THE FOUNDER OF MANICHAEISM

Mani, a third-century preacher, healer and public sage from Sasanian Mesopotamia, lived at a pivotal time and place in the development of the major religions. He frequented the courts of the Persian Empire, debating with rivals from the Judaeo-Christian tradition, philosophers and gnostics, Zoroastrians from Iran and Buddhists from India. The community he founded spread from north Africa to south China and lasted for over a thousand years. Yet the genuine biography of its founder, his life and thought, was in good part lost until a series of spectacular discoveries have begun to transform our knowledge of Mani's crucial role in the spread of religious ideas and practices along the trade routes of Eurasia. This book utilises the latest historical and textual research to examine how Mani was remembered by his followers, caricatured by his opponents, and has been invented and reinvented according to the vagaries of scholarly fashion.

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For Jay

Contents

Foreword

The founders of the great world religions draw our fascination, even as they elude the full grasp of the historian. They invariably are encased in layers of idealization, and rendered into icons. They serve as source and justification of what their religion has come to be, no matter how far it has developed and departed from their original work. Precisely because they serve necessary functions of inspiration and guidance for later adherents, they cannot be left as mere mortals; their story cannot be a disinterested account. The historical biographer will find much easier prey anywhere else than with the founders of religions. Yet the canons of history will not allow such figures to be set apart, or to remain immune to investigative scrutiny. They must yield to the same examination as any human being to be part of history, and to belong to a particular historical moment, so that they can help explain that moment, and so that the moment can help explain them. This historical emplacement is what has been attempted for all of the great figures of religious history, for Zarathustra and Siddhartha and Jesus and Muhammad and many more. Mani, the founder of Manichaeism, is no more or less elusive than these figures, yet has been the subject of far fewer studies, no doubt because alone of this company his religion is now extinct. Yet, for more than a thousand years it played a major role in religious history, interacted and competed with the religions of those other figures, and in key ways helped to define what a 'religion' is.

Ancient promoters and detractors of Manichaeism, as well as modern scholars, credit Mani as a genius and renaissance man: consummate artist and art-education innovator, musician and musical instrument inventor, visionary and organizer, and above all else creator of a new religion – Jesus and Paul rolled into one. Even a hostile source such as the *Acts of Archelaus* depicts Mani as a clever and astute propagandist, acquiring Christian texts, studying them, and ingeniously integrating their ideas into his own to make the latter more acceptable to potential Christian converts. It portrays him as a master showman, complete with exotic (if not bizarre) costuming.

Sources from the Islamic world, such as the *Shahnameh*, describe him as a wonder-worker, whether through magical powers or chicanery. A tale related by Marwazī portrays Mani plotting his own fake heavenly ascent, choosing a suitably cavernous hideout and laying up stores for a year, returning with the books supposedly revealed to him during his heavenly sojourn. With even polemical sources ready to credit Mani with rare genius, it comes as no surprise that Manichaean hagiography laces his story with even more of the astounding, from acts of levitation to encyclopedic knowledge of every subject, no matter how obscure. Starved for sources, modern scholarship has sifted such material, sheered away the miraculous, but retained much that can be no more than legendary, built-up depictions of a saintly or villainous superman. A brilliant man who invented his own religion.

This is a general problem that has always beset the historical study of religious figures. The lack of sources tempts researchers to grasp at any information at all for their reconstructions, juxtaposing hagiographical and polemical accounts into a plausible synthesis, rather than critically deconstructing the rhetorical strategies behind them. Historical methodology might dismiss the more fanciful and miraculous elements, and call out more obviously exaggerated or stereotypical drama, but still rely on data embedded in the same narrative, as if such accounts must hew close to real history as a basis for their fantasies. One very common cliché in such studies is that a polemical source could not just make up complete fiction about its target, because that would be obvious to informed contemporaries and hence unpersuasive. But this view is naïve on two counts. First, it misidentifies the audience of polemic, which is rarely the informed adherents of the targeted individual, but rather the author's own community without direct access to reliable information about the subject. Its aim is not to persuade and convert informed adherents, but to reinforce the polemicist's own community in its hostility to the heretical other. Second, direct experience of modern religious debate and contemporary politics makes it all too plain that there is no restraint of facts on the rhetorical claims made in such contexts. Literally anything goes. An attempt to get at what is truly historical about a figure, therefore, must employ very vigorous standards of skepticism and proof.

Just as the quest for the historical Jesus, Siddhartha, and Muhammad require a caustic treatment of fanciful sources, and a fresh start from the few historical nuggets that survive such an acid test, so Mani must have his turn at strict historical examination. But the dilemma in all these cases is the same: not a single shard of historical evidence exists unfiltered by strong ideological sentiments. Mani himself pointed to this dilemma. His predecessors failed to write down their own ideas, and entrusted them

instead to the vicissitudes of oral transmission. Everything one could know of them had been filtered already by the misunderstandings and agendas of their followers over multiple generations. Mani could overcome this obstacle only by direct revelation from heaven. The modern historian of religion has no such tool.

It is ironic, therefore, that Mani sought to preserve his own voice and identity against the vicissitudes and corruptions of time through composing his own books, only to have them lost through the persecution and ultimate demise of the religion he founded. The vast mass of preserved Manichaean literature belongs to later scholastic and liturgical texts, rather than Mani's own books. This has left Mani open to speculation he would be otherwise spared. Even with the recovery of a large trove of primary Manichaean sources in the twentieth century, therefore, the question remains whether a layer of Manichaean scholasticism stands between us and the historical Mani. We rely heavily on such material, which predominates in the recovered literature, while Mani's own compositions continue largely to elude us. The material we have seems hopelessly inconsistent on whether Mani spent his whole life thinking of himself as 'the apostle of Jesus Messiah', as he dubbed himself in his letters, or came to regard himself as a new and better messenger of God, with a religious institution superior to those established by his predecessors, including Jesus. It would be helpful if we could assign the latter to an elevation of Mani by church leaders following his death as they busied themselves shoring up the identity of an independent Manichaeism, and pinpoint a historical Mani who saw himself merely as a Christian reformer. But reaching secure conclusions in that direction remains difficult.

Any day, this might dramatically change. Iain Gardner notes the surviving fragments of Mani's own *Epistles*. His fellow Coptic scholar Wolf-Peter Funk has announced that the *Synaxeis* codex from Medinet Madi appears to contain the highly fragmentary remains of Mani's *Gospel*. When the laborious work of editing and translating these remains is complete, they will offer an important if only partial check on speculative debates regarding what aspects of Manichaean teaching can be ascribed to Mani himself. But it will probably leave unanswered many of the questions examined by Gardner in the pages that follow. It may tell us nothing of Mani's human origins and parentage, of the timing and locales of his various travels, of the evolution of his thought. Without the ability to place the *Epistles* and *Gospel* in Mani's thirty-five-year public career, we will remain unable to reach certainty on the stages of Mani's intellectual and spiritual development, and of the formation of his church institutions. It

may very likely still leave us in the dark on something as basic as Mani's given name. There is no magic cure for the historian's dilemma, therefore. Even with Mani's *Gospel* in hand, no other source can be dismissed completely as a possible resource of information, and no source can be relied upon to give the full and historically accurate facts.

Dealing as we must, then, with an historical figure mediated by a faith community, we can start there, with the Mani of faith, the 'Apostle of Jesus Christ', the 'Doctor from Babylon', the 'Illuminator', the 'Great Interpreter'. The Mani available to modern history is very much the Mani imagined by the subsequent Manichaean church. A large portion of the surviving Manichaean literature is devoted to stories of Mani's life, and accounts of how he created Manichaeism convert by convert, town by town, teaching by teaching. The errors that crept into the teachings of the Buddha, Zarathustra, and Jesus as they were transmitted from one generation to the next were the result of the fact that these prophets spoke metaphorically and figuratively, and that they trusted their words to the oral medium. These circumstances left it to Mani to reform world religion by rendering its truths in precise, plain, literal language, and to commit this language to the written page. In one of the *Bema Psalms*, the members of the community declare,

> All the [teachings] which the ancients proclaimed in their scriptures, we were thinking of them [as] fables before thou didst come forth and didst fill our souls, the wisdom of our heart.[1]

Mani's instruction renders the teachings of the past fully comprehensible for the first time.

In the Manichaean tradition, Mani is the 'good interpreter' who explains all that is ambiguous in his predecessors. He does so not only by avoiding figurative speech, but also by placing isolated aphorisms and instructions into a complete system that provides context and relationship. In praise of Mani, it is said:

> The beloved son, Jesus Christ, sets a garland on thy head in great joy, because his building that was destroyed thou didst build it, his way which was hidden thou didst illumine it, his scriptures which were confused thou didst set them in order again, his wisdom which was hidden thou didst interpret it.[2]

[1] C. R. C. Allberry, ed., *A Manichaean Psalm-Book: Part II* (W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart, 1938), 13.6–13.
[2] Ibid., 12.26–33.

Mani was a zealous systematizer, who followed Paul's dictum to take possession of all that was good in human wisdom.

> The writings, wisdom, apocalypses, parables and psalms of all the earlier churches are gathered from every place and come to my church and are added to the wisdom that I have revealed to you. As a river is added to another river to form a powerful current, so also are the ancient books added to my writings; and they make a great wisdom, such as has not been uttered in all preceding generations.[3]

But by putting this great body of wisdom into his own system, he saw to it that its meaning was 'altered to the flavor' of the system as a whole.[4]

The Manichaean tradition portrays Mani as the founder of the institutions of the Manichaean church, as successor to those of his predecessors. Mani is the initiator of the order of the elect and their instructor in the ritual actions that form the core of Manichaean practice. Mani also gathers the larger community of auditors to support the elect in their work. He inculcates the combination of the auditor's alms-service with the elect's ritual meal, by which the fragments of Light scattered throughout the world attain their liberation. This work of religion necessarily entails reform of prior ritual error. Baptism of the body is useless, he argues against the Elchasaites in the *Cologne Mani Codex*. Such external purifications must be replaced by an internal realignment of the body's functioning. Only in the latter way can the body be made ritually fit. There follows from the reform of ritual qualification a reform of the central ritual itself, the sacred meal. In the *Kephalaia*, Mani critiques systems of sacrificial offering as misdirected and ineffective, and offers the ritual meal of the elect as the only true means of ritual practice.[5]

As the 'interpreter from the land of Babylon' who made all things plain and understandable, Mani used every means at his disposal to reach out and to inform. The Manichaean tradition is a religion of the book because Mani himself was a writer of books, something the Buddha and Jesus never did:

> For all the apostles, my brothers, that came before me, [they did not write] their wisdom in books, as I have written it down; [nor did] they depict their wisdom in the picture, as [I have painted] it.[6]

[3] W.-P. Funk, *Kephalaia I*, *Zweite Hälfte* (Kohlhammer, Stuttgart, 2000), 372.11–19.
[4] W. Sundermann, *Ein manichäisch-sogdisches Parabelbuch*, Berliner Turfantexte XV (Akademie Verlag, Berlin, 1985), text B, lines 58–68.
[5] I. Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher* (Brill, Leiden, New York and Köln, 1995), 224–226 (kephalaion 87).
[6] Funk, *Kephalaia I*, 371.25–29.

Although Mani was believed to have a lasting presence and influence upon the Manichaean community in his own person, it was primarily through his books that he was encountered from one generation to the next. These books are celebrated as his great gift to the world, and formed a kind of canon, which is enumerated (with minor variations) in Manichaean texts from the Roman West to the Chinese East.

Mani's religious revolution from the oral to the written medium was not his only didactic innovation. The Manichaean tradition also celebrated him as an artist. Mani tried to convey his teachings in a visual medium, especially for those who were illiterate or who needed visual aids to grasp the concepts. Ephrem Syrus quotes a Manichaean tradition that has Mani say,

> I have written them in books and illustrated them with colors. Let the one who hears about them verbally also see them in visual form, and the one who is unable to learn them from [words] learn them from picture(s).[7]

Of course, just as he was the definitive writer, so Mani was the most masterful artist, and his reputation in this respect seems to have grown over the centuries. But Mani did not just paint individual pictures; he compiled a picture book that came to be treated as part of Mani's canon of scriptures. This book was justly famous as something of a media revolution in religious proselytization. Mani was careful to send it along with his missionaries, and its existence fostered and legitimated the Manichaean artistic tradition.[8]

Mani is the 'doctor from Babylon', and the association of medical imagery with his speech and deeds is more than a metaphor. Mani's hagiography portrays him as a healer of bodies as well as of souls. Mani's cures of the sick were key moments in the initial success of his religion, reported in Iranian sources and in the Greek *Cologne Mani Codex*. Alongside of the revelation Mani received from heaven, he has been endowed with the gift of 'the laying-on of hands' (*cheirothesia*) as a healing technique, as well as an act of ordination. The polemical tradition also connects Mani to healing activity, although in this context he is a charlatan who predictably fails. The discourse of healing is so pervasive in treatment of Mani throughout the Manichaean world that we are led to assume it has some basis in Mani's own self-presentation.

[7] Ephrem Syrus, *Hypatius* 127, quoted in J. C. Reeves, 'Manichaean Citations from the *Prose Refutations* of Ephrem', in *Emerging from Darkness: Studies in the Recovery of Manichaean Sources*, eds P. Mirecki and J. BeDuhn (Brill, Leiden, 1997), 262–263.

[8] On this topic, see Z. Gulácsi, *Mani's Pictures: The Didactic Images of the Manichaeans from Sasanian Mesopotamia to Uygur Central Asia and Tang-Ming China* (Brill, Leiden, 2015).

Despite the real medical connections at the basis of Mani's image as 'the great physician',[9] Manichaean hymnody extended the idea into the realm of metaphor and simile. Mani's writings become the tools of the doctor:

> He has the antidote that is good for every affection. There are two and twenty compounds in his antidote: his great *Gospel,* the good tidings of all them that are of the light. His water-pot is the *Thesaurus*, the treasure of life. In it there is hot water; there is some cold water also mixed with it. His soft sponge that wipes away bruises is the *Pragmateia*. His knife for cutting is the *Book of the Mysteries*. His excellent swabs are the *Book of the Giants*. The narthex of every cure is the book of his *Letters*.[10]

What may have been Mani's actual healing ability is built up in hagiography into the miraculous. Even at a distance, or after his death, Mani can be invoked for the purposes of healing. Thus Mani appears in Palmyra in response to the prayer of his representative there, Addā, and heals the sister of 'Queen Tadī', who is most likely the famous Zenobia.[11] Apparently, this trend towards ascribing miracles to Mani met with resistance in some circles, and the debate over whether Mani in fact worked any miracles added to the issues dividing factions of Manichaeism in the Islamic period. Nevertheless, the numerous prayers to Mani concerning the well-being of both body and soul show that his power in this regard continued to strongly attract the interest of his followers.

As in Christianity, the tragic death of the founder is incorporated into the ideology of the Manichaean community, and commemorated in its practice. We find religious literature devoted to the subject of Mani's martyrdom, both poetic and prose, in both Western and Eastern Manichaeism. The details of Mani's last days are meticulously recorded: his journey to the Persian court, his audience with the shah Bahram, his imprisonment and suffering, the final visits of his disciples, the moment of his death, and its immediate aftermath. In its description of these events, the Manichaean tradition itself draws parallels to the death of Jesus. It likens the Zoroastrian priests to the Jewish leaders, Bahram to Pilate or Herod, Mani's death to Jesus' crucifixion, and Mani's apotheosis to Jesus' ascent. The whole scenario comes across as a momentous clash of good and evil, and highlights the tragedy of evil's great earthly power.

> He sounded with his trumpet in the worlds that are far, that are near, he roused them. . . The ruler of the earth rose up against him and persecuted

[9] Allberry, *A Manichaean Psalm-Book*, 46.1. [10] Ibid., 46.19–32.
[11] H.-J. Klimkeit, *Gnosis on the Silk Road* (HarperCollins, San Francisco, 1993), 209 (M566 I).

> him in his cities... He assumed the heart of his judges that they might condemn him like the impious... They shut him up in their prisons and loaded his limbs with iron... They counseled against him in their evil counsels that they might cast a slur on him daily.[12]

Yet Mani's martyrdom is ultimately a triumph and a liberation, just as Jesus' resurrection is a victory over death. Mani achieves one more little victory in the long, painful struggle with evil. Nearly crushed by his iron chains, the sixty-year-old apostle of light prays to God for a much-earned release from his battles, and departs his body precisely at sunset after twenty-six days of imprisonment.

> On the second day of the week, thou didst receive the glory of victory, thou didst bind the diadem upon thee, for thou didst kill the race of darkness, in the month of Phamenoth, on the fourth day, Monday, thou didst receive thy garland.[13]

In Manichaean belief, the moment of death is the time when the ultimate triumph of light over darkness may be made manifest. For those who have freed and 'collected' their soul, death holds no power and has no sting. The liberated soul of the dead ascends into the realm of light, welcomed by an angelic entourage. Mani's death quite naturally offers the prototypical illustration of this belief. Mani accomplishes his physical death voluntarily, and in it displays his victory over evil.

The culmination of martyrdom in triumphant ascent is captured in the Parthian *Parinirvana Hymns*, which in comparison to the Coptic *Bema Psalms* show how consistent were the traditions of Mani's end. The term *parinirvana* is used here mostly to convey a strong contrast with the contention and difficulty of the world. Mani had earned a rest from his trials, and the heavenly world to which he ascended is a land of pure good, where no evil can touch him. Nevertheless, we must not confuse Mani's *parinirvana* with that of the Buddha. Mani remains in the universe and actively engaged in its affairs.

Mani's continued proximity to his beloved flock of followers is conveyed in the idea that he abides in the moon, and from there looks down upon the works and sufferings of his church. According to this tradition, 'the Parinirvana of the Apostle' was 'when he was raised up into the chariot of the Moon and found peace with the Father, the God Ohrmizd'.[14] Mani's presence in the moon was a powerful symbol of his lasting care and watchful

[12] Allberry, *A Manichaean Psalm-Book*, 23.20–29. [13] Ibid., 17.21–28.
[14] Klimkeit, *Gnosis on the Silk Road*, 87 (M8171.V.II).

gaze. The idea provided comfort to the Manichaean community in its travails, offered a sense of Mani's accessibility, and held out hope of his future return by what must have appeared to be a rather short and easy descent. Mani's location in the moon meant that every Manichaean would face him in night-time prayers, which were directed to the moon. In this way, Mani was the object of a daily practice of veneration and prayer.

The Manichaean liturgical year culminated in the annual *Bema* ceremony, held on the anniversary of Mani's apotheosis. With Mani's ascent as an impressive sign of light's triumph over darkness, its commemoration served as a celebration of the hope and promise of the Manichaean faith. In part, the hymns and sermons performed at this time called to mind the career of the historical Mani. Indeed, much of what we know of Mani's life, and much of the material we have about the Manichaean view of Mani, comes from literature produced for use at the *Bema*. But the ceremony itself also invoked the living Mani, the continued presence of the Apostle of Light in the moon. Mani had promised to remain close at hand, and the annual *Bema* was the moment when that proximity was drawn even closer by the invocation of Mani's presence into the community during the festival. The *Bema* takes its name from the judgment seat set up for the ceremony, which was to be occupied only by Mani himself. During the proceedings, Mani was brought down to the seat, and the community interacted with the seat as if he were truly present. He was addressed directly, and his all-seeing gaze was acknowledged in the community's confession of sin.

> The great exalted king is seated upon his Bema, he sees the deeds of each one of us... Our Lord the Paraclete has come, he has sat down upon his Bema; let us all pray, my brethren, that he may forgive us our sins.[15]

In thus invoking and celebrating the presence of Mani, the members of the Manichaean community annually reaffirmed their commitment to Mani's religion, and to the obligations that it entailed. The *Parinirvana Hymns* convey a sense of heightened expectation at the *Bema*, as if this moment held portent each year as the potential finale of the Manichaean mission. These hymns bear the unusual feature of being dated according to the number of years that had transpired since Mani's departure. The Manichaeans were counting the years until their prophet returned and brought an end to their earthly struggles in a glorious triumph. At that time, Mani's descent onto the *Bema* would simply be prelude to his surrendering of authority to the true judge, Jesus.

[15] Allberry, *A Manichaean Psalm-Book*, 21.27–32; 22.28–30.

The numerous accomplishments and roles of Mani pertinent to Manichaean belief and practice provided the impetus and content of a vast body of poetry and prose used in the worship of the Manichaean church. This literature recounts and celebrates Mani's teaching and guidance, both in person during his earthly career and less directly through his writings or supernatural influence after his ascent. In reciting his work as interpreter and reformer, author and illuminator, healer and ritual authority, as well as guardian and judge of his religious community, this literature makes a case for Mani as a savior figure who has fundamentally changed the world and made salvation possible.

The Coptic *Bema Psalms* supply many epithets of praise for Mani. He is 'the Spirit of Truth', 'the merciful one', 'the holy one, the giver of good tidings', 'the glorious one, [the great] god, the savior', 'the envoy of them that are on high', 'the great conqueror, our lord, our light, who has given victory to his loved ones', 'the beloved', 'the blessed', 'the new sun of the souls', 'the judge of this universe'; he is a victor, an angel, a shepherd, a sage, and a god. As the founder and focal point of the Manichaean tradition, Mani receives a thesaurus of honorific titles. Yet, in a more systematic way, Manichaeism attempts to state precisely what Mani accomplished, what he has made possible for those who adhere to his teachings. Mani brought truth and awareness:

> Thou didst preach to all of us thy wisdom, thou didst teach us the things that used to be, that are and that shall be, thou didst save us from the darkness. . . the mixture of the dark and the light which is within.[16]

He created the institutions of the Manichaean church:

> Thou didst appoint the twelve Teachers and the seventy-two Bishops. Thou didst make Sisinnios leader over thy children.[17]

He started a mission that reaches all people:

> Lo, thy holy churches have spread out to the four corners of the world. Lo, thy vine-trees have filled every place. Lo, thy sons have become famous in all lands. Lo, thy Bema has been firmly established in every place [like a] river now that flows in the whole earth.[18]

In short, all that Manichaeism is and does derives from Mani, and its accomplishments are to his glory.

[16] Ibid., 13.6–13. [17] Ibid., 44.8–10. [18] Ibid., 13.20–24.

Perhaps the best example of this kind of liturgical and literary commemoration of Mani is the Turkic *Great Hymn to Mani*.[19] Here Mani is again the spiritual healer who cures the madness of ordinary mortals and brings them clarity and insight. He is the guide who leads people across the sea of suffering and samsara to nirvana. Mani himself is envisioned traversing all lands and rescuing those mired in delusion, passion, and ignorance. His Gospel teaches 'the roads of escape and salvation'. His commandments provide the rules of conduct that restrain evil deeds and make the Manichaean community possible as a way of life. His instruction organizes the 'collection', the ritual process by which humans contribute to the cause of universal salvation. Finally, in his deified and celestial position, he is called upon to do even more, to bless and give absolution for human failings in emulating his model. The totality of Manichaeism – its doctrines, code of behavior, ritual practices, and highest aspirations and hopes – is encapsulated in the *Great Hymn to Mani* and placed at the apostle's feet, where the hymn's reciters 'venture to bow and worship with profound respect'.

This is the Mani of faith, presenting as daunting an edifice to the historian as any King Arthur or Lao Tzu. Yet try we must to find historical nuggets embedded in it. Scholars, who had accepted as historical far more than they ever should from the anti-Manichaean sources available to them in the nineteenth century, were just as quick to embrace the traditions contained in newly discovered Manichaean sources in the twentieth century. Whether it was the enticing tale of the visionary boy in the *Cologne Mani Codex* or the exacting itinerary of 'Mani's Last Journey', too many scholars decided that history lay just below the surface of these texts, overlooking signs that these narratives obeyed formulas and tropes of hagiography. Literally nothing guarded them from being made up whole cloth by the Manichaean church to meet its needs and unfolding identity.

Iain Gardner offers here a detailed case for a more critical historiography of the origins of Manichaeism, based in part on skepticism regarding the previously known sources, and in part on newly available sources (such as Mani's *Epistles* and the Chester Beatty *Kephalaia*). Based on a deep knowledge of the relevant sources in their original languages and contexts, Gardner exposes the rhetorical strategies and hagiographical tropes that may not be simply putting a gloss on historical reality, but inventing that reality whole cloth. This is patient, show-your-work scholarship, as a masterful historian leads readers through complicated evidence and makes detailed arguments based on it. Gardner equips the reader to see through

[19] L. Clark, *Uygur Manichaean Texts, Volume II: Liturgical Texts* (Brepols, Turnhout, 2013), 137–177.

the myriad fragmented and slanted sources to the true identity of a founding figure.

By reading against the grain of some of the sources well known to scholars, and overturning our assumptions of how to read them, Iain Gardner argues that we can come closer to the historical Mani. Those of us laboring in the study of Manichaeism have until now assumed we knew at least a little bit about Mani's parentage and heritage. Gardner shows that the identification of Mani's father as Patīg (and the Parthian and even royal ancestry that goes with it) appears quite late in the tradition, attested first in the eighth century Chinese *Compendium* already deeply embedded in a birth legend borrowing heavily from the life of the Buddha, and in a less obviously fantastic tenth-century version historians have tended to prefer in Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist*. Gardner argues that earlier references to Patīg depict him rather as Mani's spiritual and administrative 'father' within the sectarian community in which he was raised, and fail to say anything that would confirm actual parentage. We have until now felt reasonably confident that Mani was the founder's personal name, despite the plethora of titles that he is accorded. Gardner points out signs that this name, too, may have been simply his most proper title, much like 'Christ' is for Jesus, and his personal identity is forever obscured behind it.

The use of specific dates and correlation with known historical events gives Manichaean narratives a semblance of historicity, and researchers have taken these details as the few points of terra firma around which a life of Mani can be built. But, as Gardner demonstrates, Manichaean political self-promotion and passion for numerological niceties may have supplied such reference points, independently of actual events. Mani may not have achieved immediate contact with the Sasanian court, especially in light of the convoluted (if not contradictory) set of accounts of Mani gaining access to it found in the Chester Beatty *Kephalaia*. Even scholars fall prey to good drama, and the *Cologne Mani Codex* has enthralled them for that reason in the half-century since its discovery. Gardner provides the necessary corrective, pointing out its hindsight construction of a dramatic break of Mani with the baptist community of his youth and the immediate launching of his new religion, counter to numerous clues in the content of the codex itself that Mani operated more as a reformer and schismatic at first, and the emergence of 'Manichaeism' occurred more gradually.

When it came to the last months of Mani's life and his martyrdom, it is only to be expected that these events would be stylized into something of a 'stations of the cross'. Indeed, explicit comparison to the death of Jesus deeply penetrated commemorations of Mani's demise. Yet, scholars have

confidently spoken of the itineraries of his last travels as historical and established. Gardner breaks this reconstruction down into its constituent parts, rearranges it according to new sources and fresh readings of older sources, and comes to novel conclusions about where Mani was coming from, and under what conditions, in the final period of his life. Even the correlation of the twenty-six days of the annual Manichaean fast with the actual time of Mani's trial and imprisonment runs into difficulties, as Gardner demonstrates how this term does not correspond with expected key events in the narrative dramas and poetry concerning these events. Gardner also finds the quite regal conditions reported for Mani's death, in the company of key disciples, and providing instructions for carrying on the community, implausibly convenient, despite their specificity and verisimilitude.

The sort of critical analysis Gardner offers in the following pages is not completely without precedent, of course. A number of scholars have chipped away at the legendary edifice, pointing out parallels in the saintly lives of other figures, exposing the formulaic nature of key narratives. But I think it fair to say that no one has gone so far as Gardner in questioning even basic elements of what we have accepted as established fact about Mani. Very few if any have worked with such a wide range of sources. A reader is well served by the careful surveying of issues and evidence that Gardner offers, and will get up to speed on all of the pertinent sources far more quickly and thoroughly than from any other monograph or article on this subject. Gardner applies his caustic to the legendary edifice and describes much of it melting away. What survives may or may not be purely historical, but freed from its legendary matrix it has a good chance of supplying the relatively secure points in the historical life of Mani. Since that life will forever remain fragmentary, this book – with its cautious suggestions and eschewal of neatly harmonized accounts – may be as close to the historical Mani as we will ever get.

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Preface

When I first became interested in Manichaeism and started to study it my approach was through 'gnosticism' and what I had been taught were the wilder fringes of early Christian literature. My focus was on texts and teachings, especially the fantastical worlds of gods and demons; and it took time before I began to think about practice, ethics and the social context. Only much later did I turn to historiography; then finally and quite recently to the Mani-biography. When Erica Hunter approached me in 2014 regarding the Jordan Lectures in Comparative Religion of 2016, in her role as Head of the Department of Religions and Philosophies at SOAS, I was excited. This seemed an ideal opportunity to follow up a new enthusiasm, and one very relevant to the series' rubric of 'Comparative Religion'. In his life Mani travelled through Mesopotamia, Persia and even to India; he interacted with the sages and religious communities of the early Sasanian empire; he played a crucial role in the development of the actual idea of world religions and to attitudes about their multiplicity in human society and history. This book will explain something of this, of my own fascination and the path I have taken to arrive here. It is my belief that certain fundamental issues in our modern understanding of the life of Mani, taken commonly to be true, need to be rethought and on occasion rejected. My purpose is to bring together a good number of themes and topics on which I have been working in recent years, in the hope that they be found fruitful for future scholarly research.

The four chapters of this book are lightly revised and expanded versions of the lectures I gave in London during the week of 30 May to 2 June 2016. The three appendices are there to fill out some topics of interest subsidiary to the principal theme. The lectures were mostly prepared during March and April of that year, firstly in Fowey (Cornwall) where I was distracted by spring weather and glorious walks along the coastline; and then in Kirkwall (Orkney) where it seemed I was plunged back into winter storms, snow and rain. I dedicate the book to my closest friend and partner Jay Johnston, who encouraged me in the writing and shared both

the daffodils and the wild winds. The width of her knowledge and the generosity of her scholarship are inspirational. The book itself was put together a year later in Thirroul (New South Wales), in the midst of teaching at the University of Sydney and with the resources of work and home to hand. Final revisions pre-publication have been made while on sabbatical in 2019 hosted by the Institute of Iranian Studies at St Andrews University, a time of calm and reflection and good company.

The contents of the book cross over multiple areas on which I am currently researching and writing, and borrow from a number of discrete but related projects that reflect my interests at this time. Consequently, certain sections overlap with material I have presented elsewhere, some published or soon to be published in other formats. These include near-duplicate paragraphs here and there, with occasional longer passages that may paraphrase or intersect with a course of argument over several pages. The more obvious of these should be acknowledged, but note that similar wording will also have been utilised elsewhere in my own writing from time to time. For comments on Mani's background and especially his supposed father Patticius (in Chapter 2), see I. Gardner and L. Rasouli-Narimani, 'Patīg and Pattikios in the Manichaean Sources', in *Manichaeism East and West*, eds S. N. C. Lieu, E. C. D. Hunter, E. Morano and N. A. Pedersen, Analecta Manichaica I (Brepols, Turnhout, 2017), 82–100. My especial thanks to Leyla Rasouli-Narimani for our many enjoyable discussions and detailed co-readings of those Middle Iranian fragments of Manichaean church history that have informed much of my recent research, the influence of which can be found across this book. For Mani's audiences with King Shapur (Chapter 2), see I. Gardner, 'The Final Ten Chapters', in I. Gardner, J. BeDuhn and P. Dilley, *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings. Studies on the Chester Beatty* Kephalaia *Codex* (Brill, Leiden and Boston, 2015), 75–97. For work on the Apostle's last days, the sources and his journeys (Chapter 4), see I. Gardner, 'Mani's Last Days', in *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings*, 159–208. I returned to some of the same material in I. Gardner, 'Did Mani Travel to Armenia?', a paper read at the *Iran and the Caucasus* Conference held to celebrate its 20-year anniversary in Aghveran, in October 2016 and now published in *Iran and the Caucasus*, 22 (2018): 341–352; my expenses were funded by a Kerkyasharian and Kayikian Fund for Armenian Studies grant. For the question of dualism (Appendix A), see I. Gardner, 'Dualism in Mani and Manichaeism', in *Dualismes. Doctrines religieuses et traditions philosophiques*, eds F. Jourdan and A. Vasiliu, *Chôra. Revue d'études anciennes et médiévales* (Editura Polirom, Paris, 2015), 417–436; it was first read as a paper in Paris, in November 2013, with my thanks to Fabienne Jourdan

for the invitation to join the LABEX RESMed research seminar at the Sorbonne. For the arrival of Manichaeism in Egypt (Chapter 2) and the community at ancient Kellis (Appendix B), see I. Gardner, 'The Manichaean Mission in Egypt', research first presented in Göttingen, in December 2014; my thanks to Bernhard Neuschäfer for the invitation to join the SAPERE colloquium on Alexander of Lycopolis; the paper is to be published in German in the forthcoming volume devoted to the philosopher's important account of the religion. Parts of the above and related research on the Mani-biography were also presented in Paris, in June 2015, at the workshop on religious controversy organised by M. Timuş and F. Ruani; with forthcoming publication of a version of the same paper in English. For the Chester Beatty *Kephalaia* and the 'Jesus-book' (Appendix C), a paper on this topic was first read at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting in San Antonio, November 2016; my thanks to Dylan Burns for the invitation to speak at the session on Manichaeism organised for the Nag Hammadi and Gnosticism programme.

The broader concerns and direction of my research as represented in this book make me indebted to many friends and colleagues. I will not attempt any exhaustive list, which would cover a large number of persons working across Manichaean studies and related areas, papyrology, Coptic, the Dakhleh Oasis Project and so on. Please be assured that I know well how much I owe to you all. However, it would be remiss of me not to mention by name Jason BeDuhn and Paul Dilley, for our close work and companionship on the Chester Beatty *Kephalaia* project that has so informed much of my recent research; Zsuzsanna Gulácsi, for her generous lending of many of the wonderful slides and images I used to illustrate my Jordan lectures in 2016; Erica Hunter, all at SOAS and the audience in London, who made the event such a pleasure. I am truly grateful to you all.

I am also pleased to acknowledge my Department of Studies in Religion, the School of Literature, Art and Media and the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Sydney for their support, time-release and the use of resources necessary for the preparation of this book. Many thanks to Giselle Bader for assistance with formatting and proofreading. Funding from the Australian Research Council has greatly aided my work over many years. The professionalism of Michael Sharp and his colleagues at Cambridge University Press has been much appreciated.

Iain Gardner
Thirroul, May 2017–Anstruther, February 2019