MANI'S DISCIPLE THOMAS AND THE PSALMS OF THOMAS

By

F. FORRESTER CHURCH AND GEDALIAHU G. STROUMSA

Upon their publication in 1938, the Psalms of Thomas were ascribed by their editor C. R. C. Allberry to Thomas the disciple of Mani. In this he was followed by T. Säve-Söderbergh, who concludes in his seminal study of the Psalms that “the Thomas to whom the Psalms of Thomas are ascribed is certainly Mani’s disciple of that name.” To determine just how far this positive identification between Mani’s disciple and the Psalms of Thomas is to be trusted, we have drawn up the following brief examination of the evidence concerning him and the conclusions that have been based upon it.

The locus classicus for a description of Mani’s early disciples has long remained Hegemonius’ Acta Archelai. In their entirety the Acta are preserved only in a Latin translation, though Epiphanius, in chapter sixty-six of the Panarion, quotes them at length in the original Greek to document his attack upon the Manichaeans. Both accounts mention three disciples: Thomas, Addas, and Hermas. The Acta first report that Mani sent Thomas to Syria, Addas to the East, and Hermas to Egypt, where they purportedly remained preaching Mani’s gospel “until today.” However, later in the same text, Thomas is placed in Egypt and Addas in Scythia, while Hermas stays with Mani. This apparent contradiction is not resolved by simple recourse to Epiphanius. Although he records only the former of the above tales, he includes two further variants upon them. One connects Thomas with Judaea, Addas with the North, and Hermas with Egypt. The other states that all three were sent by Mani to the locale of Jerusalem to pirate Christian scriptures. This, in effect, is the sum-total of all that the Acta and Epiphanius have to say concerning Mani’s disciples.

Tracing this tradition through the writings of later heresiologists dependent upon the Acta Archelai, one encounters a number of slight but significant modifications. Cyril of Jerusalem lists the three disciples as
Thomas, Baddas, and Hermas, without mention of their travels.\textsuperscript{10} Theodoret drops Hermas altogether, sends an Aldas to Syria, and Thomas to India,\textsuperscript{11} while oriental Christian sources list the three disciples as Thomas, Addas, and Mari (or Maradi), associating Thomas again with India and Addas with Yemen, with Mari remaining by Mani's side in Susa.\textsuperscript{12} Finally, in the twelfth century, Michael the Syrian attempts to reconcile Theodoret's account with that of Eusebius, who mentions only that Mani had twelve disciples, after the model of Jesus.\textsuperscript{13} According to Michael, Mani first sent Thomas to India and Addas to Beith Aramayé, apparently to preach the Christian gospel. Only later, upon abandoning Christianity, did he appoint twelve disciples to proclaim the new message that Mani himself was the promised paraclete.\textsuperscript{14}

Whereas the configuration of three disciples does not appear outside of the \textit{Acta Archelai} tradition, this notion of twelve, conceived in polemical parallelism to Christianity, is elaborated upon in the writings of Peter of Sicily and Photius. Thomas, Bouddas, and Hermas are included among the twelve, but it is another disciple, Adémanatos (or Adeimantos), who is singled out as Mani's emissary, "whom he sent to various places to preach the error."\textsuperscript{15} This composite tradition is further reflected in both the short and long Formulae of Abjuration, medieval lists of anathemas to be pronounced by apostates who wished to forswear their former association with Manichaeism and earn readmission to the Christian fold.\textsuperscript{16}

If evidence from the \textit{Acta} pervades the Christian literature concerning Mani's disciples, their identity and missionary activities are severally recounted in a number of non-Christian sources independent of the \textit{Acta} tradition. In the third century, the Neo-Platonic philosopher Alexander of Lycopolis offers witness to early Manichaean proselytizing in Egypt, noting that "the first expounder of his doctrines to visit us was a man called Papos, after whom came Thomas, and again some others after both of these."\textsuperscript{17} Far more detailed is the account that can be pieced together from the Persian Manichaean texts discovered at Turfan. There it is reported that Addas and a certain Pategh were missionaries in Egypt between 244 and 261, and that one other disciple, by the name of Mar 'Ammo, visited Abharshahr, the provincial capital of Khorasan, on Mani's behalf.\textsuperscript{18} This tradition is supplemented by the Syrian Acts of the Persian Martyrs, where it is said that Addas travelled in company with a disciple named 'Abzakya when he travelled to Garamae in 261–2.\textsuperscript{19} To close, mention must be made of the important new evidence contained in the