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The Conceptualization of Religion and Incipient Secularity in Late Sasanian Iran: Burzōy and Paul the Persian’s Parallel Departures from Tradition

Abstract: This article examines the parallel conceptualizations of “religion” developed by two intellectuals of distinct backgrounds in late Sasanian Iran, Burzōy and Paul the Persian, and the broader climate of incipient “secularity” their ideas, and the convergence between them, may reflect. The article shows how these authors made similar innovations within their respective religious and scholarly traditions (Zoroastrianism for Burzōy, and specifically the genre of *andarz* or wisdom literature; East Syrian Christianity for Paul the Persian, along with late antique Neoplatonism) significantly breaking with their antecedents and contemporaries. Both Burzōy and Paul delineate a certain sphere of discourse, focused above all on questions of cosmology, eschatology, and the otherworldly consequences of action in this world, in which the members of various “traditions” or “religions” participate. These authors also share the assumption that the choice between these traditions or religions should be made on the basis of reason, and not tradition; and they are also each, in their way, emphatically non-committal to any individual

tradition or religion. Aspects of Burzōy and Paul the Persian's shared late Sasanian context, including the popularity of the inter-religious disputation, are brought forth to explain their parallel departures from tradition. The transmission and reception of these authors' respective works and ideas in the medieval Islamic world are also considered, along with the broader intellectual legacy of the Sasanian Empire.

## I. Introduction

This article examines an important development in the intellectual life of late antique Iran: a new circumscription of the “religious” as one realm of discourse among others, and a concomitant tendency toward a kind of religious relativism, if not outright unbelief. Altogether, this suggests a kind of incipient “secularity”: the approach of a situation where, in Charles Taylor's formulation, “faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others.”<sup>1</sup> The article focuses on two scholars who addressed works to the Sasanian Iranian ruler Khusrō I (r. 531–79 CE), the East Syrian ecclesiastical official and philosopher Paul the Persian, and the physician Burzōy, who made parallel departures from the traditions of, respectively, late antique Neoplatonism and East Syrian Christianity (in Paul's case), and Zoroastrian wisdom literature (in Burzōy's). Paul and Burzōy break with their antecedents and contemporaries in delineating a certain sphere of discourse, focused on questions of cosmology, eschatology, and the otherworldly consequences of action in this world, in which the members of various “traditions” or “religions” participate. Both authors claim that this sphere of discourse is unusually prone to doubt and conflict, due to the very nature of its subject matter. Burzōy takes the further extraordinary step of declining to back any particular faction participating in this discourse, as he

simply adopts those views on which all of these groups agree and does not take a position where they disagree. And if Paul persists in his Christianity, he expresses his faith in a vastly more muted, equivocal way than his East Syrian contemporaries did. These texts, I argue, reflect a momentous epistemic shift in late Sasanian Iran with, in all likelihood, an enduring legacy in the medieval Islamic world: the emerging recognition of the “religious” or “religion” as a certain sphere of discourse among others, uniquely focused on certain issues. The neutrality with which Paul and Burzōy treat the religions they discuss, as they adjudicate among them on the basis of reason, rather than belief or prior commitment, is part and parcel of this recognition of a distinct “religious” realm.

Some further discussion of what I mean by “religion,” as well as “secularity,” is in order. The past fifty-odd years have seen a much-needed reevaluation of these terms’ histories and ranges of applicability, which Sasanian Studies, as a field, is only beginning to digest.<sup>2</sup> As scholars such as Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Talal Asad have persuasively and helpfully argued, the terms “religion” and “secularity” (along with, of course, relatives such as “religious,” “secular,” etc.) have specifically modern and Western histories, which have been decisive in determining their meanings; in applying these terms outside of the modern West, one risks anachronism and, hence, a considerable distortion of the situation one is trying to explain or understand.<sup>3</sup> Some, building upon Smith and Asad’s work, have arrived at somewhat more radical positions: that, for instance, “religion” can never be an appropriate translation for a word in a premodern text, since the term “has no place [in any] attempt to reproduce the classifications of the group of people being studied,” as Brent Nongbri has argued;<sup>4</sup> or that the development of terms more or less equivalent to “religion” and “secularity” in the non-Western world can be

explained as a straightforward result of “the modern concept of religion [being] exported to non-western countries in the context of colonialism,” in the words of Timothy Fitzgerald.<sup>5</sup>

Although I find arguments like those put forth by Nongbri and Fitzgerald usefully thought-provoking, I do not accept their conclusions. As with all such analytic terms, reflection on the history and applicability of “religion” and “secularity” is not only useful but necessary; it is only thus, in the study of the premodern world, that we can avoid the wild and unwitting projection of modern categories and concepts onto the subjects of our research. The result of this reflection, however, need not and should not be these kinds of blanket generalizations and prohibitions.

For one thing, the sheer complexity of these terms’ histories, and their corresponding multivalence, *within* the modern Western context, poses no less of a problem for those who would drastically restrict their use, than for those who would apply them to the premodern, non-Western world.<sup>6</sup> This complexity, to be sure, calls for care and qualification in using these terms, in and (particularly) outside modern and Western contexts—but it also offers a rich variety of possibilities for cross-cultural comparison. To fully accept the axiom that terms such as “religion” and “secularity” are strictly and uniquely applicable to the modern West is also to set unnecessary limitations on the potential for drawing illuminating analogies between this context and others.

More to the point, “religion” and “secularity” are, in the end, scholarly, analytic terms: they are, as Jonathan Z. Smith said of “religion,” “created by scholars for their intellectual purposes and therefore... theirs to define.”<sup>7</sup> This is not to say these terms’ specifically modern and Western histories lack importance, but rather that this background does not constitute a kind of ineradicable pollution. Critical reflection upon these terms’ histories ultimately makes them

more useful as tools for analysis; we can plot, as Rajeev Bhargava, Christoph Kleine, and others have done, a more judicious set of uses for the terms “religion” and “secularity” for non-Western and premodern contexts, whereby these terms are not assumed to have a universal application, but are reserved for those situations—infrequent, perhaps, but far from non-existent—where, independently of the modern West, distinctions and categories did arise and even come into common use that can be usefully and accurately translated or described as “religion” or “secularity.”<sup>8</sup>

In what follows, I argue that we have one such situation in sixth-century Iran, as reflected in the theorizing of two scholars who may have shared a further association with Khusrō I’s court: the recognition and circumscription of a certain set of fundamental issues and questions having to do with the ultimate nature of the universe and morality, on which various “religions” and “traditions” have distinct views. It is not a coincidence that alongside this circumscription of matters that might be called “religious,” these authors show a strikingly lessened, if not altogether lacking, commitment to any one of these “religions” or “traditions,” as well as a distinct preference for rational knowledge over belief or traditional authority. Although these texts lack terms precisely corresponding to “secularity” (or “secular”), this is, I argue, a suitable characterization for this constellation of phenomena: the recognition of a specifically “religious” realm of matters, on which the various “religions” or “traditions” have diverging views; the presumption that the individual should choose among these “religions” largely or entirely based on rational knowledge, as opposed to belief or fealty to authority or tradition; and the possibility that one could ultimately opt for no individual “religion,” but rather choose none of them, or only the tenets on which they all agree.<sup>9</sup> But it is, once again, theorizing that we are primarily dealing with here, rather than the “social imaginary... shared by large groups of people, if not the whole

society” with which Taylor’s *A Secular Age* is largely concerned; the extent to which this incipient “secularity” had an impact (or origins) beyond a small group of scholarly élites is an important question, but one that will be touched on only briefly and suggestively here.<sup>10</sup>

I will first situate the innovations of these authors, Burzōy and Paul the Persian, with respect to the traditions they were writing in, showing how each author broke with and built upon the ideas of his contemporaries and antecedents. I then turn to their shared late Sasanian context, to explain the striking commonalities in their thought, before concluding with a word on the enduring legacy of their ideas and writings, and of Sasanian intellectual life more broadly, in the medieval Islamic world.

## II. Burzōy

We will begin with Burzōy’s introduction to his collection of Indian tales, a composition clearly indebted to the Zoroastrian *andarz* (or wisdom literature) tradition, but one which also marks a significant departure from any Zoroastrian antecedent.<sup>11</sup> A physician at Khusrō I’s (r. 531–79 CE) court, Burzōy is known primarily for rendering the bulk of the Sanskrit *Pañcatantra*, as well as some additional material, into a Middle Persian work that would have been called *\*Kalīlag ud Damanag*. While the work does not survive in Burzōy’s Middle Persian, its Arabic translation, Ibn al-Muqaffa’s (d. 756 CE) *Kalīla wa-Dimna*, would become perhaps the most widely circulated and translated literary classic of the early Islamic era. In addition to putting together the Vorlage for the Arabic *Kalīla wa-Dimna*, Burzōy also apparently authored two introductory chapters, which likewise only survive in Ibn al-Muqaffa’s Arabic translation: one a kind of

autobiography (which we will focus on here), the other more narrowly focused on his journey to India.<sup>12</sup>

Burzōy begins this introductory chapter with a discussion of his Zoroastrian background and medical career, before turning to a kind of personal crisis:

Then I thought about medicine and realized that a physician cannot give his patient a remedy which would heal his illness to such a degree that he would never again suffer from it, or from any other illness; and that there is no guarantee against the same disease, or an even more serious one, recurring. I came to the conclusion that knowledge of the hereafter [*ilm al-ākhira*] is the thing which brings permanent salvation [*salāma*] from all diseases. Thus, I came to hold medicine in contempt and to long for religion [*dīn*]. But when I had come to this conclusion, I felt confusion concerning religion [*dīn*]. I found nothing in my books of medical learning which could show men which religion [*dīn*] was the true one. I found that there are many different sects [*amā milal kathīra wa-mukhtalifa*]... and [their members] are of three kinds: some inherited their religion [*dīn*] from their ancestors, others adopted it on account of fear and coercion, yet others hoped by means of it to acquire worldly goods, pleasures, and prestige. But every one of them claims that his religion [*dīn*] is the true and correct one and that whoever contradicts him lives in error and deception. Concerning the creator and what He created, the beginning and the end of the world, and other questions they have violently different opinions, but every one of them despises, opposes, and attacks the others.<sup>13</sup>

Burzōy's medical training, then, suddenly seems to pale in significance and efficacy by comparison with "religion," the word whereby I have rendered Arabic *dīn*.<sup>14</sup> For medicine only deals with ailments in this world and can only hold them at bay for so long; religion focuses on the next world, and accordingly heals for all time, insofar as it provides a permanent "health," or "salvation" (Arabic *salāma* has both meanings). But Burzōy has trouble deciding which of the various "religions" (*adyān*, plural of *dīn*) or "sects" (*milal*) to affiliate himself to. On certain fundamental issues, having to do with the nature of God and the universe, they have "violently different opinions."

Nonetheless, Burzōy makes valiant efforts to determine which correct religion is the correct one:

I decided to frequent the scholars of every sect [*milla*] and their leaders, and to examine what they teach and stipulate in the hope that perhaps I could distinguish truth from falsehood, and adhere with confidence and certainty to it... without believing something that I have no knowledge of and without following what I do not understand. I pursued this plan, inquired and investigated. But I discovered that all of these people merely repeat what was handed down to them. Each one praises his own religion [*dīn*] and curses the religion [*dīn*] of those who disagree with him. It became clear to me that they put forth arguments based on inclination and that their speech is not motivated by a sense of fairness. In not one of them did I find that degree of rectitude and honesty [or “veracity”; *ṣidq*] which would induce rational persons [*dhawu l-‘aql*] to accept their words and be satisfied with them. When I observed this, I could find no way to become an adherent of any of them, and I realized that if I came to believe in one of them, in something I had no knowledge of, I would become like the [proverbial] “deceived believer”.... I will limit myself to those deeds which all men recognize as good, and which the religions [*al-adyān*] agree on.<sup>15</sup>

These efforts, however, prove fruitless; none of the religions on offer can provide a convincing argument as to why it is right, and the others are wrong. What would make for a convincing argument? Burzōy makes an appeal to reason: an objective standard, not aligned with one religion or another, which can only be met if one’s arguments are “motivated by a sense of fairness,” not “based on an inclination” towards one’s ancestral faith. Such rationally sound arguments, he implies, would yield actual “knowledge”; he would know which religion was correct, and be able to adhere to it with confidence, rather than merely “believe.” Belief on its own, for Burzōy, is inadequate. In the end, he opts for no religion at all; as far as his personal conduct is concerned—a matter on which, he also apparently recognizes, the various religions are distinctively opinionated—he will simply go with the consensus, among “all men” as well as the religions.

To bring the innovative nature of Burzōy’s work into relief, it will be helpful to compare these passages to a work representative of the broader *andarz* tradition in which he was writing. As Daniel Sheffield has demonstrated, Burzōy’s other introductory chapter, on his journey to India, has an important allegory in common with the *andarz* tradition.<sup>16</sup> The chapter under



examination here likewise has significant parallels with *andarz* literature; this is especially true of the portion we have just examined. A comparison with a parallel passage from the anonymous *Judgments of the Spirit of Wisdom* (*Dādestān ī Mēnōy ī Xrad*), a classic Middle Persian *andarz* work, which Shaul Shaked and François de Blois have highlighted in this connection, will be particularly instructive.<sup>17</sup>

The *Judgments of the Spirit of Wisdom* was very likely composed in the late Sasanian era, and perhaps even by a contemporary of Burzōy.<sup>18</sup> A collection of advice and wise sayings, it touches on everyday concerns, such as the correct way to urinate (never standing up, lest demons appear and drag you to Hell), as well as more abstract and fundamental problems, as in the following passage:

There was a sage who said: if this is known, that the *dēn* of the gods is the truth, and their law is righteousness, and benevolence and mercy upon the creatures, why are most people of many doctrines [*was-kēš*] and of many beliefs [*was-wurrōyišn*] and of many principles [*was-buništ*]?... [And] one must be aware concerning this matter. For in the end the body mixes with dust and [one's only] refuge is in the soul.... When he had considered this state of affairs, [the sage] went forth into the world in search of wisdom, from country to country and from province to province, and pondered, inquired, and investigated about the several doctrines [*kēš*] and beliefs [*wurrōyišn*], [seeking out] those people whom he considered foremost in knowledge. And when he saw that they were contradictory and antagonistic to one another, he knew that these doctrines [*kēš*] and beliefs [*wurrōyišn*] and separate sects [*jud-ristagīh*] which are so contradictory... to one another are not fit to be derived from the creation of the gods, for the *dēn* of the gods is truth and their law is righteousness. He had no doubt... that for all who are not in this pure *dēn*, there is doubt in everything; they are confused about all the reasons [for things].<sup>19</sup>

This passage and Burzōy's introductory chapter have an obvious structural similarity, as they share what Shaul Shaked has called a "spiritual quest" motif.<sup>20</sup> Both the *Judgments'* anonymous sage and Burzōy tell of a distressing realization that people have all kinds of "beliefs" and "doctrines" which are "contradictory and antagonistic to one another," about matters of the greatest import: as the sage writes, "one must be aware concerning this matter. For in the end the

body mixes with dust and [one's only] refuge is in the soul." They also touch on the great lengths to which they have gone, including consulting various authorities (Burzōy's "scholars of every sect and their leaders"; the sage's "people whom he considered foremost in knowledge"), in order to figure out the real truth. The difference is, of course, in the conclusions of their respective quests; while Burzōy declines to join any existing "religion" or "sect," the *Judgments'* sage opts for the *dēn*. While *dēn* here does, in a word, mean Zoroastrianism, a discussion of this fundamental and notoriously multivalent term's meaning and use, by committed Zoroastrians and others, will help to bring out the nature and significance of Burzōy's radical break with tradition.

*Dēn* is the Middle Persian reflex of Avestan *daēnā-*, Avestan being the language of the Avestan corpus, the earliest and most fundamental body of Zoroastrian texts (composed ca. 1500–500 BCE). We must discuss *dēn* alongside *daēnā-*. Although the Zoroastrian priests of the Sasanian period (220–651 CE) wrote in Middle Persian, they continued to regard the Avestan corpus as authoritative and to engage with it closely. Consequently, many Middle Persian words, especially those occurring in priestly compositions such as the *Judgments of the Spirit of Wisdom*, have meanings deeply rooted in Avestan—not only because they were loaned from Avestan, or are otherwise etymologically related to an Avestan word, but also because the Avestan corpus itself continued to be interpreted and reinterpreted by Zoroastrian priests into the Sasanian period and beyond.<sup>21</sup>

The most apt one-word English translations for *dēn* and *daēnā-* alike are "religion" and "vision"—both, in their way, attempts to capture these terms' capaciousness and complexity. Just like "religion," *dēn/daēnā-* has both an individual and a collective sense: the "religion," or more specifically, "religiosity" of the individual and the "religion" of the collective, as in a

system of beliefs and practices held by a certain community. And just like “vision,” *dēn/daēnā*’s root meaning, these terms designate both the individual capacity to see and a certain thing that is seen.<sup>22</sup> This is a “vision” of a special kind, taking place in the other world, and happening chiefly in two contexts: after death, and in the “consultation,” an important Zoroastrian ritual.<sup>23</sup> After death, when the individual passes into the other world, one’s *dēn/daēnā*- appears as a maiden, in whom one’s conduct in this world, good or bad, is made visible as beauty or ugliness. This maiden is further responsible for leading one to Heaven or to Hell, as the case may be.<sup>24</sup> The *dēn/daēnā*- in this case, then, primarily represents the caliber of one’s individual “religion”: the extent to which one has lived up to certain standards and the corresponding consequences in the afterlife.

The ritual “consultation” likewise involves a transit to the other world, although in this case it is only the sacrificer, the performer of the ritual, who makes the journey. In the other world, the sacrificer experiences a “vision,” the *dēn/daēnā*-, which he is then charged with communicating to his community. As Alberto Cantera has put it, this vision “contains a *corpus* of texts... common to the Zoroastrian sacrificial community in which the key elements for individual and collective salvation are collected.”<sup>25</sup> Alongside its individual, moral sense, then, *dēn/daēnā*- thus eventually comes to refer to the “religion” of the collective as well, designating the corpus of authoritative Zoroastrian texts and, by extension, the system of beliefs and practices set down therein.<sup>26</sup>

Two aspects of Middle Persian *dēn*, as it was normally deployed and understood by the Zoroastrian priests of the Sasanian and early Islamic periods, are especially relevant to the topic at hand: the contrast between Burzōy and his Zoroastrian contemporaries. First, *dēn*, as it was typically used by Zoroastrian priests, is extremely broad in its epistemological scope. Recall that

Burzōy is quite specific in delineating those matters on which “the religions and sects” had strong views and disagreed: “the creator and what He created, the beginning and the end of the world, and other questions.” The sage of the *Judgments of the Spirit of Wisdom*, by contrast, is rather vague and expansive in his presentation of the disagreements between the *dēn* and the various “doctrines” and “sects”: in sum, for those who choose wrongly in this matter, opting for some alternative to the *dēn*, “there is doubt in everything; they are confused about all the reasons [for things].” This is in keeping with a “totalizing” view of the Avesta that, while perhaps already emergent earlier, is increasingly emphasized in the Sasanian period; as Yuhan Vevaina has noted, in a study of late antique Zoroastrian exegetical practices, the *dēn*, as in the corpus of authoritative Zoroastrian texts, comes to be understood as “all forms of knowledge in this world as well as that one and the one in between.”<sup>27</sup> One unfortunate enough not to be a Zoroastrian is not confused about abstract theological and cosmological matters alone. For a Sasanian-era Zoroastrian priest such as the author of the *Judgments of the Spirit of Wisdom*, the *dēn* comprises all knowledge, and therefore the non-Zoroastrian is actually confused about everything.

Second, late antique Zoroastrian priests took pains to privilege Zoroastrianism above the alternatives to it; linguistically speaking, this is reflected in their dedication to using the term *dēn*, when unmodified by any adjective, to refer to Zoroastrianism. Only with a pejorative prefix attached—most commonly, *ag-*, “evil,” or *jud-*, “anti-”—could *dēn*’s range of reference extend beyond Zoroastrianism. More often, as we see in the *Judgments of the Spirit of Wisdom*, *dēn* is reserved for Zoroastrianism, while other terms, such as *kēš*, “doctrine” or *wurrōyišn*, “belief,” refer to other religions.<sup>28</sup> Burzōy, on the other hand, seems to have used *dēn* indiscriminately, referring not only to Zoroastrianism but also to any number of other religions. And of course, in the end he does not opt for Zoroastrianism, choosing rather to affiliate himself to no existing

religion. This terminological leveling may have been, somehow or other, inspired by Mānī, or the subsequent writings of Manichaeans, who used *dēn* much more freely than their Zoroastrian contemporaries.<sup>29</sup> For them, however, as for Zoroastrians, there was only one *dēn* that was really correct; in committing to no existing religion at all, Burzōy stands apart from Manichaeans and Zoroastrians alike.<sup>30</sup>

In two key respects, then, which we might call epistemological circumscription and radical relativism, Burzōy's introductory chapter constitutes a decisive break with the Sasanian Zoroastrian consensus. The domain of the "religious" is confined to a certain set of issues rather than assumed to be all-encompassing; Burzōy draws a distinction between religious and other matters which his Zoroastrian contemporaries and antecedents would not have made. Burzōy also places the various "religions," each with a characteristic approach to these issues, on an equal footing with each other. This is a level of relativism that, again, we do not otherwise see in the Zoroastrian tradition in which Burzōy wrote.

### III. Paul the Persian

A contemporary of Burzōy and, apparently, another associate of Khusrō I, Paul the Persian wrote on the problem of religious difference, and its implications as to the ultimate truth, in similar terms.<sup>31</sup> As with Burzōy, it will be helpful to set Paul's discussion against the broader traditions in which he was writing. Paul was an official in the Church of the East and author of several treatises on philosophical topics; the passage we will be focusing on appears near the beginning of his *Treatise on Aristotle's Logic*, addressed to this same Khusrō I.<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, we will first assess how Paul fits into the broader East Syrian and Greco-Roman philosophical traditions of

late antiquity, before turning to a discussion of the sixth-century Iranian milieu from which Paul and Burzōy emerged.

At the beginning of the *Treatise*, Paul is concerned with justifying the study of philosophy and showing how it can be beneficial. He first draws a familiar distinction, redolent of Plato's *Republic*, between the eye of the body, whereby the material world is perceived, with the aid of visible, "external light," and the eye of the soul, which allows one to perceive the intelligible world, due to its "kinship with intelligible light." It is only through the study of philosophy that this eye of the soul can be "illuminated and enlightened."<sup>33</sup> Paul then moves to problems of more immediate concern, for whose resolution philosophy might be of use:

And it becomes evident that men are opposed to one another and that every one refutes the next one. Some of them say there is but one god; others say that he is not unique. Some say that he is affected by contradiction; others deny this. Some say that he is capable of everything; others that he has not the capability to do everything. Some say that he is the creator of the world and of everything in it; others declare that it is not correct to call him the creator of everything. Some say that the world was created out of nothing; others that he made it out of matter. Some say that the world is without a beginning and will continue without an end; others teach otherwise. Some say that man possesses free will; others deny this. They mention many other things of this kind and include them in their traditions [*sām b-mašlmānwāthon*], in which they are seen to refute one another and be mutually opposed.<sup>34</sup>

Here, then, we have a situation quite similar to that described by Burzōy: wide-ranging disagreement on certain questions, specifically those having to do with the fundamental nature of God and the universe. For Burzōy, the various opinions on these matters are each associated with a certain "religion" or "sect." Paul expresses something like this in asserting that these views are part of "traditions" (*mašlmanwātā*)—literally, things "passed down." It is not just that individuals have differing views on these topics; rather, these views are held by whole communities and transmitted from generation to generation.

Paul then, again in line with what we saw in Burzōy, proceeds to the question of how one might choose among the views associated with the various traditions:

For this reason it is not easy for us to accept and to adopt for ourselves all of these dogmas [*dogmo*], nor can we... choose one and reject the others. We are therefore in need of clear awareness [*metyad 'ānutā*], on the basis of which to believe one, and leave behind all the rest. But there is no clear demonstration [*tahwītā*] in this connection. And therefore as far as those dogmas are concerned, we need belief [*haymānutā*] and knowledge [*īda 'tā*]. Knowledge treats everything nearby, clear, and knowable; belief, on the other hand, all matters that are far away and invisible, and cannot be known exactly. This latter is what is in doubt; but the former is without doubt. Each doubt creates division, but the absence of doubt, unanimity. Therefore knowledge is [here a word is missing in the single extant manuscript of the text; J.P.N. Land suggests *potior*, “preferable,” in his Latin translation] to belief, and the one is to be chosen over the other. For even believers, when an account of their belief is asked of them, they give their response on the basis of knowledge, saying “the thing which we now only believe, we will know later.” *For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face* [1 Cor. 13:12].<sup>35</sup>

For Paul, there is something inherent to these cosmological and theological questions, which makes them difficult or even impossible to conclusively resolve; the matters they deal with are “far away and invisible, and cannot be known exactly.” It is no surprise, then, that the various “traditions” disagree about things like the origins of the universe and the nature of God; these are fundamentally matters of “belief” rather than “knowledge” and, therefore, by their very nature, give rise to “doubt” and “division,” rather than certainty and “unanimity.” Paul then goes so far as to declare his preference for knowledge over belief—for “even believers,” Paul writes, claim that their belief will eventually be validated as knowledge. To be clear, both knowledge and belief are necessary according to Paul (a bit later on he even says “we praise belief especially”), but belief is nonetheless a half-measure: insufficient to overcome disagreement and achieve consensus and eventually, one hopes, to be superseded by knowledge. In some cases we might have to wait until the hereafter for this supersession. But, Paul suggests, our best hope in this world to expand the scope of our knowledge, whether on such matters as the origins of the

universe or in connection with more mundane concerns, is the kind of “clear demonstration” effected by philosophy, for which the logic his *Treatise* teaches is fundamental. Indeed, as Paul concludes his preface, invoking a classic definition of philosophy based on Plato’s *Theaetetus*, philosophy is “an assimilation to divinity, to the extent that human beings can be like God. For God knows and acts; and philosophers also, like God, know and reason, in a lesser way.”<sup>36</sup>

As a rule, Paul’s *Treatise* resembles a production of the sixth-century Neoplatonic School of Alexandria substantially more than anything we have from his East Syrian contemporaries. As noted by Dimitri Gutas, in structure and in content, this work’s closest analogues are the general introductions to philosophy attributed to the sixth-century Alexandrians Elias and, especially, David.<sup>37</sup> This work, then, is a key example of the “philosophical *koine*” shared between the late Roman and Sasanian Empires, as discussed by Joel Walker.<sup>38</sup> However, with respect to these Alexandrian philosophical prolegomena too, Paul makes several significant departures in emphasis and substance. These departures point in two directions: a commitment to reason and philosophy, as opposed to any single religious tradition; and the articulation of a distinction between matters of belief and matters of knowledge, reformulating the canonical Aristotelian account of the parts of theoretical philosophy.

The content and style of Paul’s citations illustrate both of these tendencies—particularly when contrasted with the writings of his East Syrian and Alexandrian contemporaries. Let us return to the Biblical verse in the passage just cited: from 1 Corinthians, *For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face*. Paul, rather strikingly, does not designate this as God’s word, or otherwise some kind of authoritative truth; rather, this passage is brought up simply as an example of something “believers” might say, as opposed to those who truly know. Paul adduces two further Biblical passages in the *Treatise*, *My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine*



*gold; and my revenue than choice silver* (Prov. 8:19); and *The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness* (Eccl. 2:14). These are likewise introduced not as the word of God, manifestly true, but rather as, respectively, “what has been said by philosophy about philosophy”; and as something “correct” (*šappīr*) that “was said by a certain philosopher.”<sup>39</sup> Needless to say, this diverges rather starkly from the way Paul’s East Syrian contemporaries treated Biblical verses: whether we are looking at the monastic Bābai the Great, or the more philosophically-inclined Nisibene Barḥadbšabbā, Biblical verses are treated as inherently and authoritatively true, not just an example of what “believers” say, or the word of some philosopher that happens to be correct.<sup>40</sup> As Javier Teixidor has pointed out, there is also a striking gap in Paul’s treatment of the origins of the universe. In a Christian author, we would expect some reference to *Genesis* here—if not as the authoritative word on the subject, at least as an option—but we meet with nothing of the kind.<sup>41</sup>

Also worth noting, and conflicting somewhat with Paul’s broader unwillingness to rely on scripture, is his apparent reference to revelation—a kind of “instruction” (*yullpānā*) called “apostleship” (*šlīḥutā*) that proceeds “spiritual beings”—as a valid source of “knowledge” near the beginning of his text. But this “apostleship” is ranked alongside the “instruction” that is passed along from person to person and the individual’s own “seeking and finding.” And Paul’s survey of the disagreements between the various “dogmas” and “traditions” immediately follows this brief discussion of “apostleship.”<sup>42</sup> Although Paul does mention a version of revelation as a valid source of knowledge, then, its position seems pointedly diminished: for Paul it is one kind of “instruction” among others, which, moreover, has been manifestly unable to allay the stark disagreements on fundamental issues that continue to rage between the world’s various “traditions.”

In citing the Bible at all, Paul also stands apart from the Alexandrians Elias and David, who never do. Whatever ultimately lies behind this choice on the Alexandrians' part—whether Elias and David were not the Christians their names suggest they were, or they simply strove to “keep philosophy and dogma as far apart as possible”—the departure Paul makes from these antecedents is noteworthy as well.<sup>43</sup> We can certainly see some echoes of the Nisibene Barḥadbšabbā's accommodation between philosophy and Christianity here, which is itself rooted in earlier traditions but, as Matthias Perkams has noted, unusually pervasive and well-developed in this author's *Cause of the Foundation of the Schools*.<sup>44</sup> In this work, Barḥadbšabbā claims Plato and Aristotle for the School of Nisibis' lineage; refers to the “great school of perfect philosophy” founded at the time of Moses and to Jesus Christ having “established strong definitions of philosophy”; and more generally draws extensively on the Neoplatonic tradition.<sup>45</sup> Again, though, citing Biblical passages simply as “philosophy” is a more radical step, which Barḥadbšabbā never takes. Rather than a demonstration of his steadfast Christian beliefs, Paul's treatment of the Bible—as one of many works of “philosophy,” whose word is not even enough to rule out the possibility that the world is eternal, or that there are many gods and not just one—could just as easily be taken as a provocation, the likes of which even the Alexandrians Elias and David shrunk from.

We have nothing resembling Paul's survey of the theological and cosmological disputes among the “traditions” in Elias or David, but we do have analogous discussions comparing Christianity with the alternatives to it in other East Syrian works of the late Sasanian period. A similar tendency emerges in Paul's treatment of the various “traditions” to what we saw in his treatment of the Bible: just as he does not explicitly privilege the Bible over “philosophy,” so too he does not pick one “tradition” over the others, also using the same two words, *mašlmānūtā*

(“tradition”) and *dogmo* (“dogma”), in connection with Christianity and other religions alike. As Adam Becker has discussed, East Syrian Christians did eventually come to use a single term, *dehltā* or “fear,” essentially meaning “religion,” to denote both their own Christianity and the alternatives to it such as Zoroastrianism. This usage features especially prominently in two martyr acts, with likely times of composition in the late sixth century.<sup>46</sup> However, as Becker notes, in this context, the “good fear,” Christianity, is almost always opposed to the “bad fear,” Zoroastrianism.<sup>47</sup> This constitutes a close parallel for the typical Zoroastrian (and Manichaean) uses of *dēn*, discussed above, which (again, unlike Paul) are similarly explicit about which of the *dēns* is the best.<sup>48</sup>

Paul’s reason for not opting for one of these traditions over the others rests on a distinction between matters of knowledge and matters of belief, and a preference for knowledge over belief. As Gutas has noted, what we have here is essentially a pointed reformulation of Aristotle’s account of the three parts of theoretical philosophy, as commented and elaborated upon in the Alexandrian tradition.<sup>49</sup> An account of the divisions and subdivisions of philosophy, including these three subdivisions of its theoretical branch, was a fundamental part of Neoplatonic philosophical prolegomena. Elias and David dedicate sections of their introductions to philosophy to such accounts, and Paul does as well, somewhat further along than his distinction between matters of belief and matters of knowledge. These accounts, as in each of these authors, typically proceeded from a basic distinction between the practical and theoretical “parts” of philosophy, to a tripartite subdivision of each of these “parts”; the practical part fell into ethics, economics, and politics, while the theoretical part, our focus here, fell into physics, mathematics, and theology.<sup>50</sup>

According to Elias and David's very similar accounts of the parts of theoretical philosophy, natural science (*to phusikon*) deals with "material beings" (*enula*) such as "bones, hair, and fingernails" while theology (*to theologikon*) deals with "immaterial beings" (*aula*) such as "the divine" or, as David adds, "god, angel, or the soul." Mathematics, meanwhile, deals with beings that have a certain intermediate status—in David's words, "material in existence... but immaterial in thought."<sup>51</sup> The directly corresponding account in Paul (which is, again, distinct from his account of matters of belief and matters of knowledge) is likewise very similar, although he declines to name the divisions of theoretical philosophy and, more importantly, explicitly includes *hulē*, "the fundamental principle [*šettestā*] of the world" within the purview of his first division of theoretical philosophy, among other "intelligible things" or "invisible substances" such as "the soul, demons, angels." Paul's second division of theoretical philosophy, corresponding to Elias and David's "natural science," deals with "natural things," or "visible substances"; his third, i.e., mathematics, deals with what is between the "visible" and "intelligible" realms.<sup>52</sup>

Hence, Paul's first two parts of theoretical philosophy correspond quite closely to his matters of belief and matters of knowledge, as even the descriptor "invisible" is repeated across his accounts of the former and of the first part of theoretical philosophy's purview. But in his explicit inclusion of *hulē*, the fundamental "material" of the universe, among the objects of "theology," Paul contradicts, or at least substantially expands on, Elias and David's accounts of theology's objects. They define theology's object as "immaterial" things (*aula*); for *hulē* to fall among these "immaterial" things is, strictly speaking, a contradiction in terms. In including *hulē* among the objects of his first division of theoretical philosophy, Paul emphasizes the agreement between this first division and his matters of belief, which likewise include the fundamental

composition of the universe. This adjustment also almost certainly reflects the Zoroastrian-dominant context in which Paul wrote. Among the key tenets of Zoroastrianism is that a supreme God was not responsible for the entire creation; Ahrimen, the anti-God, made his own “counter-creation,” and the world as we know it is a mixture of the two.<sup>53</sup> In late Sasanian Iran, therefore, the fundamental material of the universe had a distinctly “theological” importance it may not have had in Elias and David’s milieu.

Paul’s discussion of the matters of belief and matters of knowledge, and his avowed preference for knowledge over belief, has a further point of departure in Elias and David’s discussions of why only one division of theoretical philosophy merits the name “mathematics” (*to mathēmatikon*), literally meaning “learning” or “understanding.” Are natural science and theology not also “mathematical” in this sense? According to David and Elias they are not: as Elias puts it, only “the mathematical sciences are suitable for demonstration, because we make conjectures about [*eikazomen*] the others more than we come to know [*manthanomen*] them.”<sup>54</sup> David makes the same point but is more expansive on the deficiencies of natural science and theology: “natural science... is not susceptible to exact knowledge [*akribēi gnōsei*], seeing that it is completely material, always in flux and flow, and different at different times. Rather, [it] knows something in one way today and in a different way tomorrow, because of its changeable nature.” It would be no more accurate to call theology “mathematical”: “the divine, inasmuch as it is invisible [*aorata*] and incomprehensible [*akatalēta*], is better understood through conjecture [*eikasmō*] than exact knowledge [*akribēi gnōsei*].”<sup>55</sup>

Paul’s distinction between matters of knowledge and matters of belief, and preference for knowledge over belief, is to a significant extent based on these assessments of the parts of theoretical philosophy and the extent to which each of them can yield true understanding of its

objects.<sup>56</sup> But while Elias and David point out the shortcomings of natural science and theology alike, as opposed to mathematics, as neither can yield the “exact knowledge” that mathematics can, Paul essentially leaves only theology open to this criticism. As opposed to his matters of belief, which “cannot be known exactly,” and, as we have seen, closely correspond to the objects of theology in the Aristotelian tripartition of theoretical philosophy, Paul’s matters of knowledge seem to at least include, if not correspond entirely with, the objects of natural science. Paul’s dichotomy of matters of knowledge and matters of belief therefore elides Elias and David’s concerns about the extent to which exact knowledge can be reached about the material world; he breaks with them in designating the objects of theology as uniquely difficult, if not impossible, to understand accurately.

Paul’s substitution of “belief” for Elias and David’s “conjecture,” as the means whereby these objects of theology are approached, is also significant, as is his avowed preference for knowledge over belief. In all, the effect is a more direct challenge to Christian epistemology and self-understanding than an emphatic preference of “knowledge” to “conjecture” would have offered, or, similarly, a stress on the level of exact understanding offered by mathematics, as opposed to the shortcomings of natural science and theology alike. Arguments continue to rage about the nature of God and the ultimate composition of the universe because, Paul claims, our only recourse in dealing with issues like these is belief. Even on points such as whether the universe is eternal, or whether there is just one god or many, there is only belief to rely on; for true certainty, which, Paul leaves no doubt, is preferable to belief, we need philosophical demonstrations and the scientific knowledge they yield.

In sum, then, Paul’s epistemological discussion reworks old materials—the distinctions between knowledge and belief and natural science and theology—into a new form, which

constitutes a significant departure from his Alexandrian antecedents and, in all likelihood, an outright provocation for his East Syrian contemporaries. These contemporaries conceived of these matters quite differently. An especially stark contrast can be found in Bābai the Great's (d. 628) Christological work the *Book of Union*.<sup>57</sup> Bābai was educated at the School of Nisibis and would be, for many years, the *de facto* leader of the Church of the East.<sup>58</sup> Although Bābai draws a very similar distinction to Paul's, between belief and rational inquiry, his first priority in the *Book of Union* is to establish the absolute primacy of the former over the latter.<sup>59</sup> As Bābai writes in his second chapter:

For if the hope of true Christians were placed on what can be seen, and what can be understood, and what can be sensed, and what falls under the inquiry and power of thought, they would never be called this name "believers" [as they actually are], nor would they have risen, by means of investigation of him, which proceeds from his creatures, to the doctrine of his hidden knowledge.... Because God himself created everything, none of his creatures can understand him, except through the belief which belongs to believers in their spirit, to those who, without inquiry, worship him spiritually with their spirit.<sup>60</sup>

Paul implies that a resolution to the disputes between the various "traditions" of the world could conceivably be attained through the knowledge one reaches through logic and the exercise of reason; in this way one could go beyond belief, which is inherently associated with doubt and disagreement. This project is, according to Bābai, futile and wrongheaded. As far as human beings are concerned, there is nothing incomplete or lacking about belief—the only way to achieve any kind of knowledge or understanding of God is, in fact, by setting reasoned "inquiry" completely aside and relying solely on belief. Belief, as Bābai stresses here and elsewhere, is what separates the Christian "belief" or "faith" (*haymanūtā*) from the mere "fears," or *dehlātā* (making a terminological distinction not observed by the writers of the sixth-century martyr acts discussed by Becker); for only Christians are called "believers."<sup>61</sup>

Somewhat more common ground can be found between Paul and Barḥadbšabbā's *Cause*; this latter work exemplifies the kind of epistemology, incorporating reasoned inquiry based on Aristotle's *Organon* and characteristic of the School of Nisibis in the late sixth century, that seems to have been the main target for Bābai's criticism.<sup>62</sup> Nonetheless, we can find fundamental disagreements with Paul here as well. On the human rational faculty and the extent to which it can comprehend God, Barḥadbšabbā writes:

Although [God] is so high in his nature, exalted in his lordship, and distinct from everything which has come into being, nevertheless He took it upon himself to be said and spoken of in the compound language of creatures for the sake of our learning. For also in learning thus you find that all the lower distinctions take the appellation of the higher ones, but the higher ones are not called by the names of the lower ones. For the human being is living and ensouled of essence, but not everything that is living is a human being, such as every animal, bird, and creeping thing. And again everything which is living is ensouled, such as all plants, but not everything which is a nature is ensouled, such as rocks and material species, and again not everything that is a nature is a body, such as angels and souls.<sup>63</sup>

God, is, then, to some limited extent, susceptible to linguistic description and therefore comprehensible by the human mind and subject to philosophical inquiry, insofar as he has certain things in common with human beings.<sup>64</sup> As Barḥadbšabbā goes on,

Learning about the creator and creation is only found in these two orders, I mean angels and human beings. But because these are too weak to consider that divine essence, he has established for us an invisible lamp, the soul within us, and he has filled it with the oil of immortal life, and he has placed it in continuous wicks with intellectual thoughts, and he has caused to be grasped in it the light of the divine mind... For [we would not be able to do this] if he had not given us this light, as John says: *In it was life and the life was the light of human beings* [John 1:4], that is, the rational faculty, such as our Lord said: *If the light within you is darkness, how much will be your darkness; for if the blind lead the blind, the two of them will fall into the pit*. And because of this he commands us: *Walk while you have the light of rationality in the divine wisdom, lest the darkness of error and ignorance overtake you*. Therefore it is the lot of this rational and illuminated mind, which is the likeness of God, its maker, to dwell in two places: this one, upon the earth while clothed in a corporeal garment, going about within a fleshy enclosure; the other, in turn, up above—the portion fell to it that it might walk within the open plain of air; for such as these are all the spiritual orders.<sup>65</sup>



According to Barḥadbšabbā, then, in a discussion interspersed with Biblical proof texts, the human “rational mind,” being the “likeness of God, its maker” and sharing in “the light of the divine mind,” has a certain affinity with, and consequently a certain capacity for understanding, the divine.

Barḥadbšabbā’s epistemological views share a considerable amount with those of Paul: particularly his hope that human reason, through philosophical inquiry, might yield durable insights about the nature of God. At the same time, Paul and Barḥadbšabbā diverge on several foundational issues. For one thing, they disagree on how it is that humans might be able to, in some way, attain some understanding of God. As we just saw, Barḥadbšabbā makes it clear that such an understanding, however limited, is only possible because the rational faculty was created by God, in his own likeness. Paul, on the other hand, does not directly assign any credit to God in this connection, or at least is not nearly as explicit about this as Barḥadbšabbā is. For Paul the Persian it is by an abstract “wisdom” that “the world was made and [is] governed.” And it is through this “wisdom,” or (as mentioned above) its “kinship with intelligible light” that the “eye of the soul” can see.<sup>66</sup> Nor is God’s creation adduced in Paul’s explication of the standard definition of philosophy as “assimilation to the divine” cited above; philosophers are simply said to be in some way “like God” insofar as they can “know and reason.” This would seem like an opportune moment to discuss God’s creation of mankind and the human rational faculty in his own likeness, but Paul offers nothing about God’s creation or other actions to explain this capability.<sup>67</sup>

Moreover, Barḥadbšabbā expounds a kind of “natural theology,” coming across more clearly later on in the *Cause*, arguing that the nature of God might be understood, in a fairly straightforward manner, from an investigation of creation. As he writes, “as if upon some tablet

[God] wrote and composed all the invisible bodies that [the human mind] might read them and from them know that one who was the cause of this learning, as Paul said: *They seek and search for God and from his creation they find him.*”<sup>68</sup> This diverges significantly from Paul’s stark distinction between the matters of knowledge, defined in part as the “nearby and visible,” and matters of belief, the “far away and invisible.”

It is also worth emphasizing, once again, that Paul starts from a very different place than Barḥadbšabbā does. Paul leaves open the questions of whether the world has a beginning, whether God is responsible for the whole creation, and even whether there is just one God or many. For someone like Barḥadbšabbā who regards the Bible as authoritative, although further insight on these points might be achievable through philosophical inquiry, the answers to these questions could not be more obvious. Moreover, Paul chalks up the continuing disagreement on these matters to a general deficit in philosophical demonstration, rather than the errors and ignorance that Barḥadbšabbā imputes to Zoroastrians, Greco-Roman philosophers, and the other members of “pagan schools” whose doctrines he surveys near the beginning of his work.<sup>69</sup>

Altogether, then, Paul’s innovations vis-à-vis his East Syrian and Alexandrian antecedents and contemporaries closely parallel those Burzōy makes with respect to the Zoroastrian tradition. In particular, we can discern two tendencies in common, already noted for Burzōy: radical relativism and the circumscription of a realm of discourse that can fairly be called the “religious.” If Paul is not exactly uncommitted to any existing religious tradition, his commitment to Christianity is at least far more equivocal than what we see in his East Syrian contemporaries. Paul seems to regard the Bible not as the inherently authoritative word of God but as one philosophical work among many. And in his terminology, he does not draw the same distinctions between “faith” and “fears” or good “fear” and bad “fear” that his East Syrian

contemporaries largely did, as he refers indiscriminately to the various “traditions” and “dogmas” of the world. Moreover, as with Burzōy, Paul’s religious relativism presents itself alongside a circumscription of the religious: his distinction between matters of “belief,” fiercely debated by the various religious “traditions,” and matters of “knowledge.” Belief itself is a mere stopgap—necessary, to be sure (as Paul makes clear, diverging somewhat from Burzōy’s rather dim assessment of belief) but not nearly enough, on its own, to bring about a final resolution to religious difference and disagreement. For this true knowledge, the kind brought about by a philosophical demonstration, is required.

One way to characterize this entire cluster of ideas is as a reflection of a kind of incipient “secularity” or “secularization.” In both Burzōy and Paul the Persian’s writings, we have reached, or are moving toward, a displacement of religious tradition or authority as the ultimate arbiter of truth; certain “knowledge,” attained through the exercise of reason, is replacing it. Apart from this fundamental shift, several other elements of “secularization,” according to Peter Berger’s insightful phenomenological description, can be discerned here as well. Burzōy and Paul have not merely recognized a realm of certain distinctly “religious” issues, on which only reason can yield certain conclusions; their views on these issues have also apparently moved “from the levels of consciousness that contain the fundamental ‘truths’ on which at least all ‘sane’ men will agree to the levels on which various ‘subjective’ views are held—views on which intelligent people readily disagree and of which one is not altogether sure oneself.”<sup>70</sup> It is not just that the “religious” realm of discourse has been recognized and circumscribed; it is also that this realm is constituted by issues on which one had been certain but is no longer.

For Berger, this “secularization,” and the associated shifts in consciousness, is, above all, the result of “pluralism” or “pluralization”: it is the sheer plurality of religious options to which

the individual is exposed that results in a situation wherein “any particular choice is relativized and less than certain.”<sup>71</sup> As Charles Taylor usefully points out in his account of the development of secularity in the modern West, to some extent echoing qualifications formulated by Berger himself, plurality alone is not sufficient to bring about this kind of doubt, or, in Taylor’s words, the “mutual fragilization of all the views in presence, the undermining sense that others think differently”; it is only when “through increased contact, interchange, even perhaps intermarriage, the other becomes more and more like me, in everything else but faith... then the issue posed by difference becomes more insistent: why my way and not hers? There is no other difference left to make the shift preposterous or unimaginable.”<sup>72</sup>

The recognition of a plurality of “religions” or “traditions” obviously plays an important role in Burzōy and Paul’s thinking as well, with close relationships to their other principal commitments and conclusions; the connection is made fairly explicitly, in both authors, between a multiplicity of opinions, associated with various traditions, and their inability to conclusively decide among them. But here too, we must go a step beyond simply pointing to the sheer multiplicity of religions in late Sasanian Iran, in accounting for these thinkers’ intellectual trajectories, and the parallels between them. This is the concern of the next section.

#### IV. The Late Sasanian Context

That Burzōy and Paul arrived at such similar conclusions, and were both contemporaries Sasanian subjects, if not associates at Khusrō I’s court, is surely no coincidence. But what exactly was it about late Sasanian Iran, and perhaps specifically this courtly milieu, that fostered these kinds of ideas? In scholarship on Sasanian Iran, there is a long tradition of imputing a kind

of unusual “liberality” to the sixth-century Sasanian king Khusrō I; his court, in the words of Arthur Christensen, was typified by the “freedom of thought” prevailing there, in stark contrast to the “religious intolerance” of the late Roman Empire.<sup>73</sup> The writings of Burzōy and Paul the Persian have been brought forth, by Christensen and Paul Kraus before him, as characteristic of this climate of openness and tolerance.<sup>74</sup>

Although there is something palpably anachronistic and value-laden about these assessments, which essentially chalk up Burzōy and Paul’s peculiarities to an individual ruler’s implausible commitment to modern liberal virtues, the role of the Sasanian state’s religious policy (or lack thereof) in these figures’ respective formations should not be ignored.<sup>75</sup> The Sasanian state does seem to have been more comfortable with a certain level of religious diversity than its western contemporary, the Roman Empire—whether we attribute this diversity to a concerted policy of “differentiated, hierarchical inclusion of religious others” on the part of the Sasanian state, or more simply a “relative lack of regulation of religion,” when compared with the Roman Empire.<sup>76</sup> This “sheer diversity of religions” in itself, as Patricia Crone has suggested, offering a version of Berger’s connection between religious pluralism and secularization, may have been a significant factor behind Paul and Burzōy’s “trouble[s],” which, as we have seen, would ultimately lead to a principled hesitation to commit to any existing religion and corresponding circumscription of a specifically “religious” realm.<sup>77</sup>

Alongside the fact of religious diversity in the Sasanian state, we can also discern parallel articulations of a distinction between state and religion in the East Syrian and Zoroastrian intellectual traditions, even as their respective views of the relationship between the two differ radically. While, as Richard Payne has argued, East Syrians sought to differentiate between a “ideally secular” Sasanian state and the Zoroastrian establishment, the better to accommodate

themselves to the former, it was apparently a commonplace in Sasanian Zoroastrian thought that kingship and religion (*dēn*) should be closely associated with one another—whether as “brothers,” “kinsmen,” or “fellow-countrymen.”<sup>78</sup> The important commonality here is, again, the articulation of a distinction between state and religion.<sup>79</sup> Although neither Burzōy nor Paul articulates such a distinction, it is tempting to posit some relationship between these distinctions between religion and state and Burzōy and Paul’s own differentiations between religious and other matters; in identifying a distinctively religious realm, these authors’ theorizing converges with a prominent tendency in Sasanian political thought, which can be discerned in both the Zoroastrian and East Syrian traditions.

As Crone and Richard Payne have argued, another factor in Burzōy and Paul’s intellectual formations was the Greco-Roman practice of inter-religious disputation, and, in particular, late Sasanian rulers’ sponsorship of this “competitive sport.”<sup>80</sup> Although we have no direct evidence of Paul or Burzōy participating in disputations, their insistence on evaluating the various religions (at least as a first resort) on the basis of reason, and without allowing the weight of tradition to tip the scales, is well in line with the epistemological norms of the inter-religious disputation. Here contestants likewise had to demonstrate the superiority of their favored tradition by recourse to reason. Where available, other such “shared premises” were also fair game. But while Christian debaters of various denominations, Jews, and even Manichaeans could at least rely on their shared recognition of certain authoritative texts, Zoroastrians would not find these convincing. It is not hard to see how the norms of the disputation could have spilled over into other areas of life, with disputants forgoing the authority of scripture not only in the realm of the disputation but also outside it. As Crone puts it, “inevitably, many disputers came to regard reason rather than scripture and tradition as the ultimate authority at all times, not

just for the purposes of disputation.”<sup>81</sup> Similarly, the recognition of a specifically religious sphere (and, implicitly, less-religious, or perhaps even outright non-religious spheres) we see in Burzōy and Paul could be an insight drawn from the disputation: a realization that inter-religious disputations tended to turn around the same set of intractable issues.

How and why such disputations came to be hosted at the Sasanian court, and became a common practice in the wider empire too (as attested in Christian and perhaps, in a more oblique manner, Jewish sources as well), is difficult to ascertain.<sup>82</sup> Payne presents the disputation as a “cultural good” imported from the Roman Empire to Sasanian Iran by the Sasanian Empire’s Zoroastrian ruling elite—above all, Khusrō I.<sup>83</sup> This was, according to Payne’s account, a shrewd tactical move, rooted not in some disinterested desire to find the ultimate truth through reasoned inquiry, but rather in a concern to “safeguard [Zoroastrianism] from the omnipresent intellectual challenges that the heightened trans-regional traffic in texts and ideas posed to its standing and, perhaps more important, to subordinate the rival systems of belief proliferating in the empire.”<sup>84</sup> While this is, on the face of it, a reasonable aim for Khusrō I, and the ruling elites of Sasanian Iran more broadly, to have had, Payne is not especially convincing in demonstrating how it would have been reached. The court, by this account, would have deftly steered any given disputation toward the acknowledgment of commonly agreed upon banalities and away from the true “core” of Zoroastrianism. The notion that these disputations were guided by a shared commitment to logic alone was, therefore, a misleading veneer; in the end, the Christians and Jews who participated in them were effectively tricked into assenting to “Zoroastrian supremacy.”<sup>85</sup> The implausible level of control and manipulative facility Payne attributes to the Sasanian court aside, the evidentiary basis for his claims about the mechanics of these disputations, and about the date of their introduction to Sasanian Iran, is rather thin. A single

Middle Persian *andarz* text is offered in support of this point, whose reliance on an age-old Iranian motif Payne takes to be specifically representative of the “intellectual tendencies of the sixth-century court,” as well as a Sasanian king’s apparent insistence, as reported in Bābai the Great’s *History of George the Priest*, that Zoroastrianism be referred to as “The Good Religion” (*wehdēnīh*) rather than “The Teaching of the Forefathers” (*pōryōtkēšīh*).<sup>86</sup> Payne also does not address the evidence for the inter-religious disputation having a foothold at the Sasanian court already in the third century: writings circulating not only within but presumably also outside the Manichaean community attest to Mānī engaging in such debates.<sup>87</sup>

Aside from the spread of the inter-religious disputation from the Roman Empire to Sasanian Iran, a few other factors may help us account for Paul and Burzōy’s circumscription of the religious and reliance on reason over fealty to any one religion. For one thing, Burzōy and Paul’s epistemological views have a close analogue in the writings of the physician Galen, who disparages theoretical philosophy as concerned with “useless” and fundamentally irresolvable questions, such as whether the universe has a beginning or a creator.<sup>88</sup> Burzōy was a physician himself, and many indications suggest that the major Greco-Roman medical writings and theories would have been well known to rarefied circles in Sasanian Iran by Burzōy and Paul’s day.<sup>89</sup> While Galen does not single out “religions” or “traditions” as specifically having strong and poorly-supported opinions on these “useless” matters as Burzōy and Paul do, his pointed distinction between theoretical and practical philosophy may well have informed Burzōy and Paul’s discussions of the various religions and traditions, and their designations of the matters these religions and traditions argue about among themselves.

Burzōy and Paul’s discussions have a further parallel in the “skeptical argument” that points to disagreements within a certain group to discredit that group as a whole, which surfaces



in the polemics exchanged between Christians and anti-Christians under Roman rule.<sup>90</sup> One could imagine several ways in which Burzōy and Paul the Persian could have become familiar with such arguments: whether through reading Christian polemics themselves, or perhaps through a more direct acquaintance with philosophical Skepticism; Agathias reports that a Pyrrhonian Skeptic called Uranius made his way from the Roman Empire to the Sasanian court during Khusrō I's reign and was well-received there.<sup>91</sup>

The Roman Empire was also not the only Sasanian neighbor where the disputation had a major presence. India was also home to a long tradition of scholarly debate, closely associated with the elaboration of sophisticated epistemological theories. Some of the earliest detailed evidence for such debates, and especially for the corresponding epistemological theories, can be found in the classic medical compendium called the *Carakasamhitā* (wr. ca. 100 BCE–200 CE), suggesting that physicians were particularly engaged in them.<sup>92</sup> In addition to Burzōy's avowed background in medicine, and the fact that he essentially reworked the Sanskrit *Pañcatantra* into a Middle Persian version, it is also worth noting that his introduction to the work apparently discusses some Indian medical theories and has some broader resemblances with the *Carakasamhitā*.<sup>93</sup> As far as Burzōy's discussion of the religions is concerned, he shares with the *Carakasamhitā*'s author a deep concern about the hereafter and the variety of opinions in connection with this. Both authors rely on reason and exacting epistemological criteria in their attempts to resolve these disputes. In all likelihood this Indian disputation tradition and its associated epistemological theories significantly informed his discussion of the various religions.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, we have several indications that Sasanian intellectuals more broadly were engaging with Indian scholarly traditions, in part at the behest of Khusrō I. Aside from Burzōy's own translation activities, there are signs of significant contact between the Sasanian and Indian

medical and astral science traditions.<sup>95</sup> It is therefore well within the realm of possibility that the Indian tradition of disputation, alongside that of the Greco-Roman world, informed the broader late Sasanian culture of the disputation, which in turn seems to have been an important part of Burzōy and Paul’s respective intellectual formations.

## V. Conclusion

This article has focused on the theorizing of two authors and their immediate backgrounds and contexts: in the respective religious and philosophical traditions they were engaging with and in the late Sasanian Empire more broadly. In this concluding section, I would like to briefly touch on some of the broader consequences and legacies of their theorizing.

As I have discussed above, Burzōy and Paul the Persian’s writings have a certain complex of ideas in common, including the circumscription of a certain realm of discourse, contested by adherents of various “religions” or “traditions,” along with a decidedly relativistic view of these “traditions” and “religions,” which might altogether be aptly described as a kind of incipient “secularity” or “secularization.” But can we trace a broader shift in Sasanian or post-Sasanian thought that informed, or even was driven by, this theorizing? As Charles Taylor has written, “it very often happens that what start off as theories held by a few people may come to infiltrate the social imaginary, first of élites perhaps, and then of the whole society”—do Burzōy and Paul’s writings have anything to do with this kind of process?<sup>96</sup>

We can begin to address this question in a few ways. First, and most obviously, there are the basic facts of the reception of both Burzōy and Paul’s works in the medieval Islamic world and beyond. Ibn al-Muqaffa’s eighth-century Arabic translation of Burzōy’s work, *Kalīla wa-*

*Dimna*, would become perhaps the greatest classic of medieval Arabic literature, with a stupendously wide-ranging circulation and array of translations.<sup>97</sup> And as Dimitri Gutas, Matthias Perkams, and Elvira Wakelnig have demonstrated, Paul's *oeuvre* constitutes an important link between late antique Alexandrian Neoplatonism and the Aristotelian tradition of the medieval Islamic world: Paul's writings, and particularly his classification of the parts of philosophy, significantly informed the work of the Abbasid-era philosopher al-Fārābī and other authors.<sup>98</sup>

Beyond the specific afterlives of these late Sasanian texts, there is also the broader legacy of late Sasanian intellectual life to consider—a vast topic to which I can only allot a small space here. For one thing, one can see continuity in certain practices and discourses that seem to have figured importantly into Paul the Persian and Burzōy's respective formations: in, for instance, the practice of the inter-religious disputation, which is attested well into the Abbasid period; and in the Islamic reception of Sasanian political maxims asserting the close association (but also, implicitly, difference) between religion and the state.<sup>99</sup> We can also examine the formation of the fundamental Islamic notion of *dīn* itself in this light—the complex and multivalent term typically translated as “religion.” It has long been thought that the Sasanian context in general, and the Zoroastrian notion of *daēnā-/dēn* in particular, were significant or even decisive for the origins and subsequent development of this Islamic concept.<sup>100</sup> It will only aid our understanding of these difficult questions of transmission and reception if we can approach Sasanian intellectual life as a complex and dynamic phenomenon—bringing the Empire's various scholarly and religious traditions into focus and examining the agency of individual authors with respect to their specific backgrounds and contexts.

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First and foremost, I would like to thank Dan Sheffield for suggesting that I take a look at François de Blois's *Burzōy's Voyage to India and the Origin of the Book of Kalilah wa Dimnah* and Brent Nongbri's *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* during my first semester as a doctoral student at Princeton; this article had its beginning in those recommendations and our subsequent discussions. In addition to Professor Sheffield, I would also like to thank Michael Cook, Richard Payne, Cyrus Schayegh, Yuhan Vevaina, and Moritz Maurer for reading complete drafts at various stages, and providing valuable feedback. The two anonymous reviewers were also most helpful. I have presented versions of this research in several settings over the years, and would like to thank those audiences for their questions and comments as well: at the Annual Meeting of the American Oriental Society in Boston and the University of Chicago's Ancient Societies Workshop in 2016; at the Princeton University Near Eastern Studies Department's Brown Bag Lecture Series in 2019; at New York University's Institute for the Study of the Ancient World and at the University of California, Berkeley in 2020; and at the University of Tübingen's Ancient History Colloquium in 2022. Of course, any errors remain solely my own responsibility. Finally, this article is part of a project that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant agreement No. 851607).

<sup>1</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press), 3.

<sup>2</sup> A helpful discussion of the state of the field is provided in Adam Becker, "Political Theology and Religious Diversity in the Sasanian Empire" in *Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians: Religious Dynamics in a Sasanian Context*, ed. Geoffrey Herman (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2014), 7–26.

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<sup>3</sup> Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind* (New York: Macmillan, 1963); Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); and id., *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity, Cultural Memory in the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 156–7.

<sup>5</sup> Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), ix.

<sup>6</sup> The obviously multiple meanings of “religion” in the modern West, extending far beyond a “resembl[ance to] modern Protestant Christianity,” are discussed in James Broucek, “Thinking About Religion Before “Religion””: A Review of Brent Nongbri’s *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (Review),” *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 98, no. 1 (2015): 98–125, 104–8). I thank Francesca Rochberg for alerting me to this review. See also the varieties of “secularization” taking place in the late medieval and early Modern West, discussed in José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); and the discussion of the various meanings of “secularity” in Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press), 1–24.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark Taylor (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 269–84, 281.

<sup>8</sup> Rajeev Bhargava, “The ‘Secular Ideal’ before Secularism: A Preliminary Sketch,” in *Comparative Secularisms in a Global Age*, ed. Linell Elizabeth Cady and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 159–80; Christoph Kleine, “Religion and the

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Secular in Premodern Japan from the Viewpoint of Systems Theory,” *Journal of Religion in Japan* 2, no. 1 (2013): 1–34; id., “Formations of Secularity in Ancient Japan?: On Cultural Encounters, Critical Junctures, and Path-Dependent Processes,” *Journal of Religion in Japan* 8, no. 1–3 (2019): 9–45. See also the discussions of the applicability of “religion” and “secular” to the (respectively) the early medieval West and premodern Islamic world in Conor O’Brien, “The early medieval secular: spectrum and strategies,” *Early Medieval Europe* 29 (2021), no. 1, 5–11; Robin Whelan, “After Augustine, after Markus: the problem of the secular at the end of antiquity,” *Early Medieval Europe* 29, no. 1 (2021), 12–35; and Rushain Abbasi, “Did Premodern Muslims Distinguish the Religious and Secular? The *Dīn–Dunyā* Binary in Medieval Islamic Thought,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 31, no. 2 (2020): 185–225.

<sup>9</sup> Notable in its absence from this list may be the conceptual distinction or institutional separation between religion and state, which is central to many definitions of secularity (as in, e.g., the “secularity 1” discussed in Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 1–2). Neither Burzōy nor Paul the Persian directly discusses such a distinction or separation, and hence this aspect of secularity will not be a central focus here, although we will return to it when the discussion turns to these authors’ broader social context; in what survives of Sasanian political thought, if not in the structure and actions of the Sasanian state as well, we can discern signs of this kind of “secularity.”

<sup>10</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 171–72. See also the discussion in Peter Gordon, “The Place of the Sacred in the Absence of God: Charles Taylor’s ‘A Secular Age,’” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 69, no. 4 (2008): 647–73, 658.

<sup>11</sup> On the *andarz* genre, see, e.g., Shaul Shaked, “Andarz i. Andarz and Andarz literature in pre-Islamic Iran,” in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, online version, at

<https://iranicaonline.org/articles/andarz-precept-instruction-advice#pt1>; and id., “The Pahlavi Andarz Literature” (Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1964).

<sup>12</sup> For more detail on all of this, see François de Blois, *Burzōy’s Voyage to India and the Origin of the Book of Kalīlah wa Dimnah* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1990).

<sup>13</sup> *Kalīla wa-Dimna*’s Arabic manuscript witnesses are notoriously abundant and variable (as sketched in de Blois, *Burzōy’s Voyage*, 1–11). There is no true “critical edition” of the work at present, and the prospects for one are dim. However, the promising AnonymClassic project, led by Beatrice Gruendler and funded by the European Research Council, will eventually produce an online synoptic edition, where the dizzying array of variant readings can at least be readily compared. Here and below I have cobbled together readings from the two standard editions, Louis Cheikho (ed.), *La version arabe de Kalīlah et Dimnah, d’après le plus ancien manuscrit arabe daté* (Beirut: Imprimerie catholique, 1905); and ‘Abd al-Wahhāb ‘Azzām (ed.), *Kalīla wa Dimna* (Cairo: Dār al-ma‘ārif, 1941; repr. Cairo: Dār al-ma‘ārif, 1981), and have also drawn upon the translations of Theodor Nöldeke (*Burzōes Einleitung zu dem Buche Kalila waDimna* (Strassburg: K.J. Trübner, 1912)), and (especially) de Blois (*Burzōy’s Voyage*, 26), who themselves relied upon different manuscripts than Cheikho or ‘Azzām did. The text of this passage can be found in Cheikho (ed.), *La version arabe de Kalīlah et Dimnah*, 33; ‘Azzām (ed.), *Kalīla wa Dimna*, 63; cf. also the translations in Nöldeke, *Burzōes Einleitung*, 14–15; and de Blois, *Burzōy’s Voyage*, 26.

<sup>14</sup> This term can generally be fairly translated as “religion”; as will be touched on below, it is highly likely that this term has a substantial etymological relationship with the Middle Persian word *dēn*, the term Ibn al-Muqaffa‘ is almost certainly translating as *dīn*. For Arabic *dīn*, see Louis Gardet, “Dīn,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Peri J. Bearman, Thierry Bianquis,

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Clifford E. Bosworth, Edouard J. van Donzel, and Wolfhart P. Heinrichs et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2010), vol. 2, 293. For full bibliography on the debate as to *dīn*'s Middle Persian etymology, see Firouz-Thomas Lankarany, *Daēnā im Avesta: eine semantische Untersuchung*, Reinbeck: Inge Wezler, 1985, 24–26. I will also briefly note that in my discussion of this text and Burzōy's notion of "religion," I have independently reached some similar conclusions to those advanced in Rushain Abbasi in a publication that appeared well into the review process for this article, "Islam and the Invention of Religion: A Study of Medieval Muslim Discourses on *Dīn*," *Studia Islamica* 116 (2021): 1-106, 31–36.

<sup>15</sup> Cheikho (ed.), *La version arabe de Kalilah et Dimnah*, 33–34, 37; 'Azzām (ed.), *Kalīla wa Dimna*, 64, 66. Cf. translations in Nöldeke, *Burzōes Einleitung*, 15, 18; and de Blois, *Burzōy's Voyage*, 26.

<sup>16</sup> Daniel Sheffield, "New Evidence for the Middle Persian Prototype of *Kalila Wa-Dimna*" (Annual Meeting of the American Oriental Society, Los Angeles, 2017). The allegory in question occurs in the Middle Persian *Wizīrgerd ī Dēnīg*, where it is attributed to Ōšnar, a figure otherwise frequently encountered in *andarz* literature (on this point, see, e.g., Shaked, "Andarz").

<sup>17</sup> de Blois, *Burzōy's Voyage*, 33, n. 1; Shaul Shaked, "From Iran to Islam: Notes on some themes in transmission," *Jerusalem studies in Arabic and Islam*. 4 (1984): 31–67, 57–58.

<sup>18</sup> For more on this text, including further details on its likely Sasanian-era time of composition, see Ahmad Tafazzolī, "Dādestān ī Mēnōg ī Xrad," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, online version, at <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/dadestan-i-menog>.

<sup>19</sup> Ervad Tehmuras Dinshaw Anklesaria and Jivanji Jamsedji Modi (eds.), *Dānāk-u Mainyô-i Khard: Pahlavi Pazand and Sanskrit Texts* (Bombay: Fort Printing Press, 1913), 3–6. My translation is in part based on Edward William West, *The Book of the Mainyo-i-Khard; the*



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*Pazand and Sanskrit Texts (in Roman Characters)* (Stuttgart: C. Grüniger, 1871), 5–7; Ahmad Tafazzoli, *Mīnū-ye Kharad* (Tehran: Entesharāt-e Tūs, 1364/1985), 3-4; and (especially) Shaked, “From Iran to Islam,” 58, n. 39.

<sup>20</sup> Shaked, “From Iran to Islam,” 57.

<sup>21</sup> As discussed in, e.g., Alberto Cantera, *Studien zur Pahlavi-Übersetzung des Avesta* (Wiesbaden, 2004), and Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina, “‘Enumerating the Dēn’: Textual Taxonomies, Cosmological Deixis, and Numerological Speculations in Zoroastrianism,” *History of Religions* 50, no. 2 (2010): 111–43.

<sup>22</sup> Jean Kellens, “La fonction aurorale de Miθra et la Daēnā,” in *Studies in Mithraism: Papers Associated with the Mithraic Panel Organized on the Occasion of the XVIth Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions, Rome 1990*, ed. John R. Hinnells (Rome: “L’Erma” di Bretschneider, 1994), 165–71, 171. These terms, Kellens adds, also have a causative sense: the ability to cause something to be seen.

<sup>23</sup> Vevaina, “Enumerating the Dēn,” 135.

<sup>24</sup> As discussed in, e.g., Mansour Shaki, “Dēn,” in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, online version, at <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/den>.

<sup>25</sup> Alberto Cantera, “Talking with God: The Zoroastrian *Ham.Parsti* or Intercalation Ceremonies,” *Journal Asiatique* 301, no. 1 (2013): 85–138, 130–31.

<sup>26</sup> Firouz-Thomas Lankarany argues that this collective sense is not yet evident in the Old Avesta, the Avestan corpus’s oldest stratum (composed ca. 1500-1000 BCE); it is only in the Young Avesta (composed ca. 500 BCE), that it emerges (Lankarany, *Daēnā im Avesta*, 149–70). Éric Pirart has challenged this view, arguing that the collective sense, too, is already evident in at least one Old Avestan passage (Éric Pirart, *Corps et âmes du mazdéen: le lexique zoroastrien de*

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*l'eschatologie individuelle* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2012), 121–79). Cf. also Cantera, “Talking with God,” 130, n. 65.

<sup>27</sup> Vevaina, “Enumerating the Dēn,” 116. Cf. also Cantera, “Talking with God,” 131.

<sup>28</sup> Kianoosh Rezania’s study of Zoroastrian Middle Persian *dēn* notes only one, late exception to this tendency (“‘Religion’ in Late Antique Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism: Developing a Term in Counterpoint,” *Entangled Religions* 11, no. 2 (2020), 19–20).

<sup>29</sup> On the differences between Manichaean and Zoroastrian uses of Middle Persian *dēn* (and its Parthian and Sogdian cognates) see Jason BeDuhn, “Mani and the Crystallization of the Concept of ‘Religion’ in Third Century Iran,” in *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings: Studies on the Chester Beatty Kephalaia Codex*, ed. Iain Gardner, Jason BeDuhn, and Paul Dilley (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 247–75; Jason BeDuhn, “The Co-Formation of the Manichaean and Zoroastrian Religions in Third-Century Iran,” *Entangled Religions* 11, no. 2 (2020); and Rezania, “‘Religion’ in Late Antique Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism.” A central claim for both of these authors is that *dēn* is, already in the Sasanian era, a notable instance of a premodern analogue for the modern notion of “religion,” but neither touches on the two texts under discussion here, or finds a precedent for their distinguishing features: the circumscription of a specifically religious realm of discourse; and a discussion of various religions, where the author’s commitment to one is either not obvious or explicitly lacking.

<sup>30</sup> For the point that Burzōy’s non-commitment to any existing religion is decidedly non-Manichaean, see de Blois, *Burzōy’s Voyage*, 31–32.

<sup>31</sup> This similarity was first pointed out in Paul Kraus, “Zu Ibn al-Muqaffa’,” *Rivista Degli Studi Orientali* 14, no. 1 (1933): 1–20.

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<sup>32</sup> As many as four figures with the name Paul the Persian are attested for the sixth century, the overlap among which remains unclear. On the matter of Paul's identification, see esp. Dimitri Gutas, "Paul the Persian on the Classification of the Parts of Aristotle's Philosophy: A Milestone between Alexandria and Bagdād," *Der Islam* 60, no. 2 (1983): 231–67, 238–39, n. 14; Peter Bruns, "Paul der Perser – Christ und Philosoph im spätantiken Sasanidenreich," *Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte* 104 (2008): 28–53, 28–34; and Matthias Perkams, "The Syro-Persian Reinvention of Aristotelianism: Paul the Persian's Treatise on the Scopes of Aristotle's Works between Sergius of Rēš'aynā, Alexandria, and Baghdad," *Studia graeco-arabica* 9 (2019): 129–46, 145. Paul's two other surviving works include a treatise on Aristotle's *Peri Hermeneias*, surviving in Syriac, and a treatise on Aristotle's philosophy more broadly that survives in Arabic. The former has been edited, translated, and discussed in Henri Hugonnard-Roche, "Sur la lecture du *Peri hermeneias* d'Aristote. Paul le Perse et la tradition d'Ammonius. Édition du texte syriaque, traduction française et commentaire de l'*Élucidation* du *Peri hermeneias* de Paul le Perse," *Studia graeco-arabica* 3 (2013): 37–104. The most comprehensive and up-to-date discussion of the latter, including a survey of the text's various editions and manuscripts, can be found in Perkams, "The Syro-Persian Reinvention of Aristotelianism."

<sup>33</sup> J. P. N. Land, *Anecdota syriaca, collegit, edidit, explicavit* (Leiden: Brill, 1862–1875), vol. IV, 1 [unless specified otherwise, references to Land's *Anecdota Syriaca* are to the work's Syriac section]. Cf. *Republic* VI.507b–511e (Plato, *Republic, Volume II: Books 6-10*, ed and tr. C. J. Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013), 86–103); and also *Alcibiades I* 132d–133d (Plato, *Charmides, Alcibiades I and II, Hipparchus, The Lovers, Theages, Minos, Erinomis*, ed. and tr. W. R. M. Lamb (Cambridge, Mass. & London:

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Harvard University Press, 1955), 208–13). This kinship with Plato is noted in Henri Hugonnard-Roche, *La logique d'Aristote du grec au syriaque: études sur la transmission des textes de l'Organon et leur interprétation philosophique* (Paris: Vrin, 2004), 237. This motif had a long afterlife, particularly in the Syriac tradition; as Javier Teixidor notes, we have something like it in the pseudepigraphic *Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite* and Sergius of Reš'aynā's translation of ps.-Aristotle's *De Mundo*, both nearly contemporary with Paul the Persian, as well as in several later Syriac authors (Javier Teixidor, "L' 'œil de l'intelligence' chez les syriaques," *Semitica* 50 (2000): 211–16). Samra Azarnouche and Olivia Ramble have also highlighted the discussion of the "eye of the soul" in Priscian of Lydia's *Answers*, another treatise dedicated to Khusrō I, and the possibility that this concept is, in some part, informed by Zoroastrian notions of "interior vision" (Samra Azarnouche and Olivia Ramble, "La vision zoroastrienne, les yeux dans les yeux. Commentaire sur la dēn selon Dēnkard III.225," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 237 (2020): 331–95, 375–76).

<sup>34</sup> Land, *Anecdota Syriaca*, vol. IV, 2. My translation, here and below, is in large part based on de Blois, *Burzōy's Voyage*, 28–29.

<sup>35</sup> Land, *Anecdota Syriaca*, vol. IV, 2–3 [Syriac], 3 [Latin].

<sup>36</sup> Land, *Anecdota Syriaca*, vol. IV, 4. The original passage is in *Theaetetus* 176a–c (Plato, *Theaetetus; Sophist*, ed. and tr. Harold North Fowler (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1928), 126–28). On its evolution into one of the canonical definitions of philosophy, see, e.g., Christian Wildberg, "Three Neoplatonic Introductions to Philosophy: Ammonius, David and Elias," *Hermathena*, no. 149 (1990): 33–51, 36–37.

<sup>37</sup> Gutas, "Paul the Persian on the Classification of the Parts of Aristotle's Philosophy." Several additional plausible western sources for this and other works of Paul the Persian are discussed in

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Perkams, “The Syro-Persian Reinvention of Aristotelianism” and id., “Sergius de Rēš‘ aynā: Le renouveau syro-occidental de l’aristotélisme et sa transmission syro-orientale” in *La philosophie en syriaque*, ed. Emiliano Fiori and Henri Hugonnard-Roche (Paris: Geuthner, 2019), 209–30.

Some additional parallels between Paul’s writings and those of John Philoponus, in particular (also discussed by Perkams as an influence on Paul) are noted in Richard Sorabji, “The Cross-cultural Spread of Greek Philosophy (and Indian Moral Tales) to 6<sup>th</sup> Century Persian and Syriac,” *Studia graeco-arabica* 9 (2019): 147–64, 157.

<sup>38</sup> Joel Thomas Walker, *The Legend of Mar Qardagh: Narrative and Christian Heroism in Late Antique Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 202–5. Walker also touches on Paul the Persian in this connection (Walker, *Legend of Mar Qardagh*, 184–85).

<sup>39</sup> Land, *Anecdota Syriaca*, vol. IV, 1. Paul’s neutral tone in referring to these Biblical passages is noted already in Kraus, “Zu Ibn al-Muqaffa‘,” 20.

<sup>40</sup> See, e.g., the many Biblical citations in Barḥadbšabbā’s *Cause of the Foundation of the Schools* (wr. late sixth century) (Addai Scher, *Cause de la fondation des écoles* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1908); or Bābai the Great’s (d. ca. 628) *Book of Union* (Arthur Adolphe Vaschalde, *Babai Magni Liber de unione*, (Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1953).

<sup>41</sup> Javier Teixidor, *Aristote en syriaque Paul le Perse, logicien du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2003), 123–30.

<sup>42</sup> Land, *Anecdota Syriaca*, vol. IV, 2–3.

<sup>43</sup> For the possibility that these prolegomena were not actually written by Christians, and their attributions to figures with Christian names were late additions, see Wildberg, “Three Neoplatonic Introductions to Philosophy.” For the alternative, that these authors simply tried to keep philosophy separate from Christianity, see L.G. Westerink, “The Alexandrian

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Commentators and the Introductions to Their Commentaries,” in *Aristotle Transformed: The Ancient Commentators and Their Influence*, ed. Richard Sorabji (London: Duckworth, 1990), 325–48, 339–40.

<sup>44</sup> Matthias Perkams, “Ostsyrische Philosophie. Die Rezeption und Ausarbeitung griechischen Denkens in der Schule von Nisibis bis Barḥad̥bšabbā,” in *Griechische Philosophie und Wissenschaft bei den Ostsyryern: Zum Gedenken an Mār Addai Scher (1867–1915)*, ed. Matthias Perkams and Alexander M. Schilling (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 49–76, 62–63; and id., “Sergius de Rēš‘aynā,” 219.

<sup>45</sup> For the *Cause*’s debt to the Neoplatonic tradition, see Adam H. Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 126–54; and id., *Sources for the History of the School of Nisibis* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), *passim*. For the specific references to Moses, Jesus, Plato, and Aristotle, see Scher, *Cause de la fondation des écoles*, 356, 363–65, 371.

<sup>46</sup> Adam H. Becker, “Martyrdom, Religious Difference, and ‘Fear’ as a Category of Piety in the Sasanian Empire: The Case of the Martyrdom of Gregory and the Martyrdom of Yazdpaneḥ,” *Journal of Late Antiquity* 2, no. 2 (2009): 300–336, 308.

<sup>47</sup> Becker, “Martyrdom, Religious Difference, and ‘Fear’ as a Category of Piety in the Sasanian Empire,” 309. The only glimpse of a more relativistic view of these matters, interestingly, comes from a Zoroastrian priest in the sixth-century *Martyrdom of Yazdpāneh*: swayed by the Christian Yazdpāneh’s anti-Zoroastrian rhetoric, and inspired by God, this priest suggests that he and his colleagues should “sit and discuss the *dehltā* of the Christians and our *dehltā*, and see which of them is true” (Paul Bedjan (ed.), *Histoire de Mar Jab-alaha, patriarche et de Raban Sauma*

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(Leipzig: O. Harrassowitz, 1895), 403; discussed in Becker, “Martyrdom, Religious Difference, and ‘Fear’ as a Category of Piety in the Sasanian Empire,” 310). While this could simply be meant as a testament to Yazdpāneh’s oratorical skills, and the Christian God’s omnipotence, it may somehow refer to the religious debates held at the Sasanian court, the evidence for which we will examine in more detail further on.

<sup>48</sup> This parallel between Syriac *deḥltā* and Middle Persian *dēn* is discussed as a reflection of a shared discourse stemming from the late Sasanian court in Richard E. Payne, “Iranian Cosmopolitanism,” in *Cosmopolitanism and Empire: Universal Rulers, Local Elites, and Cultural Integration in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean*, ed. Myles Lavan, Richard E. Payne, and John Weisweiler, Oxford Studies in Early Empires (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 209–30, 225–26. It is also touched on in Becker, “Martyrdom, Religious Difference, and ‘Fear’ as a Category of Piety in the Sasanian Empire,” 325.

<sup>49</sup> Gutas, “Paul the Persian on the Classification of the Parts of Aristotle’s Philosophy,” 247–50.

<sup>50</sup> Gutas, “Paul the Persian on the Classification of the Parts of Aristotle’s Philosophy,” 244–45, 261.

<sup>51</sup> A. Busse, *Eliae in Porphyrii Isagogen et Aristotelis Categorias Commentaria* (Berlin: Reimer, 1900), 27–28; Id., *Davidis Prolegomena et In Porphyrii Isagogen commentarium* (Berlin: Reimer, 1904), 58 Here and below, in translating these authors I have relied heavily on Sebastian Gertz, *Elias and David: Introductions to Philosophy; with Olympiodorus: Introduction to Logic* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

<sup>52</sup> Land, *Anecdota Syriaca*, vol. IV, 5.

<sup>53</sup> On this point, see, e.g., the first chapter of the Middle Persian *Bundahišn* (edited in Fazl Allāh Pakzād (ed.), *Bundahišn: Zoroastische Kosmogonie und Kosmologie* (Tehran: Centre for the

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Great Islamic Encyclopaedia, 2005), 4–25; translated in Domenico Agostini and Samuel Thrope, *The Bundahišn: The Zoroastrian Book of Creation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 6–11).

<sup>54</sup> Busse, *Eliae in Porphyrii Isagogen et Aristotelis Categorias Commentaria*, 28.

<sup>55</sup> Busse, *Davidis Prolegomena et In Porphyrii Isagogen commentarium*, 59. Gutas offers “representation” as the meaning for *eikasmos* (and “represent” for *eikazomen*), “behind which there seems to lie the entire tradition of *allegorical* interpretation of sacred texts (whether pagan or Christian), as practiced from the earliest Hellenistic times down through Neoplatonism,” but in the absence of supporting evidence this seems a stretch (Gutas, “Paul the Persian on the Classification of the Parts of Aristotle’s Philosophy,” 247–48, n. 38).

<sup>56</sup> As Gutas puts it, limiting his comparison to David and Paul, “the tenor of the two arguments... is certainly different, but their correspondence cannot be fortuitous” (“Paul the Persian on the Classification of the Parts of Aristotle’s Philosophy,” 248).

<sup>57</sup> I thank Salam Rassi for bringing this text and its important parallels to Paul the Persian’s *Treatise* to my attention.

<sup>58</sup> Arthur Vööbus, “Bābay the Great,” in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, online version, at <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/babay-the-great>.

<sup>59</sup> This tension between belief and reason, of course, extends at least as far back as the Pauline epistles. See, e.g., Günther Bornkamm, “Faith and Reason in Paul’s Epistles,” *New Testament Studies* 4, no. 2 (1958): 93–100; and Douglas A. Campbell, “Natural Theology in Paul? Reading Romans 1.19–20,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 1, no. 3 (1999): 231–52.

<sup>60</sup> Vaschalde, *Babai Magni Liber de unione*, vol. I, 7–8.

<sup>61</sup> Vaschalde, *Babai Magni Liber de unione*, vol. I, 4, 6.



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<sup>62</sup> On this epistemological divide within the Church of the East in the later Sasanian period, which corresponded to a broader “tension” between schools and monasteries, see Marijke Metselaar, “The Mirror, the Qnoma, and the Soul: Another Perspective on the Christological Formula of Babai the Great,” *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum / Journal of Ancient Christianity* 19, no. 2 (2015): 331–66, 348–52; and Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom*, 169–203.

<sup>63</sup> Scher, *Cause de la fondation des écoles*, 339. Here and below, I have essentially reproduced *verbatim* the translations in Becker, *Sources for the History of the School of Nisibis*.

<sup>64</sup> As Becker writes, in the *Cause* as in the broader late antique Neoplatonic tradition on which Barḥadbšabbā drew, “investigation into something begins with how we speak about it... semantics is the first step towards epistemology and ontology” (Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom*, 134).

<sup>65</sup> Scher, *Cause de la fondation des écoles*, 340–41.

<sup>66</sup> Land, *Anecdota Syriaca*, vol. IV, 1.

<sup>67</sup> Land, *Anecdota Syriaca*, vol. IV, 4.

<sup>68</sup> Scher, *Cause de la fondation des écoles*, 345. Barḥadbšabbā’s natural theology is discussed extensively in Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom*, 134–50.

<sup>69</sup> Scher, *Cause de la fondation des écoles*, 362–67.

<sup>70</sup> Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 174.

<sup>71</sup> Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 177; id., *A Far Glory: The Quest for Faith in an Age of Credulity* (New York: Free Press; Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan Canada; New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1992), 37–46.

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<sup>72</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 303–4. Cf. Berger, *A Far Glory*, 37–39.

<sup>73</sup> Arthur Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*, (Copenhagen: E. Munksgaard, 1944), 426–28. Cf. also Gutas, “Paul the Persian on the Classification of the Parts of Aristotle’s Philosophy,” 249, and the references in his n. 37 there.

<sup>74</sup> Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*, 426–40; Kraus, “Zu Ibn al-Muqaffa’,” 19–20.

<sup>75</sup> There is a helpful discussion of the broader “framework of liberalism... apparent in much of the historiography on Sasanian Iran in Becker, “Political Theology and Religious Diversity,” 8–16.

<sup>76</sup> For the former argument, see Richard E. Payne, *A State of Mixture: Christians, Zoroastrians, and Iranian Political Culture in Late Antiquity*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015) (quotation from 26). For the latter, see Kevin T. van Bladel, *From Sasanian Mandeans to Šābians of the Marshes*, (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 98–117 (quotation from 115–16).

<sup>77</sup> Patricia Crone, “Ungodly Cosmologies,” in *Islam, the Ancient Near East and Varieties of Godlessness: Collected Studies in Three Volumes, Volume 3*, ed. Hanna Siurua (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2016), 118–50, 121; on Berger’s theory, see above.

<sup>78</sup> Payne, *State of Mixture*, 5–14, 38–55, quotation from 170; Shaked, “From Iran to Islam,” 37–40.

<sup>79</sup> As noted, for the Sasanian maxim that kingship and religion should be “brothers,” in Abbasi, “Islam and the Invention of Religion,” 36. On the actual intertwining or even inseparability of “religion” and “state” in the Sasanian Empire, see, e.g., Becker, “Political Theology and Religious Diversity”; it is, of course, strictly the articulation of such a distinction that we are dealing with here, rather than anything that would directly correspond to any institutional separation.

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<sup>80</sup> Crone, “Ungodly Cosmologies,” 121–22; Payne, “Iranian Cosmopolitanism.” On the disputation in late Sasanian Iran, see also Walker, *Legend of Mar Qardagh*, 164–205.

<sup>81</sup> Crone, “Ungodly Cosmologies,” 121–22.

<sup>82</sup> A key piece of evidence for the disputation’s broader popularity in the Sasanian Empire is the debate narrated in the *History of Mar Qardāgh*, a sixth-century martyr act. For an extensive discussion of this disputation and its philosophical significance, see Walker, *Legend of Mar Qardagh*, 164–205; and also Payne, “Iranian Cosmopolitanism,” 221. A useful discussion of Christian narratives of the comparisons of various religions undertaken by Sasanian rulers, which seem in some way to reflect an awareness of actual inter-religious disputations, can be found in Alexander Markus Schilling, *Die Anbetung der Magier und die Taufe der Sāsāniden: Zur Geistesgeschichte des iranischen Christentums in der Spätantike* (Leuven: Peeters, 2008). The Babylonian Talmud’s notable departures from its predecessors in the Jewish tradition, including its heightened emphasis on argumentation, striking “enhancement of the position of human reason, both on its own terms and in relation to Torah,” as well as its implicit “recognition that truth divine in origin, is, on the human level, indeterminable,” may also reflect Jewish engagement with a broader culture of disputation in Sasanian Iran (David Kraemer, *The Mind of the Talmud: An Intellectual History of the Bavli* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 156, 7). Although the discussion is rather speculative, some forums in which such engagement could have taken place are suggested in Shai Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud: Reading the Bavli in its Sasanian Context* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 34–63. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for alerting me to these important developments in late antique Judaism and their relevance for my argument.

<sup>83</sup> Payne, “Iranian Cosmopolitanism,” 220.

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<sup>84</sup> Payne, “Iranian Cosmopolitanism,” 224.

<sup>85</sup> Payne, “Iranian Cosmopolitanism,” 224–27.

<sup>86</sup> Payne, “Iranian Cosmopolitanism,” 223–25; on the “fourfold debate” motif, in this *andarz* text and elsewhere, see Shaked, “From Iran to Islam,” 41–49.

<sup>87</sup> Manichaean texts, such as the version of the *Kephalaia* housed at the Chester Beatty Library, discuss Mānī’s victories in these debates, while Islamic-era authors such as al-Ya‘qūbī and al-Tha‘ālibī, presumably drawing on non-Manichaean reports, discuss Mānī’s defeats (Paul Dilley, “Mani’s Wisdom at the Court of the Persian Kings: The Genre and Context of the Chester Beatty Kephalaia,” in *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings: Studies on the Chester Beatty Kephalaia Codex*, ed. Iain Gardner, Jason BeDuhn, and Paul Dilley (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2015), 15–51, 16–18, 43–44). I thank Yuhan Vevaina for alerting me to this evidence for inter-religious debates at the early Sasanian court.

<sup>88</sup> Galen makes these points in his *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* (edited in Phillip De Lacy, *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato*, (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1978), 576–78, 588–89). The epistemology on display here is also usefully discussed in Michael Frede, “On Galen’s Epistemology,” in *Galen: Problems and Prospects*, ed. Vivian Nutton (London: Wellcome Institute, 1981), 65–86. The broadly Galenic character of Burzōy’s thought is noted in Michel Tardieu, “Le curiosités scientifiques des rois: Chosroès Ier et Frédéric II,” in *Husraw Ier, reconstructions d’un règne : sources et documents*, ed. Christelle Jullien, (Paris: Association pour l’Avancement des Études Iraniennes, 2015), 305–24, 316–17. For a more extensive discussion of Burzōy and Galen’s similarities, see Thomas Benfey, “The Scholars of Sasanian Iran and Their Islamic Heirs” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2020), 155–58.

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<sup>89</sup> In addition to the characterizations of Sasanian medicine as broadly marked by a Greco-Roman influence in Islamic-era historiography, and the specifically Greco-Roman remedies and medical theories manifest in medical texts with origins in Sasanian or early Islamic Iran and Iraq, several physicians with Roman backgrounds are known to have had significant relationships with Khusrō I and other Sasanian rulers. For these accounts in Islamic historiography, see, e.g., Vasily Eberman, “Meditsinskaya Shkola v Djundishapure,” *Zapiski Kollegii Vostokovedov pri Aziatskom Muzee Akademii Nauk Soyuzha Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik* 1 (1925): 47–72. For the clear Greco-Roman impact on late antique and early Islamic medical texts from Iran and Iraq, see, e.g., Oliver Kahl, *The Sanskrit, Syriac and Persian Sources in the Comprehensive Book of Rhazes* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2015) (for texts surviving in Arabic), Paolo Delaini, *Medicina del corpo, medicina dell’anima. La circolazione delle conoscenze medico-filosofiche nell’Iran sasanide* (Milan: Mimesis, 2014), and Philippe Gignoux, *Man and Cosmos in Ancient Iran* (Rome: ISIAO, 2001) (for texts surviving in Middle Persian and Syriac). For contacts between the late Sasanian court and Greco-Roman physicians, see R. C. Blockley, “Doctors as Diplomats in the Sixth Century A.D.,” *Florilegium* 2 (1980): 89–100, and the roster of physicians listed as associates of Khusrō I in Michel Tardieu, “Chosroes,” in *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques*, ed. Richard Goulet, vol. II (Paris: Brepols, 1989), 309–18. For a more extensive discussion of points of contact between the Greco-Roman and Sasanian (and Indian) medical traditions, see Benfey, “The Scholars of Sasanian Iran and Their Islamic Heirs,” 1–100.

<sup>90</sup> As discussed in, e.g., George Karamanolis, *The Philosophy of Early Christianity* (Durham: Acumen Press, 2013), 35–37

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<sup>91</sup> For more on Uranius, and other indications that philosophical Skepticism was at least known in late Sasanian Iran, see Benfey, “The Scholars of Sasanian Iran and Their Islamic Heirs,” 161–80.

<sup>92</sup> On the history of the disputation in ancient India, particularly its close connections with the development of epistemological theories, and the medical tradition, see Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), vol. II, 392–402; and Karin Preisendanz, “Logic, Debate and Epistemology in Ancient Indian Medicine and Philosophy: An Investigation,” *Indian Journal of the History of Science* 44, no. 2 (2009): 261–312. Although it was written substantially later than Burzōy and Paul’s lifetimes, Jayanta Bhaṭṭa’s ninth-century Sanskrit drama *Āgamaḍambara*, edited and translated by Csaba Dezső as *Much Ado about Religion*, has an account of inter-religious debates at a court in Kashmir that makes for an intriguing comparison piece (Jayanta Bhaṭṭa, *Much Ado about Religion*, ed. and tr. Csaba Dezső (New York: New York University Press, 2005)). I thank Michael Cook for bringing this reference to my attention. On the dating of the *Carakasamhitā*, see G. Jan Meulenbeld, *A History of Indian Medical Literature*, (Groningen: E. Forsten, 1999), vol. IA, 105–14.

<sup>93</sup> For the apparently Indian medical theories discussed by Burzōy, see Johannes Hertel, *Das Pañcatantra, seine Geschichte und seine Verbreitung* (Lepizig & Berlin: B.G. Teubner, 1914), 367–69; de Blois, *Burzōy’s Voyage*, 27–28; and Delaini, *Medicina del corpo, medicina dell’anima*, 45–54.

<sup>94</sup> On the *Carakasamhitā*’s discussion of the hereafter, see Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat, “Caraka’s Proof of Rebirth,” *Journal of the European Āyurvedic Society* 3 (1993): 94–111. For a more extensive comparison of Burzōy to the *Carakasamhitā*, see Benfey, “The Scholars of Sasanian Iran and Their Islamic Heirs,” 158–61.

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<sup>95</sup> On the likely Sasanian background for many of the Indian *materia medica* that would eventually be taken up in the early Islamic medical tradition, see Anya King, “The New Materia Medica of the Islamicate Tradition: The Pre-Islamic Context,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 135, no. 3 (2015): 499–528. On the Indian influence on Sasanian astral science, which probably included a sixth-century translation of an Indian astral science work, perhaps commissioned by Khusrō I, see David Pingree, “Astronomy and Astrology in India and Iran,” *Isis* 54, no. 2 (1963): 229–46, and Benfey, “The Scholars of Sasanian Iran and Their Islamic Heirs,” 101–34.

<sup>96</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 171.

<sup>97</sup> de Blois, *Burzōy’s Voyage*, 1–11. See now also the illuminating discussion of Islamic authors’ engagement with Burzōy’s ideas in Abbasi, “Islam and the Invention of Religion,” 56–86.

<sup>98</sup> Gutas, “Paul the Persian on the Classification of the Parts of Aristotle’s Philosophy,” esp. 250–60; Perkams, “The Syro-Persian Reinvention of Aristotelianism”; and Elvira Wakelnig, “Late Antique Philosophical Education, Miskawayh, and Paul the Persian: On the Division and the Ranks of Philosophy” in *Islamic Ethics as Educational Discourse: Thought and Impact of the Classical Muslim Thinker Miskawayh (d. 1030)*, ed. Sebastian Günther and Yassir El Jamouhi (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), 109–33.

<sup>99</sup> On the inter-religious disputation in the medieval Islamic world, see, e.g., Michael Cook, “Ibn Sa‘dī on Truth-Blindness,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 33 (2007): 169–78. On the Islamic reception of Sasanian political maxims about the proper relationship between religion and the state, see, in addition to the references surveyed in nn. 78–79 above, Noah Feldman, “The Ethical Literature: Religion and Political Authority as Brothers,” *Journal of Persianate Studies* 5 (2012): 95–127.

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<sup>100</sup> See, e.g., Cantwell Smith, *Meaning and End*, 75-108; Abbasi, “Islam and the Invention of Religion,” 14–23, 31–36; and the bibliography on the etymology of Arabic *dīn* surveyed in n. 14 above.