

Bardaisan's Account of Indian Religious Practices and the Identification of the Described Phenomena on the Basis of Textual and Archaeological Sources

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ABSTRACT

This article is an analysis of the two preserved passages of the work *Ἰνδικά* by Bardesanes, a Syrian historian, philosopher, poet, and astrologer who lived in the years 154–222 AD. These passages are the account from the meeting of the members of an Indian embassy with the emperor Elegabalus and can be significant for our understanding of contacts between ancient Syria and India, as well as of ancient Indian religious practices. Therefore the purpose of this article is to reconsider a realistic interpretation of these passages by finding a possible identification of the described phenomena (namely, the ordeal of water, the ordeal of door, and a cave in the first passage handed over by Porphyry and Stobaeus, and two groups of Indian ascetics, the Βραχμᾶνες and the Σαμαναῖοι, in the second passage handed over by Porphyry) based on archaeological and textual evidence.

KEYWORDS

Bardaisan; India; Syria; religion; ordeal of water; ordeal of door; androgynous statue; Śiva; Kashmir; Indian ascetics; Romano-Indian relations.

Bardaisan (154–222 AD), a Syrian astrologer, historian, philosopher, and poet, in the two extant passages of his work *Ἰνδικά* quoted the account from the meeting of the members of an Indian embassy with the emperor Elegabalus. The text treats about what the Indian embassy told the emperor about certain Indian religious practices. In the first passage, handed over by Porphyry and Stobaeus, Bardaisan described two Indian rituals, namely, the ordeal of water and the ordeal of door, as well as a cave, where these rites were held; and in the other one, handed over by Porphyry, he described two groups of Indian ascetics (the Βραχμᾶνες and the Σαμαναῖοι). Because these descriptions seem fabulous and improbable, especially the first passage, symbolic interpretations have prevailed in research on the subject. However, Bardaisan's text could be significant for our understanding of ancient Indian religious practices and contacts between ancient Syria and India. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to reconsider realistic interpretation and find possible identification of the described phenomena on the basis of archaeological and textual evidence, e.g. Kashmiri chronicle *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* by Kalhana, describing a place of worship called Kapateśvara Tīrtha, which may perhaps be identified with the cave from Bardaisan's text.

BARDAISAN'S LIFE AND WORKS

With Bardaisan we apparently move to the Syrian Christian reality, but not entirely, because Bardaisan knew perfectly both the Syriac and Greek language. In his works can be seen the

so-called Syrian syncretism and many different influences, including pagan.¹ Since Bardaisan is not very well known, a moment needs to be devoted to introduce his life and works.²

In the preserved fragments of Bardaisan's works one can see his interest in such areas as: astrology, history, ethnography, philosophy, and poetry. He is not very widely discussed, perhaps due to the fact that his works have survived only in fragments, what can be explained by the fact that his teachings were considered heretical, and therefore they did not survive in the face of the subsequent censorship of the Church. Bardaisan's biography was written among others by two medieval Syrian chroniclers, Michael the Syrian and Bar Hebraeus. These sources are given by F. Nau in his edition of Bardaisan's *Liber Legum Regionum* in *Patrologia Syriaca* I, 2.³ However, H. J. W. Drijvers denies the credibility of Bardaisan's biography by claiming that it bears the hallmarks of an ecclesiastical legend designed to show the heresy in stark comparison with orthodoxy.⁴ Important sources for the reconstruction of Bardaisan's image are also the references in *Historia Ecclesiastica* IV, 30 of Eusebius of Caesarea, and several other individual references from various writers. Bardaisan was born in 154 AD in a pagan aristocratic family near Edessa, an ancient city in North Mesopotamia, and from the 2nd century BC capital of Osroene, which was an important centre of Christianity in the East. According to the tradition, Christianization of this region took place in the 1st century during the reign of Abgar V.⁵ Bardaisan converted to Christianity together with Abgar VIII the Great, he was baptized by the bishop of Edessa Hystaspes, and soon was ordained a deacon, but bishop Aggai condemned his views and excommunicated him.⁶ He died in 222 either in Edessa or in Armenia. Bardaisan was named by A. Hilgenfeld in the title of his monograph *der letzte Gnostiker* (the last Gnostic).⁷

In the works of Bardaisan one can observe certain characteristics of Gnosticism, as for example dualism in the cosmic and anthropological sphere, esotericism, as well as the demand of the liberation from the power of fate (εἰμαρμένη) by obtaining knowledge (γνώσις), what can be seen especially in his work *Liber Legum Regionum*, known also as *Περὶ Εἰμαρμένης*. R. Guenther in his article on this work wrote about Bardaisan: partly Christian, partly philosopher of nature, partly Gnostic, partly astrologist, thus the opinion about him changed.⁸ It should be remembered that Bardaisan was also, and perhaps primarily, an astrologist. He relied on traditional Babylonian astrology; however, as in other cases also in this field, he showed great independence and created his own view far from the astrological determinism. He also had associations with hermetic literature, the so-called *Corpus Hermeticum*, Alexandrian treatises attributed to Hermes Trismegistus. This diversity of inspirations in Bardaisan's worldview is associated with the so-called Syrian syncretism, which combines Greek elements (the so-called Babylonian Hellenism) with Iranian-Semitic ones.

1 For example, he learned pagan hymns from a pagan priest Anuduzbar in Hierapolis (Manbij).

2 This is only an overview of the biography of Bardaisan. For a detailed study cf. e.g. DRIJVERS 1966; WINTER 1999; RAMELLI 2009.

3 NAU 1907.

4 DRIJVERS 1966, 190–191.

5 Cf. BARNARD 1968; DRIJVERS 1997.

6 According to Michael the Syrian he inclined towards Valentinianism, according to Bar Hebraeus he turned to Valentinus and Marcion, according to Eusebius of Caesarea to Valentinus and the Ophites. However, some researchers deny that he had any connections with Valentinus (cf. RUDOLPH 1977; RAMELLI 2009).

7 HILGENFELD 1864.

8 'Teils Christ, teils Naturphilosoph, teils Gnostiker, teils Astrologe, so schwankt die Meinung über ihn' (GUENTHER 1978, 15).

Bardaisan's works are preserved only fragmentarily. *Liber Legum Regionum* was known until the 19th century only from the fragments quoted by Eusebius (as *Περὶ Εἰμαρμένης*). In 1855 it was discovered in Syrian manuscript by W. Cureton and Nau.⁹ In addition, Porphyry assigns to Bardaisan a book about India (*Ἰνδικά*), for which the information was derived from the account of the members of the Indian embassy sent to the emperor Elagabalus. Bardaisan was also a talented poet, considered to be the father of the Syriac hymnology. However, only a few verses are preserved, quoted by Ephrem the Syrian in his collection *Carmina Nisibena*, usually for polemics with the views of Bardaisan, but often also to present the orthodox principles of faith using the poetic form of hymns. In addition, the authorship of the *Acts of Thomas*, apocrypha written in the first half of the 3rd century in Edessa, is attributed to him. However, the authorship of Bardaisan is doubtful. At present, some researchers believe rather that he was only the author of lyrical poems contained in this work, for example the famous *Hymn of the Pearl*.¹⁰

BARDAISAN'S *Ἰνδικά*

The work most important for the present paper is Bardaisan's account about India. In the extant sources, there are two long passages of *Ἰνδικά*¹¹ quoting Bardaisan's account from the meeting of the members of Indian embassy under the leadership of Σανδάλης with the emperor. The first one is a quotation from the work of Porphyry *Περὶ Στυγός* and was transmitted by Stobaeus in his *Florilegium* I, 3.56. It contains, *inter alia*, the descriptions of the ordeal of water and the ordeal of door, and a cave with an androgynous statue inside. The second of these fragments is preserved in the work of Porphyry *De abstinentia* IV, 17 (cf. Jerome *Adversus Jovinianum* II, 14) on abstaining from eating meat (vegetarianism), and it relates to the specificity of the two groups of Indian theosophists (θεοσόφων), the Βραχμᾶνες and the Σαμαναῖοι. As mentioned in the introduction, these descriptions are denied credibility on the basis of their similarity to fairy-tale motifs. Therefore, this article will attempt to identify the motifs contained in these descriptions in relation to real phenomena.

Before proceeding to a more detailed commentary on the various issues concerning the descriptions contained in both passages it is worth looking into the circumstances of the meeting and possible motivations of the author to write an account of this meeting. The emperor mentioned here is identified with Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus, known also as Elagabalus, who was the son of Julia Soaemias from the royal family of Emesa. He was a priest of the god Elagabal (*the God of the Mountain*), worshipped in the form of a black stone (Baetylus). The cult of that deity was introduced to Rome through that emperor. He also adopted the title Elagabal, the Greek spelling of which as Ἡλιογάβαλος, giving a new reference to the Greek Sun god (Ἥλιος). The meeting probably took place in 218 AD in Edessa, which was a very important communication point on the route linking the East with Rome: two major trade routes in luxury goods crossed here, and it was the place from which, according to tradition, the mission of the Christianization of India started. To investigate the possible reasons why Bardaisan wrote an account of the meeting with Indian embassy, one should pay attention to the author's tendency to syncretism. Bardaisan had a remarkable ability to synthesize a variety of phenomena belonging to different cultures. He was probably generally much interested in

9 This work has been discussed elsewhere (cf. KUBICA 2013).

10 Other, not preserved Bardaisan's works, are not mentioned here.

11 Henceforth cited after BECKER 2011.

foreign peoples and their customs, which is particularly evident in his work *Περὶ Εἰμαρμένης*, in which he presented a variety of laws to deny determinism and to prove the fact that a man acts according to free will. Perhaps also in the case of *Ἰνδικά* the aim of Bardaisan's account was to compare the phenomena from Indian culture to a known culture, both Syrian and Greco-Roman, and thus to present his views on the general situation of a man in relation to God and the world around him. Therefore, while analysing these fragments one should note a high probability of occurrence of the so-called *interpretatio Graeca*.

THE SECOND PASSAGE (PORPHYRY DE ABSTINENTIA IV, 17)

Due to limited space, I will not discuss thoroughly all the described phenomena, because they were discussed at length by previous scholars, for example, by Ch. Lassen,¹² K. Karttunen,¹³ or F. Winter.¹⁴ I will start with the second fragment, cited by Porphyry, because it is less problematic. It raises social issues, and more specifically the description of two groups of the so-called theosophists, or ascetics engaged in the exploration of knowledge of the divine laws. At first glance, this is a very well-known topic in Western literature on India, where similar descriptions for the most part come from the work of Megasthenes. But it is too hasty a conclusion, since the present *Σαμαναῖοι* are not the same as those in the Greco-Roman literature and in Megasthenes.

At the beginning of this section is included the introduction by Porphyry, in which he speaks of the division of Indian society into many groups. This information was probably taken from another Greek writer. Megasthenes for example in his book about India writes about the division into seven groups (*γενέματα δὲ οἱ πάντες Ἰνδοὶ εἰς ἑπτὰ μάλιστα γένηα*) and then proceeds to describe each of these groups, which include: σοφισταί, γεωργοί, νομέες / ποιμένες / βουκόλοι, δημιουργικόν / καπηλικὸν γένος, πολεμισταί, ἐπίσκοποι, βουλευόμενοι.¹⁵ Bardaisan mentioned as one of the groups the so-called theosophists (*θεόσοφοι*). He distinguishes them as a separate group on the basis of their education, thus moving away from the denotation of Indian terms: *varṇa* (literally 'colour', one of the four groups) or *jāti* (occupational group). Instead, he pays attention to their wisdom, as indicated by the ending of their determination -σοφοί.

The *Βραχμᾶνες*, according to Bardaisan, unlike *Σαμαναῖοι* (who recruit from the whole Indian nation), come from one family, from 'one mother' and 'one father'. At first glance, this view does not agree with the 'Puruṣasūkta' of the *Ṛgveda* X, 90, according to which the Brahmans were created from the head of the cosmic giant Puruṣa, because there is no mention of 'father' and 'mother' in this hymn. However, there is no discrepancy here, because this hymn, in contrast to the account of Bardaisan, concerns cosmogony. Another explanation of this passage was suggested by Lassen, who claimed that it describes the Brahma and his wife Sarasvatī.¹⁶ But there is no confirmation of this theory in other sources. Winter in turn drew attention to the possible identification of the second group, the *Σαμαναῖοι*, with the Buddhists.¹⁷ As a consequence of this theory, this section can be regarded as a representation of the contrast between the two groups: on the one hand are *Σαμαναῖοι*, who are identified as

12 LASSEN 1858.

13 KARTTUNEN 1997.

14 WINTER 1999.

15 Cf. Arr. *Ind.* 11–12 (ed. Hercher – Eberhard 1885).

16 LASSEN 1858, 362.

17 WINTER 1999, 106.

λογάδες (elected), and on the other the Brahmins, who pass their *θεοσοφία* in their lineage from generation to generation.

Another issue concerning the Brahmins is the issue of sovereignty. According to Bardaisan, they are independent of the king, and do not pay taxes. The case is similarly presented in Megasthenes regarding the whole group called φιλόσοφοι. This is also confirmed in the Indian texts presenting the Indian social system. The Brahmins were therefore the most privileged group in Indian society. However, their lives were very modest. According to Megasthenes, they lived in the mountains (the so-called φιλόσοφοι ὄρεινοί) and near the River Ganges (the so-called φιλόσοφοι πεδιάσιοι).¹⁸

As for the food, Bardaisan highlights the fact that the Brahmins do not eat meat. In this context it is worth noting that originally *ahimsā* was not a part of the Buddhist ethical system. It was promoted by various ascetic groups, and Buddhism took it over. Vegetarianism grew in India as a Brahmin custom (visible for example in the *Mahābhārata*), and was passed on to other groups. Regarding the lifestyle of the theosophists, according to Bardaisan, they lived in seclusion and spent time exploring the words about the deity.

The second group described by Bardaisan are the so-called Σαμαναῖοι. Surely they are not the same as the Samanas of Western literature on India, or the Σαρμᾶνες, whom Megasthenes listed next to the Brahmins as the second group of the so-called φιλόσοφοι.¹⁹ The name Σαρμᾶνες derives from the Sanskrit term *Śramaṇa* – an ascetic. As Karttunen noted, formerly it had been debated whether Σαρμᾶνες should be identified with Buddhists or Brahmins, but now it is simply assumed that the name refers to different groups of wandering monks.²⁰ In contrast, the researchers have long agreed that the Σαμαναῖοι in Bardaisan's account are the Buddhists.

Another question arises when trying to determine the etymology of the word Σαμαναῖοι. According to Karttunen this name refers to the Pāli form *Samaṇa*.²¹ And the ending -αῖοι, according to A. Dihle, may derive from the Aramaic intermediate level, or might have arisen by analogy to the Greek adjectives formed from nouns belonging to the -a- declination (as, for example, the adjective ἀρχαῖος formed from the noun ἀρχή), or as an exception (as in the word ἐπιστολμαῖος), or similarly to Semitic determination of groups of population (for example Ἰουδαῖοι).²² Since Bardaisan was a Syrian, it is possible that the first hypothesis is right, namely that it is of Aramaic origin. The validity of this theory is further indicated by the mention of the Samanas preserved in other Western writers: Clement of Alexandria and Cyril of Alexandria (not mentioning the fragment in the work of Jerome *Adversus Iovinianum* II, 14, for which Bardaisan was a direct source). These texts show that Σαμαναῖοι are connected with Bactria, or the Iranian-Indian frontier, which in the first centuries of our era was the place of residence of the Kuṣāṇas, who had a major impact on the promotion of Buddhism, as well as on the maintenance of the influence of Western art and culture throughout the Central Asia, and above all, along the silk routes, which were then gaining importance.

As already mentioned, Σαμαναῖοι are elected (λογάδες) from all the people of India, from among of those, who want to sacrifice their life to theosophy. Therefore, they are in opposition to the Brahmins, who are of one family and their theosophy is passed down from generation to generation. Similarly, in Megasthenes we find information about becoming σοφιστής.²³

18 Strab. XV, 1,58 (ed. Meineke 1877).

19 Strab. XV, 1,59–60 (ed. Meineke 1877).

20 KARTTUNEN 1997, 58.

21 KARTTUNEN 1997, 57.

22 DIHLE 1964.

23 FGtH 3C 715 F19a (after JACOBY 1958): μούνον σφισιν ἀνεῖται σοφιστήν ἐκ παντὸς γένεος γενέσθαι, ὅτι οὐ μαλθακὰ τοῖσι σοφιστῆσιν εἰσιν τα πρήγματα ἀλλὰ πάντων ταλαιπωρότατα.

The problem here concerns the Buddhist postulate of rejection of caste barriers as a protest against the exclusivity of salvation for the chosen, namely the Brahman priests. This is one of the main points of the Buddhist propaganda. According to Buddhists, not by birth but by deeds one can really be considered a Brahman. The *locus classicus* on this subject is the text of the *Dhammapada* 393, according to which, 'A man does not become a Brāhmana by his platted hair, by his family, or by birth; in whom there is truth and righteousness, he is blessed, he is a Brāhmana'.²⁴ Thus, Buddhism in opposition to Brāhmaṇism aims to democratize and disseminate the philosophy, to make the liberation (*mokṣa*) accessible for all social groups. This feature made Buddhism more open to different groups, including foreigners.

The next section in Bardaisan's account describes the procedure of the admission of new adepts to the Order. Now, to join the group of the Σαμαναῖοι, one must go to the authorities of the village and get rid of all goods, have his body shaved, and abandon his wife and children, who thereafter do not legally belong to him. According to Indian texts, joining the Order is a two-step process. The first stage (*pravrajyā*) involves liberation from all things binding a man to this world. This is a necessary requirement to become a bhikṣu. Whereas the second stage (*upasamṇpadā*) involves profession of vows. Bardaisan here describes the first stage, during which, according to the Pāli canon, adept passes 'from his homeland to exile' (*agārasmā anagāriyam pabbajati*). Also in the *Upaniṣads* it is presented as a stage of the *saṃnyāsa*, because attaining liberation (*mokṣa*) is possible only in isolation from everyday life and in lonely quest to focus on the ultimate goal, to reject everything else (*saṃni-ās* means 'to reject'). This process is very clearly visible in Bardaisan's account. At the beginning there is a mention of shaving unnecessary hair and putting on new robes. This information is confirmed in the text of the *Mahāvagga* I, 12.3, where we read about cutting off hair and beard, putting on yellow robes, and where we find a description of the three robes (*tricīvara*), which the monks wore: a bottom robe (*antaravāsaka*), top robe (*uttarāsanga*) and a cloak (*sanghāti*).

Bardaisan then proceeds to describe the abandonment by an applicant of all his possessions. According to the text of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* XIV, 7.2, possessions are like fetters. In Bardaisan's account liberation from possessions concerns also the family of the adept. The participle κερτημένος indicates that the family is one of the so-called κτήματα, or 'things owned'. After joining the Order the adept does not consider having a family (πρὸς αὐτὸν νομίζων). This aspect of the abandonment of the world plays an important role in Buddhism. The wife, whom the monk has abandoned, is called 'old comrade' (*purāna dutiyikā*) and so he appoints her 'sister', just like other women. In the text of the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* V, 23 (*Sutta* 16 of the *Dīgha Nikāya*) we find a description of a conversation between Ananda and the Buddha, where the Buddha instructs the student how he should behave in relation to women. Namely he advises not to approach them, but if he approaches them, not to talk to them, but if he talks to them, to be extremely careful. The monk, who had abandoned his life in the society, had the status of a person legally dead.²⁵ Thus, his former wife was considered a widow (*vidhavā*), what led to her very difficult situation in Indian society, because a woman had to be under the care of a man, as we read in *Manuṣṣṛti* V, 147. Thus, left by her husband, the wife passed under the care of her son, and if she did not have a son, then a male relative of her husband, and if the husband had no male relatives, she returned to her father. In contrast, the children were taken care of by the king, who provided such care also to the sick, crippled, pregnant women, widows, and the elderly.

24 Ed. Müller – Fausbøll 1881, 91.

25 OLIVELLE 1987, 52.

With regard to the information provided by Bardaisan on monastic life, we need to verify it in the Chinese sources speaking on this subject, for example Xuanzang, Faxian, and Yijing. Useful for this purpose is the description of the Nālandā monastery.²⁶ The first issue is the role of the king in the construction of new monasteries. According to Bardaisan, the king was the founder of the residential quarter (οἴκοι) and the sacred precincts (τεμένη). This is confirmed by the data provided by S. Beal on the construction of the Nālandā monastery, which was built by the king of this country.²⁷ However, the largest contribution to the building of new monasteries was made by kings Aśoka and Kaniṣka. It should be noted that the Buddhist monasteries also had economic functions.

As for the daily life in the monastery, the description by Bardaisan also seems to be confirmed in the sources. For example κώδων ('a bell') corresponds to Indian *ghaṇṭā* ('a gong'), and it seems to play an important role; namely it gives a signal to the monks to begin their activities, it is a part of their daily ritual. The text of the *Cullavagga* V, 11.5 provides a description of the material used to make the gong: silver or gold. Remarkable is also Bardaisan's mention of the vessels. The beggar's bowl (*pātra*) was something, the Buddhist monks had from the beginning.²⁸ Interesting is also the presence of the laity in the monastery, which is evident from the statement that those, who were not Σαμαναῖοι, had to leave. Also the mention of the administrators of monasteries (οἰκονόμοι) is confirmed in the sources.²⁹

The final issue discussed by Bardaisan in this fragment is the attitude of the Σαμαναῖοι towards life and death, and more specifically towards suicide. It is interesting that the majority of scholars interpret αὐτοί in this passage as pertaining to both groups: Σαμαναῖοι and Brahmans. However, I accept F. Jacoby's conjecture that the phrase τε καὶ τῶν Βραχμάνων is Porphyry's later addition, and therefore the rest of this description should be treated as referring only to Σαμαναῖοι. Suicide is a known τόπος in Western literature on India concerning the monks. This τόπος had its origins in the story about Calanus and Zarmanochegas,³⁰ who committed suicide by burning themselves at a stake. These examples show that suicide was practiced in India. Perhaps it was not the rule, but it was certainly a well-known phenomenon. In the Indian *dharma* literature suicide was often mentioned as prohibited. For example, *Manuṣṃṛti* V, 89 prohibits pouring libations of water (*udakakriyā*) to those, who have committed a suicide (*ātmanastyāginah*). According to Karttunen, 'what was not occasionally done was not forbidden. Actually it (*sc.* a suicide) must have been practised in ancient times, and there are also direct references to it.'³¹ A. Hillebrandt gathered references to committing suicide at a stake in Indian literature.³² The first text on the subject is *Vasiṣṭhadharmasūtra* XXIX, 4, where it is clearly written that by entering a fire (*agnipraveśād*) the world of Brahma (*brahmalokaḥ*) is gained. According to U. Thakur, 'The practice of religious suicide prevailed long before the 4th century BC.'³³ Other references to suicide are also found in such texts as *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*, *Kathāsaritsāgara*, *Mudrārākṣasa*, or *Daśakumāracarita*.

26 Cf. BEAL 1888; 1905; SLAJE 1986.

27 BEAL 1888, 110.

28 Cf. LAMOTTE 1958, 786.

29 Cf. LAMOTTE 1958, 59.

30 Cf. Nic.Dam. FGtH 2 A 90 F100 (after JACOBY 1926); cf. Strab. XV, 1.4 (ed. Meineke 1877); D.C. LIV, 9.10 (ed. CARY *et al.* 1914). Cf. LASSEN 1858, 60 (for the identification of Zarmanochegas as *Śramaṇa-karja*).

31 KARTTUNEN 1997, 65.

32 HILLEBRANDT 1917.

33 THAKUR 1963, 110.

As far as Buddhism is concerned, suicide is more common in the Chinese tradition, but there are also some cases in the Indian sources.³⁴ As noted by H. G. Rawlinson, the popularity of suicides among Buddhist monks increased over time, although it was banned by the Buddha.³⁵ Thakur stated that ‘A monk or follower is explicitly told that he would not commit suicide in order to reach nirvana.’³⁶ This prohibition is very clearly expressed in the text of the *Pāṭimokkha* 3. Similarly, some western writers (e.g. Clement of Alexandria or Hippolytus of Rome) described the attitude of Indian ascetics to the matter of life and death. In their view, life was regarded by them as building a bridge to a better life beyond this world. This is evident in Megasthenes’ passage³⁷ relating to the Brahmans, where he writes about their *contemptio mortis*. On the other hand, there are also texts confirming cases of recognition of suicide as a religious act of high value, such as *Milindapañha*.³⁸ It is worth remembering that Buddhism consists of many sects, which recognize different paths to liberation, and therefore it is possible that some Buddhists considered suicide as a way to liberation, although the first of the so-called Five Buddhist Precepts (*pañcaśīlāni*) is the prohibition of killing, which is associated with the previously mentioned principle of non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), the main Buddhist ethical standard.

THE FIRST PASSAGE (STOBAEUS *FLORILEGIUM* I, 3.56)

More problematic is the first fragment, cited by Stobaeus, where Bardaisan described the trials by ordeal of water and by ordeal of door. He provided also a description of the place, where the second trial took place. I would like to focus on this description, as it raises great doubts among researchers. Because it seems fabulous, its reality has been questioned. The place is described as a naturally formed cave in the highest mountain near the middle of the earth (σπήλαιον αὐτόματον ἐν ὄρει ὑψηλοτάτῳ κατὰ μέσον τῆς γῆς). This mountain can perhaps be identified with Jambudvīpa, which was said to be located in the centre of the earth. In the western ancient literature it was identified with the Mount Meros or Meru located near Nysa.³⁹ It is interesting to note that Mount Meru can be identified with Mount Kailash, where Śiva is seated in a state of perpetual meditation along with his wife Pārvatī. Bardaisan also described a statue (ἀνδριάς) located inside the cave, ten to twelve cubits high (πηχῶν δέκα ἢ δώδεκα), standing up straight (ἔστῳς ὀρθός), with hands stretched out in the form of a cross (ἔχων τὰς χεῖρας ἠπλωμένας ἐν τύπῳ σταυροῦ) and with an image of a god on its head (ἐπὶ τῇ κεφαλῇ θεοῦ ἄγαλμα). This statue is androgynous: right side male, left side female (δεξιὸν μέρος ἀρσενικόν, εὐώνυμον μέρος θηλυκόν). Therefore, it is usually identified with Śiva Ardhanārīśvara,⁴⁰ however, without clear evidence. According to Rawlinson ‘There is little doubt, that we have in this passage a description of one of the great Hindu rock-temples of

34 Cf. KARTTUNEN 1997, 65.

35 RAWLINSON 1916, 144.

36 THAKUR 1963, 139.

37 Megasth. FGtH 3C 715 F33 (ed. JACOBY 1958).

38 Cf. THAKUR 1963, 107.

39 Arr. An. V, 1.6 (ed. Roos 1907): Νῦσάν τε οὖν ἐκάλεσε τὴν πόλιν Διόνυσος ἐπὶ τῆς τροφοῦ τῆς Νύσης καὶ τὴν χώραν Νυσαίαν: τὸ δὲ ὄρος ὃ τι περ πλησίον ἐστὶ τῆς πόλεως καὶ τοῦτο Μηρὸν ἐπωνόμασε Διόνυσος; Curt. VIII, 10.12: *Sita est urbs sub radicibus montis, quem Meron incolae appellant* (ed. Hedicke 1908).

40 For example by LASSEN 1858, 350; DE BEAUVOIR-PRIAULX 1862, 292; or MAJUMDAR 1960, 448.

Deccan-Elephanta, Ajantā, or Kāñheri.⁴¹ However, it is worth noting that the statue described by Bardaisan does not correspond exactly to any currently known Indian statue, so this description should perhaps be interpreted as syncretic.

Most problematic in this description is the passage, where Bardaisan describes the statue as a visible model (θεατὸν παράδειγμα), which is handed by the god to his son (δημιουργός), who has to re-create the world. Winter suggested the interpretation of this παράδειγμα in the context of the philosophy of Plato, who in his dialogue *Τίμαιος* provided a description of cosmogony, in which the universe was created as an imperfect reflection of the perfect, eternal archetype (παράδειγμα), looked at by the δημιουργός during the creation of the world.⁴² This dialogue has played an important role in late antiquity, also in Gnosticism. However, in my opinion, the possibility of reading the description in the context of Indian sources should be revisited. It is possible that Bardaisan's tendency to synthesize made the deity represented by the statue difficult to identify. Besides, Indian deities are also very often syncretic.

No less mysterious is the description of the material (ὕλη), from which the statue is made, which is closer to the hardest and least liable to decay wood (παραπλήσιος ξύλωι στερροτάτωι) and produces blood (αἷμα) and sweat (ἰδροῦν).

Then follows the description of the interior of the cave and the door, from which the water goes forth and forms pools around the ends of the cave (ἐξ θύρας προέρχεται ὕδωρ, καὶ λιμνάζει περι τὰ τελευταῖα τοῦ σπηλαίου). This is where the ordeal of water (δοκιμαστήριον) takes place. As regards this motif, any relationship seems difficult to prove, because the so-called trial is a very common theme in many texts. Therefore, it seems unwise to attempt to prove unequivocally Bardaisan's dependence on any particular author or text, as the convergence of certain descriptions, procedures of trial does not prove anything in this regard, showing only the universality of the phenomenon and its similarities in different cultures, both Greco-Roman and Indian.

However, it is worth looking again at all the elements in Bardaisan's description in the context of an observation made by O. de Beauvoir-Priault, who drew attention to an interesting passage in the *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*. As we read in his article, 'The Rājatarāṅgiṇī has a passage which reminds one of this cave and statue.'⁴³

Rājatarāṅgiṇī is a chronicle of the kings of Kashmir written by Kalhana ca. 1148–1149. The passage mentioned by de Beauvoir-Priault is in book I verse 32, as translated by Sir M. A. Stein: 'There [worshippers] touching the wooden image of the husband of Umā at the Tīrtha of Pāpasūdāna, obtain comfort [in life] and final liberation [thereafter] as their rewards.'⁴⁴ Here *tīrtha* means 'a passage, a ford, shallow water that may be easily crossed, place of pilgrimage on the banks of sacred streams', but also 'advice, instruction, counsel', so it denotes places of pilgrimage associated with sacred water and perhaps with the trial. *Pāpasūdāna* means 'sin removing'. The spring is located above the village of Kapaṭeśvara (modern Kōthēr/ Kuther). The name of the village refers to the appellation of God Śiva, who, according to the legend in *Nīlmata Purāṇa*,⁴⁵ has shown himself under the disguise (*kapaṭe*, where *kapaṭa* means 'fraud, deceit, cheating, circumvention') of pieces of wood (*kāṣṭha*) floating on the water, while *īśvara* means 'a master, a lord, God' and is often used as a synonym of Śiva. It is also worth noting, that *kapāṭa* with long *ā* means 'a door, the leaf or panel of a door', and thus *kapāṭeśvara* may mean 'a master of the door' or perhaps 'Śiva, master of the door'. Therefore, we find other elements of

41 RAWLINSON 1916, 146.

42 WINTER 1999, 77–80.

43 DE BEAUVOIR-PRIAULT 1862, 289, note 1.

44 STEIN 1900, 6.

45 Ed. de Vreese 1936, verses 1125–1147; English transl. Kumari 1973, 295–300, verses 1169–1191.

Bardaisan's account, namely the door and perhaps the androgynous statue, since it is possible that Śiva was presented together with his wife, Umā, who is also mentioned in the description.

We can also see Kapaṭeśvara on a photograph by Stein in his *Illustrated Rājatarāṅgiṇī*, published *post mortem* by L. Obrock in collaboration with K. Einicke.⁴⁶

This Tīrtha was known also by al-Bīrūnī and Abu'l-Faḥl.⁴⁷ Al-Bīrūnī (973–1048 CE) in his *India* wrote about pieces of wood, which nobody can seize, floating either in the river Vitastā, or in 'a pond called Kūdaishahr, to the left of the source of the just-mentioned river (Vitastā)'.⁴⁸ Here Kūdaishahr is a clerical error for *Kavadeśvar (pracritized form of the name Kapaṭeśvara). Abū al-Faḥl (1551–1602) in *Ā'in-i Akbarī* wrote: 'In the village of Kotihār is a deep spring, surrounded by stone temples. When its water decreases, an image of Mahādeva in sandal-wood appears. The quality of this spring does not alter.'⁴⁹ It is worth noting that sandalwood as a material, from which the statue is made, does not correspond to Bardaisan's description of a material, which is closer to the hardest and least liable to decay wood (ὄλη παραπλήσιος ξύλωνι στερροτάτωι καὶ ἀσηπτοτάτωι), but is not a wood (μὴ εἶναι δὲ ξύλον).

Kashmir as a location of the described place may be confirmed by the name Σανδάλης, which, according to me, should be interpreted as Sardales or Śardales, a name connected with the cult of Goddess Śāradā (Sarasvati), matron Goddess of Kashmir Shaivism, whose name is also visible in Śāradā script, a native script of Kashmir; or such forms as Shardakshetra or Shardabhumī, which are Sanskrit names for Kashmir valley. If we accept this reading of the name, then we may conclude that the envoys were most probably from Kashmir.

An interesting place of worship of Goddess Śāradā was Sharada Peeth, an abandoned Hindu temple located in the village of Sharda in Azad Kashmir. In Jonaraja's Chronicle (*Dvitiyā Rājatarāṅgiṇī*) there is a description of King Zain-ul-Abidin's pilgrimage (1422 AD) – here in verse 1057 are described miraculous manifestations of the Goddess: the appearance of sweat on the face of the image of the Goddess, the shaking of the arm, and a sensation of the heat on touching the feet. In the context of the present considerations the sweat is especially interesting. This description shows that sweating statue was a phenomenon present in Kashmir Shaivism.

Regrettably, unambiguous identification will never be possible, because, as we read in K. Pandit's translation of *Tohfatu'l-Ahbab* by Muhammad 'Alī Kashmīrī in chapter IV, Mission in Kashmir, part II, Araki's⁵⁰ mission of destroying idols and temples of infidels: 'A temple stood in Kuther⁵¹ by the side of the spring. Araki dispatched a group of sufis to demolish it. Arrangements were made for five-time congregational prayers in that mosque. A mulla was appointed to look after these duties.'⁵²

CONCLUSION

From the above overview it follows that Bardaisan indeed based his description on the relation of the envoys, who had visited the emperor. I am inclined to argue, despite the lack of conclusive evidence that the description of the cave, the statue, and the ordeals also refer to the

46 OBROCK – EINICKE 2013.

47 STEIN 1900, 6–7, note 32.

48 Ed. Sachau 1910, 181–182.

49 Transl. Jarrett 1949, 359.

50 Šams-ad-Dīn Muḥammad Arākī, born in 1424, was a founder of Nurbakhshiyeh sufi order in Kashmir.

51 Modern name of Kapaṭeśvara, elsewhere also Kōthēr.

52 PANDIT 2009, 276.

description of the actual place, perhaps Kapaṭeśvara Tīrtha in Kashmir. Also the description of the Σαμαναῖοι, who should be identified with the Buddhists, is confirmed in Indian sources. Therefore, Bardaisan has provided very accurate information about the Buddhists and about India in general. Unfortunately, because he was considered a heretic from the Christian point of view, his works have survived only in fragments.

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