CHAPTER FOUR

NARRATIVE OPTIONS IN MANICHAEAN ESCHATOLOGY

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For he has set a difficult beginning over against a confused ending…
—Éphrem Syrus, The Second Discourse to Hypatius

A False Witness? Re-reading Turbo’s Account in the Acta Archelai

For centuries Turbo’s survey of the baroque Manichaean myth in the Acta Archelai was the true and accurate description of Mani’s teachings. His words had the authority of a direct testimony provided by an alleged disciple of the arch-heresiarch. The authenticity of the material was derived from a close chain of transmission, as Turbo’s account is presented as containing the teachings which Mani had imparted to his three major missionaries: Addas, Thomas, and Hermas. Yet the emergence throughout the twentieth century of original Manichaean texts out of the darkness of history initiated a process of corrosion and fissure upon Turbo’s picture of Mani’s doctrines. In subsequent scholarly editions of the text Turbo’s words became heavily annotated with

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1 This paper was originally presented at the V Congresso Internazionale di Studi sul Manicheismo, Napoli, 3–6 Settembre 2001. The present form is a revised and expanded version. My personal thanks to Barbara Rissinger for opening the way.

2 See Ries 1988, 17–57, esp. 21–23. Cf. also Scopello 2000. The first modern scholar who questioned the authenticity of the Acta was Isaac de Beausobre (Beausobre 1734, 9–154) who arrived with his keen critical eye at the following conclusion, indeed revolutionary for his time: “Toutes les Réflexions, que je viens de faire, m’ont convaincu, que les Disputes d’Archélai avec Maniche, ne sont au fond qu’un Roman, composé par un Grec, dans la vue de réfuter le Manichésme, & de donner à la Foi Orthodoxe l’avantage d’en avoir triomphé, en confondant le Chef de l’Hérésie, qui la défendoit en personne.” (Beausobre 1734, 152).

3 Turbo is introduced as the disciple of Addas (Allen 4.3).

4 Allen 13.4 (= Epiphanius, Panarion 66.31.8).
references to parallel passages, concepts, or formulations in “authentic” Manichaean works.\(^5\)

I would like to draw attention to a detail in Turbo’s description of Manichaean eschatology whose anchoring in “authentic” Manichaean texts has been strongly questioned. The passage describes the closure of the cosmic conflict between Darkness and Light, the last events of the universal drama, after the Great Fire has consumed the whole world. The two versions of the text, however, do not agree on this important detail of the story. The Greek text cited by Epiphanius differs from the Latin translation of the work in a single word which, nevertheless, gives a completely different semantic turn to this dramatic final scene:

- **Greek text:**\(^6\) And after this [sc. the destruction of the cosmos by the great fire] there will be a restoration of the two natures, and the archons will occupy their own realms below, while the Father will occupy the realms above, and have received his own back.\(^7\)

- **Latin text:**\(^8\) After this will be the restoration of the two heavenly bodies and the princes will live in their lower regions, and the father in the higher, recovering his own possessions.\(^9\)

The two minimally different versions of Turbo’s account raise the question of authenticity. The reference in the Latin version to the \textit{restitutio} of the “two heavenly bodies” [i.e. the sun and the moon] makes little sense, as there has been no description in the text of any previous corruption of the luminaries. It is therefore highly probable that Epiphanius’ Greek quotation is the original form of the text. The Latin \textit{luminarium} is ultimately a misprision of the Greek \textit{φύσεων}.\(^10\)

It is interesting to see how the Greek version of Turbo’s account describes the final stage of Manichaean eschatology as a “restoration of the two natures” (\textit{ἀποκατάστασις τῶν δύο φύσεων}), a final separation

\(^{\text{5}}\) See the dense and learned comments by Holl in his edition of the text (Holl 1933, 53–72). Cf. also the meticulous annotation of the text in Riggi 1967 and those by Lieu in Vermes 2001, 44–58.

\(^{\text{6}}\) Translation by Williams 1994, 253.


\(^{\text{8}}\) Translation by Vermes 2001, 58.

\(^{\text{9}}\) \textit{I} 13.3 (ed. Beeson 1906): Et post haece \textit{restitutio erit duorum luminarium} et principes habitabunt in inferioribus partibus suis, pater autem in superioribus, quae suae sunt recipiens.

\(^{\text{10}}\) See Beeson 1906, 17.