

CHAPTER I

Introduction

THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

The term 'Manichaean' is here used in its primary sense, with reference to the religion that was founded by Mani (or Manichaios, that is Mani 'the living' as the original Syriac was transmitted into Greek) in the early Sassanian empire during the third century of the common era. Mani was a visionary, for he was a mystic and a painter; he was an intellectual, with a passion for understanding all aspects of the natural world and integrating them into a coherent system; but he was also intensely practical in his approach to this divine revelation and this knowledge. We might say that Manichaeism is the first real 'religion' in the modern sense, because Mani established it directly and deliberately, with its scriptures and its rituals and its organisation all in place. A principal aspect of his purpose was that this teaching and this practice and this community would be universal, and would supersede all previous faiths (which indeed were understood to reach their true culmination here). Mani himself travelled widely to preach, heal, convert and establish communities; and he dispatched missionaries in all directions. This book is concerned with the religion's spread and success and ultimate demise to the west of its homeland, that is in the world of the later Roman Empire.

In the last years of Ardashir the king I came out to preach. I crossed to the country of the Indians. I preached to them the hope of life. I chose in that place a good election. In the year that Ardashir the king died Shapur his son became king. I crossed from the country of the Indians to the land of the Persians; from the land of Persia I came to the land of Babylon, Mesene and Susiana. I appeared before Shapur the king. He received me with great honour. He gave me permission to journey . . . preaching the word of life. I even spent some years . . . in the retinue; many years in Persia, in the country of the Parthians, up to Adiabene, and the borders of the provinces of the kingdom of the Romans.

I have chosen you, the good election, the holy church that I was sent to from the Father. I have sown the seed of life. I have . . . from east to west . . . my hope has gone toward the sunrise of the world, and every inhabited part; to the clime of the north, and the . . . Not one among the apostles did ever do these things . . . (my hope) will remain in the world until (the return of Jesus in judgement, and he will place my) church on the right side (and the evildoers) on the left.¹

Mani's call to the founding of this new and final community came about the year AD 240, and the first Manichaean mission would have reached Alexandria about AD 260. In the Roman Empire Manichaeism arrived as a rival to Christianity, itself suffering its final persecutions before the triumph under Constantine. Indeed, Mani announced himself as the 'apostle of Jesus Christ', its preachers proclaimed that they preached the true gospel, and condemned their opponents as failed or only 'part Christians'. The fourth century saw a bitter conflict between these two interpretations, a conflict that what we now call Christianity ultimately won, allied as it became with secular power. Manichaeism became cursed as the ultimate heresy.

Manichaean studies have seen major growth and development over recent decades. A substantial reason has been the repeated and often spectacular discoveries, of primary and previously unknown texts in particular, which have led to the transformation of our understanding and to the emergence of an entirely new discipline. At the same time, the topic has spoken to contemporary interests in the deconstruction of received histories, here with regard to the 'triumph' of Christianity and its defeat of heresy; in the reconstruction of alternative Christianities, especially the so-called 'gnostic' movements of the early church; in attitudes to the body and to the natural world, where Manichaeism provides a striking and obsessive new vision; and in dialogue between religions and cultures, for Manichaeism spread to both east and west, and interacted not only with Christianity but also with Buddhism, Islam and Taoism.

The purpose of this book is, therefore, to make available many of the diverse and scattered sources relevant to an understanding of the subject. The development of Manichaean studies in the anglophone world has been hampered by the traditional leadership in this field by scholars from the elite universities of the European continent. Also, the topic is shared (and in a sense falls) between many traditional disciplines, so that developments are often not followed by non-specialists. As authors of this book, it is our hope to provide in a convenient and accessible format the resources

¹ *Keph.* 15. 24–16. 17 abbreviated.

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and the knowledge necessary for an understanding of Manichaeism in the Roman Empire; this for scholars and students of ancient history and adjacent disciplines in the English-speaking world. It is with this purpose in mind that we have made our selections of material, imposed structure and order, and offered introductory comments to each piece (and these we have tried to keep short and specific). Specialised linguistic notes have been kept to an absolute minimum, and we have mostly omitted seriously damaged text. The material presented here is not intended to substitute for advanced work, for this the scholar must turn to the critical editions of the primary texts in the original languages, and to the detailed studies. In this sense, this is an introductory source-book; but at the same time we have striven for total accuracy and awareness of the very leading scholarship in the field; and, indeed, some of the material presented here is in advance of that published anywhere in the world.

THE LIFE OF MANI

Mani was born, according to a Manichaean source in Chinese, on 14 April 216. His father, Pattek (Arab. Futtuq, Gr. Pattikios, Mid. Pers. Ptyg), is said to have come from Ecbatana (modern Hamadan), the ancient capital of the Parthian Kingdom; and to have later taken up residence in Seleucia-Ctesiphon in Mesopotamia, then the winter capital of the Parthians and later of the Sassanians. The name of his mother is known to us in Arabic as Mays² or Awtāhīm or Mar Maryam, and in Chinese as Man-yen (lit. 'full of beauty', perhaps a transliteration for Maryam) of the royal house of the Arsacids (Arab. Ašgāniyya) and from Chin-sa-chien (probably a transliteration for Kamsaragan, a region of Parthia).³ The presumed descent of his parents from Arsacid lineage could explain Mani's reserve toward the first Sassanian ruler Ardashir who overthrew the last Parthian king Artabanus V in 224. His father is said to have been told by a divine voice in a pagan temple at Seleucia-Ctesiphon not to eat meat or to drink wine, and to stay away from women. In obedience to this call he joined one of the baptist sects existing in Mesopotamia. The group he joined, which acknowledged the Jewish-Christian leader Elchasai(os) as one of its founders, was very active in missionary work, and not only endeavoured to spread within the Persian Empire, but had even gone as far as Rome. It is possible that Mani received some impetus for his world mission from it, and it may be the

² *Fihrist*, trans. Dodge, II, 773.

³ *Mo-ni kuang-fō chiaō-fa yi-lüeh*, ms. line 19, trans. Haloun and Henning (1952), 190.

source of his reference back to the patriarchs of Hebrew tradition: Adam, Seth, Enosh, Enoch, Shem.

After his birth, Mani stayed with his mother for four years until his father took him to join the 'baptists'. He lived in their community until he left them soon after his twenty-fourth birthday (his twenty-fifth year) and began to preach his own doctrine. The time with the 'baptists' was of special importance for his personal and spiritual development. He believed that he had twice had a vision in which he encountered his divine 'twin' (his Syzygos), at the age of twelve and at the age of twenty-four. In true hagiographical fashion, Mani was shown in the *CMC* as wanting to reform the sect. He even put words characteristic of his own teaching into Elchasai(os)'s mouth. For example, the 'baptists' used to carry out ablutions; they washed or baptised vegetables which they grew in their gardens, not only for their own use but also to sell in town (see below, pp. 48–9). Mani, however, was utterly opposed to the baptisms and ablutions, because he saw them as being harmful to the light particles which were bound in them. According to Mani, Elchasai(os) had already had a vision while bathing which pointed out to him the sinfulness of this act. Mani regarded the ablutions carried out by the baptists in the context of a great cosmic event, and criticised them. The Sabbath 'rest of hands' observed by the community seems to have led him to the radical conclusion that hands should do no work at all. Mani opposed the ritual use of a certain type of bread, so he was asked if he wanted to eat 'Greek bread'. His companions simply noticed that he neglected their customs; nor did he take vegetables from the garden himself, but asked for them as if asking for alms (see below, pp. 48–9 and 60–5).

Among the men of revelation who, in Mani's opinion, preceded Elchasai(os) was Jesus the Messiah. Thereafter, after failing to reform the community along more gnostic lines, Mani was able to present himself as the fulfilment of the promise of the Paraclete given in the Gospel according to St John. According to the young Mani, Elchasai(os) already wanted to use this name to give himself mythical justification. In the war of words prior to his leaving the sect, the young Mani was accused by some of turning to another trend in Christianity, namely the 'Greeks'; it is possible to understand this as Marcionism. As Mani set great store by Paul in his own writings, and as Paul was regarded as *the* enemy to many Jewish-Christian sects, Mani could not have derived this reverence from the teaching of the baptists. Mani also seems to have been familiar with the teaching of the Christian gnostic thinker Bardaisan (who flourished in Edessa in the last years of the Abgar Dynasty during the second and third centuries AD), on cosmogony; as well as that of Valentinus on the division of body and soul.

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Mani was not one who merely wanted to construct a system out of philosophical elements and then disseminate it. Rather, he was wholly convinced that he was the 'seal of the prophets'. As mentioned before, he had a vision of his alter ego on his twelfth birthday who had enlightened him about his true existence and calling, but who also required him to stay with the Elchasaites until he had reached full maturity. In those days one reached adulthood at twenty-five. In fact, Mani stayed with the baptists until after his twenty-fourth birthday; but he was already leading a life according to the revelation of his Syzygos ('Twin', or more accurately 'Pair-comrade'). As has already been said, this finally led to disagreements between Mani and his group. When he had turned twenty-four (i.e. in his twenty-fifth year – 'when my body had reached completion'), he had a new vision of his Syzygos. He ordered Mani to appear independently from now on, and that he should do missionary work. This heavenly alter ego is also identified in Manichaean writings with the Johannine Paraclete. Mani unites with his alter ego in the revelation, so that he can be rightly regarded as Paraclete. He began his missionary work during the reign of Ardashir (224–42), but presumably at a time when Shapur I (240–73) had already been crowned co-sovereign.

The second part of the preserved sections of the Greek *Mani Codex*, which narrates the early missionary activities of Mani and the foundation of his church, is very fragmentary (viz. ms. pages 99 *ad fin.*, see below, pp. 65–73). It appears that after he had broken away from the community Mani first went to Ctesiphon, and from there to a village called Naser where he was joined by his father Patticius who had also left the sect. The two then, with a small band of fellow baptists, became wandering holy men; and Mani soon showed his mettle as a dispenser of wise teaching and a performer of miracles. The party travelled northeast to Ganzak, at that time a Zoroastrian stronghold and a residence of the King of Kings. There he introduced himself as a doctor and cured a young child. It was probably on the Iranian Plateau that Mani encountered a hairy hermit who admitted to him that his abnormal covering was the result of taking the best fruits from a tree, thus confirming Manichaean belief in the need of the elect members to avoid hurting the Light elements which are in fruit and vegetables (see below, pp. 67–70).

Mani then turned his attentions to India, probably because he was unable to win imperial patronage for his new teaching from Ardashir during his visit to Ganzak. He travelled first to the important port of Ferat on the Persian Gulf, where he befriended a rich merchant called Oggias (?), and it appears that he travelled to India via Turan and Makran; but it is equally possible for him to have travelled back to Ferat in Mesene

from Ganzak via these regions. According to Middle Iranian sources he is said to have converted the Shah of Turan in the course of his journeys, and we have in the Greek *Mani Codex* the account of the conversion of at least one local king and his entourage *before* he reached Ferat. The encounter with Buddhism in India and adjacent territories was important for the development of the universal and the ascetic aspects of his teaching. Manichaean hagiographical sources speak of him being regarded as Buddha by the ruler there, and being successful in his teaching; whereas the *Kephalaia* also acknowledges difficulties in gaining acceptance. When Ardashir died in 242 and Shapur I became his fully acknowledged successor, Mani returned to the Iranshar from India. He landed in Rew-Ardasir, went to Persis (modern Fars) and then to Babylonia, from where he went to Mesene and Susiana. In Mesene he won over the ruler Mihrshah;⁴ he was introduced to the Great King by the latter's brother Peroz whom Mani had presumably got to know in Marw as governor of Chorasan.⁵ Shapur I intended to expand the Iranian Empire in all directions and to strengthen it internally at the same time. Mani seemed to him to be the very man for this purpose. His belief was especially suited to the East because of the elements which either came from Buddhism or were confirmed by it. The syncretistic self-awareness which was characteristic of Mani's perception of himself, and which made him consider himself to be the perfection and fulfilment of the three great religions, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism and Christianity, would allow him to appear as a spiritual cement for the Iranian Empire. He was granted membership of the King's retinue for a long time. Furthermore, it was possible for him to do missionary work within the boundaries of the empire or its sphere of influence. Apart from the aforementioned provinces, he was thus able to preach in Media and Parthia also; and in the Caucasus as well, as at least one Manichaean missionary was active during Mani's life-time in the city of Waruc in Iberia (modern Georgia).⁶

Given the fact that Zoroastrianism was the official religion of his imperial patrons, Mani's religion diffused within the Zoroastrian milieu and at an early stage it assimilated Zoroastrian deities into its pantheon. A more Judaeo-Christian version of his religion spread in the Roman Empire, and also into Parthia where it came under the influence of Zurvanism and later of Buddhism. The two main streams (Judaeo-Christian and Zoroastrian) of Manichaeism later merged in Central Asia, from where many Manichaean texts were recovered in the region of Turfan, and in the Cave of Thousand

⁴ M47, *KG*, §10 (1576–1607), pp. 102–3. ⁵ *Fihrist*, trans. Dodge, II, 776.

⁶ M216b + M2230 (Parthian), *KG*, §2.3 (130–49), pp. 24–5 and u237 + u295 (Turkish), ed. Zieme (1975) §21, pp. 50–1.

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Buddhas from Dunhuang. The lack of awareness by earlier scholars of the complex history of diffusion of the religion has led to it being seen either exclusively as a form of Zoroastrianism (or Zurvanism) or as a deviant form of Syriac Christianity.

It appears from circumstantial references in the *Kephalaia* that Mani spent much of his years under Shapur's patronage in the Twin-Cities of Seleucia-Ctesiphon teaching his growing band of disciples. This may explain why the Twin-Cities (Arab. *al-Madain*) later became the seat of the *archegos* (Arab. *imam*) of the sect. After Shapur's death (273) Mani does not seem to have had any difficulties under his successor Hormizd I, but his reign only lasted for one year (273–4). He was succeeded by his brother Vahram I (274–6/7). From Hormizd-Ardashir (Suq al-Ahwaz) in Susiana Mani wanted to go to Kushan, which must be Chorasan, the governor of which held the title of Kushanshah. It was probably the only territory within the Iranshar which could offer him personal safety. In any case he was forbidden to undertake the journey. Full of anger and grief, he returned to Hormizd-Ardashir and then went to Mesene. He knew then that he was on his last journey.⁷

Mani travelled to Ctesiphon in order to go to Bet Lapat from there. At the same time he wanted to meet the vassal King Baat, who seems to have joined his religion and who intended being there also but who then preferred to absent himself. The King later reproached Mani for this. It is likely that Vahram had a hostile attitude towards Mani and his teaching right from the start, thinking it had a destructive effect on his Empire where the Magians and their superiors had gained a decisive influence. After all, Mani's teachings, and the ethics derived from them, were totally contradictory to the feudalist lifestyle. The rejection of procreation, the condemnation of hunting, indeed in effect of all knightly sport because of the fear of harming light particles, must necessarily have led to disputes when it came to acquainting the ruling warrior class with his teachings. They might well be useful as a means of controlling subjects of non-Iranian mentality. According to a later Arabic tradition, Vahram said: 'This man has set off, incited to cause the destruction of the world. Because of this, it is necessary to begin by destroying him before any of his intentions can succeed.'⁸ The discussion between the King and Mani, which was extremely acrimonious, amply demonstrates the conflict between secular and spiritual power. The King of Kings was angered especially by Mani's

⁷ All the relevant sources (mainly Middle Persian and Parthian) are conveniently collected in Henning (1942).

⁸ al-Biruni (1878) 207. 7–9.

self-assurance of being enlightened by God. He saw in this the arrogance of a subject who took to himself unauthorised qualities. Here the conflicting interests of king and prophet clash. It was of no help to Mani either that he referred to King Shapur who had given him his support. Opinion against Mani was certainly stirred up by his accusers. The preserved texts are quite concrete in the description of the events. They show how the charge was carried out through the official channels. The Magians who saw Mani arrive in Bet Lapat turned to the chief Magian, Karder. He then consulted a colleague of his. Next to the Chief of Chief Magians (*mobadan mobad*) was also the Chief of the Priests of Fire (*herbadan herbad*). Whereas the former had special moral and spiritual influence over the King, the latter was a man who had not only ritual but also juridical functions. It is no wonder that these two men, as representatives of state church offices, consulted the Vizier in a difficult religious trial. The Vizier reported the situation to the King, who thereupon summoned Mani before him. The King's wrath resulted in the chaining and imprisonment of Mani, where he died after 26 days.⁹ However, he had the opportunity to receive visitors, and thus to prepare his congregation for his end. The year of Mani's death is still in dispute. Scholarly opinion vacillates between 276 and 277 (see below, p. 89).

THE MANICHAEAN SYSTEM

Manichaeism was a religious system that taught a practice for the salvation of the divine in the universe; and which presented a revealed (and in principle total) knowledge of transcendent realities, including the divine nature of the soul, and the details of the pathway to eternal life. At its core was an analysis of the causes and nature of evil and suffering in the world, the predicament in which human and all life are entangled, that was entirely coherent in its own terms. Certainly, Mani directly utilised prior revelations; and in this way particular concepts can be tracked, especially from esoteric or heterodox forms of prior Judaism and Christianities, through Manichaeism, and into later metamorphoses such as in Shi'ite Islam and the neo-Manichaean sects of the medieval period. However, the religion should first be studied and must be understood as a complete, self-contained world-view; for this was how Mani and his followers presented it to society. Echoes of other faiths and teachings were placed in relation to the revelation of Mani, so that for

⁹ The most important source on the death of Mani is the 'Narrative on his Crucifixion' in the Coptic *Homilies* (42–85, ed. Polotsky). This text has been translated in full by Dr S. Clackson for this collection (10).

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the believer all reality was measured against this given presentation of the one truth. Thus, Manichaeism should be categorised as a religion in its own right, and not subordinated to whatever influences the historian may track.

What is often termed the 'gnostic' character of Manichaeism must be strongly qualified, for Mani turned his revealed knowledge outwards to a universal evangelical purpose. Thus, whilst the elect learnt the secret workings of the divine nature, all were offered the call to faith, and the religion firmly grounded itself in time and the existential world. The religion promulgated faith, knowledge and good works; and rose above the obscure and short-lived irrelevancies of most gnostic sects. An analysis of the core tenets of Manichaeism, when measured against what we suppose to be gnosticism (for instance esotericism, elitism and a sense that the world is a product of error), shows that this faith must be differently categorised. It will be better if we set it apart from such labels, which have their origins in the polemic of its opponents, often reinvented by modern scholars of religion seeking to impose patterns upon the unique products of history.

Certainly, it is possible and important for the historian to trace the diverse elements that Mani drew upon in his revelation; but we emphasise that it is first vital to understand Manichaeism as a discrete and coherent entity, for this is how one can enter the world of the believer. The following account of the teachings of Mani will emphasise this inner structure and coherence. Nevertheless, any such summary can tend towards artificial synthesis. Manichaean knowledge was carefully graded and tailored to the needs of its audience, as with any other avowedly evangelical ideology that seeks the power to change people's life and thought. 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 (see chapter 7) there appears to be scarce knowledge or interest in the many gods and demons, and the intricacies of cosmology, that dominate a handbook for the elect such as the *Kephalaia* (see particularly chapter 5). The textual material derived from Kellis (modern Ismant el-Kharab) evidences how carefully the hierarchy attempted to draw adherents further into the church and the knowledge of truth.

Whereas Christianity took centuries to formulate its doctrines, and the controversies of the great councils seem far removed from the teachings of Jesus, Mani took great pains to establish a total religion based upon his own comprehensive scriptures and preaching. He may be said to have combined the charisma of Jesus, the missionary purpose of Paul, and the doctrinal

stringency of an Augustine. He understood himself to be the final and universal apostle of God, called to restore the truth of all prior messengers, including Jesus, the Buddha and Zarathushtra. There is thus less scope in the study of Manichaeism to trace the evolution of doctrine, since all teaching was rigidly tied to the very details of the divine word in Mani's scriptures. Nevertheless, the eschatological urgency of earliest Manichaeism may be said to have slowly turned towards an accommodation with the world. It may also be true that the absolute centrality of Mani and his teaching, and the self-standing nature of the religion that we have emphasised, was the result of an evolution in Mani's own religious consciousness, further developed and hardened in the early generations of the church's life. In his *Epistles* Mani habitually introduces himself as an 'apostle of Jesus Christ', and it took both time and confidence for the founder to achieve his full stature as 'Mani the living' (i.e. Manichaios).

Mani believed that he was the recipient of divine revelation from his heavenly Twin (Greek: *syzygos*): '... everything that has happened and that will happen... I have seen the totality through him (*Keph.* 15: 19–23)'. Although later systematisation asserts that the divine counterpart will appear and bring help to every apostle (*Keph.* 36: 6–9), for Mani this was clearly a deeply personal experience, which is firmly embedded in the traditions (see especially the account of his call and early life recorded in the *Cologne Mani-Codex* (chapter 2)). Scholars have sought to explain the concept with reference to various sources, especially the Thomas narratives of early Syriac Christianity, where that apostle is indeed the twin of Jesus; and calling upon the 'Hymn of the Pearl' with its curious correspondences to the spiritual life of Mani (the origins of this text have been much discussed, but never satisfactorily resolved). However, the core is one of those unaccountable religious experiences, where the recipient knows him or herself to be especially called. It seems certain that Mani himself came to understand his Twin to be the Paraclete, foretold by Jesus, the 'comforter' and 'Spirit of Truth' who would be sent afterwards according to the divine will. Since Mani asserts that with the Paraclete, 'I have become a single body, with a single Spirit! (*Keph.* 15: 23–24)', he himself came to be proclaimed as the Paraclete. This then became one of the most characteristic assertions of the Manichaeans, and one of the most offensive to their catholic opponents; however, it was not intended to mean that Mani was the Holy Spirit, as that equation is part of catholic not Manichaean tradition.

This revelation given by the Twin was systematised, in substance at least by Mani himself, into an elaborate and holistic account of the cosmos,