

Paradigms of Masculinity in Late Antique Cosmological Narrative

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ABSTRACT

The religion of Manichaeism, the creation of the self-proclaimed prophet and “apostle of Jesus Christ,” Mani, grew from the heartland of Persian Mesopotamia in the 3rd Century C.E.¹ Practised by followers across and beyond the Persian and Roman empires between the 3rd and 9th centuries, Manichaeism finally succumbed to persistent persecution from rival faiths. Manichaeism is famous for a complex cosmological mythology that predicated a primordial conflict between two kingdoms of darkness and light. The divinities of the Kingdom of Light are hypostasised as a series of emanations from the Father as Mother, Son, and daughters.

This paper will explore an apparent paradox in the characterisation of the Manichaean First Man, beloved son of the Father, in whom two conflicting personae of keen warrior and defeated victim are implicit. This paradox will be considered in the context of emerging shifts in construction of masculinity in Second Temple literature related to developments in the exegesis of the *Aqedah*. The emergence of a parallel model of masculinity in Manichaean cosmology will be explored.

INTRODUCTION

The religion of Manichaeism was the creation of the self-styled prophet and “apostle of Jesus Christ,” Mani, who was a native of Sasanian Persia from 216 to c.276 C.E. The doctrine promulgated by Mani may be viewed as both amalgamation and concentration of the wisdom of the faiths which he encountered in his upbringing in a Judaeo-Christian sect, his extensive travels and his sojourn at the court of the Sasanian King Shapur I. Manichaean doctrine is notable for a complex and dramatic dualist cosmology which asserts the primordial existence of two polarised kingdoms of light and darkness. The divine inhabitants of the Kingdom of Light are hypostasised as a family of father, mother, sons, and daughters with defined roles in the mythological drama.

This paper seeks to explore an apparent paradox in the characterisation of an aspect of the Divine entitled the First (or Primal) Man. As first emanation of the Manichaean “Father of Greatness” and “Mother of Life,” the First Man is despatched to battle with the powers of the Kingdom of Darkness who conspire to invade the Kingdom of Light.² His

¹ Mani announces himself as “I, Mani, apostle of Jesus Christ,” in his letters. See discussion of Majella Franzmann, *Jesus in the Manichaean Writings*, (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 15-23.

² The Father of Greatness holds various titles in Manichaean literature, including the “King of light” and “the father, the Lord of the all.” For further Coptic titles see Timothy Pettipiece, *Pentadic Redaction in the Manichaean Kephalaia*. (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2009).

characterisation in Manichaean sources is marked by a contrast between strong, vigorous hunter-warrior and weeping, helpless victim of imprisonment. The First Man as hunter-warrior conforms to the “hegemonic” model of masculinity as strength, dominance, and power as defined by Raewyn Connell.³ The masculinity of the weeping prisoner, however, appears to have been compromised by the encounter with darkness.

This paper will seek to interpret the paradoxical imagery of the First Man in the context of a contemporaneous shift in the construction of masculinity exemplified by 4 Maccabees, in which masculinity is defined as endurance in the face of suffering and oppression. Central to this construction is a transformation of the representation of the *Aqedah* (the binding of Isaac by Abraham in Genesis 22) in Second Temple literature, in which Isaac transfigures from nescient victim to willing participant in his imminent sacrifice. The construction of masculinity as willingness to endure forms a central theme of 4 Maccabees, which describes the torture and execution of members of the Jewish faith by the Seleucid ruler Antiochus Epiphanes IV during the Maccabean revolt between 167-160 CE. In this text, the endurance of Rabbi Eleazar and seven brothers is portrayed as the embodiment of the Hellenistic ideal of the victory of reason over emotion. It will be argued that the characterisation of the Manichaean First Man embodies a parallel construction of masculinity. The centrality of the persecution of the Manichaean faith to this construction will be explored.

The first section of this paper will address the characterisation of the First Man in Manichaean cosmological mythology. After an initial review of the mythology surrounding the First Man, examples of the competing characterisations of the First Man as keen warrior and weeping victim will be discussed in detail. The second section of this paper will present evidence of the transformative effect of persecution and oppression on the formation of masculinities through analysis of the imagery and language of 4 Maccabees, which unveils willingness to endure as a valued male trait in contrast to the hegemonic model of masculinity as active strength, dominance, and power. Thirdly, the paper will explore references to the experience of the persecution of the Manichaean faith embedded in primary sources. The emergence of endurance as a valued male trait in response to persecution becomes central to the community ethos and spirituality of the Manichaean faithful. It will be argued that the suffering Manichaean First Man becomes the prototype of the persecuted Manichaean faithful and his endurance becomes enshrined, as Iain Gardner and Samuel Lieu state, as: “the most

³ Raewyn W. Connell, *Masculinities*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005).

characteristic tone of the Manichaean ethic...the very summation of life lived in this world.”⁴

MYTHOLOGY SURROUNDING THE FIRST MAN

The chief Manichaean sources relating to the First Man are the Coptic “Manichaean Psalm-book” (henceforward *Psalm-book*) and the “Kephalaia of the Teacher,” in both of which the First Man features heavily.⁵ Both of these texts were discovered c.1929 at Medinet Mani in Egypt, where a Manichaean community is believed to have existed during the 4th century C.E.⁶ The Coptic *Psalm-book* dates to the 4th century C.E. but is believed to have been composed originally in Syriac. Authorship of the *Psalm-book* is both uncertain and varied but believed to include Mani himself. The “Kephalaia of the Teacher” is one of a pair of codices found at Medinet Mani and also dates to the 4th century C.E. The second codex, the “Kephalaia of the Wisdom of my Lord Mani,” has not as yet been fully edited. This paper will be concerned with references to the First Man in the “Kephalaia of the Teacher” (henceforward the *Kephalaia*).⁷ Authorship of the *Kephalaia* is attributed to Mani’s close circle of disciples to whom leadership of the Manichean church fell following his demise. The distinct literary genres of the *Psalm-book* and the *Kephalaia* lend variance to the presentation of the mythology surrounding the First Man. The *Psalm-book*, a liturgical community text, reveals the First Man through the medium of religious poetry, frequently adopting the first-person voice of the First Man. In contrast, the didactic format of the *Kephalaia* reveals the First Man in the context of the clarification and elucidation of Manichaean doctrine for the purpose of instruction, as theorised by Timothy Pettipiece.⁸ The *Kephalaia* also seeks to assert the actions of the Manichaean divinities as the prototypes of human religious ritual.

In the absence of a surviving single account of his mythology by Mani, a further valuable resource on Manichaean protological cosmology survives in the *Liber Scholiorum*

⁴ Iain Gardner and Samuel Lieu, *Manichaean Texts from the Roman Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 241.

⁵ All translations of the *Kephalaia* in this paper are taken from Iain Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher, The Edited Coptic Manichaean Texts in Translation with Commentary*, (Leiden: Brill, 1995). All translations from the *Psalm-book* are taken from Charles R. C. Allberry, *A Manichaean Psalm-Book. Including psalms by Syrus, Heraclides and Thomas. A transcription and translation of the Coptic text. With plates* (Manichaean Manuscripts in the Chester Beatty Collection. vol. 2.), (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1938).

⁶ See Nicholas J. Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism, An Ancient Faith Rediscovered*, (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 29-30.

⁷ For latest research on this codex, see: Iain Gardner, Jason BeDuhn and Paul Dilley, (eds.) *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings. Studies on the Chester Beatty Kephalaia Codex*, (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

⁸ See discussion of Pettipiece 2009, 8-9.

(henceforward *Lib. Schol.*) of the 8th-century bibliographer and church historian Theodore bar Khonai.⁹ The late date of this text belies its importance; Bar Khonai writes in Syriac, preserving the original Manichaean names for the deities and appearing to cite from copies of Mani's works.¹⁰ The text is, however, heresiological in nature.

Mani employs an emanationist model of divine generation, following the Gnostic schools and fitting with the Manichaean repudiation of sexual generation. The First Man is emanated by the Mother of Life at the command of the Father of Greatness in response to a threat of invasion by the Kingdom of Darkness. The First Man himself emanates five sons to aid him in his battle with the powers of darkness. In *Lib. Schol.* Theodore Bar Khonai employs the Syriac term ܟܘܢܐ (to call, evoke, cause to call) to designate emanation: "He says that the Father of Greatness evoked the Mother of Life, and the Mother of Life evoked the Primal Man and the Primal Man evoked his five sons, just as a man who puts on armor for war."¹¹

Manichaean doctrine represents the emanation of the First Man as an act of self-abnegation by the divine Father, who acts in order to protect the core of the Kingdom of Light.

¹² This act is explained in *Lib. Schol.* as follows:

He (Mani) says that when the King of Darkness contemplated ascending to the Region of Light, those five shekinahs (there) became agitated, and he says that at that time the Father of Greatness took thought and said: "I will not send from my worlds any of these five shekinahs to do battle because they were created by me for tranquillity and peace. Instead, I myself will go (Literally: By means of my own soul)¹³ and do battle."¹⁴

The Syriac term *shekinah* frequently appeared in Second Temple literature to designate the dwelling place, presence, or glory of God.¹⁵ In Manichaean literature, the Father is said to exist in the five limbs of Intelligence, Reason, Thought, Intention, and Counsel.¹⁶ The usage of the term *shekinah* in *Lib. Schol.* would appear to reference these five limbs, which the Father seeks to preserve and protect by the emanation of the First Man from within himself. The five limbs are undisturbed by the departure of the First Man, as related in the *Psalms of Heracleides*:

⁹ All translations here of *Lib. Schol.* are taken from John C. Reeves, *Prolegomena to a History of Islamicate Manichaeism*, (Sheffield: Equinox, 2011), 146-152.

¹⁰ Burkitt, Francis C. *The Religion of the Manichees. Donnellan Lectures for 1924*, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1925).

¹¹ *Lib. Schol.*, loc. cit., 147.

¹² See discussion of Baker-Brian 2011, *Manichaeism...*, 110-114.

¹³ Translation offered by Pettipiece 2009, *Pentadic Redaction...*, 32.

¹⁴ *Lib. Schol.*, loc. cit., 147.

¹⁵ Carol A. Dray, *Studies on Translation and Interpretation in the Targum to the Books of Kings*, (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 87-94.

¹⁶ See analysis of Pettipiece 2009, *Pentadic Redaction...*, 21-25.

I left the Intelligence guarding the Father, the joy of the Land of Light....

I left the Reason guarding the Faith, the Aeons surrounding the Father...

I left the Thought guarding the Perfection, the breath of life which surrounds the Father...

I left the Counsel guarding the Endurance, carrying
Life to all the Aeons.

I left the Intention being the foundation and base to the Land
of Light.¹⁷

Furthermore, the dispatch of the First Man to the Kingdom of Darkness obviates the need for the powers of Darkness to approach the Kingdom of Light. *Lib. Schol.* recounts the thoughts of the King of Darkness as the First Man approaches: “The thing that I desired which was distant, I have discovered nearby!”¹⁸ The necessity for sacrifice indicates that, as expressed by Iain Gardner and Samuel Lieu: “Evil is real, and even God must suffer. The reality of divine loss is an unavoidable consequence of this recognition of the absolute nature of evil.”¹⁹ Thus, the necessity for sacrifice is embedded in Manichaean protological mythology as a cardinal Manichaean quality.”²⁰

Chapter nine of the Kephalaia describes the ceremonial farewells endowed upon the First Man by the divinities and angels of the Kingdom of Light upon his departure to the abyss. Here “blessing” and “fortification” are presented as the archetype of acts of blessing in religious ritual:

The first peace is the one that the gods and the angels in the land of light gave to the First Man, when he comes out against the enemy. The gods and the angels were walking with him; escorting him, giving him their peace and power, and their blessing and fortification. This is the first peace that the gods and the angels gave to the First Man, as he comes forth from the aeon of light.²¹

The encounter between the First Man and the forces of darkness results in a preliminary defeat for the powers of light; the First Man is imprisoned in the abyss, unable to deliver himself or his sons who have been relinquished into the jaws of the demons. The *Psalm-book* voices his despairing call to the Kingdom of Light:

“Hast thou not heard, O great brightness?

¹⁷ *Psalm-book* 200, 19-28.

¹⁸ *Lib. Schol.* loc. cit., 147.

¹⁹ Gardner and Lieu 2004, *Manichaean Texts*, 13.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

²¹ *Kephalaia* 9.38.10-38.20

Has none informed you that Hades has been stirred up
and rebelled
and they of the abyss have put their arms upon them?”²²

The Mother of Life intercedes on behalf of her beleaguered son to the divine Father.

Chapter sixty-five of the Kephalaia describes her prayer:

She begged, she prayed, she implored, she praised, she glorified, she blessed the first that stood firm, which is the Father, She prayed to him a prayer, she begged him a request, she received a great gift. She and the many powers that were with her, they prayed a prayer for the Primal Man because he went away, he fell down, he removed himself from the Mother of Life, he separated from her, he brought himself in a great affliction...²³

In response, the Father evokes the “gods of rescue,” a second group of emanations. Amongst these, the Living Spirit calls out to the First Man to enquire after his welfare. The communications between the Living Spirit and the First Man are hypostasised as the divinities “Call” and “Answer” or “Caller” and “Respondent,” as described in *Lib. Schol.*: “The Caller and the Respondent joined together and ascended together to the Mother of Life and the Living Spirit. The Living Spirit clothed himself with the Caller, and the Mother of Life clothed herself with the Caller, her beloved son...”²⁴ These divinities represent the relation between the human call for salvation and the divine grace granted. The First Man may thus be interpreted as the prototype of the human call for deliverance to the Divine. *Chapter seventy-five of the Kephalaia* uses the image of a letter for this communication:

See, the call that was sent by the Living Spirit; he sent him to the Primal Man. A letter of peace and greetings is what he wrote and that he sent to his brothers. All messages are written in it and all things that happened he established in this Call. This Call the Primal Man... are provided to happen. The Answer that was sent by the Primal Man came up to the Living Spirit. Again a letter was what was sent by the Primal Man to the Living Spirit.”²⁵

Chapter nineteen of the Kephalaia presents the rescue of the defeated First Man by the Living Spirit as the archetype of liberation: “[The First] liberation and rescue is the First Man’s. For, when the First Man escaped from [the prison of] the Archons by means of the Living Spirit, who came to him... the First Man, much light and much power was rescued from the whole ruling power.”²⁶ Following his rescue from the abyss by the Living Spirit, the First Man

²² *Psalm-Book* 209, 17-20.

²³ *Kephalaia* 115.271.30-272.7

²⁴ *Lib. Schol.*, loc. cit., 149.

²⁵ *Kephalaia* 75.182.1-15.

²⁶ *Kephalaia* 19.60.19-24.

is restored only temporarily to the Kingdom of Light, dwelling instead in the “light-ship” of the moon. Here he aids the return of divine light to its origins until the end of time, in perpetual grief for his stolen sons who remain lost to him. Chapter fifty-eight of the *Kephalaia* tells: “he however is sad for his five sons, which are in the middle of the danger.”²⁷

CHARACTERISATION OF THE FIRST MAN

This section will explore the paradoxical characterisations of virile warrior and weeping victim implicit in the portrayal of the Manichaean First Man, commencing with a discussion of his characterisation as warrior. Images of strength in battle are particularly apparent in the *Psalm-book*, which describes him as “the warrior, the strong one of manifold activities,”²⁸ “the Great Warrior, the weapon of those of the Light”²⁹ and the “strong son.”³⁰ The “Psalms of Thomas” portray him as a keen youthful warrior who “leaps” with vigour and enthusiasm into the abyss:

The little one among the tall stepped in.

He took up arms. He armed his waist.

He leapt and raced into the abyss.

He leapt and got to their center to battle them.³¹

This portrait of an enthusiastic and battle-ready warrior, symbolised by the willing “leap” of the First Man, is consistent with a construction of masculinity as power, strength and dominance.³² In his study of the birth of Jewish masculinities borne out of the Roman occupation in the Second Temple period, Daniel Boyarin defines this construction of masculinity as the “Imperial Phallus”³³ which he identifies as the “dominant fiction” of the Roman Empire.”³⁴

²⁷ *Kephalaia* 58.173.31-148.2.

²⁸ *Psalm-Book* 1, 25-26.

²⁹ *Psalm-Book* 137, 14-15.

³⁰ *Psalm-Book* 10, 7.

³¹ *Psalm-Book* 204, 23-26. For discussion of authorship of *Psalms of Thomas*, see: Frank Forrester Church and Guy G. Stroumsa, “Mani’s Disciple Thomas and the *Psalms of Thomas*.” *Vigiliae Christianae*, 34 no. 1, (1980), 47-55.

³² For discussion of the significance of the leap of the First Man, see Jason BeDuhn, “The Leap of the Soul in Manichaeism,” in *Atti del V Congresso Internazionale di Studi sul Manicheismo. Nuove Prospettive della Ricerca, Napoli 2–8 Settembre 2001*, eds. Alois van Tongerloo and Luigi Cirillo, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 9-26.

³³ Daniel Boyarin charts the birth of competing masculinities in Talmudic discourse in the context of the resistance of the Jewish faith to Roman oppression. Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct, The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man (Contraversions: Critical Studies in Jewish Literature, Culture & Society)*, (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 109.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

A subtype of this characterisation may be found in the representation of the First Man as hunter through references to the tools of hunting, such as nets, arrows, spears and snares in the *Psalm-book* and the *Kephalaia*.³⁵ The *Lib. Schol.* also couches the communication between the First Man and the Living Spirit in terms of weaponry; the voice of the Living Spirit calls the First Man up from the war, “like a sharp sword.”³⁶

The significance of hunt and battle to Sasanian masculine identity is indicated by its centrality to court ideology and politics. As a substitute for true battle, prowess in hunting was highly esteemed.³⁷ The Middle Persian narrative text M3 describes an angry encounter between Mani and a King (traditionally identified as Bahram I, but recently challenged by Iain Gardner).³⁸ Here, the King frames his rejection of Mani in the context of his failure to participate in the court’s male-gendered sports and roles: “And in anger he spoke thus to the Lord: “Ah, what need of you as you go neither fighting nor hunting. But perhaps you are needed for this doctoring? And you do not even do that.””³⁹ The condemnation of Mani implicit in the King’s comment is indicative of the ideal of Sasanian kingship as martial masculinity. The royal sport of hunting, as living metaphor for power and victory, played a significant part in court and imperial diplomatic relations. Aptly described by Matthew Canepa as “sublimated combat,” the hunt afforded demonstration of martial prowess *ex situ*.⁴⁰ The hunt and slaughter of the lion was deemed the zenith of the royal hunt, the final lethal strike being the prerogative of the King.⁴¹ The lion-hunt also appears as symbol for investiture, as exemplified by a carving upon a boulder at Tan-i-Sarvak in Elymais, in which the act of enthronement is portrayed through the metaphor of the lion-hunt.⁴² The carving, believed to date to the late 2nd century, depicts the effortless slaughter of a lion by a male figure with the inscription: “This is the image of... ascending the throne.”⁴³ As discussed by Prudence Harper, the codification and propagation of visual representations of equestrian hunt as a central image of Sasanian dynastic

³⁵ *Kephalaia* 28.7-8, 43.34-35 and 129.7.

³⁶ *Lib. Schol.*, loc. cit., 148.

³⁷ Matthew Canepa, *The Two Eyes of the Earth: Art and Ritual of Kingship Between Rome and Sasanian Iran*, (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2010.), 157; 174-182.

³⁸ Iain Gardner, “Mani’s Last Days,” in Gardner, BeDuhn and Dilley 2014, *Mani at the Court...*, 159-204.

³⁹ M3 cited by Gardner and Lieu 2004, *Manichaeae Texts...*, 84.

⁴⁰ Canepa 2010, *The Two Eyes of the Earth...*, 137.

⁴¹ See Ch. 5 in Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, *King and Court in Ancient Persia 559 to 331 BCE (Debates and documents in ancient history)*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 127-150.

⁴² Harper 2008, “Image and Identity...”

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 76.

rule are evident from rock reliefs and Sasanian dynastic art.⁴⁴

In parallel with the hunter-warrior imagery attached to the First Man runs a counter-narrative of the First Man as defeated, vulnerable and impotent. The “Psalms of Thomas” give voice to his lament as he languishes in the abyss:

The youth groaned and wept in the pit
which is at the bottom of Hades;
The youth groaned and wept,
his cry [to the great brightness went] up...”⁴⁵

In this psalm, the characterisation of the First Man moves from hunter to hunted, as the demons of the Kingdom of Darkness prepare their spears and armour for battle:

The false gods that have rebelled
have taken their armour against me.
The goddesses, the daughters of shame, have set up their armour against me.
The goddesses, the daughters of shame, have set up their spears.⁴⁶

Furthermore, *Chapter* thirty-nine of the *Kephalaia* relates that following his rescue from the realms of darkness, the First Man is not restored fully to the Kingdom of Light, instead remaining aboard the Moon, the “Ship of Light,” where he continually sifts redeemed light for release to its divine origin. *Chapter* fifty-eight of the *Kephalaia* describes his state of perpetual grief for his five sons: “the second sad one is the primal man whose greatness and kingdom is in the Ship of Light... he however is sad for his five sons, which are in the middle of the danger.”⁴⁷ This portrait of the loneliness of the First Man, unable to return to his home and fearing for his lost sons, is suggestive of the experience of exile and reinforces his characterisation as vulnerable and impotent.

The centrality of the theme of the suffering and sadness of the First Man in the *Kephalaia* and the *Psalm-book* emerges in the wake of the exploration of the suffering male in Second Temple literature which becomes embodied in Judeo-Christian martyrology. Central to this discourse is a transformation in haggadic exegesis of the *Aqedah*, the binging of Isaac by Abraham in Genesis 22, in which the portrayal of Isaac shifts from nescient victim to willing

⁴⁴ Prudence Harper, “Image and Identity: Art of the early Sasanian Dynasty,” in *The Sasanian Era (The Idea of Iran)* vol. 3, eds. Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis and Sarah Stewart, (London: Tauris, 2008), 71-85.

⁴⁵ *Psalm-Book*, 209, 13-21.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 209, 21-28.

⁴⁷ *Kephalaia* 58.173.31-148.2

participant in his imminent sacrifice.⁴⁸ The following section will discuss this development and its centrality to 4 Maccabees.

MASCULINITY IN SECOND TEMPLE JUDAISM

Géza Vermès identifies a transformation in the interpretation of the *Aqedah* in haggadic midrash of the Second Temple era. The portrayal of Isaac Vermès locates the first occurrence of this in the *Genesis Fragment Targum*, in which Abraham confesses his intention to an obedient Isaac prior to the attempted sacrifice: “‘At all events, God will provide himself the lamb, O my son; and if not, thou art for a burnt-offering, my son.’ So they went both of them together - one to slaughter and the other to be slaughtered.”⁴⁹ Isaac’s acquiescence to his sacrifice is symbolised in haggadic exegesis by a request to Abraham to bind him securely, as exemplified by *Fragment Targum* 12: “Bind my hands properly that I might not struggle in the time of my pain and disturb you and render your sacrifice unfit and be cast into the pit of destruction in the world to come.”⁵⁰ *Targum Neofiti* I, dated between the pre-Christian era and 200 CE, repeats Isaac’s request for binding: “Bind me properly that I may not kick (resist) you and your offering be made unfit.”⁵¹ This characterisation of the sacrifice of Isaac may also be found in The *Antiquities of the Jews* of Jewish historian and hagiographer Josephus. This text was written in the last year of the reign of Emperor Domitian (c 93-94 C.E) from within Roman-Judaea as *apologia* for the Jewish faith. Here Isaac is attributed with the qualities of religious piety and filial obedience. He is deemed:

not worthy to be born at first, if he should reject the determination of God, and of his Father, and should not resign himself up readily to both their pleasures, since it would have been unjust, if he had not obeyed, even if his father alone had so resolved.⁵²

A further dimension of the reconfiguration of the *Aqedah* is the introduction of Hellenistic philosophical concepts into Midrashic narrative. In *Genesis Rabbah*, Abraham becomes an example of the virtue of self-control; he is said to have “suppressed my feelings of

⁴⁸ Géza Vermès, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies*, (*Studia Post-Biblica* 4), (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 193-228.

⁴⁹ Fragmentary *Targum* xxii. 8 cited by Vermès 1973, 194. The *Genesis Fragment Targum* is believed to have originated from the *Pentateuchal Palestinian Targums* either as a gloss or aide-memoire for preachers or translators: see Martin McNamara, ed. *Targum and Testament Revisited: Aramaic Paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible: A Light on the New Testament, Second Edition (Biblical Resource)*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) 2010. Fragmentary *Targum* xxii. 8 cited by Vermès 1973, 194.

⁵⁰ *Fragment Targum* xxii. 10 loc. cit., 194.

⁵¹ *Fragment Neofiti* cited by Vermès 1973, *Scripture and Tradition...*, 194.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 107.

compassion in order to do Thy will.”⁵³

The example of Isaac as willing sacrifice is central to the narrative of 4 Maccabees, in which the roots of an emerging portrayal of masculinity as the endurance of suffering may be found.⁵⁴ This text, which appears in the Greek Septuagint, has been dated to the mid-first century C.E.⁵⁵ The author, although unknown, was evidently a devout Jew familiar with Hellenistic philosophy.⁵⁶ 4 Maccabees develops the narratives of 1 and 2 Maccabees, but is, to quote George Nickelsburg, “transposed into the key of Greek philosophy.”⁵⁷ This is achieved through the twinning of the great universal principle Reason (λογισμὸς) with the adjective devout (εὐσέβεια) throughout the text, as discussed by David deSilva.⁵⁸

4 Maccabees relates the torture and execution of Rabbi Eleazar and seven brothers by the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV during the Maccabean revolt (167-160 CE). The cruelty of Antiochus is intended as a metaphor for the contemporaneous oppression of the Jewish people under Roman occupation. The passages of particular significance to this paper relate to the torture and execution of the seven brothers who refuse to submit to Antiochus’ demands to partake of food that has been sacrificed to Greek gods. The brothers’ resistance is assimilated to the Hellenistic male-gendered virtues of self-control (σωφροσύνη), and endurance (ὕπομονη). Their demonstrations of religious loyalty are thus presented as paradigms of the supremacy of reason over the emotions (σπλάγχνα).

In 4 Maccabees, the example of Isaac’s willing sacrifice achieves the transformation of execution into the glory of martyrdom. A brother evokes the endurance (ὕπεμεινεν) of Isaac to inspire his brother: “Remember whence you came, and the father by whose hand Isaac would have submitted (ὕπεμεινεν) to being slain for the sake of religion (εὐσέβεια).”⁵⁹ Furthermore, the mother of the brothers recalls Isaac as ancestral paradigm of fearlessness in death: “For his

⁵³ For translation of *Genesis Rabbah* 56.1-11 “The binding of Isaac,” see Mary Gerhart and Fabian Udoh, *The Christianity Reader*, (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 189-193. *Genesis Rabbah* 56:10 loc. cit., 192.

⁵⁴ The representation of masculinity in 4 Maccabees is addressed by Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson, “Taking It like a Man: Masculinity in 4 Maccabees,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 117, no. 2, (Summer, 1998), pp. 249-273.

⁵⁵ Larry R. Helyer, *Exploring Jewish Literature of the Second Temple Period: A Guide for New Testament Studies*, (Illinois: Intervarsity Press 2002), 402-412 (404).

⁵⁶ David A. deSilva, *4 Maccabees (Guides to the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha)*, (London: A&C Black), 1998.

⁵⁷ George W.E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 223.

⁵⁸ deSilva 1998, *4 Maccabees*..., 13-14.

⁵⁹ 4 Macc. 13:12, 377.

sake also our father Abraham was zealous to sacrifice his son Isaac, the ancestor of our nation; and when Isaac saw his father's hand wielding a sword and descending upon him, he did not cower (οὐκ ἔπτηξεν)."⁶⁰

As discussed by Stephen Moore and Janice Capel, the characterisation of the mother reveals a further significant aspect of gender construction in 4 Maccabees.⁶¹ Her exhortation to her sons to endure is lauded in male-gendered language. She demonstrates manly courage (ἀνδρειώσας).⁶² She is acclaimed with martial imagery, being a "soldier of God in the cause of religion,"⁶³ (δι' εὐσέβειαν θεοῦ στρατιῶτι) who has achieved the conquering of a tyrant (τύραννον ἐνίκησας).⁶⁴ She is "more powerful than a man" (δυνατωτέρα εὐρέθης ἀνδρός) through the overcoming of her maternal compassion (σπλάγχνα).⁶⁵ The mother's demonstration of male-gendered courage (ἀνδρεία) is also used as a measurement by which to challenge male behaviour. The text challenges the reader to examine their thoughts: "Do not consider it amazing that reason had full command over these men in their tortures since the mind of woman despised even more diverse agonies."⁶⁶ If a woman may overcome a state of emotional extremity and submit to reason, how much easier for a man. 4 Maccabees thus reveals a reversal in the characterisation of desirable gendered responses to oppression. The male is portrayed as suffering and submitting to torture; the female is portrayed as prepared to battle.

As discussed by Stephen Moore and Janice Capel, in 4 Maccabees, self-control (σωφροσύνη) and endurance (ὑπομονή) are adopted as valid male responses to persecution, torture and suffering.⁶⁷ The masculinisation of these virtues ensures submission without emasculation. These responses are internalised, moving the focus of the text away from the external confrontation with Antiochus, whose brutality is equalled by the tyranny of the human emotions. The emergence of these constructs as male-gendered characteristics in 4 Maccabees reveals that oppression challenges and destabilises gender construction. This may be considered a demonstration of the fluidity of masculinity under pressure. Daniel Boyarin identifies reformations of masculinity as a response to oppression in rabbinical discourse,

⁶⁰ Ibid. 16.20, 381.

⁶¹ Moore and Capel, "Taking it like a Man..." 1998.

⁶² 4 Macc. 15.23, 380.

⁶³ Ibid. 16.14, 381.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 14.11, 378.

⁶⁷ See discussion of Moore and Anderson, "Taking It like a Man," 1998.

arguing that the rejection of the Roman model of masculinity by the rabbis constitutes a form of resistance:

The early rabbis constitute an instance of opposition to the representation of masculinity as activity and dominance... both early rabbinic Jews and early Christians resisted the Roman imperial power structure through “gender bending,” thus marking their own understanding that gender itself is implicated in the maintenance of political power. ⁶⁸

The following section will discuss evidence of persecution in Manichaean sources and possible effects upon formations of masculinity as long-suffering and endurance.

PERSECUTION AND ENDURANCE IN MANICHAISM

4 Maccabees exemplifies the construction of endurance as a laudable male-gendered response to oppression. This construction may be understood as an adaptive response to oppression and persecution in the context of contact with Hellenic philosophy.

The Manichaean faith was the target of brutal and persistent persecution, commencing with the imprisonment and death of Mani himself in c.276 C.E. during the reign of King Bahram I. The events of Mani’s last days are recounted in a variety of sources. The Coptic Manichaean *Homilies* (henceforward *Homilies*) describe these events in terms that echo the mythology surrounding the First Man, including the sending forth, imprisonment and plea for deliverance: “Shame the hated ones with your ... you sent me to this place ... the Mind of greatness, the essence of ... You sent me and dispatched me (... entreaty) quickly. Save the prisoner from the ones who seize him. Release the bound man from (his irons).” ⁶⁹ Worthy of note also is the portrayal of Mani’s death in Manichaean literature as crucifixion. For example, the *Homilies* contains an important section on Mani’s trial, imprisonment and death entitled “The Section of the Narrative about the Crucifixion.” ⁷⁰ The parallel with the accounts of Christ’s last days is readily apparent.

A key figure in the persecution of Manichaeism in the Sasanian Empire was the Zoroastrian priest Kartīr. Although listed amongst the court members of Shapur I, Kartīr’s ascension to the height of religious power appears to have occurred under subsequent rulers, being named as the chief of priests (*mowbedān mowbed*) of the Sasanian monarchs Hormizd I,

⁶⁸ Boyarin 1997, *Unheroic Conduct...*, 6.

⁶⁹ *Homilies* 53.10-20 cited by Gardner and Lieu 2004, 85.

⁷⁰ Gardner 2014, “Mani’s Last Days,” 164.

Bahram I and II.⁷¹ Kartīr proudly recorded his titles and his successful persecution of rival faiths upon four surviving rock reliefs at Naqš-e Rājab, Naqš-e Rostam, Sar-e Mašhad and upon the Ka'ba-ye Zardošt at Naqš-e Rostam.⁷² The inscription at the Ka'ba-ye Zardošt portrays the success of these persecutions as a victory over the Zoroastrian evil spirit Ahriman and his followers (Middle Persian: *devs*):

And in country upon country and place upon place throughout the whole empire the works of Ohrmazd and the gods superior became, and (to) the Mazdayasnian religion and magi-men great dignity.....there was, and the gods and water and fire and small cattle great contentment befell, and Ahriman and the devs great beating and hostile treatment befell, and the teaching Ahriman and the devs from the empire departed and Jews and Buddhist monks and Brahmins and Nazarenes and Christians and [MKTK-y] and Zandiks (Manichaeans) within the empire were driven out... And idol destruction and dwelling of the devs and burning down...⁷³

The *Homilies* address the persecution of the Manichaean community during this era. In terms of genre, it is helpful to consider the definition of homily offered by Martin Doerne, as “a *community sermon*: a teaching, admonitory and consolatory discourse closely linked to the reading (or pericope).”⁷⁴ As discussed by Nils Pedersen, the *Homilies* describe the persecution of the Manichaean faithful through vivid imagery of blood, bones and corpses reminiscent of the prophets.⁷⁵ Chapter seventy-five of the *Homilies* tells that: “... bones were scattered in every land [and in every] / city.”⁷⁶ Chapter eighty of the *Homilies* adopts animal imagery: “The dogs which have / [...] the evil dragons, they tore / [their bodies] to pieces, their blood flowed upon the earth. / [...] in every city.”⁷⁷

Timothy Pettipiece discusses the theme of torture and persecution as potential temptations to apostasy in *Chapter* one hundred and eighty-nine of the *Kephalaia*:

[The fifth is this:] If persecution/ [happens] in ... through the persecutor .../ ... the Sects ... those who stand in .../... tribulation. Or again as they .../... as they strike him

⁷¹ Martin Sprengling, “Kartīr, Founder of Sasanian Zoroastrianism.” *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, 57 no. 2, (1940), 197-228 (204) and “From Kartīr to Shahpuhr I.” *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, 57 no. 3, (1940), 330-340.

⁷² See articles above by Sprengling 1940. See also Frye, Richard N. “The Middle Persian Inscription at Sar Mashhad.” *The Harvard Theological Review*, 42 no. 1, 1949, 69-70; Manfred Hutter. “Manichaeism in the Early Sasanian Empire.” *Numen*, 40 no. 1, (1993), 2-15.

⁷³ Sprengling 1940 “Kartīr, Founder of Sasanian Zoroastrianism,” 205.

⁷⁴ Cited by Nils A. Pedersen, *Studies in the Sermon on the Great War: Investigations of a Manichaean-Coptic Text from the Fourth Century*, (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1996), 156.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Homilies* 75.14-16 cited by Pedersen 1996, *Studies in the Sermon...*, 251.

⁷⁷ *Homilies* 80.10-131, *ibid.*

with whips .../... and they come to “crucify” him and he does not turn .../... from his truth and he bears everything .../... wrath, bond, and (crucifixion).⁷⁸

As indicated by Timothy Pettipiece, this suggests the persecution of the Manichaean faith to have been within the “living memory” of the compilers of the *Kephalaia*; this may be applied also to the *Homilies*.⁷⁹

Chapter fifteen of the *Kephalaia* identifies the imprisonment of the First Man as the archetype of persecution, which is compared to the persecution of Mani, the “Second Living Man:” “They persecute him, like they persecuted [already] in the beginning the First Man in the Land of Darkness...they take [him into] captivity and they remove (any) company from him...”⁸⁰ The introduction of the theme of persecution to the mythology of the First Man unveils a further construction beneath the presenting personae of the First Man. Pertinent to the emergence of this theme are Manichaean community texts, including Mani’s epistles, in which he self-identifies with suffering and persecution.

The theme of suffering is approached by Mani in a community letter entitled *P. Kell. Copt. 53*, preserved at the site of a 4th century Manichaean community at Kellis in Egypt.⁸¹ Dating to c.360 C.E., *P. Kell. Copt. 53* consists of fragments of letters originally written by Mani in Syriac and sent to his followers. Iain Gardner suggests that *P. Kell. Copt. 53* may have been translated into Coptic in the first part of the 4th century and circulated amongst the Manichean community.⁸² In this letter, Mani writes to a Manichaean community from whom he has received reports of discord. In response, Mani proffers personal experience of betrayal, echoing Christ’s revelation of John 13.18:

I myself also, this thing has happened to me: One who eats salt with me at the evening table, my garments upon his body. All these things I have endured from my children and my disciples; they whom I saved from the bondage of the world and the bondage of the body. I took them from the death of the world. I, all these things I have borne and endured from time to time, from many people.⁸³

Mani exhorts his readers to meet suffering and betrayal with endurance and, in emulation of Mani himself, to “bear-up” and practise “long-suffering:”

If you wish to make yourself like me: Bear

⁷⁸ *Kephalaia* 485.30-4.

⁷⁹ Pettipiece 2009, *Pentadic Redaction...*, 87.

⁸⁰ *Kephalaia* 15.49.2-49.4.

⁸¹ *P. Kell. Copt. 53* cited by Iain Gardner, *Kellis Literary Texts: Volume 2* (Dakhleh Oasis Project: Monograph15), (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2007), 11-84.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.* 41.5-19, 47.

Up like the wise shall bear, so that you
Will live. I reveal to you, my child,
My loved one: whoever wishes life, and life added
To his life, long-suffering
Is what befits him; because without long-suffering
He will not be able to live. For long-suffering
Has everything in it. ⁸⁴

Mani offers his long-suffering (Coptic: $\text{MNT}\bar{\text{Z}}\text{AP}\omega\text{ZHT}$) and endurance (Coptic: ZYPOMONH) as exemplae for his followers to emulate in their relations with each other. ⁸⁵ As discussed by Nicholas Baker-Brian, Mani's constructs long-suffering and endurance as a "purposeful ordeal," which offer a "spiritual ennobling of the individual and the community more generally." ⁸⁶ Significantly, Mani appears to accommodate endurance and suffering within the construction of an active "muscular" masculinity, through metaphors of physical work and combat. Mani allegorises the task of "bearing up" as physical labour, comparing it to a farmer toiling in his vineyard:

Again; become like a farmer who is tending
a good vineyard; when he has borne
his fruit from the produce, he takes (it)
in to his master. ⁸⁷

The active nature of this discipline is reinforced by reference to 1 Corinthians 9.24-27, in which Mani merges the task of "bearing up" with the Pauline imagery of athletic strength: "I also repeat for you the word: Gird your loins and secure your limbs like an athlete who goes down to the contest; so that by his strength he would find the crown of victory." ⁸⁸ In similar stlye, Mani exhorts the reader to "become a person good and strong who should enter a contest and acquit himself and receive the victory." ⁸⁹ Thus the passive tasks of enduring and "bearing up" are reframed as an active, physical form of strength through the construction of masculinity as athletic and combative strength. Nicholas Baker-Brian suggests the exhortations to endure

⁸⁴ Ibid., 44.09-16 75.

⁸⁵ E.g. 44.13; 15, 53.

⁸⁶ Baker-Brian, N., "'Putrid Boils and Sores, and Burning Wounds in the Body': The Valorization of Health and Illness in Late Antique Manichaeism." *Harvard Theological Review*, 109 no. 3, (July), (2016), 422-446 (433).

⁸⁷ *P. Kell. Copt.* 53.22-25, 49.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 42.9-13, 76.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 41.24-42.02, 48-49.

found in *P. Kell. Copt 53* may be placed within the framework of the developing Christian discourse on suffering:

The emergence of endurance (ὕπομονή/ὕπομένω) as the cardinal ascetic virtue in post-classical and early Christian literature (e.g. in martyrological narratives) signified the transformation of a repertoire of passive behaviours (endurance, long-suffering etc.) into the “active resistance” of the body to physical torture and suffering inflicted by the (Roman) state on followers of an illegitimate pre-Constantinian Christianity.⁹⁰

In Mani’s letter endurance and long-suffering emerge as positive spiritual responses to suffering caused by specifically internal community strife. Mani’s introduction of these themes are expanded in the *Kephalaia* and the *Psalm-book*, in which Mani’s original definition of endurance as a positive spiritual trait to combat discord within the community is extended to encompass endurance of persecution from outside the community. The portrayal of the First Man as an archetypal image of endurance as a response to persecution is evident in the “Psalms of Endurance,” in which the First Man is accompanied by endurance as he descends to the abyss:

The First Man

he was sent out to the fight,
and endurance came to him.

He left his land of light behind him,
he went out to the Land of darkness
and Endurance came to him.

He left also his men behind him, he went out to the field – (?)...
and endurance came to him.⁹¹

The Psalm proceeds to identify biblical figures, apostles, Manichaean and Christian martyrs as examples of endurance: Adam, Enosh, Noah, Shem, Jesus, Thecla, Drusiane, Maximilla, Aristobula and Mani himself. The inclusion here of female figures from the *Apocryphal Acts of Apostles* (Thecla, Drusiane, Maximilla and Aristobula) should be noted.⁹² Their literary characterisation in the apocryphal *Acts* reveals them as repudiating the feminine-gendered roles of marriage, reproduction and child-bearing through alignment with encratite doctrine. This reading is reinforced in the *Psalms of Heraclides*:

⁹⁰ Baker-Brian 2016, “Putrid Boils...,” 10-11.

⁹¹ *Psalm-Book* 141, 4-9.

⁹² English translation from Syriac original by William Wright. *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, Edited from Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum and Other Libraries*, vol. 2. *The English Translation*, (London; Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate 1871).

A despiser of the body is Thecla, the lover of God.

A shamer of the serpent is Maximilla the faithful...

A champion in the fight is Aristobula the enduring one...

A ... that loves her master is Drusiane, the lover of God.⁹³

The epithet of Thecla as “despiser of the body” places her firmly in the framework of encratism; the bodily passions are sublimated into love of God. The characterisation of Aristobula as “champion of God” echoes the masculine martial imagery employed in the characterisation of the mother of the seven brothers in 4 Maccabees as discussed above. Furthermore, the portrayal of Maximilla as “shamer of the serpent,” a reference to the Genesis Eden narrative, places her in the role of a pre-sexual Eve. Thus these female figures may be interpreted as functionally male.⁹⁴

The purpose of the appearance of these female figures in the “Psalms of Endurance” would appear to relate to the roles of women in the Manichaean community. It is evident that women were numbered amongst the *electae*, the higher echelon of the binary Manichaean system, amongst whose duties was the dissemination of the faith through missionary work.⁹⁵ As Gábor Kósa notes: “Therefore, if the author of the hymn desired to encourage contemporary female believers as well, he/she had to address them by citing female forerunners.”⁹⁶

Finally, the Manichaean faithful are drawn into this circle of figures through their own experience of suffering and endurance. Group membership is expressed in terms of male kinship relationships: “We also, my brothers, have our part of suffering, we shall join in their suffering and rest in their rest... We are true sons, the heirs of their fathers.”⁹⁷ The emergence of the First Man as prototype of the persecuted may be understood to reflect the development of the themes of suffering and endurance in the context of the persecution of the Manichaean community following the death of Mani.

⁹³ *Psalm-book* 192, 25-193, 3.

⁹⁴ See discussion of “manly women” in Kim Haines-Eitzen, *The Gendered Palimpsest: Women, Writing, and Representation in Early Christianity*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 124-126.

⁹⁵ See, for example the debate between Julia the Manichaean and Porphyry the Bishop of Gaza in *Vita Porphyrii episcopi Gazensis*. English translation in Gardner and Lieu 2004, *Manichaean Texts...*, 125-128.

⁹⁶ Gábor Kósa, “The protagonist-catalogues of the apocryphal Acts of Apostles in the Coptic Manichaica - a re-assessment of the evidence,” in *From Illahun to Djeme, Papers Presented in Honour of Ulrich Luft (BAR International Series 2311)*, eds. Ulrich Luft, Eszter Bechtold, András Gulyás, and Andrea Hasznos, (Oxford: Archaeopress) 2011, 107-120 (111).

⁹⁷ *Psalm-Book* 143, 20-24.

CONCLUSION

This paper has focused upon an apparent paradox in the characterisation of the Manichaean First Man. The First Man, upon his descent to the abyss, is presented as a hunter-warrior figure, keen and ready to battle. Accompanied by his five sons, he “leaps” with enthusiasm into the abyss to do battle with the creatures of the Kingdom of Darkness. Here, he is defeated and his sons are stolen from him. His characterisation shifts to present a weeping, isolated figure who appears to have been abandoned and forgotten by the forces of light. Unable to save himself, he cries out for rescue.

The emergence of a paradigm of masculinity as the ability to endure suffering in Judaeo-Christian discourse as represented in 4 Maccabees elucidates the paradoxical characterisation of the Manichaean First Man. This is exemplified by 4 *Maccabees*, which reveals a positive valuation of the endurance of torture and execution through the adoption of the Hellenic philosophical virtues of endurance and self-control. This shift of paradigm away from the construction of masculinity as power, strength and dominance permits masculinity to be retained in the context of oppression and helplessness. It is suggested that this shift in gender paradigm represents a response to oppression and persecution during occupation by the Roman Empire. This exemplifies the effect of persecution and oppression on the construction of gender; the fluidity of gender in times of subjection.

The motif of endurance emerges in Manichaean discourse first in Mani’s own community letters, found at the site of the Egyptian Manichaean community of Kellis. The letter concerned is *P. Kell. Copt. 53*, in which Mani self-identifies with Christ’s experience of betrayal by one amongst his inner circle. Mani extends the narrative of John 13 to encompass the themes of long-suffering and endurance, which he offers as positive exemplae to his followers for emulation within their community relationships.

Following Mani’s fall from favour, imprisonment and death, endurance develops a new significance in Manichaean discourse. References to persecution and exhortations to “endure” are scattered throughout the *Psalm-book*, *Kephalaia* and *Homilies*. Furthermore, suffering and endurance become central and meaningful aspects of the characterisation of the First Man in the *Psalm-book*. In the “Psalms of Endurance,” the First Man is presented as the archetype of the suffering Manichaean who continues to endure persecution and torture.

The dual characterisation of the Manichaean First Man should be interpreted in the context of the model of shifting gender characterisation demonstrable in Second Temple

literature, in which the experience of occupation and suppression by the Roman Empire of the Jewish faith can be seen to be influential upon formations of masculinity. In Manichaean texts, the myth of the entrapment of the Primal Man acts as a template upon which persecution and worldly suffering may be mapped. This appears to have been a development following Mani's death, although his commentary upon his own experience of betrayal within his community lays the foundation stone for the centrality of endurance and long-suffering to the Manichaean ethic, which is subsequently broadened to encompass persecution from outside the community. In the absence of a single mythological source authored by Mani, his original characterisation of the First Man is ambiguous. However, it appears that his characterisation as exemplar of endurance in the face of suffering and persecution may have developed following Mani's death in the context of the persecution of the Manichaean faith under Sasanian rule.

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