

Bardaisan of Edessa on the Resurrection: (Early Syriac Eschatology in its Religious-Historical Context

Bardaisan (154-222), the “Aramean philosopher,”¹ was a nobleman who flourished at the royal court in Edessa.² Bardaisan converted to Christianity as an adult,³ and subsequently strove to reconcile his adopted faith with the contemporary philosophy in which he had been trained.⁴ Bardaisan’s theology was formulated in late second-century Edessa, a multi-cultural and religiously diverse city at the intersection of Greek, Mesopotamian, and Parthian civilizations.⁵ Bardaisan’s syncretistic theology found many admirers, especially among the local nobility, and he established a Christian community that flourished in Edessa until at least the fifth century.⁶

1 This title is given to Bardaisan by Ephrem in the *Prose Refutations* (hereafter quoted as *PR*), II, 7,48-8,1 and 225,25-26, ed. with Engl. tr. C. W. Mitchell, A. A. Bevan, and F. C. Burkitt, *S. Ephraim’s Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion, and Bardaisan*, 2 vols. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1912-1921).

2 Sextus Julius Africanus, *Cesti* I, 20,39-53, ed. with French tr. J.-R. Vieillefond, *Les “Cestes” de Julius Africanus* (Paris: Didier, 1970); Epiphanius, *Panarion* 56.1.1-3, ed. K. Holl, *Epiphanius*, vol. 2, GCS 31 (1922), 338-343; Engl. tr. F. Williams, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis: Books II and III* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

3 Bardaisan’s conversion as an adult is presupposed by those writers who like Eusebius claim that he converted from Valentinianism (cf. n. 10 below). It is explicitly stated by Theodore bar Koni (9c.), who reports that “after he had been brought up at Edessa and had been baptized and trained in the Holy Scriptures, he received the ordination to the priesthood.” (*Liber scholiorum* II, ed. A. Scher, CSCO 69, Syr. 26 [Louvain, 1954], 307,24-26, section also ed. F. Nau, PS 1.2 [1907; reprint 1993], *praefatio*, 517). This claim is confirmed by Agapius of Mabbug (10c.), *Kitab al ‘Unwan*, ed. A. Vasiliev, PO 7, 519.

4 On Bardaisan’s syncretism, cf. H. J. W. Drijvers, *Bardaisan of Edessa* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1966), 165; F. Winter, *Bardanes von Edessa über Indien: Ein früher syrischer Theologe schreibt über ein fremdes Land* (Thaur, Austria: Verlagshaus Thaur, 1999), 21-24.

5 On Edessa’s history and culture, cf. J. B. Segal, *Edessa: ‘The Blessed City’* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970; reprint Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2001); H. J. W. Drijvers, “Hatra, Palmyra und Edessa: Die Städte der syrisch-mesopotamischen Wüste in politischer, kulturgeschichtlicher und religionsgeschichtlicher Beleuchtung,” *ANRW* II. 8 (1977), 799-906; idem, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa* (Leiden: Brill, 1980); E. Kirsten, “Edessa,” *RAC* 4 (1959), 552-597.

6 The biographer of Rabbula, bishop of Edessa from 411/12 to 435, credits Rabbula with suppressing the movement (*Vita Rabbulae*, ed. J. J. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri, Rabbulae episcopi Edesseni, Balaei aliorumque opera selecta* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1865], 192 f.). However,

In the late second century, a variety of Christian groups existed in Edessa, including the Marcionites, the Gnostics, and the so-called "Palutians." The Marcionites had established themselves in Edessa at an early date,⁷ and it was thus partially in conversation with Marcion's theology⁸ that Bardaisan's theological outlook emerged.⁹ Another possible influence upon Bardaisan's theology is Valentinian Gnosticism, as has been claimed by both patristic writers and modern scholars.¹⁰ Yet Bardaisan considered himself to be in the mainstream of Christian thought. In particular, his "orthodoxy" led him to embrace an explicitly anti-Marcionite position,¹¹ and he is said to have composed dialogues against the Marcionites in Syriac.¹² Furthermore, there is no evidence of Bar-

Jacob of Edessa (d. 708) indicates the continuing existence of Bardaisanites in this city up to his time. Text quoted by F. Nau, *Bardésanes, Liber legum regionum*, PS 1.2 (1907; reprint 1993), *praefatio*, 512.

- 7 W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, German first edition 1934, Engl. tr. ed. R. A. Kraft (Mifflintown, PA: Sigler Press, 1996), 1-43. After Marcion's break with the church in Rome, the Marcionite church rapidly spread throughout the Roman Empire and beyond, and it posed a lasting challenge to the normative church of antiquity. In the Syriac-speaking East, in particular, Marcionism flourished for centuries. Cf. H. J. W. Drijvers, "Marcionism in Syria: Principles, Problems, Polemics," *Second Century* 6 (1987/88), 153-172; D. Bundy, "Marcion and the Marcionites in Early Syriac Apologetics," *Muséon* 101 (1988), 21-32; J. M. Fiey, "Les marcionites dans les textes historiques de l'Église de Perse," *Muséon* 83 (1970), 183-188.
- 8 On Marcion's theology, cf. A. v. Harnack, *Marcion. Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott: Eine Monographie zur Geschichte der Grundlegung der katholischen Kirche* (second ed. 1924; reprint Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1996); R. J. Hoffmann, *Marcion: On the Restitution of Christianity. An Essay on the Development of Radical Paulinist Theology in the Second Century* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984); B. Aland, "Marcion: Versuch einer neuen Interpretation," *ZThK* 70 (1973), 420-447; eadem, "Sünde und Erlösung bei Marcion und die Konsequenz für die sog. beiden Götter Marcions," in *Marcion und seine kirchenge-schichtliche Wirkung*, ed. G. May and K. Greschat (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), 147-157. See also the other essays in this volume.
- 9 Cf. Drijvers, "Marcionism," 153-156.
- 10 Eusebius reports that Bardaisan had been a Valentinian prior to his conversion, but that "the taint of the old heresy stuck to him to the end." (*Historia ecclesiastica* 4.30.3, ed. with French tr. G. Bardy, SC 31 [Paris: Cerf, 2001]; Engl. tr. G. A. Williamson, revised by A. Louth [London: Penguin, 1989]). Epiphanius, on the other hand, maintains that Bardaisan "fell in with the Valentinians" later, which led him to introduce into his theology first principles and emanations, and to deny the resurrection of the dead (*Pan.* 56.2.1). Eusebius' version of events is confirmed by Didymus the Blind, who also claims that Bardaisan joined the priesthood, *Commentary on the Psalms*, ed. A. Gesché and M. Gronewald, *Didymus der Blinde. Psalmen-kommentar (Tura-Papyrus)*, Teil 3 (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1969), 182-184. On this passage, cf. S. Brock, "Didymus the Blind on Bardaisan," *JTS* N. S. 22 (1971), 530-531. Among modern scholars, B. Aland has associated Bardaisan with Gnosticism (B. Ehlers, "Bardésanes von Edessa – ein syrischer Gnostiker: Bemerkungen aus Anlaß des Buches von H. J. W. Drijvers, Bardaisan of Edessa," *ZKG* 81 [1970], 334-351). H. J. W. Drijvers, on the other hand, denies links between Bardaisan and Gnosticism (*Bardaisan*, 224).
- 11 Eusebius, *H. e.* 4.30; other evidence is discussed below.
- 12 *Ibid.*

daisan having criticized the so-called “Palutians” in Edessa, the forerunner of the later orthodox Christian community.¹³

Of Bardaisan’s writings, neither his *Dialogues against Marcion* nor any other treatises are preserved, and his thought needs to be reconstructed from a few remaining fragments of his writings quoted by his opponents,¹⁴ from summaries in the anti-heretical literature, and from the *Book of the Laws of the Countries*, a dialogue written by Bardaisan’s disciple Philip, in which the Aramean philosopher is the main interlocutor.¹⁵ A further source for the reconstruction of Bardaisan’s theology is the *Adamantius Dialogue*, composed in the late third or early fourth century,¹⁶ in which a Bardaisanite named Marinus explains his views in a conversation with a Marcionite, several Gnostics, and Adamantius, a representative of the orthodox church. Finally, the *Life of Abercius* speaks favorably of Bardaisan, whom Abercius is said to have met on his journeys.¹⁷

Despite the loss of his original treatises and the relative paucity of evidence concerning Bardaisan’s teachings, his anti-Marcionite position is well attested by Eusebius, Ephrem, and the *Book of the Laws of the Countries*. Bardaisan stressed the unity and goodness of God, a clear rejection of Marcion’s distinction between a creator God and the good God who sent Jesus Christ.¹⁸ Moreover,

13 Cf. Bauer, *Orthodoxy*, 29. The Palutians were so named after bishop Palut (ca. 200). Ephrem criticizes this name, noting that they should call themselves “Christians” in his *Hymns against Heresies* (hereafter quoted as *CH*), ed. with German tr. E. Beck, *Ephraem des Syrsers Hymnen Contra Haereses*, CSCO 169-170, Syr. 76-77 (Louvain, 1957), Hymn 22, 5-6. On the Palutians, see also Bauer, *ibid.*, 17, 20-22.

14 Ephrem preserves quotations in the *Prose Refutations* (n. 1 above) and the *Hymns against Heresies*. On Ephrem’s presentation of Bardaisan’s teachings, cf. E. Beck, “Bardaisan und seine Schule bei Ephräm,” *Muséon* 91 (1978), 271-333.

15 *The Book of the Laws of Countries: Dialogue on Fate of Bardaisan of Edessa*, ed. with Engl. tr. H. J. W. Drijvers (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1965); also ed. F. Nau, PS 1.2 (1907; reprint 1993). Hereafter cited as *BLC* from the Drijvers edition.

16 Adamantius, *De recta in Deum fide*, ed. W. H. van de Sande Bakhuyzen, GCS 4 (1901); Engl. tr. R. A. Pretty, *Adamantius, Dialogue on the True Faith in God* (Louvain: Peeters, 1997). Pretty dates the dialogue to between 280 and 313 (*ibid.*, 16f.).

17 *Life of Abercius* 69-70, ed. Th. Nissen, *S. Abercii Vita* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1912). The *vita* dates from the fourth century (D. Bundy, “The *Life of Abercius*: Its Significance for Early Syriac Christianity,” *The Second Century* 7 [1989-90], 170). Scholars have reached different conclusions concerning the historicity of the encounter with Bardaisan. Drijvers, *Bardaisan*, 170f. holds that there “would seem to be no reason to doubt the historicity of this passage in the *Vita of Aberkios*.” Bundy, on the other hand, does not consider the *vita*, which reflects the situation in fourth-century Phrygia, to be a good historical source for Syriac Christianity (“The *Life of Abercius*,” 172, 175). The *Life of Abercius* cites the funerary inscription of Abercius, which can be dated to before 215, on which there is a significant amount of scholarly literature, cf. W. Wischmeyer, “Die Aberkiosinschrift als Grabepigramm,” *JAC* 23 (1980), 22-47.

18 *BLC*, 4,9; 4,14-15; 10,12; 12,21. In the *Hymns against Heresies*, Ephrem quotes Bardaisan’s

Bardaisan differed from Marcion by accepting the authority of the Old Testament scriptures.¹⁹ Epiphanius testifies: "(Bardaisan) uses the Law and the Prophets, the Old and the New Testaments ...,"²⁰ a claim that is confirmed by Ephrem.²¹ Further evidence for doctrinal controversy between the Marcionites and Bardaisan comes from the *Refutation of All Heresies* by Hippolytus (d. ca. 236), who notes that a Marcionite named Prepon wrote against Bardaisan.²² On the other hand, there are certain theological views attributed to Bardaisan which he held in common with Marcion, such as the denial that Christ took on a human body, and the rejection of belief in a bodily resurrection at the end of time.²³ Similar observations can be made with respect to the Gnostics. Eusebius records that Bardaisan, after his conversion, vehemently refuted many ideas of the Valentinian Gnostics to whom he had formerly belonged.²⁴ Bardaisan's opposition to Gnosticism, however, is not evident in his theology of the resurrection, for like him many of the Gnostic groups rejected a bodily resurrection.

The subject of this paper is Bardaisan's understanding of the resurrection and its relation to contemporaneous systems of thought. Can the peculiarities of his eschatology be attributed to religious ideas prominent in late antique Edessa? Was it his training in philosophy that suggested to him certain modes of thought? Or was it Marcionite or Gnostic influence that led Bardaisan to deny a bodily resurrection? In order to answer these questions, the first part of this paper will examine in detail Bardaisan's eschatology; the second part

opposition to Marcion's dualism: "It is impossible that there be two Gods, because one is the name, the substance (*qnōmā*), of God." (CH 3,4; cf. CH 3,5). On this subject, cf. H. J. W. Drijvers, "Bardaisan's Doctrine of Free Will, the Pseudo-Clementines, and Marcionism in Syria," in *Liberté chrétienne et libre arbitre*, ed. G. Bedouelle and O. Fatou (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires, 1994), 13-16, 30. On Marcion's theology, cf. v. Harnack, *Marcion*, 93-143.

- 19 To what degree Bardaisan accepted the New Testament writings we can not ascertain. In his time, the canon was still in the process of formation (cf. W. Schneemelcher, "Bibel III. Entstehung des Kanons des Neuen Testaments und der christlichen Bibel," *TRE* 6 [1980], 22-48; W. Künneth, "Kanon," *TRE* 17 [1988], 562-570, with further literature). To my knowledge no sources exist that accuse Bardaisan of not accepting any of the Scriptures generally recognized at his time. We can assume that Bardaisan was familiar with and accepted the Syriac Diatessaron; he presumably also knew at least some of the Pauline epistles. On the early version of the New Testament in Syriac, cf. B. M. Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament: Their Origin, Transmission, and Limitations* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 3-63; S. P. Brock and B. Aland, "Bibelübersetzungen I.4," *TRE* 6 (1980), 181-196.

- 20 Epiphanius, *Pan.* 56.2.2.

- 21 Ephrem, *PR* II, 53,38-40; *CH* 21,10.

- 22 Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 7.31, ed. M. Marcovich (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1986).

- 23 On Marcion's view, cf. Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* 5.10.3, ed. with Engl. tr. E. Evans, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972); v. Harnack, *Marcion*, 122-133. On Bardaisan, cf. Ephrem, *PR* II, 145,22-147,17 (no. 9-15).

- 24 Eusebius, *H. e.* 4.30.

will discuss views on death and afterlife prevalent in Bardaisan's religious environment; the third part will address the connections between Bardaisan and Graeco-Roman philosophy; and the fourth part will compare Bardaisan's understanding of the resurrection with that of contemporary Christian groups.

1. Bardaisan's eschatology

The topic of eschatology was by no means a marginal question in the second century. Rather, it stood at the center of theological debate in Bardaisan's lifetime, and it was the late second-century controversies that led to the incorporation into the creed of the phrase "resurrection of the flesh."²⁵ Challenges to this belief were brought forth by pagan philosophers,²⁶ by members of the ecclesiastical community,²⁷ and by various "heretical groups" such as Valenti-

25 The phrase does not occur in the New Testament, which instead speaks of the "resurrection of the dead." The Nicene Creed also employs this terminology. The phrase "resurrection of the flesh" emerges as dominant in the second century, so that local creeds (including the Old Roman Creed, which emerged into the Apostles' Creed) required the confession of *resurrectio carnis*. Cf. Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 21.17, ed. B. Botte, SC 11/3 (second ed., 1984). The exact reading of the passage is subject of debate, cf. B. Botte, "Note sur le symbole baptismal de saint Hippolyte," in *Mélanges J. de Ghellinck*, vol. 1 (Gembloux: Duculot, 1951), 189-200; A. Stewart-Sykes, *Hippolytus, On the Apostolic Tradition* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 115f. Further evidence for the terminology is Hippolytus, *Commentary on Daniel* 2.28.4-5, ed. G. N. Bonwetsch and M. Richard, *Hippolyt Werke*, Bd. 1, Teil 1, GCS N. F. 7 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000), p. 110-112; Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 80.5, ed. M. Marcovich (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997). Cf. C. W. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 26; B. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); R. Staats, "Auferstehung I/4. Alte Kirche," *TRE* 4 (1979), 467-477; J. G. Davies, "Factors Leading to the Emergence of the Belief in the Resurrection of the Flesh," *JTS* N. S. 23 (1972), 448-455.

26 Perhaps the most prominent pagan critic was Celsus. Origen preserved his objections in *Contra Celsum* V. 14, ed. M. Marcovich, *Origenes, Contra Celsum libri VIII* (Leiden: Brill, 2001). Celsus notes that it is not according to God's nature to resurrect the body: "But, indeed, neither can God do what is shameful nor does He desire what is contrary to nature." (Tr. H. Chadwick [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965]). On pagan criticism, cf. also Ps.-Justin, *De resurrectione* 6, ed. with German tr. M. Heimgartner, *Pseudo-Justin – Über die Auferstehung* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001).

27 Cf. Justin, *Dialogue* 80; Tertullian, *De resurrectione carnis* 2 (ed. with Engl. tr. E. Evans, *Tertullian's Treatise on the Resurrection* [London: SPCK, 1960]). Origen, *Contra Celsum* 5.14, quotes Celsus as stating: "The fact that this doctrine is not shared by some of you [Jews] and by some Christians shows its utter repulsiveness ..." (tr. Chadwick). Cf. W. C. Van Unnik, "The Newly Discovered Gnostic 'Epistle to Rheginos' on the Resurrection," *JEH* 15 (1964), 157f.

Expressing a different view on the resurrection did not necessarily put one outside the church in the second century. Justin, *Dialogue* 80.2, acknowledges that among those who "belong to the pure and pious faith" were those who had diverse opinions on the resurrection. However,

nian Gnostics and Marcionites. Yet as Caroline Walker Bynum has convincingly argued in her study on *The Resurrection of the Body*, it was within the context of martyrdom, not primarily in response to the Gnostic challenge, that the early church affirmed the resurrection of the body.²⁸ She writes: "The specific adjectives, analogies, and examples used in treatises on the resurrection suggest that the palpable, vulnerable, corruptible body Christ redeems and raises was quintessentially the mutilated cadaver of the martyr."²⁹

Bardaisan upheld the Christian teaching of the resurrection of the individual, yet he believed that only the human soul, not the body, would rise from death. Bardaisan believed that God created the world from pre-existing substances ('ityê),³⁰ and he expected the order of creation, given by God, to remain "until the course is completed and measure and number have been fulfilled."³¹ God created humankind with a free will, and capable of keeping the divine commandments.³² Bardaisan emphasized that the fulfillment of the commandments depends neither on one's bodily constitution, nor on professional skill or social status, but merely on the individual's free will.³³ On the last day, a judgment will take place. Bardaisan does not explicitly state that God will be the judge, but this seems apparent from the context. Based on the

he later in the section qualifies this statement by regarding those who "say there is no resurrection of the dead, and that their souls, when they die, are taken to heaven," as not within the bounds of orthodoxy (tr. A. Coxe, ANF 1 [reprint 1989]). In the fourth century, Gregory of Nazianzus still acknowledges that the resurrection is among those topics on which theological debate and a variety of positions is permissible. Errors on this and several other themes are "without danger," i. e., they do not imply heresy. (*Oration* 27.10 [*First Theological Oration*], ed. with French tr. P. Gallay, SC 250 [Paris, 1978]; cf. Gallay's comments p. 96f., n. 7). Van Unnik, "Epistle to Rheginos," 158, remarks that "... many people who were accused of holding differing views about the resurrection still belonged to the Church in the second century."

28 Bynum, *Resurrection*, 43-51.

29 Ibid., 43. Ephrem the Syrian's defense of the bodily resurrection takes up this point as well in the second part of the *Carmina Nisibena* (hereafter quoted as *CNis*), ed. with German tr. E. Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Carmina Nisibena*, zweiter Teil, CSCO 240-241, Syr. 102-103 (Louvain, 1963), Hymn 47,10.

30 The 'ityê from which the world was created are water, fire, air, and light. Darkness also played a role. Bardaisan's substances slightly differ from the Empedoclean elements (earth, water, fire, air). God out of his goodness made humankind in the image of God: "Because (a human being) is made in the image of God, because of this these things are given to him out of kindness, that they should serve him for a time, and it was given to him to live by his own free will." (*BLC*, 12,10-13; cf. 10,12-13; 12,21).

31 *BLC*, 38,3-4.

32 Bardaisan identifies the commandment with the Golden Rule of Mt. 7:12: "For two commandments are laid upon us, concordant with that liberty, and just. One, that we shall keep clear of all that is evil, which we would not wish to befall ourselves. And the other, that we shall do what is good, what is pleasant to us and which we desire to be done to ourselves also." (*BLC*, 14,25-16,4, tr. Drijvers).

33 *BLC*, 16,6-15.

use which people had made of their free will, whether or not they had kept the commandments, they would be judged as either righteous or guilty. At the end of time, this creation will cease, and a new world will come to be. Bardaisan, who understood cosmogony as a process of mixing of substances, characterized this new creation as “a different intermixture,” and he described it as follows: “In the constitution of that new world, all evil impulses³⁴ will have ceased and all rebellions will have ended, ... and there will be tranquility and peace through the gift of the Lord of all natures.”³⁵

The extant sources thus imply that Bardaisan saw the eschatological events not in terms of apocalyptic images, as a tumultuous crisis, or a final grand battle between the forces of good and evil. Rather, for the Aramean philosopher the eschaton will begin at the appointed time, there will be a judgment and a re-ordering of the universe, and there will be a resurrection of the individual. Bardaisan’s eschatology – as far as the remaining evidence permits a generalization – is representative of that kind of eschatological hope formulated in times of relative peace and prosperity, an eschatology which is “an ordered doctrine of the ‘last things’, personal expectation of final justice and retribution, a personal longing for rest and satisfaction in a new life that will begin at death.”³⁶

According to Bardaisan, at the time of death the body disintegrates, and the soul experiences a kind of death as well – understood as a shadowy existence in the underworld – but the resurrection of the individual pertains to the human soul only, not to the human body. The extant sources, unfortunately, are silent on the question whether Bardaisan believed the resurrected soul would be clothed in some kind of spiritual body. In order to defend his view, Bardaisan and his followers set forth two major types of argument. The first group of arguments was theological and scriptural in nature; the second group of arguments drew on natural philosophy.

Our main source for Bardaisan’s theological arguments against a bodily resurrection is Ephrem the Syrian,³⁷ who had first-hand acquaintance with his

34 This is a reference to fate.

35 *BLC*, 62,15-18.

36 Daley, *Hope*, 1. In times of oppression and persecution, eschatological texts tended to emphasize apocalyptic images and expectations of a violent cosmic struggle.

37 Ephrem’s *Memra Against Bardaisan* (*PR* II, 143-169) focuses on the question of the resurrection. This treatise also challenges Bardaisan’s christology. Bardaisan apparently believed Christ did not assume a human body, but a “heavenly body.” The *Adamantius Dialogue* takes up the critique of Bardaisan’s christology as well (tr. Pretty, 147f., 152f.). Ephrem understands both aspects to be closely related. The incarnation, Christ assuming a human body, already indicates the value of the body and that it must be resurrected (*PR* II, 145,44-146,11 [no. 11]; *CNis* 49,2). *CNis* 46ff. present a lengthy defense of the bodily resurrection, including arguments from nature and Scripture. Cf. Daley, *Hope*, 72-76; Bynum, *Resurrection*, 75-78.

of the devil, played a prominent role in early Syriac Christian literature,⁴³ where it was often combined with the Adam-Christ typology employed by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15.⁴⁴ Bardaisan accepted the Adam-Christ typology and the story of Christ's descent into Sheol, but he wondered: "Our Lord, who was raised, why did he not raise all their bodies, so that as their destruction was by Adam, so their reconstruction should be by our Lord?"⁴⁵ And in another fragment: "For if (it is) through Adam that we are dying the death of here below, it would be right that he who came (i.e., Christ) should have given life here below, for he was putting down the recompense for the punishment."⁴⁶ Ephrem summarizes his opponent's view succinctly:

Bardaisan insists that if (it) were so
that these bodies died in Adam,
it was right for our Lord who came
that he should raise up the bodies from the grave;
but if he did not raise the bodies,
it is clear that by his sins
Adam brought in the death of the soul (ܠܡܡܬܐ ܕܢܦܫܐ),

43 It occurs, for instance, in the *Odes of Solomon* 42.11, 17.9-10 (ed. with Engl. tr. J. H. Charlesworth [Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1977]), the *Acts of Thomas* (ed. W. Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles I/II* [London, 1871; reprint Hildesheim: Olms, 1990], text p. 180,9-11, tr. p. 155), and Ephrem, *CNis* 36-41; idem, *Sermo de Domino nostro* (ed. E. Beck, CSCO 270-271, Syr. 116-117 [Louvain, 1966]). Cf. R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 234-236, 324-329; P. Féghali, "La descente aux enfers dans la tradition syriaque," *ParOr* 15 (1988-1989), 127-141 [on Old and New Testament roots and on Aphrahat]; J. Teixidor, "La thème de la descente aux enfers chez saint Éphrem," *OrSyr* 6 (1961), 25-40; R. E. McCarron, *The Appropriation of the Theme of Christ's Descent to Hell in the Early Syriac Liturgical Tradition*, Ph. D. Diss. Catholic University of America (Washington, D. C., 2000). McCarron notes that Eznik of Kolb criticizes the Marcionite use of this motive (*ibid.*, 70).

S. Brock makes the essential observation that for Ephrem, Christ's descent into Sheol is part of sacred time, not an event within historical or ordinary time. "The purpose of the doctrine of the descent of Christ into Sheol is precisely to show that the incarnation effects *all* historical time and *all* geographical space. To achieve this, however, it has to speak in terms of sacred time and sacred space, and accordingly the descent can only be described in a story-like and mythopoeic manner – something that Ephrem does with great dramatic effect in the second half of the cycle of Nisibene hymns." (*The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem* [Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1985], 30). Bardaisan seems to have lacked understanding of this "sacred dimension" of the descent into Sheol, a point stressed by Ephrem in his refutation (*PR* II, 167,30-168,24 [no. 91-93]).

44 "For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ." (1 Cor. 15:21-22; tr. NRSV).

45 *PR* II, 162,32-39 (no. 74).

46 *PR* II, 143,17-24 (no. 2).

for the souls which he brought down to Sheol
our Lord brought up with him.⁴⁷

Since Christ's descent into Sheol apparently did not result in a bodily resurrection, Bardaisan argued, it surely must have been the souls that Christ raised up. Consequently, Adam's death must have resulted in the death of souls, not bodies. Bardaisan's interpretation that Christ's descent into Sheol resulted in his resurrecting only the souls would be directly contradicted by Matthew 27:52, which records that "the tombs also were opened, and many bodies (σώματα) of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised."⁴⁸ Bardaisan, however, may never have read the text in this form. The passage under discussion is part of the Matthean *Sondergut* and was incorporated into Tatian's *Diatessaron*, which we can assume to have been available to Bardaisan. The Diatessaronic text, however, did not coincide with that preserved in the canonical Matthew. As W. Petersen has shown, the older versions of the Diatessaron used an earlier version of Matthew than the canonical one, and spoke of those raised as "the dead" instead of "many bodies of the saints." Only gradually did the wording in the Diatessaron assimilate to the canonical Matthew.⁴⁹ The Diatessaronic text of Mt. 27:52 thus did not pose a challenge to Bardaisan's theology of the resurrection, for his interpretation of "the dead" as "dead souls" was easily applicable to this pericope as well.

According to Ephrem's *Prose Refutations*, Bardaisan used one further exegetical argument to support his claim that the death due to Adam and the resurrection due to Christ pertained to the soul. He observed that, according to the Genesis account, Adam did not die a bodily death right after he sinned. The punishment of immediate death, threatened by God in Gen. 2:17, was not executed.⁵⁰ In fact, it was not Adam, but Abel slain by Cain, who was the first to die. Therefore, Bardaisan claimed, the consequence of Adam's sin could not have been the death of the body, but must have been the death of soul.⁵¹

47 PR II, 164,3-16 (no. 79), cf. PR II, 167,30-35 (no. 91).

48 Mt. 27:52, tr. NRSV.

49 W. L. Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron: Its Creation, Dissemination, Significance, and History in Scholarship* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 404-414. On the early NT texts in Syriac, cf. Metzger, *Early Versions* (n. 19 above).

50 On this, cf. R. Albertz, "Ihr werdet sein wie Gott' (Gen 3,5)," in *Was ist der Mensch ...? Beiträge zur Anthropologie des Alten Testaments*, ed. F. Crüsemann, FS H. W. Wolff (München: Kaiser, 1992), 11-27, esp. 22.

51 Ephrem discusses the subject in PR II, 151,11-152,2 (no. 32-34); in PR II, 153,20-154,2 (no. 40-41) he attributes the argument to Bardaisan. Ephrem's counterargument runs similar to that against Bardaisan's interpretation of the descent to Sheol. "Reasoning that of all bodies that die, only the body of our Lord rose, Bardaisan erred and thought that it was the souls that our Lord raised up, and he did not consider that also the death of Adam had reigned in Adam first, and after nine hundred years the leaven of it had spread in all generations."

Bardaisan's reasoning about "Abel died first" found many followers still in Ephrem's time, and Ephrem accuses him of misleading the simple folk.⁵²

Besides employing Scripture passages to support his understanding of the resurrection as pertaining to the soul alone, Bardaisan brought forth arguments from natural philosophy to substantiate his view. From Ephrem's *Memra Against Bardaisan*, we learn that "Bardaisan declared that even without the transgression of Adam, the body would turn to its dust, that flesh does not cleave to spirit, that the dregs run downward and the clear parts are running upward."⁵³ The body, by nature heavy, can not cleave to the soul, which is light.⁵⁴ At the time of death, Bardaisan argued, the soul, the light part, departs "and like a breath it is for a while and flies away lightly."⁵⁵ Unfortunately, much of the remaining text is illegible, but these brief references indicate that Bardaisan regarded bodily death as a natural, inevitable occurrence that did not result from Adam's sin.

Further elucidation of Bardaisanite reasoning from natural philosophy can be gained from the *Adamantius Dialogue*, composed around the year 300. In certain passages, this dialogue reflects a much later state of the discussion and can thus not be used as a source of Bardaisan's thought. This is the case, for example, for passages in which the Bardaisanite interlocutor Marinus uses arguments about bodily identity that are drawn from Methodius of Olympus' treatise *On the Resurrection*, where they express the view of the Origenist Aglaophon.⁵⁶ Other sections of the *Adamantius Dialogue*, however, show parallels with Bardaisan's general philosophical outlook, and can perhaps shed light on his eschatology.

In the dialogue, the Bardaisanite Marinus maintains that the human body is

(*PR* II, 167,30-42 [no. 91]). Ephrem also discusses the topic in *CDiat*, Prayers 3, ed. Leloir, 242 (n. 40 above). Ephrem vehemently objects to Bardaisan's exegesis, and in response he distinguishes between the types of death Adam and Abel died: Adam died from justice, but Abel was killed on account of free will (*PR* II, 151,22-152,23 [no. 33-36]).

52 "For not small is the harm that has entered through Bardaisan, for simple people who have hearkened have suffered loss of the merchandise of their lives." (*PR* II, 153,25-31 [no. 40]). Ephrem addresses the question also in *CNis* 51,5-7.

53 *PR* II, 143,1-9 (no. 1).

54 *PR* II, 154,28-39 (no. 44); 155,32-42 (no. 48).

55 *PR* II, 160,14-16 (no. 65).

56 For example, Marinus objects to the bodily resurrection by noting that the human body does not remain the same but is in a constant state of flux, changing from childhood to old age. The similarities with Methodius' treatise are noted by Pretty, 168. On Origen's understanding of the resurrection, cf. H. Chadwick, "Origen, Celsus, and the Resurrection of the Body," *HThR* 41 (1948), 83-102; H. Crouzel, "La doctrine origénienne du corps ressuscité," *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 81 (1980), 175-200, 241-266; idem, *Origen*, tr. A. S. Worrall (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), 235-266; Bynum, *Resurrection*, 63-71; Daley, *Hope*, 47-64. On Methodius, cf. L. G. Patterson, *Methodius of Olympus: Divine Sovereignty, Human Freedom, and Life in Christ* (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 141-199.

composed of the four Empedoclean elements earth, water, fire, and air. At the time of death, the body goes into dissolution and the elements, which in the body existed in a form of mixture, each return to their original state: the part that came from fire returns to fire, and so on. He asks: "How then can humans, who are composed of parts mingled together, rise in the resurrection?"⁵⁷ Marinus' objection, taking up a common criticism of a bodily resurrection,⁵⁸ confirms Ephrem's statements about Bardaisan's thought:⁵⁹ The human body is made from a mixture of substances, and at death these dissolve and return to their respective elements.⁶⁰

Bardaisan's arguments from natural philosophy are standard objections made by pagan philosophers against Christianity. To give just one example, let me cite the words of Bardaisan's contemporary Celsus:

For what sort of body, after being entirely corrupted, could return to its original nature and that same condition which it had before it was dissolved? ... For the soul (God) might be able to provide an everlasting life; but as Heraclitus says, 'corpses ought to be thrown away as worse than dung'. As for the flesh, ... God would neither desire nor be able to make it everlasting contrary to reason.⁶¹

Behind this conception stands the disregard for the body as a non-essential part of human nature, and the view that it would be contrary to God's nature to resurrect this body.

How then, did Bardaisan envision the fate of the soul after death? And what did he think concerning the soul's resurrection? His arguments outlined above make it sufficiently clear that he thought that, on account of Adam's sin, the soul underwent a kind of death. In this regard, Bardaisan is in agreement with biblical thought, which does not, like Greek philosophy, maintain the immortality of the soul. The biblical perspective, rather, is that death is an all-encompassing event and can include the soul as well.⁶² Bardaisan's terminol-

57 *Adamantius Dialogue* V. 18, tr. Pretty, 172. This argument was brought forth by Origen also, but since it occurs in earlier writers, it is clear that it does not originate with Origen.

58 Ps.-Justin, *De resurrectione* 2.1-2.2, observes that critics of a bodily resurrection claim that it is impossible that the bodily parts, which dissolve into its constituents, can be reassembled to form the exact same body.

59 The only difference between Bardaisan's and Marinus' statements is that Bardaisan postulated a group of slightly different four elements (water, fire, air, light).

60 It should be noted that the idea that the body consists of four elements does not by necessity result in a denial of the resurrection. Ephrem, as well as many Greek Christian authors, shared this view. They believed that it is possible for God to re-assemble the body from these elements. Ephrem states that human beings are composed of the four elements in *PR* II, 156,34-42; his resurrection theology is developed in *CNis* 45-77.

61 Origen, *Contra Celsum* 5.14, tr. Chadwick.

62 Cf. O. Cullmann, "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?" in *Immortality and Resurrection*, ed. K. Stendahl (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 27f. (German essay first

ogy of “death of soul” might also be conditioned by his effort to adhere to Pauline theology as expressed in 1 Cor. 15, which understands “death” as the result of Adam’s sin. The death of the soul, according to Bardaisan, is not a complete destruction or decomposition, as the death of body, but consists in being prevented from rising to its proper place. After a person’s life ends, the soul lingers in the underworld, while the body is given over to dissolution. Ephrem summarizes Bardaisan’s view of salvation history:

According to the teaching of Bardaisan
the death that Adam brought in
was a hindrance to the souls,
in that they were hindered at the crossing-place (ܐܬܪ ܕܡܝܬܐ)
because the sin of Adam hindered them.
“And the life,” [Bardaisan said,] “that our Lord brought in
is that he taught truth and ascended,
and allowed them to pass over into the kingdom.”⁶³

Through Christ, the soul is again able to cross over into the kingdom, which Bardaisan also describes as the bridal chamber of light, an image highly popular among the Syrian authors.⁶⁴

2. Views on death and afterlife in Bardaisan’s religious environment

Bardaisan’s understanding of the resurrection was formulated within the religiously and culturally diverse climate of late antique Edessa,⁶⁵ and I shall now

published in *Theologische Zeitschrift* 12 [1956], 126-156). Cullmann refers, for example, to Mt. 10:28.

63 *PR* II, 164,41-165,8 (no. 82), cf. *PR* II, 164,33-40 (no. 81) and 165,9-19 (no. 83) quoted above.

64 “And [the] word the argument of which is something else he makes into stuff for his argument, for he considered about this same death that the Souls which are hindered in every place in all depths and Limbos, and that ‘have kept the word of our Lord’, ... from within the Body, are exalted to the Bridal chamber of Light!” (*PR* II, 164,29-40 [no. 81], tr. Mitchell). In the *Gospel of Philip* (NHC II,3), the “bridal chamber” is the as yet mysterious place of eternal bliss (84.20-23, 86.4-7), Engl. tr. W. W. Isenberg, in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, ed. J. M. Robinson, third edition (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990). Cf. Daley, *Hope*, 27f.

65 Besides Judaism and Christianity, there existed a large number of pagan religious cults in second-century Edessa. The diverse pagan pantheon reflected the cultural and ethnic variety among the population. The Edessan deities can be subdivided roughly into three groups. First, the ancient Babylonian gods Bel and Nebo played a prominent role in the city’s religious life. They were the traditional gods of Edessa and came to be assimilated to the Greek gods Hermes/Mercurius and Apollo. The great altar, which still stood in the city in the fourth or fifth century, was the site where Nebo, Bel, and other deities were venerated at the time of the spring festival. The traditional gods of the local Aramaic population form a second group within the Edessan pantheon. In the second and third centuries, the most prominent one of these was the goddess Atargatis (Tar’atha), the Dea Syria of Hierapolis,

examine the prevalent notions on death and afterlife in Bardaisan's environment, in order more clearly to see the contours of his eschatology. Does Bardaisan's eschatology seem to be indebted to Mesopotamian ideas on the subject? Does he seem to be influenced by any of the non-Christian monotheistic faiths?

Ancient Mesopotamian religion understood death as an inevitable fate for all of humankind, and the quest for immortality was seen as futile. In the *Gilgamesh Epos*, we read:

Gilgamesh, whither rovest thou?
The life thou pursuest thou shalt not find.
When the gods created mankind,
Death for mankind they set aside,
Life in their own hands retaining.⁶⁶

The notion of an afterlife, or a salvation, was absent from ancient Mesopotamian religion.⁶⁷ Human beings were created primarily to serve the gods, and their mortality was necessary to avoid any human revolt. After death, humans were thought to reside forever in the underworld, the "land of no return."⁶⁸ It may be noted here that the ancient Greeks similarly thought that some part of the human person continued to exist after death, either in the tomb or beneath the earth in the "House of Hades," as Homer calls it.⁶⁹ Beliefs about a post-mortem shadowy existence in the underworld were thus common among the two major civilizations that shaped Edessan culture, and it does not surprise to encounter them in Bardaisan. Overall, however, the followers of the ancient Mesopotamian religions held views markedly different from Bardaisan's, and it does not appear likely that they directly influenced his eschatology.

whose cult spread far into the Roman Empire. Third, Edessan residents venerated gods of Arab provenance, in particular Azizos and Monimos, the assessors of Helios the sun god. Cf. Drijvers, *Cults*.

66 *Gilgamesh Epos*, Tablet X.3, tr. J. B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 90. Cf. *Gilgamesh Epos*, Tablet III.4, tr. Pritchard, 79.

67 Cf. J. Davies, *Death, Burial and Rebirth in the Religions of Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 4 and ch. 3, p. 47-59, esp. 53; J. S. Cooper, "The Fate of Mankind: Death and Afterlife in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Death and Afterlife: Perspectives of World Religions*, ed. H. Obayashi (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 19-33, esp. 24-26; E. Yamauchi, "Life, Death, and the Afterlife in the Ancient Near East," in *Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the New Testament*, ed. R. N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 21-50. The matter was different for the gods, however. There are Near Eastern deities who were believed to have undergone death and risen again. Cf. T. Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection: "Dying and Rising Gods" in the Ancient Near East* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2001).

68 Davies, *Death, Burial and Rebirth*, 52f.

69 Homer, *The Odyssey* 11, ed. with Engl. tr. A. T. Murray, 2 vols., LCL (London: Heinemann, 1919). Cf. H. F. North, "Death and Afterlife in Greek Tragedy and Plato," in Obayashi, *Death and Afterlife*, 49-64.

Our main source for the pagan understanding about death and afterlife in late antique northern Mesopotamia are the numerous funerary inscriptions, almost all of them pagan, found in and around Edessa.⁷⁰ The epigraphic evidence dates largely from the second and third centuries, the time in which Bardaisan flourished. Most of the inscriptions make no reference to any kind of resurrection or afterlife, a fact that confirms the results obtained above concerning the absence of such beliefs in Mesopotamian paganism. Most funerary inscriptions are of a commemorative nature; they merely identify the person buried at the site or the figure depicted on a funerary relief.⁷¹ Several inscriptions, often found on the funerary mosaics from the third century, refer to the tomb as “house of eternity” (ܠܒܝܬ ܥܠܡܐ),⁷² a phrase which functions as a synonym to “tomb” (ܡܨܝܒܐ).⁷³ The phrase “house of eternity” alludes to the desire – explicitly stated in some epigraphs – that the person’s corpse not be removed from the grave. On a funerary inscription, possibly dating from the second or third century,⁷⁴ found on the cemetery of Kirk Magara outside of Edessa, the following words are inscribed:

I, Gayyu, daughter of Baršuma, made for myself this tomb. I ask you coming later who enter here: do not remove my bones from the sarcophagus. And whoever removes my bones, may he have no latter end⁷⁵ and may he be cursed by Maralahe. Remembered be Baršuma son of Wa’el.⁷⁶

The concern for the buried bones does not reflect hope in a resurrection, but indicates that “the tomb is the very place where the living ones meet the dead, where the visual representations and the inscriptions express the bonds between them, and where the dead are present in the form of their corpses and effigies.”⁷⁷

70 The Syriac inscriptions have been ed. with Engl. tr. H. J. W. Drijvers and J. F. Healey, *The Old Syriac Inscriptions of Edessa and Osrhoene* (Leiden: Brill, 1999). All Syriac epigraphic evidence is quoted from this edition.

71 For example, As3, As6, As12, As13, As16-As19, As24.

72 For example, inscription As7 reads: “I, Rabbay son of ‘Abšalma, courier, made for myself this house of eternity, for myself and for my children and for my heirs and for Gannaya, my son.” (tr. Drijvers and Healey). Cf. As9 (dated 209 A. D.), and the inscriptions on the mosaics Am1-Am3, Am5-Am7, Am10. The dated mosaics come from 228-259 A. D.

73 R. Payne Smith translates ܠܒܝܬ ܥܠܡܐ as *sepulchrum* in the *Thesaurus Syriacus*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1879), 493. Several inscriptions use the synonym ܡܨܝܒܐ (As16, As20, As55, Am9).

74 Segal, *Edessa*, 59.

75 Syriac ܠܐ ܥܝܢܐ. Drijvers and Healey translate “afterlife.”

76 As20. The divinity called upon in the inscription, Maralahe (“Lord of the gods”), has been associated with the moon god Sin, whose veneration was prominent at Harran, but it may also refer to Bel, whose cult dominated in Edessa. Cf. Drijvers and Healey, *Old Syriac Inscriptions*, 80. Literature on the subject is listed here. On the identification of the deity as Bel, cf. Drijvers, *Cults*, 75.

77 Drijvers, *Cults*, 189.

Curse formulas found on other funerary inscriptions confirm this observation. An epigraph on a tomb tower at Serrin on the Euphrates, dated 73 A. D., states: "Whoever gives thanks, may all the gods bless him and permanence and life may he have. Whoever comes and destroys this work and ... these bones ... may he have no tomb and may children to throw dust upon his eyes not exist for him ..." ⁷⁸ Potential vandals of the burial site are threatened with not having a proper tomb and no posterity. The concept of a resurrection or an afterlife of body or soul is not explicitly mentioned.

One funerary mosaic and two stone reliefs on tombs depict a banquet scene ⁷⁹ which, as Drijvers observes, "does not bear upon a religious or metaphysical concept of, e. g., a meal in the beyond or a meal held in honor of the dead, who are supposed to be present. On the contrary, the scene illustrates the happiness and wealth of a man in the midst of his family ..." ⁸⁰ Finally, two third-century mosaics deserve attention, since their iconography – one depicts the Phoenix bird, the other Orpheus – evokes the idea of immortality. ⁸¹ Scholars have generally assumed pagan authorship of these mosaics (dated A. D. 235/6 and 228, respectively). ⁸² Drijvers interprets their symbolism as follows: "Both mosaics ... express the expectation of an after-life for the human soul that will even go beyond the existence of this world ... They attest to the spread at Edessa of motifs and ideas from the Greco-Roman world which became part of local culture." ⁸³

It is thus not in conversation with ancient Mesopotamian or local Edessan religious cults that Bardaisan formulated his theology of the resurrection. It is rather, as will be argued in more detail below, the Graeco-Roman influence that shaped his thought.

The oldest monotheistic religion to express belief in a bodily resurrection was Zoroastrianism, and it appears probable that Bardaisan would have been familiar with this. Although no direct evidence seems to have survived for a presence of Zoroastrianism in Edessa, for several reasons it appears likely that the followers of Zarathushtra (fl. ca. 1200 B. C.) spread to northern Mesopotamia: Armenia, located not far to the north of Edessa and in cultural contact with the city, ⁸⁴ "was a predominantly Zoroastrian land" during the later Parthian

78 Bs2, tr. Drijvers and Healey.

79 These are Am8, As12, As14; also depicted in Drijvers, *Cults*, Pl. XVII, XVIII, XIX.

80 Drijvers, *Cults*, 188.

81 Am6 and Am7. For a discussion of this symbolism, cf. Drijvers, *Cults*, 189-192 with bibliography in the notes; A. Rusch, "Phoenix 5.VIII." *PRE* 20.1 (1941), 422.

82 Drijvers, *Cults*, 192.

83 Ibid., 192.

84 Segal, *Edessa*, 10.

period.⁸⁵ Edessa was ruled by a Wa'el bar Sahru (163-165), a Parthian puppet.⁸⁶ Persian colonists practiced their Zoroastrian faith as far away from their homeland as Cappadocia and Lydia in Asia Minor, where their customs were observed by Strabo (first c. B. C.) and Pausanias (fl. ca. 150 A. D.), respectively.⁸⁷ Textual and epigraphic evidence suggests Zoroastrian presence in Antioch and its vicinity, as well as in Hierapolis in the second and third centuries.⁸⁸ Moreover, Syriac literature shows a good knowledge of Zoroastrianism.⁸⁹ Considering the wide spread of Zoroastrianism, it is likely that educated residents of Edessa were acquainted with the basic tenets of this faith. That this is indeed true of Bardaisan becomes evident in the *Book of the Laws of the Countries*, which demonstrates Bardaisan's familiarity with the Zoroastrian custom of marrying close relatives.⁹⁰

Zoroastrian eschatology teaches that at the time of death people are judged according to their deeds and whether they contributed to the cause of goodness in their lives. Judgment takes place at the "Bridge of the Separator" or "Account-Keeper's Bridge" (Chinvat-Bridge): those whose good deeds suffice are led across the bridge to the House of Song (paradise), whereas those whose evil deeds prevail fall into the House of Lies (hell). Persons with an equal amount of good and evil deeds go to the Place of the Mixed Ones, where they lead a shadowy existence.⁹¹ Later Zoroastrian texts also specify that there will be a second judgment, for which all human beings will be re-united with their bodies. This second judgment results in the destruction of all evil and an everlasting life of happiness for the good.⁹²

There are elements in Bardaisan's eschatology which have parallels in Zoroas-

85 M. Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London: Routledge, 2001), 84.

86 Drijvers, *Cults*, 132. Only numismatic evidence exists for Wa'el's reign (ibid., 137). Several funerary mosaics found in Edessa are representative of the so-called "Parthian art," although this does not necessarily indicate Parthian cultural influence. On this subject, cf. H. J. W. Drijvers, "A Tomb for the Life of a King: A Recently Discovered Edessene Mosaic With a Portrait of King Abgar the Great," *Muséon* 95 (1982), 168, esp. n. 4; idem, *Cults*, 4f.

87 Strabo, *Geography* 15.3.15, ed. with Engl. tr. H. L. Jones, LCL, vol. 7 (London: Heinemann, 1961); Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 5.27.5-6, ed. with Engl. tr. W. H. S. Jones and H. A. Ormerod, LCL, vol. 2 (London: Heinemann, 1926). Cf. Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 85. On epigraphic evidence of a Zoroastrian presence in Cappadocia, cf. Drijvers, *Cults*, 56.

88 M. Boyce and F. Grenet, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, vol. 3: *Zoroastrianism under Macedonian and Roman Rule* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 354-357.

89 Drijvers, *Cults*, 39; J. Teixidor, "Reflexiones sobre el Zoroastro siriaco," *OCP* 28 (1962), 181-185.

90 *BLC*, 42,21-44,1; Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 97.

91 For a discussion of Zoroastrian eschatology, cf. Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 27-29; P. Clark, *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction to an Ancient Faith* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1998), 59-75; F. Ma'súmián, *Life After Death: A Study of the Afterlife in World Religions* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1995), 16-27; Davies, *Death, Burial, and Rebirth*, 40-46.

92 Clark, *Zoroastrianism*, 64, 69-75; Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 27-29.

trian teachings. Bardaisan's idea of a crossing-place (ܠܚܝܬܐ),⁹³ for example, does not take up biblical imagery, but is reminiscent of Zoroastrian ideas. On the other hand, he does not take up the concept of a bodily resurrection, which was also proposed by Zoroastrians. This suggests that if there were a Zoroastrian influence on Bardaisan's thought, it would be rather limited. The notion of a crossing place, an obstacle (or several) which the soul on its heavenward journey must surmount, appears also in several Middle Platonic and Gnostic texts on the ascent of the soul through the planetary spheres, which will be dealt with below.

Judaism, by the time of Bardaisan, also stated the hope of a resurrection. The Hebrew Scriptures only late came to express a belief in the resurrection; earlier texts view the dead as no longer in community with God. The dead were believed to lead a shadowy, much diminished form of existence in Sheol, where God is not (Ps. 6:6; Sir. 17:27). The idea of a resurrection was absent. In the later writings, however, the view of death changes and now God's power is explicitly seen as extending beyond life, such as in God's promise to Israel in Isa. 26:19: "Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise, ... and the earth will give birth to those long dead."⁹⁴

In the first century B. C., the problem of martyrdom increased eschatological hope of a resurrection (2 Makk. 7), but the doctrine was not unanimously accepted. Whereas the Sadducees rejected belief in a resurrection (Mk. 12:18), the Pharisees defended it, and it was under Pharisean influence that the doctrine was included in the Eighteen Benedictions (*Amidah*) and became a central part of Jewish eschatology.⁹⁵

Overall, the influence of local religious cults on Bardaisan's eschatology was rather limited. Apart from the general idea of a shadowy existence after death, which was widespread in both East and West, and the Zoroastrian

93 *PR* II, 165,2 and 165,15.

94 The hope of a resurrection is also expressed in Dan. 12:2f.; Isa. 25:8. On the understanding of death and afterlife in the Old Testament, see for example B. Janowski, "Die Toten loben JHWH nicht. Psalm 88 und das alttestamentliche Todesverständnis," in *Auferstehung – Resurrection*, ed. F. Avemarie and H. Lichtenberger (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 3-45 (further bibliography in n. 93-94 and passim); G. Stemmerger, "Auferstehung I/2. Judentum," *TRE* 4 (1979), 443f.; H. W. Wolff, *Anthropologie des Alten Testaments*, third ed. (München: Kaiser, 1977), 150-176.

95 *Ethiopic Enoch* 51:1, tr. E. Isaac, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth, vol. 1 (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1983), 36; *IV Ezra* 7:32, tr. B. Metzger, in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 538. Some Jewish authors under Hellenistic influence, such as Philo, expressed their eschatological hope in terms of immortality of soul, rather than a bodily resurrection. American reform Judaism rejected belief in a bodily resurrection and favored the immortality of the soul in the *Pittsburgh Platform* (1885). Cf. Stemmerger, "Auferstehung," 444-450.

concept of a crossing place, no specific parallels between these religions and Bardaisan can be observed.

3. Bardaisan's eschatology and Hellenistic philosophy

Ephrem calls Bardaisan the "Aramean philosopher," and although we neither know what kind of philosophy Bardaisan studied, nor where,⁹⁶ nor whether he at all associated with any particular school of late antique philosophy, the sources do quite clearly view him as one trained in rhetoric and philosophy.⁹⁷ Bardaisan's teachings in general show similarities with the philosophy of his age,⁹⁸ and I shall argue that his understanding of the resurrection is rooted in an anthropology that is indebted to Greek philosophy. Space permits here only a brief discussion of some aspects of Bardaisan's anthropology which diverge from views espoused by biblical authors, but coincide with views held by contemporary Greek philosophers, especially those of the Middle Platonic tradition.⁹⁹

Bardaisan's belief that only the soul will be resurrected is based on an anthropology which locates human identity exclusively in the soul or mind. He states that by being endowed with free will, humankind has been raised to the level of angels.¹⁰⁰ Thereby, his view of human nature and human identity deviates from biblical anthropology, which generally regards personhood as a body-soul synthesis, an integrated unity, and does not equate the status of

96 J. Teixidor considers the cities of Antioch, Apamea, and Babylon as places in which Bardaisan possibly could have received his philosophical training (*Bardesane d'Edesse: la première philosophie syriaque* [Paris: Cerf, 1992], 67-70).

97 Bardaisan's philosophical and rhetorical skills are noted by Ephrem, *PR* II, 224, 19-20, Eusebius, *H. e.* 4.30, and Epiphanius, *Pan.* 56.1.2-4.

98 A. Dihle, "Zur Schicksalslehre des Bardesanes," in *Kerygma und Logos: Beiträge zu den geistesgeschichtlichen Beziehungen zwischen Antike und Christentum*, ed. A. M. Ritter, FS C. Andresen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 123-135, emphasizes connections between Bardaisan's ideas and Middle Platonic philosophy as well as with Alexander of Aphrodisias' *On Fate*. See also H. J. W. Drijvers, "Bardaisan of Edessa and the Hermetica: The Aramaic Philosopher and the Philosophy of his Time," in *Jaarbericht van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Genootschap, Ex Oriente Lux* 21 (Leiden, 1970), 190-210; reprint in idem, *East of Antioch: Studies in Early Syriac Christianity* (London: Variorum, 1984), no. XI.

99 On Middle Platonism, cf. J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: 80 B. C. to A. D. 220*, revised edition (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); H. Dörrie, *Platonica minora* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1976), esp. 154-360.

100 *BLC*, 10,14; 12,23-25. In the *BLC*, Bardaisan uses "soul" and "mind" virtually interchangeably. Hence he can at times locate free will in the soul (*BLC*, 16,8; 18,4), and at other times in the mind (*BLC*, 16,6-7; 22,25-24,2).

angels and human beings.¹⁰¹ Plato and most of his followers in late antiquity, on the other hand, viewed the soul as the essential part of a human being.¹⁰² They regarded the body as the soul's tool during its existence in the cosmos.¹⁰³ Any concept of a general resurrection at the end of time was foreign to Greek thought.¹⁰⁴

Concerning the soul's origin and final destination, Plato's *Timaeus* set forth a model influential in later times: the individual souls are fashioned by the demiurge and are of the same substance as the world soul. They travel down through the heavenly spheres, and during their journey they are impressed with certain features.¹⁰⁵ The souls get attached to a body, but after death the pure souls ascend again to their place of origin.¹⁰⁶ In the *Phaidros*, Socrates argues that the souls of the more distinguished people rise to the upper spheres of the stars, whereas those of lesser quality go to the underworld.¹⁰⁷ Cicero notes that whether souls are composed of fire or air, after death, by virtue of their natural movements, they are carried upwards to the heavenly regions.¹⁰⁸ The Middle Platonist Alcinous (probably 2c.) expounds the doctrine of the *Timaeus* and notes in the *Didaskalikos* about the creation of the human race that

the creator of the universe sent down to earth the souls of this race in number equal to the stars, and mounting each upon its kindred star as upon a chariot, he expounded to them the laws of fate ...¹⁰⁹

101 On biblical anthropology, cf. Wolff, *Anthropologie* (n. 94 above); W. G. Kümmel, *Man in the New Testament*, tr. J. J. Vincent (London: Epworth, 1963); R. Albertz, "Mensch. II. Altes Testament," *TRE* 22 (1992), 464-473; H. Hegemann, "Mensch. IV. Neues Testament," *TRE* 22 (1992), 481-492 (with literature).

102 Plato, *Protagoras* 313a-c; *Gorgias* 493a; *Phaidon* 70c, 80b-81e, 115c; *Nomoi* 959a, ed. with German tr. G. Eigler, *Platon, Werke*, 8 vols. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1990). For the view of later Platonists, cf. H. Dörrie, *Der Platonismus in der Antike*, vol. 6.1: *Die philosophische Lehre des Platonismus. Von der "Seele" als der Ursache aller sinnvollen Abläufe* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 2002), 251, n. 5. Antiochus of Ascalon regarded the essential human person as a *συναμφότερον* of soul and body. Cf. *ibid.*, 251, n. 4. The Middle Platonic view is also reflected in Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* I.52, ed. with Engl. tr. J. E. King, LCL (London: Heinemann, 1927). Plotinus explicitly identified human self with the soul (*Enneads* 4.7.1, 20-25; cf. Dörrie, *ibid.*, 58).

103 Dörrie, *Platonismus*, vol. 6.1, 252.

104 A. Oepke, "Auferstehung II (des Menschen)," *RAC* 1 (1950), 932.

105 On the question why the souls descend and are joined to bodies, see J. Dillon, "The Descent of the Soul in Middle Platonic and Gnostic Theory," in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, vol. 1: *The School of Valentinus*, ed. B. Layton (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 357-364.

106 Plato, *Timaeus* 41d-44d.

107 Plato, *Phaidros* 248a-249a.

108 Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.* I.40-41.

109 Alcinous, *Didaskalikos* 16.2, ed. with French tr. J. Whitaker, Budé (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1990); Engl. tr. J. Dillon, *Alcinous, The Handbook of Platonism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993). Cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 41ff.

Numenius of Apamea (2 c. A. D.), by some considered to be a Neopythagorean rather than a Platonist, held that “by nature, bodies are dead and unstable ...”¹¹⁰ The soul, immaterial in nature, descends through the cosmos to be united to a body, taking up impressions during the journey which form the irrational soul.¹¹¹ These two souls, according to Numenius, are engaged in a struggle, but both are viewed as immortal.¹¹²

Did Bardaisan share this Platonic view of the origin of the soul? The extant sources are limited, but a section in Ephrem’s *Hymns against Heresies* points in this direction. Exposing to his fellow Christians the errors of the Bardaisanites, the Syrian poet writes:

But of necessity, love compels you,
my brethren, to endure the repetition of their words
regarding the beings and the obstructing principles,
the stars and the signs of the zodiac,
regarding the body, that derives from evil,¹¹³
regarding is resurrection which will not be,
regarding the soul, that derives from the seven,
not to speak of the rest.¹¹⁴

Drijvers understands Ephrem’s remarks as indicating that Bardaisan held the soul to originate from the seven planetary powers; the reference to the “obstructing principles” he interprets as the powers that prevent the soul from returning to its place of origin,¹¹⁵ a notion much developed in Gnostic literature.

Bardaisan’s understanding of the origin and nature of the soul, thus, is more indebted to Middle Platonism than to biblical theology. The peculiarities of his eschatology are the results of his efforts to synthesize this philosophical understanding of human nature and the human soul with the Christian belief in a resurrection. His understanding of the human soul is insofar influenced by biblical anthropology as he allows for the possibility of the soul’s death – understood as a rather limited, shadowy existence in the underworld – whereas

110 Numenius, Frgm. 4a, ed. with French tr. É. des Places, *Numénios, Fragments*, Budé (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1973). On Numenius’ teachings, see Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 361–379; M. Frede, “Numenius,” *ANRW* II.36.2 (1987), 1034–1075. Numenius’ view of matter is derived from his dualism; he sees matter as “fluid and without quality, but yet a positively evil force.” (Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 373).

111 Numenius, Frgm. 34 and 43; cf. Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 375f.

112 Numenius, Frgm. 43, 44, 46c, 47; cf. Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 376f. Dillon points out that the concept of two warring souls is rather un-Platonic, and that Numenius’ position is influenced by Gnosticism.

113 Ephrem here refers not to the doctrine of Bardaisan, but to the beliefs of his followers, who apparently deviated from Bardaisan’s view of body as part of God’s good creation.

114 Ephrem, *CH* 53.4, tr. quoted from Drijvers, *Bardaisan*, 132f.

115 Drijvers, *Bardaisan*, 133.

most philosophers advocated belief in the immortality of the soul. The immortality of the soul was clearly expressed in the Platonic dialogues,¹¹⁶ and held by most later Platonists. Cicero's (106-43 B. C.) *Tusculan Disputations*, for instance, reflecting Middle Platonic teaching, contain a list of reasons for the soul's immortality.¹¹⁷ In the second century, Alcinous' *Didaskalikos* similarly included a list of arguments for the immortality of the soul.¹¹⁸ In Roman imperial times, philosophers entered lengthy debates as to whether only the rational part of the soul could be considered immortal.¹¹⁹ Philosophers of the school of Epicurus, however, denied the idea of any afterlife or resurrection, holding that mind as well as body is mortal, and that at death all disintegrates into its constituent atoms, which then in turn are free to form new forms of life.¹²⁰ Bardaisan's general familiarity with the basic tenets of Hellenistic philosophy would imply that he was acquainted with the philosophers' belief in the soul's immortality. His statements about the soul's death, as consequence of Adam's sin, are to be interpreted as deliberate efforts on his part to formulate a Christian theology within the philosophical anthropology that he had adopted prior to his conversion. In his theology of the last things, Bardaisan produced a synthesis of this philosophically-oriented anthropology with biblical concepts about the fall, about death as the consequence of sin, about Jesus' promise that his disciples would not taste death (John 8:51), and about Christ's descent into Sheol. Since his anthropology, however, was predominantly shaped by Greek philosophy rather than by Scripture, his theological conclusions deviated from those of the emerging normative Christianity which – although likewise indebted to Greek thought – was more firmly grounded in biblical anthropology.

4. Bardaisan's eschatology in its Christian context

As was noted above, Bardaisan was not the only second- or third-century theologian who rejected the idea of a bodily resurrection. The Marcionites as

116 Plato, *Phaidon* 71d-72e, 80e-81a.

117 Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.* I.50-71; cf. E. K. Emilsson, "Platonic Soul-Body Dualism in the Early Centuries of the Empire to Plotinus," *ANRW* II.36.7 (1994), 5333-5341; Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 96-101.

118 Alcinous, *Did.* 25.1.

119 Cf. H. Dörrie, "Kontroversen um die Seelenwanderung im kaiserzeitlichen Platonismus," *Hermes* 85 (1957), 414-435; reprint in *Platonica minora*, 420-440.

120 Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. with Engl. tr. W. H. D. Rouse and M. F. Smith, second ed., LCL 181 (London: Heinemann, 1966).

well as Gnostic groups expressed similar thoughts, and both groups were well represented in Edessa.¹²¹

According to the dualist Marcion, the human body was produced from evil matter by the creator God, and is itself evil.¹²² It does not constitute an essential part of human nature,¹²³ and its resurrection is unthinkable. According to Marcion, the resurrected person is not lacking substance, but will be "like the angels."¹²⁴ While thus both Bardaisan and Marcion locate human identity in the soul alone, the underlying reasons are quite different. For Marcion, the body belongs to the evil realm of matter; it can not be saved because it entirely belongs to the creator.¹²⁵ For Bardaisan, on the other hand, the body is part of the creation of the one God, and is not evil in itself. It is extraneous to the soul, which fully represents the essential human person. To resurrect the body would be pointless, and contrary to the laws of nature. Bardaisan's positive view of body manifests itself also in his appreciation of marriage and sexuality. Unlike many of the early Syriac Christians, he was not oriented towards sexual asceticism. These underlying differences support the above thesis that the peculiarities of Bardaisan's eschatology are to be explained by his philosophical anthropology. An attribution to Marcionite influences appears unlikely, especially in light of Bardaisan's explicit anti-Marcionite attitude.

Among the Gnostics, various views of the resurrection were held,¹²⁶ but none of the extant Gnostic sources states a belief in the resurrection of the flesh.¹²⁷ The *Gospel of Philip*, in which the image of bridal chamber occurs,¹²⁸ views the resurrection as a state that needs to be attained already in this life: "While we are in this world it is fitting for us to acquire the resurrection, so that when we strip off the flesh we may be found in rest and not walk in the

121 On the Marcionites, cf. n. 7 above. The Gnostic Ququites, who were said to have denied the resurrection, flourished in Edessa around 160; cf. H. J. W. Drijvers, "Quq and the Ququites: An unknown sect in Edessa in the second century A. D.," *Numen* 14 (1967), 104-129, esp. 108, 112; Ephrem, *CH* 22,2. The *Vita Rabbulae* refers to the existence of the Gnostic Borborians in this city, ed. Overbeck, 194,3. On this group, cf. L. Fendt, "Borborianer," *RAC* 2 (1954), 510-513. Note, however, K. Rudolph's observation that our evidence for libertine traits of Gnostic groups comes only from the heresiological accounts, not from the recently discovered Gnostic texts themselves ("Gnosis und Gnostizismus," in idem, *Gnosis und spätantike Religionsgeschichte: Gesammelte Aufsätze* [Leiden: Brill, 1996], 5; originally published in *Zeichen der Zeit* 38 [1984], H. 9, 217-221).

122 Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* 1.13, 1.15, 5.6.11; cf. v. Harnack, *Marcion* (n. 8 above), 97, 102f.

123 Cf. v. Harnack, *Marcion*, 136.

124 Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* 3.9.4; cf. v. Harnack, *Marcion*, 136f.

125 Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* 5.6.11, 5.10.3. On Marcion's anthropology, cf. also Hoffmann, *Marcion* (n. 8 above), 180-183, 212-220.

126 For an overview, cf. K. Rudolph, *Die Gnosis: Wesen und Geschichte einer spätantiken Religion*, second edition (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 207ff.; Daley, *Hope*, ch. 3.

127 Staats, "Auferstehung," 474.

128 *Gospel of Philip* 67,16; 69,1; 69,25-29, tr. Isenberg, in *Nag Hammadi Library*.

middle ... Those who say they will die first and then rise are in error. If they do not first receive the resurrection while they live, when they die they will receive nothing."¹²⁹ In the *Exegesis on the Soul*, the resurrection of the soul is viewed as ascent to the heavenly place of origin: "And she (i. e., the soul) received the divine nature from the father for her rejuvenation, so that she might be restored to the place where originally she had been. This is the resurrection that is from the dead."¹³⁰ The *Treatise on the Resurrection*, also known as *Letter to Rheginos*, deals with the subject in detail.¹³¹ Originating from a Valentinian Gnostic milieu in the late second century,¹³² the treatise explains that the resurrection comes through the Son of Man who transformed himself into an imperishable aeon, raised himself up,¹³³ and restored the pleroma.¹³⁴ As the *Gospel of Philip*, the *Treatise on the Resurrection* advocates a realized eschatology, that is the notion that the Gnostic can obtain the resurrection already in this life.¹³⁵ On the other hand, the treatise also expresses belief in a future resurrection, understood as reentry into the pleroma. Through knowledge of the truth proclaimed by the Savior,¹³⁶ the Gnostic believer will be "drawn to heaven by him (i. e., Christ), like beams by the sun."¹³⁷ This ascent into the aeon will not extend to the body.¹³⁸ Some Gnostic texts elaborate on the details of the soul's journey to the aeon, and the obstacles the soul encounters when meeting the archons, who strive to hinder the soul from its return. Celsus apparently accused the Christians of trying to prepare themselves for the encounter with the seven archontic demons by memorizing secret

129 *Gospel of Philip* 66,16-21, 73,1-4, tr. Isenberg. See also the following statement: "If one does not first attain the resurrection he will not die." (56,18-19, tr. Isenberg). The *Gospel of Philip* also associates the resurrection with baptism: "Baptism includes the resurrection [and the redemption; the redemption (takes place) in the bridal chamber." (69,25-27, tr. Isenberg).

130 *Exegesis on the Soul* (NHC II,6), 134,9-12, tr. W. C. Robinson, in *Nag Hammadi Library*.

131 *Treatise on the Resurrection* (NHC I,4), tr. M. L. Peel, in *Nag Hammadi Library*, 54-57. Further discussion of the eschatology of this treatise can be found in Van Unnik, "Epistle to Rheginos" (n. 27 above); Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 209-212; E. Pagels, "The Mystery of the Resurrection: A Gnostic Reading of 1 Corinthians 15," *JBL* 93 (1974), 276-288.

132 Peel, 53; cf. Van Unnik, "Epistle to Rheginos," 144.

133 *Treatise on the Resurrection* 45,17-23.

134 Ibid. 44,30-33. The pleroma is discussed also in 46,35ff., 49,4-9. Van Unnik understands this to mean that Christ restored humankind to the pleroma ("Epistle to Rheginos," 145). The author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection* claims a special revelation, but the book does not have the form of a secret teaching, or of a partial exposition, as does for example the *Letter to Flora*. Cf. Van Unnik, "Epistle to Rheginos," 147.

135 *Treatise on the Resurrection* 49,15-16. A realized eschatology was probably advocated by some Christians in Corinth, whom Paul addresses in 1 Cor. 15.

136 *Treatise on the Resurrection* 43,33-44,3; 44,14-17.

137 Ibid. 45,36-38.

138 "Why will you not receive flesh when you ascend into the Aeon? That which is better than flesh is that which is for it (the) cause of life." (Ibid. 47,6-10, tr. Peel).

formulas. Origen denied that such practices are found among Christians and attributed them to the Ophites.¹³⁹

Bardaisan's understanding of the resurrection, as it is preserved in the extant sources, on the one hand shows a number of similarities with the Gnostic beliefs, but on the other hand lacks elements central to the Gnostic literature. Bardaisan, much like the author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection*, thinks the soul will eventually journey heavenwards to its place of origin. The soul has to pass the "crossing-place," for which it needs Christ. He also resembles Gnostics in rejecting a bodily resurrection, as has already been noted. However, there are significant differences as well. Bardaisan does not speak of a pleroma, a concept essential to most Gnostic systems. Neither does he uphold a realized eschatology, as do the majority of the Gnostic texts surveyed above. And finally, Bardaisan does not divide humankind into different classes, only some of which have the γνῶσις that leads to the resurrection.¹⁴⁰ Rather, Bardaisan's theology is strongly egalitarian in character. Everyone has the possibility to achieve salvation by keeping the commandments.¹⁴¹ These differences in the respective thought systems are fundamental and outweigh the apparent points of connection; hence Bardaisan's eschatology should not be labeled as "Gnostic."

Bardaisan's theological approach had a strong ethical component, and – like the orthodox writers of his time¹⁴² – he closely linked ethics and the resurrection: "And it is also given to (a human being) to live by his own free will, and do all that he is able to do, if he will, or not to do it, if he will not; and he will justify himself or become guilty."¹⁴³ Most patristic authors would agree with this statement, but since their anthropology differed, so did their conclusions concerning the resurrection. Bardaisan's later opponent Ephrem, for example, also stressed the necessity of fulfilling the commandments, but he saw the body's contribution as decisive. The body is essential in works of charity, Ephrem argued, and it is affected by the ascetical life.¹⁴⁴ The body cooperates

139 Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.30f.; 7.40; cf. Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 187f. *Poimandres* 24–26 describes the soul's ascent and purification, ed. A. D. Nock and A.-J. Festugière, Budé (Paris, 1945–1954), Engl. tr. B. P. Copenhaver, *Hermetica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). On the soul's heavenward journey, cf. D. W. Bousset, "Die Himmelsreise der Seele," *ARW* 4 (1901), 136–169, 229–273, who argues for an Iranian origin of this concept (p. 169 and passim).

140 This view is expressed in the *Tripartite Tractate* (NHC I,5) 118,14–21; 119,16–34, tr. H. W. Attridge and D. Mueller, in *Nag Hammadi Library*. Irenaeus records it in *Adv. haer.* 1.7.5, ed. A. Rousseau and L. Doutreleau, SC 264 (Paris, 1979); cf. *Poimandres* 19.

141 *BLC*, 16,8–18,5.

142 See below n. 152 with text.

143 *BLC*, 12,12–15.

144 Bardaisan is one of the few early Syriac authors who is not oriented towards sexual asceticism.

in living an ethically correct life, and it suffers in martyrdom. He asks: "If the soul would eat and fast, and be rewarded, it is right that also the body, which fasted with it, be rewarded."¹⁴⁵ According to Ephrem's anthropology, human identity encompasses body, mind, and soul. He attacks Bardaisan for dividing the human person and taking away one part of it, the body.¹⁴⁶ A genuine resurrection, Ephrem states, must include the body, "the soul's companion."¹⁴⁷

5. Conclusion

The second and early third centuries were a time in which a great variety of eschatological models were formulated, ranging from Tertullian's firm belief in the resurrection of the flesh to the Marcionite or Bardaisanite assertion that the resurrection of the individual will not extend to the body. Underlying these different beliefs about the last things were differing assumptions about human nature and human identity that by necessity led to particular conclusions about the resurrection.

Bardaisan, having been trained as a philosopher and only converted to Christianity at a later time in life, encountered the Gospel with certain preconceptions about human nature and identity. Although in his eschatology he strove to take account of the essential biblical beliefs on the subject, and indeed held much in common with contemporary representatives of normative Christianity, he remained indebted to Greek philosophy in several respects. Like many Platonists, he seems to have thought of the soul as journeying through the heavenly spheres before it becomes united with a body. His understanding of human identity, a point central to the conception of its restoration, remained largely based on the philosophical rather than on the biblical tradition. Bardaisan did not adopt the scriptural understanding of human nature as a psychosomatic unity that experiences death as a whole and is resurrected as a whole, but like most of the philosophers located human identity exclusively in the soul. Ephrem already clearly identified this as his central error: Mani, Marcion, and Bardaisan "read (Scripture) and did not understand that the whole form of a person will be established at the resurrection."¹⁴⁸ The Gnostics and Marcion, who likewise rejected belief in a bodily resurrection, similarly based their eschatology on an anthropology that did not take account of the biblical unified view of humankind. Their respective anthropologies, however, differed fundamentally from

145 Ephrem, *CNis* 45,1; cf. 46, 6-7.

146 Ephrem, *CH* 52,1; cf. 1,9.

147 *CNis* 51,4; cf. 51,9.

148 *CNis* 46,8; *CH* 52,1.

Bardaisan's, so that a direct influence of Gnosticism or Marcionism on Bardaisan's theology does not appear likely. The apparent resemblances between these schools of thought are better attributed to the similar philosophical milieu in which they were formulated.¹⁴⁹

Whereas Bardaisan's anthropology clearly shows the influence of Graeco-Roman philosophy, it is based on biblical concepts as well. His idea that the soul undergoes a certain kind of death on account of Adam's sin directly opposes the view held by many philosophers concerning the immortality of the soul and illustrates his effort to formulate a biblically based theology.¹⁵⁰ Bardaisan would have agreed with the exclamation by his older contemporary, Tatian: "The soul is not in itself immortal, men of Greece, but mortal!"¹⁵¹ With respect to Bardaisan's understanding of the resurrection, the above analysis has shown that we must take seriously his efforts to formulate a Christian eschatology. Like all contemporary Christians, Bardaisan asserted the belief in the resurrection of the individual, an idea rather opposite to the prevailing beliefs among Edessan pagans. He maintained that death entered through Adam's sin and was overcome by Christ, whose redeeming action gave "re-compense for the punishment." Bardaisan also upheld the idea of a final judgment, and he closely connected ethics with the resurrection, stressing individual responsibility and each person's capability to fulfill the divine commandments. In that regard, Bardaisan's theology resembled that of the second-century apologists Justin and Athenagoras. Athenagoras affirmed that Christians are hoping for the reward they "shall receive from the great judge for a gentle, generous, and modest life."¹⁵²

The shortcoming in Bardaisan's theology of the last things, as was soon recognized by the emerging normative church in Syria, consisted in locating human identity exclusively in the soul, and not to conceive of human nature as a psychosomatic unity. Bardaisan's reasons for doing so, however, are in itself theologically motivated and should not be attributed to an uncritical acceptance of philosophical premisses. As the *Book of the Laws of the Countries* demonstrates, Bardaisan was primarily concerned with defending human freedom against fatalism, and he did so by entirely excluding the human soul and human free will from any governance of fate, but conceding that fate has a

149 The degree to which Marcion was indebted to Greek philosophy is disputed, cf. v. Harnack, *Marcion*; J. G. Gager, "Marcion and Philosophy," *VigChr* 26 (1972), 53-59; E. Norelli, "Marcion: ein christlicher Philosoph oder ein Christ gegen die Philosophie?" in *Marcion und seine kirchengeschichtliche Wirkung* (n. 8 above), 113-130.

150 Cf. Cullmann, "Immortality."

151 Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos* 13.1, ed. and tr. M. Whittaker (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982).

152 Athenagoras, *Plea* 12, tr. C. C. Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers* (New York: Macmillan, 1970). Cf. Justin, *First Apology* 43, tr. *ibid*.

certain influence over the body. He shared this concern to oppose a fatalistic world view with other Christian writers of his era, such as Justin Martyr, who stressed that "punishments and good rewards are given according to the quality of each man's actions. If this were not so, but all things happened in accordance with destiny, nothing at all would be left up to us. ... And if the human race does not have the power by free choice to avoid what is shameful and to choose what is right, then there is no responsibility for actions of any kind."¹⁵³ Bardaisan's solution to the question of the role of fate consisted in limiting the power of the stars to those seemingly arbitrary events of life such as sickness or health, poverty or wealth, a long or short life – events that pertain to the body but are beyond both human control and natural law. Since the body was to a certain degree subject to the influence of fate, and Bardaisan wished to maintain human freedom, he located human identity exclusively in the soul and defended the consequence that only the soul will be resurrected.

153 Justin, *First Apology* 43, tr. Richardson. On the question of fatalism and its rejection in antiquity, cf. D. Amand de Mendieta, *Fatalisme et liberté dans l'antiquité grecque* (Louvain, 1945; reprint Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1973).