

8. The Commission of John Mark in the Acts of Barnabas

The *Acts of Barnabas* is one of the ‘later’ apostolic Acts, and it has received little attention in modern research¹. Lipsius and De Santos Otero found the *Sitz im Leben* of the text to be the church-political milieu of Cyprus in the fifth century. According to this interpretation, the book was intended as a proof of the ‘apostolicity’ of the Church of Cyprus, supporting its efforts to gain institutional independence from the patriarchate of Antioch, the main issue being the right to consecrate its own bishops². While the canonical *Acts* mentions Barnabas’ Cypriote birth and his missions there³, the *Acts of Barnabas* adds the founding of churches, the consecration of bishops, and also locates the apostle’s grave on Cyprus, the latter being at that time a criterion of ‘apostolicity’.

1. The text was published by Bonnet, *Acta apostolorum*, vol 2/2, 292–302. I adapt the translation by Walker, *Apocryphal Acts*, 293–300. For other modern translations, see Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 524, to which add Kollmann, *Joseph Barnabas*, 76–82. The only thorough discussion remains Lipsius, ‘Acten des Barnabas’, also dealing with the Milanese legend of Barnabas and the *Encomium* by Alexander the Monk. On the textual tradition see *idem*, *Acta apostolorum apocrypha*, vol 2/1, xxvii–viii. Kollmann, *Joseph Barnabas*, 66–68 and De Santos Otero, ‘Acta Barnabae’ are short introductions. Also Walker, *Apocryphal Gospels*, xv, James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 470 and Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 523–4 give a brief note each.

2. The independence of the Church of Cyprus was declared first by the Council of Ephesus in 431 and later confirmed by the emperor Zeno in 474–5 (De Santos Otero, ‘Acta Barnabae’, 465) or 485–8 (Lipsius, ‘Acten des Barnabas’, 297). Zeno reigned from 474–491. On the whole political debate see Hackett, *Church of Cyprus*, 13–32. Thurston, ‘Christian Cyprus’ is forthcoming in *ANRW* II.24.

3. *Acts* 4.36, 13.4–12 and 15.39.

The Story

Before going into more details, it is worth summing up the plot. The book is titled ‘The Travels and the Martyrdom of the Holy Apostle Barnabas’. The first two chapters contain a preface by the inscribed author ‘John’ (in chapter 3 identified as John Mark), who will narrate the whole story in first person. In the next two chapters John Mark and Barnabas are sent out by visions on their missionary journeys. In chapter 5 the story assumes the ‘itinerary style’ of the canonical *Acts* and the *Acts of Paul*⁴:

After I was instructed in these things by him, we remained in Iconium for many days. [...] From there, we came to Seleucia, and after staying three days sailed away to Cyprus. [...] Setting sail from Cyprus we landed in Perge of Pamphylia. Then I stayed there about two months, wishing to sail to the regions of the West, but the Holy Spirit did not allow me. Turning back, therefore, I again sought the apostles, and on learning that they were in Antioch, I went to them⁵.

Chapters 6 to 10 contain an elaborated version of the controversy between Barnabas and Paul reported in *Acts* 15.36–41. John Mark entreats Paul for his departure in Pamphylia. In two visions Paul is warned to let Barnabas go to Cyprus, and himself instructed to travel to Jerusalem.

The narrative here reassumes the ‘itinerary style’. The major difference to chapter 5 is that the itinerary described here is not known from the canonical *Acts* (or the *Acts of Paul*). The rest of the book can be seen as an extension of *Acts* 15.39: ‘Barnabas, taking Mark with himself, sailed away for Cyprus’. They want to cross to Cyprus from

4. The ‘itinerary style’ (a special form of travel account in the first person) probably had its roots in the *Odyssey*, and became a standard form followed by many Greek authors: *Odyssey* 14.244–58; Lucian, *True Story* 1.6; Pseudo-Lucian, *Ass* 36–41; Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon* 3.1–5, etc. Reports of military expeditions and accounts of sea storms often assume a similar style. Cf. Norden, *Agnostos theos*, 313–27; Pokorný, ‘Romfahrt des Paulus’, 234–8; Robbins, ‘By Land and by Sea’, 217–28; Pervo, *Profit with Delight*, 57.

5. The itinerary of *Acts* 13 (esp. verses 4 and 13) is followed here, except that in *Acts* Iconium comes much later (14.1–6). One should note, however, that the itinerary of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* begins precisely in Iconium; cf. note 41 below.

Laodicea, but because of the unfavourable wind they visit first localities in Isauria and Cilicia. On the island of Pithyusa they are entertained by the pious Euphemus (ch. 11), and in Anemurion they convert and baptise two Greeks (chs. 12–3)⁶.

One of the Greeks, Stephanus by name, wants to follow them, but Barnabas does not allow him to come. They manage to cross to Crommautica on Cyprus by night (ch. 14), and put up with Timon and Ariston, who are temple servants. Timon falls ill and Barnabas cures him by laying his hands upon him. He also cured many others in the regions where they proceeded by laying upon them ‘the wisdom (μαθήματα) he received from Matthew, a book of God’s voice, a text about miracles and teachings’⁷.

In chapter 16 Barnabas and Mark are not allowed to enter the city of Lapithus because there is an idolatrous feast (εἰδωλομανία) in the theatre. Thus, they rest a little at the city gates, and this will be a recurrent motif in the narrative⁸. Timon, the temple servant healed by Barnabas in Crommautica, joins them here. Through the mountains they arrive at Lampadistus⁹. This is Timon’s place of origin, and they are entertained here by Heraclius (or Heraclides) whom earlier Barnabas converted and baptised in Citium. They appoint him as a ‘bishop of Cyprus’ (ch. 17) and plant a church at Tamasus.

6. For the localities on the itinerary see Lipsius, ‘Acten des Barnabas’, 288ff. For Ἑλλην meaning ‘pagan’ see note 11 below.

7. We do not quite see the point in the complicated identification of Barnabas’ book, evidently meant to be a copy of the *Gospel of Matthew*: in ch. 22 it is called τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, in ch. 24 again μαθήματα. In the *Acts of Andrew* (Gregory of Tours, *Epitome* 23), when Trophima is condemned to prostitution she protects herself by putting a copy of the Gospel (*euangelium quod secum habebat*) on her breast (cf. p. 128, note 53 above). For books with magical power in antiquity, see Speyer, ‘Das Buch’; for books as relics, see Vezin, ‘Les Livres’. In patristic Greek μάθημα often means Scripture or Gospel (Lampe, *Lexicon*, 819, s.v. B4), here it might be a pun with Ματθαῖος (as A. Hilhorst suggests to me). Why Barnabas and John Mark sailed to Cyprus by night also remains unexplained. On the temple servants (John Mark fulfilled a similar post, ὑπηρέτης τοῦ ἀρχιερέως τοῦ Διός, before his conversion) we will come back later in this Chapter.

8. Cf. *Acts of Barnabas* 16–20; *Acts of Philip* 13.4; *Acts of Peter and the Twelve* 8.6–7.

9. This place remains unknown also for Lipsius, ‘Acten des Barnabas’, 288, note 2.

In Palaia Paphus (ch. 18) Rhodon, another temple servant, is converted and joins them. At this point ‘some Jew called Bariesus coming from Paphus’ appears, who recognises Barnabas as the earlier companion of Paul. He is of course Bar-Jesus or Elymas, known from *Acts* 13 as the ‘magician’ and ‘false prophet’ from Paphus. He will be the negative protagonist in the narrative, the arch-enemy of Barnabas (much like Simon is Peter’s rival in Rome in the *Acts of Peter*) who stirs up the Jews against Barnabas at all places on Cyprus. Thus, they cannot enter Paphus and proceed to Curium.

Near Curium (ch. 19), Barnabas and his companions find a certain δρόμος, which can mean either an event (race) or an object (course), and has the adjective ‘abominable’ (μειρός¹⁰). There are naked men and women, and ‘lots of deception and error’ (πολλή ἀπάτη καὶ πλάνη). Barnabas turns around to rebuke the place and the ‘Western part’ collapses. Many people are wounded and killed, but a few manage to escape to the nearby temple of Apollo. At Curium Bariesus turns up with a ‘great multitude of Jews’, and Barnabas with his team have to lodge under a tree outside the city.

In a village, they meet Aristoclianus (ch. 20), who was consecrated bishop by Paul and Barnabas. He entertains the missionaries in a cave where he lives in the mountains¹¹. In Amathus they find a multitude of indecent (ἄσεμνος) men and women who are pouring libations in a temple on the mountain¹². Bariesus finds them also here, and turns the Jewish population against them. Thus, Barnabas and his

10. A late spelling for μισρός.

11. This seems to be a strange residence for a bishop. Aristoclianus could be a hermit, but his task was explicitly that of a missionary: he was sent back to his village ‘because of the many pagans (Ἕλληνες, cf. Lampe, *Lexicon*, 451b) who lived there’. The scene can also be a reminiscence of the persecutions, the first of which (immediately after the martyrdom of Barnabas) is reported by Alexander the Monk, *Encomium* 550–553 (cf. note 27 below). The episode can be perhaps better understood in connection with the next scene (see below).

12. It is quite possible that pagan rites occurred in the rural areas and hidden places still at the time of the *Acts of Barnabas* (cf. also chs. 18, 21, 22). This makes also the situation of a ‘bishop’ like Aristoclianus understandable: ‘A village might be formally catechized by a resident monk, followed by a presbyter who recited the Christian liturgy at a local chapel. Some baptisms might occur, but the populace would summon the aid of the traditional deities in their daily concerns [...]’ (Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, vol 1, 148).

group cannot enter the city. But an eighty year old widow who does not worship the idols takes them into her house for an hour. They shake the dust off their feet against the pagan temple¹³.

In Citium (ch. 21) they find ‘much uproar’ in the hippodrome, and no one receives them. They shake the dust off their feet and rest at the gates next to the aqueduct. Near to Salamis (ch. 22) there is a religious festival again. They find here Heraclides and educate him how to preach the gospel, how to found churches and install officials to them.

Arriving at the city of Salamis, they go to a synagogue ‘near to the so called Biblia’¹⁴ and Barnabas teaches from the Gospel which he received from Matthew. This is the spot of Barnabas’ martyrdom. Bariesus appears (ch. 23) and stirs up the Jews who take hold of Barnabas and try to deliver him up to Hypatus (his name itself meaning ‘consul’), the governor of Salamis¹⁵. When the pious Iebusaius (or Eusebius), kinsman of Nero, arrives on the island, the Jews take action themselves, drag Barnabas by his neck to the hippodrome and burn him ‘so that even his bones became dust’. They wrap up the ashes in lead and plan to throw it into the sea.

John Mark, however, together with Timon and Rhodon, stole the ashes in the night, and buried them together with the book from Matthew at a hidden place. It was the fourth hour of the night on the second day of the week. From the rest of the book (chs. 25–6) we learn how John Mark and his companions managed to escape from the Jews, spending three days in a cave, and finally sailing over to Alexandria. John there continues teaching the brothers ‘of everything that he learned from the apostles of Christ’, the ones from whom he also received the name Mark from baptism. The text is rounded off by a doxology.

13. Cf. *Matthew* 10.14; *Mark* 6.11; *Acts* 13.51, 18.6.

14. Bonnet, *Acta apostolorum*, vol 2/2, 301, lines 15–6, εἰς τὴν συναγωγὴν τὴν πλησίον τῆς ἐπιλεγουμένης Βιβλίας (or Βυβλίας). Lipsius did not identify this place. Is ‘Biblia’ perhaps an epithet of the synagogue (although this makes the grammatical structure clumsy)? Cf. *Acts* 6.9, ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τῆς λεγομένης τῶν ἀπὸ Κιλικίας κτλ.

15. Either the name must be corrected to ‘Hypatios’ (supported by the Parisian Codex) or the word ἡγεμόν understood as a gloss, cf. Lipsius, ‘Acten des Barnabas’, 284, note 1.

Political Themes

Evaluations of the *Acts of Barnabas* (the few we have) are mainly interested in the church-historical setting of the book. Walker is close to classifying it as a reliable historical document: '[T]his work has more air of truth about it than any of the others [i.e., other *Acts*]. There is not much extravagance in the details, and the geography is correct, showing that the writer knew Cyprus well'¹⁶. If one feels an 'air of truth' in the book, it is due, in our view, to two components. One is the feature emphasised also by Lipsius, namely, the accurate geography. This indicates the presence of Cypriote local traditions in the text and the pen of a local patriot as the editor of the book. Further, the *Acts of Barnabas* imitates the style of the canonical *Acts* better than any of the other apocryphal Acts. This is mainly achieved by the rather schematic use of the itinerary style, references to names and events in the Lucan *Acts*, and the use of a prologue (also mentioning Jesus' incarnation, words and deeds). It cannot be said, however, that this book is less 'extravagant' as far as the miraculous elements are concerned. Barnabas' conspicuous 'rebuking' of the 'abominable race' (ch. 19), for example, turns into a massacre that is unparalleled in the other Acts (see below).

True enough, we know more about the immediate historical circumstances of the genesis of these Acts than is usual with other examples of the genre. In addition to the documents about the church-political conflicts with Antioch and the declarations of the independence of the Cypriote church in the fifth century (see note 2 above), there are also reports on the finding of Barnabas' tomb on the island. Three sources from the sixth century write about the finding of Barnabas' tomb under the emperor Zeno, the location of which had earlier become unknown because of the persecutions¹⁷. The major difference is, however, that they all know about the finding of the *whole* corpse (rather than of ashes), with the Gospel of Matthew on its

16. Walker, *Apocryphal Gospels, Acts*, xv.

17. Lipsius, 'Acten des Barnabas', 291–2. Alexander the Monk writes in his *Encomium of Barnabas 550–554*: ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ καιρῷ διωγμὸς μέγας [...] καὶ πάντες διεσπάρησαν ἄλλος ἄλλαχού· καὶ λοιπὸν ἄγνωτον γέγονε τὸ μνήμα τοῦ ἁγίου ἀποστόλου Βαρνάβα. Lipsius discusses the *Encomium* in detail on pages 298–304.

breast. Since it makes no sense writing about the ashes when the whole body is thought to be found, the earliest of these sources helps us to set the latest date for the writing of the *Acts of Barnabas*. This date then will be 527, when the church-historian Theodorus Lector (reporting on the finding) died. The earliest date of writing for our text can be inferred from an indirect argument: in the records of the Ephesian council of 431, whose *decreta* confirmed the position of Cyprus, the Cypriotes do not mention Barnabas at all.

Knowledge about the church-political background may certainly help us to interpret some details of the narrative. First of all, in chapters 6 to 10 the necessity of a second ministry on Cyprus is argued for in length. The original plan of the apostles is to begin their second missionary journey in the East and then visit Cyprus (ch. 7). But Barnabas repeatedly entreats Paul to go first to Cyprus and visit ‘his own ones in his village’ (while Lucius wants to visit his own city Cyrene)¹⁸:

When they finished teaching in Antioch, they gathered on the first day of the week and decided to set out for the places of the East, and then go to Cyprus, and oversee all the churches in which they had spoken the word of God. But Barnabas entreated Paul to go first to Cyprus and oversee his own ones in his village.

Paul, however, saw a vision in [his] sleep that he should hasten to Jerusalem because the brothers expected him there. But Barnabas asked that they would go to Cyprus and spend the winter there, and then go to Jerusalem for the feast.

[Barnabas said,] ‘Since it has thus seemed good to you, Father Paul, pray for me that my labour would become worthy of praise. [...] For I go to Cyprus and hasten to be made perfect’.

Paul said to him, ‘The Lord stood by me also this night, saying, “Do not force Barnabas not to go to Cyprus, for there it has been prepared for him to enlighten many”’.

18. Lucius of Cyrene appears in *Acts* 13.1 as a disciple in Antioch. That he accompanied Paul and Barnabas already on their first missionary journey is maintained, for example, by Ephrem Syrus, *Commentary on Acts*, 416, where he calls him the evangelist Luke (and John Mark the author of the first Gospel); cf. Czachesz, ‘Acts of Paul’, 118.

None of these sentences appear in any of the other Acts, and all of them emphasise the importance and divine necessity of Barnabas's second ministry on Cyprus. The conflict, which in the canonical *Acts* is referred only in a passing remark, becomes an elaborated debate here. The ministry on Cyprus is not even an issue in *Acts* 15.36–40, where Mark is the only cause of the dissent. In the *Acts of Barnabas*, however, it is supported by several arguments. First, it is Barnabas' personal will. His loyalty toward his homeland is emphasised. Further, he regards the island as the place where he has 'to be made perfect'; that is, the place of his future martyrdom¹⁹. Finally, the most significant argument is Paul's vision where he is instructed to support Barnabas' plans because they fulfil divine dispensation.

Another theme of major political interest is the establishing of churches and clergy on Cyprus. We learn about the consecration of two bishops: Heraclides is consecrated 'bishop of Cyprus' by Barnabas in Tamasus (ch. 17). Aristoclianus, in turn, was consecrated by Paul and Barnabas (ch. 20). The two of them had been considered in local tradition as the first bishops on the island²⁰. Moreover, the itinerary of the narrative touches all the episcopal seats of Cyprus: Lapi thus, Tamasus, Curium, Citium, and Salamis²¹. Barnabas and his team also plant a church at Tamasus (ch. 17). It is even more remarkable that they teach bishop Heraclides the know-how of church administration:

When we found there [in Salamis] Heraclides again, we taught him how to proclaim the gospel of God, and establish churches and ministers in them²².

This shows Heraclides a clergyman of similar importance as Titus or Timothy, who are instructed about the administration of churches by

19. Cf. Lampe, *Lexicon*, 1383b, s.v. τελειώω 8.

20. Lipsius, 'Acten des Barnabas', 286 and 289, without specifying his sources.

21. Lipsius, 'Acten des Barnabas', 290: 'The itinerary is planned with the purpose that Barnabas may travel through all parts of the island, both on the coast and inland. [...] Meanwhile he touches all the places that were later to become an episcopal see: Lapithus, Tamasus, Curium, Citium, and Salamis'.

22. Chapter 22: εὐρόντες δὲ κακεῖ πάλιν Ἡρακλείδην, ἐδιδάξαμεν αὐτὸν πῶς κηρύσσειν τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ εὐαγγέλιον καὶ καθιστάναι ἐκκλησίας καὶ λειτουργοὺς ἐν αὐταῖς.

Paul in the canonical epistles bearing their names. The *Acts of Barnabas* thus demonstrates that the Cypriote church came to being through the hands of the apostle Barnabas—he ordained its first bishops, founded or supervised all of its important congregations, and laid down its institutional frameworks²³.

The last theme of political importance to be mentioned is the martyrdom and the grave of the apostle. The possession of the remains of the apostle was regarded just as important in the contemporary political debate as the founding of the church by the apostle²⁴. It is therefore all the more surprising that the text does not seem to provide sufficient certainty at this point.

Let us examine briefly four crucial issues: The narration of the martyrdom, the remains of the apostle, their placement, and the precious manuscript. (1) The narration of the martyrdom (ch. 23) is strikingly terse. Within a few lines Barnabas is lynched by the ‘Jews’. Superficial references are made to a governor and a pious relative of Nero. There is no process, no imprisonment, no farewell address to the brothers or revelational sermon in the minutes of death, which all seem to have been obligatory *topoi* of the apostolic martyrdom texts.

(2) The apostle is dragged by the neck from the synagogue to the hippodrome and then burned on a pyre. The ashes are then put into linen and closed into lead. Does this (ἐν μολίβδῳ ἀσφαλίσόμενοι) mean that they put them into a vessel that was made of lead, or rather that they cast lead around it?²⁵ In either case, such a relic provides little clue for identification. This makes sense, of course, if there is a similar thing at hand (not too difficult even to forge), of which it has to be proven that it is identical with the vessel containing the remains of the apostle. All the documents from Cyprus, however, talk about the full body of the apostle, the location of which was forgotten and then newly found²⁶.

23. The motif has its precedent in *Acts* 14.23, which reports that Paul and Barnabas ‘appointed elders in each church’. Cf. *Acts of Titus* 4 and 8.

24. De Santos Otero, ‘Acta Barnabae’, 465.

25. Casting lead around the remains may have had the purpose of preventing resurrection, as J.N. Bremmer suggests to me.

26. Lipsius, ‘Acten des Barnabas’, 291–292. The church of Milan, however, claimed precisely the possession of the ashes, *ibidem*, 295.

(3) The place of the burial by John Mark and his companions is identified ambiguously (ch. 24). ‘Where the Jebusites lived’ might identify the cave, as well as the area in general. The mentioning of ‘a certain place’ and ‘a cave’ (without article) in the Greek seems to support the latter reading²⁷. We also read that they bury the remains ‘in a hidden place’. In the possession of a concrete finding, one could have given a precise description of the place. The time of the burial is indicated by the exact hour, and in view of the competence of the author in local geography, we would expect a similar precision also at the description of the place²⁸.

(4) The last issue related to the martyrdom is the placement of the precious manuscript into the tomb. In the later documents it is found on the breast of the apostle, and told to be a copy made by him of the *Gospel of Matthew*. This confirms the claim that the corpse is that of Barnabas. If the text is an *autographon*, however, it is certainly more precious, and even lends higher authority to the teaching of Barnabas, but counts less as a piece of evidence for the identity of the ashes.

The above four points, although they do not exclude the possibility, certainly make it less evident that the text was written to prove the identity of a concrete relic²⁹. Although the knowledge of the church-political events of the period is useful for the interpretation of the text, it cannot be connected with certainty to any of the related historical events or documents. Especially when looking at the proportions of the narrative, one can see that the problem of the apostle’s death and remains is not the major concern of the author. The idea of a (political) tendency in early Christian texts, so typical for Lipsius’ generation³⁰, sheds light only on a narrow segment of the narrative. In the

27. Lipsius, ‘Acten des Barnabas’, 284, note 2, quotes a Latin translation which supports the first possibility: *collocavi in cripta, quae olim fuerat habitatio Jebuseorum* (placed them into the vault where earlier the Jebusites lived). The whole island was believed, however, to have been colonised by the tribe of the Jebusites after they had been driven out by King David from Palestine (Walker, *Apocryphal Gospels, Acts*, 299, note 2).

28. Alexander the Monk, *Encomium of Barnabas* 547–549, informs us, for example, that the cave was ‘five stadia away from the city’.

29. As Lipsius, ‘Acten des Barnabas’, 297, argues.

30. For an overview of nineteenth century *Tendenzkritik* in the interpretation of the Lucan *Acts*, see Haenchen, *Apostelgeschichte*, 14–22.

final part of this chapter, we will attempt to read the text from another perspective, one that also better fits the purpose of our recent study.

The Commission of John Mark

In the second half of this chapter we will read the *Acts of Barnabas* from the point of view of John Mark, the inscribed author of the text, who also narrates the story in the first person. As Lipsius already remarked, there is relatively little told about Barnabas' actual 'deeds' in this book³¹. Although the death and burial of the apostle forms beyond doubt an important concern of the author, we found in the previous section that it hardly provides the key for the interpretation of the whole text³². One has to notice that much of the narrative is focused on the person of the inscribed author John Mark. Not only is the whole book written from his narrative perspective, but also chapters 1–6 with chapters 24–26 contain a frame where he is the protagonist. John Mark speaks here in the first person singular, and this frame constitutes roughly a third of the whole text³³. His figure is rather in the centre of the controversy between Barnabas and Paul (chs. 7–10). In the rest of the book, most of the events are told in the plural 'we', including the founding of churches, consecration of bishops (ch. 17), and instruction of local leaders (ch. 22).

It is logical to suggest that a certain version of the *Acts of Mark* served as a source for the *Acts of Barnabas*. That hypothetical version seems to be lost. The longer *Acts of Mark* is most probably dependent on the *Acts of Barnabas*³⁴, and the shorter *Martyrdom of Mark* which

31. Lipsius, 'Acten des Barnabas', 286. He identifies the recurring theme of Bariesus' stirring up the Jews against Barnabas (an echo of *Acts* 13.6–12) as the basis of the missionary story on Cyprus, and calls the report on the rest of Barnabas' deeds 'extremely scanty' (ausserordentlich dürftig).

32. Lipsius, 'Acten des Barnabas', 287, finds that the 'remarkable connection' between Barnabas and the *Gospel of Matthew* and the 'closer identification' of his manner of death and place of burial form the 'really characteristic content' of the narrative.

33. In Bonnet's edition, 80 lines out of 253.

34. Halkin, 'Actes inédits de Saint Marc', 345. Cf. the observations on the figures of Mark and Barnabas below.

predates the *Acts of Barnabas*³⁵ basically agrees with it only in that Mark was in Alexandria³⁶. We have to notice that in most of the passages related to John Mark in our text, the figure of Barnabas is also presupposed. One could perhaps speak about the ‘Acts of Barnabas and John Mark’. If we now concentrate on those parts of the narrative which are centred around the figure of John Mark, we can easily notice that the theme of his commission is foremost in them. The following passages pertain directly to the subject of our study:

Since from the end of the parousia of our Saviour Jesus Christ³⁷, the unwearied, the philanthropic, the mighty, the Shepherd, the Teacher, the Physician, I beheld and saw the unspeakable, holy, and blameless mystery of the Christians who hold the hope in holiness and who have been sealed³⁸; and since I have zealously served it³⁹, I, John, have deemed it necessary to give account of the mysteries which I have heard and seen. I was accompanying the holy apostles Barnabas and Paul, being formerly a servant of Cyrillus the high-priest of Zeus, but now having received the gift of the Holy Spirit through Paul, Barnabas, and Silas, who are worthy of the calling, and who baptized me in Iconium (chs. 1–2).

35. The *Martyrdom of Mark* is dated back to the middle of the fourth or the beginning of the fifth century by Lipsius, ‘Acten des Markus’, 345. We have two (published) Greek recensions from a Parisian and a Vatican codex (see the Bibliography).

36. *Martyrdom of Mark* 3, *Acts of Barnabas* 26. For other similarities see our discussion below.

37. It is difficult to translate ἀπὸ τῆς καθόδου τῆς [...] παρουσίας. Walker, ‘Acts of Barnabas’, 293, renders it literally ‘from the descent of the presence’, which does not help us further. Bonnet (in the critical apparatus) suggests that τῆς καθόδου might be superfluous. In Patristic Greek, the word κάθοδος in itself can mean the descent or incarnation of Jesus (Lampe, *Lexicon*, 690). ‘Parousy’ certainly means here the period of Jesus’ ministry until his ascension. The prologue is an imitation of the beginning of the *Gospel of Luke* and of *Acts* (*Luke* 1.1–4 and *Acts* 1.1–8), which are also referring back to the earthly ministry of Jesus.

38. The word ἐσφραγισμένων is an echo of *Revelation* 7.1–8: ‘And I saw another angel rising from the East who hold the living seal of God and cried [...], “do not damage the earth [...] until I seal the servants of our God on their foreheads”, etc.’. Later σφραγίζω was a usual word for baptism; cf. Lampe, *Lexicon*, 1355, s.v. C; Yseabert, *Baptismal Terminology*, 391–421.

39. Or: ‘served him’, that is, Jesus. Even then the expression means service among the Christians. A claim for John serving Jesus during his ministry is hardly reconcilable with the context (especially chs. 2 and 3).

After I was baptized, I saw in a vision a man standing clothed in white raiment, and he said to me: ‘Take courage, John, because your name will be changed to Mark, and your glory will be proclaimed in all the world. And the darkness that was in you has departed from you, and you have been given understanding to know the mysteries of God (ch. 3)’.

When I saw the vision, becoming greatly terrified, I went to the feet of Barnabas, and related to him the mysteries that I had seen and heard from that man⁴⁰. The apostle Paul was not present when I reported the mysteries. Barnabas said to me: ‘Do not reveal the sign that you have seen. For the Lord appeared also to me last night and said, “Take courage, for as you have given your soul for my name to die and be excluded from your people, so also you shall be made perfect. Moreover, as for the servant who is with you, take him also with yourself [plural]; for he has certain mysteries”. Now, my child, keep to yourself the words that you have seen and heard; for a time will come for you to reveal [them]’. (ch. 4)

After I was instructed in these things by him, we remained in Iconium for many days; for there was a holy and pious man, who also entertained us, whose house also Paul had sanctified⁴¹. From there, we came to Seleucia, and after staying three days sailed away to Cyprus; and I was ministering to them until we had gone round all Cyprus. Setting sail from Cyprus we landed in Perge of Pamphylia. Then I stayed there about two months, wishing to sail to the regions of the West, but the Holy Spirit did not allow me⁴². Turning back, I again sought the apostles, and on learning that they were in Antioch, I went to them (ch. 5).

In Antioch, I found Paul in bed from the toil of the journey. When he saw me, he was exceedingly grieved because of my delaying in Pamphylia. Barnabas came and entreated him, and he tasted bread, and took a little of it. They preached the word of the Lord, and enlightened many Jews and Greeks. I only attended to them, and did not dare to approach Paul, because he held that I spent much time in

40. Cf. *1 Samuel* 3.5–9.

41. The ‘holy and pious man’ entertaining Paul and his companions in Iconium might be identical with Onesiphorus in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 2. However, we do not see enough reason to suggest that the author of the *Acts of Barnabas* used the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. Cf. note 5 above.

42. Cf. *Acts* 16.6–7.

Pamphylia, and was quite enraged against me. I gave repentance on my knees on the ground to Paul, and he would not endure it⁴³. Although I remained for three weeks in entreaty and prayer on my knees, I was unable to prevail on him about myself; for his great grievance against me was on account of my keeping several parchments in Pamphylia (ch. 6)⁴⁴.

Now great dissension arose between them. Barnabas urged me also to accompany them, because I was their servant from the beginning, and was serving them in all Cyprus until they came to Perga of Pamphylia; and I there had remained many days. But Paul cried out against Barnabas, saying, 'It is impossible that this one may come with us'. Those who were with us there urged me to accompany them, because there was a vow upon me to follow them to the end. Thus, Paul said to Barnabas, 'If you want to take with you John, who is also called Mark, go another way; for he shall not come with us'. Barnabas coming to himself, said, 'The grace of God does not abandon the one who has once served the Gospel and journeyed with us. If, therefore, this be agreeable to you, Father Paul, I take him and go'. Paul answered, 'Go in the grace of Christ, and so we in the power of the Spirit' (ch. 8).

(In chs. 24–5 John Mark steals the ashes of Barnabas, buries them in a cave, and escapes from 'the Jews'.)

Coming to the shore, we found an Egyptian ship, and after embarking in it, we landed in Alexandria. I remained there teaching the word of the Lord to brothers who came [to me], enlightening them, and preaching what I had been taught by the apostles of Christ, who also baptized me in the name of Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost; who also changed my name into Mark in the water of baptism, by which also I hope to bring many to the glory of God through His grace. Because to Him is due honour and everlasting glory. Amen (ch. 26).

This is the narrative frame of the book, which consists essentially of the commission story of John Mark. From the perspective of John

43. Or: 'he did not refuse it'. The middle voice of ἀνέχω can mean both (see Lampe, *Lexicon*, 137). Paul is shown, however, as rather unrelenting in the whole episode.

44. Or: 'the rest of the parchments', 'the major parchments' (τὰς πλείους μεμβράνας). We do not know about this affair from other sources. The motif is reminiscent of 2 *Timothy* 4.13. The objects in question are parchment codices (*membranae*); cf. Gamble, *Books*, 51–2, 64–5.

Mark's commission, we can divide the text into the following episodes: (a) prologue and conversion to Christianity; (b) the revelation of mysteries; (c) commission for the apostolic mission with Barnabas; (d) first journeys with Paul and Barnabas; (e) conflict with Paul; [(f) the 'Acts of Barnabas' proper, rounded off by the stealing and burying of the ashes;] and (g) ministry in Alexandria. Below we will have a closer look at each of these episodes.

(a) The prologue of the book, which also contains the remarks on John Mark's conversion to Christianity, clearly imitates the opening verses of the *Gospel of Luke* (and to a lesser degree the beginning of *Acts*). Both prologues consist of two parts, the first beginning with ἐπειδήπερ (since, after), the second with the personal pronoun 'I' (κἀμοί, ἐγώ), and claim the competence of the author who 'followed' (παρακολουθέω, συνακολουθέω) the events⁴⁵. The imitation of the Lucan prologue already clearly shows that pseudo-Mark wants to (re)write a piece of biblical history⁴⁶. Whereas the *Acts of Titus* (ch. 2) depicts its hero as an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry and death in Jerusalem, the *Acts of Barnabas* situates John Mark in the institutional framework of the early Church. He is not an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry, but rather to the 'mysteries of the Christians'⁴⁷.

The conversion of John Mark is told as part of the prologue. Given that the prologue carefully imitates the Lucan writings, it is remarkable that the conversion story itself contradicts the information of *Acts* 12 (esp. verses 12 and 15), where we read that John Mark and

45. What παρακολουθέω in *Luke* 1.3 means remains ambiguous. Moessner, 'Eyewitnesses', 122, after examining the occurrences of the verb in Josephus concludes that 'Luke is either presenting himself as a *contemporary* who stayed actively informed about Jesus and his followers [...], or as one who [...] has an *immediate comprehension or valuation* of their significance'.

46. Other parallel expressions include 'servant' and 'serve' (ὑπηρέτης, δουλεύω), which Luke applies to the apostolic generation, but John Mark to himself; 'write' and 'expound' (γράφω, ἐξηγέομαι); 'eyewitnesses and servants of the word' and 'the Christians who devoutly preserve the hope'.

47. This is in accordance with the witness of Papias (Eusebius, *Church History* 3.39.15), who claimed John Mark's authorship for the *Gospel of Mark*, but denied that he would have 'heard' or 'followed' Jesus: οὔτε γὰρ ἤκουσε τοῦ κυρίου, οὔτε παρηκολούθησεν αὐτῷ. A similar passage is found in Megethios, see Lipsius, 'Acten des Markus', 328, note 1.

his mother Mary lived in Jerusalem and their house was a meeting-point of the Jesus-followers. This suggests that they were Jews who from an early time belonged to the Christian community of Jerusalem. The *Acts of Barnabas*, however, places the baptism of John Mark into the context of the first Pauline mission in Iconium (reported also in *Acts* 14.1–7), and makes him a servant of a high-priest of Zeus. Our text relies here on a tradition that was obviously independent from the canonical *Acts*. In the patristic tradition, John Mark is a Levite from Jerusalem who amputated his thumb to become ineligible for the priestly service⁴⁸. With some assimilation to the conversion story of Paul one could have made John Mark easily the agent of the Jewish high-priests. But whence did the tradition come that he was the servant of Cyrillus, the high-priest of Zeus?

A survey of the whole book shows that pagan temple-servants are typical figures of the social world of the *Acts of Barnabas*. In Cromautica, the first stage of the second ministry on Cyprus (ch. 14), Barnabas and his group are entertained by two temple-servants, Timon and Ariston. Timon is healed, and soon we find him in the company of Heraclius, the to-be bishop of Cyprus (chs. 16–7). A third temple servant, Rhodon, appears in Palaia Paphus (ch. 18). If we now look at the finishing chapters, we will find precisely these three persons, Timon, Rhodon, and Ariston, as the companions of John Mark when stealing and burying the ashes of Barnabas and sailing to Alexandria. Thus with John Mark, there is a tight group of four temple-servants in the *Acts of Barnabas*, who convert to Christianity, bury the remains of the apostle, and continue missionary work in Alexandria. Although they occasionally appear in the company of Cypriote clergymen, they themselves do not seem to have been leading figures in the history of the Church of Cyprus. They might have had, however, more importance in Alexandria. We can conclude that the figure of John Mark in the *Acts of Barnabas* is coloured by Cypriote local tradition—perhaps with Alexandrian ties—about the four temple-ser-

48. A witness from the fourth century is the prologue to the *Gospel of Mark* in the Codex aureus: *sacerdotium in Israel agens secundum carnem Levita [...], denique amputasse sibi post fidem pollicem dicitur ut sacerdotio reprobis haberetur* (quoted in Lipsius, ‘Acten des Markus’, 325, note 1; cf. *ibidem*, 326, note 1 and p. 327, note 1).

vants who were converted by Barnabas. This tradition is singular (no *ἱεροδούλοι* are found in the other apostolic Acts) and unrelated to the political controversies (discussed earlier in this chapter) of the fourth and fifth centuries⁴⁹.

(b) The baptism of John Mark by Paul, Barnabas, and Silas is not the final seal on his commission (as with Paul in *Acts* 9), but rather the first step. It is immediately followed by a vision, in which he receives the name Mark. The man in a white stole who appears to him is meant to be an angel rather than Jesus⁵⁰, who is explicitly named in the visions of Barnabas and Paul (chs. 4 and 10). In the *Martyrdom of Mark* it is Jesus himself who appears to Mark, on this and other occasions⁵¹. The difference is significant because it once again shows that our text makes no effort to elevate John Mark to the rank of an apostle either by making him an eyewitness to Jesus' life and death⁵² (as Titus in his Acts) or by epiphanies (as Paul the canonical *Acts*⁵³). John Mark remains an ideal figure of the second generation, initiated to the 'mysteries' of Christianity as a religious system⁵⁴, rather than being one of the founders. It seems likely that the 'mysteries of God' mentioned in this vision are the same as the 'mysteries of the Christians' in the prologue. What the 'mysteries' exactly are is a difficult question. They have probably less to do with specific doctrines (such are not

49. The reminiscence of pagan cults on Cyprus is typical of the book: cf. chapters 16, 18, 20–1; Lipsius, 'Acten des Barnabas', 287–8. Although Hackett, *Church of Cyprus*, 11, thinks that the cult of Zeus (Jupiter) on Cyprus—in which even human sacrifice occurred—was extinct by the time of Epiphanius the Great, bishop of Salamis (Constantia) from 368 or 369 (*ibidem*, 304), in rural areas pagan rites might well have survived until the time of the *Acts of Barnabas*; cf. note 12 above, and the discussion of the *ἱεροδούλοι* below.

50. For similar appearances of Jesus, see p. 225, note 46 below. Angelic figures appear in white raiment in *Matthew* 28.3, *Luke* 24.4, *Acts* 1.10.

51. Chapter 2 of the Parisian, chapter 3 of the Vatican text. The content of the revelation is different. In chapter 8 of both texts Jesus converses with Mark before his death.

52. Cf. the prologue of the book; notes 37 and 39 above.

53. Paul's argumentation in his own epistles is similar, cf. *Galatians* 1.15–17 and *1 Corinthians* 15.1–8; pp. 46 and 84 above.

54. The expressions τὸ ἐν σοὶ σκότος παρήλθεν and ἐδόθη σοι σύνεσις πρὸς τὸ γινῶναι κτλ. belong to the language of conversion that is attested in *Acts* 26.18; cf. p. 83, note 81 above.

mentioned in the book) than with the life and institutions of the Church. They perhaps included the apostolic ‘know-how’ of mission and church-founding, as mentioned in chapter 22, where John Mark himself participates in the instruction of the new bishop Heraclides on ‘how to proclaim the gospel of God, and establish churches and officials in them’⁵⁵.

(c) As the next episode shows, one of the narrative functions of the revelation is to qualify John Mark as a co-worker of the apostles. It is in this sense that Barnabas calls the revelation a ‘sign’ (δύναμις). Barnabas is told in a vision to take John Mark with him because ‘he has certain mysteries’. He commands John Mark to keep them until the appropriate time comes to reveal them. We can only speculate what time is meant. If we want to find it within the context of the story, it might refer to the preaching of John Mark in Alexandria (ch. 26), although there he is said to speak what he learned ‘from the apostles of Christ’. This also calls our attention to the complexity of John’s figure in the book. On the one hand, there is a tendency to subordinate him to Paul and Barnabas. On the other hand, there is a tendency to emancipate him from this role.

(d) Such an autonomous act is his staying in Perge, with the plan to embark on a missionary journey to the West on his own. This plan is not known either from the canonical *Acts* (whose itinerary is otherwise followed), or from earlier traditions on John Mark⁵⁶. Had he gone to the Western parts and founded churches there, he would have managed to emancipate himself from the position of an apprentice to that of an apostle. But the rules of the narrative do not allow him to do that. Until the end of the story he has to remain the faithful (and inferior) companion of Barnabas, the admiring student and chronicler,

55. Lipsius, *Acten des Barnabas*, 290, note 3, suggests the mysteries of Mark are ‘specielle Anweisungen in Betreff seines künftigen Lehrberufs’.

56. The later *Acts of Mark* (ch. 8) probably took it from the *Acts of Barnabas*: ‘The most holy apostle Mark wanted to reach the Western parts of the Galls, but he did not execute this [plan] because of divine revelation’. This motif is basically different from Mark being the ‘translator’ of Peter in Rome (Eusebius, *Church History* 3.39.15).

similar to the figures of Luke, Baruch, and Damis⁵⁷. Therefore, an echo of *Acts* 16.6 is used as a *deus ex machina* to keep him on the correct track: ‘But the Holy Spirit did not allow me’⁵⁸.

(e) Already in the commission story of Paul in *Acts* 9 we have seen that a hero can have two patrons. In that case, however, Ananias and Barnabas helped Paul at two different stages of his career. In the *Acts of Barnabas* it is Paul, Barnabas and Titus who baptise John Mark in Iconium, and soon he finds himself involved in the conflict of two of his patrons, Paul and Barnabas. That he is bound to Barnabas by stronger ties is clear already from chapter 4, where Paul is absent when John Mark relates his heavenly revelation.

It is remarkable how many details the text supplies about the conflict of the two apostles; this is the best elaborated episode in the whole book. The person of John Mark becomes quite important in this conflict. He is depicted as ultimately humble, creeping on his knees before Paul, who is shown, in turn, as a crotchety old fellow, lying in bed and refusing food, unrelenting because of a few books, crying out against his fellow apostle in public, and finally turning up his nose and departing from his co-workers. The public sentiment in the Antiochian church also supports John Mark and Barnabas, who are evidently the positive heroes of the episode.

The figures of Paul and Barnabas are drawn according to the ‘iconographical’ rules of the tradition. Barnabas is not the patron of Paul any more (as in *Acts* 9), but rather his disciple, calling him ‘father’ (three times in chs. 8–9) and serving him when he lies in bed after the tiresome journey (ch. 6). It means that even from the Cypriote point of view Paul stands higher in the hierarchy, and while claiming that Barnabas was more gentlemanly in character, his subordinate position among the saints is not denied.

The two heavenly visions that occur to Paul in this episode fulfil multiple purposes. (1) They justify Paul’s behaviour in two respects: the first vision (ch. 7) confirms that he had to go to Jerusalem, while

57. In *Acts*, *Jeremiah*, and Philostratus’ *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, respectively; cf. Norden, *Agnostos theos*, 34–40.

58. There Paul and his companions were ‘forbidden by the Holy Spirit’ (κωλυθέντες ὑπὸ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος) to preach in Asia.

the second (ch. 10) explains the separation from Barnabas: ‘Do not force Barnabas not to go to Cyprus’. (2) The second vision states that Barnabas’ ministry on Cyprus is necessitated by divine provision: ‘For there it has been prepared for him to enlighten many people’. (3) The second vision at the same time serves as a conclusion to the conflict episode, sealing the farewell of the two apostles.

Such a peaceful and ‘pneumatic’ settling of the conflict is important also for John Mark. After all, he did not cause a schism between the two leaders of the early Christian missions to the West, but rather his figure smoothly fitted into the scenario written by God. After his emancipatory efforts in Perge, he is shown (especially by his spectacular *mea culpa* before Paul) to accept his subordinate position, from now on as a co-worker on the side of Barnabas, rather than an apprentice, until he will be let on his own in the final chapters of the book.

(f) The stealing and burial of the ashes of Barnabas has already been discussed in the previous section. After the death of the apostle, John Mark evidently assumes the leadership in the team, which seems to consist basically of the other converted temple-servants, Timon, Rhodon, and Ariston. It is remarkable that he does not become a successor of Barnabas in any sense. When his master dies, he provides for an appropriate burial of the remains, and by the same act he separates himself from his master and from the whole Cyprus tradition.

(g) With his group John Mark sails to Alexandria, and begins to teach (διδάσκων) there. One has to notice, however, that there is no mention of any real missionary activity in Alexandria. John Mark teaches only the brothers he already finds there, ‘enlightening’ them, and ‘preaching’ whatever he ‘learned from the apostles of Christ’. He is explicitly less than an apostle even at the end of the story: a witness to the apostolic teaching—rather than to the life and death of Jesus.

Conclusions

The figure of John Mark seems to have been downgraded consciously in the *Acts of Barnabas*. There is a tradition behind the text in which he is commissioned as an apostle and entrusted with ‘mysteries’

(whatever these actually meant) in a heavenly revelation. The tradition that John Mark introduced Christianity to Alexandria is attested at least from the early fourth century:

It is told about Mark that he was sent to Egypt and preached the Gospel (which he also wrote down) for the first time there, and founded the first church in Alexandria itself⁵⁹.

This tradition is elaborated in the *Martyrdom of Mark* and the *Acts of Mark*. It is also remarkable that the *Acts of Barnabas* never identifies John Mark with the writer or the gospel wearing his name, but pays much attention to the *Gospel of Matthew*, referring to the ties between its author and Barnabas.

Thus our text treats the tradition about Mark in an ambivalent way. First, it introduces a lengthy commission narrative about him. (Let us notice that there is no commission story about Barnabas in the book.) In this story it is emphasised several times that he was entrusted with ‘mysteries’ and that he planned to pursue his own mission to the West. In the notable conflict episode, however, he totally surrenders to Paul and is happy to continue his career as the co-worker of Barnabas. After doing the services of a faithful disciple of Barnabas, he ends up in Alexandria as the mouthpiece of the apostles.

The reason for this odd treatment of his figure is probably that the legendary material about Mark was used to fill up the thin tradition about Barnabas. The lively figure of the student in the book is intended to emphasise the somewhat light figure of his master, but not allowed to overshadow it. It is also possible that certain deeds which earlier tradition attributed to Mark are simply told about Barnabas here. We have some clues to suggest that. (1) Barnabas is martyred in a similar way as Mark in his *Martyrdom*; both are dragged by the neck, and then their bodies are burned⁶⁰. (2) The healing of Timon is attributed to Mark in his *Acts*⁶¹. (3) Another interesting issue is Barnabas’ use of the precious roll. It is (unfortunately for our thesis) not mentioned in the Marcan Acts known to us. But there is another

59. Eusebius, *Church History* 2.16.1.

60. *Martyrdom of Mark* 9–10.

61. *Acts of Mark* 15, cf. *Acts of Barnabas* 15. Since Timon is not mentioned in the *Martyrdom*, the similarity can be explained also the other way around: a healing by Barnabas was later attributed to Mark.

point where the two traditions can be compared. In chapter 22 of his *Acts*, Barnabas unfolds the roll of the *Gospel of Matthew* and teaches from it⁶². In earlier tradition (see the quote from Eusebius above) Mark preaches the gospel that he also wrote down. Consequently, the use of the notable book in the *Acts of Barnabas* (and the silence about Mark being the writer of a Gospel) might be also a sign of the blending of the two traditions—which in this book happens to the benefit of Barnabas and at the expense of Mark.

Another important aspect of the commission of John Mark is his original job as a pagan temple-servant, along with his appearance in the company of another three Christians with that background (Mark being the leader of the group). At this point the book represents a new development of the institutional type of commission. Not only does an individual become integrated into the institutional frameworks of a community, but several individuals associated with a Greco-Roman institution are converted and find their place in Christianity as a group.

Can the story be interpreted as the collective conversion of Cypriote temple-servants into Christian clergy, or even as the transformation of a Greco-Roman religious institution into a Christian one? Although there is no direct evidence to prove that, still we have a few analogies and hints.

62. Although the codex was more widespread in Early Christianity, there are arguments for identifying this book as a roll. (1) The *Acts of Barnabas* uses two words for books. The Latin *membranae* meant a parchment codex (note 44 above); the Greek βιβλος designated a papyrus sheet or roll, later any kind of book. The books held by John Mark in Pamphylia (ch. 6) are *membranae*; Barnabas' book is βιβλος (ch. 22). The differentiation implies that the latter is not a (parchment) codex. (2) A distinction between βιβλία (rolls?) and *membranae* is found in *2 Timothy* 4.13, on which *Acts of Barnabas* 6 probably relies. (3) When Barnabas opens the book in ch. 22, ἀναπτύσσω is used, the term for unfolding a roll (Liddel and Scott, *Lexicon*, 118a). (4) The roll appears in early Christian literature in a similar context. In the Nazareth synagogue, Jesus opens the scroll of *Isaiah* (ἀναπτύξας τὸ βιβλίον), reads from it, rolls it up, and begins to speak (ἤρξατο λέγειν, *Luke* 4.17–21). This scene may have inspired our text: Barnabas opens the Gospel (ἀναπτύξας τὸ εὐαγγέλιον) and begins to teach (ἤρξατο διδάσκειν). Another example is found in the *Acts of Peter* 20: when Peter finds someone reading the Gospel, he rolls up the book. Cf. *Revelation* 5.1ff; *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs* 12.

The conversion of a coherent group of Hellenic rhetoricians is known from Alexandria at the time of the *Acts of Barnabas*. This group, known as the *philoponoi*, became actively engaged in missionary activity among the pagan population of the city⁶³. Conversions at that time were often connected (as a reason as well as a consequence) with the destruction of pagan temples. The *philoponoi* themselves actively took part in the demolishing of a temple of Isis⁶⁴. The pagan temples were not necessarily demolished to the ground, and ‘temple conversions’ around the time of the *Acts of Barnabas* may have well meant the reconstruction of the place for Christian use⁶⁵. Even the pagan rites might have been continued with some Christian adjustment and reinterpretation⁶⁶.

The episode about the *μειρὸς δρόμος* at Curium (ch. 19) may fit into the context of the temple conversions. The motif of the apostle’s destroying a pagan sanctuary with his words is known from the *Acts of Paul* 5 (Papyrus Heidelberg 37–9), the *Acts of John* 42–7, the *Acts of Titus* 9, and the Coptic *Acts of Philip*⁶⁷. Notwithstanding our passage, there are no victims in those stories; the only one in the *Acts of John* is raised and converted. There are at least three similar episodes in *Pseudo-Prochorus*, which is dated tentatively to the 5th century, when the *Acts of Barnabas* was also written⁶⁸. In this book, John destroys pagan sanctuaries on two occasions, first the temple of Artemis in Ephesus (a parallel to *Acts of John* 42–7 mentioned above), and later the temple of Apollon on Patmos⁶⁹. The former

63. Their story is mainly known from the *Vita Severi* by Zachariah of Mytilene, himself a *philoponos*; cf. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, vol 2, 1–51. The events reported took place at the time of the emperor Zeno (p. 14), when also the independence of the Cypriote church was reconfirmed (cf. above in this Chapter).

64. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, vol 2, 13–5.

65. Deichmann, ‘Frühchristliche Kirchen’ 115–36, lists a great number of ‘converted temples’ (*gewandelte Heiligtümer*) all over the Mediterranean (unfortunately none from Cyprus). Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, vol 2, 378, writes: ‘The work may only have entailed knocking out walls to add the apses for the altar, reliquary, and *diakonikon*, and furnishing the interior suitably with cut marble slabs’.

66. Examples in Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, vol 1, 147–68.

67. In von Lemm, ‘Koptische Apostelacten’, 191.

68. See p. 172 above.

69. Zahn, *Acta Joannis*, 42 and 81, respectively.

episode is especially interesting for us. It elaborates on the much earlier *Acts of John* 42–7 (mentioned above), but contains several new motifs. *Pseudo-Prochorus* uses the same adjective (μιαρός) for the temple of Artemis⁷⁰ as the *Acts of Barnabas* for the notable δρόμος. The word is attested as a name for pagan temples in the the same century⁷¹. Before finally destroying the temple, John also calls about an earthquake, which kills eight hundred persons. This reminds the reader of the death of ‘many people’ at Curium after Barnabas ‘rebuked the place’. The place described in the *Acts of Barnabas* is known to us from excavations. There was a monumental temple-complex of Apollo one and a half miles to the west of the city, and a stadium near the temple beside the road⁷². Both of our texts may reflect actual aggression against the remnants of pagan cults in the fifth century, or the ‘abominable’ (μειρός) places, as they call them.

In conclusion, the religious situation of the fifth century makes is plausible that a group of pagan temple personnel converts and continues its career as a team of Christian missionaries. The group-cohesion and the missionary zeal of the Alexandrian *philoponoi* provides a good parallel. The *Acts of Barnabas* probably made John Mark the leading figure of this team because tradition held he was a Jewish temple servant⁷³. In one of the typical Lucan summaries of the canonical *Acts* we read: ‘The word of God grew and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly; also a large multitude of the priests (πολύς τε ὄχλος τῶν ἱερέων) were obedient to the faith’⁷⁴. Although the group of the Cypriote temple-servants was certainly important at one time (it also formed the local basis of the ministry of

70. Zahn, *Acta Joannis*, 42, lines 10–1: τὸ μιάρων ἱερὸν τῆς Ἀρτέμιδος.

71. Constantine of Antioch (4–5th century), *Epistles* 2.61.1, quoted in Lampe, *Lexicon*, 870.

72. Rigsby, ‘Missing Places’, 258; Masson, ‘Sur le nom’, 22.

73. Cf. note 48 above.

74. *Acts* 6.7. Josephus provides some background here: In *Against Apion* 2.108 (cf. 2.119) he writes about four tribes of priests each with over 5000 members. (One may compare this to the data of the *Letter of Aristeeas* 95 about 700 priests and many other persons on duty at one time in the temple.) In *Jewish War* 2.409–10, Josephus reports a schism on the issue of the sacrifice for the emperor. It also happened that the high-priests confiscated the tithe due to the lower priesthood (*Antiquities* 20.181).

Barnabas, see ch. 14)⁷⁵, they never became the leading force in the Cypriote church, as the subordinate position of John Mark in the story shows.

In sum, this late example of commission in the apostolic Acts tells us about a game of power related to religious institutions. The realities of contemporary church politics—namely, the tendency of centralisation around a few important patriarchates (like the Roman administrative centre Antioch) and the struggle for independence of communities with less power and influence (like the Church of Cyprus)—presents itself in the legendary narratives. The account of the conflict in Antioch might be read as a miniature imitation of the lengthy controversies at the ecumenical councils⁷⁶. It is against this background that the figure of John Mark is drawn. During his commission story he tries to find his place in a changing network of religious institutions; between pagan and Christian offices on the one hand, and personal emancipation and Church hierarchy on the other hand.

75. '[A]nd going to the place called Crommautica we found Timon and Ariston the temple servants, by whom we were also entertained'.

76. Perhaps of the Council of Ephesus itself, where the Cypriote delegates were fighting for their independence. Cf. Hackett, *Church of Cyprus*, 16–21.