Parallels between Coptic and Iranian Kephalaia: Goundesh and the King of Touran

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The discovery, in the first half of the twentieth century, of two caches of original Manichaean texts thousands of miles apart, opened a new era of research, but at the same time set the stage for a debate over the historical unity of Manichaeism. The ninth- to tenth-century Middle Iranian and Turkic text fragments of Turfan and the fourth- to fifth-century Coptic codices of Medinet Madi provide plenty of continuities and discontinuities to suit either side of the debate. Although the ‘canon’ of Mani’s own writings is largely absent from the recovered texts, it is at least presupposed in references found in both the Coptic and Iranian remains, and well beyond. These compositions of the founder anchored a common Manichaean tradition, as it moved out through missionaries sent both west and east in the third century.1 Yet the question remains: How long following Mani’s death did a unified Manichaean movement last, and missions to the Roman west and Asian east continue to receive instruction from the religion’s Mesopotamian headquarters? Had second and third generation Manichaeans in both mission areas participated in a single process of forming an institutionalized Manichaean Church with a common orthodoxy and orthopraxy? Or had western and eastern Manichaeans followed entirely separate developmental trajectories? The answer depends on finding evidence of a common post-Mani literary tradition in the Coptic and Iranian texts. In continuity with a number of recent studies that have devoted attention to literary connections across the Manichaean world,2 the Chester Beatty Kephalaia (hereafter 2 Ke) now supplies a fresh opportunity to explore this issue.3

As soon as readings from the Medinet Madi codices started to become available, researchers scoured them for parallels to the Turfan material. Basing themselves on the fascicles of the Berlin Kephalaia (hereafter 1 Ke) that had

1 On Mani’s Epistles as an example of the founder’s work preserved in both the Iranian and Coptic material, see Sundermann 2009(b) and Gardner 2013(c).
2 See, e.g. Gardner 2011.
3 See also Gardner, ‘Mani’s Last Days’, chapter 7 in this volume.
appeared before the second world war, Walter Henning and Mary Boyce identified a number of Turfan fragments as belonging to the same genre, and perhaps the same composition, as 1 Ke. In 1945, Henning published eight pages from a manuscript designated m135, four pages of which (Text b) contained material which Henning accurately characterized as ‘a text in the style of the Kephalaia’. It evidences two distinct kephalaia, the second of which retains its title: To Divide the Day into Three Parts. The other four pages contain the parable of the pearl-borer; and, given the latter’s presence in the same manuscript, Henning concluded that this too ‘formed part of a kephalaion, or in other words that it was supposed that Mani had narrated the story to his disciples’. Based on consultation with Henning, Boyce listed ten other fragments as belonging to the kephalaia-genre in her Catalogue: 149.II, 1346, 1964, 5671, 6005, 6030, 6032, 6040, 6041 and 8i80. The entry for m6032 indicates that its content (on the question of the limitation of foreknowledge to apostles, not given also to the elect) matches that of a then unpublished kephalaion from 1 Ke, given as ‘Ch. 147’. This was subsequently corrected by Werner Sundermann to k102.

Sundermann identified several other Iranian texts from Turfan that bore the hallmarks of the kephalaia-genre, in that Mani was presented as giving a certain teaching to an individual or an audience, rather than being quoted from his own written compositions. He could match some of these Turfan texts with specific passages from 1 Ke. Yet, based on his thorough study of all the Iranian texts in which Mani featured as a character and not an author, Sundermann sounded a cautionary note in his ‘Studien zur kirchengeschichtlichen Literatur der iranische Manichäer’ published in 1986. He observed that no certain literary connection could be demonstrated between Coptic and Middle Iranian texts in which Mani engages in the question-and-answer exchange typical of

4 Henning 1945.
5 Henning 1945: 466.
6 Boyce 1960: 147. M5671, 6032, and M6040 + 6041 were subsequently published in Sundermann 1981 along with additional related fragments. M6005 + 6030 were published (as text 38) in Sundermann 1973.
7 Sundermann 1986(c): 88; but when k147 was finally published by Funk in 1999 it was shown indeed to cover some of the same content.
8 E.g. m 4578, Sundermann 1981: 63–66, text 4a.5; which closely parallels content in k6 (1 Ke 30, 12–34, 12). For duplication of content see also k27. The relationship between the Parthian Sermon on the Light-Nous and k38 falls into a separate category, since the Parthian text, unlike the Coptic version (and Chinese Tractate), is not framed as an oral instruction by Mani, despite bearing the same wīfrās designation as other kephalaion-like Iranian texts.
9 Sundermann 1986(c).