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The Manichaeans of the Roman East: Manichaeism in Greek anti-Manichaica & Roman Imperial legislation

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Conclusions

1. Introduction

In this concluding chapter, instead of summarizing the individual conclusions of each chapter and following the sequence of the eight thematic pillars of this dissertation, I will attempt a horizontal scan of the study in order to answer the questions that run through the entire thesis and re-emerge steadily in all the chapters. These are: (1) the issue of reliability and interdependence of the sources, (2) the question of “real and imagined Manichaeans”, (3) the question of “the silence of the sources”, (4) the question of “why Manichaeans were persecuted to such an intense degree”, and finally (5) the question of “the identity of East-Roman Manichaeans and its transformation over time”. The above questions will act like threads that bring together the most significant findings of the study and will enable us to draw the final conclusions.

Concerning the first issue, and continuing the discussion started in the introduction, I hope that this thesis is a contribution to the revision of some clichés in scholarship regarding the value and importance of Greek anti-Manichaica for the reconstruction of Manichaean history in the Roman East. It is true that the difficulties and methodological problems identified by researchers regarding the Greek anti-Manichaean corpus apply to a large extent. Several scholars, trapped in the difficulties of the sources, either repeat what has already been said and which is centred around a limited number of sources, or avoid dealing with the matter altogether. Thus, an academic narrative has been created that passes from one researcher to another, a practice similar to that of some ancient writers who continue a Manichaean discourse stereotypically without having any personal experience of Manichaeans. For this reason, one of the goals of this dissertation has been to bring to the spotlight sources that, while being very important, have received little discussion (e.g. the *SC* and *SAF*) and others that have not been studied at all. Within the voluminous Greek (Christian) corpus there are texts that have never been commented upon and translated, especially their parts concerning Manichaeans.

Examining the totality of the sources by their chronological presentation and through their comparative examination and analysis, it has been shown that:

- (1) Not all Greek authors rely mainly on the *AA* (which is not as unreliable as initially thought); those who rely on the *AA*, do not always have the *AA* as their only source of information.
- (2) The word ‘Manichaean’ in our sources is not just a term of religious abuse but also refers to real Manichaeans. A sufficient number of sources attest to the presence of real Manichaeans in the Roman East.
- (3) Beyond the theological discussion, which undoubtedly dominates and focuses on the theme of dualism and on the question of theodicy, our sources also provide information that illuminates aspects of the portrait of East-Roman Manichaeans and of their everyday life.
- (4) Regarding the reliability of the genre of the sources, we have seen that just because most authors have a religiously inspired bias against Manichaeans does not mean that everything they say is unreliable. Nor does this mean that they do not preserve historical information, although they may not have intended to do so. A comparison with the Manichaean sources

that are currently known has shown that they preserve much accurate information, in some cases, indeed, drawn from original Manichaean texts.

All the literary genres of the corpus can contribute to the reconstruction of the image and history of the Manichaeans of the Roman East. Even the theological treatises, although they focus on theological argumentation and polemics, have their share in reconstructing not only Manichaean beliefs, but also Manichaean practices. The value of the live speeches (the homilies of Cyril and John Chrysostom), as well as of the letters written on the subject of the Manichaean question, lies in the fact that they substantiate the Manichaean presence at given times and places. The legal sources, first of all, present us with their own internal dynamics, and with evidence for the construction and treatment of Manichaeans. In this, they show a clear pattern of escalation. In many cases, however, they also reflect aspects of the daily life and practices of the Manichaeans. Finally, by means of the chronological and comparative examination of the sources, the importance and uniqueness of the *AFs* (*SC* and *SAF*) was pointed out, while a first suggestion was made regarding the question of why so much of the accurate information they provide did not find its way into contemporary and posterior anti-Manichaean sources. Certainly, further research needs to investigate thoroughly this highly interesting and intriguing issue.

It thus becomes apparent that the Greek anti-Manichaean corpus is worth studying in its own right, and not only partially and selectively, or as a complement to larger inquiries into Manichaean history. Besides, in order to reconstruct the history of Manichaeism in the Roman East, which is a part of the history of Manichaeism in general, the examination of the totality of the sources is indispensable. In the course of this study I attempted several times to highlight the differentiated context of the Roman East, which, compared to the Roman West, was religiously and culturally more pluralistic. This differentiated context must be taken into account in our interpretation, because it is a key parameter that affects the formation of the identity of East-Roman Manichaeans, as well as their representation and treatment by our anti-Manichaean authors.

2. Real and Imagined Manichaeans

One of the clichés that has dominated modern scholarship is that Greek anti-Manichaean authors did not confront real Manichaeans, and that they had neither personal experience nor contact with them, as opposed to Augustine, who did. Examining individual references to individuals designated as Manichaeans in Greek anti-Manichaica, scholars have been unanimous in their conclusion that those references did not concern real Manichaeans and that the term was rather used as a religious abuse targeting other religious groups. This has reached the point that one naturally wonders whether indeed there were any Manichaeans at all in the eastern part of the empire.

However, what more proof is needed to confirm the existence of real Manichaeans than the abjuration formulas? Such confirmation lies, on the one hand, in the ceremonial context in which these anathemas were used: the conversion ceremony of real Manichaeans. On the other, confirmation comes from the accuracy of the information they provide. Especially the *SC* provides the most accurate information in Greek anti-Manichaica on a number of subjects, such as the names of the first Manichaean missionaries, the titles of the books of the Manichaean canon, the grades of the Manichaean hierarchy, the Manichaean pantheon, a compendium of Manichaean beliefs on cosmology, anthropology and Christology, as well as Manichaean rituals, behaviour and ethics. Even if we had only these texts, there

would be sufficient testimony for the existence of Manichaeans, indeed of so many that the need of compiling set abjuration formulas arose. As I have argued, set abjuration formulas were likely established in times of massive conversions.

The ecclesiastical function of these texts (i.e. the fact that they were not literature intended to be circulated), probably explains why so much accurate information seems to have been ignored by posterior tradition. They were circulated only in a ritual context. For this reason, it is plausible to assume that apart from the *SC* and *SAF* (which, as I argue, were two contemporary and independent documents) there were other *AFs* (with varied content) in use too. It further seems plausible that these written *AFs* which the converted Manichaeans had to sign, and which the *chartophylax* kept in the ecclesiastical archives, were more extensive versions of the text that was read in public (*εἰς ἐπήκοον πάντων*) during the anathema ceremony.

Additional evidence for the existence of real Manichaeans comes from the following taxonomical classifications:

- (1) The canons for the acceptance of the converted heretics into the Church, which preserve different procedures and specific ceremonies for how to accept the converted Manichaeans.
- (2) The anti-Manichaean laws, which when speaking about Manichaeans, mean it literally. This is because, in law, Manichaeans first appear in parallel with the whole range of heretics, and more importantly, are clearly distinguished from the others.
- (3) The lists of the ecclesiastical authors, where Manichaeans are classified as a distinct category along with the other 'heretics', with whom they are compared. Indeed, Manichaeism as the 'worst heresy' *par excellence* became the metric for measuring the degree of heresy and a tool for the classification of the other 'heretics'.

Moreover, the live speeches of Cyril and John Chrysostom to their Christian catechumens and believers respectively are evidence of the presence of real Manichaeans and of a particularly strong Manichaean community and church in Palestine and Antioch. Both pastors used vivid examples to prepare their audience for the inevitable encounter they would have with Manichaeans on the streets of their city. In addition, Cyril's homilies attest to the existence of Manichaean church-buildings in the mid-fourth century. From the persistent warnings of the two men, it appears that some among their flock were in communion with or even used to visit (in the case of Cyril) Manichaean assemblies. Indeed, as is implied by Cyril's instructions, some of his catechumens could have been both Christian and Manichaean catechumens at the same time.

Apart from the above cases which concern the Manichaeans as a group, chapters [6] and [7] demonstrated that among the individuals designated as Manichaean there are certain cases that appear to have been real Manichaeans, such as the teachers Aphthonius and Photinus, and the missionary Julia and Bassa(?). It is true that the limited information we have about them neither sufficiently enables us to reconstruct their identity nor unreservedly to affirm their historicity, as is the case of the eponymous Manichaeans with whom Augustine discourses and debates, such as Felix and Fortunatus who were undoubtedly historical persons. Yet, this is not a fair comparison, because Augustine himself was a Manichaean auditor, so it makes sense that he knew them personally.

Finally, 'real' Manichaeans make their appearance occasionally in written letters (e.g. Barsanuphius, Olympiodorus, etc.) with advice and instructions on how to deal with them.

Most testimonies about Manichaeans come from the fourth century, and the picture these sources convey to us regarding real Manichaeans (in relation to subsequent ones) is more vivid. Their elderly contemporaries have seen Mani with their own eyes (Cyril) and had

experienced the arrival of the first Manichaean missionaries in their provinces (Alexander, Epiphanius). Alexander points out that he had first-hand information from Manichaean missionaries who belonged to the inner circle of Mani's students. He knew that Mani accompanied Shapur, the Persian king, during his military campaigns, as well as that the Manichaeans used the form *Χρηστός* instead of *Χριστός* for Christ, which means that he had access to their books. The dynamic of the Manichaean spread from Mesopotamia to the Roman East during the fourth century is well recorded. Epiphanius dates Mani's missionary activity during the reign of Valerian and Gallienus (253-268)—as Alexander also did—whereas he dates the arrival of the second wave of Manichaean missionaries in Palestine in the time of the emperor Aurelian (270-275, i.e. just before Mani's death), which sounds very realistic. In the second half of the fourth century the Manichaeans were “found in many places”¹ and Manichaeism was “widely reported and ... talked of in many parts of the Roman world”.² This dynamic continued at least until the end of the fourth to the beginning of the fifth century when our sources present Manichaeism as still being active, acquiring followers, and “corrupting the *oikoumene*”.³

Yet, it is true that along with the real Manichaeans, quite early on, the term ‘Manichaean’ acquired the content of a term of religious abuse. This is because Christians of all factions, despite their many differences, agreed on one thing: that the Manichaeans were the worst heretics. Therefore, Christians from all parties used the *nomen Manichaeorum* in order to discredit their opponents, and not only the Catholics (as is often assumed). This clarification, which was not sufficiently noted in previous research, is very crucial for our analysis and interpretation. Characteristic of how insulting it was to call someone a ‘Manichaean’ is the testimony of Athanasius regarding the fear of a group of Arian bishops and of the Arian Emperor Constantius II, lest they be co-classified (by the Catholics) as heretics along with the Manichaeans.⁴

However, it is important to note that the use of the term ‘Manichaean’ as one of abuse was not necessarily malicious (to eliminate an opponent), but also served pastoral concerns. Because the church authorities actually believed that the Manichaean beliefs and practices were dangerous and could influence the supporters of their opponent Christian factions, attributing to them the charge of Manichaeism (with all the shame that this entailed), would contribute to the ‘awakening’ of the ‘heretics’ themselves, and to the protection of their flock. “Perhaps” if we call them Manichaeans, Athanasius says, “then they will become ashamed [...] so they will be enabled to perceive into what depth of impiety they have fallen”.⁵ Furthermore, we saw that, in parallel with the term ‘Manichaean’, the terms *μανιχαϊόφρων* (the Manichaean-minded individual) and *μανιχαῖζων* (the person whose specific views or statements on specific issues sound as if he were a Manichaean) were also in use. These two terms were used in the *etic* level of this study as a heuristic tool to distinguish the imagined from the real Manichaeans. However, their use at the *emic* level cannot be an absolute criterion because they are often perceived by the sources as identical and are used alternatively, or all three are assigned to the same person at the same time. Obviously, the fact that the terms Manichaean, *μανιχαϊόφρων* and *μανιχαῖζων* were attributed to non-

¹ Libanius, *Ep.* 1253.

² Epiphanius, *Pan.* 66.1.3.

³ Macarius, *Apocriticus* 4.184.8-11(3).

⁴ Athanasius, *H. Ar.* 30.2.

⁵ Athanasius, *Ep. Adelp.* col. 1073.20-30.

Manichaeans does not mean that there were no Manichaeans and that all the relevant references should be reflexively interpreted as examples of slander.

3. The Question of the Silence of the Sources

As the present study showed, the view that Greek anti-Manichaean authors ignored Manichaean texts and that their knowledge regarding Manichaeism was very limited is a generalization.

A number of authors claim that they derive their information from Manichaeans, converted Manichaeans, and from Manichaean books (e.g. Theonas, Alexander, Cyril, Epiphanius, Titus, compiler of *SC*, Simplicius, etc.). This claim, in some cases, as is deduced from the co-examination of genuine Manichaean sources, is not a rhetorical *topos*. The latter applies not only to the compilers of the *AFs* (the *SC* and *SAF*) whose accuracy of information is confirmed, but to other authors as well. For example, the excerpts that Titus quotes, as he states, verbatim (“this is exactly what they say in their book”)⁶ appear to be of Manichaean origin (direct or indirect), possibly coming from the *Book of Mysteries* or from the *Thesaurus*. From Cyril’s testimony that his contemporary Manichaean missionaries were carrying the *Thesaurus* during their endeavours (which is correct), as well as from the fact that the *Thesaurus* is the most cited book of the Manichaean canon in Greek anti-Manichaean literature, we can infer that the *Thesaurus* must have been the most well-known and most widely circulating Manichaean book in the Roman East.

The majority of our authors know and comment on the two contradictory rationales behind Manichaean fasting, namely the materiality of food versus foods containing light particles. But it is only Alexander who explicitly points out their incompatibility, as well as the Manichaean qualitative distinction of foods depending on whether they contain more or less light or matter. In addition, from the numerous references of our sources to the Manichaean sun and moon worship (in all probability the Manichaean daily prayers), and the accuracy of the information they provide regarding these rituals (prostrations before the sun and the moon), we can assume that (at least initially) these rituals were accessible to non-Manichaeans.

It is true, however, as noted, that our authors do not appear to know or do not discuss a number of other issues (most of them known to Augustine), concerning Manichaean organization, conduct and beliefs, such as:

(1) They do not distinguish between Elect and catechumens. In general, in both corpora (legislation and literature), the distinction of the two classes is very rare. It is unclear whether Manichaean catechumens were considered as Manichaean as the Elect. When commenting on Manichaean asceticism, our sources do not clarify which commands apply to the Elect and which to the catechumens. There is also no distinction made between the two classes in the canons regulating the procedures for the reception of converted Manichaeans into the Church, or in the laws (with the exception of three early laws). The distinction of the two classes is clear only in the specific context of alms-giving (the Manichaean meal), and there it is only mentioned in order to emphasize the elitist division of the Manichaean community into two classes; yet even here, the distinction is not always clear, because in some cases it seems as if only the Elect were considered Manichaeans. This may have been a strategy of the anti-Manichaean authors either to take Manichaean catechumens on their side, or to equate the

⁶ Titus of Bostra, c. *Manichaeos* 1.21.

two classes, in the context of their polemic. However, we cannot rule out the probability that this was due to the vagueness of the class of Manichaean catechumens. "In practice", as BeDuhn remarks, "the boundaries of the Auditor class probably varied considerably in exclusivity of commitment from one region to the next".⁷

(2) Whereas for the Manichaean sacred meal the discussion is extensive, it is limited to the criticism of the exploitation of catechumens by the Elect, whom the former had to feed. Information about the ritual itself is non-existent, apart from the famous prayer, the Apology to the Bread, which was probably done just before the meal and which seems to be authentic, although it is not confirmed by Manichaean sources. What is striking is that both the Christian and pagan authors do not comment at all on the very purpose of the ritual, the redemptive theology that lies behind it, i.e. on the liberation of the light particles imprisoned within food by the Elect during the ritual. Comparing the representation of the Manichaean ritual meal to the Manichaean sun and moon worship, some observations could be made. The fact that the latter is well documented in the sources may be indicative of the wide circle of participants. The reverse could be argued for the sacred meal, that the absolute absence of relevant testimonies is indicative of the small circle of participants and possibly of the secrecy that surrounded the ritual.

(3) There is also silence in our sources regarding the Bema, the most important feast of the Manichaean calendar, which was celebrated during the Christian period of Easter and commemorated Mani's martyrdom. The only explicit reference to the Bema in Greek anti-Manichaica is recorded in the SC. A reference to the Bema could also have been Eusebius' testimony that he saw Mani's icon surrounded by the Manichaeans.

(4) The SC is also the only Greek anti-Manichaean source that records the structure of the Manichaean hierarchy in detail. However, none of our sources seems to know that the seat of the Manichaean leader (*archegos*) was located at Seleucia-Ctesiphon.

The fact that the focus of the Greek anti-Manichaean works is mainly on argumentative polemics rather than on Manichaean mythology has been used to support the view that the Greek anti-Manichaean authors ignored Manichaean beliefs, especially their cosmogonic narrative. If we accept ignorance as the cause of the silence of our authors, it is likely that this silence is due to the Manichaeans themselves and signifies either a process of adaptation into the Christianized context, or a concealment of those aspects of their rituals and beliefs that would undermine their missionary efforts and would endanger their safety. Instead of exposing the details of their complicated cosmogonic myth, they preferred to control the logical weaknesses (the 'whence evil' question) and the contradictions (e.g. in the OT versus NT) of Christianity. However, the silence of our sources does not necessarily mean that their knowledge was limited. There are also other alternative interpretations apart from interpreting silence as ignorance. As we have seen, both Epiphanius (and AA) and the SC, do record the Manichaean beliefs regarding cosmogony and anthropogony, as well as a number of technical terms used by the Manichaeans in their cosmogonic narrative. Even though the content of the SC was not known, the same does not apply in the case of the account of Turbo in the AA and Epiphanius. So, it seems that several of our authors knew the Manichaean myth, at least from AA's version. But while they had access to the AA for their information (whether they declared it or not), and used details of Manichaean cosmogony in their polemics, they avoided an in-depth discussion on Manichaean mythology and a presentation of the

⁷ BeDuhn 2000b, 162. The question of the status of the Manichaean catechumens is still open to the discourse of the Manicheologists, see BeDuhn 2000b, 211ff.

Manichaeen pantheon. They silence Manichaeen mythology and persist in dualism and its consequences in anthropology and ethics.

Thus, an alternative interpretation for the silence of our authors is that they opted for this (choice) consciously. When the heresiologists deemed that heretical knowledge could be ruinous for their flock, they restricted information. The flow of specific heretical information had to be controlled. They only said what served the needs of their *kerygma*. Our authors themselves state at least three reasons for which they choose silence and conceal information: (1) they avoid the exposition of the complex cosmogonic Manichaeen system because they did not consider it appropriate to fill their audience's ears with Manichaeen mythologies and scandalous words; (2) they are afraid that over-exposure of Manichaeen practices and ideas will become more harmful than beneficial; (3) they conceal information lest Manichaeen beliefs and conduct would seem appealing.

Of course, in some cases the above arguments (which cultivated danger and fear) may not reflect genuine fears but simply served rhetorical opportunism.⁸

4. Why Were Manichaeans Persecuted to such an Intense Degree?

The comparison between the attitude of both the state and church authorities towards Manichaeans and their attitude towards other religious groups revealed the particularity and the gravity of the Manichaeen question and shed light on the reasons why Manichaeism was persecuted to such an intense degree.

From the available data of both legislative codes (*CTh* and *CJ*) it became apparent that Manichaeans were the most harshly persecuted religious group. This is firstly reflected in the number of laws against Manichaeans which are more numerous than the respective laws against any other religious group, as well as in the whole prosecuting procedure, the persecutory rationale (kind of crime), and in the inflicted penalties. Manichaeism is the first 'heresy' that appears in the *CTh* (372) and remained a constant target in both codes (*CTh* and *CJ*), and not an occasional one like other heresies. In contrast to *noble* heretics, whereby only their clergy was being persecuted, in the case of Manichaeans both Elect and catechumens were persecuted. Unlike Jews and pagans who were persecuted only when infringing the law, the Manichaeans, as the Christians earlier, were persecuted in advance, just for being Manichaeans. Anti-Manichaeen laws are the only case in Roman legislation in which the law is directed also against the women of a religious group.

The designation of Manichaeans as *infames* and of Manichaeism as a *public crime* constituted the tools of the imperial religious policy for imposing stricter penalties aimed at their financial (deprivation of their property rights, evaporation of real estate property), social (marginalization, exile, intra-family conflicts) and finally physical eradication (capital punishment). The escalation of the exile measure, initially aimed at the exclusion of Manichaeans from the cities, and subsequently from the *mundus*, whereby the meaning of *mundus* was broader than the 'Roman world' and signified the 'universe', and 'mankind', prefiguring likewise the death penalty.

In repressing the Manichaeans, the law proved to be surprisingly innovative by introducing for once and exclusively for the Manichaeans the concept of retroactivity of the law (381); by constituting for the first time in Roman law a specific body of inquisitors for tracking down Manichaeans (382); by establishing a collaboration between bishops and secret

⁸ Cf. Berzon 2013, 185. Lieu (1998b, 227) also questions whether the demythologized version of Manichaeen theology reflects an evolving Manichaeen self-identity or was "the invention of orthodox Byzantine churchmen".

agents; and by inaugurating networks of cooperation between regional bishops and provincial governors. Under Justinian, the ecclesiastical authorities were empowered to act as the supreme inquisitorial body for the prosecution of Manichaeans in the service of the emperor.

However, this general observation (arising from all laws) is in actuality only relatively applied, when we focus on a local level with the help of the tool of *province wide* applicability of the laws. This enables us to observe that for a specific period of time (383-423) the most persecuted heresy in the prefecture of the East was not the Manichaeans, but the Eunomians. On the contrary, the western Manichaeans were still a steady target, and this appears to have been in part due to the increase of their number in North Africa and due to Augustine's polemics.

It should also be emphasized that generally, and for a long period of time (up to Justinian), the aim of the law was the prevention and 'correction' of the Manichaeans through their punishment and not their extermination. To a certain extent, it was due to this tactic that the laws were not always implemented and there was significant room for silent tolerance. Indeed, for the same purpose we saw that an alternative religious policy was applied: that of charity, that enabled Manichaean converts to be exempt from previous guilt and annul their penalties with a simple confession of faith. Under Justinian, however, the persecution did not end with their conversion because the converts from Manichaeism would always be suspected of crypto-Manichaeism and apostasy.

But why were Manichaeans persecuted to such an intense degree? While initially in Diocletian's rescript (302) what seemed to worry the Roman authorities was mainly the Persian origin of Manichaeism, as well as the fear of corruption of Roman citizens by the Perso-Manichaean principles and values, under the Christian emperors this dimension of the threat fades out. Apparently, this is because the Manichaean origin was no longer important since the Manichaean 'virus' was now endemic to the Roman world. Yet, a latent dimension of the national threat continued to underlie the persecutory rationale of the law and the penalties, according to which the Roman Manichaeans had to be treated as traitors (since they had succumbed to the Manichaean 'plague'). What appears to be a common denominator of both Diocletian's and Christian emperors' fears (and is also repeatedly stressed in the whole of anti-Manichaean literature) is that the Manichaeans were considered as the most dangerous corrupters of the Roman citizens. What constituted the Manichaean corruption?

The key point that has been noted in our analysis, is that the law (as Church synods too) does not even enter into a discussion about the failure of Manichaean beliefs, doctrine and teachings, as it does for other heretics. But as in the case of the persecution of pagans and Jews, it did target their bad practices. It is the Manichaean gatherings that are targeted by the law because they instigate seditious mobs and are inimical to public discipline. In the rhetoric of law, the social unrest (caused by Manichaean gatherings) that threatens public discipline is not associated with Manichaean religious beliefs (dualism), even though such political reflections exist in literary sources (as in the political theology of the era dualism meant anarchy). In the latter, dualism, as we have seen and was also expected, is a central topic, as is its implications on everyday life, behaviour, and ethics. That the Manichaean public subversion in the laws is not associated with beliefs does not mean that the religious dimension of the threat is non-existent. Social order is undermined because in the case of Manichaeans, public crime acquires the content of an additional capital crime (apart from treason), that of sacrilege. According to the law, Manichaeism was considered a public crime

“because what is committed against divine religion is effected to the injury of all persons”.⁹ Undermining the ‘correct’ religion at that time was equivalent to undermining the state and its citizens.

In addition to the Manichaean gatherings that caused disturbance in civic communities, it was the very presence of Manichaean individuals, but mainly their proselytizing activity: “Manichaeans attract people and collect a multitude of followers”.¹⁰ For this reason, the goal of the law through the *infamia* and exile penalties was to deactivate the Manichaeans socially, so as not to infect the citizens through social intercourse. The Manichaeans must stop disturbing the world, the law declares.¹¹ That ‘citizens are forbidden to talk to or about a Manichaean’, is the constant advice given by almost all ecclesiastical authors.¹² What remains a latent fear in Christian legislation, while it is explicitly expressed in Christian and pagan literature, is that the Manichaeans systematically ‘poison’ Roman citizens in everyday life.¹³ As is highlighted in a line of the law, such heretics “have nourished by long and long-lasting meditation a deep-seated evil”.¹⁴ The Manichaean issue was not a visible conflict; it was not a clash of power, a confrontation between ecclesiastical authorities that threatened the unity of the Church and of the State, as was the case with intra-Christian factions which, for a long period of time, alternated each other in imperial and episcopal thrones. Manichaeism did not threaten the unity of the Church but the Church as a whole, all its members together, and each individual member separately.

The rapid spread of Manichaeism and the great appeal of the Manichaean way of life to social groups prone to radicalization, such as young people and wandering urban ascetics (probably of both sexes), threatened fundamental social institutions and dominant values (marriage, procreation, labour, role of women in a male-dominated society). The problem was exacerbated by the fact that, unlike specialists, ordinary people regarded Manichaeans as Christians, since they presented themselves as the true Christians. The many external similarities (e.g. asceticism, fasting and abstinence, grades of hierarchy, form of churches, structure of sacred meal) were misleading, while the doctrinal differences, as the specialists stressed, were immense. In the eyes of the authorities, the Manichaeans were greater experts than earlier heretics (Gnostics) in pretending to be Christians, thus misleading true Christians. By presenting Manichaeism as an alternative Christianity, the collective identity of the Roman Manichaeans was not distinct like that of the Jews and pagans. Rather, it was blurred, making their boundaries as a social group indistinct, which was one factor that made them even more threatening. Moreover, the ambiguity of the boundaries of the sect was magnified because there was always a suspicion that there were crypto-Manichaeans not only among the faithful, but also among Church and state officials.

Especially their influence on the ascetic milieu was considered very critical. Because of the many similarities, it was especially difficult to distinguish between Christian ascetics and the Manichaean Elect. Groups of anarchist urban ascetics, such as Encratites et al. and Messalians, were associated by both the law and the Church with the Manichaeans, who were

⁹ CTh 16.5.40.1.

¹⁰ CTh 16.5.9, 16.5.11.

¹¹ CTh 16.5.18.

¹² Pseudo-Didymus, *Trin.* (PG 39.989.33-34); John of Caesarea, *Adv. Manichaeos*, *hom. 1*, 17.271-273; Cf. CTh 16.5.38.

¹³ The same fear is also highlighted in Diocletian’s rescript: “there is danger that, in process of time, they will endeavour, as is their usual practice, to infect the innocent, orderly and tranquil Roman people, as well as the whole of our empire”.

¹⁴ CTh 16.5.41 (Coleman-Norton, 504).

regarded as the mentors of their false practices and ideas. Manichaeans were also held responsible for their increase in number, and for the dissemination of their ideas in both monasteries and society. As ascetics at that time functioned as social exemplars, there was the fear that the Manichaean attitudes and ideas would be disseminated through these ascetics to the whole society. It is for this reason that both legal and ecclesiastical sources characterize the environment of anarchist asceticism as a factory producing apostates from faith. However, it is noteworthy that despite the association of these ascetics with Manichaeans, the fact that the number of anti-Manichaean laws is much higher (25) than the respective laws against Encratites (3) and Messalians (1), shows that, for the authorities, Manichaeism, was an issue of a higher order. It went beyond ecclesiastical jurisdiction and extended to the political sphere, whereas for the state the issue of Encratites and Messalians was an intra-ecclesiastical affair.

Lastly, from the data collected from Arabic and Chinese anti-Manichaean sources it appears that Manichaeans were persecuted for very similar reasons in other environments too. The “heresy of the Manichaeans”, Peter of Sicily states, “is persecuted by all the nations”.¹⁵ Probably he was referring to the persecutions of the Manichaeans in the early Islamic and in pagan world (Diocletian). Indeed, the Christian authorities did not forget this when they wanted to emphasize the seriousness of the threat: “A superstition condemned also in pagan times, inimical to public discipline [...] We speak of the Manichaeans”.¹⁶ Later Manichaeans were persecuted for the same reasons in Buddhist China too.

5. Manichaean Group Identity and its Transformation over Time

One of the key questions discussed repeatedly in this thesis is the group identity of Manichaeans and its transformation during their confrontation with the official Christian Church and Roman state. Certainly, the information provided by our sources is not sufficient and depicts a Manichaean portrait filtered through their own perspective: that of their opponents. However, although the viewpoint of our sources obviously does not coincide with that of the Manichaeans, the change that is recorded in their representation reflects a respective change in the level of reality, and possibly to the self-identity of the Manichaeans.

National dimension of Manichaean group identity

The national dimension of the identity of the first Manichaean missionaries that dominates Diocletian’s rescript fades out for later East-Roman Manichaeans (Aphthonius, Photinus, etc.). On the contrary, Mani’s Persian origin and Manichaeism’s Persian components are constantly emphasized throughout the Greek anti-Manichaean corpus.

It is also important to note that the use of Syriac as the language of Mani’s books did not indicate to our authors that the first Manichaean missionaries in the Roman East were Syrians (and not Persians).¹⁷

Social dimension of Manichaean group identity

The analysis showed that there is no correlation between social stratification and Manichaean attractiveness and that the examined individuals (designated as Manichaeans) represent all

¹⁵ Peter of Sicily, *Hist. ref. Man.* 33.

¹⁶ *NVal* 18.pr.

¹⁷ As Epiphanius (*Pan.* 66.13.4-5) clarifies, “Most Persians use the Syrian letters besides < the > Persian, just as, with us, many nations use the Greek letters even though nearly every nation has its own. See ch.[2], 2.3.4.

social classes and both genders. However, looking at the sources as a whole, a transformation into the projected earlier and later social profile of the Manichaeans can be noticed.

In the first laws of the *CTh*, the Manichaeans are presented as solitary ascetics on the fringes of society, and as highlighted by the law, this is the identity that the Manichaeans themselves also wished to project.¹⁸ It was not only the state that held this perception regarding the Manichaean profile (the ascetic). Actually, the first laws against Manichaeans were the result of a long discussion that had taken place for decades between ecclesiastical authorities (culminating in the 370s-80s). Throughout this discussion, the Manichaeans were systematically affiliated with various ascetic groups.

In contrast, the social image of the Manichaeans, as captured by Justinian's first laws, after a legislative gap of 82 years, is completely different. The Manichaeans now seem to be fully integrated in society and hold public offices in the imperial civil and military structure and in other social structures (e.g. guilds). Testimonies about Manichaeans in the upper social classes at Justinian's time are also given by contemporary literary sources. For example, the chronographer Malalas talks about the wife of Senator Erythrius, and the historian Procopius informs us that the outranked officer Peter Barsymes probably even joined the sect.¹⁹ A hint for this forthcoming evolution is reflected much earlier (445), in legislation.²⁰

However, under Justinian, a further change to the Manichaean group identity must have taken place due to the persecutions. This change is reflected in the laws themselves, which instead of persecuting Manichaeans, now persecuted crypto-Manichaeans and apostates to Manichaeism. Thus, the Manichaean groupness—although blurred—remained visible through the Manichaean assemblies, churches, etc., as long as they were not persecuted (or to the extent that they were not persecuted). Yet, under Justinian this faded-out and was replaced by the group identity of crypto-Manichaeans. The possibility cannot be ruled out that crypto-Manichaeans (or Christian catechumens who were ex-Manichaean converts verging on Manichaeism) were among the members of the *dēmos* of the Greens; the Green faction had attracted all those dissatisfied with Justinian's policy, among whom unquestionably the two above groups belonged.

Religious dimension of Manichaean group identity

Both Christian and pagan anti-Manichaean literature often calls the Manichaeans heretics, and the *CTh* co-classified the Manichaeans in the same chapter with intra-Christianity heretics. These facts have led many modern scholars to support the view that Manichaeans were considered as one of the Christian parties by their contemporaries.

However, this study highlighted some basic parameters for the reconstruction of the Manichaean religious identity that have not been taken adequately into consideration in previous scholarship. As a result, it has demonstrated that this view is a generalization and misinterpretation of the data. The main weaknesses of the above position are summarized as follows:

- (1) The terms 'heresy' and 'religion' are not interpreted in context.
- (2) The Christian stance towards the issue is homogenized and identified with that of the Catholics (*etic* level). It has been argued therefore, that the distinctiveness of the Manichaean religious identity is a rhetorical construction of the Catholics.

¹⁸ *CTh* 16.5.7.3, 16.5.9.

¹⁹ Malalas, *Chron.* 17.21; Procopius, *Hist. Arcana* 22.25.

²⁰ *NVal.*18.

(3) The view concerning both: (a) Alexander's stance towards the issue and (b) the legal classification of Manichaeans in the *CTh*, is based on the first impression that these texts give, disregarding or not examining the full material of the two sources.

Regarding the first issue, it was clarified that the concept of the term 'heresy' during the investigated period was not confined to its current meaning, as many scholars suggest. Instead it had a broader meaning that was inclusive of both the modern meanings attributed to the terms 'heresy' and 'religion' and also signified the wrong religious choice. It is for that reason that the literature of the era also called both Jews and pagans heretics. Besides, our authors, apart from the terms 'heretic'/'heresy' for Manichaeism also used the terms 'religion' and 'dogma'. Regarding the term 'religion' (*θρησκεία*), this study challenged the notion that the term is a modern one and that it is anachronistic to use it for the past. As was shown, the term 'religion' is used systematically by our authors with the modern meaning of the term. In brief, all three terms (*αἵρεσις*, *θρησκεία*, and *δόγμα*) are interchangeably attributed to Manichaeans and in most cases mean what we would today define as religion.

Concerning the second issue, it became apparent that not only the Catholics, but the Manichaean specialists of all Christian parties considered Manichaeans a distinctive religious category, different from Christianity. In addition to the arguments of the specialists, the distinction is clear in the ecclesiastical lists that co-classified and paralleled Manichaeans to Gnostics, pagans, and Jews. The non-Christian classification of Manichaeans becomes clearer in the canons that set out different procedures and rules for accepting the converted 'heretics' into the Church. For Manichaeans (as well as for Valentinians and Marcionites) the procedure (the stricter one) was the same as for the Greeks/pagans, while for the intra-Christian heretics it was much easier. It is noteworthy that while exactly the same procedure (as that of the Manichaeans) was defined for the reception of Eunomians, Montanists and Sabellians, the latter three comprised a different set of converts. This indicates the intention of the compiler of the canon to emphasize that they belonged to different (i.e. non-comparable) categories of heretics. Moreover, the fact that the Manichaean issue and doctrines had never been addressed in ecumenical or other Church synods shows that the ecclesiastical authorities in no way considered Manichaeism as a form of Christianity. On the contrary, a number of synods did deal with Encratites, Messalians, Montanists, Donatists, namely the other 'heretics' with whom Manichaeans were co-classified when they were not grouped together with Gnostics, Jews and pagans. Of particular importance, as a more neutral view, is the opinion of two sixth-century authors who were not ecclesiastical authorities: the historian Agathias and the geographer Cosmas. Both of them clearly regarded Manichaeism as another religion, different from Christianity; indeed, Agathias accentuates the Zoroastrian influences on Manichaeism.

The view that Alexander considered Mani as a Christian heretic and Manichaeism as a Christian heresy has been adopted by the majority of modern researchers and was used to support the Christian origin of Manichaeism. However, this is mainly based on the two introductory paragraphs of the text, and is in direct opposition with the rest of the work; in it, Alexander challenges the Christianness of the Manichaeans to the same degree as Christian authors do by juxtaposing and comparing Christianity and Manichaeism as two different religious categories. The core of his criticism is that whereas Manichaeans are self-identified as Christians, they differ radically from Christians on a number of substantial issues. The Manichaeism that Alexander presents is more a Hellenistic than a Christian 'heresy'. It is important to note that both Alexander and Christian authors consistently emphasize Manichaeism's loans from Greek poetry and philosophy, as well as polytheism, and astrology.

For Titus, Manichaeism is a synthesis of Persian and Greek elements, while Socrates states that the Manichaean books are Christian in voice, but pagan in ideas.²¹

Concerning the classification of Manichaeans in the *CTh*, the comparative examination of the treatment of Manichaeans and of other heretics revealed that the Manichaeans were regarded as a *sui generis* class of heretics, constituting their own category. The *sui generis* status of Manichaeans is also apparent in the chapter 'De Apostatis' (*CTh* 16.7), where only pagans, Jews, and Manichaeans are considered as apostates. In the *CJ*, as is reflected by the title of the corresponding chapter "*De haereticis et Manichaeis et Samaritis*", the Manichaeans are clearly distinguished from heretics.

Of course, for the illumination of the religious profile of East-Roman Manichaeans, the *ab intra* self-designation of Manichaeans is important. However, besides the fact that the Manichaean texts themselves provide contradictory testimonies regarding the use of autonoms, equally important is the opinion of the non-Manichaeans. This is because these opinions come from followers of different religious groups who were rivals of each other. The latter remark, not sufficiently emphasized by previous research, enables us to form a more comprehensive and intersubjective picture. Thus, the meaning that the terms Manichaean and Manichaeanness had during that period in the Roman East, can now be built from the individual meanings that all participants in the relevant 'language game' attributed to these terms. As Jensen notes in stressing the intersubjective character of meaning,

... meaning is no longer considered the property of individual subjects with privileged access to their own mental secrets [...] one of the salient features of the revised notion of meaning is that it is public, intresubjective, and translatable, and therefore it is not just 'meaning for someone' but that potentially it is meaning for all of us. [...] the meaning of a ritual is not in the informants' heads, or in their individual interpretations, but in the total network of semantic and behavioural relations, in the network of externalized intentionality, and that is more likely to be successfully analyzed by external observers.²²

In our case, it is clear that for both Christian (of all denominations) and pagan authors the 'Manichaean Church' was not one of the many Christian Churches. The latter, however, did not apply for ordinary people, who considered Manichaeism as an alternative Christian choice. In practice, the theoretical clarity of the specialists was blurred, and this was intensified by the fact that Manichaeans in their relations with the Christianized world self-identified as Christians. The religious pluralism that existed in the eastern part of the Empire made the lines between orthodoxy and heresy, Christian and non-Christian even more obscure. Moreover, this ambiguity was magnified by crypto-Manichaeans and false conversions.

The issue of crypto-Manichaeism brings our discussion to the latest and more dramatic change of the Manichaean religious identity, which took place under Justinian. This subject is directly linked to the question of the disappearance of Manichaeism in the Roman East. In the process of time, logically, due to the intensification of the persecutions the cases of pseudo-conversions and crypto-Manichaeans (prudential secrecy) would have increased. Examined testimonies of other persecuted religions in the Roman Empire and elsewhere showed that this was a common practice. Certainly, executions would have also taken place, but we cannot estimate their extent, since the evidence is inadequate, and the term 'capital/ultimate punishment' in the laws of the era did not necessarily mean the death penalty. Moreover, as appeared from the analysis, the choice of pseudo-conversion in the case of Manichaeans was more likely than that of martyrdom.

²¹ Titus of Bostra, c. *Manichaeos* 4.16-21; Socrates the Scholastic, *HE* 1.22.5 & 8. 5.

²² Jensen 2003, 444, 446.

However, Manichaean pseudo-conversions had preoccupied the Church much earlier and this is reflected in the *SC*, where the Manichaean convert had to sign that his conversion was sincere. The reservation of the authorities was further intensified because as our sources indicate, crypto-Manichaeism could have been a missionary tactic (i.e. strategic infiltration), in addition to an option of necessity. Of course, there is no way to prove this claim as it is only the opponents' perspective. Nevertheless, I consider that it seems plausible, and it stands to reason as an alternative interpretation for the following reasons: (1) it makes sense, because by this method it was much more likely for the persecuted Manichaean minority to survive and put its missionary vision into practice; (2) some basic features of Manichaeism (e.g. importance of mission, stance towards martyrdom, meaning of sacrifice), as well as corresponding testimonies regarding this Manichaean tactic by Muslim and Buddhist writers, support the claim of our sources; (3) it provides an answer to the question of the elusiveness of the Manichaean presence in the Greek corpus.

A further suggestion of this study was that apart from prudential secrecy and the plausible strategic infiltration, the laws themselves (persecutions) in combination with the canons contributed to boost the phenomenon of crypto-Manichaeism. As I argued, there is evidence to support the hypothesis that the converted Manichaeans did not proceed to the last stage of their conversion (baptism), and remained Christian catechumens for a long period of time, or even for all their life. The Christian name was sufficient to secure their lives and property. This may have been convenient for them, as they abhorred baptism, while the majority was familiar with the idea of being catechumens for a lifetime. However, the status of unbaptized, firstly, cast on them a permanent suspicion of apostasy and crypto-Manichaeism and, secondly, rendered them second-class citizens and Christians in their relationship with the state and the Church. It is not unreasonable to assume that the ambiguity of this new group identity of the Manichaean converts, who were somewhere between being Manichaeans and becoming Christians, could actually lead them to apostasy or crypto-Manichaeism.

In conclusion, the Manichaean group identity, (at least) from Justinian's era onwards, was mainly identified with that of Christian catechumen converts from Manichaeism. To judge whether the latter were sincere converts, or converts who had relapsed, or converts verging on Manichaeism, or just suspected of verging on Manichaeism and of being crypto-Manichaeans, is rather impossible. What is highly probable though, is that the death of Manichaeism in the Eastern Roman Empire seems to have been not as violent as modern scholarship implies, but was a rather slow process of absorption, assimilation, and dissolution into Christianity.

The preceding pages have been an attempt to investigate Manichaeism through the study of Greek anti-Manichaean literature. This dissertation aimed to illuminate aspects of the religious and social identity and daily life of East-Roman Manichaeans. Further research could explore the Greek corpus by focusing on questions that fell beyond the scope of this study, such as: Manichaean Christology in the Greek anti-Manichaean texts, biblical quotations which, according to the Greek authors, were used by the Manichaeans, the connections between Manichaeism and Hellenism, as well as the relationship between Manichaeism, Paulicianism, and Bogomilism. At the same time, more research is needed to explore in greater detail some of the issues discussed in this thesis, such as the interrelation of the various *AFs* and their source of information. Moreover, targeted research is required to shed light on the Kellis findings in terms of their comparison with patristic literature. Lastly, to continue my suggestion regarding the dissolution of Manichaeans into the Christian Church, I propose that

future research could concentrate on investigating the possible Manichaean impact on theology, art, liturgical and ascetical life, and on the popular religiosity in Eastern and Orthodox Christianity.