



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

**The Manichaeans of Kellis : religion, community, and everyday life**  
Brand, M.

**Citation**

Brand, M. (2019, April 10). *The Manichaeans of Kellis : religion, community, and everyday life*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/71236>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Leiden University Non-exclusive license](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/71236>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/71236> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

**Author:** Brand, M.

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

**Issue Date:** 2019-04-10

## Chapter 9. Ision's Books: Scribal Culture and Manichaean Texts

Study your psalms, whether Greek or Coptic, every day ... Write a little from time to time, more and more. Write a daily example, for I need you to write books here (Makarios to his son).<sup>1</sup>

Send a well-proportioned and nicely executed ten-page notebook for your brother Ision. For he has become a user of Greek and a Syriac reader (Apa Lysimachos to Theognostos).<sup>2</sup>

### 9.1. Introduction

Books and the art of book writing are generally considered core features of the Manichaean tradition. It positioned Manichaeans at the heart of the “scriptural revolution” of late antique religion, in which text and sacred books began to dominate the transmission of religious wisdom, as well as daily ritual practice.<sup>3</sup> The common trend in late antique religious movements, or “secondary religion,” to transmit cosmological wisdom in written texts and codex-style books, is perfectly exemplified in Manichaeism. The *Kephalaia* emphasizes Mani's personal involvement in committing his teachings to writing.<sup>4</sup> In their hagiographical accounts, Manichaeans stressed the role of books. The earliest history of the religion in the Roman Empire, for example, was remembered as built on the scribes and books that Mani sent to his missionaries:

They went to the Roman Empire and saw many doctrinal disputes with the religions. Many Elect and Hearers were chosen. Patig was there for one year. Then he returned and appeared before the apostle. Hereafter the lord sent three scribes, the Gospel and two other writings to Adda. He gave the order: “Do not take it further, but stay there like a merchant who collects a treasure.”<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> μελετε ἡν[εκ]γαλμος εγτε ἡογανην εγτε ἡρῆῆκνηε ροογ <νημ>... ςε ρῆκ[ογ] ςῆ ρῆσαπ σαπ ἡρογο ἡρο[γο] ςῆ ογγγπος ἡνηε δε ἡρχρ[α] ηη[α]κ αςε ρῆαωμε ἡπηα P.Kell.Copt. 19.13-14 and 17-18. See below on this passage and the translation.

<sup>2</sup> Πινακίδιον εὔμετρον καὶ ἀστίον δέκα πτυχῶν πέμψον τῷ ἀδελφῷ σου Ἰσίῳ. Ἐλληνιστῆς γὰρ γέγονεν καὶ ἀναγνώστης συριατικὸς P.Kell.Gr. 67.17-21, translation in Gardner, “P. Kellis I 67 Revisited,” 224 on the Syriac address containing the name of Lysimachos.

<sup>3</sup> Stroumsa, *The Scriptural Universe of Ancient Christianity*. J. C. Reeves, “Manichaeans as *Ahl Al-Kitab*. A Study in Manichaean Scripturalism,” in *Light against Darkness: Dualism in Ancient Mediterranean Religion and the Contemporary World*, ed. A. Lange, et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 249-65.

<sup>4</sup> Discussed below and in G. G. Stroumsa, “The Scriptural Movement of Late Antiquity and Christian Monasticism,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16, no. 1 (2008): 61-77; G. G. Stroumsa, *The End of Sacrifice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 36-42.

<sup>5</sup> M2 translated by Asmussen, *Manichaean Literature*, 21. Reproduced in Gardner and Lieu, *MTRE*, no. 21a.

In a similar fragment of Manichaean hagiography, the apostle to the East, Mar Ammo, could only convince the spirit Bagard, who guarded the frontier, to let him enter the kingdom after reciting from *The Treasure of Life*, as Mani had instructed him in a vision.<sup>6</sup> In both stories, texts—and more specifically the books of Mani—were more than just vehicles of information. They represented and contained the power of the Apostle of Light. The Psalmbook conveys the same message. It presents Mani's books as the medicine and antidotes of the "great physician" (πναδ νεΐνε):

He has the antidote that is good for every affection. There are two and twenty compounds in his antidote: His Great Gospel, the good tidings of all them that are of the Light. His waterpot is the Thesaurus, the Treasure of Life. In it there is hot water: there is some cold water also mixed with it. His soft sponge that wipes away bruises is the Pragmateia. His knife for cutting is the Book of Mysteries. His excellent swabs are the Book of Giants. The medicine chest of every cure is the Book of his Letters.<sup>7</sup>

Mani's books were considered powerful: they contained Mani's own power, with the capacity to bring life and healing. In this respect, Manichaean texts were a central feature, closely tied to the founder and therefore to the wisdom and power of the cosmos.<sup>8</sup>

The scribal activities attested in the Kellis material have been interpreted against this background as part of an overarching missionary strategy. Soon after the discovery of the village and its texts, Samuel Lieu suggested that Kellis "must have had the service of a scriptorium for the copying of their texts."<sup>9</sup> Other scholars, likewise, stressed the missionary background of some of these texts. Hans-Martin Schenke, for example, has considered Kellis "*das Zentrum oder ein Zentrum der Übersetzung von Syrisch geschriebenen Büchern des Mani.*"<sup>10</sup> None of these observations are entirely wrong, but I will show that the published texts from Kellis do not explicitly relate books to proselytizing or mission, nor is there any evidence for late antique scriptoria that resemble the stereotypical medieval writing conditions.<sup>11</sup> Instead, it may be more plausible to consider book writing as a religious

<sup>6</sup> Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire*, 219-20; Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism*, 71-72.

<sup>77</sup> οὐῖτεϥ ταντιλωτος εωαϣϣεϥ ἀπαθος νιν οὐῖ ζοϥτσναϥς ἕνιγμα ϣοοπ ϣῖ τεϣανλωτος πεϣναδ ἕϣαγγελιον παῖνοϥϣε ἕναποϣαινε τηροϥ τεϣλακानη ἕनाϥ πε πεῃσαϣρος περο ἕτε ποῃῃ οὐῖ μοϥ ϣῖνε ἕρητῃ. μοϥ ἕκῃβε αν οὐῖ οϣαν τητ νεῃς πεϣπογτος ετῃαν ετῃωτ πληη τε τηραγματια πεϣκῃαλιον ἕοϥωϣε πε πεϣῃνε ἕῃῃϣτηριον νεϣωλ ετῃανοϥ πε πεϣῃνε ἕῃῃαλαϣρε πεῃαροῃϣ ἕπαρε νιν πε πεϣῃνε ἕῃῃεϣπεστολαϣε 2 PsB. 46.19-30. Wurst translated πεῃαροῃϣ "der Kasten," "The medicine chest of every cure is the book of his Letters." The section is followed by a fragmentary passage, probably including other Manichaean books.

<sup>8</sup> K. Hopkins, "Conquest by Book," in *Literacy in the Roman World*, ed. M. Beard, et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1991), 133-58. This central feature was already discussed at length before the watershed discoveries of the twentieth century. P. Alfarc, *Les écritures manichéennes* (Paris: Emile Nourry, 1918).

<sup>9</sup> Lieu, *Manichaeism in Mesopotamia*, 95.

<sup>10</sup> Schenke, "Rezension zu Iain Gardner," 222-3 (his italics).

<sup>11</sup> One might add, before the fifth century. K. Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters. Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 83-96 for the second and third century. I see no real indication in the Kellis letters for a different type of textual reproduction than these private scribal networks. Evidence for Pachomian scriptoria is from after the fourth century, see Palladius, *Lausiac History* 32.12 and John Cassian, *Institutes* 4.12; C. Kotsifou, "Books and Book Production in

practice for local and regional communities, without immediately seeking the connection to missionary practices.<sup>12</sup>

This chapter will examine the literary as well as the documentary papyri to show that Kellis was a booklovers' place. We have already encountered a neighbor capable of producing high-quality wooden tablets and codices (in Chapter 3), but we will also get a glimpse of several young scribes in training, among whom at least one was involved in copying Manichaean texts. Apart from a more historical, factual inventory of evidence for book production in section 9.2, the full spectrum of (semi)literary documents found in the vicinity of Houses 1–3, 4, and 5 will be highlighted in section 9.3 to illustrate local reading practices. As some of this material is strongly connected to the Manichaean textual tradition, the following section will consider how the production of text functioned as a ritual practice for Manichaean catechumens, especially in light of the Manichaean claim that Mani wrote all his wisdom himself. Together, these sections illustrate the unmistakable Manichaean character of the community. A Manichaean character, however, which adapted and connected to the manifold local concerns and circumstances of village life.

## 9.2 Book Production in Papyrus Letters

The personal letters from Kellis contain numerous references to books and the production of books, some of which have been already introduced in Chapter 4. Most noteworthy is the instruction sent to Matthaios, who is trained as a scribe:

Study your psalms, whether Greek or Coptic, every day (?) ... Do not abandon your vow. Here the *Judgement of Peter* is with you.<sup>13</sup> Do the *Apostolos*, or else master the *Great Prayers* and the Greek *Psalms*. Here too the *Sayings* are with you, study them! Here are the *Prostrations*. Write a little from time to time, more and more. Write a daily example, for I need you to write books here.<sup>14</sup>

---

the Monastic Communities of Byzantine Egypt," in *The Early Christian Book*, ed. W. E. Klingshirn and L. Safran (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 48–66.

<sup>12</sup> E. Iricinschi, "A Thousand Books Will Be Saved": Manichaean Writings and Religious Propaganda in the Roman Empire," in *Jewish and Christian Scripture as Artifact and Canon*, ed. C. A. Evans and D. Zacharias (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2009), 269; E. Iricinschi, "*Tam pretiosi codices vestri*. Hebrew Scriptures and Persian Books in Augustine's Anti-Manichaean Writings," in *Revelation, Literature and Community in Late Antiquity*, ed. P. Townsend and M. Vidas (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 158. The juxtaposition with missionary practices is my emphasis, although strongly related to Iricinschi's argument.

<sup>13</sup> With Schenke I wonder whether we should translate εἰς... εἰς freely with "attached you'll find ...," even though in line 84, Matthaios is to bring the Judgment of Peter (to Makarios?). Schenke, "Rezension zu Iain Gardner," 223.

<sup>14</sup> μελετε εἰς[ε]κ]ψαλμος εἰςτε ἡογιασιν εἰςτε ἡρῆκῆνε ροογ <нин> ερε τ̄ραρ[...]. Πι ἡπ̄κε τεκεπαγγελια εβαλ εἰς τ̄κρις ἡπ̄ετρος εἰς τ̄κ εἰς παπ|οστολος η̄ ἡναν ἀμαρτε ἡἡναδ ἡφληλ ἡἡ ἡψα[λ]μος ἡ[ογιασ]ιν εἰς ἡρῆνα ἀν εἰς τ̄κ ἀρι ἡ[ε]λετε ἡἡνα εἰς ἡκλις εἰς εἰς[ογ]ι εἰς εἰς[απ] σαπ ἡρογο ἡρο[γο] εἰς ογτγπος ἡἡνε δε τ̄ξρη[α] ἡἡκ ἀεἰ εἰς. P.Kell.Copt. 19.13–19. The emendation in line 14, <нин>, is questionable. It seems more likely to read the following as a relative clause, maybe "ροογ ερε ἡεραρ[τ̄] ..π." The same noun (εραρ) is used in line 5. The passage remains difficult, but I thank Jacques van der Vliet for his insightful comments.

Likewise, his younger brother, who was traveling with The Teacher, learned how to read in every church (P.Kell.Copt. 25.46). Various other letters mention books by their title, or contain guidance on where and when to send them, either to the Nile valley or back to Kellis. Makarios's admonition to Matthaïos continues with detailed instructions: "[I]f my mother Kouria will give the great (*Book of*) *Epistles*, bring it with you. If not, bring the small one, with the *Prayer-book* and the *Judgement of Peter*."<sup>15</sup> Another letter, perhaps addressed to Pamour III, contains similar demands: "(About) this book that Lamon has: let the *Acts* be copied (?) from it. (As for) the *Gospel*: Let them bring it to me from father Pabo."<sup>16</sup> This latter example already indicates that there was a wider network of scribes beyond the Makarios family alone, even though their letters are pivotal to our reconstruction.

Other instances of scribal activity have already been noted in Chapter 3, with the description of a spell in a letter by Ouales (P.Kell.Copt. 35). The letter describes the choice for this particular spell as an alternative to the one that was requested, since the original spell was written on a small piece of papyrus and was lost. Other texts, moreover, were requested, but Ouales struggled to make the deadline: "Do not make it in big script, for they say that the papyrus has run out. Yet, it [MB: the τερραc?] is a useful text, and if you do write them, I for my part will find your recompense."<sup>17</sup> This exchange shows that the recipient and author were part of a network of scribes, who wrote ritual texts to each other on request. At least some of these scribes had a Manichaean affiliation, shown in the reference to "our Lord Paraclete" (νεκῆπιπῆχαιc παρακλήτοc P.Kell.Copt. 35.26–27). In this context, it is important to bear in mind that books in Late Antiquity were published informally, through social networks. Authors usually sent their works to friends and patrons, who disseminated copies through a circle of literate elite benefactors.<sup>18</sup> The references to texts and scribal activity in the Kellis letters are therefore not primarily friendly reminders among family, nor do they attest to a monastic scriptorium. Instead, they belonged to the standard procedure of circulating and publishing books.

<sup>15</sup> ερωπε ετανο ουρια νατ πναc νεπιστολ[ιον] ενιc νῆνεκ ερωπε εῆῆαν αῆι πκογῆ νῆ πευχων νῆ τκρῆc ἡπετροc P.Kell.Copt. 19.81–84.

<sup>16</sup> πχων ετιτοτῆ ἡλμων ταρε νηπραζειc ρριc ἡταc πεγαγ' γελιον τρογῆτῆ νῆ ἡτοτῆ ἡπιωτ vac παβο (modified translation) P.Kell.Copt. 120.2–7, Pekos to Pamour (III?). See linguistic notes at Shisha-Halevy, "Review Article of: Gardner," 275.

<sup>17</sup> ἡπωρ αῆετῆ ἡναc ἡρεῆ cε παχεγ cε α νκαρτῆc ογω αλλα ογρεῆ ερωπεγ αγω εκκαρογ ἡναcῆ πκωιβε ρωτ P.Kell.Copt. 35.44–46 (modified translation). The translation and interpretation of the first section is difficult. The editors offer as alternative: "Do not make it a long letter, because they say that the papyrus has run out; but (just) a useful letter." Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDTL*, 228. Other complaints about the availability of papyrus are included in P.Kell.Copt. 78 and 79, while P.Kell.Copt. 39 refers to writing letters on scraps of papyrus.

<sup>18</sup> K. Haines-Eitzen, "The Social History of Early Christian Scribes," in *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research*, ed. B. D. Ehrman and M. W. Holmes (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 484–5; W. A. Johnson, *Readers and Reading Culture in the High Roman Empire: A Study of Elite Communities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 179–92; N. Denzey Lewis and J. A. Blount, "Rethinking the Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133, no. 2 (2014): 416–19; Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt*, 184–232.

Fortunately, several personal letters reveal more about the process of book writing. The most illustrative are Makarios's instructions to Matthaïos (cited above), who is clearly being trained to do scribal work. His training began in the oasis, where he copied various books, after which he traveled to the Nile valley and worked with both his father and Apa Lysimachos. Makarios indicates that he needs him to write books in the Nile valley, but the further family correspondence does not reveal whether Matthaïos continued with this type of work. The author of P.Kell.Copt. 33 combines a request for the production of a mat with several questions about book writing. He asked whether "the little one completed the *gospel*" and mentions "read the *epaggelïai*."<sup>19</sup> Despite their fragmentary state, these phrases seem to refer to the practice of book writing by people like Matthaïos (would he have been a "little one"?). In P.Kell.Copt. 34, the author wishes to know (?) "the hour when your son has finished writing the book."<sup>20</sup> Both instances show how these authors participated in a reading network and actually ordered books to be written.

Several book titles, or texts, have been mentioned already in the cited passages. Table 16 lists all the titles that feature in the Kellis letters. The ten items on this list include Manichaean books, but also a wider array of Christian, Classical, and apocryphal literature. The first two items on the list, however, have been interpreted incorrectly as allusions to Manichaean texts. Rather than relating the "prostrations" (ἱκλις) to the daily prostrations, and the "sayings" (ἡρημα) to a collection of Manichaean homilies, it is more likely that they referred to grammatical education. Matthaïos is called on to study the conjugations of verbs (ῥῆμα) and "inflections" (κλίσις) in this letter, rather than to engage more deeply with Manichaean texts.<sup>21</sup>

| Text or Book                 | Reference  |
|------------------------------|--|
| "Prostrations" (?)           | P.Kell.Copt. 19.17 (ἱκλις).  |
| "Sayings" (?)                | P.Kell.Copt. 19.17 (ἡρημα).  |
| The vow(s) (?)               | P.Kell.Copt. 19.15 (επαγγελια, presumably a practice, a vow) and P.Kell.Copt. 33.7 (..ωω ηεπαρ'γελια, "read the <i>epaggelïai</i> (pl.)"). |
| <i>The Judgment of Peter</i> | P.Kell.Copt. 19.15 and .84 (ἵκρις ἱπετρος).  |
| <i>Apostolos</i>             | P.Kell.Copt. 19.15 (ἱπαποστολος) and P.Kell.Copt. 127.21 (αποστολ[ος]).  |
| <i>The Acts</i>              | P.Kell.Copt. 120.4 (πραζεις).  |
| <i>The Gospel</i>            | P.Kell.Copt. 120.5 (πεγαγγελιον) and P.Kell.Copt. 98.21 <sup>22</sup> and P.Kell.Copt. 33.4 (χωκ [πεγα]γ'γελιον, reconstructed).           |
| <i>The Epistles</i>          | P.Kell.Copt. 19. 82–83 (ἱναδ ηεπιστολ[ιον]) and P.Kell.Copt. 120.14 (ἱεπιστοναςη, diminutive?).  |
| <i>Psalms</i>                | P.Kell.Copt. 19.14 (ἡν[εκ]ψαλμος) and .16 (ἡψα[λ]μος η[ογαν]η, "the Greek  |

<sup>19</sup> α προγι χωκ [πεγα]γ'γελιον and ..ωω ηεπαρ'γελια P.Kell.Copt. 33.3-4 and 7-8.

<sup>20</sup> [...το]γνογ ετερε πχωρη ογω εφζει ἱπχωρη P.Kell.Copt. 34.22-23.

<sup>21</sup> Criboire's suggestion is noted in Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT1*, 163. See also the alternative "study your verbs and inflexions" in Gardner, "Manichaean Ritual Practice at Ancient Kellis," 256n26. I see therefore no reason to speculate about whether these sayings could have been related to Kephalaia-style texts with sayings of Mani (see below on T.Kell.Copt. 1).

<sup>22</sup> Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT2*, 187.

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
|                    | <i>Psalms</i> ”).   |
| <b>The Prayers</b> | P.Kell.Copt. 19.16 (ἡ ἰνναδὸς ἡ φωνή, “the great prayers”) and .84 (πρωτων). In P.Kell.Copt. 66.7–8 (τετευχη) it seems to be an expression (“the request of Pebo”). |

Table 16: List of book titles in the Kellis letters.

The *Judgment of Peter* cannot but have been a religious text. It has been identified with several apocryphal books because of their attribution to Peter: the *Acts of Peter*, a *Revelation of Peter*, and even the *Apocalypse of Peter* in the Nag Hammadi Library. Unfortunately, we do not have a text called the *Judgment of Peter*. The most plausible identification, thus far, can be found in the fourth-century Christian author Rufinus, who spoke of *Peter’s Judgment* as an alternative title for a text called the *Two Ways*.<sup>23</sup> The content of the *Two Ways*, which we primarily know in its incarnation as the first chapters of the *Didache*, would resonate with the ascetic stance of Manichaeans, as well with their dualistic world view. It does not seem too farfetched to find a boy in the Egyptian desert copying a version of this Ancient Christian text.

A similar connection can be made for the *Acts*, as it could have referred to one of the other apocryphal books from the Christian tradition, like the apocryphal *Acts of the Apostles*. If this is the case, the *Acts of John* would be an option, as one of the Greek papyri from Kellis contains a text with strong affiliations to the *Acts of John* (P.Kell.Gr 97). Could one of the Manichaean scribes at House 3 have worked on a Manichaean redaction or transmission of this text?<sup>24</sup> The simplicity of the reference to πρᾶξεις without any further designator, however, seems to suggest that a Manichaean book of acts was meant, for which no additional apostle name was required. The lost *Acts* codex from the Medinet Madi collection (P15997) is a plausible candidate, as the few transmitted and legible pages in the 1960s contained reports about the early history of the Manichaean church.<sup>25</sup>

The case of the *Apostolos* is one of the few instances in which we have also found the document that they were referring to. There can be almost no doubt that Makarios’s suggestion to his son to copy “the *Apostolos*” ([παπ]οστολος P.Kell.Copt. 19.15–16) referred to the letters of Paul. As we will see in the next section, fragments of the New Testament letter(s) to the Hebrews and the Romans have been found. The name “*Apostolos*,” moreover,

<sup>23</sup> The *Two Ways* is the text of which a version is integrated in the *Didache*, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, and the *Doctrina Apostolorum*. Of course, one could wonder whether the Judaizing tendencies of some of these texts would have been present in the *Two Ways*, and how this would have related to the anti-Jewish stance of the Manichaeans. The identification of *Peter’s Judgment* and the *Two Ways* is also made by Jerome and Optatus. R. E. Aldridge, “Peter and the “Two Ways,”” *Vigiliae Christianae* 53, no. 3 (1999): 233–64. Alternatively, the Kellis reference has been interpreted as the apocalypse of Peter, J. D. Dubois, “Sur la notion d’apocryphe en milieu manichéen,” in *Apocryphité: histoire d’un concept transversal aux religions du livre*, ed. S. C. Mimouni (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), 150–51.

<sup>24</sup> Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT2*, 256.

<sup>25</sup> The content and the history of the codex is discussed in Robinson, *The Manichaean Codices of Medinet Madi*, 225–47.



is the common name for the works of Paul in the Greek and Coptic orthodox tradition, and it is cited as such in a fragment from Oxyrhynchus.<sup>26</sup>

More difficult to identify are “the vow(s)” (επαγγελια). In both passages, the phrase might relate to an actual vow or promise, although in P.Kell.Copt. 33, this word is preceded by a form of the verb to read, which suggests it was an otherwise unknown text.<sup>27</sup>

The remaining four book titles refer to well-known Manichaean texts. *The Gospel*, the *Epistles*, the *Psalms*, and *The Great Prayers* suggest that these people not only read Greek literature (like the Isocrates codex) and biblical or apocryphal texts (like the letters of Paul) but copied Manichaean canonical texts as well. This may not seem remarkable at first glance, but it is surprising for two reasons. First, because it is sometimes thought that the Manichaean canon was not accessible to catechumens (see section 9.4.2) and second, because of the sheer absence of canonical texts from the extant material remains. I am convinced, however, that the Manichaeans of Kellis may have had access to at least three or four of the books listed as canonical. At the same time, we should note that the notion of a “canon” as an inner core of authoritative books attributed to Mani carries modern connotations. Manichaean texts frequently list texts that carried authority because they were written by Mani himself (but see 9.4.1). These lists contain some variation, but a fairly consistent selection is commonly included in Manichaean Heptateuch.<sup>28</sup> The *Kephalaia*, for example, lists the *Great Gospel*, the *Treasury of Life*, the *Treatise (pragmateia)*<sup>29</sup>, one of the *Mysteries*, the *Writings about Parthians*, the *Epistles*, the *Psalms*, and the *Prayers* (1 Keph. 5.23–26). Among the texts found in Kellis is at least one codex with several epistles of Mani, which makes it most probable that Matthaios worked on a copy of these important texts. Once, the texts are introduced as the “great Epistles” (πινδ νεπιστολιον, P.Kell.Copt. 19. 82–83), and a second reference appears to use a diminutive form (†επιστονασλη, P.Kell.Copt. 120.14).<sup>30</sup> In the former letter, Matthaios is also told to practice his writing on the “psalms, whether Greek or Coptic” (ἴν[ε]κ[τ]ῶν εἴτε ἰουδαίων εἴτε ἡρῆνικῶν, P.Kell.Copt. 19.14), and later on the “Greek Psalms” (ἡψα[λ]μος ἡ[ο]υδαίου, P.Kell.Copt. 19.16). These songs may have been the

<sup>26</sup> Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT1*, 163. In Oxyrhynchus, a fragment with Rom. 1: 1-7 (P.Oxy. II 209) has “π[...]ση ἀπόστολος” on the verso.

<sup>27</sup> Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT1*, 219.

<sup>28</sup> For a systematical interpretation, see Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism*, 67. The various lists differ. Compare the following with the list in the introduction of the *Kephalaia*: *The Gospel*, the *Treasury of Life*, the *Pragmateia*, the *Book of the Mysteries*, the *Book on the Giants*, the *Epistles*, the *Psalms* and the *Prayers*, his *Image* (Hom. 25.2-5). *The Living Gospel*, the *Treasury of Life*, the *Pragmateia*, the *Book of Mysteries*, the *Writing of the Giants* (last three listed as one single gift), the *Epistles* (1 Keph 148, 355.4-25). *The Great Gospel*, the *Treasury of Life (Thesaurus)*, *Pragmateia*, *Book of Mysteries*, *Book of Giants*, *Book of his letters* (2 PsB. 46.21-31, on page 47 it includes the two *Psalms and his Prayers*). M. Krause, “Die Aussagen von Sarakoton-Psalms 2 (Man. Ps. Book 139,52-140,17) über die heiligen Schriften der Manichäer,” in *Gnosisforschung und Religionsgeschichte: Festschrift für Kurt Rudolph zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. H. Preißler and H. Seiwert (Marburg: Diagonal-Verlag, 1994), 136-41. On the diversity within the canon, see also Lim, “Unity and Diversity,” 245.

<sup>29</sup> Tardieu has suggested to translate *pragmateia* with “legends.” Tardieu, *Manichaeism*, 41-42. cf. Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism*, 81-83.

<sup>30</sup> Gardner considers the possibility of reading επιστολη ετ(τ)αβε, “the letter that is sealed,” but considers this “most unlikely.” Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT2*, 256.

psalms found among the liturgical texts from Kellis or the original “two psalms” written by Mani (2 PsB. 47.3). The same two options exist for the “the great prayers” (ⲛⲓⲛⲛⲁⲅ ⲛⲟⲗⲏⲗ, P.Kell.Copt. 19.16 and ⲛⲉϣⲟⲩⲛ 19.83), although the adjective seems to set this text apart as one of the *Prayers* written by Mani (2 PsB. 47.4). A final ambiguous case is the “prayer” (ⲧⲉϣϣⲏ, P.Kell.Copt. 66.7–8) associated with Pebo. Rather than a text, this may have been an expression meaning something like “the request of Pebo.”<sup>31</sup> Makarios’s letter to Matthaïos, urging him to master the “great prayers” (ⲛⲓⲛⲛⲁⲅ ⲛⲟⲗⲏⲗ, P.Kell.Copt. 19.16, again in line 84, “prayer(s)” ⲛⲉϣⲟⲩⲛ), is a more likely candidate to refer to Mani’s book of prayers. Indeed, the presence of a Greek version of the daily Manichaean prayers (known as the *Prayer of the Emanations*, see Chapter 7.5.2) may suggest that these Kellites had access to earlier authoritative Manichaean traditions. If these prayers go back to a third-century version, they may have been part of the canonical *Prayers* associated with Mani.<sup>32</sup>

In sum, the casual references to book titles in the personal letters add to the impression of Kellites as booklovers. In particular, the letters by some of the Manichaeans contain references to books that are known from the Manichaean tradition. This brings us to the accessibility of the Manichaean texts. Could catechumens have had access to Manichaean books from the canon in order to copy them? Would Matthaïos have worked with texts like the *Living Gospel*? Before considering these questions, we will see that the physical documents from the site reveal more about the broad scope of the reading (and writing!) practices in the village.

### 9.3 Local Reading Practices

What do we learn about the Kellites in the Roman period houses if we would just look at their reading practices? Is there something their bookshelves can tell us about the variety of their religious choices? No one has, thus far, studied these households from this angle. Mostly, the presence of various types of literature has been interpreted within the well-known scriptural nature of Manichaeism. In other words, the new documentary texts seem to confirm previous reconstructions. But is that really what we see? My focus is different and follows new approaches in the study of the texts from Nag Hammadi. Research on these documents has recently turned to a synchronic analysis, examining them as meaningful utterances read within one historical context. Instead of reconstructing hypothetical origins, this approach starts with the reader. It presupposes that texts are only copied when they fulfill a specific function in everyday life and the liturgy. Without such use, the act of copying or buying a text was simply too expensive.<sup>33</sup> This does not mean that the reader would have agreed with all aspects of the texts, but we can be sure that it reflected at least

<sup>31</sup> Compare with P.Kell.Copt. 56.18, the miniature codex with the amulet against a snake bite (P.Kell.Copt. 56), which contains a number of empty pages which ends with the title (?) ⲧⲉⲡⲣⲟⲥⲉϣϣⲏ ⲛⲁⲃⲧ[...], “the prayer of Ab(raham?),” while the ⲉϣϣⲏ is received from Pebo in P.Kell.Copt. 66. ⲛⲉϣϣⲏ ⲁ[βαλ] ϣⲓⲧⲏ ⲡⲁⲥⲁⲛ [ⲡ]ⲉⲃⲟ P.Kell.Copt. 66.7–8. Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT2*, 55.

<sup>32</sup> Gardner, “Manichaean Ritual Practice at Ancient Kellis,” 257.

<sup>33</sup> I. S. Gilhus, “Contextualizing the Present, Manipulating the Past: Codex II from Nag Hammadi and the Challenge of Circumventing Canonicity,” in *Canon and Canonicity: The Formation and Use of Scripture*, ed. E. Thomassen (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2010), 96.

something of their interests. They spent time and resources on the production of the texts, or they paid someone else to do it for them, so their content must have appealed to them.<sup>34</sup> In contrast to the unprovenanced Nag Hammadi documents, the find location of the Manichaean texts from Kellis enables an in-context analysis of the literary papyri among documentary material.<sup>35</sup> We are thus in the fortunate position to relate the reading and writing conditions of the previous section to the manuscripts and textual fragments found at the same site.

### 9.3.1 On the Bookshelves

Now, what did Kellites read? Apart from the book titles mentioned in the documentary letters, there are several papyri, codices, and wooden tablets that have been published as so-called "literary texts."<sup>36</sup> The division of the Kellis texts into literary and documentary texts is arbitrary, as some of the personal letters show indications of an epistolary style closely related to Manichaean scriptures (see Chapters 4 and 5). We have to remind ourselves that these personal letters and literary texts were found together, among the debris of the fourth-century houses. Although we cannot prove with certainty that the Kellites copied these texts, I will take for granted that they were read by some members of the community. The corresponding terminology and self-designators in the letters of Makarios, Pamour III, and their relatives shows their familiarity with these Manichaean texts.

Table 17 lists the texts found in the vicinity of Houses 1–3, some on fragments of papyrus, others on wooden boards. Some of these texts may have been directly related to Manichaean ritual practices, while others had an administrative function or belonged to an entirely different repertoire, such as the wooden codex containing three orations of Isocrates. What can these documents tell us about local reading practices?

---

<sup>34</sup> Similar argument made for NHC in H. Lundhaug, "The Nag Hammadi Codices in the Complex World of 4th- and 5th-Cent. Egypt," in *Beyond Conflicts. Cultural and Religious Cohabitations in Alexandria and Egypt between the 1st and the 6th Century CE*, ed. L. Arcari (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 344; Contra Lieu, "Self-Identity of the Manichaeans," 227, the Kellites read Paul's *Letter to the Romans*, but this does not make them Christians. On the cost of book manufacturing, see R. S. Bagnall, *Early Christian Books in Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 50-69.

<sup>35</sup> As Willy Clarysse pointed out, the connection between literary and documentary papyri is often very superficial and accidental, even when they are found together. W. Clarysse, "Literary Papyri in Documentary "Archives," in *Egypt and the Hellenistic World*, ed. E. van 't Dack, P. van Dessel, and W. van Gucht (Leuven: Peeters, 1983), 47. An excellent example of a contextual analysis of a New Testament fragment, in the archive of an otherwise unmarked flax-merchant, is found in Luijendijk, "A New Testament Papyrus and Its Owner," 569-90. The analysis of a psalm fragment from Karanis likewise draws on prosopographical information and archaeology. G. Schwendner, "A Fragmentary Psalter from Karanis and Its Context," in *Jewish and Christian Scripture as Artifact and Canon*, ed. C. A. Evans and D. Zacharias (London: T & T Clark, 2009), 117-36.

<sup>36</sup> Mostly published in KLT1 and KLT2. See Appendix 2 for a full list of documents and publications.

| Document         | Description  |
|------------------|--|
| T.Kell.Copt. 1   | Doctrinal text ( <i>Kephalaia</i> type?) probably brief catechism.   |
| P.Kell.Copt. 5   | Fragment. Astrological? <i>Kephalaia</i> ?   |
| P.Kell.Copt. 8   | Doctrinal text (shares terminology with <i>Kephalaia</i> ).  |
| P.Kell.Copt. 9   | Hebrews 12:4–13.   |
| P.Kell.Gr. 97 A1 | Apocryphal compilation based on material from <i>Acts of John</i> .  |
| P.Kell.Copt. 6.  | Romans 2:6–29.   |
| P.Kell.Gr. 93    | An invocation (?) with a part of Sethian literature (?).   |
| P.Kell.Copt. 53  | Canonical (?) <i>Epistle(s)</i> of Mani.   |
| P.Kell.Copt. 54  | Canonical (?) scripture, <i>Epistle(s)</i> of Mani (?).  |
| P.Kell.Gr. 95    | Isocrates codex, including <i>Ad Demonicum</i> , <i>Ad Nicoclem</i> , and a large part of the <i>Nicocles</i> (on wooden tablets). |

Table 17: List of literary texts, excluding the liturgical Manichaean texts (*Psalms and Prayers*).

The texts from Table 17 can be divided into three broad categories: (1) Manichaean texts; (2) biblical or apocryphal texts; and (3) Classical texts. The last category of Classical texts stands out. There is no apparent reason to connect the Isocrates codex with Manichaeans, apart from its find location in House 2. The codex contains three orations attributed to Isocrates, a fourth-century BCE Athenian rhetor whose orations belonged to the curriculum of Classical rhetorical education. Presumably, it was owned and copied by a local schoolmaster, as a fragment of Demosthenes's *De Corona* has also been found.<sup>37</sup> The schoolmaster added simple explanations of words in the margins of the page, explaining the difficult words to his students or elaborating on specific phrases.<sup>38</sup> The educational setting is also reflected in other texts, some of which were written on similar wooden boards. Among these were texts with fragments of the work of Homer and a parody of Homer.<sup>39</sup> The scattered material remains—several pens, ostraka, and fragments from inscribed boards—make clear that a teacher once used one of the shrines in the temple area to teach Classical literature and rhetoric.<sup>40</sup> A copy of Demosthenes's oration on the crown (*De Corona*, TM642081) was also found in the temple area, which suggests that the orations of Isocrates may have belonged to the same school, but they were found in House 2.

One explanation for this find location, by Jean Daniel Dubois, suggests a relation with Ammonios the schoolteacher. Ammonios's son wrote a letter to the *logistes* (P.Kell.Gr. 69), which has been found in House 3.<sup>41</sup> Prosopographical connections with either Pamour I (P.Kell.Gr. 31, dated in 306 CE) or Philammon I (P.Kell.Gr. 65) bring this schoolteacher closer to the Manichaeans. Dubois takes this a step further by suggesting that if Ammonios is to be

<sup>37</sup> K. A. Worp and A. Rijksbaron, eds., *The Kellis Isocrates Codex: (P. Kell. III Gr.95)* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1997), 30-31; K. A. Worp, "A New Demosthenes Fragment from Kellis." *Symbolae Osloenses* 89, no. 1 (2015): 148-55.

<sup>38</sup> Worp and Rijksbaron, *The Kellis Isocrates Codex*, 28-29, 56-7.

<sup>39</sup> Hope and Worp, "Miniature Codices from Kellis," 232.

<sup>40</sup> Hope and Worp, "Miniature Codices from Kellis," 232.

<sup>41</sup> Dubois, "Greek and Coptic Documents from Kellis," 23-24. I agree with his rejection of the interpretation of the teacher as a member of the Manichaean hierarchy, but disagree with his suggestion that P.Kell.Gr. 69 alludes to almsgiving.

identified with Ammon, in the Coptic letters, he could have belonged to the immediate circle of acquaintances of Makarios (P.Kell.Copt. 21, 22, and 37). Even without this last identification, the connections between neighbors are real enough.<sup>42</sup> A Coptic writing exercise (P.Kell.Copt. 10) and a school exercise (P.Kell.Gr. 90) have been found at Houses 1 and 3, both on reused wooden boards. The material evidence for carpentry in House 2, moreover, suggests that one of the neighbors was responsible for the production of the wooden tablets of the Isocrates codex (see Chapter 3). How would these neighbors have interacted with the Manichaeans? Would Manichaean scribes have received their education solely within their Manichaean network or is it more probable that they were also taught at a local school, like the one found in Trimithis?<sup>43</sup> Makarios's letter to Matthaïos suggests that Matthaïos had to practice his handwriting in absence of his father, either with another teacher, or on his own. The comparative material on third- and fourth-century Christian education suggests that Classical education was still the norm for a long time, before it was supplemented with group-specific educational practices.<sup>44</sup> Matthaïos and other Kellites may therefore have been educated locally, before continuing their education with specific Christian or Manichaean texts.

The second subset of texts found in Kellis consists of biblical and apocryphal texts. The presence of biblical fragments is hardly a surprise, as Manichaeans extensively used Christian texts in their own works. The *Kephalaia*, the *Cologne Mani Codex*, the Psalmbook, and the *Homilies* all include citations of Christian books, as well as allusions to the books of

---

<sup>42</sup> Dubois's interpretations, however, cannot be followed in all details. Father Ammonios cannot be identified with the Ammonios in the generation of Makarios (who was active in the 350s CE), if the son Petechon was active in at the beginnings of the fourth century (306 CE). If we identify the Ammon in the Coptic letters with the father figure Ammonios the teacher in P.Kell.Gr. 69, we will have to place him in the second half of the fourth century. In that case, the prosopographical relation between Petechon and the Pamour family in the early fourth century cannot be identified with the son Petechon in P.Kell.Gr. 69. Contra Dubois, "Greek and Coptic Documents from Kellis," 23; Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT1*, 21.

<sup>43</sup> Criboire, Davoli, and Ratzan, "A Teacher's Dipinto from Trimithis (Dakhleh Oasis)," 179-91.

<sup>44</sup> There exists a number of Greek didactical texts with a traditional religious background that have been used for educational purposes in a Christian setting. Monks used Homer to practice their writing and various composite schoolbooks contained both Christian and traditional texts. S. Bucking, "Christian Educational Texts from Egypt: A Preliminary Inventory," in *Akten des 21. Internationalen Papyrologenkongresses, Berlin 1995*, ed. B. Kramer (Stuttgart: B.G. Teubner, 1997), 132-38. Frankfurter, likewise, points to a shared repertoire in which the Christian texts stood next to traditional religious texts. Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt*, 189-97. More on Christian education in M. R. Hauge and A. W. Pitt, eds., *Ancient Education and Early Christianity* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016). Despite the challenge, traditional religious literature was widely used by Christians. K. O. Sandnes, *The Challenge of Homer: School, Pagan Poets and Early Christianity* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2009). Blumell states that "it is probably not until the fifth or more likely the sixth century that actual "Christian schools" first began to arise." Blumell, *Lettered Christians*, 194: Cf. J. H. F. Dijkstra, "A World Full of the Word: The Biblical Learning of Dioscorus," in *Learned Antiquity: Scholarship and Society in the Near-East, the Greco-Roman World, and the Early Medieval West*, ed. A. A. MacDonald, M. W. Twomey, and G. J. Reinink (Leuven: Brepols, 2003), 135-46.

the Septuagint.<sup>45</sup> This engagement with Christian texts is visible in the letter to Eirene (P.Kell.Copt. 32), in which the author played with several allusions to the gospel of Matthew. The intertextual relation with New Testament texts probably started with Mani's self-understanding as the "Apostle of Jesus Christ," a phrase that is clearly modeled after the Pauline letters in the New Testament.<sup>46</sup> Paul is listed in the genealogy of Apostles of Light in the *Kephalaia* (1 Keph. 1 11.26–14.1) as one of the last of the righteous before the corruption of the original message of Light.

The fragment of the *Letter to the Romans* found at Kellis contains a section with Pauline polemic against the Jews and the Jewish law, a message that would have struck a chord with Manichaean readers.<sup>47</sup> Its find location in room 6 of House 3, right beside several Manichaean documents (Mani's *Epistles* for example), points to a Manichaean readership. As the linguistic variations fall outside those labeled as "L" (see Chapter 5), this Pauline fragment may have derived from outside the oasis or was copied from a Sahidic model.<sup>48</sup>

Another biblical fragment is a piece of (the *Letter to the*) *Hebrews*. This is harder to place in a Manichaean context, although the letter was usually ascribed to Paul in antiquity. It contains significant variants in the text and the language is more closely related to the L-variations.<sup>49</sup> The papyrus does not resemble a normal codex leaf, according to the editor, which may suggest it was part of an exercise instead of a full codex.<sup>50</sup> The passage itself contains an admonition, not dissimilar to the letter Matthaïos received, to be strong and endure hardship because this is how God trains his children. His divine discipline and chastisement is to be embraced for it will bring healing (Hebr. 12: 4–13). The presence of these two letters attributed to Paul explains Makarios's suggestion to his son to copy "the *Apostolos*" ([παπ]οστολος P.Kell.Copt. 19.15–16).<sup>51</sup>

A third and fourth manuscript fragment are labeled apocryphal for convenience's sake, but share the Ancient Christian literary traditions. One piece shows affiliations to the themes and topics of the *Acts of John* (P.Kell.Gr. 97), while the other has been labeled a Sethian invocation (P.Kell.Gr. 93). The former, found in House 3, was thought to be an independent, earlier edition of the Eucharistic prayers, which later on became part of the *Acts*

---

<sup>45</sup> The CMC for example, quotes from Gal. 1:1, 11-12 and 2 Cor. 12:1-5 directly (CMC 60-62). Citations and allusions to the Hebrew Bible/Septuagint are discussed in Pedersen et al., *The Old Testament in Manichaean Tradition*. I do, however, wonder to what extent these passages would have connoted Jewishness instead of Christianness.

<sup>46</sup> This is cited in the *Epistula fundamenti*, Augustine, *Fund.*, 6; in the CMC 66.4-5; and in a Middle Persian version of the opening of the Living Gospel and the Seal letter as "Mani, the apostle of Jesus Aryāmān." Sundermann, "Christianity V. Christ in Manicheism." Whether or not these texts actually convey Mani's own self-understanding is less relevant here than their shared claim that he did so.

<sup>47</sup> Gardner, *KLTI*, 90.

<sup>48</sup> Gardner, *KLTI*, 81.

<sup>49</sup> Gardner, *KLTI*, 100.

<sup>50</sup> Gardner, *KLTI*, 100.

<sup>51</sup> Paul is also cited in one of the abbreviated psalms: "listen also to Paul" which is followed by the first word of a new line "the proclaimer." This must have meant simply "Paul, the evangelist." ϣωτη ρωϥ επαγλος πρεφταθελειω T.Kell.Copt. 2, text A2 36-37.

of *John*.<sup>52</sup> More recently, this view has been contested, as some of the liturgical formulas seem to be more developed in this version of the text, in which most narrative elements have been eliminated. A Manichaean editor could have developed certain formulas and slightly adjusted the narrative, but the fragments do not really contain significant Manichaean interpolations, apart from mentioning the "holy church."<sup>53</sup> The apparent familiarity with the traditions behind the *Acts of John* confirms earlier observations about the Manichaean tradition. According to their Christian opponents, Manichaeans cited the apocryphal *Acts of the Apostles* extensively. Augustine claimed that they "read the apocryphal scriptures, which they call the most uncorrupted."<sup>54</sup> In contrast to these polemical claims, authentic Manichaean texts rarely cite the apocryphal acts. The main exceptions are three Coptic psalms (2 PsB. 141.1–143.32, 179.13–181.12 and 192.5–193.3). These psalms belong to the Psalms of the Wanderers (*Psalmoi Sarakoton*) and the Psalms of Herakleides, which were both sung antiphonally during the liturgy, in the presence of the catechumens. Gábor Kósa therefore concludes that

it seems that while Manichaean elects were using "pure Manichaean" material among themselves, auditors were offered some mixture, a sort of consciously constructed syncretism. Thus there is a certain degree of probability that the AAA [MB: Apocryphal *Acts of the Apostles*] figures were consciously inserted into these hymns in order to make certain concepts, which were important for the Manichaean community (endurance, vigilance, virginity), more attractive for the auditors who might have had a (not necessarily distant) Christian past.<sup>55</sup>

If Kósa is correct and the apocrypha were read to propagate Manichaean values for the outside world, the fragment found at Kellis would provide evidence for one of the intermediate steps during which this material was edited for Manichaean purposes.<sup>56</sup> Kósa is

---

<sup>52</sup> Gardner, *KLT2*, 96-97; cf. G. Jenkins, "Papyrus 1 from Kellis. A Greek Text with Affinities to the Acts of John," in *The Apocryphal Acts of John*, ed. J. N. Bremmer (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1995), 197-230.

<sup>53</sup> P. J. Lalleman, *The Acts of John* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 8n16. Specifically, the phrase "in the holy church and in the holy..." seems to have been added. O. Zwielerlein, "Die Datierung der Acta Iohannis und der Papyrus Kellis Gr. Fragm. A.I," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 174 (2010): 62-84.

<sup>54</sup> Augustine, *Adim.* XVII.2, cited in Kosa, "The Protagonist-Catalogues," 114. According to Kevin Coyle's summary, Manichaeans treasured the apocryphal acts because of "the importance they ascribed to the apostle figure, to the ideal of asceticism (especially continence), to the fortitude of the Acts' protagonists in the face of suffering, to some liturgical themes, or to the notes of partnership with a heavenly companion, and of missionary endeavour." Coyle, "The Gospel of Thomas in Manichaeism," 125-26, including extensive references to secondary literature which should be consulted.

<sup>55</sup> Kosa, "The Protagonist-Catalogues," 113.

<sup>56</sup> I think, however, that there is not enough evidence to conclude that Manichaean elect concealed parts of their beliefs, even though they may have strategically presented certain elements first (see below). Secrecy and concealment is, however, a topic that deserves further study. There are two streams of interpretation. One tradition points to the missionary strategies of the Manichaeans and suggests there was no actual concealment, only knowledge-differentiation between elect and catechumens. The second tradition leans on the accusations of Christian polemicists and suggests that concealment was part of the missionary strategy. Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom*, 6; A. F. de Jong, "Secrecy I: Antiquity," in *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western*

spot on with his analysis of the purpose of the exemplary figures in the Coptic Manichaean psalms. Following Peter Nagel, he points out that the psalms contain a different account of John's death and include other elements of Aristobula and Drusiane's suffering that are absent from the *Acts of John*.<sup>57</sup> The textual traditions behind the Acts of John were thus adapted and changed to support a Manichaean discourse of suffering and persecution.<sup>58</sup>

The so-called Sethian invocation from Kellis (P.Kell.Gr. 93), on a small piece of papyrus, may not have been Sethian, nor an invocation. It is associated with "Sethian" literature on the basis of the word *autogenes* (αὐτογένους, line 10), which is central to gnostic literature conventionally brought together under the label of "Sethianism." The connection is, however, fragile, because of the fragmentary nature of the piece.<sup>59</sup> This is unfortunate, because at least two scholars have recently explored the possibility of a Manichaean influence, or transmission, of some of the documents from Nag Hammadi.<sup>60</sup> P.Kell.Gr. 93 looks like a piece of a literary papyrus text, but it is too small to draw firm conclusions about the content of this text, let alone the engagement of Manichaeans with certain types of gnostic literature.

The third subset of text fragments is directly related to Manichaeism. The fragments of the psalms and prayers have been discussed in Chapter 7, so I will focus on the doctrinal texts. These so-called "doctrinal" Manichaean texts confirm our earlier observations about psalm fragments: the Manichaeans in Kellis not only produced manuscripts in order to send them to the Nile valley (see below), but kept them for internal usage as well.

Among these texts are fragments of multiple epistles of Mani (P.Kell.Copt. 53 and maybe 54), some of which could be identified with the "enemy letter" and the "letter of the ten words," or the "sickness letter," known from the list in the *Fihrist*.<sup>61</sup> It is noteworthy that these letters do not share the systematic character of the *Kephalaia*, but are "pastoral rather than catechetical."<sup>62</sup> The pastoral tone, however, is not entirely devoid of conflict, as a rather lengthy section deals with people who seek to discredit individual Manichaeans before Mani. These accusations were "proclaimed in envy," according to the letter, and those who

*Esotericism*, ed. W. Hanegraaff, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 1052b; Gardner and Lieu, *MTR*, 9; Pedersen, *Demonstrative Proof*, 198.

<sup>57</sup> Kosa, "The Protagonist-Catalogues," 112-3; Nagel, "Die apokryphen Apostelakten," 168.

<sup>58</sup> A similar argument could be made about the commemoration of Drusiana's death (Acts of John, 72 and 85) and Manichaean commemoration rituals, as observed by A. Böhlig, "Neue Kephalaia des Mani," in *Mysterion und Wahrheit: gesammelte Beiträge zur spätantiken Religionsgeschichte*, ed. A. Böhlig (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 259. On the other hand, it would be more surprising if these similarities were entirely absent. For the Manichaean discourse of suffering, see Brand, "In the Footsteps of the Apostles of Light."

<sup>59</sup> Gardner, *KLT1*, 142.

<sup>60</sup> T. Pettipiece, "Towards a Manichaean Reading of the Nag Hammadi Codices," *Journal of the Canadian Society for Coptic Studies* 3-4 (2012): 43-54. R. Falkenberg, "What Has Nag Hammadi to Do with Medinet Madi? The Case of Eugnostos and Manichaeism," in *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt*, ed. H. Lundhaug and L. Jenott (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 261-86.

<sup>61</sup> Reconstructions in Gardner, *KLT2*, 74-75 and 75-77.

<sup>62</sup> Gardner, *KLT2*, 13.



uttered them “did neither read it nor pronounce it... nor did they write these letters.”<sup>63</sup> An earlier section of the letter employed the metaphor of an athlete, a priest, and a farmer to remind the readers to endure the foolishness of their brothers, to serve them, and to bring their fruits to their master (P.Kell.Copt. 53, 49.1425). These sections work well within a Manichaean context of almsgiving and the possibility of tensions between elect and catechumens within the community.

Since we are still awaiting the publication of a collection of Mani's *Epistles* from Medinet Madi, the discovery of these letters in Kellis will further enhance our knowledge of Mani's style of writing and the role of these *Epistles* in the development of the Manichaean tradition.<sup>64</sup> The presence of these texts indicates the strength of their connections to the worldwide Manichaean tradition. Just like the *Prayer of the Emanations* (the daily prayers, see section 7.5.2), these texts show how these Kellites were connected to a transregional Manichaean tradition far beyond the Egyptian regional sphere.

In this regard, it is interesting to note the presence of another letter (P.Kell.Copt. 54) that resembles Mani's *Epistles*.<sup>65</sup> Although the editors consider this letter not one of the official letters of Mani, its theme connects closely to the “letter of Abā, love,” mentioned in the *Fihrist*, or the *Kephalaia* chapter “concerning love.”<sup>66</sup> If this letter is indeed a reworking of a similar theme on the basis of either texts like the *Kephalaia* or the letters of Mani, it provides us with an interesting secondary development in the production of Manichaean books. There are several known apocryphal letters of Mani, all of which stem from polemical situations in which theological opponents were associated with Manichaeism or Mani was presented as a supporter of a specific theological development.<sup>67</sup> As Baker-Brian concludes: “[T]he effort that went into producing epistolary forgeries bearing Mani's name is a clear indication of the formidable reputation that Mani had established for himself as one of the most prolific letter writers in Late Antiquity.”<sup>68</sup> P.Kell.Copt. 54, however, lacked the same polemical content. Rather, it starts with a previously unknown logion of “the saviour”—presumably Jesus—concerning love and eternal redemption.

In terms of secondary developments, it may therefore be more interesting to focus on the short doctrinal text on a small wooden board measuring 74 by 55 mm (T.Kell.Copt. 1). This miniature document contains a highly structured exposé on the nature of “the father.” Gardner considers it a “brief catechism” that played a role in the didactic practices of

---

<sup>63</sup> ⲛⲉⲗⲁⲩⲧⲉⲟⲩⲁⲩ [ⲉⲛ ⲟⲩ]ⲫⲉⲟⲛⲟⲥ and ⲉ[ⲙ]ⲓⲡⲟⲩⲁ[ⲟ]ⲥ' ⲉⲛⲡⲟⲩⲧⲉ[ⲩⲁⲥ....] ⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲉ[ⲙ]ⲓⲡⲟⲩⲥⲉⲓ ⲛⲉⲛⲓ[ⲥⲧⲟⲗⲁⲩⲉ] P.Kell.Copt. 53, 62.13-14 and 2-3.

<sup>64</sup> Gardner, “Archaeology of Manichaean Identity,” 147-58.

<sup>65</sup> Gardner, *KLT2*, 85.

<sup>66</sup> Gardner, *KLT2*, 85. *Fihrist*, translation in B. Dodge, ed. *The Fihrist of Al-Nadīm: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 799.

<sup>67</sup> Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism*, 90. The fifth-century letters are discussed in Lieu, *Manichaeism in Mesopotamia*, 109-12. The letter to Menoch is discussed in Harrison and BeDuhn, “The Authenticity and Doctrine of (Ps.?) Mani's Letter to Menoch,” 128-72. The letter of Mani to Mar Ammo, among an eastern schismatic Manichaean movement is translated in Klimkeit, *Gnosis on the Silk Road*, 259-60. Discussed in M. Boyce, *A Reader in Manichaean Middle Persian and Parthian* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 50.

<sup>68</sup> Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism*, 90.

Manichaeans.<sup>69</sup> Documents like these would “ensure that doctrinal unity which is so evident across the Manichaean world. It is probable that Mani himself initiated the use of memory aids in his teaching. In particular, the use of numerical sequences and structures seems to be embedded in the most fundamental strata of Manichaean doctrine.”<sup>70</sup> A plausible interpretation is to locate T.Kell.Copt. 1 in the composition process of the *Kephalaia*. The organization of the *Kephalaia of the Teacher* and the *Kephalaia of the Wisdom of my Lord Mani* suggests that independent lectures, homilies, and narratives were combined and systematized into one compilation. T.Kell.Copt. 1 dates back to the period before the extant copy of the *Kephalaia* (the manuscript is from the early fifth century), but adheres to the fivefold scheme that is so characteristic for the *Kephalaia of the Teacher*. The father in this instance is not the Father of Greatness, but the Third Ambassador, one of the beings from the third emanation, whose work is also central in several *Kephalaia* chapters (including 1 Keph. 20, 34, 46, 55, and 66). The same is true for P.Kell.Copt. 8, a poorly preserved text on a single codex leaf, which resembles the theme of 1 Keph. 159.<sup>71</sup> P.Kell.Copt. 5 may have derived from a similar compilation, but is too fragmentary to identify. Such short summaries with organized sections of Mani’s lectures may have been “proto-*Kephalaia*” that were reworked into the longer variant(s) of the *Kephalaia* as found at Medinet Madi.<sup>72</sup>

Besides locating these texts in the development of the Manichaean tradition, Gardner stresses the missionary nature of these textual products. They show the “evangelical technique of the Manichaean community,” which would only gradually introduce Manichaean elements that were less similar to Christianity. In fact, he states “catechumens would then be slowly drawn into the community and gradually introduced to the higher knowledge of Mani’s revelation.”<sup>73</sup> In another publication, Gardner and Lieu suggest that the Kellis letters show little interest in the Manichaean cosmology, while the other Kellis texts show “how carefully the hierarchy attempted to draw adherents further into the church and the knowledge of truth.”<sup>74</sup> Curiously, T.Kell.Copt. 1 and P.Kell.Copt. 8 seem to indicate the exact opposite: they show that knowledge of the cosmological system was available, even though it played less of a role in the personal letters. The illegible lines on the backside of T.Kell.Copt. 1, moreover, suggest that the text was used in the context of the other school exercises, maybe even for boys like Matthaios.<sup>75</sup> As we will see in section 9.4, catechumens

---

<sup>69</sup> Gardner, *KLT1*, 2. Note the allusion to Phil. 2:7, discussed in Pedersen et al., *The Old Testament in Manichaean Tradition*, 11.

<sup>70</sup> Gardner, *KLT1*, 4.

<sup>71</sup> Gardner, *KLT1*, 96-7, where Gardner also points to a parallel in a Parthian text. The Parthian text is translated in Klimkeit, *Gnosis on the Silk Road*, 230-1, text E. The publication of Funk’s edition of 1 Keph. 159 has not brought to light more similarities, but confirms Gardner’s analysis that “they are not the same; but they do share certain terminology.”

<sup>72</sup> Pettipiece, *Pentadic Redaction*, 12.

<sup>73</sup> Both citations are from Gardner, *KLT1*, 4.

<sup>74</sup> Gardner and Lieu, *MTRE*, 9. Here they also explain that they see the *Kephalaia* as a “handbook for the elect.”

<sup>75</sup> Many of the psalm-fragments have been interpreted as part of scribal exercises as well. Gardner, *KLT2*, 6.

were involved in scribal activities, which means that at least some of these Kellites had a more profound knowledge of Manichaean doctrine than Gardner and Lieu held possible.

In sum, although this initial description of the various types of documents is only a preliminary overview, it gives an impression of the textuality and literacy of the Manichaean community in Kellis. The texts they read were not limited to biblical or Manichaean scriptures, but derived from a broader range of thematically related texts.

**9.3.2 The Syriac Connection**

Another set of documents that has not yet received the full attention it deserves consists of the documents with Syriac writing. Table 18 lists all the documents found in Kellis that have (traces of) Syriac writing. Mostly, this is fragmentary material: a faint line of Syriac above the first line of a Coptic document (P.Kell.Copt. 57) or traces on the back of a writing exercise (P.Kell.Copt. 10). Nowhere it suggests that Syriac was central to the textual practices of Kellis. The most noteworthy fragments are two bilingual word lists or exercises in which Syriac phrases are matched with a Coptic equivalent (T.Kell.Syr/Copt. 1 and 2).

| Document                  | Location and description   |
|---------------------------|--|
| P.Kell.Syr. 2             | (Structure D/8), extremely fragmentary.                                  |
| P.Kell.Copt. 10           | (House 1) traces on the back of a writing exercise with Coptic alphabet. |
| P.Kell.Copt. 57           | (House 3) reused text with traces of Syriac above the first line.        |
| T.Kell.Syr./Copt. 1 and 2 | (House 3) Wordlists or writing exercise (?) with doctrinal phrases.      |
| P.Kell.Syr. 1             | (House 3) Multiple fragments.  |
| P.Kell.Syr./Gr. 1         | (House 3) Single codex leaf, Greek and Syriac on parchment.              |
| P.Kell.Gr. 67             | (House 3) Syriac address.  |

Table 18: List of document with Syriac writing.

The presence of Syriac writing in Kellis suggests a connection to Syria and Mesopotamia, the traditional Manichaean homeland. It is significant that some other Syriac texts from Egypt also appear to have had Manichaean content.<sup>76</sup> This linguistic connection between the Egyptian desert and Mesopotamia was, however, not a movement from an organized religious center to a more peripheral region, but one from Kellis toward a historical narrative. The Syriac fragments from the village are not the Manichaean books that missionaries like Adda brought with them to the Roman Empire, but represent the opposite movement of Egyptian scribes attempting to learn Syriac. This is visible in the two bilingual wooden boards (T.Kell.Syr./Copt. 1 and 2). Majella Franzmann has shown that in both cases, the Syriac was written first and the Coptic added thereafter, probably as a translation exercise.<sup>77</sup> A variety of handwriting is visible, so multiple people may have worked on these

<sup>76</sup> But see the careful considerations of Pedersen with regard to these fragments. Although he considers them Manichaean, most of these fragments contain too little text to offer more than a “tentative” interpretation. Pedersen and Larsen, *Manichaean Texts in Syriac*, 187-244.

<sup>77</sup> M. Franzmann, “The Syriac-Coptic Bilinguals from Ismant Al-Kharab,” in *Il manicheismo: nuove prospettive della ricerca*, ed. L. Cirillo and A. van Tongerloo (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 117. The edition of the Syriac texts in the first volume of the Coptic Documentary Texts should be consulted, as it replaces the edition in

tablets. The translations contain a number of mistakes in which the Coptic scribe was either sloppy or otherwise failed in his translation. From these mistakes, Franzmann concludes that the community was not “truly bilingual” in Syriac and Coptic.<sup>78</sup> Instead of Syriac writers attempting to translate their work into the local language, these documents attest to the process of Coptic writers attempting to learn Syriac.



Figure 16: Syriac/Coptic bilingual glossary T.Kell.Syr./Copt. 2. Courtesy of the Dakkleh Oasis Project (Colin Hope).

The documentary letters mention two individuals with Syriac skills. Brother Ision was a Manichaean lector known to Apa Lysimachos (P.Kell.Gr.67), who noted that Ision had become a “user of Greek and a Syriac reader.”<sup>79</sup> The fact that Lysimachos signed his own name in Syriac on the back of the letter indicates that he was also able to read and write in

---

the first volume of *Literary Texts*. Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT1*, 344-64. On the use of the Syriac language and the so-called “Manichaean script,” see Pedersen and Larsen, *Manichaean Texts in Syriac*, 3-4, 113-20, 132-37. Page 26-7 lists the Kellis finds, which are excluded from their study.

<sup>78</sup> Franzmann, “The Syriac-Coptic Bilinguals from Ismant Al-Kharab,” 120.

<sup>79</sup> Ἐλληνιστῆς γὰρ γέγονεν καὶ ἀναγνώστης συριατικῶς P.Kell.Gr. 67.20-21, translation in Gardner, “P. Kellis I 67 Revisited,” 224 on the Syriac address containing the name of Lysimachos. Cf. G. Ioannidou, “A Note on συναγτικῶς,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 118 (1997): 162.

Syriac. Hence, at least one of the elect was able to write the language.<sup>80</sup> Would he have taught Syriac to local scribes when he visited the oasis?

Several school exercises have been found in the village. P.Kell.Copt. 10, found in House 1, stands out because it contains an exercise with the Egyptian letters of the Coptic alphabet, while other exercises among the temple debris were Greek only.<sup>81</sup> Ammonios the schoolteacher from House 3 may have worked with some of these exercises, but the traces of Syriac writing on the back of P.Kell.Copt. 10 point to Manichaeans. This Manichaean nature is most evident in the bilingual word lists of P.Kell.Syr./Copt. 1 and 2, which contain expressions and phrases known from Manichaean scripture.<sup>82</sup> These wooden tablets were produced locally, with coarse Coptic handwriting, different from the translators who may have worked with Greek-Syriac bilingual texts (P.Kell.Syr./Gr.1, which may have derived from elsewhere in Egypt). The reused wooden tablet P.Kell.Copt. 57 points in the same direction, as traces of Syriac were preserved above the first line, but the tablet was reused for new purposes.

The awareness in Kellis of Syriac traditions behind Manichaean texts does not necessarily mean that the authors were involved in a scribal mission, as most of the translation work was done in an earlier stage, either at the end of the third or the beginning of the fourth century, when Manichaeans first entered Egypt.<sup>83</sup>

In relation to these Syriac documents, we should consider the relation with Ision the reader. The initial translation of the postscript to this letter by Apa Lysimachos was: "Send a well-proportioned and nicely executed ten-page notebook for your brother Ision. For he has become a user of Greek and a comprehensive reader."<sup>84</sup> The last two words were reinterpreted by Gardner as "Syriac reader" (ἀναγνώστης συριατικὸς instead of the initial reading ἀναγνώστης συναγτικὸς). The adjective Syriac (συριατικὸς) indicates that Ision was not only the lector in a Manichaean church, but also the lector for specific Syriac texts. Gardner suggests that here we have evidence that "the community in their first century in Egypt found real value in maintaining Syriac usage in church, and one can well imagine that certain central texts such as (e.g.) Mani's *Living Gospel* or *Letter of the Seal* might have first

<sup>80</sup> Gardner, "P. Kellis I 67 Revisited," 224. In contrast to W. B. Oerter, I do not think this means that Syriac was a living language in Kellis. Oerter, "Bedeutung der Manichaica aus Kellis," 110.

<sup>81</sup> These include the ostraka 153-8, published in Worp, *Greek Ostraka from Kellis*, 134-37. Only ostrakon 158 is from House 4, but this may have been a calculation with a mistake instead of a school exercise. Other school texts have been published in Hope and Worp, "Miniature Codices from Kellis." On miniature codices, see H. Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church. A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 235-6; C. Roberts, *Manuscript, Society, and Belief in Early Christian Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 12.

<sup>82</sup> Pedersen also points to parallels between phrases in the other Syriac Manichaean texts from Egypt and the bilingual word-lists from Kellis. Pedersen and Larsen, *Manichaean Texts in Syriac*, 197-8, 204-5, and 236.

<sup>83</sup> Gardner, *KLT1*, vii; Franzmann, "The Syriac-Coptic Bilinguals," 121-22. Johnson argues that Greek should not be underrepresented in this reconstruction. S. F. Johnson, "Introduction: The Social Presence of Greek in Eastern Christianity, 200-1200 CE," in *Languages and Cultures of Eastern Christianity: Greek*, ed. S. F. Johnson (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 37-40.

<sup>84</sup> Πινάκιδιον εὖμετρον καὶ ἀστίον δέκα πτυχῶν πέμψον τῷ ἀδελφῶσ σου Ἰσίωνι. Ἑλληνιστὴς γὰρ γέγονεν καὶ ἀναγνώστης συναγτικὸς P.Kell.Gr. 67.17-21, the Greek is cited from Worp's edition.

been read in Syriac before receiving a vernacular translation and exposition."<sup>85</sup> Unfortunately, there is no evidence for the use of Syriac in Manichaean liturgical settings in the fourth century, which would allow for cross-cultural comparison. The suggestion that Syriac continued for a while as the liturgical language of Manichaeans is fascinating, as it stands in contrast to the claims in the *Kephalaia* that Manichaeism was a vernacular movement (1 Keph. 151).<sup>86</sup> Pedersen tentatively suggests that some of the Syriac fragments from Egypt (the so-called "Berlin fragments") contain Mani's own work, as the transmitted phrases have parallels in special expressions only known from texts directly attributed to Mani.<sup>87</sup> If this is true, we may have a priceless clue in the Kellis texts about the role of Syriac in the Manichaean liturgy. Could it be possible that some of the readings in Manichaean gatherings were read in Syriac by specially trained readers? If so, it would have stood out as an exceptional practice. A reading in an unfamiliar language tapped into a specific Manichaean groupness that was not encountered elsewhere in the village. It would have been quite an experience for most of the audience, but more profoundly, it would have set this type of writing apart from the other liturgical documents they used.

The use of Syriac is highly marked, more than the use of Coptic (see Chapter 5). This cannot have been anything other than a specific Manichaean trait, connecting the community in the desert with their Mesopotamian heritage. Even though these documents were written by Coptic scribes attempting to master Syriac, this choice was highly group-specific and is, in fact, almost unprecedented in the papyri.<sup>88</sup>

### 9.3.3 Materiality: The Use of the Codex and Wooden Tablets

Traditionally, the rise of the codex is associated with Christianity. Christians seem to have played a pioneering role, even though they were not the only ones embracing this innovation.<sup>89</sup> Manichaeans participated in this transition and used codices for various types of texts. This may have been due to practical reasons: the codex was cheaper to produce (both sides of the page could be used for writing), easier to manipulate (as there was no need to unroll it), portable, and allowed for a relative freedom to quote specific passages and

---

<sup>85</sup> Gardner, "P. Kellis I 67 Revisited," 227. This reconstruction is accepted in Pedersen and Larsen, *Manichaean Texts in Syriac*, 12. Earlier discussions of the phrase ἀναγνώστης are included in A. Jördens, "Buchbesprechung Worp, Greek Papyri from Kellis I," *Münstersche Beiträge zur antiken Handelsgeschichte* 17, no. 1 (1998): 130; Ioannidou, "A Note on συναγτικός," 162.

<sup>86</sup> It has been suggested that the emphasis on the use of Syriac gave way, with the growing diffusion of the religion, to the practice of translation, now formulated as a fundamental principle and attributed to Mani. Pedersen and Larsen, *Manichaean Texts in Syriac*, 11.

<sup>87</sup> Pedersen and Larsen, *Manichaean Texts in Syriac*, 204-10.

<sup>88</sup> The exception being, of course, the Syriac Manichaean fragments from Oxyrhynchus. Published in Burkitt, *The Religion of the Manichees*. Discussed in Blumell and Wayment, *Christian Oxyrhynchus*, 337-40.

<sup>89</sup> G. G. Stroumsa, "Early Christianity: A Religion of the Book?," in *Homer, the Bible, and Beyond: Literary and Religious Canons in the Ancient World*, ed. M. Finkelberg and G. G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 153-73; Bagnall, *Early Christian Books in Egypt*, 70-90 is rather sceptical about the innovative role of Christians. See also R. Lane Fox, "Literacy and Power in Early Christianity," in *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World*, ed. A. K. Bowman and G. Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 126-48.

move from text to text.<sup>90</sup> The technology and materiality of Christian and Manichaean books, thus, facilitated another type of religious practice. Many of the Kellis texts, therefore, were written in codex style, either on papyrus or on wood. Some of these specific factors made Manichaeism, just like Christianity, a “religion of the paperback,” rather than a religion of the book.<sup>91</sup>

Noteworthy, also, are the miniature codices (smaller than 76 mm in height and width), which would have been even cheaper, easier to hide, convenient for transportation, but more difficult to produce.<sup>92</sup> The most well-known example is the Greek biography of Mani (CMC), which measures 45 mm by 35 mm and contains 192 pages: the smallest known manuscript from antiquity. Just like other miniature codices, it may have been made for private reading sessions with a rather small group, as the size would prevent any liturgical reading in a larger assembly.<sup>93</sup> Miniature codices from Kellis mostly include school exercises, amulets, and Manichaean texts. T.Kell.Copt. 1 is a small wooden tablet (74x54 mm) with a short doctrinal statement. P.Kell.Gr. 91 (42x57 mm) and 92 (46x74 mm, both on papyrus) have been interpreted as amulets because of their small size, but were probably Manichaean hymns of praise (just as P.Kell.Gr.94, which is slightly larger, 82x50 mm on wood). The documents do not show any trace of wear that would suggest they were carried as amulets.<sup>94</sup> Rather, I would suggest that they were either used as scribal exercises or belonged to the small codices that were read or sung in small group settings.

Another material aspect stands out: wood was frequently used for Manichaean texts. Appendix 3 lists at least thirty-seven documents written on wood. Some of these wooden objects were clearly cheap material that was easily available (P. Gascou 83), while others were tablets of a higher quality or even full wooden codices. The latter category includes the Isocrates codex (nine boards with text on both sides), the KAB (eight boards with text on both sides), and four miniature wooden codices with school exercises from the temple area (TM 91945, 48–50). Two other codices deserve special attention, as they contained Manichaean psalms. T.Kell.Copt. 2 consisted of five boards. Four boards were scrubbed clean to be used again and bound together with a fifth board, which still contained text. With the construction of the new codex, new additional holes were drilled and the top of the inscribed board was cut off.<sup>95</sup> The text consisted of about five or six Manichaean psalms and a commemoration hymn. These were found bound together with T.Kell.Copt. 3, which

---

<sup>90</sup> Stroumsa, “The Scriptural Movement of Late Antiquity and Christian Monasticism,” 66.

<sup>91</sup> Stroumsa, *The End of Sacrifice*, 43. He aptly compares the massive use of television, radio and video equipment by evangelical Americans.

<sup>92</sup> Choat has categorized 57 Coptic miniature codices, of which 35 “sacred texts,” “prayers” and “liturgy.” Luijendijk adds another 9 with divinatory texts. Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles?*, 51-56.

<sup>93</sup> Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 235. The CMC shows no trace of typical amulet texts, which could be rather small. Other divinatory miniature codices were used in intimate gatherings at shrines or at home. Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles?*, 53 and 84-91 on church regulations concerning divination.

<sup>94</sup> Bruyn, *Making Amulets Christian*, 232.

<sup>95</sup> Gardner, *KLT1*, 8-9 highlights that the text was thus originally part of another codex. J. L. Sharpe, “Dakhleh Oasis Project: The Kellis Codices,” *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* XVII, no. 4 (1987): 192-97 only discusses the KAB and Isocrates codex.

consisted of seven boards cleaned for reuse. In both cases, it is most probable that Manichaean texts were part of another original and were scrubbed off for the reuse of the boards when they were bound in the new codex.<sup>96</sup> This may have been done after the Manichaeans disposed of the wooden boards or as part of a novel attempt to bring together an anthology of Manichaean psalms.

There were more documents written on wood, apart from those mentioned above, so the choice for this material needs to be explained.<sup>97</sup> Why was wood used for liturgical texts? Wood was mostly used for working copies, teachers' models, or business accounts, and sometimes for amulets and horoscopes. With a few exceptions, it was never used for personal letters that had to be carried by travelers.<sup>98</sup> The choice for this material was not only determined by the price (that papyrus could be expensive at times is visible in the complaints of P.Kell.Copt. 39.20, 78, and 79), but was also related to the function of the document in a liturgical setting. Unlike papyrus, a wooden tablet could be brought to gatherings and held steady without the risk of damaging it. It could be held up for multiple people to read (although the size of the handwriting seems to speak against this) or pinned on the wall for close reading or studying purposes.<sup>99</sup>

The liturgical function is most visible in the single legible page of T.Kell.Copt. 2, containing abbreviated psalms that could have helped the singers during the performance. Instead of providing the reader with the full texts of the psalms, only the first couple of words of each new verse line are given.<sup>100</sup> The lines break off, sometimes even in the middle

---

<sup>96</sup> Note that these wooden boards were not covered in a coating of wax, as earlier wooden tablets or notebooks. R. Criore, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 153-4.

<sup>97</sup> Other Manichaean texts on wood include: T.Kell.Copt. 1 (a doctrinal text about the Father), T.Kell.Copt. 4, 5, 6, 7 (psalms), T.Kell.Syr./Copt. 1 and 2 (bilingual glossary).

<sup>98</sup> The exceptions are SB 24 15919, P.Kell.Copt. 42, 57 and 83. Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT2*, 9. Cf. K. A. Worp, "A New Survey of Greek, Coptic, Demotic and Latin Tabulae Preserved from Classical Antiquity Version 1.0," *Trismegistos Online Publications TOP 6* (2012). A large set of inscribed wooden boards have been found over the last years at Vindolanda (UK), the majority written before 102 CE. A. Sarri, *Material Aspects of Letter Writing in the Graeco-Roman World: C. 500 BC – C. AD 300* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 79-84. On the use of wood for amulets, see Bruyn, *Making Amulets Christian*, 46-7; A. Delattre and K. A. Worp, "Trois tablettes de bois du musée de Leyde," *Chronique d'Égypte* 87, no. 2 (2012): 379-82. Generally, wood was more expensive than papyrus or ostraka. Wood had, however, several advantages which made it more useful for teachers' models: it could be passed around without extreme care, it could be displayed in a classroom or used for close range copying by students. R. Criore, *Writing, Teachers, and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 125.

<sup>99</sup> Despite the coarse hand of some of the texts on the tablets, I see no reason to consider all of these texts as part of scribal education. T.Kell.Copt. 1 has a pen exercise on the back. The glossaries had an educational function and one section of T.Kell.Copt. 2 contains sections written in a coarse hand. Gardner, *KLT1*, 9, 13. E. A. Meyer, *Legitimacy and Law in the Roman World: Tabulae in Roman Belief and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004), 91-2 treats recitation from tablets as an allegedly powerful symbolic action.

<sup>100</sup> The collection of various psalms in one anthology is not unprecedented, see the edition of M315 in I. Colditz, "Hymnen an Šād-Ohrmezd. Ein Beitrag zur frühen Geschichte der Dinawariya in Transoxanien,"



of a word, even though the sentence has hardly begun. I concur with Gardner that it functioned as an aid for the memory of those performing the psalm in a congregational setting<sup>101</sup> The text would have helped the singers to remember the beginning of each line correctly. It has a parallel in other wooden boards with similar anthologies of Greek or Coptic psalms and prayers from the sixth century. Such books of hours (sometimes called *horologion*) contained the psalms and prayers of the liturgy for official readers and singers.<sup>102</sup> The abbreviated psalms of T.Kell.Copt. 2 were not randomly added to the wooden board, but belonged to the performative setting of a communal gathering. Specifically, some of the psalms and prayers were devoted to the commemoration of the departed (see Chapter 8 with Table 15 presenting the content of this wooden codex).

#### 9.4 Scribal Activity and Ritual Practice

Scribal activity and book production was of pivotal importance to Manichaeans. They consistently associated their religious community with the set of books associated with Mani, and attributed them with special powers. Outsiders also associated Mani with his books, as for example the Christian heresiological text known as the *Acta Archelai* described Mani polemically as carrying a "Babylonian book under his left arm."<sup>103</sup> Augustine, likewise, recalled how the Manichaeans of his youth had "many and huge books" as "dishes" in which they "served up the sun and the moon."<sup>104</sup> These Christian perceptions of Manichaean books are important because they concur with the Manichaean emphasis on books. They do not, however, always give us detailed information about the way and manner in which these books were used. While it seems logical to accept the hagiographical claims in which books were powerful missionary tools, we have to recognize that this is not evident in the Kellis letters. Scribal activity plays an important and marked role in Kellis, but it is never explicitly associated with mission or proselytizing. Instead, the Manichaeans of Kellis produced books also as a ritual practice.<sup>105</sup> These Manichaean texts functioned primarily as paraenetic texts for insiders, rather than having a protreptic function for outsiders. It involved catechumens in an act of worship, more than a strategic missionary production process in which informative texts were copied.<sup>106</sup> To appreciate this fully, we have to consider the internal

---

*Altorientalische Forschungen* 19, no. 2 (1992): 330-33. I have not found other parallels, in particular because in T.Kell.Copt. 2, text A2 provides only the beginning of every second complete line. Gardner, *KLTI*, 19.

<sup>101</sup> Gardner, "A Manichaean Liturgical Codex," 37. The alternative interpretation, cited on page 52, is that they were used in a scribal exercise.

<sup>102</sup> Worp's survey of wooden tablets includes other liturgical compositions, for example, P.488 Yale (sixth century CE), which starts with a prayer and continues with several psalms and a doxology. H. Quecke, "Erhebet euch, Kinder des Lichtes!," *Le Muséon* 76 (1963): 27-45. In general on the Coptic daily liturgical prayers, see G. W. Woolfenden, *Daily Liturgical Prayer. Origins and Theology* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 171-84.

<sup>103</sup> Hegemonius, *AA*, 14.2-3; Iricinschi, "Manichaean Writings and Religious Propaganda," 266-67.

<sup>104</sup> Augustine, *Conf.* III 6.10, cited and discussed in van Oort, "Augustine and the Books of the Manichaeans," 188-99.

<sup>105</sup> Iricinschi, "Hebrew Scriptures and Persian Books," 158.

<sup>106</sup> The difficult distinction between protreptic and paraenetic texts is discussed in A. Kotzé, "Protreptic, Paraenetic and Augustine's *Confessions*," in *In Search of Truth': Augustine, Manichaeism and Other Gnosticism*.

paradox of Manichaean scribal activity, as on the one hand Manichaeans proclaimed Mani's superiority because he wrote his scriptures himself, while on the other hand his disciples were urged to record his wisdom in books.

#### 9.4.1 Working on Mani's Books?

In the introduction of the *Kephalaia*, Mani is praised for his books. His religion is superior because of the failure of Jesus, Buddha, and Zoroaster to write their wisdom in books (1 Keph. 6.20–26, 7.23–26, 7.35–8.7). Their message was adulterated and as a result the people were led astray. In fact, the author states: “[T]heir church will pass away from the world; therefore they did not write.”<sup>107</sup> The failure of the previous Apostles of Light is also included in the list of ten reasons for the superiority of the Manichaean church: “[M]y brethren who came prior to me: they did not write their wisdom in books the way that I, I have written it.”<sup>108</sup> The ultimate paradox is that the *Kephalaia* itself was not written by Mani but consisted of a series of questions and answers and lectures attributed to Mani. These texts were collected by his disciples, according to Timothy Pettipiece, to fill the gaps in the theology of the Manichaean canon. This is visible in the introduction of the *Kephalaia of the Teacher*, where it starts with instructions on how to handle Mani's wisdom:

[T]he world has not permitted me to write down... to me all of it; and if you, my children and my disciples, write all my wisdom... the questions that you have asked me .... And the explanations that I have made clear to you from time to time; the homilies, the lessons, that I have proclaimed with the teachers to the leaders, together with the elect and the catechumens; and the ones that I have uttered to free men and free women.... All of them that I have proclaimed from time to time! They are not written. You must remember them and write them; gather them in different places; because much is the wisdom that I have uttered to you.<sup>109</sup>

After discussing the failure of the previous Apostles of Light and the adulteration of their message, the text continues:

To you, that the wisdom and the interpretation ..... From time to time, which I did not write... and you write after me, so that ... it leads you not astray! For you yourselves know the great wisdom I have uttered in city after city, in each land separately. What I have written in books, no human mouth will suffice to write.

---

*Studies for Johannes van Oort at Sixty*, ed. J. A. van den Berg, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 3-23. As Derek Krueger has observed for the entire Byzantine period, “ascetic practice and the making of texts were parallel enterprises.” D. Krueger, *Writing and Holiness. The Practice of Authorship in the Early Christian East* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 195.

<sup>107</sup> τοῦκεκλ[ησια ναοῦνε αβ]αλ εἰ πκοσμοσ εἵβε [πε]ἰ ἡποῦρε[ἰ] 1 Keph. 8.9-10 (modified translation).

<sup>108</sup> νασνηῦ εταγεῖ ἡωαρπ ἀραῖ ἡ[ποῦρεῖ] τοῦσοφια ἀμχμε ἡτρε ἀνακ εταῖεαζε 1 Keph. 151 371.26-28.

<sup>109</sup> ἡπε πκοσμοσ τῆα ἡἰ ἀταρεῖ πετ[.]α .. μεγε ἡἰ τηρε καν πτωτη ναοη[ε ἡν ναμαον]τηε ερεῖ τασοφια τηρ[ε] .... ετηε .. [.....] . ἡωἡνε ετατετηωητ [αραῦ .....] ἡἡ ἡερεἡηηα εταῖερεἡηηε[γε ἡναῦ κατα οῦ α]ω οῦαῖω ἡροηηια ἡσεεε εταῖετωαῦ ἡἡνεα[ε α]ἡαρηηοσ ἀραἡ ἡεκληετοσ ἡἡ ἡκατηηοἡηε[ηοσ ἡἡ] ἡεταῖετωαῦ ἡελεγεωεροσ ἡἡ ἡελεγεωερα ἡ[.....].ἡ ἡηρωῦ εταῖετωαῦα κατα οῦαῖω ε[ε]ση[ε εἡ ἡτ]ωτη ἡποἡηεγε ἡτετηεαερω[ε α.]γρωῦ ἀρωῦ[ἡ κατ]α ἡα επεληἡ ἡαωε τσοφια ετα[ἡτ]εωαε [αρωτηε] 1 Keph. 6.16-27.

Nevertheless, according to your capacity, and even as you may find strength; remember! And write a little something from the great wisdom that you have heard from me. When you write down and are amazed by them ... enlighten greatly; and they shall give benefit and make free ... of the truth.<sup>110</sup>

Clearly, this passage legitimated the paradoxical existence of the *Kephalaia*, which was written by Mani's disciples, while it distinguished Mani from previous Apostles of Light by the alleged fact that he wrote his own scriptures.<sup>111</sup> Wolf-Peter Funk, moreover, identified two other passages that mirror this paradoxical call to put into writing what Mani had not written himself. At the end of the Dublin *Kephalaia*, a fragmentary passage reads: "[T]hings which I have not written" and "you shall write it down."<sup>112</sup> Similarly, the compiler of the collection justifies his work with the words:

This commandment which He has given [ ... ]. So I have written down these *Kephalaia* [ ... ] and the interpretations that the Apostle uttered occasionally, at the particular places in the particular countries, so that [ ... ] and it be known [ ... ] in His Church. Now, then, His [ ... ] do not let them ... and say ... (etc., longer lacuna) ... what I have heard ... what I have written in ... this book (?) ...<sup>113</sup>

If this reconstruction by Funk is correct, the entire double volume of the *Kephalaia* starts and ends with the call to write Mani's wisdom.<sup>114</sup>

The result was an ideology of Manichaean authorship in which Mani was the (intellectual) author, while others physically wrote his message down.<sup>115</sup> The forthcoming pages of the Dublin *Kephalaia* attest to the presence of scribes supporting Mani's literary ventures (2 Keph. 333 is entitled "This chapter tells about the Apostle: how he causes the scribes to write letters, sending them to different places"). From Augustine and some of the eastern Manichaean texts, we know that scribal activity worked as a personal ascetic practice,

<sup>110</sup> ατοττνηνε δε τσοφια νη οε[ρηννια? .... .. κατα] ουαϊω ουαϊω ετε ηπσαρε.. [.....]. νετενισαρε νηησωι δεκαε..[.....] νεσρταδανι ντοττνηνε επελαη τετησα[γνε?] ρωττνηνε δε τσοφια ετναωωε ετ[αίτεογας κατα] πολικ κατα χωρα χωρα χωρικ πετ[αίσαρε] ααωμε νη ταπρο ηρωμε ναρωωε ασαρ[ε] αλλα ντωττη κατα πετνχιη νη τρε ετετη[η]αδ [η]βαν αρπηνεγε ντετησεει ουκογι ηλαγε ρη [τσο]φια ετναωωε ετατετησατνες ντοοτ ε[ω]αντε] τήσαρογ η[τετη]ρωπηρε νρητογ[...]....ε... ουαϊνε τονω νσετηνη νσερηρηε.... ντε τνη 1 Keph. 8.33-9.10. As is clear from the transcription, Gardner's translation is built on a rather fragmentary text. I have removed some of the brackets in the translation for readability.

<sup>111</sup> W. P. Funk, "The Reconstruction of the Manichaean Kephalaia," in *Emerging from Darkness: Studies in the Recovery of Manichaean Sources*, ed. J. D. BeDuhn and P. A. Mirecki (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 152.

<sup>112</sup> 2 Keph. 429.12 and 430.4 (?), Unpublished. Cited and translated in Funk, "The Reconstruction of the Manichaean Kephalaia," 153.

<sup>113</sup> 2 Keph. 447.2-7 (?), unpublished, with Coptic text transcribed and translated in Funk, "The Reconstruction of the Manichaean Kephalaia," 153-4.

<sup>114</sup> Keith Hopkins already stated that the missionary argument stressing Mani's authorship cannot be accepted in full. In fact, to do so with be a historian's "sin." K. Hopkins, *A World Full of Gods: Pagans, Jews and Christians in the Roman Empire* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999), 269-70.

<sup>115</sup> A similar dual attitude toward authorship is visible in the references to Mani's pictures. Some passages claim that Mani painted them, but others make clear that he had them painted and was only the intellectual author. Gulácsi, *Mani's Pictures*, 53.

aimed at the transformation of the self. The Chinese *Traité* mentions how zealous Manichaeans would chant hymns in their rituals, but also “transcribe what they have chanted, and then repeat it in their thoughts; in this way there is never a moment wasted.”<sup>116</sup> These moments of intense association with Manichaean texts could help to “fill their heads with Manichaean thoughts,” as Jason BeDuhn explained.<sup>117</sup> Instead of being primarily aimed at conveying information, this type of writing provided for “private, individualized spiritual development,” which brought the “disjointed and conflicted thought of the individual” into alignment with “true Manichaean selfhood by a process of entextualising the self.”<sup>118</sup> I would suggest that this was true also for Ision and Matthaïos. Indeed, one of the long literary letters from Kellis (maybe one of Mani’s *Epistles*, or an imitation) urged the community to “devote yourself to what is written.”<sup>119</sup>

The dual dimension of Manichaean authorship consisted of a profound authorial anonymity, in which authors are merely transmitters or writer-witnesses to Mani’s original and final revelation, as well as the identification of some writers with their titular rank instead of personal name.<sup>120</sup> The latter strategy is visible in the letter of the Teacher, who is only known through his title (P.Kell.Copt. 61), while in sections of the CMC the authors are named as witnesses to Mani’s revelation. In both instances, writers did not report on their own authority, but the authorial agency was exclusively ascribed to Mani.<sup>121</sup> Mani’s role as author stressed finality, as the completeness of the revelation had arrived through his words. In the introduction to the *Kephalaia*, his books are “the measure of all wisdom. Everything that has occurred, and that will occur, is written in them.”<sup>122</sup> The guideline for additional teaching and writings, set out in this introductory passage, is that they should be in line with Mani’s three great lessons: “[E]very writer, if he reveals these three great lessons: that one is the writer of truth. Also, every teacher, if he gives instruction and proclaims these three lessons, is the teacher of truth.”<sup>123</sup> The three great lessons probably represent the three times and the two principles, which provided the framework in which Manichaean authorship could develop after Mani.<sup>124</sup>

<sup>116</sup> *Traité*, XXIX 260-263 translation in Lieu and Mikkelsen, *Tractatus Manichaicus Sinicus*, 69. In a Middle Persian parable, the gifts of a rich man to the king are compared to, and identified with, sacred books. M47, translation given in Klimkeit, *Gnosis on the Silk Road*, 190. Discussed in Colditz, “On the Names of ‘donors’,” 59.

<sup>117</sup> BeDuhn, “The Domestic Setting,” 268.

<sup>118</sup> BeDuhn, “The Domestic Setting,” 269 and 270; Cf. Krueger, *Writing and Holiness. The Practice of Authorship in the Early Christian East*.

<sup>119</sup> просехе аρωτῆι εἰς[ε] πε]τση P.Kell.Copt. 54. 16-17.

<sup>120</sup> Baker-Brian, *Study of Augustine’s Contra Adimantum*, 148-59.

<sup>121</sup> Pedersen, *Studies*, 399-400 on Koustaïos transmitting the teachings of Mani.

<sup>122</sup> .. ηταγνε ποῦ ητσοφια τηрс εωβ ним εαφω[ωπε] ηῖ η[ε]τναω[ωπε] ε цне ηηητοῦ 1 Keph. 5.27-28.

<sup>123</sup> гpa[φeyс ним εεω]ηп ав[а.]л эа пωамт̄ ῖнаб нсехе петнне[γ] пе ..... с]аэ ним ан еф[с]во ефтаωελῶ эа пω[а]мт̄ ῖсехе пе] цаэ ῖнне 1 Keph. 5.29-33 (the reconstructed text is not given in Böhlig/Polotsky, nor in Gardner’s translation).

<sup>124</sup> The Chinese Compendium of the doctrines and styles includes a category of teachings attributed to Mani, but written by his disciples. This “tradition,” according to Haloun and Henning, is “as genuine and false as the Muslimic ‘tradition’: it may reflect the prophet’s views with perfect accuracy, or it may distort

The office of reader (*ἀναγνώστης*) or lector was held in high esteem. Readers are praised in both Greek and Coptic Manichaean sources. In the *Homilies'* description of the postwar situation, thousands of books will be saved and there will be a textual community gathered around Manichaean scripture and its reader.<sup>125</sup> This sermon (Hom. 23–30) continues to sketch a utopia in which the followers of Mani will “once again recover their memory and study in the books of the wisdom.”<sup>126</sup> New generations of catechumens will arise and find the “writings written and they will find the books adorned.”<sup>127</sup> Their communal life will be filled with psalm singing and their houses “will be like schools.”<sup>128</sup> One of the most striking elements in this utopian textual community is that catechumens are portrayed as being deeply involved in the reading and writing of sacred books. In this future, even the little girls will be found “being taught to write and singing psalms and reading.”<sup>129</sup> We have seen how some of this was actually put into practice, as the Kellis letters make clear that The Teacher taught Piene to read (and write?) Latin and he “made him read in every church.”<sup>130</sup>

Scribes, readers, illustrators, and those who financed the production of books were praised for their accomplishment. According to the *Homilies*, their names are to be publicly proclaimed, as the community will praise “the name of the scribe who wrote it and also the name of he who put the punctuation marks in it.”<sup>131</sup> Thousands will come to visit the reader, in each and every city, for they rejoice in the writing of books (Hom. 30.27–30). It is no exaggeration to say that scribes and readers were highly regarded!

In direct connection to the status of the reader and scribes, Manichaean texts conveyed the religious merit of the donation of books, or donations for the purpose of book writing. In the extant sections of the *Book of Giants*, scribal activity is listed in a section with parables about proper behavior. It compares the “Hearer that copies a book” to a sick man who gave his life (?) for the sake of the community.<sup>132</sup> Similarly, in one of the colophons of a

---

his meaning completely.” G. Haloun and W. Henning, “The Compendium of the Doctrines and Styles of the Teaching of Mani, the Buddha of Light,” *Asia Major, Third Series* 3 (1952): 211. They thought the introduction of the *Kephalaia* was simply a late invention to legitimize the production of new Manichaean books.

<sup>125</sup> Iricinski, “Manichaean Writings and Religious Propaganda,” 270 with references to Homilies 25.1-19 and 30.27-31.7. “Readers” in the Catholic church belonged to the minor orders and were responsible for the sacred books of the community. They read scripture out loud during gatherings. On the reader in Ancient Christianity, see D. Näselsqvist, *Public Reading in Early Christianity: Lectors, Manuscripts, and Sound in the Oral Delivery of John 1-4* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 63-118, pages 10-16 on the office in the first two centuries CE. The status of the reader changed into an important moral role in the third century. Early Christian lectors became church officials, teachers, chosen from the confessors, instead of simply literate slaves. Wipszycka, “Les ordres mineurs,” 181-215. On the literacy of these officials, see M. Choat and R. Yuen-Collingridge, “A Church with No Books and a Reader Who Cannot Write. The Strange Case of P.Oxy. 33.2673,” *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 46 (2009): 109-38.

<sup>126</sup> ἡσεναγοροῦ ἀποῤῥπνεγε ἡκεσ[α]π ἡσμελετα ρῆ ἡχμε ἡτσοφια Hom. 23.1-2.

<sup>127</sup> сенаеи ἡсєбῆ ἡграфаγε еуси[ρ] нс]єбῆ ἡхме еукосне Hom. 28.10-11 (modified translation).

<sup>128</sup> сенаρ ое [ἡн]ансиḥ ἡсєω Hom. 30.31-32.

<sup>129</sup> е[γχι]сєω асρєῖ еуῤῥале еуαη Hom. 31.7. Iricinski, “Hebrew Scriptures and Persian Books,” 158-59.

<sup>130</sup> егтрєєωη каτє еκκλῆсиα P.Kell.Copt. 25.46 (modified translation).

<sup>131</sup> прєн ἡграфєує’ етаєсаєу. [ἡн] прєн] аи ἡпєтаєтєтєзє ἡнає Hom. 25.18-19.

<sup>132</sup> The passage is translated by Henning as “The Hearer that copies a book, is like unto a sick man that

Turkic Manichaean text, a Hearer expresses his desire to be remembered for his reciting and copying of texts.<sup>133</sup> The copying of these texts was perceived as easing the illness of ignorance, countering the decline of the world. As Andrea Piras states: “[W]riting and copying is a good therapy to cure the individual and the community”; it works as a medicine through which “the human condition of illness is counteracted by the act of writing (with zeal, accuracy, precision).”<sup>134</sup> Both scribes and donors were therefore praised. Their names were mentioned at the end of several Parthian and Middle Persian Manichean hymns, where they appear without further introduction or frame.<sup>135</sup> In several documents, the intended space at the end of the hymn was left blank, flanked by punctuation marks and ready to be filled with a donor name. Since these names were not restricted to catechumens, but included names of elect, these passages may have included all those involved in the production process. According to Iris Colditz, their names would be recited and remembered in the context of funeral ceremonies.<sup>136</sup> The names in the Coptic Psalmbook, as discussed in Chapter 8, may have had a similar function, namely to include the names of donors in the recitation and remember them as part of the imagined community.

#### 9.4.2 Access to Books

The participation of Manichaean catechumens (or Hearers) in book writing has led to raised eyebrows. A substantial number of scholars believe that access to Manichaean teaching and books was restricted, or even that their books were concealed from outsiders. A strong argument in favor of this reconstruction is Secundinus’s accusation that Augustine “never knew the secret, hidden teachings,” which may have been preached during separate cultic gatherings for the elect.<sup>137</sup> Augustine’s status of catechumen might have restricted his access

---

gave his . . . to a . . . man.” W. Henning, “The Book of the Giants,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 11, no. 1 (1943): 59 lines 230-33. In this paragraph, I follow the interpretation and reading of A. Piras, “The Writing Hearer. A Suggested Restoration of M 101d,” in *Zur lichten Heimat: Studien zu Manichäismus, Iranistik und Zentralasienkunde im Gedenken an Werner Sundermann*, ed. Team “Turfanforschung” (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2017), 525-34.

<sup>133</sup> Cited and translated in Klimkeit, *Gnosis on the Silk Road*, 375.

<sup>134</sup> Piras, “The Writing Hearer. A Suggested Restoration of M 101d,” 530. I cannot agree with Claudia Leurini that Hearers were banned from copying texts. Her reading of this passage equates copying a book with being sick, not taking into account the entire parable. Leurini, *The Manichaean Church*, 82-85, in particular the last page.

<sup>135</sup> Colditz, “On the Names of ‘Donors,’” 56-67. The majority of the names appears in hymns, with a few exceptions in prose texts or texts whose character cannot be determined. Earlier work by Sundermann includes W. Sundermann, “Namen von Göttern, Dämonen und Menschen in iranischen Versionen des manichäischen Mythos,” *Altorientalische Forschungen* 6 (1979): 95-133; W. Sundermann, “Iranische Personennamen der Manichäer,” *Die Sprache* 36, no. 2 (1994): 244-70.

<sup>136</sup> Colditz rightly points to the paradox of high-ranking elect donating money for the purpose of book-writing, while they were supposed to live in voluntary poverty. The association with funerary rituals is made on the basis of a name with the additional phrase “should be remembered.” Colditz, “On the Names of ‘Donors,’” 62-5, citation from page 64.

<sup>137</sup> The first text is a letter from Secundinus to Augustine (*Epistula ad Augustinum*, CSEL 25/2 p. 895.17-19) where the former coreligionist accused him of never being a true Manichaean because Augustine “never knew the secret, hidden teachings (potuisse arcana incognita secreta cognoscere).” Augustine himself

to Manichaean books. He himself, however, reports that he could not find any trace of a hidden esoteric meaning behind the interpretations of Mani. As Manichaeism was a missionary religion with the aim of disseminating Mani's message, I consider it highly unlikely that esoteric teaching existed among the elect.<sup>138</sup> Most Manichaean texts about secrets and supernatural mysteries praise Mani for his role of enlightener and revealer. Mani is the giver of revelations, the one who has instructed them in all the secrets (1 Keph. 95. 144.15). In the Manichaean daily prayers, they praise Christ, who came forth from the outer aeons and "without concealment interpreted his wisdom and the secret mysteries to people on earth."<sup>139</sup> In the letter from Kellis that may belong to the Mani's *Epistles*, the author states: "[L]ook, you have seen everything by an eye revelation. You do not lack anything from the mysteries of the wisdom of God," whereafter he describes the way he transferred this knowledge: "[F]urthermore, all these other mysteries and the wisdom that I have revealed to you, I am adapting and adjusting for you in various particular forms for the sake of love; so that you will possess it and its fruits be truly apparent to me."<sup>140</sup> Even though Mani was

---

however does not refer to concealed knowledge as the difference between elect and catechumens, as he explains the difference to Petilian as a distinction in regiments: "the name of catechumen is not bestowed among them upon persons to denote that they are at some future time to be baptized, but that this name is given to such as are also called Hearers, on the supposition that they cannot observe what are considered the higher and greater commandments which are observed by those whom they think to distinguish and honor by the name of Elect." (*Contra litteras Petiliani* 3.17.20) cited and discussed in J. D. BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma, Volume 2: Making a "Catholic" Self, 388–401 C.E* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 312. In my understanding of the letter of Secundinus, the author attributes Augustine's misunderstanding to his ethnic background (Africa!) and states, immediately after the accusation of not knowing the secret teachings, that Augustine attacked Hannibal and Mithridates "under the name of Manichaeus." See translation in Gardner and Lieu, *MTRE*, no. 37, where they also point to the Africanness of Hannibal, who was a considered a traditional archenemy of Rome, just as Mithridates. The second texts is Augustine in debate with Fortunatus in 392 where he states that he does not know whether the Elect had separate cultic gatherings, and if they gathered to receive the Eucharist, as he has heard, these times were concealed from him. Augustine, *For.* 3, cited in J. K. Coyle, "Saint Augustine's Manichaean Legacy," in *Manichaeism and Its Legacy*, ed. J. K. Coyle (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 318.

<sup>138</sup> BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma* 1, 71, see also 82, 105. Augustine's testimony on this issue is, of course, deeply colored by his rejection of the Manichaean religion, as he portrays his younger self as looking for rationalist accounts and philosophical wisdom behind the mythological veil. Stroumsa concluded: "the whole community knows the ipsissima verba of Mani, and yet we have no evidence of any esoteric traditions among the elect." Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom*, 6. Cf. van Oort, "The Young Augustine's Knowledge," 454; Pedersen, *Demonstrative Proof*, 204; De Jong, "Secrecy I: Antiquity," 1052; Jonas states: "Mani indeed, alone among the gnostic system-builders, intended to found, no a select group of initiates, but a new universal religion: and so his doctrine, unlike the teaching of all other Gnostics with the exception of Marcion, has nothing esoteric about it." And "Mani's work was not to penetrate the secret aspects of a given revelation and to establish a minority of higher initiation within an existing church..." H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 206.

<sup>139</sup> ἀπαρακαλύπτως ἐξηγησάμενον αὐτοῦ τὴν σοφίαν καὶ τὰ ἀπόρρητα μυστήρια τοῖς ἐπὶ γῆς ἀν(θρῶπ)οῖς P.Kell.Gr.98.40-42.

<sup>140</sup> εἰς ῥω[β] νη[μ] ἄτε[ρ]η[ν]ω[ν] ἀρ[α]γ[ο]ν [ῥ]ῆ[ν] ο[γ]ῶ[ν]η[ν] ἀβ[α]λ[λ] ἡ[ν] βελ. τετ[τ]ῶ[ν] δα[τ] [ἡ]λ[α]γε ἐν ἀβ[α]λ[λ] ῥῆ [ἡ]μ[υ]στ[η]ριον ἡ[τ] [σο]φία ἡ[τ]ε π[ρο]υ[τε]. and νικ[ε] [μ]ῆ[τ]η[ρ]ι[ο]ν [ἡ] μ[η] τ[η]ρογ. ἡ[ν] τ[σο]φία ἡ[τ]αῖ]β[α]λ[λ] [σο]φ[ι]α[ν] ἡ[τ]ε. ἐπει[ρ]ωνε ἡ[μ]ῶ[ν] [σο]φ[ι]α[ν] ἡ[τ]ε [σο]φ[ι]α[ν]

acclaimed as the revealer of secrets, there may have been various gradations or phases in the revelation that may have contributed to a certain level of knowledge differentiation.<sup>141</sup> As we have seen, one of the most recent introductions into Manichaeism in the Roman world moves against this reconstruction, and suggests—on the basis of the lack of cosmological details in the Kellis papyri—that Manichaean knowledge was “carefully graded and tailored to the needs of its audience,” with the experience of lay catechumens was inherently different from the “higher echelons of the elect.”<sup>142</sup> Without delving too deeply into all accusations of Manichaean concealment, the issue in Kellis revolves around the question of whether Matthaïos worked on canonical Manichaean books.<sup>143</sup>

As the previous examination has made clear, there is some reason to doubt Matthaïos’s involvement in the Manichaean canon—by which I mean the books listed in the *Kephalaia* and other Manichaean texts as part of Mani’s own writings. Also thematically, there seems to have been a difference between the prevalent devotional material from Kellis and the cosmological and theological works found at Medinet Madi.<sup>144</sup> At Kellis, most of the

---

ⲛⲏⲏⲧⲏ. ⲉⲛ̅ ϣⲓⲛϣⲁⲧ ϣⲏⲁ[ⲧ ⲁⲛ ⲉ]ⲧⲃⲏⲧ[ϣ ⲛ̅ⲧ]ⲁⲓⲛⲉ. ϣⲉⲣⲉⲧⲛⲁⲣ̅ⲫⲟⲣⲉ [ⲛ̅]ⲏⲁϥ. ⲛⲟϣⲟⲛⲉ ⲛⲏⲏ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ. ⲛ̅ϫⲓ ⲛⲉ[ϣ]ⲕⲁⲣⲓⲟϥ. ⲉⲛ̅ⲛ  
 ⲟϣⲏⲉ P.Kell.Copt. 54.8-11 and 24-30.

<sup>141</sup> Despite such praise, the *Kephalaia* sets out to show that not all knowledge is revealed, not even to the Manichaean elect. Some mysteries about future events, fate, and medicine are still veiled and should remain hidden. They are kept back primarily for the archons, supernatural beings of Darkness and ignorance who would thwart the designs of the kingdom of Light (Keph 147, 350-355). N. A. Pedersen, “The Term *Mysterion* in Coptic-Manichaean Texts,” in *Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and Other Ancient Literature: Ideas and Practises*, ed. Ch. H. Bull, L. I. Lied, and J. D. Turner (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 141-2. Primarily because of the risk of misuse for money or individual gain (divination, magic?) but also to prevent the archons from delaying future events. I have no problems with the idea that specific types of texts, such as parables, were used for outsiders or for the edification of catechumens. I. Colditz, “Manichäische Parabeln - didaktische Literatur für Hörer?,” in *Zur lichten Heimat: Studien zu Manichäismus, Iranistik und Zentralasienkunde im Gedenken an Werner Sundermann*, ed. Team Turfanforschung (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2017), 85-102.

<sup>142</sup> Gardner and Lieu, *MTRE*, 9, they state: “For the lay faithful in the Roman Empire it was a kind of superior Christianity, and the metaphysical details that attract the attention of scholars (and the higher echelons of the elect) had little profile. In the personal letters of the believers at Kellis there appears to be scarce knowledge or interest in the many gods and demons, and the intricacies of cosmology.” Other statement about secrecy is found in Chadwick: “but this myth belonged to the secrets of the cosmos which were first disclosed to those who penetrated far into the mysteries of the society. Augustine expressly records that the missionaries never started by revealing the Manichee cosmogony to those whom they had targeted for recruitment.” Chadwick, “The Attractions of Mani,” 217. On page 221, Chadwick concludes that the myth was kept on the background until “the person being recruited was already captured.”

<sup>143</sup> On secrecy and Manichaeans, see also G. G. Stroumsa, “Monachisme et marranisme chez les manichéens d’Egypte,” *Numen* 29, no. 2 (1982): 184-201; Matsangou, “Real and Imagined Manichaeans,” 159-70. On accusations of secrecy and concealment, see Pedersen, *Demonstrative Proof*, 204. This heresiological strategy is discussed in Berzon, *Classifying Christians*, 177.

<sup>144</sup> I would not go as far as Gardner, who has suggested that the Kellis version of Manichaeism had a limited role for the cosmological world of Manichaean deities and was “more matter-of-fact,” like a “kind of higher and more effective Christianity.” Gardner, *KLTI*, ix-x; Echoed in T. Pettipiece, “Rhetorica Manichaica: A Rhetorical Analysis of *Kephalaia* Chapter 38: “On the Light Mind and the Apostles and the Saints” (Ke



papyri and wooden tablets contained liturgical texts; no copy of the *Living Gospel*, the *Treasure of Life*, or the *Book of Giants* has been discovered among the textual fragments. The exceptions are liturgical in nature: Mani's *Epistles* and the daily prayers may very well belong to the core of the Manichaean textual tradition, going back to the first generations in Mesopotamia, but they are of a different character.

This is, however, not the same as affirming previous assumptions about the restricted role and knowledge of catechumens. On the contrary, what this brings to light is the unarticulated definition of a canon. Despite the prominent lists of Mani's books, the Kellis evidence shows that the scribal activity of Manichaeans was much wider. Matthaïos might have had access to the *Living Gospel*, but the documentary references to "the gospel" are hardly sufficient evidence. Likewise, the book of *The Great Prayers* and the "Greek *Psalms*" may have referred to canonical books, but could just as easily have referred to other psalms and prayers. Moreover, he did not own any of these books personally. Instead, several community members had to send them over for him to work on. In particular the role of mother Kouria, whom I have tentatively identified as his aunt (see Chapter 4), is striking: a woman identified as keeper of Manichaean books (P.Kell.Copt. 19).<sup>145</sup> The letters make clear that other members of the family also owned or circulated Manichaean books (for example in P.Kell.Copt. 20 and 120). Apparently, these catechumens had access to a large number of Manichaean texts, including books that may have had a canonical status.<sup>146</sup>

## 9.5 Conclusions

Scribal activity mattered to Manichaeans. Not only did they have an explicit and elaborate theory about the value of Mani's authorship, but also they actually produced large numbers of books and may have been involved in the transmission of other religious literature. While intuitively, the attention has always been directed toward questions about the origin of these books and the religious roots of Manichaeism, I have proposed to consider the usage of books in daily practice.

The examination of all passages in the Kellis papyri brings to the fore a broad range of texts and books. Mostly, book titles mentioned in the letters are difficult to identify, but in combination with the manuscripts found on the site, it is possible to discern biblical books, Christian apocrypha, Classical literature, and Manichaean texts. Although there was no trace of canonical books like the *Living Gospel* or the *Treasure of Life*, some of these texts may have belonged to the so-called "Manichaean canon." The identifications are tentative, with the exception of a Coptic version of Mani's *Epistles* that has been positively identified. Speculation about the reasons for the absence of other canonical works has, erroneously in

---

89.19-102.12)," in *Coptica - Gnostica - Manichaica: Mélanges offerts à Wolf-Peter Funk*, ed. P. H. Poirier and L. Painchaud (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 740.

<sup>145</sup> Franzmann, "The Manichaean Women in the Greek and Coptic Letters from Kellis," suggests that perhaps Kouria supported the child throughout his training.

<sup>146</sup> Contra Leurini, *Contra Leurini, Hymns in Honour*, 25-26. Robin Lane Fox refers to the circulation of Nepos' book on the millennium, which circulated among the villages of the Arsinoite nome, to the great displeasure of the bishop Dionysius. Eusebius, *HE*, 7.24.6; Lane Fox, "Literacy and Power in Early Christianity," 145.

my opinion, led to the idea that catechumens were excluded from higher forms of esoteric knowledge. The Kellis documents show, in fact, that catechumens played a very active role in the scribal traditions of the Manichaean community. Matthaïos was involved with members of the elect, but his scribal activities are not directly associated with the Teacher. While Piene is traveling with the Teacher, Matthaïos was trained as a scribe in the oasis. Rather than understanding this training, and book production in general, as part of missionary activities, we should understand it as part of his ritualized practice. With Iricinschi and BeDuhn, I think that it served as a spiritual exercise focused on the formation of a self-identity instead of as the (re)production of information. Just like in other fourth-century "secondary religions," Manichaean rituals focused on self-improvement, by which listeners, readers, and writers allowed their minds to be shaped by the power of the books.<sup>147</sup> This perceived power is stressed in their hagiographical stories, in which books had "an iconic, almost totemic, status" because they were the tangible record of supernatural revelation.<sup>148</sup>

With this background in mind, we have to return to the interpretation of the doctrinal flip card (T.Kell.Copt. 1). This miniature wooden board has been seen as a flip card to teach the complex details of the Manichaean doctrine. Gardner suggests that "it would seem that in their evangelical mission the elect presented the faith as that of the true church, and as the fulfilment of Jesus's teaching. Catechumens would then be slowly drawn into the community and gradually introduced to the higher knowledge of Mani's revelation."<sup>149</sup> Even though it is only natural to assume a certain level of knowledge differentiation, this flip card mentioning the Third Ambassador shows that the Manichaeans in the village had knowledge of the same doctrinal system as laid out in the *Kephalaia* and other Manichaean texts, including in this text alone the Third Ambassador, the Father of Greatness, and the twelve aeons of the Father.<sup>150</sup> Doctrinal and cosmological knowledge was clearly available in Kellis, even though it may not have characterized most of the liturgical documents. This snapshot of history shows connectedness and similarities with Manichaeism as attested in other regions. The use of Syriac writing in Kellis is another indication of the transregional connections or the awareness of a Manichaean tradition and history outside the Egyptian-Roman world. It was not a question of Syrian missionaries proselytizing in a new area, translating their work into Coptic, but rather of Coptic scribes extending their focus from Greek and Coptic to Syriac. The tentative evidence for the use of Syriac during church gatherings is, moreover, highly remarkable. If Ision was indeed a church lector appointed for specific readings in Syriac, this would have stood out as an extraordinary group-specific practice beyond anything performed or experienced by other fourth-century Kellites.

The scribal culture as well as the texts written and read by these Kellites has shed light on several instances of high Manichaeanness, while they also showed a wider context with Classical and biblical texts. This combination of situations of activated and deactivated

---

<sup>147</sup> Iricinschi, "Hebrew Scriptures and Persian Books," 175.

<sup>148</sup> Reeves, "Manichaeans as *Ahl Al-Kitab*. A Study in Manichaean Scripturalism," 251.

<sup>149</sup> Gardner, *KLTI*, 4.

<sup>150</sup> Contra Gardner, *KLTI*, 4.

Manichaeanness is characteristic of the situation in Kellis and will therefore be further explored and theorized in Part III.



# **Part III.**

## **Conclusions**



## Chapter 10. Manichaeans and Everyday Groupness

[Augustine] was a rhetorician, a teacher, a family man, and an amateur astrologer. His bookshelf was lined with volumes of Cicero, Seneca, Virgil, Aristotle, and pseudo-Pythagoras. He also read a little Mani, and took initiation as a Manichaean auditor (Jason BeDuhn).<sup>1</sup>

The last six chapters have brought to the fore several fundamental elements of everyday life in Kellis: family relations, work, death, language use, gift-giving, reading, communal gathering, singing and praying. These practices could be examined up close because of the great body of documents, as well as the connections between personal letters and liturgical texts. They have been examined for traces of Manichaeanness, which I defined as instances of collective solidarity with the imagined Manichaean community. By asking where and when a Manichaean group affiliation mattered, I identified situations in which religion affected everyday life, as well as those instances in which it hardly mattered at all. In result, the foregoing chapters have sketched a wide array of quotidian practices in a specific microhistorical context that demonstrate the untidiness of religion in everyday life.

This chapter will summarize the impact of Manichaeism on four basic categories of everyday action: talking, choosing, performing, and consuming Manichaeanness. As these findings suggest that Manichaeanness was only infrequently activated, the second section will explore the tension between the characterization of Manichaeism as a “secondary” or “utopian” religion and the observed intermittence of Manichaeanness.

### 10.1 Untidy History: Manichaeanness in Everyday Life

Drawing all the threads together, I will summarize my observations in the four categories of action used by Fox and Miller-Idriss to address the role of nationhood in everyday life experience (see Chapter 2). Following their lead, I will describe the everyday activation, or experience, of Manichaeanness in talking, choosing, performing, and consuming. Together, these sections will show the invaluable corrective nature of the Kellis sources. They challenge prevailing assumptions about Manichaean groups and capture the nuance and complexity of religious groupness in daily life.<sup>2</sup>

Previous studies, mostly published before all Coptic documentary texts were published, have frequently interpreted the Kellis finds within existing reconstructions of Manichaeism, using the new finds to reinforce existing conceptualizations rather than to challenge them. I have pointed out that the Manichaeans of Kellis have frequently been described as sectarian and persecuted, but also as engaged in mission work and claiming a

---

<sup>1</sup> BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma* 1, 287.

<sup>2</sup> The section title alludes to A. E. Franklin, “Untidy History: Reassessing Communal Boundaries in Light of the Cairo Geniza Documents,” in *Age of Transition: Byzantine Culture in the Islamic World*, ed. H. C. Evans (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015), 54-69.

Christian identity.<sup>3</sup> Most notably, Peter Brown has repeatedly stressed the “intense solidarity” and “spiritual friendship” that would have characterized the Manichaeans of Kellis.<sup>4</sup> Such strong religious interpretations are not without merit, as they corroborate the observation that Manichaeans were among the first to think about themselves and others as distinct communities defined by their religion (as for example set out in their list of ten advantages of the Manichaean church). My examination of all the published Kellis documents, however, has raised serious questions about the validity of these strong religious interpretations. In particular, I have stressed the risk of embracing the “groupism” that is articulated in elite theological sources. These elite perspectives gave rise to the prevailing notion of Late Antiquity as a predominantly religiously defined era in which individuals either belonged to well-defined religious groups, or were involved in the identity formation of nascent religious communities. The everyday letters and business accounts examined in this dissertation only infrequently corroborated this assumption. Although many passages in the Kellis letters can be harmonized with some of the previous interpretations based on religious groupism, I have pleaded for a minimalist interpretation. Rather than thinking about the Manichaeans as a persecuted sect with strong in-group bonds, we have seen how infrequently religion defined everyday life as visible in the papyri.

The result is twofold. On the one hand, I have exposed the weak factual basis of some—in my eyes rather tentative—historical interpretations of the local Manichaean community in Kellis. These interpretations included the looming threat of religious persecution, the mandatory presence of the elect and the daily ritual meal, as well as the existence of a Manichaean monastery in the oasis. On the other hand, I have shown that the observed multiple cross-affiliations or identifications of the individuals in our corpus do not render religious identifications insignificant. Rather, I have highlighted both situations in which Manichaeanness was extremely visible and relevant and occasions in which it remained latent, inactivated, or invisible. I believe that the dynamic between these two modes of religion in everyday life is of fundamental importance to the study of lived ancient religion. I will therefore return to this intermittence of religion in everyday life in the second part of this chapter, after having sketched exactly where and when Manichaeanness mattered in Kellis.

### ***10.1.1 Talking Manichaeanness: Politeness Strategies and Funding the Elect***

The duration and impact of the experience of solidarity with the Manichaean group, what I have called Manichaeanness, varied. It could arise as an occasional event or become a long-lasting affiliation. Whether occasional or dominant, this experience was constructed and maintained discursively through talking and writing. Previous studies have highlighted how religious authorities constructed religious social imaginaries in their theological or polemical accounts. What has received less attention is how routine talk in everyday interaction contributed to the awareness of such social imaginaries in more mundane situations.

---

<sup>3</sup> Gardner, Alcock, Funk, *CDT1*, 72-82.

<sup>4</sup> Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 159.



I have argued that the authors of the Kellis letters framed situations in their choice of words, formulas, and self-designators. They marked them as group-specific religious events. In doing so, they reappropriated elements from Manichaean texts and theology. They could talk Manichaeanness by approaching their recipients as “children of the living race” or “daughters of the Light Mind.” The most explicit examples of phrases that carried Manichaean connotations came from the fundraising letters of the elect (P.Kell.Copt 31 and 32 stand out), who needed the support of catechumens to live their ascetic lives and fulfill their role in the process of liberating the Living Soul. Additionally, a Manichaean repertoire was employed by other authors as a politeness strategy, stressing a common bond in the introduction of their letters. The primary goal of most ancient letters was not to convey information, but rather to maintain existing social relations and foster new ones. Religiously marked politeness strategies played a large role in defining relations and nourishing group bonds. Specific words, phrases, and self-designators were therefore employed in the introduction of the letter to present the relationship in a favourable light and according to the author’s wishes. Sometimes, this meant incorporating Manichaean formulas, while other situations drew on more conventional repertoires. Modern historians and papyrologists can, therefore, at times detect ancient religious affiliations based on the use of specific phrases and formulas. This has been a blessing for a historical perspective from below, but I have stressed the need to study the language use and linguistic choices primarily as performative actions in specific situations, rather than to use them as one-on-one criteria for establishing religious backgrounds. This is particularly relevant for the large set of marked phrases that were shared by Manichaeans, Christians, and others; the dual usage of words and formulas that were perceived as powerful by people of various ways of life. The prayer formulas, studied in Chapter 4, are a case in point, as their terminology is not exclusively Manichaean. In contrast to the interpretation offered by David Martinez, however, I think that ultimately the closest parallels to these tripartite prayer formulas in the Kellis letters are found in the fragments of Mani’s *Epistles*. Ancient letter recipients familiar with this Manichaean epistolary style would have noticed the similarities, but others may have thought of alternative (i.e., Christian) liturgical parallels, or simply admired it for its display of learned literary skills.

The personal letters displayed different levels of activated Manichaeanness. It was not always necessary to approach the recipients as “children of the living race.” Many of the Kellis letters simply greet the recipients with kinship terminology, or simple designators related to the household or neighborhood. In fact, the previous chapters have sketched a modest picture of daily life, in which Manichaeanness was only occasionally salient as one of the membership categories in a wider array of options. The majority of the identifications show that the Kellites who wrote the papyrus letters did not envision, or represented, themselves as belonging to a secluded, closed-off, or persecuted religious group. Despite occasionally strong religious language, there is no trace of major interreligious group conflicts, nor of any internal tension between religious identifications and the non-Manichaean social obligations and expectations. With some exceptions, the Manichaeans of

Kellis seem to have identified themselves with the village and with their family first, before religious self-designators came into play.

Two situations stand out from this pattern, in which Manichaean group-identification was not only salient, but was made visible in words: fundraising and singing. The fundraising letters of the elect have been mentioned already, as they played a major role in my reconstruction of the Manichaean community at Kellis. These letters contain the most explicit repertoire, including elaborate Manichaean self-designators. Rhetorically, they situated author and recipients in a narrative reality in which alms were frequently given for the sake of releasing the Living Soul. Elect reminded the local community of catechumens of their role in the cosmological battle between Light and Darkness, even though they themselves worked at a distance. I have stressed how the geographical circumstances of the Egyptian desert fundamentally defined the relation between catechumens and elect. In contrast to previous reconstructions, as well as in contrast to the normative theological framework, I have claimed that daily interaction between elect and catechumens was mostly impossible. The elect mainly traveled in the Nile valley and although they may have visited the oasis, the everyday distance between the two classes of the Manichaean community was primarily overcome by travelers carrying letters.

Singing was the second situation in which Manichaeanness was activated in talk—or rather speech acts. The vacuum left by the absence of the elect seems to have been filled with regular gatherings for catechumens, who came together to sing psalms, pray, and listen to scripture readings. The details on the liturgy and frequency of these communal gatherings are sparse. It is tempting to fill the gaps by comparing them to Christian gatherings in the same period, or Manichaean liturgies from other regions. I have avoided this gap-filling strategy by focusing on the extant manuscripts of the psalms and the prayers, as well as by tracing minor papyrological vignettes, like Ision's role as lector and Piene's training to read in every church. Chapter 7 has suggested that these communal gatherings contributed to the formation of a discrete Manichaean group identity and style through certain performative aspects (see below) and the verbal reiteration of the Manichaean cosmological and theological narrative. Participation in these gatherings, as well as the performative function of ritual meals, singing, and the commemoration of the dead, constituted social situations in which Manichaean doctrine mattered to individual Kellites.

Besides these two instances in which the Manichaean church and world view were the topic of conversation, there are passages in which Manichaeanness is hinted at, or implied, in the choice of words. This unintentional use of Manichaean repertoire resembles what Fox and Miller-Idriss have called talking *with* nationhood, in which the nation is not the object of talk but rather a disposition that shines through.<sup>5</sup> In a similar vein, the Kellis letters sometimes contain a repertoire of phrases and formulas that connote Manichaeanness, even

---

<sup>5</sup> "[T]he nation not as the object of talk but rather as an unselfconscious disposition about the national order of things that intermittently informs talk. The nation in this sense is a way of seeing, doing, talking and being that posits and sometimes enacts the unproblematic and naturalizing partition of the world into discrete ethnocultural units." Fox and Miller-Idriss, "Everyday Nationhood," 540, citing Brubaker (their italics).

though it is not always explicit or exclusive. It is, of course, difficult to determine, after sixteen hundred years, which terminology would have carried what religious connotations. What we can say, despite the difficulties involved, is that there is ample evidence for phrases in personal letters that were common in Manichaean scripture(s) and unattested or uncommon in the surviving corpus of Greek and Coptic papyrus letters, such as the allusion to the “Father, the God of truth” in the letter cited in the introduction. In Chapters 4 and 5, I have treated this repertoire less as a deliberate marker of a distinct religious identity and more as an in-group language that followed from the socialization in a group style. Presumably, the authors and scribes copied elements from the style of the letters of the elect, from Mani’s *Epistles*, and the speech patterns they picked up during the liturgy. As a result, readers familiar with this group style would pick up on the groupness carried in the linguistic variation or in the choice of Coptic as a literary language. I am less certain about the direct correlation of these elements with the activation of Manichaeanness. Rather, I suggest that the recipients would have picked up a sense of commonality and connectedness that included identifications with the family, village, and a religious community.

Talking Manichaeanness could strengthen group bonds and contribute to the notion of a coherent Manichaean group. In turn, this groupness led to the possibility of institutionally mediated choices, like burials or alms gifts.

### 10.1.2 *Choosing Manichaeanness: Almsgiving and Burial Customs*

Demarcated religious groups in Late Antiquity were not only a matter of talk. Imagined religious communities were real for people in their day-to-day life. They had a profound impact on everyday actions, and not only as repertoires to draw on when writing a letter. I have sketched several situations in which the religious group was implied in the decisions of Kellites, but I have also noted the frequent absence of any institutionally mediated choices. Most remarkable was the limited (but not nonexistent) impact on giving and burial customs.

Giving was an institutionally mediated choice. Manichaean theological texts presented a full ideology of giving in which these social interactions were strongly related to the salvation of the cosmos. Many features from this ideology are attested in the Kellis papyri: the division in catechumens and elect is visible and there are clearly letters with requests for alms. It is therefore not unlikely that some Kellites donated food or other commodities for specifically Manichaean reasons. Since these interactions and transactions blended and intersected with other behavioral expectations, it is not easy to discern the motivation behind gifts. My skeptical reading of some of the previously identified instances of Manichaean almsgiving in the papyri has led to the suggestion that gift exchange in Kellis was less defined by the normative framework (as presented in the *Kephalaia*) and more by the social and geographical circumstances of the village. In this multilayered world, religious ideas and practices were not pre-given constructs acted out or put to use in an alternative domain of everyday life, without conscious reflection, but they belonged to the sphere of daily interactions between individuals.<sup>6</sup> The interaction between various socializations and

---

<sup>6</sup> Modern lived religion studies have highlighted individual variation and the situational nature of religious talk. On the relative absence of explicit religious identification and discussion, see C. Bender, *Heaven’s*

social roles also suggests that it is not likely that the Manichaeans constituted an exclusive community. Against the interpretation of Majella Franzmann, I have argued that it is most likely that the Manichaeans of Kellis continued most of their interactions with their (non-Manichaean) family and neighbors on the basis of their shared village identification. Even though the religious group norms may have led to an exclusive stance, as for example suggested by Augustine, the impact of the other social factors must have led to a continuation of gifts beyond the community's boundaries. It appears, moreover, that catechumens also gave to other catechumens, a type of gift exchange that is hardly discussed in their own religious writings (with the possible exception of 1 Keph. 77). While none of these interactions and gifts directly contradict the institutionally mediated choices or expectations, they attest to a full spectrum of social actions, in religiously motivated gifts had a rather limited place.

Death ritual is the second cluster of actions where the impact of Manichaeanness on individual choices was examined. It included rituals surrounding the deathbed, burial, and commemoration. Manichaeans had elaborate ideas about what happened to the soul after death, just like many of their contemporaries in fourth- and fifth-century Egypt. This is visible in the Kellis papyri, which include a short hymn (or prayer) listing the seven stages of the postmortem journey of the soul. These stages have also been found in various Manichaean psalms, studied by Siegfried Richter. My exploration of the Kellis Psalms has shown that some of these songs were also known in the village. I have followed Richter's identification of this ritual setting as a commemorative event. The Manichaeans supported the ascent of the soul through the performance of commemorative rituals, including singing songs and giving alms. Additionally, I have argued for the existence of another ritual moment at the deathbed, during the precious moment that the soul left the body. Although there is less information available about this ritual practice, the grief expressed in one of the Kellis letters points to the importance of the ritualization of these last moments on earth. Matthaïos's grief about the absence of the elect, as well as the entire community of catechumens, at the moment of departure shows that Manichaeanness was sky-high in these instances. Choosing Manichaeanness meant embracing the efficacy of the songs and prayers of the elect as potent powers, capable of affecting the afterlife of the soul.

The activation of Manichaeanness in dealing with death is, however, but one side of the story. What the sources fail to tell us is what Manichaeans thought about burial. Without textual indications of what Manichaean burials looked like, it is impossible to identify Manichaean tombs or interments. Despite some suggestions by archaeologists about the poverty of graves, the orientation of the body, and the absence of burial goods, the archaeological remains of tombs and cemeteries at Kellis remain silent on this issue. Either the specific religious practices left no trace, or Manichaeans followed local customs without religiously marked and tangible variations. With our current set of textual and material

---

*Kitchen. Living Religion at God's Love We Deliver* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 140ff. Methodological reflections on the translation from observations of action in one situation to another situation, see D. Trouille and I. Tavory, "Shadowing: Warrants for Intersituational Variation in Ethnography," *Sociological Methods & Research* (2016): 1-27.

evidence, it is impossible to locate and identify Manichaean graves. I have argued that it is most probable that they followed local burial customs. There is no reason for speculative connections with late Chinese sources on putative Manichaean funeral rituals. In the specific circumstances of the Dakhleh Oasis, Manichaeans participated in the common burial practices that they shared with most of their neighbors, with a relatively poor treatment of the body and a simple grave without tangible religious elements in the material culture or orientation. Whether these decisions were made deliberately, based on specific theological ideas about the value of the body, cannot be determined with certainty, especially since it is unknown what Manichaeans would have said or done at the site of the tomb. With the current state of our sources, choosing Manichaeanness in burial customs remains invisible.

### *10.1.3 Performing Manichaeanness: Communal Gatherings and Psalm Singing*

A close affiliation with the Manichaean group was performed at various occasions: in regular communal gatherings, in the daily prayers, and in offering hospitality to the elect. The performance of these actions involved a redefinition of the communal identity in light of Manichaean notions about voluntary poverty, reciprocal obligations, and the salvation of Light. Manichaean psalms and prayers not only narrated the Manichaean cosmology, thus reiterating important ideas, but were also performed during intense moments of groupness. These songs were sung in unison or antiphonally, presumably accompanied by ritual gestures and acclamations like “Yes and Amen” (1 Keph. 122). The combination of bodily experience, singing, and the perceived efficacy of these acclamations contributed to the activation of Manichaeanness and the socialization of the self within the community. The same holds true for the daily prayers. By prostrating themselves thirty times during the three sets of daily prayers, catechumens acted on their self-identification as Manichaeans, presumably even within communal settings.

I have argued that the participation in these gatherings and the bodily experience of taking part in the singing, praying, and prostrating affected groupness. There are, however, also three reasons for a limited impact of these gatherings. In the first place, it is unclear how regularly these gatherings took place and how many people participated in them. Second, we do not know to what extent all participants understood what was going on. In particular, the use of Syriac could have hampered the audience’s understanding of the liturgy. Comparative studies of Ancient Christian preachers and their audiences suggest that it would be a mistake to consider the audience as eager pupils who would adjust their behavior in response to what was being said.<sup>7</sup> The geographical situation of the oasis, third, led to a lifestyle in which traveling was of fundamental importance, which meant that people like Makarios and Pamour could not frequently attend the communal gatherings in Kellis. Nonattendance, rather than attendance, may have been the norm.

Other opportunities for the performance of Manichaean group identity were connected with the hospitality for the elect and communal traveling. Hospitality may have played a role in the Kellis community, but is never explicitly expressed in the material.

---

<sup>7</sup> Sandwell, *Religious Identity*, 16. See section 7.5.3 above on the pedagogical and didactical function of psalms during the liturgy.

Traveling with members of the elect, on the other hand, is visible. Some of these journeys had specifically religious functions. Piene traveled with the Teacher to learn to read in every church. He may even have been trained as one of the new members of the elect. Matthaïos's journeys with Apa Lysimachos and Philammon's association with the elect appear to have been less religiously motivated. They may have traveled together, taken care of the elect, shared in songs, meals, or confession, but at the same time they conducted business at the various markets in the Nile valley. I have stressed that there is no explicit trace of any missionary activity. The postulated connection between mission and the production of books is therefore entirely dictated by hagiographical narratives and reports about the Manichaean tradition. It is never explicitly found in the Kellis letters, even though there are numerous references to scribal activity and the circulation of Manichaean books.

Rather than directly informing us about the missionary practices of Manichaeans in Egypt, the passages concerning the production of texts have been read as revealing that Manichaean catechumens in Kellis were involved in the reproduction of texts that may have belonged to the inner core of books attributed to Mani (*The Gospel*, *Mani's Epistles*, and perhaps the *Psalms and Prayers*). The scribal activity associated with these texts, accordingly, knew moments of intense Manichaeanness when the scribe stepped into the Manichaean authorial tradition to participate in the recounting of Mani's wisdom. Two specific literary situations indexed Manichaeanness. The first situation was the public reading of Manichaean texts by the ecclesiastical reader or lector, which was a major event. Especially remarkable is that one of the Kellis letters suggests that the local community was in touch with a lector who read texts in Syriac. I have listed the various fragments of documents in Kellis that included Syriac writing and concluded that the public performance of reading a Syriac text in a communal gathering would have been a very marked and explicit moment connoting the imagined Manichaean community and its roots in third-century Syria and Mesopotamia. The second situation comprised the production of Manichaean texts and its ritualization through scribal practice. I have suggested that this may have included memorization and chanting, making it in itself a performance of a marked Manichaean groupness.

#### ***10.1.4 Consuming Manichaeanness: Reading and Copying Texts***

In many respects, the Kellis letters have shown the absence of sharp demarcations between a Manichaean group and the outside world. There is hardly any evidence for the consumption of religiously marked products: there is, for example, no trace of specifically Manichaean art or architecture. Economic interactions crossed religious categories, and consumption habits based on the material culture of the houses in Kellis show no visible distinctions from other houses. If Manichaeanness affected what ancient Kellites bought, or ate, it remains invisible in our sources.

The only instance in which we could possibly detect the expression of religious difference through consumption habits is in the local reading habits. We do not know who was responsible for the production of the documents found in Houses 1–5, but the correlation between the wood used for some of the inscribed wooden boards and the acacia wood found among the carpenter tools in House 2 suggests that they were probably locally produced. I have suggested to approach these documents, as well as the papyrological

passages pertaining to scribal activity, as revealing the local reading practices of the Kellites in Houses 1–3. These reading practices conveyed the impression that on the one hand, Manichaean literature was read and copied by these individuals, while on the other hand, they showed that a wider range of texts were read and studied. Some of the documents belonged to Classical literature, such as the work of Homer and the orations of Isocrates. Other texts are best described as biblical or apocryphal texts (the compilation based on the *Acts of John* and the fragments of two NT letters). Likewise, some of the Manichaean letter authors were involved in the production of amulets and spells (mostly without clear indication of the religious background of the client). In many ways, then, the situation at Kellis resembles BeDuhn’s characterization of Augustine, cited at the outset of this chapter. Just like Augustine, some of these Kellites read widely, thereby including the consumption of Manichaean texts in a broader spectrum of learning.

The scribal activity performed in Kellis shows that catechumens were deeply involved in the reproduction and study of Manichaean texts. I have argued that Makarios’s letters reveal how various Manichaean books could be requested and sent to his son Matthaïos for scribal practice. The documents found in Houses 1–3 also include Manichaean texts on papyrus and wood. Many of these are liturgical texts, mostly psalms for communal singing or texts used as examples in writing exercises. Some papyri, on the other hand, contained doctrinal texts, such as Mani’s *Epistles* and a doctrinal text resembling the *Kephalaia*. The most remarkable discovery is the wooden board with a Greek version of the daily Manichaean prayers that are also known in Middle Persian and Arabic versions. The presence of these documents points to the long transregional connections of the Manichaean tradition. The Manichaeans of Kellis were able to draw on the liturgical traditions of the Manichaean Psalmbook as well as the religious traditions behind the *Epistles*. In this respect, the documents show the influence of a marked and group-specific religious tradition, in which books played a major role. They show that even at the fringes of the Roman Empire, in the western desert of Egypt, individuals followed the traditions associated with the Apostle of Light.

### 10.1.5 Summary

This examination of the full corpus of published texts from Kellis has offered an almost mundane image of a Manichaean life *from below*. For most of the letter authors, Manichaeism was one of the affiliations, but it did not pervade everyday life in all aspects.

Rather than providing a full-fledged counternarrative, standing in stark contrast with the institutional regulations of a Manichaean life, this reconstruction of Manichaeanness in everyday life offers a mixture of instances with marked Manichaean language and rituals, and situations without any trace of this repertoire. There is no indication of religious conflict, few hints of boundary maintenance, and little explicit discussion of what went on in religious gatherings. This rather limited role of religious groupness concurs with the observations of Eric Rebillard about the Christians of second-, third- and fourth-century North Africa. Although his corpus of texts required a different type of approach, it has yielded similar conclusions. Christianness, in his analysis, was only intermittently given salience in everyday life, as individuals were also involved in social groups that were not

directly based on Christian texts or institutions. He concludes that “when I looked for contexts in which Christianity was the principle of group formation, I not only found very few, but I also concluded that instances of groupness did not necessarily last.”<sup>8</sup> In contrast to the strongly religious portrayal of everyday life engagements in late antique homilies and other prescriptive texts, “religion and religious affiliation were neither the unique nor even the primary principles of action for Christians.”<sup>9</sup>

The same dichotomy is visible for Manichaeans. Papyrus letters convey a distinctly different picture from most literary sources. Whereas in literary and historical texts religious situations take a central stage, the role of Manichaeanness in the personal letters from Kellis is occasional at best, often embedded in side references without additional or situational information. In this respect, it may be useful to call to mind Brubaker’s warning that if we try “to understand *how* ethnicity matters [...] it is important to bear in mind *how little* it mattered to much of everyday experience.”<sup>10</sup> My historical enquiry into religion and everyday life resembles Brubaker’s analysis of the lived experience of modern ethnicity. Despite the totalizing narrative or views of political and religious leaders, the everyday preoccupations of ordinary people only occasionally show the salience of elite classifications and boundaries. The grand narratives told by political or religious leaders were not without influence, but they cannot be taken as neutral representations of local realities. By focusing, instead, on individuals, I have illustrated where and when they called on these classifications and repertoires, while at the same time they frequently worked with other frames of reference.

As the papyri derive from several generations, these conclusions are in need of quantification. The earliest generation of Manichaeans, presumably those under the patronage of Pausanias (in the 330s and 340s) may have had other experiences than those associated with Makarios and his children (in the 350s and 360s), or those who had to abandon the village in a time of changing environmental and legal conditions (in the 370s and 380s).

My skeptical position concerning groupism has steered this research away from the a priori assumption of a coherent Manichaean tradition with well-demarcated religious groups toward more fluid and situational models of religious identification and behavior. It has revealed that our reconstruction of Late Antiquity as the cradle of “secondary” religion, with its autonomous religious groups, is a rather limited—or selective—image of what went on in the lives and minds of these people. On the one hand, these secondary religious communities are the primary key to understanding late antique Egyptian society, but on the other hand, they are optical illusions, evoked by religious leaders and their textual resources. Underneath the discursive construction of religious groupness existed a variety of individual choices, the intermittence of religious identifications, and the wider array of religious group styles and repertoires that could be called on to bring structure to everyday experiences. In result, this study has shown gaps in the so-called “religious bias” of the study of late antique

---

<sup>8</sup> Rebillard, *Christians and their Many Identities*, 93.

<sup>9</sup> Rebillard, *Christians and their Many Identities*, 93.

<sup>10</sup> Brubaker et al., *Everyday Ethnicity*, 206.



Egypt, as if the period and region were more defined by monasticism, Christological controversies, and theological developments, than other parts of the ancient world.<sup>11</sup>

What we need to capture, therefore, is the “sociological untidiness” of ancient religious communities: the local diversity and individual agency at the level of the everyday practices.<sup>12</sup> Much of everyday life was devoid of group-specific religious inflections, but it could be highly salient in certain situations. Against previous interpretations of the Manichaeans at Kellis as a “sectarian,” “exclusive,” and “persecuted” community, I have stressed that talking, choosing, performing, and consuming Manichaeanness had its place, but simply not as the primary mode of all individual action. Kellites were Kellites, even when they praised Mani on Mondays and prostrated themselves while facing the sun and the moon.

### 10.2 The Late Antique Transformation of Religion

The second aim of this dissertation was to locate and contextualize the transformation(s) of “religion” in a specific historical context. In Chapter 2, I characterized this large-scale transformation as one from a world in which religion was embedded within preexisting social formations to one in which competing religious groups became organized as discrete social units. This latter type is frequently called “secondary” or “utopian” religion, as the organizational differentiation was closely tied to a changing world view. Rather than preserving the status quo, these new group-specific religions developed universal claims, challenging the social order and emphasizing an exclusive concept of truth. This type of religion is exemplified in Manichaeism. Theological texts such as the *Kephalaia* have shown the explicit conceptualization of the Manichaean church as an autonomous, religiously defined group, claiming superiority over all previous religions because of their universal wisdom and organizational strength.

While Manichaeism generally corresponds to many characterizations of “secondary” or “utopian” religion, the story *on the ground* appears to have been different. The microhistorical analysis of the Kellis letters has shown that the authors only intermittently associated with others in Manichaean terms, as well as with the transregional Manichaean tradition. On the one hand, their religion was no longer coterminous with their village or ethnic identity; it was a marked choice against the long village tradition of venerating Tutu. On the other hand, this local community was not crystalized into a coherent and well-demarcated religious group with explicit labels for insiders and outsiders. Building on Lahire’s theoretical work, I have suggested that the regular interactions with neighbors, their business ventures, or legal appeals almost never asked for the activation of religious dispositions. Rather than accepting the totalizing vision of religious groupism, I have highlighted the infrequency and situatedness of religious identifications or group norms. As this conclusion seems to be at odds with the common message conveyed in studies of “secondary religion” and the tendency to focus on processes of religious-identity formation

<sup>11</sup> See the complaints in A. Papaconstantinou, “Egypt,” In *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. S. F. Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 197.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Brown has emphasized the “sociological untidiness of the Christian communities of around 400 AD.” Brown, “From Civic Euergetism to Christian Giving,” 29.

in Late Antiquity, the following sections will explore three—potentially related—explanations of this paradoxical situation.

### ***10.2.1 Conflict Model: Lived Religion as Resistance***

The first and easiest explanation is to place lived religious practice in a binary opposition with institutional, textual, or elite religion. Some of the studies after the quotidian turn have followed this route by highlighting the manifold instances in which individual practices deviated from institutional norms and models. This has been a necessary redirection of focus, to remind us that the words of religious leaders cannot be taken to represent their entire community. Rather than finding theologically matching practices and ideas, these studies have focused on deviant voices that illustrate the diversity and complexity within religious traditions. Frequently, these deviant voices has been interpreted as a type of resistance against the dominant frame: the voice of single individuals against the current of a powerful institution.<sup>13</sup> The downside of this conflict model is the way it equates lived religious practice with deviance or resistance (see also Chapter 2), while concealing how frequently lived religious practices follow and absorb religious group norms, or how little religious leaders sometimes knew of the so-called elite religious traditions. Rather than following this conflict model, the various chapters of Part II have tried to keep lived religion and institutional group norms together. In doing so, I have complicated the prevailing accounts of Manichaeism, highlighting situations in which religion was highly salient, as well as those instances in which it was invisible or absent. This version of a lived-religion approach, quite consciously called “everyday groupness,” is more than a revival of the binary opposition between the “great tradition” and the “little tradition.” Rather than juxtaposing religion and everyday life in a binary opposition, they belong together in a dialectical relationship, as everyday life is more than a site of “disruption” or resistance. It also includes instances in which institutional models are drawn on extensively.<sup>14</sup> This approach has allowed me to highlight where Manichaeism in Kellis was different from previous reconstructions based on theological and liturgical texts, as well as where it showed the remarkable salience of Manichaeanness. The conflict model is aimed at explaining the individual appropriation of religious ideas and practices in new and local situations, while we need an interpretative framework that can *also* incorporate the striking continuity

---

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Tweed has illustrated this with his description of a lady of Cuban descent who appropriated the site of the shrine of Our Lady of Charity of Cobre at Miami to perform Santería rituals, resisting normative Catholic interpretations of this shrine. T. Tweed, *Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 45-49.

<sup>14</sup> Some studies of everyday Islam have been accused of treating religion as a set of abstract rules that are lived out differently in the realm of the everyday life, as if religion and the everyday stand in a binary opposition. N. Fadil and M. Fernando, “Rediscovering the ‘everyday’ Muslim. Notes on an Anthropological Divide,” *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5, no. 2 (2015): 59-88. At pages 69-70, they accuse Samuli Schielke and others of treating everyday practices as “moments of disruption, of *not conforming* to religious norms.” This characterization of Schielke, in my view, does not do justice to his attempt to rethink the relation between everyday morality and everyday Islam.

between the Greek version of the daily Manichaean prayers at Kellis and the tenth-century Arabic version reported by Ibn al-Nadim.

### 10.2.2 *The Nature of the Sources*

A second potential explanation for some of the patterns in the evidence for local Manichaeanness is the specific documentary nature of the sources. What if Manichaeanness was not highly visible in the Kellis letters because letters are not the proper place for religious bickering? What if Manichaeanness was only intermittently visible because of the documentary nature of the sources? As people say: the absence of evidence is not evidence for absence. Historical information may have disappeared during the abandonment of the village and its subsequent long history of preservation and deterioration. Information regarding religious persecution or regular conflict with Christians could have been lost, destroyed by postdeposition processes, or never recorded in such a way that it could survive the test of times. As shared information between the author and the recipients, it may not have been necessary to identify the religious affiliations of social others, or discuss initiation rituals that set them apart from other villages. Would the documentary nature of these sources not explain the marked difference with the reconstructions of Manichaeism in hagiographical and theological texts?

Earlier papyrological studies have likewise observed how “ecclesiastical writers spill much ink on inner church conflicts and heresiological disputes in this period. But however large the tears such doctrinal disputes created in the intellectual and social fabric of community, they leave few, if any, traces in documentary papyri.”<sup>15</sup> AnneMarie Luijendijk concludes that papyrological evidence for the Ancient Christians of Oxyrhynchus is skewed toward clergy in similar ways as the literary record, since it is only in relation to the nascent institutional church that religiously marked language and titles tend to be used.<sup>16</sup> Many issues remain invisible without this explicit connection to clergy and an institutional church. In a village like Kellis, people must have known about most practices of their neighbors, especially if this included getting up at night to pray toward the moon, or extensive scribal activities. With this background knowledge in mind, there may have been no reason for authors to make explicit statements about religious affiliation, ritual, or conflict, except for the few instances in which religious groupness was discussed specifically.

This explanation for the intermittence of religiously marked language and information in personal letters can be extended with Swidler’s research into the way modern Americans employ multiple, often contradictory, cultural repertoires. She observed that many of her interlocutors did not offer coherent systems of meaning, but rather a “kaleidoscope of common sense” or “a swirling pattern of shifting justifications.”<sup>17</sup> This incoherence of narratives does not bother them, as by keeping their options open, they can

<sup>15</sup> Luijendijk, “On and Beyond Duty,” 104; Cf. Blumell, *Lettered Christians*, 154-5.

<sup>16</sup> A. Luijendijk, “The Dynamics of Religious Identity at Oxyrhynchus,” paper read during the Leiden University conference “Late Antique Religion in Practice: Religious Identification in Late Antique Papyri” (November 2017). I also owe the emphasis on nosy neighbors to her paper. An edited volume based on this conference will be edited by Eline Scheerlinck and me.

<sup>17</sup> Swidler, *Talk of Love*, 182.

strive to limit the uncertainty of social interactions. Just like modern Americans, who can switch between modes of representation, identifications, and different types of logic or narrative when the situation requires alternative approaches, ancient Kellites used “strategies of network diversification” in their letters. Rather than thinking about themselves and others in strictly religious terms, the authors employed a variety of identifications, leading to the typical situation of multiple layered social interactions. They could easily switch between the various frames of reference in their letters, either in relation to the topics discussed or the aim of a section of the letter. Introductory formulas frequently employed phrases and formulas with marked religious language, while the final greeting sections were often limited to a repertoire related to the social network of family and village relations. When read together, these sections of the letter constituted a social strategy of network diversification, addressing the recipients (and bystanders) on multiple levels at the same time. Where the letters of the elect could potentially fail entirely if the recipients did not accept the religious framing as “daughters of the holy church,” most everyday letters must have succeeded in their purposes because they kept multiple cultural meanings on tap. The requested support may have been sent because of the distant kinship relation, the shared village identification, or the affiliation to the Manichaean church. Appealing to more than one frame of reference enabled the letter authors to make the most out of the situation.

### *10.2.3 The Integrated and Segregated Mode of Everyday Religion*

The previous two explanations for the intermittence of Manichaeanness in everyday life can be developed in more depth with Swidler’s theoretical framework of culture in action. What if the absence or presence of Manichaean terminology points to sociopsychological patterns rather than only to epistolary conventions? Swidler’s notion of “settled life” can be used to explain the relatively infrequency of explicit Manichaeanness. In periods of settled life, Swidler states, culture reinforces social action through habitual acts and common sense. For most behavioral choices, individuals simply know from experience how to proceed.<sup>18</sup> Rather than deliberately choosing a course of action, people follow established cultural patterns. Following her lead, we can discern two modes of everyday religious practice: the integrated and segregated mode.

The integrated and segregated mode derive from Swidler’s observations on the marked difference between some of her interlocuters with regard to the way they used cultural repertoires in their daily lives. Even though all of them draw on the same cultural repertoire (she examined the way modern Americans talk about love), some fully integrated culture into their personal experience, while others seemed to keep them segregated. The segregated mode became visible when the interlocuters used elements from a cultural repertoire as “policy statements”: abstract cultural formulas as substitute for personal experiences. In this mode of cultural integration, the repertoire is highly regarded, but almost as a separate domain, only marginally affecting everyday actions and choices. It is a detached but elaborate philosophy that is not engaged in the transformation of the self, but

---

<sup>18</sup> Swidler, “Culture in Action,” 281.

primarily used to defend or express a stable orientation to the world.<sup>19</sup> Other interlocuters worked with a fully integrated mode of culture and everyday life, in which the conventional cultural repertoire was inserted into personal experiences and actively reworked into their understanding of life.<sup>20</sup>

Religious repertoires can be fully integrated in everyday life experiences, as well as kept more segregated from the majority of life's events. The integrated mode is part of unsettled life and requires extensive cultural work by all those involved, especially when the cultural distance between the local situation and the religious or cultural repertoire is substantial, as was the case for some of the Manichaeans in the Egyptian desert. The time and effort involved in this process means that it was primarily the elect who could have developed this integrated mode. The strict Manichaean regulations, moreover, made it imperative for them to reflect on their lifestyle and their daily interactions with others. Most catechumens, on the other hand, were expected to follow less strict ascetic rules. Even when they harmed the Living Soul, something that must have been inevitable to stay alive, they would receive forgiveness in their weekly confession rituals. These confession rituals may have spurred a more reflexive stance, but this is not frequently visible in the letters. For some of the authors, Manichaeism with its group norms was one of their affiliations, not necessarily the highest overarching identification that defined all other behavioral choices. The image that emerges from the Kellis letters is one of settled life, in which there is no urgent need to make religious affiliations explicit.

The segregated mode of religion has frequently been associated with religious behavior in modernity, but the shift toward autonomous religious groups is exactly what facilitated the conceptual segregation of group-specific practices and most everyday behavior. This has also been observed in Isabella Sandwell's comparative study of John Chrysostom, Libanius, and their respective audiences. She highlights the tension between Chrysostom's totalizing ideals and the more flexible attitude of most of his audience, who disagreed with him on the extent to which religion should permeate their lives. Instead, Sandwell argues, it is most likely that these individuals saw their religious affiliation as something that could be kept in a personal or family domain, sometimes even separate from the demands of other aspects of life.<sup>21</sup> Religious groupness was "something that had the minimum impact on how they lived their social lives and [they] would on different occasions position themselves within different forms of social organization *as it suited them*."<sup>22</sup> Rather than thinking about competing groups or conflicting, crosscutting social identities, Mairs's notion of "separation identities" may be closer to the mark, designating how infrequently the identification as Manichaeans affected their affiliation with the village or the family. Lahire's theoretical framework of multiple identifications, matching dispositions with the needs of situations, offers a fruitful perspective on the intermittence of these identifications in

---

<sup>19</sup> Swidler, *Talk of Love*, 53-55.

<sup>20</sup> Swidler, *Talk of Love*, 55-7.

<sup>21</sup> I. Sandwell, "John Chrysostom's Audiences and his Accusations of Religious Laxity," In *Religious Diversity in Late Antiquity*, ed. D. M. Gwynn and S. Bangert (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 540.

<sup>22</sup> Sandwell, *Religious Identity*, 242.

everyday life. Manichaeanness was occasionally salient, but frequently part of settled life in which explicit and distinctive religious behavior was not necessary. Sandwell explains her observations about settled life in Bourdieuan terms. Religious behavior derived from the embodied dispositions that have been turned into a second nature.<sup>23</sup> Bodily routines and mundane practices belonging to the almost boring repetition of everyday life are thus considered field-specific presuppositions that “go without saying,” or belong to a “practical sense,” or “feel for the game” that enables individuals to recognize situations and anticipate successful responses within various social environments and events.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, what would have happened to the Manichaeans when they had to abandon Kellis and move to Aphrodite or other places of the Nile valley? There is, unfortunately, no trace of them in the papyri from the beginning of the fifth century, but we can be sure that they needed new structures and rhythms to adapt to novel social environments. In light of the aforementioned theoretical suggestions, as well as the legal developments of the end of the fourth century, I see three plausible options. Some may have left their Manichaean identification, especially when it became more dangerous for them to perform Manichaeanness and adhere to its group norms. Others may have integrated their religion more fully into their everyday lifestyle, either by working more closely with the Manichaean elect, or by embracing a more detailed social imaginary in which the large cosmological narrative became connected to the situation on the ground. Manichaeanness may have been transformed, from an intermittently salient identification belonging to a cluster of social identifications in the oasis to a more well-defined, totalizing, or highly integrated religious group style that came to define more aspects of daily life. One could even imagine that the compilation of the *Kephalaia* in its final form as found in the Medinet Madi collection stemmed from this end of the fourth-, beginning of the fifth-century movement toward a more explicit conceptualization of the Manichaean group identity. The identification of historical and contemporary religious groups with the forces of Darkness in the Medinet Madi documents corroborates this more explicit conceptualization of Manichaeism in contrast to religious others (1 Keph. 38, and 59 and 122, see also Hom. 15.24–18.26). Future studies will have to examine to what extent these antagonistic conceptualizations went back to pre-fifth century texts and traditions. Unfortunately, little is known about this postulated Manichaeization of everyday life, but parallels are visible in the slow process of Christianization in Egypt.

A final strategy of latter-day Manichaeans was one that kept bishops up at night: crypto-Manichaeism. Some Manichaean ascetics during the fifth century decided to conceal their religious affiliation to avoid persecution. They presented themselves as proper Christian ascetics, living in cenobitic monasteries, while secretly devoting themselves to the teachings of Mani. This latter type of Manichaeism is the zenith of unsettled life, which required a constant vigilance to uphold both repertoires, even when the various obligations

---

<sup>23</sup> P. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990 ), 66-79; H. Kupari, "Lifelong Minority Religion: Routines and Reflexivity: A Bourdieuan Perspective on the Habitus of Elderly Finnish Orthodox Christian Women," *Religion* 46, no. 2 (2016): 145.

<sup>24</sup> Kupari, *Lifelong Religion as Habitus*, 23; Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 66.

and schemes of expectations led to daily conflict and concealment. The problematic plurality of investments in this setting could not be solved in the same way as the flexible negotiation of roles and identifications in Kellis.<sup>25</sup> Other studies will have to take up the complex relation between imagined threats in narratives of crypto-Manichaeism and real historical processes of secrecy and concealment.<sup>26</sup> The unsettled nature of intentional concealment, however, stands in stark contrast with the intermittence of Manichaeanness in everyday life in Kellis. While stories of crypto-Manichaeism need an explicit, marked, and well-defined religious identity, the Kellis letters convey the impression of settled life, with few conflicts between religious actions and expectations, and the common and communal way of life in a fourth-century Egyptian village.

---

<sup>25</sup> Lahire, "Habitus," 353-4.

<sup>26</sup> Matsangou, "Real and Imagined Manichaeans."

