

The Judaic Background of the “Beloved Disciple” in the Gospel of John

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The identity of the “Beloved Disciple” is one of the most puzzling issues in the Gospel of John. At least twenty-two different suggestions have been made in this regard; none of them up to now having become the majority opinion.¹ The object of this essay is not to make a new suggestion, but to investigate the Judaic background of the expression.² However, this in turn can provide hints at least as to what kind of community the author of the “Beloved Disciple” may have come from, and indications of what kind of person he may have been. After a short review of the relevant passages in Section I, Section II deals with the Beloved Disciple’s role in the scene of Jesus’s final meal with the disciples (13:23–25), Judaic tradition on Deut 33:12, and the reunion meal of Joseph with his brothers. Section III then deals with the “Other Disciple,” Section IV with the original language of the author behind the “Beloved Disciple,” and Section V with the

¹ Cf. the extensive analysis of these in chapter three of James Charlesworth’s *The Beloved Disciple: Whose Witness Validates the Gospel of John?* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), 127–224. Charlesworth himself favors Thomas (422–437). Already in 1959, Alv Kragerud wrote in *Der Lieblingsjünger im Johannesevangelium* (Oslo: Universitätsverlag, 1959), 10, that “among the New Testament problems which we are tempted to declare insolvable, L [the Beloved Disciple] would have to take one of the first places.”

² I employ the term “Judaic” for “early Jewish” as it is used, e.g. by Jacob Neusner and his adherents, as well as by numerous New Testament scholars such as Bruce Chilton. Almost all my studies have been published in series edited by Neusner and follow this usage. This essay is a greatly expanded and modified version of the cursory remarks I previously made on this subject within the study “Jesus as a Nazirite in Mark 14:25 par., and Joseph’s Reunion Meal in Judaic Tradition,” in *Searching the Scriptures: Studies in Context and Intertextuality*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Jeremiah Johnston (London, etc.: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 104–107. In contrast, Joachim Kügler in *Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte* (SBB 16; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1988), 451, maintains that in the Beloved Disciple texts “traditionsgeschichtliche Vorstufen” cannot be ascertained.

question of what kind of person the Beloved Disciple could have been. The essay concludes with an Addendum concerning the role of the Beloved Disciple at the Cross in John 19:25-29.

I. The Relevant Passages

1. John 13:23 states: “One of his disciples — the one whom Jesus loved — was reclining at Jesus’s chest” (ἓν ἀνακείμενος εἷς ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, ὃν ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς).³
2. Verse 25 reads: “Thus, that [disciple] having reclined/leaned in such a way on the chest of Jesus, says to him: ‘Lord, who is it?’”⁴
3. John 21:20 refers back to 13:25 with the same terminology by relating: “Having turned, Peter sees the disciple whom Jesus loved following, the one who reclined/leaned on his chest at the meal, and said: ‘Lord, who is it who is betraying you?’”
4. John 19:26–27 relates a moving scene at the Crucifixion: “When Jesus saw his mother and ‘the disciple whom he loved’ [τὸν μαθητὴν...ὃν ἠγάπα] standing beside her, he says to his mother: ‘Woman, behold, [this is] your son.’ Then he says to the disciple: ‘Behold, [this is] your mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.”
5. John 20:2 states that when Mary Magdalene came to Jesus’s tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from it, “she thus runs and comes

³ The term κόλπος literally means “bosom,” “breast,” “chest” (BAGD 442). LSJ 974 adds “lap.” Just as the Beloved Disciple reclines at Jesus’s “chest,” so the Son is “in the bosom/chest” of the Father (John 1:18). One of my Yale professors, Paul Minear, also pointed to this in his article “The Beloved Disciple in the Gospel of John: Some Clues and Conjectures,” in *NovT* 19 (1977): 105–123, esp. 117. Although he too considers Deut 33:12 important in regard to the Beloved Disciple (he is a “second Benjamin,” 116), Minear relies on secondary sources such as the *Encyclopedia Judaica* and Paul Billerbeck (Str-B) for Judaic traditions and nowhere deals with the many primary sources I cite below. Interestingly, he considers the audience of the Fourth Gospel to mainly consist of three different kinds of Jews (106). The verb ἀνάκειμαι means “to lie, recline,” when always used of reclining at table, “to dine” (BAGD 55; LSJ 107 III. “lie at table, recline”). All biblical translations in this article are my own.

⁴ The two terms οὖν and οὕτως basically mean the same and are repetitive. Also typical of the author’s style, a different verb for “to recline” is employed here: ἀναπίπτω, literally to fall back (LSJ 116, but also 5. “recline at meals, like ἀνάκειμαι”); BAGD 59, 1. “lie down, recline esp. at a meal”; 2. “lean, lean back,” as here. A different term is also employed for “chest” here: στῆθος; “chest, breast” (BAGD 767; LSJ 1643).

to Simon Peter and ‘the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved’ [τὸν ἄλλον μαθητὴν ὃν ἐφίλει ὁ Ἰησοῦς], and says to them...”⁵

6. John 21:7 relates that on the shore of the Sea of Galilee Jesus appeared to some of his disciples and instructed them to try their luck again after first catching nothing while fishing. When a miraculously large number of fish was then caught, “that disciple whom Jesus loved [ὁ μαθητὴς ἐκεῖνος ὃν ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς] says to Peter: ‘It is the Lord!’”
7. John 21:24 states regarding “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (in v. 20): “This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true.”⁶ This statement implies the Beloved Disciple is the author of (i.e., ultimately behind) the Gospel of John.
8. The Beloved Disciple is also designated “the other disciple” (ὁ ἄλλος μαθητής) in John 20:2, 3, 4 and 8.⁷ Especially for someone reading the Gospel for the first time, this instance of referring to another important person as “other” without specifically naming him appears at least somewhat strange.⁸

⁵ Here the verb φιλέω is employed: “love, have affection for, like” (BAGD 859). In all other occurrences of Jesus’s “loving” the Beloved Disciple the term ἀγαπάω is used: “love, cherish” (BAGD 4). This is another instance of the author’s artistic ability shown in varying terms for the same thing (cf. “thus,” “recline/lean on,” and “chest” above). An example of such usage in the LXX is Prov 8:17, “I love [ἀγαπάω] those who love [φιλέω] me,” both translating the כָּחַם of the MT.

⁶ Cf. 19:35, implying he was at the Crucifixion as an eyewitness.

⁷ While I consider it improbable, he could also be meant in 18:15–16, where he is described as “known to the high priest.” R. Alan Culpepper in *John, the Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 58, for example, treats these verses as involving the Beloved Disciple.

⁸ Richard Bauckham in *Jesus the Eyewitness: The Gospel as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 384–411 regards “the beloved disciple” (including for him “the other disciple”) as a self-designation of the author of the entire Gospel, an eyewitness, yet not one of the Twelve, not well known, a “mysterious person” whose anonymity is a “paradoxical combination of modesty and temerity” (402–403, 407–408). He also very improbably finds him in 1:35–40 (393). Culpepper in *John, the Son of Zebedee*, 84, also believes the Beloved Disciple was an eyewitness. Urban von Walde in *The Gospel and Letters of John: Volume 2, Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Eerdmans Critical Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 607, believes all the Beloved Disciple passages were not part of the original Gospel, but were first added in the third edition. I consider this very improbable. Johannes Beutler in *Das Johannevangelium: Kommentar*

II. The Beloved Disciple’s Reclining/Leaning on Jesus at a Meal with his Disciples, Deut 33:12 in Judaic tradition, and Benjamin’s Reclining/Leaning on Joseph at a Meal with his Brothers in Judaic Tradition

II. 1. Jesus’s “Last Meal”

In the Synoptics, Jesus’s “Last Supper” with his twelve disciples is a Passover meal (Mark 14:12–26, par.).⁹ They “reclined” while eating it (*ἀνάκειμαι* in v. 18),¹⁰ required at the celebration of the Passover. M. Pesah. 10:1 states that on this occasion “even the poorest Israelite should not eat until he ‘reclines’ at his table.”¹¹ The Gospel of John, in contrast, has Jesus’s last meal take place one day earlier (13:1; 18:28; 19:14). This was to present Jesus as the Passover “Lamb of God” (1:29), none of whose bones were allowed to be broken, as at the Crucifixion (19:36; Exod 12:46).¹²

(Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2013), 386, also remarks on 13:23 that the Beloved Disciple was probably inserted into the Gospel only in the Passion Narrative.

⁹ This is convincingly argued by Joachim Jeremias in *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966).

¹⁰ The NRSV conceals this verb by rendering: “And when they had taken their places and were eating....”

¹¹ Cf. Albeck, 2.176, with the verb סבב (Jastrow, 948, piel: “Esp. reclining on the dining couch around the tables”); Eng. Neusner, 249. Paul Billerbeck in Str-B 4:56–57 elucidates this passage, also by referring to John 13:23 and 21:20. In 4:618 he describes the reclining at a non-religious banquet, also treated in 2:257,2 on Luke 22:27. While Billerbeck’s theological stance is often questionable (including supersessionism), his collection of sources can still be valuable today if carefully used. I am well aware of the problematical use of later rabbinic sources in regard to the New Testament, as I have indicated numerous times elsewhere, also in regard to the Fourth Gospel. See the volumes cited in n. 75 below. Here I also attempt wherever possible to cite analogous material from Jubilees, Philo, Josephus, and other earlier sources. When this is not possible, specific motif and expression analysis is done, showing the continuous development of a particular motif or expression such as “leaning on the breast” of Joseph. North American New Testament scholars are particularly skeptical of employing rabbinic sources. Yet someone like Philip Alexander can state that while there are numerous caveats in this regard, “only good can come from New Testament students studying Rabbinic literature....” See his “Rabbinic Judaism and the New Testament,” in *ZNW* 74 (1983): 237–246, here 238. Geza Vermes follows him in maintaining that “rabbinic literature, judiciously and sensitively handled, can throw valuable and sometimes unique light on the study of the Gospels.” See his *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (London: SCM Press, 1993), 7. In this essay I attempt to “judiciously and sensitively” point also to the relevance of rabbinic sources to the Judaic background of the Beloved Disciple in the Fourth Gospel.

¹² Cf. m. Pesah. 7:11 (Albeck, 2.167; Neusner, 243; Danby, 146 with n. 6).

Jesus's disciples are present at the final meal in John (13:5, 22–23, 35; 15:8; 16:17, 29; 18:1). Since the author mentions the Twelve specifically in 6:67, 70–71, and 20:24, the hearer/reader of the Gospel could assume he also means only them in 13:22, yet this must not necessarily be so. He may have simply added the Beloved Disciple as a “disciple” to them. For example, the latter is labeled “the other disciple” in 20:2–4, 8 (see Section III below). After Jesus announces that one of them would betray him, 13:22–25 reads:

The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. One of his disciples — the one whom Jesus loved — was reclining/leaning at Jesus's chest. Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. Thus, that [disciple], having reclined/leaned in such a way on the chest of Jesus, says to him: “Lord, who is it?”

Although it cannot be excluded, the Beloved Disciple does not appear to be one of the original Twelve here, but a separate figure like Nathanael (1:45–49; 21:2). He is characterized by the Fourth Evangelist as being so “loved” by Jesus that he had him, and him alone, “recline/lean on his chest” at the final meal with his disciples. I propose that the author primarily borrowed this imagery from Judaic comment on Benjamin's “reclining/leaning” on Joseph at the reunion meal related in Gen 43:16–34. Before analyzing this, however, it is necessary to examine the key passage, Deut 33:12, upon which it is based.

II. 2. Deut 33:12

Shortly before Moses' death, related in chapter 34, Deuteronomy 33 describes how he blesses each of the tribes. Verse 12 reads:

- a) Of Benjamin he said:
- b) The Beloved of the LORD shall rest securely upon Him,
- c) surrounding Him all the days.
- d) And between his shoulders He rests.

MT:

a) לְבִנְיָמִן אָמַר

b) יְדִיד יְהוָה יִשְׁכֵּן לְקִטְחָה עָלָיו

c) חִפְּףָה עָלָיו כָּל־הַיּוֹם

d) וּבֵין כְּתֵפָיו יִשְׁכֵּן

II. 2.1. *The Beloved of the LORD / Lord*

The term “Beloved of the LORD” here is יהוה יָדִיד.¹³ The adjective יָדִיד means “beloved.”¹⁴ It is translated in the LXX five times by the adjective ἀγαπητός, “beloved,”¹⁵ and four times by the perfect passive participle ἠγαπημένος,¹⁶ both forms of the verb ἀγαπάω, “to love.”¹⁷ LXX Deut 33:12 employs the perfect passive participle in the phrase ἠγαπημένος ὑπὸ κυρίου. “The Lord” here is κύριος, meant as the LORD (God). Yet the Messiah at times could also bear this divine title. For example, the LORD promises to raise up for David a righteous Branch (Jer 23:5). The name by which he is to be called is “The LORD Is Our Righteousness” (יהוה צְדִקְנוֹ - v. 6), the latter expression attested as messianic in rabbinic sources.¹⁸ Since the Johannine community considered Jesus to be their Lord (cf. for example 13:25 // 21:20), and even God (1:1, 18; 5:18; 8:24; 10:30, 33; 20:28), it was not difficult for one of its members, the author of the Fourth Gospel, to borrow the image of “the beloved of the LORD” in Deut 33:12 and to create from it “the disciple whom [the Lord] Jesus loved.”

¹³ Targum Onqelos has רחמא דיי (Sperber, 1.350; Eng. Grossfeld, 106–107), as does Fragment Targum “V” (Klein, 1.232; Eng., 2.189), with Targum Neofiti 1 having the similar רחמה דיי (Díez Macho, 5.287; Eng. McNamara, 167). For רחמא as “love,” cf. Jastrow, 1467. Targum Pseudo-Jonathan renders the term instead with חביביה דיי (Clarke, 252; Eng. Clarke, 100). See חביב as “beloved, dear, precious,” in Jastrow, 418.

¹⁴ Cf. BDB 391. It occurs only nine times in the MT. See also Jastrow, 564, on the noun יָדִיד as the “chosen, beloved.”

¹⁵ Cf. Ps 44(45): superscription; 59(60):7(5); 83(84):2(1); 107(108):7(6); and 126(127):2.

¹⁶ Cf. here; Isa 5:1 (twice); and Jer 11:15.

¹⁷ Cf. BAGD 4–5, and the *GELS* 3.

¹⁸ Tg. Jer 23:5 has “a Messiah/Anointed One of righteousness” (Sperber, 3.188; Eng. Hayward, 111); cf. Num. Rab. Korah 18/21 on the same verse (Mirkin, 10.209; Soncino, 6.734); b. Bat. 75b says the Messiah in 23:6 is one of three called by the name of the Holy One (Soncino, 303); Lam. Rab. 1:16 § 51 has the term as the name of the King Messiah (Vilna, 36; Soncino, 7.136); Pesiq. Rab Kah. 22/5a (Mandelbaum, 331; Eng. Braude and Kapstein, 349); and Midr. Pss. 21/2 (Buber, 178; Eng. Braude, 1.294). See also Pss. Sol. 17:32 (“their king shall be the Lord Messiah”) and 18:7 (“the Lord Messiah”) in *OTP* 2.667 and 669. R. B. Wright notes that they were originally composed in Jerusalem in Hebrew sometime after Pompey conquered the city in 63 BCE (*OTP* 2.640–641). See also George Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 247 (“between at least 63 B.C.E. and 30 B.C.E.”).

II. 2.2. Benjamin as Beloved

Benjamin was considered “beloved” because he was the twelfth and last son of his father Jacob, who wanted to protect him (Gen 42:4) from the same fate his only full brother Joseph¹⁹ had endured—presumably death.²⁰ Because of his young age, he had not been involved in the other brothers’ selling Joseph. The Tannaitic midrash *Sipre Vezot ha-Berakhah* 352 on Deut 33:12 states: “Beloved [חביב] is Benjamin, for he is called ‘the beloved of the LORD’ [ידיד למקום].”²¹ He is one of the six called “beloved” with this term.²² Elsewhere, Judaic tradition lauds him as “Benjamin the Righteous.”²³ He is “a man, the beloved [חביבה] of the eyes.”²⁴ He is also one of the four who died not because of his own sins, but because of the serpent’s machinations (with Adam and Eve).²⁵ Finally, because of the expression “securely” in Deut 33:12, “Our Rabbis taught” that Benjamin was one of the seven “over whom the worms had no dominion.”²⁶

¹⁹ Their common mother was Rachel, who later died giving birth to Benjamin (Gen 35:18). The other brothers were from Jacob’s three other wives. Tanḥ. B *Miqqes* 13 (Buber, 1.197; Eng. Townsend, 263) on Gen 43:29 says that when Joseph saw his brother Benjamin, the son of his own mother, “he rejoiced because he resembled his mother.” The late midrash *Bereshit Rabbati* (Albeck, 205) repeats this and adds a different interpretation: “Therefore he was more beloved [חביב] to him than all of them, for he was his brother, the son of his mother.”

²⁰ Cf. on this Jub. 42:11, “If perhaps [Benjamin] became feverish on the way, then you would send down my old age to death in grief” (*OTP* 2.132). See also Gen 44:20, “his [Jacob’s] life is bound up in the boy’s life.”

²¹ The noun מקום, literally “place,” is a reverential circumlocution for “the LORD” (Jastrow, 830). Samuel R. Driver aptly remarks: “The tribe [of Benjamin] is characterized (so to say) as Jehovah’s darling, enjoying in a special sense His protection and regard.” He notes that “ידיד is a poetical word, choicer than אהוב....” See his *Deuteronomy* (ICC 5; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), 403.

²² Cf. Finkelstein, 409; Eng. Hammer, 364. See also b. *Menaḥ.* 53a-b (Soncino, 320); *’Avot R. Nat.* B 43,39 (Schechter, 121; Becker, 391; Eng. Saldarini, 265); and *Midr. Pss.* 84/1 on Ps 84:2 (Buber, 370; Eng. Braude, 2.64).

²³ Cf. b. *Yoma* 12a (Soncino, 53); b. *Meg.* 26a (Soncino, 157); and b. *Soṭah* 37a (Soncino, 182).

²⁴ Cf. *Gen. Rab.* *Vayyiggash* 93/6 on Gen 44:18 (Theodor and Albeck, 1156; Soncino, 2.860). See Jastrow, 416, on חביבה as love, esteem, honor.

²⁵ Cf. b. *Šabb.* 55b (Soncino, 256 with n. 3).

²⁶ Cf. b. *B. Bat.* 17a (Soncino, 86). Several of these passages are also noted by Haiim Hirschberg, art. “Benjamin,” “In the Aggadah,” in *EncJud* 3.354–356.

II. 2.3. Resting “Securely” Upon the Lord

Deut 33:12 states: “The Beloved of the LORD shall rest securely upon Him.”²⁷ The expression “shall rest securely” is *יָשָׁבַן לְבִטָּח*. The noun *בִּטָּח* means “security.”²⁸ Precisely this expression in its exact form also occurs in Jer 23:6, the messianic passage noted above in II. 2.1.²⁹ Jer 33:16 repeats 23:6 with only slight variations. It too receives messianic interpretation in the Targum.³⁰ Many learned Palestinian Jews of the first century CE appear to have known the Hebrew Scriptures almost by heart.³¹ I suggest that the occurrence of “shall rest securely” in the messianic passage Jer 23:6 (and 33:16 in almost the same form) probably aided the author of the “Beloved Disciple” motif in borrowing other relevant imagery from Judaic interpretation of Deut 33:12.

II. 2.4. Resting Between His Shoulders, and Leaning On

Deut 33:12b states that the Beloved of the LORD “shall rest” securely upon Him. The verb “to rest” here is *יָשָׁבַן*.³² The same verb is employed in 12d, “And between

²⁷ Some modern commentators wish to interpret the final word, *עָלָיו*, to derive from *עָלָה*, “Exalted One,” an epithet for God. Cf. for example those cited in Jack Lundbom, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 929. Yet he prefers the meaning “upon him, by him, beside him” (ibid.). Others agree, considering the term to be the *lectio difficilior*, and as such original. See Eckart Otto, *Deuteronomium 23,16–34,12* (HThKAT; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2017), 2217, as well as Duane Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10–34:12* (WBC 6B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 850.

²⁸ Cf. BDB 105, where three other occurrences of the phrase are given. It is not found with this meaning in post-biblical Hebrew (Jastrow, 156). The NRSV has the similar “in safety” for the expression.

²⁹ Cf. also Ps 16:9.

³⁰ Cf. Sperber, 3,215, Eng. Hayward, 141, on the preceding v. 15, as at 23:5. It should be recalled that at this time there was no exact verse numbering, only “sections” (see e.g. Mark 12:26). The two verses would have been considered together.

³¹ The many priests who according to Acts had “become obedient to the faith” in Jerusalem (6:7) had excellent knowledge of the Scriptures, and it should not be overlooked that Josephus was of priestly lineage. The members of the Qumran community at the Dead Sea, who opposed the priestly hierarchy in Jerusalem, employed the Scriptures in a masterful, learned way. The latter is also true of the earliest rabbis, the Tannaim. The Hellenistic Jew Saul/Paul also knew the Septuagint almost by heart, as demonstrated in his letters. The extent of literacy on the part of the common people in Palestine in the first century CE is another, often debated question, not applicable here.

³² Cf. BDB 1014–1015, which at 1. “settle down to abide” notes: “esp. at rest, peace, in security,” as in Jer 23:6; 33:16; and Deut 33:12. See also Jastrow, 1575: to dwell, rest.

his [Benjamin's] shoulders 'He rests' (שָׁכַן).³³ Judaic interpretation of the latter is unanimous in asserting that it means the Shekhinah or Presence of God dwelt in the Jerusalem Temple. Its main buildings such as the Sanctuary, the Entrance, and the Chamber of the Holy of Holies, did not belong to the tribe of Judah, but were located in territory belonging to the tribe of Benjamin. Indeed, he was found worthy of becoming "the host/landlord of the Divine Majesty" in the latter.³⁴ The term "shoulders" here thus emphasizes that the LORD rested in the sections not of Judah, as might be assumed, but in those of Benjamin.³⁵

It is important to note here that "Benjamin is pictured as a reclining man."³⁶ The LORD in His Temple "rests between his shoulders." The Tannaitic commentary on Deuteronomy, Sipre, has a parable at this point which illustrates why Benjamin was considered worthy of having the Shekhinah dwell in his tribal section of land. It says a king's youngest son, his favorite (אוהבו), in contrast to the others, would stay and eat and drink with him, and the king would "lean on him" (נשען עליו), a phrase repeated four times for emphasis. This is meant to represent the relationship between the father Jacob and his youngest, favorite son Benjamin, as well as the verse part "And between his shoulders He rests" (Deut 33:12d).³⁷ Here the niph'al of the verb שָׁכַן is employed to mean "to lean" on someone.³⁸ I propose that such comment on Deut 33:12 was a major factor in the Palestinian Jewish Christian's description of the Beloved Disciple's "reclining/leaning on the chest" of Jesus in the Gospel of John.

Yet the Hebrew of Deut 33:12d can just as well be read in the following, reverse way: "And between His [the LORD's] shoulders he [Benjamin] rests." I

³³ Here the LXX has *καταπαύω* in the sense of "rest, repose" (GELS 322).

³⁴ Cf. Targum Onqelos (Sperber, 1.350; Eng. Grossfeld, 106–107); Targum Pseudo-Jonathan (Clarke, 252; Eng. Clarke, 100); Targum Neofiti 1 (Diez Macho, 5.287; Eng. McNamara, 167); Fragment Targum "V" (Klein, 1.232; Eng. Klein, 2.189); Sipre Vezot ha-Berakhah 352 on Deut 33:12 (Finkelstein, 410–411; Eng. Hammer, 365–366); b. Yoma 12a (Soncino, 53); b. Meg. 26a (Soncino, 157); b. Zebah. 54b (Soncino, 273) and 118b (Soncino, 584); and 'Avot R. Nat. A 35,11 (Schechter, 104–105; Becker, 250; Eng. Goldin, 144–145).

³⁵ Cf. the sources cited in the previous note after the targumic references. See also Driver, *Deuteronomy*, 404.

³⁶ Cf. again Driver, *ibid.*

³⁷ Cf. Vezot ha-Berakhah 352 (Finkelstein, 413; Eng. Hammer, 368, who unfortunately omits several cases of "lean on him"). See also Midrash Tannaim on Deut 33:12 (Hoffmann, 217). It employs here the nithpa'el of שָׁכַן: to lean oneself (Jastrow, 1001).

³⁸ Cf. Jastrow, 1611; BDB 1043: lean (upon, על). The *Modern Hebrew New Testament* (Jerusalem: United Bible Societies), 278, employs נשען for ἀναπεσών in John 13:25.

suggest that this is the way the Palestinian Jewish Christian author of the Beloved Disciple passages in the Gospel of John interpreted v. 12d. For him, it is the Beloved (ידיד) Disciple who rests/leans/reclines on the shoulders of the Lord (Jesus) at the final common meal.³⁹ I propose that this motif of “resting/leaning” was transferred from Deut 33:12 to Judaic interpretation of Joseph’s reunion meal with his eleven brothers in Egypt,⁴⁰ and that this biblical scene in Judaic tradition in turn also influenced the author of the Beloved Disciple passages in a major way.⁴¹

II. 2.5. *The Reunion Meal of Joseph with His Brothers*

The Joseph narrative in Genesis 37 and 39–50, one of the longest in the Bible, is also one of the most fascinating. It has inspired artists and musicians throughout the centuries.⁴² It is no wonder that it was commented on in Judaic sources from an early time onward. Of particular relevance in regard to the motif of the Beloved

³⁹ Such a reversal is called an “inverted text” (מקרא מְסוּרָה). A good example is found in Num. Rab. Naso 11/4 on Num 6:23 (Mirkin, 9.294; Eng. Soncino, 5.427–428) by R. Jonathan, a third-generation Tanna (see Hermann Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992], 83). On this phenomenon, see also number thirty-one of the “Thirty-two Middot” in *ibid.*, 33–34. Cf. Jastrow, 1028, on סרס as “to transpose,” with the example of b. B. Bat. 119b on Num 27:2 (Soncino, 489) and elsewhere. He notes that the usage is frequent. When I speak here and elsewhere of “the Palestinian Jewish Christian author of the Beloved Disciple passages,” I do not exclude the motif as possibly originally deriving from the Johannine community. See Section V.

⁴⁰ Christensen in *Deuteronomy 21:10–34:12*, 850, also calls attention to Benjamin’s role in the meal. Cf. also references to the Joseph story in Genesis 43–44 in Driver, *Deuteronomy*, 403, and Lundbom, *Deuteronomy*, 929.

⁴¹ Against Craig Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 2.916: “John’s language might allude to Deut 33:12, though without the use of *κόλπος* [there] the comparison seems tenuous; probably both texts simply reflect an ancient portrait of special intimacy.” See also Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee*, 82, who states that while reference to Benjamin may be “one piece to the puzzle,” it is doubtful “Whether the links between the figure of the Beloved Disciple and the promise to Benjamin are strong enough to bear the weight of the role of the Beloved Disciple in the Gospel....”

⁴² Cf., e.g. most recently Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice’s musical “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat” of 1974. Interestingly, the Koran even devoted an entire surah (12) to it.

Disciple is Gen 43:16–34, which deals with the meal Joseph had prepared in Egypt for his eleven brothers, including now Benjamin.⁴³

Philo of Alexandria, roughly a contemporary of Jesus,⁴⁴ describes this meal as “sumptuous” (*Ios.* 196), a “feast” (201). Since Gen 43:34 says Joseph’s brothers “drank and were merry with him,” Philo assumes there were “toasts and good wishes and invitations to take refreshment” (206; cf. 213).⁴⁵ Judah the Prince, a fourth-generation Tanna and the editor of the Mishnah,⁴⁶ maintained: “From the day that Joseph departed from his brethren, they drank no wine until that day, for they all abstained from wine. Joseph too drank no wine until that day,” as Gen 49:26 is interpreted of him as a nazirite.⁴⁷ This had been twenty-two years.⁴⁸ Joseph then interviewed his only full brother, Benjamin, who tells him he is married and has ten sons, all named in regard to Joseph.⁴⁹ He also tells Joseph (not knowing his identity): “Since the day [Joseph] was exiled, I have not bathed nor combed my hair, but have been like a mourner.”⁵⁰

This banquet, according to Tannaitic tradition, was a Sabbath meal.⁵¹ When portions were taken to the ten brothers from Joseph’s table, “Benjamin’s portion was five times as much as any of theirs” (Gen 43:34), showing Joseph’s

⁴³ On Joseph in general “In the Aggadah,” cf. also Moses Aberbach in *EncJud* 11.410–411, and on the meal scene the specific sources Louis Ginzberg cites in *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1920/1977), 2.94–99 and the notes in 5.350–352.

⁴⁴ Cf. Maren R. Niehoff, *Philo of Alexandria: An Intellectual Biography* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 245–246: ca. 20 BCE to ca. 49 CE.

⁴⁵ Josephus in *Ant.* 2.128 also notes regarding Joseph: “the loving-cup in which he had pledged their healths.”

⁴⁶ Cf. Strack and Stemmerger, *Introduction*, 89.

⁴⁷ Cf. Gen. Rab. Vayyiggash 93/7 on Gen 43:34 (Theodor and Albeck, 1166; Soncino, 2.866). Mark 14:25 par. may be related to this motif.

⁴⁸ Cf. Gen. Rab. Miqqeṣ 92/5, also on Gen 43:34 (Theodor and Albeck, 1143; Soncino, 2.852).

⁴⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 93/7 on Gen 43:29 (Theodor and Albeck, 1164; Soncino, 2.864–865). Their names are listed in Gen 46:21.

⁵⁰ Cf. Strack and Stemmerger, *Introduction*, 97.

⁵¹ Cf. Mek. R. Ish. Beshallah 1 on Exod 13:19 (Lauterbach, 1.179) regarding the “preparing” of Gen 43:16 and Exod 16:5. A parallel is found in Gen. Rab. Miqqeṣ 92/4 on Gen 43:16 (Theodor and Albeck, 1140; Soncino, 2.850), pointing out that “Joseph kept the Sabbath before it was ordained.” Slaughtering the meat for it was done in a kosher manner: b. Ḥul. 91a (Soncino, 511) and Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 43:16 (Clarke, 54; Eng. Maher, 142).

love for his only full brother, Benjamin.⁵² The book of Jubilees was written by a Jew in Palestine in Hebrew sometime between 161–140 BCE.⁵³ It betrays very early haggadic treatment of the above by stating of Joseph in 42:23: “And he increased Benjamin’s portion seven times more than any of their portions.”⁵⁴ With regard to Gen 43:33, Joseph before this had seated his brothers according to their ages.⁵⁵ Josephus notes that this was “in the same order as at their father’s table.”⁵⁶ Rabbinic tradition relates that Joseph took his cup, struck it, and placed Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun together as the sons of one mother, then Dan and Naphtali likewise, and Gad and Asher likewise. Only Benjamin was left, so Joseph placed him next to himself.⁵⁷ At this point the closest affinity to the imagery describing the Beloved Disciple in the Gospel of John becomes apparent.

Gen 43:33 states literally: “And they [Joseph’s brothers] ‘sat’ before him, the firstborn according to his birthright, and the youngest according to his youth, and the men looked in astonishment at each other.” The verb “to sit” here is יָשַׁב.⁵⁸ Yet because of the Hellenistic-Roman practice of “reclining” at banquets, even the usually reticent Targum Onqelos states here: “And they ‘reclined’ [וַאֲסָחָרוּ] before him.”⁵⁹ Targum Neofiti 1 also reads: “And he made them lie down/recline before him.”⁶⁰ This haggadic tradition is already attested for the first century CE by Josephus, who in *Ant.* 2.123 literally wrote of this incident: “He invites them to the meal, and they ‘recline’ just as at their father[’s table].” The Greek verb

⁵² Gen. Rab. Miqqeṣ 92/5 on this verse notes that in addition to his own portion, Benjamin received one each from Joseph, Asenath, Manasseh, and Ephraim (their sons) (Theodor and Albeck, 1143; Soncino, 2.852).

⁵³ Cf. Orval S. Wintermute in *OTP* 2.43–45, as well as Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 73 (“in the early 160s”).

⁵⁴ Cf. *OTP* 2.133.

⁵⁵ Cf. Philo, *Ios.* 203, on this.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Ant.* 2.123.

⁵⁷ Cf. the remarks of Samuel b. Naḥman, a third-generation Palestinian Amora (Cf. Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction*, 97), in Gen. Rab. Vayyiggash 93/7 on Gen 43:33 (Theodor and Albeck, 1165; Soncino, 2.865). The mothers were Leah, Bilhah, Zilpah, and Rachel, respectively.

⁵⁸ Cf. BDB 442.

⁵⁹ Cf. Sperber, 1.75 with the afel of סָחָר (Jastrow, 971: 4) “to recline around the table.” Although Grossfeld translates this verb as “reclining” in 27:19 and 37:25, he strangely has “And they were seated round about” here (144).

⁶⁰ Cf. Diez Macho, 1.289; Eng. McNamara, 196.

κατακλίνω in the passive, as here, means “to lie at table.”⁶¹ Philo in *Ios.* 203 also shows his awareness of this usage when he relates: “When the guests were seated, arranged by his commands in order of age, as at that date it was not [yet] the custom to ‘recline’ at convivial gatherings....”

Gen. Rab. Vayyiggash 93/7 on Gen 43:33 says Joseph “prepared a great feast for them [the brothers], and when they came to ‘recline’ [at the meal], he took the cup, struck it,” etc.⁶² This narrative continues by noting that when all the other brothers had already reclined, Joseph said, regarding Benjamin: “He is motherless, and I am motherless. Let us recline together.”⁶³ Tanḥ. Vayyiggash 4 on Gen 44:18 also states regarding 44:33 that Joseph “arranged a banquet for them at which he decided to have Benjamin ‘recline at his side.’” The latter is the Hebrew וְצָלָה.⁶⁴ Finally, Gen. Rab. Miqqeṣ 92/5 on Gen 43:33 has Joseph state: “I have no mother, and this young man [Benjamin] has no mother, since when she [Rachel] bore him, she died. On that account ‘let him come and place his head on me.’” The latter is the Aramaic: ייתי ויתן ראשיה גבי.⁶⁵

As shown in Josephus’s retelling the Joseph narrative, the haggadic motif of Joseph and his brothers’ “reclining” at their reunion meal is very old. While some of the rabbinic sources cited above are Amoraic, and the *final* form of the relevant targums is also from that time, these sources appear to also reflect earlier traditions. Many of them are related to Judaic interpretation of Moses’ blessing Benjamin in Deut 33:12, whereas the Beloved One, Benjamin could also be thought of as resting/reclining/leaning on the shoulders of the LORD (and not the reverse, the usual interpretation). The author of the Fourth Gospel then

⁶¹ Cf. LSJ 894. See also BAGD 411: “recline at dinner.” Thackeray in the Loeb Classical Library paraphrases with “where couches were set for them,” yet he implies the brothers reclined on these.

⁶² Cf. Theodor and Albeck, 1165; Soncino, 2.865. This is related by R. Samuel b. Naḥman, a third-generation Palestinian Amora (see n. 57). The verb is סבב, meaning in the piel and hiphil “reclining on the dining couch around the table” (Jastrow, 948–949). See also the noun הַסְבָּה, “lying down for a meal in company” (Jastrow, 359; an example is given of lying on the right side at the Passover meal).

⁶³ Cf. again Theodor and Albeck, 1165, where I prefer the reading נסב, “let us recline together.” It is found in four MSS, in contrast to “let us sit together,” found only in one MS.

⁶⁴ Cf. Eshkol, 174; Eng. Berman, 269, who wrongly has “sit.” This is the version of R. Naḥman bar Isaac, a fourth-generation Babylonian Amora (Strack and Stemmerger, *Introduction*, 105). The term וְצָלָה means “by the side of, near, with” (Jastrow, 111).

⁶⁵ Cf. Theodor and Albeck, 1143. Soncino, 2.852, only paraphrases this. On the preposition גבי, see Jastrow, 203.

appropriated such imagery from there and the related reunion meal of Joseph and his eleven brothers, with the emphasis on Benjamin, to create the figure of the Beloved Disciple. He described him as “reclining/leaning” on the chest of Jesus (John 13:23, 25; repeated by a later hand in 21:20) at Jesus’s last meal with his disciples.

III. The “Other” Disciple

John designates the Beloved Disciple as “the other disciple” (ὁ ἄλλος μαθητής) in 20:2, 3, 4, and 8. This somewhat unconventional designation may also derive from a passage in Genesis 43, just before Joseph’s reunion meal with his eleven brothers in vv. 16–34. It also is closely associated with Benjamin.

Gen 43:14 has Jacob address his sons: “May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man [Joseph], so that he may release to you ‘your brother, the other, and Benjamin.’” By “the other” Simeon is meant, whom Joseph had taken as a hostage (42:24). Yet the Hebrew is unusual here, inviting interpretation of its meaning: אֶת־אֲחֵיכֶם אַחֵר וְאֶת־בְּנֵימִין. ⁶⁶ The adjective אַחֵר means “another, other.” ⁶⁷ Targum Onqelos ad loc. has אַחֲרַנָּא, ⁶⁸ and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan חֲרִינָּא. ⁶⁹ These can mean not only “another,” but also an “additional” person. ⁷⁰ Gen. Rab. Miqqeṣ 92/3 on this verse interprets “to you” (pl.) as the ten tribes, and “the other, and Benjamin” as the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Another interpretation given here is: “‘your brother’—this is Joseph; ‘the other’—this is Simeon; ‘and Benjamin’ is to be taken literally.” ⁷¹ Avot R. Nat. B 43,4 also relates that Jacob was the third of the ten persons who prophesied and did not know they were prophesying. When he uttered Gen 43:14, “‘your brother’ refers to Simeon; ‘other’ refers to Joseph; ‘and Benjamin’ refers literally to Benjamin.” ⁷²

⁶⁶ For this reason, the modern editors of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensis*⁵ suggest instead דָּאֲחֵרָא as in the LXX (τὸν ἕνα) and 42:19.

⁶⁷ Cf. BDB 29, which notes that it can also have the sense of “different.” The term could also be used to avoid naming Dan in 1 Chr 7:12 (BDB 31, II.). See also Jastrow, 41.

⁶⁸ Cf. Sperber, 1.74.

⁶⁹ Cf. Clarke, 54.

⁷⁰ See Jastrow, 41, on אַחֲרַנָּא, and 440 on חֲרִינָּא.

⁷¹ Cf. Theodor and Albeck, 1140; Soncino, 2.850.

⁷² Cf. Schechter, 118; Becker, 388; Eng. Saldarini, 255. Saldarini in n. 4 remarks that “the superfluous word ‘other’ in his [Jacob’s] statement is a prophetic reference to Joseph, who is indeed alive.” Jacob’s being informed of this is “by the Holy Spirit” in Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 43:14 (Clarke, 54; Eng. Maher, 142). This is also hinted at in Fragment Targum “P” and “V” ad loc. (Klein, 1.63 and 154; Eng., 2.28 and 115).

The above examples show that Palestinian Judaic comment on אֲחֵר, “the other,” could be applied to different persons. Since it was directly adjacent to the name “Benjamin,” I propose that the Palestinian Jewish Christian who spoke of the Beloved Disciple also as “the other’ disciple” was inspired to do so because of its occurrence in Genesis 43, which chapter also influenced his imagery of “reclining/leaning” on the chest of the Lord (Jesus).⁷³

IV. The Original Language of the Author Behind the Beloved Disciple

Almost all the sources cited in this study are from Palestinian Judaism, most of them in Hebrew, with only a few in Aramaic. The author appears to be very well acquainted with the Hebrew Bible, especially the portions Deut 33:12⁷⁴ and Genesis 43, and with Judaic haggadic interpretation of these passages. This means that he knew Hebrew. He probably also had to know Aramaic in order to deal with everyday life. Elsewhere I have also argued extensively for the author of the Fourth Gospel as a Palestinian Jewish Christian who not only was bilingual, writing in Greek, but could also think in Hebrew and knew Aramaic.⁷⁵ I thus agree

⁷³ A possible corroboration of this suggestion is found in Franz Delitzsch’s *Hebrew New Testament*, which always translates “the ‘other’ disciple” in John 20:2, 3, 4, 8 as אֲחֵר (208). That of the United Bible Societies (295) has instead אֲחֵרִי.

⁷⁴ In this respect cf. already the lengthy interpretations of Deuteronomy 33 in the section “Moses as Prophet and King in the Rabbinic Haggada” in Wayne Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology*, reprinted from 1967 in the Johannine Monograph Series, edited by Paul N. Anderson and R. Alan Culpepper (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017).

⁷⁵ Cf. recently the section “A Semitic Background to John 19:28–30” in the essay “John 19:28–30 and the Significance of Hyssop,” in *Essays in the Judaic Background of Mark 11:12–14, 20–21; 15:23; Luke 1:37; John 19:28–30; and Acts 11:28* (Studies in Judaism; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2015), 152–156. There I point to other scholars who think that “John” was a Jewish Christian who knew Hebrew but wrote in Greek. See also *Simon Peter’s Denial and Jesus’ Commissioning Him as His Successor in John 21:15–19: Studies in Their Judaic Background* (Studies in Judaism; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2013), 164–165, on the author of chapters 1–20, and 253–255 on the author of chapter 21. Other studies also propose an acquaintance with Hebrew and Aramaic on the part of the author of the Fourth Gospel. See “The Wedding Feast at Cana (John 2:1–11), and Ahasuerus’ Wedding Feast in Judaic Traditions on Esther 1,” in *Water Into Wine and the Beheading of John the Baptist* (BJS 150; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 1–37; “The Death of One for All in John 11:45–54 in Light of Judaic Traditions” in *Barabbas and Esther and Other Studies in the Judaic Illumination of Earliest Christianity* (SFSHJ 54; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 29–63; “Caught in the Act’ – With Whom, and By Whom? The Judaic

with Raymond Brown who with regard to “The History of the Johannine Community” believes that in its first phase, from the middle of the fifties to the eighties CE, the “originating group” was “in or near Palestine, Jews of relatively standard expectations....”⁷⁶ They then may have emigrated to Ephesus, as maintained in later church tradition.

This having been said, there is no reason to maintain that the author of the Fourth Gospel first wrote in Hebrew, which he or someone else then translated into Greek. As a bilingual Christian Jew, he appears to have written his Gospel originally in Greek. To this extent he was like the writer of the First Gospel, Matthew, who may even have been a converted Jewish scribe (13:52).

V. Who Was the Beloved Disciple?

Can the above study of the Judaic background of the Beloved Disciple offer any hints as to his identity? The author of the Fourth Gospel avoids giving his real name. This is similar to his not naming Mary as the mother of Jesus, although he certainly knew her name (2:4; 19:25–27).⁷⁷ As in the Synoptics, he knows of the “Twelve” disciples, shown in 6:67, 70–71, and 20:24. Yet he introduces two disciples unknown there: Nathanael (1:45–49; cf. 21:2), and Nicodemus (3:1, 4, 9; 7:50; 19:39), who is assumed to be a secret one like Joseph of Arimathea because

Background of the Adulteress in John 7:53–8:11,” in *“Caught in the Act,” Walking on the Sea, and the Release of Barabbas Revisited* (SFSHJ 157; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 1–48; and “Abraham’s Prophetic Vision of the Messiah: The Judaic Background of John 8:56–58,” in *My Name Is “Legion”: Palestinian Judaic Traditions in Mark 5:1–20 and Other Gospel Texts* (Studies in Judaism; Lanham, MD, etc.: University Press of America, 2003), 253–287.

⁷⁶ Cf. Chart One in his *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 166–167. Antioch of Syria, with its very large bilingual Jewish population, was directly adjacent to Palestine and could also have been the first (or second) home of the Johannine community. Many scholars, for example, think the bilingual Jewish Christian Evangelist Matthew was at home there. J. Ramsey Michaels does not exclude Palestine, but favors Syria as “more likely” for the home of the Fourth Gospel, in part because of its “Jewishness.” See his *The Gospel of John* (NICCNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 37–38. Wolfgang Fenske in *Der Lieblingsjünger. Das Geheimnis um Johannes* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2007), 49, thinks that the author, now in a congregation in Ephesus, may have been influenced by the traditions of Syrian congregations with which he became acquainted on the way there. He considers the Odes of Solomon, composed in Syriac, to be close in language.

⁷⁷ Cf. the similar phenomenon of his also omitting the “words of institution” at Jesus’s last meal in chapters 13–17, certainly known to him from Christian tradition.

he aids the latter in burying Jesus (19:38–42).⁷⁸ In the Synoptics, all the disciples (except the betrayer Judas) are pictured as abandoning Jesus at his arrest in Gethsemane. Out of fear of death they are not present at the Crucifixion.⁷⁹ Yet the Fourth Evangelist portrays the Beloved Disciple as the only male disciple present there (19:26–27).

Like Nathanael and Nicodemus, the Beloved Disciple thus does not appear to be one of the Twelve.⁸⁰ The Fourth Evangelist could have named him, as he did with Nathanael and Nicodemus. His not doing so probably points to the creation of this figure either by the Evangelist “John” or possibly already by the Palestinian Jewish Christian community from which the Gospel emanated. If the Fourth Evangelist or already the Johannine community had given him a specific name not already known to other Christian communities, these could have objected that they had no knowledge of such a disciple. To avoid such a possible reproach, the Evangelist or the Johannine community may have described him as anonymous, also by the designation “the other disciple.”

The creation of such a figure was typical of Jewish haggadic narratives, aptly called “imaginative dramatization” by Judah Goldin.⁸¹ The Evangelist John, or already the early Johannine community, probably wanted to have a disciple represent them to show how close the members of the community felt to their Lord, Jesus.⁸² To do so, he or they developed the figure of an unnamed disciple who even reclined/leaned on the chest of his Lord (more intimacy was not possible) and did not abandon him even at the Crucifixion, as other male disciples

⁷⁸ “John” may also have considered Lazarus, also known to the Synoptics as such, to be a disciple (chapters 11–12).

⁷⁹ Cf. 16:32, “The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you [Jesus’s disciples—v. 29] will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone.” The author was most probably aware of the tradition found in Mark 14:27–29 with “deserters.”

⁸⁰ Against, for example, Minear, “The Beloved Disciple,” 110.

⁸¹ Cf. the treatment of “Haggadic Interpretation” by Goldin, also one of my Yale professors, in *The Song at the Sea* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1971/1990), 27. See also Isaac Heinemann’s term “creative historiography” in this respect (Cf. Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction*, 260).

⁸² A much later analogy is the great veneration of the disciple Thomas by those Christians in Kerala, India, who believed he had emigrated there already in the first century CE. In a letter from 6/11/2019, Harold Attridge convincingly notes that the Beloved Disciple “stands in some way for all those who want to be ‘close’ to Jesus. Readers can in some fashion ‘identify’ with this character and participate with him in the final meal of Jesus and be there for the crucifixion. That dramatic ‘identification’ is surely one of the things that the evangelist wants to foster.”

did out of fear for their lives. This shows that for the Johannine community the Beloved Disciple was even more important to them than Simon Peter, who plays the role of Jesus’s main disciple in the Synoptics.⁸³

Finally, the above analysis of the background of the Beloved Disciple in Judaic haggadic traditions on Benjamin in Deut 33:12 and Genesis 43 strongly points to the development of the figure of the Beloved Disciple as most probably taking place in a Palestinian Jewish Christian context. There such traditions in Hebrew (and in part in Aramaic, as in the translations of the biblical text in the synagogue,) were well known and were constantly being further developed, as already shown in Jubilees and Josephus, and then in the rabbinic writings. More, unfortunately, cannot be said about this figure, who remains mysterious even today.

* * *

Addendum: Jesus’s Concern for the Welfare of His Mother After His Death in John 19:25–27, and Moses’ Concern for the Welfare of His Mother After His Death

In John 19:25–27, Jesus on the Cross commends “the disciple whom he loved” to his mother standing beside this figure, and his mother to the disciple, who then “took her into his own home.” This passage led to the later belief that the Beloved Disciple took Mary along with him to Ephesus, where her tomb is displayed and visited even today.

Elsewhere I have proposed that this incident, not found in the Synoptics, is based on Judaic tradition regarding Israel’s first redeemer, Moses, just before his own death in Deuteronomy 34. There he expresses his concern for the welfare of his still living 250-year-old mother Yochebed, whose other children Aaron and Miriam have already died, and he commends her to the care of his main disciple Joshua. It is assumed that he will take her into his own home, just as Moses requests him to do with his orphans. The first part of this Palestinian Jewish tradition is found in Tanḥ. B Va’eṭḥanan 6 on Deut 3:23 and Tanḥ. Va’eṭḥanan 6, and the second in the Parma MS of the midrash on Moses’ death, “Petirat

⁸³ Rudolf Bultmann in *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1941/1964), 369–370, strangely considers the Beloved Disciple at the Cross as representing Gentile Christianity (and Jesus’ mother Jewish Christianity). Lutz Simon in *Petrus und der Lieblingsjünger im Johannesevangelium: Amt und Autorität* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1994), 290, in contrast, views the portrayal of Peter and the Beloved Disciple in the Gospel of John as completing the integration of Johannine Christians into the community, tradition and theology of Peter.

Mosheh.” In this scene Moses makes Joshua into Yochebed’s son, thus his own brother, just as Jesus makes the Beloved Disciple in John into his mother’s son, thus his own brother. This is another sign of how close the Beloved Disciple of the Johannine community was to Jesus, their Lord.⁸⁴ While the “Petirat Mosheh” is very late, the two Tanḥuma versions reveal that Moses’ concern for his mother at his death was part of rabbinic tradition. Thus John 19:25–27 may indeed be ultimately based on *much earlier* forms of this motif.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Harold Attridge notes that the chief function of the Beloved Disciple in the Gospel of John “is his role as an ideal disciple, close to Jesus in his sacred meal, keeping watch at the crucifixion, and coming to belief at the sight of the empty tomb. As the adopted brother of Jesus, he may also serve as an alternative to other ‘brothers’ of Jesus prominent in the early Christian movement.” Cf. his “Ambiguous Signs, an Anonymous Character, Unanswerable Riddles: The Role of the Unknown in Johannine Epistemology” in *NTS* 65 (2019), 267–288, here 270.

⁸⁵ Cf. the full presentation, also in discussion with the relevant secondary literature, in *The Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Jesus, and the Death, Burial, and Translation of Moses in Judaic Tradition* (Studies in Judaism; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2008), 125–132. It is very hard to believe that Jews would later borrow a motif from the Gospel of John’s Crucifixion scene of Jesus, whom they completely rejected as the Messiah, and would apply it to the esteemed major founder of their own faith, Moses. I thank Harold Attridge and Hans-Jürgen Becker, as well as the two reviewers from this journal, for reading and critically commenting on this study. I gained much from their remarks.