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The Manichaean Attitude to Natural Phenomena as Reflected in the Berlin *Kephalaia*

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Abstract: The relationship between religion and science is a hotly debated issue, which has triggered new approaches and redefinitions of fundamental notions worldwide. This paper presents a preliminary sketch of the Manichaean attitude towards natural phenomena, thus exploring the question of the relation of religion to science—even if these notions are not necessarily applicable for early, non-European phenomena—in a historical context. In my survey, I use the Coptic *Kephalaia*, a fourth-century Manichaean text from Egypt, to highlight some instances (the Sun and the Moon, clouds, vegetation and animals, the salty sea, shadow, and earthquake) that characteristically reflect the unique, early Manichaean attitude to the physical world.

Keywords: Manichaeism, Coptic, *Kephalaia*, science and religion

Introduction

Augustine (354–430 AD), who was a Manichaean auditor for at least nine years, was partly attracted to Manichaeism because of its rational methods of inquiry and various “scientific” explanations of natural phenomena.¹ As convincingly shown by Leo C. Ferrari, Augustine was immersed in the art of astrology during his youth, and this fascination of his was in particular responsible for his attraction to Mānī’s (216–ca. 277 AD) religion. As he says in the *Confessions* (4.3.5): “I was an eager student of those who make horoscopes.”² However, Ferrari continues, his increasing knowledge of the astronomers’ (“philosophers”) art induced several doubts and questions in him pertaining to the Manichaean myth which was replete with astronomical details.³ Consequently, his disillusionment with Manichaeism can, partly at least, be attributed to his decisive encounter in 382/383 AD with the then famous Manichaean bishop Faustus, who did not wish or simply was not able to give satisfactory answers to his inquiries.⁴

“I had been waiting with a kind of boundless longing for the coming of this man Faustus. (...) The books of the Manichees are indeed full of lengthy fables about the heaven and the stars and the sun and the moon, and I now thought that he could not give me a reasoned answer to what I wanted to know, which was whether, after comparing all this with the calculations I had read of elsewhere, the facts were as stated in the books of Manes, or if, at any rate, some explanation equally good could be discovered in these books.”⁵

1 Lieu, *Manichaeism*, 177–179, BeDuhn, *Augustine’s Manichaean Dilemma*, 29–31, also see the further references on p. 307 n.35.

2 Ferrari, “Astronomy,” 268.

3 BeDuhn, *Augustine’s Manichaean Dilemma*, 98.

4 Ferrari, “Astronomy,” 275–276, BeDuhn, *Augustine’s Manichaean Dilemma*, 106, 108, 124.

5 *Confessions* 5.6.10 (Ferrari, “Astronomy,” 275), 5.7.12 (Ferrari, “Astronomy,” 269).

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Astronomical notions, as well as other natural phenomena, indeed play a pivotal role in both the fundamental Manichaean myth(s) and its/their various subsequent elaborations.

In the following, I will focus on some of these phenomena to show how they were integrated into Mānī's unique religious system. In presenting the Manichaeans' attitude towards various natural phenomena, I will basically rely on the fourth-century Coptic *Kephalaia* (1Keph), now preserved in Berlin.⁶

The Berlin *Kephalaia* (P. 15 996, entitled 'The Kephalaia of the Teacher', abbreviated as 1Ke to distinguish it from the Dublin *Kephalaia* [2Ke]), despite its *lacunae*, is a major continuous Manichaean text—originally more than 500 pages—that provides a plethora of information on a great number of important subjects.⁷ Together with other Manichaean codices like the *Psalm-Book* and the *Homilies*, it was probably found in Medinet Madi (Middle Egypt) in 1929, purchased by Carl Schmidt from a Cairo dealer in 1930, and conserved by Hugo Ibscher in the subsequent years. The *Kephalaia* is a fourth-century Coptic—more precisely, Lycopolitan [L4]—translation or compilation of Greek or perhaps ultimately Syriac originals.⁸ The greatest part of this paginated codex is housed in Berlin, while some pages are held in Vienna and Warsaw.

According to Funk, the compiler-author of the *Kephalaia* was a high-ranking Manichaean.⁹ These second or third generation Manichaeans were evidently cognizant of Mānī's original writings.¹⁰ The popularity of the genre *kephalaia* among Manichaeans can be inferred based on works of similar types in Middle Persian and Chinese.¹¹ The Coptic *Homilies* (18.16) has Mānī himself exclaim: 'I am weeping for the *Kephalaia*.'¹² Even if such an attribution seems to be very unlikely, the fourth-century *Acta Archelai* (62) also seems to refer to it under the rubric *Capitula*, thus making it probable that the *Kephalaia* circulated as a Manichaean collection by the 340s.¹³

Unlike the *Psalm-Book*, the *Kephalaia* is discursive and presents its contents in a relatively well ordered form, frequently classifying content by numerical taxonomies.¹⁴ T. Pettipiece, just like others before him—e.g. A. Böhlig, W.-P. Funk, and I. Gardner—emphasized that the *Kephalaia* is not Mānī's *ipsissima verba* (as C. Schmidt supposed), nor a kind of *summa theologiae manichaicae* (as L. Koenen viewed it), but instead a section of 'addenda and corrigenda' to Mānī's canonical works.¹⁵ I. Gardner sees the work as a series of commentaries to the revelation, i.e. the canonical scriptures.¹⁶

Gardner already stressed the catechetical and mnemonic purposes of the numerical sequencing,¹⁷ while Pettipiece analyzed the overwhelming presence of consciously constructed pentads in the work,¹⁸ as well as the connection of the *Kephalaia* to *Capitaliteratur* and *erōtapokrisis* literature.¹⁹

In this paper, I intend to explore the Manichaean view of certain natural phenomena, especially concentrating on how the Manichaeans tried to offer a mythological interpretation of their activities.

⁶ The completion of the present paper was supported by the European Institutes for Advanced Study (EURIAS) Fellowship Programme at the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH) in Cambridge (cohort 2014/2015).

⁷ On the *Kephalaia* generally see Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher*, xvii–xxiv, Funk, "The Reconstruction," Pettipiece, *Pentadic Redaction*, 6–15. The Coptic text was edited by Polotsky and Böhlig, *Kephalaia*, Böhlig, *Kephalaia*, and Funk, *Kephalaia*. I usually quote Gardner's translation (*The Kephalaia of the Teacher*), unless Pettipiece (*Pentadic Redaction*) has also translated the same chapter, since the latter author could also incorporate W.-P. Funk's *addenda et corrigenda* (see Pettipiece, *Pentadic Redaction*, 93).

⁸ For a possible reconstruction of the process, see Pettipiece, *Pentadic Redaction*, 12.

⁹ Funk, "The Reconstruction," 154.

¹⁰ Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher*, xxii.

¹¹ Sundermann, "Iranische Kephalaia-texte?"; BeDuhn, "Parallels".

¹² Gardner and Lieu, *Manichaean Texts*, 152 n.1.

¹³ Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher*, xix.

¹⁴ Cf. Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher*, xx.

¹⁵ Pettipiece, *Pentadic Redaction*, 8–9; idem, "Coptic Answers," 52.

¹⁶ Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher*, xxii.

¹⁷ Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher*, xxii–xxiii.

¹⁸ Pettipiece, *Pentadic Redaction*.

¹⁹ Pettipiece, "Coptic Answers." The indebtedness of various types of scriptures to this genre was proposed by Kurt Rudolph (1968); furthermore, Paul Dilley has recently suggested that Bardaisan's *Book of the Laws of Countries* might have had an even more direct influence on Mānī (Dilley, "Mani's Wisdom," 19–20).

Before turning to the concrete examples, the general mythical²⁰ context must be outlined for those who are not students of Manichaeism. The Manichaean sources basically unanimously narrate that after the Kingdom of Darkness had approached the Realm of Light, the king of the latter, the Father of Greatness, devised a far-seeing plan to counter their potential attack. As a first step of his preventive countermeasures, he sent the Primal Man, an emanation of his, with the Five Light Elements into the midst of Darkness, which, to its detriment, greedily “swallowed” the Primal Man and his Light Elements, the latter variously described as the sons or weaponry of the former. After a basically victorious battle, the Primal Man was ushered back up to the Realm of Light by other emanations, but his Five Light Elements became mixed with the elements of the dark principle. From this point on, the entire Manichaean myth concentrates on the rescue of these elements held in mixture.

After various further emanations, it will be the Living Spirit and the Mother of Life who establish the cosmos with a double goal in mind: they design it to serve as a gigantic prison that holds the captured demons, and, at the same time, to function as a colossal hospital to heal the wounded, i.e. mixed, light particles. These two purposes are explicitly and pronouncedly mentioned together in such temporally and geographically distant sources as the Coptic and the Chinese ones.

“He [the Living Spirit, GK] spread out all the powers of the abyss to ten heavens and eight earths, he shut them up into this world once, he made it a prison (πυτεκο) too for all the powers of Darkness, it is also a place of purification (μαλτιουβο) for the Soul that was swallowed (?) in them.”²¹

“[The sixth thro]n[e] is that of the Living Spirit, the [glorious] mighty one, he who bore up the First Man out from the [land of darkness]; who also set in order and constructed the world[s ...] both for a cleansing of the light (καθαρισμος μεν απολαϊνε), [and] for a binding [of the] powers of enmity (αγμπερε ξε ηη) βαμ πτμητσαδε).”²²

“Therefore, by uniting the two powers of the five types of demons and the five light bodies, the Light Envoy of the Pure Wind established the ten firmaments and the eight earths of the cosmos. Thus the cosmos became a hospital (*yaotang* 藥堂) where the light bodies were recovering (*yiliao* 醫療) and a prison (*laoyu* 牢獄) where the dark demons were bound (*jinx* 禁繫).”²³

As is clear from the passages above, the Manichaeans imagined a cosmos with ten firmaments and eight earths, with a vast atmosphere and the human world between them. The boundaries of this created universe now hold all the mixed light elements and the dark ones confined, therefore the carefully designed plan to separate and thus rescue the light elements can start within a relatively precisely defined space. The healing function of the cosmos requires skillfully constructed mechanisms that aid the process of separating the light and dark elements. The basic reason why such a separation is needed is that the light elements, collectively called the Living Soul, suffer immensely in their being attached to the dark ones. This suffering is described in detail in various Manichaean texts.²⁴

What is important for us here is the presence of the light elements in nature, even if the various parts of nature contain varying amount of light. The Sun and the Moon, for example, are constructed entirely from already separated and rescued light elements, and so their components do not need to be rescued. Vegetation contains a high proportion of light mixed with dark elements, while the animals, as we will see, contain much less light.

The Manichaeans thus viewed the macrocosmos not only as the creation of divine emanations like the Living Spirit and the Mother of Life, but also considered it vivified and beautified by the “built-in”

²⁰ I will use the words ‘myth’ and ‘mythical’ throughout to denote the Manichaean narrative of cosmogony, cf. Stroumsa and Stroumsa, “Aspects,” 40: “Manichaeism represented the last significant outburst of mythological thought in the world of antiquity.”

²¹ *Psalm-Book* 10.23–29 (trans. Allberry, *A Manichaean Psalm-Book*, 10).

²² 1Ke 82.12–17 (trans. Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher*, 84). The Berlin *Kephalaia* mentions the Living Spirit and the Mother of Life several times as creators of the cosmos and jailers of the demons, see 1Ke 4.15–33, 56.7–13, 58.20–33, 60.27–61.6, 79.29–33.

²³ *Traité* 11–13 (my translation).

²⁴ Klimkeit, *Gnosis on the Silk Road*, 43–54, Durkin-Meisterenst, *The Hymns to the Living Soul*, Sundermann, *Die Rede der Lebendigen Seele*.

light elements. This Manichaean fascination with the beauty of the cosmos is expressed in various works.²⁵

After this general introduction, I will now focus on some specific phenomena (the Sun and the Moon, clouds, vegetation and animals, the salty sea, shadow, and earthquake) to explore the Manichean view of them as reflected in the *Kephalaia*. The range of topics is not exhaustive. Due to spatial constraints, I will leave out such complicated topics as, for example, the Manichaean concepts of the astral sphere or of the human body.

The Sun and the Moon

Since their function is to transmit liberated light to the Realm of Light, the Sun and the Moon both play a crucial role in the cosmic rescue process. Manichaean imagination populated these two celestial bodies with divine beings, three gods in each luminary.²⁶ Moreover, the Sun and the Moon have twelve and fourteen doors, respectively, to accept the light and a group of five light-gatherers to facilitate this process. The Moon and the Sun were conceived as palaces or ships, and the latter notion explains the presence of seven and twelve ship-masters in them, respectively.²⁷

The Sun and the Moon were frequently visualized as ships, more specifically as ferries carrying the cargo of light.²⁸ Here I would like to concentrate on an evidently widely held Manichaean notion, closely related to the concept of luminaries as ships, which is supposed to account for the waxing and waning phases of the moon. The liberation of light from the worldly sphere was conceived as a continuous process, in which both the cosmic mechanisms and the Manichaean elect actively participated. The purified light ascending from the world back to the Realm of Light was helped in its ascension by the so-called Column of Glory (or Column of Praise), the Moon, and the Sun. The Moon and the Sun continuously loaded and unloaded cargoes of liberated light. As attested in several sources, the changing shape of the Moon was explained by the Manichaeans as due to its receiving the light for fourteen days, and then transmitting it to the Sun for another fourteen days. The following first two passages from Arabic sources give a detailed description of the process, while the second passage from the *Kephalaia* offers a short argument why the Sun does not change in the same way that the Moon does.

“He (i.e., Mānī) says that what aids the purification and the separation and the ascension of the particles of Light are (the chanting of hymns of) glorification, (invocations of) sanctification, proper speech, and pious deeds, and that by this (behavior) the particles of Light are lifted in a Column of Radiance to the orbit of the moon. The moon constantly receives this (i.e., the flow of particles) from the first of the month to the middle (of the month); then it is full and becomes the full moon. Then (the moon) conveys (it) to the sun until the end of the month, and the sun propels it onward to the Light that is above it, and it circulates in this world until it rejoins the uppermost, pure Light.”²⁹

“All of this rises and flows through the Column of Praise to the sphere of the moon: the Column of Praise is that (instrument) through which the particles of Light ascend to the sphere of the moon. The moon constantly receives this (Light) from the first of the month until the full moon appears. Then—since it is full—it conveys it to the sun. The waxing of the moon is due to its reception over the course of the first day to the fourteenth night of the month of what is released and has ascended from the particles of Light (that were bound) in the earth, vegetation, water, and other things, as the pure portions of the Light of the world and the praises. Its waning from the time of the appearance of the full moon to the end of the month and to the time when the new moon appears is due to its propulsion of that (Light) to the sun. And the sun propels it to the Light which is above it in the World of Praise, and it travels through that World up to the pure supernal Light. By means of their activity this (purification) will not cease until there remains from the Light only a compressed thing which the sun and the moon are unable to render pure.”³⁰

²⁵ On this concept, see Gershevitch, “Beauty as the Living Soul.”

²⁶ 1Ke 20.15–18, 26–29; 24.9–20. Also see Kósa, “The Sun, the Moon and Paradise.”

²⁷ On the Coptic material about the two luminaries, see van Lindt, *The Names*, 119–132.

²⁸ E.g. *Psalm-Book* 75.4, 134.25, 139.29–30 (trans. Allberry, *A Manichaean Psalm-Book*, 75, 134, 139); 1Ke 151.24–28; St. Ephrem Syrus: *Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion, and Bardaisan* 26.29–31 (Reeves, “Manichaean Citations,” 248); *Acta Archelai* 8.5–7. Also see Kósa, “Ships and Ferries.”

²⁹ Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-mīlāl wa-n-nihāl*, 243 (trans. Reeves, *Prolegomena*, 204).

³⁰ Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Kitāb al-mu’tamad*, 564–65 (trans. Reeves, *Prolegomena*, 202–203).

“The first is the filling up of the disk of its ship (of the Sun); because its ship has filled up every season, and shall not wane at all the way that the ship of the Moon wanes. This continuous fill[ing] by which it is filled displays the mystery of the Father, the great Greatness.”³¹

This natural process, discernible to everybody, served as evidence for the believers that the basic notion of the mixed light being constantly purified via the elect, the Column of Glory, the Moon, and the Sun was correct and that the meaning and relevance of the believers’ life was conspicuously verifiable in the sky. To cite J. J. Buckley’s summary: “Waxing and waning, the moon demonstrates the effect of the Elects’ activities: the moon regularly fills up with ascending light elements and just as regularly empties these into the sun, whose task is to further propel the particles upward. Consoled by this visible salvation process, the Hearers might retain confidence in the effect of their service to the Elect and see their own lives as adjacent to theirs, if not fully coequal.”³²

The sixty-fifth *kephalaion* lists various characteristics to highlight the importance of the Sun, a central object of veneration for the Manichaeans.³³ This *kephalaion* details the numerous benefits this pure light grants (1Ke 162.1–12): “it illuminates by its light the world,” “it floods beauty and loveliness upon all creatures,” it grants peace to people, it releases the Living Soul from the “bonds and fetters of heaven and earth,” “it gives strength to the elements,” and “a scent and a taste to the entire Cross of the Light”. The text then proceeds to praise the superiority of the Sun with regard to all these aspects (1Ke 162.12–20). It is evident from the description that the unique status the Sun enjoys is attributable to its being replete with pure light particles. Thus all its visible, physical manifestations (its brilliance, or granting beauty and peace to the world) are the results of its invisible, non-physical characteristics. As the *Kephalaia* (1Ke 163.16–18) itself puts it: “It (i.e. the Sun) displays all [the] marks of its graces, displaying and signifying on its own behalf that it is good, out of the essence of the good.”

As mentioned in the introductory passages, the more Augustine became acquainted with astronomical *realia*, the more he became disillusioned with Manichaean teachings about them. Augustine alludes to his fascination with the astronomers’ precision in calculating eclipses. Even if Manichaeans probably did not make such calculations, they probably had a general view about the cause of eclipses; at least, this seems to be reflected in the critique of the sixth-century *In Epictetum Encheiridion* of Simplicius:

“They [sc. the Manichaeans] mention some pillars, but they do not take them to mean [those] ‘which hold heaven and earth together,’ as they do not think it right to understand any of the things they say allegorically, but those which are made of solid stone and carved, as one of their wise men informed me. (They also mention) twelve doors and one of them opens each hour. They also show a marvelous excess of ingenuity in explaining the cause of eclipses. They say that when the evil (archons) who were chained in creation create upheaval and disorder by their own movements, their light particles inside them throw up some sort of veil so as not to share in their excitement. Eclipses are therefore caused by the interposition of this veil Why do I quote their views at length? For they fabricate certain marvels which are not worthy to be called myths. However, they do not use them as myths nor do they think that they have any other meaning but believe that all the things which they say are true.”³⁴

The details in this description (enchained and rebellious demons containing swallowed light particles) seem to corroborate that a genuine Manichaean explanation of eclipses has been preserved here.

Atmosphere and Clouds

The region below the ten firmaments and the zodiac is that of the atmosphere, the habitat of the Righteous Judge and the Virgin of Light. The latter’s name is associated with lightning in Uighur (*yašin t(ä)ñri kny rwsn t(ä)ñri* – “Lightning god, Light Virgin god”) and Chinese (*Dianguangming* 電光明) sources, but not in other language traditions, where she is almost invariably called the Virgin of Light (Syriac *btūlat nūhrā*,

³¹ 1Ke 162.23–27.

³² Buckley, “Tools and tasks,” 409.

³³ See e.g. BeDuhn, *Augustine’s Manichaean Dilemma*, 56–57.

³⁴ Simplicius, *In Epict. ench.* chap. 27, p.71,44–72,15; Lieu, “Some Themes,” 451–52.

Coptic $\pi\alpha\rho\theta\epsilon\nu\omicron\varsigma$ $\mu\pi\omicron\gamma\alpha\iota\eta\varsigma$, Latin *Virgo lucis*, Greek η $\pi\alpha\rho\theta\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omicron\varsigma$ $\tau\omicron\upsilon$ $\phi\omega\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$, Middle Persian and Parthian *knygrwšn* or *qnyg*, Sogdian *qnygrwšn*).³⁵ Although her name does not suggest a direct link to lightning in the Coptic *Kephalaia*, in fact her activity, through the agency of her angels, involves tackling lightning and thunderbolts created by the demons of the dark elements. It is worth stressing that the scene described in the ninety-fifth *kephalaion* (“The Apostle asks his disciples: What does cloud mean?”) is set on a cloudy day, and according to the narrative in the *Kephalaia*, this natural circumstance triggers Mānī’s lengthy teaching on the subject, which deserves here an equally lengthy quotation:

“Again, as the Apostle sat in the assembly of his disciples, the sky was cloudy that day, (so) he raised his eyes and looked at this cloud (and) said to his disciples: This cloud, which appears before you, as you look at it, I will reveal to you and teach you how it ascended. Know that it is stripped from Five Places, ascends above this Great Earth, is then revealed and is visible in the middle-air.

So, the cloud shall ascend from the upper fire towards the image of the Virgin of Light, which she makes visible to it, its sign are the sights found in lightning-bolts . . . passing away . . . But it is purified towards [the image of the Virgin of] Light [to whom] it becomes visible the Archons are stripped off of the lightning-bolts. They go out and separate, but these angels are sent to them immediately so that they might seize them. Knowing that they never do good, (and that) every place that they touch they cause death and ruin, when the angels make for them and come beside (?) ... they flee in their distress before them and come [to] what(ever) they meet and assume it. Like a thief, (when he) is caught (and) flees from a man stronger than him who pursues him in order to overtake him. Now, these Archons that shall be freed from this cloud,³⁶ they bear that which they meet ... in ... it, which they do not ... will seize this little bit, whether a tree [that] they found in the way or beasts or people. In short, every place that they assume they burn and destroy with the fire of their bodies—that is the Archons, the sons of fire, those who are stripped of the fire.

The cloud, however, that rises up from the water and ascends to the Virgin of Light, its sign(s) are this thunder and this noise which is in the air in various forms and (which people) hear when the Archons who belong to those found in the cloud find time, they strip themselves of this cloud, flee from it and leave it behind [them. But their sign] is this: that in every place which [they destroy] they make frost and hail and snow, and they lay waste to seeds and fruit and plants, and they ... every place [that] they destroy

[The] cloud, however, which rises up from the wind comes up to the middle-air, towards the image of the Virgin who makes it visible—its sign is [the] dark wind that blows bitterly All these rivers and seas which they reach and attain, they make waves in them and raise ... and they ... the ships and they cause destruction ... [similar, but more fragmentary descriptions of the clouds of Light and Mixed Air follow].

Behold, then, I have opened your eyes concerning this cloud, how it ascends to the height and (how) the living beings that are purified in it. I have also taught you (about) the Archons that are in it, how they cause these adversities and how they are seized and thrown into the prison below by the angels who were given the command by the power of the Virgin of Light, she who has authority over the entire zone to purify the living beings that are in it.”³⁷

A Middle Persian fragment also links the motif of the Virgin [or Maiden] of Light with the clouds and the demons, although in a much more succinct way:

“The cloud that arises from the dark demons (...) Rain and lightning arise from the water-demons (and) the fire-demons. The angels, (however,) bind the demons. Wherever they get, they cause damage to the trees and the animals. The Virgin of Light ...”³⁸

The ascension of the five types of clouds and the subsequent events follow the same basic pattern: a cloud belonging to a certain element and containing certain types of demonic forces (archons) due to the mixture ascends towards the Virgin of Light. She forces the demons to leave the cloud and then sends her angels to chase the demonic forces. While the demons flee, they cause various damaging events via certain natural phenomena. Although the *kephalaion* has several lacunae, the following chart may still be instructive:

³⁵ See Kósa, “The Virgin of Light.”

³⁶ I follow Gardner’s (*The Kephalaia of the Teacher*, 247) translation of the phrase $\beta\omega\lambda$ $\alpha\beta\alpha\lambda$ $\varrho\eta$ $\dagger\kappa\lambda\omicron\omicron\lambda\epsilon$ (cf. Polotsky and Böhlig, *Kephalaia*, 241.11) instead of ‘escape to this cloud’.

³⁷ 1Ke 240.16–241.29; 242.2–5, 9–12; 244.6–13 (trans. Pettipiece, *Pentadic Redaction*, 193–94, 196 [slightly modified according to W.-P. Funk’s suggestion to the present author of ‘sights’ instead of ‘flash’ in 240.27]). For a slightly different translation, see Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher*, 247–48, 250.

³⁸ M292/R/I/9–10; M292/R/II/4–9 (trans. Sundermann, *Mittelpersische und parthische*, 47).

ELEMENT	SIGHT	DAMAGE CAUSED BY ITS DEMONS
Fire	lightning-bolts	burning and destroying trees, beasts, people
Water	thunder	frost and hail and snow
Wind	dark, bitter wind	waves on the rivers and sea, destruction of ships
Light	---	(taking of lives)
Mixed Air	--	begetting of trees and flesh

Through the frequent use of Coptic aorist³⁹ (e.g. 240,25: ⲙⲁϥⲉⲓ; 240,27, 242,4: ⲙⲁϥⲟⲩⲁⲛⲁⲩⲉⲩⲉ; 241,19: ⲙⲁϥⲁⲩⲉⲥⲧⲥ), regularity and habitual occurrence is implied in these descriptions. An explicit and fitting description of the continuous nature of the process is referred to in a Sogdian source: “The third Resurrection: the Maiden of Light performs it from rains and clouds, ceaselessly, winter and summer, spring and autumn.”⁴⁰ The continuous task of the Virgin of Light to purify the atmosphere by removing the demons present in the various types of clouds and thus liberating the light particles from them in fact serves as a general explanation for various phenomena (lightning-bolts, thunder, wind, frost, hail, snow, huge waves) related to the atmosphere. According to the narrative, Mānī in fact explains the relevance of clouds from his perspective and expounds their various types after observing some actual clouds in the sky. This setting therefore reinforces that all the natural phenomena mentioned in the subsequent description must be taken literally and their ultimate cause must be ascribed to the continuously on-going process of purification, one which is supervised by the Virgin of Light. This *kephalaion* thus becomes an excellent witness to the inextricable relationship between natural phenomena and their explanation via the Manichaean myth.⁴¹

Vegetation and Animals

A unique feature of the Manichaean system is its markedly dissimilar evaluation of the spheres of vegetation and animals. While vegetation is considered to contain a great amount of light, animals only have as much light as the vegetation they eat. Consequently, Manichaean elects did not eat meat since there was hardly any light element in them that awaited liberation and even that small amount was thought to escape when the animal was slain;⁴² auditors (hearers), however, were allowed to eat meat.⁴³ This difference between the spheres of vegetation and animals is described in the *Kephalaia* in connection with the ‘conduits’ (ⲁⲓⲣⲉⲙⲉ) that link the worldly regions with the celestial ones.

“The second conduit is the one that runs from the temples and the dwellings and the cities in heaven down to the *Five Kinds of Trees* that grow upon the earth. Life comes up from the Trees to the temples and the cities. But, the Life and the Fire of the heavenly ones comes down to the Trees in their conduits.

The third conduit, however, is all the powers and the companions who dwell in all the firmaments, those whose roots run down from them to the *Five Worlds of Flesh* that creep upon the earth, fixed to one another. While Power and Life gather together in the *Worlds of Flesh* and go out from them in various forms, the powers of heaven draw it to them upwards

³⁹ On the Sahidic (and not L4) aorist, see, e.g., Layton, *A Coptic Grammar*, 261–63.

⁴⁰ M140/R (trans. Sundermann, “A Manichaean View,” 191).

⁴¹ An explanation for rain, another natural phenomenon closely related to cloud, is also linked to the figure of the Virgin of Light in some non-Coptic sources. This is most typically attested in the *Acta Archelai* 27.1–3 [IX]: “A lovely, decorated and very attractive maiden tries to rob the rulers, who were brought up and crucified in the firmament by the Living Spirit, by appearing to the male rulers as a beautiful woman, to the female ones as a good-looking and desirable youth. When the rulers see how beautiful she is, they are stung by a love-charm; since they cannot grasp her however, they become terribly enflamed and erotic desire deprives them of all reason. Now when the maiden becomes invisible before their advance, the great ruler produces clouds from out of himself, to darken the world in his anger, and if he strains much, like a man he sweats and grows tired, and his sweat is the rain” (Gardner and Lieu, *Manichaean Texts*, 184).

⁴² Augustine, *De haeresibus* 46.11 (trans. Fox, Sheldon and Lieu, *Greek and Latin Sources*, 89): “Yet they do not eat meat either, on the grounds that the divine substance has fled from the dead or slain bodies, and what little remains there is of such quality and quantity that it does not merit being purified in the stomachs of the elect.”

⁴³ Augustine, *Epistle* 236.2 (Parsons’ translation cited in Gardner and Lieu, *Manichaean Texts*, 244): “Those who are called hearers among them eat flesh and meat, till the soil, and, if they wish, have wives; but those called elect do none of these thing.” On the differences between auditors and elects, see BeDuhn, *The Manichaean Body*, 25–68.

through the conduits. [The] dregs, however, and the desires and the evils and the wraths, which abound in the powers [of] heaven, they are poured their various conduits. They are poured into human beings [and] the rest of the beasts. When the heavenly cause the dregs, the stink, and the poison to flow down to the creations of flesh below, the creations abound in desire, in wrath, (and) in evil [through] the energy of their fathers on high.”⁴⁴

A Uighur Manichaean fragment furthermore appears to offer an explanation for the different presence of light particles in vegetation and animals: “In the five kinds of trees and plants they [i.e., the five light elements] are living (...) they [i.e., the five light elements] become mindless, dead (things) in the bodies of the five kinds of so-called ‘living’ creatures.”⁴⁵

It must be noted that the ‘powers’ (Coptic ⲩⲁⲙⲓ) mentioned in the *Kephalaia* passage above seem to refer to the defeated demons who were imprisoned in the firmaments. Presumably the same connection is alluded to in Augustine’s summary: “They caution their same hearers, furthermore, when they eat meat, not to kill the animals, to avoid offending the princes of darkness who are bound in the celestials. From them, they claim, all flesh has its origin.”⁴⁶

The assessment of animals as essentially belonging to the Kingdom of Darkness is tellingly reflected in the description of its king who is a composite creature containing only animal features.

“But, as for [the King] of Darkness, there are *Five Forms* in him: his head [is lion-faced, his] hands and feet are demon- [and devil]-faced, [his] shoulders are eagle-faced, while his belly [is dragon-faced,] (and) his tail is fish-faced. These *Five Forms*, the imprints of his [*Five*] *Worlds*, are found in the King of (those belonging to) Darkness.”⁴⁷

“As for the Archon, the leader of all the powers [of Darkness], there are [*Five Forms*] in his body, according to [the form] of the seal [of the *Five*] *Creations* which exist in the *Five Worlds of Darkness*. His head has the face of a lion and originated from [the] World of Fire. His wings and his [shoulders] have the face of an eagle, according to the form of the Sons of Wind. [His hands] and [his feet] are demons, according to the form [of the Sons] of the World of Smoke. His belly has the face of [a dragon, according to the form of the] World of Darkness. His tail [has] the form of the fish, which belongs to [the World of the] Sons of Water. These *Five Forms* are found in him; they [have come] from the *Five* [*Creations*] of the *Five Worlds of Darkness*.”⁴⁸

The Salty Sea and the Reflection in the Water

Seas and oceans as metaphors and similes frequently occur in Manichaean scriptures;⁴⁹ here I will first focus on a single physical feature of the sea, its saltiness. Manichaean sources emphasize that the saline nature of the sea is the vestige of a primordial mythological event, the outpouring of the Three Vessels of dark elements from the firmaments to the earths. The first quotation from the *Kephalaia* is a brief reference to this association, while the second passage from the same source lists three consequences of this mythological event, all being natural phenomena.

“And the waste and the accretion of the three vessels, they of [water and of] darkness [and] of fire, which had been discharged upon (the earth), he gathered them [and deposited them in the] sea that is within the walls and the vessels; because of this sea waters are salty. For they have received salt and bitterness from the washing out and cleansing of the three vessels.”⁵⁰

⁴⁴ 1Ke 121.13–32 (trans. Pettipiece, *Pentadic Redaction*, 169–70).

⁴⁵ Ch/U 6814[=T/II/T/509].V.2–5; Zieme, *Manichäisch-türkische Texte*, 34 [German]; BeDuhn, *The Manichaean Body*, 84 [English].

⁴⁶ Augustine, *De haeresibus* 46.12 (trans. Fox, Sheldon and Lieu, *Greek and Latin Sources*, 88–89): *Monent etiam eosdem Auditores suos ut, si uescuntur carnibus, animalia non occidant, ne offendant principes tenebrarum in caelestibus colligatos, a quibus omnem carnem dicunt originem ducere*. The Latin ‘principes’ is equivalent with the Greek ἄρχων, which is often used in the Coptic Manichaean texts (ⲁⲣϭⲟⲛ), especially the *Kephalaia* (Clackson, “Manichaean texts,” 63).

⁴⁷ 1Ke 30.33–31.2 (trans. Pettipiece, *Pentadic Redaction*, 108). A subsequent part of the same *kephalaion* provides a more detailed description of the kings of the five dark elements (1Ke 33.2–34.4).

⁴⁸ 1Ke 77.26–78.3 (trans. Pettipiece, *Pentadic Redaction*, 150).

⁴⁹ E.g., Arnold-Döben, *Die Bildersprache*, 68–70; Kósa, “The Sea of Fire.”

⁵⁰ 1Ke 113.35–114.3 (trans. Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher*, 120).

“... something remained behind on the face of the earth from these three [v]ess[e]ls, so that you can find their mark and type displayed in the universe. The e[le]m[e]nt that is left in water is the pungency and salinity of this salty inner sea that surrounds the worlds. And the remnant that is left from the darkness is this black mountain that exists in the s[urroundings] of the sunrise. (...) And [the re]mnan[t] that remains behind from the fire, upon the earth, are all the mountains and islands from where fumes of fire gush up [an]d are visible.”⁵¹

To mention another motif related to water, Mānī gives a mythological explanation of the reflections in the water in the one hundred and first *kephalaion* (1Ke 253.25–255.21). When the disciples ask him why one sees his reflection in the water upside down, he replies:

“The face of people and the shape of trees shall app[ear] turned upside down in the water as this is signifi[ed] in [the] mystery of the summons, when it was sent do[wn] to the worlds of darkness towards the First Man. Sin[ce ...] in this way it cast itself down [...] like a person [who] plunges headlo[ng] into water; so it is also with the summons.”⁵²

In a subsequent passage of the same chapter, Mānī recalls a further meaning of the same natural phenomenon:

“[I]f you wish to understand another cor[pore]al mystery (μυστήριον πτωματικόν) on this subject, listen and I may teach you to unders[stand it]. The face of people and of animals [and of] trees is visible in the water, hangi[ng upside down]. This occurs to the mystery of the [stars] and the zodiac, which hang upside down and are vis[ible in] the great sea. For [the face of people a]nd beasts and all trees hang on the ro[ot] of the stars and the zodiac, being begotten from them. Just as their fathers, who are spread out above, [hang] upside down; so it is also that the m[yste]ry of their fathers is being revealed to them whenever th[ey sta]re down into the water. This is, that you shall find their [shapes] inverted.”⁵³

From the two quotations above, one can realize a more refined connection between these natural phenomena and the “mythological”—for Mānī, of course, primeval and real—events: here Mānī does not postulate a causal relationship between them, but instead he emphasizes that physical appearance can transmit a message hinting at an otherwise hidden “mythological” truth.⁵⁴ He basically claims that the reflection in the water, for example, is a reminder of at least two otherwise separate “mythological” events. The whole explanation is in fact introduced by the following general statement: “Ha[ppen] you know this, that this universe is established [of m]ystery, and is entirely full of mystery.”⁵⁵

In this context, the term *mysterion* seems “to designate individual sections of the Manichaean myth”⁵⁶ that his Twin revealed to Mānī,⁵⁷ who in turn explicated it to his disciples. The revelations Mānī received through his Twin are secrets or mysteries in various senses of the word: he had to keep them secret during his years at the Jewish-Christian community where he was brought up; later on, he imparted them orally and in writing basically only to his disciples; and, even more importantly, they are secrets that the Father of Greatness shares only with some chosen people.⁵⁸ The fact that the *Kephalaia* frequently calls the individual sections of the entire truth a mystery might well be related to the “bio-/hagiographical” detail of the *Cologne Mani-Codex* that Mānī received these revelations in small portions, thus at a certain time he was initiated into only a certain act or scene of the cosmic drama.⁵⁹

51 1Ke 111.34–112.18 (trans. Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher*, 117–18).

52 1Ke 254.7–16 (trans. Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher*, 259).

53 1Ke 254.24–255.7 (trans. Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher*, 259).

54 In connection with the same passage, K. von Stuckrad (“Manichäische Astrologie,” 739) notes: “Mani gefällt es, die theosophischen Überlegungen zur Erklärung auch alltäglicher Dinge heranzuziehen.”

55 1Ke 254.7–9 (trans. Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher*, 259).

56 Pedersen, “The Term *mystêrion*,” 136.

57 See Stroumsa, “Esotericism” on the use of this word in the *CMC* and its background, e.g.: “When, then, that all-glorious and all-blessed one (i.e. the Twin) disclosed to me these exceedingly great secrets, he began to say to me: ‘This mystery I have revealed to you [...] to reveal . . .’” (*Cologne Mani-Codex* 26.7–15, *apud* Stroumsa, “Esotericism,” 64).

58 1Ke 15.1–3: “He (the Twin) unveiled to me the hidden mystery, the one that is hidden from the worlds and the generations, the myster[y] of the dep[ths] and the heights” (trans. Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher*, 20).

59 *Cologne Mani-Codex* 3.34 (trans. Gardner and Lieu, *Manichaean Texts*, 48): “I was protected through the might of the angels and of the powers of holiness which were entrusted with my protection. They also brought me up by means of the visions and signs they showed me, which were short and very brief such as I could bear.”

The cosmos being full of mysteries here means that the natural phenomena, equally individual and suitably diverse sections of the natural order, are mute narrators of “mythological” truths which are hidden from the ordinary people who are not familiar with the Manichaean teachings, and which can be understood only with the help of Mānī’s explanations, which are in turn based on the revelations he received in his youth. In this sense, nature itself functions as a reminder about the revelations for all those who know the latter, and can be read only by those cognizant of the truths preached by Mānī.⁶⁰ Since due to the revelations Mānī is the only one who has access to the totality of the secret truths with all their minute details,⁶¹ he is equally the only one who is authorized to give a complete explanation of all the details of nature.

Shadow

A similar type of explanation appears at the end of the one hundred and first *kephalaion*, where Mānī complements his earlier teachings with a new mythological explanation of another everyday phenomenon, the shadow:

“Furthermore, I reveal something else to you: Behold, you will find the shadow of the person who walks along is joined to the earth all the time. (...) See, the mystery (μυστήριον) is [a] great sign (μεῖνε), signifying (σημαίνει) that the entire body came from the earth and had ascended from the abyss. Again, d[u]e to this, its shadow is joined on the earth, turned downwar[ds], and hanging from above.”⁶²

It is worth pointing out that a special word used in this passage—σημαίνει—is hardly used in the Coptic Manichaica. There seem to be merely two further occurrences, both in the *Kephalaia*.⁶³ One of them is in this same chapter, where the non-visibility of the reflection in a certain position is explained by the “mystery of the obedience that ascended from below” (1Ke 254.18–24). The other locus is in the one hundred and eleventh *kephalaion*, where a rather fragmentary explanation can be found about how the pupil of the eye works during daylight. It is introduced by the question “What myster[y] does this matter signify?” and concluded by a mythological explanation (1Ke 265.20–266.2).

Earthquake

According to the Manichaean imagination, the eight earths are divided into two sets of three and five earths. Two sons of the Living Spirit dwell on the fifth earth from below: the King of Glory, whose authority extends to the three upper earths, and Atlas (Ἀποφόρος, the ‘Porter’), who has authority over the five lower earths. The *Kephalaia* mentions an earthquake in connection with the figure of “Atlas” (= “the Porter”), who is credited with holding the three upper earths, even if he has no authority over them, and the same passage also mentions another accident happening in the earths below him. In both cases, Jesus descends to repair the consequences of the earthquakes, in the first case to remove the obstacles that blocked the way of the ascending light elements, propelled by the Three Wheels.

“Also, because of the earthquake (κῆλυτο) which occurred in these Three Earths, and because the roads ended (and) the fountains of wind, water, and fire ceased, Jesus descended (and) bore Eve. He made straight the paths of the wind, the water, and the fire, opened to them the fountains, (and) constructed for them the paths of ascent. Again, since the earth

⁶⁰ There is a further instance in the *Kephalaia* where another aquatic phenomenon inspires Mānī to expound certain parts of his mythological system. In the sixty-first *kephalaion* (1Ke 152.21–155.5) he observes the flooding of the Tigris river and explains how the Primal Man defeated the rulers of darkness with the help of the light-element of water. In this case, Mānī only seizes the opportunity to recount this narrative and does not trace the actual flood to the primordial waters.

⁶¹ Cf. Pedersen, “The Term mystērion,” 137: “So the mystery revealed to Mani is the totality of the myth, which also explains that every single part of it is a mystery.”

⁶² 1Ke 255.12–21 (trans. Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher*, 260).

⁶³ Clackson, “Manichaean texts,” 81.

which is below the Porter (was) stripped [of the] fixtures which . . . indeed, because of this, Jesus came down to bear [Eve.] Before he reached that place, he ordered (and) strengthened the fixtures which are below, (then) returned (and) went back up to his resting-[place](?).”⁶⁴

Another passage in the *Kephalaia* basically recounts the same kind of twofold event, without mentioning the solution.

“Also, in the watch-tower of the King of Glory, there was movement in these Three Earths, which are above the Porter. The route and the ascent of these Three Wheels—(the wheel) of wind, of water, and of fire—were blocked. Also, in the watch-tower of the Porter, the lower fixtures were stripped off (and) their bonds levelled. A great earthquake occurred in that place.”⁶⁵

The first quotation mentions an earthquake in the three upper earths, the second one in the five lower earths. Since a previous passage in the same *kephalaion* (1Ke 93.20) and another further passage (1Ke 171.16) mentions ‘earthquakes’ (κῆντρο) above the firmaments and in the seventh firmament, respectively, where an earthquake is difficult to be interpreted literally, the above-quoted passages theoretically could also be simply metaphorical images. However, an evidently analogous description in the *Acta Archelai*, an anti-Manichaean scripture that however preserves surprisingly reliable pieces of information about the Manichaean cosmogony, makes it probable that instead of the possible metaphorical meaning a rather literal one is implied.

“Then the Living Spirit created the lights, which are the remnants of the soul, and made them circle round the firmament. Furthermore he created the earth in eight forms. The Porter down below carries it, and when he becomes weary of carrying, he trembles and causes an earthquake (*terraemotus*, σεισμός), outside the determined time. For this reason the good Father sent his son from his bosom into the heart of the earth and into its lowest parts, to bring upon him a suitable punishment.”⁶⁶ For every time the earth quakes, he is either trembling with weariness, or transferring the earth onto his other shoulder.”⁶⁷

In his *Panarion*, Epiphanius even gives a precise number of years for the frequency of the earthquakes. Here I also cite the first part of the passage, because this also contains relevant information about the origin of storms.

“When, in the divine goodness, storms are sent by the mercy of God, Mani is not ashamed to say blasphemously that storms do not come from God, but from the effluent of the archons. But who could fail to laugh out loud to say the rest, since the tales of Philistion probably carry more conviction than Mani’s mimes? He teaches about a mythical porter who supports the whole world, and says that every thirty years the porter’s shoulder gets tired, and he shifts the world to the other shoulder, and < this is why > there are earthquakes.”⁶⁸

Summary

The selected natural phenomena briefly presented above allow us a preliminary classification of the early Manichaean view of them. The first type, which I label as “residue-type,” explains a certain part or feature of nature as a consequence of a single primeval event. The worlds of vegetation and animal life exist due to a certain event in the primeval past; the saltiness of the sea is also attributable to a former “mythological” event. The second type of the phenomena can be viewed as “witness-type for on-going events,” which are continuous witnesses and pieces of evidence for the Manichaean interpretation of the cosmos. The waxing

⁶⁴ 1Ke 94.1–11 (trans. Pettipiece, *Pentadic Redaction*, 158).

⁶⁵ 1Ke 171.21–27 (trans. Pettipiece, *Pentadic Redaction*, 183).

⁶⁶ ‘Punishment’ is very strange here; probably something else is meant. The Latin version has *coherceret* (translated by Vermes as ‘to restrain’), which might in fact also refer to ‘holding together’ the basement of the cosmic edifice.

⁶⁷ *Acta Archelai* 26.1–2 (= VIII), Greek version (trans. Gardner and Lieu, *Manichaean Texts*, 183). *Acta Archelai* 27.4–5 [IX] offers another explanation for the earthquake that is related to the Virgin of Light (see Gardner and Lieu, *Manichaean Texts*, 184).

⁶⁸ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 66.21.8–22.2 (trans. Williams, *The Panarion*, 249). In his footnote (n.109), Williams also adds that “[o]utside of Epiphanius, the shifting of the porter’s pole is found only at Timothy Presbyter PG 86, 21A.”

and waning moon, just like the various phenomena related to the atmosphere and sea (clouds, lightning-bolts, thunder, wind, frost, hail, snow, huge waves) and earthquakes all attest to the existence of certain members of the Manichaean pantheon (the Virgin of Light or Atlas) and their proper functioning. The third category is what I label as the “reminder-type.” Here various physical features like reflections in the water or shadows are not the residue of a single former event; nevertheless, they do have the function to remind the initiated of that.

In Mānī’s system natural phenomena reflect a “supernatural” level of mythic events, and thus often carry an evidentiary value for his teachings. And even more than that: the various elements of the invisible truth which were revealed to him in his predominantly visual experiences are in fact legitimated by his expert opinion on visible things. Invisible and visible unite for a moment, the visible is understood via the invisible, while the invisible is legitimated via the visible. Every single natural phenomenon thus carries a meaning that points beyond itself: the entire cosmos “is full of mysteries.” The demarcation lines between what the modern West calls ‘religion’ and ‘science’⁶⁹ are not simply blurred, but disappear, or even more probably never existed where we would be inclined to assume them.⁷⁰ What we currently see as two distinct and rarely overlapping territories, Manichaeans viewed as vast realms continuously infusing and legitimating each other.

Endowed with supernatural visions, Mānī appears as an expert on the interpretation of natural phenomena. Thus the *Kephalaia* seems to refer to the “book of scripture [revelation]” and the “book of nature.”⁷¹ Ultimately both derive from the same source, the Father of Greatness, and are mediated through Mānī’s Twin and the Living Spirit, respectively. Revealed knowledge about the origin, structure, and purpose of the universe is a secret revelation first only imparted to a single person, Mānī—now ignoring the former revelations which became distorted according to the Manichaean view—and then subsequently to a limited circle of people, the chosen ones.

By contrast, nature, created by the Living Spirit and the Mother of Life, is observable by everyone. Thus theoretically anybody could become aware of the Manichaean mysteries by inspecting, e.g., the waxing and waning moon, the saltiness of the sea, the reflections on water, or the shadows, since they are witnesses to primeval secrets. Nevertheless, in reality, only those equipped with the first type of secrets, i.e., those mediated by revelation, are capable of understanding the signs of nature. Thus for Mānī and his disciples, the entire created world becomes a realm full of mysteries that can potentially be explained on the basis of the truth revealed to the founder and later on to the chosen ones. Natural phenomena are remnants, pieces of evidence, witnesses, and everyday reminders of the primeval past, even if the majority of the people are not aware of this. In the *Kephalaia*, Mānī is presented as a teacher comparing and expounding the sophisticated relationships between two complex systems: nature visible to everyone, and the revelations visible only to him.

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⁶⁹ On these two notions as originating in modern Europe and a critical evaluation of their supposed conflict, see, e.g., Harrison, *The Territories* (and his former works).

⁷⁰ Cf. BeDuhn, “A Regimen for Salvation.”

⁷¹ On this Western European distinction, see, e.g., Harrison, *The Territories*, 55–93, with further references on p. 222 n.5.

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