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**MANICHAEAN CHRISTOLOGY THROUGH THE LENS OF LATE-ANTIQUÉ
HERESIOLOGY: BETWEEN STEROTYPES AND REALITY**

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MANICHAEAN CHRISTOLOGY THROUGH THE LENS OF LATE ANTIQUE HERESIOLOGY: BETWEEN STEREOTYPES AND REALITY

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Abstract

The present article proposes an analysis of the confrontation between Manichaeism and Late Antique heresiology regarding the figure of Jesus. Manichean Christology is a particularly complex subject. However, most heresiologists have stereotyped Manichean beliefs, and assimilated them to Monophysitism, and especially the most extreme ramifications, which were Docetic or questioned the authenticity of the incarnation of God. Therefore, the accusation of Manichaeism plays a fundamental role in the Christological controversies of Late Antiquity. Contemporary to the development of these stereotypes, there is a small group of sources, from the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth centuries, that move away from these stereotypes and report various Christological doctrines closer to Manichaean sources. These texts seem to indicate that, during this period, Christian writers had access to information unknown to their predecessors, which coincided with the last persecution of Manichaeism in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Keywords

Christology – Manichaeism – Monophysitism – Sleepless Monks – Severus of Antioch – *Capita VII contra Manichaeos*.

1. Introduction

It is difficult to overestimate the impact of Manichaeism, a religious system founded in the third century by the South Mesopotamian prophet Mani (216-274/277), on Christian mentality. Christianity responded to Manichaeism through polemic, and anti-Manichean polemic was a sensitive issue for Christianity. A “foreign” religious group, coming from the land of the Persian enemy and therefore “barbarian,”¹ Manichaeism considered itself the heir of Jesus’s evangelical mission, and could therefore challenge Christianity on its own ground: as heir of Christ’s message and exegete of the scriptures. From a Christian perspective, Manichaeism was not a religion of totally alien beliefs, but an otherness infiltrated within the doctrines of Christianity itself. The problem that Manichaeism represented for Christian identity was already present in the *Acta Archelai* (330-350 *circa*), the first great anti-Manichaean Christian work, which had an enormous influence on subsequent heresiology.² The *Acta*, a fictitious work, was presented as the transcription

¹ On the relation between the concepts of “Manichaean” and “barbarian”, see Scopello, Madeleine. 2008. “*Persica adversaria nobis gens*: controverse et propagande anti-manichéennes d’après les *Acta Archelai*.” *Comptes rendus de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 152/2, 929-50.

² Attributed to a certain author called Hegemonius. The *Acta* were probably composed in Greek, although the text is preserved in a not much later Latin translation. A series of Greek extracts from the original text can be found in the *Panarion* of Epiphanius of Salamis.

of a public debate that took place in the Mesopotamian city of *Carchara* (*Carrhae*, modern day Harran) between Archelaus, the Christian bishop of the city, and Mani.³ In this work, we can find a series of traits on the representation of Mani and Manichaeism that clearly express the problem that this religious group constituted for Christianity, which would be present in all subsequent polemical literature:

- The Manichaeans have the intention of attracting new believers, whose souls they guide into error.
- In order to accomplish this objective, the Manichaeans appropriate some of the main identifying motifs of Christianity, such as the figure of Christ, the name “Christian” and the Christian scriptures (New Testament). This appropriation is only a mask that allows them to embellish a poisonous, harmful doctrine, and thus accomplish the aforementioned objective.
- As a result, Christian elements were corrupted and mixed with pagan and “barbarian” (Persian) beliefs and doctrines. In some cases, Manichaeans hide the origin of these doctrines with philosophical vocabulary, to gain credibility.

In this way, Manichaeism appeared, in the eyes of Christians, as an ambivalent doctrine: close, but at the same time distant in its content. In fact, Manichaeism was dangerous precisely for this ambivalence. For this reason, the portrait of the *Acta* can be found in nearly all the Christian authors and works against Manichaeism in Late Antiquity, such as Serapion of Thmuis, Cyril of Jerusalem, Ephraem the Syrian, Didymus the Blind, Titus of Bostra, Epiphanius of Salamis, Theodoret of Cyrrhus, Evodius of Uzalis, John the Grammarian or Severus of Antioch.

In view of the ambivalence of Manichaeism in the eyes of Christians, it is not surprising that heresiologists have simplified, stereotyped and adapted some Manichaean doctrines, assimilating them to other Christian groups considered heretical by orthodoxy. In fact, one of the most important points of contact with other heterodox groups established by heresiologists is the figure of Jesus. In this way, the term “Manichaean” was a useful accusation in Christological controversies of Late Antiquity from the fourth century, and was established as a true “heretical marker” in the fifth and sixth centuries. “Manichaean” was synonymous with someone who defended a Christological position considered contrary to orthodoxy. However, among all the heterodox doctrines on Jesus, those that were most closely related to Manichaeism were the Monophysites, and especially the most extreme ramifications, which were Docetic or questioned the authenticity of the incarnation of God. The identification between Manichean and Monophysite (and Docetic) was one of the most repeated constants in Christological literature and in the anti-Manichean polemical tradition.

³ For a more detailed analysis of the *Acta*, see Scopello, Madeleine. 2000. “Hégémonius, les *Acta Archelai* et l’histoire de la controverse antimanichéenne en Occident.” In *Studia Manichaica IV. Internationaler Kongreß zum Manichäismus, Berlin, 14-18 Juli 1997*, edited by Roland E. Emmerich, Werner Sundermann and Peter Zieme, 528-45. Berlin: Akademie Verlag; Ead. 2019. “Autour des Carrhes: quelques témoignages chrétiens entre souvenirs bibliques et *realia*.” *Semitica et Classica* 12: 129-43; Vermes, Mark and Samuel N.C. Lieu. 2001. *Hegemonius. Acta Archelai (The Acts of Archelaus)*. Translated by Mark Vermes with an introduction and commentary by Samuel N.C. Lieu. Turnhout: Brepols, 1-34; BeDuhn, Jason D. and Paul A. Mirecki. 2007. “Placing the Acts of Archelaus.” In *Frontiers of Faith: The Christian Encounter with Manichaeism in the Acts of Archelaus*, edited by Jason BeDuhn and Paul A. Mirecki, 1-23. Leiden: Brill.

However, contemporaneously with the development of these identifications, there is a small group of sources that seem to reject these stereotypes. This group of sources offers a much more accurate description of Manichaean Christology, which functions not through Docetism *stricto sensu*, but through the interaction of figures identified with Jesus. Furthermore, the improvement in knowledge observable in this group of sources does not seem to be produced by progressive development but is instead restricted to concrete dates and contexts: the reactivation of persecution against the Manichaeans, after almost 50 years, between the end of the fifth century and the beginning of the sixth.

2. The Manichaean Sources on Christology

Let us return to the Manichaean sources. As has been said, Manichaean Christology was notoriously more complex than simple Docetism if we look at the texts of this religious group. In fact, the Manichaean conception of Christ is, still to this day, one of the most debated subjects among the doctrines of what was known as the “Religion of light.” Currently, there is no general academic consensus on the idea of Jesus as an Apostle of light⁴ and a divine entity at the same time, his soteriological role, his incarnation in a material body and the evolution of Manichaean beliefs about Christ upon contact with the Christian communities of the Mediterranean.⁵ However, the Manichaean texts do not show a Docetic view *stricto sensu*. Although particularly confused on this point, Manichaean sources explain the main events of Christ’s life not through an “apparent” body, but through the existence of several figures identified with Jesus. For example, Manichaeism explains the baptism⁶ through one figure, identified with Jesus, who entered the waters of the Jordan River and another, purely spiritual (the divine Jesus), who came out of the waters. Regarding the baptism of Jesus according to Manichaeism, some of the most extensive expositions are found in the *corpus* of Augustine of Hippo.⁷ More concretely, the interaction of various figures identified with Jesus as the hermeneutical key to explain

⁴ On the figure of the Apostle of Light, see Cirillo, Luigi. 2009. “The Mani *Logion*: ‘The Purification that Was Spoken about Is that which Comes through Gnosis’ (CMC 84, 9-12).” In *New Light on Manichaeism: Papers from the Sixth International Congress on Manichaeism Organized by the International Association of Manichaean Studies*, edited by Jason D. BeDuhn, 45-59 (51-54). Leiden: Brill.

⁵ On these subjects, see Franzmann, Majella. 2003. *Jesus in the Manichaean Writings*. London – New York: T&T Clark, 7-11; Cirillo, Luigi. 2005. “From Elchasaite Christology to the Manichaean Apostle of Light.” In *Il Manicheismo. Nuove Prospettive della Ricerca. Quinto Congresso Internazionale di Studi sul Manicheismo, Atti: Dipartimento di studi asiatici, Università degli studi di Napoli ‘L’Orientale’, Napoli, 2-8 Settembre 2001*, edited by Alois van Tongerloo and Luigi Cirillo, 47-53. Turnhout: Brepols. For the origins of the Manichaean Christological conceptions, see Toda, Satoshi. 2017. “Some Observations on Greek Words in Coptic Manichaean Texts.” In *Manichaeism East and West*, edited by Samuel N.C. Lieu, Erica Hunter, Enrico Morano and Nils A. Pedersen, 242-48 (246-47). Turnhout: Brepols.

⁶ A particularly complex topic if we consider that Mani grew up within a Elchasaite baptist community. Mani’s rejection of the ritual ablutions practiced by this group is precisely the reason why he left the community. On the Manichaean refusal of baptism, see Mimouni, Simon C. 2020. *Les baptistes du Codex manichéen de Cologne sont-ils des elkasaites ?* Turnhout: Brepols, 227-244, 269-302.

⁷ Augustine’s knowledge on Manichaeism is exceptional, given that he was Manichaean for almost a decade. On the relation of Augustine and Manichaeism, see the studies of BeDuhn, Jason D. 2009. *Augustine’s Manichaean Dilemma 1: Conversion and Apostasy, 373-388 C.E.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press; Id. 2013. *Augustine’s Manichaean Dilemma 2: Making a Catholic “Self”, 388-401 C.E.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

this event is found in the *Contra Faustum*, in an *excursus* attributed to the Manichaean bishop:⁸

I will, for the present, suppose that this person was right in saying that the **son of David was born of Mary**. It still remains true that in this whole passage of the generation **no mention is made of the Son of God till we come to the baptism**; so that it is an injurious misrepresentation on your part to speak of this writer as making the Son of God the inmate of a womb. . . . And if you attend to the writer's meaning and purpose, you will see that what he wishes us to believe of Jesus the Son of God is not so much that He was born of Mary, as that He became the Son of God by baptism at the river Jordan. . . . It appears from this that what was born, as is supposed, of Mary thirty years before, was not the Son of God, but what was afterwards made so by baptism at Jordan, that is, the new man, . . .⁹

Therefore, Manichaeism developed an exegesis of baptism that separated the divine Jesus from the events narrated in the Bible before baptism. One wonders, then, who was the figure behind the “pre-baptism” Jesus, called by Faustus “son of David.” Even if there is no consensus on this matter among researchers, most scholars understand the Manichaean interpretation of baptism as the moment of the coming of the divine Jesus (named “Splendor” in Manichaean sources). This divine Jesus adopted a body capable of suffering, and thus became Jesus the Apostle or the “historical” Jesus of the Bible. In fact, the “son of David” seems to be related to the concept of carnality. This conceptual relation was proposed by Majella Franzmann in her exhaustive study *Jesus in the Manichaean Writings*. She understands the “son of David” as an allusion to the nature of the flesh, in opposition with the divine nature of Jesus Splendor.¹⁰

In any case, baptism was the crucial point of the Manichaean Christological account. In this event, an intellectual and transcendent substance (Jesus Splendor) and a body capable of suffering came together in one biblical character (Jesus the Apostle). This interpretation of the figure of Christ allowed the Manichaeans to dissociate the figure of him from most of the events that they rejected, such as the baptism. For Manichaeism, the divine Jesus (the Splendor) was not baptized, since baptism is reinterpreted as the

⁸ Faustus was a Manichaean of African origin who seems to have enjoyed great prestige in the period in which Augustine adhered to the group. Augustine's disappointment after meeting Faustus in Carthage was fundamental to his departure from Manichaeism. On this figure, see Gaans, Gijs M. vans 2013. “The Manichaean Bishop Faustus: The State of Research after a Century of Scholarship.” In *Augustine and Manichaean Christianity: Selected Papers from the First South African Conference on Augustine of Hippo, University of Pretoria, 24–26 April 2012*, edited by Johannes van Oort, 199-227. Leiden: Brill.

⁹ Augustine, *contra Faustum* XXIII, 2, ed. Zycha, Joseph. 1891. *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, vol. 25/1. Wien: F. Tempsky, 249-797 (707.23-708.17): “Ut ergo huic interim dicenti credam, filius Daud erit mihi de Maria natus; adhuc de Dei Filio in hoc omni generationis textu nulla fit mentio usque ad baptismum scilicet frustra que calumniam uos ingeritis scriptori, tamquam dei ille filium in utero mulieris incluserit. . . . nam Iesum quidem eum, qui sit filius dei, si scriptoris huius mentem propositumque consideres, non tam ille de Maria uirgine uult nos accipere procreatum, quam factum aliquando per baptismum apud fluentia Iordanis. . . . uides ergo id, quod ante annos triginta, ut huic uidetur, de Maria natum est, non esse ipsum filium dei, sed id, quod de baptismo postea factum est ad Iordanem, id est hominem nouum, . . .” Trans. Schaff, Philip and Henry Wace. 1994. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4. Peabody: Hendrickson, 313.

¹⁰ Franzmann, 2003, 56-59; Richter, Siegfried G. 1996. “Christology in the Coptic Manichaean Sources.” *Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte* 35: 117-28 (120).

coming to Earth of a divine entity. Again, by means of Faustus, we have further evidence that the baptism of Jesus is one of the biblical episodes rejected by Manicheism:

...take as examples, the shameful birth of Jesus from a woman, His being circumcised like the Jews, His offering sacrifice like the Gentiles, **His being baptized in a humiliating manner**, His being led about by the devil in the wilderness, and His being tempted by him in the most distressing way.¹¹

Following this explanation, Manichaeism also defended the position that there was a figure identified with Jesus who suffered the passion and crucifixion, and another, purely spiritual (the divine Jesus), who observed how “the other” was crucified. Thus, there is a group of Manichaean and anti-Manichean sources that, regarding the crucifixion, state that it was the “Enemy” or Satan who was crucified in Jesus’s place. The testimony of Evodius of Uzalis is part of this group: he quoted a fragment (attributed to the *Epistula Fundamenti*, written by Mani) in which “the Enemy” (“inimicus”) was crucified instead of the Savior, and it was this Enemy who suffered the passion (“The enemy, as you can see, who hoped that he had crucified the same savior, the father of the righteous, was himself crucified”).¹² The crucifixion was therefore inflicted on the powers of darkness (also called matter or the Principle of Evil in Manichaean mythology), which became the protagonists of the narrative of the pain and suffering of the biblical event (“Everything which he seemed to suffer here, is imposed to the chiefs of shadows, who were also wounded by nails and the lance”).¹³ A parallel with Evodius and the *Epistula Fundamenti* can be found in the Coptic sources. In fact, there are some references to this idea in the Manichaean *Psalm-Book*: here, the crucifixion of Jesus is again associated with “the Enemy” (“... thy cross, the Enemy being nailed to it”).¹⁴ Finally, there is a third source in which this idea is found: Ibn al-Nadīm, in his long digression on Manichaeism, reports the curious information that the Manichaeans believed that Jesus was Satan.¹⁵ Considering all these attestations, it seems that, according to Manichaeism, Satan or the Principle of Evil was crucified in place of Jesus.¹⁶

¹¹ Augustine, *contra Faustum* XXXII, 7, ed. Zycha, 1891, 766.15-18: “... dico autem hoc ipsum natum ex femina turpiter, circumcisum Iudaice sacrificasse gentiliter, baptizatum humiliter, circumductum a diabolo per deserta et ab eu temptatum quam miserrime.” Trans. Schaff and Wace, 1994, 334.

¹² Evodius *De fide* 28.5-6, ed. and trans. Vanspauwen, Aaron. 2021. *In Defence of Faith, Against the Manichaeans: Critical edition and Historical, Literary and Theological Study of the Treatise Adversus Manichaeos, Attributed to Evodius of Uzalis*. Brepols: Turnhout, 374-75: “inimicus quippe, qui eumdem saluatorem iustorum patrem crucifixisse se speravit, ipse est crucifixus, ...”

¹³ Evodius, *De fide*, 28.10-11, ed. and trans. Vanspauwen, 2021, 374-75: “... atque omnia quae hic sustinere uisus est, tenebrarum ducibus irrogata sunt, qui clavis etiam et lancea uulnerati sunt.”

¹⁴ *Psalm-Book ad dominum Iesum*, ed. and trans. Allberry, Charles R.C. 1938. *A Manichaean Psalm-Book, part II*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 123.5.

¹⁵ al-Nadīm, *Fihrist* IX, trans. Reeves, John C. 2011. *Prolegomena to a History of Islamicate Manichaeism*. Sheffield – Oakville: Equinox, 173: “He even says in certain passages of his books that they themselves (i.e., certain biblical prophets) were devils, and he maintained that Jesus, a renowned figure among us and the Christians, was Satan.” See also the possible reference of Abū Nuwās, collected by Jāhiz, *Kitāb al-hayawān*, trans. Reeves, 2011, 256, who seems to express a similar idea.

¹⁶ See also another fragment of al-Nadīm who, in his exposition of the chapters of the *Book of Mysteries* of Mani, mentions the title of a chapter that would speak of a certain “son of the widow.” According to the fragment, this “son of the widow” would have been the one who was crucified instead of Jesus (trans. Reeves, 2011, 106-07). On the identification of this figure, see Andrae, Tor. 1960. *Mohammed: The Man and His Faith*. Translated by Teophil Menzel. New York – Evanston: Harper & Row, 113; Reeves, 2011,

The question, however, is much more complex, since the passion and crucifixion of Christ have a functional meaning in Manichaean soteriology: Jesus must suffer and die in order to save our souls.¹⁷ In fact, there is another group of Manichaean sources that affirm Jesus was crucified, and highlight the physical dimension of Christ's suffering.¹⁸ This contrast within the Manichaean texts is almost paradoxical in light of other fragments regarding the passion and crucifixion:

Amen, I was seized; Amen again, I was not seized.
 Amen, I was judged; Amen again, I was not judged.
Amen, I was crucified; Amen again, I was not crucified.
 Amen, I was pierced; Amen again, I was not pierced.
Amen, I suffered; Amen again, I did not suffer.¹⁹

Based on what we have seen so far, we could theorize that the crucified was the body, which was capable of suffering, assumed by the divine Jesus in his descent to Earth. This would explain why in the Manichaean psalm quoted above is only one interlocutor (Jesus) who, in the first person, reports both that he suffers (his body) and that he does not suffer (the divine Jesus), that he was crucified and that he was not crucified. In turn, the fact that the "corporeal Jesus" is crucified would include the Principle of Evil or Enemy (identified, in Manichaeism, with matter) in the crucifixion, who would find himself nailed to the wood. We can find further evidence for this (apparently paradoxical) idea in the *Ke-phalaion* 126. According to the text, Jesus Splendor was crucified "through the Enemy":

Indeed, Jesus Splendor, he who came and was revealed in the world: They crucified him **through the enemy**, against whom he stood firm. This occurred

106, n. 146; Dubois, Jean-Daniel. 2017. "The Coptic Manichaean *Psalm to Jesus* (N° 245)." In *Manichaeism East and West*, edited by Samuel N.C. Lieu, Erica Hunter, Enrico Morano and Nils A. Pedersen, 68-75 (71-73). Turnhout: Brepols.

¹⁷ On the importance of the passion and crucifixion of Jesus in Manichaeism, see *Psalm-Book Heracleides*, ed. and trans. Allberry, 1938, 196.15-31. See also the *excursus* of the pagan philosopher Alexander of Lycopolis, *Tractatus adversus Manichaeos* IV, ed. Brinkmann. August. 1895. *Alexandri Lycopolitani contra Manichaei opinionis disputatio*. Leipzig: Teubner, 7.14-19. For a more detailed analysis, see, Berg-Onstwedder, Gonie van den. 2005. "The Descent into Hell in one of the *Heracleides Psalms*." In *Il Manicheismo. Nuove Prospettive della Ricerca. Quinto Congresso Internazionale di Studi sul Manicheismo, Atti: Dipartimento di studi asiatici, Università degli studi di Napoli 'L'Orientale', Napoli, 2-8 Settembre 2001*, edited by Alois van Tongerloo and Luigi Cirillo, 1-9. Turnhout: Brepols; Franzmann, 2003, 81-84; Theodorou, Christos. 2015 "The Concept of Body and the Body of Christ in the Manichaean *Coptic Psalm-Book*." In *Mani in Dublin: Selected Papers from the Seventh International Conference of the International Association of Manichaean Studies in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, 8-12 September 2009*, edited by Siegfried G. Richter, Charles Horton and Klaus Ohlafer, 338-58 (343-47). Leiden: Brill.

¹⁸ See, for example, *Psalm-Book Σαρακοστήων*, ed. and trans. Allberry, 1938, 142.10-17, and the analysis of this passage in Villey, André. 1994. *Psaumes des errants. Écrits manichéens du Fayyūm*. Paris : Éditions du Cerf, 222-24; Franzmann, 2003, 72-73; Theodorou, 2015, 351. For similar examples among Eastern sources, see M 4570, M 132 + 5861, trans. Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim. 1993. *Gnosis on the Silk Road. Gnostic texts from Central Asia*. San Francisco: Harper, 72-73.

¹⁹ *Psalm-Book Heracleides*, ed. and trans. Allberry, 1938, 191.4-8. On this psalm see Richter, Siegfried G. 1994. *Exegetisch-literarkritische Untersuchungen von Heracleidespsalmen des Koptisch-manichäischen Psalmenbuches*. Altenberge: Oros, 139-140; Id., 1996, 123; Franzmann, 2003, 76; Theodorou, 2015, 349-50.

(corresponding) to the mystery of the First Man, he who came at the beginning against the enemy; ...²⁰

In recent years, an important part of academic research on the figure of Jesus in Manichaeism has reached the conclusion that these differences between the sources could be explained through the union between an entity incapable of suffering (divine) and another capable of doing so:²¹ two natures, as defined by Siegfried Richter and Majella Franzmann, or a divine nature and a carnal garment, as defined by Christos Theodorou.²² Therefore, they would be two ontologically separate entities, but chronologically united at a certain point (the baptism) in the life of Jesus according to the *Gospels*. Personally, I believe that the co-presence of a purely celestial Jesus and a suffering body is the hypothesis that best agrees with the Manichaean sources. Furthermore, this Christology would allow Manichaeism to believe in the passion and crucifixion without diminishing the fully divine and spiritual dimension of Jesus. This is evidenced, again, in the *Contra Faustum*, in which the Manichaean bishop explicitly affirms that the Manichaean doctrine believes in the “mystic crucifixion.”²³

3. The Christian Sources on Manichaean Christology

3.1. The dominant stereotype: the Manichaean as Monophysite (Docetic)

As stated in the introduction, the complex nuances of the Manichaean Jesus were not preserved in Christian sources, which demonstrated limited knowledge of the issue and projected various stereotypes on the Manichaean doctrine, making “Manichaean” synonymous with someone who defends a heretical Christological position. Thus, for

²⁰ *IKephalaion* 126, ed. Funk, Wolf-Peter. 1999. *Kephalaia I, Zweite Hälfte (Lieferung 13/14)*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 302.25-29, trans. Gardner, Iain, and Samuel N.C. Lieu. 2004. *Manichaean Texts from the Roman Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 227.

²¹ Until the end of the twentieth century, most researchers considered that the Manichaean Christology was Docetic: see, for example, Sundermann, Werner. 1968. *Christliche Evangelientexte in der Überlieferung der iranisch-manichäischen Literatur*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 368; Rose, Eugen. 1979. *Die Manichäische Christologie*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 124-27; Gardner, Iain. 1983. “Manichaean Christology. The Historical Jesus and the Suffering Jesus with particular reference to western texts (i.e. texts from a Christian environment), and illustrated by comparison with Marcionism and other related movements.” PhD diss., Manchester University, 240-44; Pedersen, Nils. A. 1988. “Early Manichaean Christology, Primarily in Western Sources.” In *Manichaean studies: Proceedings of the First International Conference on Manichaeism, 5–9 August 1987*, edited by Peter Bryder, 157-90. Lund: Plus Ultra; Villey, André. 1985. *Alexandre de Lycopolis: Contre la doctrine de Mani*. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 223-24. However, the historiographical trends changed in the late 1990s, with the seminal studies of Richter, 1994; Id., 1996. Richter considers that, although the Manichaean Jesus has a Docetic character (in the widest sense, i.e., that Jesus is other than he appears to be), the body of Jesus is capable of suffering. On Jesus’s suffering, see, Franzmann, 2003, 56-59. More recently, Theodorou, 2015; Id. 2017. “Heavenly Garment and Christology in Western Manichaean Sources.” In *Manichaeism East and West*, edited by Samuel N.C. Lieu, Erica Hunter, Enrico Morano and Nils A. Pedersen, 232-41. Turnhout: Brepols, rejects the idea of a Docetic body.

²² Richter, 1996, 125-26; Franzmann, 2003, 86. Theodorou, 2015, considers the body of Jesus to be a “garment” capable of suffering, defining this body as “polymorphic”.

²³ Augustine, *contra Faustum*. XXXII, 7, ed. Zycha, 1891, 766.20-21: “... credimus cetera, praecipue crucis eius mysticam fixationem.” We should note that Faustus, just like the *Kephalaion* 126, qualifies the crucifixion as “mystic” or a “mystery”. The fragmentary information on the crucifixion of Jesus preserved by the Manichaean sources could be due to the nature of the teaching itself: it could be a mystery, reserved only for the elect.

example, Athanasius of Alexandria (fourth century) linked Manichaeism to Arianism, on the basis of the *subordinatio* of the Son to the Father.²⁴ Similar accusations against Arianism can be also found among other Fathers of the Church, such as Basil of Caesarea²⁵ or Gregory of Nyssa.²⁶ In contrast, Arius accused the defenders of the term “ὁμοούσιος” (“consubstantial”) of introducing the Manichaean emanations into the Christian faith.²⁷

The accusation of Manichaeism became omnipresent with the beginning of the era of Christological polemics (fifth to sixth centuries). This accusation against the Monophysites and the Nestorians is a constant in the religious literature of the time. In fact, in the Council of Ephesus (431) we can see how the faction of Cyril of Alexandria accused the Christology of Nestorius of being Manichaean.²⁸ Ironically, confrontation with the more extreme tendencies of Monophysitism is the context in which the accusation of Manichaeism took root. In fact, this accusation played a leading role throughout the late fifth and first half of the sixth centuries. Since Manichaeism rejected the carnal nature of the divine Jesus (flesh, according this religious group, belongs to the Principle of Evil), the accusation of Manichaeism can be applied to any theology that diminishes the human character of the Son.²⁹ The success of this *topos* is due to two main factors: first, the legal category of “Manichaean” was associated with severe punishments inflicted during the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth century against this religious group,³⁰ and was a useful tool in the confrontations between religious and political factions. Second, the concept of “Manichean” played a social role, and allowed the qualification of a rival as a supporter of an unacceptable ideological deviation. Considering these two factors, it is not surprising that the accusations of Manichaeism by the Chalcedonians against Monophysites and, especially, the most extremist factions of them, became a constant of the era. The importance of this accusation was such that a genre of spurious, polemical literature consisting of letters attributed to Mani himself flourished during these years. In the letters (that can be found even in the works of the emperor Justinian I),³¹ Mani’s

²⁴ For example, Athanasius of Alexandria, *Oratio I contra Arianos*, 53.3-4, ed. Metzler, Karin, Dirk U. Hansen, and Kyriakos Savvidis. 1998. *Athanasius, Werke*, band 1: *Die dogmatischen Schriften*, teil 1, Lieferung 2. Berlin - New York: De Gruyter, 109-75.

²⁵ Basil of Caesarea, *Adversus Eunomium* II, 34, ed. *Patrologia Graeca* 29, 497-669, 672-768 (652A-B).

²⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* I.503-523, ed. Jaeger, Werner. 1960. *Gregorii Nysseni opera*, vol. 2. Leiden: Brill, 3-311.

²⁷ *Apud* Epiphanius, *Panarion* LXIX, 7, 6, ed. Holl, Karl. 1933. *Epiphanius. Ancoratus und Panarion*, vol. 3. Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 158.11-14.

²⁸ *Concilium universale Ephesenum anno 431*, (*Collectio Vaticana* 19, 8; *Sermo Procli*), ed. Schwartz, Edward. 1927. *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, vol. I, 1, 1: *Concilium universale Ephesenum anno 431*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 106.17-19.

²⁹ On this subject, see Lieu, Samuel N.C. 1992. *Manichaeism in Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 207-09; Id. 1994. *Manichaeism in Mesopotamia and the Roman East*. Leiden: Brill, 109-11; Boulluc, Alain Le. 2017. “Mani déguisé en monophysite.” In *Gnose et manichéisme. Entre les oasis d’Égypte et la Route de la Soie. Hommage à Jean-Daniel Dubois*, edited by Anna van den Kerchove and Luciana G. Soares Santoprete, 333-48. Turnhout: Brepols.

³⁰ On this subject see, for example, the laws of the *Codex Justinianus* I, 5, 12, 15, 16, 18, 19 and 21. See also Lieu, 1992, 91-116; Minale, Valerio M. 2010. “Alcune riflessioni sulla recezione della legislazione antimanichea in epoca bizantina e sulla sua applicazione, con un accenno ad un’ipotesi di ricerca.” *Revue internationale des droits de l’antiquité* 57: 523-61 (525-33); Matsangou, Rea. 2023. *The Manichaeans of the Roman East: Manichaeism in Greek anti-Manichaica & Roman Imperial Legislation*. Leiden: Brill, 454-57.

³¹ See, for example, the *Contra Monophysitas*, 89.5-92.6, ed. Albertella, Rosangela, Mario Amelotti and Livia Migliardi (post Edward Schwartz). 1973. *Drei dogmatische Schriften Iustinians*. Milan: Giuffrè, 6-

Guillermo Menéndez Sánchez, “Manichaean Christology Through the Lens of Late Antique Heresiology,” *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture* 18.2 (2024) 53-73; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18573/jlarc.144>

Christology was assimilated to Monophysite tendencies.³² In addition, the term “Manichaeism” was associated with the main Monophysite leaders, such as Timothy Aelurus,³³ Peter the Fuller,³⁴ Severus of Antioch³⁵ or Philoxenus of Mabbug.³⁶ It was also associated with important members of imperial bureaucracy, such as the *praepositus sacri cubicularii* Amantius,³⁷ Peter Barsymes (first *praefectus praetorio* and afterwards *comes sacrarum largitionum*)³⁸ or even the emperor Anasthastius I.³⁹

The importance of this polemic *topos* is not only evident in Christological literature, but also in the heresiological tradition. The link between Manichaeism and Monophysitism (and especially Docetism), is widely treated by many anti-Manichaean works and authors, such as Titus of Bostra (fourth century),⁴⁰ Theodoret of Cyrus (fifth century),⁴¹ the text known as the *Short Abjuration Formula* against Manichaeism (second half of the fifth century⁴² or beginning of the sixth⁴³)⁴⁴ or Theodore bar Khoni (eighth century),⁴⁵ among many others. In summary, the idea of the relation between Manichaeism and Monophysitism is one of the most important leitmotifs of anti-Manichaean and Christological literature.⁴⁶

78, in which are collected quotations from the *Letter to Addas*, the *Letter to Koundaros* and the *Letter to Scythianus*.

³² The *Letter to Addas*, the *Letter to Koundaros*, the *Letter to Scythianus* and the *Letter to Zabinas*. On these letters, see Lieu, 1994, 110-12; Gardner and Lieu, 2004, 174-75; Boulluec, 2017, 333-38.

³³ Justinian I, *Contra Monophysitas*, 100.2-3, 107.11-14, 121.2-3, 200.12-13, ed. Albertella, Amelotti and Milgiardi, 1973.

³⁴ On Peter the Fuller and the accusation of Manichaeism, see *infra*.

³⁵ *Synodus Constantinopolitana et Hierosolymitana anno 536 (Collectio Sabbaitica 5. 27, 32, 35, 129)*, ed. ed. Schwartz, Edward. 1940. *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, vol. 3: *Synodus Constantinopolitana et Hierosolymitana anno 536*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 72.5, 72.17-18, 89.11, 89.27-28, 103.19-20, 181.29-30. On Severus of Antioch and Manichaeism, see *infra*.

³⁶ Theodorus Lector, *Historia ecclesiastica* IV, ed. Hansen, Gunther C. 1995. *Theodoros Anagnostes. Kirchengeschichte*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 96-151, fr. 470.

³⁷ *Synodus Constantinopolitana et Hierosolymitana anno 536 (Collectio Sabbaitica 5, 27)*, ed. Schwartz, 1940, 75.33.

³⁸ Theodorus Lector, *Historia ecclesiastica* IV, ed. Hansen, *Theodoros*, fr. 467. The same accusation is found in Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 5999, ed. Boor, Carl de. 1883. *Theophanis chronographia*. Leipzig: Teubner.

³⁹ Procopius, *Historia arcana*, XII, 22.2-25.4, ed. Wirth, Gerhard (*post H. Jaury*). 1963. *Procopii Caesariensis opera omnia*, vol. 3. Leipzig: Teubner.

⁴⁰ Titus of Bostra, *contra Manichaeos* IV, 44.15-17, ed. Agathe, Roman, Thomas S. Schmidt, Paul-Hubert Poirier, Éric Chrégheur and José Declerck. 2013. *Titi Bostrensis Contra Manichaeos Libri IV, Graece et Syriace*. Turnhout: Brepols.

⁴¹ Theodoret of Cyrus, *Haereticarum fabularum compendium* I, 26, ed. *Patrologia Graeca* 83, 336-556 (379C).

⁴² Ficker, Gerhard. 1906. “Eine Sammlung von Abschwörungsformeln.” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 27: 443-64 (445); Gouillard, Jean. 1970. “Les sources grecques pour l’histoire des Pauliciens d’Asie Mineure, 4: Les formules d’abjuration.” *Travaux et mémoires* 4: 185-207 (187, n. 10); Klein, Wassilios Wolfgang. 1991. *Die Argumentation in den griechisch-christlichen Antimanichaica*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 16.

⁴³ Adam, Alfred. 1954. *Texte zum Manichäismus*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 93; Lieu, 1994, 226.

⁴⁴ *Short Abjuration Formula*, ed. and trans. Parenti, Stefano and Elena Velkovska. 2000. *L’Euclologio Barberini gr. 336*. Roma: Edizioni Liturgiche, § 148.

⁴⁵ Theodore bar Khoni, *Liber scholiorum* XI, 58, ed. Scher, Addai. 1912. *Liber scholiorum*, vol. 2. Paris: E. Typographeo Reipublicae, 312.28-313.1.

⁴⁶ Among the Greek Christian *anti-Manichaica* composed before the sixth century, the only work that demonstrates some knowledge on Manichaean Christology are the *Acta Archelai*. In chapters LIX-LX, ed. Beeson, Charles. 1906. *Hegemonius: Acta Archelai*. Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 86.1-89.4, there is a debate

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3.2. The exceptions: the sources of the end of the fifth century to the beginning of the sixth

However, there are some important exceptions to this trend: the polemical and Christological sources of the end of the fifth century and the beginning of the sixth. In some texts from this period, we can observe real Manichaean Christological concepts that were not attested before. More concretely, I would like to focus on three texts. The first is a spurious letter attributed to Patriarch Acacius (472-489) of Constantinople, addressed to the Antiochene Patriarch Peter the Fuller (471-488). The particular Christological exposition contained in this passage was noted first by Samuel N.C. Lieu (although he did not analyze the passage).⁴⁷ This letter is part of a spurious epistolary *corpus* composed by the monastic group known as the “Sleepless” (“ἀκοίμητοι”) Monks, with the aim of denigrating the Monophysite and Theopaschite doctrine of Peter (this doctrine holds that God, through his incarnation in Jesus, can suffer at the moment of crucifixion), a former co-religionist of theirs. Peter is, without a doubt, one of the fundamental figures in the *Thrisagion* hymn controversy, by adding the phrase “ὁ σταυρωθεὶς δι’ ἡμᾶς” (“who was crucified for us”) to this hymn (“ἅγιος ὁ θεός, ἅγιος ἰσχυρός, ἅγιος ἀθάνατος, ὁ σταυρωθεὶς δι’ ἡμᾶς, ἐλέησον ἡμᾶς”), implying that, in his view, divine nature was crucified (through the Son).⁴⁸ In this spurious letter, we can find a curious parallel between Peter’s faith and the Manichaean doctrine on the baptism and crucifixion. Contrary to the more common association between Manichaeism and Docetism, the letter collects a series of new information on Manichaean Christology, seemingly with the aim of adapting the accusation to Peter’s Theopaschism:

καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτά σου φρονήματα πάσης αἰρετικῆς κακονοίας ἴδια, μᾶλλον δὲ Μανιχαικῆς μανίας ἰνδάλματα. καὶ γὰρ ἐκεῖνος, καθάπερ καὶ σύ, παντελῶς ἀπαρνησάμενος τὸν μονογενῆ τοῦ θεοῦ υἱὸν καὶ τὴν παρθενικὴν ὠδῖνα ἔφησε τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα τὸ ἐν εἶδει περιστερᾶς κατελθὸν ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν ἐν τῷ Ἰορδάνῃ ποταμῷ σεσωματῶσθαι ἐκ τῶν ὑδάτων καὶ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις συναστραφῆναι καὶ τῷ σταυρῷ προσηλωθῆναι καὶ τὸν θάνατον ὑπομεμενηκέναι τὸν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν.

And such thoughts of yours are typical of every heretical perversity; or rather, they are hallucinations of the Manichaean madness. That person (Mani), like you, completely denying the Only Begotten Son of God and the birth from a virgin, said that the Holy Spirit, who came down from heaven in the form of a dove,

between Archelaus and Mani regarding the baptism of Jesus. In this debate, Mani describes baptism as the moment of arrival of a spiritual entity to Earth (in accordance with Manichean sources). In any case, the leitmotif of the interaction between various figures identified with Jesus (the divine Jesus and his body) does not appear, and the physical form of Christ is described as an appearance. In addition, there is no information on the passion and the crucifixion. This part of the *Acta* does not seem to have any influence on later heresiology.

⁴⁷ Lieu, 1992, 169; Id., 1994, 121.

⁴⁸ On Peter the Fuller, the Sleepless Monks and the *Thrisagion* controversy, see Kosiński, Rafał. 2010. “Peter the Fuller, Patriarch of Antioch (471–488).” *Byzantinoslavica: Revue internationale des Études Byzantines* 68/1: 49-73. Grillmeier Alois and Theresia Hainthaler. 1995. *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2: *From the Council of Chalcedon (451) to Gregory the Great (590-604)*, part 4: *The Church of Constantinople in the Sixth Century*. Translated to English by J. Cawte and P. Allen. Mowbray: London, 252-62.

became corporeal from the waters in the river Jordan, and lived among men, and was nailed to the cross, and underwent death for us.⁴⁹

Even though the leitmotif of various figures identified with Jesus (the divine Jesus and his body) does not appear, the letter assigns the following characteristics to the Manichaean doctrine: 1) the interpretation of baptism as the fundamental moment that marks the descent of a purely spiritual entity to Earth (in this case, the Holy Spirit⁵⁰); 2) that the spiritual entity adopts a body with which it is crucified; 3) that the crucifixion is real, as long as this entity dies; 4) that the death of this spiritual entity has a functional role in Manichaean soteriology (this entity “died for us”). In short, the letter seems to collect some information on Manichaeism not previously attested among Christian sources, but with many parallelisms among the Manichaean texts. In addition, this new information allows adaptation of the accusation of Manichaeism to the Theopaschite Christology of Peter the Fuller.

The second text that must be mentioned is the *Homilia Cathedralis* CXVII (518) by Severus of Antioch, patriarch of Antioch in the beginning of the sixth century (512-518). Severus was one of the most important leaders of the moderate Monophysite faction. In addition, he demonstrated broad knowledge on Manichaeism in several of his works.⁵¹ However, despite Severus’s acquaintance with Manichaeism, the following passage seems to have been neglected by modern research.⁵² In this homily, the patriarch offers an explanation of baptism according to Manichaeism that makes use of two figures identified with Jesus, in correspondence with the doctrine of this religious group:

ܐܘܢ ܕܥܝܣܝܘܫ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܥܝܣܝܘܫ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܥܝܣܝܘܫ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܥܝܣܝܘܫ
 ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܥܝܣܝܘܫ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܥܝܣܝܘܫ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܥܝܣܝܘܫ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ
 ܕܥܝܣܝܘܫ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܥܝܣܝܘܫ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܥܝܣܝܘܫ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܥܝܣܝܘܫ
 ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܥܝܣܝܘܫ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܥܝܣܝܘܫ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܥܝܣܝܘܫ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ

And also, the (verse) “When Jesus was baptized, he immediately came out from the waters” (Mt 3:16) muzzles the follies of the impure Manichaeans. Indeed they, who tell stories of folly about everything and evilly elaborate these (tales) of old

⁴⁹ *Synodus Constantinopolitana et Hierosolymitana anno 536 (Collectio Sabbaitica 4, 8: Epistula Acacii)*, ed. Schwartz, 1940 (1965), 18.14-18. The translation is mine.

⁵⁰ The image of the divine Christ descending to Earth at the moment of baptism in the form of a dove is already found in earlier gnostic groups, such as the Ebionites; see Epiphanius, *Panarion* XXX, 16, 1-8, ed. Holl, Karl. 1915. *Epiphanius. Ancoratus und Panarion*, vol. 1. Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 353.9-355.8. See also Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus Haereses* I, 26, 1.9-15, ed. and trans. Rousseau, Adelin and Louis Doutreleau. 1979. *Irénée de Lyon: Contre les Hérésies*, vol. 2. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 344-347, regarding the Christology of the gnostic Cerinthus.

⁵¹ For an introduction to Severus’s life and thought, see Allen, Pauline and C.T. Robert Hayward. 2004. *Severus of Antioch*. Abingdon: Routledge, 3-55. On Severus’s knowledge on Manichaeism, see Kugener, Marc-Antoine and Franz Cumont. 1912. *Recherches sur le Manichéisme*, vol. 2: *Extract de la CXXIIIe Homélie de Sévère d’Antioche*. Bruxelles: Lamertin, 83-172; Reeves, John C. 1992. *Jewish Lore in Manichean Cosmogony: Studies in the “Book of Giants” Traditions*. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 170-74; Id. 2015. “Further Textual Evidence Pertaining to the Enigmatic ‘Mani-Citations’ of Severus of Antioch.” *Open Theology* 1: 436-44; Alpi, Federico. 2004. “Les manichéens et le manichéisme dans les Homélie cathédrales de Sévère d’Antioche (512-518) : Observations sur l’HC 123 et sur quelques passages négligés”. *ARAM* 16: 233-43.

⁵² The passage is mentioned by Alpi, 2004, 239. To the best of my knowledge, there is no analysis of this passage in other works on the relation between Severus and Manichaeism.

women, say that the one who was baptized remained below, while the waters gave another (who is) an illusion in place of him who is truth, ...⁵³

Severus's exposition is very similar to the Manichaean sources and the Augustinian passages. However, the complex relationship between the Manichaean Jesus and his body is reduced to two separate entities (which do not unite at a certain point). Furthermore, Severus links the "post-baptism Jesus" to the concept of "illusion" (ἰλλυσιον), relating the Manichaean Jesus to a more "classic" form of Docetism. In short, Severus's testimony does not recognize baptism as the moment of arrival of Jesus Splendor on Earth, by means of the assumption of a body that can suffer.

Finally, a passage must be mentioned which is undoubtedly the most interesting of all. It is found in the abjuration formula known as *Capita VII contra Manichaeos*, composed in the first years of Justinian's reign (around 527-529), most likely to be attributed to Zacharias Rhetor, bishop of Mytilene and a leading intellectual in the first third of the sixth century.⁵⁴ This formula dedicates the fourth and fifth anathemas to criticize the Manichaean biblical exegesis. In these anathemas, a Christological cycle is preserved, in which the following explanation of baptism is provided:

... Ἀναθεματίζω οὖν τοὺς ἕτερόν τι παρὰ ταῦτα φρονοῦντας καὶ ἄλλον μὲν λέγοντας εἶναι τὸν γεννηθέντα ἐκ Μαρίας, ὃν καὶ γεννητὸν ἀποκαλοῦσιν Ἰησοῦν, τὸν καὶ βαπτισθέντα, ὃν καὶ βεβυθίσθαι τερατεύονται, ἕτερον δὲ εἶναι τὸν ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος ἀνελθόντα καὶ παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς μαρτυρηθέντα, ὃν ἀγέννητον ἀποκαλοῦσι Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ φέγγος προσονομάζουσιν ἐν σχήματι ἀνθρώπου φανέντα, ...

... I anathematize therefore those who think differently "in any way from these (statements) and say that there was one person born from Mary, the one whom they call "Jesus the Begotten," who was baptized and about whom they invent the story that he was immersed, but that there was another one who came out of the water about whom testimony was given by his Father and whom they call "Christ Jesus the Unbegotten." They give him the title of "The Brightness," who appeared in the likeness of man. They invent the story that the former was from the evil principle, the other was from the good."⁵⁵

⁵³ Severus of Antioch, *Homilia Cathedralis* CXVII, ed. Brière, Maurice. 1948. "Les *Homiliae Cathedrales* de Sévère d'Antioche : Homélie CXIII à CXIX." In *Patrologia Orientalis* 26. Paris: Firmin-Didot, 393-410 (409.1-5). The translation is mine.

⁵⁴ For an introduction to Zacharias's life, see Allen, Pauline. 1980. "Zachariah Scholasticus and the *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Evagrius Scholasticus." *The Journal of Theological Studies* 31/2: 471-78; Greatrex, Geoffrey (ed.). 2011. *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor: Church and War in Late Antiquity*. Translated by R.R. Phenix and C.B. Horn, with introductory material by S.P. Brock, and W. Witakowski, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 3-12. On the attribution of the *Capita VII* to Zacharias, see Richard, Marcel (ed.). 1977. *Iohannis Caesariensis Presbyteri et Grammatici, opera quae supersunt*. Turnhout: Brepols, xxxii. Lieu, 1994, 222-223 (also 62, 118, 124) proposes a series of arguments that support the authority of Zacharias, although he does not explicitly accept the identification. See also, Gertz, Sebastian, John Dillon and Donald Russell. 2012. *Aeneas of Gaza, Theophrastus, with Zacharias of Mytilene, Ammonius*, London: Bristol Classical Press, 94; Greatrex, 2011, 18; Menéndez Sánchez, Guillermo. 2022. *La polemica antimanichea nel VI secolo alla luce delle principali fonti di lingua greca: tradizione, interpretazione, innovazione*, PhD diss., Università degli Studi di Padova – École Pratique des Hautes Études, 34-39. The *Clavis Patrum Graecorum* (CPG 6997) also attributed the text to Zacharias.

⁵⁵ *Capita VII contra Manichaeos* IV, 124-130, ed. Richard, 1978, xxxvi; trans. Fox, Greg, John Sheldon and Samuel N.C. Lieu. 2010. *Greek and Latin Sources on Manichaean Cosmogony and Ethics*. Turnhout: Brepols, 121.

As in the case of Severus, the *Capita* mention the existence of two figures identified with Jesus. Again, these two figures do not seem to unite, but one replaces the other. The same leitmotif is used later, in the fifth anathema, this time regarding the crucifixion:

Ἀναθεματίζω τοὺς λέγοντας δοκήσει πεπονθέναι τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν καὶ ἄλλον μὲν εἶναι τὸν ἐν τῷ σταυρῷ, ἕτερον δὲ τὸν μὴ δυνηθέντα ὑπὸ Ἰουδαίων κατασχεθῆναι, γελῶντα δὲ ὡς ἑτέρου παρ' αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τοῦ ξύλου κρεμασθέντος, ...

I anathematize those who say that our lord Jesus Christ's suffering was only apparent, and that there was one who was on the cross, and another who could not be held fast by the Jews, but laughed because someone because someone other than him was hung on the wood. ...⁵⁶

There is another point in this passage that demonstrates the accuracy of the formula regarding Manichaean Christology: the laughter of Christ at the moment of the crucifixion. This image, which is very recurrent in Gnostic Christological literature,⁵⁷ can be found in various Manichaean sources. Let us return, for example, to the Manichaean Coptic *Psalm* cited above, regarding the crucifixion of Jesus:

Amen, I was seized; Amen again, I was not seized.
 Amen, I was judged; Amen again, I was not judged.
 Amen, I was crucified; Amen again, I was not crucified.
 Amen, I was pierced; Amen again, I was not pierced.
 Amen, I suffered; Amen again, I did not suffer.
 Amen, I am in my Father. Amen, again, my Father is in me.
 But thou desirest the fulfilment of Amen: **I mocked the world,
 they could not mock me.**⁵⁸

Therefore, Jesus concluded his suffering/not suffering with a derisive note, in relation to the presence of the Principle of Evil (identified with matter) in his passion and the crucifixion: by crucifying the earthly Jesus – or rather, his body – Evil ends up crucifying itself. The crucifixion would therefore be a deception: thinking it has trapped Jesus, matter falls into its own trap.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ *Capita VII contra Manichaeos* V, 132-135, ed. Richard, 1978, xxxvi; trans. Fox, Sheldon and Lieu, 2010, 121.

⁵⁷ Some examples in the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth*, 56.5-19, ed. and trans. Riley, Gregory. 2000. "Second Treatise of the Great Seth." In *The Coptic Gnostic Library: A Complete Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, vol. 4, edited by James M. Robinson, 129-200 (56.5-19). Leiden: Brill; *Apocalypse of Peter*, 81.3-21, ed. and trans. in Brashler, James. 2000. "The Apocalypse of Peter." In *The Coptic Gnostic Library: A Complete Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, vol. 4, edited by James M. Robinson, 201-47. Leiden: Brill. For a study on this concept see Stroumsa, Guy. G. 2004. "Christ's Laughter: Docetic Origins Reconsidered." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 12/3: 267-88; Bermejo Rubio, Fernando. 2007. "La imagen de la risa en los textos gnósticos y sus modelos bíblicos." *Estudios bíblicos* 65/1-2: 177-202.

⁵⁸ *Psalm-Book Heracleides*, ed. and trans. Allberry, 1938, 191.4-11. For other examples of Jesus's mockery, see *Psalm-Book Heracleides*, ed. and trans. Allberry, 1938, 193.27-194.3.

⁵⁹ The idea of the crucifixion of Jesus as a deception is another concept found in Gnostic literature. See, for example, the *Paraphrase of Sem*, 39.24-40.3, in which the crucifixion of the earthly body of Jesus means the crucifixion of the demon Soldas, ed. and trans. Wisse, Frederick. 2000. "The Paraphrase of Shem." In *The Coptic Gnostic Library: A Complete Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, vol. 4, edited by James M.

In view of the abovementioned, we can conclude that the Manichaean Christological cycle collected by the formula is, without a doubt, the most detailed not only of Greek heresiology, but of the Christian tradition in general (with the exception of the Augustinian *corpus*). In this cycle, we find the interaction of two figures identified with Jesus, who alternate within the biblical story with the aim of explaining some of the most important events in the life of Christ according to the New Testament. However, the formula presents some changes between a Docetic vision *stricto sensu* and a more clearly Manichaean vision, in which these events are explained by the existence of another figure identified with Jesus (his suffering body), which becomes the protagonist of the biblical episodes.

Having analyzed the main points of the abovementioned passages, we should consider why some sources from the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth century seem to mark an inflection point in a period in which the assimilation of Manichaeism to Monophysite (and especially Docetic) Christology was the main trend, as we have seen. In fact, this trend is also present in the three mentioned passages: they combine new information on Manichaean Christology with the assimilation of Manichaeism and Monophysitism. The spurious letter of Acacius was addressed to a Monophysite like Peter the Fuller, and develops an explicit comparison between both Christologies. In this case, it is interesting that the new knowledge on Manichaeism appears together with a new type of polemical assimilation: Peter's Christology is Theopaschite, and not Docetic. It appears that some previously unattested information has been reformulated to adapt it and accuse Peter of being Manichaean. In the case of Severus of Antioch and the *Capita VII contra Manichaeos*, both present some degree of overlapping between the concept of "apparent" (closer to the predominant stereotype) and the Manichaean leitmotif of two figures identified with Jesus. Furthermore, we should consider that Severus (a moderate Monophysite) actively fought against the most extreme versions of Monophysitism, and developed several polemics against the Eutychians and against Julian of Halicarnassus and his followers. In addition, Zachariah (if he was author of the formula) seems to have been a Monophysite in his youth, but later (being part of the imperial bureaucracy at Constantinople) he seems to have accepted Chalcedonian orthodoxy. However, the two texts do not use the "classic" polemical stereotypes for accusing someone of being Manichaean. In contrast, they develop a more detailed controversy that, a priori, does not seem to add anything to the identification of Manichaeism with Monophysitism (and Docetism). In fact, if the aim was to relate Manichaeism to these types of Christology, it would have been more useful to repeat the same stereotypes that we have seen used previously and contemporaneously by other texts. In this aspect, the detailed description of various figures identified with Jesus in Manichaeism would not seem productive and, instead of him, it would be more useful to speak only of an "apparent" body, like the rest of the anti-Manichaean polemical works.

4. Conclusion

The main aim of this analysis was to research knowledge of heresiological literature regarding Manichaean Christology and, above all, to identify any eventual difference

Robinson. Leiden: Brill, 15-128. On this passage and its parallelisms with Manichaean Christology, see Johnston, Steve. 2012. "Une nouvelle traduction de la Paraphrase de Sem." *Laval théologique et philosophique* 68/3: 701-06 (702-03).

Guillermo Menéndez Sánchez, "Manichaean Christology Through the Lens of Late Antique Heresiology," *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture* 18.2 (2024) 53-73; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18573/jlarc.144>

between the sources. In fact, while the vast majority of sources identify Manichaean Christology with the Monophysite conception of Jesus (especially with Docetism), some texts from the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth century collect different (and more detailed) expositions on Manichaean Christology. These expositions explain the main events of the life of Jesus based on the interaction of two figures which are identified with Jesus himself. In addition, these texts are closer to Manichaean sources: although Manichaean Christology is a particularly confusing subject, it seems probable that Manichaeism defended the existence of several figures identified with Jesus. In this way, Manichaeism distinguished between a divine and incorporeal Jesus and a carnal entity (his body) with which the divine Jesus unites at a certain point of the New Testament narrative (the baptism).

The first text that demonstrates more accurate information on Manichaean Christology is a spurious letter against Peter the Fuller. This letter explains that, according to the Manichaeans, a purely spiritual entity (in this case, the Holy Spirit) arrived on Earth during the baptism. This purely divine entity adopts a physical body, and with this body suffered the passion, crucifixion, and death. During these events, the suffering was real: as the letter correctly recognizes, this suffering is important for Manichaean soteriology. Although the text presents some peculiarities, it shows more parallelisms with Manichaean sources than the preceding Christian texts. In addition, the letter tries to assimilate the new information on Manichaean Jesus not to a Docetic Christology, but to the Theopaschite ideas of Peter.

The second text is the *Homilia Cathedralis* CXVII by Severus of Antioch. In homily, the existence of two figures identified with Jesus is explicitly mentioned: the first, who remained under the waters of the Jordan at the time of his baptism, and the second, who comes out of the waters and whose body is apparent. However, Severus's exposition has some inaccuracies. For example, he does not mention that post-baptismal Jesus had a body capable of suffering. Instead, he identifies this body as an "illusion." However, the *Homilia* presents clear parallels with the Manichean doctrines, which are not present in the previous polemical literature.

Finally, the third heresiological document is the abjuration formula known as *Capita VII contra Manichaeos*, which was most likely composed by Zachariah of Mytilene in the early years of Justinian's reign. According to the formula, one figure identified with Jesus entered in the waters of the Jordan, and another figure (called Jesus Splendor) emerged from the waters. Likewise, one figure identified with Jesus suffered the passion and crucifixion, and another (Jesus Splendor) watched how "the other" was crucified in his place. Although the formula presents some shifts between the concept of "apparent" and the use of different figures identified with Jesus, the *Capita VII* are, undoubtedly, the most detailed exposition of Manichaean Christology among Christian sources.

In the three cases, the texts try to relate the new knowledge reported with the stereotype of Manichaean "Monophysitism": the spurious letter of Acacius explicitly compares Manichaean Christology and the Monophysite and Theopaschite doctrines of Peter the Fuller. The *Homilia Cathedralis* of Severus and the *Capita VII* present shifts between the concepts of two figures identified with Jesus and the "apparent" body of Christ. Regarding the two figures identified with Jesus, this is new information on Manichaeism, not previously attested, and which found a great number of parallelisms with Manichaean sources. In addition, this information does not seem to accord with the idea that

Manichaeism and Docetism *stricto sensu* were assimilable. In its place, it would be more useful to speak only of an “apparent” incarnation (as the previous polemical works do).

In view of the aforementioned, one might think that the appearance of these new Christological conceptions is due to genuine interest in Manichaean Christology, together with the discovery of new information on Manichaeism in the late fifth and early sixth centuries. For Manichaeism, these years meant the time of its last great persecution in the Eastern Mediterranean, and consequently, its substantial extinction in the region. This persecutory environment would be ideal for the discovery and confiscation of original Manichaean texts.⁶⁰ Indeed, anti-Manichaean texts from this period demonstrate a large number of novelties. For example, the third anathema of the *Capita VII* collects several details on Manichaean mythology not previously attested in Greek heresiology.⁶¹ Furthermore, the second anathema also preserves new (and accurate) information on the history of Manichaeism, mentioning several names of Mani’s disciples only found in Manichaean sources, and providing the only complete list of all ranks of the Manichaean Church preserved in Greek.⁶² In the case of Severus, his *Homilia Cathedralis* CXXIII (518), exclusively dedicated to Manichaeism, is one of the richest anti-Manichaean Christian texts. The homily shows excellent knowledge of the Manichaean primordial myth (which narrates the clash between the Principle of Good and the Principle of Evil), exposed in great detail.⁶³

In short, it seems likely that the new concepts on Manichaean Christology that appear in Christian sources between the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth century are due not only to the polemical role of Manichaeism as a “heretical marker” in Christian controversies, but also to the discovery of real information on Manichaeism not previously attested, in a period in which Christian authorities persecuted this religious group in the Eastern Mediterranean with renewed vigor.

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⁶⁰ Note the mention, among the laws of this period, of the Manichean books in *Codex Justinianus* I, 5, 16.3 (requiring that they must be confiscated and destroyed). On the anti-Manichaean persecution of these years, see the bibliography quoted *supra*.

⁶¹ On this subject, see Lieu, 1994, 273-83; Menéndez Sánchez, Guillermo. 2025. “Manichaean Mythology in the Time of Justinian: Cosmogony, Anthropogony and the Myth of the Giants in the Third Anathema of the *Capita VII Contra Manichaeos*”. *Gnosis: Journal of Gnostic Studies* 10.1 (forthcoming).

⁶² On this subject, see Lieu, 1994, 262-66; Menéndez Sánchez, 2022, 54-88.

⁶³ On this homily, see Kugener and Cumont, 1912; Reeves, 1992, 170-74; Id. 2015; Bennett, B. 2001. “*Iuxta Unum Latus Erat Terra Tenebrarum*: The Division of Primordial Space in Anti-Manichaean Writers’ Descriptions of the Manichaean Cosmogony.” In *The Light and the Darkness: Studies in Manichaeism and Its World*, edited by Paul A. Mirecki and Jason D. BeDuhn, 68-78. Leiden: Brill; Alpi, 2004.

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