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THE FIGURE OF SETHEL IN THE MEDINET MADI MANICHAEAN WRITINGS: A RESULT OF THE INFLUENCE OF THE Gnostic SETHIANISM? OBSERVATIONS ON MANICHAEISM AS A RELIGIOUS SYSTEM

1. THE SO-CALLED HYMN TO SETH
FROM THE MANICHAEAN PSALM-BOOK

IN THE COLLECTION of Manichaean psalms in Coptic entitled *Psalms sarakoton* belonging to the *Manichaean Psalm-Book* from the Medinet Madi discovery (Egypt, c.400 AD), we find a psalm to which French translator André Villey gave the title *Hymne à Seth*¹ (it should be *à Sethel*)² (*PsB* 144.1–146.13).

The work occupies two and a half pages of a papyrus codex, although it is damaged in some places. The text can be divided into four parts. In the

¹ A. VILLEY (tr.), *Psaumes des errants. Écrits manichéens du Fayyūm* [= *Sources gnostiques et manichéens* 4], Paris 1994, pp. 75–77; commentary: pp. 237–246.

² The origin of the name ‘Sethel’ is unclear, although there have been various attempts to explain it. The suffix ‘-el’ may have been used to give divine meaning to biblical Seth, son of Adam, thus contrasting the son with the father, who lost the status of a creature created ‘in the image and after the likeness of God’ (Gen. 5:3). Another explanation suggests that ‘Sethel’ is derived from the same Hebrew root as that in the verb שָׂרַח, or ‘to plant’, which could be taken as an allusion to ‘another seed’, a race of people whose father and leader was Seth. A third expla-

short first section, the epithets of Sethel (σῆθελ) are listed,³ of which three have survived: ‘the saviour’ (πρεσβωτε);⁴ ‘the apostle of the Electship’ (παποστολος ἡτμητσωτῆ);⁵ and ‘the giver of life to souls’ (πρεφτηρο ἡμψχαγε).⁶ In the longer second part, Sethel is praised by the whole of the Manichaeian pantheon from the Father of Greatness and his god-emanations up to Mani and the Manichaeian Church.⁷ In the next part, the psalmist attempts to express admiration for Sethel through comparisons,⁸ of which, again, three have survived: he is compared to the Sun which gives joy,⁹ to a fertile flood,¹⁰ and finally, to a good farmer.¹¹ The final part is a doxology, which mentions Sethel, Mani and Mary.¹²

Two points in the text are of especial interest: 1. Sethel is described as ‘the saviour’ and is also compared to the Sun, the clearest manifestation of divine Light in the zone of ‘the mixture’. In the doxology he is juxtaposed with Mani, the founder of Manichaeism; 2. He is glorified not only by gods-emanations of Light but also by the supreme god of the Manichaeian pantheon, the Father of Greatness,¹³ as well as by the Manichaeian Church and its founder, Mani.¹⁴

nation proposes a phonetic harmonisation with the names of the other sons of biblical Adam: we observe a similar phenomenon in the Muslim tradition in which the names Cain, Abel and Seth become Qābil, Hābil and Šāhīl. See: G. A. G. STROUMSA, *Another Seed. Studies in Gnostic Mythology* [= *NHS* 24], Leiden 1984, pp. 73–77; B. A. PEARSON, ‘The figure of Seth in Manichaeian literature’, [in:] P. BRYDER (ed.), *Manichaeian Studies. Proceedings of the First International Conference on Manichaeism* [= *Lund Studies in African and Asian Religions* 1], Lund 1988, pp. 147–155, at pp. 150–151; J. C. REEVES, *Heralds of That Good Realm. Syro-Mesopotamian Gnosis and Jewish Traditions* [= *NHMS* 41], Leiden 1996, pp. 112–114.

³ *PsB* 144.1–4 (edition: C. R. C. ALLBERRY [ed.], *A Manichaeian Psalm-Book*, vol. 2, Stuttgart 1938).

⁴ *PsB* 144.1.

⁵ *PsB* 144.3.

⁶ *PsB* 144.4.

⁷ *PsB* 144.5–145.20.

⁸ *PsB* 145.21–146.8.

⁹ *PsB* 145.22–24.

¹⁰ *PsB* 145.26–28.

¹¹ *PsB* 145.29–31.

¹² *PsB* 146.9–13.

¹³ *PsB* 144.8–10.

¹⁴ *PsB* 145.12–14.

The special meaning ascribed to Sethel raises the question of whether we can detect the influence of Sethianism, an important Gnostic movement in which Seth plays a crucial role. If we are to address this question, it will be necessary to determine the characteristics of Sethel on the basis of other writings from Medinet Madi and to compare these characteristics with those found in the Gnostic Sethian writings from the Nag Hammadi. It is my hope that this investigation will allow us to draw several conclusions regarding Manichaeism as a religious system.

Manichaean references to Sethel have already been studied from the perspective of Gnosticism, but never specifically in relation to Gnostic Sethianism.¹⁵ In addition, my analysis will also draw on the second part of the *Kephalaia* (*The Kephalaia of the Wisdom of My Lord Mani*, Codex C from Dublin)¹⁶ which, due to its high degree of damage, is used less frequently by scholars than the better-preserved first part (*The Kephalaia of the Teacher*, Codex P. Berol. 15996 from Berlin).¹⁷

2. THE FIGURE OF SETHEL IN MANICHAEISM ACCORDING TO THE WRITINGS FROM MEDINET MADI

Before we examine the Manichaean writings from Medinet Madi to determine the characteristics of Sethel, it should be stated that, in addition to the

¹⁵ A. F. J. KLIJN, *Seth in Jewish, Christian and Gnostic Literature* [= *NovTSup* 46] Leiden 1977, pp. 109–112, 115; STROUMSA, *Another Seed* (cit. n. 2), pp. 145–152; PEARSON, ‘The figure of Seth’ (cit. n. 2), pp. 147–155; A. VILLEY, ‘Le personnage de Seth dans la tradition juive, la gnose, le mandéisme et le manichéisme’, [in:] *Psaumes des errants* (cit. n. 1), pp. 237–243.

¹⁶ On the subject of *The Kephalaia of the Wisdom of My Lord Mani*, see: J. M. ROBINSON, ‘The fate of the Manichaean codices of Medinet Madi 1929–1989’, [in:] G. WIESSNER & H.-J. KLIMKEIT (eds.) *Studia Manichaica. II. Internationaler Kongress zum Manichäismus, 6.–10. August 1989, St. Augustin/Bonn*, Wiesbaden 1992, pp. 19–62, at pp. 38–39; I. GARDNER, ‘An introduction to the Chester Beatty *Kephalaia* codex’, [in:] I. GARDNER, J. BEDUHN & P. DILLEY (eds.), *Mani at the Court of the Persian King* [= *NHMS* 87], Leiden 2015, pp. 1–12.

¹⁷ On the subject of *The Kephalaia of the Teacher*, see: ROBINSON, ‘The fate’ (cit. n. 15), pp. 46–51; I. GARDNER (tr.), *The Kephalaia of the Teacher. The Edited Coptic Manichaean Texts in Translation with Commentary* [= *NHMS* 37], Leiden 1995, pp. xix–xxiv.

common form of ‘Sethel’, we also find the variant ‘Seth’ in some of the texts.¹⁸

In the damaged text of the third part of the *Manichaean Homilies*, entitled *The Narrative about the Crucifixion*,¹⁹ we find the phrase ‘crowned like Sethel’ (ⲁⲓ ⲃⲣⲏⲡⲉ ⲛⲟⲉ ⲛⲥⲏⲞⲏⲗ)²⁰ which – as Villey²¹ claims – is undoubtedly a reference to Mani who was admitted to the Paradise of Light. In the same text we also find references to Adam,²² Enosh,²³ Sem,²⁴ Shem,²⁵ Nikotheos,²⁶ Enoch,²⁷ Jesus,²⁸ Paul,²⁹ and Zarathustra.³⁰

In the *Kephalaia*, an extensive Manichaean doctrinal commentary, Sethel is placed most often in the context of the so-called apostles, holy men and founders of religions who brought holy knowledge to mankind regarding the spiritual and material world. The last and most important of these apostles – according to the Manichaeans – was Mani himself, who is referred to in Arabic sources as ‘the Seal of the Prophets’.³¹ In Chapter 1 of the *Kephalaia: Concerning the Advent of the Apostle*, the author presents a list of the apostles of mankind, starting with Sethel, Enosh, Enoch and Sem, then Buddha, Aurentes

¹⁸ 2 *Keph.* 422,28–424,19 (provisional translation of a fragment: I. GARDNER, ‘The final ten chapters’, [in:] GARDNER, BEDUHN & DILLEY, *Mani at the Court* [cit. n. 16], pp. 93–94; this place: p. 93).

¹⁹ *MH* 42.9–85.34 (edition: N. A. PEDERSEN [ed.], *Manichaean Homilies with a Number of Hitherto Unpublished Fragments*, Turnhout 2006).

²⁰ *MH* 61.23.

²¹ VILLEY, *Psaumes des errants* (cit. n. 1), p. 242.

²² *MH* 68.15.

²³ *MH* 68.17.

²⁴ *MH* 68.17.

²⁵ *MH* 68.17. The Manichaeans distinguished between Sem and Shem, although it seems to be the same figure, see note 33.

²⁶ *MH* 68.17.

²⁷ *MH* 68.19.

²⁸ *MH* 75.32.

²⁹ *MH* 69.26.

³⁰ *MH* 70.2.14.

³¹ G. G. STROUMSA, ‘Seal of the Prophets’, [in:] *idem*, *The Making of the Abrahamic Religions in Late Antiquity*, Oxford 2015, pp. 88–89.

and Zarathustra, and finally Jesus Christ, Paul, and Mani.³² Additional information regarding the Manichaean chain of apostles is found in Chapter 342 of the second part of *Kephalaia*. Here we find Zarathustra, Buddha, Aurentes and Kebellos, as well as Jesus Christ, Adam, Seth, Enosh, Sem, Enoch, Noah, and Shem.³³ Mani himself is revealed as the last of the apostles.³⁴

It is also worth mentioning the prayer of Sethel (Chapter 10), in which the fourteen great aeons are introduced. The aeons are, in fact, the fourteen Manichaean gods responsible for creating the world in the zone of 'the mixture'. Apart from this we know very little about the prayer. However, Sethel is also mentioned as belonging to the first generations of mankind who lived longer and were larger (Chapter 57). The author of the *Kephalaia* refers to Sethel as the first-born son of Adam,³⁵ a notable departure from the book of Genesis, in which Cain appears in this role.³⁶

In addition to the *Hymn to Seth*, there are references to Sethel in two other works contained within the *Manichaean Psalm-Book*. *The Psalm of Endurance* refers to the martyrdom of Adam's descendants, who are the apostles of mankind; the author lists Adam, Sethel, Enosh, Noah, Shem, and Enoch.³⁷ Sethel also appears in the interesting so-called *Psalm of the Three Cries*, in which three women represent the three ways of the soul's life on the earth. The first, a Virgin, symbolises unblemished beings of Light; the second, a Continent one, is connected to beings of Light who came into contact with Darkness but overcame it; the third, a Married one, refers to beings of Darkness. In the context of the psalm, the Virgin refers to Sethel, the Con-

³² 1 *Keph.* 12.10–16.23 (the edition: A. BÖHLIG & H. J. POLOTSKY [eds.], *Kephalaia. 1. Hälfte (Lieferung 1–10)*, Stuttgart 1940; A. BÖHLIG [ed.], *Kephalaia. Zweite Hälfte. Lieferung 11/12 (Seite 244–291)*, Stuttgart 1966; W.-P. FUNK [ed.], *Kephalaia. Zweite Hälfte. Lieferung 13/14 (Seite 292–366)*, Stuttgart 1999; W.-P. FUNK [ed.], *Kephalaia I, Zweite Hälfte. Lieferung 15/16 (Seite 366–440)*, Stuttgart 2000).

³³ Chapter 342 of 2 *Keph.* On the distinction between Sem and Shem, see P. DILLEY, "Hell exists, and we have seen the place where it is." Rapture and religious competition in Sasanian Iran', [in:] GARDNER, BEDUHN & DILLEY, *Mani at the Court* (cit. n. 16), pp. 211–247, at p. 218 n. 28.

³⁴ 2 *Keph.* 422.28–424.19.

³⁵ 1 *Keph.* 12.10–11; 42.29.

³⁶ Gen. 4:1.

³⁷ *PsB* 142.3–9.

minent one to Adam, and the married one to Eve.³⁸ The positive evaluation of Sethel comes at the expense of Adam, who is an ambiguous figure in Manichaeism: he is, on the one hand, created by the forces of Darkness, but also shaped according to the pattern of one of the Light gods, and then saved later by the Jesus Splendour through soterical knowledge.³⁹

3. THE FIGURE OF SETH IN Gnostic SETHIANISM ACCORDING TO THE WRITINGS FROM NAG HAMMADI

It should be noted from the outset that Gnostic Sethianism, one of the most significant currents of Gnosticism, has been a subject of lively scholarly discussion for years. There are various issues facing anyone who would wish to reconstruct this religious formation. Firstly, it is likely that the name 'Sethians' was coined by polemicists – the term would not have been self-applied. Then, the Christian heresiologists who write about the Sethians (including: Pseudo-Hippolytus of Rome, *Refutation of All Heresies* 5.19–22; Pseudo-Tertullian, *Against All Heresies* 2.7–9; Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion* 39 but also, e.g. Theodoret of Cyrus, *Compendium of Heretical Accounts* 1.14) differ on several significant points regarding the religious content of these communities. Furthermore, it is difficult to distinguish the Sethians known from the testimonies of the heresiologists from those who appear in the original Sethian texts (e.g. Nag Hammadi). And finally, some scholars have also proposed that Sethianism represents an interpretative tradition, rather than a religious group with clearly defined social boundaries.⁴⁰

³⁸ *PsB* 179.22–24.

³⁹ On this subject, see: al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, B. DODGE (trans.), vol. 2, New York 1970, pp. 783–786: *The Beginning of Generation, According to the Doctrine of Māni*: Adam and Eve were begotten by the archons. However, Jesus was sent by the gods of Light to Adam in order to give him enlightening knowledge. Moreover, these gods gave Adam instructions to avoid Eve. Eve begot Cain with the archon and Abel with Cain. Then Eve seduced Adam and from this intercourse a boy was born unlike her previous children, probably because Adam, his father, had already received knowledge from Jesus, the god of Light. Adam named his son Shātil, i.e. Sethel. Sethel became the leader of this part of mankind who lived virtuously.

⁴⁰ On the subject of Gnostic Sethianism and problems with its reconstruction, see H.-M.

While the definition of Sethianism is beyond the scope of this paper, we can at least outline its limits by listing the original writings which scholars have classified as Sethian. While various scholars have proposed different lists,⁴¹ they differ mostly in minor points. The texts from Nag Hammadi which appear most frequently on the lists are:

1. *Apocryphon of John* (NHC II 1; III 1; IV 1);
2. *Hypostasis of the Archons* (NHC II 4);
3. the so-called *Gospel of the Egyptians* (*The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*; NHC III 2; IV 2);
4. *Apocalypse of Adam* (NHC V 5);
5. *Three Steles of Seth* (NHC VII 5);
6. *Zostrianos* (NHC VIII 1);
7. *Melchizedek* (NHC IX 1);
8. *Thought of Norea* (NHC IX 2);
9. *Marsanes* (NHC X);
10. *Allogenes* (NHC XI 3);
11. *Trimorphic Prottennoia* (NHC XIII 1).

SCHENKE, 'Das sethianische System nach Nag-Hammadi-Handschriften', [in:] P. NAGEL (ed.), *Studia Coptica*, Berlin 1974, pp. 165–173 (I used G. SCHENKE ROBINSON, G. SCHENKE & U.-K. PLISCH [eds.], *Der Same Seths. Hans-Martin Schenkes Kleine Schriften zu Gnosis, Koptologie und Neuem Testament* [= NHMS 78], Leiden 2012, pp. 285–292); M. TARDIEU, 'Les livres mis sous le nom de Seth et les Sethiens de l'heresiologie', [in:] M. KRAUSE (ed.), *Gnosis and Gnosticism*, Leiden 1977, pp. 204–210; F. WISSE, 'Stalking those elusive Sethians', [in:] B. LAYTON (ed.), *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism. Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale, New Haven, Connecticut, March 28–31, 1978*, II: *Sethian Gnosticism* [= *Numen Book Series* 41], Leiden 1981, pp. 563–576; K. RUDOLPH, 'Die "Sethianische" Gnosis. Eine heresiologische Fiktion?', [in:] LAYTON, *The Rediscovery* (cit. n. 40), pp. 577–578; H.-M. SCHENKE, 'The phenomenon and significance of Gnostic Sethianism', [in:] LAYTON, *The Rediscovery* (cit. n. 40), pp. 588–616; STROUMSA, *Another Seed* (cit. n. 2), pp. 4–9; J. D. TURNER, *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition*, Québec 2001; J. D. TURNER, 'Le séthianisme et les textes séthiens', [in:] J.-P. MAHÉ & P.-H. POIRIER (eds.), *Écrits gnostiques. La bibliothèque de Nag Hammadi*, Paris 2007, pp. xxxvi–xliii; M. A. WILLIAMS, 'Sethianism', [in:] A. MARJANEN & P. LUOMANEN (eds.), *A Companion to Second-Century Christian 'Heretics'* [= *VChr Sup* 76], Leiden 2008, pp. 32–63; W. MYSZOR, *Gnostycyzm i teologia Ireneusza z Lyonu. Zagadnienia wybrane* [Gnosticism and the theology of Irenaeus of Lyon. Selected questions], Katowice 2010, pp. 58–61.

⁴¹ SCHENKE, 'Das sethianische System' (cit. n. 40), pp. 285–286; SCHENKE, 'The phenomenon and significance' (cit. n. 40), p. 588; B. A. PEARSON, *Ancient Gnosticism. Traditions and Litera-*

In four of these texts – the *Thought of Norea*, the *Marsanes*, the *Allogenes*, and the *Trimorphic Protennoia* – we find no mention of Seth; the remainder include references to the common form ‘Seth’ (CΘ), but the variants ‘Em-macha Seth’ (ΕΜΜΑΧΑ CΘ)⁴² and ‘Seth Emmacha Seth’ (CΘ ΕΜΜΑΧΑ CΘ)⁴³ also occur.

In the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, the account of Seth’s birth does not differ from that found in Genesis (Gen. 4:25),⁴⁴ and Seth himself has no salvific functions (Norea, who is born later, has these qualities).⁴⁵ It is important to note that Seth was born after ‘Adam [knew] his female counterpart Eve’.⁴⁶ The verb CΘΟΥΝ used here may indicate not only physical conception but also spiritual birth (the noun ΠCΘΟΥΝ = ΤΓΝΩCΙC = the soterical, spiritual knowledge of the Gnostics). This can be contrasted with the conception of Cain and Abel; before their birth, Eve is described as ‘the carnal woman’ (ΤCΓΙΜΕ ΝCΑΡΚΙΚΗ)⁴⁷ and about two parents together are called ‘the psychic ones’ (ΜΨΥΧΙΚΟC).⁴⁸

The *Apocalypse of Adam* is also based on Genesis, although it is more mediated. Here we find references to the deluge,⁴⁹ Noah and the ark,⁵⁰ the division of the earth between the three sons of Noah,⁵¹ and the destruction

ture, Minneapolis 2007, pp. 60–97; TURNER, ‘Le séthianisme’ (cit. n. 40), pp. xxxvi–xxxvii; WILLIAMS, *Sethianism* (cit. n. 40), pp. 36–50.

⁴² *Three Steles*, NHC VII 5: 118.28 (edition: J. E. GOEHRING [ed.], ‘The Three Steles of Seth’, [in:] B. A. PEARSON [ed.], *Nag Hammadi Codex VII* [= NHS 30], Leiden 1996, pp. 371–421).

⁴³ *Zostr.*, NHC VIII 1: 6.25; 51.14–15 (edition: B. LAYTON & J. H. SIEBER [eds.], ‘Zostrianos’, [in:] J. H. SIEBER [ed.], *Nag Hammadi Codex VIII* [= NHS 31], Leiden 1991, pp. 7–225).

⁴⁴ *Hypost. of the Arch.*, NHC II 4: 91.30–33 (edition: B. LAYTON [ed.], ‘The Hypostasis of the Archons’, [in:] *idem* [ed.], *Nag Hammadi Codex II 2–7* [= NHS 20], Leiden 1989, pp. 219–259).

⁴⁵ *Hypost. of the Arch.*, NHC II 4: 91.34–92.3.

⁴⁶ <Α>ΔΔΑΜ ΔΕ [CΘΟΥ(Ν)] ΝΤΓΕΩΥΒΡΕΙΝΕ ΕΥΖΔ, *Hypost. of the Arch.*, NHC II 4: 91.30–31 (trans. LAYTON, ‘The Hypostasis’ [cit. n. 44], p. 247).

⁴⁷ *Hypost. of the Arch.*, NHC II 4: 90.13.

⁴⁸ *Hypost. of the Arch.*, NHC II 4: 90.15.

⁴⁹ *Apoc. of Adam*, NHC V 5: 69.2–70.6 (edition: G. W. MACRAE [ed.], ‘The Apocalypse of Adam’, [in:] J. BRASHLER [ed.], *Nag Hammadi Codices V 2–5 and VI* [= NHS 11], Leiden 1979, pp. 151–195).

⁵⁰ *Apoc. of Adam*, NHC V 5: 70.6–25.

⁵¹ *Apoc. of Adam*, NHC V 5: 72.15–17.

of Sodom and Gomorrah.⁵² In this text, Seth appears as little more than a confidant of the revealed knowledge received earlier by his father Adam,⁵³ but is also referred to as ‘the man who is the seed of the great generation or from whom it comes’.⁵⁴

However, in the *Apocryphon of John*, one of the most important texts for the study of Gnostic Sethianism, the spiritual aspects of Seth emerge clearly. In the world of the Pleroma, he was appointed ruler over the second (of four) aeons hierarchically,⁵⁵ and in the demiurgic world, where he appears as the image of the Son of Man, he is described as being born of Adam and the spiritual being Prognosis.⁵⁶ The text also emphasises the pleromatic character of Seth’s generation, which has its place in the third aeon:⁵⁷ it is said that the generation will descend to the demiurgic world where it will be deprived of knowledge regarding its origin, but when the spirit descends from the pleromatic world, it will return to Pleroma.⁵⁸

The so-called *Gospel of the Egyptians* gives Seth the greatest consideration, and also presents him most fully from the spiritual perspective. Pleromatic Seth is brought into existence alongside four enlighteners (Harmozel, Oroiael, Davithe, Eleleth) by Prophaneia who, in turn, revealed herself on the initiative of Adamas (pleromatic Adam).⁵⁹ As the son of Adamas, Seth was called upon to become ‘father of the immovable, incorruptible generation’ (ΕΙΩΤ ΝΤΓΕΝΕΑ ΕΤΕΜΕΣΚΙΜ ΝΑΦΘΑΡΤΟΝ)⁶⁰ and is referred to as ‘the great,

⁵² *Apoc. of Adam*, NHC V 5: 75.9–16.

⁵³ *Apoc. of Adam*, NHC V 5: 64.2–6; 67.14–21; 85.19–24.

⁵⁴ ΠΡΩΜΕ ΕΤΙΜΑΥ ΕΤΕ ΤΣΠΟΡΑ ΤΕ ΝΤΝΟΣ ΝΓΕΝΕΑ Η ΕΒΟΛ ΝΡΗΤΩ. *Apoc. of Adam*, NHC V 5: 65.7–9 (trans. MACRAE, ‘The Apocalypse’ [cit. n. 49], p. 157).

⁵⁵ *Apocr. of John*, NHC II 1: 9.11–13; III 1: 13.17–18 (the edition: M. WALDSTEIN & F. WISSE [eds.], *The Apocryphon of John. Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices II 1; III 1 and IV 1 with BG 8502.2* [= NHMS 33], Leiden 1995).

⁵⁶ *Apocr. of John*, NHC II 1: 24.35–25.2; IV 1: 38.25–30.

⁵⁷ *Apocr. of John*, NHC II 1: 9.14–15; III 1: 19–21.

⁵⁸ *Apocr. of John*, NHC II 1: 25.5–16; IV 1: 39.2–15.

⁵⁹ *Gosp. of Egyp.*, NHC III 2: 51.14–22; IV 2: 63.8–17 (edition: A. BÖHLIG & F. WISSE [eds.], *Nag Hammadi Codices III 2 and IV 2. The Gospel of the Egyptians [The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit]* [= NHS 4], Leiden 1975).

⁶⁰ *Gosp. of Egyp.*, NHC III 2: 51.8–9, see also: IV 2: 62.2–3.

incorruptible' (πῖνος ἄφθαρτος σὺ).⁶¹ The text informs us that the generation of Seth was persecuted by the devil through fire, hunger, plagues, and the deluge,⁶² but that Seth defended his generation;⁶³ his activity is described as salvific.⁶⁴ The text also mentions that Seth established a holy baptism,⁶⁵ and informs us that he wrote a revelation in a book that was then placed in the mountains, to be disclosed at the end of history.⁶⁶

According to the *Three Steles of Seth*, the titled steles contain holy knowledge regarding the trinity – the son Geradamas, the mother Barbelo, and the pre-existing father – written by Seth himself.⁶⁷ He is described here as the son of Geradamas⁶⁸ and 'the father of the living and unshakable generation' (πῶτ ἦτε †γενεα ετοῖζ ἀγῶ ἄτκιμ).⁶⁹

The extensive (although seriously damaged) *Zostrianos* identifies Seth with the soterical knowledge that comes to every soul⁷⁰. Here we find references to 'the children of Seth' (ἡδῆρε ἦτε σὺ),⁷¹ 'the holy seed of Seth' (†σπορα ετογααβ ἦτε σὺ)⁷² and Seth as 'the father of the immovable generation' (πῶτ ἦτε †γενεα ἡν ἀτκιμ).⁷³

Finally, the writing *Melchizedek*, also damaged, informs us of the gathering (ἐκκλησία) of the children of Seth who are above a multitude of aeons in the Pleroma.⁷⁴

⁶¹ *Gosp. of Egypt.*, NHC III 2: 51.20, see also: IV 2: 63.14–15.

⁶² *Gosp. of Egypt.*, NHC III 2: 61.1–23; IV 2: 72.10–73.6.

⁶³ *Gosp. of Egypt.*, NHC III 2: 61.23–64.9; IV 2: 73.7–75.24.

⁶⁴ *Gosp. of Egypt.*, NHC III 2: 63.4–8; IV 2: 74.17–23.

⁶⁵ *Gosp. of Egypt.*, NHC III 2: 63.23–24; IV 2: 75.11–13.

⁶⁶ *Gosp. of Egypt.*, NHC III 2: 68.1–69.5; IV 2: 80.15–81.2.

⁶⁷ *Three Steles*, NHC VII 5: 118.10–127.32.

⁶⁸ *Three Steles*, NHC VII 5: 118.25–28.

⁶⁹ *Three Steles*, NHC VII 5: 118.12–13.

⁷⁰ *Zostr.*, NHC VIII 1: 30.9–12.

⁷¹ *Zostr.*, NHC VIII 1: 7.8–9.

⁷² *Zostr.*, NHC VIII 1: 130.16–17.

⁷³ *Zostr.*, NHC VIII 1: 51.15–16; 6.26–27.

⁷⁴ *Melchiz.*, NHC IX 1: 5.19–22 (edition: S. GIVERSEN & B. A. PEARSON [eds.], 'Melchizedek', [in:] B. A. PEARSON [ed.], *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X* [= NHC 15], Leiden 1981, pp. 19–85).

4. MANICHAEAN SETHEL AND SETHIAN SETH: A COMPARISON OF THE FIGURES

Now that we have provided a brief overview of Manichaean writings from Medinet Madi and Sethian writings from Nag Hammadi, we can compare the figures of Sethel and Seth. In Sethel of the Manichaeans, we find two noteworthy features. Firstly, there is the spiritual and even divine nature of Sethel. In the Manichaean texts from Medinet Madi, there is no close relationship between Sethel and the figure of Seth who appears in Genesis. While he is referred to in the context of Adam and the Old Testament patriarchs, these are not so much the protoplasts of mankind as the revealers of the transmundane truths, who have been highly spiritualised by the Manichaeans. References to Sethel in relation to the longevity and greatness of the first generations of mankind apply only to the topic discussed in the *Ke-phalaia* and not to the biblical context. It is also possible to refer to the spiritualisation and even apotheosis of Sethel; as he is more perfect than Adam, Mani can be compared with Sethel in an eschatological context. Sethel is also compared to the pure substance of Light (the Sun), and equated with the gods of the Manichean pantheon – including even the Father of Greatness – who praise him. Secondly, Sethel is considered one of the apostles of mankind, the figures who brought true religious knowledge to people. He is occasionally considered to be first among them, although the most is Mani who, as the last in the sequence of apostles, brings the fullest knowledge. In some Arabic sources he is referred to as ‘the Seal of the Prophets’.

In the Gnostic Sethian writings, there is still a clear relationship between Seth and Genesis (*Hypostasis of the Archons*), although the pleromatic approach, which occasionally deviates from the biblical context, is unquestionably more prevalent. As the son of the pleromatic Adam (Adamas/Ger-adamas), Seth was brought into being alongside four Sethian spiritual enlighteners, who assisted in the process of salvation (*Gospel of the Egyptians*). In the pleromatic world Seth has his place in the second aeon (the first belonging to Adamas, his father), whereas in the demiurgic world he will intervene as the Son of Man (*Apocryphon of John*).

In the Sethian tradition, its eponym Seth is often presented as the one who transmits spiritual knowledge. In the so-called *Gospel of the Egyptians*,

the revelation written by Seth is said to have been hidden, to be disclosed at the end of time. The *Three Steles of Seth*, in turn, discloses one of its possible contents: a knowledge of the Sethian trinity. Seth is also identified with the direct transmission of gnosis to every soul (*Zostrianos*). Although Seth himself was a spiritual being, the sources also suggest that this knowledge was given to Seth by his father Adam, who had previously received it from three mysterious men (*Apocalypse of Adam*).

Many Sethian writings also mention 'the children of Seth' and emphasise that Seth is 'the father of the unshakable generation'. This generation has a spiritual nature and comes from the pleromatic world: according to the *Apocryphon of John*, the generation has its place in the penultimate third aeon. It will descend to the demiurgic world, where it will be deprived of knowledge of its identity and, once redeemed, will return to the Pleroma. According to the so-called *Gospel of the Egyptians* Seth will defend the generation when it is persecuted by the devil.

As we can see from even this cursory outline, there are both clear similarities and substantial differences between Sethel of the Manichaeans and Seth of the Gnostic Sethians. Both are spiritual beings, although the Manichaeans go as far as apotheosis. Moreover, Sethel of the Manichaeans has only a tenuous connection with the book of Genesis, while Seth of the Gnostic Sethians is still, to some extent, dependent on the biblical tradition. Yet, Sethel and Seth are both recognised as salvific figures within their respective milieus, primarily due to their transmission of esoteric knowledge. The Manichaean figure, however, is placed most often in the context of the apostles of mankind, the most important of whom is Mani, whereas Seth of the Gnostic Sethians is the founder, revealer, guardian and saviour of his spiritual generation.

We should not discount the possibility that the name Sethel was used in Manichaean writings to emphasise the more spiritual side of this Manichean figure, to distance him from the biblical Seth or to indicate his Mandaean (*Šitil*) rather than Sethian origin.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ On the subject of *Šitil* in religion of the Mandaeans, see J. J. BUCKLEY, *The Mandaeans. Ancient Texts and Modern People*, Oxford 2002, pp. 35–39.

5. OBSERVATIONS REGARDING
MANICHAEAN SETHEL AND SETHIAN SETH

The comparison provided above does not suggest an exact overlap between the Seth of Sethian writings and the Manichaean Sethel, yet there are clear similarities between them. If we are to reconcile the two figures, we must first turn to the *Cologne Mani Codex*, a spiritual biography of the founder of 'the religion of Light'. In this exceptional (for the knowledge of the spiritual development of Mani) testimony, Sethel is discussed in the context of the apostles of mankind, and what is particularly important about their apocalyptic writings.⁷⁶ Here, one by one, are listed the apocalyptic works of Adam,⁷⁷ Sethel,⁷⁸ Enosh,⁷⁹ Shem,⁸⁰ and Enoch⁸¹ as well as short quotations from the letters of Paul.⁸² This may indicate that Mani and/or the early Manichaean community had an extensive knowledge of Judaeo-Christian literature, and that his/their understanding of Sethel may have drawn on many spiritual and religious traditions, not merely that of the Gnostic Sethians.

Modern scholarship has offered several hypotheses regarding how the figure of Seth became incorporated into Manichaean thought. According to Albertus F. J. Klijn, who examined the figure of Seth in 'Gnostic literature' (broadly defined to include the texts of the Mandaeans and Manichaeans),⁸³

⁷⁶ CMC 45.1–72.7 (the edition: L. KOENEN & C. RÖMER [eds.], *Der Kölner Mani-Kodex. Über das Werden seines Leibes. Kritische Edition aufgrund der von A. Henrichs und L. Koenen besorgten Erstedition*, Opladen 1988). On the subject of this fragment of the *Cologne Mani Codex*, see STROUMSA, *Another Seed* (cit. n. 2), p. 146; REEVES, *Heralds* (cit. n. 2); N. J. BAKER-BRIAN, *Manichaeism. An Ancient Faith Rediscovered*, London 2011, pp. 50–51, 65–66; H. APPEL, 'Kodeks Maniego' [The Codex of Mani], [in:] W. APPEL & P. WOJCIECHOWSKI (eds.), *Z antycznego świata. Religio – Cultus – Homines* [Out of the Antique World: *Religio – Cultus – Homines*], Toruń 2000, p. 129; J. RIES, *Gnose, gnosticisme, manichéisme* [= *HomRel* 9], Turnhout 2011, pp. 484–494, 507–510, 517–519.

⁷⁷ CMC 48.16–50.7.

⁷⁸ CMC 50.8–52.7.

⁷⁹ CMC 52.8–55.9.

⁸⁰ CMC 55.10–58.5.

⁸¹ CMC 58.6–60.12.

⁸² CMC 60.13–62.9.

⁸³ KLIJN, *Seth* (cit. n. 15), pp. 81–117.

suggested that Jewish Haggadic literature may have provided inspiration for the Gnostic understanding of Seth.⁸⁴ Gedaliahu A. G. Stroumsa, who analysed the figure of Seth as one of the motifs of Gnostic⁸⁵ and Manichaeic⁸⁶ mythology, further suggested that the sources of certain Manichaeic myths could be found in the 'Judaeo-Christian gnosticizing community' in which Mani grew up.⁸⁷ Birger A. Pearson proposed that 'Mani's teachings regarding Seth were influenced by previous Gnostic traditions of a 'Sethian' stamp',⁸⁸ although Pearson's understanding of previous Gnostic traditions is more broadly defined than the strict corpus of the Sethian writings.⁸⁹ He also suggests that Mani would have come into contact with Sethian literature in 'the Elchasaite community in which he was raised'.⁹⁰ André Villey examines the development of Seth in the Jewish intertestamental and apocryphal tradition, in Gnosticism and Mandaeanism,⁹¹ and also suggests that Buddhists 'probably played the role of an intermediary between [Gnosticism] and Manichaeism'.⁹² John C. Reeves, in his extensive commentary on a fragment of the 'Sermon of Baraies' from the *Cologne Mani Codex* – which discusses the Old Testament predecessors of Mani: Adam, Sethel, Enosh, Shem and Enoch, (CMC 48,16–60,12)⁹³ – claims that Mani's knowledge of Adam, Sethel, Enoch and their holy books may have come from a tradition similar to Enochic literature and Christian *Adamschriften*.⁹⁴ Reeves discuss-

⁸⁴ KLIJN, *Seth* (cit. n. 15), pp. 118–120.

⁸⁵ STROUMSA, *Another Seed* (cit. n. 2), pp. 49–53, 73–134.

⁸⁶ STROUMSA, *Another Seed* (cit. n. 2), pp. 145–152.

⁸⁷ STROUMSA, *Another Seed* (cit. n. 2), pp. 172.

⁸⁸ PEARSON, 'The figure of Seth' (cit. n. 2), p. 155.

⁸⁹ See the remark of Pearson in his later work: 'The important role played by Seth in Gnostic literature is not confined to the Sethian corpus, for we shall encounter him in other Gnostic contexts as well, including Manichaeic and Mandaean writings', PEARSON, *Ancient Gnosticism* (cit. n. 41), p. 126.

⁹⁰ PEARSON, 'The figure of Seth' (cit. n. 2), p. 155.

⁹¹ VILLEY, 'Le personnage de Seth' (cit. n. 15), pp. 237–243.

⁹² VILLEY, 'Le personnage de Seth' (cit. n. 15), p. 240.

⁹³ REEVES, *Heralds* (cit. n. 2), *passim*.

⁹⁴ REEVES, *Heralds* (cit. n. 2), p. 210.

es what he refers to as ‘Syro-Mesopotamian gnosis’, a feature of Manichaeism and Mandaicism originating from ‘Jewish biblical exegesis’.⁹⁵

Much of the scholarship discussed above suggests the Manichaean conception of Seth was influenced by a broad Judaeo-Christian tradition, not merely by Sethian Gnosticism. Even Pearson, who refers to a specifically ‘Sethian’ tradition agrees that the Elchasaite community in which Mani was brought up was also a source of inspiration; and while Villey suggests that the Manichaeans borrowed the figure of Seth from the Mandaeans he also illustrates that the idea of Seth developed within a wider religious milieu which included the Jewish tradition and Gnosticism.

6. THE FIGURE OF SETHEL AS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW MANICHAISM WORKS AS A RELIGIOUS SYSTEM

In addition to examining the sources from which the Manichean understanding of Seth emerged, it is also important to say a few words about the role he plays within their religious system. As Albertus F. J. Klijn has observed, the Gnostics ‘never adapted ideas taken from their environment simply for their own sake. Such ideas were rigorously integrated into their own systems of thought’.⁹⁶ In the case of Sethel, he was incorporated into the chain of the apostles of mankind. The ‘Sermon of Baraies’ from the *Cologne Mani Codex* provides us with a short version of this chain – featuring only Old Testament figures and Paul – which may represent an initial version. It also tells us that the reason this sequence of apostles was established was to demonstrate that the revelation of Mani was not so different from the revelations of previous apostles.⁹⁷ We are, in other words, dealing with an attempt to legitimise a new religion by emphasising its ‘antiquity’ and downplaying the notion that Mani is a ‘revolutionary’.

The writings from Medinet Madi provide alternative ways in which the sequence of the apostles was used by the Manichaeans. In the first chapter

⁹⁵ REEVES, *Heralds* (cit. n. 2), p. 209.

⁹⁶ KLIJN, *Seth* (cit. n. 15), p. 119.

⁹⁷ *CMC* 70.23–72.7.

of the *Kephalaia*, entitled *Concerning the Advent of the Apostle*, Sethel is listed at the beginning of the chain together with Enosh, Enoch and Sem;⁹⁸ next come Buddha and Aurentes⁹⁹ who are connected with the East,¹⁰⁰ Zarathustra who is connected with Persia,¹⁰¹ then Jesus Christ,¹⁰² Paul,¹⁰³ and ‘a righteous man of truth’ (ΟΥΔΙΚΑΙΟΣ ΝΡΜΪΜΗΕ),¹⁰⁴ who immediately precede Mani.¹⁰⁵ The chain, as we can see, has grown to encompass not only the Judaeo-Christian line (plus Jesus Christ and ‘a righteous man of truth’), but the ‘eastern’ and ‘Persian’ lines as well. This version seems to emphasise the spatial and temporal universality of a tradition which was to be superseded by Mani, who claims: ‘[my] hope has gone toward the sunrise of the world, and [every] inhabited part; to the clime of the north’,¹⁰⁶ and that ‘not one among the apostles did ever do these things’.¹⁰⁷

The damaged Chapter 342 of the second part of the *Kephalaia* also presents an expanded sequence of the apostles naming the regions to which the apostles were sent: Zarathustra to Persia; Buddha to India and Kushan; Aurentes and Kebellos¹⁰⁸ to the East; another figure (the damaged text) to Parthia; then Jesus Christ and, one by one, Adam, Seth, Enosh, Sem, Enoch,

⁹⁸ 1 *Keph.* 12.10–12.

⁹⁹ According to the findings of the scholars, this is not a name but a term for a representative of the Buddhist religious elite, the ‘arhat’, see: I. GARDNER, ‘Some comments on Mani and Indian religions from the Coptic sources’, [in:] A. VAN TONGERLOO (ed.), *Il Manicheismo. Nuove prospettive della ricerca. Dipartimento di Studi Asiatici, Università degli Studi di Napoli ‘L’Orientale’*, Napoli, 2–8 Settembre 2001, Turnhout 2005, pp. 123–135, at pp. 128–129.

¹⁰⁰ 1 *Keph.* 12.15.

¹⁰¹ 1 *Keph.* 12.17–18.

¹⁰² 1 *Keph.* 12.21–13.10.

¹⁰³ 1 *Keph.* 13.19–25.

¹⁰⁴ 1 *Keph.* 13.30–31.

¹⁰⁵ 1 *Keph.* 14.3–16.23.

¹⁰⁶ [Α ΤΑ]ΡΕΛΠΙΣ ΒΟΚ ΟΔ ΤΑΝΑΤΟΛΗ ΜΠΚΟΜΟΣ ΜΗΪΣΑ [ΤΗΡΟΥ] ΝΤΟΙΚΟΥΜΕΝΗ ΔΠΚΛΙΜΑ ΜΠΪΡΓΙΤ, 1 *Keph.* 16.7–8 (trans. GARDNER, *Kephalaia* [cit. n. 17], p. 21).

¹⁰⁷ ΜΠΕ ΟΥΕ ΖΪ ΝΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΟΣ Π ΝΕΪ ΔΝΗΖΕ, 1 *Keph.* 16.9 (trans. GARDNER, *Kephalaia* [cit. n. 17]).

¹⁰⁸ According to Iain Gardner, this is not a name but a term for a representative of the Jain religious elite, one who has omniscience (*kevalin*), see GARDNER, ‘Some comments on Mani’ (cit. n. 99), pp. 131–135.

Noah, Shem, and finally Mani. The fact that the text mentions the ‘eastern’ apostles before the Old Testament ones may be due to the fact that the chapter was compiled from Iranian materials.¹⁰⁹ The presentation of the chain in this text was probably intended to validate the important Manichaean conviction about the existence of the Land of Light: ‘I have told you about a multitude of witnesses who have come forth from the land of light’.¹¹⁰

The third of the *Manichaean Homilies*, entitled *The Narrative about the Crucifixion* provides a sequence of figures who are, with the exception Nikotheos,¹¹¹ the Old Testament patriarchs: Adam, Enosh, Sem, Shem, Nikotheos, and Enoch.¹¹² The text is damaged in many places, but the name Sethel, who is also mentioned a few pages earlier, may appear in the seventeenth line.¹¹³ In the same homily we also find representatives of Christianity – Paul¹¹⁴ and Jesus¹¹⁵ – as well as Zarathustra¹¹⁶ and, of course, Mani.¹¹⁷ As the subject of this text is the death of Mani and the persecution of the early Manichaean Church, the chain of apostles may have been invoked here to demonstrate the long tradition of holy persons who suffered for their faith in the same way as the founder of ‘the religion of Light’.

The sequence of apostles in *The Psalm of Endurance* is particularly interesting.¹¹⁸ Here, the Old Testament patriarchs (Adam, Sethel, Enosh, Noah,

¹⁰⁹ DILLEY, “Hell exists” (cit. n. 33), pp. 211, 218, 245–246.

¹¹⁰ 2 *Keph.* 422.28–424.19 (GARDNER, ‘The final ten chapters’ [cit. n. 18], p. 94).

¹¹¹ Nikotheos is a visionary of unknown provenance also mentioned in the Manichaean Turfan fragment M 299a and moreover by Porphyry in his *Life of Plotinus*, chapter 16; Zosimos of Panopolis in his treatise *On Apparatus and Furnace (On the Letter Omega)*, chapters 1 and 10) and also in *Untitled Treatise*, chapter 7 of Bruce Codex, see H. M. JACKSON, ‘The seer Nikotheos and his lost *Apocalypse* in the light of Sethian apocalypses from Nag Hammadi and the *Apocalypse of Elchasai*’, *NovT* 32 (1990), pp. 250–277.

¹¹² *MH* 68.15–19.

¹¹³ *MH* 61.23.

¹¹⁴ *MH* 69.26.

¹¹⁵ *MH* 75.32.

¹¹⁶ *MH* 70.2.14.

¹¹⁷ *MH* 45.13; 56.5.6.8.9.12; 58.15.

¹¹⁸ Commentary on this psalm: VILLEY, *Psaumes des errants* (cit. n. 1), pp. 211–235.

Shem, and Enoch)¹¹⁹ are supplemented not only by Jesus,¹²⁰ Paul,¹²¹ and Mani,¹²² but also by the apostle-martyrs of Jesus (Peter, Andrew, John, James, and Thomas)¹²³ and the holy women-martyrs known from apocryphal Christian literature (Thecla, Drusiane, Maximilla, and Aristobulla).¹²⁴ Before these figures are mentioned, the psalm talks about the gods of Light who, in their fight against the forces of Darkness, sacrificed themselves and mixed with them (the First Man and his five sons),¹²⁵ and about those who carry the weight of the visible universe¹²⁶ (five sons of the Living Spirit).¹²⁷ A long sequence of beings of Light was thus established that ran from the cosmogonic and cosmological gods, through the apostles of mankind and the holy men and women of Christianity, culminating in the Manichaean community of the author's day.¹²⁸ The work which encourages Manichaeans to persevere in the face of persecution presents the Manichaean Church as part of a long tradition of beings of Light that withstand suffering: 'We are true sons, the heirs of their Fathers'.¹²⁹

The simplest sequence of apostles in which Sethel appears is that of the Old Testament patriarchs beginning with Adam or Sethel and ending with Enoch or Shem. In the *Cologne Mani Codex* the sequence is enriched with the Christian figure of Paul, while the third of the *Manichaean Homilies*, adds the founders of Christianity and Zoroastrianism, as well as the visionary Nikotheos who completes the line of Old Testament patriarchs. The chain is further enlarged in Chapter 1 of the *Kephalaia* with the addition of

¹¹⁹ PsB 142.3–9.

¹²⁰ PsB 142.11.

¹²¹ PsB 142.31

¹²² PsB 143.16.17.

¹²³ PsB 142.18–30.

¹²⁴ PsB 143.4–14.

¹²⁵ PsB 141.4–25.

¹²⁶ For the Manichaeans, the visible universe is a result of the mixing of Light with Darkness.

¹²⁷ PsB 141.26–142.1.

¹²⁸ PsB 143.20–31.

¹²⁹ ἀλλὰν εὐφῶνρε ἴμνε ἡκληρονομος ἡνεγίατε, PsB 143,23 (trans. ALLBERRY, *A Manichaean Psalm-Book* [cit. n. 3], p. 143).

Buddha and Aurentes (a figure whose name probably means *arhat* and represents Buddhism). Chapter 342 of the *Kephalaia* reorganises the sequence from Chapter 1, presenting the eastern line (Zarathustra, Buddha), the western one (Jesus Christ) and a third line featuring Adam, Seth and the other Old Testament patriarchs. Kebellos, whose name most probably refers to the kevalin and represents Jainism, also appears in the Eastern line. *The Psalm of Endurance* is perhaps the most interesting example as it adds the apostle-martyrs and the holy Christian women-martyrs to the Judaeo-Christian apostles of mankind (from Adam and Sethel to Jesus and Paul), and placed the cosmogonic and cosmological gods of Light at the beginning.

The sequence of the apostles, of which Sethel was a feature, was a useful tool within Manichaean writing that served many purposes. The most important purpose was to demonstrate that the founder of 'the religion of Light' and his message belonged to a universal spiritual and religious tradition (Chapter 1 of the *Kephalaia*). However it is used in the *Cologne Codex Mani* to show that Mani was not a subversive innovator, but rather belonged to an 'ancient' tradition of holy revealers; in Chapter 342 of the *Kephalaia* it offers validation for the existence of the Land of Light, and in the third of the *Manichaean Homilies* and *The Psalm of Endurance* it is used to justify the necessity of withstanding suffering and persecution.¹³⁰ More broadly, the sequence could be used as a means of adapting the Manichaean message to different religious and cultural circles.

7. FINAL CONCLUSIONS

Although there are similarities between the figure of Sethel who appears in the writings from Medinet Madi and the figure of Seth from the Gnostic

¹³⁰ It should be mentioned that the modern scholars note only one function of using the sequence of the apostles of mankind, namely that which justifies the message of Mani as a part and a summary of the great spiritual and religious tradition: G. G. STROUMSA, 'Seal of the Prophets', [in:] *idem, The Making of the Abrahamic Religions* (cit. n. 31), pp. 96–97; M. TARDIEU, *Le manichéisme*, Paris 1997, pp. 20–22; BAKER-BRIAN, *Manichaeism* (cit. n. 76), pp. 49–54; J. C. REEVES, *Prolegomena to a History of Islamicate Manichaeism, Comparative Islamic Studies*, Sheffield 2013, p. 12.

Sethian texts, it is impossible to detect a direct line of influence from the latter to the former. This ambiguity may stem from the fact that the Manichaeans drew on a broad base of Judaeo-Christian literature, and Sethelian motifs may thus have come from a variety of spiritual and religious traditions including (but not limited to) Gnostic Sethianism. Furthermore the focus on the Manichaean religious system – in this case the structure of ‘the religion of Light’ as represented by the sequence of apostles of mankind – caused outside figures such as Seth/Sethel to lose some of their characteristic features in the process of being adapted to the needs of the religion.

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THE FIGURE OF SETHEL IN THE MEDINET MADI MANICHAEAN WRITINGS: A RESULT OF THE INFLUENCE OF Gnostic SETHIANISM? OBSERVATIONS ON MANICHAISM AS A RELIGIOUS SYSTEM

Abstract

In the Manichaean Coptic *Psalm-Book* (c. AD 400) we find a hymn (*PsB* 144.1–146.13) addressed to Sethel/Seth. Hence, a French scholar, André Villey, titled it *Hymne à Seth*. This is an interesting work, since the biblical figure of Seth is the eponym of one of the two most important movements of Gnosticism, namely Sethianism. In my paper, firstly, I study the characteristics of the figure of Sethel/Seth in the Manichaean writings from Medinet Madi; secondly, I examine whether, as for Sethel/Seth, we can talk about the influence the Sethians on ‘the religion of Light’ or, on the contrary, whether his figure in the Manichaean writings was an original, Manichaean, reinterpretation. Finally, this analysis allows us to draw two important conclusions regarding Manichaeism as a religious system. The first of them is that the Manichaeans drew on a broad base of Judaeo-Christian literature, not only from Gnostic Sethianism. The other is that Manichaeism caused external figures such as Seth/Sethel to lose some of their characteristics in the process of being adapted to the needs of the mentioned religion.

Keywords: Sethel, Seth, Manichaeism, Sethianism, Gnosticism, Medinet Madi discovery, Nag Hammadi discovery

CZY POSTAĆ SETHELA W MANICHEJSKICH PISMACH Z MEDINET MADI JEST WYNIKIEM WPŁYWU GNOSTYCKIEGO SETIANIZMU? OBSERWACJE NA TEMAT MANICHEIZMU JAKO SYSTEMU RELIGIJNEGO

Abstrakt

W koptyjskim *Psalterzu* manichejskim (ok. 400 r. n.e.) znajdujemy hymn (*PsB* 144.1–146.13) skierowany do Sethela/Seta. Stąd francuski badacz André Villey nadał mu tytuł *Hymne à Seth*. Utwór ten jest interesujący, ponieważ Set, postać biblijna, stał się eponimem jednego z dwóch najważniejszych nurtów gnostycyzmu, mianowicie setianizmu. W moim artykule badam, po pierwsze, cechy postaci Sethela/Seta według manichejskich pism z Medinet Madi. Po drugie zadaję pytanie, czy rzeczywiście

możemy mówić co do Sethela/Seta o wpływie setian na „religię światłości”, czy przeciwnie, jego postać w pismach manichejskich była oryginalną, manichejską, reinterpretacją. W końcu analiza ta pozwala nam wyciągnąć dwa ważne wnioski dotyczące manicheizmu jako systemu religijnego. Pierwszy jest taki, że manichejczycy czerpali z szerokiego zaplecza literatury judeochrześcijańskiej, a nie tylko z gnostyckiego setianizmu, inny zaś, że manicheizm spowodował, iż postacie zewnętrzne, takie jak Sethel/Set, utraciły niektóre ze swoich charakterystycznych cech w procesie dostosowywania ich do potrzeb wspomnianej religii.

Słowa kluczowe: Sethel, Set, manicheizm, setianizm, gnostycyzm, odkrycie z Medinet Madi, odkrycie z Nag Hammadi