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“... Putrid Boils and Sores, and Burning Wounds in the Body” (*The Kephalaia of the Teacher* 70.175.17-18): The Valorisation of Health and Illness in Late Antique Manichaeism.¹

1. Introduction: Health and the Manichaean body

Recent publications concerned with examining attitudes to the human body in the religion of Mani have revealed a complex spectrum of ideas relating to its role in the theology and practice of Manichaeism.² A reading of the ‘Manichaean Body’ informed by a gnostic polarity of flesh *versus* spirit has been largely rejected, and a more complex, ambivalent portrayal of the body, shaped by specific cosmological and theological readings of its origin and purpose, have come to light. New interpretative tools and approaches have changed perceptions of classical texts, and revealed how the “subjugated, perfected [Manichaean body was] put into use in the process of salvation.”³ For example, re-reading *Chapter 70* of the Coptic work⁴, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher*,⁵ we encounter a complex lesson which betrays the Manichaeans’ understanding of the dual heritage of the human body. Here the Mani of the *Kephalaia*⁶ instructs his disciples about the correspondences that exist between the fleshly body and the universe, formulated in a manner which suggests a simultaneous patterning of the two forms: “Mani says to his disciples: ‘This whole universe, above and below, reflects the pattern of the human body; as the formation of this body of flesh accords to the pattern of

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented to the International Association of Manichaean Studies, held at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, between September 9-13, 2013. I would like to thank Paul Dilley, Jean-Daniel Dubois, Desmond Durkin-Meisterernst, Erica Hunter, together with the anonymous reviewers for *HTR*, for all their comments and suggestions on the paper.

² E.g. Jorunn J. Buckley, “Tools and Tasks: Elchasaite and Manichaean Purification Rituals,” *JR* 66 (1986) 399-411; Ludwig Koenen, “How Dualistic is Mani’s Dualism?,” in *Codex Manichaicus Coloniensis. Atti del Secondo Simposio Internazionale* (ed. Luigi Cirillo; Cosenza: Marra, 1990) 1-34; Jason D. BeDuhn, “A Regimen for Salvation: Medical Models in Manichaean Asceticism,” *Semeia* 1992 (58) 109-34; Idem, *The Manichaean Body in Discipline and Ritual* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

³ Jason D. BeDuhn, “The Battle for the Body in Manichaean Asceticism,” in *Asceticism* (ed. Vincent Wimbush and Richard Valantasis; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 513-19, at 518.

⁴ On *Chapter 70*, see Timothy Pettipiece, *Pentadic Redaction in the Manichaean Kephalaia* (NHMS 66; Leiden: Brill, 2009) 65.

⁵ On the titles of the *Kephalaia*, see Wolf-Peter Funk, “The Reconstruction of the Manichaean *Kephalaia*,” in *Emerging from Darkness: Studies in the Recovery of Manichaean Sources* (ed. Paul Mirecki and Jason BeDuhn; NHMS 43; Leiden: Brill, 1997) 143-159.

⁶ On the status and purpose of the *Kephalaia of the Teacher*, see Pettipiece, *Pentadic Redaction*, 7, which is worth quoting here: “[The *Kephalaia*] should not be seen as a record of the *ipsissima verba* of Mani himself, nor should it be viewed as a *summa* of Manichaean theology. Instead, it can be more accurately described as representing the emergence or evolution of a scholastic, interpretive tradition, ostensibly rooted in an authoritative oral tradition analogous to those which led to the compilation of the Jewish Talmudic and Islamic Hadith traditions.”

the universe''' (70.169.28-170.1).⁷ The organs and limbs of the body resemble specific astral structures and elements in the universe, and both body and universe are afflicted by a range of competing powers. *Chapter 70* offers a melothesiatic reading of these archontic powers as zodiacal signs fused with the organs, bones and sinews of the body (cf. *Chapter 69*).⁸ As archons they exercise a malevolent influence over the flesh. However, they are also constantly in conflict with each other, and the cause of bodily sickness lies in their "creeping, and moving within the body ... [where] they shall beset and destroy one another ... they shall erupt from the body of the person who will die; and make putrid boils and sores and burning wounds in the body" (70.175.12-14; 16-18). Leaving such colourful descriptions of lesions aside, *Chapter 70* also indicates that human beings, specifically the Manichaean Elect, possess enormous potential as the ones who are able to facilitate the release of the Light by subduing the activities of the 'five camps' (i.e. the face, heart, genitalia, stomach, ground).

The ascetic regimen underlying the Manichaean myth has been extensively discussed by Jason BeDuhn et al., and I do not propose to add to the debate about the role of the body in realising the salvific ambitions of the religion. Instead, and suggested by the purulence of *Chapter 70*, the point of departure for this paper is to examine the concomitant concerns of health and illness in Manichaeism; specifically, attitudes of Manichaeans to health in the early history of the religion, i.e. from the time of Mani (d. ca. 276 C.E.) to the mid fourth century C.E., a period that witnessed not only the rapid, geographical expansion of the faith, but also the development of Mani's ideas into a comprehensive theology practised by exclusive communities of practitioners in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and North Africa etc.⁹ This paper is especially concerned with investigating references to health and illness in a selection of Coptic Manichaean sources from Roman Egypt, along with scrutinising these same sources for Manichaean responses to the related themes of physical and emotional suffering which this paper will also consider in light of the prevailing ancient definition of well-being as a state of physical and emotional equilibrium (see below). The preliminary conclusion in light of these issues is that late antique Manichaeans appear to have valorised

⁷ English translations of the *Kephalaia* are taken from Iain Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher* (NHMS 37; Leiden: Brill, 1995). For the edition of the *Kephalaia* consulted here, see Hans Jakob Polotsky and Alexander Böhlig, *Kephalaia* 1. Hälfte (Lieferung 1-10), mit einem Beitrag von Hugo Ibscher (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1940).

⁸ On the role of melothesia in gnostic cosmology, see Karen L. King, *The Secret Revelation of John* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006) 111.

⁹ Cf. Majella Franzmann, "Augustine and Manichaean Almsgiving: Understanding a universal religion with exclusivist practices," in *Augustine and Manichaean Christianity* (ed. Johannes van Oort; NHMS 83; Leiden: Brill, 2013) 37-49

both health and illness, since the evidence would seem to suggest that they assigned constructive meaning-sometimes pastoral, sometimes empathetic-to their own experiences of the two states.

Two sets of sources in particular form the *locus* for this paper. In the first instance, there are fragments in Coptic translation from some letters written by Mani himself, in which we can hear echoes of “Mani’s true voice”.¹⁰ These fragments enable us to understand, albeit within a limited context, the way in which Mani valorised his own experiences of illness. Mani was a talented and prolific author, whose writings included evangelical, apocalyptic and epistolographic works.¹¹ Mani’s letters in particular offered an important conversational medium for himself and his followers, in which a range of ideas were discussed, and problems and other issues affecting nascent Manichaean communities were resolved between the correspondents.¹² A further important feature was the opportunity which letter-writing afforded Mani for developing a distinctive, authorial persona. In this regard, the role that Mani took as an author of letters offering pastoral guidance to his followers is especially relevant to a discussion of health and illness in Manichaeism, since it is in his letters that we witness Mani imparting meaning to his own physical and emotional hardships. For instance, in the composite text known as P. Kellis Copt. 53 which is discussed below, Mani is to be seen transforming such hardships into a rhetorical trope with pastoral connotations which he utilises in his letters in order to reinforce his and his followers’ identities as members of a sacred community, within the context of a broader religious landscape where physical suffering carried theological and pastoral significance.

In the second instance, there are the very many references to health and illness in the correspondence of Mani’s later, fourth-century Egyptian followers associated with the village of Kellis in the Dakhleh Oasis (referred to as the “Coptic Documentary Texts”).¹³ In these texts, the valorisation of health and ill-health takes on a different form from the

¹⁰ Iain Gardner, “‘With a Pure Heart and a Truthful Tongue’: The recovery of the text of the Manichaean daily prayers,” *JLA* 4 (2011) 79-99, at 99.

¹¹ See Nicholas J. Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism. An ancient faith rediscovered* (London: Continuum, 2011) 61-95.

¹² See Iain Gardner, “Once More on Mani’s *Epistles* and Manichaean Letter-Writing,” *ZAC* 17 (2013) 291-314.

¹³ See Iain Gardner, Anthony Alcock and Wolf-Peter Funk, eds., *Coptic Documentary Texts from Kellis. Volume 1* (Dakhleh Oasis Project Monograph 9; Oxford: Oxbow, 1999). All translations from the documentary papyri are taken from this volume. Whilst I was preparing this paper for final publication, the second volume of the documentary papyri was published. Preliminary investigations of the corpus of texts contained therein indicates a similar level of concern on the part of the ancient letter writers with matters of health and illness, so much so that the editors of the volume note (on p. 139 in relation to P. Kellis Copt. 84): “Illness is a common theme in the papyri.” See Iain Gardner, Anthony Alcock and Wolf-Peter Funk, eds., *Coptic Documentary Texts from Kellis. Volume 2: P. Kellis VII* (Dakhleh Oasis Project Monograph 16; Oxford: Oxbow, 2014).

example seen in Mani's letters. In the Kellis letters, enquires between correspondents about their own well-being, which include details of the ways in which good health might be maintained (e.g. in the sharing of medicinal remedies), suggest that the matter here is practical rather than literary, and was determined by the need to uphold a functioning community of Manichaean practitioners. Thus, sanguine hopes for good health exchanged between correspondents in the documentary texts clash strikingly with the "infamous reputation" for bodily hatred and bodily renunciation which gnostic forms of Christianity (including Manichaeism) have long been accused by scholars of espousing.¹⁴

However, the matter under consideration here is not reducible to the correction or otherwise of long-established narratives. Indeed, certain of Mani's own sentiments in the letters discussed in this paper appear to reinforce the academic typology of a gnostic-Manichaean attitude to the physical body. For instance, P. Kellis Copt. 53 reveals Mani speaking about his own bodily sickness where he states that he "strove to come forth from it [i.e. his body] (52.07-52.08)"; and, when raising the strenuousness of his efforts for the community, Mani notes that "[a]ll these things I have endured for my children and my disciples; they whom I saved from the bondage of the world and the bondage of the body" (41.13-41.16). As the passage from *Chapter 70* of the *Kephalaia* above indicates, the human body was for Mani and his followers something which was ultimately irredeemable. Nevertheless, while practitioners of the religion lived "in the body" they were not to be neglectful of it, as the reconstructive work of BeDuhn on the regimens, rationales and rites of the religion has illustrated.¹⁵ As the material under discussion here also indicates, consideration was given by Mani and his followers to maintaining a purposeful and healthy existence for the sake of the religion's ideals. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to make a contribution towards the ramifying of Manichaean theology and the history of Mani's church in the late antique period.

While some thought has been given in recent times to the titular designation of Mani as Physician (e.g. in relation to the origin of the term, and its significance for followers of Mani's teachings),¹⁶ it is fair to say that health and illness have never been major

¹⁴ Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism. An argument for dismantling a dubious category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 118.

¹⁵ BeDuhn, *The Manichaean Body*.

¹⁶ See esp. L. J. R. Ort, *Mani. A Religio-Historical Description of His Personality* (Leiden: Brill, 1967) 95-101; Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, "Jesus, Mani and Buddha as Physicians in the texts of the Silk Road," in *La Persia e l'Asia Centrale da Alessandro al X Secolo* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1996) 589-95; John Kevin Coyle, "Healing and the 'Physician' in Manichaeism," in *Healing in Religion and Society from Hippocrates to*

discussion points for scholars of Manichaeism. This is a curious omission in light of the flourishing interest in both topics among historians of antiquity (to say little about recent research into the practice of ancient health-care and medicine¹⁷), and in particular among those scholars interested in the relationships between health, illness, ascetic practice, and the formulation of sanctity in late antique religions (including Christianity, Gnosticism, and later manifestations of pagan religion and philosophy).¹⁸ In light of the dietetic orientation of Mani's teachings,¹⁹ Manichaeism lends itself very appropriately to the research questions raised by the study of health and illness in the ancient world. Indeed, there are some notable exceptions to this dearth of interest, with Jason BeDuhn having led the charge towards establishing a more responsible understanding of Manichaean attitudes to health in the context of his work on the 'Manichaean Body'. In an early article from 1992, "A Regimen for Salvation. Medical Models in Manichaean Asceticism,"²⁰ BeDuhn analysed the Hellenistic medical foundations for the dietetic concerns of the Manichaean Elect's practice of asceticism. He noted the broad correspondences existing between the medical language of Manichaean texts (e.g. in the *Psalm-Book*, the *Kephalaia*, the *Cologne Mani Codex* etc.) and Greek medical and philosophical writings dealing with health, but also the fundamental differences separating Manichaean ideas about the role and purpose of the body from those proposed by other ancient philosophies. In 1999, John Kevin Coyle took up some of the issues raised by BeDuhn in his *Semeia* article, in a paper entitled, "Healing and the 'Physician' in Manichaeism." Coyle raised the interesting question, albeit in a tangential fashion, of how the Manichaean Elect understood their own experiences of ill-health given the quotidian risk to their health brought about by engaging in so intimate a manner (i.e. via the digestion of Light in food) with the noxious products of Matter. A preliminary inference, that Manichaeans had some conception of good health, can be drawn from Coyle's observation that "a physically afflicted body was not worth curing, except to restore its utility

the Puritans: Selected Studies (ed. John Kevin Coyle and Steven C. Muir; Lewiston, New York: Mellen, 1999) 135-58' repr. in John Kevin Coyle, *Manichaeism and Its Legacy* (NHMS 69; Leiden: Brill, 2009) 101-121 (I follow the reprinted version); Alois van Tongerloo, "Manichaeus Medicus," in *Studia Manichaica* IV (ed. Ronald E. Emmerick, Werner Sundermann and Peter Zieme; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000) 613-21.

¹⁷ Most recently, see Gary B. Ferngren, *Medicine and Health Care in Early Christianity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

¹⁸ E.g. Owsei Temkin, *Hippocrates in a World of Pagans and Christians* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 9; Helen King, "Introduction: What is Health?," in *Health in Antiquity* (ed. Helen King; London: Routledge, 2005) 1-11; Gillian Clark, "The Health of the Spiritual Athlete," in King, *Health in Antiquity*, 216-229; Andrew Crislip, *Thorns in the Flesh. Illness and Sanctity in Late Ancient Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

¹⁹ Discussed comprehensively by BeDuhn, *The Manichaean Body*.

²⁰ See above, n. 2.

to the salvific process,”²¹ a point which Coyle raised when proposing that medical treatments were prohibited within Manichaeism (a point I nuance later in this article).

However, the restoration of ancient attitudes to health and illness is fraught with problems, not least because people in the past thought differently about these issues than people in the modern age do. As the medical historian Henry Sigerist pointed out as far back as 1941, attitudes to health have never been constant, and “while [health] always seemed desirable to the individual, the degree of desirability and motivations changed considerably.”²² Therefore, not everything about the attitudes of Manichaeans to health has been settled, or in all likelihood can be settled. For instance, in light of Manichaean thinking on the soul (e.g. its origin, and destiny), and the ambiguous statements about the status of the body in sources for the religion,²³ it has yet to be established precisely what a “Manichaean” definition of health amounted to, with well-being understood broadly in antiquity as the attainment of humoral equilibrium for both soul and body.²⁴ In light of the complex interplay between anthropology, cosmology, and theology in Manichaeism, it may not be possible to arrive at such a definition. Nevertheless, there is still much work to be done in this area: for instance, there are the recently discovered fourth-century texts from the Dakhleh Oasis which contain material relevant to the themes of health and illness. These texts were not available to BeDuhn and Coyle at the time they produced their studies. Much of this material is epistolographic, which lends poignancy to our understanding of these themes given the timeless role served by letters as a way of enquiring about the health of an addressee, and for informing an addressee about one’s own well-being. Furthermore, many of the epistolographic texts were written or received by non-elite Manichaeans from fourth-century Egypt—their precise status in the religion is often undefined, but they appear to belong to the catechumenate or are related supporters of Manichaeans in and around Kellis and the Nile Valley—an important section of the Manichaean *ecclesia*²⁵ about whom little has been known in the past.²⁶

²¹ Coyle, “Healing and the ‘Physician’,” 109.

²² Henry E. Sigerist, *Medicine and Human Welfare* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1941), *non vidi*; repr. in *Journal of Public Health Policy* 17 (1996) 204-34, at 205.

²³ Some of the key sources are discussed by Koenen, “How dualistic is Mani’s dualism?,” 16.

²⁴ Temkin, *Hippocrates*, 8-17.

²⁵ On the use of the term *ecclesia*, see Richard Lim, “Unity and Diversity among Western Manichaeans: A reconsideration of Mani’s *sancta ecclesia*,” *REAug* 35 (1989) 231-50.

²⁶ For an extensive discussion of the social context of the Kellis documentary texts, see the introduction and prosopography in Gardner, Alcock and Funk, *Coptic Documentary Texts*. Volume 1, 4-83. See also, Jason D.

2. Illness and holiness in Manichaean writings

Beginning with the antithetical state of health, namely sickness, there are a number of references to illness in Manichaean literature, indicating that Manichaeans were very aware of the consequences of ill-health and physical suffering to their cause: as Coyle notes, “like everyone else, Manichaeans would have had to somehow take [illness] into account.”²⁷ As noted above, recent research has scrutinised more carefully the portrayal of the ailing saint in early Christian literature, and in particular the role played by representations of illness in shaping perceptions of holiness: rather than seeing the two as being opposed to one another, the saint’s willingness to endure episodes of ill-health was regarded in some quarters ‘as a useful component’ in defining the nature of Christian asceticism.²⁸ In this regard, the Manichaeans appear more aware than most of the close association between holiness and sickness. Returning to the mythic substrate of Manichaean ontology, *Chapter 59* of the *Kephalaia of the Teacher* indicates that the origins of illness were located in the abandonment of “the Garments, the Sons of the First Man” (59.148.24-25), who after the immediate ascent of their father (i.e. the First Man) from the abyss of the darkness, weep and ‘[become] sick (ϠϠNE²⁹) under the pressure of the weighty burden of all the works, until the end of time’ (59.149.12-13). Sickness is here the consequence of the elaborate demands which befall the Five Sons as a result of their abandonment in the realm of darkness. More specifically, the cause of the Sons’ collective ill-health is the emotional strain placed on them as a result of having been left behind in “the darkness of the abyss” after the First Man’s departure; their anxiety thereby making them more susceptible to the archontic powers who, as with the human body in *Chapter 70* as the *locus* for the warring powers, contribute to an intensification of ill-health and suffering. This cosmogonic version of the myth importantly demonstrates that being divine *and* holy does not mean that the Five Sons can escape falling ill.

This equivalence of holiness with illness is continued in a number of other Manichaean texts, most significantly in the remains of the canonical collection of Mani’s

BeDuhn, “The Domestic Setting of Manichaean Cultic Associations in Roman Late Antiquity,” *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 10 (2008) 259-74.

²⁷ Coyle, “Healing and the ‘Physician’,” 108.

²⁸ Crislip, *Thorns in the Flesh*, 23.

²⁹ See Sarah Clackson *et al.*, *Dictionary of Manichaean Texts*. Volume 1. Texts from the Roman Empire (Corpus Fontium Manichaeorum Subsidia II; Turnhout: Brepols, 1998) 158.

letters in Coptic from Kellis. The text referred to as P. Kellis Copt. 53 contains epistolographic material from at least three letters composed by Mani himself, portions of which provide an intriguing autobiographical insight into Mani's own health. The passage in question is taken from Mani's "Epistle of the Ten Words", and is drawn from Iain Gardner's reconstruction of a continuous translation of the text:

(30.24-31.08) I was very sick in my body (ⲛⲁⲓ ⲩⲱⲛⲉ ⲧⲟⲛⲟⲩ ⲡⲉ ⲁⲡⲁϭⲙⲁ). I did not find the way to spend a single hour to sit and hear it; nor also was I able to straighten out, because I was greatly pained. Indeed, further, when I listened to the words that you wrote for me in that letter, all my limbs slackened and worsened with me painfully in the anguish of my body. ... (51.17-52.23) What will I proclaim to you, my loved ones? It is your well-being (ⲛⲁⲩⲣⲉ) that I seek daily: the things that benefit your life I am proclaiming for you; so that you will live by them and become without fault. Indeed, my loved ones, I was obliged to write a mass of words for you this time; but it is God himself who knows that these little ones, whom you sent, came and found me in what pain! For I was sick in my body; and I strove to come forth from it, as I had no ease in it at all. For all of thirty years until today I was never sick like this occasion. And these little ones who had come: I wished only to proclaim the news to them by my mouth, and send to you without a letter. However, (thinking of) you, your heart grieves from the words of the brethren who are sick; Because of this I suffered myself a greater pain and have written for you these ten words that I would comfort your heart, my child. And I have suffered that I would give ease to my child. Know then: These words, I heard them in suffering; but you, receive them in joy and consent, and you reflect upon them!³⁰

The fragments of this text in Coptic form one part of P. Kellis Copt. 53, a single codex comprising over eighty fragments as eleven double-sided leaves.³¹ The codex as a collection of Mani's canonical epistles has been assigned a date around 360 C.E., although the original letters of Mani were composed in Syriac and date from his lifetime at some point in the third-century (from approximately 240 C.E. onwards). As Gardner notes, the fragments of this letter most likely formed part of the "Epistle of the Ten Words"—the ten words offered as consolation to the addressee at 51.18—listed as one of Mani's epistles by al-Nadīm.³² While a historical context for the concerns addressed by Mani is largely absent, it seems that the background for the "ten words" lay in Mani's receipt of a letter from a member of a nascent Manichaean community (location unknown), in which the author described the behaviour of

³⁰ Iain Gardner and Wolf-Peter Funk, eds., *Kellis Literary Texts*. Volume 2 (Dakhleh Oasis Project Monograph 15; Oxford: Oxbow, 2007), 74-5. Codicological considerations are addressed from 22-7.

³¹ Gardner and Funk, *Kellis Literary Texts*. Volume 2, 11.

³² Al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*. Translated Bayard Dodge, Volume II (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970) 799. See also, John C. Reeves, *Prolegomena to a History of Islamicate Manichaeism* (Comparative Islamic Studies; Sheffield: Equinox, 2011) 116, with commentary at n. 210.

a fellow member who, having “generated these wicked words” (32.4), prompted a major (unspecified) disturbance in the community. Mani’s “ten words”—i.e. the letter he writes back to the author—are thus intended to pour oil on some very troubled waters. Throughout, Mani seeks to strike a consolatory tone in the letter, calling on the addressee to remember happier times and to recall “your first faith that you had in your youth” (51.2-3). Beyond the remarkable fact that the codex preserves in translation some of the canonical remains of Mani’s letters, there are several points of interest raised by the fragments of this epistle. The disclosure by Mani of his own ill-health is seemingly strategic, and his empathy for the anguish of his followers is evident at numerous points. Most strikingly, Mani indicates that his physical pain grew more acute after hearing the news of the difficulties described by the author of an earlier letter: “Indeed, further, when I listened to the words that you wrote for me in that letter, all my limbs slackened and worsened with me painfully in the anguish of my body” (31.5-8); and later: “However (thinking of) you, your heart grieves from the words of the brethren who are sick. Because of this I suffered myself a greater pain and have written for you these ten words that I would comfort your heart, my child” (52.14-19)). In this sense, the cause of Mani’s pain being an emotive response to an unspecified rupture in communal relations among his followers, bears some comparison with the fracturing of the archetypal divine family (i.e. the departure of the First Man) in Chapter 59 of the *Kephalaia* discussed above, as the cause for the collective sickness of the Five Sons. The disclosure of his illness seems quite deliberate, and raises the question of why a religious authority like Mani would speak about his own bodily illness in a letter; Mani is writing as “Mani the living, the apostle of Jesus Chrestos” (12.1-2) on behalf of the “God of Truth” in whom Mani has “sealed” all believers (12.10-14).³³ An answer may be found in considering the place of illness as “a marker of moral and theological meaning”³⁴ in the religious milieu of Late Antiquity. With reference to the place of illness in early Christian literature, Andrew Crislip has stated recently:

Late ancient Christians—ascetics and their observers—needed to make sense of illness as part of the ascetic or self-forming practice of Christianity ... In the eyes of some, illness came to be regarded as a useful component of Christian asceticism, even

³³ For the ‘God of Truth’ as a marker of Manichaean identity and authorship, see Iain Gardner, “Personal Letters from the Manichaean Community at Kellis,” in *Manicheismo e Oriente Cristiano Antico* (ed. Luigi Cirillo and Alois van Tongerloo; Louvain: Brepols, 1997) 77-94.

³⁴ Crislip, *Thorns in the Flesh*, 81.

the highest form of asceticism. Others presented health as the surest signifier of ascetic sanctity. Still others withheld judgment.³⁵

Without engaging in the broader, taxonomic debates about Mani's religion as a late antique form of Christianity,³⁶ the broader point of Crislip's argument applies to the disclosure of Mani's ailing condition in P. Kellis Copt. 53: namely, that there was always something to profit from a holy man's misery (cf. Paul's admission in Gal. 4.13, οἴδατε δὲ ὅτι δι' ἀσθένειαν τῆς σαρκὸς εὐηγγελισάμην ὑμῖν τὸ πρότερον³⁷). However, Mani's disclosure in this regard should not really strike us as being all that puzzling especially when we consider both the literary and historical context for displays of ascetic endurance in the face of suffering. In terms of literary context, Mani's admission of ill-health is intimately linked, I suggest, with handling the "Epistle of the Ten Words" as a type of consolatory text, in which the quality of empathy for the well-being of others is paramount.³⁸ Mani's efforts to console in the letter could indeed be taken as evidence for the religion's self-forming practices, principally as an indication of Mani's emergent sanctity within early Manichaeism, and in particular the unfolding of his persona as the Paraclete, the teacher-comforter figure which Mani appears to have first laid claim to in his *Living Gospel*.³⁹ We could go further by suggesting that the theme of consolation, and in particular the call to "carry a burden" or "bear up" under illness and suffering which are evident throughout Mani's address in the "Epistle of the Ten Words",⁴⁰ were major concerns for him and thereby placed Mani squarely in the prevailing ascetic milieu of Late Antiquity. The emergence of endurance (ὑπομονή/ὑπομένω) as the cardinal ascetic virtue in post-classical and early Christian literature (e.g. in martyrological narratives) signified the transformation of a repertoire of passive behaviours (endurance, long-suffering etc.) into the "active resistance" of the body to physical torture and suffering inflicted by the (Roman) state on followers of an illegitimate

³⁵ Crislip, *Thorns in the Flesh*, 23.

³⁶ Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism*, 2-24.

³⁷ For commentary, see John C. Thomas, *The Devil, Disease and Deliverance. Origins of Illness in New Testament Thought* (Cleveland: CPT Press, 2010) 44-6.

³⁸ On the manifestations and concerns of ancient consolatory literature, see J. H. D. Scourfield, "Towards a Genre of Consolation," in *Greek and Roman Consolations. Eight Studies of a Tradition and its Afterlife* (ed. Han Baltussen; Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2013) 1-36.

³⁹ Al-Biruni, *Al-Athar al-Baqiya 'an al-Qurun al-Khaliya* 207. Translated Carl Eduard Sachau, *The Chronology of Ancient Nations* (London: W.H. Allen, 1879) 190. See also, Reeves, *Prolegomena*, 94-8; and, Johannes van Oort, "The Paraclete Mani as the Apostle of Jesus Christ and the Origins of a New Church," in *The Apostolic Age in Patristic Thought* (ed. Anthony Hilhorst; Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 70; Leiden: Brill, 2004) 139-157.

⁴⁰ N.b. in P. Kell. Copt. 53 alone, 'bear/bearing up' (ⲙⲓ ⲁⲣⲏⲏ) makes six appearances at 53.31.9; 42.7,14,19,25; 44.9-10.

pre-Constantinian Christianity.⁴¹ Whilst Mani's comprehension of the role of physical and emotional endurance in shaping the ascetic identity of his own theology shared features with certain broader trends in the ascetic landscape of the period, it was the ability to endure the pains of ill-health which marked out his own contribution to the ongoing debate about how religious meaning could be extracted from the travails of the body. In this regard therefore, Mani must be viewed as one of the earliest innovators in aligning illness with ascetic endurance and holiness.⁴² Whilst violence, e.g. torture and rape, inflicted by external agencies on the bodies of recalcitrant Christians conditioned the explication of *hypomonē* in *Passiones* and related literature, in the letters of Mani from Kellis we witness something subtly different. Here, illness replaces violence as the causative force eliciting displays of ascetic endurance. The cosmic, archontic origins of illness as presented in the *Kephalaia* indicate that for Mani and his followers, ill-health was also however caused by an agency hostile to the body, even if at times the body was sympathetic to demonic influence.⁴³ A form of resistance to these forces for Mani and his followers may, therefore, have entailed maintaining a semblance of good health in the face of the overwhelming odds stacked against the Manichaean body and soul.⁴⁴ As the documentary sources discussed in the second half of this paper indicate in unequivocal fashion, the Manichaeans of fourth-century Kellis acknowledged the need to maintain their own well-being in order to ensure the continued functioning of their community: beyond such practical considerations, the awareness of Manichaeans in this matter may also have been determined by the theological intuition that maintaining health thwarted in some way the ambitions of the powers of darkness. The Manichaean discourse on fortitude in the face of pain was not, however, entirely conditioned by the somatic effects of malevolent, cosmic forces. As we shall discuss below, later Manichaean literature (e.g. the Coptic Psalms) also reveals the influence of state-sponsored—Sasanian and Roman—antipathy in shaping the identity of Manichaeans as 'long-sufferers' in the face of religious persecutions.

⁴¹ See especially, Judith Perkins, "The Self as 'Sufferer,'" *HTR* 85 (1992) 245-72, and eadem, *The Suffering Self. Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (London: Routledge, 1995); and also Brent Shaw, "Body/Power/Identity: Passions of the Martyrs," *J ECS* 4 (1996) 269-312.

⁴² Cf. Crislip, *Thorns in the Flesh*, 15-35, which nevertheless does not mention Mani's contribution to the debate.

⁴³ Cf. Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism*, 118-122.

⁴⁴ On Manichaean ideas of the soul, see now Jason D. BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma 2. Making a 'Catholic' Self, 388-401 C.E.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

The ability and willingness to ‘bear up’ under pain and other trials is also a central plank in the accompanying ‘Enemy Letter’ (P. Kellis Copt. 53.41.18). Here, Mani recounts a recent betrayal in his community:

The word that our lord proclaimed with his mouth has been fulfilled with me, that ‘one who eats the salt with me has set his foot upon me’ (cf. John 13.18). I myself also, this thing has happened to me: One who eats salt with me at the evening table, my garments upon his body, set his foot upon me; just as an enemy would do to his enemy. All these things I have endured from my children and my disciples; they whom I saved from the bondage of the world and the bondage of the body. I took them from the death of the world. I, all these things I have borne and endured from time to time, from many people. (41.5-41.19)⁴⁵

Mani’s concern with expressing his own endurance in the face of adversity here and elsewhere presaged the importance of ‘long-suffering’ (ⲙⲛⲧⲁⲣⲱⲩⲏⲧ e.g. 44.13;15) in Manichaean literature, as for example in one of the ‘Psalms of the Wanderers’ from the Coptic *Psalm-Book* (141.1-143.34). Here endurance (ⲩⲱⲡⲟⲙⲟⲛⲏ) is given a cosmic-historical setting in Mani’s cosmogony and in the affairs of the Manichaean *ecclesia* which include the trials and tribulations of Mani himself and his prophetic forebears.⁴⁶

Thus, for Mani, illness appears to have been a purposeful ordeal which lay on a spectrum of trials and tribulations that could lead to the spiritual ennobling of the individual and the community more generally. Mani’s stamina in the face of terrible ordeals received legendary representation in the commemorations surrounding his imprisonment and death (his ‘crucifixion’) in the homiletic tradition of the church.⁴⁷ As the Psalm on endurance indicates, the valorisation of perseverance in the face of hardship was presented as a requisite for Manichaeans in their role as heirs of Mani and the true apostles (e.g. *Psalm-Book* 143. 23), which one imagines derived from the early history of religion as it faced successive persecutions in both Sasanian and Roman territories during the late third, and most of the fourth century and beyond.⁴⁸ The constructive meaning which Mani read into his own physical infirmity in the “Epistle of the Ten Words” thereby casts into greater relief the

⁴⁵ Gardner and Funk, *Kellis Literary Texts*. Volume 2, 76.

⁴⁶ Charles R. C. Allberry, ed., *A Manichaean Psalm-Book Part II* (Manichaean Manuscripts in the Chester Beatty Collection Volume 2; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1938). A more recent English translation of this psalm can be found in Iain Gardner and Samuel N. C. Lieu, eds., *Manichaean Texts from the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 240-44. For commentary, see André Villey, *Psaumes des errants. Écrits manichéens du Fayyūm* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1994) 211-235.

⁴⁷ See Nils A. Pedersen, ed., *Manichaean Homilies with a Number of Hitherto Unpublished Fragments* (Corpus Fontium Manichaeorum Series Coptica II; Turnhout: Brepols, 2006) 42-85.

⁴⁸ On the influence of the early, troubled history of Manichaeism on its literature, see especially Nils A. Pedersen, *Studies in the Sermon on the Great War. Investigations of a Manichaean-Coptic Text from the Fourth Century* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1996) 153-398.

attempts by the opponents of Manichaeism to defame Mani's reputation by ascribing to him a physical disability: e.g. the infamous stigmatising description from the Zoroastrian *Dēnkart* of Mani as "the crippled fiend", and the less pejorative description by al-Nadīm of Mani as suffering "a distortion of the foot".⁴⁹ Rather than regarding this simply as invented slander,⁵⁰ there are good grounds for believing that Mani did bear some impairment or injury which caused him severe pain. The important issue here is the recognition that Mani's pastoral persona in at least one of his letters was contingent on him disclosing the details of his own illness and consequent suffering, and the possible act of inversion which the opponents of Manichaeism undertook in transforming something affirmative and intrinsic to this persona into an aspersion.

3. Health and well-being in the Kellis documentary archive

Further instances of material from Kellis also offer a seemingly alternative insight into the attitudes to health and well-being of other individuals involved in practising the religion. The texts in question, designated 'documentary' by the editors of the archive,⁵¹ are letters exchanged between kinship groups who are primarily concerned with the practical concerns of daily life, e.g. greeting and enquiring about the well-being of people (e.g. the addressee of the letter or individuals known to the author and addressee), requests for items (e.g. food-stuffs, clothing, books, medicines) or requests for the acknowledgement of items sent previously. These are letters concerned with the exchange of news, gossip, matters of household economy, and material possessions; although, a substantial number of the letters demonstrate that these concerns were entwined with the religious obligations of the Manichaean faith.⁵² In the main, they show a familiarity with the theological and ecclesial terminology of the late antique Manichaean church in Egypt,⁵³ and were discovered in House

⁴⁹ Translation of the *Dēnkart* by Abraham Valentine Williams Jackson, *Researches in Manichaeism with Special Reference to the Turfan Fragments* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932) 205. For al-Nadīm, see Reeves, *Prolegomena*, 36-7, and the brief discussion of the translation of "crippled fiend" in the *Dēnkart* in n. 115.

⁵⁰ Cf. Nicholas J. Baker-Brian, "Between Testimony and Rumour. Strategies of Invective in Augustine's *De moribus manichaeorum*," in *The Purpose of Rhetoric in Late Antiquity. From Performance to Exegesis* (ed. Alberto J. Quiroga Puertas; Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013) 31-53.

⁵¹ Gardner, Alcock and Funk, *Coptic Documentary Texts*. Volume 1. All translations are taken from this volume.

⁵² See BeDuhn, "The Domestic Setting," 260.

⁵³ E.g. most prominently, P. Kell. Copt. 19 (Makarios to Matheos), P. Kell. Copt. 25 (Matthaios to Maria), P. Kell. Copt. 31; less prominently, 'Petros' letters, i.e. P. Kell. Copt. 38-41. N.b. the comments by Gardner, Alcock and Funk concerning the 'Petros' group: "[These] letters...do not have any particularly overt Manichaean sentiments, so that their religious affiliations are uncertain, except by inference. In general we presume such to be Manichaean in the absence of any conflicting evidence," 234.

3 of the Dakhleh Oasis site together with a range of Manichaean theological and liturgical texts (e.g. versions of the Coptic Psalms).⁵⁴

Many of these letters making requests for material items are in effect ‘begging letters’;⁵⁵ and where the evidence exists, these may be read in the context of Manichaean social relations. In brief, these social relations were defined by a complex series of reciprocal obligations between the Manichaean Elect and Hearers. From the latter’s side, Manichaean Hearers were required to supply alms—principally foodstuffs—to their co-religionists, specifically the Elect who were charged with the task of realising the soteriological aims of the religion by consuming the food in their daily ritualised meal.⁵⁶ Additionally, obligations also extended to providing hospitality and clothing for the itinerant Elect.⁵⁷ These relations and by extension the ‘begging’ implicit in the texts are clearly apparent in a number of letters, e.g. P. Kell. Copt. 31 and P. Kell. Copt. 32, where unnamed authors write to ‘my loved daughters’ (31), and ‘our loved daughter, the daughter of the holy church’ (32, the recipient Eirene), who are female catechumens of the faith from whom oil and wheat are sought as part of their religious responsibilities to the community. The operation of these social relations are less defined but no less apparent in other letters, for example those connected with the figures of Makarios and Maria—likely husband and wife—two Manichaeans who form a fixed point in an exchange of letters (P. Kell. Copt. 19-29: about which, see below). Makarios, together with Mattheos and Piene, the children of Maria, write often (e.g. P. Kell. Copt. 20, 22, 24, 25, 26, 29) to request food, clothing etc. from Maria in Kellis, while they remain engaged with religious and business matters in the Nile Valley. The men’s association with senior figures, likely members of the Elect, such as Lysimachos (e.g. P. Kell. Copt. 24), and an individual referred to as the Teacher (P. Kell. Copt. 25)—one of the most senior grades in the Manichaean *ecclesia*—suggest strongly that their requests to Maria are defined by her religious obligations to them and their associates; although, Maria’s spousal and maternal obligations to her family appear irretrievably woven with her religious commitments.

⁵⁴ On the broader issues involved in identifying the Manichaean provenance of the Kellis texts, see Iain Gardner and Samuel N. C. Lieu, “From Narmouthis (Medinet Madi) to Kellis (Ismant el-Kharab): Manichaean documents from Roman Egypt,” *JRS* 86 (1996) 146-69.

⁵⁵ See Franzmann, “Augustine and Manichaean Almsgiving,” 37.

⁵⁶ On the meal, see BeDuhn, *The Manichaean Body*, 163.

⁵⁷ Cf. Peter Brown, “Alms and the Afterlife: A Manichaean view of an early Christian practice,” in *East and West: Papers in Ancient History Presented to Glen W. Bowersock* (ed. T. Corey Brennan and Harriet I. Flower; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008) 145-158.

More broadly, the network of obligations and dependencies linking Manichaeans together as evidenced in the Kellis archive—specifically, the importance of those in a position to supply food and other essentials to believers—underlies the valorisation of good health in the letters: in light of the labours revealed in the letters, *e.g.* the gathering and preparation of food, the making of garments to be worn (*e.g.* P. Kell. Copt. 20. 33) etc., enquiries about, or expressions of hope for good health in the first instance would imply physical well-being, although the expression of concern with broader ideas of well-being should also be entertained, as seen in the use of the ‘Pauline’ formula of body, soul, and spirit, in P. Kell. Copt. 25 (as discussed below). Thus, illness was seen as a direct threat to the continuity of care offered by catechumens and other supporters of the faith in Kellis, and the fulfilment of duties which sustained Manichaean communities and cells beyond the village.⁵⁸

Thus, while the cache of letters naturally contains theological sentiments of an “otherworldly” nature, the letters indicate that the Manichaeans of Kellis did not have their eyes fixed only on the hereafter, wishing for release into, “a better world where the tragic opacities of normal society would be removed”:⁵⁹ instead, these are individuals fully engaged with the affairs of daily life. This point raises the broader issue concerning the integration of this type of evidence into the study of Manichaeism, and late antique religious history more generally. These are documentary texts, and the types of issues arising from them are different in the main from theological writings. This does not mean, however, that the conclusions reached in the course of analysing them should have little or no influence on the academic assessment of Manichaean theology from the period. Indeed, it is arguable that the documentary evidence for Manichaean activity and belief from Kellis provides a significant challenge to the enduring types of conclusions that scholars have drawn when analysing textual artefacts for this late antique religion; in particular, the sorts of typologies which emerge from analyses based on texts which were composed with the express intention of affirming elite identities and practices (*e.g.* liturgical, theological, and hagiographical writings). Returning to the original concern of Manichaeism’s ambiguity towards the body, the evidence for the attitudes of the catechumenate associated with Kellis to their own physical well-being presents a striking departure from a traditional reading of Manichaeism’s rejection of the body as a demonic shell, orientated as it has been around sources relaying elite (*ergo*, Elect) attitudes.

⁵⁸ On the quasi-institutional structures of Manichaeism in Egypt, see BeDuhn, “The Domestic Setting.”

⁵⁹ Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle. Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012) 159.

Of the thirty-six letters designated personal correspondence by the editors, twenty-two letters express some sort of sentiment relating to health and illness: an outline of references to health, illness, and related concerns in these letters is supplied in Table 1 below. The most frequently expressed type of sentiment in the Kellis letters with regard to health falls within the range of the epistolary opening (greeting), reception, and farewell formulae of letters: *e.g.* from the same Kellis letter (P. Kell. Copt. 15) are the following reception and farewell formulae, “There is no measuring the joy that came to me when I received your letter; all the more, for I learned about your health”, and “Be well and live for a long time”.⁶⁰ Such formulae were standard items in ancient epistolography across a range of linguistic traditions in, *e.g.* Greek, Demotic, Latin, Coptic etc.,⁶¹ although significant variations in the formulation of such sentiments even within a single linguistic group are apparent.⁶² However, further enquiries about the health and well-being of correspondents which appear not to be formulaic are also apparent in the Kellis archive (see the “Additional” column in Table 1 below). Furthermore, a number of letters also contain requests for medicine or acknowledgements of medicine received. Nevertheless, to what extent such enquiries and good wishes about health can be seen as sincere expressions of emotional interest is a controversial point. They have tended to be regarded as polite asides, *topoi* or “conventions that have largely lost their meaning.”⁶³ As a result largely of their use as model sentences copied by pupils learning to write,⁶⁴ the rote-pedagogical role of such formulae has meant that they have been studied primarily ‘as part of the development of epistolary *topoi*, modes of *politesse*, and rhetorical strategies.’⁶⁵

Inasmuch as such sentiments are formulaic, it is also the case that they have lately been reappraised by commentators seeking to understand more clearly the conversational role

⁶⁰ P. Kell. Copt. 15 (Horion to Hor) 7-9; 34-35 in Gardner, Alcock and Funk, *Coptic Documentary Texts*. Volume 1, 141-3.

⁶¹ For Coptic epistolography, see the exhaustive study by Anneliese Beidenkopf-Ziehner, *Untersuchungen zum koptischen Briefformular unter Berücksichtigung ägyptischer und griechischer Parallelen* (Würzburg: G. Zauzich, 1983). More recently, see Malcolm Choat, *Belief and Cult in Fourth-Century Papyri* (Studia Antiqua Australiensia Volume 1; Turnhout: Brepols, 2006) 101-113; Idem, “Early Coptic Epistolography,” in *The Multilingual Experience in Egypt, from the Ptolemies to the Abbasids* (ed., Arietta Papaconstantinou; Farnham: Ashgate, 2010) 153-178.

⁶² Cf. Choat, ‘Early Coptic Epistolography,’ 157.

⁶³ Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006) 29.

⁶⁴ See Raffaella Cribiore, “Greek and Coptic education in late antique Egypt,” in *Ägypten und Nubien in spätantiker und christlicher Zeit. Akten des 6. Internationalen Koptologenkongresses*, volume 2 (ed. Stephen Emmel, Martin Krause, Siegfried G. Richter and Sofia Schaten; Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1999) 279-86.

⁶⁵ Malcolm Choat, “Early Coptic Epistolography,” 154.

taken by ancient epistolography,⁶⁶ and the possibility that such conventions carried genuine emotional meaning in addition to revealing the prevailing values of those engaged in epistolary exchanges.⁶⁷ In relation to a number of letters from Kellis (e.g. P. Kell. Copt. 20; 32) farewell formulae have been utilised expressly, so it appears, to elicit updates from addressees about the state of their own health, thereby further indicating the importance of formulae in the context of the exchange of letters as a form of conversation. Thus, the assessment of formulae as *topoi* has to some extent been replaced by the assessment of formulae as authentic expressions of solicitude. As Roger Bagnall has noted,⁶⁸ the ubiquity of ill-health in late antique Egypt in all likelihood meant that such sentiments were not simply polite asides; rather, they comprised “very strong statements”⁶⁹ of emotional sincerity indicating the high regard in which good health was held. Should such a reading of the letters from Kellis be valid, then the findings with regard to the Manichaeans residing there are remarkable in light of the long-standing scholarly assumptions about the body-hating attitudes of late antique gnostic Christians, as noted above.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, context remains indispensable when appraising emotive and familiar language. In determining whether epistolary formulae wishing good health were—borrowing the words of Raymond van Dam—signs of affection rather than affectation,⁷¹ it is important to consider a number of other details in the letters, e.g. the overall reason for composition, the nature of the relationship between the correspondents (largely dependent on developing a reliable prosopography, evidence permitting), the language and allusions employed, and other seemingly incidental details; whether, for instance, anything was sent with the letters such as food, clothing, medicine, which may be construed as tokens of affection.⁷² In this way, a more sincere impression of the formulaic language so often employed in these letters may come to light. In this regard, our task is partially assisted by the

⁶⁶ Malcolm Choat, “Early Coptic Epistolography,” 162-3.

⁶⁷ Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, 28, outlines the parameters for reading letters within the context of historical research into emotions. With a focus on the epistolary evidence for fourth-century Egypt, see the remarks by Roger S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 184-6. Andrew Crislip has most recently offered an interpretation of the monastic archive from Hathor which eschews a conventional reading of such formulae as simply *topoi* in *Thorns in the Flesh*, 41-44, with provocative results. Cf. Wendy Mayer, review of Andrew Crislip, *Thorns in the Flesh*, *BMCR*, 2013.05.03, <http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2013/2013-05-03.html> Accessed December 2013

⁶⁸ Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 184.

⁶⁹ Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 185. See also the detailed survey by Walter Scheidel, *Death on the Nile. Disease and the Demography of Roman Egypt* (Mnemosyne Supplements 228; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1-117.

⁷⁰ Cf. Williams, *Rethinking ‘Gnosticism’*, 116-138.

⁷¹ Raymond an Dam, *Families and Friends in Late Roman Cappadocia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003) 133.

⁷² van Dam, *Families and Friends*, 135.

survival of a cache of letters detailing aspects of family relations associated with a certain Makarios, a Manichaean residing in the Nile Valley, with members of his family living in or associated with Kellis. This particular collection of letters demonstrates the largely domestic-familial context for Manichaean activity in this region during the first quarter of the fourth-century,⁷³ with Maria and her household forming the nucleus around the activities of her sons and husband in and beyond the village. The Makarios group of letters is arguably the most integral collection of letters from Kellis, comprising around thirteen letters (nos. 19-29; including 30 and 52⁷⁴), including three fragmentary texts (P. Kell. Copt. 23; 27; 28) which the editors have suggested also belong to the group.⁷⁵ The cache provides a suitable starting point for gauging the exchange of sentiments between correspondents, and where exchanges about one another's health, while often brief, were nevertheless essential items in the overall concerns of these letters.

The nature of the kin relations in evidence in the Makarios letters indicate strongly that while formulaic statements were employed to elicit or provide updates on health, they were unlikely to have been either intended or received as epistolary embellishments. Rather, one of the main reasons for writing letters in the first place was to receive news about the state of health of family members and associates.⁷⁶ In view of its relative integrity as an archive-in all likelihood maintained by Maria, the wife or sister of Makarios⁷⁷-the letters associated with Makarios provide suitable subject matter for pursuing the points outlined above. One caveat, however: relationships between correspondents which are defined by consanguinity and affinity may result in different styles and concerns of epistolary exchange from the correspondence of people who are not related, and thus with the Makarios letters we may (or indeed, may not) gain an exaggerated impression of a correspondent's concerns for their addressee's health; although who is related to whom in the documentary archive is often difficult to judge even within defined family groupings (e.g. the

⁷³ See especially BeDuhn, "The Domestic Setting."

⁷⁴ Gardner, Alcock and Funk, *Coptic Documentary Texts*. Volume 1, 56.

⁷⁵ Gardner, Alcock and Funk, *Coptic Documentary Texts*. Volume 1, 154-6.

⁷⁶ An important (although oft-neglected) point made by Hubert Steinke, "Krankheit im Kontext. Familien-Gelehrten-und Patientenbriefe in 18. Jahrhundert," in *Krankheit in Briefen im deutschen und französischen Sprachraum. 17.-21. Jahrhundert* (ed. Martin Dinges and Vincent Barras; Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2007) 35-44.

⁷⁷ See the insightful analysis of Maria's role in Kellis by Jennifer Sheridan Moss, "Women in Late Antique Egypt," in *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World* (ed. Sharon L. James and Sheila Dillon; Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World; Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012) 510-11. Prosopographical details for Maria are given in Gardner, Alcock and Funk, *Coptic Documentary Texts*. Volume 1, 32-3; see also the details for Makarios and his relationship to Maria in the same volume at 32: "[Makarios as] most probably the husband of Maria. However, we do note that he consistently refers to her as 'sister' (not in itself surprising)."

relationship of Maria and her children to Makarios), a difficulty compounded by the fact that many letters seem to indicate the extra-familial adoption of family titles by correspondents and recipients (e.g. father, mother, daughter, brother) who are not biologically related to one another, and which seem to be determined in part by religious (Manichaean) and/or social onomastic practices.⁷⁸ The following is therefore offered as some brief, preliminary remarks on matters relating to health and illness in three letters from this group.

i) P. Kell. Copt. 19. This is a letter from Makarios to his son Matheos (also spelt Mathaios, or Matthaïos) in which the language of familial affection coalesces with the obligations of religious duty: it is the letter of a father to his son, although one where their relationship is framed by their joint commitment to the teachings of Mani. Matheos would appear to be based in Kellis, and Makarios is writing from the Nile Valley—where he may be engaged in the affairs of the religion⁷⁹—with three main concerns: Firstly, to enquire about Matheos’ progress as a student of theology, and to remind Matheos to complete his “Indicative Reading”, the (Manichaean) Psalms, the *Judgement of Peter*, the *Apostolos*, the *Great Prayers*, the *Sayings*, and the *Prostrations*;⁸⁰ secondly, to request various items from Matheos, and also from Maria (who is addressed directly from 19.28); and thirdly, to ask Matheos to send greetings to other relatives and associates (19.45) Along with requests (to Maria) for clothing and money (including a request to sell her loom to pay for Matheos’ fare (?)), Makarios also requests Matheos to send ‘a good remedy’ (19. 21 ΟΥΤΙΑΝΑΚΙC ΕΝΑΝΟΥC), evidently a reference to a medicament required by Makarios himself or someone associated with him in the Nile Valley. P. Kell. Copt. 19 addresses a hope for good health to a group of women, referred to by Makarios as his daughters and sisters—most likely female Manichaean devotees (catechumens) in Kellis⁸¹—in the form of the following greeting at 19. 65-68, ‘Tell them that I myself am very grateful to them, and God is my witness that ... all in my prayers and my supplications. I [remember] you very very much, praying for your health.’

ii) P. Kell. Copt. 20: An important letter from Makarios to Maria which exposes some of the conventions surrounding the exchange of letters among Manichaeans, in particular the

⁷⁸ Cf. Eleanor Dickey, “Literal and Extended Use of Kinship Terms in Documentary Papyri,” *Mnemosyne* 57 (2004) 131-76.

⁷⁹ See the entry for ‘Makarios’ in Gardner, Alcock and Funk, *Coptic Documentary Texts*. Volume 1, 31-2.

⁸⁰ For commentary see Gardner, Alcock and Funk, *Coptic Documentary Texts*. Volume 1, 163.

⁸¹ Cf. the note on Drousiane (19.62) in Gardner, Alcock and Funk, *Coptic Documentary Texts*. Volume 1, 23-4. See also BeDuhn, “The Domestic Setting,” 261.

anxieties arising from letters which remained unanswered. Concerning the Makarios group of letters, however, where family relationships coalesce alongside religious obligations, concerns expressed about letters that remain unanswered do offer up a degree of ambiguity. For instance, where Makarios expresses such anxieties, we are justified in reading his concerns in two ways: firstly, that as Maria's husband, his concern is for her welfare as his wife, and not having heard from her, he is justifiably worried; and secondly, that his anxieties are determined by the social-religious relations which also define their relationship, specially the running of the household in Kellis on which Makarios, his family, and possibly other Manichaeans are dependent. Both readings are not exclusive, and in the context of P. Kell. Copt. 20, we are justified in seeing both spousal and religious concerns as lying behind Makarios' pleas for information. However, the context for Makarios' concerns is relatively clear: he wants to receive some assurance from Maria that she is well, together with the corollary assurance that the household in Kellis continues to serve his family's needs. Promised items not received by Makarios—e.g. a garment for Mathaios who is now with his father Makarios in the Nile Valley, together with a cushion and a book requested by Makarios—lead to expressions of concern about Maria's health: "Now indeed, do not neglect to send (a message) to us about your health, so that we can leave our house" (20.39); "I am astonished how I entrusted you: 'Do not neglect to send (a message) to me about your health' ... and you did not send a greeting to us at all (20.53)". Whatever the reason for the lack of response on Maria's part in Makarios' letter, the same complaint against her is made by her son Matthaïos writing from Hermopolis to Maria in Kellis in P. Kell. Copt. 26. In light of Makarios' concern for the running of the household, i.e. Maria's ability and willingness to despatch necessary items to her family, we would be amiss not to take seriously Makarios' need for an assurance of Maria's health.⁸²

iii) P. Kell. Copt. 25: A letter of pronounced complexity, Matthaïos writes to update his mother Maria about his situation in Antinoou following an earlier request by Maria to, "Tell me about how you are" (25.41). Matthaïos informs his mother about the success of Piene—his brother and Maria's other son—specifically Piene's adoption by the Teacher (one of the senior Manichaeans in Egypt⁸³)—and Piene's role in the Manichaean church as a reader. In the course of the letter, Matthaïos divulges news of the mourning for 'my great mother' by

⁸² Cf. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 185.

⁸³ See the comments in Gardner, Alcock and Funk, *Coptic Documentary Texts*. Volume 1, 53.

members of the community.⁸⁴ The ceremony of remembrance for this figure seems to precipitate Matthaïos' anxiety about the health of Maria, and he instructs her, "Do not neglect to write to us about your health" (25.53). Matthaïos greets Maria and her associates with a distinctive prayer: "This is my prayer to the Father, the God of Truth, and his beloved son the Christ, and his Holy Spirit, and his light angels: That he will watch over you together, you being healthy in body, joyful in heart and rejoicing in soul and spirit, all the time we pass in the body, free from any evil and any temptation by Satan and any sickness of the body" (25.12-22).⁸⁵ As Iain Gardner, Alanna Nobbs and Malcolm Choat have noted, this tripartite formulation of body-soul-spirit (and variations thereof) draws on the trichotomy of blessings from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians (1.Thess. 5.23), and is repeated in other letters from Kellis (see Table 1 below), thus becoming "a feature of the epistolary style in that religious community".⁸⁶ Matthaïos indicates to Maria that among a bundle of letters, including some from his father (i.e. Makarios), he has also included medicines (παρρη) for her. As evidence from a range of other letters demonstrates, the Manichaeans connected with Kellis were not averse to exchanging medicinal remedies in order to maintain their health. P. Kell. Copt. 19, 24, 25 and 26 all relate requests for, or the receipt of, remedies. For instance, in P. Kell. Copt. 26 (26.31) reference is made to an eye-salve (*collyrium*) for the treatment of an unspecified eye disease (see Table 1 below, for details of all other references). In light of this, Coyle's careful assertions—pertaining it should be noted to the Elect—that "some sources explicitly deny to the Manichaean any recourse to medical attention", and that "[s]uch references, however, are few and appear to stem exclusively from Eastern Manichaean sources"⁸⁷, require further nuance in light of the seeming circulation of medicinal remedies among Manichaeans in Egypt. Having said this, however, we should not overlook the importance attached to prayer as a "medium of healing"⁸⁸ across the spectrum of letters from Kellis (as noted in Table 1), which bear comparison with the instances of prayer in the context of healing as seen in the sources discussed by Coyle.

⁸⁴ See the note on P. Kell. Copt. 25. 52 in Gardner, Alcock and Funk, *Coptic Documentary Texts*. Volume 1, 193.

⁸⁵ On the implied demonic etiology of illness, see Ferngren, *Medicine and Health Care*, 59.

⁸⁶ Iain Gardner, Alanna Nobbs, Malcolm Choat. "P. Harr. 107: Is this another Greek Manichaean Letter?" *ZPE* 131 (2000) 118-124, (for comments on the trichotomy, 122-23). It is likely drawn from Mani's own epistolary "style", about which see Werner Sundermann, "A Manichaean Collection of Letters and a List of Mani's Letters in Middle Persian," in *New Light on Manichaeism* (ed. Jason David BeDuhn; NHMS 64; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 259-77 (at 272).

⁸⁷ Coyle, "Healing and the 'Physician'," 107-8.

⁸⁸ Coyle, "Healing and the 'Physician'," 109.

As the anxieties of Makarios and Matthaïos surrounding Maria's silences (20 and 26 respectively) indicate, it was enormously important for a correspondent to know that the person on whom they were dependent for so many of life's necessities was in good health. Thus, rather than such enquires being read as polite asides or even as signs of sycophancy in expectation of provender, the letter-writers routinely disclose their dependence on the continued good health of their correspondent for the 'perceived benefits' which they provide.⁸⁹ A reflection of the importance which a supportive (healthy) catechumen offered Manichaeans associated with the village, can be glimpsed beyond the letters associated with Makarios in P. Kell. Copt. 32, addressed to the "daughter of the holy church", the catechumen Eirene ("She whose deeds resemble her name, our daughter Eirene. It is I your father who writes to you" (32.14-15)). The author of the letter requests from Eirene measures of oil and wheat for "our brother" , and inquires about the general running of her affairs framed by allusions to Mt. 6. 19-20 ("She who has acquired for herself her riches and stored them in the treasuries, where moths shall not find a way, nor shall thieves dig through them to steal") and Mt. 24.43 ("for a person knows not at what hour the thief will come to dig through to the house"). The farewell statement by the writer of the letter is striking and would seem to encapsulate the conversational nature of ancient epistolography, where concerns about the health and well-being of an addressee are expressed in order to evoke a response from that person. Thus, the writer, having heard from someone that Eirene has been unwell, seeks news about the catechumen's health. The writer's dependence on Eirene is openly declared in the following claim: 'Indeed, I have heard that you are sick: since some days. I am grieving; but, praise God, they say that you are getting better. There is no health without your health (ΟΥΔΕΙΤΕ ΕΝ ΙΔΝ ΠΡΟΥΔΕΙΤΕ)! Live in God, our beloved daughter' (P. Kell. Copt. 32. 45-51).⁹⁰ We may take this concern for Eirene's health as a primary explanation of the broader valorisation of health in the Kellis archive: the context for which was social, and one where health was essential to the continued practice of the religion.

4. Conclusion

The epistolographic texts from Kellis reveal a valorisation not only of health but also of illness by Mani and his followers. The fragments of Mani's epistles translated and preserved by Egyptian Manichaeans of the fourth-century reveal the role played by Mani's own

⁸⁹ See the corresponding examples from the Melitian Hathor archive in Crislip, *Thorns in the Flesh*, 42.

⁹⁰ See the note on the translation of vv. 48-9 in Gardner, Alcock and Funk, *Coptic Documentary Texts*. Volume 1, 217.

disorder in influencing the presentation of his apostolic persona, both by Mani himself and his later followers. The importance of Mani's ability to 'bear up' under the ordeals of his life formed an important component in the broader identity of the Manichaean church in relation to its experiences of persecution during much of the late antique period. Conversely, the state of being healthy—however that was defined by the Kellis Manichaeans—was also assigned a significant degree of importance by Mani's followers. The frequent appearance of expressions such as 'I pray for your health', along with references to the exchange of medicines and other remedies – to be employed one assumes in order to either alleviate illness or maintain health – are indications of the value assigned to health by the Manichaeans associated with Kellis. Above all, however, the theological writings of Manichaean authors which convey negative portrayals of the body's origin and nature⁹¹ now need to be read alongside these other literary and documentary sources which reveal the valorisation of health and illness. In this way, assumptions about the absolute claims of Manichaean theology which emanate from the 'master discourse' of Manichaeism as first defined by Christian heresiology,⁹² can give way to a more complex understanding of a most complex late antique religion.

⁹¹ Cf. Coyle, "Healing and the 'Physician'," 107.

⁹² See Richard Lim, "The *Nomen Manichaeorum* and its Uses in Late Antiquity," in *Heresy and Identity in Late Antiquity* (ed. Eduard Iricinschi and Holger M. Zellentin; Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum 119; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008) 143-67, at 167.