INTRODUCTION

Religion and Everyday Groupness

> To my loved mother, greatly revered by me; her whom I love with all my heart, whose memory is planted in my thought every hour. I am looking forward to seeing you, my mother Maria, precious to me. It is I, your son Piene, who is greeting you; in the Lord, – greetings.
>
> This is my prayer every hour to the Father, the God of Truth, that he may preserve you healthy in your body, joyful in your soul, and firm in your spirit; for all the time that you will spend in this place. Also after this place, you may find life in the kingdom for eternity.
>
> PIENE TO HIS MOTHER MARIA[1]

Introduction

Papyrus letters seem to convey close and personal information, directly from the mouth (or the pen) of an ancient author. Piene's letter to his mother Maria accentuates a vivid sense of proximity and similarity. A boy, traveling far away from his mother, expresses his affection for her in a most elegant manner. How different is he from you and me?

Intimate as it may feel, this passage may also surprise us, generating feelings of cultural distance and alienation. For modern readers, Piene's words feel over the top: too explicit and affectionate. This affectionate tone is but one indication of the cultural distance between past and present. The passage derives from a fourth-century Coptic letter, written on papyrus and found in a recently excavated desert village in the Dakhleh Oasis – a world very different from our own. It reminds us that what *we* expect to read, after sixteen hundred years, is

1 ⲧⲁⲙⲟ ⲙ̄ⲙⲉⲣⲓⲧ` ⲉⲧⲧⲁϊⲁϊⲧ` ⲛ̄ⲧⲟⲧ` ⲧⲟⲛⲟⲩ ⲧⲉϯⲙⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲥ ϩⲛ̄ ⲡⲁϩⲏⲧ` ⲧⲏⲣϥ ⲉⲣⲉ ⲡⲉⲥⲣ̄ⲡⲙⲉⲩⲉ ⳉⲁϊⲧ` ϩⲛ̄ ⲡⲁⲙⲉⲩⲉ ⲛ̄ⲛⲟ ⲛⲓⲙ` ⲉϊϭⲁϣⲧ` ⲁ̣ⲃⲁⲗ ⳉⲉϊⲛⲁⲛⲉⲩ ⲁⲣⲟ ⲧⲁⲙⲉⲩ ⲉⲧⲁϊ ⲛ̄[ⲧⲟⲧ] ⲙⲁⲣⲓⲁ ⲁⲛⲁⲕ ⲡⲉϣⲏⲣⲉ ⲡⲓⲉⲛⲉ ⲡ̣[ⲉ]ⲧϣⲓⲛⲉ ⲁ̣ⲣⲟ ϩⲛ̄ ⲡⳉⲁⲓⲥ ⲭⲁⲓⲣⲉ ⲛ̄ⲛⲟ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲡⲉϊ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲁϣⲗⲏⲗ ϣⲁ ⲡⲓⲱⲧ` ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲙⲉ ⲧ̣ⲁ̣[ⲣ]ⲉϥⲣⲁϊⲥ ⲁⲣⲟ ⲉⲣⲉⲟⲩ[ⲁ]ⳉ` ϩⲛ̄ ⲡⲉ̣[ⲥ]ⲱ̣ⲙ̣ⲁ ⲉⲣⲉ̣ⲣⲉϣⲉ ϩⲛ̄ ⲧⲉⲯⲩⲭⲏ ⲉ̣[ⲣ]ⲉⲧⲁⳉ̣[ⲣⲁⲓⲧ` ϩⲛ̄] ⲡⲉⲡⲛ̄ⲁ̣ ⲙ̄ⲡⲟⲩⲁⲓϣ ⲧⲏ[ⲣ]ϥ̄ ⲉⲧ̣ⲉⲣ̣[ⲁ]ⲉ̣ϥ̣ ⲛ̄ⲡⲓⲙ[ⲁ] ⲙⲛ̄ⲥⲁ ⲡⲓ̣ⲙⲁ ⲁⲛ [ⲧ]ⲉ̣ϭⲓⲛⲉ ⲙ̣̄ⲡ̣ⲱⲛϩ̄ ϩⲛ̄ [ⲧ]ⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲣ̄ⲣⲟ̣ ϣⲁⲁ[ⲛ]ⲏ̣ϩⲉ P.Kellis v Copt. 29.1–13 (Piene to Maria) found in House 3, room 6.

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not the same as what Piene's mother expected to hear from him.[2] Instead of offering direct insight into his emotions, the message is mediated by the rules and customs of ancient letter writing. The presence (or absence) of a scribe has to be taken into account, as do the epistolary conventions of the era, and the question of his mother's literacy. If she was illiterate, as were most women of her time, she may have asked a relative or neighbor to read her son's letter to her. So much for an intimate letter between mother and son.

As one reads further in Piene's letter, the religiously marked language stands out. Who is he praying to when he addresses the "Father, the God of Truth"? Coptic letters from the same period – of which there are only a few – use similar polite wishes and prayer formulas, but not these specific words. In fact, the "Father, the God of Truth" is only once referred to in fourth-century letters outside the oasis. The phrase is, however, common in Manichaean cosmological and liturgical texts. Along with other indicators, it places Piene and his mother in a Manichaean context. Piene's father, Makarios, addresses his wife and her family as "the children of the living race."[3] Again, this is an uncommon phrase with parallels in Manichaean literature. Why was invoking a Manichaean transempirical entity known from a long and complex cosmological narrative that originated in third-century Mesopotamia relevant in the Egyptian desert? How much of this tradition can we safely assume was present in the author's context? Should we consider these Manichaean phrases as casual or strategic references to a deeply felt religious identity? If so, how did this religious group identity affect the lives of Piene and his brother? Did they play with the neighbors' children? Did their mother attend birthday parties in the village, or is it more probable that they secluded themselves within a semiclosed religious group?

Seemingly casual references to transempirical beings and the use of extraordinary self-designators open up another world within and beyond the context of everyday life in the Dakhleh Oasis. Sometimes explicitly religious in tone, these short references in personal letters provide insight into the daily lives of individuals in a fourth-century village. The letters were part of a stunning cache of new papyri found in several Roman houses in one of the larger villages of the Dakhleh Oasis: Kellis (modern Ismant el-Kharab in the western desert of Egypt, roughly 350 km from the Nile). These papyri have been made accessible by members of the Dakhleh Oasis Project, the most important for

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2 On contextual factors, such as rhetorical structures and epistolary conventions, see R.S. Bagnall, *Reading Papyri, Writing Ancient History* (London: Routledge, 1995). On the role of emotions in ancient letters, see W. Clarysse, "Emotions in Greek Private Papyrus Letters," *Ancient Society* 47 (2017): 63–86.

3 ⲛ̄ϣⲏⲣⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧ̣ⲣⲉⲓⲧⲉ ⲉⲧⲁⲛϩ̄ P.Kellis V Copt. 22.5 (Makarios to Maria) found in the same House 3, room 6.

our purpose being those discovered during Colin Hope's excavation of Ismant el-Kharab. A final synthesized publication has yet to appear, but a series of field reports has presented the main finds.[4] This includes seven volumes with critical editions of the extant papyri and ostraca.[5] In these texts, we encounter individuals and families we call "Manichaeans," a name they never used themselves. Manichaeans were made famous by the polemics of religious and imperial authorities in Late Antiquity. They were *the* religious *other*, perceived as an imminent threat to the Roman state and to an orthodox Christian way of life. It was commonplace to describe them as crazy and perverted, and to label them as a fifth column of the Persian archenemy. Twentieth-century finds that included authentic Manichaean texts in several ancient languages have amended heresiological perspectives, even though these texts most often dealt only with theological or liturgical issues. Some liturgical documents were found at Kellis as well, thereby confirming the Manichaean connection. The most striking discovery in the village, however, were the personal letters and business accounts of ordinary Manichaean individuals and families, which offer an unprecedented perspective on the Manichaean religion in everyday life.[6]

In fact, the Manichaean letters from Kellis are the *only* extant evidence of this type from the Roman era found so far, with the exception of three Greek letters, whose Manichaean background became clear after the Kellis finds.[7]

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4 Unfortunately, I have not yet seen C.A. Hope and G.E. Bowen, eds., *Kellis: A Roman-Period Village in Egypt's Dakhleh Oasis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022). The field reports initially appeared in the Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities (JSSEA) and continued in the Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology (BACE).

5 K.A. Worp, ed., *Greek Papyri from Kellis I* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1995); I. Gardner, ed., *Kellis Literary Texts: Volume 1* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1996); R.S. Bagnall, ed., *The Kellis Agricultural Account Book* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1997); I. Gardner, A. Alcock, and W.P. Funk, eds., *Coptic Documentary Texts from Kellis: Volume 1* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1999); K.A. Worp, ed., *Greek Ostraka from Kellis* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2004); I. Gardner, ed., *Kellis Literary Texts: Volume 2* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2007); I. Gardner, A. Alcock, and W.P. Funk, eds., *Coptic Documentary Texts from Kellis: Volume 2* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2014). The editions will be cited with the abbreviations listed above.

6 The most recent reflections by the editor of the papyri are found in I. Gardner, "The Coptic and Syriac, Christian and Manichaean Texts Recovered from Ismant Al-Kharab: An Update on New Discoveries and Significant Research Since First Publication," in *Oasis Papers 9*, ed. G.E. Bowen and C.A. Hope (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2019), 395–401; I. Gardner, *The Founder of Manichaeism: Rethinking the Life of Mani* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 95–105.

7 P.Oxy. XXXI 2603, LXXIII 4965, and P.Harr. 107. A few fragmentary personal letters from Manichaeans are known from eighth/ninth-century Turfan. A. Benkato, "Sogdian Letter Fragments in Manichaean Script," *Studia Iranica* 45 (2016): 197–220; W. Sundermann, "Eine re-edition zweier manichäisch-soghdischer Briefe," in *Iranian Languages and Texts from Iran and Turan: Ronald E. Emmerick Memorial Volume*, ed. M. Macuch, M. Maggi, and W. Sundermann (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007), 403–21; M.Y. Yoshida, "Manichaean

The letters from Kellis shed light on the nitty-gritty details and contested practicalities of lived religion. Mostly, these new finds supplement existing reconstructions of Manichaeism, adding the distinct flavor of a local Egyptian setting, but at times, they strongly challenge perspectives from prescriptive theological texts and cosmological tractates. This challenging aspect is of pivotal importance to the field of Manichaean Studies, as the papyri from Kellis include the oldest datable Manichaean documents, firmly placed in the second half of the fourth century CE. They give us a glimpse into the everyday life of Manichaeans at a crucial period in the development of the Manichaean religion, before – and contemporaneous with – the systematization of their doctrine and its diffusion throughout the ancient world.[8]

Religion and the Everyday Life of Manichaeans in Kellis will take a two-pronged approach to these papyri. The first is a cultural historical approach to the new texts and the daily practices of their authors. With a theoretical framework of *Everyday Groupness*, I will explore where and how ordinary Manichaeans practiced their religion in their daily lives, something that could hardly be addressed in previous academic studies published before the Kellis discoveries. Building on modern sociological theories (on identity and everyday practices, individual religious agency, and group-formation) and historical approaches (microhistory), this book places ordinary individuals at its heart, without omitting the textual or prescriptive perspectives of religious specialists.

The second approach uses the Manichaeans of Kellis to put an academic grand narrative about religious transformation to the test. It locates the Manichaeans at the heart of the late antique rise of disembedded, group-specific religions by zooming in on the everyday construction of a group identity, interactions with outsiders, and the existence of a translocal network of texts, practices, and ideas. In Kellis, we see a version of Manichaeism built on a network structure of itinerant elect and family units. These Manichaean families lived in close proximity to Christians and devotees of Egyptian gods, such as

Sogdian Letters Discovered in Bazaklik," *École pratique des hautes études, section des sciences religieuses* 109 (2000): 233–36.

8 Although the documents are older than the Medinet Madi documents and predate the Iranian, Latin, Greek and Chinese documents sometimes by centuries, it remains possible to argue that other texts reflect even earlier textual traditions. This is in particularly true for some of the texts that have been ascribed to Mani, like the cosmological fragments of the *Šābuhragān*. The Medinet Madi codices have been radiocarbon dated to the end of the fourth-, beginning of the fifth century. J.D. BeDuhn and G. Hodgins, "The Date of the Manichaean Codices from Medinet Madi, and Its Significance," in *Manichaeism East and West*, ed. S.N.C. Lieu (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 10–28.

the local sphinx-shaped Tutu. They were involved in village affairs, connected to the Roman administration, engaged in astrological practice, and read the famous works of Classical Greek authors. On a microhistorical scale, therefore, the situation in Kellis reflects the religious dynamics of the Roman Empire at large, illustrating the mechanisms of religious change: instances where a distinct religious group seems to emerge, as well as situations in which this conceptual frame was entirely absent. The occasional nature of articulate religious self-identification and behavior within everyday life offers a strong incentive against uncritically accepting late antique totalizing religious discourse (of the *all-or-nothing* type) as a reflection of everyday life.[9] It also discourages overarching academic narratives that emphasize religious conflict and demarcation of group-specific religions in Late Antiquity.

The discovery of Manichaean documents in Kellis facilitates this double approach: theological and liturgical documents speak to religious practices, while the personal letters and business accounts reveal *where* and *how* such Manichaean practices and ideas affected everyday life.

Introducing Manichaeism

Manichaeism came into being in third-century Mesopotamia, and it spread over the Sasanian Empire into the Roman Empire and China, where it continued to exist for centuries. The story of its rise and decline spans a long period of time and a wide variety of geographical and cultural settings. The academic study of these sources started in the eighteenth century, though mainly through the lens of the anti-Manichaean polemics of Early Christian authors. New watershed discoveries in the twentieth century shifted the focus from the heresiology of patristic writers to the Iranian context of Mani and his scriptures. As many of these texts were written in various Iranian languages, they gave the impression that Manichaeism was in essence an Iranian religion, presumably a reform movement within Zoroastrianism.[10] Inevitably, however, scholars with knowledge of Syriac Christianity began to notice similarities

9 On the totalizing fiction of narratives and labels, see M.R. Somers, "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach," *Theory and Society* 23 (1994): 610 and 624.

10 Gardner and Lieu, *MTRE*, 27. Geo Widengren, for example, repeatedly argued for a strong relationship between Manichaean cosmology and Zurvanism. G. Widengren, *Mani und der Manichäismus* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1961), 48–52. The existence and status of Zurvanism is, however, contested. A.F. de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi: Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 63–68, 330–38. More

between Mani's teachings and those of Marcion and Bardaisan, which led to an emphasis on the Christian nature of Manichaeism.[11] Interpretative transitions also followed manuscript discoveries at Turfan, Dunhuang, Medinet Madi, and Ismant el-Kharab. These finds fueled the study of Manichaeism throughout the twentieth century, both by philologists of various languages (including Middle Persian, Parthian, Sogdian, Bactrian, Turkish, and Chinese) and by historians of religion (whose expertise has tended to include knowledge of Greek, Latin, Coptic, and Syriac). In recent years, the center of gravity of Manichaean Studies has shifted away from Iranian interpretations (although excellent text editions are still produced), as many scholars now consider Manichaeism a trajectory of ancient Christianity.

Named after the founder Mani (known as the Apostle of Light, born on April 14, 216 CE), the term Manichaean carries a mixture of ancient and modern derogatory connotations. Greek heresiological texts often played with the Greek version of the original Syriac title Manichaios, which probably meant "my living vessel," to associate it with μανείς: foolishness.[12] The modern label Manichaeism is not as derogatory as its ancient equivalents, but it runs the risk of concealing the fragmentary, diverse, and random nature of most of our knowledge. As Jason BeDuhn, one of the leading voices in Manichaean Studies, points out, by hallowing it with a modern "-ism," the Manichaean tradition has been "comfortably nested in a web of interpretation that locates Manichaeism in its relation to other, better-known dualisms, asceticisms, gnosticisms, mysticisms, and syncretisms."[13] The academic interpretations and classifications of what we call Manichaeism, therefore, deserve our attention as we aim to understand the social dynamics of the Manichaeans of Kellis.

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studies stressing the Iranian background of Manichaeism are listed in J.C. Reeves, *Jewish Lore in Manichaean Cosmogony* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1992), 5n5.

11 F.C. Burkitt, *The Religion of the Manichees* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925), 71–86; C.W. Mitchell, ed., *S. Ephraim's Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion and Bardaisan* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1912–21).

12 J.K. Coyle, "Foreign and Insane: Labelling Manichaeism in the Roman Empire," in *Manichaeism and Its Legacy* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 3–24; J. Tubach and M. Zakeri, "Mani's Name," in *Augustine and Manichaeism in the Latin West*, ed. J. van Oort and O. Wermelinger (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 272–86 considers the original title to mean something like "the living, or hidden, vessel." Shapira proposes to render "The Living Self." D. Shapira, "Manichaios, *Jywndg Gryw* and Other Manichaean Terms and Titles," in *Irano-Judaica IV*, ed. S. Shaked and A. Netzer (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 1999), 122–50; Gardner, *The Founder of Manichaeism*, 31–36.

13 J.D. BeDuhn, *The Manichaean Body in Discipline and Ritual* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), x.

Most Manichaean texts derive from one of two main clusters: the oldest documents stem from fourth- and fifth-century Egypt (Medinet Madi and Kellis), while the majority of later texts were found at Turfan and Dunhuang (modern China), and date back to the eighth–eleventh centuries.[14] Apart from these main clusters, authentic Manichaean texts were found in Latin (Tebessa, Algeria, 1918), Greek (*Cologne Mani Codex*, bought in Egypt by the University of Cologne in the 1960s), Syriac (mostly in fragments or in citations by Christian authors), and Chinese.[15] These texts supplement descriptions of Manichaeism in heresiological texts, which range from Theodor Bar Khoni's summary of the Manichaean myth, to Ibn al-Nadīm's list of Mani's *Epistles*, to Augustine's nasty remarks about Manichaean elect farting out supernatural Light.[16] With the twentieth-century discoveries in hand, it is possible to correct polemical portrayals, understand more of the internal logic of Manichaean discourse, and fill in some of the gaps in our reconstructions of Manichaeism.[17]

The Manichaean myth centered on the fate of the Living Soul, who was ensnared in the material world. This Living Soul originated from the Father of

14 W. Sundermann, "Manichaean Literature in Iranian Languages," in *The Literature of Pre-Islamic Iran*, ed. R.E. Emmerick and M. Macuch (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 197–265. Manichaeism flourished during this period and was became the state religion in a Uighur kingdom between 762 and 840 CE. In 840 CE the empire was annihilated, but the Manichaean presence continued until in the tenth century it was largely been surpassed by Buddhism. W. Sundermann, "Manichaeism on the Silk Road: Its Rise, Flourishing and Decay," in *Between Rome and China: History, Religion and Material Culture of the Silk Road*, ed. S.N.C. Lieu and G.B. Mikkelsen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), 84–87. For the Medinet Madi documents, see C. Schmidt and H.J. Polotsky, *Ein Mani-Fund in Ägypten: Orinalschriften des Mani und seiner Schüler* (Sonderausgabe aus den Sitzungsberichten der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-Hist. Klasse 1933.1; Berlin: Akademie der Wissenschaften, in Kommission bei W. de Gruyter, 1933). A full discussion of the discovery can be found in J.M. Robinson, *The Manichaean Codices of Medinet Madi* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013). Only two sections of a historical codex (presumably the *Acts*) have been published. N.A. Pedersen, "A Manichaean Historical Text," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 119 (1997): 193–201.

15 S.N.C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in Central Asia and China* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 49–54 on the discovery of these texts and their earliest translations. For recent discoveries and literature, see M. Xiaohe, "Remains of the Religion of Light in Xiapu (霞浦) County, Fujian Province," in *Mani in Dublin*, ed. S.G. Richter, C. Horton, and K. Ohlhafer (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 228–58.

16 Reports on breathing, farting, and burping out Light are polemically employed in Augustine, *Contra Faust.* 2.5, 6.6, 20.13, *Conf.* 3.10.18. It appears as a real topic of soteriological discourse in CMC 81. R. Lane Fox, *Augustine: Conversions to Confessions* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 121.

17 Gardner and Lieu, *MTRE*, 25–45 on the impact of these discoveries on the study of Manichaeism. An English translation of some of the Middle Persian, Parthian, Sogdian and Turkic texts is found in H.J. Klimkeit, *Gnosis at the Silk Road* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993).

Greatness, who through a series of emanations surrounded himself by Light beings acting on his behalf (he himself is praised as hidden and exalted in some of the hymns found in Kellis, such as T.Kellis II Copt. 1 and P.Kellis II Gr. 92, while P.Kellis VI Gr. 98 contains a prayer praising all the emanations). The First Man, one of the beings from the first emanation, descended to wage war against the realm of Darkness. He was captured, stripped of his five sons (his armor, also perceived as transempirical Light beings), and trapped in Darkness. Light beings from the second emanation came to the rescue: they awakened him by reminding him of his true destiny and origin (1 Keph. 72 and 85). In the process, they collaborated with the Third Messenger and other Light beings from the third emanation, and fashioned the universe in such a way that it – despite its material nature (made from Darkness) – worked toward the liberation of the last elements of Light.[18] This cosmological narrative was told with variations, but Manichaeans summarized their worldview as the "two principles" and the "three times," which referred to the worlds of Light and Darkness and the three temporal stages of the cosmological drama: the original state of separation between Light and Darkness, the present moment of mixture, and the restoration of Light at the end of times.[19] While there can be no doubt that both notions had roots in Zoroastrian cosmology, the story also resonated with Christian notions about the cosmos.[20] The enchained elements of Light received various names: they were called the Living Soul, the

18 On this positive view of the cosmos, see L. Koenen, "How Dualistic Is Mani's Dualism?," in *Codex Manichaicus Coloniensis – Atti 2*, ed. L. Cirillo (Cozenza: Marra Editore, 1990), 13–24.

19 I. Colditz, "The Abstract of a Religion or: What Is Manichaeism?," in *Mani in Dublin*, ed. S.G. Richter, C. Horton, and K. Ohlhafer (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 52–56. The three times and two principles are discussed, for example, in CMC 132.11–13, Hom. 7.11–15, 2 PsB. 9.8–11, 11.30–1, 1 Keph. 5.27–8, 15.19–20, 16.20–21, 73.28, and more fully in 1 Keph. 55.16–57.32. N.A. Pedersen, *Studies in the Sermon on the Great War* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1996), 172–76.

20 Bermejo-Rubio points to structural parallels between the Christian son of God and the Manichaean Primal Man. F. Bermejo-Rubio, "Primal Man, Son of God: From Explicit to Implicit Christian Elements in Manichaeism," in *Mani in Dublin*, ed. S.G. Richter, C. Horton, and K. Ohlhafer (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 34–46. Cf. A. Böhlig, "The New Testament and the Concept of the Manichaean Myth," in *The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in Honour of Robert McL. Wilson*, ed. A.H.B. Logan and A.J.M. Wedderburn (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1983), 98–9. Similar parallels exist, however, with the Zoroastrian myth of the original conflict. J.D. BeDuhn, "The Leap of the Soul," in *Il manicheismo: nuove prospettive della ricerca*, ed. A. van Tongerloo and L. Cirillo (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 22–25; M. Heuser, "The Manichaean Myth According to Coptic Sources," in *Studies in Manichaean Literature and Art*, ed. M. Heuser and H.J. Klimkeit (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 3–108; M. Hutter, "Manichaeism in Iran," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism*, ed. M. Stausberg, Y.S.-D. Vevaina, and A. Tessmann (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 477–90.

Cross of Light, and were also identified as the Suffering Jesus (*jesus patibilis,* lit. vulnerable Jesus): "Jesus that hangs to the tree, Youth, son of the dew, milk of all trees, sweetness of the fruits."[21]

Theologically, Manichaean texts relate a strongly dualistic worldview in which transempirical kingdoms of Light and Darkness stood against each other in a primordial cosmological battle: a conflict that defined all of reality. Humankind could participate in this battle through revealed knowledge (*gnosis*) and by following the rules and regulations of the Manichaean church, either as members of the elect or as hearers (in Western sources often called catechumens). The reciprocal relationship between these two classes of Manichaeans stood at the core of their religious life. The ascetic-living elect needed the financial and material support of the hearers, because they had to keep strict behavioral rules. By following these rules, the elect could purify themselves and liberate the transempirical elements of Light trapped inside defiling matter (the Living Soul, 1 Keph. 79). Simple acts of agriculture, sexual immorality, or wine consumption could hurt the Living Soul (1 Keph. 80). Therefore, catechumens were expected to bring food for a daily ritual meal as alms gifts. Manichaean texts from both the East and West attest to the widespread practice and alimentary logic of this meal, which was considered to contribute not only to the liberation of Light, but also to individual salvation.[22] In the Kellis papyri, we witness the catechumens and elect in action, allowing us to examine how Manichaean regulations were put into practice.

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21 [ⲓ̣ⲏ̣̄ⲥ̣ ⲉⲧⲁϣⲉ ⲁⲡϣⲉ: [ⲡ]ⲗⲓⲗⲟⲩ ⲡϣⲏⲣⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲓ̈ⲱⲧⲉ: [ⲡ]ⲉⲣⲱⲧⲉ ⲛ̄ⲛ̄ϣⲏⲛ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ· [ⲡϩⲗ] ⲁϭ ⲛ̄ⲛ̄ⲕⲁⲣⲡⲟⲥ. 2 PsB. 155.24–27. Cf. 2 PsB. 121.32. A full discussion of this Jesus figure is found in the published edition of E. Rose's 1937 Marburg dissertation. *Die manichäische Christologie* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1979), 89–116. A key question in subsequent research has been to what extent the Manichaeans identified the various Jesus figures with each other. Majella Franzmann considers the vulnerable Jesus as a not fully developed side-figure, equivalent to the Living while simultaneously arguing for the essential unity of the other Manichaean Jesus figures. *Jesus in the Manichaean Writings* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 131–139. Jason BeDuhn points out that we see "the figure of Jesus expanding and contracting in its roles," depending on the cultural environment. "The Manichaean Jesus," in *Alternative Christs*, ed. O. Hammer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 53. Despite such cultural specific variation, Jesus remains a key figure associated with the imprisoned supernatural Light (for example in the Chinese Manichaean *Hymnscroll*, 252–4).

22 H.C. Puech, "Liturgie et pratiques rituelles dans le manichéisme (Collège de France, 1952–1972)," in *Sur le manichéisme et autres essais* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), 235–394; BeDuhn, *Manichaean Body*; N.A. Pedersen, "Holy Meals and Eucharist in Manichaean Sources: Their Relation to Christian Traditions," in *The Eucharist – Its Origins and Contexts*, ed. D. Hellholm and D. Sänger (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 1267–97.

The diffusion of the Manichaean tradition is often associated with the central role of books. Mani was remembered as the author of his own set of sacred scriptures (canonized as either a Pentateuch or Heptateuch), which included the *Living Gospel*, the *Treasure of Life*, the *Treatise* (*Pragmateia*), the *Book of Mysteries*, the *Book of Giants*, the *Epistles*, and the *Psalms and Prayers*.[23] With these books, he was said to have restored Jesus's wisdom (2 PsB. 224, 12.31). Not only did he write his words of wisdom; he also depicted them in his *Picturebook*.[24] Unfortunately, few of these canonical works survived, apart from brief citations in other ancient texts. Although Manichaeans claimed that Mani was a prolific writer, modern scholars depend largely on texts written by his disciples. Among the works of the first generations of disciples are collections of Mani's sayings and lectures, which were subsequently circulated in sermons, hagiographical stories, and question-and-answer literature (known as *Kephalaia*: chapters). The two *Kephalaia* books are of importance because of their systematized character and sheer size (both volumes held about five hundred pages, slightly less than the Manichaean *Psalmbook*, but still constituting the second largest papyrus codex of the ancient world).[25] Manichaean kephalaia were known as a genre as early as the 340s CE, and several Iranian texts contain traces of hagiographical homilies that correspond

23 For a systematical interpretation, see N.J. Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism: An Ancient Faith Rediscovered* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 67. The various lists differ. Compare the following with the list in the introduction of the *Kephalaia*: The *Gospel*, the *Treasure of Life*, the *Pragmateia*, the *Book of the Mysteries*, the *Book on the Giants*, the *Epistles*, the *Psalms* and the *Prayers*, his *Image* (Hom. 25.2–5). *The Living Gospel*, the *Treasure of Life*, the *Pragmateia*, the *Book of Mysteries*, the *Writing of the Giants* (last three listed as one single gift), the *Epistles* (1 Keph 148, 355.4–25). The *Great Gospel*, the *Treasure of Life* (*Thesaurus*), *Pragmateia*, *Book of Mysteries*, *Book of Giants*, *Book of his letters* (2 PsB. 46.21–31, on page 47 it includes the two *Psalms and his Prayers*). M. Krause, "Die Aussagen von Sarakoton-Psalm 2 (Man. Ps. Book 139,52–140,17) über die heiligen Schrifter der Manichäer," in *Gnosisforschung und Religionsgeschichte: Festschrift für Kurt Rudolph zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. H. Preißler and H. Seiwert (Marburg: Diagonal-Verlsag, 1994), 136–41. The concept of a canon is suitable only in so far it designates lists of Mani's writings that carried a certain authority. N.A. Pedersen et al., *The Old Testament in Manichaean Tradition: The Sources in Syriac, Greek, Coptic, Middle Persian, Parthian, Sogdian, New Persian, and Arabic* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), xii.

24 Z. Gulácsi, *Mani's Pictures: The Didactic Images of the Manichaeans from Sasanian Mesopotamia to Uygur Central Asia and Tang-Ming China* (Leiden: Brill, 2015). In general on textuality in Ancient Christianities, see G.G. Stroumsa, *The Scriptural Universe of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016). A comparative perspective on canon formation and religious networks is pursued in P. Dilley, "Religious Intercrossing in Late Antique Eurasia: Loss, Corruption, and Canon Formation," *Journal of World History* 24, no. 1 (2013): 25–70.

25 T. Pettipiece, *Pentadic Redaction in the Manichaean Kephalaia* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

to Coptic kephalaia.[26] If the kephalaia texts date back to the late third or early fourth century, they may have belonged to an earlier body of work that was collected and redacted into the two volumes found at Medinet Madi: the *Kephalaia of the Teacher* and the *Kephalaia of the Wisdom of my Lord Mani*. Other Coptic texts found at Medinet Madi included the *Psalmbook*, *Synaxeis* codex, the historical *Acts* codex, a codex with *Homilies*, and Mani's *Epistles*.[27] These theological and cosmological codices have defined our understanding of Egyptian Manichaeism, and they remain pivotal in any examination of Manichaean belief and practice.

Manichaeism spread over the entire ancient world. Manichaean historical narratives inform us about the heroes of the first generation of missionaries: Mani's successor Sisinnios, Mar Adda and Pattek, who traveled to the Eastern Roman Empire, and Mar Ammo, who preached in Parthia and Central Asia. While it is difficult to establish the historicity of such accounts, the wide diffusion of Manichaean texts suggests groundbreaking success from the third century onwards.[28] Manichaeism flourished in Central Asia, where it even became

26 On the early date of the *Kephalaia*, see I. Gardner, "Towards an Understanding of Mani's Religious Development and the Archaeology of Manichaean Identity," in *Religion and Retributive Logic: Essays in Honour of Professor Garry W. Trompf*, ed. C.M. Cusack and C.H. Hartney (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 148n4. The *Kephalaia* is mentioned in Hom. 18.6 and the *Acta Archelai*. On the early fourth-century date of the latter, see S.N.C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in Mesopotamia and the Roman East* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 135–40. The Iranian "*Kephalaia*" are generally of late date. They correspond to the Coptic texts in content and enumerative structure, but the two texts are never in agreement more closely. Sundermann, "Manichaean Literature in Iranian Languages," 224–27; W. Sundermann, "Iranische Kephalaiatexte?" in *Studia Manichaica II*, ed. G. Wießner and H.J. Klimkeit (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992), 305–18.

27 I. Gardner, ed., *The Kephalaia of the Teacher* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), xxiv calls it an "evolving and fluid discourse." See also, I. Gardner, "Kephalaia," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, ed. E. Yarshater (2018). Available at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kephalaia (accessed on 20 December 2020). The parallels between the Chinese *Traité* and the *Kephalaia* point toward Iranian *Kephalaia* traditions. Lieu, *Manichaeism in Central Asia and China*, 59–75. Funk argues that a single author or compiler was responsible for the final Medinet Madi versions. W.P. Funk, "The Reconstruction of the Manichaean *Kephalaia*," in *Emerging from Darkness: Studies in the Recovery of Manichaean Sources*, ed. P. Mirecki, J. BeDuhn (Leiden, 1997), 154. Most recently, the reflections on the forthcoming edition of the Dublin *Kephalaia* (2 Keph.) have offered new thoughts on the evolving collection of *Kephalaia* traditions in relation to the coherence of a Manichaean tradition. P. Dilley, "Mani's Wisdom at the Court of the Persian Kings: The Genre and Context of the Chester Beatty Kephalaia," in *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings*, ed. I. Gardner, J.D. BeDuhn, and P. Dilley (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 15–51; J.D. BeDuhn, "Parallels between Coptic and Iranian Kephalaia: Goundesh and the King of Touran," in *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings*, ed. I. Gardner, J.D. BeDuhn, and P. Dilley (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 52–74.

28 Pivotal are the historical studies by W. Sundermann, "Studien zur kirchengeschichtlichen Literatur der iranischen Manichäer I," *Altorientalische Forschungen* 13, no. 1 (1986):

the state religion of the Uighurs in the eighth and ninth century. In China, the veneration of "Mani the Buddha of Light" seems to have continued for centuries. A UNESCO-sponsored project looked into a temple near Quanzhou (Zayton, in the Fujian province), and even found indications of the continuation of a highly Buddhaized Manichaeism in recent religious practices of some South-Chinese villagers.[29] Despite its initial success, Manichaeism gradually disappeared from the Roman Empire during the fifth and sixth centuries, due to a combination of persecution, historical and social change, and internal differentiation. It already becomes more difficult to trace Manichaeans in Egypt during the period after the village of Kellis was abandoned.

Kellis and Quanzhou are two villages at the extreme ends of the ancient world, divided by centuries of history and a vast geographical distance. Including them both within the history of Manichaeism underlines the pivotal questions behind this book: What is Manichae*ism*? How was a Manichaean life lived by ordinary people in their specific localities?

Manichaeans and the Transformation of Religion in Late Antiquity

Religion and the Everyday Life of Manichaeans in Kellis will show how the Kellis papyri challenge one prevailing model of religious change in Late Antiquity. It questions the characterization of Manichaeism as a "total religion" with sectarian characteristics, and instead focuses on the flexibility of local religious practice and the haphazard visibility of religious identities in daily life; the interactions beyond dualistic representations of light and darkness.[30]

40–92; W. Sundermann, "Studien zur kirchengeschichtlichen Literatur der iranischen Manichäer II," *Altorientalische Forschungen* 13, no. 2 (1986): 239–317; W. Sundermann, "Studien zur kirchengeschichtlichen Literatur der iranischen Manichäer III," *Altorientalische Forschungen* 14, no. 1 (1987): 47–107. More recent are S.N.C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992); Lieu, *Manichaeism in Mesopotamia*; I. Gardner and S.N.C. Lieu, "From Narmouthis (Medinet Madi) to Kellis (Ismant el-Kharab): Manichaean Documents from Roman Egypt," *Journal of Roman Studies* 86 (1996): 146–69. Various theories about the introduction of Manichaeism into Egypt are discussed in the second chapter of J.A. van den Berg, *Biblical Argument in Manichaean Missionary Practice* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

29 This was even announced as the discovery of a "living Mani cult" in M. Franzmann, I. Gardner, and S.N.C. Lieu, "A Living Mani Cult in the Twenty-First Century," *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 41 (2005): vii–xi. See the contributions in the final report, S.N.C. Lieu, ed., *Medieval Christian and Manichaean Remains from Quanzhou* (*Zayton*) (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012).

30 The phrase "total religion," usually designating religion(s) that exert hegemonic claims over all other cultural spheres, is used in Gardner and Lieu, *MTRE*, 9.

Religious change in Late Antiquity is frequently characterized as a fundamental transition from localized community religions to disembedded, group-specific religions. Jan Assmann uses the phrases *primary* and *secondary* religion to designate this transition, and Jonathan Z. Smith speaks of *locative* and *utopian* religion to discern fundamentally different orientations.[31] In most of these binary classifications, ancient religions are the primary mode of religiosity, organized within pre-existing social formations such as the family or the city. The newer types of religions that arose – or became more widespread – during Late Antiquity were less strongly tied to local environments, frequently more mobile, and they presented universal and utopian claims aimed at the renewal and transformation of the entire cosmos (sometimes even in strong opposition to the societal and political status quo).[32] Recent elaborations have suggested that "*utopianism* and *locativism* are better seen as two tendencies" within religions, much like the tension between modern *globalization* of religion and its *localization* in a wide variety of contexts.[33] Assmann's designation of this new type of religion as "secondary" focusses on the emergence of a true-false doctrinal distinction as a defining principle in the crystallization of distinct religious groups.[34] Belief in a black and white truth paved the way for

31 J. Assmann, *The Price of Monotheism* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009); J.Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), xiii–xiv; J.Z. Smith, "Native Cults in the Hellenistic Period," *History of Religions* 11, no. 2 (1971): 236–49. Another binary classification is Bruce Lincoln's *ancient* and *postancient* religion. B. Lincoln, "Epilogue," in *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide*, ed. S.I. Johnston (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 665.

32 Roman religion has been described as *embedded* because "the whole of the political and constitutional system was conducted within an elaborate network of religious ceremonial and regulation." M. Beard, J. North, and S. Price, *Religions of Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 43; For a critique on this model see B. Nongbri, "Dislodging 'Embedded' Religion: A Brief Note on a Scholarly Trope," *Numen* 55, no. 4 (2008): 440–60. More recent studies on Greco-Roman religion share a critical stance toward the "polis-religion" model that has dominated the field since the 1980s. J. Kindt, "Polis Religion – A Critical Appreciation," *Kernos* 22 (2009): 9–34; J. Kindt, "Personal Religion: A Productive Category for the Study of Ancient Greek Religion?," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 135 (2015): 35–50; J. Rüpke, "Individuals and Networks," in *Panthée: Religious Transformations in the Graeco-Roman Empire*, ed. L. Bricault and C. Bonnet (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 261–77.

33 G. Woolf, "Empires, Diasporas and the Emergence of Religions," in *Christianity in the Second Century: Themes and Developments*, ed. J.C. Paget and J. Lieu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 29. Literature related to the globalisation and localization of religion in the ancient world is found in G.S. Gasparro, "The Globalisation and Localisation of Religion: From Hellenism to Late Antiquity. Assessing a Category in the History of Religions," in *Hellenisation, Empire and Globalisation: Lessons from Antiquity*, ed. L.H. Martin and P. Pachis (Thessaloniki: Vanias, 2004), 41–83.

34 Assmann, *The Price of Monotheism*, 1–2.

religiously demarcated groups with their totalizing claims. Becoming part of these new religions was perceived as an individual choice of conversion, making membership optional, but also directly tied to group-specific behavioral expectations.[35]

Manichaeism seems to fit the bill perfectly. Manichaean historical and hagiographical texts present a highly self-conscious image of the Manichaean church as a distinct social entity, superior to all preceding regional religions. A fifth-century Coptic text, also known in a Middle Persian version, systematizes this sentiment of superiority with a list of ten ways in which the Manichaean "church" surpassed all other "churches" (ⲉⲕⲕⲗⲏⲥⲓⲁ). In this text, Manichaeans praise their founder Mani: "you have opened our eyes, that this church surpasses by its primacy over the first [or: previous] churches."[36] They locate the source of this superiority in Mani's accumulation of wisdom, the strength of the Manichaean church under persecution, and its universal appeal (1 Keph. 151). Specifically, the text claims:

> The writings and the wisdom and the revelations and the parables and the psalms of all the first churches have been collected in every place. They have come down to my [Mani's] church. They have added to the wisdom that I have revealed, the way water might add to water and become many waters. Again, this also is the way that the ancient books have added to my writings, and have become great wisdom.
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> 1 Keph. 151 372.11–18

35 A.F. de Jong, "Waar het vuur niet dooft: Joodse en Christelijke gemeenschappen in het Sasanidenrijk," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 70, no. 3 (2016): 177; Woolf, "Empires, Diasporas and the Emergence of Religions," 30–38; J. North, "The Development of Religious Pluralism," in *The Jews among Pagans and Christians*, ed. J. Lieu, J. North, and T. Rajak (London: Routledge, 1992), 178.

36 [..] ⲁⲕⲧⲟⲩϊⲉⲧⲛ̄ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ ϫⲉ ϯⲉⲕⲕⲗⲏⲥⲓⲁ ⲟⲩ̣[ⲁ]ⲧ̣ⲃ̣ⲉ̣ ⲛϩ̣[ⲟⲩⲁϊⲧ]ⲥ ⲡⲁⲣⲁ ⲛ̄ϣⲁⲣ̄ⲡ ⲛ̄ⲛ̄ⲉⲕⲕⲗⲏⲥⲓⲁ 1 Keph. 151, 375.11–12, translation by Gardner in Gardner and Lieu, *MTRE*, no. 91. The most complete version of this list is found in Coptic (1 Keph. 151), but it has also been transmitted in a Middle Persian version, which suggests that an earlier version goes back to the third century. D. Durkin-Meisterernst, "Wie persisch war der Manichäismus in Ägypten? Wie ägyptisch ist er geworden?," in *Ägypten und sein Umfeld in der Spätantike*, ed. F. Feder and A. Lohwasser (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2013), 217. For the Middle Persian version, see the translation and discussion in Gardner and Lieu, *MTRE*, 109–10; S.N.C. Lieu, "'My Church Is Superior …' Mani's Missionary Statement in Coptic and Middle Persian," in *Coptica – Gnostica – Manichaica: Mélanges offerts à Wolf-Peter Funk*, ed. P.H. Poirier and L. Painchaud (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 519–27; M. Brand, "Ten Steps to Superiority: Manichaean Historical Reasoning and the Formation of a New Religion," in *Claiming History in Religious Conflicts*, ed. A. *Brändli* and K. Heyden (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2021), 111–141.

This self-representation of the Manichaean church as a social entity organized around religious wisdom in books and in competition with other "churches" is telling. It shows how Manichaeans conceptualized themselves within a system of distinctly organized communities in particular parts of the world, and were guided by the written revelations of founder figures.[37] The Manichaean usage of terms such as "ⲥⲁⲩϩⲥ̄" (community), "ⲇⲟⲅⲙⲁ" (sect), and "ⲉⲕⲕⲗⲏⲥⲓⲁ" (church) reflects a self-understanding that corresponds with emerging group-specific religions in Late Antiquity.[38]

About fifty years ago, Peter Brown argued that to "favour the Manichees meant favouring a group. This group had a distinctive and complex structure. Because of this structure, the Manichaean group impinged on the society around it in a distinctive way; and this structure, in turn exposed it to distinctive pressures from its Roman environment."[39] As Brown continues to assert, Manichaeism's success was based on the organizational structure with communities of hearers who were mostly "indistinguishable from their

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37 In 2 Keph. 422.28–423.12, the same perspective was applied to other religions. J.D. BeDuhn, "Mani and the Crystallization of the Concept of 'Religion' in Third Century Iran," in *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings*, ed. I. Gardner, J.D. BeDuhn, and P. Dilley (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 268. Although he was never mentioned, the Syriac Christian author Tatian feeds into the same milieu, making similar innovative steps as Mani. J. Lössl, "The Religious Innovator Tatian: A Precursor of Mani in Syrian Christianity?," in *Manichaeism and Early Christianity*, ed. J. van Oort (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 1–23.

38 In fact, BeDuhn argues that they were among the first to think of themselves – and others – in terms of religiously demarcated groups. There are, however, good reasons to consider the Zoroastrian self-representation as an earlier example of specifically religious group identifications. Kerdir's inscription explicitly designates the groups of conquered people in religious terms, and I am not convinced by Nongbri's argument about the broader semantic meaning of the Middle Persian "dēn". Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 69–70. BeDuhn is more accommodating toward Kerdir's inscription, but states that "Mani did more than refer to or describe this plurality; he made it the subject of a theory". BeDuhn, "Crystallization of the Concept of 'Religion'," 266. Cf. K. Rezania, "'Religion' in Late Antique Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism: Developing a Term in Counterpoint," *Entangled Religions* 11, no. 1 (2020): 71–74; N.J. Baker-Brian, "A New Religion? The Emergence of Manichaeism in Late Antiquity," in *A Companion to Religion in Late Antiquity*, ed. J. Lössl and N.J. Baker-Brian (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2018), 319–343; C. Markschies, "Globalized History of Religions in Late Antiquity? The Problem of Comparative Studies and the Example of Manichaeism," in *Comparative Studies in the Humanities*, ed. G.G. Stroumsa (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2018), 173–194. On the waning of the negative evaluation of "novelty," see A.K. Petersen, "Between Old and New: The Problem of Acculturation Illustrated by the Early Christian Use of the Phoenix Motif," in *Jerusalem, Alexandria, Rome: Studies in Ancient Cultural Interaction in Honour of A. Hilhorst*, ed. F.G. Martínez and G.P. Luttikhuizen (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 147–64.

39 P. Brown, "The Diffusion of Manichaeism in the Roman Empire," *Journal of Roman Studies* 59, no. 1 (1969): 99.

environment" and sheltered the "vagrant" and "studiously ill-kempt" elect living ascetic lives.[40] Much has changed in the study of Manichaeans in the last fifty years, but the emphasis on the group structure of Manichaeism has remained. The presence of a Manichaean teacher in the Kellis documents (e.g. P.Kellis V Copt. 20) has been interpreted in reference to previous accounts of a pyramid-shaped church hierarchy, leading the editors to suggest, "it would appear that the Kellis community had a direct link to (conceivably) the foremost Manichaean leader in Egypt at the time."[41] Reflecting on Augustine's life and the new sources from Kellis, Peter Brown continues to stress the strong group identity of Manichaeans: their deep sense of intimate friendship and the "intense experience of bonding in one of the most starkly countercultural groups in the Latin West."[42] Manichaeism's group structure, others argue, influenced Augustine's sense of "elitism," which remained influential even after his conversion to Nicene Christianity.[43] To become Manichaean, according to these reconstructions, was to become part of a well-defined and demanding religious group: a religion *par excellence*.[44]

40 Brown, "The Diffusion of Manichaeism," 99.

41 Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT1*, 75.

42 Interestingly, Brown already described Manichaeism as a strong current of new spiritual Christianity in his biography of Augustine, P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (London: Faber & Faber, 1967), 43–44; P. Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 159; P. Brown, *Treasure in Heaven: The Holy Poor in Early Christianity* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 43–50.

43 J.D. BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma 1: Conversion and Apostasy, 373–388 C.E.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 35. On a related note, Johannes van Oort summarizes how Manichaeism "became a feared competitor of the official Christian Church both in the Roman Empire and elsewhere. Its firm organization guaranteed a strong unity. Thanks to its organization and a system of teachings that could easily be accommodated, Manichaeism was already within Greco-Roman antiquity a success". J. van Oort, "Mani and Manichaeism: A General Introduction," in *Mani and Augustine* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 9.

44 In fact, Jonathan Z. Smith has called Manichaeism "perhaps the first, self-conscious 'world' religion," a label that has found wide following. J.Z. Smith, "A Matter of Class: Taxonomies of Religion," *Harvard Theological Review* 89 (1996): 387–403. Reprinted in J.Z. Smith, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004). Wilfred Cantwell Smith credited Mani with "deliberately establishing a religion." W.C. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind*. Reprint. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991 [1962]), 93; and Guy Stroumsa described the Cologne Mani Codex as offering "a glimpse at the very passage from sect to world religion." G.G. Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom: Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 64.

Classifying Manichaeans

Before I highlight some of the problems with this group-based approach to Manichaeism, two sensitive academic classifications deserve attention. The first process of classification involves speaking of Manichaeism as a religion; a growing number of contemporary scholars question the concept of *religion* for antiquity.[45] The second process of classification involves the inclusion of Manichaeans in the broad category of ancient Christianity (sometimes spelled in the plural: Christianities). The limited – but not unsubstantial – evidence for Christian institutions in Kellis, as well as the heavily Christian tone of some of the personal letters, has sparked characterizations of the Manichaeans of Kellis as "*the* Christians in the Dakhleh Oasis."[46] This designation, in turn, has affected scholarly understanding of Manichaeism as a religion. Should we understand Manichaeism as a type of Christianity *or* as a new religion?[47] My take on the classification of Manichaeism is substantive and pragmatic: I believe that we should treat Manichaeism as a religion, and that it should be distinguished (but not separated) from ancient Christianity.

The concept of religion has been subject to deconstruction and controversy over the last couple of decades, to the extent that some specialists in the study of religion would rather abandon the concept than continue to use it as an explanatory category, especially for premodern societies.[48] Religion, these scholars argue, is conceptually tied to the early modern world and tainted by imperialism, colonialism, and European polemics between Protestants and

45 Russell McCutcheon, for example, states that, "by means of such classifications, we may very well be actively presenting back to ourselves the taxonomies that help to establish our own contingent and inevitably provincial social world as if their components were self-evident, natural, universal, and necessary." R.T. McCutcheon, *The Discipline of Religion: Structure, Meaning, Rhetoric* (London: Routledge, 2003), 255.

46 Lieu, "Self-Identity of the Manichaeans," 224 (his emphasis).

47 Brent Nongbri argues that the close affiliation between Manichaeans and Christians implies that it is difficult to regard Manichaeism a distinct religion. Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 66–72. His argument hinges on the purported Christian self-identification of Manichaeans, but he concludes that "groups of Manichaeans were different entities in different contexts to different observers" (72).

48 T. Fitzgerald, "A Critique of 'Religion' as a Cross-Cultural Category," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 9, no. 2 (1997): 91–110. An overview of the literature is given in R.T. McCutcheon, "The Category 'Religion' in Recent Publications: A Critical Survey," *Numen* 42, no. 3 (1995): 284–309; R.T. McCutcheon, "The Category 'Religion' in Recent Publications: Twenty Years Later," *Numen* 62, no. 1 (2015): 119–41; R. Orsi, "The 'So-Called History' of the Study of Religion," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 20 (2008): 134–38.

Catholics.[49] Without delving into the ethical and ontological debates, I believe that we can embrace historiographical reflection *and* retain an open concept of religion. When I describe Manichaeism as a religion, I mean to refer to a bundle of social practices, beliefs, experiences, narratives, and discourses that assume the existence of transempirical – or supernatural – entities, worlds, and/or processes.[50] This stipulative definition leaves space to theorize about historical differences, for example, concerning the types of organization and levels of religious groupness. It also prioritizes social practices over individual beliefs, without losing sight of the fact that particular beliefs about transempirical beings is a differentiating factor. Some of these *bundles* of practices coalesce into religious groups or religions – networks of interrelated practices that are grouped together into social complexes.[51] The demarcation of what gets to be grouped together, and what is excluded, is determined by the social and religious dynamics between religious texts, leaders, and practitioners. With this broad substantive definition, I hope to highlight ancient conceptualizations analogous – but not directly equivalent – to the modern concept of religion.[52] This requires reflection on the difference between ancient self-understanding and modern classification, as Kevin Schilbrack argues, "the retentionist hypothesis is that even if a culture does not have the concept of religion, the connections that constitute the cultural pattern are indigenous and not imposed by the use of the external label."[53] In other words, there

49 Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion;* R.F. Campany, "On the Very Idea of Religions (in the Modern West and in Early Medieval China)," *History of Religions* 42, no. 4 (2003): 287–319; C.A. Barton and D. Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion: How Modern Abstractions Hide Ancient Realities* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).

50 Slightly deviating from the definition given by M.A. Davidsen, "Theo Van Baaren's Systematic Science of Religion Revisited: The Current Crisis in Dutch Study of Religion and a Way Out," *NTT Journal for Theology and the Study of Religion* 74, no. 3 (2020): 234. A different – but comparable – definition is outlined in J. Rüpke, "Religious Agency, Identity, and Communication: Reflections on History and Theory of Religion," *Religion* 45, no. 3 (2015): 344–66.

51 C. Smith, *Religion: What It Is, How It Works, and Why It Matters* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 26; M. Riesebrodt, *The Promise of Salvation: A Theory of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), xii defines religions as concrete systems of practices that are related to superhuman powers.

52 R.F. Campany, "'Religious' as a Category: A Comparative Case Study," *Numen* 65, no. 4 (2018): 335–6; M.L. Satlow, "Disappearing Categories: Using Categories in the Study of Religion" *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* (2005) 17: 289.

53 K. Schilbrack, *Philosophy and the Study of Religions: A Manifesto* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 95; K. Schilbrack, "Religions: Are There Any," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78, no. 4 (2010): 1112–38; K. Schilbrack, "A Realist Social Ontology of Religion," *Religion* 47, no. 2 (2017): 161–78.

are valuable lessons to be learned by reflecting on the concept of religion in European colonial history, but this does not undermine the existence of what we now call religion across cultures.[54]

The characterization of Manichaeism as a religion, controversial among a small number of scholars of religion, is less contested among historians of Manichaeism than its classification as a type of ancient Christianity. In its starkest form, the distinction is between scholars who consider Manichaeism to be a new religion built on various previous traditions, and those who regard it as a type of ancient Christianity that was expelled, rejected, and externalized within the heresiological process of crystallizing Christianity. Johannes van Oort, one of the leading voices in the latter stream of scholarship, describes Manichaeism as originating from a Jewish-Christian that in the West was crystalized into Gnostic-Manichaean Christianity alongside and in conversation with its "Catholic" counterpart, as "frères ennemis."[55]

Classifying Manichaeism as a type of Christianity is a scholarly strategy; classification does not tell one what *is* the same, but only what *counts as* the same. It implies an abstract decision about sameness (which features of a religion make it *the same* as another religion?) and difference (since everything is somehow different, which differences count?). Conflicts over classification belong to the heart of the study of religion, not only because of the definitional question outlined above, but also because of everyday social and legal struggles about inclusion and exclusion.[56] The recognition of the evident *othering* of Manichaeans by heresiologists has led to a cautious scholarly approach, much

54 Or, as Jonathan Z. Smith put it in *Imagining Religion*, "from Babylon to Jonestown". K. Schilbrack, "Imagining Religion in Antiquity: A How To," in *Theorizing "Religion" in Antiquity*, ed. N. Roubekas (Sheffield: Equinox, 2019), 63; W. Hanegraaff, "Reconstructing 'Religion' from the Bottom Up," *Numen* 63, no. 5–6 (2016): 576–605.

55 J. van Oort, "The Emergence of Gnostic-Manichaean Christianity as a Case of Religious Identity in the Making," in *Religious Identity and the Problem of Historical Foundation*, ed. W. Otten, J. Frishman and G. Rouwhorst (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 285; J. van Oort, "The Paraclete Mani as the Apostle of Jesus Christ and the Origins of a New Church," in *The Apostolic Age in Patristic Thought*, ed. A. Hilhorst (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 139–57. I agree with Albert the Jong that the shift in interpretation away from Iranian interpretations, should have led to profound reflection on academic classification strategies, but, "[t]his debate has, unfortunately, never taken place." A.F. de Jong, "A Quodam Persa Exstiterunt: Re-Orienting Manichaean Origins," in *Empsychoi Logoi: Religious Innovations in Antiquity*, ed. A. Houtman, A. de Jong and M. Misset-van de Weg (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 90; A.F. de Jong, "The Cologne Mani Codex and the Life of Zarathushtra," in *Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians: Religious Dynamics in a Sasanian Context*, ed. G. Herman (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2014), 130.

56 A.B. Seligman and R.P. Weller, *How Things Count as the Same: Memory, Mimesis, and Metaphor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 6–8.

attuned to ancient Manichaean self-identifications.[57] Strengthened by the postcolonial desire to uncover the voices of marginalized people and groups, recent research has highlighted the competition behind claims on a Christian identity. As Nils Arne Pedersen states:

> The paramount concern is to avoid a terminology that tears apart groups and ideas which in a historical perspective had not only a common source, but also a continuous, interconnected history in which they remained related: each defined itself in relation to the other and each professed to represent the true version of what its opponent also claimed to be.[58]

Indeed, the Manichaean documents from Kellis contain strikingly Christian features that should be analyzed in light of the gradual development of ancient Christian traditions. Some letters of the elect, as we will see, allude to biblical parables, and their psalms praise Jesus, but is this sameness enough to call Manichaeans Christians?

At this point, a brief comparison can be drawn with the study of ancient gnostics. While their claims on secret knowledge (*gnosis*) were fiercely rejected by Christian heresiologists, some individuals gnostics considered themselves to be proper Christians (the self-identification criterion to classification), and they were part and parcel of some of the earliest Christian communities (the genealogical approach to classification).[59] Scholars like Michael A. Williams and Karen King have reflected on the continuation of heresiological discourse in modern scholarship and rejected binary divisions resembling the orthodoxy and heresy divide. Instead, they shifted to classifications based on ancient self-identification or more elaborate academic typologies of *Gnosticism* (frequently highlighting cosmological sameness). In this perspective, gnostics became "alternative" Christians whose voices were written out of history by

57 Baker-Brian states that, "bubbling away beneath the surface of Manichaean studies lies the continuation of some of these heresiological characterisations of Mani and his religion." Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism*, 7. Likewise, Richard Lim argues that modern scholars "owe the sense of a distinctive Manichaean identity to the works of catholic/orthodox Christian writers". R. Lim, "The *Nomen Manichaeorum* and Its Uses in Late Antiquity," in *Heresy and Identity in Late Antiquity*, ed. E. Iricinschi and H.M. Zellentin (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 147.

58 N.A. Pedersen, *Demonstrative Proof in Defence of God: A Study of Titus of Bostra's Contra Manichaeos: The Work's Sources, Aims and Relation to Its Contemporary Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 11.

59 D. Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 1–28; C. Markschies and E. Thomassen eds., *Valentinianism: New Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

other Christian polemicists.[60] Interestingly, the emphasis on self-identification led April DeConick to argue in another direction, namely that "making the gnostic into a Christian only imposes another grand narrative on the early Christians, one which domesticates gnostic movements," and conceals their "countercultural" attitude.[61] What if the same is true for the way we classify the Manichaeans? Following these twenty-first century re-evaluations of essentialist classifications, we can redirect attention to ancient *processes* of identity formation and the *heuristic* application of labels and categories to shed light on both sameness and difference.

Classifying Manichaeans within the category of ancient Christianity runs the risk of creating a false friend. There is still a lot that is unknown about what Manichaeans in Kellis practiced and believed. Lumping them with other Christians obviates the development of a fine-grained academic classification and obscures open questions: did the Manichaeans make use of Kellis's third-century church buildings? How did they relate to priests and bishops of the regional Christian church? Did they regard these non-Manichaean Christians as belonging to *the same* religion? Would the Manichaean families have thought about themselves as *similar* to the village's Christians? In light of these questions, it remains imperative to recognize that Manichaeans not only claimed continuity with the message of Jesus, but also claimed novelty and superiority (for example, in 1 Keph. 151). Any classification should take into account the fact that they venerated a new founder figure, read an additional set of scriptures, and established distinct institutional structures, not unlike the difficult-to-classify Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.[62] Apart

60 M.A. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); K.L. King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003); The most helpful overview of classification history is D.M. Burns, "Gnosticism, Gnostics, and Gnosis," in *The Gnostic World*, ed. G.W. Trompf, G.B. Mikkelsen, and J. Johnston (London: Routledge, 2019), 9–25.

61 A.D. DeConick, "The Countercultural Gnostic: Turning the World Upside Down and inside Out," *Gnosis: Journal of Gnostic Studies* 1 (2016): 7–35.

62 Despite his attention for the Christian features of Manichaeism, a more nuanced position was already argued by A. Böhlig, "Neue Kephalaia des Mani," in *Mysterion und Wahrheit* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 262–65. On the classification of the LDS Church, see the reflections of J. Shipps, *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years among the Mormons* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 335–357. John Turner categorizes Mormon Christianity as a new *genus* of the *family* Christianity rather than a new world religion. *The Mormon Jesus* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 1–18. Some scholars and insiders, on the other hand, prefer to classify it as a distinct world religion. L. Wiles, "Mormonism and the World Religions Discourse: Contesting the Boundaries of Comparative Religion's Prevailing Taxonomy," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 27, no. 1 (2015): 1–30. For the ancient separation – and academic distinction – of Judaism

from these organizational features, Manichaean texts and practices show the extensive engagement with – and influence of – Zoroastrian, Buddhist, and Jain traditions, to the extent that these elements cannot be understood as a veneer layer of missionary adaptations only.[63] This warrants a nuanced understanding of Manichaeism as a multifaceted phenomenon, to be distinguished – but not separated[64] – from Christian traditions. Invoking a modern metaphor, Baker-Brian characterizes the position of Manichaeans as "somewhere within what is the equivalent of a religiously-style Venn diagram, where claims to an identity – such as those made by Mani himself as an 'Apostle of Jesus Christ' – overlap other claims and are dependent upon being read within the context of a specific theological setting."[65] This Venn diagram also leaves space for in-depth classificatory argumentations based on a genealogical approach (highlighting Mani's upbringing in a Christian baptist community), a self-identification approach (based on Manichaean self-understanding), or a typological approach (focused on the central role of Jesus, revealed gnosis, and biblical exegesis).[66]

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and Christianity, see A.Y. Reed and A.H. Becker eds., *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

63 The discussion about transmigration is a good example of how the field of Manichaean Studies has to navigate essentialism and notions of cultural influence. I. Gardner, "Some Comments on Mani and Indian Religions According to the Coptic *Kephalaia*," in *Il manicheismo: nuove prospettive della richerca*, ed. L. Cirillo and A. van Tongerloo (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 123–36; M. Deeg and I. Gardner, "Indian Influence on Mani Reconsidered: The Case of Jainism," *International Journal of Jaina Studies* 4–6 (2011): 158–86; A. Henrichs, "'Thou Shalt Not Kill a Tree': Greek, Manichaean and Indian Tales," *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 16 (1979): 99. Response in W. Sundermann, "Mani, India, and the Manichaean Religion," *South Asian Studies* 2, no. 1 (1986): 16. The dual context of Manichaeism is best seen in BeDuhn's examination of Christian and Zoroastrian ritual meals as models for the Manichaean food rituals. J.D. BeDuhn, "Eucharist or Yasna? Antecedents of the Manichaean Food Ritual," in *Studia Manichaica IV*, ed. R.E. Emmerick, W. Sundermann, and P. Zieme (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000), 14–36. While previous scholarship has approached this in terms of the distinction between Mani's hypothetical "Urform" and its countless cultural adaptations, I would stress the ever-changing nature of religion. *Contra* H.H. Schaeder, "Urform und Fortbildungen des manichäischen Systems," in *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg*, ed. F. Saxl (Leipzig: Teubner, 1927), 65–157.

64 For the difference between "distinguishing" and "separating" in classificatory action, see K. Schilbrack, "A Metaphysics for the Study of Religion: A Critical Reading of Russell McCutcheon," *Critical Research on Religion* 8, no. 1 (2020): 92–93.

65 Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism*, 17–18.

66 A fuller examination of Christianizing interpretations and the history of Manichaean Studies remains imperative, but falls, unfortunately, outside the scope of this chapter. For an example of the typological approach, see Pedersen's statement that the centrality of Jesus as a Manichaean savior figure, "must already undermine the understanding of Manichaeism as a 'new religion'," and "on this basis certain scholars including myself

The consensus understanding of Manichaeism as a world religion that arose within a late antique transition toward distinct group-specific religions stands in contrast to emerging scholarly critique of group-based models in the study of religion. Pivotal in this regard is Rogers Brubaker's warning against *groupism*, defined as "the tendency to take discrete, sharply differentiated, internally homogeneous and externally bounded groups as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts, and fundamental units of social analysis."[67] While Brubaker's warning was directed at scholars working on ethnicity and nationalism, the same tendency is visible in the study of late antique religions. David Brakke has questioned academic models that presuppose bounded groups: "In the laudable effort to emphasize the diversity of early Christian groups and movements, we tend to create stable 'name brands,' [such as Gnostics, Montanists, Marcionites, Encratites] which interact and compete with each other like so many brands of breakfast cereal on a grocery store shelf."[68] Stanley Stowers has also criticized the unreflective use of the term *community* for the study of ancient Christianity, which he traces back to German Romanticism. The existence of highly cohesive communities with commonality in belief and practice standing behind Christian and Manichaean literature has to be proven, rather than uncritically assumed. A groupism perspective, based on heresiological classifications with "neatly

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have been willing to regard Manichaeism as a part of ancient Christianity". Pedersen, *Demonstrative Proof*, 9. Cf. Franzmann, *Jesus in the Manichaean Writings*, 2–6. This crucial role of Jesus in Manichaean soteriology and eschatology, highlighted by Rose, *Die manichäische Christologie*, 132–138, 140–153, is not to be dismissed, but can hardly be used as the single criterion for an academic classification. Within a genealogical approach, the CMC is often presented as definite proof of Mani's *Christian* identity, but there has been very little eye for the "obvious apologetic devices" of this text. I concur with Gardner's statement that, "as Manichaeologists we have not been critical enough" about these narratives (although Gardner's arrows are aimed at synchronicity between Mani's revelation, his mission, and the Shapur's rise to power). Gardner, *The Founder of Manichaeism*, 38 and 64. Cf. J.H. Han, "The Baptist Followers of Mani: Reframing the Cologne Mani Codex," *Numen* 66, no. 1 (2019): 243–70; S.C. Mimouni, *Les baptistes du Codex manichéen de Cologne sont-ils des elkasaïtes?* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 149–268, 337–350. I am not convinced by his dismissal of Luttikhuizen on 279–280, 290–3. Cf. G.P. Luttikhuizen, "Waren Manis Täufer Elchasaiten?," in *Inkulturation des Christentums im Sasanidenreich*, ed. A. Mustafa, J. Tubach and G.S. Vashalomidze (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2007), 21–29. The *Jewish*-Christian elements in the CMC are highlighted in J. van Oort, "Jewish Elements in the Cologne Mani Codex," *Journal of Early Christian History* 9, no. 3 (2019): 85–96.

67 R. Brubaker, "Ethnicity without Groups," *Archives européennes de sociologie* 43, no. 2 (2002): 164.

68 Brakke, *The Gnostics*, 9.

differentiated groups built around texts," is in itself a discursive construction.[69] The authors of Christian and Manichaean texts may have wished for such communities to come into existence, but it is more likely that readers, copyists, interpreters, and writers formed their own social networks that only partially reflected other religious group styles.[70] What is required, therefore, is a more "flat methodology," in which the conceptual leap from text to community is reexamined by focusing on the discursive identity formation in theological texts, the role of scribes, and the lingering presence of modern academic presuppositions.[71] The Manichaean papyri from Kellis offer an opportunity to develop this approach and re-think the groupism behind the current prevailing models of religious change in Late Antiquity.

Theoretical Framework: Everyday Groupness

This book's theoretical framework is characterized by what I will call *Everyday Groupness*, a critical scholarly approach to everyday life undergirded by current debates in religious studies and sociology.[72] It draws upon William H. Sewell Jr.'s characterization of "worlds of meaning" as "contradictory, loosely integrated, contested, mutable, and highly permeable."[73] Following this critical post-Parsian view of culture, scholars of lived religion focus on the

69 S.K. Stowers, "The Concept of 'Community' and the History of Early Christianity," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 23 (2011): 238–56. Citation from J. Rüpke, "The Role of Texts in Processes of Religious Grouping during the Principate," *Religion in the Roman Empire* 2 (2016): 172.

70 Stowers treats the "religion of literate cultural producers" as a distinct mode in ancient Mediterranean religion, to be distinguished from the "religion of everyday social exchange" that entailed plant and animal offerings. S.K. Stowers, "The Religion of Plant and Animal Offerings Versus the Religion of Meanings, Essences, and Textual Mysteries," in *Ancient Mediterranean Sacrifice*, ed. J.W. Knust and Z. Varhelyi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 35–56.

71 D. Ullucci, "Competition without Groups: Maintaining a Flat Methodology," *Journal of Religious Competition in Antiquity* 1 (2019): 1–17, building on Bruno Latour's "flat methodology".

72 The specific phrase and the approach are strongly influenced by the work of Éric Rebillard, for example in his *Christians and their Many Identities in Late Antiquity, North Africa, 200–450 CE* (London: Cornell University Press, 2012).

73 W.H. Sewell, "The Concept(s) of Culture," in *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, ed. V.E. Bonnell and L. Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 53. Inconsistency and ancient religion are explored in H.S. Versnel, *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion: Ter Unus. Isis, Dionysos, Hermes. Three Studies in Henotheism* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 1–35.

everyday practices of ordinary individuals, detecting and analyzing religious groups when they become important within individual choices. It is, however, not enough to point to individual diversity, or the contradictory complexity of everyday life. A more sophisticated theoretical framework should allow us to move from typological characterizations of religion to the nitty-gritty of everyday religious behavior – and back. Practice theories provide us with tools to do this: they focus on individual agency without positing or rejecting religious groups as essentialist constructions. They point in the direction of the everyday practices that constitute a religion by asking: where and when was a Manichaean group identity formed? When and how was it relevant enough to be acted upon?

The Quotidian Turn: Toward Everyday Life

The conventional focus on Manichaeism as a religious system has for a long time prioritized the theological and cosmological texts of the elite, while the everyday life of ordinary Manichaeans remained unexplored. Most Manichaean sources primarily represent the perspective(s) of religious elites with access to enough resources to produce manuscripts that stood the test of time.[74] BeDuhn, while reflecting on his study of the cosmology, anthropology, and ritual of the Manichaean meal, has hinted at the omission of everyday life. In retrospect, he argues that we should focus on

> how other religions actually lay out in practice, what they actually mean to their living adherents, how they are integrated into daily lives, how their ideals are modified by local conditions and expediencies – in short, the human reality of a lived religion.[75]

Reading the Kellis letters from the perspective of the *quotidian turn* has the potential to bring this unexplored side of Manichaeism to the fore, and offer valuable insights into the world of ordinary Manichaeans, who, as we will see,

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74 With terms like “institutional” and “elite,” I refer to the wealth standing behind written documents and elaborate literary works. Wealthier individuals are more frequently visible in papyri because their societal role and property often involved interactions put into writing. Bagnall, *Reading Papyri, Writing Ancient History*, 14–15. The conventional focus on institutionalized religion is visible in the various introductions to Manichaeism. M. Tardieu, *Manichaeism*, trans. P.A. Mirecki (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), which hardly treats Manichaeism as a historical and social movement (with the exception of a section on the church hierarchy). Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism* has a short section on the community, focused on the relation with the cosmological myth, but excludes the history of the Manichaean religion.

75 BeDuhn, *Augustine’s Manichaean Dilemma 1*, 2.

were not constantly in the process of constructing a religious narrative. In fact, they only occasionally referred to its impact on their lives.

The intersection of daily life and religion has returned to the forefront of the study of religion in the last decades. Topics previously associated with the German *Alltagsgeschichte* of the 1970s and the French *Annales* school of the 1960s were revived in the late 1980s and '90s by historians and sociologists interested in "local religion," "lived religion," and "everyday religion."[76] In his landmark volume *Lived Religion in America*, David Hall argues that historians of religion became aware of knowing "next-to-nothing about religion as practiced and precious little about the everyday thinking and doing of lay men and women."[77] Robert Orsi, Nancy Ammerman, and Meredith McGuire decided to refocus on the practices of laity rather than preachers, and on religion in almost mundane places: the home, the workplace, and the garden, instead of institutional centers of religious learning.[78]

A central problem within studies of lived religion is the dichotomy between "ordinary" people and religious elite.[79] There can be no denying that preachers and religious leaders had a different perspective on religion than slaves, merchants, and women, but the emphasis on lived religion should not drive a wedge between different social strata. Adherents to the quotidian turn have stressed, therefore, the dialectical relationship between everyday behavior and textual, institutional religion. This results in two methodological challenges. The first is that scholars of lived religion must *excavate* religion in the messiness of everyday life. This is not always easy, as the complex mosaic of

76 T.A. Tweed, "After the Quotidian Turn: Interpretive Categories and Scholarly Trajectories in the Study of Religion since the 1960s," *Journal of Religion* 95, no. 3 (2015): 365n16 cites the relevant literature. For late antique history, we now have K. Sessa, *Daily Life in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

77 D.D. Hall, ed., *Lived Religion in America: Towards a History of Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), vii.

78 R. Orsi, "Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion," in *Lived Religion in America: Towards a History of Practice*, ed. D.D. Hall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 4–12; R. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880–1950*, 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); M.B. McGuire, *Lived Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); S. Schielke and L. Debevec, "Introduction," in *Ordinary Lives and Grand Schemes: An Anthropology of Everyday Religion*, ed. S. Schielke and L. Debevec (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 1–16.

79 "Ordinary people" is used as a shorthand for ancient individuals who did not write elaborate religious treatises, nor held religious positions of power. We must keep in mind that the majority of the ordinary people are invisible in our ancient sources. Most written accounts, even in the exceptional case of the papyri from Egypt, derive from well-to-do subsections of society. R.S. Bagnall and R. Cribiore, *Women's Letters from Ancient Egypt. 300 BC–AD 800* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 2006), 10–11.

relationships, expectations, and daily individual choices stands in strong contrast to the straightforward discourse of religious specialists, who tend to work from a perspective of coherence and perfection.[80] Historians have therefore focused on alternative types of source material (inscriptions, archaeological finds, papyri), and attempted to read literary sources against the grain to reconstruct the more mundane realities behind elite discourse. Both options involve learning how "to interpret the surviving texts and other artifacts with less reliance on patristic categories and limits."[81] Following such steps, sociologists and historians have slowly opened up the category of religion to include new perspectives based on the idiosyncrasies of their interlocutors and sources. Within this approach, the distinction between *marked* and *unmarked* language, borrowed from linguistics, can be used to understand everyday language carrying particular social and religious meanings that differ from the habitual commonsense usage. Addressing an elderly villager as "father" was unmarked, while the honorific "Apa" was religiously marked. By embracing the centrality of the interlocutor's perspective, however, these approaches run the risk of blindness to structure and favor a postmodern aversion to generalizations beyond the micro level.[82] The Everyday Groupness approach aims to resolve these risks by taking a dialectical perspective with openness to the structural constraints of religious repertoires when they coalesce into social groupings. These groupings can subsequently be generalized into group styles (see below), which may bridge the analytical gap between the micro level of late antique individuals and the macro level of late antique religious change.

The second methodological challenge is to avoid an easy dichotomy in which "popular religion" becomes "presented as in some way a diminution, a misconception or a contamination of '*un*-popular religion.'"[83] Institutionalized religion, even when embedded in elite literary texts, remains an important source for individuals and families to draw upon, including when they adapt

80 L. Meskell and R.W. Preucel, "Identities," in *Companion to Social Archaeology*, ed. L. Meskell and R.W. Preucel (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), 129.

81 V. Burrus and R. Lyman, "Shifting the Focus of History," in *Late Ancient Christianity: A People's History of Christianity*, ed. V. Burrus (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 5.

82 N. Ammerman, "Rethinking Religion: Towards a Practice Approach," *American Journal of Sociology* 126, no. 1 (2020): 10 reflects on the field's "drift toward an individualist approach" in light of the minimization of institutional religion, and the modern Western freedom of choice. A different type of criticism is explored in K. Knibbe and H. Kupari, "Theorizing Lived Religion: Introduction," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 35, no. 2 (2020): 167.

83 P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 19.

and appropriate elements according to their own needs.[84] The active usage of religious ideas and practices by non-professionals is called *appropriation* in Jörg Rüpke's approach to lived ancient religion.[85] Developed by Michel de Certeau, appropriation does not refer in a negative sense to taking what is not one's own, but to the wide range of ways in which people use, transmit, adjust, and accommodate cultural and religious practices and ideas.[86] It is through appropriation that religions come to play a role in everyday life, including institutionalized domains. In this way, the focus of the quotidian turn is *beyond* the scope of officially sanctioned beliefs and practices, though it does not exclude or discredit them.

Practice Theories: From Groupism to Individuals and Families

While the quotidian turn builds on a methodological shift toward individuals, the wider set of practice theories entail a more fundamental sociological

84 W.A. Christian, *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); E. Badone, ed., *Religious Orthodoxy & Popular Faith in European Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 12; Tweed, "After the Quotidian Turn."; S. Sharot, *A Comparative Sociology of World Religions: Virtuosos, Priests, and Popular Religion* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 13–19; R. Orsi, "Afterword: Everyday Religion and the Contemporary World: The Un-Modern, Or What Was Supposed to Have Disappeared but Did Not," in *Ordinary Lives and Grand Schemes: An Anthropology of Everyday Religion*, ed. S. Schielke and L. Debevec (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 152. To study everyday religion, according to Nancy Ammerman, does not exclude religious institutions, but primarily deals with them "once they get used by someone other than a professional." N. Ammerman, "Introduction: Observing Religious Modern Lives," in *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives*, ed. N. Ammerman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5; C. Bender, *Heaven's Kitchen: Living Religion at God's Love We Deliver* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

85 The Lived Ancient Religion project (LAR) was announced in J. Rüpke, "Lived Ancient Religion: Questioning 'Cults' and 'Polis Religion'," *Mythos* 5 (2011): 191–203. Key publications from this research perspective are published in the new journal *Religion in the Roman Empire*. Associated conference proceedings include: J. Rüpke and W. Spickermann, eds., *Reflections on Religious Individuality* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012); J. Rüpke, ed., *The Individual and the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); E. Rebillard and J. Rüpke, eds., *Group Identity and Religious Individuality in Late Antiquity* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press 2015). The final publications (with further references) are J. Albrecht et al., "Religion in the Making: The Lived Ancient Religion Approach," *Religion* 48, no. 2 (2018): 1–26 and V. Gasparini, et al., *Lived Religion in the Ancient Mediterranean World: Approaching Religious Transformations from Archaeology, History and Classics* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020).

86 M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). Discussed in J.H.F. Dijkstra, "Appropriation: A New Approach to Religious Transformation in Late Antiquity," *Numen* 68, no. 1 (2021): 1–38.

and philosophical reflection on how actions at the individual level relate to broader explanatory schemes like religion and culture.

Practice theories focus on human action. The focus on what individuals and families do entails a shift from religion as discursively constructed, to religion as practiced and performed.[87] These theories build on the central premise that "through their activities, individuals internalize cultural symbols and meanings" and thereby "also reproduce and transform these symbols and meanings in the social world."[88] The recursive and re-creative nature of tradition is central in the work of theorists such as Anthony Giddens, Pierre Bourdieu, Marshall Sahlins, and William H. Sewell Jr. When applied to everyday religious choices, practice theories make it apparent that individuals not only draw on cultural and religious repertoires, but by doing so replicate and transform these repertoires for future generations. Individual action is not a carbon copy of a religious model, but a situational event informed by previous socializations, experiences, and the needs of a particular situation. A helpful concept for understanding religious practices within specific situations is Brubaker's *groupness*, which indicates "phases of extraordinary cohesion and moments of intensely felt collective solidarity."[89] This notion – specified as *Manichaeanness* for moments of identification with the imagined Manichaean community – allows us to move beyond the common discursive approach to the construction of group identity and into the realm of social practices; it is through everyday human action that imagined communities become real.[90]

In an effort to initiate a "sociology of the individual," Bernard Lahire suggests following individuals through several fields of life to see them "switching" their behavior in different situations and in various types of interactions. Building

87 Paraphrasing G.M. Spiegel, "Introduction," in *Practicing History: New Directions in Historical Writing after the Linguistic Turn* (London: Routledge, 2008), 3.

88 H. Kupari, *Lifelong Religion as Habitus: Religious Practice among Displaced Karelian Orthodox Women in Finland* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 10; M. Polyakov, "Practice Theories: The Latest Turn in Historiography?," *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 6 (2012): 218–35. The relation between structure and agency is a frequently returning topic in microhistorical work, in which seemingly unique cases are taken to illustrate underlying structures. A.I. Port, "History from Below, the History of Everyday Life, and Microhistory," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, ed. J. Wright (Oxford: Elsevier, 2015), 108–13. Specifically focused on (Christian) Late Antiquity are the contributions in P. Eich and E. Faber, eds., *Religiöser Alltag in der Spätantike* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2013). Unfortunately, this last volume fails to establish a theoretically informed common ground.

89 Brubaker, "Ethnicity without Groups," 168.

90 R. Wuthnow, *What Happens When We Practice Religion? Textures of Devotion in Everyday Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 46–53 on situational cues triggering religious habits.

on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, and in particular his notion of a *habitus* comprised of multiple dispositions, Lahire describes individual action as following from a match between situations and acquired dispositions. Dispositions are the result of socialization; the individual has learned how to think and behave as a Manichaean catechumen, an inhabitant of Kellis, and a grandfather.[91] These dispositions are latently available, ready to be activated in corresponding circumstances, and leading to moments of groupness. According to Lahire:

> [B]ringing them [dispositions] back to activity may depend on the social micro-situation, (e.g. interaction with a particular actor, a certain situation, permitting schemes or habits to be actualized that are inhibited in some other type of interaction and/or with some other actor), on the domain of practices (e.g. applying in relation to food consumption different cultural schemes from those applied in relation to cultural consumption), on social universe (e.g. doing in the family or leisure world what one cannot do in the professional world), on the social group (e.g. doing in a certain social group what one would not do in some other social group), or again on the moment in the life cycle.[92]

This is what I will call the *situatedness* of religious gestures and language, which are activated or considered salient in specific times and places. For Lahire, "the activation of a particular disposition can be conceived of as the product of *the interaction of* (*relations between*) *internal and external forces*."[93] The elements of the context or situation (external forces) combine with dispositions that have been established during past socializations (internal forces) and provide fertile ground for the activation of religious or group-specific dispositions.

Éric Rebillard, in his slim but influential *Christians and their Many Identities in Late Antiquity*, highlights the plurality of ancient individuals' identities.

91 B. Lahire, "From the Habitus to an Individual Heritage of Dispositions. Towards a Sociology at the Level of the Individual," *Poetics* 31 (2003): 351. Bourdieu defines *habitus* as "an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted; the habitus engenders all the thought, all the perceptions, and all the actions consistent with those conditions and not others." P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 95.

92 B. Lahire, *The Plural Actor* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), 57.

93 Lahire, "Habitus," 353 (his italics). Cf. Symbolic interactionism, outlined in I. Tavory, "Interactionism: Meaning and Self as Process," in *Handbook of Contemporary Sociological Theory*, ed. S. Abrutyn (Cham: Springer, 2016), 85–98. Methodological reflections on the translation from observations of action in one situation to another situation, see D. Trouille and I. Tavory, "Shadowing: Warrants for Intersituational Variation in Ethnography," *Sociological Methods & Research* 48 no. 3 (2019): 534–560.

These individuals evaluated situations (consciously or unconsciously) and acted on one of their membership affiliations. North African Christians, for example, could either prioritize a Christian identification and resist the call to sacrifice to the genius of the Roman emperor, or affirm their belonging to the imperial world by making the required sacrifices. The latter, according to Rebillard, was done because they were "either unaware that it might be contradictory to their Christian membership, or because they simply did not activate their Christian membership in this context."[94] From this perspective, these ancient individuals *were* not Christians, they *did* Christian acts or they *became* Christian each time by embracing a Christian group identification and performing associated behavior.[95]

When does religion affect situations so fundamentally that individuals align their behavior and self-understanding with imagined religious communities and develop explicit religious strategies of action? Cultural sociologist Ann Swidler distinguishes between the influence of culture on *ideology*, *traditions*, and *common sense* in *settled* and *unsettled* periods. In *unsettled* circumstances or periods of life, culture's influence on social action is very pronounced, as people look for explicit cultural ideas and practices to navigate crises or develop new strategies of action to deal with uncertainty. Think for example about people going through a divorce, or about migrants entering a new country.[96] To outside observers, it may appear as if culture is more prominent in these unsettled circumstances, since people develop explicitly formulated *ideologies*.[97] When the crisis is over, and life has settled down, culture exerts another type of influence on action. Many cultural elements have by then become part of an unarticulated way of seeing the world. During such *settled* periods of life, religious

94 Rebillard, *Christians and their Many Identities*, 60. In a similar analysis, Rebillard points out how Augustine promoted to the status of martyr "the Christian who sticks to his or her Christian identity as his or her unique principle of action." E. Rebillard, "Religious Sociology: Being Christian in the Time of Augustine," in *A Companion to Augustine*, ed. M. Vessey (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 49. Further examples of these "hierarchical and lateral arrangements of category membership sets" in Augustine's letters and sermons are discussed in E. Rebillard, "Late Antique Limits of Christianness: North Africa in the Age of Augustine," in *Group Identity and Religious Individuality in Late Antiquity*, ed. E. Rebillard and J. Rüpke (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 293–317. Cf. H. Wendt, *At the Temple Gates: The Religion of Freelance Experts in the Early Roman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

95 E. Rebillard, "Everyday Christianity in Carthage at the Time of Tertullian," *Religion in the Roman Empire* 2, no. 1 (2016): 92.

96 A. Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* 54, no. 2 (1986): 279.

97 A. Swidler, *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 89.

and cultural repertoire is a toolkit people draw from without much explicit articulation. Individual actions in settled life thrive on what Bourdieu calls "the feel for the game" or a "practical sense" of things. The *common sense* that needs no explicit support or elaboration is pervasive throughout settled life, but it is also more fragmented than ideologies. People invoke elements from their available repertoires intermittently, and often implicitly, as part of daily life, without necessarily subscribing to a full set of religious ideas and practices.[98] *Traditions* take a middle position on the continuum between ideology and common sense. They consist of beliefs and practices that are presented as established facts that help to define a group. In contrast to ideologies, which are closely tied to overarching worldviews, there is a loose fit between traditions and broader schemas, and tradition allows for more flexibility and less explicit systematizations than ideology.[99] Culture's impact on action in settled life is therefore almost invisible. People habitually draw from their various cultural repertoires, adapt it to new purposes, and create a multitude of resources without explicit justification or systematization. People prefer this multiplicity because it helps them to approach situations from different angles, with the possibility of shifting to other metaphors when they deem it necessary, which Swidler calls "strategies of network diversification."[100] These strategies are visible, for example, in the way modern individuals "play" with spirituality and "try out" religious identities, before (or: instead of) wholeheartedly embracing a religious group identification.[101]

The resulting multiplicity of social roles and identities sometimes creates tension.[102] Scholars interested in the dynamics of multiple social roles and self-understandings posit various types of intersecting identities: nested,

98 Swidler, "Culture in Action," 277.

99 Swidler, *Talk of Love*, 97.

100 Swidler, *Talk of Love*, 183. This notion is applied to religion by R.F. Campany, "Religious Repertoires and Contestation: A Case Study Based on Buddhist Miracle Tales," *History of Religions* 52, no. 2 (2012): 99–141.

101 M.A. Davidsen, *The Spiritual Tolkien Milieu: A Study of Fiction-Based Religion* (PhD dissertation, Leiden University, 2014), 258–75 on the construction and maintenance of plausibility structures in the elven movement; T.M. Luhrmann, *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 312 describes how newcomers in the *magical milieu* gradually adopt an identity as magicians through a gradual "interpretive drift" by which they begin to see themselves and the world through a group-specific narrative.

102 Although not all of these identities are of equal standing. On identity-hierarchies, see R.D. Ashmore, K. Deaux, and T. McLaughlin-Volpe, "An Organizing Framework for Collective Identity: Articulation and Significance of Multidimensionality," *Psychological Bulletin* 130, no. 1 (2004): 80–114.

crosscutting, and separation identities. Nested identities are strongly related: "I am a Londoner; I am English; I am British; I am European (and/or perhaps Anglo-American)"; crosscutting identities have an interplay between the two: "I am French and a diplomat," while separation identities bear no direct relation to one another: "I am a woman and I am an avid opera-goer."[103] Potential conflict arises when crosscutting identities have conflicting claims and behavioral dispositions. This is especially visible in what Swidler calls the "integrated mode," in which individuals aim to integrate cultural or religious repertoire and their personal experience into a single framework. In many situations, however, people demonstrate Swidler's "segregated mode," in which cultural and religious repertoire is kept separate from experiences in other facets of life.[104] One can be a Christian without having thought through all practical and doctrinal elements, or articulating how the various schemes of behavioral expectation relate to each other. Looming conflict between disparate roles and identities is, however, defined by more than just internal factors. Individuals do not only self-identify; they are also categorized by others in social situations through processes such as stereotyping and discrimination, or by legal or administrative classifications. The complex entanglement of *self-identification*, *identification* by others, and *categorization* reminds us that individuals are not simply the carriers of pre-established cultural packages or identities.[105] Makarios and Pamour, two of the ancient individuals who will be central in the following chapters, acted as Manichaeans, but this identification intersected with other roles as fathers, sons, merchants, villagers, and Egyptians.

How these theoretical reflections on multiplicity can be operationalized to study the Manichaeans at Kellis is not self-evident. Building on contemporary approaches in sociological studies, I will discern four basic categories of social action in which religious groupness takes shape: talking, choosing, performing, and consuming. The following chapters will examine situations in which the Manichaean group was discursively constructed during routine correspondence (talking), in which it defined and framed the choices of individuals (choosing), in which it was expressed by ritual enactments or

103 R. Mairs, "Intersecting Identities in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt," in *Egypt: Ancient Histories, Modern Archaeologies*, ed. R.J. Dann and K. Exell (New York: Cambria Press, 2013), 163–92.

104 Swidler, *Talk of Love*, 53–70.

105 R. Brubaker and F. Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 17. On the use of "identity" for the ancient world, see K.B. Stratton, "Identity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Mediterranean Religions*, ed. B.S. Spaeth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 220–51; J. Lieu, *Christian Identity in Jewish and Greco-Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

performative actions (performing), and in which it was enacted as part of ordinary consumption patterns (consuming).[106] The patterned regularities within such action and interaction will provide a framework for evaluating the specific ways that Manichaeanness resonated – to the extent that it did so at all – within everyday life.

From Individual Practices to Emerging Group Styles

The shifting identifications of individuals and the occasional activation of previously acquired dispositions are not without consequence in society. As John L. Comaroff puts it, "identities are not things but relations," which become "properties of individuals and collectivities, and they gradually become detached even from these, taking on a life of their own."[107] To reflect on the territory between individual religious practices and full-blown group-specific religions, I will use the concept of *group styles*, which sociologists Nina Eliasoph and Paul Lichterman developed to examine repertoires of action, ideas, and social strategies of interaction. Group styles define adequate and acceptable behavior, speech norms, and conceptual maps in specific settings; the widespread American practice of forming voluntary civil associations in response to societal problems is an example of a group style.[108] Scholars of the ancient world have identified several common group styles of the period, including a sacrificial group style, organized in the civic sphere and characterized by temporary moments of groupness, and a philosophical group style, which was organized in didactic dyads and characterized by frequent interaction between teachers and their students.[109] Reading communities constituted another common group style, and mostly consisted of loose virtual networks for which physical colocation was infrequent or absent. Additional communal group styles included large-scale gatherings involving intense emotional

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106 J. Fox and C. Miller-Idris, "Everyday Nationhood," *Ethnicities* 8, no. 4 (2008): 537–38. Summarized in Rebillard, "Everyday Christianity in Carthage at the Time of Tertullian," 91–102.

107 J.L. Comaroff, "Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Politics of Difference in an Age of Revolution," in *The Politics of Difference: Ethnic Premises in a World of Power*, ed. E.N. Wilmsen and P. McAllister (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 165. Discussed in M. van Beek, "Beyond Identity Fetishism: 'Communal' Conflict in Ladakh and the Limits of Autonomy," *Cultural Anthropology* 15, no. 4 (2001): 527.

108 N. Eliasoph and P. Lichterman, "Culture in Interaction," *American Journal of Sociology* 108, no. 4 (2003): 737.

109 W. Löhr, "Modelling Second-Century Christian Theology: Christian Theology as *Philosophia*," in *Christianity in the Second Century*, ed. J. Carleton Paget and J. Lieu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 151–68.

experiences, found in some of the so-called mystery cults, and the commensal activities of Greco-Roman associations.

The various styles of "grouping together" transcend traditional group boundaries. The group-specific religions of Late Antiquity, in fact, consisted of a variety of group styles, each *producing* different kinds of belonging through *maps*, *scenes*, *group bonds*, and *speech norms*.[110] First, *maps* provide conceptual reference points for individual actors, defining their place within religious narratives. Second, changes in *scenes* or *situations* transform expectations and behavioral norms in such a way that narrative is put into action. Third, *group bonds* define the way actors understand relations within a group, or within specific situations. Fourth, *speech norms* determine appropriate speech for actors within group settings.[111] This set of concepts further improves our grasp of lived ancient religions and the dynamics of short- and long-term social grouping.[112]

Sources and the Structure of the Book

A word of caution: papyrological and archaeological sources come in many shapes and forms. Some of these texts and objects adhere to relatively well-defined genres and models, while others are personalized for situations unknown to the modern observer. Papyrus letters are notorious for their ambiguity. Letter writers hardly ever sketch the entire situation, which is even more difficult, as we often have only one side of the correspondence. As a result, the interpretative framework of a historian can fundamentally affect the interpretation of papyrus letters. As David Frankfurter points out,

110 P. Lichterman et al., "Grouping Together in Lived Ancient Religion: Individual Interacting and the Formation of Groups," *Religion in the Roman Empire* 3, no. 1 (2017): 3–10. Cf. T. Whitmarsh, "Atheism as a Group Identity in Ancient Greece," *Religion in the Roman Empire* 3, no. 1 (2017): 61; P. Lichterman, "Religion in Public Action: From Actors to Settings," *Sociological Theory* 30, no. 1 (2012): 15–36.

111 Lichterman et al., "Grouping Together in Lived Ancient Religion," 4.

112 Several contributions in the 2017 (3.1) volume of *Religion in the Roman Empire* have used these conceptual tools, although it is noteworthy that most of them discuss short-term social grouping. Their conceptualizations resemble Mische and White's work on network domains. For them, a situation "involves predictable, stylized interaction that suddenly becomes fraught with uncertainty, danger and/or opportunity." The predictable nature of the previous moment depended primarily on the array of routinized stories, symbols and idioms of such network domains as family or business. A. Mische and H.C. White, "Between Conversation and Situation: Public Switching Dynamics across Network Domains," *Social Research* 65, no. 3 (1998): 698.

> it is in the nature of papyri that, within some limitations, one can make the evidence mean whatever one wants to make it mean: a collection of classical literature from Oxyrhynchus can suggest a thriving and broadly literate gymnasium culture or an insular elite; a profusion of "magical" texts can mean a cultural decline into occult and selfish concerns or the ongoing attention to private ritual; a derogatory aside about "Egyptians" can signify an overarching Hellenistic racism or one person's frustrated attempt at cultural self-definition in a far more complex ethnic situation.[113]

Without a doubt, this admonition is valid for all historical work. Any evaluation of historical interpretation, therefore, must reflect on the methodological assumptions and theoretical predispositions of the interpreter; the sources do not simply tell a story by themselves.[114]

Since Nicholas Baker-Brian noted that "the responsible reconciliation of the data supplied by the documentary material from Kellis with Manichaean literary-theological texts remains a relatively unexplored area of investigation,"[115] I will suggest four methodological principles for interpreting these papyrological sources: (1) methodological agnosticism, (2) contextual situations, (3) minimalist religious interpretation, and (4) consistent non-eclectic reading. First, as a historical analysis of ancient religion, this book will not touch upon the existence or nonexistence of the transempirical world. Methodological agnosticism indicates that religion is only studied where it can be observed through empirical social and historical analysis. Questions concerning the truth of the transempirical world are outside the realm of historical scholarship; the religious claims of believers are not.[116] Second, particular truth

113 D. Frankfurter, "Review of Roger S. Bagnall, Egypt in Late Antiquity. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993," *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 94.03.19 (1994).

114 Post-structuralist and postmodern theories have stressed the interpretative nature of historical research. Keith Jenkins correctly states that, "it is never really a matter of the facts *per se* but the weight, position, combination and significance they carry *vis-à-vis* each other in the construction of explanations that is at issue." K. Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History* (London: Routledge, 1991), 33.

115 N.J. Baker-Brian, "Mass and Elite in Late Antique Religion: The Case of Manichaeism," in *Mass and Elite in the Greek and Roman Worlds: From Sparta to Late Antiquity*, ed. R. Evans (London: Routledge, 2017), 181.

116 The outside perspective of the scholar is agnostic *in principle*, as we cannot know whether the transempirical exists. On the other hand, I agree with Davidsen that the scholarly outsider perspective is atheist or naturalist *in practice*, as the transempirical interpretation is not an option that can be pursued. Davidsen, *The Spiritual Tolkien Milieu*, 30–32 arguing for "methodological naturalism or non-supernaturalism"; J. Platvoet, "Theologie

claims or practices have to be evaluated within their specific context. Despite the idea that Manichaeism is a coherent religious tradition, we cannot simply assume the sameness of Manichaean practice in various regions and periods. Just as the theological logic and hermeneutics of American Protestantism cannot be used to explain Greek Orthodox practice, so we cannot borrow unrestrictedly from the more abundant Iranian, Arabic, and Chinese accounts of Manichaean practice in order to elucidate Manichaeism in Kellis. The natural inclination to harmonize, to combine various strands of evidence despite their geographical and historical differences, is a risky academic strategy. This way of filling in gaps suggests a coherent social entity that either never existed or cannot be proven beyond speculation: it merely presents Manichaeism as it *ought* to have been. Meanwhile, abstaining from such harmonization does not exclude explicit comparison between sources from various regions. Third, when in doubt, the sources should be interpreted carefully, without overstating the religiosity of these ancient individuals and families, or essentializing them into a religious singularity. Instead of equating all ambiguous phrases with Manichaean practices, I propose adopting a minimalist religious interpretation, in which the Manichaean interpretation requires specific argumentation. This also means that fourth, eclectic readings and cherry picking should be avoided. Less tantalizing passages in the Kellis papyri have to be examined in order to contextualize instances of marked Manichaeanness. Together, these four methodological principles guarantee a sober but fair interpretation, even if they may render some of the religious practices of Manichaeism invisible because they do not stand out from local habits and conventions. A fair and minimalist interpretation should be willing to see how little Manichaeism may have mattered, instead of focusing on the most explicit and breathtaking evidence only.[117] The Everyday Groupness approach aims for a middle position between the harmonization of sources into a coherent narrative of religious interaction and conflict on the one hand, and a full deconstruction of the narrative and individualization of all religious options on the other hand.

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als dubbelspel: over verscheidenheid en dynamiek van theologie en godsdienstwetenschap," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 63, no. 3 (2009): 234 for the "agnostic" study of religion. J. Platvoet, *Comparing Religions: A Limitative Approach. An Analysis of Akan, Para-Creole, and Ifo-Sananda Rites and Prayers* (The Hague: Mouton, 1983), 4–5,15–17, 21, and 29; W. Hanegraaff, "Empirical Method in the Study of Esotericism," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 7, no. 2 (1995): 576–605.

117 Echoing R. Brubaker et al., *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvian Town* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 206. Compare the approach and results of Karen Stern's investigation into the Jewishness of North-African Jews. K.B. Stern, *Inscribing Devotion and Death: Archaeological Evidence for Jewish Populations of North Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 47.

The following seven chapters will delve into the everyday world of individual Kellites, their letters, and the situatedness of their religious choices while walking this tightrope.

Chapter 1 begins with the papyri associated with Makarios, Pamour, and their families. Their personal letters inform us about many aspects of their lives, including their involvement in textile trade and interaction with the Manichaean elect. The letters sometimes employ Manichaean phrases and terminology that directly correspond to well-known Manichaean liturgical texts. On other occasions, the letter writers use vocabulary derived from repertoires shared with neighbors, particularly fourth-century Christians. The archaeological find location of these papyri also sheds light on the domestic setting and the wider village-based network. Chapter 2 highlights the complex sociocultural environment by outlining some of the evidence for various religious and cultural repertoires. Despite its remote location in the desert, Kellis was not a rural backwater. The architectural and artistic remains reveal that it was firmly connected to the Nile valley, as well as the Roman Empire at large. Previous claims that these people belonged to a sectarian and persecuted group, moreover, are highly unlikely, as they were in direct contact with some of the local and regional administrative and military elite. Some religious maltreatment may have occurred in the Nile valley, but Makarios's and Pamour's families lived in relative peace.

The subsequent chapters are built around five key themes of Manichaean life: self-designation, gift giving, communal gathering, death ritual, and book writing. These themes logically follow from the current state of Manichaean Studies and can be informed by the new documents from Kellis. Chapter 3 is devoted to self-designators in the personal letters. The authors draw on an explicit Manichaean repertoire in some phrases, but frequently opt for more neutral designators associated with the village, family, and neighborhood. While the use of Coptic, at first glance, seems to correspond to demarcated group boundaries, further consideration shows that it marks a more ambiguous network connoting family, regional, and religious affiliations. Chapter 4 focuses on gifts and economic transactions between inhabitants of Kellis. While the Manichaean families in the oasis were familiar with the Manichaean ideology of gift giving, many of their letters attest to less clearly delineated transactions in which economic interactions, village support, and religious obligations blended. Passages that have been read as evidence for the Manichaean system of almsgiving to the elect, such as those mentioning "the *agape*," do not inform us directly about the regular performance of a Manichaean ritual meal. As the elect spent most of their time outside the village, traveling in the Nile valley,

alms were given over a distance, and the ritual meal was not (or infrequently) performed in Kellis.

Chapter 5 treats the evidence for specific Manichaean gatherings in the oasis, in particular, the wooden tablets and papyri containing psalms and prayers, some of which have direct parallels in the Manichaean texts from Medinet Madi. The ritual performance of these psalms and prayers contributed to marked moments of Manichaeanness, and therefore potentially to a distinct group identification. Chapter 6 zooms in on situations in which Manichaeans gathered and commemorated the departed. This included at least two distinct rituals involving singing and almsgiving: a ritualized setting at the deathbed and a commemorative event. Despite the extensive funerary archaeology of Kellis, there are no specific indications of a Manichaean identity among the burials or in the two large cemeteries of Kellis. This absence of extent tangible markers suggests that Manichaean families chose to follow local burial customs and performed Manichaean rituals on other occasions. Chapter 7 analyzes the frequent references to books and scribal activity. The combination of papyrological evidence and archaeological finds at the site reveal what the inhabitants of Houses 1–3 read, and who participated in the scribal network that produced these manuscripts. Manichaean books were copied on wood and papyrus by catechumens, who also produced (or read) classical literature, biblical texts, and apocryphal texts. This plurality occurred despite the fact that inhabitants had direct access to some of the books attributed to Mani, thereby illustrating how activated Manichaeanness and an unmarked wider social repertoire go together.

The conclusion returns to the value of modern academic classifications and the local nature of most of the Kellis papyri, arguing that focusing on everyday religious practice not only adds an unruly layer of analysis, but also offers a vantage point from which to construct alternative models of religious groupness and the changing religious landscape of Late Antiquity.