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Introduction to the Epistle of Barnabas

Within the pages of the New Testament, and particularly within the Acts of the Apostles, Barnabas is depicted as a generous patron, an energetic preacher, and a trusted mediator.[1] Yet Barnabas is ultimately overshadowed by the towering figures of Peter, Paul, and others. Within the collection of documents known as the Apostolic Fathers, the Epistle of Barnabas is in danger of a similar fate. Unlike the sayings of Papias or the letters of Ignatius, Polycarp, and possibly Clement, the Epistle of Barnabas has been transmitted in the name of someone who is known from the New Testament but is unlikely to have been its author. *Barnabas* contains a Two Ways Tradition that is closely related to the Didache but has not received the same level of scholarly attention in recent years.[2] The transformative elements within the apocalyptic story of the Shepherd of Hermas give readers a handhold to grasp as they make their way through its occasionally repetitive allegorical teachings that the epistolary nature of *Barnabas* does not easily allow. Barnabas's attempt to distinguish early Jesus-followers from his Jewish opponents has made the document of interest to those who study the partings of the ways, but the severity of Barnabas's polemic and the deftness with which the author of the Epistle to Diognetus writes of Christians as a third race and the soul of the world

1. A word about orthography should be given from the outset. Within the pages of this commentary, the Epistle of Barnabas may also be identified by the italicized *Barnabas*. Although this commentary follows the majority opinion in arguing that the historical Barnabas was not the author of the letter studied here, I will sometimes refer to the author of the Epistle of Barnabas as Barnabas. These alterations are purely stylistic in order to limit repetition. Thus, *Barnabas* refers to the Epistle of Barnabas, while Barnabas refers to the author of the letter or, at times in the introduction, to the historical figure as he is remembered elsewhere in early Christian literature.

2. A similar point has been made by Draper ("Barnabas," 89–90). Since then, the studies of Rhodes ("Two Ways Tradition," 797–816) and Smith ("The *Epistle of Barnabas*," 465–97) have also focused on the Two Ways Tradition in *Barnabas*.

(Diogn. 5.1—6.10) makes the latter an easier point of entry to discussions about Jewish-Christian relations in the second century.

Despite the possibility that the Epistle of Barnabas may be overshadowed by other texts in the Apostolic Fathers, it remains the case that readers who study the letter carefully are likely to find both a rich text to engage on its own merits and points of connection between the letter and other early Jewish and Christian literature from the first and second centuries CE. This commentary will focus on the first matter, that is, on the interpretation of the Epistle of Barnabas as a single text. The primary aim of the commentary is to offer a clear interpretation of the text with a view to its historical, literary, and theological contexts. At times, I will also look further afield to compare *Barnabas* to other early Christian texts in order to better situate the letter. In so doing, this volume hopes to illustrate the benefit of devoting focused attention to the arguments within *Barnabas*, of noting the letter's unique contributions to the interpretation of scripture, and of wrestling with Barnabean teaching alongside other expressions from the Jesus movement of the first and second centuries. In order to accomplish these tasks, it will be helpful to set out key introductory matters that are assumed and argued for within the pages of the commentary. Before proceeding to critical questions about the letter's provenance, date, and authorship, it will be useful to outline the manuscripts and translations in which the letter remains extant.

Manuscripts and Versions of the Epistle of Barnabas

Although most readers will engage the Epistle of Barnabas through critical editions and modern translations, such publications are attempts to reconstruct and communicate the text based upon the best available witnesses.[3] The most important manuscripts for the Epistle of Barnabas are the Greek witnesses and the Latin translation.

3. The editions and translations that have been regularly consulted in the course of writing this commentary include Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*; Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*; Lindemann and Paulsen, *Apostolischen Väter*; Prigent and Kraft, *Épître de Barnabé*; Prinzivalli and Simonetti, *Seguendo J*; Prostmeier and Lona, *Epistola Barnabae*; Wengst, *Didache*. Although all translations of the Epistle of Barnabas are my own and I have regularly checked textual variants listed in textual apparatuses with photographs of the manuscripts when they are available online, I have relied most heavily on the recent critical editions of Prinzivalli and Simonetti, *Seguendo Gesù*; Prostmeier and Lona, *Epistola Barnabae*.

Greek Manuscript Witnesses

Codex Sinaiticus (S)

Codex Sinaiticus was brought to the public's attention by Constantine Tischendorf after he found it at St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai.[4] Tischendorf published his find in 1862, and the manuscript is now housed at the British Library, the Leipzig University Library, the National Library of Russia (St. Petersburg), and St. Catherine's Monastery.[5] S is a parchment codex comprised of more than 400 leaves. It dates to the fourth century and is written in an uncial hand with each page divided into four columns of text.[6] Most important for the purposes of this book, S contains the Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas in its final pages.[7]

The Epistle of Barnabas is located between Revelation and the Shepherd of Hermas. The entire letter is extant in S, beginning in the second column of folio 334^{r} with Barn. 1.1 and ending on the third column of folio 340^{v} with Barn. 21.8. The title given at the start of the work is "Epistle of Barnabas" (ΒΑΡΝΑΒΑΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ), while the scribe marked the end of the work with a coronis to the left of the column and a three-line subscription again reading "Epistle of Barnabas" (ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ / ΒΑΡΝΑ / ΒΑ). The headings on the intervening pages read "of Barnabas" (ΒΑΡΝΑΒΑ). The text was copied by Scribe A.[8] Since it provides an early and complete witness to the Epistle of Barnabas, S is an immensely valuable manuscript for textual criticism. However, New Testament scholars who are accustomed to viewing S as a reliable text should not assume without warrant that the same thing holds when it comes to the Epistle of Barnabas.[9] The text of S must be compared closely to the texts of the other Greek witnesses and versions.[10]

4. For a concise account of the drama surrounding Tischendorf's initial discovery in 1844 through publication and the subsequent controversy, see Porter, *Constantine Tischendorf*, 24–29, 40–54.

5. Constantine Tischendorf, *Bibliorum Codex Sinaiticus Petropolitanus*. The manuscript can be viewed online at codexsinaiticus.org (accessed March 3, 2020).

6. Prigent and Kraft, *Épître de Barnabé*, 49; Parker, *Codex Sinaiticus*, 27–42.

7. Batovici, "Apostolic Fathers," 581–605; Batovici, "Less-Expected Books," 39–50.

8. On the scribes in Sinaiticus, see Batovici, "Two B Scribes," 197–206; Hernández, *Scribal Habits and Theological Influences*, 49–95; Jongkind, *Scribal Habits*, 9–18; Milne and Skeat, *Scribes and Correctors*, 1–86; Myshrall, "Codex Sinaiticus," 40–48; Myshrall, "Presence of a Fourth Scribe?" 139–48.

9. See similarly Prostmeier, *Barnabasbrief*, 14; Prostmeier, "Einleitung," 14.

10. On the correctors that have also worked on the Epistle of Barnabas in S, see Batovici, "Textual Revisions," 443–70; Malik, "Earliest Corrections," 207–54; Malik, "Corrections of Codex Sinaiticus," 595–614; Milne and Skeat, *Scribes and Correctors*, 1–86; Myshrall, "Codex Sinaiticus," 65–92, 533–703.

Codex Hierosolymitanus 54 (H)

Codex Hierosolymitanus was discovered in 1873 by Philotheos Bryennios in the Library of the Holy Sepulcher in Constantinople.[11] Bryennios arranged to have portions of the manuscript published in 1875 and 1883.[12] The Epistle of Barnabas was printed in the 1883 volume along with the Didache and the long recension of Ignatius's letters. The manuscript is now kept in the Library of the Greek Patriarchate in Jerusalem.[13] H is a parchment manuscript comprising 120 leaves and is written in a cursive hand with no columns dividing the pages. The end of the manuscript is significant for codicological studies of H because the scribe signs their name and dates the manuscript (folio 120r). The codex has been copied "by the hand of Leon, notary and sinner" (χειρὶ Λέοντος νοταρίου καὶ ἀλείτου) and was completed on June 11, 1056.[14] The codex contains several early Christian texts but, differently from S, none that have been included in the New Testament.[15]

The Epistle of Barnabas begins on folio 39^{r} and comes to a close on folio 51^{v}. The text is preceded by a work attributed to Pseudo-Chrysostom and is followed by 1 Clement. The title given at the inscription of the letter is "Epistle of Barnabas" (ΒΑΡΝΑΒΑ ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ). No subscription is given at the end, nor is there any indication of the name of the text given in the headings of intervening pages. However, the Epistle of Barnabas is marked off from the work that follows it by a colon and the indentation of the title of 1 Clement. The text is significant because it provides only the second complete Greek text of the Epistle of Barnabas. The precise planning of the whole manuscript may lead one to think that the scribe was careful in the copying of individual texts.[16] Although the evidence of H should be weighed judiciously when

11. On the discovery of H, see Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, 1.1.121–23.

12. Bryennios, Τοῦ ἐν ἁγίοις πατρὸς ἡμῶν Κλήμεντος ἐπισκόπου Ῥώμης; Bryennios, Διδαχὴ τῶν δώδεκα Ἀποστόλων.

13. Images of the manuscript can be viewed online through the Library of Congress at www.loc.gov/item/00279389694-jo (accessed March 3, 2020). The manuscript has been designated by various abbreviations in modern scholarship. For example, Wilhite (*Didache*, 7) refers to the manuscript as H54, thereby helpfully recognizing its number within the papyrological collection in which it is found. I have followed Prinzivalli and Simonetti (*Seguendo Gesù*) as well as Prostmeier and Lona (*Epistola Barnabae*) in referring to the manuscript as H.

14. Schaff (*Oldest Church Manual*, 7) offers a fuller translation of the colophon: "Finished in the month of June, upon the 11th (of the month), day 3d (of the week, *i.e.*, Tuesday), Indiction 9, of the year 6564. By the hand of Leon, notary and sinner."

15. For a complete list of texts contained in H, see Wilhite, *Didache*, 7.

16. Prostmeier, *Barnabasbrief*, 17; Prostmeier, "Einleitung," 15.

discrepancies appear in the manuscript tradition, it provides an important witness for textual criticism of the Epistle of Barnabas.

Codex Vaticanus Graecus 859 and Its Descendants (G)

G is a collective symbol for the text of *Barnabas* as it is witnessed in ten manuscripts.[17] The most important of these manuscripts is Codex Vaticanus Graecus 859 (v), an eleventh-century minuscule. These manuscripts are typically grouped into three families as follows.[18]

Family G^1

1. Vaticanus gr. 859 (v): Folios 198^r–211^v
2. Ottobonianus gr. 348 (o): Folios 66^v–84^r

Family G^2

1. Florentinus Laurentianus plut. 7.21 (f): Folios 59^v–75^r
2. Parisinus Bibl. Nat. gr. 937 (p): Folios 50^v–63^v

Family G^3

1. Andros Hagias 64 (a): Folios 120^r–126^v
2. Romanus Bibl. Casanatensis 334 (c): Folios 335^r–353^v
3. Vaticanus gr. 1655 (d): Folios 301^v–311^r
4. Neopolitanus Bibl. Nat. Borbonicus 17 (n): Folios 535^v–546^v
5. Vaticanus gr. 1909 (r): Folios 70^r–75^v [19]

17. Lightfoot (*Apostolic Fathers*, 2.1.549, 2.3.319) lists a manuscript not included here. He refers to this manuscript as Salmasianus and gives it the siglum "s." This manuscript appears to have been used indirectly by James Ussher in his edition of Polycarp's *Philippians* and seems to have been included in the count of manuscripts in Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 375. However, Kraft notes that he has been unable to find anything about the manuscript (Prigent and Kraft, *Épître de Barnabé*, 52 n 1). The manuscript is not listed in Lindemann and Paulsen's edition (*Die apostolischen Väter*, 24) or in Prostmeier's fuller study ("Zur handschriftlichen Überlieferung," 48–64).

18. On this grouping, see Hartog, *Polycarp*, 26–27; Kraft, *Barnabas*, 17–18; Prigent and Kraft, *Épître de Barnabé*, 50–53; Prostmeier, "Zur handschriftlichen Überlieferung,"55–57. The folios following the list of manuscripts indicate the folios in the manuscripts that contain the Epistle of Barnabas.

19. Notably, this manuscript begins only at Barn. 10.3. Folios 68–69 are missing in this manuscript. They most likely contained earlier portions of the Epistle of Barnabas. Polycarp's *Philippians* is not contained in this manuscript, so r does not follow the pattern of the other manuscripts in G in which Pol. *Phil.* 9.2 abruptly gives way to Barn. 5.7. See further Prostmeier, "Zur handschriftlichen Überlieferung," 52–53.

6. Vaticanus Reginensis Pii gr. 2.11 (t): Folios 236^{v}–257^{r}

The unique element of v and all of its descendants is that Polycarp's *Philippians* immediately precedes the Epistle of Barnabas. An even more unusual trait is that v ends abruptly in Pol. *Phil*. 9.2 and passes seamlessly into Barn. 5.7: ἀποθανόντα καὶ δι' ἡμᾶς ὑπό (from Pol. *Phil*. 9.2) τὸν λαὸν τὸν κενὸν (from Barn. 5.7).[20] The transition is made seamlessly and without any indication that there has been a change in texts. The best explanation for this peculiarity is that either the exemplar used by the scribe of v or an exemplar used by another scribe further back in the stemma of v was missing a group of pages containing Pol. *Phil*. 9.2—14.1; Barn. 1.1—5.7. This manuscript was copied by the scribe and incorporated into v. This manuscript then became the progenitor of a series of manuscripts that contain the same defect.

These manuscripts are not exactly identical, but it will be sufficient to refer to G as a single witness for the purposes of this commentary. While a more detailed textual study of *Barnabas* may be a desideratum, F. X. Funk's conclusion is appropriate for this volume: "The truth is, despite the presence of four or even more manuscripts, we will only have to refer to v, since this is the archetype of all the others."[21] While the manuscripts date between the eleventh and seventeenth centuries, the text contained in these manuscripts may reflect a third- or fourth-century provenance.[22]

Papyrus PSI 757 (P)

Papyrus PSI 757 is a fragment from a papyrus codex that contains Barn. 9.1–6 currently housed in Florence at the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana.[23] It is 6.3 x 11 cm, is written in semi-uncial letters, and is dated between the late-third and early-fifth centuries.[24] The papyrus is written on both sides. 9.1–3a

20. A variant appears within some of the manuscripts related to v in which καινόν may be read instead of κενόν, the latter of which is the reading in v.

21. "In Wahrheit werden wir uns in Zukunft trotz des Vorhandenseins von vier, bezw. noch mehr weiteren Handschriften ausschließlich an V halten müssen, da dieser sich als das Archetyp aller übrigen darstellt" (Funk, "Codex Vaticanus gr. 859," 637).

22. Prostmeier, "Einleitung," 37–38.

23. Images of the papyrus can be viewed online at http://www.psi-online.it/documents/psi;7;757 (accessed February 2, 2020).

24. Vitelli (*Papiri greci e latini VII*, 40–41) and Kraft ("An Unnoticed Papyrus Fragment," 153) date the papyrus to the late-fourth or early-fifth centuries. However, Kraft modified his view in his 1971 introduction to the Sources Chretiennes edition of the Epistle of Barnabas. On the basis of correspondence with C. H. Roberts, he posits a date in the late-third or early-fourth century (Prigent and Kraft, *Épître de Barnabé*, 53 n 3).

is on the verso side, while the recto contains 9.3b–6. Although the papyrus was published and identified as a fragment of Barn. 9.1–6 in 1925,[25] its text seems to have gone largely unnoticed by scholars until Robert Kraft drew attention to its existence in 1967.[26] His study of the manuscript highlights similarities between the text of P and readings found in G. This provides confirmation that, although the text of G is only witnessed in manuscripts that are relatively late, its *Vorlage* likely dates to the fourth century.[27]

Versions

As one moves from Greek witnesses to the versions of the text that likewise impact text-critical judgements, three translations should be mentioned: the Latin translation, Syriac translation, and a possible Coptic translation.[28]

Latin Translation (L)

The most important early translation of the Epistle of Barnabas was into Latin. The Latin translation is attested in only one manuscript that is written in a minuscule hand and is alternatively known as Codex Corbeiensis Q.v.I. 38/39 or Codex Petropolitanus Lat. Q.v.I. 38–39. The manuscript is usually dated to the ninth century, and the Epistle of Barnabas is sandwiched between Pseudo-Tertullian's *De cibis Iudaicis* and the New Testament letter of James.[29] The origins of the translation are likely to be found at the end of the second century or early in the third.[30] One reason for dating

More recently, Rachel Yuen-Collingridge dates the papyrus to the third century (Yuen-Collingridge, "Hunting for Origen," 55 n 67). I have followed Prostmeier ("Einleitung," 24), the most recent editor of a text of the Epistle of Barnabas, in giving a range of dates for the papyrus.

25. Vitelli, *Papiri greci e latini VII*, 40–43. The papyrus was transcribed by Raffaello Bianchi, while S. G. Mercati identified it as a portion of the Epistle of Barnabas.

26. Kraft, "An Unnoticed Papyrus Fragment," 150–63.

27. Kraft, "An Unnoticed Papyrus Fragment," 157; Prostmeier, "Einleitung," 37–38.

28. Prostmeier ("Zur handschriftlichen Überlieferung," 61 n 22) notes that there is a reference to an Armenian translation at the end of the Epistle of Barnabas as contained in v. Although v appears to have served as the Vorlage for an Armenian translation, no manuscript evidence has been found that would allow one to know anything further about its date, the translation technique, or its value for textual criticism. It has thus not been included in this introduction.

29. Cunningham, *Dissertation*, viii; Dentesano, "La versione latina," 135; Heer, *Versio Latina* xii–xv; Prigent and Kraft, *Épître de Barnabé*, 53; Prostmeier, "Einleitung," 24.

30. Bardy, *La question des langues*, 107; Dentesano, "La versione latina," 135; Gleede,

the translation so early is its choice of Latin glosses for Greek terms. For example, ἔθνη is translated as *ethnici* rather than *gentes* (16.2). Likewise, σῴζω is translated variously as *sanare* or *liberare* rather than *saluare* (e.g., 5.10; 12.3). These are generally the marks of earlier Latin translations.[31] A unique feature of the Latin version of *Barnabas* is that it contains only 1.1—17.2. 18.1—21.9 is not contained in the manuscript.[32] The translation attests a shortened text at other points within 1.1—17.2, but the translation otherwise seems to have been made word by word.[33] It thus provides an important witness for textual criticism of the Epistle of Barnabas.

Syriac Translation (sy)

Fragments of a Syriac translation have been found in Codex Cantab. Univ. Add. 2023. The manuscript dates from the thirteenth century, was copied by two scribes, and preserves portions of the Epistle of Barnabas on folio 61^{v}.[34] The folio contains 19.1–2, 8; 20.1, but the entire fragment consists of only forty-nine words. The translation has been dated to the turn of the sixth century (ca. 500 CE). It may offer evidence for a separate transmission of the Two Ways Tradition in *Barnabas*.[35] However, the fragmentary nature of the material requires caution when characterizing the translation and the transmission.

A Coptic Translation?

Hans-Martin Schenke draws attention to a citation of *Barnabas* in the so-called "Coptic Book" that is otherwise known as P.Berol. 20915. The

Parabiblica Latina, 200; Heer, "Lateinische Barnabasbrief und die Bibel," 224; Prigent and Kraft, *Épître de Barnabé*, 53; Prostmeier, *Barnabasbrief*, 32.

31. For further examples, see Gleede, *Parabiblica Latina*, 199.

32. Gleede (*Parabiblica Latina*, 200–203) follows Heer (*Versio Latina*, lxix) in finding an anti-Jewish tendency in the translation. He then posits that Barn. 18–21 is missing from the Latin translation because it did not fit the translator's anti-Jewish purposes.

33. Gleede, *Parabiblica Latina*, 201, 203. One exception to this word-by-word translation technique arises when the translator introduces scriptural quotations, on which, see Dentesano, "La versione latina," 140–41.

34. The whole manuscript has been published in Wright, *Catalogue*, 2.600–628. The text of the Epistle of Barnabas is found in Wright, *Catalogue* 2.611–12; Baumstark, "Barnabasbrief," 236 n 2. Baumstark (Review, 209) referred to this manuscript in 1902 in his review of Wright's work.

35. See further Batovici and Verheyden, "Digitizing," 105–6; Prostmeier, *Barnabasbrief*, 32–34; Prostmeier, "Einleitung," 25–26.