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MANICHEAN ART

MANICHEAN ART, the term referring to objects with aesthetic appeal that were made for and/or used in association with the Manichean religion. This much-persecuted, monotheistic, missionary world religion existed in phases between the mid-3rd and the late 15th centuries across a vast territory stretching between the Mediterranean region and southern China. Relatively little is known about the overall, ca. 1,200-year history of Manichean art, since not only are the surviving artistic sources limited, but they also derive from complex and often poorly documented cultural, linguistic, and religious contexts. With special attention to its Iranian aspects, this entry and bibliography are designed to provide a brief introduction to the study of Manichean art through a survey of its remains and their basic characteristics, which is followed by a discussion of the book art, the most favored artistic medium for the followers of the "Religion of the Light."

With the exception of a rock-crystal seal (Klimkeit, 1982, p. 50) in the collection of the Bibliothиque Nationale de France in Paris (INT. 1384 BIS, FIGURE 1), no other item of Manichean art is known from Sasanian Mesopotamia, where the religion had originated. Nor are there any artistic remains from the Mediterranean region, where Manicheism was present from the 4th to at least the 6th-7th centuries. The same is true for western Central Asia and Persia, where Manichean communities existed up to the 10th century. The vast majority of the Manichean art known today derives from eastern Central Asia, where this religion was supported by the ruling elite of the Turkic-speaking Uighurs, between the mid-8th and early 11th centuries (Clark, 2001, pp. 83-123;

Moriyasu, 2003, pp. 84-112). At that time, the Uighurs had a powerful military presence along the northern borders of China, profiting handsomely from military services to the Tang court as well as the safeguarding of Silk Road trade (Mackerras, 1990, pp. 317-42). The Uighurs' rich sponsorship is evident in the eastern Central Asian Manichean remains, most examples of which were discovered during the early 20th century in the region of the Turfan oasis in Xinjiang (northwestern China) by German expeditions that rescued some 5,000 Manichean items, almost all of which were fragments of manuscripts (Grünwedel, 1906, pp. 1-196; Boyce, 1960, pp. IX-XXXI; Härtel and Yaldiz, 1982, pp. 24-46; Gumbrecht, 2004, pp. 111-20). The German findings turned out to contain about 100 artistic items which are today positively identified as Manichean, including fragments of eighty-four illuminated manuscripts, fifteen painted and embroidered textiles, four wall paintings, and also the records of two mud-brick buildings associated with the discoveries, preserved in the Museum of Indian Art (Museum für Indische Kunst, hereinafter abbreviated as MIK) and the State Library in Berlin (Le Coq, 1913, pl. 1-6; Idem, 1923, pp. 7-63; Gulácsi, 1997, pp. 177-215; Idem, 2001a, pp. 13-206; Idem, 2005, pp. 15-38; Bhattacharya-Haesner, 2003, pp. 372, 377-79). A few additional Manichean works of art from the Turfan region are housed in St. Petersburg, London, Kyoto (Gulácsi, 2005, pp. 36-38), and Turfan, including a wall painting *in situ* at Bezeklik (Grünwedel, 1920, p. 76; Moriyasu, 1991, pl. 16) and a newly discovered scroll in the Sogdian language with a pictorial insert, preserved in the collection of the Turfan Antiquarian Bureau in Turfan (81 TB 65:01, FIGURE 2). The scroll was discovered in superb condition in a Buddhist reliquary monument (*stūpa*) at Bezeklik (Moriyasu, 1991, pl. 17b; Yoshida, 2000-2001, pp. 233-36; Gulácsi, 2005, pp. 180-81 and 213-16). While no works of art have survived from the northern Chinese Manichean community that was active between the 7th and 9th centuries, a 15th-century Manichean temple and its inscribed stone statue of Mani is now a protected UNESCO site in the Fujian (Fukien) province of southeastern China (Bryder, 1991, pp. 35-42). This sculpture of Mani is our most recent artistic source, confirming that Manichean art was still created in southern China during the early modern times (Lieu, 1992, pp. 298-304).

The long history of Manichean art, together with its vast geographical and cultural extent, must have facilitated a great artistic variety in terms of media, style, and function, much of which is now lost. The West Asian/Mesopotamian roots of this art originate from along the late-antique frontiers of the Roman Empire and Sasanian Persia, where the first Manichean pictorial subjects,

iconography, painting styles, and attitudes towards aesthetics were developed. Certain traces of this early era are preserved by the Turfan remains. They document the continuing existence of two West Asian painting styles (Gulácsi, 2003, pp. 5-33), a descriptive approach towards capturing contemporaneous material culture, including local carpets and liturgical garments (Gulácsi, 1996, pp. 101-34; Ebert, 2004, pp, 72-83), a set of reoccurring religious subjects and iconography (Gulácsi, 2005, pp. 203-6), the use of various official church seals (for the one with an image of Mani see Sundermann, 1985, pp. 172-74; Idem, 1996, pp. 99-111), as well as the employment of the highest-quality materials and superb scribal and pictorial techniques.

Many of these features can be seen on the two best-known examples of Turfan Manichean art from the collection of the Museum of Indian Art in Berlin. One of them is the largest and most intact Manichean painting found on a torn codex folio (MIK III 4979,verso, FIGURE 3). In a style known as the "West Asian Fully-Painted Style of Turfan Manichean Art," this image depicts a spring festival, referred to as the "Bema Ceremony," that commemorated Mani's death and spiritual ascension. Along the two sides of the image, male elects (the Manichean sacerdotal class) are depicted arranged in rows. They wear traditional white priestly garments and tall headgear and are seated on their heels facing toward the center of the image. The central area, on the left, is occupied by a high-ranking church official, seated cross-legged on a dais. His head is surrounded by a crescent-shaped halo. On the right, a diagonal row of elects hold books in their hands. Along the vertical axis, in the very center, piles of bread and fruit lead our attention upwards to a large multi-layered dais (Gr. *bema*, 'throne'), which forms the focal point of the composition (Le Coq, 1923, p. 54; Gulácsi, 2001a, p. 74) on the now-missing top of which something important was most likely displayed: a portrait of Mani (Klimkeit, p. 16; Ebert, 1994, p. 5), or possibly a book or a reliquary chest as seen on other fragments (Gulácsi, 2001a, pp. 87-88 and 152-54). Arguably the best example of the Manichean painting rendered in the Chinese "fully painted" style of this corpus is a now lost fresco from Berlin (MIK III 6918, FIGURE 4). This fragmentary wall-painting portrays the local Manichean community including a high-ranking elect, who is most likely the "Mozhak of the East" (the head of the community in the region, previously mistakenly identified as Mani), together with rows of male elects, female elects, and laypeople. Although its medium and style were newly established for Manichean use during the Uighur era, this image contains numerous West Asian elements seen in the way it communicates hierarchy via the figures' placement, garments, recorded

names, and the main figure's crescent-shaped halo (Le Coq, 1913, discussion of pl. 1; Idem, 1923, p. 34; Klimkeit, 1982, p. 28; Gulácsi, 2001a, pp. 198-201).

Book art was the most important artistic medium for the Manichean communities of West and Central Asia (mid-3rd to early 11th cents.). Already in Mani's teachings, the written word played an integral role. Raised in the cosmopolitan intellectual climate of late-antique Mesopotamia, Mani spoke several languages (Parthian, Middle Persian, Aramaic, and possibly Greek) and was highly educated. Religious books written by himwere to guard against later corruption of his thoughts. In Mani's view, the greatest problem with other religions was that the messages of true prophets (such as Zoroaster, Buddha, and Jesus) had become corrupted by later generations, who, with lesser understanding, had the task of committing their prophets' teachings to writing (*Kephalaia* 7.18-8.29, see Gardner, p. 13). Accordingly, Mani not only wrote but also, for those who could not read, painted images of his message in his work "Picture" (Gk./Syr. *Eikon*, Copt. *Hikon*, MIr. *Ardahang* [see ARŽANG], Chin. *Da-menhoi*), which became a standard part of the Manichean canon (*Refutations* 126, see Reeves, pp. 262-63; *Compendium*, see Haloun and Henning, p. 188). The doctrinal and theological scenes of Mani's "Picture," originally in the format of a painted scroll, influenced the formation of later Manichean pictorial art, especially the book illumination. A great appreciation for book art is documented in textual sources throughout the Manichean world, even in polemical accounts. For example, the 9th-century Muslim author al-Jāḥeẓ (d. 868-69) writes in his *Ketāb al-ḥayawān*: "We may compare the lavish expenditure of the Zindīqs [meaning 'the Manicheans'] on the production of their books with that of the Christians on their churches" (Arnold, 1808-19, p. 1817). Similar documentary evidence is known from North Africa, as well as from West and Central Asia. As fragile objects made of perishable material (e.g., papyrus, parchment, paper, and silk), Manichean manuscripts that are known today have been preserved by the arid climate of two deserts located far away from one another: the Western Desert in Egypt yielded Manichean papyrus codices from the 4th century, and the Takla Makan Desert in northwestern China yielded remnants of mainly paper manuscripts from the 8th to the 11th century. Only the latter group includes illuminated fragments. Variety of their size and format, as well as pictorial and textual content, document a flourishing book art (Gulácsi, 2005, pp. 59-104, 133-94, and 195-220, respectively).

Manichean illuminated book fragments represent the oldest illuminated

manuscripts known from medieval Central Asia. The vast majority of them belong to the collection of the Museum of Indian Art in Berlin. One item in this corpus (MIK III 8259, FIGURE 5) has been radiocarbon-dated to the 10th century, based on which a comparative study confirmed that the West-Asian ("Persian") style of its painting was in use until the last era of Uighur support (Gulácsi, 2003, pp. 5-33; Idem, 2005, pp. 39-58). This paper fragment derives from the lower half of a bifolio (a large sheet of paper folded in half to make two folios within a quire of a codex) that once belonged to an illuminated anthology of religious literature, with sections of four Manichean-script texts in the Parthian and Middle Persian languages (BeDuhn et al., pp. 221-24). Only the first folio is illuminated; its recto retains a sideways-oriented, intracolumnar (within the body of the column or columns) painting of a "Sermon Scene" (Le Coq, 1923, p. 48; Gulácsi, 2001a, pp. 56-61; Idem, 2005, pp. 142-44).

Despite its fragmentary condition, Turfan Manichean book art displays a uniquely high quality of artisanship. Numerous paintings demonstrate the liberal use of expensive materials such as lapis lazulifor the blue background and gold leaf to capture jewel-encrusted metal book covers, hems of garments, metal vessels, and the stems of plants. The successive stages of illumination, concealed in the final product, are frequently revealed within the damaged paintings, as in the intra-columnar scene on a codex folio from the collection of the Museum of Indian Art in Berlin illustrated here (MIK III 4974, FIGURE 6), where much of the preliminary under-drawing is exposed beneath faded paint or vanished gold leaf. On the recto, the busy pictorial program of sideways-oriented figures incorporates an intra-columnar painting that represents a visual rendering of the ultimate goal of Manichean practice: the liberation of Light from the forces of Darkness through discipline and ritual, known in textual sources as "the work of the religion" (Asmussen, 1975, pp. 59-60; BeDuhn, 2000, p. 160; Gulácsi, 2001a, p. 86). This painting is one of the most important Manichean paintings in terms of its content. The fruit (considered to be rich in particles of Light) is presented by the laypeople to the elects, who consume the fruit and use their bodies to separate the Light from the Darkness. After the meal, their singing of hymns sends the liberated Light up to the heavenly bodies (moon, sun, and stars) which function as vessels, ferrying the Light back to its original home, to the Realm of the Light, where God dwells. God's hand reaching into the picture symbolizes the completion of the journey. The well-understood iconography of this important allegorical image (Gulácsi, 2001b, pp. 105-27) can now be accessed in a digitally

reconstructed version (Gulácsi, 2007, forthcoming). The text of this codex folio contains a Middle Persian benediction to the sacred meals and to the leaders of the community, confirming that it derives from an illuminated hymn- or service-book (BeDuhn et al., 2001, pp. 228-30; Gulácsi, 2005, pp. 144-46 and 200-1).

Remnants of Turfan Manichean book art also document various innovations with the materials and formats of the book medium. The invention of silk codices was most likely catalyzed by the close proximity of the Chinese tradition that utilized fine, tightly woven silks for writing on. In order to form the codex folios, Manichean bookmakers glued paper sheets as stiffeners between the textile layers (Gulácsi, 2005, p. 74). The illuminated silk fragments from the collection of the Museum of Indian Art in Berlin illustrated here (MIK III 4981 a and f, FIGURE 7) preserve the silk layers of two folios from such a paper-reinforced silk codex. They both contain hymns, possibly to Mani, written in Sogdian in the Manichean script (BeDuhn et al, p. 243). Along the upper margins, their headers are enclosed in floral vines, scarves, and a plate filled with symbolic food (featured sideways). Their programs of decoration and overall page arrangements accord well with Manichean book illumination, including the unique calligraphy seen in their headers. The enlarged letters are defined by multicolored outlines that create a distinctive three-dimensional effect (Gulácsi, 2005, p. 99 and pl. 4).

Numerous textile fragments with painted or embroidered religious scenes are conveyed on scales comparable to those of book illuminations, and have been thought to derive either from textile-books (in the format of hand scrolls, Le Coq, 1913, discussion of plate 4b; Klimkeit, 1982, p. 46), or possibly from didactic textile displays (in versions of hanging scrolls) such as the painting from the collection of the Museum of Indian art in Berlin with the Deities of the Moon and the Earth (MIK III 6278, FIGURE 8). This silk fragment once belonged to a larger textile of unconfirmed shape that included a geometrical border along its right and most likely another scene on its left. The blue background and the black rim of the surviving scene define a cohesive composition of an imagined space that includes a large crescent moon with its three deities (Boyce, 1975, p. 6) depicted above additional mythological figures and pomegranate plants (Gulácsi, 2001a, pp. 174-75).

Arguably, the most distinctive characteristic of Turfan Manichean book art is the systematic application of sideways-oriented paintings. As confirmed by a survey of all currently known Manichean illuminated fragments, the figural

scenes in these books (be they in codex, scroll, or *pustaka* formats) are positioned on their sides, i.e., at a 90°-angle in relation to the direction of the writing (Gulácsi, 2001a, pp. 7 and 10-11; Idem, 2005, pp. 133-94). This special feature connects Turfan Manichean art to a little-documented episode of medieval West Asian book illumination, seen mainly through examples of Eastern Christian (Syriac and Armenian) Gospels and certain Islamic books. Similarities of Manichean, Eastern Christian, and Islamic illuminated manuscripts observed in their sideways-oriented images, along with certain scribal and book-making techniques, foreshadow rich possibilities for future comparative studies that will help us better understand the place of Manichean art in the overall history of Asian art.

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