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**Barsabas of Jerusalem, *On Christ and the Churches*:
Its Genre and Liturgical Contents**

After the publication, in 1972, of the Georgian fragments of Melito of Sardis¹, it became widely known that some parts of the earliest Christian literary heritage were available only in Georgian. About ten years later, Michel van Esbroeck, who published Melito's fragments, also provided the *editio princeps* of another early Christian text, this one attributed to an otherwise unknown writer, Barsabas of Jerusalem². In this case, the scholarly community was absolutely unprepared for such a discovery. Unlike the name of Melito, the name of Barsabas was saying nothing to anybody. But the worst problem posed by this text was its unfamiliar genre; this will be the focus of my present communication.

The early Christian text *On Christ and the Churches* (late 2nd or early 3rd cent.), attributed to a writer called Barsabas of Jerusalem, is known only in Georgian translation, in the unique manuscript *Ivion 11* (10th cent., going back to an earlier asomtavruli model; the translation can be dated to the second half of the 5th cent.). The first study of this text together with the *editio princeps* was prepared in 1982 by Michel van Esbroeck. Since then, only three specific topics of this work have been studied: the exegesis of Josephus (F. Manns, 1984)³, its anti-Jewish polemics (D. Bumazhnov, 2008)⁴, and a kind of proto-monastic ideology in the exegesis of Adam in the Paradise (D. Bumazhnov, 2008 and 2009)⁵. There are, moreover,

¹ van Esbroeck, Michel, *Nouveaux fragments de Méliton conservés en géorgien*, Analecta Bollandiana 90 (1972), 63-99.

² van Esbroeck, Michel, *Barsabée de Jérusalem, Sur le Christ et les églises. Introduction, édition du texte géorgien inédit et traduction française*, Turnhout: Brepols, 1982 (Patrologia orientalis, 41,2, N° 187).

³ Manns, Frédéric, *Une nouvelle source littéraire pour l'étude du judéo-christianisme*, Henoch 6 (1984), 165-180; reprinted in: *idem*, *Les enfants de Rébecca*, Paris: Médiaspaul, 2002 (Vivre la Parole), 48-61.

⁴ Bumazhnov, Dmitry, *The Jews in the Neglected Christian Writing "The Word of Saint Barsabas, Archbishop of Jerusalem, about our Saviour Jesus Christ and the Churches" of the Second – Early Third Century*, Scrinium 4 (2008), 121-135.

⁵ Bumazhnov, Dmitry, *Some Ecclesiological Patterns of the Early Christian Period and Their Implications for the History of the Term ΜΟΝΑΧΟΣ (Monk)*, in: Alexeev, A. A., Karakolis, Ch., Luz, U. (editors), *Einheit der Kirche im Neuen Testament. Dritte europäische orthodox-westliche Exegetenkonferenz in Sankt Petersburg 24.–31. August 2005*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008 (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 218), 251–264; *idem*, *Adam alone in Paradise. A Jewish-Christian Exegesis and its implications for the history of asceticism*, in: Grypeou, E., Spurling H. (editors), *Exegetical Encounter between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity*, Leiden etc.: Brill, 2009 (Jewish and Christian Perspectives Series, 18), 31-41.

several mentions of the Georgian text by other scholars and by van Esbroeck in his later papers but, however, the four papers by Manns and Bumazhnov together with van Esbroeck's *editio princeps* and his accompanying scholarly introduction exhaust the bibliography of the original studies dedicated to the Barsabas' work. The peculiar composition of the work and its genre remain unexplained.

In the present study, I propose an interpretation of the text as a Christian reworking of a Jewish Second Temple apocalyptic frame especially close to that of *2 Baruch* and *4 Ezra* and also used in the early Christian *Apocalypse of John*. The structural similarity of the three latter apocalypses is well known; elsewhere, I have proposed a reconstruction of the calendrical scheme which was, in slightly different modifications, used in *2 Baruch* and *4 Ezra*⁶. These apocalypses contain an exact specification of the temporal intervals between the visions and other important acts of revelation.

Unlike them, the *Apocalypse of John* does not contain an explicit calendrical calibration in time intervals (save the mention of the "Lord's Day" in 1:10), but it does contain seven great visions which are sometimes subdivided into seven separate episodes; thus, its structure is especially close to that of *2 Baruch*.

The sermon of Barsabas is also composed of seven major sections dedicated to the seven great prophets. These parts are subdivided into twenty-eight "mysteries" (საიდუმლო) in an uneven way. The resulting structure turns out to be especially close to that of *2 Baruch*. The similarity between both structures is especially remarkable with respect to the implied weekdays (s. the Table).

The weekdays for *2 Baruch* are taken from my own reconstruction of its calendar⁷. The weekdays for Barsabas are calculated on the basis of two presumptions:

- (1) The starting point is Sunday (I will discuss this point below);
- (2) One "mystery" corresponds to one day (this presumption is analogous to that which is used to establish the structural correspondence between the *Apocalypse of John* and *2 Baruch* and *4 Ezra*).

The differences between these four sources can be explained by calendrical motives; van Esbroeck's supposition that one or two "mysteries" were dropped during the manuscript transmission of the text⁸ is unnecessary.

⁶ Lourié, Basil, *The Calendar Implied in 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra: Two Modifications of the One Scheme*, in: Boccaccini, G., Zurawski, J. M. (editors), *Interpreting 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch. International Studies*, London etc.: Bloomsbury, 2014 (Library of Second Temple Studies, 87), 124–137.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ van Esbroeck, *Barsabée de Jérusalem...*, p. 35.

Scenes	Barsabas of Jerusalem			Weekdays		<i>John</i>	<i>2 Baruch</i>	<i>4 Ezra</i>
	Prophets	§§	Mysteries	Bars	<i>2 Bar</i>			
	Christ	1–2		Sun	Thu	Sun	Thu	Tue
I	Adam	3–10	4	Thu	Thu	7	7	1
II	Noah	11	1	Fri	Thu	7	7	7
III	Abraham	12	1	Sat	Thu	7	7	7
IV	Sarah	13	1	Sun	Fri	1	1	7
V	Isaac	14–28	13	Sat	Sat	7	1	1
VI	Jacob	29–40	7	Sat	Sat	1	7	7
VII	Moses/Christ	41–44	1	Sun	Sun	1	1	3
Σ			28			31	31	33

Most important calendrical features

1. Christ is Sunday

In a more archaic exegesis preserved by Clement of Alexandria quoting an earlier source (*Strom* 6:16:145; Stählin 506), Christ is the light and a “day” but this day is the Sabbath (such is the Christian understanding of the fourth commandment).

In Barsabas, Christ is still the light and a “day” but this day is “the First from Sabbath” = Sunday (პირველი შაბათი, § 2; not “the first week,” cf. პირველსა შაბათსა = πρώτη σαββάτου in Mk 16:9). This is an additional argument for a third-century dating.

One has to recall the *Apocalypse of John*, where the starting point of the following visions falls on Sunday.

2. Midpentecost

In the same manner as in both *2 Baruch* and *4 Ezra*, the seventh part of Barsabas’ sermon is dedicated to Moses and is related to the Pentecost. The calendrical setting of all these texts is the second half of the Pentecost period.

However, the first visions in *2 Baruch* and *4 Ezra* are related to specific dates in the second month important in the Second Temple period, whereas the beginning of the sermon of Barnabas is related to the Midpentecost: the Sunday of the corresponding week and the commemoration of Noah. The commemoration of Noah on the Midpentecost is traceable back to the third century although it may have pre-Christian roots.⁹

3. Pentecost

⁹ van Goudoever, Jan, *Fêtes et calendriers bibliques*, tr. par M.-L. Kerremans, Paris: Bauchesne, 1967 (Théologie historique, 7), 193–194; Lourié, Basil, *Computus*, in: Uhlig, S. (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 1, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verl., 2003, 784–787, here 787.

The final and culminating part corresponds to the Pentecost, in the same manner as in many Second Temple Jewish apocalypses but especially *2 Baruch* and *4 Ezra*. Here, Barsabas explains the role of Christ as the second Moses, in the same way that Christ's New Testament is a renewal of the Testament of Moses. Christ as New Moses is the leitmotiv of the corresponding part of Barsabas' work.

Actually, I know no liturgical interpretation of the remaining figures of Barsabas' "holy prophets." Nevertheless, in light of the given liturgical interpretations of Christ as Sunday, Noah, and Christ as New Moses, which provide a frame for the entire structure of the work, one has to suggest that such interpretations were implied.

Therefore, Barsabas' work is a paraliturgical text, that is, a text relying on the liturgy but not created for the needs of the liturgy. It is similar to some apocalypses but it is clearly does not belong to this genre itself.

Genre

Unlike *John*, *2 Baruch*, and *4 Ezra*, Barsabas' work is not an apocalypse. Instead, it is an inverse apocalypse in which the prophecies of the past ("mysteries") are examined and proclaimed as fulfilled. I do not know what to call such a genre; perhaps something along the lines of "realized apocalypse" would be the best name.

We do know one work of the same or similar genre, the sermon of John II of Jerusalem on the *encaenia* of the Sion basilica in 394 (preserved in Armenian)¹⁰. It is also subdivided into seven great parts, all of them being dedicated to some Old Testament "prefigurations" of the New Testament. Moreover, John of Jerusalem's sermon is partially based on and explicitly quotes *4 Ezra*. There is an obvious need to continue the study of both John of Jerusalem's sermon and Barsabas' work taking into account their possible relationship. So far, however, the following conclusion by Michel van Esbroeck still holds: "Une inconnue demeure: Jean de Jérusalem (387-427), qui parvint à s'allier des groupes judéo-chrétiens de Jérusalem lors de l'inauguration de l'Église du Saint-Esprit à la Sainte-Sion, n'a-t-il pas laissé sa trace dans ce document ? Il est bien difficile de préciser ce point qui demanderait des développements trop extérieurs à la simple présentation de l'œuvre de Barsabée"¹¹.

¹⁰ van Esbroeck, Michel, *Une homélie sur l'Église attribuée à Jean de Jérusalem*, Le Muséon, 86 (1974), 283-304 (the *editio princeps* of the Armenian text together with a Latin translation); *idem*, *Jean II de Jérusalem et les cultes de S. Étienne, de la Sainte-Sion et de la Croix*, Analecta Bollandiana, 102 (1984), 99-134 (contains a study and a French translation which corrects the previous Latin translation).

¹¹ van Esbroeck, *Barsabée de Jérusalem...*, p. 60.