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## AGER DAMASCENUS: VIEWS ON THE PLACE OF ADAM'S CREATION

In about the middle of the thirteenth century, the Dominican Burchard of Barby paid a visit to the Holy Places. In the account of this journey that he wrote some decades later, he offers a description of Hebron in which he makes the following remark: *Ager Damascenus distat de spelunca duplici ad magnum iactum arcus, ubi formatus Adam*, 'The *ager Damascenus* lies at a good bowshot's distance from the double cave; Adam was formed there.' The words left untranslated are startling. A 'Damascene field' at Hebron? Indeed this is exactly what he says, and he is followed in this by a number of later authors. Apparently we have to accept the fact that there is an *ager Damascenus*, part of the Hebron area, that has nothing to do with the territory of Damascus in Syria; there, in Hebron, the creation of the first man took place. And if at about the same time Burchard's fellow Dominican Jacobus de Voragine in his *Golden Legend* 51.141 states that the first man *iuxta Damascum, in agro Damasceno dicitur fuisse formatus*, 'is said to have been formed in the region around Damascus, on the Damascene soil', he is just the victim of a mistake. This is what we are told in the impressive study of traditions on Genesis by Hans Martin von Erffa.<sup>1</sup>

Admittedly, the name *ager Damascenus* for a piece of ground in Hebron requires an explanation, and at least two have been offered. In the fifteenth century, another pilgrim to the Holy Land and author of a circumstantial *Euagatorium in Terrae Sanctae, Arabiae et Egypti peregrinationem*, Felix Fabri, declares (III 343 Hassler): *Hoc autem nomen sortitus est hic ager a Damasco, seruo Abrahae, quia forte eum emerat sicut Abraham speluncam duplicem a populo terrae, ut habetur Genes. 23*, 'The field has got this name from Damascus, Abraham's servant, because perhaps he had bought it, like Abraham had bought the double cave from the people of the land, as is mentioned in Genesis 23.' Indeed, in the Septuagint and Vulgate versions of the Bible, the name of Damascus (in full Damascus Eliezer) is used in Genesis 15.2, denoting the son of Abraham's principal servant, the one who was to be his heir should he die childless. It was not an unreasonable guess that this son, once an adult, would be in a position to buy a piece of land near Hebron, where Abraham lived, although, of

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<sup>1</sup> von Erffa 1989, 81, cf. ib. 376, 410. For the view of the *ager Damascenus* as a field at Hebron, cf. the influential seventeenth-century exegete Cornelius a Lapide, S.J., who states in his commentary on Genesis 2 (1881 edition, p. 80): 'Rursum *Adama* (ex qua formatus et dictus est « Adam ») significat terram rubram. Unde ex terra rubra, quæ est in agro Damasceno, non urbis Damasci, sed agri cuiusdam ita dicti, qui est iuxta Hebron, creatum esse Adamum, multorum est traditio.'

course, no such transaction is mentioned in Scripture. But in fact this explanation fails to convince, if only because it is based on a gratuitous assumption, and has never again been proposed, either before or after Fabri.<sup>2</sup> In modern times, Hans Martin von Erffa again has a different suggestion. According to him, *Damascenus* should be taken as a corruption of *adamascenus*, derived from the Hebrew *'adamah*, the word used in Genesis 2.7 for the earth from which man was formed.<sup>3</sup> But *adamascenus* is a ghost word, and a suffix *-(a)scenus* is unknown either in ancient or Medieval Latin. So there seems to be every reason for investigating the purport of the designation *ager Damascenus* afresh.

### 1. Biblical basis

The basis from which the traditions about the place of Adam's creation developed is formed by two passages from the book of Genesis which encompass the account of his stay in paradise. In Genesis 2.7-8 the earliest part of the life of the first man is summarized:

Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed.

In Genesis 3.23 his expulsion from paradise is reported:

Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken.

In the sources that will concern us, the former text was taken to mean that Adam came into being outside the garden, outside paradise, although it was a matter of dispute whether the Garden of Eden was created before or after Adam's creation. In the latter text the 'ground' is the same as the ground in the former, but the question is whether it was meant as the material from which he was shaped or the piece of land from which he was taken. Those anxious to know where exactly Adam had been formed opted for the latter interpretation. However, where then was this piece of land situated? To answer this question, one would follow the usual procedure to find out facts not mentioned in the Bible, namely to deduce them from facts that *are* mentioned there. Three places usually came under consideration: Jerusalem, Hebron and Damascus.

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<sup>2</sup> Rosen 1858, 500 thinks that a later passage in Fabri's *Euagatorium* contains the clue, namely III 354 Hassler (not 'II p. 254'): *In agrum autem quendam uenimus in quo deambulabat Isaac meditando quando Damascus, seruus Abrahae, adduxit sibi Rebeccam puellam uxorem, ut habetur Geneseos XXIV.* A different *ager* must have been meant here, since the preceding pages already deal with the *ager Damascenus*.

<sup>3</sup> von Erffa 1989, 81, cf. ib. 376.

## 2. Jerusalem

Jerusalem is the place where Abraham stood the test of his faith in God. In Genesis 22 the sacrifice of Isaac takes place in the unspecified 'land of Moriah', which 2 Chronicles 3.1 identifies with the hill on which the Jerusalem temple was later built. This place came to be conceived as the middle, the navel of the world.<sup>4</sup> It seemed logical to assume that an event as important as the creation of the first man should have occurred there as well. Christians adopted this view from Judaism, but as for them the overpowering biblical fact concerning Jerusalem was the crucifixion of Jesus Christ on Golgotha, they transposed the precise spot from the Temple Mount to Golgotha. Thus the anonymous Syriac *Cave of Treasures* (between early 3rd and mid 4th century) 2.15-16 states: 'And when he (viz. Adam) rose at full length and stood upright in the centre of the earth, he planted his two feet on that spot whereon was set up the Cross of our Redeemer; for Adam was created in Jerusalem' (trans. Budge).<sup>5</sup> Also the *Breviarius of Jerusalem*, a short text written in about AD 395, declares in chapter 2 (CCSL 175.110): 'There (viz. on Golgotha) Adam was formed. There the Lord was crucified.'

## 3. Hebron

It may be the case that the idea of Jerusalem as the place of Adam's formation was developed from the belief that he was buried there. This development can indeed be observed when we turn to the second candidate, Hebron. In Judaism, at some time opinions were voiced that Adam was buried not in Jerusalem, as had been thought so far, but in Hebron. According to Joachim Jeremias, practical circumstances might have stimulated this change of view: in the period from 135 to 336 Jews were not admitted into Jerusalem; unable to venerate Adam's grave there, they came to believe that he was buried in Hebron.<sup>6</sup> As scriptural underpinning they interpreted the older name of Hebron, Kiriath-arba, not as 'The city of Arba' but as 'The city of four', 'four' denoting the three patriarchs who were buried there (Gen. 25.9-10; 35.27-30; 49.29-31; 50.13), to whom they added the progenitor of the human race, Adam. Jerome took this idea, including the interpretation of Kiriath-arba as 'The city of four', over from Judaism. His biblical basis was Joshua 14.15. This text, which concludes a passage in which the portion of land allotted to Caleb is described, in a literal translation of the original Hebrew reads: 'And the name of Hebron formerly was Kiriath-arba / City of Arba. This was the great(est) man among the Anakim'. Jerome, however, reads the word for man, *adam*, as the proper name Adam; so he renders the verse *Nomen Hebron antea uocabatur Cariath Arbe. Adam maximus ibi inter Enacim situs est*, 'The name of Hebron formerly was Cariath Arbe. The very great Adam is lying

<sup>4</sup> Ginzberg I 1909, 12; V 1925 14-15 n. 39, 117 n. 109; Jeremias 1926, 82-5, 95, 106, 107. Cf. Psalm 73(74).12: 'Yet God my King is from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.'

<sup>5</sup> The express mention of Jerusalem is probably secondary, cf. Ri 2000, 148.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Ginzberg I 1909, 288-90; V 1925, 126 n. 137, 256 n. 263; Jeremias 1925, 160-1; 1926, 78-9.

there among the Anakim'. This 'lying' in its turn is taken as 'is buried'.<sup>7</sup> Arguing in this way, Jerome could claim that Scripture itself witnessed that Adam's grave was in Hebron. The question seems to have engaged him considerably, for apart from the Vulgate in which he introduced his rendering, in no fewer than five other places in his extant works he returns to it: in his *Commentary on Ephesians* 5.14 (PL 26.558-9), his translation of Eusebius' *Onomasticon* s.v. Arboc (GCS 11.7), *Hebrew Questions on Genesis* 23.2 (CCSL 72.28), *Commentary on Matthew* 4 on 27.33 (CCSL 77.270) and *Letter* 108.11.3 (CSEL 55.319).

Why, however, did he take the trouble to contest the idea of Adam's burial on Golgotha? After all, unlike the Jews, Christians had free access to Jerusalem, and the juxtaposition of first and second Adam, visualized in the picture of the blood of Christ, the Second Adam, being poured out over the head of the First, was bound to be an attractive topic. He discusses the matter in the passages just mentioned in his commentaries on Matthew and on Ephesians. In the former, after giving Joshua 14.15 as his scriptural authority, he adds two arguments against the Jerusalem option: (1) the name of Calvary does not come from Adam's skull (*caput*; he avoids using the word *caluaria*, 'skull', which would lend more weight to the argument of the Jerusalem option, *Caluaria* being the Latin equivalent of Golgotha), but from the fact that Christ was crucified on the place where condemned people were beheaded, for the good reason that Christ was crucified there for the salvation of all; (2) should one assume that Christ was crucified there in order that his blood would be poured out on Adam's tomb, why then were the two criminals crucified there as well? The strength of these arguments is disputable and it is hard to avoid the impression that a personal agenda is at work here. Indeed, both here and in the commentary on Ephesians he relates that he had heard someone (*quendam*) arguing, with a lot of bravura which captivated his audience, that the quotation in Ephesians 5.14, 'Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light' is meant to refer to Adam buried under the cross on Golgotha. Quick-tempered Jerome may well have thought that the confident orator needed to be taught a lesson and used his learning to show that the man was mistaken. Jerome does not call him by name; Karl Schmaltz suspected that he had his adversary, Bishop John of Jerusalem, in mind.<sup>8</sup>

Whatever the merits of Jerome's argument – few Christians of his own or of later times were able to check its correctness – it remained authoritative simply because the *uir trilinguis* had said so. Time and again the choice of Hebron is repeated by medieval authors, including Gregory of Tours, Isidore of Sevilla, Adomnán, Bede, Alcuin, Hrabanus Maurus, Rupert of Deutz, Saewulf, Rorgo Fretellus, Peter Comestor, Thomas Aquinas, and Jacobus de Voragine.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Hayward 1995, 183.

<sup>8</sup> Schmaltz 1918, 108. Bardy 1934, 162 thought it was Epiphanius, but Epiphanius was Jerome's friend.

<sup>9</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum* 1.4 (MGH, Scr. rer. Mer. 1<sup>2</sup>.1.7); Isidore of Sevilla, *Etymologies* 15.1.24; Adomnan, *De locis sanctis* 2.10.2,5 (CCSL 175.209-10); Bede, *De locis sanctis* 8.1 (CCSL 175.266); Alcuin, *Interrogationes et Responsiones in Genesin* 211 (PL 100.546); Rupert of Deutz, *De sancta trinitate et operibus eius* 3.31 (CCM 21.272); Saewulf (CCM 139.73); Rorgo Fretellus, *Descrip-*

It is natural to suppose that people were buried in the place where they had lived. So it does not come as a surprise that Hebron, once it was regarded as Adam's burial place, was thought to have been his domicile. Yet it took quite a while before statements to that effect were made. Eventually a variant text of the Latin *Life of Adam and Eve* tells us in plain terms: 'Adam lived for nine hundred and thirty-two years in the valley of Hebron.'<sup>10</sup> Also the Muslim world knew of Adam's sojourn in Hebron; as Murphy-O'Connor notes in his description of the Haram el-Khalil (the Tomb of the Patriarchs): 'According to Arab legend Adam prayed so frequently in the corner that his foot left a mark in the stone (now part of a small shrine).'<sup>11</sup> But usually, at least in Christian sources, only one fact is mentioned, namely that Adam and Eve mourned a hundred years long there for their son Abel. The exact location of this mourning may be given as 'the Vale of Tears', which we find for the first time in the *Work on Geography*, written before AD 1114, and then in Rorgo Fretellus' *Descriptio de locis sanctis* from AD 1137, in the anonymous writer who in about AD 1150 described the finding of the remains of the three patriarchs in Hebron, in Peter Comestor, Luke of Túy (d.1249), and Sanudo the Elder (c.1270-c.1343).<sup>12</sup>

This 'Vale of Tears' stems ultimately from Scripture, where it occurs in Psalm 83(84).6-7. In the Vulgate the text runs as follows: *Beatus uir cuius est auxilium abs te, ascensiones in corde suo disposuit, in ualle lacrimarum, in loco quem posuit*, 'Blessed is the man whose help comes from you, he has prepared ascensions in his heart, in the vale of tears, in the place he has set'. This version diverges considerably from the Hebrew and is hard to interpret in itself. The 'vale of tears', in the original Hebrew Psalm text a designation of the last stage the pilgrims had to pass through before reaching Jerusalem, lent itself to a more abstract understanding in the Latin text. As such Jerome in his *Letter* 22.10.2 (CSEL 54.157) used it for the first time as a common designation for the misery of this world: *primus de paradiso homo uentri magis oboediens quam deo in hanc lacrimarum deiectus est uallem*, 'the first man, obeying his belly and not God, was cast down from paradise into this vale of tears' (trans. Fremantle). This abstract purport became concretized in its turn in that the expression was used as a name for the site in Hebron where Adam and Eve spent their century of mourning. Burchard of Barby (c.1275) and later Bernhard von Breyden-

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*tion of the Holy Places* 8 (9 Boeren); Peter Comestor, *Historia Scholastica* Genesis 25, 59 (CCCM 191.47,112). Hrabanus Maurus explicitly refers to the book of Joshua, *Commentary on Genesis* 3.4 on Gen. 23 (PL 107.570); *Commentary on Kingdoms* (PL 109.75-6). Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III q. 46 a. 10 (397-8 Leonine ed.) and Jacobus de Voragine, *Golden Legend* 51.142 (345 Maggioni) mention both Joshua and Jerome.

<sup>10</sup> In the fifteenth-century MS Balliol Coll. Oxford 228, see Mozley 1929, 135.

<sup>11</sup> Murphy-O'Connor 1998<sup>4</sup>, 277.

<sup>12</sup> *Work on Geography* 15 (415 de Vogüé; the title and the section numbers were introduced by Wilkinson 1988); Rorgo Fretellus, *Description of the Holy Places* 8 (9 Boeren); *Tractatus de inuentione sanctorum patriarcharum Abraham, Ysaac et Jacob* (RHC Occ. 5.303); Peter Comestor, *Historia Scholastica* 26 (CCCM 191.48); Lucas of Túy, *World Chronicle* 1.3 (CCCM 74.14); Sanutus (Sanudo), *Liber Secretorum Fidelium Crucis*, Hanoviae 1611, 177, cf. 248. The hundred years, without the location in Hebron, appear already in the *Cave of Treasures* 6.1 (CSCO 486.48-9) and in Pseudo-Methodius, *Apocalypse* 1.2 (CSCO 569.72-3).

bach (c.1440-1497) give the location as *spelunca in quadam rupe, spelunca quedam in rupe*, 'a cave in a rock'.<sup>13</sup>

Having lived and been buried in Hebron, Adam might have seen the light of life there as well. The earliest text I have found mentioning Adam's formation in Hebron is, once again, the *Work on Geography* 4 (414 de Vogüé): Hebron is in *territorio illo in quo summus creator patrem nostrum plasmauit Adam*, 'the country where the Most High Creator formed our first father Adam' (trans. Wilkinson). It is followed by Honorius Augustodunensis, whose *Imago mundi* in first redaction was in existence by about AD 1110 at the latest, by Rorgo Fretellus in AD 1137 and by John of Würzburg in about AD 1170.<sup>14</sup> The anonymous author to whom we owe a description of the finding of the remains of the three patriarchs has an additional element, stating that Adam's formation at Hebron was mentioned by Saint Ambrose in a work entitled *De creatione Adae*.<sup>15</sup> No such work can be found in the extant works of Ambrose of Milan, nor does Ambrose mention anything of the sort. If the work was written by him, then the earliest testimony concerning Hebron as Adam's place of creation would be shifted by almost 750 years! We are probably dealing with a fake.

#### 4. Damascus

Our third candidate for the honour of being the ground on which the first human being was created is Damascus. Here again the place has been deduced from known biblical facts, in this case Abel's murder by Cain. The reasoning was apparently that Adam and Eve and their sons Cain and Abel lived together or at least in the same area. This could be concluded from the fact that Eve (and Adam by implication) knew that Cain had slain his brother (Genesis 4.25); in addition the fact that God drove Cain 'away from the ground' (Genesis 4.14) suggests a common domicile for the proto-plasts and their two sons up until the fratricide. This common domicile came to be thought to be Damascus. And if Adam had lived in Damascus before and after the stay in paradise, it was natural to think that he had been formed there as well. This clear development, however, began to be disturbed by the interference of the Hebron tradition.

(1) Damascus as the spot where Abel was slain was known in Judaism, as we know from Jerome.<sup>16</sup> As so many ancient exegetes, Jerome is interested in the etymology of proper names. Thus, among the several etymologies for Damascus he offers in various places, he proposes *Damascus = sanguinem bibens* 'drinking blood'.<sup>17</sup> It is

<sup>13</sup> Burchard of Barby, *Description of the Holy Land* (20 Canisius and Basnage); Bernhard von Breidenbach, *Peregrination to the Holy Land*, Spira 1502 (no pagination).

<sup>14</sup> Honorius Augustodunensis, *Imago mundi* 3.1 (124 Flint); Rorgo Fretellus, *Description of the Holy Places* 8 (9 Boeren); John of Würzburg, *Description of the Holy Land* (CCCM 139.99).

<sup>15</sup> *Tractatus de inuentione sanctorum patriarcharum Abraham, Ysaac et Jacob* (RHC Occ. 5.303).

<sup>16</sup> Ginzberg, *Legends* V 1925, 139 n. 19. As for the 'whimsical idea of John a Lapide (*commentarium in Genesim*) to assume that another Damascus in the neighborhood of Hebron is meant here', cf. our remarks hereafter.

<sup>17</sup> On this interpretation cf. J. Martianay in PL 23.1584-5; Wutz 1914-1915, 170, 1067.

not clear whether Jerome is the source of this etymology; so far I have failed to find earlier references, but it occurs, more or less *dépaysé*, in Procopius of Gaza's *Catena in Canticum Canticorum* 7.4 (PG 87.1729B). Be that as it may, in his *Commentary on Ezekiel* 8,18 (CCSL 75.373) Jerome applies it to the murder of Abel by Cain, which according to Hebrew tradition, he states, occurred in Damascus: *Sin autem Damascus interpretatur sanguinem bibens, et Hebraeorum uera traditio est, campum in quo interfectus est Abel a parricida Cain fuisse in Damasco, unde et locus hoc insignitus uocabulo sit*, 'But if Damascus is interpreted as "drinking blood" and the tradition of the Hebrews is correct, namely that the field where Abel is killed by the parricide Cain was in Damascus, for which reason the place has got this name.'

This affirmation of Damascus as the scene of the murder of Abel is also known from Islamic authors, who mention that Abel's blood is still visible on mount Qāsiyūn near Damascus.<sup>18</sup> Christian witnesses after Jerome include first of all Hrabanus Maurus, who in his *Commentary on Ezekiel* 5.17 (PL 110.382) repeats Jerome's statement verbatim, and further Fulcher of Chartres, *Historia Hierosolymitana* 3.51.2 (794 Hagenmeyer): *legimus in Damasco sanguinem Abel fusum fuisse*, 'We read that Abel's blood was shed in Damascus'; Rupert of Deutz, *De sancta trinitate et operibus eius* 5.17 (CCCM 21.350): *Damascus bibens sanguinem interpretatur, a quo conditam aiunt Damascum ciuitatem, quo in loco fertur protomartyr Abel fuisse occisus*, 'Damascus is interpreted as drinking blood; he (viz. Damascus Eliezer) is said to have founded the city of Damascus, where the first martyr, Abel, is held to have been slain'; Honorius Augustodunensis, *Imago mundi* 3.1 (124 Flint); the *Work on Geography* 45 (420 de Vogüé): *Eliezer dispensatoris Abrahe filius, Damascum condidit in agro illo in quo Caim fratrem suum peremit. Vnde Damascus sanguinis potus siue sanguinis osculum sonat*, 'Eliezer the son of the steward of Abraham founded Damascus in that district where Cain killed his brother: for this reason Damascus means 'drink of blood', or 'kiss of blood' (trans. Wilkinson) and, in almost identical terms, Fretellus, *Description of the Holy Places* 28 (20 Boeren): *Damascum construxit Elyezer seruus Abrahe in agro illo, in quo Cayn fratrem suum peremit. Vnde Damascus sanguinis potus siue sanguinis osculum sonat*. So the idea that Abel was killed in the area of Damascus was tolerably well dispersed in Western Christendom.

Comparing this list with the list of authors in the section on Hebron, we find two names occurring in both: Rupert of Deutz and Honorius Augustodunensis, who combined the views of Adam being formed in Hebron and Abel being killed in Damascus. We might deem them docile disciples of Jerome who, as we have seen, introduced the latter idea and at least inspired the former. But as we will see now, their example was not followed universally.

(2) Peter Comestor makes a statement which is crucial in this respect, *Historia Scholastica* 25 (CCCM 191.47), where he observes: *Emisit eum dominus de paradiso uoluptatis ut operaretur terram de qua assumptus est, in agrum scilicet Damascenum de quo sumptus fuerat, in quo Cayn Abel suum fratrem interfecit*, 'The Lord sent him forth from the paradise of delight, to till the ground from which he was taken, namely

<sup>18</sup> Wüstenfeld 1864, 456; Lüdtke 1919-1920, 156.

to the *ager Damascenus* from which he had been taken, where Cain killed his brother Abel.' Similarly, Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia imperialia* 1.23 (146 Banks and Binns) states: *Caim autem habitauit in campo Damasceno, ubi fratrem occiderat, in qua regione plasmatus fuit Adam*, 'Cain lived in *campo Damasceno* where he had killed his brother, which was the region where Adam had been formed' (trans. Banks and Binns). These declarations are important for two elements: they equate the place where Abel was slain with the place where Adam was formed, and they call this place *ager* or *campus Damascenus*. Combining two passages from Vincent of Beauvais in his *Speculum Historiale* we get the same information: 1,14 (16 Duaci) states that God transferred Adam to paradise *de agro Damasceno, ubi eum formauerat*, 'from the *ager Damascenus*, where he had formed him' and 1.56 (22 Duaci) that Cain *in agro Damasceno per dolum occidit Abel*, 'slew Abel in the *ager Damascenus* by deceit'. Clearly in both passages the *ager Damascenus* denotes the same territory. So the idea that Adam was created and Abel was murdered on the same spot, called *ager Damascenus*, could be read in three influential authors, and probably in others as well.

(3) What spot, however, was referred to by the designation *ager Damascenus*? The general reader who stumbles across it will no doubt take it in the sense of 'Damascene area, territory of Damascus', and combining the information under (1) and (2) he will wonder why we have not translated it as such. But exactly that is the crux of the matter. The passage from Jacobus de Voragine cited at the beginning of this paper, *Golden Legend* 51.141, where it was said that the first man *iuxta Damascum, in agro Damasceno dicitur fuisse formatus*, 'is said to have been formed in the region around Damascus, on the Damascene soil', seems to put him in the right. But if he turns to Gervase of Tilbury, who lived some eighty years earlier, he will find in *Otia imperialia* 2.4 (206 Banks and Binns): *Porro iuxta uallem uel montem Mamre est Ebron, olim Acheron, metropolis Filistinorum et habitaculum gigantum, sita in agro in quo plasmatus fuit Adam. Hec iuxta uallem Lacrimarum posita, in qua Adam centum annis luxit Abel*, 'To continue, near the valley or hill of Mamre is Hebron, formerly Acheron, the chief city of the Philistines and the abode of giants; it is situated on the plain where Adam was formed. Hebron lies near the Vale of Tears, where Adam mourned for Abel for a hundred years' (trans. Banks and Binns). In this quotation the *ager* has to do without the adjective *Damascenus*, but Gervase has no fewer than five passages that show that it should be supplied: Adam was formed *in regione Damascena* (1.8), he was created *in agro Damasceno* (1.10), he returned *in agrum Damascenum* (1.16), he was taken from *agro Damasceno*, where Cain was to kill Abel (1.19), and he was formed *in campo Damasceno* (1.23). Obviously Jacobus de Voragine took *ager Damascenus* to be the area around the later city of Damascus in Syria, while Gervase took it to be a piece of land in Hebron, south of Jerusalem. Jacobus represents what we may call the pure Damascus tradition: Abel was murdered in Damascus in the same place where Adam was formed; that place was called *ager Damascenus*, 'area of Damascus'. Gervase, on the other hand, is a witness to a contamination of the Hebron and the Damascus traditions: His reasoning must have been as follows: on the one hand the ground where Adam had been shaped had the name of *ager Damascenus*, and on the other the place of his formation was Hebron; thus the *ager Damascenus* had to be situated in Hebron. Gervase's example is followed by the pilgrim accounts of the late Middle Ages. We have already mentioned Burchard of



Barby, who gave its exact location as lying at a bowshot's distance from the double cave where Adam and Eve mourned their son Abel. The statement returns in Sanudo the Elder, *Liber secretorum* (248 Hanoviae), Petrus de Natalibus, *Catalogus sanctorum et gestorum eorum* (fo. xliiij<sup>a</sup> 1508 edition), Bernhard von Breydenbach, *Peregrination to the Holy Land*, Spirae 1502 (no pagination), and Felix Fabri (III 343 Hasler); Sanudo asserts explicitly that the murder of Abel also occurred in Hebron.

There are many more authors to cite who state that Adam was formed *in agro Damasceno*, but they tantalizingly leave us in doubt when we try to chart the pure Damascus and the contaminated tradition, simply because the passages may be read either way. This is the case with Peter Comestor and Vincent of Beauvais, cited under (2). An earlier, indeed the earliest example we could get hold of, an Irish text written in about AD 1000, the prose version of the poetical composition *Saltair na Rann*, states: 'This is the name of the place where Adam was created, *in agro Damasco*. He proceeded from there to Paradise' (trans. Herbert). The Latin words in the otherwise Irish text point to a Latin source.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, this Latin *Vorlage* is unknown. So, we know nothing of its date nor can we decide whether *Damasgo* (no doubt a variant of *Damasco*) should be conceived of as a substantival name functioning as an apposition to *agro*: *in agro Damasco*, 'in the territory Damascus', or whether it is a contraction of *Damasgeno*: *in agro Damasceno*, 'in the territory of Damascus'. There is no point in piling up citations, but the following one may stand for all of them. In the anonymous poem edited by Albrecht Wagner in 1882 as 'Das lateinische Gedicht', and presumably written in the thirteenth century, verses 583-6 run:

Ista quidem patria est paradisi deliciarum,  
 qua Damasceno plasmatus celitus agro  
 est pater humani generis, parendo satori  
 ad bene uiuendum felici sorte locatus.

That country is the paradise of delight where the father of the human race, formed in the field of Damascus, by a happy lot was placed to obey the Creator to lead a good life.

This passage once more shows both the spread of the *ager Damascenus* designation and the unhelpfulness of the context to discover its purport.

So, in many cases we can only guess whether a given author had Damascus or Hebron in mind. Still, it seems to be possible to conjecture about the origin and growth of both traditions. In our view, *ager Damascenus* was originally a designation for the area of the city of Damascus; stating that Adam had been created *in agro Damasceno* meant that he had been created there. Later on, the tradition that the site of his creation was at Hebron was so overwhelming that the location *in agro Damas-*

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<sup>19</sup> See McNamara 1984, 16-17; Herbert and McNamara 1989, 3, 165. In the English translation added to the edition of the Irish text, Mac Carthy 1892, 49, the Latin words are translated: 'Howbeit, this is the name of the place in which was formed Adam, namely, in the land of Damascus. And he passed therefrom into Paradise.'

*ceno* had to be adjusted to it. This occurred by reinterpreting the expression so as to designate a piece of land in Hebron. It is, however, impossible to fix a point in time at which the shift in meaning came about. Whereas Jacobus de Voragine sticks to the earlier, pure Damascus tradition, two or three generations earlier Gervase of Tilbury already presents the revised idea.

## 5. Conclusion

The result of our investigation may be summarized as follows. Thoughts given to the place where Adam was created have led to a number of views. In Christian sources three main options appear: Jerusalem between about AD 200 and 350, Hebron in about AD 1100 and Damascus maybe as early as AD 1000. Eventually, however, the second option proved so prevalent that the term denoting the third, namely *in agro Damasceno*, ‘in the area of Damascus’ was taken to be the name of a piece of land in Hebron; even the murder of Abel by Cain was transposed from Damascus to Hebron. In those texts where the expression *ager* (or *campus*) *Damascenus* is used, it is impossible to know whether Damascus or rather Hebron is meant, unless the context offers additional clues.

This investigation has once again shown the vitality of apocryphal traditions, not just that they were transmitted through so many generations, but that they developed continually or, to use a different image, sprouted new shoots time and again. Biblical facts were for the most part sacrosanct, but facts not recorded in Scripture could be challenged or replaced according to need.<sup>20</sup>

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### Abbreviations of text corpora

CCCM = Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis, CCSL = Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, CSCO = Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, CSEL = Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, GCS = Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller, MGH = Monumenta Germaniae Historica, PG = Patrologia Graeca, PL = Patrologia Latina, RHC = Recueil des historiens des croisades.

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Additional remark: The study of Alexander Toepel, *Die Adam- und Seth-Legenden im syrischen Buch der Schatzhöhle. Eine quellenkritische Untersuchung* (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 618, Subsidia 119), Louvain 2006, came too late to my notice to be used in the present paper. Toepel dates the *Cave of Treasures* to the late sixth or early seventh century (p. 6), and has interesting observations on chapter 2.15-16 of that work at pp. 56 and 76-8; cf. also his pp. 178 n. 76, 179 n. 78 and 180.

AGER DAMASCENUS:  
POGLĄDY NA TEMAT MIEJSCA STWORZENIA ADAMA

*Streszczenie*

W XIII-wiecznych zapiskach Burcharda z Barby jako miejsce stworzenia Adama podany został Ager Damascenus (Pole Damasceńskie). Autor artykułu konfrontuje ten zapis z wcześniejszymi przekazami dotyczącymi tej kwestii. Po krótkim wprowadzeniu o charakterze biblijnym, zostały zaprezentowane trzy tradycje odnoszące się do miejsca stworzenia Adama. Według pierwszej z nich, Adam został stworzony w tym samym miejscu, gdzie ukrzyżowano Chrystusa, a więc na Golgocie w Jerozolimie. Druga tradycja jako miejsce stworzenia wskazuje Hebron, przy czym określenia Ager Damascenus według niektórych odnosiło się do pola znajdującego się w okolicach Hebronu. W końcu trzecia tradycja sytuuje stworzenie Adama w Damaszku, interpretując w sposób dosłowny nazwę pola.

(streszczenie opr. K. Bardski)