

In conclusion, the identity of the angels, as characters, could be described as that of heavenly beings who identify the place of Jesus' burial as an area of divine significance. They thereby serve as witnesses of the divine event that caused the empty tomb, marking heavenly or divine presence. They interact with Mary, in preparation for her revelatory meeting with the living Jesus whom she seeks among the dead. The angels are not complex characters at all. Their relative inactivity – sitting in the empty tomb and simply uttering three words – minimizes their role in favour of the overwhelming presence of the character of Jesus as the true revealer (1:18).

## The Sons of Zebedee and Two Other Disciples: Two Pairs of Puzzling Acquaintances in the Johannine Dénouement

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In the Fourth Gospel's last chapter (21:2) the implied reader finds for the first and last time a reference to the sons of Zebedee followed by a reference to two other unnamed and thus unknown disciples. Although the information about these mysterious characters is minimal, there is still a certain amount of information to be extracted from the immediate context of 21:2, as well as from the Gospel narrative as a whole. This information will help us to understand the position, the function, and the traits, and even make some assumptions about the actual identity of these characters. To this end we will employ a narratological approach with an emphasis on characterization and on reader-response criticism.

### The "Sons of Zebedee"

The first question related to the collective character<sup>1</sup> of the "sons of Zebedee" in John 21:2 that has to be answered is about its classification. Since they do not appear anywhere else in the Johannine narrative and they lack even the slightest active role in the story of the Gospel, they have to be classified as background characters or even as walk-ons.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless there are some interesting narrative elements that do connect them with the Johannine story. The sons of Zebedee are in the company of five other disciples of Jesus: Simon Peter, Thomas and Nathanael, as well as the two additional unnamed disciples.<sup>3</sup> All these disciples are not in Jerusalem

<sup>1</sup> See on the term Daniel Marguerat and Yvan Bourquin, *How to Read Bible Stories: An Introduction to Narrative Criticism* (London: SCM, 1999), 60.

<sup>2</sup> See on the term James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2005), 125; Sönke Finnern, *Narratologie und biblische Exegese: Eine integrative Methode der Erzählanalyse und ihr Ertrag am Beispiel von Matthäus 28* (WUNT II/285; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 148.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph of Arimathea mentioned in 19:38 is a high official, a detail made clear by the fact that he can speak directly to Pilate in order to ask for the body of Jesus. Being also apparently an inhabitant of Jerusalem he should not be considered as being one of the seven disciples at the shore of the Galilean sea in ch. 21.

any more, as is the case in the previous chapter. They are now in Galilee, which is home to at least some of them, at the shore of the Galilean sea. Up to this point in the Johannine narrative the narrator has never mentioned that some of the disciples are fishermen,<sup>4</sup> a basic piece of information in the Synoptic tradition.<sup>5</sup> However, this information can be inferred from 21:3, in which Simon announces to the rest of the disciples that he is going fishing. All of them spontaneously agree to follow him and fish all night long (21:3–4). This information reveals in an indirect way that all disciples present, including the sons of Zebedee, share a fisherman's experience, although it is not clear whether this is their actual profession. Only thus can their spontaneous response be explained, a response in which everyone in the group immediately agrees to follow Peter in a nighttime fishing expedition on a rather unpredictable and dangerous lake.<sup>6</sup> A man without fishing experience would not have followed so willingly. Indeed if such a man wanted to join the group, the others may have rejected him, since his inexperience may have proved an obstacle to their success or even a potential threat to their safe return.

Thus, since the sons of Zebedee appear to have sufficient experience to embark on a fishing trip at night using a net on a fishing boat, they are likely considered by the implied author to be Galileans and part of the disciples' subgroup that travelled from Jerusalem to Galilee after the resurrection.<sup>7</sup>

On the basis of the information provided in the Gospel narrative, it should be taken for granted that the sons of Zebedee follow Jesus too throughout his travels, listen to his teaching, and witness his signs. They belong to the disciples who were not scandalized (6:60–71), listening to Jesus' words about eating his flesh and drinking his blood (6:48–58) and, therefore, do not abandon him (6:66). They are among those whose feet Jesus washed during the last supper (13:3–11) and who listened to his farewell discourse (13:31–16:33) and his last prayer (17:1–26). Along with the other disciples, they encounter the resurrected Jesus in Jerusalem, and receive the Holy Spirit, as well as the power over human sin (20:19–23). Their situation in chapter 21 is still a pre-missionary one. The disciples, including the sons of Zebedee, are gathered, but not occupied. They seem to be just waiting for another appearance of the "Lord" (cf.

<sup>4</sup> This could be deduced by the implied reader from the story in 6:16–21.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Matt 4:18–22; Mark 1:16–20; Luke 5:1–11. Even the story of the call of the disciples in John is located in Bethany beyond the Jordan (1:28) and thus disassociated from Galilee and from anything that has to do with fishing.

<sup>6</sup> The unpredictability of the weather on the Galilean sea is witnessed to in the narrative world of John in 6:16–21. There it is implied that at least some of the disciples have an experience of navigating the sea, since they trust themselves to navigate late in the evening to the opposite shore. However, they are obviously not able to accurately predict the bad weather, as otherwise they would not have started this journey in the first place.

<sup>7</sup> In the Johannine narrative world the only body of water large enough for fishing on a fishing boat is the sea of Galilee.

21:7).<sup>8</sup> Lastly, like all other disciples, the sons of Zebedee also share the authority to take care of Jesus' sheep (cf. 21:15–17).<sup>9</sup>

This is quite a lot of information considering the fact that it refers to an unspecified number of men known only by their father's name. On the other hand, all of the experiences above are not unique to the sons of Zebedee. All of Jesus' disciples experienced these things, while the fishing trip described in ch. 21 was experienced by only the disciples of v. 2. Since however the sons of Zebedee do not stand out in any way earlier in the narrative compared to the other disciples, the question has to be raised with respect to why now, in this last chapter of the Gospel, they are expressly mentioned. Since unnamed characters – even disciples – are not an unusual occurrence in the Fourth Gospel, we have to assume that there must be a reason for mentioning the sons of Zebedee at this very point of the narrative.<sup>10</sup> Otherwise the implied author could have just mentioned any other number of anonymous disciples in addition to the three named ones and skipped mentioning the sons of Zebedee entirely.

Provided that indeed the reference to the sons of Zebedee bears some kind of narrative significance, their relationship with the other disciples of the list of 21:2 has to be more extensively considered. The three named disciples are the most complex or dynamic and round disciple characters in the Gospel (leaving aside the anonymous Beloved Disciple).<sup>11</sup> Peter often interacts with Jesus

<sup>8</sup> Had they already started their missionary activity (cf. 4:35–38), they would have dispersed and not gathered at the shore of the Galilean sea. On the other hand (contra Udo Schnelle, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* [THKNT 4; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1998], 314, 316), if they had just returned to their normal way of life, which in this case would be fishing (since any other kind of work would require them to sleep through the night and work during the day), the spontaneous dialogue between Peter and the other disciples in 21:3 would have been superfluous.

<sup>9</sup> This is a command that refers not only to pastoral care, but also or even mainly to missionary activity, since Jesus has other sheep too, sheep which need to be drawn to his own courtyard or sheepfold (10:16). In the dialogue between Jesus and Peter in 21:15–17, Peter does not receive a unique responsibility or office, as opposed to the other disciples. Due to his threefold denial he is simply restored to their state. This is evident by the structure of the dialogue, in which Jesus' command towards Peter to take care of his sheep depends upon Peter's declaration of love towards him. The love of the other disciples towards Jesus is never questioned and, therefore, their responsibility for Jesus' sheep does not have to be made explicit; contra Schnelle, *Evangelium*, 315. See the relevant discussion in George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (2d ed.; WBC 36; Nashville: Nelson, 1999), 405–407.

<sup>10</sup> In ch. 1, one of the first two disciples remains anonymous (1:37, 40). The disciple who is acquainted with the high priest is also not mentioned by name (18:15–16). The Beloved Disciple is a further case of anonymity (13:23–26; 19:26–27; 20:2–8; 21:7, 20–24), although a special one.

<sup>11</sup> The Beloved Disciple is a special case, as he is identified with the author of the Gospel (21:24; cf. 19:35). As such he is at the same time a character of the narrative, the narrator, and a person who is supposed to be shaping the narrative from the outside. This explains his paradigmatic character. Cf. R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 121–23.

demonstrating an inner development and complex character traits. He represents all other disciples by giving a confession to the uniqueness of Jesus (6:68–69) and declares his deep respect and love for his master, for whom he will willingly die (13:37). He is one of the two disciples who follow Jesus to his Jewish trial (18:15). On the other hand, he denies Jesus three times (18:17, 25–27), and he has to be reinstated by Jesus himself as a “shepherd” to take care of Jesus’ “sheep” after having to declare his love for Jesus no less than three times (21:15–17). Similarly, Thomas would rather die alongside Jesus – although he does not understand why – than not follow him (11:16). After the resurrection he refuses to believe until he sees and touches Jesus (20:25). When he does see him, however, he offers the most theologically loaded confession in the Fourth Gospel (20:28). Nathanael is also wary at first about Jesus of Nazareth (1:46) who is presented to him by Philip as being the one prophesied by the law and the prophets (1:45). Only when Jesus interacts with him does Nathanael believe, whereupon he makes an impressive messianic confession of faith in Jesus (1:49).

It is striking that the three named disciples of 21:2 are the only disciples to have made a confession of faith referring directly to Jesus. According to Peter, Jesus speaks words of life and he is the Holy One of God (6:68–69). Thomas recognizes Jesus as his “Lord” and his “God” (20:28). Nathanael confesses that Jesus is the Son of God and the king of Israel (1:49). On the other hand, Jesus also addresses each of them with words carrying great narrative and theological weight. Simon receives from Jesus the name Peter and thus a renewed identity (1:42). In the end of the narrative he is reinstated and given the responsibility to take care of Jesus’ sheep (21:15–17). Thomas is recognized by Jesus as a true believer, even if he had to see first in order to believe (20:27, 29). Nathanael is said to be a true Israelite without deceit (1:47) and is promised that he will see more than what he has already witnessed (1:50).

On the other hand, it is notable that Andrew and Philip are not mentioned, at least by name,<sup>12</sup> in the disciples’ list of 21:2, although Andrew is the brother of Simon and both Andrew and Philip come from the same Galilean city – Bethsaida (1:44). Moreover, Andrew is obviously also a fisherman according to the indirect information about his brother Simon in 21:3–11.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, from a narratological point of view Andrew and Philip are rather flat characters compared to Peter, Thomas, and Nathanael. Readers do not have access to their inner life and do not see any development in their character in the Johan-

<sup>12</sup> Unless they would be identified with the two unnamed disciples referred to in the end of the list of 21:2.

<sup>13</sup> In rural antiquity brothers usually practiced the profession of their family; cf. Miriam Peskowitz, “Family/ies in Antiquity: Evidence from Tannaitic Literature and Roman Galilean Architecture,” in *The Jewish Family in Antiquity* (ed. Shaye J. D. Cohen; Brown Judaic Studies 289; Atlanta: Scholars, 1993), 9–36 (28–34).

nine narrative. They are not presented as having ups and downs with regard to their faith in Jesus. Their relationship with Jesus is flat, expected and mainly limited to their role as those who introduce other characters to him.<sup>14</sup> Even the wish of Philip that Jesus show the Father to the disciples (14:8) is not a sign of character development. Philip’s wish is only used as the occasion for Jesus to say that anybody who has seen him, has also seen his Father.<sup>15</sup>

According to our analysis so far it would seem that from a narratological point of view there is not much in common between the first three absolutely round and dynamic characters of the list of 21:2 and the sons of Zebedee about whom there is no information whatsoever except for what is valid for other disciples too. While Andrew and Philip are rather flat characters, the sons of Zebedee are walk-ons staying in the background and not having any active role in the narrative.

It is interesting however that the list of 21:2 seems to have an inner logic in the succession of the disciples it contains. First Simon Peter is mentioned by both his initial name and the one given to him by Jesus. He is the most round and dynamic disciple in the Gospel, the most prominent of the named disciples. Thomas and Nathanael, also two round characters, but not of Peter’s prominence, follow next. Thomas is mentioned also by his Greek name, Didymus. In the case of Nathanael his city of origin, Cana, is mentioned. This additional information gives to the three named disciples of 21:2 an official character. Then follow the sons of Zebedee, disciples that are not mentioned by their own name, but only by the name of their father (which is as close to actually naming them as can be). Lastly, two other unnamed and thus totally unknown disciples complete the list. From a narratological point of view the list then moves from the most important to the most unimportant characters, from the most distinctive to the most colorless.

It is not common in the Gospel of John that a father’s name is mentioned. Jesus’ father Joseph is mentioned by Philip (1:45), as well as by the Galilean crowd (6:42). Simon Peter’s father’s name, John, is only mentioned once by Jesus himself during their first encounter (1:42) and then three more times in their final encounter (21:15–17). Simon happens to be the name of the father of Judas Iscariot and is only mentioned by the narrator (6:71; 13:2, 26). These three characters are crucial for the story. Jesus is obviously the protagonist of the story. Simon Peter is the most round disciple character with the possible exception of the Beloved Disciple. He is willing to fight (cf. 18:10) and die (13:37) for Jesus, but finally denies him out of fear (18:17, 25–27). In the end he is restored after declaring his love for him (21:15–17). Judas, on the other

<sup>14</sup> Andrew introduces his own brother Peter (1:40–42), as well as the child with the five loaves and the two fish to Jesus (6:8–9). Philip, on the other hand, introduces Nathanael (1:45–47), while both of them bring the Greeks to Jesus (12:20–22).

<sup>15</sup> The same applies also to the question of Judas (not Iscariot) in 14:22.

hand, is instrumental for the plot as a negative example of unbelief (cf. 6:71; 12:4–6), and the character who triggers Jesus' passion by betraying him (13:2, 26–30; 18:2–5).<sup>16</sup> Since no other fathers are mentioned by name in the Gospel, this character trait is significant, reserved for only a few.

In 21:2, however, a father's name is also used for the sons of Zebedee and in a peculiar and unique way within the Johannine narrative. There is no other case in the Fourth Gospel where only a father's name, not the actual name of a character is mentioned. Another peculiarity consists in that the word "sons" (υιοι) is not used at all, but only implied by a unique syntactic feature within the Fourth Gospel: in the syntactic connection of two nouns with each other (the first one being in the nominative and the second one in the genitive) the governing noun in the nominative is omitted and only the dependent noun in the genitive as well as the two articles actually remain (οι υιοι του Ζεβεδαιου).<sup>17</sup> A third peculiarity is that in our case no explanatory sentence or expression is used about who the sons of Zebedee actually are, while this is what we normally find in the Johannine narrative when named characters are introduced.<sup>18</sup> On the basis of these oddities we are forced to conclude that the implied author considers the sons of Zebedee to be well-known personalities to the implied readers, readers who are therefore expected to fill in missing pieces of information from their own knowledge base, whatever that might be.

According to James Resseguie, an implied reader is "thoroughly familiar with the repertoire of literary, historical, social, linguistic, and cultural assumptions of the authorial audience – that is the audience the author has in mind when he or she writes the work. This reader is guided by the clues of the text and reads the text as the implied author intended."<sup>19</sup> This leads us to question

<sup>16</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 124–25.

<sup>17</sup> The expression οἱ ἐν τοῖς μνημείοις (5:28) is not an exact parallel because a participle (and not a noun) is omitted (οἱ ὄντες ἐν τοῖς μνημείοις). The difference is that such a participle can be easily added by the reader, while an expression with an omitted noun is more ambivalent and therefore only used when the omitted noun is considered to be well known. In our case οἱ τοῦ Ζεβεδαιου could take on also other meanings, such as the friends, the soldiers, the slaves, the servants, the relatives and so on, of Zebedee. As readers of the Gospel we are absolutely certain that the reference is to the sons of Zebedee not due to intratextual, but to intertextual evidence derived from the Synoptic tradition. See for this grammatical phenomenon the excellent observation of Raphael Kühner, *Grammatik der griechischen Sprache* (2 vols.; 2d ed.; Hannover: Hahnsche Hofbuchhandlung, 1870), 285–86: "Oft hängt das Verständnis des Genitivs von historischer Kenntnis ab, so z. B. wenn eine Abstammung ausgedrückt wird." Kühner cites examples, among others from Homer, *Il.* 2,527 (Οἰλῆος υἱός) ταχὺς Αἴας; Sophocles, *Phil.* 943 (ἱερὰ λαβῶν τοῦ Ζηνὸς Ἡρακλέους); *El.* 694 (Ὀρέστης τοῦ Ἀγαμέμνονος); *Aj.* 172 (Διὸς Ἀρτεμῆς), 450 (ἡ Διὸς γοργῶπις ἀδάματος θεά); Herodotus, *Hist.* 3,60 (Ἐὐναλῖνος Ναυστροφου).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. 1:6–8, 40, 42, 44, 47; 3:1; 6:71; 11:1–2, 16, 49; 14:22; 18:10, 13, 40; 19:38. Pilate (in 18:29) forms an exception to this rule, and is worthy of further examination from a narratological point of view.

<sup>19</sup> Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 32.

what exactly the implied reader was meant to understand from the implied author's reference to the sons of Zebedee.

The implied reader should identify the Beloved Disciple, who makes his appearance later on in the narrative of this chapter, with either one of the sons of Zebedee or with one of the two unnamed disciples of 21:2. However, what seems like a riddle to the modern reader of the Gospel would probably have been obvious to the implied readers of the Gospel. According to Resseguie's reconstruction above, implied readers bring to the narrative their own knowledge of the issue at hand which may be beyond the content of the Gospel. We can at least be certain that implied readers understood that οἱ τοῦ Ζεβεδαιου indeed meant the sons of Zebedee. Otherwise the implied author would have written the word υιοι. We can also safely conclude, therefore, that the implied readers knew the individual names of the sons of Zebedee.<sup>20</sup> We cannot be sure where they derived this knowledge from, but we can be certain that the implied author trusts them to know what goes unmentioned, as otherwise the implied author would probably have mentioned it. The tradition about the two sons of Zebedee and about the great importance of one of them, namely John, is very broadly witnessed in the New Testament and should be assumed to be widely known at the end of the first century C. E. when the Gospel of John was presumably written.<sup>21</sup>

Why then isn't there any mention of the names of the two sons of Zebedee within the Fourth Gospel? And why are they only mentioned as such at the end of the Gospel? The implied reader should be able to make all necessary connections and draw the relevant conclusions. While on the one hand the Beloved Disciple remains mysteriously unnamed, on the other hand the actual names of the sons of Zebedee are never mentioned. The Beloved Disciple is very close to Jesus and a person that is often compared to Peter and found to have a superior faith and a closer relationship to Jesus than Peter has.<sup>22</sup> From the perspective of the implied reader this person should therefore be a most significant apostle and not an unknown and insignificant character. From an historical point of view John of Zebedee was such a person.<sup>23</sup> Although this kind of argumentation ignores some important information from an historical

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Klaus Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium: 2. Teilband: Kapitel 11–21* (TKNT 4; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2001), 311; Hartwig Thyen, *Das Johannesevangelium* (HNT 6; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 781.

<sup>21</sup> See a summary of the relevant discussion in Carl R. Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament: Interpreting the Message and Meaning of Jesus Christ* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 279.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. 13:23–26; 20:2–8; 21:7, 20–23, and perhaps also 18:15–16.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (3d ed.; London: InterVarsity, 1970), 245–49. For a detailed presentation of the relevant ancient Christian traditions, see R. Alan Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee: The Life of A Legend* (Studies on Personalities of the New Testament; Columbia, SC: South Carolina University Press, 1994), 107–244.

point of view,<sup>24</sup> it does, however, make sense from the point of view of the interaction between the implied author and the implied reader. The implied reader should be able to draw the above conclusions, although these were perhaps not always drawn by real historical readers of the Fourth Gospel.

We cannot be sure about what the real author(s) of chapter 21 or – in case this chapter comes from the same author(s) as the rest of the Gospel – the real author of the Fourth Gospel wanted real historical readers to understand. This has to remain an open question. However, the implied reader could very well interpret the clue about the sons of Zebedee in a way that pointed to John of Zebedee as the unnamed Beloved Disciple of Jesus.<sup>25</sup>

If this assumption is correct, then the reference to the sons of Zebedee only at the end of the Gospel can be better explained from a narratological point of view. The Beloved Disciple has to remain obscure and only known to the implied reader. This is a strategy that the implied author of the Gospel chooses to follow from the beginning of the Gospel to its end. However, this does not mean that no traces are left for the implied reader to follow so as to ascertain the hidden identity of the Beloved Disciple. The anonymity of the Beloved Disciple and the lack of reference to John of Zebedee in the Gospel narrative as a whole is such a trace. This trace is reinforced by the reference to the sons of Zebedee in ch. 21. This is the first (and last) time in the Gospel that a disciples' list is utilized, even if only seven disciples are contained in it. The Beloved Disciple is part of this list and it is the first time that the sons of Zebedee are mentioned. James and John of Zebedee are absent from the preceding narrative, while Peter and Andrew of "John" (cf. 1:40–42) are present in the Gospel's story and influence the plot right from the beginning. The reference to the sons of Zebedee would in this sense bring balance to the antagonism between Peter and the Beloved Disciple. If the Beloved Disciple is indeed identified with John of Zebedee, then he also has a brother just like Peter, and his brother is also here referred to, if only by his father's name. Furthermore, mentioning the father's name of the Beloved Disciple adds to the significance of the Beloved Disciple in the Fourth Gospel's narrative.

Simon Peter is always mentioned in the Fourth Gospel by one of his two names or by both of them at the same time (namely his birth name and his second name, which was attributed to him by Jesus himself; 1:42). The Beloved Disciple is not identified by his name, but by his relationship to Jesus. This gives to the Beloved Disciple a special quality that we can only find in one other person in the Johannine narrative, namely the Mother of Jesus (2:3, 5,

<sup>24</sup> See summaries of the relevant discussion in Jean Zumstein, "L'Évangile selon Jean," in *Introduction au Nouveau Testament: Son histoire, son écriture, sa théologie* (ed. Daniel Marguerat; Le Monde de la Bible 41; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2000), 362–63; Udo Schnelle, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (7th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 505–11.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Thyen, *Johannesevangelium*, 782.

12; 19:25–27), who is also identified not by her name, but by her relationship to Jesus. The disciple whom Jesus loved and the Mother of Jesus are not just ways to hide their real names. They have to be more than mere names, namely titles of honor.<sup>26</sup> By keeping the anonymity of the Beloved Disciple until the end of the narrative the implied author emphasizes the importance of his title. By naming him in 21:2 as a son of his father and not by his actual name the implied author remains faithful to this narrative strategy while at the same time giving an important hint about his identity.

In case the mysterious person of the Beloved Disciple can indeed be identified as John of Zebedee, the mention of his father's name and the implication that he has a brother provide the implied reader with proof that he was a real person who also existed outside of the narrative. This would be one more of the traces that can be found in the Fourth Gospel, witnessing to the historical existence of the Beloved Disciple.

#### "Two Others of His Disciples"

Notwithstanding the argument above, one cannot exclude the possibility of the implied reader identifying the Beloved Disciple with one of the two unnamed disciples referred to at the end of the list of 21:2.<sup>27</sup> The first question that has to be dealt with in this regard is why the implied author included two unnamed disciples at this final point of the Gospel in the first place. One obvious answer would be to include the Beloved Disciple among them, in case he is not to be understood by the implied reader as one of Zebedee's sons. The fact that the Beloved Disciple remains unnamed throughout the Gospel could lead the implied reader to the conclusion that he is one of the two unnamed disciples in the end of the list of 21:2. There are also some narrative details that could be understood as hints in this direction. One of them is the reference in the first chapter to the two disciples of John the Baptist who follow Jesus. One of these disciples is identified as Andrew, while the other one remains unnamed. This unknown disciple could very well be identified with the Beloved Disciple. In fact there does not seem to be any other plausible reason for this reference at this point of the narrative unless it is indeed a first concealed appearance of the Beloved Disciple.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Cf. a similar approach in William S. Kurz, "The Beloved Disciple and Implied Readers," *BTB* 19 (1989): 100–107 (101).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1972), 624–25; Wengst, *Johannesevangelium*, 311; Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (SP 4; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1998), 548–49.

<sup>28</sup> See the detailed argumentation of Michael Theobald, "Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte: Beobachtungen zum narrativen Konzept der johanneischen Redaktion," in *Frühes Christentum*

However, this does not necessarily mean that this unknown disciple should be understood as one of the two unnamed disciples of 21:2. Alternately, he could be one of the two sons of Zebedee. In this regard, the fact that the Beloved Disciple is mentioned as ὁ ἄλλος μαθητής (20:2–4, 8 and perhaps also 18:15–16<sup>29</sup>) is not an argument in favor of the Beloved Disciple's being one of the ἄλλοι ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ δύο (21:2). Ὁ ἄλλος μαθητής is actually a terminus technicus referring to the Beloved Disciple as a specific round character, repeatedly mentioned in the Gospel narrative, and well-known to the implied reader, although unnamed. In an analogous way with ὁ μαθητής ὃν ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς, the expression ὁ ἄλλος μαθητής is a means for covering the real identity of the Beloved Disciple, and referring to him at the same time. However, the mention of two other disciples in 21:2 is obviously no terminus technicus, as the Fourth Gospel nowhere else refers to two unnamed disciples as a pair. Even in the reference in 1:37 one of the two disciples is identified a little later as Andrew (1:40). Furthermore, there is no definite article in the case of 21:2, which would concretize the reference, as is the case with ὁ ἄλλος μαθητής in 20:2–4, 8. Lastly, there are no grammatical, syntactical or lexical peculiarities in the reference to the “two other” unnamed disciples that would call for the special attention of the implied reader, nothing that would force the implied reader to ascertain their significance and as a second step to identify one of them with the Beloved Disciple. Why then are these two unnamed disciples mentioned in the list of 21:2 in the first place? It could well be that they are needed in order for the disciples present in ch. 21 to reach the number seven.

In the Gospel of John the number seven plays an undeniable symbolic role:<sup>30</sup> the Johannine story is initiated by a period of action that lasts seven days.<sup>31</sup> On a symbolic level there is a connection between these seven days and the seven days of creation implied in the prologue of the Gospel (cf. 1:1–3). While the time after this first week is not counted any more by days, but by Jewish festivals, seven days before Jesus' resurrection, time once again starts being counted by days (12:1).<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, seven of Jesus' signs are narrated

(ed. Hermann Lichtenberger; vol. 3 of *Geschichte – Tradition – Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag*; ed. Hubert Cancik et al.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 219–55, (220–22).

<sup>29</sup> Theobald, “Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte,” 222–24.

<sup>30</sup> See the relevant discussion in Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (2d ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 311–16.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. 1:29, 35, 43; 2:1, as well as T. Barrosse, “The Seven Days of the New Creation in St. John's Gospel,” *CBQ* 21 (1959): 507–16; Donald A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), 167–68.

<sup>32</sup> Six days before the Passover in John means seven days before the resurrection, since the Passover in John is on the Sabbath (19:31), the Passion takes place on the preparation day (19:14) and the resurrection on the first weekday (20:1).

in a detailed way, although the implied reader becomes aware that there were many more signs performed by him.<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, there are seven groups of *ego-eimi* sayings in the Gospel narrative.<sup>34</sup> Five loaves of bread and two fish, a total of seven, is all that is needed for Jesus to feed a multitude of 5000 men (6:9–10). It is obvious that the number seven is important to the Johannine narrative as the number of “representative completeness.”<sup>35</sup> However, the number twelve can take a similar meaning when referring to the number of the disciples closest to Jesus (6:67), to the number of the baskets with remnants gathered after the multiplication of the loaves and the fish (6:13), or even to the number of hours of daylight (11:9).<sup>36</sup> Why then are there only seven disciples at the shore of the Galilean sea?

It seems that from the end of ch. 6 onwards there are no disciples left who indeed follow Jesus other than the twelve (6:60–71).<sup>37</sup> In the narrative after Jesus' long sermon about the bread from heaven, “many of his disciples” were scandalized and did not walk with him any more (6:66). When Jesus asked the twelve if they also wanted to leave him (6:67), they affirmed their desire to stay through Peter's confession (6:68–69). The implied reader could very well deduce from this narrative that the twelve are the only disciples who continued to follow, while all the others left him, since Jesus does not turn to the remaining disciples in general, but specifically to the twelve (6:67). Had more disciples than the twelve remained close to Jesus, it would not have made any sense for Jesus to exclusively address the twelve, considering the fact that the twelve have not been mentioned at all up to this point in the Johannine narrative. One could go so far as to see at this point the constitution of the circle of the twelve in the Johannine narrative, as being the only disciples who continue to follow Jesus after ch. 6. This way of understanding the end of that chapter is supported by the evidence of 20:24. There, Thomas is presented as being one of the twelve, although he was absent, when the resurrected Jesus appeared to them. Since up to this point the implied author speaks about the disciples in general, while in 20:24 identifying the remaining disciples as the twelve, the implied reader could draw the conclusion that in the Johannine narrative after

<sup>33</sup> Cf. 2:23; 3:2; 5:36; 6:2; 7:31; 10:25, 32, 37–38; 11:47; 12:37; 14:10–12; 15:24; 20:30.

<sup>34</sup> As classified by Koester, *Symbolism*, 312, fn. 20, concerning “bread (6:35, 51), light (8:12; 9:5), door (10:7, 9), shepherd (10:11, 14), resurrection and life (11:25), way, truth, and life (14:6), and the vine (15:1, 5).”

<sup>35</sup> K. H. Rengstorff, “ἑπτὰ, ἑπτάκις ...,” *TWNT* 2:624, notes about the symbolical meaning of the number seven in the Bible and its religious environment: “... daß sich mit der Sieben jeweils die Vorstellung eines geschlossenen und vollkommenen Ganzen verknüpft und sie also die gegebene Größe ist, wenn man ein derartiges Ganzes kurz und prägnant zum Ausdruck bringen will. Die Siebenzahl trägt somit den Charakter der Totalität, und zwar den der von Gott gewollten und geordneten Totalität.”

<sup>36</sup> Cf. K. H. Rengstorff, “δώδεκα ...,” *TWNT* 2:321–28.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 117.

the end of ch. 6 the “twelve” and the “disciples” are one and the same group. Joseph of Arimathaea is no exception to this rule. He is nothing more than a hidden disciple due to his fear of “the Jews” (19:38). This means that he does not follow Jesus in the first place and is, therefore, not taken into consideration in ch. 6 and 20.<sup>38</sup>

In this context it is noteworthy that reference to the twelve in ch. 20 is only an indirect one, primarily referring to a character trait of Thomas and only secondarily playing the role of an attribute of the disciples as a group that witnessed the resurrected Jesus. This is due to the fact that the “twelve” disciples are not really twelve anymore, since they now miss Judas Iscariot. They are eleven.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the significant number twelve is no longer accurate, while the actual number of the disciples, namely eleven, does not have any symbolic meaning whatsoever. The implied author is obviously not interested in reconstituting the number twelve after Jesus’ resurrection, as is the case for instance in the narrative of Acts (1:16–26). A possible further step would be for the implied author to reduce the number of the disciples to the next symbolically loaded number – seven. In this light, the two unnamed disciples at the end of the list of 21:2 would seem to fulfill one basic narrative function, namely to complete the disciples’ list in such a way that their number is seven.<sup>40</sup>

It is noteworthy that in the Johannine narrative the implied reader never learns all the names of the twelve disciples. The only names the implied reader encounters are Andrew, Simon Peter, Philip, Nathanael, Thomas, Judas and Judas Iscariot. These are interestingly enough seven names. Of these seven disciples only three are mentioned by name in 21:2. The sons of Zebedee are an addition that raises the number of the disciples of 21:2 to five. However, for reaching the number seven the implied author needs two more disciples. It seems to be a conscious choice not to mention the names of these two disciples. However, since Peter and Nathanael are mentioned at the beginning of the list, the implied reader could infer that the two unnamed disciples at the end of the list are actually Andrew and Philip, the brother of Peter and the friend of Nathanael respectively.<sup>41</sup> These two disciples are well-known in the

<sup>38</sup> In ch. 20 the “twelve” disciples are hidden in a closed house because of their fear of “the Jews.” On the other hand, Joseph was a hidden disciple because of his fear of “the Jews.” In the first case the hiding of the twelve is temporary and begins after Jesus’ arrest. In the second case it is a permanent character trait of Joseph.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John (xiii–xxi)* (AB; Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1970), 1067.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium: 3. Teil: Kommentar zu Kapitel 13–21* (HTKNT IV; Freiburg: Herder, 1975) 420; Jean Zumstein, *L’Évangile selon Saint Jean (13–21)* (Commentaire du Nouveau Testament 2/4b; Genève: Labor et Fides, 2007), 305; Thyen, *Johannesevangelium*, 781.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Brown, *Gospel*, 1068; contra Christian Dietzfelbinger, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (ZBK 4; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2001), 352.

preceding narrative (1:40, 44), form a distinct narrative pair of characters in two separate scenes (6:5–10; 12:20–22), come from the Galilean Bethsaida, and could at least be expected by the implied reader to belong to the seven disciples who are at the shore of the Galilean sea and share a fisherman’s experience. In this case the inclusio between the first and last chapter of John with regard to the disciples mentioned would become even stronger.

How then can the anonymity of the two last disciples of 21:2 be explained if they are indeed meant to be Andrew and Philip? A possible answer is that in giving the names of Andrew and Philip the implied author would disorient the implied reader, making it difficult to make the right connections and to draw the right conclusions from the preceding narratives: the implied reader is supposed to connect the three named disciples with their three impressive confessions of faith, addressed directly to Jesus, as a result of their character development. This is not the case with Andrew and Philip who are, as already mentioned, rather flat characters and therefore uninteresting for the story’s dénouement. If, on the other hand, the implied reader could guess that Andrew and Philip are hidden behind the reference of the last two unnamed disciples, then the unnamed disciple of ch. 1 could be more strongly identified with one of the two sons of Zebedee mentioned in 21:2.

Provided that the above line of thinking is indeed plausible, the implied reader would end up with a new set of seven, post-resurrection, disciples. In this case the sons of Zebedee would replace Judas Iscariot the betrayer of Jesus, as well as the other Judas who is mentioned only once as a background character (14:22).

## Conclusion

Summarizing the above, if we stick to the strictly narratological approach of the reference to the sons of Zebedee, we are bound to admit that their actual role in the narrative is next to nothing. Even if we may deduce a couple of character features from the rest of the Gospel narrative, these features are collective disciple traits and not particular traits of the sons of Zebedee. In this case the sons of Zebedee have to be classified as walk-ons with no inner life or development in the story of the Gospel.

However, a couple of peculiarities in the way these characters are mentioned lead us to the conclusion that their reference could be a clue for implied readers who should combine their own information with the text’s in order to be able to decode their significance for the narrative. The implied readers would then possibly be led to the conclusion that Zebedee is the father of the Beloved Disciple who also has a brother. In this case the sons of Zebedee should not be classified as being walk-ons. At least one of them, the Beloved

Disciple, is both a round and a dynamic character within the narrative, as well as a character who from the outside shapes the narrative, according to the information provided by the narrator (21:24).

On the other hand, the two unnamed disciples at the end of 21:2 are also walk-ons who seem only to play the role of filling out the symbolically significant number seven with reference to the disciples' list. In case the implied reader would identify one of them with the Beloved Disciple, mentioning them would be crucial. However, there are no conclusive intratextual or intertextual elements that would plausibly lead the implied reader to this verdict. Although such an interpretation remains possible the odds are in favor of the identification of the Beloved Disciple with one of the sons of Zebedee.

This conclusion is of course not to be confused with the intentions of the real historical author and the understanding of the real historical readership. From that perspective the judgments of this present study are rather irrelevant.

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