

MANICHAEANS AS *AHL AL-KITĀB*:
A STUDY IN MANICHAEAN SCRIPTURALISM

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‘... this revelation of mine of (the) Two Principles and of (the) living books and wisdom and knowledge is greater than (that of) the religions of the ancients.’¹ This triumphalist proclamation belongs to Mani, a third-century self-styled ‘apostle of the God of truth to Babylonia’² and the founder of what can arguably be termed the first ‘world religion.’ In this Middle Persian citation we discern a coupling of the two features of his religion that Mani’s opponents most frequently condemn and remark: its stridently dualistic interpretation of existence, and its obsession with books which it accords the status of

¹ M 5794 I verso lines 10-14: *tswm kw ’yn ’bhwmyšn ’yg dw bwn ’wd nbyg ’n zyndg ’n whyh ’wd d’nyšn ’y mn ’c h’n ’y pyšyng ’n dyn fr ’ydr ’wd why hynd*; text cited from Mary Boyce, *A Reader in Manichaean Middle Persian and Parthian* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 30. See also F. C. Andreas and W. B. Henning, “Mitteliranische Manichaica aus Chinesisch-Turkestan, II,” *Sitzungsberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (1933): 296; reprinted in *W. B. Henning: Selected Papers* (2 vols.; Acta Iranica 14-15; Leiden: Brill, 1977), 1:193.

² Bīrūnī, *Athār al-bāqiya ’an-il-qurūn al-khāliya* (*Chronologie orientalischer Völker von Albêrûnî* [ed. C. Eduard Sachau; Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1878; repr., Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1923]), 207.13; S. H. Taqīzādeh and A. A. Šīrāzī, *Mānī va dīn-e-ū* (Teheran: Ānjamān-e Irānshīnāsī, 1335 A.H./1956), 204.

revelatory scripture. Manichaeism, as H.-C. Puech has aptly characterized it, was indubitably ‘une religion du Livre.’³ Much of its distinctive doctrine, including its dualistic components, has its point of origin not in Iranian religion, but in Mani’s subversive reading of Jewish and Christian scriptures and parascriptural compositions as disseminated and filtered through the lens of a morass of dualist sectarian groups dwelling at the margins (both cultural and geographical) of the Syro-Mesopotamian world, a collection of religious fanatics and social misfits whom Ibn al-Nadīm, an industrious tenth-century Muslim encyclopaedist living in Baghdad, felicitously termed ‘sects of the Chaldean dualists,’ a rubric under which that same scholar also mapped Manichaeism.⁴ In addition to his expropriation of portions of the scriptural resources of the ‘ancestral religions,’ Mani himself reputedly authored seven books to serve as a scriptural canon for his religion,⁵ and his community subsequently placed great importance on their accurate preservation and reproduction. The crucial role which his writings play in the rapid promulgation of his dualist message is underscored by the numerous references we find to them in both Manichaean and anti-Manichaean tractates,

³ Henri-Charles Puech, *Le manichéisme: Son fondateur – sa doctrine* (Paris: Civilisations du Sud, 1949), 66. See also Geo Widengren, *Mani and Manichaeism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 74. As Widengren notes, the earliest literary portrait we possess of Mani, found in the mid-fourth century *Acta Archelai* (14.3), depicts Mani in colorful Persian garb bearing a staff in his right hand and carrying a ‘Babylonian book’ (*Babylonium ... librum*) under his left arm. Similarly the first state-sponsored suppression of Manichaeism as enunciated in the edict of Diocletian of 297 CE emphasizes that the ‘abominable scriptures’ (*abominandis scripturis*) of the Manichaeans must be burned. Citations from the *Acta Archelai* are taken from Hegemonius, *Acta Archelai* (ed. Charles Henry Beeson; GCS 16; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1906). The edict of Diocletian is conveniently accessible in *Texte zum Manichäismus* (ed. Alfred Adam; 2d ed.; Berlin: W. de Gruyter & Co., 1969), 82-83.

⁴ *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture* (ed. and trans. Bayard Dodge; 2 vols.; New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 2:745. Ibn al-Nadīm provides important details about many of these sects (2:773-825).

⁵ See John C. Reeves, *Jewish Lore in Manichaean Cosmogony: Studies in the Book of Giants Traditions* (Monographs of the Hebrew Union College 14; Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1992), 9-49, esp. 9-19.

whether in the context of proselytization, denunciation, or of state-sanctioned persecutions.

Scriptures and Scripturalism in the Near East of Late Antiquity

Near Eastern ‘scripturalism’ denotes the result of a cultural process whereby divine discourse, purportedly the very word of God, achieves inlibration; i.e., a message deemed revelatory is instantiated or registered in written form. As I have sought to show in another place, this regional nuancing of what constitutes an authoritative ‘scripture’ is intimately bound with the conceptual evolution of the role of the ‘prophet’ among the various religious communities of the Near East during late antiquity and the early medieval era.⁶ Attaining social legitimacy as an authentic prophet or messenger of God in the late antique Near East demanded the authenticating credential of a physical book or piece of writing, preferably one which the candidate for such status had retrieved from heaven. ‘We will not believe you,’ object Muhammad’s skeptical Meccan hecklers ‘... until you send down to us a book we can read’ (Q 17:90-93). The Qur’ān itself frequently concurs that in the past whenever God dispatched prophets or messengers to instruct or to warn humanity, he sent down ‘scripture’ (*kitāb*) with them (Q 2:213; 3:81; 35:25; 40:70; 57:25). This intimate intertwining of prophetic and scriptural authorities is not however limited to the conceptual sphere of Islam. Their nexus is deeply rooted in the rich soil of earlier ideological systems, particularly those of Judaism and Syro-

⁶ In an essay entitled “Chaldean Dualist Gnosis and Islamicate Judaism,” being Chapter Three of my monograph in progress *Shades of Light and Darkness: Syro-Mesopotamian Gnosis and the Islamicate World*.

Mesopotamian gnosis,⁷ and it possesses a number of significant parallels within the literatures of several schismatic religious movements arising amidst both Jews and Muslims in Mesopotamia and Persia.⁸

The notion of ‘scripture’ in the sense of a tangible record of divine disclosure and instruction very early approaches an iconic, almost totemic, status. One ideological aspect of the physical realization of scripture manifests itself in an interreligious flourishing of what we might term ‘alphabet mysticism.’ Displaying, arranging, and manipulating the graphic shapes of the characters of the sacred alphabet, or in some cases articulating the sounds which they represent, produces concrete effects in both the physical and spiritual dimensions of the universe. It is as if the alphabetic graphemes signal the elemental structures and combinations which constitute the various levels of the universe. The cross-cultural migration of this phenomenon is well illustrated in the popular episode of the ‘wise child-prophet’ who embarrasses his primary school teacher with his superior knowledge of the esoteric mysteries encoded in the letters of the Semitic alphabet: we find this tale reproduced in a number of eastern scriptures of varying provenance.⁹ According to Shahrastānī, the twelfth-century cataloger of world religions, the quasi-gnostic adherents of Mazdak, a sixth-century Persian sectarian whom Ibn al-Nadīm situates among the Chaldean dualists, revere a deity enthroned in the supernal

⁷ John C. Reeves, *Heralds of That Good Realm: Syro-Mesopotamian Gnosis and Jewish Traditions* (NHMS 41; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 15-17.

⁸ An excellent discussion of Near Eastern scripturalism in its medieval Jewish and Muslim manifestations is Haggai Ben-Shammai, “Return to the Scriptures in Ancient and Medieval Jewish Sectarianism and in Early Islam,” in *Les retours aux Écritures: Fondamentalismes présents et passés* (ed. Évelyne Patlagean and Alain Le Boulluec; Bibliothèque de l’École des Hautes Études, Section des Sciences Religieuses 99; Louvain/Paris: Peeters, 1993), 319-39.

⁹ In this episode, the child is usually instructed by his school teacher to repeat the first letter of the alphabet on command, but the child refuses to obey unless the teacher can expound that letter’s esoteric significance. When the latter confesses his inability to comply, the child proceeds to recite the entire alphabet and to discourse on the meaning of each character. For the distribution and cultural significance of this tale, see especially Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis Under Early Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 167-71.

world who rules the universe by manipulating the letters which spell out ‘the most powerful Name’: human meditation on these same letters produces a revelation of ‘the most awesome secret(s).’¹⁰ The radical Shiite sect of the Mughīriyya held that God existed in an anthropoid shape whose limbs and members corresponded to the number and shape of the letters of the alphabet.¹¹ Works like *Sefer Yetzira*, *’Otiyyot de R. Aqiva*, and the *Shi’ur Qomah* illustrate the currency of similar ideas among Jewish esotericist circles in the East during this time.

A further aspect of scriptural totemism is that ‘scripture’ and ‘community’ come to be viewed as coextensive, as concrete embodiments or objectifications of each other. An attack on the integrity of the one can be read as an assault on the existence of the other. The physical manipulation, display, or even mutilation of the sacred book can rouse religious communities to a fever pitch of martial fervor or murderous rage. Martin Goodman and more recently Seth Schwartz have called attention to what the latter aptly terms a ‘fetishization of the Torah scroll,’ an attitude already found within certain literary works of Hellenistic and Roman-era Judaism such as 1 Maccabees, the Epistle of Aristeas, and the histories of Josephus.¹² The willful confiscation and destruction of Torah scrolls, as was allegedly carried out by the agents of Antiochus Epiphanes (1 Macc 1:56-57), signals more than a spree of thuggish vandalism: it represents the calculated annihilation of a distinctive Jewish identity within the cosmopolitan ethos of the Seleucid state. A clever, even diabolical plan, but hardly a novel one. Nebuchadnezzar had

¹⁰ Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-milal wa’l-niḥal* (ed. Muhammad b. Fath Allāh Badrān; 2 vols.; [Cairo]: Matba‘at al-Azhar, [1951-55]), 1:636.4-7.

¹¹ Wilferd Madelung, “Mughīriyya,” *EF* 7:347-48.

¹² M. D. Goodman, “Texts, Scribes and Power in Roman Palestine,” in *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World* (ed. Alan K. Bowman and Greg Woolf; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 100-102; Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B. C. E. to 640 C. E.* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), 59-61, cf. 231-33.

attempted to perform a similar purgation when he sacked Jerusalem—so claims Ya‘qūbī within the ‘biblical history’ portion of his ninth-century *Ta’rīkh* (‘Chronicle’)—but the Babylonian monarch’s plan of virtual genocide was thwarted by Zerubbabel who

recovered the Torah and the books of the Prophets from the pit wherein Bukht-Naṣṣar (i.e., Nebuchadnezzar) had buried them.

He discovered that they had not burned at all.¹³ Hence he restored (and) transcribed (copies of) the Torah, the books of the Prophets, their customary practices (*sunna*), and their religious laws (*ṣarī‘a*). He was the first to record these scriptures.¹⁴

Ya‘qūbī thus affirms that Zerubbabel’s successful recovery of the Jewish ‘scriptures’ permitted not only the reclamation of his people’s literary heritage, but also the successful reconstitution of every aspect of Jewish communal life, including its very status as a distinct people. The notions of ‘scripture’ and ‘ethnos’ are thus intertwined, and even the titles or designations for ‘national’ scriptures can function as metonyms or can be employed interchangeably, even disparagingly, by one textual community when referring to another rival group: witness the qur’ānic manipulation of the appellatives *Tawrāt* or ‘the Law’ for Jews and *Injīl* or ‘the Gospel’ for Christians, or the demeaning Christian invocation of ‘that vomit of Satan ... the Avesta’¹⁵ for Zoroastrians.

¹³ In his earlier account of the Babylonian sack of Jerusalem, Ya‘qūbī had described how the impious Nebuchadnezzar had taken the Jewish scriptures, dumped them in a hole, tossed flaming torches on top of them, and filled the pit with dirt.

¹⁴ Ya‘qūbī, *Ta’rīkh* (2 vols.; Beirut: Dār Sādir, 1960), 1:66.4-6; cf. *Ibn Wadīh qui dicitur al-Ja‘qubī historiae ...* (ed. M. Th. Houtsma; 2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1883), 1:71.12-15; R. Y. Ebied and L. R. Wickham, “Al-Ya‘qūbī’s Account of the Israelite Prophets and Kings,” *JNES* 29 (1970): 97; Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 226-27.

¹⁵ Išo‘dad of Marw *apud* Matt 2:2, cited from *The Commentaries of Išo‘dad of Merv, Bishop of Hadatha (c. 850 A.D.) in Syriac and English* (ed. Margaret Dunlop Gibson; 2 vols.; *Horae Semiticae* 5-6; Cambridge: University Press, 1911), 2:32.11-12.

Accordingly religious innovation or dissent can be legitimated only through scriptural means. ‘Anan b. David, often but erroneously branded as the ‘founder’ of the Karaite or ‘scripturalist’ movement within medieval Judaism,¹⁶ reportedly based his teachings on what were supposedly superior ‘manuscripts of the Mishnah (sic!) written in the handwriting copied from the prophet Moses,’ copies of which ‘Anan allegedly brought with him to Baghdad ‘from the East.’¹⁷ ‘Anan also generated additional writings under his own name explicating his new insights; these works were predictably and pejoratively dismissed by one of his opponents as ‘a wicked and perverse Talmud.’¹⁸ Certain later Karaite authors (Ya‘qūb al-Qirqisānī, Sahl b. Maṣliḥ) ground the validity of their schism in an appeal to the authority of more ancient ‘Zadokite’ writings, some of which may have resurfaced among their community.¹⁹ Another eighth-century Jewish dissident, the messianic pretender Abū ‘Īsā al-Īsfahānī, reportedly authored a divinely inspired book wherein he critiqued and reinterpreted the Jewish Bible,²⁰ but he also supposedly exhorted his followers to study the Gospels, the Qur’ān, and their

¹⁶ For some excellently nuanced discussions of this issue, see Haggai Ben-Shammai, “Between Ananites and Karaites: Observations on Early Medieval Jewish Sectarianism,” in *Studies in Muslim-Jewish Relations: Volume I* (ed. Ronald L. Nettler; Oxford: Oxford Center for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies, 1993), 19-29; Yoram Erder, “The Karaites’ Sadducee Dilemma,” *IOS* 14 (1994): 195-226.

¹⁷ Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, as published in A. I. Silvestre de Sacy, *Chrestomathie arabe* (3 vols.; Paris: Imprimerie imperiale, 1806), 1:161.6-8. See also Salo Wittmayer Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (18 vols.; 2d ed.; New York and Philadelphia: Columbia University Press and the Jewish Publication Society, 1952-83), 5:183; Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Species of Misbelief: A History of Muslim Heresiography of the Jews* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Toronto, 1985), 436. This curious claim is now clarified by the near contemporary oriental traditions of Eldad ha-Dani about the legendary existence of a Levitical tribe known as the *beney Mosheh* or ‘children of Moses’ who dwelt in the East and who moreover were supposedly in possession of Hebrew language editions of talmudic literature emanating directly from Moses.

¹⁸ So Natronai b. Hilai, the ninth-century Gaon of Sura; text available in André Paul, *Écrits de Qumran et sects juives aux premiers siècles de l’Islam: Recherches sur l’origine du Qaraïsme* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1969), 146 n.26.

¹⁹ See Baron, *History*, 5:187-88; John C. Reeves, “Exploring the Afterlife of Jewish Pseudepigrapha in Medieval Near Eastern Religious Traditions: Some Initial Soundings,” *JSJ* 30 (1999): 148-77, esp. 159-64; Fred Astren, “The Dead Sea Scrolls and Medieval Jewish Studies: Methods and Problems,” *DSD* 8 (2001): 105-23.

²⁰ So Qirqisānī and Shahrastānī; see Baron, *History*, 5:185.

commentaries, thereby endorsing a kind of scriptural eclecticism that is intriguingly reminiscent of the Manichaean tactic of the adoption and cooptation of the scriptures of the ‘ancestral religions.’²¹

More common however than this ‘scriptural irenism’ is scriptural polemicism, where texts are wielded like weapons and where one scripture is directly opposed, blunted, and undermined by another.²² Qur’ān, for example, trumps *Tawrāt* and *Injīl*, even though all three scriptures share the status of divine revelation (Q 5:44-48). One might, like the former caliphal bureaucrat John of Damascus, contrast the sober testimony of the ‘Old and New Testaments and the words of the holy and elect Fathers’ with ‘the foul, loathsome and unclean writings of the accursed Manichaeans, Gnostics, and the rest of the heretics.’²³ Or, in those cases where particular scriptures are shared by the competing communities, one might wage battle at the hermeneutical level and strive to demonstrate that widely accepted and sanctioned interpretations of prominent verses or stories are in fact wrong and should be amended or replaced. The Chaldean dualists, many of whom exhibited various degrees of Christianization and hence nominally respectful attitudes toward most biblically allied scriptures, were especially adept at this type of warfare. Theodore Abū Qurra, the eighth-century Melkite bishop of Ḥarrān, speaks of arguing with

²¹ Abū ‘Īsā al-Īṣfahānī allegedly accepted a restrictive prophetic status for both Jesus and Muhammad. Note also the similar ecumenical attitude displayed by the early Ismā‘īliyya movement (see Wilferd Madelung, “Ismā‘īliyya,” *EI*² 4:198-206) and the infamous *Rasā’il* of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’; i.e., the ‘Brethren of Purity’: ‘The prophets are to be valued highly, because of their obedience to the angels in writing down in the revealed books the inspiration and announcements they received ... the Torah, the Gospel, the Koran, and the suḥuf of the prophets.’ Quotation taken from Fred Leemhuis, “The Arabic Version of the Apocalypse of Baruch: A Christian Text?” *JSP* 4 (1989): 23.

²² Wasserstrom also reviews aspects of this phenomenon in a discussion of what he terms ‘comparative exegesis’; see his *Between Muslim and Jew*, 145-53.

²³ John of Damascus, *Orationes tres* 2.10, cited from Averil Cameron, “Texts as Weapons: Polemic in the Byzantine Dark Ages,” in Bowman and Woolf, *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World*, 214.

people of the Manichaeans. These are they who are called the Zanādiqa, and they said: Thou must attach thyself to the (true) Christians and give heed to the word of their gospel. For the true Gospel is in our possession, which the twelve apostles have written, and there is no religion other than that which we possess, and there are no Christians apart from us. No one understands the interpretation of the Gospel save Mani, our Lord.²⁴

Finally one might, like Ḥiwī al-Balkhī, the so-called ‘Jewish Marcion,’²⁵ engage in a systematically destructive exposure of the discrepancies, contradictions, and absurdities to be found in canonical scriptures in order to ridicule their allegedly divine origin. Ḥiwī himself attacked the Hebrew Bible with devastating effect, forcing a half dozen or so later generations of Jewish exegetes to respond to and counter his critique. So-called Muslim ‘free-thinkers’ like Ibn al-Rāwandī and al-Rāzī, both of whom exhibit tantalizing links with dualist thinkers and writings, similarly disparage the Qur’ān and even the very possibility of a prophetically countenanced religion.²⁶ According to the Karaite scholar Ya‘qūb al-Qirqisānī, ‘dissenters and deviants like the Manichaeans’ were particularly active in exploiting the ambiguities and apparent contradictions to be found in the biblical

²⁴ Cited by Henri-Charles Puech, “Gnostic Gospels and Related Documents,” in Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha* (ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher; 2 vols.; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963-65), 1:268. Similarly the tenth-century Muslim jurist ‘Abd al-Jabbār states: ‘Mani claims that he knows the truth concerning Christ, that he is one of the latter’s followers, that nobody with the exception of himself and his (i.e., Mani’s) followers observes Christ’s law and precepts and that the Gospel which Mani has with him is the Gospel of Christ’ (*Tathbūt dālā’il al-nubūwwah* [ed. ‘Abd al-Karīm ‘Uthmān; 2 vols.; Beirut: Dār al-Arabiyyah, 1966-67], 1:114). Translation is that of Shlomo Pines, “Two Passages Concerning Mani,” *apud his The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity According to a New Source* (Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities 2.13; Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1966), 66.

²⁵ So M. Stein, “Hiwi al-Balkhi, the Jewish Marcion,” in *Sefer Qlozner (= Klausner Volume)* (ed. N. H. Tur-Sinai; Tel Aviv: Aḥad ha-Yovel, 1937), 210-55 (Hebrew).

²⁶ For the most recent discussion of these figures, see Sarah Stroumsa, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam: Ibn al-Rāwandī, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, and Their Impact on Islamic Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

book of Genesis.²⁷ In fact Manichaeans and their Chaldean dualist brethren were infamous for their uncompromising rejection of the canonical form of the Hebrew Bible. Barely a century after the death of Mani, Ephrem Syrus reports that ‘they (the Manichaeans) revile our Old Testament just as the Jews revile the New Testament.’²⁸ While largely unremarkable at first glance, this statement merits a closer scrutiny. It does not say that Mani or his religion rejected the importance of the *dramatis personae* and narrated events which figure in certain portions of Judaeo-Christian scripture; such a reading is clearly false in light of the crucial significance Manichaeism manifestly accords to the words and deeds of the pre-Abrahamic biblical forefathers²⁹ and Qirqisānī’s aforementioned remark attesting a Manichaean infatuation with the biblical book of Genesis. Rather, the operative word in Ephrem’s report is the pronoun ‘our’ (*dīlan*); namely, it is *our* version of the Old Testament which effects revulsion among the Manichaeans. Manichaeism denigrates only those redactions of the Jewish scriptures which were read as such among the contemporary Jewish and Christian communities.

Competing versions of what we today refer to as ‘Bible’ were rife during the initial centuries of the Common Era. Thanks to the important manuscript discoveries of the past century and the close study of these finds in tandem with a reassessment of the structure

²⁷ Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb al-Qirqisānī, *Tafsīr Bereshit* (sic), British Library Ms. Or. 2557, as published in Hartwig Hirschfeld, *Qirqisāni Studies* (Jews’ College Publication 6; London: Oxford University Press, 1918), 39.11-12. It is now recognized that the text published by Hirschfeld is actually Qirqisānī’s introduction to his much lengthier commentary on the narrative sections of the Pentateuch. His briefer commentary (called by Chiesa an ‘epitome’) on Genesis (*Tafsīr Bereshit*) is extant as British Library Ms. Or. 2492, which remains unpublished. See Bruno Chiesa, “A New Fragment of al-Qirqisānī’s *Kitāb al-Riyāḍ*,” *JQR* 78 (1987-88): 175-85.

²⁸ Translated from *S. Ephraim’s Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion, and Bardaisan* (ed. C. W. Mitchell; 2 vols.; London: Williams and Norgate, 1912-21), 1:43.40-44.

²⁹ See Reeves, *Heralds*, 7-17. It is barely possible that Abraham may have been viewed by Mani as a legitimate Apostle of Light to the Jews, a ‘national’ prophet holding a rank and prestige similar to that enjoyed by the Buddha, Zoroaster, and Jesus. See Augustine, *contra Faustum* 19.3; Shahrastānī, *Kitāb milal wa’l-niḥal* (ed. Muhammad Sayyid Kīlānī; 2 vols.; Cairo, 1961; repr., Beirut: Dār al-Marefah, n.d.), 1:248; also Taqīzādeh-Šīrāzī, *Mānī va dīn-e-ū*, 244.

and contents of various allied literatures like Jewish apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, rabbinic midrashim, Christian parascriptural sources (e.g., the *Cave of Treasures* cycle), Qur'ān, and Muslim prophetic lore (the so-called 'lives of the prophets'), a new paradigm for understanding and explaining the development of Bible and canon is beginning to emerge,³⁰ and it possesses far-reaching implications for the scholarly evaluation of the use of 'biblical' characters, episodes, and motifs in a variety of Near Eastern literary contexts. Succinctly stated, this new way of reading suggests that in the absence of firm evidence to the contrary no one 'form' of a 'biblical' narrative need necessarily enjoy temporal priority or social authority over another one. Moreover, even in those diminishing cases where one can establish such priority or authority, there are sometimes embedded frozen remnants of more primitive formulations or motifs within the later text.³¹

A Manichaean Counter-Version of Genesis 1-6?

The biblical book of Genesis as known to us in its Jewish and Christian canonical recensions and as refracted to us in a bewildering variety of alternative formulations and arrangements provides an excellent focus for illustrating this approach. Works like the Masoretic recension of Genesis, *Jubilees*, the Qumran Genesis Apocryphon (1QapGen), Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitates*, and the Nag Hammadi *Apocalypse of Adam* provide different portrayals, recountals, and even stages of redaction of a limited roster of basic

³⁰ See James E. Bowley and John C. Reeves, "Rethinking the Concept of 'Bible': Some Theses and Proposals," *Henoah* 25 (2003): 3-18.

³¹ For some illustrations, see John C. Reeves, "Some Explorations of the Intertwining of Bible and Qur'ān," in *Bible and Qur'ān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality* (ed. John C. Reeves; SBLSymS 24; Leiden/Atlanta: Brill/Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 43-60.

characters and narrative events like the creation, the first human couple, their immediate descendants, the corruption of humanity, and the universal Flood, and isolated blocks or parallel fragments of narrative materials related to the opening scenes in Genesis can be found in portions of the Enochic literature (e.g., the *Book of Watchers*; the *Animal Apocalypse*; the Qumran *Book of Giants*) or early Jewish compositions like 4 Ezra (3:4-11; 6:38-53) and the Wisdom of Solomon (4:10-15; 10:1-4). Absorption with these primal traditions was however not confined to Jewish circles: Christianity and Islam, insofar as they consciously viewed themselves as heirs to a living scriptural tradition, also fostered creative readings and verbal construals of the primary narrative cycles attested in the early chapters of the canonical form of the book of Genesis, and their rich collections of exegetical and legendary lore occasionally attest the presence of far older constellations of motifs and narrative trajectories.³² Gnostic literatures—whether Jewish, Christian, pagan, or Muslim—abundantly bear witness to a fascination with the textual dimensions of cosmogony and theodicy in their ‘biblical’ format,³³ and the published writings associated with the Mesopotamian gnostic sect known as the Mandaeans display a prominent interest in Genesis figures and themes.³⁴

³² The Syriac *Cave of Treasures*, for example, demonstrates how one Christian community could manipulate the discourse of Genesis to express distinctly parochial concerns (e.g., a positive evaluation of celibacy), while Muslim collections of so-called *Isrāʾīliyyāt* (Jewish stories) exploit the hortatory value of the deeds and sayings of earlier prophets like Adam, Noah, or Abraham.

³³ In addition to the aforementioned *Apocalypse of Adam*, note also the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, *On the Origin of the World*, and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, as well as several pseudepigrapha ascribed to prominent Genesis characters like Seth or Melchizedek. Essential guidance concerning the ‘biblical’ roots of these gnostic texts is provided by Birger A. Pearson, “Jewish Sources in Gnostic Literature,” in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period* (ed. Michael E. Stone; CRINT 2.2; Assen/Philadelphia: Van Gorcum/ Fortress, 1984), 443-81; idem, “The Problem of ‘Jewish Gnostic’ Literature,” in *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, & Early Christianity* (ed. Charles W. Hedrick and Robert Hodgson, Jr.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1986), 15-35; and especially Gedaliahu A. G. Stroumsa, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology* (NHS 24; Leiden: Brill, 1984).

³⁴ See especially Eric Segelberg, “Old and New Testament Figures in Mandaean Version,” in *Syncretism* (ed. Sven S. Hartman; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1969), 228-39.

Manichaeism unsurprisingly shares this interest, although its version of the Genesis materials presents a drastic polemical recasting of the major characters, themes, and stories related in canonical forms of the Jewish text. Even so, the Manichaean version of Genesis cannot be summarily dismissed as a patently derivative distortion of orthodox scriptures: it in fact exhibits several intriguing features suggestive of its close kinship to certain older complexes of allied traditions which once circulated as integral parts of an earlier stage of the biblical narrative tradition, but which were subsequently expunged from their original settings by the final redactors of Genesis and which are now situated beyond the boundaries of the canonical forms of Genesis in parascriptural texts like *Jubilees* and portions of *1 Enoch*. One might in fact state it this way: Manichaeism subverts the canonical narrative setting, characters, and plot of the early chapters of Genesis by restoring certain motifs and themes which it gleaned from more primitive forms of the same text. The purpose of this textual subversion is apparently to demonstrate that the distinctive message of Mani was originally encoded within what was perceived to be a more authentic form of this ‘ancestral scripture.’

In order to appreciate the astonishing nature of this claim, it must be recalled that a principal critique Mani levels against some of his prophetic predecessors is that they failed to insure the accurate registration and preservation of their writings, and that consequently these writings—which eventually evolve into the canonical scriptures associated with religions like Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity—were corrupted and falsified by later generations of disciples and followers.³⁵ Ibn al-

³⁵ See the sources cited by Carl Schmidt and H. J. Polotsky, *Ein Mani-Fund in Ägypten: Originalschriften des Mani und seiner Schüler* (Berlin: Verlag der Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1933), 40-44; Andreas and Henning, “Mitteliranische Manichaica II,” 295 n.1; Walter B. Henning, “The Murder of the Magi,” *JRAS*

Nadīm mentions that ‘Mānī disparaged the other prophets in his writings. He found fault with them and charged them with lies, and maintained that devils had taken possession of them and had spoken using their tongues.’³⁶ This mode of argument is hardly new: Christian polemicists since the time of Justin Martyr had been charging Jews with the tendentious alteration of those portions of Jewish scripture which purportedly predicted the advent of Jesus and the Church, and the same accusation would enjoy renewed currency in Islam under the label of *taḥrīf*; i.e., ‘alteration, forgery,’ particularly with regard to the falsification of both the Jewish and Christian scriptures (cf. Q 3:78; 4:46; 5:15).³⁷ Certain trajectories within early Syrian Christianity, such as those represented by the pseudo-Clementine corpus of writings and the *Didaskalia*, visualized a distinction in the contents of the Jewish scriptures between those passages which were authentically revelatory and received by Moses directly from God, and other passages, the so-called ‘false pericopes’ which emanated from corrupt writings prepared by later generations of scribes.³⁸ It is surely not coincidental that it is out of such a sectarian milieu that many of the later Chaldean dualist sects emerged, including most importantly for our purposes, Manichaeism.³⁹ Is it possible that Mani was conversant with the divergent forms or even the redactional history of the biblical book of Genesis? Is it possible that when he

(1944), 136-37 (reprinted in *Henning: Selected Papers*, 2:142-43); Puech, *Le manichéisme*, 66-67, 149 nn.259-61.

³⁶ Taqīzādeh-Šīrāzī, *Mānī va dīn-e-ū*, 159; cf. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist* (trans. Dodge), 2:794. Compare *Acta Archelai* 11.3; Titus of Bostra, *Contra Manichaeos* (see *Titi Bostreni contra Manichaeos libri quatuor syriace* [ed. Paul A. de Lagarde; Berlin: C. Schultze, 1859], 129).

³⁷ See especially Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, “Taḥrīf,” *EF* 10:111-12; idem, “Muslim Medieval Attitudes towards the Qur’an and the Bible,” in Patlagean and Le Boulluec, *Les retours aux Écritures*, 253-67.

³⁸ Ps-Clementine *Homilies* 2.38; 3.47-48. See Hans-Joachim Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judentums* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1949), 148-87; Georg Strecker, “The Kerygmata Petrou,” in Hennecke-Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2:102-27; idem, “On the Problem of Jewish Christianity,” in Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (ed. Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel; 2d ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 241-85.

³⁹ See John C. Reeves, “The ‘Elchasaite Sanhedrin’ of the Cologne Mani Codex in Light of Second Temple Jewish Sectarian Sources,” *JJS* 42 (1991): 68-91; Samuel N. C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China* (2d ed.; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1992), 33-85.

prepared ‘his’ rendering of those traditions he was *consciously* reintroducing or reintegrating elements which stemmed from a more primitive rendition of the text than those represented by its present canonical forms?

Manichaeism uses a ‘corrective’ reading of the initial chapters of Genesis which frequently applies and exploits motifs drawn from what are arguably earlier renditions of the principal Genesis narratives, especially those which highlight topics and motifs associated with that school of authors which biblical source critics identify as the Priestly source (P).⁴⁰ Several distinctive features of the Priestly account of primeval history, fuller forms of which may still be visible in parascriptural sources like *Jubilees*, *1 Enoch*, rabbinic and early medieval collections of midrash, and later Christian and Muslim compilations of exegetical lore, would seem to require only minimal adjustment by Mani (at least from the point of view of mature Manichaeism) in order to integrate them within the Manichaean system of discourse. These include (1) the Priestly source’s general affinity with Mesopotamian⁴¹ traditions pertaining to primeval ‘history’; (2) the largely asexual nature of the creative process itself;⁴² (3) the notion that humanity came into being as a conscious imitation or copy of an androgynous divine entity;⁴³ (4) a plurality of divine beings;⁴⁴ (5) a strict abhorrence of unsanctioned bloodshed;⁴⁵ and (6) the apparent prominence of the figure of Enoch as a crucial transitional character in its

⁴⁰ I.e., Gen 1:1-2:4a; 5:1-28, 30-32a; 6:9-14 + portions of the Flood narrative.

⁴¹ As opposed to autochthonous Canaanite or revisionist Deuteronomistic ones.

⁴² Both the Priestly (Gen 1:1-2:4a) and Manichaean myths of cosmogony emphasize linguistic rather than sexual or demiurgic modes of creation. See Reeves, *Jewish Lore*, 201 n.20.

⁴³ Gen 1:26-27 with its emphasis upon the creation of Adam in the divine ‘image and likeness’ is a crucial text in the elaboration of both creation myths.

⁴⁴ Gen 1:26 (‘let us create Adam’) plus the consistent employment of the grammatically plural term ‘*elohim*’ for the deity(s).

⁴⁵ According to pentateuchal source critics, the Priestly source lacked the Eden (2:4b-3:24) and the Cain and Abel (4:1-24) stories, both of which contain instances involving the possible or actual mortal spilling of blood. For the importance of this point, see Reeves, “Some Explorations,” 52-58.

narrative flow.⁴⁶ It is abundantly clear that Mani invested signal importance in the biblical character of Enoch, for he recognized him as an authentic avatar of the Manichaean Apostle of Light and as an important author of and conduit for revelatory scriptures such as are now found in *1* and *2 Enoch*.⁴⁷ Thanks to some chance archaeological finds and the brilliant perspicacity of J. T. Milik, we now know that Mani expropriated and adapted a previously unknown Second Temple era Jewish work—one which featured Enoch as a prominent character—into one of the canonical scriptures of Manichaeism, the so-called *Book of Giants*.⁴⁸ It is equally probable that Mani—or an early follower—was skillfully adept in the outright forgery of Enochic literature, a talent which later generations of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scribes also cultivated: this might explain the otherwise unknown ‘Apocalypse of Enoch’ cited by the *Cologne Mani Codex*,⁴⁹ and could go a long way toward clarifying the problem of when, where, and by

⁴⁶ It seems possible that Enoch functioned as the flood-hero in the *Urform* of the biblical Priestly source. The traditions surrounding the ultimate fate of Enoch are conceptually cognate with those associated with Mesopotamian flood-heroes like Ziusudra, Atrahasis, and Utnapishtim.

⁴⁷ Mani’s esteem for Enoch and the literature associated with that forefather’s name was emphasized by Isaac de Beausobre, *Histoire critique de Manichée et du manichéisme* (2 vols.; Amsterdam: J. F. Bernard, 1734-39), 1:428-29; Walter B. Henning, “Ein manichäisches Henochbuch,” *Sitzungsberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (1934): 27-35; idem, “The Book of the Giants,” *BSOAS* 11 (1943-46): 52-74. See also John C. Reeves, “An Enochic Motif in Manichaean Tradition,” in *Manichaica Selecta: Studies Presented to Professor Julien Ries on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (ed. Alois van Tongerloo and Søren Giversen; Louvain: International Association of Manichaean Studies, 1991), 295-98; idem, “Jewish Pseudepigrapha in Manichaean Literature: The Influence of the Enochic Library,” in *Tracing the Threads: Studies in the Vitality of Jewish Pseudepigrapha* (ed. John C. Reeves; SBLEJL 6; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 173-203; idem, *Heralds*, 5-30; 39-42; 183-206.

⁴⁸ J. T. Milik, “Problèmes de la littérature hénochique à la lumière des fragments araméennes de Qumran,” *HTR* 64 (1971): 333-78; idem, “Turfân et Qumran, Livre des Géants juif et manichéen,” in *Tradition und Glaube: Das frühe Christentum in seiner Umwelt* (ed. Gret Jeremias, et al.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), 117-27; idem, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumrân Cave 4* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 298-339; Reeves, *Jewish Lore*, 51-164; Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *The Book of Giants from Qumran: Texts, Translation, and Commentary* (TSAJ 63; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1997).

⁴⁹ *CMC* 58.6-60.12, as transcribed by Ludwig Koenen and Cornelia Römer, *Der Kölner Mani-Kodex ... Kritische Edition* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1988), 38-40. The likely spurious character of this ‘citation’ has been suggested by David Frankfurter, “Apocalypses Real and Alleged in the Mani Codex,” *Numen* 44 (1997): 60-73; see also Reeves, *Heralds* 17; 197-211.

whom the so-called *Similitudes* (now embedded and christianized as *1 Enoch* 37-71) were initially produced.⁵⁰

Important textual evidence for Mani's apparent access to pre-canonical forms of what would eventually become the 'scriptural edition' of the initial chapters of the biblical book of Genesis emerges from a reconsideration of his usage of the ancient Jewish tale about the cataclysmic effects of an illegitimate union of errant 'divine beings' and 'mortal women.' This story, tersely recounted in Gen 6:1-4, highlights several levels of tension among the supernatural and terrestrial worlds which Mani found useful for the elaboration of episodes within his cosmogonic scheme:

And it happened that when humanity began to increase upon the surface of the earth and female progeny were born to them, the divine beings noticed the female humans, for they were lovely, and so they acquired wives for themselves from among whomsoever they chose [...].⁵¹ The Nefilim were on the earth during those days, and also afterwards, when the divine beings were consorting with female humans and they bore (children) for them. These were the giants/heroes of antiquity, the famous individuals.

⁵⁰ With the significant exception of early Manichaean sources originating in Mesopotamia, there is no textual evidence for the existence of the *Similitudes* prior to its inclusion in the Ethiopic version of what modern scholars call *1 Enoch*. Almost no one has given this physical situation the attention it deserves.

⁵¹ Omitting the problematic and misplaced Gen 6:3: 'And the Lord said: "My spirit cannot abide among humanity forever inasmuch as it is flesh; its days will be one hundred and twenty years."' Compare the wording of 4Q252 I frags. 1 & 2 1-3: 'And God said: "My spirit cannot endure humans forever; their days will be fixed at one hundred and twenty years until the time of the Flood-waters.' The latter text is cited from the edition of George J. Brooke in *Qumran Cave 4 XVII: Parabiblical Texts, Part 3* (DJD 22; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 193. To extrapolate from the textual and thematic evidence supplied by both the Mesopotamian flood-traditions and *Jubilees* 5, Gen 6:3 would have originally been located *after* the Deluge but *prior* to the earth's resettlement.

This passage has generated intense discussion over the past two centuries of biblical scholarship, especially with regard to the precise identification of the enigmatic Nefilim of verse 4 as well as concerning the entire pericope's literary relationship to much fuller renditions of the story found in parascriptural sources like *1 Enoch* and *Jubilees* where the 'divine beings' of verses 2 and 4 are identified with a particular class of angels termed 'Watchers.' A detailed rehearsal of the various arguments which have been offered as a solution to these difficulties is not necessary for our present purposes. Using the testimony of other biblical passages and early versional evidence (e.g., the Old Greek and *Targum Onkelos*), most scholars accept the term 'Nefilim' as synonymous with 'giants,' reading the name 'Nefilim' as the nominal antecedent of the pronoun *hemah* ('these, they') which introduces the final clause of verse 4.⁵² Accordingly the designation 'Nefilim' would designate the same class of beings—namely the 'giants'—who are represented as being the miscegenate offspring of the divine and mortal realms.⁵³

By contrast, an examination of the extant Manichaean mythological literature which features the cast of *dramatis personae* familiar from Gen 6:1-4 and its parascriptural analogues produces a startlingly different picture. The 'divine beings' are the 'Watchers,' and Mani employs exactly the same terminology that is used in the Enochic literature.⁵⁴ Their progeny begotten on human women are 'giants' or 'monsters.' The 'Nefilim' are 'abortions,' a reading based on a play-on-words that is also found in an

⁵² E.g., Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (5th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1922), 58, who views 'giants/heroes' as a less mythologically charged gloss to the problematic 'Nefilim.'

⁵³ Excellent discussions of this evidence are available in Philip S. Alexander, "The Targumim and Early Exegesis of 'Sons of God' in Genesis 6," *JJS* 23 (1972): 60-71; Loren T. Stuckenbruck, "The 'Angels' and 'Giants' of Genesis 6:1-4 in Second and Third Century BCE Jewish Interpretation: Reflections on the Posture of Early Apocalyptic Traditions," *DSD* 7 (2000): 354-77.

⁵⁴ Henning, "Book of the Giants," 53.

early midrashic interpretation of Gen 6:4.⁵⁵ While these ‘abortions’ occasionally appear as the offspring of the Watchers, and hence can be consonant with ‘giants,’ it is in fact much more common for them to be portrayed as equivalent to the Watchers. As Guy Stroumsa has succinctly and correctly observed, ‘Mani ... practically identified the Watchers themselves with the abortions.’⁵⁶

Given Mani’s professed esteem for the scriptural authority of the ‘ancestral religions,’ why would he endorse an exegetical identification that was at variance with what appears to be the plain meaning of the received text of Gen 6:4? The stock appeals to Mani’s duplicity, mendacity, or ignorance, charges which permeate the heresiological literature, are not persuasive in this instance. Mani seems thoroughly conversant with the tales and traditions that accumulated around the antediluvian generations of humanity, a reservoir of narrative lore that was cultivated and mediated through a variety of biblicist circles inhabiting the Roman and Sasanian Near East. It was Franz Cumont, puzzling over this very point almost a century ago, who signaled the path toward its resolution: ‘Il paraît impossible d’admettre que la fable manichéenne, très développée, soit sortie de ce court verset de la Genèse [i.e., 6:4], mais on peut se demander si celui-ci ne résume pas une antique légende sémitique, que Mâni aurait connue.’⁵⁷ One can conclude, in other words, that Mani was acquainted with a more primitive and hence more authentic form of the myth which he deemed superior to its present ‘canonical’ expression in Gen 6:1-4.

Largely unnoticed by most biblical scholars is a persistent, widely attested, and undoubtedly ancient trend within parascriptural literature which understood the Nefilim

⁵⁵ See *Gen. Rab.* 26.7. The relevance of this midrash to Mani’s reading of Gen 6:4 was first pointed out by Theodor Nöldeke, *ZDMG* 43 (1889): 536.

⁵⁶ Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 160; see also 161-62.

⁵⁷ Franz Cumont and M.-A. Kugener, *Recherches sur le manichéisme* (Bruxelles: H. Lamertin, 1908-12), 41-42 n.4; cf. also Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 161.

of Gen 6:4 to be not ‘giants’ but ‘fallen angels.’ One arguable early instance of this equation is found in 1Q Genesis Apocryphon 2.1: ‘then I [i.e., Lamech, the father of Noah] considered whether the pregnancy was due to the Watchers or to the Holy Ones or to the Nefil[im/n],’ a passage where the term ‘Nefilim’ seems to be semantically parallel with the designations ‘Watchers’ and ‘Holy Ones.’⁵⁸ Another early (i.e., pre-Destruction) expression of the identity or equivalence of the beings termed Watchers and Nefilim occurs in the Qumran Damascus Document (CD 2.18): ‘by their proceeding in the stubbornness of their hearts the heavenly Watchers fell (*naflu*): they were ensnared by it for they did not observe the commandments of God.’⁵⁹ By its choice of verb,⁶⁰ the *Damascus Document* here invites its reader/auditor to associate the Watchers with the ‘fallen ones,’ i.e., the apparent semantic sense of the morpheme ‘Nefilim,’ thereby exemplifying a popular interpretative encoding which recurs throughout late antique and medieval Jewish recountals of the legend.⁶¹ In addition to relying upon this learned wordplay, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Gen 6:4 makes a bold identification of the ‘Nefilim’ in Gen 6:4 with the two leaders of the Watchers who are named in *1 Enoch* 6-

⁵⁸ See the discussion of Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave I: A Commentary* (2d ed.; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1971), 80-81.

⁵⁹ The antiquity of this language is confirmed by 4Q266 (4QD^a) Frag. 2 col. II 1.2. It should be noted that the same verb (*naflu*) is also used of the Watchers’ giant progeny in the immediately succeeding lines. One would thus be tempted to argue that the Damascus Document maintains that the term Nefilim can refer to *both* fallen angels and giants, an interpretative position which we have seen was duplicated by Mani.

⁶⁰ As *1 En.* 6:6 and *Jub.* 4:15 clearly illustrate, the favorite pun for the earthly arrival of the angelic Watchers was an assonance between forms of the verbal stem *yrd* and the proper name Yared, the father of Enoch, during whose lifetime the descent allegedly took place. Note also 1QapGen 3.3. The choice instead of the stem *npl* for the same ‘journey’ is thus exegetically governed by the form ‘Nefilim.’

⁶¹ See *Pirqe R. El.* §7 (ed. Luria 16b): ‘the angels who fell (*šenaflu*) from their exalted positions and from their holy stations in heaven’; *ibid.* §22 (ed. Luria 50b-51a): ‘the angels who fell (*šenaflu*) from their holy stations in heaven’; *Aggadot Bereshit* in Ms. Oxford Bodl. 2340 (published in Milik, *Books of Enoch*, 331-32): ‘the Nefilim ... this refers to ‘Uzza and ‘Azael,’ where the immediately preceding passage had labeled these two angels as the ‘divine beings’ of Gen 6:2; *Ba ‘al ha-Turim* to Gen 6:4: ‘[the Nefilim are] Shemhazai and ‘Azael, and they fell (*naflu*) from heaven during the time of the generation of the Flood.’ See also Zohar 1.25a-b; 1.37a; 1.58a; and 3.144a. Further examples of this same equivalence can be culled from Syriac and Arabic language sources.

11: ‘Shemhazai and ‘Azael fell (*naflu*) from heaven and were on earth in those days.’⁶²

A final even though temporally late example of this same interpretive trajectory figures in the Zohar:

Our teachers of blessed memory have said: At the time when the Holy One, blessed be He, created Adam, he created him in the Garden of Eden and instructed him to observe seven commandments. He transgressed and was expelled from the Garden of Eden. Then two heavenly angels—‘Uzza and ‘Azael⁶³—said before the Holy One, blessed be He: ‘If we were on earth, we would be meritorious!’ The Holy One, blessed be He, said to them: ‘Could you prevail against the evil impulse?’ They responded before Him: ‘We would prevail!’ Immediately the Holy One, blessed be He, cast them down, as scripture says: ‘the Nefilim were on the earth’ (Gen 6:4), and it is written ‘the mighty ones, etc.’ (ibid.). At the time they descended to earth, the evil impulse entered into them, as scripture says: ‘they acquired wives for themselves from whomever they chose’ (Gen 6:2). They transgressed and thus were uprooted from their holy stations on this account.⁶⁴

Passages such as these just cited demonstrate that Mani was not unique in effecting an assimilation between the heavenly Watchers and the mysterious Nefilim of Gen 6:4:

⁶² Translated from the text published as *Targum Yonatan ben ‘Uzziel ‘al hamishah humshey Torah* (ed. D. Rieder; Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1974), 9. See also Reuven Margalio, *Mal’akey ‘elyon* (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1945), 292.

⁶³ ‘Uzza (sometimes ‘Azza) and ‘Azael are the rabbinic reflexes of Enochic Shemhazai and ‘Azael. On the identity of ‘Uzza/‘Azza and Shemhazai, see Reeves, *Jewish Lore*, 113.

⁶⁴ Tosefta *ad Zohar* 1.37a; cf. Margalio, *Mal’akey ‘elyon*, 276.

there was ample philological and narratological precedent. But one may perhaps go even further and hypothesize upon the basis of this evidence that Mani knew a form of this Jewish myth wherein ‘Watchers’ and ‘Nefilim’ denoted two distinct sets of angelic beings who descended to earth at different times.

Some biblical scholars have observed that the present ‘canonical’ form of Gen 6:1-4 appears to conflate two or more separate legends regarding the descent of angels from heaven to earth. According to this view, the Nefilim were originally a class of beings distinct from both the angels implicated in sexual activity with human women and the resultant race of Giants.⁶⁵ If these scholars are right, this would mean that the present form of Gen 6:1-4 is a relatively late apologetic text which was deliberately crafted by one of the final redactors of the early chapters of Genesis in order to subvert and ultimately defuse an older potentially explosive mythological cycle of tales relating the history of intercourse between the terrestrial and celestial realms. Examples of these more diffuse narratives are visible in older parascriptural sources like *I Enoch* and *Jubilees*. This relative sequencing of antediluvian biblical legends—from very prolix to cryptically terse—runs counter to how most modern scholars reconstruct the literary history of Genesis,⁶⁶ but it explains why Mani would conflate Watchers and Nefilim and why he would value Enochic literature over the ‘canonical’ form of the book of Genesis.

⁶⁵ See Julian Morgenstern, “The Mythological Background of Psalm 82,” *HUCA* 14 (1939): 85-86; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (trans. J. J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 377-79; Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 76.

⁶⁶ There is an almost universal presumption that parascriptural works like *I Enoch* 6-16 and *Jubilees* 4-5, 10:1-17 are expansions of and hence derivative from Gen 6:1-4. As presently perpetuated in the scholarly literature, this presumption can no longer withstand critical scrutiny. See especially Milik, *Books of Enoch*, 30-32; Philip R. Davies, “Sons of Cain,” in *A Word in Season: Essays in Honour of William McKane* (ed. James D. Martin and Philip R. Davies; JSOTSup 42; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1986), 46-50.

Conclusion

Insofar as it is a discursive reformulation or recasting of a ‘misunderstood scripture’ in order to insure that its ‘true’ meaning is not obscured, Mani’s corrective reading of this portion of Genesis functions the same way as those historiographical texts which David Biale and Amos Funkenstein have usefully termed ‘counterhistories.’ This is a genre whose justification is described by Biale as ‘the belief that the true history lies in a subterranean tradition that must be brought to light’⁶⁷ Funkenstein adds that ‘counterhistories form a specific genre of history written since antiquity ... their function is polemical [and t]heir method consists of the systematic exploitation of the adversary’s most trusted sources against their grain.’⁶⁸ They offer, in other words, a competing version of a foundational narrative ‘history.’ Typical examples of such ‘counterhistories,’ according to Funkenstein, would include the Egyptian historian Manetho’s polemical account of the Israelite exodus from Egypt, and the library of medieval Jewish *Toledot Yeshu* texts generated in response to the Christian gospels. Both of these examples are instructive, for they both utilize and yet subtly exploit the primary plot, characters, and elements of their target narratives in order to undermine and discredit them among literate social communities. Mani’s radical reading of the canonical Genesis narrative employs the same tactic in order to accomplish a similar end, ‘restoring’ in the process what he held to be a more pristine and textually authentic; i.e., ‘scriptural’ expression of the Manichaean revelation.

⁶⁷ David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), 11.

⁶⁸ Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 36.