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Chapter 5. Orion's Language: Manichaean Self-Designation in the Kellis Papyri

Greet warmly from me those who give you rest, the elect and the catechumens, each one by name (Orion to Hor).¹

5.1 Introduction

Language matters. It gives structure to reality and offers building blocks for fundamental acts of self-identification. Sometimes, this is made explicit in names, labels, and self-designators, but often it is implied in the author's choice of words. Take for example Orion, one of the contemporaries of Makarios from House 3. He wrote to his "beloved brother" Hor, and he praised him as "the good limb of the Light Mind." These phrases were combined with other marked language, as he greeted "those who give you rest" and the "elect and catechumens."² The previous chapter has introduced such phrases as a Manichaean linguistic repertoire. In using this repertoire, Orion gave away his Manichaean affiliation: a reference to the Light Mind is not easily overlooked.

Orion may have used these words to reveal his Manichaean self-identification, but other authors were less forthcoming. Sifting through the various self-designations in the Kellis letters shows how authors wove together religious and nonreligious modes of classification and self-identification. In fact, relatively few explicit Manichaean names and labels were used, presumably because the situation did not ask for such information, which was already known to all those involved. Therefore, focusing on linguistic markers such as "those who give you rest" or "limb of the Light mind" allows us to approach both the social self-understanding of the letter writers and the situations in which there was a need for these labels.

An important reason for looking into the self-designators is the claim that Orion's language reflects the inherent "sectarianism" of the local Manichaean community.³ Self-designators are one way into the social map of a group of people. They offer a perspective (although with limitations) on the way those people perceived themselves in relation to others; how their face-to-face acquaintances related to the intangible social and religious world around them.⁴ The usage of explicit Manichaean self-designators and strong fictive kinship language has led Peter Brown to suggest a "sense of intimate friendship" between

¹ Ⲭⲓⲛⲓⲉ ⲛⲏⲓ ⲧⲟⲛⲟⲩ ⲁⲛⲉⲧⲓ ⲛⲧⲁⲛ ⲛⲉⲕ ⲛⲓⲛⲉⲕⲗⲉⲕⲧⲓⲟⲥ ⲛⲏ ⲛⲓⲕⲁⲑⲛⲟⲩⲩⲉⲛⲟⲥ ⲡⲟⲩⲉ ⲡⲟⲩⲉ ⲕⲁⲧⲁ ⲡⲉⲩⲣⲉⲛ P.Kell.Copt. 15.27-30. I will follow the spelling Orion, as this is considered the best choice in Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT2*, 20. In *CDT1* his name was spelled as Horion.

² Cited above, P.Kell.Copt. 15.27-30 and in line 3-4 ⲡⲛⲉⲗⲓⲟⲓⲥ ⲉⲧⲁⲛⲓⲧ ⲛⲓⲡⲛⲟⲩⲥ ⲛⲓⲟⲩⲓⲗⲓⲛⲉ. Orion and Hor were associated with the Makarios' letters through several onomastic connections. Most prominently Taliphanti in P.Kell.Copt. 58 (Orion) and P.Kell.Copt. 19 and 25 and 28 (Makarios archive), Hatre in P.Kell.Copt. 17 and 18 (Orion) and P.Kell.Copt. 24 and 26 (Makarios archive), although all identifications can be contested. The editors date the letters in the late 350s CE. Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT1*, 140.

³ Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT1*, 74.

⁴ Eliasoph and Lichterman, "Culture in Interaction," 778.

catechumens in Kellis, something that may have attracted people like Augustine to Manichaeism. In his opinion, the documentary letters from Kellis show how

members of the local Manichaean community thought of themselves as bound together by strong ties of spiritual friendship. Their members spoke of each other as sons and daughters of the “Light Mind.” They were inextricably joined one to the other through the common possession of the “Light Mind.”

He concludes that catechumens and elect experienced a “spiritual solidarity of unusual force.”⁵ But is he correct? Did Orion’s language indeed reflect strong groupness and a sectarian stance?

This chapter has two primary aims. First, it will analyze from a sociolinguistic perspective the forms of address, the self-designation, and ascribed identifications from the Kellis documentary papyri. How did these people describe themselves? How did they address others and what role was reserved for the religious identifications? By looking at these self-designators, this chapter will discern how and when Kellites embedded their lives and letters into a Manichaean framework—as well as situations in which they did not.⁶ The results provide a critical contribution to the postulated sectarian nature of the local Manichaean community. Second, the use of Coptic as a community marker will be examined. We have seen that some phrases (including forms of self-designation) connoted Manichaeanness, even to the extent of adhering to the *ἴππος* (P.Kell.Copt. 19.4–5) of a Manichaean epistolary style, ultimately deriving from Mani’s own *Epistles*. The second half of this chapter will continue this examination with regard to the role of Coptic. It will be argued that the choice for Coptic over Greek was a marked option that correlated partially with Manichaean groupness.

5.2 Self-Designation in Documentary Papyri

Most letters in the Kellis corpus refer to the recipients as family members or as closely related members of the household, neighborhood, or village. The identification with the village is also apparent in the Greek legal documents, which frequently designate people with their place of residence. An illuminating example is found in a contract pertaining to the exchange of ownership rights, dating from 363 CE, between Aurelius Psenpnoutes son of

⁵ Both passages are from Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 159.

⁶ With regard to religious self-identification, Cohen concluded that “a Jew is anyone who declares himself/herself to be one.” Cohen, “Those Who Say They Are Jews and Are Not,” 41. Sociologists and psychologists stressed how “people actively produce identity through their talk.” J. S. Howard, “Social Psychology of Identities,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 26: 372. Some previous studies looking into the self-identification of Manichaeans include, Lieu, “Self-Identity of the Manichaeans,” 205-27; N. A. Pedersen, “Manichaean Self-Designations in the Western Tradition,” in *Augustine and Manichaean Christianity*, ed. J. van Oort (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 177-96; A. Khosroyev, “Manichäismus: Eine Art persisches Christentum? Der Definitionsversuch eines Phänomens,” in *Inkulturation des Christentums im Sasanidenreich*, ed. J. Tubach and M. Arafa (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2007), 43-53; Earlier discussions are found in A. Böhlig, “Zum Selbstverständnis des Manichäismus,” in *A Green Leaf. Papers in Honour of Professor Jes P. Asmussen*, ed. W. Sundermann, J. Duchesne-Guillemain, and F. Vahman (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 317-38.

Pachoumon and Aurelius Horos son of Pamour (P.Kell.Gr. 30). The latter is represented by his paternal grandfather, who is introduced as:

Aurelius Psais son of Pamour and mother Tekysis, about *n* years old, with a scar on the flank of the shin of the left leg, from the village of Kellis belonging to the city of the Mothites in the Great Oasis, acting on behalf of his grandson Horos and his son Pamour named "Egyptians" (?), residing in the same village of Aphrodite in the same *nome*. Greetings.⁷

Names, nicknames, physical description, family relations, and the village- and nome-context provided enough legal designation to make clear which parties were involved in this transaction.⁸ Similar designations in other documents listed information like occupation (Tithoes, the carpenter, P.Kell.Gr. 11, Aurelius Stonius, priest, P.Kell.Gr.13) or social position (Aurelius Pausanias, son of Valerius, former magistrate of the city of the Mothites, P.Kell.Gr.38). These self-designators are fairly common in Greek documents. In contrast to the Coptic letters, few Greek documents convey a sense of Manichaeanness (with one notable exception: P.Kell.Gr. 63, see Chapter 6). Religiously marked self-designators are only found in the Coptic personal letters (see section 5.5 on the use of Coptic).

Religious self-designators, when formalized in writing, inform us about what we will call the social imaginary of a set of individuals. Charles Taylor's "social imaginaries" designate the ways in which "ordinary people imagine their social surroundings."⁹ These imaginative maps are "carried in images, stories, and legends," more than in explicit theoretical reflections.¹⁰ Naming oneself and others is an essentially imaginary practice within this social imaginary, identifying the primary actors within the narratives and tying social others to the conceptual images and stories found in theological or cosmological texts. In this way, self-designators serve as abbreviations of a more complex set of cosmological or theological ideas.¹¹ You could say that theological and heresiological literature may have

⁷ Αὐρηλίου Ψάιτος Π[α]μοῦρ μητρὸς Τεκύσιος ὡς ἐτῶν -ca.?- οὐλὴν ἔχοντος ἐπὶ πλαγίας ἀντικνήμης ἀριστεροῦ ποδὸς ἀπὸ κώμης Κέλλεως τῆς Μωθιτῶν πόλεως Ὀάσεως Μ[ε]γάλης χρηματίζοντος ὑπὲρ τοῦ υἱοῦ Ὄρου καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ Παμοῦρ Αἰγυπτίων λεγομένων ἐπιδημήσαντος τῇ αὐτῇ κώμῃ Ἀφροδίτης τοῦ [αὐτοῦ νομοῦ ἀλλήλοις χαίρειν. P.Kell.Gr. 30.5-7. The nickname "Egyptians" is heavily restored and its meaning is not entirely clear. Worp read this as a nickname, Lewis has interpreted it as "city folk" from the Nile valley instead of the oasis. N. Lewis, "Notationes Legentis," *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 34 (1997): 29-30.

⁸ Worp, *GPk1*, 89-90; A. Delattre, "Éléments de l'identification en Égypte (IVe-VIIIe siècles)," in *Identifiers and Identification Methods in the Ancient World*, ed. M. Depauw and S. Coussement (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 153-62.

⁹ C. Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 171. See also his earlier work, C. Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 23-30.

¹⁰ Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 23.

¹¹ P. Trebilco, *Self-Designations and Group Identity in the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 11-12. See also the overview of sociolinguistic studies and the ancient world in J. A. Snyder, *Language and Identity in Ancient Narratives* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 6. On Christian ethnography and the role of heresiology, see T. S. Berzon, *Classifying Christians: Ethnography, Heresiology, and the Limits of*

defined the conceptual borders of ancient religious groups insofar as it became applied and embedded in the social imaginaries of individuals in their daily life.

The social imaginary of Manichaeans has frequently been understood as sectarian in nature. In sociological studies, sectarianism means that a group exists in a state of tension with society.¹² This can be measured by (1) a high level of social difference with deviant norms, beliefs, and primarily behavior;¹³ (2) a high level of antagonism, with particularistic beliefs and an exclusive stance; (3) the practice of separation: favoring social relations among insiders and restricting social interactions with outsiders. Some of these characteristics have been detected in the letters of the Manichaeans of Kellis. According to Lieu, they

saw themselves as a chosen elite in the Christian sense. They promoted themselves as the Church of the Paraclete and as such were *the* Christians in the Dakhleh Oasis. The lack of a strong presence of other forms of Christianity in the region probably enabled this elite self-identity to develop.¹⁴

In contrast to this statement from almost twenty years ago, this chapter will problematize the antagonistic characterization of Manichaeans as a “chosen elite” and their self-understanding as “*the* Christians.” The self-designators used by Kellites show that religious difference was not their primary conceptualization of the world. Instead, I will suggest that the strong dualism of the Manichaean cosmology did not crystallize into sharp group boundaries.

The following sections will give an overview of seven types of self-designators, ranging from allusions to the Manichaean church hierarchy to more general and ambiguous designators based on the household or neighborhood.

Knowledge in Late Antiquity (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016). In particular on page 24ff where he redefines ethnography as a disposition and discerns the microscopic ethnography of customs and the macroscopic ethnography of typologies and genealogies.

¹² On the sectarian interpretation of the Manichaeans, see note 3 in this chapter. A useful summary of church-sect typologies is found in L. L. Grabbe, “When Is a Sect a Sect - or Not? Groups and Movements in the Second Temple Period,” in *Sectarianism in Early Judaism*, ed. D. J. Chalcraft (London: Acumen Publishing, 2007), 125; B. R. Wilson, *Religious Sects. A Sociological Study* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970), 14-18; R. Stark and W. S. Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 121-28; R. Stark and W. S. Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 41-67; R. Stark and R. Finke, *Acts of Faith* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 144-45 continue to propose that the average religious commitment of members is higher when the tension is high. However, use of “tension with the world” is problematic, because, a difference with aspect of the world is fundamental for every construction of movement, moreover, it presupposes consensus in the world which might not be there. D. J. Chalcraft, ed. *Sectarianism in Early Judaism* (London: Acumen Publishing, 2007), 14; C. Wassen and J. Jokiranta, “Groups in Tension: Sectarianism in the Damascus Document and the Community Rule,” in *Sectarianism in Early Judaism*, ed. D. J. Chalcraft (London: Acumen Publishing, 2007), 205-45. For an examination of these three criteria in the Damascus Codex and a comparison with the use of tension in B. R. Wilson, *The Social Dimensions of Sectarianism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 46-68.

¹³ Wassen and Jokiranta, “Groups in Tension,” 209.

¹⁴ Lieu, “Self-Identity of the Manichaeans,” 227 (his capitals) and page 224 (his capitals and emphasis).

5.2.1 Kinship Language and Ethnic Reasoning

Kinship language was commonly used to refer to colleagues, neighbors, and friends throughout the ancient world.¹⁵ The extensive usage of kinship language in the Kellis letters, therefore, complicates prosopographical research, as it masks the distinction between real kin and fictive family. Its prominence, however, also points to the value of the family metaphor. Belonging to the in-group could be demarcated as brotherhood and daughterhood, thereby stressing commonality, expectations, and behavioral norms.

The Manichaean connotation of kinship language in personal letters was strongly related to the behavioral norms associated with the two classes of Manichaeans. This is most strongly visible in P.Kell.Copt. 31 and 32, two Coptic personal letters written by members of the elect. In both letters, the author is an anonymous “father” (ⲡⲉⲓⲱⲧ) who writes to his “daughter(s)” (ⲱⲉⲣⲉ) for financial or material support.¹⁶ The recipients of P.Kell.Copt. 31 are never named but only addressed in kinship terminology. The recipient of P.Kell.Copt. 32 was addressed as Eirene, a personal name meaning “peace.” The address formulas of both letters, printed together in Table 10 show how the extensive and explicit designations were incorporated into the framework of a father-daughter relationship. In both letters, the “daughter(s)” are characterized using elaborate Manichaean designators that indicate their status as catechumens, a position which is only made explicit in P.Kell.Copt. 32.

Many of the explicit self-designators listed in the appendix and discussed in this chapter derive from these two letters. In my interpretation, these phrases and labels were used strategically. By listing all the good virtues of the daughters, the elect author framed his request for material support. He reminded the recipients of the behavioral expectations pertaining to their role as catechumens. This does not mean that he was insincere or greedy (which cannot be tracked down), but it reminds us that his recipients would not necessarily have thought about themselves in these terms.

Letter	P.Kell.Copt. 31.1–9 ¹⁷	P.Kell.Copt. 32.1–17 ¹⁸
Addressee	“My loved daughters, who are greatly revered by me: the members of the holy Church, the daughters of the Light Mind, they who also are numbered with the children of God; the favoured, blessed, God-loving	“To our loved daughter: the daughter of the holy church, the catechumen of the faith; the good tree whose fruit never

¹⁵ P. Arzt-Grabner, “‘Brothers’ and ‘Sisters’ in Documentary Papyri and in Early Christianity,” *Revista Biblica* 50 (2002): 185-204.

¹⁶ Fourth-century Christian parallels for this use of the paternal title mainly derive from the monastic environment. At the monastery of Bawit, to use an example from a later date, both “mother” and “father” were used for senior members of the community. See also the frequent use of “apa.” S. J. Clackson, *Coptic and Greek Texts Relating to the Hermopolite Monastery of Apa Apollo* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum, 2000), 8, 29.

¹⁷ ⲡⲉⲓⲱⲣⲉ ⲡⲓⲛⲉⲣⲉⲧⲉ ⲉⲧ'ⲧⲉⲓⲁⲧ' ⲡⲓⲧⲟⲩ ⲧⲟⲛⲟⲩ ⲡⲓⲙⲉⲗⲟⲥ ⲡⲓⲧⲉⲕ'ⲕⲏⲥⲓⲁ ⲉⲧⲟⲩⲁⲃⲉ [ⲡⲓⲱⲣⲉ] ⲡⲓⲛⲟⲩⲥ ⲡⲓⲟⲩⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲉ[ⲧⲏⲛ ⲁⲛ ⲡ]ⲓ ⲡⲓⲱⲣⲉ ⲡⲓⲛⲟⲩⲥⲧⲉ' ⲡⲓ[Ⲯ]Ⲫⲁⲩⲉ ⲉⲧⲥⲙⲁⲛⲁⲧ ⲡⲓⲙⲁⲕⲁⲣⲓⲟⲥ ⲡⲓⲙⲁⲓⲛⲟⲩⲥⲧⲉ ⲡⲓⲱⲣⲉ ⲡⲓⲥⲣⲟⲛⲁ' ⲁⲛⲁⲕ ⲡⲉⲧⲓⲓⲱⲧ' ⲉⲧⲣⲓⲕⲏⲛⲙⲁ' ⲡⲉⲧⲥⲣⲉⲓ ⲛⲏⲧⲓ ⲉⲓ ⲡⲁⲁⲓⲥ Ⲫⲁⲣⲉⲓⲛ'

¹⁸ ⲧⲓⲱⲣⲉ ⲡⲓⲛⲉⲣⲓⲧ ⲧⲱⲣⲉ ⲡⲓⲧⲉⲕⲕⲏⲥⲓⲁ ⲉⲧⲟⲩⲁⲃⲉ ⲧⲕⲁⲟⲛⲫⲟⲩⲙⲉⲛⲏ ⲡⲓⲛⲁⲣⲧⲉ ⲡⲱⲛ ⲉⲧⲁⲛⲓⲧ ⲉⲧⲉⲛⲁⲡⲓⲕⲁⲣⲓⲟⲥ ⲉⲱⲃⲓ ⲁⲛⲏⲣⲉ ⲉ[ⲧ]ⲉ ⲡⲓⲧⲁⲥ ⲧⲉ ⲧⲉⲗⲁⲛⲓ ⲉⲧⲣⲟⲩ[ⲣⲉ]ⲱⲣⲱ ⲡⲓⲙⲏⲛⲉ ⲧⲉⲧⲁⲥ[Ⲫ]ⲡⲓ ⲛⲉⲥ ⲡⲓⲛⲉⲥⲫⲏⲛⲙⲁ [ⲁⲥ]ⲃⲁⲗⲱⲟⲩ ⲁⲛⲉⲱⲣ ⲉⲧⲣⲓ [ⲡ]ⲪⲓⲓⲪⲉ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲙⲁⲣⲉ ⲉⲗⲉ ⲃⲓ ⲙⲁⲓⲧ' ⲟⲩⲁⲃⲉ ⲙⲁⲣⲉ Ⲫⲏⲥⲧⲏⲥ [Ⲫ]ⲁⲪⲧ' ⲁⲣⲁⲩ ⲁⲪⲓⲟⲩⲉ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲡⲓ[ⲧⲁ]ⲩ ⲛⲉ ⲡⲓⲛ ⲙⲓ ⲡⲟⲩ' ⲧⲉⲧⲉ [ⲛ]ⲉⲥⲣⲏⲩⲉ ⲉⲓⲛⲉ ⲡⲓⲛⲉⲣⲉⲛ [ⲧ]ⲓⲱⲣⲉ ⲉⲓⲣⲏⲛ ⲁⲛⲁⲕ ⲡⲉ[ⲧ]ⲓⲱⲧ ⲡⲉⲧⲥⲣⲉⲓ ⲛⲉ ⲉⲓ ⲡⲓⲛⲟⲩ[ⲧⲉ] Ⲫⲁⲣⲉⲓⲛ

	souls; my <i>shona</i> children.	withers, which is your love that emits radiance every day. She who has acquired for herself her riches and stored them in the treasuries that are in the heights, where moths shall not find a way, nor shall thieves dig through to them to steal; which (storehouses) are the sun and the moon. She whose deeds resemble her name, our daughter, Eirene.
Author	It is I, your father who is in Egypt, who writes to you: in the Lord, greetings!"	It is I, your father who writes to you: in God, greetings!"

Table 10: Start of two letters written by elect.

The biblical allusion in P.Kell.Copt. 32 takes this rhetorical strategy to a next level. The letter alludes to a New Testament parable about investing treasures in heaven, where moths and thieves cannot reach it (Matt 6.19–20, the parallels with Mt. 24:42–44 and 1 Thess 5.2 will return in Chapter 6).¹⁹ This passage featured frequently in Manichaean scripture, where it connected the almsgiving of pious catechumens to the released Light particles of the Living Soul stored on the sun and the moon (for example at 2 PsB. 151.4–152.9).²⁰ The parable is included here as directive for Eirene to commit herself to her almsgiving. The explicit reference to the sun and the moon as storehouses of spiritual riches ingeniously crafts a connection between the kinship language, the Manichaean ideology of giving, and the peace (Eirene in Greek) brought about by these gifts.

Since we are otherwise (almost) uninformed about Eirene and the anonymous recipients of P.Kell.Copt. 31, we do not know to what extent they would have recognized themselves in these pious descriptions. Eirene, to whom we have one other reference in the Kellis letters, was probably an active business woman like Tehat, but her identity in this letter is framed strictly by the role of daughter and catechumen, a supporter of the elect, even though the elaborate phrasing suggests that the social standing was actually the other way around.²¹ In most ancient letters, politeness strategies and extensive phrases were used by clients or petitioners toward their patron. In this case, the elect skillfully combined the

¹⁹ Mt. 6:19-20, discussed in M. Franzmann, "An 'Heretical' Use of the New Testament: A Manichaean Adaptation of Matt 6:19-20 in P. Kell. Copt 32," in *The New Testament Interpreted*, ed. B.C. Lategan and C. Breytenbach (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 153-62.

²⁰ M. Franzmann, "The Treasure of the Manichaean Spiritual Life," in *'In Search of Truth': Augustine, Manichaeism and Other Gnosticism. Studies for Johannes van Oort at Sixty*, ed. J. A. van den Berg, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 235-43. To which we can now add the parallel citation of Jesus in 1 Keph. 149, 362.27. The same theme is used in Iranian texts from the Zoroastrian tradition. A. Hintze, "Treasure in Heaven. A Theme in Comparative Religion," in *Irano-Judaica VI. Studies Relating to Jewish Contacts with Persian Culture Throughout the Ages*, ed. S. Shaked and A. Netzer (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2008), 9-36.

²¹ P.Kell.Copt. 105 mentions Eirene and therefore settles her name as a proper name. It does not, however, reveal more about her identity beyond the fact that she was greeted by Psais (presumably one of the Manichaeans, could this have been Psais III?).

Light Mind” and “Children of God” (P.Kell.Copt. 31.4–5). This last phrase can be compared with “child of righteousness” in P.Kell.Copt. 14.5, 15.2 and 19.1, which appropriated it from the *Kephalaia*, where the “new man,” who is free from the enslavement of the body, is called a “child of righteousness.”²⁷ Even though the “child of righteousness” is only born after the liberation of the body, the documentary texts show how it was used for catechumens like Matthaïos and the anonymous daughters. These labels established a narrative link between the supernatural world and the believers, strengthened by allusions to biblical text and Manichaean theology. For some of the elect, these self-designators probably served as abbreviations of a more complex social imaginary. They identified the recipients as “children of the holy church,” to show they understood their relation as part of a cosmological drama in which they represented the “living race” and embodied virtues such as righteousness and truth. Whether all catechumens would have understood this cosmological level remains a question, especially as most kinship terminology was used without further religious elaborations. In result, these phrases carried a certain ambivalence: they could be read with strong group connotations, but also within the unmarked framework of polite expressions in household and village interactions.

A related set of self-designators made use of the repertoire of ethnic reasoning. Ethnic reasoning was a rhetorical strategy by which Early Christians shaped their religious tradition, both by positioning themselves as a demarcated group, not unlike other ethnic groups, and by reframing themselves as universal and beyond ethnic boundaries.²⁸ According to Denise Kimber Buell, ethnic reasoning expressed the inclusive and distinct nature of Christianness, as it gave Christians conceptual space to legitimize their group identity as natural and universal, while it kept a certain fluidity in the membership structures.²⁹ Christian authors, for example, described Christians as belonging to the “righteous race,” or the “god-loving and god-fearing race.”³⁰ Conceptualizing conversion as rebirth allowed new members to enter into this new race.³¹ When Makarios, therefore, addressed Maria, Kyria, and Pshemnoute as “children of the living race” (ⲛⲱⲛⲣⲉ ⲛⲧⲣⲉⲓⲧⲉ ⲉⲣⲁⲛⲉ P.Kell.Copt. 22.5), he made use of the same type of ethnic reasoning to differentiate between insiders and outsiders. He may have learned the notion from one of the elect, as Apa Lysimachos wrote about “our children who are among our race” (ⲛⲛⲉⲛⲱⲛⲣⲉ ⲉⲧⲗⲓ ⲧⲛⲓⲣⲉⲓⲧⲉ P.Kell.Copt. 30.5). Manichaean liturgical and theological texts also employed this image of an undivided body of daughters and fathers, united in their common identity as

²⁷ Ⲙⲁϣⲙⲓ ⲛⲙⲉⲗⲟⲥ ⲛⲧⲏⲅⲁⲧⲟⲩ ⲛⲧⲏⲅⲁⲧⲟⲩ ⲛⲧⲏⲅⲁⲧⲟⲩ ⲛⲟⲩⲣⲏⲛⲏⲃⲣⲉ ⲟⲩⲱⲛⲣⲉ [ⲛ]ⲧⲉ ⲧⲁⲕⲓⲁⲓⲟⲩⲥⲩⲛⲏ 1 Keph. 38, 96.25-7. “He shall set right the members of the soul, form and purify them, and construct a new man of them, a child of righteousness.” Translation in Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher*, 101.

²⁸ D. K. Buell, *Why This New Race* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). Gruen emphasizes the malleable character of this terminology, in which he does not see a direct relation to matters of race, but instead carry wider meanings. E. S. Gruen, “Christians as a ‘Third Race’. Is Ethnicity at Issue?,” in *Christianity in the Second Century*, ed. J. Carleton Paget and J. Lieu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 235-49.

²⁹ Buell, *Why This New Race*, 3.

³⁰ Ignatius, *Mart. Pol.* 14.1, 17.1, 3.2, cited in Buell, *Why This New Race*, 52.

³¹ Buell, *Why This New Race*, 114.

“children of the living race.”³² It is also present in one of Mani’s *Epistles* at Kellis, which contributes to the impression that some authors imitated Mani’s epistolary style and thereby appropriated and adopted the social map and self-representation of these texts.³³

By adapting ethnic reasoning in their self-designations, Kellites embraced a cosmological world far greater than their local village society. It does not mean, however, that they worked with a sociological and soteriological determinism, as is sometimes claimed by ancient heresiologists. The accusation of soteriological determinism, analyzed by Buell and Williams, belonged to the broader use of ethnic reasoning. In fact, Buell and Williams show the opposite was sometimes true. Ethnic reasoning could be used without implying deterministic beliefs about salvation. Instead, metaphors of ethnicity and race were perceived as permeable: they could be used to emphasize the openness of the group identity, which allowed people to choose their own affiliation.³⁴ In other words, ethnic reasoning was not necessarily a marker of sectarianism.³⁵ While it could make use of strong groupness by stressing the ethnic distinction between insiders and outsiders, it was frequently used with a more open meaning. This is also true for Manichaeans. In the epistle of Mani found at Kellis, the author identifies the community as the “children of this living kindred,” but he continues to stress their background in the race and kin of the world: “[T]hey who have been chosen from every race and kin. We have been chosen because of nothing except that we could know our soul and understand everything; and strip ourselves of the world”³⁶ Their identity as a new race, here, does not imply an inherent, predetermined Manichaean identity or nature, but was the result of “being chosen” (εταγασατπου) and having received Mani’s teaching, example, and wisdom.³⁷

Before continuing our examination of various other types of self-designation, two curious designators have to be mentioned. Some of the Kellis letters refer to specific individuals with the honorific title “Apa” or “Ama” and the unknown phrase “shona” — daughters—is used several times. How strongly were these phrases connected to Manichaeanness?

³² See appendix, [ἰϖ]ἡρε ἡτρεῖτε, 1 PsB. 154.15 and in the reconstruction in T.Kell.Copt. 4 B41.

³³ ἰϖἡρε ἡτρεῖτε ετανε, “the sons of this living race,” P.Kell.Copt. 53, 82.7. Gardner, *KLTI*, 39. Pedersen notes that “the crucial point rather seems to be that this is a very rare attestation of an expression which seems to have been dear to Mani himself.” Pedersen and Larsen, *Manichaean Texts in Syriac*, 206.

³⁴ On this flexible notion of soteriological determinism in Valentinian sources, see Buell, *Why This New Race*, 116-37; M. A. Williams, *The Immovable Race* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 158-85; D. Brakke, “Self-Differentiation among Christian Groups: The Gnostics and Their Opponents,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity: Origins to Constantine*, ed. M. M. Mitchell and F. M. Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 251. On the question of determinism, see N. Denzey Lewis, *Cosmology and Fate in Gnosticism and Graeco-Roman Antiquity. Under Pitiless Skies* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

³⁵ See the examples discussed in Buell, *Why This New Race*, 117.

³⁶ ...ἰϖἡρε ἡτρεῖτε ετανε?: νετεταγασατπου κατα γενοσ γενοσ ρι ρεῖτε ρεῖτε ἡταγασατῖπν ετβε λαγε εν εινητι ετρεῖσοϖων ἡτῖϑϑχἡ ἡτῖἡνε ερωβ ἡἡ ἡτῖκαἡε καρηῖ ἡτῖϑ[σ]ἡϑ... P.Kell.Copt. 53, 82.7-12.

³⁷ Mani’s teaching (P.Kell.Copt. 53, 82.04), model and wisdom (idem, 82.20-21).

The honorific *Apa* and female *Ama* derived from paternal and maternal designations, which developed into Christian (but not exclusively Christian) honorific titles.³⁸ In the Kellis documents, *Apa* Lysimachos is the most prominent figure with this title. He features most prominently in Makarios's letters, where he is described as living and working in the Nile valley. In two letters by Makarios, for example, *Apa* Lysimachos is in the Nile valley. In one instance, he is reported to have stayed (or lived?) in Antinoopolis.³⁹ He seems to have intimate knowledge of the Manichaean hierarchy, since he mentions bishops in his letter to Hor (P.Kell.Copt. 30) and a Syriac lector in his letter to Theognostos (P.Kell.Gr.67). As seen in the previous chapter, *Apa* Lysimachos must have been one of the elect. He was authorized to make decisions about the travel schedule and he may have had a retinue of catechumens following him. The designator "*Apa*," therefore, was used as an honorific title, not unlike Christian ecclesiastical officeholders (*Apa* Besas in P.Kell.Copt. 124).

The female equivalent of *Apa*, the honorific *Ama*, is less well known and only attested in one of the Kellis letters: "Zosime greets you; and *Ama* Theodora and Dorothea and *Ama* Tatou; and *Ama* Tapshai and her daughter and sons."⁴⁰ While "*apa*" is used in the doxologies of the Manichaean Psalmbook (2 PsB. 47.22–23, 149.30, 155.42, 166.22, 176.10), "*ama*" is never used in Coptic Manichaean texts. The most striking fact about this Kellis passage is that *Ama* Tapshai had children, which may suggest that these *amas* were catechumens instead of elect.⁴¹ If that is the case, *ama* is used here in a more traditional sense to designate women as honorable mothers, in contrast to the honorific (and religiously marked) use of the title *apa*. In general, however, these titles are used similarly in other fourth-century Christian letters.

³⁸ Malcom Choat notes that the use of *apa* is not exclusively Christian, but is often found in a Christian context. It was more commonly used than monastic titles, and was not an indicator of an ecclesiastical office. Choat, *Belief and Cult*, 68-70; T. Derda and E. Wipszycka, "L'emploi des titres Abba, Apa et Papas dans l'Égypte byzantine," *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 24 (1994): 23-56. On the use of "*apa*" in letters, see M. A. Eissa, "The Use of the Title *Apa* for the Sender in an Opening Epistolary Formula," *Journal of Coptic studies* 16 (2014): 115-24.

³⁹ P.Kell.Copt. 21 and 24. Just like with the Teacher, we happen to have letters by Lysimachos, one to Hor and one to Theognostos. The situation alluded to (the death of Joubel) makes sure that we are dealing with the same person.

⁴⁰ ΖΩΣΙΜΕ ΟΥΙΝΕ ΔΡΑΚ ΜΗ ΑΜΑ ΘΕΟΔΩΡΑ ΜΗ ΔΩΡΟΘΕΑ ΜΗ ΑΜΑ ΤΑΤΟΥ ΜΗ ΑΜΑ ΤΑΨΗΑΙ ΜΗ ΤΕΣΩΕΡΕ ΜΗ ΝΕΣΩΗΡΕ P.Kell.Copt. 80.33-36. *Amma* 'assumes the meaning "ascetic" or "clerical personality," according to Susanna Elm. S. Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 246. Blumell lists a large number of Greek inscriptions and papyri and notes (on the basis of SB VIII 9882) that "*ama*" could have developed from its early use as "a maternal title before it eventually came to be used as an honorific title for certain Christian women." L. H. Blumell, "A New Jewish Epitaph Commemorating Care for Orphans," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 47, no. 3 (2016): 321.

⁴¹ Although she could have had children before she became a member of the elect. Unfortunately, little is known about the way one became elect. Note that in all other letters Tapshai is designated as "mother." Doctrinal texts also urged catechumens to become perfect by refraining from procreation (1 Keph. 91, 228.24, 229.12). On the evidence for female Manichaean elect, see J. Kristinat, *Zwischen Selbstverständlichkeit und Schweigen. Die Rolle der Frau im frühen Manichäismus* (Heidelberg: Verlag Antike, 2013).

An equally difficult question revolves around the meaning and translation of “my *shona*—daughters” (ⲛⲁⲟⲩⲉⲣⲉ ⲛⲥⲟⲛⲁ) in P.Kell.Copt. 31.7. The phrase ⲥⲟⲛⲁ occurs four times in the documentary papyri and resembles the Sahidic Coptic ⲥⲟⲛⲉ (female, woman). In P.Kell.Copt. 31, this would result in a “pleonastic construction” (“my female daughters”).⁴² Other letters use ⲥⲟⲛⲉ and ⲥⲟⲛⲉ as if two distinct terms (P.Kell.Copt. 44.14, 32) or employ the variant ⲥⲟⲛⲉ (P.Kell.Copt. 20.50). Although two of these passages seem to suggest a collective (P.Kell.Copt. 20.50 and 58.19), this interpretation is merely speculation. The exact interpretation of the phrase remains ambiguous and without parallels outside the Kellis papyri.⁴³

5.2.2 *Catechumens and Elect*

Many of the previously discussed kinship metaphors relate to the binary division of the Manichaean community into catechumen and elect. The author of P.Kell.Copt. 31 described the catechumens as “my loved daughters, who are greatly revered by me: the members of the holy Church, the daughters of the Light Mind, they who also are numbered with the children of God” and Eirene was approached as a “daughter of the holy church” and “catechumen of the faith.”⁴⁴ The self-designators “catechumen” and “elect” were only infrequently used in the other personal letters, with Orion’s letters as main exception. He finished most of his letters by sending greetings to all those in the oasis, including the catechumens and elect:

Greet warmly for me they who give you rest, the elect and the catechumens, each one by name.⁴⁵

Greet for me all... the elect and the catechumens, all they who give rest to you, and every one.⁴⁶

Greet warmly for me my sister Aristakenia, all (?) the catechumens and they who give rest to you.⁴⁷

⁴² Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT1*, 171, 212 referring to Crum, *CD*, 343a, 385a; See also Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT2*, 24.

⁴³ Kristionat, *Zwischen Selbstverständlichkeit und Schweigen*, 91 opts for an alternative form of the Coptic word for “schwester” (ⲥⲟⲛⲉ). Alternatively, it may be from the Egyptian *st-hmw* “mistress.” Jean Daniel Dubois, in personal communication, has suggested it came from the ancient Egyptian for “young girl” (Personal communication, 06-08-2015).

⁴⁴ See the Coptic text cited above, P.Kell.Copt. 31.1-5 and P.Kell.Copt. 32.1-4.

⁴⁵ Ⲑⲓⲛⲉ ⲛⲛⲓ ⲧⲟⲛⲟⲩ ⲁⲛⲉⲧⲓ ⲛⲧⲁⲛ ⲛⲉⲕ ⲛⲛⲉⲕⲗⲉⲕⲧⲓⲟⲥ ⲛⲓ ⲛⲕⲁⲟⲛⲕⲟⲩⲛⲉⲛⲟⲥ ⲡⲟⲩⲉ ⲡⲟⲩⲉ ⲕⲁⲧⲁ ⲡⲉⲩⲣⲉⲛ P.Kell.Copt. 15.27-30.

⁴⁶ Ⲑⲓⲛⲉ ⲛⲛⲓ ⲁ ⲧⲓⲣⲟⲩ ⲛⲉⲕⲗⲉⲕⲧⲟⲥ [.....] ⲛⲉⲧⲓⲛⲧⲁⲛ ⲛⲉⲕ ⲧⲓⲣⲟⲩ P.Kell.Copt. 16.40-41.

⁴⁷ Ⲑⲓⲛⲉ ⲛⲛⲓ ⲧⲟⲛⲟⲩ ⲁⲧⲁⲥⲁⲛⲉ ⲁⲣⲓⲧⲁⲕⲉⲛⲓⲁ ⲁⲛⲕⲁⲟⲛⲕⲟⲩⲛⲉⲛⲟⲥ ⲛⲓ ⲛⲉⲧⲓⲛⲧⲁⲛ ⲛⲉⲕ P.Kell.Copt. 17.52-53.

5.2.3 *Those Who Give You Rest*

If we return to the three greeting sections of Orion's letters, cited in the previous section, we see that the "elect and catechumens" are mentioned in close association with "those who give you rest" (ⲁⲛⲉⲧⲧⲓ ⲛⲧⲁⲛ ⲛⲉⲕ). Who are these rest givers?

"Rest" (ⲛⲧⲁⲛ in Coptic, ἀνάπαυσις in Greek) is part of a complex semantic web of meaning, in which religious connotations about heavenly peace, salvation, and a state of unshakability play a large role. A minimalist reading of the Kellis passages is to consider alternative translations like "everyone who pleases you," which is also put forward by the editors.⁵¹ Indeed, "rest" may have had a metaphorical meaning besides the specific religious connotation. In one of the letters (P.Kell.Copt. 80.26–27), ⲛⲧⲁⲛ is translated with (financial) "benefit,"⁵² while in another instance, the translation "peace" is used: "[P]eace of mind in word and deed" (ⲁⲛⲉⲧⲧⲓⲛⲧⲁⲛ ⲛⲉⲕ ⲉⲛ ⲛⲉⲕⲉ ⲛⲓ ⲛⲉⲟⲩⲱⲩ P.Kell.Copt. 35.47 cf. 36.17). This broad range of meanings has to be put in perspective, as almost no other personal letters outside this corpus use ⲧⲓ ⲛⲧⲁⲛ. It occurs in one or two Christian letters, which may imply that it was not exclusively Manichaean, but its usage in the context of other Manichaean self-designators in P.Kell.Copt. 15, 16 and 17 leads me to believe that Orion alluded to a specifically Manichaean notion.⁵³

The way this phrase is used suggests that "those who give you rest" either are identical with "elect and catechumens" or represent only a section of the Manichaean community.⁵⁴ In P.Kell.Copt. 15 and 16, the phrase can be read as a reiteration of "the elect and catechumens" earlier in the sentence, while it seems that the elect are replaced by "they who give rest to you" (ⲛⲉⲧⲧⲓⲛⲧⲁⲛ) in P.Kell.Copt. 17. In the Manichaean psalms, the elect are called "men of rest." This rest is defined as their ascetic practice, which is, in turn, a gift from God, who is called the "giver of rest."⁵⁵ In the *Kephalaia*, however, the catechumens are those who give rest because "the holy church has no place of rest in this entire world except for through the catechumens who listen to it as [...] only with the catechumens who give it rest (ⲛⲧⲁⲛ)."⁵⁶ Another chapter specifically connects "rest" to the daily almsgiving and healing, when Mani forgives all the sins done to the Living Soul, "for all that you do to this alms on that day you do to cause it to be healed. You are bringing this alms offering that you have

⁵¹ Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT2*, 241; Cf. Gardner et. al, *CDT1*, 53.

⁵² Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT2*, 123; See also Crum, *CD*, 193b-196a.

⁵³ The edition refers to the possible parallels in Christian formulas in the letters published in W.E. Crum, ed. *Coptic Manuscripts Brought from the Fayyum by W.M. Flinders Petrie* (London: Nutt, 1893), 23, 37 and 53.

⁵⁴ The phrase is used in P. Kell. Copt. 15.28, 16.41, 17.53, 35.47, 36.14 and 115.40.

⁵⁵ God is the giver of rest in 2 PsB. 155.16-42. Elect are the men of rest in 2 PsB. 170.16 and in 1 Keph. 79, 191.9-192.3, where their ascetic practice is defined as dwelling in the rest. In one of the Kellis texts which may have been part of the collection of Mani's *Epistles*, rest is promised at the end (P.Kell.Copt. 54.64). On the virtue of being "unmoved" and the desire for "rest," see Mirecki, Gardner, and Alcock, "Magical Spell, Manichaean Letter," 5; Williams, *The Immovable Race*, 1-7 and 221. In the Coptic version of the ten advantages of the Manichaean church, the steadfast stance and unshakability of the church is listed as the number three reason why the Manichaean church is superior over all others (1 Keph. 151, 372.1-10).

⁵⁶ ⲧⲉⲕⲕⲁⲛⲥⲓⲁ ⲉⲟⲩⲱⲩⲉ ⲛⲓⲧⲉⲥ ⲛⲁⲓⲛⲧⲁⲛ ⲛⲓⲛⲉⲟⲩ ⲉⲛ ⲛⲓⲕⲟⲥⲛⲟⲥ ⲧⲛⲣⲓⲉ ⲉⲛⲛⲧⲓ ⲉⲓⲧⲓ ⲛⲕⲁⲧⲛⲁⲧⲟⲩⲛⲉⲛⲟⲥ ⲉⲧⲥⲟⲩⲧⲓ ⲁⲣⲁⲥ ⲉⲣⲉ
 ⲛⲓⲛⲉⲟⲩ ⲉⲁⲧⲓ ⲛⲕⲁⲧⲛⲁⲧⲟⲩⲛⲉⲛⲟⲥ ⲉⲧⲧⲓ ⲛⲧⲁⲛ ⲛⲉⲕ 1 Keph. 87, 217.20-24.

made to life and rest (ἤταν).⁵⁷ This connection to almsgiving, the central defining feature of the Manichaean catechumenate, strongly points to the identity of “those who give you rest,” although Orion seems to include both elect and catechumens in this designator.

5.2.4 *Metaphors of Belonging*

Belonging was sometimes expressed by the authors of the Kellis letters with some elegance, especially when religious groupness was implied. They employed designators like “kingdom of the saints,” “those of this word,” “the members of the holy church,” “worthy members,” “beloved of my limbs” and the “good limb of the Light Mind.” The latter designator is most clearly exclusively Manichaean, while the other phrases are less specific.⁵⁸ The image of “limbs” for community members and supernatural beings is rather common in Manichaean theological texts.⁵⁹ The authors drew on the image of the Manichaean church as a communal body in which the members constitute the limbs. They followed Mani’s example, who had frequently addressed his disciples as “my brothers and my limbs.”⁶⁰ Otherwise, this expression was used extensively in Coptic apocryphal literature, but I know of no other instances in which “limb” is used as a self-designator in Greek or Coptic personal letters.⁶¹ The association of “limbs” with the Light Mind (πνοῦς νοῦλαῖνε, in P.Kell. Copt. 31.3-4), moreover, sets it apart as a Manichaean designator.⁶²

Most of the other metaphors of belonging would not have disturbed Christian letter writers. Although there are no direct parallels from this period in which Christians use “kingdom of the saints,” “those of this word” or “the members of the holy church,” these phrases have no specific Manichaean connotation. This so-called “warm Christian piety” has parallels in Coptic Manichaean texts discussing “kingdom,” “word,” and in particular the “holy church,” but the first two are never used in self-designators outside the Kellis letters.⁶³ It is noteworthy, moreover, that “the kingdom of the saints” was employed in a letter that shared characteristics with the letters of the elect (P.Kell.Copt. 34). The designator “holy church” (τεκκλησια ετογαβε), on the other hand, was frequently used for the Manichaean church. We also find “church of the faithful” (ἡτεκκλησια ἡπίπιστος) in the Kellis version of Mani’s *Epistles*. With the designator “those of this word,” new ground is broken. Although “word(s)” (σεξε) appear frequently, and spoken and written word are central to Manichaeism, it is never turned into a designator for the community, as far as we know. Despite tantalizing connections to Manichaean literature, it should be pointed out that most

⁵⁷ ἐπιελη πετκειρε νμαϩ τη[ρη δ]ῆμνταε ἡπροου ετῆμεϩ εκειρε νμαϩ ἀ[τρς]τλγο εκεινε ἡῖμντναε ετακειτς ἀπωνε νη πνταν 1 Keph 93, 236.24-27.

⁵⁸ Some examples are discussed in Choat, *Belief and Cult*, 57-73.

⁵⁹ Middle Persian and Parthian sources use “limbs” to designate the two groups of elect and auditors. Similar phrases are used for the process of salvation, in which the Primordial Man and the Manichaeans have to collect their limbs. BeDuhn, *Manichaean Body*, 27 and 223.

⁶⁰ νανελος 1 Keph. 41.25-30, 144.2, 213.3, 285.21.

⁶¹ For example, in the Coptic *Investiture of the Archangel Michael*, 3.11, 7.19, 11.30 etc. (I have consulted the online translation by A. Alcock).

⁶² Samuel Lieu has recently noted that the figure of the Light Mind is central in many Manichaean texts, but is never mentioned outsider observations like Augustine. Lieu, “Christianity and Manichaeism,” 289.

⁶³ Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDTI*, 80 calls it “a warm Christian piety.”

of these phrases belonged to the shared repertoire of Manichaeans and Christians, and were only occasionally explicit enough to discern one from the other.

5.2.5 *Ascribed Virtues*

We have seen how many self-designators functioned in the context of praise. These authors addressed members of the community in a positive way, designating their identity and behavior through terminology that connotes Manichaeanness. Bearing fruit or bringing rest were referred to as central and identity-defining virtues of Manichaean behavior. At least two personal letters alluded to the goods or benefits given by catechumens as “fruits” (καρπος), a term not uncommon in Manichaean theological texts. Manichaean agricultural metaphors, sometimes closely related to New Testament parables about fruitfulness and trees, included images like trees with blossoms, or trees that sprout and are full of fruits (1 PsB. 119 , 2 PsB. 91 and 175. Cf. P.Kell.Copt. 53, 42.22–25).⁶⁴ These agricultural metaphors were used for catechumens to frame them as good and worthwhile members of the community. Of course, in their situational context, these phrases could be aimed at gift exchange and mutual support. In the letter to Eirene (cited above), her character is praised as the “good tree whose fruit never withers” and Makarios addressed his wife (and her family ?) as the “good caretakers, the fruit of the flourishing tree, and the blossoms of love.”⁶⁵ These passages come across as a form of flattery, which is not uncommon in personal letters from this period. This metaphor of the blossoming and fruitful tree could be used to express the author’s expectations about the fruitful gifts these people should bring them. I take this to be almost self-evident for the letter to Eirene, where this designator is followed by an ingenious allusion to a biblical parable about wealth. In Makarios’s letter, the flattery-and-fundraising purpose is less clear. Instead, other social situations discussed in this particular letter may have triggered the need for this explicit repertoire, as it deals with a conflict about a book, the preparations for Easter, and, possibly, situations of religious maltreatment (P.Kell.Copt. 22, but see Chapter 4 on persecution).

Other expressions with ascribed virtues, like “the favoured, blessed, god-loving souls” (ⲙⲫⲓⲮⲓⲭⲁⲩⲉ ⲉⲧⲥⲙⲁⲙⲁⲧ ⲛⲙⲁⲕⲁⲣⲓⲟⲥ ⲛⲙⲁⲓⲛⲟⲩⲩⲉ P.Kell.Copt. 31.5–6), could be part of the politeness strategies of some of the letters. Noteworthy is the central role of the virtue of love (*agape*). It is alluded to several times, and is used most frequently in its adjectival form when “beloved brothers” are addressed. More specific are the designations addressing “my loved ones” (ⲛⲁⲙⲉⲣⲉⲧⲉ). The authors, for example, greeted “my loved one of my soul, gladness of my spirit,”⁶⁶ “loved one of my soul and my spirit,”⁶⁷ and the “loved ones who are honoured

⁶⁴ This inconsistency is visible in the positive use of the metaphor of the farmer in the Psalmbook, while agriculture was forbidden for the elect and featured in the life of Mani as the one of the primary examples of hurting the Living Soul (CMC 96-98). The good tree and bad tree and their fruit are, moreover, the topic of the second *Kephalaia* chapter (1 Keph. 17.2-9). Coyle, “Good Tree, Bad Tree,” 65-88.

⁶⁵ ⲡⲱⲛⲏ ⲉⲧⲁⲛⲓⲧ ⲉⲧⲉⲙⲁ ⲡⲓⲕⲁⲣⲓⲟⲥ ⲩⲱⲅⲏ ⲁⲛⲏⲩⲉ, “good tree whose fruit never withers” P.Kell.Copt. 32.4-5. ⲛⲓⲕⲁⲓⲣⲓⲁⲓⲩⲱ ⲉⲧⲁⲛⲓⲧ ... ⲛⲓⲕⲁⲣⲓⲟⲥ ⲛⲡⲱⲛⲏ ⲉⲧⲣⲁⲩⲧ ⲛⲓⲧ ⲟⲩⲱ ⲛⲓⲧⲁⲅⲁⲛⲏ, “the good care-takers, the fruit of the flourishing tree and the blossoms of love” P.Kell.Copt. 22.4-5.

⁶⁶ ⲡⲱⲟⲓⲩⲙⲉⲓⲉ ⲛⲓⲧⲁⲩⲩⲁⲛⲏ ⲡⲱⲅⲁⲧ] ⲛⲓⲡⲁⲛⲉⲅⲓⲛⲁ...] P.Kell.Copt. 14.4-6.

⁶⁷ ⲡⲛⲉⲣⲓⲧ ⲛⲓⲧⲁⲩⲩⲁⲛⲏ ⲛⲓⲧ ⲡⲁⲓⲡⲁ. P.Kell.Copt. 15.1.

of my soul.”⁶⁸ Such forms of address are highly formulaic; they are common in Early Christian letters, where the adjective “beloved” is considered as one of the markers for Christian authorship.⁶⁹ Even if a letter would contain complaints, tough remarks, or critique, the introductory praise of someone’s virtues with friendly and kind designators would uphold the image of loving family relations, either as a matter of good style, or in imitation of Mani’s *Epistles*.

What stands out in comparison to the frequent references to love is the relative absence of designators like “the faithful,” “the believers,” or “the righteous” in this corpus. Only one Greek Manichaean letter mentions “the pious.” The relative absence of these expressions in the personal letters, while they were common designators for the Manichaean community in other Coptic Manichaean sources, is presumably to be explained by the conventions of the genre. In particular, we should see the strategic politeness behind these phrases. Structural parallels from Arabic documentary letters (and Greek and Coptic letters as well) show how authors used politeness strategies to reduce friction and how they employed conventional politeness to signify and affirm their belonging to the community.⁷⁰

5.2.6 Religious and Institutional Titles

Religious identifications are often inferred on the basis of occasional references to institutional titles in legal documents or personal letters. These titles are chance appearances, used to identify witnesses or scribes. They are not meant to reveal more detailed information about religious or social positions in relation to the ecclesiastical hierarchy in the oasis, Alexandria, or the Roman Empire at large.⁷¹ Where they are attested, on the other hand, they inform us about the social ties and intermingling of individuals despite their religious differences.

In a Greek document concerning the division of a house, a priest signed for a number of illiterate people. His name was “Aurelius Stonios, son of Tepnachte, priest from the same village of Kellis.”⁷² This priest is known from other documents found in the temple of Tutu, but Christian priests appear in legal documents as well. Another Greek letter (P.Kell.Gr. 32) is a lease contract of a room, written by “Aurelius Iakob, son of Besis the priest, reader of the catholic church.”⁷³ Two other documents mention Christian priests as witnesses, namely Aurelius Harpocrates (P.Kell.Gr.58) and Aurelius Psekas (P.Kell.Gr.48).

⁶⁸ $\text{ναμερετε [e]ταιδιτ ητ[ο]τς ηταϣχη}$ P.Kell.Copt. 20.1.

⁶⁹ On the formulaic nature of the address “loved” brothers, see Choat, *Belief and Cult*, 94.

⁷⁰ Grob, *Documentary Arabic Private and Business Letters*, 121-23.

⁷¹ On the chance appearances of religious officials, see Choat, *Belief and Cult*, 57-73.

⁷² $\text{Αυρηλιος Στηωνιος Τεπναχθου ιερευς απο της αυτης κωμης Κελλεως}$. P.Kell.Gr. 13.14.

⁷³ $\text{Αυρηλιος Ιακωβ Βησιος προεσβυτερου αναγνωστης καθολικης εκκλησιας εγραψα υπερ αυτης γραμματα μη ειδυης}$. P.Kell.Gr. 32.20-23. Derda and Wipszycka, “L’emploi des titres Abba, Apa et Papas,” 23-56. P.Kell.Gr. 24.3, 48.20 and 58.8 also mention “catholic church.” Worp, *GPkI*, 74. Unconvincing is, in my opinion, the examination of Le Tiec, who erroneously assumes all inhabitants of House 3 must have been Manichaeans. P. A. le Tiec, “Le temple de Toutou et l’histoire des manichéens à Kellis,” *Journal of Coptic Studies* 15 (2013): 75-85.

Papyrologists have considered these religious titles as identity markers, offering opportunities to approach the Ancient Christian church during a period during which sources are few.⁷⁴ Their titles are, in my opinion, not meant as markers of a religious identity, but as specific designators of occupation or social status within a specific (often legal) context. The scribe of the contract P.Kell.Gr. 32 did not necessarily indicate his religious affiliation, but rather his position within Aphrodite society. Institutional titles served to support specific situations in which social status was of importance, as for example in the official declaration to the *dux* (P.Kell.Gr. 24) from 352 CE, in which the list of inhabitants of Kellis is headed by a presbyter and two deacons.⁷⁵ None of these documents, therefore, inform us of any trace of controversy or tension between Christians and Manichaeans.

Some of the religious titles may have referred to Manichaean elect in their role as members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. In the previous chapter, we have encountered the anonymous "Teacher" (ⲛⲥⲁⲗ), who was probably a prominent religious leader. In his letter (P.Kell.Copt. 61), all the (Manichaean) presbyters are addressed, while Apa Lysimachos mentioned a Manichaean lector in need of a (note)book (P.Kell.Gr. 67), and bishops (P.Kell.Copt. 31.4). The references to deacons and presbyters in the Coptic letters are often without explicit designation of a Manichaean or Christian institutional context.⁷⁶ One of Orion's letters, for example, refers to "Sa.ren the presbyter" (P.Kell.Copt. 18), who is probably to be identified with "brother Saren" in P.Kell.Copt. 58. The presbyter(s) and the subdeacon Hor, addressed in a letter from a House 4 context, were most probably officials of the Christian church.⁷⁷ Establishing such a connection without explicit identifications is, however, mainly based on linguistic variation and the presence or absence of onomastic connections to other letters.

5.2.7 Collectives: *Those of the Household, Neighborhood, or "People"*

In contrast with the widespread use of collectives associated with the place of residence in Greek papyri, Coptic documentary letters almost never identify people in relation to their village or place of residence. There are, however, some exceptions. Philammon and Pamour of Tjkoou (P.Kell.Copt. 20.29) were designated specifically with their village of residence, presumably because of the large number of villagers with identical names. Several Coptic letters employed designators with collectives of place, like belonging to someone's

⁷⁴ See A. Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord. Early Christians and the Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press for Harvard Theological Studies, 2008), 81-154 on the third-century clergyman Sotas. One of the first explicit identifications of somebody "a Christian" appears in a first half of the third-century list (SB 16.12497), which has been interpreted as contextual information, used to identify and locate the individual and differentiate him from others with the same name. See M. Choat et al., "The World of the Nile," in *Early Christianity in Contexts. An Exploration Across Cultures and Continents*, ed. W. Tabbernee (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 192. Contra the interpretation by van Minnen, who suggests the designation was used pejorative. P. van Minnen, "The Roots of Egyptian Christianity," *Archiv für Papyrusforschung und verwandte Gebiete* 40, no. 1 (1994): 74-77.

⁷⁵ See notes at Worp, *GPK* 1, 75.

⁷⁶ Deacons: P.Kell.Copt. 19.48, 72.36, 124.40. Presbyter: P.Kell.Copt. 18.22, 61.2, 92.34, 124.1. Bishop: P.Kell.Copt. 30.4

⁷⁷ P.Kell.Copt. 124. Gardner et al., *CDT* 2, 276-280.

“household” (πῆ) or “neighborhood” (ῥαοῦν). In more ambiguous terms, those belonging to these social units are called “people” (ῥωμῆ). The frequency of these collective designators reveals how fundamental the household and village were to the social imaginary of most of the Kellites.

The most remarkable instance of this collective household language is found in Matthaïos’s letter to Maria (P.Kell.Copt. 25). This letter ends with greetings to what “he appears to conceive of as a network of households,” according to Gardner, “the majority of which cluster around a matriarch.”⁷⁸ The final section of the letter greets a number of people and their households:

Greet for me Marshe and her brother, each by name, and their children and their whole house. Greet for me my mother Tashai and her children. Greet for me my mother Talaphanti and her children and her whole house. Greet for me my mother Louiepshai and her whole house and her children. Greet for me my brother Andreas, with his whole house and his people.⁷⁹

Some of these people with their households did not live in the direct neighborhood, but were located further away. Marshe may be identified with Marsis, who lived in Aphrodite. Mother Tashai (Tapshai?) is associated with the village of Tkou (P.Kell.Copt. 19 and 43).⁸⁰ Other individuals may have been based in Kellis itself.

The household was a focal point of meeting and greeting. Coptic letters often express the wish to “be able to greet you in my house,” and one letter expresses the writer’s joy about the “health of the household.”⁸¹ To what extent the households of Marshe, Talaphanti, Louiepshai, and Andreas (P.Kell.Copt. 25, cited above) connoted Manichaeanness is not clear, as none of the other letters explicitly connect households to the religious community. Greek personal letters contained polite phrases greeting similar collectives, like “all those in the house” or “all your people,” often presumably meant to indicate family members. This practice is seen in papyri from elsewhere, like in P.Giss. 97 (second century CE), where the addressees’ people are on the same line as the author’s children: “[B]efore everything I pray that you are well with all your people and I am also (well) with my children...” and “salute

⁷⁸ Gardner, “Some Comments on Kinship Terms,” 136.

⁷⁹ ⲟⲩⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲓ ⲁⲛⲁⲣⲉ ⲛⲓ ⲛⲉⲥⲥⲓⲛⲩ ⲕⲁⲧⲁ ⲡⲟⲩⲣⲉⲛ ⲛⲓ ⲛⲟⲩⲟⲩⲛⲣⲉ ⲛⲓ ⲡⲟⲩⲛⲓ ⲧⲏⲣⲓ ⲟⲩⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲓ ⲁⲧⲁⲛⲟ ⲧⲁⲟⲩⲁⲓ ⲛⲓ ⲛⲉⲥⲟⲩⲛⲣⲉ ⲟⲩⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲓ ⲁⲧⲁⲛⲁ ⲧⲁⲗⲁⲫⲁⲛⲧⲓ ⲛⲓ ⲛⲉⲥⲟⲩⲛⲣⲉ ⲛⲓ ⲡⲥⲓⲓ ⲧⲏⲣⲓ ⲟⲩⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲓ ⲁⲧⲁⲛⲁ ⲗⲟⲩⲓⲉⲡⲟⲩⲁⲓ ⲛⲓ ⲡⲥⲓⲓ ⲧⲏⲣⲓ ⲛⲓ ⲛⲉⲥⲟⲩⲛⲣⲉ ⲟⲩⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲓ ⲁⲡⲁⲥⲁⲛ ⲁⲛⲁⲣⲉⲁⲥ ⲛⲓ ⲡⲉⲑⲛⲓ ⲧⲏⲣⲓ ⲛⲓ ⲛⲉⲩⲣⲟⲩⲛⲉ P.Kell.Copt. 25.69-74.

⁸⁰ According to Iain Gardner, this place name (spelled Tjkoou in P.Kell.Copt. 20.29) was the Coptic name for Aphrodite in the Antaiopolite nome. Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDTI*, 170. Further support for this interpretation is found in P.Kell.Copt. 19, where Matthaïos is ordered to send something to “Siaout (Assiut, Lycopolis), to the house of Aristakena... Antinoe.....” ⲁⲥⲓⲁⲟⲩⲧⲓ ⲁⲡⲓⲛⲓ ⲛⲁⲣⲓⲧⲁⲕⲉⲛⲁ ⲉⲛ ⲁⲛⲧⲓⲛⲟⲩⲟⲩ P.Kell.Copt. 19.43-44. It seems likely to situate the Makarios family in Antinoe and Aristakena in Siaout. Moreover, she is probably not to be identified with the Aristakena greeted by Orion as “my sister” (P.Kell.Copt. 17.52). Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDTI*, 22. In another letter Pamour is asked to bring books from (the place of) father Pabo to Pekos in Kellis and certain things have to be sent to “the house of father Pebo” (ⲁⲡⲓⲛⲓ ⲛⲓⲡⲟⲩⲧ ⲡⲉⲑⲟ P.Kell.Copt. 120.14-15).

⁸¹ ⲁⲣⲁⲕ ⲛⲓ ⲛⲉⲧⲉⲛⲓ ⲛⲓⲓ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ P.Kell.Copt. 15.33 and rejoice in P.Kell.Copt. 77.10 about ⲡⲟⲩⲭⲉⲓⲧⲉ ⲛⲓⲛⲓ.

all the people of our family by name."⁸² In other situations, the friends could be included as well: "[G]reet all in the house and all our friends."⁸³

Another observation from P.Kell.Copt. 25 is that a distinction was made between "house" and "people," since both the whole house and the people of Andreas are mentioned. Other examples of greetings to "people" are attested.⁸⁴ P.Kell.Copt. 103.35 for example, refers to "my people" (ⲁⲛⲁⲣ[ⲱⲙⲉ]) as those who have solved a problem and bought the dye (?), which could mean that he is referring to his employees. Iain Gardner suggests that "our people" are the extended family, while "the whole house" is the actual family unit living together under one roof.⁸⁵ In one instance, this collective of "my people" was designated as "everyone who loves you."⁸⁶ Such collectives were clearly not exclusively religious in nature; they belonged to the ordinary world in which villagers upheld relations by means of their correspondence, through including extensive greetings to all those who were close to them.

Further questions involve the identification of those greeted as "everyone in the neighborhood." In a number of Coptic letters, the greetings are accompanied by greetings to "each one of the neighborhood."⁸⁷ In one letter, the author combined two collectives and sent his greetings to "you and all of the household and the neighborhood."⁸⁸ This suggests that a broader village or neighborhood sense was present. None of these examples add further details. One of the Greek contracts defines the relation to the neighbors in spatial terms (P.Kell.Gr.30) but carries no indication of religious identity, or of further village life. The neighborhood in documentary papyri is solely used as a collective designator to be included in polite formulaic greetings.⁸⁹

5.2.8 Summary

The self-designators used in the Kellis letters reveal multiple intersecting roles or identities. On the one hand, the authors described themselves and their addressees in terms of kinship, or with phrases indicating their place of residence or village identity, while on the other hand, religious groupness is expressed and constructed in self-designators. The multiplicity of the terminology and the—sometimes ambiguous—way of phrasing reminds us that even

⁸² P.Giss. III 97 citation from Bagnall and Cribiore, *Women's Letters*, 181. Other examples from this collection of women's letters from Egypt, referring to these collectives are P. Wash.Univ. II 106, O.Florida 14, P.Mert. II 81, SB VI 9122, P.Lond. VI 1926, P.Wurzb. 21, SB V 7572, P. Hamb. I 86.

⁸³ P.Oxy. XIV 1773 (third century) quotation and translation in Bagnall and Cribiore, *Women's Letters*, 371. Other examples of the use of this collective are collected in R. Alston, "Searching for the Romano-Egyptian Family," in *The Roman Family in the Empire: Rome, Italy, and Beyond*, ed. M. George (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 152.

⁸⁴ Gardner, "Some Comments on Kinship Terms," 136, mentioning P.Kell.Copt. 41 "with all our people"; P.Kell.Copt. 26 greets "Isi and her people" and in another section, greeting "you and all your people."

⁸⁵ Gardner, "Some Comments on Kinship Terms," 136.

⁸⁶ [ⲐⲮ]ⲁⲛ ⲛⲓⲛ ⲉⲣⲙⲉⲓⲉ ⲛ̀ⲛⲱ[ⲧ]ⲛ̀ P.Kell.Copt. 29.19.

⁸⁷ Ⲉⲛⲉ ⲛ̀ⲓ ⲧⲟⲛⲟⲩ ⲁⲛⲉⲧⲣⲁⲟⲩⲛ P.Kell.Copt. 36.40, 39.5, ⲣ̀ⲓⲣⲉⲟⲩⲛⲧⲟⲩ 71.31 ⲛ̀ⲓ ⲧⲣⲉⲟⲩⲛ 77.4, Ⲉⲛⲉ ⲛ̀ⲓ ⲁⲧⲣⲁⲟⲩⲛ 85.8 and 96.28

⁸⁸ [ⲧⲈⲛⲉ ⲁⲣⲟ] ⲧⲟⲛⲟⲩ ⲛ̀ⲧⲟ ⲛ̀ⲓ ⲛⲁⲛ[ⲛ̀ⲓ ⲧⲛ̀]ⲣⲟⲩ ⲛ̀ⲓ ⲛⲁⲧⲣⲁⲟⲩⲛ P.Kell.Copt. 39.5

⁸⁹ The authors could have considered these collectives to have had a religious identity, but our papyri never combine explicit religious language with these collectives.

the most religiously involved individuals were also fathers, neighbors, and coworkers. The self-designators associated with the household and the village show that these people worked with a broader social imaginary that was not always equally affected by the totalizing fiction of the claim associated with religious groupness.⁹⁰ I take this as an indication against Peter Brown's insistence on a strong sectarian groupness of "spiritual solidarity of unusual force."⁹¹ Although self-designators such as "children of the living race" and "good limb of the Light Mind" certainly revealed religious groupness, they do not imply a social imaginary in black and white only, nor do they show a high antagonistic tension toward the world. Rather, the frequent use of other designators reveals that individuals worked with a broad spectrum of social identifications.

Regarding the level of Manichaeanness that these self-designators reveal, a distinction is visible between labels with a direct parallel in Manichaean doctrinal and liturgical texts and those that seem to have derived from a shared Christian and Manichaean repertoire, but were developed beyond what was common in these texts. The latter category, without direct correspondence in liturgical texts, included the fascinating "those who give rest," an expression whose connotation with the Manichaean ideal of rest could not be proven without a doubt, while "limb of the Light Mind" or "children of the living race" were strongly connected to the in-group repertoire of Manichaeans. This creativity was most intense, and most explicit, in the letters of the elect, whose flattery-and-fundraising purpose lay behind some of the more elaborate terminology.

5.3 Excuse: Did Manichaeans Call Themselves Christians?

In many of the previous pages, I compared Manichaean letters and Ancient Christian letters. The observed similarities can easily be explained away, as many scholars have come to understand Manichaeism as a trajectory of Ancient Christianity.⁹² Similarity is, therefore, often taken as the result of sameness or a common origin, as Samuel Lieu stated about the Manichaeans of Kellis: "[They] were *the* Christians in the Dakhleh Oasis."⁹³ But can this be true? Did Manichaeans call themselves Christians and, if so, are we to adopt this self-designation?

Nils Arne Pedersen has recently reevaluated Manichaean self-designators and concluded, partly on the basis of Kellis documents, that some Manichaeans in the Latin West considered themselves to be Christians, but the name "Christian" was almost never used as an autonym (insider name) by Egyptian Manichaeans. Only two fragmentary Coptic passages seem to have used $\kappa\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\iota\alpha\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ or $\kappa\chi\rho\iota\tau\iota\alpha\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ as designator (Hom. 72.9 and 1 Keph. 105, 258.29).⁹⁴ Both passages, however, are elusive and at least one may in fact designate non-

⁹⁰ On the totalizing fiction of narratives and labels, see M. R. Somers, "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach," *Theory and Society* 23 (1994): 610, 624, and passim.

⁹¹ Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 159.

⁹² Pedersen, *Demonstrative Proof*, 6-12; Lieu, "Christianity and Manichaeism," 279-95; Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism*, 15-18.

⁹³ Lieu, "Self-Identity of the Manichaeans," 224 his emphasis. A similar statement is made by Gardner, who takes the Kellis finds to evidence "Manichaeans there regarded themselves as the true and holy church."

⁹⁴ Pedersen, "Manichaean Self-Designations," 189-90.

Manichaean Christians. The other passage used $\mu\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\iota\alpha\nu\omicron\varsigma$ with an μ instead of an ι , just like in Mani's title as apostle of Jesus Christ (spelled as $\mu\epsilon\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$) and Alexander of Lycopolis's description of the vowel change by Manichaeans (Hom. 72.9).⁹⁵ Pedersen halfheartedly suggests that this alternative spelling may have designated Manichaeans specifically, but concludes that there is "no clear evidence for any use of the name 'Christian' as an autonym" among them.⁹⁶

Moreover, in contrast to Manichaeans in the Latin West, Manichaeans in Egypt never used "Manichaean" as a label. The one exception is a *Kephalaia* chapter that seems to suggest that Mani called his disciples "with my name" ($\mu\eta\mu\epsilon\tau\omicron\varsigma$ 1 Keph. 105, 259.11–13), but this practice is unattested in Coptic Manichaean texts.⁹⁷ Instead, they used names like the ones we have encountered in the Kellis letters: "the elect and catechumen," "the holy church," "the righteous," and the "children of the living race" (see appendix). This may affect the academic classification of the Manichaeans, but for now it stands against the otherwise stimulating argument by Richard Lim that "the people whom we have grown accustomed to calling Manichaeans mainly represented themselves as Christians."⁹⁸ I rather think that within the Manichaean tradition, various positions were taken in relation to Christianity, either intensifying Christian elements, or downplaying these features in favor of a distinct identification as a new religious movement. This latter process has been detected in the redaction process and stages between Mani's *Epistles* and the *Kephalaia*, but this remains to be studied in more detail.⁹⁹

The self-designators used in the Kellis letters, as discussed above, attest to a vision of community life in which the Manichaeans belonged together, grouped together as "limbs" or "members." Just like in the Medinet Madi documents, this collective is commonly referred to as the "church." In two Kellis letters, Manichaeans designated their communal body as "the holy church" ($\tau\epsilon\kappa\kappa\lambda\eta\sigma\iota\alpha$ $\epsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon\lambda\alpha\upsilon\epsilon$ P.Kell.Copt. 31.2–3 and 32.1–2), while the phrase "catholic church" was reserved either for other (Nicene?) Christians or the most important church building of the village. The differentiation with the "catholic church" might have indicated a differentiation between Christians and Manichaeans, parallel to the crystallization of religious difference in the redaction of the *Kephalaia*, placing the Manichaeans in a separate-but-related category. On the other hand, the label "catholic church" is only used as designator in Greek contracts (P.Kell.Gr. 24.3, 32.21, 58.8). Nowhere are "the holy church"

⁹⁵ Alexander of Lycopolis conclude they did not know Christ, but only added new meaning by calling him "chrestos" (good). See *Contra manichaei opiniones disputation* 24, translated in Van der Horst and Mansfeld, *An Alexandrian Platonist against Dualism*, 91–92.

⁹⁶ Pedersen, "Manichaean Self-Designations," 192.

⁹⁷ See the evaluation of Böhlig's argument and reconstruction in Pedersen, "Manichaean Self-Designations," 191. In another passage, there is another questionable restoration suggesting the use of the name "Manichaeans" (1 Keph. 271.15 in the reading of Böhlig, but this is not followed by Pedersen and Gardner). Böhlig, "Zum Selbstverständnis des Manichäismus," 325.

⁹⁸ Lim, "Nomen Manichaeorum," 147. See chapter 8 on the place called "topos Mani" in the KAB.

⁹⁹ Gardner, "Archaeology of Manichaean Identity," 147–58; Pedersen, "Manichaean Self-Designations," 191–3. Their main example is the use of "apostle of Light" as Mani's title in the *Kephalaia*, instead of "Apostle of Jesus Christ."

and the “catholic church” used in opposition, nor is there any trace of local polemic against the “non-holy” or polluted church. As Ewa Wipszycka has argued, the label “catholic” (καθολική) could also designate the most important church building of the village.¹⁰⁰ In the specific case of Kellis, I suggest that it refers to the Large East Church, which could be distinguished from the Small East Church and the West Church through this phrase.

In sum, the Manichaeans of Kellis might have considered themselves as Christians, but they never explicitly called themselves *ἡριστιανός*. The differentiation between the “holy church” and the “catholic church,” moreover, might have reflected some sort of distinction between Christians and Manichaeans, but was never really used to highlight religious difference within the village. The main point is not this tentative differentiation, but the relatively ambiguous nature of most of the self-designators discussed above: the Kellites used many different words to designate their Manichaeanness, but they never felt the need to spell it out in the terminology that we are familiar with. Self-designators used by Kellites cannot indisputably support the hypothesis of a Manichaean self-identification as Christians.

5.4 Coptic as a Community-Specific Language

As may be clear by now, Manichaeism is not something the authors of the Kellis letters talked about frequently. The few instances in Chapter 4 where authors explicitly discussed Manichaean practices have to be supplemented by the instances in which Manichaeanness was activated as a disposition that intermittently informs the subject of the letter. This way of talking *with* Manichaeism homes in on the question of when Manichaeanness resonated in linguistic choices.¹⁰¹ Expressions like “whose name is sweet in my mouth” (πτερπε νεφρη γαλε γῆ ρωῖ, P.Kell.Copt. 37.3–4) are not directly related to Manichaeism, but are only attested in a Manichaean context. This may have been the result of linguistic choices affected by the involvement in so-called communities of practice. In sociolinguistics, “communities of practice” constitute norm-supporting and norm-constructing networks centered on a shared practice, like going to the same church or working in the same factory.¹⁰² Linguistic variation becomes something that can be picked up at the workplace, rather than a feature correlating with someone’s gender, social background, or education. In this approach, language use is

¹⁰⁰ E. Wipszycka, “Καθολική et les autres épithètes.” On the increasingly powerful role of the Alexandrian church, see Wipszycka, *The Alexandrian Church*.

¹⁰¹ The notion of “talking *with* the nation” has been developed in Fox and Miller-Idris, “Everyday Nationhood,” 540. See also the situational nature of speech utterances, discussed in P. Brown and C. Fraser, “Speech as a Marker of Situation,” in *Social Markers in Speech*, ed. K. R. Scherer and H. Giles (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 33–62.

¹⁰² L. Milroy and M. Gordon, *Sociolinguistics: Method and Interpretation* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 119; P. Eckert, *Linguistic Variation as Social Practice: The Linguistic Construction of Identity in Belten High* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000). The correlation with church attendance is discussed in W. Baker and D. Bowie, “Religious Affiliation as a Correlate of Linguistic Behavior,” *University of Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics* 15, no. 2 (2010): 2 with references. Within a network-perspective, new information and innovation occur through weak ties, M. S. Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties,” *American Journal of Sociology* 78, no. 6 (1973): 1360–80; J. Marshall, *Language Change and Sociolinguistics. Rethinking Social Networks* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 18–40. I have explored some of these themes and the application of a Social Network Analysis in Brand, “Speech Patterns,” 105–19.

not primarily a representation of social categories. Instead, "it sees speakers as constructing, as well as responding to, the social meaning of variation."¹⁰³ When a network is close-knit, with frequent interactions between its members, it is highly likely that members' individual linguistic repertoire converges toward a shared in-group language. In these instances, individuals can imply groupness, without talking about the practices that constitute their shared group activity.

The use of Coptic was one of these linguistic in-group practices that stood in marked contrast with the prevalent use of Greek. Coptic was not, as previously assumed, a written version of the vernacular language. It was rather a mixture of Egyptian and Greek that employed a large number of Greek loanwords (roughly 20 percent). The earliest transmitted Coptic texts contain monastic, gnostic, and Manichaean contents, indicating the specific religious connotation of the language in the fourth century.¹⁰⁴ Could it have been a strategic choice to formulate theological texts, liturgical documents, and letters in Coptic? Was the language use in Kellis a social-religious clue?

5.4.1 Coptic Language Variation

"Coptic" designates the system of written Egyptian in Greek characters, with six to eight additional letters derived from Demotic and filled with Greek loanwords.¹⁰⁵ Known in several variations (primarily Sahidic, but also Bohairic, Fayumic, Mesokemic, Akhmimic, and Lycopolitan), the origins of Coptic have been a matter of controversy. The invention and use of Coptic by Christians have been explained, traditionally, as a means for the distribution of the Christian gospel among native Egyptians without command of Greek.¹⁰⁶ More recent research, however, has moved away from this assumption, as the number of Greek loanwords makes it highly unlikely that individuals without Greek would have understood the message. Instead, many scholars consider Coptic a deliberately invented language. Roger Bagnall describes Coptic as "certainly invented, in the third century, with deliberateness" in bilingual literary milieus, and not simply as a representation of their spoken language.¹⁰⁷ This invention started out with earlier language experiments among the traditional temple elite,

¹⁰³ Eckert, *Linguistic Variation as Social Practice*, 3.

¹⁰⁴ E. D. Zakrzewska, "'A Bilingual Language Variety' or 'the Language of the Pharaohs'? Coptic from the Perspective of Contact Linguistics," in *Greek Influence on Egyptian-Coptic: Contact-Inducted Change in an Ancient African Language*, ed. P. Dils, et al. (Hamburg: Widmaier Verlag, 2017), 115-53.

¹⁰⁵ Reintges considers Coptic a "new language form" with two parent languages, Greek and Egyptian. C. H. Reintges, "Code-Mixing Strategies in Coptic Egyptian," *Lingua Aegyptia* 9 (2001): 193-237; C. H. Reintges, "Coptic Egyptian as a Bilingual Language Variety," in *Lenguas en contacto: el testimonio escrito*, ed. P. Bádenas De La Peña and S. Torallas Tovar (Madrid: Consejo Superiores De Investigaciones Científicas, 2004), 69-86. This is called into question in Zakrzewska, "'A Bilingual Language Variety,'" 115-53.

¹⁰⁶ Discussed and rejected in E. D. Zakrzewska, "L* as a Secret Language: Social Functions of Early Coptic," in *Christianity and Monasticism in Middle Egypt: Al-Minya and Asyut*, ed. G. Gabra and H. N. Takla (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2015), 185-98. Another less popular theory is the Jewish origin of Coptic. L. Depuydt, "Coptic and Coptic Literature," in *A Companion to Ancient Egypt*, ed. A. B. Lloyd (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 733-34.

¹⁰⁷ Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 238. A convincing argument against the assumption that Coptic resembled spoken Egyptian is made in Zakrzewska, "L* as a Secret Language," 189-91.

but the use of Coptic for a wide array of religious texts seems to have been decisive.¹⁰⁸ The institutional strength of Christianity presumably contributed to the prevalence of this new writing system. Even though Coptic and its earlier variants were never exclusively used for Christian texts, the lion's share of the earliest Coptic texts stems from a monastic, gnostic, or Manichaean background.¹⁰⁹ This suggests a marked connection between religious groupness and linguistic variation.

The new Coptic texts from Kellis will shed new light on the debates on the origin—and use—of the Coptic language. No common ground has been reached yet. The sheer size of the corpus and its Manichaean connotation have supported interpretations that allocate the deliberate invention of Coptic to religious circles. For Ewa Zakrzewska, the Manichaeans of Kellis are “well-educated counterculturists” who used literary Coptic to discuss new ideas.¹¹⁰ She considers this language not only as deliberately invented, but also as a constructed “alternative literary language and prestige variety” for ascetic groups, which set

¹⁰⁸ For David Frankfurter, Coptic is the product of the temple priests, many of whom continued in the monastic movement, as “Coptic writing in the era of these texts was for the most part a monastic system,” originated in the temples for ritual purposes and systematized for fourth-century Christian literature. Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 259ff. Malcolm Choat, cautiously, pointed to similar connections based on the Demotic and Coptic epistolary formulas. M. Choat, “Epistolary Formulae in Early Coptic Letters,” in *Actes du huitième congrès international d'études coptes*, ed. N. Bosson and A. Boud'hors (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 676. Roger Bagnall and Tonio Sebastian Richter have refuted the first part of this argument, as they argue that Coptic was invented by Christian groups in the widest sense (including Gnostics and Manichaeans), presumably not centralized but by different groups “in every part of Egypt.” Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 238-9, building on the work of J. Quaegebeur. Richter, “Coptic Letters,” 741; T. S. Richter, “Greek, Coptic, and the ‘Language of the Hijra’.” Rise and Decline of the Coptic Language in Late Antique and Medieval Egypt,” in *From Hellenism to Islam: Cultural and Linguistic Change in the Roman Near East*, ed. H. M. Cotton, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 401-46. Previous experiments with Egyptian written in Greek words, including the texts labeled Old Coptic were less systematized and they may point to the existence of “multiple independent developments of full writing systems based on Greek and Demotic signs used complementarily” instead of a single line of transmission between Old Coptic and Coptic. R. S. Bagnall, “Linguistic Change and Religious Change: Thinking About the Temples in the Fayoum in the Roman Period,” in *Christianity and Monasticism in the Fayoum Oasis*, ed. G. Gabra (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 18. This argument is made in relation to the ostracon from Kellis. I. Gardner, “An Old Coptic Ostracon from Ismant el-Kharab?,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 125 (1999): 195-200.

¹⁰⁹ Jacques van der Vliet considers Coptic a parallel language. J. van der Vliet, *Het Koptisch: de taal van de Farao's?* (Nijmegen: Radboud University Inaugural Lecture, 2009). Malcolm Choat argues that a direct connection to monasticism and the Coptic translation of the bible is “too neat.” Monasticism “did not create Coptic, and monks were not the first to use it: their contribution to the educational heritage was to consolidate the language rather than to form it.” M. Choat, “Language and Culture in Late Antique Egypt,” in *A Companion to Late Antiquity*, ed. P. Rousseau (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 352, as the vital groundwork was laid by Greco-Egyptian educated elite, concentrated in the Egyptian priesthood.

¹¹⁰ Her overarching approach is set out in depth in Zakrzewska, “A Bilingual Language Variety,” 115-53. Earlier building blocks include E. D. Zakrzewska, “Why Did Egyptians Write Coptic? The Rise of Coptic as a Literary Language,” in *Copts in the Egyptian Society before and after the Muslim Conquest: Archaeological, Historical and Applied Studies*, ed. L. Mahmoud and A. Mansour (Alexandria: Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 2016), 211-19; Zakrzewska, “L* as a Secret Language,” 185-98, the citation is from page 92.

them apart from other readers and writers.¹¹¹ When Makarios and Pamour wrote their letters in Coptic, therefore, this might have carried connotations about their religious practice and group affiliation. We will see, however, that the evidence is less straightforward than Zakrzewska suggests.

The majority of the Kellis documents belong to the cluster of Coptic language variations known as L (previously known as A2; geographical associations of these “dialects” are no longer accepted). Specifically, most of the Kellis texts belong to the variety known as L*, while L4, the language of the Medinet Madi documents, is also attested.¹¹² At Kellis, Mani's *Epistles* (P.Kell.Copt. 53 and maybe also P.Kell.Copt. 54) were written in L*, while three other documents (T.Kell.Copt. 7 and T.Kell.Syr./Copt. 1 and 2) used L4. In between those sides of the spectrum, several personal letters employ variations of L4 or L*.¹¹³ As nearly all authors used this language variant, even though they wrote from different places in the Nile valley, it is most probable that their language use correlated with their social networks back home in the oasis.

The real exceptions to this pattern are the letters written in versions of Sahidic (P.Kell.Copt. 123, 124, 126–128). The content of these letters leads us to believe that they were written by (non-Manichaean) Christians, primarily because they mentioned a “subdeacon,” two presbyters, the “good shepherd” (P.Kell.Copt. 124), and the bishop (P.Kell.Copt. 128).¹¹⁴ Most of these Sahidic texts were found in House 4 and the temple area D/8, while the majority of the L-variation texts derived from House 3. For these reasons, the editors noted: “[T]here is reason to think that the Christian community promoted Sahidic while all Manichaean texts found in Egypt can be grouped in (the admittedly somewhat artificial) dialect family L.”¹¹⁵ This correlation between religious groups and language variations seems to support the notion of community-specific language use: Manichaeans using L-variations in Houses 1–3 and Christians writing in Sahidic variations in House 4. Unfortunately, the

¹¹¹ Zakrzewska, “L* as a Secret Language,” 197. Stephen Emmel has also explained the use of Coptic instead of Greek for the NHC as a conscious attempt to create a “new esoteric-mystical Egyptian wisdom literature,” emphasizing the esoteric nature of their literature. S. Emmel, “The Coptic Gnostic Texts as Witnesses to the Production and Transmission of Gnostic (and Other) Traditions,” in *Das Thomasevangelium. Entstehung - Rezeption - Theologie*, ed. J. Frey, E. E. Popkes, and J. Schröter (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 48, even though he thinks their Coptic is barely comprehensible without Greek. For another discussion on the language of the NHC, see Lundhaug and Jenott, *The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, 94–101.

¹¹² Differences between the clusters of language variations (or dialects) are discussed in Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT1*, 90–95; Gardner, *KLT2*, 11–13; See also Schenke, “Rezension zu Iain Gardner,” 225–7.

¹¹³ These documents include T.Kell.Copt. 2, P.Kell.Copt. 50 with Sahidic type vowels, P.Kell.Copt. 44–48, P.Kell.Copt. 56 with Sahidic features, P.Kell.Copt. 122 which belongs to the broad L-family. This is discussed at Gardner, *KLT1*, xv and 9; Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT1*, 92–93; Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT2*, 263–6. There has been some debate on whether or not P.Kell.Copt. 129 contains the variation known as “Old Coptic.” Bagnall, “Linguistic Change and Religious Change,” 11–19.

¹¹⁴ The editors note that the latter letter was marked by a large number of Greek loan words and they suggested that “the author was a Christian of substantial education.” Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT2*, 295.

¹¹⁵ Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT2*, 264. Discussed earlier at Gardner, *KLT1*, vii; Gardner, *KLT2*, 5.

clear-cut pattern is disrupted by two texts from House 4 in L-variations: a wooden tablet with a Manichaean psalm (T.Kell.Copt. 7) and a personal letter (P.Kell.Copt. 122).¹¹⁶

While the language differentiation seems to support Zakrzewska's theoretical argument about the way linguistic variation was shaped by social networks, it cannot bear the entire weight of her reconstruction. In particular, it does not unequivocally support the direct relation between the use of Coptic and the Manichaean group. Not all Coptic letters relate to Manichaeanness, nor can we identify all the Coptic letter writers as belonging to a local Manichaean network. Not all of Pamour's letters were in Coptic, nor is there a clear differentiation in his use of Greek or Coptic for specific recipients (see the following section). The differences between the L- and Sahidic language variations, moreover, are not large enough to classify the one or the other as a "secret language." While it stood out from the common use of Greek, Coptic was used for a wide variety of mundane messages, not exclusively addressed to fellow Manichaeans. Modern linguistic habits in the oasis—in particular from before the introduction of television and radio in the 1980s—exhibit similar variation within a relatively small geographical and societal setting. Manfred Woidich has discerned at least three distinct dialect groups, most of which are now heavily influenced by Egyptian as spoken in Cairo.¹¹⁷ Rather than conceptualizing Coptic as an in-group language of Manichaeans, I would consider the use of Coptic as a positive act of identification with the complex network in which village identification, kinship, and religious ties came together.

5.4.2 Code-switching Greek and Coptic

Code-switching between Greek and Coptic is visible within sections of personal letters as well as between various letters of an individual author. Pamour and his brothers, for example, wrote in Coptic and Greek to each other (compare P.Kell.Gr. 71 Pamour to Psais with P.Kell.Copt. 64 Pamour to Psais). A Coptic personal letter addressing Psenpsais (?), presumably written by his mother Tehat, contains a Greek postscript by somebody else (P.Kell.Copt. 43), which clearly indicates that the recipients lived and worked in a bilingual context.

In general, letters regarding legal arrangements or administrative duties were written in Greek, while family and household issues were expressed in Coptic.¹¹⁸ This language distribution is, however, not ubiquitous, as some Greek letters are not fundamentally different from their Coptic equivalents. The family of Titoue (House 2) showcases and challenges the language distribution. Their archive comprised one personal letter in Coptic,

¹¹⁶ This latter letter, moreover, contains prosopographical connections with individuals known from letters in House 3, including Pakous (husband of Chares?), Lammon, Papnoute, and Philammon.

¹¹⁷ Briefly discussed in Thurston, *Secrets of the Sands*, 334-7; M. Woidich, "Neue Daten aus Dakhla: Ismint in Zentral-Dakhla," In *Between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans: Studies on Contemporary Arabic Dialects*, ed. S. Procházka and V. Ritt-Benmimoun (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2008), 471-481.

¹¹⁸ Comparative questions about the relation between language variation and social identifications have been explored by Brubaker et al., *Everyday Ethnicity*, 239-64, which points to the asymmetry of bilingual practices at Cluj.

one in Greek, and several administrative documents in Greek.¹¹⁹ The personal letters in Coptic and Greek (P.Kell.Copt. 12 and P.Kell.Gr. 12) relate to the same situation of Shamoun's son Titoue in the monastery. The Coptic letter is written by grandfather Titoue to his son Shamoun, while the Greek letter is Shamoun's answer to his father. The specific choice of Greek or Coptic may have been caused by social factors other than religious group norms, like the availability of a Coptic scribe.

Another type of language variation is code-switching between Greek introductory formulas and Coptic main bodies of the letters.¹²⁰ Frequently, the address on the verso was in Greek, just like the first couple of lines of some of the introductory formulas (in which the addressee and author are mentioned again).¹²¹ In the Makarios archive, the introductory formula is always in Coptic, with one exception—in which the letter switches the formula from Greek to Coptic halfway (P.Kell.Copt. 22, compare 118). The address is in Greek. In contrast to this pattern, the two letters by members of the elect (P.Kell.Copt. 31 and 32) contained no address and were written entirely in Coptic. One reason for a Greek address could be the reading abilities of the letter carrier, in which case we could speculate about the delivery process of the letters of the elect. Many of the other letters contained not only opening formulas in Greek, but also Greek closing formulas (P.Kell.Copt.11, 12, 21, 22, 24, 26, 33, 34, 36, 38, 43, 44 (?), 52, 65, 75, 84, 92, 94, 95, 102, 103, 105, 106, 107, 108, 112, 113, 116). The location of these Greek formulas on the page suggests that they may have been prefabricated, as their position at the bottom of the page does not correspond to the end of the letter. They could have been written by the scribe in the most suitable place on the papyrus, before the author (or the scribe) continued to write the main body of the letter in Coptic.¹²² A default Greek model is thus filled with Coptic content, making code-switching to Coptic a marked option.

Zakrzewska considers Coptic not only an in-group language developed within social networks, but also a countercultural prestige language.¹²³ Large collections of Coptic texts, such as the Nag Hammadi Library or the impressive Medinet Madi Psalmbook, seem to support this position. Most Manichaean liturgical texts found at Kellis, moreover, were written in Coptic. A new literary language such as Coptic could well have reinforced feelings of exclusivity and exoticness about the content of these texts. The personal letters from Kellis,

¹¹⁹ Discussed in S. J. Clackson, "Coptic or Greek? Bilingualism in the Papyri," in *The Multilingual Experience in Egypt from the Ptolemies to the Abbasids*, ed. A. Papaconstantinou (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 91.

¹²⁰ R. S. Bagnall, *Everyday Writing in the Graeco-Roman East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 80. Considers this "striking," but it is relatively common in other languages. P. Muysken, "Mixed Codes," in *Handbook of Multilingualism and Multilingual Communication*, ed. P. Auer and L. Wei (Berlin: Mouton De Gruyter, 2007), 321 calls this "alternational code mixing."

¹²¹ See the observations of the editors, Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT2*, 24-25, 93-94; M. Choat, "Review of Coptic Documentary Texts from Kellis, Volume 2, by Iain Gardner, Anthony Alcock, Wolf-Peter Funk," *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 2016.07.24 (2016); Choat, "Epistolary Formulae in Early Coptic Letters," 671. M. Choat, "Early Coptic Epistolography," in *The Multilingual Experience in Egypt from the Ptolemies to the Abbasids*, ed. A. Papaconstantinou (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 153-78.

¹²² Choat, *Belief and Cult*, 26-27; Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT1*, 233.

¹²³ Zakrzewska, "Why Did Egyptians Write Coptic?," 216.

on the other hand, contain no trace of these traits. Instead, they show the early application of Coptic for domestic purposes.¹²⁴ While other early Coptic letters came from a monastic context (for example those in the cartonnage of the NHC), the Kellis letters derive from households, dealing mostly with everyday issues and concerns. They are not directly used for the communication of countercultural ideas. The use of Coptic in personal letters is, therefore, hardly flamboyant, even though it is markedly different from the majority of the personal letters on papyrus in this period.¹²⁵ It is precisely the relative absence of explicit religious markers or prestigious countercultural notions that makes it difficult to discern the Manichaean background of some of these letters. Most letters in the corpus are related to people who shared overlapping social ties. The business content of P.Kell.Copt. 94, for example, shows no indication of religious commonality, nor can we use the choice for a particular variation of Coptic to identify the author (or scribe) with the Manichaean community. It is perfectly possible that this letter was written to Kellites without Manichaean affiliation. The use of Coptic, then, did not solely correlate with a clearly demarcated religious group, but with a local social network of family, village, and religious connections.

5.5 Conclusions

This chapter started with the idiosyncratic language use of one individual: Orion. By examining some of the self-designators in the Kellis letters, I have aimed to identify the social imaginary or social map of these individuals, in particular because of the postulated “sectarianism” of the local Manichaean community. The overall picture that emerges from the self-designators in the documentary papyri suggests that the authors saw themselves as part of a somewhat coherent network of affiliated brothers and sisters. The relations in this network were modeled after, and frequently addressed as, family and kin, ranging from “brothers” and “mothers” to “those of the neighborhood” or “those of the household.” Many of these designators carried an unmarked tone, indicating nothing more than the actual kinship of those living under the same roof. At the same time, some of the self-designators were expanded in meaning to include fellow Manichaeans, with more or less explicit phrases.

One function of religiously motivated kinship terminology was performative, to frame the relation between author and recipient in the normative Manichaean ideology of gift exchange. Expectations about the support of catechumens were alluded to in the letters of the elect. Some of the authors discussed the Manichaean church in terms of one single family or race, in which “daughters” were expected to support their “fathers.” These kinship designators served fundraising purposes. Apart from these specific situations, in which

¹²⁴ See the lists of Coptic letters in Choat, “Epistolary Formulae in Early Coptic Letters,” 667-78. Note Bagnall’s characterization, “it is prudent to suppose that the nonliterary use of Coptic was largely monastic in the fourth century and only gradually acquired a larger public.” Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 257 (which was published before the publication of the Kellis documents).

¹²⁵ Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 238; Choat, “Review of Coptic Documentary Texts from Kellis, Volume 2” points out that few Coptic texts have been found at Trimithis (Dakhleh Oasis) and the Kharga Oasis. Although this may change in the future, it shows that the use of Coptic was not widespread in the oases.

family expectations and obligations were transferred into the fictive religious kinship relationship, the repetition of the image of the "living family" in letters of the elect contributed to the social imaginary of Manichaeans. It conveyed a basic meaning of structured social relations and corresponding obligations. Additional modifications, such as "daughters of the faith," "daughters of the Light Mind," or "children of righteousness," made these designators stand out from other politeness strategies.

The more explicit self-designations reveal how the authors of the Manichaean letters considered themselves and their addressees as part of a distinct category of people, designated with various honorary designators. These include phrases like "children of righteousness," "worthy member," "children of the living race," and "the holy church." Most of these self-designators carry the sense of privilege or separateness, but none carries a strong antagonistic meaning. In the modern edition of the letters, these phrases are considered as "sectarian" or indicating "sectarianism," but on a more fundamental level these designators belonged to the social practice of (group-)identification in general, articulating a distinctive group identity.¹²⁶ While I cannot exclude the possibility that these designators resulted in intense feelings of commonality, as Peter Brown suggests, it is more telling that most authors did not use these expressions. In fact, the most marked phrases come from the letters of the elect, rather than from those of the catechumens. The widespread use of kinship terminology in all letters was not primarily the result of strong groupness, but also belonged to the common speech norms of polite village relations.

Within this context, self-designators were attempts to encourage or evoke groupness in situations that can be called—with Ann Swidler's terms—settled life. In settled life, most self-understanding was implicit, with no reason for explicit demarcations. Authors pressing for more explicitly articulated group bonds and conceptual maps used more distinct designators, but to draw these distinctions is not necessarily sectarian. We have seen that their articulation of difference was not necessarily antagonistic or elitist, in contrast to what has been argued by Samuel Lieu. In fact, his antagonistic characterization of Manichaeans as a "chosen elite" and their self-understanding as "*the Christians*" cannot be confirmed in the actual Kellis letters, where they never employed self-designators like "Christian" or "Christianity," nor used labels like "the holy church" in direct competition with other (unholy?) churches. The postulated antagonistic stance of Manichaeans appears to be based on theological texts and less on the social practices of everyday life.

The second question that has shaped this chapter concerned the use of Coptic. As the Kellis letters are among the earliest letters written in Coptic, it stands to reason that this must have carried specific connotations. Religiously marked language is mostly found in the Coptic letters, while it is almost absent from their Greek counterparts. This seems to suggest that the use of the Coptic language related closely to religious groupness. It is, however, not possible to establish with certainty what ancient readers would have thought when they noticed the language choice. Despite some tantalizing correlations between language variations, find location, and postulated religious groups, it is most probable that the use of Coptic connoted a wider network of overlapping relations, including family, village, as well

¹²⁶ Trebilco, *Self-Designations and Group Identity in the New Testament*, 5.

as religious affiliations. There is no reason to assume that all Coptic letters were exclusively written by, or addressed to, Manichaeans.

In light of the aforementioned fundraising purpose of some of the letters, the next chapter will turn to the evidence for gift exchange and the local economy of Kellis, to see where and how Manichaeanness made a difference.