

Bardaisan on Human Nature, Fate, and Free Will

The Book of the Laws of Countries

*Scripta Antiquitatis Posterioris
ad Ethicam RELigionemque pertinentia
XLVI*

Mohr Siebeck

SAPERE

Scripta Antiquitatis Posterioris
ad Ethicam RELigionemque pertinentia

Schriften der späteren Antike
zu ethischen und religiösen Fragen

Herausgegeben von
Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, Reinhard Feldmeier
und Heinz-Günther Nesselrath

Band XLVI



Bardaisan on Human Nature, Fate, and Free Will

The Book of the Laws of Countries

Introduction, Text, Translation and
Interpretative Essays by

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SAPERE

Greek and Latin texts of Later Antiquity (1st–4th centuries AD) have for a long time been overshadowed by those dating back to so-called ‘classical’ times. The first four centuries of our era have, however, produced a cornucopia of works in Greek and Latin dealing with questions of philosophy, ethics, and religion that continue to be relevant even today. The series SAPERE (*Scripta Antiquitatis Posterioris ad Ethicam Religionemque pertinentia*, ‘Writings of Later Antiquity with Ethical and Religious Themes’) undertakes the task of making these texts accessible through an innovative combination of edition, translation, and commentary in the form of interpretative essays.

The acronym ‘SAPERE’ deliberately evokes the various connotations of *sapere*, the Latin verb. In addition to the intellectual dimension – which Kant made the motto of the Enlightenment by translating ‘*sapere aude*’ with ‘dare to use thy reason’ – the notion of ‘tasting’ should come into play as well. On the one hand, SAPERE makes important source texts available for discussion within various disciplines such as theology and religious studies, philology, philosophy, history, archaeology, and so on; on the other, it also seeks to whet the readers’ appetite to ‘taste’ these texts. Consequently, a thorough scholarly analysis of the texts, which are investigated from the vantage points of different disciplines, complements the presentation of the sources both in the original and in translation. In this way, the importance of these ancient authors for the history of ideas and their relevance to modern debates come clearly into focus, thereby fostering an active engagement with the classical past.

Preface to this Volume

This volume comes from a profound engagement with Bardaisan's thought that in my academic activity has lasted for more than two decades. Its first fruits were an Italian translation of, and an essay on, the *Book of the Laws of Countries* (1999) and many studies on Bardaisan, from the historical and philosophical points of view (2000–2009), as well as classes as Professor of History of the Roman Near East. Then came an Italian commented edition of the *BLC* (2009) and a thorough and ongoing study of Origen and the Origenian tradition. One of its outputs was a monograph on apokatastasis that has been in the works for sixteen years (Brill 2013), in addition to many essays and volumes dealing with Origen, published and in preparation.

While I was studying these almost contemporary Christian philosophers, Origen and Bardaisan, and their traditions, I realised how intriguingly their ideas and respective traditions, and even the sources concerning them, are interrelated. After some essays, among which a major one in *Harvard Theological Review* 2009, and several lectures, including at the University of Göttingen, I offered the comprehensive results of this comparative investigation in a 2009 monograph on Bardaisan. Its suggestions have been positively received by many scholars, such as Patricia Crone in the *Encyclopedia of Islam* (Brill 2012), Michael Speidel in a volume on Mara bar Serapion (Brill 2012), Aaron Johnson in a monograph on Porphyry (Cambridge 2013), Heidi Marx in an article for the *Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, Ute Possekel in various articles, H. J. W. Drijvers and J. W. Drijvers in the new edition of the former's book on Bardaisan, David Litwa in a book on Hippolytus' *Philosophoumena*, Clemens Scholten, Chris De Wet, Shaye Cohen, Paul Robertson, Izabela Jurasz, Dominic O'Meara, Dylan Burns, Nathanael Andrade, Harmut Leppin, Alberto Rigolio, the late John Turner, Matyas Havrda, Antonio Panaino, David Lloyd Dusenbury in his monograph on Nemesius, Mark Edwards in his monograph on evil in the ancient world, and others. After this I have not terminated my engagement with Bardaisan: I presented new findings at the 2011 Oxford Patristic conference, published in *Studia Patristica*, and have been obviously delighted and sincerely honoured to organise, and contribute to the present volume. My research into Bardaisan has continued over the last decade and more, with investigation into Bardaisan's doctrine of apokatastasis, his theory of free will, and his Christology and engagement with (Platonist) exemplarism. Besides specific articles, published or in the works, my monograph on

Bardaisan appeared from Gorgias Press and later, also in electronic form, from De Gruyter.

After my Italian translation and commentary, during the years of the preparation of this book, the French translation appeared, *Le Livre des lois des pays. Un traité syriaque sur le destin de l'« école » de Bardesane*, introduced, translated, and annotated by Paul-Hubert Poirier and Éric Crégheur (Paris 2020).

The present volume supplies a new edition of, English translation of, and commentary on the *BLC*, with important supporting essays that help readers to situate Bardaisan in his cultural context, and at the same time provide the latest developments of scholarship on the *BLC* and Bardaisan himself.

I am very grateful to the Editors of SAPERE, my esteemed colleagues Professors Reinhard Feldmeier, Heinz-Günther Nesselrath, and Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, for their invitation to undertake this volume; to the colleagues who participated in the relevant conference I directed along with the SAPERE Editors in Göttingen in November 2011, prepared very fine essays, and collaborated to the preparation of this work: Kathleen McVey, Ute Possekkel, Aurelio Pérez Jiménez, and Maximilian Forschner, for their discussion and suggestions; and to Sebastian Brock for his (as ever!) most precious advice; as well as to Nancy Rahn (who really went beyond the call of duty!), Andrea Villani and all the editorial staff at SAPERE, whose assistance has been invaluable, to the new SAPERE team, Barbara Hirsch, Julius Furthmüller for the Indices, the copyeditor for Mohr Siebeck, and to Maros Nicak, who typed the Syriac text of the *BLC*. I extend my gratitude to all my other colleagues and friends who have discussed so many aspects of Bardaisan's thought and cultural environment with me over many years. Warm thanks to you all! This book appears after a decade and more of work and hopefully will be helpful to colleagues and students in ancient Christianity, ancient philosophy, ancient religions, Syriac studies, classics, and ancient history.

January 2024

Ilaria L. E. Ramelli

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A. Introduction

Introduction

Ilaria L. E. Ramelli

1. A Fascinating, Learned Figure at the Crossroads of Various Cultures: Bardaisan's Life, School, and Works

Bardaisan (154–222 CE) was a Christian philosopher, theologian, and teacher, a polymath whose interests ranged from geography to music, from astronomy to archery, from allegoresis to ethnography, from poetry to Platonism and Stoicism, from ethics to theology, from history, including history of Christianity, to literature, including Christian *apocrypha*. Ancient heresiologists treated him as a heretic, associating him with Valentinianism, Marcionism, and even Manichaeism, although he fought Marcionism, and Manichaeism developed after his lifetime. He was no 'Gnostic' either, as I shall show, but he certainly was a Christian, something that has been doubted, but is demonstrated, e.g., by his use of "us Christians" in the *Liber Legum Regionum* / *Book of the Laws of Countries* (BLC) ch. 15, p. 69, l. 30 (all references are to the sections, pages and line numbers of the BLC I established in this text and translation), his New Testament quotations in the BLC and elsewhere, and surely authentic fragments preserved by Porphyry, Ephrem, and the *cosmological traditions* that emphasise the role of Christ-Logos as creator and saviour and of his cross. Bardaisan's thought was fundamentally Christian, anti-Marcionite, and not 'Valentinian'. It was based on the exegesis of Scripture in the light of Greek philosophy, especially so-called Middle Platonism.¹ A similar cultural enterprise was undertaken to a greater extent by Philo one century and a half before Bardaisan, and in his day, and shortly after, by Origen.² Bardaisan's Christian

¹ See here the essay on Bardaisan, Origen, and Middle Platonism (p. 109–131). On *apocrypha* see, e.g. P. PIOVANELLI, *Apocryphites: Études sur les textes et les traditions scripturaires du judaïsme et du christianisme anciens* (Turnhout 2016) with my review in *Reviews of the Enoch Seminar* 2019.05.07: <http://enochseminar.org/review/15977>. Bardaisan was a Syriac philosopher, as emphasised by I. JURASZ, "Bardesane, un philosophe syriaque", in: E. FIORI / H. HUGONNARD-ROCHE (eds.), *La philosophie en syriaque* (Paris 2019) 1–64.

² See RAMELLI 2008a; RAMELLI 2011b; ead., "Philo as Origen's Declared Model. Allegorical and Historical Exegesis of Scripture", *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 7 (2012) 1–17; RAMELLI 2018c.

philosophy is, with Clement's and Origen's, one of the first syntheses of Greek philosophical traditions and Christianity.³

Bardaisan's name (sometimes written *Bar Daisan*, e.g. in the manuscript in which the *BLC* is preserved) means "son of the Daisan", the river Σκιρτός, a tributary of the Euphrates. It was the river of Edessa (Syriac *Orhai*), the capital of Osrhoene – today's Urfa, in Turkey. Indeed, although he also traveled, Bardaisan's activity mainly took place in Edessa, at the crossroads of several cultures, Greco-Roman and Syriac in particular, but also Iranian, Parthian, and Armenian; his interests extended even to India. He worked at the beginning of Patristic philosophy, in the Antonine and Severan age. After Marcus Aurelius' persecution, Christianity enjoyed a more tranquil period in the Roman empire, to which Edessa was close and in which it was then included during the third century. Bardaisan was a friend of Abgar the Great, king of Edessa, had been educated together with him in Greco-Roman *paideia*, and was a dignitary at his court. There, Julius Africanus, the Christian intellectual and historian who corresponded with Origen, saw his prowess as an archer (*Cest.* 1.20). At that time, Christianity was present in Edessa, where also a Christian church existed,⁴ that Abgar himself was a Christian is stated in the *BLC*, and is also supported by several scholars.⁵ In this period Abercius' epitaph was composed, which

³ I pointed out the need for such syntheses in RAMELLI 2015b; on the same line N. HUTTUNEN, *Early Christians Adapting to the Roman Empire*, NovT Supp. 179 (Leiden 2020), esp. 23, 59, 61, 260, 281. In a systematic study (RAMELLI 2009a) I hope to have contributed something – and I hope to do so in the future as well – toward the critical evaluation of the reliability of the sources on Bardaisan, their comparative analysis, the assessment of the deep convergences I point out between Bardaisan and Origen, the importance of Bardaisan's fragments preserved by Porphyry, and of Platonic and Middle-Platonic elements in Bardaisan's thought, along with Stoic ones. It must also be considered that there was reciprocal influence between Stoicism and Middle Platonism, and that both systems are reflected in Jewish and Christian authors such as Philo, Clement, Origen, and Bardaisan himself. Recent assessment on Bardaisan in my "Bardaisan (Philosopher and Poet)", in: D. HUNTER / B. J. LIETAERT PEERBOLTE / P. J. J. VAN GEEST (eds.), *Brill Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (Leiden 2024) online 2018 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2589-7993_EECO_SIM_00000385> https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/brill-encyclopedia-of-early-christianity-online/bardaisan-SIM_00000385; see also TEXIDOR 1992.

⁴ See at least RAMELLI 1999c; RAMELLI 2004; M. BROSIUS, "The Near East", in: A. ERSKINE (ed.), *A Companion to Ancient History* (Malden / Oxford 2009) 177–188.

⁵ RAMELLI 1999; RAMELLI 2004; DROWER / GRAY / SHERWIN-WHITE 2016: "L. Aelius Septimius Abgar VIII (177–212; 212–14 jointly with his son), who became a Christian."

is probably Christian.⁶ Bardaisan's work *Against Fate* was dedicated to a Roman emperor, "Antoninus" according to Eusebius (*HE* 4.30).

Bardaisan and his school were bilingual (Greek-Syriac), probably like others in the Osrhoene upper classes; according to Eusebius, his disciples translated his works from Syriac into Greek. No literary works in Syriac seem to be extant prior to the *BLC*, apart from the second-century *Apology to "Antoninus Caesar"* ascribed to Melito and the probably more ancient *Letter of Mara Bar Serapion to his son*.⁷ The *BLC* is transmitted, not accidentally, in the same sixth/seventh-century manuscript by which the *Letter of Mara* and the *Apology to "Antoninus"* are also preserved: these are all philosophical writings from the beginnings of Syriac literature and either are Christian (the *Apology*; *BLC*) or have to do with Christ (*Mara's letter*). The *Apology* is a short treatise that supports human free will and declares it to be grounded in God, like the *BLC*. Striking parallels in content and even in words can be found between the *BLC* and this *Apology*, on which see below.

Bardaisan's school in Edessa seems to have been a Christian philosophical and theological (possibly also exegetical and scientific) 'school' that did not formally depend on ecclesiastical institutions: parallel cases were those of Justin in Rome – whose disciple Tatian, the author of the *Diatessaron*, was probably well known to Bardaisan –, Pantaenus and Clement in Alexandria, and Origen in Alexandria and later Caesarea; none of these Christian 'schools' depended on the local bishop (the monarchic episcopate seems to have not yet been established at that time). Possekel has rightly claimed that Bardaisan considered himself first of all a Christian who tried to render his faith acceptable from an intellectual viewpoint.⁸ I

⁶ See at least my "L'epitafio di Abercio: uno status quaestionis e alcune osservazioni", *Aevum* 74 (2000) 191–206; M. MITCHELL, "The Poetics and Politics of Christian Baptism in the Abercius Monument", in: D. HELLHOLM / T. VEGGE / O. NORDERVAL / Ch. HELLHOLM (eds.), *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism* (Berlin 2011) 1743–1778; VINZENT 2019, 77–160 with my review *Journal of Theological Studies* 72 (2021) 970–974.

⁷ See RAMELLI 1999a; RAMELLI 2009e. On Mara: J. BLINZLER, *Der Prozess Jesu* (Regensburg ³1960); S. MAZZARINO, *L'impero Romano*, II (Bari ⁵1991) 887; K. McVEY, "A Fresh Look at the Letter of Mara bar Serapion to His Son", in: R. LAVENANT (ed.), *V Symposium Syriacum* (Rome 1990) 257–272; RAMELLI 1999b; RAMELLI 2005, also with translation of the letter; C. M. CHIN, "Rhetorical Practice in the Chreia Elaboration of Mara bar Serapion", *Hugoye* 9.2 (2006) §§ 1–24; RAMELLI 2008, 2555–2598; RAMELLI 2012b; K. McVEY's and D. RENSBERGER's contributions to M. DOERFLER / K. SMITH / E. FIANO (eds.), *Syriac encounters. Papers from the sixth North American Syriac Symposium*, Duke University, June 26–29, 2011, *Eastern Christian Studies* 20 (Leuven 2015); I. RAMELLI, "Stoic Theories of Disasters and the Letter of Mara Bar Serapion to His Son", *Journal of Religious Competition in Antiquity* 1 (2019) 62–85; ead. "Theodicy in the Letter of Mara Bar Serapion", in: B. B. ASHKELONY / M. HJÄLM / R. KITCHEN (eds.), *The Syriac Lung: New Trajectories in Syriac Studies*, FS Sebastian Brock (Leiden 2023) 193–222.

⁸ See POSSEKEL 2007, 442–461.

think this is also true of Origen, a Christian philosopher who played an essential role in making Christianity acceptable even to intellectually demanding people. Both Bardaisan and Origen played a core role in lending Christianity a philosophical, and broadly cultural, credibility. Qua Christian philosophers, they were both philosophers (Bardaisan a Middle Platonist, broadly speaking, Origen a Middle/Neoplatonist) and theologians together, which is a characteristic of Patristic philosophy.⁹

2. The *BLC*, its Relation to Bardaisan's Work *Against Fate*, its Contents, and its Transmission

Bardaisan's Christian Platonism is well suited to the *BLC*, whose literary genre is the Platonic dialogue.¹⁰ The prologue itself is stylistically close to that of Plato's *Republic*,¹¹ and Bardaisan's mention of his former interest in Chaldaeanism may intentionally echo Socrates' mention of his former interest in the 'philosophy of nature' in Plato's *Phaedo* 96a–100a.¹² The *Phaedo* is also the dialogue that Gregory of Nyssa, a faithful albeit creative follower of Origen, chose to christianise in his *De anima et resurrectione*.¹³ There are more reminiscences of Plato's dialogues and their narrative frames in the

⁹ See I. RAMELLI, "Origen, Patristic Philosophy, and Christian Platonism: Re-Thinking the Christianisation of Hellenism", *Vigiliae Christianae* 63 (2009) 217–263; RAMELLI 2009b; ead., "Origen's Anit-Subordinationism and Its Heritage in the Nicene and Cappadocian Line", *Vigiliae Christianae* 65 (2011) 21–49; RAMELLI 2012; RAMELLI 2022b; ead., "Some Aspects of the Reception of the Platonic Tradition in Origen", in: K. PARRY / E. ANAGNOSTOU (eds.), *Later Platonists and Their Heirs among Christians, Jews, and Muslims* (Leiden 2022); ead., "The Study of Late Ancient Philosophy: Philosophy and Religion — 'Pagan' and Christian Platonism", in: S. S. GRIFFIN / I. RAMELLI (eds.), *Lovers of the Soul and Lovers of the Body: Philosophical and Religious Perspectives in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA 2022) 395–400; ead., "Participation in the Divine in Gregory of Nyssa", in: D. HEDLEY / D. J. TOLAN (eds.), *Participation in the Divine: A Philosophical History, from Antiquity to Modern Times* (Cambridge, UK 2024) 99–127.

¹⁰ This was rightly observed already by J. P. N. LAND, *Anecdota Syriaca*, I (Leiden 1962) 30: the *Liber est enim Philippi illius [sc. Bardesanis] discipuli, qui praeceptoris nomine Platonis ad exemplum usus est*. The *BLC* is briefly studied as a dialogue recently in the overview by RIGOLIO 2019, 51–56. English translation in DRIJVERS 1965 / 2006; edition and French translation NAU 1907, and POIRIER / CRÉGHEUR 2020.

¹¹ This was noted by BOWERSOCK 1990, 31.

¹² This was suggested by CAMPLANI 1998, 544.

¹³ See RAMELLI 2007 with reviews by P. TZAMALIKOS, *Vigiliae Christianae* 62 (2008) 515–523; M. J. EDWARDS, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 60 (2009) 764–765; HERRERO DE JÁUREGUI, *Tlu* 13 (2008) 334–336; I. RAMELLI, "Plato in Origen's and Gregory of Nyssa's Conception of the ἀρχή and the τέλος", in: R. FOWLER (ed.), *Plato in the Third Sophistic* (Berlin 2014) 211–235; RAMELLI 2018b. For Gregory's use of the perishability axiom, see F. KARFIK / E. SONG (eds.), *Plato Revived. Essays on Ancient Platonism in Honour of Dominic J. O'Meara* (Berlin 2013), and my review in *International Journal of the Platonic Tradition* 8.2 (2014) 237–244.

BLC; I shall adduce further examples below, when analysing the characters of the dialogue. The *BLC* was probably composed in its present form around 220 C.E. or shortly after, by a disciple of Bardaisan. The latter is the main character of the dialogue, corresponding to Socrates in Plato's dialogues. The arguments that Bardaisan develops in the *BLC* perfectly correspond to those found in Eusebius' Greek excerpts from Bardaisan's work *On/Against Fate*. Κατὰ Εἰμαρμένης is the title attested by Epiphanius (*Panar.* 56) and Theodoret (*Haer. comp.* 1.22), both of whom read it, probably in Greek; Περὶ Εἰμαρμένης is attested by Eusebius (*HE* 4.30.1–3), who quotes large excerpts from it in his *Praeparatio Evangelica* (see Appendix). The identity in content and wording between these excerpts from Bardaisan's *On Fate* and the *BLC* suggests that the latter was based on Bardaisan's arguments and reflects his ideas.¹⁴ Eusebius' excerpts are, like the *BLC*, a dialogue between Bardaisan and a disciple, Philip. Eusebius himself, introducing his quotations, states that these are dialogues that took place between Bardaisan and his disciples. The *BLC* would therefore seem to correspond, at least in part, to Bardaisan's *On Fate*. What is more, if Eusebius had Bardaisan's *On Fate* in his Caesarea library, the core of which was Origen's own library, it is certainly possible that Bardaisan's work was possessed, in its Greek translation or redaction, already by Origen, who would have been highly interested in this Christian philosophical dialogue against astrological determinism, Marcionism and Valentinianism, which moreover (like Origen's own speculation especially in *De princ.* 3) began with the question of theodicy and ended with the doctrine of apokatastasis. If Origen already possessed Bardaisan's dialogue shortly after its composition, this would imply that the *BLC*, which corresponds to the Greek text known to Origen and Eusebius, really reports Bardaisan's ideas from his work *On Fate*.

The *BLC* is preserved in Syriac in one manuscript (sixth-seventh century). Its title, *The Book of the Laws of Countries*, does not reflect the contents of the whole dialogue, which, just as Bardaisan's *On Fate*, is devoted to the defence of human free will against astrological fatalistic determinism and 'Valentinian' predestinationism. "Book of the Laws of Countries" only refers to the section in which Bardaisan argues that the different customs of various peoples disprove astral determinism, i.e. that the horoscope at one's birth determines one's behaviour. Bardaisan availed himself of the νόμµα βαρβαρικά argument, which seems to have been used first by the Academic Carneades and then by Middle Platonists, including Jewish thinkers like Philo and Christians like Origen and his followers, such as

¹⁴ My supposition is now shared by JURASZ 2021. Many thanks to her and the volume editors for sharing this paper with me for comments and evaluation before publication.

Didymus and Gregory of Nyssa, as well as Diodore of Tarsus, who depended on Bardaisan in his own *Against Fate*.¹⁵ In addition to already existing anti-fatalistic lore, Bardaisan introduced a new key argument, to refute not only the horoscope theory, but also that which considered each climatic zone to be governed by one heavenly body. This counter-argument was excogitated by astrologers to refute the νόμιμα βαρβαρικά objection. Bardaisan replied that laws in one nation, within the same climate, can change, and that Jews and Christians observe the law of Moses and that of Christ in whatever climate. Bardaisan's double reply will be taken over by other Christians, among them Diodore. The example of a change of law within the same nation that Bardaisan adduces in the *BLC* is that of his very friend and king Abgar the Great, who, after his conversion to Christianity, forbade a pagan ritual mutilation for the goddess Atargatis. The same prohibition is attested by Cassius Dio, a contemporary of Abgar. The second part of the dialogue, to which the title *Book of the Laws of Countries* refers properly, manifests Bardaisan's interest in the customs of various peoples. This interest is in line with other works of his, such as a history of Armenia and especially a work on India known to both Porphyry and Jerome (*Adv. Iou.* 2.14).¹⁶

¹⁵ See RAMELLI 2009, 56–62 (Didymus), 138–142 (Nyssen), 142–161 (Diodore). R. BECK, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult in the Roman Empire* (Oxford 2006), studies the way in which some Fathers saw the stars as language signs and the heavens as a book; for Origen, this language is intrinsically benign but not primarily intended for humans. See also H. F. STANDER, "The church fathers and astrology", *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 14 (2003) 232–244; D. BURNS, "Astrological Determinism, Freewill, and Desire", in: U. TERVAHauta / I. DUNDERBERG (eds.), *Women and Knowledge in Early Christianity* (Leiden 2017) 206–220 accepts my argument on Bardaisan against fate in RAMELLI 2009a; ANDRADE 2018, 37 and 279, also receives RAMELLI 2009a, as well as POSSEKEL 2012, 530; CRONE 2012; A. JOHNSON, *Religion and Identity in Porphyry of Tyre: The Limits of Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge 2013) 207, 209, 364; DRIJVERS / DRIJVERS 2014, xv; P. CRONE, "Pagan Arabs as God-Fearers", in: C. BAKHOS / M. COOK (eds.), *Islam and its Past: Jahiliyya, Late Antiquity, and the Qur'an* (Oxford 2017) ch. 4, n. 3; D. J. O'MEARA, *Cosmology and Politics in Plato's Later Works* (Cambridge 2017); L. BATTISTINI, *Bardesane di Edessa Al crocevia dell'età e della cultura post-classica* (Diss. Parma 2017) 137 and passim; U. POSSEKEL, "Bardaisan", in: O. NICHOLSON, *The Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity* (Oxford 2018) 211–212; POSSEKEL 2018, 211–212; RIGOLIO 2019, 10, 54–57, 92–96, 256; TARRAS 2019; J. D. TURNER, "Platonizing Gnostic Views of Soul and Body", in: S. S. GRIFFIN / I. RAMELLI (eds.), *Lovers of the Soul and Lovers of the Body: Philosophical and Religious Perspectives in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA 2022) 91–109: esp. 91; M. HAVRDA, "Clement of Alexandria", in: M. EDWARDS (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Philosophy* (London 2021) 357–371: esp. 370; D. L. DUSENBURY, *Nemesius of Emesa on Human Nature: A Cosmopolitan Anthropology from Roman Syria* (Oxford 2022) 312–313; MARK J. EDWARDS, *The Problem of Evil in the Ancient World* (Eugene 2023) ch. 6 n. 369.

¹⁶ On the work on India see here the essay on Bardaisan and Middle Platonism. On the work on "Armenia" see RAMELLI 2009; RAMELLI 2009e; RAMELLI 2010; Moses of Chorene, *History of Armenia* 2.66, who used Bardaisan as a source, writes that Bardaisan went to Armenia to preach, but he was not well received; so, he entered the sacred fortress of Ani

After the discovery of the Syriac text of the *BLC* it was soon clear that it included passages that were already known in Greek, from Eusebius (*PE* 6.10.1–48), and in Latin, in the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones* (9.17.19–29).¹⁷ The author of the *Grundschrift* from which the *Recognitiones* derived (in Rufinus' translation) was likely acquainted with the *BLC*, probably in Greek, but it cannot be ruled out that he read Syriac, if he was from Coelestria. Even if the Syriac text that has reached us (seventh century) is much later than Bardaisan's lifetime, and indeed contains many mistakes, lacunae and perhaps even an interpolation (see below), it seems that Bardaisan wrote his *On Fate* in Syriac and the *BLC* first existed in Syriac, and that the Greek, attested by Eusebius and perhaps known already to Origen, is a translation, albeit a very early one (which is remarkable and confers much importance to Eusebius' excerpts). As I have mentioned, Eusebius knew that Bardaisan wrote in Syriac and his disciples soon translated his works into Greek. Furthermore, only in Syriac is it possible to differentiate – as they are differentiated in the *BLC* – the noun ܡܠܬܐ ("Nature" as a general force and factor) from ܬܠܐ ("nature" in the sense of the specific nature of a species or an individual). This distinction is crucial to the whole argument of the *BLC*, and it is therefore very probable that these were the terms originally used by Bardaisan. But in Greek only φύσις is available, which in Eusebius' excerpts is used to translate both Syriac words. It is unlikely that from an undifferentiated Greek φύσις a Syriac translator came up with these two different renderings, which are deployed very consistently throughout the *BLC*. The most probable case is, therefore, that Eusebius extracted his excerpts from a Greek version of the Syriac original.¹⁸ It is pivotal to remark that Eusebius attributes his excerpts to Bardaisan's own work, that which was dedicated to the emperor Marcus Aurelius. This suggests that the *BLC*, which closely corresponds

(Athua, in Minor Armenia), consulted there the history of the dynasty, included in the *History of the Temples* (written by Olympios of Ani, priest of the temple of Aramazd-Zeus, see 2.48), translated it into Syriac, and completed it with the facts of his days. This was later translated in turn into Greek, as Moses states. M. YEVADIAN, *Christianisation de l'Arménie I* (Lyons 2019) 232–234 now agrees with me that Bardaisan indeed wrote a history of Armenia (or, more broadly, of the Near-Middle East).

¹⁷ See Appendix, p. 233–249. On the so-called Pseudo-Clementines cf. BREMMER 2010; *id.*, F. S. JONES, *Pseudoclementina Elchasaiticaque inter Judaeochristiana* (Leuven 2011).

¹⁸ Moreover, Eusebius (or his collaborators) seems to have known Syriac, as is attested by the Greek translation of some Syriac documents found in the Edessan archives that he reports (see RAMELLI 2009c). He might even have had the Syriac text of Bardaisan at his disposal and have translated some parts, or have had them translated by his collaborators in the Caesarea library. It is more probable that Eusebius worked already on a Greek translation, because in this case he does not say that he has translated a Syriac original, and he himself attests that Bardaisan's disciples immediately translated their teacher's works into Greek.

to Eusebius' excerpts, reports Bardaisan's thought faithfully. Of course Eusebius picked from Bardaisan's work the parts that were most relevant to his discourse on free will, which he was developing in his *Praeparatio Evangelica*. It is notable that especially these excerpted parts concerning human free will reveal much closeness between Origen and Bardaisan (indeed, this is one of the many impressive traits that these two Christian philosophers share).¹⁹ Moreover, it is to be noticed that Eusebius decided to quote the excerpts from Origen and from Bardaisan next to one another in his *Praeparatio* in support of his defence of human free will. This makes me suspect that Eusebius was perfectly aware of the strong affinities of thought between these two almost contemporary Christian philosophers and heads of Christian schools.²⁰

The Syriac text of the *BLC* was first published in 1855 by William Cureton.²¹ In this *editio princeps* the *BLC* is printed along with the abovementioned Syriac *Apology to Marcus Aurelius* and *Hypomnemata* ascribed to Ambrose. All three of these works were included in the same Syriac manuscript that was discovered by Cureton himself and was acquired by the British Museum in London as manuscript *Syr. Add. 14658*. The *BLC* is at folios 129a–141a. Three editions followed Cureton's: a critical edition by Nau,²² and one by Han J. W. Drijvers;²³ an edition by I. Ramelli appeared in 2009,²⁴ hopefully with yet a few improvements. This is the basis for

¹⁹ See RAMELLI 2009b and here the essay on Bardaisan, Middle Platonism, and Origen (p. 109–131).

²⁰ The defence of human free will in Patristic philosophy, almost at the same time as Bardaisan, was undertaken by Clement, who repeatedly cited Plato's formula θεὸς ἀναίτιος, "God is not responsible", from the myth of Er in Plato's *Republic*, and Origen. They both shared with Bardaisan the polemic against predestination and determinism, especially against their Gnostic and Marcionite forms, in addition to sharing the apokatastasis doctrine with him (see RAMELLI 2013). For a detailed discussion of Clement's, Justin's, and the Stoics' views on human free will and fate see RAMELLI 2009d and 2022. For Bardaisan's doxography on fate, on the views of the Chaldaeans, the Epicureans (probably identifiable with those who had everything depend on freewill and chance) and Platonists, Aristotelians and Christians who had all depend on freewill and divine punishments: see P.-H. POIRIER, "Deux doxographies sur le destin et le gouvernement du monde : *Le Livre des lois des pays* et Eugnoste (NH III, 3 et V, 1)", in: L. PAINCHAUD / P.-H. POIRIER (eds.), *Coptica, Gnostica, Manichaica: FS Wolf-Peter Funk* (Québec / Louvain 2006) 760–786. On Bardaisan's refutation of Fate's influence on human free will: HEGEDUS 2003; HEGEDUS 2007; RAMELLI 2009; RAMELLI 2024. What is relevant to the present argument is that Justin's, Clement's, and Origen's defences of free will find a close correspondence in Bardaisan's contemporary theory, and at least Clement and Origen supported free will in polemic against Gnosticism, just like Bardaisan.

²¹ See CURETON 1855, 41–59 of the pages with Syriac numbering.

²² NAU 1907, cols. 490–658.

²³ DRIJVERS 1965 / 2006.

²⁴ RAMELLI 2009d.

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