OBSERVATIONS ON THE FUNCTION, CHARACTER AND LOCALIZATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT TOponym ΓΕΝΝΗΣΑΡΕΤ (MARK 6:53; MATTHEW 14:34)

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In 6:45 Mark reports that, after the miraculous feeding of the five thousand, Jesus sent his disciples to the boat and told them to head off "to the other shore to Bethsaida" (προάγειν εἰς τὸ πέραν πρὸς Βηθσαϊδᾶν). Jesus himself, the evangelist tells us, stayed a little longer to release the multitude and went to pray on a mountain. Late in the evening Jesus saw the boat in the middle of the lake and the disciples struggling against a strong wind. Deep in the night (περὶ τετάρτην φωλακὴν τῆς νυκτὸς) he walked across the lake to join the disciples, and the wind calmed down (6:51, see also 4:35-41—reminiscences are certainly intended!). Instead of travelling on to Βηθσαϊδᾶ they approached the shore and disembarked ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ... Γεννησαρέτ (Mark 6:53). When on land, Jesus was immediately recognized by the crowds, and as he entered "their villages, towns and farms" (6:56 εἰσπορεύετο εἰς κώμας ἢ εἰς πόλεις ἢ εἰς ἁγροὺς) people hurried their sick and infirm to him from the entire region (χώρα) and put them down on the market places (ἐν ταῖς ἁγοραῖς) to get in contact with Jesus and be healed by touching him. All this happens in broad daylight and under the eyes of a huge audience. Mark indicates that Jesus stayed in the region for a while, because no earlier than 7:24 it is reported that he "got up and left from there to the region of Tyre" (ἐκείθεν δὲ ἀναστὰς καὶ ἀπῆλθεν εἰς τὰ ὅρια Τύρου). That means that Mark locates the entire exposition about purity at Γεννησαρέτ on the shores of the Lake of Galilee, too, the summary passage 6:53-56 and the dispute 7:1-24 being tied together by geography.

1 It is a pleasure for me to express my respect and gratitude to Henk Jan de Jonge with an article that combines aspects of archaeology and Landeskunde with the analysis of a passage from the Synoptics, one of the many New Testament fields Henk Jan's energy and erudition has stimulated so much. I thank Roelien Smit for redactional help and—among others—Uzi Leibner, Stefan Münger, Yossi Stepanski and Wolfgang Zwickel for discussing various archaeological and topographical issues with me.
Geography creates that kind of stability that allows for vivid change in topic and audience.

The long passage created through the geographical *Klammer* is no random combination of disparate and unconnected material, but is skilfully divided up in a delicate sequence of sub-units. The main characteristic in the description of Jesus is the oscillating change from publicity and openness (healing, instruction of multitude) to seclusion and secrecy (prayer and instruction of disciples). After the public healings in 6:53-56, the focus shifts to another topic. In 7:1 the Pharisees and some scribes from Jerusalem approach Jesus and ask why his disciples would not keep the *παράδοσις τῶν πρεσβυτέρων*, a question Jesus answers with a detailed legal explanation redefining the concepts of purity and impurity (7:1-13). Then, he calls the ἄχλοι and makes the decision taken against the arguments of the Pharisees and scribes public to everybody (7:14-15). In a third step, Jesus leaves the multitude and withdraws to “a house” to specially instruct the disciples (7:17). This instruction builds up on the two previous passages, generalizes them and draws the fundamental conclusion that all food is pure (7:19) and only unjust actions and evil thoughts make humans impure (7:21-23). The readers are well aware of these issues. They are led on a path of didactic intensivation, they see Jesus interact with various groups and always be on top of events. They not only share the perspective of the “crowd” who sees Jesus as powerful healer and authoritative teacher, but also that of the inner circle of disciples, and are even silent witness to Jesus’ most intimate conversation with God in prayer. That puts the readers in a very privileged and unique position of omnipresence, only surpassed by that of the author himself who is not only omnipresent but also omniscient only to give away to the readers what he knows.

These observations should have made it sufficiently evident that geography plays an important role in Mark’s narrative strategy by structuring and coloring the plot. Intensive research on ancient historiography has abundantly shown that topography is always intentionally used and—even in references as passing as the one at the end of Mark 6—therefore needs to be taken seriously. Moreover, Jens

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2 I have illustrated the role of geography in Matthew’s narrative in J. Zangenberg, “Pharisees, Villages and Synagogues in Matthew’s Galilee. Reflections on the Theological Significance of Matthew’s Geography of Galilee,” in: V.A. Lehnert/U. Rüsen-Weinhold (eds), Lo-