

# Manichaean Studies in the 21st Century

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## Introduction

Since Flügel's 1862 edition of an-Nadim's chapter on Manichaeism in the *Fihrist* (987CE), studies of Manichaeism have grown well beyond Christian heresiology. We have had the discovery of Manichaean monasteries in Central Asia, Manichaean manuscripts from Egypt that surfaced via the international black market, and the discovery of a Manichaean house in the Libyan desert by an Australian excavation team. Now, with the discovery in April 2005 of what seems to be a living Mani cult in China, Manichaean Studies is truly coming into its own. The investigation of this least-known of world religions relies heavily on careful linguistic and codicological study: spanning languages from Coptic to classical Chinese (and everything in between), not to mention scholarship in an almost equally diverse range of modern languages. So, after almost 150 years, what is the current state of Manichaean studies, and what do the modern tools of research lend to it?

## Manichaeism

Perhaps a paper on the current state of Manichaean studies should commence with a brief introduction to the religion and the history of its study. The need for such an explanation only serves to highlight the necessity for scholars to raise the profile of Manichaeism as there is still too little awareness of this most-maligned of world religions. Manichaeism is a religion named after its founder, the prophet Mani, or Manichaeus as he came to be known in the West after his Aramaic epithet *Mani Hayya*, or, 'the living Mani.'<sup>1</sup> Mani was raised in a heterodox baptist

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<sup>1</sup> J Tubach and M Zakeri 'Mani's Name,' in J van Oort, O Wermelinger and G Wurst editors, *Augustine and Manichaeism in the Latin West: Proceedings of*

community in Babylon, or southern Iraq. This community was ostensibly Jewish/Christian with some Gnostic features, such as the belief in recurring incarnations of heavenly apostles, one of whom was a docetic Christ. At the age of twelve Mani received a revelation from his divine 'Twin,' and at the age of twenty-four he received another which led him to leave the Baptist sect of his youth and preach a new gospel.

This gospel was, according to Mani, the same as the one that had come to the world through Zoroaster to Persia, the Buddha to the East, and Jesus to the West. Mani was the last in this roster of divine prophets, differentiable only in that he (unlike his predecessors) would not leave this world without deliberately establishing a church and writing scriptures with his own hand. Many have commented that, in this sense, Mani was the first founder to be so deliberate in establishing a religion: other prophets simply taught during their lives and had religions established by their disciples posthumously.

So what was his gospel? Mani believed that there had always been two powers in the universe: one good, and one evil. When the Dark power took possession of some of the Light, the Good god realised he had to get it back somehow, without corrupting his own pure realm. He tricked the chaotic demons into creating Adam and Eve (which they did in an orgy of incest and cannibalism, transmitting the divine Light through their seed) and sent Jesus to give them knowledge of the true origin of their souls (which was the remnant of the stolen Light). After a great battle the good gods crafted the universe out of the slain bodies of the Dark powers into a giant engine, whose purpose was to distil the Light from the world and send it back to heaven.<sup>2</sup>

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*the Fribourg-Utrecht International Symposium of the IAMS* (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 49), Leiden, 2001, 272-286.

<sup>2</sup> See for example, the cosmogony in Hegemonius *Acta Archelai*, VII-XIII.

This Light was found in all living things, so for the Manichaeian destruction of any life was harmful to God. It was particularly present in anything with seeds such as fruit and, in order to assist the return of the Light to heaven, a special class of Manichaeians who (through celibacy, poverty, abstinence from alcohol, and non-violence) maintained a personal purity so they could eat these fruits and liberate the Light, then send it back to heaven with prayers. In the west they referred to this eating of their god as 'crucifying Christ,' as indeed this is how they often imagined the Light trapped in matter: as Christ.

Mani espoused an aggressive form of missionising: his disciples would go to the ends of the earth and translate his scriptures into all languages. These translations were not merely literal, however, as Mani advocated a translation also of religious terms and concepts: even the names of gods. For instance, Mani is referred to as a 'buddha' in Manichaeian texts from Central Asia and China, and Mani's death is referred to as a 'crucifixion' in Western texts but as his '*parinirvana*' in Eastern ones. They even went so far as to disguise themselves as the local dominant religion, often declaring themselves to be the true exponents of Christianity and so on, although I should perhaps qualify this by pointing out that, due to the inclusiveness of their list of prophets, they probably *did* consider themselves the true exponents of those religions). In a debate with the famous Christian bishop Saint Augustine of Hippo, who had himself been a Manichaeian for about nine years, the Manichaeian Faustus accused Catholic Christians of being only 'semi-Christian.'<sup>3</sup> This kind of one-up-man-ship may account for the vindictiveness with which Manichaeism was persecuted by Christians, Buddhists, and seemingly everyone else they came into contact with, and indeed for the fact that they were quite effectively scoured from history several centuries ago. It is usually thought to have seen its last days in Ming China.

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<sup>3</sup> Augustan *contra Faustum*, 1.2.

## Manichaen Studies

'Manichaeism' is a term that gets bandied about a lot these days, particularly by political opinion writers talking about George W Bush's foreign policy. In their definition the word 'Manichaeism' refers to a dualism: that is, an opposition of two principles of Good and Evil. As we have seen, this dualism does describe Manichaeism to some extent. So why is it that the religion Manichaeism is relatively unknown to the wider populace?

Primarily because of Augustine, who wrote extensively on the religion, the image of Manichaeism we had in the West until about 150 years ago was that of a simple Christian heresy. I suppose I should qualify the term 'simple heresy,' because for some time Manichaeism was considered a Christian heresy that was a serious rival to the orthodox church. As such it was vigorously attacked by Christian apologists, and the name itself soon became a byword for heresy. (Interestingly enough, Manichaeism was so synonymous with heresy that when Luther riled the Catholic Church he was dubbed the 'new Mani.')

But at this point it was not considered its own religion: merely a parasitic sect that needed Christianity to exist.

Aside from some important studies collecting together Christian patristic information on Manichaeism, the first real breakthrough in the study of Manichaeism came in 1862 with Gustav Flügel's publication of a chapter on Manichaeism from a medieval Arabic source: an-Nadim's *Fihrist*.<sup>4</sup> This was the first time an independent account (almost all the Christian accounts relied on the same dubious sources) had been discovered and, most importantly, the author appears to have had genuine Manichaean writings at hand.

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<sup>4</sup> *Mani, seine Lehre und seine Schriften: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Manichäismus*, edited and translated by G Flügel, Ausgabe, 1862.

Then, in the first two decades of the twentieth century, European expeditions to Central Asia uncovered Manichaean documents for the first time at Turfan and Dunhuang. This was the era of the Great Game, the last hurrah of colonialism in Central Asia, and in one instance the expedition under British archaeologist Sir Aurel Stein (who, incidentally, was George Lucas' inspiration for Indiana Jones) discovered a false wall in a monastery at Dunhuang in China. After obtaining permission from the abbot Stein knocked a hole in the wall to discover a hidden library containing Buddhist, Manichaean and Nestorian Christian texts. Many of these were in a variety of languages of the Middle Iranian family: languages such as Tocharian, Sogdian and Uighur (in fact, the khan of the Uighur Turks converted his entire state to Manichaeism!) Indeed, in the case of Bactrian and several other languages, our knowledge of the language is dependent on the discovery of these texts and, in the case of a few, they exist *only* in Manichaean documents. Some of the languages have only recently been deciphered.

The terminology of many of these texts was that of Persian mythology. Gods such as Ohrmazd, Ahriman and Mithras all appear and, particularly as an-Nadim's biography of Mani gave him an Iranian lineage (despite being raised in a Semitic context), German scholars of the the so-called *Religionengeschichteschule* ('History of Religions') school categorised Manichaeism as being primarily an Iranian religion.<sup>5</sup> This view was challenged by scholars who noted the ubiquity of the figure of Jesus in these texts, and who emphasised the Syriac-Christian origins of Manichaeism, given the inordinate amount of Syriac loanwords used.<sup>6</sup> The discovery in 1933 of

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<sup>5</sup> See especially R Reitzenstein, *Das iranische Erlösungsmysterium: religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen*, Bonn, 1921.

<sup>6</sup> F C Burkitt *The Religion of the Manichees: Donellan Lectures for 1924*, Cambridge, 1925; C W Mitchell, *S Ephraim's Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion and Bardaisan*, Oxford, 1912-21, and H H Schaeder, 'Urform und Fortbildungen des Manichäischen Systems,' in *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg 1924-1925*, Leipzig, 1927, 65-157.

Manichaean codices in Coptic from Egypt (bought on the black market at Cairo but traced to the site of Medinet Madi) only helped to confirm this view, and Manichaeism was presented with another wealth of texts to reconstruct and decipher.

A Greek text also appeared in 1970 that preserved part of a Manichaean biography of Mani.<sup>7</sup> This tiny book is the smallest extant codex from antiquity, being small enough to fit in the palm of your hand, while still having twenty-three lines of beautifully written miniscule text on each page. This discovery revolutionised thinking in several areas beyond Manichaeism, and dominated Manichaean studies for the next decade or so. So what are the current trajectories for Manichaean studies, and what is some of the most recent research?

### **Medinet Madi<sup>8</sup>**

After an initially robust series of editions coming out of this body of texts,<sup>9</sup> the events of the Second World War saw an attrition of both scholars and manuscripts. Several codices were misplaced or lost and there was some dispute regarding ownership.<sup>10</sup> Other

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<sup>7</sup> First reported in A Henrichs and L Koenen, 'Ein Griechischer Mani-Codex,' in *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 5:2, 1970, 97-216. A compelling version in English can be found in A Henrichs, 'The Cologne Mani Codex Reconsidered,' *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 83, 1979, 339-367.

<sup>8</sup> First reported in C Schmidt and H J Polotsky, 'Ein Mani-Fund in Ägypten: Originalschriften des Mani und seiner Schüler,' in *Sitzungsberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, philos-hist Klasse* 28, 1932, 4-90.

<sup>9</sup> H J Polotsky editor and translator, *Manichäische Handschriften der Sammlung A Chester Beatty Band I: Manichäische Homolien*, Stuttgart, 1934; C R C Allberry, *Manichaean Manuscripts in the Chester Beatty Collection, Vol. II: A Manichaean Psalm-Book, Part II*, Stuttgart, 1938; H J Polotsky and A Böhlig, editor and translator, *Kephalaia. Seite 1-243* (Manichäische Handschriften der staatlichen Museen Berlin), Stuttgart, 1940.

<sup>10</sup> J M Robinson, 'The Fate of the Manichaean Codices of Medinet Madi,' G Wiessner and H J Klimkeit, editor, *Studia Manichaica: II. Internationaler Kongress zum Manichäismus. 6-10 August 1989 St Augustin/Bonn*, Wiesbaden, 1992, 19-62.

than one further publication in the 1960s,<sup>11</sup> the momentum of the task had petered out. Thanks, however, to the dedication of a few scholars, the edition has begun once more. Danish scholar Søren Giversen has published facsimiles of all leaves in the Chester Beatty Library (now housed in Dublin),<sup>12</sup> allowing scholars all over the world to work on the texts without the need to visit the actual manuscripts themselves.

The Berlin *Homilies* have just received a re-edition by Nils-Arne Pedersen, due out in March 2006.<sup>13</sup> The Dublin *Psalm-Book II* has also seen re-edition by Gregor Wurst and Siegfried Richter,<sup>14</sup> and the first part is finally going to be published as well. Its edition now being completed by Richter, who gave a brief progress report at the 2005 IAMS conference.<sup>15</sup> The *Kephalaia* or 'Chapters' contain a series of teachings on Manichaean doctrine and practice. It exists in two halves: one held in Berlin, that has been for the most part already published,<sup>16</sup> and another in Dublin that still awaits a critical edition.<sup>17</sup> The remainder of the Berlin

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<sup>11</sup> A Böhlig. Editor and translator, *Kephalaia: Zweite Hälfte. Seite 244-291* (Manichäische Handschriften der staatlichen Museen Berlin), Stuttgart, 1966.

<sup>12</sup> S Giversen *The Manichaean Coptic Papyri in the Chester Beatty Library: Facsimile Edition* (Cahiers d'Orientalisme 14-17), Geneva: I. *Kephalaia*, 1986; II *Homilies and Varia*, 1986 and III *Psalm Book part I*, 1988; IV *Psalm Book part II*, 1988.

<sup>13</sup> G Wurst, editor and translator, *Manichaean Homilies* (Corpus Fontium Manichaeorum: Series Coptica 3), Turnhout, 2006.

<sup>14</sup> G. Wurst, editor and translator, *The Manichaean Coptic Papyri in the Chester Beatty Library. Psalm Book Part II, 1* (Corpus Fontium Manichaeorum: Series Coptica 1.1), Turnhout, 1996 and S Richter, editor and translator, *The Manichaean Coptic Papyri in the Chester Beatty Library: Psalm Book Part II, 2. Die Herakleides-Psalmen* (Corpus Fontium Manichaeorum: Series Coptica 1.2), Turnhout, 1999.

<sup>15</sup> S Richter, 'Psalm 42 and the Living Gospel of Mani' (conference paper presented at the 6th International Meeting of the International Association of Manichaean Studies; Flagstaff AZ, USA; 1-5 August 2005. Awaiting publication).

<sup>16</sup> See *supra*, nn 8 & 10.

<sup>17</sup> Although several extracts have been published in M Tardieu 'La diffusion du bouddhisme dans l'empire Kouchan, l'Iran et la Chine, d'après un kephalaion manichéen inédit,' *Studia Iranica* 17, 1988, 153-182.

codex is being gradually edited by Wolf-Peter Funk of Laval.<sup>18</sup> The character of the Berlin *Synaxeis* ('Collection') is still somewhat vague, although it is commonly thought to be a commentary on Mani's canonical *Living Gospel*.<sup>19</sup> Its impending edition by Funk will no doubt clear some of this up.<sup>20</sup> The fragmentary codex of Mani's canonical *Epistles* is almost due for publication by Iain Gardner and Wolf-Peter Funk.<sup>21</sup>

## Turfan

The nature of the Eastern material is somewhat different from that of the Western which, as we have just seen, is organised into discrete codices. The Central Asian material, however, is mostly composed of tens of thousands of individual leaves with simple catalogue numbers to distinguish them. Some of these leaves have been collected and organised into continuous works. Current editors include Christane Reck, Enrico Morano and Iris

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<sup>18</sup> W P Funk, 'The Reconstruction of the Manichaean *Kephalaia*,' in P Mirecki and J BeDuhn editors, *Emerging from Darkness: Studies in the Recovery of Manichaean Sources*, Leiden, 1997, 144-159; *Kephalaia I, Zweite Hälfte* (Manichäische Handschriften der staatlichen Museen Berlin), Stuttgart: *Fascicles 13/14*, 1999; *15/16*, 2000, and *17/18*, 2001.

<sup>19</sup> P A Mirecki 'The Coptic Manichaean *Synaxeis* Codex: Descriptive Catalogue of Synaxis Chapter Titles,' in P Bryder, editor *Manichaean Studies: Proceedings of the First International Conference on Manichaeism: August 5-9, 1987* (Lund Studies in African and Asian Religions 1), Lund, 1988, 135-145; K L King, 'A progress report on the editing of the Manichaean *Synaxeis* codex,' in M Rassart-Debergh and J Ries editors *Actes du IVe congrès copte*, Louvain-la-Neuve 1992, 281-288.

<sup>20</sup> He presented some of his findings in a conference paper: W-P Funk 'Mani's account of other religions according to the Coptic *Synaxeis* Codex' (conference paper presented at the 6th International Meeting of the International Association of Manichaean Studies; Flagstaff AZ, USA; 1-5 August, 2005. Awaiting publication).

<sup>21</sup> I Gardner 'The Reconstruction of Mani's *Epistles* from Three Coptic Codices (Ismant el-Kharab and Medinet Madi),' in P Mirecki and J BeDuhn, editors *Emerging from Darkness: Studies in the Recovery of Manichaean Sources*, Leiden, 1997, 93-104.



Colditz. Zszusanna Gulácsi is also continuing her unique work on Manichaeon book illumination.<sup>22</sup>

One of the most important technological innovations in this field has been the digitisation and uploading to the internet of many of the leaves<sup>23</sup> through The Digitalisierung der Berliner Turfantexte (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft Projekt), which has made available some 14500 of the total 43000 or so pages.

### **The International Association of Manichaeon Studies and The Manichaeon Studies Seminar**

In 1980 the International Association for Manichaeon Studies was formed and now hosts a conference every four years. The most recent of these just wrapped up in August 2005 at Flagstaff, Arizona and the edition of many important texts that have been waiting for attention for almost a century are now nearing completion. Also, in 1993 the annual conference for the Society of Biblical Literature in the USA added to its program a special Consultation on Manichaeism session that has since grown into the Manichaeon Studies Seminar, lasting about three days. The papers from both of these conferences are regularly published.

### **Ismant el-Kharab**

Since 1986 an Australian archaeological team has been digging in the western desert of Egypt at the Dakhleh Oasis. The site in question, Ismant el-Kharab, is also known by its Roman name, Kellis. The team digging there is comprised of archaeologists, physical anthropologists, palaeobotanists, papyrologists, and specialists from a range of other fields. In one of the rooms in House 3 of the site many papyrus fragments were discovered, and in 1991 the University of Sydney's Iain Gardner was invited

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<sup>22</sup> Z Gulácsi *Manichaeon Art in Berlin Collections* (Corpus Fontium Manichaeorum: Series Archaeologica et Iconographica 1), Turnhout, 2001.

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.bbaw.de/bbaw/Forschung/Forschungsprojekte/turfanforschung/de/DigitalesTurfanArchiv>.

to examine the pieces identified as Manichaean. What these texts have yielded is not only new copies of texts known to us from Medinet Madi, but some heretofore unknown liturgical texts, as well as the personal letters of the family who lived in the house: a family since identified as being Manichaean in character.

There were already fragments of Manichaean letters known to us from the Central Asian finds, but those are either canonical epistles (like Paul's letters in the New Testament) or ecclesiastical in origin. The Kellis letters are mainly those of a simple Manichaean family which give us some idea of the cares and concerns of Manichaean lay-people: concerns usually conspicuously absent from other Manichaean texts. These letters are also interesting in a wider sense for what they tell us about ordinary people in the ancient world. They have also helped us to recognise what a Manichaean letter would look like, while at the same time caused us to reconsider the nature of what had been previously deemed 'Christian' letters against this model, as instead being Manichaean. Another volume of literary texts including some Manichaean ones from the site is due to be published soon.

There is also the tantalising reference to the 'place of Mani' mentioned in an accounts ledger found at the site, as well as clues pointing to a monastery in the area.<sup>24</sup> Such a discovery would be important for Manichaean studies, as the only Manichaean monasteries found have been in Central Asia where it had the Khan's patronage, and it is thought that Manichaeans in the West may have remained anchoritic.

Archaeologists have also been excavating the necropolis at Kellis, and have asked Gardner about Manichaean funerary

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<sup>24</sup> I Gardner "'He has gone to the monastery ...,'" in R E Emerick, W Sundermann and P Zieme, editors, *Studia Manichaica IV: Internationaler Kongreß zum Manichäismus, Berlin, 14-18 Juli 1997*, Berlin, 2000, 247-257.

practices so they can identify any graves. Unfortunately, no research has been conducted into Manichaean funerary practices. Once such research has been undertaken, however, it is likely that the existing excavations will need to be screened for any related data.<sup>25</sup>

### ***Corpus Fontium Manichaeorum***

On the publishing front, Belgian house Brepols are producing the *Corpus Fontium Manichaeorum* project with Belgian scholar Alois van Tongerloo the General Editor, although primarily run by Macquarie University's Samuel Lieu. This series is a UNESCO-backed cultural project, and its purpose is the re-edition, translation and publication of all primary texts relating to Manichaeism. In the *Series Subsidia* a bibliography of all primary and modern texts was completed in 1996 and is updated annually in the *Manichaean Studies Newsletter* (an IAMS bulletin), and there is an ongoing *Dictionary of Manichaean Texts* series, of which only two volumes have been published yet. There are also volumes on Manichaean art and archaeology being produced. In conversation with Samuel Lieu, however, I discovered that the project currently has more completed texts than they want to publish at any one time. I was at first aghast to hear this but, after purchasing a few volumes recently, would have to now agree with their decision to go easy on scholars' pockets. This is because the books are rather cost-prohibitive, and no scholar or university library can be expected to buy more than one a year. Due out in 2006 are dictionaries of Manichaean terms in Chinese (by Gunner Mikkelsen) and in texts from Iraq and Iran (by Francois de Blois and Nicholas Sims-Williams), an

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<sup>25</sup> See also the gravestone from Salona (in the modern Czech Republic) with the Greek inscription 'Bassa, a Manichaean virgin from Lydia' (Ba/ssa parqe/noj Ludi/a Manixe/a): F Cumont and M Kugener, *Recherches sur le Manichéisme, III: L'inscription de Salone*, Brussels, 1912, 177, and more recently, M Scopello 'Bassa la Lydienne,' *Mani et le manichéisme, Connaissance des Pères d l'Église* 83, 2001, 35-44, and *idem Femme, Gnose et Manichéisme: De l'espace mythique au territoire du réel*, Leiden, 2005, 293-315.

edition of Theodor bar Khoni's *Scholia*, Augustine's *Contra Secundinum*, and the Chinese *Traite Pelliot*.

### **Medieval Christian and Manichaean Remains from Zaitun (Quanzhou)**

Another important project that still has funding for a few more years (again from UNESCO and the ARC) is concerned with the Chinese end of the Silk Route at Fujian on the Pacific coast opposite Taiwan.<sup>26</sup> (I use 'Silk Route' to differentiate this primarily over-sea route from the better-known overland Silk Road). As the terminus of merchants from all over the world for centuries, the province of Quanzhou (referred to as Zaitun by Marco Polo) played host to religions seemingly from everywhere, including Manichaeism.

There is a Manichaean shrine still standing in Fujian that had been converted into a Buddhist one in the early part of the twentieth century and is now being restored by the local government.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps most interesting, however, was the discovery in April 2005 by the project of an active cult of some sort in the village at the foot of the hill below the old shrine. While initial reports were hopeful that this might represent continuous practice of Manichaeism until the present day,<sup>28</sup> more recent papers have been less optimistic.<sup>29</sup> Extensive anthropological fieldwork needs to be conducted, and to do so an expert in the relatively obscure Fujianese dialect with some familiarity with Manichaeism must be found. While this may be difficult to achieve, the results will undoubtedly be rewarding.

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<sup>26</sup> I Gardner, S Lieu and K Parry, *From Palmyra to Zayton: Epigraphy and Iconography*, Turnhout, 2005.

<sup>27</sup> S N C Lieu, *Manichaeism in Central Asia and China*, Leiden, 1998, 177-195.

<sup>28</sup> M Franzmann, I Gardner and S Lieu, 'A Living Mani Cult in the Twenty-first Century,' in *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa*, 2005, vii-xi.

<sup>29</sup> S Lieu, "The Last of the Muni-chaeans:' Report of the Quanzhou (Zayton) Project 2005,' *Manichaean Studies Newsletter* 20, 2005, 13-19.

After one and a half centuries, Manichaean studies have moved past their infancy, but are still locked in adolescence. This is not a criticism: it is a necessary step that we are currently progressing through well. We are unfortunately still involved, however, in establishing the foundations afforded by the edition of what are all important texts. This process of edition will necessarily be followed by interpretation of the texts, before we can then begin the reconsideration of past materials in light of these additions. Besides the textual work, however, are the perhaps more immediately exciting opportunities afforded by the discovery of at least *some* kind of living worship of Mani. One hopes that by the dawn of the twenty-second century our picture of Manichaeism will be much more complete.