

'Time is no Barrier' in John's Resurrection Narrative (John 20:24-29):  
A Theology of the Absolute Identity of the 'Wounds at the Cross'?

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**Abstract:** John 20:24-29 – the Doubting Thomas Narrative - is explored in terms of the thesis that Jesus showed Thomas wounds absolutely identical to the wounds originating at the time of the crucifixion. John understands the risen Jesus to enact sovereignty over time in this passage. This was a new stage in John's Christological Development and augmented his Heavenly Son of Man Christology. The latter posited Jesus' everlasting eternal personhood but did not on the basis of this conclude, as the later development did, that Jesus could manipulate or 'cut and paste' time in the way that ordinary humans can control (or manipulate) events and objects.

**Keywords:** time; the Gospel of John; Heavenly Son of Man Christology; wounds of the cross.

## INTRODUCTION

The final and primary intention behind the Johannine resurrection narrative and tradition is to assert that Jesus is sovereign over time. While it would be natural to think that this means Jesus is timeless (on the grounds that to be 'in time' means time having 'a hold' over you), it will emerge in the course of my argument that in fact Jesus has to be in time (and indeed in space) at the moment of his enacted sovereignty. It is precisely this that demonstrates time has no 'hold' over him, does not constrain him. The presence of the category of time everlasting in John's Heavenly Son of Man Christology indicates that John's intentionality is already focussed here. Nevertheless integration into this Christology – in effect into the descending-ascending motif - does not itself involve any modification to the apostolic resurrection tradition per se.

Therefore it cannot itself account for John's subsequent seminal insight since the latter constitutes a fundamental modification in understanding the action of the risen Jesus eliciting recognition or acknowledgement. The explanation must lie with the nature of the risen Jesus' action itself. John came to see that it itself – the locus of the action itself – was what manifested Jesus' sovereignty over time.

The essay unfolds like this. First, I discuss the claim that John's mind was already focussed on the conceptuality of time since it was an intrinsic part of John's Heavenly Son of Man Christology. I also set out the notion of YHWH's sovereignty over time. I follow this with analysis of the tension that may exist between John 20:17d and 20:28.

Then I proceed to the core of the essay. I focus on the Thomas narrative in the context of the first appearance in the Upper Room and provide an argument to the effect that Jesus enacts sovereignty over time. It does not dispute the traditional 'believing without seeing' interpretation, but wonders whether John could have seen more in Jesus' showing of his wounds than this – most plausibly at a later date. It seeks to reconfigure this interpretation in terms of a conceptuality that recognizes that the sentence 'Jesus showed the very same wounds to Thomas's has a Jastrowesque 'duck-rabbit' quality about it. The reconfiguration is best described as 'numerical identity in a revelatory context.' Jesus can only reveal himself through showing *wounds absolutely identical to those originating at the cross* if he is able to transcend time such that time poses no barrier to him.

As indicated above, one dimension of my argument will be that Thomas's confession "My Lord and My God" (20:28) says something above and beyond, and perhaps even discontinuous with, the 'believing without seeing' interpretation (it was not the prerogative of the 'congregation' to ask for the missing premise: it was to believe this too without seeing.) Since the latter could be accommodated quite easily within the Heavenly of Man Christology I reason this may be a clue to John having initiated a new stage in his Christological development, one that locates sovereignty over time at the locus of Jesus' appearance-action itself.

My conclusion will be that the evidence is at the very least compatible with the following thesis. According to John Jesus showing the identical wounds inflicted at the time of the crucifixion to Thomas demonstrated his sovereignty over time such that time 'posed no barrier to him.' Though this interpretation is not found in the classical tradition it has a precedent in the work of Barth though not as regards this specific passage.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I am thinking especially of Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* III/2 tr. Geoffrey Bromily (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1961), 466-473 and Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, tr. G Bromiley [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), 144-7 which seem to provide a lone precedent to the position taken in this essay.

It is my view that the full case for understanding Jesus' sovereignty over time in the Fourth Gospel involves both the Mary Magdalene narrative and the Sea of Galilee narrative in John 21. *But I also hold that each of these narratives feed into an assessment of what John meant in the Thomas narrative, John 20:24-29, and vice-versa.* The final horizon of the Apocalypse is also relevant. In other words, the Johannine literature as a whole (inclusive of the epistles) has to be assessed *comprehensively and simultaneously* in order to assess the relevant hermeneutical evidence. Such an undertaking is beyond the scope of this essay. Instead I want to explore what kind of argument we can marshal based on the Thomas narrative alone in conjunction with the first appearance to the disciples in the Upper Room (John 20:19-20).

### JOHN'S HEAVENLY SON OF MAN CHRISTOLOGY

Central to John and also the Synoptic Gospels is the claim that Jesus does actions that are uniquely the prerogative and remit of YHWH. Speaking of Jesus healing the paralyzed man in Mark 2:2-12 Eugene Boring makes the following claim about Mark's Christology:

In this pericope Jesus forgives, heals, knows people's hearts as only God can, yet at the end his actions do not detract from praise to God (2.12). The scribes rightly recognize that Jesus *acts in the place of the one God* (2.7). The charge on which Jesus is ultimately condemned emerges early in the narrative, in a claim that seems to his opponents to infringe on God's prerogative', (Boring, 'Markan Christology: God-language for Jesus?', *New Testament Studies* 45 [04] 1999: 451-471, 466; *my italics*).

In John Jesus doing actions that are the unique province of YHWH is pervasive. It is found in the Signs tradition in John 2-11 – most notably in the raising of Lazarus – but also in Jesus' authority over eschatological judgment and eternal life (John 5:19-31). What sets John apart from the Synoptic tradition is the assimilation of the tradition into a Heavenly Son of Man Christology implying the pre-existence of the Son.<sup>2</sup> Jesus' actions are

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<sup>2</sup> See John Painter's enduring argument for this in his *The Quest for the Messiah: The History, Literature, and Theology of the Johannine Community* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd, 1994). It is clearly a consensus view: Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (London: SCM, 1996); Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Oxford: OUP, 2008); Hurtado, *One God, One Lord* 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), and of course Borgen below, n.3).

understood as those of a heavenly agent sent from the Father to do the Father's actions (John 5, 6, 7, 8, 10).<sup>3</sup>

It is at this stage in John's Christological development that time everlasting becomes integral to John's Christology. To say that Jesus was enthroned in heaven and had in fact been in heaven before the creation of time meant that Jesus like YHWH was eternal. This (at least in this respect) made Jesus equal to YHWH. Judaism claimed that 'only God [i.e. YHWH] was eternal, and all the others even if they could be addressed as 'gods' in some sense, were lesser, created beings.'<sup>4</sup> This assumption about God and time was pervasive in that it was also true of pagan religion: 'even outside of Judaism, in the wider Hellenistic world it appears that the key difference between divinity in the truest sense and other lesser forms of divinity was *eternal existence*.'<sup>5</sup> As Lindars notes, Jesus cannot be the giver of eternal life

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<sup>3</sup> The title of Peder Borgen's seminal essay 'God's Agent in the Fourth Gospel' accurately sums up this aspect of this Christology. See Borgen, 'God's Agent in the Fourth Gospel' in *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough* ed. Jacob Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 1968) 137–48.

<sup>4</sup> See McGrath, *The Only True God: Early Christian Monotheism in its Jewish Context* (Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 137.

<sup>5</sup> McGrath, *The Only True God*, 137. Jeffrey Neyrey writes: 'Stepping aside from Jewish sources, considerable light can be shed on this material from comparable discussions about the nature of a true deity in Graeco-Roman literature. For example, Sextus Empiricus records the popular idea about god as "eternal (*aidion*) and imperishable (*aphtharton*) and perfect in happiness." Diogenes Laertius, in reporting Stoic doctrine about god, notes that the deity must be "everlasting (*aidion*) and the artificer of each thing throughout the whole extent of matter." Later he remarks that as the deity is a principle, it belongs to principles to be "without generation (*agentous*) or destruction (*aphthartous*). Occasionally we find formal discussions of the attributes of a true deity by which they are compared and contrasted with heroic mortals who were apotheosized at their death, which discussions have a direct bearing on the point of this inquiry. Examples of this discussion may be found in Plutarch, although the clearest illustration of this topos comes from Diodorus of Sicily. As regards the gods, men of ancient times have handed down to later generations two different conceptions: Certain of the gods, they say, are eternal and imperishable (*aidios kai aphthartous*) . . . for each of these genesis and duration are from everlasting to everlasting. But the other gods, we are told, were terrestrial beings who attained immortal honors and fame because of their benefactions to mankind, such as Heracles, Dionysus, Aristaeus, and the others who were like them. From . . . Graeco-Roman god talk, certain patterns emerge: (1) a true deity must be genuinely eternal, without beginning (*aidios*) or end (*aphthartos*); (2) a true deity, then,

and be not eternal be himself. And, as Raymond Brown says: 'Jesus is presented as speaking in the same manner in which Yahweh speaks in Deutero-Isaiah' (Brown, *Gospel According to John I-XII* [NY: Doubleday, 1917] 537). Some of these declarations are specifically about eternal or everlasting existence though as Catrin Williams argues, this is not to exhaust the implications of a statement like 8:58 (Williams, *I am He: The Interpretation of 'Ani Hu' in Jewish and Early Christian Literature* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000] 278) "Before Abraham was, I am" can be paraphrased as "Before Abraham was (came to be), I am (the one who is, who was, and is to come (cf. Revelation 1:4, 8) but it can also be interpreted as a reference to the divine name. Scholars are divided whether Jesus bearing the divine name implies John intended to present Jesus as the equal of YHWH, and therefore introduced a modification to Jewish monotheism;<sup>6</sup> or that he 'merely' employed it to mean that Jesus did actions that were uniquely the remit of YHWH, especially the giving of eternal life and exercising eschatological judgement.<sup>7</sup>

#### YHWH NOT JUST EVERLASTING BUT SOVEREIGN OVER TIME

The two-fold temporal descriptions of YHWH in deutero-Isaiah ('I am the first and the last') and the three-fold description in Pseudo-Jonathan Targum's paraphrase of Deuteronomy 32:39 ('Behold now, that I am He who Am, and Was, and Will Be, and there is no other God beside Me: I, in My Word, kill and make alive') say that YHWH is everlasting and is God, always has been

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becomes responsible for creation, (3) but will survive the necessary corruption of all finite creation. There are definite points of contact between the notion of God in the targums to Exod 3:14 and popular discussions of true deity in Graeco-Roman literature. True deity must be: (a) eternal in past (*aidios*) and imperishable in the future (*aphthartos*); and (b) uncreated creator who is different in being from created, perishable beings. This is what it means to be a true deity for Jew and Greek alike' Neyrey, "'My Lord and My God": the Divinity of Jesus in John's Gospel' *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 1986), 159-62; See also Neyrey, *An Ideology of Revolt: John's Christology in Social-Science Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1989), 218-20.

<sup>6</sup> See for example Hurtado, *The Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); Hurtado, *One God, One Lord* 3<sup>rd</sup> edn.

<sup>7</sup> For example, McGrath, *John's Apologetic Christology: Legitimation and Development in Johannine Christology* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004); McGrath, *The Only True God*.

God, and always will be God. But it is not merely that YHWH is everlasting; it is that YHWH is above time, YHWH is the ruler of time, so that time is subject to YHWH. Sean McDonough distinguishes between a “hard line” and a “soft line” on the concept of YHWH’s timelessness (McDonough, *YHWH at Patmos: Rev. 1:4 in Its Hellenistic and Early Jewish Setting* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996, 207-217, esp. 210-12). The first is the aforementioned unity of past (and present) and future eternally present, which McDonough calls “non-durational eternity” (McDonough, *YHWH at Patmos*, 207). The second is precisely the notion that God – YHWH – is not subject to time. McDonough prefaces his explanation of the “soft line” with words from Oscar Cullman’s classic *Christ and Time: God alone ‘can conceive, survey, and control this endless line [of time], since in its unlimited form it is only his own line. Only to him does eternity belong’; and ‘...God is superior to time. He rules over time ...’* (Cullman, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Tr. Foyd V. Filson [London: SCM Press, 1962], 69-70). In other words, not only is God not subject to time, time is subject to God. YHWH rules over time and is ‘higher’ than time in this sense. Though the assertion, YHWH is the creator of time, may not a necessary condition of the view that YHWH is the ruler of time, it certainly amounts to a sufficient one. Is time to be located among the creatures? Is it one of the things that ‘came to be’? Westermann provides salutatory arguments to the effect that the Priestly creation narrative and Genesis 1:3-5 in particular makes the claim that YHWH created time (Westermann, *Genesis 1-11* tr. John Scullion [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985], 112-122). This would imply that time then is at YHWH’s ‘disposal’ because it is one of his creatures.

It may be said that John’s insight regarding time at the very locus of Jesus’ resurrection-actions – if it is there - did not appear from nowhere. Whatever else is true, by the time John may have had his seminal insight he had already assimilated the original ‘apostolic’ understanding of the resurrection tradition to a Heavenly Son of Man Christology in which the risen Jesus was deemed to be in the process of ascending back to a heaven from which he had originally descended (20:17). He already had time in his sights as a distinguishing necessary feature of Jesus’ divinity. He almost certainly affirmed YHWH’s sovereignty over time. That John subsequently made yet another breakthrough, one heralding a further development in his Christological development in the realm of time, is the focus of the next section. It attempts to provide evidence that one took place, and that it was no less the claim that Jesus manifested sovereignty over time through demonstrating that time posed no barrier to him. Jesus can, as YHWH can, ‘control this endless line of time.’

## A TENSION BETWEEN JOHN 20:17 AND 20:28?

At 20:17 John effectively has Jesus telling Mary Magdalene to inform the disciples of the confirmation of the Heavenly Son of Man Christology which at least in the context of Eucharistic doctrine was greeted with resistance (John 60-66 (see Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* [NY: Paulist Press, 1979], 82-86). It is clear that this occurs at a stage in John's Christological development when the resurrection has already been absorbed into the descending-ascending motif crucial to the Heavenly Son of Man Christology. But of particular interest is that he conveys this in the following enigmatic statement (comparable with 17:3):

"I am ascending to my Father and your Father, *to my God and your God.*" (20:17; *my italics*).

Thomas Aquinas discerned the presence of a Christological position lower than he would have liked. He attempted to resolve the tension between 20:17 and 20:28 – Thomas's confession of Jesus as "my Lord and my God" - by understanding the former to refer to Jesus' human nature: 'When [Jesus] adds, *to my God and your God*, he is referring to his human nature. From this point of view God rules him; thus he says, *my God*, under whom I am a man.' (Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 13-21* trans. by Fabian Larcher and James A Weisheipl; introduction with notes by Daniel Keating and Matthew Levering [Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010], 268-9).<sup>8</sup> The modern classics (Bultmann, Brown, Lindars Barrett, Schnackenburg)<sup>9</sup> appear to concentrate entirely on the aspect of the verse that implies reference to covenantal relationship<sup>10</sup> but it cannot be

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<sup>8</sup> What Thomas discerns is one more example of what Raymond Brown said about the Fourth Gospel: 'one of the anomalies in the Fourth Gospel' is 'that new insights are placed next to old insights, high Christology next to low Christology, realized eschatology next to final eschatology, individualism next to stress on community, a sacramental understanding of reality in a Gospel that shows relatively little interest in the institution of individual sacraments' (Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, 51-2). There are places in the gospel where, as Claus Westermann put it, it is an account not a narrative (Westermann, *The Gospel of John in the Light of the Old Testament* tr.' Siegfried Schatzmann [Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1998], 23).

<sup>9</sup> See Paul N Anderson's recent characterization of these scholars in this way (Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6* [Eugene: Wipf, 2010). Anderson devotes a chapter to their respective treatments of John 6.

<sup>10</sup> See for example Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* tr. John Beasley-Murray (Louisville: WJK, 1971), 686-9; Brown, *John XIII-XXI*, (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 1021; Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to John* vol 3 (New York:

gainsaid that John could have made this point without casting it the way he does. James McGrath perceives the same tension as Aquinas. But his resolution of it is with the opposite design in mind – to affirm overall the lower Christology present in 20:17. He harmonizes this particular strata of Heavenly Son of Man Christology with Thomas’s confession at 20:28 by taking recourse to the following passage from the Jewish-Christian *Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions*:

Therefore the name *God* is applied in three ways: either because he to whom it is given is truly God, or because he is the servant of him who is truly; and for the honour of the sender, that his authority may be full, he that is sent is called by the name of him who sends (*Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions* XLII, quoted in McGrath, *John’s Apologetic Christology*, 130).

Both it seems to me are right to take account of this tension. But Aquinas’ resolution of 20:17 it seems to me belongs to another age. He is however to all intents and purposes right about 20:28. Hence though I take McGrath to be essentially right about 20:17 his extrapolation to 20:28 misfires. In other words, and somewhat ironically, pace McGrath’s thesis that the solution to 20:28 is found in the *Recognitions* such that John can say both 20:28 and the earlier saying at 20:17 without contradiction, it can be argued that 20:28 represents a distinctive Christological and indeed Patrological development in John’s thought over 20:17.<sup>11</sup>

If this is true, the following becomes conceivable. There is a Johannine intentionality behind the Thomas narrative that represents a decisive Christological breakthrough above and beyond the tradition of 20:19-20 and

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CrossRoad, 1990), 665. Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (New Century Bible Commentary) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 609.

<sup>11</sup> The consensus view is that John 20:28 refers to the Heavenly Son of Man Christology itself continuous with the Logos doctrine of the Prologue. Dunn is representative of it. See for example, Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, Dunn, *Christianity in the Making vol. 3. Neither Jew or Greek: A Contested Identity* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans], esp. 766-769. I take the view that 20:28 represents a further Christological development distinct from the Heavenly Son of Man Christology, and it is this higher Christology – in conjunction with a more nuanced Patrological doctrine – that informs the first few verses of the Prologue.



20:24-29,<sup>12</sup> which latter in its original inception was understood in terms of the Heavenly Son of Man Christology constrained as it is by 20:17.<sup>13</sup>

### JESUS' SOVEREIGNTY OVER TIME?

... Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. (John 19d-20)

The comparatively opaque reference of 19d<sup>14</sup> has lent to essentially two ways of interpreting it. On the one hand, there are those who take it to mean

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<sup>12</sup> For Schnackenburg as for a number of commentators the story is fundamentally about faith without seeing (Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to John*, 686). The moral of believing without seeing - which Thomas famously failed to do - is a decided presence in the story (20:29). It may be the case that as Lindars says 'John has the reader in mind' in making his point the point about faith and seeing (Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, 616). But if our concern is to establish what John as *ho theologos* believed in the end about Jesus - John the celebrated teacher within the Johannine community who may not have been particularly interested in writing a Gospel (C K Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John. An Introduction with commentary and notes on the Greek Text*. Second Edition [SPCK: London, 1978], 135; Martin Hengel, *The Johannine Problem* tr. John Bowden [London: SCM, 1989], 97) - may encounter real theological profundity even for the first century. John believing that Jesus showing Thomas numerically the same wounds inflicted at the crucifixion would be one such instance. For then it would be manifest that time constituted no barrier to the risen Jesus and that this enacted Jesus' sovereignty over time. It is this - and not 'faith without seeing' - that delivered the divinity of Jesus. One should think of the Thomas narrative as exhibiting the kind of features that in John's resurrection narrative deliver sovereignty over space. Then one has a glimpse of the real John's mind.

<sup>13</sup> Though it may be that the Heavenly Son of Man Christology was charged with the heresy of ditheism (see for example, Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*; the source-text for this historical hypothesis is J Louis Martyn's seminal *Theology and History in the Fourth Gospel*, Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*. 3rd edn. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), it may have been, as McGrath himself says, rather more 'culpable' of making Jesus the equal of YHWH rather than (intentionally) contravening Jewish monotheism (McGrath, *John's Apologetic Christology*, 31-9; McGrath, *The Only True God*, 58-61).

<sup>14</sup> Though Lindars describes this as a 'much weaker statement' (Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, 610), Luke 24:39-40 still does not let us ascertain what it was

something like the actual wounds themselves.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, there are those who take it to mean that Jesus showed the disciples something more akin to the scars of the wounds and that this was sufficient for the disciples to acknowledge 'the Lord'<sup>16</sup> (Barrett seems to offer a compromise: 'scars or wounds', Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 569).

*Then [Jesus] said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side (20:27).*

There may in fact be a consensus that 20:27 means wounds and not the mere closed scars of the wounds. Lindars seems to sum this up when he writes: 'The wounds of crucifixion prove the continuity between the dying Jesus and the risen Lord' (Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, 610). Brown too as we have seen seems to endorse this view.<sup>17</sup> Andreas Korstenberger, on the other hand, presumably takes 20:27 to mean scars (he has Thomas wanting to put his

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Jesus 'exactly' showed. Thomas Aquinas' interpretation endures to the present day: Jesus gives them sure proof that it is really himself by showing them his hands and side. *When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side*, because in them the marks of his passion remained in a special way: "See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself" (Lk 24:39) (Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 13-21*, 272).

<sup>15</sup> 'In vs. 25 John will make it clear that he means the nail marks in the hands and the lance wound in the side; Luke never specifies he means nail marks both in the hands and in the feet' (Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, 1021). Granted that this is compatible with scars, the fact that he chides the Catholic modernist Alfred Loisy for objecting to a gaping wound as regards the Thomas narrative (see below) and considers 20:24-29 a commentary on 20:19-23 (Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, 1032) would appear to suggest wounds. Schnackenburg may also be considered to be in the 'wounds to wounds' camp ('... the showing of wounds [*Wunde*] in hands and side ...'. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to John* vol 3, 323; 'Thomas demands a closer examination', Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to John* vol 3, 328).

<sup>16</sup> See for example Kostenberger: 'Jesus' scars on his hands and sides (cf. 19:34) are marks not only of his suffering but also of his victory' (Andreas Kostenberger, *John* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament) Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004, 572. Again: 'The scars of Jesus proved to them that the person before them really was their resurrected Lord' (Kostenberger, *John*, 573).

<sup>17</sup> See n.15.

finger on the nail mark)<sup>18</sup> such that the disciple's demand is, as Schnackenburg says of wounds, one of 'closer examination.' Again, in continuity with Brown and Schnackenburg, for Korstenberger, the Thomas story serves to raise the epistemic bar in the form of Thomas's demand.

Common then to both the wound and scar interpretation is that the difference between 20:19-20 and 20:24-28 is essentially an epistemic one. This, it is fair to say is the consensus interpretation of the relationship between the two passages.

In continuity with the epistemic interpretation I wish to explore the following model of the relationship between the two appearances traditions.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Kostenberger, *John*, 578. However, it is conceivable that he means that the first appearance showed scars and the second showed wounds (Kostenberger, *John*, 579) though by wounds he may mean scars.

<sup>19</sup> There is another model that I do not discount. This is that there is a difference of ontology between the two narratives. What Thomas saw could have at the very least been different from – and very plausibly nothing like – what the disciples saw. The reason Thomas doesn't reach forth to Jesus because – in the wake of Jesus' unearthly 'command' to thrust finger and hand – Thomas can already see these are the *very wounds inflicted at the crucifixion* – not just signs of the very wounds inflicted at the crucifixion. In seeing this Thomas is shown *something different* from what the disciples were shown (the disciples were shown partially healed wounds or scars.) The dynamics of the narrative interplay between John 20:19-20 and John 20:24-29 plays a central role in this interpretation. In a certain sense Jesus overrides his action in 20:19-20 in order to satisfy Thomas's 'impossible' demand. In the first appearance to the disciples in the Upper Room the risen Jesus shows them the scars or wounds from his crucifixion. In the second appearance Jesus shows Thomas the very wounds inflicted at the crucifixion, not merely signs of the very wounds of the crucifixion. The claim then is that Jesus first shows the disciples the marks of his wounds and, in response to the demand Thomas makes, does something different and more wonderful and radically discontinuous with his first appearance in the Upper Room. He shows Thomas the very wounds inflicted on him at the time of the crucifixion. It must be remembered that Jesus' appearances are short and sharp and discontinuous encounters and so to imagine Jesus 'walking around' with such wounds does not accord with the facts. There is still essentially a mystery which cannot be eliminated. Perhaps the action of showing the wounds came and went (as in akin to a flash) as did in its own way the earlier appearance in the Upper Room. (This observation also applies to the one appearance in the epistemic model.) In this model 20:24-28 and 20:19-20 are *separate histories*. Even Bultmann acknowledged that the Thomas story could be a source rather than a redaction (Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 784) though this did not entail

Both the disciples and Thomas saw the same thing, the *identical wounds inflicted at the crucifixion*; but only Thomas – in the wake of the ‘command’ to thrust finger and hand - perceived that this is what he had seen. Making Thomas pay the penalty of being chided for unbelief is the cost to him of being able to say “My Lord and my God.”<sup>20</sup> A consequence of this model is that Jesus bearing marks or scars of the wounds (*cicatrices*) is ruled out. Behind this interpretation of the text is a historical tradition that goes like this. At the original resurrection event in the Upper Room the disciples – and John in particular <sup>21</sup> - did not perceive that Jesus was enacting sovereignty over time. It was subsequently, at a later date,<sup>22</sup> that John made the seminal breakthrough.<sup>23</sup> It was only because Jesus was sovereign over time that he could show Thomas wounds that were *numerically and absolutely* identical to the wounds of the cross.

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for him commitment to historicity. For the latter see Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 657-8. The difficulty this account has to overcome is why it is not present in the Lukan version of 20:19-20 if it originated at the same time. That the divine *ego eimi* is a later insertion at Luke 24:39-40 may mean that Luke himself did not take this encounter to be a sign of Jesus’ divinity.

<sup>20</sup> These comments are helpful: ‘The point of Jesus’ remark [at 20:29] is not so much to pronounce Thomas’s faith inferior ...- after all, the confession has a climactic function in the Johannine narrative’ (Kostenberger, *John*, 580); ‘Thomas’s scepticism makes him an ideal proponent of a high Christology’ in John’s Gospel (Keener, *John* vol 2 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010], 1211).

<sup>21</sup> Who is this John? I am persuaded by Martin Hengel’s thesis in *The Johannine Question* and Richard Bauckham’s extensive argument in *Jesus and the Eye-Witnesses* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017) that it is John the Elder and John the Apostle. He is both the ‘the beloved disciple’ and the author of the text that constitutes the Fourth Gospel.

<sup>22</sup> As R T France put it: ‘No doubt the impact made on them by Jesus was striking and immediate, but there is no reason to imagine that their Christological understanding was fully formed at the first encounter. Indeed, the gospels give us plenty of evidence that the progress was slow and painful for them, and that it was not until after the resurrection that the full truth of what they had heard and seen began to come home to them. (RT France, ‘Development in New Testament Christology’, *Themelios* (18) 1992, 5.

<sup>23</sup> It would also make sense if the disciples just did not perceive that this is what they had seen. Brown and Lindars both hold that the original Johannine tradition like the Lukan account exhibited doubt (Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, 1023; Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, 608). It was subsequently erased and in this way the Thomas story became a commentary on 20:20 (Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, 1023).

*Thomas's Stipulation: his Demand for the "Absolutely Identical" Imprints.  
This is just what Jesus shows him*

<sup>24</sup>Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and thrust my finger into the place of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe."

[δὲ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς Ἐὰν μὴ ἴδω ἐν ταῖς χερσὶν αὐτοῦ τὸν τύπον τῶν ἥλων καὶ βάλω τὸν δάκτυλόν μου εἰς τὸν τοπον τῶν ἥλων καὶ βάλω μου τὴν χειρὰ εἰς τὴν πλευρὰν αὐτοῦ, οὐ μὴ πιστεύσω.]

<sup>27</sup>Then [Jesus] said to Thomas, "Thrust your finger here; see my hands. Reach towards me and thrust your hand into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

[<sup>27</sup>εἶτα λέγει τῷ Θωμᾷ· Φέρε τὸν δάκτυλόν σου ὧδε καὶ ἴδε τὰς χειρὰς μου, καὶ φέρε τὴν χειρὰ σου καὶ βάλε εἰς τὴν πλευρὰν μου, καὶ μὴ γίνου ἄπιστος ἀλλὰ πιστός.]

The Thomas narrative is in fact a meticulously crafted, highly choreographed scene in which the bare necessary facts of what Thomas says and what Jesus says *is the story*. When Jesus invites Thomas to put his fingers and hands into wounds identical with the wounds originating at the time of the crucifixion the latter is meant to take Jesus at his word as regards what he has been shown. To fill in supposed gaps in the narrative with actions not mentioned in the text, especially Thomas's, is surely to go beyond John's intention (which latter is the meaning of the story).

It is not enough that Thomas sees what the disciples sees, nor touch what they did not touch. He wants to thrust his finger and hand right into the place of the nails and spear-wound.<sup>24</sup> It may be that John is referring to the actual three-dimensional nature of the wounds exactly corresponding to the shape of the nails that inflicted them. This is why as Brown says, one's translation should try to 'catch the sense of motion in the verb *ballien* "'to throw"' (Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, 1025). Accordingly, John would have understood Thomas's demand to be one of thrusting his finger right into the three-dimensional space exactly corresponding to the shape of the nails that inflicted them – and corresponding (less exactly) to the shape of the human finger. Presumably, Thomas was also implicitly asking to thrust his hand right into the three-dimensional space exactly corresponding to the shape of the spear that inflicted it – and corresponding (less exactly but

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<sup>24</sup> Seeing Jesus' side is not explicitly mentioned but we can presume it is not excluded from the examination

more accurately than a finger) to the human hand. The point is, one can see an imprint but not a massively invasive internal space.<sup>25</sup>

Fenton suggests that 'John may have intended Thomas's stipulation to sound absurd' (Fenton, J C Fenton, *The Gospel according to John*, New Clarendon Bible (Oxford: OUP, 1970, 147). As Ridderbos put it, Thomas's declaration does not represent 'a serious condition of belief but rather shows how ridiculous he thought his fellow disciples' statement was' (Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans: 1997), 646-7. But he Thomas, so it seems, see and do something that is only possible were Jesus' wounds akin to the actual wounds of the crucifixion. The 'literal' intentionality that John attributes to Thomas here can be paraphrased like this:

"Unless I see nail imprints (τύπον) in his hands identical to those originating at the time of the crucifixion; and also thrust (βάλω) my finger into (εἰς) the identical imprints (τύπον) (of the nails hammered into the hands); and thrust (βάλω) my hand into (εἰς) the identical wound originating at the time of the crucifixion, I will not believe."

Thomas seems to be asking for something akin to the original three-dimensional space exactly corresponding to the actual wounds inflicted at the time of the crucifixion.

Jesus' answer famously is: "reach out your finger here ... see ... reach out and thrust your hand into ...". As before, we can paraphrase the meaning of this to get at the core point:

Then he said to Thomas, "Thrust your finger here into the identical wounds from the nails (hammered into me); see identical wounds in my hands. Reach towards me – don't be hesitant! - and thrust your hand into the wound identical with the one originating with the soldier's spear. Stop doubting and believe."

Thomas had stated his conditions for believing it is self-same Jesus raised from the dead. In one-to-one correspondence, Jesus invites Thomas to satisfy each and every condition. He mirrors Thomas's demands. As Schnackenburg put it: 'The expressions are, indeed, somewhat altered (that belongs to a good narrative style) but, factually, Jesus acts exactly in accordance with the disciples' demand' (Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to John* vol. 3, 333). And Barrett is surely right to say: 'Thomas was offered exactly what he sought' (Barrett, *The Gospel According to John*, 606).

Nevertheless, when John has Jesus show him *exactly the same wounds* – as in *the same wounds inflicted at the time of the crucifixion* - Thomas is confronted with a reality utterly beyond what he imagined would have satisfied his demand: 'the differing size of the two wounds is crudely

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<sup>25</sup> Presumably those such as Kostenberger who describe Jesus showing scars in both encounters take John to mean 'marks' rather than (literally) imprints, though a scar could be understood to be an imprint.

underscored (a finger can probe the nail wound but the side wound is large enough for a whole hand)', (Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, 1033). In this context it is surely right to say that the great Catholic modernist Alfred Loisy's charge of naivete [*plutôt naïve*] is misplaced (Loisy, *Le Quatrième Evangile*, [Paris: Emile Nourry, 1921], 510) Brown agrees:

qualified as naïve the idea that there was still a gaping wound in the side of the body, but one wonders whether he would not have also judged it naïve had the risen body appeared with wounds healed' (Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, 1026).

Jesus' appearances were short and sharp and discontinuous encounters such that Jesus 'walking around' with his wounds – or (as we will see) passing through solid objects - does not accord with the facts.<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, discriminating between, on the one hand, the same wounds inflicted *by the crucifixion*<sup>27</sup> and, on the other, numerically the same wounds inflicted *at the crucifixion* - such that transcendence of time was involved – would not have

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<sup>26</sup> As Barth put it the resurrection appearances 'consisted of a series of concrete encounters and short conversations between the risen Jesus and his disciples. In the tradition these encounters are always described as self-manifestations of Jesus in the strictest sense of the term. [...] The execution and termination [of Jesus' self-manifestations] as well as the initiative lie entirely in His own hands and not in theirs. [The disciples'] reaction is a normal one *but it is to an action in whose origination and accomplishment they have no part at all* [my italics] [*Sie reagieren normal menschlich, aber auf eine Aktion, an deren Zustandekommen und Vollzug sie keinerlei Anteil haben.*].' (Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, 144). The risen Jesus as resurrected object can only be apprehended in an action, not as object. This is why the medieval paintings of Thomas inspecting a slit in Jesus' side (typically an amalgam of wound and underlying scar-tissue) – and this is true of all representational visual art no matter how sublime in artistic verisimilitude – cannot but fail to represent the final truth underlying the narrative. Suitably interpreted, a painting such as Otto Dix's 'The Resurrection' would render better what we are after.

<sup>27</sup> Back to our soldier at the front. Suppose this same man who had been killed continued to be dead. Overcome with grief I don't want to believe it is the same man. I ask to check his wounds. His body exhibits the very same wounds. I want to suggest that though this is the sense behind the original intention of 20:24-29 it is not the final one. It does not involve *numerically the same wounds as at the time of injury*. It does not involve transcending the barrier of time. John's final intention understood in this way also entails the moral of 'believing without seeing.'

been an easy matter.<sup>28</sup> This may have been John's perception at a later date when he reconfigured the event in terms of the latter.

To be sure, he had initially resolved the issue entirely in terms of the 'believing without seeing' model. It too is clearly compatible with short sharp encounters but has the advantage of being a simpler model both to articulate and to understand the risen Jesus. That it is much more invested in the language of object made it the first choice of artistic representation. Typically it holds that Jesus' wounds persisted or endured into the present ('resumed' in the resurrection body) - Jesus rose with his scars or wounds such that this is what the disciples *saw in the present*. It was employed in the main to identify Jesus and to explain the continuity of the resurrection body with the crucified body. Jesus 'straightforwardly' continues a feature of past reality into the present.

All this may have been at some point in time part of the original Johannine tradition at 20:19-23 and 20:24-28. But if my argument is valid it was subsequently assimilated into an insight of Jesus' sovereignty over time. (The original view does not of itself imply sovereignty over time since, though it is a miracle of some magnitude, it does not involve Jesus in the present re-doing some feature of past reality that has 'been and gone'.)

According to the later interpretation, both the disciples and Thomas saw the same thing, the *very wounds inflicted at the crucifixion*; but in John's final interpretation only Thomas perceived that this is what he had seen. As John has it Thomas's demand asks for something necessarily anchored to the past - to history past, to time past. He appears to want to see and touch the very same imprint and very same wound *then, now!* For Jesus to show him the actual wounds suffered at the time of the crucifixion would mean the past reinstated in the present. One who could enact this would be one for whom time posed no barrier - *not least because the crucifixion was 'then' and this is 'now.'* Such a one would manifest sovereignty over time. Behind this interpretation of the text is a historical tradition in which, at the original resurrection event, the disciples - and John in particular - did not perceive that Jesus was enacting sovereignty over time. It was subsequently, at a later date, that John made the seminal break-through. In this model the Thomas narrative performs the function of theological commentary on 20:19-20. John came to see that Jesus' showing of his wounds in the Upper Room was *numerically* the same showing of the wounds inflicted at Golgotha. If these wounds were the very same wounds - not merely an 'exact copy' but one and the same wounds - then Jesus' showing here was of *numerically* identical

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<sup>28</sup> There is still essentially a mystery which cannot be eliminated. Perhaps, as was said, the action of showing the wounds came and went in a flash so that the stories involve some kind of literary time-dilation not capturing in language the actual fleetness of the experience.



'wounds at the cross.' For John this meant that the pastness or 'before-ness' of the crucifixion event was no barrier to Jesus doing the very same 'action' again. Time was no barrier. He could, as it were, reach across the chasm of death and time, and re-do numerically the same 'action' - the very same showing of the wounds inflicted at the time of the crucifixion, the identical past or 'before' action again.<sup>29</sup>

#### AN ASYMMETRY BETWEEN JOHN 20:25 AND 20:28

We arrive at the following conclusion regarding a theological asymmetry between, on the one hand, what Thomas says he will believe if his conditions are met (20:25), and, on the other, what he believes at 20:28, namely his confession of, not just Jesus' divinity, but what one might call Jesus' 'Yahweh-ness'. Given the nature of Thomas's demand under the original interpretation, one might expect the denouement to be other than it is.<sup>30</sup> In the original interpretation, Thomas's reference is to believing that the other disciples have 'seen the Lord' and indeed that Jesus is risen. It doubtless meant originally, as a consequence of this, believing Jesus is the messiah, the Son of God and believing in the Heavenly Son of Man Christology informed by such as 20:17. But in fact none of these beliefs may explain the climax of the narrative. The climax is that he believes and confesses Jesus as "My Lord and my God" (20:28). That this is the only place in the New Testament where Jesus is addressed face-to-face as God - in a way that cannot be reconciled with Jesus calling YHWH *his* God - takes the denouement of the story to an unexpected higher theological status or level. Were Jesus to have shown the very same wounds inflicted at the cross, then he would have crossed the barrier of time

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<sup>29</sup> A logician would say the difference between, on the one hand, Jesus' showing of numerically the same wounds, and, on the other, Jesus' numerically the same showing of the same wounds, is one of scope operation. I proffer the observation that John would not have acknowledged such a distinction in this context and that from his perspective they were one and the same.

<sup>30</sup> Conversely: "Unless I see the very imprints and marks on his hands and side I will not believe that he is my Lord my God" - it is not only that Thomas saying this would deprive the ending of its dramatic impact; it is that it would attribute to him an understanding of his demand - and what he will encounter - that he doesn't actually have. The point is that Thomas does not know that sovereignty over time is in effect what he has demanded; or rather he does not know that this is, in effect, what Jesus is going to show him. And perhaps it is not he but John who knows the awesome import of Jesus' action.

separating 'ordinary mortals' from their past and ultimately in the course of time from themselves. He would have enacted sovereignty over time.<sup>31</sup> He would justly be "my Lord and my God"

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Had Jesus died and that was the end of it, his past would be past and he would have had no future. Conversely, if Jesus had been resurrected in the way Lazarus was, his past would still be past though he would now have a future (a limited one). But suppose now counterfactually Lazarus' resurrection had been in fact to everlasting life. And suppose that Jesus' resurrection had been this too. However monumental this is, it would not impinge one whit on Jesus' receding past. His receding past is still a reality in the way that Lazarus' past is - no matter that Jesus is everlasting (his time is endless). The fact that Jesus re-enacts not merely generically the same action but numerically the same action - a 'past' or 'before' action actually executed (again) - means something rather substantial, namely that: time is subject to him in that the action in question is not 'lost' - 'welded' to the 'past' or the 'before'. In particular, time is subject to Jesus such that his past has not receded into the past but is 'present.'

The objective ordering of time was for the ancients (as it remains for us) a fundamental given of creaturely life.<sup>32</sup> Ostensibly, the 'numerically the same' action belonged irredeemably (without redemption) to the past. It belonged to the 'before.' If it took place 'then' or 'before', then it necessarily took place 'then' or 'before', such that the following seemed to be an irrevocable truth: once an event took place, the very same event could not take place at another time. It could not take place at any *other* time - because then it would not be exactly (numerically) the *same* event. It was fixed in its place in terms of its 'when-ness.' It could be imitated, 're-enacted' - *copied* - but *it itself* - the very same event or action - it itself could not, despite Proust's

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<sup>31</sup> Evidence for this may be the awkward fact that Thomas's confession at 20:28 - the real climax of the narrative - is in fact overshadowed by 20:29 as the concluding verse to the narrative. It is plausible to infer that the latter was the original conclusion to the 'believing without seeing' interpretation and 20:28 was inserted later. But my argument does not depend on it.

<sup>32</sup> As creatures we are subject to time, time is not subject to us. In contrast, the risen Jesus is not inexorably subject to the objective temporal ordering that determines the ordinary trajectory of our actions and indeed the events that constitute our lives. To say "Jesus is Lord of time" is to say not only that he is not a subject *of* time, it is also to say that time is subject to Jesus and time is a subject *of* Jesus.

efforts on behalf of great art in *A la Recherche du Temp Perdu*, be 're-done.' For to do that would be to do numerically the same action in time and this would mean being in sovereign control of time itself. It would mean the subversion of Origen's understanding of time (and space) as the very forms of creation, and in Kant's terms a violation of the transcendental aesthetic basic as it may be to the anthropology of time and indeed space.<sup>33</sup>

Ultimately the history of the Johannine literature may witness to the fact Jesus re-orders time, manipulates time - superimposes one time on another - as a film-maker might when s/he cuts and pastes celluloid film. In other words, Jesus does to time - and therefore to the reality it encompasses or contains - what the film-maker does to celluloid film. Nevertheless, the analogy of Jesus as a divine film-maker cannot do justice to the reality; it is rather that Jesus is able to do to the fabric of time what a film-maker is able to do to the fabric of film. Time of course is not a fabric like celluloid film so it is the very fact that Jesus can 'cut and paste' something as evanescent as time that is the true miracle, and testifies to his divinity in a way that integrates the Heavenly Son of Man Christology into a new Christological and Patrological matrix.

One reason the Greeks thought that time and space were eternal is because they could not imagine them being destroyed; it was like trying to

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<sup>33</sup> Though space is beyond the scope of this essay one can plausibly posit the view that more or less the same time as the author of the Fourth Gospel re-imagined the profound theological implications of the risen Jesus in terms of time, he may have conceived of Jesus' standing in the Upper Room in terms of his enactment of sovereignty over space. This interpretation would provide additional evidence that Jesus' sovereignty over time was at least part of the intentionality he inscribed in verses vv. 24-29. Conversely, that John had sovereignty over time in mind at vv. 24-29 makes it more likely that he had sovereignty over space in mind at 20:19-20 (and 26). Even were one sceptical about the validity of this exegetical or hermeneutical principle of interdependency, one could not really dispute that multiple independent 'presences' like this are relevant to a judgement of increased probability. In fact I hold that John 1:1-5 (and 1:1-3 in particular), John 21, and the final intentionality behind the Apocalypse are all relevant to the Johannine intention behind 20:24-29. This may mean that historically-minded exegetes should be committed to the kind of semantic holism taught by Davidson and Quine. See Davidson, *Essays in Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford, OUP, 1982); Quine and Ullian, *The Web of Belief* (Massachusetts: Harvard, 1974). This may make the results of exegesis less stable - the claims about intentions are necessarily 'mere theories' - but that is the truth of it.

catch the wind (to quote Bob Dylan).<sup>34</sup> Plato and Aristotle both thought of the forms of creation, time and space in this way. Objects could be destroyed or generated; events could be brought about – this too by human machination; but time and space eluded this kind of manipulation. Mere physical puissance could have no impact on them. John may have been only too well aware that the greatest empire the world had ever seen, the Roman Empire, may (appear to) have sovereign impact over events and objects, defined for all practical purposes as history and the human beings that comprise that history. But sovereignty over time and space – the very forms of creation as Origen put it supervening over events and objects respectively, is strictly - always - the remit of God.

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<sup>34</sup> See Richard Sorabji for a very illuminating account of this, Sorabji, *Time Space and the Continuum: Theories in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (London: Duckworth, 1983).