The Manichaeans of Kellis : religion, community, and everyday life

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Chapter 1. Introduction

> To my mother, my loved lady, very precious to me, the beloved of my heart: The one whose memory and worthy motherhood are sealed in my heart every hour; the one whose kindnesses and goodness that she performs for me at all times are sealed in my inmost thought. My mother, very precious to me, Maria. It is I, your son; in the Lord God—greetings (Matthaios to his mother).[1]

1.1 Introduction

What do you expect when you read someone else's mail? Instant recognition of a shared human bond? The same fears, hopes, or beliefs? Or rather the opposite: a profound, awkward feeling of being too privy to the interactions of others? Maybe you feel a mixture of both—curiosity and surprise, recognition and alienation—even when the letters date back more than sixteen hundred years. Papyrus letters convey the impression of close and personal information, directly from the mouth (or the pen) of an ancient author. This suggestion of intimacy creates a fiction that historians of everyday life use to familiarize the sources and subtly communicate a message of a shared human nature: even across vast distances in time and space, these people resemble us in our deepest feelings and emotions. Matthaios's letter to his mother Maria, cited at the outset of this chapter, vividly illustrates this point. A boy, traveling far away from his mother, expressing his affection for her in a most elegant manner. How different is he from you and me?

Intimate as it may feel, this passage may also surprise us, generating feelings of cultural distance and alienation. For modern readers, Matthaios's words feel over the top: too explicit and affectionate. This affectionate tone is but one indication of the cultural distance between past and present. The cited passage derives from a fourth-century Coptic letter, written on papyrus and found in an abandoned desert village in the Dakhleh Oasis. It came from a world very different from our own. It reminds us that what *we* expect to read, after sixteen hundred years, is not the same as what his mother expected to hear from him. When we use the letter to reconstruct a social and historical reality, we need to be aware of contextual factors, such as the underlying rhetorical structures and epistolary conventions.[2] Instead of offering direct insight into the emotions of Matthaios, the message was mediated through the rules and customs of ancient letter writing. The presence (or absence) of a scribe has to be taken into account, just as the epistolary conventions of the era, and the question of his mother's literacy. If she was illiterate, as most women of her time, she may have asked a

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[1] ⲧⲁⲙⲉⲩ ⲧⲁϫⲁⲓⲥ ⲧⲁⲙⲉⲣⲓⲧ᾽ [ⲉ]ⲧ᾽ⲁⲓ ⲛ̄ⲧⲟⲧ᾽ ⲧⲟⲛⲉ· ⲧⲱⲟⲩⲛⲉⲓⲉ ⲛ̄ⲡⲁϩⲏⲧ·ⲧⲉⲧⲉ ⲡⲥ̄ⲣ̄ⲡⲙⲉⲩⲉ ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ ⲧⲥ᾽ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ⲧⲙⲟ ⲉⲧ᾽ⲣ̄ⲱⲉⲩ ⲧⲁⲃⲉ ⲣ̄ⲛ̄ ⲡⲁϩⲏⲧ᾽ ⲛ̄ⲛⲟ ⲛⲓⲙ· ⲧⲉⲧⲉ ⲛⲉⲥⲛ̄ⲧⲙⲁⲣⲉ ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ ⲛⲉⲥⲁⲅⲁⲑⲟⲛ ⲉⲧⲥ᾽ⲉⲓⲣⲉ ⲛ̄ⲛⲁⲩ ⲛⲛⲓ ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲁⲓⲕⲱ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲧⲁⲃⲉ ⲣ̄ⲛ̄ ⲡⲁⲙⲉⲩⲉ ⲉⲧ᾽ⲣⲓⲣⲟⲩⲛ· ⲧⲁⲙⲉⲩ ⲉⲧ᾽ⲁⲓ ⲛ̄ⲧⲟⲧ ⲧⲟⲛⲟⲩ· ⲙⲁⲣⲓⲁ· ⲁⲛⲁⲕ ⲡⲉϣⲏⲣⲉ ⲣ̄ⲛ̄ ⲡϫⲁⲓⲥ ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ· ϫⲁⲓⲣⲉⲓⲛ· P.Kell.Copt. 25.1-8. The Coptic texts and most of the translations in this dissertation follow the editions, listed among the abbreviations.

[2] R. S. Bagnall, *Reading Papyri, Writing Ancient History* (London: Routledge, 1995). On the role of emotions in ancient letters, W. Clarysse, "Emotions in Greek Private Papyrus Letters," *Ancient Society* 47 (2017): 63-86.

relative, or the neighbors, to read her son's letter to her. So much for an intimate letter between mother and son.

Matthaios's brother Piene also wrote to his mother with elaborate phrases: "This is my prayer every hour to the Father, the God of Truth, that he may preserve you healthy in your body, joyful in your soul, and firm in your spirit," wishing that she "may find life in the kingdom for eternity."[3] What did he mean to say? Where did these words come from? Coptic letters from the same period, of which there are only a few, use similar polite wishes and prayer formulas, but not these specific words. In fact, the "Father, the God of Truth" is only once referred to in fourth-century letters outside the oasis. The phrase is, on the other hand, common in Manichaean texts. Would the boy's father have taught him to express himself in this way? In one of his letters, he addresses his wife and her family as "the children of the living race."[4] Again, an uncommon phrase with parallels in Manichaean literature. Why was invoking a Manichaean supernatural entity, known from a long and complex cosmological narrative that originated in third-century Mesopotamia, relevant in the Egyptian desert? If indeed we recognize a Manichaean deity in the "Father, the God of Truth," how much of this tradition can we safely assume to have been present in the author's context? Should we consider these Manichaean phrases as casual or strategic references to a deeply felt religious identity? If so, how would this religious group identity have affected the lives of the two boys? Would they have played with the neighbors' children? Would their mother have attended birthday parties in the village, or is it more probable that they secluded themselves within a semiclosed religious group?

Seemingly casual references to supernatural beings or the use of extraordinary self-designators open up another world, within and beyond the context of everyday life in the Dakhleh Oasis. Sometimes explicitly religious in tone, these short references in personal letters provide insight into the daily lives of individuals in a fourth-century village. The letters were part of a stunning amount of new papyri found in several Roman houses in one of the larger villages of the Dakhleh Oasis: Kellis (modern Ismant el-Kharab in the western desert of Egypt, roughly 350 km from the Nile). These letters offer valuable insight into everyday life in a Roman village in Egypt, as well as into the daily practices of its inhabitants. In particular, we learn about people we would call "Manichaeans," a name they never used themselves. Manichaeans were made famous by the polemics of religious and imperial authorities in Late Antiquity. They were *the* religious "other," perceived as an imminent threat to the Roman state as well as to an orthodox Christian way of life. Authentic Manichaean texts in several languages have amended this perspective, even though they frequently dealt with theological or liturgical issues only. At Kellis, such documents have also been found, but primarily in the context of personal letters and business accounts. This unprecedented discovery formed the incentive for this dissertation. It stands out for two reasons. First, these personal letters and business accounts are the largest set of documentary

[3] ⲛ̄ⲛⲟ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲡⲉⲓ̈ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲁⲱⲗⲏⲗ ⲫⲁ ⲡⲱⲧ᾽ ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲙⲉ ⲧ̣ⲁ̣[ⲣ]ⲉⲕⲣⲁ̈ⲓⲥ ⲁⲣⲟ ⲉⲣⲉⲟⲩ[ⲁ]ⲭ᾽ ⲉⲛ̄ ⲡⲉ̣[ⲥ]ⲱ̣ⲙ̣ⲁ ⲉⲣⲉ̣ⲣⲉⲱⲉ ⲉⲛ̄ ⲧⲉϥⲩⲭⲏ ⲉ̣[ⲣ]ⲉⲧⲁ̣ⲭ̣[ⲣⲁⲓⲧ᾽ ⲉⲛ̄] ⲡⲉⲡⲛ̄ⲁ̣ and [ⲧ]ⲉ̣ⲃⲓⲙⲉ ⲙ̣̄ⲡ̣ⲱⲛⲉ̣ ⲉⲛ̄ [ⲧ]ⲙⲛ̄ⲧ̄ⲣ̄ⲣⲟ ⲫⲁⲁ[ⲛ]ⲏ̣ⲉ P.Kell.Copt. 29.7-10 and 12-13 (Piene to Maria) found in House 3, room 6.

[4] ⲛ̄ⲱⲛⲣⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲣⲉⲓⲧⲉ ⲉⲧⲁⲛⲉ̣ P.Kell.Copt. 22.5 (Makarios to Maria) found in the same House 3, room 6.

evidence for late antique Manichaeans, providing a unique, novel perspective on the role of this religion in daily life. With the exception of three Greek Manichaean letters from Oxyrhynchus, the Manichaean letters from Kellis are the *only* extant evidence of this type from the Roman era found so far. Second, they are also the oldest datable Manichaean documents.[5] Therefore, I see these new documents as an important new step in a sequence of discoveries that have transformed the academic study of Manichaeism.

These newly found Manichaean sources offer the opportunity to study Manichaeans in Egypt *from below,* adding a new layer of insight to previous reconstructions that were mainly based on texts from an elite perspective. Apart from informing us about the specificities of Egyptian Manichaeism, this discovery sheds light on fundamental questions about the transregional nature of Manichaeism, as well as its transformation in local settings. It offers new sources, of an exceptional type, to consider the specific appeal of Mani's church in the widely varied and diverse regions of the ancient world. On another level, these texts, and their material context, speak to the wider question of the impact of religion in everyday life in Late Antiquity. They enable scholars of Manichaeism to contribute to the ongoing conversations about lived ancient religion and the dynamic between individual choice and institutional religious structure(s).

1.2 Aims, Method, and Directions

This dissertation will take a two-pronged approach to these new sources. First, it brings an everyday perspective to the practices of Manichaeans in fourth-century Kellis. Developing a theoretical framework of "everyday groupness," I will explore where and how Manichaeans practiced their religion in their daily lives, a topic largely unaddressed in previous studies. Building on modern sociological theories (on identity and everyday practices, individual religious agency, and group-formation) and historical approaches (microhistory, the linguistic turn), this study places individuals at its heart. It is from the personal letters of these individuals that we can glean impressions of their religious concerns and practices. I understand these relatively new sources first and foremost as elucidating the *local* situation of these individuals, rather than representing a blueprint of a reified Manichaean tradition.

The second aim of this study is to locate and contextualize the transformation(s) of "religion" in a specific historical context, as the fourth century witnessed the rise of disembedded, group-specific religions. This transformation has been described in broad

[5] Although the documents are older than the Medinet Madi documents and predate the Iranian, Latin, Greek and Chinese sources sometimes by centuries, it remains possible to argue that other sources reflect even earlier textual traditions. A few fragmentary personal letters from Manichaeans are known from 8th–9th-century Turfan. See most recently A. Benkato, "Sogdian Letter Fragments in Manichaean Script," *Studia Iranica* 45 (2016): 197-220; W. Sundermann, "Eine re-edition zweier manichäisch-soghdischer Briefe," in *Iranian Languages and Texts from Iran and Turan: Ronald E. Emmerick Memorial Volume*, ed. M. Macuch, M. Maggi, and W. Sundermann (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007), 403-21; M. Y. Yoshida, "Manichaean Sogdian Letters Discovered in Bazaklik," *École pratique des hautes études, section des sciences religieuses* 109 (2000): 233-36.

typologies as one from *primary* to *secondary* religion, or from *locative* to *utopian* religion.[6] Whatever the terminology used, the difference between the traditional religious practices of Greek, Roman, or Egyptian temple cults and the religious structure of these new "religions" is remarkable. In "secondary" or "utopian" religion, religion was no longer coterminous with their village or ethnic identity, but became transportable, internalized, and conceptualized as a discrete social unit: the religious community or group (I will use these two terms interchangeably throughout this dissertation). It is against the background of this transformation that we need to understand the Manichaeans, since they have been described frequently as the first "world religion." Within academic reflections on the transformation of religion in Late Antiquity, Manichaeism is presented as the second type of religion: transregional, text-based, with universal claims, and organized in well-structured, exclusive (but syncretistic) religious communities.[7] The Kellis material offers the first documentary material of Manichaeans in the Roman Empire that can put this academic narrative about large-scale religious transformation to the test in the context of an Egyptian village.

My interest in this transition is both conceptual and historical. The new material from Kellis sheds light on the way Kellites came to understand the Manichaean religion within a local context. As they lived in close proximity to Christians and worshippers of the Egyptian god Tutu, various types of religion were practiced all around them. On a microhistorical scale, therefore, the situation in Kellis reflects developments that took place in the Roman Empire at large. By closely examining the social organization of the Manichaeans in fourth-century Kellis, we will get a glimpse of the mechanisms of religious change: the instances where a distinct religious group seems to emerge, as well as the circumstances in which this specific conceptual frame was entirely absent. The discovery of Manichaean personal letters, theological texts, and liturgical documents in the same village will facilitate this double approach. Theological and liturgical documents contain conceptualizations of a shared group identity based on (what we call) religion, while the personal letters and business accounts at times reveal how this affected their everyday life.

This study takes place at the intersection of several disciplines, each with their own focus, expertise, and language. The historical study of Late Antiquity, Egypt, and Ancient Christianity is the first context, especially now that Manichaeism is classified by many

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[6] Jan Assmann designated this transformation as one from "primary" to "secondary" religions. The locative-utopian distinction is Jonathan Z. Smith's. The latter typology has been used extensively in modern scholarship, most recently by Greg Woolf, who stressed that "utopianism and locativism are better seen as two tendencies or emphases each offering different ritual and theological possibilities." G. Woolf, "Empires, Diasporas and the Emergence of Religions," in *Christianity in the Second Century. Themes and Developments*, ed. J. C. Paget and J. Lieu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 29; J. Assmann, *The Price of Monotheism* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009); J. Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), xiii-xiv; J. Z. Smith, "Native Cults in the Hellenistic Period," *History of Religions* 11, no. 2 (1971): 236-49.

[7] This characterization is almost a stereotype, but it features widely in the previous interpretations of the Kellis material. The Chapters of Part II will highlight how this religious community has been understood as "sectarian," "exclusive," and as both persecuted and secluded. See section 1.4 on the appeal of Mani's church.

scholars as a trajectory of Ancient Christianity/ies.[8] Scholars interested in "gnosticism," monasticism, the diversity of Early Christianity, and the interplay between theological debates and lived local practices will find much that is familiar in these pages. Scholars of religion will recognize the modern comparanda, even though these are sometimes relegated to the notes, as well as the theoretical terminology that I use to describe and analyze the ancient world. As most of the inscribed Kellis material was written on papyrus, with the occasional exceptions of ostraka and wooden tablets, I share the burden of papyrologists to interpret lacunas and read beyond the fragments. The excellent editions and translations of the Kellis papyri and ostraka have greatly facilitated this study. I will frequently refer to these editions. Despite occasional differences of opinion, they remain the first set of volumes to consult on the specifics of the social, economic, and religious lives of ancient Kellites. Where possible, I have labored to include the archaeological material of the village. This material is of great importance to scholars of Ancient Christianity, who are often as unaware of the Manichaeans as they are of the early church buildings and securely datable biblical manuscripts from Kellis (see Chapter 3).

As this dissertation will provide the first book-length description of the Manichaeans of Kellis, it will add to our knowledge of how Manichaeans lived and practiced their religion. This study will contribute to wider debates on how religious identities worked inside and outside of an institutional context, taking items from the realm of theological texts and placing them amid the ordinary errands of everyday life. The notion of a coherent "Manichaean community," or an abstract "Manichaeism," will therefore be related to the everyday choices of individuals and families. This focus and theoretical background will be discussed in the next chapter. It is necessary, however, to first introduce ancient and modern perspectives on Manichaeism and its appeal as a religious option.

1.3 Manichaeism in Late Antiquity

Manichaean hagiographical texts present the Manichaean church as superior to all. Their church surpassed all previous religions, as it constituted the accumulation of all previous wisdom. This sentiment was developed in a systematized list that discussed ten aspects in which they surpassed all other religions. In this text, they praised Mani because "you have opened our eyes, that this church surpasses by its primacy over the first [*or:* previous] churches."[9] Interestingly, modern scholarship often stresses the same success factors as those listed by the Manichaeans themselves. Many of the ten aspects of the success of Mani's

[8] For example, in N. A. Pedersen, *Demonstrative Proof in Defence of God. A Study of Titus of Bostra's Contra Manichaeos: The Work's Sources, Aims and Relation to Its Contemporary Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 6-12.

[9] [..] ⲁⲕⲧⲟⲩⲓⲉⲧⲛ̄ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ ⲭⲉ ⲧⲉⲕⲕⲗⲏⲥⲓⲁ ⲟⲩ[ⲁ]ⲧ̣ⲃ̣ⲉ̣ ⲛ̣ⲉ[ⲟⲩⲁⲓⲧ]ⲥ ⲡⲁⲣⲁ ⲛ̄ⲑⲁⲣ̄ⲡ ⲛ̄ⲛ̄ⲉⲕⲕⲗⲏⲥⲓⲁ 1 Keph. 151, 375.11-12, translation by Gardner in I. Gardner and S. N. C. Lieu, eds., *Manichaean Texts from the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), no. 91. The most complete version of this list is found in Coptic (1 Keph. 151), but it has also been transmitted in a Middle Persian version, which suggests that an earlier version goes back to the third century. For the Middle Persian version, see the translation and discussion in Gardner and Lieu, *MTRE*, 109-10; S. N. C. Lieu, ""My Church Is Superior..." Mani's Missionary Statement in Coptic and Middle Persian," in *Coptica - Gnostica - Manichaica: Mélanges offerts à Wolf-Peter Funk*, ed. P. H. Poirier and L. Painchaud (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 519-27.

church relate to its character as a "secondary" or "utopian" religion. The Manichaean church, the list proclaims, will become "manifest in every country and in all languages."[10] This universal and disembedded nature, as well as the central role of texts, have also been highlighted by modern scholars as defining features of the transformation of religion in Late Antiquity.

Manichaeism came into being in third-century Mesopotamia, from where it spread over the Sasanian Empire into the Roman Empire and China, where it continued to exist for centuries. The story of its rise and decline spans a long period and a wide variety of geographical and cultural settings. Manichaeism today is an extinct religion, but a large number of sources from various regions inform us about this ancient religion. The academic study of these sources started in the eighteenth century, though mainly through the lens of anti-Manichaean polemics of Early Christian authors. New watershed discoveries in the twentieth century shifted the emphasis from the heresiology of patristic writers to the Iranian context of Mani and his scriptures. As many of these texts were written in Middle Persian, Parthian, Sogdian, and other Iranian languages, they gave the impression that Manichaeism was in essence an Iranian religion, presumably a reform movement within Zoroastrianism.[11] Inevitably, scholars with knowledge of Syriac Christianity began to notice similarities between Mani's teachings and those of Marcion and Bardaisan, which led to an emphasis on the Christian nature of Manichaeism.[12] Textual sources from Turfan, Dunhuang (modern China), Medinet Madi, and Ismant el-Kharab (Egypt, ancient Narmouthis and Kellis) have fueled the continuous study of this religious tradition throughout the twentieth century, both by specialists in the philology of various languages (including Middle Persian, Parthian, Sogdian, Bactrian, Turkish, and Chinese) and by church historians or scholars of religion (whose expertise has tended to include knowledge of Greek, Latin, Coptic, or Syriac). In recent years, the center of gravity of Manichaean Studies has shifted away from the Iranian interpretations (even though excellent text editions are still produced), as many scholars now consider Manichaeism a trajectory of Ancient Christianity, a classification that we will consider in more depth later.[13]

Named after founder Mani (the "Apostle of Light," born on April 14, 216 CE), the term "Manichaean" carries a mixture of ancient and modern derogatory connotations. Greek

[10] M5794 and M5761, translation in Garder and Lieu, *MTRE*, 109.

[11] Gardner and Lieu, *MTRE*, 27. Geo Widengren, for example, repeatedly argued that all features of the Manichaean cosmology are strongly related to Zurvanism. G. Widengren, *Mani und der Manichäismus* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1961), 48-52. The existence and status of Zurvanism is, however, contested. A. F. de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi: Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 63-68, 330-38. More studies stressing the Iranian background of Manichaeism are listed in J. C. Reeves, *Jewish Lore in Manichaean Cosmogony* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1992), 5n5.

[12] F. C. Burkitt, *The Religion of the Manichees* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925), 71-86; C. W. Mitchell, ed. *S. Ephraim's Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion and Bardaisan* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1912-21).

[13] For a critique on the history of study in relation to essentialized Gnosticism, see N. J. Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism. An Ancient Faith Rediscovered* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 5-15; M. A. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

heresiological texts often played with the Syriac title "Manichaios," which probably meant something like "Mani the Living," to associate it with μανείς, foolishness.[14] The modern label "Manichaeism" is not as derogatory as its ancient equivalents, but it tends to conceal the fragmentary, diverse, or random nature of most of our knowledge. As Jason BeDuhn points out, by hallowing it with a modern "–ism," the Manichaean tradition has been "comfortably nested in a web of interpretation that locates Manichaeism in its relation to other, better-known dualisms, asceticisms, gnosticisms, mysticisms, and syncretisms."[15]

Two fundamental obstacles hinder the study of this religion (see section 2.4 on the concept of "religion"). The first obstacle consists of the polemical strategies and cultural adaptations within the textual sources themselves. A second obstacle is the diversity of perspectives in sources hundreds of years apart, which makes it difficult to approach this religion as one single tradition. Mostly, the texts derive from two main clusters: the oldest documents are from fourth- and fifth-century Egypt (Medinet Madi and Kellis), while the majority of texts were found at Turfan and Dunhuang (modern China), and stem from the eighth to the eleventh century.[16] Apart from these main clusters, authentic Manichaean texts

[14] J. K. Coyle, "Foreign and Insane: Labelling Manichaeism in the Roman Empire," in *Manichaeism and Its Legacy*, ed. J. K. Coyle (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 3-24; J. Tubach and M. Zakeri, "Mani's Name," in *Augustine and Manichaeism in the Latin West*, ed. J. van Oort and O. Wermelinger (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 272-86 considers the original title to mean something like "the living, or hidden, vessel." Shapira proposes to render "The Living Self." D. Shapira, "Manichaios, *Jywndg Gryw* and Other Manichaean Terms and Titles," in *Irano-Judaica IV*, ed. S. Shaked and A. Netzer (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 1999), 122-50. Although 14 April 216 CE is commonly taken as Mani's birth, alternative chronologies are possible, see T. Pettipiece, "Mani's Journey to India: Mission or Exile?," in *Zur lichten Heimat: Studien zu Manichäismus, Iranistik und Zentralasienkunde im Gedenken an Werner Sundermann*, ed. Team Turfanforschung (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2017), 507n24 and the appendix.

[15] J. D. BeDuhn, *The Manichaean Body in Discipline and Ritual* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), x. Richard Lim has also articulated similar critique on the academic construction of Manichaeism: "The term 'Manichaeism' evokes a sense of conspiratorial solidarity and coherence throughout the area of its considerable diffusion." R. Lim, "Unity and Diversity among Western Manichaeans: A Reconsideration of Mani's *Sancta Ecclesia*," *Revue des études augustiniennes* 35 (1989): 231; R. Lim, "The Nomen Manichaeorum and Its Uses in Late Antiquity," in *Heresy and Identity in Late Antiquity*, ed. E. Iricinschi and H. M. Zellentin (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 143-206.

[16] W. Sundermann, "Manichaean Literature in Iranian Languages," in *The Literature of Pre-Islamic Iran*, ed. R. E. Emmerick and M. Macuch (London: I.B.Tauris, 2008), 197-265. Manichaeism flourished during this period and was became the state religion in a Uighur kingdom between 762 and 840 CE. In 840 CE the empire was annihilated, but the Manichaean presence continued until in the tenth century it was largely been surpassed by Buddhism. W. Sundermann, "Manichaeism on the Silk Road: Its Rise, Flourishing and Decay," in *Between Rome and China. History, Religion and Material Culture of the Silk Road*, ed. S. N. C. Lieu and G. B. Mikkelsen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), 84-87. For the Medinet Madi documents, see C. Schmidt and H. J. Polotsky, "Ein Mani-Fund in Ägypten," *Sitzungsberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Berlin: Akademie der Wissenschaften, in Kommission bei W. de Gruyter, 1933), 4-90. On its dating, J. D. BeDuhn and G. Hodgins, "The Date of the Manichaean Codices from Medinet Madi, and Its Significance," in *Manichaeism East and West*, ed. S. N. C. Lieu (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 10-28. A full discussion of the discovery can be found in J. M. Robinson, *The Manichaean Codices of Medinet Madi* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013). Only two sections of a historical codex (presumably the Acts) have been published. N. A. Pedersen, "A Manichaean Historical Text," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 119 (1997): 193-201.

have been found in Latin (Tebessa, Algeria, 1918), Greek (*Cologne Mani Codex*, bought in Egypt by the University of Cologne in the 1960s), and Chinese.[17] This abundance of new Manichaean sources, most of which became available in the twentieth century, has often vindicated the polemical accounts of heresiologists, while now exposing the internal logic of authentic Manichaean discourse in liturgical, theological, and historical documents.[18]

Theologically, the documents relate a strongly dualistic world view in which Light and Darkness stood against each other in a primordial cosmological battle, a conflict that continued to define all of reality. Humankind could participate in this battle through revealed knowledge (gnosis) and by following the rules and regulations of the Manichaean church, either as members of the elect, or as Hearers (in Western sources often called catechumens). The reciprocal relation between these two classes of Manichaeans stood at the core of their religious life. The elect needed the financial and material support of the Hearers, because they had to keep strict behavioral rules. By following these rules, the elect could purify themselves and liberate the supernatural elements of Light trapped inside defiling matter (often called the Living Soul, 1 Keph. 79). Simple acts of agriculture, sexual immorality, or wine consumption, could hurt the Living Soul (1 Keph. 80). Therefore, Hearers, or catechumens, were expected to bring food for a daily ritual meal as alms gifts, which will be the topic of Chapter 6. Sources from the East and from the West attest to the widespread practice and alimentary logic of this meal, which was considered to not only contribute to the liberation of Light, but also to individual salvation (see Chapter 8 on the relation between collective and individual eschatology).[19]

The Manichaean myth circled around the fate of the Living Soul, ensnared in the material world. This Living Soul originated from the Father of Greatness, who through a series of emanations surrounded himself by Light beings acting on his behalf (he himself is praised in hymns like T.Kell.Copt. 1 and P.Kell.Gr. 92 as hidden and exalted, while P.Kell.Gr. 98 contains prayers praising all the emanations). The First Man, one of the beings from the first emanation, descended to wage war against the realm of Darkness. He was captured, stripped from his five sons (his armor, also perceived of as supernatural Light beings), and trapped in Darkness. Light beings from the second emanation came to the rescue: they awakened him by reminding him of his true destiny and origin (1 Keph. 72 and 85). In the process they fashioned the universe, which despite its nature (made from Darkness), was

[17] S. N. C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in Central Asia and China* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 49-54 on the discovery of these texts and their earliest translations. For recent discoveries and literature, see M. Xiaohe, "Remains of the Religion of Light in Xiapu (霞浦) County, Fujian Province," in *Mani in Dublin*, ed. S. G. Richter, C. Horton, and K. Ohlhafer (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 228-58.

[18] Gardner and Lieu, *MTRE*, 25-45 on the impact of these discoveries on the study of Manichaeism. An English translation of some of the Middle Persian, Parthian, Sogdian and Turkic texts is found in H. J. Klimkeit, *Gnosis at the Silk Road* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993).

[19] Studies of the Manichaean ritual meal include H. C. Puech, "Liturgie et pratiques rituelles dans le manichéisme (Collège de France, 1952-1972)," in *Sur le manichéisme et autres essais*, ed. H. C. Puech (Paris: Flammarion, 1979); BeDuhn, *Manichaean Body;* N. A. Pedersen, "Holy Meals and Eucharist in Manichaean Sources. Their Relation to Christian Traditions," in *The Eucharist – Its Origins and Contexts*, ed. D. Hellholm and D. Sänger (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 1267-97.

considered as working toward the liberation of the last elements of Light that remained after the ascent of the First Man (without his five sons).[20] This cosmological narrative was told with variations, but can be summarized in two catchphrases, the "two principles" and the "three times," which referred to the worlds of Light and Darkness and the three temporal stages of the cosmological drama: before the mixture, mixture, and the separation at the end of times.[21] There can be no doubt that both notions had roots in Zoroastrian cosmology.[22] The enchained elements of Light received various names: they were called the Living Soul, the Cross of Light, or in some western sources the Suffering Jesus (*jesus patibilis*). In the Psalmbook, for example, the Living Soul is identified with the Suffering Jesus: "Jesus that hangs to the tree, Youth, son of the dew, milk of all trees, sweetness of the fruits"[23] and "the trees and the fruits, in them is thy holy body, my Lord Jesus."[24]

This last example may illustrate why the Manichaean missionary technique has often been considered as a type of syncretism. Manichaean texts from various regions were written in the local languages and adopted religious analogies from the new religious environments. As a result, Manichaeism in the West used Christian terminology, while in the East it resembled Buddhism and in Iran, Zoroastrianism.[25] The extent to which these adaptations influenced the system of Manichaean thought has been the subject of considerable debate, in

[20] Bermejo-Rubio points to structural parallels between the Christian son of God and the Manichaean Primal Man. F. Bermejo-Rubio, "Primal Man, Son of God: From Explicit to Implicit Christian Elements in Manichaeism," in *Mani in Dublin*, ed. S. G. Richter, C. Horton, and K. Ohlhafer (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 34-46. Similar parallels exist, however, with the Zoroastrian myth of the original conflict. J. D. BeDuhn, "The Leap of the Soul," in *Il manicheismo: nuove prospettive della ricerca*, ed. A. van Tongerloo and L. Cirillo (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 22-25; M. Heuser, "The Manichaean Myth According to Coptic Sources," in *Studies in Manichaean Literature and Art*, ed. M. Heuser and H. J. Klimkeit (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 3-108. On the positive view of the cosmos, L. Koenen, "How Dualistic Is Mani's Dualism?," in *Codex Manichaicus Coloniensis - Atti 2*, ed. L. Cirillo (Cozenza: Marra Editore, 1990), 13-24.

[21] On short summaries of Manichaeism, see I. Colditz, "The Abstract of a Religion Or: What Is Manichaeism?," in *Mani in Dublin*, ed. S. G. Richter, C. Horton, and K. Ohlhafer (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 52-56. The three times and two principles are discussed, for example, in CMC 132.11-13, Hom. 7.11-15, 2 PsB. 9.8-11, 11.30-1, 1 Keph. 5.27-8, 15.19-20, 16.20-21, 73.28, and discussed in full in 1 Keph. 55.16-57.32. N. A. Pedersen, *Studies in the Sermon on the Great War* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1996), 172-76.

[22] M. Hutter, "Manichaeism in Iran," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism*, ed. M. Stausberg, Y. S-D. Vevaina, and A. Tessmann (Chichester Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 477-90.

[23] ⲓ[ⲏ̅ⲥ̅] ⲉⲧⲁϣⲉ ⲁⲡϣⲉ: [ⲡ]ⲗⲓⲗⲟⲩ ⲡϣⲛⲣⲉ ⲛ̅ⲧ̈ⲓⲱⲧⲉ: [ⲡ]ⲉⲣⲱⲧⲉ ⲛ̅ⲛ̅ϣⲏⲛ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ· [ⲡⲉⲗ]ⲁⲁ ⲛ̅ⲛ̅ⲕⲁⲣⲡⲟⲥ. 2 PsB. 155.24-27.

[24] ⲛ̅ϣⲏⲛ ⲙⲛ̅ⲛ̅ⲕⲁⲣⲡⲟⲥ ⲛ̅ⲧⲁⲩ ⲛⲉ ⲡⲕⲥⲱⲙⲁ ⲛ̅ⲣⲏⲧⲟⲩ ⲡⲁⲭⲁⲓⲥ ⲓ̅ⲏ̅ⲥ̅. 2 PsB. 121.32.

[25] W. Sundermann, "Manicheism IV. Missionary Activity and Technique." *Encyclopædia Iranica Online*, last updated: July 20, 2009, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/manicheism-iv-missionary-activity-and-technique- (accessed on 27 May 2015); Koenen, "How Dualistic Is Mani's Dualism?," 1-34. Explicitly on "syncretism" is P. Bryder, "Transmission, Translation, Transformation. Problems Concerning the Spread of Manichaeism from One Culture to Another," in *Studia Manichaica II*, ed. G. Wießner and H. J. Klimkeit (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992), 334-341; P. Bryder, "The Zebra as a Chameleon. Manichaean Missionary Technique," in *Gnosisforschung und Religionsgeschichte: Festschrift fuïr Kurt Rudolph zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. H. Preißler and H. Seiwert (Marburg: Diagonal-Verlag, 1994), 49-54. On the impact of Buddhism on Mani (or vice versa), T. Pettipiece, "A Church to Surpass All Churches: Manichaeism as a Test Case for the Theory of Reception," *Laval théologique et philosophique* 61, no. 2 (2005): 253.

particular because it is so hard to determine a baseline that may go back to Mani himself. One could wonder whether it is even proper to regard the local variants as somehow adapted from a previous tradition, as there are few fragments ascribed to Mani, and none of these are free from redaction in the later textual traditions. This makes it difficult to estimate to what extent certain elements belonged to the original "core" of Mani's teaching, or represented secondary layers of syncretic additions; to discern "Urform" from "Fortbildungen."[26] How much, for example, did the first generation of Manichaeans know about Buddhism? Are typically Buddhist phrases such as "Buddha," or "nirvana" in Chinese Manichaean texts examples of appropriation for missionary purposes or do they reflect Mani's own knowledge?[27] Are the hagiographical stories of Mani's journey to India historically accurate, and therefore proof of long-distance religious exchange?[28]

The diversity of the sources, the strategy of adaptation, as well as the modern perspectives on this transmission process have made it difficult to define Manichaeism's "core." What is the core? Gábor Kósa helpfully illustrated the reconstruction of the Manichaean cosmological system with the metaphor of a "gigantic three-dimensional puzzle, the different layers of which are the disparate linguistic traditions and the puzzle pieces being the individual Manichaean concepts."[29] Some of the puzzle pieces, like the fundamental concepts of the two principles and the three times, are present at all levels. Other pieces are only known from one or two regions and are therefore only present at some levels of the puzzle. "Naturally," Kósa states, "the closer the analogy, the more secure the explanation is, thus researchers of Manichaeism attempt to recover the philologically secure antecedents of respective texts."[30] The procedure of finding parallels and identifying them as probable antecedents is, however, a problematic one, especially when there are Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian antecedents available. For the western Manichaean material, which provides the first context of the Kellis documents, the distinctions are hard to draw:

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[26] H. H. Schaeder, "Urform und Fortbildungen des manichäischen Systems," in *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg*, ed. F. Saxl (Leipzig: Teubner, 1927), 65-157.

[27] G. B. Mikkelsen, "Skillfully Planting the Tree of Light: The Chinese Manichaica, Their Central Asian Counterparts, and Some Observations on the Translation of Manichaeism into Chinese," in *Cultural Encounters: China, Japan and the West*, ed. S. Clausen, R. Starrs, and A. Wedell-Wedellsborg (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1995), 102-3; G. Kosa, "The Sea of Fire as a Chinese Manichaean Metaphor: Source Materials for Mapping an Unnoticed Image," *Asia Major, Third Series* 24, no. 2 (2011): 1-52.

[28] Although some have argued that Buddhist/Jainist influence derived from Mani's own journeys into India. I. Gardner, "Some Comments on Mani and Indian Religions According to the Coptic *Kephalaia*," in *Il manicheismo: nuove prospettive della richerca*, ed. L. Cirillo and A. van Tongerloo (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 123-36; M. Deeg and I. Gardner, "Indian Influence on Mani Reconsidered: The Case of Jainism," *International Journal of Jaina Studies* 4-6 (2011): 158-86. Henrichs has suggested that the doctrine of the transmigration came from India, but this has not commonly been accepted. A. Henrichs, ""Thou Shalt Not Kill a Tree": Greek, Manichaean and Indian Tales," *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 16 (1979): 99. Refutation in W. Sundermann, "Mani, India, and the Manichaean Religion," *South Asian Studies* 2, no. 1 (1986): 16.

[29] Kosa, "The Sea of Fire," 9.

[30] Kosa, "The Sea of Fire," 10. Compare the methodological introduction by BeDuhn, in which he formulates his aim as establishing what "remains negotiated in local conditions." BeDuhn, *Manichaean Body*, 5.

which elements belonged to the secondary garb of missionary adaptations and which belonged to the shared commonality of the Manichaean tradition as a whole?

As indicated, the hunt for parallels is strongly tied to the vexed question of origins. Parallels between Iranian and Coptic sources may point to roots in early traditions, as for example the list of ten advantages of the Manichaean church cited earlier. Previous generations of scholars, in fact, interpreted the Christian terminology of some of the Greek, Coptic, and Latin Manichaean sources as the result of strategic missionary adaptation. Some of them even considered the Jesus figure a secondary layer of cultural adaptation.[31] More recent scholarship has readdressed this misconception and has shown the centrality of Jesus as a soteriological figure throughout the Manichaean tradition.[32] The texts from Kellis have contributed to this understanding because they included a Coptic version of some of the canonical *Epistles* of Mani (P.Kell.Copt. 53). According to Iain Gardner, the Kellis version of Mani's *Epistles* reveals his "authentic Christian voice," which can be used to differentiate between the primary tradition of Mani and secondary, "scholastic" developments.[33] The Holy Spirit, for example, features in the *Epistles*, but is almost entirely replaced with the Light Mind in the *Kephalaia*. Apparently, Gardner suggests, the Manichaean scribal tradition quickly erased the most Christian elements and replaced them with a more profound, alternative Manichaean framework.[34]

A decisive moment in the quest for origins, however, occurred long before the discovery of the Kellis papyri, with the acquisition and translation of a Greek biography of Mani, the *Cologne Mani Codex* (CMC), in 1970.[35] This text describes Mani's youth and upbringing. Despite the obvious hagiographical models involved in this "biography," the information regarding the community of his upbringing has generally been accepted as

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[31] Sundermann, for example, observed how several attributes of Jesus were ascribed to other supernatural figures in the Manichaean pantheon. W. Sundermann, "Christianity V. Christ in Manicheism." *Encyclopædia Iranica Online*, last updated: October 18, 2011, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/christianity-v (accessed January 10, 2017). Previous positions are discussed in M. Franzmann, *Jesus in the Manichaean Writings* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 2-6 which includes a discussion of Widengren's statement in 1977 that Christian elements were merely "Stilelementen."

[32] The most recent contribution, arguing for the essential unity of the Jesus-figure in Manichaeism, is J. D. BeDuhn, "The Manichaean Jesus," in *Alternative Christs*, ed. O. Hammer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 51-70.

[33] I. Gardner, "Towards an Understanding of Mani's Religious Development and the Archaeology of Manichaean Identity," in *Religion and Retributive Logic: Essays in Honour of Professor Garry W. Trompf*, ed. C. M. Cusack and C. H. Hartney (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 149.

[34] Gardner, "Archaeology of Manichaean Identity," 149-50.

[35] The edition was published as L. Koenen and C. Römer, eds., *Der Kolner Mani-Kodex (Uber das werden seines Leibes), kritische edition aufgrund der von A. Henrichs und L. Koenen besorgten Erstedition* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1988). Further additions were published by C. Römer, *Manis frühe Missionsreisen nach der Kölner Manibiographie. Tekstkritischer Kommentar und Erlauterung zu P. 121 - P. 192 des Kölner Mani Kodex* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1994). Unfortunately, there is no consensus on whether this text was produced in the fourth century or during the seventh century, which would explain other accurate details as well as Byzantine-looking features. S. N. C. Lieu, "Manichaeism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, ed. S. A. Harvey and D. G. Hunter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 224.

historical. We learn that Mani was raised among baptists, a community that may have considered "Alchasaios" one of their founding fathers. The name "Alchasaios" has led to the (mis)interpretation of the community as "Jewish-Christian," and specifically "Elchasaite," in many modern studies, despite the critical evaluation of this identification by Gerard Luttikhuizen, Albert de Jong, and others.[36] The text continues to relate how Mani rebelled against the community's rules, after having received two revelations of his supernatural twin (*syzygos*). He set out to reform the community, but his revelation and novel practices were not appreciated by his fellow baptists, forcing him to take his message to the streets. With his father and a few disciples, Mani entered a new itinerant missionary phase. The CMC describes Mani's missionary work in the Sasanian Empire, where he found the imperial support of Shapur I, which enabled him to travel freely throughout the East and into India. This initial success, however, stirred up Zoroastrian priest Kerdir, who convinced the new king Vahram I to imprison Mani, which led to his death in the year 276 or 277 CE.[37]

This hagiographical origin story has been awarded central importance in the reconstruction of the rise of Manichaeism, as it revealed the Christian nature of the community of Mani's youth.[38] Indeed, the CMC contains a short quote from Mani's *Living*

[36] G. P. Luttikhuizen, "The Baptists of Mani's Youth and the Elchasaites," in *Gnostic Revisions of Genesis Stories and Early Jesus Traditions*, ed. G. P. Luttikhuizen (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 170-84; A. F. de Jong, "A Quodam Persa Exstiterunt: Re-Orienting Manichaean Origins," in *Empsychoi Logoi: Religious Innovations in Antiquity*, ed. A. Houtman, A. F. de Jong, and M. Misset-van de Weg (Leiden: Brill, 2009): 81-106. The association with the Elchasai of the patristic sources has been made in A. Henrichs and L. Koenen, "Ein griechischer Mani-Codex (P.Colon. Inv. Nr. 4780) Περὶ τῆς γέννης τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ: Edition der Seiten 72.8-99.9," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 32 (1978): 183-4; A. Henrichs, "The Cologne Mani Codex Reconsidered," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 83 (1979): 339-67. Contra these studies, I see few traces of Judaism in the CMC. Food and purity rules, as well as "keeping the rest of the hands" are not exclusively Jewish practices, but featured more widely among minority religions of the region, see J. Maier, "Zum Problem der jüdischen Gemeinden Mesopotamiens im 2. und 3. Jh. n. Chr. im Blick auf den CMC," in *Codex Manichaicus Coloniensis: Atti del simposio internazionale*, ed. L. Cirillo and A. Roselli (Cosenza: Marra Editore, 1986), 37-67.

[37] The CMC does not discuss Mani's demise, but accounts have been preserved in a Coptic homily and various Middle Persian texts. On the reconstruction of his final days, see I. Gardner, "Mani's Last Days," in *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings*, ed. I. Gardner, J. D. BeDuhn, and P. Dilley (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 159-208.

[38] "Man wird folglich die christlichen Elemente im Manichäismus nicht mehr als sekundäre Zutat des westlichen Manichäismus abtun dürfen…" A. Henrichs and L. Koenen, "Ein Griechischer Mani-Codex (P.Colon. Inv. Nr. 4780)" *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 5 (1970): 40. A strong Christian interpretation is presented in J. van Oort, "The Emergence of Gnostic-Manichaean Christianity as a Case of Religious Identity in the Making," in *Religious Identity and the Problem of Historical Foundation*, ed. W. Otten, J. Frishman, and G. Rouwhorst (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 275-88; J. van Oort, "The Paraclete Mani as the Apostle of Jesus Christ and the Origins of a New Church," in *The Apostolic Age in Patristic Thought*, ed. A. Hilhorst (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 139-57. The first sentence of Lieu's summary in the Cambridge History is "The religion of Mani arose from a Judaeo-Christian milieu in southern Mesopotamia in the third century – a time of both cultural and religious syncretism." S. N. C. Lieu, "Christianity and Manichaeism," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, ed. A. Casiday and F. Norris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 279. Baker-Brian is critical of the possibility of composing a "positivist account of Mani's life." Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism*, 33-60 on the role of biographical writings in Manichaean identity-formation. Literary models,

Gospel, in which he self-identifies as the apostle of Jesus Christ.[39] Combined with the strongly "Christian" vocabulary of some of the Medinet Madi texts, like the Psalms to Jesus, these passages are now commonly taken as original or primary to the Manichaean system of thought. As mentioned, the Kellis version of Mani's *Epistles* seems to confirm this reconstruction. A curious trend in this respect is the intrinsic connection between the postulated Christian nature of Manichaean thought and the person of Mani. A recent introduction, for example, states that there is "less scope in the study of Manichaeism to trace the evolution of doctrine, since all teaching was rigidly tied to the very details of the divine word in Mani's scriptures."[40] In fact, "Mani took great pains to establish a total religion based upon his own comprehensive scriptures and preaching."[41] Clearly, these scholars portray Manichaeism as a designed religion in which all features came from Mani himself, a notion actively propagated by Manichaean literature. Manichaeans themselves stressed that Mani wrote his own wisdom down, thereby preventing the corruption of his scriptures, as had happened to the message of Jesus and Buddha (1 Keph. 151).[42] However, uncritically accepting insider claims would be naïve. Do we really believe that all tenets of Manichaean religion had their origin in Mani's own blueprint? In defense of these scholars, it should be said that at least one of them has retracted this position and stressed in a more recent publication that "Mani was not really different from other supposed religious 'founders'."[43]

In sum, there are two different perceptions of the Manichaean tradition: one in which a hypothetical "Urform" is subjected to countless cultural adaptations, and one in which there is limited room for profound developments because the center of gravity is located in Mani's own design, his books, and his personality.[44] The problem with the latter is apparent—it cannot account for diversity—while the difficulty with the former approach lies in the scarcity of third- (or even fourth-)century Manichaean sources. As indicated above, I

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and sources, for Mani's life are discussed by A. F. de Jong, "The *Cologne Mani Codex* and the Life of Zarathushtra," in *Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians. Religious Dynamics in a Sasanian Context*, ed. G. Herman (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2014), 129-47; Cf. D. Frankfurter, "Apocalypses Real and Alleged in the Mani Codex," *Numen* 44 (1997): 60-73.

[39] CMC 66.4, this introduction has parallels in two middle Persian and one Sogdian version. Koenen, "How Dualistic Is Mani's Dualism?," 2-3; Henrichs and Koenen, "Ein Griechischer Mani-Codex," 189-202.

[40] Gardner and Lieu, *MTRE*, 1.

[41] Gardner and Lieu, *MTRE*, 9. Cf. similar statements on page 151. With Baker-Brian, I think we see here "the related assumption that Mani's teachings appeared fully formed, systematized and institutionally-implemented from the very earliest days." Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism*, 23.

[42] The Iranian variant of this text is given in Gardner and Lieu, *MTRE*, 109-10 and the Coptic version on page 265-8, no. 91. A full discussion is found in Lieu, "Mani's Missionary Statement," 519-27.

[43] Gardner, " Archaeology of Manichaean Identity," 147n1.

[44] L. J. R. Ort, *Mani: A Religio-Historical Description of His Personality* (Leiden: Brill, 1967). Which was reviewed severely (but for good reasons) by Mary Boyce the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society. Tudor Sala cites Polotsky and Klimkeit as examples of the tendency to think about the "monolithic coherence" of Mani's religion, an approach which he regards as the construction of a "homogeneous and and invariable ideology and social entity called 'Manichaeism'." T. A. Sala, "Narrative Options in Manichaean Eschatology," in *Frontiers of Faith: The Christian Encounter with Manichaeism in the Acts of Archelaus*, ed. J. D. BeDuhn and P. A. Mirecki (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 52.

will examine the Kellis letters first and foremost in their local and regional context, without tracing all antecedents back to earlier Mesopotamian traditions. It is not our purpose to determine whether local Kellite practices were in truth "Christian" or "Manichaean," as these two categories overlap and boundaries are difficult to draw. In the three-dimensional conceptual puzzle, the Christian elements are not necessarily more authentic. Instead, both Christian traditions and Sasanian Zoroastrianism must be taken into account when the origins of Manichaeism are explained.[45]

The continuity and diffusion of the Manichaean tradition is often associated with its canonical books. Mani was remembered as the author of his own set of sacred scriptures (either listed as a Pentateuch or Heptateuch), including the *Living Gospel,* the *Treasure of Life,* the *Treatise (Pragmateia),* the *Book of Mysteries*, the *Book of Giants,* the *Epistles,* and the *Psalms and Prayers*.[46] With these books, he was said to have restored Jesus's wisdom (2 PsB. 224, 12.31). Not only did he write his words of wisdom, but he also depicted them in his *Picturebook*.[47] Unfortunately, few of these canonical works survived, apart from brief citations by other authors. In contrast to the Manichaean claims about Mani as a prolific writer, modern scholars depend largely on the works of his disciples. Among the works of the first generations of disciples, for example, are collections of Mani's sayings and lectures, which were subsequently circulated in sermons, hagiographical stories, and question-and-answer-literature (known as *Kephalaia*: "Chapters"). The *Kephalaia* is of importance because of its sheer size (both volumes held about five hundred pages, slightly less than the Manichaean Psalmbook but still constituting the second largest papyrus codex of the ancient world) and systematized character.[48] As a genre, Manichaean kephalaia were known as early as the 340s CE, and several Iranian texts contained traces of hagiographical homilies that correspond to

[45] An example of this dual context is BeDuhn's examination of Christian and Zoroastrian ritual meals as models for the Manichaean food rituals. J. D. BeDuhn, "Eucharist or Yasna? Antecedents of the Manichaean Food Ritual," in *Studia Manichaica IV*, ed. R. E. Emmerick, W. Sundermann, and P. Zieme (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000), 14-36.

[46] Hom. 25.2-5, cf. 1 Keph. 148, 355.4-25. The information about these books and their content is discussed in Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism*, 66-95. The concept of a canon is suitable only in so far it designates lists of Mani's writings that carried a certain authority. The implicit comparison with Christian canon formation, as well as the relation to this set of text is complicated. Cf. N. A. Pedersen et al., *The Old Testament in Manichaean Tradition. The Sources in Syriac, Greek, Coptic, Middle Persian, Parthian, Sogdian, New Persian, and Arabic* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), xii.

[47] Z. Gulácsi, *Mani's Pictures: The Didactic Images of the Manichaeans from Sasanian Mesopotamia to Uygur Central Asia and Tang-Ming China* (Leiden: Brill, 2015). In general on textuality in Ancient Christianities, see now G. G. Stroumsa, *The Scriptural Universe of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016). A comparative perspective on canon formation and religious networks is pursued in P. Dilley, "Religious Intercrossing in Late Antique Eurasia: Loss, Corruption, and Canon Formation," *Journal of World History* 24, no. 1 (2013): 25-70.

[48] Pettipiece has shown the systematic redaction process behind the *Kephalaia*, which was probably meant to fix problems in the interpretation of the Manichaean canon. T. Pettipiece, *Pentadic Redaction in the Manichaean Kephalaia* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

Coptic kephalaia.[49] If these texts go back to the late third or early fourth century, they may have belonged to an early phase before the collection and redaction of these texts into the two volumes found at Medinet Madi: the *Kephalaia of the Teacher* and the *Kephalaia of the Wisdom of my Lord Mani* (see Table 1 for an overview of the texts found at Medinet Madi).[50] For our purposes, I will refer to the *Kephalaia* as a systematization of which elements may have been known to Manichaeans in fourth-century Egypt (such as the ideology of gift-giving examined in Chapter 6), even though the text in itself cannot be taken as a neutral representation of any local Manichaean way of life.

Title	Description
Kephalaia of the Teacher	1 Keph. Edition published with a German translation. The largest part is also translated in English.
Kephalaia of the Wisdom of my Lord Mani	2 Keph. A first section of a critical edition is now published with an English translation.
Psalmbook	1 PsB. Is unpublished, but some sections have been published in individual articles. The second part (2 PsB.) is published with an English translation.
Synaxeis codex	Unpublished.
Acts	A codex with a historical narrative. Presumed lost, although some pages remained.
Mani's *Epistles*	Unpublished, although other versions and citations of this text are known.
Homilies	Hom. Edition with a German translation and a more recent edition with an English translation.

Table 1: List of the Medinet Madi texts.

[49] On the early date of the *Kephalaia*, see Gardner, "Archaeology of Manichaean Identity," 148n4. The *Kephalaia* is mentioned in Hom. 18.6 and the *Acta Archelai*. On the early fourth-century date of the latter, see S. N. C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in Mesopotamia and the Roman East* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 135-40. The Iranian "*Kephalaia*" are generally of late date. They correspond to the Coptic texts in content and enumerative structure, but the two texts are never in agreement more closely. Sundermann, "Manichaean Literature in Iranian Languages," 224-27; W. Sundermann, "Iranische Kephalaiatexte?," in *Studia Manichaica II*, ed. G. Wießner and H. J. Klimkeit (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992), 305-18.

[50] I. Gardner, ed. *The Kephalaia of the Teacher* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), xxiv calls it an "evolving and fluid discourse." See also his forthcoming I. Gardner, "Kephalaia," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, ed. E. Yarshater (Forthcoming). In particular the parallels between the Chinese *Traité* and the *Kephalaia* suggest the existence of Iranian *Kephalaia* traditions. Lieu, *Manichaeism in Central Asia and China*, 59-75. Funk argues that a single author or compiler was responsible for the final Medinet Madi versions. W. P. Funk, "The Reconstruction of the Manichaean *Kephalaia*," in P. Mirecki, J. BeDuhn, *Emerging from Darkness. Studies in the Recovery of Manichaean Sources* (Leiden, 1997), 154. Most recently, the reflections on the forthcoming edition of the Dublin *Kephalaia* (2 Keph.) have offered new thoughts on the evolving collection of *Kephalaia* traditions in relation to the coherence of a Manichaean tradition. P. Dilley, "Mani's Wisdom at the Court of the Persian Kings: The Genre and Context of the Chester Beatty Kephalaia," in *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings*, ed. P. Dilley, J. D. BeDuhn, and I. Gardner (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 15-51; J. D. BeDuhn, "Parallels between Coptic and Iranian Kephalaia: Goundesh and the King of Touran," in *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings*, ed. I. Gardner, J. D. BeDuhn, and P. Dilley (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 52-74.

Manichaeism spread over the entire ancient world through books and preaching. Historical narratives inform us about the heroes of the first generation of missionaries: Sisinnios, Mani's successor, Mar Adda, and Pattek traveling to the Eastern Roman Empire, Mar Ammo to Parthia and Central Asia. Authentic Manichaean sources also derive from all these regions, from North Africa to Greece, and from Egypt to China. Where they portrayed their religion as truly universal (again, in contrast to their predecessors: Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Buddhism), the diffusion patterns of their texts seem to agree.[51] Manichaeans belonged to the ancient world from the third century onwards, until they started to disappear from the face of the Roman Empire during the fifth and sixth centuries. In the East, especially in Central Asia, Manichaeism flourished, and even became the state religion of the Uighurs in the eighth and ninth century. The veneration of "Mani the Buddha of Light" seems to have continued in China for centuries. A UNESCO-sponsored project is currently looking into a temple near Quanzhou (Zayton, in the Fujian province), as there are indications for the continuation of this cult in the religious practices of some of the villagers.[52]

1.4 The Appeal of Mani's Church

About fifty years ago, Peter Brown answered the question of what it meant to become a Manichaean with reference to a strong communal group identity. In his interpretation, to "favour the Manichees meant favouring a group. This group had a distinctive and complex structure. Because of this structure, the Manichaean group impinged on the society around it in a distinctive way; and this structure, in turn exposed it to distinctive pressures from its Roman environment."[53] With its structural differentiation between the wandering elect and their supporters, Manichaeism's success was based on the existence of communities of Hearers, who were mostly "indistinguishable from their environment" and sheltered the "vagrant" and "studiously ill-kempt" elect.[54] Manichaeism had a different appeal for

[51] Pivotal are the historical studies by Sundermann. W. Sundermann, "Studien zur kirchengeschichtlichen Literatur der iranischen Manichäer I," *Altorientalische Forschungen* 13, no. 1 (1986): 40-92; W. Sundermann, "Studien zur kirchengeschichtlichen Literatur der iranischen Manichäer II," *Altorientalische Forschungen* 13, no. 2 (1986): 239-317; W. Sundermann, "Studien zur kirchengeschichtlichen Literatur der iranischen Manichäer III," *Altorientalische Forschungen* 14, no. 1 (1987): 47-107. More recent are S. N. C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China*, 2nd edition ed. (Tübingen Mohr Siebeck, 1992); Lieu, *Manichaeism in Mesopotamia;* I. Gardner and S. N. C. Lieu, "From Narmouthis (Medinet Madi) to Kellis (Ismant el-Kharab): Manichaean Documents from Roman Egypt," *Journal of Roman Studies* 86 (1996): 146-69. Various theories about the introduction of Manichaeism into Egypt are discussed in the second chapter of J. A. van den Berg, *Biblical Argument in Manichaean Missionary Practice* (Leiden: Brill, 2010). This will not be repeated in this dissertation.

[52] This was even announced as the discovery of a "living Mani cult" in M. Franzmann, I. Gardner, and S. N. C. Lieu, "A Living Mani Cult in the Twenty-First Century," *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 41 (2005): vii-xi. See the contributions in the final report S. N. C. Lieu, ed. *Medieval Christian and Manichaean Remains from Quanzhou (Zayton)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012).

[53] P. Brown, "The Diffusion of Manichaeism in the Roman Empire," *Journal of Roman Studies* 59, no. 1 (1969): 99. Where used to designate the Manichaean group, "distinctive" should mean "different" or "discernable because of its specific characteristics" and not unique.

[54] Brown, "The Diffusion of Manichaeism," 99.

different people. Those attracted to rigid asceticism found a place among those who lived more flexible or worldly lives. Highfliers could embrace the Manichaean rigid behavioral expectations and affirm their critique of lax Christianity, while others could live more comfortably as part of a community facilitating the ascetic lifestyle of the elect.[55] This ingenious structure made both classes of Manichaeans dependent on each other. Only together they could achieve salvation.[56]

Much has changed in the study of Manichaeans in the last fifty years, but the emphasis on the group structure of Manichaeism has remained. This is for good reasons, as the newly discovered sources of the twentieth century inform us in more depth about the structure and hierarchy of the communities. One recent study has even highlighted Manichaean reflections on the "time management" of catechumens, who had to balance all the obligations of their secular lives with the required prayers and almsgiving.[57] At the same time, Peter Brown continues to stress the strong group identity of Manichaeans. In his opinion, reasons why Augustine stayed among the Manichaeans were a deep sense of intimate friendship and an "intense experience of bonding in one of the most starkly countercultural groups in the Latin West."[58] Manichaeism's structure captured his sense of "elitism," which remained influential in Augustine's life even after his conversion to Nicene Christianity.[59]

To be sure, Manichaean hagiographical narratives point to the community's structure and its wisdom as causes for success. One of the Middle Persian historical texts (M2) attributes the introduction of Manichaeism in the Roman Empire to Mar Adda's books, the conversion of imperial figures as catechumens, and the establishment of monasteries. Adda was said to have "laboured very hard in these areas, founded many monasteries, chose many elect and hearers, composed writings and made wisdom his weapon."[60] By bringing a scribe and several Manichaean books, the Manichaean missionaries engaged in doctrinal disputes and opposed other religious groups. They went as far as Alexandria and claimed to have received support from the Queen of Thadmor (the famous Zenobia of Palmyra?) after they healed her.[61] The patronage of royal benefactors was consistently mentioned in Manichaean

[55] H. Chadwick, "The Attractions of Mani," in *Pleroma: Salus carnis: homenaje a Antonio Orbe S.J.*, ed. E. Romero-Pose (Santiago de Compostela: Publicaciones Compostellanum, 1990), 203-22.

[56] BeDuhn, *Manichaean Body*, 65.

[57] I. Colditz, "Manichaean Time-Management: Layman between Religious and Secular Duties," in *New Light on Manichaeism*, ed. J. D. BeDuhn (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 73-100.

[58] Interestingly, Brown already described Manichaeism as a strong current of new spiritual Christianity in his biography of Augustine, P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (London: Faber & Faber, 1967), 43-44; P. Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 159; P. Brown, *Treasure in Heaven: The Holy Poor in Early Christianity* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 43-50.

[59] J. D. BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma 1: Conversion and Apostasy, 373-388 C.E.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 35.

[60] M2 I R 1-33 cited in Gardner and Lieu, *MTRE*, no. 21 which also includes the Parthian and Sogdian version of the same narrative. On the identification of Adda and Adimantus, as well as the most probable historical diffusion of Manichaeism in Egypt, see van den Berg, *Biblical Argument*, 31-48.

[61] Text translated in Gardner and Lieu, *MTRE*, no. 22.

histories, which suggests it was pivotal to their representation of missionary success.[62] These narratives framed the diffusion of Manichaeism as the result of a centralized missionary approach, directed by Mani and his first generation of disciples. Its appeal, they suggest, lay in their wisdom and books, while the communities were socially structured in monasteries supported by local royalty.[63]

In reality, no trace of Manichaean monasteries is found in the Roman Empire, nor in the Coptic and Greek Manichaean literature of the region. Quite clearly, the authors of the historical narrative retrojected their local variant of Manichaeism back unto Mar Adda's adventures.[64] The literary representations of missionary success are first of all rhetorical and hagiographical accounts, which do not directly correspond to the experiences of real Manichaeans in the Roman Empire.

Thus, if we cannot be sure about the existence of intense emotional group bonds and the establishment of monasteries in Egypt, what about the doctrinal debates? Stories about public disputations abound in Christian representations of Manichaean missionaries. In their version of events, Manichaeans were formidable debaters, often only defeated by the power of supernatural miracles. Such stories include those about Egyptian holy men like Copres, who could not outargue a Manichaean missionary at Hermopolis and therefore challenged

[62] Other examples are discussed in Sundermann, "Manicheism IV. Missionary Activity and Technique." These Middle Persian texts are believed to date back to the ninth or tenth century, but might go back to earlier accounts. The fourth- or fifth-century material from the historical codex in the Medinet Madi collection (now largely lost) seems to have contained similar stories. Pedersen, "A Manichaean Historical Text," 193-201. Dilley describes Mani and other itinerant religious specialists as conduits in a web of Eurasian courts. Dilley, "Religious Intercrossing," 62-70. On Mani's journeys to the courts of the Sasanian empire, see the contributions in I. Gardner, J. D. BeDuhn, and P. Dilley, eds., *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

[63] Sundermann, "Kirchengeschichtlichen Literatur III," 71-72 suggests that the account reflects "mittelasiatisches Selbstverständnis" but keeps the possibility of Manichaean monasticism in Egypt open. Berg, *Biblical Argument*, 45 accepts the account as historical for the larger part. N. Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire. A Study of Augustine's Contra Adimantum* (Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 47 does not comment on the tradition of establishing monasteries, but points to the "plasticity of the cultural memories surrounding Adda."

[64] This subject will return in Chapter 7, since the Kellis material now plays a key role in the discussion. Positive arguments for the existence of Manichaean monasteries in the Roman Empire have been made by various scholars, see G. G. Stroumsa, "The Manichaean Challenge to Egyptian Christianity," in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, ed. B. A. Pearson and J. E. Goehring (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 307-19; L. Koenen, "Manichäische Mission und Klöster in Ägypten." In *Das römisch-byzantinische Ägypten: Akten des internationalen Symposions 26.-30. Sept. 1978 in Trier*, ed. G. Grimm, H. Heinen, and E. Winter (Mainz am Rhein: Phillip von Zabern, 1983), 93-108; S. N. C. Lieu, "Precept and Practice in Manichaean Monasticism," *Journal of Theological Studies* 32, no. 1 (1981): 153-73. Others have called the existence of Manichaean monasteries in this region into question. According to Asmussen, monasteries were a Buddhist influence to early Manichaeism. J. P. Asmussen, *Xuāstvaānīft: Studies in Manichaeism* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1965), 200.

him to a trial by fire.[65] Around the same time, a biblical commentator in Rome warned against the "deceitful" practices of proselytizing Manichaeans. Instead of public debates, these sneaky Manichaeans used "persuasive and crafty words," approached vulnerable women, and allegedly said other things in public than in private.[66] This warning has a parallel in a papyrus letter, commonly believed to have come from bishop Theonas of Alexandria (r. 282–300? CE), which targeted the ascetic biblical exegesis of Manichaean missionaries (P.Ryl.Gr. 469).[67] Such accounts, as well as Alexander of Lycopolis's critique of the Manichaeans in his philosophical circles, highlight small-scale preaching as well as public disputations.[68] Fourth- and fifth-century Christian authors continued to debate Manichaeans, whether real or imaginary, with new heights in the accounts of the debates of Augustine with Fortunatus and Felix and the polemical *Acta Archelai* (AA).[69] According to Richard Lim, some of these records became part of a "deliberate strategy in which written accounts were used to displace actual events."[70] Therefore, Lieu's observation that "the Manichaean missionaries in the Roman empire were noted for their zeal as door-to-door Gospel-peddlers and skilled debaters" may be most telling for the Early Christian image of the Manichaean threat.[71]

While the historicity of some of these reports on debates is called into question, there is a strong tradition of looking for the intellectual involvement of Manichaeans in their cultural environment. For Augustine, the appeal of Mani's church lay in its philosophical attitude and its answer to the problem of evil. Manichaeism in North Africa "looked more like a philosophical system than a religion."[72] Initially, the mythic nature of Mani's discourse

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[65] *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* X.30-5. Translated in Gardner and Lieu, *MTRE*, no. 29. The well-known account by Mark the Deacon of the debate between Julia and Porphyry of Gaza is another example of supernatural intervention during a disputation.

[66] Pseudo-Ambrosiaster, *In Ep. Ad. Tim.* II.3.6-7.2 translated in Gardner and Lieu, *MTRE*, no. 26.

[67] Translated in Gardner and Lieu, *MTRE*, no. 23. Original published in C. H. Roberts, *Catalogue of the Greek and Latin Papyri in the John Rylands Library, Manchester* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1938), 42-43; Lieu, *Manichaeism in Mesopotamia*, 95-7 with few new insights. This papyrus requires further study, as it has not been exhaustingly studied.

[68] Alexander of Lycopolis, *Contra Manichaei Opiniones Disputatio* 2, translation in Gardner and Lieu, *MTRE*, no. 24. Note that Mark Edwards, most recently, has argued in favor of the previous Christian identification of Alexander of Lycopolis. M. Edwards, *Religions of the Constantinian Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 140. Contra P. W. van der Horst and J. Mansfeld, *An Alexandrian Platonist against Dualism* (Leiden: Brill, 1974).

[69] Doctrinal debates are discussed by Richard Lim, who states that "we have no basis for assuming that the Manichaeans engaged others in public debate in the usual sense as a regular part of their missionary activity." R. Lim, *Public Disputation, Power, and Social Order in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 70-71; Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire*, 192-201.

[70] Lim, *Public Disputation*, 71.

[71] Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire*, 119. Caroline Humfress notes that at least some of the described disputes could have taken place in the context of legal trials rather than theological debates. C. Humfress, *Orthodoxy and the Courts in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 251.

[72] BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma 1*, 31. For a critique on BeDuhn's reconstruction of Augustine and Faustus" Manichaeism, see J. van Oort, "Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma in Context," *Vigiliae*

may have appealed to Augustine's interest in astronomy and philosophy, but eventually these traditions seemed to be at odds (*Conf.* 5.3.4).[73] In other regions, the intellectual involvement resulted in the adaptation of elements from this environment in Manichaean texts. For the situation in Egypt, it has been argued that Manichaeans "may have contacted priests and bombarded them with questions," only to incorporate whatever they found to be "sympathetic to their own religious system."[74] Similarities between Manichaean documents and traditional Egyptian religious texts may have been the result of their belief that the Manichaean church came to encompass all previous religions: "[T]he writings and the wisdom and the revelations and the parables and the psalms of all the first churches have been collected in every place. They have come down to my church."[75] Even though some of the similarities may be farfetched, and evidence for transmission is often lacking, the appeal of Mani's church must have been located in the combination of exotic newness and familiar aspects. As Rodney Stark posits for the growth of Early Christianity: "[A] new religion is more likely to grow to the degree that it sustains continuity with the religious culture of those being missionized."[76]

If we, then, return to the initial question of what it meant to join the Manichaeans, or consider what may have appealed to outsiders, these narrative representations point to two potential answers. First, Manichaeism was portrayed as a highly textual phenomenon, both in its own accounts and in the Christian resentment. Therefore, it was strongly tied to an upper layer of society: those with the time and resources to engage in cosmological and philosophical speculation. Second, the community structure and organization of the Manichaean church were considered essential for its diffusion, a process that has also been described by modern scholars as centralized, organized, and intense. This understanding of

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Christianae 65 (2011): 543-67. Manichaean texts also stress the intellectual involvement of elect, for example in 1 Keph 103 and 140.

[73] BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma 1*, 29-31; J. D. BeDuhn, "Am I a Christian? The Individual at the Manichaean-Christian Interface," in *Group Identity and Religious Individuality in Late Antiquity*, ed. J. Rüpke and E. Rebillard (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 42. The initial layer of scientific exploration and explanation in Manichaean thought is, however, one of the ways in which they appropriate the language of their environment to reflect supernatural mythic events. G. Kosa, "The Manichaean Attitude to Natural Phenomena as Reflected in the Berlin Kephalaia," *Open Theology* 1 (2015): 255-68.

[74] L. Depuydt, ""Wisdom Made a Weapon": On Manichaeism in Egypt," *Chronique d'Egypte* 64 (1993): 310.

[75] 1 Keph. 151, 372.11-14. Parallels with Egyptian traditions are discussed in J. Vergote, "Het Manichaeisme in Egypte," *Jaarbericht van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch genootschap Ex Oriente Lux* 9 (1944): 77-83; Depuydt, ""Wisdom Made a Weapon"," 301-15; D. McBride, "Egyptian Manichaeism," *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* 18 (1988): 80-98. A key role is attributed to the Manichaean notion of the eschatological fire taking 1468 years, which is taken to correspond to the Egyptian Sothis period. L. Koenen, "Manichaean Apocalypticism at the Crossroads of Iranian, Egyptian, Jewish and Christian Thought," in *Codex Manichaicus Coloniensis: Atti del simposio internazionale*, ed. L. Cirillo and A. Roselli (Cosenza: Marra Editore, 1986), 321; G. G. Stroumsa, "Aspects de l'eschatologie manichéenne," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 198, no. 2 (1981): 167.

[76] R. Stark, *Cities of God. The Real Story of How Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 127. Critique on Stark's methods is laid out in the third part of L. E. Vaage, ed. *Religious Rivalries in the Early Roman Empire and the Rise of Christianity* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006).

Manichaeism is not without its critique, but is highly coherent with ancient insider and outsider descriptions. As an example of a disembedded and utopian religion with universal claims, Manichaeism stressed its superior structure and the strong ascetic and intellectual commitments of (some of) its members. This introductory sketch, however, requires immediate questioning. Attractive factors must have been different for members of the elect, and what attracted Augustine and other literate individuals to Manichaeism may not have been the same factors as those that appealed to people from other social strata.

In summary, the twentieth-century discovery of a wide array of Manichaean sources is both a blessing and a challenge. It is a blessing because it has enabled us to move away from heresiological perspectives, but it is also a challenge because of the problems it presents to modern scholarship. First, there is the constant urge to explain the unknown in terms of the known, as BeDuhn complained with regards to the interpretations that nested Manichaeism in relation to "better-known dualisms." The complexity of Manichaeism is sometimes domesticated into the familiar category of Ancient Christianity, as if this allocation diminished the interpretive challenges. Second, the reconstruction of Manichaeism as a coherent system of beliefs and practices (echoing Geertz's definition of religion) within the bandwidth of Ancient Christianities and originating (in its entirety) with Mani himself seems oblivious to the literary and historical problems of the earliest Manichaean history. The evaluation of the sources for this period could do with an infusion of some of the skepticism of the linguistic and cultural turn in the study of Late Antiquity, as too few studies have taken into account the rhetorical nature of hagiographical or polemical sources.[77] In particular, the absence of secure third-century sources prevents us from establishing a baseline for cross-cultural comparison. The third problem lays in the way in which the available sources have been harmonized into one coherent system or tradition. Therefore, despite the rich philological tradition and the continuous effort put into the translation of ancient sources, there remains a need for overarching studies with more sophisticated and explicitly defined theoretical frameworks.[78] Within the history of the study of Manichaeism, the Kellis finds present a new opportunity to reexamine previous reconstructions. The secure archaeological find location and the nature of these sources are promising. Never before were Manichaeans visible in their daily affairs or at the village level in the Roman Empire.

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[77] Baker-Brian's discussion of the life of Mani is an exception, although his introduction into Manichaeism has the downside of almost entirely ignoring the history of the Manichaean church. See also on the rhetorical nature of the sources, N. Baker-Brian, "Between Testimony and Rumour: Strategies of Invective in Augustine's *De Moribus Manichaeorum*," in *Purpose of Rhetoric in Late Antiquity*, ed. A. J. Q. Puertas (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 31-53. On the impact of the linguistic and cultural turn on the study of religion in Late Antiquity, see E. A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text. Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); D. Martin and P. Cox Miller, eds., *The Cultural Turn in Late Ancient Studies: Gender, Asceticism, and Historiography* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

[78] BeDuhn's work is an example of new comparative perspectives. More comparative is his, J. D. BeDuhn, "Digesting the Sacrifices: Ritual Internalization in Jewish, Hindu, and Manichaean Traditions," in *Religion and Identity in South Asia and Beyond: Essays in Honor of Patrick Olivelle*, ed. S. Lindquist (London: Anthem, 2011), 301-19.

1.5 Caveat on the Nature of the Sources

This dissertation will develop a theoretical framework attuned to the fundamental incompleteness of historical sources, as well as to the questions and approaches from contemporary social-scientific studies. In this way, it will provide a framework for future cross-cultural comparison between textual or institutional Manichaeism and the lives of Manichaeans in various regions. The new documents from Kellis inform us in depth about the social setting of Manichaeans in Egypt. It is to be hoped that future discoveries will do the same for Manichaeans elsewhere.

Before engaging with modern academic theories about the impact of religion on everyday life, there are a number of methodological caveats to be made about the historical nature of our sources. Papyrological and archaeological sources come in many shapes and forms. Some of these sources adhere to strictly regulated expectations, genres, and models, while others reveal a more personal touch. Using such documentary sources is stimulating, as it may bring everyday life closer to the surface, but it also comes with great difficulties. At the outset of this introduction, I have already warned against a naïve reading of emotions in papyri and the use of modern concepts to interpret fragments of ancient correspondence. Despite the abundant display of emotional attachment, Matthaios's letter to his mother was constrained by epistolary conventions.[79]

Papyrus letters, moreover, are notorious for their ambiguity. Authors hardly ever sketch the entire situation, which is even more difficult as we often only have one side of the correspondence. As a result, as pointed out by David Frankfurter, the interpretative framework of the historian can obscure the meaning of papyrus letters.

> Indeed, it is in the nature of papyri that, within some limitations, one can make the evidence mean whatever one wants to make it mean: a collection of classical literature from Oxyrhynchus can suggest a thriving and broadly literate gymnasium culture or an insular elite; a profusion of "magical" texts can mean a cultural decline into occult and selfish concerns or the ongoing attention to private ritual; a derogatory aside about "Egyptians" can signify an overarching Hellenistic racism or one person's frustrated attempt at cultural self-definition in a far more complex ethnic situation.[80]

Without a doubt, this admonition is valid for all historical work on papyri. As these sources characteristically offer information without describing the context or situation, they tend to be selected and interpreted within preexisting analytical frameworks. In this chapter and the next, I will be as explicit as possible about my theoretical framework. By defining my concepts and questioning my theoretical predispositions, I hope to escape the trap of selection bias or interpretation through colored lenses. Four methodological principles will therefore guide my examination of the Kellis papyri: (1) methodological agnosticism; (2) contextual situations; (3) minimalist religious interpretation; and (4) consistent non-eclectic reading.

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[79] On emotions in papyrus letters, see Clarysse, "Emotions in Greek Private Papyrus Letters." 63-86.

[80] D. Frankfurter, "Review of Roger S. Bagnall, Egypt in Late Antiquity. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993," *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 94.03.19 (1994).

First, as a historical analysis of an ancient religion, this dissertation will not touch upon the existence or nonexistence of the supernatural world. Its fundamental perspective is one of methodological agnosticism, indicating that religion is only studied where it can be observed through general scientific analysis. The truth about the supernatural world is outside the realm of historical scholarship. The religious claims of believers are not.[81] The existence of supernatural beings or the truth of the revelation will be bracketed, and instead I will examine the social, cultural, and historical features of Manichaeism.

Second, particular truth claims or practices have to be evaluated within their specific context or situation. Despite the claims of a coherent religious tradition, we cannot simply assume the similarity of Manichaean practice in various regions and periods. Just like the theological logic and hermeneutics of American Protestantism cannot be used to explain Greek Orthodox practice, so we cannot borrow freely from the more abundant Iranian, Arabic, or Chinese accounts of Manichaean practice to elucidate Manichaeism in Kellis. The natural inclination to combine various strands of evidence, despite their geographical and historical differences, is a risky academic strategy. This way of filling gaps suggests a postulated coherent social entity that either never existed, or cannot be proven beyond speculation. It merely presents Manichaeism as it ought to have been like, rather than as how it was. Meanwhile, abstaining from such harmonization does not exclude explicit comparison between sources from various regions, but rather allows the Kellis texts to challenge previous reconstructions.

Third, I will tread carefully when interpreting fragmentary passages in relation to Manichaeism. Instead of equating all ambiguous phrases with Manichaean practices, I propose to work with a minimalist religious interpretation, in which these practices actually have to be attested in the sources.

This also means, fourth, that I will seek to avoid eclectic readings or cherry picking. The less tantalizing passages and options have to be examined, as well as the instances of marked Manichaeanness (a term that will be defined more closely in the following chapter, but designates instances in which the Manichaean group affiliation was considered relevant). With Rogers Brubaker, whose work will be discussed more closely in Chapter 2, I think we should also be prepared to see how little Manichaeanness may have mattered, instead of focusing on the most explicit and breathtaking evidence only.[82] In effect, Manichaean

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[81] The outside perspective of the scholar is *agnostic* in principle, as we cannot know whether or not the supernatural exists. On the other hand, I agree with Davidsen that the scholarly outsider perspective is *atheist* or *naturalist* in practice. The supernatural interpretation is not an option that can be pursued in the religious studies. Davidsen, *The Spiritual Tolkien Milieu*, 30-32 arguing for "methodological naturalism or non-supernaturalism"; J. Platvoet, "Theologie als dubbelspel: over verscheidenheid en dynamiek van theologie en godsdienstwetenschap," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 63, no. 3 (2009): 234 for the "agnostic" study of religion; J. Platvoet, *Comparing Religions: A Limitative Approach. An Analysis of Akan, Para-Creole, and Ifo-Sananda Rites and Prayers* (The Hague: Mouton, 1983), 4-5, 21, 29 on emic and etic distinction, and pages 15-17 on theological, positivist-reductionists and religionist approaches; W. Hanegraaff, "Empirical Method in the Study of Esotericism," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 7, no. 2 (1995): 576-605.

[82] R. Brubaker et al., *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvian Town* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 206.

practices that left no trace in the papyri will not be discussed at length. The possibility that Manichaeanness was sometimes entirely invisible and unidentifiable, because it adhered to local convention without any need of distinction, leaves us in the precarious situation that the absence of evidence may or may not be considered as evidence. This uncertainty, however, is to be preferred to the unwarranted stretching of sources from elsewhere in the world. With these four principles, I will analyze the Kellis material as carefully and accurately as possible, in conversation with both scholarship on the local Egyptian setting and the wider transhistorical Manichaean tradition.[83]

Despite some of these caveats, I will not only analyze the sources in their own right and on their own terms. Although I sympathize with the ambition of historians like Edwin Judge to analyze the ancient world on its own terms, I approach the ancient world with a different register: that of the critical terminology of the social-scientific study of religion. While Judge considers modern concepts unhelpful in his emic, or descriptive, analysis of Ancient Christian communities, I generally find them both useful and necessary as outsider, or redescriptive, concepts.[84] I consider comparison a necessary process, the fundament of all (historical) knowledge, which makes the unfamiliar familiar and the particular understandable to outsiders. Our concepts and definitions may be external to the people and period we study, but as long as they are not used as "predetermined pattern[s] of explanation" they can serve as *tertia comparationis* to highlight similarity and difference.[85] By actively reflecting on some of the fundamental terms and assumptions of the study of religion (first of all the notion of "religion" itself and second also the notion of "groups") I will walk the tightrope between ancient vocabulary and modern concepts. Therefore, while stressing the processual and performative nature of Manichaeanness, I will sometimes refer to these individuals as simply "Manichaeans" for the sake of brevity.

1.6 Scope and Limitations of This Study

The skeleton of this dissertation consists of three parts. Part I starts with the groundwork of introducing the theoretical framework, as well as the social and economic context of the Kellis. Building on this groundwork, the chapters of Part II delve into the world of individual Kellites, their letters, and the formation of a local religious community. Part III will

[83] Compare the approach and results of Karen Stern's investigation into the Jewishness of North-African Jews, K. B. Stern, *Inscribing Devotion and Death: Archaeological Evidence for Jewish Populations of North Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 47.

[84] Many of Edwin Judge's articles have now been reprinted. E. A. Judge, "Did the Churches Compete with Cult Groups?," in *Early Christianity and Classical Culture*, ed. J. T. Fitzgerald, T. H. Olbricht, and L. M. White (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 501-24; E. A. Judge, "The Beginning of Religious History," in *Jerusalem and Athens: Cultural Transformation in Late Antiquity*, ed. A. M. Nobbs (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 11-31; E. A. Judge, "The Social Identity of the First Christians: A Question of Method in Religious History," in *Social Distinctives of the Christians in the First Century: Pivotal Essays by E. A. Judge*, ed. D. M. Scholer (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2008), 128 where he coined "the sociological fallacy" for the transposition of social theories across centuries without verification.

[85] Judge, "The Social Identity of the First Christians," 135. On the comparative method, see D. Frankfurter, "Comparison and the Study of Religions in Late Antiquity," in *Comparer en histoire des religions antiques*, ed. C. Calame and B. Lincoln (Liège: Presses Universitaires de Liège, 2012), 83-98.

subsequently summarize the main findings, in order to analyze the most noteworthy patterns and return to some of the broader questions about the study of ancient religions and everyday life.

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework that structures my examination of the Kellis letters. I will highlight several academic theories that together provide the building blocks for a consideration of religion's impact on everyday life. These building blocks center around three key themes: everyday life, individuals, and religion. By combining recent studies into lived religion with the strong historical challenge of "groupism," I will identify opportunities and pitfalls for the examination of religious choices in ancient source material. Individuals and families draw on multiple repertoires in their decision-making process. These include late antique religions such as Manichaeism, but local village expectations and the particular needs of a situation were also taken into account. Religious choices, in consequence, are the result of an explicit or implicit negotiation of group norms, social identifications, and situations. The work of scholars like Rogers Brubaker, Bernard Lahire, and Ann Swidler lead the way in stressing the dynamics between agency and structure, offering critical insight that can be used to examine where, when, and how religion mattered in everyday life. I will propose the concept of "Manichaeanness," following Brubaker's "groupness," to distinguish situations in which the affiliation with the imagined Manichaean community mattered most. In this chapter, moreover, I define my concept of religion and sketch the fundamental transition from a society characterized by religions associated with preexisting social formations to a society that saw a rise of autonomous religions.

Chapter 3 consists of a detailed introduction to the social and economic setting of Kellis, introducing the archaeology of the Roman houses in which Manichaean texts were found, as well as the papyrological and material evidence for multiple and diverse cultural and religious repertoires in the village. Despite its remote location in the desert, Kellis was not a rural backwater. Rather, the architectural and artistic remains reveal that it was firmly connected to the Nile valley, as well as the Roman Empire at large.

The body of Part II of this study is built around five key themes of Manichaean life: self-designation, gift-giving, death ritual, communal gathering, and book writing. These themes logically follow from the current state of Manichaean studies and can be informed by the new sources from Kellis. Chapter 4 begins with the letters of Makarios, Pamour, and both of their families. These letters inform us about many aspects of their lives, including their relatives, businesses, and interaction with the Manichaean elect. The letters sometimes employ Manichaean phrases and terminology that directly correspond to well-known Manichaean liturgical texts, while at other occasions they use vocabulary derived from a religious repertoire that was shared with fourth-century Christians. Despite previous claims that these people belonged to a sectarian and persecuted group, I will show that they had direct contact with some of the local and regional administrative and military elite. Some religious maltreatment may have occurred in the Nile valley, but I contend that Makarios and Pamour lived in relative peace.

Chapter 5 is devoted to particular items of the Manichaean linguistic repertoire. I will examine the various self-designators used in the corpus of personal letters. In some of the

phrases, the authors draw on an explicit Manichaean repertoire, while in others they quite frequently opt for more neutral designators associated with the village, family, or neighborhood. Likewise, I conclude that the use of Coptic was a marked option in this early period, but rather than corresponding to a solid and sectarian religious group, I conclude that it marks a more ambiguous network connoting family, regional, and religious affiliations.

Chapter 6 focuses on the gifts and economic transactions that lay behind most of the letters. In particular, I will reexamine the passages that have been read as evidence for the Manichaean system of almsgiving to the elect, facilitating their daily ritual meal. Against previous reconstructions, I will argue that many of these passages attest to less clear-cut situations in which economic interactions, village support, and religious obligations blended. More importantly, I contend that the passages pertaining to the *agape* do not inform us about the performance of a Manichaean ritual meal. As the elect spent most of their time outside the village, traveling in the Nile valley, alms were given over a distance and the ritual meal was not (or infrequently) performed in the Kellis community.

Chapters 4 to 6 stress the multi-interpretable nature of the sources and the infrequency of explicit Manichaeanness. Chapters 7 to 9 highlight the other side of the equation. Chapter 7 treats the evidence for specific Manichaean gatherings. Although it is tempting to import insights from Manichaeism in other regions, I will only examine the local evidence for such communal gatherings. This includes the liturgical texts found at Kellis, in particular many psalms and prayers, some of which have direct parallels in the Manichaean texts from Medinet Madi or the wider Manichaean tradition. The ritual performance of these psalms and prayers, I will argue, contributed to Manichaeanness and therefore to a distinct group-identification.

Chapter 8 deals with a very specific situation, in which Manichaeans gathered and commemorated the departed. I will show that there is evidence for at least two distinct rituals pertaining to death: one a ritual at the deathbed, and the other a commemorative event. No distinct Manichaean evidence, on the other hand, is found among the burials or in the two large cemeteries of Kellis. Rather than engaging in an extensive and elaborate treatment of the body, these families probably chose to follow the customs of their neighbors and perform Manichaean rituals at other occasions.

Chapter 9 focuses on the frequent references to books and scribal culture. Combining papyrological evidence with the archaeological finds at the site shows the prominence of books and written texts in Kellis. Apart from Classical literature, Christian and apocryphal texts were found. It is not unlikely that some of the Manichaeans read, or even copied, these texts, as their letters allude to some of them. I will argue that Manichaean catechumens were not only involved in the production of these texts, but also copied Manichaean books, including books that may have belonged to the Manichaean canon. Against previous assertions, I see no reason to think that these texts were secret or concealed from catechumens. As there is no evidence for missionary work, I propose to consider these scribal actions a ritual performance in itself, bringing the religious authority of Mani close to the village context in absence of the elect.

Part III consists of one concluding chapter, which is followed by a number of appendices that supplement the foregoing chapters. Chapter 10 will summarize where and when Manichaeanness was deemed relevant and visible in the Kellis sources. Drawing on the theoretical framework, it will highlight instances in which Manichaeanness was constituted in talk ("talking Manichaeanness"), in choices ("choosing Manichaeanness"), in performances ("performing Manichaeanness"), and in consumption ("consuming Manichaeanness"). The specific outcome will also ask for a shift in the evaluation of the new type of religions common in Late Antiquity ("secondary religion").

To preserve the focus on Manichaeanness in the Greek and Coptic papyri from Kellis, the study put certain limitations on the scope of the material that could be included. Frequent references will be made to the specific fourth-century documents from the village, as well as the early fifth-century Manichaean texts from Medinet Madi. Readers interested in Augustine, Leo the Great, or other polemicists against Manichaeans will find only a few references to their works. Likewise, eastern Manichaean sources will only infrequently be cited, mostly because an exhaustive evaluation of the history of Manichaean communities or the development of a Manichaean tradition is beyond the scope of this dissertation.[86]

Because of the various and distinct audiences, I have tried to make this book accessible to papyrologists, historians, and scholars of religion. Therefore, substantial attention is given to elements that may be familiar to the individual specialists in either discipline, but not to other scholars. By bringing these disciplines together, I hope to shed light on an otherwise little-known religion on the fringes of the Roman Empire.

[86] Regarding secondary literature, I have not attempted to include a full bibliography on all aspects of Manichaean life. Secondary literature is cited *in relation to* the Kellis material. The fundamental contributions of earlier generations (Böhlig, Burkitt, Widengren, Henning, Puech, Decret, Ries, Sundermann and others) have been consulted but could not be cited at each instance. For a critical review of previous scholarship on Manichaean rituals, see BeDuhn, *Manichaean Body*, 211-22.