

JAMES A. KELHOFFER

# The Diet of John the Baptist

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen  
zum Neuen Testament*

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**Mohr Siebeck**

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James A. Kelhoffer

# The Diet of John the Baptist

“Locusts and Wild Honey”  
in Synoptic and Patristic Interpretation

Mohr Siebeck

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*almis parentibus:*

*Janet Elsie Kelhoffer*

*Daniel Jay Kelhoffer*



## Acknowledgments

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

St. Louis, December 2004

James A. Kelhoffer

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## Abbreviations and References

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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





## Chapter 1

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

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

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

### 1. *The Problem*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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