



Andrea Piras

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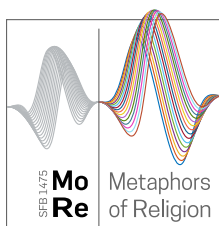
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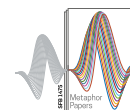
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# The Recovery of Light

## Metaphors of Rescuing the Light Soul in Manichaeism

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**ABSTRACT** In antiquity the Manichean religion was identified by two basic principles of its doctrine, the Light and the Darkness, or the God and the Matter, put in a dualistic opposition of conflict and struggle. The result was an attack of the Matter and a consequent mixture of darkness and light. This mixture is the basic point of a process of knowledge and awareness about the human existence and the cosmic life, both marked by the stigma of an amalgamation that must be recognised as reduced and (as much as possible) extinct. The means is furnished by a series of noetic and spiritual energies, with a practical intention of purification, to deliver the light entrapped into the matter and the world (macrocosm and microcosm). A cosmic divine framework of refinery and an ascetic effort of depuration are two aspects of a macrocosmic and microcosmic machinery of filtering, cleaning, and delivery of the Light-Soul, a process described by an imagery of collecting metaphors for recovery, rescue, and transmission.

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**KEYWORDS** light, darkness, cosmology, asceticism, salvation, metaphors

## Introduction

Manichaeism was a religious system founded by Mani, born (April 14, 216–276/277)<sup>1</sup> from an Iranian family, the father Pattek (from Ecbatana, today's Hamadan located in Western Iran) and his mother Maryam belonging to the royal lineage of the Arsacid Dynasty (250 BCE–ca. 226) (cf. [Sundermann 2009a](#) on Mani's life and religious experience). His father is said to have heard a divine voice in a pagan temple, at Seleucia-Ctesiphon, demanding him to stay away from women, not to eat meat and to drink wine. In obedience to this call he entered, with his son Mani, a Baptist sect in Mesopotamia founded by Elchasai (ca. [1]

1 Mani was born in the year 527 of the era of the Babylonian astronomers, the Seleucid era. This date, transmitted by al-Birūnī, places his birth in 216–217 CE. Thanks to other Chinese and Coptic sources, it is possible to be more precise and to situate his birth on April 14, 216, or sometime between March and April of that year. On Mani's date of birth cf. [Sundermann \(2009a\)](#).

1st–2nd c.), a Jewish-Christian leader. Among the Baptists, the young Mani experienced a supernatural meeting with an angel called Syzygos, who taught him the divine secrets of the gnosis and ordered him to leave the Baptists to proclaim this gnosis of salvation to humanity.<sup>2</sup>

Mani and his disciples then widespread this message, moving westward towards the Mediterranean area as well as eastward, spreading to the Middle East, Iran, and Central Asia. His missionary strategy consisted of intercultural communication (i.e. local languages) and tools of conversion (i.e. writings and illustrations)<sup>3</sup>. The result was a massive work of translation in different target languages of the Mediterranean world (Greek, Latin, Coptic) and of the Middle East and Central Asia (Iranian, Tocharian, Chinese, Turkic) that form a noteworthy corpus of Manichaean texts, together with polemical anti-Manichaean writing (Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic) equally important for a contrastive understanding of this religious system.<sup>4</sup> [2]

The religious typology of Manichaeism entails different features such as [3]

- (1) gnosticism: knowledge as salvation [4]
- (2) prophetism: Mani himself and his forerunners
- (3) missionarism: proselytism and conversion
- (4) asceticism: non-violence, vegetarianism, and celibacy
- (5) universalism: cosmopolitism
- (6) multilingualism: communication *versus* esotericism
- (7) scripturalism
- (8) syncretism of Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, plus a Biblical lineage (Adam, Seth, Noah, Henoch), all together conflated into Mani as a final achievement of prophecy, the Seal of Prophets (Arab. *ḥātam al-nabiyyīn*) in Islamic sources.

First and foremost, the dualism is the all-encompassing aspect of a whole doctrine including mythology, commandments, as well as ascetic practices, strongly polarised around two principles, the Light and the Darkness that are sharply opposed. Namely, there is not a ‘natural’ correlation between light and night but an antagonism: Light *versus* Darkness, wherein Darkness is much more than a natural phenomenon; it is a characterised entity of tangible obscurity with devilish features, in Latin texts called *materia* (Grk. *hyle*; Iran. *āz*; Chin. *tan* 貪, literally meaning ‘greed, concupiscence’, a translation from *āz*). Contrariwise, the same goes for the light which is not properly ‘immaterial’, but a kind of tangible and divine ‘substance’ involved in a cosmic drama of falling. Both darkness and light, respectively associated with evil and good, are vividly personified in a rich multilingual system of demonology (Grk. *pandaímōnion*) and divine mythology (Grk. *pantheion*), stretching from west to east.<sup>5</sup> [5]

2 Gnosis is a knowledge of salvation, a redeeming wisdom.

3 On a survey on Manichaean missions and missionary techniques, see Sundermann (2009b).

4 For an anthology of Manichaean texts concerning the Mediterranean area, cf. Gardner and Lieu (2004); for Iranian (Middle, Persian, Parthian, Sogdian) and Turkic texts, cf. Klimkeit (1993). A recent contribution on Mani’s life is Gardner (2020).

5 Cf. Sundermann (2002) for the Manichaean *pantheion* and Sundermann (2018) for demonology.

The Light is then an all-pervading subject in Manichaeism: being a divine aspect, a natural phenomenon, a notion, a substance, a cultural concept strongly intertwined with cosmological, mythological, anthropological, soteriological, and eschatological tenets. The metaphorical level of language and its shaping of symbols and imageries provides us with a vivid set of expressions and a multifarious textuality centered on a dramatic vicissitude: the story of the light, from the highness of supreme abode to the jail of the material existence, from its purity to the contamination of the world and the body. This contamination is the starting point of a strong intervention of depuration. [6]

## Methodology and Aims of this Contribution

The methodology of this article will focus on textual analysis: the overlapping of texts and intertextuality within Manichaean texts in different languages; and the comparison with polemical non-Manichaean texts as well. Before this context analysis, it is important to recognise a peculiar Manichean *Bildersprache*, sharing in many cases an interactive relationship with other set of imageries that pertain to the multifaceted aspect of the Manichaean religion, namely Christian, Buddhist, and Zoroastrian metaphors, the three major cultural contexts related to Mani's system.<sup>6</sup> [7]

The terminology of light in the many languages of Manichaeism<sup>7</sup> is provided in the following list: [8]

**Table 1** Terms for light in the languages used in Manichaeism.

Language	Term for light
Latin	<i>lumen</i>
Greek	<i>phōs</i>
Coptic	<i>ouaïne</i>
Iranian	<i>rōšn</i>
Syriac	<i>nuhra</i>
Arabic	<i>nūr</i>
Chinese	<i>ming li</i> 明力 (lit. light power) <sup>8</sup>
Old Uyghur	<i>yaruq t(ä)ηri</i> (lit. light-God) <sup>9</sup>

A logical consequence of this pre-eminence of light into a religious system based on the gnosis is its illuminating power for the mind. This explains the role of Mani as [9]

6 Cf. Arnold-Döben (1978) for the Manichaean imagery (among which cf. the Tree, Pearl, Treasure, Merchant, Healer, Helmsman; for light metaphors, cf. the Lantern, Cross of Light, Robe of Light, Sun, Moon, Ship, Palaces). Cf. Murray (2006, 69–94, 95–130, 159–204) for Christian imagery, and Kaygusuz (2021) for Buddhist metaphors. For Zoroastrian terminology, cf. Colditz (2006) and Skjærvø (1995).

7 The series of *Dictionary of Manichaean Texts* furnishes a remarkable tool of linguistic enquiry in (1) Middle Persian and Parthian (Durkin-Meisterernst 2004), (2) Sogdian and Bactrian (Sims-Williams and Durkin-Meisterernst 2022), (3) Syriac, Greek, Coptic and Latin (Lieu, Clackson, and Hunter 1999), (4) Chinese (Mikkelsen 2007), and (5) Arabic, New Persian, Pahlavi (de Blois and Sims-Williams 2004).

8 The Chinese dyad stresses the energy / activity of this principle.

9 The Uyghur compound emphasizes the divine aspect of this principle.

illuminator (Cop. *phōster*) and a diffused light symbolism related to different aspect of thinking and noetic energies that allow the realisation of spiritual awareness and luminous states of consciousness. An important mental and divine notion is then the luminous Nous, the ‘Intellect of Light’ (Iran. *manohmed rōšn*)<sup>10</sup> that must be awakened into the human soul and activated to realise the salvation process within the ascetical behaviour of the Elects.

The pervasiveness of Light everywhere, in the language and in metaphorical expressions, links the light with many aspects of reality: ‘words of light’, ‘books of light’, ‘Light Mind’, ‘Apostle of Light’ (Parth. *frēstag rōšn*), ‘Painter of Light’ (Pers. *naqqāš-i rōšn*), ‘Buddha of Light’ (Chin. *guangfo* 光佛)<sup>11</sup>, ‘Religion of Light’ (Chin. *mingjiao* 明教). The central role of light depends on the fact that this luminous particle of divine origin must be saved from the obscurity of the matter (i.e. human instincts, passions). In short, it must be delivered, ‘extracted’ from its prison by means of cosmic devices and tools for cleaning (often comparable to medical implements). [10]

As a selected target of analysis, the present contribution will be dealing with the process of the recovered light, namely the light, which is extracted from the world, delivered to paradise and thus saved. This activity of ‘filtering’<sup>12</sup> is then a process of both human-microcosmic purification and macrocosmic depuration. To better understand the reality of situations underneath the metaphors, the light must be considered ‘immaterial’ but nearly ‘tangible’ and ‘physical’, a condensed substance or luminous energy imprisoned into Matter. Thus, the aim of this essay is to underline—unlike Blumenberg’s judgement—that in Manichaeism the Light is not an abstract entity but a concrete spark, cast in the material world after a devilish attack of violence and bulimia. So, the cosmogonic myth provides the explanation of the events and the prerequisite for the human action: cosmology and anthropology are then strictly interconnected, as will be shown below. [11]

## Cosmology: Rapture and Swallowing of the Light

The Manichaean cosmology constitutes a highly complex system composed of multiple phases, in which divine and demonic powers engage in conflict over the possession and redemption of light.<sup>13</sup> [12]

At the beginning of the Manichaean myth, the Light and the Darkness and their rulers, God and Matter, were separated. This original separation, as well as the mixture and final separation are the ‘three times’ of the Manichaean doctrine of the ‘two principles’ (i.e. Light/God and Matter/Darkness). Once upon a time, this condition of original sepa- [13]

10 The textual cycle of the *Manohmed rōšn wifrās* [Sermon on the Light Nous] has masterly been edited by Sundermann (1992).

11 ‘Apostle of Light’, ‘Painter of Light’, and ‘Buddha of Light’ are three epithets of Mani.

12 The word ‘filtering’ or ‘purification’ is employed in Manichaean texts to describe this process of separation. Cf. Syr. *šl*, Arab. *šaffā*, New Pers. *pālāy-*, MP. *pāgēn*, in de Blois and Sims-Williams (2004), 154 (index, s.v. ‘purify, filter’).

13 The intricacy of this cosmological framework is clearly exemplified in Chinese Manichaeism by a painting known as the ‘Manichaean Cosmological Painting’, about which cf. Kósa (2011).

ration was threatened by an accident: the attack of the Matter. According to the Greek philosopher Alexander of Lycopolis III (fl. 3rd/4th c. CE):

At one time, Matter was seized with **desire** to ascend to the Place on High, and having reached it marvelled at the splendour and the light of God. It **wished** to become master of this kingdom and drive God out of it. The latter resolved to punish it but he had difficulty in finding it [...] he dispatched a power that which we call **Soul** to confront Matter. (Gardner and Lieu 2004, 180) [14]

This soul (Grk. *psychē*) is more characterised as a mythological personality called ‘the First Man’ and created by God as a weapon against the Matter: [15]

But when the Good Father realised that Darkness had come over his land, he generated from himself a power, which is called the Mother of Life with which he surrounded the First Man, that is the five Elements, namely wind, light, water, fire, air. Equipped with these, as if in readiness for war, he came down to fight against the Darkness. However, the Princes of Darkness fought back and devoured part of his armoury, namely the soul. (cf. *Acta Archelai* VII, 3–4 in Vermes 2001, 45–47) [16]

This swallowing of light (i.e. of soul) is a mythical event of devilish gluttony that entails the mixture of darkness and light and denotes the importance of human fasting to master the bodily physiology as a discipline of the stomach and of alimentation. This is the human, microcosmic aspect of the process. Now let us have a look at the cosmic level of the issue. [17]

## The Macrocosmic Machine: Separation and Depuration

God’s counterattack prepares a separation from this mixture: the Living Spirit saved the Primal Man and rescued the Soul from the Matter by fighting the evil powers (cf. Grk. *árchōn*, Cop. *arkhōn*) and creates the world from their skin and bones. Everything is shaped by dismemberment of the Archons, including the firmament, earth, human life, flora and fauna. Thus, this is the paradox of cosmogony: the matter and human body is devilish but its handling is divine and managed by the Living Spirit, a mythological god of cosmic craftsmanship: [18]

when he [the Living Spirit] had arrived, he set up a machine [Grk. *dēmiurgia*] devised for the salvation of souls, that is a wheel, holding twelve jars. It rotates in this sphere, draining the souls of the dying which the greater heavenly body, the Sun, takes away with his rays, purifies and hands on the Moon, which is how the disc of the Moon, as we call it, is filled up. Those two bodies (Sun and Moon) are ships or merchant boats. (cf. *Acta Archelai* VIII, 5–6 in Vermes 2001, 50–51) [19]

This redemption-machine (Grk. *mēchanē*) with twelve jars (Lat. *duodecim urceos*)<sup>14</sup> corresponding to the twelve hours, is a symbolic framework and a picturesque description of the cosmic device of transmission of the light by means of 'boats', following a temporal scheme of absorption involving the full moon that: [20]

[...] carries the souls (the sparkles of light) to the eastern region and so effects its waning or decline, by being relieved of its load. Then again the boats are refilled and once more loaded, as the souls are drained by means of the jars, until it releases its correct portion of souls. (*Acta Archelai* VIII, 7) [21]

The creation of the cosmos is thus articulated in three stages. The first consists in the descent of the Primordial Man (the Light-Soul), who is defeated by the Powers of Darkness, which consume the luminous substance. This is followed by a second phase in which the Living Spirit assaults the malevolent Archons and dismembers their bodies, from which the sky, the sun, and the moon are fashioned; these celestial entities perform the function of separating and purifying the light. A third creative act is then required to expel the residual light by means of a stratagem. The divinity known as the Third Messenger manifests itself as a beautiful maiden to the male Archons, who, overcome by desire, emit the light; conversely, it appears as a young man to the female Archons, who conceive and subsequently miscarry. From the seed of the Archons and the aborted offspring of the Archonesses derive further forms of cosmic life, including animals and plants. Finally, in a last attempt to confine the light, Matter employs two demons, one male and one female, to generate the first human couple, Adam and Eve. Through concupiscence and procreation, they perpetuate the imprisonment of the light, which remains the object of continual contention between God and Matter. The possibility of redemption, inaugurating a horizon of salvific optimism, depends upon the Nous that enlightens Adam: though corporeally imprisoned, he becomes conscious of his condition and seeks emancipation through gnosis.<sup>15</sup> [22]

## Microcosmic Separation and Recovery: The Body and the Ascetic Practices

This critical situation of the world and mankind requires a series of possible solutions. By the point of view of the empirical experience, the natural as well as human life is a mixed state. The bodily dimension is a schizophrenic condition of blending Light and Darkness. It entails a pessimism and a hope, as the body is a 'prison', a 'corpse' for the Light. The hope is a promotion of redeeming knowledge: the gnosis is the awareness of such a mixed condition and a determined intention of 'separation' and 'extraction'. This need explains the frequent employ of metaphors of cutting (see below). After the knowledge, the action of 'practicing gnosis' is the remedy to antidote the evil of Darkness, in that the microcosm of the body must be dominated by means of asceticism, total for [23]

14 According to the Greek and Latin version of the *Acta Archelai* VIII, 5–6.

15 For a synopsis of the Manichaean myth in its different stages, cf. Tardieu (2008, 76–81).

the Elects, partial for the Hearers (non-violence, alimentary regimes). These precepts of abstention are the first step of the question: how not to injure the light in the world?<sup>16</sup>

The second step entails this question: how to deliver the light from the world (i.e. macrocosm) and from the body (i.e. microcosm)? The sanctified body of the Elect is a microcosmic machine that channels the light until its releasing, by means of fast (i.e. purification of the body) and appropriate food (i.e. plenty of ‘diet light’ consisting of fruits [melons, grape] and bread). After the offering of meals from Hearer to Elect there is a transformation of the food into the Elect’s sanctified stomach.<sup>17</sup> The delivery by means of the voice (i.e. prayers, psalms, songs, and hymns) conveys upwards the Light and Breath, in a synesthetic combination of two immaterial energies, which are luminous and acoustic. So, the scheme is very simple and the metaphorical level of language enables to represent a twofold mechanism, from macrocosm to microcosm, wherein the human subject is engaged in an ascetic effort to master his body for extracting the light component of his soul; and in the same way, the macrocosmic machine of moon, sun, milky way, and the gods charged with the watching of the universe, are the device of a cosmic process of washing (by rain and dew), depuration and absorption of the luminous energy entrapped into the whole world. Human soul and cosmic soul are then the same subject of a work of refinery and recovering.

[24]

The body of the Elect functions then as a machine of extraction and his holy physiology provides the way of delivery: his breath, voice, words, and singing. The process is described by the Iranian erudite scholar of the Islamic Middle Age, al-Šāhrastānī (1086–1153), in his *Kitāb al-milal wa-l-niḥal* [Book on Religions and Beliefs]:

[25]

He (Mani) says that what aids the purification, and the separation and the ascension of the particles of light are (the chanting of hymn of glorification, (invocations of) santification, proper speech, and pious deeds, and that by this (behavior) the particles of light are lifted in a Column of Radiance to the orbit of the moon. The moon constantly receives this (i.e. the flow of particles) from the first of the month to the middle (of the month); then it is full and becomes the full moon. Then (the moon) conveys (it) to the sun until the end of the month, and the sun propels it onwards to the Light that is above it, and it circulates in this world until it rejoins the uppermost, pure Light. (Reeves 2011, 204)

[26]

The need for separation and depuration can often be expressed by other sets of metaphors. The imagery of cutting tools and surgical implements denote the strong Manichaean resolution against the Matter and the urge of ascetical means (of thought and volition) to ‘cure’ the human soul by means of spiritual healing. The Matter is evil and sickness; the good is a constant making of vital resources against the infection

[27]

16 For the bodily dimension in the Manichaean anthropology (e.g. diet, asceticism) and its soteriological practices of purification, cf. BeDuhn (2000). A survey of Manichaean asceticism is Piras (2018). For the Manichaean commandments cf. Sims-Williams (1985).

17 According to the clever definition of Tardieu, the stomach is called the ‘gastric machine’. See Tardieu (1981, 109–10).

of devilish powers, the demons that causes diseases into the body. This explains the frequent imagery of medical symbolism, including remedies, tools, and practices,<sup>18</sup> to denote healing and salvation, the first for life and the second for afterlife, being the therapeutic effect of Mani and of any wise man who bestows the religious knowledge, the gnosis of discernment, to defeat the Matter. An interesting medical metaphor matches Mani's book with medical tools, because the knowledge and the learning are the way for therapy: in the Coptic Psalms 241. Mani's *Mysteria* [*Book of Mysteries*] is thus compared to a knife (Grk. *akmádion*) together with all other books included in the medicine-chest (Grk. *nárthēx*) of his tools for teaching:

He has the antidote that is good for every affection [(Grk. *pathos*)] [28]  
 There are two and twenty compounds in his antidote.  
 His Great Gospel, the good tidings of all them that are of the Light.  
 His water-pot is the Thesaurus, the treasure of Life [...]  
 His soft sponge that wipes away bruises is the Pragmateia  
 His knife for cutting is the *Book of Mysteries*,  
 His excellent swabs are the *Book of the Giants*,  
 The *nárthēx* of every cure are in the Book of his Letters. (Coyle 2009, 116)

Even the monastery is compared to an hospital, to cure the nature infected by the devilish matter and its contamination. The Uyghur term for *sanatorium* or infirmary (OU *otačiliqi*) indicates a special place inhabited by the Elects involved in their monastic activities of preaching, teaching, chanting, writing, and drawing, a series of monastic duties promoting the spiritual therapy to heal the mankind from the poisonous sickness of the Matter. The architectural symbolism of the world, being a kind of refinery in Chinese Manichaean texts, records a significant expression, 'hall of remedies' (Chin. *yaotang* 藥堂), to designate a room for plants, an *herbarium*, a pharmacy (with a marked Daoist meaning related to alchemy) for the cure of the natural elements (i.e. air, water, light, wind, fire) inside the world and the human soul, corresponding to macrocosm and microcosm. The Chinese *Bosijiao canjing* 波斯教殘經 [Fragmentary Scripture of a Persian Religion], commonly known in scholarship as the *Treatise* or *Traité*,<sup>19</sup> clearly explains this conception of the world as infirmary for light and prison for the demons as well: "Thus, the cosmos is the hall of healing where the Light-Bodies are cured, and it is also the prison where the dark demons are incarcerated" (*Traité*, ll. 13–14, trans. Lieu and Mikkelsen 2017, 5).<sup>20</sup> [29]

18 The medical symbolism and its metaphors of healing has been approached in many contributions, among which cf. van Tongerloo (1996, 2000), Coyle (2009), and Piras (2021).

19 Most valuable information about Manichaean doctrine as it was alive in 9th-century China and the Tarim Basin, are the so-called *Traité*, *Hymnscroll*—the full Chinese title is [*Monijiao*] *xiabu zan* [摩尼教]下部讚 [The Lower (Second?) Section (of the Manichean Hymns)], and Compendium—the full Chinese title is *Moni guangfu jiaofa yilüe* 摩尼光佛教法儀略 [Outline of the Teachings and Rules of Mani, Buddha of Light].

20 Chinese *yaotang* corresponds to the hendyad '(place) of healing' (OU *as(a)gl(i)k tusuluk*) of the Uyghur version (Lieu and Mikkelsen 2017, 4, U267a 1, 167 [Uyghur word indices, s.v.]).

## Eschatology and Final Recuperation

Cosmology and anthropology (e.g., ascetical practices) display the metaphors of the machinery of depuration and transmission that pertains to the macrocosmic and microcosmic level of the divine work of filtering and delivery, the gods in the cosmos and the Nous inside the man. Needless to say, a further aspect dealing with eschatology (individual and collective) describes the scenario of a final reintegration of the scattered light (human soul and cosmic soul) into a final redemption for the individual avoiding the transmigration of the light in the circle of rebirthing. The model of this final and afterlife reintegration is obviously Mani himself. The apotheosis after his death is a triumph of royal emblems, sovereignty, and lightning: [30]

And in great joy he flew up, together with the bright gods that accompanied him on the right and the left, to the sound of harps and songs of joy, in divine miraculous power, like a swift (bolt of) lightning and a bright, quick apparition, to the Column of Glory, the path of Light, and the chariot of the Moon, the meeting place of the gods. And he stayed with God Ohrmizd, the Father.<sup>21</sup> (Klimkeit 1993, 215) [31]

The account of the Islamic sources by Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 998) follows this model of royal apotheosis but with a remarkable point for understanding the role of the sun and moon in the cosmic work of absorption. In the first description of the fate of the Elect, the scenery is very alike to the before quoted text on Mani's ascension: the Elect is reached by a luminous deity in form of a wise guide with three deities bringing a cup, a garment, a turban, a crown, and a diadem of light; the deities protect him from demons of obstacle for the soul and the soul is then welcomed in the Light-Paradise, dressed in royal garments and with emblems of royalty. But the body of the Elect, his corpse, is left on the ground for an ultimate work of depuration: [32]

That discarded body remains behind, and the sun, the moon, and the luminous deities strain out from it those species which are water, fire and air. (The product of this filtration) ascends to the sun and becomes divine. The rest of the body, which is al Darkness, is cast down to Jahannam.<sup>22</sup> (trl. Reeves 2011, 217) [33]

The Biblical notion of 'gehenna' (Arab. *jahannam*) is then the repository for the bodily corpse, the negative stuff of the materia and archons, whose bodies were originally dismembered to shape the universe, the earth, and the same human body, unlike the subtle elements of water, fire, and air that belongs to the human physiology and anatomy. [34]

The scenario of the individual eschatology is completed by the events of the collective eschatology, at the end of the world and the final judgement with the last battle between gods and demons to achieve the final defeat of the evil, of the devilish materia. Within [35]

21 The original Parthian text can be found in M 5569.

22 The original can be found in al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist* [The Book Catalogue], 398–399.

this scene of ultimate situations, the mechanism of light filtering and depuration achieves its task of ‘separation’, the final ‘time’ of the Manichaean formula ‘two principles and three times’ which synthesises the religious doctrine of Light and Darkness engaged in a cosmic struggle of the beginning, the duration, and the end (i.e. of the history, of mankind, of the evil). The *apokatastasis* as a final restoration of an original separation of two principles (and defeat of evil) entails the recollection of any residual sparkle. According to the text of the *Šābuhragān*:

And the power and the \*energy of that Splendour of the gods which has remained in the cosmos of earths and heavens and struck down and \*exhausted by Az and the demons will go out from it (the cosmos) in that conflagration [and] be purified and go up to the sun and moon and become a god in the form of Ohrmezdby, and together with sun and moon will go up to Paradise. (MacKenzie 1979, 515) [36]

The residual divine splendour (MP. *rōšnīh*), cast into Matter after the first attack, will then be delivered in a final conflagration (MP. *sōzišn*, lit. ‘burning’) that elsewhere, in other texts, corresponds to the ‘great fire’ (Grk. *méga pyr*) (cf. *Acta Archelai* XIII, 1 in Vermes 2001, 57) which consumes the whole world preparing the coming of a statue (Grk. *andriás*), a final condensation of any remaining particles of light that will be saved into this form by putting together the ultimate sparkles that will be delivered to a paradisiacal condition of purity. [37]

## Conclusion

The metaphorical language of Manichaean texts and its primary purpose of rescuing the light is structured around a differentiated imagery. The light is not only an abstract symbol of Truth and God but is a dynamic subject with different aspects: a bright substance, an agent of mental illumination and cultural education, a particle of energy spread everywhere in the cosmos and even in the food that must be eaten, digested and distilled in a microcosmic work of refinery and transportation. Unlike Blumenberg’s analysis of light “as an absolute metaphors that, due to his degree of abstraction, lacks a real reference to metaphors in the material world” (Blumenberg 2022) it is possible to say that, on the contrary, in Manichaeism the Light is not an abstract entity but a tangible spark, cast in the material world after Matter’s attack of violence and devilish bulimia. There is no abstraction but incorporation of a kind of luminous energy, falling from heavenly highness into a gradual process of solidification and condensation. All that needs a work of extraction, either in a cosmic framework of deities, engaged in a struggle against the demons, or in the human body, mastered by noetical and divine powers generated by asceticism. The approach to Manichaeism is far from being a philosophical, conceptual, and speculative point of view, therefore refused by Augustine, trained in the school of rhetoric and Neoplatonism. Conversely, it needs an aesthetic evaluation of its doctrine, considering the emotional values (i.e. suggestions, impressions, evocations) of [38]

its teaching, symbols, imageries, and practices. For this reason, the judgement of Michel Tardieu is a very fitting conclusion of any discussion on Manichaean metaphors: “Mani worked out the design of his system not as a philosopher but as a painter. This system was the product not of theoretical reflection but of behaviour linked to the perception of colours, odours, and flavours” (Tardieu 2008, 88).

## Abbreviations

M Manuscripts in Manichaean script preserved at the Turfan Collection in Berlin.

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