Estudios

Iesus Edens. A Dietary Perspective on the Jesus of the Gospels

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Abstract: This article examines the topic of Jesus' eating and drinking in the Gospels, focusing on passages that depict Jesus consuming food or drinking, experiencing physiological effects related to nutrition, or expressing ideas about bodily processes connected to eating and drinking. The study categorises these texts into seven thematic groups, providing a comprehensive typology of Jesus' material meals in the Gospels. This analysis serves as a foundation for future research on pre-Nicene theological interpretations of Christ's corporeality. Key findings include the prevalence of commensality in Jesus' meals, suggesting its importance in shaping early Christian identity and practices. The Gospels also present physiological notions about eating and drinking, often attributed to Jesus himself, indicating an assumption of his full human corporeality. The texts also illustrate a tension between Jesus' recognition of food's vital role and the prioritisation of his divine mission, sometimes at the expense of his own nourishment. This tension highlights the complex relationship between Jesus' human needs and divine mission. By cataloguing and analysing these passages, this study provides a crucial resource for exploring early Christian conceptions of Christ's body and the theological implications of his eating and drinking practices.

Keywords: Jesus and food, food in the New Testament, corporeality.

Resumen: Este artículo examina el tema de las comidas y bebidas de Jesús en los Evangelios, centrándose en los pasajes que lo representan consumiendo alimentos o bebidas, experimentando efectos fisiológicos relacionados con la nutrición, o expresando ideas sobre los procesos corporales conectados con el comer y el beber. El estudio categoriza estos textos en siete grupos temáticos, proporcionando una tipología completa de las comidas materiales de Jesús en los Evangelios. Este análisis sirve

como base para futuras investigaciones sobre las interpretaciones teológicas pre-nicenas de la corporeidad de Cristo. Los hallazgos clave incluyen la prevalencia de la comensalidad en las comidas de Jesús, sugiriendo su importancia en la formación de la identidad y las prácticas cristianas primitivas. Los Evangelios también presentan nociones fisiológicas sobre el comer y el beber, a menudo atribuidas al mismo Jesús, indicando una asunción plena de la corporeidad humana. Además, los textos revelan la conciencia de Jesús sobre la necesidad de la nutrición para sostener la vida, a veces en tensión con sus compromisos apostólicos. Esta tensión destaca la compleja relación entre las necesidades humanas de Jesús y su misión divina. Al catalogar y analizar estos pasajes, este estudio proporciona un recurso crucial para explorar las concepciones cristianas primitivas del cuerpo de Cristo y las implicancias teológicas de sus prácticas de comer y beber.

Palabras clave: Jesús y la comida, comida en el Nuevo Testamento, corporeidad.

1. INTRODUCTION

This article[1] is the first in a series dealing with pre-Nicene polemical assessments of the material body of Jesus, investigated through the lens of each author's interpretation of the Gospel passages that depict:

1. Jesus eating, drinking or experiencing bodily effects directly attributable to food and/or drink or their deprivation.
2. The disciples or other characters expressing ideas about Jesus' nutrition.
3. Jesus having opinions about what happens to the body as an effect of eating, drinking or the deprivation of food or drink.

In this article, I seek to deal with the issue of Jesus' meals in the Gospels, understood in the material sense, which is not always considered. I have selected and classified the texts I explain in detail. I aim to fill a gap often present in theological scholarship, which tends to quickly move past the *material* sense of the passages in favour of their theological significance. In any case, I have not considered the historicity of biblical texts as a cause of exclusion or inclusion since it

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did not imply a criterion for the Christian authors of the first three centuries.

It is clear from reading the Gospels that Jesus eats and drinks. Nevertheless, it is still necessary to ask systematically: 1) How, what and with whom does Jesus eat or drink? 2) What messages do the texts in which Jesus eats and drinks seek to convey? 3) What physiological concepts can be identified in the texts, and what is their theological significance? 4) What can we say about Jesus' body from the texts studied? 5) Was Jesus an ascetic? And 6) What relationship to food and drink does Jesus promote? In the following pages, I will seek to answer these questions

2. Conceptual Challenges: Framing the Debate on Christ's Materiality in Pre-Nicene Theology

The reception of Christ's message gradually took place during the pre-Nicene period. This reception was not homogeneous since it was determined by the different cultural models the message encountered. Beyond the unity that Greeks and Romans were able to give to the Mediterranean region during the centuries surrounding the first century of our era, the panorama between the different regions of the then-Roman Empire was relatively heterogeneous,[2] which had a notable impact on how Christ's message was interpreted and, along with it, the religious baggage coming from the Judaism of the Second Temple. In this regard, a fundamental principle that must guide any research about the body of Christ in early Christianity is sensitivity to the different cultural, philosophical, and theological patterns that resulted in different *Christianities*, with all the controversial-theological consequences that this implies.

One of the earliest documented controversial issues (cf. 1 Jn 1:1-4), which has had an impact that lasts to this day, was the denial of the corporeality of Jesus, or at least of the plenitude of this corporeality. Behind this lies the complex relationship between God and the world,

[2] On cultural patterns in first-century Mediterranean culture, cf. C. Osiek – D. L. Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches* (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Ky 1997) 36–38.

between the spiritual and the material and, in the cosmological realm, the relationship between the intelligible and the sensible world. Christ's incarnation is a transcendental problem because, by conditioning a central aspect of the leading and, therefore, the normative figure of the Christian faith, it consequently determines all other aspects of this faith: the valuation of sexuality, the function and destiny of human bodies, the ways of celebrating religion, the relationship between sacred and profane, in short, everything that affects the worldview of those who adhere to this message. This is not a problem confined to the period under study, for that initial reception conditioned the very models which, with the passing of the centuries, shaped the current physiognomy of the West.

Since the canonical Gospels were understood from very early on to contain the narrative of the person and work of Jesus, they were the source from which theological reflection developed; along with them, the standard that shaped all the beliefs of the emerging religion were the Jewish scriptures, especially in their Greek translation. However, the reception of all this heritage was conditioned, as has been announced, by various philosophical and cultural models, which determined the application of different hermeneutical categories. These, responding to principles defined by grammar, heterogeneous religious sensibilities and even medicine and physiology, generate interpretations that can even be contradictory. In this context, any research about Christ's body must focus on recognising, highlighting, and explaining the controversial aspects, tracing their ideological background.

The relevance of the problem of the conception of the reality of Jesus' body, its impact on Western theology and anthropological imaginaries, and the context in which this conception is investigated are thus evident. In any case, a more concrete question remains: which aspects of Jesus' life are most eloquent or could have produced an explicit theological stand among the pre-Nicene authors on the issue of his corporeality? I believe the answer lies in all the realities that are intuitively conceivable as the most human. First, these are the biological processes proper to the body, as understood by the ancient authors. I have decided to focus on nourishment, specifically on Jesus'

eating and drinking, because both actions are essential to human life and have a central place in the Gospel stories, Christian life and, particularly, in the generation of Christian identities.

In the paragraphs below, I will briefly illustrate the abovementioned elements: *Gospel accounts*, *Christian life*, and *identity generation*. The theological study of all these aspects requires a preliminary investigation into the material meals of Jesus as depicted in the Gospels, which is precisely what this article aims to provide. By examining the specific instances of Jesus' eating habits, dietary choices, and meal-centered interactions recorded in the Gospel narratives, we can gain valuable insights into the cultural, social, and spiritual dimensions of his ministry. This exploration not only sheds light on the historical Jesus but also offers a unique lens through which to understand his teachings and the symbolic significance of communal meals in early Christian practice.

The Gospel accounts, reflecting paradigmatic aspects of Jesus' historical life, have a context where eating and drinking are central: Second Temple Judaism. Although little studied, the issue of food appears on almost every page of the Old Testament[3] and represents a complex semiotic system using dietary prescriptions.[4] These prescriptions show God's relationship with the world while at the same time governing how members of the Jewish people –and, among them, the early Christians– identify with each other, respond to what they conceive as God's will, and distinguish themselves from other peoples. Thus, eating and drinking in Judaism has a totalising value, for Yahweh's power is conceived as manifest in his ability to control food: he blesses when he feeds and judges when he gives bad food or does not give it.[5] On the other hand, God's word is progressively

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[3] Cf. N. MACDONALD, *Not Bread Alone: The Uses of Food in the Old Testament* (Oxford University Press, Oxford-New York 2008) 2; A. W. DAY, "Eating before the Lord: A Theology of Food According to Deuteronomy," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57/1 (2014) 85.

[4] Cf. F. SOLER, *Orígenes y los alimentos espirituales: El uso teológico de metáforas de comer y beber* (Patristic Studies in Global Perspective 2; Brill-Schöningh, Leiden-Paderborn 2021) 5.

[5] Cf. G. FEELEY-HARNIK, *The Lord's Table: Eucharist and Passover in Early Christianity*, Symbol and Culture (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 1981) 72.

equated with food, which reinforces human dependence by equating it with bodily nourishment, which is indispensable. In Jesus' time, this takes the form of a set of rules that he is expected to follow. It is not uncommon that his religious adherence –and his political loyalty to the Jewish world– is evaluated by his contemporaries based on his relationship to food and the prescriptions surrounding it.[6]

Coming from this mould, Christianity assumes the message of Jesus as programmatic, particularly regarding its relation to eating and drinking. This notion implied a break with Judaism, which, in contact with pagan cultures, reached a point of no return,[7] giving birth to the Christianity known as the *Great Church*. Because of its universalist approach, this form of Christianity was the one that withstood the identity struggles of the first two centuries of our era.[8] The emerging Christianity was thus characterised by the relative and allegorical tenor it attributed to the dietary prescriptions. On the one hand, *relative* because the suitability or not of this or that food now depended on the consciousness of the person consuming it, rather than on an inherent value in the food itself. On the other hand, *allegorical*, because, as Philo had already been doing in the Jewish context, food in Christianity took on non-literal values that referred to other realities,[9] for example, to the animals that serve most efficiently to represent metaphorically what kind of society the Jews should constitute.[10] Beyond this, in any case, the core of Christian life is a *convivial* moment, where eating and drinking are central. The Eucharist, with its bread and wine, is progressively assumed as the primary and elemental mark of the identity itself, thus taking a value that unifies fundamental aspects of

[6] Cf. Mt 11:19; Lk 7:34; Mk 2:13-17; Lk 7:36-50.

[7] Cf. Mk 7:19; Acts 10:9-23; 15:6-21.

[8] Cf. G. Filoramo – D. Menozzi (eds.), *Storia del cristianesimo. L'Antichità* (Editori Laterza, Roma-Bari 2016) 105–108.

[9] Cf. J. N. Rhodes, "Diet and Desire: The Logic of the Dietary Laws According to Philo", *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 79/1 (2003) 122–133.

[10] Cf. H. Eilberg-Schwartz, *The Savage in Judaism: An Anthropology of Israelite Religion and Ancient Judaism* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1990) 125; *apud* D. Kraemer, *Jewish Eating and Identity through the Ages* (Routledge Advances in Sociology 29; Routledge, New York 2007) 20.

Jewish and Greco-Roman culture,[11] generating and transmitting a new identity.

Finally, food selection, preparation and consumption are complex cultural activities that play a determining role in the generation of identities.[12] Human beings colonise raw nature, making every step of the process surrounding eating meaningful: men and women grow, harvest, raise, mix, cook, serve and eat in a way that is sometimes unprecedented,[13] and this represents a kind of semantics with which they describe and transmit who they are, and who have been the men and women who have inhabited specific spaces.[14] This is a more general aspect and the context in which the two elements described above (Gospel stories and Christian life) unfold.

By clearly understanding Jesus' dietary practices and meal-centered interactions in their original context, we lay the groundwork for future investigations. Such study of the reception of Jesus' material meals among pre-Nicene authors can illuminate, decisively and concretely, our understanding of the first Christian identities, not only of the mere valuation of the body but also of the relationship between spirit and matter. This aspect of Christianity, which is particularly controversial, has been at the heart of the religious and theological models of the West up to the present day. The convergence between the more anthropological aspects of eating and drinking and the theological ones additionally offers a particularly relevant entry point, for example, if one thinks from the so-called *paradox of the omnivore* or the *principle of incorporation*.[15] However, before we can fully explore these complex theological and anthropological implications, we must first

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[11] Cf. M. MONTANARI, *Mangiare da cristiani: diete, digiuni, banchetti, storie di una cultura* (Rizzoli, Milano 2015) 26.

[12] Cf. J. ROSENBLUM, *Food and Identity in Early Rabbinic Judaism* (University Press Cambridge, Cambridge 2010) 7.

[13] Cf. M. MONTANARI, *Il cibo come cultura*, (Laterza & Figli, Bari [5]2012) 35–40.

[14] Cf. R. BARTHES, "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption," in C. COUNIHAN – P. VAN ESTERIK (eds.), *Food and Culture: A Reader* (Routledge, New York [3]2013) 23.

[15] Cf. C. FISCHLER, "Food, Self and Identity," *Social Science Information* 27/ 2 (1988) 277–282.

thoroughly examine Jesus' material meals as presented in the Gospel narratives.

All this inevitably surrounds my research, whose central problem is the diverse –and consequently polemical– assessments of the material body of Jesus in pre-Nicene theology, studied from the Gospel texts that show him eating or drinking. Behind this lies a worldview in which two poles, which can be characterised as *inferior* and *superior* or, correspondingly, *sensible* and *intelligible*, are valued in different, even opposing, ways. This is evident from their presence in the biblical texts, where they are found both in their vertical (inferior-superior), i.e., *cosmological*,[16] and horizontal (present-future), i.e., *historical*[17] versions. The omnipresence of these poles is particularly evident in the ideological models of the pre-Nicene authors and their exegesis. The latter is particularly relevant, as it conditions the whole reception of the Bible since the conception of the world as endowed with two dimensions consequently imposes at least two significant dimensions on its texts.[18]

Now, even the mere observation in pre-Nicene thought of these two dimensions –the material and the spiritual– reveals a twofold problem: the value given to each pole and how the relationship between them is conceived. The answers to this problem are heterogeneous and often misunderstood due to theological prejudices and oversimplifications. Examining the Gospel narratives themselves is crucial to address these misconceptions and gain a more nuanced understanding. This article will investigate all occurrences related to Jesus' eating and drinking and the perceptions and ideas surrounding these acts, as outlined in the introduction.

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[16] Cf. R. WILLIAMSON, "Platonism and Hebrews," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 16/4 (1963) 415–424.

[17] Cf. S. FERNÁNDEZ, "'A manifestis, ad occulta'. Las realidades visibles como único camino hacia las invisibles en el Comentario al Cantar de los cantares de Orígenes," in *Sapientia patrum, Homenaje al profesor Sergio Zañartu, s.j.* (Anales de la Facultad de Teología 41; Facultad de Teología, Santiago 2000) 137.

[18] Cf. M. SIMONETTI, *Lettera e/o allegoria: un contributo alla storia dell'esegesi patristica* (Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum 23; Institutum Patristicum 'Augustinianum', Roma 1985) 29.

By grounding the analysis in these specific Gospel accounts, we can better prepare for a systematic and comprehensive investigation of the reception of Jesus' material meals among early Christian authors. This approach can lead to a more accurate understanding of the relationship between the material and spiritual poles, challenging monolithic and often erroneous views of early Christian authors and their theological emphases. For instance, some scholars have projected Platonic philosophy onto Alexandrian authors, creating insufficient understandings that become *canonical* and are used as data for further academic elaborations. However, a closer examination of topics such as spiritual food in the thought of Alexandrian authors like Origen can reveal a more positive evaluation of the material pole than is often assumed.[19]

This systematic examination of Jesus' material meals in the Gospels reveals key patterns and themes illuminating our understanding of how his eating practices were perceived and documented. By grounding the analysis in these specific Gospel accounts, we can better appreciate the nuanced presentation of Jesus' corporeal activities within the gospel narratives, breaking us free from oversimplified categorisations and better appreciating early Christian thinkers nuanced theological perspectives.

3. JESUS' MEALS IN THE GOSPELS

By standardising and categorising the texts, I propose the following thematic typology of the passages in which Jesus is shown as eating or drinking in a material sense.[20] I present them, first, in a synthetic table, which allows precise visualisation of the passages. As some texts can

[19] Cf. F. SOLER, *Orígenes y los alimentos espirituales*, 59–64.

[20] A thorough classification of references to eating, meals and table-fellowship in Luke-Acts can be found in Jerome H. NEYREY (ed.), *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (Hendrickson, Peabody, Mass 1993) 361-362. While Neyrey's taxonomy aims to analyse the ceremonial and social aspects of meals in Luke's writings, my classification focuses specifically on material meals and their physiological implications across the gospels. I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers of this article for bringing this valuable taxonomical work to my attention.

be classified into multiple categories, I have repeated them where necessary.

Table 1 (passages)

Topic		Passages
A	Physiology of eating/drinking	Mt 15:17 (par. Mk 7:18–19); Mt 6:25.31 (par. Lk 12:22–23.29); Mt 15:32 (par. Mk 8:3); Mk 5:43 (par. Lk 8:55); Lk 11:27; Lk 16:24; Lk 24:41–43; Jn 4:13; Jn 21:5
B	Jesus is hungry/thirsty	Mt 4:2 (par. Lk 4,2); Mt 21:18–19 (par. Mk 11:12); Jn 4:7; Jn 4:31; Jn 19:28
C	Jesus eats/drinks with others (commensality)	Mt 9:10–11 (par. Mk 2:15–16; Lk 5:29–30); Mt 26:7 (par. Mk 14:3; Lk 7:36; Jn 12:2); Mt 26:20–21.23.26.29 (par. Mk 14:18.20.22.25; Lk 22:14–16.18.21); Mk 14:14 (par. Lk 22:8.1); Lk 11:37–38; Lk 14:1; Lk 24:41–43
D	Jesus eats/drinks with outcasts	Mt 9:10–11 (par. Mk 2:15–16; Lk 5:29–30); Mt 11:19 (par. Lk 7:34); Lk 15:2
E	Jesus is considered a glutton/drunkard	Mt 11:19 (par. Lk 7:34)
F	Jesus has no time to eat[21]	Mk 3:20; Mk 6,31; Jn 4:31
G	Jesus' drinks during the crucifixion	Mt 27:34 (par. Mk 15:23); Mt 27:48 (par. Mk 15:36; Lk 23:36; Jn 19:28–30)

From a thematic perspective, the picture is wide-ranging. First, there are many passages in the realm of commensality, i.e., texts that

[21] This category is necessary because it corresponds to the expression of a material concern for Jesus' nourishment, even if he responds by referring to a tropological sense. This concern may be expressed by the disciples or by the narrator.

show Jesus sharing the table. Many of these passages use verbs from the semantic field of ἀνάκειμαι, i.e. *recline*, to refer to Jesus' action; I have chosen to include these passages, even though they do not explicitly apply the terminology of eating or drinking to Jesus. I was persuaded in this direction, for example, by the fact that in Mt 9:10, Jesus is said to have sat down (ἀνάκειμαι) at the table where the debt collectors and sinners were with him (συνανάκειμαι). Next, in v. 11, the Pharisees question Jesus' *eating* with these people ("μετὰ τῶν τελωνῶν καὶ ἁμαρτωλῶν ἐσθίει"), not merely that he is *sharing the table* with them. In the parallel account in Mk 2:15–16, instead of ἀνάκειμαι (Matthew), we find κατάκειμαι to describe the action of Jesus, while the same verb συνανάκειμαι is used to refer to the action of debt collectors and sinners. The following verse is slightly different since those who observe Jesus' activity are called "Pharisees" in Matthew, while in Mark, they are called "scribes of the Pharisees". In the case of the Matthew text, what these spectators have seen is understood to be already described in the preceding v., while Mark makes it explicit: "καὶ ἰδόντες ὅτι *ἐσθίει* μετὰ τῶν ἁμαρτωλῶν καὶ τελωνῶν…".

The Lucan account of this scene (Lk 5:29–30) further elaborates on the nature of the meal by describing it as a "μεγάλη δοχή", i.e., a *great feast* or *reception* in honour of Jesus: *δοχή* is etymologically connected to the verb δέχομαι, which, among its senses, has the meaning of receiving someone into one's own home. In Luke, the diners are characterised by the narrator as the "tax collectors *καὶ ἄλλων*" without explicit mention of the ἁμαρτωλοί, who will be introduced by the Pharisees and scribes in verse 30, when complaining to the disciples. In this verse, anyway, the description of Jesus' action is more detailed: Jesus' opponents say that he eats (ἐσθίω) and drinks (πίνω). The Lucan version, with its πίνω seems to have influenced the manuscript tradition of the accounts from Mt and Mk, as can be seen from the insertions to verses Mt 9:11 and Mk 2:16 in some manuscripts of different value. A relevant conclusion from this episode is that the verbs used to describe the action of reclining at the table, such as ἀνάκειμαι and κατάκειμαι, suggest that Jesus is not only *around the table* but also *partakes of it by eating and drinking*. While these verbs reflect the act of *reclining* in the context of the triclinium, in my opinion,

they can also denote *sitting*. Despite the ancient custom of sitting at the table, the Jews had adopted the custom of reclining by the first century AD; however, this was impractical for meals with numerous guests.[22] In any case, this assertion has more merit in texts such as the ones commented here, in which the association between reclining and eating and drinking can be safely deduced. Finally, the significant number of texts in the category of commensality is not surprising since commensality is a motif well suited to the expression of membership and the constitution of identity, which is also reflected in sub-motifs of this category, i.e., Jesus' meals with the outcasts and the claims that he is a glutton and a drunkard.

Secondly, it is significant that many physiological convictions are expressed around Jesus in the Gospels. These include not only the most comprehensive description of the digestive process we find in the NT but also the naturality of hunger and thirst for human bodies, including that of the resurrected Jesus, the effects of hunger and thirst on the body, the impact of water and food on the body, and the claim that Jesus was breastfed. This set of texts is close, in a thematic sense, to the statements that Jesus is hungry or thirsty (although sometimes

[22] Some banquet rooms in public buildings, which we may assume to be larger than those in houses, had up to eleven places for sitting: Cf. C. OSIEK – D. L. BALCH, *Families in the New Testament World*, 194. Smith and Taussig claim that Jesus' meals in the Gospels were always in a reclining position, which they deduce from the vocabulary of the texts and from the application to the 1st century of the text of the *Mishnah Pesahim* (10,1), stating that this text "suggests that it was a custom that derived from an earlier period but was no longer the norm for the later period": D. E. SMITH – H. E. TAUSSIG, *Many Tables: The Eucharist in the New Testament and Liturgy Today* (Wipf and Stock, Oregon 2001) 23. This opinion is not sufficiently proven by the authors, so the position of Jesus in many of these meals cannot be determined based on the terminology in the texts. Regarding rabbinic literature, it is necessary to consider that "scholarship has come more and more to recognize that the rabbis in late Antiquity were a small and, to a large extent, elitist group whose ideas and practices were hardly shared by Jews at large" (D. KRAEMER, *Jewish Eating and Identity through the Ages*, 6–7). In this context, it is not only relevant to consider the representativeness of what the rabbinic texts communicate but also their intention: often, the normative purpose is more important than the descriptive one. Consequently, it cannot be excluded that in meals with many guests in Jesus' time, the position of diners was seated at the table.

the texts express the concern that the teacher does not have time to eat) and to the drinking scenes in the context of the crucifixion.

Having elucidated some general issues, it is possible to carry out a more detailed analysis of each category.

3.1. Eating/drinking physiology

The first group of texts contains passages in which beliefs relating to the physiology of eating and drinking are expressed. These may be shown implicitly by Jesus, by other characters around him, expressed explicitly through medical vocabulary, or by denoting some knowledge of what happens to the body in relation to food or lack thereof. The first thing that stands out from these texts is Jesus' conviction that food sustains life. In a passage concerning the supernaturalness of existence and divine sovereignty, namely Mt 6:25.31, and its parallel (Lk 12:22–23.29), Jesus closely associates the life (ψυχή) of the body (σῶμα) with eating and drinking (ἐσθίω/πίνω). The naturality of these actions constitutes an argumentative opportunity for early Christian authors even to argue for the real humanity of Jesus' body, from the beginning of Jesus' human life, e.g., when it is declared –without anyone denying it– that he was breastfed (θηλάζω; cf. Lk 11:27), to his earthly indwelling after the resurrection (cf. Lk 24:41–43).

This physiological approach is particularly rich since there is also Jesus' knowledge of the beneficial effects of food and water besides the naturality mentioned above of bodily nourishment. He prescribes food to the daughter of the leader of the synagogue after raising her from the dead (cf. Mk 5:43; par. Lk 8:55), showing that food strengthens the weak body or, in another possible interpretation, that eating is a sign of good health.[23] Water, for its part, has in the view of the Jesus of the Gospels refreshing effects (καταψύχω; cf. Lk 16:24), although this effect is not lasting (cf. Jn 4:31), nor is the life-giving capacity of food

[23] This literary motif has close parallels in rabbinic literature, cf. H. STRACK – P. BILLERBECK (eds.), *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, vol. II (C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, München 1956) 10.

(cf. Jn 4:27,58[24]). Consequently, not drinking produces the opposite of refreshment, whereas whoever does not eat faints (ἐκλύω; cf. Mt 15:32; Mk 8:3).

Finally, it is remarkable how the evangelists place the most comprehensive description of the food cycle on the lips of Jesus, with rich recourse to technical language from the physiological field. Let's consider collectively the texts of Mt 15:17 and Mk 7:18–19 (the pericope of Jesus on the pure and impure). From these texts, it is possible to deduce that, in the view of the Jesus of these Gospels, food enters (εἰσπορεύω) the human being through the mouth (στόμα), passing, from there, to the intestines (κοιλία) in order, then, to be expelled (ἐκβάλλω; ἐκπορεύω) into the latrine (ἀφεδρών). For the *passing* between the mouth and the bowels, the verb χωρέω is used, and its physiological sense is clear to early authors.[25] Christian authors used these texts, taking theological advantage of all their physiological nuances, and Origen is a good example.[26]

3.2. Jesus is hungry/thirsty

The second group of texts brings together passages in which Jesus is described as hungry or thirsty or those around him perceive him to be hungry or thirsty. Regarding Jesus' hunger, it is striking that, on all occasions, this is presupposed by the narrator or the disciples. The first scene in this category relates to the forty days before the beginning of Jesus' public mission; in these, he fasted (νηστεύω; cf. Mt 4:2), i.e., *did not eat* ("οὐκ ἔφαγεν"; cf. Lk 4:2). Both accounts agree that, after the time of not consuming food, Jesus was hungry (πεινάω). The second scene referring to Jesus' hunger shows him seeking his food and, as in the previous scene, it is the narrator who assumes that this is because

[24] While Jn 4 *passim* reflects ideas about food, both its highly theological context and the lack of parallels in the Synoptics have persuaded me not to include it in a systematic survey of the pre-Nicene authors. Exploring Origen and other relevant authors suffices to realise that it is a text quickly interpreted in a theological sense, with no qualms about literal or biological aspects. Otherwise, these texts do not apply to the material body of Jesus.

[25] Cf. HIPPOCRATES, *De semine, de natura pueri, de morbis iv* 34; 47; 55; 57; *De mulierum affectibus i–iii* 25.

[26] Cf. F. SOLER, *Orígenes y los alimentos espirituales*, 21–30.

he was hungry (πεινάω; cf. Mt 21:18; Mk 11:12). On this occasion, Jesus expects the fig tree (συκῆ) to provide him with fruit (καρπός). The scene is important because, in addition to showing Jesus' hunger and the fact that he is searching for his food by himself, it is the only one that explicitly indicates a food item –other than bread and lamb– that Jesus would like to eat; this would be the fig (σῦκον). The last scene about Jesus' hunger occurs around Jacob's well, shortly after his dialogue with the Samaritan woman. On this occasion, it is the disciples who assume Jesus' need and ask him to eat ("ῥαββί, φάγε"; Jn 4:31).

The scene of Jesus and the Samaritan woman is interesting, for as the narrative indicates, Jesus was exhausted (κοπιάω: Jn 4:6) by the journey. As seen in Galen,[27] the terms κόπος/κοπιάω, which, in a general sense, refer to fatigue and exhaustion, in the medical context refer quite precisely to pain or muscular stress resulting from physical exercise. While not all of Jesus' exhaustion can be attributed to the deprivation of water or food, the account is rather explicit in suggesting not only rest as a remedy for fatigue but also drinking water and, in the mouths of the disciples, eating. The scene in Samaria takes place in the context of a transfer between Judea and Galilee; the distance between these two regions is about 130 kilometres (taking Jerusalem and Tiberias as the starting and finishing point, respectively), which places the encounter about halfway through the trip. It is not surprising, then, that the disciples assume that Jesus was hungry, especially if they have heard that the Master has just asked a Samaritan woman for a drink ("δός μοι πεῖν": Jn 4:7). The distance of the journey, and the explicitness of Jesus' thirst are not overlooked by ancient authors. Origen, for example, depicts that day as hot and summery, and consequently, Jesus' body reacts like any other human body being thirsty.[28]

Finally, in Jn 19:28, again we find a thirsty Jesus, to the point that he exclaims that he is thirsty (διψάω). In this crucifixion passage, Jesus finally receives (λαμβάνω) the sour wine (ὄξος; cf. Jn 19:30). When

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[27] Cf. GALENUS, *De sanitate tuenda* III, 1–6. The relationship between physical fatigue and food or drink is found in *De sanitate tuenda* III, 8 (Kühn 203 ff.).

[28] Cf. *Commentarii in evangelium Joannis* Fr. LII (GCS OW IV 526,16–17 Preuschen).

comparing the texts referring to Jesus' hunger with those referring to his thirst, it is striking that only *thirst* is put on his lips (which occurs only in John's Gospel).

3.3. Jesus eats/drinks with others (commensality)

The third category contains texts in which the central theme is commensality.[29] As seen in *Table 1*, this is the numerically most abundant set, reflecting this topic's fundamental value in the ancient world. Through the texts in which Jesus is seen eating and drinking with other commensals, the Gospel authors seek to express the vital communion with his person and message, codifying, through commensality, not only ideas but also practices in the field of communal cohesion and ritual, some of them revolutionary; this codification is not primarily descriptive, but instead seeks to generate and transmit the values that it portrays. In my work, I have not primarily considered this anthropological sense of commensality since the research aims to identify, justify and catalogue gospel texts that show material meals of Jesus. In this perspective, I have not selected those scenes which are an expression of a highly idealised context, such as those in Jn 6, or others from the realm of the so-called *Last Supper* or of meals reflecting eschatological issues, but only those scenes in which it is possible to assume that an ancient author may have perceived Jesus, in a literal sense, as eating or drinking.

The texts in which Jesus eats and drinks with others are rooted in the fundamental value of communality as participation, which is based on the fundamental naturalness of food for the human being. This naturalness of food for Jesus is attested, even after his resurrection, in a text with a high anti-docetic potential, i.e., Lk 24:41–43, where Jesus

[29] For a more systematic and comprehensive view (in the Gospel of Luke, but applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, to the other gospels) regarding how meals represent a purity system that allows the distinction not only of people but also of things, places and times, see Jerome H. NEYREY, *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, 363–368. Neyrey demonstrates how meals function as complex social codes that communicate messages about hierarchy, inclusion/exclusion, and social boundaries through the classification of persons (who can eat with whom), things (what can be eaten), places (where one can eat), and times (when certain meals take place).

not only asks for something to eat (βρώσιμος) but also receives and consumes it before the disciples ([Jesus] "λαβὼν ἐνώπιον αὐτῶν ἔφαγεν": v. 43). The meals of the risen Jesus constitute a very characteristic motif in antiquity, to the point of forming extra-canonical traditions that circulated, at least, during the first three centuries of our era. In ancient Christianity, the meals consumed by the resurrected Jesus were an argument for his authentic corporeality against the docetists. This argumentative tradition was so strong that, even when its provenance is unclear, it gave birth to a narrative attributed to writings considered canonical in different milieux. A notable example is the passage transmitted by Ignatius in his letter to the Smyrnaeans, and this is the most relevant fragment for the subject under discussion here: "[Jesus] ate and drank together with them as fleshly being (συνέφαγεν αὐτοῖς καὶ συνέπιεν ὡς σαρκικός), even though having been spiritually united with the Father" (*Smyrn.* 3.3).[30] Origen attributed this text to the *De Petri doctrina* (*Prin*, *praef*. 8), while Jerome to the *Gospel of the Hebrews*.

The wide range of vocabulary around commensality allows us to deduce that eating with others was not only crucial for the Jesus of the Gospels but was also usual. The verbs referring to the action of *sitting* or *reclining* in the context of eating are the familiar ones: ἀνάκειμαι and κατάκειμαι.[31] However, Luke presents a distinctive vocabulary, being the only one –in the entire NT– to use, for example, the verb κατακλίνω, or the verb ἀναπίπτω outside the narratives around the miraculous feeding of the multitudes. Matthew and Mark only use the verb ἀναπίπτω in the stories of the multiplication of the loaves (cf. Mt 15:35; Mk 6:40; Mk 8:6), while in Luke, its use is more abundant and includes passages in which Mt and Mk use ἀνάκειμαι or κατάκειμαι (cf. Lk 11:37; 14:10; 17:7; 22:14). While alluding to the act of *reclining* or

[30] A more detailed study of the passage can be found in P. F. Beatrice, "The 'Gospel According to the Hebrews' in the Apostolic Fathers", *Novum Testamentum* 48/2 (2006) 147–195. About Ignatius' assertion of Jesus' human body from this passage, cf. T. W. Proctor, "Bodiless Docetists and the Daimonic Jesus: Daimonological Discourse and Anti-Docetic Polemic in Ignatius' Letter to the Smyrnaeans", *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 14/1 (2013) 183–204.

[31] Cf. Mt 9:10–11 (par. Mk 2:15–16; Lk 5:29–30); Mt 26:7; Mt 26:20 (par. Mk 14:18). These verbs are also used with the prefix συν.

sitting on the ground, all these verbs do not allow us to deduce that this was Jesus' position at all the meals described with these words in the Gospels.[32] In this context, it is possible to think that the massification of the *reclining* present in the Greco-Roman banquet model impacted the vocabulary used in the NT to denote the eating position, narrowing it down but not necessarily expressing the praxis. As evidence, in my view, the radical change in vocabulary is eloquent: in the NT, there are no references to *sitting*, except for the use of καθίζω in 1 Cor 10:7 (which is a quotation from Ex 32:6); in contrast, the OT almost always uses verbs from the semantic field of *sitting* to denote the same action.[33]

The vocabulary is also broad in describing at what hours the Jesus of the Gospels ate. First, we find it applied the general reference "φαγεῖν ἄρτον" to Jesus (Lk 14:1; cf. Mk 3:20), which is not to be understood in a specific sense since ἄρτος, i.e., bread made in different ways and from various ingredients, being the staple food, metonymically designates all food. However, it can be deduced that a formal meal would not be called this way. Alongside the general reference, we find other more precise expressions that better illustrate Jesus' insertion in the daily meals, which the evangelists naturally reflect. In Lk 11:37–38, we find the verb ἀριστάω and the noun ἄριστον and, although the timing of meals has mutated over the ages, the action of eating referred to with these words can undoubtedly be placed around noon.[34] Although it is impossible to identify this meal's time precisely, it can be thought of as the day's first meal.

Along with this midday meal, Jesus is also described as eating in the context of a supper, i.e., the paradigmatic evening δεῖπνον, which is

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[32] I have addressed this in more detail in footnote 22 of this article. An interesting analysis of the positions of the diners at the meals in the Gospels can be found in J. Bolyki, *Jesu Tischgemeinschaften* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 96; Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 1998) 34–38.

[33] The analysis of the term τράπεζα, in my opinion, supports my conclusion. Cf. L. Goppelt, "Τράπεζα," in G. Kittel (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Eerdmans, Michigan 1972) 210–211.

[34] Cf. J. P. Alcock, *Food in the Ancient World*, (Food through History; Greenwood Press, Westport 2006) 182–83; J. Wilkins – Sh. Hill, *Food in the Ancient World* (Ancient Cultures; Blackwell, Malden, Oxford 2006) 72; D. E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis 2003) 20.

regarded as a special occasion for the expression of identity[35] (cf. Jn 12:2). At the same time, it is clear that the use of the noun δεῖπνον is preferably Johannine. In the Synoptics, Jesus is never said to partake of a δεῖπνον. Instead, the term is reserved for uses in a pedagogical context, and usually in a negative sense: 1) to criticise the scribes and Pharisees who seek the first places (Mt 23:6 and its parallels, Mk 12:39 and Lk 20:46); 2) to describe the banquet given by Herod on the occasion of his birthday (Mk 6:21); 3) to insist on not expecting retribution from one who is invited to dinner (Lk 14:12), a message reinforced by the parable of the dinner guests who do not show up (Lk 14:16;17;24). In contrast, Jn uses it in the case just described (Jn 12:2: a supper is prepared for Jesus by Martha, Mary, and Lazarus), and also, in a very significant and characteristic way, to describe the Last Supper, both at the moment (Jn 13:2;4), and by recalling that the beloved disciple was reclining next to Jesus (Jn 21:20). The verb δειπνέω is used only two times in the Gospels, both in Luke: 17:8 and 22:20. This last text is in the context of the Last Supper and is the narrator who uses δειπνέω. However, the context of Lk 5:29 allows us to situate the Lucan δοχή also in the time and ideological perspective of the δεῖπνον as a space favourable for instruction and the generation of identity. Furthermore, the formulae of Lk 5:29 and Jn 12:2 are very similar ("ἐποίησεν δοχὴν" and "ἐποίησαν αὐτῷ δεῖπνον", respectively): this reinforces the association between δοχή and δεῖπνον.

In this group of texts, it is also possible to place, finally, the passages in which Jesus *eats the Passover*, which is the space of commensality that most marked Christianity. For this reason, given the idealised framework of the accounts, which consequently gave rise to numerous interpretations that quickly left aside the material aspect of Jesus´s eating, I have exclusively selected the verses in which Jesus is most probably eating. The phrase "φαγεῖν τὸ πάσχα" (Mk 14:14 and its parallel account, Lk 22:11) is a fixed formula –already in the Greek of

[35] Cf. a summary, with bibliographical reference, in F. SOLER, *Orígenes y los alimentos espirituales*, 10–13.

the Septuagint– indicating *eating the paschal lamb*.[36] It is, therefore, very likely that the accounts in this category have as their primary setting the actual Passover meal, despite the discordant dating proposed by Jn for the *Last Supper*.[37] In some of these passages, it is particularly significant that Jesus applies to himself the desire to eat, using the verb ἐσθίω[38] (although the narrator also does so[39]), or to drink, utilising πίνω.[40] Also notable is the use of the verb ἐμβάπτω, whose only occurrence in the NT is in Mt 26:23 and its parallel, Mk 14:20. This verb, which refers to the act of soaking a piece of food in a sauce or liquid (as in ὄξος, for example) and which does not appear in the Septuagint, is typical of the accounts of eating, as seen, for instance, in its numerous occurrences in Athenaeus's *Deipnosophistae* and the works of Aristophanes.

Regarding the *paschal lamb*, however, it is essential to note that meat does not even appear in the lists of meals expected for the poor,[41] and it was both the most desired and the least accessible food. Its regular consumption was a sign of status among the rich, while exceptional consumption marked special times of the year for the poor.[42] On the other hand, fish was more accessible. Still, its consumption varied

[36] Cf. J. JEREMIAS, "Πάσχα," in G. KITTEL (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Eerdmans, Michigan 1968) 897; 899.

[37] In Jn, the Last Supper is celebrated 24 hours in advance, i.e. on the night between the 13th and 14th of Nisan. This timeline probably sought to date the death of Jesus in the evening of the 14th, coinciding with the slaughter of the lambs and thus associating Jesus with the true paschal lamb. Cf. J. JEREMIAS, "Πάσχα," 899–901.

[38] Cf. Mk 14:14 and par. (Lk 22:8;11); Mk 14:18.

[39] Cf. Mt 26:20–21 and par. (Mk 14:18); Mt 26:26 and par. (Lk 14:22).

[40] Cf. Mt 26:29 and par. (Mk 14:25 and Lk 22:18).

[41] Cf. *Mishnah Peah* 8,7. Cf. J. ROSENBLUM, *Food and Identity in Early Rabbinic Judaism* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2010) 18.

[42] Montanari calculates the annual consumption of meat between one and two kilos. The exceptional nature of meat consumption is explained by a practical reason since raising animals for meat production is much more expensive and inefficient than raising them to obtain products such as milk, eggs, or wool. Cf. J.-L. FLANDRIN – M. MONTANARI (eds.), *Histoire de l'alimentation* (Fayard, Paris 2008) 109–110. The same argument is found in D. KRAEMER, *Jewish Eating and Identity through the Ages*, 15–16.

considerably according to the possibilities of access and preservation,[43] although, anyway, it was not much consumed, due in part to the distance from the sea of the area of the *Promised Land* inhabited by the Jews and in part to the fact that the Mediterranean adjacent to the Palestinian region was a poor environment for marine life.[44] Proteins of animal origin, such as eggs and a wide variety of dairy products, were more accessible[45] and, therefore, more likely to have been consumed by Jesus.

Finally, in the context of the passages in this category of commensality, the use of the noun τράπεζα is relevant. Its most straightforward translation is *table*. However, this should not lead the reader to think that it is necessarily a table like the contemporary ones, since in antiquity, a τράπεζα had different versions. Yet, all imply a delimited space made of a material of greater or lesser rigidity (leather or wood, for example), whose purpose is to keep the food separate from the floor. Its most notable variation, along with the material of manufacture, is the height at which it is placed, as it can be a kind of tablecloth set at ground level or varying heights, depending on the body's position when eating.[46] In Jesus' socio-cultural context, it is most likely that meals involved some kind of table, low or high.[47] The noun τράπεζα occurs nine times in the Gospels, though only four times with a sense linked to eating (the other five refer to the table at which the exchange of coins takes place). Of the times in which it has a commensal meaning, two emphasise the gap between those who eat at the table and those who eat what falls from it (lords/dogs in Mt 15:27 and its parallel Mk 7:28. Rich/poor Lazarus in Lk 16:21), while two are in the context of the Last Supper. Of these, I have only selected Lk 22:21 (the hands of Jesus and his betrayer at the same table) since the text in Lk 22:30 refers to the eschatological table. From all these texts, it emerges that in the Gospels the τράπεζα is an object ideologically

[43] On meat and fish, cf. A. McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists: Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals* (Oxford Early Christian Studies; Clarendon Press, Oxford 1999) 41–43.

[44] D. Kraemer, *Jewish Eating and Identity through the Ages*, 16.

[45] Cf. J. Rosenblum, *Food and Identity in Early Rabbinic Judaism*, 21.

[46] Cf. L. Goppelt, "Τράπεζα," 209.

[47] Cf. L. Goppelt, "Τράπεζα," 211.

linked to wealth and abundance, to the point of constituting an eschatological motif.[48]

3.4. Jesus eats/drinks with outcasts

In this category, I have classified texts that show Jesus eating and drinking with people whose acceptance, for the narrator or other characters, is difficult or impossible, which is why they are rejected, disregarded, or ignored. In the language of the texts in this category, these are sinners (ἁμαρτωλός) and tax collectors (τελώνης). Both words have, in this context, the function of denoting those who contravene the precepts of Jewish law, not only living in a publicly immoral manner under those laws but also living on the income of an occupation considered dishonest. In any case, since for Pharisees, an ἁμαρτωλός does not follow the Pharisaic interpretation of the law, and this would, in Jesus' time, describe most people,[49] it is not possible to define the term precisely in this context. On the other hand, Judaism at the time of Jesus regarded the τελώνης as criminals of the worst kind, as can be seen, for example, in Philo, *De specialibus legibus* III 159–162, concerning the cruelty of the τελώνης, who not only instils terror in debtors but effectively tortures their families, friends and neighbours.

This negative judgement, especially against tax collectors, is transversal in antiquity and Christianity.[50] However, Jesus opposes these conventions through an explicit exercise of commensality, i.e., participation. On the one hand, he sits at the table alongside this group of people identified as sinners and tax collectors, both by the narrator and by Jesus' opponents.[51] Along with this action, the texts explicitly place on the lips of the Pharisees the confirmation that Jesus has been eating and drinking with these people. The text of Mk 2:16 is particularly explicit in noting that the scribes and Pharisees *see* (εἶδον)

[48] Further arguments and examples of the link between food abundance and eschatology can be found in F. SOLER, *Orígenes y los alimentos espirituales*, 5–13.

[49] Cf. K. H. RENGSTORF, "Ἁμαρτωλός," in G. KITTEL (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Eerdmans, Michigan 1965) 328.

[50] Cf. O. MICHEL, "Τελώνης," in G. KITTEL (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Eerdmans, Michigan 1972) 103.

[51] Cf. Mt 9:10–11 (par. Mk 2:15–16; Lk 5:29–30).

him eating and drinking.[52] On the other hand, together with the narratives of this commensality, we find Jesus' account of himself: "the son of man comes eating and drinking"[53] and, since he shares table and meal with sinners and tax collectors, he is considered a friend (φίλος) of these since, as we read in Lk 15: 2, to *eat-with* these (συνεσθίει) is to welcome and admit them, as it is possible to deduce from the verb προσδέχομαι. Given the polemical nature of these passages and, in particular, the difficulties of showing Jesus sharing the table with these diners –and thus welcoming them– it has been argued that these accounts have an exceptionally reliable historical substratum.[54]

3.5. Jesus is considered a glutton/drunkard

While the central theme of both texts in this category is related to Jesus' commensality with the outcasts just discussed, it is particularly striking in these texts that the statement about the *son of man*, who comes eating and drinking to the point of being considered a glutton and a drunkard, is directly attributed to Jesus.[55] Beyond the evocations of OT texts such as Deut 21:20 (the stubborn and rebellious son, accused by his parents before the elders of being a glutton and a drunkard and condemned to death by stoning) or Prov 23:20 (the advice of not to be considered between wine bibbers and gluttonous meat eaters), the very language of Mt 11:19 and its parallel Lk 7:34, so

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[52] The houses of the wealthy in Palestine followed Roman construction patterns, meaning that anyone could enter, even uninvited. On this, cf. C. OSIEK – D. L. BALCH, *Families in the New Testament World*, 12–17. Concerning the ἄκλητοι, cf. M. J. MARSHALL, "Jesus: Glutton and Drunkard", *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 3/1 (2005) 47–60. This text, while helpful in understanding the phenomenon of guests entering a meal uninvited, puts forward the thesis that the historical Jesus "typically arrived at meals uninvited" (p. 47), with which I disagree since not only do I consider the data provided by the Gospels as insufficient to conclude this, but mainly because in my view the formula ἐποίησεν δοχὴν, used to describe the organisation of the meal in Lk 5:29, suggests that Jesus was the honouree and therefore the guest of honour at the reception.

[53] Cf. Mt 11:19 (par. Lk 7:34).

[54] C. BLOMBERG, "Jesus, Sinners, and Table Fellowship", *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 19/1 (2009) 35–36; J. P. MEIER, "The Roots of the Problem and the Person", in J. P. MEIER, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, Vol. 1 (Yale University Press, New Haven London 1991) 168–171.

[55] Cf. Mt 11:19 and par. Lk 7:34.

explicit in stating that Jesus drank wine and ate bread, is especially propitious for triggering, among patristic authors, comments about Jesus' meals in a material sense.[56]

In this context, regarding the *realia* of Jesus' diet, it is possible to affirm that, like most of his contemporaries of similar (low) socio-economic status, Jesus' diet must have been not very diversified and likely consisted of very few staples, especially cereals, such as wheat and barley. These were consumed primarily as bread but also as porridge or pasta.[57] Of the so-called *Mediterranean triad* (cereals, olives, and wine), only grains can be found in all the Palestinian region.[58] Bread can be considered of primary importance, constituting about 50% of the daily caloric intake.[59] Because of its better resistance to drought, which allowed it to be grown in more arid regions, barley was more accessible to the poor than wheat. Still, it was considered "food for the donkeys and slaves of the field",[60] while wheat enjoyed a higher status and was considered, in classical Greece, a luxury food.[61]

3.6. Jesus has no time to eat

In this category, I have identified three texts that show how Jesus, given his time on preaching activities, does not have time to eat. In Mk 3:20, the narrator declares that because the crowds gather around Jesus and his disciples, even when he goes home, they cannot even eat. Here, the text uses the generic form *ἄρτον φαγεῖν*, which refers to any meal, excluding formal ones.[62] Mk 6: 31 shows practically the same picture,

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[56] Cf., for example, CLEMENS, *Paedagogus* II,32,1–4.

[57] Cf. A. MCGOWAN, *Ascetic Eucharists*, 38.

[58] Cf. P. GARNSEY, *Food and Society in Classical Antiquity* (Key Themes in Ancient History; Cambridge University Press, New York-Cambridge, U.K. 2002) 14.

[59] Cf. D. KRAEMER, "Food, Eating and Meals", in C. HEZSER (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine* (Oxford Handbooks in Classics and Ancient History; Oxford University Press, New York 2010) 405. For his part, Massimo Montanari raises this figure to 80%, estimating the daily bread ration of a soldier of the period at 800 grams and one kilo, cf. J.-L. FLANDRIN – M. MONTANARI, *Histoire de l'alimentation*, 108–109.

[60] ORIGENES, *HGn* XII,5. Among pulses, rice also fell into this inferior category, cf. GALENUS, *De alimentorum facultatibus* I,17.

[61] Cf. P. GARNSEY, *Food and Society in Classical Antiquity*, 119.

[62] See p. 610 of this article.

although the statement that Jesus and the apostles do not find the right occasion to eat ("οὐδὲ φαγεῖν εὐκαίρουν") is a gloss by the narrator on the attitude of Jesus, who invites the apostles to a deserted place to rest (ἀναπαύω) a little (ὀλίγος). Again, we see in Jesus the concern for nourishment.[63]

Related to the topic of the rest necessary for the health of the body, the third text in this category (Jn 4:31) shows us a Jesus who is tired from his journey[64] and who, in the scene around Jacob's well, has explicitly asked the Samaritan woman for a drink.[65] After the episode has unfolded, the woman leaves Jesus and the disciples, who, knowing first-hand the master's weariness, had gone to buy food in the city.[66] Although in the case of both thirst and hunger the words spoken by Jesus quickly transition to a non-literal meaning, it is clear that the material substratum of the story points to thirst and hunger in a physiological sense. While following the same hermeneutical path as the Gospel, the patristic commentaries on this passage must also make a choice regarding the literal interpretation of the text. For example, Origen's interpretation of this scene in *Commentarii in evangelium Joannis* XIII,203–208 conveys valuable insights into his convictions about nutritional physiology while still applying this physiology to Jesus himself.[67]

3.7. Jesus' drinks during the crucifixion

In this last category, I have gathered the passages that portray Jesus drinking in the context of his crucifixion. There are two scenes: the first takes place before the crucifixion, as soon as they arrive at the place called Golgotha,[68] and the second once Jesus has already been crucified; this last scene is one of the few studied in this article with a parallel in the four Gospels.[69] The details that characterise each of the scenes allow us to confirm that they are indeed two separate moments,

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[63] See p. 605 of this article.
[64] Cf. my comments on the term κοπιάω, note 27 of this article.
[65] Cf. Jn 4:7.
[66] Cf. Jn 4:8.
[67] Cf. PAMPHILUS, *Apologeticum pro Origene* 113.
[68] Cf. Mt 27:34 and par. Mk 15:23.
[69] Cf. Mt 27:48 and par. Mk 15:36; Lk 23:36 and Jn 19:28–30.

a conclusion that is reinforced by the difference between what is mixed with the wine given to Jesus in the first scene (χολή, in the case of Mt and σμύρνα, in the case of Mk), that is, two different substances, although with an equally bitter taste. Both scenes are rich in detail, and beyond the differences between the Gospels, there is an apparent coherence in the fact that on both occasions, Jesus did drink what was offered to him, although on the first occasion, only enough to taste it.

The first scene (Mt 27:34; Mk 15:23) takes place before the crucifixion, during the journey to Golgotha. Jesus is offered a drink by the soldiers who escort him. It is precisely at this point that we find the first difference between the Gospels: in the text of Matthew, Jesus, before refusing the wine, tastes it (γεύω), while in Mark he did not receive it ("οὐκ ἔλαβεν"). The second difference is that in Matthew, the soldier gives Jesus wine mixed with χολή, which is a generic way of referring to any bitter drink,[70] whereas, in Mark, Jesus is given wine σμυρνίζω, i.e., prepared with an infusion of myrrh (σμύρνα). In my view, since myrrh is bitter, it is possible to say that both accounts agree that the wine had an unusual ingredient of bitter taste, and since one of the texts specifies that this would be myrrh, I see no reason to look for any other meaning for χολή.

Understanding the meaning of the offering of wine mixed with myrrh is challenging. Beyond the hapax σμυρνίζω, unique both in the NT and in the LXX, it is necessary to study more precisely the mixture of σμύρνα with οἶνος. The σμύρνα is a bitter substance obtained from the sap of a tree (*commiphora abyssinica*). This aromatic substance is used in various ways: in the embalming of corpses –and so we find it among the ἀρώματα brought by Nicodemus in Jn 19:39; it also constitutes the main ingredient of the holy anointing oil in Ex 30:23; and is also among the gifts brought to Jesus by the magi in Mt 2:11. About its properties, Dioscorides, a 1st century AD physician, highlights its ability to give warmth (θερματικός), to close wounds

[70] Cf. "χολή" in A. BAILLY, *Dictionnaire grec français* (Hachette, Paris 2000) 2144. On the other hand, while *χολή* may be a translation of the Hebrew *rôsh*, which can be found in Ps 68:22 (LXX) and Jer 8:14 (LXX), in this case, is being used in the general sense of a *bitter drink*, that I have indicated.

(κολλητικός) and to cause drowsiness (καρωτικός), among others.[71] Regarding this last property, there is testimony among the rabbinical texts of a Jewish custom of giving wine mixed with frankincense to those condemned to death to relieve pain.[72] However, both the fact that it is myrrh, i.e. another ἄρωμα that is given to Jesus, and that the text places as the agent of the action a soldier and not a Jew, suggest that this action should not be interpreted as the merciful dispensing of a narcotic.[73]

In addition to the medicinal uses of myrrh, its consumption with wine is well-attested.[74] This custom was intended to change the taste of the wine to make it more pleasant.[75] One of the most valuable testimonies is found in Book XI of the *Deipnosophistae*, where Athenaeus quotes and comments on a fragment of Aristotle's lost work *Περὶ μέθης*.[76] This text informs us of the existence of vessels in which, at the time of manufacture, the clay is mixed with herbs and aromatic plants (ἄρωμα). These vessels, when heated, would not only transfer their flavour to the wine but would also make it less inebriating. According to Aristotle (*apud* Athenaeus), this effect would also be achieved by mixing the wine with an infusion of myrrh and other herbs. This mixture with wine would be so effective that it would not only prevent inebriation but would also turn off (παραλύω) the sexual impulses (ἀφροδίσιος) associated with drunkenness.[77] In any case, wine mixed with myrrh is a finer drink than wine alone, therefore not

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[71] Cf. DIOSCORIDES PEDANIUS, *De materia medica* I,64.

[72] Cf. W. MICHAELIS, "Σμυρνίζω," in G. KITTEL (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, (Eerdmans, Michigan 1971) 459.

[73] In favour of the thesis of the stupefying value of a bitter drink offered to those condemned to death, see the series of rabbinical texts adduced in H. STRACK – P. BILLERBECK, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, vol. II, 1037–1038. In any case, myrrh is not mentioned in these texts.

[74] Cf. A. SCHMIDT, *Drogen und Drogenhandel im Altertum* (Verlag von Johann Ambrosius Barth, Leipzig 1924) 62.

[75] Perhaps this is the meaning of the wine *μυρεψικός* of Song 8:2.

[76] On this lost work of Aristotle, cf. M. JAWORSKA-WOŁOSZYN, "Arystotelesa zaginiony Sympozjon i O winopiciu. Treść ocalałych świadectw i fragmentów / Aristotle's Lost Symposium and On Drunkenness. The Content of The Extant Testimonies and Excerpts," *Peitho. Examina Antiqua* 7/1 (2016) 205–216.

[77] Cf. ATHENAEUS, *Deipnosophistae* XI (Kaibel paragraph 11).

accessible to anyone, and it is used in the context of a *symposium*. Thus, considering several possible interpretations of the scene discussed, I am inclined to think that the offering of the soldiers is nothing more than a further continuation of the mockery and humiliation begun in Mt 27:27 and Mk 15:16 by offering now the supposed king of the Jews a drink considered to be elegant. This interpretation is corroborated by Pliny's assertion that in antiquity, the more noble wines (*lautissima*) were those spiced with myrrh ("*myrrhae odore condita*").[78] Jesus rejects this drink, as well as the insinuation contained in the mockery of the soldiers.

The second scene in this category depicts Jesus crucified in the context of his last utterances before his death. As I indicated, this account is one of the few studied here with parallels in all four Gospels. The texts show slight differences, which do not affect the fact that Jesus seems to drink what is offered to him. Regarding the differences, it is possible to consider them as complementary. From Mt 27:48, we know that someone hears Jesus crucified, runs, soaks a sponge (σπόγγος) and gives him to drink (ποτίζω) the wine called ὄξος with the help of a reed (κάλαμος) since the height of the cross did not allow direct contact. Mk 15:36 presents the same vocabulary and differs only by attributing an ironic mockery to the one who gave Jesus to drink ("Ἄφετε ἴδωμεν εἰ ἔρχεται Ἠλίας καθελεῖν αὐτόν"). Lk 23:36 is briefer, although it specifies that the one who gives Jesus the ὄξος to drink while mocking is a soldier. Jn 19:28–30 is the most extended text and begins with Jesus himself, declaring to be thirsty: *διψῶ*. This statement is not strange in John since the passage of the Samaritan woman had already characterised Jesus as one who asks for water to drink. There was near the cross a vessel (σκεῦος) filled with ὄξος in which they soaked a sponge and offered it to Jesus using a stick, which this time is not a generic κάλαμος, but a branch of ὕσσωπος (v. 29). This plant cannot be *hyssopus officinalis*, of the same family as mint, as it did not grow in the region of Palestine but *origanum maru*. Moreover,

[78] PLINIO, *Naturalis historia* XIV, XV.

the latter variety grows to one metre (while the former is only up to 60 centimetres), making it more suitable for giving Jesus to drink.[79]

Concerning the ὄξος given to Jesus to drink, it is not what we understand as vinegar today but a sour wine of poor quality. This was given as a ration to soldiers along with bread and was a popular drink in warmer regions,[80] even if in the Jewish world it was subject to prescription, at least among the Nazirites (Num 6:3). In this sense, it was customary for soldiers to carry it even during the crucifixions.[81] Finally, the joint use of the stick and sponge raises whether the scene depicts a *tersorium* or *xylospongium*, i.e., a utensil used for hygienic purposes in Roman latrines. If this is the case, the scene would describe the ultimate humiliation of Jesus. In addition to this association of elements, it has been suggested that the *tersorium* was just soaked in vinegar (which would fit well with the ὄξος) between one use and another.[82] For my part, I consider that proving this hypothesis would imply locating a latrine near the crucifixion site. In addition, the text adduced to prove the hypothesis by those who argue that the *tersorium* was cleaned by soaking it in ὄξος[83] contains no such reference, so I tend to consider it an unsubstantiated assumption.[84] I believe this scene shows us the continuation of the humiliations that began before the crucifixion. However, the thesis that we are witnessing a soldier taking

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[79] In any case, it cannot be excluded that the mention of hyssop is related to the fact that it is a plant of ritual relevance, e.g. Ex 12:22, Num 19:18, among others passages.

[80] H. W. HEIDLAND, "Ὄξος," in G. KITTEL (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, (Eerdmans, Michigan 1968) 288.

[81] Cf. C. E. B. CRANFIELD (ed.), *The Gospel According to St Mark: An Introduction and Commentary* (Cambridge Greek Testament Commentaries; Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1959) 458.

[82] Cf. Ph. CHARLIER et al., "Toilet Hygiene in the Classical Era", *BMJ* 345 (17 December 2012), online: https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.e8287.

[83] Charlier et al. draw on Seneca, *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium* 70,20, but this text only describes this gloomy scene: "Nuper in ludo bestiariorum unus e germanis, cum ad matutina spectacula pararetur, secessit ad exonerandum corpus: nullum aliud illi dabatur sine custode secretum: ibi lignum id, quod ad emundanda obscena adhaerente spongia positum est, totum in gulam farsit et interclusis faucibus spiritum elisit".

[84] I have examined through the *Library of Latin Texts* the presence of the combinations *spongia* + *lignum* and *spongia* + *acetum* without finding any text that allows us to go beyond what we read in Seneca.

pity on Jesus, giving him a drink, and mocking him to keep up appearances does not seem improbable. What is clear, in any case, is that this time Jesus does not refuse the offered drink.

4. Conclusion

This article has sprung from the need for a catalogue of Gospel texts in which Jesus can directly relate to food and drink, whether eating, drinking, fasting, or expressing opinions that show his ideas about food physiology. The wide variety of topics in the selected passages has resulted in a typology consisting of seven situations or concepts, which are developed in detail. In this way, this article constitutes the first step in broader research, which seeks to explore the various ideas and imaginaries expressed by pre-Nicene authors surrounding the body of Christ, studied from the particular perspective of the *Iesus edens*. Since nourishment is a necessary condition for the survival of biological bodies, a Jesus who is frequently described in the Gospels as eating and drinking confronts patristic authors (but certainly also contemporary theologians) with the need to consider the authenticity of his human body and, more interestingly, to take a position on a controversial topic.

In the first place, there is a predominance of texts whose context is commensality. This is not surprising, given the fundamental value this has in shaping the identity of early Christianity. Beyond this, the panorama of the texts studied allows us to affirm that Jesus ate with others regularly, not only with his disciples but also with people not accepted by hegemonic sectors of society. The detail and number of these texts, to which could be added others not considered in my research (for example, the multiplications of food), suggest that Jesus, perceiving the sociological value of eating, used it consciously and systematically, in my opinion intending to generate, at least, reflection on the traditional values of society in the context of the inclusion and exclusion of people. These texts' profound impact on shaping Christian communities and their practices cannot be denied.

A second noteworthy finding is the presence of physiological notions around eating and drinking, which are even put on the lips of

Jesus. This reflects not only a medical culture in the Gospel authors – or in Jesus himself– but also the naturalness with which elements related to bodily physiology are assumed. No text indicates that the corporeality of Jesus before his resurrection was different from all other humans, and even after his resurrection, food remains proof of his corporeality, allowing us to extend the value of commensality to unprecedented horizons. Early Christian authors who affirmed the full humanity of Jesus noted this detail and frequently used it as an anti-docetic argument. The fact that the *risen Jesus ate* had such argumentative power that it even constituted traditions that some authors considered canonical.

Finally, Jesus' awareness of the necessity of eating and drinking to sustain life is interesting. This presupposes *his* physiological convictions but goes beyond that, for the gospels show us a Jesus concerned with the nourishment of others. In this awareness, however, there is a tension. On the one hand, Jesus speaks of food without any apprehension, asks for a drink naturally, and is concerned that people should eat, either explicitly for the beneficial effects of food or to avoid the consequences of deprivation. On the other hand, his apostolic commitment leads him to neglect his sustenance, which the disciples notice. In any case, this tension is another indication of the depth of the issue before us and of the need for further study that seeks to develop the theological perspective with a more thoughtful analysis of the physiological and cultural ideas surrounding the Jesus of the Gospels.