On reading an earlier draft of this small study, Maarten Menken did not agree with the argument I had proposed. Such good-natured exchanges are, of course, of the essence of collegiality, and hence I am delighted to have the opportunity to contribute the finished piece to this volume in his honour. I look forward to further valuable debate with Maarten, a very fine scholar and a good friend.

As is often the case, the present study arose unexpectedly as part of a larger project. The project involved gathering information on how John repeats material which his readers already know from earlier in the gospel. It could be expected, therefore, that sooner or later John 10:40 in relation to 1:28 would come into the exercise; what could not be expected, however, was that this investigation would take on a life of its own and that 10:40 and related texts would give rise to a fresh perspective on the enigmatic reference to “Bethany beyond the Jordan” in the earlier verse.

I embarked on the investigation already aware of Pierson Parker’s article, in which he argues that πέραν in the phrase πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου in 1:28 must mean ‘opposite’ rather than ‘across’, so that Bethany then is opposite the place on the Jordan where John had baptised.1 While perhaps plausible for 1:28, it will not do for 10:40, where John uses exactly the same phrase and the usual meaning “across” is the only option.2 In other words, Parker’s thesis obliges exactly the same wording in John to be read with two different meanings, which does not happen elsewhere and rather defeats the function of 10:40 as a reminder. Indeed, it is one of the weaknesses of his case that in instances of πέραν elsewhere in the

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2 So Parker, with a verb of movement (“Bethany,” 260).
Gospel, which Parker neglects to investigate, the usual meaning “across” seems to suffice.

The problem of the whereabouts of “Bethany beyond the Jordan” seems to have arisen with Origen, in the early third century. Origen, who lived in Palestine (maritime Caesarea), went to look for a place named Bethany on the east bank of the Jordan but failed to find it. Despite the fact that, as he states, almost all the witnesses available to him, including Heracleon’s commentary, read Βηθανία, Origen decided on Βηθαβαρά, with the result that it found its way into the manuscript tradition and exists today as a minority reading. Even more of a minority reading is Βηθαραβά, which is probably just a variant form.3

In recent times, the tendency has been not so much to question the textual evidence as to propose that βηθανία is a corruption of another, similar, place-name. The strongest contender for this is Batanaea, the name of a region North and East of the Sea of Galilee, which has a Hebrew equivalent in the Old Testament name Bashan. Advocates of this proposal include William Brownlee, Don Carson, Andreas Köstenberger, Rainer Riesner and Douglas Earl.4 This proposal relies on conjecture in the absence of manuscript support, a precarious exercise at the best of times,5 and one which I find less than compelling. In particular, I find it difficult to believe that when John—that most painstaking of narrators—tells his readers in 10:40 that Jesus crossed over the Jordan from Judea, what he meant them to understand, without further indication, was that

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3 For Origen’s text with French translation and notes, see Origène, Commentaire sur saint Jean: texte grec/avant-propos, traduction et notes par C. Blanc (5 vols.; SC 157; Paris: Cerf, 1970) 2:284–287. The major textual witnesses and the logic of Origen’s choice are set out accessibly in D.S. Earl, “‘(Bethany) Beyond the Jordan’: The Significance of a Johannine Motif,” NTS 55 (2009) 279–294 (279–280). Earl reports that UBS4 reads βηθανία in 1:28, but only with a C rating (279 n. 2). This estimate reflects a modern judgment, which presumably takes account of Origen’s failure to locate Bethany beyond the Jordan as well as his own alternative proposal. Nevertheless, the fact that βηθανία appears in P66 and P75, both of which antedate Origen, means that its claim to originality remains considerable. For the fullest and most recent discussion of this issue, see W. Willker, A Textual Commentary on the Greek Gospels (8th ed.; 6 vols; Bremen: published online, 2011) 4:33–38.


5 In agreement with Parker, “Bethany,” 258.