CONCLUSION

Untidy History: Manichaeanness in Everyday Life

> A second-century observer might have been unlikely to pick out the rise of differentiated groups as *the* religious innovation of his or her age.
>
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Introduction

Looking for Manichaean lives in the day-to-day papyri from Kellis showcases the unruly nature of religion in everyday life. The practices of Manichaean individuals and families never entirely correspond with the prescriptive reality of theological and cosmological system builders found in texts. Everyday life is more diverse, ambiguous, and creative than the world imagined in religious texts. In other words, religion beyond representations of light and darkness is a world in many shades of grey. Thousands of papyrus fragments, wooden boards, and ostraca read within their archaeological context further reveal the fundamentally local and untidy nature of daily religion. The excavations at Ismant-el Kharab provide unprecedented insights into the social and economic lives of fourth-century families on the fringes of the Roman Empire. Many of these individuals and families engaged with Manichaean texts and practices, and interacted with associated religious specialists. Some of their children traveled with Manichaean elect throughout Egypt, while others were trained in scribal practice, copying Manichaean books alongside other various types of religious literature. Additional family members and acquaintances prayed Manichaean prayers while facing the sun or the moon, and sung psalms and hymns about Mani and the fate of the soul after death. Some of them expressed this religious involvement in their choice of words, utilizing Manichaean self-designators

1 Woolf, "Empires, Diasporas and the Emergence of Religions," 34 (his italics). The chapter title alludes to A.E. Franklin, "Untidy History: Reassessing Communal Boundaries in Light of the Cairo Geniza Documents," in *Age of Transition: Byzantine Culture in the Islamic World*, ed. H.C. Evans (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015), 54–69.

and expressions in personal letters. A number of Kellites were stirred to give alms to Manichaean elect and catechumens.

At the same time, individuals in these letters interacted with neighbors who did not necessarily share a Manichaean affiliation and practice. They called upon local and regional Roman elites, used a Christian scribe when necessary, ordered amulets and horoscopes, buried their beloved without tangible indication of a distinct group identity, and mostly addressed each other using unmarked kinship repertoire. Even the instances of recognizable *Manichaeanness* – moments of group solidarity and salience – took place within a broader village context, which included a wide array of social interactions, gifts, and economic exchanges. Whereas religious situations and groups take a central stage in literary and historical texts, they are less visible in documentary sources. The role of Manichaeanness in the personal letters from Kellis is limited at best, often embedded in side references without additional information. This stands in contrast to the underlying assumptions of groupism, which tend to uncover one-dimensional religious individuals who are singularly devoted. Peter Brown espouses this reconstruction when he repeatedly describes the Manichaean "intense solidarity" and "spiritual friendship" as inherently attractive characteristics that bolstered a strong group identity.[2] Such strong religious interpretations are not without merit, but they tend to capture the high ideals of religious elites. The Manichaeism detected in the Kellis papyri is not only "lightly institutionalized," but also infrequently salient: it did not pervade everyday life in all aspects.[3]

Recognizing the fractured and multifaceted nature of Manichaeism as practiced at the village level requires one to move beyond modern reconstructions of Late Antiquity as the cradle of secondary religion (characterized by autonomous religious groups with universal claims). Typologies based on such binary abstractions tend to prioritize rhetorical and textual realities. They do not aid the close-up study of micro level engagement, the identification of a variety of individual choices, the intermittence of religious identifications, or the wider array of religious group styles and repertoires that could be called

2 Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 159.

3 R.S. Bagnall, "Models and Evidence in the Study of Religion in Late Roman Egypt," in *From Temple to Church: Destruction and Renewal of Local Cultic Topography in Late Antiquity*, ed. J. Hahn, S. Emmel, and U. Gotter (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 36. In contrast, Teigen stresses the institutional aspects of the Manichaean church in Kellis, stating that "[w]hile our sources do not chiefly relate to Elect activities, the glimpses we *do* get suggest that they sought to reinforce ties to the local community while maintaining a wider church organization." Teigen, *The Manichaean Church in Kellis*, 290 (his italics).

upon to bring structure to everyday experiences.[4] Thinking about everyday groupness and "untidy history" *on the ground* supplements academic classifications of locative-utopian and primary-secondary religion. Closer inspection of Manichaeanness in everyday life reveals details that challenge previous reconstructions of Manichaeans as a well-defined religious group (even characterized as "sectarian") that engaged in mission work, experienced persecution, and claimed a reified Christian identity in competition with other such groups. Without such ideas on the background, it becomes clear that a Manichaean affiliation in the Dakhleh Oasis was only occasionally salient and shaped some situations more than others.

When Did Manichaeism Matter?

Even though group-specific religious identification was unaccentuated for many ancient individuals in daily life, a Manichaean identification could also be highly salient. These situations entailed activating a Manichaean disposition in four basic categories of social action: *talking*, *choosing*, *performing*, and *consuming*. Pinpointing when it featured prominently – and when not – has led me to prioritize the local papyrological evidence over comparative transregional reconstructions. The Kellis papyri do not always represent a profound internalization of a Manichaean identity and associated group norms: it could arise as an occasional event *or* crystalize into a long-lasting affiliation.

Talking Manichaeanness means the discursive construction and maintenance of moments of identification with a Manichaean group. The authors of the Kellis letters framed situations as group-specific religious events with their choice of words, formulas, and self-designators. In doing so, they appropriated elements from Manichaean theology and cosmology, and used them to approach their addressees, as in "children of the living race" or "daughters of the Light Mind." Letter writers also employed a Manichaean repertoire as a politeness strategy, stressing a common bond in the introduction of the letter before moving on to more specific – and often mundane – considerations. Since the primary goal of most ancient letters was not to convey information, but rather to maintain existing social relations and foster new ones, these Manichaean designators and phrases served a rhetorical strategy of stressing

4 Late antique Egypt is not only defined by ascetic innovations like monasticism, Christological controversies, and fierce confrontations between bishops and heretics See the complaints in A. Papaconstantinou, "Egypt," in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. S.F. Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 197.

commonality. Far more common are the unmarked alternatives, including the use of kinship terminology and simple designators related to the household and neighborhood.

Two situations stand out from this pattern: fundraising and singing. The elect's fundraising letters contain the most explicit Manichaean repertoire, through which the author framed the situation in a religious reality of frequent almsgiving for the sake of releasing the Living Soul. Framing the exchange relationship in light of the cosmological battle between Light and Darkness was necessary since most of the elect traveled in the Nile valley. They may have visited the oasis, but the distance between the two classes of Manichaeans had to be overcome primarily by travelers carrying letters. In absence of the elect's daily presence, catechumens may have gathered among themselves to sing psalms, pray, and listen to scripture readings. The details concerning the liturgy and the frequency of communal gatherings are sparse, but the extant psalm and prayer manuscripts point to communal gatherings in which a discrete Manichaean group identity and style were narrated in song, performed in bodily action, and reiterated in prayers and readings. Those who participated in these gatherings may have picked up a Manichaean repertoire and view of the world. After sixteen hundred years, it is difficult to determine which terminology was understood as Manichaean in-group language. A prayer formula addressing the "Father, the God of truth" did not directly mark a distinct religious position in the same way as the phrase "limb of the Light Mind," but it may have derived from socialization in the liturgy, from copying Mani's *Epistles*, or from exposure to the elect's letters. This formula would have been recognized by readers familiar with this repertoire, leading to the activation of group-specific dispositions. Other readers may have associated it with fourth-century Christian liturgy and literature, depending on their socialization and background knowledge. The usage of a specific variant of Coptic in the personal letters and liturgical documents seems to correlate with a sense of commonality and connection that included religious identifications, but the distinctions are too subtle for a direct identification with one group-specific tradition, as Greek continued to play a major role in liturgy and life.

Demarcated religious groups in Late Antiquity were not only a matter of talk. Imagined religious communities became real for people in their day-to-day life, sometimes directly influencing everyday choices. *Choosing Manichaeanness* was infrequently visible in the personal letters, albeit not entirely absent. Many features from the Manichaean ideology of gift giving are present in the Kellis papyri: the division between catechumens and elect is visible and there are clearly letters with requests for alms. It is therefore most probable that some inhabitants of Kellis donated food or other commodities

for specifically Manichaean reasons. Since these interactions and transactions blended and intersected with other behavioral expectations, it is not easy to discern the motivation behind gifts. In the multilayered world of Kellis, religious almsgiving was not a presumed construct acted out in the domain of everyday life without conscious reflection; it was entangled in daily interactions between individuals. The interaction between various socializations and social roles also suggests that it is unlikely that the Manichaeans constituted an exclusive community. It is most likely that the Manichaeans in Kellis continued most of their interactions with their (non-Manichaean) family and neighbors on the basis of their shared village identification.

Choices surrounding death, burial, and commemoration illustrate the same duality of activated Manichaeanness on the one hand, and the absence of visible group-specific customs on the other. Manichaeans had elaborate ideas about what happened to the soul after death, just like many of their contemporaries in fourth- and fifth-century Egypt. Some of these Manichaean beliefs became ritualized in songs, such as the short Coptic *Seven stages hymn*, sung during a commemorative event in which Manichaeans supported the ascent of the soul through singing and almsgiving. A second ritualized event may have taken place at the deathbed, during the precious moment that the soul left the body. Matthaios's grief about the absence of elect and catechumens at the moment of departure indicates sky-high Manichaeanness. Unfortunately, the sources fail to tell us about local Manichaean burial practices. Even though connections between Manichaeans and the poverty of graves, the orientation of the body, and the absence of burial goods have been suggested, no indications of a distinctly Manichaean funerary tradition remain. Either the group-specific customs left no tangible trace, or the Manichaeans of the Dakhleh Oasis followed local burial customs with relatively poor treatment of the body and simple pit graves.

Manichaeanness was *performed* on various occasions: in regular communal gatherings, in the daily prayers, and in hospitality to the elect. Engaging in these activities meant seeing themselves – and others – in light of Manichaean notions about voluntary poverty, reciprocal obligations, and the salvation of Light. Manichaean psalms and prayers not only narrated the Manichaean cosmology, thus reiterating doctrine, but offered moments of emotional and bodily engagement with the ideas. The combination of bodily experience and singing, along with the perceived efficacy of acclamations and songs must have activated Manichaeanness and contributed to socializing the self within the narrative world of Manichaeism. The same holds true for the daily prayers. By prostrating themselves thirty times during three sets of daily prayers, catechumens acted on their self-identification as Manichaeans. There are, however,

also reasons to question the regularity and uniformity of participation in communal gatherings. It is unclear how often these gatherings took place and how many people participated in them; let alone to what extent they understood the meaning of some of the cosmological texts. Since many family members spent time traveling in the Nile valley, they cannot have frequented gatherings in Kellis. Some of these trips took place in the retinue of the elect, such as Piene's journeys with the Teacher. As he was taught how to read in church, he may have been trained as one of the new elect. Matthaios's and Philammon's journeys with Apa Lysimachos appear to have been less religiously motivated. They may have traveled together, taken care of the elect, and shared in songs, meals, and confession, but they also conducted business at the various markets in the Nile valley. The recommendation letters from Oxyrhynchus show that local communities and households could support such traveling groups, but such hospitality is never explicitly addressed in the Kellis letters. This silence also hampers further investigation of the religious aim of traveling. Though hagiographical and polemical stories about missionary activity exist, there is no explicit trace of mission trips in the papyri.

This stretched out network of travelers and households is also visible in requests to circulate Manichaean books, which were to be sent along with other types of literature. The passages in the letters concerning scribal activity reveal that Manichaean catechumens in Kellis were involved in reproducing texts that belonged to the canon of books attributed to Mani (Mani's *Epistles*, the book of *Acts*, and perhaps the *Psalms and Prayers*, and the *Gospel*). Text copying involved intense moments of Manichaeanness – the scribe stepped into the Manichaean authorial tradition and participated in recounting Mani's wisdom. If these texts were read by ecclesiastical "readers" like Piene and Ision, they would have redefined time and space entirely (especially when read in Syriac), connecting the audience to the imagined Manichaean community and its roots in third-century Mesopotamia.

Finally, there is hardly any evidence for *consuming Manichaeanness*: there is no trace of specifically Manichaean art or architecture. Economic interactions seem to have crossed religious categories, and there is no trace of religious distinction in the material remains of consumption habits. The only instance when an expression of religious difference can be detected is in the local reading habits. Not only do we witness Manichaean books being circulated and copied; they are also found among the personal letters. Copies of Mani's *Epistles*, texts related to themes of the *Kephalaia*, and reused codices with Manichaean psalms and prayers were consumed – and probably produced – in Houses 1–3. The material characteristics of some of these codices reveal that they were used in liturgical and educational settings. The most remarkable

discovery is a wooden board with a Greek version of the daily Manichaean prayers (also known in Middle Persian and Arabic versions). Along with the Manichaean psalms and the *Epistles*, this wooden board shows the influence of a group-specific religious tradition that stretched beyond the Egyptian context of its users. Nevertheless, the same readers may have read the Classical literature found in the same vicinities, such as the work of Homer and the orations of Isocrates. Other texts mentioned in letters or found on papyrus fragments are best described as biblical and apocryphal, including a compilation based on the *Acts of John*, fragments of two New Testament letters, and an invocation (?) resembling Sethian literature, as well as horoscopes and amulets. In some ways, then, the reading habits at Kellis resemble BeDuhn's characterization of Augustine:

> [Augustine] was a rhetorician, a teacher, a family man, and an amateur astrologer. His bookshelf was lined with volumes of Cicero, Seneca, Virgil, Aristotle, and pseudo-Pythagoras. He also read a little Mani, and took initiation as a Manichaean auditor.[5]

Just like Augustine, some of the Kellites read widely, included Manichaean books in a broader spectrum of learning, and circulated religious literature not regarded as group-specific. This leads to the question of how prominent their Manichaean identification was in relation to their other social roles, and whether all these situations coalesced into the type of differentiated groups that Greg Woolf, in the epigraph of this chapter, called "*the* religious innovation" of Late Antiquity.[6]

Modeling Late Antique Religion

It has been said that the most remarkable transformation – or innovation – in Late Antiquity was from a world in which religion was embedded within preexisting social formations to one in which competing religious groups became organized as discrete social units. For the Manichaeans of Kellis, religion was no longer coterminous with their village or ethnic identity; Manichaean practices constituted a marked choice against the long-held village tradition of venerating Tutu. On the other hand, their various Manichaean practices did not always crystalize into a coherent and well-demarcated religious group with

5 BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma 1*, 287.

6 Woolf, "Empires, Diasporas and the Emergence of Religions," 34 (his italics).

explicit labels for insiders and outsiders. Scholarly classification of these individuals as "Manichaeans," therefore, follows a logic outside of their own texts, reducing them to one single identity.

The lived religion approach response is to stress the complex and improvised nature of religious practice on the micro level, and the ever-changing mixture of beliefs, practices, social organization, and experience.[7] Concepts such as *superdiversity* – designating the increasing interplay of overlapping variables in, for example, ethnic minority groups – and *multiple religious belonging* – describing individuals' association with more than one religious tradition – have been coined to further theorize this unruly complexity in the modern world. Reflections on ancient religion have added the label *incerti* to unclassifiable individuals occupying the space between pagans and Christians, or have approached such middle ground by applying an anthropological lens to manifold local *appropriations* of a "great tradition."[8] This emphasis on individual diversity, occasional Manichaeanness, and local appropriations provides an important counterweight to late antique totalizing narratives and modern reconstructions that stress conflict between monolithic religious groups or accent the omnipresence of religious identity formation.[9] While religious conflict and identity formation play a role in the stories we tell about Late Antiquity, it should be supplemented with the more mundane reality of everyday life in which these featured less frequently.

Lahire's theoretical work on the shifting plural identities of individuals according to their situational needs has helped us observe the limited role a Manichaean identity played in interactions with neighbors, business associates, and legal actors. These observations can be compared with Éric Rebillard's research on late antique North-African Christians, showing that "religion and religious affiliation were neither the unique nor even the primary principles of action for Christians."[10] Future comparative research will have to build on these conclusions in order to highlight the social and religious factors that

7 McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 185.

8 M. Kahlos, "Incerti in Between: Moments of Transition and Dialogue in Christian Polemics in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries," *Parola del Passato* 59 (2004): 10; M. Kahlos, "Meddling in the Middle? Urban Celebrations, Ecclesiastical Leaders, and the Roman Emperor in Late Antiquity," In *Spaces in Late Antiquity: Cultural, Theological and Archaeological Perspectives*, ed. J. Day, R. Hakola, M. Kahlos and U. Tervahauta (London: Routledge, 2016), 11–31; Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt*.

9 Dijkstra, "Appropriation," 4 reminds us that the increasing interest in religious violence can in part be explained by the events of 9/11. The growing polarization within European and American societies, with the prominent othering of Muslims has also contributed to a renewed interest in processes of religious identity formation.

10 Rebillard, *Christians and their Many Identities*, 93.

increase or decrease the salience of religious identities. The Everyday Groupness approach offers a variety of insights that can be developed to generalize beyond the tendency of diversification in lived religion research. Ann Swidler's distinction between *settled* and *unsettled* life is helpful to further understand different modes of engagement with religious repertoires in everyday life. During settled periods of life, individuals simply know from experience how to proceed.[11] Rather than deliberately choosing a course of action, employing elaborate religious ideologies, or consulting religious leaders, individuals follow the established cultural patterns that have served them well for a long time, occasionally infusing their practices with group-specific repertoire. The benefit of Swidler's *culture in action* framework is that it explains the intermittency of religious identities in late antiquity as part of the default rule, rather than the exception. Just like Swidler's modern American interlocutors, ancient Kellites did not offer coherent systems of meaning to limit the uncertainty of social interactions, but rather a "kaleidoscope of common sense" or "a swirling pattern of shifting justifications."[12] These *strategies of network diversification* included switching between modes of representation when a situation required alternative approaches. Manichaeans in Kellis employed a variety of identifications, and activated different dispositions, leading to multiple layered social interactions. The introductory formulas of their personal letters frequently included phrases and formulas with marked religious language, while the final greeting sections were often limited to a repertoire related to the social network of family and village. When the sections were combined to form a letter, they addressed the recipients (and bystanders) on multiple levels at the same time. As a result, most everyday letters succeeded in their aims because they kept multiple cultural meanings open, while the letters of the elect could potentially fail entirely if the recipients did not accept the religious framing "daughters of the holy church". Appealing to more than one frame of reference enabled the letter authors to make the most out of the situation.

Swidler distinguishes two modes of combining cultural repertoires and personal experiences: the *integrated mode* and the *segregated mode*, which surface in both *settled* and *unsettled* life. Even when individuals draw upon the same cultural repertoire, they respond to it differently; some fully integrate cultural repertoire into their understanding of personal experience, while others seem to keep the two apart. The integrated mode points to the way in which some individuals actively rework cultural repertoires into their understanding

11 Swidler, "Culture in Action," 281.
12 Swidler, *Talk of Love*, 182.

of everyday life and personal experiences.[13] This requires extensive cultural and psychological work, of the type common in unsettled periods of life. The cultural and geographical circumstances of the Manichaeans in the Egyptian desert stimulated an integration of religion and everyday life, as they had to navigate the substantial cultural distance between the local situation and the expectations embedded in Manichaean ideology. The time and effort involved in this process means that it was primarily the elect who would have been able to develop a deeper integration between Manichaean repertoires and personal experiences. The strict Manichaean regulations they abided by made it imperative for them to reflect on their lifestyle and daily interactions with others. Some catechumens integrated Manichaean repertoire in their lives as well, especially if they participated in weekly confession rituals and traveled with the elect. The majority of situations, however, did not ask for explicit reflection. Most situations in the Kellis papyri convey the impression of a segregated mode in which Manichaean repertoire was highly appreciated, even though it was mostly used as "policy statements": abstract cultural formulas used as a substitute for personal experiences. Most situations could be navigated without the activation of a religious identity.[14] This flexibility has also been observed in Isabella Sandwell's study of John Chrysostom, Libanius, and their respective audiences. Chrysostom's audience seems to have disagreed with his all-encompassing ideals about the extent to which religion should permeate their lives. Instead, they regarded their religious affiliation as something that could be kept in a personal or family domain, separate even from the demands in other aspects of life.[15] Religious groupness was "something that had the minimum impact on how they lived their social lives and [they] would on different occasions position themselves within different forms of social organization *as it suited them*."[16] In Kellis, we also see religion segregated from everyday experiences, in spite of the religious leaders' calls to prioritize Manichaean behavior. With some exceptions – such as Piene's involvement with the Teacher – the Manichaeans of Kellis acted as inhabitants of an Egyptian-Roman village

13 Swidler, *Talk of Love*, 55–7.

14 Swidler, *Talk of Love*, 53–55. With regard to the situational salience of Manichaean repertoire, Teigen concludes that fluidity, variation, and appropriation does not exclude "a degree of continuity in the maintenance of group boundaries," arguing that the religious practices at Kellis "agree well" with reconstructions based on canonical Manichaean texts. Teigen, *The Manichaean Church in Kellis*, 293. I am skeptical, however, about his emphasis on the Manichaean church as an institution bringing about a "social world".

15 I. Sandwell, "John Chrysostom's Audiences and his Accusations of Religious Laxity," in *Religious Diversity in Late Antiquity*, ed. D.M. Gwynn and S. Bangert (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 540.

16 Sandwell, *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity*, 242.

whose religious practices belonged to the mundane conditions of everyday life, to be navigated with a "practical sense," or a "feel for the game" – something which enabled them to recognize situations and anticipate successful responses within various social commitments and relationships.[17]

Within this segregated mode, the situatedness of individuals stirred the activation or deactivation of a religious identity. Theorizing about these situations includes not only looking at individual patterns, such as the correlation between time spent with the elect and the articulation of an explicit Manichaean stance, but also at patterns in emergent group styles. The conceptualization of Manichaeism as a type of utopian or secondary religion can be augmented by a discussion of the four group-styles discerned in the Kellis material: family religion, itinerancy networks, scribal networks, and a congregational group style. Most papyri attest to a *family religion group style*, in which the specific needs of the family members and household, such as fertility, health, and protection, took center stage. Due to this group style, Manichaeans in Kellis appropriated religious repertoires in amulets and horoscopes, and adapted Christian liturgical texts to a Manichaean context. Organization around households was combined with an *itinerancy group style*, in which Manichaeanness became tied to journeys with the elect. Scribal training occurred during such trips, but the *scribal network group style* stretched beyond the activities of the elect, and also included catechumens who copied amulets and Christian texts. Some of the Manichaean manuscripts copied at Kellis point to a *congregational group style*, in which Manichaeans gathered communally to sing, pray, and listen. Although such situations are most potent in their social and psychological impact, they may have had little significance in Kellis, where frequent gatherings cannot have been the norm. There is very little evidence that all Manichaeans in Kellis gathered regularly and developed fully integrated reflective Manichaean "selves." Instead, ordinary individuals engaged in Manichaean activities within overlapping social clusters of religious practice. *Manichaeism* is an assemblage of individual religious practices, varying repertoires available to practitioners, and the group styles developed over time.[18]

As observed, the ways Manichaeanness emerged in talking, choosing, performing, and consuming varied considerably. Apart from geographical variation

17 P. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 66.

18 Thinking about group-styles has the advantage of highlighting similarities with Christian intellectuals, itinerant ritual specialists with traditional Egyptian knowledge, mystagogues of Mithras, and Platonic philosophers. H. Marx-Wolf, *Spiritual Taxonomies and Ritual Authority: Platonists, Priests, and Gnostics in the Third Century C.E.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

between Manichaeans in the Oasis and the Nile valley, there was hierarchical variation between elect and catechumen, social variation between individuals, and temporal variation between the generations. Although not all papyri are dated, it is possible to detect diachronic differences within generational clusters in the personal letters. The earliest generation of Manichaeans, those under the patronage of Pausanias (in the 330s and 340s), had different experiences from those associated with Makarios and his children (in the 350s and 360s), and from those who had to abandon the village in a time of changing environmental and legal conditions (in the 370s and 380s). The relative prominence of Manichaean situations in Makarios's letters and the frequency of Manichaean self-designators in the letters of Psais, Pamour, and their associates, points to an open and flourishing – settled – situation around the turn of the second half of the century. The declining number of sources from the ensuing decades, along with the abandonment of the village, makes it harder to follow the transmission of Manichaean ideas and practices to the next generation.

Abandoning Kellis

What happened to the Manichaeans after they had to abandon Kellis? Did they move to Aphrodite and other towns in the Nile valley? There is, unfortunately, no trace of them in the papyri from the beginning of the fifth century, but we can be sure that they needed new structures and rhythms to adapt to novel social environments. Three plausible options emerge in light of the aforementioned theoretical suggestions, as well as legal developments at the end of the fourth century. Makarios's grandchildren may have disassociated themselves from Manichaeism, especially when it became more dangerous for them to perform Manichaeanness openly and adhere to Manichaean group norms. While Theodosian laws against Manichaeans and other ascetics may have had little direct impact on everyday life, they contributed to the increasingly clear demarcation between acceptable imperial Christianity and dissenting religious practices.[19] Alternatively, the younger generation of Manichaeans may have integrated their religion more fully into their everyday lifestyle, either by working more closely with the Manichaean elect, or by embracing a detailed social imaginary in which the cosmological narrative became connected to the situation on the ground. Manichaeanness may have been transformed from an intermittently salient identification belonging to a larger cluster of social

19 Kahlos, *Religious Dissent*, 27–39.

identifications in the oasis, to a more well-defined, highly integrated, religious group style that came to define more aspects of daily life. One could even imagine that the compilation of the *Kephalaia* as found in the Medinet Madi collection stems from this end of the fourth-, beginning of the fifth-century development toward a more explicit conceptualization of the Manichaean group identity. The absence of a more thorough Egyptianization of the Coptic Manichaica makes this an implausible – albeit not impossible – scenario.[20]

A final option is a strategy that kept Christian bishops up at night: crypto-Manichaeism. Supposedly, some Manichaean ascetics concealed their religious affiliation to avoid persecution during the fifth century. They presented themselves as proper Christian ascetics living in cenobitic monasteries, while secretly devoting themselves to the teachings of Mani. Christian polemical reports about such concealment cannot be taken at face value, but should not be ignored either. If latter-day Manichaeans indeed employed this strategy, which would not be the first nor the last time it was used in the history of religious minority groups, it represents the zenith of unsettled life. It would have required constant vigilance to uphold both a Christian and a Manichaean repertoire even when crosscutting identities and dual expectations led to daily conflict and painful choices. The problematic plurality of investments in this scenario could not be solved in the same flexible way as the negotiation of roles and identifications in Kellis. It resulted in a fundamentally different group style.[21] Future studies will have to take up the complex relation between imagined threats in narratives of crypto-Manichaeism and real historical processes of secrecy and concealment.[22] The unsettled nature of intentional concealment stands in stark contrast to the intermittence of Manichaeanness in everyday life in Kellis. While crypto-Manichaeism needed an explicit, marked, and well-defined religious identity, the Kellis letters mostly convey an impression of settled life, with relatively few conflicts between group-specific religious dispositions and local commonsense. These Kellites were Kellites, even when they praised Mani and prostrated themselves facing the sun and the moon.

20 Compare the thorough integration of Christianity in Egypt with the limted Egyptianness of Coptic Manichaean texts. Durkin-Meisterernst, "Wie persisch war der Manichäismus in Ägypten?," 214–16.

21 Lahire, "Habitus," 353–4.

22 Matsangou, "Real and Imagined Manichaeans."