ELCHASAI AND MANI

BY

A. F. J. KLIJN AND G. J. REININK

In the Fihrist, a work written by al-Nadim at the end of the tenth century, Mani's father is said to have become a member of the sect of the Mughtasilah. At the age of four Mani too was admitted into this group. In a passage devoted to the Mughtasilah in the same work we read that "their head is known as al-Hasih (Elchasai) and it is he who instituted their sect". Until recently it was generally denied that there was any relationship between Elchasai and the Mughtasilah, since the ideas of this sect deviated from those of the Elchasaites as can be found in Hippolytus, Eusebius and Epiphanius.

After the discovery of an original Manichaean manuscript, the Kölnner Codex, this opinion has had to be abandoned. This work, which deals among other things with Mani's youth among a baptist sect, also states that Elchasai was its founder (ἀρχηγός). As a result some scholars have

---

2 Dodge, o.c., 811.
4 See Hippolytus, Refut. 9,13,1-17,2 and 10,29,1-3; Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 6,38; Epiphanius, Pan.19, about the Osseaens, and 53, about the Sampsaears, cf. Anaceph. t.3,53, and in the passage about the Ebionites 30,3,2 and 30,17,4-6. Later, secondary information: Methodius, Conv. 8,10; Augustine, De haer. 32; Praedestinatus 1,32; Theodoretus, Eccl. hist. 2,7; Georgius Monachos, Chron. breve 3,157; John Damascene, De haer. 53; and Theodor bar-Khonai, Lib. schol., p.307.
concluded that Mani must have been influenced by every idea attributed to the Elchasaites by the early church fathers. This conclusion does not take into account the problem that the deviation between the ideas of the Mughtasilah and the Elchasaite doctrine has still not been resolved. Moreover, hardly anything has been said about that Elchasaite doctrine and the contents of the Manichaean papyrus up to now. But before reaching any conclusions about the relationship between Elchasai and Mani, it is necessary to examine both the contents of al-Nadim's words about the Mughtasilah and those of the papyrus, and then to compare the result with remarks on the Elchasaite faith found in ecclesiastical authors.

The Mughtasilah are mentioned for the first time in a passage on Mani's youth. When Mani's father, Futtuq, was in a pagan temple, he heard a voice shout: "O Futtuq, do not eat meat, do not drink wine and do not marry." This was repeated several times during the following three days. Not long afterwards Futtuq met the group known as Mughtasilah.

All this happened at a time when Mani was as yet unborn. But at an early age he too joined the sect. As a young boy he spoke words of wisdom but in his twelfth year his "companion" said to him: "Leave this cult for thou art not one of its adherents. Upon thee are laid purity and refraining from bodily lusts, but it is not yet time for thee to appear openly because of thy tender years." When Mani had completed his twenty-fifth year his "companion" appeared to him again and it was after this that he started to preach.

This is all to be found about Mani and the Mughtasilah in the Fihrist. However, the three instructions to Mani's father are mentioned again in a passage about the way to enter Mani's religious community. "He who

---

6 See Henrichs–Koenen, o.c., 158–160, and G. Quispel, Mani the Apostle of Jesus Christ, in: _Epiktasis, Mélanges Patristiques offerts au Card. J. Daniélou_ (Paris 1972) 667–672, p.668: "In this papyrus it is stated that Mani from his fourth till his twenty-fifth year was a member of the Jewish Christian sect of the Elkesaites in Southern Babylonia. So Mani once was a Jewish boy, circumcised and educated in the law ... Probably his parents too were Jewish." R. N. Frye, The Cologne Greek Codex about Mani, in: _Ex Orbe Religionum. Studia Geo Widengren oblata I_, Studies in the History of Religions (Supplements to Numen) XXI (Leiden 1972) 424–429, p.428–429, gives an uncritical summary of the remarks in Henrichs–Koenen.

7 Dodge, o.c., 773–774.

8 In the papyrus σφυγής, see the discussion about the idea in Henrichs–Koenen, o.c., 161,189.

9 Dodge, o.c., 774.