



Bardaisan of Edessa

A compilation by Soror Capella Lux, © 2009 – Feel free to share & use as ye will.

also, Bar-Daisan, Bar Daisan, Latin: Bardasanes
 Born Edessa, capital of Osroene 155 A.D. [modern Sanli Urfa, Turkey]
 Died either in Ani Armenia, or at Edessa Osroene circa 222 to 233 A.D.

Lived in the capital Edessa of the Syrian kingdom Osroene which functioned as an independant state from 132BC to AD 244 when it was incorporated into the Roman Empire.

The name Bardaisan means Son of Daisan. Daisan being the name of the river in Edessa, which is said to be a tributary of the Euphrates. The more modern names of this river have been Skirtos (Greek) and the Kara Koyun.

Being named the son of a river is a high honor since rivers were viewed by the ancients as a source of life. For example, the ancient Gaelic-Sanskrit Indo-European Goddess Danu is the river Danube. The ancients lived near rivers because they had fresh water to drink, fish to eat, a place to bathe, and could hunt animals who came to the rivers to also drink and bathe. Travel long distances was made easier and faster by boat than by foot. And trade could more easily be established between villages of greater distance this way. These are all of the reasons why river floods were so damaging.

Early Life, Conversion to Christianity, and the Bardaisanian Order

Bardaisan was born to wealthy pagan Persian parents who had him educated alongside the crown prince (later King of Osroene) Lucius Aelius Megas Abgar IX. Due to political unrest in Edessa, the family moved for a time to Hierapolis (present day Manbog, Mabug or Manbij Syria) where Bardaisan lived in the home of pagan priest

Anuduzbar where he was instructed on topics including Chaldean astrology.

In 176 A.C., Bardaisan's childhood friend Abgar IX ascended to the throne. It was at this time Abgar requested Bardaisan to return to Edessa and put him in charge of the school. While at Edessa, Bardaisan heard the homilies of Hystaspes, Bishop of Edessa in the church originally built and founded by Eastern Orthodox Saint Addai. Bardaisan was so deeply moved that he subsequently became initiated into the mysteries of Christ, first baptized, then ordained as deacon, and later as priest by Hystaspes. It was during this time that Bardaisan was instrumental in converting Abgar IX to Christianity, which led to Osroene becoming the first Christian state, long before Constantinople.

While teaching at the school in Edessa, Bardaisan established a choir and write 150 psalms which were sung to the tune of popular folk songs. His son, Harmonius, aided him in writing the first Syriac hymns.

Bardaisan later left this church when he was not able to fulfill his desire to rise to the level of bishop. He subsequently joined the Valentinian order. He later left the Valentinians and founded his own order, named after himself, the Bardaisanites. During which time he wrote many works, including Dialogues against Marcion and Valentinus.

Legend of Abgar

But we have to back up to the beginning. The foothold of what was later called Christianity in Edessa started as per the Legend of Abgar. Saint Ephrem of Syria and also the "Doctrine of Addai" by Eusebius of Caesarea document this important legend which must be told to explain the Christian influences at work.

The legend starts with the correspondence between King Abgar Ouchama V (great-great grandfather of Abgar IX) of Edessa and Jesus the Christ. From King Abgar V to "Jesus, the good Deliverer," "I have written to request that you would trouble yourself to come to me, and cure this disease which I have; for I have also heard that the Jews murmur against you, and wish to do you harm. But I have a city, small and beautiful, which is enough for two." Jesus replied: "Blessed are you who believed in me, not having seen me. . . . Now concerning what you wrote to me, I must first complete here all for which I was sent, and after thus completing it be taken up to Him who sent me, and when I have been taken up I will send one of my disciples to heal your suffering and give life to you and those with you."

It is said that after the ascension of Jesus the Christ in 29 A.D., that Thomas the Apostle sent one of his 72 disciples, Thaddeus (called Saint Addai in the Eastern Orthodox religion), to Edessa to fulfill this promise. Thaddeus (Addai), healed Abgar V, converted him, and

founded the church where Bardaisan first heard Hystaspes preach many years later. It should be noted that even though Abgar V converted to Christianity, he did not set up Edessa as a Christian state. That only later occurred with his descendant, Abgar IX.

Writings

The "Hymn of the Pearl," (also known as "The Hymn of the Robe of Glory" as per G. R. S. Mead's Fragments of a Faith Forgotten.) contained in the apocryphal Acts of Judas Thomas (Thomas the Apostle and 'twin of Jesus') has been attributed to Bardaisan, however, this attribution has also been disputed. It should be noted that Sabazius mentions Mead "was Crowley's primary source on Gnosticism."

In the Acts of Thomas, Thomas was sent by the ascended Jesus the Christ to India to set up ministry there. The present-day Syrian Malabar Nasrani (also called Saint Thomas Christians) in Kerala, India are from this religious tradition. The return of the relics of Saint Thomas to Edessa from India in 232 (at or around the time of the death of Bardaisan) is of note.

Nicolas Notovitch writes of the travels of Jesus throughout India in his 1894 book *The Unknown Life of Christ*, based upon his translation of Tibetan document "The Life of St. Issa." which he claims he discovered while at the Himis convent in Tibet. However, this book was deemed a fraud by Orientalist F. Max Muller and biblical scholar Edgar Goodspeed.

Bardaisan also wrote "An Account of India", some of which was preserved by Porphyry and Stobaeus.

Bardaisan's early Chaldean astrological and hermetic influence is seen in his writings *The Dialogue Concerning Fate*, or, *the Book of the Laws of Countries* and a surviving French translation later called *Une biographie inédite de Bardesane l'astrologue*, published by François Nau.

Other writings of Bardaisan are cited by Ibn Abi Jakub: *Light and Darkness*, *The Spiritual Nature of Truth*, *The Movable and the Immovable*

Later in life, Bardaisan moved to Armenia where he attempted to spread Christianity and also where he composed a history of the Armenian Kings. This move to Armenia may have been at the heels of the abduction and removal of King Abgar IX by Caracalla, Emperor of Rome; which was pivotal to the eventual incorporation of Osroene into the Roman Empire later in 244.

Beliefs of the Bardaisanites

"The followers of Daisan believe in two elements, light and darkness. The light causes the good, deliberately and with free will; the darkness causes the evil, but by force of nature and necessity. They believe that light is a living thing, possessing knowledge, might, perception

and understanding; and from it movement and life take their source; but that darkness is dead, ignorant, feeble, rigid and soulless, without activity and discrimination; and they hold that the evil within them is the outcome of their nature and is done without their co-operation."

Influence upon & Reactions of Others

Information on Bardaisan is available through his opponent Catholic Saint Ephrem

- Against Bardaisan's Book "Dominus"
- A Discourse in Stanzas against Bardaisan.
- Discourses to Hypatius against Mani, Marcion and Bardaisan.

Helena Patrovna Blavatsky, founder of Theosophy, tells of Bardaisan's influence. "Yet it is undeniable that some of the alleged philosophical views and doctrines of Bardesanes are found in the codex of the Nazarenes."

This codex is the *Ginza Raba*, holy book of the Mandaeans. Within this codes lies the *Book of Adam*, (*Liber Adami*), which discusses the Prophet Adam who lived in Qurnat Iraq and who began the Mandaean religion. (I take this to mean Adam Kadmon, or Primordial Man, everyman, humanity, 'man know thyself...'. - which is extremely profound.) A version was translated into Swedish by Matthias Norberg (1747-1826), professor of Greek and Oriental languages at Lund University. (isbn 0-646-35222-9).

A chapter of Mani's lost *Book of Secrets* was on Bardaisan, as per tenth-century Islamic writer Ibn al-Nadim.