

Sun and Moon, Manicheans echoes in the Quran

FORTHCOMING, DRAFT VERSION

Introduction

As one of the most enigmatic sacred writings for the modern scholar, the Quran, despite its mystery, bears the echoes of traditions that existed before it. In my opinion, one such tradition, often neglected, is Manichaeism. Manichean soteriology emphasizes the struggle between the forces of good and evil, often personified as light and darkness. The whole cosmos in Manichean worldview is created out of the corpses of slain demons.¹ The preceding cosmic war, which provided such rich material for the construction of the universe, also marked the entrapping of particles of light in the chambers of matter. The release of this light is the mechanism of salvation, which is carried out through the Deity called Living Spirit, which produces the two celestial luminaries, the Sun and the Moon, for such purpose.² The Sun and the Moon are a kind of pumps for vacuuming light, they are also aptly called ships, as they are parking stations for transporting light from the lower worlds to the higher ones.³

The Sun and the Moon play a significant role as the primary agents of the Father of Greatness, rescuing humanity from the clutches of darkness. This crucial aspect is well captured in the Manichean religion, as seen in emblematic depictions like the Chinese Manichaean Diagram of the Universe and the Sasanian girded plate from the 5th/6th century.⁴ These depictions prominently feature the Sun and the Moon as integral elements of Manichaean doctrine. It is worth exploring whether a similar theological framework can be identified in the Quran, despite its apparent departure from the strict monotheistic stance of traditional Islam.

Within the Quranic text, the word شمس (*šams*, “sun”) is found 33 times, whereas the word قمر (*qamar*, “moon”) appears 27 times. Although the origin of the Arabic word for the Sun is well established and derives from the Proto-Semitic **šamš-*, the etymology for the *qamar* is a more intricate matter. In Classical Arabic the word stands for the moon, however even in first Arabic lexicon *Kitāb al-ʿAyn* the given definition is very ambiguous.⁵

In other Semitic languages the same root is used to denote a belt.⁶ This in turn is most likely to be a borrowing from the Persian *kamar* (“girdle”), and ultimately from Proto-Indo-European **kamp-* (“to bend”).⁷ The existence of loanwords in Semitic languages, such as the term in question being borrowed from Persian, is a common phenomenon. Persian had a significant impact on the Semitic-

¹ Pettipiece, *Pentadic Redaction in the Manichaean Kephalaia*, p. 226: “The Mother of Life stretched out the sky from their skins and made Eleven Heavens. And they threw down their corpses to the Land of Darkness and made Eight Earths. And the Five Sons of the Living Spirit each completed his task.”

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 227, see also *Epiph. Panarion* 22,6; *Shahrastānī, Kitāb al-milal wa-n-niḥal*, (trans. Reeves, Prolegomena, p. 204)

⁴ This subject is pedantically elaborated by Kósa in *The Sun, the Moon and Paradise — An Interpretation of the Upper Section of the Chinese Manichaean Cosmology Painting*

⁵ كتاب العين, الفراهيدي, ليلة مقمرة: القمراء ضوء القمر، وليلة مقمرة: القمراء ضوء القمر; used as adjective do describe night.

⁶ For example, Peshitta 2Kings 1:8: *ܩܡܪܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ* “And leather belt holds firmly around him”; Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, p. 220

⁷ Lubotsky, (2007). *Etymological Dictionary of the Iranian Verb* (Vol. II), p. 229

speaking regions in ancient times, particularly during the Sassanid era when the Persian Empire extended its influence over much of the Middle East. The occurrence of an identical word in Arabic to refer to a celestial luminary raises a question regarding its origins and the linguistic processes that led to such semantic transformation.

The Safaitic language, a Northern Arabian dialect that was prevalent in the region of the basalt desert of southern Syria and northern Jordan during the first millennium BCE to the fourth century CE, has been the subject of much scholarly attention in recent years. Many modern scholars consider it to be the closest known language to Classical Arabic due to its similarities in grammar, vocabulary, and syntax.⁸ In Safaitic, the word in question is also attested, but its meaning remains vague, and its usage is somewhat obscure, al-Jallad & Jaworska (2021) interpreting it to have the same meaning as it does in Classical Arabic.⁹ However, in Safaitic, this word is also used interchangeably with a word *kesā'*, which al-Jallad & Jaworska (2021) links with Syriac.¹⁰

The use of synonyms across different Semitic languages, as noted by the interchangeable use of the *qamar* with *kesā'* in Safaitic, suggests that there may have been some degree of linguistic continuity and shared cultural practices in the ancient Middle East. In Syriac, an Aramaic language spoken by early Christian communities, an identical term is used to refer to the full moon.¹¹ The shared use of this term between Safaitic and Syriac, therefore, points to a possible cross-cultural exchange of knowledge, including astronomical knowledge, which was of great significance to the people of the region. I think this is the most plausible explanation of semantic transformation for the Arabic word in question. Having dealt with the etymology of the words, I will move on to specific examples of their application and comparison with the Manichean writings.

The Sun and the Moon as a celestial ships

As previously noted, a fundamental tenet of Manichean doctrine postulated that the Sun and Moon served as a vessel for conveying light to the higher strata of the cosmos. The Manichean understanding of cosmology is intricately linked to the belief that the Elect possess a supernatural ability to extract light from food which is given as alms from laity. The alms received by the Elect are subject to purification and the release of light that is trapped within the darkness of the material realm.¹² This released light is then stored in the ships of light, heavenly luminaries, which carry it to the celestial domain.¹³ Of the two vessels, the Moon is navigated by Jesus, who serves as a pilot ferrying souls to the realm of Light.¹⁴

⁸ For more details, look up *An Outline of the Grammar of the Safaitic Inscriptions* by Al-Jallad (2015). Such important isoglosses as particle *ma* as negative one (*ma hijaziyah*), G-passive participle prepositions, subjunctive ending in *-a*, vestiges of nunation etc., can not be explained by mere coincidences

⁹ Al-Jallad & Jaworska, *A Dictionary of the Safaitic Inscriptions*, p. 110: "ASFF 229: *r'y h-'nhl b-qmr h-'nsy* 'he pastured in the valleys during the (full) moon of Virgo'"

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.91

¹¹ Peshitta Psalms 81:4: *ܩܘܢܝܢܝܢ ܘܢܝܚܝܢ ܘܢܝܚܝܢ ܘܢܝܚܝܢ* "on full moons and feast days"; Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, p. 220

¹² Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher*; §208, §217

¹³ Allberry, *A manichaeon Psalm-book*, p. 139: "Luminaries (φωστῆρες) that are in the skies. The barks that sail on high."

¹⁴ Allberry, *A manichaeon Psalm-book*, p. 151: "It is Jesus who steers it, he will put in for us until we embark."

Upon initial examination, these themes may appear to be incompatible with the teachings of the Quran. However, a detailed analysis shows striking similarities with the ideas promoted in Manichean beliefs. The good example is the verses 84:18-19, which seems to suggest the Moon as a ship. 84:18-19: *wal-qamara idā ittasaq latarkabunna ṭabaqa ‘an ṭabaqa* “and when the Moon is loaded, you will surely embark from stage to stage”. The use of *انتسق* (*ittasaq*, “to be full”) in the text is critical, as the VIII Form verb derives from the root *و-س-ق* (*waw-sin-qaf*), which is associated with a measure of capacity in Classical Arabic.¹⁵ This semantic meaning is most likely related to Ancient South Arabian *𐩧𐩣𐩪* *ws³q*, “to carry.”¹⁶ (The use of the verb suggests a gradual filling of the Moon to the point of completion. This parallels directly with the Manichean ideas outlined in Kephalaia:

“The first is its light; for it illumines by its light the world, and all the creatures who exist in it...The first is the filling up of the disk of its ship (of the Sun); because its ship has filled up every season, and shall not wane at all the way that the ship of the Moon wanes. This continuous fill[ing] by which it is filled displays the mystery of the Father, the great Greatness.”¹⁷

The author of the Manichean text posits that souls, which are equated with light in the Manichean cosmology, completely fill the disk of the Sun without undergoing any form of change. This stands in contrast to the Moon, whose phases author obviously connects with the cyclical influx of souls, which, like water filling a glass, fill the moon. Such interpretation of the relationship between the phases of the Moon and the periodic filling of its surface with souls reflects the unique Manichean soteriology, and highlights the importance of celestial luminaries as key agents in the salvation process.

A noteworthy aspect is the use of the Arabic verb *لتركبن* "*latarkabunna*" (which can be translated to mean "you will surely embark") in the Quran. This verb connotes a sense of continuation and progression, implying that once the Moon is filled with souls during the Full Moon phase, these souls will then embark on the next journey, to be transported by the next celestial ship. The following passage in Manichean Psalms should not be overlooked:

The ships are the Sun and Moon: he that embarks (*πεταιτελο*) — of him is nothing demanded.¹⁸

Thus Arabic verb is semantically identical to Coptic verb *τελο* (“to sail”) used in the Psalm. The significance of this linguistic construction in the Quranic text serves to underscore potential existence of a conceptual and linguistic framework that aligns with the Manichean ideas. Another notable example is found in verse 36:38 of the Quran, which reads: *wal-šamsu tajrī limus'taqarrin lahā dālika taqdīru l-‘azīza l-‘alīma* “And the Sun is swimming to resting place. Which is appointed for it by the Powerful and Knowing One.” The verse employs the verb *تجرى* (*tajrī*, meaning "floating" or "swimming") to describe the motion of the primary celestial luminary. Additionally, the use of *مستقر* (*mus'taqarrin*), meaning "a place of rest," is also noteworthy. The context of the verse does not

¹⁵ *كتاب العين* الفراهيدي: صاعا: ستين صاعا: الفراهيدي, كتاب العين

¹⁶ Attested in Minaic inscription M 356: ḥly ws³q ḥmr “commodities carried on asses”. For further details see Beeston, *A Minaean market code. Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 41: p. 142-145.

¹⁷ Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher*, §162; also Acts of Archelaus, §8

¹⁸ Allberry, *A manichaean Psalm-book*, p. 134

provide a clear indication of what is meant by this resting place. However, a passage from Kephalaia may shed some light on the matter:

Again, further in, also the light-givers of the heavens have no place of rest amongst all the powers of heaven; except for the land of light, that has indeed been theirs forever.¹⁹

Based on the passage, the land of light serves as the resting place for the celestial luminaries. The land of light is often identified with the Supreme God in Manichaeism, which may suggest the divine nature of this resting place and its importance in the Manichaean cosmology.²⁰ In the Quranic text, the term considered above, مستقر (*mus'taqarrin*), is also used in verse 75:12 to describe a place with the Lord on the Day of Judgment.²¹ In my view, the choice of terminology is not arbitrary here, and indicates that, in the Quran, the Sun also halts at the presence of the Lord, thereby highlighting a shared theological framework between the two traditions.

The belief in divine ships is also echoed in the Quran 25:45-46: *thumma ja'alnā l-šamsa 'alayhi dalīla thumma qabaḍnāhu ilaynā qabḍan yasīra* "Then we put the Sun as a guide, then We will gather it to Us by gentle gathering!" The passage seems again to reflect the influence of Manichean theology, wherein the transportation of the souls is facilitated by celestial vessels. The notion that the Sun "will be gathered to Us" in this context implies the conveyance of souls to God. Also a noteworthy aspect is the use of دليل (*dalīl*, "guide"), which in our context may be taken as synonymous to the word آية (*āyāt*, "sign"). The Quran consistently uses this word when referring to different natural phenomena, including celestial bodies, as seen in 41:37: *wamin āyātihi al-laylu wal-nahāru wal-šamsu wal-qamaru* "And among His signs are the night and the day, the Sun and the Moon." A similar pattern is also found in Kephalaia:

The seventh: (The sun) shall display and manifest to the world the sign of the splendour of the Aeons of ligh[t], from which it has come out; it here in this world being their *sign*. It brings light to the whole of creation.²²

The idea conveyed in this passage is that certain natural elements serve as peculiar reflections of higher realms, as is the case in Manichaean doctrine, wherein the Sun serves as a manifestation of the world of Aeons, which is not too far from the Quranic view.

Additional compelling point of agreement can be observed in the following passage in the Manichean Psalms: "The two καμπτηρες, the Luminaries which is the gift of the three strong contests."²³ The use of the term καμπτηρες, meaning "running in a curve", in the Manichean Psalms is strikingly similar to the Arabic word فلك (*falakin*) used in Quran 21:33: *wahuwa alladī ḥalaqa al-layla wal-nahāra wal-šamsa wal-qamara kullun fī falakin yasbaḥūn* "He is the one who created the night and the day, and the Sun and the Moon. Everything in orbit swimming." In Classical Arabic, فلك

¹⁹ Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher*; §218

²⁰ Allberry, *A manichaean Psalm-book*, p. 136: "Father of all our race. Light of the blessed. God of all the Gods. Manna of the Land of Light."

²¹ Quran 75:12

²² Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher*; §160

²³ Allberry, *A manichaean Psalm-book*, p. 110

is used to denote sky firmaments and their rotation.²⁴ Interestingly, in the Hebrew Bible, a similar word is used to denote a spindle.²⁵ The employment of *يسبحون* (*yasbaḥūn*, "swimming") within the relevant Quranic verse strongly implies a linguistic connection to the "ships". However, it should be noted that due to the lack of voicing marks in the early Quranic manuscripts, the word *يسبّحون* (*yasabbahūn*, "praising") may also be applied in the context. In my view, the examples cited showcase certain degree of intertextuality between the Quranic and Manichean views on a role of heavenly bodies.

Echoes of the Manichean beliefs about eclipses

Within the context of astrology, there was a widespread belief in Eurasia that solar and lunar eclipses can be explained by the existence of two celestial dragons. According to this theory, the temporary disappearance of the sun or moon during an eclipse is attributed to the mythical dragons taking over and devouring the celestial bodies. The myth had variations that can be traced from North Africa to India, where it was particularly prominent. In the latter, the deities Ketu and Rahu are understood to represent the two unseen planets responsible for periodic eclipses.²⁶ The same can be said about Zoroastrianism, but both functions are done by a single dragon *Gōzihr*, the Head (*Gōzihr Sar*) being responsible for solar eclipses, while the Tail (*Gōzihr Dumb*) is responsible for lunar one.²⁷ The Dragon was believed to have existed before the constellations and planets, and was responsible for watching over the universe with its head oriented towards the sunrise and its tail pointed towards the sunset, being closely associated with Dark Sun and Dark Moon.²⁸ The existence of this dragon cosmology among the Manichaeans is confirmed by Middle Persian omen text M556, the sun and the moon becoming eclipsed are said to put on "Gōzihr";²⁹ and by text M98/I/R, which is considered to be part of Shapuragan, where two dragons (*dō azdahāg*) are mentioned explicitly.³⁰

The replacement of positive celestial luminaries with negative ones in Manichean cosmology was a crucial undertaking accomplished through the figurative application of two Dragons. This transformation was primarily motivated by the Manichean's endeavor to reconcile certain Vedic astronomical concepts with the Ptolemaic system. While the Vedic system recognizes nine celestial luminaries, including Rahu and Ketu, the Ptolemaic system acknowledges only seven. To retain the Gnostic trend, which adhered to the Greek astronomical model, and to disassociate the Sun and

²⁴ "الفلك سبعة أطواق دون السماء، ركبت فيها النجوم السبعة"; "al-Falku is a rotation of the Sky"; الفراهيدي, كتاب العين: الفلك: دوران السماء

²⁵ NAS Proverbs 31:19: *wakappêhâ tāmākû pālek* "And her hands grasp the spindle"

²⁶ The *Brhatsaṃhitā* by Varāhamihira contains the earliest (6th century) and most comprehensive analysis and rejection of this theory. For elaboration on the function of Ketu and Rahu see Markel, *Origins of the Indian Planetary Deities*

²⁷ See Panaino, *Pahlavi Gwcyhl: Gozihr O Gawcihr?*

²⁸ Agostini & Thrope, *The Bundahišn. The Zoroastrian Book of Creation*, v.4-5; MacKenzie, *Zoroastrian Astrology in the "Bundahišn"*

²⁹ For more details, see Reck & Sundermann, *Ein illustrierter mittelpersischer manichäischer Omen-Text aus Turfan*

³⁰ Pirtea (2022) quoting Klimkeit: "[And the Living Spirit and the Mother of Life ...] fixed the seven planets (to the firmament) and hung up the two dragons (*dō azdahāg*) and bound them fast (there). And they hung them up on that lowest firmament, and in order to make them rotate unceasingly upon the Call, they appointed two angels, one male and one female."

Moon from other Gnostic traditions that viewed them as Archons,³¹ the Manicheans substituted the Sun and Moon with two Dagon. Consequently, the Sun and Moon no longer assumed the role of demonic forces of influence, as the dragons bore the responsibility of cosmic activity.³²

In some Syriac literature, the dragon is referred to by the term ܐܬܳܐܠܳܝܳܐ (atālyā).³³ This Syriac term is also found in the Manichean Coptic Psalms:

They pierced him with a spear because he destroyed their creation (πλάσμα) / The sun withdrew its light, it wore (φορε) the dragon/veil (αθάλια). He disguised himself from those murderers, he was caught up from their presence.³⁴

Same term but with assimilation of initial letter aleph can be witnessed in Jewish and Mandaean literature. תלי (tely) in Sefer Yeşirah is a being who is located at the center of the universe.³⁵ Shabbatai Donnolo, a Jewish astrologer from the tenth century, reports the existence of certain texts that propose the notion of two eclipse dragons (telayyim):

According to some books, there are two Dragons (telayyim), which are like two big sea-monsters (tanninim), or like two writhing serpents twisted in the shape of two [half] rings facing each other, one to the south, the other to the north, with the head of the one attached to the tail of the other and vice versa.³⁶

In the Mandaean Book of the John term talia is associated with a place for the Moon to sit:

ܐܠܳܘܳܗܳܐ ܕܳܗܳܘܳܐ ܕܳܗܳܘܳܐ ܕܳܗܳܘܳܐ ܕܳܗܳܘܳܐ ܕܳܗܳܘܳܐ ܕܳܗܳܘܳܐ

“The Sun sat in its dwelling place, and the Moon sat in a Drago (talia).”³⁷

Pirtea (2017) argues the context doesn’t necessarily imply identification of this mandean term with sky dragon. He thinks the term atālyā originally referred to a "veil" or "curtain" that luminaries draw to protect themselves, but later due to the influence of Vedic astrology, the term started being associated with dragons. The good argument for such position is a 6th century Greek philosophical work, which provides intriguing evidence supporting the early Manichaeism concept of atālyā. In his Commentary on the Encheiridion of Epictetus, Neoplatonist Simplicius of Cilicia, critiques the dualism of the Manichaeans. Simplicius had personal interaction with the Manichaeans and mocks their detailed explanation on the cause of eclipses:

³¹ As per Welburn (1978) reconstruction, the Sun governs Iaoth, who serves as the leader of the twelve archons in the Apocryphon of John.

³² See Pettipiece, *Pentadic Redaction in the Manichaean Kephalaia*, p. 64-65

³³ Pirtea (2017) quotes Severus in *Is There an Eclipse Dragon in Manichaeism*: “For men of no little renown in this science say that the occurrence of eclipses (eqlipsis) and the covering of the luminaries (taḥpītā-nahhīrē) is caused by atālyā; and to support their words, they draw a shape (eskīmā) and form (dmūtā) of this kind, saying that atālyā is a certain body (gūšmā meddem) and its shape and form (eskīmēh wa-mūtēh) is that of a dragon (tannīnā) Very often they call it dragon (tannīnā) and serpent (ḥawyā)”

³⁴ Allberry, *A manichaean Psalm-book*, p. 196

³⁵ Hayman, Sefer Yesira §59C: תלי בעולם במלך על בסאו “the Hook (Tely) is like a king on his throne”

³⁶ Mancuso, Shabbatai Donnolo's Sefer Ḥakhmoni, p. 346

³⁷ Mandaic text taken from Häberl & McGrath, *The Mandaean Book of John. Critical Edition*

Their explanations of the reasons for eclipses reveal a wondrous excess of sagacity. They say that evil things linked together in the world's creation cause disturbance and disarray in their common motions and that the light-bringers cast some kind of veils in front of themselves (παραπετάσματά τινα τοὺς φωστῆρας ἑαυτῶν προβάλλεσθαι) owing to their desire to have no part in the confusion caused by these creatures. This phenomenon explains the eclipses which are their method of self-concealment under the veils (τὰς ὑπὸ τοῖς παραπετάσμασιν ἀποκρύψεις αὐτῶν).³⁸

In my opinion, the aforementioned argument holds merit. Nonetheless, it is plausible that the authors of the Quran were attempting to preserve both astrological models. An instance that provides evidence for an Eastern influence is 75:6-9: *yasalu ayyāna yawmu l-qiyāmat fa-idā bariqa l-baṣar waḥasafa l-qamar wajumi'a l-šamsu wal-qamar* "And he asks: "When is the day of the Resurrection?" When vision will be dazzled and the Moon will eclipse (lit. swallowed)! And (when) the Sun and the Moon are joined!" The term خسف (*ḥasafa*) is usually translated in the verse as "to darken", however in all other cases in the Quran, verb is used in its more literal meaning "to swallow".³⁹ I do not believe the use of words in this way is coincidental, the verse may indicate that the Moon is being devoured, which in turn shows the influence of myth of swallowing Dragon. One might argue that the verse points to the idea of an eclipse as the union of two bodies, which is what the term جمع (*jumi'a*) indicates. Indeed, there is no denying the primary meaning of the term in the Quran as in classical Arabic is to gather something, hence جماعة (*jama'at*) – the big gathering of something,⁴⁰ however, we can also suggest Aramaic wordplay here as a secondary one.⁴¹ For example, in the Targum on Job identical Aramaic verb גמג (*gama'a*) is used to translate Hebrew גלע (*'āla'a*, "to sip/to suck"), thereby conveying the meaning of absorption.⁴² Considering this semantics, the Quran would imply once again the absorption of the Moon and the Sun.

Reception of *aṭālyā* i.e. veiling, in my opinion, is presented in 91:1-2: *wal-šamsi waḍuḥāha wal-qamari idā talāha* "By the Sun and its Radiance! By the Moon when its following!" The conventional interpretation of the passage is highly problematic due to the ambiguity surrounding the word تلاها (*talāha*). The traditional translation is based on the presupposition of the root base of this word being ت-ل-و (*ta-lam-waw*), which primarily means to recite. However, in the verse, the same supposed root changes its literal meaning to denote the verb "to follow." Various explanations have been offered to justify this incongruity, including the assertion that the act of recitation involves the repetition of words, thereby allowing to state that the Moon is following the Sun's path in a sense of "repeating" its motion.⁴³

In my opinion, this explanation is unconvincing and can be disregarded if we consider the possibility that we are not dealing with the root ت-ل-و (*ta-lam-waw*), but with the root ت-ل-ي (*ta-lam-ya*). This is indirectly confirmed by the early writing of the word تلهها (*talaha*) without the dagger alif in the

³⁸ Berg, In Search of Truth. Augustine, Manichaeism and other Gnosticism, p. 223, quoting Simplicius

³⁹ الخسف: سؤخ الأرض بما عليها من الأشياء: الفراهيدي, كتاب العين "Al-ḥasfu: when the Earth swallows anything on top of it"

⁴⁰ الجماعَةُ: عدد كل شيء وكثرته: الفراهيدي, كتاب العين "Al-jama'at is a collection of things and its abundance"

⁴¹ By that I mean an instances in the Quran where similar expressions from other languages have been incorporated into specific narratives and themes. A good illustration would be the use of يم (*yam*, "Sea") in the Mosaic narratives, thereby alluding to the Old Testament Hebrew ים (*yam*), instead of general بحر (*bahr*)

⁴² Job 39:30: וְאֶפְרַיִם וְגִמְעָן דֹּמָא "his young are sipping blood"

⁴³ For the best case for traditional interpretation read Beck, *The Astral Messenger, The Lunar Revelation, The Solar Salvation*

early manuscripts, and also by using the letter *ى* (*alif maqṣūrah*) in the middle of the word instead of letter *و* (*waw*), which would be expected.⁴⁴ Given the fact the letter *ي* (*ya*) is indistinguishable from the letter *ى* (*alif maqṣūrah*) in the middle of the word in the early Quranic manuscripts, *تليها* (*talyaha*) was probably intended here.⁴⁵

Agreeing with the previous conclusion, we have a direct correspondence between the Arabic *تلي* (*taly*) and the Hebrew *תלי* (*tely*), which gives us the right to assert a similar semantics with certainty. Thus the new understanding of this passage "When the Moon *veils* Itself", yields another instance of intertextual conformity between the Quranic and Manichean traditions. I completely agree with the Pirtea's (2022) recent research, which shows that veiling and dragon traditions do not unequivocally lead to a contradiction.⁴⁶ The two traditions may be reconciled by positing that the veils serve as a means of protection for the celestial luminaries from the Dragon, who seeks to devour them. The eschatological tone of verse 75:6 precisely point to the fact that the Sun and the Moon will be unable to safeguard themselves against the imminent danger that will emerge on the Day of Resurrection.

Vestiges of Manichean customs of worship

The Sun and the Moon hold great significance in Manichaeism as the most revered objects. Due to their crucial role in the salvation of imprisoned light, Manichean prayers were directed towards these heavenly luminaries:

"In the daytime they offer their prayers towards the sun, wherever it goes in its orbit; at night, they offer them towards the moon, if it appears; if it does not, they direct them towards the north, by which the sun, when it has set, returns to the east. They stand while praying."⁴⁷

A similar observation can be seen in the Quran by changing two voicing marks in one word in the verse 50:39: from time adverb *قَبْلَ* (*qabla*), which means to be before, to the location adverb *قِبْلَ* (*qibala*), which means to facing towards something. Hence the adverbial noun *قِبْلَةٌ* (*qiblah*) in the "traditional" Islam is an indicator of prayer, stemming from the same semantic pattern of root base in question. Thus, a passage from the Quran with a reading *wasabbih̄ biḥamdi rabbika qibala ṭulū'i l- šamsi waqibala ghurūbihā* would mean "and praise with a praise your Lord *facing* sun rising and *facing* its setting", the second part of the passage thus conforms the prayer custom of the western Manichean community described by Augustine.

Quran also gives corrections in the prayer service, as reflected in verse 41:37: *lā tasjudū lilšamsi walā lil'qamari wa-us'judū lillahi alladī ḥalaqahunna in kuntum iyyāhu ta'budūn* "Do not prostrate towards the Sun nor towards the Moon, but prostrate towards the God, who created them, so Him you will serve."⁴⁸ The main point of the passage is to denounce the act of prostrating to the heavenly luminaries. Such practice, for example, was probably performed in the Manichean community in the village of Kellis, located in Dakhleh Oasis. During the excavation of the monastery, a trove of

⁴⁴ See how letter *waw* is spelled in the word with the same root in the Quran 2:121

⁴⁵ See Jocham, *Dublin, Chester Beatty Library: Is. 1615II* for example how the word is spelled in relatively early manuscript

⁴⁶ For the attempt to harmonize two traditions using "lunar nodes" explanation, see Pirtea, *Eclipse Dragons, Seasonal Change, and the Salvation of Light: A Case of Overlapping Cosmologies in Manichaeism*, p. 81-91

⁴⁷ Augustine, *De haeresibus* XLVI.18, in Gardner & Lieu 2004, p. 191

⁴⁸ See also Quran 27:24, where Suleiman is disgusted by queen Saba and her people worshipping the Sun

manuscripts was unearthed, among which the "prayer of emanations" was a significant discovery. The act of prostration is prominently featured within this liturgical text.⁴⁹ Of particular interest is the usage of the Greek verb προσκύνω (*proskyno*) in the Manichean document, which retains an ambiguity akin to the Arabic verb سجد (*sajada*), as it can be interpreted as a literal prostration or an act of worship.⁵⁰

To assert the Quran is unambiguously in opposition to the Manichaeism doctrine solely based on the passage found in 41:37 would be unjustified. It is plausible the authors of the Quran are critiquing a particular Manichaeism custom of prostration, rather than condemning the entire Manichaeism belief system. Moreover, the Augustinian passage provides clear evidence about how some Manichaeism communities practiced prayer in an upright position. It is not hard to imagine that some congregations have given up this exhausting type of prayer. Similar criticism might be reflected in the 4:142: *wa-idā qāmū ilā l-ṣalati qāmū kusālā yurāūna l-nāsa walā yaḍkurūna l-laha illā qalīla* "And when they stand for a prayer, they do it very reluctantly only for people to see, and they only remember the God for a little." This passage shows how hypocrites, which is a very serious accusation, are seen as lazy people who do not want to get up for prayer.

It should not go unmentioned that the orientation of prayer was not universally standardized among the Manichaeism. Biruni, in his writings from the 10th century, highlights the existence of a Manichaeism sect that demonstrated indifference towards the direction of prayer, while also being critical of the over fixation of Muslims, Jews, and Christians on this particular aspect.⁵¹

The opening verse of *sūrah Al-Qamar* in the Quran references the "split moon" phenomenon انشقق (*inṣāqq*), where it declares the nearness of the Hour and the occurrence of a split in the moon (Q 54:1). Subsequent verse (Q 54:2) allude to the rejection by the disbelievers of the miracle, labelling it as magic: *iq'tarabati l-sā'atu wa-inṣāqqa l-qamar wa-in yaraw āyatan yu'riḍū wayaqqūlū siḥ'run mus'tamirru*, which traditionally translated as "And near is Hour, and the Moon split itself. But if they do see a miracle, they turn away and say: "Enduring magic!" This passage is one of the rare instances in the Quran that describe the miracles of the Prophet Muhammad, which were vital for theologians in affirming his prophetic status.⁵² It is unnecessary to mention that many hadiths were created to validate this story too.⁵³

In my view, the introduction of *sūrah Al-Qamar* is misinterpreted, which may be attributed to an inaccurate oral transmission of the term انشقق (*inṣāqq*, "to split itself"). In the early manuscripts for our verse there is no differentiation between the skeletal text (*rasm*) of انشقق (*inṣāqq*) and اتسق

⁴⁹ Bermejo-Rubio, *I Worship and Glorify: Manichaeism liturgy and piety in Kellis prayer of the emanations*: "In fact, each stanza in the Prayer starts with the verb προσκύνω, which should be understood in its full sense of "prostrate" (here we find a ritual practice of daily prayer and prostration that precedes the rise of Islam)."

⁵⁰ See Quran 12:4

⁵¹ Bīrūnī, al-Āthār in Reeves, *Prolegomena to a History of Islamicate Manichaeism*, p. 126: "However, I discovered (that) the author of the Book on Sexual Relations, who is one of their group (i.e., a Manichaeism) and a missionary for them, upbraids the adherents of the three (Abrahamic) religions for turning toward one direction (in prayer) in lieu of another. He quarrels with them about other things, and he indicates that one praying to God may dispense with turning toward a qibla."

⁵² Ess, *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra* (Vol. IV), p. 701-715

⁵³ The most obvious examples are Sahih Muslim 39:6725 and 39:6728

(*ittasaq*, “to be full”), the latter of which has already been witnessed being applied to Moon in 84:19.⁵⁴ It is plausible that a transmission error occurred, when a dot was missed above the letter ت (ta); the differentiation in the manuscripts of letters ش (*š*) and س (*s*) is much earlier phenomenon too. In order to reinterpret the passage, it is also necessary to reexamine the term "سحر" (*siḥ'rūn*), which is predominantly used in the Quran to refer to magic. However, in this particular context, I believe the text follows a common Semitic root *šḥr, which primarily signifies blackness and dawn.⁵⁵ Such semantic is also employed in the traditional Quranic exegesis in the same chapter.⁵⁶

Thus, the new recitation will be *iq'tarabati l-sā'atu wa-ittasaqa l-qamar wa-in yaraw āyatan yu'riḏū wayaqūlū saḥirun mus'tamirru* “And near is hour, and the Moon is full. But if they do see a sign, they turn away and say: “It is still gloomy!”” Reading this way there is no hint of any eschatological motif at all. Term *sā'atu* as well *āyatan* are used in a general way.⁵⁷ Thus the verse tells us about some people turning away from the sign of the full Moon. We can assume certain obligations had to be fulfilled that day, resulting in the group who turned away not to recognize the fact of the full Moon by objecting the luminary is still dark. Manichaeans performed special obligations during the full moon, Ibn al-Nadīm in *Fihrist* points out that some Manichaean fasts began on the full moon:

As for fasting, they fast for two days without a break between them when the sun is in the zodiacal sign of Sagittarius and the moon is full. When a new moon occurs, they also fast two days without a break between them. Besides these they fast when a luminary appears for two days in the zodiacal sign of Capricorn.⁵⁸

Given the great importance the Quran places on the major luminaries, especially for calculating the seasons of the year,⁵⁹ it is not difficult to imagine that a similar function for calculating the days of fasting also took place.

Summary

The Quran's focus on the Sun and the Moon cannot be fully explained by traditional interpretations that attempt to tie all references in the Quran to pre-Islamic Arabian pagan religion. Rather, there are indications that the Quran is drawing from another significant pre-Islamic religious tradition, namely Manichaeism. The Quran retains the idea of the Sun and the Moon as cosmic vessels that transport believers, a concept that has its roots in Manichaean cosmology. Furthermore, a linguistic analysis suggests a shared mythological foundation between Manichaeism and the Quran, as evidenced by the Quran's precise use of terminology relating to the Moon. A fresh examination of the Quranic text, divorced from traditional interpretations that are absent from the earliest manuscripts, reveals remarkable similarities between Manichaean and Quranic cosmology. The

⁵⁴ That's a fair statement for early kufic manuscripts, like *Berlin, Staatsbibliothek: Wetzstein II 1913*; as for the hijazi manuscripts, there is no manuscriptal material for our case as far as I know

⁵⁵ See Strong Hebrew 7838; Smith (1908) p. 572; also left Gynza 65:12

⁵⁶ See Quran 54:34

⁵⁷ For non-eschatological application of the words See Quran 9:117; 25:37

⁵⁸ Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist* in Reeves, *Prolegomena to a History of Islamicate Manichaeism*, p. 211

⁵⁹ See Quran 10:5

Quran's detailed attention to the Sun and the Moon suggests that these celestial bodies were of great importance in the daily lives of early Muslim community.

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