

# Apparatus of salvation : formation and function of the Manichaeian cosmos

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## VI

JASON DAVID BEDUHN

### APPARATUS OF SALVATION:

FORMATION AND FUNCTION OF  
THE MANICHAEAN COSMOS

We may fairly recognize in Mani the first religious innovator who undertook his mission in full consciousness of religious pluralism. Through the special conditions of his cosmopolitan Mesopotamian homeland, where originally distinct cultural traditions came together and blended in ever new combinations, and his own travels and inquiries, Mani became aware of what different regional cultures had to say about the origins of the gods and the cosmos. He recognized certain common and recurring themes among these tales; and well he should have, not only from their common origin — e.g., in an Indo-European substrate of Greek, Iranian, and Indian mythology — but from millennia of contact and amalgamation preceding his own efforts. Mani became convinced that these shared themes represented a repeatedly revealed truth, and explained their diversity through a theory of corrupted transmission. Informed by his own visionary experiences, he sought to purge the existing mythic traditions of their corruptions, and restore a single, pure narrative as the foundation of his religious reform. In doing so, he represented, in the words of Guy and Sarah Stroumsa, “the last significant outburst of mythological thought in the world of antiquity”.<sup>1</sup> To fully explicate the significance of his achievement,

<sup>1</sup> STROUMSA / STROUMSA (1988) 40.

therefore, we need to analyze it in terms both of its synthetic and applied originality, and as the culmination of a rich history of mythic creation and recreation.

Mani speaks of visionary experiences, and we must not disregard their importance for his authority and the creativity of his discourse. Yet Mani's psychology is not available to us, and it would be pointless to speculate about it. We will duly regard his originality when we understand the overall cosmogonic narrative and cosmological model within which he managed to coordinate the various characters and themes found within them. But for those characters and themes we should not be afraid of identifying antecedents and parallels. Mani did not consider his visions as *sui generis*, but as confirmations and clarifications of the visions of prior messengers of God preserved in the cultural traditions around him in West Asia. Mani famously proclaimed his interest in and affirmation of prior religious traditions:

“The writings, wisdom, revelations, parables, and psalms of the earlier churches are from every place collected, brought back to my church, and joined to the wisdom which I have revealed to you. As a river is joined to another river to form a powerful current, just so are the ancient books joined in my writings, and form one great wisdom such as has not existed in preceding generations (*Kephalaion* 151, 372, 11-19).”<sup>2</sup>

Notably, Mani sees himself both as on the receiving end of multiple traditions of religious discourse, and as in some sense welcoming these distinct strands “back” (*katantan*) to where they belonged, i.e., collected and reunited to a single master narrative. Mani thus undertook a kind of ‘comparative religion’ project in his own late antique world, examining and comparing the distinct traditions around him for common elements he could attribute to a primordial ur-myth, transmitted in various corrupted forms. Guided by his own visionary experience and insight, he believed he could recover the original, pure narrative of cosmic origins.

<sup>2</sup> FUNK (2000) 372; the translation is my own.

Mani identified the homeland of this project with 'Babylon', i.e., southern Mesopotamia, which in his time had the character of a multicultural 'melting pot' where he could have been exposed to cultural traditions we typically think of as quite far afield of one another. For instance, it had the largest concentration of people of Hellenic descent anywhere in the Parthian and Sassanid empires, as well as a very active trading culture running through the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean. Mani himself spent a considerable amount of time in Mada'in, 'The Cities' constituted of Hellenic Seleucia, Parthian Ctesiphon, and various Sasanid suburbs. He also traveled to India by ship. A century before him, even a Chinese delegation had arrived in the entrepôts of the region. In short, he was ideally situated for the kind of 'comparative religion' project that informed his myth-making.

## I. Antecedents to the Manichaean myth of primordial cosmic conflict

### 1.1. *Primordial battle*

Within a dualistic metaphysical conception, Manichaeism provides an account of cosmogony as the outcome of a primordial contact and conflict between realms totally alien to each other. A timeless heavenly realm of the gods is threatened with invasion by a rabble of demonic beings, led by a dragon-like monster,<sup>3</sup> but is preserved by a newly emerged young god,

<sup>3</sup> The hideous dev ... he scorches, he destroys ... and he terrifies. He flies on wings as of air; he swims with fins as in water; and he crawls like a being of darkness. He is armed on his four limbs, to repel the children of fire, rushing upon him like the beings of hell. Poisonous springs gush forth from him, and he exhales [smoky] fog. (His) [claws] and teeth are [like] daggers ... They rot upon a couch of darkness; in lust and in pursuit of desire they give birth to each other and then destroy each other. The bellicose prince of darkness has subjugated the five pits of death through great ... terror and wrath. He has spurted forth streams of poison and wickedness from the depth ... (KLIMKEIT [1993] 36 [Text 2.2]).



endowed with powers by his divine parents, who goes out to battle with the opposition.

“The righteous god, the highest of gods ... was proud and glad ... when you were born in the realm. The twelve sons and the aeons of aeons of the light-air were happy-minded. All gods and inhabitants (of the realm), the mountains, trees, and springs, the wide, strong palaces and halls became glad-minded through you, friend. When the lovely maidens and girls ... saw you, they all unanimously with praise blessed you, faultless youth. Tambourine, harp and flute sounded music of songs from all sides ... Voices sound from the light air, music of songs from the light earth, as they say thus to the Father of Light: The battle-stirrer has been born who makes peace. Forever all-good, the Highest of the Gods has entrusted you with three tasks: Destroy death, smite the enemies, and cover the whole Paradise of Light. You paid homage and went out for battle and covered the whole Paradise of Light. The tyrannic prince was bound for ever and ever, and the dwelling place of the dark ones was destroyed. The light friend, the first man, was there until he carried out the Father’s will.”<sup>4</sup>

This scenario puts Manichaean myth in continuity with themes found throughout West Asian polytheism, and in various ways sublimated within the monotheistic traditions (Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian).

As far as we can tell, the indigenous Babylonian myth of primordial cosmic conflict was alive and well in the centuries leading up to Mani, and points of comparison to Mani’s myth have been obvious since the discovery of Assyrian and Babylonian texts at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We possess Achaemenid period copies of the creation myth *Enūma Eliš*, as well as testimony from the Seleucid period to the continued performance of the Akitu Festival where it was recited.<sup>5</sup> Berossus, writing in

<sup>4</sup> M10.R.11 - V.22: ASMUSSEN (1975) 120.

<sup>5</sup> The gradual decline in the use of cuneiform and clay tablets in the Seleucid and early Parthian periods (last known use 74 CE: BOTTÉRO [1992] 206) deprives us of literary and documentary evidence now written on perishable materials. In Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, for example, tens of thousands of clay bullae are all that remain of the huge city archive, the documents they once sealed being utterly lost.

the early Seleucid period, supplies a summary of the myth in his *Babyloniaka*:

“There was a time in which all was darkness and water, wherein strange and peculiarly shaped creatures came into being; there were born men with two wings, some also with four wings and two faces; some also having one body but two heads, the one of a man, the other of a woman, being likewise in their genitals both male and female; and there were other human beings with legs and horns of goats; some had horses’ feet; others had the limbs of a horse behind, but before were fashioned like men, resembling hippocentaurs; likewise bulls with the heads of men bred there; and dogs with fourfold bodies and the tails of fish; also horses with the heads of dogs; and men and other creatures with the shapes of every species of animals; besides these there were fishes, and reptiles, and serpents, and still other wondrous creatures, which had appearances derived from one another ... Over all these ruled a woman named Omorka. In Chaldaean her name was ...,<sup>6</sup> which translated into Greek means ‘sea’. All things being in this condition, Bel came and clove the woman in two; and out of one half of her he formed the earth, but with the other half the sky; and he destroyed the creatures within her.”<sup>7</sup>

Berosus went on to interpret this story as what his epitomizer, Alexander Polyhistor, calls an “allegory of nature”, but which appears more like a cultural translation into Greek terms: “While the whole universe consisted by moisture and such living creatures had been born therein, Bel, that is Zeus, divided the darkness in two, separated heaven and earth from one another, and reduced the universe to order; but the living things, not being able to bear the strength of the light, perished”.<sup>8</sup>

The internal diversity, anarchy, and conflict of the primordial substrate appear in both the Babylonian original Berosus

<sup>6</sup> The text is corrupt here, giving *Thalath* under the influence of Greek *thalassa*, “sea”. EUDEMUS OF RHODES 3, 7, 1 gives the form *Tauthe* or *Tauathe* in his account of the Babylonian creation story. In any case, these variant forms represent *Tiamat*.

<sup>7</sup> *FGrHist* 680 F 1, 6. Translation from BURSTEIN (1978).

<sup>8</sup> BURSTEIN (1978).

was reporting,<sup>9</sup> and in the Manichaean myth. More significantly, the Babylonian myth stresses that Tiamat (Berossus's Omorka) and her brood plotted to assault Ea, king of the universe — a plot point missing from Berossus: "They held a meeting and planned the conflict" (*Enūma Eliš* 1, 131). The same plot to attack from below is found in the Manichaean myth (e.g., Severus of Antioch: "They plotted against the light in order to mix with it").<sup>10</sup> Tiamat armed herself with "the viper, the dragon, the *lahamu*, the great lion, the mad dog, the scorpion-man ... the dragonfly, the bison" (1, 140-142), putting this army under the command of Kingu. As in the Manichaean myth, the denizens of heaven are not suited to defend it against the assault: "No god whatever can go to battle and escape with his life from the presence of Tiamat!" (*Enūma Eliš* 2, 90-91). Ea's son, Marduk, is chosen to go to battle on behalf of all (2, 95).<sup>11</sup> They bestow on him scepter, throne, and royal robe (4, 29), and arm him with bow and arrow, club, lightning, flame, net, winds, and downpour (4, 35-37). He mounted his chariot drawn by four horses (4, 50-53). He addresses Tiamat: "[In arrogance] thou art risen and has highly exalted thyself. [Thou hast caused] thy heart to plot the stirring-up of conflict" (4, 77-78). Marduk casts his net and forces winds into Tiamat's mouth, then shoots an arrow

<sup>9</sup> "The divine brothers gathered together. They disturbed Tiamat and assaulted their keeper; yea, they disturbed the inner parts of Tiamat, moving and running about in the divine abode" (*Enuma Eliš* 1, 21-24).

<sup>10</sup> See CUMONT / KUGENER (1912) 124.

<sup>11</sup> At this point in the narrative appears a curious episode: "Then they placed a garment in their midst; to Marduk, their firstborn, they said: 'Thy destiny, O lord, shall be supreme among the gods. Command to destroy and to create, and they shall be! By the word of thy mouth, let the garment be destroyed; command again, and let the garment be whole!' He commanded with his mouth, and the garment was destroyed. He commanded again, and the garment was restored" (*Enūma Eliš* 4, 19-26). The Manichaean myth speaks of the First Man being clothed in a garment consisting of the five divine elements; when he is overpowered, this garment is stripped from him and consumed, and its scattered fragments are the divine light mixed in the cosmos, whose liberation is the primary goal of salvation history. One might compare the stripping of Ishtar when she descends to the underworld, or the related stripping of Tammuz; see WITZEL (1935) 92, 1-13; 126, 8.

into it, piercing her heart (4, 95-102). After she is slain, he captures and disarms her forces.<sup>12</sup> The battle between First Man and the King of Darkness is described similarly in Manichaean myth:

“Together with his four bright powers he descended to this earth ... The god Xormuzta had a merciful heart. If someone should skeptically ask: ‘How did he kill Shimnu?’ then answer, ‘Shimnu, changing his speech, declared to all demons: “I will fling the poison I have taken from you against the god Xormuzta. [I will kill?] the god Xormuzta [with] this [poison]”.’ But the poison he flung hit his own head; he implored him ten thousand times. Shimnu (said) ‘I [will] ... god Xormuzta ...’ But he fell into the front (?) of hell. Then the god Xormuzta, making an ax from god of fire, split open Shimnu’s head. Then, making the god of fire into (something) like a lance seven hundred thousand miles long, he [pierced?] the head of Shimnu with the tip of the lance.”<sup>13</sup>

Unfortunately, little remains of the religious art and architecture of Seleucid and Parthian Mesopotamia, to provide us a sense of how the traditional myths were re-imagined under the enriched multicultural conditions of the later period. Dura Europos, approximately 12 days’ journey from Babylon offers some of the best preserved examples, and we find there juxtaposed both Hellenic and local cults, alongside Jewish and Christian communities whose remains date to the time of Mani. Six days’ journey further west stood Palmyra, which became a major player in the regional economy in the first two centuries CE. Palmyrene inscriptions attest the regular trade along the route into Mesopotamia, with Palmyrene merchant colonies in Dura, Seleucia, and Charax. The first Manichaean mission into the Roman Empire followed this route to Palmyra. It is here in Palmyra that we have an opportunity to get a sense of how the

<sup>12</sup> Cf. the Canaanite myth of the combat between Baal and Yam (“Sea”): Baal does not fight Yam directly, but sends two magical weapons to strike him (GASTER [1961] 115-116). The prostrate Yam is enclosed in a net (117). The “Virgin Anat” escorts the victorious Baal to the queen goddess Asherah (177-180).

<sup>13</sup> KLIMKEIT (1993) 341-342.

Mesopotamian myth of primordial conflict had been re-imagined in engagement with Hellenistic narrative and artistic traditions.

A relief in the peristyle of the Temple of Bel in Palmyra provides a visual representation of the Mesopotamian divine combat myth as it was imagined in the region in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE (Fig. 6.1). A female humanoid monster, with curling serpents instead of legs, and carrying a vessel from which snakes pour forth, is attacked by a group of deities. On her left, an archer riding a chariot loosens an arrow at her head; a mounted warrior attacks from her right, and behind him march a row of gods and goddesses armed for combat.<sup>14</sup> R. Du Mesnil du Buisson initially saw in this relief a synthesis of the Marduk-Tiamat battle of the *Enūma Eliš* with the Greek myth of Zeus' combat with Typhon;<sup>15</sup> he subsequently focused exclusively on the Mesopotamian myth, and dropped reference to possible Hellenistic influence in the iconography.<sup>16</sup> Yet his initial impression can be supported by comparison with a number of Hellenistic period depictions of the battle of the Gigantomachy, i.e., the war of the gods with the giants, in which the latter are characteristically depicted with the same ophidian lower limbs. Indeed, Tiamat is not actually described as ophidian in form in Babylonian mythology,<sup>17</sup> and so the identification of the scene with that myth relies in part on an *interpretatio Graeca* associating the Mesopotamian myth with the Greek one.

In the Classical period, the Gigantomachy typically appeared as a scene of combat between multiple gods and multiple opponents, with the latter portrayed as armored humanoids, not

<sup>14</sup> DIRVEN (1999) 154 argues that the mounted warrior represents Nabu, who in Late Babylonian texts displaces Marduk as the actual combatant against Tiamat, in service of the now more exalted Marduk. One of the goddesses is in military dress, carrying a spear and a bow; the other is in a long robe. One of the gods has the iconography of Heracles.

<sup>15</sup> DU MESNIL DU BUISSON (1962) 247-251.

<sup>16</sup> DU MESNIL DU BUISSON (1976) 83-110.

<sup>17</sup> For an argument that Tiamat actually was imagined as a bovine, with important implications for Iranian myth and the Mithras cult, see LANDSBERGER / WILSON (1961) 161 and 175.

ophids.<sup>18</sup> But the iconography changes in the Hellenistic period. A lekythos of circa 380 is perhaps the earliest representation of them with ophidian lower limbs,<sup>19</sup> and this representation is canonized in the Great Altar at Pergamon and a set of contemporaneous temple decoration throughout Seleucid and early Roman West Asia. Apollodorus so describes them (1, 6, 1-2), and a scholion to the *Odyssey* ( $\Sigma$  *Od.* 7, 59) says that Homer does not seem to know “the things in the *neôteroi*, neither that <the Gigantes> were monstrous and snake-footed as paintings show them, nor that they inhabited Phlegra, nor that they fought against the gods”. In Euripides’ *Herakles* (177-180), Heracles is said to shoot arrows at the giants from a chariot. Athena also features prominently in accounts and depictions of the battle. The 1<sup>st</sup> century CE pediment of the Temple of Bel at Palmyra should be understood in this context.

Similar iconography appears in the Mithraeum at Dura-Europos and in a relief from Soueida even closer to Mani’s time (Fig. 6.2a-b), and we can probably conclude safely that Hellenistic temple art throughout Babylonia followed this tradition. In addition to the familiar identification of Greek deities with those of other peoples during the Hellenistic period, therefore, we see a deeper exchange and fusion of mythological themes, creating the conditions in which Mani produced his own new variations.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> GANTZ (1993) 450. Depictions of the battle can be seen on pediments at the Alkmeonid Temple of Apollo and Athenian Treasury at Delphi, the Megarian Treasury at Olympia, the Pesistratid Temple of Athena at Athens, and the metopes from Temple F at Selinous, the Siphnian Treasury (452). The east facade metopes of the Parthenon as well as the inside of the shield held by the Athena statue there depicted the battle. Athena is found in all of the above examples. Heracles is often depicted shooting arrows from a chariot (451). But Zeus, too, is often mounted in a chariot (but typically wielding a thunderbolt, not a bow). In other representations of this time (later 5<sup>th</sup> century) the giants begin to change their appearance, now often naked and “barbaric”, hurling stones while attempting to scale Olympus.

<sup>19</sup> Berlin: PM VI 3375: GANTZ (1993) 453.

<sup>20</sup> A scholion on PIND. *Isthmian* 6 ( $\Sigma$  *Isthm.* 6, 47) says that the giant Alkyoneus had stolen the cattle of Helios, and thus precipitated the war between the giants and the gods. Apollodorus also singles out Alkyoneus as a being who

Alexander of Lycopolis refers to Manichaean discussion of the Gigantomachy: “They also refer to the battle of the giants as told in our poetry, which to their mind proves that the poets were not ignorant of the insurrection of matter against God” (*C. Man.* 5).<sup>21</sup> Lest we think Alexander’s comment merely reflects secondary cultural adaptation by the Manichaean mission in the Greco-Roman environment, Ephrem Syrus, who knew Manichaean literature in its original language, likewise says that “Mani ... gave credence to (the narrative) about the giants”,<sup>22</sup> using the Syriac form *gbry’* found also in the Aramaic Enochic *Book of Giants* fragments and *Targum Onkelos*.<sup>23</sup> It was John Reeves who demonstrated that these reference testify to Mani’s exposure to a Jewish permutation of the conflict myth embodied in the Enochic *Book of Giants*, fragments of which had been identified by J.T. Milik among the Dead Sea Scrolls.<sup>24</sup> But Mani did more than simply appropriate the Jewish *Book of Giants*. Jerome, in his *Homily on Psalm 132*, refers to Mani commenting on the content of the earlier Jewish *Book of Giants* as confirmation of his account of primordial events: “I have read about this apocryphal book in the work of a particular author who used it to confirm his own heresy”, and goes on to identify the author as Mani.<sup>25</sup> Mani, therefore, did not merely copy the earlier work, but cited it in evidence as part of his elucidation of what he regarded as an Ur-myth, putting it in conversation with other comparable

cannot be defeated on his native ground. Heracles shoots him with an arrow, and drags him out of his native land, thus subduing him. In a number of Greek sources, the “Aloadai” are two of the giants — Otos and Ephialtes — who plot to scale Olympus and from there reach to Ouranos (HOM. *Od.* 11, 305-320; see PIND. fr. 162 SM for a ladder leading to Ouranos). They are slain by Apollo.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. similar references in Serapion of Thmuis: CASEY (1931) 52; and in Titus of Bostra: KESSLER (1889) 199.

<sup>22</sup> BECK (1957) 18 and 29.

<sup>23</sup> The LXX translates *ha-gibborim* in Gen 6, 4 with γίγας.

<sup>24</sup> REEVES (1992).

<sup>25</sup> EWALD (1964) 338.



mythologies in surrounding cultures, including Hellenic, Babylonian, and Iranian.<sup>26</sup>

### 1.2. *The God's initial defeat*

Ancient critics of Manichaeism expressed horror at the detail that the forces of good are initially “defeated” when the First Man goes out from the realm of light to meet the assault of the dark beings.<sup>27</sup> Yet the theme of initial defeat was a commonplace of divine conflict mythology from Greece to India. In the story of Zeus’s combat with the dragon Typhon,<sup>28</sup> for instance, Apollodorus reports such an initial defeat of Zeus, who has his tendons cut out, rendering him paralyzed. Hermes and Aigipan recover the tendons and restore Zeus.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, Zeus’s victory is ensured when the Moirai feed Typhon some fruit that weakens him from within. Zeus stuns him with his thunderbolt,

<sup>26</sup> See REEVES (1992) 127: “Mani’s Book of Giants is not merely a copy of the Qumran prototype. The Henning fragments suggest that Mani exegeted the story of the Watchers and the Giants by interspersing allegorical observations with the ‘historical’ recountal of the battle between Heaven and the rebels upon the earth”.

<sup>27</sup> E.g., AUG. *C. Faust.* 11, 3: “Faustus proclaims that some first man or other ... who comes from the substance of God and is what God is, plunged his limbs or his clothing or his weapons, that is, the five elements, for they are nothing but the substance of God, into the nation of darkness so that they were defiled and taken captive”.

<sup>28</sup> Typhaon or Typhoeus is described by Hesiod as a beast with one hundred snake heads that breathe fire (*Theog.* 845, etc., see GANTZ [1993] 49). But in art, as in a Chalkidian hydria now in Munich (GANTZ [1993] 596) a figure labeled as Typhoeus has a human head and torso, but a lower body consisting of two snakes; the same representation (unlabeled) is found at Olympia (GANTZ [1993] 50), and the pediment of the Temple of Artemis at Kerkyra. Later literature (e.g., Apollodorus) concurs with this artistic motif, making the lower part of his body ophidian. We thus can see that in Hellenistic times opponents of the gods — whether Typhon or the Giants — came to be conventionally depicted by this iconographic short-hand.

<sup>29</sup> In another Greek story, the giants Otos and Ephialtes (the “Aloadai”) capture Ares and keep him in a bronze jar until Hermes discovers and frees him (GANTZ [1993] 170).



and imprisons him under a mountain. Not only did Mani describe the same sort of paralysis or unconsciousness of the defeated First Man; he also characterized ultimate victory being ensured by the fact that the dark beings consumed the “armor” of the First Man, consisting of his five children, which poisoned them.<sup>30</sup> The Greek myth as known to Apollodorus a century or two before Mani closely follows a Hittite tale from more than a thousand years earlier: the Storm God is defeated in battle by a great serpent, and calls for help from the gods; the goddess Inara prepares a feast for the serpent and its offspring, who become over-satiated and easily subdued and tied up.<sup>31</sup> In the Hurrian mythic Kumarbi cycle, Kumarbi, the offspring of the netherworld, assaults the sky-god Anu, seizing him by his feet and dragging him down from the sky. He bites off Anu’s penis, and when he had swallowed it “he rejoiced and laughed out loud”. But Anu, who apparently has escaped Kumarbi’s grasp, turns and tells him, “Stop rejoicing within yourself! I have placed inside you a burden”. He explains that he has impregnated Kumarbi with five gods who will cause him grief. Then he departs for the sky where he hides himself.<sup>32</sup> The Kumarbi cycle, with its succession of stratagems and coups in the rulership of the cosmos, clearly provided Hesiod and other Greek writers with many elements of the Classical Greek theogony. Yet echoes in the Manichaean myth — such as the dualistic character of the conflict and the specific details of the five gods overpowering Kumarbi from within — cannot be explained by the Greek intermediary, and suggest survival of the myth in its

<sup>30</sup> AUG. *C. Faust.* 2, 5 refers to “that war by which that first man of yours fought against the nation of darkness, with the result that the world was fashioned out of the very princes of darkness who were captured in such a mingling”. And adds later (11, 3): “Faustus proclaims that some first man or other ... who comes from the substance of God and is what God is, plunged his limbs or his clothing or his weapons, that is, the five elements, for they are nothing but the substance of God, into the nation of darkness so that they were defiled and taken captive”.

<sup>31</sup> HOFFNER (2009) 11-12; GASTER (1961) 245-246.

<sup>32</sup> HOFFNER (2009) 42-44.

northern Mesopotamian homeland, where it was already amalgamating with Semitic traditions.

In Canaanite myth, Baal is invited to the netherworld, the realm of Mot. He descends armed with all his equipment (incl. clouds, wind, and rain) and staff (including the “lady of light”, and “lady of rain”).<sup>33</sup> But upon reaching the netherworld he dies or otherwise becomes incapacitated. Mot describes “swallowing” Baal, so that the latter becomes “like a lamb in my mouth”.<sup>34</sup> The goddess Anat is sent to retrieve Baal from the underworld; she confronts Mot and “with a sword she rips him up; with a winnowing fan she scatters his members; in fire she burns him; in a mill she grinds him; over the fields she strews his remains”.<sup>35</sup> Baal is revived and restored to mastery of the world. Similarly, in Mani’s account, the First Man descends armed with the five elements, which are stripped from him as he lies unconscious. Later, the Living Spirit descends, cuts open the realm of darkness, and retrieves the First Man.

A number of other Mesopotamian and West Asian myths follow the same theme of divine conflict, temporary defeat or despoliation of the divine realm by dark and wild powers, and eventual recovery and restoration.<sup>36</sup> In one, the storm-being Zu sees and desires the properties of Enlil, and proceeds to make off with the “tablets of destinies”. After several gods decline to undertake their retrieval, Marduk agrees to go.<sup>37</sup> In the Yuzgat tablet, the supreme god is threatened by Hahhimas, and successive sons of god are taken prisoner by Hahhimas; the text breaks off, but presumably Hahhimas is defeated in some way and his divine prisoners freed.<sup>38</sup> In a Canaanite myth, Baal is

<sup>33</sup> GASTER (1961) 209-211.

<sup>34</sup> GASTER (1961) 121-122; cf. 206: “Its one lip is stretched upward to the sky; its other downward to the netherworld. Baal will descend into its maw, go down into its mouth”.

<sup>35</sup> GASTER (1961) 121-122.

<sup>36</sup> For some parallels in the Zoroastrian tradition, see BEDUHN (2005).

<sup>37</sup> HEIDEL (1951) 122-125. Comparison to the Manichaean myth was made already by WIDENGREN (1946) 34-35.

<sup>38</sup> GASTER (1961) 270-272.

overpowered and dismembered by Asherah, wife of El, but rescued and reconstructed at the initiative of his sister Anat-Astarte (Ishtar). The redemption of Tammuz from the netherworld by his sister Ishtar contains some of the same themes echoed in the rescue of the First Man in Manichaean myth, including descent into the netherworld, divestiture of the divine being's garments by the dark beings there, and eventual rescue and restoration.<sup>39</sup> These examples demonstrate the ubiquity of the theme of the initial defeat of gods at the hands of their enemies in the mythology of West Asia. Mani's dualism did not impose this theme by some sort of inversion or subversion of monotheistic omnipotence. Rather, his dualism works against a background of polytheistic narratives of divine conflict, fitting them into a monotheistic framework.

### 1.3. *The cosmos as a dismembered body*

The idea that the cosmos derives from the dismemberment of a god has been explored as a widely attested Indo-European myth of creation, or perhaps even more broadly distributed across Asia.<sup>40</sup> The idea appears, for example, in the so-called 'mystical' Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian literature which records the esoteric exegesis of myths and rituals shared among the priests of the region.<sup>41</sup> Among Indo-European cultures, the theme is well known from Indian myth — i.e., the Purusha myth (*Rig Veda* 10, 90). In Iranian tradition, both the first man Gayōmart and his companion the primordial bull perish at the hands of Angra Mainyu. When the bull dies, some of its semen pours onto the ground, producing plants, while another portion of semen is purified in the moon, and gives rise to

<sup>39</sup> WIDENGREN (1946) 78-81.

<sup>40</sup> Indo-European examples of the theme include Gayōmart in Iranian tradition, the "Dove King" in Russian myth, Ymir in Scandinavian tales, the Orphic hymn to Zeus, etc. Cf. Pan-ku in Chinese mythology.

<sup>41</sup> E.g., LIVINGSTONE (1989) texts 38 and 39.

beneficial animals. All of the man's semen appears to be purified in the sun, but from there some pours into the fire, while the rest drops to the earth and produces human beings. His corpse meanwhile becomes the metals. Manichaeism duplicates this theme, characterizing the good elements of the earth as the dismembered 'limbs' or 'armor' of the Primal Man, and the bad elements as the flayed and dismembered corpses of demonic beings.<sup>42</sup>

But the more architectonic ideas of cosmogonic world-construction displayed in Manichaean myth (seen, for example, in Mani's composition *Šābuhragān*) find a closer analog in native Babylonian mythology. The *Enūma Eliš*, following the victory of Marduk in the primordial conflict with Tiamat, proceeds to describe its cosmogonic aftermath. Examining Tiamat's corpse, Marduk decides "to divide the abortion and to create ingenious things therewith" (4, 136). Whereupon, "he split her open like a fish into two parts; half of her he set in place and formed the sky therewith as a roof. He fixed the crossbar and posted guards; he commanded them not to let her waters escape" (4, 137-140). Similarly, in the Manichaean myth, the eight earths and ten heavens are made from the corpses and flayed skins, respectively, of the dark beings.<sup>43</sup> Marduk constructs a special place modeled on heaven: "The lord measured the dimensions of the Apsu, and a great structure, its counterpart, he established: Esharra, the great structure Esharra which he made as a canopy. Anu, Enlil, and Ea he caused to inhabit their residences" (4, 143-146). Similarly, in Canaanite myth, a palace is built for Baal by the architect god, Koshar-wa-Khasis, after Baal's victory over Yam.<sup>44</sup> The Manichaean myth contains a similar episode, the construction of the 'New Paradise' as a kind of temporary copy of the realm of light.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> AUG. *C. Faust*. 20, 9.

<sup>43</sup> Theodore bar Konai: REEVES (1992) 191.

<sup>44</sup> GASTER (1961) 187.

<sup>45</sup> See *Psalm-Book* (ALLBERRY [1938]) 1, 32-2, 1; 11, 21-23; 137, 62-64; 144, 21; *Kephalaia* (GARDNER [1995]) 28; 79, 34 - 80, 4; 87, 1; also 11, 44, 2-3.

As in Mani's account, the *Enūma Eliš* describes the establishment of a cosmic order with divine beings stationed at strategic spots throughout:

"He created stations for the great gods; the stars, their likenesses, the signs of the zodiac, he set up. He determined the year, defined the divisions; for each of the twelve months he set up three constellations. He founded the station of Nibiru (Jupiter) to make known their duties ... He established the stations of Enlil and Ea" (5, 1-8).

"Marduk, the king, divided the totality of the Anunnaki above and below; he assigned them to Anu, to guard his decrees. Three hundred he set in the heavens as a guard. Moreover, the ways of the earth he defined. In heaven and in earth six hundred he caused to dwell" (6, 39-44).

Geo Widengren has noted the striking similarity to the Manichaean myth in the idea that the defeated powers of evil are chained in various levels of the cosmos.<sup>46</sup>

#### 1.4. *The ambivalent creation of human beings*

In its account of the creation of humans, we may note more intriguing common themes between the *Enūma Eliš* and Manichaean myth. Ea suggests to Marduk that humans be made out of one of the prisoner offspring of Tiamat: "Let a brother of theirs be delivered up; let him be destroyed and men be fashioned" (6, 13-14). Kingu is brought forward for this purpose (6, 28-33). There appears to be some connection between this account and the Orphic myth of the creation of humans from the ashes of the Titans, who had killed and consumed the god Zagreus. Mani distinctively ascribes human creation to the defeated but still resistant powers of darkness, speaking in similar terms of a request for beings to be brought forth to be killed and eaten to produce the first humans from the mixture of divine and demonic natures.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>46</sup> WIDENGREN (1946) 34-35.

<sup>47</sup> In his *Šābuhragān*, as preserved in the Middle Persian fragments M 7984 and M 7982: ASMUSSEN (1975) 127-129; cf. KLIMKEIT (1993) 231-233.

This account of anthropogenesis as a counter-plot of evil has a distinctive prelude in the so-called “Seduction of the Archons”, wherein the dark beings are attracted to the beauty of divine male and female forms, and as a result of their lust ejaculate semen and abort fetuses, which fall to earth and produce plants and animals, respectively. Critics of Manichaeism were fond of citing the story because of its bizarre and grotesque character.<sup>48</sup> But in fact even here Mani worked with mythic material that would have been familiar in the melting pot of late antique Mesopotamian culture. Already in the Sumerian myth of “Enki and Ninhursag”, the god Enki is tricked into spilling his semen onto the earth, from which eight kinds of plants grow.<sup>49</sup> Of course, this text is far too old to have been known to Mani, unless some derivative narrative had survived in later Babylonian literature that is still unknown to us. The theme of using sexual attraction to overpower a dangerous and problematic mighty being appears relatively closer to Mani’s time — but still more than a thousand years prior — in the Canaanite myth of Baal vs. Yam for mastery of the world, which contains the detail that his sister Astarte deliberately displays herself at the seashore to attract Yam;<sup>50</sup> and a similar element is found involving Ishtar in the Hurrian “Legend of the Dragon Hedammu”, part of the Kumarbi cycle cited above, wherein Hedammu beholds Ishtar’s naked limbs and is inflamed with passion, which allows her to overpower him. Although the text is fragmentary, it appears that his semen pours out onto the ground as rain.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> E.g., AUG. *C. Faust.* 20, 6: “But it is intolerably criminal when you say that handsome boys and beautiful girls are displayed from that ship and that the princes of darkness are inflamed with lust for their very lovely bodies, the males for the females and the females for the males, so that, in their burning lust and craving desire, limbs of your God may be released from their limbs, as if from foul and sordid shackles”.

<sup>49</sup> KRAMER (1945). Enki proceeds to eat the eight plants, and grows ill, due to Ninhursag’s anger at him for eating them. After an appeal from the gods, Ninhursag evokes eight deities to cure the eight afflicted parts of Enki’s body.

<sup>50</sup> GASTER (1961) 114-115.

<sup>51</sup> GASTER (1961) 115; HOFFNER (1998) 50-55.

To further bridge the time between these late Bronze Age narratives and Mani, we must look further afield, bearing in mind that these non-native mythic traditions could well have been found in the rich multiculturalism of the region in late antiquity. Greek myth, for example, contains several episodes with similar features. For example, the tale of the origins of the Athenian people tells how Hephaistos lusted after the virgin goddess Athena, but succeeded only in ejaculating onto her leg. Athena wipes it off and it falls to earth, giving birth to Erichthonios. Pindar (*Pythian Ode* 2, 21-48) summarizes a similar tale involving a goddess resisting unwanted advances, in this case Hera against the advances of the Titan Ixion. Here again, the assaulter's semen misses its target, yet still produces offspring. Zeus interposes a phantom Hera made of clouds, embracing which Ixion produces the ancestor of the Centaurs. Three features of the myth of Ixion connect it quite closely to Manichaean myth. First is the phantom-like quality of the false apparition of Hera, formed of mere cloud. Similarly, the male and female forms that attract the dark forces in the Manichaean narrative are illusory, and ultimately untouchable. Second, we have the characterization of the offspring of Ixion's encounter with the cloud, much as in Manichaean myth, as a beastly mixture of qualities, a derangement of order. Third, the miscreant Ixion is bound to a rotating wheel as punishment, exactly as Mani told of the dark forces being bound to the wheel of the zodiac and spun on it as a means to both punish them and cause them to yield up the light they had consumed.<sup>52</sup>

Even where Manichaean myth appeared to some as most (negatively) original, therefore, we find instead abundant evidence that Mani had precedent in the narrative traditions flowing back and forth amid the vibrant cultural exchanges of late antique West Asia. While connections to ancient Babylonian traditions have been remarked before, they have typically been

<sup>52</sup> In Apollodorus, the Aloadae giants Otos and Ephialtes are involved in a similar attempted assault on Hera and Artemis.



treated in isolation from the cosmopolitan conditions of Mani's own time. I consider it highly significant, therefore, that many of the same themes appear in Hellenistic mythic culture, and it appears likely that Mani had familiarity with both narratives and artistic representations he would have encountered in the region's Hellenic colonies. Mythic connections in this direction have gone under-appreciated in previous scholarship.<sup>53</sup>

## II. The cosmic apparatus: an artistic interpretation

Mani reformulated the mythic resources he encountered, arranging them in novel combinations, and investing them with his own sense of significance. The Manichaean community sustained this new mythic system for over a thousand years. With the benefit of a formalized scriptural canon and institutional structure to support it, Manichaean myth was preserved largely unchanged throughout that period. So much so that an artistic rendering of the Manichaean cosmos a millennia later than Mani can be understood directly from Mani's own compositions. In 2008, a private collector in Japan generously came forward with a 14<sup>th</sup> century Chinese painted representation of the Manichaean cosmos (Fig. 6.3).<sup>54</sup> This painting closely matches descriptions in Manichaean literature of the cosmos that results from the cosmogonical narrative discussed above.

In its present state, this painting depicts the structure and functioning of the existing cosmos, with the many deities emanated from the Father of Greatness managing its operation and

<sup>53</sup> The only researcher to posit substantial Hellenistic influence on Mani himself is SCHAEDE (1968), in a section titled "Die hellenistische These", 46-51. He focused, however, on possible debts to Greek philosophy, rather than more popular religious traditions, and was followed in this in several studies by his pupil C. Colpe. By no means do I wish to rule out the possibility that Mani had some knowledge of Hellenistic philosophy from literature available in the well-connected urban centers of Mesopotamia.

<sup>54</sup> The following exposition is based upon GULÁCSI / BEDUHN (2015).



subduing various demonic beings strewn throughout the heavens and the earths. The primordial realms of light and darkness remain off-stage: the former veiled from this world, the latter rendered inert. At the top, the “New Paradise” or “New Aeon,” built as a palace of the cosmic gods, appears as a brightly colored platform filled with a large number of divine figures. A central figure flanked by twelve attendants supervises the cosmos below.<sup>55</sup> The vessels of the sun and moon dominate the space beneath it, each inhabited by three deities and a number of subordinate figures. Between them can be seen the head of a figure whose neck and shoulders are formed of streams of light. The Coptic Manichaean Psalm-Book invokes these three as a set: “For you the ships (i.e., the sun and moon) are waiting on high that they may draw you up and take you to the light. Behold, the Perfect Man is stretched out [in the middle of] the world, that you may walk in him and receive [your] unfading garlands”.<sup>56</sup> The heavens and earths that unfold downward apparently are to be visualized as parts of the body of this “Perfect Man”. The curving ten heavens, for instance, represent his ribs. This multi-tiered heaven has West Asian parallels.<sup>57</sup> Connections to the much simpler Greek cosmology appear to be at a minimum in the more complex Manichaean cosmology, with a small number of isolated motifs, such as the Atlas figure who supports the upper earths. The influence of astrology on Hellenistic cosmology yielded more complicated layered heavens throughout the Greco-Roman world, based on the orbits of the sun, moon, and planets. Such a scheme does not appear to serve as the basis of the ten heavens of Manichaeism, however, since the sun and

<sup>55</sup> On the possible identity of this deity, see the discussion in GULÁCSI / BEDUHN (2015).

<sup>56</sup> *Psalm-Book* (ALLBERRY [1938]) 163, 16-18; cf. 35, 23-26; 160, 16-17; 178, 25-26.

<sup>57</sup> Sumerian references to seven heavens and earths are too remote from Mani’s context (HOROWITZ [1998] 208-220), but the same construct appears in late antique Jewish texts from Mesopotamia (GRUENWALD [2014] 168), and is found as well in early Islam (JACHIMOWICZ [1975] 147).

moon stand above the heavens, and the stars and planets are clustered together in the lowest, first heaven, where in the cosmology painting a zodiac is flanked by groups of seven (planetary) and twelve (constellatory) figures.<sup>58</sup> The chief deity of the ten heavens appears twice as an enthroned figure to the right and left sides of the seventh heaven. This is the King of Honor (Lat. *rex honoris*) “surrounded by soldierly angels” (Lat. *angelorum exercitibus circumdatum*).<sup>59</sup> This imagery goes back to biblical precedent in the divine epithet Sabaoth (“of armies”) and references to God enthroned “with all the host of heaven standing around him on his right and his left” (1 Kings 22, 19), carried forward in later Jewish visionary literature, which specifies his location in the seventh heaven, with “all his soldiers standing ... to his right and to his left before him”.<sup>60</sup>

Several recurring motifs occupy the heavens. Aligned along their vertical center appear a series of upturned crescents, conceived as boats carrying two individuals each, and flanked by a pair of buildings apparently representing treasuries filled with the good deeds accompanying the ascending souls. Demonic creatures appear in nearly every heaven, usually in subdued or pacified poses. Manichaean texts refer to their imprisonment in the heavens, a perhaps unexpected notion that goes back to Jewish Enoch literature.<sup>61</sup> Throughout these heavenly spaces, a figure identifiable as Mani, dressed in a white robe with red trim, appears again and again as a witness to the structural and dynamic details of the cosmic organization.<sup>62</sup> Regardless of any

<sup>58</sup> Similarly, the standard three-tiered heaven of Mesopotamian cosmology places all astronomical phenomena in the lowest heaven (HOROWITZ [1998] 152-153).

<sup>59</sup> AUG. *C. Faust.* 15, 6.

<sup>60</sup> *Siddur Rabbah* 48-51.

<sup>61</sup> See *Kephalaia* (GARDNER [1995]) 16, 51, 25-31.

<sup>62</sup> He stands next to the central deity in the New Paradise, and a number of times in the space beneath it looking at various divine figures, including in the vessels of the sun and moon; he can be seen on both sides of the seventh heaven and once in the first heaven; and he appears in the atmosphere below the heavens, looking upon the Maiden of Light on the left and the Great Judge on the right.

antecedents for the overall structure or individual elements of this cosmic map, Mani's own visionary witness serves to authenticate it.

Below complex activities in the atmosphere between the earths and the heavens, which cannot be explored here, the eight layers of the earth rest stacked one upon the other. In Theodore bar Konai's account of Manichaean cosmogony, once the archons have been skinned to provide the material for the heavens, their skinned bodies are cast down to form the eight layers of the earth, just as Marduk splits Tiamat in half to make the heavens and earth in *Enūma Eliš*. In Babylonian mythology, seven gates divide the surface of the earth from the depths of the underworld, but this does not necessarily entail an idea of seven distinct levels beneath the earth, as it may have in much earlier Sumerian accounts.<sup>63</sup> The surface of the uppermost earth in the painting is filled with figures and activities around a central mountain. Water encircles the inhabited earth, as it was imagined in nearly every culture with which Mani had contact.<sup>64</sup> The earth's surface is demarcated into four regions — a familiar Mesopotamian motif.<sup>65</sup> In the four directional corners, monstrous heads erupt from beneath the earth, spewing flame. Only the fifth earth shows figures in action, with an Atlas figure holding up the worlds above it, and the King of Glory, holding a ring of investiture, seated on a throne, supervising the turning of three elemental wheels of wind, water, and fire.

### III. The soteriological function of the cosmic apparatus

Due to its understandable focus on salvation and the motives for it, Manichaean literature can give the impression of a quite Gnostic or Platonic view of the material cosmos, as a place and

<sup>63</sup> HOROWITZ (1998) 358-359.

<sup>64</sup> HOROWITZ (1998) 325-327.

<sup>65</sup> HOROWITZ (1998) 298-301, 324-325.

state foreign to the soul, and as the latter's prison. It has been easy to interpret the strict rules Manichaeans followed on handling nature around them as part and parcel of an abhorrence of this world, and a commitment to have nothing to do with it. Hints here and there in Manichaean accounts of cosmogony suggested to some that such an understanding might be an oversimplification. The biggest difference between Manichaean and Gnostic cosmologies is who carries out the demiurgical function. It is characteristic of Gnosticism that the demiurge is a degenerate and flawed being, self-serving and egomaniacal. In Manichaeism, the demiurgical beings are emanated divinities properly carrying out the will of the supreme deity. The cosmos, then, is properly constructed, albeit with imperfect raw materials due to the mixture of light and darkness.

It was Werner Sundermann's edition of the "Sermon on the Soul" (*Gyān Wifrās*), and his astute interpretive analysis of it, that revolutionized our thinking on Manichaean attitudes towards the surrounding world. Acknowledging the preponderance in other Manichaean texts of rhetoric regarding the soul's suffering, struggle, pollution, and imprisonment, Sundermann noted that the "Sermon on the Soul" brings out an important other dimension to Manichaean thinking.

"The distinctiveness of its message is that the Living Soul *also* is a powerful, effective pentad of divine light-elements, which bestows order on the world and continuity on its existence, sustains and supports the bodies of living beings, delivers continuous life to creatures, allows the plants to grow and multiply, even helps the birth and growth of humankind, fashions creatures in beauty and enables them to see and hear, to have the capacity to move and communicate with each other and live with one another in peace and well-being. Moreover, in many small things the Living Soul makes the life of humans on earth as pleasant and easy as possible ... In short: only through the presence of the Living Soul can the world exist at all."<sup>66</sup>

<sup>66</sup> SUNDERMANN (1997) 15. I have omitted the citations of individual passages of the text supporting each of these characterizations.

The “Sermon on the Soul” thus complements Manichaeian cosmogonic accounts by explaining the role of “soul” mixed with darkness in forming and ordering the cosmos in all of its positive qualities, which the text enumerates with almost rapturous naturalism. So much for the ‘anti-cosmic’ orientation of Manichaeism.<sup>67</sup>

These observations help to clarify the character of the cosmos as Manichaeians conceived of it as the arena of human action. But they do not yet bring us to a full picture of that cosmos, for the Manichaeians understood it to be not just an arena, but actually an instrument or apparatus through which salvation of all life was achieved. The scope of concern extends to all living things. “The purification and liberation of good from evil is brought about ... by the forces of God throughout the world as a whole, and as regards all its elements” (Aug. *Haer.* 46). The great apparatus of the cosmos turns and flows, and generates salvational effects on its own, apart from any help or hindrance from human beings. Whenever wind blows or water flows, we are told, life is liberated from death, light from darkness. In this way, Manichaeian myth goes beyond merely explaining *how* the world came to be the way it is, to dealing with the question of *why* it is as it is, in terms of a purpose and function. This teleological orientation distinguishes the focus of Manichaeian myth from the start. The Jewish and Christian traditions belatedly sought a teleological master plan within a cosmological account that originally had no such interest, and even then could come to no consensus on a purpose behind God’s act of creation. The same can be said of many other traditions. Perhaps Zoroastrianism comes closest to Manichaeism in sharing a view of the cosmos as directed towards an end in its very creation, within a similar dualistic context that saw it as a defensive bulwark

<sup>67</sup> Cf. the Turkic lay confession text *Xwāstwānīft*, IIIA: “The tenfold sky above and the eightfold earth below exist because of the Fivefold God. The divine blessings and fortunes, the colors and complexions, the spirits and the souls, the forces and lights, and the origins and roots of all that is upon the earth is the Fivefold God” (CLARK [2013] 89).

against evil. Manichaean spokespersons frequently pressed this issue against their Christian opponents: what was God's prompt and motive for creation? They argued that the Christians had no answer to this question, and that only Manichaeism provided one (e.g., Aug. *Gen. c. Manich.* 1, 2, 3-4).

As we have seen, God's motive for creating the cosmos did not at first envision a role for, or even the existence of human beings. This relative marginality of humans puts Manichaeism closer to ancient polytheistic anthropologies of the region than to the major monotheistic faiths, which tend to place human beings at the center of the universe, and to see in human existence the main purpose of the cosmos. Manichaeism does not merely carry forward this relative marginality of humanity as an implicit aspect of its mythology, but even stresses it doctrinally (e.g., *Kephalaion* 112). Humans are far from the center of the vast soteriological operation of the cosmos. Nevertheless, religious discourse is directed to human beings so that they know their own small part in this work. Moreover, they benefit from the assurance that their religious labors take place within a supportive context, surrounded by structures and beings working toward the same goals.

From this survey of the sources, details, and controlling themes of Manichaean cosmogony and cosmology, I would like to conclude by putting it in light of the observation of Hans Schaeder, that Mani strove always for a unified system.<sup>68</sup> Personal salvation and universal salvation mirrored one another. Human purpose and cosmic purpose shared a common moral value. The movements of clouds and stars were as closely linked to the battle of good and evil as were the shifting inclinations of the human will. Mani relentlessly drew parallels between the battles within the human body and psyche and the signs of struggle writ large on the sky and earth (e.g., *Kephalaion* 38 and 70). The same drive for inclusive and comprehensive system can be seen in Mani's handling of the mythology of other

<sup>68</sup> SCHAEDER (1968).

cultures and traditions. They were not simply rejected as error, but incorporated into Manichaean discourse as echoes of truth, to be purged of corruption through a careful critique, informed by a surprising comparative analysis that we tend to think of as a modern intellectual trait. The more sources we acquire, and the more we study Manichaean cosmogony and cosmology, the more we are struck by its systematic character. What initially appeared to be a loose assemblage of isolated units in uneasy juxtaposition, and typically characterized as ‘baroque’ in its complexity, with further study keeps revealing deeper symmetries and correlations. The Manichaean example deserves to be brought into the larger academic discussion of mythopoesis, as it undoubtedly can shed light on how myths work within their own discursive frame, and how they are put to work in relation to the practices and overarching ethos of religious communities.

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## DISCUSSION

*K. Schmid:* I was struck by the quote from the *Kephalaia* early in your paper. Mani's self-evaluation reminded me of the possible logic we can reconstruct behind the complex formation of biblical literature, except for the fact that no such explicit self-reflections are extant in the Bible. It is noteworthy, however, that Mani thinks to be able to supersede all wisdom of previous generations in his own writings. How was this bold position received and possibly modified in later Manichaeism?

*J.D. BeDuhn:* Manichaeans came to see Mani as, in effect, the "Seal of the Prophets", the "Interpreter" of all previous revelation. Augustine of Hippo, who spent more than a decade among the Manichaeans, reports that they viewed Mani as the one who decoded all previous symbolic language, and explained it in straightforward terms to be taken literally, and not itself subject to further decoding by later interpreters. Mani's writings, including his letters, came to be cited as scripture. Although we are not yet in a position to reconstruct the history of Manichaean interpretation of that scripture, we do know that doctrinal debates occurred, and that both sides appealed to Mani's writings in support of their positions. Yet, even though Mani had this kind of ultimate authority, later Manichaeans carried forward his project of interpreting religious traditions with which they came into contact. Chinese Manichaean literature documents this clearly, with Taoist and Chinese Buddhist material being appropriated and read in light of Mani's teachings.

*S. Maul:* Ohne Zweifel war Mani ein ungeheuer gelehrter Mann, der — wie Sie eindrucksvoll zeigten — sich mit vielen geistigen Strömungen seiner Zeit intensiv auseinandergesetzt

haben muss. Sie haben seine Beeinflussung durch altorientalische Lehren in besonderer Weise hervorgehoben. Dieses Wissen muss in seinem Umfeld noch sehr lebendig gewesen sein, obgleich der herkömmliche Schriftträger altorientalischer Gelehrsamkeit, die Tontafel, zu Lebzeiten Manis schon außer Gebrauch gekommen war. Ist dieses Wissen um altorientalische Überlieferungen im dritten Jahrhundert unserer Zeitrechnung Ihrer Einschätzung nach noch allgemein, und damit auch der spätantiken Umwelt, zugänglich oder hat Mani, was die altorientalische Überlieferung anbetrifft, eher ein bereits weitgehend vergessenes, arkanes Wissen wieder aktiviert?

*J.D. BeDuhn:* I think this is the next question of broad historical importance that arises from the demonstration that Mani had somehow accessed ancient mythological materials that we otherwise have trouble tracing as far as his time. We know that at the dawn of the Hellenistic age these traditions were alive and well, and that spokesmen for these cultures, such as Berossus, had access to written records. But Berossus himself had to adopt a Greek writing medium to transmit this knowledge, and he certainly was not alone. In your paper, you noted that Hesychius had knowledge of hundreds of Sumerian words, which must have been transmitted in written materials by 'Chaldaioi' who were marketing their cultural and ritual expertise in the new conditions of the Hellenistic age, and the results were preserved all the way to Hesychius's time. We can see in the remains of the archives at Seleucia that it was filled with records in a perishable medium, whenever we date its destruction by fire. I do not assume that there was anything like a major translation project or systematic transfer of ancient knowledge to a new language or writing medium. But I think we must be cautious about equating the gradual abandonment of cuneiform tablets with a decline of the region's traditional religious culture. Even several centuries after Mani, Mesopotamia is full of indigenous religious experts of various kinds, who were transmitting and reworking and recombining various mythological and ritual traditions in

some continuity with the distant past, and doing so in the same Aramaic language Mani spoke. In Mani's own time this indigenous tradition, in engagement with Hellenic and Iranian influences to be sure, was still dominant, and had not been displaced by Judaism or Christianity or Zoroastrianism, all of which were just in a process of formation alongside of Manichaeism. Given that, I think that it was possible that when people even in ordinary villages gathered on certain festival days, or in response to the arrival of a traveling 'holy man,' it was the familiar *Enuma Eliš*-like tales that they heard. Yet, since Mani evidently was raised in a rather insulated environment, a community where he may have been more likely to hear narratives related to the Jewish Enoch cycle than to anything more directly related to the *Enuma Eliš*, he must have made a concerted effort to either read texts or interview experts belonging to the indigenous tradition, and, as I have suggested, in a form already heavily engaged with Hellenistic culture. It is entirely possible that this knowledge was treated as arcana, but perhaps deliberately so, as part of its allure. I imagine that Mesopotamia was filled with purveyors of the sacred, just as the Roman Empire was at the same time. It was in the very nature of such a quasi-intellectual class to bring together sacred lore from a variety of sources. Mani comes from such a background, but manages to turn it into a full system, a community, and in the end a religion.

*T. Fuhrer:* According to the Manichaean cosmology, we can perceive — that is, see and touch and so forth — the process and results of the cosmogonic struggle in every single 'thing' in the world around us, which explains the strict moral and dietetic rules for the Manichaean community and also the way they are expected to behave with nature and its elements. Jason has compared the Manichaeans' materialistic and sensualistic approach to nature with 'tree hugging,' which some people do in order to get a sense of the power which is acting in nature and from which they might get good energy. My question is whether for modern cosmology, too, the elements —

atoms, electrons, or any particles in material things — provide information on the universe and its history and perhaps origin.

*R. Durrer:* And now I have the following question for Jason: Can you explain or guess why the Manichaean religion has died out, in contrast to Judaism, Christianity, or Islam?

*J.D. BeDuhn:* A number of causes have been suggested, one of them being the close dependence of Manichaean doctrine on a particular mythological cosmology that could not withstand advances in cosmological science. But I think that suggestion is a bit anachronistic, and exaggerates pre-modern scientific challenge to religious models of cosmic order. Very similar multi-tiered models of the heavens, filled with ranks of angels, thrived in Jewish and Christian traditions right up until the Enlightenment, with no detriment to the survival of those religions. A variation on this theme has been to suggest that Manichaean doctrine is just too complicated to have gained popularity. But that impression comes from looking mostly at very scholastic types of Manichaean literature, and not having the same quantity of evidence for popular forms of Manichaean devotion and practice. The complex pantheon of divine figures and roles in Manichaeism is certainly no more complicated than Jewish or Christian angelology or the catalog of saints. The Manichaeans had the misfortune of recurrent persecution; but Judaism managed to survive a similar history. So, in the end, I am inclined to attribute the extinction of Manichaeism not to anything inherently different or maladaptive in it, but to historical accident: its bad luck in arriving in regions just when new aggressive orthodoxies had come into power, its failure to secure state power for itself (except for a brief historical period among the Uygurs in Central Asia). But perhaps we should not make too much of our own historical moment as a vantage point from which to judge a religion's historical success. After all, Manichaeism had a remarkable history of some 1,400 years — just as long of

a history as Islam has enjoyed — and in certain periods was more widespread than any of its rivals. Its success might be best assessed now by tracing its legacy in its influence on those rival religions, which often took over aspects of Manichaean teaching or practice in order to better compete with it.

