An-Nadim informs us that the Manichaeans left Baghdad in the reign of the Caliph al-Muqtadir. This was from the year 908 to the year 932, a time window of twenty-four years. However, the great French Islamicist Louis Massignon wrote in *The Passion of al-Hallaj* that the Manichaean “patriarch, who was tolerated at Ctesiphon, the Sassanid capital (with the symbolic title of ‘Babel’), was watched closely by the Muslim police from the very beginning of the conquest; and ended up by being exiled to Soghdiana precisely in 296/908.”¹ Massignon did not explain how he knew the precise year. His translator, Herbert Mason, told me that he did not know either. Nevertheless, by long reflection (and it takes a long time to go through those four volumes of Massignon’s), the logic of Massignon’s statement becomes quite clear and the details that become apparent are rather interesting.

It should be noted that Massignon was very well informed on Manichaeism. Al-Hallaj, Massignon’s hero, was executed for Manichaeism in the year 922. Before Massignon, it was assumed by scholars that al-Hallaj really had been a Manichaean. In 1902, E. G. Browne wrote, “what we learn [of Hallaj’s writings] as to the sumptuous manner in which they were written out, sometimes with gold ink, on Chinese paper, brocade, silk and the like, and magnificently bound, reminds us strongly of the Manicheans. In short, as to the extreme unorthodoxy of this Persian, whose near ancestors had held the Magian faith, there can be little doubt…”² Not to mention that Hallaj’s actual doctrines cleverly weave Manichaeism into Islam, and his cryptic statements, like “I am an orphan but I have a Father,” glow with double meaning in the light of modern scholarship.

Yet, in the new edition of the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, in the article *Nur* (“Light”), we read: “The first representatives of a metaphysics of light in Islam readily fell under the suspicion of Manichaeism ... many mystics also (e.g., al-Halladj, according to Massignon, Passion 150–1, wrongly) were accused of this dualism.” Wrongly accused of Manichaeism? Now, after Massignon, we find that the contemporary authorities who tried al-Hallaj twice with deliberations that ran for years in the tenth century were misinformed!

What Massignon accomplished was to posthumously argue as a lawyer in a Court of Appeals for al-Hallaj and to acquit him of the accusations and judgment of the original trial in Baghdad. In doing so, Massignon learned a great deal about the Manichaeans and went so far as to calculate how much lettuce – the Manichaean staple – had to be grown in ‘Iraq to feed what he called Hallajians (432 Hectares were used to grow lettuce for the “Hallajians” of Baghdad). That is why he knows “precisely” when the Archegos left Baghdad, because, as he says, already in 910 “Hallajians” were being rounded up and arrested. This is a reconstruction of his deductions, along with some choice additions that Massignon did not know, which further the argument.

*The Palace Intrigue of 908*

Al-Muqtadir, the 18th ‘Abbasid Caliph, succeeded his elder brother al-Muktafi on 13 Qa’dah 295/August 14, 908 when he was thirteen years old. He was deposed soon after, for a day, on 20–21 Rabi‘ 296/December 17–18, 908, by his cousin ‘Abu-l-Abbas ibn al-Mu’tazz al-Muntasif bi-Llah, and, before the end of his reign, for three days (February 28 – March 2, 929), by his brother al-Qahir bi-Llah. Al Muqtadir was finally killed in 320/932.

Ibn al-Mu’tazz (861–908), the grandson of the Caliph al-Mutawakkil, was the son of the Caliph al-Mu’tazz, who himself had been put on the throne in 866 until 869 by the Turkish Guards of Samarra’ when the Caliph al-Musta’in fled from them to Baghdad. A poet, he wrote “The Epistles,” a miniature epic of 450 iambic couplets celebrating the reign of his cousin, the Caliph al-Mu’tadid, which Browne called the “nearest approximation to an epic poem to be found in Arabic

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