



Was the Religious Manichaean Narrative a Mythical Narrative? Some Remarks from the Perspective of Andrzej Wierciński's Definition of Myth

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Abstract

Many specialists in Manichaeism wrote after World War II about the religious Manichaean narrative as a myth or a mythology. In this paper I examine whether the Manichaean narrative actually meets the criteria of definition of myth. This question is also worth asking because some scholars emphasise the monosemic character of the mentioned narrative. The definition of myth which I use is that of Andrzej Wierciński (1930–2003), a Polish anthropologist of religion. Among my reasons for choosing this is because it includes as many as nine features of myth and also refers to scientific narrative, which by its nature has one level of meaning. I refer this definition, above all, to Manichaean evidence in the Coptic language, but when the need arises I also invoke other sources, both polemical and apologetic.

Key words: Manichaeism, myth, Andrzej Wierciński

The main reason why I decided to address this issue is the observation that since the mid-twentieth century almost all scholars specialising in Manichaeism have universally talked about the doctrine of “the religion of Light” as a myth or a mythology.

For example, in 1949 Henri-Charles Puech wrote these words about the doctrine of Manichaeism in his monograph on this religion: “en fait, malgré toutes ses ambitions, dans Manichéisme comme dans tout gnosticisme, cette science qui se croit pure Raison se résout en mythes”.¹ Then, in 1998 Manfred Hauser titled his extensive essay, which reconstructs religious Manichaean narrative on the basis of the discovery from Medinet Madi, “The Manichaean Myth According to The Coptic Sources”.² And finally, in the most recent monograph on “the religion of Light”, by Nicholas

¹ H.-C. Puech, *Le manichéisme, son fondateur, sa doctrine*, Paris 1949, p. 73.

² M. Heuser, *The Manichaean Myth According to The Coptic Sources* [in:] *idem*, H.-J. Klimkeit, *Studies in Manichaean Literature and Art*, Leiden 1998, pp. 1–108.

J. Baker-Brian (2011), most parts of the chapter on doctrine include the word “myth” in their titles (“1. Introduction: Mani’s Myth and *Ecclesia*”; “2. ‘An Imperfect Beginning, a Flabby Middle and a Ruined End’: Mani the Mythographer”; “4. Approaching the Manichaeic Myth”; “5. The Myth”; “6. The Myth and the Manichaeic Body”).³

Another reason is that some scholars at the end of the twentieth century talked about the Manichaeans’ monosemic understanding of religious narrative, and this is contradictory with one of the most important criteria of myth, namely its symbolical, polysemic character. For example, in the context of Christian and Muslim anti-Manichaeic polemics, Sarah Stroumsa and Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa write about “the Manichaeans’ univalent understanding of their myths”,⁴ and Jason David BeDuhn, concerning the anti-Manichaeic works of St Augustine, talks about “the literal character of Manichaeic discourse”.⁵

The need to examine our problem therefore leads us to two areas of research: firstly to “the religion of Light”, and secondly to the theory of myth.

As regards the first point I will only recall that Manichaeism was a universalist dualistic religion which developed on three continents: Asia, northern Africa and southern Europe, from the third until the sixteenth century BC.⁶ In my study I will refer to the whole area where Manichaeism developed, and especially to the Coptic sources. I should add that the Manichaeic narrative had the same content in the whole area where this religion developed.⁷

³ N.J. Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism. An Ancient Faith Rediscovered*, London 2011, pp. 96–133. Other examples of defining of the Manichaeic narrative as a myth: H. Jonas, *Religia gnozy*, trans. M. Klimowicz, Kraków 1994, p. 222 (original edition: Boston 1970); G. Quispel, *Gnoza*, trans. B. Kita, Warszawa 1988, p. 95 (original edition: Zürich 1972); F. Decret, *L’Afrique manichéenne (IV^e–V^e siècles). Étude historique et doctrinale*, Paris 1978, vol. 1, p. 322; M. Tardieu, *Le manichéisme*, Paris 1997, p. 94; J. Prokopiuk, *Manicheizm – religia Światłości* [in:] *idem, Labirynty herezji*, Warszawa 1999, pp. 42–47; A. Böhlig, *Manichäismus* [in:] *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 22, Berlin 2000, pp. 31–33, 34–35. Manichaeism as a mythology: W. Myszor, *Manicheizm w Afryce Północnej i św. Augustyn* [in:] *św. Augustyn, Pisma przeciw manichejczykom*, trans. J. Sulowski, Warszawa 1990, pp. 26, 27.

⁴ S. Stroumsa, G.G. Stroumsa, *Aspects of Anti-Manichaeic Polemics in Late Antiquity and Under Early Islam*, “Harvard Theological Review” 1988, no. 81, p. 40.

⁵ J.D. BeDuhn, *The Manichaeic Body. In Discipline and Ritual*, Baltimore 2000, p. 71.

⁶ On the subject of Manichaeism see: G. Widengren, *Mani und der Manichäismus*, Stuttgart 1961; T. Margul, *Manicheizm*, “Euhemer” 1972, no. 83, p. 45–56; S.N.C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China*, Tübingen 1992; M. Tardieu, *op. cit.*; J. Prokopiuk, *op. cit.*, pp. 40–54; A. Böhlig, *op. cit.*, pp. 25–45; W. Myszor, *Gnostycyzm, manicheizm i mandaizm* [in:] *Religia starożytnego Bliskiego Wschodu*, K. Pilarczyk, J. Drabina (eds.), Kraków 2008, pp. 523–563; N.J. Baker-Brian, *op.cit.* A bibliography of Manichaeism: G.B. Mikkelsen, *Bibliographia Manichaica. A Comprehensive Bibliography of Manichaeism through 1996*, Turnhout 1997.

⁷ See e.g.: M. Dobkowski, *Mit pierwotnego zmieszania w zwierciadle gatunków literatury manichejskiej* [in:] *Pod słońcem gnozy*, A. Chudzińska-Parkosadze, J. Prokopiuk (eds.), Poznań 2015, pp. 19–32. In this paper I analyse the mythologem of the primal mixing of the substance of Light with the substance of Darkness from the perspective of various forms of Manichaeic literature (psalms, doctrinal commentary, formulary for the confession of sins, official document) and on three areas where “the religion of Light” was developed: Egypt, the Silk Road, China. Among the things shown by my analysis was that the basis of the analysed mythologem was the same, regardless of the area where the Manichaeans were active. Another example: also the complex of mythologems the New Eon-the Great Building-the Great Builder, which works in the background of the main mythical events, is confirmed in the Manichaeic sources in the three mentioned areas, see: M. Dobkowski, *O Nowym Raju, Wielkiej Budowli*

As regards the second point I will only say that the myth is a polysemic and multifunctional category, and hence it is difficult to provide only one definition. It is therefore not surprising that many works were created on this topic.⁸ To indicate the problem, I will just mention the “minimal definition of myth” discussed by the British anthropologist of religion Fiona Bowie who sums up the Robert Segal’s findings: “A myth is (1) a story, (2) whose main protagonists are personalities, (3) which accomplishes something significant for its adherents, (4) who hold to the myth tenaciously”.⁹

Why have I chosen this definition of myth by Andrzej Wierciński (1930–2003), the Polish anthropologist of religion? There are three reasons: the first, because it includes as many as nine features of myth; the second, because it also refers to the “contemporary scientific message”, in this way encompassing the whole domain of “human cognitive tendency”;¹⁰ and finally the third, because we can link it with this scholar’s theory of religion. Following these preliminary remarks, I would like to turn to the main body of my discussion.

1. Andrzej Wierciński’s definition of myth

We find Andrzej Wierciński’s definition of myth in his 1994 paper *Mit religijny a współczesny przekaz naukowy* (“The religious myth and contemporary scientific message”).¹¹ This reads as follows: “The religious myth is the story of the deeds of deities, humans and other animated creatures, which presents, in a symbolical way, the specific part of religious model of the world”.¹² This definition, as we can see, is a typical definition of mythical narrative which, moreover, refers to the whole of the religious worldview. For our aims, however, other aspects of Andrzej Wierciński’s reflection on myth are important.

In the paper in question, the Polish anthropologist of religion lists nine criteria by which he compares “mythical message” with “contemporary scientific message”.¹³ We are interested in the features of mythical narrative. They will be determinants of whether we can call Manichaean narrative a myth.

The first criterion: authorship. Authorship of myth is generally attributed to some supernatural being, and these beings often cooperate with historical or quasi-historical human persons (e.g. the founders of religions). According to Wierciński,

i Budowniczym. Mitem Nowego Eonu w koptojskich pismach manichejskich [in:] *Gnoza, gnostycyzm, literatura*, B. Sienkiewicz, M. Dobkowski, A. Jocz (eds.), Kraków 2012, pp. 31–42.

⁸ In Polish literature see e.g.: A. Szyjewski, *Etnologia religii*, Kraków 2001, pp. 77–90; M. Czeremski, *Struktura mitów. W stronę metonimii*, Kraków 2009.

⁹ F. Bowie, *The Anthropology of Religion. An Introduction*, Malden 2006, p. 269.

¹⁰ A. Wierciński, *Magia i religia. Szkice z antropologii religii*, Kraków 1997, p. 121.

¹¹ I used the 1997 edition of this book. A. Wierciński, *op. cit.*, pp. 111–121.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 111.

¹³ *Ibidem*, pp. 112–120.

the model of the myth creator is the figure of shaman. And, as we know, a shaman presents to his community knowledge imparted to him by the spirits.

The second criterion: general cognitive paradigm. Mythical narrative is governed by the paradigm of animism. According to this paradigm, reality is considered to be the result of a game of animated and personified forces (gods, demons and other living beings).

The third criterion: cognitive sources of message. Myth draws from two cognitive sources: (a) encyclopaedic (this term used by Wierciński we can understand – in my opinion – as “empirical”) knowledge of natural and social environment; (b) revealed knowledge.

The fourth criterion: form of message. A verbalised form of message, poetic language with “plenty of allegories and metaphors as well as numeric characters”.¹⁴ The imagery of mythical language allows one to transcode mythical motifs into representational art or into structures of ritual activities.

The fifth criterion: semantic functions. Myth is polysemic, i.e. it has many levels of meanings at once. These are usually the following contents: (a) cosmological, (b) socio-historical, (c) concerning development of an individual, in the sense of both social adaptation and spiritual initiation.

The sixth criterion: emotional incentiviveness. The symbols which we find in myth stimulate emotions and create moods, especially if the myth is recited combined with music, singing and theatrical behaviours. Recitation of myth associated with a ritual calendar makes the content of the myth easy to remember.

The seventh criterion: verifiability. The veracity of myth is verified by the authority of its (usually) dual author, i.e. – as I mentioned in the first point – by the authority of a supernatural being, as well as that of an important human person who cooperates with the former.

The eighth criterion: social range of message. As myth has a few levels of meaning (see point 5), they may be read at successive degrees of initiation.

The ninth and last criterion: relationship to patterns of behaviours. A mythological message has both individual and collective patterns of behaviours. These are the prohibitions and injunctions which may be sanctioned in various ways: e.g. by taboo or morality.

2. Religious Manichaean narrative as a mythical narrative

Before I answer the title question – “Was the religious Manichaean narrative a mythical narrative?” – I would like to present briefly the content of the Manichaean narrative. Namely, the believers of “the religion of Light” presented their complicated and very detailed narrative about the origins of the world and of man, about the function of man in the existing world and about their future, according to the original rule: “two principles, three ages”. These principles are Light and Darkness; both are

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 115.

eternal and co-existing. In turn, the “three ages” are: the ages of the original separation of two principles, then the age of their mixture and finally the age of their ultimate separation.¹⁵

The religious Manichaean narrative is most often presented by contemporary scholars on the basis of the *Liber Scholiorum*, whose author was a Nestorian commentator, writing at the end of the eighth century, Theodor bar Khoni.¹⁶ This author wrote his summary of the sacred Manichaean narrative based on one of the canonical books of “the religion of Light”, namely the *Pragmateia*.¹⁷ However, bar Khoni’s summary is a non-Manichaean text. So has any evidence survived on this topic coming from Mani’s adherents? Yes, it has – for example, we can point to the Coptic doctrinal treatise *Kephalaia*, which was created in Egypt between the fourth and fifth century.¹⁸ We find the summary of this narrative at the beginning of this work (unfortunately, the text is seriously damaged).¹⁹ Moreover, the treatise itself is in fact an extensive and systematic commentary on sacred Manichaean narrative. Another source which has included the summary of religious Manichaean narrative is the Chinese *Compendium*, a copy of the official document prepared by the adherents of “the religion of Light” in 731 upon the demand of the Chinese imperial court.²⁰ Information on the history of the religious Manichaean universe is in the sixth article of this document.²¹ We find individual motifs of sacred Manichaean narrative, of course, also in other evidence from adherents of “the religion of Light”, e.g. in their hymns preserved in the Coptic,²² Iranian²³ and Chinese²⁴ languages.

Now we can finally confront the religious Manichaean narrative with Professor Wierciński’s criteria of myth.

The first criterion: authorship. According to *The Cologne Mani Codex*, a kind of spiritual biography which was created in Egypt probably between the fourth

¹⁵ For the contemporary reconstruction of the Manichaean narrative see e.g.: W. Myszor, *Manicheizm w Afryce Północnej...*, pp. 26–30; J. Prokopiuk, *op. cit.*, pp. 42–47; M. Heuser, *op. cit.*, pp. 1–108; N.J. Baker-Brian, *op. cit.*, pp. 110–118.

¹⁶ Teodor bar Khoni, *Scholia* [in:] H. Pognon, *Inscription mandaites des coupes de Khouabir*, Paris 1898, pp. 184–193.

¹⁷ M. Tardieu, *op. cit.*, pp. 93–94.

¹⁸ On the subject of *The Kephalaia of the Teacher* see e.g.: *Kephalaia I, 1. Hälfte (Lieferung 1–10)*, A. Böhlig, H.J. Polotsky (eds.), Stuttgart 1940, pp. V–XXXII; *The Kephalaia of the Teacher. The Edited Coptic Manichaean Texts in Translation with Commentary*, trans. I. Gardner, Leiden 1995, pp. xvii–xxv; M. Tardieu, *op. cit.*, pp. 66–67. In Polish literature: M. Dobkowski, “Błogosławiony ten, który poznał tę tajemnicę i rozróżnił dwie substancje, Światła i Ciemności”. Substancja Światła według koptyjskiego traktatu manichejskiego *Kephalaia*” [in:] *Ciemność i światło*, vol. 6, K. Rutecka, K. Arciszewska (eds.), Gdańsk 2015, pp. 324–345.

¹⁹ Up to *Keph. 5, 20* (the edition: *Kephalaia I, 1. Hälfte (Lieferung 1–10)...*).

²⁰ *Mani, le Boudda de Lumière. Catéchisme manichéen chinois*, trans. N. Tajadod, Paris 1990.

²¹ Lines of the Chinese text: 97–109; *Mani, le Boudda de Lumière...*, pp. 62–65.

²² *A Manichaean Psalm-Book. Part II*, C.R.C. Allberry (ed.), Stuttgart 1938.

²³ E.g. *The Manichaean Hymn Cycles Huyadagman and Angad Rošnan in Parthian and Sogdian*, W. Sundermann (ed.), London 1990.

²⁴ The scroll Stein 2659, which is now in the British Museum. The English translation: Tsui Chi, *Mo Ni chiao Hsia Pu Tsan. The Lower (Second?) Section of the Manichaean Hymns*, “Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies” 1943, no. 11, pp. 174–219.

and fifth centuries or later and was written in Greek, the founder of Manichaeism did not receive his “truth and secrets” from human beings, and nor did he take it from the writings.²⁵ Mani obtained the sacred knowledge which became the basis of religious narrative from his spiritual companion the Syzygos (Greek: Σύζυγος) sent from the Father (of Light).²⁶ Then the text says that the content of the revelation contains answers to the following questions: who is Mani in fact? How did he come into this world? Who is the Father (of Light)? With what mission was Mani sent to earth? etc.²⁷ In another part of the revelation it talks about what is happening on “the ships” and about “the pillar”.²⁸ This is probably a reference to the functioning of the celestial mechanics, which according to Manichaean narrative is part of the cosmic machine for purifying of Light, of which important elements are, among others, “the ships” (the Sun and the Moon) as well as the Pillar of Glory (the Milky Way).²⁹ On the next page of *The Cologne Mani Codex* there is a brief description of the Manichaean community which lists several functions – teachers, bishops, the Elect, Catechumens (i.e. Hearers) – and mentions a sacred meal.³⁰ This sacred meal was according to the Manichaean narrative an instrument for purifying the substance of Light on earth. Then the Syzygos, messenger of the Father of Light, not only revealed the truth about Mani to Mani himself, but also communicated to him important motifs of the later sacred narrative.

In turn, thanks to supernatural religious knowledge and cooperation with his spiritual companion the Syzygos, Mani founded the new religious community and became its most important human person. The aforementioned Chinese *Compendium* talks about Manichaeism as “the Religion of Mani the Buddha of Light”.³¹ Moreover, the Coptic treatise *Kephalaia* shows that in the tradition of western Manichaeism Mani was called “The Apostle” (Coptic: ΠΑΠΟCΤΟΛΟC)³² and “The Enlightener” (ΠΦΩCΤΗΡ).³³

The second criterion: the general cognitive paradigm. In the Manichaean narrative, the paradigm of animism dominates: here we can find about thirty deities and hypostases of Light as well as a few personified forces of Darkness,³⁴ but we also find references to the paradigm of mechanism, which, according to Wierciński,

²⁵ CMC, 64 (the edition: *Der Kölner Mani-Kodex. Über das Werden seines Leibes*, L. Koenen, C. Römer (eds.), Opladen 1988). In Polish literature on *The Cologne Mani Codex* see: H. Appel, *Kodeks Maniego* [in:] *Z antycznego świata. Religio-Cultus-Homines*, W. Appel, P. Wojciechowski (eds.), Toruń 2000, pp. 119–134.

²⁶ CMC, 18–20. About the Syzygos in CMC see: M. Woszczyk, “Przychodził jak błyskawica...”. *Syzygos-Paraklet i judeochrześcijańska pneumatologia w Kolońskim Kodeksie Maniego* [in:] *Gnoza, gnostycyzm...*, pp. 43–58.

²⁷ CMC, 21–24.

²⁸ CMC, 34.

²⁹ See below, criterion 3.

³⁰ CMC, 35.

³¹ Line of the Chinese text: 1; *Mani, le Boudda de Lumière...*, p. 44.

³² *Keph.* 9, 13, 21; etc.

³³ *Keph.* 23, 17; 25, 11; etc.

³⁴ E.g. Michel Tardieu lists 25 gods of Light and 3 forces of Darkness; M. Tardieu, *op. cit.*, pp. 102–105.

is typical of scientific narrative. Namely, the Manichaeans explain the functioning of the visual cosmos, the whole celestial mechanics, by the working of the great purifying cosmic machine which liberates the particles of Light mixed with Darkness and then transports them to the Kingdom of Light. This machine consists of parts of the visual cosmos (generally the Milky Way, the Moon, the Sun), and of elements only imagined by Manichaeans (e.g. three great wheels placed by them between Earth and the Kingdom of Darkness). This part of the cosmic machine for purifying of the Light which is in the sky was described first of all in the *Acta Archelai*,³⁵ a fourth-century Christian polemical work, traditionally ascribed to Hegemonius. Whereas both parts of the said construction are mentioned by the text of the *Kephalaia*, when its editors talk about setting it in motion by a god called the Third Messenger. In Chapter 34 we first find information that “the ship moved through the heights in the heavens”,³⁶ i.e. the Sun and the Moon began their movement across the firmament, and then that “the wheels begin to send the life to earth and to the upper worlds”,³⁷ i.e. the cosmic mechanism of three great wheels placed between Earth and the Kingdom of Darkness began its action of separating the light elements of fire, water and wind from their dark equivalent.

The third criterion: cognitive sources of message. For the Manichaean narrative we can find two cognitive sources. The first of them is – contrary to what *The Cologne Mani Codex* mentions, emphasising significance of revealed knowledge – and “encyclopaedic” (i.e. empirical) knowledge on, most of all, astrology or astronomy³⁸ and physiology or medicine.³⁹ However, Jason David BeDuhn, a contemporary American specialist in Manichaeism, points to the popular nature of this knowledge: “Mani’s actual sources must have been the popular and popularizing philosophical and medical digests”,⁴⁰ and to the fact that it was most similar to the Stoic physical world view.⁴¹ The second cognitive source of the Manichaean message is the spiritual knowledge which was revealed to Mani by the Syzygos, as I mentioned in point 1.

³⁵ *Acta Arch.* VIII, 5–7 (the edition: Hegemonius, *Acta Archelai*, C.H. Beeson (ed.), Leipzig 1906, pp. 12–13).

³⁶ λ ΝΕΣΗΥ ΜΑΖΕ ΖΙ ΠΛΙΣΕ ΖΝ ΜΠΗΥΕ (*Keph.* 87, 2). Translated by I. Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher...*, p. 90.

³⁷ λ ΝΤΡΟΧΟC †ΖΟΥΪΤΕ ΝΤ[Ν]ΝΑΥ ΠΩΝ[Ζ] / [ΔΠ]ΚΑΖ ΜΝ ΝΚΟCΜΟC ΕΤΝΤΠΤΕ (*Keph.* 87, 3–4). Translated by I. Gardner, *ibidem*.

³⁸ About the astrological and astronomical knowledge of the Manichaeans see: F.S. Jones, *The Astrological Trajectory in Ancient Syriac-Speaking Christianity (Elchasai, Bardaisan and Mani)* [in:] *Atti del Terzo Congresso Internazionale di Studi „Manicheismo e Oriente Cristiano Antico”, Arcavacata di Rende-Amantea, 31 agosto – 5 settembre 1993*, L. Cirillo, A. van Tongerloo (eds.), Turnhout 1997, pp. 183–200; A. Panaino, *Visione della volta celeste e astrologia nel Manicheismo* [in:] *Atti del Terzo Congresso...*, pp. 249–295.

³⁹ About the physiological and medical discourse of the Manichaeans see: J. BeDuhn, *The Metabolism of Salvation. Manichaean Concepts of Human Physiology* [in:] *The Light and the Darkness. Studies in Manichaeism and its World*, P. Mirecki, J.D. BeDuhn (eds.), Leiden 2001, pp. 5–37.

⁴⁰ J. BeDuhn, *The Metabolism of Salvation...*, p. 35.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 34–35.

The fourth criterion: form of message. The religious Manichaean narrative was distinguished by imagery, e.g. the allegory of the Cross of Light, i.e. of Light which is imprisoned in plant forms,⁴² as well as by the symbolism of the number five in various contexts, e.g. the five elements of the substance of Light (living light, fire, water, wind, air)⁴³ – also called the Five Sons of First Man,⁴⁴ deities of Light arranged in fives (e.g. the Five Sons of Living Spirit⁴⁵), the five commandments of the Elect (no lying, no killing, no eating of meat, chastity, poverty)⁴⁶ and five degrees of hierarchy of the Manichaean Church (doctors, ministers, administrators, the Elect, Hearers).⁴⁷ Moreover, contemporary scholars emphasise the great poetic advantages of Manichaean hymns, which, after all, provide us with many motifs and symbols of religious Manichaean narrative. So, for example, Swedish Egyptologist Torgny Säve-Söderbergh evaluates Manichaean hymns in Coptic as follows: “the rather well preserved *Psalms* not only have an interesting content, but are also composed in a most charming poetical form”.⁴⁸

Transcoding mythical motifs into forms of representational art was initiated by the religion’s founder himself. According to the tradition, Mani was the author of the book *Image*, which included miniatures of the main themes of Manichaean doctrine.⁴⁹ In Chapter 92 of *Kephalaia* we find the information that the book *Image* contained a scene showing the afterlife fate of the dead: the Righteous one immediately reaches the Land of Light, whereas the Sinner is condemned to eternal wandering in Gehenna.⁵⁰ Manichaean iconography from Central Asia, in spite of its fragmentary preservation, confirms that there were themes of a sacred narrative of the “religion of Light” in representational art. For example, on a fragment of embroidered textile from the area of Turfan (MIK 6251), three feminine figures can be found. Two of them, on the right, represent the Manichaean Elect, whereas the main figure, on the left, is greater, differently dressed and coiffed, and moreover her head is surrounded by a coloured aureole. Scholars identify this Manichaean goddess with the Virgin of Light, who plays an important role in purifying of Light in the working cosmos.⁵¹ In turn, a relatively well-preserved miniature, also originating from the area of Turfan (MIK 4974), shows in the lower right corner two seated Hearers, on the left two large figures of the Elect,

⁴² In the Coptic sources: ΠΤΑΥΡΟΣ ΜΠΟΥΛΙΝΕ, see e.g. Chapter 85 in *Kephalaia* (*Keph.* 208, 11–213, 20).

⁴³ In the Coptic sources: ΠΤΟΥ ΝΚΤΟΙΧΕΙΩΝ, see e.g. *Keph.* 20, 2; 29, 8, etc.

⁴⁴ In the Coptic sources: ΠΤΟΥ ΝΩΗΡΕ ΜΠΩΑΡΠ ΝΡΩΜΕ, see e.g. *Keph.* 24, 24; 25, 26, etc.

⁴⁵ In the Coptic sources: ΠΤΟΥ ΝΩΗΡΕ ΜΠΠΝΑ ΕΤΑΝΖ, see e.g. *Keph.* 24, 23; 25, 26, etc.

⁴⁶ See e.g. the Coptic *Psalm-Book: PsB* 33, 19–23.

⁴⁷ See e.g. the Chinese *Compendium*: lines of the Chinese text: 70–75; *Mani, le Boudda de Lumière...*, pp. 58–59. Cf. M. Tardieu, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

⁴⁸ T. Säve-Söderberg, *Studies in the Coptic Manichaean Psalm-Book*, Uppsala 1949, p. 1.

⁴⁹ About Mani’s the *Image* see: M. Tardieu, *op. cit.*, pp. 55–56; N.J. Baker-Brian, *op. cit.*, pp. 67–68.

⁵⁰ *Keph.* 235, 1–9.

⁵¹ Z. Gulácsi, *Manichaean Art in Berlin Collections. A Comprehensive Catalogue of Manichaean Artifacts Belonging to the Berlin State Museums of the Prussian Cultural Foundation, Museum of Indian Art, and the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences, Deposited in the Berlin State Library of the Prussian Cultural Foundation*, Turnhout 2001, pp. 193–195.

and in the higher right corner the divine hand. On the left side at the bottom is a large bowl, probably filled with fruits. In the space between the figures of the Elect, Hearers and the divine hand we can see outlines of some forms, which are correctly interpreted by the eminent specialist in Manichaean iconography Zsuzsanna Gulácsi as the moon in its waning phase and the sun.⁵² The discussed scene therefore presents the most important motif of Manichaean narrative: the cooperation of the Manichaean community and the macrocosm during the purification of the substance of Light. Gulácsi explains the detailed meaning of the miniature as follows:

The fruit (considered to be rich in particles of Light) is presented by the laypeople to the elects. The elects consume the fruit and use their bodies to separate the Light from the Darkness. After the meal, their singing of hymns sends the liberated Light up to the heavenly bodies (moon, sun, stars) that function as vessels, ferrying the Light back to its original home, to the Realm of Light, where God dwells. God's hand reaching into the picture symbolizes the completion of the journey.⁵³

The fifth criterion: semantic functions. A few anti-Manichaean polemicists: Christian St. Augustine (IV–V),⁵⁴ the Neo-Platonist Simplicius (V–VI), as well as the Muslim theologians al-Māturīdī (IX–X) and ‘Abd al-Jabbār (X–XI)⁵⁵ underline the monosemic character of the Manichaean narrative, i.e. its single level of meaning. This single level of meaning is explained by the contemporary Israeli scholars Sarah Stroumsa and Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa as follows: “since Mani was the Last Prophet, and had brought the final revelation to humankind, there was no place left for interpretation or exegesis of his message”.⁵⁶ In my opinion, such a reading of their own religious narrative by the Manichaeans was also enabled by the idea of two opposing substances, Light and Darkness, which are de facto the only reality of the Manichaean universe.⁵⁷ But, as I said at the beginning of this paper, the single level of meaning of Manichaean message would be in contradiction with one of the most important criteria of myth, i.e. with its polysemic character, and this would resemble scientific narrative, which, according to Wierciński, is characterised by “a strong tendency for one meaning and one theme”.⁵⁸

⁵² About miniature MIK 4974 see: Z. Gulácsi, *Manichaean Art...*, pp. 83–86 and *eadem*, *An Experiment in Digital Reconstruction with a Manichaean Book Painting: The Work of the Religion Scene (MIK III 4974 recto)* [in:] *New light on Manichaeism. Papers from the Sixth International Congress on Manichaeism, organized by the International Association of Manichaean Studies*, J.D. BeDuhn (ed.), Leiden 2009, pp. 145–168.

⁵³ Z. Gulácsi, *An Experiment...*, p. 147.

⁵⁴ Augustine, *C. ep. fund.* 23 (the edition: *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, I. Zycha (ed.), vol. 25, Praga 1891–1892, p. 221); Augustine, *C. Faust.* XV, 5 (CSEL 25; 425); Augustine, *C. Faust.* XV, 6 (CSEL 25; 427). Cf. J.D. BeDuhn, *The Manichaean Body...*, pp. 70–72.

⁵⁵ S. Stroumsa, G.G. Stroumsa, *op. cit.*, pp. 40–41.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 40.

⁵⁷ This ultimate, and in fact the only reality, which is the substance of Light and the substance of Darkness, is strongly emphasised by St. Augustine in his *The Confessions*: “Sed me maxime captum et offocatum quodammodo deprimebant corporalia cogitantem moles illae”, Augustine, *Conf.* V, 11 (the edition: *Patrologiae cursus completus. Patrologia Latina*, J.-P. Migne (ed.), vol. 32, Parisii 1877, col. 716.

⁵⁸ A. Wierciński, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

The sixth criterion: emotional incentiveness. Manichaean hymns (e.g. in Coptic), using abundantly mythical motifs, have great musical value.⁵⁹ In turn, Manichaean iconography from Central Asia presents singing and playing believers – I am thinking here of a miniature from the area of Turfan MIK 6368. In this, seriously damaged, illustration we can identify four seated figures. On the left there is a Manichaean Elect and on the right three Hearers; however, of the latter figure only an elbow is preserved. The Hearer in the middle plays a four-string musical instrument called oud.⁶⁰ And so ceremonies of “the religion of Light” were accompanied by music and singing, and this had a strong influence on the emotional sphere of the participants.

Moreover, the Manichaeans had their own sacred calendar based on the history of the life of Mani and his community, and this, in turn, consolidated the tradition of “the religion of Light”. In the annual cycle, Mani’s birth, the revelation of the Syzygos, Mani’s passion and death as well as the martyrdom of the first Manichaean apostles were commemorated. The most important celebration was the Bema festival, commemorating Mani’s martyr death.⁶¹

The seventh criterion: verifiability. In the case of Manichaean narrative its veracity is verified both by the authority of the Syzygos, Mani’s spiritual companion, and by the authority of Mani as the founder of the religion and “the Enlightener” (see point 1).

The eighth criterion: social range of message. One of the most important motifs of Manichaean narrative, which has theo- and cosmogonic value – the descent of the First Man into battle against the forces of Darkness – gains one of initiation too in the interpretation of the Coptic *Kephalaia*. Namely, in Chapter 9 of this treatise⁶² we find the explanation that the five ritual gestures used by the Manichaean Church, i.e. **ΤΕΙΡΗΝΗ** (the peace), **ΤΟΥΝΕΜ** (the right hand), **ΠΑCΠΑΜΟC** (the embrace / kiss), **ΠΟΥΟΥΤ** (the worship / salutation), **ΤΧΕΙΡΟΤΟΝΙΑ** (the laying on of hands) – performed during initiation, as Henri-Charles Puech correctly suggests⁶³ – were established to commemorate the said act of the First Man:

So, these five signs are the mystery of the First Man. He came forth with them from the aeon of light. Also, when he finished his contest, he went up with these good signs. They received him into the aeons of light.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ See the article of Henri-Charles Puech, in which he analyses, first of all, hymns in Coptic language and in Iranian languages: H.-C. Puech, “Musique et hymnologie manichéennes” [in:] *idem, Sur le manichéisme et autres essais*, Paris 1979, pp. 179–233.

⁶⁰ Z. Gulácsi, *Manichaean Art...*, pp. 92–95.

⁶¹ M. Tardieu, *op. cit.*, pp. 89–92.

⁶² *Keph.* 37, 28–42, 23.

⁶³ H.-C. Puech, *Sur le manichéisme...*, p. 360.

⁶⁴ **ΕΚΙΑ ΠΙΤΟΥ ΜΜΕΙΝΕ / ΠΜΥCΤΗΡΙΟΝ ΝΕ ΜΠΩΑΡΤΙ ΝΡΩΜΕ ΝΤΑΦΕΙ ΑΒΑΛ ΝΖΗ / ΤΟΥ ΖΜ ΠΑΙΩΝ ΜΠΟΥΑΙΝΕ ΝΤΑΡΕΦΧΩΚ ΑΝ ΑΒΑΛ Μ / ΠΕΦΑΓΩΝ ΝΤΑΦΒΩΚ ΑΖΡΗΙ ΖΝ ΝΙΜΕΙΝΕ ΕΤΑΝΙΤ / ΑΥΩΑΠΪ ΑΖΟΥΝ ΖΝ ΝΑΙΩΝ ΜΠΟΥΑΙΝΕ** (*Keph.* 38, 8–12). Translated by I. Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher...*, p. 43.

The ninth criterion: relationship to patterns of behaviours. Manichaean narrative is the basis of two codices of religious behaviours: the first one – severe ethics of the Elect (five commandment – see point 4); and the second one – milder ethics of the Hearers (according to the Coptic *Kephalaia*, duties of Hearer, here called “catechumen”, are as follows: fasting, prayer, almsgiving and supporting Church and the Elect in material matters).⁶⁵

3. Concluding observations

As we have seen, the presented juxtaposition of the criteria of myth according to Andrzej Wierciński with the features of the Manichaean narrative shows that the narrative fulfils the definition of myth in seven points out of nine. There are incompatibilities in point 2 (general cognitive paradigm) and point 5 (semantic functions). In the first occurs an element of paradigm of mechanism (the visual cosmos as part of the great cosmic machine for purifying the substance of Light), which is associated by Wierciński with scientific narrative. In turn, in the second, the polysemic character of the Manichaean narrative is undermined in favour of a monosemic one, and the latter is also a feature of the scientific message. In point 8, however (social range of message), we see a multi-level reading of the Manichaean narrative during initiation (the descent of the First Man into battle against the forces of Darkness and his return to the Kingdom of Light as the mythic rationale for the initiation process). Summing up these observations, one must consider the religious Manichaean narrative a mythic narrative, although we see in it some features of a scientific narrative too.⁶⁶

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⁶⁵ *Keph.* 192, 29–193, 13.

⁶⁶ The presence of elements of scientific message in Manichaean narrative is also noticed by Stroumsa and Stroumsa when they write about the “scientific and rational pretense of Manichaeism”, S. Stroumsa, G.G. Stroumsa, *op. cit.*, p. 41 and Nicholas J. Baker-Brian: “Rather than viewing Mani as the creator of a fable, Manichaeans were inclined to regard their apostle as a revealer of profound truths – a ‘scientific’ account of the universe – which made him the mediator of literally life-saving knowledge hitherto undisclosed (or at least, of knowledge undisclosed in an uncorrupted form for many generations)”, N.J. Baker-Brian, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

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