



FEHREST III. REPRESENTATION OF MANICHEISM

iii. THE REPRESENTATION OF MANICHEISM IN THE *FEHREST*

Moḥammad b. Eshāq b. Abī Ya‘qūb al-Nadīm al-Warrāq al-Baḡdādī included in his *Fehrest al-‘olūm* an extensive account of Manicheism, which gives details about Mani’s life, teachings, and the fate of the Manicheans in the Islamic countries. The account is comparable to some non-Manichean descriptions of Manicheism: the *Acta Archelai*, which, however, narrates Mani’s life as an anti-legend; the account of Theodor bar Kōnai’s in his *Scholia*, limited to cosmogony; and most accurately with the shorter, more consistently philosophical stylised accounts of Šahrastānī in his *Ketāb al-melal wa’l-neḥal* and of Ebn al-Mortaḏā in the *Ketāb al-baḥr al-zaḳār* on the teachings of the Manicheans. The account in the *Fehrest* is the most extensive, varied, and reliable non-Manichean description of Mani and his teachings, and it is of the highest value for research on Manicheism even after the discovery of numerous Manichean original sources. Ebn al-Nadīm writes that he had known around 300 Manicheans in Bagdad at the time of the Buyid Mo‘ezz-al-Dawla (334-56/945-67), but at the time of writing (ca. 377/987-88) there were “hardly more than five” there (tr. Dodge, p. 803). This reduction in the number of Manicheans in the capital of Islam almost to the point of disappearance enabled his account of them to become a work of scientific-historical



dimensions. It was easier for the author to report objectively, unpolemically, and to the best of his knowledge on a foreign, often persecuted, religion which had almost disappeared.

An overview of the content of Ebn al-Nadīm's chapter on the Manicheans is given in tabular form (see [Table 1](#)). The table offers a synopsis of the most important editions and translations of the text, and it may be used to locate passages in Flügel's now outdated edition corresponding to those cited in this article. A detailed account of the contents has also been given by E. G. Browne (*Lit. Hist. Persia* I, pp. 384-87).

Sources. An unfortunate consequence of the dwindling presence of the Manicheans in Baghdad was the decreasing knowledge of their teachings. Ebn al-Nadīm names the books and letters by Mani and his followers known to him (tr. Dodge, pp. 797-801). They are: (1) *Ketāb sefr al-asrār* (The Book of Secrets). (2) *Ketāb sefr al-jabābera* (The Book of Giants). (3) *Ketāb farā'ez al-samā'in* (The Book of the Duties of Auditors) as well as *Ketāb farā'ez al-mojtabīn* (The Book of the Duties of the Elect; Ebn al-Nadīm, ed. Tajaddod, p. 399, l. 24). Flügel identified the first of these as the *Kephalaia* (Flügel, 1862, p. 363), but both titles listed have exact Iranian correspondents—Sogd. *Niyōšākāne wiḍvāy* “The Homily of the Auditors” (Henning, 1944, p. 137) and Parth. *Wižīdagān saxwan* “The Homily of the Chosen” (cf. Sundermann, 1984, p. 229). (4) The *Šābuhragān* (Ar. **Šāborqān*). (5) *Ketāb sefr al-ehyā* (“The Book of Animating” according to Flügel, *Mani*, pp. 367-68; the “Living Gospel,” or, more probably, the “Treasure of Life”). (6) *Ketāb feraqmāṭayā* (The Book of Pragmateia). Then Ebn al-Nadīm names the titles of 76 (?) letters, which could have been the content of the collection of the *Epistles of Mani*, i. e. one of the canonical texts of the Manicheans (the seventh in this list). That does not necessarily mean that these are solely the letters of Mani, which would be grammatically possible but contradictory to Ebn al-Nadīm's words. Manichean sources mention a pentad or heptad of canonical texts but never include the Middle Persian *Šābuhragān* (Henning, 1952, pp. 204-5).

The chapters of the aforementioned “Book of Secrets” and the *Šābuhragān* are named, so one must assume Ebn al-Nadīm had a detailed knowledge of these works. Certainly, further information on the “Book of Giants” and other texts could have been lost in the manuscript transmission. The eschatological chapters of the *Šābuhragān* on the fates of the auditors, the elect, and sinners after death are also mentioned (tr. Dodge, p. 798). This fits in with F. W. K. Müller's realization that an exact correspondence between the apocalyptic



damnation of the sinners in the *Fehrest* and in the MP fragments of the *Šābuhragān* exists (Müller, pp. 20-22). Bīrūnī's statement that a chapter "On the coming of the Prophet" (*bāb majī' al-rasūl*) belonged to the *Šābuhragān* proves, however, that the eschatological fragments cannot be the whole work (*Ātār*, p. 118, l. 15). Carsten Colpe justifiably tried to derive whole sections of the *Fehrest* (individual, cosmic eschatology, role of the sons of the Living Spirit) from the *Šābuhragān* (Colpe, 1954, pp. 124, 218-20).

Could the author of the *Fehrest* have directly referred to these texts as sources for his presentation? This supposition is supported by the fact that Ebn al-Nadīm elsewhere describes and even reproduces the alphabet of the holy books of the Central Asian Manicheans (tr. Dodge, pp. 32-33; ed. Tajaddod, p. 19). The letters in the extant manuscripts are mostly damaged beyond recognition, but this does not speak against Ebn al-Nadīm's reliability. On the other hand, one can prove that he followed at least one Arabic source extensively. It is unlikely that he used additional Modern and Middle Persian and Aramaic texts. The different, "western" terminology (Colpe, 1954, p. 124) of the *Fehrest*-presentation speaks against a direct use of the *Šābuhragān*.

It is clear, even if Ebn al-Nadīm does not say it, that his presentation depends at least in the sections Cosmogony, Ethics, Commandments, Events after Death, and End of the World on a lost text of Abū 'Īsā Warrāq (Colpe, 1959, pp. 82-91; Vajda, tr. Widengren, pp. 454-76). Abū 'Īsā's text itself contained citations from the *Šābuhragān*, Mani's Gospel and perhaps other canonical texts. The sources of other sections of the *Fehrest* cannot be identified with certainty.

Unfortunately Ebn al-Nadīm differentiated between his sources only generally. When describing Manichean teachings he introduces all sections with *qāla* (*Mānī*) "he/Mani said." Sections dealing with Mani's life or the history of the Manicheans after Mani are introduced with *wa qīla* "and it has been said" and *qālat al-mānawīya* "the Manicheans have said." Here the author, or his source, was using perhaps non-canonical writings (eg. hagiographic homilies) or was relying on oral information. The author refers to his information on Mani's genealogy and the dating of his public appearance as his own summaries or calculations: *qāla Moḥammad ebn Eshāq* "Moḥammad b. Eshāq said."

References to sources in Iranian languages. If Ebn al-Nadīm's information does also go back to the *Šābuhragān*, i.e. a Middle Persian work, we can expect references to a Persian model in the text of the *Fehrest*. Hans Jacob Polotsky had reported Walter B. Henning's observation that in the description of



“Satan” the feet are described as “reptilian” (*dawābb*, ed. Tajaddod, p. 393, l. 7), which could have been the result of a confusion of MP *dēwag* “worm” with *dēw* “demon” (Polotsky, col. 250; Widengren, pp. 113-14; otherwise, unconvincingly, tr. Dodge, p. 778 with n. 157). It has been pointed out that the concept “the righteous ones” (*ṣeddīqūn*), i. e. the *electi*, could be translated from an Iranian tradition where they were called *ardāwān* (Böhlig and Asmussen, p.334, n. 3), which is not compelling. One may also mention that in the story of Adam and the Adamites two of his descendants are called by the Persian names *Faryād* and *Bar-faryād*, “cry for help” and “bring help” (ed. Tajaddod, p. 395, ll. 5 + 6; differently tr. Dodge, p. 784).

In other cases it is possible to compare terms of the *Fehrest* with their Iranian correspondents. But the possibility cannot be excluded that they are translations from the Aramaic. The “Mother of Life” is called “Happiness” (*al-bahja*, ed. Tajaddod, p. 393, l. 20, tr. Dodge, p. 780 reads *al-bahija* “the Happy One”). *Bahja* can be compared with the Sogdian name *rāmṛātox vayi* (M 172 /I/r/18/) if this literally means “the god Sense of Joy” (pointed out by N. Sims-Williams, oral communication). The *Fehrest* mentions as a failing of auditors “being in two minds” (*al-qīām be hemmatayn*; ed. Tajaddod, p. 96, p. 396, l. 23; explained in the *Fehrest* as religious doubt). This corresponds exactly to MP *pad dō manohmed ēstādan* (attested in the *Hermas* fragment, cf. Colpe, 1972, p. 412 and n. 2). Somewhat more distantly related is Aramaic *plyg brʿyn* “ambiguous in opinion” (mentioned by Polotsky and Schmidt, 1933, p. 68, n. 4). The party name *al-māsiya* could have arisen in Iranian circles (ed. Tajaddod, p. 394, l. 20, tr. Dodge, p. 783), if it comes from Sogdian *māse* “old” and means the “party of the old-believers,” which makes good sense (they professed the teaching of the irredemptibility of a part of the Light-soul), but needs historical justification (Flügel, *Mani*, p. 242, derives the word from a personal name). Ebn al-Nadīm certainly knew about the Central Asian Manicheans. From there, he was acquainted with the Manichean script (and cf. the place names in tr. Dodge, p. 803). It is also asserted here that the Sogdian Manicheans were called *ajārī* (or *ājārī*; ed. Tajaddod, p. 401, l. 6), which one could also read *ācārī* and derive from (Buddh.) Skt. *ācārya-* “teacher, master” (Asmussen, p. 137), in the sense of the heresy of following a teacher (Flügel, 1862, p. 399, “wage labourer”; tr. Dodge, p. 803, n. 330 suggests “*al-Bukhārī*”). A particular East-Iranian influence on the legend of Mani’s first meeting king Šābuhr I is assumed in J. Tubach’s still unpublished article “Ostiranische Traditionen in der arabischen Überlieferung bei Ibn an-Nadīm.”



Structure of the Manichean chapter. The author seems to have used two sometimes contrary principles in the structuring of his description of Mani and his teachings: (1) the desire to present the material logically and coherently, (2) the preservation of traditional pieces. The first principle is apparent in the sequence of the five portions of the text: (1) Mani's biography until his public appearance, (2) Mani's teachings from cosmogony to commandments and the innovations after his death, (3) Mani's end and eschatology, (4) Mani's writings, (5) history of the Manicheans in the Islamic era. The second principle resulted in the description of the worlds of light and darkness being given (tr. Dodge on p. 777 and then repeated with more detail on pp. 786-87). The description of Mani's end and the final evaluation of his personality in the passage on the reprimands of the *Meqlāṣīya* against the *Mehrīya* seem strangely out of place in the manuscripts (see also Flügel, *Mani*, pp. 99-100). But, in fact, the two are to be separated (thus correctly tr. Dodge, p. 794) and Mani's end is to be connected rather with the presentation of Manichean eschatology. Two differing versions of the liberation of the primal man from the power of darkness are given one after the other: (1) the "Friend of the Lights" (*ḥabīb al-anwār*), i.e., the first divinity of the second evocation redeems the primal man (tr. Dodge, pp. 779-80); (2) the "Spirit of Life," i.e., the third figure of the second evocation, completes the task along with the "Mother of Life" (tr. Dodge, p. 780). The second version is the usual one. The first appears only here in the Manichean tradition.

Hagiographic traditions. The presentation of Mani's life contains noticeably more variants than that of his teachings. Ebn al-Nadīm gives three variants for the name of Mani's mother (tr. Dodge, p. 773). There are also three descriptions of Mani's death (tr. Dodge, p. 794). This is due less to the difficulty of correctly preserving personal names and historical events than to the fact that there was no canonical account of the life of the prophet. Instead its parts were constantly re-arranged, enlarged and corrupted by the following generations. It is possibly due to the sources available to Ebn al-Nadīm that the information on the larger, second part of Mani's life becomes steadily scander.

The division of Mani's life into periods of twelve years, characteristic of the hagiographically stylised story of his life, is most apparent in the account of the *Fehrest*. The *Fehrest* is the only account to mention that the revelation of his spiritual twin occurred with the completion of his 12th year (cf. Sundermann, 1981, pp. 18-19) as well as that the command to proselytize was given by the twin when he was 24 (tr. Dodge, pp. 775-76, cf. Koenen and



Römer, pp. 10-13). It does not mention, however, Mani's death at the age of sixty. On the contrary, if the assertion of the *Fehrest* that Mani had spread his teachings for "about" forty years as far as China (tr. Dodge, p. 776) before he met King Šābuhr I rested on a secure tradition, then this must have happened when he was 24 plus 40, i.e., 64 years old. (The proposal of Maricq, pp. 257-58, n. 2, that *arba'īn* in the text be emended to *arba'a* "four" is problematic in view of the enormous extension assumed by Ebn al-Nadīm of this journey.) As we can see, the impressive reconstruction of the myth of Mani's life by Henning (in Taqizadeh, 1957, pp. 115-21) has not yet been found complete in any work of the Manichean or non-Manichean tradition (cf. Sundermann, 1986).

That material of antiquity and historical value is to be found among the hagiographically stylised information of the *Fehrest* is shown by a tradition which was once doubted but has since been verified by the Cologne Mani Codex (Koenen-Römer, pp. 66 ff.). Mani's father joined the baptist sect, the *moğtasela* (tr. Dodge, p. 774). Another passage of the *Fehrest*, which names the leader of the sect *al-Ḥasīḥ* (Flügel, *Mani*, pp. 132-34; tr. Dodge, p. 811; ed. Tajaddod, p. 403-4), i.e. Elchasaïos (Sundermann, 1974, pp. 148-49; de Blois, pp. 55-56), shows this to be Elchasaits of the Cologne Mani Codex.

The description of Mani's first historical appearance (tr. Dodge, p. 775) also has a historical basis. It has a parallel closer to the events in the "Cologne Mani Codex" (Koenen-Römer, pp. 10-13, 74-75), and both accounts can now be dated to the year 240 (Henrichs and Koenen; cf. Sundermann, 1990, pp. 295-99). Among the various accounts of Mani's passion and end, Ebn al-Nadīm (tr. Dodge, p. 794) mentions the historically correct one of his death in prison (cf. Puech, pp. 51-53). It is remarkable that the topos of "Mani the Painter," which in other Islamic accounts has almost replaced that of the founder of a religion, does not appear in the *Fehrest*.

Presentation of the teachings. Most Muslim scholars and poets who dealt with Manicheism in their writings were more interested in the person Mani than in his teachings, especially if they were praising him as a skilled painter. In the *Fehrest* it is the other way round. The description of Mani's teachings occupies the main part. The high reliability of the account can be demonstrated in several ways.

Ebn al-Nadīm describes in detail the good deeds of the cosmic Elements of Light for the terrestrial world (tr. Dodge, pp. 780-81). He mentions the "pleasantness and refreshment" (*men al-ladda wa'l-tafrīḥ*; ed. Tajaddod,



p. 393, l. 24) afforded by the ethereal light. This corresponds to the Manichean “Sermon of the Soul,” which accords each element five “merciful gifts” (*išnōhr*). Particularly close is the Arabic choice of concept in the Old Turkish version of the work, which has *ärdäm sävinč*, “preference and joy” (thus P. Zieme in Sundermann, 1977, p. 187 par. 36; see further Sundermann, 1977, p. 116, n. 22).

The puzzling naming of the “Spirit of Darkness” (Lat. *concupiscentia*, in Iranian languages *āz*) as *homāma* (ed. Tajaddod, p. 394, l. 18; tr. Dodge, p. 783 translates “the bold chieftainness”) can be shown to be an exact rendering of this demoness’s epithet “*Enthymesis* of death” (MP *andēšišn ī marg*, etc: cf. Polotsky and Schmidt, p. 77). *Homāma* thus belongs to Ar. *hamma* “plan something, aim for” (cf. Sundermann, 1978, pp. 491-93).

Of basic value for modern research because of their detail and singularity are still the story of Adam, Eve, and their children (tr. Dodge, pp. 783-86; cf. also Stocks), with which one can now compare the fragments of a Manichean account (Sundermann, 1973, pp. 70-75); and the descriptions of individual and cosmic eschatology (tr. Dodge, pp. 795-97; see now Gardner, pp. 42-44, 53-58). Of unique value, at least as long as the Coptic corpus remains unpublished, is the information on the letters of Mani and his students (tr. Dodge, pp. 799-801). Certain details of the cosmogony are also not to be found in such detail in any other textual source, e.g., how the primal man arms himself with the elements for the fight against darkness (tr. Dodge, pp. 778-79) or how he obliges them as his sons to serve the world of light against the darkness (tr. Dodge, p. 781).

Generally one can say that Ebn al-Nadīm is most reliable and exhaustive in his account of the Manichean teachings. A remarkable gap is the almost complete lack of the “Third Ambassador,” who is merely mentioned with the name *bašīr* “messenger of good news” (ed. Tajaddod, p. 394, l. 26; p. 397, l. 13 [here to be understood as sun god]; p. 399, l. 10). Jesus and an “accompanying” god (*elāhon*) are active in his place (tr. Dodge, pp. 783-84). This is a peculiarity shared with original Manichean sources (cf. van Lindt, pp. 221-22).

More importantly, however, the description of Mani’s teachings given in the *Fehrest* shows clear features of an adaptation to Islam, which Ebn al-Nadīm already found in his sources, particularly in Abū ‘Īsā Warrāq, who “accomplished the for us most impressive adaptation of Manicheism to Islam” (Colpe, 1954, p. 217). Often, but not always, the Manichean gods are called “angels” (*malā’eka*), which must have softened the impression of what was for Muslims the blasphemy of polytheism (“the sons of the primal man,” tr. Dodge,



p. 781; “the Living Spirit,” tr. Dodge, p. 781; and “the sons of the Living Spirit,” tr. Dodge, p. 781 are “angels”). The emphasis that the devil, contrary to the chaotic world of darkness, is not eternal like the Father of the World of Light (tr. Dodge, p. 778) does not have to be an adaptation to Islam but it did perhaps attenuate Manichean dualism.

The adaptations to Islam distance the picture given in the *Fehrest* from Mani’s own myth of his teachings, but this distance becomes larger in view of the fact that the basic Gnostic idea of cosmic redemption by light as the Self-redemption of the divinity, often mentioned in Manicheism, is not spoken of at all.

Manicheism under Islam. On the statements made about Manicheism during the Islamic period see the essay by G. Vajda in the bibliography. The statements on the Manichean split into the parties *Meqlāsīya* and *Mehrīya* (tr. Dodge, pp. 793-94) are very important for the history of the Manicheans, and, as Henning showed (1936, pp. 16-18), can be confirmed by Sogdian-Manichean letters from Turfan (cf. Sundermann, 1983). According to the *Fehrest* the *Meqlāsīya* introduced innovations in the “long fasts” (*weṣālāt*), i.e. in ritual affairs, thus differing from ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s account, which attests for the *Meqlāsīya* a dogma assigned by Ebn al-Nadīm to the *Māsīya* (tr. Dodge, p. 783), viz. the irredemptibility of part of the Light (Monnot, p. 169).

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