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EASTERN CHRISTIAN STUDIES 20

SYRIAC ENCOUNTERS

Papers from the Sixth North American Syriac Symposium
Duke University, 26-29 June 2011

Edited by
Maria Doerfler, Emanuel Fiano
and Kyle Smith



PEETERS

LEUVEN – PARIS – BRISTOL, CT

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BARDAISAN'S PSYCHOLOGY:
KNOWN AND UNKNOWN TESTIMONIES AND
CURRENT SCHOLARLY PERSPECTIVES

Alberto CAMPLANI

The issue I wish to explore in this paper is why Mani, in his *Book of the Mysteries*, asserted that the followers of Bardaisan of Edessa¹ claim that the living soul purifies itself and ascends inside the corpse. At first sight, this statement could be seen as a minor problem in the research about Bardaisan and Mani. My intention, however, is to show that the contextualization of Mani's claim about Bardaisan's followers may be a good exercise in textual and historical criticism that could raise new issues in the study of Bardaisan.²

1. MANI AND DIODORE OF TARSUS ON BARDAISAN'S PSYCHOLOGY

The role Mani played in Edessa could hardly be overstated. The *Codex manichaicus coloniensis* (64,3-6)³ tells us that Mani wrote an epistle εἰς Ἑδέσσαν. In the *Kitab al-Fihrist*,⁴ an-Nadim speaks of the *Book of the*

¹ On the name "Bar Dayṣān" see J. Tubach, "Bar Dayṣāns Name," in *Syriaca. Zur Geschichte, Theologie, Liturgie und Gegenwartslage der syrischen Kirchen*. 2. Deutsches Syrologen-Symposium (Juli 2000, Tittenberg), Studien zur orientalischen Kirchengeschichte, 17 (Hamburg: Lit, 2002), 11-18.

² Abbreviations used in this contribution for both the works of Bardaisan and the sources quoting Bardaisanite texts, with indication of the editions, are as follows: *BLC* = *Book of the Laws of the Countries*: H.J. W. Drijvers, *The Book of the Laws of the Countries. Dialogue on Fate of Bardaisan of Edessa*, Semitic Texts with Translations 3 (Assen: Van Gorcum & Co., 1965); F. Nau, *Bardesanes. Liber legum regionum*, PS I. 2 (Paris: Firmin-Didot et socii, 1907) // *PR* (I and II) = Ephrem, *Prose Refutations*: C.W. Mitchell, *S. Ephraim's Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion and Bardaisan*, vol. I (London: Williams and Norgate, 1912); A.A. Bevan and F.C. Burkitt, vol. II (London: Williams and Norgate, 1921). // *HH* = Ephrem, *Hymns against Heresies*: E. Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen contra Haereses*, CSCO 169-170, Scriptorum Syri 76-77 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CSCO, 1957).

³ See L. Koenen and C. Römer, *Der Kölner Mani - Kodex. Über das Werden seines Leibes*, Kritische Edition, Abhandlung Reinisch-Westfälischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Coloniensia Papyrologica 14 (Opladen: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 1988); see the Italian translation by L. Cirillo in G. Gnoli, *Il Manicheismo*. Vol. I: *Mani e il manicheismo* (Milano: Fondazione Lorenzo Valla - Arnoldo Mondadori, 2004), 75.

⁴ G. Flügel (ed.), Al-Nadim, *Kitab al-Fihrist* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1871), 336.

Secrets or Mysteries by Mani (*Sifr al-asrar*), giving a brief outline of its contents, which included a mention of the Bardaisanites, their claim about the soul and the body, and their confutation concerning the living soul. Al-Biruni in his *Taḥḥīqu mā li l-Hindī*, speaking about the concept of transmigration, is naturally led to discuss Manichaean anthropological doctrines. It is in this context that mention is made of Mani's polemics against the *Daysāniyya*:

When Mani was banished from Eranshahr, he went to India, learned metempsychosis from the Hindus, and transferred it into his own system. He says in the *Book of Mysteries*: "Since the apostles knew that the souls are immortal, and that in their migrations they array themselves in every form, that they are shaped in every animal, and are cast in the mould of every figure, they asked Messiah what would be the end of those souls which did not receive the truth nor learn the origin of their existence. Whereupon he said, 'Any weak soul which has not received all that belongs to her of truth perishes without any rest or bliss.'" By *perishing* Mani means her being punished, not her total disappearance. For in another place he says: "The partisans of Bardesanes think that the living soul rises and is purified in the carcass (*qad zanna al-Daysāniyyatu 'anna 'urūḡa nafsi l-ḥayāti wa-tasfiyatahā huwa fī jīfati l-bašari*), not knowing that the latter is the enemy of the soul, that the carcass prevents the soul from rising, that it is a prison, and a painful punishment to the soul. If the human figure were a real existence, its creator would not have compelled it to reproduce itself by the sperma in the uterus."⁵

This passage is more complex than it might seem at first glance. If we take it literally, we should assimilate the position of the Bardaisanites to the Arab and Syriac Christians who, according to a plurality of sources,⁶ believed that the soul had to remain close to the corpse after death until the time of resurrection. However, upon deeper reading, we discover the occurrence of a Manichaean technical vocabulary: for example, the expression "living soul," whose meaning is not only the single soul, but also the original soul scattered in the material universe;⁷ and the word "corpse" (πτῶμα), commonly used to indicate not only the corpse of a single dead creature, but also the entire "universe of flesh," or material world.⁸ If we take into consideration these meanings, the scope of Mani's

⁵ E.C. Sachau, ed., *Al-Biruni's India* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1887, reprint Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1925); quoted here is the English translation of the same publisher (vol. I, 1888, 54-55).

⁶ Those include Aphrahat, *Demonstrations* (6-8) and Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* (6,37).

⁷ S. Clackson, E. Hunter, S.N.C. Lieu, M. Vermes, *Dictionary of Manichaean Texts*, I (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 27b, 49b, 87b-88a.

⁸ Clackson, et al., *Dictionary of Manichaean Texts*, 81.

Bardaisan's anthropology has been dealt with recently by Ute Possekel and Ilaria Ramelli, with very different results.¹⁰ Here, I wish to focus on Bardaisan's psychology. In particular, the philosopher, as well as Mani, wrote a book entitled *The Book of mysteries*: ܩܘܪܝܢܐܘܢ.¹¹ Since Mani's book reserved a remarkable amount of space to issues concerning Bardaisan and the doctrine of the soul, I would surmise that the Bardaisanite fragments concerning the soul quoted in Ephrem's *Against Bardaisan (Prose Refutations)* were drawn from Bardaisan's *Book of Mysteries*. Before proposing my analysis, however, a brief discussion of the main issues of Bardaisanite studies is in order, especially what has been written in the past few years.

2. SOURCES ON BARDAISAN IN CURRENT SCHOLARSHIP

The reconstruction of the thought of Bardaisan and his disciples is a fascinating and difficult challenge for the contemporary scholar, since the sources attesting their literary activity are quite problematic and diverse. They include:

- *The Book of the Laws of the Countries* (= *BLC*), in the form of a dialogue between Bardaisan and his disciples, preserved in a Syriac manuscript (BL add. 14658)¹² and probably written in that language, subsequently quoted by later Greek authors in an ancient Greek version.
- The fragments transmitted by Porphyry, recently edited and studied by Franz Winter,¹³ about an Indian embassy to Edessa under the emperor Elagabalus.
- The works of Ephrem: the *Prose Refutations* (= *PR*), the *Hymns against Heresies* (= *HH*), other collections of hymns, to be compared with later sources. Of a peculiar nature are Ephrem's quotations of poetical works by Bardaisan and his disciples (*HH* 55). These verses

¹⁰ For the two more recent studies by Ramelli see *infra*. Ute Possekel has devoted a study to Bardaisan's anthropology and doctrine of resurrection; see U. Possekel, "Bardaisan of Edessa on the Resurrection: Early Syriac Eschatology in its Religious-Historical Context," *OC* 88 (2004): 1-28, and "Bardaisan of Edessa. Philosopher or Theologian?," *ZAC* 10 (2006): 442-61.

¹¹ Ephrem, *HH* 1,14; 56,9.

¹² I apologize for noting the incorrect ms. number ("14568" instead of "14658") in previous publications.

¹³ F. Winter, *Bardaisan von Edessa über Indien. Ein früher syrischer Theologe schreibt über ein fremdes Land*, Frühes Christentum. Forschungen und Perspektiven 5 (Innsbruck: Thaur, 1999).

evoke some characters that are also part of the Gnostic pantheon: the Father and the Mother of Life (compared to, or identified with, the sun and the moon), who beget, through sexual union, the Son of Life; and two female characters — the Holy Spirit and the youthful spirit. The youthful spirit, which is destined for a wedding feast, calls upon God in the words pronounced by Christ on the cross (Mt 27:46) in a way that reminds us of the Valentinian character of Sophia.

- Cosmogonic traditions preserved in later accounts about the heresy of the Bardaisanites, written by Syriac authors from the sixth to the tenth centuries, describing the Bardaisanite doctrine of the origin of the world. It should be stressed that Ephrem, as well as these accounts, preserve some quotations from cosmogonic poems by Bardaisan or his followers.¹⁴

From this list of witnesses, two main controversial issues emerge about Bardaisanite literature: (1) the ideological coherence of Bardaisanite texts; and (2) their relationship with dualistic and Gnostic trends. Some scholars, for whom the *BLC* reflects Bardaisan's own ideas, maintain the ideological unity of all Bardaisanite texts and deny their dualistic character, justifying the variety of expressions or ideas with the difference in language and literary genre.¹⁵ Others, disqualifying the *BLC* as an authentic text by Bardaisan and interpreting it as a late and Catholicizing product, read the other fragments as clear proof of Bardaisan's close proximity to dualism and Gnosticism.¹⁶ A possible third interpretation considers the Bardaisanite texts as the product of different authors who, in varying ways, support (in some cases with the aid of Gnostic language) an anti-Marcionite theology. This theology is averse to systems that divide God the creator from God the savior too sharply and is based on the assumption

¹⁴ For all these sources see H.J.W. Drijvers, *Bardaisan of Edessa*, Studia Semitica Neerlandica, 6 (Assen: Van Gorcum & Co, 1966); A. Camplani, "Note bardesanitiche," *Miscellanea marciiana* 12 (1997): 11-43 (= *Scritti in memoria di Emilio Teza*), and the books by Iaria Ramelli mentioned *infra*.

¹⁵ To this category belong, for example, H.J.W. Drijvers and J. Teixidor, *Bardesane d'Edesse. La première philosophie syriaque*, Patrimoines Christianisme (Paris: Cerf, 1992).

¹⁶ This was the position assumed for example by G. Levi della Vida, *Pitagora, Bardesane e altri studi siriaci*, ed. R. Contini, Studi Orientali 8 (Roma: Bardi, 1989); T. Jansma, *Natuur, lot en vrijheid. Bardesanes, de filosoof der Arameeërs en zijn images*, Cahiers bij het Ned. Theol. Tijdschrift 6 (Wageningen: Veenman, 1969). For the history of studies see A. Camplani, "Rivisitando Bardesane. Note sulle fonti siriache del bardesanism e sulla sua collocazione storico-religiosa," in *CMS* 19 (1998): 519-96.

that the original crisis took place not within God, but within a distinct and created principle (the entities) subordinated to him.¹⁷

Ilaria Ramelli has posed the problem of the sources in its acute form in her two books of 2009 that offer a new portrait of Bardaisan: the first one, written in Italian, contains a new edition of the *BLC* with commentary; the latter, in English, is a huge reconsideration and detailed analysis of *BLC*, Porphyry's quotations, and the heresiological reports.¹⁸ In the face of such a commitment and such a wealth of material (in excess of nine hundred pages) it is impossible to avoid taking a stand. Two aspects of Ramelli's portrait of Bardaisan are worthy of note: first, Ramelli's passion for the Syriac thinker, which leads her to judge him as orthodox *sui generis* ("Above all, I hope to have shown that Bardaisan's thought was fundamentally Christian, and even somehow 'orthodox' *ante litteram*"¹⁹); and second, Ramelli's scholarship, which in many cases allows her to identify the classical sources influencing the author's thought — for example, the fundamental role of Plato's *Timaeus* for Bardaisanite cosmogony and psychology. Despite this, I propose here a critical verification of her method, in line with my contributions of 1997 and 2004, in which I invited scholars to maintain great methodological caution in using the witnesses about Bardaisan, a caution accompanied by a consciousness of the epistemological limits that are imposed by the different kinds of sources. Ramelli believes that more can be done than what I indicated as possible in those contributions. At any rate, I would like to express some concerns about important points of her analysis:

- a) first, the use of conceptual parallels between Bardaisan and other thinkers, which I find excessive and often inappropriate, whose aim is to recover aspects of his thought that are badly attested by the sources. Origen and the Origenian tradition play a key role in Ramelli's reconstruction of Bardaisan's thought. The point of departure is the evident similarity between the final section of *BLC* and Origen's doctrine of *apokatastasis*. It is hard to deny this parallel, but how far can it be used to outline Bardaisan's views concerning other dimensions of

¹⁷ It is what I proposed in "Bardesane et les bardesanites," *École pratique des hautes études. Section des sciences religieuses. Annuaire. Résumé des conférences et travaux*, 112 (2003-2004): 29-50.

¹⁸ I. Ramelli, *Bardesane di Edessa Contro il fato, Kata Heimarmenes / Liber legum regionum* (Roma – Bologna: Edizione San Clemente — Edizioni studio domenicano, 2009); Ead., *Bardaisan of Edessa: A Reassessment of the Evidence and a New Interpretation*, *Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies* 22 (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2009).

¹⁹ Ramelli, *Bardaisan*, 10.

theology and anthropology? Is the philosophical and theological context of these expressions really so close as to be legitimately extended to include, in Ramelli's words, "the defence of human free will, the doctrine of *apokatastasis*, divine Providence, the allegorical exegesis of Scripture, the rejection of Marcionism and Gnostic predestinationism, the doctrine of Christ's *epinoiai*, the so-called theology of the image, the refusal of apocalypticism"?²⁰ One of the main points of Ramelli's outline is her interpretation of a number of Bardaisan's fragments quoted by Ephrem in which a materialistic view is clearly expressed, to the point that even a line is considered corporeal. This view is assimilated by Ramelli to Origen's opposition between the diverse corporeality of creatures and the absolute incorporeal state of the Trinity (*De Principiis* 1.6.4; 2.2.2).²¹ However, the author of these fragments simply maintains that the creatures (including the soul) have different degrees of thickness or fineness: nothing is said about the incorporeality of God. On the contrary, it is to be pointed out that in one of the branches of Bardaisan's school it was maintained that after the original incident, instead of the *mêmra d-tar'itâ*, atoms of spirit, force and intellect were sent to the mixture of the original elements with darkness.²² It becomes hard to maintain that these atoms are the mark of a non-materialistic conception of the spiritual world. So, in no place do we find a clear trace of what Ramelli qualifies as the "absolute incorporeality of God alone";

- b) second, the method of utilization of the sources, which is not rationally grounded. Their reliability is established or denied *a priori* without a criterion other than that of their compatibility with the portrait of the thinker Ramelli is outlining. This portrait in fact is mostly drawn from the *BLC*, whose close relationship with the historical figure of Bardaisan is more declared than proven.²³ But what in my eyes is most questionable is the way of harmonizing conflicting evidence. Ramelli belongs to the group of scholars for whom the *BLC* is a good reflection of Bardaisan's thought. But, parting from previous scholarship, she ties this position with a pronounced tendency to stress the (orthodox) Christian elements scattered in other sources or conjectured by her in

²⁰ Ramelli, *Bardaisan*, 13: "The most favorable sources on Bardaisan, and generally also the best informed, are all constituted by Origenians (...) None of them, moreover, depicts Bardaisan as a heretic."

²¹ Ramelli, *Bardaisan*, 18-19.

²² *PR* II, 220 ll. 10-33.

²³ Ramelli, *Bardaisan*, 65-68.

order to outline the profile of a thinker who, despite the opacity of the witnesses, should be deeply Christian and orthodox *ante litteram*.²⁴ Ramelli does this with great conviction, to the point of correcting the Syriac text of the *BLC* when it contradicts her general outline of the thinker. For example, when the *BLC* says that there are men who were not created for good and who are called “darnel” (Mt 13:24-30), she proposes to correct the Syriac so as to neutralize such a statement, which seems too deterministic in her eyes. I cannot accept this correction for multiple reasons of methodological character, but above all for the fact that it is not compatible with Syriac grammar.²⁵ The other important text in Ramelli’s reconstruction is a short series of quotations that Porphyry drew from a work composed by Bardaisan about India, reporting the discourses he had heard from the Indian embassy that had come to Edessa in the reign of Elagabalus (after 218 CE). This text, in Ramelli’s opinion, not only illuminates the account of the ambassadors or its reformulation by Bardaisan, but is the deepest expression of his theology. On the other hand, another significant element of Ramelli’s argument is the negative evaluation of Ephrem’s witness, who is “a most valuable, albeit biased, source on Bardaisan,”²⁶ deemed responsible for having projected Manichaean conceptions back onto Bardaisan and having attributed to him doctrines which are in fact those of his later followers. But Ephrem is a source that cannot be discarded. In Ephrem’s writings we find a lot of quotations, as he was in the condition to read Bardaisan’s works in the original Syriac better than the modern scholar. As for the quotations, there is no sufficient

²⁴ We can summarize the way Bardaisan’s Christology is described by Ramelli in a few words: in the time of origins, the Logos of God arranged the creation, impressing upon it the symbol of the cosmic cross, and providing it with his providence and his fate; then this same Logos was made flesh by God and Mary and took a body. But this last assumption is based on a questionable interpretation of a passage by Philoxenus of Mabbog (Ramelli, *Bardaisan*, 85), whose correct understanding has been proposed by L. Van Rompay, “Bardaisan and Mani in Philoxenus of Mabbog’s *Mēmṛē Against Habbib*,” in *Syriac Polemics. Studies in Honour of Gerrit Jan Reinink*, ed. W.J. Van Bakkum, J.W. Drijvers, and A.C. Klugkist (Leuven-Paris-Dudley: Peeters, 2007), 77-90.

²⁵ See Ramelli, *Bardaisan*, 74-76, for whom *etbarī* is interpolated. This seems to be contrary to a sound method, in the sense that it is not correct to eliminate what is in contradiction with our understanding of a given text, which in turn is guided by our general model of interpretation. In addition, there are two grammatical facts that have escaped Ramelli: *hwā* is not only singular and cannot be adapted to a plural subject (unless it is corrected in *hwaw*), but it is also certainly not the verb, rather part of the negation *lā (h)wā* (“not”)! As for the meaning of this passage about men created for the evil, I would prefer to interpret it as a trace of an original anthropological dualism, which in *BLC* is evolving towards a more unitive understanding of the human being. See also the edition in Ramelli, *Bardesane di Edessa*, 144-145.

²⁶ Ramelli, *Bardaisan*, 156-57.

- ground for clearly distinguishing what is attributable to Bardaisan and what to his disciples, except in a few cases (“they” and “he” are used interchangeably by Ephrem in relation to the same quotations);
- c) third, the misuse of the *argumentum ex silentio*, in particular when a number of sources attribute to Bardaisan some ideas that are felt by Ramelli to be far from orthodoxy. To give but one example, the docetic Christology or the explicit denial of the resurrection of the body, attributed to Bardaisan by some sources (it is not important here to determine whether rightly or wrongly) are denied by Ramelli on the ground that they are not attested by either the *BLC* or the fragments of the *De India*. But it is to be stressed here that these works do not deal at all with either Christology or resurrection, so that the *argumentum ex silentio* makes no sense;
- d) fourth, Ramelli assumes that Bardaisan may have admitted resurrection: “He could conceive of a resurrection of the bodily substance, finally pure and without any mixture with darkness, which would also guarantee the incorruptibility of the risen body. In this view, the body can rise again, if finally constituted by pure elements, unmixed with darkness.”²⁷ This is an interesting assumption, but unproven on the basis of the sources and therefore speculative.²⁸

The only critical operation that I deem sound on the methodological level is the reconstruction of textual units which are to be obtained from the quotations scattered in the heresiological sources, with the notable exception of the *BLC*, the only complete text. Much more difficult is the task of assigning each unit to Bardaisan and to his followers, or to propose a relative chronology.

3. PSYCHOLOGY IN BARDAISANITE TEXTS AND FRAGMENTS

3.1 *Soul and Intellect*

In the *BLC* we find a number of positive statements about man’s intellect (*re’yānâ / madd’â*), which is the place of both free will and the image of

²⁷ Ramelli, *Bardaisan*, 164-65.

²⁸ On the other hand, Ramelli’s opinion that, according to Bardaisan, the original sin affected not only the soul, but also the body, seems to be explicitly contradicted by those quotations of Bardaisan’s in which the thinker underlines that original sin and salvation concern not the body, which is destined to death and corruption, but exclusively the soul, which is to be saved and resurrected.

God. However, the idea of a connection of the soul with Fate (probably to be interpreted, as Ramelli rightly proposes, as the lower part of man's soul), can be deduced from the following passage:

For that which is called Fate, is really the fixed course determined by God for the Rulers and the guiding Signs. According to this course and order the spirits (*madd'ê*) undergo changes while descending to the soul, and the souls while descending to the bodies. That which causes these changes is called fate and native horoscope of that mixture which was mixed and is being purified to the help of that which, by the grace and goodness of God, was and will be helped till the termination of all.²⁹

Notwithstanding this assertion, in the *BLC* it is absolutely clear that the place of man's responsibility and subjectivity is the *re'yânâ*/intellect.³⁰

But this is not the unique statement about the soul that we find in Bardaisanite literature. The metric poem *Against Bardaisan* (eight verses per stanza, consisting of seven syllables each) deals with the relationship between body and soul and their resurrection. The fragments have consistency of ideas and language and might have been taken by Ephrem from the same Bardaisanite work. I suppose that this is exactly the *Book of Mysteries* against which Mani polemicizes, and its attribution to the historical Bardaisan should be considered probable.

Some basic ideas may be deduced from the fragments. The general pattern is that lighter things tend to ascend (such as the soul), while heavier things (such as the body) tend to descend.³¹ The body, therefore, is destined to dissolution and has no chance of salvation.

Life and death are ambivalent notions in the author's thought, as they can indicate both bodily and spiritual states. However, the author emphasizes that salvation and damnation pertain only to the spiritual level. The text in this regard uses two scriptural arguments: a) the fact that Abel died before Adam means that the death sentence imposed by God on the latter, far from introducing bodily death, concerned only the spiritual portion of man;³² b) at the same time, the immortality promised

²⁹ Nau, *Bardesan. Liber*, 572 ll. 9-13, Drijvers, *The Book of the Laws of the Countries*, 33.

³⁰ On the anthropological aspects of the *BLC*, see T. Hegedus, "Necessity and Free Will in the Thought of Bardaisan of Edessa," *LTP* 59 (2003): 333-44; Id., *Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology* (Bern-Berlin-Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2007); P.-H. Poirier and E. Crégheur, "Foi et persuasion dans le *Livre des lois des pays*. À propos de l'épistémologie bardesanienne," *Mus* 116 (2003): 329-42; U. Possekkel, "Bardaisan and Origen on Fate and the Power of the Stars," *JECS* 20 (2012): 515-41.

³¹ St. 1, *PR* II, 143 ll. 2-9; St. 44, *PR* II, 154 ll. 28-39.

³² See for example St. 1, *PR* II, 143 ll. 2-9: "Bardaisan, lo, declares that even without the sin (*saklûtâ*) of Adam the body would turn to its dust, that flesh does not cleave (*lâwê*) to spirit, that the dregs run downward and the fine material upward."

by the Lord in Jn 8:51-52 is to be understood only in spiritual terms, since all those who kept the word of the Lord had to experience bodily death.³³ True death is identified not with bodily death, which is “a natural, inevitable occurrence that did not result from Adam’s sin,”³⁴ but with the impediment of the souls in their ascent to God; at the same time, the real life promised by Christ in John is the possibility of learning the truth, overcoming all barriers and reaching the bridal chamber of light:³⁵

According to the teaching of Bardaisan
 the death that Adam brought in
 was a hindrance (*kelyānā*) to souls
 in that they were hindered at the crossing-place (*ma’bartā*)
 because the sin of Adam hindered them.
 “And the life,” [Bardaisan said] “that our Lord brought in
 is that He taught truth (*qūštā*) and ascended,
 and allowed them to pass over into the kingdom” (*malkūtā*).³⁶

In this perspective, Adam’s sin and Christ’s action are closely related. It is clear from what is found above that the author of this text has denied the resurrection of the body in the clearest terms. The resurrection, therefore, is the process of purifying the soul that has kept the word of the Lord — in other words, the soul that has kept true knowledge (“life”). It consists in the rising of the soul from the underworld, or from the world, through the planetary spheres (literally “depths and limbos,” *b-kull ‘ūmqīn wa-b-mā’ōnīn*)³⁷ towards the kingdom.

Besides the oppositions light/heavy, body/spirit, the text establishes a distinction between soul and intellect (*madd’ā*, an equivalent of the Greek *nous*), which is essential for our understanding of the author’s doctrine of man: while the condition of the soul is intermediate between body and intellect,³⁸ so as not to have knowledge of the being and of itself,³⁹ the intellect is hidden in it and is the center of true knowledge.⁴⁰ In this regard, it is interesting to notice the use of the parable of Mt 13:33 / Lk 13:20-21 / *Gospel of Thomas logion* 96, where the kingdom of heaven is likened to the leaven that a woman has hidden:

³³ St. 80, *PR* II, 164 ll. 18-26.

³⁴ Possekel, “Bardaisan of Edessa on the Resurrection,” 11.

³⁵ St. 81, *PR* II, 164 l. 32 – 165 l. 19.

³⁶ St. 82, *PR* II, 164 l. 41 - 165 l. 8, in Possekel’s translation in “Bardaisan of Edessa on the Resurrection,” 13.

³⁷ *PR* II, 164, ll. 34-36.

³⁸ St. 61, *PR* II, 159, ll. 9-13.

³⁹ St. 59, *PR* II, 158, ll. 24.

⁴⁰ St. 59, *PR* II, 158, l. 23.

“Reason (*madd'â*),” as they say, “is the foreign (*nûkrâyâ*) leaven that is hidden in the soul, which is without knowledge, to the body and reason it is foreign.”⁴¹

The leaven in the text is to be interpreted as the intellect which is qualified as “foreign,” *i.e.*, of a different origin from man’s, and possibly from the soul’s.⁴² From the same work another quotation is drawn in which the corporeality of the soul is dealt with:

“The soul also in comparison with the body,” as they say, “is thin, and corporeal (*gšimâ*) in comparison with the intellect.”⁴³

Other fragments, whose provenance from this same work is dubious, provide us with a better understanding of the situation of the soul in the world. In *HH* 54 it is said that, according to the Bardaisanites, “the senses of the soul are not able to comprehend something which is in reality (*ītūtâ*)” (st. 1), and “the soul, too, is constituted of the beings (*ītyê*) and cannot grasp the reality (*ītūtâ*)” (st. 3). In other words, the soul is not only ignorant, but also consists of “beings” which are to be identified with either the matter or the planetary influences.⁴⁴ Another fragment leads us in that direction: “He said that of seven parts the soul was composed and fixed.”⁴⁵

In concluding this brief survey, three observations are in order: 1) the soul enjoys an intermediate condition between the body and the *madd'â*/intellect, which is a quality given by the grace of the Lord and is qualified as “life”; in itself the soul is something corporeal, without a real knowledge of both reality and the self, and is deeply affected by Fate; 2) the soul, notwithstanding these limitations, is the place of subjectivity, is that portion of man which, thanks to the intellect, is destined to enter God’s realm; 3) it is necessary to emphasize the importance assumed by the Christological action in the salvation of the souls and of the intellects / *madd'ê* hidden in them. If the crucifixion does not play a particularly explicit role, the *parousia* of “the one who comes,” however, is of great importance because it gives the soul both knowledge of and deliverance from the enclosures in which it was forced from Adam onwards, paving the way to the bridal chamber of light.

⁴¹ St. 59, *PR* II, 158 ll. 20-26.

⁴² In *PR* II, 221, ll. 2-4, a fragment not drawn from the work discussed here, the knowledge is defined as God’s particle.

⁴³ St. 61, *PR* II, 159 ll. 9-13.

⁴⁴ See also *HH* 53,4.

⁴⁵ *PR* I, 8 ll. 8-10.

or of one of his followers. Ephrem, who deals with the Father and the Mother of Life in *HH* 55, explicitly attributes to the son of Bardaisan a passage in which the Mother of Life and her daughters are mentioned.⁵⁰

4. A COMPARISON WITH Gnostics, Tatian, and Hermogenes

The main aspects of Bardaisan's doctrine are to be seen against the backdrop of the discussion on the soul that took place in a number of streams of Christianity and Gnosticism during the second century. The questions of its mortality or immortality, of its corporeality⁵¹ and connection with the spirit, and of its relationship to human freedom were commonly debated.

The use of Jesus' parable for the description of both the situation of the soul in man and its salvation by the divine principle is well represented in Gnostic texts. The *Sermon of the Naassenes*, for example, proposes to identify the Celestial Man — a soteriological principle — as the inner man through the images of the hidden treasure (Lk 17:21; Mt 13:44) and the leaven (Mt 13:33).⁵² Irenaeus,⁵³ with reference to the Valentinians, says that while the three measures of meal in Jesus' parable are the symbols of the three kinds of men (hylic, psychic, pneumatic), the leaven is the Saviour himself. In the *Excerpta ex Theodoto* it is asserted that, after the creation of the psychic body, the Logos placed a male seed in the sleeping soul, which fermented so as to give unity to what seems divided, *i.e.*, the soul and the flesh, derived from the passions of Sophia.⁵⁴

However, two thinkers living on the margins of orthodoxy show a greater proximity to the positions of the Bardaisanite literature: Tatian and Hermogenes. If in Justin Martyr, Tatian's teacher, we discover a connection between mortality and creatureliness of the soul, on one hand, divine grace and immortality of the soul on the other,⁵⁵ it is with Tatian (*Oratio* 12-13) that we find a negative psychology, counterbalanced by God's gift of the "spirit":

also Philoxenus knows these characters ("Bardaisan and Mani," 87).

⁵⁰ *PR* II, 223 ll. 13-22.

⁵¹ A kind of corporeality is admitted by Irenaeus as well when he wants to differentiate the soul from the body; the soul is incorporeal *quantum ad comparationem mortalium corporum* (Haer. V.7.1).

⁵² *Elenchos*, V,8,8.

⁵³ *Adv. haer.*, I,8,3.

⁵⁴ *Excerpta ex Theodoto*, 1.1.3.

⁵⁵ *Dialogue with Trypho*, 5,2-3 e 6,2.

13. The soul, men of Greece, is not in itself immortal but mortal; yet it also has the power to escape death. For if it is ignorant of the truth (μη γινώσκουσα τὴν ἀλήθειαν) it dies and is dissolved with the body, but rises (ἀνίσταται) later at the end of the world along with the body, to suffer death by immortal punishment; on the other hand it does not die, even if it is dissolved for a time (κἂν πρὸς καιρὸν λυθῆ), if it has obtained knowledge of God. In itself it is dark and there is no light in it, and so the saying goes "The dark does not comprehend the light" (Jn 1:5). For the soul did not itself preserve the spirit, but was preserved by it. The light comprehended the dark in that the light of God is word, but the ignorant soul is darkness (σκοτός δὲ ἡ ἀνεπιστήμων ψυχῆ). Because of this if it lives alone it inclines down towards matter and dies with the flesh, but if it gains union with the divine spirit it is not unaided, but mounts to the realms above where the spirit leads it; for the spirit's home is above, but the soul's birth is below (τῆς δὲ κάτωθεν ἐστὶν ἡ γένεσις). So the spirit became originally the soul's companion, but gave it up when the soul was unwilling to follow it.⁵⁶

There are many points of similarity with Bardaisan. The soul, which is from below, is neither autonomous nor capable of knowledge and salvation. This negative psychology is counterbalanced by the spirit, which is from above and guarantees salvation to that soul which is not ignorant and does not commit sin; just like the *madd'â*-intellect-life in Bardaisan, however, the spirit is an accidental quality of man. The greatest difference between Bardaisan and Tatian is that for the latter the flesh is destined to resurrection.

As for Hermogenes, whose doctrine of the preexistence of matter and of its coexistence with God shows many similarities with that of Bardaisan, it must be remarked that he was fought by both Theophilus of Antioch and Tertullian of Carthago. According to a polemical remark of the latter, the close relationship between the human soul and matter was stressed by Hermogenes to the point that he denied the derivation of the soul from the blow of God (*ex dei flatu* or *ex dei spiritu*)⁵⁷ and stressed its derivation from matter. According to Hermogenes, the spirit of Gen 2:7 was added to the man as an act of divine grace, but was not part of his nature.⁵⁸

We must conclude that the Bardaisanite doctrine of the soul is strictly connected with the debate that arose in Christian and Gnostic circles regarding the role and final destination of the *psyché*. The Bardesanite

⁵⁶ Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos and Fragments*, trans. M. Whittaker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 23-24.

⁵⁷ Tertullian, *De anima* 1,1; 11,2.

⁵⁸ See F. Chapot, "L'hérésie d'Hermogène. Fragments et commentaire," *RecAug* 30 (1997): 3-111, esp. 79.

literature appears to have articulated more than one position about the matter. According to the fragments (of the historical Bardaisan?) quoted in Ephrem's *Against Bardaisan*, the intellect (*madd'â*) is something connected with the gracious gift of divine life in the time of the origins (the blow of Gen 2:7), subsequently lost because of sin, and finally revived by the Lord ("the one who comes"). The soul, despite its derivation from the matter and the astral spheres, is the place of man's subjectivity and is destined to salvation only if the ties with the intellect-life are not broken. In other fragments (*HH 55*, Moshe bar Kepha) this gift of life comes from characters, such as the Father and the Mother of Life, that could be connected with Gnostic speculations. On the other hand, according to *BLC*, while the body has been affected by Fate and the soul has been touched by it, the intellect is a natural component of man and the place of his subjectivity and of the image of God, completely independent of Fate.

Whether these slight differences in conception and language are to be attributed to differences in the style of the same author, to diversity in the author's audiences, or (as I am led to believe) to differences among many ideologically diverse authors who all belong to the same school is a question that remains open for further research.

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