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## 6 Water in Early Christian Ritual: Baptism and Baptisteries in Corinth

**Abstract:** Water has been the central element of Christian baptism since the very beginnings of Christianity. After briefly introducing the origins and development of baptism, the article focuses on the relevance and performance of baptism in an early urban context, in ancient Corinth. How did Corinthians practise and understand baptism, what kind of connotations did the baptismal use of water evoke in the Corinthian context, and what significance did baptism gain during the 1<sup>st</sup> centuries AD? Baptism seems to have been developed in the early years in close contact with the local religious context and the construction of baptisteries in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD adapted local pagan elements of architecture. The early Christian baptisteries featured water as the central element of baptism in an architecturally, ritually and theologically reflected way.

### Early Christian baptism

Already in the first Christian narratives about Jesus, water plays a crucial role. The oldest of the four gospels, the gospel of Mark, begins at the River Jordan with the ‘baptism’ of Jesus by John ‘the Baptist’. The literal meaning of the Greek words *baptizein* and *baptistes* is, respectively, submerge and submerger. John performs a baptism of repentance not only on Jesus, but also on many Jews who came to the Jordan to be cleansed of their sins (Mk 1, 1–11).

The baptism of Jesus by John most probably was an historical event.<sup>1</sup> The gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke theologise the baptism of Jesus by connecting it with the installation of Jesus as son of God by the sending of the spirit.<sup>2</sup> Baptism therefore becomes crucial with respect to the divinity of Jesus. After crucifixion, the followers of Jesus likely remembered the baptism of Jesus, took up the baptism of John, and began performing a similar act,<sup>3</sup> by which Jews – and soon after pagans – willing to follow Jesus and his teaching prepared themselves for the coming kingdom of God and joined the new movement. As the Acts of the Apostles tell us, the Jesus followers Peter, Philippus, and Paul performed baptisms. Ablution of sins was now supplemented by the transfer of the godly spirit (*pneuma*) after the baptismal act, which symbolised the believers’ participation in God by the spirit and integrated the converts into the community of Christ believers. During baptism, the name of Jesus was recited and he was understood to be the new lord of the believers.

In the early years of Christianity, the newly-founded Christian communities most probably differed in the use of formulae during baptism and in performative details, as they differed in the theological understanding of baptism. Despite local differences in performance and theological interpretation of baptism,<sup>4</sup> water was a crucial element of this act.<sup>5</sup>

The Didache, the earliest Christian church order from Syria, shows that, at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, there was already a need to regulate baptism in the growing church. In Did. 7, 1–3 we read:

*But with respect to baptism, baptize as follows. Having said all these things in advance, baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, in running water. But if you do not have running water, baptize*

1 Avemarie 2002, 246 f. n. 176.

2 Mk 1, 11; Mt 3, 13–17; Lc 3, 21 f.

3 Cf. Betz 2011; Labahn 2011.

4 Müller 2012, 84–90; Ferguson 1993.

5 Cf. Klostergaard Petersen 2011, 12–14 on the ritual effects of water.

*in some other water. And if you cannot baptize in cold water, use warm. But if you have neither, pour water on the head three times in the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit. But both the one baptizing and the one being baptized should fast before the baptism, along with some others if they can. But command the one being baptized to fast one or two days in advance.*<sup>6</sup>

The act of baptism includes preparatory fasting of the persons involved, baptism, and a formula spoken by the Baptist: *in the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit* (cf. Mt 28, 19). A special focus here is on the quality of water: the recommendation is to baptise in running or ‘living’ water; still water is the second choice and if there is no cold water, warm could be used as well. The mention of still water and warm water could be references to urban circumstances where ‘living’ water was not easily available.<sup>7</sup>

Another point discussed in the church order notes situations where there is no possibility of immersion or submersion: the Didache validates pouring water over a person (affusion) instead of immersing the person in water.<sup>8</sup> This regulation might refer to urban situations, too, where open water-places were not available everywhere. There is no mention of baptismal basins, fonts, or even special buildings for baptism, i. e., baptisteries. Later texts inform us about different elaborations, such as baptismal instruction and different theological interpretations of baptism.<sup>9</sup>

The earliest rites of baptism described in 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD texts did not demand a specific location or building for baptism, but they did demand submersion or affusion – probably most often performed in rivers – and a baptismal formula. A precondition for baptism therefore is the environmental access to (flowing) water. Around AD 200, Tertullian points out that there is no difference between being baptised in the sea, a pond, a river, a spring, a lake, or a basin (Tert. bapt. 4, 3); he attests a development of the ritual which, at least in Carthage, included praying, fasting, confession of sins, triple submersion, anointing, and the laying on of hands. Other texts from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD attest to similar, but also different wide-ranging developments; in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, we find that baptism could last several weeks (Jerusalem, Antioch) and become a long process that culminated in the baptismal act as such.<sup>10</sup> Baptism therefore was not practised in a singular and consistent way from the very beginning, but seems to have been a purification and entrance rite<sup>11</sup> into the group of Christ believers that developed within the context of the local settings of the Christian communities.

During the first Christian centuries, baptism might have been performed either in living water outside, in open or public water places,<sup>12</sup> or in private buildings in still water.<sup>13</sup> The earliest church buildings and intact, free-standing buildings of baptisteries date from the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, when Christian religion became the official religion in the Roman empire.<sup>14</sup> It was only then that baptism acquired its own fixed architectural location. In addition to the introduction of baptisteries, which defined a fixed place as a kind of ‘entrance’ building in close connection with the church buildings, baptism definitely took place inside and was no longer visible to outsiders; it became a hidden act in which only chosen members of the Christian community would participate, with a special preparation and liturgy known only by members of this Christian group.

<sup>6</sup> Translation by Ehrman 2014. On baptism in the Didache, see Mitchell 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Fürst 2008, 125.

<sup>8</sup> Klauser 1974; Lindemann 2011, 784.

<sup>9</sup> Strecker 2011, 1391–1404, gives a short summary of the material from the first Christian centuries.

<sup>10</sup> Strecker 2011, 1396–1404.

<sup>11</sup> On the problem of definition, see Klostergaard Petersen 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Justin, 1 Apol. 61, 3: *Then they are led by us where to there is water and are reborn in the kind of rebirth in which we ourselves were also reborn* (translation by Minns 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Klauck 1981; Meeks 1993, 159–180. On the problem of identifying private Christian houses, see Mell 2010, 19 f. 33 f. The so called house church of Dura Europos in Syria, which dates from AD 241, remains to this day a singular example: it had a room with a rectangular water basin that might have served as a baptismal basin.

<sup>14</sup> Brandt 2011; Mell 2010, 33; Fürst 2008, 169 f.; Ristow 1998.

## Baptism and the Early Christian community in Corinth

Corinth, the famous city in the north-eastern Peloponnese, was an important centre of Greek cultural and commercial life, destroyed in 146 BC by Lucius Mummius. After a period of reduced urban life, it was re-founded by the Romans as a colony in 44 BC. In 27 BC, Corinth became the capital and administrative centre of the Roman province of Achaia.<sup>15</sup> In addition to local inhabitants and migrants, Corinth was inhabited by Roman veterans and freedmen from leading families. Its location attracted many merchants; the city saw remarkable growth and became the ‘first’ city of Greece, as John Chrysostom called it in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD.<sup>16</sup> During the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, when the Christian gospel reached Corinth, a significant number of cults of Greek, Roman, Egyptian, and local gods was already established in the city. Corinth also had a Jewish community, and Clarion Apollon was venerated as the ancestor-God of the Emperor Augustus.<sup>17</sup>

The community of Christ believers added another type of cult to this diversity. Initially, this cult was almost invisible to outsiders, as it lacked a sacral building or a special building exclusively for reunions. In reconstructing the early community of Christ believers in Corinth – their gatherings, preaching, and practises – we only have a few written sources at our disposal: the letters of Paul to the Corinthians written in the early 50s (1 Cor and 2 Cor); a notice in the Acts of the Apostles on Paul coming to Corinth (Acts 18, 1–18), written after AD 70; the letter of the church of Rome to that in Corinth, the so-called First Clement (written about AD 100); finally, from Eusebius (AD 260/64–339/340), quotes and observations concerning the church historian Hegesippus, who travelled to Rome by way of Corinth around AD 160, and Bishop Dionysios of Corinth, who officiated around AD 170.

After having founded communities of Christ believers in Galatia, Philippi, Thessaloniki, and Beroia, Paul came to Corinth in AD 51/52 for the first time<sup>18</sup> and founded<sup>19</sup> a community of Christ believers there, which he visited again in around AD 55.<sup>20</sup> The author of Acts 18, 7–8 describes how he imagined Paul’s first stay in Corinth: *he left there [i.e. the synagogue] and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue. Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul, believed and were baptized.*<sup>21</sup> Titius Justus, a so-called worshiper of God (*sebomenos tou theou*), was a pagan man who was attracted to the Jewish religion and finally by Paul’s preaching on Jesus. Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, was also converted to the Christian gospel and baptised. His conversion, however, was not imitated by many of his kinsfolk. At the end of Paul’s stay, after 18 months (Acts 18, 11), a significant part of the Jewish community no longer tolerated Paul’s preaching and brought an indictment against him. This led to court action, presided over by the proconsul Gallio (Acts 18, 12–17).<sup>22</sup> We do not know if this story told by the author of Acts reflects historical facts, but Paul’s preaching in the synagogue is quite probable, while the existence of Jews in Corinth is attested by Philo.<sup>23</sup> The name of Crispus is mentioned by Paul himself, who confirms baptising Crispus in 1 Cor 1, 14.<sup>24</sup> Paul does not mention how he performed the baptism, but from other

<sup>15</sup> On the urban development of Corinth in imperial times, see Fouquet 2019, 28 f., who is critical about the status of Corinth as capital of the new province.

<sup>16</sup> PG 61, 9.

<sup>17</sup> Bookidis 2005, 151–163; for domestic cults, see Ehrensperger 2016, 108–119.

<sup>18</sup> Koch 2014, 256 f.

<sup>19</sup> Possibly there were already Christians in Corinth who Paul gathered into a community; see Koester 2000, 118.

<sup>20</sup> Koch 2014, 266.

<sup>21</sup> All translations of the New Testament texts in this article are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

<sup>22</sup> Koch 2014, 567–571.

<sup>23</sup> Phil. Legat. 281. Jos. BI. 3, 540 mentions that Vespasian (AD 9–79) sent 6,000 young Judaeans from Magdala to help with the building of the canal through the Isthmus of Corinth.

<sup>24</sup> Lüdemann 1989, 203 f., argues that the identity of the two men and the Jewish background of Crispus is historically credible. On the historical credibility of the conversion of Titius Justus, see Lüdemann 1989, 203.

New Testament texts we can infer that he probably immersed or submerged converts like Crispus into living water (Acts 8, 38). How and if the transfer of the spirit was performed is not clear from Paul's texts, but in his letters he presupposes the sending of the spirit, which most probably happened during or after baptism.<sup>25</sup> Paul's own texts let us further assume that he baptised 'in Christ' (*eis Christon*), this is, 'in the name of Christ',<sup>26</sup> assigning the converts to Jesus as their new Lord. The converts most probably then confessed Jesus as 'Lord Jesus' (*kyrios Iesous*).<sup>27</sup> The Pauline letters show, moreover, that the converts finally thought of themselves as 'children of God', who addressed God as 'Father', probably in Aramaic *abba*, which was the original address of God by Jesus.<sup>28</sup> Through baptism, Christ believers entered into a community that considered themselves the family of God. From Paul's letters (and Acts) we know 12 members of the community of Christ believers in Corinth by name,<sup>29</sup> but the true number of members was most probably around 50 and perhaps as many as 100.<sup>30</sup> Only some of them, however, were baptised by Paul.

After his first stay, Paul wrote at least three letters<sup>31</sup> to his community in Corinth, which struggled with obvious problems of a new religious community that had to find its place in the context of the synagogue, as well as in the broader context of the Graeco-Roman and other cults of the time. There were both inter-religious problems – for example, Christ believers eating meat coming from pagan cult sacrifices<sup>32</sup> – and intra-religious problems, such as those caused by other Christian preachers. One point of friction among Christ believers seems to have been baptism.

In 1 Cor 1, 10–17, Paul mentions quarrels among the Christ believers of Corinth who apparently had begun founding groups. Paul urges the Corinthians to stop these quarrels:

*I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarrelling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, 'I follow Paul', or 'I follow Apollos', or 'I follow Cephas', or 'I follow Christ'. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. – I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else. – For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.*

Paul criticises the formation of groups in Corinth, as they threatened the unity of the young community. These groups connected themselves with leading figures, possibly associated with a certain standard of 'eloquent wisdom' (see 1 Cor 1, 18 ff.).<sup>33</sup> It seems that certain Christ believers in Corinth tried to convince their Christian brothers and sisters to follow one of the leading figures mentioned.<sup>34</sup> Apollos, a later missionary in the Christian community of Corinth, might

<sup>25</sup> Gal 4, 6.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Acts 22, 16; Hartman 2011; Hellholm 2011.

<sup>27</sup> Rom 10, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Gal 4, 6; Rom 8, 15. Zimmermann 2007, 76–79.

<sup>29</sup> Koch 2014, 265.

<sup>30</sup> Lindemann 2000, 13. The total number of inhabitants of Corinth at Paul's time might have been around 100,000; Ebner 2012, 85.

<sup>31</sup> The first letter is not preserved; Paul refers to it in 1 Cor 5, 9. 2 Cor might be a collection of letters. 3 Cor is a pseudepigraphic letter not included in the canon of the New Testament.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 8.

<sup>33</sup> The Kephas, i. e. Peter-group, may have its origins in the mission of followers of Peter in Corinth. There are no indications that Peter himself came to Corinth. The Christ-group is often explained as a later addition; cf. Schrage 1991, 135 f. 143–148; Schrage explains the Christ-group as a deliberate hyperbole of Paul, who wants to show the absurdity of group-building.

<sup>34</sup> Gerber 2010, 230–232.

have played an important role here.<sup>35</sup> Paul himself mentions him again in 1 Cor 3, 4–6. Acts 18, 25 relates that Apollos *knew only the baptism of John*. If this notice is reliable, it might imply that, apart from the new Christian baptismal ritual, another ritual was propagated and even practised in Corinth that resembled the baptism of John, but included neither the confession to Christ nor the transfer of the spirit.<sup>36</sup> Apollos might have underlined the importance of his person in connection with baptism or might have baptised in a different way and he might have been an eloquent preacher. Paul therefore counteracts the growing importance of Apollos – and possibly other leading Christians – by underlining that he himself did not baptise many people,<sup>37</sup> because the crucial element of his missionary work was preaching the gospel of the cross, a preaching that was authorised by God.<sup>38</sup>

The link between the group-building-process and baptism is disputed, but it is evident that Paul connects his critique of group-building with baptism. The groups in Corinth thus may have been related to different ways of baptism and possibly even different understandings of spirit.<sup>39</sup> Later in his letter, Paul refers to baptism again to point out the importance of unity instead of divisions in the Christian community: baptism gives participation in Christ (1 Cor 12, 13: *For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, [...] and all were made to drink of one Spirit*). The community of Christ believers forms the ‘body’ of Christ which cannot be divided into different groups. Group-building in any case contradicted the aim of baptism of creating unity and threatened the stability of the community of Christ believers.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, baptism had obviously started to play an important role in the early Corinthian community of Christ believers. They took baptism quite seriously, and it might be that even different forms of baptism were performed.

This assumption is confirmed by 1 Cor 15, 29. This verse shows that Christ believers in Corinth apparently not only came to be baptised themselves, but they asked for their dead relatives to be baptised, too. The verse has to be read in the context of 1 Cor 15, 12–28. In 1 Cor 15, 12–19, Paul strongly criticises Corinthians who deny resurrection and describes the process of resurrection in detail (1 Cor 15, 23–28). Then, in 1 Cor 15, 29, Paul asks: *Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?* Paul refers here to baptism on behalf of the dead, which apparently was practised by some Corinthians who at the same time denied resurrection. The verse is highly disputed,<sup>41</sup> but it seems that baptism was understood by some of the Corinthian believers not as an assurance for participating in resurrection, but probably as simply improving the status of the deceased. Richard E. DeMaris explains this concern with a general focus on death and the dead in Roman Corinth, and interprets baptism on behalf of the dead as a kind of support to enter the community of the dead.<sup>42</sup> If we add the consideration by Kathleen Warner Slane that Corin-

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Horn 1992, 165; Pascuzzi 2009.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Avemarie 2002, 429–432, 443–452; Wolter 1987. Cf. Acts 19, 1–7, where Paul is said to have baptised anew disciples who only received the baptism of John (Avemarie 2002, 443). In Acts 8, 26–40 Philipppus baptises the Ethiopian eunuch without transferring the spirit. This story possibly reflects a special rite of baptism performed by Philipppus.

<sup>37</sup> He mentions Crispus, Gaius, Stephanas, and his house by name, then downplays baptism by saying *I do not know whether I baptised anyone else* (1 Cor 1, 16). 1 Cor 10, 1–13 seems to emphasise the critique. Paul recalls the fate of the Israelites in the desert with allusions to baptism. Cf. Ostmeier 2000.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 3, 5–9.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. 2 Cor 11, 4.

<sup>40</sup> Clement, the bishop of Rome, in his letter to the Corinthians, written at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, repeats this Pauline argument in stressing that the one spirit (*pneuma*) given to all (in baptism) is meant to keep the ‘body’ of Christ, the Christian community together (1 Clem 46, 6).

<sup>41</sup> DeMaris 1995, 661 f.

<sup>42</sup> DeMaris 1995; DeMaris 2008, 57–71. DeMaris argues that excavations on the north cemetery show a ‘steady interest in supplying the dead with adequate goods’ (DeMaris 2008, 66) and he underlines the importance of cults connected with death in Roman times (DeMaris 2008, 66–69; Palaimon, Demeter). ‘Differences in burial customs might have heightened the concern about the disposition of the dead’ (DeMaris 2008, 70).

thian graves in Roman times might have been seen as the final resting place of the body and not as the gateway to the underworld,<sup>43</sup> these believers might have sought – without believing in resurrection – to integrate their ancestors into the new religious community of Christ believers by baptism on their behalf and thus create a strong identity between the Christian and the physical family, including the ancestors.<sup>44</sup> Baptism on behalf of the dead is not attested elsewhere in Early Christianity and seems to have been a local Corinthian speciality in the development of this Early Christian ritual. It might indeed have its motivation in the special Corinthian interest in the care for the dead, who were no longer meant to travel into the underworld, but to stay in their graves.

Quarrels in Corinth around baptism are thus attested from the very beginnings of the gatherings of the Christ believers, and while baptism seems to be a premise for participating in the community of Christ believers, there seem to have been different practices and understandings of baptism in Corinth.

Although Christians in Corinth met in private homes (1 Cor 16, 23),<sup>45</sup> baptism probably did not take place in residences, but was performed somewhere outside: in the sea, under the running water of a spring<sup>46</sup> or in one of the baths of Corinth. Most likely, places with running water and water places not connected with the many pagan sanctuaries in the city were preferred,<sup>47</sup> as were thermal baths.<sup>48</sup>

## Use of water in pagan cults and the semiotics of water in Corinth

Thus, in contrast to the probably private gatherings of the first Christians, baptism was an act initially visible to non-Christians, too. How would they perceive baptism? Did they use water in their cults too? Whereas different archaeological data suggest ‘a varied and extensive use of water for cultic purposes’ as in the Asclepieion or in the cult of Demeter in the Greek era of Corinth, we see a ‘decline in the religious use of water’ in the Roman period.<sup>49</sup> This phenomenon might suggest that baptism would have appeared as a strange ritual in Roman Corinth.<sup>50</sup> But pagans and Jews watching Christians being baptised somewhere in running water in Corinth or

<sup>43</sup> Slane 2017, 6. The consideration follows the information that Roman tombs of the northern cemetery did not yield any vessels, ‘which are usually interpreted as providing sustenance for the deceased on the journey to the underworld’.

<sup>44</sup> DeMaris 1995, argues that baptism for the dead was a way of maintaining connections to ancestors for these Corinthians. Concannon 2016, 100, looking on migrants interprets it rather as a ‘vehicle with which some Corinthians connected with the ancestral spirits of their homeland’.

<sup>45</sup> The house of Gaius apparently offered enough space for the assembly of all Christ believers in Corinth (Rom 16, 23); Koch 2014, 265 f. Other houses offered space for at least smaller assemblies, cf. 1 Cor 16, 15 (house of Stephanas); Acts 18, 7 f. Mell 2010, 42, assumes the house of Stephanas as the earliest meeting place of Christians in Corinth; cf. Horn 2008, 82–98. On the location of these places in Corinth, cf. Schowalter 2010, 335 f: ‘It is time to admit that our ability to distinguish potential *ekklesia* space in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD Corinth is compromised for the immediate future by a lack of specific archaeological evidence’. Heid 2019, 69–160, has recently questioned the existence of house churches radically.

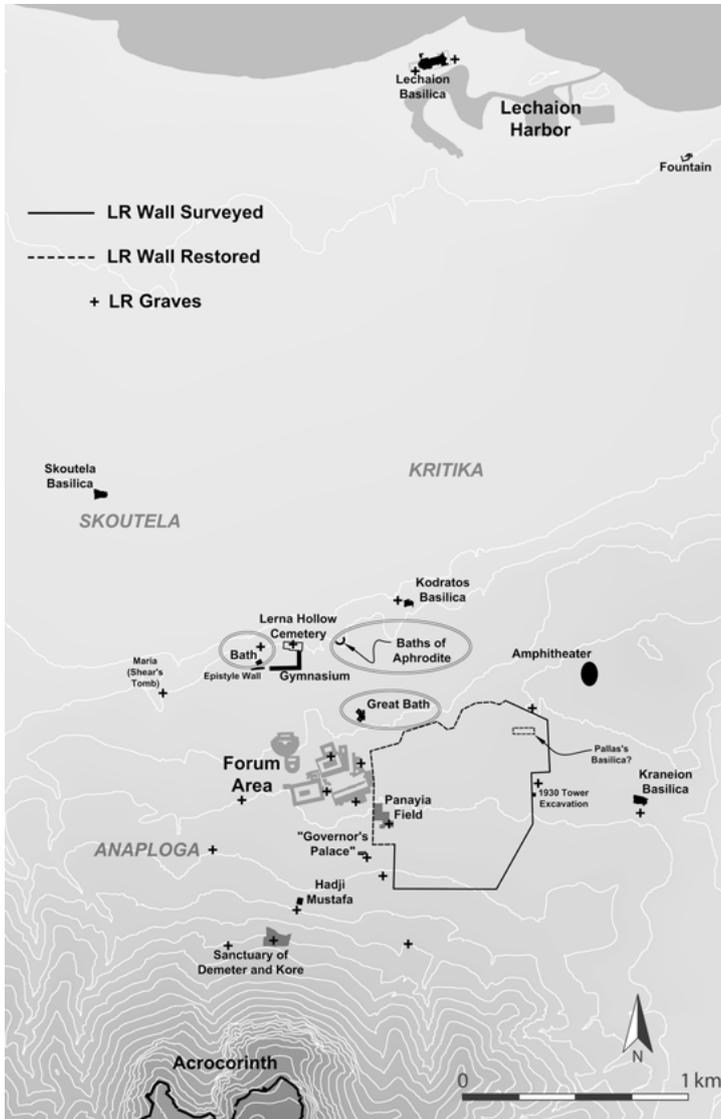
<sup>46</sup> See n. 61.

<sup>47</sup> Early catacomb paintings show baptism practised in public places with running water, too: Jensen 2011, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Pall. *Dialogus de vita sancti Iohannis Chrysostomi* 9, 162–166 (*Sources Chrétiennes* 341, 194–196); Brandt 2011, 1589 f.; Fürst 2008, 170. On the thermal bath on the east side of the Lechaion street, see Fouquet 2019, 51 f.

<sup>49</sup> DeMaris 2008, 48 f. The water basin of the Asclepieion (close to the gymnasium) was covered, the lustral room went out of use in Hellenistic times already. The bathing facilities of the Demeter and Kore sanctuary did not survive the sack of Corinth by the Romans. The Sacred Spring was obliterated in Roman times as well. Wickkiser 2010, 56. On water basins in the Asclepieion, see Kobusch, this volume.

<sup>50</sup> DeMaris 2008, 49.



**Fig. 1:** Corinth, baths in Roman times. LR: Late Roman.

in a public water place nonetheless would not be surprised: Jews practised their own ritual washings, and baptism practised as an immersion into water would first of all resemble a washing connected with words which might not even have been heard by passers-by. Taking into account that this was a religious act, and knowing that after baptism Christ believers participated in meetings held in private homes, pagan Corinthians probably would have thought of similar pagan rituals and gatherings as in the Mysteries,<sup>51</sup> although there is no real parallel to Christian baptism in the pagan cults.<sup>52</sup>

Demeter and Kore had a sanctuary at the hill beneath Acrocorinth (Fig. 1) and Eleusis with its Mystery cult of Demeter and Kore was not far from Corinth. The cult images of Demeter and Kore in Corinth were not exposed to view<sup>53</sup> and might have been part of a mystery cult too.<sup>54</sup> Although water facilities in the sanctuary apparently were no longer in use in Roman times,<sup>55</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Lucian (2<sup>nd</sup> century AD) called Christianity a new *τελετή* (Lucian. *De morte Peregrini* 11) and Celsus (2<sup>nd</sup> century AD) compared Christianity to the other *τελεταί* (Orig. 3, 59). Kloft 2003, 114.

<sup>52</sup> Graf 2011, 101 f. 110–114.

<sup>53</sup> Paus. 2, 4, 7. Reichert-Südbeck 2000, 222. 225–227; Brown 2018, 142–144.

<sup>54</sup> Reichert-Südbeck 2000, 225, notes the large number of cult members, most probably exclusively women.

<sup>55</sup> See n. 49.

the memory of the former importance of water in the sanctuary might still have survived. Isis, linked with Mysteries in nearby Kenchreai, if we follow Apuleius (Met. 11), was venerated in Corinth already in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD and even before.<sup>56</sup> The sanctuary of Isis in Corinth might have been located close to the Hadji Mustafa fountain spring (Fig. 1) serving to supply water.<sup>57</sup> The famous narrative of Apuleius on the Mysteries of Isis in Kenchreai dates only from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD and might be pure fiction, but in Apuleius' description, bathing was part of the preparation (*sueto lavacro traditum*, Apul. Met. 11, 23), as was an affusion by a priest of Isis (*purissime circumrorans abluit*, Apul. Met. 11, 23). Additionally, the initiation ritual of *travelling through the elements* (*per omnia vectus elementa remeavi*, Apul. Met. 11, 23) might include contact with water, too. We do not know about the real practices of the Isis cult in Kenchreai nor in Corinth, but at least there are archaeological traces of the use of water in the context of this cult.<sup>58</sup> But even if we suppose an initiation ritual in connection with water in the Mystery cults, baptism is unique in performing not only a cleansing act, but in connecting this act with granting the Holy spirit of God and transferring the believer under the dominion of Christ.

While the cultic use of water in Corinth declined in Roman times and the use of water in the Isis cult remains hypothetical, interest in bathing facilities grew considerably. A number of public baths were built during this period (Fig. 1), suggesting a manifold presence and importance of water in Corinth.<sup>59</sup> In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, Pausanias summarises:

*The Corinthians have baths (loutra) in many parts of the city, some put up at the public charge and one by the emperor Hadrian. The most famous of them is near the Poseidon. It was made by the Spartan Eurycles, who beautified it with various kinds of stone, especially the one quarried at Croceae in Laconia. Throughout the city are many wells (krenai), for the Corinthians have a copious supply of flowing water, besides the water which the emperor Hadrian brought from Lake Stymphalus [...].*<sup>60</sup>

Water was present at many places in Corinth, which was named 'well-watered', as springs<sup>61</sup> and many local aquifers brought water to the city.<sup>62</sup>

Apart from the possible use of water in local cults and Mystery cults, the growing importance of bathing in Roman Corinth, and the obvious cleaning effects of water, there were more aspects of water that the local inhabitants could associate when experiencing the use of water in baptism. Local Corinthian traditions show that water places, especially fountains, not only supplied water or offered a refreshing and relaxing atmosphere, but told stories connected with life, death, and the idea of transformation.<sup>63</sup> Some of the Corinthian water places thus offered a mental background for the belief in the transformative character of water and baptism. One

<sup>56</sup> Brown 2018, 141; Concannon 2016, 90 f. Paus. 2, 4, 7 knows of two sanctuaries of Isis and two of Sarapis. Ebner 2012, 32, mentions an inscription from Corinth dedicated to Isis (AD 50) and refers to a possible mystery cult in the area of the Isthmic games.

<sup>57</sup> Brown 2018, 141.

<sup>58</sup> In the Isis cult in Kenchreai, a hydria symbolising Osiris apparently had a central cultic function; cf. Apul. Met. 11, 11; Nagel 2013, 167; Rife 2010. The location of the Isaeum in Kenchreai is still disputed; Rothaus 2000, 69–71.

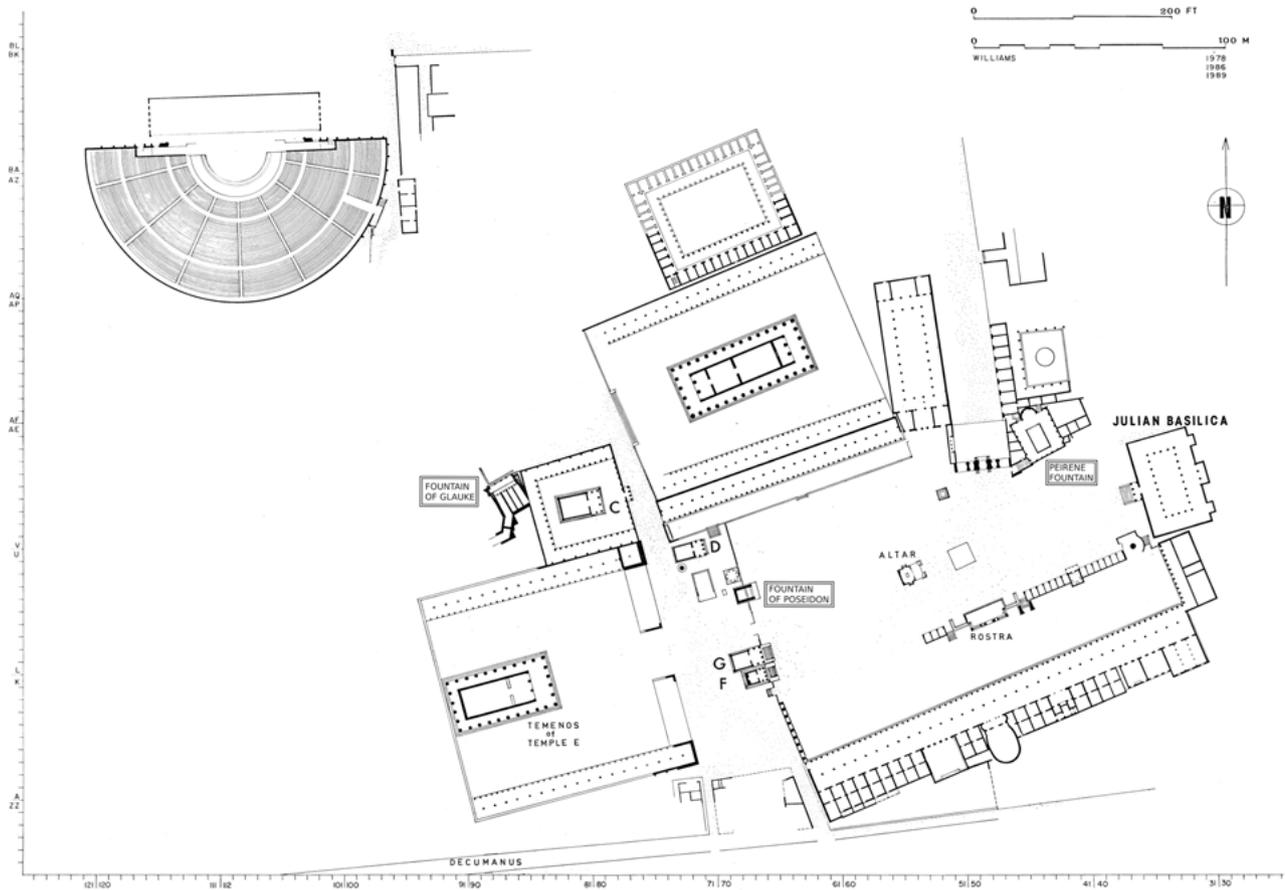
<sup>59</sup> Concannon 2016, 97. Examples are the Roman Baths on the Lechaion Road and the Great Bath, see Brown 2018, 60–62; Fouquet 2019, 51–53. The Great Bath was the major bathing complex of third-century Corinth, Brown 2018, 62. Another impressive bath dates from the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> or early 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD: Biers 1985. Baths from the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD are mentioned by Brown 2018, 62–64, as well as springs which were tapped in the Roman era (Brown 2018, 131).

<sup>60</sup> Paus. 2, 3, 5 (translation by Jones 1979). Cf. Str. 8, 6, 21.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. the Hadji Mustafa fountain spring on the road up to Acrocorinth and the Kakavi spring to the east; Brown 2018, 63; Landon 2003, 46–48.

<sup>62</sup> Concannon 2016, 97; Brown 2018, 58–70; Landon 2003; Fouquet 2019, 104–106, assumes that the Fountain of the Lamps, a Hellenistic *loutron*, close to the Asclepieion, was renovated in Roman times, too. On the water supply system in Corinth, see Fouquet 2019, 39 f. From the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD onwards, around 80,000 cubic meters of water were transferred from the lake of Stymphalia to Corinth via the Hadrianic Aqueduct.

<sup>63</sup> Robinson 2011, 30.



**Fig. 2:** Corinth, forum, mid-1st century AD (Fountain of Glauke, Fountain of Poseidon, Peirene Fountain).

example is the fountain of Glauke<sup>64</sup> (Fig. 2), named after the second wife of Jason, who sought relief from the burning sensation of the poisoned dress that Medea, Jason's first wife, had sent her as a wedding gift (Paus. 2, 3, 6). Glauke hoped for salvation through water, but nevertheless died.<sup>65</sup> Another example is the lower Peirene fountain to the north of the forum (Fig. 2), which has a long history. Remodelled after the city was re-founded, the fountain was transformed into a luxurious marble revetted courtyard in the late 1<sup>st</sup> or early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.<sup>66</sup> Since the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, the upper Peirene fountain had been located in a meadow below Acrocorinth and was probably connected with the lower Peirene fountain.<sup>67</sup> The lower Peirene fountain commemorates the location of Bellerophon's taming of Pegasus,<sup>68</sup> but Pausanias provides more information: 'the legend about Peirene is that she was a woman who became a spring because of her tears shed in lamentation for her son Kenchrias, who was unintentionally killed by Artemis' (Paus. 2, 3, 2-3).<sup>69</sup> The myth connects the fountain with a story about the tears of a mother having lost her son. The fountain was 'one of the most famous Corinthian landmarks in the ancient world', known by many authors of antiquity.<sup>70</sup> There was also the fountain of Poseidon

<sup>64</sup> The fountain was revived after the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD; Robinson 2011, 201.

<sup>65</sup> See Fouquet 2019, figs. 11-13. The original context of the fountain might have been different, see Reichert-Südbeck 2000, 155 f.

<sup>66</sup> Robinson 2011, 175-203. Fouquet 2019, 48 f. 131-133.

<sup>67</sup> Robinson 2011, 20.

<sup>68</sup> Robinson 2005, 116-127.

<sup>69</sup> The two harbours of Corinth were named after Leches and Kenchrias, the sons of Peirene (Paus. 2, 1, 3).

<sup>70</sup> Robinson 2011, 28-30.

(Fig. 2), father of Kenchrias, and lord over life and death at sea, located on the forum's west terrace.<sup>71</sup>

Despite the absence of water from cultic rituals in Corinth after the city's re-founding by the Romans, the refreshing atmosphere of baths and the myths and stories linked to the fountains offered a local encyclopaedia connecting water with purification, renewal, and stories about life, death, and transformation.<sup>72</sup> Thus, baptism most probably dovetailed with the general importance and connotations of water in Corinth. Christ believers discussing different models of baptism and practising baptism interacted 'with the complex cultural situation that typified life' in Corinth.<sup>73</sup>

## Late Antique baptisteries in Corinth

Christianity in Corinth spread during the first centuries: Clement, the bishop of Rome, addressed a letter to the Corinthians at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, exhorting the still-confrontational Corinthian Christians to be humble; a number of martyrs are known from the times of prosecution, including Silas, Kyriakos, and Leonidas.<sup>74</sup> But there are no archaeological remains to help reconstruct baptismal rites, rooms, or churches from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD.<sup>75</sup> After the Pauline letters that confirm the growing importance of baptism, there are no hints in the following centuries regarding the development of baptism in Corinth.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD the situation changes. Various churches were built (Lechaion basilica, Quadratus basilica, Kraneion basilica; a basilica with a martyrion;<sup>76</sup> basilica in Skutela),<sup>77</sup> possibly in connection with the building policy supported by Emperor Justinian and a resulting local competition.<sup>78</sup> None of these basilicas was built in the centre of Corinth<sup>79</sup> (Fig. 3), a phenomenon that might have its cause in the apparent connection of the churches with Christian cemeteries.<sup>80</sup> The effect of this building policy seems to have been a most visible sacralisation of the landscape around Corinth, pointing to Christianity as the major religion at this entrance gate to the Peloponnes.<sup>81</sup> 'The basilicas announce visually, aurally and olfactorily that Corinth was Christian [...] the basilicas proclaimed that the aristocracy, and the Empire were fully in support of this Christianity'.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Concannon 2016, 97; Robinson 2011, 201; Fouquet 2019, 60–62. Another prestigious central fountain was built in the South Stoa of the forum, Fouquet 2019, 79 f.

<sup>72</sup> Concannon 2016, 91–93, connects the Peirene fountain with the taming of Pegasus by Bellerophon, but this is only one – certainly important – element of the myth.

<sup>73</sup> DeMaris 2008, 50.

<sup>74</sup> Pallas 1990, 748.

<sup>75</sup> In the fountain of Lamps, however, some 4,000 lamps were found, many inscribed with Christian invocations, which might be connected with baptism, see Brown 2018, 131 f.

<sup>76</sup> Pallas 1990, 764, dates it to the time of Justinian I.

<sup>77</sup> Brown 2018, 147, counts 'at least eight large, new sixth-century AD churches built, all adjacent to earlier pagan sanctuaries'. As far as the basilicas of Lechaion, Quadratus, and Kraneion are concerned, we can assume that they were built on earlier Christian buildings which most probably did not date to before the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. Rothaus 2000, 94 f., discusses other possible Christian remains. Another basilica was built close to the Temple of Aphrodite in Acrocorinth (4<sup>th</sup> /5<sup>th</sup> century AD?), see Peloschek 2010, 21 f.; Brown 2018, 146 f, mentions a second one.

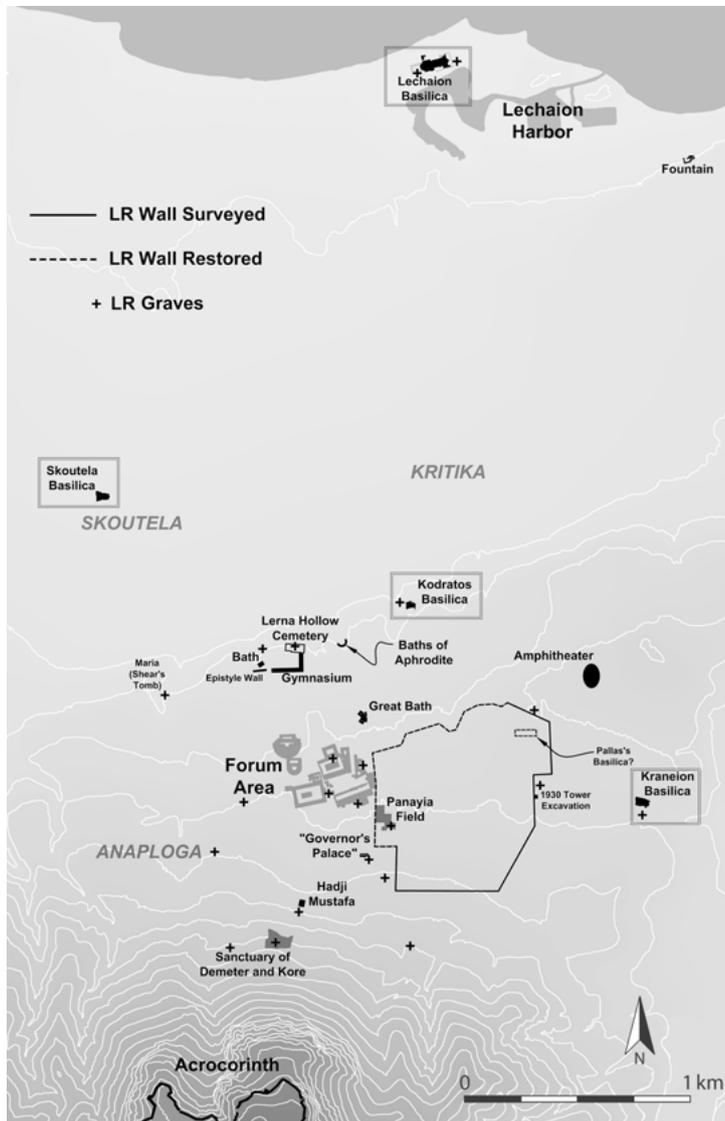
<sup>78</sup> Vionis 2017, 152. On the economic prosperity of Corinth from the 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> century AD, allowing this building boom, see Jacobs 2014, 86 f.

<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, remaining pieces of Christian buildings and sculpture found close to the agora hint at the existence of a church in this area, too, see Pallas 1990, 760.

<sup>80</sup> Brown 2018, 147.

<sup>81</sup> Rothaus 2000, 102.

<sup>82</sup> Rothaus 2000, 103.



**Fig. 3:** Corinth, the main basiliicas, 6th century AD. LR: Late Roman.

Some of these churches, the basiliicas of Lechaion, Skoutela and Kraneion, were connected to baptismal buildings<sup>83</sup> (Fig. 4), which localised baptism now in the sacred area of the basiliicas and transferred the Christian initiation ritual into a fixed architectural structure.<sup>84</sup> The baptisteries built adjacent to the basiliicas, but not integrated into them, interpreted baptism in an architectural way as a rite de passage from the non-Christian to the Christian world.

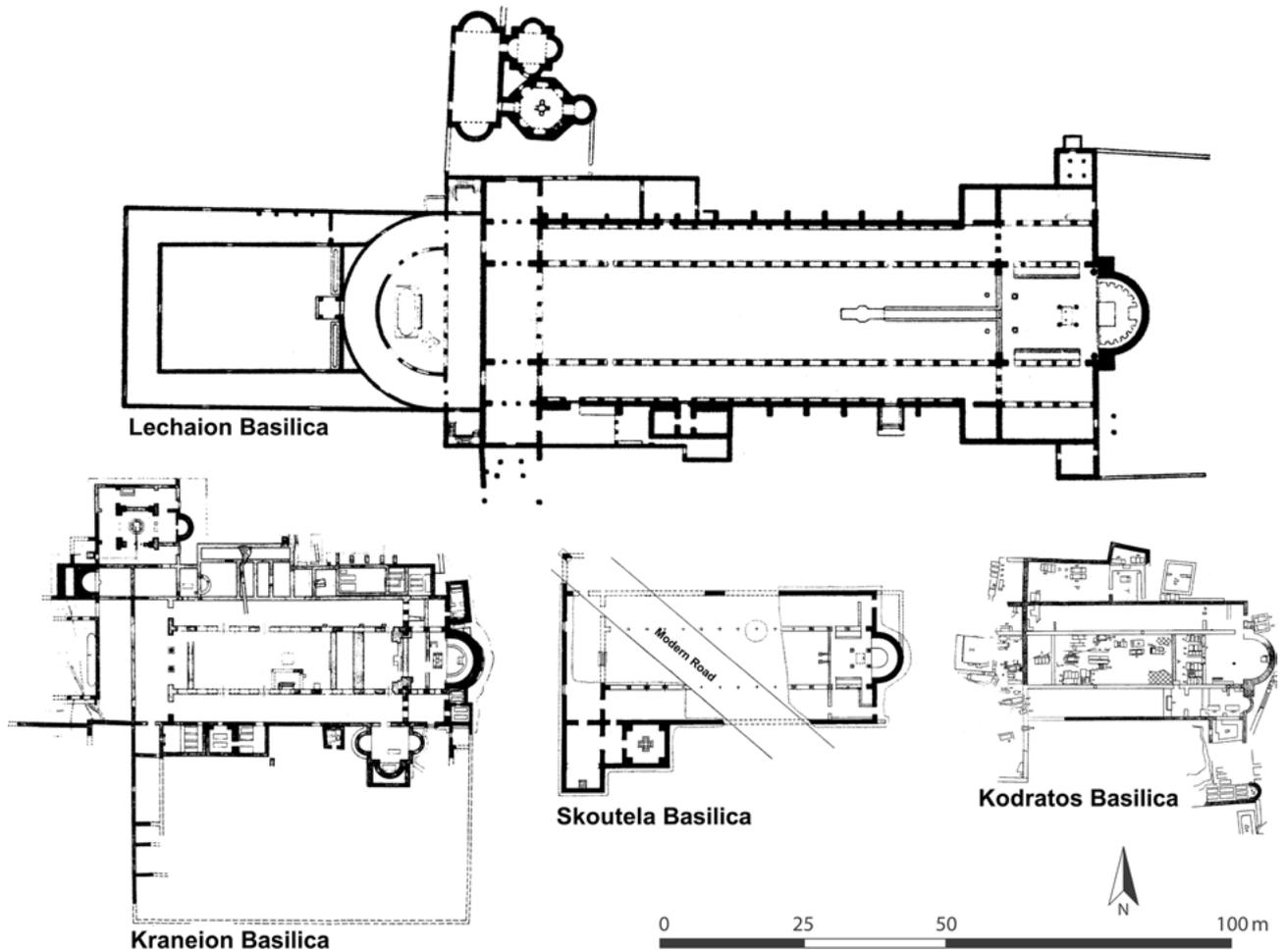
The Lechaion basilica near the harbour, probably built in the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century AD,<sup>85</sup> was one of the largest basiliicas of the time and possibly the seat of the archbishop. From the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, Christianity in Corinth had spread considerably, especially after the Constantinian shift, but the basilica's size does not just reflect the growing numbers of Christians, but imperial policy, too.<sup>86</sup> The basilica demonstrated the power of Christianity – now

<sup>83</sup> Ristow 1998, 155 no. 247, mentions a piscina belonging to the church on Acrocorinth, which might have had a baptistery, too.

<sup>84</sup> Fürst 2008, 170–192, gives an overview of architectural forms and decoration of late antique baptisteries.

<sup>85</sup> Pallas 1990, 774, dates the building process between AD 450–457 and AD 518–525 (repairs). Sanders 2005, 440, suggests the restoration process dates to after AD 525.

<sup>86</sup> Caraher 2014, 148. 151 draws this conclusion from the size, style and quality of the Lechaion basilica; cf. Brandt 2011, 1588.



**Fig. 4:** Corinth, the basilicas and baptisteries, 6th century AD.

supported by the imperial family – to anyone passing by. Everybody approaching Corinth from the sea would notice that Christianity was the religion supported by the authority of the emperor.

The Lechaion basilica most likely was built close to a place where a former martyr, St Leonidas, had a shrine.<sup>87</sup> Leonidas and seven Christian women accompanying him were drowned in the sea during the persecutions and miraculously were washed up onto the beach.<sup>88</sup> It is very possible that Early Christians in Corinth used water and practised baptism as an initiation ritual reflecting the death and resurrection of Jesus in a context which allowed commemoration of the dying and ‘rising’ of these martyrs, too. The death of these martyrs was understood as their birth into spiritual and eternal glory, as baptism was understood as a kind of death and rebirth. Converts would benefit from their confession to Christ and the divine patronage of the martyrs.<sup>89</sup> The basilica featured water prominently and not only in the baptistery: several water basins were built in the atrium, possibly for purification rituals,<sup>90</sup> while there were tubs for washing feet near the gate.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Pallas 1990, 776. There are no indications that the basilica was built in place of a former pagan sacral building. Cf. Peloschek 2010, 15.

<sup>88</sup> Pallas 1990, 770; Halkin 1953; Brown 2018, 135 f.

<sup>89</sup> Brown 1981.

<sup>90</sup> On purification rituals in pagan Greek sanctuaries in Hellenistic times, see Chiarenza and Kobusch, this volume.

<sup>91</sup> Pallas 1990, 770; Rothaus 2000, 96 f. Under the main room a sewage system was installed (Pallas 1990, 773).

The baptistery of the Lechaion basilica (Fig. 5) follows the floor plan of pagan baths<sup>92</sup> and evokes martyria and tombs in Italy and north Africa; this may allude to the function of the church and baptistery as a martyr shrine.<sup>93</sup> The form of the baptistery, then, corresponds to the theological understanding of baptism as the washing away of sins, and as dying and rising with Christ. But the architecture of the baptistery followed a growing liturgy for baptism, too, which demanded different steps for confirmation, including the rejection of Satanic powers,<sup>94</sup> and the changing of clothes before the ritual act performed in the basin. ‘The baptistery itself consists of three architecturally distinct compartments. The largest is a 16.20 × 7.60 m hall with apses on its north and south end. This main hall was entered from the south end, presumably from the basilica, through the apse. To the east of this apsidal hall were two additional chambers. The northern chamber has a central core measuring 5.05 m square with apsidal exedra at the cardinal directions. Entered from the west through the western apse, this room was identified by the excavator as the *apodyterion*. This chamber lacks a font and seemed well positioned for this purpose. Immediately to the south of this chamber was the octagonal *photisterion* or baptistery proper which measures 3.15 m across. It appears to have communicated with the *apodyterion* to its north through the triangular space formed by the east wall of the long hall and the west walls of the north and south chambers. The octagonal room featured apses at the corners and square exedra at the cardinal directions. To the west, the *photisterion* communicated with the long hall. To the east projects a usually shaped apse. Marble revetment decorated the walls of the elaborate buildings and the interior of the font. The *photisterion* preserved two fonts. The centre of the octagonal interior space featured cruciform octagonal font set in the floor with stairs on the northern and southern cross-arms. It is just under 0.50 m in depth [...] A smaller font sits in the southeast apse’.<sup>95</sup>

Catechumens, after having confirmed in the main hall and taken off their clothes in the *apodyterion*, would enter the cruciform font in the *photisterion* and be baptised by the bishop and a deacon.<sup>96</sup> Single doors in the different rooms pointed the way clearly to the following room, which had a different function in the baptismal liturgy. Leaving the *apodyterion* by a single door and a small rectangular floor, the catechumens entering the *photisterion* immediately faced the basin lowered in the middle of the room. The centric structure of the *photisteria* signaled very clearly the water basin as the destination of the procession which the catechumens had started in the main hall. Catechumens would enter the basin from one side by steps, be baptised by the clerics standing on their right and left, and leave the basin, baptised, by the opposite side. After baptism, the newly baptised would leave the *photisterion* again by a single door and would finally be allowed to enter the main area of the basilica, probably wearing a new white dress, and participate in the Eucharistic meal and the liturgy as real members of the Christian community. There is some indication that the impressive baptistery of the Lechaion

<sup>92</sup> Pallas 1990, 774. Sanders compares bathing establishments in Corinth with the form of the baptistery, see Sanders 1999, 474 f.; Caraher 2014, 149 map 8.2. Brandt 2011, 1588, demonstrates the convergence of baptismal terminology with the terminology concerning baths.

<sup>93</sup> Pallas 1990, 776, assumes the former martyr shrine to be close to the basilica, but not at the same place.

<sup>94</sup> Müller 2012, 87.

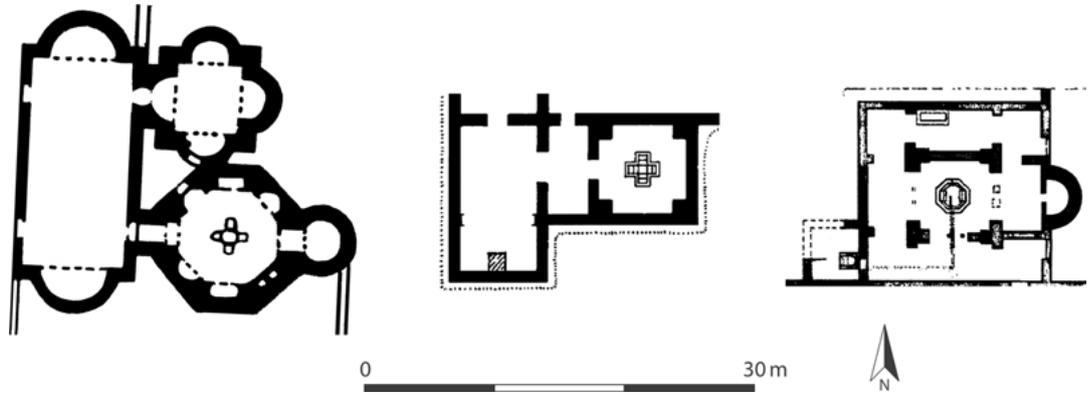
<sup>95</sup> Description by Caraher 2009. The function of the second font is not clear, Fürst 2008, 174. On the apses in late antique baptisteries, see Fürst 2008, 176.

<sup>96</sup> The *Traditio Apostolica* 21 mentions a presbyter/priest and a deacon. The *Didascalia Apostolorum* 8, 28 mentions the assistance of deaconesses at the baptism of women. Although the church orders of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries show different liturgies, Müller 2012, 94, mentions some essential elements of baptism performed in baptisteries. The central act of baptism was a triple immersion/affusion by the clerics, followed by a Trinitarian confession of the baptised (see *Didache* 7,1–3). The body of the baptised would then be anointed, he/she would be granted the spirit by the laying on of hands by the bishop, and his/her front would be anointed. Fürst 2008, 127–137, gives more details on pre- and post-baptismal rites and on the baptismal act. Fürst 2008, 172, notes the difficulty of correlating archaeological structures to a specific baptismal liturgy.

Fig. 5: Corinth, Lechaion basilica, baptistery.

Fig. 6: Corinth, Skutela basilica, baptistery.

Fig. 7: Corinth, Kraneion basilica, baptistery.



basilica predates the basilica<sup>97</sup> and continued to be used even after the main basilica was damaged and abandoned (presumably as a result of the earthquake in AD 551).<sup>98</sup> It seems that a 3<sup>rd</sup> century pagan nymphaeum near the Lechaion basilica was converted to Christian use in the 6<sup>th</sup> century and from then on functioned as a kind of architectural ‘introduction’ to the basilica or different church buildings.<sup>99</sup> William R. Caraher assumes that the nymphaeum might have served ‘to advertise the imperial connections of a wealthy local resident, to support the prestige of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, or to serve as a stopping point for travellers along the coastal road on the approach to the church at the Lechaion’.<sup>100</sup> Featuring water prominently, the nymphaeum could have demonstrated to everybody the significance of water as a metaphor of life in Christianity and the importance of its cultic use in baptism, too.

The basilica in Skutela, built in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, was located outside the ancient walls in the northwest of the city; it was much smaller than the Lechaion basilica, but it may have been connected with one of the martyrs of Corinth, too.<sup>101</sup> The basilica likewise had a baptistery (Fig. 4), with a room for catechesis, a passage (*apodyterion*?) and a *photisterion* with an octagonal basin (Fig. 6).<sup>102</sup> The rooms followed each other in an axis directed towards the east. Here again, single central doors leading to the next room would clearly show the catechumens their way to the sacral centre, the octagonal basin. The walls of the *photisterion* form a cross, too.

The Kraneion basilica near the former gate to Kenchreai was also built in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD. A baptistery on its north side consisted again of three rooms (Fig. 4) and a *photisterion* with an octagonal basin<sup>103</sup> framed by four pilasters connected by marble bars,<sup>104</sup> underlining the restricted access to the basin and its holyness (Fig. 7). A small apsidal room directed to the east as the apse of the basilica might have served for anointment or shaving of the newly baptised and so might have had a special function in the baptismal liturgy, too.<sup>105</sup>

Three Corinthian basilicas from the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD (Lechaion, Skutela, Kraneion) each had a baptistery consisting of three rooms and a cruciform baptismal font in each case, suggesting a partial immersion of the converts.<sup>106</sup> The baptisteries served as a kind of ritual entrance build-

<sup>97</sup> Rothaus 2000, 96.

<sup>98</sup> Pallas 1990, 793.

<sup>99</sup> Pallas 1990, 766. Brandt 2011, 1590, points to the growing popularity of baths and nymphaea in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>100</sup> Caraher 2014, 150.

<sup>101</sup> Pallas 1990, 776 f.

<sup>102</sup> Pallas 1990, 777; Ristow 1998, 156 no. 250.

<sup>103</sup> Pallas 1990, 780–786; Ristow 1998, 155 no. 248.

<sup>104</sup> Pallas 1990, 785.

<sup>105</sup> Pallas 1990, 785.

<sup>106</sup> Sanders 2005, 441, assumes total immersion; the depth of the basins rather hints to a partial immersion and affusion.

ings to the churches. They were not part of the main building, but adjacent to it, still separating the not-yet-Christians from the sacred Christian space. All three baptisteries seem to have had a final entrance door to the aisles of the basilicas, giving access to the sacred area directly after baptism. Although they were not part of the main building, the baptisteries had a central function as ‘entrance rooms’ to the basilicas, representing the passage from non-Christianity to Christianity.<sup>107</sup> In contrast to purification rites, baptism was performed only once; the elaborated procedure of baptism in a separate building emphasised that baptism was understood as a rite de passage, following different steps, and as an initiation ritual into a community which was architecturally defined by the nearby basilica. Water played a central role in this passage, as indicated by the central position of the baptismal basins, which were architecturally staged.<sup>108</sup> But water featured prominently only in the central room, the *photisterion*, and water was not the only element pointing to the renewal of life: the dying and rising with Christ, the transfer under the dominion of Christ, the granting of the Holy Spirit, and the integration into the Christian community were theological effects as important as the purification from sins by immersion into the baptismal font. These theological effects, central for the understanding of baptism, could not easily be reflected by the architecture.

The cross-shaped baptismal fonts, however, recall the central symbol of the Christian gospel, introduced into Corinth by Paul, who preached ‘the word of the cross’ (1 Cor 1, 18). Converts entering the Corinth baptisteries stepped down into a cruciform font, reflecting the essential soteriological symbol of Christianity: the saving force of the dying of Jesus on the cross was transferred to the converts in baptism (cf. Rom 6, 3; Gal 2, 19). Architecture, myths, and cultic practices are aspects already closely connected in Greek and Roman Corinth, as demonstrated above, and they continue to be connected in Early Christianity, too. Christianity, however, added a theological framework that influenced architectural structures and even the decoration of Christian buildings. As in other places, the Christian baptisteries in Corinth might have been decorated with biblical symbols for life in mosaics and wall paintings.<sup>109</sup> The baptisteries in Corinth were not just functional buildings, but bore a wide range of theological meanings. Like other water places in the city, they were connected with stories of life, death, and transformation, and their architecture, resembling Corinthian baths, helped create a familiar atmosphere.

There may have been multiple reasons for building several basilicas and three baptisteries in Corinth during the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD.<sup>110</sup> The construction of monumental new churches can be seen at different places across Greece at the time.<sup>111</sup> Richard M. Rothaus interprets the impressive building process in Corinth as a sign of imperial propaganda, but takes a growing power of bishops and clerics into account, too.<sup>112</sup> Caraher sees the monumental Christian architecture as a reflex of local competition between different groups and as a kind of architectural ‘conversation’, showing that Christianity was an authority not dependent on monumental buildings in the city centre and was locally growing everywhere in the outskirts of the city.<sup>113</sup> In any case, the monumental church buildings around Corinth demonstrate ‘the growing power of the local Christian community’.<sup>114</sup> Whereas Rothaus and Caraher are reluctant to relate the size of the

**107** There is no information on rituals at the entrances to the baptisteries in Corinth; cf. Day 2018 on the entrances to the baptisteries in Milan and Jerusalem.

**108** See, in contrast, Kobusch, this volume.

**109** Cf. Jensen 2011. Fürst 2008, 176–187, gives examples.

**110** The presence of at least three baptisteries in Corinth during the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD has not yet been explained satisfactorily. Possibly we have to reckon with more than one bishop at the time. Unfortunately, only three inscriptions dating from the 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries AD give evidence of bishops in Corinth: Sironen 2018, 202 (a bishop’s muleteer). 206 (Eustathios). 210 (Photios).

**111** Brown 2018, 147.

**112** Rothaus 2000, 95 f.; Caraher 2014, 145 f. Vionis 2017, 145 f. hints at the fact that the private land of rich Christians might have been used to build monumental churches around cities in Late Antiquity.

**113** Caraher 2014, 145–147.

**114** Vionis 2017, 152.

churches and baptisteries to a growing Christian population,<sup>115</sup> Guy D. R. Sanders still points out ‘that the galleries at Lechaion afford as much space to catechumens as to baptised in the aisles below. We know that adults often put off baptism until late in life, but one can also speculate that a large number of Corinthians were late in adopting Christianity. This neglect may have required urgent remedial action in the early 6<sup>th</sup> century [...]. In the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the buildings that were erected provided an inordinate amount of space for adult catechumens, suggesting a large population of unbaptised Corinthians’.<sup>116</sup> After several centuries where Christianity played no major role as yet, the situation changed considerably, at least in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD. The reason for the large number of converts might be seen in imperial policy, but also in the experience of disastrous natural phenomena in the second quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, such as earthquakes, famine, and epidemics in AD 542.<sup>117</sup> ‘With Poseidon, Demeter, and Asclepius unable to avert these disasters, Corinthians may have had cause to reflect on the relative potency of the Christian God. Combined with mounting pressure from Justinian [...] these natural disasters may have persuaded many Corinthians to accept Orthodox Christianity in the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century’.<sup>118</sup> The size of the baptisteries might at least be due to the fact that baptism in Late Antiquity seems to have been performed only once a year.<sup>119</sup> In Corinth, however, the impact of imperial power on Christian architecture is evident and might be an important explanation for the large number of monumental, but also less monumental church buildings in the area.

## Conclusion

Like Christianity itself, baptism underwent different developments during the first Christian centuries. Local interests and aspects seem to have played a role in the way Christ believers practised and understood baptism. In the early years of Christianity, baptism was of great importance in Corinth and practised in different forms, probably somewhere outside with running water. Baptism even seems to have been practised on behalf of the dead, possibly taking up a special Corinthian interest in the well-being of the dead. The later Corinthian baptisteries continued to use the Corinthian context: the Lechaion baptistery was built with a close formal similarity to pagan baths and so demonstrated that baptism was a cleansing act, albeit now not in a physical, but in a spiritual sense. Baptism, the Christian purification and entrance ritual, during the first Christian centuries developed in strong interaction with the local cultic and architectural context of Corinth. The construction of baptisteries, however, built adjacent to the main sacred area of the basilicas and used exclusively for the Christian initiation ritual, does not have a parallel in any of the pagan cults of Corinth, which seem to have featured water basins for regular purification only.<sup>120</sup> The architecture of the baptisteries, albeit adapting pagan architecture, is closely linked to the ritual and theological dimension of baptism which focuses on water as the central element of the Christian initiation ritual. The sequence of rooms pointing to the baptismal basins as the centre of the baptisteries, the staging of the basins and the cross-shaped form of the basins demonstrate this clearly.<sup>121</sup>

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**115** Rothaus 2000, 96.

**116** Sanders 2005, 441.

**117** Pallas 1990, 747 f.

**118** Sanders 2005, 442.

**119** Fürst 2008, 128.

**120** The Isis cult might have been an exception, see above.

**121** I am most grateful to my colleague Andreas Müller and to my assistant Hi-Cheong Lee for helpful comments.

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