangs der Josuaüberlieferung gelegenen und mit der Eliatradition verbundenen Wādi Ḥarrār ersetzt wurde«.

<sup>115</sup> WIEFEL 1967, 80, citing T. TOBLER, Topographie von Jerusalem und seiner Umgebung 2 (Berlin 1854) 686.

<sup>116</sup> The Madaba mosaic – which, as LEAL has shown, fails to conform to specifically Christian preferences – also assumes that the Jordan was there to be crossed and that the territory depicted could be divided into ›lots‹ (AVI-YONAH 1954, 26f and LEAL 2018, 29, 33).

<sup>117</sup> JACOBS 2004 cit. (n. 35) 108.

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