

Manichaeism - New Historical and Philological Studies
Editorial

Open Access

John C. Reeves*

Introductory Remarks to the topical issue “Manichaeism - New Historical and Philological Studies”

DOI 10.1515/oph-2015-0034

This special thematic issue of *Open Theology* bears the sub-title “Manichaeism - New Historical and Philological Studies,” and it is designed to call attention to the robust vitality which Manichaean studies enjoys at the present time, thanks to continuing archaeological excavations, new textual discoveries, and the ongoing reassessment of the older paradigms of explication in the light of the most recent developments.

Originating with the prophet Mani in southern Mesopotamia during the third century of the Common Era, Manichaeism was vigorously promulgated as ‘the correct religion’ in both the Roman and Sasanian empires by successive generations of missionaries and adherents, and it eventually achieved a geographical footprint extending from North Africa to China. Owing to its rapid spread and influential teachings, Manichaeism also was subject to ruthless suppression measures meted out by both governmental and clerical opponents to the extent that it was largely extirpated as a viable religious identity within the various Christian and Islamicate realms by the thirteenth century, surviving ultimately only in the Far East in severely attenuated forms until the sixteenth or seventeenth century. However, during those periods when and amidst those cultures where it flourished, the doctrines, rituals, and institutional structures of the Manichaeans attracted the attention and interest of the intelligentsia, with the result that certain ideas, arguments, behaviors, and crafts associated with Manichaeism played important roles within the cultured discourse and belles-lettres of the time.

The present issue consists of six essays whose successive topics of investigation mirror the chronological, geographic, and linguistic span of Manichaeism from its early proselytizing years in the West to the detection of its final remnants in Ming Dynasty China. The contribution by Gábor Kósa uses the Coptic *Kephalaia*, an early Manichaean collection of doctrinal lore which assumed its present form in fourth-century Egypt, to assess how Manichaeans explained certain natural phenomena which took place in the physical world. Timothy Pettipiece uses early Manichaean literature as well as a number of Christian testimonia about Manichaean mythology in order to suggest that Manichaean cosmogonic literature was originally based on a ‘trinitarian’ structure featuring Father, Mother, and Child. My own contribution takes up an old conundrum with regard to the identification of a specific Manichaean scripture quoted within a homily of a sixth-century Christian father, and points to some analogous materials found within later Christian, Muslim, and Mandaean texts that should be taken into account within future research. Utilizing some new textual discoveries, Takao Moriyasu offers a fresh synthesis of the history of Manichaeism in Central Asia under the aegis of the East Uighur empire. Xiaohe Ma recovers some Manichaean Aramaic and Middle Iranian terminology from the new Xiapu Chinese language texts. Finally, Majella Franzmann re-examines a fourteenth-century bilingual inscription in Chinese and Syro-Turkic in order to highlight an interesting facet of the relationship between Manichaeans and Church of the East Christians in Zayton at that time.

*Corresponding author: John C. Reeves, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, E-mail: jcreeves@uncc.edu

Lastly, I thank each of my collaborators for their contributions to this enterprise: I am confident their thoughtful essays will stimulate much discussion among both students of Manichaeism and scholars of the other religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Daoism) with which it interacted during the course of its long history. I am especially grateful to Katarzyna Tempczyk and her talented team of technical assistants at De Gruyter Open for their efficient and cheerful oversight of what must have been a complicated editorial process.