



## FESTIVALS II. MANICHEAN

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### ii. MANICHEAN

The rationale of the Manichean cult was the release of light. The release of light particles which are bound in the world is achieved through the redemption of the souls, through the sacramental repast of the elect, and the glorification of the deities in hymns and psalms. The contribution of the hearers is the offering to the elect of foods which contain light and quell the inclination to sin.

An unconditional requirement for the release of light was the saintly life of the elect and the hearers' performance of their duties. Continuous instruction and spiritual edification through the reading of the scriptures and sermons served these purposes, while confession and absolution could efface shortcomings and negligence. These ritual achievements especially determined the communal parish life of the Manicheans and the function of their holidays.

The Manichean calendar of holidays proves independence from that of the Zoroastrians. Even if the heptavalent number of the Manichean Yimkis was correlated to the Zoroastrian *gāhānbār* and Nowrūz (qq.v.) celebrations, this would have no bearing upon the character and goal of the celebrations (Klimkeit, p. 183, n. 6). The rituals of confessions in both religions, of which formulated texts have been preserved, are, however, comparable (Asmussen, pp. 26, 167).

### FESTIVITIES OF THE MANICHEAN ECCLESIASTICAL CALENDAR



*Weekly holidays.* The parish's communal Sunday celebration, which was considered the special holiday of the hearers, had been adopted from Christian tradition. The hearers (along with the elect) were obliged to fast on this day (*Kephalaia* I, pp. 192.30-33, 193.20-31; *Kephalaia* II, pp. 262.16-17). Augustine experienced it as a day when the hearers congregated, prayed, sang hymns, and listened to the reading of the holy scripture (Alfaric, I, p. 26; Chavannes and Pelliot, p. 172). In the Coptic Book of Psalms twelve Sunday hymns are known (Puech, 1979, pp. 224-26; Krause, 1991, pp. 182-83), of which only one has been published (Giversen, pp. 378-79). It places a strong emphasis on praise of Jesus. In eastern Manicheism Sunday hymns are documented only in two fragments of manuscripts (Mid. Pers. M 15 and M 234, both with the complemented headline *mhr'n yg yqšmbd r'y* "Hymns for Sunday"; see Reck, 1991, pp. 115-21).

Monday counted as special holiday for the elect. The Sogdian confession of sins for the elect, which is comprised in the prayer and confession book (see Henning, 1937), mentions the following essential elements of this day's rite, which were binding for the elect (according to Henning's translation): confession (*xw'stw'nyft*), prayers and hymns (*'frywn, b'syk*), sermon (*wyδβ'γ*), and "mutual request and granting of change of mind and forgiveness" (Henning, 1937, p. 40.730-38). The seeming likeness of the first and the fourth point may probably be explained in that, in the beginning of the rite, the elect confessed their sins to the levitated Mani and the gods and, toward the rite's end, mutually forgave each other with assurances of their brotherly love.

A large number of Middle Persian and Parthian Monday hymns confirm the picture rendered by the book of confessions (Reck, 1991, pp. 45-121). Monday is the "Day of the gods' (*yzd'n*) confession of sins," i.e., of the elect (M 137/r/5-6/). "Read the strict law and the scripture and propagate wisdom, morals, and commandments on this day," instructs the manuscript M 5860 /r/i/6-10/; "Forgive each other and be merciful" (M 284a /r/i/27-29/). These texts do not say that Monday was a fasting day as well, but Ebn al-Nadīm emphasizes this as the particular duty of the elect (Flügel, pp. 66.6-7, 97; Ebn al-Nadīm, tr. Dodge, p. 791). It is, however, characteristic that the communal meal of the elect is never mentioned among these deeds of Monday. When the elect are further commanded not to "come and go their way, nor to enter and leave, nor to write the scripture. . ." etc. (M 5860/r/i/11-15/), there remains little of the old Judaeo-Christian commandment of rest on the Sabbath. The intention is rather to ensure that the perfect believer inflicts as little damage



as possible on the living souls which he encounters in the multitudinous occurrences of the course of this day.

According to the understanding of Yutaka Yoshida, the Chinese roll of hymns contains Monday hymns (review of Sundermann, pp. 139-40); however, Monday hymns cannot be documented so far in the Coptic book of Psalms (cf. Krause, 1991, pp. 188-89).

Ebn al-Nadīm, who knows both the Monday and Sunday rites, describes the relation of both days to each other: “the common people among the Manicheans make Sunday important, whereas members of their elevated ranks make Monday important. Thus did Mānī prescribe for them” (Flügel, p. 334.2; tr. Dodge, p. 791). That this description reflects the Manicheans’ opinion correctly is corroborated by the 109th Kephalaion (*Kephalaia* I, pp. 262-64). Flügel concluded correctly that the elect fasted and celebrated both on Sunday and Monday (p. 42; see also Puech, 1979, pp. 232, 286). Flügel’s further conclusions, however, that Monday was reserved for the elect’s “secret worship,” needs to be qualified because the mirror of lay confessions of the *Xwāstwānāft* stipulates the command for the hearers to entreat the elect for the forgiveness of their sins on Monday (Asmussen, pp. 177, 198, sec. XIII A).

Sunday as holiday has its roots in Christian tradition. Mani himself may be responsible for its adoption. Should Monday have been selected as a special holiday surpassing that of Sunday, because it followed Sunday, or because Mani received his revelation on that day, or for a similar reason, its designation as a holiday, too, may be attributed to the founder of the religion himself. It is, however, also possible that the Monday observances are a later addition of the Manichean community because Mani died on a Monday. Yet, the fact that the Monday hymns do not refer to Mani’s FERĒDŪN death is as conspicuous as the lack of Coptic Monday hymns. The introduction of the Monday commandments through the sentence *čw’gwn kd nm’y d* (as when he/it shows) in M 5860/r/i/5/ may perhaps point to a canonic instruction which has been attributed to Mani (Sundermann, 1981, p. 76, n. 3).

It may be presumed that the singing of the hymns, the speaking of a sermon, the telling of a parable, and the reading of canonical texts were part of the continuously repeated elements of the weekly observances as described in the Sogdian instructions of the “body-soul-rite” (Henning, 1937, pp. 46-47).

*Annual recurrence of holidays.* The Sogdian calendar-lists published by W. B.



Henning (1939) provide reliable information about the names of the annual celebrations. To them should be added the manuscript fragment 6191 of the Otani collection of Ruykoku University, Kyoto. The annual celebrations of the Manichean church were determined by the lunar year of the Babylonian calendar (see CALENDARS) as it had been known by Mani. Holidays were determined by the position of the sun in the ecliptic and certain phases of the moon. Commonly they fell into the latter third of the Babylonian luni-solar year (Sagittarius to Pisces). Calendar lists which had to be created every year anew were used for the conversion of these dates into the common Sogdian calendar (Henning, 1945, pp. 151-52; Taqizadeh, notes to Henning, 1945, pp. 158-59).

These so-called Yimki-celebrations, which lasted for two days, were dedicated to the commemoration of the arch-martyrs of the Manichean church. The first of these festivities solemnized Ohrmazd, the First Man, who was the first to have sacrificed himself for the salvation of the world of light. The Ohrmazd-Yimki was celebrated during a full moon concurrent with the sun in Sagittarius.

The Yimki of Mār Sisin, Mani's successor in the church's leadership, who had suffered martyrdom under Wahrām II (276-93), was celebrated on New Light, the sun being in Capricorn, while the Jesus-Yimki was practiced when the moon was full and the sun in Capricorn. Eight days after New Light, with the sun in Aquarius, the Yimkis of the Three Presbyters, those martyrs who followed Mār Sisin into death, were commemorated (Polotsky, pp. 81-83).

The end was formed by the "Mani-Yimki," which were celebrated twenty-six days after the Yimkis of the Three Presbyters. They are the only ceremonies which were not determined by a conspicuous phase of the moon but by Mani's twenty-six-day imprisonment and his death on the twenty-seventh day. As this whole time used to be the main part of a fasting month (Sogdian *čxš'pδm'x*, the correlating Turkish name is *čaxšapat/čaxšaput ay*), the Yimkis of the Three Presbyters fall on the first and second day of this month and the Mani-Yimki on the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth day. It is probably only a coincidence that the names of the Mani-Yimki never appears in the sources. Instead, the Iranian hymns repeatedly mention the "Bēma fast" (*b'ym rwčg*, M 30/r/ii/5-6/, Reck, 1991, pp. 189, 192; M 273 /r/5/, Reck, 1991, p. 185), followed by "and the blessed Yimki" (*u ymg 'frydg*) at M 30/r/ii/5-6/. From this specification it may be concluded that by this is meant the Yimki closest to the Bēma (q.v.), namely the Mani-commemoration days on the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth day of



the month of fasting (Reck, 1991, p. 195, n. 9). A proof for this may be found in the following, partly restored statement of the calendar fragment Otani 6191 /v/2-4/: (γ)'δwkyy (ym)[kyy xšwmyč m'xyy] (x)[w](r)mzt' 'tyy (x)[wmn' rwč I 'ty II š]mbδyy “the Bēma-yimki in the month Axšūmīč, on days Xormazdā and Xumnā, Monday and Tuesday”; the Bēma yimki, a two-day Yimki, which fell on the first and the second day of the twelfth month, seems to be implied by this. According to the statements on the recto page, this could only be the case for Mani-Yimkis. (The Sogdian fragment So 10030(2)/1/ appears to allude to an otherwise unknown čxš'pd ym[kyy]: Might this be the Yimki of the three Presbyters?)

Together these are five two-day celebrations, which are only seemingly in contradiction to the particulars given by Ebn al-Nadīm, where only four two-day celebrations are mentioned (Flügel, pp. 333-34). This, moreover, is also incongruent with the Turkish *Xwāstwānīft*, which relates *yiti yimki* “seven Yimkis” (Asmussen, pp. 178, 198). Henning’s explanation of this fact is that Ebn al-Nadīm’s list is incomplete and that the Yimkis of the Three Presbyters were thus counted as three, because they were dedicated to three martyrs, i.e., in effect the memory of seven martyrs was honored in only five celebrations (Henning, 1945, p. 147). The sequence of the Yimki celebrations does not consequently follow the order of the martyrs, for they end with Mani’s death and then concede a central space for the Jesus-celebration.

The term *yimki*, which for a long time had remained an enigma, has been convincingly explained by Alexander Böhlig (p. 246) as the Turkish development of the Parthian *yamag* “twin,” which referred to the two-day duration of celebration and fasting. If this is so, the meaning of “supplication” (Henning, 1945, p. 155), by which *yimki* has also been understood, seems improbable and ought to be replaced by “two (day) fast” or “continuous fast.” As the word has been attested in Sogdian as *ymkyy* and in Turkish as *y2mk2* and *y(i)mkii* (Henning, 1945, p. 155), it is plausible to regard *yimki* as a Sogdian development from the Parthian *yamag*, just as the word has been borrowed by Middle Persian and has been attested there in its adjective derivative *ymg'nyg* (*Fragment S*, 1.2, see Salemann).

The main achievement of these celebrations was an uninterrupted, two-day fast. The manuscript fragment S (mentioned above) contains the beginning of an index of homilies, which were recited on the Yimki days. It may be presumed that on those days the same rituals were performed as on the common weekly community celebrations. A bit of information about the Sīsen-



Yimki, which underscores the edification of the observances, is given in M 197 (Henning, 1945, p. 154).

The Yimki celebrations certainly have an old, Mesopotamian background, but they are only known through the traditions of eastern Manicheism, a fact which is justifiably emphasized by G. Wurst (1994, pp. 152-53; idem, 1995, pp. 15-17). Böhlig compares, however, the *pannykhismoi* of the Coptic Psalm Book. The little knowledge available about the Pannykimos Psalms (suffering of the First Man), in any case, does not contradict this interpretation. Böhlig also referred to Christian and even pagan models of cult ceremonies which lasted for a whole night (*pannykhis, pervigilium*; Böhlig, pp. 246-47). The Iranian parallel is evidently Sogdian, *nymyxšp' p'sš*, “midnight fasting” (M 311). Accordingly the convention of an uninterrupted fast, lasting for two days and one night, may be considered a common Manichean custom.

As commemoration days of the martyrs, the Yimkis were certainly imbued with a solemn and serious mood. This is only partly true for the Bēma or throne festivities, the highest celebration of the Manichean ecclesiastical year, which was celebrated two days after the Mani-Yimkis, and at the end of the thirty day fasting month (Taqizadeh, p. 49; Henning, 1945, p. 147), or because the Bēma celebration was also praised as new years day on the first day after the month of fast (Allberry, p. 26.19; M 319/8/, M 782/r/2/; see also Reck, 1991, p. 134). These datings are not based on the eastern Manichean texts but on the testimony of the Coptic Psalms, which themselves require further investigation. It is plausible to assume that the highest festivity of the Manichean church was celebrated on the same date in all regions of its presence, but that does not exclude arrangements colored by local practices.

The throne, which gave the festivity its name, has been interpreted as the symbol of the tribunal of Christ, who will return after the time of the eschatologic persecutions to rule over mankind (Allberry, pp. 25.24-26, 34.23-24; Puech, 1979, p. 392). In this sense the Bēma celebration was for the believer a day of cheerful, optimistic expectation of salvation. It marked the beginning of a new and better eon in the history of the church and could therefore be seen as the beginning of the ecclesiastical year (Allberry, p. 26.19; Reck, 1991, p. 313), which was followed by a new luni-solar cycle of Yimki celebrations.

The character of the Bēma festivity remains the same, although the Manichean church attributed the throne also to the Judge of the Souls, throning in the



atmosphere (Allberry, p. 21.2), and interpreted it primarily as the throne of the elevated Mani or Paraclete, who returned with every annual celebration to the midst of his community (Allberry, pp. 8.33, 17.33, 20.24, 22, 28; Reck, 1991, pp. 313-15; Puech, 1979, p. 392). It further encompassed the commemoration of Mani's suffering, dying, and his heavenly ascension (Allberry, p. 34.19-20), as well as the erection of a five-stepped estrade (cf. Wurst, 1995, p. 21). The rituals of the Bēma day seem essentially the same as those of other holidays (like the singing of hymns, recitation of canonical texts and homilies, telling of parables, the giving of alms, as well as a fast commanded for hearers and the elect; see Allberry, p. 25.27-29). The Sogdian Bēma liturgy (pub. by Henning, 1937, pp. 45-46, esp. ll. 42-44 and pp. 98-99, but certainly to be read in the inverted order *verso-recto*), contrary to this, implies a common meal of the elect which is supported by the fruits and bread of the presumed Bēma picture (pub. by von Le Coq, pl. 8b, a). The explanation of this contradiction may be found in the fact that the commandment for the fast was strictly valid for the so-called Bēma-Yimki, that is the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth of the fasting month. Allberry's supposition of the four-day Bēma celebration (p. XX, n. 6) could be further actualized to the extent that it consisted of the two Mani Yimki-days and the two actual Bēma days (the 29th and 30th of the fasting month or the 30th and the following day?). Possibly the Mani-Yimki-days were the period called the "Bēma time of the month of commandments" (*čxšpδδ m'xy g'hyg zm[n]*), for which midnight fasting hymns (*nymyxšp' p'ščyk p'šykt*) were determined (see headline of M 311; somewhat different in Henning, 1937, p. 9). In any case, it may have been possible to call certain days close to the proper Bēma fast Bēma days, too (cf. Henning, p. 155 and n. 1). The manuscript text mentions a Bēma Monday (*j'yd'nyy m'hjmnw*), which imposes the question of whether there actually existed a Bēma week (for more on Bēma festivities see *EIr.* IV, pp. 136-37; Rouwhorst). The mark of distinction and common celebration of the Bēma days is emphasized by the large number of Bēma hymns, found in Coptic, Middle Persian, and Parthian, which means in the traditions of eastern and western Manichism (Allberry, pp. 1-47; Reck, 1991, pp. 122-97).

The question of whether Mani himself or his church after him introduced the Bēma celebration remains unanswered (see *EIr.* IV, p. 137). The circle of festivities of the Yimki celebrations definitely dates after the martyrdom of Sisin and with that not before the end of the 3rd century. This, however, does not exclude that Mani himself has interpreted the Bēma festivity as return of Christ and that his church has later integrated Mani in the revering



commemoration of that particular day.

*Possible further holidays.* We have almost no information about possible other holidays in the Manichean calendar of festivities through the following centuries. St. Augustine reproached the Manicheans of his native region that they entirely neglected the Passover of Christ in favor of the Bēma (*Contra epistulam fundamenti* VIII; Jolivet and Jourjon, pp. 408-410; Passah psalms are found in the unpublished Coptic Book of Psalms; see Puech, 1979, p. 232; Krause, p. 183). Henri-Charles Puech has also pointed to further local celebrations and fasting days anticipating a festivity (1979, p. 280).

In 1980-81 three voluminous Manichean letters were found in Bezeklik in the Turfan oasis, two of which have been appraised by Yoshida as letters of congratulations to the “teacher” of the church in Qočo by Manichean priests. The congratulations have been expressed on the occasion of the New Day (*nwy myδ*), which certainly corresponds to the old-Turkish *yangi kün* and Middle Persian Nowrūz. However, it is unclear, whether the generally celebrated new year festivity of the secular year is meant by this (or perhaps that of the luni-solar year common in Central Asia) or the Bēma festivity of the ecclesiastical year which, too, has been labeled a new years day.

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