



## BARDESANES

---

**BARDESANES** (Syr. Bar Dayṣān, Ar. Ebn Dayṣān), gnostic thinker (154-222) who occupies a position between the Syriac gnostic systems of the first two centuries a.d. and the Iranian gnostic system of Mani of the third century.

1. Sources. Bardesanes' own works are now known only through second-hand accounts by primarily Syriac authors, some of which include short quotations. The most important of these second-hand accounts are the antiheretical writings of church father Ephrem (306-73), who wrote against the teachings of Marcion, Bardesanes, and Mani. According to Ephrem (*Hymns* 53.6, tr. p. 182), Bardesanes wrote 150 hymns, from which he often quotes. Accounts of, possibly also quotations from or paraphrases of, a cosmological treatise are preserved in the works of Ephrem, Barḥadbešabbā (end 6th cent.), [Theodore bar Konai](#) (late 8th cent.), John of Dara (1st half 9th cent.), and Moses bar Kepha (813-903). Accounts of an ethnographic work which includes information about India and Indian religions are preserved by Porphyrius (234-ca. 303) and Hieronymus (ca. 347-ca. 419; cf. Drijvers, pp. 173ff.). Of Bardesanes' history of Armenia, mentioned by Moses of Khorene (see Drijvers, pp. 207f.) and his polemics against Marcion and other heresies nothing is extant. The names of two of Bardesanes' works are known from Ephrem (see Drijvers, p. 163): the *Book of Mysteries* (*Hymns* 56.9, tr. p. 192; this book was known to Mani, who wrote one of the same name) and the treatise *Of Domnus*, a book of anti-Platonist polemics, against which Ephrem wrote an entire treatise (*Prose Refutations* II, pp. 1-48, tr. pp. i-xxii). Ebn al-Nadīm (*Fehrest*, p.402, tr. Dodge, p. 806) mentions three books by Bardesanes: *Light and*



*Darkness (al-Nūr wa'l-Zolma), The Spirituality of Truth (Rūhānīya al-Ḥaqq), and The Moving and the Static (al-Motaḥarrek wa'l-jamād).*

The principal sources for Bardesanes' life are his contemporary Julius Africanus and the much later Agapius (Maḥbūb b. Qoṣṭanṭīn) of Mabbug (1st half of 10th century), Michael the Syrian (1126-99), and Bar Hebraeus (Ebn al-'Ebrī, 1225/6-86).

The *Book of the Law of the Countries*, written by one of Bardesanes' pupils, discusses the relation between destiny and free will and contains both primary and secondary source material. Though it contains traditions going back to Bardesanes, its apparent admixture of later elements disqualifies the work as a possible basis for reconstructing Bardesanes' system (see Ehlers, pp. 337-39). Western sources such as Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339) and Epiphanius of Salamis (ca. 315-403) contain apparently authentic elements, but their references to Bardesanes' teaching appear to be based on the writings of his followers. The Arabic sources, e.g., Agapius, Mātorīdī, Ebn al-Nadīm, Šahrestānī, are probably based on (lost) Syriac sources and, judging by their largely correct accounts of Manicheism, can be assumed to preserve some authentic traditions; they emphasize the dualistic character of Bardesanes' system and stress the inactive quality of darkness.

2. Life. According to Michael the Syrian (text, pp. 109-11, tr. pp. 183ff.) Bardesanes' parents, Nuḥāmā and Naḥšīram, had fled "Persia" in the year 475 (a mistake for 465 = a.d. 154; see Drijvers, pp. 186ff.) because of a revolt against the ruler in their native country. Bardesanes' Syriac name Bar Dayṣān is explained by a story that he was born on the bank of the Dayṣān (the river of Edessa), hence literally "Son of Dayṣān." This story is repeated by Ebn al-Nadīm (loc. cit.), whereas Mas'ūdī (*Tanbīh*, p.130) reports another tradition which said that Bardesanes was not born there but was a foundling picked up on the banks of the river. The *Chronicle of Edessa* (p. 147, tr. p. 90) gives Bardesanes' birth date as 11 Tammuz 465. After Bardesanes' birth his parents moved to Hierapolis-Mabbug, where Bardesanes was educated by a "pagan" priest. Julius Africanus (*Kestoi* 29) reports that he once saw Bardesanes performing feats of archery at the court of King Abgar the Great of Edessa (177-212). Ephrem's statement that the devil "adorned Bardesanes with attire and jewels" (*Hymns* 1.12, tr. p. 4; in contrast to Marcion's asceticism and Mani's pale complexion) may also refer to Bardesanes' high social position. Finally the *Life of Aberkios*, who during his travels in the east preaching against Marcion once met him (Drijvers, p. 170), refers to Bardesanes' high birth and



wealth. We may note that Africanus calls him a Parthian, but the sources do not provide firm enough evidence for a Parthian origin of Bardesanes. The Iranian elements in Bardesanes' system, however, are more easily explained if we assume an Iranian origin.

According to Michael, Bardesanes was converted to Christianity by Bishop Hystaspes, whom he once happened to hear in Edessa. He was initiated into the mysteries of the Christians and made a deacon. Bardesanes himself founded a community, which soon became the chief Christian group in and around Edessa, replacing the Marcionites, at whom they aimed harsh polemics. Though Bardesanes accepted both the Old and New Testaments as holy scriptures his followers included many additional revelations in their holy books (Barḥadbešabbā; Drijvers, p. 104, and cf. pp. 111f.). Bardesanes wrote both hymns and prose works (see above), the reason for casting his teaching in the form of hymns with musical accompaniment being, according to Ephrem, his wish to appeal to young people (*Hymns* 1.17, 53-5-6, tr. pp. 5-6, 182).

There is also a tradition that Bardesanes later abandoned Christianity, becoming a "pagan" according to Agapius or a Valentinian according to Michael (Drijvers, pp. 188f.). This association of Bardesanes with the teaching of Valentine is also mentioned by Hippolytus (d. 235; Drijvers, p. 168), Eusebius (ibid., pp. 169f.), and Epiphanius (ibid., p. 178). It may be significant here that these were Western authors who were likely to have been more familiar with the Valentinian system, taught by Valentine himself in Rome ca. 135-60, than with other heresies and who may have been struck by certain strong but superficial resemblances between the two teachings (see further below).

According to Michael (loc. cit.) and Bar Hebraeus (*Chronicon* I, col. 47), Bardesanes died in 533 = a.d. 222, when he was 68 years old.

After the death of Bardesanes the community founded by him remained dominant in Edessa until Bishop Rabbūla (d. 435), an ardent persecutor of Marcionites and Bardesanites, destroyed the cult places of the Bardesanites (Bedjan, IV, pp. 431f.) and established his own "orthodox" church in Edessa after 400. The community was obviously not strong enough to withstand Rabbūla and half a millennium or so later we find the Bardesanites scattered in various parts of the Sasanian empire: according to Ebn al-Nadīm (loc. cit.) in the "swamps" of Iraq, in Khorasan, and in "China."



3. Teaching. Bardesanes' theological system must be reconstructed by carefully sifting the information provided by the secondary sources. The following outline of Bardesanes' cosmology is based on the Syriac sources (Ephrem, Barḥadbešabbā, Moses bar Kepha, John of Dara, and Bar Konai; see Drijvers, pp. 96-121, 130-43).

*Cosmology.* From eternity there were six beings (*ītyē*; on the meaning of Syr. *ītyā* see the discussion in Ehlers, pp. 340-43). According to Ephrem (*Hymns* 3.6, tr. p. 13), the six corresponded to the six directions: "he placed (*sām*)[them] in the four quarters of the winds, one . . . in the depth and one other on high." In the heights was the Lord God, located in the middle of Space (*Prose Refutations* I, pp.132, 135, tr. pp. xcvi-xcvii). In the middle were four beings: light, wind, fire, and water. In the beginning the light was in the east and the wind in the north. They were made up of atoms (*perdē*; II, pp. 214-19, tr. ci-ciii) and were light and heavy or fine and coarse (II, p. 159, tr. p. lxxiv; cf. Barḥadbešabbā in Drijvers, p. 100), of different colors, smells, tastes, and textures (II, pp. 223-24, tr. p. cvi), corresponding to the five senses. According to Ephrem "the Stranger (*nukrāyā*)[i.e., God] blew His life into the beings and girded (*ḥzaq*) them" (II, p. 158, tr. p. lxxiii).

The sixth substance, darkness, was in the depths. It was the heaviest of all the elements (I, p. 54, tr. p. lv) and is characterized as sleeping and powerless (I, p. 56, tr. p. lvi) and cold (II, p. 226, tr. p. cvii), a point stressed by the Arabic sources as constituting an important difference between Bardesanes and Mani (Vajda, pp. 23-31).

Whether the first being, God, is to be identified with the Father of Life whose consort is the Mother of Life (see below), implying that the uppermost level of being was peopled by several entities (as in other gnostic systems and in Manicheism), is not clear.

The four beings, weak and erring, were then shaken, either by chance or by destiny, and began to stir and knock against one another. According to Bar Konai, it was the wind blowing with its force that caused the elements to make contact and start mingling. Then, according to Ephrem (*Prose Refutations* II, p. 226, tr. p. cvii), "the heat caused the cold to disappear and its smoke (*tennānā*) rose up (*ṭar*)" while, according to Bar Konai, the fire began to burn in a forest (*b*) and a dark smoke gathered (*qṭar*) that caused confusion, making the beings mingle and fight with each other. There is also the image of the darkness rising and making an assault (*s'ā*) on "the heels and the skirts of the



upper Light” (ibid.), and Moses says that “the darkness made an assault (s’ā) from the depths to rise up and mingle with and among them” (Drijvers, p. 100). However, the attack is clearly provoked by the disturbances above the darkness and not by the darkness itself, as in Manicheism. The beings fled before the oncoming darkness, seeking refuge with God and asking Him to save them from it (or the disfiguring color caused by the darkness; Moses bar Kepha). Their Lord then sent to them the Word of Intention, which separated the darkness from the pure beings (according to Bar Konai, he ordered the wind to be down and turn its blast against the confusion), and the darkness was thrown into the abyss. This Word, which is said to be the Logos (Barḥadbešabbā) or Christ (Moses, John), then erected each substance in its place and order and from the mingling that had taken place It made this world. Ephrem (*Prose Refutations* II, p. 220, tr. p. civ) also says that, according to Bardesanes, it was the power of the First Word which remained in created things that made everything, but he also quotes a different opinion among the Bardesanites that God sent down the atoms of spirit, force, and thought to the darkness to create order and that some of these were mixed with those others (of darkness). The world thus established was given a finite time to exist (Barḥadbešabbā) and was placed “in the middle,” so that no further mingling of the darkness and the four beings might take place (Moses).

Few other details of Bardesanes’ cosmology are known. The following have been preserved in Ephrem’s hymns. According to the followers of Bardesanes the Father and Mother of Life brought forth the Son of Life (*Hymns* 55.1, tr. p. 187; Drijvers, p. 144): “Something streamed down from that Father of Life and the Mother became pregnant . . . and bore . . . the Son of Life.” Another fragment (55.2, tr. p. 187) ascribed to Bardesanes makes it clear that the Son of Life is Christ: “(Bardesanes) called our Lord the child that was produced by two, through sexual union.” The Holy Spirit brought forth two daughters, “the blush of the earth and the image in the water” (55.3, tr. p. 187). The Father and the Mother measured and laid out Paradise, founded it by their sexual union, and planted it with their numerous divine descendants (55.8, 10, tr. pp. 189f.). It is not clear whether these divine descendants may be compared with the Aeons who in Gnosticism and Manicheism populate the Realms of Light. It would seem that Bardesanes’ system also contained the notion that the Sons of Darkness fashioned (human) bodies in the likeness of an image shown them by the Primal Man (*Prose Refutations* I, p. 123, tr. pp. xc-xci), comparable with the Archons who in the other systems are instrumental in the creation of man (see e.g., Jonas, 1963, p. 202; for the Manichean version of this event, see



āsreštār). The much later Michael the Syrian (loc. cit.) reports that there were three spiritual and four material elements of which man was composed and from which 360 worlds originated. (Numbers like 360, or 366 as Bar Hebraeus has it, Drijvers, p. 192, are known from other gnostic speculations; thus according to Basilides there were 365 heavens; Jonas, 1963, p. 43.)

*Anthropology and soteriology.* According to Ephrem, man consists of reason (*maḏ'ā*) or spirit, soul, and body, reason being hidden in the soul, which is subtle compared to the body but corporeal compared to reason (*Prose Refutations* II, p. 157, tr. p. lxxiii). Body and soul are separate parts of man (*Carmina Nisibena* 51.4, tr. p. 61). The soul, it too made from the *ityē* (*Hymns* 53.4, tr. p. 182), wears the body like a garment (*Carmina Nisibena* 51.9, tr. p. 61; cf. *Prose Refutations* I, p. 8, tr. xxxii). The bodies, hailing from the darkness (*Hymns* 53.4, tr. p. 182), being fashioned by the Sons of Darkness compelled by an image shown them by the Primal Man (presumably of his own beauty; *Prose Refutations* I, p. 123, tr. p. xc), are not resurrected (*Carmina Nisibena* 51.4, tr. p. 60; *Hymns* 53.4, tr. p. 182). According to Ephrem, the soul is composed of seven parts (*Hymns* 53.4, tr. p. 182; *Prose Refutations* I, p. 8, tr. xxvii), but it is not clear whether the number seven here is connected with the seven planets.

There is also little information about the process of salvation. The cosmological accounts state that what was mixed is now in the process of being purified and distilled by conception and birth (Moses) and this process will continue until the world comes to an end. Whatever has not been purified within the period set for the world, the Word will purify at the end of time (Barḥadbešabbā). However, we do not know exactly in what manner salvation is achieved. Later sources disparagingly emphasize sexual union as a means of purification, especially for women (Michael and Agapius; Drijvers, p. 190), but no doubt such statements are tainted by antiheretical feeling. However, sexual union must have played some part in Bardesanes' soteriology. A passage in Ephrem (*Prose Refutations* I, p. 27, tr. pp. xli-xlii) concerning the Father and Mother of Life and their relationship to the sun and the moon may be of relevance here: According to Ephrem Bardesanes called the moon "an earth and a womb which is filled from a sublime and elevated stream which floods those who are below and beneath." Comparison with the salvatory function of the waxing and waning of the moon in Manicheism, with which Ephrem contrasts the Bardesanite myth (loc. cit.), would suggest a similar interpretation of the latter. Note also Ephrem's statement that Bardesanes



compared (*mattel*) the Father and Mother of Life with the sun and moon (*Hymns* 55. 10, tr. p. 189), and the later biographers of Bardesanes (Agapius, Michael, and Bar Hebraeus; Drijvers, p. 149) maintain that, according to him, the Mother of Life would undress every month to go in to the Father of Life to unite with him, from which union seven sons were born, in analogy with the waning of the moon.

About the soul's return Ephrem states that the souls were at first held back at the "Crossing," also called the "Bridal Chamber of Light" (*Prose Refutations* II, pp. 164-65, tr. pp. lxxvi-lxxvii). This hindrance was caused by Death, which Adam brought into the world through his sin, but then our Lord brought in Life, so that every soul, in every place and every depth, that has kept His word shall not taste Death but cross over the "Crossing" and be brought into the Kingdom. The body on the other hand, composed of atoms from the four beings and from darkness, returns to dust, dissolved into the original substance (*ibid.*, p. 143, tr. p. lxvi). Moreover, Bardesanes, like Mani after him, insisted that the entire cosmos, the sea and the dry land, the heaven and the earth, must be purified (*ibid.*, p. 204, tr. p. xcvi).

*Astrology and free will.* Bardesanes' system, like other gnostic systems, contained a fair share of astrological speculation. His interest in astrology is mentioned by Ephrem (*Hymns* 51.13, tr. p. 177): "he preaches the signs of the Zodiac, observes the hour (of birth), teaches the seven (planets), and inquires about the times," and in *Hymns* 1.18 (tr. p. 6) it is said that Bardesanes and his followers read books about the zodiac rather than the prophets. The *Book of the Law of the Countries* repeatedly emphasizes the free will of man; however, the more reliable Barḥadbešabbā states clearly that the followers of Bardesanes made nought of freedom [of will] (*ḥērūtā m<sup>e</sup>baṭṭ<sup>e</sup>līn*; cf. Ehlers, p. 339).

*Bardesanes and Gnosticism.* Bardesanes' system contains Gnostic elements that cannot be overlooked. As in gnostic systems as well as Manicheism, the presupposition for salvation is gnosis; cf. Ephrem (*Prose Refutations* II, p.206, tr. p. xcvi), who states that in the schools of Bardesanes and Mani the creation is purified by knowledge and faith, and the tripartite arrangement of the original elements agrees in principle with several other Gnostic systems (Ehlers, p. 345). It is not clear whether Bardesanes' system contained the notion of the captured or mingled light as an expatriate, abandoned far away from home, typical of Gnosticism, including Manicheism. Only one passage in Ephrem (*Hymns* 55.6, tr. p. 188) contains a similar notion, in which apparently



the Holy Spirit complains “My God and Lord, Thou hast left me alone.” Some mythical elements common to both the Syriac Gnosticism, Bardesanes, and Manicheism probably derive in part from old Mesopotamian religion (Sumerian and Babylonian). Among these are the names Father of Life, Mother of Life, and Son of Life, the founding and planting of the Paradise Garden by the Father and Mother, and the idea of the Bridal Chamber of Light (Widengren, pp. 14f.).

Bardesanes attacks Marcion vehemently, rejecting his teaching of the two gods—the hidden or alien good God and the God of creation, the demiurge (see, e.g., Jonas, 1963, pp. 141ff.)—and probably also his asceticism, with its condemnation of marriage and reproduction (cf. Jonas, 1963, p. 145).

The various traditions that connect Bardesanes with the Valentinian speculation (see above) are probably based upon some striking similarities between the two systems. On the whole, however, the systems differ strongly from one another. A brief summary (based on Jonas, 1963, p. 174) of the main principles of Valentine’s (fl. mid-2nd century) teaching may serve to illustrate the similarities between his and Bardesanes’ systems (as well as an example of how evil is explained in Syriac Gnostic systems): From eternity there were in the invisible and nameless heights a perfect aeon (Fore-Father, Abyss) and his consort the Ennoia (Thought). The Aeon wanted to create from himself the beginning of all things and inserted his emission like a seed into the womb of the Ennoia, who conceived and bore the Mind (Nous, Father) and his consort Truth. These two then generated Word and Life; a further series of emanations produced a large number of aeons and finally the Sophia. The Sophia, in her desire to find the perfect aeon (Abyss) plunges into it but is stopped by the Limit (Horos) hiding the Aeon from his emanations (except Truth and Life), which returns her to her own kind. Her desire and the passion to which it led are separated from her and cast by the Limit outside of the other emanations as a formless spiritual substance, an “abortion” brought forth without conception, hypostasized as a separate being, the lower Sophia. All these events and the Sophia’s remorse have created disturbances among the aeons, who pray to the Father for the emanation of Christos and the Holy Spirit, who are to restore the serenity among the aeons and give form to the formless substance. After perfect repose has been reestablished, all together they produce the aeon Jesus, who is to bring salvation to the formless substance. The world is then created by a demiurge of the typical gnostic kind (cf. Jonas, 1963, p. 191), shaped by the Sophia. Here we may note the following



similarities between the two systems: 1. In the Valentinian system the perfect aeon is the unknown god (known only by his first emanation, Mind and Truth) corresponding to the Stranger in that of Bardesanes (Ephrem, *Prose Refutations* II, p. 158)—a concept common to all Gnostic systems; 2. the importance of male and female couples in the Valentinian scheme and the similarity with Ephrem's description of the Father and Mother of Life's bringing forth the Son of Life (see above); 3. the importance of the Limit, which in the Valentinian speculation separates the aeons from the formless substance and the Boundary, which in Bardesanes' system separates the five higher elements from the sixth, and darkness below (*Prose Refutations* I, pp. 54-56; cf. Ehlers, p. 345 and n. 43); 4. the prayer to the Father corresponds to the element's taking refuge with the All-highest (and more closely to corresponding events in Manichean cosmology); 5. in the Valentinian system the Christos starts the creation process by giving form to the formless substance, though the creation is mainly performed at a later stage by the demiurge, and in Bardesanes' system it is the Word of Thought (Logos, Christ) sent by God that creates the visible world; 6. in the Valentinian system gnosis is brought to the historical Jesus by the Christos and the aeon Jesus who descend upon him at his baptism in the river Jordan; in Bardesanes' system it is again the Word of Thought (Logos, Christ) that starts the work of purification and salvation.

*Bardesanes and Iran.* There are, however, some fundamental differences between Bardesanes' system and the Syriac gnostic systems as exemplified in the Valentinian speculation, which characterize Bardesanes' system as an Iranian gnostic system. (On these two kinds of systems see Jonas, 1963, pp. 236f.) The feature of Bardesanes' system which places it firmly in the Iranian tradition is the coexistence from eternity of the two opposite principles of light and darkness, located in the heights and the depths respectively, and the disturbance of the original peace and harmony through an intermingling of the two principles. In details, however, the two systems differ considerably. Thus, in Bardesanes' system darkness is lifeless and inactive, and contact is caused by disturbances among the four lighter elements, which bring them all the way down to the boundary, thus awakening the sleeping darkness which rises and intermingles with the light elements. Mani, however, represents darkness as something evil and active, full of strife, which of itself rises and, arriving at the border, sees the light and wants to possess it and so attacks it. Mani's Father of Light therefore calls forth from Himself a series of emanations who are to fight the darkness, and during this fight some of the



light is imprisoned in the darkness. It has not been determined where Bardesanes got the concept of the lifeless darkness from; it may, however, be related to the similar concept of *hulē* which is found in some gnostic systems (Ehlers, p. 347) and which both Marcion and Bardesanes employed, according to Ephrem (*Hymns* 14.7-8, tr. p. 51, with n. 5; *Prose Refutations* I, p. 141, tr. p. c).

Another element which may derive from Iranian cosmologies is that of Space, in the middle of which God was located; this recalls the role played by Space in Zoroastrian (Zurvanite) tradition (cf. also Mani's Light Ether, coeternal with the Light Father). Similarly, an element of Bardesanes' system from Iranian religion not utilized by Mani appears to be the role he assigns to the wind, at once one of the light elements and the cause of the disturbance. This may reflect the dual nature of Vayu in Zoroastrian (Zurvanite) speculations.

*Other elements.* According to Drijvers (p. 151) the comparison of the Mother of Life with a fish (see above) may betray some connection with the cult of Atargatis, goddess of fertility honored in Hierapolis, where Bardesanes according to Michael was educated by a pagan priest (see above).

Bardesanes' system also contains elements borrowed from atomistic speculations. According to Ephrem (*Prose Refutations* II, pp. 214-20, tr. pp. ci-civ; cf. Ehlers, pp. 346f.), the beings (*ītyē*) consisted of minuscule, indissoluble particles (*perdē*). The characterization of the elements as "heavy/light" or "coarse/fine" is also known from Greek atomism (Ehlers, loc. cit.).

*Bardesanes and Manicheism.* Though Bardesanes' system is both similar and dissimilar to Manicheism, the lack of information makes it difficult to assess in detail how his system may have influenced Mani's: On the one hand, Bardesanes' Father of Life and Space resembles Mani's Father of Greatness (Father of Light, Lord of Paradise, Pater Ingenitus, Malek Jenān al-Nūr, etc.) who exists from eternity with four other Greatnesses, among them the Pure Ether (Mid. Pers. *'ndrw'z*, Sogd. *'wswycβry'*, Aer Ingenitus, al-Jaww); Bardesanes' Mother of Life has the same name as Mani's Mother of Life, the Father of Greatness's first emanation; Bardesanes' Paradise, which the Father of Life and the Mother of Life founded, recalls the name Lord of Paradise for Mani's Father of Greatness; Bardesanes' four *ītyē*, which God is said to have girded, at least superficially correspond to Mani's five elements (breeze, wind, light, water, fire), the sons of the First Man, whom he put on as a weapon and an armor (in both systems these four/five beings are mixed with darkness); and, finally, Bardesanes' Word of Intention spoken by God resembles the Cry



uttered by the Spiritus Vivens, which cuts open the darkness and reveals the vanquished First Man and his sons (for details see, e.g., Asmussen, pp. 12ff.).

On the other hand, for a gnostic system, that of Bardesanes, unlike Mani's, appears extremely simple, but this impression may be due to lack of source material. In Bardesanes' system the *ityē* are weak and erring and themselves cause their downfall by waking the sleeper in the abyss. In Mani's system the First Man and his sons are sent out from the Paradise of Light to fight the attacking darkness but are defeated. Where Mani had recourse to the Gnostic notion of emanation to explain the creation of divine beings, Bardesanes apparently used sexual procreation. In this positive view of sexuality Bardesanes differs sharply from both Manicheism and other Gnostic systems (e.g., Marcionism, which advocated strict asceticism, see Jonas, 1963, p. 144). In Manicheism sexuality and reproduction are viewed as evil, as they perpetrate the imprisonment of the particles of light in matter by dividing them into smaller pieces, rendering the salvation process still more difficult. All the emanations proceeding from the Father of Greatness are therefore represented as asexual. However, in Bardesanes' system the Father and Mother of Life unite in a sexual manner, producing the Son of Life, and salvation is thought to be brought about through conception and birth.

*Conclusion:* Bardesanes' system is a syncretistic one containing elements from Syriac gnosticism, Iranian cosmological speculations, and Greek atomism. In stressing the existence of the two principles of light and darkness from eternity and the intermingling of the two principles as the origin of the creation and the beginning of the process of salvation, concepts adapted from Iranian religious speculations, he may have provided a partial model for Mani's system.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

For a complete bibliography of sources and studies see Drijvers, 1966; for later publications also Davids, Ehlers, Vajda. The following bibliography contains only select titles.



Sources: 1. Syriac. Bar Hebraeus, *Chronicon ecclesiasticum*, ed. J. B. Abbeloos and T. Lamy, 2 vols., Louvain, 1872-77.

Theodore bar Konai, in CSCO, 2nd ser., 65-66, Paris, 1910-12.

Barḥadbešabbā, ed. F. Nau, in *Patrologia Orientalis* XXIII, Paris, 1932.

P. Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, 7 vols., Paris, 1890-97.

*Chronicon Edessenum*, ed. L. Hallier, *Untersuchungen über die edessenische Chronik mit dem syrischen Text nebst einer Übersetzung*, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altkristlichen Literatur 9/1, Leipzig, 1892.

Ephrem, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Carmina Nisibena* II, ed. E. Beek, CSCO 240: Scriptorum Syri 102, Louvain, 1963.

Idem, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen contra Haereses (Hymns)*, ed. E. Beck, CSCO 169-70: Scriptorum Syri 76-77, Louvain, 1957.

Idem, *S. Ephraim's Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion and Bardaisan*, ed. C. W. Mitchell, I, London, 1912, II, completed by A. A. Bevan and F. C. Burkitt, London, 1921.

John of Dara, ed. A. Baumstark, "Iwannîs von Dârâ über Bardaišan," *Oriens Christianum*, 3rd ser., 8, 1933, p. 62-71.

Michael the Syrian, ed. J. B. Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien* I-III, Paris, 1899-1910.

*The Book of the Law of the Countries*, ed. F. Nau, in *Patrologia Syriaca* 1/2, Paris, 1907, cols. 536-611.

2. Arabic. The Arabic sources are conveniently put together in Vajda, 1966.

Many of them are also found in S. Ḥ. Taqīzāda and A. Afšār Šīrāzī, *Mānī wa dīn-e ūbe-enžemām-e motūn-e 'arabī o fārsī dar bāra-ye Mānī o Mānawīyāt*, Tehran, 1335 Š./1956; see index s.vv. Ebn Dayšān, Dayšān.

3. Greek. Epiphanius, *Ponarion*, ed. K. Holl. II, *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte (GCS)* 31, Leipzig, 1922.

Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* I, ed. E. Schwarz, GCS 91, Leipzig, 1903.



Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium*, ed. P. Wendland, GCS 26, Leipzig, 1916.

Julius Africanus, ed. and tr. J. R. Vienne, Florence, 1970.

Porphyrius, *Excerpta*, in Stobaeus, *Anthologium* 1-4, ed. C. Wachsmuth and O. Hense, Berlin, 1884-1912.

Secondary literature: A. Abel, "Dayšāniyya," in *EF*<sup>2</sup> II, p. 199 (assumes that *The Book of the Laws of the Countries* was written by Bardesanes).

B. Aland, "Mani und Bardesanes—Zur Entstehung des manichäischen Systems," in A. Dietrich, ed., *Synkretismus im syrischpersischen Kulturgebiet. Bericht über ein Symposium in Reinhausen bei Göttingen in der Zeit vom 4. bis 8. Oktober 1971*, Göttingen, 1975, pp. 122-43.

J. P. Asmussen, *X<sup>u</sup>āstvānīft: Studies in Manicheism*, Copenhagen, 1965.

E. Beck, *Ephräms Polemik gegen Mani und die Manichäer im Rahmen der zeitgenössischen griechischen Polemik und der des Augustinus*, CSCO 391, subs. 55, Louvain 1978.

Idem, "Bardaisan und seine Schule bei Ephräm," *Le muséon* 91, 1978, pp. 271-333.

J. M. Davids, "Zur Kosmologie Bardaisans," *ZDMG* 120, 1970, pp. 32-42.

H. J. W. Drijvers, *Bardaisan of Edessa*, Assen, 1966.

This is to date the most comprehensive study of the sources on Bardesanes. It also contains a detailed description and evaluation of earlier studies. The author concludes that Bardesanes' system does not fall within the definition of Gnosticism; however, the author's definition is probably more at fault than Bardesanes' system; see Ehlers, 1970.

Idem, "Bardaisan von Edessa als Repräsentant des syrischen Synkretismus im 2. Jahrhundert n. Chr.," in A. Dietrich, ed., *Synkretismus im syrischpersischen Kulturgebiet. Bericht über ein Symposium in Reinhausen bei Göttingen in der Zeit vom 4. bis 8. Oktober 1971*, Göttingen, 1975, pp. 109-22.

B. Ehlers, "Bardesanes von Edessa—ein syrischer Gnostiker," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 1970, pp. 334-51 (criticism of Drijvers, 1966, with important



clarification of Bardesanes' position within Gnosticism).

H. Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist* I, 2nd ed., Göttingen, 1954.

Idem, *The Gnostic Religion*, enlarged ed., Boston, 1963.

K. Rudolph, *Gnosis. The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, tr. and ed. by R. M. Wilson, San Francisco, 1987.

H. H. Schaeder, "Bardesanes von Edessa," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 51, 1932, pp. 21-74.

G. Vajda, "Le témoignage d'al-Māturidī sur la doctrine des Manichéens, des Daisanites et des Marcionites," *Arabica* 13, 1966, pp. 1-38, 113-28.

G. Widengren, *Mesopotamian Elements in Manichaeism (King and Saviour II)*, Uppsala Universitets Årsskrift, 1946, no. 3.

*Search terms:*

( ) bardaysan barday saan