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The visionary dimension of Mani's gnosis: Manichaean interactions with Platonic Metaphysics and Buddhism

João Paulo Dantas Almeida

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Doctoral advisor: Gabriele Cornelli

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Prof. Gabriele Cornelli (doctoral advisor) – University of Brasília (UnB)

_____

Prof. Aldo Lopes Dinucci – Federal University of Sergipe (UFS)

_____

Prof. Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta – University of Groningen (RUG)

_____

Prof. André Leonardo Chevitarese – Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ)

_____

Substitute Committee Member: Prof. Eduardo Wolf Pereira – University of Brasília (UnB)

To the memory of my father

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A dimensão visionária da gnosis de Mani: interações maniqueístas com a metafísica platônica e o budismo

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the soteriological nature of the concept of gnosis in Manichaeism, in particular its unitary character, which links the visionary and prophetic dimension to ritual practice. To achieve this goal, I will analyze the mediating role of Mani's visions to determine how the apocalyptic dimension of his thought affects his conception of the body. The body is the primary location of Manichaean ritualized meals, which aim to release the particles of Light that have been trapped in matter, according to the Manichaean cosmogonic myth. Subsequently, a historical study will be conducted on the expansion of Manichaeism, including its interactions with Iranian and Indian religions. The study will indicate how a visionary hermeneutic and a cosmological and soteriological concern guided the contacts and conflicts with other religious traditions. Finally, a historical-comparative analysis of Manichaeism with Platonic metaphysics and Buddhism will be made to demonstrate the reasons why Mani's visionary tradition and the eidetic character of Manichaean cosmology flourished in Central Asia while being opposed and rejected in the Roman Empire.

Keywords: Manichaeism; Buddhism; Platonism; gnosis; Silk Road studies; gnosis

Resumo

Esta tese tem por objetivo o exame da raiz soteriológica do conceito de gnosis no maniqueísmo, especialmente o seu caráter unitário, que vincula a dimensão visionária e profética à prática ritual. Para tanto, irei analisar o papel mediador das visões de Mani, de modo a discernir a maneira com a qual a dimensão apocalíptica de seu pensamento influencia a sua concepção de corpo, local por excelência da liberação das partículas de luz por meio das refeições ritualizadas. Posteriormente, farei um estudo histórico da expansão do maniqueísmo, de suas interações com religiões iranianas e indianas, indicando o modo como uma hermenêutica visionária e uma preocupação cosmológica e soteriológica pautou os contatos e os conflitos com outras tradições religiosas. Finalmente, farei uma análise comparativa do maniqueísmo com a metafísica platônica e o budismo, a fim de demonstrar os motivos pelos quais a tradição visionária de Mani, bem como o caráter eidético da cosmologia maniqueísta, floresceu na Ásia Central ao mesmo tempo em que foi combatida e rejeitada no Império Romano.

Palavras-chave: Maniqueísmo; Budismo; Platonismo; gnosis; estudos da Rota da Seda

Summary

Introduction

a) Methodology

In Late Antiquity's mystical-prophetic literature, many visionaries and prophets claimed to have ascended to heaven, especially during the encounter between Near Eastern and Hellenic cultures. In this crossroads, there is a particular figure whose impact was powerful yet remains largely unknown in contemporary imagination. Only fossilized artifacts from an extinct religion remain, tainted by centuries of ecclesiastical conflict and persecution of 'heretics'. However, to the modern reader, these ancient texts reveal not only the content of their prophecies and visions but also their ritual practices. Both of these aspects provide new insights into the religious and philosophical milieu of Late Antiquity.

Methodologically, the Manichaean prophetic metahistory provides a means for historical analysis of the contact between Jewish, Christian (mainly from its Near Eastern offshoot), Iranian, and Indian ideas and practices and their assimilation into Manichaeism. This incorporation originated with Mani himself and was not due to a division between 'Western' and 'Eastern' Manichaeism. Mani posited that divine manifestations have occurred throughout human history, providing countless examples. He considered prophets, Buddhas, and notable figures as his forebears. Therefore, the systematization of a universal religion was at the heart of the Manichaean project.

It is doubtful that Mani solely utilized biblical prophets, buddhas, and deities as a mere rhetorical tool to support his religion. This is especially true since his mystical encounter with the Syzygos played a crucial role in the inception of his religious journey. It is evident that such figures were already held in high regard within other religious communities, and consequently, they proved to be advantageous for gaining recognition and authority for Manichaeism in its missionary pursuits. The focus should not be on the proselytizing aspect, but rather on the presence of prophets and biblical figures in Jewish mysticism, and in esoteric texts that were designed to guide the visionary through the celestial realm. With this in mind, it is plausible to explore other facets of the ritualized meal and its connection with gnosis, in terms of its aim to establish a universal religion.

Among the most significant religious figures in the emergence of Manichaeism are the Apostle Paul, Marcion, and Bardaisan of Edessa. The Pauline and Marcionite

approach offer necessary elements to apprehend the "σῶμα" (body) concept in Manichaeism. It must be noted that both Paul and Marcion's Christology established a correlation between the body and the παρουσία or resurrection in general. Therefore, it is crucial to analyze Mani's understanding of the term 'body' in its Late Antiquity context, where beliefs about subtle bodies were prevalent. In Mani's context, the body has a cosmogonic and soteriological function as it serves as the focal point of the Manichaean ritual.

Manichaean dualism asserts the descent of divinity itself. Moreover, in the Manichaean prophetic trajectory, the dualism between body and soul signifies the concept of rebirth/reincarnation, which holds a central position in its metahistory. This explains the constant presence of passages about the mystery surrounding the body, the abduction, and the manifestation of the soul throughout the Manichaean Codex of Cologne. Thus, it is crucial to investigate how prophetology, biblical schemes, Jewish and Gnostic pseudepigraphy, and "theurgic" ascension practices informed Mani's original scheme for a universal religion, where various incarnated emissaries would emerge in different geographic regions, such as Buddha, Zarathustra and Jesus, alongside the relationship between Manichaeism and the apocalyptic and Merkebah tradition, which played a crucial role in providing Mani and his adherents with a heavenly blueprint that guided their ascensions and interactions with prophetic revelations.

My focus on gnosis rather than Gnosticism is deliberate. As argued by Daniel Merkur (1993), gnosis is a technical term that relates to visionary experiences rather than salvific knowledge in and of itself. Manichaean soteriology, for example, revolves around a ritualized meal and its salvific bodily processes. Since gnosis is the subject of this thesis, it is not feasible to entirely depart from the examination of Gnosticism. However, it is important to define the meaning of 'gnosis' after considering Jason BeDuhn's (2020) recent critique of the concept of an original Gnostic myth in the creation of Manichaeism, as well as the reclassification of Manichaeism as a Silk Road religion (cf. Gardner, 2020). This provides an opportunity to investigate Indian and Iranian concepts that have been present during the inception of Manichaeism. Such an examination would help eliminate the notion that Manichaean beginnings were exclusively Gnostic or Christian.

I follow Nathaniel Deutsch (2001), who advocate for a continuity between some Gnostic currents and Merkabah mysticism. Furthermore, Idel made a more precise connection between Gnostics and Jewish mysticism, particularly from a ritualistic viewpoint (Idel, 2000, p. 236). Therefore, I will focus on exploring the relationship between Manichaean gnosis and the apocalyptic tradition as well as Jewish esotericism. John Reeves (1992, 1994, 1996) has conducted this approach in multiple works, situating Manichaeism in a Jewish mythological stratum that likely predates the texts in the Nag Hammadi library. The benefit of this approach is the ability to elucidate the cultural factors involved in Manichaean visionary encounters and their corresponding knowledge, while also preserving their independence.

Additionally, rites and practices characterized by ecstasy often mirror the worldview of distinct groups, which can be deemed 'esoteric'. Although 'esoteric' is a broad term, it plays an important role in contextualizing visionary encounters within the context of the apocalypse and the mysticism of Merkabah. Therefore, there is no need to argue for a "Gnostic origin" (in the classical Gnosticism sense) of Manichaeism. Likewise, gnosis and the prophetic-visionary experience that underlie Manichaeism need not be relegated to a secondary role as they can be integrated into the technical terminology. The similarities between Manichaeism and Gnosticism can be attributed to the relationship between Manichaeism and the apocalyptic tradition, as well as other forms of Christian and Near Eastern religions such as Mandaeism. However, it is plausible that Gnostic beliefs entered Manichaeism without explicit acknowledgement, particularly in areas beyond mythology. This historical connection and contact between Manichaeans and Gnostics after the genesis of Manichaeism clarifies the similarities between Manichaeism and Gnosticism.

It is possible to explore gnosis as a technical word used in both philosophical and religious contexts. This intersection demonstrates the limitations of a strict division between 'philosophy' and 'religion' in Late Antiquity. Methodologically, the investigation of certain concepts over time by different groups in Late Antiquity would potentially extend this vocabulary to mystical literature (cf. Rossetti, 2006, p. 254). A clear example of terminology used by late Platonists and priests of various religions in the Near East is the concept of *prophetes*. In fact, Ugo Bianchi (1986, p. 26) suggests that a 'prophetic' prediction can be historically justified if it incorporates new beliefs or values borrowed from other religions that were not previously considered in the current situation.

The term 'Theology' was first used by Plato (*Republic*, II, 379a; cf. Gasparro, 2011) and was considered a discipline within philosophy. Additionally, visionary experiences such as prophecies, divination, and celestial ascensions were integral to philosophy. These experiences were not only relevant to epistemology but also to cosmology and metaphysics. Sometimes a rigid dichotomy between 'philosophy' (understood as primarily theoretical) and 'religion' is created without a proper historical definition of these concepts in Antiquity.

In contrast to this tendency, Thomas McEvilley conducted a historical and comparative study of the relationship between Greece, India, the Near East, and the Indian subcontinent. The purpose of the study was to move away from the outdated view that Greek philosophy existed in isolation from surrounding cultures. (McEvilley, 2002, xx-xxxi). Accordingly, the dualist religion of Mani, an important factor in the Silk Road culture, ultimately serves as an appropriate means of overcoming exactly such dualisms as "theoretical" vs. "mystical" and "West" vs. "East" in Late Antiquity, since, as Iain Gardner (2020, p. 90) states, Mani had knowledge of the intellectual traditions of India, Iran, and Hellenism, which allowed him to use a variety of religious terminology.

On the other hand, it is important to consider the degree to which gnosis as "knowledge that saves" is central to Mani's religion. Since Manichaean gnosis is not inherently salvific, but rather knowledge pertaining to salvation, it can be positioned between prophetic-visionary activity and rite. Apocalyptic revelation has an intermediate status that connects cosmogony and soteriology, serving as a link between knowledge about the creation and end of the world and the correct ritual praxis needed to achieve the Manichaean objective of separating light and darkness. By establishing gnosis as a technical term with a visionary foundation within Manichaeism, I assert the autonomy of the Manichaean phenomenon without entirely disconnecting it from the so-called Gnostic milieu.

Although various philosophical and religious groups had their distinctive beliefs about the nature of prophetic and visionary experiences, celestial visions and heavenly ascents were crucial in Late Antiquity. These experiences reinterpreted the practices and visionary elements of older traditions and were paramount in importance. Manichaeism interacted not only with literary aspects of other religions but also with cosmologies, theologies, and visionary traditions. Although the means of literary transmission may not

always be possible to verify, there is enough evidence to follow this line of reconstruction and interpretation of a Manichaean visionary hermeneutic. As I. P. Couliano (1991, p.8) stated:

> Intertextuality means “transmission” in a very complex way. All previous experiences seem to converge and deeply influence what we believe to be a new, fresh experience. This convergence mainly happens below the threshold of consciousness, and it presupposes a mental synthesis of many elements, an active processing of the new occurrence that is not the mere repetition of anything past. In history, transmission is usually viewed as a process in which someone reads and rereads a text and then repeats it to others, often in distorted way. Sometimes texts never show up in the transmission of ideas, even if they exist; sometimes a general hermeneutical principle is casually or furtively passed on to someone else, who then produces texts according to this rule, and not according to any previous text, which is in fact unknown to him or to her.

Manichaean gnosis was acquired through prophetic and visionary means. However, it is not a form of salvific gnosis that dismisses ritual practices. On the other hand, upon closer examination of the Manichaean symbolic constellations, to use Durand's (1992) terminology, from the perspective of revelation/ritual's driving force, the symmetry of the Manichaean doctrine reveals itself. Specifically, the symbolic connection between cosmogony and soteriology becomes apparent. This connection operates through the body, which serves both as a means for divine manifestations to recur and as a route to salvation. Additionally, ritual practice provides the liberation of light particles, which is integral to the eschatological component.

The visionary experience through which Mani and the Manichaeans would enter forms the foundation of the Manichaean understanding of sacred text - namely, the divine message's actualization through angelophanies and theophanies, which are subsequently transcribed. In summary: It is possible to derive a Manichaean hermeneutic from Mani's metahistory, which can serve as both an academic research topic and a method of investigation. This hermeneutic functions as a map for understanding the development of Manichaeism. What were Mani's concerns and cosmological schemes? Mani's in-depth study of Indo-Iranian doctrines led to his commentary on the Judeo-Christian substrate and its relation to the Manichaean notion of the recurrent manifestation of the divine

message. These observations were not mere embellishments, but a central objective of missionary activity.

The term 'visionary experience' is broad and should be briefly explained in studies on mysticism, philosophy, and religion. Multidisciplinary studies in these fields provide a good starting point for this discussion, particularly considering more recent historical criticism. R.C. Zaehner, an eminent expert in Iranian and Indian religions, published studies on mysticism that serve as a basis for this discussion, particularly in light of the many criticisms of his work that followed. Zaehner (1961) differentiates between panenhenic mysticism (the experience of nature in all things, cf. Zaehner, 1961, p. 59) and monistic and theistic experiences. In Zaehner's thesis, monism and theism are not associated with any particular religion, as there can be both monism and theism within religions such as Hinduism and Christianity. However, Zaehner contends that Christianity is generally opposed to monism (Zaehner, 1961, pp. 204-205).

However, Zaehner employs the Adamic myth as a hermeneutic tool for mysticism (Zaehner, 1961, p. 191). This approach reduces the diversity of mystical experiences, resulting in his phenomenology of mysticism being implicitly theological (cf. Zaehner, 1961, pp. 191-205). Ninian Smart (1965) discusses the hermeneutics of mystical experience and engages in a dialogue with the work of R. C. Zaehner. Smart treats mystical experience as an inner or introverted journey that culminates in experiences not described in terms of sense-experience or mental images. According to Smart, this account needs a supplement, namely examples of people who typify the mystical life and a distinction between mysticism and what is not mysticism (Smart, 1961, p. 75). Smart criticizes Zaehner's position due to his theological interpretations, which weaken Zaehner's arguments (Smart, 1961, pp. 77-78). According to Smart, Zaehner's own thesis requires distinguishing between experience and interpretation, even when two experiences belong to the same class but have different modes of interpretation (Smart, 1961, p. 79).

Steven Katz, despite holding different positions from Smart, also criticizes Zaehner's typology. He considers it to be too reductive and inflexible, forcing multifaceted and extremely diverse forms of mystical experience into inappropriate interpretive categories that lose sight of the fundamental differences between the data being studied (Katz, 1978, p. 25). Katz argues that to understand mysticism, it is important

to recognize that the study of mystical experiences should not only involve analyzing the mystic's later reports of their experience. It is also crucial to acknowledge that the experience itself, as well as the way in which it is reported, is shaped by the concepts that the mystic holds. These concepts give shape to the mystic's experience. Katz provides an example that a Hindu does not have an experience x, which is then described with terms familiar from Hinduism. Instead, the individual has a Hindu experience (Katz, 1978, p. 26).

From a historical perspective, understanding how cultural and religious factors mediate visionary experiences is essential, not because of a supposed reductionism in which every mystical experience is inherently a reflection of the culture in which the mystic is embedded - for it is often the case that the experience itself is at odds with the religion in which the person participates. Cultural and religious mediations are significant because, for instance, when examining Buddhist visionary experiences, the focus should be on the Buddhist interpretation of the experience, rather than simply blending it into the general framework of what is considered a 'visionary experience'.

On the other hand, Manichaeism is a significant historical example because Mani himself had a theory of religion and visionary experiences that supported a form of universalism. The Manichaean literary corpus attests to this process of synthesis and amalgamation of disparate visionary narratives, subject to the particular interpretation of Manichaeism. The category of 'visionary experience' is useful for organizing available material for scholars, but its use for morphological purposes does not exclude historical interpretation - on the contrary, since it is used in a specific study of Manichaeism and the philosophical-religious groups with which Manichaeism interacted, the morphological dimension is integrated into historical-comparative interpretation.

The relevance of historical context to the study of mystical experiences has been recently defended by Alexander Mazur (2020), whose study of Plotinus and the Gnostics provides insights into the historical study of mystical and visionary experiences. Mazur not only criticized Zaehner's thesis but also questioned some of the presuppositions underlying Katz's work. Mazur argues that the distinction between monistic and theistic mysticism is too generic, particularly when considering Plotinus' position within these interpretative schemes. Additionally, Mazur notes that the concept of universal mysticism often serves to de-historicize Plotinus' own mystical experience, “by undercutting its

relative uniqueness and chronological priority and thus masking its seminal influence upon the subsequent tradition of theological discourse to which it is then anachronistically compared." (Mazur, 2020, p. 7).

Regarding Mani, his historical context is significant not only for understanding the content and interpretation of his visions, which is typically examined through comparative and phenomenological studies of mysticism, but also for his association with other visionary traditions such as Jewish, Christian, and Iranian, among others, and their corresponding practices. In summary, it is insufficient to solely consider the intellectual aspect of visions. It is also necessary to examine their anthropological and ritualistic dimensions, and then analyze the process of transforming visions in literature and their role in Manichaean theology. Additionally, while the morphological differentiation between prophets and mystics[1] may have theoretical value, it may not be suitable for certain historical instances, such as that of Mani.

Merkur (1993) provided a useful definition for studying visionary experiences historically and comparatively. To develop a cross-cultural formulation that reflects the autonomy of contemplations, he defines ecstasy as "any state of involuntary[2] belief in the reality of the numinous" (Merkur, 1993, p. 12). According to Merkur (1993), the ecstatic believes that the numinous is just as real, if not more so, than the sensible world (pp. 12-13). Thus:

> In contrast with sober faith in the numinous, which requires an act of will, ecstatic belief in the reality of the numinous is involuntary. Whether or not the occurrence of ecstasy was voluntary sought, once the experience is underway faith in the reality of the numinous is not subject to volition. Doubt can be entertained, but it cannot be sustained for the duration of the experience. Uniquely among the varieties of religious experience, ecstasies have the power

[1] Smart's (1965, p. 75) distinction between mysticism and prophetism does not apply to Mani, particularly when considering his paradigmatic character. Mani is an exemplary individual who became a norm in his tradition (cf. Katz, 1982, p. 248). He is considered both an apostle and prophet, and he is also regarded as the visionary par excellence, whose ritual practices are used for continuous contact with the Light dimension of Manichaean cosmology.

[2] When Merkur uses the term 'involuntary', he is not referring to the spontaneity of the ecstatic experience, as the quote above clarifies (Merkur, 1993, p. 13). Rather, he is referring to the belief in the reality of the numinous that is experienced in ecstasy, which is beyond belief. For a critique of the misuse of the concept of spontaneity, which is sometimes used to ignore the historical and cultural context of the visionary, see Mazur (2020, p. 7).

> not only to confirm religious faith that already exists, but also to induce conversions from unbelief to belief (Merkur, 1993, p. 13).

Moreover, I follow the methodological insights of authors such as Raffaele Pettazzoni, Ugo Bianchi, and Giulia Sfameni Gasparro. Pettazzoni highlighted the issues that arise from dividing the science of religion into two branches: historical and phenomenological. This division would compromise religious studies and disrupt the unity of its subject (Pettazzoni, 1954, p. 127). In addition to the dispute regarding phenomenology and the history of religions, there is also the issue of the relationship between the history of religions and theology. Bianchi argues, and I agree with his position, that there can be a contrast between the doctrinal positions of a particular scholar and particular currents in confrontation with Faith, but not between the history of religions and theology as such (Bianchi, 1986, p. 28). Bianchi (1986, p. 28) notes that the history of religions and theology share a common object and are both interested in establishing the historical consistency of certain facts, texts, and testimonies, although not for identical reasons. Finally, Bianchi suggests a cautious use of the comparative principle based on historical and phenomenological analysis.

This approach, Bianchi argues, orders religious phenomena within a historically integrated complex, providing a clearer understanding of the objective relationships between previously studied religious worlds and their development (Bianchi, 1986, p. 28). Furthermore, according to Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, religious facts possess a peculiar *qualitas* due to a 'rupture of level,' a term coined by Mircea Eliade[3] in his phenomenological perspective. However, Gasparro notes that the term was used in a historical sense, without an ontological connotation, and with attention to the particularity of each context by Ugo Bianchi (Gasparro, 2011, p. 7).

In so doing, I aim to avoid a reductionism of visionary phenomena that would see them as nothing more than fanciful literary creations; but I also remain mindful of the historical and cultural contexts, since such visionary accounts are found in historical records and therefore need to be studied accordingly. In this thesis, gnosis is conceived

[3] In this regard, Eliade's (1965) dialectic of the sacred further clarifies his terminology. See also Jonathan Z. Smith's critique of Eliade's essentially morphological approach (Smith, 1982, p. 25). Smith argues that Eliade's approach would require him to exclude the patterns and systematics of history (Smith, 1982, pp. 25-29). For a reassessment of Eliadean hermeneutics, please refer to Rennie (1996) and Allen (1978). On the other hand, it is possible to conduct a historical study that avoids reducing visionary narratives solely to their literary conventions, while also acknowledging the importance of the historical context in which the visionaries lived. Ugo Bianchi's comparative historical method is a promising approach in this regard.

as a concept that refers to a technical use as a vocabulary associated with visionary experiences and their practices, following the work of Daniel Merkur (1993). Moreover, Historian Reinhart Koselleck provides interesting insights based on the method of Begriffsgeschichte, which can be applied to the study of prophetic-visionary experiences and their relationship with language[4].

This is particularly relevant in the long-term period from the genesis of Manichaeism to its expansion on the Silk Road. Using Koselleck's terminology, one can discern the *sediments of time* (*Zeitschichten*) of the Manichaean religion, with special attention to the formulation of visionary hermeneutics and its literature. Koselleck argues that individuals who aim to communicate effectively use a language that their audience is already familiar with, even when introducing new concepts. Thus, language evolves slowly, even as new concepts emerge (Koselleck, 2000, pp. 21-22). Koselleck then argues that history is made exciting by the emergence of a phenomenon where not only sudden events guarantee change in their uniqueness, but also longer-lasting structures that enable change, despite appearing static, also change (Koselleck, 2000, p. 22).

For instance, in expressing his theory of religion, Mani, as shown by BeDuhn (2020, [7]), still employs a terminology that belongs to the logic of traditional cults and predates the conception of religion as a universal practice that is not locally conditioned, since he presents himself as the prophet of a specific nation, i.e., Babylon. However, historically speaking, his conception of religion is radically new. He does not claim to be just the prophet of a specific people, but the seal of the prophets. Furthermore, regarding the codification and literal interpretation of visionary and prophetic experiences, it is evident that literary conventions change slowly, even with the addition of new experiences and interpretations. In this way, certain tropes from the apocalyptic tradition and the Pauline epistles are reinterpreted based on Mani's prophetic experiences and his new theory of religion. In this theory, a revelation does not pertain to a specific group of people, but rather to humanity as a whole.

[4] Reinhart Koselleck focused on studying political concepts in the development of modernity. Therefore, adapting his insights to the religious context of late antiquity requires some adjustments. His study of the history of concepts and the emphasis on the linguistic dimension to discern historical strata is useful when combined with the anthropological and morphological study of visionary experiences and their impact on ancient cosmological narratives.

Consequently, Manichaeism incorporates extra-biblical figures such as Buddha, Zarathustra, Plato, and Hermes. This is evident not only in the prophetology but also in the visionary narratives, as well as in the construction of Mani's Christology and Buddhology, where characteristics of other 'prophets' are attributed to Mani himself. Historically, this implies the creation of a hagiographic literature that assimilates and integrates the new religions as if they were other facets of Mani's religion - understood as a universal revelation. Since visionary experiences and heavenly ascents are often used to legitimize religious authority, it is not surprising that Manichaeism developed its own hermeneutics to synthesize Mani's life with those of Buddhas, prophets, and philosophers. Accordingly, the Manichaeans had to find ways to express Mani's doctrine without losing its uniqueness and using a language that could be understood by any philosophical or religious group they encountered. Therefore, it is possible to study the history of Manichaeism through its visionary tradition, which includes its cosmology, the symbolism and function of light in its soteriology, as expressed in its visionary narratives (cosmological and eschatological descriptions, and apocalyptic-type accounts and so forth) insofar as these aspects become literature and are historically and culturally mediated.

When considering gnosis as a technical term and visionary experiences in general as a category in the history of philosophy and religion, my intention is not to speculate on an abstract type of gnostic experience without situating it in a historical context. I understand Merkur's (1993, p. 114) proposal to define gnosis in relation to visionary experiences, distancing himself from Messina's typology[5], as a valuable technical term precisely because it does not reduce such experiences to mere literary conventions, while at the same time such a technical term only makes sense within a specific system and therefore requires a study that is aware of its historical context.

As I. M. Lewis contends, it is crucial to analyze the manifestation of ecstasy and visionary experiences in diverse social contexts, as well as the functions ascribed to them in various types of societies (Lewis, 1971, p. 21). Therefore, I understand the visionary experiences with such an anthropological sensibility, in a historical and comparative

[5] I concur with Merkur's critique of the limitations of Messina's typology, particularly in the way it influenced subsequent studies. However, as I will discuss in the conclusion of this thesis, I believe there is a misinterpretation of Bianchi's methodology, which was historical-comparative. Therefore, the typology was open to further refinement, as evidenced by Bianchi's methodological endeavors in his investigations of Gnosticism and Manichaeism.

enterprise, following the methodology of the 'Italian School' of history of religions. Gananath Obeyesekere (2012, p. 20) notes that anthropology, and one might say the history of religions or the history of philosophy, has written much about "alien modes of thought," with detailed sociological analyses of spirit possession, shamanic trances, and so forth. However, these modes of thought are seldom considered reliable means of knowledge, as the author puts it, 'as vehicles for ideas to germinate'.

The archaeologist Brian Hayden, in a wide-ranging study dealing with questions of anthropology and comparative religion, traces the importance of visionary and ecstatic experiences from prehistoric times to the emergence of Christianity. Hayden (2003, p. 5) distinguishes between traditional religion and religions of the book. The latter can be further defined as the difference between traditional cults and religion as such (cf. BeDuhn, 2015). Hayden (2003, p. 7) argues that ecstatic and visionary experiences were the religious experiences par excellence. Mani's prophetic authority stems from his ecstatic and visionary experiences. He believed that the Holy Book was not only a means of preserving the original teachings, but also a testament to the divine origin of his teachings. Ironically, the complexity of the academic study of Manichaeism is due in part to the fact that the books he composed were destroyed, with only fragments existing in later literature.

Mani claimed to possess knowledge of cosmogonic and soteriological processes. According to him, he glimpsed a history of his soul and a universal history through prophetic-visionary experiences. His gnosis is associated with an eschatological process in which an army of ascetics embodies an image of the cosmos in their body. This image serves as an instrument for purification and salvation. The significance of this behavior, which played a crucial role in converting to Manichaeism, is often overlooked in academic research. There is a tendency to relegate philosophical and religious elements that do not align with contemporary sensibilities to the background.

Gilbert Durand (1992, p. 41) observed that symbols often cluster together around a theme or archetype. Consequently, it is possible to examine an "anthropological trajectory" of certain constellations, which pertains to the unique manner in which each culture establishes a relationship between its sensibility and the surrounding environment (see in this regard Pitta, 2017, p. 25). A study of the anthropological trajectory of Mani is presented, investigating the role of the body concept in its Pauline and Marcionite sense

with soteriology and gnosis. By situating Mani in the cultural and intellectual environment of his period, it is possible to comprehend the overlap of different prophetic strata and identify Manichaeism within the philosophical and religious realms of Late Antiquity.

This thesis comprises four chapters. The first two chapters interpret the genesis of Manichaeism, geographically placing it in a region where Mediterranean and Asian traditions converge. This section forms the first part of the work. Mani's prophetic-visionary activity is viewed as Manichaean hermeneutics, used to systematize his religion with elements from various religions, including Judeo-Christian, Mesopotamian, Indo-Iranian, among others. The reconstruction of Mani's system and the correlation between mystical and practical knowledge offer a historical foundation for reassessing Manichaean fortune. Since Mani had already developed his own dualist conception before the debate with Zoroastrians (cf. Sundermann, 1997), Chapter 2 delves further into the investigation of Indo-Iranian philosophies and religions using themes already introduced in Chapter 1. This includes an exploration of the reasons why certain 'Judeo-Christian' ideas could have been influenced or reinterpreted through interactions with Buddhists, Zoroastrians, and other groups.

After examining the early philosophical beliefs of the Manichaean religion using new primary sources and secondary literature, it becomes feasible to analyze its simultaneous transmission through the Silk Road to both the Western and Eastern regions, with a specific focus on the social milieu of Alexandria/Lycopolis and Central Asia. Thus, an analysis of Alexander of Lycopolis' Neoplatonic writings reveals how Manichaeism was "translated" into Hellenistic theoretical language, resulting in the loss of its visionary and dramatic elements in cosmology and its integration into the language of Greek philosophy. Furthermore, this approach is meritorious for avoiding one-sided investigations that some scholars have conducted. It concurrently reconstructs the world of Alexandrian Platonism through the figure of Alexander of Lycopolis by linking his way of thinking to local Middle Platonist authors.

Therefore, Chapter 3 analyzes Alexander of Lycopolis and Augustine's anti-Manichaean polemics and the impact on the development of a simplified understanding of their dualism. The comparison with chapter 4, which focuses on the exchange between Manichaeans and Buddhists, clarifies the relegation, if not disregard, of the visionary and

salvation features of Manichaeism and the contribution of Eastern Manichaeism in obtaining an appropriate hermeneutic for Mani's religion.

b) Manichaean scriptures and its visionary rationale

Mani's literary and religious education can be discerned from his Baptist background in Mesopotamia during a time when the region was part of the Persian Empire and had a heterogeneous religious composition. It is known that Mani became familiar with the New Testament writings in Eastern Aramaic during his youth. This involved either a version containing the Four Gospels with the Pauline Epistles or a harmonized version (diatessarial) that synthesized the Four Gospels (Tardieu, 2008, p. 31). Michel Tardieu notes that Mani's Elchasaite education exposed him to a variety of revelatory and visionary texts, including those attributed to Elchasai and the apocalypses of Adam, Seth, Enoch, and Noah. Additionally, Mani became familiar with fictional literature focused on adventurous visions, journeys, and dramas, a common theme in Manichaean writings, along with the philosophy and poetry of Bardaisan of Edessa (Tardieu, 2008, pp. 31-32).

The Manichaean scripture canon was categorized into three options: Tetrad, Pentateuch, or Heptateuch (Decret, 1974, p. 75). Among Mani's important works[6] were the *Šābuhragān*, *the Living Gospel*, *the Living Treasure*, *the Book of Mysteries*, *the Book of Legends* (*Pragmateia*), *the Book of Giants*, *the Epistles*, and a *Book of Images* (*Ārdahang*). The *Šābuhragān*, preserved only in fragmentary form, discusses topics that are primarily eschatological, prophetic, and apocalyptic in nature. It was dedicated to Emperor Šābuhr and contains a synthesis of Mani's doctrine, in which we can already see the assimilation of Iranian doctrines into the Christian Baptist and apocalyptic stratum, on the one hand, and the presence of extra-biblical "prophets", such as Buddha (cf. Al-Bīrūnī, *Āthār*).

The *Living Gospel*, written in Aramaic, consists of 22 chapters or sections that allude to the Aramaic alphabet's 22 letters[7] (see Al-Bīrūnī, *Āthār*; Marwazī, *Kitāb ṭabā'i al-ḥayawān*; and Mīrkhwānd, *Rauḍat al-ṣafā*, ed. Taqīzādeh-Šīrāzī, cf. Reeves 2011, p.

[6] In this regard, see Andrea Piras (2022, pp. 37-38); Michel Tardieu (2008, pp. 34-48); François Decret (1974, pp. 74-79) and Geo Widengren (1961, pp. 79-83).

[7] Andrea Piras notes that Mani's choice of disseminating his writings had magical-evocative implications. This was due to the combination of alphabetic and iconic signs, which were applied to objects for exorcist purpose, such as the "magic cups" which were widespread in Sassanid Mesopotamia (Piras, 2012, pp. 29-30)

98, where Mani attributed a heavenly origin to his Gospel). It includes texts from both the New Testament and Pauline Epistles, along with a synthesis of Mani's doctrine. The *Treasury of the Living*, written in Syriac, is an apologetic work featuring themes of angelology and demonology. Its terminology reflects that of the biblical wisdom tradition (Piras 2022, p. 37; Tardieu 2008, p. 37). According to a Middle-Persian text (M 2 I and II) on the eastern missions of Mār Ammō, a prominent disciple of Mani, the Treasury was used in missionary work.

The *Book of the Mysteries* included an apologetic aspect and criticized other teachings, such as those of Bardaisan of Edessa. It also covered topics related to theology, cosmology, eschatology, and apocalyptic events. Other examples of Iranian-Christian synthesis are evident in the Mysteries, including a section focused on the legendary King Hystapes, who was converted by Zarathustra; this account is also found in Coptic literature. The Mysteries also contain other sections that explore significant themes, such as apocalyptic and prophetic topics, including Adam's testimony about Jesus (Piras, 2022, p. 37; Tardieu, 2008, pp. 38-39). The *Pragmateia*, known as *The Book of Legends*, was written in Syriac and comprised a collection of legends, myths, and narratives. It served as a form of erudite and pedagogical entertainment, as described by Piras (2022, p. 37).

The Book of Giants serves as a significant source for the Manichaean assimilation of Jewish traditions, expressing an Enochian apocalyptic tone. John Reeves (1992) thoroughly scrutinized its cosmogonic, cosmological, and angelological themes in his primary work exploring Mani's connection with Judaism. Furthermore, the Epistles capture Paul's attention on theological and missionary concerns, and the Book of Images showcases Mani's unique artistic talent.

Unfortunately, nearly all of the mentioned works, barring the *Šābuhragān*, which is not a canonical work, have been lost. Nevertheless, the content of Mani's canonical works is known through excerpts present in translations into Iranian languages, interpolations and commentaries in Coptic, verbatim quotations and commentaries in the *CMC*, and quotes from Islamic tradition and polemic literature. Comparing Medinet's *Kephalaia* with parts of Chester Beatty's 'Iranian' *Kephalaia* in Coptic literature allows modern research to identify the oldest layer of Mani’s religion more definitively. This has sparked numerous controversies regarding the origins of Manichaean research. Furthermore, Mani's religion displayed a visionary character in his perception of

prophetic activity and the apostolate. This thesis aims to analyze Manichaean visionary hermeneutics, considering historical issues and discernment between the oldest to youngest strata of religion, as well as cosmological and theological aspects beyond the purely historical.

Historians, as observed by Couliano (1991, p. 8), conclude that the transmission of ideas, such as visionary accounts featuring celestial ascensions, relies solely on written texts. However, Couliano suggests a simpler explanation: individuals produce thoughts consistent with their thought patterns. People also experience visionary phenomena, which may occur spontaneously or as part of a ritual, and they dream and enter into what anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere (1981, p. 175) has termed a "hypnomantic" state.

In this case, one can apply the thought patterns to the patterns of visionaries themselves. Thus, Mani, raised in a Baptist Christian environment in Iranian Mesopotamia under the influence of other Christian and Jewish currents, in addition to Syrian-Mesopotamian, Iranian, Indian religions, etc., exhibits characteristics similar to visionary traditions of other groups. This cannot be solely attributed to cultural transmission, as visions are not solely created by cultural influences[8]. With regards to Manichaeism, it can be argued that Mani himself recognized these similarities and that there is a visionary interpretation that precedes a textual interpretation, even in situations where the transmission is primarily textual and literary, as it was in the conversion of the king of Tūrān. This aspect of Manichaeism remains a consistent theme throughout the history of religion and will be further analyzed in the upcoming chapters.

As highlighted by Couliano (1991, p. 8), otherworldly journeys, heavenly ascensions, and visionary experiences existed long before the invention of writing. Mani is not only experiencing a transitional context in terms of popular transmission, but he is also an agent in the process of transforming visions in literature. With the advent of writing technology and the widespread distribution of books, interpreting visions has undergone a transformation. In Manichaeism, this has led to a symbiotic relationship between word and image, as the act of writing is perceived as having a divine and

[8] The connection between the two undoubtedly exists, but it is considerably more intricate and intricate due to the independence of the different viewpoints, as demonstrated by Gananath Obeyesekere (1981, 2012), and Dan Merkur (1993)

visionary source. Visions are recorded in text, ensuring their accurate transmission, and elevating their status as authoritative.

In addition to the prophetic authority of his apostolate, which Mani derived from his visionary experiences, he emphasized the eminently literary nature of his religion as a point of distinction from others. This is evident in a "prelude" to the *Kephalaia*, which is more of an introduction than a chapter, according to Iain Gardner. Listing the activities of those whom Mani considers his predecessors, the *Kephalaia* states that Zarathustra, the apostle of light and the splendid enlightener, traveled to Persia to meet with King Hystaspes (ⲁⲩⲉ ⲁϩⲟⲩⲛ ⲁⲧⲡⲉⲣⲥⲓⲥ ϣⲁ ϩⲩⲥⲧⲁⲥⲡⲏⲥ ⲡⲣⲣⲟ). He selected disciples (ϩⲙⲁⲑⲏⲧⲏⲥ), who were righteous men (ⲛⲇⲓⲕⲁⲓⲟⲥ) committed to the truth, and he shared his hope for Persia.

Zarathustra, however, did not write books (ⲍⲁⲣⲁⲇⲏⲥ ⲥⲁϩ ⲭⲱⲙⲉ ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ⲛⲉⲩ ⲙⲁⲑⲏⲧⲏⲥ ⲉⲧⲁⲩⲉ ⲙⲛ̄ⲛ̄ⲥⲱⲩ ⲁⲩⲣⲡⲙⲉⲩⲉ ⲁⲩⲥϩⲉ). His disciples, who came after him, wrote down their recollections. Buddha, like Zarathustra, also proclaimed his hope and great wisdom, chose his churches and perfected his churches; he didn't write down his wisdom in books. His disciples are those who recorded scriptures based on what they had heard. They authored the documents (*Ke. 1*, 13; Polotsky, 1940). Accordingly, Decret (1974, pp. 74-75) argues that Manichaeism adopted a “Religion of the Book” approach to prevent the issues that, from Mani's perspective, harmed religious revelations[9]: the distortion and modification of their original message. Mani believed he had the skills to overcome what he saw as a fundamental issue among religions. As Piras (2022, p. 39) notes, he was referred to as a "translator of religions" (*tarkumānān dēn*) in a Parthian preaching (M 38) and a skilled interpreter" (*hermēneutē*s) in the Coptic Homilies (III, 60, 30-31).

Additionally, these passages are significant for another reason: it is evident that the Holy Book's emphasis, alongside its symbolic and theological aspects in the Near East, suggests a viewpoint on the history of religions *ante litteram*. Mani hypothesizes

[9] It is intriguing to compare Mani's intuition with the Buddhist perspective. According to Y. Karunadasa, the Buddha also acknowledged another issue that arises with revelations, namely the possibility of distortion. This distortion can turn truth into a falsehood - a very perilous one, given that it comes from a superhuman authority (Karunadasa, 2018, pp. 162-163); This interpretation did not indicate an anti-visionary perspective, as visionary experiences and heavenly ascents are typical in all Buddhist traditions. Instead, it presents a different way of understanding the religion, one that distinguishes it from the category of “Religion of the Book.”

that the absence of sacred texts that documented and safeguarded the concepts of his forerunners was a crucial factor in the ultimate “degeneration” of their doctrines. The historical significance of Mani's perception can be better grasped by contextualizing the term "religion" as it was originally employed.

Jason BeDuhn (2015) argues that Mani was the first to theorize the concept of religion in a version analogous to that used in the modern scholarly discussion. BeDunh notes that while the concept of religion has often been considered inherently modern, this assertion is tautological. However, this does not preclude the possibility that pre-modern concepts identified similar socio-cultural entities that are now classify as part of the modern category of religion. BeDuhn contends that Mani and his third-century Iranian followers developed a concept that incorporated recognizable entities, including Christianity, Mazdayasnianism, Buddhism, Jainism, and their own Manichaean community (BeDuhn, 2015, p. 247). According to BeDuhn (2015, p. 248):

> The Manichaeans employed terms and expressions analogous to modern discussions of religions in that they refer to self-identifying communities that were not interchangeable or coterminous with ethnic or cultural identity, but organized around systems of discourse and practice that were ‘disembedded’ from a particular society and culture;4 within such communities, the members could understand themselves to share a set of markers and commitments that set them apart from others of the same ethnicity, and united them despite disparate ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

BeDuhn highlights that, in the *Šābuhragān*, Mani presented his religion within the pluralistic context of dēns, as also observed in Kerdīr's comments made almost fifty years later. However, Mani uniquely made this diversity the subject of a theory, commonly known as prophetology in specialized research. In his analysis, BeDuhn observes that Mani identifies parallels among different religions, particularly in their fundamental tenets and goals. Through this comparison, Mani asserts his own spiritual authority by situating himself within the lineage of earlier religious founders (BeDuhn, 2015, p. 266).

This shift in perspective regarding the religious phenomenon is evidenced by Mani's emphasis on his Babylonian heritage, which BeDuhn attributes to the traditional practice of considering each prophet as representative of a specific people. However, Andrea Piras (2022, p. 38) highlights an additional dimension of the designation

"Babylonian": Mani combines the Babylonian etymology of *Bāb ilāni* ("gate of the gods") with his contemporary salvation requirements. By doing so, Mani provides his religion with an all-encompassing foundation, making it the ultimate universal religion. This allows all other religions to enter through its gateway, without the historical-cultural burden attached to them. From Mani's perspective, he is not, in a sense, "uprooting" his doctrine but refining it.

Finally, the term *dēn*'s semantic value during Mani's time has instructional value regarding its prophetic perspective. It designated not just a "religion" but also referred to vision in certain contexts and the celestial image of eschatological and soteriological function known as *daēnā*. Obtaining this vision occurred in post-mortem or visionary ritualistic contexts, as attested by Kerdīr's inscriptions. Referring to BeDuhn's (2015) study, which interpreted *dēn* as "religion", Rezania (2020, [9]) asserts that the term originates from the Middle Persian lexeme, *daēnā-*, found in the Avesta. Rezania also contends that the root *di-*"to see" is common among Avestan lexemes, resulting in polysemy. Therefore, it is noteworthy that Manichaeism employs symbolic language related to light and darkness that serves not only as an ethical conflict but also as a cosmological. The interdependence of vision and light confirms the visual nature of cosmology.

c) Cosmology

the fundamental aspects of Manichaean cosmology[10] center on a conflict between Light and Darkness, instigated by the latter. According to Andrea Piras (2022, p. 84), both entities were seemingly boundless and initially unable to communicate with each other. This lack of communication may be responsible for the ‘monotheistic’ tone found in certain Manichaean writings (cf. Gardner, 2020). The conflict between these two principles is based on a metaphysical theory of time that divides temporality into three stages – beginning, middle, and end. The time leading up to the mixture and the eschatological process that results in the release of light particles is highly complex, particularly because the former was considered a mystery in Mani's religion, while the

[10] Regarding Manichaean cosmology, see Piras (2022, pp. 84-102); Tardieu (2008, pp. 34-48) and Gardner (2020, pp.87-94); for a detailed analysis of Manichaean cosmology in relation to the eidetic and artistic nature of Mani's doctrine, see Piras (2012). On the temporal dimension of Manichaean cosmology, see Heuser (1998).

latter included the contentious doctrine that not all light particles will be saved[11]. Moreover, Mani's originality and the pictorial character of his doctrine are related, as Piras emphasizes, to the fact that Mani is an artist and a lover of music (Piras, 2012, p. 16). Piras argues that Mani developed his system primarily as a painter rather than a philosopher, which is evident in the cosmological system based on intense sensory experiences of colors and odors (Piras, 2012, pp. 20-21). In sum:

> [C]omponente dottrinale ed estetica si compendiano nello sfondo di un dualismo che in questo caso è veramente ottico, visibile e iconico, e che si fa vestibolo della dimensione etica mostrandola e illustrandola; rendendola percepibile, nella esecuzione artistica di un'opera in cui l'insegnamento e la didattica, la parola e l'immagine si contemperano (davvero, *ut pictura poiesis*) nell'arte del libro e della scrittura che nella cultura letteraria del manicheismo raggiunse vertici di raffinatezza decorativa e ornamentale: facendo del libro un *medium* non solo de insegnamento ma anche di propaganda, da offrirsi alle masse dei fedeli o alla concorrenza dottrinale come oggetti di pregio[.] (Piras, 2012, p. 23)

For now, it is necessary to explain the key events during the middle time, which involves the blending of Light and Darkness. This will enable a better understanding of the soteriological role of Jesus and the concept of the body in Manichaeism. These topics will be addressed in chapter 1 and have implications for this entire thesis concerning Manichaean soteriology.

Michel Tardieu provides an overview of the cosmological events where the King of Darkness perceives the beauty of the Land of Light and subsequently prepares for an attack, which triggers the First War. Subsequently, the Father of Greatness responds by launching a series of "Calls" as part of the First Creation to thwart the King of Darkness. Instead, he engages in the war personally. Notably, the Father of Greatness refrains from deploying his dwellings, which he created for peace and prosperity. According to Mani, the Father of Greatness contacted the Mother of Life, who subsequently contacted the Primordial Man. The Primordial Man then called his five arms or sons (Tardieu, 2008, p. 76). Subsequent to these cosmogonic events, the Primordial Man was defeated, and the

[11] For more information on this topic, refer to the second section of chapter 2 in this thesis, which discusses the god Zurvān.

Father of Greatness responded for the second time by sending out new calls and rescuing the Primordial Man through the Living Spirit (Tardieu, 2008, p. 77).

The origin and existence of the two principles prior to mixing are unknown. According to the *Kephalaia*, their essence (οὐσία) cannot be proclaimed (ⲛⲁϣⲧⲉⲟⲩⲟ) or revealed (ⲛ̄ⲧⲥⲱⲗⲡ) by any human being (ⲣⲱⲙⲉ). (*Ke.* XXIII, 67, 1-6; Polotsky, 1940). One further reads in the *Kephalaion* XXIII, albeit its fragmentary character, that as for the eternity of[12] [...] (ϩⲁⲡⲣⲁ ⲛ̄ⲧⲙ̄ⲛ̄ⲧϣⲁⲁⲛϩⲉ ⲛ̄...), which have existed forever (ⲉⲧϣⲟⲟⲡ ϫⲛ̄ ⲛⲁⲛϩⲉ) no one is able to [reveal] what they are like; for there is no other power that can speak of their existence (ⲙⲛ ⲥⲁⲙ ⲛ̄ⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲁⲧⲣⲉϥ [ⲙ̄ⲙⲉ ϫ]ⲉ ⲉⲩϣⲟⲟⲡ ⲛ̄ⲉϣ ⲛ̄ϩⲉ). One can discuss, however, (ἀλλά), about the time when (darkness -- the King of Darkness) stirred and rose up against the light (ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ϫⲛ̄ ⲙⲡⲥⲛⲩ ⲛⲧⲁϥ ⲉ ⲧⲁϥⲕⲙ̄ⲧⲧ̄ ⲁϥϫⲉⲥⲧ̄ ⲁϩⲣⲙⲓ ⲟⲩⲃⲉ ⲡⲟⲩⲁⲓⲛⲉ), so that he might come to rule the land (χώρα) of the living (ⲉϥⲁⲉⲓ ⲛϥ̄ⲣ̄ⲣⲣⲟ ⲁⲧⲭⲱⲣⲁ ⲛⲧⲉ ⲛⲉⲧⲁⲛϩ) (*Ke.* XXIII, 67, 16-22; Polotsky, 1940).

Still in fragmentary form, the *Kephalaion XXIII* presents the central tenets of Manichaean cosmogony. According to the text, the First Man came to meet him and stopped (κωλύειν) him (ⲁ ⲡϣⲁⲣⲡ ⲛ̄ⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲉⲓ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ ⲟⲩⲃⲏϥ ⲁϥⲣ̄ⲕⲱⲗⲩ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲩ). The First Man kept him away from the House of Life (ⲙⲡⲏⲓ ⲛⲛⲉⲧⲁⲛϩ̄) and precluded its access (i.e., he prevented him; Greek: κωλύειν; Coptic: ⲁϥⲕⲱⲗⲩ). From then on, when light mixed with darkness (ⲡⲟⲩⲁⲓⲛⲉ ⲙⲟⲩϫⲧ ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ ⲡⲕⲉⲕⲉ) and life mixed with death (ⲡⲱⲛϩ̄ ⲙⲛ ⲡⲙⲟⲩ), there was the possibility for the Firstborn... [the] Apostle[13] to proclaim about them - to speak and reveal (ⲛ̄ⲥⲉⲥⲱⲗⲡ) how the strife and the battle took place, how the light was caught in the darkness, [. ...] and life was caught in death (ⲡⲱⲛϩ ϩⲙ̄ ⲡⲙⲟⲩ) (Ke. XXIII, 23-30; Polotsky, 1940, p. 67)

However, the Father of Greatness was aware of the War (πόλεμος) that disrupted the [Land of the] (χώρα) Light (ⲡⲟⲗⲉⲙⲟⲥ ⲁⲱⲧⲁⲣⲧⲡ ⲧⲭⲱⲣⲁ ⲙⲡⲟⲩⲁⲓⲛⲉ) [...] in the wisdom

[12] The two principles.

[13] ⲙ̄ⲡ]ϣⲁⲙⲓⲥⲉ . . . . ⲁ]ⲡⲟⲥⲧⲟⲗⲟⲥ; (Gardner: [for the] first-born [and the a]postle[s])

(σοφία) of his (ϩⲛ̄ ⲧⲥⲟⲫⲓⲁ ⲛ̄ⲧⲫⲙⲛⲧ) […], he went towards (ⲁⲫⲱⲃⲧ̄ⲫ ⲟⲩⲃⲏⲥ ⲛ) it [...] against (ⲟⲩⲃⲏⲥ) it (*Ke*. XXIII, 69, 1-6; Polotsky, 1940). Out of him [...] poured [...] into the elements (στοιχεῖον): in smoke (καπνός), fire, wind, water and darkness (ϩⲛ ⲛⲥⲧⲟⲓⲭⲉⲓⲱⲛ ϩⲙ ⲡⲕⲁⲡⲛⲟⲥ ⲧⲥⲉ ⲡⲧⲏⲩ ⲡⲙⲁⲩ ⲙ̄ⲙ̄ ⲡⲕⲉⲕⲉ) [. ...] remaining in the trees (ϩⲛ̄ ⲛⲱⲟⲏⲛ) (*Ke*. XXIII, 69, 12-16; Polotsky, 1940).

In *Kephalaion XVIII*, also known as "the sons of light (ⲛ̄ⲱⲟⲏⲣⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲟⲩⲁⲓⲛⲉ) engaged in five battles (ⲡϯⲟⲩ ⲙ̄ⲡⲟⲗⲉⲙⲟⲥ) against the sons of darkness, humiliating (ⲟⲃⲓⲟ[14]) the sons of darkness in all of them (ⲛ̄ⲱⲟⲏⲣⲉ ⲙⲡⲕⲉⲕⲉ ⲛϩⲏⲧⲟⲩ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ)" includes an important discussion of Mani's cosmogony. The first war (Ⲡⲱⲁⲣⲡ̄ ⲙ̄ⲡⲟⲗⲉⲙⲟⲥ) (*Ke*. XVIII, 58 1-19; Polotksy, 1940) describes the events of the battle between the First Living Man and the King of the Realms of Darkness and his archons (ⲡⲁⲡⲱⲁⲣⲡ ⲛ̄ⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲉⲧⲁⲛϩ ⲡⲉⲧⲁⲩ ⲉⲉⲩ ⲙ̄ⲙ̄ ⲡ̄ⲣⲣⲟ ⲛⲛⲁⲡⲕⲉⲕⲉ ⲙⲛ ⲛ̄ⲁⲣⲭⲱⲛ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ ⲉⲧⲁⲩⲉ). The First Man hunted down all the archons of darkness with his net (ⲡⲉⲩⲱⲛⲉ), which is the Living Soul (ⲉⲧⲉ ⲛⲧⲁⲩ ⲡⲉ ⲧ̀ⲩⲩⲭⲏ ⲉⲧⲁⲛϩ̄ ⲁⲩ). From this point on, the fragmentary text describes how the First Man captured the rulers of darkness with the trap (ϩⲛ̄ ⲧⲥⲁⲣⲥ ⲙⲛ) of his net (Ke. XVIII, 58, 10-11; Polotsky, 1940).

Furthermore, it is said that the First Man caught them like fish (ⲛϩⲛ̄ⲧ̄ⲃⲧ), and then cut (ⲁⲩⲱⲱⲧ) and uprooted (ⲁⲩⲡⲱⲣⲕ) the root of the five (trees?[15]). And the savior (ⲡⲥⲛⲣ) showed the axe (ⲡⲕⲁⲗⲁⲃⲓⲛ) that cut out the root of the evil soul (ⲧⲛⲟⲩⲛⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲱⲏⲛ) so that henceforth it will bear no more bad fruit (ⲕⲁⲣⲡⲟⲥ) (*Ke*. XVIII, 58, 14-19; Polotsky, 1940). The number five holds symbolic value in the *Kephalaia* accounts as it represents a quinary structure in Manichaeism (cf. Tardieu, 2008). Furthermore, the tree's symbolic significance, which can be traced back to the New Testament's parable of the good and

[14] Sahidic: ⲟⲉⲃⲓⲟ. Polotsky translated it as bezwangen die Söhne der Finsternis, which could mean to conquer or overcome (i.e. bezwingen), while Gardner kept the literal translation, The sons of light humiliated the sons of darkness in them all.

[15] The text is in a fragmentary state. Thereafter, one reads another sentence with lacunae, which said that "the root of the wicked tree (ⲛⲟⲩⲛⲉ ⲙⲡⲱⲏⲛ ⲉⲧϩⲁⲩ), like an axe (ⲛ̄ⲑⲉ ⲛⲟⲩⲕⲁⲗⲁⲃⲓⲛ)"

bad tree (Matthew 21:18), is widely acknowledged among scholars. From the sources, two trajectories of Manichaean dualism can be distinguished, with the first one emphasizing the clear Iranian accent in the war between the two principles. Piras notes similarities between epic and dramatic character in Mazdayanian cosmological narratives. For example, the first chapter of the *Bundahišn* describes Infinite Light and Infinite Darkness separated by a void, highlighting this connection and the contrast between Ormazd and Ahriman. Additionally, the opposition between two trees in *Kephalaion* XVIII highlights these similarities, incorporating Biblical, Gnostic, and Babylonian echoes, as Piras has pointed out (Piras, 2022, p. 85).

It is stated that during the Second War (*Ke.* XVIII,[16] 58, 20-31; Polotsky, 1940), the Living Spirit established (ⲁⲩⲥⲙⲓⲛⲉ) the things and worlds of light (ⲛ̅ⲛ̅ϩⲃⲏⲩⲉ ⲙ̅ⲛ̅ ⲛⲕⲟⲥⲙⲟⲥ ⲙ̅ⲡⲟⲩⲁⲓⲛⲉ). According to the Manichaean text, the archons revolted against the Living Spirit, which then imprisoned them. None of them were able to escape[17]. From there followed the Third War, which deals with the Third Ambassador (ⲙⲡⲣⲉⲥⲃⲉⲩⲧⲏⲥ), who manifested his image (εἰκών) (ⲡⲉⲧⲁϥⲟⲩⲱⲛϩ ⲧⲉϥⲓⲕⲱⲛ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ) (Ke. XVIII, 3-4, 59; Polotsky, 1940); the Fourth War (Ke. XVIII, 59, 19-20; Polotsky, 1940), which deals with the glorious Jesus, against all the rebels above and below (Ⲡⲙⲁϩⲣⲧⲁⲩ ⲙⲡⲟⲗⲉⲙⲟⲥ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲉⲓ ⲉⲧⲁ ⲓ̅ⲏ̅ⲥ̅ ⲡⲡⲁⲡⲉⲁⲩ ⲉⲉⲩ ⲙⲛ ⲛⲃⲉ̈ⲉ̈ⲩⲉ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ ⲉⲧⲁⲩⲃⲱϭⲥ ⲙ̅ⲡⲥⲁⲛⲧⲡⲉ ⲙ̅ⲛ̅ ⲡⲥⲁⲙⲡⲓⲧⲛⲉ) and the Fifth War, in a rather fragmentary state, in which the good are said to have been victorious over the wicked. From these early events, a closer examination of Manichaean cosmology can be pursued, particularly with regard to the function of gnosis in relation to cosmogony and soteriology.

[16] There are lacunae in this passage. Afterwards, it is said that the Living Spirit distributed (ⲁⲩⲥⲱⲣ) his archons (ⲛ̅ⲛ̅ⲁⲣⲭⲱⲛ) and bound them in the midst of [...] the stars in [...] the lands [...] them in the tree vessels).

[17] Or "save" (ⲛ̅ⲧ̅ⲥⲁϩⲙⲉ), e.g., Gardner (1995, p. 63); see Polotsky (1940, p.59) "ⲙ̅ⲡⲉ ⲟⲩⲉ ⲛ̈ϩⲙ ⲧⲟⲩ ⲱⲛⲟⲩϩⲙⲉ ⲛ̅ⲧ̅ⲥⲁϩⲙⲉ".

First Part: The visionary dimension of Manichaean gnosis.

Chapter 1

1.1 Manichaean Christology

To comprehend the role that Jesus held in Mani's doctrine, it is imperative to analyze the origins of Manichaean Christianity[18] and pinpoint the specific route Mani took among the various options of early Christianity. Initially, it is crucial to redirect attention from "Christianity" as a singular religion towards what Gerd Theissen (2004) referred to as the "Jesus movement[19]." Thus, the spread of the Jesus movement in both the East and West enables us to identify distinct features of the different forms of Christianity that emerged, particularly those discovered by Mani.

Christianity in the Syro-Mesopotamian[20] region and in Iran[21] was assimilated into the local cults and traditions. This adaptation illustrates the particularities of Mani's

[18] Henri-Charles Puech (2006, p. 115) noted in the 1970s the importance of transcending the responses to inherited conceptions by heresiologists and the emerging theories on the origins of Manichaeism as primarily an "oriental religion," driven mainly by recent discoveries of Manichaean texts in Turfan, which downplayed the significance of Christianity in Mani.

[19] Gerd Theissen (2008) posits in his sociological analysis of the Jesus movement that the charism served as a catalyst for value change, where Jesus takes on a paradigmatic model. Theissen further divides the Jesus movement into three subgroups: Jesus as the central charismatic, itinerant preachers as secondary charismatics, and sympathizers as tertiary charismatics. Sociologically, Theissen argues that the formation of a network centered around Jesus resulted from the interaction of three groups (Theissen, 2008, p. 49). This network exhibited a charismatic symbiosis where the followers of Jesus participated in his charism.

[20] According to François Decret (1974, p. 28), Antioch, the capital of western Syria, served as a base of departure for the spread of Christianity to Osroena, in the region of Upper Mesopotamia, and across the Tigris to Adiabene, although it's not known who the first missionaries were. The significance of Syro-Mesopotamian Christianity is relevant to Apamea, as Puech (1985, p. 60-61) posits that the region was in proximity to Antioch and thus could not have avoided influence from Christianity. Moreover, it served as a nexus of Eastern and Western Mediterranean conceptions. Another significant factor in the spread of Christianity in Syria was the presence of Judaism in the region. According to Maurice Sartre (2002, p. 115), numerous Jewish settlements existed in major cities, particularly Antioch. This was one of the reasons for the early development of Christianity in the area. Alongside Antioch, Edessa played a crucial role as a hub and catalyst for new Christian doctrines in the eastern spread. For Manichaeism, the remarks made by Gillman and Kilmkeit (1999, p. 33) concerning the existence of Marcionite and Bardesanite Christianity, as well as Christian syncretism with local cults, are noteworthy as Marcion and Bardaisan of Edessa were fundamental philosophers and theologians for Mani's doctrine. Additionally, H. J. W. Drijvers (1980, p. 194) notes that the ancient Christianity pattern in Edessa showcases how diverse groups with distinct viewpoints engaged in conflict, highlighting the competitive nature of early Christianity, which is frequently overlooked due to the uncritical application of categories from apologetics to the history of religions.

[21] Gillman and Klimkeit (1999, p. 110) note that Christianity was able to flourish in Iran during the Sassanid empire despite the Zoroastrian clergy. In the second chapter, it will be argued that the Manichaean use of ideas from the apocalyptic writings of the Apostle Paul underlies the conflict between Mani and Kerdīr in religious matters - two important figures in the crystallization of the concept of religion (cf. BeDuhn, 2015), briefly outlined in the introduction to this thesis. Of great significance to Mani was his upbringing in the Baptist community of Elchasaite Christianity. According to Michel Tardieu (2008, p. 6-9), Mani's

doctrine, forming the intellectual and cultural context from which he would elaborate his religion. It also provides a hermeneutical horizon for his visions and ritual practices. Moreover, the perspectives on Jesus' divine character yielded diverse responses and formulations in both the East and West. In this context, the apostle Paul was essential. The reception and interpretation of Pauline Christology catalyzed numerous controversies in both the Syrian-Mesopotamian environment of Mani and the Western Mediterranean, ultimately shaping the concepts of "orthodoxy" and "heresy".

First, the function of Jesus within the cosmogonic myth exposed in the introduction of this thesis will be examined, since it makes explicit the difference between the intellectual models of Iranian Mesopotamia and those of the western Mediterranean; thus, as the Jesus movement spread between its western and eastern branches, each Christian group assimilated the ideas underlying the cultures in which it found itself. Hence, Manichaeism has clear elements from the Iranian-Mesopotamian[22] region where it originated that were not found in Christianity within the Roman Empire.

Only in a later period did the search for greater uniformity and ultimately the codification of orthodox opinions lead to the labeling of these diverse forms of Christianity as "heretical". However, this distinction can lead to numerous misconceptions in academic circles as it projects a late theological typology onto history. The concept of "heresy" (αἵρεσις) only referred to a "group" or "school of thought," making the heresiological use of "deviation from a form" a later polemical invention[23].

After examining the Manichaean Christological paradigm present in the cosmogonic myth, the next step is to analyze the Pauline-Marcionite stratum of Mani's

worldview was influenced by both Elchasaite Christianity and the legendary accounts of Syriac Christianity pertaining to the apostle Thomas, which were linked to the training necessary for a future prophet.

[22] Regarding Mesopotamian elements, Geo Widengren's *Mesopotamian Elements in Manichaeism* (1946) remains the leading study of the influence of Mesopotamian religions on Mani's doctrine. see also Mehmet-Ali Ataç's more recent study, *Manichaeism and Ancient Mesopotamian "Gnosticism*" (2005)

[23] The term αἵρεσις originally referred to a group or school of thought (Bauer; Danker, 2021, p. 24; Diggle, 2021, p. 35; Liddel; Scott, 1996, p. 41). Only during the period of disputes between various Christian groups did the term come to signify an "error" or deviation from the correct perspective, i.e. orthodoxy.According to Polymnia Athanassiadi (2006, p. 21) “lentement, le mot commence à acumuler des connotations negatives qui relèvent d’une nouvelle conception de la vérité em même temps qu’elles marquent um rétrécissement des voies de la tolérance [...] la αἵρεσις-choix de vie devient l’hérésie, autrement dit um façon de voir, de penser et de sentir perverse et, de ce fait, condamnable et punissable”. Furthermore, Athanassiadi (2006, p. 26) observed that this new concept of heresy entered late Platonic philosophy by osmosis. This does not mean that the old usage (school of thought) was completely lost. Porphyry, repeating the testimony of Bardaisan of Edessa about India, uses the term αἵρεσις in the sense of a school or philosophical perspective (Τούτων δὲ δύο αἱρέσεις- ὧν τῆς μὲν Βραχμᾶνες προΐστανται , τῆς δὲ Σαμαναῖοι; De Abstinentia, 17, 1; Girgenti; Sodano, 2005, p. 338).

thought, in which the resurrection of Christ is an important theme for those who come after Jesus; in this way, the visions one has of Jesus are reflected in Christology - in the vision of the nature of Jesus and the nature of one's own body. Paul is not only a source of intellectual influence but also a visionary model. Finding the "living" Jesus requires seeing him through visions rather than solely in literature. Therefore, Mani's visions, which have distinct teachings from those of the historical Jesus, are deemed as credible revelations originating from Jesus himself. We can see a relationship in the prelude that emphasizes the importance of the sacred book and revelation, with the book serving as a vision and the vision as a book.

The portrayal of Jesus in Manichaeism is multifaceted, featuring in various contexts, including cosmology, soteriology, and Manichaean ontology. Eugen Rose (1979) conducted a groundbreaking study on Manichaean Christology, thoroughly reviewing existing literature on the topic. His findings indicate that many sources were not acknowledged and that some works addressed the issue of the Manichaean Jesus marginally, with a concession to Christianity that were deemed irrelevant to the original system (Rose, 1979, p. 8). Therefore, Rose conducted a comprehensive analysis of all Manichaean Christological sources in his study, which encompasses Islamicate accounts as well as polemical literature. The goal was to interpret the sources based on Mani's church history, placing them within a systematic context. (Rose, 1979, p. 17).

Nils Arne Pedersen (1988, p. 158) agrees with Rose that Manichaeism arose as a response to the existential problem of the coexistence of evil, and that this experience is the primary explanation for Manichaeism's dualism. However, this does not seem the case, since Mani was well-versed in the Mazdaean tradition, rendering his dualism to be a distinct non-Christian Iranian trait. Nonetheless, the problem of evil can indeed be observed within the comprehensive Manichaean Christology due to its prominent connection with soteriology.

Rose's (1979) analysis identified various "types" of the figure of Jesus, namely the Redeemer Jesus (Microcosmic Redeemer), the Sufferer Jesus, the Historical Jesus, the Eschatological Jesus, and the Cosmic Jesus (Macrocosmic Redeemer). Meanwhile, Nils Arne Pedersen (1988, p. 157) discerned six hypostases of Jesus in Manichaeism, with Jesus as an active redeemer and Jesus as a passive suffering figure representing the central organizing principle of Manichaean Christology. This classification of Jesus, while useful

for analysis, runs the risk of losing the organic nature of Manichaean Christology, particularly its theological importance. For this reason, Iain Gardner argues that analyzing the meaning of Jesus in Manichaeism for historical changes and doctrines is an important academic exercise. However, as Gardner has warned, it should not be conflated with the perception of Jesus held by the Manichaean believer (Gardner, 1991, p. 72).

As Gardner has noted, the narrative of the Living Soul in Manichaeism, which includes its descent, passion, and redemption, is not simply a borrowing of images from the life of Jesus, but rather is interpreted as the true essence of Jesus' suffering (Gardner, 1991, p. 72). Jesus' passion, therefore, is a cosmic event in Manichaeism, associated with the mainlines of its cosmology. That being said, I can proceed now to the analysis of Jesus' role in the Manichaean cosmogony. According to the description in *Kephalaion* XVIII, which chronicles the five battles (ϯογ ⲙ̄ⲡⲟⲗⲉⲙⲟⲥ) against the sons of darkness (ⲙⲛ̄ ⲛ̄ϣⲛⲣⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲕⲉⲕⲉ), critical instances of Manichaean cosmogony occurred in the form of confrontations involving the First Man, the Living Spirit, and the Third Ambassador.

Regarding Jesus' role, the Fourth War was waged by him, referred to as Jesus the Splendor, against all the rebels above and below (Ⲡⲛⲁϩⲣⲏⲧⲁⲩ ⲙⲡⲟⲗⲉⲙⲟⲥ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲉⲓ ⲉⲧⲁ ⲓⲏⲥ ⲡⲡⲁⲡⲉⲁⲩ ⲉⲉϥ ⲙⲛ ⲛⲃⲉ̈ϫⲉⲩⲉ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ ⲉⲧⲁⲩⲃⲱϭⲥ ⲙ̄ⲡⲥⲁⲛⲧⲡⲉ ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ ⲡⲥⲁⲙⲡⲧⲛⲉ). Jesus, the glorious one, carried on the action of the Third Ambassador who had previously shown his image, purifying (ⲥⲱⲧⲏ̄) the Light (ⲡⲟⲩⲁⲓⲛⲉ) within the rebels and ultimately weakening their grip. Jesus fulfilled the desire for greatness and provided Adam with hope (*Ke*. XVIII, 59, 19-33; Polotsky, 1940).

In *Kephalaion* XIX (61, 17-24; Polotsky, 1940) concerning the 5 liberations (releases) and what they are, it is stated, albeit in a fragmentary manner, that the fourth salvation (Ⲧⲛⲁϩⲣⲏⲧⲟⲉ ⲛⲥⲓⲛⲛⲟⲩϩⲙⲉ) is that of Jesus the Splendor (ϫⲁⲓⲛⲥ ⲡⲡⲣ ⲉ) because when he manifested himself (ⲣⲉϥⲟⲩⲱⲛ̄ϩ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ) in the ζώνη (ϩⲛ̄ ⲧⲍⲱⲛⲏ), he showed [his] image (εἰκών) from the firmament (στερέωμα) (ⲁϥⲟⲩⲱⲛϩ ⲧⲉϥϩⲓⲕⲱⲛ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ ⲛⲁϩⲣⲛ̄ ⲛⲥⲧⲉⲣⲉⲱⲙⲁ) and purified [the light] that was above (ⲁϥⲥⲱⲧϥ ⲙ̄ⲡⲟⲩⲁⲓⲛⲉ ⲉⲧⲙ̄ⲡⲥⲁⲛⲧⲡⲉ). He established the first righteous ἀρχιδικ[αστής(?)] (ⲁϥⲥⲙⲓⲛⲉ ⲙⲡⲁⲣⲭⲓⲇⲓⲕ...)[...] of all the churches (ἐκκλησία) (ⲭⲏ ⲛ̄ⲛⲉⲕⲕⲗⲏⲥⲓⲁ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ ⲁϥⲭⲓ ⲡⲉⲓⲛⲉ). He took on the likeness... ... he

became like the angels (ἀγγέλους) (ⲁⲫⲧⲛⲧⲱⲛ̄ⲫ ⲁⲛⲁⲓⲧⲉⲗⲟⲥ) in the... [...] until he went and descended into the form (πλάσμα) of the flesh and established the earth and all its creations.

Regarding the relationship between Jesus and cosmogony, on one hand, and between a 'cosmic' Jesus and his embodied counterpart on the other, this latter part of the *Kephalaion* XIX is of great interest, since it relates the Jesus the Splendor to his earthly incarnation, which in Manichaeism is known as Jesus the Messiah. The initial observation is that a docetic understanding and an emphasis on the incarnation – Jesus' corporeality – are not in conflict Christologically. Concerning the historical figure of Jesus, there are relevant passages from the Iranian corpus of Manichaean texts which can provide clarification. In the Parthian text M 132, translated by Klimkeit (1993, p. 73), it is said that Jesus

> [remained?] holy (*šōž*) (and) without [grief] when he was brought in and led to the great ruler (*hēgemōn*). And Pilate (<pyltys>) asked [him], "[Are you] in truth [king (*šāh*)] in the house (*kadag*) of Jacob (*yākōb*) and among the children (*tōxm*) of Israel? (*sraēl*)" The righteous (*razwar*) interpreter (tarkumān) (<trkwm'n rzwr>) (Jesus) answered Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world". Then, at the urging of the Jews, he bound him and [sent] him to king Herod (*hirodos*) (hyrdws š'ẖ). […] [Silently] he stood there. And king Herod…clothed (him) with a garment (*padmōžan*) (<pdmwc'd pdmwcn>) and put [a crown of thorns] on his head. They came to pay homage, they covered his head, they hit (him) on the chin and mouth with a cane, they spat into his eyes and said, "Prophesy for us, Lord Messiah!". Then the Romans (the soldiers) came and fell down (before him) there times. For he constantly turned his beautiful countenance to them and (let them hear his) voice, in his great miraculous power.

The crucifixion is also emphasized in another Parthian text which says "that we all (*harwīn*) know (*zānām*) that Jesus Christ (Jesus the Messiah; <yyšwyc mšyh'ẖ>), our lord (*xwadāy*) was crucified (*dārūβδag*) (M 4570, Boyce, 1975; see also Klimkeit, 1993, p. 129). In the Coptic Psalms (*Psalm of Constancy*), it is said that all the beatified ones (i.e. Adam, Sethel, Enoch, etc.) endured such sufferings, that is, the whole cosmic tragedy that followed the attack by the forces of darkness. Thus, putting it into cosmic context, the Psalm recounts the events of Christ's passion, including the placement of a crown of

thorns on his head, being beaten and spat upon, being crucified on a cross (σπαυρός) with four nails, and receiving wine, vinegar, and myrrh (*I Salmi degli erranti*, III, Pernigotti, cf. Gnoli, 2006, p.72)

These passages highlight how the multifaceted aspect of Jesus necessitates understanding Mani's Christology within the main myth of Manichaeism. Focusing on the cosmic and incarnate aspects, it is evident that Jesus played a crucial soteriological role. However, this thesis is not new, and it is one of the essential aspects of E. Rose's work. The issue, in reality, stems from scholars attempting to position Manichaean Christology in the broader context of Christologies present during the time of Mani. Generally speaking, the interpretation of the "cosmic" and "incarnate" aspects aligns with docetic and anti-docetic conceptions. It is notable that the Jesus of Mani lacks an earthly origin, rather he is an essential envoy of the Father of Greatness, thus emphasizing the docetic aspect. However, the Manichaeans emphasize the incarnation of Jesus and the event of the Passion, indicating their affirmation of Jesus' suffering during his earthly life.

Pedersen highlights certain passages in the Coptic Manichaean literary corpus (Ke. 12.24-26; Psalm-book, 194.1-3) that address the topic of Jesus' phantom body. These sections recount the unsuccessful efforts to kill Jesus once his phantom body is discovered, emphasizing its supernatural qualities and invulnerability to death. Pedersen observed that in both versions, Jesus is victorious as he deceives Death and the Devil into thinking that he has been crucified. This event in the crucifixion becomes a redemptive one, symbolizing a victory of the Light over darkness, which according to Pedersen, accounts for the 'orthodox' accent of the descriptions (Pedersen, 1988, p. 171).

Passages from the *Kephalaia* (Ke. XVIII and XIX) and the Iranian corpus of Manichaean texts (M 132 and M 4570) indicate the coexistence of docetic and "orthodox" interpretations in the Christology of Manichaeism. Such interpretations reflect crucial elements of Mani's cosmology and theology, leading to divergent scholarly opinions. Scholars' disparate assessments partly stem from an indiscriminate use of the "docetic" concept that denies a literal and hence "orthodox" account of the passion's events. However, according to Gregory Riley, the concept of docetism is confused due to Christian culture being isolated from Hellenic ontologies and theological polemics being inserted into the study of Christologies. These polemics create a pseudo-chronology

where docetism is viewed as a late and secondary phenomenon rather than coexisting with other Christologies.

The crucifixion, according to Manichaean theology, exemplifies the divine benevolence and victory over matter in line with the Manichaean myth. Thus, it can be argued that the incarnation in matter is a benevolent act, whose sacrifice not only redeems but also proves that Jesus, as Jesus Splendor, did not succumb to death. On the contrary, he triumphed over it, as his true essence was not destroyed. Moreover, the unique aspects of Mani's Christology cannot be solely attributed to textual factors. It is important to take into account the influence of his visionary experiences on his conception of Christology and his overarching vision of Christianity. With this in mind, delving into the portrayal of the body in narratives of journeys to other worlds is a worthwhile pursuit.

All Christology[24], inasmuch as it endeavors to disclose a cosmic-salvific aspect behind the life of Jesus, is interpretive; and Manichaean Christology is no exception. As stated earlier in this chapter, Mani's ideas have both original elements and influences from the Syro-Mesopotamian and Iranian milieu in which he was born, such as the Baptist communities (which will be explored in the third topic of this chapter), Iranian religions, and the influence of Pauline and Marcionite Christologies (which will be examined in the next topic).

1.2 The Apostle Paul, Mani's visions of Jesus and their reflection in the concept of σῶμα

The concept of docetism has significant implications for interpreting Manichaean Christology, particularly with regards to the doctrine of Christ's Resurrection. The perspective of so-called docetic Christologies in relation to the resurrection did not necessarily deny the resurrection itself. Firstly, Gregory Riley has demonstrated that concepts of resurrection were not limited to Christianity. There was a discourse on what a post-mortem resurrection or rebirth would entail, which could have ontological implications for the connection between the human soul or consciousness and the body. In the Christian context, there was debate about what would make up the resurrection

[24] For a study on the diversity of early Christian experiences and the methodological debates surrounding the interpretation of Christianity, refer to Smith (1990). Specifically, page 38 addresses the issue of the adjective 'unique', which can turn it into an ontological rather than a taxonomic category in the study of Christianity.

body, specifically, its nature. Marcion, typically known as a "docetic Gnostic," a category that has faced criticism, may have envisioned the Resurrection body as a spiritual body[25], a concept not vastly different from Paul's resurrection of the spiritual-pneumatic body.

The topic of this discussion centers on the impact of Jesus' views on the body concept. Paul's visionary experiences with the risen Christ made him question the nature of Christ's body and this leads to the question of whether Mani's apostolate follows Paul's intellectual framework and visionary status. Additionally, it is worth considering the extent to which Mani's visions impacted his understanding of matter and the body, which are key components of his gnosis and soteriological practices.

The Pauline epistles have been a subject of ongoing debate. The fact that Marcion systematized Pauline theology implies multiple and conflicting perspectives. In a review of the historiography of Pauline studies, Stanley E. Porter noted that modern research has focused on the diversity of Paul's thought (Porter, 2006, p. 7). Defining the center of Pauline theology remains a challenge. The return of Christ, known as the parousia, held significant importance in his eschatology. However, over time, Paul's anticipation for Jesus' return during his lifetime shifted as he realized he would not live to witness the parousia (Porter, 2006, p.7).

Porter contends that a significant number of Pauline theological elements were not originally created by Paul, but rather were adopted from previous traditions. Therefore, it is doubtful whether they can truly be considered central to Paul's original reflections (Porter, 2006, p. 11-12). Investigating the influence of the Pauline corpus on proto-Catholic, and Gnostic circles, as well as other groups such as the Marcionites and Manichaeans, may yield fruitful avenues of inquiry.

Based on 1 Corinthians 1:17, Walter Schmithals (1984, p. 31) argues that the "false Corinthian teachers" teach a "false wisdom" instead of the cross. Thus, Schmithals suggests that Paul would have defended himself against Gnostic "preaching". Schmithals derives his argument from Paul's statement that he did not preach the good news (εὐαγγελίζεσθαι) through the discourse of wisdom (οὐκ ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου), so that the cross of Christ may not be emptied (ἵνα μὴ κενωθῇ ὁ σταυρὸς τοῦ Χριστοῦ) (1 Cor. 1:17). There are various issues with the prevalent misconception in certain theological circles.

[25] See Lieu, 2017, p. 266

Sociologically speaking, establishing a methodical Gnostic theology[26] during the 1st century CE presents challenges (Perkins, 1993, p. 91).

Helmut Koester (1982, p. 121) contends that 1 Corinthians 1 is not a polemical or apologetic treatise; rather, it includes the basic elements of parenesis, Church organization, and eschatological instructions. He accepts, as did Schmithals, that Paul's opponents were proto-Gnostics or Gnostics. Pheme Perkins emphasized the most challenging aspect of Schmithals' thesis- his theory divides two key components which most of the interpreters agree are essential for re-evaluating the opponents of Paul in Colossians. These two aspects include Judaizing or Gnosticizing speculations, which try to liken the figure of Christ to one of the heavenly powers (Perkins, 1993, p. 77).

Moreover, Paul was not a systematic theologian, and his Christology encompassed a mystical dimension based on his personal visionary experiences. As Segal adeptly observed, due to the ecstatic nature of Paul's experiences, no one deemed it necessary to examine them in relation to the Jewish mystical tradition and its ritual practices (Segal, 1990, p. 52). Segal explored the language used to describe biblical theophanies and visions of God, taking into account the Merkabah mysticism and apocalyptic tradition and their precursors. He identified recurring tropes indicating comparison and likeness, such as *mar'eh*, *demuth*, *tavnith*, and *ṣelem*, all within a visionary framework (Segal, 1990, p. 52). Similarly to the use of apophatic mysticism and its corresponding terminology, Segal asserts that terms pertaining to comparison and similarity have a significant role in theophanies, shielding the vision of God from the ordinary vision humans possess. Segal highlights the translation of the Hebrew demuth in Ezekiel (1:26, LXX) to the term eidos as an intriguing example (Segal, 1990, p. 52).

The significance of Paul's visions for his Christology can be explained in part through his concept of resurrection. As emphasized by James Carleton Paget (2012, p. 74-75) in his review of Vinzent's book[27], the Apostle assigned great importance to the Resurrection because it was foundational to his apostolate. In contrast to the apostles who knew Jesus while he was alive, Paul was a later generation Christian. The ecstatic

[26] Moreover, Elaine Pagels identified an additional issue, namely, the Pauline influence within Gnostic circles (Pagels, 1992, pp. 1-2). Perkins, for instance, remarked that the supposed "Gnostic" elements that Paul aimed to disprove are actually the same elements that generated his impact in Valentinian circles (Perkins, 1993, p. 91).

[27] For his criticisms and disagreements with Vinzent's thesis, see Carleton Paget, 2012, pp. 79-83.

experiences exemplify this aspect of his belief system. This statement by Paget applies equally to Manichaeism and elucidates why Mani esteemed Paul highly. Mani asserted his authority and apostolic mission in his visionary experiences. Historically, Mani had to interpret aspects of his visions in relation to previous traditions, as is evidenced in the history of Christianity. This allowed the autonomous and original dimension of his visions to guide his interpretation of preceding events, while the earlier tradition provided him with a framework for understanding his views.

Mani ended up founding a new religion. He deviated from the traditional framework of biblical prophets by incorporating Buddha and Zarathustra into his lineage. Despite the Jewish and Christian structure of this prophetic notion, situated in the broader environment of the Near East, the inclusion of extra-biblical 'prophets' in Mani's perspective allowed him to integrate not only external aspects of these religions, but also their structures of thought. For example, Manichaeism developed a Buddhology in contrast to a Christology as it spread throughout Central Asia.

In 1 Corinthians 15 (12-13), Paul explores the concept of resurrection the dead. His account indicates that some individuals opposed the notion of post-mortem resurrection. This belief was integral to Paul's eschatology, and he posits that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ cannot have been resurrected (εἰ δὲ ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν οὐκ ἔστιν, οὐδὲ Χριστὸς ἐγήγερται). But what was the nature of the body of the risen Jesus? Elsewhere (1. Cor. 15:33), Paul addresses the question of how the dead are raised and what type of body they receive. Paul notes that there is no single variety of 'body' or 'flesh' in the world. This includes flesh types among human beings, livestock, farm animals, birds, and fish (οὐ πᾶσα σάρξ ἡ αὐτὴ σὰρξ ἀλλὰ ἄλλη μὲν ἀνθρώπων, ἄλλη δὲ σὰρξ κτηνῶν, ἄλλη δὲ σὰρξ πτηνῶν, ἄλλη δὲ ιχθύων). Additionally, when Paul refers to heavenly bodies (σώματα ἐπουράνια), he speaks of "glory" instead of flesh and underscores the diverse "glories" of those bodies.

These observations of Paul's vision's ritual and ecstatic context, in addition to the range of cosmological conceptions from the Mediterranean and Near Eastern worlds, hold significant historical importance. One issue in examining primitive Christianity is the often implicit, and mistaken, separation of Christian communities from contemporaneous philosophical-religious groups, along with the variety of competing Christian groups. Within specialized research, Stowers highlights an anachronism in the belief that Paul's

God lacks ontology or exists beyond ontology. This perspective coincidentally aligns with modern Christian theology (Stowers, 2017 p. 233).

Recently, scholars have noted the use of Stoic terminology in key issues of Pauline Christology in order to connect Paul with his intellectual context. Troels Engberg-Pedersen (2010, p. 39) argues for the significance of the Stoic concept of pneuma in Paul's idea of resurrection (1 Corinthians 1), wherein pneuma is understood as a bodily entity with a physical constitution similar to stars and other celestial bodies. Such a connection between human beings and celestial bodies – or with astral deities whose symbolic representation was observed in celestial bodies – was extensively explored and debated in the cosmologies of Late Antiquity, which were heavily influenced by astrology.

Troels Engberg-Pedersen (2010) summarized two readings of Paul's concept of pneuma: 1) an interpretation aligned with Middle Platonism, as seen in Philo of Alexandria, where pneuma is an immaterial and non-corporeal phenomenon; and 2) an apocalyptic interpretation where pneuma is also considered apocalyptic and its ontological foundation is not questioned. Engberg-Pedersen (2010) suggests that while the apocalyptic interpretation has merit, it is important to also consider Paul's overall perspective on pneuma in line with 1 Cor. 15. This raises questions about the corporeal understanding of pneuma, which have philosophical and even stoic implications.

In *Kephalaion* I, the text references both the pneumatic Jesus and the role of Paul in Christianity. Thus, following Mani's theory of religion, Paul is seen as a central figure in spreading the teachings of Jesus, but those teachings were corrupted in the decline of the post-Pauline church. In light of the Pauline epistles and their Christological commentaries, the idea of Mani's apostleship takes on new shapes. Contacts with Jesus, following the events of the Passion, are facilitated by visionary experiences, henceforth supporting communication amongst the generation subsequent to the period of Jesus' teaching, including the likes of Paul and Mani. Thus, in addition to the previously stated cosmogonic model used to interpret Jesus, there exists a complementary visionary model. The *CMC* includes quotes from the Pauline epistles that assist in understanding the significance of the Pauline apostolate model for Mani.

In *CMC* (9; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, pp. 72-73), it is reported that the Apostle Paul was raptured to the third heaven (2. Cor. 12-2), as he said in the Epistle to the Galatians (I,1) (ὃν τρόπον καὶ ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος ἴσμεν ὅτι ἡρπάγη ἕως τοῦ τρίτου οὐρανοῦ,

καθὼς λέγει ἐν τῆι πρὸς Γαλάτας ἐπιστολῇ): "Paul, an Apostle, not by men or through [works of]man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead." (Παῦλος ἀπόστολος οὐκ ἀπ'ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ δι'ἀνθρώπου, ἀλλὰ διὰ 'Ιησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ Θεοῦ Πατρὸς τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν).

Furthermore, the Mani Codex quotes 2 Corinthians to state that Paul said (καὶ ἐν τῆι πρὸς Κορινθίους δευτέραι (12, 1-5) λέγει): "I will return to the visions and revelations of the Lord (ἐλεύσομαι πάλιν εἰς ὀππασίας καὶ ἀποκαλύψεις κυρίου). I know a man in Christ, whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know, only God knows (οἶδα ἄνθωπον ἐν Χριστῶι - εἴτε ἐν σώματι εἴτε ἐκτὸς σώματος οὐκ οἶδα, θεὸς οἴδεν), who was raptured in Paradise and heard words that can't be uttered by a human being (ὅτι ἡρπάγη ὁ τοιοῦτος εἰς τὸν παράδεισον καὶ ἤκουσεν ἄρρητα ῥήματα ἃ οὐκ ἐξὸν ἀνθρώπωι λαλῆσαι). On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast" (61:1-23; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, p. 70). And the following quotation from Galatians (I, 11-2) is particularly pertinent: "I prove to you, brethren, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ." (δείκνυμι, ἀδελφοί, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ὃ εὐαγγελισάμην ὑμῖν ὅπι οὐκ ἐξ ἀνθρώπου αὐτὸ παρείληφα οὐδὲ ἐδιδάχθην ἀλλὰ δι'ἀποκαλύψεως 'Ιησοῦ Χριστοῦ).

Finally, the concluding statement of this chapter in the CMC (Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, pp. 72-74) states that the blessed apostles, saviors, evangelists, and prophets of truth, each seized the opportunity to preach the living hope as it was revealed to them. They wrote, preached, and deposited it for the remembrance of future generations of the Holy Spirit's children who comprehended their voice's spiritual importance (καὶ τὸ πέρας δὲ πάντες οἱ μακαριώτατοι ἀπόστολοι καὶ σωτῆρες καὶ εὐαγγελισταὶ καὶ τῆς ἀληθείας προφῆται ἕκαστος αὐτῶν ἐθεώρησεν καθ' ὃν ἀπεκαλύφθη αὐτῷ ἐλπὶς ἡ ζῶσα πρὸς τὸ κήρυγμα καὶ ἔγραψαν καὶ καταλελοίπασιν καὶ ἀπέθεντο εἰς ὑπόμνησισ τῶν ἐσομένων υἱῶν τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος καὶ γνωσομένων τῆς φωνῆς αὐτοῦ τὴν αἴσθησιν).

This final passage makes very clear the relationship between the Holy Book and the revelation that supports it. According to Manichaean Christianity, Paul's Christology reflects visionary experiences and offers additional rationale for Mani's religious advancements. In conjunction with the intellectual and cultural aspect mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, namely the spread of Jesus' traditions throughout the

Mediterranean and the Near East, which produced different aspects of Christianity as they adapted to local cultures, Mani's visionary and ecstatic character functions as a hermeneutical authority. Not only in the exegetical sense of interpreting scriptures but also prophetically authorized to renew and complete ancient religions based on new revelations.

Paul's mystical and visionary paradigm, which includes heavenly ascensions and apocalyptic knowledge of Jesus, is a fundamental aspect of Manichaean Christianity. It serves as a validation of Mani's apostolate, demonstrating his ability to present ancient religious messages, including Christianity, in a new light through visionary practices rather than solely through theological study. In other words, Paul the apostle and visionary's paradigm utilized apocalyptic hermeneutics that were later universalized by Mani. This method was employed to interpret and theorize various religions, including Christianity, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism.

In Manichaean hermeneutics, new doctrinal concepts in relation to other forms of Christianity were justified using visionary authority based on what Mani learned from Paul. In Manichaeism, the sacred books have heavenly status, which creates a dynamic where the book derives its sacredness from its divine origin. Contact with the divine origins is accessed through visionary and theurgical praxis which then gives authority to scriptures, allowing the composition of new ones. This significant aspect of Manichaeism, which has received emphasis in the preceding pages, will be thoroughly analyzed in the final section of this chapter. It is within this section that the concept of gnosis will be situated within Mani's doctrine.

Given that the concept of a body is linked to the sightings of Jesus in the Christian belief following his Passion when the Risen Christ became part of specific Christian traditions (Vinzent, 2011, p. 2), it is imperative to examine how individuals who had encounters with Christ comprehended his nature, specifically, what attributes they believed constituted his body as it appeared in these visions. Resuming Markus Vinzent's insights, it can be inferred that the resurrection held greater significance from a historical standpoint to a generation unfamiliar with Jesus of Nazareth. Paul's thoughts and visions thrived in a context where multiple Christian groups with distinct theologies often clashed. An essential interpreter of Paul's epistles was Marcion, whose fundamental impact extended to the Manichaean interpretation of Christianity.

A few remarks on the importance of Marcion's understanding of the resurrection and his approach to the New Testament suffice to provide context for the two paradigms examined in Mani's Christology: the cosmogonic and the Pauline. Marcion of Sinope (85-160 CE) was a significant theologian and Christian philosopher, among the earliest interpreters of Paul and responsible for an influential edition of the New Testament that left a mark on the history of biblical exegesis. Marcion coined the term Gospel[28] and was its initial publisher. Interestingly, the term itself implies opposition to the Old Testament, according to Markus Vinzent, which is ironic since Marcion's opponents, who were nonetheless influenced by him, chose a contrasting approach of linking the Old and New Testaments (Vinzent, 2011, p. 91)

The academic study of Marcion faces a significant issue: the absence of any extant copy of his Gospel. As a result, scholars must rely solely on the preservation of select passages by Marcion's adversaries[29]. Nevertheless, it is known that Marcion esteemed Paul highly and considered him a pivotal figure in his interpretation of Christianity[30]. The gospel of Marcion was composed of a text similar to the canonical gospel of Luke and ten Pauline letters. For the study of Manichaeism, Marcion's significance primarily lies in his emphasis on the authority of the apostle Paul, which had previously been habitually ignored (Vinzent, 2011, p. 44). François Decret (1974, pp. 29-30) confirms that the chief Marcionite influence on Mani was the aforementioned adoption of the canon of scriptures that Marcion edited, comprising a version of the Gospel of Luke and ten Pauline epistles[31].

For this purpose, there is a passage regarding the resurrection of Jesus found in both Marcion's and Luke's editions hold significance. In the first passage[32] regarding the

[28] See Vinzent, 2011, p. 83; and BeDuhn, 2013, p. 6, who states that before Marcion there was no such a thing as a "New Testament".
[29] See Lieu, 2017, p. 7; Knox, 1942, p. 46; Vinzent, 2011, p. 80
[30] See Knox, 1942, pp. 50-51
[31] As François Decret (1974, p. 30) has noticed, "[l]'influence du marcionisme, fondée sur une organisation ecclésiastique solide, fut considérable dans le monde chrétien et elle a spécialement marqué les communautés d'Orient, en Mésopotamie et en Perse, où elle a précédé le manichéisme" Marcionism was a significant Christian movement in the East, particularly in the Syro-Mesopotamian milieu where Mani was educated.
[32] See Luke 24:38-39 (ἴδετε τὰς χεῖράς μου καὶ τοὺς πόδας μου ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι αὐτός· ψηλαφήσατέ με καὶ ἴδετε, ὅτι πνεῦμα σάρκα καὶ ὀστέα οὐκ ἔχει καθὼς ἐμὲ θεωρεῖτε ἔχοντα) and the Marcion Gospel, according to the Italian edition by Claudio Gianotto and Andrea Nicolotti (2019) : ἴδετε τὰς χεῖράς μου καὶ τοὺς πόδας μου ὅτι ἐγώ αὐτός εἰμι· ψηλαφήσατέ καὶ ἴδετε, ὅτι πνεῦμα σάρκα καὶ ὀστέα οὐκ ἔχει καθὼς ἐμὲ θεωρεῖτε ἔχοντα

physical body of Jesus, he reportedly questioned his disciples, "Why are you agitated and why do doubts arise in your hearts?" This question displays Jesus' concern for the emotional state of his disciples. Take a look at my hands and my feet; it's really me. Touch me and see for yourselves. Spirits don't have flesh and bones like I do."

The incorporation of this excerpt from Luke in the Gospel of Marcion raises questions since it contradicts the supposed Docetism associated with Marcionite Christology. In this regard, the work of Tertullian (c. 155 CE - c. 220 CE) is pertinent. Tertullian argues that those who aim to undermine (*inquietare*) the faith in bodily resurrection (*fidem resurrectionis*) by denying that this hope applies to the physical body (*ut eam spem negent etiam ad carnem pertinere*), a belief that had previously remained uncontested (*sine controversia*) until the Sadducees' dissent (*ante istos Sadducaeorum propinquos*), are unwarranted in subjecting Christ's flesh and our own to questioning. Thus, Tertullian asserts in his anti-Marcionite theological controversy that Marcion's denial of the flesh of Christ also amounted to a denial of Christ's birth, and by denying his birth, he denied his flesh (*Marcion ut carnem Christi negaret negavit etiam nativitatem, aut ut nativitatem negaret negevit et carnem*) (*De Carne Christi*; Evans, 1956, pp. 4-5).

These remarks from Tertullian, however, require further scrutiny. Similar to the opposition to Manichaean Christology, critics failed to grasp the intricacies of Marcionite terminology, as they were swayed by the newfound legendary design of the Risen Christ. As noted by Judith Lieu (2017, p. 221), Marcion's opponents exploited his account of Jesus' resurrection to the fullest, which they interpreted as a contradictory sign in Marcion's understanding of who Jesus was. Indeed, Judith Lieu suggests that opponents of Marcion may have misunderstood the subtleties of his Christology, as it was likely developed independently from the Gospel. It is possible that Marcion paid less attention to the narrative details that his opponents may have expected (Lieu, 2017, p. 222).

When examining these controversies in their historical and theological context, it is ironic to note, as indicated by Markus Vinzent (2011, p. 2), that if Marcion had not harmonized Paul's epistles with a Gospel, “the Resurrection of Christ would presumably never have made its way into the Christian creed. The myth of God incarnate gave way, though only slowly and never fully, to the other myth of Jesus, the Risen Christ.” Therefore, the heresiologists who criticized Marcion under the rubric of the Risen Christ

relied nonetheless on Marcion's editorial work and his Christological ideas. James Carleton Paget (2012) argues that Marcion held a unique conception of Christ's resurrected body as being somewhere between a phantasm and a physical body. Consequently, one should not see Luke's addition as a contradiction. This idea of the body vacillating between affirmation of its carnality and docetism is also present in Manichaean Christology, as previously discussed.

The concept of a "soulish body" appears in the Pauline epistles (1 Cor 15:44), but according to Stanley Stowers, Paul's interpretation should be connected with Platonic terminology: “I think, mean something like the Platonic irrational soul in its attachment to the body. Paul writes (vss. 15–16): ‘The pneumatic person critically judges all things, but is critically judged by no one. ‘For who has known the νοῦς (mind) of the Lord so as to instruct him. But we have the νοῦς of Christ.’” (Stowers, 2017, p. 236). In any case, the development of the connection between visionary experiences and speculations relating to the nature of the body of Christ as presented in the teachings of the apostle Paul is evident in the Christology of Marcion and Mani. It is necessary to move past the dichotomy of docetism and the risen Christ paradigm, as Marcion and Mani partially reconciled these two Christological viewpoints. Another crucial aspect of Manichaean soteriology is clarified through his conflict with his former Elchasaite co-religionists, which will be explored in the next section.

1.3 Gnosis and the role of the body in Manichaean ritual practice

In the *Kephalaion* LXX (170, 1-13, Polotsky, 1940), concerning the body which is the image of the world, it is stated that again (ⲡⲁⲗⲓⲛ), at a certain time (ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲉ ⲛ̄ⲛⲥⲏⲩ), the apostle (ⲉⲣⲉ ⲡⲁⲡⲟⲥⲧⲟⲗⲟⲥ), who was in the community (ⲧⲉⲕⲕⲗⲏⲥⲓⲁ) told his disciples (ⲙⲁⲑⲏⲧⲏⲥ) that the world above and below (ⲡⲥⲁⲛⲧⲡⲉ ⲛ̄ⲛ̄ ⲡⲥⲁⲙⲡⲧⲉ) is the image of man's body, for the creation of this body made of flesh is in agreement with the image of the world. The comparison between the microcosm and the macrocosm was widespread during Late Antiquity. In Manichaeism, however, this analogy resulted in a unique soteriology. According to this perspective, the body reflected the mixture of Light and matter in the cosmogonic myth, making it the vehicle of salvation. To understand this Manichaean viewpoint, it is useful to compare the ritual practices developed by Mani

with the baptismal purifications observed in the Elchasaite community where he received his education.

In the *CMC* (16, 1-16; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, pp. 46-47), it is stated that the Nous rescues those who have been enslaved and frees its members from the submission to rebels and rulers' arrogance by dwelling in the body (οἰκήσας ἐν σώματι). Moreover, through the body, it reveals the truth of Gnosis itself and opens the door for those who are incarcerated, granting them a blessed life (ἰδίας γνώσεως τὴν ἀλήθειαν, ἐν αὐτῶι δὲ ἀναπετάσηι τὴν θύραν τοῖς καθειργμένοις καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ μὲν ὀρέξῃ τὴν εὐζωίαν ἐκείνοις). In the context of the *CMC, gnosis* is saturated with apocalyptic terminology and Pauline connections to raptures and celestial ascensions. Analyzing the ritual dimension of these passages reveals a reflection of Manichaean cosmogony, where descending into the body is crucial to the salvific process of liberating particles of Light through specific ritual operations.

Inasmuch as light is confined to the material world, it possesses an immanent quality that can be viewed as a type of Manichaean ontology. Within the *CMC* (23:1-6; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, p. 48), this point is demonstrated through Mani's confirmation of the connection between his soul and the world's soul (“concerning my soul, which is the soul of all the worlds”; περὶ τῆς ψυχῆς μου, ἥτις πάντων τῶν κόσμων ὑπάρχει ψυχή). It is the suffering Jesus (Jesus patibilis in the terminology of Latin Manichaeism). Faust asserts that he is the source of life and salvation for humanity, which is borne up from all plants ([…] *patibilem Iesum, qui est uita ac salus hominum, omni suspensus ex ligno*; Piras, cf, Gnoli, 2006, p. 198) a principle which forms the basis of Manichaean vegetarianism.

Thus, the distinction between Manichaean and Elchasaite cosmology generates varying soteriological tactics, which were central to Mani's debate with his past co-religionists. Mani's soteriology, namely, the emancipation of the particles of light, necessitates an alternative approach to ritual practices, conflicting with the Elchasaite custom of baptizing food. If Mani does not believe that baptism can truly purify food and the particles of Light within it, what actions can the Manichaean take to become an active participant in the salvific process of the cosmos? Mani's motivations can be delineated by studying Elchasaite baptismal practices and investigating gaps in his biography.

Reconstructing Mani's biography proves to be a challenging endeavor. It requires sifting through various sources from different cultural contexts and time periods while also considering the discrepancies between Manichaean literature and the heresiological reports. The task is not made any easier with the very name of Mani posing difficulties. As Theodore bar Konai notes in *Liber scholiorum* (ed. Scher; cf. Reeves, 2011, p. 29), Mani went by the name Qūrqabyōs. In this context, John Reeves (2011, p. 29, n 62) observed that the name in question is transcribed in Syriac characters from the Greek Κούβρικος (Latin Corbicius), a name originating from the Acta Archelai (64, 2-3).

According to Ibn al-Nadim (Fihrist, ed. Flügel; cf. Reeves, 2011, pp. 36-37), Mani was born into a noble family. His mother's name was either Mays, Utakhim, or Maryam, and she was descended from a royal lineage of Arsacid. His father, called Fattiq and originally from Hamadān, moved to al-Madā in Babylon where he resided in Ctesiphon. In Greek, Fattiq is referred to as Pattikios. The CMC (13, 89, I-23; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, p. 90) provides evidence about Pattikios in the context of a conflict between Mani and his coreligionists, a group of Baptists called Elchasaites. According to the testimony, the Elchasaites named Pattikios, who was responsible for supervising the house (τὸν οἰκοδεσπότην), and told him "your son (ὁ νἱός σου) has distanced himself from our law (τοῦ νόμου ἡμῶν) and wants to wander in the world (εἰς τὸν κόσμον Βούλεται πορευθῆναι).

The term "son" (νἱός) initially suggest that Pattikios is Mani's biological father. However, the merging of Ibn al-Nadim's testimony with that of the *CMC* has certain lacunae. As noted by Iain Gardner (2020, p. 28), this interpretation results from the placement of the Fihrist narratives alongside the CMC. However, Gardner argues that despite the use of the term 'son', Pattikios is not explicitly identified as Mani's father. Therefore, Gardner suggests that Pattikios, who led a celibate group, could not have had a son. The terminology must be understood in its religious context, where senior monks often raised children as helpers. (Gardner, 2020, p. 28-29).

As remarked by Gardner, an analysis of different biographical sources for Mani's life allows for the apprehension of certain historical gaps, which are crystallized through the hagiographic narrative of the CMC; hence, in Gardner's words, it is “not surprising that Manichaean sources stress a complete break with the past and the beginning of something new' (Gardner, 2020, p. 29). In the CMC (10, 72, 9-21;73, 1-22; Cirillo, cf.

Gnoli, 2003, p. 80), it is stated that Mani was sent by order of the Father (i.e. the Father of Greatness) (ἐξ ἐντολῆς τοῦ πατρὸς), to whom is also attributed the mode by which he was begotten, that is, according to the body in which he was born (ἐγεννήθη κατὰ τὸ σῶμα); thus, when Mani separated from the Baptist community, the CMC presents a narrative that contrasts Mani's fleshly body with his spiritual image[33], hence the statement that Syzygos (σύζυγος) separated him from the law (διέστησεν αὐτὸν ἐκ τοῦ νόμου) in which his body was created. This is why the CMC (73, 1-22) emphasizes the importance of knowing the *parousia* of his spiritual image (γνῶμεν τὴν παρουσίαν αὐτοῦ πνευματο ειδῶς).

The Elchasaites, as summarized by Julien Ries, followed a doctrine based on Jewish traditions. This doctrine emphasized adherence to the Law, including circumcision, observing the Sabbath, and fasting. They also professed strict monotheism, rejected fire sacrifice, and replaced it with purification rites. Ablutions with running water were used for forgiveness of sins and even healing. In addition to regular liturgical bathing, the food consumed is purified with water sourced solely from the community garden. Elchasai added a Christology to this legalistic practice, positing that Jesus would be the final messianic messenger in a succession that started with Abraham (Ries, 2011, p. 96).

The Cologne Manichaean Codex (CMC) offers valuable insights into the origins of Mani in a Baptist community for researchers of Manichaeism. Eliminating any uncertainty regarding their identity. Luigi Cirillo's analysis reveals that the quote from Zacheas within the CMC containing a logion of Mani confirms that the group of Baptists referred to in Manichaean texts were, indeed, the Elchasaites. In the context of the Baptist synod, a relationship is established between Alchasaios (Elchasai) and the νόμος τῶν Βαπτιστῶν, based on the ἀρχηγός term. In the Fihrist, D. Chwolsohn (apud Cirillo, 1986, p. 97) identified the connection between al-Ḥasīḥ and Elchasai. Consequently, Cirillo states that the CMC and the Fihrist are reliant on the same tradition (Cirillo, 1986, p. 97).

[33] Arnold van Gennep (1977, p. 35) called this intermediate state in which Mani finds himself socially a liminal situation, that is, when a person who passes from one state to the other finds himself for a time in a special situation, which fluctuates between the two worlds. Victor Turner (1969, p. 95) developed this notion in his study of the ritual process, emphasizing this state in which the person is not in a socially defined state between positions designated by laws, customs, and conventions.

In Baraies' report, it is stated that Mani (i.e., κύριός μου, "my Lord"), discussed the Elchasaite rituals during a conversation (διάλογος) in the Baptist community regarding the way of God and the precepts of the Savior (περὶ τῆς ὁδοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ περὶ τῶν τοῦ σωτῆρος ἐντολῶν). This includes the practice of baptizing vegetables (περὶ τοῦ βαπτίσματος καὶ περὶ ὧν Βαπτίζουσιν λαχάνων) as well as any laws and norms they live by (περὶ παντὸς θεσμοῦ καὶ τάξεως αὐτῶν καθ'ἣν πορεύονται).

Mani explains that when he demonstrated the inconsistencies in the Elchasaite doctrines and mysteries (κατήργουν αὐτῶν τοὺς λόγους καὶ τὰ μυστήρια), some Baptists were impressed[34] (τινὲς μὲν ἐξ αὐτῶν ἐθαύμαζόν με) while others became annoyed and angry, suggesting that he align himself with the Greeks, i.e., if he wanted to live with Greeks[35] (ἄλλοι δὲ ὠργίζοντο καὶ θυμούμενοι ἔλεγον· "μήτι εἰς τοὺς Ἕλληνας βούλεται πορευθῆναι;"). Then, Mani informs the Elchasaites that their food purification baptism holds no value since our impure bodies were created from impure matter (τοῦτο τὸ βάπτισμα οὐδὲν τυγχάνει ἐν ᾧ βαπτίζετε ὑμῶν τὰ ἐδέσματα· τὸ γὰρ σῶμα τοῦτο μιαρόν ἐστιν καὶ ἐκ πλάσεως μιαρότητος ἐπλάσθη). Even after purifying meals through baptism and consumption, impurities such as blood, bile, flatulence, shameful excrement, and body impurities still remain (ὁρᾶτε δὲ ὡς ἐπάν τις καθαρίσῃ ἑαυτοῦ τὴν ἐδωδὴν καὶ ταύτης μεταλάβῃ ἤ δη βεβαπτισμένης φαίνεται ἡμῖν ὅτι καὶ ἐξ αὐτῆς γίνεται αἷμα καὶ χολὴ καὶ πνεύματα καὶ σκύβαλα τῆς αἰσχύνης καὶ τοῦ σώματος μιαρότης) (CMC, 81, 1-23; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, p. 86).

Mani stated that refraining from consuming this food results in a decrease of excrement; however, resuming its consumption leads to a resurgence of excretion in the body. Upon consuming baptized and purified food followed by unbaptized food, one can observe consistent levels of bodily beauty and strength. And because of all this, it becomes evident that all impurity arises from the body (καὶ ἐν τούτῳ δὲ φανερὸν εἶναι προδηλότα πᾶσαν τὴν μυσαρότητα ἐκ τοῦ σώματος εἶναι.) (13, 82-83; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, pp. 86-89). Consequently, Mani argues that true purification (καθαρότης) occurs

[34] According to Cirillo, Mani employed ideas used by the Elchasaite group, despite going against Baptist practice. This is evidenced by the approval of his thinking by some Baptists in CMC (13, 85, 1-23), who referred to him as a leader and a teacher (ἀρχηγὸν καὶ διδάσκαλον). Additionally, Cirillo highlights Jewish elements present in Mani's thought, likely of apocalyptic origin, that challenged the idea of water purification. In this view, impurity is not accidental but rather an essential aspect of human nature (Cirillo, 1986, p. 99). Added to Cirillo's observations is Gardner's (2020) study of Mani's missionary activity, which utilized his connections with his former coreligionists during his travels.

[35] The reference to "Greeks" pertains to the apostle Paul, as previously mentioned (cf. Lieu, 1985).

through gnosis (διὰ τῆς γνώσεος). According to him, this is different from the Elchasaites' practice of baptizing food. (CMC, 13, 84, 1-23; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, p. 88). But this gnosis has a specific purpose, which is the true purification (ἀλήθειαν […] καθαρότης): to separate light from darkness, death from life, and living water from turbid water (CMC, 13, 84-85; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, p. 88).

In Augustine of Hippo, one finds another testimony to the alimentary purification operated at the center of the Manichaean rite, albeit its polemical tone. According to Augustine (*De Natura Boni*, 45; Piras, cf. Gnoli, 2006, p. 186), the mixed part of God's nature (*commixtam partem ac naturam Dei*) is purified (*purgari*) by the elect (*per Electos*) when they are eating and drinking (*manducando scilicet et bibendo*). Similarly, it is stated In the *Psalm of the Spiritual Banquet* (XVI; Pernigotti, cf. Gnoli, 2006, p. 95) that the alimentary purification occurs through the spirit (πνεῦμα) with the discernment of wisdom (σοφία). This wisdom must be seen as a synonym for Manichaean *gnosis*. Summarizing the Manichaean controversy with the Elchasaites, Ries (2011, p. 106) argues that

> Per quanto Mani si opponga categoricamente al ritualismo delle abluzioni del corpo e degli alimenti, egli riconosce tuttavia una grande importanza all'acqua, che ha una funzione centrale nella crescita della vegetazione ed è carica di un simbolismo significativo per la dottrina della salvezza: l'acqua è infatti composta di Luce. L'uomo non deve né ferire né contaminare questa anima luminosa mettendola a contato con la materia tenebrosa del proprio corpo. Crescita e purificazione, due virtù che vengono dall'acqua, sono da riferire alla purificazione spirituale che opera la salvezza. Questa dottrina del *CMC* s'impone nella catechesi della Chiesa manichea. L'acqua è uno specchio che riflette il mistero dell'Appello e dell'Ascolto (*Tōchme* e *Sōtme* nei testi copti), è il riflesso del dialogo gnostico della salvezza, operante nel cosmo.

This evidence suggests a shift from Elchasaite ritual practices to Manichaean soteriology through the body rather than water. According to Jason BeDuhn (2000, p. 125), the human body becomes the center of Manichaean sacralization, where light and darkness are systematically identified, separated, and suppressed. Therefore, the connection between gnosis and rite is inseparable. As Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley (1986, p. 399) asserts, "soteriological gnosis, however, involves speculation and down-to-earth, ritual "know-how.". Rituals can serve as a foundation for grounding experiences, as noted by anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966, p. 79), providing a unique means of knowledge

not achievable through other methods. The act of separating particles of light from darkness through gnosis is a well-established aspect of Manichaean soteriology. However, unlike the views expressed by Hans Jonas (2001, p. 208) or Julien Ries (2011, p. 132) who regard it as inherently salvific, Mani's gnosis conveys ritualistic knowledge rather than purely salvific in nature. According to Buckley (1986, p. 403):

> Fluid and formless, baptismal water (its divine qualities notwithstanding) appears to Mani as a composite element from which it is impossible to sift the "living" from the "turbid." I take the two kinds of water-like light and darkness, life and death to refer, in CMC, to elements in the body. Recognizing this state of affairs, this forced tenancy of dichotomous components in his own body, the Manichaean prepares to sift pure from impure elements. He brings his knowledge to bear on his body, directing attention not to any external purifying agent, such as water, but to his bodily self. For, the gnosis required belongs to the mindbody, and therefore the practically applied gnosis performs a role equivalent to that of cleansing water in Elchasaism. In short, knowledge corresponds to water as internal to external means of liberation.

The role of the meal in Manichaean practice led BeDuhn to question its purpose. While food typically serves the function of sustenance, the elite in Manichaeism consumed a separate meal with a different purpose (BeDuhn, 2000, p. 163). The formalization and limitation of its participants, materials, implements, gestures, and vocalizations are required to transform an ordinary meal into a religious act, according to BeDuhn. In short, the process is one of ritualization. (BeDuhn, 2000, p. 163). Furthermore, the articulation of the microcosm-macrocosm, as formulated in a Manichaean manner, illustrates, as BeDuhn contends, that "[t]he Manichaeans understood the body to operate in a particular fashion, and to be connected with the larger cosmos in concrete, knowable way", so that "[t]he Manichaean practitioner was able to take advantage of these physiological facts both in the sense of possessing certain knowledge and in the sense of acting upon that knowledge in a salvationally skillful manner" (BeDuhn, 2000, p. 164).

The separation of light from darkness through a bodily operation is a significant aspect of the Manichaean hierarchy, distinguishing the Elect who release light particles during metabolic processes and the Hearers who support the Elect through alms-giving.

In another section of the CMC (15, 109, 1-23) Mani restates his apostolic and prophetic work in transmitting this gnosis. This includes not only the knowledge of the origin of the cosmos (mixture) and the significance of the body (rite), but also spreading his *dēn* along with all the required machinery for conducting the ritual metabolism (cf. BeDuhn, 2000).

Gershevitch asserts that the auditors were not sufficiently pure to serve as filters for the Living Soul. However, they could still aspire to salvation, as their impurities and sins - especially those of harming the Living Soul - would be absolved through creating daily vegetarian meals for the Elect. According to Gershevitch, these duties, which also included providing shelter and clothing for the Elect, were referred to as "alms-giving" or "gift-giving", since "[o]ne third of every Auditor's working-day had to be devoted to alms-giving pursuits, in fields, workshops or kitchens." (Gershevitch, 1980, 282).

Thus, within the salvific structure of Manichaeism, the auditors, to use Jain soteriological terminology, could not completely expunge their karmic (a subject which will be discussed in the second chapter). These traces are understood here in the Manichaean sense of being trapped in this world - the light mixed in matter. Polemical literature attests to the distinction between the two classes, with Augustine's complaint to Faust that the Manichaeans "deceive[36]" their auditors (*quid autem fallitis Auditores uestros*). Augustine states that individuals are not promised resurrection but rather a return to their mortal life, providing them with a new birth (*sed quia eis non resurrectionem sed reuolutionem ad istam mortalitatem promittitis*) (*Contra Faustum*, V.10; Piras, cf. Gnoli, 2006, pp. 194-195). Ilya Gershevitch (1980, pp. 281-282) summarizes the relationship between Elect and auditors as follows:

> Naturally the rearing of pure Electi was a crucial part of Mani's plan for the liberation of the Living Soul. For only Electi were capable of acting as filters for the Light. But of course no Electus was pure and could act as filter if he himself should in any way have hurt or harmed the Living Soul, for instance by cutting bread with a knife or, Heaven forbid, trampling on some cucumber in a field. In fact it was so risky to let him do anything to the Living Soul other than eat it, that the whole preparation of food, from cultivation of crops to the

[36] In Manichaean cosmology and soteriology, rebirth to this life is not a promise, as Augustine implied from a monotheistic perspective without ideas of transmigration. Instead, rebirth is the consequence of not achieving final liberation - which, in Mani's doctrine, requires radical asceticism and soteriological and ritualistic knowledge limited to an elite group known as the Elect, who are responsible for technical-salvific operations.

> actual cooking of meals had to be left to the Auditores, the Manichaean laymen.

In summary, it is apparent in Mani's dispute with the Elchasaites that both a sociological element, pertaining to his connections with the regulations and traditions of his former co-religionists, and a prophetic and transcendental component enhance it, given that Mani relies on ritual and soteriological knowledge in a revealed gnosis. In addition to practical and discursive knowledge of the body, it is noteworthy that the concept of matter is linked to mystical experiences in Mani's Christology and the Manichaean cosmogonic myth. All beings are correlated due to their origin from the world of Light, whose particles mix with matter, creating a certain unity of life. In this regard, Manichaean soteriology fully aligns with both the horizons of ultimate release and metempsychosis.

Mani's hagiography, as presented in the CMC, showcases the interplay between social tensions and prophetic encounters. This is inflected through subtle narrative details that relate to Mani's divine lineage. Recent historical investigations suggest that the symbolism behind Mani's hagiography can be clarified. Iain Gardner's research (2020, p. 48) confirms that the split between Mani and the Elchasaites occurred gradually, leading to the belief that the Elchasaites played a greater role in the expansion and development of Mani's religion. From a theological standpoint, the CMC highlights the concept of rupture while also presenting examples of a gradual process, following the pattern between Mani and his Divine Double. It appears as if Mani had two lives, ready to demonstrate his doctrine at the proper time, with frequent experiences among angels and dwelling with the Elchasaites, as demonstrated through the overall theology (cf. *CMC*, 3-6)

Thus, Mani's "double life" is comprehensible, and the portrayal of his stay among the Elchasaites in the CMC is explained. Additionally, the CMC's angelophanies emphasize Mani's education with his Syzygos and his ascension to the celestial realm. The Elchasaites were familiar with the actualization of a revelation, prophecy, and prophet. It is probable that Mani acquired this knowledge from his coreligionists, as outlined in Luigi Cirillo's argument (2001, p.48). The debates concerning the notion of prophecy focused on the origins of the prophetic condition. Consequently, extensive discussions on cosmological and ontological matters were deemed necessary. Additionally, further explanations can be found by examining the concepts of prophecy

and the craft of the prophet in Late Antiquity, within the religious milieu in which Mani lived, as will be discussed in the following section.

1.4 Mani's Apostolate and the craft of prophecy.

Returning to Gardner's (2020, p.28-29) thesis that Pattikios was not Mani's biological father, one can examine the general layout of religious organizations in relation to the skill of prophecy. Walter Burkert observed that sponsorship was a common practice among charismatics, prophets, and visionaries, particularly in the context of itinerant movement between the Near East and Greece for cultural exchange among charismatic leaders, prophets, and healers (Burkert, 1992, pp. 41-42). Actually, its origins can be traced back to the Archaic period, surpassing the so-called 'Orientalizing Revolution'. Stephanie Dalley and A. T. Reyes (1998, p. 86) indicate that a plethora of "Orientalizing" periods emerged in Greek culture, and that there were continuous cultural and religious exchanges between Mesopotamia and the Hellenistic world until the Hellenistic era. Thus, the time in which Manichaeism first originated - the Late Antiquity period - still reflected these interactions.

Michael Flower defines the μάντις, a visionary, as a professional diviner with expertise in the art of divination. He further explains that the Greek terminology is imprecise, so a μάντις could be classified as a type of "freelance specialist" in various religious practices (Flower, 2008, p. 22). Flower distinguishes the μάντις from the prophet by their differing divination techniques, a view shared in Biblical studies and Assyriology. The visionary employs an "uninspired" technique, while the prophet acts as the divine spokesperson (Flower, 2008, p. 23).

In Late Antiquity, the use of Greek terminology referring to prophetic phenomena for various ecstatic practices independent of the Hellenic tradition emerged with the Hellenization of areas in the Near East. Egypt and Syria exemplify this phenomenon, of great importance to the Platonic tradition, particularly in the theurgy and its connections to hermeticism and the Chaldean oracles. In Egypt, a connection existed between priests as the voice of God and the presence of sacred books. In the Hellenistic era, these books utilized prophetic language, as Franz Cumont noted (2003, pp. 182-183). Additionally, the incorporation of astrology, magic, and visionary experiences with these holy texts

exemplifies the reinterpretation of Egyptian theology with regards to Hellenistic principles, ultimately leading to the creation of the *Corpus Hermeticum*[37].

In his argument with Porphyry, Iamblichus offers insight into divination, specifically in De Mysteriis (3.31; Clarke; Dillon; Hershbell, 2003, pp. 194-197). Iamblichus mentions the perspective in which deceitful entities cause visions, which some individuals suggest is the authentic reason behind divination. Porphyry noted in his Letter to Anebo that a kind (γένος) of spirits, possessing a deceitful (ἀπατηλῆς) nature, portrayed themselves as deities, daemons or the deceased souls (γένος) (Girgenti; Muscolino 2011, pp. 354-355). Iamblichus reports that he was informed by the Chaldaean prophets (Χαλλδαίων ποτὲ προφητῶν λεγόντων) that the exclusive bestower of positive blessings are the gods. Additionally, the gods only associate with virtuous individuals, and mix only with those who have been purified through sacred knowledge[38]. With the acquisition of divine enlightenment, the daemonic ceases to exist within the individual in question (3.31; Clarke; Dillon; Hershbell, 2003, p. 194-197).

Manichaeism did not grow and spread in a vacuum; rather, it was part of a larger cultural and religious atmosphere. Various trends reworked soteriological doctrines and discussed prophetic and divinatory phenomena. Such views were fundamental in late Platonism, Chaldaean Oracles, the Corpus Hermeticum, and so forth. Nonetheless, at the dawn of Mani's religion, other religious tenets seemed to have a more significant impact on his outlook. According to Michael Tardieu (2008, p. 39):

> Having founded his own religion, Mani read and assimilated (as the contents of the Book of Mysteries testify) the philosophical treatises and collections of the sacred poems and songs of Bardesanes. It seems unlikely that he himself knew the quite recent revelations written in Greek and ascribed by the "Hellenized magi" to the Chaldean prophets: the Apocalypses of Nicotheos,

[37] For further discussion into the connection between Ancient Egyptian theology and Late Antiquity's hermetic movements, refer to Erik Hornung's (2006) analysis. As an Egyptologist, Hornung provides a valuable perspective on this topic.

[38] There is a noteworthy resemblance between Iamblichus' theology and Manichaean Light theology. This similarity can be attributed, additionally to Iamblichus' theurgical practice and anagogical experiences that may be cosmologically close to those experienced in other traditions, to a common cultural heritage in the Near East that can be seen in the Chaldaean Oracles and the Corpus Hermeticum. Sarah Iles Johnston notes that, according to Iamblichus, the deity exists as literal light and is situated above the material plane. It never directly interacts with the human world (within Manichaeism, however, there are direct interactions between the deities and the human world, which can be seen in the accounts of Manichaean cosmogony) (Johnston, 2008, p. 47). In essence, Johnston contends that Iamblichus shares the Delphic cult's belief that the substance emerging from the abyss does not induce prophecy, but rather acts as a trigger for the prophetic state (Johnston, 2008, p. 47).

> Zoroaster, Zostrianos, Allogenes, and Messos. On the other hand, we know that he used the Apocalypse of Hystaspes to write the second section of his Mysteries. To all these writings it is necessary to add other minor writings attributed to some person or other in the Old or New Testament (cycles of legends, prayers, hymnic evocations)

In Mesopotamia, the birthplace of Mani, a conflation of the roles of scribe and prophet seems to have given rise to a visionary's authority as both a prophet and an author of holy texts. Karel van der Toorn (2007, p.10) notes that these written documents mirror the state of civilizations in the Near East during that time, where literacy was an elite privilege in the oral culture. Thus, oral tradition had a significant impact on the creation of written records in both Israel and Babylon, as writing began to serve a secondary purpose as a means of extending or replacing memory (van der Toorn, 2007, pp. 11-15).

Moreover, according to van der Toorn, the scribes' perception of past prophets changed due to the emergence of a new prophecy concept. Thus, when prophecy became mostly a literary genre, prophets were seen as its authors instead (van der Toorn, 2007, p. 230). Finally, Van der Torn (2007) observed that during the period when Hebrew scribes took on revelation as the paradigm for prophetic literature, they regarded visionary experience as the archetypal mode of prophetic revelation. This prophetic method parallels the one described in the chapters of CMC 9, where the union between prophetic-visionary experience and a sacred book's authority is usually attributed to a prophet who was contacted by Mani and the Manichaeans during heavenly ascents.

A genealogy of the prophets and divination clarifies Mani's stance: 1) charismatics, healers, and visionaries (μάντις) have been easily traveling between the Near East and Greece since the Archaic period (Burkert, 1992, p. 41-42). However, it is important to note that a visionary was not always considered to be a prophet and may have employed a divination technique that did not rely on divine inspiration (Flower, 2008, p.). 23); Additionally, a form of divination based on the "work of the gods," known as theurgy, existed. 4) Furthermore, the term prophet had varying meanings due to its interactions with Mesopotamian and Jewish culture and did not possess a "prophetological" character, as seen in Judaism and Christianity, within Iamblichus and the Egyptian mysteries. 5) Mani inherited both Mesopotamian and Judeo-Christian traditions and popularized prophetic literature, which was previously exclusive to

Mesopotamian kings. His prophetic and visionary activity mirrors that of priests, serving as a voice for the Manichaean divinity connected to their dualistic cosmology.

In Late Antiquity, the existence of many religious experts, gods, and goddesses did not present any contradictions within a polytheistic context. Thus, there was no requirement for the exclusivism commonly found in monotheistic religions. Different prophet-priests could represent varying divinities without requiring competition between them. The prophet's role in monotheism shifts the focus to representing a single deity, which inevitably causes conflict with other philosophical and religious beliefs. Dualism and the presence of a Manichaean pantheon influenced a milder and less extreme approach, adapting to various religious environments. This directly clashed with Christianity, as both movements were missionary in nature. Notwithstanding this, a distinct demarcation between Christian and "pagan" rituals relied heavily on the perspective of what the orthodoxy, in its formative stages, deemed authentically Christian[39].

Prophetic activity is evident in the field of medicine as well. A Parthian fragment (M 566) narrates Mani's meeting with a king, where he announces himself as a Babylonian physician (*man wāxt ku bizišk hēm, āz Bābel zamīg*; cf. Boyce, 1975, p. 34). After restoring the king's health, he is referred to as "my God and savior" (*man bay ud anǰīwag*; cf. Boyce, 1975, p. 34). Klimkeit observed that within these texts, which follow biblical accounts of Jesus's miracles, Mani performs several healings and miracles. His activities focus solely on kings, rulers, and people in positions of authority (Klimkeit, 1993, p. 208).

Andrea Piras explains how Manichaean medical practice operates and identifies several reasons why medical and ascetic practices are intertwined in the science of soul and body. These include the practical concern of finding appropriate remedies for specific diseases and identifying the correct dietary regimen (Piras, 2018, p. 34). Such attitudes were not uncommon in the ancient world. In fact, even the Hippocratic tradition, which oftentimes had an ambivalent and hostile view towards charismatic healers, shared such concerns. According to Maria Campolina Diniz Peixoto (2009, p. 57), Hippocratic

[39] André Leonardo Chevitarese (2003, p. 102) suggests that early Christianity may have directly incorporated aspects of polytheistic practices related to magic. Additionally, Drijvers (1980, p. 195) notes that Christians and "pagans" in the Edessa region commonly engaged in astrology, magic, and the use of amulets.

medicine viewed the medical art and culinary practices as working together to determine what is suitable for each individual and specific state. The pursuit of equilibrium in Hippocratic medicine, according to Peixoto (2009, p. 63), aligns with the principles of measuring fairly and acting at the right time.

In Late Antiquity, Pythagorean philosophy was characterized by its widespread influence, including medical-dietetic concerns. As explained by Gabriele Cornelli, the method of ἀρχαί utilized by the Pythagoreans was in a context of convergence of distinct literatures, from the Hippocratic corpus to the Herodotean History (Cornelli, 2009, p. 35). Manichaeism was not particularly concerned with balance, either in the mathematical form of Pythagoreanism (cf. Cornelli, 2009, p. 42) or in the Hippocratic sense. Instead, Manichaean radical asceticism ran in the opposite direction. However, there is a convergence of Pythagorean and Manichaean themes regarding the body, especially in the assimilation of Platonic and Pythagorean ideas by Christian theologians.

Ephrem of Syria presents Manichaean concepts similar to Orphic-Pythagorean discussions of *sōma-sēma*. For example, he suggested that souls cannot remember due to the presence of oblivion and addressed the concept of a "tomb." Furthermore, Ephrem reports that Mani (208, 17-29 [Reeves # 102]; cf. Gnoli, 2006, p. 233) explained that the Manichaeans believed Hermes, Plato, and Jesus were heralds of Good in the world and were incorporated into the salvific metahistory of Manichaeism. The Hermetic and Platonic traditions held views on the transmigration of the soul linked with Pythagorean concepts.

However, Manichaeism differed from both Pythagorean and Hippocratic traditions in that it favored extreme ascetic practices, particularly among the Elect, rather than a middle way. This asceticism appears to have roots in Jainism, which will be discussed further in the next chapter. However, the more significant aspect of Manichaean medicine is its reputation as a missionary force for performing miraculous cures. In a Sogdian text (So. 18, 224; cf. Klimkeit, 1993, Text C, pp. 209-210), Gabryab, a disciple of Mani, says that true Christians should perform miracles like Jesus. Gabryab requests that, should he succeed in healing a girl, the community turn away from Christianity and convert to Manichaeism (i.e. the religion of Mār Mani). Gabryab then says that the true disciples of Christ-those who resemble Christ-will heal the sick girl. Christians are unable to perform the miracle which is eventually performed by Gabryab (Klimkeit, 1993, p.

209-210). In addition to the missionary character of the text, one can clearly see that there is a distinction, from the Manichaean point of view, between being a disciple of Jesus, and therefore of Mani; and being a Christian.

In this regard, Burkert (1992, p. 41) notes that the activities of the visionary and the physician were connected until at least the period before the Hippocratic era, and the continuity of this tradition is demonstrated by the example of Manichaeism. Additionally, Burkert identifies an important fact that even in the work of a Hippocratic polemicist, there was still recognition of the special knowledge possessed by visionary and healing migrants (Burkert, 1992, pp. 41-42). In Manichaeism, Jesus served as an exemplary thaumaturgist, highlighting the importance of exploring his connection to magic. According to Chevitarese (2003, p. 58), the belief in magic was widespread among early Christian communities. Moreover, Morton Smith (1978, p. 81) observed that early Jesus followers viewed miraculous actions as a sign of a magician, an interpretation that was rooted in the context of magical practices by priests of diverse religions throughout the Hellenistic world and the Near East. Morton Smith contends that claims of Jesus' divinity, even when not directly related to miracles, were seen as evidence that Jesus was a magician.

Morton Smith conducted an analysis of Christian material that aimed to distance the portrayal of Jesus from magic. As noted by Smith, Origen's approach was to distinguish a genuine miracle, performed by Jesus and his disciples, from magic. The former would be enduring, while the latter would be temporary. This approach did not negate the effectiveness of magic, but rather relegated it to a lower status. (Smith, 1978, pp. 82-83) However, according to Smith, this distinction relies on a caricature of the magician, which represents the most inferior type of magician in Antiquity:

> Since the magi had distinctive ethical and eschatological teachings, the fact that Jesus had similar teachings would not have prevented his being thought a magus. He certainly had disciples, and those who accused him of being a magician must have known this; therefore, by “magician” they meant a figure who could appear as a teacher and attract a following. The Christians attempted to refute the accusation by reducing “magician” to its lowest possible meaning and arguing that *this meaning* did not match Jesus.” (Smith, 1978, p. 84)

In a study of the θεῖος ἀνήρ, Gabriele Cornelli examines Eusebius of Caesarea's dual stance - serving as a model of Catholic perspective - regarding magic. This analysis

takes place within a polemical context surrounding the γόητες and μᾰ́γοι. In the case of Apollonius of Tyana, Eusebius dismisses his miracles as the result of magic in a derogatory sense. Alternatively, if the stories are fictional, Apollonius is regarded as a great philosopher (Cornelli, 2006, p. 62). However, Jesus was a part of a magical-prophetic culture. It should be noted that while sources regarding this culture are limited, Cornelli suggests that the issue may be more related to historians' selective interpretations than to the actual testimonies of magic spreading during this time period (Cornelli, 2006b, p. 84). For instance, the Eucharist rite shares similarities with the magical literature of the era, including the sympathetic connection between Isis and Osiris found in the Greek Magical Papyri (CornelIi, 2006b, p. 88).

An identical approach is evident in the Acta Archelai's anti-Manichaean polemics. There is a passage (XVI; Benson,1906, pp. 22-23) in which it is stated that "Mani carried an authentic Babylonian book under his left arm (*Babylonium vero librum portabat sub sinistra ala*); in addition, he covered his legs with pants of different colors (*crura etiam bracis obtexerat colore diverso*) and had the look of a Persian magician and war leader" (*vultus vero ut senis Persae artificis*[40] *et bellorum ducis videbatur*). Another factor that supports the use of "*artificis*" as a term for the magician's profession is the portrayal of Mani, who wore Persian clothes and was associated with Babylonian books. This synthesis of Persian and Babylonian cultures during the Achaemenid period influenced the beliefs of the magi. (Panaino, 2021, pp. 38-39). Additionally, Mani's emphasis on astrology supports the hypothesis that the "*Babylionium vero librum*" was an astrological reference[41].

In this religious debate over the authority of prophets and magi, one can see a distinct Manichaean approach that diverges from the Christian perspective. Gabryab's passage critiques Christians but leaves Jesus's prophetic and healing abilities unscathed. In the language of Late Antiquity's prophets, priests, and philosophers, medical

[40] Both the Latin terms artifex and artificium may carry a negative connotation of "deception" and can be translated as "ploy" and "deceit" (Torrinha, 1945, p. 78). These were the terms used by critics to refer to magicians, particularly in defense rhetoric. Similarly, Cornelli (2006a, p. 69) previously stated that while the term magus was not necessarily negative, those who opposed a magus could use the term γόης to belittle them.

[41] As Piras notes, the mention of Babylon suggests an association with astrological, mantic, and divinatory practices, as well as a connection to Mani's heritage: *"[i]l "libro di Babilonia" che Mani porta sotto il braccio sinistro è un' immagine che l'estensore degli Acta Archelai ha tratto da un comune fondo di conoscenze sui natali di Mani, nella Babilonia di epoca partica, e da lui stesso sempre rivendicati nella sua proclamazione di origine e di intenti, in cui si esprime anche il suo programma missionario*" (Piras, 2012, p. 24)

proficiency would reflect the priest or prophet as a divine messenger. They were believed to have experienced heavenly ascents, gained angelic and theophanic powers, which bestowed them with social charisma. In the Gabryarb episode and other accounts of miracles and healings, the Manichaean presents himself as a more genuine disciple of Jesus compared to other Christians. This was also a typical occurrence in the Near East, where the healer's actual ability carried more weight than religious and philosophical doctrines. According to Richard Foltz (2013, p. 85), this circumstance can be described as follows:

> Rabbis and magi, along with religious leaders of other Babylonian communities, tended to be valued by the general population in terms of their effectiveness with spells and incantations, and people would after consult whichever figures they believed most skilled in this regard whatever their religious affiliation.

Mani's charisma, as a figure traversing distinct social and cosmological realms through "heavenly ascents," may serve as a source of power and peril, as noted in anthropological and sociological analyses (cf. Douglas, 1966, p. 119). This observation suggests a process of charisma emanation akin to Theissen's (2008, p. 47) characterization of the Jesus movement's power. The positions held by physicians, healers, and prophets in the Near East provide insight into the reasoning behind Manichaean narratives. Leo Oppenheim's categorization of physicians in Mesopotamia into scientific and practical groups sheds light on this topic (Oppenheim, 1964, p. 290). Oppenheim (1964, p. 292) characterizes Mesopotamian medicine as a traditional folk medicine that primarily employs native herbs of various types, along with animal products such as fat, tallow, blood, milk, bones, and a limited number of mineral substances.

Therefore, symptoms were considered more as 'signs' that influenced the outcome of the disease. These signs helped the specialist to identify the disease so that they could apply the suitable magical countermeasures (Oppenheim, 1964, p. 294). According to Oppenheim, this specialist is not a physician (*asu*), but a conjurer (*asipu*) (Oppenheim, 1964, p. 294). The treatment, classified as magical by Markham J. Geller, comprised fumigations and ritual actions. The exorcist, attired in the appropriate costume, influenced the patient's psychological state through these practices (Geller, 2010, p. 161). The boundaries between exorcism (*asiputu*) and medicine (*asutu*) were not fixed as the medications often incorporated incantations and rituals (Geller, 2010, p. 162).

Concerning Manichaeism, Andrea Piras posits that, after initial diagnosis, individuals gain self-awareness and recognition, which subsequently leads to the development of gnosis as one distinguishes between light and dark, both physically and mentally (see, for instance, CMC, 13, 85, 1-23; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, p. 88). This gnosis grants a separation of the luminous aspects in both mind and body. Therefore, Piras argues that Manichaean medical language reflects ascetic practices, as evidenced in Iranian texts, and was known as the epithet of "physician" (*bizišk*) of Babylon (Piras, 2018, pp. 33-34). Similarly, Jason BeDuhn (2000, p. 125) observed that Manichaean disciplinary regimes include not only techniques for personal purification, but also a method of exorcism that demarcates a sacred place. This process of sacralization is observed in both the practice of ritualized meals and the ecstatic and visionary dimension of Manichaeism. That being said, the concept of Manichaean gnosis, with its mystical and transcendent orientation on one hand, and its practical orientation on the other, can be examined.

1.5 The visionary dimension of Manichaean gnosis

The testimony of Ephrem of Syria suggests that Mani joined the Bardaisanite system unwillingly, due to lack of alternative options (cf. Drijvers, 2014, p. 252). This sheds some light on the development of the concept of gnosis in Mani, considering the period and location - several decades after his death. Despite some gaps in Ephrem's report, examining his observations allows for a more precise historical reconstruction. Ephrem of Syria reports that Bardaisan and Mani claim that the body's nature is evil and was fashioned by archons. The creation of the body was due to Wisdom, who cunningly presented its attractive form to the archons and fooled them (Ephr., Hyp. 122, 45-123, 14 [= Reeves # 44]; cf. Gnoli, 2006, p. 230). The idea that this Gnostic mythologem may have been a later addition by Ephrem cannot be excluded. Furthermore, Bardaisan and Mani hold differing views regarding matter, which is not considered 'wicked in itself' in Bardaisanite philosophy. Therefore, the merging of doctrines can be attributed to both the polemical and heresiological nature of the discussion, as well as the potential association between later Bardaisanite and Manichaeism (Gillman; Klimkeit, 1999, pp. 44-45).

In the Book of the Laws of the Countries, a text from the Bardaisanite school that H. W. Drijvers edited and translated, explores ideas around knowledge and wisdom through a conversation between Awida and Bardaisan. Awida inquires about the unity of God, His role in creating humanity, and why He didn't design it in a way without sin.

Bardaisan challenges Awida's beliefs by asking him if he genuinely believes in what he is asking, to which Awida admits that he had previously posed the same question to colleagues of his age. Bardaisan asserts that those who desire to learn ought to seek the guidance of an elder, and he underscores the significance of the learner's intent to gain knowledge and be convinced (BLC, 536-540; Drijvers, 2006, pp. 5-7).

Bardaisan contends that knowledge and faith are intertwined and that those without faith find it challenging to determine definitive conclusions. As per Bardaisan, a significant portion of the population lacks faith and thus do not possess a grasp of true wisdom. These individuals lack the ability to articulate and replicate knowledge while evincing a reluctance to listen because of their faith-deficient foundation (BLC, 540-542; Drijvers, 2006, p. 9).

According to H. J. W. Drijvers, Bardaisan's understanding of 'gnosis' relies on intellectual intuition rather than revelation, thus indicating that Jesus was not the primary catalyst, for the cosmic process as salvation had already commenced (Drijvers, 2014, p. 251). Drijvers notes that the elements forming the world in Bardaisan's cosmogony have an atomistic structure and distinct properties. The salvation of these elements starts at creation when they detach from chaos or darkness. The relationship between cosmogony and soteriology is evident in Bardaisan's teachings. Drijvers (2014, pp. 246-247) has posited that the Christology of Bardaisanites is intertwined with Jesus' function as a teacher and a lawgiver. Moreover, salvation is attained through knowledge. The correlation between faith and knowledge lies in a form of confidence in a divine plan, or theodicy (Drijvers, 2014, pp. 246-247).

Mani presents a form of theodicy wherein the creation of the universe by God's wisdom serves to counterbalance the attack of Darkness. Similar to Bardaisan, whose cosmology is a substructure of soteriology, Manichaeism also underlines the correlation between the universe's creation and the plan of salvation. (Drijvers, 2014, p. 252). Ephrem's opinion about the sole means of Mani's entrance, which Drijvers shares, overlooks that comparable conceptions existed in Mandaeism and analogous religious phenomena. Especially those who reworked esoteric and mystic doctrines from Jewish and Mesopotamian traditions. Additionally, Mandaeism has a visionary dimension and praxis, which hold greater importance for Mani's gnosis than Bardaisan's intellectual intuition.

There is a congenial relationship between gnosis and revelation in Manichaeism. The presence of a Mandaean gnosis, which similarly links the macrocosm/microcosm to the body - specifically that of a Primordial Human Being - must be considered due to their shared Near Eastern cultural and religious heritage. The apocryphal and apocalyptic literature greatly influenced the emergence of several forms of gnosis, from classical Gnosticism to Mandaeism and Manichaeism. In Mandaeism, *manda*, the gnosis, is closely linked to the cosmogonic revelation in Adam's narratives. This particular type of gnosis appears to resemble Manichaeism the most. Mandaeans became acquainted with Babylonian, Zoroastrian, and Manichaean religious doctrines. Many of their hymns were integrated and translated into the Manichaean literary corpus (Buckley, 2002, p. 3). The connection between Manichaeism and Mandaeism has been widely debated over the years, with a particular focus on the chronological aspect. In the 1960s, Kurt Rudolph emphasized the significance of the dispute surrounding the origin of Mandaeism: whether the religion was influenced by Manichaeism or if it was the Manichaeans who were affected by the Mandaeans (Rudolph, 1960, p. 176).

Interactions between Manichaeans and Mandaeans are documented to have occurred (Puech, 2006, p. 88), and the chronological precedence of Mandaeism has confirmed some hypotheses. Ibn al-Nadīm (Fihrist, ed. Flügel, cf. Reeves 2011, p. 87) claims that Pattikios, Mani's father - who, as discussed in section 1.2, was likely not his biological father (Gardner, 2020, p. 30) - joined a group named Mughtasila. E. S. Drower asserts that al-Nadīm's account bolsters the theory that the Mughtasila group was composed of Sabeans, specifically Mandaeans and Nazarenes (Drower, 1960, p. xiii). However, Jorunn Buckley later posited that Sabaeans and Mandaeans are separate groups with, at best, a distant connection (Buckley, 2002, p. 5).

On the other hand, Edwin Yamauchi has dismissed Kurt Rudolph's theory proposing a Jewish ancestry for Mandaeism. Yamauchi argues that it would be challenging to establish the validity of this claim since Mandaeism, propelled by a "centrifugal tendency," renounced the cardinal components of Judaism, namely monotheism, circumcision, and sabbath, and evolved into an anti-Jewish faith (Yamauchi, 1973, p. 139). Yamauchi proposed a dual origin theory, suggesting the existence of a proto-Mandaean Western component and a proto-Mandaean Eastern component (Yamauchi, 1973, p. 140).

The Western element, as stated by Yamauchi, would have been comprised of: 1) non-Jewish individuals with predominantly superficial familiarity of the Old Testament; 2) adversaries of Jewish people; 3) Aramaic dialect speakers; 4) residents of Transjordan who worshipped the god of the Hauran range east of Galilee; 5) the debate on whether they had any knowledge of John the Baptist is uncertain; notwithstanding, they undoubtedly had no first-hand acquaintance with Jesus or Christianity (Yamauchi, 1973, p. 141). Finally, Yamauchi supports the hypothesis that Mandaeism originated in the late 2nd century, as the Western component migrated. This component, through its gnosis, introduced the belief in immortality[42] to Mesopotamia, which the Eastern Proto-Mandaean component then accepted (Yamauchi, 1973, p. 141).

Dan Cohn-Sherbok (1983, p. 148) challenges Yamauchi's proposition stating that Judaism is distanced from Mandaeism. Cohn-Sherbok argues that during the Tannaitic period, rabbinic literature mentioned several Jewish groups designated as '*minim*'. Furthermore, Cohn-Sherbok observes the existence of the Adamic mythologem, which portrays Adam as a divine helper in creating the world, in various groups. Therefore, proto-Mandaeism, and by extension Mandaeism, could belong to this religious milieu. Thus, Cohn-Sherbok suggests that Christian Jews settled in eastern Jordan after the destruction of Jerusalem, according to Drower's reconstruction. This group, due to their doctrinal peculiarities, may have been despised by both Jews and Christians, hence seeking refuge in the more hospitable Parthian environment (Cohn-Sherbok, 1983, pp. 149-151).

The doctrine of Adam's body, which influenced Mandaeism and possibly left its imprint on Manichaeism, has been thoroughly examined by E. S. Drower (1960) in the context of Adam's cosmogonic role. According to E. S. Drower, Naṣoraean cosmogony holds that the macrocosm precedes the microcosm. The cosmos was formed with the human body as a model, since Adam Kasia, the mystical Adam, preceded the physical human being known as Adam pagria. Therefore, according to Drower, the creation of one followed the creation of the other (Drower, 1960, pp. 21-22). Placing the human body

[42] It is noteworthy that the concept of immortality was not completely foreign to Mesopotamian tradition, which Yamauchi fails to acknowledge. For instance, Simo Parpola (1993, p. 169-171) suggests that the Assyrian tree of life and the Kabbalistic tree of life share a remarkable parallel, as part of a broader "Mesopotamian esoteric lore." However, Parpola further posits that it remains unclear whether Kabbalistic mystical literature, including the theme of the throne room of Merkabah mysticism, was directly influenced by Mesopotamian esoteric texts.

and the cosmic body in a complementary relationship is a key symbolism for interpreting the Nazarene cosmogony. The Naṣoraeans, who are Mandaean priests, were defined by Drower (1960, p. IX) as follows:

> Those amongst the community who possess secret knowledge are called *Naṣuraiia* - Naṣoraeans (or, if the heavy 'ṣ' is written as z, Nazorenes). At the same time the ignorant semi-ignorant laity are called "Mandaeans", *Mandaia* – 'gnostics'. When a man becomes a priest he leaves "Mandaeanism' and enters *tarmiduta*, 'priesthood'. Even then he has not attained to true enlightenment, for this, called '*Naṣiruthra*', is reserved for a very few. Thoses possessed of its secrets may call themselves Naṣoraeans, and 'Naṣoraeans' today indicates not only one who observes strictly all rules of ritual purity, but one who understands the secret doctrine.

Two passages from the Manichaean corpus can now be interpreted according to the concept of gnosis, further exploring the current themes in Manichaeism from different viewpoints, based on Mani's self-proclaimed role as an apostle of Jesus and a prophet. The two passages in question are *Kephalaion* LXX, which discusses the body as the image of the world, and *Kephalaion* IV, which delves into the Column of Glory. The Mandaean word '*ṣṭuna* highlights the relationship between the body and Column. It has two meanings, as assigned by Drower: the first refers to "the trunk [of a human being]," while the second means "column or support." Drower notes that in reference to Adam Kasia - a cosmic figure designated as Gnostic rather than Jewish or Iranian (Drower, 1960, p. 22) - the word denotes "trunk of a human body" (Drower, 1960, p. 21).

Moreover, according to Geo Widengren (1945, apud Drower, 1960, p. 21), in the Manichaean Column of Glory, the human spine is consistently linked with Perfect Man, that is, the First Adam, according to Drower, based on information provided by Mary Boyce, corresponds to the Indo-Iranian term *ṣṭuna*, which has cognates in Sanskrit, Avesta, and Middle-Persian. She explains that in the case of Adam, "whose body stands erect, the 'ṣṭuna (as in other Mandaean texts) has the meaning of 'body', i.e., without head and limbs, body in a literal sense of trunk." Finally, according to Drower (1960, p. 21, n. 1), the Column of Glory is a Manichaean idea that possibly originates from the "body-of-light" concept of the cosmic Adam as discussed in Mandaean texts.

The body, as previously shown, played a significant role in Manichaean soteriology. Ritual meals, due to their salvific purpose, served as the primary rite of Manichaeism. Multiple studies have emphasized the crucial importance of these meals through various perspectives (Gershevitch, 1980; Buckley, 1986; BeDuhn, 2000; Sundermann, 2001; Piras, 2018). This thesis's third section examined their significance within the Baptist Christian milieu. A few additional remarks can clarify the effect of ritual meals on the scholarly comprehension of Manichaean gnosis.

Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley has noted that the operators' control over rituals relies on their understanding of available tools and their efficacy as perceived by the operators. Furthermore, Buckley emphasizes that the manipulators' relationship with their implements is restricted by their perception of their work environment's suitability for tool usage (Buckley, 1986, p. 404). Accordingly, Buckley observes that Mani's rejection of baptismal water as a viable means to purify and save caused water to lose its salvific status as a tool. With the shift from water to the body, Manichaean soteriology was presented as a social relationship where purified bodies of the Hearers and Elect stand next to each other from a practical perspective (Buckley, 1986, p. 405).

Werner Sundermann (2001) discovered in his examination of the Iranian corpus of Manichaean texts that the task of the Auditores is also considered sacred. They deliver food to the elect in a ceremonial manner, accompanied by words of address and hymns. Considering these factors, one may conclude that the almsgiving ceremony was performed as a solemn ritual (Sundermann, 2001, pp. 201-207). The relationship between the Elect and the Auditores is implicit and emerging in the genesis of Mani's ritual practice. In the CMC, understanding gnosis means understanding how to manage the body, where Light particles undergo transmutation.

BeDuhn has noticed that in the CMC passage, gnosis is referred to as soteriological practice, meaning that it pertains to individuals who know what to do. Notwithstanding, in other parts of the same CMC, gnosis is associated with an apocalyptic focus that emphasizes the visionary dimension of the concept, which has been highlighted in this thesis. To address this issue, one solution is to consider the historical evolution of the concept of gnosis. BeDuhn (2000) presents an argument against the interpretation of gnosis as salvation, which is primarily championed by Jonas. Nonetheless, BeDuhn (2000) does not fully depart from the perspective of Hans Jonas when differentiating

between Mani's gnosis and that of Gnosticism. In comparing the salvific knowledge of gnosis with Manichaean gnosis, BeDuhn contrasts the latter as a practical and ritualistic form of gnosis.

However, if the concept of gnosis is understood in its technical sense within a cosmological and soteriological context, and in relation to visionary practices, as argued by Merkur (1993), then the practical and transcendental sides' distinction becomes unnecessary. In the quoted passages from the CMC and their correlations with the concept of sophia in the Coptic corpus, it is evident that there is prophetic and revelatory wisdom regarding cosmology and eschatology concerning the hypostasis of the Call and the Great Thought. Additionally, the CMC suggests that gnosis is a revelatory knowledge that teaches an eschatological and soteriological mystery, instructing on how to liberate particles of light. Therefore, visions serve as intermediary elements and establish connections between cosmogony and eschatology, as well as between cosmology and soteriology.

Andrea Piras had already observed the relationship between the main practice of the ritualized meal and a more esoteric practice linked to ecstatic and visionary experiences by conducting studies on both aspects of Manichaeism. Piras (2018a) noted that, similar to Zoroastrianism, Manichaean ecstasy is regulated within a codified priestly orthopraxis, limiting ecstatic data to a few subjects. According to Piras, this phenomenon arises in Manichaeism due to a lifestyle committed to the pursuit of salvation and internalization that "*non abbisogna di esperienze di uscita dalla coscienza, quanto piuttosto di una educazione della coscienza, visitata dal divino e trasformata nel Nuovo Sé, o Nuovo Uomo, che la dottrina manichea persegue con zelo*" (Piras, 2018a, p. 32).

Thus, Piras argues that in analyzing the Manichaean ritualized meal, it is necessary to consider the tendency of Manichaean asceticism towards universal piety and charity, with the aim of saving the Light imprisoned in the world and freed by ascetic practices. For this reason, Piras highlights that the Elect are referred to as "physicians of the cosmos" (Piras, 2018b, p. 41). As discussed in the section on the concept of the prophet in Late Antiquity, there existed a close association between the roles of physician and visionary. The functional aspect of being a "physician of the cosmos" encompassed not only a "soteriological metabolism", but also the faculty of traversing different realms, which bestowed upon Mani the position of a divine being. Piras notes that Mani's spiritual

experiences align him with a charismatic tradition that manages divine gifts and thaumaturgical powers, leading to his success in preaching. According to Piras, this is due to the therapeutic implications of the Indo-Mediterranean milieu that emphasize the affirmation of mediators of salvation who possess supernatural mandates and revelations of mysteries. And finally, Piras contends that, in a more practical sense, the ability to cure physical and metaphysical ailments using medical and magical-exorcistic knowledge and techniques is crucial for health and well-being (Piras, 2018b, p. 32).

Therefore, gnosis has both mystic and practical aspects. It represents a revealed mystery and relates to practical procedures. The necessary procedures are revealed in the context of the body's role in purifying food. The gnosis of separating water from the life of darkness is in contrast to baptism, as seen in the polemic with the Elchasaites. But it is worth noting once again that the knowledge in question is attributed in the Manichaean text to revelations, ecstatic experiences, and visions. As such, it possesses a mystical and transcendent dimension that extends beyond practical application.

Now, examining the aforementioned passage regarding the apocalyptic dimension of Manichaeism, one can discern from the CMC that Mani's body is a topic of revelation among pre-diluvian biblical figures including Adam, Seth, and Enoch. One of the required gnoses (γνῶτε τοίνυν, ὦ ἀδελφοί, i.e. "therefore know, brothers") concerns Mani's body (περὶ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ) (CMC, 9, 45, 1-10), more specifically to the origin of his body (περὶ τῆς γέννης τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ) (CMC, 9, 46, 1-9). This passage clarifies that Mani's soteriological knowledge has a mystical, visionary dimension, and that the body is the subject of a revelation shrouded in mystery. Also, in the CMC (5, 14, 4-14; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, p. 44), a comparison is made between the body and a colt that, with the assistance of its creators, matures into a full-grown horse (ἱπποφόρβων γίνεται βασιλέως ὄχημα), accomplishing its ultimate purpose. This comparison is made because in both manners (τρόπωι) there is a goal to achieve. The body is further likened to a dress (CMC, 5, 22, 1-18; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, p. 48-49), as Mani explains that he has been sent in accordance with divine will, and that the Father "gave me a counsel before I put on the body" (ὑποθήκην δεδώρηταί μοι πρὶν ἐνδύσωμαι τὸ ὄργανον), before (πρὶν) Mani wandered (πλανηθῶ) "in this disgusting flesh" (ἐν τῆι σαρχὶ ταύτηι τῆι βδελυρώδει).

Therefore, a connection exists between the visionary context and the apocalyptic nature of this phenomenon. This observation does not contradict the visionary nature of

Mani's teachings. The fact that elsewhere (CMC, 13) Mani applies the concept of gnosis in another context, related to Elchasaite controversies, which confirms BeDuhn's interpretation of gnosis as a tool that discerns the best course of action in soteriology, in no way contradicts its visionary aspect. On the contrary, there is frequently no inclination to explore how Mani acquired his visions, possibly due to the latent and evident nature of his visionary experiences in his religion, as Segal similarly noted regarding the Apostle Paul. Ecstatic practices that encourage the pursuit of these visions occur within a context of spontaneous visionary experiences. The existence of two ritual trajectories in Mani indicates that he believed his practical gnosis, as defined by BeDuhn, was based on a divine dimension revealed to him, according to the Manichaean perspective.

The body plays a significant role in Mandaean gnosis and cosmogony. According to the *Alma Rišaia Rba* (83-97), which Drower (1963, p. 5) translates as follows:

> And then He stood at the brink of the Wellspring and the Palmtree, looked in), and beheld that which was wondrous. Thus was there formed | Seed within the Wellspring, and thus He planned to create Adam, His First-born Son, Whom the worlds worship. And from him proceeded a multitudinous host; it came into existence for his sake (*lit.*'for him'').
>
> And then he rose to his feet | and said "In the name of the Life, answer me, my Father, answer me, and raise me up! Great (*Being*), Son of the Mighty (*Life*) answer me!"'.....
>
> And then he came forth from the Wellspring and rose up towards Him and spoke. And He said "O my good Plant, what | desirest thou?" And he (*who?*) said "I desire to create sons'. ..... *[Beginning of second right panel*]
>
> Then seed was cast and fell into that Wellspring which is named the Womb. It was three hundred and sixty days within that Well, | until everything had become strong. Then He sent to it the lofty strength which is named Pure Ether). And it has three hundred and sixty names and three hundred and sixty wings and three | hundred and sixty powers and three hundred and sixty aspects (*parṣufia*).
>
> When seeking increase, he (Adam) came and entered that Wellspring and remained therein until all things were formed—(*yea*) a space | of three hundred and sixty days. Thus did he enter into it, and uplifted (*himself*) and rose to the brink of the Wellspring. Thereupon his light shone out over all worlds.

Afterwards, Adam ascended to the top of the Source, and his light radiated throughout all the worlds. In another passage (ARR, 129-137, Drower 1963, p. 7), Adam instructed all the Naṣiruthra. Additionally, nine treasures, symbolizing the nine months of pregnancy, were crafted as garments for him. The first Adam is immense, and his body encompasses all that will exist in the future cosmos (Drower, 1960, p. 26). According to Drower (1960, p. 27), the noble parts of the human being are attributed to the great spirits of light and/or the worlds of light, while the lower parts are assigned to darkness. Therefore, Drower (1960, p. 27) concludes that:

> The cosmic Body, the *'ṣṭuna* in which Adam Qadmaia appears in ATŠ and other texts, includes the worlds of light and the worlds of darkness. Man's body has organs and parts which perform what are thought to be menial functions and the cosmic Body of Adam, although immaterial inasmuch as it is the ideal counterpart of the universe, likewise possesses organs of digestion and evacuation: they are realms assigned to spirits of darkness and pollution.

In the Manichaean literary corpus, a doctrine about Adam echoes that found in the Nazarene and Mandaean communities. It asserts that from a magical standpoint, the secret of the entire universe lies in Adam (Ke. LXIV, 157, 25-31; Demaria, cf. Gnoli, 2006, p. 53). The belief that the archons shaped Adam's body to curb his abilities is shared by both Mandaeism and Manichaeism. Furthermore, according to Ke. LXIV, 157, 32 and Ke. LXIV, 158, 5-23, the 'captivity' of Adam impedes the escape of light (Demaria, cf. Gnoli, 2006, p. 54).

Now, regarding the prophetic-visionary experience itself, with no direct relation to a gnosis, there is a paradigmatic antecedent for Mani's visionary experience, both from the historical point of view and in the missionary model that Mani adopted in his life, as already pointed out (1.1.), in Paul of Tarsus. Besides presenting himself as an apostle of Jesus (ἀπόστολος), Paul emphasizes the divine will, which set him apart and set him apart for the good news of God, that is, the gospel (ἀφωρισμένος εἰς εὐαγγέλιον θεοῦ) (Rom. 1:1). Mani, in turn, also emphasizes the divine will by setting himself up as Jesus' apostle ('Ιησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀπόστολος διὰ θελήματος Θεοῦ) (CMC, 66, 1-23; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, p. 76). Paul grounded his authority, as Mani would later do, in visions and revelations (ὀπτασίας καὶ ἀποκαλύψεις; 2 Cor. 12:1); claimed to have received his message directly from Jesus through a revelation (οὔτε ἐδιδάχθην ἀλλὰ δι'ἀποκαλύψεως

'Ιησοῦ Χριστοῦ; Galatians, 1: 12) and, during his missionary activity, he wrote that he returned to Jerusalem according to a revelation (κατὰ ἀποάλυψιν; Galatians 2:1-2).

The visionary perspective deems the separation important, as Paul and Mani both assert prophetic experiences in their works. Therefore, the discursive framework they utilize to justify their authority as being "set apart by God" is linked to their visions. In essence, these claims have a ritualistic foundation that may hinder our understanding due to the temporal gap and religious sensitivities. According to Alan F. Segal, Paul depicted his spiritual experiences in a manner consistent with that of a first-century mystagogue and apocalyptic Jew (Segal, 1990, p. 35). Segal argues that Paul's claims about his ecstatic encounters with Christ, including a heavenly ascension with Jesus in an enthroned presence, aligned with first-century Jewish beliefs. Such experiences at the divine throne have parallels in the apocalyptic and Merkabah tradition (Segal, 1990, p. 36).

In chapter 9 of the CMC, there are examples of the "authority of the sacred text/visionary experience" pair, featuring apocalyptic narratives of Adam, Seth, and Enoch. One fragmentary passage mentions that Adam claimed in his apocalypse to have witnessed an angel (ἐθεώρησα ἄγγελον) and had received revelations (CMC, 9, 48, 1-23; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, pp. 62-63). Balsamos, the highest angel of light, instructs him to inscribe the revelations onto a pure papyrus, immune to corruption or destruction. This apprehension stems from Mani's belief that the holy texts would be altered by adherents, thereby losing their prophetic validity.

For the sake of methodological clarity, it is customary in scholarly research to differentiate between apocalypticism as a religious phenomenon and as literature. Nonetheless, these two aspects are intimately connected. Lars Hartman states that this differentiation between apocalyptic and apocalypticism in the fields of literature, phenomenology, and sociology of religion has resulted in certain confusions. According to Hartman, the varied perspectives on the apocalyptic genre stem from researchers utilizing different understandings of "apocalyptic" and "literary genre" (Hartman, 1983, p. 329). Hartman identifies linguistic elements (style, vocabulary, phraseology) that contribute to a genre's constitution. The propositional level deals with a given text's content, while characteristics of a work, both as a whole and in its parts (plot, main themes, topic), also contribute. Thus, Hartman suggests that one should analyze similar characteristics in the text such as the structure of smaller episodes or units, motifs, and

modes of organization and presentation found in smaller literary pieces (Hartman, 1983, pp. 332-333).

John Collins (1998, p. 5) defines Apocalyptic literature as a genre characterized by revelations that emerge from a heavenly ascent. These revelations are frequently supported by a speech or dialogue along with an occasional appearance of a heavenly book. Additionally, the constant use of an angel as an interpreter is a distinguishing feature of apocalyptic literature. Elsewhere, John Collins characterizes Apocalypse as a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative structure. The genre involves a revelation mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, revealing a transcendent reality that is both temporal and spatial, foreseeing eschatological salvation and involving another supernatural world. Furthermore, according to Collins' definition, one can differentiate between apocalypses that include a journey to another world (Type II) and those that do not (Type I). And within each of these subtypes, one can also distinguish a) "historical" apocalypses that involve revising history, experiencing eschatological crisis, and dealing with cosmic and/or political eschatology; b) apocalypses that predict cosmic and/or political eschatology without any historical review; and c) apocalypses that do not involve historical revision or cosmic transformation, but only personal eschatology (Collins, 1983, p. 532).

All the definitions mentioned, developed from a groundbreaking study published in the Semeia journal, were further summarized by Adela Yarbro Collins (1996, p. 7), with some additions, as follows:

> “Apocalypse” is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world; such a work is intended to interpret present, earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future, and to influence both the understanding and the behavior of the audience by means of divine authority.

As Adela Collins noted, there are debates regarding whether the accounts depict genuine ecstatic experiences. However, she asserts that the narratives undoubtedly represent a revelatory encounter for the audience, virtually providing them with the same experience. Furthermore, Collins asserts that although the visionary experience may be a

product of literary convention, the text transcends its own boundaries, pointing to a mystical experience. This legitimizes the text since the author claims to have experienced such an event (Collins, 1996, p. 7). Ioan P. Couliano (1991) discusses Jewish mysticism in a chapter of his landmark work on visionary experiences in many religious traditions. Couliano examines Jewish mysticism and notes that the heroes of Jewish apocalypses are biblical characters who possess unique qualities connecting them to the heavenly realm. Therefore, Couliano argues that it is unsurprising that most of the journeys to another world in the Jewish apocalypses are attributed to Enoch, Elijah, and Moses, three individuals who ascended to heaven without dying (Couliano, 1991, pp. 157-158).

Couliano (1991, pp. 156-157) classified apocalypses based on the main character's attitude towards the otherworldly journey. The first category is "call or elective apocalypses" where the hero is chosen by virtue of the merits they have earned in the other world. The second category is "accidental" where the journey is the result of an accident or serious illness. In this case, personal evaluation is irrelevant. The hero's quest for apocalypse involves striving to obtain divine revelation through various means, including incubation, absorption, entheogen ingestion, as well as utilizing bodily and psychological techniques, such as breath control, fasting, and bodily postures.

In Manichaeism, categories 1 and 2 are present. The Father of Greatness elects Mani, who experiences otherworldly events and angelophanies. Additionally, the call is a hypostasis in Manichaean cosmology and a significant aspect of the concept of gnosis/sophia. 2) Philological evidence suggests the existence of an additional substratum of rituals in Manichaeism, extending beyond ritualized meals. This new layer incorporates theurgical techniques that bear influence of Merkabah mysticism and the Hekhalot literature, enabling visions and journeys to a divine realm (cf. Reeves, 1994) The purpose is to establish communication with prophets and envoys of light. Such journeys spark Manichaean literary creation, as they culminate in revelations and the production of sacred books.

In the first two sections of this thesis, it was demonstrated that the Manichaean tradition held an anti-Jewish stance in relation to the Old Testament, influenced by Marcion, as well as the crucifixion of Christ, removing culpability from Pilate and attributing it to Judaism. Nonetheless, the aforementioned passages of the Manichaean literary corpus evince a distinct impact of Jewish tradition, albeit filtered through a

Christian lens. According to John Reeves, scholarly research typically does not view Manichaean writings as logical sources for transmitting Jewish literary motifs. The Manichaean religion, along with certain Gnostic schools and Mandaeism, was critical of Judaism and the Hebrew Bible. However, oddly enough, as Reeves argues, all of these religions heavily relied on Jewish literature and exegetical traditions during their formative periods. In the context of Manichaeism, the Jewish thought and literature of the Second Temple period holds a primary influence (Reeves, 1994, p. 173). Reeves (1994, p. 174) further identifies the most significant events and characters from the Hebrew Bible for Manichaeism as follows:

> The accounts of creation, the experiences of protoplasts and their progeny, the generational succession of the primal patriarchs, the angelic corruption and enslavement of humankind, the roles of Enoch and Noah, the cataclysmic Flood, the prominence of Shem, and possibly even Abraham, in the preservation of antediluvian wisdom – all of these biblically based actors and episodes receive varying amounts of attention in the Manichaean corpus of writings.

With this in mind, Reeves presents significant insights regarding a lesser-known and more obscure and esoteric Manichaean ritual tradition that supplements the pragmatic element of his gnosis as demonstrated in ritual meals. Firstly, according to Reeves, the quotes in CMC attributed to Adam, Seth, Enosh, Shem, and Enoch are noteworthy as they are considered part of Jewish pseudepigrapha. These works share a similarity in their formal structure. Each quotation begins with an ἀποκάλυψις attributed to the named author, who then adds a notice of other writings (γράφαι) that supposedly supplement the excerpted vision. Each visionary experiences an angelophany, a vision of one or more angelic beings who are named Balsamos (Adam) and Michael in two instances. The visionary is then transported to heaven where he sees certain sights and is given access to specific secrets (Reeves, 1994, p. 176).

Then, Reeves emphasizes the significance of the throne symbol in the visions described in the Manichaean text, suggesting a later association with various aspects of Jewish mysticism beyond the apocalyptic tradition. When referring to the quote from Shem, Reeves underscores the relevance of the throne-room, where God is both seen and heard. This language bears a strong resemblance to that used in Hekhalot literature, incorporating its technical terminology. And these connections are evident with ancient

Jewish apocalyptic traditions, particularly those wherein a visionary is presented with several heavenly mysteries or guided through the heavens to behold the residents or components of each supernal level (Reeves, 1994, p. 176). These fragments from the Manichaean tradition, as analyzed by Reeves, lend support to Scholem's theory which posits a continuous lineage between the apocalyptic texts of the Second Temple and the earliest Hekhalot literature. Furthermore, they provide indications of Mani's expertise techniques of heavenly ascension, including possibly to the Realm of Light found in Manichaean cosmology (Reeves, 1994, p. 179).

Apocalypses of Seth and Enoch describe angelophanies and visionary experiences while acknowledging similar experiences in Manichaean texts. The Revelation of Enoch specifically reveals the purpose behind the creation of the world. (CMC, 9, 50-51; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, pp. 64-65). The descriptions of the visionary experience during a heavenly ascent emphasize the potency of Mani's visions on a mountain. There is a vivid expression of the contrast between the body, which is oppressed and has trembling limbs, and the soul. (CMC, 9, 52, 21-3; 53, 1-21; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, pp. 66-67). As noted by John Reeves, the bodily tremors and tensions described in the Apocalypse of Shem share similarities with Merkabah Mysticism and its depictions of God's throne room. The corporeal tension thus emphasizes the ecstatic privilege granted to the visionary (Reeves 1994, p. 176).

According to Martha Himmelfarb, ascension apocalypses from the 1st century CE or later contain seven heavens. However, the image of a single heaven still appears in various texts, including those related to ascension apocalypses such as Revelation, the Apocalypse of Peter, and the Apocalypse of Paul. Some apocalypses with seven heavens are actually reworked versions of earlier apocalypses that had a single heaven (Himmelfarb, 1993, p. 32). The origins of the seven heavens, as Adela Collins suggests, do not derive from either Jewish or Greek traditions[43]. Therefore, despite Couliano's rejection of the notion that they originated from Babylonian cosmology, which proponents of the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* defended, Collins observed that the number 3 and 7 are more prevalent in the heavens of Babylonian and Assyrian tradition. Furthermore, the significance of the number seven in Babylonian magic supports the

[43] However, Professor Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta drew my attention to the fact that the division of the cosmos into seven parts has a Greek precedent. This is evident in its presence in the Nag Hammadi library in its Platonist and Gnostic context. For instance, see Roig Lanzillotta (2016, pp. 278-279).

notion that the seven heavens in Sumerian and Babylonian traditions result from magical practices and beliefs, which aligns with the use of the second motif in the second recension of the Testament of Levi (Collins, 1996, pp. 28-29).

According to Mary Douglas (1966, p. 118), individuals who return from inaccessible regions possess a power that is unavailable to those who remain in control of themselves and society. Therefore, Mani's experience contains aspects of what anthropologists refer to as a 'liminal state', but the danger extends beyond the social factor and has a cosmological and theological basis. Accordingly, Mary Douglas (1966, pp. 119-120) argues that

> Danger lies in transitional states, simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable. The person who must pass from one to another is himself in danger and emanates danger to others. The danger is controlled by ritual which precisely separates him from his old status, segregates him for a time and the publicly declares his entry to new states.

It is unclear what procedures Mani used to experience his visions, although some clues can be found in Merkabah mysticism and Hekhalot literature. In the mentioned chapter of CMC, which discusses his experience on the mountain (CMC, 9, 55, 1-23; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, p. 68-69), it is reported that Mani had an ecstatic experience during meditation. Afterwards, he was transported to the mountain by a living spirit. This account follows a quote by Seth, who, in an apocalyptic moment, contemplated the possibility that the world's creation may have prompted the prophetic experience.

Scholars have shown that there is a connection between apocalyptic literature and Merkabah mysticism (Collins, 1997, pp. 134-135; Scholem, 1995, pp. 44-45) which explains why the presence of both substrata of Jewish mysticism in Manichaeism is not unexpected. The term *hekhalo*t has been translated as "palace" or "temple." However, according to Merkur, in its original meaning in the Hebrew Bible, hekhal denotes the antechamber or vestibule situated in front of the holy of holies within the temple in Jerusalem. Consequently, the seven *hekhalot* are occasionally regarded as their own locations but still serve as preludes to unitive experiences (Merkur, 1993, p. 155). Collins (1997, p. 133) notes that the typical structure of Near Eastern temples includes three chambers, with the *hekhal* being one of them.

Even though the Hekhalot literature attributes its teachings about celestial ascension to several 2nd century rabbis, Merkur argues that there is no reason to believe that the literary character of these texts excludes their technical use – that is, as instructions for heavenly ascension practices. On the contrary, Merkur asserts that the Hekhalot literature itself provides evidence that the authors, despite literary conventions, were knowledgeable in mystical practices (Merkur, 1993, p. 155). Furthermore, Merkur (1993, p. 158) identified a range of practices and consciousness states in Merkabah mysticism capable of inducing mystical trance, including sadness and weeping. The texts embed descriptions of such practices in narratives that do not overtly suggest that such a state of mind could produce a visionary experience, leading to an "esoteric" reading. It is possible that the Manichaeans employed a similar strategy.

The connection between Manichaean cosmogony and the Judaism practiced in the Qumran region is thoroughly documented in Reeves' (1992) seminal work. Notably, an apocryphal of Ezekiel (4Q385, frag. 6; Wise, 2005, p. 449) includes the central theme of the divine chariot, significant to Merkabah mysticism. In Enochian literature, references to an 'immovable throne' and the concept of ascending to heaven (2 Enoch 1a:1-9; Charlesworth, 1983, pp. 104-108) are frequently present in many Manichaean practices. However, these texts only share thematic similarities with the Apocalypses cited in the CMC, which makes it challenging to deduce the source of Manichaeans' Apocalyptic literature.

David Frankfurter (1997, p. 63) contends that the apocryphal texts cited in the Manichaean sources are most likely forgeries as they deviate from known apocalyptic sources, but this claim should be approached with caution. Reeves (1994, p. 177) posits that the Manichaeans targeted an audience acquainted with apocalyptic and mystical literature, and thus, persuasion relied heavily on the authority of sources. Likewise, Luigi Cirillo (2005, p. 53) counters Frankfurter's position and indicates that it is difficult to assume that Baraies composed artificial apocalypses, as his objective was to prove the authenticity of Mani's mission and refute claims of invention by his disciples.

Now, the section of CMC (9, 58, 1-23; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, p 69) where Merkabah mysticism and Hekhalot literature intersect is particularly noteworthy. It discusses two outcomes resulting from the ascent to heaven, one of which relates to the body, the physical harm it endures, and the fleeting nature of humanity before superior

beings. Additionally, Mani hears a voice emanating from the "glorious throne room" (καθεστὴριον ἐπίδοξον), the location where he received divine revelations and was requested by angels to record them for preservation. The term καθεστὴριον is infrequent, absent from both Bauer's (2001) New Testament Greek Lexicon and the more recent Cambridge Greek Lexicon (2021). Considering the context of celestial ascension and the association between CMC and apocalyptic and Hekhalot literature, Reeves (1996, p. 170) explains that this term implies a 'chamber' or 'inner room' and translates it as 'throne room'.

Deutsch (2001, p. 88) argues that Merkabah mysticism and Gnosticism are united by a complex of analogies centering on the deifying vision, which is the shared objective of both practices of heavenly ascent. The Manichaean objective, however, if different; it involves seeking celestial and sacred books, which nonetheless has similarities with the Hekhalot texts. According to Scholem, the latter texts were closer to the center of rabbinic Judaism and aimed for the perfect knowledge of the Torah. This knowledge was entrusted to an angel in charge of heavenly archives and distribution among humans (Scholem, 1965, pp. 12-13). In fact, it appears that the re-examination and reaffirmation of sacred texts holds greater significance than deification within Manichaean cosmology and eschatology. This is due in part to the ritual practices associated with the ritualized meal and its separation of light particles, which do not seem to allow for a *unio mystica* type of experience. Despite this, Manichaean doctrine does support liberation from the cycle of rebirths, comparable to Buddhist and Jain soteriology.

Elchasai, a visionary prophet from the community where Mani was raised, claimed possession of a divine book (Reeves, 1994, p. 177). In fact, Mani (CMC, 14, 94, 1-23; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, pp. 94-95) uses Elchasai as a source against the Elchasaites, relying on anecdotal visions involving a man's image appearing to him while he was going to wash himself (πορευομένου γὰρ αὐτοῦ λούσασθαι εἰς ὕδατα εἰκὼν ἀνδρὸς ὤφθη αὐτῶι). Reeves asserts that Elchasai's book contained elements of both apocalyptic and Merkabah mysticism. It is feasible to argue for a transmission of these traditions, including heavenly ascensions, as well as for the thesis that Mani studied and practiced them (Reeves, 1994, p. 178).

According to Hippolytus of Rome (*Refutatio Omnium Haeresium*, 29, 1-2; Litwa, 2016, pp. 738-739), Elchasaite Christology posits the idea of a Christ (Χριστὸν) who has undergone multiple transmigrations (μεταγγίζεσθαι ἐν σώμασί πολλοῖς πολλάκις) and is

now believed to have reincarnated in Jesus (καὶ νῦν δὴ ἐν τῷ Ἰησοῦ). Luigi Cirillo (2001, p. 48) compared the passages of Hippolytus with those of Irenaeus of Lyon, which describe the Simonian gnosis. According to Cirillo, in this belief system, a pre-existent Ennoia migrates between bodies, which connects the Elchasaite doctrine with the Pythagorean metempsychosis.

There is evidence to support Reeves' line of thought, specifically regarding the language utilized in the CMC, amidst the dispute between the Elchasaites and Mani. The Elchasaites ask Mani what happened (νῦν τί σοι γέγονεν) and immediately after, what he *saw* (τί σοι ὤφθη) (CMC, 13, 90, 1-23; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, p.92). In a prophetic context, a prophecy or vision can only be nullified or refuted by another vision. Furthermore, the fact that the Elchasaites promptly questioned Mani about what he saw indicates a proclivity for such practices among the community of visionaries. Another passage (CMC, 1, 1-5; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, p. 38) corroborates the usage of terms like "vision," "signs," etc. The concept of mystery (μυστήριον) pertains to mystical experiences, specifically those related to the visitation of angels (τῶν ἀγγέλων). The image is utilized as a form of language to reveal divine truths through the use of visions and signs (ὀπτασιῶν καὶ σημείων).

Moreover, angelophanies, heavenly ascents, and prophetic messages are recurring motifs in the literary works of Manichaeism. The visionary aspect, which incorporates eschatological and soteriological elements, can be observed in the *Šābuhragān* with its pronounced apocalyptic emphasis, as observed by Reeves (1994, p. 179). Since the *Šābuhragān* was written by Mani himself to present his religious synthesis to the Sasanian Emperor Šābuhr, it is notable that its apocalyptic tone could be conveyed effectively through the use of terminology from Iranian traditions. The confluence of Judeo-Christian and Iranian doctrines in the Šābuhragān is significant from a prophetic-visionary perspective, with numerous parallels and historical connections between apocalyptic literature and Persian religions. This highlights the universal claims made by Mani, which can be further explored through the visionary hermeneutics of Manichaean religion.

According to Jason M. Silverman (2012, p. 94), the Iranian historical vision includes the eschaton of history, culminating in the destruction of evil. Silverman argues that this conception cannot be found in the pre-exilic prophets, suggesting Iranian influence. Therefore, Silverman concludes that the end-of-history logic of Iranian

traditions may have slowly manifested itself as a natural and native development underlying their own religious tradition. Religious influence, as noted by Silvermann (2012, p. 97), involves a continuous process of reinterpretation rather than outright adoption of foreign ideas. Thus, if there is clear Judeo-Christian influence in *Šābuhragān*, its Persian components should not be regarded as mere "ornaments"; Mani clearly recognized the synthesis between Jewish, Christian, and Persian eschatological concepts, which were intimately linked to his own reinterpretation, based on his prophetic-visionary experience.

In the eschatological scheme, certain signs are identified with celestial language in the *Kephalaia* (LXIX, 168, 17-32; 169, 1) and linked to the disappearance of animals and plants. These signs were also mentioned in the *Šābuhragān* (170-183; 190-212; MacKenzie, 1979, pp. 511-513). The great cosmic fire, known as the conflagration in heaven and earth (280-290; MacKenzie, 1979, pp. 515-517), illustrates the theory of ἀποκατάστασις, which refers to the restoration of all things, and the return of light particles to the celestial dimension (Tardieu, 2008, p. 35). Furthermore, Tardieu observes that the preserved fragments regarding al-Bīrūnī are in line with the previously mentioned concept of a divine manifestation that occurs repeatedly, from Adam to Mani. In addition, Tardieu argues that the metahistory that is linked with seal theology of the prophets exhibits apocalyptic literary form, which provides evidence of the influence of the New Testament, Pauline Christology (particularly the Parousia), and Enochian writings on Mani (Tardieu, 2008, p. 34).

Xradesahr, the god of wisdom, bestowed knowledge and wisdom upon the First Man and continued to offer such enlightenment to humanity over time (*Šābuhragān*, 19-23; Mackenzie, 1980, p. 505). According to Jackson (1930, p. 184) and Michel Tardieu (2008, p.35), Xradesahr is associated with Jesus. Tardieu (2008, p.35) further observed that in the *Šābuhragān*, Mani reproduced the Gospel of Matthew (25:31-46) in its entirety. This passage conveys the core concept of Manichaeism, which denotes the recurring divine manifestation which, as argued by Giulia Sfameni Gasparro (2005, p. 412), distinguishes the Manichaean message as a conscious and systematic summary of the most distinguished and respected religious traditions.

Elchasaite Christology, as mentioned before, served as a precursor to the recurring manifestation of the divine, which is also evident in *Šābuhragān*. However, Elchasaite

prophetology does not fully explain the universalism present in Manichaean prophetology, as Jesus was not the sole divine manifestation within the Manichaean cosmology. Other "prophets", such as Zarathustra and Buddha, coexisted alongside biblical figures. The difference can be attributed to Mani's intuition, which combined the Elchasaite concept, his familiarity with various religions (leading to the universalization of prophets, Buddhas, and influential figures), and his visionary experiences in the manner of the apocalyptic tradition.

A passage from CMC (9, 48, 1-23; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003 p. 62) serves as an example of how prophetic-visionary experience connects to the authority of sacred text. Here, the disciples are urged to honor their teachers (διδασκάλους) and the truth (τὴν ἀλήθειαν) that have been revealed to them (τὴν ἀποκαλυφθεῖσαν αὐτοῖς) in due course (κατὰ τὴν περίοδον), which is clearly linked to the chain of prophets. Mani claimed to be the seal of the prophets[44]. His universalism consisted of a belief that each prophet or religious figure, such as Buddha and Zarathustra, had made timely revelations for particular times and places. This emphasis on space demonstrates a sensitivity to the diversity of religions across various geographic regions, thus breaking away from biblical exclusivism. In this passage, the significance of recording visual observations is underscored, thus the worth of a religious script is attributed to its prophetic and visionary legitimacy.

Concluding this chapter, in regards of the visionary dimension of Manichaean cosmology, I defend that the speculations regarding the World of Light are not solely literary, but also mirror Mani's ecstatic experiences. It is postulated that a symbolic constellation (cf. Durand, 1992) surrounding the Light brought together the Iranian tradition with Baptist Christianity and apocalyptic literature. The constellation served as an a priori background for expectations in the visions, while the visions themselves provided a posteriori confirmation of the tradition, as Daniel Merkur (1993, pp. 21-23) argued in his theory of visionary experiences.

[44] The name "Mani" is closely linked to the recurring divine manifestation, the chain of prophets, and visionary experiences, particularly those related to the symbolism of light. Etymologically, "Mani" is associated with the term "mana," which means "vessel," "recipient," or "garment." The technical use of "mana," in Mandaean literature, refers to the worlds of light (Gardner, 2020, p. 33). E. S. Drower asserts that the term "mana" originated in Iran and refers to the mind or soul. In addition, there is a clever wordplay associated with this concept, connecting the Aramaic meaning of garment, robe, vessel, or vehicle with the Iranian meaning (Drower, 1960, p. 2-p.2 n.1).

The realization of Mani's first visionary experiences transformed into a doctrinal conduit that was not just pedagogical device for religious teaching, but also a means of transmitting an esoteric knowledge with unique symbols and methods for achieving ecstasy. Mani's visions and otherworldly experiences served to legitimatize his spiritual authority and as vehicles for missionary preaching at a literary level. Given the archetypal model of his ascension, which shapes and synthesizes cosmogony and soteriology under the authority of the prophetic office, this model can utilize rhetorical topoi and literary tropes from Late Antiquity in the Mediterranean, Near East and Indian subcontinent. In this process, Central Asia has played a crucial role by assimilating the Eurasian complex of cosmological and visionary symbolism. Mani's process of Buddhistization further emphasizes this observation by coherently synthesizing apocalyptic, Iranian, and Buddhist elements within his constellation of symbols. All the aforementioned matters will be considered in the following chapter.

Chapter 2

2.1 Zoroastrianism

The previous chapter mentioned that, while the *Sābuhragān* is not always recognized as a canonical work of the Manichaeans, it is significant as one of the few written by Mani that still has surviving sources. From a visionary perspective, the *Šābuhragān* highlights the importance of visions and visionary traditions in the formation of Manichaeism, as it includes apocalyptic themes. This blending of apocalyptic concepts from Jewish and Christian sources with Mazdaean conceptions provided Mani with the means to present a synthesis of his ideas to Shābūhr; furthermore, although it is not possible to state that Shābūhr converted to Manichaeism, *Kephalaion I* attests to the fact that the Sassanid emperor was indeed sympathetic to Mani's doctrine and granted him the right to travel through Iranian territory for his religious missions.

In this way, it becomes clear that Mani had a universalist intention. His poetic and discursive abilities allowed him to develop a doctrine that maintained unique characteristics in relation to other religions (*dēn*), while also being presented using the terminology of other groups. These included Iranian, Indian, Greco-Roman, and Christian movements in areas under Roman rule. This can be observed from the very beginning of the development of Manichaeism. Thus, it is stated in the *Kephalaion I*:

> I presented myself to King Sapōrēs (Šābūhr) (ⲁⲓⲟⲩⲱⲛ̄ ⲁⲥⲁⲡⲱⲣⲏⲥ ⲡ̄ⲣⲣⲟ), who received me (ὑποδέχεσθαι) with great honor (ϩ̄ⲛ ⲟⲩⲛⲁⲥ ⲛⲧⲁⲓⲟ) and allowed me to wander through (his) territories preaching the word of life (ⲙⲡⲥⲉϫⲉ ⲙⲡⲱⲛϩ); (with) him in my following, many years in Persia to the land (country, (χώρα) of the Parthians (ⲧⲡⲉⲣⲥⲓⲥ ϩ̄ⲛ ⲧⲭⲱⲣⲁ ⲛⲛⲓⲡⲁⲣⲑⲟⲥ) in the districts (or countries, μεθόριον) bordering the territory of the Roman Empire (῾Ρωμαῖος) (ⲛⲧⲏⲛⲧⲣⲣⲟ ⲛⲛϩⲣⲱⲙⲁⲓⲟⲥ) (Ke. 1, 15-31-4, 16, 1-10; Polotsky, 1940).

Throughout this thesis, the basis of this peculiarity of Mani's thought, which is called Manichaean prophetology in scholarly research, has already been alluded to. To fully comprehend Mani's own hermeneutic when dealing with the Mazdaean tradition, it is necessary to revisit two points. The *Kephalaia* (Ke. 1; Polotsky, 1940) presents an allegory that outlines Manichaean prophetology and its missionary logic. The text states that the apostles (ⲛⲁⲡⲟⲥⲧⲟⲗⲟⲥ) were sent out into the world (ⲁⲡⲕⲟⲥⲙⲟⲥ) in various eras

to establish their teachings and churches. However, similar to the Parmouti (ⲫⲡⲁⲣⲙⲟⲩⲧⲉ), the eighth month of the Coptic calendar, their actions were restricted to specific times. The text draws a parallel with the cyclical nature of seasons and harvests, which enhances the perception of recurring time.

Similarly, Zarathustra, Buddha, and Jesus founded their respective "churches" that flourished and bore fruit. The *Kephalaia* (*Ke. 1*; Polotsky, 1940) emphasizes the sense of unity and completion underlying the Manichaean seal of the prophets, stating that for every fruit reaped, others are sown. The passages from al-Bīrūnī regarding *Šābuhragān* were translated by John Reeves and corroborate the information in the *Kephalaia*:

> He states at the beginning of his book which is called al-Shābūraqān (i.e the Shābuhragān), which is the one he composed for Shābūr b. Ardašir: 'Apostoles of God have constantly brought wisdom and deeds in successive times. In one era they were brought by the apostle al-Bud (i.e., the Buddha) to the land of India in another (era) by Zardāsht (i.e. Zoroaster) to Persia, and in another (era) by Jesus to the West. Now this revelation has descended and this prophecy is promulgated during the final era by me, Mānī, the apostle of the God of truth to Babylonia (Āthār, ed. Sachau; cf. Reeves, 2011, p. 102-103)

Manichaean missionary activity is integral to Manichaean Gnosis/Sophia. The objective is to spread Manichaean knowledge among the peoples, rather than simply retaining Gnosis within oneself. The aim is to serve as the conduit for the transmission of the truth of Gnosis among various religions and communities (δι' ἐμοῦ ἔκδηλον καταστήσηι τὴν τῆς ἰδίας γνώσεως ἀλήθειαν τῶν δογμάτων ἐν μέσῳ καὶ τῶν γενῶν; CMC, 15,109, 1-23; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, p. 104).

Examining the biographical information of many Manichaean and anti-Manichaean texts, it is noteworthy that there is a convergence between Mani's prophetic activity and Šābūhr's reign. This relationship has recently been scrutinized in Gardner's (2020) study. In the *CMC* (5, 17,23; 18, I-16; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, p. 46), for example, the following account is given At the age of 24, Mani was visited by his syzygos (ἀπέστειλέν μοι [..... ...] υς σύζυγόν), the divine twin, at the same time that Sapores (Šābūhr) assumed the crown after his father, Dariardaxar, had conquered the city of Hatra (Δαριάρδαξαρ ὁ βασιλεὺς τῆς Περσίδος, ἐν ᾗ ι καὶ Σαπώρης ὁ βασιλεὺς ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ διάδημα μέγιστον ἀνε). Moreover, in the Coptic Manichaean homilies (Polotsky, 1934, p. 42) report that [when] King (ⲡⲣⲣⲟ) Šābūhr (ⲥⲁⲡⲱⲣⲏⲥ) arrived in Persia, in the city of

Bīšapūr (ⲁⲧⲡⲉⲣⲥⲓⲥ ⲁⲫⲉⲓ [ⲁⲩⲟⲩⲛ] ⲁⲃⲁⲱⲁⲃⲁⲩⲱⲣ ⲧⲡⲟⲗⲓⲥ), a sickness took hold of his body (ⲁⲩⲱⲱⲛⲉ ⲧⲉⲩⲟ ⲡⲏ ⲥⲱⲙⲁ) and a great danger (ϩⲛⲕⲓⲛⲇⲩⲛⲟⲥ; Greek: κίνδυνος) overtook him (ⲧⲉⲩⲁⲩ).

This convergence during the reign of Šābūhr and the genesis of Manichaeism had hagiographic presuppositions. It emphasized Mani's apostolic calling (Gardner, 2020). However, Mani was not the sole claimant of the religious legacy of the Mazdaean tradition. Kerdīr, the Zoroastrian priest, competed with Mani for the Sassanid dynasty's favor. Thus, the death of Šābūhr had political, religious, and theological effects. However, it was also viewed by the Manichaeans as a tragedy for their religion. To better understand this context, it is necessary to place the birth of the Zoroastrian religion in historical perspective and analyze Mani and Kerdīr's search for the "true" heir of Mazdayanism.

a) The Birth of Zoroastrianism and Mani's religion

What exactly can be defined as Zoroastrianism, the religion that Mani encountered? The name Zoroaster appears in various Greek sources and is first recorded in the fifth century B. C. (Strausberg, 2008, p. 13). As Strausberg points out, the name has astrological connotations and belongs to an ancient era; he notes that the Lydian Xanthos reported Zoroaster to have lived 6000 years before Xerxes crossed the Hellespont, which again holds astrological significance[45] (Strausberg, 2008, p. 14).

The relationship between Zoroaster and Ahura Mazda is documented in Greek literature. In a significant passage, (pseudo) Plato describes Persian religion, mentioning the Magi priests, Zoroaster, and Ahura Mazda. In this passage, a potentially spurious dialogue presented by Plato (Alcibiades I, 122A) references the instruction in the

[45] The association between Iranian religions and astrology or divination was a topic of interest among the Hellenic community. The primary source of information on the *Mages Hellénisés* was edited by Joseph Bidez and Franz Cumont ([1938], 2007). For further insight into the relationship between astrology, Iranian clergy, and pseudo-epigraphic literature in the Greco-Roman world, refer to Roger Beck (1991, p. 493) and Albert de Jong (1997, p. 35). Herodotus describes the purported etymology of the term Magus, tracing it back to an ancient tribe of the Medes. In addition, he discusses the general religious practices of the Magi (Historiae, I, 106-18; Godley, 1920, p. 163) who were known to perform dream interpretation (τῶν Μάγων τοῖσι ὀνειροπόλοισι τὸ ἐνύπνιον). Silvermann suggests that the reference to dream interpretation in Herodotus' account may originate from Babylonian astrology and oneiromancy. It is worth noting that some of Herodotus' statements, such as the alleged scarcity of Babylonian physicians, are not completely trustworthy (Geller, 2010, pp. 125-126). Despite this, given the Magi's assimilation of various Babylonian concepts, it would not be unexpected for them to also engage in interpreting dreams. Moreover, Mendoza Forrest notes the existence of numerous references to dream interpretation, divination, and soul travel in Zoroastrian texts from a later period.

"Zoroastrian magical practices of Hormazd's (Ohrmazd's) son, Zoroaster." Ahura Mazda)" (μαγείαν τε διδάσκει τὴν Ζωροάστρου τοῦ Ωρομάζου), which, as noted by Silvermann (2012, p. 49), is significant for understanding Zoroaster's association with the Magi as early as 390-374 BCE and the link between Zoroaster and the royal religion.

The sources from Iran about Zoroaster's birthplace and date are complex, featuring conflicting information that may be attributed to the growth of hagiographic literature[46], much like in other ancient religions. Additionally, scholars have questioned the existence of a Zoroastrian cult during the Achaemenid era. An examination of the Old Persian texts has prompted researchers to adopt a more sober perspective of their contents. Antonio Panaino argues that while the text contains numerous references to a cult centered around Ahura Mazda and other Iranian deities, its textual parallels in Acadian and Elamite do not definitively support an adherence to Zoroastrian theology (Panaino, 2021, p. 26). Therefore, some scholars use the term Mazdayanism instead of Zoroastrianism (Panaino, 2021, p. 26; Foltz, 2013, p. 33).

The interactions between Manichaeism and Mazdayanism present some difficulties, including subtle and chronologically controversial issues in Iranian studies. One of the main issues is how to categorize Zarathustra: as a prophet or as a sacrificial priest? These are the most prevalent typological and methodological perspectives, as succinctly stated by Michael Strausberg (2008). The first perspective, presented by Mary Boyce, emphasizes the continuity between the early and late traditions, while the second perspective assigns importance to the similarities between Iranian and Indian religions. This view posits that Zarathustra was primarily a visionary and sacrificial poet, in line with the ancient Vedic tradition (Strausberg, 2008, p. 16).

According to Antonio Panaino (2021, p. 30), the main issue with the mythological depiction of Zarathustra, as proposed by Kellens and Skjærvø, in which he is portrayed as a paradigmatical sacrificial poet who was then historicized by the Mazdaean tradition, is that this approach

> In fatti, a parte la constatazione che il ruolo attribuito a Zaraθuštra nelle *Gāθā* e poi in tutta l'*Avesta* è tale da non trovare alcun confronto parimenti sostenibile nel mondo vedico e nella sua gigantesca letteratura, per cui il

[46] As Richard Foltz (2013, p. 32) has argued, spreading ideas related to Zarathustra led priests within Iranian territory to adapt local legends to associate him with their own regions.

> compito specificamente personale attribuito alla responsabilità di Zoroastro appare come una vera frattura sistemica rispetto alle funzioni normalmente riconosciute al clero indo-iranico, eliminare totalmente dal campo una figura, se pur pallida, tutto sommato ancora storicizzabile, per sostituirla con un ancora più evanescente circolo gāθico, può tramutarsi in una specie de gioco nominalistico privo di alcun vantaggio.

Later, a Zoroastrian orthodoxy was established and its core beliefs, as highlighted by Richard Foltz (2013, p. 33), were organized during the Sasanian Empire period, which coincided with the emergence of Manichaeism. Skjærvø's (1997) research has provided a new approach to the origins of both Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism, suggesting mutual influences between the two and Manichaean beliefs eventually being integrated into Zoroastrianism. Insights into this topic can be found in the scholarship of Hasan Taqizadeh (2020), who hypothesized that Mani's religion had a significant impact on Iran, even at a time when Manichaeism was considered a taboo subject; and Ilya Gershevitch, who ranked Mani alongside Zarathustra as one of the most significant figures in the spiritual setting of pre-Islamic Iran.

More recently, Jason BeDuhn (2015, 2020b) and Kianoosh Rezania (2020) have introduced further hypotheses previously implicit in research, albeit in an early stage. These authors suggest that Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism coexisted contemporaneously, which they support by examining the concept of "religion." As examined in the first chapter, there is a noteworthy connection between the Middle Persian term *dēn-*, which BeDuhn has demonstrated can be interpreted as religion, and the term *daēnā-*, which means "to see" (Rezania, 2020).

According to BeDuhn (2020b, [4]), a religion is born “when it is summoned forth by conditions on the ground that no longer abide by previous assumptions”. These assumptions, according to BeDuhn, are the following: each ethnic group has culturally distinct ways of relating to the forces that govern the universe, such as deities. It is believed that one is born and dies within this identity, and abandoning these traditional ways requires one to leave home and acculturate into another ethnic group's ways or marry someone from that group. It is not a simple matter to abandon one's cultural identity. Therefore, BeDuhn argues that the category of religion arises when there are options or alternative modes within a single ethnic group or state for relating to the gods (BeDuhn, 2020b, [4]).

The vestigial form of the ancient modus operandi, the worship and relationship with gods before the systematization of religion, is present in Manichaeism. BeDuhn highlights the use of *Šābuhragān* in designating Mani as the prophet of Babylon, echoing the concept that a spiritual leader is the prophet of a region and its cultic tradition. (BeDuhn, 2020b, [7]). In this way, the title "Doctor of Babylon" attributed to Mani assumes additional meanings. It not only represents a symbolic aspect of the Near East, as briefly explored in the first chapter relating to the symbolism of life and its bestower, but also conveys an understanding of cult structures, as well as the deliberate endeavor to establish a universal system separate from them - a religion.

Moreover, the use of *dēn-* to denote religion in the singular and plural. Rezania (2020, [25-27]) has examined all instances of this usage in *Šābuhragān*. Likewise, the term *daēnā-* has a visionary connotation that adds another dimension to the analysis of Mani's hermeneutics, specifically how religion is connected to prophetic and revelatory visions in Manichaeism. In light of the apocalyptic nature of *Šābuhragān*, and the visionary and theurgical approach of *CMC*, which implies a concept of the book as a heavenly model or a divine archetype. That is, in addition to a spiral model of time, which includes cyclical movements such as the birth, decay, and renewal of various "churches", and the linear model of time, which is seen in the claim of Mani as the seal of the prophets who would complete this series of revelations and "churches," there is the idea of a heavenly origin of the sacred books. In this conception, vision (in the sense of revelation) is a type of "reading," and reading is a type of "vision."

There are other instances in which it is possible to see the outline of such a hermeneutic; Mani, reflecting the notion of the sacred book that was widespread in the Near East, also argued that the sacred books went through processes of genesis and corruption[47], a perspective that again takes on another dimension in the light of the heavenly book and the theurgical practice of contacting prophets through heavenly journeys and visions[48]. Thus, it is evident that the visionary and apocalyptic features previously mentioned are intrinsic to the religious context of Iran, rather than a mere overlay of a religion that is fundamentally Christian[49].

[47] Cf. *Ke.* 1, 11, 15-34; 12, 14-34; *Šābuhragān*, 20; MacKenzie, 1979. p. 505
[48] Cf. *CMC*, 9, 50, 1-18.; 51, 23; Reeves, 1994, p. 175.
[49] This interpretation, moreover, is flawed by its static character; if Mani's religion is to be considered in terms of its "final product," then this means that the Indo-Iranian elements, whether they belong to an "early

The conflict with Kerdīr, the priest who played a significant part in the systematization of Zoroastrianism and the eventual denunciation of Mani, enables a clearer understanding of this process; indeed, as BeDuhn points out, Kerdīr demonstrates the same religious consciousness as Mani, namely the knowledge that there was a pluralism of cults. Kerdīr's viewpoint is apparent in the inscriptions, which serve as significant sources when studying religions during the Sassanid era. Mention of other cults and religions is made in a polemical and legislative context aimed at expelling foreigners. Unlike Mani, Kerdīr maintains an aspect of ancient cults, but believes that only Zoroastrianism is a viable path for the Iranian people, regardless of religious possibilities (BeDuhn, 2020b, [11-14]).

After discussing the correlation between vision and religion, both in terms of a visionary experience and a visionary perspective on the world, there are three Iranian terms that allow for understanding the alteration of the Mazdaean tradition during the Sassanid period. This period is distinguished by the revelatory position given to visionary hermeneutics: the already mentioned *daēnā* and the terms *mēnōg* and *gētig*. This terminology addresses cosmological and soteriological (ritual) matters. Vision serves as a hermeneutic element that connects cosmogony to eschatology and lends authority to a particular philosophical-religious doctrine. These three concepts can be employed to analyze the points of contention between Mani and Kerdīr.

b) the Manichaean ritual practice and its Iranian parallels

In a study on Iranian elements in Manichaeism, Ilya Gershevitch (1980) demonstrated that the concept of beauty held a crucial position for Iranian Manichaeans. Gershevitch (1980, pp. 283-284) noted that Mani himself translated the Aramaic notion of the Living Soul into Iranian languages, defining it as beauty. The presentation of Mani, according to Gershevitch, can be understood through pre-Manichaean Iranian concepts, particularly the concept of *daēnā*. This concept holds that every person has a soul personified in the afterlife, with whom they will have an encounter after death. Individuals who have lived an ethical and worthwhile life will see a beautiful young woman, whereas wrongdoers will see an ugly old hag (Gershevitch, 1980, p. 284).

phase" or a "late phase," are, regardless of their chronological inclusion, an equally important part of the universalistic systematization they produced.

In addition to the eschatological aspect, there is a ritual dimension to the concept of *daēnā*, which concerns the Manichaean concept of the soul and its meaning in Iranian languages. Thus, in the Bactrian language fragment studied by Gershevitch, the term for the Manichaean alms-giving institution, in which auditors serve food to the elect is *Ruvānegān*; Gershevitch notes that the term *ruvān*, which has the form *urvan-* in Avestan, is the pan-Iranian word for soul. *Ruvānegān*[50] literally means " that which has reference to the soul" (Gershevitch, 1980, p. 284). This allusion to the soul is more significant than it first appears, for as Gershevitch argues

> [o]f course in religion almost anything has reference to the soul, but it has never been clear why a term so ostentatiously sporting the soul, should be the very one chosen to denote the pretty materialistic concern with the feeding, clothing and housing of Manichaean monks. For it is not the Living Soul which was alluded to by the term Ruvānegān, seeing that in Iranian Manichaean terminology the word used for the anima of Anima Viva is not ruvān, but another word for "soul", grīw. (Gershevitch, 1980, p. 284-285)

There is an admonition (M 49 I) to the auditors which, after listing several misdeeds that an auditor might commit (e.g., if the auditor is a soldier who pursues an enemy, takes revenge, and protects (his) country, if he enjoys meat and drinks wine, if he has a wife and children [...] if he steals and hurts others, or if he acts tyrannically and without compassion, etc.), he should still inquire about wisdom and knowledge of the gods and think about his soul (*ruvān*). (Klimkeit, 1993, p. 264). In M 6020 there is another passage dealing with the almsgiving of auditors; it says that the auditor must remember that the services offered (to the Dēnāvars) are ultimately for his soul (Klimkeit, 1993, p. 266).

The relationship between the Elect and the Auditors, as seen in Manichaean literature, has not only a communal and social dimension, but also a soteriological one, in which the harmony between the two groups is indispensable for the technical operations (i.e., the dietary regimes of light separation) of the Elect. In M 825, the style of which, according to Klimkeit (1993, p. 265), suggests that the passage was taken from

[50] In this regard, Klimkeit (1993, p. 265) notes that the admonition to give alms is linked to the fate of the soul; that is why giving alms was known as "soul service" (ruvānagān), because it has an effect on the soul of the giver.

a work written by Mani himself, the friendship between the Manichaean groups is described by means of food service.

So, one reads that "[The Elect who[51]] would accept (*istānendīh*) the alms-food (*punwār*) of such a kind (*čawāγōn*) as one big hill (*kōf*), being able (*šahēndēh*) to redeem (*bōžād*) it, then (*abāwiš*) he or she must (*čār*, i.e., it is necessary to […]) eat (*wxard*) it. And (*ham*) himself or herself (*wxad*) will be redeemed (*bōxsēd*) and whoever offered the alms-food (*punwār*) will be redeemed (*bōžēd*), reaching (*yādēd*) the abode (*ārām*) of the undamaged (*abē wizend*, without damage) gods (*baγān*)." (M 6020; Boyce, 1975, p. 181; see also Klimkeit, 1993, p. 266).

In the Parthian letter probably written by Sisinnius, a dignitary of the Manichaean church (M 5815 II; Boyce, 1975, p. 49; Klimkeit, 1993, p. 260), to Mar Ammō, which, among other things, discusses spiritual growth within a Manichaean community, it is said that "′promptly [52] (?) (*tāž*) they give [53] (*karēnd*) Glory (*farrah*) to God (*yazd*) and Mār Mani (<t'c yzd krynd 'wd mry m'ny frẖ>) […] and behold! (*winōh*) [for] I have sent (*frašūd*) to you the beloved (*fryānag*) brother (*brād*) Khusrō (<wnwẖ xwsrw br'd *fry'ng 'w tw fršwd>)". In the end, Sisinnius admonished Mar Ammō so that when he sent brothers (*brādar frašāwān*) they would be properly received (*pādiγrāw*, < p'dgr'w>)

According to Mary Boyce (1977, p. 27), the word *brādar*, in addition to meaning "brother," is used as a synonym for the Manichaean Elect – to whom the technical knowledge of metabolic-soteriological procedures was reserved. Therefore, the "reception" (<p'dgr'w>) of which the Epistle speaks implies, according to BeDuhn (2000, p. 133), all the hospitality necessary for the itinerant missionaries "bound by their discipline not to provide for themselves[54]"; for, as BeDuhn (2000, p. 134) points out, the Auditors are admonished not to participate in the meal[55], because the minutiae of

[51] Klimkeit (1993, p. 266) translates as "[he who] would take alms-food […]", but, according to Mary Boyce (1975, p. 181), the missing subject of *istānendīh* is clearly one of the Elect.
[52] Klimkeit (1993, p. 260) translates as "Quickly (?)"; according to Mary Boyce (1975, p. 49) "Obscure. Possibly "Swiftly (?)"
[53] i.e., "to make, to do" cf. Boyce (1977), *Word-List*, p. 52.
[54] As is known, the Elect cannot engage in activities that could harm the light particles trapped in matter.
[55] The text M 177 examined by BeDuhn provides further evidence that the activity of the auditors in Manichaean soteriology is limited to almsgiving. Thus, BeDuhn notes that after the soul work had been completed, that is, the almsgiving had been performed before the elect and the offerings had been placed

releasing the particles of light, with its ritual-digestive complexities, was reserved for an elite, composed of the Elect, who were able to perform it; for this reason. "[t]he Manichaean authorities had a keen and understandable interest in maintaining a monopoly on the alms-exchange […]", since "the alms-service is not an exercise in generosity, it is a technical operation that can go awry if attempted with the wrong instruments" (BeDuhn, 2000, p. 136).

Thus, the aforementioned passages on the office of the Auditor and its significance for the soteriological operations of the Elect give a new dimension to Gershevitch's observations in his study of the Manichaean fragment in the Bactrian language: the seemingly mundane activity of serving food to the Elect is also a work of the soul, for even though the Auditors are subject to the cycle of transmigrations, good deeds[56] will have consequences in their personal eschatology. The good done in this world through almsgiving will be reflected in the beautiful post-mortem vision of his or her *daēnā*. In addition to its consequences in soteriological practice, the Manichaean ontology (onto-cosmology of the particles of light and their condition of captivity in the material world) and its visionary-cosmological dimension had other differences with the emerging codification of Zoroastrianism, which would end in the conflict with the Zoroastrian priest Kerdīr.

c) Visionary experiences and conceptions regarding the soul and its fate after death

The analysis of Kerdīr's eschatology in relation to its Mazdaean context on the one hand, and in opposition to Manichaeism on the other, reveals the main differences of the nascent Zoroastrian orthodoxy in relation to Mani's doctrine. Once again, the different anthropologies, with their respective soteriological practices, bring to light the controversies regarding the concepts of *mēnōg* and *gētig*. In this regard, the Manichaean sources provide another face of the eschatological and visionary context in Sassanid Iran, studied by Shaul Shaked (1994), that deserves comment.

According to Shaked (1994), the Sassanid period was marked by controversies in eschatological matters; the motivations for these controversies are apparently manifold, encompassing sociological, political, and sociological aspects. Given the well-known

in their presence, the Auditors departed before the actual "time of eating. They were therefore not present at the time of the prayers of the Elect (BeDuhn, 2000, p. 137).

[56] Cf. Gershevitch (1980, p. 285) for the Mazdaean context of the terminology of good deeds.

problem of the periodization of Pahlavi sources, Shaked relies on the testimony of Maqdisī, a ninth-century Muslim, whose accounts of Zoroastrian eschatology are consistent with the "orthodox" perspective found in Pahlavi literature. More importantly, however, as Shaked notes, Maqdisi is clearly aware of the divergent eschatological conceptions of the Sassanid period (Shaked, 1994, p. 32).

The most controversial issue seems to be that of the resurrection; indeed, Shaked points out that Maqdisī alludes to the disputes surrounding the resurrection by saying that "many of the Magians affirm that [...]", implying that such a doctrine was not universally accepted. “The fact that the Resurrection is singled out for assertion in such a short creed”, argues Shaked, “seems to indicate that it was an item of faith that needed particular affirmation.”. Therefore, “[t]hat it was a hard doctrine to swallow is also evident from the fact that Pahlavi literature carries frequent arguments proving its possibility. ‘How is the Resurrection possible?’ is the question that Zoroaster puts to Ohrmazd.” (Shaked, 1994, p. 32-33).

The Resurrection became a crucial doctrine in post-Pauline Christianity, serving as the focus of Christology and of conjecture concerning the condition of believers following death (cf. Vinzent, 2011). The concept of resurrection in Manichaean philosophy involves being reborn into eternal life in an enlightened dimension, free from darkness. However, this rebirth depends on a technical salvific apparatus that only a select spiritual elite, well-versed in the proper rituals and soteriological metabolism, can access. Resurrection, moreover, implies a renewal under superior conditions linked to particular eschatological concepts; it was not purely a theoretical and abstract matter but, as seen in the cases of Paul and Mani, a visionary one, where visions of the afterlife state and its eschatological effects furnish the factual foundation for theoretical discourse.

But why then did Kerdīr need to invoke the visions' authority? Shaked (1994, p. 35) suggests that Kerdīr's religious intent is the primary cause, but such an impulse cannot exist in isolation. The reliefs were, according to Skjærvø (1997, p. 314), aimed at the Manichaeans. In Mazdayanism, the possibilities of being correspond to the different levels of existence found in its cosmological doctrines. According to Michael Stausberg, it is possible to identify two types of existence in the Middle Persian scriptures, which in turn are based on ancient Avestan notions. In some texts, these two existences are linked to the creation of the cosmos, based on its primordial duality (Stausberg, 2008, p. 46).

In the Sassanid period, as seen in Pahlavi literature, these two levels of existence were expressed by the concepts of *mēnōg* and *gētig*. Stausberg (2008, p. 47) defines them as invisible-conceptual (*mēnōg*) and visible-physical (g*ētig*). Stausberg points out, however, that unlike the distinction between Ohrmazd and Ahriman (or between light and darkness), the two modes of existence do not necessarily imply a value judgment. On the one hand, human beings need to be aware that they have come from the invisible-conceptual type of existence; on the other hand, the physically visible type of existence is essential so that Ahriman can finally be expelled from creation (Stausberg, 2008, p. 47).

The Manichaean tripartite ontology, in which one finds traces of the Pauline ontological tripartition, differs from Mazdaean conceptions. From a soteriological point of view, these nuances are quite significant, as they are in line with the Manichaean ritual practice of liberating the particles of light, which emphasizes the role of the body in the salvific and eschatological process, while deploring the material world. The Manichaean synthesis of Christian and Persian ideas is best understood through writings in Iranian languages, such as the *Šābuhragān* (cf. BeDuhn, 2005). In the corpus of Iranian Manichaean documents, the text M 9 II is particularly illuminating. According to Boyce (1975, p. 89), the passage in question was clearly taken from the writings of Mani himself.

Accordingly, at the very beginning of the text (M 9 II; Boyce 1975, p. 89), it is said that "the manifestation (*paydāgīh*) of being has the same (*ham*) substance (*gōhr*) as the spirit of the body (*menōgīh i tan*[57])". Then, following Klimkeit (1993, p. 252) translation, one reads "if that which is corporeal (*tanīgirdīh*) and that which is psychic (*mēnōgīh*) are both dark (*tārīg*), ignorant (*adān*), and harmful, and are by their nature (*če'ōnīh*) one (*yak*); and (together) constitute the being and nature of the body, so the question is: what is the substance (*gōhr*) and nature of the soul (*gyān*) (divine)? […] the (divine) soul is of different substance (*judēgōhr*) from the body, and is so mixed and bound up with the (corporeal) spirit of the body (*menōgīh i tan*), with wrath and greed and sensuality (?) in the body, as...[…]".

[57]According to Mary Boyce, the <'ync> refers to the *menōgīh i tan*, i.e., "the spirit of the body"; Boyce also provides the following literal translation: "the manifestation (*paydāgī*h) of the being of the same nature (*hamgōhr būdan*) of this also with the body (is) from this which by me was written above, and (is) clear to the discriminating" (Boyce, 1975, p. 89). Klimkeit (1993, p. 252) translates as "the spirit of the body is of the same nature as the body."

This perspective regarding the Soul is in accordance with what is known of the Manichaean ontology from the CMC, in which it is stated that "a temple was constructed to honor the Nous" (ἐκτίσθη δὲ τὸ ἱερὸν πρὸς εὔκλειαν τοῦ νοῦ) (CMC, 15 -16; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, p. 44). And "the Nous, residing within the body, liberates those who have been enslaved and discloses the truth of gnosis by means of the body. This opens the door to a life of blessings" (CMC, 16, 1-16, Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, p. 47) (ἰδίας γνώσεως τὴν ἀλήθειαν, ἐν αὐτῶι δὲ ἀναπετάσηι τὴν θύραν).

Klimkeit noted in the aforementioned M 9 II fragment a reflection of the Pauline tripartite division into body, bodily soul, divine soul; the divine soul itself, pneuma, can be understood in terms of a kind of bodily quality, the concept of which was crucial for Paul in understanding his visions of Jesus and the respective formulation of the resurrection (cf. ch. 1). Accordingly, Klimkeit contends that the Zoroastrian term for spirit (*mēnōg*) is related to the body (tan) and thus distinguished from the imperishable soul (*gyān*) (Klimkeit, 1993, p. 252).

Kerdīr had a different perspective on the body/soul dichotomy and aimed to respond to Mani accordingly: by means of visionary authority. Gignoux's harmonized edition of the Sar Mašhad and Naqš-i Rustam accounts offer a glimpse into Kerdīr visionary experiences. Kerdīr reports conducting inquiries into the Yasnas and the Mazdayanian religion, both of which are practiced in this lifetime. He then utilized these services as his tool throughout various regions, leading to the happiness and prosperity of many magi. (Gignoux, 1991, pp. 94-95).

In Kerdīr's vision, it is stated that a woman appeared from the East who was considered so precious that no one had ever seen a woman like her before. It was said that she arrived through a brilliantly lit pathway where she encountered a man who looked like Kerdīr's double. Kerdīr's double and the precious woman held hands and headed towards the East, walking along the luminous pathway (Gignoux, 1991, p. 96). Along this path, at the crossing where Kerdīr's double and the woman meet, a prince appeared in a golden throne. A scale was set before the prince, creating the impression that he was a judge. Kerdīr's double and the woman stood before the prince. Afterward, another prince appeared, seated on a golden throne with a *cydyn* in his hand. It was reported that the *cydyn* appeared menacing, with no discernible end and filled with snakes and other dangerous creatures (Gignoux, 1991, pp. 96-97).

Then, it is reported that certain mortals, who were in a kind of death, witnessed numerous demonic figures and creatures in Hell and were greatly troubled by the prospect of being sent there. Following this another prince appeared, brilliant and precious, even more precious than those who came before him. He crossed the bridge and took the hand of both the woman and Kerdīr's double. They departed from the bridge and headed east (Gignoux, 1991, p. 97). In the vision, a palace appeared in the Sy. All of them, the prince, Kerdīr's double, and the woman, were escorted into the palace. Kerdīr's double and the Woman entered it and sat in the radiance of Vahrām. Finally, Kerdīr's double brought bread, meat, and wine and many (people) come to meet him. (Gignoux, 1991, p. 98).

As noted by Shaul Shaked (1994, p. 36), understanding the stages of Kerdīr's journey proves challenging due to the fragmentary nature of the inscriptions. However, the inscription's primary focus is on his doubt and anxiety concerning the afterlife, and Kerdīr's ability to have a vision[58] and via piety and good deeds, share his insights for the benefit of his contemporaries and future generations. According to Gignoux (1991, p. 75), the first *šahryār* is depicted as a horseback rider, while the subsequent ones are not. It has been suggested that this figure is Vahrām, who is known in the MX as the receiver of the souls of the deceased upon their arrival in the afterlife and as the god of victory. He is therefore well-suited to being depicted as a rider carrying a banner. Gignoux brought to attention that Skjærvø prefers to identify this "prince" as the fravashi of Kerdīr, based on Kellen's proposal. But the latter, Gignoux argues, should only appear at the moment of Kerdīr's actual, and not just apparent, death, which is already adequately represented by his daēna and double.

Moreover, Gignoux argues that the fourth šahryār, who accompanies guests across the bridge and navigates them through the perilous passage, should be none other than Srōš, whose role is to guide souls on their journey in accordance with the AVN, and to assist in crossing the bridge according to the MX. However, Gignoux asks, if the precedent is Mihr, how can it be asserted that Srōš is more valuable? (Gignoux, 1991, p. 76). The controversies surrounding Kerdīr's vision do not end there. There is also a disagreement concerning its ritual aspect and how Kerdīr acquired these visions.

[58] the woman might be the dēn, the post-mortem vision which also took part of Manichaean ritual and visionary praxis.

The ritual context of Kerdīr's visions is found in the Naqš-i Rustam (KNRm) inscriptions; the actual content of such visions, namely the presence of a knight (*šahryār*) - a radiant (*spēdagān*) prince - seated on a noble horse carrying a banner, as well as the appearance of a figure in the likeness (*hangerb*) of Kerdīr, is not disputed; but the means by which Kerdīr gained access to these visions is. Thus, the two opposing perspectives, that of Philippe Gignoux and that of Frantz Grenet, lead to different interpretations not only of the visions, but of the religious milieu of Sassanid Iran itself. Gignoux (2001, pp. 85-94) believes that Kerdīr himself had the visions and compares them to Central Asian shamanic practices that may have influenced Iranian religions, while Grenet (2003, p. 6) argues that Kerdīr did not have the visions, but rather led a group of children to receive them. The above passage from Naqš-i Rustam was translated[59] into French by Grenet (2003, p. 10) in the following way:

> [Et] les enfants que j'avais […] dans le manthra de la *vision dirent : "Nous voyons un cavalier (šahryār), un prince, éclatant (spēdagān), et il est assis sur un noble cheval, et une bannière [...] [...], un homme (mard) [...] et sur une banquette […] [...] de même aspect (hanger) que Kerdīr apparaît, et il a un compagnon de voyage qui se tient [...] [...],

The philological interpretation of these passages in Kerdīr's relief is indissociable from one's understanding of Kerdīr's ritual praxis, which is understood from the point of view of anthropology and the history of religions. Hence, for Grenet, who argues for Kerdīr's role as a guide to the visions rather than himself being the visionary, the word *rehīg* (*lysyk*) should be translated as 'child' rather than 'mortal'. The choice for the word mortal would, in Grenet's opinion, be motivated by the strangeness it causes to common sense, namely that it would seemingly be out of place in a passage dealing with ritual practices and visionary experiences. However, Grenet argues that rendering *rehīg* as 'child' is better precisely because the visions reported by Kerdīr have a naïve character that would be best explained by the very naïveté of the children who had the visions (Grenet, 2003, p. 17).

According to Grenet, scholars have noticed in Kerdīr's inscription the importance of the following words: 'dwyn mḥly, in paragraph 24, which Grenet transcribes as ēwēn

[59] Another translation into French, done by Gignoux (1991, p. 95-96), is as follows: "[Alors] les mortels que, dans une sorte de mort, j'avais vus dirent ainsi: "Nous voyons un cavalier, un prince, éclatant, et il es assis sur un cheval précieux, et il a une bannière (?) [dans le main?] …… [Et là] un homme [apparaît ?..] et place sur un trône en or. Et ……. Le sosie de Kirdīr apparat et un compagno se tient [devant……?] lui."

mahr; and in paragraphs 25 and 29, lysyk, which Grenet transcribes as rehīg. In paragraph 29, Grenet asserts, one can see the link between the two expressions, namely, that the rehīg were seated (or *installés*) in the ēwēn mahr. The difficulty involved in interpreting this terminology yielded two attitudes: the search for words distant from those known in the literature produced in Pahlavi, or the postulation of words non-existent in Pahlavi, whose meanings were sought in ancient Iranian etymologies (Grenet, 2003, p. 13).

In any case, for the purpose of emphasizing the role of visionary experiences as mediators of cosmological and soteriological doctrines, as well as that of analyzing the Iranian context of Mani's conceptions, the manner in which Kerdīr received his visions is not so important. What is more relevant for the fate of Manichaeism during the Sassanid Empire is the content of the vision, with its Mazdean symbolism and its anti-Manichaean political purpose, i.e., the consciousness of Kerdīr who, like Mani, glimpsed the existence of different religions and, also like Mani, disputed the political support of Šābuhr.

According to Gignoux's harmonized edition of the Sar Mašhad and Naqš-i Rustam accounts, one reads that Kerdīr asked the gods to guide him towards paradise and hell. He stated that the saved ones would be greeted by their dēn (in the form of a woman), who would lead them to paradise, while the damned would also be taken to hell by their *dēn*. So too, Kerdīr states that upon his death his own *dēn* will come to meet him. And if he was saved, may his own *dēn* present itself to him as the guide to paradise, and if I was condemned, may it appear as the one leading to hell (Gignoux, 1991, p. 94).

Such questions should be confirmed after analyzing the visions – to which the aforementioned passages concerning his ritual praxis pertain. That’s why he said that at the command of Šabuhr, king of kings, he performed a form of self-sacrifice for the sake of divine services and to his own spiritual well-being (Gignoux, 1991, p. 95), i.e., he undertook a other-worldly journey to verify matters concerning eschatology. For this reason, Kerdīr (Naqš-i Rajab, Gignoux, 1991, p. 38) states that nobody should doubt the existence of the afterlife, as it is certain that there are both heaven and hell. Those who do good will ascend to heaven, while sinners will be condemned to hell. And whoever performs virtuous actions and conducts themselves well in matters of reputation and prosperity will accumulate reward in their physical body and salvation in their spiritual body.

As noted by Domenico Agostini (2014, p. 62), the visions have elements found in the earliest Mazdaean eschatology: the *daēnā*, the bridge *činwad*, paradise with the blessed souls and hell with the damned. The fate of good souls in paradise and evil souls in hell is elaborated differently by Mani and Kerdīr; at the epicenter of this controversy are two antagonistic views of the body and matter. The details of the Manichaean conception of the body have already been dealt with in its Christian context on the one hand, and in the Iranian context (i.e., the ritual practice of the Ruvānegān) on the other.

Prods Oktor Skjærvø's (1997, p. 315) research on Kerdīr's inscriptions shows that they hold political and religious importance. For example, certain reliefs (ŠKZ) were created to honor Šābuhr's political achievements, particularly his triumph over the Roman emperor Valerian. Moreover, the Coptic Manichaean Homilies and inscriptions from Kerdīr and Šābuhr at Naqš-e Rostam, and Ka'be-ye Zardošt suggest a possible tradition of Zarathustra's burial at that location (Skjærvø, 1997, pp. 313-317). As Skjærvø has demonstrated, any research focusing on the contrasts between Sasanian Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism must account for their varying beliefs on anthropology and the afterlife. Additionally, as pointed out by Skjærvø (1997, p. 335), these differences extend to soteriology. The affirmation of the benevolent nature of the Kerdīr body implies a ritual and soteriological practice that is in direct conflict with Manichaean soteriology, representing more than just a subtle variation.

The importance of visionary experiences and its correlative accounts was demonstrated by Andrea Piras, whom, in addition to the 'counter-Manichaean' elements investigated by Skjaervo, emphasized to the visionary context that underlines Kerdīr's anti-Manichaean doctrinal statements. Piras has drawn attention to the fact that the edict of Kerdīr's promotion was accompanied by a visionary account, which, in Piras' words, is immersed in a core of eschatological conceptions intrinsic to a tradition of texts and ritual and sacrificial practices correlate to supernatural experiences, in which Kerdīr stands in opposition to Mani (Piras, 2019, p. 669):

> forse non nelle intenzioni di Mani ma nelle reazioni dei suoi avversari. La fabbricazione di un sigillo-gemma corredato da una iconografia più una iscrizione, costruito per essere portato come pendaglio, si configura infatti come un elemento di decoro e di censo oltre che strumento di personale segnatura e di identificazione. Vi è poi un elemento di ulteriore autorevolezza, relativa a questa facoltà di vidimazione che accrebbe il prestigio di Mani, e

> forse anche determinò ulteriori effetti collaterali nei luoghi e nelle figure del potere a lui ostili. Il catalogo delle sue qualità (sapiente, terapeuta, letterato, artista) e dei suoi carismi è noto, infatti, non solo dalla varietà delle fonti manichee primarie ma anche – controluce e in filigrana – dai proclami del suo avversario Kirdīr, le cui iscrizioni rappresentano una sorta di narrazione contrastiva che allude a Mani: direttamente, quando si nominano gli zandīk, o indirettamente, quando vengono menzionati i provvedimenti di Kirdīr e la sua infaticabile difesa dei principi della religione, delle consuetudini sociali e dei privilegi del clero e della monarchia.

In sum, the Manichaeans and the Zoroastrians had in common the orientation of their lives toward their souls, to use Stausberg's expression. However, the Manichaean perspective on the physical world differs significantly from the Middle Persian wisdom literature, which recommends treating the body with joy and moderation to fulfill its obligations (cf. Stausberg, 2008, p. 47). In contrast to Kerdīr's perspective, Mani's anthropology proposes a distinct eschatological process. According to the Šābuhragān (390-395; Mackenzie, 1979, pp. 520-521), the body is a product of the demon Āz. As a result, souls that are unable to break free from Āz and desire will be confined with Ahriman and the demons in a everlasting prison.

In conclusion, the Manichaean tripartite nature of the soul, combining Pauline and Iranian teachings, marginalized the mēnōg aspect and exemplified a pessimistic view of matter in cosmogonic conflicts. While Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism share a near-identical cosmogonic myth, their understandings of anthropology, eschatology, and soteriology diverge. Kerdīr's visions reinforce his understanding of the resurrection and post-mortem state, demonstrating that eschatology was the center of controversies. For a clearer understanding, an in-depth analysis of Mani's eschatology with references to his metaphysics of time, Zurvān, and astrology in the Iranian context can be instructive.

2.2 Zurvān

a) the problem of “Zurvanism” as a scholarly category.

Zurvanism is an academic category that refers to a purported branch of the Mazdaean religion in which the dualism between Ohrmazd and Ahriman, subject to the God of Time, Zurvān, is mitigated; the essential myth of Zurvanism would identify

Ohrmazd and Ahriman as twin brothers begotten by Zurvān[60] – which has caused considerable controversy. Scholars have scrutinized this category, particularly in terms of its typological use, that is whether there are sufficient elements to classify Zurvanism as a separate religion, or merely a branch of Zoroastrianism[61]. Recently, evidence has emerged showing that "Zurvanism" as a religion distinct from Zoroastrianism never existed[62]. Therefore, this study analyzes the issues surrounding the category of "Zurvanism" in the study of Manichaeism. This will enable us to understand the role of Zurvān in Mani's system, and the significance of time, particularly in astrology.

For Zaehner, Zurvanism was a reaction to Zoroastrian dualism - a foreseeable one, in his view, considering that the history of religions indicates that people usually search for a unified godhead. The goal was to restore this unity by establishing a principle that was superior and prior to both Ohrmazd and Ahriman, thus distancing itself from the fundamental dualism found within Zoroastrianism. Zurvanism was considered a heterodox sect that revived unorthodox concepts that were strictly forbidden in Zoroastrianism. These ideas were believed to be alien to Zoroastrianism and Iranian culture, making them subject to examination for connections to non-Iranian religions (Zaehner, 1955, p. 3).

J. Duchesne-Guillemin (1956, p. 108) summarizes the problem of the study of Iranian religions in the Sassanid period as follows: most of the sources are foreign and consist essentially of accounts by Christians in Armenia and Syria. In such accounts Zurvān is presented as the supreme god, father of Ormazd and Ahriman. Unlike Christensen, Zaehner's predecessor, for whom the Sassanid religion was Zurvanism, which would have been purged after the Islamic conquest, Duchesne-Guillemin (1956, p. 108), on the contrary, downplayed the conflict between "dualistic" and "monistic" tendencies, arguing that Zurvanite features in Pahlavi literature were a tendency that could never prevail.

[60] R.C. Zaehner (1955) conducted the primary study on the purported Zurvanism, examining the god Zurvān and the associated doctrines that constitute a distinct theology, separate from the Mazdaean tradition and conflicting with the Zoroastrian tradition. This thesis proposed by Zaehner has a lengthy history. For a summary, please refer to Mary Boyce's article (1957, p. 304).

[61] See Richard Frye (1959)

[62] See Albert de Jong (2014) and Shaul Shaked (1994, p. 54)

Richard Frye (1959, p. 68), in an analysis of the above arguments, distanced himself from the thesis that there was a conflict between a Zurvanite and a Zoroastrian religion; against Christensen's hypothesis, Frye states that there is no evidence of a geographical distribution of a Mazdaean orthodoxy in opposition to a supposed Zurvanism, so that Christensen's theory (i.e., Zurvanism was the religion of the Sassanids) does not hold. Frye, however, still admits a distinction between what would be a Zurvanite and a Zoroastrian perspective, but does not express it in terms of a conflict between two religions ("In conclusion, I feel that the separate existence of a Zurvanite religion and church is more the creation of European scholars than a true picture of what existed in Sassanian times"; Frye, 1959, p. 73).

Zaehner (1955, p. 38) argues that the term "Zandīks" was originally used to refer to "unorthodox" understandings of the Zand or the Avesta that denied the creation of the world and believed in the eternity of matter. This was brought to attention by the Arab historian Mas'ūdī. Zaehner (1955, p. 38) also suggests that Kerdīr may have persecuted the Zurvanites based on his inscription discovered at Naqš i Rajab. As per Boyce (1957, p. 307), Kerdīr's persecution of Zandīks should not be extended to include Zurvanites. However, she does not completely discard the concept of Zurvanism (Boyce, 1957, p. 306). According to Zaehner, Kerdīr, being an opponent of the Zandīks, could not have followed Zurvanism. Thus, his teachings would have represented a return to Mazdaean orthodoxy, which Boyce[63] rejects.

To clarify the above controversies, it is important to primarily understand Zurvān as a concept for time. According to the *Bundahišn*, as translated and edited by Domenico Agostini and Samuel Thrope (2020), Ohrmazd was not the Lord before creation, but became the Lord after creation. According to the *Bundahišn*, Ohrmazd realized that the Evil Spirit would not stop attacking, and creation was necessary to make his attack powerless. Creatures could only become animated and start moving with the creation of time, and once time was created, Ahriman's creatures were also animated (*Bundahišn*, 33-35; Agostini & Thrope, 2020, p. 8). Agostini's translations of the following passages highlight the cosmological significance of time:

[63] Nonetheless, Boyce still regards Zurvanism as a 'Zoroastrian heresy', even unjustly calling it a "deep and grievous heresy, which was greatly to weaken Zoroastrianism in its later struggles with Christianity and Islam" (Boyce, 2001, p. 69).

> He fashioned Time of Long Dominion as the first creation that was infinite. Before the Mixture, the perpetuity of Ohrmazd was fashioned finite from the infinite. For from the primal creation, when he created the creatures, to the end, when the Evil Spirit will become powerless, there is a measure of twelve thousand years, which is finite, and then it mixes with and turns into infinity. That is, the creatures, too, will be eternal and pure with Ohrmazd. As it says in the dēn: "Time is more powerful than both creations, the creatures of Ohrmazd and those of the Evil Spirit. Time is the measure of all things. Time is the most covetous of those who covet. Time is the most questioning of those who question. (That is, it is possible to decide in time.) Our time was laid down limited; in time, what is built up6 falls down. No mortal man escapes it, not if he flies upward, nor if he digs down a deep well and sits in it, nor even if he goes down under the spring of the cold waters." (*Bundahišn*, 41-42; Agostini & Thrope, 2020, p. 9).

R. C. Zaehner (1955, p. 106) linked this creation of the Time of the Long Dominion, also known as finite Time (*zamān i kanārakōmand* or *zamān i brīn*), with Zurvān. At the end of the cosmic period, finite Time mixes again with infinite Time (*Zurvān* or *zamān i akanārak*). For Zaehner, this cosmology, which involves a cosmic period of 12,000 years, could be easily accepted by Zoroastrians and "Zurvanites" because there is no suggestion that time is superior to Ohrmazd, a doctrine the former would reject (Zaehner 1955, p. 108). To support his theory of a Zoroastrian heresy known as Zurvanism, Zaehner equated time with Zurvān. However, Shaul Shaked has argued against this hypothesis by saying that while time is a critical factor in the Iranian creation myth, Zurvān does not figure in the 'classical' or 'deviant' versions. Nevertheless, Shaked acknowledges that time (*zamān*) plays an essential role. The deity Zurvān is mentioned in Pahlavi texts, but not in the creation myth, as noted by Shaul Shaked (1994, pp. 16-17).

According to Agostini (2020), non-Iranian sources such as Greek, Syriac, Armenian and Arabic ones narrate an alternative version of the Iranian creation myth. In this version, Ohrmazd and Ahriman are the children of Zurvān, the God of time. However, this story is absent from Zoroastrian literature. Thus, scholars believed Zurvanism to be a suppressed 'heresy,' and consequently, references to it were likely removed from Zoroastrian literature. As noted by Agostini, Zurvanism was identified in several passages of the Bundahišn, including Chapter 1, by Zaehner (Agostini, 2020, xviii). In his article for the Encyclopaedia Iranica, Albert de Jong (2014) pointed out the circularity of the

methodology used to establish a supposed Zurvanism. It designated all speculations about time and space as Zurvanite and interpreted all passages alluding to these concepts as a 'Zurvanite remnant'. In fact, de Jong (2014) has articulated this situation quite clearly:

> Zurvanism became a convenient receptacle for everything that clashed with generally held notions about “real” Zoroastrianism, and since the dominant approach to the subject was that Zurvanite ideas originated in a confrontation of Iranian with Babylonian or Greek ideas, the Zurvanite hypothesis came to function as a shield to protect “proper” (Iranian) Zoroastrianism from a hybridized version of that religion that was contact-induced.

In Manichaean research, the weaknesses of the Zurvanism thesis are significant. In a pivotal study on the relationship between Manichaean dualism and Zoroastrian dualism, Werner Sundermann (1997) proposed that Mani had preferred Zoroastrian dualism over Zurvanite solution. Methodological caveats have been highlighted by Werner Sundermann (1997) for a historical study of Mani's relationship with Zoroastrianism. The first issue Sundermann pointed out is the textual difficulty of studying Mani's relationship with Zoroastrianism. One must determine if a strictly dualistic type of Zoroastrianism, which could have influenced Mani during the second century CE, existed. However, the available material ranges from the Gathas of Zarathustra to the Pahlavi literature of the ninth century (Sundermann, 1997, p. 347).

Subsequently, in the discussion, Sundermann presents a passage analyzed by Zaehner (1955) from a Manichaean manuscript in Turkish, which includes a supposed anti-Zurvanite criticism. In this Manichaean text, Ohrmazd and Ahriman (Xormuzda and Šimnu in Turkish) are referred to as the younger and older brother, respectively. Sundermann (1997, p. 344) highlights the parallel between them and the Zurvanite myth, where Ahriman is born before Ohrmazd. 348). According to Sundermann (1997, p. 348), Mani must have been aware of this myth; otherwise, he could not have associated his Primal Man with Ohrmazd and his Father of Greatness with Zurvān.

Based on this identification, Sundermann drew the following conclusions: 1) Mani was aware of another version of the Mazdaean myth, as evidenced by his contradiction of the Zurvanite version that presented Ohrmazd and Ahriman as twin brothers. Sundermann highlighted this in Yasna 30. This dualistic concept in Yasna 30 could have been familiar to Mani. This dualistic concept in Yasna 30 could have been familiar to Mani. 2) Sundermann argued that if Mani had to choose between two Mazdaean

perspectives, then he did so based on his own dualistic ideas (Sundermann, 1997, pp. 348-350). However, Shaked (1994, p. 18) emphasizes that there is no justification to view the 'monist' version of the Mazdaean myth as a Zurvanite creation. Rather, the creation of Zurvanism was, among the aforementioned motives (cf. de Jong, 2014), a solution to the various dualist perspectives in the Mazdaean tradition. Mani's opposition was not to a non-existent Zurvanist religion existing apart from Zoroastrianism, but rather in favor of his own understanding of an allegedly "original tradition" of Mazdayanism.

This section will deal with the role of time and the god Zurvān in Manichaeism through the following problem: the origin of the astral gods and their astrological consequences within the cosmogonic myth of the battle between Ohrmazd and Ahriman, i.e. the idea of a material dimension of the cosmos created from the bodies of demons. Thus, it will be seen that the choice between a mitigated dualism and a radical dualism has significant consequences for Manichaeism, since Manichaean eschatology makes use of a kind of "cosmic machinery" whose aim is to liberate the particles of light from matter. The soteriology implicit in Manichaean eschatology is in stark contrast to that found in Kerdīr. This opposition complements the visionary controversies explored in the first topic of this chapter.

b) The role of Zurvān as the Manichaean Father of Greatness and the birth of the Astral Gods

In a collection of Turkish Manichaean texts edited and translated by Hans-Joachim Klimkeit (1993, p. 330) one reads that "the eternal God Zurvān is the Living Self, He is more bright and splendid than all the mighty ones and kings". The Iranian cosmogonic hymns describe the same function for Zurvān as the Father of Greatness in the central cosmogonic myth that speaks of the attack of Darkness on the Kingdom of Light: During the battle when the king of demons (<'wy dyw'n š'ẖ>) moved towards Light (*rōšn*) due to envy (*rešk*), Zurvān, the greatest of the gods, was injured (S 13 + S 9 R ii 30; Boyce, 1975, pp. 100-101; cf. Klimkeit, 1993, pp. 38-39).

In the Iranian world, the adaptation of astrology to Mazdayanism led to the demonization of the astral gods, which had cosmological consequences. Although the Sun and the Moon were originally considered benevolent deities, the Zoroastrian priests had to safeguard their divine character after the demonization of astral gods, just as in Mandaeism. (Zaehner, 1955, p. 158). The Sun and the Moon were both crucial in Mani's

salvific scheme. However, the Manichaeans adopted a unique approach, which is evident in the creation of the material world.

The *Kephalaion* XLVIII (122-123; Polotsky, 1940) offers further details about the core cosmogonic myth of Manichaeism. Mani's doctrine states that matter exists in all archons. The archon subsequently tried to seize the image of the Envoy, but it failed to do so. The outcome was its tumbling down and splitting into three pieces: The three parts then fell on the wheel (τροχός), the earth (ⲁⲡⲕⲁϩ) (*Ke.* XLVIII, 123, I), and into the sea (θάλασσα), respectively. The wheel received the first component, whereas the second and third ones crashed on the earth and the sea, accordingly. The significance of this cosmological concept regarding adverse astral effects is supported by the testimony of Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, who presents a matching account of the demonic origin of the celestial vault in the *Shābuhragān* of Mani. John Reeves has translated this passage as:

> He (i.e., Abū Bakr al-Rāzī) mentioned what the Zoroastrians claim on the authority of Zoroaster with regard to Ahriman and Ohr[mazd], and what Mānī asserted about it; (namely), that the Word became separated from the Father and it dispersed the devils and killed (them); that the heavens originate from the skins of the (slain) devils; that thunder is (caused by) the cries of demons and that earthquakes are (caused by) the commotion of devils beneath the Earth (*Kitāb a'lām al-nubuwwa,* ed. Ṣāwī; cf. Reeves, 2011, p. 99)

Antonio Panaino highlighted the similarity between this cosmological myth, wherein the body of a demon is responsible for creating the material world, and other tales from Iranian and Indian mythology. It is suggested that Mani may have been familiar with these stories, considering the context. Out of all the similarities, Panaino suggests that the Manichaean and the Mesopotamian ideas are the closest to each other. Thus, Panaino cites a passage from the Enūma Eliš (137, 138), describing how Ea slays Apsū, the original monster, and Marduk overcomes Tiāmat, creating the sky with one half of her body and the earth with the other half (Panaino, 1997, p. 259).

The cosmological-astrological perspective of matter offers a glimpse into the distinct attributes of the 'Wheel of the Stars ' (*Ke*. XLVIII, 121, 33-5). Although the Wheel of the Stars (ⲁⲡⲧⲣⲟⲭⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ⲛⲥⲓⲟⲩ) has no root (ⲛⲟⲩⲛⲉ) in this Earth (ⲡⲓⲕⲁϩ), it has its foundations in everything. and it receives life (ⲡⲱⲛϩ) that comes from the lands through the filaments and the firmaments (ϩⲛ̄ ⲛ̄ⲕⲁϩ ϩⲛ̄ ⲛ̄ⲗⲓϩⲙⲉ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲛⲥⲧⲉⲣⲉⲱⲙⲁ) – it obtains life

through those filaments that lead to the firmaments and the higher worlds (ⲛⲕⲟⲥⲙⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ⲧⲡⲉ) above it, including the higher realms (122, 1-5; Polotsky, 1940). This cosmological process aligns with the doctrine of Manichaean time, which presents the main events, referenced in the introduction of this thesis, to Mani's cosmogonic myth. The doctrine of the three times (Ke. XVII, 55, 25-33; Polotsky, 1940) presupposes the description of the descent of the First Man (ⲡϣⲁⲣⲡ ⲛⲣⲱⲙⲉ) into the abyss, where he fought a war (πόλεμος) against the King of Darkness (ⲙⲛ ⲡⲣⲣⲟ ⲛⲛⲁⲡⲕⲉⲕⲉ) and his forces.

The astrological ordering[64] illustrates the cosmic procedure of freeing the particles of Light central to Manichaean soteriology, where the significance of the Sun and the Moon becomes apparent. The sun and moon have a function that becomes clear when one understands the "filaments," which are a fascinating convergence point between Mazdaean and Manichaean cosmology. Within the context of Sassanid astrology, the union of different cosmographic schemes - and often in opposition to each other - forms what Antonio Panaino (2019, p. 10) has called the "cinematic character" of the various filaments/strings of planetary motion. Therefore

> The Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Iranian uranography, despite some bold contradictions, was able to compress a traditional representation of the heavens into a spherical model, accepting Ptolemaic patterns and schemes openly in contradiction with the coexistence of older models and peculiar cosmographic concepts. The presence in Sasanian (and post-Sasanian) Iran of contrasting visions of the heavens, including Ptolemaic, and anti-Ptolemaic, and even anti-Aristotelian, theories (as the one of the Celestial Tabernacle defended by Cosmas Indicopleustes), confirms the intellectual complexity of the multi-cultural and multi-religious debate current in this area in Late Antiquity (Panaino, 2019, p. 11).

[64] According to Mani, the signs of the zodiac are fixed and spread out on the four sides, with three on each angle (Ke. LXIX 168, 17-32; Polotsky, 1940, p. 168). There are three signs at each corner, thus dividing the twelve signs into four ends and creating the following groups: Aries, Leo and Sagittarius; Taurus, Capricorn and Virgo; Gemini, Libra and Aquarius; Scorpio, Pisces and Cancer. The signs were arranged (Ke. LXIX, 167, 22-23, Polotsky, 1940,) by the five worlds of darkness; each world has two signs: Gemini and Sagittarius are in the world of smoke, which is the Nous; Aries and Leo, in the world of fire; Taurus, Aquarius and Libra, in the world of wind; Cancer, Virgo and Pisces, in the world of water; Capricorn and Scorpio, in the world of darkness. They are defined as 'archons of perfidy', the cause of all evil, whether in the tree or in the flesh.

Manichaean and Mandaean astrology[65] and cosmology share the same Iranian cosmographic heritage of filaments and strings, as noted by Panaino (1998, p. 131). The Mandaean texts relevant to this cosmological teaching, edited and translated by Mark Lidzbarksi, may shed some light. The *Ginza Rabba* (III, 97,9-34; 98, 7-30; Lidzbarksi, 1925, p. 103-14) narrates the story of Pthahil, who plays a demiurgic role in Mandaeism (cf. Drower, 1960, p. xv). It tells about the creation of the celestial firmament and the action of the planets. Another cosmogonic factor that can be compared to the Manichaean material is the combat against light, where Ruha and the planets learned about the utria spirits' plans to take Adam and his father, Adakas-ziwa, to a dwelling of light. Upon learning this, they lamented and planned to capture Adam and imprison him in the world (GR, III, 104, 17-35; Lidzbarksi, 1925, p. 113). 113). This is similar to the attempt made by Matter to capture the Manichaean Envoy in *Ke*. XLVIII.

According to Antonio Panaino, the Ginza demonstrates that the dragon and planets are attached to the celestial vault, and the same teaching is present in the episode where Mana refers to the seven planets. Additionally, Panaino noted parallels between the confinement of planets and constellations and the Manichaean tradition (Panaino, 1998, p. 137). Moreover, Panaino added that classical Mandean texts use the terms *šibiahia* and *šībīahē* when referring to the planets that express the word 'demon,' which is also evident in their malevolent influence on Adam, as mentioned before. Similarly, the Ethiopian version of the Book of Enoch reflects this idea by demonizing the planets and subjecting them to celestial bindings (Panaino, 1998, pp. 138-139).

The book of 1 Enoch (72, 2-19; Charlesworth, 1983) provides a precise instance of the use of astrological terminology for cosmological (astronomical) aims. According to 1 Enoch (72, 2-19; Charlesworth, 1983), the sun is a luminary whose output opens to the sky, and Isaac adds that the term hewhew, sometimes interpreted as portal or gate, actually means opening (Charlesworth, 1983, p. 51e). Charlesworth observed that the twelve signs of the zodiac are designated by 'openings' or 'portals,' and that each sign of the zodiac has a 'celestial abode' (Charlesworth, 1977, p. 189). We can clearly see the

[65] The arrangement of signs' nature in Manichaeism is different from the Mandaean arrangement, which, in the Book of the Zodiac (IV, 108; Drower, 1949, p. 70), is Aries, Leo and Sagittarius - Fire; Taurus, Virgo and Capricorn - Earth; Gemini, Libra and Aquarius - Air; Cancer, Scorpio and Pisces - Water. The gender division is as follows: Aries is male, Taurus is female, Gemini is male, Cancer is female, Leo is male, Virgo is female, Capricorn is female, Aquarius is male, and Pisces is female. In the *Kephalaia* (Ke. LXIX), the material was arranged based on Manichaean cosmological principles, leading to the inclusion of the 'vapor world (Nous)' conception.

cosmological nature of these astrological symbols when we examine the aforementioned passage, where the visionary witnessed the openings from which the sun rises and sets, and the moon passes through the same portals while being guided by the stars (1 Enoch, 72, 3; Charlesworth, 1983, p. 51).

According to Edmondo Lupieri (2002, p. 41), the celestial vault marks the boundaries of the cosmos, and serves as the basis for the control of the twelve and seven, which were the ancient astral gods worshipped across Mesopotamian territories. Lupieri (2002, p. 41) notes that not all texts depict the astral gods in a negative way. Positive aspects are taken into account, given that the routine of the Mandaean culture involves constant astrological consultations through horoscopes, predictions of the future, and more. E. S. Drower (2002, p. 75) further states that magical methods can have both beneficial and malevolent effects.

The Land of Darkness (ⲡⲕⲁϩ ⲙⲡⲕⲉⲕⲉ) is referred to as the First Night (ⲧⲱⲁⲣⲡ ⲛⲟⲩⲱⲛ). It consists of twelve shadows because of the fivefold nature of the four great days and their counterparts in the twelvefold categories. These twelve shadows correspond to the five constituents of darkness. Matter (ὕλη) is referred to as the Second Night, also known as the King of Darkness (see Tardieu and Ke. IV, 26, 1-27), whereas the Third Night is known as the five worlds of the flesh (ⲧⲙⲁϩⲱⲁⲙⲧⲉ ⲛⲟⲩⲱⲛ ⲡⲉ ⲡϯⲟⲩ ⲛ̄ⲕⲟⲥⲙⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ⲧⲥⲁⲣⲍ̈) More important for the cosmological and astrological aspect is the Fourth Night (Ⲧⲙⲁϩⲩⲧⲟⲉ ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲱⲛ), when the law of sin (ⲡⲛⲟⲙⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ⲡⲓⲛⲁⲃⲉ) is in operation, the Spirit of Darkness manifests in the form of twelve spirits (ⲡⲙⲛⲧⲥⲛⲁⲩⲥ ⲙ̅ⲡ̅ⲛ̅ⲁ̅) - the twelve zodiacal (ζῴδιον) of Matter (ⲡⲙ̅ⲛ̅ⲧⲥⲛⲁⲩⲥ ⲛⲍⲱⲇⲓⲟⲛ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲧϩⲩⲗⲏ) (*Ke.* IV, 26-27; Polotsky, 1940).

The influence of the zodiac on people's lives is quite clear: everything that happens to a man (ⲣⲱⲙⲉ), whether wealth comes to him, or poverty befalls him, sickness and health (ⲡⲫⲱⲱⲛⲉ ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ ⲡⲟ̄ⲩⲭⲉⲓⲧⲉ), happens to him because of the signs of the zodiac and the stars (ⲡⲍⲱⲇⲓⲟⲛ ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ ⲡⲥⲓⲟⲩ) (*Ke. XLVIII*, 122, 12-15; Polotsky, 1940). How the zodiac affects human affairs is reflected in the astrological terminology used by the Manichaeans to express the soteriological process of the cosmos. For instance, the Middle-Persian

cosmogonic text (M 98 I and M 99 I) contains a description of the creation of the heavens and its soteriological function, which, according to Hutter, most likely belongs to the *Šābuhragān* (Klimkeit, 1993, p. 225). It is said that the seven planets (*haft abāxtar*) were fastened (*parzīd*) while the two dragons[66] (*dō azdahāg*) were hung up (*āgust*). Then they were placed in the sky (*āsmān*, i.e., firmament; cf. p. 60; Klimkeit, 1993, p. 226) by hanging (*āgus*t). Two angels (*frēstag*), one male (*nar*) and one female (*māyag*), were appointed (*gumārd*) to continuously (*anaspēn*) rotate (*gardānīdan*) them around the Call[67] (*pad*) (Boyce, 1975, p. 60)

This cosmic machine's purpose is to liberate light particles from matter. The Sun and Moon are depicted positively for their actions in this regard, as one sees in the Iranian Manichaean text M 7984 II (Boyce, 1975, p. 64). It is stated that (the Third Messenger) will assign the Sun (*xwar*) and Moon (*māh*) (<xwr 'wd m'ẖ>) to their continuous (*ǰār*) cycles[68] (*pahrēzišn*) for the Light (*rōšnīh*) and Goodness (*xwašan*) of the gods (*yazdān*), who were attacked by Āz, Ahriman, and the demons (<''z 'wd 'hrmyn 'wd dyw'n>). Alexander of Lycopolis (6, 6-22; Piras, cf. Gnoli, 2006, p. 144) was acquainted with this Manichaean doctrine, which held that the Sun and Moon (ἥλιον καὶ σελήνην), by means of generation and destruction, are continuously separating the divine power from matter, bringing it (back) to God (ταῖς γενέσεσιν καὶ ταῖς φθοραῖς ἀεὶ τὴν δύναμιν τὴν θείαν τῆς ὕλης ἀποχωρίζοντας καὶ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν παραπέμποντας). Alexander's account supports the rationale for excluding the Sun and Moon (ⲡⲣⲏ ⲙⲛ ⲡⲟⲟⲩ) from the stars and the zodiac (ⲁⲛ̃ⲥⲓⲟⲩ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲛ̄ⲍⲱⲇⲓⲟⲛ) in *Kephalaion LXIX* (169, 21-22 Polotsky, 1940): they come from Greatness, which pertains to the domain of the Father of Greatness.

c) Manichaean Eschatology: Astrology, Bardaisan of Edessa, and the Mazdaean Tradition

As the previously quoted texts show, astrology played a significant role for Mani and Manichaeism. According to Samuel Lieu (1985, p. 141), the Manichaeans were well-

[66] According to Mary Boyce (1975, p. 60), the two dragons represent the lunar nodes. In ancient times, the lunar nodes were thought to be evil as they were associated with eclipses. In Zoroastrianism, they are considered to replace the Sun and the Moon as planets.

[67] That is, the same Call present in Manichaean Coptic texts and connected to Manichaean gnosis/sophia. Cf. Ke.; for further reference, see Boyce (1975, p. 60) and Ries (2011, pp. 133-135).

[68] <j'r 'wd phryzyšn>. Boyce (1975, p. 64) translates this passage (*ud xwar ud māh* […] as and he (i.e. Third Messenger) shall assign to sun and moon time and revolution, whereas Klimkeit (1993, p. 227) translates as "to ascribe to Sun and Moon their cyclical courses".

known in Late Antiquity for their astrological prowess. From the available material of the time, what were the ways in which the Manichaeans explained their astrological doctrines? According to research on Bardaisan of Edessa, Mandaeism, and Astrology during the Sassanid period, which included Indo-Iranian and Greco-Egyptian influences, Manichaean astrology can be contextualized within the cosmological currents of the period. This is important to understand the Manichaean eschatology and soteriology, which is the liberation of light particles.

While only fragments of Bardaisan's original writings have survived, the Bardaisanite school left a significant work to posterity, which is the Book of the Law of the Countries, translated by H.J.W. Drijvers. The Book of the Law of the Countries provides a categorization of three attitudes towards astrology (Book of the Law of the Countries, 567, 5-15; 568, 20-25, Drijvers, p. 29), which is helpful in comprehending the place of Manichaean astrology in the Syro-Mesopotamian framework and in clarifying Mani's association with Bardaisan and Mandaeism. The above mentioned passage contains two paradigmatic views of astrology: 1) Those who believe that everything that happens is a reflection of the Seven (i.e., the stars); 2) Those who consider the art of the Chaldeans to be a hoax and believe that everything happens by chance; and 3) Those for whom everything that a human being does is in accordance with his will, through the freedom given to him; thus, all the negative incidents in his life are considered to be divine punishments.

Epiphanius' *Panarion*, translated by Frank Williams (2013), offers some information about Bardaisan, which, due to its polemical nature, is helpful in explaining the representation of astrology in the Jewish and Christian world so far. By comparing it with the Book of the Laws of the Countries, a work of the Bardaisanite school, it is possible to place Epiphanius' views in a certain heresiological pattern while correcting some inaccurate claims about Bardaisan's astrological beliefs. Epiphanius then contrasts two moments in Bardaisan's life. The first, positively described, is when he belonged to the "Holy Church". Subsequently, it gives an account of Bardaisan's near-martyrdom and his affinity to the Valentinians[69].

[69] However, the association between Bardaisan and Valentinianism has been contested by Illaria Ramelli (2009), who attributed it to the influence of Hippolytus.

Epiphanius claimed that when Bardaisan was "poisoned by the foolish doctrine", he introduced "various first principles and emanations" and denied the resurrection of the dead" (*Panarion*, 56, 1.1-2-1; Williams, 2013, p. 88). Epiphanius connects Bardaisanite astrology with Greek polytheism and argues that belief in Christian monotheism is incompatible with the Greeks' god-making of the sun, moon, and stars (*Panarion*, 56, 3.1-3; Williams, 2013, p. 88).

Epiphanius' accounts highlight two important points: the rejection of the resurrection and the nature of the astral gods, which were believed to contradict monotheism. Starting with astrology is helpful since it emphasizes the importance of the freedom concept in Bardaisan's cosmogony and helps clarify the relationship between astrology and monotheism. The allegedly denial of the resurrection, as it pertains to the study of Manichaeism, can be better comprehended through a comparison with Manichaean cosmology and its concept of the "filament," as well as the doctrine of the three times.

In *'The Book of the Laws of the Countries*,' Bardaisan responds to Awida's question concerning why God didn't create humans in a way that they do not commit sins and lays out the central elements of his idea of freedom. According to Bardaisan, if God had created humans in such a way, they would have been mere instruments in the hand of God. As human life is inherently driven by good, rather than evil, Bardaisan argues that freedom is essential so that human beings do not become mere puppets controlled by someone else. In the same section, Bardaisan equates human beings with angels, mainly because their inherent freedom puts them above other creatures - even over celestial bodies, which always act based on orders. Besides, Bardaisan claims that the freedom of humans is an expression of the divine (BLC, 547-548; Drijvers, 2006, p. 13). However, the ontological relation between humans and angels (BLC, 548-55; ed. Drijvers, 2006, p. 15) suggests, from Bardaisan's perspective, that there's a possibility of free will being used for sin, which was the question raised by Awida.

Therefore, there exists a relationship between God and the idea of freedom in Bardaisan's cosmology, astrology, and hierarchy of beings. The argument used to link free will with ontological queries (BLC, 548; Drijvers, 2006, pp. 13-15). This account goes into detail about fallen angels, which is reminiscent of the mythological descriptions discovered in the Dead Sea Scrolls about the sexual union of angels and humans,

abortions, and Nephilim. It's significant to remember that these same themes are fundamental to the Manichaean cosmogony (Reeves, 1992, pp. 69-71), and that Epiphanius claims that Bardaisan read apocryphal texts[70] (*Panarion*, 56, 2-2; Williams, 2013, p. 89).

The conjunction of God's omnipotence with the concept of freedom and fate in Bardaisan is presented in the following model by Tim Hegedus (2003, p. 337): God has authority over everything, but beneath this authority there are degrees of power stemming from astrological fate and the freedom of human conscience. This makes evident the presence of fate that both restricts the influence of the divine power and the scope of human conscience. Thus, opposing Epiphanius's perspective, it is clear that the Christian theology of Bardaisan is in full accord with his philosophical and astrological opinions. This is particularly apparent in the assertion that the heavenly bodies will be judged not by the components of their nature, but by the way they have exercised their free will (BLC, 548-551; Drijvers, 2006, p. 15).

The planets, or the celestial gods, did not have complete autonomy as they were part of a divine hierarchy with God holding the highest rank. Ute Possektel (2012, pp. 526-528) effectively summarized Bardaisan's position, explaining that he identified a similarity between humans and angels. Unlike other beings, humans and angels had the freedom of choice over their own actions, while the celestial gods enjoyed a certain degree of freedom, but would be subject to judgment in the final reckoning. Therefore, the Bardaisanite cosmogony serves as the basis for the aforementioned theory of freedom:

> The planets and other elements have been created from some kind of primordial substance and have lost some, but not all, of their initial energy.53 Matter thus is thought of as having an inherent spiritual quality, which during the process of creation was changed. The planets are on the one hand subject to the divine commandment, on the other hand they have a certain freedom on account of which they ultimately will be judged. And although Bardaisan—unlike his younger contemporary Origen—does not explicitly say that the planets are rational creatures, this does appear to be the logical conclusion (Possektel, 2012, p. 528)

[70] However, in the historical context of Bardaisan, it is important to use this terminology with caution since, as Ilaria Ramelli (2009, p. 3) notes, the biblical canon had not yet been established. On the other hand, the positively moral use of freedom implies an alignment of individuals' wills with divine will, such that those angels who acted in this manner were sanctified and exalted (BLC, 548; Drijvers, 2006, p. 15).

These elemental substances did not lose their own nature in the Bardaisanite cosmogony, but part of their power was lost by mixing them with each other (BLC 548-551; Drijvers, 2006, p. 15). Several studies have pointed out the significance of Bardaisan to Mani[71]; and, As Kurt Rudolph (1977, p. 351) argued, Bardaisan prepared the ground for Manichaeism.

Besides Bardaisan's work, the theory of the five elements that impacted the battle between light and dark forces in Manichaean cosmogony is also evident in Mandaeism, a religion that should be regarded as one of the sources of Manichaean cosmogony. Rudolph (1960) asserts that both Mandaeism and Manichaeism share cosmogonic and cosmological elements that can be traced back to Iranian traditions. These components notably include the idea of a Kingdom of Light and a Kingdom of Darkness (Rudolph, 1960, p. 179). Thus, the similarities between Bardaisanite and Mandaean concepts can be observed, which increases their importance for Mani. Aside from the five elements of light, the Kingdom of Light in the north and Darkness in the south (Rudolph, 1960, p. 179), Rudolph identified the following resemblances between Manichaeism and Mandaeism:

> Einzelne Stücke der mandäischen Literatur haben "manichäischen" Charakter, besonders zwei Stücke die sich mit der Urzeit befassen. Es begegnen hier: die zwei uranfängliche Naturen bzw. Könige, die Autogenese der Finsternis, der Krieg innerhalb der Finsternis, der Neid und Kampf der Finsternis gegen das Lichtreich, die Gestalt der Finsternis und seine Geschöpfe, Mischung der fünf Elemente, Schaffung der Welt und Adams, seine Erweckung durch den Ruf de Boten. (Rudolph, 1960, p. 178)

Mandaeism shares some similarities with Manichaeism but is different from Bardaisan. The significance of combat in its cosmogony sets it apart as a distinct feature of Mandaeism. The passages in the Ginza Rabba that illustrate the King of Light's initiation of the cosmogonic process are highly relevant. Kurt Rudolph (1965, p. 204) explored this in his work, *Theogonie, Kosmogonie und Anthropogonie in den mandäischen Schrift.* The *Ginza* (GR, III, 111, 5-30; Lidzbarski, 1925, p. 123) reports on the process whereby those deserving to be in the abode of light have corrupted the good things in this world. Specifically, they have corrupted the authentic mysteries and truthful speeches

[71]See Burkitt, 1922, p. 269-270; Decret, 1974, p. 30; Puech, 2006, p. 116; Tardieu, 2008, p. 32; Widengren,1964, p. 92

while propagating lies, leaving them undeserving to inhabit the abode of light. Rudolph notes that this mythological account of the Mandaean cosmogony highlights the idea that evil has corrupted good through the link to the orgy involving Ruha and the planets (Rudolph, 1965, p. 206).

The *Kephalaion VI* (*Ke.* VI, 30, 17-24; Polotsky, 1940) exemplifies the concept of darkness as an evil character in Manichaeism. The text outlines the emergence of the Five elements (στοιχεῖον) from five deposits (ταμιεῖον), which were originally situated in the Land of Darkness. The text contains information on The King of the World of Smoke (ⲡⲣ̄ⲣⲟ ⲙⲡⲕⲟⲥⲙⲟⲥ ⲙⲡⲕⲁⲡⲛⲟⲥ), who is the leader of all evil according to Manichaean tradition (*Ke.* VI, 30, 25-36; Polotsky, 1940). He against the Realm of Light, which represents the activity of Darkness. Thus, the differentiation between στοιχεῖον and the combination of elements in the Bardaisanite cosmogony differs from Manichaean doctrines. In Manichaeism, this idea is conveyed through a myth that features cosmogonic and theogonic processes distinguished by a metaphysical comprehension of time.

The metaphysics or theology of time is the doctrine that identifies three eras. The salvific process of Manichaean eschatology is briefly described in *Kephalaion* XVII (55, 19-24; Polotsky, 1940) as the right time (καιρός) when all light that is contaminated by darkness will separate and purify itself. The process starts with the crucifixion (σταυροῦν) of the light in darkness (ⲡⲟⲩⲁⲓⲛⲉ ⲉⲓ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ ⲁⲩⲥⲧⲁⲩⲣⲉ ⲉⲣ̄ⲙ̄ ⲡⲕⲉⲕⲉ) and ends with the ascension of the statue (ἀνδρίας) (ⲡⲕⲁⲓⲣⲟⲥ ⲉⲧⲉⲣⲉ ⲡⲁⲛⲇⲣⲉⲓⲁⲥ ⲛⲁⲉⲓ ⲁⲉⲣⲏⲓ).

Epiphanius claimed that Bardaisan denied the resurrection of the dead, which can be examined by comparing elements of Bardaisanite cosmogony and Manichaean cosmogony. This comparison helps to analyze the function of a mysterious "Statue" in Manichaean eschatology, which has no apparent parallel in Mandaeism. Kurt Rudolph had advocated a similar idea to Epiphanius, perhaps influenced by the heresiologist's accounts, stating that the Bardesanite worldview is consistently pessimistic and rejects the idea of resurrection (Rudolph, 1977, pp. 350-351). Based on the contents of the Book of the Laws of the Lands, however, it can be said that the Bardaisan worldview is, as Iain Gardner argues, more optimistic than that of the Mani, especially since Bardaisan define darkness as dead and inactive, whereas for the Mani, evil forces are real and active (Gardner, 2020, p. 91).

Although it may appear to be a strange term at first, the meaning of the statue has a connection to Bardaisan of Edessa that relates to the figure of Christ. Ilaria Ramelli analyzes a Bardaisanite passage located in Porphyry. In this passage, Bardaisan provides a commentary on a statue composed of an unidentified material. The statue had an image of a deity above its head. The figure used to sweat in hot periods and the Brahmins would cool it (Ramelli, 2009, 103). Ramelli contends that Bardaisan incorporated the depiction of God and his son found in Timaeus. From Bardaisan's Christian perspective, Ramelli attests that the son of God is identified as 'logos,' which, according to John's prologue, actively partakes in creation and finds confirmation in Syriac cosmological traditions. As per Ramelli, Bardaisan interpreted the Timaeus considering both Middle-Platonism and Christianity. In this context, Christ is represented as the son of God and the agent of creation. (Ramelli, 2009, p. 102).

Ramelli establishes the connection between Platonic, Stoic, and Christian lines of thought in Bardaisan's philosophy and theology. She notes that in Bardaisan's theological framework, the statue shares a common substance with the human being and the cosmos, both of which are identified as the body of Christ. The body of Christ is conceived of not only as a mortal and perishable body but also as an imperishable and glorious body of the resurrection (Ramelli, 2009, p. 104) - thus, far from being a "denial of the resurrection," Bardaisan holds a relatively common view in Late Antiquity (cf. Riley, 1995), including among his opponents, the Marcionites.

Finally, Manichaean eschatology can be understood through a comparison of Coptic texts with Iranian ones, along with consideration of the earlier mentioned Bardaisanite context. The proper timing (καιρός) to distance from the contaminated material (Ke. XVII, 55, 19-24; Polotsky, 1940) is associated with the original crucifixion and departure of the Statue/Christ, as noted by Stroumsa (1981, pp. 163-181, apud Gnoli, 2006, p. 288). However, this departure at the end of time does not result in a straightforward return to the initial state. Moreover, as Andrea Piras observed (2022, p. 120), the third time of the end, the *finitum*, is not a reinstatement of the beginning since dualism will be obliterated, although it's not possible to entirely eradicate the demons. Additionally, as Piras has emphasized, the light isn't all-powerful in terms of filtering and entirely redeeming its essence, which is to some degree irreversibly lost and corrupt. Hence, the Soul of the World, a part of the Father of Greatness, remains injured and flawed in the cosmic struggle.

Explaining the Manichaean eschatology, especially the notion that not all light can be saved, was difficult. According to Boyce (1975, p. 84), the text M 2 II is a translation of the original writing by Mani and provides a thorough description of the culmination of the eschatological process, resulting in the salvation of a significant portion of the Light. It has been stated (M 2 II; Boyce, 1975, ac, pp. 84-87; Klimkeit, 1993, pp. 254-255) that the battle-seeking gods led and guided their own aeons, as well as those of similar nature, which they established as the Great Earth. Afterward, they are summoned again by divine command to the New Then, they settled there as nomads, moving from place to place with their tents, horses, and flocks. Moreover, it is suggested that there remains a light which is so entwined with darkness that it cannot be distinguished from it, and thus does not possess the same properties as light. And it is also stated that the Five Lights, which refer to the Elements of Light that were bound, pleaded with the First Man during a battle. They expressed their desire not to be left among the darkness and asked to be released with the aid of a helper. God Ohrmizd (The First Man), promised not to leave them among the powers of darkness.

Next, the Manichaean text recounts that the divine elements of light prayed. However, this was not due to any lack of faith in the Ohrmizd God's assistance. Rather, the act of praying was a source of joy for them. It augmented their power, similar to how the voices and hearts of supporters strengthen fighters through their zeal. Nonetheless, the Manichaean text emphasizes that the gods were not saddened by the little light that remained forever mixed with Darkness, despite all the prayers and God's benevolence. This highlights an important and difficult doctrine espoused by Mani, proving that the eschatological process is not merely a return to the condition prior to the mixing of Light and Darkness. As noted by Klimkeit (1993, p. 254), this doctrine has been a topic of discussion among Manichaeans. Finally, following Klimkeit's translation (1993, p. 255), one reads that

> And when the battle-seeking (*razmyōz*[72]) ones (the gods) have rested for a while in the New Aeon (The New Paradise), and when even that small part (*kambīft*) of the Earth (*zamīg*) of Light (*rōšn*) and its mountains (*kōf*) (from which material was taken for the creation of the New Aeon) is restored, and

[72] The term <rzmywz'n> ('battle-rousing', 'battle-seeking', 'battle-seeker'), as Mary Boyce (1977, p. 81) shows, is essentially used to refer to the redeeming gods.

> when the "Last God" (*istomēn-iž*[73] *yazd*) (the last portion of Light to be saved) stands there redeemed, with full power in his limbs, and when the gods (*bayān*) of battle (*razmγāhīg*), together with the five Light Elements (*ād panǰ rōšn*) have recovered from their wounds (*xaδm*), then all the "jewels," the "messengers" and the battle-seeking gods will stand before the Lord of Paradise in prayer and praise (literally, supplication). (These are) 1. First the God Ohrmizd, together with "the Last God," 2. The Mother of the Righteous, 3. The Friend of the Lights, 4. God Narisaf (the Third Messenger), 5. God Bām (the Great Builder), 6. The Living Spirit, 7. Jesus the Splendor, 8. The Maiden of Light, and 9. The Great Nous.

Returning to the controversy between Mani and Kerdīr presented in the previous topic, Mani's universalist synthesis provided a novel expression of Mazdayanian eschatology, resulting in the opposition of the Zoroastrian Magi. Regarding the Iranian tradition, a Pauline and apocalyptic interpretation raised *gyān* above *mēnōg*, in agreement with the Manichaean soteriology of releasing the particles of Light. As Skjærvø (1997, p. 340) stated, this is why Manichaeism was considered as the primary rival of emerging Zoroastrianism since they were seen as less foreign than Christianity and the Indian *dēn*, according to Kerdīr's clarification. As Piras (2022, pp. 121-122) aptly summarized:

> Un concetto escatologico zoroastriano di basilare importanza, quello della trasfigurazione finale del mondo (*frašegird*), venne per esempio acquisito e proposto in una nuova interpretazione di Mani: si la trasfigurazione nello zoroastrismo prevede, nell'economia della salvezza, una redenzione e purificazione finale, in una ordalia del metallo fuso che investe le anime e i corpi dei buoni e dei malvagi, diversamente nel manicheismo – data la svalutazione del corpo – tale trasfigurazione riguarda solamente l'anima, unica preoccupazione delle strategie di salvezza, sia nel microcosmo che nel macrocosmo. Il corpo è una prigione e quindi un concetto tipo quello del corpo futuro (*tan ī pasēn*) nello zoroastrismo, quando dalle ossa risorgerà tutta l'umanità, doveva apparire inutile se non blasfemo, per una mentalità tesa alla salvaguardia dell'anime, non interessata al mondo in quanto creazione materiale.

[73] <ʿstwmynyc>: "last". This term also refers to the "last statue" (Coptic "ⲡⲓⲁⲛⲇⲣⲉⲓⲁⲥ ⲛ̄ⲣⲁϵ" from the Greek ἀνδριάς), a Manichaean terminology found in Coptic texts and discussed in this section; cf. Ke. XVI, 54, 10-22; Desmond Durkin-Meisterernst (2004, p. 91), *Dictionary of Manichaean Middle-Persian and Parthian*.

Skjærvø (1997, p. 341) summarizes the differences between Manichaeism and Kerdīr in the following manner: the Mazdaean tradition posits that God created man's mind and soul, while in Manichaeism, man and his mind (but not his soul) were created by darkness and evil. Furthermore, in Manichaean doctrine, the goal was for the individual to liberate their soul from both their physical form and the world, whereas in Mazdayanianism the individual's conduct within society determines the destiny of their soul following death.

However, it could be argued that in Manichaeism, conduct in society partially determined the afterlife. The conduct of the auditors, who served meals to the elect, still caused harm to the imprisoned light, yet through their services, they could hope for a good vision, dēn, in the form of a beautiful woman after death. In addition, the auditors hoped for the return to life in better condition, indicating the value of rebirth--a concept foreign to Mazdayanism yet significant in Manichaeism. Additionally, as previously mentioned, the emphasis on the resurrection of the body was present, and it was a topic of significant controversy in the Christian community. Manichaeism (and Marcionism), exemplifies that the distinction between Docetism and resurrection was not strict, resulting in Manichaean Christology having elements of both beliefs.

Moreover, the resurrection of the body is closely linked to distinguishing between the righteous and the evildoer in eschatology. According to the *Bundahišn*, when asked about the resurrection, Zarathustra queried Ohrmazd, who cited various aspects of creating the world that were more arduous than performing the Resurrection, "[f]or at that time I shall call the bones from the earth in the world of thought, the blood from the water the hair from the plants, the soul from the wind, as they received them at the original creation" (cf. Skjærvø, 2011, p. 168). The events comprising the eschatological process of the resurrection of the dead, as translated by Skjærvø's, are as follows:

> The first bones Sōshāns will raise are those of Gayōmard, and then those of Mashī and Mashiyānī, and then he will raise those of other persons. [7]For fifty-seven years, Sōshāns will raise all the dead. Whether good or bad, everybody will be raised from wherever their soul departed or they first fell to the ground. [8[Then, when they have restored the entire existence with bones in bodies, then they give them a frame (ēwēnag). Of the light which is with the sun, they give one half to Gayōmard and one half to the other people. [9]Then people will recognize other people: souls will recognize other souls, bodies other bodies, thinking: "This is my father, this is my brother, this is my wife,

> this is one of my close relatives. Then the assembly of Isadwāstar will take place, that is, people will stand up on this earth. [11]In that assembly everybody will see their own good and evil deeds. The good will be apparent among the bad like a white sheep among the black. [12]In that assembly, a good person who befriended a bad person in the world, that bad person will complain to the good one: "Why did you not tell me about the good deeds you yourself performed in the world?" If the good one informs him accordingly, then he has to experience shame in the assembly. [13]Then the good are separated from the bad, and the good are led to paradise, and the bad are thrown into hell. For three days and nights, they experience in their bodies and souls the punishments of hell, while, for three days and nights, the good will experience in paradise bliss in their bodies. [14]As it says: On that day, when the good and bad are separated, everybody's tears will reach as far as their calves, when sons are separated from their fathers, brothers from brothers, and friends from friends. [15]Everybody will experience their own deeds. The good will weep for the bad. The bad will weep for themselves (*Bundahišn*; cf. Skjærvø, 2011, p. 169)

With that in mind, it is possible to understand the meaning of Kerdīr's conclusion in his inscriptions. He reported that after the gods had revealed these things to him, even from the perspective of the dead, he became a better servant, displaying greater goodwill towards the gods and being more generous and just towards his own soul. Moreover, he gained greater confidence in relation to these Yasnas performed in the country. (Gignoux, 1991, pp. 98-99). Kerdīr also wrote to the succeeding generation, exhorting them to exhibit righteousness and generosity towards the divine beings and their own souls. He underscored the reality of heaven and the condemnation of wrongdoers to hell. Additionally, he stressed that the righteous would attain both a commendable reputation and physical prosperity, while also securing salvation for their souls - an achievement that Kerdīr himself is said to have acquired. (Gignoux, 1991, p. 99).

Compared to other texts in Pahlavi literature, such as the *Bundahišn*, one can see why emphasis on conduct in this world and its consequences in the future are important in Kerdīr's work. At first glance, the notions of heaven and hell, to which people go according to their conduct, seems similar to what is found in Manichaean texts, as well as the visions and receptions of the *dēn*. However, there is a significant difference in Kerdīr's work: the resurrection of the body holds great importance. Unconcerned with the

notion of transmigration, Kerdīr follows a very ancient conception in Iran, as noted by Skjærvø (1997, p. 341), which is already found in Achaemenid inscriptions and involves receiving a reward in this life for both body and soul. During the confrontation with Kerdīr, it became clear that the debates about eschatology, specifically the resurrection and its impact on the view of the body, as well as the perception of the body itself, were central to the dispute.

Furthermore, both Mani and Kerdīr used visionary practices and the authority of visions to rationalize their stances. And since the *Bundahišn* links the resurrection of the body to post-mortem rewards, Kerdīr's statement that there is a heaven and a hell can be viewed as a reaffirmation of Mazdaean eschatology in response to Manichaeism. Indeed, according to Skjærvø (1997, p. 341), the inscription of Kerdīr on the triumphal relief of Šābuhr may symbolize victory over another force that threatened Iranian religion and society. Manichaeism, after all, was considered perilous by Kerdīr for its dual similarity to Zoroastrianism and foreignness to Iran, since Kerdīr advocated for Zoroastrianism as the only appropriate religion for Iran (cf. BeDuhn, 2015, 2020b) This new religious climate had theological-political results, which culminated in the condemnation and death of Mani.

In the end, the theological disputes between Mani and Kerdir, both in the doctrinal and visionary dimensions, should be viewed as differing perspectives on an older Mazdaean tradition rather than a struggle between “orthodox” and “heresy”, albeit Kerdīr surely saw himself as an “orthodox” defending Iran against the “foreign” doctrines of the Manichaeans.

The controversy surrounding eschatology in Manichaeism reflects two aspects of the religion: doctrines on rebirth and radical asceticism. The latter was discussed in relation to the ritualized meals that the auditors oversaw, while rebirth was briefly mentioned in the same context. Though the concepts of rebirth and metempsychosis were common in Greece, the existence of transmigration in Manichaeism cannot be solely attributed to the cultural environment of the Mediterranean region. The significant differences between Mani's soteriology and eschatology and those of nascent Zoroastrianism cannot be solely accounted for by contrasting the Christian and Jewish influences with the Iranian substrate. The Indian substrate provides another crucial factor that requires investigation.

2.3 Jainism and Ājīvikism[74]

Scholars believe that Mani travelled to India between 240 and 242 A.D., although the hagiographic discourse at times hinders access to the exact dates of his journey[75]. According to the *Kephalaia*, in the last years of King Ardashīr I (ⲛⲁⲣⲧⲁϫⲟⲟⲥ ⲡⲣⲣⲟ), Mani embarked on a preaching mission (ⲁⲓⲉⲓ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ ⲁⲧⲁⲱϥⲉⲁⲓⲱ) to the land (χώρα) of the Indians; following Ardashīr I's passing, his son Sapōrēs (Šābuhr) became king, and then Mani travelled from India to Persia and subsequently returned to Babylon (*Ke. 1*, 15, 24-31; Polotsky, 1940). Regarding Mani's journey, it is stated that he travelled to Pharat, where he encountered a man named Oggias (?)'('Ωγ [...]). During his visit, Mani observed how merchants sailed to Persia and India (εἶδον δὲ τοὺς ἐμπόρους ὡς ἐπὶ τῶν πλοίων εἰς Πέρσας καὶ εἰς Ἴνδους) (*CMC*, 24, 144, 3-16; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, p. 126)

The occurrence of Indian elements within Manichaeism is typically linked to two inquiries: 1) the rationale behind Mani's trip to India - or, more accurately, to the Indian-influenced region of Central Asia, primarily Indo-Iranian locales, where Indian influence is noticeable; and 2) viewpoints on rebirth, karma, asceticism, and church organization[76]. Until recently, scholars have emphasized the role of Buddhism in the transmission of Indian practices and ideas to Manichaeism; indeed, the "Indian elements" in Manichaeism are often equated with Buddhism. The reason for this is simple: with the discovery of manuscripts belonging to the Eastern wing of Manichaeism in Central Asia, scholars have focused their attention on documents that are predominantly Buddhist in nature.

Richard Fynes (1996) and more recently Max Deeg and Gardner (2009) have emphasized the significance of Jainism in Manichaean thought. Fynes has highlighted the similarity between Jainism's hylozoism and the Manichaean ontology of light in plants. As this concept was quite unusual, Fynes posits a Jain origin for this ontology, primarily

[74] The section on Jainism and Ājīvikism has been synthesized with the following section on Buddhism and published as an article in Portuguese (Dantas, Cornelli; forthcoming).

[75] For a reconstruction of Mani's travels to India, refer to Sundermann (1986). Gardner (2020) has identified conflicting accounts regarding the chronology of events in Mani's life, including his journey to regions of Indian influence. These conflicting accounts likely resulted from the convergence of certain dates for hagiographic purposes.

[76] Much has been written on Manichaean conceptions of rebirth and transmigration, including frequent allusions and comparisons to Indian doctrines, particularly Buddhism. For instance, A. V. William Jackson (1925, 1930), Werner Sundermann (1986), Henri-Charles Puech (2006, p. 62), and Andrea Piras (2022, p. 114-116) have written about the topic. The structure of Manichaean monasticism has also been compared to Buddhism and, more recently, to Jainism. On this topic, see Geo Widengren (1961, p. 97), Michel Tardieu (2008, p. 61), and Ian Gardner (2005, p. 127).

based on the textual evidence from the CMC. Max Deeg and Ian Gardner, building on previous studies by Gardner (2005), examined the radical asceticism of Jainism and the similarities between Mani's conception of an encapsulated soul in matter and Jain ontology, with focus on the Jīva.

In the following analysis, the historical relationship between Manichaeism and Indian religions will be examined using passages from the Iranian corpus of Manichaean texts and the account of Bardaisan of Edessa, a key source used by scholars to reconstruct Mani's knowledge of India (Fynes, 1996; Henrichs, 2019 [1979]; Deeg and Gardner, 2009). I will analyze Mesopotamian, Christian, and Jewish perspectives on plant symbolism, as well as the various Indian cults, Vedic and non-Vedic, that emphasized tree spirits, to connect Manichaeism with the broader context of worship practices in the Indian subcontinent. In addition, the first chapter's analysis of Manichaean ritual practices, which explores the significance of the body in separating light from darkness, and the belief in the futility of baptism as a purification practice, is complemented by a brief analysis of a set of Manichaean tales and anecdotes in CMC, 14. These anecdotes demonstrate how the visionary aspect of Manichaeism expressed the concept of a dynamic universe in which the idea of Light trapped in substance was not only discussed but also implied the existence of specific groups of entities throughout the cosmos.

The limited textual evidence presents the main challenge in exploring the connection between Manichaeism and Jainism, and to some extent the Ājīvikas. Nonetheless, since Manichaeism held a unique belief in the soul of plants and incorporated Coptic terminology reminiscent of Jain doctrines, it is plausible that Jainism impacted Manichaeism[77]. An additional problem within Jain tradition is the lack of consensus on the chronology and canonicity of their scriptures[78]. The Ājīvikas present an

[77] The concept of a 'plant-soul' in Jain ontology, which according to Fynes (1996) has influenced Manichaeism, is part of a broader doctrine known as hylozoism. In Gombrich's words, hylozoism holds that "[a]ll matter contains sentient life in the form of *jīva*. This word basically means 'life', but here it denotes something which has certain of the properties of material, for it occupies the same space as the body it inhabits" (Gombrich, 2009, p. 48)

[78] On Jain literature see Jaini (1979, pp. 47-50), and on the dispute between the two main sects, the Digambara and Śventāmbara, see Jaini (1979, pp. 50-51). As Paul Dundas (2002, p. 45) emphasizes, the word *saṃpradāya* (sect) "suggests not so much a breaking away as a 'handing down' or 'transmission' of a particular set of teachings, along with a lineage of teachers associated with this process". Although the category of 'sect' can be useful, Dundas explains that it can also be misleading, for Jainism, like other Indian religious traditions, "places a high value upon correct pupillary descent which provides a channel of communication with ancient truths, manifesting itself most tangibly in correct forms of practice". However,

even greater challenge because it is an extinct religion that poses difficulties for study. As a result, this topic will receive less coverage than the others, and will be limited to providing a broader context for the notion of the soul of plants and suggesting that a particular passage in Bardaisan's account refers to a religious practice of the Ājīvikas.

a) Manichaeism and Indian Ascetic Traditions

In a Middle-Persian text (M 2 I e II; Boyce, 1975, h, 4-6, pp. 40-41) concerning the Manichaean missionary active in Eastern regions, it is said that when Mār Ammō and his companions arrived at the Kushan watch-post (*pahrag ī kušān*), a female spirit (*wāxš*) resembling (*dēs*; i.e., in the shape of) a girl (*kanīzag*) appeared at the Eastern (*hwarāsān*) border (*wimand*). She asked Ammō what his task[79] was and where he came from. Ammō said (*guft*) that he was a *dēnwar*, a devout follower of Apostle (*frēstag*) Mani. The spirit responded by stating that she was unable to receive[80] him there and, just before vanishing (i.e. hiding, *nihum*; cf. Durkin-Meisterernst, *Dictionary of Manichaean Middle Persian and Parthian*, 2004, p. 242), ordered him to return to his place of origin. Ammō fasted (*rōzag*) and prayed (*āfrīn*) to the Sun (*xwarxšēd*) for two days. Later, the spirit appeared again and asked him, "Which religion (*dēn*) do you bring with you?" and Ammō responded, "We do not eat meat (*pit*), drink wine (*may*), or enter into marriage[81]". The Spirit commented, "There are many (*was*) individuals here like (*če'ōn*) you."

The aforementioned passage contains two elements relevant for comprehending the historical interactions between Manichaeism and Indian religions. 1) the spirit at the border; 2) the abstinence from meat and wine and the ascetic habits in India, whose echoes are found in Manichaeism. The response of the spirit to Mār Ammō holds importance as it suggests the presence of groups similar to the Manichaeans, that is, ascetics refraining from wine and meat (Klimkeit, 1993, p. 218). Porphyry, in his *De Abstinentia*, provides insight into Indian religions through an account by Bardaisan of Edessa, which aids in contextualizing the Iranian Fragment.

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according to Dundas (2002), an original form of Jainism cannot be discerned or may not have existed at all (Dundas, 2002, p. 45).

[79] <cy-k'rg>, "task"; cf. Durkin-Meisterernst (2004, p. 222), *Dictionary of Manichaean Middle Persian and Parthian*. Klimkeit (1993, p. 204) translate as "[w]hat do you want?".

[80] <pdyrym> de <pdyr-> "to take, receive, accept"; cf. Durkin-Meisterernst (2004, p. 272), *Dictionary of Manichaean Middle Persian and Parthian*

[81] i.e., they don't take wives (*zan*)

Bardaisan (*De Abstinentia*, 17, 1; Girgenti; Sodano, 2005, p. 338) notes the existence of a group (γένος) of theosophists (θεοσόφων), who are wise in matters of divinity, and whom the Greeks (Ελληνες) refer to as gymnosophists (γυμνοσοφιστὰς). These gymnosophists are divided into two schools (δύο αἱρέσεις): Brahmins and Samanaioi (ascetics/mendicants) (Βραχμᾶνες and Σαμαναῖοι). The naked philosophers (γυμνοσοφιστὰς) reported by Bardaisan were significant personalities in the Greek imagination. Klaus Karttunen (1997, p. 56) notes that the term 'gymnosophist' (plural: γυμνοσοφισταί) was not utilized by Alexander's contemporaries, according to the sources accessible to researchers at least. Nevertheless, it later gained widespread usage, as demonstrated in the aforementioned excerpt, to identify Indian philosophers.

According to Strabo (15, I, 63; Jones, 1930, p. 108), Onesychritus of Astipalaia stated (φησιν) that he personally visited and discussed (διαλεξόμενος) with Indian philosophers (σοφισταῖς). Alexander, who was interested in these philosophers, heard (ἀκούειν) that they habitually remained naked (γυμνοὶ διατελοῖεν) and devoted themselves to perseverance (καρτερίας ἐπιμελοῖντο). The division of the Gymnosophists into Brahmins and *Samanaioi* (Βραχμᾶνες and Σαμαναῖοι) indicates that during this time, the term Gymnosophist had lost its specific meaning from the Alexandrian period and had become a general term for Indian philosophers. Roughly speaking, these ascetics include numerous groups of renunciants belonging to the non-Vedic tradition, the most famous of which, besides the Buddhists, are the Jains[82] and the Ājīvikas[83]; Geographically, this tradition dominated the northwest region of the Indian subcontinent in the greater Magadha area. Johannes Bronkhorst (2007) called this region 'greater Magadha' due to its distinct cultural and philosophical-religious aspects. Johannes

[82] Jainism had a significant impact on Indian society, and unlike Buddhism, which eventually disappeared from India, it remained a relevant force within the Indian subcontinent. Mahāvira, who is mentioned in the Pāli canon, must be seen from the Jain point of view as similar to the historical Buddha, for, as Richard Gombrich has said, "Jainism and Buddhism are alike in claiming that the figures whom modern scholars have considered to be founders of their respective religions were not founders, but re-founders: that each was part of a chain of great religious leaders who appear on earth at vast intervals of time to promulgate the truth and the ideal way of life". On the subject of karma among Jains, consult Padmanabh S. Jaini's seminal work. Regarding the Buddhist emphasis on the intent behind actions, which may be a response to the Jain theory of karma, refer to Gombrich (2009, p. 50). Another important issue in the interactions between Buddhism and Jainism concerns the role of specialized knowledge in matters of salvation. This topic was extensively discussed by Johannes Bronkhorst (2009), with particular attention paid to page 33, in which Bronkhorst outlines reasons for the emphasis on soteriological knowledge in Buddhism.

[83] The Ājīvikas, an extinct religion, held greater significance in Ancient India than is commonly acknowledged. The primary resource for studying their ideas remains A. L. Basham's *History and Doctrines of the Ājīvikas: A Vanished Indian Religion* (2009 [1951]). Nevertheless, Piotr Balcerowicz's recent work (2016; notably pages 37-43) offers a fresh and stimulating perspective on the connection between Jainism and Ājīvikism.

Bronkhorst observes that several doctrines, which later became a shared philosophical and religious tradition in the Indian subcontinent, originated in the Magadha milieu[84].

In Bardaisan's' testimony, as cited by Klaus Karttunen (1997, p. 57), the term Σαμαναῖοι denotes the Pali *samaṇa*. In fact, the *Dīgha Nikāya* (referred to henceforth as DN) features a significant sutta on ascetics or mendicants that is pertinent to the context of this article. Briefly, the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* (DN, I, ii, 1; Rhys-Davids; Carpenter, 1890, p. 47), discusses the discrepancies between the philosophy and soteriology of various groups of ascetics. On one occasion (*ekaṃ samayaṃ*), the Buddha (i.e., *bhagavā*) resided (*viharati*) in Rājagaha (*rājagahe*) at the park of Jivaka Komārabhacca. During this time, King Ajātasattu Vedehiputta of Magadha (*rājā māgadho ajātasattu vedehiputto*) decided to meet an ascetic or a brahmin (*samaṇaṃ vā brāhmaṇaṃ*). In regard to Ājīvikism, Maurice Walshe (1996, pp. 94-95) translated Makkahali Gosāla's stance as following:

> "Your Majesty, there is no cause or condition for the defilement of beings, they are defiled without cause or condition. There is no cause or condition for the purification of beings, they are purified without cause or condition. There is no self-power or other-power, there is no power in humans, no strength or force, no vigour or exertion. All beings, all living things, all creatures, all that lives it without control, without power or strength, they experience the fixed course of pleasure and pain through the six kinds of rebirth. [...] Therefore there is no such thing as saying: "By this discipline or practice or austerity or holy life I will bring my unripened kamma to fruition, or I will gradually make this ripened kamma go away.

While the Jain stance, defended by Niganṭha Nātaputta, was, in Maurice Walshe's (1996, pp. 96-97) translation, as following:

> The Niganṭha Nātaputta said: "Your Majesty, here a Niganṭha is bound by a fourfold restraint. What four? he is curbed by all curbs, enclosed by all curbs, cleared by all curbs, and claimed by all curbs. And as far as a Niganṭha is bound by this fourfold restraint, thus the Niganṭha is called self-perfected, self-controlled, self-established. Thus, Lord, the Niganṭha Nātaputta, on being

[84] B. C. Law's *Geography of Early Buddhism* (1932) provides valuable insights into the geography of Buddhism. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the archaeological and linguistic aspects that have led to a new historical perspective on Ancient India, one should refer to Bronkhorst's *The Greater Magadha* (2007) and *How the Brahmins Won* (2016); for further details on the relationship between karma and ethics, see Gananath Obeyesekere's book *Imagining Karma* (2002).

> asked about the fruits of the homeless life, explained the fourfold restraint to me... I got up and left.

Johannes Bronkhorst notes that the Ājīvikas generally agree with Jainism, but one specific factor leads them to a different conclusion regarding salvation: the inability to purify past karmas through ascetic-induced suffering. According to the *Sāmaññaphala sutta*, karma must follow its natural course without interference. This fatalism can be explained by the fact that for the Ājīvikas, some karmic traits are eliminated, but other actions are performed, which results in new karmic consequences that continue in an endless cycle of birth after birth (Bronkhorst, 2011, p. 15). The Jains believed that extensive ascetic practices would result in complete immobilization of the ascetic, both mentally and physically, eventually leading to the cessation of all bodily activities, including breathing, and resulting in physical death (Bronkhorst, 2011, p. 9).

Max Deeg and Iain Gardner have shown, with regard to the Bardaisan's passage, the weakness of an approach that takes Buddhism exclusively as the source for the introduction of Indian ideas into Manichaeism; certain ascetic customs mentioned by Bardaisan, according to Deeg and Gardner, are in conflict with what is known about the lifestyle of Buddhist monks (Deeg; Gardner, 2009, p. 7). An analysis of texts in Coptic suggests that an exclusively Buddhist interpretation may be limiting. For instance, Gherardo Gnoli once posited that the term *aurentēs* referred to the Buddhist arahant, but Iain Gardner's subsequent research indicated that this term is linked to a Coptic terminology with a possible Jain origin: *kebellos*. Gardner believes that this term is an epithet for a class of person, such as *bouddas* and *aurentēs* (Gardner, 2005, p. 131) and drew attention to the passage that the *kebulloi* built 24 towers (which, in the Coptic text, is designated by the Greek πύργος), which would be a literal translation of the Jain term *tīrthaṅkara* (Gardner, 2005, p. 134).

Moreover, Rupert Gethin (1998, p. 98-99) notes that the ascetic and mendicant life, praised by the Buddha, continued during the phase of urbanization when Buddhist monks were divided between forest-dwellers (*āraññika*) and those who wore a rag-robe (*paṃsu-kūlikā*), and city-dwellers (*gāma-vāsin*). The ideal type continued to be that of the renunciant in the forest/rag-robe. Bardaisan, as previously noted by Deeg and Gardner (2009, p. 7), does not depict any specifically Buddhist practices. Regarding this matter, the descriptions in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* (DN, I, ii, 67; Rhys-Davids; Carpenter, 1890, p. 71) are informative. The text suggests that after eating, the monk should sit cross-

legged (*nisīdati pallaṅkaṃ ābhujitvā*), maintain an upright posture (*ujuṃ kāyaṃ paṇidhāya*), and focus his attention (*sati*) before[85] himself[86] (*parimukhaṃ satiṃ upaṭṭhapetvā*).

It is possible, as Rupert Gethin has argued, that both Buddhism and Jainism influenced each other in terms of monastic structure, which makes it difficult to make a definitive statement that such and such features present in Bardaisan's account belong exclusively to one group or the other; moreover, Gethin warns, one cannot rule out the possibility that both religions were based on a common heritage of renunciant groups from which Jainism and Buddhism emerged (Gethin, 1998, p. 96).

On the other hand, Bardaisan's report does not mention any prominently Buddhist features such as the hall-poṣadha for the fortnightly recitation of monastic rules, the stūpa containing Buddha's relics, or the aṣvatha type Bodhi tree under which Buddha attained enlightenment. Additionally, there is no mention of a shrine or image room (Gethin, 1998, p. 97). Indeed, Bardaisan's account includes a pertinent passage that stresses the value of exploring beyond Buddhism. In addition to the Jain evidence, it is advisable to contemplate the likelihood of an assimilation, possibly indirect, of Ājīvika doctrines. Prior to that, it is important to delve into the significance of arboreal symbolism in both the Near East and the Indian subcontinent.

b) Manichaeism and the symbolism of plants and trees

As shown in the first chapter, the Manichaean purification ritual moved the focus of purification from baptism to the body, diverging from the Elchasaite belief. The use of watery symbolism, nonetheless, remained significant in Mani's teachings. Andrea Piras elucidated the interdependence between the symbolic significance of existence, bread, sustenance, and water in the social setting where Mani originated. It is a common practice in the Mediterranean and Eastern world to use diet as a symbolic means of redemption and restoration of both body and spirit. Piras (2022, p. 9) suggests that Manichaeism adopts these soteriological strategies and uses them in their ritual practices, wherein dietary regimes play a fundamental role in transforming the body's digestion process.

[85] *Pari* + *mukha*, facing, in front; cf. The Pali Text Society's Pali-English, 1921, p. 54.
[86] Or "to surround oneself with watchfulness of mind", cf. The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary, 1921, p. 131.

The relationship between the aquatic and tree-related symbols has undergone thorough examination by Geo Widengren, whose findings most pertinent to our study appear in his analysis of Mesopotamian elements in Manichaeism. Widengren drew attention to a passage from Theodore bar Kōnay (ed. Pognon, p. 131: 3 f.) in which it is stated that Mani made Adam erect and enabled him to taste from the Tree of Life. Widengren compared this with Mandaean and Syriac terminology and noted an explicit association between 'putting Adam on his feet' and the practice of baptism (Widengren, 1946, p. 123). Furthermore, Widengren observes the significant connection between baptism and exorcism in Early Christianity, which played an important role in Mani's status as a healer, despite his anti-Baptist stance (Widengren, 1946, p. 124).

In this context, the Manichaean process of creating the universe, in which all living beings are interconnected because of the confinement of Light Particles, served as the foundation for the unification of visionary narratives (CMC, 14). So, the search for Indian elements in this narrative is not the same as tracing its Indian origin through genetic methods. Instead, by demonstrating how numerous tropoi from the ancient world, spanning from the Near East to the Mediterranean and the Indian subcontinent, were present in the tale, we can observe that Mani utilized every available tradition to enhance the conveyance of the importance of the tree spirits and their role in the Manichaean cosmology and soteriology.

In CMC 14, Mani illustrates the guidelines of his purification theory through a series of tales and anecdotes. Unlike the theoretical and theological approach in CMC 13, Mani focuses on several hierophanies of Elchasai, emphasizing the impurity of the body. According to the accounts (CMC, 14, 94, 1-23; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, pp. 94-95), while bathing (αὐτοῦ λούσασθαι) in the waters, Elchasai was visited by the image of a man (εἰκὼν ἀνδρὸς) from the spring of the waters (ἐκ τῆς πηγῆς τῶν ὑδάτων). Then the image said to him: "It is not sufficient that your animals injure me, must you also abuse my property and profane my water?" (οὐκ αὐτάρκως ἔχει τὰ ζῷά σου πλήττειν με; ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὸς σὺ καταπονεῖς μου τὸν τόπον καὶ τὰ ὕδατά μου ἀσεβεῖς.) Once again (πάλιν), long after (μετὰ πολὺν) his initial attempt, Elchasai sent out his disciples to find a new place (ἐνετείλατο τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ ἐπιτηρῆσαι τόπον) for him to wash; and they were able to locate a fitting spot (εὗρον δ' οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ τὸν τόπον αὐτῶι) for him to clean himself (CMC, 14, 96:1-22; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, pp. 94-97).

Considering the importance of the Tree of Life in the Near East and the prevalence of stories and parables with tree and plant symbolism, it is crucial to compare the CMC passage with other Manichaean texts that address plants' function in Mani's doctrine. The Manichaean text most relevant to this purpose is a parable about trees (*Ke*. 2), which describes Manichaean tree symbolism. In this *Kephalaion*, the disciples desire an explanation of the biblical parable of the trees, which forms the foundation for Mani's conception. Briefly, the interpretation of the good tree and the bad tree follows Manichaean dualism, whereby each tree has a distinct nature that reflects the mixture of light particles and matter in the Manichaean cosmogony (*Ke.* 2, 19:16-29; Polotsky, 1940; Demaria, cf. Gnoli, 2006, p. 18). The fruit of the good tree is said to be Jesus Splendor, which originates from the elements of Light mixed into matter (*Ke*. 20, 1-7; Polotsky, 1940; Demaria, cf. Gnoli, 2006, p. 19).

Albert Henrichs notes that few stories about the souls of trees from antiquity have survived, which highlights the relevance of the Manichaean material discussed in the CMC (14). Mani, who resided in Iranian Mesopotamia, had the unique opportunity to learn about both Western and Eastern traditions. Henrichs (2019) identifies that some accounts, such as the tale of the speaking tree, have resemblances in the Jewish tradition, while other features, like the vengeful, bleeding tree, find resemblances solely in Greco-Roman texts (Henrichs, 2019, pp. 511-512).

Henrichs (2019, p. 523) observes that the stories in CMC 14 bear similarities to the Testament of Abraham and Jewish narrative traditions, since the miracle of the talking tree is labelled a 'mystery', which must be kept confidential. Furthermore, John Reeves (1992, p. 102) notes that the designation of Noah and his progeny as a "plant" was a popular image in Jewish literature of the Second Commonwealth, when examining the presence of Jewish traditions in Manichaeism. Subsequent groups or individuals who were perceived as heirs to Noah's righteousness could assume the "plant" appellation, making the "plant" a synonym for the tree of life in this strict sense. Elchasai's hierophanies, which are accompanied by revelations of water and tree spirits, are reminiscent of the transformation noted by John Reeves (1992, p. 102), wherein the "plant" or "tree" is nourished not only by revelation (i.e., the Torah), but rather “an actual bearer of revelation, a ‘shoot” or “fruit”, so to speak, of the original heavenly Tree of Life transplanted among humanity to propagate more of its own kind”.

Regarding the Indian material, as noted earlier, Fynes (1996) draws attention to the Jain tradition, while Henrichs (2019, pp. 517-520) looks for parallels in the literature of the Vedic tradition, such as the Laws of Manu and the Upaniṣads, and in the Buddhist tradition. However, concerning the traditions used in the Manichaean anecdote (CMC, 14), it is possible to hypothesize the inclusion of Indian traditions beyond those typically recognized, including Buddhism, Jainism, and Brahmanism. The so-called spirit cults[87], which were a notable influence in the Indian subcontinent, were also potentially involved[88]. The significance of watery symbolism and its connection to arboreal spirits dates back to the earliest layers of Indian religions. Asko Parpola (2015, p. 178) highlights the prominent involvement of yakṣa and yakṣiṇī in primitive folk cults in North Indian villages, which Parpola relates to traditions established during Harappan culture.

The scholarly research on the Yakṣa cults has bridged the gap between Buddhist, Jain, Vedic traditions, and local folk cults in ancient India. Ananda Coomaraswamy's study (1928) is considered a classic and remains the primary work in this field. Recently, scholars such as Ram Nath Misra (1979) and Gail Hinich Sutherland and Robert DeCaroli (2004) have expanded on Coomaraswamy's ideas. Coomaraswamy (1928, p. 4) argued for the need to differentiate between the status of a Yakṣa in the later sectarian literature and in current folk traditions that were still influenced by earlier beliefs. Through this distinction, Coomaraswamy aimed to provide a more multifaceted understanding of these ancient cults while emphasizing their significance in Indian culture.

Gail Hinich Sutherland (1991, pp. 25-26) notes that the Yakṣas provide insight into the symbolic significance of trees and plants in the ancient world. They were seen as a microcosm, often used as stone pillars dedicated to fertility deities, and symbolized the entirety of the cosmos. Additionally, trees were viewed as the center or support of the cosmos. The tree of good and evil, borrowed from the Christian tradition to explain his cosmological dualism, is a prime example of this principle.

Accordingly, research into the assimilation of Jain ideas by Manichaeism may illuminate a potential flow of Yakṣa traditions, whether directly or indirectly. An

[87] For further information on the use of tree symbolism in relation to Yakṣas and its impact on Indian iconography, specifically on the iconography of the Lotus flower, refer to Sutherland (1991, pp. 24-32) and Bosch (2017, pp. 151-154).
[88] For example, there is a Manichaean amulet in Parthian (cf. Henning, 1947) that contains various instructions regarding the Yakṣas.

important Jain text, the *Uttaradhyayana Sutra* (III, 14-16; Jacobi, 1968, p. 16-17), relays the following commentary on Yakṣa: these beings inhabit heavenly realms to indulge in divine pleasures, living for centuries in the upper Kalpa which, as Jacobi notes, spans 7.56 billion years. Consequently, based on karmic configurations, the Yakṣa descend to Earth and are reborn as humans. This cosmological role of the Yakṣa is comparable to that found in Buddhism and has clear cultic implications, influencing how worshippers of Jainism or Buddhism approached them.

In this regard, Gail Hinich Sutherland (1991, p. 128) observed that Jainism, similar to Buddhist tales about the conversion of the Yakṣas, connects the ancient Indian gods and their followers to the principles and ethics of a novel, highly ascetic religious practice. Moreover, Suntherland (1991, p. 129) notes that both Buddhist and Jain texts use legends to separate themselves from Brahminical traditions and establish a shared mythical and folkloric origin with them. This is accomplished by using a denominational foundation of folk tales and beliefs. The Manichaean strategy, as observed in the moral tales referenced earlier, employs an ascetic approach via dietary practices and rituals. This approach serves soteriological functions and establishes a new way of interacting with numerous gods and spirits.

One of the key traits of the Yakṣa spirit category, as previously noted, was its notable function as a spirit of the trees (Bosch, 2017, p. 233). As noted by F. D. K. Bosch, these spirits were consistently benevolent and amiable towards humanity, serving as guardian spirits and genii loci. Among their many functions, Bosch emphasizes two that are relevant to Manichaean accounts: the ability to grant wishes and protect borders or cities (Bosch, 2017, p. 232). Moreover, iconographic and archaeological research in the Kuṣana region, where Manichaeans missionaries were active, as well as in other areas influenced by Indo-Greek and Indo-Iranian cultures such as Gandhara, have revealed the presence of yakṣa and yakṣiṇī figures (Misra, 1979, p. 125).

Since cultic practices related to Yakṣas have influenced Jain and Buddhist oral tradition and literature, it is reasonable to include 'spirit cults' in the sources analyzed by Richard Fynes (1996) and Albert Heinrichs (2019). This substratum of Indian folk religion forms the basis of all the sources[89] selected by these authors to uncover Indian traditions in Manichaean anecdotes and moral tales. Thus, by analyzing the cultural and

[89] cf. Henrichs (2019, pp. 516-521); Fynes (1996, pp. 26-27)

religious context surrounding the Manichaean and Jain beliefs about plants and their role in salvation, it is now possible to return to Bardaisan's account in order to hypothesize the influence of the Ājīvikas on Manichaeism.

c) Ājīvikism and Jainism

Regarding the Ājīvikas, the evidence available is brief and straightforward. According to Bardaisan's report (*De Abstinentia*, 18.1-2; Girgenti; Sodano, 2005, p. 342), some ascetics are inclined towards death (πρὸς θάνατον διάκεινται), viewing the length of life (τοῦ ζῆν χρόνον) as a necessary service to nature (ἀναγκαίαν τινὰ τῇ φύσει λειτουργίαν) and hastening to free the soul from the body (σπεύδειν δὲ τὰς ψυχὰς ἀπολῦσαι τῶν σωμάτων). Often, even when in good health and with no misfortune (κακοῦ) befalling them, they choose to end their lives (ἐξίασι τοῦ βίου; i.e., commit suicide). All consider them happy (πάντες αὐτοὺς εὐδαιμονίζοντες) as they believe souls share a common way of life (οἱ πολλοὶ ταῖς ψυχαῖς τὴν μετ'ἀλλήλων εἶναι δίαιταν πεπιστεύκασιν.). So far, the passage suggests the conclusion of a Jain saint's journey, which culminates in a type of ritual self-immolation, in which the ascetic is liberated from the cycle of birth and death. But a second commentary (*De Abstinentia*, 18.3) asserts that ascetics hurl themselves into fire, a practice uncommon among Jains.

This passage presented some challenges for Max Deeg and Iain Gardner (2009, p. 10). While the practice of "ritual suicide" is not foreign to the Jain tradition, it is achieved through a fasting ritual. Deeg and Gardner, taking into account Karttunen's comments, have raised the possibility that the passage in question may have been added later to Bardaisan's account, since the theme of suicide became more prevalent after the historical works on India from the Alexandrian period. However, there is another solution to this predicament: the Ājīvikas.

Firstly, according to Richard Stoneman (2019, p. 315), in a study examining the reception of Indian concepts in the ancient Greek world, the Ājīvikas are the only group in ancient India known to systematically practice self-immolation as an asceticism. Secondly, the Ājīvikas and Jains had a harmonious relationship, with stronger ties between these groups than with the Buddhists. Several Jain terms, including *tīrthaṃkara*, were suggested by Gardner (2005) to have been translated into Coptic and adopted by the Manichaeans. However, these terms also belonged to the Ājīvika tradition (cf. Balcerowicz, 2016, pp. 39-41).

The Ājīvikas are not considered mainly due to the lack of surviving literature. However, glimpses of their beliefs can be seen in Buddhist and Jain polemic literature. A. L. Basham noted similarities between Jains and Ājīvikas in the Pāli canon, suggesting early interaction between the groups. However, Basham acknowledged that accounts of Gośāla and Mahāvīra are not entirely reliable due to a tendency to highlight the supposed inferiority of Ājīvikas compared to Jains, and of Gośāla compared to Mahāvīra (Basham, 2009, pp. 40-41)

Recently, Piotr Balcerowicz (2016) argued that Gośāla and Mahāvīra's connection was closer than what the Jain polemicist literature indicates. Balcerowicz's argument is supported by a non-canonical text of the Jains known as The Sayings of the Visionaries (Isibhāsiyāiṃ), which is generally disregarded. In this work, Balcerowicz observes that Gośāla appears among prominent leaders of the Jain community, including Pārśva. Additionally, Balcerowicz notes that the text contains one of the oldest portions of Jain literature and is of extreme antiquity. Furthermore, Gośāla is classified among the main category of Jain beings known as tīrthaṃkaras (Balcerowicz, 2016, p. 37).

Finally, Balcerowicz (2016, pp. 41-43) has shown that Mahāvīra was a student of Gośāla, but any evidence of this earlier connection was erased by Jain monks in their conflict with the Ājīvikas. Thus, in conclusion, it is challenging to determine which belief system belongs to Jainism or Ājīvikism due to the shared use of religious terminology. In any case, this was likely irrelevant to Manichaeans, and whatever practice of Indian asceticism acknowledged by Mani was certainly influenced by his distinct interpretation.

2.4 Buddhism

Iain Gardner's (2020, pp. 41-46) research on the biography of Mani reveals that his journeys to the Indian-influenced regions were "synthesized" to align with hagiographic purposes. As a result, the period of these journeys was shortened to converge with the rise of Šābuhr, the Sassanid emperor who showed an affinity for Mani's doctrine despite not converting to Manichaeism. Romila Thapar (2013) explored the historiography of ancient India and made observations applicable to the study of ancient sources overall. Thapar distances herself from a modern perspective that considers sources from the ancient period as objects to be interpreted in line with today's historical consciousness. She argues that sources reflect the interests of a particular society and can

be narrated and described in the way that a specific group deems most appropriate (Thapar, 2013, p. 4).

This does not, of course, exclude the usefulness of Gardner's efforts to provide a more plausible chronology for the reconstruction of Manichaeism. However, the genesis of Mani's religion involves countless journeys and the synthesis of a vast range of traditions from Mesopotamia to India. Therefore, there is a risk of losing the symbolic nuances, particularly the 'prophetological' ones, that are described by the hagiographic form. In this regard, Thapar's remarks are pertinent, as they highlight the importance of comprehending why a historical tradition “was embedded in sacred literature to ensure its continuity” (Thapar, 2013, p. 5.).

The recognition of historical context in the study of religions, while avoiding reductionist perspectives, is a major focus of Ugo Bianchi's (1986, pp. 28-29) research on the methodology of the history of religions. This topic will focus on the Manichaean formulation of a "Buddha Mani" by examining reports of heavenly ascensions, a recurring theme in Late Antiquity. These reports provide empirical evidence on both cosmological and soteriological matters and serve as a way for the Manichaeans to argue that Mani himself was a Buddha. This topic will enable an exploration of "ruptures of ontological level," as defined by Giulia Sfameni Gasparro (2011, p. 7), and an examination of heavenly ascents within a historical comparative context.

Therefore, this investigation of the relationship between Manichaeism and Buddhism is based on a common theme: visionary experiences. Following Daniel Merkur's (1993, p. 114) suggestion, this study examines gnostic-type religions in the context of visionary experiences. It is true that Manichaean visionary experiences had a ritual element, usually linked to what Gershom Scholem (1965, p. 75) defined as theurgy in the Jewish tradition. For instance, the Cologne Manichaean Codex (CMC) is an important document for using texts as "maps" for these visionary experiences (Reeves, 1994, p. 179), which were connected to celestial ascensions as identified by specialized research. The incorporation of Buddhism into Manichaeism is exemplified by the key passages involving the conversion of the Tūrān king, which focus on the heavenly ascension theme and employ language evocative of Manichaean texts with apocalyptic and visionary elements. Nonetheless, unlike the CMC, one must be cautious about

arbitrarily ascribing a ritualistic role to the narrative about the Tūrān king, given its intent to support the Manichaean assertion that Mani was a Buddha.

The Manichaean claim posits a dual purpose for these accounts: 1) to establish a "Buddhology" for Mani, which is a process linked to Manichaean Christology, with the goal of formulating the concept of Mani as the "seal of the prophets" and providing a universal character to his apostleship; 2) to amalgamate Manichaean and Buddhist terminology to create an intelligible account for both groups, considering the proselytizing nature of Manichaean missionary activity. Finally, the claim is argued to have been catalyzed by the context of Buddhist expectations for the Buddha of the future and the interactions between Iranian and Indian cultures in Central Asia.

a) Manichaeans in Central Asia: From the Apocalyptic Tradition to Buddhism

Discussing the history of his church (ⲉⲕⲕⲗⲏⲥⲓⲁ), Mani cites (Ke. I, 12, 15-20; Polotsky, 1940) his predecessors 'Bouddas' (i.e., Buddha; ⲃⲟⲩⲇⲇⲁⲥ) and 'Aurentēs' (ⲁⲩⲣⲉⲛⲧⲏⲥ) who originated in the East (ⲁⲧⲁⲛⲁⲧⲟⲗⲏ). The Manichaean lineage then continued through 'Zarades' (i.e., Zarathustra) from Persia (ⲛⲍⲁⲣⲁⲇⲏⲥ ⲁⲧⲡⲉⲣⲥⲓⲥ) to Jesus Christ (ⲡ$\overline{\text{ⲭⲣⲥ}}$), the last one before the arrival of the apostle (i.e., Mani). Buddha is mentioned in another text of the Manichaean literary corpus in Coptic, as related to Kushan, a location in Central Asia. In the Codex C, Buddha is referred to as the sage of India and the Kušān (cf. Gnoli, 2003, p. 161). The Kushan empire, where Iranian, Indian, and Hellenic culture intersect, provides the backdrop for interactions between Manichaeans and Buddhists and aids in comprehending how the Manichaean assertion that Mani was a Buddha came to be.

According to B. N. Puri, the history of Buddhism in Central Asia is connected to the history of the Indo-Bactrians. It is believed that Buddhism may have reached the region even before the time of Aśoka. Puri notes that the bilingual decree made by Aśoka in Kandahar provides evidence of Buddhism's spread towards Central Asia (Puri, 1987, p. 90). In Indo-Hellenic culture, Demetrius and King Menander are prime examples of the influence exerted by Buddhists on the Greek-Bactrian state (Puri, 1987, p. 91). Menander is renowned in the Buddhist imagination for various reasons, one of which is

his portrayal in the Milindapañha, a dialogue that features conversations between the king and Nagasena, a Buddhist sage.

A. K. Narain (1957, p. 13) opposes Tarn's thesis that the Greeks in Bactria were connected to Alexander. According to Narain, the Greeks in Central Asia and India were ancient settlers linked to Seleucids and Iranians. They were Greeks who were distant from what he refers to as Hellenic Greeks. Tarn found it challenging to account for the significant Greek population in Bactria, and Narain argues that the Seleucids likely facilitated these settlements. Narain contends that the Bactrian Greeks were not "Hellenistic Greeks" but rather the offspring of ancient colonies who maintained their traditions while also 'intermingling' with the Iranian population. Narain (1957, p. 14-17) contested the notion that Indo-Greek history was a crucial component of Hellenistic history. Rather, Narain posited that the Indo-Greeks' Hellenistic influence has been overemphasized to the detriment of two additional factors: 1) the decline of the Achaemenid Empire following Alexander's military conquests; and 2) the collapse of the Mauryan dynasty in India.

The dispute between Tarn and Narain was not only academic but also reflective of the political tensions of the time. According to Thomas McEvilley (2002), W. W. Tarn believed that Greek civilization was the most advanced and considered the Greek culture in Bactria and India as legitimate Greek kingdoms. For him, certain cities established by Alexander in India were complete poleis, with full paideia equipment, Greek cultural education. However, Narain contended, shortly after India's independence, that the Greeks in Bactria, did not depict any Hellenic dynasty. They were instead semi-outcasts who had lost touch with Greek culture and disappeared without a trace, leaving no trace of Greek influence in India (McEvilley, 2002, p. 359).

However, archaeological research reveals that Alexander established numerous communities in Bactria and India. Narain's thesis, which claimed these communities were irrelevant and eventually assimilated into others, cannot be accepted according to McEvilley (2002, p. 360). The discrepancies occurred because, according to Rachel Mairs, each of them focused on different regions and different periods. Thus, the opposition of Tarn and Narain, under closer examination, is dissolved (Mairs, 2014, p. 13).

Regarding Indian religions, the Aśokan edicts (Carratelli, 203, pp. 117-121) discovered in Kandahar report that King Devānampiya Piyadassi (i.e. Aśoka, also known as Πιοδάσσης in Greek inscriptions; see Karttunen, 1997, p. 264) preached about piety to men for ten years (δέκα ἐτῶν πλήρης ἐλέων βασιλεὺς Πιοδάσσης εὐσέβειαν ἔδειξεν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις), while Brahmins and ascetics pursued piety (βραμεναι ἢ σραμεναι [...] περὶ τὴν εὐσέβειαν διατρίβοντες). As McEvilley (2002, p. 361) notes, the Kandahar decree was written in proficient Hellenistic Greek, likely by a Greek individual within the local community who worked for Aśoka. This inscription illustrates that the local Greeks stayed in touch with the Greek world, possibly through connections with the Seleucid kingdom, which would demonstrate cultural shifts occurring in the Mediterranean.

In fact, according to research conducted by Klaus Karttunen (1997, p. 266), Aśoka sent missionaries or ambassadors to the Western kingdoms, although there are few records of these missions. Buddhist monks were frequently chosen for these diplomatic missions. Alongside their more practical goals, they also took part in spiritual and philosophical discussions (Karttunen, 1997, p. 267). The extent of their influence is a matter of debate. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1989, p. 156) contends that Aśoka's missions were well-received. However, Karttunen is more skeptical and argues that they were merely Aśoka's rhetoric.

It is interesting to note that Skjærvø (1994 p. 242) discovered the name 'Šoka' (referring to Aśoka) listed as an evildoer in a Sogdian text, accused of 'murdering' Šākman (Buddha Śākyamuni). Aśoka holds an incomparable position within Buddhism as the quintessential example of a Buddhist ruler amongst all the emperors. Given the other names listed in the Manichaean list, including Judas Iscariot (and Satan himself!), it appears that the most likely explanation for this out-of-place addition, when considering the other "illustrious members" of the list, is a deliberate attack on Buddhists, possibly rooted in the Manichaean belief on the origin and degeneration of religions[90].

Despite certain older Buddhist influences present in Manichaeism, which reflect pre-Manichaean forms of Buddhism in Central Asia, the late Iranian period holds greater

[90] Aśoka implemented what historian Romila Thapar termed "the policy of dhamma." However, the view of Rhys Davids (1907, p. 64), who posited that Aśoka aimed to restore 'original Buddhism' amid divisions and disagreements within the Buddhist community, has been disregarded. From a Manichaean perspective, it is possible that they viewed Aśoka in a completely different way than Rhys Davids did: as someone who "tainted" Buddhism, which is clearly an unacceptable viewpoint in scholarly Buddhist research.

significance for the development of Mani's religion. Mostafa Vaziri (2012, p. 32) identified three stages in the integration of Buddhist elements into Manichaeism: 1) Mani's depictions of Buddha, when Buddhist language was not prevalent in Manichaean texts; 2) the encounter of the two religions in Central Asia, where Manichaeans gradually incorporated Buddhist practices and vocabulary; 3) the intersection of Manichaeans and Buddhists in China. Only the first two phases of the incorporation of the Buddha into Manichaeism will be examined in this section.

One of the main events of Mani's missions in the Indo-Iranian regions was the conversion of the king of Tūrān. While the Parthian versions provided some information about the account, the partial publication of the Coptic manuscript by Chester Beatty (CB) has filled in several gaps in this event. In the Parthian text (M 48; Boyce, 1975, pp. 34-35), it is stated that Mani, the apostle (*frēštag*), raised (*wāst*, past participle of *wāy*; see Boyce, *Word-list*, 1977, p. 90) the righteous (*ardāw*) into the air (*andarwāz*) (<fryštg 'w 'rd'w pd 'ndrw'z w'st>). After a series of questions and answers ("what's bigger?" "my sphere" "and what's even bigger?" [...] and so on), which deal with Manichaean cosmological themes, the Tūrān Shāh states that the wisdom of the Buddha is, among all the aspects mentioned, the superior one; more relevant, however, is the fact that in this text, in Enrico Morano's (cf. Gnoli, 2003, p. 222) reconstruction with numerous Iranian parallels, the Tūrān Shāh states that Mani is the "Buddha himself".

Werner Sundermann opined that the term *ardāw* could denote a Buddhist monk, shaman, or sorcerer, but later considered it a referring to the spirit of a deceased individual. On the other hand, Mary Boyce (1977, p. 14) suggests that ardāw ('rd'w) can also be a synonym for 'elect', the highest-ranking position in the internal hierarchy of Manichaeism. Furthermore, Klimkeit (1993, pp. 206-207) suggests that the term "righteous" was commonly used in an apocalyptic context to describe prophets who had experienced visionary levitations to the higher spheres. In the account of Enoch (CMC, 9, 58, 1-23; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, p. 70), which commences with the reiteration of the epithet, "I am Enoch the righteous (ἐγώ εἰμι Ἐνὼχ ὁ δίκαιος)", one reads that Enoch "saw everything and questioned the angels; what they said to him he wrote down in his scriptures (πάντα δὲ ἐθεώρησεν καὶ ἐξήτασεν τοὺς ἀγγέλους, καὶ εἴ τι αὐτῶι εἶπον, ἐνεχάραξεν αὐτοῦ ταῖς γραφαῖς)" (CMC, 9, 60, 1-23; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003, p. 70).

John Reeves (1994, p. 181) observed that these revelations indicate the Manichaean emphasis on the creation of sacred books associated with prophetic activity. The theurgical nature aside, this aspect of Manichaeism embodies the concept of a progressive revelation along with the emergence of new prophets, such as the "prophet" Buddha, who would enhance the preceding revelations until Mani arrived and declared himself as the seal of the prophets- the one who, in the Manichaean doctrine, would finalize the prophetic lineage.

In *Kephalaion* 1 (Ke. 1, 12, 9-12; Polotsky, 1940), prior to the mention of Buddha previously discussed , it is stated that apostles arriving in history is a common occurrence according to the Manichaeans; from Sethel, the firstborn (literally the son, ϣнрє, who was born first, ϣамісє; although in Coptic it is done in a genitive construction with the preposition ⲛ, i.e., пϣамісє ⲛϣнрє) from Adam (ⲛ̄ⲁⲇⲁⲙ), to Enoch (єⲛⲱⲭ), and from Enoch to Shem (сиⲙ), the son of Noah (fragmentary in the manuscript: [п]ϣнрє ⲛ. .; reconstructed in Polotsky, 1940, p. 12 and Gnoli, 2003, p. 147). The importance of this prophetology, which contains biblical figures and Buddha, is corroborated by Iranian texts[91].

It is evident that apocalyptic language and the Manichaean view of ongoing revelation connect the prophets and prominent biblical figures to the Indian tradition. Additionally, the theory that Buddhism played a crucial role in the origin of Manichaeism was confirmed by the discovery of a Coptic parallel to the account of the conversion of the king of Tūrān. In the *Kephalaion* 323 (CB, 355, 4-7; Gardner; BeDuhn; Dilley, 2018 p. 30), there is an introductory call to attention ("see!" i.e., єістє) directed towards "this angel" (пιаггєλос) who is calling the king (єчмоγтє оγвєпр̄ро). It is noteworthy that the Coptic term "ⲙоγтє" refers to the act of both calling and enchanting in a magical sense (Černý, 1976, p. 93; CD 191b;). The term serves to highlight the prophetic nature of the angelophany, as viewed by the Manichaeans.

Given the fragmentary nature of the manuscript, one episode stands out: the report that the king, just like in the Iranian text previously quoted, was raised to the heights

[91] After analyzing Manichaean texts from Central Asia, Klimkeit (1998, p. 242) highlighted that Buddhas and Envoys of Light, another group of beings in Manichaeism, hold equal positions.

(ⲁⲡϫⲓⲥⲉ) (*CB*, 355; Gardner; BeDuhn; Dilley, 2018, p. 30). It is stated that the king listened (ⲥⲱⲧⲙⲉ) to the teaching (i.e., the word ⲥⲉϫⲉ) of the righteous (ⲙⲡⲇⲓⲕⲁⲓⲟⲥ) and received divine wisdom (ⲧⲥⲟⲫⲓⲁ ⲛ̄ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ) (CB, 356, 2-3; Gardner; BeDuhn; Dilley, 2018, p. 32); later, the king of Tūrān tells the apostle (ⲡⲁϫⲉⲡ̄ⲣⲣⲟ ⲛ̄ⲧⲟⲩⲣⲁⲛ ⲁⲡⲁⲡⲟⲥⲧⲟⲗⲟⲥ) [...] "you are Bouddas (i.e., Buddha), the apostle of God" (ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲕ ⲡⲉ ⲃⲟⲩⲇⲇⲁⲥ ⲡⲁⲡⲟⲥⲧⲟⲗⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ) (*CB*, 356, 5-9; Gardner; BeDuhn; Dilley, 2018, p. 32).

Regarding the first item, Jason BeDuhn has demonstrated that both the Coptic manuscript from Chester Beatty and Iranian Manichaean literature contain identical accounts of Tūrān. Both the Coptic and Iranian traditions were based on an earlier model of the same account, i.e., the Coptic and Parthian manuscripts share the same Vorlage for the story of Mani as "Buddha" (BeDuhn, 2015, p. 64). It is evident that the Manichaean account brings together separate and distant elements into a cohesive narrative. This is achieved through its visionary dimension, which serves as the guiding thread. The excerpts found in Chester Beatty's manuscript and potential Buddhist parallels confirm the incorporation of the apocalyptic aspect into Buddhism. This allowed it to make sense to both groups, as the 'Mani-Buddha' story had a missionary objective.

The 'Buddhology' behind the Manichaean claim can be better comprehended by studying accounts of heavenly ascents and their visionary terminologies, as commonly documented in Late Antiquity. However, the problem of the chronology of the texts poses a challenge for Manichaeism and Buddhologists alike. Prods Oktor Skjærvø (1994, p. 245) compared Tūrān's episode to similar accounts found in the Mahāyāna-accented *Suvarnabhāsottama sutra*, while Jason BeDuhn (2015, p. 62) preferred Hsüan-tsang's testimony, as he believes that the Chinese pilgrim's account is in line with the more "mundane" character of Mani's miracles. Mary Boyce (1975, pp. 34-35) also argued that the levitation of Tūrān Shāh should be understood literally, since Mani, "the Babylonian physician", was known for his thaumaturgical powers.

However, the act of being lifted into the air can be interpreted as a parallel to celestial ascensions experienced during prophetic visions, utilizing the theme of journeys to an otherworld. Since visionary experiences hold high significance in Manichaeism, there is no need to oppose the literal and symbolic meanings of such experiences.

According to I. P. Couliano, this correlation was prevalent in Central Asian shamanistic religions. Additionally, the connection between actual levitation and the symbolic aspect of heavenly ascensions is present within Buddhism (Couliano, 1991, p. 89).

In any case, thanks to the stories of heavenly ascensions, it is possible to present another hypothesis, which corroborates the interpretation that Tūrān's accounts and the related episodes in Chester Beatty's manuscript develop a 'Buddhology' whose aim is to attribute to Mani the status of Buddha. The key to this hypothesis lies in the presence of a 'Sapores' (Šābuhr). According to Jason BeDuhn, the presence of Buddhist themes underlying Šābuhr's levitation is suspect, as there was no association between Buddhism and the Sassanid nobility. BeDuhn (2015, pp. 64-65) suggests two hypotheses: 1) Šābuhr became familiar with Buddhism, the dominant religion among his subjects in the region, and this historical event was subsequently integrated into the accounts found in Parthian and Coptic sources; 2) there was an interpolation between the Buddhist components and Šābuhr's accounts.

In any case, the mention of Šābuhr in the accounts of the conversion of the king of Tūrān can be interpreted along the same lines as Mani's Christology/Buddhology. Iain Gardner had previously indicated that the kingdom of Tūrān has a double meaning, that is, a geographical region and a mythical kingdom in the Iranian visionary tradition (Gardner, 2021, p. 42). Therefore, it is accurate to state that the confluence of significant events in Manichaeism's history holds prophetological importance for Manichaeans. The legitimization of Mani's religion, potentially in alignment with existing politico-religious norms in Iran, is comparable to the relationship between Zarathustra and King Hystapes, as noted in the Manichaean Kephalaia (Ke. 1; 12, 14-34; Gardner, 2020, p. 49). One could interpret Šābuhr's role in the aforementioned accounts as that of a legitimizing force of Mani's "Buddha" nature. Either way, as will be seen below, the presence of Buddhism in Central Asia provides a broader context for the inclusion of the Buddha in Manichaeism and Mani's life.

b) Manichaean Buddhology: the integration of Buddha into Manichaean prophetology

As seen thus far, a primary challenge of studying the connection between Mani and Buddhism is the difficulty in establishing a precise chronology for the studied texts, on the one hand, and the choice of Buddhist material to compare with Manichaean texts,

on the other. In any case, philological and historical analyses of various Manichaean manuscripts have provided the means to discern the oldest strata of certain texts, making it possible to identify common themes and interests throughout the period of relations between Buddhists and Manichaeans.

Therefore, it is important to note the Buddhist parallels for visionary experiences and celestial ascensions, which are often associated with events in the life of a Buddha and cosmological issues. This understanding is crucial for interpreting the accounts of the king of Tūrān that were examined in the previous topic. Among the relevant aspects of Buddhism for analyzing the Manichaean texts, the most significant are: 1) Shakyamuni's life in relation to heavenly ascents; 2) the thirty-two characteristics of a Great Man; 3) Maitreya, the Buddha of the future.

The selection of these elements is based on their paradigmatic significance within different Buddhist schools, so that the Manichaeans could have found them in any Buddhist tradition. The means by which these accounts were integrated into Manichaeism cannot be definitively determined, but the cultural exchange between Iranian, Indian, and Hellenic societies in the context of Central Asia provides a possible explanation. Additionally, Parthian, a significant language spoken in Western Iran and Central Asia, may have played a pivotal role in facilitating communication between Manichaeans and Buddhists. Mār Ammō, sent by Mani himself on these missions, was knowledgeable in the Parthian language. He played a vital role in integrating Buddhist concepts into Manichaeism. Additionally, as per B. N. Puri (1987, p 97), Parthian monks translated Buddhist texts into Chinese. Thus, even though there is a deficiency of Buddhist manuscripts in Parthian, it is assumed that Iranian language was utilized in Central Asian Buddhism.

Having said that, the *Soṇadaṇḍa Sutta* (DN, I, iv, 2; Rhys-Davids; Carpenter, 1890, p. 111) provides a description of Buddha using the titles *bhagavā* (The Blessed One), an arahant (in the accusative: *arahaṃ*), and *sammāsambuddho* (a fully awakened/enlightened buddha). Added to these characteristics is the quality of bearing the thirty-two exceptional marks (*dvattiṃsa-mahāpurisa-lakkhaṇeh*). Regarding these marks, Rupert Gethin explains that in the Buddhist tradition, the bodhisattva

(Shakyamuni) did not remember his time in Tuṣita[92] or any past life. However, his father, Śuddhodana, predicted his future and Brahmins examined the Buddha and found the thirty-two marks (*mahāpuruṣa-lakṣana/mahāpurisa-lakkhaṇa*) (Gethin, 1998, p. 20).

From the Buddhist viewpoint, Gethin notes that there exist two paths for individuals with these marks: the "turning of the wheel" path, taken by a just king who shall rule the four corners of the earth or the Buddha path (Gethin, 1998, p. 20). Additionally, Edward Conze (1959, p. 36-37) explains that the list of thirty-two marks is typically augmented by another catalogue of eighty marks. This idea existed prior to Buddhism and is accepted by all Buddhist traditions (Conze, 1959, p. 37).

There are fragments of a Manichaean scroll[93] (MIK III 4947 & III 5 d.) that feature an iconographic representation of a Buddha. His right hand is in *vitarka mudrā*, and he is covered by representations of the *mahāpuruṣa-lakṣana*. According to Zsuzsanna Gulácsi (2001, p. 48), the iconography in this case is identical to that found in Central Asian Buddhist art. Consequently, it is more accurate to describe it as a process of integrating Buddhism into Manichaeism rather than a Manichaean assimilation of Buddhist notions, as the former involves the incorporation of Buddhist ideas in their entirety without incorporating any particularly Manichaean accent (Gulácsi, 2001, p. 48).

In the second century CE, Buddhist sources address the symbolism related to Buddha's life and discuss some of his interactions with Brahmins. The *Buddhacarita* should be taken into account when considering the genesis of Manichaeism, as it might played a role in the fusion of apocalyptic and Indian visionary traditions that Mani and his disciples pursued. Its author, Aśvaghoṣa, played a significant role in the Buddhology of his era. As an Indian poet born into the Brahmin tradition, he seamlessly integrated themes from the Vedic tradition into the life of the Buddha, a process similar to the one found in the Pali canon. The emphasis on cosmological themes and celestial ascensions in *Buddhacharita* is crucial in the context of Manichaean studies.

The theme of levitation, whose parallels have been examined by Jason BeDuhn (2015, p. 62) and P. O. Skjærvø (1994, p. 247), passed from Buddhism to Manichaeism,

[92] In Buddhist cosmology, the Tuṣita heaven holds significance as the fourth of Kāmadeva's paradises. According to Kloetzli (1989, p. 29), its importance lies in its position among various paradises since Buddhists regard this place as where a bodhisattva is born immediately before being born as a Buddha.
[93] The images are available in Gulácsi's (2001, p. 146) edition and commentary of Manichaean art collection in the Berlin museum.

and therein lies the importance of Aśvaghoṣa's work for Mani's "Buddhology." According to W. Klein (2005, p. 228-229), the *Buddhacharita* shares similar themes with those known to Manichaeans in the Christian environment of Iranian Mesopotamia, particularly supernatural birth and protection from celestial beings. Furthermore, according to Klein, the account present in the *Buddhacharita* holds great importance for Manichaeism. It is a document predating Manichaeism that portrays the life of the Buddha, with a special emphasis on the concept of levitation into the air.

Patrick Olivelle notes in his edition of the Buddhacarita that Aśvaghoṣa frequently employs terminology related to the ṛṣi tradition, which refers to the Vedic visionary tradition (Olivelle, 2009, xxviii), reflecting the presence of the heavenly ascents theme in Buddhist literature. In fact, the demi-gods (*div'āukasaḥ*; or heavenly beings; Olivelle, 2009, p. 9), who were *(bhāvā*) invisible (*adṛśya*), were said to hold a white parasol over the Buddha (*ādhārayan pāṇḍaram ātapatraṃ*) (*Buddhacarita*, I.15; Olivelle, 2009 pp. 8-9). In short, the assimilation, even if indirect, of episodes that are found in the *Buddhacarita*, but which could easily circulate in the oral tradition, emphasizes the importance of visionary narratives for the life of the Buddha; the similarity with the accounts of Tūrān corroborate the usefulness of these themes for the creation of a Manichaean Buddhology.

Furthermore, the theme of heavenly ascent and levitation developed by the poet Aśvaghoṣa reflects ancient discussions about the concept of iddhi. In the Saṃyutta Nikāya's *Iddhipādasaṃyutta* (V, 51, 22:8; Feer, 1960, p. 284), it is stated that these ascents were associated with meditative practices. in which the Buddha's body (*tathāgatassa kāyo*) rises (i.e., levitates, *abbhuggacchati*) from the earth (*pathaviyā*) towards heaven (or the sky) (*vehāsam*). The context, as shown by I. P. Couliano (1991, p. 91), pertains to Buddhist visionary experiences wherein the concept of levitation is linked to *iddhi* (Sanskrit *siddhi,* i.e., "supernatural" or "magical" powers), and ascents to the world of Brahmā (*brahmalokā*). This same theme was also integrated into Manichaean literature as a trope of heavenly ascents, with the exception that, in Mani's case, the king was elevated.

Finally, the importance of a historical factor in the relationship between Manichaeans and Buddhists, particularly regarding Mani's Buddhology, cannot be underestimated: the Buddha Maitreya. Werner Sundermann (1986, p. 13) had already

emphasized the importance of Maitreya in attributing a Buddha-like character to Mani; and Samuel Lieu (1985, p. 211) drew attention to the similarity between the claim that Mani was the Paraclete in the Christian culture of Mesopotamia, and that Mani was the Buddha Maitreya in the Buddhist environment of Central Asia.

There are two concise passages that describe the characteristics of the future Buddha in accordance with pre-existing Buddhist terminology. The *Dīgha Nikāya* (DN, 26; 25, 76) describes the arrival of an arahant, a "fully enlightened Buddha," named Metteyya (Maitreya in Pali). Similarly, in the corpus of Buddhist texts in Sanskrit, there is an account of Maitreya and his eventual descent to Earth. In the Sanskrit text, the presentation of Buddhology, akin to that of the Pali canon, occurs within a Brahmanical framework, featuring motifs that were previously observed in the life of Shakyamuni. Thus, according to the Divyāvadāna, a brahmin named Brahmāyus, the son of King Śaṅkha (*Śaṅkhasya rājño Brahmāyur nāma brāhamaṇaḥ purohito bhavishyati*), will have a wife named Brahmavatī, who will give birth to a boy named Maitreya (*Divyāvadāna*, 60; Cowell; Neil, 1886, p. 60.; cf. Rotman, 2008, p. 125).

Among the texts written in Iranian languages, there is a passage that mentions Buddha Maitreya. Klimkeit (1993, p. 125) provides a summary of this passage, which takes the form of a hymn and a dialogue between a boy, who represents the soul's longing for deliverance, and the redeemer (likely Jesus). The text (M 42; Boyce, 1975, p. 171-172), though incomplete, is still decipherable in its fragmented state, and its main objective can be understood. The boy says that "suffering (*yōbišn*) ended (*angūd*), for me (*man*) at the time (*žamān*) when [...] when (*kaδ*) the Buddha (*būd*) Śākyamuni (*šākman*) [...] he opened the door (*bar*) of salvation (*mōxšīg*) for the fortunate (*farrox*) Indians (*hindūg*), whom he saved (*bōžād*, <bwj'd>; or redeemed; from the root *bōž-*: to redeem or save. cf. Boyce, *Word-list*, 1977, p. 28). Then (Jesus) replied to him by saying that when he (*hō*, i.e. the Buddha) entered nirvana (*niβrān*) (kd hw sd 'w nybr'n), "he ordered (*framādiš*) you to wait (*bus*) here for Maitreya (*maitrag*)" (<frm'dyš 'w tw kw 'yd bws 'w mytrg>).

The Manichaean text links Jesus and Buddha from a soteriological and prophetological perspective. Furthermore, the text introduces Maitreya, a new Buddha identified with Mani. In addition to the synthesis of Christian and Buddhist visionary traditions, the Manichaeans incorporate the traditions about Buddha's life into Mani's

himself - exactly what the accounts of Tūrān Shāh's conversion testify to: a Manichaean "Buddhology". According to Padmanabh S. Jaini, there was agreement among the various Buddhist schools that Maitreya would become the future Buddha. However, Jaini notes that Maitreya did not play a prominent role in the Theravāda canon. This, in turn, led researchers to suggest that Maitreya was "promoted" to the status of future Buddha due to the influence of Iranian religions, especially Saošyant and Mithras Invictus figures. In any case, Jaini argues that Maitreya could only attain his position after being fully integrated into the traditional structure of the bodhisattva path (Jaini, 1988, p. 54).

In fact, A. L. Basham notes that the Mazdaean conception of Saošyant had the greatest influence on religions to the west and east of Iran. He further contended that the cult of Maitreya gained traction within an Indo-Iranian and Indo-Greek milieu, particularly as Buddhism encountered Iranian religions (Basham, 2005, p. 276). Unlike Basham, David Alan Scott (1990) questions the extent of Iranian influence on the cult of Maitreya. According to Scott, Buddhism already contained a tradition of anticipating a future Buddha. The issue with the term "influence" is its connotation of a one-sided relationship or genetic reductionism, on one hand, and oversimplification of Buddhist visionary experiences and their cosmological correlates to being impacted by other religions, on the other. Contact between different visionary hermeneutics, in which Buddhists could recognize concerns and themes similar to those in their respective traditions, is a plausible alternative. This is along the lines of the observation made by Jason Silverman (2012, p. 97) on contacts between Jewish apocalyptic tradition and Iranian visionary traditions.

Thus, there would exist an "Iranian hermeneutics", which synthesized with the ideas that Buddhists already had about Maitreya. Paul Williams (1989, p. 230) made a similar observation, corroborating Basham's position – who, contrary to what Scott makes clear, argues that the Buddha Maitreya and his functions within Buddhism are entirely understandable in terms of Indian Buddhism. In regards to Manichaeism, the Iranian influence on Buddhism allowed for the blending of two prevalent themes found in religious and philosophical groups of the late antique period. Specifically, the connection between celestial ascension and the exceptional attributes that denoted divine status for their respective bearers, known as θεῖος ἀνήρ (cf. Cornelli, 2006).

The Manichaeans synthesized their prophetology with expectations of Maitreya, the future Buddha. The assimilation of extraordinary marks and characteristics transferred elements from Buddhism to Manichaeism in Mani's prophetological scheme. Furthermore, in social and political terms, historical and hagiographic accounts were merged to promote Manichaean missionary activity in Buddhist environments. This led to the establishment of a "Manichaean Buddhology", which integrated significant aspects of the lives of the Buddha, Maitreya, and bodhisattvas based on prophetic-visionary themes inherent in Manichaeism, transforming its original character.

The use of technical terms to describe visionary experiences is crucial for comprehending how Mani integrated Buddhist concepts - particularly the Buddha himself - into his teachings. This visionary geography and the narratives of heavenly ascents cannot be reduced to a mere adaptation of Buddhist elements to the prophetic-visionary terminology of the philosophical and religious environment of the Mediterranean and the Near East. Instead, there exists a Manichaean synthesis of apocalyptic and Indian themes. Therefore, the comparison of the Manichaean texts in the Coptic and Iranian corpus shows the presence of a Mani Buddhology that was further developed as Manichaeans and Buddhists in Central Asia had increased contacts.

Therefore, the Buddhology found in late Manichaean texts and paintings, despite further modifications and developments as Manichaeism and Buddhism spread throughout Central Asia, should not be seen as a secondary phenomenon of a post-Mani Manichaeism. The accounts of heavenly ascents and associated themes in the Buddhist tradition reveal the presence of a Manichaean Buddhology that existed from the religion's inception. This development can be attributed to Mani and the first generations of Manichaeans, particularly those who were familiar with the Parthian language, such as Mār Ammō.

Second part - The Fortune of the Manichaean Visionary Tradition: From Platonism to Buddhism

Chapter 3 - Platonic Metaphysics and Manichaean Cosmology: The Reception of Manichaeism in the Roman Empire.

The initial section of this thesis aimed to present the correlation between visionary experiences and ritual practices, indicating that there exists no opposition between the transcendental sense of gnosis and its practical dimension, as a particular understanding of ritual actions. I traced the development of Pauline-Marcionite Christology to explore the historical context of Mani's views on the body and its role in salvation. Subsequently, I examined the link between Mani's visions and the apocalyptic tradition and Merkabah mysticism, as well as the relationship between Manichaean gnosis and Mandaeism.

The second part of the study entails two case studies. Initially, I will explore the Neoplatonic reception of Manichaeism, concentrating on Alexander of Lycopolis' anti-Manichaean treatise and Augustine's Christian version of Platonic Metaphysics and Heavenly journeys. For the second case study, I will investigate the encounters between Manichaeans and Buddhists in Central Asia. The study aims to investigate why Manichaeism faced greater rejection in the cultural environment of Platonism and Christianity than in Central Asia, despite the fact that Buddhism and Neoplatonism shared equally anti-dualistic views. The greater success of Manichaeism in Central Asia appears to stem from both the cultural circumstances on the Silk Road, where most religions were from foreign lands and had to adapt to the local religious environment, and the fascination with the symbolism of Light and its cosmological and soteriological consequences.

Alexander of Lycopolis attempted to translate Mani's doctrine into Platonic philosophical terminology but failed to differentiate the prophetic-visionary discourse from the epistemological and metaphysical discourse. Augustine employed a similar approach with varying objectives, namely, to mock Manichaean doctrine and cosmology while also establishing his concept of visionary knowledge. In Central Asia, Manichaeism and Buddhism both shared a cosmological and soteriological interest influenced by Iranian culture. They found a common ground through the aesthetics of Light which allowed for the creation of a similar visionary hermeneutic, despite the fundamental contradictions between the two religions, particularly the anti-dualism of Mahāyāna Buddhism and the radical dualism of Manichaeism.

3.1 Alexander of Lycopolis on the History of Christianity and Manichaeism

Little is known about Alexander of Lycopolis's life, aside from his anti-Manichaean work. This treatise, preserved for its polemical character, was written during a time when Christian theologians were responding to the growing Manichaean influence in the Roman Empire. Scholars once considered Alexander of Lycopolis a Christian theologian, but further research revealed him to be a Platonic author[94]. Alexander remains an important figure in the study of Manichaeism, particularly in its early reception in Egypt during the late third and early fourth centuries. The scholar encounters several challenges concerning his philosophy and his place in the Platonic tradition, particularly due to the absence of any works other than his anti-Manichaean treatise which could offer a clearer insight into his philosophy[95].

At the outset of his anti-Manichaean work, Alexander of Lycopolis offers brief remarks on what he intends by Christianity and outlines its history. This introduction clarifies his view of Manichaeism and lays a foundation for analyzing his interpretation of Mani's religion. It is noteworthy that Alexander considered it necessary to expound on his beliefs about the history of Christianity in the context of a treatise on the Manichaeans. Alexander argues that Manichaeism is a Christian group or *hairesis*. While other historical sources, especially heresiological ones, have classified the Manichaeans and Gnostic schools as "Christian heresies", Alexander's claim calls for a cautious examination of these passages.

Alexander asserts that the philosophy of Christians is straightforward ('Η Χριστιανῶν φιλοσοφία ἁπλῆ καλεῖται), focused on ethical instructions. However, he argues that Christian positions regarding God are ambiguous. Christians, according to Alexander of Lycopolis, claim that the productive cause is the most honorable, most important, and the cause of all beings. On the other hand, Christians in matters of ethics refrain from tackling the most challenging issues, including what constitutes ethical and intellectual virtue, dispositions, and affections (Brinkmann, 1895, p. 3; cf. van der Horst & Mansfeld, 1974, pp. 48-49).

The perception of Christianity as a 'superficial philosophy' had precedents in Hellenistic culture, but it is in the emphasis on ethics that lies the central foundation of

[94] See van der Horst & Mansfeld (1974, p 7-9)
[95] See Villey (1985, pp. 33-38)

Alexander's argument about the history of Christian philosophy. Alexander notes that Christian philosophy splintered into numerous groups and ethical instruction diminished because group leaders lacked theoretical precision. Additionally, there were no laws or norms to decide issues (Brinkmann, 1895, p. 7; cf. van der Horst & Mansfeld, 1974, p. 51)

The conception of Christianity's history is primarily theoretical rather than theological. Therefore, the comparison between Alexander's viewpoint and that of the heresiologists is inadequate. The concept of *hairesis* in Alexander seems to primarily refers to its pre-Christian meaning as a group or school of thought.[96] The idea of a 'primal' Christian philosophy that gradually dissolved into various groups is also attributed to this environment. This context is crucial in comprehending Alexander's place within the Platonic tradition and the philosophical and religious milieu that Manichaeism had to accommodate.

b) Platonic cosmology

Plato's cosmology serves as the foundation for comprehending the dispute between Alexander of Lycopolis and the Manichaeans, particularly in terms of its epistemological and ontological implications. As noted by Richard D. Mohr (1985, p. 1), Plato's cosmology intertwines central points of Platonism, including gods, souls, ideas, matter, and space, revealing the main relationships within the expansive field of Platonic thought encompassing epistemology, physics, metaphysics, and theology.

The Timaeus presents the cosmogonic myth of the Demiurge[97], who imposes order on chaos, serving as a model for subsequent Platonist investigations of the problem

[96] I disagree with P. W. van der Horst and J. Mansfeld (1974, p. 6) on this matter. They argue that Alexander's testimony reinforces the alleged evidence of Mani as primarily a Christian 'heretic' in the CMC. However, I believe that Alexander's testimony does not necessarily support this claim. Alexander mainly refers to Christianity as a philosophy, and for him, the eventual fragmentation was due to theoretical reasons rather than theological ones.

[97] Mohr argues that Plato designates forms as paradigms (παραδείγματα) to be viewed as standards or measures. In order for forms to serve as standards, they must possess specific properties referred to by Mohr as "standard-establishing properties" " that "will be the properties requisite to a standard's ability to serve as a standard, that is, requisite to it having the functional properties it has" (Mohr, 1985, p. 13). Thus, Mohr (1985, p. 13) argues that the Demiurge supposes that the world can be improved if he can somehow make it possess standards in some sense. Therefore, the patterns created by the Demiurge, derived from the idea patterns, become immanent in the sensible world. In Plato's State theory, the concept of paradigm does not only create a tension between the derivative and the ideal but also indicates varying possibilities for transferring the ideal into the sensible world. See André Laks (2022) for further discussions on this matter. In later Platonism, such as that of Alexander of Lycopolis, the demiurge possessed a theological aspect, including God, the One, and other philosophical-religious groups of Late Antiquity that influenced the

of evil (e.g. Numenius and Plutarch). Alexander of Lycopolis, adhering to Platonic cosmology, posits that Manichaeism created an opposition between the ideal, incorporeal world and matter. Within the ancient Mediterranean intellectual context and its links to Near Eastern cultures, scholars analyzed Plato's cosmology in relation to Orphism, Pythagoreanism[98], and "Chaldean" thought. Moreover, the transmission of Platonic ideas poses an issue for later speculations, particularly the "unwritten doctrines[99]."

According to Luc Brisson (2018, p. 231), Plato contended that a cosmology must be capable of addressing, at minimum, the following three inquiries: 1) what are the conditions necessary for comprehending the sensible world? 2) how does one describe it? 3) what is the most effective way to interact with it? As Brisson notes, these queries align with the thought of ancient Greece, where true reality must remain immutable because something must remain unchanged, amidst change, in order for it to become an object of knowledge. Brisson (2018, p. 231) highlights that Plato expresses this necessity through the concept of the world of Forms, which can solely be understood through intellect and in which the sensible world takes part.

Brisson identifies two issues that underlie the hypothesis of the existence of intelligible forms: 1) the participation of forms among themselves; and 2) the participation of sensible things in intelligible things. The second problem is the most pertinent to Alexander of Lycopolis' criticism of Manichaeism, as Plato introduces the demiurge in addressing it (Brisson, 2018, p. 231). Instead, Alexander of Lycopolis delves into the ontological implications of the interplay between an ideal world and the world of becoming in Manichaeism. This is a crucial point that underpins the dualistic approach to

development of late Platonism. This theological dimension relates to the problem of evil and its ontological implications. Scholars are divided on whether the Demiurge in Plato should be taken literally. John Dillon (2019, p. 25), for instance, contends that the Demiurge should not be understood literally and distinguishes Plato's viewpoint from that of the late Platonists concerning the "problem of evil".

[98] On the subject of Plato's adaptation of Orphic cosmogonic myths, please refer to Alberto Bernabé's (2011) work, pages 77-95. Additionally, Gabriele Cornelli provides insight into the influence of Pythagoreanism and Orphism in Plato's thought. Although Plato establishes philosophy as the authority on religious matters (cf. Bernabé, 2011), the transition hypothesis from "religion" to "philosophy" defended by Thomas Robinson (2007, pp. 62-63) is susceptible to misunderstandings, particularly those involving an implicitly affirmed teleology between ancient spirituality and philosophy. See also Burkert's work provides insight into the relationship between itinerant charismatics and ecstatic religion in Greece, as well as the links between Orphism and Egypt.

[99] For a detailed study of the so-called unwritten doctrines of Plato, see Rodolfo Lopes and Gabriele Cornelli (2016).

the problem of suffering and evil, situating Mani's teachings in the context of Hellenic philosophy.

The concept of being and becoming is introduced early on in *Timaeus*, when Timaeus urges the gods to sanction a report on divine matters. He questions whether the Universe was created or not, posing the questions: what always exists but never undergoes change, and what undergoes change but never truly exists? (ἔστιν οὖν δὴ κατ᾽ ἐμὴν δόξαν πρῶτον διαιρετέον τάδε· τί τὸ ὂν ἀεί, γένεσιν δὲ οὐκ ἔχον, καὶ τί τὸ γιγνόμενον μὲν; *Tim.* 27CD). That which is eternal and immutable can be comprehended by the intellect (τὸ μὲν δὴ νοήσει μετὰ λόγου περιληπτόν), whereas the second object is a matter of opinion that is backed by an irrational (ἀλόγου) sensation (αἰσθήσεως), since it comes into being (γιγνόμενον) and then passes away (ἀπολλύμενον) without ever truly existing (ὄντως δὲ οὐδέποτε ὄν). Since it is created, it relies on something else - everything that is created must have a cause, as nothing can come into existence without something being accountable for its origin (πᾶν δὲ αὖ τὸ γιγνόμενον ὑπ᾽ αἰτίου τινὸς ἐξ ἀνάγκης γίγνεσθαι· παντὶ γὰρ ἀδύνατον χωρὶς αἰτίου γένεσιν σχεῖν) (*Tim.* 28AB).

Then Timaeus poses a question: did it always exist with no beginning, or was it created? The answer is that it was created, since it is visible, tangible, and corporeal, and anything with these properties is perceptible (ὁρατὸς γὰρ ἁπτός τέ ἐστιν καὶ σῶμα ἔχων, πάντα δὲ τὰ τοιαῦτα αἰσθητά) (*Tim.* 28B). This process of coming into being is further related to the demiurgic activity, for the visible world had previously been in a state of confusion and chaos; but through the demiurge's intervention, everything gained structure and clarity (*Tim.* 30 A). And so, the demiurge emerged and brought order to the chaos. Through reasoning, the universe was then fashioned by the demiurge with reason in soul and soul in body (διὰ δὴ τὸν λογισμὸν τόνδε νοῦν μὲν ἐν ψυχῇ, ψυχὴν δ᾽ ἐν σώματι συνιστὰς τὸ πᾶν συνετεκταίνετο), resulting in a creation of unparalleled beauty and perfection (*Tim.* 30b).

With a Platonic theoretical foundation, Alexander of Lycopolis examines Manichaean cosmology, influenced by the notion, found in the Timaeus, that there must be a third term between the sensible world and the ideal world (cf. Timaeus, 31bc). As a result, Alexander of Lycopolis interprets Manichaeism using the theoretical language of Platonism, converting Manichaean dualism into a form of metaphysics.

In Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism, the relationship between the world of Forms and matter is driven, among other issues, by the problem of Evil. The existence of suffering and evil necessitated an appropriate ethics and soteriology. Within this context, the recent entry of Manichaeism into the Hellenic environment of Egypt led to the Manichaean solution, which Alexander of Lycopolis opposed. However, the dilemma of suffering and evil - or the challenge of incorporation that gives rise to them - and their corresponding soteriological solution have been present in the Platonic tradition from Numenius to Iamblichus, rather than being exclusive to the Manichaeans. The clearest search for dualistic solutions can be seen in the mid-Platonic philosophers Plutarch and Numenius. At the time, they were also considered Pythagoreans, as noted by Alexander of Lycopolis, who compared their ideas to those of Manichaeism.

c) Platonic dualism

"Translating" Manichaean dualism into Greek ontology, Alexander posits that the two principles would be more effectively expressed through the contrast between being and becoming. This would prevent matter from forming itself and thus avoid the contradiction of being both active and passive, as well as similar contradictions in the productive cause, which Alexander dismisses as unworthy of mention (Brinkmann, 1895, pp 9-10.; cf. van der Horst & Mansfeld, 1974, pp. 59-60). As van der Horst and Mansfeld have translated, Alexander of Lycopolis states that:

> It should not be forgotten that God is wholly independent of matter as to his works, since his relation to that Intellect all things are capable of coming into being hypostatically. If, on the other hand – as seems to be his real meaning – matter is the random motion inherent in things two remarks must be made. First, that he seems to be ignorant of the fact that he attributes reality to another productive principle as well, though it be only the cause of evil (Van der Horst e Mansfeld, 1974, p. 60)

This passage holds significance in the context of the Manichaean doctrine, which asserts that matter is independent of God precisely because it has another principle as its productive cause, to use Alexander's terminology; however, Alexander believes that Mani ascribes disordered motion to matter-an important theme in Platonic cosmology and ontology. The examination of the consequences of Plato's cosmology, as expressed in Timaeus, on Plutarch and Numenius, will be examined now.

Van der Horst and Mansfeld (1974, p. 10) argue that Alexander of Lycopolis, as a Neoplatonist, adhered to the theory of hypostatic origin as the "true doctrine." However, they disagree with Praechter's interpretation that Alexander does not accept a hypostasis above the demiurgic God. Van der Horst and Mansfeld (1974, pp. 10-11) provide an objective summary of Alexander's philosophy, stating the existence of a supreme principle that cannot be equated with the Plotinian one, with the implication that the Christian doctrine is in harmony with it to the extent that it recognizes the first principle as the cause of all things (pp. 3, 5-7. Br). Consequently, Van der Horst and Mansfeld (1974, pp. 11-12) explore the roots of Alexandrian Platonism in other Platonic currents:

> This conception of the first principle as an incorporeal, simples, divine, productive Intellect which is beyond being and hard to know is close to the various conceptions of such Middle Platonists as Albinus, Maximus of Tyre, Celsus and Numenius. That the first principle is the cause of all things can be paralleled from Plotinus and Porphyry, who how do not speak of it as Intellect. The theory of hypostases (cf. p. 24, 19 Br.) is not Middle Platonists, though the so-called “principle of undiminished giving” found in Numenius (whose words are echoed by Alexandre) and even early may be considered as a precursor of the Neoplatonist concept of emanation.

At first glance, according to André Villey, the description of the first principle as a demiurgic intellect in Alexandrian thinking indicates a Platonism that predates Plotinus, a conclusion that aligns with the findings of van der Horst and Mansfeld. However, Villey highlights a passage in Alexander of Lycopolis' treatise (39:18) that contradicts van der Horst and Mansfeld's hypothesis. In this passage, Alexander suggests the existence of a God who is "beyond essence" (*tòn epékeina ousías*), reminiscent of the Republic's concept of the Good (509b) (Villey, 1985, p. 34-35). Consequently, according to Villey, if God exists beyond essence, then He must necessarily surpass being and intellect (Villey, 1985, p. 35). Therefore, Alexander of Lycopolis could not uphold the thesis that the demiurgic intellect is the first principle. The dilemma stems from the polemical and anti-Manichaean nature of Alexander's treatise. Villey highlights the need for caution when examining Alexandrian philosophy and theology since there are no additional systematic writings from Alexander with which to compare his anti-Manichaean treatise. It is important to note that Alexander was primarily focused on refuting Manichaeism rather than constructing a metaphysical system: *dans lequel l'auteur se soucie moins d'exposer ses propre position que de terrasser l'adversaire* (Villey, 1985, p. 35).

In terms of Christianity, Villey proposes an alternative viewpoint to that of Van der Horst and Mansfeld. Villey (1985, p. 35) suggests that Alexander simply agrees with Christians on a tactical level, in that God can be seen as a demiurgic intellect that corresponds to a basic truth accepted by Christians. However, Alexander's stance on principles does not necessarily derive from this agreement. Alexander's main argument centers on his rejection of dualism, allowing him to align himself with the Christians and other late Platonic authors for polemical purposes (Villey, 1985, p. 35).

In translating the Manichaean doctrine into the language of contemporary Platonism, Alexander inevitably lost the dynamism of the Manichaean cosmogonic myth as well as crucial aspects of its visionary-cosmological character. This brought Mani's doctrine nearer to his opponents, namely the Pythagorean Platonists who confronted the ontological implications of the problem of Evil. Thus, as noted by Villey (1985, p. 35) Alexander criticizes Plutarch and Numenius for their view of a primordial matter that is coeternal with God and capable of limiting his power, either directly or through an evil soul.

What were the positions of Plutarch and Numenius, and how do their views help contextualize the Alexandrian philosophy and theology present in their anti-Manichaean treatise? Plutarch (*Moralia*, 4; Lelli & Pisani, 2007, pp. 1960-1961) observed that the constitution of the universe and soul was a subject on which many Platonists forced (παραβιάζονται) their interpretations on Plato's text. What exactly did this manipulation of Platonic doctrines entail? Throughout his argument, Plutarch suggests that in both the Timaeus and the Laws, it is plausible to identify a Platonic solution to this problem. According to Plutarch, Plato describes a soul that is disorderly and wicked. However, this soul, by partaking (μετέσχεν) in rationality and harmony (λογισμοῦ καὶ ἁρμονίας), can become the Soul of the Universe (ἵνα κόσμου ψυχὴ γένηται) (*Moralia*, 6; Lelli & Pisani, 2007, pp. 1962-1963).

Following Plato, Plutarch states (*Moralia*, 5; Lelli & Pisani, 2007, pp. 1962-1963) that disorder preceded the genesis of the Universe. It was not incorporeal, immobile, or inanimate, but instead had a corporeal element lacking form and cohesion – a unstable and irrational mobile element (ἀκοσμία γὰρ ἦν τὰ πρὸ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου γενέσεως, ἀκοσμία δ᾽ οὐκ ἀσώματος οὐδ᾽ ἀκίνητος οὐδ᾽ ἄψυχος ἀλλ᾽ ἄμορφον μὲν καὶ ἀσύστατον τὸ σωματικὸν ἔμπληκτον δὲ καὶ ἄλογον τὸ κινητικὸν ἔχουσα) According to Plutarch, God

did not create corporeal what was incorporeal, nor soul what was soulless (ὁ γὰρ θεὸς οὔτε σῶμα τὸ ἀσώματον οὔτε ψυχὴν τὸ ἄψυχον ἐποίησεν), but, just as a man with harmony and a sense of rhythm produces not only voice and movement, but also graceful voice and movement with a beautiful rhythm. God did not create the tangibility and resistance of the body, nor the imagination and mobility of the soul (οὕτως ὁ θεὸς οὔτε τοῦ σώματος τὸ ἁπτὸν καὶ ἀντίτυπον οὔτε τῆς ψυχῆς τὸ φανταστικὸν καὶ κινητικὸν αὐτὸς ἐποίησεν), but instead received both principles and harmonized them by ordering and arranging them. In doing so, God[100] crafted the most beautiful and perfect among living beings (τὸ κάλλιστον ἀπεργασάμενος καὶ τελειότατον ἐξ αὐτῶν ζῷον) (*Moralia*, 5; Lelli & Pisani, 2007, pp. 1962-1963).

According to Plutarch (*Moralia*, 7; Lelli & Pisani, 2007, pp. 1964-1965), by homogenizing matter and delivering it from any differentiation (ἀλλὰ τήν γε ὕλην διαφορᾶς ἁπάσης ἀπαλλάττων), Plato also placed the origin of evils at the furthest point from God (τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν τῶν κακῶν αἰτίαν ἀπωτάτω τιθέμενος). Regarding the cosmos, Plato wrote in the *Statesman* (περὶ τοῦ κόσμου γέγραφεν ἐν τῷ Πολιτικῷ) that "all good things are obtained from the One who created him, whereas all evil and unrighteous things in heaven are derived from the previous state, from which he either possesses them or produces them in living beings" (παρὰ μὲν γὰρ τοῦ ξυνθέντος πάντα τὰ καλὰ κέκτηται· παρὰ δὲ τῆς ἔμπροσθεν ἕξεως ὅσα χαλεπὰ καὶ ἄδικα ἐν οὐρανῷ γίγνεται, ταῦτ᾽ ἐξ ἐκείνης αὐτός τε ἔχει καὶ τοῖς ζῴοις ἐναπεργάζεται; cf. Moralia, 7; Lelli & Pisani, 2007, pp. 1964-1965).

It is for this reason that Plutarch argues that the derivation of evil from non-being without cause and genesis falls, in his opinion, into the Stoic aporias (αἱ γὰρ Στωικαὶ καταλαμβάνουσιν ἡμᾶς ἀπορίαι, τὸ κακὸν ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος). Therefore, evil cannot be derived from matter; instead, it must be derived from the disordered movement of matter. Plutarch's perspective seems to align with the discussions presented in the previous topic of *Timaeus*, which state that any generated matter has a cause. Thus, it can be concluded that the disordered movement of matter is not the cause of evil. Instead, it is the evil that causes disordered movement.

[100] For an interpretation of Plutarch's theology based on his confrontation with Herodotus, see Roig Lanzillotta (2012); for Plutarch's relationship to Greek historiography beyond Herodotus, especially his admiration for Thucydides, see Pelling (1992). And on Plutarch's theory of history as a whole, see Dillon (1997).

If matter lacks form and is not inherently evil, yet evil still exists, where does it originate? John Dillon explains that in the Laws passage (10, 896D-898C) used by Plutarch to tackle the problem of Evil in a Platonic cosmology, Plato did not intend to introduce an evil soul as a positive force of malevolence in the world, which would contradict God on a cosmic scale. However, Dillon raises the question of what exactly Plato meant by this passage if not that. (Dillon, 2019. p. 25). To solve this issue, Dillon contextualizes Plutarch's suggestion within the reception of Plato's unwritten doctrines, specifically the One and indefinite Dyad. Dillon highlights the Receptacle as a key element in offering a different understanding of Plutarch's interpretation, namely, that the source of disordered movement is only the minimum postulate necessary to explain the diversity of the cosmos, notwithstanding some inconvenient aspects that may be seen as "evil" (Dillon, 2019, p. 25).

Dillon's stance may be accurate for a reading of Plato's intentions and the nonexistence of a dilemma regarding the presence of evil within his work. In Late Antiquity, the problem of evil and suffering became an unavoidable subject due to the interactions between mystery and Gnostic groups and the cultural relations between Mediterranean culture and the Near East. Platonists such as Plutarch looked for a solution in Plato himself, as it seemed implausible that a philosopher of his caliber would have overlooked such an important question.

In this context, Lloyd P. Gerson has noted that the significance of the *unde malum* in Late Antiquity is related to the awareness of Eastern cosmologies and the crucial role played by the *Timaeus* in cosmological matters for the Platonists. Nevertheless, the way he combines these two factors poses serious problems. Gerson asserts that later Platonists faced serious challenges due to the lack of explicit reference to a single Idea of the Good, which was subordinated to the dialogue's overall silence about the presence of evil. Conversely, Gerson argues that the Timaeus was the beginning of the defense of Platonic cosmology against the contemporaneous alternatives, namely, Eastern cosmologies (Gerson, 2013, p. 189).

Cosmology, particularly in relation to the theory of forms and theological contexts, was the main focus of Platonism in harmonizing Hellenic cosmology with Eastern cosmologies. It is not a coincidence that Plutarch and Numenius, advocates of a dualistic interpretation of the problem of evil, held great respect for Eastern doctrines.

Even Neoplatonist authors, including Porphyry and Iamblichus, were intrigued by wisdom doctrines from the Near East and even the Indian subcontinent, as was the case with Porphyry. But these authors did not consider themselves any less Platonist. In fact, Gregory Shaw's (2014, p. 259) observation about Iamblichus' interpretation of *mantikē* being orthodox for a Platonist can be further extended to say that Iamblichus' view of the Chaldean Oracles and Hermeticism were also part of an "orthodox" late Platonic worldview.

The case of Numenius of Apamea is emblematic of Alexander of Lycopolis' critique of Manichaeism. Numenius had a considerable influence on Neoplatonism in the middle of the third century CE, but very little is known about his life. Ammonius Saccas and Puech concurred on the vital points, and Plotinus incorporated their feedback in his own scholastic exercise. He was even accused of plagiarizing Numenius (Puech, 1985, p. 58). His theology, which reflects his interest in Eastern traditions, belongs to an earlier Platonic tradition discussed earlier. Nonetheless, it appears to be tied to the fact that Numenius himself had Semitic origins[101] and belonged to Near Eastern culture.

During Numenius' time, there were two main perspectives on ancient traditions - one Christian and the other polytheistic, or 'pagan'. Polymnia Athanassiadi's work, *La Lutte Pour L'Orthodoxie dans le platonisme tardif*, offers a detailed analysis of the cultural and socio-political context that characterized the shift from ancient spirituality to late-antique religion. In her examination, Athanassiadi (2006, p. 75) highlights two prominent figures – Justin Martyr and Celsus. In Justin's version of Christianity, Platonism no longer maintained its status as an independent spiritual path and instead became an intermediary stepping stone towards Christianity[102]. Conversely, Celsus employed revered nations, including the Egyptians, Assyrians, Indians, and Persians, who were known as masters of wisdom, to criticize and oppose Christianity (Athanassiadi, 2006, p. 76).

The choice of Numenius, Athanassiadi argues, was neither that of Justin nor of Celsus; for, in Athanassiadi words, trusting in the spirit of universal tolerance, as well as

[101] See Puech (1985, p. 64).

[102] Similar to Mani's perspective presented in this thesis, the crucial distinction lies in Manichaean universalism, which allowed it to incorporate other religions into its doctrine. Thus, for a purely comparative analysis, Mani's universal theology appears to bridge the gap between Christian views and Numenius' universalism.

in his intellectual capacity, Numenius ventured down all the intellectual paths open to him. In his commentary on ancient traditions, Numenius attempted to organize the immense scope of ancient theologies under the guidance of the τροπολογίαι, which emphasizes the singularity of divinity (Athanassiadi, 2006, p. 76). In *On the Good*, Numenius outlines his theological stance[103] by attempting to merge the Pythagorean-Platonic traditions with Eastern traditions, thus providing insight into his metaphysics. Numenius asserts the convergence of Platonic and Pythagorean traditions and also contends that the teachings and ideas (καὶ τὰ δόγματα τάς τε ἰδέας) of Brahmins, Jews, Egyptians are in agreement with Platonism (βραχμᾶνες καὶ ιουδαῖοι καὶ μάγοι καὶ αἰγύπτιοι διέθεντο) (*On the Good*, Fr. 1 a; des Places, 1973, p. 42).

In regard to Numenius' so-called Pythagorean dualism, there exist fragments that elucidate his stance. Alexander of Lycopolis discusses similar ideas in his criticism of the Manichaeans. In one section of Proclus' *Commentary on the Timaeus*, it is suggested that the opposition between certain daemons (δαιμόνων), some of which are deemed superior (ἀμεινόνων), connects to the history of both the Athenians and Atlanteans (cf. des Places, 1973, p. 88). Some were inferior (χειρόνων), while others were superior in number (πλήθει) or power (δυνάμει). Some emerged victorious, while others were defeated, as Origen interpreted (ὥσπερ 'Ωριγένης ὑπέλαζεν). Others relate the fact to a disagreement between certain distinguished souls and followers of Athena, and still others linked it to generation, who return to the governing god (Οἱ δ'εἰς ψυχῶν διάστασιν καλλιόνων καὶ τῆς 'Αθηνᾶς τροφίμων καὶ γενεσιουργῶν ἄλλων, αἳ καὶ τῷ τῆς γενέσεως ἐφόρῳ θεῷ προσήκουσι). Numenius would likely lead the way for the last interpretation (Fr. 37, Test. 49 L; des Places, 1973, p. 88).

[103] Although the vision of an ultimate harmony among the ancients was known in Platonism, Lloyd P. Gerson believes that this comprehensive perspective, as found in Numenius, is unprecedented; thus, this conception of the Good would be the starting point for a construction of his ontology, which Gerson interprets according to his thesis of Ur-platonism (Gerson, 2013, p. 210). In his article about Numenius, Henri-Charles Puech analyzes various philosophical and religious doctrines prevalent in the cultural environment of Apamea. He categorically states that the issue of the alleged Oriental influence in Numenius' work is genuine and not a fabricated one (Puech, 1985, p. 59). Although Numenius delved deeply into Plato's works, Puech observes that he is a distinct Platonist. He exists within a philosophical and religious geographical context with a range of wisdom traditions, including the teachings of the Indians, Arabs, Chaldeans, and Hebrews. It can be argued, in accordance with Puech, that he amalgamated the doctrines of respected nations with a Platonic tradition that has already been traced back to Pythagoras (Puech, 1985, p.76-77).

Also, in his examination of the Timaeus, Proclus notes that some of his forerunners conceptualized the essence of the soul as a mathematical entity that operates as a mediator between physical and supra-sensible realities (τῶν δὲ πρὸ ἡμῶν οἱ μὲν μαθηματικὴν ποιοῦντες τὴν οὐσίαν τῆς ψυχῆς ὡς μέσην τῶν τε φυσικῶν καὶ τῶν ὑπερφυῶν); or, having called it number, they derive it from the monad, insofar as the latter is indivisible, and from the indefinite dyad, insofar as the latter is divisible; or they see it as a geometrical entity, composed of point and extension, the point indivisible, the extension divisible. Aristander, Numenius, and other commentators hold this opinion. (Fr. 39, Test. 31 L; des Places, 1973, p. 89).

But it is Numenius' definition of matter that most closely aligns with the view described by Alexander of Lycopolis (Brinkmann, 1895, p. 10; cf. van der Horst & Mansfeld, 1974, p. 61) in his examination of "Pythagorean dualism". Numenius posits that if matter (ὕλη) is infinite (ἄπειρος), it must be indeterminate (ἀόριστον) - and if it is indeterminate (ἀόριστος), it is irrational (ἄλογος). This irrationality renders matter unintelligible (ἄγνωστος), and therefore without order. If something cannot be known, it must lack order, because what is ordered is easily understood. Conversely, disorder is unstable and therefore not reliable. Therefore, matter is not being, neither in itself nor in the form of bodies (τὴν ὕλην οὔτε αὐτὴν οὔτε τὰ σώματα εἶναι ὄν) (Fr. 4 a. 13 L; des Places, 1973, p. 45). These are key fundamentals concerning the dualism and theology[104] of Numenius. After this contextualization, one can analyze Alexander's arguments against the Manichaeans.

d) Alexander of Lycopolis on Manichaean cosmology

Alexander's descriptions of Manichaean cosmology can be roughly divided into two categories: 1) an objective presentation without polemical aims; and, as already seen,

[104] Numenius employs Platonic hermeneutics and metaphysics to develop a theology incorporating doctrines from various traditions in the western Mediterranean and Asia. From Numenius' fragments, it seems that he is located at an intermediate point where sapiential doctrines and Pythagorean Platonism mutually influence one another, rather than solely focusing on Platonism or Eastern doctrines. Furthermore, according to John Dillon, Numenius' dualism, despite his documented openness to Eastern religions, aligns with the traditional Greek philosophical notion that God embodies both Being and Intellect. This concept proved challenging to overcome, which Numenius ultimately did not abandon, though he approached doing so (Dillon, 2007, p. 398). Additionally, Dillon noted that the concept of the second soul, a strongly dualistic aspect of Nun's philosophy, bears similarity to Paul of Tarsus' teachings in Romans 7:23 and 8:7-8, regarding a conflict between the flesh and spirit (Dillon, 2007, p. 401). Furthermore, there may be connections between the philosophy of Numenius and the Chaldean Oracles (Dillon, 2007, pp. 401-402), adding to the possibility of Gnostic influence.

2) an analysis/"translation" of Manichaean cosmological principles according to the philosophical terminology of Platonism. At times, the two subjects are conflated, to the point where even in the most impartial presentation of Manichaeism, Alexander employs a vocabulary that is foreign to Mani's. Alternatively, one can also assume that the Manichaeans he knew conveyed themselves in this manner.

In regards to the initial topic, Alexander of Lycopolis cites two principles (ἀρχὰς) that Mani established: God and matter (θεὸν καὶ ὕλην), where God is considered good and matter is deemed evil (εἶναι δὲ τὸν μὲν θεὸν ἀγαθόν, τὴν δὲ ὕλην κακόν). He does not discuss matter in either the Platonic sense - whereby it is defined as that which becomes all things when it gains quality and form (τὴν πάντα γινομένην ὅταν λάβῃ ποιότητα καὶ σχῆμα) - or in Aristotle's sense, as the element in relation to which form (εἶδος) and deprivation (στέρησις) occur. Instead, he proposes something altogether different: matter is the random movement found in each individual. Alongside God, other powers exist as auxiliaries, all of which possess goodness. Conversely, matter possesses all evil. Brightness (λαμπρὸν), Light (φῶς) and that which is Above (ἄνω) are attributed to God (Brinkmann, 1895, p. 5; cf. van der Horst & Mansfeld, 1974, pp. 52-53)

When the soul is mixed with matter, it is affected by the matter. Like the change in the contents of a defiled vessel (ἀγγείῳ), the Soul embedded in matter also experiences changes when it participates (μετουσίαν) in evil (κακίας), contrary to its true nature. Therefore, to help the Soul's plight, God sent another power (δύναμιν) known as the Demiurge according to Mani (Brinkmann, 1895, p. 6; cf. van der Horst & Mansfeld, 1974, pp. 54-55). As van der Horst & Mansfeld (1974, p. 55) have translated:

> When this power had arrived and had put its hand to creating the universe, then that part of the other power which had suffered nothing untoward as a result of the mixture was separated from matter, and this first part of the other power became sun and moon, while that part which had become moderately evil came to be the stars and the whole of the heaven. The part of matter from which sun and moon had been separated was driven past the bounds of the universe, and this is fire, burning, yet dark and without light, similar to the night. Within the other elements and the plants and other living beings which dwell within these elements, the divine power which is mixed with them moved about at random. For this reason, then, the universe came into being, and within it the sun and the moon, which by means of the coming into being and passing away of things

> continually separate the divine power from matter and send it on its way toward God.

According to Alexander, another power exists alongside the demiurge, which descended towards the Sun's rays (ἐπὶ γάρ τοι τῷ δημιουργῷ ἑτέραν δύναμιν ἐπὶ τὸ φωτοειδὲς τοῦ ἡλίου κατελθοῦσαν) and is responsible for the task of separation. Moreover, it is said that during its crescent phase, the moon takes the power that is separated from matter (ἐν μὲν γὰρ ταῖς αὐξήσεσιν τὴν σελήνην λαμβάνειν τὴν ἀποχωριζομένην δύναμιν ἀπὸ τῆς ὕλης). When the moon is full, it transmits the power to the sun, which then transmits it to God. In the Sun (ἐν ἡλίῳ), one can see an image (εἰκόνα), which is similar to an image/shape of a man (ἑωρᾶσθαι τοιαύτην, οἷόν ἐστι τὸ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εἶδος). Matter (τὴν ὕλην), in its turn, willing to rival (ἀντιφιλοτιμήσασθαι) [the Sun] crafted man after (from) itself (ποιῆσαι τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐξ αὐτῆς), due to the mixture with all the power (κατὰ τὴν διὰ πάσης αὐτῆς τῆς δυνάμεως μῖξιν). Therefore, man already has something of the soul in himself (ἔχοντα καὶ αὐτόν τι τῆς ψυχῆς), for he is himself an image of the divine power (ὑπάρχειν γὰρ αὐτὸν θείας δυνάμεως εἰκόνα) (Brinkmann, 1895, pp. 6-7; cf. van der Horst & Mansfeld, 1974, pp. 55-56; and also Piras, cf. Gnoli, 2006, pp. 144-147).

Finally, Alexander explains the Manichaean Christology, in which Christ, as an intellect (i.e., τὸν δὲ χριστὸν εἶναι νοῦν), came at a specific time from on high to free the greater part of his power in order to restore it to God. Lastly, Christ, by his crucifixion, gave us the knowledge that the divine power, too, is similarly nailed into matter (ἀνασταυρωθέντα παρασχέσθαι γνῶσιν τοιῷδε τρόπῳ καὶ τὴν δύναμιν τὴν θείαν ἐνηρμόσθαι, ἐνεσταυρῶσθαι τῇ ὕλῃ) (Brinkmann, 1895, p. 7; cf. van der Horst & Mansfeld, 1974, p. 56; and also Piras, cf. Gnoli, 2006, p. 147)

After introducing the topic, Alexander launches into a critique of Manichaean cosmology. He argues that the doctrines of Manichaeism can sway the beliefs of those who accept them uncritically. To support his point, he provides the example of fellow philosophers who apparently converted to Manichaeism, based on his testimony. Thus, he faces difficulty in proceeding with his analysis. As someone who strongly opposes Manichaean doctrine, Alexander refers to it as nonsense. Therefore, translating Manichaeism into a suitable language for conveying ideas – which for him is the language of Greek philosophy – is a challenging task, according to Alexander (Brinkmann, 1895, p. 8; cf. van der Horst & Mansfeld, 1974, p. 58)

Alexander says that, by means of their old and new scriptures (οἳ τὰς παρ' αὐτοῖς γραφὰς παλαιάς τε καὶ νέας), which the Manichaeans believed were divinely inspired (θεοπνεύστους), they expressed their personal doctrines as deductions from these revelations, so that theoretically they accepted a refutation only when the doctrine they expounded contradicted the revealed scriptures. In this light, the Greek philosophers, Alexander notes, ascribe these non-derivative propositions – upon which these proofs are predicated-– to the voice of the prophets (τοῦτο παρ'αὐτοῖς ἐστιν ἡ τῶν προφητῶν φωνή) (Brinkmann, 1895, pp. 8-9; cf. van der Horst & Mansfeld, 1974, pp. 58-59). For these reasons, Alexander notes that providing a theoretical response to the Manichaeans is challenging. However, he does not analyze Manichaeism from a theological viewpoint, nor does he examine the prophetic-visionary revelations, which were a typical element of Greek culture, including Platonic philosophy[105].

Alexander argues that during debates with Manichaeans, the arguments can become overly precise and thus, incomprehensible to those who are already persuaded by Manichaeism (Brinkmann, 1895, p. 9; cf. van der Horst & Mansfeld, 1974, p. 59). This emphasizes his original point that these individuals lack the necessary philosophical education. For Alexander, it is possible that his arguments may be subject to the same criticisms he made against Manichaeism, as they accurately mirror its doctrine and may be viewed as deceptive, echoing the usual rhetorical theme of Manichaeism's "obscurity" (Brinkmann, 1895, p. 9; cf. van der Horst & Mansfeld, 1974, p. 59). Afterwards, Alexander employs the following argument against Manichaean dualism – the one in which the limit of his methodology becomes clearer –, which was translated by van der Horst & Mansfeld (1974, p. 60) as follows:

> It should not be forgotten that God is wholly independent of matter as to his works, since his relation to that Intellect all things are capable of coming into being hypostatically. If, on the other hand – as seems to be his real meaning – matter is the random motion inherent in things two remarks must be made.

[105] Notable similarities can be observed between Alexander of Lycopolis and other Greek philosophers, especially Platonists, regarding their debate on theological and divinatory matters. According to van der Horst and Mansfeld (1974, pp. 10-13), Alexander's perspectives resemble those of Plotinus and Porphyry, indicating a comparable intellectual path. The current evidence suggests that Alexander of Lycopolis has a rather negative view of prophetic and theological matters. However, it is not possible to deduce Alexander's theological position solely from the anti-Manichaean treatise. It is also crucial to remember that, in the Greco-Roman world, the authority of tradition resided in its antiquity. Thus, it is possible that Alexander viewed Manichaeism as a "superstition" (i.e., a new doctrine).

> First, that he seems to be ignorant of the fact that he attributes reality to another productive principle as well, though it be only the cause of evil.

This passage is significant because, according to Manichaean doctrine, matter is independent of God due to possessing another principle as its productive cause, to borrow Alexander's terminology. Nevertheless, Alexander argues that Mani assigns a “irregular” (ἄτακτον) movement to matter (Brinkmann, 1895, p. 11; cf. van der Horst & Mansfeld, 1974, p. 63), whose general lines can be traced back to the *Timaeus*. Moreover, the purported Manichaean viewpoint regarding the causation and motion of matter is dissected through a discussion of the standpoints of Plutarch and Numenius (Brinkmann, 1895, p. 10; cf. van der Horst & Mansfeld, 1974, p. 61), whose doctrines were reviewed in the preceding section.

In summary, Alexander of Lycopolis argues that if, in Mani's view, God represents what is good (εἰ γὰρ θεός ἐστιν παρ'αὐτῷ ὅπερ τὸ ἀγαθόν), and if he desires to face the reality of God's opposite (καὶ βούλεται ὑφίστασθαι αὐτῷ ἐναντίον), then why does he avoid opposing it with something evil, as certain Pythagoreans (τινὲς τῶν Πυθαγορείων, i.e., such authors as Plutarch and Numenius) have done? (i.e. τὸ κακὸν αὐτῷ ἀντιτίθησιν) For Alexander, the Pythagorean theory is more easily accepted because it speaks of two principles constantly at war: one good and the other evil. However, the good ultimately triumphs (Brinkmann, 1895, p. 10; cf. van der Horst & Mansfeld, 1974, p. 61).

Now, Alexander assumes that Mani lacks awareness of the fact that his concept of matter entails an autonomous productive cause, which can only be responsible for evil. However, what Mani allegedly ignores is actually a fundamental aspect of Manichaean dualism as it is known in primary sources. It is unclear whether the Manichaeans Alexander encountered misunderstood Mani's doctrine or if Alexander simply lacked comprehension. However, since this was a fundamental principle in Manichaeism, I suggest that the mistake was made by Alexander in his attempt to "translate" Manichaeism into a metaphysical system.

Since Augustine, who was a Manichaean, made the same mistake, coupled with the significant role of Darkness in the Manichaean cosmogonic myth, it is highly probable that Alexander interpreted the concept of Manichaean ὕλη according to the Hellenic philosophical currents. However, in Manichaeism, ὕλη was one of several designations for the "King of Darkness" (cf. Tardieu, 2008), but the term's cosmological significance,

as it was interpreted within the intellectual and cultural context of the Near East by the Manichaeans, was lost. Alexander does not describe the Manichaean pantheon which is hardly surprising given his intention to integrate Manichaean doctrine into Greek philosophy, along with his animosity towards Manichaean mythology.

For Alexander, an ontological dualism between being and becoming is philosophically acceptable. This is because it could clarify the relationship among God, the productive cause, and matter without requiring a total dualism between God and matter, which would necessitate a productive cause for matter. In contrast, Manichaean dualism, which is essentially Iranian dualism, presents a productive cause for matter[106]. Concluding, from a comparative perspective, Alexander of Lycopolis' comments provide valuable insights. Despite academic debates on his alignment with the definition of God as the first principle in Middle Platonism or with a conception similar to Plotinian One (cf. Villey, 1985; van der Horst & Mansfeld, 1974), Alexander views God as omnipotent and seeks a metaphysical solution to the question of God's relationship with matter, including the problem of evil's existence. Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism incorporate time as a third element to resolve this problem.

In conclusion, Alexander suggests that a position similar to the Pythagorean one would be readily accepted and he criticizes Manichaeism for not adhering to such a view. However, the Pythagorean view, as defined by Alexander, is precisely the same as that of Manichaeism! In summary, the theoretical language of Platonism and Pythagoreanism was used to translate Manichaeism, resulting in a contradiction with its original doctrine. Additionally, Alexander's testimony downplayed the significance of the prophetic and visionary aspect, which is a crucial component of Platonic philosophy and theology.

3.2 Between Platonic metaphysics and Pauline Christology: the anti-Manichaean character of Augustine of Hippo's philosophy

Although Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE) had not read Alexander of Lycopolis'[107] work, he likewise made a critique of Manichaeism from the point of view of Platonic metaphysics, cosmology, and ontology. Augustine's unique reception stems

[106] The distinction lies in the fact that, in Manichaeism, matter is a creation of Ahriman, while in Zoroastrianism, the physical world is perceived in a more optimistic manner, cf. chapter 2

[107] However, Augustine may have studied the works of theologian Titus of Bostra, who also wrote an anti-Manichaean treatise (cf. BeDuhn, 2013, p. 194). For more details on the parallels between the anti-Manichaean positions of Alexander of Lycopolis and Titus of Bostra, see Stroumsa (1992).

from his nine-year tenure as a Manichaean auditor, while his conversion to Catholicism[108] brings a theological aspect to his disputes with former coreligionists. Undoubtedly, Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE) played a major role in shaping Western culture's perception of Manichaeism.

In addition to Manichaeism and Catholicism, Platonism was undoubtedly the most significant factor in his life, as well as his philosophical and theological career. Prosper Alfaric (1918) claimed that Augustine 'converted' to Platonism before converting to Catholicism. However, Pierre Courcelle (1968) disputed this notion, stating that during Augustine's time, Neoplatonic Christianity existed, making Platonism and Christianity compatible. In any case, it is important to consider Platonism as a third element in Augustine's intellectual trajectory, positioned between Manichaeism and Christianity.

Platonic metaphysics and Neoplatonic soteriology, particularly the spiritual practices used for the ascent of the soul, are crucial to understanding the fate of the Manichaean visionary and cosmological tradition in the Latin West. To achieve this goal, the following topics necessitate examination: 1) The Platonic arrangement of Augustine's spiritual practices 2) Augustine's theology, specifically his Christology, which impacted his perspective on Platonism and Manichaeism; 3) The conversion of Manichaean cosmology and its myths' imagery to "fables" and "hallucinations."

It can be deduced that Manichaean cosmology lost its persuasive nature rooted in intricate and complex mythology and cosmology after being translated into Platonic epistemological terms, once its symbolism and Near Eastern contextual aspects were removed. It cannot be assumed, however, that a clash occurred between a discourse based on religious authority (Manichaean) and a philosophical theoretical stance (understood in a reductionist and anachronistic manner) that generates misunderstandings in the study of the history of ideas due to its rigid dichotomy. The Latin Manichaeans were familiar with Greek and Roman philosophy. For instance, Faustus, the Manichaean leader whom Augustine unfairly labeled as the 'great snare of the devil' (*magnus laqueus diaboli*) (*Conf.* V, III, 3), held a rather unusual position for a Manichaean philosopher and theologian. According to BeDuhn (2013, p. 35):

[108] The term 'Catholicism' is used in the sense defined by BeDuhn (2013, pp. ix-x) in his study on Augustine and Manichaeism.

> Faustus, although the leading authority of a religious community that based itself on the supernatural revelations received by its founder, had himself adopted an idiosyncratic skeptical stance toward doctrinal claims, extending not only to the teachings of rival faiths, but even in principle to Manichaean tenets regarding such things as cosmology and Christology.

Additionally, theology, prophecy, and divination were significant aspects of the Platonic philosophical program, present in both Plato and Neoplatonism. Thus, a strong dichotomy between contemporary understandings of "religion" and "philosophy" is likely to lead to misunderstandings when considering the context of Late Antiquity.

Recently, Jason BeDuhn (2010, 2013) and Brian Dobell (2009) have explored new avenues for reevaluating the roles of Manichaeism and Platonism in Augustine's spiritual and intellectual development. BeDuhn (2010, 2013) examined the relationship between Manichaeism, Platonism, and Catholicism in Augustine's thoughts to investigate the formation of a "Catholic self." The significant benefit of BeDuhn's approach was its detachment from theological polemics. It also highlighted the influential position of Manichaeism in North Africa and exposed the limitations of Augustine's apprehension of the Manichaean religion. Dobell (2009, pp. 23-24) distinguishes between intellectual conversion and volitional conversion. He contends, based on a study of Augustinian texts, particularly a comprehensive analysis of the historical chronology within the Confessions, that Augustine identified as a Platonist for a prolonged period until he finally adopted the Catholic doctrine of the Incarnation. In the forthcoming analysis, the Platonic structure underlying Augustinian viewpoints of the visionary phenomenon and practices of heavenly ascent will be examined. Additionally, the theological dimension that Augustine developed in opposition to both the Manichaean and Platonist perspectives will be presented.

a) Platonic cosmology and heavenly ascents: Augustine's Neoplatonic soteriology

It is necessary to make initial clarifications regarding a Neoplatonic praxis for a stratum of soteriology in the Confessions. Following Dobell's (2009) interpretation of the historical chronology underlying Augustine's work, a Neoplatonic model for his heavenly ascents predates his "volitional" conversion to Catholicism. There is no need to adopt Alfaric's (1918) position regarding a prerequisite "conversion" to Platonism prior to converting to Catholicism. Instead, this reflects the prevalence of Neoplatonic terminology and practice as the commonly understood language of theology in Late

Antiquity. Accordingly, Augustine initially did not view this as conflicting with Catholic soteriology.

Therefore, Augustine adhered to the prevailing trend of his time, which was Christian Platonism. As noted by John Rist (1996, p. 391), negative theology, influenced by Plotinus and conveyed through authors like Gregory of Nyssa (335-94) and Pseudo-Dionysius (early sixth century), became a permanent fixture of Christian thought. Furthermore, Rist notes that Augustine and other authors used Plotinian philosophy as a theological hermeneutic, particularly after the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE when the Platonic heritage became attractive to Christians. Augustine assimilated the Kingdom of God to the Platonic intelligible world, despite having censored his younger writings. (Rist, 1996, p. 392).

From the perspective of the history of philosophy, especially with regard to the conflict between Augustine and Manichaeism, it is interesting to note that Plotinus' own doctrine of the undescended soul was written in the context of a debate with the Gnostics. Scholars (Narbonne, 2011, 2014; Gasparro, 2017; Mazur, 2021) have demonstrated that Plotinus revised Gnostic doctrines, specifically those related to ritual practices for celestial ascents and visionary experiences. This finding is noteworthy given the common approach of researchers to Plotinus' association with the Gnostics, who generally accept Plotinus' testimony as fact and support his stance in anti-Gnostic disputes.[109]

Augustine's Platonism is greatly influenced by two Christian authors, Ambrose, the bishop of Rome, and Marius Victorinus. According to the *Confessions* (7.9-13), Augustine states that he read Victorinus' translated works of the Platonic authors. As noted by John Rist, Victorinus resided in Rome during the mid-fourth century and was the inaugural Latin author with extensive knowledge of Plotinus and Porphyry's works. He wrote anti-Arian treatises with a Porphyrian influence, endeavoring to adjust Porphyry's philosophy to Christian Trinitarian speculation to support Nicene "orthodoxy" (Rist, 1996, p. 402). Additionally, Rist highlights that Ambrose possessed knowledge of

[109]Porphyry's editorial process of the Plotinian textual corpus offers historical insight into the relationship between Plotinus and the Gnostics. According to Gilles Quispel, Porphyry's work *Against the Christians* was already written before he began editing Plotinus' works. Quispel notes that in Porphyry's treatises against the "heretics," he divided them into four parts, including one specifically titled "*Against the Gnostics*" (Quispel, 2001, p. 289). The publication had transformed what was formerly an "internal discussion" into a pursuit of heretics by an opponent of *gnosis* in the manner of Christian heresiologists (Quispel, 2001, p. 289).

both Greek and Latin translations of Plotinus and Porphyry by Victorinus. However, the content of Augustine's Platonic literature is still a subject of contention. Brian Dobell highlights that in the previously mentioned section of the *Confessions*, Augustine notes his reading of Victorinus' translation without specifying the source of the books or providing any details about their content (Dobell, 2009, p. 12).

In *Confessions* 7, XVII, 23, Augustine recounts the significant moments of his Platonic spiritual practices. Augustine was surprised that he loved God rather than a *phantasma* in his place; nonetheless, Augustine couldn't stay in such a state of fruition of God, for he was torn away from god by his own (corporeal) weight (*et mirabar quod iam te amabam, non pro te phantasma, et non stabam frui deo meo, sed rapiebar ad te decore tuo moxque diripiebar abs te pondere meo*) However, Augustine's memorable visionary experiences remained with him (*sed mecum erat memoria tui*). Augustine states that he never doubted the existence of something that he should unite himself with, although he was no able to do so yet (*neque ullo modo dubitabam esse cui cohaererem, sed nondum me esse qui cohaererem*). Augustine was unable to make such a connection due to the corrupt body weighing down the soul, as well as its earthly dwelling, which downwards the soul while it is thinking about many things (*quoniam corpus quod corrumpitur adgravat animam et deprimit terrena inhabitatio sensum multa cogitantem*) (*Conf.*, 7, XVII, 23; Hammond, 2014, pp. 336-339).

Consequently, Augustine employs the cosmogonic process to counterbalance the challenge of achieving the "vision of God," a state in which he had difficulty remaining, due to its contemplative nature. Augustine maintains absolute certainty that God's invisible reality has been made apparent by the creation of the world (*eramque certissimus quod invisibilia tua a constitutione mundi per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspiciuntur, sempiterna quoque virtus et divinitas tua*) Consequently, in order to avoid a complete opposition between the visible world of contemplation and the dimension of his 'corporeal weight', Augustine reconfigures the very vision of the visible world as a method of contemplating the invisible world (*Conf.*, 7, XVII, 23; Hammond, 2014, pp 338-339). He then summarizes his soul's ascent, which led to his gradual experience of *unio mystica*, which Carolyn J. -B Hammond has translated it as follows:

> So in stages I progressed from physical entities to the soul, which experiences sensation by means of the body, and thence to the soul's inner power, to which physical sensation would communicate the world around it. This is as far as

> the capacities of animals can go. From there I went on to the power of reason: to this everything gathered from bodily sensation is referred for assessment. This reasoning power in me also ascertained that it was changeable, so it raised itself up to face its own understanding and directed my thoughts away from their habitual path. At the same time it withdrew itself from conflicting crowds of illusory images in order to find what light had been scattered upon it: when it cried out, without any hesitation, that the unchangeable is preferable to the changeable, what was the source of its knowing the concept of unchangingness? For if it did not know it by some means, it could not by any means be sure in preferring it to what is changeable. And with the stroke of one trembling glance it arrived at that which truly is. Then in truth I perceived that your invisible nature is understood by means of your creation, but I had not the strength to fix my gaze; instead my weakness rebounded and I was returned to my old habits, carrying with me no more than a loving memory and, as it were, longing to smell the sweet savor of food that I could not as yet consume. (*Conf.*, 7, XVII, 23; Hammond, 2014, pp; 339-341)

In Augustine's aforementioned account, the most crucial aspect is the spiritual practice in which his soul ascends by "withdrawing from the conflicting crowds of illusory images" (*subtrahens se contradicentibus turbis phantasmatum*) until "it reaches what truly exists is" (*et pervenit ad id quod est*). This spiritual practice is essentially Platonic, although one must also consider its Manichaean antecedents[110], and can be elucidated by a comparison with Plotinus' ascent of the soul.

The main points of Plotinian metaphysics and soteriology are connected to his views on philosophy and his disputes with the Gnostics. According to Sara Rappe, Plotinus believed that philosophical activity transcends epistemological limitations. Thus, his theory that the Intellect is its object implies that knowing the truth is a very different state from normal thinking. Furthermore, intellectual knowledge cannot be revealed through linguistic representations because it is not intentionally directed towards things outside of itself. (Rappe, 2000, p. 27). In the opening statement of "*On the Descent of the*

[110] Not only is Platonism recognizable in Augustine's assertions, but in light of Augustine's controversy with the religion of Mani, it is important to note that Manichaean dualism did not exclude an emanationist conception of divinity. Through the contemplation of the material world, one could contemplate the gods. The concept of beauty, typically associated with Platonism, was also present in Augustine's understanding of Manichaeism. As a result, Augustine's intellectual and volitional conversion to Christianity was not a complete departure from his Platonic phase. Instead, there is a collection of Augustinian themes that intersect and align with his trajectory through Manichaeism, Platonism and Catholicism. According to Kam-Lun Edwin Lee, Augustine conceives of the notion of Good in Manichaeism as Beauty, which is characterized as that which provides physical pleasure and promotes mental tranquility (Edwin Lee, 1999, p. 32).

Soul" (En. IV, 8, 1), Plotinus employs vocabulary shared among the Gnostic and Neoplatonic mystical community. He describes his experience of detachment from the external world and oneness with the One, after “frequently awakening from a corporeal dream" (Πολλάκις ἐγειρόμενος εἰς ἐμαυτὸν ἐκ τοῦ σώματος; En. IV, 8, 1). The philosophical discourse parallel to the soul's ascent and descent is apparent in this passage, particularly when discussing the descent of Intellect into reflection.

Now, in the case of Plotinus, his description of the soul's descent is not merely a discourse. It is evident from his use of the adverb "πολλάκις" at the beginning that this mystical asceticism is a routine occurrence. In Ennead VI (9, 4), Plotinus details the challenge of dealing with the One philosophically and highlights the importance of transcending discourse and experiencing the One firsthand. This hermeneutic approach, which involves practices related to ascending to the celestial realm, highlights Plotinus' position as a "director of conscience" (Hadot, 1986, p. 232). In his practice of philosophy, the theoretical and metaphysical elements are connected to soteriological goals. According to Pierre Hadot (1998, pp. 55-56), although the mystical language comprises commonplaces and conventional imagery, there is no doubt that Plotinus' experiences were genuinely authentic. Hadot notes that both Plato and Plotinus place the beginning of the soul's journey towards ascent in the experience of love. Nevertheless, despite Plotinus utilizing Plato's terminology, the psychological context differs[111]. Hadot explains that Plato describes a love relationship between master and disciple, while Plotinus employs the language of the Phaedrus to express a mystical experience[112] (Hadot, 1998, pp. 52-54).

Plotinus states in a passage from Porphyry's so-called "Against the Gnostics" (*Enn*. II, 9) that the Gnostics say that the soul and a certain Sophia fell (ψυχὴν γὰρ

[111] According to H.J. Blumenthal (1971, p. 92), makes a distinction between two types of images that emerge within the soul's regions that pertain to the body: one kind is of a lower order, while the other, the higher kind, is related to imagination (πρώτη φαντασία).

[112] On the different interpretations of vision in Plotinus, particularly the hypernoetic and pre-noetic vision, refer to Emilsson (2007, pp. 101-103). On the Porphyrian interpretation of mystical union, wherein the soul does not encounter emotions in the regular sense of the term, consult Dörrie (1973, p. 49). When examining the historical context and comparing Plotinus' otherworldly journeys with those of contemporary philosophical and religious groups, Hadot (1998, p. 25) asserts that despite their "superficial similarities," the fundamental experience of Plotinus was entirely different from the Gnostic attitude. This thesis is highly significant for interpreting Plotinus' visionary experiences and has been contested by recent research. Mazur (2020) revealed a Sethian Gnostic background to Plotinus that modern research commonly disregards due to an uncritical interpretation of the disputes between Plotinus and the Gnostics, combined with a theologically biased attitude against the Gnostics.

εἰπόντες νεῦσαι κάτω καὶ σοφίαν τινά); whether the soul went first (νεῦσαι κάτω... εἴτε τῆς ψυχῆς ἀρξάσης), or whether Sophia is guilty (αἰτίας... σοφίας) for this kind of birth or coming into being (τῆς τοιαύτης... γενομένης). And the Gnostics also say that the other souls (ἄλλας ψυχὰς) descended together, and that members of Sophia (μέλη τῆς σοφίας) took on a body (σώματα), like that of the human being (οἷον τὰ ἀνθρώπων); while Sophia is the reason for the coming to be of other souls - and that she has not descended, and does not lead anyone to be, but acts by illuminating the darkness[113] (*Enn.* II, 10, 15-30; Faggin, 2000, pp. 306-307).

Moreover, regarding the ascent of the Soul, Plotinus contends that the soul desires (ἐθέλῃ) to see (ιδεῖν) for itself (Καθ' ἑαυτὴν) and achieves this by associating with unity through contemplation (μόνον ὁρῶσα τῷ συνεῖναι). However, it does not believe that it possesses (ἔχειν) what it inquires (ζητεῖ), as it is no different from the object of its contemplation (ὅτι τοῦ νοουμένου μὴ ἕτερόν ἐστιν) (Enn. VI, 3.10; Faggin, 2000, pp. 1340-1341). Moreover, Plotinus believed that in order to seek (ζητοῦμεν) the One and examine the principle of all things (καὶ τὴν ἀρχὴν τῶν πάντων ἐπισκοποῦμεν), i.e., the Good and the First (τἀγαθὸν καὶ τὸ πρῶτον), one must detach oneself from sensible things, which are the last, and wish to be delivered from all wickedness (ἀλλ'ιέμενον εἰς τὰ πρῶτα ἐπαναγαγεῖν ἑαυτὸν ἀπὸ τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἐσχάτων ὄντων, κακίας τε πάσης ἀπηλλαγμένον) (Enn. VI, 3, 15; Faggin, 2000, pp. 1340-1341). As one can see, the elements of Plotinian spiritual practice, such as deliverance from the sensible world, the "weight" of the body, and union with the One, are virtually the same as those found in Augustine's account.

[113] In Zostrianos (9, 16-28), the passage is highly fragmented and contains references to Sophia creating darkness, along with concepts of model, essence, form, and image that were also noted by Plotinus. Zostrianos (10, 1-16) features the idea of a world formed through the reflection of a reflection, which Plotinus referenced in (II, 9). As seen, Plotinus utilizes a notion akin to Gnosticism, where the soul descends partially while something, or someone like Sofia who is identified with the soul, permanently guides the souls. It is noteworthy that Plotinus' ontology focuses on the partial descent of the soul, and in this particular passage, he refers to the Gnostic notion. Furthermore, Jean-Marc Narbonne posits that limited advancement has been made in comprehending Plotinus' crucial doctrine of the partially undescended Soul, despite its cardinal role in his teachings. Additionally, Narbonne laments that scholars have been unable to discover the origin or true antecedents of this doctrine, which has been attributed in part or in whole to Plotinus (Narbonne, 2011, p. 55). Mazur rejected the hypothesis that Sethian writings could not have impacted Plotinus' mystical concepts simply based on their circulation in his academy in the mid-260s CE. The author argued that numerous features of Platonizing Sethian works were identified in various pre-Plotinian Gnostic sources. Therefore, it is necessary to situate Plotinus' mystical ascent to the Plotinian One in a precise historical-intellectual context, leading to the rejection of the thesis of an 'invention' by Plotinus (Mazur, 2020, p. 11). For summary of the different proposals and theories concerning the issue of the individual soul's descent in Plotinus, refer to Andolfo (1996, pp. 318-319).

Although there are some differences with Christian doctrine, it seems that Augustine was more influenced by Plotinian and Porphyrian Platonism than by other authors, such as Iamblichus. Rist argues that this occurred because orthodox Christianity could not accept the Plotinian doctrine of a soul that does not descend. This is because it excludes ideas of sin and establishes the immortality of the soul, whose salvation does not rely on Christian soteriology. Rist points out that Iamblichus' soteriological program required the help of the gods, via theurgy, for the descending soul, which was better suited for Christianity. However, Christians viewed theurgy as "mere magic," resulting in the Plotinian “heresy” of the undescended soul becoming more alluring (Rist, 1996, pp. 392-393).

The explanation for this rejection is presented in Confessions, XVIII, 24. This section highlights the contrast between Platonism and Catholicism in Augustine's beliefs. Augustine no longer engages in Platonic exercises and instead focuses on Christology as a means of salvation. Augustine states that he only found salvation when he “accepted the mediator between God and humankind, a man whose name was Christ Jesus” (*nec inveniebam donec amplecterer mediatorem dei et hominum, hominem Christum Iesum*), which proclaimed “"I am the way, the truth, and the life” (*ego sum via et veritas et vita*) (Conf., 7, XVIII, 24; Hammond, 2014, pp 340-341).

In Augustine's works, Platonic metaphysics serves as a common language for theology, inasmuch as Platonism is construed by means of Catholic apologetics, particularly regarding Christology and the doctrine of incarnation. The relationship between Platonism and Christianity is likened to that between Judaism and Christianity in the Orthodox tradition. Thus, while Christianity allegedly “supplants” Platonism, Platonism, in this theological approach becomes a fundamental aspect of Christianity, almost as if it were inherent to Christianity before its inception. Unfortunately, accepting this theological perspective at face value and adopting a teleological view of the fate of Platonic mysticism disregards its continuity in polytheism and Gnostic groups, while only considering its later assimilation into Christianity (cf. Mazur, 2021, pp. 5-10). As Rist has noticed (1996, p. 405):

> Yet Augustine remained sufficiently impressed by what he saw of the Platonism that seemed to form part of Christianity - and can be glimpsed by non-Christians - to retain a lifelong respect for the Platonist, or rather Neoplatonist, who had played such an important role in the intellectual part of

> his own journey to Christianity. For it is above all Augustine's belief that Christianity can subsume Platonism, but that the Platonism it subsumes is part of the essence of Christianity, which more than any other single factor has led us to think of an almost essential relationship between Platonism and an intellectual explanation of Christianity itself. Plotinus was the Platonist who led Augustine to that view. Augustine was the most able Christian of antiquity whose conversion to Christianity had been intellectually supported by Neoplatonic theory. It is therefore not surprising that he saw the Christian possibilities of Neoplatonism more clearly than the rest of his coreligionists.

b) The Pauline background in the dispute between Augustine and Manichaeism.

As Ries (2011, p. 219) notes, the discovery of the Coptic *Kephalaia* in Medīnet Mādi underscores the significance of biblical exegesis in Manichaean catechesis. The text exhibits numerous biblical reminiscences, such as the doctrine of the kingdoms preached by Jesus, the similarity between the two trees and paths, the antithesis between God and the world, the work of Satan, and more. These findings, according to Ries, provide a fresh context for the disagreement between Augustine and the Manichaeans, particularly in the aspect that Ries refers to as the "Christian Scriptures defense," a euphemism for the defense of the Catholic perspective in relation to New Testament theology (Ries, 2011, p. 219). The defense of Scriptures involves addressing the controversy previously discussed in chapter one regarding the relationship between the Old and New Testaments.

The legacy of the Apostle Paul is at the center of this conflict, in which some argue for the opposition between the Old and New Testaments (e.g. Marcion, Mani), while others uphold concord, or a theory of supersessionism, where Jesus is viewed as the realization of the Old Testament prophecies (e.g. Catholic theology). Paul's significant role in Catholic theological theory of apostolic lineage often leads to the assumption that Pauline theology was exclusively "orthodox." However, Marcionites and Valentinians, influenced by Paul, presented alternative perspectives on his Christology, as outlined in chapter one. The conflict between Augustine and the Manichaean presents a similar situation, as it is often overlooked that the Manichaeans were reputed for their interpretations of the Pauline epistles.

As BeDuhn (2013, p. 192) states, Augustine tried to assign an important role to Paul in his initial conversion to Catholicism, but the evidence from Augustine's own writings reveals that Paul only became a central figure of his attention in the mid-390s.

Furthermore, BeDuhn (2013, p. 192) notes that Augustine entered a debatable field that required not just a biblical language, but a Catholic hermeneutic to apply to the contested field of Pauline interpretations. BeDuhn further reinforces the argument by pointing out that Augustine's abrupt fascination with Paul after 392 can only be attributed to Fortunatus' influence in using the Apostle to defend the foundational tenets of Manichaeism. In response to a well-coordinated group of Manichaeans who relied heavily on the Pauline epistles to support their dualistic and "deterministic" doctrines, Augustine was forced to engage in a public confrontation. This confrontation compelled him to reestablish Paul in a Catholic interpretation (BeDuhn, 2013, pp. 192-193).

Moreover, J. Kevin Coyle notes that Augustine's comprehension of Manichaeism should not be restricted to his time as an auditor[114] because many of his readers were Manichaean, obliging him to write things that could not be entirely false about Manichaeism (Coyle, 2001, pp. 43-44). However, it did not deter him from using his training as a rhetorician to reverse the meaning of different aspects of Manichaean doctrine. Augustine intentionally continued to utilize the biblical verses he acquired during his Manichaean period as they were familiar to his former co-religionists who comprised his readers (Coyle, 2001, p. 53).

The key components of the Augustinian interpretation of Paul are evident in his *Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans*. First of all (*Primo omnium*), Augustine asserts that the Epistle to the Romans deals with the issue of the works of the Law and grace (*versari operum legis et gratiae*) *(PropRom*; Fredriksen Landes, 1982, p. 2). For Augustine, when Paul states that "so that I may grant you spiritual grace" (*Ut gratiam vobis spiritualem impertiar*; Rom. 1: 11), the Apostle is referring to the love of God and neighbor *(dilectionem scilicet dei et proximi*) , so that through the charity of Christ (*per caritatem Christi*) they do not reject the Gentiles who are called to the Gospel (*gentibus in evangelium vocatis minime inviderent*) (PropRom, 2; Fredriksen Landes, 1982, pp. 2-3).

[114] Augustine's awareness of Manichaeism grew progressively over the years, mainly due to his political status and ability to seize Manichaean books (Kaatz, 2005, p. 195). Kevin W. Kaatz contends that Augustine not only addressed Manichaean cosmogony at the outset of his career but also increasingly discussed it over time. Kaatz (2005, pp. 200-201) posits that initially, Augustine had limited knowledge of the Manichaean cosmogony, and it was only in a later period that he gained a more in-depth understanding of Mani's cosmology.

Augustine presents arguments regarding the concept of wisdom that are relevant to understanding his anti-Manichaean rhetoric elsewhere (e.g., in the *Confessions*). The key element in his argument is pride. Augustine compares those who boast about their wisdom with those who ascribe wisdom to God[115]. Therefore, regarding Romans 1:18, Augustine mentions that Solomon referred to those whose understanding belongs to this world (*de sapientibus mundi*) by saying that “"If they have sufficient knowledge to speculate about the universe, why do they not more easily discover the Lord of this world and its Creator?" (Sap. 13:9) (*si enim tantum potuerunt scire ut possent aestimare saeculum, quomodo ipsius mundi dominum et creatorem non facilius invenerunt?*).

Furthermore, Augustine asserts that Solomon argued against those who did not recognize the Creator through creatures (*Sed quos arguit Salomon non cognoverunt per creaturam creatorem*), while the Apostle argued against those who knew him but failed to express gratitude. In claiming to be wise, they actually became fools and fell into idolatry (*quos autem arguit apostolus cognoverunt sed gratias non egerunt et dicentes se esse sapientes stulti facti sunt et ad colenda simulacra deciderunt*) (*PropRom.*, 3, 1-2; Fredriksen Landes, 1982, p. 2). The conduct of the second group (i.e. those who *cognoverunt per creaturam creatorem,* but *gratias non egerunt*), according to Augustine, constitute the origin[116] of sin (*hoc caput est peccati*). Augustine asserts that pride is the root of all sin (*initium omnis peccati superbia*). Augustine asserts that had they expressed gratitude to God, the source of their wisdom, they would not have taken credit for their own ideas (*Qui si gratias egissent deo, qui dederat hanc sapientiam, non sibi aliquid tribuissent cogitationibus suis*) (*PropRom.*, 4, 1-2; Fredriksen Landes, 1982, pp. 2-3).

Based on Rom. 3:20, "No flesh will be justified before him by the Law, for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin" (*Quia non iustificabitur in lege omnis caro coram illo; per legem enim cognitio peccati*), Augustine cautions that these statements should be read carefully to avoid the appearance that the Apostle condemns the Law or denies man's free will, (which the Manichaeans supposedly denied) (*ut neque lex ab apostolo*

[115] According to Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, during Augustine's time, the philosophical ideal was regarded as a discipline that combined reasoning and ethical norms to achieve complete convergence, resulting in the existential co-involvement of adherents. Gasparro asserts that Augustine played a role as a witness and protagonist in the second Hellenism, wherein *philosophia*'s definition took on a broader dimension equivalent to religious creed (Sfameni Gasparro, 1999, p. 77).

[116] Augustine argues on the basis of Rom. 1:21 "Knowing God, they did not glorify him as God, nor did they express their gratitude to him" (*Cognoscentes deum non ut deum glorificaverunt aut gratias egerunt) (PropRom*, 4; Fredriksen Landes, 1982, p.2).

improbata videatur neque homini arbitrium liberum sit ablatum). Augustine distinguishes four stages in the life of man (*Itaque quattuor istos gradus hominis distinguamus*). Before the Law, under the Law, under grace, and in peace. Prior to the law, we desire the flesh's concupiscence *(ante legem sequimur concupiscentiam carnis*); under the law, we are drawn by it (*sub lege trahimur ab ea*); under grace, we neither seek nor are drawn by it (*sub gratia nec sequimur eam nec trahimur ab ea*); and in peace, there is no concupiscence of the flesh (*in pace nulla est concupiscentia carnis*) (*PropRom*. 13-18; Fredriksen Landes, 1982, pp. 4-5).

Furthermore, Augustine argues that, before the Law (*ante legem*), we don't fight (*non pugnamos*) because we not only covet and sin, but we even consent to sin (*quia non solum concupiscimus et peccamus, sed etiam approbamus peccata*). Under the Law (*sub lege*), we fight, but we are defeated (*sed vincimur*). We concede that we are doing evil, and with this concession, that we really don't want to do it, but since we still lack grace, we are defeated (*Fatemur enim mala esse quae facimus, et fatendo mala esse utique nolumus facere, sed, quia nondum est gratia, superamur*) (*PropRom*. 13-18, 1-3; Fredriksen Landes, 1982, pp. 4-5).

This controversy can be explained by Augustine's position on the problem of evil and his pathologizing of Manichaeism, particularly in cosmological and visionary matters. Augustine clarifies his position on the problem of evil in *De moribus Manichaeorum*, stating that Manichaeans frequently question the origin of evil when attempting to attract individuals to their "heresy" (S*aepe atque adeo paene semper, Manichaei, ab his quibus haeresim vestram persuadere molimini, requiritis unde sit malum*; *De moribus Manichaeorum*, 2.2) Nevertheless, Augustine argues that it is more appropriate to investigate *what evil is* (*Percunctamini me unde sit malum; at ego vicissim percunctor vos quid sit malum*; *De moribus Manichaeorum*, 2.2). When Manichaeans approach the problem of evil, they refer to the essential cosmogonic myth of Mani's doctrine, where Darkness attacks Light. As a result, "origin" is understood as the source of Evil, making it a cosmological question of *where evil comes from* rather than a metaphysical question about its nature[117]. Therefore, Augustine distances himself from

[117] Manichaeans believe that there is a positivity of evil in front of God, rather than a non-being or simple absence of good as Augustine argued. As noted by Decret, Augustine shifted his focus from the Manichaean *unde sit malum* to *quid sit malum*. Augustine sought to understand the nature of evil rather than its cosmological origin. (Decret, 1991, pp. 71-72)

the question of where evil comes from (i.e., *unde sit malum*) and instead examines its nature (i.e., *quid sit malum*).

This translation of Manichaeism resembles Alexander of Lycopolis' approach and therefore suffers from the same shortcomings: what was once a cosmological process is now a metaphysical dualism. Augustine later remarks that "you (pl.) speak the truth (*Verissime, dicitis* [...]); no one is so mentally blind as to not recognize that in every kind, evil is that which is contrary to the nature of that kind" (*quis enim est ita mente caecus, qui non videat id cuique generi malum esse, quod contra eius naturam est*; *De moribus Manichaeorum*, 2.2). However, Augustine argues that the Manichaeans are undermining their own "heresy" (*Sed hoc constituto evertitur haeresis vestra*) by accepting a doctrine that nobody can doubt is true. He believes that evil cannot have a nature if it goes against nature (*nulla enim natura malum, si quod contra naturam est, id erit malum*), and anything that opposes nature must ultimately lead to its destruction (*quod contra naturam quidquid est, utique naturae adversatur et eam perimere nititur*). Evil is defined as moving away from the essence and toward non-existence (*Idipsum ergo malum est, si praeter pertinaciam velitis attendere, deficere ab essentia et ad id tendere ut non sit*; *De moribus Manichaeorum*, 2.2).

However, Augustine's comments and attempt to refute the Manichaean doctrine notwithstanding, his arguments do not seem to contradict what is known about Manichaean dualism and its explanation of the problem of evil. This blind spot in Augustinian argumentation becomes even clearer when considering that Mani did not defend his position through theoretical exposition in the manner of Greek philosophy. This observation is not new and was previously defended by François Decret. Decret argues that Augustine posits the existence of a summum bonum as a fundamental principle of morality to which every soul is subject. God, who has being in the fullest sense, represents this *summum bonum*. Given its sovereignty and primacy in the ontological hierarchy, God remains immune to corruption, change, and the constraints of time (Decret, 1991, p. 69).

On the other hand, Decret argues that this idea of God, which entails transcendence and domination, does not go against Mani's teachings (Decret, 1991, p. 70). Decret emphasizes that the existence of evil in Manichaeism is not the conclusion of a syllogism or a priori reasoning, for evil simply exists. Thus, "[s]i, pour les partisans du

dualisme manichéen, il y a nécessairement um Principe du Mal se dressant face à Dieu, Principe du Bien, c'est que, comme le démontre l'expérience quotidienne – il ne s'agit donc pas ici de la conclusion d'un syllogisme ou d'un raisonnement aprioriste –, le mal existe" (Decret, 1991, p. 71).

Now, as the chapter draws to a close, the debate between Augustine and the Manichaeans regarding their differences becomes illuminating, particularly in his discussion with Faust. In this debate, one notes a reiteration of the previously analyzed rhetorical *topoi* along with a further exploration of Manichaeism as a metaphysical dualism. Additionally, there is a significant emphasis on pathologizing the visionary nature of Manichaeism. These two factors - one eliminating the eidetic aspect of Manichaean cosmology and the other depleting the content of its visions - have greatly contributed to the obscuring of the visionary aspect of Manichaeism.

The motif of madness is revisited in *Contra Faustum*; elsewhere in the *Confessions*[118], Augustine refers to astrological divination, which he once favored but later rejected because of its use by "pagans" and "heretical" Manichaeans. Given his subsequent theological disputes on biblical hermeneutics, Augustine not only rebukes the Manichaean interpretation of the Bible and Pauline epistles, but also denounces all the innovations introduced by his faith. As seen in Chapter 1, Mani was influenced by the Pauline paradigm, which led to his perception of a direct contact with Christ through visionary experiences; this perception was linked to his theory of the heavenly book, which had its antecedents in the Near East, according to which the value of the written text lay in its superhuman origin. Thus, the CMC emphasizes the power of the written book as the supreme medium for preserving teachings, which Mani considered an

[118] In the context of anti-polytheism, according to Giulia Sfameni Gasparro's (1999, p. 81) observations, Augustine viewed astrology, in both theory and practice, as one of the most "perilous tools" of the foes of the Christian faith, prevalent amidst the current paganism. Furthermore, it was regarded as one of the most severe enticements for Christian individuals to succumb to deception. Augustine also expresses his discontent with astrology, particularly Manichaean astrology, in various passages from the Confessions (7. 6?). The reasons for this remain unclear. Psychologically, there appears to be a deliberate separation from a sacred practice for the "heretics" and "pagans," with the demonization of a practice that Augustine had previously endorsed. For instance, Leo C. Ferrari (1973, p. 267) highlights the passage (Conf. 5. 3-6) wherein Augustine asserts that Mani's astrology had little connection to virtue or morality. The Manichaeans were widely renowned for their expertise in astrology, leading some to speculate that Augustine was initially drawn to Mani's doctrine due to its astrological focus (cf. Lieu, 1985, p. 141). However, as he progressed on his path towards conversion to Catholicism, Augustine ultimately rejected this aspect of the religion. According to Ferrari (1973, p. 268), Augustine had a spiritual and celestial inclination, which may have contributed to his fascination with astrology and the stars.

advantage of his religion, while at the same time opening up the possibility of new books and new updates through contact with prophets.

In Augustine's view, on the other hand, the visionary and mythological aspects of Manichaeism were considered to be mere "fables" and "delusions". Interestingly, Mani's *Pragmateia* was written for didactic reasons, drawing from legends and fables. Furthermore, Latin Manichaeans well known to Augustine, including Faustus, were knowledgeable in philosophy and often took a skeptical stance on aspects of their own tradition (cf. BeDuhn, 2013, p. 35). To convey the discrepancy between mythical images and the reality they purport to describe, Augustine employed the term *phantasmata*. However, according to Decret, Augustine contradicts himself when he criticizes aspects of Manichaeism as if they were literal in the Manichaean view, despite knowing that interpreting some of their myths in a literal way is absurd. Augustine refers to these myths as vain dreams: *fabula, figmenta ludicra, inania* (Conf. III, 6-10; cf. Decret, p. 77; BeDuhn, 2013, p. 57).

According to Augustine in the *Contra Faustum*, poetic fictions would be more serious and respectable than Manichaean ones if it were not for the fact that poets can admit falsehood without deceiving anyone. However, the Manichaean books are known to corrupt the souls of those who allow themselves to be seduced by falsehood and errors, being puerile even though they are in old age. These individuals desire pleasing speeches, as the Apostle says, which can lead them astray from the truth and towards fables (*quibus omnia poetica mendacia grauiora et honestiora reperirentur, uel hoc certe quod apud poetas neminem decipit ipsa professio falsitatis, in libris autem tuis tanta fallaciarum turba, pueriles et in senibus animas, nomine ueritatis illectas, miserabilibus corrumpit erroribus, cum prurientes auribus, sicut Apostolus dicit, et a ueritate auditum suum auertentes, ad fabulas conuertuntur?*) (*Contra Faustum*, XV, 5; Piras, Cf. Gnoli, 2006, pp. 196-197).

Augustine then challenges Faustus with theological arguments, asking How can one tolerate the teachings of the tablets, where the first commandment declares: Is it possible to reconcile the commandment 'The Lord your God is the only God' (Deut. 6:4) with the worship of multiple gods and “immoral behavior” with a corrupted heart? (*Quomodo ergo sanam doctrinam ferres illarum tabularum, ubi primum praeceptum est: Audi, Israel: Dominus Deus tuus Deus unus est (Deut. 6, 4), cum tot deorum nominibus*

delectata turpissimi cordis fornicatione uoluteris?) (*Contra Faustum*, XV, 5; Piras, Cf. Gnoli, 2006, pp. 196-197).

Many of Augustine's allegations appear implausible, particularly given what is known about the primary Manichaean sources. They resemble what is known from the heresiological tradition, which created many caricatures of his adversaries, making contradictory accusations that ranged from radical asceticism to libertinism. However, it is important to note that 1) Mani's cosmology and myths have been categorized as fables with “delusional contents” (ironically, Mani himself wrote fables and legends for pedagogical purposes); 2) additionally, a quote from the Old Testament directly opposes Mani's Marcionite viewpoint.

Augustine employs various rhetorical *topoi* based on the term "delirious" and other related words that connote madness and insanity. Beginning with the name of Mani, as noted by Johannes van Oort (1997, p. 236), Augustine puns on "*delirantes*" and the Greek translation of Mani, Μανής, which is reminiscent of μανείς – meaning mania or madness. It is interesting to note that in Greek, *mania* refers to both madness and a visionary state known as mantic madness. This is something that Augustine, with his education, would likely have been aware of. Augustine, however, does not use his own visions to counter Mani's visionary experiences – although he did gain insight through Platonic soul-ascension practices – as Kerdīr had done; he uses, as mentioned earlier, his rhetorical knowledge and a scriptural apologetics (cf. Fredriksen, 1988)

This analysis receives support from Augustine's remarks in Conf. IX, 4, 8. Van Oort noted that Augustine refers to the biblical psalms as the antidote that could cure the Manichaeans who he called *insani* and who were “hostile to the treatment”. Therefore, Augustine is deliberately criticizing the psalms of the Manichaean Church and the title of Mani, who was known as the physician of Babylon (Van Oort, 1997, p. 239). Thus, Mani's alleged insanity, his manic behavior, is described using adjectives that pertain to vision – the disordered and misleading vision of a lunatic. Augustine's interpretation of the scriptures, considered the "antidote," indicates that the visionary dimension of Manichaeism is not only rejected, but pathologized and contrasted with what would be the correct interpretation of the Bible and thus the "orthodox" view of Christianity.

Equally important, Van Oort observes that Augustine also employs similarly harsh adjectives to describe another Manichaean element that is exceptional in its visionary

nature: his illuminated books. Augustine portrays the Manichaean Books as containing "splendid hallucinations, glittering fantasies, and brilliant apparitions" (*Conf.* III, 6, 10. P. 241; cf. Van Oort, 1997, pp. 241-242). Van Oort concludes that the terms *phantasmata* and *splendida* have purpose. In the *Confessions*, Augustine employs phantasma to describe Mani's imaginative doctrines, and *splendida* may refer to Mani's illuminated books (Van Oort, 1997, p. 242).

Concluding this chapter, Faustus' response to Augustine delves into various aspects of Manichaeism that have been previously analyzed in this thesis. It reinforces the significance of the symbolic arrangement within Manichaean cosmology. First, Faustus discusses Manichaean theology, stating that they worship one divinity under the name of God the omnipotent Father, Christ his son, and the Holy Spirit. However, they believe that the Father resides in the principal and *supreme light*, which Paul refers to as inaccessible (*Igitur nos Patris quidem Dei omnipotentis, et Christi Filii eius, et Spiritus sancti unum idemque sub triplici appellatione colimus numen: sed Patrem quidem ipsum lucem incolere credimus summam ac principalem, quam Paulus alias inaccessibilem uocat.)* (*Contra Faustum*, XX, 2; Piras, Cf. Gnoli, 2006, pp. 198-199).

Then, Faustus says that “we believe that the Son resides in the second and visible light, as he is dual in nature, as the Apostle affirms by stating that Christ embodies both the power of God and the wisdom of God” (*Filium uero in hac secunda ac uisibili luce consistere, qui quoniam sit et ipse geminus, ut cum Apostolus nouit, Christum dicens esse Dei uirtutem et Dei sapientiam [...])* (*Contra Faustum*, XX, 2; Piras, Cf. Gnoli, pp. 198-199). The Manichaeans believe that his power resides in the sun and his wisdom in the moon. It is also acknowledged that the entire atmosphere is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, the third majesty. (*[...]uirtutem quidem eius in sole habitare credimus, sapientiam uero in luna: necnon et Spiritus sancti, qui est maiestas tertia, aeris hunc omnem ambitum sedem fatemur* (*Contra Faustum*, XX, 2; Piras, Cf. Gnoli, pp. 198-199). Accordting to Faustus, through his power and spiritual outpouring, the earth, which bears him, generates Jesus, who suffered and became the savior of mankind. Jesus hangs from every plant, providing life and salvation. That is why the sacredness which we attribute to all things, including bread and wine, is equal to yours, even though you harbor intense hostility towards the creators of these doctrines ([...] *ac diuersorium; cuius ex uiribus ac spiritali profusione, terram quoque concipientem, gignere patibilem Iesum, qui est uita ac salus hominum, omni suspensus ex ligno. Quapropter et nobis circa uniuersa, et uobis similiter*

erga panem et calicem par religio est, quamuis eorum acerrime oderitis auctores) (*Contra Faustum*, XX, 2; Piras, Cf. Gnoli, pp. 198-199).

Faustus concludes by presenting the following argument: "This is our faith, which will be further elaborated upon should you choose to inquire into it. For now, let the argument be equally persuasive that just as you or anyone else would answer without hesitation that God himself dwells 'In the Light'. This supports my religion through the testimony of everyone." (*Haec nostra fides est: de qua si quaerendum alias putaueris, audies; quamuis nec illud ad praesens minus firmum sit argumentum, quod uel tu, uel quilibet alius rogatus ubinam Deum suum credat habitare, respondere non dubitabit: "in lumine"; ex quo cultus hic meus omnium pene testimonio confirmatur*) (*Contra Faustum*, XX, 2; Piras, Cf. Gnoli, pp. 198-199).

It is evident that Faust continually reinforces the symbolism of the Light that underlies Manichaeism. All of the concepts discussed by Faustus – such as the roles of the Sun and Moon, the interconnectedness of all life, and the *Jesus patibilis* as an expression of the Light trapped in matter – comprise some of the main tenets of Manichaean cosmology. This reference to Light aligns naturally with Mani's visions, particularly because Mani himself described the Light Dimension of Manichaean cosmology as a personal experience. As such, the Manichaean philosopher strengthened these elements. Finally, it is interesting to note an appeal to a, so to speak, universal theological conception, in which a God is associated with Light, as the most appropriate designation of his ontological status.

4. The Fate of the Manichaean Visionary Tradition Based on Its Interactions with Buddhism

4.1 Manichaeans and Buddhists along the Silk Road and the Iranian milieu of their interactions

In the early 20th century, the discovery of Manichaean and Buddhist manuscripts in Turfan[119] greatly expanded knowledge of Mani's religion. Besides serving as primary sources that enabled reconstruction of Manichaean history beyond the confines of heresiological polemics, the Turfan manuscripts also provided insights into religious interactions in Central Asia. The Silk Road[120], which catalyzed significant cultural synthesis between West and East religious traditions, witnessed the thriving of Manichaeism.

Manichaean sources indicate that Mani himself undertook the initial missions in regions of Indian influence. Moreover, according to recent observations by Iain Gardner, it is probable that Mani was familiarized with Indian religions, particularly Buddhism, in his native land through Buddhist converts and the reports of Bardaisan of Edessa. The primary focus of Mani's missions, analyzed in chapter 2, was the conversion of the Turan king, despite the fact that Manichaean literature is highly hagiographic and there are doubts regarding the historical accuracy of the conversion (cf. Gardner, 2020).

According to Richard Foltz (2010b, pp. 7-8), Eastern Central Asia during the pre-modern period was a melting pot of various religious traditions. It served as a safe haven for heterodox beliefs, which made it one of the most religiously diverse areas during the Mongol period. This stands in stark contrast to the religious intolerance that Manichaeans found in the Roman Empire. In contrast to what is known from the testimony of Alexander of Lycopolis and Augustine of Hippo, Central Asia provided Manichaeism a means of expressing its visionary doctrine, specifically its cosmological and soteriological interests with a focus on the symbolic meaning of Light. However, this

[119] For Albert of Le Coq's discoveries of the Manichaean manuscripts, see Hopkirk (1989, pp. 119-120).
[120] According to Craig Benjamin (2018, p. 3), the term 'Silk Roads' is a recent translation of the German 'die Seidenstrassen', which was coined by Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen. Although von Richthofen used the term in the singular to refer to a particular set of routes connecting China to the Mediterranean via Central Asia, he knew that there were several routes influenced by political and environmental factors (Benjamin, 2018, p. 3). For the background and the historical antecedents of the Silk Road, see Kuzmina & Mair (2008). For cultural, trade, and political factors on the Silk Road, see Hansen (2012) and McLaughlin (2020); and for Buddhist schools on the Silk Road, see Foltz (2010b, pp. 37-58), especially Foltz (2010b, pp. 80-84) and Scott (1985; 1995) for the interactions between Manichaeism and Buddhism.

does not imply that Manichaeism did not need to conform to local religions. Religious pluralism, among other things, was prevalent due to the adaptability of the religions that came into Central Asia. As Foltz (2010b, p. 9) has aptly described:

> The Silk Road was more than just a conduit along which religions hitched rides East; it constituted a formative and transformative rite of passage. No religion emerges unchanged at the end of that arduous journey. Key formative influences on the early development of the Mahayana and Pure Land movements, which became much a part of East Asian civilization, are to be sought in Buddhism's earlier encounters along the Silk Road. Manichaeism, driven underground in the West, appears in the eight century as a powerful political force in East Turkestan, then gradually blends into the amorphous mass of Chinese popular religion. Nestorian Christianity, expelled as a heresy from the Byzantine realm, moves eastward, touches hundreds of thousands among the Eurasian steppe peoples, and appears centuries later like a bad dream to the first Catholic missionaries in Chine who find it comfortably entrenched there as the recognized Christianity of the East.

Furthermore, Foltz (2010b, p. 7) notes that textual, iconographic, and archaeological evidence from Central Asia demonstrates a fusion of Christian ("Nestorian"), Jewish, Buddhist, and Zoroastrian ideologies, along with the ancient substrate of Mazdaean tradition from the Iranian plateau and a Eurasian shamanic complex (Lieu, 1985). It is clear, then, that both Buddhism and Manichaeism had to adapt to the cultural specificities of Central Asia, especially the Iranian religions. For the Manichaeans, this was an uncomplicated process. In fact, Mani had previously incorporated ideas from the Mazdaean tradition along with Christian apocalyptic notions in *Šābuhragān*, a work he had dedicated to the Sasanian emperor Šābuhr.

On the other hand, Samuel Lieu has emphasized that the Manichaean religion that emerged in Central Asia and China varied from the one known in Iranian Mesopotamia, where Mani crafted his doctrine. However, despite later developments, Manichaeism preserved a distinct theological coherence, which is evident in the religion's central tenet: its soteriological praxis centered on ritualized meals.

Buddhism, during the period it was known to the Manichaeans, had longstanding cultural interactions with Central Asia. In the Greco-Aramaic inscriptions of Aśoka, they

took care to translate certain Buddhist terms, avoiding Sanskrit terms like "deva[121]," which had a negative connotation in Iran, although the reasons behind this reevaluation are unclear[122]. It is widely acknowledged that King Aśoka ordered the creation of numerous inscriptions of the Buddhist faith, on both rocks and pillars throughout his kingdom. As Foltz has noticed, these inscriptions span from northern India to the eastern fringes of the Greek empire of the Seleucids, who had taken over the Persian Achaemenids. Some inscriptions were written in Aramaic, the lingua franca of the Achaemenid empire. It is believed that these inscriptions were intended for the Iranians (cf. Foltz, 2010a, p. 204).

Moreover, Mostafa Vaziri's research indicates that in Iranian territory, not only did the decentralized Parthian dynasty (247 BCE-224 CE) facilitate the spread of Buddhism westward, but several Parthian elites also converted to Buddhism. The rise of the Kushān dynasty (ca. 80-375) in the first century AD in present-day Afghanistan and Khurāsān, along with their adoption of Buddhism, brought the religion to Iran's doorstep. This was facilitated by a free and uninterrupted exchange of ideas (Vaziri, 2012, p. 15). The success of the Kushans was attributed by Vaziri to their religious tolerance and assimilation of various ancient cults and religions, such as Mithraism and Zoroastrianism. The Kushans integrated different religious symbols and deities in their empire and society, blending Iranian and Indian traditions into their art and Buddhist literature. The Kushans' cultural "cosmopolitanism" fused Indian art and culture with that of Khurasan. Although they maintained their dynasty's seat in Mathura and Peshawar (Pushapura), the Kushans regarded Gandhāra as their spiritual territory and established Buddhist centers there (Vaziri, 2012, p. 18).

Cultural interactions leading to the Iranianization of Buddhism are evidenced in art and iconography. An image of the Buddha, discovered in Qara Tepe, modern-day Afghanistan, bears the inscription “Buddha Mazda”. Moreover, during the Kuṣāna period, there exist wall paintings that depict the Buddha enflamed and surrounded by iconography featuring Ahura Mazda (Stavisky, 1980; Foltz, 2010a, p. 207). Additionally, there is evidence of Iranian iconography being incorporated into Gandhāra art.

[121] See Scott (1990, p. 45) and Foltz, 2010, p. 204.
[122] See Panaino (2021, pp. 16-17).

Furthermore, it has been hypothesized that the architectural style of ancient Iran, Syria, and Egypt had an impact on the temple in Taxila (Vaziri, 2012, pp. 19-20).

Buddhists did not accept Zoroastrian practices entirely. According to Foltz, they strongly criticized several aspects, including consanguineous marriages, the killing of "Ahrimanic" animals like snakes and scorpions, and the display of corpses (Foltz, 2010a, p. 209). Similarly, Manichaeism also abandoned some Mazdaean traditions due to shared characteristics, leading them to adopt radical asceticism. This form of Buddhism prominent in Iran is also reflected in Manichaean sources. For instance, Iris Colditz, who conducted a comprehensive cataloging of names found in the Iranian corpus of Manichaean texts and determined their origins (Middle-Persian, Parthian, Sogdian, hybrid; Aramaic, Hebrew, Semitic, old Uyghur, Chinese , Indian; Greek and Latin), recorded several names of Indian origin: Buddha Śākyamuni, Buddha Maitreya, and Vairocana (?) (part: lwšyn, in a very fragmentary hymn, possibly referring to Lušen, also known as the Chinese Lushena and Sanskrit Vairocana), as well as Tathāgata, Bodhisattva, and Arhat have been mentioned (Colditz, 2020).

Colditz also points out that Mani had a conversation at the Sasanian court with a Buddhist sage named Gundēš, although it is not known whether he was Indian or Iranian, and two other sages from the East (Colditz, 2020, [3]). Klimkeit finds this process of assimilation of Manichaeism into Buddhism understandable due to the similarity in the Daseinshaltung of both religions, and states that:

> For both religions, the world is a place of woe and suffering. In the case of Manichaeism, the world is created by a divine being, the Living Spirit, but human existence is deplorable, for the human person's divine soul is in fetters in a body made of *hyle*, matter belonging to the Realm of Darkness. In both religions, humankind is bound to the law of retribution, which ties peoples to the cycle of rebirths. The way out of this deplorable worldly existence is by a certain saving knowledge (*gnosis*, *prajñā*) which is proclaimed by the "Apostles of Light", or the Buddhas, respectively. Although the content of that knowledge is different in both religions, its function is comparable in that it serves to sever the bonds that tie the soul to the world (Klimkeit, 1998, p. 238)

Despite coexisting for over a millennium in Central Asia and China, Buddhism has been more commonly referenced in Manichaean sources than the other way around. Interestingly, the discussion of Manichaeism by Buddhists has been primarily in

controversial contexts, such as the prohibition of the Mani religion in Tibet due to the perceived threat it posed to Buddhism. However, there exist Buddhist-Manichaean temples and paintings in Tibet, presumably dating back to the time when Uighur military campaigns, which were then Manichaean, were set up in the region (cf. Lieu, 1985, p. 209); and the potential integration of Iranian and Gnostic ideas into Tibetan Buddhism was already of interest to Tibetologists and Buddhologists at the start of the 20th century, most notably Giuseppe Tucci (1995, pp. 75-76, and pp. 263-265).

Therefore, the discernment can be made that 1) Buddhism adapted to Central Asia, specifically to the Mazdayasnian tradition, in a pre-Manichaean period. Furthermore, 2) Buddhist ideas assimilated into Manichaeism, beginning with Mani and then developed by Mār Ammō, his Parthian-speaking disciple (a language used by Buddhist monks in Central Asia), who was a central figure in the development of the Manichaean Eastern Church. Additionally, 3) there was a relationship of mutual influence along the Silk Road. In following pages, I will examine the encounter of Buddhism and Manichaeism, focusing on their similarities in cosmology, salvific knowledge, and soteriology. My goal is to highlight the affinities that resulted in the Manichaean visionary perspective finding greater success than in Western culture. In any case, this examination will emphasize the differences between Buddhism and Manichaeism, ultimately demonstrating that soteriological knowledge has distinctive content in both religions. This is due to Buddhism's anti-dualistic stance and Manichaeism's defense of radical dualism.

4.2 Cosmology and visionary experiences: Buddhism and Manichaeism within the Central Asian milieu

Akira Sadakata (1997, p. 19) distinguishes Buddhist cosmology into two subdivisions: Abhidharma and Mahāyāna, whereas W. Randolph Kloetzli (1989) recognizes various types of Buddhist cosmology, solely based on the numerous worlds present in each cosmological conception. Subsequently, this section will present the key points of Buddhist cosmology in chronological order, commencing with early Buddhism tradition and finishing with Pure Land Buddhism. In this way, it is possible to identify the shared characteristics among Buddhist traditions while comprehending their variations in the context of internal motives and historical circumstances. Considering the various cultural interactions with foreign religions, particularly in Central Asia and along the Iranian border, it is feasible to scrutinize the theoretical, philosophical, religious, and

historical influence of Buddhism on Manichaeism, and vice versa, through an analysis of the contact between these two traditions.

The Aggañña Sutta discusses Buddhist cosmology through the dialogue between Buddha and Vāseṭṭha, a Brahmin who left the household life to become an ascetic. An essential aspect is the contrast between the caste system and its corresponding cosmology and the Buddhist cosmogony, with a particular emphasis on the concepts of karmic retribution. As a matter of fact, Richard Gombrich (2009, p. 186) and other scholars have put forward the argument that the Aggañña Sutta is primarily a satire of Vedic cosmology.

The Aggañña Sutta opens with a dialogue between two Brahmins, Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja, who were in the process of becoming Buddhist monks. The Buddha inquires Vāseṭṭha (*atha kho Bhagavā Vāseṭṭhaṃ āmantesi*) whether the Brahmins do not scold and insult (*kacci vo Vāseṭṭha brāhmaṇā na akkosanti na paribhāsantīti?*) them for having abandoned household life in favor of the homeless and ascetic life of a Buddhist monk (*agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajitā*).Vāseṭṭha confirms that the Brahmins insulted them and claim superiority due to their belief that they are the legitimate (*orasā*) children (*puttā*) of Brahmā, born from his mouth (*mukhato jātā*), while the ascetics were born from his feet (*bandhupādāpacce*) (Aggañña Sutta, DN, xxvii, 1-3; Estlin Carpenter, 1991, pp. 80-81).

The Buddha does not accept the Brahminical claims and states that anyone from any of the four castes who becomes a monk, an Arahant (*catunnaṃ vaṇṇānaṃ yo hoti bhikkhu arahaṃ*), i.e., one who has destroyed impurities (*khīṇāsavo*) and fulfilled (*vusitavā*) his duties (*kata-karaṇīyo*, i.e., "that ought to be, must or should be done", cf. Rhys Davids & Stede, Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary, 1921, K, p. 24), laid down the burden (*ohita-bhāro*; cf. Rhys Davids & Stede, Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary, 1921, O, p. 173), attained the highest goal (*anuppatta-sadattho*), destroyed the fetters of becoming (*parikkhīṇa-bhava-saṃyojano*), and released (*vimutto*) himself through right knowledge (*sammad-aññā*), is thus proclaimed (*akkhāyat*i) by the Dhamma and not by the non-Dhamma (*dhammen' eva no adhammena*) (Aggañña Sutta, DN), xxvii, 7; Estlin Carpenter, 1991, p. 83). From then on, the text discusses the cosmic cycles, whose relevant passages has been translated by Maurice Walshe (1995, pp. 409-410) as follows:

'There comes a time, Vāseṭṭha, when, sooner or later after a long period, this world contracts. At a time of contraction, beings are mostly born in the Ābhassara Brahmā world. And there they dwell, mind-made, feeding on delight, self-luminous, moving through the air, glorious - and they stay like that for a very long time. But sooner or later, after a very long period, this world begins to expand again. At a time of expansion, the beings from the Ābhassara Brahmā world, having passed away from there, are mostly reborn in this world. Here they dwell, mind-made, feeding on delight, self-luminous, moving through the air, glorious - and they stay like that for a very long time. 'At that period, Vāseṭṭha, there was just one mass of water, and all was darkness, blinding darkness. Neither moon nor sun appeared, no constellations or stars appeared, night and day were not distinguished, nor months and fortnights, no years or seasons, and no male and female, beings being reckoned just as beings. And sooner or later, after a very long period of time, savoury earth spread itself over the waters where those beings were. It looked just like the skin that forms itself over hot milk as it cools. It was endowed with colour, smell and taste. It was the colour of fine ghee or butter, and it was very sweet, like pure wild honey. Then some being of a greedy nature said: "I say, what can this be?" and tasted the savoury earth on its finger. In so doing, it became taken with the flavour, and craving arose in it." Then other beings, taking their cue from that one, also tasted the stuff with their fingers. They too were taken with the flavour, and craving arose in them. So they set to with their hands, breaking off pieces of the stuff in order to eat it. And the result of this was that their self-luminance disappeared. And as a result of the disappearance of their self-luminance, the moon and the sun appeared, night and day were distinguished, months and fortnights appeared, and the year and its seasons. To that extent the world re-evolved

There is a significant link between cosmology and psychology, although not in the contemporary interpretation of myths as psychological allegories[123]. The present

[123] The Pāli canon offers both allegorical and psychological interpretations of myths. However, a literal interpretation of their content is also a possibility. The issue arises with the term "myth" itself, which is unfortunately often used today as a synonym for falsehood. This differs from its original meaning in ancient Greece from which it was borrowed. As pointed out by Rupert Gethin (1997, pp. 189-191), the existence of the demon Mara, for example, did not preclude an allegorical or psychological interpretation of their myths. The gods, spirits, demons, and such were real, just as the lotus flower has a symbolic meaning that can be expressed in various ways without questioning the literal existence of the flower. Furthermore, Rupert Gethin (1997, pp. 184-185) states that contemporary scholarly research shows a limited study of Buddhist cosmology due to insensitivity in addressing the topic. Consequently, the symbolic significance of these cosmologies has been lost. Gethin argues that the absence of academic studies on Buddhist cosmology reflects the reluctance of modern scholarship to recognize its importance concerning

being is affected by karmic aspects, in a similar manner that mental conditions are associated with different tiers of existence. Therefore, meditative practices may enable communication with other cosmological dimensions via visionary experiences and otherworldly journeys. Accordingly, Rupert Gethin discerns three principles in Buddhist cosmology: 1) There are several hierarchically organized dimensions of existence, including three lower dimensions in which animals (*tiracchānayoni*), hungry ghosts (*pettivisaya*), and various hells (*niraya*) exist; the dimension of men (*manussa*); and, above all, the various paradises of the *devas* and *brahmās*. 2) Beings are reborn continually in these different dimensions based on their actions. 3) The different levels of existence are arranged into "world-systems" (*loka-dhatu*) (Gethin, 1997, pp. 186-187). The process of expansion and contraction over extended periods is observable in the *Aggañña Sutta* as previously noted.

The development of Buddhist cosmology can be explained further by another widespread concept in academic research, wherein the Buddha allegedly recognized its inferiority due to the irrelevance of cosmogony and eschatology to soteriology. Kloetzli (1989, p. 1) noted that this perception is attributed to the "fourteen difficult questions" (*caturdaśāvyākṛtavastūni*), which includes the interrogation of the world's eternity or non-eternity. Recently, Y. Karunadasa (2018) analyzed these inquiries based on early Buddhist teachings and concluded that misunderstandings caused by modern research were responsible for the misinterpretation of Buddhist cosmology and other related elements.

According to Karunadasa (2018, p. 145), the Buddha's refusal to answer certain questions has led to the creation of several labels that attempt to interpret early Buddhism, such as skepticism, agnosticism, and pragmatism. Karunadasa further notes that the Buddha classified questions into four types, with unanswered questions constituting the fourth category. They are categorized as 1) questions that require a unilateral answer (*ekaṃsavyākaraṇīya*); 2) questions that need to be understood analytically (*vibhajjavyākaraṇīya*); 3) questions that require counter-questions to be answered

Buddhism's well-known teachings such as the four noble truths, the eightfold path, no-self, dependent arising, and others. Gethin argues that the divorce between the philosophical-theoretical and doctrinal aspects from their traditional mythical context has led to a one-dimensional portrait of early Buddhism and Theravāda Buddhism. (Gethin, 1997, p. 185).

(*paṭipucchā-vyākaraṇīya*); and 4) questions to be put aside (*ṭhapanīya*) (Karunadasa, 2018, pp. 145-146).

Karunadasa argues that there is no hierarchical evaluation of answers to each question type, even when "leaving the question aside" is accepted as an answer. Rather, what determines the validity of an answer is whether it belongs to the same class as the respective question (Karunadasa, 2018, p. 146). Therefore, Karunadasa refutes the notion that the Buddha primarily utilized the analytical approach, which is the premise upon which scholars have founded Buddhist allegedly skepticism regarding cosmology (cf. Karunadasa, 2018, pp. 147-148). Karunadasa highlights a significant aspect of Buddhist cosmology: Buddhist texts do not categorize certain questions as unanswerable or inexpressible (*avyākaraṇīya*). Instead, these questions remain unanswered (*avyākata*). Therefore, referring to them as unanswerable misses the point. Buddhism only recognizes a category of unanswered questions (Karunadasa, 2018, pp. 147-148). Additionally, these inquiries have been designated as undetermined rather than false, as dismissing them would constitute a form of response. They are classified as “unanswered (*avyākata*) questions" (Karunadasa, 2018, p. 148).

However, what prompted the posing of these questions initially? Karunadasa (2018, p. 150) contends that they were part of a catalog of timeless philosophical dilemmas that predated the inception of Buddhism, and thus, all philosophical systems should strive to address them. Indeed, as will be explained further, the pre-Buddhist philosophical background carries significant implications in cosmological and soteriological concerns. This is due to the pre-existence of special and salvific knowledge within Jainism and the Vedic tradition (cf. Bronkhorst, 2009, pp. 25-26).

Karunadasa shifts the focus from the epistemological domain, with its cosmological and ontological implications, where the issue had been debated, to the realm of psychology. He argues that these questions “can be traced to what may be called the Buddhist psychology of ideologies: the diagnosis of the psychological wellsprings of all theoretical views” (Karunadasa, 2018, p 150). Buddhism stands apart from other Indian traditions due to its understanding of no-self[124] (*anatta*). Thus, Karunadasa attributes the

[124] See Collins (1990).

way in which these inquiries are posed to the "I" perspective, specifically its theoretical foundation (Karunadasa, 2018, p. 151).

This Buddhist psychology is evident in the *Brahmajāla Sutta* (DN), where the critique of eternalist or annihilationist positions provides insights into the impact of visionary experiences and otherworldly journeys on philosophical stances. The Buddhist viewpoint follows a middle path, the details of which will be explored in the following section on soteriological knowledge. For now, it is necessary to analyze the fundamental principles of Mahāyāna Buddhism, especially its cosmological novelties, which spread in Central Asia and were of greater importance to Eastern Manichaeism.

Scholars agree that the Mahāyāna Buddhist movement emerged at the beginning of the Common Era (Conze, 1967b, p. 48). However, debates persist over the factors that spurred its growth and popularity. The coincidence of early Mahāyāna and Christianity, particularly Christian Gnosticism, has led some scholars to suggest a Buddhist impact on Gnosticism. However, the scarcity of evidence makes supporting this thesis difficult[125]. Openness to religions outside of India is a defining feature of the Mahāyāna movement (Conze, 1967b, p. 50; Williams, 1989, p. 51). As indicated by Conze (1967b, p. 50), South India had established close trading relations with the Roman Empire, which is supported by the recent discovery of large amounts of Roman coins in the area. Furthermore, Conze notes that a second center of the early Mahayana movement was in Northwestern India, where the states that succeeded Alexander the Great maintained a constant connection to Hellenistic and Roman cultures. The art found in the region serves as evidence of this cross-cultural exchange.

The factors that contributed to the rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism are uncertain. Scholars (e.g., Conze, 1967b; Warder, 1979; Lamotte, 1958; and Hirakawa, 1999) have typically argued that a lay revolt against the exclusivism of the monastic community

[125] The reverse path has been proposed by scholars (e.g., Conze, 1967b; Gillmann & Klimkeit, 1999, pp. 260-262)) who have suggested a possible Christian influence on certain Mahāyāna symbols and cosmological doctrines. Edward Conze observed verbal similarities between Christian and Mahāyāna scriptures, pointing out the parallels between the Greek-written Revelation of St. John from the eastern Mediterranean and the Perfection of Wisdom in 8000 lines. Both texts place great significance on the symbolism of seals, specifically a book that is sealed with seven seals. This symbolism is prevalent in Jewish mystical texts that were adopted by Christians and Gnostics, which are primarily found in sources other than those referenced by Conze. Despite the limited evidence, Conze (1967b, p. 49) is correct in emphasizing that the number 7 and the concept of books with seals are primarily of Mediterranean Jewish origin rather than Indian, making Roman Empire transmission probable. As noted in Chapter 1, the Babylonian tradition assigned significant meaning to the number 7 (cf. Collins, 1996), making contact with other Near Eastern religions plausible.

drove the more inclusive character of the Great Vehicle. Hirakawa (1990) is a leading proponent of the thesis that Mahāyāna Buddhism was originally concerned with lay people, the general lines of which are as follows:

> Laymen were unable to strictly observe the precepts or to devote much time to meditation and thus could not put the Buddha's teachings into practice in the traditional ways. Instead, they had to depend on the Buddha's compassion for their salvation. While monastic Buddhism emphasized the Buddha's teaching, lay Buddhism emphasized the role of the Buddha in salvation. Teachings concerning the saving power of the Buddha appeared in response to the religious needs of laymen. Beliefs in the Buddhas Amitābha and Akṣobhya reflected the layman's desire to depend on someone greater than himself. (Hirakawa, 1990, p. 270).

According to Akira Hirakawa (1990, p. 260), three sources appear to have played a significant role in the emergence of Mahāyāna Buddhism: 1) Sectarianism in Nikāya Buddhism, particularly within the Mahāsaṅghika school; 2) the biographical literature concerning the life of the Buddha. 3) The cult of the. This hypothesis is especially compelling since the Mahāsaṅghika school persisted following the emergence of the Mahāyāna. Regarding the first issue, Hirakawa suggests that it is feasible to identify a development that could have caused the Mahāsaṅghika school to evolve into the Mahāyāna movement. In any case, Hirakawa emphasizes that there are numerous similarities that attest to the influence of Mahāsaṅghika on Mahāyāna. Additionally, the Sarvāstivādin, Mahīśasaka, Dharmagupta, and Theravāda Schools' teachings were assimilated into Mahāyāna (Hirakawa, 1990, p. 260).

Regarding the second topic, a considerable amount *nidāna*, *avadāna* and *jātaka* literature related to the Buddha's life existed (Hirakawa, 1990, p. 264), which certainly contributed to the later Buddhological conceptions that characterized Mahāyāna cosmology. After Buddha's death, it is believed that his remains were divided and placed in eight stūpas constructed in central India. These locations became hubs for devout Buddhists to gather. Subsequently, Hirakawa emphasizes that Emperor Aśoka continued this practice by directing the building of stūpas in other regions of India, further elevating his cult (Hirakawa, 1990, pp. 260-261).

These speculations are essential, in the view of Hirakawa (1990, p. 261), because the Mahāyāna texts do not describe the circumstances that gave rise to the movement. However, later studies have revealed that the archaeological and epigraphic evidence does not uphold this claim. Gregory Schopen (2005), for instance, observed that the majority of donations in the Mahāyāna, or proto-Mahāyāna, context was made by monastic members, namely monks and nuns. This data significantly weakens the hypothesis that Mahāyāna was primarily propelled by laypeople.

Schopen's findings from epigraphic and archaeological evidence indicate that there was minimal focus on Buddha Amitābha during the Kuṣān period. This is noteworthy since the Kushana region as well as Buddha Amitābha, a central figure in Pure Land Buddhism, had become essential to the Mahāyāna movement. Schopen concludes that, based on the available evidence, Amitābha did not significantly contribute to the development of Buddhism in Mathurā or other areas of Northern India. Thus, Schopen concludes that if the inscriptions' concern for Amitābha signifies the start or part of the Mahāyāna movement, it was initially and for several centuries a limited minority movement with little popular support. And when it finally emerged as an independent movement in the public domain, the focus on Amitāba was no longer active (Schopen, 2005, p. 264).

Schopen emphasizes that the hypothesis of the lay origin of the Mahāyāna, among other consolidated hypotheses, conflicts with the current perspective on the Mahāyāna, as revealed by epigraphic and archaeological analysis. It therefore appears improbable that the Mahāyāna emerged fully formed at the beginning of the Common Era. This hypothesis relies only on literary sources. However, Schopen cautions that one should acknowledge that the history of Mahāyāna literature is distinct from the history of religious movements associated with it and the two should not be conflated (Schopen, 2005, pp. 268-269).

Following Schopen, Paul Williams (1989, p. 22) states that it is unlikely that Mahāyāna was the product of organized and influential lay activity. Williams offers an alternative view based on the work of van Buitenen, who argued that the concept of a kṣatriya philosophical tradition, independent of Brahmanism, was invented to identify non-Brahmin knowledge, i.e., not aligned with orthodoxy. Williams argues that Mahāyāna witnessed a comparable trend: “new thought might identify itself as “new” by

calling itself non-monastic, i.e. not in line with those hidebound orthodox monks who could think only old thoughts" (Williams, 1989, p. 23).

But what is the underlying conception of the "world" that enables the bodhisattva to traverse various realms of existence? The Prajñāpāramita literature and the Mahāyāna explore early Buddhist themes, particularly dependent origination, in a way that supports the establishment of two distinct epistemological levels: one ultimate and one conventional. Thus, according to Williams (1989, pp. 45-46), pedagogical purposes may involve creating paradoxes that are only apparent, though in the end there is no actual paradox.

In the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, Subhuti and the Lord (*bhagavan*) engage in a dialogue concerning how the perfection of wisdom instructs the Tathāgatas. Subhuti asks what the Tathāgatas refer to as "world", to which the Buddha responds by identifying the five *skandhas* (form, feeling, perceptions, impulses, and consciousness) as the "world" (*loka*) declared by the Tathāgata. The Buddha proceeds to explain the reasoning behind this, as translated by Conze:

> The Lod: The perfect wisdom of the Tathāgatas has pointed out the five skandhas as 'the world' (*loka*), because they do not crumble, nor crumble away (lujyante, pralujyante). For the five skandhas have emptiness for own-being, and, as devoid of own-being, emptiness cannot crumble or crumble away. It is in this sense that perfect wisdom instructs the Tathāgatas in this world. And as emptiness does not crumble, nor crumble away, so also the Signless, the Wishless, the Uneffected, the Unproduced, Non-existence, and the Realm of Dharma. (Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra; Conze, 1994, XII, 2, 256, p. 173)

Subsequently, in the context of achieving the liberation of beings, it becomes clear that the didactic paradoxes found in Prajñāpāramita literature as noticed by Williams are merely apparent: there is an ontological basis to the division between ultimate and apparent discourse. The Tathāgata has the ability to comprehend the thoughts and actions of countless beings, as these beings do not truly exist as separate individualities. Conze translates the Buddha's explanation as follows:

> The Lord: Where there arises an act of consciousness which has none of the skandhas for objective support, there the non-viewing of form, etc., takes places. But just this non-viewing of the skandhas if the viewing of the world.

> The is the way in which the world is viewed by the Tathāgata. It is thus that perfect wisdom acts as an instructress in the world to the Tathāgatas. And how does perfect wisdom show up in the world for what is is? She shows that the world is empty, unthinkable, calmly quiet. As purified of itself she shows up the world, she makes it known, she indicates it (Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra; Conze, 1994, XII, 5, 276 p. 179

The Pure Land tradition emerged from Mahāyāna and significantly influenced Central Asia and the Far East. Luis O. Gómez translated and edited the three Sukhāvatī-vyūha sutra versions: the extended and condensed Sanskrit renditions and the Chinese translation. The Buddha communicated to Shariputra about buddha-fields located in the West, numbering in the hundreds of thousands of millions, and that there exists a world known as the Land of Bliss/Pure Land. Currently, the buddha-field houses Amitāyus, a tathagata, arhat, perfect and complete buddha (6; Gómez, 1996, p. 16). Mental and physical pain have no place in the Pure Land, where all beings experience boundless happiness (7; Gómez, 1996, p.16). Moreover, celestial musical instruments play constantly in this Buddha-field (10; Gómez, 1996, p.17).

The wild geese, curlews, and peacocks of the Buddha-field gather thrice a day to sing in unison, each with a unique voice. Through their choral performance, they proclaim Buddhist virtues, including the five spiritual faculties, five spiritual powers, and seven elements of awakening. Hearing these sounds, the inhabitants of the world become mindful of the Buddha, his teachings, and the sangha (11; Gómez, 1996, p. 17). These avian creatures, in contrast, do not originate from other birds. The nomenclatures pertaining to hells, animal rebirths, and the dominion of Yama, the King of Death, are foreign within that particular Buddha-field, let alone the phenomenon of actual birth in any of these forms. As an alternative, these congregations of winged beings come together to vocalize the teachings of the Dharma. They have been magically created by the Buddha who presides over that field, the Tathāgata Amitāyus (12, Gómez, 1996, p. 17).

Pure Land Buddhism is relevant to Manichaeism because it is a tradition tied to Iranian and Central Asian culture. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Parthians played a significant role in the spread of Buddhism in Central Asia, even though there were no Buddhist documents available in their language. Additionally, according to Prabodh Chandra Bagchi (2008, p. 31), the Sogdians and Khotanese also played a crucial role in transmitting Buddhism from Central Asia to China. Furthermore, Bagchi highlights that

during the early stages of Sino-Indian relations, Central Asian missionaries acted as intermediaries between India and China (Bagchi, 2008, pp. 31-32). Bagchi suggests that the Parthians' association with Buddhism may have been related to the success of the Hellenic kingdoms in Central Asia. Subsequently, Bagchi explains how after the decline of the Hellenistic empires in India, the Parthians gained control of a part of northwestern India and founded a brief kingdom. Thus, it is plausible that the spread of Buddhism in Bactria and Sogdiana may have also led to its penetration into the Parthian empire (Bagchi, 2008, p. 32).

In his study on Iranian Buddhism, David Alan Scott observed that Buddhism was introduced to the Iranian society with pre-existing predispositions towards other cultures and religions. As argued by Scott, despite having its own standard formulations like the four noble truths and the eightfold path, there existed flexibility in doctrinal matters (Scott, 1990, p. 44). Furthermore, when Buddhists engaged with Iranian culture, the Mahāyāna tradition had already developed the concept of *upāya* "skillful means". the outlines of which have already been examined in the preceding paragraphs, which facilitated Buddhist adaptation to the Iranian milieu (Scott, 1990, p. 45).

According to Scott, in Iran's Buddhist environment, the vocabulary utilized mainly showcases the differences. Despite having a shared Indo-Iranian history, some terms, notably deva, held a positive meaning (god) in India and a negative connotation (demons) in Zoroastrianism. The most commonly used references for gods were yazata and baga, and it is significant how Buddhists were careful with these terminologies (Scott, 1990, p. 45)

Scott (1990, p. 68) suggests that further research on Iranian influences on Buddhism could be more productive if focused on the Pure Land tradition. He notes that many of the translators of early Pure Land texts from Chinese to Iranian languages were from Iran and Central Asia. The first seven Chinese translations of the larger *Sukhāvatī-vyūha* were produced by Parthian, Bactrian, Sogdian and Khotanese Buddhists (Scott, 1990, p. 70).

In general, the Pure Land Buddhist tradition is focused on the worship of Amitābha (Infinite Light) and Amitāyus (Infinite Life), often regarded as two names for the same Buddha. However, in the Tibetan tradition, they are treated as separate entities (Williams, 1989, p. 252). Amitābha's paradisiacal Buddhist realm, known as Sukhāvatī

or "Pure Land/Happy Land," is said to be located in the West (Scott, 1990, p. 68?). The worship of Amitābha through chanting his name can lead to rebirth in the Pure Land, according to this Buddhist tradition. The transformation that took place in Buddhism as it spread in the Far East, as Charles B. Jones (2021, pp. 13-14) points out, led Pure Land Buddhism to focus exclusively on the vow made by the Buddha Amitābha to bring all people to his Buddha-field through his own power.

Akira Sadakata (1997) examines the possible origins of the Western Pure Land idea, discussing the connections between Greek and Egyptian religions from Ptolemy I (304-282 BCE) to Late Antiquity and the flourishing commercial and cultural relations between India and the Roman Empire from the 2nd century BCE to the 2nd century CE. (Sadakata, 1997, pp. 121-123). Sadaka derived his insights from archaeological and iconographic evidence found in Central Asia. Items with Greco-Egyptian origins were discovered at Begrām (Ancient Kāpiśī), which is likely the location of the Kuṣāṇa capital. The artifacts found are of Alexandrian origin and include numerous bronze and plaster statues of Greek gods and youths, such as Silenus, satyrs, Eros, Psyche, Dionysus, maenads, Athena, and Hercules (Sadakata, 1997, p. 122).

Building upon Benjamin Rowland Jr.'s research that identified a statue of the Egyptian god Harpocrates situated in Kāpiśī, and a female figure of the goddess Isis within a glass cup, Sadaka delves into the potential link between Greek-Egyptian and Buddhist ideas. This is due to the unearthing of a Serapis-Hercules statue, leading to speculation on a probable relationship between the two cults. Sadakata finds that these findings indicate the expansion of the Alexandrian cult of Serapis to the Indian subcontinent's borders. Additionally, they would suggest the coexistence of Buddhism and Greco-Egyptian religions in the region, potentially leading to opportunities for mutual influence (Sadakata, 1997, p. 123).

The encounter between Greek and Egyptian iconography may have been facilitated by the political context, particularly under the Roman Empire's aegis. The Kuṣāna King Vima Takto, who reigned between 80-90 CE, defeated the Indo-Parthian princess who was at war and ruled the Indus region, and took control of the trade ports that were frequented by Roman merchant ships (McLaughlin, 2020, p. 80). Furthermore, Raoul McLaughlin notes that Vima Kadphises, the Kuṣāna king, conquered northern India and seized multiple kingdoms between the Indus and the Ganges. This allowed the

Kuṣānas to control significant sea routes that connected India to Egypt[126], granting them access to Roman goods (McLaughlin, 2020, p. 80).

Finally, in addition to internal developments within the Buddhist tradition, understanding the peculiarities of Pure Land cosmology requires consideration of cultural factors such as the intersection of Greek, Egyptian, Iranian, and Indian culture. Although examination of the iconographic, archaeological, and textual evidence suggests the Buddhist reception of foreign ideas, such conclusions remain speculative. Moreover, the Pure Land cosmology itself, as well as the Buddhist experience of it, must be distinguished from its cultural representations. In other words, it is not justified to attribute its origin solely to the historical encounter between different philosophical and religious groups which are based solely on cultural exchange and discursive speculations. The significance of such cosmologies lays in their use as a "soteriological map" within the visionary experiences of practitioners, which necessitates a differentiation between the representative range of cultural manifestations. This offers the opportunity to borrow ideas to better articulate a perceived reality in what is commonly referred to as "otherworldly journeys" in scholarly literature.

From the perspective of the interaction between Buddhists and Manichaeans, two observations are relevant to the Pure Land tradition. The first observation pertains to the concepts of "Buddha-Field" (*buddhakṣetra*) and "Pure Land" (or blessed, *sūkhavatī*), while the second observation concerns the cultural environment in which the Pure Land tradition was developed. According to Paul Williams (1989, p. 224), while the idea of "Buddha-Field" (*buddhakṣetra*) holds significant importance in the Mahāyāna tradition, it is not limited to it. The *Mahāvastu*, a text from the *Lokottaravāda*, also acknowledges the existence of multiple universes. Essentially, Williams observes that a Buddha's function is to teach sentient beings in their Buddha-Field, which is not limited to a place where a Buddha has appeared. Moreover, a future Buddha (Buddha-to-be) is believed to "purify" his Buddha-Field through his bodhisattva career driven by great compassion. Consequently, a Buddha Field's existence is contingent on a Buddha's bodhisattva career (Williams, 1989, p. 225).

Regarding Sukhāvatī, Gregory Schopen (2005) analyzed texts from the Mahāyāna tradition, including *Bhaiṣajyaguru* and *Ajitasenavyākaraṇanirdeśa-sūtra*, and concluded

[126] See also Salomon (1991) on the Indian evidence found in Egypt.

that this Buddhist concept is not limited to the Pure Land tradition. In both *Bhaiṣajyaguru* and *Ajitasenavyākaraṇanirdeśa-sūtra*, rebirth in a blessed land is achieved by hearing the name of their respective Buddhas, *Bhaiṣajyaguruvaiḍūryaprabha* and Śākyamuni. It is worth noting that rebirth is not connected to Buddha Amitābha in either case (Schopen, 2005, p. 156-157). Therefore, according to Schopen (2005, p. 158), rebirth in Sukhāvatī is not exclusively linked to the Amitābha cult, as numerous other rebirth locations were accessible to the Mahāyāna community at that time.

Considering the chronology of Mahāyāna and Pure Land Buddhism, it can be argued with a degree of speculation that not only did Buddhism influence Manichaeism, but also that Mani's religion influenced the Pure Land tradition. This impact is notable. The assimilation of Manichaean ideas by Buddhists can be explained by a shared visionary hermeneutic and an appreciation of the aesthetics of light in a more general way. Furthermore, the universal nature of Manichaeism suggests that there may be Iranian influences in Buddhism that did not come through Zoroastrianism, but rather through Manichaeism itself.

Furthermore, Klimkeit (1993, p. 99) raises questions based on Iranian Manichaean evidence, specifically two cycles of Parthian hymns attributed to Mār Ammō, a disciple of Mani and an important missionary in East Iran. He queries whether the Mahāyāna texts concerning the "Western Paradise" of the Buddha Amitābha/Amitāyus, known as Sukhāvatī, were influenced by Manichaean descriptions of the Kingdom of Light, or vice versa. Indeed, Klimkeit notes that Mār Ammō traveled to the region of the Oxus River, towards the Kuṣāna kingdom in the mid-3rd century CE. This kingdom had ties with the Sasanian empire and shared borders with the partly Buddhist region of Gandhāra in Northwestern India (Klimkeit, 1993, p. 99).

Klimkeit notes that the "Greater *Sukhāvatīvyūtha*," the main Buddhist texts falling under this category, were translated into Chinese in 252 CE. Mar Ammō would have been active within the Kuṣāna empire, located along the Indo-Iranian border area. Finally, according to Klimkeit, Mar Ammō could have utilized earlier texts from Western Asia, specifically Gnostic and Christian apocryphal material (Klimkeit, 1993, p. 99). To sum up, Klimkeit (1993, p. 99) argues that:

> It seems possible that Gnostic ideas on the Realm of Light and the Father of Light, as they emerge in such hymns as these, inspired the Buddhist

> conception of the “Western Paradise” *Sukhāvatī*. Mani himself had been in Northwestern India (the Indus Valley, Baluchistan, and maybe even Gandhara) in 241/242 A. D. on his first major missionary trip; this fact would suggest that there were already Gnostic and Christian groups in that area, for the Manichaeans tended to address themselves to these circles first.

The chronology of the assimilation of Buddhist concepts into Manichaeism is evident in the Iranian (roughly 3rd-10th centuries) and Turkish collection of Manichaean texts (probably 13th-14th centuries). Thus, from now on, the analysis of these texts can illustrate how Manichaeism incorporated Buddhism while remaining distinct in identity. A relevant text for analyzing the incorporation of Buddhist terminology into Manichaeism and the consequent “Buddhistization” of the Mani religion is the Parthian hymn composed to Mār Zaku. Klimeit notes that the hymn was most likely created shortly after Zaku's passing in 300 CE, and despite its early origin, it contains a multitude of terms derived from Indian Buddhism (Klimekit, 1993, p. 87). Zaku is referred to as both the Battle-seeking Hero and the “Zealous Caravan Leader”. Battle-seeking Hero references battle-seeking gods in Manichaean cosmology, who played a crucial role in fighting against darkness. On the other hand, the term "caravan leader" is frequently employed in Mahāyāna Buddhism to describe bodhisattvas (cf. Klimkeit, 1998, p. 240)

Furthermore, the text describes the individual eschatology of Mār Zaku: “(t) Strong, good, powerful One who has attained a throne. Like all the Apostles, Buddhas and Gods” (cf. Klimkeit, 1993, p. 88). It is worth noting that the Buddhas were placed in the same cosmological realm as the apostles and deities of the Manichaean pantheon. The use of the term "throne" may evoke the ecstatic and visionary experiences detailed in the CMC, with its symbolism mirroring that of the Merkabah's mysticism. Another pertinent text for integrating Manichaean and Buddhist cosmology is the Sogdian liturgy for celebrating the body-and-soul rite. According to Klimkeit, the meaning of the rite is still vague; nevertheless, the liturgy provides evidence of the assimilation of Buddhist elements among the Manichaeans in Central Asia, who even narrated Buddhist stories in their worship (1993, p. 150). Klimkeit (1993, p. 151) has translated this text as follows:

> [Sogdian] “...the five assemblies of five Buddhas of Mahāyāna. It will be well to indicate how much of it is to be recited. Then the noon prayer should be said, (together with the singing of) the Apostle hymn, (beginning with) [Persian]: "Come, blessedness.".

> [Sogdian]: Then the body-and-soul rite takes place. First of all the preacher should preach a sermon on body and soul. When the day draws to a close, a parable should be recited, (for example) "The Prince with the Čandā...son."
>
> [Sogdian]: Then (the hymn cycle) "Body (and) Soul" should be sung. This is to be followed by some exegesis. When you have gone through this order (of worship), sit down at the table,... recite the dinner prayer. It consists of the following three hymns: [Parthian]: "Oh soul of Light, great Light-Self!" [Persian]: Two times. [Parthian]: "Lord Mani, forgive my sins."
>
> "Redeem, Lord Mani, my soul."

The liturgy references a Chinese Manichaean hymn (H 129a, 244a, 247c) that compares the five elements of Light (fire, water, light, wind, and air) to "five classes of Buddhas of Light," "the Five Great Buddhas of Light," or "the five Light-Buddhas." A Beijing Manichaean manuscript (MS. BEI 8470; Palumbo, cf. Gnoli, 2008, p. 318), which presents a cosmogonic account, also mentions these five classes. In fact, according to Antonello Palumbo (2008, p. 312; cf. Gnoli, 2008), the five luminous elements in the Chinese Manichaean manuscript correspond to the Manichaean cosmogonic and anthropogonic myth. These elements, namely Air, Wind, Light, Water, and Fire, are identical to those listed in Klimkeit's document and are regarded as the offspring of the Primordial Man.

Samuel Lieu notes that the Five Members of the Manichaean Great Nous are identified with the Five Great Buddhas of Light in the Chinese hymnscroll. Similar to this pentad, the five Dhyāni-Buddhas or Tathāgathas have a significant place in Buddhism, as they are emanations of the Primordial Buddha[127]. To this end, Lieu highlights that in Tibetan Buddhist art[128], deities are arranged in a circular maṇḍala with Vairocana in the center, Aksobhya to the east, Amitābha to the west, Ratnasambhava to the south, and Amogasiddhi (Śākyamuni representing final nirvāna) to the north (Lieu, 1985, pp. 208-

[127] In the Manichaean Compendium of Dunhuang, there is a similar teaching about the Cosmic Buddha. Palumbo has noted that the Mahāyāna doctrine of the Buddha's three bodies was applied to the Mani Buddha. Thus Mani, defined as the *dharmakāya* of a cosmic Buddha, is identified with the Father of Greatness. Palumbo argues that this double identification of Mani with the Father of Greatness and of Mani with a transcendent Buddha structured according to the morphology of *trikāya* led to the definition of the aeons, emanations of God, as l*akṣana* (*xiang*), that is, the characteristic signs of a Buddha (on the *mahāpuruṣalakṣaṇa*, see chapter 2, section 4) (Palumbo, pp. 340-342, cf. Gnoli, 2008).

[128]

209). That being said, it is possible to compare Buddhist and Manichaean soteriological knowledge.

4.2 *Jñāna* and *gnōsis*: soteriological knowledge and heavenly ascensions

To comprehend the meaning of "soteriological knowledge" in the Buddhist tradition, it is imperative to scrutinize the earliest texts in the Pāli canon, detecting the core stratum of Buddhist soteriology to discern its changes in later Buddhist schools. This entails scrutinizing the setting in which the Buddha and Buddhists developed their salvific knowledge, and the competitive aspect with other groups, Vedic and non-Vedic, in soteriological matters.

As is widely acknowledged from the accounts in the Pāli canon, prior to attaining enlightenment, Buddha visited various masters. Some scholars (e.g. Bronkhorst, 2009, p. 19; Wynne, 2007) emphasized the importance of two teachers: Ārāḍa Kālāma and Udraka Rāmaputra. These Nikāyas accounts' significance has been upheld by Johannes Bronkhorst, Alexander Wynne and, most recently, by Bhikkhu Anālayo. The cited authors responded to Gregory Schopen's excessive skepticism regarding the reliability of the Pāli canon's texts (cf. Wynne, 2007, pp. 5-6; Bronkhorst, 2009, p. 7; Anālayo, 2022). Schopen (1997, pp. 23-25) argues that the Nikāyas are limited to reflecting the period in which they were composed, specifically the last quarter of the first century BCE for the oldest source and the first centuries of the Common Era for their contents. Consequently, he considered the Nikāyas to be unreliable sources for reconstructing the earliest tradition of Buddhism. Schopen's approach, which emphasizes non-literary sources, effectively reexamined academic research on Buddhism. Nevertheless, Bhikkhu Anālayo (2022, pp. 189-190) convincingly exposes the limitations of this perspective regarding the accuracy of oral tradition.

As indicated by Bronkhorst, the earliest texts provide evidence that even following his enlightenment, Buddha engaged in discussions with individuals who held divergent views, implying that he shared certain concepts with his contemporaries while also introducing novel teachings beyond the existing viewpoints (Bronkhorst, 2009, pp. 19-20). In the cultural and intellectual context of the Buddha, two concepts are crucial for comprehending the discussions concerning soteriology: cyclic rebirth and karmic distribution. Considering that the concepts of rebirth and post-mortem conditions were prevalent in Buddha's cultural surroundings, stemming from a shared intellectual lineage

among various philosophical and religious groups, it is crucial to comprehend the prevailing beliefs surrounding rebirth during Buddha's era. These will serve as a backdrop against which Buddha's own ideas were developed.

According to Bronkhorst, rebirth forms an integral part of the four noble truths and the path of liberation, and was not a new teaching introduced by the Buddha. The Buddha accepted it as the starting point of his journey (Bronkhorst, 2009, p. 20). Different conceptions of rebirth and their respective doctrines of karma were present in both the non-Vedic ascetic tradition (Ājīvikas, Jains) and the Vedic tradition as seen in the earliest Upaniṣads. The dissemination of karmic doctrines poses a historical problem with much debate on its origins – whether it is Vedic or non-Vedic in nature. The *Brahmajāla Sutta* elucidates this matter. According to the Buddha, there are ascetics and brahmins[129] who are eternalists (*sassata-vādā*), claiming that the self and the world are eternal (*sassataṃ attānañ ca lokañ*) in four different ways (*Brahmajāla Sutta*, DN, 1.30; Rhys Davids & Estlin Carpenter. 1890, p. 13). Moreover, the role of visionary and ecstatic experiences is considered highly relevant, as they allow individuals to recall past lives and world cycles. The Buddha specifically highlights the conclusions that ascetics or brahmins reach when recalling such past events. Thus, the Buddha states that an ascetic or Brahmin, in consequence (*anvāya*) of his zeal (*ātappam*), effort (*padhānam*), devotion (a*nuyogam*),

[129] The Buddha is discussing concepts similar to those found in the Upaniṣads. While scholars disagree on whether or not the Buddha was familiar with the Upaniṣads (e.g. Bronkhorst, 2009, p. 25), there are compelling reasons to believe that he was acquainted with Vedic culture. This is due in part to the significant use of Vedic symbols and allusions to their practices (cf. Gombrich, 2009; Wynne, 2007). For instance, in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (4.4; Olivelle, 1998, pp. 124-125), it is stated that when a person perceives the ātman as a god (*deva*) (*yadaitamanupaśyatyātmānaṁ devamañjasā*), the lord of the past and present (*īśānaṁ bhūtabhavyasya*), they no longer try to escape it. It is important to note that only the mind (*mana*) should be used to understand it, and that there is no multiplicity within it. The passage also suggests that one who only sees (*paśyati*) multiplicity goes from death to death (*mṛtyoḥ sa mṛtyumāpnoti*). Regarding ascetics, the Jains had an ontology centered on the concept of *jīva*. This concept, as previously discussed (see chapter 2, 2.3), is more similar to the Manichaean ontology of particles of light trapped in matter than to Buddhist philosophy. According to Padmanabh Jaini, the Jain perspective on soul bondage posits that the soul's involvement with the material world has no beginning and can extend indefinitely over time. In contrast to the Manichaeans, who hold a cosmogonic doctrine in which particles of light, previously uncorrupted, were mixed with matter, and whose purification is carried out by the Manichaean ritualistic elite, Jains argue that the soul has always been impure. Moreover, Jaini states that impurity is the condition that causes the soul to enter the cycle of rebirths in different states of embodiment. These existences are characterized by desire, which leads to action, and in turn, attracts karmic matter (Jaini, 1979, p. 107). Additionally, according to Walther Schubring (1978, pp. 172-173), the teachings on karma are closely linked to another fundamental aspect of jīva: the wandering of souls, a world law (*loga-tthiī*) among other world laws, which is exclusively caused by the accumulation of karma and which is also the primary cause for the existence of the world's structure For the relationship between *jīva* and karma and their respective states, see the fivefold division identified by Helmuth von Glasenapp (1998, pp. 40-41); and for the concept of 'world' (*loka*) in Jainism, as well as a comparison of Jain cosmography with Manichaean cosmography, see Paul Dundas (2002, pp. 90-93).

vigilance (*appamādam*) and right attention (*sammā-manasikāram*), reached *(phusati*) such (*tathārupaṃ*) an undisturbed mental concentration (*ceto-samādhiṃ*) that he was able to remember (*anussarati*) countless past existences (*aneka-vihitaṃ pubbe nivāsaṃ*) (*Brahmajāla Sutta*, DN, 1.31; Rhys Davids & Estlin Carpenter. 1890, p. 13). The process of cosmic development and dissolution (*saṃvaṭṭa*-vivaṭṭaṃ) follows the same procedure (*Brahmajāla Sutta*, DN, 1.32-33; Rhys Davids & Estlin Carpenter. 1890, pp. 14-15)

The Bhayabherava Sutta in the Majjhima Nikāya further clarifies the search for a middle path between eternalist and annihilationist perspectives, which was translated by Bikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bikkhu Bodhi (1995, p.p. 104-105) as follows:

> 23. "Quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, I entered upon and abided in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion. 24. With the stilling of Applied and sustained thought, I entered upon and abided in the second jhana, which has self-confidence and singleness of mind [22] without applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of concentration. 25. With the fading away as well of rapture, I abided in equanimity, and mindful and fully aware, still feeling pleasure with the body, I entered upon and abided in the third jhana, on account of which noble ones announce: 'He has a pleasant abiding, who has equanimity and is mindful'. 26. With the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous disappearance of joy and grief, I entered upon and abided in the fourth jhana, which has neither-pain-nor-pleasure and purity of mindfulness due to equanimity. 27 When my concentrated mind was thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, I directed it to knowledge of the recollection of past lives".

This latter part is reminiscent of the *Brahmajāla Sutta* in which the Buddha criticizes the eternalists and the annihilationists. The parallel is important because it shows that the Buddha was not criticizing the memory of past lives[130] achieved through higher mental states, such as that which the Buddha achieved in the fourth *jhāna*. The conclusion of the Bhayabherava sutta supports this interpretation. Buddha then identifies

[130] Bhikkhu Anālayo highlights that, according to early Buddhist discourses, residual memories can be carried from one existence to the next, although they cannot be recalled in the normal waking state. However, it is possible to recall them during deep states of concentration and mindfulness (Anālayo, 2018, p. 18). Obeyesekere notes that skepticism about past life memories was linked to Buddhist controversies. In the earlier Buddhist tradition, however, here were many discussions about the discovery of past lives, contrary to the belief that only Buddhas and Arahants were capable of remembering them (Obeyesekere, 2002, p. 161).

three types of knowledge: knowledge of his past lives, knowledge of the destiny of living beings, and soteriological knowledge of liberation from the cycle of rebirths.

An important aspect of Mahāyāna Buddhism, with significant cosmological and soteriological implications for later developments in the Buddhist tradition, is the focus on the ideas presented in the Prajñāpāramitā literature. Conze highlights the introduction of new terminology, such as bodhisattva and mahāsattva, in the development of Prajñāpāramitā thought, whereby the emerging Mahāyāna movement proclaimed their adherence to a new type of holy man, distinct from the 'Arhats' of the preceding era. In this context, Conze contends that the term prajñā, which was relatively inconspicuous in the ancient formula of the eightfold path, assumed a central role in the post-Aśokan Buddhist orthodoxy as the main virtue (Conze, 1967b, p. 124).

The Mahāyāna tradition, particularly in Prajñāpāramitā literature, places greater emphasis on wisdom. However, as Williams points out, it is important to exercise caution when interpreting the meaning of the term prajñā in Buddhist texts. According to Williams, prajñā is a mental event or state of consciousness that typically results from analysis, particularly in the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist context. Furthermore, upon examining the Abhidharmasamuccaya, Williams notes the existence of an ultimate prajñā (*paramārtha*), which is the result of an investigation into the way things actually are (Williams, 1989, p. 42).

Moreover, according to Paul Williams (1989, p. 51), the Perfection of Wisdom addresses more than just the Bodhisattva's spiritual development. It also encompasses practices aimed at fostering psychic and worldly abilities that can aid sentient beings in material and spiritual ways. As an act of compassion, the Bodhisattva may even visit hells to rescue suffering beings. Furthermore, the compassion of the bodhisattva has played a significant role in the dissemination of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Consequently, as the Mahāyāna tradition evolved, the concept of skillful means emerged as a tactic to incorporate external non-Buddhist ideas (Williams, 1989, p. 51).

Following the discussion of soteriological knowledge in Buddhism, including subsequent developments in Mahāyāna Buddhism, the bodhisattva idea, and the concept of *prajñā*, which all influenced Manichaean literature in Iranian languages, a brief recapitulation of the concept of gnosis in Manichaeism is necessary. The concept of gnosis in Buddhism has been primarily studied through the works of Edward Conze and

subsequent studies by Klimkeit. These studies have been influenced by the debates surrounding the work of Hans Jonas.

Edward Conze (1967a) utilized Jonas's work in his comparative study as an accessible introduction to the study of Gnosticism, since Conze's participation in the Congress of Messina was aimed at both Gnosticism researchers and Buddhologists. However, Conze criticized Jonas's phenomenology, particularly his comparisons between modern nihilism and the so-called alienation felt by the Gnostics. Conze argues that comparing the Gnostic worldview to nihilism is unreasonable because they are opposite, since it is accompanied by an optimistic hope in the possibility of salvation (Conze, 1967a, p. 666)

Conze compared the concept of gnosis to its Indian correlates, such as *jñāna*[131] and *prajñā*, considering it as salvific knowledge in itself. This comparison was made especially with Gnosticism and, to a lesser extent, with Manichaean literature. For Conze, the common worldview linked to the soteriological use of gnosis was responsible for the similarities between Gnosticism and Mahāyāna Buddhism. Throughout this thesis, it has been emphasized that the concept of gnosis in Manichaeism unifies a visionary and mystical aspect with a ritualistic and practical one. However, it is important to note that gnosis cannot be understood purely as salvific knowledge in the abstract, as this knowledge only makes sense from a specific cosmological conception.

Therefore, it is important to consider some comments on Jonas' work, which Conze discussed. Hans Jonas' *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*, followed by a synthesis and translation into English titled *'The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*', was a milestone in Gnostic studies. It studied Gnosticism from a philosophical perspective, relating it to the intellectual and cultural context of Late Antiquity. However, Jonas did not succeed in breaking away from some of the commonplaces of the Gnostic phenomenon. Despite his intention to present the philosophical dimension of Gnosticism by studying it on its own terms, Jonas ended up perpetuating certain heresiological stereotypes, albeit in a new form, now under the guise of an 'existential phenomenology' (cf. King, 2003, p. 123).

[131] For a philological and philosophical analysis of the term jñāna, refer to Wayman (1955). For a comparative study between the concept of jñāna and gnosis and its relevance to indology, see Bailey (2019).

Hans Jonas viewed the Manichaean myth as a variation of the supposed standard myth of Gnosticism. According to Jonas, Mani developed his version of the Gnostic myth of cosmic exile and its respective salvation through original speculation (Jonas, 2001, p. 208). Jonas' description of the Manichaean cosmological system, which depicts battles between Light and Darkness, was based on Theodore bar Konai's account "supplemented by whatever pieces of material from parallel texts fit into a particular passage and contribute to the fuller presentation of the idea treated" (Jonas, 1991, pp. 209-210). Manichaeism was considered to be the universalization of Gnosticism and Mani's gnosis was accordingly regarded as salvific knowledge in itself. (Jonas, 1991, pp. 206-208)

According to Nicola Denzey Lewis, Jonas characterized Gnosticism in a scholarly context of seeking answers for the supposed 'spiritual malaise' of Late Antiquity. Jonas believed that the pessimistic worldview that defined Gnosticism was the psychological reflection of 'material hardship' (Denzey Lewis, 2013, p. 14). Additionally, Jonas defined Gnosticism as an anti-cosmic religion (the so-called Gnostic acosmism), which deliberately opposed the Greek vision of cosmic harmony (Jonas, 2001, pp. 250-252). In sum:

> In Jonas's view, however, the development of 'gnostic cosmic pessimism' had perverted the providential relationship that, according to Stoicism, the divine could share with the human. In gnosticism as he understood it, "the cosmic logos of the Stoics," he wrote, was "replaced by heimarmene, oppressive cosmic fate." Jonas believed that the gnostics, like the Stoics, had borrowed their concept of *heimarmene* from astrology. But unlike its Stoic prototype, gnostic *heimarmene* became "tinged with the gnostic anti-cosmic spirit. "Far from the practical action of *harmonia* on the terrestrial plane, gnostic *heimarmene* aimed "at the enslavement of man." The pessimism inherent in gnosticism, Jonas maintained, ensured that pronoia had been completely abandoned as a positive concept; the starry sky's rule is "tyranny, not providence." (Denzey Lewis, 2013, pp. 29-30).

This perspective is not limited to cosmology, for Jonas' interpretation reinforces stereotypical Gnostic anthropology, as he applies his 'existential' hermeneutics to pre-Nag Hammadi material that is essentially heresiological. As Lanzillotta observes, anti-heretical polemicists' biased accounts have reconstructed Gnostic anthropology, resulting in a distorted interpretation. This has resulted in a distorted interpretation of Gnostic

anthropology, which suggests that there are only three classes of human beings: pneumatikoi, psychikoi, and hylikoi, without any possibility of alteration for better or worse (Roig Lanzillotta, 2013, p. 72).

Moreover, Jonas' approach results in an opposition between gnosis and ritual praxis, insofar as a salvific knowledge in itself excludes any practical means of soteriological realization. However, BeDuhn (2000) has demonstrated that Manichaean gnosis has a practical and ritualistic dimension, and therefore cannot be considered an instrument of salvation in itself. Gnosis pertains to the practical means of achieving salvation, specifically the ritual apparatus and the relationship between the Elect and the auditors in the process of releasing the particles of Light that were, according to the Manichaean cosmogonic myth, imprisoned in matter.

Now, recapitulating the examination of the concept of gnosis made in the first part of this thesis, three uses of gnosis are discerned. Firstly, an apocalyptic and prophetic sense that reveals the origin of the body. Secondly, a practical and ritual sense that reveals the soteriological function in the separation between Light and Darkness. The Manichaeans also refer to a third meaning of gnosis/sophia as a missionary activity, which aims to preach the truth of gnosis, a combination of the first two functions. CMC 16 reveals the apocalyptic and prophetic dimension through the body Nous, which opens the door for those who are trapped and grants them a blessed life by revealing the truth of gnosis (ιδίας γνώσεως τὴν ἀλήθειαν, ἐν αὐτωι δὲ ἀναπετάσηι τὴν θύραν τοῖς καθειργμένοις καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ μὲν ὀρέξῃ τὴν εὐζωίαν ἐκείνοις). The context of controversies between Mani and his former Elchasaite co-religionists, a group of Baptist Christians active in the Mesopotamian region, helps to understand this blessed life as described in CMC 13. That is, the practical dimension, in which the body is considered the epicenter of ritual activity. While the missionary dimension is highlighted in the CMC, which speaks of the importance of transmitting the truth of Gnosis among different religions and communities (δι' ἐμοῦ ἔκδηλον καταστήσηι τὴν τῆς ἰδίας γνώσεος ἀλήθειαν τῶν δογμάτων ἐν μέσῳ καὶ τῶν γενῶν; CMC, 109, 1-23; Cirillo, cf. Gnoli, 2003)

Hence, it is essential to reassess the notion of gnosis/jñāna in light of Jonas' thesis criticisms. The concept of a soteriology based on salvific knowledge brings Manichaeism and Buddhism closer together from a phenomenological perspective. This is evident from the historical interactions between the two religions, which focused on perspectives

regarding a final soteriological release. However, while Conze criticizes Jonas' interpretation of 'nihilistic acosmism', he fails to acknowledge the importance of ritual praxis in such soteriological conceptions – for soteriological knowledge is considered salvific knowledge in relation to a particular understanding of the cosmos.

In summary, the mere existence of *gnosis, jñāna, prajñā*, and similar terms is insufficient to eliminate the distinctions between Manichaeism and Buddhism. Even their similarity necessitates, as previously stated, a convergence in cosmological beliefs. As I shall indicate in the following and last section, the Manichaeans' use of the concept of *nirvāṇa* contributed to the adaptation of Manichaeism to Buddhist cosmology, so that at first glance some texts express Manichaean soteriology in a way that is virtually indistinguishable from Buddhist soteriology. However, a detailed examination reveals that the content of the soteriology remained the same: the liberation of the particles of Light. The eidetic character of Manichaeism was influenced by cosmology, Iranian concepts, and an aesthetic of light that suited the expression of the Manichaean visionary character. Unlike in the Platonic-Christian milieu, there was a soteriological knowledge that could be expressed in Buddhist terms without losing its particularities.

4.4. Parinirvāṇa: From Buddhist soteriology to the ascent to the Manichaean Realm of Light

The concept of Nirvāṇa is central to the Buddha's dhamma and is linked to the analyses contained in the Four Noble Truths. Louis de la Vallée Poussin (1917, p. 110), for example, has asserted that Nirvāṇa is the central teaching of Buddha Śākyamuni and the raison d'être of religious life; however, there is much confusion about its meaning. The *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (DN) explains the connection between Buddhist soteriology and the Four Noble Truths. By doing so, it allows for the observation of Buddhist soteriology guidelines from the Nikāyas to Mahāyāna Buddhism, which had a significant influence on Manichaeism.

It is stated in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* that failure to realize and comprehend (i.e. not-realizing, *ananubodhā*, and not- comprehending, *appaṭivedhā*) the Four Noble Truths[132] (*ariya-saccānaṃ*) results in an unceasing cycle of existence (*sandhāvitaṃ*) in

[132] i.e., the noble truth of suffering (*dukkhassa* [...] *ariya-saccassa*), of the origin of suffering (*dukkha-samudayassa*), of the cessation of suffering (*dukkha-nirodhassa*) and of the path leading to the cessation of suffering (*dukkha-nirodha-gāminiyā paṭipadāya*) (cf. *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, DN, 16, 2.2.). Although

saṃsāra (*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, DN, 16, 2.2.; Rhys Davids, Carpenter, 1903, p. 90). Furthermore, the Buddha tells Ananda that he will teach him a discourse on the dhamma whose name is "Mirror of the Dhamma"(*Tasmāt ih Ānanda Dhammādāsaṃ nāma dhamma-pariyāyaṃ desessāmi*). By knowing (i.e., having it, possessing it, *samannāgato*) this discourse, the *Dhammādāsa*, the noble disciple (*ariyasāvako*) can attain a state where all sorts of woes and misfortunes, including hell (*niraya*), the animal realm (*tiracchāna-yoni*) and the ghost realm (*pettivisaya*), are abolished. Following that, one is bound to enlightenment (*niyato sambodhi-parāyaṇo) (khīṇa-nirayo 'mhi khīṇa-tiracchāna-yoniyo khīṇa-petti-visayo khīṇāpāya-duggati-vinipāto, sotāpanno 'ham asmi avinipāta-dhammo niyato sambodhi-parāyaṇo" ti*) (Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, DN, 16, 2.8; Rhys Davids, Carpenter, 1903, p. 93)

Moreover, by means of the *Dhammādāsa*, the noble disciple has a perfect faith (*aveccappasādena*, cf. Rhys Davids & Stede, *Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*, 1921, pp. 85-86) in the Buddha, being a Arahant, a fully enlightened Buddha (*sammā-sambuddho*), accomplished in wisdom and virtuous conduct (*vijjā-caraṇa-sampanno*) – a Well-gone (*Sugato*), Knower of the Worlds (*loka-vidū*), the Unsurpassed Leader of men to be tamed (*anuttaro purisa-damma-sārathi*), Teacher of Gods and Men (*satthā deva-manussānaṃ*), Enlightened (*Buddho*) and Blessed (*Bhagavā*) (*Idh' Ānanda ariya-sāvako Buddhe aveccappasādena samannāgato hoti: Iti pi so Bhagavā arahaṃ sammā-sambuddho vijjā-caraṇa-sampanno sugato loka-vidū anuttaro purisa-damma-sārathi satthā deva-manussānaṃ Buddho Bhagavā " ti*) (*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, DN, 16, 2.9; Rhys Davids, Carpenter, 1903, p. 93).

Regarding the meaning of Nirvāṇa and its philosophical and religious context, it is important to consider several factors. Rupert Gethin argues that although Nirvāṇa is a complex concept, there are clear aspects of it within traditional Buddhist understanding. Gethin argues that the concept of Nirvāṇa is often misunderstood due to the lack of distinction between its various uses in Buddhist literature. Specifically, Nirvāṇa can refer to: 1) a particular event, which occurs at the moment of awakening; 2) the content of an experience, which is what the mind knows at the moment of awakening; and 3) the state or condition enjoyed by the Buddhas and arhats after death (Gethin, 1998, p. 75).

'suffering' is the standard translation for 'dukkha', it is more accurately understood as 'unsatisfactoriness' (see Collins, 2010, p. 34)

Scholars have indicated that Nirvāṇa can be translated as "cooling" and "blowing out, extinguishing," since it comes from the Sanskrit verb root *vā*, meaning "to blow," and the prefix *nir*, denoting the basic concept of "ceasing to burn" or "going out" (cf. de la Vallée Poussin, 1917, p. 113; Gethin, 1998, p. 75; Gombrich, 2009, p. 112). From a philosophical and spiritual perspective, an arhat is considered 'tranquilized' (*śītībhūta*). This is expressed through the metaphoric meaning of *śītībhūta* (a word frequently used with the adjective *parinibbuta*, meaning 'completely calmed, at peace, at rest', for this term is applied to the Buddha and Arahants who have destroyed the seeds of future existence; see Rhys Davids & Stede, *Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*, 1921, p. 51), which means 'become cold' and 'cooled', implying the extinction of desires and passions. It also refers to the state of an Arahant after his death (cf. de la Vallée Poussin, 1917, p. 113; Gethin, 1998, p. 75).

For the aforementioned reasons, Gethin notes that the Buddhist commentaries use a play on words to explain the concept as 'absence of desire', which is lost in English translation. As a result, Gethin contends that English translations of Buddhist texts often use phrases such as 'he or she attains *nirvāṇa/parinirvāṇa'*, while the Pali or Sanskrit original uses the verbal form, i.e., he or she nirvāṇa-s", "he or she parinirvāṇa, or, most frequently, *parinibbāyati* (Gethin, 1998, p. 75). Furthermore, given the fire symbolism associated with the ‘fires’ of desire, Richard Gombrich argues that the three fires mentioned elsewhere in the *Fire Sermon* must be understood in the context of Vedic culture, for “[t]he brahmin householder had the duty to keep alight a set of three fires, which he tended daily. The Buddha thus took these fires to symbolize life in the world, life as a family man. This is not a hypothesis of recent scholarship: it is stated clearly enough in a sutta in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* (IV, 41-6)” (Gombrich, 2009, p. 112).

Regarding scholarly research, the term Nirvāṇa has been a subject of difficulty, as noted in Louis de la Vallée Poussin's lectures on Nirvāṇa. After discussing outdated clichés regarding Indian philosophical terminology and contrasting it with “European thought”, De la Vallée Poussin (1917, p. 111) proposes a 'Buddhist dialectic' where the term Nirvāṇa can represent a set of opposing pairs and apparent 'contradictions', as per the terminology of a formal apophatic language. It can be existence, non-existence, both existence and non-existence, or neither existence nor non-existence. De la Vallée Poussin's definition is flawed because it implies the notion of independent existence – a

proposition that has been denied by the Buddha –, which would lead to the type of reasoning he describes.

Y. Karunadasa conducted a study on early Buddhist thought, providing a thorough analysis of the Pali corpus. The study dispelled numerous misconceptions about the earliest Buddhist tradition. According to Karunadasa (2018, p. 123), current research on the Buddhist teachings of *nibbāna* has mainly focused on the post-mortem status of the arahant, the one who has realized *nibbāna*. Thus, the following questions are addressed: Does the post-mortem status of the arahant involve complete physical annihilation or a metaphysical existential continuum? According to Karunadasa, these questions are irrelevant because they do not consider the Buddhist stance on the binary opposition between spiritual eternalism and materialist annihilationism (Karunadasa, 2018, pp. 145-150).

Asanga Tilakaratne discusses in his analysis of Theravāda Buddhism that there is a common misunderstanding regarding the status of a person after *nibbāna* (i.e. that the person who realized *nibbāna* was extinguished after death) which was already present in the Indian philosophical tradition. As a result, Buddhism was classified as one of the "annihilationist systems", which denied the existence of the soul, as opposed to the "affirmative systems" that affirmed it (Tilakaratne, 2012, p. 43). Tilakaratne, like Karunadasa, highlights a fundamental aspect of the Buddhist tradition: the Buddha did not teach the annihilation of the individual because he did not acknowledge the reality of his independent existence (Tilakaratne, 2012, p. 44).

Furthermore, comments on the metaphysics of time in Indian philosophical schools can shed light on Buddhist soteriology. This is because they allow a discussion of the relationship between cosmology and karma. Additionally, the metaphysics of time was crucial to Manichaean soteriology, which represents the culmination of the eschatological process. The origins of the cyclical theory of time and karma are subjects of debate. Johannes Bronkhorst (2011, p. 8) argues that it was an ascetic prerogative that later spread to Brahmanism and Hinduism. In Vedic culture, the myth of the four ages underlies the theory of time. Wendy Doniger (1980b, p. 18) notes the difficulty of dating it but emphasizes that there is a foreshadowing of such a myth as early as the Brāhmaṇas. Furthermore, there are similarities among Indian, Iranian, and Greek conceptions of time

cycles. Therefore, the myths may represent parallel syntheses of various elements from the three aforementioned cultures and Mesopotamia (Doniger, 1980b, p. 18).

The Vedic tradition had an explanation for theodicy-type suffering prior to the ethicization of karma: "[t]he concept of the sinful deity, which explains the origin of evil as a result of the malevolence of gods toward men, definitely predates the doctrine of karma and continues to prevail despite karma" (Doniger, 1980b, p. 16). It seems clear that karmic redistribution was more relevant to Buddhist soteriology than Vedic, at least in Early Buddhism. Furthermore, David J. Kalupahana notes in Early Buddhism that the Buddhist theory of time is guided by the recognition that everything is impermanent (*anicca*), conditioned (*saṅkhata*), and causally produced (*paṭiccasamuppanna*), which is linked to the denial of an immutable, eternal entity (*dhuva, sassata*) and permanence (*nicca*). These teachings are well illustrated in the suttas analyzed throughout this chapter.

Steven Collins emphasizes the significance of the connection between karma and *saṃkhāra* in Buddhist soteriology from a philological and theoretical perspective. Collins notices that the root *kṛ*, meaning doing, is the basis of karma, and the forms of saṃ-s-kṛ provide the standard terminology for the sequence of rebirths resulting from the process of conditioning brought about by action and its inevitable consequences. Finally, Collins acknowledges that the term *saṃkhāra* is challenging to translate. It can refer to a conditioning factor, thing, or event, a mental formation, or an inherited force or construction (Collins, 2010, p. 32).

Additionally, the concept of *nirvāṇa* must be understood in the context of the Bodhisattva ideal, which, according to Conze, can be attributed to their vow of avoiding absorption in nirvṛti, i.e., the nirvāṇā that excludes worldly suffering. This prevents the Bodhisattva from distancing themselves from the skandhas[133], the basis of suffering, consequently enabling them to fulfill their pledge of freeing all sentient beings (Conze, 1967b, p. 126). "Skill in means" poses both cosmological and soteriological challenges. Conze (1967b, p. 133) posits the following question: how can the Bodhisattva maintain

[133] The Pāli Canon lists the five skandhas as: rūpa (form), vedanā (feelings), saññā (perception), saṅkhāra (mental activity, formation; Conze translates it as "impulse"), viññāṇa (consciousness). Not only are they significant for Buddhist cosmology, which explains the emergence of the world (loka), but also for psychology. It is crucial to acknowledge that these five skandhas (also known as aggregates; Pāli: pañcakkhanda) are responsible for the erroneous perception regarding the self. David Kalupahana (1987, p. 17; and for a thorough analysis of all aggregates, pp. 17-21) emphasizes the five grasping aggregates (upādānakkhandha), which are the aggregates that one clings to as their personality.

contact with the diluted world without losing their gnostic insight? This question essentially explores how the Bodhisattva can remain in contact with the world as it falsely presents itself, while simultaneously saving the essentially illusory beings they have promised, without losing the insight that freed them from that same world. However, there are alternative solutions to the dilemma presented by Conze. For instance, Paul Williams highlights the various interpretations of *nirvāṇa* within the Mahāyāna tradition:

> In fact it should be clear that to speak of nirvāṇa in a Mahāyāna context is naïve. There are a number of different types of nirvāṇa – nirvāṇa of the Arhat, of the Pratyekabuddha, the supreme and compassionate 'non abiding' nirvāṇa of the Buddha, for example, not to mention the separate issue of whether a Buddha ever finally 'goes beyond' beings and enters some kind of final nirvāṇa. Generally, the Mahāyāna Bodhisattva does not postpone or turn back from nirvāṇa. Rather he or she rejects the nirvāṇas of the Arhat and Pratyekabuddhas, at least as final goals, and aims for the full nirvāṇa of the Buddha (Williams, 1989, p. 53)

In any case, it is noteworthy that Prajñāpāramitā literature establishes a relationship between wisdom and soteriology. The literature suggests that even the gods can be released through the words of the Buddha, similar to the way the Manichaeans would later treat the connection between soteriology and nirvāṇa. For instance, one reads in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra (XIII, 4, 283), which was translated by Conze (1994, pp. 182-183)

> If, O Lord, all the beings in this great trichiliocosm should, for an aeon or the remainder of an aeon, course on the stage of a Faith-follower; and if, on the other hand, someone should, for one day only, find pleasure in the patient acceptance of this deep perfection of wisdom, and should search for it, reflect on it, weight it up, investigate it and meditate on it, then this latter will be better than all those beings.
>
> The Lord: if someone would hear, O Gods, this deep perfection of wisdom, etc., then one would expect his Nirvana to take place more quickly than that of those who course on the stage of a faith-follower for an aeon, or for the remainder of an aeon.
>
> The Gods: […] and the Gods of the realm of sense-desire departed for the world of sense-desire, and the Gods of the realm of form departed for the

> Brahma world. (Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra; Conze, 1994, XIII, 4, 283, pp. 182-183)

Finally, in regards to the analysis of karma and the conditioning factors relates to the aforementioned teachings of the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, which discuss how *nibbāna* is connected to the cessation of the cycle of rebirths and, consequently, the end of *dukkha*. Karunadasa (2018) stresses that to understand *nibbāna* properly, it must be viewed within the framework of the Four Noble Truths, which are presented in a logical sequence, with *nibbāna* being the third noble truth that follows the first two. Moreover, Karunadasa contends that if there is suffering and a cause for suffering, it logically follows that the cause of suffering can be eliminated, leading to the cessation of suffering, which is *nibbāna* (Karunadasa, 2018, p. 123).

Accordingly, the cosmos is perceived through karmic distribution, with inherent dukkha and an incessant cycle of rebirth. Turkish Manichaean literature suggests that Manichaeans also observed this fact, which Karunadasa (2018, p. 155) defended in his academic research. Buddhist cosmology, specifically its notion of the world (*loka*), is related to *saṃsāra*. Therefore, by examining the pair of concepts *saṃsāra*/*parinirvāṇa*, it is possible to observe a shift in Manichaean literature. At first glance, Turkish Manichaean literature appears to express Mani's cosmology and soteriology in a manner that closely resembles Buddhism.

The Parthian text M 104 contains a Buddhist interpretation of the events of Christ's passion, stating that Jesus entered the Parinirvāṇa. This hymn is part of the Crucifixion Hymns. Klimkeit suggests that the renowned Manichaean Parinirvāṇa Hymns were likely based on the pattern found in hymns such as M 104. Klimkeit also notes that both the crucifixion of Jesus and the death of Mani were interpreted as a parinirvāṇa. However, in this context, the Buddhist concept has a Manichaean meaning of entry into the dimension of Light (Klimkeit, 1993, p. 71).

In fact, the Parthian Parinirvāṇa Hymns have a Manichaean content, despite their Buddhist name. However, upon comparing the parables in Parthian, texts M 333 and M 334ª, one can observe a teaching that closely aligns with the concept of karma in Buddhist literature, albeit the absence of any explicit mention of this concept. M 333 exhorts faithful Manichaeans to 'first (*naxwišt*) pay the debts (*pār*) that you owe in this land

(*šahr*).' Afterwards, free individuals confidently (*wistāf*) go to the Watch-post (*pahrag*), where the evildoer (*bazakkar*) is unable to harm them. Finally, the importance of understanding the logic behind the cycle of rebirths (*zādmurd*[134]) is emphasized (and so know (*zānēd*) this (cycle of) rebirths; cf. Klimkeit, 1993, p. 185; Colditz, 1987, p. 291).

Klimkeit explains that the debts referred to in the text are the 'tributes' one must pay to Ahriman to be reborn in this cycle of births, where the soul is always subject to matter (Klimkeit, 1993, p. 185). The doctrine of the cycle of rebirths is similar to what is known from Augustine's testimony (*Contra Faustum*, V, 10). It is noteworthy that the karmic conception is situated in a dualistic cosmology, as expressed by Ahriman's opposition to the Manichaean kingdom of Light. This handling of religious doctrines from Iran and India is significant since it corroborates the influence of Iranian culture in the interactions of Manichaeans and Buddhists. Moreover, another Parthian parable (M 334ª) emphasizes the teaching of Buddhism regarding the inherent dukkha in this world, such as old age (*zarwān*), harm[135], and sickness (*yōbahr*). It also states that those who hear the word of Mani, believe, accept, and maintain their religion will go to a realm where Ahriman has no power – the Paradise, where there is Nirvāṇa (*niβrān*) and peace (*angōn*) (cf. Klimkeit, 1993, p. 186; Colditz, 1987, p. 294).

As one moves from the Parthian Manichaean texts to the Turkish Manichaean literature, one notices that Buddhist cosmology seems to gain prominence in such a way that, at first glance, it seems to surpass Manichaean cosmology. In the Manichaean Turkic *Pothi*-Book, which has been edited and translated by Larry Clark and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, Mani is regard, as elsewhere in Iranian Manichaean texts, as a Buddha[136]. It also discusses the aforementioned relationship between wisdom and soteriology, stating that Mani, detached from ignorance and imbued with wisdom, made bound for Parinirvāṇa *(Pothi-Book*, D 260, 49; Clark, 1982, p. 182). Also, the text suggests that

[134] <z'dmwrd>, "transmigration of souls", cf. Desmond Durkin-Meisterernst, Dictionary of Manichaean Middle Persian and Parthian, 2004 p. 379; or "Geburten-Tod", cf. Colditz, 1987, p. 312. In view of its Buddhist connotation, I follow Klimkeit (1993, p. 185) who translates it as "cycle of rebirths".

[135] The text is fragmentary, with Klimkeit (1993, p. 186) and Colditz (1987, p. 294) providing the word 'harm' (Schaden)

[136] Clark translates 'burxan' as 'prophet' and therefore renders 'Mani burxanim' as 'my prophet Mani', whereas Klimkeit translates it as 'my Buddha Mani', mainly because the word 'burxan', in certain contexts, has a Buddhist meaning (e. g. Buddhahood, 'burxan qutï', Klimkeit, 1993, p. 279; for 'burxan' as Buddha, see also Marcel Erdal's 'A Grammar of Old Turkic', 2004, p. 364).

people who were previously suffering were able to see the Buddhalike Sun-God[137] (*burxanliγ kün tngrig körkel[i.]).*

The most significant passage, however, pertains to the use of saṃsāra to express Manichaean cosmology in a Buddhist fashion. According to the text, individuals were rescued from this saṃsāra (*sansar*, e.g., *bo sansartin qutrulti*, cf. Clark, 1982, p. 169) and Mani preached the true doctrine to those who were clinging (*ilinmiške*) to temporary (*ertimlig*) pleasures (*mengike*), and guided them across (*kečürtüngüz*) the sea of suffering (*emkeklig taluytin*) *(Pothi-Book*, D 260, 50-51; Clark, 1982, p. 182). By doing so, the 'Buddha' Mani carry them (*ilttingiz*) closer (*yaqin*) to good nirvāṇa, showing (*körkittingiz*) the way (*yoluγ*) to the Realm (*ulušinga*) of Buddhas[138] for "[Mani] raised (*turqurtunguz*) a Mount Sumeru of merit (buyanliγ = Skt. puṇya, cf. Clark, 1982, p. 212)" (*Pothi-Book*, D 260, 52-54; Clark, 1982, p. 182).

Therefore, The Turkic text demonstrates the Manichaean use of Buddhist solteriology, i.e. parinirvāṇa, within a saṃsāra cosmology. However, the mention of the Gospel of Mani suggests that even in the peak of Manichaean 'Buddhism', soteriology's ultimate goal was still viewed dualistically as the purification of Light and entry into the Light Dimension. Central Asian Buddhism, along with a broader Iranian context, provided fertile ground for the fortunes of Manichaeism due to its penchant for the symbolism and aesthetics of light, as well as a cosmology expressed in terms of light that was especially useful for the expression of visionary experiences. This allowed for ample scope not only for the expression of the doctrine as it existed in the Near East but also for further modifications and developments.

Manichaeism did not become a form of Buddhism, as its primary focus on ritual praxis for the refinement and liberation of the Light remained central to its soteriological concerns. While the concept of gnosis, or a 'gnostic worldview' as a special knowledge of a soteriological nature, is a fundamental element in the connection between Manichaeism and Buddhism, as Edward Conze and Klimkeit have stressed, I believe that soteriological knowledge cannot exist in isolation as an abstraction but must be linked to a specific

[137] I follow Klimkeit (1993, p. 281), who translates burxanliγ as Buddhalike, instead of Sun (kün) God (tngrig) of Prophets as Clark (1982, p. 182) has rendered it.

[138] For "Realm of Buddhas" instead of "country of the Prophets" (Clark, 1982, p. 182), see Klimkeit (1993, p. 281

cosmology. This is why the content of such gnosis differs between Manichaeism and Buddhism. Nevertheless, this chapter's examination of cosmology, gnostic-type knowledge, and soteriology reveals significant cultural and religious differences that enabled the Eastern Manichaean community to more effectively express the visionary nature of its doctrine in contrast to its reception by Platonists and Christians.

Conclusion

In this thesis, it has been demonstrated that Manichaean gnosis has both visionary and practical dimensions, which are reflected in the ritual praxis aimed at liberating the particles of Light. To achieve this goal, I sought to tie in with the studies of John Reeves (1994) and Jason BeDuhn (2000), insofar as another Manichaean ritual practice, of a "theurgic" nature, to borrow Iamblichus' terminology, sheds light on the concept of Manichaean gnosis and its consequences in Mani's "metabolic soteriology," so to speak. Regarding the visionary nature of Manichaeism as a system, which is expressed through imagery, it is important to note that Mani was not only a prophet but also an artist. Additionally, analyzing the concept of gnosis provided insight into a hermeneutic approach for interpreting the history of Manichaeism. This approach is based on visionary experiences and their representation in literature, utilizing conventions, tropes, and rhetorical means. Therefore, the multifaceted nature of Manichaean gnosis, combined with Mani's cosmological and eschatological speculations, inspired me to study the relationship between Manichaeism and other religions based on cosmogonic and soteriological notions. This includes their practical consequences, such as asceticism.

Thus, I explored cosmological issues and a dispute of visionary hermeneutics, along with Mani's conflict with Kerdīr. In the study of Zurvān and astrology, I focused on the eschatological and soteriological counterpart. Regarding Jainism and the Ājīvikas, I examined the relationship between a Manichaean ontology of the particles of light and its counterpart in ascetic strategies. In relation to Buddhism, I drew a correlation with the Christology studied in the first chapter in order to demonstrate the symmetry in the Manichaean doctrine, particularly in its so-called prophetology. For the Manichaeans, it was essential to create a polyvalent figure of Mani as a continuation of Jesus and the Buddha. This was particularly necessary for missionary purposes, since Mani himself was considered a Buddha.

However, I have not addressed the relationship between Gnosticism and Manichaeism as this issue is heavily dependent on the definition of 'Gnosticism', particularly in light of recent research and the controversies surrounding this concept[139].

[139] Michael Williams (1996) and Karen King (2003) have criticized the modern categorization of 'Gnosticism' for reflecting primarily heresiological polemics. However, I agree with David Brakke (2010) and Einar Thomassen (2021) that there was a historical movement that identified itself as Gnostic. However, this movement was not a broadly a-historical or 'Universal' gnosis, as some have argued.

In any case, it is clear that Manichaeism cannot be considered as 'universal Gnosticism', as implied in this thesis.

In scholarly research, a gnostic religion is commonly defined as one in which special knowledge of a salvific nature plays a soteriological role. This definition implies that such a religion is necessarily 'pessimistic' and 'anti-cosmic'. However, this typology poses problems for the historical study of Gnosticism and Early Christianity. Additionally, understanding gnosis in this way renders ritual praxis useless. However, Manichaean gnosis is a technical knowledge of the best ritual action to liberate the particles of light. This view is defended primarily by BeDuhn (2000). Following Daniel Merkur's (1993) definition, gnosis is a technical term typically associated with visionary experiences. Thus, instead of speculating about an 'Ur-Gnosis', I conducted a comparative historical study on how the Manichaean definition of gnosis influences its religious discourse, particularly in its interaction with other religions and philosophies of Late Antiquity.

I agree with the research conducted by David Brakke (2010) and Einar Thomassen (2021) regarding the existence of a historically identifiable Gnostic school. However, the concept of 'Gnosticism' as it was traditionally understood cannot be sustained in such a comprehensive way, as recent criticism (e.g. Williams, 1996; King, 2003) has shown. Therefore, Brakke sought a middle ground, as 'Gnosticism' does not precisely identify an actual ancient religion. There was a Gnostic school whose literary remnants can be identified, described, and studied (Brakke, 2010, pp. ix-x). Brakke also notes that the term gnōstikos had a positive meaning in antiquity and continued to do so even after the attacks of Irenaeus and other heresiologists. Therefore, it is unlikely that Irenaeus introduced the term, which was already in use in Christian circles (Brakke, 2010, p. 30).

Brakke argues that the ancient identification of the Gnostics as a school of thought, suggests that they shared certain doctrines and defended them against the doctrines of other schools (Brakke, 2010, p. 45). Then, according to Brakke, Irenaeus uses the term Gnostic in a precise sense to refer to a group of Christians, which provides evidence for the existence of an ancient school of thought whose adherents called themselves Gnostics (Brakke, 2010, p. 49). Moreover, Einar Thomassen's (2021) observation regarding the differing perspectives on the concept of gnosis might be further related to its distinct usage in two areas of philosophy and religion: the Gnostic schools in Late Antiquity and

the academic study of Western esotericism. The concept is used in a contrasting manner between complete deconstruction and generic use, although not mutually exclusive. Thus, 'gnosis' evolved into a technical term removed from its original context and became one of the subjects associated with 'esoteric' spirituality (e.g. Faivre, 1994, 2019).

Therefore, I refrained from discussing the relationship between Manichaeism and Gnosticism due to its complexity and the limited space available in this thesis. Furthermore, the use of the concept of Gnosticism and the existence of a Gnostic religion are still debated. In any case, this means that I implicitly accepted Thomassen's position that a historically identifiable Gnostic school actually existed. On the other hand, I also accept Jason BeDuhn's and Iain Gardner's criticisms of the conception of Manichaeism as Gnostic in the sense of Gnosticism.

Additionally, in regard to this gap in my thesis, future investigation of the initial research on Gnosticism, particularly that which culminated in the Congress of Messina, is necessary in light of recent criticism. This is because, as previously mentioned in the introduction, I agree with Ugo Bianchi's methodological reflections on the history of religions. However, it is possible to reevaluate the research of the time in view of the recent criticism of Jonas's position and the Messina Colloquium[140].

I have based my study on a constellation of concepts and symbols related to the intermediary role of visions in cosmology and soteriology. In Manichaean soteriology, the body is considered a fundamental element since it becomes the ritual site par excellence, to the detriment of the Elchasaite practice of baptism. According to

[140] However, there is a significant amount of misunderstanding regarding Bianchi's work, particularly among American authors. Most of the criticism has centered on typological issues (e.g., Denzey Lewis, 2013, p. 15; King, 2003, p.171). Nevertheless, it seems that Bianchi's typology has been interpreted in a way that reflects Jonas' research. Although Jonas' typology had a significant impact on research at the time, including the Messina Congress, there seems to be a lack of attention given to analyzing Bianchi's method. The analysis was conducted without comparing his theoretical work, which clarifies his terminology. Augusto Cosentino after having studied Bianchi's work, notes that the title of the Messina Colloquium is not explained by a search for "origins", but by emphasizing that the problem of a category of "Gnosticism" is a problem of historical definition, historical-comparative. Therefore, it implies a historical-religious method, which is not evolutionary comparison, nor strictly phenomenological comparison (Cosentino, 2012, p. 270). Cosentino draws attention to recent criticisms, such as those of Williams and King, and observes that there are two scientific misunderstandings regarding the Messina document. The first is the lack of understanding of the method (and its respective terminology) adopted by Bianchi. The second is the misunderstanding regarding the 'systems of the 2nd century AD', since there was never any intention in the document to delimit Gnosticism within the chronological boundary of the 2nd century (Cosentino, 2012, pp. 271-272). In brief, the definition of Gnosticism was a working hypothesis subject to successive changes for correction. Furthermore, Bianchi does not refer to typologies or categories as metahistorical but as definitional tools (Cosentino, 2012, p. 271).

Manichaean sources, the function and purpose of the body is also an apocalyptic mystery and an object of revelation. In my analysis, I explored the concept of body within Manichaean Christology and compared it to the Christologies of Paul and Marcion, where the concept of body also holds great significance. Through my research, I found that the concept of the body is multifaceted and not easily defined, and that Paul's visions of Christ had a significant impact on his Christology. Furthermore, it became apparent that Paul's influence on Mani extended beyond the literary realm, as Paul was considered an exemplary Apostle who had personal visions of Jesus. Thus, Paul played a crucial role in the development of Manichaean religious innovations and served as a model for visionary experiences,

The literary aspect of Manichaeism caught my attention due to its visionary dimension. It is interesting to note that Mani, the Apostle, wrote and edited his teachings, which he considered an advantage over other religions that relied on later disciples. This perception led me to study Augustine, as opponents of Manichaeism had to 'domesticate' these views. Augustine believed that biblical exegesis should highlight the interconnectedness of Christianity and Judaism, as well as the Old and New Testaments. He also cautioned against using a Manichaean hermeneutic based on new revelations. As a result, Augustine pathologized the visionary dimension of Manichaeism[141].

The study of Augustine was postponed to the second part, and a chapter was formed on the fortunes of Mani's visionary dimension, alongside Alexander of Lycopolis. This was in contrast to the Manichaean setting in Central Asia. Yet I had already noticed a similar phenomenon in Kerdīr: Mani's additions caused some dissatisfaction among the Zoroastrian priests, particularly Kerdīr. However, recent academic research suggests that Zoroastrian orthodoxy may have emerged around the same time as Manichaeism (cf. BeDuhn, 2020). Kerdīr employed a similar tactic to Mani, using the authority of visions and heavenly ascents. The Zoroastrian magician presented a vision in response to Manichaeism, which was eventually accepted as the orthodox expression of the Mazdaean tradition. Both Mani and Kerdīr were vying for control of the Mazdaean

[141] It is worth noting that the conflict between Manichaeism and Catholicism was not solely based on intellectual issues; Manichaeism was politically persecuted to the extent that it was considered a Persian "snake" in the midst of the conflict between the Roman Empire and the Sasanians. Therefore, it is important to avoid viewing the relationship between Manichaeism and Catholicism in an ahistorical manner or as an apologetic exercise. Instead, it represents a long process of religious intolerance in Late Antiquity. For further details, refer to the study undertaken by Peter Brown (1969).

legacy, interpreting the ancient tradition according to their own doctrinal and visionary perspectives.

To further understand the differences between Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism, I felt it necessary to address the most controversial aspects of the two religions: ritual practice and eschatology. As pointed out by scholars (Skjærvø, 1997; Sundermann, 1997), it is worth noting that their cosmology is very similar. The connection between ritual praxis and eschatology in Manichaeism is well established. It is believed that ritual praxis leads to the liberation of the particles of Light, while eschatology represents the end of this process. To fully comprehend this connection, one must consider a third element: a metaphysics of time. For this reason, even though I couldn't go into as much depth as I would have liked, I thought it necessary to outline the discussions about Zurvān as a concept of time and as a god, and the role of astrology in Manichaeism.

In conclusion, this section has carried out the main objectives of the thesis, namely that the soteriological basis of the concept of Gnosis is transcendental (prophetic and Apocalyptic) and practical (ritual), and that through this fact I have been able to explore a symbolic constellation (cf. Durand, 1992) around the concept of Gnosis through a historical-comparative methodology for the study of philosophy and religion. Then, I sought to comprehend the lasting attraction of the visionary tradition and the imagistic and eidetic aspect of the cosmology of Manichaeism. In the context of Western philosophy and theology, particularly Alexander of Lycopolis and Augustine, Manichaeism's visionary dimension was purged of what I considered to be its most important features, while in the context of Central Asia, where the Manichaeans interacted with the equally anti-dualistic Buddhists, this feature was preserved.

Finally, a detailed examination of the common apocalyptic and visionary heritage in Manichaeism and so-called Sethian Gnosticism could have provided more insight into the role of Maitreya Buddha as a catalyst between the Manichaean visionary tradition with its apocalyptic, Jewish and Christian heritage and the Buddhist cosmology. This would allow for a more systematic examination of the topics mentioned in chapter 2, topic 4 on Manichaean Buddhology, and in chapter 4. Furthermore, it would be possible to explore the Manichaean visionary tradition during the transition of religion to Central Asia. These are the subjects that were not adequately addressed in my thesis and that I intend to explore in future studies.

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