THE SHEMEION AT CANA OF THE GALILEE

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It is fair to say that two of the major problems labouring the minds of New Testament scholars today are the quest for the historical Jesus and, closely related to it, the Johannine problem. The honour for the current interest in the last—although for the past century it had never been dormant—must be shared between the fortuitous discovery of the Qumran Scrolls and the Nag-Hammadi manuscripts on the one hand, and the sustained research of Professor Rudolph Bultmann on the other. The decision of the editors to centre this Festschrift in honour of J. N. Sevenster around the Johannine literature is surely indicative of their appreciation of its relevance now. The pattern of Johannine studies had in the meantime become so vast and complex that, barring exceptions like R. Schnackenburg, individual scholars can in general focus their effort only on facets of it. This study is such an effort, and it will concentrate on the miracle reported in John ii 1-11.

Of the seven miracles of Jesus reported in the Fourth Gospel only two are without any parallel material whatsoever in the Synoptics. They are the stories of the raising of Lazarus in xi 1 ff and the water-into-wine miracle at Cana. Now, the lack of a synoptic or any other New Testament witness does not in itself turn this miracle into a problem, but it does add to the cumulative weight of questions concerning its origin and purpose. This is the more so since earlier and contemporary extra-biblical literature do seem to offer parallels to it. Then, the mystery of this otherwise unattested miracle deepens when the author of the Fourth Gospel explicitly and emphatically states: "this is the first semeion which Jesus did . . ." (ii 11). Knowing the Synoptics as he most certainly did, there must have been some very important reason

for him to deliberately recount a Galilean miracle which they did not know, or if they did, did not care to mention, and above all, to number it as number one.

That the author set great store, exceptional store, by this miracle at Cana is evidenced further by the fact that in iv 46 he intentionally reminds his readers of it in the course of the account of another miracle which Jesus performed at this same Cana, the healing of the son of a basilikos. Cana, like this miracle never mentioned by the Synoptics, is mentioned a third time in the Fourth Gospel in xxi 2. Secondary though ch. xxi may be, it recalls, and probably on good tradition, that Nathana'el derives from Cana. Now this person like Cana and like the miracle performed in his home town is utterly unbeknown to the Synoptists. Yet, the Johannine Gospel presents him as one of the first disciples of Jesus, and apparently as a witness of the wine wonder. The scene of this first act of Jesus becomes the more mystifying when one considers that even outside the New Testament there is hardly any reference to Cana in the Galilee. Of the various Cana's mentioned by Josephus only one possibly coincides with that of John. Vita 86 states that it was close to Sepphoris and a temporary headquarters of Josephus during the war of 66-70. One might surmise that its name derived from its Zealot occupants, but this hardly clarifies the performance of the wine miracle here.

Apart from its location at Cana and its total absence in the Synoptic accounts this miracle bristles with further difficulties. How come a simple Galilean village wedding is presided by an official here pompously styled an ἀρχιπρεσβύτερος "the slave who was responsible for managing a banquet" (Arndt and Gingrich)? Both the office and the banquet (triclinium) seem patently out of place in this rural setting.

Mystifying too is the role of Mary his mother and the way in which Jesus is reported to have addressed her. The miracle is emphatically numbered as his first. Mary prompted him to perform it, and seemed to have been so sure of his positive response notwithstanding his rather abrasive answer, that she instructed the waiters to do everything he would tell them. Apart from the question regarding her apparent authority over the catering staff, on what previous experience does she found her faith that he could, and more, that he would miraculously provide in the suddenly arisen wine emergency? The problem becomes even greater if