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A Forgotten Principle of Writing the Four Gospels

A variety of names referring to the Lord are used and commented on in *The Martyrdom of St Abo Tbileli* of the 8th century in the following succession: *Door; Way; Lamb, Shepherd; Stone; Pearl; Salt; Flower; Angel of Great Intentions; Man; God; Light; Earth; Mustard Seed; Worm; Sun of the Truth, Son of Immortal God, the One Eternal God*** (The Martyrdom of St. Abo Tbileli 1964: 52–55). In a number of works we tried to substantiate the assumption that, listing the names of the Lord in Chapter 1 of *The Martyrdom*, the author, John (Ioane) Sabanisdze allegorically shows the path of spiritual ascension (Kuchukhidze 2006: 215-228...). Man becomes similar to the Lord in different name-symbols step by step. Since each symbol is a concrete step of spiritual ascension, he changes and gradually becomes elevated spiritually by means of this assimilation.

In Chapters 2 and 3 of the work the life of St Abo (Habo) is divided into separate stages - Blessed Abo becomes similar to the Lord first as *Door*, then as *Way, Lamb*, and so forth. These chapters present the eighteen-step path of spiritual ascension with the observance of the exact succession. There is not a single sentence in Chapters 2 and 3, where Blessed Abo would not be linked to a specific stage (Kuchukhidze 2006: 228-253).

All the aforementioned name-symbols can be found in the text of the Bible and quite often also in Byzantine literature (Abuladze 1982: 130; Baramidze 1990: 48; Kekelidze 1980: 131; Kekelidze 1986: 43; Oniani 1955: 70-107, etc.), but only Sanabisdze's work has them mentioned in the sequence described above.

A study of *The Martyrdom of St Abo Tbileli* in the light of the Gospel leads to very interesting conclusions.

To begin with, let us turn to the Gospel of St John. It seems quite obvious that in the Gospel, the Savior is represented by all the eighteen names listed by Ioane Sabanisdze and, what is particularly interesting, the sequence of name-symbols in the Gospel is precisely the same as that in *The Martyrdom of St Abo Tbileli*. In individual chapters of the Gospel, Jesus appears first as the *Door*, then as the *Way*, the *Lamb*, and so forth. Each part of specific chapters is associated with one of the names of the Lord. The symbols used in Chapter 1 of Sabanisdze's work make it possible to look deeper into the inner structure of the Gospel. Since we researched this issue thoroughly in the work specially devoted to it (Kuchukhidze 2006: 274-269; Kuchukhidze 2006a...), in this paper, we consider it possible to dwell in detail on these symbols, particularly those used in the Gospel of St John without repeating the general conclusions.

* The author did not comment on the last two of the aforementioned names.

Reading of each chapter of the Gospel of St John elevates a people's soul, preparing them for ascension on the steps of spirituality. From Chapter 10, the text includes the names of the Lord, mentioned in Chapter 1 of Ioane Sabanisdze's work.

Door is the first among the name-symbols of the Lord Sabanisdze uses.

The Lord first appears under this name at the beginning of Chapter 10 of the Gospel of John: "*He who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens*" (The Bible, Oxford University Press). The Gospel says: "*This parable was told to them by Jesus,*" and then the words of the Savior himself are quoted: "*I am the door of the sheepfold*", and then the words of the Lord himself are given: "*I am the door of the sheep*" (John. 10:1-9). Then the Lord says in the Gospel that after entering the door of Christian spirituality, the *Way* that leads to salvation, to the Father, opens before a man. Thus, after entering the door of the ascension, Christ is the path leading to life... The Lord's words: "*I am the door*" are continued: "*He that cometh in me shall be saved, and shall come in and come out, and find life*" (John. 10: 9), i.e. this time Christ appears before us as the Way leading people to the Father...

Then Sabanisdze uses the symbol Lamb.

A man who enters the path of Jesus Christ, should try to destroy sins in himself with all his might, i.e. he must become a Lamb... Jesus Christ was crucified for the sins of humanity, he was "slain" as a "lamb"... Thus, reading Chapter 10 of the Gospel of John, we reach Verse 10 that says: "*A thief comes only to steal, kill [the word θύση (thūse) – to slaughter – is used in the Greek version (The Greek New Testament: 1994)] and to destroy; I have come that they may have life*"- i.e. this time, we can see our Lord Jesus Christ as a lamb, who is not to "kill and destroy" others, but it is He who must be "slain" Himself. It is not unexpected that it is Lamb that is the symbol following Way in the Gospel.

After *Lamb* Ioane Sabanisdze uses *Shepherd*.

Verse 11 of the Gospel reads: "*I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep*". Then the Lord repeats that He is a Good Shepherd, and his sheep will follow Him. Verse 30 says that He and Father are one.

Then Ioane Sabanisdze mentions *Stone*.

Stone is a symbol of Jesus offended and rejected by the unbelieving men. Later, Jesus becomes a cornerstone of the new faith (Cf. Psalm. 117: 22; Acts. 4: 11 ...). Verse 31 shows how people insulted Jesus: "*Here again the Jews took up stones to stone Him.*" Jesus asks the offenders: "*I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me*" The answer is as follows: "*We are not stoning You for any good deed, but for blasphemy: you, a man, are claiming to be God*" (John. 10: 31-33). Jesus departs from the offenders, and then it becomes clear that, "*there many believed on Him*", whom they intended to stone (John. 10:42).

In this verse, Jesus takes up the fifth step. The duty of Christians, including, of course, apostles, the first disciples, is to follow Him. Chapter 11 shows how Lazarus overcomes the step of Lamb in order to reach the step of Shepherd. Lazarus died, having killed

in himself everything that is transient and lost all interest in the earthly. The interest in spiritual life has not yet arisen in him. Praying at his grave, Jesus awakens spirituality in this man – an interest in new, Christian, and spiritual values, and thereby brings him back to life... Then it is said in the Gospel that they prepared a supper for Jesus in Bethany, where “*Martha served, and Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with Him*” (John. 12: 2). Thus, having overcome the level of Lamb, Lazarus already ascends or will ascend in the future to the step of Shepherd... It is to be expected that in the future, all disciples will become good shepherds. As compared to Lazarus, they will not have to die for this, because the interest in spiritual values will be awakened in them in advance and this will give them the force for life... And we can see the Lord himself ascended to the step of Stone.

After Stone, Sabanisdze mentions Pearl and Salt. In our opinion, after the symbol of Stone, the Lord is represented by the symbols of Pear and Salt in the Gospel.

Pearl is a symbol of wisdom and Salt symbolises protection from decay. By giving Lazarus communion to divine wisdom, enlivening and purifying his dead body through spiritual transformation, the Lord is represented in the Gospel in the shape of the symbols of Pearl and Salt.

The eighth symbol in Sabanisdze’s work is Flower.

According to him, this name was given to the Lord because “*by the Divine fragrance filled us with the Spirit*”... Having examined Chapter 11 of the Gospel of John to the end, we reached Verse 3 of Chapter 12, which describes the arrival of Jesus in Bethany. Then it is said about Mary that she “*anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair; And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume*” (John. 12: 3)... As if concerned about the poor, Judas Iscariot feels sorry for the perfume used. Justifying Mary, Jesus answers that they will always have the poor among them, but they will not have Him. Mary feels that Jesus will elevate man to the kingdom of heavenly spirituality. In this case, the Lord is likened to Flower that grants Christians the fragrance of paradise.

The ninth symbol in Ioane Sabanisdze’s work is “the Angel of Great Intentions”.

From Verse 12 of Chapter 12, the Gospel tells how Jesus comes to Jerusalem in the name of the fulfillment of the Great Sacrament: To defeat death, He must be crucified... Jesus resembles an Angel preparing for the fulfillment of a great mission...

Verse 22 shows that Jesus is told that pagans want to see Him.

The symbol Man is the tenth mentioned by Sabanisdze and God is the eleventh.

In the next verse – Verse 23 of the Gospel of John, we can see that Jesus responds to the apostles, who told Him that pagans wanted to see Him: “*The hour is come that the Son of Man is to be glorified*” ..., i.e. in this passage of the Gospel, He is shown as the Son of Man, Man.

The following verses – Verse 24 and Verse 25 – say that the grain must die in order to rise to a new life, i.e. in order to awaken the Divine in man, all earthly features must die in him... Having obtained the human nature of a mortal, the Lord must die on the cross and rise again thereafter and, thanks to the Truth, appear as an immortal God-Man... The Lord

says: *“Whoever serves me will be honored by the Father”* (John 12:26). Here, the Lord appears as the Son of God Father, i.e. as God. Jesus tells people what kind of death He is going to take. People do not understand how God can be crucified, so they ask: *“Our law teaches us that the Messiah remains forever. What do you mean by saying that the Son of Man must be lifted up? What Son of Man is this?”*(John 12:34).

Thus, the Lord is represented with the names of Man and God in the aforementioned verses.

After these symbols, Sabanidze mentions the symbol of Light. If the chain of our reasoning is correct, this time, the Lord is to appear under the symbol of Light in the Gospel too.

In John 12:34, we can see that Jesus is asked: *“Who is this Son of Man?”*, In the following verses – 12:35 and 36 – Jesus answers: *“The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going; Put your trust in the light while there is still time; then you will become children of the light.”* Then Jesus speaks in the words of Prophet Isaiah (Is. 6:9-10): *“He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them”* (John 12:40). Verses 12:45-46 say: *“He that sees Me sees Him who sent Me. I have come into the world light, that whoever believes in me should not remain in darkness”*, and 12 it is said at the end of Chapter that the Savior gives men eternal commandments.

After the symbol of Light, Sabanidze mentions the symbol of Earth.

By his definition, God is called the Earth because He descended to the earth and thereby received a beautiful fruit in the shape of His followers... Thus, it is to be supposed that after Light, the Lord will appear in the image of a teacher of submission and humility...

Chapter 13 describes how the Lord is washing the feet of the disciples, they are embarrassed, but at the same time, it becomes clear that the followers of Christ should take more care of inferiors, which will become a condition for universal revival. In Chapter 14, Jesus tells his disciples that he will soon go to the Father... In Chapters 15 and 16, the Lord calls the people to patience. Turning to the Father, He pronounces the words: *“I have made your name known to the men”* (John 17: 6) ... *“I made your name known to them and will make it known”* (John 17:26) Chapter 18 describes the trial of Jesus, His renunciation by the people, and the choice of Barabbas by the Jews. This is the end of Chapter 18. In the aforementioned chapters, we can see God condescended to the Earth, to this world...

Ioane Sabanidze further mentions the Mustard Seed.

This has the following meaning in the language of symbols: A mustard seed must die, before a big plant grows from it. John 19:1-37 narrates how Jesus was tortured and crucified and how his side was pierced and how blood and water flowed down on the ground. At this time, a life-giving, reviving force was sown in the earth. Crucified Jesus forgives murderers, which cannot fail to give birth to a purifying and exalting power in

many hearts. In this passage of the Gospel, Jesus is like a mustard seed. Christ accepts death to be resurrected through the truth. He sows love in the hearts of many and many people.

The symbol of Worm is the 15th mentioned by Sabanisdze.

God obtained not only the mortal nature of man, but, after the crucifixion, also the nature of dead man. It is this dead nature obtained by the Lord that is symbolically called Worm... Jesus is presented under this symbol in John 19:38-40, which is a record of his burial. (When a man at this time becomes like immortal God, he is freed from sinful thoughts that changed his essence, making him mortal. He becomes more aware that death was not created by God and He did not create him as a mortal. And man begins to be freed from the influence of false spirituality, he ascends to the kingdom of truth and immortality returns to man, which is to happen during the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.)

Ioane Sabanidze further mentions the Sun of the Truth and we can see the Lord as the Sun radiating the truth, as Godman, who defeats death in John 20. At the same time, here He is represented by two more names, which are also mentioned by Sabanisdze (the Son of Immortal God and the One Eternal God).

It has already been said that Lazarus ascended from the level of the Lamb to the level of the Shepherd and that in the future, all disciples must reach the level of the Shepherd. At the end of Chapter 21, Jesus visits his disciples. He asks Peter three times: “*Do you love me?*” And three times he calls him: “*Feed my lambs*” (John 21:15); “*tend my sheep*” (John. 21:16); “*feed my sheep*” (John. 21:17). Then Jesus tells Peter and John what future awaits them. The disciples will become Shepherds and in the future, together with other followers of Christ, they should continue their ascension on the spiritual levels.

Thus, in our opinion, the Gospel of Apostle John refers to the Lord using symbols in the following succession in the aforementioned chapters and verses:

Door (10:1-9); **Way** (10:9); **Lamb** (10:10); **Shepherd** (10:11-30); **Stone** (10:31-42); **Pearl** (11:1-38); **Salt** (11:39-57); **Flower** (12:3-11); **Angel** (12:12-22); **Man** (12:23); **God** (12:24-34); **Light** (12:35-50); **Earth** (13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18); **Sun** (19:1-37); **Worm** (19:38-42); **Son of Immortal God, Invariable and Everlasting God** (20).

Such a succession of symbols is observed in all four Gospels. Frequently (but not always), the same symbol for the Lord is presented by the Gospel writers in different episodes of His life. For example, the Gospel of John uses the symbol of the Angel of Great Intentions to refer to the Lord in the passage of his entry to Jerusalem, but Matthew uses the same symbol, when the Lord tells the apostles: “*My time is at hand*” and when He prepares for the Passover with His disciples. And in our opinion, He appears under the symbol of Flower in the same episodes of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John.

It is clear that not every person must necessarily ascend in the sequence we have described: Great love can instantly elevate him like it happened with the blessed one, who was crucified together with Jesus and who recognised God. Man can also ascend step-by-step, not realising what specific step he is standing on.

All the aforementioned sheds light on one of the principles of the creation of the Gospel. Writers of the Gospel knew the same names of the Lord and the same sequence of these names. Narrating the life of Jesus, this sequence of names remained unchanged. At the same time, the study of some non-canonical Gospels has shown that such a principle was not observed in them. Thus, it seems that **the four canonical Gospels are united by the same symbols, as well as a strictly defined sequence of their use, i.e. a unified principle of the organisation of the text.** In this case, it should be admitted that **a certain sequence of the Lord's names adopted in the Christian world** (that we described) **was also known to Ioane Sabanidze**, and he built the story about the life of St Abo precisely based on this principle. **In this work, we are dealing with the manifestation of the ancient tradition of Christian literature**, which must be taken into account when studying problems of Areopagetica, Neoplatonism. In our opinion, the method of referring to God by His Names is used in the process of the creation of the four Gospels. This method originates from the Ancient East. The Christian era transformed it and elevated it to new heights.

Below we present those chapters and paragraphs in the Synoptic Gospels that comprise the aforementioned symbols referring to Jesus. Some corrections may be required due to the results of future research.

Door: Matt. 20; Mrk, 1:16-45; Luk. 15; **Way:** Matt. 21:1-32; Mrk. chapters 2-9; 10:1-32; Luk. chapters 16-17; **Lamb:** Matt. from 21:33 to 22:32; Mrk. 10:33-45, Luk. Chapter 18; **Shepherd:** Matt. from 22:33 to the end of the chapter; Mrk. from 10:46 to the end of Chapter 11; Luk. Chapter 19; **Stone:** Matt. Chapter 24; Mrk. 12:1-17; Luk. Chapter 20; 21:1-19; **Pearl:** Matt. 25:1-30; Mrk. from 12:18 to the end of Chapter 12; Luk. 21:20-26; **Salt:** Matt. 25:31-46; Mrk. Chapter 13; Luk. 21:27-28; **Flower:** Matt. 26:1-13; Mrk. 14:1-9; Luk. 21:29-38; **Angel:** Matt. 26:14-23; Mrk. 14:10-17; Luk. Chapter 22; **Man:** Matt. 26:24-46; Mrk. 14:18-42; Luk. 23:1-33; **God:** Matt. 26:47-68; Mrk. 14:43-65; Luk. 23:34-38; **Light:** Matt. 26:69-74; Mrk. 14:66-71; Luk. 23:39-43; **Earth:** Matt. 26:75; Mrk. 14:72; Luk.: 23:44-46; **Mustard Seed:** Matt.: 27:1-56; Mrk. 15:1-41; Luk. 23:47-49; **Worm:** Matt. 27:57-66; Mrk. 15:42-47; Luk. 23:49-56; **Sun:** Matt. 28:1-17; Mrk. 16:1-18; Luk. 24:1-48; **Son of Immortal God, Eternal God:** Matt. 28:17-20; Mrk. 16:19-20; Luk. 24:49-53.

Ioane Sabanidze's work allows to determine exactly what symbols are given in the Four Gospels and in which sequence and what name-symbols for the Lord are used in which verses. This demonstrates one of the currently forgotten principles of writing the Four Gospels. In this sense, the work *The Martyrdom of Saint Abo Tbileli* acquires a worldwide significance.

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გოჩა კუჭუხიძე (საქართველო)

ოთხთავის შექმნის ერთი მივიწყებული პრინციპი

რეზიუმე

საკვანძო სიტყვები: სახარების შექმნის ისტორია, იოანეს სახარება.

იოანე საბანისძის „წმიდა ჰაბო ტფილელის მარტვილობაში“ ჩამოთვლილია უფლის 18 სიმბოლო (კარი, გზა, ტარიგი, მწყემსი...), რომელთა საშუალებითაც ღმერთისაკენ სულიერი ამაღლების გზა არის წარმოჩენილი. იგულისხმება, რომ ადამიანის მოვალეობაა, თანამიმდევრულად მიემსგავსოს სხვადასხვა სიმბოლოში გამოხატულ უფალს, რაც ეტაპობრივად შეცვლის ქრისტეს მიმდევარს და ამაღლებს სულიერ საფეხურებზე. ყველა ის სიმბოლო, რომელიც საბანისძესთან არის ნახსენები, ცნობილია ბიბლიურ ლიტურატურაში, რაც შეეხება ხსენებული 18 სიმბოლოს ჩამოთვლის თანამიმდევრობას, იგი მხოლოდ „წმიდა ჰაბო ტფილელის მარტვილობაშია“ შემორჩენილი.

ჩვენი მიზანი იყო, გაგვეჩვენა სიმბოლოთა ჩამოთვლის თანამიმდევრობის გენეზისი. ამ მიზნით უპირველესად სახარება შევისწავლეთ. როგორც კვლევამ ცხადყო, ხსენებული სიმბოლოებით უფალი ოთხ სახარებაშია წარმოდგენილი და, რაც განსაკუთრებით საინტერესოა, სიმბოლოთა სახარებისეული თანამიმდევრობა ზუსტად შეესაბამება იმ თანამიმდევრობას, რომელიც საბანისძესთან არის დაცული. გაირკვა, რომ საბანისძისეული თანამიმდევრობა სახარებათაგან იღებს სათავეს, ამასთან, კვლევის შედეგად დაზუსტდა, სახარებათა რომელი თავების რომელ მუხლებში წარმოდგება ხსენებული სიმბოლოებით უფალი.

როგორც ირკვევა, მათე, მარკოზი, ლუკა და იოანე მახარებლები ისე გადმოგვცემენ უფლის ცხოვრებას, რომ იგი ჩვენს წინაშე ჯერ წარმოჩნდეს როგორც „კარი“, შემდეგ როგორც „გზა“, „ტარიგი“, „მწყემსი“ და ა. შ. ეს სიმბოლოები ზოგჯერ პირდაპირ არის ნახსენები, ზოგიერთ შემთხვევაში კი ტექსტის შინაარსშია ისინი გამოხატული. ე. ი. ჩანს, მახარებლები სახარებათა წერისას ღმერთთან მის სიმბოლოებზე მიმსგავსების საშუალებით მიახლების პრინციპს იყენებენ. ეს პრინციპი ძველ აღმოსავლეთში იყო ცნობილი, ქრისტიანულმა რელიგიამ კი სრულიად ახალ სიმაღლეებამდე აიყვანა იგი. უაღრესად საინტერესოა, რომ ხსენებული პრინციპი, როგორც კვლევის ამ ეტაპზე ჩანს, მხოლოდ ოთხ სახარებაშია გამოყენებული და აპოკრიფულ სახარებებში იგი არ შეინიშნება. აღსანიშნავია, რომ ეს 18 სიმბოლო განსაკუთრებული სიცხადით იოანეს სახარებაშია წარმოჩენილი.

„წმიდა ჰაბო ტფილელის მარტვილობა“ საშუალებას გვაძლევს, დავინახოთ, თუ რომელი სიმბოლოებით არის სახარებებში უფალი წარმოჩენილი, როგორია ამ სიმბოლოთა წარმოჩენის თანამიმდევრობა, საშუალება გვეძლევა, მუხლობრივად მივუთითოთ, ტექსტის რომელ ადგილას ჩანს უფლის ესა თუ ის სიმბოლო, ფაქტიურად სახარებათა დანერის ერთ-ერთი პრინციპი ირკვევა „წმიდა ჰაბო ტფილელის მარტვილობის“ მეშვეობით. ამდენად, თამამად შეიძლება ითქვას, რომ ეს ფაქტი იოანე საბანისძის ნაწარმოებს მთელი მსოფლიოს მეცნიერთათვის ხდის საინტერესოს...