CHAPTER THIRTEEN

SIMPLICIUS ON MANICHAEN COSMOGONY

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INTRODUCTION

Simplicius of Cilicia was a sixth century pagan philosopher and commentator on Aristotle. He was a member of a group of philosophers who preferred exile in Persia (531–533 CE) when the Platonic Academy in Athens was closed by order of the Emperor Justinian in 529 CE. Simplicius’ commentary on the *Encheiridion* (Manual) of the Stoic philosopher Epictetus furnishes us with one of only two refutations of the Manichaean system (although not specifically described as such) written from a pagan philosophical rather than Christian theological point of view. For long the standard edition of the Greek text of the extract from Simplicius, Commentary on the *Encheiridion* had been that of F. Dübner in *Theophrasti Characteres . . . Epicteti Enchiridion cum Commentario Simplici* in the Didot series (Paris 1840) 69.46–72.145. An English translation of the Commentary was made at the end of the seventeenth century; it is *Epictetus his morals, with Simplicius his comment, made English from the Greek* by G. Stanhope (London 1694) 207–214. A major landmark in the study of this unique polemic against the Manichaens is the article of Ilse Traut-Hadot, ‘Die Widerlegung des Manichäismus im Epiktetkommentar des Simplicios’, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 51 (1969) 31–57. This provides translation (in German) of almost the entire section against the Manichaean system as well as improved readings in the text of Didot.


This has now been completely surpassed by the same author’s major edition of the commentary of Simplicius: *Simplicius, Commentaire sur le Manuel d’Epictète—Introduction et édition critique du texte grec par Ilse-traut Hadot*, Philosophia Antiqua Vol. 66 (Leiden, 1996). This contains a long and masterly discussion of the section of the Commentary devoted to the refutation of the Manichaean system on pages 14–44.

Like Proclus, Simplicius criticizes the dualist system typified by the Manicheans without naming his adversary. There is no question, however, that Manichaeism was the intended target as the author is well-informed on several aspects of Manichaean cosmogony and his attack is not just aimed at dualism in general but in very specific details of the Manichaean cosmogonic myth. He even claims that he was citing their own words verbatim: Τά ἡτα γάρ ἐστιν αὐτῶν αὐτῶν τὰ ὁμιλητα (l. 44). An obvious question is: Where did Simplicius acquire this accurate knowledge of the Manichaean system? His brief sojourn in Persia in the company of other philosophers was a possibility, but he was unlikely to have been able to consult Manichaean texts in Middle Persian. Another possibility is that it was in Harran (Carrhae), the Roman frontier city which stayed pagan until the reign of Heraclius and where the philosophers might have sojourned on their return to the Byzantine Empire. 3 However, as texts like Capita VII *Contra Manichaeos* attributed to Zacharias of Mitylene show, there was still a considerable amount of genuine Manichaean material or summary of Manichaean teachings by their opponents available in the time of Justinian. (SNCL)

**Translation**

The only existing English translation of this section of Simplicius’ commentary on Epictetus *Enchiridion* (*Manual*) is the work of two scholars whose focus is on Neo-Platonism and provides minimal annotation. This new translation, which forms the bulk of the article, has been made from the Manichaean angle; this is reflected in the comments which elucidate the text with special emphasis on new light shed upon Mani’s religion from this source. It aims to produce a readable translation of Hadot 1996 with adjustments to her text and interpretation where it has been deemed

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