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**WOMEN IN THE COPTIC MANICHAEAN *HOMILIES***

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## WOMEN IN THE COPTIC MANICHAEAN *HOMILIES*

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### Abstract

This article examines the surprising role played by women in the Coptic Manichaean text known as *The Sermon on the Great War*. Even though Manichaean rhetoric often attributes feminine characteristics to cosmic evil, in this apocalyptic text female ascetics are awarded a special place at the end of time. This language is then situated in its historical context as a reflection of the ascetic priorities of a religious movement experiencing marginalization and persecution.

In his 2001 “Prolegomena to a Study of Women in Manichaeism,” Kevin Coyle noted the relative absence of scholarly interest in Manichaean women.<sup>1</sup> This in spite of the increased attention that has been paid to women in various bodies of early Christian literature<sup>2</sup> and the prominent role of female figures in both the ecclesiastical and theological architecture of the Manichaean movement. On the ecclesial level, we know, for instance, that women were part

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin J. Coyle, “Prolegomena to a Study of Women in Manichaeism,” in *Manichaeism and its Legacy* (Leiden: Brill, 2009) 141-2. Originally published in Paul Mirecki and Jason BeDuhn, eds., *The Light and the Darkness: Studies in Manichaeism and Its World* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 79-92. See also Madeleine Scopello, “Femmes et propagande dans le manichéisme,” *Connaissance des Pères de l’Église* 83 (2001): 35-44 and Majella Franzmann, “Tehat the Weaver: Women’s Experience in Manichaeism in 4<sup>th</sup> Century Roman Kellis,” *Australian Religion Studies Review* 20 (2007): 17-26. Some more recent works on the subject include Johannes van Oort, “Manichaean Women in Augustine’s Life and Works,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 69 (2015): 312-326 and Johannes van Oort, “Manichaean Women in a Pseudo-Augustinian Testimony: An Analysis of the North African *Testimonium de Manichaeis sectatoribus*,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 71 (2017): 85-94.

<sup>2</sup> Fiorenza E. Schüssler, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983); Elizabeth A. Clark, *Women in the Early Church* (Wilmington, Del: M. Glazier, 1983); Ben Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Karen J. Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests: Women’s Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of Their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993); David M. Scholer, *Women in Early Christianity* (New York: Garland Pub, 1993); Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Gillian Cloke, *This Female Man of God: Women and Spiritual Power in the Patristic Age, AD 350-450* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Early Christian Women and Pagan Opinion: The Power of the Hysterical Woman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Patricia C. Miller, *Women in Early Christianity: Translations from Greek Texts* (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2005); Madeleine Scopello, *Femme, Gnose, et Manichéisme : De l’espace mythique au territoire du réel* (Leiden : Brill, 2005); Nicola Denzey Lewis, *The Bone Gatherers: The Lost Worlds of Early Christian Women* (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 2007); Kim Haines-Eitzen, *The Gendered Palimpsest: Women, Writing, and Representation in Early Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

of its church as both Catechumens and Elect and that certain specific women were highly venerated in the Egyptian liturgy.<sup>3</sup> Whereas on the theological level, female beings play a central role in the unfolding of the Manichaean cosmic drama.<sup>4</sup> It is indeed notable that unlike the gnostic myth of the fall of Sophia, in which a female entity is ultimately to blame for the cosmogony, in the Manichaean version, the female demiurge engineers the cosmos as part of an elaborate divine stratagem of light-purification and redemption. Moreover, as Kevin Coyle also noted, Manichaean literature has so far evidenced little of the overtly “misogynistic” tendencies we find in other types of early Christian writing. Still, in spite of all this, we cannot automatically assume that women were held in particularly high regard in a religious movement that operated in series of highly patriarchal societies.<sup>5</sup> After all, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. Nonetheless, I would like to explore this question further by examining one particular Manichaean text—*The Sermon on the Great War*—in which a unique emphasis does seem to be placed on women by the author, revealing some rather striking attitudes to the place of women in the Manichaean community and revealing clues to the text’s historical milieu.

### **An Inclusive Apocalypse**

Contained within the *Homilies* codex<sup>6</sup> of the Medinet Madi manuscripts, the Manichaean *Sermon on the Great War* presents a vivid, albeit fragmentary, vision of the end of days and the culmination of the great cosmic struggle between Light and Darkness. It begins with an invocation of Mani and the revealed wisdom he left to his disciples. How he gave them knowledge and taught them the mysteries of the final separation. This knowledge, or “his

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<sup>3</sup> Nearly every doxology from the Manichaean *Psalm-book* ends with invocations of a woman referred to as “blessed” Maria. The identity of “Maria/Mary” has been much debated. Allberry, the original editor of the codex, assumed that they were the names of local Manichaean martyrs (*A Manichaean Psalm-Book* [Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1938], xx) or missionaries. Coyle himself remained agnostic on this question (see “Women and Manichaeism’s Mission to the Roman Empire,” in *Manichaeism and Its Legacy*, 203-4, “Mary Magdalene in Manichaeism?” in *Manichaeism and Its Legacy*, 169-170, and “Rethinking the “Marys” of Manichaeism,” in *Manichaeism and Its Legacy*, 203-204. The identity of this figure remains a mystery.

<sup>4</sup> See Timothy Pettipiece, “Many Faced Gods: Triadic (Proto-)Structure and Divine Androgyny in Early Manichaean Cosmogony,” *Open Theology* 1 (2015): 245-254.

<sup>5</sup> The early Manichaeans navigated two overlapping societies in Late Antiquity—the later Roman and Sasanian Empires. For information on the role of women in these societies, see Gillian Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity: Pagan and Christian Life-Styles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), Maria Brosius, “Women in Pre-Islamic Iran,” *Encyclopedia Iranica* (iranicaonline.org), and Touraj Daryaee, *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of an Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 59-63.

<sup>6</sup> The present analysis is based on the excellent new edition of the text by Nils Arne Pedersen, *Manichaean Homilies* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006).

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good” (παραγαθον) as the homilist<sup>7</sup> states, he has notably bequeathed to “the orphans and widows” (νηορφανος μη νκηρα) (Hom 7.19). These terms could partly be meant to designate the followers that he is leaving behind. As the end time approaches, however, none will be spared as the common people flee from their villages and even the kings and nobles are brought low (*Homilies* 9.7-18). Both married and unmarried women will suffer on that day:

<p>             ἄρῃνε ἄν ἄεταῦχι ρεῖ[...]τ’ ἄριαμε              εὔνηνη ἄγ[μ]ἄτσαγαν: ἄ[ρῃ]γε              εἰἄμο ἄτε ἄρτε · πειπρασμος              εἰ[...]νηη ἄογαν ἄμ: εἰς προογε σε              εἰἄμο ἄνηη ἄαχι ἄαλ ἐν ἄν τεφβινει           </p>	<p>             The virgins and those who have taken a              husband [...] the women when they will              come in slavery. That day of horror; this              trial that [...] will come to everyone.              Behold, therefore, that day will come and it              will not lie by its coming (<i>Homilies</i> 9.18-              22)           </p>
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“Freemen” and “freewomen” will all be affected (*Homilies* 9.31), as will “pregnant women and those who are nursing” (*Homilies* 10.22). It is striking the degree to which the homilist seems to make a special effort to include references to women as well as men, instead of simply referring to the suffering of male subjects by default as we might well expect from an ancient author. This already alerts us that *this* author has taken a particular interest in the female members of the Manichaean community and is in stark contrast to a text such as the first volume of *Kephalaia* which presents numerous Elect and Catechumens as interlocutors, but never specifically identifies any as female.

In spite of this gender-inclusive rhetoric, the discourse takes a dramatic turn with a harsh condemnation of “the cruel goddess of the fire” (*Homilies* 10.27), which the homilist equates with the image of Babylon. In this context, Babylon, no doubt influenced by biblical paradigms,<sup>8</sup> represents the manifestation of cosmic evil in the world. According to the

<sup>7</sup> Some page headings of the *Homilies* codex attribute the *Sermon on the Great War* to “Kustaios” (27, 31, 35, 39), a disciple of Mani known from the *Cologne Mani Codex* 114.6-7 and Mani’s *Third Letter to Sisinnios* from the unpublished letters codex (Pedersen, *Manichaean Homilies*, 27). Pedersen accepts this attribution (*Studies in the Sermon on the Great War* [Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1996], 87-94), even though the work is not attributed to Koustaïos in either the superscription or colophon.

<sup>8</sup> In particular, *Apocalypse of John* 17-18.

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(ζγλη) as a feminine entity.<sup>9</sup> For instance, in the Berlin *Kephalaia*, Matter is identified as “the Death-desire, which is [Mother] of them all” ([ΤΖΥ]Λ[Η] ΖΩΣ ΤΕΝΘΥΜΗΣΙΣ ΜΠΜΟΥ ΕΤΕ ΝΤΑΣ ΠΕ ΤΟΥ[ΜΕΥ] ΤΗΡΟΥ) (26.33-27.6). It would seem then that there is a certain ambivalence in the homilist’s mind between making special mention of the fate of females on the last day and the essential femininity of the primordial evil that threatens them, manifest in the world as the Whore of Babylon.

After this polemical digression, the register then shifts back to a more humanistic focus. As the homilist laments the coming fate of Manichaean women.

ΕΥΑΒΩΚ ΑΤΟ ΕΥΑ ... .. [ΖΜ ΠΙΝΑΣ] ΜΠΟΛΕΜΟΣ: ΕΪΡΙΜΕ ΝΝΑΠΑΡΘΕ[ΝΟΣ ΝΣΖΙΜΕ] ΝΕΤΑΥΜΕΡΙ ΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΖΝ ΟΥΤΟΥΒΟ[...ΠΟΥ] ΣΑΪΕ ΑΒΑΛ ΖΝ ΤΕΦΖΛ'Π[ΙΣ] ΕΡΕ Τ[... ..] Ε ΑΤΟ : ΕΪΡΙΜΕ ΝΝΑΕΓΚΡΑΤΗΣ [... ΝΕΤΑΥ] ΤΟΥΒΟ ΟΥΑΕΤΟΥ ΜΠΟΥΡΕΦΩ[ΤΕ ... ΖΜ Π]	Where will they go? [Where] will they [... ...] [in this Great] War? I weep for my [female] virgins who have loved God in purity [...] [their] beauty in his hope, where will [...] ...] I weep for my abstainers [... who have] purified themselves for their savior [...] in this] great trouble that will come about. Who [...] ...] purity? I weep
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<sup>9</sup> Matter (ϝλη) as the antithesis of God is somewhat harder to pin down in what remains of Mani’s own writings. In fact, it is so far unattested. Ephraim wrote that “if Mani and Bardaisan designate (their) creators as ‘god,’ perhaps the way is open for them to designate Matter as well, since it is the cause for creation, as they assert” (Reeves, “Manichaean Citations from the *Prose Refutations* of Ephrem” in *Emerging from Darkness: Studies in the Recovery of Manichaean Sources*, ed. Paul Mirecki and Jason BeDuhn [Leiden: Brill, 1997], 238) although this reads as somewhat hypothetical. For Serapion of Thmuis, the primary opposition is between “God” and “Satan” (*Against the Manichaeans* 12, 26, see Samuel Lieu, *Greek and Latin Sources on Manichaean Cosmogony and Ethics* [Turnhout: Brepols, 2010], 50-51), a dichotomy also found in the *Letter of Mani to Menoch* preserved by Augustine (Lieu, *Greek and Latin*, 12-13), as well as in the account of al-Nadim in which the ruler of the realm of Darkness is *al-Shaytan* (Bayard Dodge, *The Fihrist of Al-Nadīm: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1970], 778). Even one of Mani’s letters from the Kellis documents makes specific reference to Satan (*P. Kell. Copt. 53* 43.12; Gardner, *Kellis Literary Texts Volume 2*). Matter, however, does occur relatively frequently in the Coptic sources, where it is said to be the “bad tree” (1Ke 22.32) and the feminine power who created the King of Darkness (1Ke 27.13-18), as well as the “Mother of this world” (Ps 221.5-6). From the Kellis finds, *P. Kell. Gr. 97* refers to “dark matter” (τήν σκοτινήν ϝλην) (B.I v 9) (Iain Gardner, Sarah Clackson, and Malcolm Choat. eds., *Kellis Literary Texts 2* [Oxford: Oxbow, 2007]. *Kellis Literary Texts Volume 2*) and *T. Kell. Copt. 4* alludes to “deceitful matter” (ϝγλη ηζαλβε) (51, see Iain Gardner, *Kellis Literary Texts Volume 1* [Oxford: Oxbow, 1996]).

ΝΑΘ ΝΩΤΑΡΤΡ̄ ΕΤΑΩΩΠΕ ΝΙΜ [... ...] for my widows who [have no one that will]  
 stretch his hand to them (*Homilies* 17.4-  
 ΤΟΥΒΟ : ΕΙΡΙΜΕ ΝΝΑΧΗΡΑ ΕΤΕ Μ[ΝΤΕΥ  
 12).  
 ΠΕΤΑΣ]ΩΤ ΝΤΟΤ῀ ΑΡΑΥ

In this way, the homilist fears for the female members of the community, in particular the “virgins,” “abstainers,” and “widows,” as opposed to the mothers and wives early said to suffer during the end times. The primary focus now appears to be on the threat that will be posed to their chastity in the coming crisis. A time when “[sisters] will lead their sisters astray” (*Homilies* 21.3-4) and “elect will lead astray elect” (*Homilies* 21.7). In this time, even they will cry “why were we born into the world?” (*Homilies* 21.17).

There is hope, however, as the Manichaean church huddles together amid the world’s collapse. At this moment, says the homilist,

ΕΥΑΝ[ΟΥ]ΣΜΕ ΚΑΤΑ ΜΑ ΜΑ · ἘΜΗΝΩΕ They will be saved in every place.  
 Multitudes [of] abstainers, numbers of  
 [ΝΕΓ]ΚΡΑΤΗΣ: ἘΝΗΠΟ’ ΜΠΑΡΘΕΝΟΣ  
 virgins will appear—[the] leaders and the  
 ΕΥΑΟΥΩΝΣ’: [ΠΑΡ]ΧΗΓΟΣ ΑΥΩ ΜΝ ΝΣΑΕ · teachers, the presbyters [and all the  
 ΜΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΕΡΟΣ ΑΥ[Ω ΝΩΜΩΕΤΕ] ΤΗ[ΡΟΥ] deacons], the female virgins and the  
 abstainers, the catechumens and their  
 Μ[Π]ΑΡΘΕΝΟΣ ΝΣΖΙΜΕ ΜΝ ΝΕ[ΓΚΡΑΤΗ]Σ ·  
 relatives (*Homilies* 22.3-7)  
 ΝΚΑΤΗΧΟΥΜΕΝΟΣ ΜΝ ΝΕΥΣΥΓΓΕΝΗΣ

Here they will comfort one-another. “The virgin will cling to her fellow-virgin and explain [her] sigh to [her]” and “the abstainer will proclaim to [her fellow] abstainer all the sufferings she bore” (*Homilies* 22.14-17). Again, a special effort is made to suggest that male *and* female community members will come to their mutual aid and comfort.





This last detail is most striking in the homilist vision of the redeemed cosmos. Not only are Manichaean women given a special place in the new reality, but female literacy is offered as a hallmark of the final defeat of the powers of darkness.

As we can see, the homilist places a deliberate and particular emphasis on the fate of Manichaean females—Elect and Catechumens, Virgins and Abstainers, women and girls. The default masculine is studiously avoided in favor of an equal opportunity salvation, a time when “brother will look after brother, sister after sister” (*Homilies* 30.6). At the same time, however, the types of women who are highlighted—virgins, widows, abstainers, girls—are all figures that fall outside the procreative function. Yet, there seems to be a conscious avoidance of the *complete* negation of the feminine that we find in other ascetic contexts such as the much debated final saying of the *Gospel of Thomas*, where “every woman who makes herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven” (logion 114) or the *Dialogue of the Savior* where Judas calls for the “works of the female” to be destroyed (NHC III,5.145). Something here has shifted. In the Manichaean kingdom, the femininity of the redeemed women is preserved, valued, and even emphasized.

### The “Autonomy of Chastity”

Why would the homilist do this? What would have motivated him (or her!) to such a radical re-imagining of reality? While Kevin Coyle has elsewhere suggested that the Manichaean elect conceived of themselves as “ultra-sexual,”<sup>10</sup> that is beyond the constraints of gendered differences, the *Sermon on the Great War* seems intent on emphasizing and preserving gender distinctions. As already noted, women are highlighted elsewhere in Coptic Manichaean literature, not only in the *Psalm-Book* doxologies, but also in the litany of venerated women from the same collection (Ps 192.21-32):<sup>11</sup>

ΟΥΣΑΥΩΝΕ ΤΕ ΜΑΡΙΣΑΜΑ

ΕΒΩΡΘ ΑΠΚΕΜΗΝΤΟΥΝΕ ΕΤΣΑΡΜΕ

Mariam is a net-caster,

hunting eleven other wanderers.

[refrain] *There were.*

<sup>10</sup> “Women and Manichaeism’s Mission to the Roman Empire,” in *Manichaeism and Its Legacy* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 194, 205.

<sup>11</sup> Gregor Wurst, *Psalm Book: Part. II* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996); C.R.C. Allberry, *A Manichaean Psalm-Book: Part II* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1938).

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ΝΕΟΥΝ̄	A joyous servant is
ΟΥΡΕΦΩΜ̄ΩΕ ΕΣΡΑΥΤ ΤΕ	Martha her sister.
ΜΑΡΘΑ ΤΕΣΚΑΙΩΝΕ	Obedient sheep are
Ζ̄ΝΕΣΑΥ Ν̄ΣΤΜΗΤ ΝΕ	Salome and Arsenoe
ΣΑΛΩΜΗ Μ̄ΝΑΡΣΕΝΟΗ	A despiser of the body is
ΟΥΡΕΦΚΑΤΑΦΡΟΝΗ Μ̄ΠΙΩΜΑ ΠΕ	Thecla, the god-lover.
ΘΕΚΛΑ †ΜΑΪΝΟΥΤΕ	A serpent-shamer is
ΟΥΡΕΦ† ΩΠΕ Ν̄ΦΑΥ ΤΕ	faithful Maximilla.
ΜΑΞΙΜΙΛΛΑ †ΠΙΣΤΟΣ	A bearer of good news is
ΟΥΡΕΦΧΙ ΩΠΝΕ ΔΤΝΑΥΡΕ ΤΕ	Iphidama, her sister,
ΙΦΙΔΑΜΑΣ ΤΕΣΚΑΙΩΝΕ	imprisoned in these prisons.
[C]ΩΤΕΚΑΤ ΔΝΙΩΤΕΚΩΟΥ	A champion is
ΟΥΣΑΪΧ̄ ΕΣΖ̄Ν ΠΑΓΩΝ ΤΕ	Aristoboula, the enduring.
ΑΡΙΣΤΟΒΟΥΛΑ †ΖΑΡ̄ΩΖΗΤ	A light-giver is
ΟΥΡΕΦ† ΟΥΑΪΝΕ Ν̄ΣΕ ΤΕ	the noble Eubula,
ΕΥΒΟΥΛΑ †ΕΥΓΕΝΗΣ	leading astray the governor.
ΕΣΣΩΚ Μ̄ΠΖΗΤ Μ̄ΠΖΗΓΕΜΩΝ	A wise teacher-lover is
	Drusiane, the god-lover,
	confined [for 14] days,
	looking for the apostle.



ⲁⲭⲞⲠ ⲉϥⲭⲞ ⲙⲙⲁⲥ: ⲡⲛⲓⲱⲧ ⲟϥⲉⲛ

ⲁⲓⲛⲉⲕⲃⲉⲗ ⲛⲕⲓⲱⲣⲙⲉ ⲛⲥⲞⲛ

Clearly modelled on the three Marys of the gospel tradition, the homilist then instructs the reader, “bless these women, thank and worship them!” (*Homilies* 59.21-23).

Aside from such literary and hagiographic presentations, we have ample evidence of “real” Manichaean women, especially in the documentary texts from Kellis<sup>13</sup>—some of these letters even written by them. Here we have a number of women filling traditional ancient gender roles—mothers, daughters, wives, sisters—although the exact familial relationship between these individuals is sometimes hard to establish or distinguish from ecclesiastical ones.

One such letter (*P. Kell. Copt. 31*) is addressed to

<p>ⲛⲁⲱⲉⲣⲉ ⲙⲙⲉⲣⲉⲧⲉ ⲉⲧ'ⲧⲉⲓⲁⲧ' ⲛⲧⲟⲧ          ⲧⲞⲛⲟϥ ⲙⲙⲉⲗⲟⲥ ⲛⲧⲉⲕ'ⲕⲗⲏⲥⲓⲁ ⲉⲧⲟϥⲁⲃⲉ          [ⲛⲁⲱⲉⲣⲉ] ⲙⲓⲡⲛⲟϥⲥ ⲛⲟϥⲁⲓⲛⲉ ⲛⲉ[ⲧⲏⲡ ⲁⲛ ⲙ]ⲛ          ⲛⲱⲏⲣⲉ ⲙⲓⲡⲛⲟϥⲧⲉ' ⲙⲓ[ϥ]ⲭⲁϥⲉ ⲉⲧⲥⲙⲁⲙⲁⲧ          ⲙⲙⲁⲕⲁⲣⲓⲟⲥ ⲙⲙⲁⲓⲛⲟϥⲧⲉ ⲛⲁⲱⲉⲣⲉ ⲛⲥⲟⲛⲁ</p>	<p>My beloved daughters, who are greatly          esteemed by me, the members of the Holy          Church, [the daughters] of the Light Mind,          they who [are also counted] among the          children of God, the favored, blessed, God-          loving souls, my daughters.</p>
--	--

The anonymous “father” of the letter praises the women as “helpers,” “patrons,” and “pillars” before requesting some quantities of oil. Iain Gardner suspects that this oil may be some kind of offering and that its anonymity is due to it being a “circular” or “chain-letter.”<sup>14</sup> It is difficult to say. The anonymity could also be a sign of danger. After all the author writes that he is “praying to God every hour that he will guard you for a long time, free from anything evil of the wicked world” and urges the recipients not to hold on to the letter, lest it “fall into

<sup>13</sup> For a comprehensive study on the Manichaean community of Kellis see Mattias Brand, *The Manichaeans of Kellis: Religion, Community, and Everyday Life* (Dissertation, Leiden University 2019).

<sup>14</sup> Iain Gardner, Anthony Alcock, and Wolf-Peter Funk, eds., *Coptic Documentary Texts from Kellis, Volume I*, (Oxbow, 1999), 207.

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somebody's hands."<sup>15</sup> Another letter (*P. Kell. Copt. 37*), written by a certain Ammon, refers to the "grief that overcame me, and the heartbreak that seized me, when I heard about what happened; namely that they shook those of this word."

It would seem then that at least some in the Manichaean communities of Egypt experienced a degree of anxiety and existed in a somewhat precarious state. In the early 4<sup>th</sup> century, certainly after Diocletian's Edict of 302, Manichaeans were under increasing pressure from both state and ecclesiastical authorities. One of the perceived dangers, at least from proto-orthodox Christians, was in fact the prominent presence of women in the movement. Yet, the women of the Kellis community appear to be mostly Catechumens, while those praised by the homilist were Elect. Women who may have sought what Virginia Burrus has called the "autonomy of chastity" characteristic of the ascetic movement more broadly.<sup>16</sup> It is this category of Manichaean women that attracted the most scorn from the church fathers. Jerome, for instance, in his 22<sup>nd</sup> *Letter to Eustochium*, compared Manichaean women to prostitutes,<sup>17</sup> attempting to undermine their claims to ascetic chastity:

<i>Et quam viderint tristem atque</i>	When they see a woman with a pale sad
<i>pallentem, miseram et monacham et</i>	face, they call her 'a miserable
<i>Manicheam vocant, et consequenter;</i>	Manichaean nun', and quite logically
<i>tali enim proposito ieiunium heresis est.</i>	too, for on their principles fasting is
<i>Hae sunt, quae per publicum notabiliter</i>	heresy. As they walk the streets they try
<i>incedunt et furtivis oculorum nutibus</i>	to attract attention and with stealthy nods
<i>adulescentium gregem post se trahunt,</i>	and winks draw after them troops of
<i>quae semper audiunt per prophetam:</i>	young men. Of them the prophet's words
<i>'Facies meretricis facta est tibi,</i>	are true: 'You have a whore's forehead;
<i>impudorata es tu.'</i>	you refuse to be ashamed.'

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<sup>15</sup> Brand contends that the Manichaeans at Kellis likely did not face persecution (*Manichaeans of Kellis*, 161), at least not on a frequent or sustained basis.

<sup>16</sup> Coyle, "Prolegomena," 153.

<sup>17</sup> Jerome, *Letter 22* (*Jerome: Select Letters*, Loeb 262 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933), 81.

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Similarly, Epiphanius portrayed Mani’s alleged forerunner, Scythianus, as a charlatan who married a prostitute (*Panarion* 66). An account clearly modelled on the heresiological legend of Simon the Magician and his consort Helen (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.23). Moreover, Epiphanius claimed that Mani (or rather, Cubricus, as he called him) was an orphan adopted by a foolish old woman (*Panarion* 66). These are just the sort of people that Mark the Deacon, in his account of a debate between a female elect named Julia and bishop Porphyry of Gaza, claimed were attracted to Manichaean teaching:<sup>18</sup>

καὶ γὰρ τὸ μάθημα αὐτῶν τοῖς γε νοῦν	For their teaching, at least for those in
ἔχουσιν πεπλήρωται πάσης βλασφημίας	their right minds is full of every
καὶ καταγνώσεως καὶ γραῶδων μύθων	blasphemy, contemptuous opinion, and
ἔφελκομένων γυναικάρια καὶ παιδιώδεις	old wives’ tales, attracting only feeble
ἄνδρας κοῦφον ἔχοντας τὸν τε λογισμὸν	women and childish men, light on
καὶ τὴν διάνοιαν	reason and understanding.

Here, too, the rhetoric is telling in that Mark attempts to discredit his hero’s opponents by reference to two of antiquity’s most marginalized and disempowered groups—women and children. Precisely the two groups that the author of the *Sermon on the Great War* makes a place for in the eschatological age-to-come. The homilist seeks to re-assure the women of their importance to the movement and their right to secure a place within its apocalyptic narrative. In this our author is following the counsel of Mani himself, who in a letter also found at Kellis (*P. Kell. Copt. 54*)<sup>19</sup> instructs his followers, both male and female, to “love one another”:

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<sup>18</sup> *Life of Porphyry of Gaza*, 85 in Iain Gardner and S.N.C. Lieu, eds., *Manichaean Texts from the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 126; *Marci Diaconi: Vita Porphyrii episcopi Gazensis* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1885).

<sup>19</sup> Gardner, *Kellis Literary Texts* 2, 89.

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ⲛⲓⲥⲁⲗ ⲙⲓⲉⲣⲓ ⲛⲥⲁⲗ · ⲛⲥⲁⲃⲉⲟⲩⲉ · The [teachers] will love the teachers, the  
 ⲛⲛⲥⲓⲁⲃⲉⲟⲩⲉ · ⲛⲓⲉⲡⲓⲥⲕⲓⲟⲩⲟⲥ · ⲛⲉⲡⲓⲥⲕⲟⲩⲟⲥ wise ones (will love) the wise ones, the  
 · ⲛⲙⲁⲟⲩⲧⲓⲥⲓ · ⲛⲙⲙⲁⲟⲩⲧⲓⲥⲓ · ⲛⲥⲁⲛ · bishops (will love) the bishops, the  
 ⲛⲛⲥⲁⲛ · ⲛⲥⲟⲩⲛⲉ ⲁⲓⲛ ⲛⲓⲛⲥⲟⲩⲛⲉ · disciples (will love) the disciples, the  
 ⲓⲛⲓⲥⲧⲉⲧⲛⲟⲩⲛⲉ ⲧⲓⲣⲧⲛ̅ · ⲛⲉⲓⲛⲓⲛⲟⲩⲛⲉ · brothers (will love) the brothers, also the  
 ⲛⲛⲓⲛⲟⲩⲛⲉ ⲧⲓⲣⲧⲛ̅ · ⲛⲉⲓⲛⲓⲛⲟⲩⲛⲉ sisters (will love) the sisters —you will all  
 ⲛⲛⲓⲛⲟⲩⲛⲉ ⲧⲓⲣⲧⲛ̅ · ⲛⲉⲓⲛⲓⲛⲟⲩⲛⲉ become children of a single undivided  
 ⲛⲛⲓⲛⲟⲩⲛⲉ ⲧⲓⲣⲧⲛ̅ · ⲛⲉⲓⲛⲓⲛⲟⲩⲛⲉ body.

It is also interesting to note the dramatic tension evoked by this precarious situation in the mind of the homilist. On the one hand, the status and chastity of the Manichaean women is highlighted and valued, while on the other, the cosmic force that threatens to undermine that status and chastity is personified as the profoundly unchaste Whore of Babylon. Conversely, to opponents of the movement such as Jerome, the roles are reversed and it is the moral corruption of Manichaean women that is cast as a threat to women of his own theological faction. In both cases, the sexualization of evil is employed as a powerful rhetorical trope, as one early Christian group seeks to marginalize its rivals.

### Enkratites in Context

While it is clear that the author of the *Sermon on the Great War* places a unique emphasis on women in the text's apocalyptic vision, does this really tell us anything about the Manichaean community of Egypt? It is often tempting to view Coptic Manichaean texts as reflective of a specifically Egyptian milieu, but this approach is difficult to sustain. All we really know is that the Medinet Madi manuscripts were read and used as part of the liturgy of an otherwise obscure Egyptian community, but there is mounting evidence of a Syriac substratum to that community.<sup>20</sup> In fact, both Koenen and Petersen have identified elements

<sup>20</sup> For instance, the Coptic-Syriac glossaries from Kellis (Gardner, *Kellis Literary Texts I*).

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of the *Sermon* that point to a “Babylonian” environment,<sup>21</sup> which is in fact the heartland of the original Manichaean movement.

Thus, the more likely context for the female-focused rhetoric of the *Sermon on the Great War* is the increased pressure and marginalization being experienced by the Manichaean church in the immediate aftermath of Mani’s execution in 277 CE. Moreover, the ascetic tone of the discourse bears many of the hallmarks of Syrian asceticism native to the region. After all, one of the key groups of women that the homilist describes are called *ἐγκρατις*, or *enkratites*, a label applied since the second century CE to a Syrian sect who, according to Irenaeus, “preached against marriage, thus setting aside the original creation of God, and indirectly blaming him who made the male and female for the propagation of the human race” (*Against Heresies* 1.28). Such anti-cosmic values and denial of procreation imbued the early Manichaean church, particularly the Elect, and drove its proto-monastic programme.<sup>22</sup> As Mani states in *Kephalaia* Chapter 85 (212.22-28):<sup>23</sup>

<p>ΜΠΡΗΤΕ ΝΤΕΚΚΛΗCΙΑ ΕΤΟΥΑΒΕ ΤΕΤΕΩΔΑΡΕ ΠΑΠΟCΤΟΛΟC CΜΗΤΥC ̅̅ ΠΚΟCΜΟC ΔΕ ΧΩΡΙC ΖΙCΕ ΖΙ ̅̅ΚΑΖ ΜΑΡΕ ΝΕΚΛΕΚΤΟC CΝCΑΜ ̅̅ΡΒΑΛ ΔΒΑΛ ΔΠΚΟCΜΟC ΑΛΛΑ ΕΙΜΗΤΙ ΖΝ ΤΕCΚΕΥΙC ̅̅[ΤΗΝCΤΙ]Δ Μ̅̅ ΤΑΠΩΛΗΛ Μ̅̅ ΤΑΤΕΓΚΡΑΤΕΙΑ Μ̅̅ ΤΑΤΜΗΤΥ[ΔΕ] Μ̅̅</p>	<p>Thus, the Holy Church which the Apostle established in the world: without toil and suffering the Elect will not be able to be free from the world, but rather, by consideration of fasting and prayer and abstinence (<i>enkrateia</i>) and alms and only-begottenness and with-drawal (<i>anachōrēsis</i>), wounds and lashings, the</p>
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<sup>21</sup> Nils Arne Pedersen, *Studies in the Sermon on the Great War* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1996), 81-3.

<sup>22</sup> The role played by Manichaeans in the development of early Christian monasticism remains controversial and inconclusive. The debate is frequently colored by theological concerns, as some scholars have tended to view asceticism in general as “un-Christian” and a foreign element (William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005], 438–39), while others want to insulate monastic tradition from any association with “heresy.” See Guy Stroumsa, “Monachisme et marranisme chez les manichéens d’Égypte,” *Numen* 29, no. 2 (1982): 184-201; Guy Stroumsa, “The Manichaean Challenge to Egyptian Christianity,” in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, ed. B. A. Pearson and J. E. Goehring (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 307-19, also Brand, *Manichaeans of Kellis*, 243 n. 68-70. More work needs to be done on this question.

<sup>23</sup> With *addenda et corrigenda* by W.-P. Funk (personal communication).

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ΤΑΤΜΝΤΜΟΝΟΓΕΝΗΣ Μῆ ΤΑΝΑΧΩΡΗΣΙΣ discipline (*askēsis*) of bonds, (and)  
 ΜΠΛ[ΗΓΗ] ΜΗ ΝΩΣῆΝΤΑΥΡΕΑ ΤΑΣΚΗΣΙΣ martyrdom  
 ἡμῶν πμοῦ ἡ[μαρτυ]ρος

Such a statement, laced with ascetic terminology, evokes the need for the Elect to transcend the things that bind them to the cosmos, to tame the body, and to deny themselves even unto death—as their master had done before them. As a reward, our homilist has seen not a time when sexual difference will be definitely erased, as in other ascetic discourses, but permanently controlled. Namely, brought under the rule of *enkrateia*. This is a time, we might say, when the Elect will neither marry nor be given in marriage, but will find their rest like angels in heaven (Mt 22:30).

While on the surface, the Manichaean *Sermon on the Great War* presents yet another take on early Christian apocalypticism, the text can and should also be read as yet another testimony from the front in the late antique war over women, procreation, and sexual ethics, whereby the honor and/or shame attributed to the women of a religious community is seen to have profound cosmic and soteriological implications. The author’s perspective, however, is unique both in the amount of attention given to women in the eschatological narrative and the affirmation of women’s place in late antique ascetic ideology. Does this mean that the text could have possibly been authored by a female member of the Manichaean community and pseudonymously attributed to Koustaios? That is a tempting argument to make, but not one I will make here. Hopefully, further research will continue to uncover the important roles played by women in the wider Manichaean movement.

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