



ARCHELAUS

ARCHELAUS, the assumed author of a Christian polemic against the Manicheans composed before A.D. 348. The only complete text of the *Acta Archelai* is a Latin version from the end of the 4th century.

Authorship. The work is attributed to a certain Hegemonius, of whom nothing is known. The statements of Jerome (*De viris illustribus*, no. 72) that he was made “bishop of Mesopotamia” in the reign of the emperor Probus are valueless because they attribute to Hegemonius things that are said about the bishop Archelaus in the *Acta Archelai*. Hegemonius may well be a pseudonym. The dating is equally uncertain. Eusebius of Caesarea, who completed books I-VIII of his *Ecclesiastical History* in 312, does not mention the work. The earliest reference to it comes in the sixth *Baptismal Catechesis* written by Cyril of Jerusalem in 348. Jerome (loc. cit.) states that the work was first composed in Syriac (*Syro sermone*) and then translated into Greek. Onomastic and toponymic reasons were adduced by L. A. Zacagni (1698), J. A. Assemani (1719), K. Kessler (1876 and 1883), and A. Harnack (1883) in support of Jerome’s testimony; but for the very same reasons, I. de Beausobre (1734-1739) considered the original to have been Greek, and Th. Nöldeke has shown that the arguments advanced for the Syriac origin of this work are unfounded (*ZDMG* 43, 1889, pp. 535ff.; 44, 1890, p. 399. Yet Ch. H. Beeson, the editor of the *Acta Archelai*, (1906), was unwilling to express a definite opinion. Since the work is an echo of public anti-Manichean debates in bilingual communities in northern Mesopotamia at the end of the 3rd century, there are grounds for supposing that these debates were conducted in Aramaic and recorded in



Greek. This would account for Jerome's misunderstanding. There are no Syriac fragments of the *Acta Archelai* independent of the Greek fragments transmitted by Epiphanius.

The *Acta Archelai* was a source of materials for almost all the Christian historians and theologians who engaged in polemics against the Manicheans, whether they wrote in Greek, Latin, Syriac, Coptic, or Arabic. They found in it quotations (or distortions) of sayings of Mani, sketches (or caricatures) of his career, and rebuttals of Manichean counterinterpretations of the New Testament. The popularity of the *Acta Archelai* in the west as well as the east of the Christian world, appears to have been due to its grotesquely derisive portrayal of Mani as both a heretic and an Iranian, as a religious adversary linked to the traditional political enemy. In this respect the work is a prototype in the long record of Western (Greek and Latin) descriptions of "accursed Persia" in late antiquity and the middle ages.

Contents. The *Acta Archelai* are a collection of *acta*, i.e. achievements, ascribed to Archelaus, a bishop in northern Mesopotamia who contended with Manicheans. The episodes are as follows: descriptions of the protagonists (chaps. 1-5); statements by a former Manichean named Turbo (Greek *Túrbōn*) about the religion which he has just renounced (chaps. 7-13); first public debate between Mani and the bishop Archelaus (chaps. 14-42); second debate between Mani and Archelaus, followed by the death of Mani (chaps. 43-66); concluding oration by Archelaus about Mani's origin and antecedents (chaps. 67-68). The purpose of the work is to supply proofs of Mani's heresy by showing that both in his career and in his beliefs he was merely a link in the chain of error beginning with Simon the Magian. This is why a general list of Christian heresies has been added as an appendix in the 13th-century Monacensis manuscript (p. 98, 18-100, 13 in Beeson's ed.).

The story invented by the author of the *Acta Archelai* to achieve this heresiological purpose may be summarized as follows: In the days of the early church at Jerusalem, a rich Arab merchant named Scythianus (Gr. *Skuthianós*), who has married a prostitute from Upper Egypt, starts teaching the theory of the two principles; he writes four books on the subject, named *Mysteria*, *Capitula*, *Evangelium*, and *Thesaurus*, and engages in polemics with the leaders of the Jerusalem church, but dies while performing a magic trick. His belongings and his books are then seized by his slave and disciple Terebinthus (Gr. *Térbinthos*, *Terébinthos*). To escape the vengeance of Scythianus's widow, Terebinthus flees to the Persians in Babylonia. There he adopts the surname



Buddâ (Gr. Bouddâ), finds shelter in the house of a rich and elderly widow, engages in polemics with Zoroastrians and Mithraists, and likewise dies while performing magic. His protectress inherits his possessions and purchases a boy slave named Corbicius (Gr. Kouúbrikos). The boy grows up and the widow grows older. On her deathbed, she bequeaths to Corbicius her fortune and the four books of Scythianus. Corbicius then adopts the surname Mani (Gr. Manē, Latin Manes, Syriac Mānī) or Manichaeus (Gr. Manikhaîos). In the hope of gaining prestige, Mani becomes a magician and attempts to cure the daughter of the king of Persia; but the girl dies, and the king throws Mani into prison. While in prison, Mani sends out disciples as missionaries. Then he escapes, having bribed the warden. He plans to go to the Roman empire and spread his doctrine there, and asks a disciple name Turbo (Gr. Túrbōn) to get in touch with Christian leaders, in particular with Archelaus, the bishop of Carcharae in northern Mesopotamia. Archelaus invites Mani, and the pagan civic authorities at Carcharae arrange a great public debate. This ends with an attempt by the infuriated crowd to do away with Mani; but he escapes and flees to a nearby village named Diodoris, then to the Castle of the Arabs on the Stranga river. The king of Persia orders his arrest, and he is flayed alive with a reed scalpel. His skin is then filled with straw and put on display at the gates of the royal city.

Historical value of the Acta Archelai. Until the 18th century, Western scholars accepted the Mani story in the *Acta Archelai* as historical fact, and held all sorts of contradictory opinions about it. After the publication of the Arabic sources on Mani and the discovery of the Turfan texts at the end of the 19th century, the *Acta Archelai* were consigned to oblivion. This is regrettable because the work is not without literary interest and historical value.

The literary interest of the *Acta Archelai* lies in its method of rebutting the adversary. Proof of the impugned doctrine's absurdity is taken to be established by evidence of its founder's dubious origin and infamous affiliation—evidence which has manifestly been invented for this very purpose. The argument is based on a biography in which rumors and some real, but anachronistically misplaced, facts are added to a fictional story inherited from the accounts of the heresy of Simon the Magian. Belonging to the fictional framework are the themes of the lineal transmission of error; of the prostitute, the widow, and the slave; of the heretic's change of name, practice of magic, and enthusiasm for the “wisdoms of the barbarians” (Egyptians, Greeks, Chaldeans, Iranians, Indians). The names of Mani's



fictitious forebears are derived from titles given to the movement's founder by its devotees: Scythianus from Arabic *šayk* (elder, master), Terebinthus from Syriac *tarbīṭa* (pupil, child); Budda from the Buddha Śākyamuni, seen as Mani's precursor in India; Corbicius from Middle Persian *kirbakkar* (pious, charitable); Manichaeus from Syriac *Mānī ḥayyā* (the living Mani).

The documentary value of the *Acta Archelai* lies in the geographical and social setting of the described events. They take place in the town and district of Carcharae (other spellings in Latin mss., Charcharae, Charchara, Charra; in Greek mss., Kárkarai, Kálkarai, Káskarai). According to the *Acta Archelai* (14, p. 23, 8) Carcharae was a town in northern Mesopotamia, politically Roman (i.e. belonging to the Roman empire) and socially "Hellenic." Its magistrates, officials, and teachers bear Greek names and are "gentiles in religion." Consequently Carcharae can not be Kaškar as found, for example, in Epiphanius in the version of the story he adopted), which was an Iranian town in southern Mesopotamia (later al-Wāseṭ), but must, as Fiey has shown, be Carrhae (Gr. Kárrai), which was a Greco-Syrian town in the Osrhoene district in the west of northern Mesopotamia (later Ḥarrān, the chief town of the Dīār Moẓār district). Both before and after the Islamic conquest of Syria and Iran, Carrhae/Ḥarrān was an important center of pagan (Sabeian) and also Manichean intellectual life. Thus the *Acta Archelai* provide confirmation of the statements of Afrahaṭ (d. ca. 340) and Ephraim (d. 373) about infiltration of Manicheism into Osrhoene in the early years of the 4th century. The provenance of the fictional characters in the *Acta Archelai* show how far beyond Iran Manicheism had spread at that time: northwestward to Carrhae, southwestward into Palestine, upper Egypt, and Arabia, and eastward into India, the land of the Buddha.

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Latin names pp. 102-133.

This edition is based on a 13th-century manuscript, the Monacensis, which was discovered and acquired by L. Traube: see his “Acta Archelai. Vorbemerkung zu einer neuen Ausgabe,” in *Sb. der bayerischen Ak. Wiss.*, 1903, pp. 533-49.

Greek fragments. Mani’s letter to Marcellus and Marcellus’ reply (*Acta* 6, pp. 5-8, Beeson) are reproduced by Epiphanius, *Panarion* 66, 6-7 (*G. C. S.* 37, Leipzig, 1933, p. 25.14-27, 16 Holl and p. 28.15-20); so too is Turbo’s speech (*Acta* 7-13, pp. 9-22, Beeson) in *Panarion* 66, pp. 25-31 (*G. C. S.* 37, p. 53.19-72, 8 Holl).

The Greek text published by K. Holl should be used with caution, because Holl died on 23.5.1926 and his text was only printed in 1933 after H. Lietzmann, E. Klostermann, and C. Schmidt had made emendations, mainly to Heresy 66 (the Manicheans).

See also the corrections by F. Drexler, in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 34, 1934, pp. 365-68.

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