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## MANICHAISM IN THE CONTEXT OF EPHRAIM'S POLEMICS WITH THE BARDESANIAN DOCTRINE AND THE SYSTEM OF MARCION IN PROSE REFUTATIONS

The doctrinal concepts of Mani originated and developed in an environment where the systems of Marcion and Bardasain (Ibn Desan) had already been deeply rooted. About 987 A.D., in his work *Fihrist al-'Ulûm* („Catalogue of Works”), Ibn an-Nadîm, an Arabic historian, made an attempt at giving a chronological structure to the relationships between Marcionism, Bardaisanism and Manichaeism: Mani made his appearance after Marcion had appeared a hundred years before him, under the reign of Titus Antoninus, in the first year of his reign, and Ibn Desain about thirty years after Marcion<sup>1</sup>. According to F. Decret, despite the doctrinal differences between the two, the systems of Marcion and Bardaisan should be considered as two determinants of the Gnostic path that led to Manichaeism<sup>2</sup>.

In *Prose Refutations* I<sup>3</sup>, Ephraim turns against heretics: in the introduction to the second discourse *To Hypatius*<sup>4</sup>, the names of Mani, Marcion and Bardaisan are explicitly mentioned; the third discourse begins with an anonymous mention of the enemies, then immediately focuses on an argument against the teaching of Marcion; the fourth discourse is almost entirely devoted to polemics against Mani's theory of elements of light and darkness; in the fifth discourse –

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ibn an-Nadîm, *Fihrist al-'Ulûm*, ed. G. Flügel, Leipzig 1871, 328.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. F. Decret, *Mani et la tradition manichéenne*, Paris 2005, 28.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. S. Ephraim's *Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion and Bardaisan*, ed. C.W. Mitchell – A.A. Bevan – F.C. Burkitt, vol. I-II, London 1912-1921.

<sup>4</sup> Syr. ܡܝܡܪܐ (*mîmrô*) means *discourse, homily, treatise*; an exception occurs in the title of the second discourse *To Hypatius*, where the term ܥܘܩܬܐ (*'egrôto*) (pl.) is used, meaning *script, letter*; the exception made more interesting by the fact that in the title of the first discourse *To Hypatius*, ed. Overbeck, we find ܡܝܡܪܐ (*mîmre*) (pl.), translated as *tractatus*. The English translation by Mitchell and Burkitt uses *discourse*. Memra is „a poetic form, a metrically arranged homily, a type of poetic prose. Designed for reciting (not for singing like *madraga*), it did not necessarily have a strophic form. [...] The subject matter of *memra* was usually uniform and coherent, most often related to the Scriptures. Some memre contained polemics, commentaries, confessions of faith or didactic instructions”; cf. W. Myszor, *Memra*, in: C.V. Manzanares, *Pisarze wczesnochrześcijańscy I-VII wieku*, ed. W. Myszor, transl. E. Burska, Warszawa 2001<sup>2</sup>, 134.

the last one in *Prose Refutations I* – Ephraim engages in a fight against not only the errors of Mani, but also those of Marcion, Valentinus, Bardaisan and the Jews. *Prose Refutations II* begin with an apologetic treatise *Against Domnus*, the work in which Bardaisan opposed the Platonists. The entire three discourses that follow contain a dispute against the teaching of Marcion. After a short hymn in praise of virginity, which is free from polemical elements, comes the last discourse, *Against Mani* where, apart from Manichaeism, Ephraim criticizes the doctrine of Bardaisan<sup>5</sup>.

In a research on Ephraim's polemics against Manichaeism, it seems interesting and necessary to take account of the religious context in which the doctrine emerged and developed. The analysis covers only those passages from *Prose Refutations* in which the author defines direct relationships whereby Manichaeism, Bardaisanism and Marcionism either mutually influence or contradict one another.

## I. EPHRAIM'S POLEMICS WITH THE TEACHING OF BARDAISAN<sup>6</sup>

Bardaisan (Ibn Desan) was born in 154 A.D. at Edessa (Osroene) on the river Desan in the period when the Marcionist schism must have been well established; he died in 222/223 A.D. He is regarded as the first Christian poet<sup>7</sup>. Known as Bardesanes in the West, he fiercely fought against the doctrine of Marcion, however, he did not manage to avoid the trap of Gnostic dualism, which, according to E. Renan, might have been an influence of the powerful Iranian Mazdaism<sup>8</sup>. Apart from Ephraim, Bardaisan is mentioned by Julius Africanus and George, Bishop of the Arabs<sup>9</sup>, Eusebius of Caesarea<sup>10</sup>; *Recognitions*<sup>11</sup> and Philip, the disciple of Bardaisan<sup>12</sup>. The turn of the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Ephrem Syrus, *Sermo alter contra Manem (tūb mymrō dlūqbal mani)*, transl. and introd. A. Uciecha: Św. Efreim, *Kolejna mowa przeciw Manesowi*, VoxP 25 (2005) vol. 48, 359-376.

<sup>6</sup> Ephraim also presents the Bardesanian doctrine in his *Hymns against Heretics*, cf. *Contra haereses* 1, 9-12 and 16-18; 3, 4-6; 56, 1-2 and 8-9; ed. E. Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrer. Hymnen contra Haereses*, CSCO 169-170 (Syr 76-77), Louvain 1957; CSCO 170, 3-6; 12-13; 190-192.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. M. Albert, *Langue et littérature syriaque*, in: M. Albert – R. Beylot – R.G. Coquin, *Christianismes Orientaux. Introduction à l'étude des langues et des littératures*, Paris 1993, 338.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. E. Renan, *Marc-Aurèle et la fin du monde antique*, Paris 1882, 436-439; Decret, *Mani et la tradition manichéenne*, p. 27-28.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Georgius, *Coniunctiones astrorum*, PSyr 1, 613-614.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Eusebius, HE IV 30, 1-3; *Praeparatio Evangelica* VI 10, 1-48.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Recognitions* (Pseudo-Clementina) IX 19-29.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Philippus, *Liber legum regionum*, in: Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* VI 10, 1-48; *Recognitions* IX 19-29; ed. F. Nau, PSyr 1, 490-658 vel: Bardesane, *Le livre des lois des pays*, Paris 1899 (with french translation).

centuries brings a valuable testimony of the Bishop of Mosul (died 903 A.D.)<sup>13</sup>. According to A. de Halleux, Bardaisan was not a Gnostic, nor was he a Christian devoted to astrology, nor was he a heretic humanist<sup>14</sup>. *Bardaisan of Edessa* by H.J.W. Drijvers<sup>15</sup> still remains the basic work describing the person and the thought of that original Syrian philosopher. Drijvers was challenged by T. Jansma in *Natuur, lot en vrijheid. Bardesanes, de filosoof der Aramers en zijn image*<sup>16</sup>. The debate on that controversial thinker is still open, and further research is necessary for a thorough evaluation of his views<sup>17</sup>.

At the end of *Another Discourse against Mani*, Ephraim mentions Bardaisan as *الفيلسوف السرياني* („the Philosopher of the Syrians”)<sup>18</sup>. It seems that the phrase should be considered together with other polemical arguments in *Prose Refutations*, and the information on the origin and the profession of the adversary was meant as a clear sign of rejection of his philosophy<sup>19</sup>. F.C. Burkitt claims that Bardesanian philosophy was never a coherent system and its lack of logical consistency is obvious; therefore, rather than on the system itself, he prefers to focus on the unsympathetic refutations by the Deacon of Edessa<sup>20</sup>. Ephraim criticized Bardaisan for mixing up the doctrines of Plato with those of the Stoics<sup>21</sup>, suggesting his poor command of Greek. It has to be born in mind, however, that the „Aramean philosopher” spent part of his life at the court of Edessa and therefore probably could speak Greek. On that basis, Burkitt questions the knowledge of Greek by Ephraim himself, stressing that he gives us no quotations from Plato or the Stoics in his discourses, and his information about Greek literature and philosophy seem to be based on hearsay<sup>22</sup>.

In his criticism of Bardaisan’s teaching on the structure of human soul, the Syrian explicitly calls him „Mani’s teacher” (*معلمه مانى*)<sup>23</sup> and his „elder brother”

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Bardesanes, *Liber legum regionum*, ed. F. Nau, PSyr 1, 490-658.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. A. de Halleux, rec. (H.J.W. Drijvers, *Bardaisan of Edessa*, Assen 1966), „Le Muséon” 81 (1968) 274.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. H.J.W. Drijvers, *Bardaisan of Edessa*, Assen 1966.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. T. Jansma, *Natuur, lot en vrijheid. Bardesanes, de filosoof der Aramers en zijn image*, Wageningen 1969.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. R. Lavenant, *Bardesane (154-222)*, DECA I 340-341 vel DPAC I 476-478.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Refutations* II 225, 24-26: „.....and there ended the construction of Aramaean Philosopher”; cf. *Prose Refutations* II 7, 48 – 8, 1: Bardaisan is called *الفيلسوف السرياني* („the Philosopher of the Syrians”).

<sup>19</sup> Ephraim most probably wanted to stress his negative attitude towards the doctrine of Bardaisan, whom he regarded as a pagan philosopher, cf. R. Duval, *Traité de grammaire syriaque. Écriture, phonétique, orthographe, les parties du discours et les formes des mots. Syntaxe, index des mots*, Amsterdam 1969, p. V.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. F.C. Burkitt, *Introductory essay*, in: *Prose Refutations* II, p. CXXV.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Prose Refutations* 5, 27 – 8, 14.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Burkitt, *Introductory essay*, in: *Prose Refutations* II, p. CXXVI-CXXVII.

<sup>23</sup> *Prose Refutations* I 8, 4-18, Mitchell – Bevan – Burkitt, vol. I, p. XXXII: „And it is in this connection that Bardaisan, the teacher of Mani, is found to speak with subtlety, when he said that

(ܩܘܪܕܐܢ ܩܘܪܕܐܢ)<sup>24</sup>; Mani, as a disciple of Bardaisan, was supposed to make use of his teacher's work<sup>25</sup>. That is the conclusion the Syrian draws after analyzing the anthropological concepts developed by the two heretics and pointing to their close similarity, or even identity. In a similar way, he assesses their approach to the important philosophical concept of *Hülē* and its prime role in the creation of the visible world<sup>26</sup>. In the criticism of both systems, an important emphasis is placed on their mutual impact, also as far as the concept of deity is concerned. All heretics, including Bardaisan and Mani, are blamed for introducing a multitude of divine beings. The similarities between their gods results from a similar way of thinking, in which they close their minds to the revealed truth, limiting themselves to mere human knowledge<sup>27</sup>. Burkitt points to a remarkable correspondence between the account of Ephraim and that of Moses bar Kepha (ca

of seven Parts the Soul was composed and fixe; though he is refuted as well. For the numerous Parts which the Soul gathers and collects, make (possible) many a mixing of the seven Parts without proper regulation”.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *ibidem* I 140, 19-29, Mitchell – Bevan – Burkitt, vol. I, p. XCIX: „And because Mani saw that before him his two elder brethren, namely Marcion and Bardaisan, that one had said, ‘below’ and the other ‘above’- because he saw that if he said ‘below’, that had been said; and if he said ‘above’, he saw that it was not new (lit., ancient)”; I 140, 37-44: „For He, too, prophesied by the spirit of his brethren, and *Hülē* (*i.e.*, Matter) is found in all of them, for it is only the Church that it is not found”.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *ibidem* I 123, 15-22, Mitchell – Bevan – Burkitt, vol. I, p. XC: „And since Mani saw in his place that He was not able to cross the river at any other place, he was forced to come and cross where Bardaisan crossed”; I 122, 26-41: „Because Mani was unable to find another way out, he entered, though unwillingly, by the door which Bardaisan opened. For because they saw that his Body is well put together, and that its seven senses are arranged in order, and that there is in the heart an instrument for the impulses of the Soul, and that there is in the tongue a harp of speech...”.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *ibidem* I 141, 9-17, Mitchell – Bevan – Burkitt, vol. I, p. C: „And if Mani and Bardaisan have called the Maker God, perhaps a way might have come to them to call *Hülē* also (God). For it is the cause of the Making as they say”.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *ibidem* I 138, 46 – 140, 18, Mitchell – Bevan – Burkitt, vol. I, p. XCVIII-XCIX: „So his proves concerning their Teaching that it is the elaborate arrangement of men. For the cause of his nearness of their Gods who are near to one another is evidently his, (namely), that it is because the false (Teachers) are near to one another; on his account they bring their Gods together. And because they are imprisoned in the midst of one hollow of Creation, therefore they have imprisoned their Gods within one Space. And because they are not able to go outside of his world, lest the argument should be brought against them ‘Whence did you perceive their Gods?’ they have manager to construct causes which result in their Gods being in the midst of his world so that the effect might be that from these Gods they received the revealed Teaching concerning their secrets. And as children who play on a wide staircase, when one sits on the lowest step his companion, in order to anger him, sits on the middle step, and in order to resist both another sits on the upper step, even such are the heralds of Error. To resist each other they have named Places some of which are more compressed (*i.e.*, lower) than others, and Gods who are higher than their companions. In the sport of children the (same) story (?) is found. For children who are older than one another have ranks one above another. But they (the Teachers) have named empty Domains and idle Gods who do not exist, and futile stories which have no root”.

790 A.D.) regarding the teaching of Bardaisan on God the Arranger, the Entities and the constitution of the material world<sup>28</sup>.

In *Prose Refutations*, the criticism of Bardaisan as the teacher and Mani as his disciple is not limited to highlighting the similarities and mutual relationships between their systems: it also takes account of numerous differences and even contradictions between the two. Respecting the chronological order in which the heretical doctrines appeared (cf. referring to Bardaisan as Mani's „elder brother"), Ephraim claims that, as for the number of divine beings, the teaching of Bardaisan (the „teacher") is markedly different from what his disciple Mani stood for<sup>29</sup>. Despite the similarities in their limited ways of thinking, they did not manage to avoid discrepant and even opposing views. Ephraim accuses them of yielding to infantile impulses, giving way to unhealthy rivalry<sup>30</sup>. A comparative analysis of both cosmologies suggests the superiority of the „teacher's" doctrine. The contradictions between Bardaisan's and Mani's cosmology had an impact on their anthropological concepts, where they attempted to identify and describe the creators of the body<sup>31</sup>.

The relativised way in which the Syrian qualifies the heretical theses seems to be a polemical method thanks to which the addressee of *Prose Refutations*

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Burkitt, *Introductory essay*, in: *Prose Refutations* II, p. CXXIII.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Prose Refutations* II 53, 2-29 (*Against Marcion* I), Mitchell – Bevan – Burkitt, vol. II, p. XXIV: „For how could he be veracious who proclaims Seven Gods, when another asserts after him in confirmation who proclaims only Two Gods? Or how could he who proclaims Three Gods assert (anything) in confirmation of both of them? Thus all the teachings are refuted by the Jews, because the Scriptures belonging to the Jews are truer than all the teachings. But the Jews themselves, who by means of their true Scriptures have been able to overcome many teachings, are refuted by the Church..."; I 134, 40 – 136, 22, Mitchell – Bevan – Burkitt, vol. I, p. XCVII: „But as for Mani and Marcion, the one before, the other after, with Bardaisan in the middle, one inquiry is directed against the three of them. But let Marcion be asked first as (being) the first-if those Heavens actually exist for the Stranger it is clear that he is not one Entity, but two unlike one another. And if a Space surrounds him, then again there are three Entities, and the Space is not like the Heavens, nor do they both resemble God. God is found to be weak and inferior to the two of them. For it is found that a Space surrounds him as being an inferior, and that the Heavens bear him up as being weak, not to mention other things which we shall not give at length, which indeed refute Mani also. For he names a Space and an Earth along with God as an actual existence. But Bardaisan (who was) in the middle and (was) clever, chose one and rejected the other; and his (he did) in order that he might thereby refute his neighbour, and did not know that that of which he was ashamed is the companion of that which he affirmed. For he said concerning God that He is in the midst of Space, but he does not [attribute actual existence to the Heavens as Marcion did nor to a Luminous Earth as Mani]...[Yet in his Teaching like them he limited God. For he made Space] support God and did not know that there is something beneath God which bears him up. ... a self-existent Space like God. For both of them Egest also, so that either the latter was dissolved like the former, or the former was established like the latter".

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *ibidem* I 138, 46 – 140, 18.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *ibidem* I 124, 11-18: „[...] it is clear that its Architect and Regulator is God, and not the Sons of the Darkness as Mani said, nor the foolish Governors as Bardaisan said".

should be able to understand that any departure from orthodoxy leads to heresy and gives rise to further divisions, also among heretics themselves. It is, therefore, possible to assess their degree of deceit and the level of threat they pose<sup>32</sup>. Thus, Ephraim introduces the principle of gradation of heresies according to their harmfulness: all heresies are evil, but to a different extent.

What the author of *Prose Refutations* aimed at was not only to expose the similarities and differences between the systems he opposed, but also to correct any misconceptions around them. The source of those misconceptions remains anonymous. The sentences quoted by Ephraim might have been borrowed from heretical apologetic writings, where the teaching of other heretics was challenged, while some of them were cited as authorities on the ground of their seniority. Another possibility is that there was a number of polemicists writing in defence of orthodoxy. Such a theory seems to be fairly well-grounded<sup>33</sup>.

In his comparative analysis of Mani's and Bardaisan's teachings, the Syrian polemicist makes use of invective. Carrying out a critical analysis of their false theories concerning the purifying role of the moon which releases parts of light, he calls them both liars (كذابين)<sup>34</sup>. Their belief in changeable parameters of natures is also classified as a lie<sup>35</sup>. Ephraim qualifies Bardaisan as a deceiver

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *ibidem* I 138, 6-45: „And, therefore, let us inquire briefly concerning these two Roots, leaving on one side many questionings in their statements, (let us ask) whether they (*i.e.*, the Entities) were in contact with one another, or far from one another, or whether one was below or above the other. And if he says that one was opposite to the other, then Marcion and Bardaisan are more subtle than he. For Bardaisan supposes that the Darkness was beneath, below everything; and Marcion represents the Stranger as being above everything. Therefore (it may be said), that if that Space in which they all dwell is one, and the length of that Space is immeasurable, and its breadth infinite, what (is meant by saying) that all those Entities were dwelling in the same neighbourhood, and one above the other or one behind the other? Was there not a chance that they would be scattered and be far from one another in that Space which is infinite?”

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *ibidem* I 136, 23 – 137, 5: „But, again, Mani goes on to make many things, five Natures which he calls Ziwanē (the Bright Ones). And how, if he assumes two Roots, can there be many (beings) confined in the midst of each of them? For how from [one source can such diverse objects come as Light and Water, Wind and Fire?]... These show concerning their nature as also Water and Light show that their Root is not a single one. The fashioner of this Teaching was foolish even if he was clever. For he says (there are) two Roots that we (?) may not say to him as Bardaisan said, (namely, that there are) five Roots (one) above (the other)”.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *ibidem* I 27, 31 – 28, 1: „And which view shall we hear, that of Bardaisan, who says about the Moon that it is an Earth and a Matrix which is filled from a high and lofty overflow and floods those who are below and beneath, or that of Mani, who says that the Moon is filled with those who come from beneath and sends (them) away to the Upper Places? But they both are wrong in both respects, so that the word of Moses may be believed who said concerning the Luminaries, «they shall be for signs and for seasons, etc.»”.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *ibidem* II 214, 11-23: „[...] these Natures stir up an unfalsifiable refutation against those who wished to tell all these lies about plain things. For these Natures that have not become weaker and are not becoming weaker prove about Bardaisan and Mani that there is no sense in their teaching”.

though, in his opinion, it is Mani that created greater confusion<sup>36</sup>. In their dispute on the number of beings (ܡܢܝܢܝܢ), they argue and fight like snakes (ܫܘܢܝܢ), proclaiming doctrines which disregard the value of the human body<sup>37</sup>. However, the very act of proclaiming is inextricably linked to and dependent on the body. With unrelenting consistency and logics, the polemicist analyzes the theses of his adversaries and exposes their inner contradiction: the body, without which no doctrine can be taught, comes from the evil element and is, therefore, incapable of truth. The ontological pessimism underlying their concepts of somatism disqualifies the whole teaching of Bardaisan and Mani. Their anthropological vision makes a search for truth impossible, and those who pronounce it as the truth are, in fact, „advocates of error” and should be considered as liars<sup>38</sup>. Their contemptible and deplorable rivalry in increasing the number of gods are merely human fabrications, and only „deceivers and advocates of error” are capable of such conduct<sup>39</sup>. Ephraim uses similar epithets in the polemical passages of *Hymns against Heretics*, referring to Bardaisan and Mani as the „sons of error” (ܩܘܪܒܢܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ) and „sons

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *ibidem* I 125, 1-10: „And because his is the Teaching which comes from the party of Marcion and Valentinus and Bardaisan and he is the last of all, that is to say, the dregs, lower than that above him, so his one (*i.e.*, Mani) is more abominable than those before him”.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *ibidem* I 122, 13-45: „And those things which Bardaisan makes (*i.e.*, considers to be) five Entities, Mani makes (to be) from a single Essence. And his conflict is not ours. For it is wright for us to lift ourselves from between two serpents in order that they may fight with one another for the victory which is itself altogether a defeat in other respects. Because Mani was unable to find another way out, he entered, though unwillingly, by the door which Bardaisan opened. For because they saw that his Body is well put together, and that its seven senses are arranged in order, and that there is in the heart an instrument for the impulse of the Soul, and that there is in the tongue a harp of speech, they were ashamed to speak blasphemy against it (*i.e.*, the Body) in plain terms, and they had recourse to cunning, and divided it into two parts”.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *ibidem* I 146, 33 – 147, 37: „And, therefore, accordingly to his infallible refutation and undeniable evidence and unanswerable demonstration and experience which neither errs nor causes to err, Marcion, too, and Mani and Bardaisan, because they were clothed with the Body which they represent as from the Element of Evil, were unable to be good in it, because, as they say, it is from the Evil One, nor (could they be) upright, because it is vicious; nor (could they be) true, because it lies; nor (could they be) pure, because it is turbid. And let them not be angry because these things have been spoken against them by us. For their mouth overthrows them, not our tongue; and their Teaching not our Will; and their Error, not our free Choice. For they said that the Body comes from the Element of Evil and lies; and it is clear that because their Souls were playing on his hateful harp, the ‘intoxicating Foulness of the Body’ did not allow the melody of Truth to be player on its strings. And, therefore, they have decided against themselves that they are preachers of Error, owing to the fact that they are mixed in the Body which comes from Error according to their decision. For it (*i.e.*, the Body) speaks against them”.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. *ibidem* I 138, 46 – 140, 18.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. *Contra haereses* 14, 7: „And behold: all the sons of error (ܩܘܪܒܢܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ) are one (Marcion, Bardaisan, Mani)! From the Greeks have they received the abominable name of the accursed *Hūlē* (*sanjō hūlō*). Moses never wrote about it in the Law, nor was it mentioned by the Prophets, nor was it noted by the Apostles; all those sons of the truth (ܩܘܪܒܢܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ) proclaimed one being (*itjō*)”.

of the lie” (ضمر الكفر)<sup>41</sup>. The antisomatism of the two heretics might suggest a consensus between them, yet, in fact, the similarity is only superficial and is directed against the truth<sup>42</sup>. Their obstinate deception and rejection of the truth are illustrated with the strong images of a „mire” (Bardesian doctrine) or „foulness” (Manichaeism)<sup>43</sup>. Both the „teacher” and his „disciple” perceive the matter (*Hūlē*) as the cause of creation of the material world<sup>44</sup>. According to the Polemicist, spreading such views is a deception, and those involved in similar practices are like thieves and robbers from the evangelical parable on the good Shepherd and His sheep (cf. Jn 10:8)<sup>45</sup>.

Invective also abounds in the passages of *Prose Refutations* devoted to the criticism of Bardaisan himself, with no reference to other heretics. In straightforward words, Ephraim expresses his indignation at what he perceives as a pagan worship of the space (كبرياء), accusing his adversary of great blasphemy<sup>46</sup>. Perhaps the harshest description of Bardaisan is comparing him to Beelzebub<sup>47</sup>. According to Burkitt, Ephraim’s method lies in stressing the

<sup>41</sup> Cf. *ibidem* 14, 8.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *Prose Refutations* I 123, 28-37, Mitchell – Bevan – Burkitt, vol. I, p. XCI: „And because here they both say the same thing, the same thing may be said against them both, so that by means of the Truth which is not divided against itself, the two divided ones may be overcome, (the two) who in this passage have clothed themselves with (a semblance of) agreement against the Truth”.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *ibidem* I 9, 27-31, Mitchell – Bevan – Burkitt, vol. I, p. XXXIII: „But we have not come to stir up now the mire of Bardaisan; for the foulness of Mani is quite sufficient”.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *ibidem* I 141, 9-17.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. *ibidem* I 142, 20 – 143, 17, Mitchell – Bevan – Burkitt, vol. I, p. C: „And, therefore, this *Hūlē* which is found in them all is a sign set upon all of them, so that by one sign set upon all of them they may be known to be all one. But wild asses are weak against a strong lion. When they see him they verily gather against him as one who is strong, and victorious, but he sends one and as for the many who have gathered, he scatters all of them by means of one. The Truth also in its splendour when it conquers one of the false (Teachers), by means of that one who fails, defeats all those who have gathered together. For all who are in Error are limbs, the limbs also which are not caught are caught by the one which is caught. For it is written concerning those former deceivers, <All those who have come are thieves and robbers>. But blessed is he who is able to bear insult (lit., that which stirs indignation), and blessed is he again whom their insult does not reach at all, so as to perturb him”.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *ibidem* I 133,1-38, Mitchell – Bevan – Burkitt, vol. I, p. XCVI: „For greater are the praises which Bardaisan uttered concerning Space than those which he uttered concerning the God in the midst of Space, which (praises) are not suitable for Space, but for God. For if they are suitable for Space their Space is found to be more excellent than their God. But the true word (*i.e.*, piety) demands praises as it demands acts of worship, and presents them to the one great and adorable (Being). For as it is not right to worship idols that there may not be many gods with the One, so it is not right to bestow the title of ‘Existence’ on Space along with God. And as it is not right to postulate another Power which is able to command God, so it is not right to postulate a Space which is able to limit God. For if He is made subservient in one respect, this is a great blasphemy”.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *ibidem* I 184,47-185,12, Mitchell – Bevan – Burkitt, vol. I, p. CXIX: „And just as he who worships idols does not worship wood or stone, but devils, so he who prays with the Manichaeans



similarities between Bardaisan and Mani in some situations, while ignoring them when convenient. In *Prose Refutations* Ephraim is treated contemptuously as *the Dilettante*<sup>48</sup>.

All the above-signaled similarities between the Manichaean and the Bardesanian cosmogony, cosmology and anthropology, as well as the differences dividing the two systems, as understood and defined by Ephraim, still require a thorough analysis. Certain caution is necessary in the evaluation of the statements made by the Deacon of Edessa because of the apologetic nature of his reasoning and the degree of his familiarity with the views of his adversary. The basic question to be tackled is whether and to what extent Ephraim's concern for orthodoxy influenced his perception and criticism of the heresies he was fighting against. Thus, are the theses of the rival schools presented objectively, or have they been simplified in order to fit the idea of their elimination? The need for a distance towards Ephraim's polemical stance also results from the simple fact that its preliminary critical analysis is still superficial and cannot lead to final conclusion.

## II. EPHRAIM'S POLEMICS WITH THE SYSTEM OF MARCION IN *PROSE REFUTATIONS*

Ephraim's polemics with the teaching of Marcion is neither the oldest nor the most exhaustive. Chronologically, the first information concerning Marcion's heresy is found in Justin's *Apology* of about 150 A.D. From the same period come the mentions by Papias of Hierapolis and by Filastrius. At the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, Clement of Alexandria, Rodon and Irenaeus of Lyon warned against the danger of the heresy. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, the group of polemicists was enlarged by, first of all, Origen, Hyppolitus of Rome, Tertullian and, to a lesser degree, Cyprian of Carthage and Novatius in Rome. Later sources include the *Dialogue of Adamantius* by an unknown author and *Panarion* by Epiphanius (4<sup>th</sup> century). Three treatises against Marcion and numerous critical hints in *Prose Refutations* provide an invaluable source of information about the Syrian Marcionism. According to Burkitt, Ephraim's polemics became an inspiration to Eznik of Kolb, an Armenian bishop and theologian, who refuted the errors of Marcion in his work *Against the Sects*<sup>49</sup>.

F.C. Burkitt notices that, in one respect, S. Ephraim's polemic against Marcion differs fundamentally from that of Tertullian and Epiphanius: there

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prays with Satan, and he who prays with the Marcionites (?) prays with Legion, and he who (prays) with the followers of Bardaisan (?) (prays) with Beelzebub, and he who (prays) with the Jews (prays) with Barabbas, the robber".

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Burkitt, *Introductory essay*, in: *Prose Refutations* II, p. CXV.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, p. CXVII; B. Aland, *Marcion-marcionisme*, DECA II 1541-1543.

is no controversy about Marcion's Gospel. Marcion rejected the authority of the Old Testament and all that he perceived as the influence of Judaism, and the only Gospel he accepted was a mutilated version of Luke, which he considered as a genuine account of God's truth. Therefore, pointing to the weaknesses of the texts he received as inspired formed an integral part of any polemics against the theses of Marcion. However, as Burkitt claims, Ephraim used the *Diatessaron*, quoting it from memory, and probably did not realize that Marcion's Gospel was one of the Canonical Four used by Greek and Latin orthodox Christians. Possibly, he did not even know the Marcionite Gospel itself, and, while quoting from it, he used the passages that were found in other works of Marcion<sup>50</sup>. As an example of his unawareness, Burkitt quotes his commentary to the death of John the Baptist in which he refers to the daughter of Herodias and to the soldier (executioner)<sup>51</sup>. St Luke does not describe the above-mentioned episodes, which means that they must have been absent from the Marcionite Gospel, quoting them is, therefore, pointless from the polemical point of view. There is not much value, either, in referring to the theses from St Paul's Letter to Timothy<sup>52</sup>, as Marcion rejected the so-called pastoral epistles<sup>53</sup>. In Burkitt's view, there are two most typical examples of Marcionite exegesis presented by Ephraim in *Against Marcion II*<sup>54</sup> and *II*<sup>55</sup>. The first passage dwells on John the Baptist<sup>56</sup>. Because of his mission as the herald of Jesus, he was an inconvenient figure for the Marcionites: according to their doctrine, Jesus was the Son of the Stranger and His coming was unexpected and unprepared. In the other example, Ephraim quotes an unknown Marcionite work, in which Jesus is described as the one who came to annul former Laws and heal people from their diseases. On that basis, Ephraim is able to demonstrate inconsistency in the teaching of his adversaries: The acknowledged interest of Jesus in the human body contradicts the exclusion of matter (*Hūlē*) from the plan of salvation<sup>57</sup>.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Burkitt, *Introductory essay*, in: *Prose Refutations II*, p. CXVII.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Ephraem, *Adversus Marcionem I* 64, 24; II 109, 13 and 108, 45.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *Prose Refutations II* 100, 10.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Burkitt, *Introductory essay*, in: *Prose Refutations II*, p. CXVIII-CXIX.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *Prose Refutations II* 106, 38-42, Mitchell – Bevan – Burkitt, vol. II, p. XLVIII: „<Because John was near to die, he sent his lock by the hand of two dunder-sheperds to the Lord of the flock>”.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *ibidem II* 125, 40-47: „For the Marcionites preach two things concerning our Lord which are at variance with each other, for <He abrogated the former laws and healer injured organs>”.

<sup>56</sup> The authors of *Prose Refutations* consider the Syriac 𐤀 as corresponding to ‘inverted commas’ at the beginning of quotations, unfortunately there is no corresponding word or sign to mark the ends of quotations, cf. C.W. Mitchell, *Prose Refutations I*, p. (10); Burkitt, *Introductory essay*, in: *Prose Refutations II*, p. CXX, footnote 1.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Burkitt, *Introductory essay*, in: *Prose Refutations II*, p. CXX.

What characterises Ephraim's reasoning in his polemics with Marcion is its biblical emphasis. Burkitt draws attention to the fact that the Marcionite doctrine was Christian and biblical in its essence, and its founder built his philosophy on the Holy Scriptures. In the Bardesanian doctrine, the main emphasis is placed on cosmology: the „Aramean philosopher” adopted certain elements from both the Bible and Greek philosophy because they seemed to be in harmony with his own system. Similarly to his „teacher”, Mani is more or less independent of Biblical data. For both, Burkitt claims, their cosmological notions are an essential part of their religion. Marcion seems to have been a cosmologist only by accident, with more stress placed on morals and the „psychology of forgiveness”<sup>58</sup>. Ephraim accuses him of being ‘half in and half out’ of orthodox thought, which demonstrates his inconsistency<sup>59</sup>.

The issues of biblical exegesis are not the only polemical points in *Prose Refutations*: according to Ephraim, the Marcionites fast more than Ezekiel and pray more than Daniel. The early Syriac-speaking Church esteemed the ideal of virginity so highly, that we need not be surprised that none of Ephraim's discourses contains a defence of Christian marriage<sup>60</sup>.

Although the anti-Marcionite testimony of Ephraim is, indeed, relatively late, it is difficult to agree with Harnack, who would deny it any value for that reason. According to Myszor, the Syrian describes the teaching of Marcion in the mythological perspective, which draws it closer to the perspective applied in Gnosticism<sup>61</sup>.

In *Prose Refutations*, the Marcionites are treated as the ancestors of the Manichaeans, and, similarly to the Bardesanites, they are called their „elder brothers” (ܩܕܝܫܝܢ ܩܕܝܫܝܢ)<sup>62</sup>. The kinship between the two heresies is expressed in their teaching and worship: they worshipped towards the West, contrary to the biblical tradition which associated salvation with the East<sup>63</sup>. Some passages give an impression that Ephraim wanted to present Marcion's views in an objective way: without any critical remarks, he gives an account of basic Marcionite concepts, such as the Stranger, the Creator and *Hūlē*, analysing their interconnection<sup>64</sup>. The attempt to provide an overview without any polemical

<sup>58</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, p. CXX.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. *ibidem* p. CXXI.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, p. CXXII.

<sup>61</sup> A review of early Christian sources containing polemics against Marcion, cf. W. Myszor, *Wstęp*, in: Tertulian, *Przeciw Marcjonowi*, transl. S. Ryznar, PSP 58, Warszawa 1994, 9-31.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. *Prose Refutations* I 140, 19-29.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. *ibidem* I 128, 45 – 129, 1.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. *ibidem* I 141, 17 – 142, 19, Mitchell – Bevan – Burkitt, vol. I, p. C: „As for Marcion who compelled him to rend again his tunic and dance with the wanton...? For if he says concerning the Stranger that he is not the Maker his would be sufficient to put him in error. For he said that the Good One came – he who did not make (things) – and gave life to the Sons of the Maker; and because he had no property in the realm of the Creator it would not be necessary for him to

comments was probably made deliberately. However, caricature and invective remain Ephraim's favourite tools in his fight against the Marcionites. As other heretics, they tell lies and deform the truth, while their theories resemble children's tales<sup>65</sup>. In a detailed analysis, the Deacon of Edessa criticizes the Marcionite tendency to weaken the concept of God and ascribe some divine features to the heavens (celestial bodies?) and space (cosmic?)<sup>66</sup>. Despite his errors, Marcion shows more wisdom than Mani, and though both of them bring about confusion (ܠܗܘܢ ܕܥܘܒܪܝܢ, „deceivers”), Ephraim perceives Mani as the worse of the two<sup>67</sup>.

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In *Prose Refutations*, Ephraim polemicizes against not only Manichaeism, but also the heresies of Bardaisan and Marcion. The underlying key issue of the article is whether the Syrian Polemicist is objective while presenting the hostile doctrines, and to what extent his apologetics determines the form and substance of his theology. Certain caution in the evaluation of his judgments is necessary for finding an answer to the above-mentioned questions.

The author of *Prose Refutations* intends to expose the similarities and differences between the criticized systems on the one hand, and to correct any misconceptions around them on the other. He uses comparative analysis, which makes his principal message clear and simple: any departure from orthodoxy leads to heresy and gives rise to further divisions, also among heretics themselves. It is, therefore, possible to assess the degree of deceit and threat they represent. All heresies are evil, but to a different extent. It seems that the thoroughness and objectivity of Ephraim's polemical argumentation is subordinated to the purposes of apologetic and pastoral defence against the heretical errors.

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undertake the cause of Hülē. And if in order to show that the Maker tricked Hülē the Stranger Himself did not keep faith with him when he came, and transferred by fasting and prayer the bodies which were from Hülē, and after he worked all this work in them he sent them by death to the realm of Hülē, he removed them without compensating the Maker in that he raised the bodies of Enoch and Elijah to Heaven, and promised resurrection in his Scriptures as He said to Daniel, «Go, rest till the end, and thou shalt stand in thy time at the end of the days»”.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. *ibidem* I 138, 46 – 140, 18.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. *ibidem* I 134, 40 – 136, 23.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. *ibidem* I 125, 1-10. Certain relativity in Ephraim's use of invectives against heretics can be noted: in *Contra haereses* 24, 11 it is Marcion that is called the first blasphemer (ܘܡܪܝܢ ܕܥܘܒܪܝܢ) (ed. Beck, CSCO 170, 88: *der erste Lästerer*; gossip).

MANICHEIZM NA TLE POLEMIKI EFREMA SYRYJCZYKA  
Z BARDESANIZMEM I MARCJONIZMEM W *PROSE REFUTATIONS*

(Streszczenie)

W *Prose Refutations* Efreem Syryjczyk polemizuje nie tylko z manicheizmem, ale również z heretyckimi poglądami Bardesanesa i Marcjona. Zamiarem autora *Prose Refutations* było zdemaskowanie podobieństw i różnic w nauce zwalczanych systemów oraz sprostowanie błędnych opinii na ich temat. Problem badawczy podjęty w artykule wyznaczony został przez pytania o obiektywizm syryjskiego Polemisty w prezentacji zwalczanych herezji. Efreem nazywa Bardesanesa „syryjski filozof”, „nauczyciel Manesa”, „starszy brat (Manesa)”. Podobnie marcjonici otrzymują status przodków manichejczyków i nazwę „starsi bracia”. W nauce Bardesanesa Efreem krytykował tezy nauki kosmologicznej, zaś w sporach z nauczaniem Marcjona akcentował jego biblijny charakter. Zdaniem Efrema wszystkie herezje są złe, ale w różnej mierze: wszystkie wprowadzają zamieszanie, jednak najgorszy jest manicheizm.