

## The Manichaean Reception of Jewish and Christian Apocryphal Traditions

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Among the many groups of Late Antiquity interested in religious narratives, the Manichaeans were particularly proficient not only at facilitating the transmission of such narratives between cultures (Asmussen 1966) but also at integrating them into their own religious discourse. Generally speaking, this process occurred in two phases. Phase one began with the movement's 3<sup>rd</sup>-century CE founder, Mani, who incorporated a wide range of pre-existing motifs and traditions into his own religious ideas and writings. For instance, he was heavily influenced by Jewish and Christian "apocryphal" traditions in the formulation of his theological vocabulary, since key Manichaean figures such as the "Father of Greatness," the "Living Spirit," the "First Man," "Adamas," the "Five Limbs" (Pettipiece 2006\*), "Saklas," and "Nebroel" can be shown to have precedents in 2<sup>nd</sup>- and 3<sup>rd</sup>-century CE, apocryphal writings such as the *Secret Book of John* (NHC II,1; III,1; BG 8502), *Eugnostos* (NHC V,1), and the recently published *Gospel of Judas* (Codex Tchacos). On a more ambitious level, Mani even produced his own *Book of Giants* based on similar Jewish material, some of which was discovered at Qumran (Reeves 1992). Such a strategy of incorporating previous religious traditions should not be surprising given the fact that Mani considered himself to be the final messenger of god sent to correct the imperfectly preserved revelations delivered to Zoroaster, Buddha, and especially Jesus. The fact that Mani himself grew up in an Aramaic-speaking, Judaeo-Christian environment means that he would have naturally sought to privilege the traditions with which he was most familiar.

After his death circa 277 CE, Mani's disciples of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries CE followed their master's lead by incorporating additional apocryphal material into the Manichaean church's liturgical and catechetical writings. In particular, the Coptic, Manichaean *Psalm-book* makes prominent use of material drawn from the apocryphal acts of the apostles, such as the *Acts of Paul*, the *Acts of Peter*, the *Acts of Andrew*, the *Acts of John*, and the *Acts of Thomas* (Nagel 1973; Kaestli 1977; Leloir 1991). It has even been shown that Manichaeans made significant use of various logia from the *Gospel of Thomas* (Coyle 2003\*; Funk 2002; Mirecki 1991). Similarly, the so-called *Cologne Mani Codex*, a hagiographical biography of Mani, incorporated Jewish apocryphal material attributed to biblical figures such as Adam, Sethel, Enos(h), S(h)em, and Enoch (CMC 48-58) as part of a deliberately polemical rhetorical strategy (Sala 2005\*), as well as imagery from the *Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch* (Tardieu 1995). Most recently, however, newly excavated personal letters from ancient Kellis (Ismant el-Kharab, Egypt), reveal traces of how apocryphal literature was used by lay members of the community when a certain Makarios instructs his son Matheos to study texts such as the *Judgment of Peter* (Gardner, Alcock, Funk, 1999). Moreover, the Kellis find also includes a text similar to the *Acts of John* (Jenkins 1995). Into the early Middle Ages, as Manichaean missionaries penetrated Central Asia, they continued to transmit apocryphal traditions into various Iranian and Turkish languages (Klimkeit 1991), some fragments of which were discovered early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century at Turfan in Western China.

While a number of important articles on specific uses of apocryphal literature by Manichaeans have been published over the last thirty years, no systematic attempt has

been made to study the general reception not only of apocryphal *texts* but also of apocryphal *traditions* and motifs by Manichaeism over an extended timeframe. As such, this project aims to fill that gap by providing a comprehensive account of how Jewish and Christian traditions were received first by Mani himself and then by his followers, who in themselves constitute a significant (though much neglected) stream of this same, broadly conceived, Judaeo-Christian tradition. It is my intention to show how Jewish and Christian apocryphal traditions served as an important reservoir out of which a number of key Manichaean concepts were derived and elaborated.

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