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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*

The only manuscript to which we owe the transmission of “The Word of Saint Barsabas, Archbishop of Jerusalem, about our Saviour Jesus Christ and the churches [and about the chief priests],”¹ is the Old Georgian manuscript Athos Iviron 11 dating to the 10th century. The text was published with a French translation and introductory notes in 1982 in Patrologia Orientalis by the Belgian Jesuit Michel van Esbroeck. However, this seems to have produced little reaction in the scholarly milieu apart from the registration of the writing in the Clavis Patrum Graecorum (no. 1685) and in some other patristic handbooks.²

Meanwhile, the editor’s claims concerning the date of the probably Greek original of the text (2nd century) and its place of provenance (Palestine, possibly Jerusalem), as well as its archaic theology coupled

(*) The references to the scholarly works and journals are abbreviated in accordance with Theologische Realenzyklopädie. Abkürzungsverzeichnis, 2., überarbeitete und erweiterte Auflage, zusammengestellt von S. M. Schwertner (Berlin—New York, 1994). TEG which is absent in this list means “Traditio exegetica graeca.” The patristic authors and their writings are quoted according to the abbreviations used in G. W. H. Lampe, A Patristic Greek Lexicon (Oxford, 1961) XI–XLV.

(1) The words “and about the chief priests” are a later addition to the title, see M. van Esbroeck (introd., éd. du texte géorgien inédit et trad. française), Barsabé de Jérusalem sur le Christ et les églises (Turnhout, 1982) (PO 41/2) 29–31.

with the considerable length of the document (over 40 PO pages), calls for an examination of van Esbroeck’s theses and for further efforts in the contextualization of the “Word” in the history of early Christian literature.

In this article I will present some observations concerning the role of the Jews in the text of Barsabas. Dealing with this question, we shall touch upon the problem of the different sources of the “Word” and its overall purpose. Incomplete and preliminary as it is, this article is to be understood as a kind of invitation for further study of Barsabas’ work. In order to give a general impression of the document to be discussed, a summary of its contents and van Esbroeck’s considerations about the author and the dating should be offered.

Content

The “Word of Saint Barsabas” can be described as a collection of Old Testament testimonies\(^3\) about Christ and the Church. With this hermeneutical principle in mind, the author goes through several biblical stories, starting with the first chapter of the book of Genesis and reaching Moses at the end of his discourse. In particular, he looks at the stories of Adam in Paradise, Noah and the flood, the annunciation to Sarah and her laughter, Isaac’s benediction of Jacob and Esau’s reaction, Jacob’s benediction of his sons, Joseph’s story, and Moses and the Exodus. Thus, the continuous typological Christ-and-Church-oriented exegesis of the Old Testament can be seen as the primary concern of the author.\(^4\)

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(3) We use this word in a non-terminological sense, even though the study of the relationship of the “Word” to the genre of testimonies, i.e. “Bibelkommentare, die entweder eine Folge von Zitaten mit jeweils daran anschließenden Interpretation oder lediglich interpretirende Paraphrasen der entsprechenden atl. Texte bringen” (M. KAMPTNER, Art.: Testimonialsammlung, in: S. DÖPP, W. GEERING (Hrsg.), Lexikon der antiken christlichen Literatur (Freiburg—Basel—Wien, 2002), 674a), would certainly be rewarding.

(4) Cf. Barsab., Christ. 1 (PO 41, 64,9–10): \textit{yoveliweriliqristisTÂsdaeklesiatATÂsgamondibian}; “the whole Scripture becomes clear because of Christ and the Churches,” the English translation here and in the following excerpts is mine, unless the translator is named. About the term “Scripture(s)” (\textit{werili} / \textit{werilni}) as designation of the Old Testament in contrast to the Gospel(s) (\textit{saxareba} / \textit{saxarebani}), see below.