A Possible Liturgical Context for the First Hymn to Jesus in the Chinese Manichaean Hymnbook (Col. 6–44)

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The Chinese Manichaean Hymnbook is a fascinating work, but a rather neglected one, among commentators of Manichaean texts. Beside the pioneering studies of Ernst Waldschmidt and Wolfgang Lentz,\(^1\) Lin Wushu,\(^2\) and Peter Bryder,\(^3\) commentaries of such poetic hymns in Manichaean studies are rarely found today. And if Chinese texts are referred to in Manichaean studies, most of the references are usually taken from the Chavannes—Pelliot Treatise\(^4\) or the Chinese Compendium.\(^5\) The new translation into French of the Chinese Manichaean Hymnbook made by Lucie Rault in Paris has given us the opportunity to delve, in spite of our lack of competence in Chinese studies, into the content of some hymns that could be related to other known Manichaean works. Lucie Rault is a scholar in Chinese studies but also an ethnologist studying the history of musical instruments. Working in the Musée de l’Homme in Paris, she was Head of Collections of Musical Instruments before they were transferred into the cellars of the new Musée des Arts Premiers. Beside several books

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and articles on musical instruments, notably her seminal work on the Chinese cithara zheng, she is appreciated as a specialist of musical instruments that were used on the Silk Roads. As she is also known for her publications on Chinese traditional music, she has been encouraged by Professor Michel Tardieu, some years ago, to work on a French translation of the Chinese Manichaean Hymnbook. Last year, she presented her translation, among other works, in her “Dossier d’habilitation”. Lucie Rault likes translating Chinese texts into French. In her effort to render into French some of the poetic metaphors of the original text, she managed to express herself in a poetic way that could explain why Manichaeanst attracted so many new-comers to his singular religion.

This first translation into French of the Chinese Manichaean Hymnbook made by Lucie Rault gave us the idea to compare some strophes of the first Hymn to Jesus (col. 6–44) with other Manichaean sources, like the “Jesus Hymns” of the Dublin Coptic collections. Therefore, the purpose of this communication is limited: we would like to underline certain features of this hymn in order to propose a possible liturgical context. We will start with a few remarks about the literary composition of this hymn and will deal successively about different aspects of the figure of Jesus which could be compared to other Manichaean sources. This will lead us to propose a new hypothesis about a possible liturgical context.

1 The Literary Composition of This Hymn

As it is well known, the Chinese Manichaean Hymnbook is a compilation of different hymns chosen from Manichaean hymnbooks and imported into China. If one is to believe what the translator writes in the colophon (col. 417), the

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8 L. Rault, Musiques de la tradition chinoise (collection Musiques du monde), Paris 2000 (winning the Diapason d’Or of the magazine Diapason for outstanding performances of traditional Chinese music).

9 I would like to express all my appreciation to Lucie Rault who introduced me to the world of this hymnbook and without whom these lines could not have been written.