

Manichaeism

Manichaeism (/ˌmænɪˈkiːzəm/; ^[1] in Modern Persian آیین مانی *Āyin e Māni*; Chinese: 摩尼教; pinyin: *Móní Jiào*) was a major religion that was founded by the Iranian ^[2] prophet Mani (in Persian: مانی, Syriac: ܡܢܝܢ, Latin: Manichaeus or Manes; c. 216–276 AD) in the Sasanian Empire. ^[3] ^[4]

Manichaeism taught an elaborate dualistic cosmology describing the struggle between a good, spiritual world of light, and an evil, material world of darkness. Through an ongoing process which takes place in human history, light is gradually removed from the world of matter and returned to the world of light whence it came. Its beliefs were based on local Mesopotamian gnostic and religious movements. ^[5]

Manichaeism was quickly successful and spread far through the Aramaic-Syriac speaking regions. ^[6] It thrived between the third and seventh centuries, and at its height was one of the most widespread religions in the world. Manichaean churches and scriptures existed as far east as China and as far west as the Roman Empire. ^[7] It was briefly the main rival to Christianity in the competition to replace classical paganism. Manichaeism survived longer in the east than in the west, and it appears to have finally faded away after the 14th century in southern China ^[8] contemporary to the decline in China of the Church of the East during the Ming Dynasty. While most of Manichaeism's original writings have been lost, numerous translations and fragmentary texts have survived.

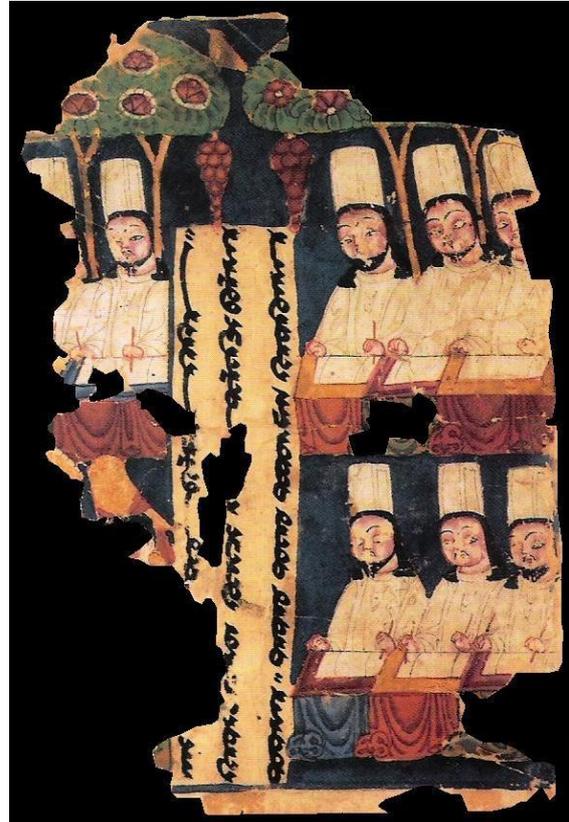
An adherent of Manichaeism is called, especially in older sources, ^[9] a *Manichee*, or more recently *Manichaean*. By extension, the term “manichean” is widely applied (often used as a derogatory term) as an adjective to a philosophy of moral dualism, according to which a moral course of action involves a clear (or simplistic) choice between good and evil, or as a noun to people who hold such a view.

1 History

1.1 Life of Mani

Main article: Mani (prophet)

Mani, an Arsacid Persian by birth, ^[10] was born 216 AD in Mesopotamia (Iraq), which was ruled by Persia, ^[11] then within the Sassanid Empire province of Asuristan. According to the Cologne Mani-Codex, ^[12] Mani's par-



Manichaean priests, writing at their desks. Manuscript from Gaochang (Khocho), Tarim Basin, China.

ents were members of the religious sect of Elcesaites.

Mani composed seven writings, six of which were written in Syriac Aramaic. The seventh, the *Shabuhragan*, ^[13] was written by Mani in Middle Persian and presented by him to the contemporary King of Sassanid Persia, Shapur I, in the Persian capital of Ctesiphon. Although there is no proof Shapur I was a Manichaean, he tolerated the spread of Manichaeism and refrained from persecuting it in his empire's boundaries. ^[14] According to one tradition it was Mani himself who invented the unique version of the Syriac script called Manichaean script, which was used in all of the Manichaean works written within the Persian Empire, whether they were in Syriac or Middle Persian, and also for most of the works written within the Uyghur Empire. The primary language of Babylon (and the administrative and cultural language of the Sassanid Empire) at that time was Eastern Middle Aramaic, which included three main dialects: Judeo-Aramaic (the language of the Talmud), Mandaean Aramaic (the lan-

guage of the **Mandaean religion**), and **Syriac Aramaic**, which was the language of Mani, as well as of the **Syriac Christians**.

While Manichaeism was spreading, existing religions such as **Zoroastrianism** were still popular and **Christianity** was gaining social and political influence. Although having fewer adherents, Manichaeism won the support of many high-ranking political figures. With the assistance of the **Persian Empire**, Mani began missionary expeditions. After failing to win the favour of the next generation of Persian royalty, and incurring the disapproval of the Zoroastrian clergy, Mani is reported to have died in prison awaiting execution by the Persian Emperor **Bahram I**. The date of his death is estimated at AD 276–277.*[11]

1.2 Influences

Mani believed that the teachings of **Buddha**, **Zoroaster**, and **Jesus** were incomplete, and that his revelations were for the entire world, calling his teachings the “Religion of Light.”*[11] Manichaean writings indicate that Mani received revelations when he was 12 and again when he was 24, and over this time period he grew dissatisfied with the **Elcesaites** sect he was born into.*[15] Mani began preaching at an early age and was possibly influenced by contemporary Babylonian-Aramaic movements such as **Mandaeanism**, and Aramaic translations of **Jewish apocalyptic writings** similar to those found at **Qumran** (such as the book of **Enoch** literature), and by the Syriac dualist-gnostic writer **Bardaisan** (who lived a generation before Mani). With the discovery of the **Mani-Codex**, it also became clear that he was raised in a Jewish-Christian baptism sect, the **Elcesaites**, and was influenced by their writings as well. According to biographies preserved by **Ibn al-Nadim** and the Persian polymath **al-Biruni**, he allegedly received a revelation as a youth from a spirit, whom he would later call his *Twin* (Aramaic *Tauma* (ܛܘܡܐ)), from which is also derived the name of the apostle **Thomas**, the “twin”), his *Szyzygos* (Greek for “partner”, in the **Cologne Mani-Codex**), his *Double*, his *Protective Angel* or *Divine Self*. It taught him truths which he developed into a religion. His *divine Twin* or true *Self* brought Mani to *self-realization*. He claimed to be the *Paraclete of the Truth*, as promised in the **New Testament**.

Manichaeism's views on **Jesus** are described by historians:

Jesus in Manichaeism possessed three separate identities: (1) **Jesus the Luminous**, (2) **Jesus the Messiah** and (3) **Jesus patibilis** (the suffering **Jesus**). (1) As **Jesus the Luminous**... his primary role was as supreme revealer and guide and it was he who woke **Adam** from his slumber and revealed to him the divine origins of his soul and its painful captivity by the body and mixture with matter. **Jesus the Messiah**

was a historical being who was the prophet of the **Jews** and the forerunner of **Mani**. However, the **Manichaeans** believed he was wholly divine. He never experienced human birth as notions of physical conception and birth filled the **Manichaeans** with horror and the **Christian doctrine** of virgin birth was regarded as equally obscene. Since he was the light of the world, where was this light, they asked, when he was in the womb of the **Virgin**? (2) **Jesus the Messiah** was truly born at his baptism as it was on that occasion that the **Father** openly acknowledged his sonship. The suffering, death and resurrection of this **Jesus** were in appearance only as they had no salvific value but were an exemplum of the suffering and eventual deliverance of the human soul and a prefiguration of **Mani's** own martyrdom. (3) The pain suffered by the imprisoned **Light-Particles** in the whole of the visible universe, on the other hand, was real and immanent. This was symbolized by the *mystic placing of the Cross whereby the wounds of the passion of our souls are set forth*. On this mystical **Cross of Light** was suspended the **Suffering Jesus** (**Jesus patibilis**) who was *the life and salvation of Man*. This *mystica crucifixo* was present in every tree, herb, fruit, vegetable and even stones and the soil. This constant and universal suffering of the captive soul is exquisitely expressed in one of the **Coptic Manichaean psalms**.*[16]

Historians also note that **Mani** declared himself to be an “apostle of **Jesus Christ**”*[17] **Manichaean tradition** is also noted to have claimed that **Mani** was the reincarnation of different religious figures from **Buddha**, **Krishna**, **Zoroaster**, and **Jesus**.

Other than incorporating the symbols and doctrine of dominant religious traditions, **Manichaeism** also incorporated the symbols and deities of indigenous traditions, in particular the **Hindu deity Ganesha** into its fold, demonstrated by the image available in the article, **Manichaean art and calligraphy** by **Hans-Joachim Klimkeit**. **Mani** was allegedly claiming to be the reincarnation of the **Buddha**, **Lord Krishna**, **Zoroaster** and **Jesus** depending on the context in which he was carrying out his preachings. Such strategic claims fostered a spirit of toleration among the **Manichaeans** and the other religious communities and this particular feature greatly assisted them in gaining the approval of authorities to practice in different regions along the **Silk Road**.*[18]

Academics also note that since much of what is known about **Manichaeism** comes from later 10th and 11th

Century AD Islamic historians like Al-Biruni and especially the Shia Muslim Persian historian Ibn al-Nadim (and his work *Fihrist*), “Islamic authors ascribed to Mani the claim to be the Seal of the Prophets.” This topic is discussed by an Israeli academic, Guy G. Stroumsa. * [19] * [20]



10th century Manichaean *Electae* in Gaochang (*Khocho*), China.

Another source of Mani's scriptures was original Aramaic writings relating to the book of Enoch literature (see the *Book of Enoch* and the *Second Book of Enoch*), as well as an otherwise unknown section of the book of Enoch called the "Book of Giants". This book was quoted directly, and expanded on by Mani, becoming one of the original six Syriac writings of the Manichaean Church. Besides brief references by non-Manichaean authors through the centuries, no original sources of “The Book of Giants” (which is actually part six of the “Book of Enoch”) were available until the 20th century.

Scattered fragments of both the original Aramaic “Book of Giants” (which were analyzed and published by Józef Milik in 1976) * [21] and of the Manichaean version of the same name (analyzed and published by W.B. Henning in 1943) * [22] were found with the discovery in the twentieth century of the *Dead Sea Scrolls* in the Judaeen Desert and the Manichaean writings of the Uyghur Manichaean kingdom in Turpan. Henning wrote in his analysis of them:

It is noteworthy that Mani, who was brought up and spent most of his life in a province of the Persian empire, and whose mother belonged to a famous Parthian family,

did not make any use of the Iranian mythological tradition. There can no longer be any doubt that the Iranian names of *Sām*, *Narīmān*, etc., that appear in the Persian and Sogdian versions of the *Book of the Giants*, did not figure in the original edition, written by Mani in the Syriac language. * [22]

From a careful reading of the Enoch literature and the *Book of Giants*, alongside the description of the Manichaean myth, it becomes clear that the “Great King of Honor” of this myth (a being that sits as a guard to the world of light at the seventh of ten heavens in the Manichaean myth, * [23]) is identical with the King of Honor sitting on the heavenly throne in the Enoch literature. In the Aramaic book of Enoch, in the Qumran writings in general, and in the original Syriac section of Manichaean scriptures quoted by Theodore bar Konai, * [24] he is called “malka raba de-ikara” (the great king of honor).

Mani was also influenced by writings of the Assyrian gnostic Bardaisan (154–222), who like Mani, wrote in Syriac, and presented a dualistic interpretation of the world in terms of light and darkness, in combination with elements from Christianity.

Noting Mani's travels to the Kushan Empire (several religious paintings in Bamiyan are attributed to him) at the beginning of his proselytizing career, Richard Foltz postulates Buddhist influences in Manichaeism:

Buddhist influences were significant in the formation of Mani's religious thought. The transmigration of souls became a Manichaean belief, and the quadripartite structure of the Manichaean community, divided between male and female monks (the “elect”) and lay followers (the “hearers”) who supported them, appears to be based on that of the Buddhist *sangha*. * [25]

The Kushan monk Lokakṣema began translating Pure Land Buddhist texts into Chinese in the century prior to Mani arriving there, and the Chinese texts of Manichaeism are full of uniquely Buddhist terms taken directly from these Chinese Pure Land scriptures, including the term “Pure land” (淨土 *Jìngtǔ*) itself. * [26] However, the central object of veneration in Pure Land Buddhism, Amitābha, the Buddha of Infinite Light, does not appear in Chinese Manichaeism, and seems to have been replaced by another deity.

1.3 Spread

Manichaeism spread with extraordinary speed through both the east and west. It reached Rome through the apostle Psattiq by a.d. 280, who was also in Egypt in 244 and



The spread of Manichaeism (a.d. 300–500). World History Atlas, Dorling Kindersly.

251. It was flourishing in the Fayum area of Egypt in 290. Manichaean monasteries existed in Rome in 312 during the time of the Christian Pope Miltiades.

In 291, persecution arose in the Persian empire with the murder of the apostle Sisin by Bahram II, and the slaughter of many Manichaeans. In 296, Diocletian decreed against the Manichaeans: “We order that their organizers and leaders be subject to the final penalties and condemned to the fire with their abominable scriptures”, resulting in martyrdom for many in Egypt and North Africa (see *Diocletian Persecution*). By 354, Hilary of Poitiers wrote that the Manichaean faith was a significant force in southern Gaul. In 381 Christians requested Theodosius I to strip Manichaeans of their civil rights. He issued a decree of death for Manichaean monks in 382.



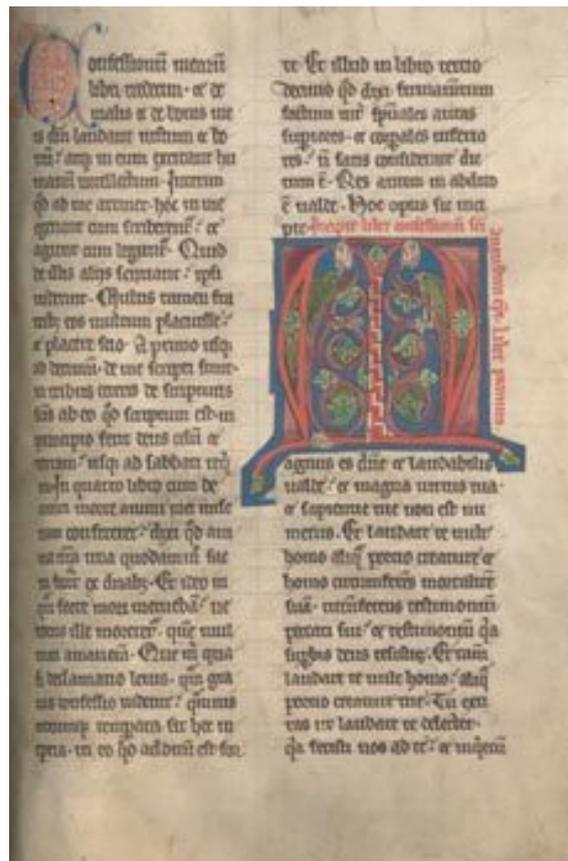
St. Augustine was once a Manichaean.

Augustine of Hippo (354–430) converted to Christianity from Manichaeism, in the year 387. This was shortly after the Roman Emperor Theodosius I had issued a decree of death for all Manichaean monks in 382 and shortly before he declared Christianity to be the only legitimate religion for the Roman Empire in 391. Due to the heavy persecution, the religion almost disappeared from western Europe in the 5th century and from the eastern portion of the empire in the 6th century.*[27] According to his *Confessions*, after nine or ten years of adhering to the Manichaean faith as a member of the group of “hearers”, Augustine became a Christian and a potent adversary

of Manichaeism (which he expressed in writing against his Manichaean opponent Faustus of Mileve), seeing their beliefs that knowledge was the key to salvation as too passive and not able to effect any change in one's life.*[28]

I still thought that it is not we who sin but some other nature that sins within us. It flattered my pride to think that I incurred no guilt and, when I did wrong, not to confess it... I preferred to excuse myself and blame this unknown thing which was in me but was not part of me. The truth, of course, was that it was all my own self, and my own impiety had divided me against myself. My sin was all the more incurable because I did not think myself a sinner. (*Confessions, Book V, Section 10*)

Some modern scholars have suggested that Manichaean ways of thinking influenced the development of some of Augustine's ideas, such as the nature of good and evil, the idea of hell, the separation of groups into elect, hearers, and sinners, and the hostility to the flesh and sexual activity.*[29]



A 13th-century manuscript from Augustine's book VII of *Confessions* criticizing Manichaeism.

How Manichaeism may have influenced Christianity continues to be debated. Manichaeism may have influenced the Bogomils, Paulicians, and Cathars. However, these

groups left few records, and the link between them and Manichaeans is tenuous. Regardless of its accuracy the charge of Manichaeism was levelled at them by contemporary orthodox opponents, who often tried to make contemporary heresies conform to those combatted by the church fathers. Whether the dualism of the Paulicians, Bogomils, and Cathars and their belief that the world was created by a Satanic demiurge were due to influence from Manichaeism is impossible to determine. The Cathars apparently adopted the Manichaean principles of church organization. Priscillian and his followers may also have been influenced by Manichaeism. The Manichaeans preserved many apocryphal Christian works, such as the Acts of Thomas, that would otherwise have been lost.*[30]

Manichaeism maintained a sporadic and intermittent existence in the west (Mesopotamia, Africa, Spain, France, North Italy, the Balkans) for a thousand years, and flourished for a time in Persia and even further east in Northern India, Western China, and Tibet. While it had long been thought that Manichaeism arrived in China only at the end of the seventh century, a recent archaeological discovery demonstrated that it was already known there in the second half of the 6th century.*[31]

Some Sogdians in Central Asia believed in the religion.*[32]*[33] Uyghur ruler Khagan Boku Tekin (759–780) converted to the religion in 763 after a 3 days discussion with its preachers,*[34]*[35] the Babylonian headquarters sent high rank clerics to Uyghur, and Manichaeism remained the state religion for about a century before the collapse of the Uyghur empire in 840. In the east it spread along trade routes as far as Chang'an, the capital of the Tang dynasty in China.*[36]*[37] After the Tang Dynasty, some Manichaens groups participated in peasant movements. The religion was used by many rebel leaders to mobilise followers. In the Song and Yuan dynasties of China remnants of Manichaeism continued to leave a legacy contributing to sects such as the Red Turbans. During the Song Dynasty, the Manichaeans were derogatorily referred by the Chinese as *chicai simo* (meaning that they “abstain from meat and worship demons”). An account in *Fozu Tongji*, an important historiography of Buddhism in China compiled by Buddhist scholars during 1258-1269, says that the Manichaens worshipped the “white Buddha” and their leader wore a violet headgear, while the followers wore white costumes. Many Manichaeans took part in rebellions against the Song government and were eventually quelled. After that, all governments were suppressive against Manichaeism and its followers and the religion was banned by the Ming Dynasty in 1370.*[38]*[39]*[40]

The Manichaeans tried to assimilate their religion along with Islam in the Arab Islamic empires.*[41] Relatively little is known about the religion during the first century of Islamic rule. During the early period of the Arab Islamic empire, Manichaeism attracted many followers. It had a significant appeal among the Muslim society especially among the elites. Due to the appeal of its

teachings, many Muslims adopted the ideas of its theology and some even became dualists. Ibn al-Muqaffa' wrote an apologia for Manichaeism, defending its phantasmagorical cosmogony and attacking the fideism of Islam and other monotheistic religions. According to some accounts, even the Umayyad caliph Al-Walid II was a follower of Mani. The Manichaeans had sufficient structure to have a head of their community.*[42]*[43] Under the 8th-century Abbasids, Arabic *zindiq* and the adjectival *zandaqa* could denote many different things, though it seems primarily (or at least initially) to have signified a follower of Manichaeism however its true meaning is not known.*[44] In the ninth century, it is reported that the Muslim Caliph Al-Ma'mun tolerated a community of Manichaeans.*[45] During the early period of Abbasids, the Manichaeans underwent persecution. The third Abbasid caliph al-Mahdi persecuted the Manichaeans, establishing an inquisition against dualists who if being found guilty of heresy refused to renounce their beliefs, were executed. Their persecution was finally ended in 780s by Harun al-Rashid.*[46]*[47] During the reign of the Caliph Al-Muqtadir, many Manichaeans fled from Mesopotamia to Khorasan from fear of persecution and the base of the religion was later shifted to Samarkand.*[27]*[48]

Manichaeism claimed to present the complete version of teachings that were corrupted and misinterpreted by the followers of its predecessors Adam, Zoroaster, Buddha and Jesus. Accordingly, as it spread, it adapted new deities from other religions into forms it could use for its scriptures. Its original Aramaic texts already contained stories of Jesus. When they moved eastward and were translated into Iranian languages, the names of the Manichaean deities (or angels) were often transformed into the names of Zoroastrian yazatas. Thus *Abbā dāRabbūā* (“The Father of Greatness”, the highest Manichaean deity of Light), in Middle Persian texts might either be translated literally as *pīd ī wuzurgīh*, or substituted with the name of the deity *Zurwān*. Similarly, the Manichaean primal figure *Nāšā Qadmāyā* “The Original Man” was rendered *Ohrmazd Bay*, after the Zoroastrian god Ohrmazd. This process continued in Manichaeism's meeting with Chinese Buddhism, where, for example, the original Aramaic *karia* (the “call” from the world of Light to those seeking rescue from the world of Darkness), becomes identified in the Chinese scriptures with Guan Yin (觀音 or Avalokitesvara in Sanskrit, literally, “watching/perceiving sounds [of the world]”, the Chinese Bodhisattva of Compassion).

1.4 Persecution and extinction

Manichaeism was repressed in Persia by the Sassanids.*[41] In 291, persecution arose in the Persian empire with the murder of the apostle Sisin by Bahram II, and the slaughter of many Manichaeans. In AD 296, the Roman emperor Diocletian decreed all

the Manichaean leaders to be burnt alive along with the Manichaean scriptures and many Manichaeans in Europe and North Africa were killed. This policy of persecution was also followed by his successors. Theodosius I issued a decree of death for all Manichaean monks in 382 AD.*[49] The religion was vigorously attacked and persecuted by both the Christian Church and the Roman state. Due to the heavy persecution upon its followers in the Roman Empire, the religion almost disappeared from western Europe in the 5th century and from the eastern portion of the empire in the 6th century.*[27]

In 732, Emperor Xuanzong of Tang banned any Chinese from converting to the religion saying it was a heretic religion that was confusing people by claiming to be Buddhism. However the foreigners who followed the religion were allowed to practice it without punishment.*[50] After the fall of the Uyghur Khaganate in 840 which was the chief patron of Manichaeism (which was also the state religion of the Khaganate) in China, all Manichaean temples in China except in the two capitals and Taiyuan were closed down and never reopened since these temples were viewed as a symbol of foreign arrogance by the Chinese. Even those that were allowed to remain open did not for long. The Manichaean temples were attacked by Chinese people who burned the images and idols of these temples. The Manichaean priests were ordered to wear Chinese dress. In 843, Emperor Wuzong of Tang gave the order to kill all Manichaean clerics as part of his campaign against Buddhism and other religions, and over half died. They were made to look like Buddhists by the authorities, their heads were shaved, they were made to dress like Buddhist monks and then killed.*[37] Although the religion was mostly forbidden and its followers persecuted thereafter in China, it survived till the 14th century in the country. Under the Song dynasty, its followers were derogatorily called by the Chinese people and the authorities as *chicai simo* (meaning that they “abstain from meat and worship demons”). Many of the followers of the religion took part in rebellions against the Song dynasty. They were quelled by the Songs and were suppressed and persecuted by all successive governments before the Mongol Yuan dynasty. In 1370, the religion was banned through an edict of the Ming dynasty, whose founding emperor had a personal dislike for the religion.*[37]*[40]*[51] The religion survived in East Turkestan (a region controlled by Uyghur Khaganate before its fall in 840) until the Mongol invasion in the 13th century.*[27]

The Manicheans also suffered persecution for some time under the Abbasids. In 780, the third Abbasid Caliph, Al-Mahdi started a campaign of inquisition against those who were “dualist heretics” or “Manichaeans” called the *Zindīq*. He appointed a *master of the heretics* (Sahib-az-Zanadiqa), an official whose task was to pursue and investigate suspected dualists, who were then examined by the caliph. Those found guilty who refused to abjure their beliefs were executed. This persecution continued under his successor Caliph al-Hadi as well. It contin-

ued for some time during reign of Harun al-Rashid who abolished it and ended it.*[46] During the reign of the 18th Abbasid Caliph Al-Muqtadir, many Manichaeans fled from Mesopotamia to Khorasan from fear of persecution by him and about 500 of them assembled in Samarkand. The base of the religion was later shifted to this city.*[27]*[48]

1.5 Later movements accused of “Neo-Manichaeism”

During the Middle Ages, several movements emerged which were collectively described as “Manichaean” by the Catholic Church, and persecuted as Christian heresies through the establishment, in 1184, of the Inquisition.*[52] They included the Cathar churches of Western Europe. Other groups sometimes referred to as “neo-Manichaean” were the Paulician movement, which arose in Armenia,*[53] and the Bogomils in Bulgaria.*[30] An example of this usage can be found in the published edition of the Latin Cathar text, the *Liber de duobus principiis* (*Book of the Two Principles*), which was described as “Neo-Manichaean” by its publishers.*[54] As there is no presence of Manichaean mythology or church terminology in the writings of these groups, there has been some dispute among historians as to whether these groups were descendants of Manichaeism.*[55]

1.5.1 Present day

Some sites are preserved in Xinjiang and Fujian in China.*[56]*[57] The Cao'an temple is the only fully intact Manichaean building,*[16]:256–257 though it later became associated with Buddhism.*[58] Several small groups claim to continue to practice this faith.*[59]*[60]*[61]*[62]

2 Teachings and beliefs

2.1 General

Mani's teaching dealt with the origin of evil,*[11] by addressing a theoretical part of the problem of evil by denying the omnipotence of God and postulating two opposite powers. Manichaean theology taught a dualistic view of good and evil. A key belief in Manichaeism is that the powerful, though not omnipotent good power (God) was opposed by the semi-eternal evil power (Satan). Humanity, the world and the soul are seen as the byproduct of the battle between God's proxy, Primal Man, and Satan. The human person is seen as a battleground for these powers: the soul defines the person, but it is under the influence of both light and dark. This contention plays out over the world as well as the human body—neither the Earth nor

the flesh were seen as intrinsically evil, but rather possessed portions of both light and dark. Natural phenomena (such as rain) were seen as the physical manifestation of this spiritual contention. Therefore, the Manichaean worldview explained the existence of evil with a flawed creation which God took no role in forming but rather was the result of Satan striking out against God.* [63]

2.2 Cosmogony



Uyghur Manichaean clergymen, wall painting from the Khocho ruins, 10th/11th century AD. Located in the Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin-Dahlem.

Manichaeism presented an elaborate description of the conflict between the spiritual world of light and the material world of darkness. The beings of both the world of darkness and the world of light have names. There are numerous sources for the details of the Manichaean belief. There are two portions of Manichaean scriptures that are probably the closest thing to the original Manichaean writings in their original languages that will ever be available. These are the Syriac-Aramaic quotation by the Nestorian Christian Theodore bar Konai, in his Syriac "Book of Scholia" ("*Ketba de-Skolion*", eighth century),* [24] and the Middle Persian sections of Mani's *Shabuhrgan* discovered at Turpan (a summary of Mani's teachings prepared for Shapur I* [13]). These two sections are probably the original Syriac and Middle Persian written by Mani.

From these and other sources, it is possible to derive an almost complete description of the detailed Manichaean vision* [64] (a complete list of Manichaean deities is outlined below). According to Mani, the unfolding of the universe takes place with three "creations":

The First Creation: Originally, good and evil existed in two completely separate realms, one the *World of Light*, ruled by the *Father of Greatness* together with his five *Shekhinas* (divine attributes of light), and the other the *World of Darkness*, ruled by the *King of Darkness*. At a certain point, the *Kingdom of Darkness* notices the *World of Light*, becomes greedy for it and attacks it. The *Father of Greatness*, in the first of three "creations" (or "calls"

), calls to the *Mother of Life*, who sends her son *Original Man* (*Nāšā Qadmayā* in Aramaic), to battle with the attacking powers of Darkness, which include the *Demon of Greed*. The *Original Man* is armed with five different shields of light (reflections of the five *Shekhinas*), which he loses to the forces of darkness in the ensuing battle, described as a kind of "bait" to trick the forces of darkness, as the forces of darkness greedily consume as much light as they can. When the *Original Man* comes to, he is trapped among the forces of darkness.

The Second Creation: Then the *Father of Greatness* begins the *Second Creation*, calling to the *Living Spirit*, who calls to his five sons, and sends a call to the *Original Man* (*Call* then becomes a Manichaean deity). An answer (*Answer* becomes another Manichaean deity) then returns from the *Original Man* to the *World of Light*. The *Mother of Life*, the *Living Spirit*, and his five sons begin to create the universe from the bodies of the evil beings of the *World of Darkness*, together with the light that they have swallowed. Ten heavens and eight earths are created, all consisting of various mixtures of the evil material beings from the *World of Darkness* and the swallowed light. The sun, moon, and stars are all created from light recovered from the *World of Darkness*. The waxing and waning of the moon is described as the moon filling with light, which passes to the sun, then through the Milky Way, and eventually back to the *World of Light*.

The Third Creation: Great demons (called *archons* in bar-Khonai's account) are hung out over the heavens, and then the *Father of Greatness* begins the *Third Creation*. Light is recovered from out of the material bodies of the male and female evil beings and demons, by causing them to become sexually aroused in greed, towards beautiful images of the beings of light, such as the *Third Messenger* and the *Virgins of Light*. However, as soon as the light is expelled from their bodies and falls to the earth (some in the form of abortions – the source of fallen angels in the Manichaean myth), the evil beings continue to swallow up as much of it as they can to keep the light inside of them. This results eventually in the evil beings swallowing huge quantities of light, copulating, and producing Adam and Eve. The *Father of Greatness* then sends the *Radiant Jesus* to awaken Adam, and to enlighten him to the true source of the light that is trapped in his material body. Adam and Eve, however, eventually copulate, and produce more human beings, trapping the light in bodies of mankind throughout human history. The appearance of the Prophet Mani was another attempt by the *World of Light* to reveal to mankind the true source of the spiritual light imprisoned within their material bodies.

2.3 Outline of the beings and events in the Manichaean mythos

Beginning with the time of its creation by Mani, the Manichaean religion had a detailed description of deities

- **Jesus the Splendour** (Syriac: ܝܫܘܢ ܙܝܘܐ *Yisho Ziwa*). Sent to awaken Adam and Eve to the source of the spiritual light trapped within their physical bodies.
- **The Maiden of Light**
- **The Twelve Virgins of Light** (Syriac: ܩܘܪܒܢܐܬܐ ܩܘܪܒܢܐܬܐ *tratesra btultē*; Middle Persian *kanīgān rōšnān*; Chinese: 日宮十二化女 *ri gong shi er hua nyu*). Reflected in the twelve constellations of the Zodiac.
- **The Column of Glory** (Syriac: ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܩܘܪܒܢܐ *estūn šubḥa*; Middle Persian: *srōš-ahrāy*, from *Sraosha*; Chinese: 蘇露沙羅夷, *su lou sha luo yi* and 盧舍那, *lu she na*, both phonetic from Middle Persian *srōš-ahrāy*). The path that souls take back to the *World of Light*; corresponds to the *Milky Way*.
- **The Great Nous**
- **His five Limbs**
 - Reason
 - Mind
 - Intelligence
 - Thought
 - Understanding
- **The Just Justice**
- **The Last God**

2.3.5 The World of Darkness

- **The King of Darkness** (Syriac: ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܩܘܪܒܢܐ *melech kleshokha*; Middle Persian: *Ahriman*, the Zoroastrian supreme evil being)
- **His five evil kingdoms** Evil counterparts of the five elements of light, the lowest being the kingdom of Darkness.
- **His son** (Syriac: ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܩܘܪܒܢܐ *Ashaklun*; Middle Persian: *Az*, from the Zoroastrian demon, *Azi Dahaka*)
- **His son's mate** (Syriac: ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܩܘܪܒܢܐ *Nebroel*)
 - Their offspring – **Adam and Eve** (Middle Persian: *Gehmurd* and *Murdiyanag*)
- **Giants** (Fallen Angels, also Abortions): (Syriac: ܩܘܪܒܢܐ *yakhte*, “abortions” or “those that fell”; also: ܩܘܪܒܢܐܬܐ *arkhonata*, the Gnostic *archons*; Greek, Coptic: Ἐγρήγοροι *Egrēgoroi*, “Giants”). Related to the story of the fallen angels in the Book of Enoch (which Mani used extensively in his Book of Giants), and the נפילים *nephilim* described in Genesis (6:1–4), on which the story is based.

3 Organization and religious practices

3.1 Organization of the Manichaean Church

The Manichaean Church was divided into “Elect” – those who had taken upon themselves the vows of Manicheism, and “Hearers” – those who had not, but still participated in the Church. The terms for these divisions were already common since the days of early Christianity. In the Chinese writings, the Middle Persian and Parthian terms are transcribed phonetically (instead of being translated into Chinese).* [66]

- **The Leader**, (Syriac: ܩܘܪܒܢܐ; Parthian: *yamag*; Chinese: 閻默) Mani's designated successor, seated at the head of the Church in Ctesiphon (Babylonia). Two notable leaders were Mār Sīsin (or Sisinnios), the first successor of Mani, and Abū Hilāl al-Dayhūri, an 8th-century leader.
- **12 Apostles** (Latin: *magistri*; Syriac: ܩܘܪܒܢܐ; Middle Persian: *možag*; Chinese: 慕闍). Three of Mani's original apostles were Mār Pattī (Pattikios; Mani's father), Mār Zaku and Mār Ammo.
- **72 Bishops** (Latin: *episcopi*; Syriac: ܩܘܪܒܢܐܬܐ; Middle Persian: *aspasag, aftadan*; Chinese: 薩波塞, 拂多誕; see also: **Seventy Disciples**). One of Mani's original disciples which was specifically referred to as a bishop was Mār Addā.
- **360 Presbyters** (Latin: *presbyteri*; Syriac: ܩܘܪܒܢܐ; Middle Persian: *mahistan*; Chinese: 默奚悉德)
- The general body of the **Elect** (Latin: *electi*; Syriac: ܩܘܪܒܢܐܬܐ; Middle Persian: *ardawan, dēnāwar*; Chinese: 阿羅緩, 電那勿)
- The **Hearers** (Latin: *auditores*; Syriac: ܩܘܪܒܢܐ; Middle Persian: *niyoshagan*; Chinese: 耨沙嘜)

3.2 The Bema Fest

The most important religious observance of the Manichaeans was the Bema Fest, observed annually:

The Bema was originally, in the Syriac Christian churches, a seat placed in the middle of the nave on which the bishop would preside and from which the Gospel would be read. In the Manichaean places of worship, the throne was a five-stepped altar, covered by precious cloths, symbolizing the five classes of the hierarchy. The top of the Bema was always empty, as it was the seat of Mani. The Bema

was celebrated at the vernal equinox, was preceded by fasts, and symbolized the passion of Mani, thus it was strictly parallel to the Christian Easter.*[67]

While it is often presumed that the Bema seat was empty, there is some evidence from the Coptic Manichaean *Bema Psalms*, that the Bema seat may have actually contained a copy of Mani's picture book, the *Arzhang*.*[68]

4 Primary sources



Statue of prophet Mani as the "Buddha of Light" in Cao'an Temple in Jinjiang, Fujian, "a Manichaean temple in Buddhist disguise" ,[69] which is considered "the only extant Manichean temple in China" * [70]*

Mani wrote either seven or eight books, which contained the teachings of the religion. Only scattered fragments and translations of the originals remain.

The original six Syriac writings are not preserved, although their Syriac names have been. There are also fragments and quotations from them. A long quotation, preserved by the eighth-century Nestorian Christian author Theodore bar Konai,*[24] shows that in the original Syriac Aramaic writings of Mani there was no influence of Iranian or Zoroastrian terms. The terms for the Manichaean deities in the original Syriac writings are in Aramaic. The adaptation of Manichaeism to the Zoroastrian religion appears to have begun in Mani's lifetime however, with his writing of the Middle Persian *Shabuhrgan*, his book dedicated to the King Shapur.*[13] In it, there are mentions of Zoroastrian deities such as Ohrmazd, Ahriman, and Az. Manichaeism is often presented as a Persian religion, mostly due to the vast number of Middle Persian, Parthian, and Soghdian (as well as Turkish) texts discovered by German researchers near Turpan, in the Xinjiang (Chinese Turkestan) province of China, during the early 1900s. However, from the vantage point of its original Syriac descriptions (as quoted by Theodore bar Khonai and outlined above), Manichaeism may be better described as a unique phenomenon of Aramaic Babylonia, occurring

in proximity to two other new Aramaic religious phenomena, Talmudic Judaism and Babylonian Mandaism, which were also appearing in Babylonia in roughly the third century AD.

The original, but now lost, six sacred books of Manichaeism were composed in Syriac Aramaic, and translated into other languages to help spread the religion. As they spread to the east, the Manichaean writings passed through Middle Persian, Parthian, Soghdian, Tocharian and ultimately Uyghur and Chinese translations. As they spread to the west, they were translated into Greek, Coptic, and Latin.

Henning describes how this translation process evolved and influenced the Manichaeans of Central Asia:

Beyond doubt, Soghdian was the national language of the Majority of clerics and propagandists of the Manichaean faith in Central Asia. Middle Persian (= Pārsīg), and to a lesser degree, Parthian (= Pahlavānīg), occupied the position held by Latin in the medieval church. The founder of Manichaeism had employed Syriac (his own language) as his medium, but conveniently he had written at least one book in Middle Persian, and it is likely that he himself had arranged for the translation of some or all of his numerous writings from Syriac into Middle Persian. Thus the Eastern Manichaeans found themselves entitled to dispense with the study of Mani's original writings, and to continue themselves to reading the Middle Persian edition; it presented small difficulty to them to acquire a good knowledge of the Middle Persian language, owing to its affinity with Soghdian.*[71]

4.1 Originally written in Syriac

- The Evangelion (Syriac: ܩܘܪܘܢܐܢܐ; Greek, Coptic: Ευαγγελιον, meaning roughly "good news"). Also known as the *Gospel of Mani*. Quotations from the first chapter were brought in Arabic by Ibn al-Nadim, who lived in Baghdad at a time when there were still Manichaeans living there, in his book the "Fihrist" (written in 938), a catalog of all written books known to him.
- The Treasure of Life
- The Treatise (Coptic: πραγματεία)
- Secrets
- The Book of Giants: Original fragments were discovered at Qumran (pre-Manichaean) and Turpan.
- Epistles: Augustine brings quotations, in Latin, from Mani's Fundamental Epistle in some of his anti-Manichaean works.

- Psalms and Prayers. A Coptic Manichaean Psalter, discovered in Egypt in the early 1900s, was edited and published by Charles Allberry from Manichaean manuscripts in the Chester Beatty collection and in the Berlin Academy, 1938–9.

4.2 Originally written in Middle Persian

- The Shabuhrgan, dedicated to Shapur I: Original Middle Persian fragments were discovered at Turpan, quotations were brought in Arabic by al-Biruni.

4.3 Other books

- The Ardahang, the “Picture Book”. In Iranian tradition, this was one of Mani’s holy books which became remembered in later Persian history, and was also called Aržang, a Parthian word meaning “Worthy”, and was beautified with paintings. Therefore, Iranians gave him the title of “The Painter”.
- The Kephalaia (Κεφαλαία), “Discourses”, found in Coptic translation.
- *On the Origin of His Body*, the title of the Cologne Mani-Codex, a Greek translation of an Aramaic book which describes the early life of Mani.*[12]

4.4 Non-Manichaean works preserved by the Manichaean Church

- Some portions of the Book of Enoch literature.
- Some literature relating to the apostle Thomas (who by tradition went to India, and was also venerated in Syria), such as portions of the Syriac The Acts of Thomas, and the Psalms of Thomas. The Gospel of Thomas was also attributed to Manichaeans by the early Church Fathers.*[72]
- The legend of Barlaam and Josaphat passed from an Indian story about the Buddha, through a Manichaean version, before it transformed into the story of a Christian Saint in the west.

4.5 Later works



摩尼教文獻 *The Chinese Manichaean “Compendium”*

In later centuries, as Manichaeism passed through eastern Persian speaking lands and arrived at the Uyghur Empire (回鹘帝国), and eventually the Uyghur kingdom

of Turpan (destroyed around 1335), Middle Persian and Parthian prayers (*āfrīwan* or *āfurīšn*) and the Parthian hymn-cycles (the *Huwīdagmān* and *Angad Rōšnān* created by Mar Ammo) were added to the Manichaean writings.*[73] A translation of a collection of these produced the Manichaean Chinese Hymnscroll (the 摩尼教下部贊, which Lieu translates as “Hymns for the Lower Section [i.e. the Hearers] of the Manichaean Religion”*[74]). In addition to containing hymns attributed to Mani, it contains prayers attributed to Mani’s earliest disciples, including Mār Zaku, Mār Ammo and Mār Sīsin. Another Chinese work is a complete translation of the “Sermon of the Light Nous”, presented as a discussion between Mani and his disciple Adda.*[75]

4.6 Critical and polemic sources

Until discoveries in the 1900s of original sources, the only sources for Manichaeism were descriptions and quotations from non-Manichaean authors, either Christian, Muslim, Buddhist or Zoroastrian. While often criticizing Manichaeism, they also quoted directly from Manichaean scriptures. This enabled Isaac de Beausobre, writing in the 18th century, to create a comprehensive work on Manichaeism, relying solely on anti-Manichaean sources.*[76] Thus quotations and descriptions in Greek and Arabic have long been known to scholars, as have the long quotations in Latin by Saint Augustine, and the extremely important quotation in Syriac by Theodore bar Khonai.

4.6.1 Patristic depictions of Mani and Manichaeism

Eusebius commented as follows:

The error of the Manichees, which commenced at this time.

—In the mean time, also, that madman Manes, (Mani is of Persian or Semitic origin) as he was called, well agreeing with his name, for his demoniacal heresy, armed himself by the perversion of his reason, and at the instruction of Satan, to the destruction of many. He was a barbarian in his life, both in speech and conduct, but in his nature as one possessed and insane. Accordingly, he attempted to form himself into a Christ, and then also proclaimed himself to be the very paraclete and the Holy Spirit, and with all this was greatly puffed up with his madness. Then, as if he were Christ, he selected twelve disciples, the partners of his new religion, and after patching together false and ungodly doctrines, collected from a thousand heresies long since extinct, he swept them off like a deadly poison, from Persia, upon this part of the world. Hence the impious name of the Manichaeans spreading

among many, even to the present day. Such then was the occasion of this knowledge, as it was falsely called, that sprouted up in these times.*[77]

4.6.2 Acta Archelai

An example of how inaccurate some of these accounts could be is seen in the account of the origins of Manichaeism contained in the *Acta Archelai*. This was a Greek anti-manichaean work written before 348, most well known in its Latin version, which was regarded as an accurate account of Manichaeism until the end of the 19th century:

In the time of the Apostles there lived a man named Scythianus, who is described as coming 'from Scythia,' and also as being 'a Saracen by race' ('ex genere Saracenorum'). He settled in Egypt, where he became acquainted with 'the wisdom of the Egyptians,' and invented the religious system which was afterwards known as Manichaeism. Finally he emigrated to Palestine, and, when he died, his writings passed into the hands of his sole disciple, a certain Terebinthus. The latter betook himself to Babylonia, assumed the name of Budda, and endeavoured to propagate his master's teaching. But he, like Scythianus, gained only one disciple, who was an old woman. After a while he died, in consequence of a fall from the roof of a house, and the books which he had inherited from Scythianus became the property of the old woman, who, on her death, bequeathed them to a young man named Corbicius, who had been her slave. Corbicius thereupon changed his name to Manes, studied the writings of Scythianus, and began to teach the doctrines which they contained, with many additions of his own. He gained three disciples, named Thomas, Addas, and Hermas. About this time the son of the Persian king fell ill, and Manes undertook to cure him; the prince, however, died, whereupon Manes was thrown into prison. He succeeded in escaping, but eventually fell into the hands of the king, by whose order he was flayed, and his corpse was hung up at the city gate.

A. A. Bevan, who quoted this story, commented that it 'has no claim to be considered historical.*[78]

View of Judaism in the *Acta Archelai* According to Hegemonius' portrayal of Mani, the devil god which created the world was the Jewish Jehovah. Hegemonius reports that Mani said, "It is the Prince of Darkness who

spoke with Moses, the Jews and their priests. Thus the Christians, the Jews, and the Pagans are involved in the same error when they worship this God. For he leads them astray in the lusts he taught them." He goes on to state: "Now, he who spoke with Moses, the Jews, and the priests he says is the archont of Darkness, and the Christians, Jews, and pagans (ethnic) are one and the same, as they revere the same god. For in his aspirations he seduces them, as he is not the god of truth. And so therefore all those who put their hope in the god who spoke with Moses and the prophets have (this in store for themselves, namely) to be bound with him, because they did not put their hope in the god of truth. For that one spoke with them (only) according to their own aspirations."*[79]

4.7 Central Asian and Iranian primary sources

In the early 1900s, original Manichaean writings started to come to light when German scholars led by Albert Grünwedel, and then by Albert von Le Coq, began excavating at Gaochang, the ancient site of the Manichaean Uyghur Kingdom near Turpan, in Chinese Turkestan (destroyed around AD 1300). While most of the writings they uncovered were in very poor condition, there were still hundreds of pages of Manichaean scriptures, written in three Iranian languages (Middle Persian, Parthian, and Sogdian) and old Turkish. These writings were taken back to Germany, and were analyzed and published at the Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften in Berlin, by Le Coq and others, such as Friedrich W. K. Müller and Walter Bruno Henning. While the vast majority of these writings were written in a version of the Syriac script known as Manichaean script, the German researchers, perhaps for lack of suitable fonts, published most of them using the Hebrew alphabet (which could easily be substituted for the 22 Syriac letters).

Perhaps the most comprehensive of these publications was *Manichaeische Dogmatik aus chinesischen und iranischen Texten (Manichaean Dogma from Chinese and Iranian texts)*, by Ernst Waldschmidt and Wolfgang Lentz, published in Berlin in 1933.*[80] More than any other research work published before or since, this work printed, and then discussed, the original key Manichaean texts in the original scripts, and consists chiefly of sections from Chinese texts, and Middle Persian and Parthian texts transcribed with the Hebrew alphabet. (After the Nazi party gained power in Germany, the Manichaean writings continued to be published during the 1930s, but the publishers no longer used Hebrew letters, instead transliterating the texts into Latin letters.)

4.8 Coptic primary sources

Additionally, in 1930, German researchers in Egypt found a large body of Manichaean works in Coptic.

Though these were also damaged, hundreds of complete pages survived and, beginning in 1933, were analyzed and published in Berlin before World War II, by German scholars such as Hans Jakob Polotsky.* [81] Some of these Coptic Manichaean writings were lost during the war.

4.9 Chinese primary sources

After the success of the German researchers, French scholars visited China and discovered what is perhaps the most complete set of Manichaean writings, written in Chinese. These three Chinese writings, all found at the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas among the Dunhuang manuscripts, and all written before the 9th century, are today kept in London, Paris, and Beijing. Some of the scholars involved with their initial discovery and publication were Édouard Chavannes, Paul Pelliot, and Aurel Stein. The original studies and analyses of these writings, along with their translations, first appeared in French, English, and German, before and after World War II. The complete Chinese texts themselves were first published in Tokyo, Japan in 1927, in the Taisho Tripitaka, volume 54. While in the last thirty years or so they have been republished in both Germany (with a complete translation into German, alongside the 1927 Japanese edition),* [82] and China, the Japanese publication remains the standard reference for the Chinese texts.

4.10 Greek life of Mani, Cologne codex

In Egypt a small codex was found and became known through antique dealers in Cairo. It was purchased by the University of Cologne in 1969. Two of its scientists, Henrichs and Koenen, produced the first edition known since as the Cologne Mani-Codex, which was published in four articles in the *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*. The ancient papyrus manuscript contained a Greek text describing the life of Mani. Thanks to this discovery, much more is known about the man who founded one of the most influential world religions of the past.

5 Figurative use

The terms “Manichaean” and “Manichaeism” are sometimes used figuratively as a synonym of the more general term “dualist” with respect to a philosophy or outlook.* [83] They are often used to suggest that the world view in question simplistically reduces the world to a struggle between good and evil. For example, Zbigniew Brzezinski used the phrase “Manichaean paranoia” in reference to U.S. President George W. Bush’s world view (in *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, March 14, 2007); Brzezinski elaborated that he meant “the notion that he (Bush) is leading the forces of good against the empire of evil” .

Author and journalist Glenn Greenwald followed up on the theme in describing Bush in his 2007 book, *A Tragic Legacy*.

In “The Man Who Shot Snapping Turtles,” (*Memoirs of Hecate County*), Edmund Wilson’s narrator refers to Asa Stryker’s argument as “the Manichaean heresy.”

6 See also

- Abū Hilāl al-Dayhūrī (8th century)
- Agapius (Manichaean) (4th or 5th centuries)
- Akouas
- Ancient Mesopotamian religion
- Hiwi al-Balkhi
- Indo-Iranian religion
- Mar Ammo (third century)
- Mazdak
- Ming Cult
- Abu Isa al-Warraq
- Yazdânism
- Yazidi

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8 External links

8.1 Outside articles

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- International Association of Manichaean Studies
- Manichaean and Christian Remains in Zayton (Quanzhou, South China)
- Religions of Iran: Manichaeism by I.J.S. Taraporewala
- 专题研究 – 摩尼教研究
- 《光明皇帝》明尊教背景书 (1)

8.2 Manichaean sources in English translation

- A summary of the Manichaean creation myth
- Manichaean Writings
- Manicheism. Complete bibliography and selection of Manichaean source texts in PDF format:
 - A thorough bibliography and outline of Manichaean Studies
 - A number of key Manichaean texts in English translation
- The Book of the Giants by W.B. Henning, 1943
- The Manichaean Chinese Hymnscroll

8.3 Secondary Manichaean sources in English translation

- St. Augustine Against the Fundamental Epistle of Manichaeus
- Acta Archelai

8.4 Manichaean sources in their original languages

- Photos of the Entire Koeln Mani-Kodex (Greek).
- The Syriac Manichaean work quoted by Theodor bar Khonai
- Photos of the Original Middle Persian Manichaean Writings/Fragments Discovered at Turpan (The index of this German site can be searched for additional Manichaean material, including photos of the original Chinese Manichaean writings)
- “Sermon of the Soul” , in Parthian and Sogdian
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8.5 Secondary Manichaean sources in their original languages

- Augustine's *Contra Epistolam Manichaei* (Latin)

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