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Free Will, Ethical Intellectualism, Fate and Cosmology: From Bardaisan to Theodore Abū Qurrah¹

Ilaria Letizia Elisa RAMELLI

Keywords: *Bardaisan, Theodore Abū Qurrah, Ethical Intellectualism, Free will, Fate, Cosmology*

1. Introduction: Theodore Abū Qurrah; 2. Bardaisan of Edessa: Among Theodore's Anti-Fatalistic Sources? 3. Bardaisan and Origen; 4. Bardaisan's (and Origen's) Arguments against Astrology Taken over by Didymus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Diodore of Tarsus; 5. Theodore Relies on the Anti-Fatalistic Tradition, against Manichaeism and in Dialogue with Islam; 6. Concluding Remarks

1. Introduction: Theodore Abū Qurrah

Theodore Abū Qurrah (ca. 750-830) is one of the first Christian authors who wrote in Arabic² and defended Christianity from charges coming from Islam, Manichaeism, and other currents, in

1 Many thanks to Miklós Gyurkovics for kindly inviting me to contribute to the Journal, to KUL for the Professorship of Patristics and Church History bestowed on me, and the libraries and colleagues at Stanford, Princeton, the Catholic University, the Angelicum, and the Universities of Oxford, Durham and Bonn, during all the stages of the preparation of this essay.

2 Georg Graf, *Die arabischen Schriften des Theodor Abū Qurrah, Bischofs von Harrân (ca. 740-820). Literaturhistorische Untersuchungen und Übersetzung*, Schöningh, Paderborn 1910, 5-24.

an inter-religious environment.³ He seems to have endeavoured to make Christianity understandable to the Islamic Mutakallims,⁴ and at the same time addressed his own Christian community, to show them that they were intellectually on a par with the other (Islamic)

- 3 Sidney Harrison Griffith, *The Controversial Theology of Theodore Abū Qurrah (c. 750-c. 820 AD): A Methodological, Comparative Study in Christian Arabic Literature*, PhD. diss., Catholic University of America, Washington DC 1978; Idem, "The view of Islam from the monasteries of Palestine in the early Abbasid period: Theodore Abū Qurrah and the Summa theologiae arabica", in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7 (1996), 9-28; Idem, *The Beginning of Christian Theology in Arabic*, Ashgate, Burlington 2002; Najib George Awad, "Interreligiosity as a Realist Learning Engagement: Theodore Abū Qurrah and 'Alī b. Rabbān al-Ṭabarī – Two Comparative Theologians from Early Islam?", in *Journal of Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology* 1/2 (2018), 48-71; see also Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology and Inter-Religious Dialogue*, in Catherine Cornille (ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford 2013, 51-63.
- 4 Shlomo Pines, "A Note on An Early Meaning of the Term Mutakallim", in *Israel Oriental Studies* 1 (1971), 224-240; S. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ 2008. On Islamic *kalām*: Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Kalām*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1976; Michael Cook, "The Origins of Kalām", in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 43 (1980), 32-43; Josef van Ess, *The Early Development of Kalām*, in Gualtherüs Hendrik Albert Joynboll (ed.), *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale 1982, 109-123; S. Griffith, "Free will in Christian Kalām: The Doctrine of Theodore Abū Qurrah", in *Parole de l'Orient* 14 (1987), 79-107 especially on the idea of free will in *kalām*; John Lamoreaux, *Theodore Abū Qurrah*, in David Thomas – Barbara Roggema – Juan Pedro Monferrer Sala – Johannes Pahlitzsch – Mark Swanson – Herman Tuele – John Tolan (eds.), *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, 1 (600-900), Brill, Leiden 2009, 439-491; Alexander Treiger, "Origins of Kalām", in Sabine Schmidtke (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology Online*, OUP, Oxford 2014, 27-43.

tradition. He used philosophical and Christian philosophical ideas.⁵ In *The True Religion*, he defends Christianity as the one religion that accords with human nature and draws on prophecies and miracles (an argument already employed by Origen⁶) in order to demonstrate its superiority over Ḥarrānian paganism, Zoroastrians, Muslims, Manichaeans, Marcionites, Jews and Samaritans, and the like.⁷ He also cites the followers of Bardaisan; some inclined to Manichaeism (unlike Bardaisan himself, who not only lived before the spread of Manichaeism, but was also refuted by Mani).⁸

Theodore is squarely against Manichaeism and follows Bardaisan's theory on free will as well as Origen's theory of free will, which, as we shall see, were very similar. He attacks what he regards as Christian

- 5 On the use of Proclus' ideas by Theodore, see Najib George Awad, "When the Intellectuals of Ḥarrān Contributed to Falsafa': Theodore Abū Qurrah as 'Nāqil-wa-Mufasssir' of Proclean Legacy in Early Islam", in *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 74 (2022), 5-47. On Theodore's use of Christian philosophy, see below the investigation into his use of philosophical trends common to Origen and Bardaisan.
- 6 See I. Ramelli, "Prophecy in Origen: Between Scripture and Philosophy", in *Journal of Early Christian History* 7/2 (2017), 17-39.
- 7 See Georg Graf, *Des Theodor Abū Kūrā Traktat über den Schöpfer und die wahre Religion*, Aschendorff, Münster 1913.
- 8 Argument in my *Bardaisan of Edessa*; further in my introduction to *Bardaisan on Human Nature, Fate, and Free Will: The Book of the Laws of Countries*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2025. On free will see already my *Bardesane e la sua scuola tra la cultura occidentale e quella orientale: il lessico della libertà nel Liber Legum Regionum (testo siriano e versione greca)*, in Rosa Bianca Finazzi – Alfredo Valvo (eds.), *Pensiero e istituzioni del mondo classico nelle culture del Vicino Oriente*, Dell'Orso, Alessandria, 2001, 237-255. On Manichaeism see, e.g., Einar Thomassen, *Mani und der Manichäismus*, in Christian Riedweg – Christoph Horn – Dietmar Wyrwa (eds.), *Philosophie der Kaiserzeit und der Spätantike*, Schwabe, Basel 2018, 879-887.

heresies, especially Monophysites (Miaphysites) and so-called Nestorians (the Church of the East).⁹

Theodore Abū Qurrah became the bishop of Ḥarrān (Carrhae) and was possibly deposed owing to Christological controversies.¹⁰ He stemmed from Edessa, the city of Bardaisan, and may have taken his ideas into account in his treatise *On Free Will* (or *On Freedom*), written in a cultural centre of primary importance characterised by the presence of ‘pagan’, Manichean, and Christian communities of various confessions, as well as Muslims (Syria had already been conquered in Theodore’s time). Born in Edessa after 740, possibly around 775, Theodore became the leader of the city’s Melkite community (and John Damascene seems to have contributed to the Melkite identity formation).¹¹ He was a monk in the Laura of St Sabas, where he devoted himself to the study of theology and Patristic authors.

I find it significant that, like Origen, who grounded his work in Scripture and reason, so did Theodore Abū Qurrah, who programmatically asserted that “reason” and “the words of the Holy Fathers” are the criterion of truth (*Christ’s Death*, 60 Baha). Theodore’s method, indeed, joining rational investigation and Scriptural authority, is the same as that of Patristic Platonists, from Origen to Eriugena,

9 See Sebastian Paul Brock, “The ‘Nestorian’ Church: A Lamentable Misnomer”, in *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 78 (1996), 23-36.

10 On his theology and Christology see N. Awad, *Orthodoxy in Arabic Terms: A Study of Theodore Abū Qurrah’s Theology in its Islamic Context*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2015.

11 S. Griffith, “Reflections on the Biography of Theodore Abū Qurrah”, in *Parole de l’Orient* 18 (1993), 143-170.

including Bardaisan.¹² Within this tradition, I shall draw parallels especially between Origen and Bardaisan, with a focus on the latter, as forerunners of Theodore's anti-fatalism, an approach that will prove fruitful.

2. *Bardaisan of Edessa: Among Theodore's Anti-Fatalistic Sources?*

Theodore Abū Qurrah's main Syriac source – whether direct or, more probably, indirect – regarding theories on fate, free will, and cosmology seems to have been Bardaisan of Edessa (d. 222 CE). We shall see that there is evidence of Theodore's reception of cosmological positions from Bardaisan; therefore, we should not rule out some reception of Bardaisan's position concerning free will, since a certain thematic continuity can be detected, as it will be indicated.

Bardaisan is the main character of a Platonic dialogue, the Syriac *Book of the Laws of Countries* (henceforth: *BLC*): here, he plays the role that Socrates plays in Plato's dialogues. The excerpts from Bardaisan's *On/Against Fate* preserved in Greek by Eusebius parallel the Syriac, and represent a part of Bardaisan's argument (Eusebius preserves the

12 On Theodore: N. Awad, *Min al-'Aql wa-Laysa min al-Kutub: Scriptural Evidence, Rational Verification and Theodore Abū Qurrah's Apologetic Epistemology*, in George Tamer – Regina Grundmann – Assaad Elias Kattan – Karl Pinggéra (eds.), *Exegetical Crossroads: Understanding Scripture in Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the Pre-Modern Orient*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2017, 95-118. On Origen, Eriugena and Bardaisan: I. Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 120, Brill, Leiden 2013, 137-215; Eadem, *From God to God: Eriugena's Protology and Eschatology against the Backdrop of His Platonic Patristic Sources*, in I. Ramelli (ed.), *Eriugena's Christian Neoplatonism and its Sources in Patristic and Ancient Philosophy*, Peeters, Leuven 2021, 99-123; *L'Auctoritas che fonda ogni filosofia e teologia: Bardesane e l'Apologia siriana ad Antonino Cesare*, in Maria Vittoria Cerutti (ed.), *Auctoritas. Mondo tardoantico e riflessi contemporanei*, Cantagalli, Bologna 2012, 151-176.

title *Περὶ Εἰμαρμένης*, *On Fate*; Epiphanius and Theodoret report *Κατὰ Εἰμαρμένης*, *Against Fate*).¹³ Bardaisan's arguments and words in Eusebius' excerpts correspond to those found in the *BLC*. Identical philosophical content, and often wording, suggest that the *BLC* was composed on the basis of Bardaisan's arguments in *Against Fate* and reflects Bardaisan's thought.

The *BLC*, like Bardaisan's *Against Fate*, focuses on the defense of human free will against determinism. The determinism against which the *BLC* argues is the astrologers' fatalistic determinism as well as 'Gnostic' fatalism and predestinationism. Bardaisan adduces the various customs of different peoples (hence the title's "laws of countries") against the theory according to which the horoscope at one's birth determines one's destiny and moral choices. Bardaisan's demonstration is based on the νόμιμα βαρβαρικά argument ("customs of barbarian nations"), which goes back to the Academic Carneades (and has even earlier antecedents) and was later used by authors influenced by Platonism. Among the latter we find Jewish authors such as Philo of Alexandria and Christians such as Origen († 255 ca., who shows

¹³ See I. Ramelli, *Bardaisan of Edessa: A Reassessment of the Evidence and a New Interpretation: Also in Light of Origen and the Original Fragment from De India*, Gorgias, Piscataway, NJ 2009; De Gruyter, Berlin 2019, including on the *BLC*'s characterisation as Platonic dialogue (including in several echoes of Plato's introductions). See also Eadem, *Bardaisan (Philosopher and Poet)*, in David Hunter – Paul Jacobus Jozef van Geest – Bert Jan Lietaert Peerbolte (eds.), *Brill Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, Brill, Leiden 2024, online 2018: http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2589-7993_EECO_SIM_00000385. On introductions in Plato, see Eleni Kaklamanou, Maria Pavlou and Antonis Tsakmakis (eds.), *Framing the Dialogues: How to Read Openings and Closures in Plato*, Brill, Leiden, 2020.

remarkable points of agreement with Bardaisan¹⁴), and fourth-century authors who were familiar with Origen, such as Didymus the Blind, who also knew Bardaisan's treatment, Ambrose in his *Hexameron*, Caesarius, Gregory of Nyssa in his *Against Fate*, which has the same title as Bardaisan's work and rested on at least Eusebius' excerpts from Bardaisan, and Procopius of Gaza († 526/530). I have argued extensively that Diodore of Tarsus, who knew Origen's thought and even seems to have shared the doctrine of apokatastasis or restoration with him, in his own *Against Fate* also based much of his reasoning on Bardaisan's *Against Fate*.¹⁵

To this anti-fatalistic material Bardaisan added a new argument, refuting not only the horoscopic doctrine, but also that of the climatic zones, each of which was considered by astrologers to be governed by a celestial body. This was a counter-argument excogitated by astrologers to refute the objection based on the "laws and customs of barbaric peoples". Bardaisan's reply to this "climatic" counter-argument is that

14 As I argued in *Bardaisan of Edessa: A Reassessment*; Eadem, "Bardaisan of Edessa, Origen, and Imperial Philosophy: A Middle Platonic Context?" in *Aram* 30/1-2 (2018), 337-353; Eadem, *Bardaisan: A Christian Middle Platonist from Edessa and His Reading of Scripture in the Light of Plato*, in Cornelia Horn – S. Griffith (eds.), *Biblical and Qur'ānic Traditions in the Middle East*, Abelian Academic, Warwick 2016, 215-238; Eadem, *The Body of Christ as Imperishable Wood: Hippolytus and Bardaisan of Edessa's Complex Christology*, in Emidio Vergani – Sabino Chialà (eds.), *Symposium Syriacum XII, Held at St Lawrence College, Rome 19-21 August 2016, Organized by the Pontifical Oriental Institute on the occasion of the Centenary Celebration (1917-2017)*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 311, Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome 2022, 447-458.

15 I. Ramelli, *Bardaisan of Edessa*; further below. On Bardaisan's anti-fatalism and its context and reception (without attention to Theodore Abu Qurra), see Tim Hegedus, "Necessity and Free Will in the Thought of Bardaisan of Edessa", in *Laval théologique et philosophique* 59/2 (2003), 333-344 and my "Intellectual Constructions of Free Will: Bardaisan vs. Astrological Determinism, Novelties, Parallels, and Aftermath", in *Studies in Late Antiquity: A Journal* 8/4 (2024), 559-595.

laws and customs in one and the same state or people can change, for instance by a sovereign, and that Jews and Christians keep their laws, of Moses and Jesus respectively, in whatever climate they are. An example that Bardaisan adduces is that of Abgar the Great, who, after his conversion to Christianity, forbade a ‘pagan’ ritual mutilation (*BLC* 15 Ramelli).¹⁶ Bardaisan’s double reply will be taken over by subsequent Christian authors, among others by Diodore of Tarsus, who also adduced the example of Jews and Christians. We shall see that an echo of Bardaisan’s new argument, along with the older lore, will reach Theodore Abū Qurrah.

Bardaisan argues that Fate, which in his view depends on God, can only dominate over the vital, inferior soul, and cannot go against Nature, which controls the body and, for example, establishes that a person must eat to stay alive, cannot procreate before or after a certain age, and so forth. Fate has no power over the rational, intellectual soul, which is the seat of human freedom (Syr. *ḥērūtā*, later reflected by Theodore’s use of *ḥurriyya*). Bodies are governed by Nature, lower souls by fate, and intellects by their free will. Thus, intellects or intellectual souls are at the highest level, vital souls in the middle, and bodies at the lowest level. Their hierarchy and their relation with free will, fate, and Nature can be illustrated as follows:

<i>Human components:</i>	<i>Influenced by:</i>
Freedom, free will	intellect / intellectual, superior soul (ethical intellectualism)
Fate	inferior soul
Nature	body

¹⁶ I refer to the sections of the *BLC* that I established in *Bardesane di Edessa Contro il Fato*, ESD, Bologna 2009, and in the English translation with commentary, introduction, and supporting essays, *Bardaisan on Human Nature*.

Bardaisan concludes: “Fate overpowers Nature; likewise, we can also realise that *human free will* opposes *Fate* and overpowers it. But not in every respect, just as fate itself does not oppose Nature in every respect” (*BLC* 11 Ramelli).

Divine grace will correct every negative effect of the Rulers/Governors (which express Fate) in the eventual apokatastasis or final universal restoration, a doctrine of which Bardaisan is one of the first Christian proponents along with Origen.¹⁷ Then, all capacity for harm in all creatures will disappear: “And there will come a time when even *this capacity for harm that remains in them will be brought to an end* by the instruction that will obtain in a different arrangement of things. And, once that new world will be constituted, all evil movements [*sc.* of free will] will cease, all rebellions will come to an end, and the fools will be persuaded, and *the lacks will be filled*, and there will be safety and peace, as a gift of the Lord of all natures.”¹⁸ This is an expression of the doctrine of apokatastasis, which Bardaisan shared with one of the greatest and most illustrious theologians, his younger contemporary: Origen of Alexandria.

3. Bardaisan and Origen

Almost at the same time, the same argument against Fate appears in Bardaisan and Origen – one of the many parallels between these two Christian thinkers, besides apokatastasis. This closeness has been overlooked by scholars, but can provide a key for a better comprehension of Bardaisan’s and Origen’s thought and also of their influence on the later tradition against fatalistic determinism, which eventually reached

17 As argued by I. Ramelli, “Origen, Bardaisan, and the Origin of Universal Salvation”, in *Harvard Theological Review* 102/2 (2009), 135-168.

18 *BLC* 611 Nau = 16 Ramelli. François Nau (ed.), *Bardesanes, Liber legum regionum, cuius textum syriacum F. N. vocalium signis instruxit*, Patrologia Syriaca 2.1, Leroux, Paris 1907, 537-611.

Theodore Abū Qurrah. Remarkably, Eusebius, well acquainted with both Origen and Bardaisan, in *Praeparatio Evangelica*, in the context of a defence of human free will, cites Bardaisan and Origen together: the former in 6.10 and the latter in 6.11, a passage which was later excerpted in the *Philocalia*.¹⁹ Eusebius connects these two Christian philosophers, drawing a close intellectual relationship between them. This link is not unwarranted: as we have noted about apokatastasis, and as we shall see, and as recent research has begun to argue, there are indeed important philosophico-theological convergences between the two.²⁰

Origen knew Philo directly and extensively. Philo's *De Providentia* already used the νόμιμα βαρβαρικά argument,²¹ which corresponds to Bardaisan's excerpts in Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica* and aimed at refuting the power of Fate exercised through celestial bodies: if the customs of a whole people are the same, they cannot be determined by the horoscope of each one, that is, by the position of the stars at his or her birth.

There is another parallel between Origen's and Bardaisan's thought, in addition to many other shared traits and doctrines, such as ethical intellectualism, the ontological non-subsistence of evil, human free will, the doctrine of apokatastasis, the preference for allegorical exegesis, the rejection of apocalypticism, the polemics against Marcionism and Gnosticism, and so on. Both Bardaisan and Origen deemed fate

19 Greek text edited and commented in my "Linee generali per una presentazione e per un commento del *Liber legum regionum*, con traduzione italiana del testo siriano e dei frammenti greci", in *Rendiconti dell'Istituto Lombardo, Accademia di Scienze e Lettere* 133 (1999), 311-355.

20 I. Ramelli, "Origen, Bardaisan, and the Origin of Universal Salvation", in *Harvard Theological Review* 102/2 (2009), 135-168; *Bardaisan of Edessa: A Reassessment*; "Bardaisan of Edessa, Origen, and Imperial Philosophy".

21 Paul Wendland, *Philos Schrift über die Vorsehung: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der nacharistotelischen Philosophie*, H. Heyfelder, Berlin 1892, 27-33.

an expression of God's Providence, administered by celestial bodies. Origen, like Bardaisan, rejected the worship of stars (*Cels.* 5.11), which are creatures, although he, like Bardaisan and most ancients, thought that these were governed by spiritual powers (*ibidem* 8.31; *H. Ies. Nav.* 23.7; *H. Ier.* 10.6). These powers are living and rational, and therefore endowed with a degree of freedom (*Cels.* 5.12; *Or.* 7: "even the sun has a will of its own"). However, they are not the expression of a Fate understood as an independent force, but they are instruments of God's Providence, which orders them what to do (*Princ.* 1.7.3). Bardaisan also held this conception in the *Liber* (4 Ramelli). Both for Bardaisan and for Origen, celestial bodies are submitted to God and creatures of God (*Princ.* 1.7.2; 3.6.4).²²

Origen, like Bardaisan, was blamed because of his astronomical competence and his knowledge of astrological doctrines, including the knowledge of some interpretations of Hipparchus (the second-century-BCE Greek astronomer and geographer who discovered the precession of the equinoxes) or astrological vocabulary (*Philoc.* 23.14-28). However, being acquainted with astrological doctrines does not mean that Origen or Bardaisan also *espoused* such doctrines. In *BLC* 8 Ramelli, Bardaisan says he did embrace Chaldaean fatalism earlier, but in his *Against Fate* and (as a character) in *BLC* he builds up his whole argument *against* fatalistic determinism.

22 Methodius, who depended on Origen although he also criticised him about the resurrection, seems to have known Bardaisan's doctrine of fate (even in the extenuated form supported by Bardaisan), to have borrowed arguments from it, and to have engaged dialectically with it in Thecla's speech in his *Symposium*. See I. Ramelli, *L'Inno a Cristo-Logos nel Simposio di Metodio di Olimpo: alle origini della poesia filosofica cristiana*, in Antonio Vincenzo Nazzaro (ed.), *Motivi e forme della poesia cristiana antica tra Scrittura e tradizione classica*, Augustinianum, Rome 2008, 257-280; *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis*, 260-273, esp. 273; Dylan Burns, *Astrological Determinism, Free Will, and Desire according to Thecla*, in Ulla Tervahauta et alii (eds.), *Women and Knowledge in Early Christianity*, Brill, Leiden 2017, 206-220.

Certainly, in neither of them did this knowledge produce “paganism”, as Ephrem even states concerning Bardaisan (*Hymni contra Haereses* 55.10). Ephrem’s judgement is retrospective (just as the condemnation of Origen) and gives expression to the formation of Christian ‘orthodoxy’. Bardaisan and Origen rather testify to a more fluid state of Christian doctrine. Origen exalts the order of the movements of stars to extol God’s Providence (*Cels.* 8.52; *Princ.* 4.1.7; *Philoc.* 23.6). Origen, in *Philoc.* 23.20-21, surmises that the celestial bodies are signs disposed by God to instruct the angels and give them orders, that they may take care of humans. Angels are endowed with free will and decide whether to follow such divine indications.²³ In *Philoc.* 23, Origen uses the argument of the νόμιμα βαρβαρικά against Fate, possibly relying on Bardaisan. He could have read the Greek translation available to Eusebius some decades after Origen himself.²⁴

According to both Origen and Bardaisan, fate, administered by celestial bodies, is not an independent power or deity, but it is the expression of divine Providence. Providence governs human affairs not as a blind power, but according to God’s justice and goodness, by caring for all creatures, but respecting the free will of each one. For it is God who gave it to each rational creature as a gift.

Origen, like Bardaisan, refuted fatalistic determinism both in *Commentary on Genesis* (*ap. Philoc.* 23) and elsewhere, even in his homilies, and definitely rejected the worship of stars (*Cels.* 5.11), *qua* creatures, although he, like Bardaisan and several ancient thinkers,

23 See my treatment in *Conceptualities of Angels in Late Antiquity: Degrees of Corporeality, Bodies of Angels, and Comparative Daemonologies in ‘Pagan’ and Christian Platonism*, in Delphine Lauritzen (ed.), *Inventer les anges de l’Antiquité à Byzance: conception, représentation, perception*, CNRS, Paris 2021, 115-172.

24 Origen’s argument that heavenly bodies can only indicate, but not determine, will be taken up by Basil in *Hom. Hex.* 6.5-7.

thought that these were governed by spiritual powers.²⁵ It was clear to Rufinus, *Apol. Hier.* 2.12, that the theoretical basis, grounded in theodicy, of Origen's doctrine of apokatastasis was his defence of human free will against determinism and the conciliation of justice and goodness in God. Now, the polemic against predestination and against the separation of God's justice and goodness, and the doctrine of apokatastasis are typical of Bardaisan as well. The theory of apokatastasis, a tenet of Origen's soteriology, eschatology, ethics, and theology, is expounded, as noted, at the end of the *BLC* (608-611 Nau = 16 Ramelli).

Here, after a refutation of astrological determinism, and after arguing that God is both good and just and has endowed each rational creature with free will, Bardaisan formulates the apokatastasis doctrine, connecting (like Origen) the defence of free will and the polemic against the severing of justice and goodness in God with apokatastasis, which thus proves to be grounded in the theory of free will. Rational creatures' free will is not conditioned by astral determinism, but God does not allow this freedom to bring a creature to total perdition. Therefore, God allows rational creatures to govern themselves by their free will until the end of the aeons, but in the end God's Providence will eliminate all evil, according to its ontological non-subsistence (this point, that evil is no substance but a lack and derives from bad choices of human free will, is common to both 'pagan' and Christian Platonists, from Bardaisan to Origen, Plotinus, Augustine and others²⁶).

25 *Philoc.* 8.31; *Hom. Ies. Nav.* 23.7; *Hom. Ier.* 10.6; Alan Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1991.

26 See I. Ramelli, "The Legacy of Origen's Metaphysics of Freedom in Gregory of Nyssa's Theology of Freedom and Condemnation of Slavery and Social Injustice", in *Modern Theology* 38/2 (2022), 363-388.

Being found in evil is finding oneself in weakness and error, as Bardaisan puts it forcefully, and such a state cannot endure forever. Therefore, all creatures, purified from evil, through persuasion and teaching and the filling of all lacks, will adhere to the Good (God) voluntarily.

Bardaisan and Origen embraced the doctrine of apokatastasis, ethical intellectualism, and a strong defence of human free will and accountability, and rejected apocalypticism.²⁷ Apocalyptic perspectives have a dualistic eschatological scenario that was essentially incompatible with the doctrine of apokatastasis or the universal restoration of all rational creatures to God,²⁸ which, as said, was upheld by both Bardaisan and Origen.

4. Bardaisan's (and Origen's) Arguments against Astrology Taken Over by Didymus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Diodore of Tarsus

Didymus, like his inspirer Origen, also agreed with Bardaisan on the refutation of Fate. As I demonstrated elsewhere, Didymus' argument depends on both Origen and Bardaisan and was known to Gregory of

27 Thoroughly argued in I. Ramelli, "Origen, Bardaisan, and the Origin of Universal Salvation", in *Harvard Theological Review* 102/2 (2009), 135-168. See also Ute Possek, "Bardaisan and Origen on Fate and the Power of the Stars", in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 20/4 (2012), 515-541; Patricia Crone, *Daysanis*, in Gerhard Endress – Janina Safran – David Thomas – Sabine Schmidtke (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Third edition, Brill, Leiden/Boston 2012, 116-118; Aaron Johnson, *Religion and Identity in Porphyry of Tyre: The Limits of Hellenism in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2013, 207; 209; 364; Jan Willem Drijvers, *Bardaisan of Edessa*, Gorgias Press, Piscataway, NJ 2014, 15; Paul Robertson, "Greco-Roman Ethical-Philosophical Influences in Bardaisan's Book of the Laws of Countries", in *Vigiliae Christianae* 71 (2017), 511-540, 517.

28 As I argue in *Bardaisan on Human Nature*, 99-108.

Nyssa.²⁹ In *Commentary on Genesis* 74-75,³⁰ Didymus refutes Fate on the grounds of the different laws and customs of the various peoples, employing (although with simplifications and cuts) the same argument as Philo, Bardaisan, and Origen did against astral determinism. He relied on Origen's own lost commentary on Genesis, from which the *Philocalia* passage with the refutation of astrological determinism is drawn. Didymus was acquainted with Bardaisan probably through Eusebius' translation of his *On/Against Fate*. Didymus takes up Bardaisan's main refutation of the determinism of the climatic zones, namely his novel argument concerning the Jews, which functions both against the general theory of Fate as based on the horoscope (all the Jews follow the same law, although they are born on all the different days of the year) and against the secondary argument of Fate as based on the various climatic zones, since the Jews, albeit following the same law, are born in all the regions of the earth.

Didymus agrees with Bardaisan in subtracting the sphere of human free choice (*προαίρεσις*) from the influence of Fate and in submitting the astral indications to God's Providence. The latter point derives from Origen, whose attack upon Fate is preserved by Eusebius (*PE* 6.11.69-70 = *Philoc.* 23.16) soon after his (Eusebius') anti-fatalistic excerpt from Bardaisan. Didymus' statements that the heavenly bodies indicate things, but do not determine them, derives from Origen verbatim: "Let us consider another problem: how celestial bodies cannot produce things [*ποιητικοί*], but, in case, can only indicate them [*σημαντικοί*]... it is impossible to say that they have in themselves the cause of the production of things; rather, they only indicate things". From Origen Didymus also draws his parallel concerning the Ethiopians; the very Greek wording is identical in both authors.

29 I. Ramelli, *Bardaisan of Edessa: A Reassessment*, 56-62.

30 Louis Doutreleau – Pierre Nautin (eds), *Didyme l'Aveugle. Sur la Genèse, I-II*, SC 233, 244, Cerf, Paris 1976-1978.

Didymus clearly relied on Origen, but he probably also used Bardaisan's arguments through Eusebius. The biographical information he offers on Bardaisan proves that he knew Bardaisan's historical figure as well, very probably from an Alexandrian source connected to the school of Origen. This attests to a rich history of the anti-fatalistic, anti-astrological arguments that both Origen and Bardaisan used and transmitted.

Gregory of Nyssa wrote *Against Fate* (GNO 3/2, from 386), the same title as Bardaisan's work according to Epiphanius and Theodore.³¹ Gregory knew both Philo³² and Bardaisan, of whom he read at least Eusebius' excerpts in *Praeparatio Evangelica* 6, devoted to the refutation of the doctrine of Fate. Gregory absorbed Bardaisan's arguments against Fate. Gregory's interlocutor was a supporter of the doctrine of Fate (31-32), probably a follower of Stoicism and astral determinism, and had Fate depend on the heavenly bodies (34-35). Gregory employs the Stoic and Neoplatonic category of "what depends on us" (τὰ ἐφ' ἡμῖν), applying it to our moral choices. Gregory objects (44) that such a theory eliminates justice, holiness, virtue, and accountability. In the *Liber*, Bardaisan supports human accountability in the same way. Gregory adduces a further argument, similar to that of his contemporary Didymus, and also found in Philo (*Prov.* 87): catastrophes involving entire peoples, epidemics, and all cases in which enormous amounts of humans perish in the same circumstances and in the same moment prove that the death of each individual does not depend on their personal horoscope.

Gregory refutes both kinds of astral determinism rejected by Bardaisan: that based on the individual horoscope, which was believed to determine the whole life of a person, and that which revolved around

³¹ Critical edition GNO 1987, 31-63. I refer to these pages in the text.

³² See I. Ramelli, "Philosophical Allegoresis of Scripture in Philo and Its Legacy in Gregory of Nyssa", in *Studia Philonica Annual* 20 (2008), 55-99.

the theory of the climatic zones of the earth, each one controlled by a given heavenly body (55). Gregory's argument against the first type of astral determinism relies on the νόμιμα βαρβαρικά. Gregory employs a concise form of Bardaisan's argument from the "Laws of Countries", among which the Persians' customs and their incests, which they permit but other nations abominate, demonstrate that it is not Fate to determine human choices, but "the free determination [προαίρεσις] of each one, which makes one's choices in full mastery [κατ' ἐξουσίαν προαιρουμένη]" (56). Against the determinism of climatic zones, Gregory argues adducing the same proof already adduced by Bardaisan (57): all Jews obey to the same law, that of Moses, although they are spread everywhere on earth.³³ Moreover, like Bardaisan, Gregory also regards the facts of human life as depending on God's will (63). Indeed, the Edessan philosopher considered them to depend on a "fate" that, as mentioned, he conceived differently from the way astrologers (and most 'Gnostics') did: that is, as the executor of God's providence, not as an independent, omnipotent force. The common element adduced above suggests a line of continuity between Bardaisan and Gregory, who was familiar with both Bardaisan (at least through Eusebius) and Origen.

33 Gregory adduces the example of the Jews against the theory of the *climatic zones*, like Bardaisan, and explains that the Jews keep the same law although they inhabit many different regions. Origen, instead, adduced the example of the Jews against the deterministic theory of the *horoscope* and observes that all the Jews are circumcised, although they are not born all on the same day and at the same hour, and thus they do not have the same horoscope. I deem it probable that, in this case, Gregory followed Bardaisan more closely than Origen, and that he knew Bardaisan's argument through Eusebius. Full argument for Gregory's dependence on Bardaisan in Ramelli 2009 – 19: 138-142. See also my review of Beatrice Motta, *Il Contra Fatum di Gregorio di Nissa nel dibattito tardo-antico sul fatalismo e sul determinismo*, Fabrizio Serra, Pisa-Rome 2008: *The Mediaeval Review* November 2009.

Diodore of Tarsus' long treatise *Against Fate* refutes not so much Bardaisan, whose arguments it actually follows, as Fate and astrological determinism, its full title being *Against Astronomers and Astrologers and Fate*.³⁴ Diodore in *Against Fate* 45 (preserved by Photius³⁵) responds to the same astrological objection concerning the climatic zones, each governed by a star, to which Bardaisan had replied with his innovative counter-argument to 'climatic' fatalism. Diodore responds to this objection exactly like Bardaisan: he produces the same examples of the Jews and the Christians, two peoples who keep their laws in many different regions. The most disparate peoples in every zone have converted to Christianity and submitted to the law of Christ. The words with which Diodore introduces his treatment of the Christians, "our race [γένος], I mean that of the Christians", echo the phrase with which Bardaisan introduced his own example of the Christians: "the new race of us Christians". Bardaisan, too, like Diodore later, observed that Christianity had already spread "in every land and in all regions". Diodore closely follows Bardaisan's argument. The reference to the Lazi, a Colchian people, reveals that he is using Bardaisan.³⁶

Diodore adduces a second argument: that of the peoples who, conquered by the Romans, modify their laws and customs and assume those of the Romans. This argument is based on Bardaisan and echoes the specific example adduced by Bardaisan, i.e., that of Abgar the Great, who, after his conversion to Christianity, forbade a 'pagan' ritual

34 Κατὰ ἀστρονόμων καὶ ἀστρολόγων καὶ Εἰμαρμένης (Suda s.v. Diodore of Tarsus); I. Ramelli, *Bardaisan of Edessa*, 142-60.

35 PG 103, 829-876, which I use.

36 Indeed, on the basis of Diodore's reference, in my edition of the *BLC*, 596 Nau = 16 Ramelli, I proposed to correct the reading "Zazi" of the manuscript into "Lazi", also given the resemblance between *l* and *z* in Syriac, both in *estrangela* and (more) in *serto*. The manuscript that Diodore read, whether it was Syriac or Greek, still preserved the exact reading, whereas the only Syriac manuscript of the *BLC* available to us bears a textual corruption.

mutilation (*BLC*, 15 Ramelli). The arguments concerning the Jewish people and the Christians are identical in Bardaisan and in Diodore, who merely added the point based on the succession of the empires.³⁷

Diodore concludes that the changes in religion, convictions, laws, and so on, and the adhesion to a given philosophical school or religion depends, not on Fate, but on free moral choices for good or evil, thus on human free will.³⁸ Thus, evil derives neither from Fate nor from God – as Plato had stated in his tenet “God is not responsible” for evil in the myth of Er – but from bad choices, as Bardaisan and Origen maintained. In *Against Fate* 49, Diodore adds the argument from apokatastasis or universal restoration (“the great mystery of our salvation” against “the astrologers”), a theory which, as I argued elsewhere, he supported like Bardaisan and Origen,³⁹ and which Origen upheld against astrology.⁴⁰ Diodore only blames Bardaisan for failing to remove completely not only fatalistic determinism (which Bardaisan did), but even the name of “fate”.

The works examined so far belong to the main Christian works against Fate. These include Bardaisan, Origen (*Philoc.* 23, almost entirely from his commentary on Genesis), Methodius (*Symp.* 8), Basil (*Hex.* 6.4-7, based on Origen), Didymus, Gregory of Nyssa’s *Against Fate*, Diodore of Tarsus’ *Against Fate*, and Nemesisius’ *Human Nature*, 35-38.

37 See I. Ramelli, *Bardaisan of Edessa: A Reassessment*, 179-191.

38 In Photius’ summary, PG 103, 855.

39 Demonstration in the section devoted to Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia in my *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis*.

40 Rightly Rufinus, *Apol. c. Hier.* 2.12: *Dei iustitiam defendere et respondere contra eos qui vel fato vel casu cuncta moveri dicunt*.

5. *Theodore Relies on the Anti-Fatalistic Tradition, against Manichaeism and in Dialogue with Islam*

Paralleling Origen and Bardaisan as forerunners of Theodore's anti-fatalism, as is being done in the present essay, is especially fruitful. There are many correspondences between Theodore Abū Qurrah on the one side and Origen and Bardaisan on the other and they seem to reflect a long strand of anti-fatalistic Christian tradition. Not accidentally, among Theodore's Greek works, there is a dialogue with a follower of Origen, about how to defend theodicy if God torments for ten thousand years or forever a person who has sinned for ten years.⁴¹ Theodore maintains that it is unnecessary that the time of torment is as long as the one of sinning. The representation of Origen's position is simplistic, but may be filtered through Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, who supported the non-eternity of punishment in the other world, and were well-known in the Syriac tradition.⁴²

Severus of Antioch, for example (512-518),⁴³ in Letter 98 provides a refutation of this doctrine of the limited duration of otherworldly punishments. He criticises Origen's, Methodius', and Gregory of Nyssa's assumption that physical death was providentially introduced by God to put an end to one's sins or reveal the finitude of evil, in both cases to limit the amount and duration of otherworldly suffering and eventually have all rational creatures return to the Good. Severus – like Theodore afterwards – argues that one's sins are not measured on the basis of their duration, but on the basis of the sinner's *intention*—a

⁴¹ PG 97, 1581-82.

⁴² I. Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis*, 521-548; *Isacco di Ninive teologo della carità divina e fonte della perduta escatologia antiochena*, in *La teologia dal V all'VIII secolo tra sviluppo e crisi*, SEA 140, Augustinianum, Rome 2014, 749-768.

⁴³ Pauline Allen – Robert Hayward, *Severus of Antioch*, Routledge, London 2004; Iain Torrance, *The Correspondence of Severus and Sergius*, Gorgias, Piscataway, NJ 2011.

central concept in Theodore's theology as well. In Severus' view, such an intention is not limited; therefore, otherworldly punishments will also be unlimited. Severus probably targeted John of Caesarea, the author of a series of anti-Manichaean syllogisms. In *Syll.* 1.3.5.10, John attacked the Manichaean claim that evil is a substance and has an ontological consistence of its own, as opposed to that of God. John rather claimed – like Origen and his followers – that evil has no ontological substance, but it comes from a wrong use of free will. Now, since all punishments will have the aim and effect of transforming the evil persons, in the end nobody will choose evil anymore, and thereby evil will no longer exist. John's syllogisms reveal an influence of Didymus' anti-Manichaean work.⁴⁴

Faithful to Chalcedon, Theodore Abū Qurrah was one of the first Christian thinkers to discuss with Islam, to a far greater extent than the Damascene. Theodore is described as John's spiritual disciple, although there is no direct, explicit reference in this sense.⁴⁵

44 Marcel Richard (ed.), *Iohannis Caesariensis presbyteri et grammatici opera quae supersunt*, CCG 1, Brepols, Turnhout – Peeters, Leuven 1977, 56-57.

45 *Disputatio Christiani et Saraceni* PG 94, 1596 but in a title. Constantin Baha [Bacha], *Un traité des oeuvres arabes de Théodore Abou-Kurra*, The Author, Tripoli – Rome 1905, 4. On Theodore as continuator of Damascene: Ignace Dick, "Un continuateur arabe de saint Jean Damascène", in *Le Muséon* 12 (1962), 209-223; 319-332; 13 (1963), 114-129; texts: Reinhold Glei – Adel Theodor Khoury, *Johannes Damaskenos und Theodor Abū Qurrah: Schriften zum Islam*, Echter, Würzburg 1995; on the relationship between Damascene and Islam: Paul Khoury, "Jean Damascène et l'Islam", in *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 7 (1957), 44-63; *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 8 (1958), 313-339; Peter Schadler, *John of Damascus and Islam: Christian Heresiology and the Intellectual Background to Earliest Christian-Muslim Relations*, Brill, Leiden 2018. See also Emmanouela Grypeu (ed.), *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, Brill, Leiden 2006.

Damascene's *De fide orthodoxa* supported human free will,⁴⁶ with clear expressions, I find, of ethical intellectualism: "free will is joint to the rational faculty: for, either it will not be rational, or, if it is rational, it will be master of its own actions and free" (*Fid.* 149-50 Fazzo⁴⁷). Damascene, like Theodore later, supported God's foreknowledge, not determinism (*ibid.* 155; PG 94, 1577b: "what depends on us does not depend on divine foreknowledge, but on our free will"; "the Divinity exercises providence according to its foreknowledge [πρόγνωσιν] of everything", 77.10-78.4; *Dialogus contra Manichaeos*, 80.1-6, 394-395 Kotter).

Damascene's *Dialogue against the Manichaeans* reworked Basil of Caesarea's homily titled *God Is Not the Author of Evil*,⁴⁸ which stressed the value of human free will, the non-substantiality of evil ("privation of Good"⁴⁹), and was influenced by Origen. Basil offers an abridgement of Origen's theology of freedom: "God does not love what is done

On Damascene also Andrew Louth, *St John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002; Smilen Markov, *Die metaphysische Synthese des Johannes von Damaskus: historische Zusammenhänge und Strukturtransformationen*, Brill, Leiden 2015; Adolf Martin Ritter, *Johannes von Damaskus*, in Christian Riedweg – Christoph Horn – Dietmar Wyrwa (eds.), *Philosophie der Kaiserzeit und der Spätantike*. Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie. Die Philosophie der Antike 5/1-3, Schwabe, Basel 2018, 2288-2299.

46 Michael Frede, *John of Damascus on Human Action, the Will, and Human Freedom*, in Katerina Ierodiakonou (ed.), *Byzantine Philosophy and its Ancient Sources*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002, 63-95.

47 Vittorio Fazzo, *Giovanni Damasceno: La fede ortodossa, Introduction, translation and notes*, Città Nuova, Rome 1988. On ethical intellectualism, see my "Ethical Intellectualism in Seneca and the Roman Stoics", in *Lucius Annaeus Seneca* 2 (2023), 131-162.

48 John Demetracopoulos, *In Search of the Pagan and Christian Sources of John of Damascus' Theodicy*, in Antonio Rigo (ed.), *Byzantine Theology and its Philosophical Background*, Brepols, Turnhout 2012, 50-86.

49 στέρησις ἀγαθοῦ, PG 31, 341BC.

out of necessity, but what is accomplished out of virtue. Now, virtue comes into being out of free choice, not out of necessity. But free choice [προαίρεσις] depends on what is up to us [ἐφ' ἡμῖν]: this is free will [τὸ αὐτεξούσιον]" (345B). Basil applies the image of therapeutic cures, including surgery and cauterisation, to God as Physician (333BD), already abundantly employed by Origen. Damascene declares the non-substantiality of evil: "loss and voluntary privation [ἀποβολή καὶ στέρησις ἐκούσιος] of what God endowed the rational nature with".⁵⁰ This view of evil from Origen passed on, through Basil, to Damascene and Theodore Abū Qurrah.

After Basil, human free will was defended by Nemesius around 400, Theophylact Simocatta in the early-seventh-century *On the Predestined Terms of Life*, Maximus the Confessor,⁵¹ Germanus in *On the Predestined Terms of Life*, and Damascene in *Dialogue against the Manichaeans* and the *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, which seem to be indebted to Maximus and in turn inspired Theodore Abū Qurrah.

It is discussed whether the *Controversy between a Muslim and a Christian* is by Theodore Abū Qurrah. Damascene treated Islam as a Christian heresy.⁵² This is consistent with the origins of Islam hypothesised by Griffith, Patricia Crone, Édouard-Marie Gallez, and

⁵⁰ *Dial. c. Man.* 14.7-8, 358 Kotter.

⁵¹ Ken Parry, *Fate, Free Choice and Divine Providence*, in Anthony Kaldellis – Niketas Siniosoglou (eds.), *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2017, 350-355.

⁵² Raymond Le Coz, *Jean Damascène, Écrits sur l'Islam*, présentation, commentaire, et traduction, Cerf, Paris 1992; Johannes Zachhuber, *The Rise of Christian Theology and the End of Ancient Metaphysics: Patristic Philosophy from the Cappadocian Fathers to John of Damascus*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2020, 288-310.

partially Jack Tannous,⁵³ although here we needn't be concerned with the potential Christian role in the origins of Islam. Theodore, coming later, given the evolution of Islam, treats the latter as a different religion.

Theodore Abū Qurrah knew Greek and Syriac, but preferred to write in Arabic; however, he also wrote in Syriac (and there are Greek works that are transmitted under his name). Thus, he could read Bardaisan in both Syriac and Greek, although a direct line of influence is impossible to demonstrate. Paola Pizzi and Khalil Samir observe: "it is impossible to ascertain the influence of the Syriac fathers" on Theodore.⁵⁴ Indeed, Theodore Abū Qurrah never mentions Bardaisan in the treatise *On Freedom*, but this is what he and many ancients did with their sources. I suspect that Bardaisan influenced Theodore in this respect, indirectly, or possibly even by Theodore's reading his arguments against Fate in Syriac or Greek. Significantly, Theodore reports a cosmological tradition going back to Bardaisan, showing that he was acquainted with his doctrine of creation (although he did

53 E.g. Patricia Crone, *Pagan Arabs as God-Fearers, in Islam and its Past: Jabiliyya, Late Antiquity, and the Qur'an*, in Carol Bakhos – Michael Cook (eds.), *Islam and its Past: Jabiliyya, Late Antiquity, and the Qur'an*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2017, Ch. 4; Édouard-Marie Gallez, *Le Messie et son prophète. Aux origines de l'Islam* 1, Éditions de Paris, Paris 2012; Jack Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East: Religion, Society, and Simple Believers*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ 2018 argues that the beginnings of Islam in the Middle East must be understood within the background of "simple believers" under Roman and Arabic rule. Their blurred confessional identities, including "conversions" from Christianity to Islam, is similar to that depicted by Ramsay McMullen for Christians in the Patristic era (Idem, *The Second Church. Popular Christianity A.D. 200-400*, Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta, GA 2009).

54 Paola Pizzi – Samir Khalil Samir, *Teodoro Abū Qurrah. La libertà*, Zamorani, Turin 2001, introduction, II, 3,5: my translation; Peter Tarras, *Zwischen gefesselter und freier Natur: Willensfreiheit in syrischen und christlich-arabischen Quellen*, in Dagmar Kiesel – Cleophea Ferrari (eds.), *Willensfreiheit*, Klostermann, Frankfurt a. M. 2019, 105-145, esp. 130: "Eine direkte Abhängigkeit von Bardaisan soll damit nicht behauptet werden".

not espouse it).⁵⁵ Theodore wrote a treatise concerning exactly God as Creator: *On the Creator and the True Faith*.⁵⁶

Theodore Abū Qurrah defended free will in more than one work, including in his anti-Manichaean polemics, as did Diodore of Tarsus (and I demonstrated that Diodore's treatise was taken from Bardaisan: see above) and apparently Titus of Bostra, who was inspired by Diodore.⁵⁷ Titus seems to have been a supporter of the doctrine of apokatastasis, like his inspirers Origen and Diodore, as is attested by the Byzantine theologian Gobar (Phot. *Bibl.* 232.291b) and is suggested

55 Studied in I. Ramelli, *Bardaisan of Edessa: A Reassessment*, 322-323. This, of course, does not rule out that Theodore was inspired by Ephrem, as argued by P. Tarras, "Zwischen gefesselter und freier Natur".

56 Louis Cheickho, "Theodore Abū Qurrah, On the Existence of God and the True Religion" (in Arabic), in *Al-Mašriq* 15 (1912), 757-774; *Traité inédit de Théodore Abou Qurrah (Abucara) évêque Melchite de Harran sur l'existence de Dieu et la vraie religion*, Beiruth 1912; G. Graf, *Des Theodor Abū Kurra Traktat über den Schöpfer*; Ignace Dick, *Théodore AbuQurrah. Traité de l'existence du Créateur et de la vraie religion/Maymar fi wujud al-Kaliq qa-l-din al-qawim li-Thawudburus Abi Qurrah*, Libr. Saint-Paul, Jounieh 1982; P. Pizzi, *La geografia religiosa a Edessa al tempo di Teodoro Abū Qurrah. Notizie dal Trattato sull'esistenza del creatore e sulla vera religione*, in *La letteratura arabo-cristiana e le scienze nel periodo abbaside (750-1250 d. C.). Atti del 2° convegno di studi arabo-cristiani. Roma 9-10 marzo 2007*, Patrimonio Culturale Arabo Cristiano, Turin 2008, 163-178. Theodore is also reported by a colophon to have translated into Arabic a philosophical work such as Ps. Aristotle's *De virtutibus animae*, and wrote in Greek a discussion of philosophical names (*Opusculum* 2, PG 97, 1469-1492).

57 Titus' edition in Paul-Hubert Poirier – Agathe Roman – Thomas Schmidt – Eric Crégheur – José Henri Declerck (eds.), *Contra Manichaeos Libri IV: Graece et Syriace; cum excerptis e Sacris Parallelis Iohanni Damasceno attributis Titus Bostrensis*, CCG 82, Brepols, Turnhout 2013, with my review in *Hugoye* 18.2 (2015), 446-452.

by passages of his very treatise against the Manichaeans.⁵⁸ Manichaeism was well known in the Arabic-speaking world.⁵⁹ Theodore Abū Qurrah participated in a council against the Manichaeans.⁶⁰ In the early eighth century, in Syria and Palestine, some Muslim and Christian thinkers had a penchant for Manichaean dualism; hence the response from anti-Manichaean treatises establishing monism and free will, including those of Damascene and Theodore. In early Islam, Manichaean dualism triggered discussions on free will and grounded Islamic doctrines of theodicy.⁶¹

Probably an early work, Theodore's treatise on free will is presented as a refutation of Manichaeism, to which the central section is dedicated. It also features an anonymous advocate of predestination, a position referred to in Muslim heresiography as "Ġabriyya" (i.e. determinists): *mağbūr*, "predetermined", at the beginning, in the description of the adversary of Theodore as one who "maintained that he possesses no

58 That Diodore, like his disciple Theodore, supported this doctrine is demonstrated in I. Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis*, 521-548 and my review in *Hugoye* 18/2 (2015), 446-452. A universalistic passage ascribed to Titus speaks of "places of torment and education aimed at the correction of those who have sinned", which sounds significant and is similar to the remarks made by the Antiochene theologians Diodore and Theodore of Mopsuestia, besides Origen. Although this passage might belong to Serapion of Thmuis, there is other evidence that points to Titus' knowledge of Origen and his potential penchant for apokatastasis, and it is significant that Titus explicitly refrains from advocating eternal punishment. See my "Titus of Bostra's Refraining from Advocating Eternal Punishment", in *Eclectic Orthodoxy* 8 (2024), 1-49.

59 Arabic sources on Manichaeism: Armand Abel, "Les sources arabes sur le manichéisme", in *Annuaire de l'institut de philologie et d'histoire orientales et slaves* 16 (1961-62), 31-73; Early Islamic sources and Manichaeism: Sarah Stroumsa – Guy Stroumsa, "Aspects of anti-Manichaean polemics in late antiquity and under early Islam", in *Harvard Theological Review* 81 (1988), 37-58.

60 PG 152, 784; 809.

61 According to S. Stroumsa – G. Stroumsa, "Aspects of anti-Manichaean polemics", 52-54.

freedom, and claims to be predetermined by his Creator”, comes from the same root as “Ġabriyya” (*ġabriyyah*). The Quran defended both determinism and freedom,⁶² while the prophetic tradition advocates determinism.

The arguments that Theodore Abū Qurrah uses to confute the above-mentioned anonymous advocate of predestination – the question of the “excuse” that God would seek to explain the damnation of predestined souls, for example – are, in good part, identical to those that were to be discussed by the Muʿtazilites. Theodore Abū Qurrah argues from the Bible, the Muʿtazilites from the Quran. One of the reasons why early Christian Arabic theologians might have been inclined towards Muʿtazilism is that a number of its teachings resonated with Christian patristic heritage. A later source such as Shahrastani describes the Muʿtazilites as supporters of free will: “they are concord in claiming that the human beings are powerful, creators of their acts, whether good or evil, and for their deeds deserve recompense or punishment” in the other world, because God is just.⁶³ Even the principles of theodicy (“God’s justice”) and accountability are the same as in Theodore. As we shall see, they were already supported by Bardaisan and Origen.

Theodore Abū Qurrah’s Arabic treatise *On Freedom* – not the only work he wrote on this topic⁶⁴ – is literally, according to its title,

62 Daniel Gimaret, *Théories de l’acte humaine en théologie musulmane*, Vrin, Paris 1980; P. Pizzi – S. Samir, *Teodoro Abū Qurrah. La libertà*, n. 188.

63 Daniel Gimaret – Guy Monnot, *Livre des religions et des sectes*, Peeters, Leuven 1986, 181.

64 There is another short text pertinent to the topic, which will, however, not be discussed here. It is a treatise in Arabic by Theodore dealing with free will, preserved in Sinai ar. 72, translated by Lamoreaux as *Questions on Free Will*. It is structured as “questions and answers” with a Muslim. Its focus is on the intention of an action (not its outcome), something that was stressed in *On Free Will* as well and is in line with Bardaisan’s and Origen’s theology of freedom.

a “Treatise confirming that humans possess an innate freedom from God in his creation (of them) and that absolutely no compulsion in any manner constrains human freedom”. It investigates the nature of human freedom and is often structured casuistically, with the division of possibilities and the relevant treatment.

The title itself reflects Bardaisan’s idea that human freedom is a gift from God, expressed by him as the main speaker in the *BLC*, which, as noted, broadly corresponds to his *Against Fate*.⁶⁵ Theodore Abū Qurrah’s first phrase also states the same as Bardaisan as a character does in *BLC*: “Those who commit a sin cannot enjoy its delights, as long as their souls consider that sin is reprehensible and fault them for committing it”.⁶⁶ The first sentence is indeed very similar to Bardaisan’s claim:

There is no human being who is not gladdened when he or she has done the good, and who does not rejoice in his or her soul whenever he or she has refrained from odious things. One thing is concupiscence and another is love; one is friendship and another is conspiracy. We should easily understand that the ardour of love is called concupiscence: now, even if in it there is the pleasure of a moment, however it is very different from true love, whose beatitude, forever, is not destroyed or annihilated.⁶⁷

Only good actions can be enjoyed; a momentary pleasure cannot bring an enduring delight and blessedness.

The last sentence, “souls consider that sin reprehensible and fault them for committing it” reflects ethical intellectualism, a theory deriving from ancient philosophy (especially Socrates, Plato, and

65 I. Ramelli 2009-2019; see also P. Crone, “Daysanis”.

66 PS 130, trans. Lamoreaux: John Lamoreaux (ed.), *Theodore Abū Qurrah On Free will*, Brigham Young University Press, Provo, UT, 2005, 195-206.

67 553-56 Nau; 5 Ramelli. Trans. mine, as for the all passages from *BLC*.

Stoicism, including Roman Stoicism,⁶⁸ and Platonism) and followed by Bardaisan and Origen. Theodore Abū Qurrah sticks to ethical intellectualism soon after, PS 132: to have one's soul stop faulting a desire, so as to commit it, one should make it commendable. It is necessary that one's *nous* – the intellect, central in Bardaisan and Origen⁶⁹ – determine that it is good. The Arabic notion that corresponds to Greek νοῦς is *'aql*. Theodore, like Bardaisan, embraced a tripartite anthropology of body, soul, and intellect. In Bardaisan, this may also explain the reason why he maintained the notion of “fate” even though he did not see it as an independent force, but, as said, as an expression of divine providence (see my scheme above about the correspondence of free will to *nous*, Fate to the soul, and Nature to the body);⁷⁰ indeed, he was strongly anti-fatalistic.

Theodore Abū Qurrah endeavours to demonstrate the error of various opponents, among whom are the Muslims. They are never mentioned by name (some scholars have argued that the treatise does not address them⁷¹), but he uses allusions to the Quran in describing their theological position. The first objection that Theodore contrasts is that by those who claim that they have no freedom but are compelled by God to do good or evil. This position was already rejected by Plato in his theodicy, in his Myth of Er: “God is not responsible” for evil.

68 See I. Ramelli, “Ethical Intellectualism”; Eadem (ed.), *Stoici romani minori*, Bompiani, Milan 2008.

69 See my *The Reception of Paul's Nous in Christian Platonism*, in Jörg Frey – Manuel Nägele (eds.), *Der νοῦς bei Paulus im Horizont griechischer und hellenistisch-jüdischer Anthropologie*, WUNT I 464, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2021, 279–316. On the theology of the body, see my “Soma (Σῶμα)”, in *Das Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 30, Hiersemann Verlag, Stuttgart 2021, 814–847.

70 As I argued in *Bardaisan of Edessa: A Reassessment*, 141–161.

71 S. Stroumsa – G. Stroumsa, “Aspects of anti-Manichaean polemics”, 55.

This passage taken over by Clement, Origen and Nyssen,⁷² and by Bardaisan's opponent in the dialogue at the beginning of the *BLC*: "if God is one and has created human beings, and wants you to do whatever is prescribed to you, why did God fail to create us humans in such a way that we could not sin, but might always do what is good? For in this way God's will would be realised". This is the question of Bardaisan's interlocutor Awida. Bardaisan argues against this hypothesis on the basis of human free will as a gift of God: God wanted humans to choose the Good voluntarily (543 Nau; 2 and 4 Ramelli). Bardaisan thereby rejected determinism, fought in the *BLC* and by Origen in his anti-gnostic polemic.⁷³

The purpose of Theodore's treatise is the same as that of Bardaisan in the *BLC* and of Origen's theology of freedom: "Our aim is to establish that there is freedom in human nature and that compulsion was not introduced into it from some cause or another, until it voluntarily yielded to that cause" (PS 140).⁷⁴ Human beings are free and good and evil are voluntary, a fruit of free choice. In what follows, Theodore shows to be induced to the conclusion that humans were created free by God by a concern for theodicy: "God is just" and "treats humans equally". This is the same concern that lies at the basis of Bardaisan's and Origen's theories of freedom.⁷⁵ When Theodore Abū Qurrah exclaims: "Far be it from God to assign people a task that does not lie within their power!" (PS 144), this is not only an allusion to the Quran (e.g. 2:233, 7:42), but also, I suspect, an echo of Bardaisan, who precisely argued that God commanded humans things that they can

72 I. Ramelli, *Social Justice and the Legitimacy of Slavery: The Role of Philosophical Asceticism from Ancient Judaism to Late Antiquity*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016; Eadem, "From God to God".

73 I. Ramelli, "Origen, Bardaisan, and the Origin", 135-168.

74 Trans. J. Lamoreaux, as ever with this treatise.

75 On both see I. Ramelli, "Origen, Bardaisan, and the Origin"; on Origen alone, Eadem, "The Legacy of Origen's Metaphysics of Freedom", 363-388.

do and nothing more. Indeed, in response to Awida's objection, "the commandments that have been given to humans are severe, and they are unable to observe them", Bardaisan replied:

This assumption is typical of the person who does not want to do the good... For humans are not ordered to do but what they can do. Indeed, two are the commandments that lie before us, which are appropriate and right for the aforementioned free will: one, that we abstain from everything that is evil and we would detest if done to ourselves; and the other, that we do whatever is good and we love, and wish that were likewise done to us as well. Now, who is the human who is too weak to refrain from stealing, or from lying...? Since, you see, all these things depend on human intellect, and do not dwell in the vigour of the body, but in the soul's will. For, even if one is poor, or ill, or old, or infirm in one's limbs, one is able to abstain from all these things ... Thus, what it is that he or she cannot do, about which those who are deprived of faith mutter, I don't know.⁷⁶

Theodore Abū Qurrah repeatedly uses the argument of human accountability, and of God's commandments and prohibitions to humans, to support human free will. For instance, "God would not have needed to give humans commandments and prohibitions... constraint can never be reconciled with the giving of commandments and prohibitions... If they continue to affirm that God gives people commandments and prohibitions, clearly they will have to reject constraint" (PS 150-152). This is a major argument of both Bardaisan and Origen in support of human freedom. Bardaisan speaks repeatedly of God's commandments at the beginning of the *BLC*, stating that such commandments are good and everyone can follow them (see above), and uses the argument of praises and punishment, namely accountability, repeatedly.

⁷⁶ *Liber* 551-552 Nau; 5 Ramelli.

The whole argument of the *BLC* seems to be reflected in Titus' *On Freedom*, PS 154: "every nation has a law, whether prescribed by God or invented by the nation itself". Bardaisan devoted a long part of his anti-fatalistic argument to the "laws of the nations". The title itself of the Syriac treatise, *Book of the Laws of Countries*, comes from this argument. Bardaisan here claimed that Jews and Christians in all nations had a law prescribed by God, and all nations invented a set of laws for themselves. This argument refuted fatalistic determinism (both that relying on horoscopes and the one based on "climatic" determinism). It is clear that Theodore's two points (every nation has a law, either [1] prescribed by God or [2] invented by the nation itself) reflect Bardaisan's points. And Bardaisan's claim about the laws of Jews and Christians among the nations (including the sub-argument of conversion to Judaism and Christianity at a certain point) is original to Bardaisan himself, whereas he inherited the νόμιμα βαρβαρικά lore from an earlier tradition. Therefore, Theodore's mention of the laws prescribed by God in addition to those invented by the nations relies on Bardaisan's original argument and points to Theodore's (direct or indirect) dependence on his ideas.

Regarding Theodore Abū Qurrah's category of "those who claim that they have lost their ability to choose freely", this was also the position of the mature Augustine, although earlier, when from Manichaeism he became anti-Manichaean, he had used the arguments of Origen against the Manichaeans, and embraced Origen's doctrine of apokatastasis.⁷⁷ Theodore from PS 156-158 begins a development of his treatise to show that humans never lost their freedom (a view that differs from that of the mature Augustine). This thesis is that of Bardaisan and Origen – who based his apokatastasis theory on it as

⁷⁷ See I. Ramelli, "Origen in Augustine: A Paradoxical Reception", in *Numen* 60 (2013), 280-307. On Manichaeism E. Thomassen, *Mani und der Manichäismus*, 879-887.

well (*manere quidem naturae rationabili semper liberum arbitrium, C.Rom. 5.10*).⁷⁸ However, while Origen thought that freedom remained after the fall and after death, Theodore Abū Qurrah agrees that it remains after the fall (contrary to Augustine), but not that it endures after death. This undermines the possibility of universal restoration, which indeed Theodore does not appear to maintain (unlike Origen, Bardaisan, the young Augustine, perhaps Titus of Bostra, and many others).

Theodore Abū Qurrah's treatise includes a long argument against Manichaeism and very relevant to the issue of the freedom of will.⁷⁹ This polemic was pursued by the foregoing Titus of Bostra, who seems to have had some sympathy for the doctrine of apokatastasis, Augustine in the West, but also Gregory of Nyssa and Diodore of Tarsus in the East, both supporters of apokatastasis and both acquainted with Bardaisan's *Against Fate*.⁸⁰ John Chrysostom also opposed the Manichaeans regarding free will and wrote a homily against Manichaeans and Marcionites.⁸¹ Also, Theodore Bar Konai (who devoted a section of his *Scholia* around 791 to the refutation of Manichaeism) and John Damascene, with whose ideas Theodore was acquainted, attacked the Manichaeans, like the Christian philosopher al-Kindi.

78 I. Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis*, 152-160.

79 On the knowledge of Manichaeism in Muslim philosophy, with which Theodore discussed, see A. Abel, "Les sources arabes sur le manichéisme", 31-73.

80 I. Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis*, 372-440, 521-548, 649-676; *Bardaisan of Edessa: A Reassessment*, 142-161.

81 Chris de Wet, "John Chrysostom on Manichaeism", in *HTS Teologiese Studies* 75 (2019), a5515.1-6: <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i1.551>

The doctrine of the “idiot Mani,” full of “ignorance” (PS 164, 168), is summarised as that of two principles, Good and evil, with the theory of the soul free from evil but sometimes overcome by the body. The soul is “from the essence” of the good principle (PS 170). This is the consubstantiality (ὁμοουσιότης) with God that Origen had attacked against some “Gnostics”.⁸²

To refute Mani, Theodore Abū Qurrah uses the argument from conversion and change of one’s will with examples taken from Scripture: in Matt 3:7-8, John the Baptist reproaches the Pharisees as “brood of vipers”, but he asks them to repent: “He called them a brood of vipers, but he demanded of them acts of repentance. Because by an act of their will they became a brood of vipers, by an act of their will they could change from that state and perform acts of repentance” (PS 178). Note the emphasis on free will, so central to Theodore’s thought. Theodore’s discourse proceeds through many dichotomies in argument; the main conclusion is that the soul is responsible for the choice of evil or good, not the body (PS 194).⁸³

Origen had used exactly the same Biblical “brood-of-vipers” passage as Theodore, also in defence of free will:

Even if you were a ferocious beast, by listening to the Logos who tames and makes gentler, who transforms you into a human, by the Logos you

82 See my “Origen’s Anti-Subordinationism and Its Heritage in the Nicene and Cappadocian Line”, in *Vigiliae Christianae* 65 (2011), 21-49; “The Father in the Son, the Son in the Father in the Gospel of John: Sources and Reception of Dynamic Unity in Middle and Neoplatonism, ‘Pagan’ and Christian”, in *Journal of the Bible and Its Reception* 7 (2020), 31-66.

83 From his quotations and reminiscences of Scripture, it seems that he did not rely on an Arabic translation of the Bible, since the same text is translated differently into Arabic from treatise to treatise, or even within the same treatise. He did not know an Arabic Biblical text by heart, but worked on the Syriac text, which he translated in his various works. See S. Samir, “Notes sur les citations bibliques chez Abu Qurrah”, in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 49 (1983), 184-191.

will never be addressed as “snake, brood of vipers” any longer. For, if it were impossible for these snakes – snakes in their souls because of sin – to be transformed into humans, the Saviour, oh John, would not have said, “Make worthy fruits of repentance.” After repenting/converting, you will no more be a “snake, race of vipers” (*Her.* 14).

Bardaisan also used this argument of the change of one’s intention and conduct as a support of free will in *BLC* (6 Ramelli), although the Scriptural reference is present only in Origen and Theodore and the connection is closer:

there are some who were fornicators and drunkards, and yet, when the warning of good advices reached them, became chaste and moderate, and abandoned the concupiscence of their body. And there are some who behaved with chastity and temperance, and yet, when they neglected the right advice and despised the commandments of the divinity and of their teachers, they fell from the way of truth and became fornicators and prodigal. And there are some who after their fall repented, and fear came upon them, and they returned to the truth in which they had been. Which is, therefore, the nature of the human being? Since, you see, all humans are different from each other in their behaviours and their intentions (because of free will).

Origen used examples from the New Testament to support his theory of ever-possible conversion on the basis of free will: besides the

On Theodore’s use of Biblical quotations see also Peter Tarras, “The Spirit Before the Letter: Theodore Abū Qurrah’s Use of Biblical Quotations in the Context of Early Christian Arabic Apologetics”, in Miriam Lindgren Hjälm (ed.), *Senses of Scripture, Treasures of Tradition: The Bible in Arabic among Jews, Christians and Muslims*, Brill, Leiden 2017, 79-103. On Arabic translations of the Bible: S. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the ‘People of the Book’ in the Language of Islam*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ 2013.

“brood of vipers” invited to convert, there is Paul, who, from an arch-enemy of all Jesus-followers, became a Christian apostle: “Who is the person whom «I shall kill?» It is Paul the traitor, Paul the persecutor; and ‘I shall make him live,’ so that he may become Paul the apostle of Jesus Christ” (*H. Jer.* I.15-16).

Theodore Abū Qurrah interprets another passage of Matthew used by the Manichaeans in support of their dualism: a good tree cannot produce bad fruits, a bad one cannot produce good fruits (Matt 7:18, which also occurs in anti-Manichean polemicists such as Titus of Bostra and Ephrem).⁸⁴ Theodore explains that Jesus here refers to one’s intention, not to one’s nature. The same reading of another, close passage in Matthew, based on one’s intention and not one’s nature, was provided by Bardaisan in the *BLC*:

Indeed, I, for my part, think that, more than in anything else, it is in these commandments (*sc.* the divine commandments) that the human being has power; indeed, they are easy and there are no things that are able to impede them. For we are not ordered to transport burdensome loads of stones, or of pieces of timber, or of anything else, those things that only those who are physically robust can do, nor to erect fortified buildings and to found cities, which only kings are able to do, nor to steer a ship, which only expert sailors are able to guide, nor to measure ground and divide it, which only geometricians know (how to do), nor even one of those arts that few human beings are skilled in, and the rest are ignorant of. But we have been given, according to the gentleness of God, commandments without invidiousness, such that *every human being who has a soul in itself is able to observe them with gladness*. For there is *no human being who is not gladdened when he or she has done the good, and who does not rejoice in his or her soul whenever he or she has refrained*

84 John Kevin Coyle, *Good Tree, Bad Tree: The Matthean/Lukan Paradigm in Manichaeism and its Opponents*, in Idem, *Manichaeism and Its Legacy*, Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 107, Brill, Leiden 2009, 65-88.

from odious things, apart from those who do not turn to this good and are called “tares”. For, would not that judge be wrong who blamed a human being because of what the latter is unable to do?⁸⁵

The whole interpretation, theodicy and accountability are the same as those Theodore Abū Qurrah later supported. Bardaisan takes Matt 13:24-30 and 36-43, about “tares”, and interpreted it in a voluntaristic way, not as supporting different natures, which would impair theodicy and human accountability (both of which he defends in the *BLC* and elsewhere).

In Theodore’s formulation, Mani pretended to be constituted in his soul by God’s “Goodness” (*al-ṭayyib*). The supreme Good, or Goodness, is the name of God in Origen, Nyssen, and Augustine (ἀγαθότης, ἀγαθόν, καλόν, *bonitas*).⁸⁶ Bardaisan also characterises God as goodness, for instance: “God’s goodness is abundant” (16 Ramelli; also 4 Ramelli). This philosophico-theological remark, based on a terminological point, traces a continuity.

Theodore Abū Qurrah then turns to the problem of God’s foreknowledge and argues that it exists and does not entail compulsion: “God’s foreknowledge necessarily does not compel human freedom” (PS 204). That divine foreknowledge does not imply divine determinism is the position of Bardaisan, Origen, and Evagrius, who was also well known in the Syriac tradition. God’s foreknowledge does not determine one’s salvation or perdition, because God wants to safeguard human self-determination (τὸ αὐτεξούσιον, Origen, *Hom. Ier.* 18.6). God foreknows everything, with the causes of everything, from the beginning of creation to the end of all, but does not determine

85 Nau 553= Ramelli 5 with emendation.

86 See I. Ramelli, *Good/Beauty, Agathon/Kalon*, in Giulio Maspero – Lucas Francesco Mateo-Seco (eds.), *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 99, Brill, Leiden 2010, 356-363; I. Ramelli, “Origen in Augustine”, 280-307.

anything, as Origen stated in the third book of his *Commentary on Genesis*, preserved only fragmentarily.⁸⁷ *Cels.* 2.20 distinguishes God's foreknowledge from determinism, using Stoic arguments such as the example of Laius and the refutation of the so-called "idle argument". Laius received an oracle that recommended him to have no children, since a child would slay him; Laius was free to beget or renounce begetting, since the oracle would never have given him an impossible command. Neither alternative was necessarily determined. The "idle argument" is illustrated by Origen himself – who calls it "a sophism" – through one example: if one is ill and it is fated that he recovers from the illness, one will recover even without a doctor and therapy; if it is fated that one will not recover, he will not recover, even with a doctor and a cure. Origen refutes this fatalistic example by means of a counter-example: "If it is fated that you beget a child, whether you have intercourse with a woman or not, you will beget a child; if, instead, it is fated that you will *not* beget a child, whether you have intercourse with a woman or not, you will *not* beget a child... therefore it is useless to have intercourse with a woman". Now, Origen observes, this is false, since it is impossible for any man to beget without intercourse with a woman. Origen's conclusion, then, is that fatalism is wanting and that God foreknows all but does not determine, leaving responsibility to the free will of rational creatures. This is a pillar of Origen's "theology of freedom", which will be taken over and developed by Gregory of Nyssa.⁸⁸

God's foreknowledge, then, is not deterministic, either for God or for humans, as Theodore Abū Qurrah observes: "far be it from God that his knowledge compel him, or that his knowledge nullify the freedom he kindly and generously implanted in people when he created them" (PS 210). According to Theodore, then, just as according

87 Preserved in *Philoc.* 23.8. See also *Or.* 6.4 on divine foreknowledge (πρόγνωσις).

88 See I. Ramelli, *Social Justice*, 190-211.

to Bardaisan and Origen, free will is a gift from God. Bardaisan had explicitly maintained this tenet; this common element connects Bardaisan and Theodore closely (*BLC* 547 Nau = 4 Ramelli):

God, in his benevolence, did not want to create the human being like this, but, thanks to free will, has exalted it above many creatures, and has made it equal to the angels... those things that are meant to serve have been placed in the power of the human being, because it has been created in the image of God. This is why these things have been given to it by (God's) benevolence, that they might serve it for some time. And it has been given to it to govern itself through its own will; and all that it can do, if it wants, it will do, and if it does not want, it will not do, and it will justify itself or make itself culpable. For, if it had been made in such a way as to be unable to do evil, so as to become culpable for this, likewise also that good which it would do would not be its own, and it could not be justified through it. Indeed, the one who does not do voluntarily what is good or evil, well, his or her justification or condemnation would depend upon the arbitrary decision of the one by whom he or she has been created. Therefore, it will be clear to you that God's goodness is abundant towards humanity.

The trichotomy postulated in Bardaisan's *BLC*, which probably derives from his *Against Fate*, of (1) free will depending on human *nous*, (2) Fate, and (3) nature, the last two independent of our free will, is the very same as the trichotomy postulated by Theodore Abū Qurrah of (1) human free will, (2) what lies outside of one's body and control (corresponding to Fate) and (3) what directs one's body (corresponding to Nature):

The power of *human freedom* does not cease and is not in any way subject to compulsion with regard to what God commands and prohibits. It can intend what it wishes, whether to obey or disobey God, and carry out what it wishes in *everything that lies within its ability*, both in moving its body and in moving things outside its body. That said, in terms of *what is outside its body*, it is often prevented from carrying out its will. Sometimes,

too, it is prevented from directing its body as it intends, whether because of sickness or because of external compulsion (PS 212).

In Bardaisan's theory, external compulsion pertains to Fate, as opposed to free will, which belongs to one's *nous* or the highest part of the soul. Such a trichotomy is therefore very close in Bardaisan and in Theodore.

Theodore Abū Qurrah insists on human freedom, which depends on one's intention, and founds human accountability, which results in praise / reward or punishment (a pivotal argument in Bardaisan's and Origen's theory of free will):

None of these (i.e. Nature or external things, corresponding to Bardaisan's "fate") prevents freedom from *intending* what it wills, whether to obey or disobey God, whether to do what is *praiseworthy or blameworthy*. All of its acts are requited according to the intention behind those acts ... (freedom) always has power over itself, to do what it wishes. It is this power that does not cease (PS 214).

That free will remains always is a tenet of Origen (*C. Rom.* 5.10: see above). But Origen, like Bardaisan, maintained apokatastasis, while Theodore Abū Qurrah speaks of heaven and hell without a final unification: "It lies within its ability to perish or to enjoy a life of blessing, to enter hell or to inherit the kingdom" (PS 216). In this connection, the terminology of "movement" employed by Theodore ("whether it is one or the other [hell or heaven], it depends on the movements of its intention", *ibid.*) derives from Bardaisan and Origen, who both employed "movement" in the sense of movement of will, free moral choice.⁸⁹

89 I. Ramelli, "Bardesane e la sua scuola, l'Apologia siriana 'di Melitone' e la Doctrina Addai", in *Aevum* 83 (2009), 141-168.

However, Theodore departs from Bardaisan and Origen in not supporting the doctrine of apokatastasis, and a proof consists in his explicit declaration that after death free will shall no longer work (whereas Origen based on the eternity of free will his doctrine of restoration, including in *C. Rom.* 5.10). This is what Theodore Abū Qurrah states: once a human being “has quit this world, the place of desire, and this prevents it from desiring to obtain things ... and when the resurrection has occurred, everything has become unchanging ... everyone must hasten to repentance, while still in this transient realm, before death befalls them”.⁹⁰ Bardaisan and Origen thought of a continuity between this and the next world based on the continuity of free will, while Theodore, like a number of Patristic authors before him, believed that the movement of free will ceases with death.

The last section of Theodore Abū Qurrah’s treatise is devoted to a final refutation of those who deny God’s foreknowledge. Here, Theodore adduces the biblical example of Judas: Jesus prophesied that Judas would betray him (John 6:70), showing his foreknowledge *qua* being God, but this does not mean that Judas was not responsible for his action, as Jesus indicates in Matt 26:24: “The Son of the Human Being will be betrayed, as it is written, but woe to the man by whom he is betrayed”.⁹¹ In a line of thought that is similar to that of Origen, who also reflected on prophecy,⁹² Theodore concludes that divine foreknowledge does not entail predestination, which would contradict theodicy: “Although God *foreknows* that some will do evil, this does not mean that they are *predestined*, and if they are not predestined, they are not compelled. If I am wrong on this point, it would have to be concluded that *God is unjust* in finding fault with them”.⁹³

⁹⁰ PS 218.

⁹¹ PS 226.

⁹² On prophecy in Origen see I. Ramelli, “Prophecy in Origen”.

⁹³ PS 226.

Theodicy, with its corollary of accountability, was the prime mover of Bardaisan's and Origen's theological theories as well. Bardaisan, like Origen, denied fatalistic determinism, which would have led to predestination and would have been at odds with theodicy.

Theodore Abū Qurrah's final statement, before the conclusions, stresses the principles of accountability and responsibility, which, as seen, were central to Bardaisan's and Origen's discourse as well: "Depart into the fire prepared for the devil and his angels:⁹⁴ surely God would never have prepared this fire for the devil and his angels, had he not foreknown their acts, through which they would merit this fire. If they were excused before God because of his foreknowledge of their acts, he would never put them into that fire, for *otherwise he would be unjust...* God's foreknowledge compels no one".⁹⁵ The short conclusion emphasises the importance of human free will, repeating that it is a gift of God, exactly as Bardaisan had claimed: "the freedom with which God has honoured us" (PS 230).

6. Concluding Remarks

Theodore Abū Qurrah was influenced by Bardaisan, directly or (perhaps more probably) indirectly, not only from the point of view of the refutation of Fate and of the divine gift of free will to the human beings, but also from that of cosmology and cosmogony. At least, he uses Bardaisan's tradition as a source, although he does not always embrace the positions expressed by it.

Theodore Abū Qurrah, indeed, reports a cosmological tradition concerning Bardaisan which is close to the so-called first and second

⁹⁴ Matt 25:41.

⁹⁵ PS 228.

cosmological traditions,⁹⁶ but which presents some divergences from both these traditions and should be considered separately. Theodore in his above-mentioned *Treatise on the Creator and on True Faith*⁹⁷ reports a cosmology that he expressly ascribes to Bardaisan himself: five deities exist from eternity, one of which is endowed with reason, while four are not. These four are: Fire, Air, Water, and Earth. The one endowed with reason – identifiable with the Logos of God – submitted the four, and the result was the formation of the present world and its creatures. The entity endowed with reason (*āqil*), on the basis of the four beings, formed “the natures of the world” through its wisdom.

The “five deities” are God or the divine Logos, that is “the one endowed with reason”, plus the four “beings” (*īthyē*) not endowed with reason, which, according to Bardaisan, are not at all deities or comparable to God, but which Ephrem considered thusly because of his own conviction that the name “being” indicated God.⁹⁸ The names of the four original elements in Theodore’s account is slightly different from that reported by the other cosmological traditions; it corresponds more closely to the standard Greek series of the elements. However, the Air appears among Bardaisan’s preexistent beings in Theodore Bar Konai’s account as well, whose “matter” might have a parallel in the “earth” mentioned by Theodore Abū Qurrah.

In Theodore Abū Qurrah’s testimony, the formation of the present world from the preexistent beings is ascribed to the work of God, by means of the action of the Logos, which here seems to assume the name of Wisdom. Indeed, in the *BLC* as well, the main agent of creation is precisely divine Wisdom; according to Origen, the two main *epinoiai*

96 All examined in I. Ramelli, *Bardaisan of Edessa: A Reassessment*; on Theodore: *ibid.* 338-339.

97 L. Cheickho, “Theodore Abū Qurrah, On the Existence of God”, 757-774; *Traité inédit de Théodore Abou Qurrah*.

98 Argument in I. Ramelli, *Bardaisan of Edessa: A Reassessment*.

or conceptualisations of Christ are exactly Logos and Wisdom.⁹⁹ They are partially interchangeable also for his contemporary Bardaisan. It is also notable that Theodore does not mention darkness among the beings, and indeed darkness/evil is not a being, according to Bardaisan, but it is close to non-being.

Of course, reporting Bardaisan's cosmology does not mean sharing his supposed views; Theodore actually disagreed. However, his report indicates that Theodore was acquainted with what was considered to be Bardaisan's cosmology – that is, with an aspect of Bardaisanism, which was as different from Bardaisan's own thought as Origenism was from Origen's authentic ideas¹⁰⁰ and was probably close to Manichaeism.

I suspect that Theodore's interest in Bardaisan's cosmology and his preservation of one of the so-called cosmological traditions of Bardaisan also suggest his direct or indirect knowledge of Bardaisan's arguments in favour of human free will and against determinism. In other words, since there is evidence of Theodore's reception of cosmological positions from Bardaisan, why should we rule out his reception of Bardaisan's ideas concerning free will and against determinism? We know that the *BLC*, in which Bardaisan is the main (Socratic) speaker, was still copied in Syriac in the seventh century, the date of the manuscript we possess, which includes the only copy of the *BLC*.¹⁰¹ Theodore could, in principle, have read a copy, since he knew Syriac well. But even an indirect tradition would explain the

99 See I. Ramelli, "The Logos/Nous One-Many between 'Pagan' and Christian Platonism: Bardaisan, Clement, Origen, Plotinus, and Gregory of Nyssa", in *Studia Patristica* 102 (2020), 175-204.

100 See, e.g., my, *Decadence Denounced in the Controversy over Origen: Giving Up Direct Reading of Sources and Counteractions*, in Therese Fuhrer – Marco Formisano (eds.), *Décadence: "Decline and Fall" or "Other Antiquity"?*, Winter, Heidelberg 2014, 263-283.

101 The only available manuscript was transcribed in the sixth or probably seventh century CE.

very close similarities I have pointed out. In any case, I have argued for many significant parallels between Origen and Bardaisan that can be seen as antecedents of Theodore Abū Qurrah's anti-fatalistic position, supported in a rich and conflicting theological environment.

Abstract

This article will carefully examine Theodore Abu Qurrah's ideas concerning fate and cosmology, primarily in his *Treatise on Free Will*, which included a refutation of Manichaeism. His works are the first complete theological texts in Arabic to explain the Christian faith and make it understandable and persuasive for the Muslim Mutakallims in the early Abbasid era. The present analysis of the notion of free will / freedom (*hurriyya*) will be performed in relation to Theodore's main Syriac (direct or indirect) source, Bardaisan of Edessa, and his theories on fate, free will, and cosmology, as far as they can be reconstructed from the Syriac *Book of the Laws of Countries*, the Greek fragments from his work *Against Fate* preserved by Eusebius (largely converging with the *Book*), and fragments from the so-called cosmological traditions and other fragments. The development of the doctrines will be investigated also against the backdrop of Origen's and his tradition's reflections on fate, divine providence and free will, which in many cases parallel Bardaisan's ideas (including the doctrine of universal restoration). In this discussion, the study will briefly consider Gregory of Nyssa and Diodore of Tarsus and their debt to Bardaisan, all the more significant in that they polemicised against the Manichaeans.

