



MANICHEISM I. GENERAL SURVEY

MANICHEISM

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i. GENERAL SURVEY

This article is designed to provide a brief general survey of Manichean doctrine and religious practice. Specific aspects of Manicheism, as well as biographies of eminent scholars of the field, have their own entries in the *Encyclopædia Iranica* as indicated by the following list of published or forthcoming entries.

Addā (*EIr.* I, pp. 451-52); Alchasai (*EIr.* I, pp. 824-25); Ammō, Mār (*EIr.* I, p. 979); Aržang (*EIr.* II, pp. 689-90); Asmussen, Jes Peter (forthcoming); Augustine (*EIr.* III, pp. 27-28); Bardesanes (*EIr.* III, pp. 780-85); Bar Kōnay, Theodore (*EIr.* III, pp. 737-38); Baur, Ferdinand Christian (*EIr.* III, pp. 873-74); Beausobre, Isaac de



(*EIr.* IV, pp. 70-71); Bēma (*EIr.* IV, pp. 136-37); Chavannes, Emmanuel-Édouard (*EIr.* V, pp. 389-91); Christianity v. Christ in Manicheism (*EIr.* V, pp. 535-39); Cologne Mani Codex (*EIr.* VI; pp. 43-46); Cosmogony and Cosmology in Manicheism (*EIr.* VI, pp. 310-15); Dīnāvārīya (*EIr.* VII, pp. 418-19); Dualism (*EIr.* VII, pp. 576-82, esp. p. 579); *Fehrest*: The Representation of Manicheism in the *Fehrest* (*EIr.* IX, pp. 479-83); Festivals, Manichean (*EIr.* IX, 546-50); *Giants, The Book of* (*EIr.* X, pp. 592-94); Gnosticism in the Pre-Islamic Iranian World (*EIr.* XI, pp. 14-17, esp. pp. 15-16); Henning, Walter Bruno (*EIr.* XII, pp. 188-98); Hermas, The Shepherd of (*EIr.* XII, pp. 232-34); Manichean Eschatology (*EIr.* VIII, pp. 569-75); Mani the founder of Manicheism (forthcoming); Manichean Literature (forthcoming); Manichean Missionary Activities; Manichean Pandemonium (forthcoming); Manichean Pantheon; Manichean Script; Iran ix. Religions in Iran 1 (1.2) Manicheism (*EIr.* XIII, pp. 439-42); Manicheism, Buddhist Elements in; Manicheism in China; Mithra in Manicheism.

This article focuses on references to these entries with additions and corrections wherever necessary.

A brief note on the history of Manichean Studies (for references and details see the following *EIr.* entries: Asmussen, Baur, Beausobre, Chavannes, Henning).

A detailed, balanced, and comprehensive introduction to the history of Manichean studies up to 1987 is given by Julien Ries (1988). The work ends with the discovery and the initial stages of the scholarly discussion of the *Cologne Mani Codex*. The continuation of Père Ries' study is an urgent desideratum, particularly if it is borne in mind that probably there have been greater advances in the study of Manicheism in the last century than in any other similar branch of religious studies.

The main additions to be made are the reports and the studies based on the ongoing (since the 1980s) archaeological activities in the Upper Egyptian ruin complex of the ancient Kellis (Ismant el-Kharab, Dakhleh oasis, cf. the report article by Gardner, 1993, pp. 18-26); and many more publications by Iain Gardner, Majella Franzmann, and Klaas Worp on Coptic, Greek, and Syriac texts from Kellis.

In Xinjiang Chinese archaeological work is continuing and supplementing earlier European and Japanese excavations. A substantial quantity of Iranian (mainly Sogdian) and Old Turkish Manichean texts were discovered at Bezeklik.



In the absence of an up to date survey of the state of Manichean studies, the interested scholar can follow the current progress in the field in the *Manichaean Studies Newsletter*, edited by the International Association of Manichaean Studies. A carefully compiled bibliography of Manichean studies through 1996 was published by Gunner B. Mikkelsen in 1997.

Manicheism as a world-religion. (For references and details see the following *EIr.* entries: Mani the founder of Manicheism; Manichean Literature; Manichean Missionary Activities.) Manicheism is the only world religion that has become completely extinct. Its founder, Mani, lived in the third century CE. His religion spread over the continents from the Atlantic to the Chinese Sea. It probably died out in the European part of the Roman Empire in the 6th or 7th century, in Byzantium not later than in the 9th century, but probably already in the 7th century (Rochow, 1979, pp. 13-21), in the Islamic Near East in the 11th century, in Central Asia probably in the 12th or 13th century, and finally in China in the 16th century (Lieu, 1992, p. 303). A Manichean temple in Buddhist disguise still exists in Quanzhou in the South Chinese Fujian province (Bryder, 1988, pp. 201-8). It is true that European scholars recently discovered traces of Buddha-Mani worship still being practiced in the same Fujian province, but this is, according to S. N. C. Lieu, a modern revival of the faith once widespread in this region. The same may be true of a modern “[Manichaean Church](#)” presented on the internet (accessed 20 July 2009).

Wherever it was present, Manicheism appeared as the religion of an often persecuted minority, with the exception of the Uighur steppe empire and the Uighur kingdom of Qocho, where it gained the status of a state religion from about 762 to the 11th century.

Manicheism itself claimed the universal validity of its truth. Mani regarded his doctrine not as the religion of a region, a state, or a chosen people, but as the completion of the preceding great religions of Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Buddhism. It incorporated traditions of those and many other religions and doctrines (Andreas and Henning, 1933, pp. 295-96 = Henning, 1977, I, pp. 192-93. A comprehensive but partially destroyed Coptic version of Mani’s speech on the ten superiorities of his religion is given in the *Kephalaia*, ed. Funk, pp. 370-75. Cf. also Sundermann, 1985, pp. 22-23).

Manicheism left its traces mainly in the works of anti-Manichean polemicists or historians in the Occident and the Orient, in the Near East and China, where Manicheism gained the status of a kind of arch-heresy. It was only in the 20th



century that genuine Manichean texts and documents came to light in different parts of the world (cf. Manichean literature).

As a universal religion Manicheism was, in the words of Henri-Charles Puech, a “religion de caractère essentiellement missionnaire,” and more so than any other religion, Islam included, “une religion *du livre*,” a “religion of the Book” (Puech, 1949, pp. 61-68).

A sketch of the Manichean doctrine and ritual practice. (For references and details see the following *EIr.* entries: Christ in Manicheism, Cosmogony and Cosmology in Manicheism, Dīnāvārīya, Manichean Eschatology, Mani the founder of Manicheism, Festivals (Manichean), (The Book of) Giants, Manichean Pandemonium, Manichean Pantheon, Iran ix. Religions in Iran 1 (1.2) Manicheism, Mithra in Manicheism.)

Gnosis and practice in Manicheism. Manicheism promised the redemption of the human soul from the bonds of its corporeal existence in the transcendent World of Light through wisdom [Middle Persian. *wihīh ud dānišn* “wisdom and knowledge,”] (Andreas and Henning, 1933, p. 296, l. 10 = Henning, 1977, I, p. 193; also *xrad ud dānišn* “wisdom and knowledge,” Andreas and Henning, 1933, p. 306, l. 19, p. 307, ll. 21-22, p. 309, ll. 1-2 = Henning, 1977, I, pp. 203-5). This renders the widespread Gnostic term of *Gnosis*, the revealed (not taught or excogitated) doctrine of Mani (cf. in the *Cologne Mani Codex*, ed. Koenen and Römer, 1988, pp. 44-45) that claimed to convince the human mind instead of demanding unquestioning acceptance (Puech, 1949, pp. 70-72; Hoffmann, 2001, pp. 67-112). But beside the conceptual pair of *wihīh/xrad ud dānišn* there is also the pair of (Arabic) *al-ḥikma wa’l-a’māl* “wisdom and works” in Biruni’s translation of a passage of the *Šābuhragān* (Sachau, 1923, p. 207, ll. 14-15; otherwise Tardieu, 1981, pp. 477-81; see also Middle Persian *wihīh ud kirdagān* “wisdom and work(s),” Andreas and Henning, 1933, p. 296, l. 3, with note 2 = Henning, 1977, I, p. 193). This expresses with precision the Manichean demand that from Gnosis good deeds should follow which would contribute to the redemption, not only of one’s own soul, but also of the World Soul. It implied a strictly ascetic lifestyle of the elect and the support for the elect by the auditors through almsgiving and a general confession and atonement of sins.

Cosmogony. The heart and core of the Manichean doctrine is the cosmogony. It gives the answer to the questions “where have you come from, where do you go, what is your desire, for what purpose did you come, where have you been sent to?” etc. (Sundermann, 1997, pp. 74-75). A simplified description of its



main issues will be given here (for details see [COSMOGONY AND COSMOLOGY IN MANICHEISM](#)). The cosmogony starts with a description of the primeval existence of the two worlds of divine Light and demonic Darkness limiting each other directly without any void space in between (Ebn al-Nadim, ed. Flügel, p. 63, ll. 5-7, p. 94; tr. Dodge, pp. 787-88). The superiority of the World of Light lies in its blissful, self-sufficient harmony; its weakness is its peaceful nature, which makes it unprepared for any conflict. The World of Darkness is related, in contrast, to anarchic, chaotic strife and sexuality, and destructive concupiscence in every respect. The activities of the World of Darkness are neutralized so long as they are ignorantly directed against themselves. But the time comes when they discover by chance the existence of the World of Light, which now becomes their object of desire. Their whole aggressive force is turned against the completely unprotected World of Light. The attack of the demonic hosts is averted only by the self-sacrifice of the highest god, the Father of Greatness, in the person of his son, the First Man (Polotsky, 1935, p. 251 = Widengren, ed., 1977, p. 115). The First Man advances towards the enemy, suffers defeat, loses consciousness, and his five sons, the Light Elements, are swallowed up by the greedy demons. But this apparent triumph of the demons turns out to be a hollow victory. It was in the end rather, as BeDuhn put it, the First Man's "victory by self-sacrifice" (BeDuhn, 2005, p. 11, cf. p. 26). The devoured Light Elements have a poisonous effect on the demons. They paralyze their aggressive force and give the World of Light time to develop militant protective counter-measures against the demonic attack.

Therefore, under the constraint of the demonic menace, the World of Light changes its character, and becomes a mighty warlike power. The warlike aspect of the World of Light is represented by its Second Evocation, the third deity of which, the Spirit of Life, liberates the First Man, but cannot immediately liberate his sons. He builds instead this world from the corpses of slain demons to serve as a prison for the still living demons and as a grandiose mechanism for the liberation of the swallowed and dismembered particles of the Light Elements which from now on, and as the subject of permanent liberation, appear as the suffering World Soul (also called the Living Soul, the Living Self, etc.; called *Jesus patibilis* by Faustus).

It is a result of the encounter of the call of the Spirit of Life and the answer (or the hearing) of the First Man that a new deity comes into being, the Enthymesis of Life, the desire of the imprisoned divine entities to be redeemed (and of the redeeming gods to regain their lost relatives). The Enthymesis of



Life is the counterpart of the Enthymesis of Death, the eternal, powerful principle of greed that inspires the whole demonic world as *ataktos kinēsis* “disorderly motion” according to Alexander of Lykopolis. The divine “greed” as it were (Alexander of Lycopolis, ed. Brinkmann, 1895, p. 6; van der Horst, 1974, p. 54), could only arise under the impact of the loss the World of Light had suffered at the hands of the dark powers; and it never played such a predominant role as the Enthymesis of Death. (For further details see Sundermann, “God and his adversary in Manichaeism. The case of the ‘Enthymesis of Death’ and the ‘Enthymesis of Life,’” forthcoming.)

The creation of the world marks the beginning of cosmogony in its proper sense. Although the world is made of demonic substance and is, as such, of an evil nature (plants and animals in particular, Puech, 1949, p. 80; animals are not given access to paradise, Henning 1959, p. 123 = 1977 II, p. 538; Asmussen, 1975, p. 82, verse 66), it is the work of a divine demiurge and it fulfills the functions of making the liberation of the World Soul possible and of keeping the still active demons imprisoned. The redemption of the World Soul is the main object of cosmic history (human world history included). The result of the cosmic history, however, is predetermined by the pre-cosmic events, the sacrifice of the First Man and the defeat of the demons at the hands of the Spirit of Life and the Mother of Life, even if the demons are not yet made powerless and even if the final divine victory will not be a perfect one.

The creation of the world—the Macrocosm (Middle Persian *ns’ (h) wzrg* “Big Corpse”)—provokes the demonic counter-creation of the first human couple and their descendents: the Microcosm (Middle Persian *šhr ýg qwdg*, Parthian *zmbwdyg qšwdg* “Small World,” Manichean New Persian *qwdqbw d (kw dkbw d)* “Small Being.” The Enthymesis of Death herself, in the form of the demonic couple of Ašaqlūn and Nebrō’ēl, procreates Adam and Eve as the best possible prisons of the Light substance of the World Soul. Therefore, according to Mani’s doctrine it is humankind that is a demonic creation, rather than the world as such.

The cosmic work of the successive, step by step, liberation of the World Soul is the task of the deities of the Third Evocation who act under the guidance of the Third Messenger, mainly in the macrocosmic sphere, and under Jesus the Splendor who is mostly concerned with the liberation of the human souls. In fact, Jesus and his emanation, the Light-*Nous*, find the means to enlighten men through divine Gnosis, to deprive their demonic ruler, the Spirituality of the Body (Middle Persian *mēnōgīh ī tan*, explained as *xišm ud āz ud āwarzōg* “fury,



greed and lust,” Andreas and Henning 1933, p. 300, ll. 1-2 = Henning, 1977, II, p. 197), of power and to imprison it in the corporeal limbs. This Spirituality, in Mani’s Pauline terminology, the Old Man, is then replaced by the New Man as the personality of the enlightened and righteously acting religious person. This is described in great detail in the *Sermon on the Light-Nous* (Sundermann, 1992, esp. pp. 22-24; Idem, 1995, pp. 255-62 = 2001, pp. 27-34). But not only were Jesus and his helpers successful in rescuing the souls of many men, they even managed to transform some persons—the elect— soul and body, to instruments of the material liberation of the light substance in plants through their digestive system (BeDuhn, 2000, esp. pp. 163-233). Thus, thanks to the superior aptitude of the divine beings, man, the most sophisticated creature of the demonic world, can be made the most effective instrument of the redemption of the World Soul.

The salvation history of mankind. Jesus the Splendor himself proclaims the divine truth to Adam, converts him and makes him the first human prophet. A chain of prophets, inspired by the *Light-Nous*, follows one by one and at different places, renewing the divine message that is exactly the same as what Mani later espoused. Their number and their sequence change in our sources, but the most prominent ones between Adam and Mani are Zoroaster, the Buddha, and Jesus of Nazareth, or, in other sequence, the Buddha, Zoroaster, and Jesus (Sundermann, 1991, pp. 430-32 = 2001, pp. 441-43). Unfortunately, none of the forerunners of Mani took sufficient care to have his message preserved in written form and in authorized texts, so that their disciples misunderstood their masters in many ways and their detractors produced their own falsifications in the name of the same masters (for references cf. *Kephalaia*, ed. Polotsky and Böhlig, 1940, pp. 7-8, Gardner, 1995, p. 13; Andreas and Henning, 1933, pp. 295-96 = Henning, 1977, I, pp. 192-93; Henning, 1944, pp. 140-42 = Henning, 1977, II, pp. 146-48). Therefore Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Christianity, let alone Judaism, can no longer claim to teach the eternal verities. And it is only Mani, the prophet at the end of time (“in this last generation,” *Kephalaia*, ed. Polotsky and Böhlig, 1940, p. 14.6, 146.9-10; Gardner, 1995, p. 20, 153; cf. also Polotsky, 1934, pp. 28.1-6, 32.21-23), who avoided the faults of his forerunners, and his message, composed in five or seven canonical books (Haloun and Henning, 1952, pp. 204-5) and the traditions of reliable disciples (*Kephalaia*, ed. Polotsky and Böhlig, 1940, p. 6. 24-27; Gardner, 1995, p. 12), are, and remain, the ultimate truth.

In the Manichean view human history is essentially *Heilsgeschichte*, salvation



history, in a double sense: the history of the salvation of human beings and the process of the salvation of other parts of the World Soul through human beings. In spite of the active redemptive role of the Light-*Nous*, it is also true that man himself is responsible for his own salvation and that of the World Soul (Polotsky called it “kosmisches Verantwortungsgefühl,” a sense of cosmic responsibility, Polotsky, 1935, col. 271 = Widengren, 1977, p. 143). This implies belief in a type of human free will (Birnbauts, 2005, pp. 33, 34). But in the Manichean understanding free will could not be the choice between (at least) two options. It could only be the voluntary decision in favor of the World of Light, the ultimate origin and home of any soul and the natural aim of its (subconscious) nostalgia. The faculty or failure of a soul to act according to its “free will” depended only on the degree of contamination with corporeal matter. As Alexander of Lycopolis succinctly put it: “When it was mixed with matter, Soul became affected by matter. For just as a change of the contents of a defiled vessel is often due to the condition of the vessel itself, so something happens also to soul embedded in matter when, contrary to its real nature, it is debased so as to participate in evil” (van der Horst, 1974, pp. 54-55; text: Brinkmann, 1895, p. 6, ll. 2-6).

Ethics. The acceptance of the Manichaeic doctrine was the first step to salvation. But it necessarily entailed a submission to the rules of Manichean ethics (on this subject see in general and in detail BeDuhn, 2000). Their *raison d'être* followed from the events of the cosmogony. For example, the commandment (in Coptic) “that we eat no flesh” (Allberry, *Psalm-Book*, 1938, p. 161, ll. 21-22, in Parthian more generally *dēncīhrift* “chastity,” Sims-Williams, 1985, p. 575) followed from the assumption that animals were the abortions of celestial she-demons and therefore rich in greed-arousing substance (Baur, 1831 = 1973, pp. 249-51, likewise forbidden was the consumption of alcoholic drinks, *ibid*, p. 251). On the other hand, the commandment (in Coptic) “that we do not kill” (Allberry, 1938, p. 573, ll. 21-22, in Sogdian more generally *pu-āzarmyā* “not to hurt,” Sims-Williams, 1985, pp. 574-75) implied that any living being, but also the earth, the water and the stars in the skies contain particles of the vulnerable World Soul, so that to kill an animal, to cut a plant, to walk on the earth, to take a bath, etc. was a violation of the Living Soul (Baur, 1831 = 1973, pp. 253-54; Henning, 1937, pp. 32-34 = 1977, I, pp. 446-47).

It is obvious that morals like these are impracticable. The dilemma was solved to a certain degree by the introduction of a double set of ethical demands:



strict commandments (or rather prohibitions) for a small elite of “perfect” or “elect” people and ten less demanding commandments for the greater community of the devout lay-people (Puech, 1949, pp. 89-90). The elect were submitted to five rigorous commandments which confined their lives to the duties of hearing and reading the instructive sermons and scriptures, singing hymns, offering prayers, attending the services and above all the sacramental communal meals, teaching and preaching the gospel of truth to brethren and lay-people, doing missionary work, etc. They were submitted to a strict vegetarian regime and forbidden to drink alcoholic drinks and eat meat, to earn their own livelihood (except for acts of financial business), or practice any sexual activities (Baur, 1831 = 1973, pp. 267-70; Puech, 1949, pp. 89-91).

But living a holy life affected more than the elect’s personal salvation. It made his body, and his digestive system in particular, a miraculous instrument for liberating the light particles of the World Soul that were imprisoned in melons, cucumbers, grapes, water, fruit juice, etc. By eating those fruits the elect set free the light particles from the material *massa damnata* and let them ascend to the New Paradise of Light in their hymns of praise, their prayers and, as Augustine derisively says, their belches (*ructatibus*, Baur, 1831 = 1973, p. 287). This happened in their sacramental meals, regularly held whenever fasting was not incumbent. If we call the communal meal of the elect a kind of Eucharist, it is just the opposite of the Christian ceremony. It does not mediate God’s redemption of the believers through Christ’s sacrifice, it affects the redemption of the suffering divine World Soul (also called *Jesus patibilis* by Faustus) through the redeeming force of holy men (Tardieu, 1981, pp. 111-12). In this way the elect gain a super-human rank, and it is doubtlessly in this function that they are addressed as “gods” (Copt. *nnoute*, Parth. *yazdān*, *Kephalaia*, ed. Polotsky and Böhlig, 1940, pp. 219.34-220.3; Gardner, 1995, p. 227; Zieme, 1975, pp. 28, 29).

The lay-people were exempt from the rigorous obligations and restrictions of the elect. For them a catalogue of ten moderate commandments (Ebn al-Nadim, ed. Flügel, pp. 64, 95-96, tr. Dodge, p. 789) was valid. Their main obligation, however, reflected in the commandment not to be miserly (Ebn al-Nadim, ed. Flügel, pp. 299-302) and frequently enjoined in sermons and parables, was to give alms, but only to the elect people (Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalmos*, 140, 12, in Adam, 1969, pp. 64-65; Henning, 1965, pp. 29-33 = 1977 II, pp. 597-601). To give alms meant feeding, clothing, and housing the elect, ordaining one of their children for the service of the elect (Puech, 1949, p. 89),



and if those hearers belonged to the ruling or upper class “helpers” giving them protection.

Nevertheless it could not be overlooked that neither the elect nor the hearers were in a position to completely fulfill their respective religious duties, and so both communities had to undergo regularly repeated atonement ceremonies, the lay people on Sunday, the elect also on Monday, and all of them on such high feast days as the Bema festival. In Central Asia the practice of confession was completed with the help of all-encompassing confessional forms, both for the elect and the hearers (Henning, 1937 = 1977, I, pp. 417-557, Henning, 1940, pp. 63-67 = 1977, II, pp. 64-68; Asmussen, 1965; Klimkeit, 1977, pp. 193-228; Sims-Williams, 1991, pp. 323-28). The Parthian term *xwāstwānīft* “confession” was taken over in Sogdian and Old-Turkish texts.

Individual eschatology. The most effective incentive for the fulfillment of the commandments was certainly the conviction that human deeds, both good and evil, accompanied the souls of the deceased on their way to the world beyond (Sundermann, 1992(b), pp. 166-69). The 90th *Kephalaion* quotes Mani’s words: “Every person shall follow after his deeds, whether to light or indeed to death” (Polotky and Böhlig, 1940, p. 224, ll. 8-9; Gardner, 1995, p. 232).

The deeds of man had their place in the complex system of Manichean individual eschatology. The righteous person was promised (usually as the first step to the other world) a meeting with his (good) deeds (Sogd. *xw xypδ krtyh*) in the appearance of a beautiful young girl (Henning, 1945, pp. 476-77 = 1977, II, pp. 180-81). In a more developed form of the myth, the deceased meet a divine figure whom Ebn al-Nadim calls *al-ḥakīm al-hādī* “the wise guide” and who was probably the *Light-Nous* or one of his emanations. In his retinue appears *inter alia* the virgin who resembles the soul of the deceased (so in the Ebn al-Nadim, ed. Flügel, pp. 69-71, 100-1; tr. Dodge 1970, pp. 795-96, cf. for this and further sources, *EIr.* VIII, pp. 573-74 = Sundermann, 2001, pp. 66-70). The elect will then be given the insignia of victory, and they will be triumphantly led to Paradise, commonly specified as the “New Paradise” of the First Man (Boyce, 1954, pp. 15-23). The souls of the hearers and the worldly sinners have to undergo as their appropriate punishment a process of painful transmigration. There is also the myth of a post-mortal judgment before the “righteous judge” (Parth. *dādwar rāštīgar*) whose throne is in the air (Sundermann, 1981, p. 115) and who weighs the works of the deceased (Jackson, 1923, pp. 20-22; Durkin-Meisterernst, 2006, pp. 30-31, ll. 303-307, with n. 126), and the metaphor of (at least three, but up to fifteen) ways which lead



to paradise, transmigration and eternal death (Sundermann, 1992(a), p. 315 = 2001, p. 677), namely of the righteous elect people (and, on the same level, the “perfect” hearers), of their helpers, the hearers, and of the worldly-minded sinners. On the complexity of the Manichean doctrine of the afterlife cf. Polotsky, 1935, pp. 260-61 = Widengren, ed., 1977, pp. 128-29.

The Manichean understanding of the transmigration is best characterized by its Gnostic term (Greek) *metaggismos*, i.e. “transvasement,” pouring from one vessel to another (Puech, 1979, pp. 22-23), Middle Persian *wardišn* “turning,” Parthian *zādmurd*, Sogdian *zādmurδ*, both “birth – death”. This may mean that transmigration in the Manichean sense does not necessarily presuppose being born as a new personality or creature but rather being restricted to a kind of guest-status in another living being, a plant, an animal, a man and preferably an elect. The Parthian term for this kind of light substance is *widāragān mihmān* “transient guest” (Sundermann, 1992, pp. 91-92).

It is the grim fate of the sinners to transmigrate to animal bodies, to fall into the hands of the merciless demons, and in the end to be imprisoned with them in the eternal *Bōlos*. The hearers will go the opposite way: transmigration to plants and liberation and ascension as the result of a process that in the end makes them the alimentation of the elects’ sacred meals. But this view may be too simplistic. Mani himself regarded the fate of the hearers after death as so intricate and complicated that he did not try to depict it in his *Eikōn*, the “Picture Book” (Polotsky and Böhlig, 1940, pp. 235-36; Gardner, 1995, p. 242). Through the transmigration of hearers and sinners the individual eschatology links up with the cosmic eschatology.

The Manichean church. Not only was Mani the universal teacher and leader of his community, and not only was he a gifted artist who put painting, music, and the means of storytelling into the service of his message, he was also an able organizer who established a church which spread throughout the world. The core of his church was the elect (Baur 1831 = 1973, p. 267). The greater number of the hearers were not always regarded as members of the church. The 87th Coptic *Kephalaion* compares the church to a good tree and the hearers to good soil that receives the seed of the tree (Polotsky and Böhlig, 1940, pp. 217.31 – 218.2; Gardner, 1995, p. 225). The Latin *Tebessa* manuscript, however, speaks of electi and auditors as *hos duos ecclesiae [gra]dus* “these two ranks of the church” (Decret, 2005, p. 87, likewise Augustine, *De haeresibus* 46, in Böhlig and Asmussen, 1980, p. 139).



The community of the elect was hierarchically structured. There were ideally 12 teachers, 72 bishops, 360 presbyters (not always mentioned) and the simple elect people (Puech, 1949, pp. 86-87, p. 180, note 362). Mani's successors at the head of the community were called (Greek) *Archēgoi* (Sogd. *δέν-σάρδάρ*, Henning, 1937, p. 77, n. 623 = 1977, I, p. 491). For the seemingly amorphous multitude of the lay-people, the hearers, a "chief auditor" (Sogdian *niyōšāk-pat*) and a "chief auditrix" (Sogdian *niyōšāk-patānc*) are mentioned in the text M 1 (cf. Gershevitch, 1961, sec. 1040). On further Central Asian Manichean titles see Moriyasu, 2004, notes 29, 32a, 52.

It is hard to tell to what degree it proved possible to preserve the original structure of the church and to uphold its universal unity and cooperation. Was the head of the church, who resided in Ctesiphon, later in Baghdad and then in Samarqand (Samarkand), able to keep in touch with all the wide-spread Manichean communities, let alone supervise and control their activities? Of the powerful "Church of the East" in Central Asia, also called the *dēnāwarift* (Parthian), *dīnāwarīya* (Arabic; cf. *EIr.* VII, pp. 418-19 = Sundermann, 2001, pp. 533-35), we know that it regarded itself as Mani's most promising legacy (Sundermann, 1981, pp. 133-34) and so must have played a rather independent role.

It is highly possible that the constant adherence to the common essentials of the doctrine was the mainstay of the Manichean community. In any case, schisms of the Manichean church such as that between the Mesopotamian (Arabic) *Mihriya* and *Miqlāšiya* (from the 8th to the 9th century) were provoked by disagreement on ritual matters, not on dogmatic questions. The only exception to the rule seems to be the separation of a sect called by Ebn al-Nadim *al-Māsiya* (by 'Abd-al-Jabbār, however, *Miqlāšiya* which is, according to de Blois, 2006, p. 77, the correct name of the sect, cf. *EIr.* IX, p. 483 = Sundermann, 2001, p. 564). It maintained against the majority of its time the genuine Manichean doctrine that the Light substance of the World Soul cannot be completely redeemed. On the other hand, further local developments of the doctrine are traceable in different parts of the Manichean oecumene, such as the total replacement of the Third Messenger by Jesus in the Latin West (Polotsky, 1935, pp. 257-58 = Widengren ed., 1977, p. 124).

A unique chance was given to the Manichean church when in about 762 the ruler of the Uighur Steppe empire, Bögü (Bügü) Khan, adopted the Manichean religion (Clark, 2000, pp. 83-123; Sundermann 2001a, pp. 159-61). For at least 250 years Manicheism remained the creed of the Uighur kings, after the



breakdown of the steppe empire in 840 it was taken by the fleeing Uighurs to the Turfan oasis and was made the religion of the kingdom of Qocho. In the 11th century Manicheism was superseded by Buddhism, which had long since been the religion of the majority of the inhabitants of the Turfan area (Moriyasu, 2004, esp. pp. 174-92). It was only under the favorable conditions of a community enjoying the privileges of a state religion that Manicheism could produce a wealth of spiritual literature, often written in fine calligraphy and accompanied by superb illuminations, of wall-paintings, textile art objects, etc., the relics of which were, and still are, being retrieved through numerous Turfan expeditions.

Manicheism found its last refuge in the southern Chinese province of Fujian. At Quanzhou a Manichean temple with a statue of the prophet has survived through the ages in Buddhist disguise. This and some more traces of a Manichean presence attest to the “Religion of Light” there from the 10th to the 16th centuries (Lieu, 1992, pp. 264-304).

Cosmic eschatology. Manicheism existed for more than a millennium. Mani himself did not anticipate such a long history for his church. He was convinced that he was the last prophet of truth on earth (*Kephalaia*, ed. Polotsky and Böhlig, 1940, p. 14.6; Gardner, 1995, p. 20), he was sure that his mission would lead imminently to the eschatological events at the end of the world. More than any other part of the Manichean myth its eschatology received inspirations from other religions, mainly from Zoroastrianism and Christianity (*EIr.* VIII, pp. 571-72 = Sundermann, 2001, pp. 61-65). This led to an accumulation of somewhat similar motifs, structured as the alternating sequence of dark periods on the one hand and periods of relief on the other. Our main sources on these events are Mani’s Middle Persian *Šābuhragān* and the Coptic *Sermon on the Great War* (on which in general see Pedersen, 1993). After Mani’s death a great war was foretold, during which the Manichean church would suffer severe persecution (Polotsky, 1934, pp. 8-11, 13-21). Then a blissful time of peace and the accomplishment of justice would follow. Under the rule of the “great king” the Manichean church would predominate and liberate much light from the bonds of the world (Polotsky, 1934, pp. 21-33). Again evil will get the upper hand. The Antichrist (in an Old-Turkish text the false Maitreya, Le Coq, 1919, p. 5) comes into power and establishes a reign of terror. But he will be overcome by Jesus the Splendor who returns to earth, rules for 120 years (Sundermann, 2003, pp. 421-27), and will hold the Last Judgment upon mankind. He will do what the biblical parable on the Last



Judgment, Matt. 25. 31-46, foretold: separate the righteous from the evildoers like the sheep from the goats. The first he will put on his right side, the second on the left. The Manichean version, however, makes it clear what right and wrong mean: the righteous ones are the pious elect and next to them their faithful helpers, the hearers. The evildoers are the sinful elect and next to them the multitude of the worldly-minded infidels (MacKenzie, 1979, pp. 504-509 = 1999, pp. M I 89-92; Polotsky, 1934, pp. 35-38).

After Jesus' judgment has cleared the world from human life, it remains void for a hundred years (Sundermann, 2003, p. 424). Then the functionless building of the world, so long a useful means of salvation and protection, will be given up by the divine powers, and a process set in motion which is a reversion of cosmogonic events. The five sons of the Living Spirit who upheld and watched over the cosmos, and the five sons of the First Man, the active part of the World Soul, leave their posts and, together with all the cosmic deities, retire to the heavenly sphere. The building of the world breaks down and is devoured in a final conflagration, the "great fire" (MacKenzie, 1979, pp. 510-13 = 1999, pp. M I 93-96; *EIr.* VIII, pp. 570-71 = Sundermann, 2001, pp. 60-61). The great fire will last for 1,468 years (Ogden, 1930, pp. 102-5; Koenen, 1986, pp. 314, 321-26). The demons and the irredeemable sinners will find in it their last punishment (MacKenzie, 1979, pp. 516-21 = 1999, pp. M I 99-104). After the extinction of the fire the demons, and with them the irredeemable human souls, will be imprisoned in the *Bōlos* (Polotsky, 1934, p. 41; MacKenzie, 1979, pp. 520-21 = 1999, pp. M I 103-4; Decret, 1974, pp. 487-92), male and female beings separated, so that they cannot multiply and inflict more damage (*Kephalaia*, ed. Polotsky and Böhlig, p. 105. 30-35; Gardner, 1995, p. 110).

It is less easy to describe how the Manicheans imagined the final state of the divine world of light. The most likely possibility is that their ideas were contradictory. The end of the Coptic Sermon on the Great War allows Koenen's interpretation that both the Eternal Paradise of the Father of Greatness and the New Paradise of the First Man will continue to exist forever (Koenen, 1986, pp. 306-307). On the other hand the 39th *Kephalaion* and its Middle Persian equivalent, "He teaches the three great days" (M 5750) warrant the conclusion that the New Paradise will ultimately merge with the Eternal Paradise (Sundermann, 1992(a), pp. 313-14 = 2001, pp. 675-76, cf. also *Kephalaia*, ed. Polotsky and Böhlig, 1940, p.5.16-17 = Gardner, 1995, p. 11).

But however that may be, the post-cosmic *finitum* will not be a re-establishment of the pre-cosmic *initium*. The beginning-less dualism will be



overcome, even if it is not possible to annihilate the immortal demons. The conflict between the worlds of light and darkness ends with the victory of light, but the divine powers are not able to retrieve the whole of the lost light substance. A small part of it (the Manichean literature tends to minimize or even to ignore the loss, cf. Andreas and Henning, 1934, p. 851 = Henning, 1977, I, p. 278) proves to be so irredeemably corrupted by the matter of darkness that it cannot be regained. This meant, since the World Soul is a part of the Father of Greatness himself, that the deity emerges injured and, as it were, imperfect from the cosmic battle, as Augustine and others did not fail to stress (Baur, 1831 = 1973, pp. 100-11).

The arrangement and presentation of the doctrine. It was a remarkable intellectual achievement to develop and present the exceedingly complex and intricate Manichean doctrine in a more or less understandable way. Mani succeeded in doing so, in spite of serious shortcomings concerning precision of terms, clearness of style, and consistency of description (cf. forthcoming entry in *EIr.* on Mani). As far as one can follow the arrangement of Manichean works one may state that they are systematically grouped subject-wise, however manifold their contents may have been. That is perceptible even in such voluminous works as the collections of the *Kephalaia*.

Another helpful arranging method was the mnemonic grouping of concepts and events in the order of religiously meaningful “sacred” figures: *three*: the divine trinity, three days (epochs) of salvation history, the seals of the perfect, *five*: the Light Elements, the parts of the body, the limbs of the soul, the cardinal virtues, the classes of animals, *seven*: the components of the cardinal virtues, the Light Elements plus Call and Answer, *twelve*: the dodecad of the Light and Dark Aeons, two periods of Mani’s life, etc.

The syncretistic aspect of Manicheism (For references and details see the following *EIr.* entries: Bardesanes, Christ in Manicheism, Cologne Mani Codex, Cosmogony and Cosmology in Manicheism, Giants, Gnosticism, Hermas, Manichean Eschatology, Manichean pantheon, Manichean pandemonium, Iran ix. Religions in Iran 1 (1.2) Manicheism, Mithra in Manicheism.)

More than any other world religion, Manicheism may be called a syncretistic religion in so far as it adopted manifold motives, terms, ritual and hierarchical institutions from other communities. Mani himself admitted this dependence, and it seems not to have clashed with his claim to have received his wisdom from divine revelation. In his famous speech about the superiority of his



religion in ten points he mentions “the scriptures, the wisdom and the parables” of the former religions that came to “this” [religion]. But in that selfsame speech he also underlines the superiority of his universal religion (Andreas and Henning, 1933, pp. 295-96 = Henning 1977, I, pp. 192-93; *Kephalaia*, ed. Funk, pp. 370-75). So the adoption of alien matters must have been a critical one, the criteria being compatibility with Mani’s own convictions.

Christianity. The great impact of Christianity on Manicheism is obvious. It is attested in many Manichean and counter-Manichean documents which mention, *inter alia*, Mani’s self-chosen title “Apostle of Jesus Christ,” adopted Christian terms such as “Paraclete,” “Evangelion” or “Presbyter,” passages quoted from canonical and apocryphal Christian works, and the fact that even in texts used in a non-Christian environment Jesus is praised.

That this impact was not simply an outward accommodation to a Christian ambiance, as has been assumed (Widengren, 1961, pp. 158-59), follows unmistakably from the *Cologne Mani Codex* which states that Mani grew up in the Jewish-Christian South Mesopotamian sect of the Elkhasaites (Koenen and Römer, 1988; Cameron and Dewey, 1979). One is led therefore to assume an already existing Christian influence on the formation of the Manichean dogma, i.e. on Mani’s own world-view from the outset.

This has most clearly been seen by Böhlig who explained the central Manichean dogma of the self-sacrifice of the First Man (and the ensuing suffering of his sons) for the sake of the whole World of Light and its protection against the onslaughts of the powers of darkness (cf. *EIr.* VI, p. 311 = Sundermann 2001, pp. 15-16) as a transposition of the central Christian doctrine of Christ’s sacrifice on behalf of mankind beyond all earthly events to the divine, pre-cosmic sphere (Böhlig, 1983, pp. 91-93; 1986, p. 36. Cf. also Skjærvø 1995(a), p. 271, and Sundermann, 1997(a), p. 353 = 2001, p. 49).

Jesus himself plays a perplexingly multifarious role that makes him almost omnipresent in the Manichean system (*EIr.* V, pp. 535-39 = Sundermann, 2001, pp. 5-12; cf. Rose, 1979 and now Franzmann, 2003, *passim*, where the essential unity of the complex Jesus figure, even of its active and passive aspects, is stressed). He has both become a transcendent and earthly active, redeeming, and a passive, redeemed person of the Manichean pantheon. He is indeed what Richard Reitzenstein called the *salvator salvandus* (Colpe, 1956, pp. 200-1) in order to characterize the essence of the Gnostic idea of salvation. But



in all his capacities Jesus can be replaced by other, less ubiquitous deities, and in such cases, the Manichean system lost nothing of its essentials. So Manicheism can be characterized as a de-Christianized religion of Christian origin.

One of the redeeming Jesus figures is the historical Jesus of Nazareth who appeared on earth in order to teach mankind the divine truth in the western regions. Mani accepted him as one of his forerunners, and the best known to him.

Even as a human prophet Jesus preserved his divine, spiritual nature. Mani adopted the non-orthodox early-Christian doctrine of Christ's docetic nature, i.e. of his un-born, non-corporeal nature. The question whether Christ was submitted to suffering and death was admittedly disputed, but even this controversy reflected arguments in the early Christian church (Sundermann, 2002, pp. 209-17).

Gnosticism. Manicheism shares so many motives and concepts and even the structure of its doctrine with Gnostic teachings that it is almost *communis opinio* to regard the Manichean doctrine as a late formation of Gnostic ideas, according to Hans Jonas as the typical representative of what he called the "Iranian type" (1991, pp. 206, 236-37), according to Henri-Charles Puech the most radical form of Gnosticism (1949, p. 72). It is possibly only Michel Tardieu who strictly separated Manicheism from Gnosticism because of its positive evaluation of the demiurge and of the creation of the world (Tardieu, 1988, pp. 148-49). Most recently Jason BeDuhn accepts the Gnostic affiliation of Manicheism only in a very restricted, qualified sense: as Gnosis of the purification of the material body through separation of its opposing forces of material spirituality and the spirituality of the Light Soul (see BeDuhn, 2000, pp. 120-23), not as sheer "intellectual" Gnosis, but as knowledge of how to practice the soul-saving rituals (BeDuhn, 2000, pp. 214-18).

On the other hand, Gnosticism embraces such a complex multitude of schools and doctrines that even teachings closer to the Manichean ones, for example concerning a positive view of the creator of the world (Colpe, 1961, p. 181, n. 4) can be found within it. In any case, the overwhelming impact of Gnostic myths, terms, and concepts on Manicheism cannot be denied (see in general Rudolph, 1977, pp. 326-42; Böhlig, 1988, pp. 317-38). Some examples may suffice: The pre-cosmic history of the divine (and, for Manicheism, the demonic) world that explains and determines the events of cosmic history (a



teaching shared, however, more precisely with the Zoroastrian cosmogony of the Sasanian period); the seduction of the Archonts (cf. Stroumsa, 1984, pp. 62-65); the demons (the Gnostic archons) imitate the divine image when they create the first human couple (Stroumsa, 1984, p. 84); the mixture of psychical with material parts in the Microcosm; the imprisonment of the human soul in the body; the five parts of the divine and the human soul (as Tardieu was able to prove); a positive evaluation of Eve (the heavenly Eve in Gnosticism) as the illuminator of Adam which goes against her common reputation as the sinful seducer of Adam (Sundermann, 1994, pp. 317-27); a general anti-corporeal and anti-sexual attitude; the tripartite distribution of mankind in *electi* = *pneumatikoi*, *auditores* = *psychikoi* and worldly people = *hylikoi* (Baur, 1831 = 1973, p. 281); a widespread hostility against the Jewish god and the treatment of Jesus by the Jews.

Some common teachings seem to indicate an exclusive closeness to mythologoumena and terms of the Valentinian School (Böhlig, 1988, pp. 326-32; Polotsky, 1935, p. 248 = Widengren, ed. 1977, p. 111). An example is the doctrine of a pre-cosmic *Enthymēsis*. Valentinianism seems to have predated the important Manichean dogma of a bad and a good *Enthymēsis* in the person of the so-called Lower *Sophia*. She is the result of the undue desire of the Upper *Sophia* in the *Plērōma* to behold the Father, the origin of her existence. This turns out to be an illusion that sets the whole divine world in unrest and turmoil. In this chaotic situation the Upper *Sophia* emanates the Lower *Sophia*, her *Enthymēsis*. The passion and desire of the Lower *Sophia* materialize as the substance of this world in such a way that from her “blind passions” the four elements of the world originate, and from her rueful “turning back” to the Giver of her Life, the psychical parts of the world (Jonas, 1964, pp. 362-74; idem 1991, pp. 179-94). The passion and desire of the Valentinian *Enthymēsis* and her split nature can certainly be best compared with the Manichean “*Enthymēsis* of Death and Life.” Since details of the Valentinian myth were already known to heresiographers in the first half of the third century, it is reasonable to assume that Mani drew on a Gnostic, presumably Valentinian pattern and interpreted it in a strictly dualistic way.

Specific Gnostic terms or definitions reappear in Manicheism, such as the Manichean designation of the macrocosm as the “Big Corpse” (Middle Persian *nasāh wuzurg*), for which compare the *Gospel of Thomas* 56: “Jesus said: Who recognized the world, found a corpse.” In other cases Gnostic traditions mediated philosophical terms.



There are, on the other hand, some specific traits of the Manichean doctrine that distinguish it from the characteristic Gnostic systems. There is, above all, in Manicheism, the positive evaluation of the Macrocosm and even the divine rank and commission of the demiurge. Not only is the Macrocosm a useful instrument in the hands of the divine powers, it is not even a mere vale of woe. The pains and sufferings of the World Soul are being relieved through the beneficial work of the five Gods of the Light Elements (Sundermann, 1997). The skies are no longer the watch-posts of the malicious planets that impede the ascension of the souls, but prisons for the celestial demons and the watch-posts of two of the sons of the Living Spirit (Sundermann, 1979, pp. 777-78 = 2001, pp. 799-800, with earlier literature). Even Mani's fleshly body could be described as an effective armor against the assaults of the dark powers (Andreas and Henning, 1934, p. 860, ll. 15-18 = Henning, 1977, I, p. 287, also 1934, p. 864, ll. 6-7 = 1977, I, p. 291, but the opposite evaluation does also exist, cf. *Cologne Mani Codex*, ed. Koenen and Römer, 1988, pp. 14-15.). One might explain this optimistic side of the Manichean world-view as an alignment to Zoroastrian ideas and the Manichean system as a kind of Gnosticism under Iranian impact, which would confirm Jonas' definition of Manicheism as a representative of the Iranian type of Gnosticism. Although Manicheism shares many details, as well as the very structure of its doctrine with Gnostic systems, it is remarkable that Mani did not do any of the Gnostic sectarian leaders the honor of mentioning him by name as one of his prophetic forerunners. He did mention Marcion and Bardesanes, but only in order to criticize them or their followers (M 28, ed. Skjærvø, 1995, p. 246, differently de Blois, 1998, pp. 484-85; Ebn al-Nadim, ed. Flügel, p. 73, l. 3; p. 102; tr. Dodge 1970, p. 862). But this does not preclude the possibility that Mani made selective, critical use of some of Bardesanes' (Skjærvø, 1988, pp. 784-85) and even Marcion's (Gardner, 1995, p. 15; Sundermann, 2002, p. 217) mythologumena. Bardesanes and Marcion are, however, at best marginal figures in the Gnostic world, and the Gnostic nature of their teaching is disputed by some scholars. Mentioned in a positive sense is the shadowy Gnostic figure of Nikotheos (nkty'wys) as one of the patriarchs of mankind (Henning, 1934, p. 28 = 1977, I, p. 342). But it is no more than an unproven hypothesis that Mani knew and made use of a Gnostic pseudepigraphical work ascribed to Nikotheos (Puech, 1979, p. 17). There is, however, an unacknowledged dependence on at least one Valentinian doctrine, and Valentinianism may have essentially molded Mani's Gnosticism.

Zoroastrianism. Judging by the bulk of Iranian Manichean texts and other East Manichean texts as well, which largely draw on the Iranian tradition, the



Zoroastrian influence on Manicheism must have been overwhelming. Almost all deities, demons, and mythological persons bear names familiar from the religion of Zoroaster (Sundermann, 1979, pp. 101, 124-29 = 2001, pp. 127, 150-55). The Manichean accommodation to Zoroastrian terms and concepts went so far as to induce the designation of the Manichean church as the *dēn māzdēs* “the Mazdayasnian Religion” (in Middle Persian, M 543, Müller, 1904, p. 79, etc.). This misled scholars of the *Religionsgeschichtliche* School of the early 20th century, and notably Richard Reitzenstein, to assume a Manichean adoption of deities and demons and the myth of the suffering World Soul from an unattested Iranian *Volksreligion* (Reitzenstein, 1921, p. 94; Colpe, 1961, pp. 36-37, 41-57. On the concept of “iranische Volksreligion” cf. Widengren, 1961, p. 58). Hans Heinrich Schaeder, who himself had first followed this line of thought, gave decisive proof that the Iranian mythological names were no more than outward terminological accommodations (he called it “mechanische ‘Übersetzungen;’” mechanical translations) to the Iranian Zoroastrian ambience of Mani’s and his disciples’ activities (Schaeder, 1927, p. 135 = 1968, p. 85). Further research on the Iranian Manichean documents as well as the discovery of Coptic and Greek texts confirmed Schaeder’s criticism. The persons of the East Manichean pantheon and pandemonium are figures of a Gnostic system in Zoroastrian garb. Only a limited Zoroastrian influence on the Manichean mythological persons is traceable (Schaeder, 1927, pp. 138-45 = 1968, pp. 88-95; Boyce, 1962, pp. 44-54).

The assessment of possible Zoroastrian sources in Mani’s system is complicated by the fact that Mani evidently also adopted some non-Iranian information on the person of the Iranian prophet handed down by the *magēs hellénisés* (as shown by Joseph Bidez and Franz Cumont in *Les magēs hellénisés*, Paris, 1938, cf. Sundermann, 1986(a) = 2001, pp. 853-76).

There is, however, evidence for an overwhelming impact of the Zoroastrian on the Manichean cosmogony and its radical ethical and ontological dualism (cf. Gnoli, 1985, p. 76; Gnoli, *EIr.* VII, p. 579; Rudolph, 1991, pp. 307-21). The Zoroastrian cosmogony that can be used for comparison is mainly the teaching of the Zoroastrian Pahlavi books *Bundahišn* and *Wizīdagīhā ī Zādsparam*. They were admittedly written down five centuries after Mani’s lifetime and even later, but they contain older traditions. They display a strictly dualistic world-view already in existence before the third century CE according to the testimonies of Plutarch (de Jong, 1997, pp. 163-204) and the Gnostic Basilides (Jonas 1991, p. 214, n. 10). It is true that under the Sasanians, the dualistic



system was grafted to a principle of time and fate, Zurvan, superimposed upon god and devil. Below the time and fate level, however, the antagonism of good and evil remained at full power. It was this second level dualism that agreed with Mani's own preconceived dualism, and this he accepted, placing the Zoroastrian Zurvan uncompromisingly on the side of the good beings.

A systematic comparison of the Zoroastrian and the Manichean cosmogonies displays accords and differences. It has been done in a most comprehensive and judicious way by Oktor Skjærvø who admits an Iranian, i.e. orthodox Zoroastrian influence on Manicheism with the proviso that "wherever we detect Zoroastrian elements in Manicheism we can be almost *certain* that their function in Zoroastrianism was different" (Skjærvø, 1995(a), esp. p. 281; cf. also Skjærvø, 1997, pp. 333-40; Sundermann, 1997a, pp. 351-58; Idem, 2001, pp. 47-54).

Both Zoroastrianism and Manicheism postulate the existence of two independent, primeval worlds, the world of light and goodness and the world of darkness and evil. Both worlds are limitless and at the same time limit each other. The attack of the demons plunges both worlds into turmoil and conflict. The leaders in battle against the dark powers are the Zoroastrian god *Ohrmazd* and the Manichean First Man who is called *Ohrmazd* too in the Iranian Manichean tradition. But while the Zoroastrian god is always invincible, the Manichean *Ohrmazd* has to save the world of light through his self-sacrifice and the sacrifice of his sons, even if this is stylized as a heroic achievement or a clever ruse. The struggle of the two worlds will be, in the Zoroastrian view, settled definitely at the end of the cosmos. For the Manicheans the outcome of the fight had already been decided before the creation of the cosmos by the victory of the Living Spirit and the Mother of Life over the demons.

The material creation of this world is in the Zoroastrian view a divine act, and matter is a divine substance. In Manicheism the demiurge is also a god, but he forms the world from the bodies of slain demons. The Zoroastrian assessment of the material world is entirely positive, for the Manicheans the substance of the world is bad but its function is salutary.

In Zoroastrianism the creation of man is a necessary precondition for the final victory of the divine powers. It is the work of demons according to the Manichean doctrine, designated to imprison the World Soul forever in generations of human bodies. In this point the views of Zoroastrianism and Manicheism are incompatible, even if the Manichean gods find means to



convert man into an instrument of salvation.

The world is, in the Zoroastrian as well as in the Manichean view, the permanent battlefield of the divine powers and their demonic counterparts. In this battle humankind plays an important role. The world is the prison of the demons. This is also the opinion of the Manicheans. But more than that, for them it is also a grandiose device to set free and purify the dismembered particles of the World Soul.

For the Zoroastrians the end of the world is its return to its original ideal state. For the Manicheans it is its total destruction and the return of the last redeemable particles of the World Soul to their home and origin, the world of light. Both the Zoroastrian and the quite different Manichean conception of these events are called in Middle Persian *frašgird* (*EIr.* VIII, p. 570 = Sundermann, 2001, p. 61).

These examples suffice to show that Manicheism has the basic dualistic concept of its cosmogony (and cosmology) in common with the Zoroastrian doctrine. It comes close to Zoroastrianism in its evaluation of the material world. In other points it keeps a more Gnostic view: the nature of matter, of man, of the world as a prison of the World Soul, the final destruction of the world. Its idea of the sacrifice of the First Man imitated the Christian doctrine of the *sacrificium Jesu Christi*. Manicheism, one may conclude, is a Gnostic religion with Christian roots and additional Zoroastrian components.

Buddhism and Jainism. The Buddha whom Mani recognized as one of his forerunners was the least known Apostle of Light of the triad Jesus, Zoroaster, Buddha, and so the contribution of the Buddhist doctrine to Manicheism was a modest one at best.

The importance of the inclusion of the Buddha in the chain of Mani's forerunners was rather an ostentatious, symbolic one: it demonstrated that the Manichean claim to world-wide universality overstepped the limits of Mani's Christian and Gnostic background.

Manicheism was twice exposed to the impact of Buddhist ideas and ways of life. The first encounter may have been the more effective one, even if it took no more than a couple of months: Mani's early missionary journey to India in the period between 240 and 242. The second encounter, the long period of Manichean and Buddhist coexistence in Central Asia of nearly a millennium,



took place when Manicheism was a fully developed doctrine, and only minor, outward adaptations to the Buddhist ambiance were made, including frequent use of Buddhist religious terms, mainly of the titles Buddha, Maitreya, Bodhisattva, etc., in Parthian, Sogdian, and other east Manichean texts, but not in Middle Persian ones (see in general Sundermann, 1986, pp. 11-19 = 2001, pp. 199-216. On Buddhist terms of Indian origin in Manichean Parthian and Sogdian cf. Sims-Williams, 1983, pp. 132-41).

In modern studies on Manicheism the Buddhist origin of the Manichean doctrine of transmigration (Puech, 1949, p. 69), as well as of the Manichean monastic life (Jonas, 1991, p. 232) has been taken for granted. As for the first point, the Manichean term *metaggismos* denoting the transmigration, suggests a more likely Gnostic origin, and so does the important testimony in Biruni's *Tahqiq mā li'l-Hind*. Even if Biruni himself regarded it as an argument for the Indian origin of the Manichean doctrine of transmigration, it rather speaks in favor of a Christian-Gnostic source (cf. Sundermann, 1986, p. 16 = 2001, pp. 208-9). It is perhaps of minor importance that the somewhat materialistic Manichean idea of transmigration is far from the Buddhist concept of rebirth.

There are better arguments for a Buddhist pattern of Manichean monastic life and especially the monastic institution (*mānistān* in the Iranian languages). The Manichean monasteries were initially (or only in the Buddhist environment?) meant to be places of communal worship and instruction, places for repose for electi who had fallen ill, and perhaps resting-places for religious wayfarers (Chavannes and Pelliot, 1913, pp. 108-14). They were not initially meant to be the permanent abode of electi who had withdrawn from the world, let alone centers of commercial activity. This seems to agree well with the Buddhist *vihāras* as they may have been run in the third century CE (Lamotte, 1956, pp. 63-71, 342-43). On the other hand, a kind of monastic cohabitation may be assumed for the Elkhasaite community in which Mani grew up (Koenen, 1983, pp. 101-5), and according to a paper read by Wolf-Peter Funk at the International Congress of Manichaeic Studies in Flagstaff (August 2005), the still unedited Coptic *Synaxeis of the Living Gospel* contain a reference to those Mesopotamian monasteries.

There is a striking similarity between the Manichean doctrine of the suffering World Soul and how it should be spared from maltreatment, and corresponding ideas in the Jain religion. Ferdinand Christian Baur (1831 = 1973, pp. 449-51) may have been the first to make this observation. In our time Richard Nelson Frye made public this same observation made by his pupil V.



A. J. Alaharasan (Frye, 1992, pp. 95-96; concise comparisons of belief and practice in Jainism and Manicheism have recently been made by Woschitz, 1989, pp. 105-8 and by Gardner, 2005, pp. 125-35). Strangely enough, Mani does not mention the Mahāvīra as one of his prophetic forerunners, and the Jainas are ignored in Manichean texts, unless they are to be understood in the Sogdian fragment So 18248 II (TM 393) as the “Brahmanic religion” (*pr'mn'nch* [□*ynh*]; Henning, 1944, p. 138, l. 22, p. 141 = 1977, II, pp. 144, 147; also mentioned in the Coptic Synaxeis Codex, cf. Gardner, 2005, p. 124).

Albert Henrichs assumed Indian sources for the Manichean legends about speaking and lamenting trees (Henrichs, 1979). That might confirm the Indian contribution to the Manichean doctrine about the suffering World Soul.

The Jewish religion, ancient Mesopotamian traditions, and Hellenistic philosophy left their traces in Manicheism. But it cannot be doubted that their influence was largely an indirect one, that it underwent a Gnostic – negative – evaluation (Judaism) or was more or less mediated by Gnosticism (philosophical traditions) or Judaism (Mesopotamian elements).

Judaism. The contribution of Judaism to the formation of the Manicheism dogma is smaller than might have been expected from a religion that originated in a Jewish-Christian community. The main reason was certainly a strong Manichean anti-Jewish bias which Mani shared with the Christian communities in general who condemned the Jews as the instigators of the death of Christ, or even as his murderers themselves, but also as the target of a general Gnostic rejection of Jewish monotheism. On the other hand, the early formation of Mani's world-view in a Jewish Christian environment left its traces in the further development of Mani's doctrine. He made (so far as we currently know) extensive use of those parts of the Old Testament and of Jewish apocryphal texts – in a critical or approving way – which treated of the pre-Jewish history of mankind, i.e. the time of the patriarchs before Abraham (whose occasional inclusion into the chain of Manichean prophets in Islamic sources is erroneous). But even those traditions were often re-interpreted in Gnostic manner in a contrastive, contrary way (Kurt Rudolph called it the Gnostic “Protestexegese,” 1996, pp. 161-62); and it could be said that Jewish monotheism exerted a clarifying negative, contrastive impetus on Manichean dualism.

This is most clearly expressed in the Manichean re-interpretation of the creation myth of Genesis 1-3. Mani identified the Biblical creator god with the



arch-demon Ašaqlūn of his myth, the procreator of the first human couple (Andreas and Henning, 1932, pp. 199-200 = Henning, 1977, I, pp. 25-26). The statement in Genesis 1.27 that “God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them,” is referred to in the context of the Manichean Third Messenger whose male and female beauty had once aroused the desire of the demons in the skies and had seduced them (Sundermann and Yoshida, 1992, pp. 119-34 = Sundermann, 2001, pp. 683-95). The snake, which according to Genesis 3.1-5 led Eve and Adam into temptation, actually opened Adam’s eyes to the divine truth, and Augustine maintains that it is Jesus the Splendor himself (Baur, 1831 = 1973, pp. 160-62). By eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge Adam gains Gnosis (Merkelbach, 1986, p. 29, with further references, Puech, 1949, p. 175, n. 337). It must not be overlooked, however, that anti-Jewish polemics in the Gnostic manner also attacked, and had perhaps as their main target those Christian communities that had accepted the tales and commands of the Old Testament unreservedly and at face value (Luttikhuizen, 2006, pp. 10, 28).

The most important topic beside the Genesis myth was the legend of the “sons of *Elōhīm*” who descended on earth, copulated with the daughters of men, and procreated a race of giants (Genesis 6.1-4). The legend was elaborated in the apocryphal Jewish *Book of the Giants* and related works which were ascribed to Enoch, fragments of which were discovered among the Qumran texts (Milik, 1971, pp. 117-27; 1976, pp. 4-69, 298-317). Parts of the Enoch literature found their way into the Christian tradition, and so it is likely that Mani became familiar with the Jewish *Book of the Giants* in his paternal Elkhasaite community. The Jewish book inspired him to write his own *Book of the Giants*, which became one of his canonical works (Henning, 1943, pp. 52-74 = 1977, II, pp. 115-37; Sundermann, 1984, pp. 491-505 = 2001, pp. 615-31; Reeves, 1992; Idem, 1996, p. 47). A “secondary Iranization” of epic motives in the Iranian Giants texts has been suggested by Skjærvø, 1995(b).

The *Cologne Mani Codex* quotes many more apocryphal works of Jewish origin (Reeves, 1996, pp. 67-206).

Ancient Mesopotamia. It would be surprising if Mani, who took pride in calling himself the “doctor from Babel,” would have disregarded the time honored traditions of his Mesopotamian home country. An essential determination of Mani’s doctrine by ancient Mesopotamian religious myths was repeatedly postulated by Konrad Kessler (e.g. 1889, pp. 226-27). Geo Widengren discovered more “Mesopotamian Elements in Manichaeism” (in Iranian



interpretation, however, Widengren, 1946). Even if some of those observations are exaggerated and not provable, the Mesopotamian presence in Manichean literature has recently been substantiated. We owe to John C. Reeves the convincing observation that the name *Atambīš* of one of the demonic “watchers” in Mani’s *Book of the Giants* goes back to the name *Utnapištim* of the Noah-figure in the *Gilgamesh* epic, just as *Hubbābēš* is (according to J. T. Milik) the *Óumbaba* of the *Gilgamesh* story (Reeves, 1993, pp. 110-15, cf. also Schwartz, 2002, pp. 231-38). In this case the Mesopotamian influence was only an indirect one, however, mediated through the Jewish Enoch texts, since they have the name *ḥwbbš*, too.

Philosophy. That the essence of Mani’s doctrine was Platonic philosophy in mythical garb was proposed by Schaefer in his fundamental study *Urform und Fortbildungen des manichäischen Systems* (Schaefer, 1927). That the essence of Mani’s doctrine was best rendered by Alexander of Lycopolis, that it presupposed familiarity with, and application of, “griechisches Denken” and “griechische Wissenschaft” was presupposed by Schaefer. He especially referred to Plato’s *Timaeus* and Poseidonios’ commentary on the *Timaeus* (Schaefer, 1927, p. 118 = 1968, p. 68). Alexander of Lycopolis did give a brief description of the Manichean system in Platonic terms. But the subsequently discovered Manichean Coptic texts confirmed that the Manichean doctrine was basically a mythical one and not the other way round (Widengren, 1977, esp. pp. 487-90).

Schaefer himself modified his theory thereafter and restricted himself to speaking about “eine vulgär-philosophische Tradition griechischen Ursprungs” (“a vulgar-philosophical tradition of Greek origin”) that became only indirectly accessible to Mani “durch christlich-gnostische Vermittlung” (“by Christian Gnostic mediation,” Schaefer 1936, p. 99). Within these limits, however, his views can be maintained and given more precision as was shown by Alexander Böhlig in several articles (mainly Böhlig, 1986, 1994, 1995). Böhlig pointed in particular to the Stoa in general and to the Stoic philosopher Poseidonios and the Platonist and neo-Pythagorean Numenius in particular as possible sources of Mani’s knowledge.

Terms of Greek philosophy reappear in Manicheism, such as *Hylē* (*hwl’* in Mani’s Aramaic native language, rendered in Iranian languages as *Āz* “concupiscentia”) or *Nous* (so in Greek and Coptic texts, *haunā* in Aramaic, *manohmed* in Iranian), even if they were used in a specific Manichean sense. *Hylē* is according to Alexander of Lycopolis (ed. Brinkmann 1895, p. 5, l. 8; tr.



Van der Horst, 1974, p. 53) *ataktos kinēsis* “disorderly motion”; *Nous* a limb of the soul, as *Nous of Light*, etc., the divine revealer of Gnosis. Words like these, however, belong to the common inventory of Gnostic terminology and certainly reached Manicheism via Gnosticism.

But a Manichean special feature without an equivalent in Gnosticism is the doctrine of the charitable effects of the five Light Elements on the earthly living conditions (Sundermann, 1997, pp. 14-16). Some of these effects can be compared with the Stoic theory of the elements (Sundermann, 1997, pp. 20-24). They may be the result of a Stoic impact on Manicheism as already suggested by Böhlig.

The Manichean identity (For references and details cf. in this entry: Cosmogony, Ethics, Individual and Cosmic Eschatology, The Manichean Church).

The Manichean religion claimed to possess an all-embracing world-view describing the construction of the world with its eight earths and ten skies, mentioning diverse countries, listing the five kinds of animals and explaining such mysterious phenomena as earthquakes, the tides, the eclipses of sun and moon and the diversity of human languages. A claim to omniscience cannot be denied. In the course of its history it attracted the interest of outstanding personalities of spirituality and scholarship – and at the same time disappointed their expectations (for St. Augustine cf. his *Confessiones* V, 3, for Biruni cf. Ruska, 1922, pp. 30-33). In any case, the main concern of the Manichean doctrine was its theodicy. The solution offered by Mani is indeed a unique one. More than any other religion, even more than Zoroastrianism, his doctrine drew radical consequences from its dualistic premises. Not only did it deny god’s omnipotence, it even proclaimed a deity inferior to the demonic world in the beginning and imperfect in the end, a suffering god, and a god in need of human help. These concessions to the constantly experienced evil under the sun made the question of god’s responsibility for the deplorable state of the world meaningless, but provoked all the more the other question of whether god was able to render man help and protection against earthly and spiritual mischief or at least to lighten and compensate his suffering.

This dilemma, to uncompromisingly uphold the dualistic dogma of god’s exoneration from evil and at the same time to encourage trust and hope in god’s helpfulness, was to a certain degree solved by the grandiose myth of a god developing in history, of a historical god.



At the first clash of good and evil the divine world in its self-sufficient, peaceful harmony was helplessly exposed to the attack of the powers of darkness. The danger could be temporarily averted through god's subsequent self-sacrifice – in the person of the First Man, his son, and his sons's sons—as a stupefying bait for the demons. The effect of the sacrifice and the delay of the demonic attack gave god the chance to prepare his world for battle. He evoked the militant force of the Second Evocation that gained a peril-averting victory over the demons. The sons of the First Man, the World Soul, however, remained under the sway of the demons. The fate of the First Man and the imprisonment of his sons led to the development of a divine counterpart of the eternal demonic *concupiscentia*, the victims' desire to be saved and the divine desire to save its lost part. Thus perfected, god puts his superior wisdom to good use. With the clever means developed by the deities of the Third Evocation, the work of the progressive liberation of the World Soul is being undertaken and continued up to the end of the cosmos, though it could not be completely accomplished. A small remainder of irredeemable particles of the World Soul remains with the demons and shares their eternal imprisonment in the *Bōlos*. God emerges from the cosmic battle as a somewhat injured winner, an incomplete god, an idea that went, as Augustine and others stated (Baur, 1831 = 1973, pp. 29-40), against the classical definition of god as a perfect being and of evil as mere *absentia boni*. But this was not the Manichean concern. Their concern was the ultimate return of the divine world to the aboriginal state of self-sufficient, peaceful harmony. In later times the majority of Mani's followers came to minimize as far as possible the consequences of Mani's theodicy. They either denied the irredeemable fate of any part of the World Soul (Ebn al-Nadim, ed. Flügel, p. 58, ll. 9-10, p. 90; tr. Dodge 1970, p. 783), or they maintained that the divine world resigned itself to its loss and would no longer miss its lost parts (Andreas and Henning, 1934, p. 851, ll. 12-22 = Henning, 1977, I, p. 278).

A deity like this could be expected to do his best to redeem human souls from the prison of their bodies for a happy life in the hereafter. But success could not be guaranteed. It was not the main concern of the redeeming gods to ensure a blessed human life on earth. It is the sublunar gods of the five Light Elements, the active aspect of the World Soul, as it were, who alleviated the conditions of everyday life as much as possible (Sundermann, 1997, pp. 15-16). Besides, the Manicheans did what all the world practiced against any kind of mischief: they administered magic spells (Henning, 1947 = 1977, II, pp. 273-300; Durkin-Meisterernst, 2004; Morano, 2004) or interpreted omnia (Reck



and Sundermann, 1997, pp. 7-23 = Sundermann, 2001, pp. 761-78).

The suffering god is the World Soul, it is not the translunar and the soul-redeeming pantheon, even if they may miss their relatives imprisoned on earth. But as the sons of the First Man, the “soul” of the “Father of Greatness,” the World Soul is not only a part of the world of light, but also a part of its highest god. So one could argue that the suffering World Soul is the suffering god himself, and whatever evil befalls the World Soul happens to god himself. Not only is god not the one who produces evil or he who does not prevent it, he is even the victim of evil himself.

The god in need of human help is again the World Soul. How this dependency is to be understood and how the human help worked was described under “Ethics.” It should be added here that the god in need of human help is one of the main topics of Manichean mythology and poetry and perhaps the core of Manichean practiced piety. A substantial part of Iranian Manichean poetry consists of hymns in praise of the World Soul or expressing the complaint of the World Soul (Durkin-Meisterernst, 2006). A long hymn cycle, *Gōwišn ī grīw zīndag* “The Sermon on the Living Self” (or “The Speech of the Living Self”), thematized the honorable and the disgraceful treatment of the World Soul by mankind (cf. the published parts in Andreas and Henning, 1933, pp. 318-21 = 1977, I, pp. 215-18; Sims-Williams, 1981, pp. 239-40; complete edition Sundermann, forthcoming).

Much more could be said about Manichean theology. It had a polytheistic, an emanistic and a pantheistic, and even, for the very first and last times, a monotheistic aspect. It was mythical, but the myth was known to be no more than an image, presenting a temporal diversification of the divine unity (Biruni’s *India*, in Adam, 1969, pp. 4-5, cf. also *EIr.* entry “Manichean Pantheon”; Polotsky, 1935, pp. 247-48 = Widengren, ed., 1977, p. 110). All these aspects are not necessarily contradictory. They rather represent the rich variety of Manichean theological concepts as applied to the ideas of divine formation and development, the sublunar and the translunar spheres of divine reality, and perhaps even the mythical and the abstract view of divine nature. But Manicheism shared one or the other of these features with other religions and doctrines. It seems as if Mani wanted to convince the world that all possible types of theological speculation had their place in the harmonious system of his doctrine. The unique property of Manichean theology is its theodicy. It justifies the assessment that Manicheism is more than the sum of its syncretistic components.



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