

G.A.M. Rouwhorst, *Les Hymnes Pascales d'Éphrem de Nisibe. Analyse théologique et recherche sur l'évolution de la fête pascale chrétienne à Nisibe et à Edesse et dans quelques Églises voisines au quatrième siècle*. Vol. I: Étude, Vol. II: Textes (Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae VII/1–2). Leiden 1989.

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- [1] Beside the numerous studies on Ephrem (†373), monographs on his work deserve special attention, especially those that provide comprehensive and summarizing research on an important Ephremic topic. In the case of Rouwhorst (his theol. Diss. submitted to the Catholic Theological University of Utrecht, The Netherlands in 1985), this attention must be paid even ten years after its publication, for it offers a thorough investigation of Ephrem's Paschal Hymns and contributes to our knowledge about the paschal feast (date and liturgical celebration) in the area east of Antioch. The subtitle gives the work its true broad scope, which refers to the passage of the paschal tradition from the pre-Nicene quartodeciman celebration of the feast on the 14th of Nisan to the post-Nicene standard celebration on the Sunday following the 14th. Though opposed to the quartodeciman practice, essential features of Ephrem's paschal hymns reflect the quartodeciman tradition and its remaining influence over him. This review can only give a general outline of Rouwhorst's investigation and findings, without going into details, and present his interesting approach to Ephrem's paschal hymns.

- [2] Volume I offers the study; it is well presented and clear cut. Volume II gives an annotated French translation of the special sources Rouwhorst relies on, i. e., the collection of the paschal hymns edited by E. Beck in CSCO 248 (containing the cycles *de Azymis, de crucifixione, de resurrectione*) to which *de Ieiunio* is added (ed. by E. Beck in CSCO 246), *Demonstratio XII* of Aphrahat (ed. by J. Parisot)¹ and chapter XXI of the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (ed. by A. Vööbus in CSCO 407).

¹ Recent translations of Aphrahat's *Demonstrations* are the French one of M.-J. Pierre, *Aphraate le Sage Persan. Les Exposiōs*, vol. I–II [Sources Chrétiennes 349/359]. Paris 1988–9, and the German one of P. Bruns, *Aphrahat. Unterweisungen*, vol. I–II (Fontes Christiani V/1+2). Freiburg u.a. 1991.

- [3] Chapter I of the study introduces Ephrem's life and writings. *Chapter II* outlines the transmission of the Paschal Hymns in two manuscripts of the 6th century. Though neither the formation of the whole collection nor the titles of the cycles derive from Ephrem himself, the authenticity of these hymns can be taken as granted (except *res. I* and *cruc. III, I*). It is of some importance for Rouwhorst's study that the titles obviously refer not to themes, but to single days of the paschal week, thus reflecting a liturgical background of this collection.
- [4] *Chapter III* gives an analysis of the Paschal Hymns, including their general themes (cosmos, God, Christ, angels, salvation history, etc.), and their special paschal themes. The latter are divided into three paschal themes: 1) the Passover of the Israelites in Egypt, dealing with the rites to prepare and to eat the Passover lamb, with the exodus of the Israelites and with their crossing of the Red Sea, 2) the Passion of the Lord, dealing with the time from the Last Supper until the ascension, 3) the paschal feast of the Church which commemorates and celebrates the Lord's passion prefigured by the Passover and the exodus of the Israelites in Egypt. Some conclusions concerning the liturgical setting (Eucharist, baptism, chants), date (month of Nisan), and anti-judaism are drawn.
- [5] By this analysis (which of course is of more detail than reported here), Rouwhorst describes the thematic structure of the hymns in order to indicate their archaic character and to prepare the stage for the interpretation. The archaic character is due to the dominance of the Passion as the key theme, contrasting with the reduced attention paid to the resurrection. This brings the paschal hymns in an obvious affinity with the Pascha Homily of Melito of Sardes, a quartodeciman of the 2nd century. Also the strong anti-judaism, the peculiar significance given to the month of Nisan, and the absence of any baptismal typology are indeed unusual features in a set of paschal hymns.
- [6] *Chapter IV* turns to sources contemporary with Ephrem in order to gain evidence for the paschal feast practiced in the area east of Antioch: the 12th *Demonstration* of Aphrahat (composed 343/344), and the *Didascalia Apostolorum* of northern Syria, translated from the Greek in the 4th century (according to Rouwhorst). To these sources, Eusebius' record (*Hist. eccl.* V 23,4) on the quartodeciman controversy of the 2nd century between

Victor of Rome and the Christian quartodecimans of Asia Minor is prefixed. According to this account, the bishops of Osrhoene and of all the cities of this area (i. e., the area where Ephrem lived) already shared the Roman practice to celebrate on Sunday instead on the 14th of Nisan which is the date of the Jewish Passover. Rouwhorst points to the absence of this record in Rufinus' (†410) Latin translation of Eusebius' text and casts suspicion on it to be a later addition in order to date back the final accord to the earlier period. Eusebius' record also appears to be unreliable by the fact that the Council of Nicea (325) had to decide authoritatively in favour of the Sunday celebration² and still the Council of Antioch (341) had to resume the same topic. Finally, Aphrahat and the *Didascalia* provide evidence for the quartodeciman tradition still vivid in the post-Nicene east.

[7]

For the church, a severe offence of the Christian quartodeciman celebration was the connection of its date with the Pesach of the Jews, though the quartodecimans in fact celebrated an anti-Pesach by commemorating the Lord's Last Supper (which took place on 14th of Nisan), his passion, death, victorious descent to and ascent from the dead, and by giving a typological explanation of Exodus 12.³ Accordingly, the Nicene rule to celebrate on Sunday following the 14th of Nisan aimed not only at the unification of the Christian paschal feast, but also at the definite separation of its date and theological meaning from any Jewish influence. For the same reason, the Nicene decision was based on the principle that the paschal full moon could never occur before the vernal equinox, thus avoiding two paschal feasts within one single solar year as it could happen according to the Jewish paschal computation based on the lunar year. And if the Christian and the

² We know the results (not the details) of the Council's debate on this topic by the Emperor's letter recorded in Eusebius' *De vita Constantini*, ed. by I.A. Heikel in *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte*, vol. 7 (Leipzig, 1902) 3–148. — On the paschal controversy see J. Hefele and H. Leclercq, *Histoire des conciles d'après les documents originaux*, vol. I,1 (Paris, 1907) 133–51 and 450–88.

³ See G.A.M. Rouwhorst, "The Quartodeciman Passover and the Jewish Pesach," *Questions Liturgiques* 77 (1996): 152–73. The elements of the quartodeciman celebration are a fast, readings from the Scriptures (Exodus 12 and probably the Passion Narrative), singing chants and hymns, Eucharist and agape meal (no baptisms).

Jewish feast still happened to coincide, the Christians followed the practice of celebrating one week later.

- [8] Rouwhorst's detailed presentation of Aphrahat's 12th demonstration *De paschate* is the most comprehensive one so far. Avoiding discussions of isolated sections in favour of a thorough interpretation of the whole, Rouwhorst makes a quartodeciman imprint to be the red thread of the interpretation. He sees Aphrahat directing towards conservative people of quartodeciman tradition within his own community who oppose the paschal feast as it is practiced by Aphrahat himself (p. 191). According to Rouwhorst,⁴ Aphrahat observed a feast which was already removed from the 14th of Nisan to the Friday after the 14th being an imperfect adoption of the Nicene norm and still exhibiting traces of a quartodeciman past, for Aphrahat is celebrating "the day of the great passion," on "Friday, the fifteenth, both the night and the day" (XII,8), which looks like a modification (not like a decisive change) of the quartodeciman practice. On the other hand, Aphrahat offers an explicit (though curious) chronology for the passion (XII,6–7) which allows Christ to spend three days and three nights among the dead, in order to extend the one-day passion feast to Saturday/Sunday and the resurrection.⁵ Rouwhorst explicitly points to the ambivalent character of Aphrahat's "celebration of the passion:" according to its structure it culminates in the night of Saturday/Sunday (the night of resurrection, with fast, prayers, and a vigil, followed by prebaptismal onctions and baptisms), but the object of the celebration is the "Friday" and the events connected with it (passion, death, descent to sheol).

- [9] The clue for a conclusive understanding of Aphrahat's position is provided by Rouwhorst's analysis of the *Didascalia* ch. xxi. Introducing the manuscript tradition of this text, Rouwhorst reports the existence of a longer and a shorter version. He abstains from giving priority to one of these versions in advance but prefers to be guided by the "tenor" of the chapter's single sections, i. e., by their quartodeciman imprint. Applying this criterion, his analysis

⁴ See G.A.M. Rouwhorst, *The Date of Easter in the Twelfth Demonstration of Aphraates* (Studia Patristica VII,3, ed. E. Livingstone; 1982) 1374–80.

⁵ This chronology is based on the view that Christ is dead from the moment he offered his body and blood to the disciples and that the three hours of darkness between the sixth and ninth hour on Friday are an extra night and the remaining three hours an extra day.

results in the distinction of a quartodeciman nucleus within ch. xxi (mainly represented by the shorter version), which connects the Christian paschal feast with the 14th of Nisan and prescribes a fast and prayers for the Jews at the moment when the passover of the Jews starts. This nucleus (which Rouwhorst supposes to have originally been more complete) successively became extended and modified by textual strata which reflect the removal of the quartodeciman paschal feast to Friday and Saturday/Sunday after the 14th. One of these strata pays an explicit attention to a fast on Friday and to a vigil in the night of Friday/Saturday, a second stratum moves on to a peculiar significance of Saturday/Sunday night.

- [10] From this analysis of *Didascalia* ch. xxi, Rouwhorst explains the ambivalent character of Aphrahat's paschal practice by connecting it with the evolution of the paschal tradition reflected in this document. In the church of Aphrahat, the removal of the quartodeciman practice to the Friday after the 14th is regarded by Rouwhorst to be an event not too long ago, neither generally accepted nor elaborately reflected. Aphrahat obviously tries to meet the new situation by settling a correspondence between the old quartodeciman practice and the new one of his own using terms like "day of the great passion," "Friday," and "one night and one day" for the celebration which in fact had extended to a complete Holy Week under the influence of the Nicene norm, but imperfectly stripped of its quartodeciman past.

- [11] The paschal feast in the area East of Antioch reflected in these two sources contemporary with Ephrem appears to be moved from a quartodeciman celebration in pre-Nicene time to the celebration in post-Nicene time on Friday and then Saturday/Sunday after the 14th, culminating in an Eucharist on Sunday morning at the time of the resurrection. This passage of the paschal tradition, which Rouwhorst can trace in Ephrem's paschal hymns, provides the clue for the explanation of several motifs and details of the hymns which remained enigmatic before (pp. 195–203): 1. the dominant role of the Friday events (passion and death) reveals a feast with a still minor accentuation of the Saturday/Sunday celebration and of the resurrection; 2. the chronology of the three days (Friday morning until Sunday morning) Christ spent among the dead obviously serves to justify the (recent) introduction of a paschal Friday and Saturday (as in Aphrahat);

3. traces of a quartodeciman past of the church in Nisibis and Edessa are a) the still great importance given to the typology of the paschal lamb and the Exodus story, b) the explicit mention of Christ's "ascension" which is of no minor importance than his resurrection, c) the anti-Jewish polemic which may reflect the threat of Ephrem's church (and its Jewish converts) by the Jewish community and at the same time may be a reminiscent of the Christian anti-Pesach formerly celebrated on 14th of Nisan, d) the reduced importance of the preparatory pre-paschal fast and of the paschal baptisms (the crossing of the Red Sea is hardly connected with baptismal typology, *Az.* VIII–IX) which both seem to be too recently introduced to Ephrem's church to leave any imprint on his paschal theology; 4. the peculiar significance given to the month of Nisan⁶ may reflect the Nicene rule to celebrate the paschal feast after the vernal equinox but (according to Rouwhorst) should also be regarded as a substitute for the still undeveloped theme of resurrection.

[12]

Rouwhorst's "quartodeciman" approach to the paschal hymns of Ephrem provides much light for a better understanding of their general thematic structure and of some of their details. It fits in well with our knowledge of the close connections between Aphrahat's and Ephrem's theology on the one hand and Judaism (or Christians attracted by Judaism) on the other. The interpretation of his sources (especially the 12th demonstration of Aphrahat) is admittedly difficult, and even one who does not agree with some of Rouwhorst's views⁷ will accept the general line of his approach.

⁶ See G.A.M. Rouwhorst, "L'évocation du mois de Nisan dans les Hymnes 'Sur la résurrection' d'Ephrem de Nisibe," in: *IV. Symposium Syriacum* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 229; Roma, 1987) 101–10.

⁷ See the review of Rouwhorst's book by S.P. Brock in the *Journal of Theological Studies* 42 (1991): 740–4. The book of K. Gerlach, *The Antenicene Pascha. A Rhetorical History* (Liturgia Condenda 7; Louvain, 1998), excludes Ephrem's Paschal Hymns, but includes Aphrahat's 12th demonstration (pp. 231–43) and ch. 21 of the Didascalia (pp. 203–30). In the footnotes the author objects to a quartodeciman background of both (p. 207 note 51 and p. 233 note 105) without detailed discussion.