



ALEXANDER OF LYCOPOLIS

ALEXANDER OF LYCOPOLIS, apparently a Neoplatonic philosopher living in Egypt about 300 CE. He is known exclusively from his Greek treatise, *Against the Doctrines of Mani* (ed. A. Brinkmann, *Alexandri Lycopolitani contra Manichaei opiniones disputatio*, Leipzig, 1895), an account of the Manichean system and a criticism of it based on Alexander's own views. His controlled arguments, with no outbursts of hatred like those found in Christian polemics, are not always profound and sometimes open to criticism, but he has well grasped both the essential structure of the system and its inherent weakness—its complete lack of a philosophical basis. He points out that Manichean doctrines were based not on logical reasoning, but on an alleged revelation and a religious sentiment expressed in mythical images (V, pp. 8.17-9.4). When Schaeder—after Baur—drew attention to Alexander, he missed this decisive passage and tried to use Alexander to prove that Mani's system was a kind of Hellenistic philosophical speculation (Schaeder, "Urform," pp. 109-27). What Alexander actually offers us—besides some valuable notices about the first spread of Manicheism in Egypt—is an exposition of the so-called Western type of the system with its more philosophical than mythical language. That Alexander represented the utmost extreme in this respect was seen already by Baur (*Religionssystem*, p. 9); more remarkable is the fact that even Alexander was unable to give an account completely free from mythical elements, e.g., Matter's longing to ascend to the realm of Light and seize God's Kingdom, the Mixture of Soul and Matter, the ascent of the souls to the moon and the sun (pp. 4.24-8.4). That it is impossible to give an account of the Manichean system without including mythical elements was seen by Polotsky



(“Manichäismus,” repr., p. 108). What may be discussed is whether Alexander took his summary of the system from a Manichean tract (Schaeder, “Urform,” p. 107), or if he himself summarized Mani’s doctrines; stylistic observations invoked by Schaeder may speak for the first alternative. Already Baur says that Alexander is a first class source among the philosophical accounts of the system (*Religionssystem*, pp. 6ff., 8ff.). Schaeder, however, went farther, trying to base the interpretation of the system on Alexander’s account as the most correct and original form of Mani’s doctrines (“Urform,” pp. 156ff.). But this is completely wrong, since Alexander’s exposition is fully understood only in light of the mythical accounts. Alexander as a source has therefore only restricted value for our understanding of the system. It shows how the Manicheans wanted their system interpreted in philosophical circles; to judge from Alexander’s example, their success was only modest.

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