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Eastern Sages in Roman Egypt: Manichaean Trajectories through a "Global" Late Antiquity

ABSTRACT Scholars have long been curious about the transmission of religious and philosophical ideas across Eurasia in antiquity. It is well known that Mani named a number of important figures from "Eastern" religious traditions—such as Buddha and Zoroaster—among his list of prophetic forerunners in an effort to establish his own authority as a religious teacher. Recently published portions of the Dublin codex of the Manichaean *Kephalaia* provide an additional attestation of this prophetological paradigm in an even more amplified form, as it includes figures not previously attested. Textual analysis of this new testimonium invites us to reflect on how Mani and his early followers imagined their relationships to other religious traditions. It will be shown that, while Manichaean textual traditions were an important conduit of religious information across Eurasia, modern interpreters should be cautious about supposing that ancient readers of Manichaean texts made any meaningful association between the names of these prophetic forerunners and particular doctrines, which by then had been fully naturalized as "Manichaean" teachings. KEYWORDS Manichaeism, Late Antiquity, Buddhism, Zoroaster, early Christianity, transmission, global

Lux orientis . . .

There have been numerous attempts by scholars (and others) to identify trajectories of transmission for religious and philosophical ideas across Eurasia in antiquity and to trace lines of contact between the so-called East and West. Some early investigations along these lines were ideologically motivated. For example, the late 19th and early 20th centuries saw a proliferation of efforts to find traces of Buddhist influence on Jesus and the Gospels, or (conversely) to assert Christian influence on South Asian religions.[1] Such

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[1] See, for instance, the works of Rudolf Seydel, *Das Evangelium von Jesu in seinem Verhältnis zur Buddhasage und Buddhlehre* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Haürtel, 1882); Seydel, *Die Buddhalegende und das Leben Jesu nach den Evangelien* (Leipzig: Otto Schulze, 1884); Seydel, "Buddha und Christus," in *Deutsche Bücherei* 3/1 (Breslau: S. Schottlaender, 1884), 5–24; G. A. van den Berg van

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studies were aimed at polemically casting Christianity as derivative and dependant on superior wisdom from the East and in some ways foreshadowed the upsurge of interest in "eastern religions" as an alternative spiritual resource in the 20th century. Similar lines of inquiry have been made to link certain strands of Greek philosophical tradition to Indian thought, with mixed results.[2] Many of these past works rely on unsubstantiated claims about the extent of Buddhist "missions" to the Roman Empire or the presence of Buddhists and even Buddhist communities in places such as Egyptian Alexandria.[3] These assertions are often based on uncritical acceptance of highly contested or ambiguous testimonies from ancient sources, not to mention a willingness to simply conjecture as to what may or may not have been plausible at the time.[4] As such, there is a great deal of confusion in

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Eysinga, *Indische Einflüsse auf evangelische Erzählungen* (Gottingen: Vendenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1909); A. J. Edmunds, *Buddhist and Christian Gospels Now First Compared from the Originals* (Philadelphia: Innes and Sons, 1908–1909); Louis de la Vallée Poussin, "Le Bouddhisme et les évangiles canoniques à propos d'une publication récente," *Revue biblique* n.s. 3, no. 3 (July 1906), 353–81; Otto Wecker, *Christus und Buddha* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1910); E. Washburn Hopkins, *India Old and New* (New York: Scribner and Sons, 1901); Paul Carus, "Buddhism and Christianity," *The Monist* 5, no. 1 (1894): 65–103. One of the most prolific authors of this type of work was British soldier and convert to Buddhism Arthur Lillie (e.g., *India in Primitive Christianity* [London: Kegan Paul, 1909]). Much of this scholarship was recycled by Zacharias P. Thundy, *Buddha and Christ: Nativity Stories and Indian Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), who repeated many earlier unsubstantiated claims.

[2] R. Baine Harris, ed., *Neoplatonism and Indian Thought* (Norfolk: International Society for Neoplatonic Studies, 1982). Among the more recent attempts are Adrian Kurminski's *Pyrrhonism: How the Ancient Greeks Reinvented Buddhism* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008), and Christopher Beckwith's *Greek Buddha: Pyrrho's Encounter with Early Buddhism in Central Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

[3] For Buddhist missions to the Mediterranean basin in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, see, for example, David A. Scott, "Ashokan Missionary Expansion of Buddhism among the Greeks [in N. W. India, Bactria, and the Levant]," *Religion* 15 (1985): 134–37. While diplomatic contacts certainly existed between Hellenistic kingdoms and the Mauryan court, specific mention of Buddhist envoys to the eastern Mediterranean are not found in the Greek literary record; Greek communities in Bactria are far more likely candidates for Buddhist missionary activity among the *yona*, who had increasingly severed their ties with the Seleucids. For a Buddhist presence in Egyptian Alexandria, see, for example, Thundy, *Buddha and Christ*, 244–45, which claims that the "therapeutae" sect mentioned by Philo were actually Theravada Buddhists, tracing the origins of Christian monasticism in Egypt to that alleged environment. In addition, a claim is reasserted that 30,000 Buddhists from Alexandria attended a consecration ceremony in Sri Lanka in the second century BCE (*Buddha and Christ*, 246, citing Arthur Lillie, *India in Primitive Christianity*, 174).

[4] Speculations of this type sometimes find their way into scholarship on Manichaeism, as when Widengren conjectured that Mani's father received his own revelation in a "House of the Buddha" (*Mani and Manichaeism* [New York: Hold, Rinehart and Winston, 1965], 23–24). Moreover, it is sometimes claimed that Socrates debated an Indian sage in Athens, based on a doubtful fragment attributed to Aristoxenus. For a recent assessment, see Alessandro Stavru, "Aristoxenus on Socrates,"

academic (and popular) discourse as to the amount of meaningful exchange of religious or philosophical ideas during the ancient period. This is despite renewed scholarly interest in understanding the dynamics of the "Eurasian" late antique world within a broadly conceived paradigm of global history.[5]

There is indeed ample evidence of interactions between Greek and Central or South Asian cultures, particularly in the Hellenistic era.[6] Moreover, diplomatic contacts and trade routes[7] certainly existed both overland and by sea between the Mediterranean and the East.[8] But it has so far proven difficult to conclusively establish the direct borrowing or adaptation of Eastern philosophical or religious ideas by Greco-Roman authors, other than simply pointing out analogies or similar patterns of thought.[9] Direct links seem tenuous even in spite of an apparent willingness by some seekers of wisdom in the Roman world to obtain such information.[10] The famous anecdote recorded by Porphyry about Plotinus's failed attempt "to investigate the Persian methods and the system adopted among the Indians"[11] is a case in point. The philosopher's willingness to undertake such a journey is significant in itself, although perhaps he should have taken a sea voyage instead of

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in *Socrates and the Socratic Dialogue*, ed. Alessandro Stavru and Christopher Moore (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 623–64.

[5] Nicola Di Cosmo and Michael Maas, eds., *Empires and Exchanges in Eurasian Late Antiquity: Rome, China, Iran, and the Steppe, ca. 250–750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[6] Jean Filliozat, "Les échanges de l'Inde et de l'Empire romain aux premiers siècles de l'ère chrétienne," *Revue historique* 201 (1949): 129; Donald F. Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 5–19.

[7] As Richard Lim has explained, demand for prestige items such as silk, spice, ceramics, and glass stimulated trade throughout Eurasia along the so-called silk and steppe routes ("Trade and Exchange along the Silk and Steppe Routes in Late Antique Eurasia," in Di Cosmo and Maas, *Empires and Exchanges*, 70–85).

[8] Lionel Casson, *Ancient Trade and Society* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984).

[9] Unfortunately, everything that was written about the Far East by Alexander's companions and successors has been lost. From what we can tell, authors such as Ptolemy and Megasthenes were not particularly interested in religious or philosophical issues. For the most part, as Lach suggested, India was substantially known only by the elite and was not part of "common knowledge" (*Asia in the Making of Europe*, 12). At the same time, there is ample evidence of the migration of religious traditions, such as Buddhism, the Church of the East, and Manichaeism, along the Eurasian trade routes, although just how far that migration extended remains to be seen (Lim, "Trade and Exchange," 78–79).

[10] Pythagoras, the apostle Thomas, and Apollonius of Tyana were all variously alleged to have journeyed to India for religious or philosophical reasons.

[11] Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 3, in Plotinus, *Ennead, Volume I: Porphyry on the Life of Plotinus. Ennead I*, trans. A. H. Armstrong, Loeb Classical Library 440 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969).

enlisting in the imperial legions, as trade relations between Roman merchants and South Asia were well established by that time.[12]

Nonetheless, we do in fact possess concrete references to identifiable figures from so-called Eastern religious traditions—such as Buddha and Zoroaster—in a Roman context among the Manichaean literary corpus. It is well known that the Mesopotamian prophet Mani in the third century CE included several important religious founding figures among his list of prophetic forerunners in an effort to establish his own authority and lineage as a religious teacher and author. Recently published portions of the Dublin codex of the Coptic Manichaean Kephalaia have provided an additional articulation of this prophetological paradigm in an even more amplified form, as it includes figures not previously attested.[13]

This article examines what this new testimonium tells us about how Mani and his early followers might have imagined their relationship to other religious traditions. It will be shown that, while Mani might have engaged with and was influenced by several third-century CE religious discourses and that Manichaean textual traditions were an important conduit of religious information across Eurasia, it is doubtful that later readers of Manichaean texts made any meaningful association between the names of these prophetic forerunners and particular doctrines or practices, which by then had been fully naturalized as Manichaean teachings.

1. PROPHETS AND APOSTLES

One of the remarkable things about Mani's career as a religious organizer was the fact that he is said to have authored his own set of scriptures to be used by his emergent religious movement. He appears to have believed that one of the primary weaknesses of earlier religions was the failure of their founders to preserve their teaching in writing, which led to their doctrines being poorly

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[12] Giusto Traina has argued that the second century CE saw an increase in what Romans knew about the eastern *oikumenē*, although they never overcame the clichés and stereotypes inherited from the Hellenistic period and the legacy of Alexander ("Central Asia in the Late Roman Mental Map, Second to Sixth Centuries," in Di Cosmo and Maas, *Empires and Exchanges*, 123–32). However, in spite of significant finds of Roman materials in South Asia, the full extent of Roman trading presence there remains unclear (Warwick Ball, *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire* [New York: Routledge, 2016], 141–47). For a detailed account, see Roberta Tomber, *Indo-Roman Trade: From Pots to Pepper* (London: Duckworth, 2008).

[13] Iain Gardner, Jason BeDuhn, and Paul Dilley, *The Chapters of the Wisdom of My Lord Mani: Part III: Pages 343–442 (Chapters 321–347)* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

preserved and corrupted by later adherents.[14] Ironically, however, most of Mani's so-called canonical works do not survive, apart from a small collection of fragments and testimonia. Nonetheless, such textual shards do provide some important information about Mani's own formulation of key ideas. As such, the earliest surviving attestation of Mani's statement of his prophetological lineage comes from a work known as *Shaburagan*, which was prepared for an audience with King Shapur I sometime around 241 CE.[15] Unlike the rest of Mani's writings, which were composed in Aramaic, a Mesopotamian lingua franca, the *Shaburagan* was written (or at least translated) in Middle Persian, the language of the Sasanian court. Surviving Middle Persian fragments focus largely on eschatological and apocalyptic themes, whereas Arabic testimonies by later Islamic scholars attest to Mani's presentation of his prophetic genealogy. The 11th-century polymath Al-Biruni has preserved a key passage from the *Shaburagan* in his *Chronology of Ancient Nations*: "Apostles of Light have constantly brought wisdom and deeds in successive times. In one era they were brought by the apostle *al-Bud* (the Buddha) to the land of India, in another (era) by Zardāsht (i.e., Zoroaster) to Persia, and in another (era) by Jesus to the West. Now this revelation has descended and this prophecy is promulgated during this final era by me, Mānī, the apostle of the God of Truth to Babylonia."[16] In this version, we learn that emissaries from the light realm (apostles) have been periodically sent to various parts of the world throughout history. Mani is presented as the most recent of these emissaries, thereby linking his own prophetic authority to that of key figures from major geopolitical zones of the late antique world and attempting to establish the universality of his own religious message.

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[14] The introductory section of the Berlin codex of the Kephalaia (7.18–8.28) describes how Jesus, Zoroaster, and Buddha did not "write books," allowing their disciples to stray from their teachings (H.-J. Polotsky and A. Böhlig, *Kephalaia (I): 1. Hälfte [Lieferung 1–10]* [Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1940]).

[15] This discourse was not typically included in the surviving lists of Mani's canonical scriptures. See Manfred Hutter, *Manis kosmogonische Šābuhragān-Texte: Edition, Kommentar und literaturgeschichtliche Einordnung der manichäisch-mittelpersischen Handschriften M 98/99 I und M 7980–7984* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992).

[16] John C. Reeves, *Prolegomena to a History of Islamicate Manichaeism* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2011), 102–3; Edward Sachau, *The Chronology of Ancient Nations: An English Version of the Arabic Text of the Athar-ul-Bakiya of Albiruni* (London: William H. Allen, 1879), 207. A similar version is attested by Marwazī (12th century CE) (Reeves, *Prolegomena*, 103). As Reeves pointed out, based on surviving parallels, the phrase "wisdom and deeds" should probably be rendered "wisdom and knowledge" (*Prolegomena*, 102–103n114).

Another attestation of this statement of prophetic lineage is found in the Manichaean Kephalaia, a Coptic compendium of theological discourses attributed to Mani produced in Roman Egypt during the fourth to fifth century CE.[17] Chapter 1 of the Berlin codex of the Kephalaia, "On the Advent of the Apostle," describes:

> The advent of the apostle has occurred at the occasion . . . as I have told you: From Sethel [the first] born son of Adam up to Enosh, together with [Enoch]; from Enoch up to Sem [the] son of [Noah . . .] church after it [. . .] *Bouddhas* (ⲃⲟⲩⲇⲇⲁⲥ) to the east, and *Aurentes* (ⲁⲩⲣⲉⲛⲧⲏⲥ), and the other [. . .] who were sent to the orient; from the advent of *Bouddhas* and *Aurentes* up to the advent of *Zarades* [i.e., Zoroaster] (ⲍⲁⲣⲁⲇⲏⲥ) to Persia, the occasion that he came to Hystaspes [the] king; from the advent of *Zarades* up to the advent of Jesus [the Christ,] (ⲛⲓⲏⲥ ⲡⲭⲣⲥ) the son of greatness.[18]

This version adds a series of biblical forefathers to the earlier list, as well as a figure named Aurentes, whose identity will be addressed. There is also a brief contextual note on Zarades visiting the Persian king Hystaspes (Goštāsp), the traditional patron of Zoroaster and visionary known to Greco-Roman tradition.[19]

An additional (more amplified) version of Mani's prophetic lineage can be found in recently edited portions of a second volume of Coptic Kephalaia found at Medinet Madi (the Dublin codex).[20] The title of Chapter 342 of the Coptic Kephalaia reads: "This Chapter says that, while the Apostle is sitting in the Church, a noble came before him. He spoke with him in the Wisdom of God."[21] The text itself reports:

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[17] Carl Schmidt and H.-J. Polotsky, "Ein Mani-Fund in Ägypten," *Sitzungsberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (1933): 4–90; James M. Robinson, *The Manichaean Codices of Medinet Madi* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2015); Iain Gardner and Samuel Lieu, "From Narmouthis (Medinet Madi) to Kellis (Ismant el-Kharab): Manichaean Documents from Roman Egypt," *Journal of Roman Studies* 86 (1996): 146–69.

[18] 1 Ke 12.9–20. A version with biblical forefathers, including Abraham, is found in Shahrastānī (12th century CE) (Reeves, *Prolegomena*, 104).

[19] *Encyclopedia Iranica*, vol. 11, fasc. 2, 171–76.

[20] Two volumes of Kephalaia were discovered at Medinet Madi: volume 1, the Berlin codex, known as the Kephalaia of the Teacher, and volume 2, the Dublin or Chester Beatty codex, known as the Kephalaia of the Wisdom of my Lord Mani (Robinson, *Manichaean Codices*; Gardner and Lieu, "From Narmouthis," 148–54). In spite of their different titles, both codices contain continuous chapter numbering, which suggests that they are two volumes from separate editions of the Kephalaia. As the Dublin codex has now been more extensively studied, it has been noted that it contains far more Iranian material than its Berlin counterpart (see Iain Gardner, Jason BeDuhn, and Paul Dilley, *Mani at the Court of the Persian King: Studies on the Chester Beatty Kephalaia Codex* [Leiden: Brill, 2015]).

> Behold, I will [tell] you about each one of the apostles (ⲁⲡⲟⲥⲧⲟⲗⲟⲥ) by name, they who came (and) appeared in this world. *Zarades* (ⲍⲁⲣⲁⲇⲏⲥ) was sent to Persia, to Hystaspes (ⲩⲥⲧⲁⲥⲡⲏⲥ) the king. He revealed the truly-founded law (ⲛⲟⲙⲟⲥ ⲉⲧⲥⲙⲁⲛⲧ ⲙ̄ⲙⲏⲉ) in all of Persia. Again, *Bouddas* the blessed (ⲃⲟⲩⲇⲇⲁⲥ...ⲡⲙⲁⲕⲁⲣⲓⲟⲥ), he came to the land of India (ϩⲛⲧⲟⲩ) and Kushan (ⲅⲟⲩϣⲁⲛ). He also revealed the truly-founded law in all of India and Kushan. After him again, *Aurentes* (ⲁⲩⲣⲉⲛⲧⲏⲥ) came with *Kebellos* (ⲕⲏⲃⲏⲗⲗⲟⲥ) to the east (ⲁⲛⲁⲧⲟⲗⲏ). They also revealed the truly-founded law in the east. *El[chasai]* (?)[22] came to Parthia (ⲡⲁⲣⲑⲓⲁ). He revealed the law of truth in all of Parthia. Jesus the Christ (ⲓⲏ̅ⲥ̅ ⲡⲭ̅ⲣ̅ⲥ) came to the west (ⲥⲁⲛϩⲱⲧⲡ). He (also?) revealed the truth in all the west.[23]

This third version provides even more contextualizing information. Zarades is again said to have come to the Persian king Hystaspes, although this time as a revealer of the "truly-founded law" along with all the other "apostles" sent from the light realm. Bouddas, for his part, is called "the blessed" and is named as an apostle to both India and Kushan.[24] Aurentes is also mentioned, this time along with Kebellos, as apostles to the generically conceived East, while Parthia is said to have been visited by Elchasai (?), a founding figure in the baptizing sect in which Mani is said to have been raised.[25] Finally, Jesus is listed as apostle to "the west." Like the list from Kephalaia volume 1, the Dublin codex list also contains a lineage of biblical forefathers, although this series is placed after the description of the regional apostles.

Interestingly, Kephalaia chapter 342 also specifies the common revelatory experience that underpins the prophetic authority of each of these apostles of light, including Mani himself. As Mani explains, "For they were seized from

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[21] In contrast to the Berlin codex, the titles of the Dublin Kephalaia chapters are cumbersome, often offering a brief synopsis of the content.

[22] A reading of "Elchasai" is proposed here by the editors (Gardner et al., *Chapters of the Wisdom of My Lord Mani*, 166).

[23] 2 Ke 422.28–423.12.

[24] The Kushan Empire was an important and influential centre of Buddhist activity. See Richard Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 44–47; David Alan Scott, "The Iranian Face of Buddhism," *East and West* 40 (1990): 43–77.

[25] Tardieu, *Le manichéisme*, 9–12; Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism*, 47–48; Samuel N. C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 35–50.

this place; they were taken up; they went, they saw, they came (back), they bore witness; they have told [that the] Land of Light exists and that we have come from it. Also, hell exists, and we have seen the place where it is."[26] In this way, visual confirmation of the existence of heaven and hell by means of mystical ascent is presented as the foundation of prophetic authority and constitutes a core, universal, religious insight uniformly achieved by all the named apostles.[27] Moreover, written testimonies of these experiences are said to exist "in all these lands."[28]

2. READINGS AND RECEPTION

It is certainly striking, and perhaps unique (at least in antiquity), that Mani made, or was said to have made, such a universal appeal to religious authority and lineage.[29] Other religions from Late Antiquity, such as Christianity and Islam, also made claims of universality, but they did so within a more narrow biblical mythos from which other nonscriptural traditions tend to be excluded.[30] Mani, for his part, appears to have wanted to tie all the various strands of revelation together into one united, all-encompassing message, or at least to restore them to their primordial form.[31] In this sense, Mani's mission looks to modern observers as ambitious and unique and appeals to ecumenical and inclusive sensibilities. Still, the question remains: How were such claims to universal prophetic authority perceived and understood by later Manichaean readers and adherents? Did references to Bouddas and Zarades, which scholars today can easily recognize as Buddha and Zoroaster, mean anything to late antique readers, particularly those outside of the Sasanian environment? Or were they simply names of mysterious eastern sages that served to cast the Manichaean message as yet another form of orientalized wisdom?[32]

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[26] 2 Ke 423.15–18.

[27] Dilley has argued in his analysis of the passage that speculations about "heaven and hell" were relatively commonplace among the various religious traditions of the Sasanian world and should be understood in the context of religious rivalries at the Persian court ("'Hell Exists, and We Have Seen the Place Where It Is': Rapture and Religious Competition in Sasanian Iran," in Gardner et al., *Mani at the Court of the Persian King*, 211–46).

[28] 2 Ke 423.21–22.

[29] The Kephalaia codices contain discourses attributed to Mani, although much of this appears to have undergone redactional revision (see Timothy Pettipiece, *Pentadic Redaction in the Manichaean Kephalaia* [Leiden: Brill, 2009]). It is difficult to assess how much of this material might have been derived from Mani himself and how much is the product of later traditions.

[30] Christianity and Islam are by no means monolithic in this sense, as there have been various attempts over the centuries to conceptually assimilate preexisting religious or intellectual traditions. For example, early Christian authors sometimes attempted a qualified integration of Greek philosophical tradition as God's gift to the Greeks (see Clement of Alexandria), while the Muslim concept of "peoples of the book" tended to become more expansive over time (Jacques Waardenburg, ed., *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions: A Historical Survey* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999]).

[31] To be fair, Mani's teaching was not absolutely universal. There were forms of religious behavior that Manichaean sources present him as condemning, such as fire worship, idolatry, and oracles (1 Ke 33.9–34.1). Moreover, Mani's concept of authentic revelation is highly idealized. As mentioned previously, each of his prophetic forerunners are said to have received a vision of the Land of Light, only to have their witness corrupted by inept followers.

Given the fact that the codex containing this text would have been read by and to Coptic-speaking Manichaeans in Roman Egypt sometime in the fourth or fifth centuries CE, what did its readers make of this litany of important religious figures?[33] We might presume that reference to biblical forefathers such as Adam, Enoch, and Seth would have been familiar to people living in such a highly Christianized environment. In fact, the Coptic Manichaean literature from Medinet Madi contains an abundance of references to biblical figures and motifs, particularly from the New Testament,[34] and Manichaeans in the Mediterranean world are regularly depicted as debating biblical texts with other Christian interlocutors such as Augustine or Titus of Bostra.[35] As for what Manichaeans in Roman Egypt understood about the other named forerunners, such as the previously mentioned Bouddas, Aurentes, and Zarades, that is far more difficult to assess.[36]

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[32] This question has been raised by Paul Dilley in relation to *Zarades* ("Also Schrieb Zarathustra? Mani as Interpreter of the 'Law of Zarades'," in Gardner et al., *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings*, 133)

[33] Over the course of the lifetime of the codices, the readers may not have been exclusively Manichaean. Unlike the Manichaean material from Kellis, for which we have a fairly well-developed idea of the local community (Mathias Brand, "The Manichaeans of Kellis: Religion, Community, and Everyday Life" [PhD diss., Leiden University, 2019]; Hakon Fiane Teigen, *The Manichaean Church in Kellis* [Leiden: Brill, 2021]), the context in which the Medinet Madi texts were produced and used remains largely unknown. Although given the technical and liturgical nature of some of the codices, it is likely that Manichaean "elect" were involved.

[34] These include Adam, Andrew, Babylon, Cain, Enoch, Eve, Herod, James, Jerusalem, Jesus, John, Jordan, Judaea, Judas, Levi, Mary, Martha, Matthew, Noah, Paul, Peter, Philip, Pilate, Salome, Satan, Seth, Shem, Simon, Thomas, and Zebedee; for a list of references, see Sarah Clackson, Erica Hunter, and Samuel Lieu, *Dictionary of Manichaean Texts*, vol. 1: *Texts from the Roman Empire (Texts in Syriac, Greek, Coptic and Latin)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), 182–85.

[35] Jacob Albert van den Berg, *Biblical Argument in Manichaean Missionary Practice: The Case of Adimantus and Augustine* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Paul-Hubert Poirier and Timothy Pettipiece, *Biblical and Manichaean Citations in Titus of Bostra's against the Manichaeans: An Annotated Inventory* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2018).

[36] Gardner and Lieu have described Buddha and Zoroaster as "very distant figures" in the Medinet Madi corpus ("From Narmouthis," 150)

To be fair, it is not as though eastern sages were completely unknown in the late antique Mediterranean. As has been argued elsewhere, we do find references to the Buddha (Bouddas) in early Christian texts, but these contain little contextual information, and he is most often named specifically in the context of anti-Manichaean polemic.[37] Moreover, some Greco-Roman authors were aware of the existence of various classes of religious specialists in India (e.g., the *brāhmaṇa* and *śramaṇa*).[38] The Buddha and his life story, however, were not widely known, nor was there a coherent sense of what would have counted as Buddhist teachings.[39] As for the otherwise unattested Aurentes, scholars have identified this name as a Hellenized version of the Buddhist Sanskrit term *arhant* via Middle Iranian intermediaries.[40] The name Kebellos could be derived from the Jain term *kevala*, possibly in reference to Mahavira.[41] The name Zarades, for its part, is a late antique variant of *Zoroaster*.

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[37] Pettipiece, "The Buddha in Early Christian Literature," in *Millennium 6/2009: Jahrbuch zu Kultur und Geschichte des ersten Jahrtausends n. Chr.* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 133–43.

[38] These include Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata* 1.15, in *Les Stromates: Stromate I*, trans. Marcel Caster, Sources chrétiennes 30 [Paris: Cerf, 1951]); Porphyry (*De abstinentia* 4.17, in *On Abstinence from Killing Animals*, trans. Gillian Clark [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000]); and Jerome (*Adversus Iovinianum* 1.42, in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, Series Latina, ed. J.-P. Migne, Patrologia Latina 23 [Paris, 1845]).

[39] The story of the Buddha would eventually make its way to the Mediterranean in a disguised form, but here too Manichaean intermediaries were likely at play. See G. R. Woodward and Harold Mattingly, trans., *John Damascene: Barlaam and Ioasaph,* Loeb Classical Library 34 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), vii; J. P. Asmussen, "Der Manichäismus als Vermittler literarischen Gutes," *Temenos* 2 (1966): 14–21. See also Widengren, *Mani and Manichaeism*, 91; F. C. Burkitt, *The Religion of the Manichees* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1925), 97, who cites Le Coq's publication of Turkish fragment T II D 173e; D. M. Lang, "The Life of the Blessed Iodasaph: A New Oriental Christian Version of the Barlaam and Ioasaph Romance (Jerusalem, Greek Patriarchal Library: Georgian MS 140)," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 20, no. 1/3 (1957): 389–407; W. B. Henning, "Die älteste persische Gedichthandschrift: eine neue Version von Barlaam und Joasaph," in *W. B. Henning: Selected Papers II* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 542. Burkitt, for his part, doubted that Mani was influenced by Buddhism at all (*Religion of the Manichees*, 44, 97–98).

[40] Gherardo Gnoli, "Remarks on a Manichaean 'Kephalaion' of Dublin," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 4 (1990): 37–40; Gherardo Gnoli, "'Aurentes' The Buddhist 'arhants' in the Coptic 'Kephalaia' through a Bactrian Transmission," *East and West* 41, no. 1 (1991): 359–61; H. H. Schaeder, "Der Manichäismus nach neuen Funden und Forschungen," *Orientalische Stimmen zum Erlösungsgedanken* (Leipzig, 1938), 95n1.

[41] This references has opened up some intriguing pathways of research on the possible origins of certain Manichaean ideas; see Iain Gardner, "Some Comments on Mani and Indian Religions According to the Coptic Kephalaia," in *Il manicheismo: Nuove prospettive della richerca*, ed. Luigi Cirillo and Alois van Tongerloo (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 123–36; Max Deeg and Iain Gardner,

Among the eastern sages named in the Kephalaia, Zoroaster is perhaps the most well known. Variations of the name Zoroaster (Ζωροάστρης) are found in Greco-Roman sources at least from the Hellenistic period. In these works, he is identified as a mage (μάγος) and the forefather of Persian magical lore (μαγείαν).[42] Meanwhile, collections of sayings (λόγια) attributed to him appear to have circulated in Greek.[43] In the late first century BCE, Diodorus Siculus mentions him as religious lawgiver among the Aryans,[44] calling him by the name Zathraustes (Ζαθραύστην).[45] By contrast, other authors refer to him as a Persian, Mede, or Chaldean.[46] In some instances, he is identified as a Bactrian king.[47] Predictably, early Christian sources attempt to harmonize him with a biblical lineage, such as in the *Clementine Recognitions* literature, in which Zoroaster is a name given to the biblical forefather Ham meaning "living star" in Greek.[48] In general terms, then, Zoroaster was variously

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"Indian Influence on Mani Reconsidered: The Case of Jainism," *International Journal of Jaina Studies* 5, no. 2 (2009): 1–30.

[42] Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* 46, in *Plutarch: Moralia*, vol. 5, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt, Loeb Classical Library 306 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936); Dio Chrysostom, *Oration* 36, in *Dio Chrysostom: Discourses 31–36*, trans. J. W. Cohoon and H. Lamar Crosby, Loeb Classical Library 358 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940); Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1 (Caster, *Les Stromates*, SC 30). See also Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 30.2, 37.49, in *Pliny: Natural History*, books 28–32, Loeb Classical Library 418 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963).

[43] This sort of information is found in sources allegedly from the fourth century BCE, such as the *First Alcibiades* (121E–122A) of Plato, although the authenticity of this work has been subject to doubt. It is also found in fragments attributed to Xanthus, which Lionel Pearson has judged unreliable (*Early Ionian Historians* 117–18), and he has argued that there are no other credible pre-Hellenistic references.

[44] Plutarch counts him among founding figures such as Minos, Numa, and Lycurgus (*Plutarch: Lives, Theseus and Romulus, Lycurgus and Numa, Solon and Publicola*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library 46 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914]).

[45] Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotecha historica* 1.94.2, in *Diodorus Siculus: Library of History*, books 1–2.34, trans. C. H. Oldfather, Loeb Classical Library 279 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933). This form is far closer to the older Iranian form, Zarathustra, and may say something about the unique quality of Diodorus's sources.

[46] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1, in *Contre Celse*, t. 1, ed. and trans. Marcel Borret, Sources chrétiennes 132 (Paris: Éditions du CERF, 1967); Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae Philosophorum*, prologue, in *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, books 1–5, Loeb Classical Library 184 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925); Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1 (Caster, *Les Stromates*, SC 30).

[47] Aelius Theon, *Progymnasmata* 9, in *Aelius Théon: Progymnasmata*, ed. Michel Patillon (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1997); Iunianus Iustinus*, Historiae Philippicae*, in *Epitoma historiarum Philippicarum Pompei Trogi*, ed. Otto Seel (Leipzig: Teubner, 1935); see appendix in A. V. Williams Jackson, *Zoroaster: The Prophet of Ancient Iran* (New York: MacMillan, 1899), 237.

[48] *Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions* 4.27.28, in *Die Pseudoklementinen II: Rekognitionen in Rufins Übersetzung*, ed. Bernhard Rehm, Die griechische christliche Schriftsteller der ersten [drei] Jahrhunderte 51 (Berlin: Akademie, 1994); see also *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* 9.4, in *Die*

associated with "magic," religious law, and the lands of the East, sometimes specifically Central Asia.[49] It is plausible then that educated and religiously interested readers and hearers of Manichaean texts would have at least heard of Zoroaster (Zarades) as an eastern sage. Yet, other than his general association with μαγεία and a collection of curious anecdotes, few ancient authors seem to have attributed any specific philosophical or religious idea to Zoroaster.[50]

One notable and significant exception is the second-century CE Greco-Roman author Plutarch, who identifies Zoroaster with a dualistic cosmology:

> for some believe that there are two gods who are rivals, as it were, in art, the one being the creator of good, the other evil; others call the better of these a god and his rival a daemon, as, for example, Zoroaster the Magian, who lived, so they record, five thousand years before the Siege of Troy. He used to call the one Horomazes and the other Areimanus, and showed also that the former was especially akin, among objects of perception, to light, and the latter, on the contrary to darkness and ignorance.[51]

In this passage, Plutarch not only articulates a specific teaching associated with Zoroaster but also uses Hellenized nomenclature for the Persian deities Ahura Mazda and Ahriman, connecting them with imagery of light and darkness.

It is difficult to know, however, the degree to which readers of Coptic Manichaean texts such as the Kephalaia would have conceptualized dualism

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Pseudoklementinen I: Homilien, ed. Bernhard Rehm, Die griechische christliche Schriftsteller der ersten [drei] Jahrhunderte 42 (Berlin: Akademie, 1992).

[49] An alternate name for Zoroaster, Ostanes, is found in some patristic sources: Cyprian, *Quod idola di non sunt* 6, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. W. Hartel, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 3.1 (Vienna: Gerold, 1868); Tertullian, *De anima* 57, in *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani De Anima*, ed. J. H Waszink (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 5.141, in *Eusebii Pamphili Evangelicae preparationis libri XV*, ed. E. W. Gifford (Oxford, 1903), as well as magical texts (*Papyri Graecae Magicae* 4.2006, 9.123, in *Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die Griechischen Zauberpapyri*, ed. Karl Preisendanz and Albert Henrichs [Stuttgart: Teubner, 1974]).

[50] Pliny the Elder asserts that Zoroaster was the only person to ever laugh on the day they were born (*Naturalis historia* 7.15, in *Natural History*, books 3–7, trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library 352 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942]) and to have lived for 30 years in the wilderness on cheese (*Naturalis historia* 11.97, in *Natural History*, books 8–11, Loeb Classical Library 353 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940]).

[51] Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* 46 (Babbitt, *Plutarch*, LCL 306). Translation from Mary Boyce, ed., *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 108.

as a particularly Zoroastrian idea. While it is certainly possible and justifiable for modern scholars to look at the lists of Mani's prophetic forerunners and attempt to establish corresponding trajectories of influence (as many have done), we cannot assume that ancient readers engaged in any kind of analogous deconstruction. It is more likely that, for them, the teaching on the Two Natures (the dualistic root of Mani's system) was seen as a fully integrated Manichaean concept. At the very least, it formed part of the primordial revelation. As we learned earlier, according to the Dublin Kephalaia, each of the apostles from the light realm were thought to have delivered essentially the same message. Mani had simply reestablished and properly interpreted what had already been revealed.[52]

Similar information does not seem to have circulated in connection with other teachers of eastern wisdom. It seems doubtful, then, that readers of the Coptic Kephalaia had any meaningful understanding of figures such as Aurentes and Kebellos or religious teachings associated with them. Mani himself and the early compilers of Kephalaia-type material might have originally had more detailed knowledge of such rival religions, as they were likely writing in an environment closer to the Sasanian world.[53] In fact, elsewhere in the

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[52] The attempted harmonization of previous revelations appears evident in the Kephalaia material. For example, the Dublin codex does contain, in Chapter 341, a discussion between Mani and an Iranian catechumen named Pabakos on seemingly contradictory sayings attributed to Zarades and Jesus. Both sets of sayings are said to come from the respective law (ⲛⲟⲙⲟⲥ) of each teacher. As much as Dilley has tried to postulate a textual source behind the *Law of Zarades*, we should bear in mind the particular way in which *law* (ⲛⲟⲙⲟⲥ) is employed in Coptic Manichaean literature. In the Coptic version of Mani's *Living Gospel*, found in the *Synaxeis* codex from Medinet Madi, a specific terminology is employed to describe other religions. Mani seems to differentiate sects/factions, which are called ⲇⲟⲅⲙⲁ, from a religious teaching or tradition, called a ⲛⲟⲙⲟⲥ (Wolf-Peter Funk, "Mani's Account of Other Religions According to the Coptic *Synaxeis* Codex," in *New Light on Manichaeism: Papers from the Sixth International Congress on Manichaeism*, ed. Jason BeDuhn [Leiden: Brill, 2009], 115–27). Moreover, in the following chapter from the Dublin Kephalaia, each of Mani's prophetic forerunners are said to have received a "truly-founded law" (2 Ke 423.6). As such, it seems unlikely that "law of Zarades" refers to a written text rather than an authoritative tradition more broadly. Besides, the sayings themselves seem rather self-serving in that they contain specifically Manichaean terminology, such as "Land of Light" (2 Ke 416.6–7), and would have presumably been read by Mani's followers in confirmation of his wisdom.

[53] It is very unlikely that most of this material was composed in Egypt. Much of it probably goes back to an earlier Syriac and/or Mesopotamian milieu (Pettipiece, *Pentadic Redaction*, 12–13). There does appear to have been at least some adaptation of Manichaean material to the local Egyptian environment, as we would expect (Gardner and Lieu, "From Narmouthis," 152), although such redactions appear fairly marginal. The genre of the work itself seems to reflect Greco-Roman, Iranian, and Buddhist literary forms (Paul Dilley, "Mani's Wisdom at the Court of the Persian Kings: The Genre and Context of the Chester Beatty *Kephalaia*," in Gardner et al., *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings*, 23.

Dublin Kephalaia there does appear to be an awareness of more specific traditions associated with theses Indian sages, such as references to "seven buddhas" and twenty-four manifestations of "Kebellos."[54] But by the time this information was compiled and translated into the Coptic codices we possess, it had likely become little more than a fossilized relic of the literary transmission process.

The idea that readers of a particular corpus of religious literature might be blissfully unaware of the meaning of culturally or historically specific information is not controversial in itself, particularly in relation to traditions that migrate over significant geographical and chronological distances. As much as modern historical-critical methods stress the hermeneutical importance of social and cultural contexts, premodern readers were simply not equipped to fully appreciated these aspects of their sacred texts (if they cared about them at all).

3. MANICHAEANS IN THE CONTEXT OF A GLOBAL LATE ANTIQUITY

Manichaeans and their literature have often been viewed as a conduit through which religious and mythological traditions passed from "east to west."[55] This perception is sometimes used to justify the importance of Manichaeism as a subject of study and as a nexus of contact among ancient religious communities.[56] It is an idea that fits nicely with modern sensibilities around religious pluralism and intercultural exchange. However, what does it really mean to imagine such intercultural connections in a period such as Late Antiquity, which is increasingly ill-defined? How did the transmission of this sort of information actually impact the people who received it, if it impacted them at all? As much as we (as moderns) might like to see Manichaeans as important brokers in a globalized economy of late antique religious knowledge, their contribution is only visible in retrospect through our own conceptual lenses. Even though there was certainly a fascination with various

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[54] See BeDuhn, "Mani and the Crystallization of the Concept of 'Religion' in Third-Century Iran," in Gardner et al., *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings*, 268; S. Giversen, *The Manichaean Coptic Papyri in the Chester Beatty Library*, vol. 1: *Kephalaia* (Geneva: Cramer, 1986), plates 139–40.

[55] Manichaeism as a self-consciously world religion is a common trope is scholarship; see Werner Sundermann, "Mani, India, and the Manichaean Religion," *South Asian Studies* 2 (1986): 11.

[56] Iain Gardner, *The Founder of Manichaeism: Rethinking the Life of Mani* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 2. Gardner, "Some Comments on Mani," 123, goes so far as to state that "Manichaeism was a major conduit by which (originally) Indian practices and teachings travelled westwards and shook the Mediterranean world." Even if that were the case, were those practices and teachings in any way construed as Indian by those affected?

forms of Eastern religion among some members of the ancient religious and intellectual elite, there was also an equally important sense of the basic uniformity of revealed knowledge.[57] For Manichaeans, and others, sectarianism and differentiation were signs of failure and of the corruption of divine truth. As such, to classify people into various sects, dogmas, or religions was to place them in a genealogy of error.

Jason BeDuhn has recently argued persuasively that Mani's thought represents an important milestone in the development of the concept of religion as "cultic identity" based on systems of discourse and practice "disembedded" from the social and cultural environments in which they emerged.[58] Mani, it seems, was well positioned both geographically and chronologically within "an unusually rich environment of cultural inter-change and comparative awareness presaging the conditions typically associated with the modern era."[59] Outside of that initial environment, however, in places such as Roman Egypt, particularly outside of Alexandria, we cannot necessarily assume that there was a comparable level of self-conscious awareness. For readers of the Coptic Kephalaia, which as far as we know circulated in the Fayyum,[60] the lists of Mani's prophetic forerunners would probably not have led them to feel a sense of interconnectedness with other traditions, let alone to believe that they were being influenced by them. After all, theirs was the "Holy Church."[61] It was for them what it had always been, the original vision of

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[57] Porphyry also recorded that among those whom Plotinus polemically engaged with during his seminars was the sectarian Christian "who has abandoned the old philosophy" and who enthusiastically promoted revelations attributed to "Zoroaster, Zostrianus, Nicotheus, Allogenes, Mesus" (*Vita Plotini* 16, in Armstrong, *Ennead*, LCL 440). We might also mention Mani's own alleged journey to India to engage with its sages (Funk, "Mani's Account of Other Religions," 115–28), although the reasons for the journey remain obscure (Pettipiece, "Mani's Journey to India: Mission or Exile?" *Zur lichten Heimat: Studien zu Manichäismus, Iranistik und Zentralasienkunde im Gedenken an Werner Sundermann* [Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2017], 503–10). Michel Tardieu, *Le manichéisme* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1981), argues that Mani traveled to India in imitation of the apostle Thomas, not to "study Buddhism" (27).

[58] BeDuhn, "Mani and the Crystallization of the Concept of 'Religion,'" 247–75.

[59] BeDuhn, 247.

[60] Gardner and Lieu, "From Narmouthis," 146–69; C. Schmidt and H. J. Polotsky, "Ein Mani-Fund in Ägypten," *Sitzungsberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* (1933): 4–90.

[61] The term *Holy Church* as a self-designation for the Manichaean community is found throughout Coptic literary sources (e.g., Kephalaia 20.6, 24.29, 25.2; *Psalm-Book* 8.25, 13.20; *Homilies* 26.12) as well as documentary texts from the Dakhleh Oasis (see *Coptic Documentary Texts from Kellis*, ed. Gardner Iain [Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1999], 209). This, combined with many statements attributed to Mani about the "elect" nature of his church, would have contributed to a sense of Manichaean exceptionalism.

truth, not a self-consciously ecumenical amalgam.[62] More important for Egyptian readers of these texts would be the fact that Mani is portrayed as vanquishing various eastern rulers and teachers in religious debate, notably the king of Touran and a series of sages named Goundesh, Masoukeos, and Iodasphes.[63] Even though the fact that these encounters result in Mani himself being recognized as a "buddha" would have likely left them perplexed,[64] the more important message for Manichaean readers would have been that Mani is the "Apostle of God" who "knows about everything."[65]

There is a great deal of academic discussion today in various fields around the notion of globality, and a strong desire to establish more inclusive interdisciplinary frameworks that more accurately reflect the diversity of our areas of study.[66] This is both laudable and necessary.[67] Yet global awareness requires awareness of globality. As much as modern scholars might want to look to Late Antiquity as a mirror to today's hyperlinked world culture, they should exercise caution when thinking about whether or not people of that time were meaningfully aware of such interconnections or cultural pluralities.[68] As Averil Cameron has explained, while global history is interested in

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[62] Scholars have often depicted Mani's mission as a cut-and-paste project, whereby he deliberately stitched together his universal religion based on diverse materials he had on hand. This reductionist approach minimizes the importance Mani attached to his own revelatory experiences, and his perceived role as prophet. As Lieu aptly stated: "Mani was a visionary, a poet, an artist, and a missionary" (*Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992], 69). Just how conscious or unconscious his adaptation of religious ideas was is beyond our knowledge.

[63] Jason BeDuhn, "Parallels between Coptic and Iranian Kephalaia," in Gardner et al., *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings*, 52–74. This Iodasaph, with whom Mani debates the question of the eternity of the world, is said by later Islamic sources to have been a teacher of the Sabians (Kevin van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes: From Pagan Sage to Prophet of Science* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009], 115–18).

[64] 2 Ke 354.9, 406.9.

[65] 2 Ke 402.13–14.

[66] For instance, K. R. Dark, "Globalizing Late Antiquity: Models, Metaphors, and the Realities of Long-Distance Trade and Diplomacy," in *Incipient Globalization? Long-Distance Trade in the Sixth Century AD*, ed. A. L. Harris, BAR International Series 1644 (Oxford: BAR, 2007), 3–14; Mark Humphries, "Late Antiquity and World History: Challenging Conventional Narratives and Analyses," *Studies in Late Antiquity* 1 (2017): 8–37. While "pressures for wider perspectives are a current issue in historiography," as Averil Cameron points out in "Epilogue," in Di Cosmo and Maas, *Empires and Exchanges*, 425, the risk of disciplinary encroachment and overreach remains high.

[67] Annette Yoshiko Reed, "Forum | Method, Ethics, and Historiography: Tracing a Global Late Antiquity from and beyond Christianity," *Ancient Jew Review* (26 Jan. 2022).

[68] The current scholarly trend is reflective of modern geopolitical concerns (Cameron, "Epilogue," 419–20). Yet, Anthony Kaldellis has pointed to the fact that in much Late Antiquity

"connectivity and connections" through which people and societies influence each other, "the challenge is to explain just how, and how far, ideas did in fact spread, and what wider impact such a spread might have had."[69] Outside of a few elite and rarified intellectual and religious circles, most people in Late Antiquity would not have extended their conceptual gaze much beyond the boundaries of their village or town.[70] Even if they were being impacted directly or indirectly by discourses and practices originating from far distant lands, we do not know that they were conscious of it as such. Manichaeans constituted one such rarified circle, but even they, as I have tried to show previously, probably were not necessarily able to assess all the information presented in their own textual traditions. While we may find it intriguing and significant to see references to Buddhist and Jain sages alongside biblical forefathers, readers of these texts in antiquity likely did not, at least not in the same way.

Moreover, the presence of these references to eastern sages has stimulated a lot of scholarly speculation about what elements from preexisting religious traditions might have been integrated into the Manichaean system. As Nicolas Baker-Brian has pointed out, many studies of Manichaeism have been fixated on the issue of syncretism and the presence of "borrowed elements."[71] This approach encourages the critical dismemberment of Manichaean discourse into its alleged constituent parts, rather than an assessment of it as an integrated whole.[72] It is, of course, clear that Manichaean teachings evolved over time within the widely diffused contexts in which they circulated, as well as being remarkably adaptable to those environments.[73] But the well-known

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research, "evidence for contact, sharing, and communication is hermeneutically privileged" ("Late Antiquity Dissolves," *Marginalia* [18 Sept. 2015]), leading to a strong tendency to postulate influence when perhaps there is none.

[69] Cameron, "Epilogue," 426–27.

[70] Brand, in "*Manichaeans of Kellis*," approaching the eponymous community in the Dakhleh Oasis from the perspective of "lived religion," takes a minimalist view that "Manichaeanness" was only active in specific contexts. The individuals depicted in the documents were more concerned with family and professional matters than a clearly demarcated religious identity.

[71] Nicholas Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism: An Ancient Faith Rediscovered* (New York: T & T Clark, 2011), 7–9.

[72] Widengren, for example, obsessed with demonstrating the Iranian origins of Manichaean teaching, remarked that "Christian and Buddhist elements of the religion show themselves to be 'trimmings' which can be singled out without difficulty and with no harm to the system" (*Mani and Manichaeism*, 72–73).

[73] There is an interesting parallel between the previously mentioned Kephalaia passages and a Central Asian Manichaean source that warrants further study. This Sogdian text serves as a potential negative analogue in that it provides a kind of antiprophetological list—a list of slanderers

ideological obsession with origins that marks so much research into early Christianities of various types often impedes an adequate understanding of Manichaean discourse located within specific times and places.[74]

While it is certainly intriguing and important to think about the various pathways through which religious ideas and traditions may have been transmitted across a global Late Antiquity, scholars should be cautious in their speculations as to how capable people from this period were to contextualize and appreciate such exchanges. In the end, such connections are likely of far greater interest to us than to them. ■

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and enemies of the messengers of God. This Sogdian text, preserved by Manichaeans living on the Silk Road in western China, evokes a number of specifically Central and South Asia religious figures, such as Ashoka and Devadatta, but seems vague on figures like Jesus, Judas, and even Satan, who is referred to as a grammatically feminine figure. As much as Sogdian merchants have been characterized as middlemen in late antique cultural exchange (Lim, "Trade and Exchange," 81–82), this text would seem to indicate that knowledge about western figures in the east was also ambiguous (Henning, "Murder of the Magi," 138–42).

[74] For a classic critique, see Jonathan Z. Smith, *Divine Drudgery: On the Comparison of Early Christianities with the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). In past scholarship, there has been a tendency to try to harmonize Manichaean sources from a wide variety of contexts—from North Africa to Central Asia. However, as concerns this paper, what Manichaeans in Central Asia or China may have known about Buddhism from direct interaction is far removed from the context in which we find the Coptic materials. On the eastern transformation of Manichaeism, see Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China*, 248–61; H.-J. Klimkeit, "Buddhistische Übernahmen im iranischen und türkischen Manichäismus," in *Synkretismus in den Religionen Zentralasiens*, ed. W. Hessig and H.-J. Klimkeit (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1987), 58–75.