



MANICHEISM II. THE MANICHEAN PANTHEON

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ii. THE MANICHEAN PANTHEON

In this article, the gods of the Manicheans are considered collectively with regards to their names and functions.

Sources. Accounts of Manichean cosmogony are the most important sources for the understanding of the Manichean pantheon. The best available version is undoubtedly Theodore Bar Kōnay's abstract in his *Liber Scholiorum* (ed. Addai Scher, 1960; French tr. Hespel and Draguet, 1982) not only because of its concise and systematic rendering but also because it is composed in Syriac, an Aramaic dialect very close to Mani's mother-tongue (for a comprehensive survey of other Manichean and non-Manichean cosmogonical sources see [COSMOGONY AND COSMOLOGY iii](#)).

Next in importance are discourses on the deeds and merits of prominent gods. In the Eastern tradition the "Sermon on the Light-Nous" (*Manohmed rōšn wifrās*; ed. Sundermann, 1992a) and the "Sermon on the Soul" (*Gyān wifrās*, i.e. on the Living Soul; ed. Sundermann, 1997) are of particular significance. Several chapters of the Coptic *Kephalaia* also discuss various gods in some detail (e.g. *Keph.* 21-22: Father of Greatness; *Keph.* 51, 53, 72, 74: First Man and his five sons; *Keph.* 32, 43, 54: Living Spirit; *Keph.* 34-35, 46, 65, 66: Third



Messenger and Sun; *Keph.* 95: Virgin of Light; *Keph.* 38, 103: Light Nous).

Valuable information can also be gleaned from hymns in praise of divine beings, such as Mid. Pers. and Parth. hymns to the Living Soul (Andreas-Henning, 1933, pp. 318-21; Andreas-Henning, 1934, pp. 870-78), to the Third Messenger and Sun god (Andreas-Henning, 1934, pp. 883-90), to Jesus (Andreas-Henning, 1933, pp. 312-18; Andreas-Henning, 1934, pp. 878-83), and also from various Coptic Hymns (ed. Allberry, 1938, pp. 49-97, 120-26). Hymnic enumerations of gods offer brief summaries of the pantheon (see examples in Waldschmidt-Lentz, 1933, pp. 545-62), as do word-lists of divine beings (Sundermann, 1994, pp. 452-62; repr. Sundermann, 2001, pp. 833-43).

Divine categories and their terminology. The Manicheans adopted the different Zoroastrian terms designating gods, which were in common use in 3rd-century Iran, namely Mid. Pers. *bay* and *yazad* and Parth. *bag* and *yazad*. They developed in both of these languages a fixed terminological system for designating individual gods, invariably saying *Ohrmezd bay* and *bay Zurwān*, but *Mihr yazad* and *Narisah yazad*. This use of terminology has no basis in Mani's own Syriac tongue, however. It is otherwise in *Keph.* 22 (Gardner, p. 68), which distinguishes between "gods" (*noute*), "rich ones" (*rmmao*) and "[angels]" (*aggelos*). *Keph.* 50 (Gardner, pp. 133-34) explains the difference between these terms: "gods" are, according to its definition, those beings which were "evoked" by (see below), or emanated from, the Father of Greatness himself, and in turn they evoke the "rich ones" and what the "rich ones" evoke are called "angels," both in the eternal world of light of the Father and in the nether world of the cosmos. But these terminological distinctions have remained without any real consequence for Manichean theology, except for the differentiation between gods and angels (cf. Allberry, ed., 1938 p. 213, l. 21: the redeemed believers will be "added to the number of the angels") which is also well known in Eastern Manichean texts (e.g. Parth. Mani. 137 I, recto, ll. 5-8: "Full of mercy is this day of confession of the "gods" (*yazdān*, i.e. of the elect), of the assembly of gods (*bagān*) and angels (*frēštagān*)," (somewhat differently Henning, 1945, p. 485, n. 7). The "rich ones" are evidently what Mandaic texts call the *uthri* "riches" (cf. Rudolph, 1993, p. 357). They therefore must be a common Mandaic and Manichean heritage, and they belong to Mani's own theological concepts.

It is possible that the tripartite structure of the divine world is reflected in Šahrastāni's distinction between "angels, gods and *awliā*" (Gimaret-Monnot, 1986, p. 658). Although translators render *awliā* as "saints," another possible



meaning would be “lords, possessors, or owners” which is closer to “rich one.” Cf. also “(1) Light Gods, (2) Angels and Elements, and (3) Powers (*z'wrkynd*),” in the Sogd. Text M 178, ll. 5-7; Henning, 1948, pp. 307-308).

Manichean theology. The approximately forty Manichean gods and goddesses mentioned in doctrinal and hymnic texts seem to bear witness to a markedly polytheistic theology. This impression is contradicted, however, by certain classical descriptions, which present the Manichean cosmogony and cosmology in philosophical terms and concepts. The characteristic example is Alexander of Lycopolis (see Van der Horst and Mansfeld, 1974; Villey, 1985) who calls the First Man “Soul,” the Spiritus Vivens “Demiurge,” the Third Messenger “another power,” and the demoness Āz “Matter” (*Hylē*). Simplicius describes the Manichean system and its actors in an even more abstract way (Text in Adam, 1969, pp. 71-74).

Islamic sources, namely Ebn al-Nadim’s *Fehrest* (ed. Flügel, pp. 52-58, 86-90) and Šahrastāni’s *Ketāb al-melal wa’l-neḥal* (tr. Gimaret and Monnot, 1986, pp. 658-59), tend to avoid direct reference to some Manichean deities as gods, mentioning them by their proper names only, perhaps in order to conceal from their Islamic readers the polytheistic appearance of the Manichean doctrine. Most of them are called “angels” (*malak*) rather than “gods” (*elāh*). But even the Manichean myth itself makes it clear that there is, strictly speaking, only one eternal and all-embracing god, limited only by the Evil, namely the Father of Greatness. All the other deities, whether they are specified as gods or merely called angels, are no more than his “evocations.” (Text T. II K. 2a, A. von Le Coq, ed., 1911 [1912], p. 22, calls the Father of Greatness the elder brother and sister of all the other gods.)

To describe their origin Mani avoided the actual term for the concept of procreation replacing it by Syr. *qrā* (Bar Kōnay, *Liber Scholiorum*, ed. Scher, 1960, p. 313, l. 27), lit. “call,” meaning “to evoke by creative word.” The creative word sets in motion an emanation, which results in a hypostasis. It is not a *creatio ex nihilo*. The First Man, for instance, is ultimately regarded as his father’s own Self and Soul (*ibid.*, p. 313, l. 26: *’l bnpšy ’zln’* “But I shall go myself,” lit. “in my self/soul”).

In the same way as the multiplicity of the pantheon took shape at the beginning of cosmic history, it will, after the fulfillment of its tasks, return to and into the First God (*Keph.* 39, also M 5750, Mid. Pers.; cf. Sundermann, 1992b, pp. 305-18; repr. Sundermann, 2001, pp. 667-81). This does not only



follow from the events of cosmic history, Mani has described it himself in an important passage of his *Treasury of the Living* quoted by Biruni in his *India* (*Ketāb taḥqiq mā le'l-hend*): “The resplendent hosts will be called young women and virgins, fathers and mothers, sons, brothers and sisters, because such is the custom in the books of the prophets. In the country of joy there is neither male nor female and there are no limbs to be covered. They all bear living bodies. They do not differ from each other in weakness and force, in length and shortness, in figure and looks; they are like similar lamps which are lighted by the same lamp and nourished by the same material. The reason for such naming is the struggle of the two realms” (ed. and tr. Sachau, I, pp. 19, ll. 2-9, 39; Taqizadeh and Afšār Širāzi, 1956, pp. 211, l. 16-212, l. 1; Adam, 1969, pp. 4-5). In the light of this explanation it would be more correct to regard the Manichean pantheon as a manifold, complex manifestation of the Manichean original divinity, and Manichean theology as a kind of polymorph monotheism. This has been recognized clearly and emphasized by Henning (1947, p. 39).

Not only were the Manichean gods of a temporary nature, some of them could also change their appearance whenever or however it was desirable. This was the case with the First Man (Baur, 1831; repr. 1973, pp. 55, 63), the Third Messenger, the Virgin of Light, the twelve Virgins of Light, and also the Living Spirit (Sundermann, 1991, pp. 339-42; repr. Sundermann, 2001, pp. 827-31), when they seduced the demons in female and male forms. A change of appearance is also attributed to Jesus the Splendor on his way down to Adam on earth, and when he “clothed” himself in Eve (Sundermann, 1994, pp. 317-27; repr. Sundermann, 2001, pp. 877-88). Certain other deities are described sometimes as persons, sometimes as objects or abstract concepts, such as the Light Elements, which can be also the sons of the First Man, his garments, or his armor. The five sons of the Living Spirit can be five heroic warriors or five ethical concepts. The Twelve Virgins of Light also personify twelve virtues, and the Perfect Man is likewise the Column of Glory.

Manichean theology was claimed unreservedly to be a form of monotheism in the Christian milieu of North Africa towards the end of the fourth century CE. Felix, in his dispute with St. Augustine, did not hesitate to say, concerning the pantheon of his creed, *hoc unum sunt omnes* (“that one (being) are are all (gods)”) (Decret, 1991, p. 61, n. 7). The defenders of Manicheism stressed the uniqueness of god, less against polytheism than the Christian accusation of dyotheism (cf. Decret, 1970, pp. 197-201; idem, 1978, p. 295). This was because



the Manicheans were accused of having made the Prince of Darkness into an original, self-existing principle, independent of the good God, and thus endowed with the qualities of a deity *per definitionem*. What the Manicheans themselves did not accept was the Christian and Jewish (and philosophical) type of consequent monotheism, which logically resulted in confessing God as the lord over good and evil (cf. *Keph.* 112, 120; Allberry, ed., 1938, p. 57, ll. 3-12; *Decret, op. cit.*).

The functional structure of the Manichean pantheon. It was the task of the Manichean pantheon to overcome the attack of the powers of darkness and to render those powers harmless forever. This was achieved by three successions of gods, which correspond to the three acts of the Manichean cosmogony, cosmology and eschatology respectively: 1) the redemption of the World of Light from the attack of Darkness; 2) the creation of the cosmos as a prison for the demons and an instrument for the liberation of the Living Soul; and 3) the process of the liberation of the particles of the Living Soul from their imprisonment in demonic matter.

This has led to the evocation of the following essentially triadic groups of gods. First group: i. Father of Greatness (Syr. *'b' drbwt'*, Mid. Pers. *pyd 'y wzrgyh*, by *zrw'n*, Parth. *pydr wzrgyft*, Sogd. *'zrw' βγγγ*, etc.; cf. Sundermann, 1979, sub 2/1, 3/1, 4/1; Coptic names: Lindt, 1992, pp. 12-13; Chinese names: Bryder, 1985, pp. 121-22; further names: Polotsky, 1933, p. 66; Vermes-Lieu, 2001, p. 45, n. 32). The Father of Greatness is, strictly speaking, the uncreated member of the first sequence (on his role, see below, and Van Tongerloo, 1994, pp. 329-42). ii. Mother of Life/of the Living (Syr. *'m' dhy'*, Mid. Pers. *m'dr 'y zyndg'n*, Parth. *'rd'w'n m'd*, Sogd. *'rd'w'n m't* etc., also called Great Spirit, Parth. *w'd wzrg*; cf. Sundermann, 1979, sub 2/2, 4/2; Copt. names: Lindt, 1992, p. 42; Chin. names: Bryder, 1985, p. 121; further names: Polotsky, 1933, p. 66; Vermes-Lieu, 2001, p. 46, n. 33). The Mother of Life is the immediate origin of the First Man and supports the Living Spirit in his work. (On the Mother of Life, see further Tongerloo, 1997, pp. 361-64.) iii. First Man (Syr. *'nš' qdmy'*, Mid. Pers. *'whrmyzd by*, Parth. *mrd (whm) hsyng*, *mrdwhm nxwyn*, *'whrmyzdbg*, Sogd. *Xwrmzt'βγ*, *'δβγ*; cf. Sundermann, 1979, sections 2/3, 3/3, 4/3; Copt. names: Lindt, 1992, p. 53; Chin. names: Bryder, 1985, p. 121; further names: Vermes-Lieu, 2001, p. 46, n. 34), also called the "First Enthymesis" (Mid. Pers. *hndyšyšn nxwystyn*, Chin. *xian yi*; Bryder, 1985, p. 123). The First Man is instrumental in diverting the attack of the demons of darkness on the world of light. His rescue of the world of light is described both as a sacrifice to protect its integrity and as an heroic



victory over the demons. In any case, the First Man is not under the power of darkness.

The only divine beings to remain under the sway of the demons are the five sons of the First Man, who are the Five Light Gods (Syr. *ḥmš' 'lh' zywn'*, Mid. Pers. *(')mhr'spnd'n*, Parth. *pnj rwšn*, Sogd. *mrδ'spndt* etc.). They are also called the First Man's five weapon, or garments, and form together with their father the third part of the first group of gods. They are the five Light Elements: ether, wind, light, water and fire. As the light substance devoured by the demons, they are the Living Soul imprisoned and cut up in the dark matter (Syr. *npš' ḥyt'*, Mid. Pers. *gryw zyndg*, Parth. *gryw jywndg*, similarly Soghd. Which also has *jwndy yryw*; cf. Sundermann, 1979, sub 2/4, 3/4, 4/4; Copt. names: Lindt, 1992, pp. 62-63; Chin. names: Bryder, 1985, pp. 121-22, 123; cf. also Polotsky, 1933, pp. 71-72; Vermes-Lieu, 2001, p. 46, n. 35). The five sons of the First Man are the object of salvation.

The god of the Answer (Syr. *'ny'*, Mid. Pers. *'zdygr yzd*, Parth. *pdw'xtg*, Sogd. *Pδw'xtg*, cf. Sundermann, 1979, sub 2/5, 4/5; in Copt. also "hearing, obedience," cf. Lindt, 1992, p. 72; Chin. names: Bryder, 1985, pp. 121, 122, 123) is often classified as the sixth son of the First Man. (For his function, see below concerning God of the Call in the second group.)

Second group. i) Friend of Lights (Syr. *ḥbyb nhyr'*, Mid. Pers. *rwšn'n xw'ryst*, Parth. *fryhrwšn*, Sogd. *fryy rwšn βγγy*; cf. Sundermann, 1979, sub 2/6; Copt. names: Lindt, 1992, p. 76; Chin. names: Bryder, 1985, pp. 122, 123; further names: Polotsky, 1933, pp. 66-67), a deity whose function is unclear apart from the task of bringing forth the Great Architect within a triadic series of mainly demiurgic gods. ii) Great Architect (Syr. *bn rb'*, Mid. Pers. *r'z 'y wzrg*, *r'z 'yg rwšn*, Parth. *b'myzd*, Sogd. *β'm βγγy* etc., cf. Sundermann, 1979, sub 1/7, 2/7, 3/7, 4/7; Copt. names: Lindt, 1992, p. 79; Chin. names: Bryder, 1985, p. 122). The Great Architect, on the command of the Third Messenger, builds the New Paradise, which is the goal of redeemed souls, and a prison for the powers of darkness. iii) The Living Spirit (Syr. *rwḥ' ḥy'*, Mid. Pers. *myhryzd*, Parth. *w'd jywndg*, Sogd. *w'd jywndg*, *w'δ jywndyy* etc.; cf. Sundermann, 1979, sections 2/8, 3/8, 4/8; Copt. names: Lindt, 1992, p. 86, also termed Father of Life in Coptic; Chin. names: Bryder, 1985, p. 122; further names: Vermes-Lieu, 2001, p. 48, n. 43). The Living Spirit liberates the First Man from the demonic powers of darkness, and as the demiurge he builds the cosmos from the bodies of slain demons and places the remaining demons in the prison of this world.



As in the case of the First Man, who is the third in the first triadic gods, the Living Spirit is accompanied by five (or six) sons: the Keeper of Splendor, King of Honor, Adamant of Light (see Van Lindt, 1993, pp. 95-105), King of Glory and the Porter, also called Atlas (Syriac and Iranian names: Sundermann, 1979, sub 2/9, 3/9, 4/9; Copt. names: Lindt, 1992, p. 91; Chin. names: Bryder, 1985, pp. 122, 123; further names: Vermes-Lieu, 2001, p. 49, n. 49). Their task is to guard and maintain the building of the cosmos as a prison of the demons.

The god of the Call, or Summons (so Gardner; Syr. *qry'*, MP. *xwndg,myzdg'tc [yzd]*, Parth. *xrwštg*, Sogd. *xrwštg*, cf. Sundermann, 1979, sections 2/10, 4/10; Copt. names: Lindt, 1992, p. 72; Chin. names: Bryder, 1985, pp. 121, 123) is regarded as the sixth son of the Living Spirit. He is the awakening call that was once sent to the defeated, unconscious First Man. Once roused, the First Man answered the call, and both Call and Answer (or Obedience) became united into one new god, the Enthymesis of Life (Syr. [*mḥšbt' dḥy'*], Mid. Pers. *hndyšyšn zyndg*, Parth. *'ndyšyšn jywndg*, Sogd. [*jw(°)ndc šm'r'*], Copt. *sačne*, Chin. *Si*, Arabic [*hammāma*]; not in Sundermann, 1979, but in Sundermann "God and his adversary in Manicheism..." forthcoming). The Enthymesis of Life is explained by Henning (Andreas-Henning, 1943, p. 878, n. 4) as the Soul's natural will for redemption.

The third group is divided into two branches which, as H. J. Polotsky has recognized (1935, p. 253; repr. in Widengren, 1977, p. 118), correspond to the two cosmic vehicles of redemption, the Sun and the Moon.

a. *The "sun-group"*: i) Third Messenger (Syr. *ʔzgd'* "the Messenger," Mid. Pers. *nryshyzd*, Parth. *hrdyg fryštg,nrysfyzd, myhr (yzd)*, Sogd. *'štykw pr'ʔ-št'k, nryšnx βyy, myšyy βyyy* etc., cf. Sundermann, 1979, sub 2/11, 3/11, 4/11; Copt. names: Lindt, 1992, p. 115; Chin. names: Bryder, 1985, pp. 121, 122, 123; further names: Polotsky, 1933, p. 67), the redeemer of the Living Soul, mainly from its macrocosmic bonds. He seduces the female and male archons, and sets the sun, the moon and the cosmic wheel in motion, but, as the main deity in the sun-group, he is also instrumental in redeeming human souls. ii) The Twelve Virgins (Syr. *trt'sr' btwlt'*, Mid. Pers. *qnyg'n rwšn'n*, Parth. *qnyg'n*, Sogd. *XII βypwryšt*; cf. Sundermann, 1979, sub 2/12; Copt. names: Lindt, 1992, p. 173; Chin. names: Bryder, 1985, pp. 122, 123). Their function is the same as that of the Virgin of Light (see below, and also Van Tongerloo, 1997, pp. 366-67). iii) The Column of Glory (Syr. *'stwn šwbḥ'*, Parth. *b'mystwn*; cf. Sundermann, 1979, sub 2/13.1; Copt. names: Lindt, 1992, p. 179; Chin. names: Bryder, 1985, pp. 121, 122, 123), also called the Perfect Man (Syr. not preserved, Mid Pers. *mrd ʔg*



'*spwr*, *srwšhr'y*, Parth. *mrd 'spwryg*, Sogd. *srwšrt βγyy*, etc., cf. Sundermann, 1979, sub 2/13.1, 3/13.1, 4/13.1; Copt. names: Lindt, 1992, p. 179; Chin. names: Bryder, 1985, p. 122; further names: Polotsky, 1933, p. 67). He collects the redeemed souls and light particles and leads them up to the moon. An eschatological variant of this god is the (god of the) Final Statue (Syr. not preserved, Parth. '*stwmynyzd*'; cf. Sundermann, 1979, section 2/13.2; Copt. names: Lindt, 1992, p. 183; Chin. names: Bryder, 1985, pp. 121, 122, 123).

b. *The "moon-group"*: i) Jesus the Splendor (Syr. *yyšw' zywn'*, Mid. Pers. *yyšw' spyxt'n, m'h (yzd)*, Parth. *yyšw' zyw', m'h (yzd)*, Sogd. *yyšw', m'x (βγyy)*, etc., cf. Sundermann, 1979, sub 1/14, 2/14, 3/14, 4/14; Copt. names: Lindt, 1992, pp. 143-44; Chin. names: Bryder, 1985, p. 121; Greek name: Polotsky, 1933, pp. 67-68), who serves mainly, but not exclusively, as the redeemer of the Living Soul from the microcosmic sphere of mankind. He arouses Adam, emanates the Light Nous, and, through the Light Nous, he sends out all the subsequent apostles of truth, including Mani. (On the manifold aspects of the Jesus figure in Manicheism, see christ in manichaeism; see further, Franzmann, 2000, pp. 220-246, esp. pp. 229-34; Richter, 2001, pp. 174-84). ii) Virgin of Light (Syr. not preserved, Mid. Pers. *knygrwšn*, Parth. *knygrwšn, sdwys*, Sogd. *qnygrwšn, rwxšn' βγpwryc*, etc., cf. Sundermann, 1979, section 2/15, 3/15, 4/15; Copt. names: Lindt, 1992, p. 173; Chin. names: Bryder, 1985, p. 123; further names: Polotsky, 1933, p. 68; Vermes-Lieu, 2001, p. 51, n. 58). She is active mainly in the sky, where she fights against the demons of thunderstorms (see further Van Tongerloo, 1997, pp. 364-71). iii) The Light Nous (Syr.: not preserved, Mid. Pers. *whmn (yzd)*, Parth. *mnwhmyd rwšn*, Sogd. *mnwhmydrwšn, whmn rwšn, δymztyzn βγyy*, etc.; cf. Sundermann, 1979, section 2/16.1, 3/16.1, 4/16.1; Copt. names: Lindt, 1992, p. 165; Chin. names: Bryder, 1985, p. 123; further names: Polotsky, 1933, pp. 68-70), who is also called Holy Spirit and Living Spirit (Sundermann, 1979, sub 2/16.2; Chin. name: Bryder, 1985, p. 121), is the divine, redeeming force in the Manichean religion. He brings the nature of the New Man to power in the redeemed man and subdues the demonic spirit of matter. A whole volume of articles is devoted to the different aspects of the figure of the Light Nous (A. Van Tongerloo and J. Van Oort, eds., 1995), as well as the Parthian "Sermon on the light-Nous" (Sundermann, 1992a).

The group of deities redeeming the Living Soul is rich in further emanations, which are attributed either to Jesus the Splendor or to the Light Nous. They all play their role in individual eschatology. It is worth mentioning the Great Judge, who will sit in judgment over the souls of the deceased (Syr. not



preserved, Parth. *d'dbr r'stygr*, Sogd. *rštyy 'x̄tw*; Bactrian *rštyg l'dbr*: Gershevitch, 1984, p. 275 ,cf. Sundermann, 1979, sub 2/17; Copt. names: Lindt, 1992, pp. 193-94; Chin. names not attested), and the Light Form, who is accompanied by three angels who will approach the souls of the deceased and lead them on their way to paradise (Polotsky, 1933, p. 72; cf. *Keph.* 7) as well as the “Counterpart” of the apostle, that is Mani’s twin spirit or Syzygos (Mid. Pers. *nrjmyg*, Parth. *ymg (rwšn)*, Sogd. *ym'krwšn*; Sundermann, 1981, pp. 166, 176, 192; Polotsky, 1933, p. 72; cf. *Keph.* 7; also forthcoming De Blois, “Manes’ Twin’”).

The structure of the third group of gods is without doubt the most complicated one. Its arrangement as described here (cf. *Keph.* 25) may be contradicted by models presented in other Manichean texts. In *Keph.* 7, for instance, the following sequence of emanations is postulated: Father of Greatness, Third Messenger, Jesus the Splendor, Light Nous, Light Form and Three Angels (on this problem in general, see Heuser, 1998, pp. 3-108, esp. pp. 90-103).

The name of the Third Messenger (also rendered as Third Ambassador) is proof that the tripartite system of the Manichean pantheon is not merely a construct of scholars, although there is no god called the First or the Second Messenger (except in Chinese nomenclature which does have the name *dier shi* “Second Messenger” for the Friend of Lights; Bryder, 1985, p. 123). Apart from the already-mentioned triadic grouping of Manichean deities, other numeric stylizations are also evident, such as pentads (five sons of the First Man, five sons of the Living Spirit) and the dodecadic group of the Twelve Virgins of Light. (Concise synopses of the Manichean pantheon are given in Boyce, *Reader*, pp. 9-10; and Tardieu, 1981, pp. 104-107.)

The pantheon was conceived in order to fulfill specific pre-cosmic or cosmological tasks. But that does not mean that, with the fulfillment of their designated work, the gods become inactive or disappear from the cosmic scene. On the contrary, a deity of the First Evocation (I) supports the demiurgical work, and deities of the First and Second Evocation (II) participate in the redemption of the Living Soul, as it is currently under the effect of the deities of the Third Evocation (III). The following examples may suffice to illustrate this point: The Mother of Life (I) takes part in the creation of the world out of the bodies of the demons killed by the Living Spirit (II). The Third Messenger (III) commissions the Great Architect (II) to erect the New Paradise and to build a prison for the enemies of the light. From the Call (II) of the Spirit of Life and the Answer (I) of the First Man a new god comes into being, the



Enthymesis of Life, who becomes instrumental in the soul-redeeming process.

It is not self-evident why a misogynistic religion such as Manicheism admits the existence and redeeming contribution of a number of female deities. Indeed, it is remarkable that in the First and Third Evocations of the Manichean pantheon, the second part in the triple sequence of gods is left to goddesses (Mother of Life (I), Twelve Virgins (III), Virgin of Light (III)). A plausible explanation is that in those cases there is still a trace of the older (Valentinian?) idea of a “spiritual procreation,” such that the father–mother–son pattern can be presupposed. In the First Evocation, this pattern has the character of a Trinity formula of the Gnostic type (cf. Leisegang, 1985, p. 345): God the Father, Mother (= Holy Spirit), Son (= Christ).

The description of the Manichean pantheon presented here is a simplified summary based on the original sources at our disposal. It comes closest to the abstract of the Manichean cosmogony presented by Theodore bar Kōnay, which, however, is defective in its final part.

The cosmic pantheon and its model in the World of Light. Although the World of Light and the nether world of the cosmos are totally different in nature and function, a certain degree of comparability cannot be denied. This is also true for the cosmic deities. Thus, the dodecadic circle of the divine aeons surrounding the Father of Greatness reappears as the Twelve Virgins (!) of Light (III). The five “dwellings” of the Father of Light are the same as the five members of the soul and the five sons of the Living Spirit (II). Moreover, the five sons of the First Man (I) reflect the “elements” of the World of Light (the *mrδ’spndt* of Sogd. M 178 /6/; see Henning, 1948, pp. 307-308). Since it is impossible to imagine anything more perfect than the World of Light, the imitation of some of its structures in the cosmic world can only underline the well-arranged perfection of the worldly pantheon as well.

Sources of the Manichean theological system. It is natural to compare the Manichean sequences of gods deriving ultimately from the Father of Greatness with similar gnostic speculations. The Valentinian doctrine of syzygies is particularly apt for comparison (Rudolph, 1996; repr. Rudolph, 1965, pp. 647-48; Böhlig, 1988, pp. 326-28, 338). But a comparison also highlights the peculiarities of Manichean theology (cf. Polotsky, 1935, p. 248; repr. Widengren, ed., 1977, p. 111). There is hardly a trace left of the gnostic idea of a spiritual procreation of sequences of deities, from the First Father and his consort down to the last one, and until the origin of the world. This is because



the Manichean sequence of emanations does not imply a diminution of the quality of the light of succeeding beings (Bianchi, 1993, pp. 25-26), and also because it is not designed to separate the First God as much as possible from the evil of this world, but rather to guarantee the successful application of the necessary means of defense against worldly evil in due course. The Manichean doctrine of the Enthymesis of Death and Life can be compared with the Valentinian Enthymesis or “Lower Sophia,” who, out of desire to behold the Father God, became the origin of the material and psychic nature of the world (see further Sundermann, “God and his adversary in Manichaeism...” forthcoming).

The derivation of the files of Manichean gods from a Zoroastrian pattern, such as the successive creation of the divine pantheon as described in the Middle Persian *Bundahišn*, is less likely to be correct. A gnostic (most likely Valentinian) affiliation is suggested by the use of a number of gnostic terms and names to denote divine beings in the Manichean pantheon, such as the First Man, the Enthymesis of Death, the Virgin of Light, and the five parts of the Soul, namely “Reason, Mind, Intelligence, Thought, and Understanding.” They are also attested, as Rudolph and Tardieu have shown, in the *Eugnostos Letter 73* and in the *Sophia of Jesus Christ 95* (Rudolph, 1996; repr. Rudolph, 1965, pp. 646-47; Tardieu, 1984, pp. 355-57, 366-70).

The role of the gods in relation to the community and individual piety. Manichean hymns and psalms, which are preserved in large numbers in both the Coptic and the Iranian traditions, are mainly directed towards the deities and thus constitute a rich source for the understanding of the role of the gods in the religious practice of the community. In general, one can conclude that those deities to whom complete hymns are dedicated are also the principal ones, while gods of minor rank, receive, at the very most, a mere mention in invocative lists. The quantity and length of hymns dedicated to a particular deity may also be regarded as a measure of his or her reputation. On this basis, one may conclude that the deities of the Third Evocation as well as the Living Soul were the main object of Manichean devotion. It should not come as a surprise that praise and prayer were not restricted to the redeeming deities but addressed also to the suffering Living Soul, in view of the fact that the latter played a major role as the object of redemption in the ritual meal of the elect. Moreover, one means of setting free the light particles of the Soul was the chanting of hymns. Among the gods of the Third Evocation, it is primarily the Third Messenger and Jesus the Splendor who are addressed. A subordinate



role is played by the demiurgical deities of the Second Evocation, and among the deities of the First Evocation, it is the First Man who is given prominence.

In this context, the significance of the position and function of the Manichean First God, the Father of Greatness, needs to be highlighted. Not only is the Father of Greatness the origin of all the other gods of the Manichean pantheon, and not only does he manifest himself in the cosmic pantheon, but he remains at the same time the god of the World of Light beyond the cosmos. He is a member of the pentad of the World of Light, besides those 12 aeons who surround him who are called his sons, and the innumerable aeons around the inner circle of aeons, the Earth of Light and the Spirit of Life, which is the life-giving air of the World of Light (cf. Gharib, 2000, pp. 258-69).

However, it is stressed in Manicheism that it was the Father of Greatness himself who, of all the beings in the World of Light, stood up against the attack of the powers of Darkness (*Keph.* 63). He did so in the person of the First Man, who is called his own Soul and Self according to Alexander of Lycopolis (see above). He saved the World of Light at the cost of some of his own light substance. After this achievement he remained unmolested by the powers of Darkness, but that does not mean that he became a passive *deus absconditus*. (Cf. *Psalm-Book*, ed. Allberry, 1938, p. 161, 31-32: “One is the God that is hidden, that is revealed . . . silent . . . He it is that speaks also,” similarly *ibid.*, p. 171, 27-28). On the contrary, he is a deity who is often praised and invoked (see Boyce, 1960, p. 148, section 40.), and that can only mean that he constantly intervenes in the world on behalf of the Living Soul.

The involvement of the Father of Greatness in cosmic affairs finds a quasi-pantheistic expression in the well-attested dogma of the fourfold god “God, Light, Power and Wisdom” (where “God” can also be replaced by “Purity” or “Holiness”). Thus, in the Chinese *Hymn Scroll* (vv. 146a and 151a; cf. Waldschmidt-Lentz, 1933, pp. 488 and 489), and in the Chinese stone inscription of Fujian (Wushu, 1989, I, pp. 22-27; for a similar rock inscription beside the Manichean temple near Quanzhou, see Bryder, 1988, p. 206), the aspect of “Light” is represented by “Sun and Moon,” “Power” by the cosmic achievement of the Five Light Elements, and “Wisdom” by the redeeming gnosis of the Manichean church (Merkelbach, 1986, pp. 39-50; on the pantheistic aspect of Manichean theology, see also Baur, 1831 repr. Baur, 1973, pp. 41-45).

The hymns for the gods contained praise of them, prayers for the salvation of



souls, and lamentation over the fate of the Living Soul in the prison of darkness, but hardly any request for worldly goods, sound health, peace on earth, rich harvest, property etc. An easing of earthly troubles could have been expected most of all from the five Light Elements, as is explained in the “Sermon on the Soul” (Sundermann, 1997, pp. 14-16). The religious poetry of the Manicheans, their hymns and their psalms were large-scale compositions praising the redeeming gods as well as complaining about the miserable fate of the Living Soul. They reflect the essence of Manichean worship, namely to turn towards the suffering and redeeming deity.

The Manichean elect as gods. It was common to address high-ranking personalities in Sasanian Iran as *bay* “god, lord.” This was not alien to Manichean communities (Mani is repeatedly addressed in Parth. *bg 'wd 'nryw* “God/Lord and Savior”; see also Puech, 1979, pp. 356, 379). It exceeds mere Zoroastrian parlance, however, when the Manichean elect are addressed with the otherwise exclusively divine title of *yazad* (pl. *yazdān*). The reason for this remarkable practice is certainly some kind of deification of the Manichean clergy. A Coptic *Kephalaion* confirms this assumption (cf. *Keph.* 81, the fasting of the elect engenders angels; *Keph.* 88: “The elect are] gods as they stand firm in the image of the gods.”). This deification is, in my view, on account of the miraculous ability of the Manichean elect to liberate the particles of the Living Soul from what they eat during their sacramental meals, and thus to become redeemers of the deity of the Living Soul.

However, the human frailty of these “gods” could not have passed unnoticed. Thus, an Old Turkish hymn ended with the entreaty: “Forgive the sin of the gods!” (Parth. *yazdān āstār hirzā* in an Uigur hymn; cf. Zieme, 1975, pp. 28, 29; cf. also M 894 /V/3/ *yzd'n 'st'r hyrz'*, and (defective) M 870c /2/). The reason for the deification of the clergy may therefore have been to give prominence to the high rank of the elect above the lay people, rather than to raise the clergy onto equal standing with the divine pantheon. Furthermore, it has an almost Buddhist ring to it when a Coptic psalm makes Mani, as the Paraclete, an object of veneration by the gods (Allberry, ed., 1938, pp. 36-38).

The Iranian names of the Manichean gods. The Manicheans evidently had clear ideas about what characterized their outstanding divine beings. They stated, for instance, that the ideal personality should be mild like the First Man, severe like the Living Spirit, beautiful like the sun god (the Third Messenger), wise like the moon god (Jesus), and changeable like the goddess of lightning (the Virgin of Light; Le Coq, I, pp. 24-25).



And yet, it is hardly imaginable that the somewhat abstract and often complicated names of the Manichean divinities could have been of much help in making those gods – except for Jesus – into concrete objects of practical worship and belief (cf. Gardner, 1995, p. XXV). The simple believer was recommended to address his prayers to the sun and the moon, the visible residences and symbols of divinity, and of the Third Messenger and Jesus in particular (Puech, 1979, pp. 271-73; Klimkeit, p. 261, l. 20).

Proper names of familiar gods were given to the Manichean divinities in the East of Iran where the Manichean gods were identified with Zoroastrian equivalents. The gods remained Manichean throughout, and the Zoroastrian denominations were nothing more than adaptable renamings (Schaeder, 1927, pp. 135, 146). And yet it is likely that a god *Mihr* or *Ohrmazd* offered himself more readily for worship than a Third Messenger or a First Man. The Iranian renaming of the Manichean pantheon may well have strengthened the faith, and it may have given Eastern Manicheism a more polytheistic appearance than it originally had. North African Manicheism presented the radical counter-image, where the idea of divine monotheism was emphatically stressed.

Alien gods in the Manichean view. The gods of the Zoroastrian pantheon were neither rejected nor negated, but instead they were accommodated by being identified with similar Manichean deities. The rationale behind such treatment was the presupposition that the Zoroastrians had misunderstood and misinterpreted the nature of their own pantheon, and so it was up to the Manichean church to correct their theology.

It is also known that the Manicheans interpreted some details of Ancient Greek mythology as confirmation of their own worldview (cf. Baur, 1831; repr. Baur, 1973, pp. 81-82). But there is no indication so far that they treated the gods and goddesses of the Greco-Roman world like the Iranian gods. What we do know is that the Iranian example was repeated in Chinese Manicheism, where some Manichean deities came to be identified with certain Buddhist Bodhisattvas and Buddhas (Bryder, 1985, p. 122).

But even if such identification was widespread in Eastern Manichean theology, it must not be generalized universally. An obvious exception to the rule is the presentation of four Hindu deities on the famous Manichean miniature MIK 4979a /R/, who were identified by P. Banerjee as Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva and Gaṇeśa. Their suggested identification on a Manichean miniature with the



Manichean Fourfold God (God, Light, Power, Wisdom) is highly unlikely, mainly because they are given a lowly position at the bottom of the picture, below all the (human) clerics and warriors who are the actors in the scene. The repeatedly expressed alternative explanation of these gods as the protective spirits of the Manichean community in the *Čahār-Tuyri*-country is preferable (cf. Gulácsi, 2001, pp. 72-73). This would mean that the Hindu deities were accepted as gods, but given a subordinate and subservient function.

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