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Journal of Early Christian Studies, Volume 20, Number 4, Winter 2012, pp.
515-541 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/earl.2012.0032>



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Bardaisan and Origen on Fate and the Power of the Stars

UTE POSSEKEL

Bardaisan of Edessa (d. 222) is one of the earliest theologians to reflect on the proper place of the heavenly bodies within a Christian cosmology. Bardaisan draws on both biblical texts and contemporary philosophical notions to argue that planets and stars are created by God and are subject to the divine commandment, yet are also endowed with a certain freedom on account of which they will be judged on the last day. Bardaisan, wishing to maintain the oneness and goodness of God against Marcionite dualism, regards the heavenly bodies as responsible for undesirable events that are beyond the control of human will or natural law. This paper compares and contrasts Bardaisan's understanding of fate and astral power with that of his younger contemporary Origen. It argues that Bardaisan's cosmology is not an isolated phenomenon at the margins of the Christian world, but is part of a larger trajectory of speculative thought within third-century Christianity.

The belief that the stars can have a powerful influence over life on earth was current in the ancient Near East, where Babylonian astrologers first began to cast horoscopes, and in the Greek world, where Ptolemy of Alexandria in the second century C.E. systematized and advanced both astronomy and astrology.¹ The extent to which astral beliefs impacted ancient society is

Earlier versions of this paper were presented at Lund University, Sweden in March 2008 and at the Providence Patristics Group in May 2010. I would like to thank Dr. Samuel Rubenson (Lund University) and Dr. Susan Harvey (Brown University) for the invitations to present, and all the participants for their comments. Part of this research was conducted during my time as Resident Research Fellow at the Pappas Patristic Institute in Brookline, MA, which I would like to thank for its generous support.

1. For general studies on ancient astrology and astronomy, see Franz Boll, Carl Bezold, and Wilhelm Gundel, *Sternglaube und Sterndeutung: Die Geschichte und das Wesen der Astrologie*, 6th ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1974); S. J. Tester, *A History of Western Astrology* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1987); Tamsyn Barton, *Ancient Astrology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994); Wilhelm Gundel, "Astrologie," *RAC* 1 (1950), 817–25; H. Gundel, "Planeten," *RE* 20.2 (1950),

illustrated, for example, by the prevalence of zodiacal symbolism in religious art and cultus. Pagan temples as well as Jewish synagogues in the Near East incorporated the circle of the zodiac into their iconographic program, and astral phenomena were the organizing principle of the popular cult of Mithraism.² The philosophers and theologians of antiquity had to come to terms with the pervasiveness of astral beliefs and needed to articulate their positions on the relation between astral power, fate, and free will. While Christian thinkers generally rejected astral determinism,³ some Christians incorporated astrological concepts into their theologies.⁴

2017–185; David Pingree, “Astrologie.II.1,” *TRE* 4 (1979), 281–88; W. Hübner, “Astrologie,” *Der neue Pauly* 2 (1997), 123–26; Kocku von Stuckrad, *Geschichte der Astrologie: Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (München: Beck, 2003); David Pingree, “Astronomy and Astrology in India and Iran,” *Isis* 54 (1963): 229–46.

2. Günther Stemberger, “Die Bedeutung des Tierkreises auf Mosaikfußböden spätantiker Synagogen,” in *Studien zum rabbinischen Judentum*, ed. Günther Stemberger (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1990), 177–228, but originally published in *Kairos* 17 (1975): 23–56. The Temple of Bel in Palmyra shows a carved relief of the signs of the zodiac. The astral dimensions of Mithraism are outlined by David Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

3. On the early Christian response to astrology, see Utto Riedinger, *Die Heilige Schrift im Kampf der griechischen Kirche gegen die Astrologie von Origenes bis Johannes von Damaskos: Studien zur Dogmengeschichte und zur Geschichte der Astrologie* (Innsbruck: Wagner, 1956); David Amand, *Fatalisme et liberté dans l'antiquité grecque: Recherches sur la survivance de l'argumentation morale antifataliste de Carnéade chez les philosophes grecs et les théologiens chrétiens des quatre premiers siècles* (Louvain: Bibliothèque de Louvain, 1945); Albrecht Dihle, “Die griechische Astrologie und ihre Gegner,” in *Antike und Abendland. Beiträge zum Verständnis der Griechen und Römer und ihres Nachlebens*, ed. W. Harms, W. von Koppenfels, H. Krasser, et al., vol. 43, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997), 90–108; Nicola Denzey, “A New Star on the Horizon: Astral Christologies and Stellar Debates in Early Christian Discourse,” in *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World*, ed. Scott Noegel, Joel Walker, and Brannon M. Wheeler, *Magic in History* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 207–21. For the Jewish response, see, e.g., Kocku von Stuckrad, *Frömmigkeit und Wissenschaft: Astrologie in Tanach, Qumran und früh-rabbinischer Literatur*, Europäische Hochschulschriften, Reihe 23 Theologie, vol. 572 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996); James H. Charlesworth, “Jewish Interest in Astrology during the Hellenistic and Roman Period,” *ANRW* II 20.2 (1987): 926–50.

4. Bishop Zeno of Verona (d. ca. 380), for example, offered a Christian interpretation of the signs of the zodiac in *Tractate* 1.38. See W. Hübner, “Das Horoskop der Christen (Zeno 1,38L.),” *VC* 29 (1975): 120–37, and *Zodiacus Christianus: Jüdisch-christliche Adaptionen des Tierkreises von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, *Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie* 144 (Königstein: Verlag Anton Hain, 1983). The fourth-century Latin apologist Firmicus Maternus wrote an astrological treatise, the *Mathesis*, which may have been composed prior to his conversion. The Priscillianists, a sect prominent in fifth- and sixth-century Spain, maintained that different human body parts

In the early third century, Bardaisan of Edessa (d. 222) was among the first Christian theologians who attempted to define the proper place of the stars within their cosmologies. Bardaisan concedes to the stars a certain influence over life on earth, and he later came to be criticized severely for his position. Bardaisan's prior involvement with astrology and his situation in a milieu rich in astral cults might suggest his was a fairly isolated attempt within the early Christian intellectual tradition to reconcile astral beliefs with Christian faith. However, as this article demonstrates, there are substantial similarities between Bardaisan's and Origen's beliefs concerning astral power, which support a different interpretation. Both authors regard the heavenly bodies, which they situate within a larger cosmological framework, as rational beings endowed with free will, who will in the end be judged based on the use they made of their freedom. Although flourishing in different geographical locations, Bardaisan and Origen pursued similar theological goals in their discussions of astral power. Both attempted to refute astral determinism and to uphold human freedom. Both worked within an intellectual milieu shaped by Middle Platonism. Finally, both of them based their views on biblical texts, sometimes on the very same passages. This paper will argue that Bardaisan should not be seen as an outsider on the margins of the Christian *oikoumenē*, but rather as part of a larger phenomenon in early Christian discourse. The late second and early third centuries saw a broad flourishing of speculative theology that reflected critically on the extent to which heavenly bodies impact life on earth. Bardaisan is best understood in the context of this tendency, of which Origen is the most prominent representative.

BARDAISAN

Life and Works

Bardaisan, about a generation older than Origen and less well known than the Alexandrian exegete, deserves a brief introduction. Syriac chronicles inform us that he lived from 154 to 222 C.E.,⁵ and since his name is derived

were ruled by the signs of the zodiac, a belief for which the sect was condemned at the Council of Braga in 561. See J. Fontaine, "Priscillian/Priscillianismus," *TRE* 27 (1997), 449–54, esp. 453; Henry Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila: The Occult and the Charismatic in the Early Church* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 191–201; Sylvain J. G. Sanchez, *Priscillien, un chrétien non conformiste: Doctrine et pratique du Priscillianisme du IVe au VIe siècle* (Paris: Beauchesne, 2009), 217–39.

5. The date of Bardaisan's birth is given in the *Chronicle of Edessa* (ed. I. Guidi, *Chronica minora*, CSCO 1, Syr. 1, repr. [Louvain: Peeters, 1960], 3:24–25); the date of his death is recorded by Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 6.6 (ed. J.-B. Chabot, *Chronique*

from the river Daisan that flows through Edessa, we can deduce that he was a native of this city.⁶ Later biographical sketches contain little historical information, so that our knowledge of Bardaisan's intellectual and religious background is sketchy, dependent upon what we can cull from the few remaining fragments of his writings. Some of the Greek patristic authors who refer to him consider him a convert from Valentinianism, but others maintain he joined this Gnostic sect later in his life.⁷ Bardaisan himself, however, remarks in the *Book of the Laws of the Countries* that he used to be an astrologer, and his writings reveal familiarity with astrological beliefs when he refutes at length the teachings of the so-called "Chaldeans."⁸ For an understanding of Bardaisan's thought, it is paramount to take into full consideration not only his past as an adherent of astrology, but also his scientific knowledge of astronomy, which was still appreciated centuries later by Syriac intellectuals such as Severus Sebokht, the seventh-century bishop of Kenneshrin, and George, the eighth-century bishop of the Arabs.⁹

de Michel le Syrien, 4 vols., repr. [Brussels: Culture et Civilisation, 1963], 4:111b,23–24 [text], 1:185 [trans.]; cf. Bar Hebraeus, *Chronicon ecclesiasticum* (ed. J. B. Abbeloos and T. J. Lamy, *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon ecclesiasticum*, 3 vols. [Louvain: Peeters, 1872–77], 1:47).

6. Later biographical sketches record that his parents fled from Persia and make him an apprentice of a pagan priest in Hierapolis; other late sources also claim that, when Bardaisan was sent on an errand to Edessa, he was enticed to convert to Christianity by the local bishop's preaching. How much of this story is true is difficult to assess. See Agapius of Mabbug, *Kitab al 'unwan* (ed. A. Vasiliev, *Kitab al-'Unwan: Histoire universelle écrite par Agapius (Mahboug) de Menbidj*, PO 7.4 [1908], 518–21); Michael the Syrian, *Chron.* 6.6 (Chabot 4:109c–110a); Bar Hebraeus, *Chron. eccl.* 1.10 (Abbeloos and Lamy 1:47).

7. Eusebius claims Bardaisan converted to mainline Christianity from Valentinianism in *H. e.* 4.30.3. See also Theodore bar Konai (9c.), *Liber scholiorum* 2 (ed. Addai Scher, *Theodorus bar Kōnī, Liber scholiorum*, CSCO 69, Syr. 26, repr. [Louvain: Peeters, 1954], 307). Epiphanius, *Panarion* 56.2.1 (ed. Karl Holl, *Epiphanius (Ancoratus und Panarion)*, vol. 2, GCS [Leipzig: Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1922], 340), 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.

8. This refutation occupies the second half of the *Book of the Laws of Countries*, in which Bardaisan enumerates and rejects many astrological doctrines. Editions are listed below in n. 19.

9. Severus Sebokht, *Letter to the Priest Basilus* (ed. François Nau, "Notes d'astronomie syrienne," *Journal Asiatique*, 10th series, vol. 16 [1910]: 209–28). The relevant texts by George the Bishop of the Arabs are edited with a German translation in Victor Ryssel, "Die astronomischen Briefe Georgs des Araberbischofs," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 8 (1893): 1–55; the relevant section is also edited by François Nau, *Bardesanes, Liber Legum Regionum*, *Patrologia Syriaca* 1.2, repr. (Paris: Didot, 1993), 612–15. See also Edgar Reich, "Ein Brief des Severus Sēbōkt," in *Sic itur ad astra*.

If Bardaisan's intellectual and religious background is somewhat difficult to determine, his social position is not. He flourished at the court of King Abgar VIII (177–212), where Julius Africanus encountered him among the king's nobles during a visit to Edessa. Africanus did not comment on Bardaisan's philosophical or theological contributions, but he did take note of his remarkable skill as an archer, high social status, and ability to entertain guests.¹⁰ Furthermore, Bardaisan was an accomplished musician who composed *madrashé*, poems set to music. Apparently, Bardaisan was one of the first Syriac authors who developed this particular musical genre.¹¹ His later adversary Ephrem—whose own production of

Studien zur Geschichte der Mathematik und Naturwissenschaften: Festschrift für den Arabisten Paul Kunitzsch zum 70. Geburtstag, ed. Menso Folkers and Richard Lorch (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000), 478–89; Gerrit J. Reinink, “Severus Sebokts Brief an den Periodeutes Johan. Einige Fragen zur aristotelischen Logik,” in *III Symposium Syriacum: Les contacts du monde syriaque avec les autres cultures: Goslar 7–11 Septembre 1980*, ed. René Lavenant, OCA 221 (Rome: PISO, 1983), 97–107. A short Syriac text that lists the names of the signs of the zodiac according to the Bardaisanites has also come down to us, and is edited by Eduard Sachau, *Inedita syriaca: Eine Sammlung syrischer Übersetzungen von Schriften griechischer Profanliteratur. Mit einem Anhang. Aus den Handschriften des Britischen Museums herausgegeben*, repr. (Hildesheim: Olms, 1968), 126. On Bardaisan's knowledge of astrology and astronomy, cf. Albrecht Dihle, “Astrology in the Doctrine of Bardesanes,” in *Papers Presented to the Tenth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford, 1987*, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone, Studia Patristica 20 (Louvain: Peeters, 1989), 160–68; Albrecht Dihle, “Zur Schicksalslehre des Bardesanes,” in *Kerygma und Logos: Beiträge zu den geistesgeschichtlichen Beziehungen zwischen Antike und Christentum. Festschrift für Carl Andresen zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Adolf Martin Ritter (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 123–35; Amand, *Fatalisme et liberté*, 228–57; F. S. Jones, “The Astrological Trajectory in Ancient Syriac-Speaking Christianity (Elchasai, Bardaisan, and Mani),” in *Atti del Terzo Congresso Internazionale di Studi “Manicheismo e Oriente Cristiano Antico.” Arcavacata di Rende—Amantea. 31 agosto–5 settembre 1993*, ed. Luigi Cirillo and Alois van Tongerloo, Manichaean Studies 3 (Louvain: Brepols, 1997), 183–200; Paul-Hubert Poirier, “Deux doxographies sur le destin et le gouvernement du monde. *Le Livre des lois des pays et Eugnoste* (NH III,3 et V,1),” in *Coptica—Gnostica—Manichaica: Melanges offerts a Wolf-Peter Funk*, ed. Louis Painchaud and Paul-Hubert Poirier, Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, Section “Etudes” 7 (Louvain: Peeters, 2006), 761–86.

10. Julius Africanus, *Kestoi* 1.20.28–53, (ed. with French tr. Jean René Viellefond, *Les “Cestes” de Julius Africanus* [Paris: Didier, 1070], 182–85). On Africanus's visit to Edessa, see William Adler, “Sextus Julius Africanus and the Roman Near East in the Third Century,” *JTS* n.s. 55 (2004): 530–39. On the *Kestoi*, see the essays in *Die Kestoi des Julius Africanus und ihre Überlieferung*, ed. Martin Wallraff and Laura Mecella, TU 165 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009).

11. Cf. Kathleen E. McVey, “Were the Earliest *Madrashé* Songs or Recitations?” in *After Bardaisan: Studies on Continuity and Change in Syriac Christianity in Honour of Professor Han J. W. Drijvers*, ed. G. J. Reinink and A. C. Klugkist, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 89 (Louvain: Peeters, 1999), 185–98.

madrashē was intended to counter the popularity of Bardaisan's chants— noted with dismay that Bardaisan, like David, had composed 150 hymns, but lamented that, unlike David, Bardaisan had not stayed on the path of truth.¹² Bardaisan was a polymath, a talented and capable man who incorporated the many aspects of his secular learning into his theology.

In Bardaisan's time, Edessa was still an independent kingdom, located between the superpowers Rome and Parthia.¹³ Roman influence in the region was on the rise, but the clever policy of King Abgar VIII allowed Edessa to retain its political independence while at the same time becoming a city friendly to Rome.¹⁴ In this age, Edessan culture flourished, as is evident from the dozen or so beautiful mosaics that have come down to us, most of them originating from funerary settings. They show that Edessan society drew on Roman as well as Parthian culture, yet was able to produce unique works of art that gave expression to the local cultural identity.¹⁵ With regard to religion, Edessa was home to both a Jewish and a Christian community. Pagan cults, however, continued to flourish throughout late antiquity: the great pagan altar still stood in the city's center in the fourth century.¹⁶ For the subject under discussion, it is important to note that a

12. Ephrem, *Hymns against Heresies* (= CH) 53.5–6, 54.1 (ed. and trans. Edmund Beck, *Ephraem des Syrsers Hymnen Contra Haereses*, CSCO 169–70, Syr. 76–77 [Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1957]).

13. Edessa's political history in the time of Bardaisan is outlined by J. B. Segal, *Edessa "The Blessed City"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970; repr. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2001); Steven K. Ross, *Roman Edessa: Politics and Culture on the Eastern Fringes of the Roman Empire, 114–242 CE* (London: Routledge, 2001).

14. Abgar's father, King Ma'nu, minted coins on which he identified himself as Βασιλεὺς Μαννός φιλορῶμαιος; see George Francis Hill, *Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Arabia, Mesopotamia, and Persia*, A Catalogue of Greek Coins in the British Museum 28 (Bologna: Arnaldo Forni, 1965), 92–93 (hereafter cited as *BMC Arabia*). Relations between Rome and its client kings are described in David Braund, *Rome and the Friendly King: The Character of Client Kingship* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984).

15. The artistic accomplishment of Edessan society in the early third century has recently been emphasized by Janine Balty and Françoise Briquel Chatonnet, "Nouvelles mosaïques inscrites d'Osrhoène," *Fondation Eugène Piot: Monuments et mémoires publiés par l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 79 (2000): 31–72. See also Jutta Rumscheid, "Familienbilder im Haus der Ewigkeit. Zu Grabmosaiken aus Edessa," in *Edessa in hellenistisch-römischer Zeit: Religion, Kultur und Politik zwischen Ost und West. Beiträge des internationalen Edessa-Symposiums in Halle an der Saale, 14.–17. Juli 2005*, ed. Lutz Greisiger, Claudia Rammelt, and Jürgen Tubach (Beirut: Ergon, 2009), 255–65, 372–74 (Pl. 2–4).

16. On Edessa's religious traditions, see Segal, *Edessa*; H. J. W. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa*, *Etudes préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain* 82 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980). The great altar is mentioned in the *Doctrina Addai* (ed. George Howard, *The Teaching of Addai*, Texts and Translations 16, Early

number of astral cults flourished in Edessa and its vicinity. Sin, the moon god, was venerated, as was the sun. In nearby Sumatar-Harabesi, archaeological remains of an astral cultic site have been recovered.¹⁷

Of Bardaisan's writings—which include dialogues against Marcionites and “other heretics,” a treatise *On Fate*, a book *To Domnus*, hymns, a book on India, and a *Book of Mysteries*—none has survived in its entirety, since at some point after his death Bardaisan was denounced as a heretic.¹⁸ Our knowledge of his thought thus depends largely on the one continuous piece of literature from his school, the *Book of the Laws of the Countries*, a dialogue written in Syriac by Bardaisan's disciple Philip, in which Bardaisan is the main interlocutor. It dates probably from the early third century, the time shortly after Bardaisan's death.¹⁹ Further information on

Christian Literature Series 4 [Ann Arbor, MI: Scholars Press, 1981], 52); see also the *Acts of Sharbil* (ed. W. Cureton, *Ancient Syriac Documents Relative to the Earliest Establishment of Christianity in Edessa and the Neighbouring Countries* [London: Williams and Norgate, 1864], 45,23 [text], 45 [trans.]). It is probably this monument that is depicted on Edessan coins from the second century, cf. Hill, *BMC Arabia*, 91–92 (Pl. XIII.7–8).

17. J. B. Segal, “Pagan Syriac Monuments in the Vilayet of Urfa,” *Anatolian Studies* 3 (1953): 97–119.

18. The anti-Marcionite writings and those against unidentified heretics are mentioned by Eusebius, *H. e.* 4.30, as is the treatise against fate, quoted by Eusebius, *P. e.* 6.10. Our source for the treatise on India is Porphyry, *De abst.* 4.17 and *De Styge* (= Stobaeus, *Flor.* 1.3.56), in which he quotes excerpts. These texts are edited and interpreted in Franz Winter, *Bardesanes von Edessa über Indien: Ein früher syrischer Theologe schreibt über ein fremdes Land* (Thaur: Druck- und Verlagshaus Thaur, 1999). Ephrem testifies to the other titles mentioned in his *CH* and *Prose Refutations* (ed. and trans. 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, 1912–21]; = *PR*). See *PR* (ed. Mitchell et al. 1:1, 6) for “Book of Domnus” (ܡܘܨܬܘܢܐ ܕܕܘܡܢܘܨ), *CH* 56.9 (ed. Beck) for “Book of Mysteries” (ܟܬܒܐ ܕܡܝܫܬܝܪܝܘܬܐ), and *CH* 54.5–6, 54.1 (ed. Beck) for hymns.

19. Ed. and trans. H. J. W. Drijvers, *The Book of the Laws of Countries: Dialogue on Fate of Bardaisan of Edessa* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1965); also ed. François Nau, *PS* 1.2 (1907; reprint 1993). Hereafter cited as *BLC* from the Drijvers edition. The *BLC* is usually dated to the early third century, since scholars accept it as a work of one of Bardaisan's immediate disciples, e.g., H. J. W. Drijvers, *Bardaisan of Edessa*, *Studia Semitica Neerlandica* 6 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1966), esp. 67, 72, 75; Javier Teixidor, *Bardesane d'Edesse: La première philosophie syriaque*, *Patrimoines christianisme* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1992), 86. This dating is confirmed by the *BLC* being cited in the pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones* 9.17.19–29 (ed. Bernhard Rehm and Georg Strecker, *Die Pseudokomentinen II. Rekognitionen in Rufins Übersetzung*, 2nd rev. ed., GCS [Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994], 270–317). Cf. Bernhard Rehm, “Bardesanes in den Pseudoclementinen,” *Philologus* 93 (1938): 219–47; F. S. Jones, “The Pseudo-Clementines: A History of Research,” *Second Century* 2 (1982): 1–33, 63–96; A. Schneider and L. Cirillo, *Les Reconnaissances du pseudo-Clément: Traduction, introduction, et notes* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999).

his teachings can be derived from fragments cited in the writings of his opponents and from short summaries of his teachings in the heresiological literature. Besides the *Book of the Laws* our richest source on Bardaisan are the various refutations by Ephrem, the famous fourth-century poet-theologian of the Syriac church.²⁰ In addition, we have references to Bardaisan in Greek and Latin writings,²¹ many of which favorably mention his defense of free will against astral determinism. There are also a substantial number of Syriac and Arabic heresiological summaries of Bardaisan's teachings, dating from the sixth century onwards; these are primarily concerned with Bardaisan's cosmology, which became particularly objectionable to the later normative church.²² Before we turn to Bardaisan's understanding of planetary powers, a few methodological remarks are in order.

Methodological Considerations

A reconstruction of Bardaisan's thought is complicated by the fragmentary and contradictory nature of the sources. It is therefore necessary to establish a methodological framework within which the sources can be interpreted, so that the guiding principle of his theology can be discerned. A careful reading of all the available sources reveals that two major apologetic concerns underlie his thought: first, his intention to refute the Marcionites who were prominent in second-century Edessa, and second, his

20. Ephrem's counterarguments—although they must be interpreted with care—allow us glimpses into Bardaisan's thought. The works most relevant in this regard are the *CH* and *PR*, the latter of which are—to make things even more complicated—preserved only as the underwriting of a palimpsest, and therefore *lacunae* remain in many decisive passages.

21. E.g., in the writings of Julius Africanus, Hippolytus, the Ps.-Clementines, Eusebius, Jerome, the *Adamantius Dialogue*, Epiphanius, and the *Life of Abercius*.

22. These sources on Bardaisan include Philoxenus (sixth century), Barhadbešabba 'Arbaia (sixth century, head of the school of Nisibis), Theodore bar Konai (late eighth century), Moses bar Kepha (d. 903), John of Dara (ninth century), Theodore Abu Qurra (born in Edessa and later bishop of Harran, d. ca. 825), al-Jahiz (d. 869), and Ibn al-Nadim's *Fihrist*. The statements on Bardaisan are summarized by Drijvers, *Bardaisan of Edessa*; Ilaria Ramelli, *Bardaisan of Edessa: A Reassessment of the Evidence and a New Interpretation* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009). On the Arabic authors, see Wilferd Madelung, "Abū 'Isā al-Warrāq über die Bardesaniten, Marcioniten und Kantäer," in *Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des Vorderen Orients. Festschrift für Berthold Spuler zum siebenzigsten Geburtstag*, ed. Hans R. Roemer and Albrecht Noth (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 210–24; G. Vajda, "Le témoignage de al-Māturidī sur la doctrine des Manichéens, des Daišānites et des Marcionites," *Arabica* 13 (1966): 1–38; Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, 6 vols. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990–95), 1:426–30.

desire to distance himself as a Christian from the astral determinism, so widespread in antiquity, which he himself formerly had embraced.

Bardaisan's stance against the teachings of Marcion, who distinguished between the creator God of whom the Hebrew Bible speaks and the good God who sent Jesus, is extremely well testified by almost all of the sources, be they Greek accounts of his teachings, the *Book of the Laws*, Ephrem, or other treatises in which Bardaisanites make an appearance such as the *Adamantius Dialogue* or the *Life of Abercius*.²³ This surprising agreement among the rather disparate sources provides us with an important hermeneutical insight regarding Bardaisan's thought: clearly, he wished to refute Marcionite concepts. Bardaisan's rejection of Marcionism excludes the possibility that Bardaisan himself held a dualist theology, as some of the ancient sources claim.²⁴

Theology of Creation

A proper understanding of Bardaisan's view of planetary power necessitates a brief discussion of his theology of creation.²⁵ In the *Book of the Laws*, he stresses repeatedly that God created the world and humankind, and that God's creation is good, an emphasis obviously directed against the Marcionites. In the dialogue, the question of a certain Awida, a man who only recently joined the group of disciples, introduces the topic. Awida, apparently puzzled about the group's beliefs, inquires, "If God is one, as you [pl.] are saying, and (God) constituted humankind, and desires by this that what you are charged you should do, why did (God) not constitute human beings such that they are not able to go astray, but

23. Adamantius, *De recta in Deum fide* (ed. W. H. van de Sande Bakhuyzen, *Der Dialog des Adamantius*, GCS 4 [Leipzig: Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1901]; trans. Robert A. Pretty, *Adamantius: Dialogue on the True Faith in God, De Recta in Deum Fide* [Louvain: Peeters, 1997]). *Life of Abercius* 69–70 (ed. Theodor Nissen, *S. Abercii Vita* [Leipzig: Teubner, 1912], 48, 17–50, 8). On the date of the *vita*, see David Bundy, "The Life of Abercius: Its Significance for Early Syriac Christianity," *Second Century* 7 (1989–90): 163–76.

24. This point will be further developed in my forthcoming monograph on Bardaisan.

25. Bardaisan's cosmology is discussed in Drijvers, *Bardaisan of Edessa*; Taeke Jansma, "La notice de Barhadbešabba 'Arbaia sur l'hérésie des Daišanites," in *Mémorial Mgr Gabriel Khouri-Sarkis (1898–1968)* (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1969), 91–106; Alberto Camplani, "Note bardesanitiche," *Miscellanea Marciana* 12 (1997): 11–43; Alberto Camplani, "Rivisitando Bardesane: Note sulle fonti siriane del bardesanism e sulla sua collocazione storico-religiosa," *Cristianesimo nella storia* 19 (1998): 519–96; J. M. F. van Reeth, "La cosmologie de Bardaysan," *Parole de l'Orient* 31 (2006): 133–44; Ute Possekkel, "Die Schöpfungstheologie des Bardaisan von Edessa," in *Edessa in hellenistisch-römischer Zeit*, ed. Greisiger, Rammelt, and Tubach, 219–29.

are always doing good? For by this his will would be fulfilled.”²⁶ In the course of the conversation it becomes clear that Bardaisan believes God created the entire world, angels and humans, sun and moon, the stars, the water and the wind.²⁷ Yet God, Bardaisan explains, did not wish to create all things as equal, but destined some things to serve. “For if everything were serving entirely, who is being served? But if everything were entirely being served, who serves? And nothing would be distinct from anything (else).”²⁸ In the background of this passage stands the Genesis account of creation, according to which God designed the heavenly bodies to rule over day and night (Gen 1.17) and commanded humankind to rule over the earth (Gen 1.26, 28). Bardaisan’s claim that there is a certain stratification and hierarchical structure within creation thus has a biblical basis.²⁹

One can also note in passing that Bardaisan is here in agreement with the Stoic view that the world exists to serve humankind. Epictetus in his discourses stresses that animals exist not for their own sake, but in order to serve humankind.³⁰ Similarly, Cicero asks in his treatise *De natura deorum* for whose sake the world was created and answers “that all the things in this world which human beings employ have been created and provided for the sake of human beings.”³¹ In particular, Cicero affirms that sun, moon, and the other heavenly bodies have been created so that humankind should be able to behold their beauty and to determine the times and seasons.³² In the second century, Celsus maintains that everything was made for the irrational animals as well as for humankind, a view that Origen will reject in his *Contra Celsum*.³³

The Freedom of Human Beings

Regarding human beings, Bardaisan makes it clear to Awida that if people could only do good, this would have been completely against God’s plan of creation, for God desired people not to be like mere instruments, like

26. *BLC* (ed. Drijvers, 4).

27. *BLC* (ed. Drijvers, 10–12).

28. *BLC* (ed. Drijvers, 12). See Bardaisan’s explanations on the hierarchical structure of the cosmos in *BLC* (ed. Drijvers, 28–30).

29. Middle Platonist philosophers also regarded the world order as hierarchically structured; see Dihle, “Astrology,” 163.

30. Epictetus, *Discourses* 2.8.6–8, 2.10.1–3.

31. Cicero, *De natura deorum* 2.154 (ed. and trans. H. Rackham, *Cicero, De natura deorum. Academica*, LCL [London: Heinemann, 1951], 270; translation modified). See also Cicero, *De natura deorum*, 2.37, 2.133, 2.154–62.

32. Cicero, *De natura deorum* 2.155.

33. Origen, *Cels.* 4.74.

a cither played by a musician or a chariot driven by another person. As free beings, people can make ethical choices and can thereby either earn the heavenly reward, or not earn it.

And it was given to (the human being) that he should lead his life according to his own will, and that everything he is able to do, if he so wishes, that he might do it, and if he does not wish (to do it), that he would not do it, and that he might justify himself or become guilty. For if he were made such that he could not do evil, so that he would not become guilty by it, then also the good which he is doing would not be his own, and he would not be able to justify (himself) by it.³⁴

Quoting Gen 1.27, Bardaisan notes that humanity is created in the *imago Dei* (ܐܘܡܢܘܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ)—it is remarkable that he here uses the Hebrew term for God, *'elohim*, rather than the Syriac term *'allaha* that occurs in the Peshitta version³⁵—and he affirms that human beings are set over creation.³⁶ By giving them freedom, God made the human beings “greater than many things and equal to the angels,”³⁷ an idea that has parallels in the rabbinic literature of the age.³⁸ This somewhat surprising equality of angels and humans is intended to indicate that both angels and humans have freedom over themselves. Bardaisan explains a little later on in the dialogue that God endowed people with free will in order to give them the opportunity to “justify themselves” by keeping the divine commandments. This, he explains, shows the great kindness of the creator towards humankind: “Because of this it should be evident to you [pl.] that God’s grace towards the human person is immense, and more freedom was given to him than to all those elements (*'estokse*) of which we spoke, so that through freedom he might justify himself and lead his life divinely, and should have company with the angels, who also possess freedom over themselves (ܐܘܡܢܘܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ).”³⁹

Bardaisan maintains that human beings are charged to follow the divine

34. *BLC* (ed. Drijvers, 12).

35. We do not know what biblical version Bardaisan may have used. On the Syriac versions, see Sebastian Brock, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*, Gorgias Handbooks 7 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006). Bardaisan’s employment of the Hebrew term *'elohim* suggests that he may have been in conversation with Jewish or Jewish-Christian groups.

36. *BLC* (ed. Drijvers, 12).

37. *BLC* (ed. Drijvers, 10).

38. *BLC* (ed. Drijvers, 10). For Jewish discussions of the question in what ways humans resemble angels, see the statements of *Midrash Genesis Rabbah* 8.11, which are repeated at *Gen. Rab.* 14.3.

39. *BLC* (ed. Drijvers, 12–14).

commandment—which he sums up in the Golden Rule⁴⁰—and that in fact it is easy for people to do so. Drawing on ideas regarding the discernment of spirits, which were popular in ancient philosophy and are also found in Origen’s writings,⁴¹ he argues that doing good comes naturally to humankind because it evokes feelings of joy and peace, whereas evil deeds give rise to emotions of sadness, confusion, and anger.⁴² Awida, the interlocutor, challenges Bardaisan’s view and asserts that doing good is not natural for humankind.⁴³ Moreover, Awida even holds that people go astray *because* of nature,⁴⁴ an opinion that Bardaisan vehemently rejects in a long discourse on the relation of nature, human freedom, and fate.

The Angels and Planetary Powers

In the surviving works, Bardaisan only occasionally refers to the angels. Like human beings, angels have freedom, as he illustrates with an allusion to Genesis 6: “For we understand that unless the angels possessed freedom over themselves, they would not have associated with the daughters of men and would not have sinned, and would not have fallen from their places. And likewise, therefore, other ones who did the will of their Lord were lifted up by their own power, and were made holy and received great gifts.”⁴⁵ The angels, just like human beings, are either rewarded for or suffer negative consequences from their ethical choices.⁴⁶

Whereas human beings and angels were endowed with freedom over themselves, other entities were not. In order to illustrate the point, Bar-

40. *BLC* (ed. Drijvers, 14–16). On the Golden Rule in antiquity, see Albrecht Dihle, *Die goldene Regel: Eine Einführung in die Geschichte der antiken und frühchristlichen Vulgärethik*, Studienhefte zur Altertumswissenschaft 7 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962).

41. Pierre Hadot and Arnold I. Davidson, *Philosophy as a Way of Life. Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2002).

42. *BLC* (ed. Drijvers, 18–20).

43. *BLC* (ed. Drijvers, 18).

44. *BLC* (ed. Drijvers, 20).

45. *BLC* (ed. Drijvers, 14). On the exegesis of Genesis 6, see Loren T. Stuckenbruck, “The Origins of Evil in Jewish Apocalyptic Tradition: The Interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4 in the Second and Third Centuries B.C.E.,” in *The Fall of the Angels*, ed. Christoph Auffarth and Loren T. Stuckenbruck, Themes in Biblical Narrative: Jewish and Christian Traditions 6 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 87–118. On the theology of angels in Jewish literature, see Peter Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen: Untersuchungen zur rabbinischen Engelvorstellung*, Studia Judaica 8 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1975); Michael Mach, *Entwicklungsstadien des jüdischen Engelglaubens in vorrabbinischer Zeit*, Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 34 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1992).

46. Angels are also mentioned in *BLC* (ed. Drijvers, 28).

daisan lists various planetary and elemental powers and shows that these do not possess the same kind of freedom.

For look [pl.] at the sun and at the moon and at the zodiac circle and at the rest of things: they are mightier than we in some way, but they were not given freedom over themselves, but all of them were set up with a commandment, so that they only may do the thing that they were commanded, and nothing else. For the sun, from everlasting, has not said, “I will not rise at my time,” nor the moon, “I will not change and will neither wane nor wax,” nor has one of the stars said, “I will not rise and will not set,” nor the water, “I will not carry the ships and will not stay within my boundaries,” nor the mountains, “We will not remain in the places onto which we were put,” nor have the winds said, “We will not blow,” nor the earth, “I will not carry and bear everything that is on me.” But all things are laboring and subjected to one commandment. For they are instruments of the wisdom of God, which does not err.⁴⁷

A number of observations can be made. First, most of the entities listed here (sun, moon, stars, sea, winds, earth) occur in the creation account of Genesis; this shows that Bardaisan’s cosmology was—to a certain extent—based on an exegesis of the beginning chapters of Genesis. A second noteworthy point in this passage is his comment that the planetary powers (sun, moon, zodiac) are “mightier than we in some way” (ܣܘܠܐ ܕܗܘܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܝܢܐ ܕܡܢ ܗܡܝܢ), yet they are subservient to the divine commandment and do not have freedom over themselves; they cannot move as they wish. Yet the planets are powerful entities, able to exert influence over human life. For example, as Bardaisan notes elsewhere in the dialogue, the planetary powers impact the human soul as it descends through the heavenly spheres.⁴⁸ The idea of the soul’s descent was quite widespread among late antique philosophers and, Jerome claims, embraced also by Origen.⁴⁹

Next in the narrative comes a somewhat surprising turn, for Bardaisan maintains that also the planetary and elemental powers, although they are

47. *BLC* (ed. Drijvers, 10–12).

48. *BLC* (ed. Drijvers, 32); cf. Ephrem, *CH* 53.4. The descent of soul is discussed already by Plato, *Tim.* 41d–42e, and was much debated in Middle Platonist circles. Various views on the subject are summarized by Iamblichus, *De anima* (ed. Heinrich Dörrie, *Der Platonismus in der Antike*, vol. 6.2 [Stuttgart: Frommann, 2002], 16–26). See also John Dillon, “The Descent of the Soul in Middle Platonic and Gnostic Theory,” in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale, New Haven, Connecticut, March 28–31, 1978*, Vol. 1: *The School of Valentinus*, ed. Bentley Layton (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 357–64.

49. Jerome ascribes this view to Origen in *Contra Iohannem Hierosolymitanum* 16 (PL 23:384B [= *Princ.* 1.4.1 in *Origenes Werke V. De principiis*, ed. Paul Koetschau, GCS (Leipzig: Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1913), 64]).

subjected to a commandment, are not completely deprived of all freedom and will be judged on the last day.⁵⁰ Philip, the redactor of the dialogue, inquires, reasoning quite logically, how things that are fixed could be judged,⁵¹ upon which Bardaisan clarifies:

The elemental powers (*'estokse*) are not being judged in that in which they are fixed, oh Philip, but in that in which they are given power. For the elements (*'itye*) were not deprived of their natures when they were formed, but they decreased in the energy of their essential quality in the conjunction of one with the other, and they were subjected to the power of their maker. And they are not being judged in what (aspects) they are subjected, but in the thing that is their own.⁵²

Without going into further details of Bardaisan's cosmogony, we can note that this passage illustrates his view that the planets and other elements have been created from some kind of primordial substance and have lost some, but not all, of their initial energy.⁵³ Matter thus is thought of as having an inherent spiritual quality, which during the process of creation was changed. The planets are on the one hand subject to the divine commandment, on the other hand they have a certain freedom on account of which they ultimately will be judged. And although Bardaisan—unlike his younger contemporary Origen—does not explicitly say that the planets are rational creatures, this does appear to be the logical conclusion.

Nature, Freedom, and Fate

What power, then, have the heavenly bodies according to Bardaisan? He argues that nature, freedom, and fate each have their largely separate spheres of influence, but do overlap to a certain extent. Nature, for which

50. *BLC* (ed. Drijvers, 14).

51. *BLC* (ed. Drijvers, 14).

52. *BLC* (ed. Drijvers, 14). Bardaisan calls the preexisting elements "beings" (*'itye*), a term which by the fourth century came to be used exclusively in the singular to designate God; hence Ephrem objects strongly not only to Bardaisan's creation theology, but also to his terminology.

53. It should be stressed that Bardaisan's conviction that the world is created from preexisting substances is not unique among second-century theologians, cf. Justin, *1 Apol.* 10.2, 59.5; Athenagoras, *Legatio* 10.1 (cf. 10.2). Hermogenes' theology of creation quite resembles that of Bardaisan; see Possekkel, "Schöpfungstheologie." On Hermogenes, see Katharina Greschat, *Apelles und Hermogenes: Zwei theologische Lehrer des zweiten Jahrhunderts*, *Vigiliae Christianae Supplements* 48 (Leiden: Brill, 2000). On the development of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, see Gerhard May, *Creatio ex nihilo: The Doctrine of "Creation out of Nothing" in Early Christian Thought*, trans. A. S. Worrall (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994). Literature on Bardaisan's cosmogony is listed above in n. 25.

he repeatedly uses the Greek word *physis* rather than the Syriac *kyana*, governs processes like being born, growing up, getting old and dying; eating, sleeping, drinking, and having children. *Physis* is, for Bardaisan, a force that, much like the stars, follows a commandment.⁵⁴ *Physis* also governs what we might call the instinctive behavior of animals.⁵⁵ Regarding human beings, however, nature only rules over those bodily processes just mentioned, whereas human freedom controls ethical choices, including diet, doing good, living a moral life, or yielding to evil and the passions.⁵⁶

But, the disciples interrupt, can behavior not also be determined by fate, as the Chaldeans say? Bardaisan rejects this view firmly and upholds the freedom of all human action. Nonetheless, he does concede some power to the stars, maintaining that different entities in the cosmos have various degrees of power, all according to how God, who alone is omnipotent, arranged the universe. Against astrological determinism, Bardaisan states that

there is a power for God and for the angels and for the rulers [i.e. the planets] and for the courses and for the elements (*'estokse*) and for people and for animals. And all of these classes that I mentioned is not given power over everything—for it is the One who has power over everything—but they are given power over some things, and they are not given power over other things.⁵⁷

It is thus a well-ordered universe, in which angels and planets, elementary forces and people all have their own, distinctive kind of freedom. And once again, in the background of Bardaisan's belief about the power of these elements is the Genesis account of creation (Gen 1.17, 28).

The planetary forces, according to Bardaisan, are responsible for those events and circumstances that are neither controlled by *physis* nor desired by human free will. For instance, most people desire to be rich, powerful, and healthy, but only some attain these goals, whereas others do not. It is for Bardaisan out of the question to attribute the origin of negative events to a divine power, yet he also explicitly rejects the Epicurean doctrine that events occur by chance.⁵⁸ He thus concludes that the occurrence of unwanted events, such as sickness, poverty, or unruly children, is caused by fate (ܚܠܩܐ, *helqa*).⁵⁹ Fate, however, is not a power independent of

54. *BLC* (ed. Drijvers, 22).

55. *BLC* (ed. Drijvers, 22).

56. *BLC* (ed. Drijvers, 22–26).

57. *BLC* (ed. Drijvers, 28).

58. *BLC* (ed. Drijvers, 28), without explicit attribution to the Epicureans.

59. *BLC* (ed. Drijvers, 30–32).

God, but, as was noted already, one subject to the divine commandments. Bardaisan's view of fate as an entity subservient to God is thus similar to the Platonic concept that there are some areas of life control over which God has delegated to lower entities.⁶⁰ Bardaisan then sums up the impact of nature, fate, and freedom onto humankind as follows: "We human beings are found to be equally led by nature, and separately by fate, and each as he wants by our freedom."⁶¹ It is thus on account of fate, and not as divine punishment or reward that individuals attain their goals of health, wealth, and a happy family life, or fail to attain them. While Bardaisan thus concedes some power to the planets, he strictly limits their sphere of influence and maintains that the planets never can limit human freedom in ethical matters. The planetary constellations at birth do not determine a person's action, and neither do they determine the customs of people in the various regions (or *klimata*) of the earth, as he reasons at length in the second half of the *Book of the Laws*, making brilliant use of the arguments first articulated by Carneades (21/3–129/8 B.C.E.).⁶² While Bardaisan's treatment of the stars and their influence upon terrestrial affairs has unique elements, many of his ideas have parallels not only in the philosophical literature of his age, but also in the writings of Origen.⁶³

ORIGEN

At the outset, we can observe that Origen's theology emerged in a context similar to that of Bardaisan, for he too asked: How can one maintain that the world was created by a good God in the face of life's misfortunes? What is the extent of free will? Do the stars have influence over earthly affairs?⁶⁴ Both Origen and Bardaisan affirm against Marcionites and Gnos-

60. For instance, the "young gods" are entrusted with the creation of human bodies (Plato, *Tim.* 41a–47e).

61. *BLC* (ed. Drijvers, 32).

62. Carneades' arguments and their impact upon later intellectuals are discussed in Amand, *Fatalisme et liberté*. On Carneades, see Gisela Striker, "Carneades," *OCD*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 293–94; J. Barnes, "Carneades," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 2 (London: Routledge, 1998), 215–20. A detailed discussion of the doctrine of *klimata* can be found in Ernst Honigmann, *Die sieben Klimata und die ΠΟΛΕΙΣ ΕΠΙΣΗΜΟΙ: Eine Untersuchung zur Geschichte der Geographie und Astrologie im Altertum und Mittelalter* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter's Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1929).

63. For a comparison of these two authors see also Ilaria Ramelli, "Origen, Bardaisan, and the Origin of Universal Salvation," *HTR* 102 (2009): 135–68.

64. The subsequent discussion of Origen's view of astral power is indebted to Alan Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars: A History of an Idea*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

tics that there is one God, good and just, who created the world;⁶⁵ they refute positions of astral determinism current in antiquity and uphold human freedom.⁶⁶ Origen notes that, even among Christians, belief in fate is not uncommon.⁶⁷

The "Apostolic Teaching" on the Soul

Origen is well aware that in his discussion of the nature and power of the stars he is entering new territory and that ultimately any human effort to comprehend such issues remains limited. "When the saints have reached the heavenly places, then they will see clearly the nature of the stars, one by one, and will understand whether they are living creatures or whatever may be truth about them."⁶⁸ Before embarking upon this speculative discourse, he therefore lays out what he considers to be the basic Christian truths, transmitted by the apostolic teaching, regarding God the creator, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the soul. Since the nature of the soul will play an important part in his discussion of planetary powers, what he considers to be the apostolic teaching on the soul deserves attention.

Origen speaks of "souls" quite generally, without specifying which beings possess souls. Souls, he explains, are rational creatures and incorporeal, but nonetheless created.⁶⁹ The apostles taught that souls are endowed with free will and will be rewarded or punished according to their deeds.⁷⁰ The freedom of the human soul is such that no one ought to think that fate, the conjunction of the stars, could cause good or evil deeds: "We are not . . . compelled by necessity to act either rightly or wrongly, as is

65. Origen, *Princ.* 1.pref.4 (ed. Koetschau, 9): *Primo, quod unus est deus, qui omnia creavit atque composuit, quique, cum nihil esset, esse fecit universa.* The anti-Marcionite aspect also becomes clear in *Philoc.* 23.2.

66. Origen, *Princ.* 1.pref.5 (ed. Koetschau, 12): *Est et illud definitum in ecclesiastica praedicatione, omnem animam rationabilem esse liberi arbitrii et voluntatis.* On Origen's anthropology, see Christoph Marksches, *Origenes und sein Erbe: Gesammelte Studien* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), chap. 5, entitled "Gott und Mensch nach Origenes: Einige wenige Beobachtungen zu einem grossen Thema" (originally published in *Weg und Weite: Festschrift für Karl Lehmann*, ed. Albert Raffelt [Freiburg: Herder, 2001], 97–111).

67. In *Philoc.* 23.1, he draws out the philosophical and theological consequences of astral determinism: it leads to the destruction of freedom; Christ would have come in vain; God would be blamed for evil deeds of people, such as murder or piracy. In *Philoc.* 23.2, he demonstrates the pastoral dangers of fatalism, in that prayer would seem to be superfluous.

68. *Princ.* 2.11.7 (ed. Koetschau, 191; trans. G. W. Butterworth, *Origen, On First Principles* [Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973], 153).

69. *Princ.* 1.7.1 (ed. Koetschau, 86): *Omnes animae atque omnes rationabiles naturae factae sunt vel creatae.*

70. *Princ.* 1.pref.5 (ed. Koetschau, 11–12).

thought to be the case by those who say that human events are due to the course and motion of the stars, not only those events that fall outside the sphere of our freedom of will but even those that lie within our own power.”⁷¹ Like Bardaisan, Origen objects to astral determinism and draws the same distinction between matters that are subject to human free will and those that are not.

Sun, Moon, and Stars are Rational Beings

Having such laid out the basic presuppositions in the preface to *De principiis*, Origen embarks on the more speculative discourse, and in *Princ.* 1.7, he treats of the stars. But first, he reminds his audience that “all souls and all rational creatures, whether holy or wicked, were made or created. All these are incorporeal in respect of their proper nature, but though incorporeal they were nevertheless made.”⁷² He thereby excludes *a priori* the possibility that they might be considered as not subject to God. Origen’s main question is whether sun, moon, and stars ought to be considered among the rational beings. Are they, he wonders, “‘principalities’ by reason of the fact that they are said to have been made to exercise rulership, that is principality, over day and night; or whether we must suppose that they possess only that ‘rule over day and night’ which is involved in their office of giving light and are not princes belonging to the order and office of the ‘principalities.’”⁷³ The question thus is, are sun, moon, and stars “principalities”? That is, do they belong to the same class of celestial beings as do the angels? Origen will argue, both by speculative reasoning and by reference to Scripture, that sun, moon, and stars are free, rational creatures just like the angels. Consequently, he must oppose the view, apparently voiced by some members of his own Christian community, that the heavenly bodies are unchangeable—and by inference not ensouled and rational beings.⁷⁴

Origen divides the topic into three subquestions. First, “is it right to think of the sun, moon, and stars as living and rational beings?”⁷⁵ Second, did their souls come into existence at the same time as their bodies,

71. *Princ.* 1.pref.5 (ed. Koetschau, 12–13; trans. Butterworth, 4).

72. *Princ.* 1.7.1 (ed. Koetschau, 86; trans. Butterworth, 59): *Omnes animae atque omnes rationabiles naturae factae sunt vel creatae, sive sanctae illae sint, sive nequam; quae omnes secundum propriam naturam incorporeae sunt, sed et per hoc ipsum, quod incorporeae sunt, nihilominus factae sunt.*

73. *Princ.* 1.7.2 (ed. Koetschau, 86; trans. Butterworth, 59–60).

74. *Princ.* 1.7.2 (ed. Koetschau, 87).

75. *Princ.* 1.7.3 (ed. Koetschau, 87–88): *primo debemus inquirere, si animantia haec esse et rationabilia intellegi fas est.*

or did they pre-exist?⁷⁶ And third, will the souls of the stars eventually part from their bodies?⁷⁷ Origen is quite aware of the speculative nature of the subject at hand, but as this is not defined by Scripture or tradition, he feels free to embark on its discussion.⁷⁸

Origen supports his claim that sun, moon, and stars are indeed living and rational beings by exegetical, philosophical, and theological arguments. His primary scriptural proof is based on Gen 1.16–18, a passage that, as we have seen, also played a role in Bardaisan's theology, and reasons that only rational beings would receive commandments.⁷⁹ Origen adduces other passages from the Hebrew Bible, such as Isa 45.12, where God exclaims, "I have given commandments to all the stars,"⁸⁰ and Jer 44.17–19 (LXX 51.17–19), where the moon is called "queen of heaven."⁸¹ The commandments that were given to the heavenly bodies, he explains, are that they ought to shine brilliantly and move in their appointed courses.⁸² In his *Homilies on Genesis*, Origen gives a further, exegetical explanation of the exalted position of planets in the cosmological order, for he notes that Scripture states that only heaven and earth, sun, moon, stars, and human-kind were made by God, whereas all other things were made by God's command. "From this, therefore, consider how great is man's greatness, who is made equal to such great and distinguished elements."⁸³ And in *On Prayer* he notes, much like Bardaisan does, that "the sun has a certain

76. *Princ.* 1.7.3 (ed. Koetschau, 88): *tum deinde utrum animae ipsarum pariter cum ipsis corporibus extiterint, an anteriores corporibus videantur.*

77. *Princ.* 1.7.3 (ed. Koetschau, 88): *sed et post consummationem saeculi si intellegendum est eas relaxandas esse corporibus, et sicut nos cessamus ab hac vita, ita etiam ipsae a mundi inluminacione cessabunt.*

78. Cf. *Princ.* 1.7.3.

79. *Princ.* 1.7.3 (ed. Koetschau, 88): *Putamus ergo posse ea per hoc animantia designari, quod et mandata dicuntur accipere a deo, quod utique non nisi rationabilibus animantibus fieri solet.*

80. *Princ.* 1.7.3 (ed. Koetschau, 88): "Ego autem omnibus stellis praecepi" (quoting LXX Isa 45.12: ἐγὼ πᾶσι τοῖς ἄστροις ἐνετείλαμην).

81. *Princ.* 1.7.3 (ed. Koetschau, 89): *Apud Hieremiam sane etiam "regina caeli" luna esse nominatur.* The passage does not actually mention the moon, but refers by the phrase "queen of heaven" to a goddess associated with Ishtar; see Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible 21C (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 163.

82. *Princ.* 1.7.3.

83. *Hom in Gen.* 1.12 (ed. Louis Doutreleau, *Origène, Homélie sur la Genèse. Nouvelle édition*, SC 7bis [Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1976], 56; trans. Ronald E. Heine, *Origen, Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, FC 71 [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1982], 62–63): *Ex hoc ergo considera quanta sit magnitudo hominis, qui tam magnis elementis tamque praecipuis adaequatur.*

kind of freedom, since it praises God along with the moon. . . . And it is clear that the same conclusion must be reached about . . . the stars.”⁸⁴

The regular course of the celestial bodies gives rise to a philosophical argument in favor of the stars’ rationality. Origen lays out the philosophical background in his treatise *On Prayer*, where he distinguishes between three types of motion. First, motion can occur in lifeless things when they are moved from without, such as a stone being carried. A second type of motion occurs when plants are growing: these are moved “by the nature or animating principle that exists within them.” Now the third type of motion is self-motion, something possible only for rational creatures. Indeed, Origen here equates rationality with the power to move oneself.⁸⁵ In *De principiis*, he applies this observation to the heavenly bodies:

No movement can take place in any body which does not possess life, nor can living beings exist at any time without movement. And since the stars move with such majestic order and plan (*cum tanto ordine ac tanta ratione*) that never have we seen their course deflected in the slightest degree, is it not the height of stupidity to say that such order, such exact observance of rule and plan, is accomplished by things without reason?⁸⁶

The perfect and never-digressing movement of the stars certainly indicates, Origen maintains, that they are free and rational creatures. In making this philosophical argument from motion, Origen stands in a long intellectual tradition, for already Plato in the *Laws* had suggested that the perfect motions of the heavenly bodies implied they had a soul.⁸⁷

Origen’s third line of argument in support of his hypothesis that the stars are rational creatures is theological: rational and free beings should be able to make moral progress or have relapses. That this is the case, he deduces from Job 25.5 “the stars are also not clean in his sight.”⁸⁸ This verse cannot possibly refer to the actual brightness of the stars, for this

84. *Or.* 7 (ed. Paul Koetschau, *Origenes Werke II. Buch V–VIII Gegen Celsus, Die Schrift vom Gebet*, GCS 3 [Leipzig: Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1899], 315–16; trans. Rowan A. Greer, *Origen*, CWS [New York: Paulist Press, 1979], 96): ἔστι τι καὶ τοῦ ἡλίου ἐφ’ ἡμῖν, καὶ αὐτοῦ αἰνοῦντος μετὰ τῆς σελήνης τὸν θεὸν . . . δῆλον δ’ ὅτι καὶ τῆς σελήνης καὶ ἀκολουθῶς πάντων τῶν ἁστέρων. Origen’s considerations here are based upon Ps 148.3.

85. *Or.* 6.1.

86. *Princ.* 1.7.3 (ed. Koetschau, 89; trans. Butterworth, 61).

87. Plato, *Laws* 10, 898d–899b. On Plato’s understanding of the motion of stars and of the planets, see Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars*, 7–12.

88. *Princ.* 1.7.2 (ed. Koetschau, 87): *Iob namque ita videtur ostendere, quod non solum stellae possint subditae esse peccatis, verum etiam quod “mundae non sint” a contagione peccati.*

would imply that God created them with an unclean body; hence the verse must be understood as a reference to the sin of the stars. Consequently, the stars, like all other created things—inanimate objects are apparently not considered here—are capable of moral choices that will either purify or stain them.⁸⁹

After having established that the sun, moon, and stars are indeed rational beings with free will, Origen moves on to his next point, namely whether their souls preexisted or were created together with the heavenly bodies. His answer is that the souls of the stars preexisted and were joined to the ethereal bodies that now clothe them. Once again, his view is substantiated by philosophical and exegetical considerations.⁹⁰

Regarding the great diversity among the bodies with which the celestial beings were endowed, Origen explains that these depend upon the merit of their preexistent souls. Just like those angels who only fell a little received a high status in the angelic world, whereas those who sinned more were cast down lower, so also it is with the stars.⁹¹ In order to give biblical support to his claim that based on each soul's merits it received a more, or less, shining heavenly body, he elsewhere quotes 1 Cor 15.41 "there is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars, for one star differs from another star in glory."⁹²

Lastly, he addresses the eschatological fate of the stars' souls. He interprets Paul's words in Rom 8.22 about the groaning of the whole creation as an indication that all creation hopes and looks forward to the fulfillment of the promise; that is, in the eschaton, those planetary and elementary forces may be redeemed and may be in the presence of God.⁹³ He says it quite clearly in a homily on Ezekiel: "On the day of judgment not only the human person, but also the entire creation will be judged."⁹⁴

This brief overview reveals astonishing similarities between Origen's cosmology and that of Bardaisan: both theologians believe that sun, moon, and stars are rational beings endowed with free will, that they follow the

89. *Princ.* 1.7.2. Moreover, at *Or.* 7, Origen points out that Ps 148.3 ("Praise him, sun and moon. Praise him, all you stars and light") illustrates that sun, moon, and stars have freedom. The stars worship God and hence must not themselves be venerated (cf. *Cels.* 5.13, 8.67).

90. *Princ.* 1.7.4.

91. *Princ.* 1.8 discusses the ranks of angels.

92. *Princ.* 2.9.3 (ed. Koetschau, 166).

93. *Princ.* 1.7.5. The subject is discussed also at some length in *Hom. in Ezech.* 4.1.

94. *Hom. in Ezech.* 4.1 (ed. Marcel Borret, *Origène. Homélie sur Ézéchiel*, SC 352 [Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1989], 160): *Et futurum est ut in iudicii die non solum homo, sed etiam universa conditio iudicetur.* Origen in this homily also discusses Rom 8.22.

divine commandment under which they are put, and that planetary powers will be judged according to the usage they made of their free will. However, Bardaisan and Origen differ regarding the influence of heavenly bodies upon life on earth.

Misfortunes in the World

As we have already seen, Bardaisan, although he refutes astral determinism, does concede a certain influence to the planets in order to explain the occurrence of misfortune, sickness, and injustice. Origen also is well aware of the great discrepancy among human lives: "Some have healthy bodies, others from their earliest years are invalids; some are defective in sight, others in hearing and speech; some are born in such a condition, others lose the use of one faculty or another soon after birth or else suffer a like misfortune when fully grown."⁹⁵

The Marcionites and Valentinians, Origen's theological opponents, deduced from such diversity that the souls themselves are of different kinds.⁹⁶ They argued against Origen's Christian community that if one does not assign the different conditions of birth to diversity among the souls—for no one chooses where one is born—it must be attributed to chance.⁹⁷ Like Bardaisan and most patristic theologians, Origen wants to exclude from his theology any notion of chance; he therefore answers this challenge to divine providence by asserting that in the beginning all creatures were made equal, and that differentiation occurred only as a result of the different degrees to which they fell on account of their freedom.⁹⁸ Illnesses or congenital deformities—which Bardaisan attributes to fate rather than explaining them as the result of sin⁹⁹—Origen explains as the consequence of a preexistent sin.¹⁰⁰ He finds a biblical example for this in the story of Esau and Jacob, for even prior to their birth it was determined

95. *Princ.* 2.9.3. Origen goes on to observe that also among the spiritual powers there are great differences in status.

96. *Princ.* 2.9.5, where Origen alludes to the Gnostic teaching that there are pneumatic, psychic, and earthly humans. See also Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 54.

97. *Princ.* 2.9.5.

98. Origen maintains that only Christ did not fall and that a person's position in this world, or a spiritual being's location, is entirely the result of how they exercised their freedom (*Princ.* 2.9.6). See R. M. M. Tuschling, *Angels and Orthodoxy: A Study in their Development in Syria and Palestine from the Qumran texts to Ephrem the Syrian* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

99. *BLC* (ed. Drijvers, 26, 34).

100. *Princ.* 2.9.1–7.

that one would serve the other.¹⁰¹ The same, Origen asserts, is true for the realm of spiritual beings.¹⁰² He concludes his discussion of this topic by noting that all souls will be judged by God on the last day, based on their merits. And since, as we have seen, for Origen the planetary powers are ensouled, these too will be subjected to judgment, just as humans, angels, and demons will be.

*The Influence of Spiritual Beings on Humankind
and the Customs of the Nations*

Despite attributing all differences among beings to their individual merits earned through freedom, Origen concedes that spiritual powers have a certain influence over human affairs. His discussion focuses on angels and demons; we shall ask if he attributed such spiritual power also to the planets. He states that “there are also certain invisible powers, to which the management of things upon earth is entrusted,”¹⁰³ yet does not here define clearly who these *invisibiles virtutes* are. Origen’s conviction that the angels rule over earthly matters emerges particularly in his discussions of the “angels of the nations.” In his *Against Celsus*, Origen debates Celsus’s claim that the regions of the world have been allotted to certain governing spirits from the beginning, and that those spirits instituted the laws of the nations—and Origen proceeds to give a list of the “laws of the countries” that strongly resembles Bardaisan’s.¹⁰⁴ Origen in principle agrees with Celsus, although he regards the diversity of nations as an arrangement divinely instituted after the building of the Tower of Babel. In consequence of human sin, Origen asserts, God dispersed people into various nations and appointed angels to govern these. As Jean Daniélou has shown, Origen’s teaching of the angels of the nations draws on ideas widespread in ancient Judaism.¹⁰⁵ In the *Testament of Naphthali*, for example, we find the notion that God divided up the world into seventy nations, over each of which an angel presides.¹⁰⁶ The same idea

101. *Princ.* 2.9.7. Origen here draws on Paul’s interpretation of the story in Rom 9.11–14. He discusses the matter again in *Princ.* 3.3.5, where he focuses on the topic of divine providence and preexistent causes.

102. *Princ.* 2.9.7.

103. *Princ.* 2.9.3 (ed. Koetschau, 167; trans. Butterworth, 131): *sunt etiam quaedam invisibiles virtutes, quibus quae super terram sunt, dispensanda commissa sunt.*

104. *Cels.* 5.27. Origen also discusses the customs of nations in *Princ.* 2.9.5.

105. Jean Daniélou, “Les sources juives de la doctrine des anges des nations chez Origène,” *Recherches de science religieuse* 38 (1951): 132–37.

106. Daniélou, “Sources juives,” 133f., quoting the *Testament*. In *Jub* 4.15, we find the related idea that the watchers came down to earth to teach the sons of man and to perform judgment.

also occurs in the Nag Hammadi literature¹⁰⁷ and features prominently in the Pseudo-Clementines.¹⁰⁸

Origen claims that, in addition to the angelic powers, elementary forces impact human life. In his refutation of Celsus, he addresses his opponent's claim that whenever one breathes, drinks, or eats, one has companionship with those demons who are given charge over the air, springs, and plants. While Origen agrees with Celsus that plants, water, and air are administered by "invisible farmers," Origen argues that they are angels. Demons, he states, are the cause of the occasional failure of natural processes, such as famines, barren fruit-trees, droughts, or air pollution:¹⁰⁹ "Of all these things daemons are the direct creators; like public executioners, they have received power by a divine appointment to bring about these catastrophes at certain times."¹¹⁰ What Origen here attributes to the activity of demons, Bardaisan in the *Book of the Laws* assigns simply to another kind of spiritual force, namely the planetary powers.

We saw earlier that for Origen the planets are, just like angels and demons, spiritual powers endowed with freedom, and we must ask if the Alexandrian believes, as does Bardaisan, that they can have influence on terrestrial affairs. In the highly speculative work *De principiis*, it almost appears that Origen would have conceded this, for he does hold that the sun, moon, and stars are spiritual powers who belong to the "principalities" on account of their rulership.¹¹¹ And while he never explicitly spells out how exactly heavenly bodies exercise their autonomy, he once remarks that even if the heavenly bodies do not compel people to act, they may "urge us on."¹¹² Origen's references to the influence of spiritual powers

107. E.g., *On the Origin of the World* 32 (105,10–19).

108. Ps.-Clement, *Recogn.* 2.42.3–8, claims that every nation has an angel to whom God has committed government of that nation. God divided the nations of earth into seventy-two parts. In Ps.-Clement, *Hom.* 18.4.3–4, the author argues that the nations have seventy different languages and types of law. The powers instituted the laws for each nation.

109. *Cels.* 8.31 (ed. Marcel Borret, *Origène, Contre Celse*, SC 150 [Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1969], 240–42; trans. Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980], 474f.). In *Philoc.* 23.21 (ed. Éric Junod, *Origène. Philocalie 21–27 sur le libre arbitre*, SC 226 [Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1976], 202; trans. George Lewis, *The Philocalia of Origen* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1911], 194, slightly modified), he makes the same point: ". . . the opposing powers, though God foreknows the wickedness of the people and powers who devise the detestable results, bring things to pass of their own shameful free choice."

110. *Cels.* 8.31 (SC 150:242; trans. Chadwick, 475).

111. *Princ.* 1.7.2.

112. *Princ.* 1.pref.5 (ed. Koetschau, 12–13; trans. Butterworth, 4): *si enim nostri arbitrii sumus, impugnare nos fortasse possint aliquae virtutes ad peccatum et aliae iuvare ad salutem.*

over human matters do not usually qualify what kind of powers are envisioned, so that one may wonder if astral powers could be included in such statements. For instance, in *De principiis* 3, Origen concedes that special gifts and talents, such as poetry, geometry, or other arts, are inspired by “special energies of this world” (*quondam mundi humus energiae, id est virtutes aliquae spiritales*), but he does not further characterize these *energiae*.¹¹³ Thus while in the highly speculative work *De principiis*, written during the earlier part of his career,¹¹⁴ Origen seems to leave room for planetary influence upon the world, he elsewhere objects to the idea that the stars can impact human life. In his *Commentary on Genesis*, partly preserved in the *Philocalia*, he vehemently upholds human freedom over against astral determinism by employing exegetical and theological arguments, in addition to philosophical reasoning in the tradition of Carneades and the New Academy. He here concedes to the stars the power to signify future events, but not to cause them,¹¹⁵ thereby taking the same position as Plotinus, his fellow-student in the classroom of Ammonius.¹¹⁶ Human beings, however, are not usually able to interpret what the stars signify, for this far transcends their capability. Origen argues that only “the powers” (αἱ δυνάμεις) can read the meaning of the stars; these angelic or demonic δυνάμεις function as intermediaries and transfer their insights to chosen human beings.¹¹⁷

CONCLUSION

Both Bardaisan and Origen strive to maintain the goodness and justice of God the creator against theological challenges posed by Marcionites and Gnostics. Against astrologers and Chaldeans, they affirm that human beings were created free, so that they may justify themselves by keeping the commandments. Were human beings not free, their good deeds could

113. *Princ.* 3.3.3 (ed. Koetschau, 259).

114. *De principiis* was written in Alexandria.

115. E.g., *Philoc.* 23.16. Origen also notes that the stars can signify future events in *Cels* 5.12.

116. Plotinus, *Enn.* 2.3.3, 2.3.7, 2.3.10. That Plotinus as well as Origen studied with Ammonius in Alexandria is stated by Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 3. Porphyry does not say they studied at the same time. The question whether the Origen who studied with Ammonius is the same as the church father has been discussed at length in the scholarly literature.

117. *Philoc.* 23.6 (SC 226:148–50); cf. 23.16. Sometimes, he states, people are being misled as to what the stars signify by angels who lost their proper rank (*Philoc.* 23.6). Sometimes, wise men are taught by God how to interpret what the stars signify, as was the case with Jacob who “read the pages of the sky” (*Philoc.* 23.19 [SC 226:194–96]).

not be considered their own merits. Regarding the planets, both theologians believe that they are rational beings, endowed with freedom and subject to a final judgment. Ontologically, for Origen the stars seem to be in the same category as the angels, whereas for Bardaisan both angels and humans are ontologically higher than the stars, which are bound by the divine command to stay in their courses.

A major difference emerges in their view of the exact extent of planetary powers. Bardaisan concedes that matters entirely beyond human control (such as illness or health, poverty or wealth) are caused by the planetary powers, which exert influence upon the human soul as it descends towards the body, an explanation that makes good sense within a cosmological system that considers planets as free, rational beings. His readiness and willingness to concede such power to the stars, however, might also be a consequence of his familiarity and ease with astral notions (many of which he certainly regarded as scientific data), though we can note that Origen, too, was sufficiently interested in astronomy to add it to the curriculum at his school in Caesarea.¹¹⁸ Bardaisan's position also shows that, in early third-century Edessa, it was an acceptable view within the Christian community, or at least within part of the community, to accept direct planetary influence—though limited by nature and human free will. Origen, on the other hand, is more ambivalent in his understanding of planetary power. Whereas in *De principiis* he considers sun, moon, and stars as rational beings endowed with free will and counts them among the “principalities,” in his *Commentary on Genesis* he denies that these exert direct influence upon human life and claims that the planetary powers merely signify, but do not cause events. This shift in his position might either be due to a development within his theological thought, or to the different literary genres of these two works. The spiritual force that Bardaisan attributes predominantly to the planets, Origen assigns to angels and demons, the only spiritual beings that can directly impact the human soul. He also includes in his system the relative merits or demerits of preexisting souls, a thought not found in the extant fragments of Bardaisan's oeuvre.

Notwithstanding these differences, the comparison between the views of Bardaisan and Origen on astral power has shown that there is substantial agreement in the way both of these authors approach the subject. We can therefore no longer understand Bardaisan's cosmology as an isolated phenomenon at the margins of the Christian world, but must regard it as part of a larger trajectory of speculative thought within early Christianity.

118. Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Panegyric on Origen* 8.

One might wonder whether Origen could have been familiar with Bardaisan's system, and perhaps this is the case, but the similarities in their understanding of the stars as living things can equally well be explained otherwise. First, both authors base their complex cosmologies on Scripture; in particular, they allude to the Genesis account of creation according to which the stars are given power. Second, both authors draw on broad cultural currents in antiquity that attribute authority, influence, and even divine status to the heavenly bodies. Third, the views expressed by both authors on the spiritual powers, and particularly angels, stand within the larger Jewish tradition on angels and heavenly beings. What is striking about the systems of Bardaisan and Origen is that both of them set forth elaborate cosmological systems within which they locate humankind, angels, planets, and elements, all of which have their proper powers. The entire cosmos is thus permeated by spiritual beings. Such cosmological speculation reaches a high point in the early decades of the third century and does not flourish again to this degree until the high Middle Ages, when Christian intellectuals once again reflect on the topic, at least in the West, within the institutional context of a theological school. Later patristic authors become more cautious and begin to separate theology and physics much more strongly. Moreover, as the doctrine of demons and angels becomes more fully articulated, especially in ascetic circles, theologians from Origen onwards no longer attribute the occurrence of negative events to planetary powers but to the workings of such maleficent spirits.¹¹⁹ Even exegetes in the Origenist tradition, such as Didymus the Blind, do not follow these earlier thinkers in their claim that the stars are alive.

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119. On demons, see David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

