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

Brand, M.

Chapter 8. Matthaios's Grief: Manichaean Death Rituals in an Egyptian Context

> I was in distress that she died when we were not with her, and that she died without finding the brotherhood gathered around her (Matthaios).[1]

8.1 Introduction

Grief is a strong emotion. Grief over the death of a loved one activated all kinds of expectations about care within the family, burial, and commemoration, as well as particular Manichaean notions about the cosmos or the afterlife. Matthaios, the son of Makarios, expressed his grief about the departure of his "great mother" (ⲙⲁ ⲙⲁⲁ) in a letter to his mother. His distress seems primarily focused on the absence of "the brotherhood" when she died. Somehow, Matthaios would have wanted to be there, maybe even to gather around her together with "the brotherhood." These few words, written to express grief about her departure, conveyed real distress, even though such expressions also belonged to a conventional genre in papyrus letters. At the same time, this letter opens a window on the role of Manichaean beliefs and rituals pertaining to death and commemoration in the community.

To examine instances of Manichaeanness related to death and commemoration, we will go back and forth between the oasis and the Nile valley. I will place Matthaios's grief in the context of other letters in this village, as well as the systematized theological works from Medinet Madi and their Egyptian-Christian *umwelt*. When gleaned together from various sources, these details will intimate the Manichaean attitude toward death and the ritual practices they considered appropriate to protect and assist the soul during its journey after life on earth. By studying these sources, this chapter will take up the question of the impact of groupness on behavioral norms. Where and when can we identify instances in which everyday behavior is characterized by Manichaeanness? Just as in the preceding chapters, I will take our point of departure in the village setting as found in the papyri and the archaeological record. From this level, I will expand our focus regionally, as well as in comparison to other fourth-century settings.

Before delving into the documentary papyri, we need to be reminded that death, commemoration, and burial are sometimes regarded as strongly associated with a religious group identity.[2] The traditional explanation, still dominant in some studies of late antique funerary practices, is that there existed a strong and direct correlation between burial customs and theological beliefs. In other words, religious groups came to define the social imaginary in such a way that individual options surrounding death, commemoration, and burial became limited to institutionally mediated choices. As a result, distinct burial practices

---

[1] ⲁⲓ̈ⲣⲗⲩⲡⲏ ⲇⲉ ⲭⲉ ⲁⲥⲛⲟⲩ ⲁⲛⲫⲁⲧⲏⲥ ⲉⲛ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲭⲉ ⲁⲥⲛⲟⲩ ⲁⲙ̈ⲡⲥⲟⲩ̈ ⲧⲙ̈ⲙ̈ⲧⲥⲁⲛ̀ ⲉⲥⲥⲁⲩⲣ ⲁⲭⲱⲥ P.Kell.Copt. 25.53, 56.

[2] U. Volp, *Tod und Ritual in den christlichen Gemeinden der Antike* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); R. Gilchrist, "Transforming Medieval Beliefs: The Significance of Bodily Resurrection to Medieval Burial Rituals," in *Ritual Changes and Changing Rituals. Function and Meaning in Ancient Funerary Practices*, ed. M. Prusac and J. R. Brandt (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2014), 379-96.

came to be thought of as coterminous with religious groups.[3] Fortunately, more and more archaeological studies highlight the complex relation between mortuary practices and social representation.[4] The relation between burial and religion is not clear cut, as funerary patterns can reflect culture, gender, social standing, religion, and much more, either as a result of a deliberate differentiation, or following from the available resources.[5] Most recently, Eric Rebillard has challenged the postulated correlation between death rituals, burial, and religious identification by arguing that the family remained responsible for burials during the larger part of Late Antiquity. Rather than fundamentally affecting funerary practices, the institutional church's group norms had little impact on everyday life.[6] This chapter will argue that situations surrounding death were strongly related to Manichaean groupness, particularly during commemorative events, even though Manichaean burials are invisible in the material record.

8.2 Death and the Deceased in Documentary Papyri

Matthaios was not the first of his family to address situations related to the departure of relatives or acquaintances. News about the health and well-being of relatives was a central concern of papyrus letters, since this was the only way of conveying information to those who stayed behind in the oasis. Makarios also wrote to Maria to inform her about the death of an acquaintance: Joubei. Unfortunately, this section of his letter (P.Kell.Copt. 24.40) is fragmentary, and it remains unclear whether he was a member of the family or a family friend.[7] At any rate, it is most probable that Joubei belonged to the same Manichaean community or was closely associated with the household of Makarios in the Nile valley (see his connections to Apa Lysimachos and with "the brothers" in P.Kell.Copt. 24.40–41). Joubei's death returns in one of the letters of Apa Lysimachos (P.Kell.Copt. 30.24) and the freight charges on his account were included in a business account (P.Kell.Copt. 44.17). The latter probably indicates that his body was taken to the oasis for proper burial, or otherwise that commodities were bought for the funerary arrangements at a price of six hundred talents, as much as a ten-day wage for a Kellis weaver.[8] As the account may have been

[3] For a critical analysis in two specific late antique villages in Middle Egypt, see Pleşa, "Religious Belief in Burial."

[4] The strong religiously marked interpretation is for example advocated by J. G. Davies, *Death, Burial and Rebirth in the Religions of Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1999); M. Dunn, *Belief and Religion in Barbarian Europe c. 350-700* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013). For an introductory overview of the theoretical debates in archaeology, see R. Chapman, "Death, Burial, and Social Representation," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Death and Burial*, ed. L. Nilsson Stutz and S. Tarlow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 191-200.

[5] A distinction can, therefore, be made between "functional data" and "intentional data," see H. Härke, "The Nature of Burial Data," in *Burial and Society: The Chronological and Social Analysis of Archaeological Burial Data*, ed. C. K. Jensen and K. H. Nielsen (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1997), 19-27.

[6] E. Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 36 and 176-8.

[7] Makarios sent condolences to Takoshe for the departure of her husband (P.Kell.Copt. 20.44-45). Could this have been Joubei?

[8] Suggestion based on the price level gleaned together from the KAB and P.Kell.Copt. 48 Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT1*, 61; Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 188n45. It has been suggested to read "camel" at the

written by Tehat, we have several individuals from the same family network involved in one event pertaining to death and burial.[9] One wonders whether Apa Lysimachos's involvement in the situation may have been similar to the role of the "brotherhood" in Matthaios's letter.

Grief also constitutes the background of other letters. Sometimes death is mentioned only in passing, as in an order of a warp of "my brother Pshai, who has just died (lit. who left his body)."[10] More dramatic is the letter to Psais, in which the death of a little girl is reported: "[T]hen death forced itself on me and carried her away from me. I am powerless. It is not only her—Nonna's children have also died."[11] Yet another letter comes closer to a letter of condolence. As in other (often Greek) letters of this genre, it puts an emphasis on the great evil that happened and the grief in the heart of the author:

> What indeed will I write to you (pl.) about the great evil that has happened? Comfort the heart of Pamour and Pegosh. No one can do anything. God knows the grief that is in my heart. For you are the ones who ought to comfort him; surely we know that a great evil has befallen him. And we also heard that the old woman died. My heart grieved. Comfort the heart of the others too on her account. ….. Comfort the heart of our brother Papnoute about this evil that has happened.[12]

I suggest that the first section of this passage refers to the departure of the wife of Pamour, Maria, whose inheritance to their son Horos is mentioned in a Greek document (dated in May 363 CE, P.Kell.Gr. 30).[13] Philammon expressed his sorrow to the brothers Pamour and Pegosh, before he continued to write about the death of an "old woman," presumably a village acquaintance.

---

start of the sentence, in which case 15 camels would cost about 40 talents, which is close to the 50 talents mentioned in line 4. It remains, however, hard to see what 15 camels could have brought for the burial of Joubei. A. Alcock and I. Gardner, "The Coptic Economic Texts from Kellis (Dakhleh Oasis)," in *Ägypten und Nubien in spätantiker und christlicher Zeit*, ed. S. Emmel, et al. (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 1999), 231-40. A parallel text is W.Chr. 499 (= BL 11.126 from the second century), in which a woman sent the body of her mother, prepared for the funeral, with a private boat to her "brother." She explicitly mentions she has paid the shipping costs. Bagnall and Cribiore, *Women's Letters*, 289. Another letter pertaining to the details of the transportation of a corpse is P.Oxy. VII 1068 (reporting a delay and requesting additional support).

[9] On the identity of Tehat, see the suggestions in Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT1*, 257.

[10] ⲡⲁⲥⲁⲛ ⲡϣⲁⲓ ⲉⲧⲁϩⲉⲓ ⲁ[ⲃ]ⲁⲗ ϩⲛ̄ ⲥϣⲛⲁ P.Kell.Copt. 111.26-27.

[11] ⲁ ⲡⲛⲟⲩ ⲇⲉ ϫⲓⲧ ⲛ̄ⲭⲛⲁϩ ⲁⲩⲭⲓⲧⲥ̄ ⲛ̄ⲧⲟⲧ’ ⲉⲩ ⲧⲉ ⲧⲁⲃⲁⲙ’ ⲙⲛ ⲉⲣⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲥ ⲡⲉ ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲁⲉ̀ⲧⲥ̄ ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ⲛ̄ⲕⲉⲱⲟⲩⲛⲣⲉ ⲛ̄ⲛⲟⲛⲛⲁ ⲁⲩⲛⲟⲩ ϩⲱⲟⲩ ⲁⲛ P.Kell.Copt. 115.27-30. Earlier in the letter, the author already mentioned the departure of Nonna's children: ⲛ̣ⲱⲩⲣ[ⲉ] ⲛ̄ⲛⲟⲩⲛⲁ ⲱⲟⲛⲉ ⲁⲩⲛ̣ⲟⲩ P.Kell.Copt. 115.17-18. In P.Kell.Copt. 92, Nonna and her daughter were still well. Clearly there are more people deceased here than just Nonna's children. Other letters express a similar emotion, while the events are often beyond our knowledge, as in P.Kell.Copt. 68.36 where they are "grieving about….," followed by a lacuna (ⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲢⲀⲩⲧⲙ ⲉⲧⲣ̣ⲉ̣ ..). See note at Shisha-Halevy, "Review Article of: Gardner," 275.

[12] ⲉⲩ ⲇⲉ ⲡⲉϯⲛⲁⲥⲁϥϥ ⲙⲛⲧⲛ̄ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲡⲓⲛ̣[ⲁ ⲙ̄ⲡ]ⲉⲧϩⲁⲩ ⲉⲧⲁϩⲱⲱⲓⲣ̣ⲉ ⲥⲗⲥⲗ ⲡϩ[ⲙⲧ ⲙ̄ⲡⲁⲙ]ⲟⲩⲣ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲡⲉⲃⲱⲱ ⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲫ̣ⲁ̣ⲙ̣ ⲁ̣[ⲡ̄ϩ]ⲱⲃ· ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲡⲉⲧ’ ⲥⲁⲩⲛⲉ ⲁⲧⲗⲩⲡⲓⲛ ⲉⲧ’ ϩ[ⲛ̄ ⲡ]ⲁϩⲙⲧ’ ⲛ̄ⲧⲱⲧⲛ̄ ⲅⲁⲣ ⲡⲉⲧ’ ⲙⲡ ⲁⲥⲗⲥⲱⲗϥ̄ ⲛ̄ⲙⲁⲛ ⲧⲛ̄ⲥⲁⲩⲛⲉ ϫⲉ ⲁⲩⲛⲁⲃ ⲙ̄ⲡⲉⲧ’ϩⲁⲩ ⲉⲓ ⲁϫⲱϥ· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁⲛ ⲥⲱⲧⲛⲉ ⲁⲛ ϫⲉ ⲁⲧ’ϩⲗⲱ ⲉⲓ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ ϩⲛ̄ ⲥϣⲛⲁ ⲁⲡⲁϩⲙⲧ’ⲙ̄ⲕⲁϩ ⲥⲗⲥⲗ ⲡϩⲙⲧ’ ⲙ̄ⲡⲛ̄ⲕⲁⲩⲉ ϩⲱⲟⲩ ⲁⲛ ⲉⲧⲃⲏⲧⲥ̄….ⲥⲗⲥⲗ ⲡϩⲙⲧ’ⲙ̄ⲡⲛ̄ⲥⲁⲛ ⲡⲁⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲡⲓⲡⲉⲧ’ϩⲁⲩ ⲉⲧⲁⲣⲱⲟⲡⲉ P.Kell.Copt. 80.7-16, 30-31. The editors suggest to interpretat ⲧ’ϩⲗⲱ (lit. "old woman") as "matron." Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT2*, 123.

[13] This connection was brought to my attention by H. F. Teigen.

Only a few letters explicitly address the religious consequences or settings behind these references. The first passage contains Matthaios's disappointment about the absence of "the brotherhood" when his great mother died (to which we will return soon). The second passage is, unfortunately, no less ambiguous. Just as in Matthaios's letter, the author of P.Kell.Copt. 73 writes about a situation after the departure of a relative or acquaintance. Unlike Matthaios, there are no expressions of grief, nor does the letter belong to the genre of letters of condolence.[14] Instead, a remarkably explicit religious issue is discussed. It seems that proper ritual action had to be decided on by the author and his family.

To be precise, this latter letter belongs the correspondence between Pegosh and his brother Psais. Apparently, the fate of two young orphans is discussed, as they ended up being Pegosh's responsibility after the death of their mother. The deliberation about the right course of action suggests that a heavy religious burden was attached to the situation. Pegosh wrote:

> Now then I greet you my beloved brother: "How are things going?" Well, the young man heard that his sister had died and left two daughters behind. When he heard about it, he said: "Write to him that he may send one of them to me," in order that from these (two) daughters I will keep her for you (pl.). He said: "I will take care of her like a daughter." He said it a second time. (After) I had waited, I wrote to him: "You must persuade my father." If you are convinced, then I will arrange the matter. And I myself am amazed that you are persuaded, because he wants to do it head-over-heels (ⲛⲥⲁϫⲟ), so that you will perform the service of the church, and this is a hard burden at the judgement. If you (sg.) are persuaded, then you (pl.) must bring Pine and he can bring her outside to me.
>
> Greet for me warmly our brother Pfiham. Our brother Theognos will tell you everything. He will speak to you about the girl and ... let me (?) […] the matter, so that we may attain life eternal.[15]

The exact translation and the proposed citations from previous letters are difficult and this passage raises more questions than it answers. Very exceptional is the reference to the

[14] E. J. Epp, "The Oxyrhynchus New Testament Papyri: 'Not without Honour except in Their Hometown'?," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123, no. 1 (2004): 49; C. Kotsifou, "'Being Unable to Come to You and Lament and Weep with You'. Grief and Condolence Letters on Papyrus," in *Unveiling Emotions. Sources and Methods for the Study of Emotions in the Greek World*, ed. A. Chaniotis (Wiesbaden: Frans Steiner Verlag, 2012), 389-411. It is difficult to assess the emotional grief of individuals in antiquity, as seen in the debate on the interpretation of epitaphs for deceased children in the Roman Empire.

[15] ϯⲛⲟⲩ ϭⲉ ϯⲱⲓⲛⲉ ⲙⲛⲁⲕ ⲡⲁ[ⲥⲁⲛ] ⲙⲛⲉⲣⲓⲧ [ϫⲉ] ⲉⲱ ⲧⲉ ⲑⲉ <ⲉ>ⲡⲓ[ⲁ]ⲏ ⲁ ⲛⲓⲕⲟ[ⲩⲓ] ϩⲱⲧⲏ[ⲉ] ϫⲉ ⲁⲧϥⲥⲱⲛⲉ ⲙⲟⲩ [ⲁ]ⲥⲕⲁ ϩⲛⲧⲉ ⲛⲱⲉⲣⲉ ⲁϥⲥⲱⲧⲙⲉ ⲙⲁϫⲉϥ ϫⲉ ⲥⲣⲉⲓ ⲛⲉϥ ⲛϩⲧⲏⲛⲁⲩ ⲟⲩⲓⲉ ⲛⲛⲓ ⲛϩⲛⲧⲟⲩ ⲛⲧⲁⲕⲁⲥ ⲙⲛⲧⲙⲉ ⲛⲛⲓⲱⲉⲣⲉ ⲙⲁϫⲉϥ ϯⲛⲁϥ ⲡⲥⲣⲁⲩⲱ ⲛⲱⲉ ⲛⲟⲩⲱⲉⲣⲉ ⲁϥϫⲟⲥ ⲛⲟⲩⲥⲁⲡ ⲛⲥⲛⲉⲩ ⲛⲉⲁⲓⲁⲣⲉ ⲁⲓⲥⲣⲉⲓ ⲛⲉϥ ϫⲉ ⲕⲛⲁⲡⲱⲉ ⲙⲡⲁⲓⲱⲧ ⲓⲱϫⲉ ⲕⲏⲕ ⲛϩⲛⲧ ⲧⲁ<ⲣ>ⲡⲣⲱⲃ ⲁⲩⲱ ϯ<ⲣ>ⲏⲁⲓⲣⲉ ⲭⲱⲧ ϫ[ⲉ] ⲕⲡⲱⲉ ⲉⲡⲓⲇⲏ ⲉⲩⲟⲩⲁⲱⲥ ⲁⲉⲥ ⲛⲥⲁϫⲟ ϫⲉⲧⲙⲁⲣ ⲡⲱⲙⲱⲉ ⲛⲧⲉⲕⲕⲗⲏⲥⲓⲁ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲉⲓⲱⲧⲡⲓ ϫⲁⲃⲁⲧ ⲁⲡⲣⲉⲡ ⲓⲱϫⲉ ⲕⲡⲱⲉ ⲛⲓⲉ ⲧⲉⲧⲛⲁⲛ ⲧⲙⲏⲉ ⲛϩⲛⲧⲥ ⲛⲏⲓ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ· ⲱⲓⲛⲉ ⲛⲏⲓ ⲧⲟⲛⲟⲩ ⲁⲧⲛⲥⲁⲛ ⲡⲧⲓϩⲁⲛ ⲡⲛⲥⲁⲛ ⲑⲉⲟⲣⲛⲱⲥ [ⲩ]ⲛⲁⲧⲉⲩⲟ ϩⲱⲃ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲁⲣⲁⲕ ⲭⲛⲁⲥⲉϫⲉ [ⲛ]ⲙⲛⲉⲕ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲧⲕⲟⲩⲓ ⲁⲩⲱ … ⲧⲣⲁ.ⲧⲓ. […]ⲁ ⲡⲣⲱⲃ ⲉ[ⲧⲁⲓ ϫ]ⲉ ⲉⲛⲁⲓⲣ ⲡⲱⲛⲣ ⲛⲱⲁⲁ[ⲙⲛⲣⲉ….] P.Kell.Copt. 73.6-24, which constitutes the entire body of the letter (modified translation). One of the main issues with the translation is to determine who is talking and where the direct quotations begin and end.

"service of the church" (ⲡϣⲙⲉ ⲛⲧⲉⲕⲕⲗⲏⲥⲓⲁ). Is this a ritual event in the church? The religious connotation is strong as the decisions are considered a "hard burden at the judgment" (ⲡⲉⲓⲱⲧⲛ ϧⲁⲃⲁⲧ ⲁⲛⲍⲉⲡ), and appear to have resulted in "that we may attain life eternal" (ⲉⲛⲁⲛⲍ ⲛϣⲛⲍ ⲛϣⲁϩ [ⲛⲏⲍⲉ….]). What exactly was this service and how would this have affected the religious status and fate of those involved?

According to the editors of this letter, Pegosh wrote about two orphaned girls in the oasis, whose uncle had suggested Pegosh as guardian. However, Pegosh himself is still young, he is called "the young man," and therefore the head of the household has to be "persuaded." Pshai, a relative in the oasis, is approached to inform Pegosh about the current situation and the decision-making process.[16] This interpretation is not impossible, but the explicit religious language of "service for the church" or attaining "life eternal" suggests that there was more in play. Another reading that could be suggested might be to regard "the boy" (ⲡⲕⲟ[ϒⲓ]) as the uncle, who asked someone to send the girls to him so he could care for them "like a daughter."[17] The decision is contested, either because it is done head-over-heels (ⲛⲥⲁϧⲟ), or, in an alternative reading of ⲉⲡⲓⲇⲏ ⲉⲩⲟⲩⲁⲱⲥ ⲁⲉⲥ ⲛⲥⲁϧⲟ ϧⲉ ⲧⲛⲁⲣ ⲡϣⲙⲉ ⲛⲧⲉⲕⲕⲗⲏⲥⲓⲁ, because the uncle wants to train her as an ecclesiastical scribe (in the Christian church or the Manichaean church?): "Well, he wants to make her a 'great scribe,' (saying): 'you will perform the service of the church.'"[18] In this interpretation, she is a gift to the church (see 1 Keph. 80, cited in Chapter 4). The advantage of this religious interpretation is that it would explain the explicit religious language about life eternal. On the other hand, this reading is at best speculative because the phrase "service of the church" (ⲡϣⲙⲉ ⲛⲧⲉⲕⲕⲗⲏⲥⲓⲁ) in Pegosh's letter is not identical with the *Kephalaia* expression "the work of the catechumens" (ⲡϩⲱⲃ ⲛⲧⲉ ⲧⲙⲛⲧⲁⲕϩⲟⲩⲙⲉⲛⲟⲥ). The pronouns, moreover, are bewildering and cause uncertainty about the translation and context of the letter. What is visible, despite the uncertainty, is the impact a sudden departure could have on these families in the oasis, not only in terms of emotional or practical considerations, but also in terms of explicit religious problems that had to be discussed with the head of the household and other relatives. Although the performed rituals and the heavy burden of either judgment or life eternal may have been more directly related to the upbringing and allocation of the orphans, it follows directly from the death of a female community member.

So far we have seen how death was far from strange to the world of the papyri. Many other documents could be cited that refer to the emotional impact of sudden death and the practical arrangements of burials. Returning to the letter of Matthaios, we now know that some of his fellow Manichaeans in the village considered death to be an important moment with ritual consequences as well as great emotional intensity. Some of them were even willing to pay the freight for the transport of the body to the oasis (as in the case of Joubei).

[16] Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT2*, 84-5.

[17] Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT2*, 87.

[18] I am grateful to Renate Dekker and Jennifer Cromwell for discussing this passage with me. Part of the argument hinges on the reading of ⲛⲥⲁϧⲟ or ⲛⲥⲁϧⲟ. Crum, *CD*, 384a gives "great scribe" or "village official" as translations, but the editors note as alternative "officially."

Matthaios's report on the death of his great mother was part of his correspondence with his mother. For some time, he worked besides The Teacher in the Nile valley, but in contrast to his brother Piene, Matthaios seems to have followed a different path later on in life. In this specific letter, Matthaios writes from Antinoou and reports about the death of a woman in the community:

> Thus, I have been here in Antinoou since the day when the Teacher came south; and I have been unable to find a way to go L…., nor to visit my father, because they are mourning in the city for the blessed soul of my great mother. We are remembering her very much. And I was in distress that she died when we were not with her, and that she died without finding the brotherhood gathered around her. Do not neglect to write to us about your health.[19]

The remainder of the letter mostly consists of greetings. The death and commemoration of this woman is not brought up again. Who was this "great mother"? What was "the brotherhood" and what sort of practices were common when someone died within the Manichaean community?

As discussed earlier, "brother" could be a polite designator for friends, colleagues, coreligionists, and real kin. "Brotherhood" (ⲧⲛⲏⲧⲥⲁⲓ̈) conveyed a more explicit meaning. In several letters, it was employed as a virtuous attribute on which proper behavior was built. Real and fictive kinship ties did not only suggest an emotional connection or sense of connectivity, but was the vehicle of expectations about certain responsibilities for the next of kin. To remind someone of their brotherhood was to emphasize a common bond, which included supposedly supportive action. Apart from the ethical dimension of kinship terminology, the brotherhood in Matthaios's letter clearly refers to a collective agent. In the remains of Mani's *Epistles* found in Kellis, brotherhood is used as a designation for the elect (P.Kell.Copt. 53, 72.01 and 54.61, see Chapter 5). From Matthaios's own words, it appears that the brotherhood was located outside Kellis. Matthaios wrote from Antinoou and he had been unable to find a way to go to his father or to a place with an illegible name.[20] In another letter, his father Makarios wrote to Maria that "some brothers have come from Alexandria recently."[21] Since Piene is recorded to have gone with the Teacher (P.Kell.Copt. 20 and 25), it seems reasonable to locate the brothers with Piene and the Teacher in Alexandria and to believe that they were continuously traveling the country. In sum, the traveling elect

[19] ϯⲛ̄ⲛⲓⲏⲁ ϭⲉ ⲛ̄ⲁⲛⲧⲓⲛⲟⲟⲩ ⲭ̣ⲛ̄ ϕ[ⲟⲟⲩ] ⲉ̣ⲧ̣ⲁ ⲡⲥⲁϩ ⲉⲓ ⲁⲣⲏⲥ ⲙ̄ⲡⲡⲱϭⲛ̄ ⲑⲉ ⲁⲃⲱⲕ ⲁⲗ̣.[..] ⲟⲩⲁ̣ⲉ ⲁ̣ϭⲙⲡⲱⲓⲛⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲁⲓ̈ⲱⲧ’ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ϫⲉ ⲉⲉ̣ⲣ̄ⲱⲕⲧⲣⲟⲩ ⲣⲛ̄ ⲧⲡⲟⲗⲓⲥ ⲉⲧ̣ⲃⲉ ⲧ̣ϯⲩⲭⲏ [ⲁ]ⲙ̣ ⲙ̣ⲙ̣ⲁⲕⲁⲣⲓⲁ ⲙ̄ⲧⲁⲙⲟ ⲛⲁϭ ⲧⲛ̄ⲉⲓⲣⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲥ̣ⲣⲡⲙⲉⲩⲉ ⲧⲟⲛⲟⲩ ⲁⲓ̈ⲣ̄ⲗⲩⲡⲏ ϫⲉ ϫⲉ ⲁⲥⲛⲟⲩ ⲁⲙ̣ⲣⲁⲧⲏⲥ ⲉⲛ ⲁⲩⲱ ϫⲉ ⲁⲥⲛⲟⲩ ⲁⲙ̄ⲡⲥⲃⲛ̄ ⲧⲛⲏⲧⲥⲁⲓ̈ ⲉⲥⲥⲁⲩⲣ ⲁϫⲱⲥ ⲙ̄ⲡⲣ̄ⲣⲁⲙⲉⲗⲉⲓ ⲁⲥⲣⲉⲓ̈ ⲛⲉⲛ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲡⲉⲧⲙ̄ⲟⲩϫⲉⲓ̈ⲧⲉ. P.Kell.Copt. 25. 48-56.

[20] The Teacher left Matthaios in Antinoou (P.Kell.Copt. 25.42). The other place probably started with an L, as indicated in Dubois' translation, but he restrains from giving an identification. Dubois, "Une lettre du manichéen Matthaios," 235.

[21] ⲁ ⲣ̄ⲛ̄ⲥⲛⲏⲩ ⲉⲓ ⲙ̄ⲡⲣⲁⲕ̣ⲁ̣ⲧⲉ ϯⲛⲟⲩ P.Kell.Copt. 24.23-24.

probably constituted the brotherhood, which could not be gathered around this woman before her death.[22]

Who was his "great mother" (ⲧⲁⲛⲟ ⲛⲁϭ)? Presumably, the phrase refers to something more than a biological grandmother.[23] Jessica Kristionat sees strong similarities between the formulaic expression "the blessed soul of my great mother" (ⲧ̣ⲯⲩⲭⲏ̣ [ⲁ]ⲓ̣ⲛ̣ ⲙ̄ⲙ̣ⲁⲕⲁⲣⲓⲁ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲛⲟ ⲛⲁϭ) in Matthaios's letter and the secondary doxology in the Psalmbook, praising "the soul of the blessed Maria" (ⲙ̄ⲛⲧⲯⲩⲭⲏ ⲛ̄ⲧⲙⲁⲕⲁⲣⲓⲁ ⲙⲁⲣⲓⲁ). Initially, this second doxology has been taken to refer to Egyptian Manichaean martyrs, but they are more likely to have been catechumens who financed the production of these psalms.[24] Their names were included at the end of the psalms because of their pious contributions as donors, or because their names were read during commemorations after death. The latter interpretation is supported by one of the unpublished psalms, where the doxology includes an additional designator of praise to "all the souls that have laid off the body of death."[25] The departure of rich catechumens, especially if they had a long history of support for the Manichaean community, could well have resulted in a special status that asked for specific commemoration rituals, fostering an imagined community that included the deceased. If we can extrapolate from this comparison with the Psalmbook, I would suggest that Matthaios's "great mother" was a wealthy catechumen whose departure deserved special attention because of her financial or material support to the community.

What could have been Matthaios's expectation about the brotherhood's actions? How and why would they have gathered around his great mother? Would they have had a meal with prayer and singing? Would they have expected the deceased to be dressed in a specific garment, or would they have dressed the body in new clothes to signify the changing status

---

[22] For Gardner, "brotherhood" designates the elect only. Dubois includes the catechumens besides the elect. Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT1*, 51; Dubois, "Une lettre du manichéen Matthaios," 235.

[23] Kristionat, *Zwischen Selbstverständlichkeit und Schweigen*, 103. Dubois translated "grand-mère," a grandmother in the biological sense. Dubois, "Une lettre du manichéen Matthaios," 230; Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT1*, 193 "probably 'great' mother means 'grandmother', rather than 'famous'." I would consider the adjective great a form of praise, just like *ama* in one of the other letters.

[24] Allberry, *A Manichaean Psalm-Book*, xx, n4; Säve-Söderbergh, *Studies in the Coptic Manichaean Psalm-Book*, 28-31; Kristionat, *Zwischen Selbstverständlichkeit und Schweigen*, 103; Wurst, *Das Bemafest*, 56; S. G. Richter, *Exegetisch-Literarkritische Untersuchungen von Herakleidespsalmen des koptisch-manichäischen Psalmenbuches* (Altenberge Oros Verlag, 1994), 13-17. Both Wurst and Richter re-interpret the ⲙⲁⲣⲧⲩⲣⲉ in 2 PsB. 157.13 and 2 PsB. 173.12 as another personal name, cf. 1 PsB. facsimile page 294 as ⲧⲯⲩⲭⲏ ⲙⲙⲁⲣⲧⲩⲣⲓⲟⲥ ⲙ̄ⲙ̄ ⲙ̣ⲁ̣ⲣⲓ̣ⲁ̣. Contra Lieu, *Manichaeism in Mesopotamia*, 97.

[25] ⲙ̄ⲯⲩⲭⲁⲩⲉ ⲧⲏ[ⲣ]ⲟ[ⲩ] ⲛⲉⲧⲁⲩⲃⲁϣⲟⲩ ⲙ̄ⲡⲥⲱⲙⲁ ⲙ̄ⲡⲙⲟⲩ. Psalm 129 from 1 PsB. 180 at the facsilime edition, cited in Wurst, *Das Bemafest*, 56n9. I see the donation-hypothesis strengthened by the colophon of 2 PsB. 113 in which the first hand adds the lines "remember me, my beloved, I pray you remember me," and a second hand, "remember me my beloved, I." Cited and discussed in P. Nagel, "Der ursprüngliche Titel der manichäischen 'Jesuspsalmen'," in *Gnosisforschung und Religionsgeschichte: Festschrift fuŸr Kurt Rudolph zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. H. Preißler and H. Seiwert (Marburg: Diagonal-Verlag, 1994), 210; Richter, *Exegetisch-Literarkritische Untersuchungen*, 16-17. Iris Colditz has come up with a similar explanation for donor names in Middle-Iranian Manichaean hymns. I. Colditz, "On the Names of 'Donors' in Middle Iranian Manichaean Texts," in *Manichaeism East and West*, ed. S. N. C. Lieu (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 64-5.

of her body and soul?[26] Although Matthaios's letter remains silent on these specificities, there are a few passages in the Coptic Manichaean texts that may begin to answer these questions, shedding light on the impact of Manichaeanness in situations pertaining to death, burial, and commemoration.

8.3 Songs and Prayers for the Deceased

Two chapters in the *Kephalaia* deal with the question concerning the rest that is brought by the prayers of the elect for the deceased. In 1 Keph. 115 (270.25–280.19), one of the catechumens asks whether their prayer and rituals positively contributed to the deceased's journey. Mani answers and explains the power of the prayers of the elect, who can intercede on behalf of the dead just as the Mother of Life prayed on behalf of the First Man (1 Keph 115, 274.22–29). As heirs of cosmological history, the Manichaean elect and catechumens can pray for the salvation of the deceased. Their ritual actions, moreover, are not limited to prayer alone but are combined with almsgiving by family members:

> Who had left his body (i.e., died), they … him, as he had … alms on his behalf and a remembrance for his brother; whether his father or his mother or his son or else his daughter or his relative who shall leave his body. He has made alms for his … from him. He did not lack his hope… but he enacted for him a remembrance … …. of the church.[27]

Relatives could be freed and given rest through almsgiving and "remembrance." When a household member expressed "his love (ⲁⲅⲁⲡⲏ) toward him and he performed a remembrance in the church on his behalf," this will be counted to his benefit and his soul will be released.[28] Moreover, the text equated the performance of "a remembrance" (ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲣ̄ⲡⲙⲉⲟⲩⲉ) with the redemption from a cycle of "thousands of afflictions and tens of thousands of transmigrations."[29] This redemption from the cycle of transmigration indicates that the rituals were performed for catechumens and not primarily for the sake of the elect, as they were believed to be saved in a single lifetime, while catechumens would enter in a cycle of transmigrations that may eventually lead them to salvation (1 Keph. 90, 91 and 92).

Apart from the two paths of elect and catechumens, Manichaeans believed that in exceptional situations a perfect catechumen may be saved "in a single body" without having to be reborn (1 Keph. 91). This perfect catechumen's deeds will be purified during the

---

[26] On the garments which Mandaeans were expected to wear in their final hours, see E. S. Drower, *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 1962), 212-3. Egyptian funerary clothing will be discussed below.

[27] [.]ⲉ ⲉⲧⲁϥⲉⲓ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ ϩⲛ ⲡⲉϥⲥⲱⲙⲁ ⲁⲩ…ⲧⲏ ⲉⲁϥ..[.]ⲟⲩⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲛⲁⲉ ϩⲁⲣⲁϥ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲣ̄ⲡⲙⲉⲩⲉ ⲁⲡⲉⲩⲥ[ⲁⲛ ⲉⲧⲧⲉ] ⲡⲉⲩⲓⲱⲧ ⲉⲧⲧⲉ ⲧⲉϥⲙⲉⲉⲩ ⲉⲧⲧⲉ ⲡⲉϥϣ[ⲏ]ⲣⲉ [ⲏ]ⲙⲁⲛ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁϥ [ⲧⲉϥ]ϣⲉⲉⲣⲉ ⲏ ⲡⲉⲩⲥⲩⲧⲧⲉⲛⲏⲥ [ⲉⲧ]ⲉ [ϣⲁ]ⲩⲉⲓ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ ϩⲙ̄ ⲡⲉⲩⲥⲱⲙⲁ ⲁϥⲣ̄ⲟⲩⲛ̄ⲧⲛⲁⲉ ϩⲁ [ⲡⲉϥ ……..]ⲧⲟⲟⲧⲏ ϩⲱϥ ⲙⲡⲉϥϣⲁⲁⲧ ⲧⲉϥⲉⲗ[ⲡⲓⲥ …..]..ϥ ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ⲁⲩⲉⲓⲣⲉ ⲛⲉϥ ⲛⲟⲩⲣ̄ⲡⲙⲉⲟⲩⲉ ⲉ.ⲁ[….] ⲛⲧⲉⲕⲕⲗⲏⲥⲓⲁ 1 Keph. 115, 277.20-27. Where possible I cite Funk's improved readings, which are only accessible to me through Richter's *Die Aufstiegspsalmen des Herakleides.*

[28] ⲛ̄ⲧⲉϥⲁ̣ⲅⲁⲡⲏ ϣⲁⲣⲁϥ ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲣ̄ⲟⲩⲣ̄ⲡⲙⲉⲟⲩⲉ ϩⲙ̄ ⲧⲉⲕⲕⲗⲏⲥⲓⲁ ϩⲁⲣⲁϥ…1 Keph. 115, 279.15-16. With Pedersen, I take *agape* here to represent a convergence of the virtue of love, a meal, and almsgiving. Pedersen, "Holy Meals," 1284.

[29] The entire passage reads: ⲉ[…]ⲉⲧⲉⲛⲁⲉⲓⲣⲉ ⲛⲉⲥ ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲣ̄ⲡⲙⲉⲟⲩⲉ ⲉⲧⲉⲧⲉⲛⲥⲱⲧⲉ ⲙⲙ[ⲁ]ⲥ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ ϩⲙ̄ ϣⲟ ⲛⲑⲗⲓϩⲥ ⲙ̄ⲙ̄ ϩⲙⲧⲃⲁ ⲙ̄ⲙⲉⲧⲁⲓⲧⲓⲥⲙ[ⲟ]ⲥ 1 Keph. 115, 280.12-14.

ascending journey of his soul in a similar way as the Living Soul in the food of the elect is cleansed. A final cleansing is, however, only necessary for about one-fifth of his sins, since the remaining four-fifths were absolved through his service to the church, his faith, and his gnosis. This path of salvation was the same for catechumens who entered into transmigration, according to the *Kephalaia*, but it would take them longer since they would not be purified in a "single place" (ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲧ̣ⲟ̣ⲡ̣ⲟ̣ⲥ ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲱⲧ 1 Keph. 92.24). The purification they experience in transmigration was considered to be the education that leads them on the right way (1 Keph. 99). The prayers and alms of relatives helped the soul in this process and shortened the cycle of transmigration, giving "rest" (ⲙ̄ⲧⲁⲛ) to the deceased, who is said to be entangled in affliction (1 Keph. 115). These gifts, prayers, and psalms are therefore the most probable subject of the ritual activity of the brotherhood, as referred to in Matthaios's letter.

A second chapter in the *Kephalaia* supplements what we know about the ritual actions that could be undertaken on earth to support the ascent of the soul. It describes prayers (ϣⲗⲏⲗ), almsgiving (ⲧⲙⲛⲧⲛⲁⲉ), love gifts (ⲁⲅⲁⲡⲏ), offerings (ⲡⲣⲟⲥⲫⲟⲣⲁ), and making remembrance (ⲣ̄ⲡⲙⲉⲟⲩⲉ). Despite the multiplicity of terms, the actions described in 1 Keph. 144 represent the development of a death ritual that was performed in memory of the deceased.[30] Proper alms had power and were perceived as giving life to "the soul of their limbs which will leave their body."[31] The power to enliven the souls was released by the *prosphora*, which consisted of the gifts given for the benefit of the deceased's soul that was in its process of transmigration after death.[32] For this purpose, catechumens and elect worked together, as the catechumen brought their pure alms forward and put it on the table and the elect consumed the food:

> (At) the moment, when they will take it into their image (ϩⲓⲕⲱⲛ), they will pray in its power and they will sing psalms, and they will say the things that are hidden and the wisdom of God, and they will pray for mercy and they will ask for power in their holy prayer to God, in order that it will become a helper to him on account of whose name they made it. A power will be sent out from the God of Truth, and it will come and help him, on whose account they make this offering (ⲡⲣⲟⲥⲫⲟⲣⲁ).[33]

---

[30] S. G. Richter, *Die Aufstiegspsalmen des Herakleides* (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 1997), 67-9. Augustine also alludes to the existence of death rituals, but never informs us about the details. In *Mor. Man.* 17.55, he mentions that the prayers and songs of the elect were beneficial for the souls.

[31] The entire sentence is ϫⲉ ⲉⲧⲉⲧⲛⲁⲉⲉⲥ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲧⲛⲱⲛϩ̄ ⲛ̄ϩⲏⲧⲥ̄ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ̣ⲧ̣ⲛ̄ⲧⲛϩⲟ ⲁⲛ ⲛⲙ̄ⲯⲩⲭⲁⲩⲉ ⲛ̄ⲛⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲙⲉⲗⲟⲥ ⲉⲧ[ⲛⲁ]ⲉⲓ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ ϩⲛ̄ ⲡⲟⲩⲥⲱⲙⲁ 1 Keph. 144, 348.9-11 (Funk translates "damit ihr ihn veranstaltet und durch ihn lebendig werdet und auch die Seelen eurer Glieder, die ihren Körper verlassen werden, lebendig macht").

[32] S. G. Richter, "Die manichäische Toten- oder Seelenmesse," in *Ägypten und Nubien in spätantiker und christlicher Zeit* (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 1999), 535. He states "diese Opferfeier, mit dem Ziel einer aufsteigenden Seele zu helfen, können wir als manichäische Seelenmesse bezeichnen."

[33] ⲡⲛⲉⲩ ⲉⲧⲉϣⲁⲩϫⲓⲧⲥ̄ ⲁϩⲟ̣[ⲩⲛ] ⲁ̣ⲧ̣ⲟⲩϩⲓⲕⲱⲛ ⲉϣⲁⲩϣⲗⲏⲗ ϩⲛ ⲧⲉⲥϭⲁⲙ ⲛ̄ⲥⲉⲣⲯⲁⲗⲉ̣ ⲛ̣ⲥ̣ⲉ̣ⲧ̣ⲉⲟⲩⲟ ⲛⲙ̄ⲡⲉⲧϩⲏⲡ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲧⲥⲟⲫⲓⲁ ⲙ̄ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲛ̄ⲥ̣ⲉ̣[ⲧ]ϣ̣ⲃϩ̄ ⲛⲟⲩⲛⲁⲉ ⲛ̄ⲥⲉⲁⲓⲧⲉ ⲛ̄ⲟⲩϭⲁⲙ ϩⲙ̄ ⲡⲟⲩϣⲗⲏ̣ⲗ̣ ⲉ̣ⲧ̣ⲟ̣ⲩⲁ̣ⲃⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲛ̄ ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ϫⲉⲥⲛⲁϣⲱⲡⲉ ⲛ̄ⲃⲟⲏⲑⲟⲥ ⲙⲡ̣ⲉ̣ï ⲉⲧⲁⲩⲉïⲧⲥ̄ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲡⲉϥⲣⲉⲛ ϣⲁⲩⲧⲛ̄ⲛⲁⲩ ⲛ̄ⲟⲩϭⲁⲙ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ ϩⲁⲧⲙ̄ ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲧⲙⲏⲉ ⲛ̄ⲥⲉⲓ ⲛ̄ⲥⲣ̄ⲃⲟⲏⲑⲓ ⲁⲡⲉ̣ï ⲉ̣ⲧ̣ⲉ̣ϣⲁⲩⲉⲓⲣⲉ ϩⲁⲣⲁϥ ⲛϯⲡⲣⲟⲥⲫⲟⲣⲁ 1 Keph. 144, 347 2-9 (my translation, I thank Renate Dekker for discussing this passage with me).

Prayer, almsgiving, reading, or preaching from the "secrets and wisdom of God" were thus combined with psalm singing and together contributed to a great power that would help the soul of the deceased. What exactly went on during these gatherings is beyond the scope of the catechumen's question and is therefore not discussed in this passage. The participation of elect and catechumens is, I would suggest, also visible in Matthaios's letter. On the one hand, he mentions the "brotherhood" that was not gathered around her, while one line earlier he expressed his distress about her death "when we were not with her" (ⲁⲥⲛⲟⲩ ⲁⲛⲉⲁⲧⲛⲥ ⲉⲛ P.Kell.Copt. 25.48–55). The first person plural does not indicate Matthaios's position among the elect, but the absence of fellow catechumens. Both groups, elect and catechumens, played a role in the liturgy of death rituals and their absence was considered problematic.

Some of the psalms that were unearthed in Medinet Madi and Kellis have been related to the ritual context of death and commemoration. Siegfried Richter has pointed out that the Psalms of Herakleides and the Ascension Psalms (previously known as the Psalms of Jesus but now reconsidered as ⲫⲁⲗⲙⲟⲓ ⲁⲛⲁⲗⲏⲫⲱⲥ[34]) were sung from the perspective of the soul and describe the afflictions and threats of the journey.[35] They shed light on the various steps in the ascent of the soul.[36] Interestingly, these psalms never seem to cover the entire journey of ascent, but Richter has identified where and how the various psalms engage with the different stages of the ascent of the soul. At the end of Herakleides Psalm 284 (2 PsB. 106.27–107.30), for example, the singer asks for the three gifts: the garland of the gods, an unfading palm, and the robe (of glory).[37] These victory gifts are well known from Manichaean sources all over the ancient world (for the Coptic material: 1 Keph. 36.9–21, 41.11–25, Hom. 6.21–23, 2 PsB. 22.11–21, etc.) and they were incorporated in the first stage of the soul's ascent, to be sung in the Herakleides Psalms at several points (Herakleides Psalms 277, 280, 281, 282, 284, 285).[38]

There is ample evidence to show that the Manichaeans of Kellis were familiar with elements from these commemoration rituals, as well as these psalms. The Coptic hymn—or prayer—found on a wooden board from House 3 (T.Kell.Copt. 2, A5) plays a critical role in this respect.[39] Richter has argued convincingly that this song includes all steps in the ascension process.[40] Written in the first person singular, it reflects the experience of the soul

[34] Nagel, "Der ursprüngliche Titel," 215.

[35] Villey also locates two Psalms of the Wanderers in this context: 2 PsB. 154-155.15 and 167.23-168.19 Villey, *Psaumes des errants*, 33, 299-304 and 379-83. The content of the songs is indeed strongly related to the other psalms, although it is difficult to relate them to the stages identified by Richter. See also the Parthian hymns in M. Boyce, *The Manichaean Hymn-Cycles in Parthian* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 8-15.

[36] Richter, "Die manichäische Toten- oder Seelenmesse," 529-40; Richter, *Die Aufstiegspsalmen;* Richter, *Exegetisch-Literarkritische Untersuchungen* and the edition of the Herakleides psalmen in the CFM.

[37] 2 PsB. 107.20-25, see discussion in Richter, *Die Aufstiegspsalmen*, 182-3.

[38] Outside the Coptic Manichaean sources, see al-Nadim, *Fihrist*, cited and discussed in Richter, *Die Aufstiegspsalmen*, 39-40; R. van den Broek, "Manichaean Elements in an Early Version of the Virgin Mary's Assumption," in *Empsychoi Logoi: Religious Innovation in Antiquity*, ed. A. Houtman, A. F. de Jong, and M. Misset-van de Weg (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 293-316. The passages of the Herakleides Psalmen pertaining to the first phase in which these three gifts were given are listed in Richter, *Die Aufstiegspsalmen*, 78-80.

[39] Gardner, *KLT1*, 13-15, and 25-30.

[40] Richter, *Die Aufstiegspsalmen*, 43 and Tabelle 1.

that was united with the image of its counterpart and received its garment, the crown, the palm, and victory, before it was taken to the Judge and traveled upward into the Rest:

> I will pray to the Third Ambassador. He sent unto me Jesus the Splendour, the apostle of light, the redeemer of souls. He entrusted me to the Light Mind, the Virgin of Light. The spirit of truth, our Lord Manichaios, he gave to me his knowledge. He made me strong in his faith. He has fulfilled me in his commandments. The image of my counterpart came unto me, with her three angels. She gave to me the garment and the crown and the palm and the victory. He took me to the judge without any shame; for what he entrusted to me I have perfected. I washed in the Pillar.[41] I was perfected in the Perfect Man. They gave me my first mind in the living atmosphere. I rose up to the ship of living water; unto the father, the First Man. He gave me his image, his blessing, and his love. I rose up to the ship of living fire; unto the Third Ambassador, the Apostle of Light, the good Father. They ferried me up to the land of light, to the first righteous one and the Beloved of the Lights. I came to rest in the kingdom of the household (?); for the Father of the Lights has revealed to me his image.[42]

Identified as an "eschatological prayer" by the editors, this hymn (?) may have derived from the devotional context of the death rituals described in the *Kephalaia*. It connects the genre of Ascension Psalms to the domestic context of Kellis. It has, however, a number of exceptional features that suggest that it was more than a simple hymn or prayer.

First, A5 is exceptional for its exhaustive nature.[43] The hymn lists seven stages in the ascension from the point of death: the identification with the supernatural double (or twin)

---

[41] G. Wurst, "Initiationsriten im Manichaismus " in *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism. Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity I*, ed. D. Hellholm, et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 148. The Manicheans spiritualized the Christian practice of baptism into an "eschatologischen Taufe" which contributed to the forgiveness of sins. For the interpretation of the celestial baptism and the way these textual references were related to ritual practice, see the critique of Richter on Mirecki. While Mirecki posits a cultic "baptismal" celebration as the ritual background of Psalm 278 and connects this with the Gospel of Thomas, Richter emphasizes the postmortem perspective of the Soul. He has shown convincingly that the motives shared by both texts were more generally known and are therefore not directly depending on each other. Richter, *Die Aufstiegspsalmen*, 140ff; P. A. Mirecki, "Coptic Manichaean Psalm 278 and Gospel of Thomas 37," in *Manichaeica Selecta I*, ed. A. van Tongerloo and S. Giversen (Leuven: International Association of Manichaean Studies, 1991), 243-62.

[42] The text was written on a relatively small section of the board, but I'll present a continuous text and translation: ⲁ̣ⲙⲉⲧⲱⲃϩ ⲙⲡⲛⲁϥϣⲁⲛⲧ ⲙ̄ⲡⲣⲉⲥⲃⲉⲩⲧⲏⲥ ⲁⲩⲧ̄ⲛⲁⲩ ϣⲁⲣⲁⲉⲓ ⲙ̄ⲙ̄ⲥ ⲡⲡ̄ⲣⲉⲓⲉ ⲡⲁⲡⲟⲥⲧⲟⲗⲟⲥ ⲙ̄ⲡⲟⲩⲁⲉⲓⲛⲉ ⲡⲣⲉϥⲥⲱⲧⲉ ⲛ̄ⲛ̄ⲩⲭⲁⲟⲩⲉ ⲁⲩ[ⲧⲉⲉ]ⲧ ⲁⲧⲟⲧϥ ⲙ̄ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲥ ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲁ̣ⲓⲛⲉ ⲧⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲟⲥ ⲙ̄ⲡⲟⲩⲁⲉⲓⲛⲉ ⲡⲡ̄ⲛ̄ⲁ̄ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲧⲙⲛⲉ ⲡ̄ⲙ̄ϩⲁⲓⲥ ⲡⲛⲁⲛⲓϫⲁⲓⲟⲥ ⲁϥⲧ ⲙⲛⲉⲓ ⲙ̄ⲡⲉϥⲥⲁⲩⲛⲉ ⲁⲩⲧⲁϫⲣⲁⲉⲓ ⲣⲙ̄ ⲡⲉϥⲛⲁⲣⲧⲉ ⲁϥϫⲱⲕ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲉⲓ ⲣⲙ̄ ⲛⲉϥⲉⲛⲧⲟⲗⲁⲩⲉ ⲁ ⲑⲓⲕⲱⲛ ⲙ̄ⲡⲁⲥⲁⲉⲓⲱ ⲉⲓ ϣⲁⲣⲁⲉⲓ ⲙ̄ⲙ̄ ⲡⲉⲥϣⲁⲛⲧ ⲛ̄ⲁⲣⲧⲉⲗⲟⲥ ⲁⲥϯ ⲛⲛⲏ ⲛ̄ⲧⲣ̄ⲃⲥⲱ ⲙ̄ⲙ̄ ⲡⲕⲗⲁⲙ ⲙ̄ⲙ̄ ⲡⲃⲁⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙ̄ ⲡ̄ⲃⲣⲟ ⲁϥϫⲓⲧ ⲁⲣⲉⲧϥ ⲙ̄ⲡⲉ ⲕⲣⲓⲧⲛⲥ ⲁϫⲙ̄ ⲗⲁⲟⲩⲉ ⲛ̄ϣⲡⲉ ϫⲉ ⲡⲉⲧⲁϥⲧⲉⲉϥ ⲁⲧⲟⲟⲧ ⲁⲉⲓϫⲱⲕ ⲙⲛⲁϥ ⲉⲃⲁⲗ ⲁⲉⲓϫⲱⲕⲓ̄ ⲣⲙ̄ ⲡⲥⲩⲗⲟⲥ ⲁⲩϫⲁⲕⲧ ⲣⲙ̄ ⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲉⲧϫⲛⲕ ⲉⲃⲁⲗ ⲁⲩϯ ⲛⲛⲏ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁϣⲁⲣⲡ ⲛ̄ⲛⲟⲩⲥ ⲣⲙ̄ ⲡⲁⲛⲣ ⲉⲧⲁⲛⲣ ⲁⲉⲓⲧⲁⲉⲓⲗⲉ ⲁⲡϫⲁⲉⲓ ⲙ̄ⲡⲛⲁⲟⲩ ⲉⲧⲁⲛⲣ ϣⲁ ⲡⲱⲧ ⲡϣⲁⲣⲡ ⲛ̄ⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲁⲩϯ ⲛⲛⲏ ⲛ̄ⲧⲛⲧⲣⲏⲛⲕⲱⲛ ⲡⲥⲛⲁⲛⲁ ⲙ̄ⲙ̄ ⲧⲉⲭⲁⲅⲁⲡⲏ ⲁⲉⲓⲧⲁⲉⲓⲗⲉ ⲁⲡϫⲁⲉⲓ ⲛ̄ⲧⲥⲉⲧⲉ ⲉⲧⲁⲛⲣ ϣⲁ ⲡⲛⲁⲣϣⲁⲛⲧ ⲙ̄ⲡⲣⲉⲥⲃⲉⲩⲧⲏⲥ ⲡⲁⲡⲟⲥⲧⲟⲗⲟⲥ ⲙ̄ⲡⲟⲩⲁⲉⲓⲛⲉ ⲡⲱⲧ ⲛⲁⲅⲁⲑⲟⲥ ⲣⲁⲩϫⲓ ⲛⲉⲓⲟⲣⲉ ⲙⲛⲁⲉⲓ ⲁⲣⲣⲏⲓ ⲁⲧϫⲱⲣⲁ ⲙ̄ⲡⲟⲩⲁⲉⲓⲛⲉ ⲁⲣⲉⲧⲩ ⲙ̄ⲡⲁⲣϫⲓⲇⲓⲕⲁⲓⲟⲥ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲡⲛⲉⲣⲓⲧ ⲛ̄ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲁⲉⲓⲛⲉ ⲣⲁⲉⲓⲧⲁⲛ ⲙ̄ⲛⲁⲉⲓ ⲣⲙ̄ ⲧⲛⲏⲧⲣ̄ⲟ ⲙ̄ⲡⲉⲉⲓ ϫⲉ ⲣⲁ ⲡⲱⲧ ⲛ̄ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲁⲉⲓⲛⲉ ⲟⲩⲱⲛϩ ⲛⲛⲏ ⲉⲃⲁⲗ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉϥⲣⲏⲕⲱⲛ. The translation is found in Gardner, *KLT1*, 14-15. An earlier translation was included in Gardner, "A Manichaean Liturgical Codex," 30-59.

[43] Compare the list in Richter, "Die manichäische Toten- oder Seelenmesse," 532-3; Discussed further in C. Colpe, *Die religionsgeschichtliche Schule: Darstellung und Kritik ihres Bildes vom gnostischen Erlösermythus*

and the aid of three angels (1); the judge (2); the Pillar and the Perfect Man (3); the ship of the living water (the moon) and the First Man (4); the ship of the living fire (the sun) and the Third Ambassador (5); the land of Light and the Beloved of the Lights (6); and finally the Rest and the Father of the Lights (7). Other descriptions of this journey in the Manichaean tradition parallel these stages, as Richter has shown, but none is as exhaustive as this short text.[44]

A second observation has led to a direct challenge of the identification of its ritual setting. Julia Iwersen has suggested that this text was part of an ecstatic ritual of ascent that was performed for the initiation of new members of the elect during the Bema festival, rather than belonging to a commemoration ritual. Building on previous interpretations by Puech and scholars of gnosticism, she argues for a shared religious practice in which initiation processes were "intertwined with death-like experiences."[45] Indeed, a wide range of gnostic and hermetic texts combined claims of visionary ascent with supernatural revelation—both also featured in other Christian ascetic traditions.[46] The Manichaean elect, she argues, experienced a similar revelation and election during an initiation ritual. Her emphasis on traditional Egyptian and gnostic visionary ascent rituals is stimulating, but the connection to T.Kell.Copt. 2 A5 is not in the least convincing. She observes that the text seems to announce a prayer in the first lines: "I will pray to the Third Ambassador." Thereafter, the text continues in the perfect tense: "He sent unto me Jesus the Splendour, the apostle of light, the redeemer of souls." This indicates that A5 was "an account rather than a prayer in itself," as it "seems to be a sort of preparation for an individual or communal prayer by giving a description of what a community member has experienced."[47] In contrast to the Herakleides Psalms, A5 does not contain hymn-like features like a doxology, or prayers of intercession. Therefore, she concludes, it is fundamentally different from the Psalms of Herakleides that Richter connected to the "Seelenmesse."[48] Rather than understanding A5 in relation to death rituals, Iwersen revives Puech's interpretation of the five lessons in 1 Keph. 9 as one set of initiation rituals for the elect that culminated in a visionary ascent, of which A5 is a witness.[49]

(Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961), 104; Broek, "Manichaean Elements," 293-316. Similar themes, however, feature in Egyptian Christianity, see van der Vliet, "Literature, Liturgy, Magic: A Dynamic Continuum," 563.

[44] Richter, *Die Aufstiegspsalmen*, 43 Tabelle 1.

[45] J. Iwersen, "A Manichaean Ritual of Ascent? A Discussion of T. Kell.Copt. 2 A5 in the Light of Other Coptic Gnostic Materials," in *Zur lichten Heimat: Studien zu Manichäismus, Iranistik und Zentralasienkunde im Gedenken an Werner Sundermann*, ed. Team Turfanforschung (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2017), 232. A similar argument was presented by Widengren, more than fifty years ago, in which he reconstructed a baptismal ritual at the deathbed, connecting it with other gnostic "bride-chamber" rituals. G. Widengren, *Mesopotamian Elements in Manichaeism: (King and Saviour II): Studies in Manichaean, Mandaean, and Syrian-Gnostic Religion* (Uppsala: Lundequist, 1946), 104-22, in particular page 104-107 on the Coptic psalms.

[46] Fowler, "The Ascent of the Soul and the Pachomians."

[47] Iwersen, "A Manichaean Ritual of Ascent?," 232.

[48] Iwersen, "A Manichaean Ritual of Ascent?," 232. A5 does not correspond to the themes identified by Richter in the Herakleides Psalmen, see Richter, *Die Aufstiegspsalmen*, 71-74.

[49] Puech, "Liturgie et pratiques rituelles," 359ff. Among the many possible parallels, one could think of the Valentinian rituals studied in N. Denzey Lewis, "Apolytrosis as Ritual and Sacrament: Determining a Ritual

Iwersen's critique of the initial interpretation of A5 is attractive, even though I fail to see the connection between the five lessons of 1 Keph. 9 and the stages identified in T.Kell.Copt. 2, A5.[50] Instead of relocating it to the category of visionary ascent and initiation rituals, I propose a more mundane alternative. Hymn (?) A5 belongs an earlier phase before the development of a systematized Manichaean theology and cosmology. Its seven stages clearly correspond to other attempts in Manichaean sources to define and describe the journey of the soul. None of these descriptions or lists correspond entirely to the seven stages in this text, even though Richter is correct in pointing out the striking overlap. One passage that he could not include is 1 Keph. 176, of which the critical edition has not yet been published. This chapter lists two versions of five transitions that take place after death. Although they contain the same elements, these lists do not correspond one-on-one with Richter's reconstruction, or with the seven stages in A5. The fivefold structure in 1 Keph. 176, however, shows that the systematization continued, presumably to replace a more flexible presentation of various narratives about what was about to happen after you "left the body."[51] A5 may have presented this narrative in a brief, descriptive manner, but its material context suggests that it functioned either as a reading, a prayer, or a hymn in a wider liturgical setting with other songs pertaining to death and commemoration (see Table 15 below).

In lockstep with Richter, I wonder whether a commemoration ritual with songs and alms gifts on behalf of the departed is what Matthaios referred to when he wrote about the "mourning in the city" (ϩⲉⲣⲱⲕⲧⲓⲣⲟⲩ ϩⲛ̄ ⲧⲡⲟⲗⲓⲥ). His statement that "we are remembering her very much" corresponds with one of the technical terms used in the *Kephalaia* (to make remembrance, ⲣⲡⲙⲉⲟⲩⲉ) for the totality of almsgiving, prayer, and singing. In line with the observations in the previous chapter, these rituals and songs had a performative character. As such, these songs were not merely didactical devices, reminding the Manichaeans of the stages of ascent, but they were meant to assist the soul in its journey upwards. These actions are performed in someone's name after his or her departure. Matthaios's distress, on the other hand, is caused by the absence of the brotherhood at the moment of departure. Could there have been two rituals, only one of which at the crucial moment when the soul left the body?

The answer is affirmative, and the new Kellis finds provide additional support for differentiating between two ritualized moments. The Ascension Psalms suggest that there was a specific ritual that took place at the crucial moment when the soul left the body. Frequently, these songs emphasize the "hour of need" (ⲧⲟⲩⲛⲟⲩ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲛⲁⲅⲕⲏ), the moment of

Context for Death in Second-Century Marcosian Valentinianism," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 17, no. 4 (2009): 525-61; E. Evans, "Ritual in the Second Book of Jeu," in *Practicing Gnosis: Ritual, Magic, Theurgy and Liturgy in Nag Hammadi, Manichaean and Other Ancient Literature*, ed. A. D. DeConick, G. Shaw, and J. D. Turner (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 156; D. Burns, *Apocalypse of the Alien God. Platonism and the Exile of Sethian Gnosticism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 134-8 where the comparison is made with a range of ancient visionary ascent manuals.

[50] Iwersen explains the lack of similarity away by stressing the complex diversity of the Manichaean mythology. Iwersen, "A Manichaean Ritual of Ascent?," 236.

[51] The Coptic text is not yet published, but see the translation in Pettipiece, *Pentadic Redaction*, 212-17.

departure.[52] The most prominent example of the way these psalms articulate the agony of dying is the passage: "I cry unto thee in the hour of the going forth from the body."[53] In contrast to the Psalms of Herakleides, which were associated with the commemoration ritual, these Ascension Psalms only relate to the first stage of the journey, in which the soul meets its heavenly twin with the help of the angels.[54] A further difference between these two groups of psalms is the elaborate attention paid to almsgiving and descriptions of ethically correct behavior, clearly indicating that the Ascension Psalms were performed by catechumens.[55] Mostly, these songs use the first-person singular voice to describe the journey of the soul, as in hymn (?) A5 from Kellis.[56] Together, these features point to the existence of two ritualized moments pertaining to a Manichaean death: the commemoration rituals of 1 Keph. 115 and 144, and the death ritual(s) performed at the deathbed.

The Kellis texts help to flesh out the content and setting of the various Manichaean death rituals, as the wooden board with hymn (?) A5 also contains abbreviated versions of five or six psalms. In Chapter 9, I will suggest that this remarkable composition was made for a liturgical setting. It contains the prayers and songs of the readers or chanters during a specific liturgical gathering (see Table 15 on the content of this wooden tablet). The various texts in this compilation (specifically, texts A2 and A4) relate to the ritual setting at the deathbed. Text A4 gives the first line of each verse, instead of the full text, but includes passages with speech directed toward the soul that mention victory, a crown, and a diadem of the Light. Text A2 treats the same topic. It corresponds to one of the unpublished psalms from the first part of the Psalmbook, which addresses Christ "the savior of souls" (π[ρεϥc]ωτε ⲛ̄ⲙⲯⲩ[ⲭⲁ]ⲩⲉ). Where legible, the content of these abbreviated psalms either relate to the fate of the soul or directly address the soul. The thematic coherence of the texts on this wooden board indicates that it was used in a liturgical setting, presumably at the side of the deathbed.

---

[52] 2 PsB. 55.24; 57.25, 61.23 and 65.29.

[53] ϯⲱϣ ⲟⲩⲃⲏⲕ ϩⲛ̄ⲧⲟⲩⲛⲟⲩ ⲛ̄ⲧϭⲓⲛⲉⲓ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ ⲙⲡⲥⲱⲙⲁ 2 PbB. 66.19-20.

[54] Richter, *Die Aufstiegspsalmen*, 106; Richter, "Die manichäische Toten- oder Seelenmesse," 538. Note that Richter only includes the 3Her. Psalms in the death-ritual, not the 4Her. Psalms in another section of the Psalmbook. See the introduction in the CFM.

[55] Richter, *Die Aufstiegspsalmen*, 106; Cf. Boyce, *The Manichaean Hymn-Cycles in Parthian*, 12.

[56] Richter considers expressions of great need and actuality combined with the "Ich-stil" to designate the hour of death, even though a similar style in the first person singular is employed when the entire community prays in the name of the departed. Richter, *Die Aufstiegspsalmen*, 120 and 05ff; Richter, "Die manichäische Toten- oder Seelenmesse," 538-9 indicating the difference between two groups of psalms. Brown, "Alms and the Afterlife," 153 also suggests that these rituals protected the soul during the dread moment of departure from the body. Richter interprets the differentiation between an "Ich-stil" and a "Du-stil" in the various 3Her psalms as indications of the continuation of the narrative of the liturgy, since he considers these psalms to belong to one ritual event. Richter, *Die Aufstiegspsalmen*, 90-94.

Text on T.Kell.Copt. 2	Content
A1	Abbreviated Psalm (to Jesus)
A2	Abbreviated Psalm (to Christ). Parallel with Psalm 68 from 1 PsB. [57]
A3	Abbreviated Psalm (to the Soul?)
A4	Abbreviated Psalm (to the Soul?). Could be a parallel with Psalm 57 from 1 PsB. [58]
B1	Scribbles under the two columns with psalms. Doxologies? Mostly scrubbed away.
Backside **A5**	Commemoration hymn (single column)
B2	Abbreviated Psalm
C1	Illegible scribbles on the side (laterally).

Table 15: Texts and content of the wooden board T.Kell.Copt. 2.

Apart from the abbreviated psalms on the wooden board, two other psalm fragments correspond to Ascension Psalms in the Medinet Madi Psalmbook. Psalm 261 (T.Kell.Copt. 6, side a of another wooden board) addresses Christ with a request for salvation: "Save me, O blessed Christ, the savior of the holy souls, I will pass up into the heavens and leave this body upon the earth."[59] The soul continues to describe his or her correct behavior on earth, knowledge of the way of the holy ones, and their wisdom, which will lead the singer(s) up into the world of the Luminaries.[60] Likewise, Psalm 246 (P.Kell.Copt. 1, side a) addresses Jesus as a kinsman and Light who acted as a guide for the soul on its journey through the Darkness (2 PsB. 246, 54.7,11). After enduring the challenges of the journey, the soul arrives and is allowed to enter into the kingdom and receive its glorious crown (P.Kell.Copt. 1.8–14). As all these songs were found in the same house as Matthaios's letter, they connect his considerations about proper ritual action in the face of death with the regional and transregional practices known from a wider Manichaean tradition.[61]

Unfortunately, none of the letter writers inform us in more detail about the ritual expectations surrounding death. A few glimpses into their lives and situations of grief have to be combined with liturgical material. My interpretation of these texts leads me to believe that there must have been multiple settings for death rituals, one related to the commemoration (with almsgiving, prayer, and songs, as described in the *Kephalaia*), another more directly to the setting at the deathbed. Further comparative study will have to determine how common these rituals were in Manichaean communities all over the ancient

[57] See edition and comparison in Gardner, *KLT1*, 18-24.

[58] Gardner, *KLT1*, 17.

[59] ϲⲱⲧⲉ] ⲙ̄ⲛⲁⲓ ⲡⲓ̅ⲭ̅ⲣ̅ⲥ̅ ⲙ̄ⲛⲁⲕⲁⲣⲓⲟⲥ ⲡⲣⲉϥϲⲱⲧⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙ̄ⲛ̀ⲧⲩⲭ[ⲁⲩ]ⲉ ⲉⲧⲟⲩⲁⲃⲉ ⲛ̀ⲛⲁⲡⲱⲛⲉ ⲁϩⲣⲏⲓ̈ ⲁⲙⲡⲛⲩⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲕⲱ ⲁ̀ⲭ̀ⲛ̄ ⲡⲕⲁϩ ⲙ̄ⲡⲓϭⲱⲛⲁ 2 PsB. 261, 75.11-12. The Kellis texts, unfortunately, only starts with fragments of the following lines and does not contain a version of this passage.

[60] See the short analysis in Richter, "Die manichäische Toten- oder Seelenmesse," 438.

[61] Similar practices in eastern Manichaean sources Richter, *Die Aufstiegspsalmen*, 57-59; Boyce, *The Manichaean Hymn-Cycles in Parthian*, 1-6; C. Colpe, "Die 'Himmelreise der Seele': Ausserhalb und Innerhalb der Gnosis," in *Le origini dello gnosticismo*, ed. U. Bianchi (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 81-98.

world. For the Kellis context, however, it is clear that death and rituals pertaining to death and the survival of the soul were considered to be of great importance. Within such marked moments in life, some Kellites saw themselves primarily as Manichaean catechumens. They "offered a hymn and a prayer to the light giver of the heights" and presumably believed to have received absolution because of their almsgiving, knowledge, and hymns.[62] In this sense, Matthaios was not alone in his concern for the ritual actions performed for the deceased. His family and neighbors must have sung the Manichaean psalms, prayed the prayers, and maybe even contributed financially to the production of liturgical texts for these ritualized settings.

8.4 Cosmological Salvation and Individual Eschatology

A specific alternative interpretation of the Kellis letters has led Peter Brown, in several recent publications, to connect the Manichaeans of Kellis with earlier Christian traditions pertaining to death. He argues that we encounter a type of Christianity in Kellis in which alms for the dead remained important, while other Christian leaders had started to reject these practices. The Manichaean letters from Kellis are crucial evidence in this, breaking through the silence of other sources, informing us about the expectations surrounding death rituals in Christian communities.[63]

To make this claim, Brown compares the Manichaean texts from Kellis with second-century graffiti on the walls of the *triclinium* of San Sebastiano in Rome. These graffiti express the hope for a peaceful afterlife, celebrated with a *refrigerium* meal for the departed. Some of the texts even express the idea that the dead could hear the living and help them out.[64] By comparing the Manichaean document from Kellis with these second-century graffiti, he makes a compelling argument for shared questions about the place of beloved deceased in "the geography of the other world."[65] Although I agree with many of his interpretations, I do not think that "we find the same rituals, if with slightly different names…" in Kellis or the *Kephalaia* chapters.[66] The problem that Brown fails to address, probably because it would take him away from his main argument about the development of Christian thought, is twofold: on the one hand, the frustratingly inconsistent use of these terminologies in the *Kephalaia* and the Kellis document, and on the other hand, the dual nature of Manichaean eschatological teaching. Taking these two issues into account will result in a more precise evaluation of the similarities and differences of Christian and Manichaean perceptions of the afterlife.

Beginning with the latter point, Manichaean doctrine about the afterlife was less concerned with the survival of the soul of individuals than the liberation of the Living Soul.

---

[62] ⲁϥϯ ⲟⲩⲉⲩⲙⲛⲟⲥ ⲙⲛ ⲟⲩⲱⲗⲏⲗ [ⲙⲡⲫ]ⲱⲥⲧⲏⲣ ⲛ̄ⲧⲡⲓⲭⲓⲥⲉ 1 Keph. 91, 233.27-28.

[63] Brown, "Alms and the Afterlife," 156, while on page 51 he describes the rituals as pre-existing rituals of the Christians communities which have been, as it were, "manichaeized." And he claims to discuss "a Christian ritual in a Manichaean text."

[64] Brown, *Ransom of the Soul,* 38.

[65] P. Brown, *The Ransom of the Soul* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 55; Brown, "Alms and the Afterlife," 145-58.

[66] Brown, *The Ransom of the Soul*, 49-50.

The Coptic Manichaean texts reveal a tension between two types of eschatology: individual eschatology and impersonal, collective eschatology. Matthaios's grief and the painstaking question about the efficacy of prayer for the dead in 1 Keph. 115 attest to hope for individuals, but Manichaean doctrinal texts mainly treat eschatology as an impersonal, cosmological event. Usually, these texts do not consider the fate of individual souls as awaiting better times in a happy place, nor do they elaborate on the possibility that the dead would intervene on behalf of the living.[67] When the fate of the soul is discussed in Manichaean texts, the main focus is on the cosmological liberation of the Living Soul, to such an extent that one scholar could claim that "there is no individual salvation in Manichaeism."[68] This attitude is different from the Christian traditions Brown found in the *triclinium* of San Sebastiano. Whatever similarities there are between Manichaean and Christian notions about almsgiving for the dead, the key distinction lies in the ambiguous status of individual eschatology in Manichaeism.

The omnipresence of cosmological eschatology in Manichaean texts does not mean that more personal and individual eschatology is entirely absent. Mary Boyce discerned two divergent attitudes toward the fate of the soul in Middle Persian and Parthian Manichaean texts. The souls are either treated as "ethical entities, conscious of the existence they have just left and of their moral achievements within it" or as "passive members of the exiled light."[69] The same holds true for other passages with Manichaean teaching, as Gardner and Lieu point out: "[I]ndividual and cosmic eschatology are interwoven in Mani's teaching, for each soul's own tragedy and victory are but a microcosm of the history of the universal Soul and its liberation from matter."[70] The individual side of the equation is stressed in the Coptic Ascension Psalms. Despite traveling upwards to merge with the collective Light, the soul is still considered as connected to individual virtues and misbehavior. Likewise, the two *Kephalaia* chapters discussed above seem to give answers to questions about individual eschatology. They convey a pastoral message for family and community members who have lost a relative. Other Coptic Manichaean texts elaborate on the expected judgment, during which Jesus will separate the sheep from the goat (Hom. 35, cf. 2 PsB. 154.8–12).[71] Somehow, individual responsibility was retained until this very moment of eschatological judgment.

The same ambiguity about the merger of the individual soul with the collective Living Soul is visible at the end of time. After the Great War and the separation of Light and

---

[67] Contra Brown, *The Ransom of the Soul*, 36-40. On Augustine's struggle with this element of Manichaean thought after the death of a close friend, see BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma 1*, 91-95.

[68] BeDuhn, *Manichaean Body*, 233 where he considers the Manichaean theological system.

[69] Boyce, *The Manichaean Hymn-Cycles in Parthian*, 12.

[70] Gardner and Lieu, *MTRE*, 20. On individual and collective eschatology, see also Heuser, "The Manichaean Myth According to Coptic Sources," 42-89; W. Sundermann, "Eschatology II. Manichean Eschatology." *Encyclopædia Iranica Online*, last updated: January 19, 2012, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/eschatology-ii (accessed 03 January 2017); Ries, *L'église gnostique de mani*, 219-33, 235-43. J. D. BeDuhn, "The Metabolism of Salvation: Manichaean Concepts of Human Physiology," in *The Light and the Darkness*, ed. P. A. Mirecki and J. D. BeDuhn (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 32-33.

[71] Heuser, "The Manichaean Myth According to Coptic Sources," 84-5; M. Hutter, "Mt 25:31-46 in der Deutung Manis," *Novum Testamentum* 33, no. 3 (1991): 276-82.

Darkness, the Father will reveal himself and all Light will merge with him.[72] The sermon on the Great War describes how "all the Light will submerge into him," after which the Light will also "leave it again in glory."[73] This suggests that the merging is not complete and the Light (or Light beings) still have some sort of independence from the Father, just as in the period before the fall. Nils Arne Pedersen connects this to the Manichaean desire to "preserve a semi-independence" of the soul.[74] So despite the belief that the soul will merge with all the Light, there remains a second hope for a temporal and earthly salvation in which individuality is not lost. Earlier in the sermon, this dual eschatological hope became visible in the description of the peaceable kingdom on earth after the Great War.[75] On the one hand, Manichaeans believed in redemption into a timeless, ineffable abundance of Light, but on the other hand, hope was directed toward the perfect community on earth, as the sermon states, allowing "the female elect to sleep and arise in the house of queens and the noble ladies' bed."[76]

This hope, characterized by two divergent eschatologies, shows the marked difference between Manichaean notions about the afterlife and the Christian graffiti on the walls of the *triclinium* of San Sebastiano. The notion of the dead as mediators who could pray for the living on earth, as developed by Christians in the Western world, was not shared with the Manichaean "geography of the other world," which was primarily focused on the collective liberation of the Living Soul.[77] Brown's comparison is therefore limited at best. It is difference between the two systems that makes comparisons worthwhile. The Manichaean dead could benefit from earthly rituals, but the idea of receiving support *from* the departed never found an equivalent in Manichaean practice.[78]

---

[72] See the discussion between Pedersen and Gardner on whether the collective eschatology corresponds to the individual eschatology. Gardner suggests that the souls after death rise up to the New Aeon, while the Father of Greatness remains concealed until the end of times when all is unveiled. I. Gardner, "Mani, Augustine and the Vision of God," in *Augustine and Manichaean Christianity*, ed. J. van Oort (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 73-86; Contra N. A. Pedersen, "The Veil and Revelation of the Father of Greatness," 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), 229-34.

[73] ⲡⲟ[ⲩⲁⲓⲛⲉ ⲧ]ϧⲣϥ᾽ ⲛⲁⲱⲛⲥ᾽ ⲁϩⲟⲩⲛ ⲁⲣⲁϥ and ⲥⲉⲛⲁⲉⲓ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ ⲛ̄ϩⲓⲧⲟ̄ ⲁⲛ ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲉⲁⲩ Hom. 41.15-16 and 17.

[74] Pedersen, *Studies*, 396-7.

[75] Pedersen, *Studies*, 268; Cf. Koenen, "Manichaean Apocalypticism," 300-1.

[76] ⲛⲉⲕⲗⲉⲕⲧⲏ ⲛⲁⲛ̈ⲕⲁⲧⲉ ⲛ̈ⲉⲥⲉⲧⲱⲛⲉ· ϩⲛ̄ [ⲡⲏ̈] ⲛ̣ⲛ̄ⲣ̄ⲣⲱ ⲛ̈ⲛ ⲛ̈ⲏⲁⲧⲣⲱⲛⲁ Hom. 24.9-10. Pedersen, *Studies*, 268-9; Hom. 32 expresses similarly despair over those of the relatives who have passed away before the great war. It seems to suggest that those on earth are not aware of whether their souls have gone "to the good, of to the evil" (line 10-11).

[77] Brown, *The Ransom of the Soul*, 55 for "geography of the other world." Recently has been argued on the basis of a 13th -century Chinese painting that salvation for catechumens was possible, since the paintings "also gradually seem to become very personal statements for the hope of individual redemption of historical elect and lay figures depicted for example on banners after death." J. Ebert, "Individualisation of Redemption in a Manichaean Painting from Ningbo," in *Mani in Dublin*, ed. S. G. Richter, C. Horton, and K. Ohlhafer (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 155.

[78] Presumably because the Manichaean doctrine of transmigration made it improbable that any communication could take place after the soul had left its body. BeDuhn, "The Nature of the Manichaean Soul," 47.

The second problem is Peter Brown's assessment of the Kellis document as scattered with references to the care for the dead. With a firm twist, Brown equates the *agape* with the "making of memory" and almsgiving (*prosphora*), which he identifies as "the Manichaean equivalent of the Eucharist."[79] With such easy identifications, the care for the dead is everywhere. In his opinion, the Manichaean documents from Kellis "show how important these rituals were in the day-to-day life of Manichaeans," as their letters were "scattered with references to the *agape* offered for the souls of the dead."[80] As we have seen, the *agape* indeed features in both the KAB and the personal letters, but Brown's equation of these terms simply cannot be correct in this context. The afterlife or the ascent of the soul was not always subject of discussion. For example, the exposé on almsgiving in 1 Keph. 87 is related to the contribution made by catechumens to the liberation of the Living Soul, rather than about alms for the dead.[81] It is most probable that these rituals were related, as the Light that was liberated through the ritual consumption of food ascended together with the souls after death, but the ritual context on earth was different. Brown's equation of the *agape* with the Latin *refrigerium*, the meal held at the cemetery to celebrate the state of rest of the departed, is also far from evident.[82] In fact, nowhere in the descriptions of the death and burial of Joubei is the *agape* even mentioned. When *agape* is referred to in the letters and business accounts from Kellis, it is distributed to living people or even requested as a personal gift: "[T]he lentils and lupin seeds: make them as an *agape* for me."[83] Clearly the recipients of this *agape* were still alive (see Chapter 6). Finally, "remembrance" is mentioned twice in letters of the elect in passages that cannot have signified death rituals (P.Kell.Copt. 31.22–29 and 32.24–28). Rather than equating them with commemorative death rituals, they stem from the world of the living: "I write, giving you the remembrance that you … for the matter is fine, until I come up."[84]

In short, although Brown is correct to highlight the commonality between various types of alms offerings for the dead, which was deemed "very great and honored among people" according to the *Kephalaia*, it was not as omnipresent in the Kellis documents as he suggests.[85] Matthaios's grief, the short references to the death of Joubei, the stylized Coptic hymn (?) for the ascension of the soul, and the various psalms are fragmentary remains of

[79] Brown, *The Ransom of the Soul*, 49-51. *Prosphora*, however, entailed both gifts at the deathbed as gifts during the celebration of the Eucharist in this period. Wipszycka, *The Alexandrian Church*, 111-2, 202.

[80] Brown, *The Ransom of the Soul*, 52; Brown, "Alms and the Afterlife," 153.

[81] BeDuhn, *Manichaean Body*, 194-97.

[82] Brown, *The Ransom of the Soul*, 50.

[83] ⲛⲁⲣⲁⲓⲛ ⲙⲡ̄ ⲛⲧⲁⲣⲙⲟⲩⲥ ⲁⲣⲓⲟⲩ ⲛ̄ⲁⲕⲁⲡⲏ ⲥⲁⲣⲁⲉⲓ P.Kell.Copt. 47.10.

[84] ϯⲥⲣⲉⲓ ⲉⲓϯ ⲛⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡ̄ⲣ̄ⲡⲙⲉⲩⲉ ϫⲉ ⲉⲣⲉ … ⲥⲁϫⲉ ⲁⲛⲁⲩ ϫⲉ ⲡⲉⲱⲃ ⲕⲁⲗⲱⲥ ⲱⲁϯⲉⲓ ⲁⲥⲣⲏⲓ P.Kell.Copt. 32.24-28. In the later Coptic tradition, people would read the name(s) from tombstones, "in remembrance," during communal commemoration rituals. As in the Manichaean tradition, these rituals were considered to positively affect future salvation. J. van der Vliet, "'What Is Man?': The Nubian Tradition of Coptic Funerary Inscriptions," in *Nubian Voices. Studies in Christian Nubian Culture*, ed. A. Lajtar and J. van der Vliet (Warsaw: Raphael Taubenschlag Foundation, 2011), 195. It is, however, clear that this is not the context for these two letters of the elect.

[85] [ⲉ]ⲡⲉⲓⲇⲏ ⲟⲩⲛⲁϩ ⲧⲟⲛⲱ ⲡⲉ ⲩⲧⲁⲓⲁⲩⲧ ⲛⲁⲥ̄ⲣ̄ⲛ̄ ⲙ̄ⲣ[ⲱⲙ]ⲉ 1 Keph. 115, 271.12.

the impact death made on society and the Manichaean community. They attest to a life in which death was less exceptional or distant than in contemporary society.[86]

8.4.1 Excurse: Manichaean Grief

Before engaging with the archaeological remains of funerals in Kellis, a brief excurse on Manichaean admonitions against grief is necessary. It has been claimed that Manichaeans knew no lament for the dead, but rejected these lamentations because the soul was considered to be free after its departure from the body: death was a joyful event![87] The most noteworthy text in this respect is a Middle Persian fragment from a parable in which a female catechumen is told not to mourn over the corpse of her son, as this will kill her spiritual son.[88] In the Coptic sources, mourning is explicitly forbidden, but the community is called on to focus on the redemptive element of death. In the psalms, the singer urges the community: "[L]et no man weep for me, neither my brothers nor them that begot me" and reminded them that "cause for weeping left I not here: therefore, my fathers, do not weep for me."[89] Celebration is called for instead of mourning: "[L]et all my kin make festival, because I have received without doubt the true promises of the Paraclete."[90] The exhortation not to weep is found repeatedly, but rather than conveying a general interdiction against mourning over the dead, it situates weeping and grief in the earthly reality left behind by the soul.

The expressions of grief in the Kellis letters, therefore, present an additional dimension rather than a direct violation of group norms pertaining to mourning. While some of the authors may have believed that the soul was heading to a better place, grief and lament still characterized their emotional and social situation. Mourning was not a private affair. Emotional expressions of grief and lamentation are visible in other Manichaean

---

[86] Based on the bioarchaeological analysis of the Kellis 2 interments, Molto has suggested a life expectancy of 16.7 years at birth, while 34.4 percent of the children did not survive the first year. The life expectancy at 19 years old was between 16.9 (males) and 23.3 (females) years. Such figures are lower than established calculations based on the census returns of Roman Egypt, which point to a life expectancy at birth in the low twenties and female life expectancy at 10 between 34.5 and 37.5 years. Molto, "Bio-Archaeological Research of Kellis 2: An Overview," 243. Cf. Bagnall and Frier, *The Demography of Roman Egypt*. The latter is criticized exactly at the issue of using census returns for estimating mortality rates in villages. W. Scheidel, *Death on the Nile: Disease and the Demography of Roman Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 172-8. For a summary and recent literature see W. Scheidel, "Age and Health," in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt*, ed. C. Riggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 305-16.

[87] Pedersen, *Studies*, 201. I do agree with his reading of the grief and weeping in the sermon on the Great War, which is not a lament for the dead, but a reflection of the pain and anxiety related to the persecution.

[88] This story is told in Middle Persian fragment M45, the parable on the female Hearer Xybr'. Published in W. Sundermann, *Mittelpersische und parthische kosmogonische und parabeltexte der Manichäer* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1973), 89-90. Translation in Klimkeit, *Gnosis on the Silk Road*, 190-1. For more fragments of the same parable and a full discussion, see I. Colditz, "Another Fragment of the "Parable of the Female Hearer Xybr'"?," in *Studia Philologica Iranica. Gherardo Gnoli Memorial Volume*, ed. E. Morano, E. Provasi, and A. V. Rossi (Roma: Scienze E Lettere, 2017), 63-77.

[89] ⲙ[ⲡ]ⲱⲣⲧⲉ ⲗⲁⲩⲉ ⲣⲓⲛⲉ ⲛⲏⲓ ⲁⲛⲁⲕ ⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲛⲁⲥⲛⲏⲩ ⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲛⲉⲧⲁⲩϫⲡⲟ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲓ 2 PsB. 75.19-20, translation adapted. ⲗⲁⲓ̈ⲃⲉ ⲛ̄ⲣⲓⲛⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲓⲕⲱ ⲙ̄ⲡⲓⲙⲁ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲡⲉⲓ̈ ⲛⲁⲓ̈ⲁⲧⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲱⲣ ⲁⲣⲓⲛⲉ ⲛⲏⲓ 2 PsB. 84.28-29.

[90] ⲛⲁⲣⲉ ⲡⲁⲅⲉⲛⲟⲥ ⲧⲏⲣⲟ̄ ⲣⲱⲁⲓ̈ⲉ ϫⲉ ⲁⲓ̈ϫⲓ ⲁϫⲛ̄ⲣⲏⲧ ⲥⲛⲉⲩ ⲛ̄ⲛⲱⲟⲩⲡⲱⲡ ⲙ̄ⲙⲛⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲡⲁⲣⲁⲕⲗⲏⲧⲟⲥ 2 PsB. 102.28-30. Similar statements are found in 2 PsB. 62.25, 65.15-17, 75.19-20, 84.27-29, 88.16-18, 93.29-30, cf. 82.21-23.

sources, like the lament over Mani's death or the funeral hymns of important historical figures.[91] These liturgical or hagiographical passages included lament, even though, theologically speaking, grief and weeping became connected to the suffering of those who did not know Mani's message. The Middle Persian parable, likewise, has to be read in a Zoroastrian environment in which lamentations hampered the soul in the afterlife.[92] Its message is that instead of weeping, catechumens should engage in almsgiving to positively influence the fate of the soul. The soul should be mourned before death, while the forgiveness of sins is still possible. Adding to this interpretation, I would suggest that mourning was presented as ineffective. It cannot aid the departed, while almsgiving on his or her behalf could positively affect the fate of the soul.[93]

8.5 Burial practices and Material Culture

How would Manichaeans have buried their dead? The textual record does not offer clues on the practice of burial among Manichaeans. Without such guidance, the only available option is to look for patterns in the material record.[94] Despite extensive (bio)archaeological research

[91] These passages are cited in Colditz, "Another Fragment," 71. She concludes that "from this it becomes clear that there cannot have existed a general interdiction of mourning the dead in Manichaeism." Pedersen suggests that this lament is over those who do not wish to repent and therefore deserve punishment, or belongs to penitential weeping before absolution. He discusses Baumstark's hypothesis that the Bema festival included weeping over Mani's death (Hom. 28.21-30, 71.21-23, 2 PsB. 44.29-30), to conclude that a certain type of lamentation may very well have belonged to the Manichaean practice. Pedersen, *Studies*, 206-10.

[92] See the explanation and Zoroastrian sources cited in Colditz, "Another Fragment," 71-73.

[93] This would also be my interpretation of one of the two other hagiographical texts that Colditz cites. The female catechumen in M4576/R/i/3-14 (in Parthian) is told to stop mourning and instead she seems to have engaged in "charity" and she "made great [donations of alm]s." See Colditz, "Another Fragment," 73n39. For the evaluation of uncontrolled grief, see T. S. de Bruyn, "Philosophical Counsel Versus Customary Lament in Fourth-Century Christian Responses to Death," in *Rhetoric and Reality in Early Christianities*, ed. W. Braun (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 161-86.

[94] There is some evidence related to Manichaean burials. The famous Bassa-inscription published by Cumont is, for example, always regarded as a funerary inscription, primarily because of its find location. M. Scopello, *Femme, Gnose et Manichéisme* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 293-315. A Manichaean interpretation of the Tikves-funeral stelae from the same region has to be rejected. N. Proeva, "Sur l'iconographie des stèles funéraires du »type Tikveš« en macédoine à l'epoque romaine / Ikonografija nadgrobnih stela Tikveškog tipa." In *Funerary Sculpture of the Western Illyricum and Neighbouring Regions of the Roman Empire*, ed. N. Cambi and G. Koch (Split: Knjizevni Krug, 2013), 679-708. On the eastern side of the tradition, we learn from the notes of a Confucian official that they ritually undressed their dead and buried them naked within a cloth sack. Whether this actually describes Manichaeans, or rather presents a local Sogdian perspective on Zoroastrian rituals is unclear. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire*, 270-85, specifically the translation on page 278. A full examination of Manichaean death-rituals and burial is much needed. From the Roman Empire, one of the Theodosian laws (C.Th. 16.5.7.3, 381 CE) forbade Manichaeans to establish their "sepulchres of their funeral mysteries" in towns and cities or to disguise themselves under the name of other sects (*ne.. consueta feralium mysterioruum sepulcra constituant*). This is taken by Huebner as indication that religious groups used grave inscriptions as billboards to promote their virtues. S. R. Huebner, *Der Klerus in der Gesellschaft des spätantiken Kleinasiens* (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 2005), 202. She does not, however, reflect on the attribution to the Manichaeans specifically. Instead, I think the law might actually

in the cemeteries and tombs of Kellis, there is no evidence for specifically Manichaean burials. Drawing on existing research on Christian identifications and funerary customs, I will argue that Christians and Manichaeans rarely expressed their religious group-identification in the tangible, material aspects of burials.

8.5.1 Early Egyptian Christianity and Changing Funerary Patterns

In Chapter 3, I briefly reflected on the relation between the material remains of burials and religious identifications. Gillian Bowen has argued for a strong correlation between burial patterns and religious identifications: "pagans" in the West Cemetery and Christians in the East Cemetery. In the West Cemetery, the bodies were mostly wrapped in shrouds and placed on beds in low grave chambers, while the East Cemetery knew only east–west oriented pit graves without decorations or grave gifts. These patterns are striking, but are they related to religious communities? Some archaeologists of late antique Egypt have interpreted the shift toward east–west interment theologically, as the result of the Early Christian belief that the dead will rise to face the returning Christ in the East.[95] The increasing dominance of east–west oriented burials would thus reflect the Christianization of Egypt. However, at the outset of this chapter I already noted that this correlation between mortuary practices and religious identification is not universally accepted. Historians, archaeologists, and modern anthropologists have all argued against a direct and representational correlation.[96] The following sections will, therefore, briefly sketch Bowen's position, followed by a discussion of some of its weak points.

The scholarly consensus, on which Bowen draws, is that the Christian notion of bodily resurrection must have led to inhumation and a specific type of care for the deceased body. One scholar briefly summarized:

> [T]he universal and totalizing claim that Christianity exercised on the life of the believers was not compatible with leaving death, burial and the commemoration of the dead simply to the families and professional undertakers. The holy Christian texts demanded intervention in this sphere.[97]

Bowen connects the textual sources on Christian attitudes toward death with the patterns in the two cemeteries. She states that:

---

employ heresiological repertoire, using "feralis" metaphorically as deadly and "sepulcra" for heresy. G. Bartelink, "Repression von Häretikern und anderen religiösen Gruppierungen im späteren Altertum, in der Sprache wiederspiegelt," in *Violence in Ancient Christianity: Victims and Perpetrators*, ed. A. C. Geljon and R. Roukema (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 192.

[95] Bowen, "Child, Infant and Foetal Burials," 369. She builds on the typology of D. Watts, *Christians and Pagans in Roman Britain* (London: Routledge, 1991), 57.

[96] The historian Ian Morris, for example rejects "direct and linguistic interpretations" of archaeological patterns in Greek and Roman burial patterns. I. Morris, *Death-Ritual and Social Structure in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 17. See also the skeptical approach to grave goods in N. Denzey Lewis, "Roses and Violets for the Ancestors: Gifts to the Dead and Ancient Roman Forms of Social Exchange," in *The Gift in Antiquity*, ed. M. L. Satlow (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 122-136.

[97] Volp, *Tod und Ritual in den christlichen Gemeinden der Antike*, 270 (English summary).

> Burial practice throughout the cemetery, as illustrated by the excavated graves, was uniform. The bodies were placed directly onto the floor of the pit with the head on the west and with one exception they were single interments. The corpse was wrapped in a linen shroud that was secured with woven linen ties wound in a crisscross or lateral fashion and placed directly into the pit in a supine position; the hands were to the sides, or over the pelvic region … Burial goods were minimal: one string of beads, a reused glass vessel, the occasional ceramic bowl with red painted ticks on the rim, and sprays of rosemary and myrtle. Infant burials were dispersed amongst those of the adult population … Such burial practices equate with the Christian tradition and, consequently, those interred have been identified as belonging to the Christian community at Kellis.[98]

The patterns observed by Bowen are indeed striking, but they hardly correlate with the rise of Christianity. The problematic dating of the Kellis cemeteries, as well as some of their characteristic burial patterns, point toward a less clear-cut, single-issue interpretation.[99]

A fundamental argument against a neat division between Christian burial practices (in the East Cemetery) and traditional Egyptian burials (in the West Cemetery) is tied into the difficult dating of the temporal time span of these two cemeteries. The West Cemetery is dated roughly between the first and third century CE, although there is some evidence for the Ptolemaic period.[100] The radiocarbon dating of twenty-one burials from the East Cemetery has resulted in a more complex picture. The calibrated period ranges from the start of the first century to 600 CE, with a 98.8 percent probability of falling within the range of 48–436 CE.[101] These dates are at odds with the archaeological dating based on pottery and nomenclature that suggest a much shorter time range, from the end of the third to the end of the fourth century. The bioarchaeologists conclude that the "mortuary pattern at K2 predates the Christian period."[102] For Gillian Bowen, the long period cannot be correct, as Christian burials (i.e., those with an east–west orientation) cannot be expected before 220 CE. In her opinion, even this early third-century date is improbable and too early for the observed burial patterns.[103] In result, Bowen rejects the outcome of the radiocarbon dating and favors a

[98] Bowen, "Some Observations," 168.

[99] Although I focus on Bowen's argumentation, similar statements have been made by other archaeologists. The bioarchaeological team also stated that "conversion to Christianity at Kellis resulted in a shift in burial customs from that found in the pagan tombs of Kellis 1 to the traditional Christian burials found in Kellis 2." J. D. Stewart, J. E. Molto, and P. J. Reimer, "The Chronology of Kellis 2: The Interpretative Significance of Radiocarbon Dating of Human Remains," in *Oasis Papers 3*, ed. G. E. Bowen and C. A. Hope (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2003), 373.

[100] Hope, "The Kellis 1 Cemetery," 331.

[101] Stewart, Molto, and Reimer, "The Chronology of Kellis 2," 377. I thank E. Molto for discussing these findings with me and for showing me part of his unpublished work on this topic. In particular, I draw on the paper presented by E. Molto, P. Reimer, J. D. Stewart and L. Williams, "The dating of the Kellis 2 Cemetery: An ongoing conundrum," Annual Canadian Association for Physical Anthropology (London Ontario 2004).

[102] Molto, "Bio-Archaeological Research of Kellis 2: An Overview," 239-55.

[103] Bowen, "Some Observations," 168.

date from the mid-third century to fourth century CE. Her interpretation is supported by the ceramics from the East Cemetery, which correspond to the type of pottery found in the fourth-century houses and the Large East Church.[104] Radiocarbon dating, moreover, came up with widely diverging dates for two child burials from the same grave (roughly 260 years apart).[105] Despite this anomaly, we cannot disavow the majority of the radiocarbon dates. The so-called "Christian" burial customs were already in use far before Christianity could have had an impact on the local burial customs, as eleven tombs are datable with a 95.4 percent probability before the middle of the third century, and four of them even before its third decade. The West Cemetery and the East Cemetery were both in use during the second and third century. The change toward funerary customs that favored an east–west orientation of the body and little to no grave gifts was a gradual process that was not solely related to the rise of Christianity, but to a wider array of factors (not excluding Christian group practices altogether).[106]

The gradual change to east–west oriented interments is visible in other cemeteries in the oases, but, as in Kellis, this never fully corresponded to the rise of Christianity.[107] At el-Deir (Kharga Oasis), east–west oriented interments were found in close proximity to those with a north–west, south–east orientation.[108] At Fag el-Gamous, previously thought to support the thesis of a strong Christian differentiation, radiocarbon dating has shown the coexistence of various types of burial orientations for over two hundred years. The archaeological team now suggests that the change in orientation was not "instantaneous or wholesale," but that multiple conventions and traditions intermingled without "segregation based on the underlying cultural and religious beliefs associated with burial orientation."[109]

---

[104] Bowen, "Some Observations," 168; Bowen, "Child, Infant and Foetal Burials," 368-9.

[105] Bowen explains the radiocarbon date as affected by the plant-derived material in the resin coating applied to the body. Cited in Stewart, Molto, and Reimer, "The Chronology of Kellis 2," 377. On this coating, see J. Maurer, T. Möhring, and J. Rullkötter, "Plant Lipids and Fossil Hydrocarbons in Embalming Material of Roman Period Mummies from the Dakhleh Oasis, Western Desert, Egypt," *Journal of Archaeological Science* 29 (2002): 761.

[106] As David Frankfurter concludes, "we can say that – to whatever degree they arose in connection with other Christian practices – they would have served the transformation of the soul, the family's investment in that transformation, and perhaps some community investment in the distinction of mortuary practices." Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt*, 179.

[107] Bowen, "Some Observations," 169.

[108] Dunand concludes there was no general orientation plan during Late Antiquity. Dunand, "Between Tradition and Innovation," 171. This is visible in the Christian necropolis of el-Deir (Kharga Oasis) in which East-West orientated interments are found in close proximity with North-West and South-East interments. Coudert notes that the two sections of the cemetery may have dated to different periods. Coudert, "The Christian Necropolis of El-Deir," 454.

[109] P. R. Evans, D. M. Whitchurch, and K. Muhlestein, "Rethinking Burial Dates at a Graeco-Roman Cemetery: Fag el-Gamous, Fayoum, Egypt," *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports* 2 (2015): 213. Moreover, Raven has pointed to the longstanding cosmological orientations in Egyptian funerary and temple architecture. M. J. Raven, "Egyptian Concepts on the Orientation of the Human Body," *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 91 (2005): 37-53; Cf. B. Gessler-Löhr, "Mummies and Mummification," in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt*, ed. C. Riggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 675, differences in treatment

Furthermore, there is some fourth-century evidence for the burial of Christians and non-Christians in the same tomb,[110] for the use of traditional amulets in head-west burials, as well as other grave goods.[111]

Together, this suggests that there is more to the changing burial patterns than simply a strong correlation with a religious identification. Future archaeological studies will have to look into this in more depth. For now, it is enough to follow Alanna Nobbs's observation about the "diverse and decentralized attitude to funerary representation" of this period, which "speaks to the difficulty of perceiving a highly distinct and uniform attitude to death across Christian communities in Egypt."[112] Bringing this back to the possibility of discerning Manichaeanness, we have to conclude that it is highly unlikely that we will ever detect Manichaeans among the Kellis tombs. The following section will argue that the absence of specific evidence for Manichaean burials is not the result of their negative religious evaluation of the material body, but rather stems from a general pattern in the Kellis funerary practices in which religious group-identifications are mostly invisible.

8.5.2 Invisible Manichaean Burials: Following Local Customs

Manichaeans believed the soul had to escape from the material world of the body. Extensive burials and a full traditional treatment of the body seem, therefore, implausible at best. At the same time, this belief did not always result in a negative evaluation of the physical body. A positive evaluation of bodily health is evident in the Kellis letters.[113] Theologically, Manichaeans considered the body empty after the soul had left it (1 Keph 53, 130.24–29). There is, however, no evidence on how this affected their treatment of the corpse.[114] Some

---

are "an indication of social stratification." Other examples are given in F. Dunand and R. Lichtenberg, *Mummies and Death in Egypt* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 129.

[110] M. J. Johnson, "Pagan-Christian Burial Practices of the Fourth Century: Shared Tombs?," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 5, no. 1 (1997): 37-59.

[111] J. Rowland, "The Ptolemaic-Roman Cemetery at the Quesna Archaeological Area," *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 94 (2008): 88-89.

[112] A. M. Nobbs, "The Koimeterion of P. Charite 40 - Christian Burial Practices in a Papyrological Context," in *Kalathos: Studies in Honour of Asher Ovadiah*, ed. S. Mucznik (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, Department of Art History, 2006), 81. She considers the references to *koimeterion* in P.Charite 40 and P.Neph 12 and 36 as firmly in the Christian community. See on this term for "grave" also J. Kramer, "Was bedeutet Koimeterion in den Papyri?," *Zeitschrift fuïr Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 80 (1990): 269-72; E. Rebillard, "Koimetérion et Coemeterium: tombe, tombe sainte, nécropole," *Mélanges de l'école française de Rome* 105, no. 2 (1993): 975-1001. Françoise Dunand stresses the conflicting evidence. On the one hand, there are textual sources that convey a desire to differ from traditional burial customs, while on the other hand the archaeological material shows both continuity and innovation in the treatment of the body. Dunand, "Between Tradition and Innovation," 163-84.

[113] N. J. Baker-Brian, "'Putrid Boils and Sores, and Burning Wounds in the Body': The Valorisation of Health and Illness in Late Antique Manichaeism," *Harvard Theological Review* 109, no. 3 (2016): 422-46.

[114] "Just like a body: When the soul shall come forth from it no energy shall be found in it, nor anything steady at all, because the soul that was in it leaves and has come forth. For it, the energy, does everything [...]." 1 Keph. 53, 130.24-29. See also 1 Keph. 33 when the soul and its limbs leave the body, limb by limb. Richter, *Die Aufstiegspsalmen*, 48. J. Ries seems to believe that the body was considered a worthless piece of Darkness, after all the Light ascended, to be left alone without any treatment. Ries, *L'église gnostique de*

Chinese texts state that Manichaeans ritually undressed their dead and buried them naked within a cloth sack, a practice that has been interpreted in light of the Manichaean rejection of the body.[115] Is it possible that Manichaean burials are invisible in the Kellis record because of a religious disregard for the body? I contend it is not. Rather than directly relating the absence of visible indicators of Manichaean burials with a postulated religious group norm, I consider it more likely that Kellites with a Manichaean affiliation acted on the basis of their village identification. They shared in the burial customs of their neighbors, without explicitly marking the graves of their family members in religious terms.

It is hard to imagine Kellites rejecting all types of treatment or burial. One of the reasons for the continuation of burial practices contradicting some explicit beliefs is the expectation of the social *umwelt*. It must have been socially unthinkable in an Egyptian village society in which family bonds and responsibilities continued after death. Children had the responsibility to provide a decent funeral for their parents, as condition for their inheritance.[116] Just like Manichaeism, Egyptian Christianity contained contradictory traditions about burial and the treatment of the body. On the one hand, there was a negative theological evaluation of postmortem treatment of the body, presumably out of fear for a veneration of the body and the rise of the cult of the saints.[117] According to Françoise Dunand, Christian texts describing proper burial customs are "often distorted (to my mind) by a clear desire to differ from 'pagan' customs, if not indeed to contrast with them."[118] On the other hand, there are more than enough indicators that mummification was still practiced by Christians, as for example visible in the instruction by bishop Abraham of Hermontis who wanted to be buried "according the customs of the land."[119] Consequently,

---

Mani, 226. This may have been implied in Ibn al-Nadim's description of Manichaean customs, but it is not made explicit. "That discarded body remains behind, and the sun, the moon, and the luminous deities strain out from it those species which are water, fire, and air. (The product of this filtration) ascends to the sun and becomes divine. The rest of the body, which is all Darkness, is cast down to Jahannam" (Fihrist) cited from Reeves, *Prolegomena to a History of Islamicate Manichaeism*, 217; Discussed at G. Flügel, *Mani, seine Lehre und seine Schriften: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Manichaïsmus* (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1862), 339-47.

[115] Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire*, 270-285, specifically page 278 with a translation. The Chinese author, however, may have described the Zoroastrian rituals of the Sogdians. Whether these "vegetarian demon worshipers" should be considered Manichaeans is not undisputed.

[116] M. Krause, "Das weiterleben ägyptischer Vorstellungen und Brauchen im koptischen Totenwesen," in *Das römisch-byzantinische Ägypten: Akten des internationalen symposions 26.-30. Sept. 1978 in Trier*, ed. G. Grimm, H. Heinen, and E. Winter (Mainz am Rhein: Phillip von Zabern, 1983), 87; M. Krause, "Das Totenwesen der Kopten," in *Tod am Nil: Tod und Totenkult im antiken Ägypten*, ed. H. Froschauer, C. Gastgeber, and H. Harrauer (Wien: Phoibos Verlag, 2003), 34-5.

[117] Examples cited in Dunand, "Between Tradition and Innovation," 177.

[118] Dunand, "Between Tradition and Innovation," 168. The Coptic martyr acts, on the other hand, appear to draw heavily on traditional Egyptian conceptualizations of the afterlife. G. Fischhaber, *Mumifizierung im koptischen Ägypten: Eine Untersuchung zur Körperlichkeit im 1. Jahrtausend n. Chr.* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1997), 258. Similar observations about the "totenklagen" in the Coptic material which continued although prohibited. Krause, "Das Totenwesen der Kopten," 33-44.

[119] P.Lond. I 77.57-9, cited in Dunand, "Between Tradition and Innovation," 174.

the normative theological texts had few direct connections with the village reality of everyday practice.

In spite of this rhetorical nature of much of our textual evidence, there is ample archaeological evidence for the lack of postmortem treatment of the body—also at Kellis. Quite a number of excavated bodies were found without a trace of artificial mummification. Some were spontaneously mummified because of the temperature, while others were skeletonized under less favorable environmental factors (presumably they died during the winter months).[120] All of the bodies examined by Aufderheide and his team derived from the West Cemetery, which makes it unlikely that the lack of elaborate treatment corresponded to the religious convictions of Christians and Manichaeans. The trend toward less bodily treatment was already visible in these second- or third-century interments. Rather than relating it to the impact of religious group norms, (bio)archaeologists have suggested that absence of treatment was the result of either a low social status or lacking financial means.[121]

A second option would be to look for Manichaeans among the additional late interments in the mud brick tombs north and south of the village. Some of the additional burials in these monumental tombs derived from the fourth century. They were set up according to an east–west orientation, following the local customs at the time rather than those of the previous generations in the same tombs. These additional interments probably belonged to families who continued to bury their dead in the family tombs, even though their religious affiliation had changed. This religious position was, for once, indicated by a gypsum sealing with an image of the *crux ansata*.[122] No indication of Manichaean identifications was found.

The third and most likely option is therefore that Manichaeans buried their dead in the simple graves in the East Cemetery, and that most of their dead had only received superficial postmortem treatment or mummification. The general trend in Late Antiquity appears to have been a modification of previous traditions. Most analyzed bodies were less elaborately mummified, some only wrapped in several layers of shrouds with salt and berries, or myrtle and rosemary, to conserve them. These alternative treatments have been studied extensively in Kellis. Some of these bodies were dressed in old garments, but it is most probable that specific burial shrouds were made and sold widely in late antique Egypt.[123] By the fourth century, almost all the inhabitants of Kellis must have buried their relatives in the East Cemetery or one of the large family tombs. Apart from the *crux ansata* in one of the North Tombs, no religious symbols have been found to mark the religious

[120] Aufderheide et al., "Mummification Practices at Kellis," 66, type 1 and 2 mummies.

[121] Dunand, "Between Tradition and Innovation," 171. The consensus is now that the embalming process was not so much declining as it was deteriorating in standards. Gessler-Löhr, "Mummies and Mummification," 664-83; M. A. Stadler, "Funerary Religion: The Final Phase of an Egyptian Tradition," in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt*, ed. C. Riggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 383-97; F. Dunand and C. Zivie-Coche, *Gods and Men in Egypt, 3000 BCE-395 CE* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 327.

[122] Bowen, "Some Observations," 178; Hope, "The Excavations at Ismant el-Kharab from 2000 to 2002," 264.

[123] On the use of shrouds with salt and berries, see Dunand, "Between Tradition and Innovation," 171-3.

affiliation of the departed or their family. The absence of marked Manichaeanness therefore fits in with the wider funerary patterns.

Specifically religious significance has been argued to exist for the burials in and next to the West Church. Gillian Bowen has suggested that the West Church functioned as a cemetery church in connection to the buildings to the south and the West Tombs to the northeast corner of enclosure 4. She states that the graves were added as "a conscious act by the Christian community of Kellis to define and isolate a sacred space."[124] The West Tombs themselves stemmed from an earlier period, but some of the interments must have been from the late third, early fourth century. They lacked traditional grave gifts and had an east–west orientation, and have therefore been taken as Christian burials.[125] Outside this mausoleum, several other interments were built against the wall of the tomb (D/7 cemetery) with similar orientation. A connection with the Manichaeans has been proposed, primarily because of the paucity of burial style, but other explanations may be more plausible. The graves may have been set apart for a specific family.[126]

The inside of the church contained two east–west oriented graves in front of the apse, one containing the body of a man and the other an infant of about six months old. They were presumably buried there after the erection of the church, as they line up with the bema platform. The presence of these graves leads Bowen to interpret the elaborate seven-room structure south of the church building as a gathering place and kitchen for funerary rituals. The two-room structure on the north also contained a hearth and traces of a bench and domestic fourth-century ceramics.[127] The minor finds from these rooms—coins, ostraka, eggshells, and donkey hooves—do not contribute to further identification of the context, but these mud-brick rooms could have incorporated the facilities for funerary meals, with benches and a hearth.[128] The combination of these facilities with the close proximity of graves and church led Bowen to suggest that the church was not simply a cemetery church, but a *martyrium*.[129] Christians, Manichaeans, or others may have gathered here for commemorative meals.

Other evidence for mortuary churches in the oases abounds. Nicola Aravecchia's discussion of these churches, in particular the church at Ain el-Gedida, shows how substantial the contribution of the oasis can be for the study of Early Christian church buildings. Most exciting in the identification of Amheida's church is this funerary aspect of

[124] Bowen, "Some Observations," 177.

[125] Some questions, however, remain, as funerary assemblage included several features otherwise attested in the latest interments of the Group 2 tombs in the West Cemetery. Hope and McKenzie, "Interim Report on the West Tombs," 56-61; Birrell, "Excavations in the Cemeteries of Ismant el-Kharab," 33-4.

[126] In the West-Church this is supported by a rare genetic trait identified in three bodies. Bowen, "Some Observations," 177. See further J. E. Molto et al., "Late Roman Period Human Skeletal Remains from Area D/6 and D/7 and North Tomb 1 at Kellis," in *Oasis Papers 3*, ed. G. E. Bowen and C. A. Hope (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2003), 362; Molto, "Bio-Archaeological Research of Kellis 2," 239-55.

[127] Bowen, "Some Observations," 177. Two-room mud-brick structure in Hope, "The Excavations at Ismant el-Kharab from 2000 to 2002," 252.

[128] Bowen, "Some Observations," 177; Worp, *Greek Ostraka from Kellis*, no.253-68.

[129] Bowen, "Some Observations," 176.

the building. Five human interments, without funerary goods and with all heads placed to the west, were discovered within the church complex. Similar interments inside and close to church buildings are seen at Deir Abu Matta and the West Church at Kellis.[130] The church at Amheida surpassed these other buildings by the attestation of a funerary crypt, which could only be entered through the sacristy of the Church. Three sealed tombs were found in this vaulted subterranean room, bringing the total number of burials in the church to eight. While more funerary churches with crypts are known, this is the earliest datable crypt in Egypt.[131] Considering this discovery and the subsequent bioarchaeological research, some suggestions have been made about the social positions of the individuals buried in the church. Few of these individuals fitted the stereotype of clergy. The six-month-old infant in Kellis and the teenage girl found close to the bema in the Amheida church do not fit our expectations. Nor would one expect a male body with typical military injuries to be buried inside the church.[132] Instead of to the clergy, these interments may have belonged to elite donors who paid for burials in the subterranean crypt or within the church itself. Again, I find no evidence that suggests that any of these individuals belonged to a specifically Manichaean community. Despite the abundance of material evidence, it is impossible to connect this material to the textual world of the personal letters and doctrinal tractates of Manichaeans.

8.6 Conclusions

By exploring traces of burial practices and death rituals in psalms and documentary letters, we have gained an impression of the role that death and the journey of the soul played in the lives of ancient Kellites. While we are informed of death, burial, and even ritual commemoration in the papyri, there are no traces of Manichaeanness in the material record of the cemeteries and tombs at Kellis. Presumably, Manichaeans buried their dead with simple or no postmortem treatment in the pit graves of the East Cemetery, but direct evidence is absent. It is, therefore, probably best to avoid "single-issue questions of identity."[133] Instead of following institutionally mediated options of religious behavior, the individuals and families in Kellis worked with the locally available repertoires and expectations regarding death and burial.

Undisputed evidence for Manichaean commemoration rituals has been found in Kellis. The songs relate to the various stages in the ascent of the soul through the heavens into the world of Light. The fact that Matthaios explicitly related his grief for his great mother to the absence of the elect most likely indicates a fully developed set of rituals, both during the last hours and after a longer period of mourning. The psalms and hymns found in

[130] G. E. Bowen, "The Church of Deir Abu Metta and a Christian Cemetery in Dakhleh Oasis: A Brief Report," *Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology* 19 (2008): 7-16.

[131] Bagnall et al., *An Oasis City*, 128-30.

[132] N. Aravecchia et al., "The Church at Amheida (Ancient Trimithis) in the Dakhleh Oasis, Egypt. A Bioarchaeological Perspective on an Early Christian Mortuary Complex," *Bioarchaeology of the Near East* 9 (2015): 21-43.

[133] On "single-issue questions of identity" in archaeology, see L. Meskell, "Archaeologies of Identity," in *Archaeological Theory Today*, ed. I. Hodder (Malden: Polity, 2001), 187.

Kellis contain enough information to establish a strong link with the Herakleides Psalms and the rituals elucidated in the two *Kephalaia* chapters on almsgiving "for those who have left the body." In line with the conclusions of the previous chapter, commemoration constituted one of the communal gatherings of Manichaeans, marked with great emotional intensity. The songs and rituals stressed the connection between their earthly lives and the cosmological fate of the soul after death. As such, this event would have created a sense of groupness, fostering an imagined community beyond death and between all those present: elect and catechumens.