

The Gospel for Sceptics

Doubting Thomas (John 20:24–29) and Early Christian Identity Formation

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Introduction: Processes of Identity Formation and the Character of Thomas

The Gospel of John is a text with a plethora of narrative gaps and lacunae, a wealth of explicit and implicit questions, and countless ambiguities. Such gaps, questions, and ambiguities call for a creative and productive reading, for an aesthetic response of the addressees.¹ Involvement of the reading community includes not only a cognitive dimension, but also an emotional and evaluative dimension.² The productivity of the Johannine “strategy of ambiguity” is evidenced in the plethora of “apocryphal” narratives and other literary developments, and also in the growing exegetical and homiletical literature of early Christianity. In the critical era of biblical scholarship, the numerous commentaries of the 19th century prove particularly instructive, as they exploit the narrative potential of John’s Gospel with acumen and erudition, even if they oftentimes reveal historicizing and psychologizing tendencies. In an analogous manner, current narratological approaches and “character studies” endeavour to unveil the narrative possibilities of the text by means of a more nuanced methodological repertoire.³ Literary

¹ Cf. the groundbreaking work of Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). Biblical citations are generally taken from the NSRV, with occasional modifications. Throughout, chapter and verse numbers without further specification refer to the Gospel of John. I wish to thank Dr. Jan Rüggebauer for his valuable comments and Dr. Christina Harker for improving the English style of this article.

² On these three dimensions – cognitive, emotional, and evaluative – in processes of identity formation, see the classic study by Henri Tajfel, *Differentiation between Social Groups: Studies in the Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (London: Academic Press, 1978), 28. Throughout the present essay, they will recur and reinforce the perception of an efficient and creative scheme of Johannine identity construction. For a recent social identity reading of John, see Raimo Hakola, *Reconsidering Johannine Christianity: A Social Identity Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

³ Among monograph treatments, see especially Colleen M. Conway, *Men and Women in the Fourth Gospel. Gender and Johannine Characterization* (SBLDS 167; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999); Peter Dschulnigg, *Jesus begegnen. Personen und ihre Bedeutung im Johannesevangelium* (2nd edition; Münster: LIT, 2002); Judith Hartenstein, *Charakterisie-*

openness requires and inspires engaged reading and, as a consequence, fosters processes of identity formation and stabilization.⁴

The programmatic openness of John by no means correlates with a vague purpose. Rather, he pursues an unambiguous and determined “strategy of faith,” as Jean Zumstein perceptively noted.⁵ In the end of his work, he reveals the goal of his literary efforts, namely, to write a “book (βιβλίον) of faith,” which leads its readers to faith: “The narrative is concluded by 20:30–31, which on a meta-textual level formulates the theological goal and its pragmatic function: to call believers to faith.”⁶ Reflections on doubt and scepticism are part of his “strategy of faith”. In his decision to place the symbolic encounter between “Doubting Thomas” and the Risen One immediately before the meta-textual conclusion of his gospel, he attaches great importance to the tension between faith and disbelief. Thomas is an exemplar of how faith can be acquired in spite of severe obstacles and objections. For good reasons, John 20 has been called “the climax of John’s Christological narrative.”⁷ It is obvious that Thomas’s attitude to Jesus

rung im Dialog. Maria Magdalena, Petrus, Thomas und die Mutter Jesu im Johannesevangelium im Kontext anderer frühchristlicher Darstellungen (NTOA 64; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007); Susan HYLEN, *Imperfect Believers: Ambiguous Characters in the Gospel of John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009); Steven A. HUNT, D. Francois TOLMIE, and Ruben ZIMMERMANN, ed., *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Literary Approaches to Sixty-Seven Figures in John* (WUNT 314; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013); Christopher W. SKINNER, ed., *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John* (LNTS; London: T&T Clark, 2013); Cornelis BENNEMA, *Encountering Jesus: Character Studies in the Gospel of John* (2nd edition; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014).

⁴ It is not possible to delve into the intricacies of narratological analyses. One aspect should be highlighted at the outset: my focus is not so much the “implied reader” in terms of a thin textual structure, but the “intended reader/reading community,” having prior knowledge about the characters in the narrative (such as Thomas), and with community-specific as well as culture-specific knowledge. Their identity is formed and stabilized not primarily by their attending to all details and all open spaces, but by attending to elements that are repeated (such as Thomas’s name), that are inconsistent and ambivalent (such as Thomas’s attitude to Jesus), and that are emotionally charged (such as the autopsy of Jesus’s body by Thomas). Questions asked by later readers are not necessarily the questions asked by the intended readers, though differentiating both sets of questions proves utterly challenging.

⁵ Cf. Jean ZUMSTEIN, “L’évangile johannique. Une stratégie du croire,” in *Miettes exégétiques* (MdB 25; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1991), 237–252.

⁶ Jean ZUMSTEIN, *Das Johannesevangelium* (KEK 2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 34 (my translation; all other translations from non-English secondary literature are mine). On Jesus’s questions, see Douglas ESTES, *The Questions of Jesus in John: Logic, Rhetoric and Persuasive Discourse* (BibInt 115; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 165–166. Estes concludes his survey on the questions of Jesus in John with the observation that they keep coming back to two fundamental questions: “Whom do you seek?” and “Do you believe in me?” “Almost all of the questions of Jesus in John are a part of John’s persuasive discourse scheme. An alert and experienced reader understands this because the narrator makes the purpose of the scheme relatively clear: I, John, wrote these ‘so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name’ (John 20:31).”

⁷ William BONNEY, *Caused to Believe: The Doubting Thomas Story as the Climax of John’s Christological Narrative* (BibInt 62; Leiden: Brill, 2002).

should not be conflated into one single character trait, such as doubt; on the contrary, he appears to be an intricately crafted, ambiguous character in the narrative world of the evangelist. As will be seen in the first section of this essay (1), Thomas figures in the Johannine narrative three times (and once in the later addition John 21), and his convoluted journey towards the Christological confession (20:28) includes his unenlightened focus on inner-worldly logic (11:16), his lack of insight into the mission of Jesus (John 14:5), and his brash demand to validate the resurrection through physical means of proof (20:25). In a next step (2), I ask why it is Thomas who was picked by John to illustrate a specific sceptical stance towards Jesus. One decisive clue, it seems, is his cognomen Didymos, purposefully employed by the evangelist to express the duality of Thomas's character and, possibly, to provoke a self-identification of the reader with his/her twin "Doubting Thomas." In the final section (3), I gather seven characteristic elements of the Johannine presentation of the disciple, which illustrate both his role within the narrative and his intended impact in the process of Christian identity formation. Overall, I propose that John is a gospel for sceptical believers, and that Thomas embodies their stance.

1. Thomas and His Encounters with Jesus

1.1. *The Ambiguity of Thomas*

It is only in the Gospel of John that Thomas appears as an acting character. In the Synoptic tradition he is only mentioned in the lists of the apostles. In John, he first enters the literary stage of the narrative in the highly symbolic Lazarus episode. Obviously, the author assumes that his readers are aware that he is one of the disciples, as he is not properly introduced. When Jesus expresses his intention to go to Bethany and to Lazarus, who was already dead by that time, Thomas responds with enigmatic words: "Let us also go, that we may die with him (sc. Jesus or Lazarus?)" (ἀγωμεν καὶ ἡμεῖς ἵνα ἀποθάνωμεν μετ' αὐτοῦ) (11:16). He is presented as ignorant and defeatist, but loyal. Thomas's second appearance takes up the semantic field of the "way" and portrays his lack of understanding in an even stronger manner. With his objection, which belongs to the few interruptions of the Farewell Speeches in John, he admits openheartedly that he and his fellow disciples are unaware of the goal of Jesus's mission. "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" (14:5). The encounter with Jesus at the end of the gospel finally marks the climax of the literary mis-en-scène of the Johannine character of Thomas, indeed the climax of the gospel as a whole. While John keeps the tone of the previous section (the encounter of the Risen One with the ten disciples in 20:19–23) strangely restrained,⁸ the

⁸ There is no dialogue between Jesus and the disciples. The reader's attention is steered to

Thomas episode reveals a remarkable sensual and narrative imagination. Also, the tension between Thomas's severe affirmation "I will not believe" (20:25) and his solemn confession "My Lord and my God!" (20:28) is taken to extremes. The disciples' announcement that they have seen the risen Lord – and, by implication, his hands and his side – provokes Thomas's response, and he insists fiercely that he cannot base his faith on hearsay evidence, but only on his own seeing and touching.⁹ In line with his critical mind-set, Thomas requests a valid foundation for his faith based on personal experience rather than the experience of others. His doubt in the resurrection, which confirms for the readers his lack of understanding of Jesus's way (cf. 14:5–6), can only be removed if his palpable encounter with the Risen One will prove the incredible to be credible. His doubt does not reflect the disposition of every disciple, but the doubt of a critically probing character who requires compelling – i. e., tangible – evidence. Certainly, he is confronted with the problem of all later generations (i. e., Jesus's absence), but he faces the problem in his own manner, with thorough scepticism. Moreover, the manner in which Jesus responds to Thomas's request is paradigmatic (in this gospel) for an empathetic and effective reaction to doubt and scepticism. As the Gospel of John ends its "strategy of faith" by referring to a paradigmatic sceptic, the label "gospel for sceptics" seems justified.

Questions, open spaces, and ambiguities abound – both inner-textual and extra-textual – with respect to the character of Thomas and his appearances in John.¹⁰ What role does Thomas and Thomas tradition play in the Johannine community and, possibly, in rival early Christian groups? Is the authority of Thomas being questioned in the Gospel of John?¹¹ Is Thomas presented as "the dour, dogged disciple,"¹² as a believer with "weak faith,"¹³ or rather as a "courageous and loyal follower of Jesus"¹⁴ or even as a prime example of an enlightened faith?¹⁵

questions of the materiality of Jesus's resurrection body transcending a locked door, the gift of the spirit, and the command to forgive sins (*potestas clavium*).

⁹ The impression of a "sudden, drastic violence of his reply" (Glenn MOST, *Doubting Thomas* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005], 45) is caused by the double, categorical negative οὐ μὴ πιστεύσω (cf. John 4:48).

¹⁰ These are all questions asked and answered, both implicitly and explicitly, in the course of the history of reception and interpretation. Some of them are significant for the "intended readers" and for their critical self-assurance, others have only become relevant in the later exegetical reflection.

¹¹ Thus, e. g., HARTENSTEIN, *Charakterisierung*.

¹² Nicholas Thomas WRIGHT, *John for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 11–21* (London and Louisville: SPCK and Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 153.

¹³ Rudolf SCHNACKENBURG, *Das Johannesevangelium. Einleitung und Kommentar zu Kap. 13–21* (6th edition; HTKNT 4/3; Freiburg: Herder, 1992), 396.

¹⁴ Sunny Kuan-Hui WANG, *Sense Perception and Testimony in the Gospel According to John* (WUNT/2 435; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 191.

¹⁵ Cf. DSCHULNIGG, *Jesus begegnen*, 232: "Er erscheint fast schon wie ein verfrühtes Kind der Aufklärung, er will sich des eigenen Verstandes bedienen, an Fakten orientieren und nicht unausgewiesenen Worten vertrauen."

Is his call, “Let us also go!” (11:16), a sign of integrity or one of resignation? Who is the referent of the prepositional phrase μετ’ αὐτοῦ in Thomas’s rejoinder to the request of Jesus to go to Bethany – Lazarus, Jesus, or both (11:16)?¹⁶ What is the reason for Thomas’s obliviousness regarding “the way” and the identity of Jesus as the way (14:5)? How could Thomas be absent when Jesus appeared for the first time on the Easter evening (20:19)? Did he, being absent, receive the spirit? Why is it that Thomas phrases his request to touch the wounds in such a drastic tone? What happened in the eight days after the first appearance, which the evangelist passes over in silence (20:26)? Did Thomas touch Jesus or was he overwhelmed by his presence and/or his words (20:28)? What is the form and subtext of Jesus’s reply to Thomas (Ὅτι ἔώρακάς με πεπίστευκας): is it a question with an implied critique or simply a neutral statement of the obvious? And what is the intention of the subsequent macarism (20:29): is it a critique of Thomas’s yearning for signs¹⁷ or rather a comfort to those generations of Christians who do not see and cannot claim to be eyewitnesses?¹⁸ Such questions arising from the presentation of Thomas could easily be multiplied. They witness to John’s predilection for ambiguous characters, who oscillate between faith and unbelief.¹⁹ “Again and again, the characters are constructed in ways that pull the reader in multiple directions,”²⁰ and Thomas is a case in point for this composition strategy, which dovetails with John’s “strategy of faith.” A particularly intriguing ambiguity, which in fact tosses readers in rather different directions, concerns the seamless transition from Jesus’s invitation to touch his wounds to Thomas’s Christological confession. Arguably, this is the most striking and productive textual lacuna in a passage with a “number of ‘open spaces.’”²¹ Was Thomas’s doubt overcome

¹⁶ Hugo GROTIUS (*Annotationes in Novum Testamentum*, Vol. 4: *Annotationes ad Iohannem*, [2nd edition; Groningen: Zuidema, 1828], 169) reasoned that Lazarus, not Jesus, is in mind. In this sense also Theodor ZAHN, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (6th edition; KNT 4; Leipzig: Deichert, 1921), 480–481.

¹⁷ Cf. Margaret M. BEIRNE, *Women and Men in the Fourth Gospel: A Genuine Discipleship of Equals* (JSNTSup 242; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 205: “Thomas is gently chided with the lesson that, profound as it is, his personal faith is not more blessed than that of future believers who will require no such sign of Jesus’s physical presence in order to believe.”

¹⁸ Folker SIEGERT, *Das Evangelium des Johannes in seiner ursprünglichen Gestalt. Wiederherstellung und Kommentar* (Schriften des Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum 7; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 613: “Trost einer Generation von Christinnen und Christen, die weder Jesus persönlich kennt noch die Augenzeugen seines Lebens.”

¹⁹ HYLEN, *Imperfect Believers*, passim, highlights the ambiguity of several of John’s characters and claims against much of previous scholarship that the ambiguity need not be resolved. Her book, however, sidelines Thomas, whose ambiguity is dissolved into a crystal-clear Christological confession.

²⁰ Colleen M. CONWAY, “Speaking through Ambiguity: Minor Characters in the Fourth Gospel,” *BibInt* 10 (2002), 324–341 at 330.

²¹ Christopher M. TUCKETT, “Seeing and Believing in John 20,” in *Paul, John, and Apocalyptic Eschatology: Studies in Honour of Martinus C. de Boer*, ed. Jan Krans et al. (NovTSup 149; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 169–185 at 169. Tuckett proceeds: “[O]ne can fill the ‘gaps’ in the individual

by tactile evidence or (just) by the overwhelming presence and/or the powerful words of the Risen One?

1.2. *A Corporeal Experience of Faith*

The history of interpretation from the Church Fathers to the Counter-Reformation has been amply documented and analysed in Glenn Most's acclaimed study *Doubting Thomas*.²² Most reaches a remarkable conclusion: "In the whole of late ancient and medieval Christian exegesis, there seem to be only four moments when the possibility that Thomas might not have touched Jesus after all emerges briefly, only to be suppressed at once."²³ Most has Augustine in mind, who recognizes that Jesus did not say "You have touched me," but "You have seen me" (20:29). Only in a fleeting comment does he affirm "that the disciple did not dare to touch" (*Tractates on John* 121.5), despite Jesus's offer. The idea seems too unimportant to be dealt with in greater detail, and he comments: "He saw and touched the man, and acknowledged the God whom he neither saw nor touched; but by the means of what he saw and touched, he now put far away from him every doubt, and believed ..." (121.5). Augustine's brief exegetical detour was followed by Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, who would eventually align themselves with his final conclusion, though for different reasons. At the turn of the 12th century, Euthymius Zigabenus reasoned: "When [Thomas] saw the signs of the nails in his [Jesus's] hands, and his pierced side, he believed immediately and did not wait to touch him." And he immediately adds, "But others say that after he had touched him he cried out, 'My Lord and my God!'"²⁴ His final remark that Thomas deemed touching more reliable than seeing, appears to be his own thought, as it is not found in any of the patristic authors.²⁵ Hence, almost all interpreters until Reformation times presuppose explicitly or tacitly that the physical verification of the fact of resurrection overcame Thomas's doubt.

Only in Reformation times would alternative views increase in number and slowly gain the upper hand. However, Most's judgement that we witness "a new and quite different interpretation," which could be traced to "a new willingness, indeed an eagerness, to break with the Catholic interpretative tradition and the

stories in different ways with resulting different interpretations of the pericopes where they occur, as well as of the overall story of the gospel as a whole."

²² MOST, *Doubting Thomas*, draws on the dissertation of Ulrich PFLUGK, *Die Geschichte vom ungläubigen Thomas (Johannes 20,24–29) in der Auslegung der Kirche von den Anfängen bis zur Mitte des sechzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Dissertation, Hamburg University, 1965). My own article (Benjamin SCHLIESSER, "To Touch or not to Touch: Doubting and Touching in John 20:24–29," *Early Christianity* 8 [2017], 69–93) substantially expands the evidence cited by Most and Pflugk, refining and correcting some of Most's conclusions.

²³ MOST, *Doubting Thomas*, 139.

²⁴ EUTHYMIUS ZIGABENUS, *Expositio in Joannem* (PG 129.1489) (tr. in MOST, *Doubting Thomas*, 140–141).

²⁵ Cf. PFLUGK, *Die Geschichte vom ungläubigen Thomas*, 83.

hermeneutic monopoly of the church,"²⁶ is no more than sensational. In fact, most Reformers are actually quite traditionalist when it comes to the question of Thomas's touching, and the shift of emphasis is rather gradual. Occasionally, even Post-Reformation writers continued to enter the debate, though they did so in a rather non-polemical way, mostly in passing, and even the Counter-Reformation can hardly be said to display aggressiveness. Most's contention that "the Catholic Counter-Reformation responded vigorously and polemically to the Protestant challenge within the tiny field of the exegesis of John 20,"²⁷ seems like a problematic overstatement.

The most emblematic illustration of the two paradigms of interpretation is not found in written commentaries, but in two works of art depicting the Thomas episode: the shockingly graphic painting *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* (1601/1602) of Baroque painter Caravaggio shows a disciple whose doubt vanishes and gives way to utter astonishment when his finger penetrates the wound in Jesus's side. In contrast, Rembrandt's depiction of the scene, *Doubting Thomas* (1634), presents Jesus with his hand pointing at his side and the disciple shying away in dismay; neither his posture nor his facial expression allow for a touching of the *signa crucis*.²⁸ The two artistic patterns, it seems, do not represent controversial theological rivalry but rather a symbolic self-revelation of the two painters and, in a wider sense, a creative approach to the interrelation of faith, doubt, and empirical evidence.²⁹ From the 18th century, we can observe a trend in the historical-critical exegesis of the chapter, which deems Thomas's physical verification of Jesus's wounds as improbable or inappropriate.³⁰ These thinkers

²⁶ MOST, *Doubting Thomas*, 145, 148. See, however, the statement at 149: "We must of course not exaggerate the caesura produced by the Reformation within the history of the Christian interpretation of the story of Doubting Thomas." It should be noted that, compared to patristic literature, medieval exegesis placed little emphasis on the idea that Thomas really did touch Jesus, though it is uniformly presupposed (cf. the summaries in PFLUGK, *Die Geschichte vom ungläubigen Thomas*, 180, 223).

²⁷ MOST, *Doubting Thomas*, 149.

²⁸ Studies in the history or art dealing with the Thomas motif and, in particular, Caravaggio's representation, abound. Cf., apart from MOST, *Doubting Thomas*, 160–214, Lisa M. RAFANELLI, "To Touch or Not to Touch: The 'Noli Me Tangere' and the 'Incredulity of Thomas's in Word and Image from Early Christianity to the Ottonian Period," in *To Touch or Not to Touch? Interdisciplinary Perspective on the Noli Me Tangere*, ed. Reimund Bieringer, Karlijn Demasure, and Barbara Baert (Annuua Nuntia Lovaniensia 67; Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 139–177; Erin E. BENAY, "Touching is Believing: Caravaggio's Doubting Thomas in Counter-Reformatory Rome," in *Caravaggio: Reflections and Refractions*, ed. Lorenzo Pericoli and David M. Stone (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 59–82; Erin E. BENAY and Lisa M. RAFANELLI, *Faith, Gender, and the Senses in Italian Renaissance and Baroque Art: Interpreting the Noli Me Tangere and Doubting Thomas* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

²⁹ Cf. on the latter aspect BENAY and RAFANELLI, *Faith, Gender, and the Senses*, 7.

³⁰ While Most in his monograph reviews relevant works from the Church Fathers to the Counter Reformation in quite some detail, he hardly recognizes Johannine exegesis of subsequent centuries. One effect of this procedure is that his findings appear more groundbreaking than they actually are.

are guided by a shared theological viewpoint rather than differing denominations. According to them, Thomas was convinced by Jesus's overwhelming presence and/or efficacious word. No touching is necessary.³¹ It is hardly surprising that the preeminent "Word of God"-theologian Karl Barth highlights particularly Jesus's word: "Be not faithless, but believing" (20:27). Barth states, "This is not just pious exhortation, but a word of power. And to this Thomas gives the appropriate answer: 'My Lord and my God.'"³² Other leading twentieth century commentators on John concur with Barth's position, including Rudolf Bultmann, Charles H. Dodd, Rudolf Schnackenburg, and Raymond E. Brown.³³ With only a few exceptions, this view also prevails in present-day Johannine exegesis with the same rationale.³⁴ Glenn Most concludes: "[T]o suppose that Thomas might actually have touched Jesus, and thereby have been brought to belief in his divinity, is to misunderstand not just some detail of John's account, but its deepest and most fundamental message."³⁵

In retrospect we can maintain that whoever sharpens his anti-gnostic or anti-docetic knife with the biblical texts in his fight against heresy – one could think of Tertullian or Origen³⁶ – will take for granted physical contact with the resurrected body. Whoever looks out in mystical inclination for an abode of his soul – like the Moravian Nicolaus Zinzendorf – will contemplate Jesus's side wound: "Seitenhölgen, Seitenhölgen, du hist mein!" ("Little side hole, little side

³¹ Already Friedrich Adolph LAMPE, *Commentarius analytico-exegeticus in Evangelium secundum Joannem*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam: Schoonenburg, 1683–1729), 3.707: "Glowing grace dissolved the gloom of Thomas instantly and completely, and he was overwhelmed with admiration, shame, love, joy – all at once."

³² Karl BARTH, *The Doctrine of Creation*, Vol. 3.2 of *Church Dogmatics*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), 449.

³³ Rudolf BULTMANN, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, tr. George R. Beasley-Murray (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 694; Charles H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 443 n. 1; SCHNACKENBURG, *Johannesevangelium*, 396; Raymond E. BROWN, *The Gospel according to John XIII–XXI* (AB 29A; New York: Doubleday, 1970), 1046.

³⁴ Cf., for the few exceptions, Udo SCHNELLE, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (THKNT 4; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1998), 306–307; Hartwig THYEN, *Das Johannesevangelium* (HNT 6; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 770; Gerald L. BORCHERT, *John 12–21* (NAC 25B; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 314. On the *opinio communis*, see the numerous references in SCHLIESSER, "To Touch or not to Touch," 84 n. 66.

³⁵ MOST, *Doubting Thomas*, 58.

³⁶ Tertullian holds against Marcion that Christ's body was no "phantasm" (*phantasma*) (*An.* 17.14): "it was trustworthy when he was seen and heard on the mountain, and trustworthy when he tasted the wine [...] and then it was trustworthy when he was touched by believing Thomas" (CCSL 2.806; tr. in MOST, *Doubting Thomas*, 131). Like many later interpreters, Tertullian appeals to 1 John 1:1. According to Origen (*Cels.* 2.61), the Middle Platonist philosopher Celsus thought that after his death Jesus "used to produce only a mental impression (*φαντασία*) of the wounds he received on the cross, and did not really appear wounded in this way" (Miroslav MARCOVICH, ed., Origen: *Contra Celsum libri VIII* [VCSup 54; Leiden: Brill, 2001], 132; tr. in Henry CHADWICK, ed. and tr., Origen: *Contra Celsum* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980], 113).

hole, you are mine!”).³⁷ Whoever recognizes an anti-docetic slant of the Gospel of John – as does, e. g., Udo Schnelle – will consider a corporeal dimension probable in the encounter scene.³⁸ The argumentative foundations of such nowadays marginalized positions are all extra-textual or meta-textual and based on the postulation of hypothetical opponents (e. g., docetists) or a specific theological or spiritual concern (e. g., Christ mysticism). There are, however, intra-textual clues that support this minority view. A second look at the narrative style and theology of John’s Gospel as a whole and at the place of “Doubting Thomas” in its overall arrangement will uncover several aspects that make physical contact between Thomas and Jesus probable.

I will make five brief points:³⁹

(1) An examination of *Jesus’s* imperatives and commands to both his intimate and more distant followers reveals that, without exception, they follow the command immediately. This is clarified at times by the further course of the narrative and other times it is stated explicitly.⁴⁰ There is no reason to assume that Jesus’s invitation to Thomas constitutes the one exception to this pattern.⁴¹ Certainly, the rule that Jesus’s commands are carried out instantly not only describes a facet of John’s narrative technique, but is rather exemplary for a theological concept: when the characters of the gospel comply with the will of Jesus, they understand a new facet of Jesus’s identity and mission. They (and, together with them, the readers of the gospel) see another glimmer of his glory (cf. 1:14).

(2) The motif of physical closeness structures the parallelism between the “gender pair”⁴² Mary and Thomas, which has regularly caught the attention of John’s interpreters. The links between the two encounter stories with Jesus are evident – despite the fact that the meaning of Jesus’s enigmatic response to Mary

³⁷ On the quite bizarre features of Moravian “side hole” piety, cf. Craig D. ATWOOD, *Community of the Cross: Moravian Piety in Colonial Bethlehem* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 203–221 (“Living in the Side Wound of Christ”).

³⁸ Udo SCHNELLE, *Antidoketische Christologie im Johannesevangelium. Eine Untersuchung zur Stellung des vierten Evangeliums in der Johanneischen Schule* (FRLANT 144; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), 157 n. 355.

³⁹ A more extensive argument is found in SCHLISSER, “To Touch or not To Touch,” 85–89.

⁴⁰ Explicitly in John 1:39 (ἔρχεσθε καὶ ὄψεσθε – ἦλθαν [...] καὶ εἶδαν); 6:10 (ποιήσατε [...] ἀναπεσεῖν – ἀνέπεσαν); 7:8, 10 (ἀνάβητε – ἀνέβησαν); 11:39, 41 (ἄρατε – ἦραν); [cf. 21:6], and presupposed by the context in all other instances (1:43; 11:44; 14:31; 18:11; cf. 13:37). Other addressees of Jesus’s imperatives also follow suit: the servants at the Wedding at Cana (2:7–8: γεμίσατε – ἐγέμισαν; φέρετε – ἤνεγκαν); the royal official (4:50: πορεύου – ἐπορεύετο); the sick man at the pool of Bethesda (5:8–9: ἔγειρε [...] καὶ περιπάτει – ἤρην [...] καὶ περιπάτει); the man born blind (9:7: ὕπαγε νίψαι – ἀπῆλθεν [...] καὶ ἐνίψατο). Also the Samaritan woman is assumed to have followed Jesus’s command δός μοι πεῖν (4:7), because the course of the story implies that Jesus received water from her (cf. 4:13: ὁ πῖνων ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος τούτου).

⁴¹ Cf. TUCKETT, “Seeing and Believing,” 172 n. 9: “Given the very high status that Jesus has in John, an ‘invitation’ by Jesus to do something may almost have the force of a command.”

⁴² Cf. BEIRNE, *Women and Men*, 195–218.

μή μου ἄπτου (20:17) is highly contested.⁴³ Jesus prohibits Mary from holding on to him and answers Thomas's scepticism by commanding him to touch him. Both Mary and Thomas follow the directive of Jesus with the consequence that Mary's grief and Thomas's doubt are overcome, and both come to "see" the Lord (20:18, 29).⁴⁴

(3) The Johannine strategy of comparison and contrast also features in the opposition of Thomas and the soldiers at the cross (19:33–34).⁴⁵ After realizing that Jesus was already dead, one of the soldiers pierces Jesus's side with a spear in order to verify his death. By contrast, Thomas reaches with his hand into Jesus's side in order to verify his resurrection and life. The soldiers see Jesus (cf. 19:33: εἶδον) without recognizing who he is, and they spear his dead body with a sterile instrument of death. Thomas, however, sees and touches his friend and acknowledges his true identity. Ironically, the soldiers open the side of Jesus, from which blood and water – symbols of the spirit – flow out.⁴⁶ Thomas reaches into the wounded side of Jesus as the place of pneumatic presence and receives the spirit, which bestows faith.

(4) John 20 is composed of four distinct Easter scenes that epitomize a sequential intensification of corporeality.⁴⁷ Peter and the Beloved Disciple see only the linen wrappings in the empty tomb (20:3–10); Mary encounters Jesus in a peculiar liminal stage, does not recognize him by sight, and is prohibited from touching him (20:11–18); the ten disciples are privileged to see the *signa crucis* and receive the Spirit through the breath of Jesus's mouth (20:19–23); Thomas, finally, not only sees the wounds, but is invited to touch them in order

⁴³ See the survey of interpretative options in Harold W. ATTRIDGE, "Don't Be Touching Me.' Recent Feminist Scholarship on Mary Magdalene," in *Essays on John and Hebrews* (WUNT 264; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 137–159.

⁴⁴ Cf. R. Alan CULPEPPER, *The Gospel and Letters of John* (IBT; Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 243: "There is no inconsistency between Jesus' admonition to Mary, 'Do not hold on to me' (20:17) and his invitation for Thomas to touch him. In both cases he was inviting each one to do what he or she needed to do to take the next step in faith and understanding." Incidentally, commentaries unanimously recognize Mary's compliance to Jesus's will, but not Thomas's.

⁴⁵ On this pattern, see Raymond F. COLLINS, "Who Are You? Comparison/Contrast and Fourth Gospel Characterization," in *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John*, ed. Christopher W. Skinner (LNTS; London: T&T Clark, 2013), 79–95.

⁴⁶ On the pneumatological symbolism of Jesus's side and hands, see Thomas POPP, "Thomas: Question Marks and Exclamation Marks," in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Literary Approaches to Sixty-Seven Figures in John*, ed. Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmermann (WUNT 314; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 504–529 at 517 (cf. John 3:34–35; 19:34; 20:20); Sandra M. SCHNEIDERS, "Touching the Risen Jesus: Mary Magdalene and Thomas the Twin in John 20," in *Jesus Risen in Our Midst: Essays on the Resurrection of Jesus in the Fourth* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2013), 34–60 at 52.

⁴⁷ Cf. especially the section "Von Magdalena zu Thomas: Steigernde Intensität der Berührung in Joh 20" in Margareta GRUBER, "Berührendes Sehen. Zur Legitimation der Zeichenforderung des Thomas (Joh 20,24–31)," *BZ* 51 (2007), 61–83 at 74–76.

to experience the identity of the Crucified and Risen One by means of physical verification (20:24–29).⁴⁸

(5) Finally, for the composition of the gospel as a whole, the corporeal and sense-dimensions are of pivotal narrative and theological significance.⁴⁹ Based on this alone, one should not necessarily assume that Thomas's doubt has been overcome merely through the powerful word of Jesus or through his overpowering presence. In the symbolic world of the evangelist, seeing – as both a sensual and spiritual perception! – is rather more significant in the process of coming to faith than mere words, and undoubtedly the other senses of human nature play an essential role as well: taste (2:9), smell (12:3; cf. 11:39), and touch (20:27).⁵⁰

2. Why Thomas?

Pre-Johannine Thomas Traditions and Johannine Imagination

2.1. *Pre-Johannine Thomas Traditions*

Why is it that Thomas obtained a leading part on the Johannine stage? Why and how was he styled a symbol of doubt? In the following I present a few, eclectic approaches and propose that his name – “Thomas, the so-called twin” – shows the way to his characterization. It has been argued that the presentation of Thomas in the Gospel of John presupposes a foreknowledge of his readers,

⁴⁸ Cf. SCHNELLE, *Johannes*, 322. See also the modification and clarification of Schnelle's thesis in Jörg FREY, “Ich habe den Herrn gesehen’ (Joh 20,28). Entstehung, Inhalt und Vermittlung des Osterglaubens nach Johannes 20,” in *Studien zu Matthäus und Johannes*, ed. Andreas Dettwiler and Uta Poplutz (FS Jean Zumstein; ATANT 97; Zürich: TVZ, 2009), 267–284.

⁴⁹ Cf. Dorothy A. LEE, “The Gospel of John and the Five Senses,” *JBL* 129 (2010), 115–127; Jörg FREY, “Leiblichkeit und Auferstehung im Johannesevangelium,” in *Die Herrlichkeit des Gekreuzigten. Studien zu den Johanneischen Schriften*, Vol. 1, ed. Juliane Schlegel (WUNT 307; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 699–738; WANG, *Sense Perception*; Rainer HIRSCH-LUIPOLD, *Gott wahrnehmen. Die Sinne im Johannesevangelium* (WUNT 374; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017). Notably, all these studies on the senses in John either consider the question of a physical verification irrelevant from a literary or theological perspective, or assert – for different reasons – that upon seeing the risen Jesus, the Johannine Thomas no longer needed to touch him.

⁵⁰ One should not fail to mention the earliest reflexes of the passage, in particular 1 John 1:1–4, Ignatius's *Letter to the Smyrneans* (3.2), the *Epistula Apostolorum* (12), and, most intriguingly, the *Infancy Gospel of James* (20.1). On the correlation between the midwife Salome's examination of Mary's virginity and Thomas's inspection of Jesus's wounds, see Gregor EMMENEGGER, “Reflections on Salome's Manual Inspection of Mary,” in *The Protevangelium of James*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer, Tobias Nicklas et al. (*Studies on Early Christian Apocrypha*; Leuven: Peeters, 2019) in press: “As Thomas does with Jesus after His death and resurrection, so too does a doubting woman check and confirm the indisputable with her finger after the miraculous birth.” An alternative view holds that Salome's punishment – “[her] hand falls away from me in fire” – might indicate that Thomas in fact did not go so far as to touch Jesus. A detailed analysis of the mentioned passages will be given in my forthcoming monograph on the phenomenon of doubt in early Christianity.

which transcends the Synoptic traditions, e. g., the abrupt mention of the name (11:16) and the multiple references to his cognomen Didymos. Gregory J. Riley, April DeConick, and Elaine Pagels postulate a conflict between the theological position of the Johannine School and the Syrian Thomas tradition represented by the *Gospel of Thomas*. By vilifying or monopolizing Thomas, the evangelist seeks to secure victory in this conflict.⁵¹ Judith Hartenstein refutes the conflict theory, presupposes merely “a literary pre-existence [of Thomas] in the widest sense,” and regards the Gospel of John – also “in the widest sense” – as part of the Thomas tradition.⁵² James Charlesworth takes the position of an outsider, as he also assumes a relationship between the Syrian Thomas tradition and the *Gospel of Thomas*, but at the same time infers that John’s primary *raison d’être* is to identify Thomas with the Beloved Disciple.⁵³ For our purposes this debate is only of minor importance, as it remains notoriously difficult to correlate the Gospel of John to the *Gospel of Thomas* and to other Thomas traditions. In addition, his role as witness and sceptic does not resonate in those Thomas writings that have come down to us – which itself is a remarkable fact.

One plausible element of pre-Johannine Thomas tradition is the epithet Didymos, which would be taken up in a distinct manner in the apocryphal Thomas texts. In the *Acts of Thomas* and the *Book of Thomas* (= *Book of Thomas the Contender*) Thomas is described as Jesus’s twin brother. Whether or not this identification is also presupposed in the *Gospel of Thomas*, it cannot be said with certainty.⁵⁴ Also, it remains unclear whether John adheres to a traditional characterization of the disciple or whether he is in critical distance. Methodologically, firmer ground is attained when John’s account of Thomas is compared to the Synoptics’. To be sure, there is no Synoptic parallel with the Thomas episode, but the motif of doubt connects with the Synoptic Easter narratives ([Mark 16:9–14;] Matt 28:17; Luke 24:11, 21–24, 25, 37–38, 41), above

⁵¹ Gregory J. RILEY, *Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995); April D. DECONICK, *Voices of the Mystics: Early Christian Discourse in the Gospels of John and Thomas and Other Ancient Christian Literature* (JSNTSup 157; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001); Elaine PAGELS, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (London: T&T Clark, 2003). See the discussion in Christopher W. SKINNER, *John and Thomas – Gospels in Conflict? Johannine Characterization and the Thomas Question* (PTMS 115; Eugene: Pickwick, 2009).

⁵² HARTENSTEIN, *Charakterisierung*, 265, 267. Ismo DUNDERBERG (*The Beloved Disciple in Conflict? Revisiting the Gospels of John and Thomas* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006]), rejects the view that the Gospel of John and the *Gospel of Thomas* are engaged in a direct conversation, although the appearance of Thomas in John might point to a similar early Christian milieu.

⁵³ James H. CHARLESWORTH, *The Beloved Disciple: Whose Witness Validates the Gospel of John?* (Valley Forge: Trinity 1995). For a critique, see DUNDERBERG, *The Beloved Disciple in Conflict?*, 149–164.

⁵⁴ On this and the apocryphal Didymos-tradition, see, e. g., HARTENSTEIN, *Charakterisierung*, 230–246.

all with the idea that looking at and touching the hands and feet of the Risen One will overcome doubt (Luke 24:39–41: ἰδεῖν and ψηλαφᾶν).⁵⁵ Within the framework of his source theory Bultmann assumes that John 20:24–29 is part of an independent Passion Source, as is the previous section 20:19–23. However, “it can only have been a secondary appendix, even for the source; for in vv. 19–23 the continuation in vv. 24–29 is not presupposed, though certainly the latter fragment does presuppose the former.”⁵⁶ Not least because of such multilayered hypotheses – and even more because of the underlying theological agenda – the difficulties of Bultmann’s literary-historical reconstruction are patent.

2.2. Johannine Imagination: Didymos, the Doubting Twin

More recent scholarship assumes that the Thomas episode as a whole goes back to the evangelist, who drew on (a) Synoptic pre-text(s).⁵⁷ Glenn Most writes: “In the Gospel of John, all the issues of doubt and belief that, in different ways, haunt the three synoptic Gospels converge to form an unsettling climax.”⁵⁸ Even the respective contribution to the “John, Jesus, and History”-project labels the story a “midrashic work” of the evangelist, in which he uses older gospel tradition with exegetical creativity.⁵⁹ Hartwig Thyen identifies one specific text as inspiring pre-text, which the evangelist chose in a deliberate play with the Synoptics and used as a basis of his composition: the *one* disciple Thomas represents the doubting disciples, who are mentioned in Matt 28:17 (οἱ δὲ ἐδίστασαν).⁶⁰ According to Thyen this follows a common literary strategy of the author, by means of which he elevates a named narrative character and renders him or her as representative and spokesperson of a specific disposition.⁶¹ Thyen’s proposition is quite plau-

⁵⁵ Cf. BULTMANN, *John*, 693.

⁵⁶ BULTMANN, *John*, 693–694. The evangelist added the reference to the side wounds (John 20:25, 27) and the confession of Thomas (20:28) as well as the macarism.

⁵⁷ For a comprehensive survey of 20th century scholarship on the relationship between John and the Synoptics, see Michael LABAHN and Michael LANG, “Johannes und die Synoptiker. Positionen und Impulse seit 1990,” in *Kontexte des Johannesevangeliums. Das vierte Evangelium in religions- und traditions-geschichtlicher Perspektive*, ed. Jörg Frey and Udo Schnelle (WUNT 175; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 443–515.

⁵⁸ MOST, *Doubting Thomas*, 28.

⁵⁹ Jeffrey P. GARCIA, “See my Hands and my Feet: Fresh Light on a Johannine Midrash,” in *John, Jesus, and History*, Vol. 2: *Aspects of Historicity in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, and Tom Thatcher (ECIL 2; Atlanta: SBL, 2009), 325–333 at 333.

⁶⁰ According to Hartwig THYEN (“Noch einmal. Johannes 21 und ‘der Jünger, den Jesus liebte’” [1995], in *Studien zum Corpus Iohanneum* [WUNT 214; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007], 252–293, 258; cf. IDEM, *Johannesevangelium*, 757), John “specifically span out the story of Thomas from the succinct note οἱ δὲ ἐδίστασαν of Matt 28:17.” On Matt 28:17, see Benjamin SCHLISSER, “Doubtful Faith? Why the Disciples Doubted until the End (Mt 28:17),” in *Treasures New & Old: Essays in Honor of Donald A. Hagner*, ed. Carl S. Sweetman and Clifford B. Kvidahl (GlossaHouse Festschrift Series 1; Wilmore: GlossaHouse, 2017), 165–180.

⁶¹ Cf. THYEN, *Johannesevangelium*, 765–766. Mary (John 20:11–18), too, represents “for dramaturgical reasons the women of the pre-texts” (esp. Matt 28:9).

sible, though he – like the majority of interpreters – fails to answer the question why it is precisely Thomas who is singled out from the group of disciples and selected to become the representative doubter. The view that the meaning of his name might have predestined Thomas, the Twin, for this role is discarded by Thyen as a “baroque idea.”⁶²

In my opinion, it is by no means unlikely that in the Johannine reworking of the Synoptic material the construed dispositional character of the disciple connects with his name. It is not by accident that the evangelist notes in the context of his first appearance – and later on two more times (11:16; 14:5; 20:24; [cf. 21:2]) – that Thomas is called the twin (ὁ λεγόμενος Δίδυμος). The meaning of the addition Δίδυμος is not limited to the mere linguistic information that it translates the Aramaic name ܬܘܡܐܝܢ. Why would it appear more than once?⁶³ More importantly, the function of the addition differs from the attribute Πέτρος in relation to Kephas (1:42), the only other passage which elucidates a Semitic personal name with its Greek rendition.⁶⁴ The verb ἐρμηνεύειν clearly expresses that Aramaic ܟܦܬܘܨ is translated Greek Πέτρος: ܟܦܬܘܨ, ὃ ἐρμηνεύεται Πέτρος.⁶⁵ For the Greek speaking Christians the translated name Peter was at the same time his common proper name. Now, it is utterly unlikely that Thomas had been called Didymos among Greek speaking Christians, considering the lists of the apostles in the Synoptics and in Papias.⁶⁶ Furthermore, it is not plausible that the apposition Δίδυμος was intended to identify Thomas unequivocally, since in the Gospel of John no other Thomas is mentioned.

There is reason to believe that the cognomen Didymos acquires symbolic significance. This view is by no means new. In the 11th century, Theophylact supposed that the apposition reflects a character trait of Thomas: “He [sc. the evangelist] recalls the meaning of the name to show us that he [sc. Thomas] was a doubter (διστακτικός) and had this character trait (τρόπον) from the beginning,

⁶² THYEN, *Johannesevangelium*, 520. Thyen picks up Bultmann’s phrase, who disparagingly called Zahn’s suggestion to refer the phrase μετ’ αὐτοῦ (John 11:16) to Lazarus a *barocke Idee*. A symbolic meaning of the name is also excluded in Marie-Joseph LAGRANGE, *Évangile selon Saint Jean* (5th edition; Études Bibliques; Paris: Gabalda, 1936), 517; BULTMANN, *John*, 694; more recently, apart from Thyen, BENNEMA, *Encountering Jesus*, 287.

⁶³ This is not acknowledged, for instance, by WANG, *Sense Perception*, 190 n. 25; BONNEY, *Caused to Believe*, 137 n. 20: “John’s reference to Thomas as ‘the Twin’ [...] serves no special purpose in the narrative.” Why would John insist on repeating the cognomen? In the reading/hearing process one can expect this peculiarity to raise attention and call for further reflection.

⁶⁴ Cf. also John 1:41: ὁ Μεσσίας, ὃ ἐστὶν μεθερμηνεύμενον χριστός. Other Semitic names like Nathanael, John, Lazarus, Mary or Martha are not translated.

⁶⁵ Apart from John 1:42, the verb ἐρμηνεύειν is also used in 9:7, the composite verb μεθερμηνεύειν in 1:41. See also 4:25: Μεσσίας [...] ὁ λεγόμενος χριστός.

⁶⁶ Cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.4. Against, e.g., Heinrich August Wilhelm MEYER, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospel of John*, tr. William Urwick (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1884), 342: “Thomas [...] after the Greek translation of his name (*twin*), was called among the Gentile Christians *Didymus*.”

as shown by his name.”⁶⁷ I am not aware of an earlier proponent of the view that the cognomen refers to Thomas’s personality. Origen, by contrast, argued in view of the apocryphal Thomas tradition that Thomas – just like Jesus (μυμητής Χριστοῦ) – reserved secret teachings for his followers, while using parables for outsiders, and that his name Δίδυμος referred to this kind of duality.⁶⁸ By means of the Greek explanation of the name – this is my thesis, in line with Theophylact – John points at the symbolic meaning of the name. Etymologically, the adjective δίδυμος most probably derives from a reduplicated δύο, meaning “double” or “twofold.”⁶⁹ The word therefore is equivalent to the Aramaic stem ܕܝܕܝܡܝܢ.⁷⁰ The “twin” is marked by the duality of his conduct in relation to Jesus; in no other disciple is the spectrum of individual faith as wide as in Thomas.⁷¹ In the 19th and 20th century, this interpretation was widespread, and occasionally the duality of Thomas is related to the “doublemindedness” of the ἀνὴρ διψος in James (Jam 1:8; 4:8).⁷² However, rather than comparing Thomas’s attitude of faith and the “doubleminded” man in a speculative and Biblicist manner, one should note that both authors – John and James – reflect early Christian “identity management” in the face of the struggle of faith, which is confronted with obstacles and detrimental influences. While apocryphal Thomas tradition might speculate as to who the other “physical” or “symbolic” twin (e.g., Jesus) was, and while recent scholarship occasionally ponders the historical question of whether and where the cognomen Didymos was used for the apostle,⁷³ John’s question was this: in what respect is Thomas to be called “twin”? Starting from the observation that the most prominent Thomas episode is a Johannine creation, there is no reason to dispute a priori the idea that the evangelist also introduced a specific character trait into the figure of Thomas on grounds of his name, a character trait which comes to expression, allusively at first, in John 11:16 and 14:5, then highly effectively in 20:24–29. The semantics of Thomas’s name had productive capacity

⁶⁷ Theophylact, *In Joannis Evangelium* (PG 124.300).

⁶⁸ Origen, *Catena Fragments* 106 (GCS 11/4, 561–562 [Preuschen]).

⁶⁹ Cf. Wilhelm PAPE, *Handwörterbuch der griechischen Sprache. Griechisch-deutsches Handwörterbuch*, ed. Maximilian Sengebusch (3rd edition; Braunschweig: Vieweg, 1914), 1.616.

⁷⁰ Cf. ZAHN, *Johannes*, 483 note 74: “Now the stem ܕܝܕܝܢ not only means *geminus*, but also *duplex*, and the verb in the hiphil to double, in the passive voice: to be placed between two, to be divided, separated. John connects with the name Thomas the idea of someone who doubts, which otherwise is expressed by διψυχος (Jam 1:8; 4:8), διστάζων (Matt 14:31; 28:17), διακρινόμενος (Jam 1:6; Rom 4:20; 14:23).”

⁷¹ Cf. Christoph Ernst LUTHARDT, *Das johanneische Evangelium nach seiner Eigenthümlichkeit*, 2 vols. (2nd edition; Nürnberg: Geiger, 1876), 1.191–192. Already Friedrich Adolf LAMPE (*Commentarius*, 3.699) concludes from the triple mention of the cognomen that the δίδυμος is also ambivalent and unbelieving (*anceps, incredulus*), and he offers an extensive argument for this view.

⁷² Cf., e.g., Carl Friedrich KEIL, *Commentar über das Evangelium des Johannes* (Leipzig: Dörffling und Franke, 1881), 385.

⁷³ Cf. the rather unconvincing deliberation in HARTENSTEIN, *Charakterisierung*, 214: “Möglich wäre, dass so ein zweiter Name des Thomas eingeführt wird.”

for the author of the gospel, who personified the concept of doubt in Thomas, the Twin, and epitomized the force of doubt in his words and actions, until it would be overcome by an “autopsy of faith” and lead to a Christological confession.

It is possible that the author envisioned another, secondary effect of choosing Thomas. His doubt is the doubt of those born after, his desire represents their desire, and his encounter with the Risen One stands vicariously for the experiences of later (sceptical) believers. They are not unified by their physical seeing and touching – this is Thomas’s advantage over all following generations – but by their being “contemporar[ies] in the autopsy of faith” (S. Kierkegaard).⁷⁴ Thomas is the “firstborn” twin, symbolic twin brother of those who are born later. In the faith of those born after, the experience of the presence of Christ multiplies and culminates in the confession “my Lord and my God.” The symbolic name of Thomas, the duplicated appearance narrative, and the implied fraternal relationship of believers with the doubting confessor – all reflect the author’s concern to give space to doubts in the resurrection and to reinforce individual affirmation.

3. The Gospel for Sceptics:

The Characterization of Thomas and Christian Identity Formation

John crafts the figure of Thomas as a multilayered personality, whose convoluted path of faith includes impasses and blind alleys, but in the end heads towards the highest confession of Christ. The evangelist’s characterization of Thomas appears consistent, though certainly it cannot be reduced to one single trait.⁷⁵ Thomas misunderstands, questions, challenges, doubts, scrutinizes, crosses boundaries, and – finally – believes. The appearances of Thomas are emblematic of the narrative design of the Gospel of John with its numerous gaps and lacunae, questions, and ambiguities. With these elements, the author creates an inescapable dynamic, which draws his readers into reflecting about these open spaces, about their own stance towards Jesus, about their own ambiguities and their own identity as a “twin” believer.⁷⁶ Thomas stands for the sceptical readers of the gospel,

⁷⁴ Søren KIERKEGAARD, *Philosophical Fragments*, ed. and tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 102.

⁷⁵ Cf. SIEGERT, *Johannes*, 613. Against, e. g., BULTMANN, *John*, 694 n. 2; R. Alan CULPEPPER, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 102.

⁷⁶ As has been seen, the transparency of Thomas’s character traits for the “implied readers” and their identity formation encompasses several dimensions, such as ideological (e. g., 11:16: application of inner-worldly rationality), cognitive (e. g., 14:5: ignorance of the mission of Jesus), emotional (e. g., 20:25: offensive request for a “higher” goal), evaluative (e. g., 20:28: confession). See the analytical tools provided in Sönke FINNERN and Jan RÜGGEMEIER, *Methoden der neutestamentlichen Exegese: Ein Lehr- und Arbeitsbuch* (UTB 4212; Tübingen: Francke, 2016), 195–210, partly based on Jens EDER, *Figur im Film: Grundlagen der Figurenanalyse* (Marburg: Schüren, 2008).

as Ludger Schenke recently pointed out: “For them, the author has presented the scene. In the doubt of Thomas their doubt is given voice. The confession of the disciple may become their confession, even if they will never have the opportunity to overcome their doubt by means of their own examination of the Risen One.”⁷⁷ John intentionally placed the Thomas scene at the climax of his gospel and, by this, shaped his “gospel for sceptics.” The most significant aspects of the Johannine presentation of the disciple and his role in the intended process of Christian identity formation will be collated in the following.⁷⁸

1. *The inner dynamics of the figure of Thomas corresponds to the author’s “strategy of faith.”*⁷⁹ Thomas appears on stage in the context of the final and greatest sign of Jesus, the resurrection of Lazarus; moreover, his other two appearances directly relate to passion and resurrection.⁸⁰ It is within this horizon that his role in the narrative is developed, from the symbolic Lazarus episode in the centre of the gospel to the encounter narrative at the end. “At the same time, [the evangelist] responds to the question ‘When will the disciples really believe?’ The question arose due to the fact that in John 11:15 faith was declared to be the goal of Jesus’s dealing with Lazarus but has not been detected in the course of the narrative.”⁸¹ Thomas speaks and acts in place of those (implied readers) who have not yet been able to situate themselves in the Easter light, and therefore still struggle with existentially understanding the meaning of the cross. Therefore, John gives room to Thomas’s doubt, allows for his “impious” request (without criticizing it!), illustrates the empathy of Jesus, has Thomas grasp the meaning of Jesus’s death – both literally and metaphorically – and puts into his mouth the confession that Jesus is “Lord and God.” If the goal of John’s narrative is a call to believe, Thomas’s individual journey and expression of faith is neither superfluous nor anomalous,⁸² but rather climactic. The “revelatory dynamic” of the gospel, which expresses itself in dualistic paradigms of thought, reaches its goal.⁸³

⁷⁷ Ludger SCHENKE, *Das Johannesevangelium: Vom Wohnen Gottes unter uns* (Freiburg: Herder, 2018), 217.

⁷⁸ Some elements of this section are adapted from SCHLIESSER, “To Touch or not to Touch,” 89–93.

⁷⁹ Cf. again ZUMSTEIN, “L’évangile johannique.”

⁸⁰ Cf. SKINNER, *John and Thomas*, 75.

⁸¹ Klaus WENGST, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 2 vols. (2nd edition; TKNT 4/1–2; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2004–2007), 2.26–27.

⁸² Against, e. g., John A. ASHTON, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 485 (“superfluousness of the resurrection stories”); Harold W. ATTRIDGE, “From Discord Rises Meaning: Resurrection Motifs in the Fourth Gospel,” in *The Resurrection of Jesus in the Gospel of John*, ed. Craig R. Koester and Reimund Bieringer (WUNT 222; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 2–19 at 15 (“The very existence of the chapters [20 and 21] is something of an anomaly.”).

⁸³ On the concept of a “revelatory dynamics” in John, cf. Jörg FREY, “Zu Hintergrund und Funktion des johanneischen Dualismus,” in *Die Herrlichkeit des Gekreuzigten. Studien zu den*

2. *By means of his typical, subtle irony, the evangelist keeps Thomas in a doubtful shadow until he penetrates to the light and believes.* Thomas stubbornly lags behind the course of the unfolding story; what has been disclosed to the readers in bright light from the overall perspective of the gospel still remains in the dark for Thomas. His fatalistic request to go with Jesus in order to die “with him” (11:16) shows that he did not understand two things: for one, Lazarus will not remain in death, but will be resurrected for the sake of the glory of God (cf. 11:4) and, for another, he unwittingly pronounces the truth that the path to Bethany will ultimately lead to death (cf. 11:47–53).⁸⁴ Johannine irony also figures when the sentence “Let us also go” (11:16) is placed next to the question, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” (14:5). Thomas’s courageous appeal grasps at nothing, since he does not know where to go. The second utterance of Thomas underscores for the readers the fact that he has missed the point: the “way” he inquires about stands before him, in person. The subliminally ironic portrait of Thomas is completed when the evangelist declares him absent at the most central event of Jesus’s epiphany – thus provoking his “own Easter.”⁸⁵ Once more, he is late, and once again, he seems to miss what is most decisive. In the end, however, the Johannine play with the ambiguity of the disciple is dissolved as he arrives at the gospel’s most distinct confession.

3. *Thomas lives up to his symbolic cognomen Didymos and embodies a “twin” attitude to Jesus.* The tradition and even the proverbial designation “Doubting Thomas” proves right, even if the terminology of “doubt” is lacking in the narrative. Thomas’s doubt dissuades him from succumbing to the perspective of glory, and at the same time his doubt has him attached to the one who personifies this glory. As his name insinuates, he is in between, of two minds, lacking understanding. He reveals this duality, moreover, in his utterances, which are, from the perspective of the narrative logic, “inappropriate.” The “inappropriate,” defeatist appeal at his first appearance, “Let us also go” (11:6), expresses doubt despite the prospect of a “good end,” which had just been offered by Jesus. The clause “so that you may believe” (ἵνα πιστεύσητε, 11:15) is ineffective; the faith of Thomas remains absent, as does the faith of all disciples. The “inappropriate” rhetorical question regarding the “way” in Thomas’s second appearance reflects doubts in the eschatological picture painted by Jesus; his request “Believe in God, believe also in me!” (14:1) is falling on deaf ears, and Thomas is the first who steps forward and confesses his ignorance. Finally, the “inappropriate,” harsh tone of the

Johanneischen Schriften I, ed. Juliane Schlegel (WUNT 307; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 409–482 at 437–477.

⁸⁴ Cf. Jörg FREY, “Der ‘zweifelnde’ Thomas (Joh 20,24–29) im Spiegel seiner Rezeptionsgeschichte,” *Hermeneutische Blätter* 1 (2011), 5–21 at 12.

⁸⁵ Georg RUBEL, *Erkenntnis und Bekenntnis: Der Dialog als Weg der Wissensvermittlung im Johannesevangelium* (NTA 54; Münster: Aschendorff, 2009), 292 (cited in POPP, “Thomas,” 518 n. 80).

conditional clause in the midst of the disciples (20:25) exposes his fundamental doubt in the truth of Easter. Thomas remains in between faith and disbelief until faith prevails, abruptly, when Jesus complies with the condition uttered by Thomas. Only now the demand “Do not be unbelieving but believing” (μη γίνου ἄπιστος ἀλλὰ πιστός) (20:27) receives an answer. The ambivalence of Thomas, his indecisive “being in between” transforms into an unambiguous expression of faith.

4. *Jesus’s interaction with the disciple gives an impression of the coping strategies in the Johannine circle in relation to doubt and scepticism.* At the first appearance of Thomas, Jesus silently ignores his questionable and ambivalent objection. There is no conversation, for Thomas turns to his fellow disciples, not to Jesus: “Let us go with him ...” (11:16). In the Lazarus scene, Jesus makes the disciples aware of his divine identity and mission. While Thomas, like the other disciples, remains an observer of a symbolic miracle, Jesus reveals himself as the personified “way” and widens his constricted view by means of the metaphor of the way, again without putting to shame his ignorance. Thomas interacts directly with Jesus and receives a personal, albeit enigmatic, response (14:6). In the final scene of the gospel, Jesus turns to the doubter quite sympathetically, appreciates his desire, and consents to his request. The reader is surprised by the manner in which Jesus reacts to the rough demeanour of Thomas. He takes the initiative, addresses Thomas and complies. No criticism, reproach or abashment is involved, either in Jesus’s immediate response (20:27) or in his statement on the correlation of seeing and believing (20:29a) and the subsequent macarism (20:29b).⁸⁶ In the end there is the answer of Thomas (20:28: ἀπεκρίθη Θωμᾶς) and his confession. The “unbelief of the believer”⁸⁷ encounters the Risen One and is convicted by attending to the signs (notably not in private but amidst the community of

⁸⁶ From the early Church to the turn of the 20th century, readers – almost unanimously – think John’s portrayal of Thomas is critical. At times it appears that the interpreters’ own stance towards doubt enters their exegesis via mirror-reading. While Bernhard WEISS (*Das Johannevangelium als einheitliches Werk: Geschichtlich erklärt* [Berlin: Trowitzsch & Sohn, 1912], 353), for instance, detects in Jesus’s command (20:27) a “humiliating” repetition of Thomas’s words, Joachim RINGLEBEN (*Das philosophische Evangelium. Theologische Auslegung des Johannevangeliums im Horizont des Sprachdenkens* [HUTh 64; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014], 405) finds in them an affectionate reaction to Thomas and his doubts. Cf. Larry W. HURTADO, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 478: “Note that Thomas’s demand to see the nail marks and touch Jesus’ wounds is in fact answered positively by Jesus’ appearance and invitation to Thomas to do just what he demanded.” Even the following statement of Jesus and the macarism (20:29) have often been understood in a disparaging sense – especially when ὅτι ἐώρακάς με πεπίστευκας is taken as a question, as in Nestle-Aland (e. g., BROWN, *The Gospel according to John*, 2.10–46). Overall, it is interesting to observe a shift in recent scholarship that regards Thomas’s doubt more sympathetically, possibly also taking up the *Zeitgeist*.

⁸⁷ Cf. Louis WALTER, *L’incroyance des croyants selon Saint Jean* (LiBi 43; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1976).

believers), by giving room to incomprehension and doubt, and finally by interacting with and obeying the words of Jesus.⁸⁸

5. *The realism of Thomas's seeing and touching enables a solid identification of later believers with his experience and with his ensuing confession.* The encounter between Jesus and Thomas arrives at a turning point when Jesus offers himself to Thomas in a corporeal manner and deprives Thomas's doubt of its basis. Just as the enigmatic absence of Thomas in the encounter scene "alerts implied readers that an important element of the story is at hand"⁸⁹ and thus increases the significance of his appearance, the perplexing silence regarding the finger and the hand of Thomas directs the readers' eyes to his touching gesture. John insinuates that not only Thomas's seeing was real, but also his bodily encounter with the resurrection body. John made his gospel "vivid to draw his readers in, so that, through the characters' physical encounter with Jesus, they can also encounter Jesus through their imaginations and be more convinced about their faith."⁹⁰ Thomas does *not* represent, as Rudolf Bultmann has famously claimed, "the common attitude of men, who cannot believe without seeing miracles (4:48)."⁹¹ Seeing is neither linked by John to a deficient faith nor to the "weakness of man."⁹² The meta-textual conclusion about the Thomas episode and the book as a whole (20:30–31) does not devalue the faith of those who have seen signs with their physical eyes; rather, the signs are written precisely for the purpose of evoking faith.⁹³ Those who are inclined to criticize Thomas for requesting signs – whether first readers of the gospel or present-day interpreters – must deal with the concluding word of the Evangelist, who wrote down many signs "so that you may come to believe (ἵνα πιστεύ[σ]ητε)" (20:31). On the narrative

⁸⁸ As has been argued above, Thomas not only obeyed the "emphatic pneumatological-performative call" μὴ γίνου ἄπιστος ἀλλὰ πιστός (20:27) (POPP, "Thomas," 518), but also the emphatic invitation φέρε; ἴδε; φέρε; βάλε (20:27).

⁸⁹ Nicolas FARELLY, *The Disciples in the Fourth Gospel: A Narrative Analysis of Their Faith and Understanding* (WUNT/2 290; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 122; cf. Robert ALTER, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 66.

⁹⁰ WANG, *Sense Perception*, 199. Sunny Wang sees at work a rhetoric of ἐνάργεια ("vividness") in John, which serves the purpose "to bring before the eyes the events described and thereby make listeners into witnesses by working on their emotions" (ibid., 93).

⁹¹ BULTMANN, *John*, 696. At the root of this assessment is not so much John's theology of faith, but rather Bultmann's presupposed clear-cut antagonism of seeing and believing: "ὄραν [...] and πιστεύειν are radical opposites" (ibid., 695 note 5). The relationship between seeing and believing is rather complex in John; "to see" can refer to sense perception (e. g., 1:38; 6:22; 13:22; 19:6) as well as to an act foundational for confession and faith (e. g., 1:32–34; 2:23; 3:11; 6:14; 19:35; 20:8; 20:25). Bultmann's and many other interpreters' assumption that 4:48 criticizes both signs and seeing as deficient "miracle-faith" overlooks the fact that Jesus grants the official's request (just as he grants Thomas's request), so that "he himself believed, along with his whole household" (4:53) (cf., correctly, SCHNELLE, *Antidoketische Christologie*, 157).

⁹² Thus, however, BULTMANN, *John*, 696.

⁹³ Cf. Kelli S. O'BRIEN, "Written That You May Believe: John 20 and Narrative Rhetoric," *CBQ* 67 (2005), 284–302.

level, Thomas's encounter with Jesus, seeing *and* touching him, evoked genuine faith. In the world of the readers, it is the signs set out in writing that call for and manifest faith.⁹⁴

6. *Thomas represents the supreme culmination of the time of signs and sight.* He is not a "borderline case"⁹⁵ in the sense that he would be the last to see signs and the first whose faith is evoked by the word of the witnesses. Rather, in the character of Thomas the tension between the era of Jesus's presence and the era of all later believers is carried to extremes: Thomas sees *and* touches. To him – the inquisitive doubter – more is granted than to the other disciples and to the intended readers. They, by contrast, are dependent on the testimony of the Easter witnesses (17:20), the testimony of the written book (20:30), and the testimony of the Holy Spirit (14:17, 25–26). Thomas complied with Jesus's invitation in the literal sense, not merely in the spiritual, metaphorical sense.⁹⁶ A spiritual reality has been disclosed to him in his seeing with his bodily eyes and touching with his finger. His coming to faith via physical seeing and touching separates him most starkly from those who will later believe; his proven testimony and confession of faith, however, establishes a close link to believers of later generations, particularly those who doubt and wish to see and touch. It is, however, a complete misunderstanding of John's purpose to assume that for him the disciples are in a disadvantageous position compared to later generations. John is not concerned with two types of faith – "the traditional requirement of needing to see in order to be able to believe is attributed to those of little faith, and a nobler status is reserved for those people who are capable of achieving faith without having been eye-witnesses themselves"⁹⁷ – but with two times of faith; in other words, the "time of signs and sight" and the "time of the absence of the son." No judgment on either time is intended; the macarism is not a (backward-looking)

⁹⁴ Cf., against Bultmann, Hans Urs VON BALTHASAR, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, Vol. 1: *Seeing the Form*, ed. John Riches, tr. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 316: "What is [...] real is sensory, whether it is perceived directly through the human senses or whether it is witnessed to as having been perceived. The *proton pseudos*, the 'primal lie', of theology and spirituality is the naïve or reflected equation (or confusion) of the human 'spirit' with the Holy Spirit, of 'abstraction' with the resurrection of the flesh."

⁹⁵ So Marinus DE JONGE, "Signs and Works in the Fourth Gospel," in *Miscellanea Neotestamentica* 2 (NovTSup 48; Leiden: Brill, 1978), 107–125 at 119. Approversly cited, e.g., in HIRSCH-LUIPOLD, *Gott wahrnehmen*, 338.

⁹⁶ A distinctly metaphorical interpretation of Thomas's seeing and touching is prominent already in early church interpretation, and also in more recent studies. Cf., e.g., SCHNEIDERS, "Touching the Risen Jesus," 52: "The invitation is not to see physically but to grasp what cannot be seen with the eyes of flesh."

⁹⁷ MOST, *Doubting Thomas*, 59. See also, with quite different literary and theological agendas, Robert T. FORTNA, *The Fourth Gospel and its Predecessor* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 246; Andreas J. KÖSTENBERGER, *John* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 565 ("faith apart from seeing is superior").

critique of Thomas and the other disciples, but a (forward-looking) promise to the sceptical addressees of the gospel.⁹⁸

7. *Thomas is a principal witness to the sceptical among the believers and a paradigm for Jesus's turning to them.* The Easter scene does not present Thomas's path to faith as exemplary for *all* readers, that is, for all those born after. Rather, Thomas stands out due to his direct, exclusive contact with Jesus, which is not mediated by the testimony of the eyewitnesses. His special role is also evidenced by several extremes in the portrayal of his character.⁹⁹ Both his unbelief and his confession correspond in terms of their unparalleled intensity, and his encounter with Jesus is indeed extraordinary, as it includes a tangible dimension, requested by Thomas and granted by Jesus. Nevertheless, Thomas's intense Easter experience benefits all those whose time is characterized by Jesus's absence (cf. 14:18), who arrived "too late" (cf. 20:24), but who – in their sceptical attitude – want to see and feel more. Attending to the testimony of the physical hearing, seeing, and touching of Jesus's followers, particularly of "Doubting Thomas," establishes *κοινωνία* between the first and later generations of faith (cf. 1 John 1:1–3), who will hear, see, and touch with the help of the Spirit.¹⁰⁰ In the Paraclete, Jesus is active and turns to those who, like Thomas, doubt; and the manner in which Jesus meets this challenge is both model and promise for those who can no longer see, but still desire to believe.¹⁰¹ Thomas's scepticism is theirs, and the Gospel of John is addressed to their ambivalent faith, as a gospel for sceptics.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Against, e. g., TUCKETT, "Seeing and Believing," 174–175, 185. If it were a devaluation of the past, the entire testimony, the written (and unwritten) signs would fall under the same verdict (cf. Theo K. HECKEL, *Vom Evangelium des Markus zum viergestaltigen Evangelium* [WUNT 120; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999], 156).

⁹⁹ Cf. HARTENSTEIN, *Charakterisierung*, 221.

¹⁰⁰ There is no reason to assume that for John *all* later, "post-apostolic" believers think along the lines of Thomas. Rather, he is highlighted as sceptic and therefore he is a transparent stand-in for sceptical believers. Against, e. g., Michael THEOBALD, "Der johanneische Osterglaube und die Grenzen seiner narrativen Vermittlung (Joh 20)," in *Studien zum Corpus Iohanneum* (WUNT 267; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 443–471 at 468, who sees Thomas as *Sprachrohr* for all later generations: "[Thomas] spricht [...] nur aus, was die Nachgeborenen *durchweg* zu denken geneigt sind, denen jene anscheinend überwältigenden Beweise für Jesu österliche Wirklichkeit eben nicht mehr gewährt werden" (my emphasis). In this sense also Craig R. KOESTER, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (2nd edition; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 72 ("ideal spokesperson for people in later generations"); FREY, "Ich habe den Herrn gesehen' (Joh 20,28)," 280; HIRSCH-LUIPOLD, *Gott wahrnehmen*, 337–338. This view is based on the assumption that Thomas's problem is the problem of all those who are dependent on the testimony of others and have to believe their experiences to be valid. This would in fact render the physical seeing (and touching) "superfluous" and not require the encounter scene.

¹⁰¹ Cf. KOESTER, *Symbolism*, 73; FREY, "Der 'zweifelnde' Thomas," 32.

¹⁰² The interrelationship between the two sceptics Nathanael and Thomas at the beginning and at the end of the gospel strikes the eye (cf. 21:2). A closer analysis of the passages would reveal a narrative pattern, according to which the encounter with Jesus overcomes doubt; common themes include the initial scepticism of the characters regarding the testimony of a

With Thomas as their figure of identification they are drawn to reflect on how they relate sense perception and spiritual experience, personal authentication and external testimony, doubting and believing.

third party, an imperative to verify and “see” the reported, disputed fact (1:46 [Philippus]: ἔρχου καὶ ἴδε; 20:27 [Jesus]: φέρε καὶ ἴδε [...] καὶ φέρε [...] καὶ βάλε), their compliance to the command, the supernatural insight of Jesus into things concealed (1:48; cf. 20:27), the culmination of the scene in a confession of faith that surpasses the testimony of the witnesses (cf. 1:45 with 1:49; 20:25 with 20:28), and finally, a statement on the emergence of their faith in terms of conditional structure from the mouth of Jesus (1:50: ὅτι εἶπόν [...] πιστεύεις; 20:29: ὅτι ἑώρακάς με πεπιστευκάς), which does not downgrade their respective faith, but rather includes a promise. On the “sceptical pair” Nathanael and Thomas, see Fredrik WAGENER, *Figuren als Handlungsmodelle: Simon Petrus, die samaritanische Frau, Judas und Thomas als Zugänge zu einer narrativen Ethik im Johannesevangelium* (WUNT/2 408; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 535. According to Wagener, Nathanael symbolizes prejudiced sceptics, who had never been followers of Jesus, and Thomas stands for those believers who doubt in the resurrection. It is a sign of hope for the community that both sceptics are found among the seven fishermen in the (secondary) conclusion of the gospel (21:2); their testimony can be believed as they came to believe the testimony of others and encountered Jesus.