

FOREWORD

This little volume introduces to the English reader the artistic and calligraphic tradition of the Gnostic religion of the Manichaeans. Most pictures were first published in colour by Albert von Le Coq in his *Chotscho* (Berlin, 1917) and his *Die buddhistische Spätantike in Mittelasien II: Die manichäischen Miniaturen* (Berlin, 1923). They have recently been reprinted by the "Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt" in Graz, Austria, in 1979 und 1973 respectively. One significant wall painting from Bāzāklik showing a tree with three stems representing the Realm of Light was published by J. Hackin in *Revue des arts asiatiques* (Annales des Musée Guimet), Vol. IX. The examples of calligraphy referred to are mainly housed in the *Museum für Indische Kunst* of West Berlin.

The progress in the edition, translation and analysis of Central Asian, mainly Turfan texts since the first publication of these materials allows us to approach and analyse the artistic documents anew and to venture in many cases an interpretation that could not be given at the time of their first publication. Not only the teachings but also the symbolism of the Manichaean form of Gnosticism have emerged in greater clarity since the initial occupation with these materials after their discovery in the sands of Central Asia. The fact that Gnostic studies have greatly been enhanced recently justifies the presentation of Gnostic artistic materials not preserved in the Middle East or Egypt. These materials reflect visually the rich Gnostic symbolism and imagery of which we are becoming increasingly aware. Manichaean Central Asia has preserved and developed that symbolism in a religiously pluralistic world, blending many an image familiar to us from the Biblical world and from heretodox forms of Christianity with the artistic forms of Persia, India and China. It is especially the continuity with the contents of the Gnostic gospels and the apocryphal literature of early Christianity that strikes us as one of the most remarkable features of a Manichaeism that enjoyed royal protection for over half a millenium in the heart of Asia. Central Asia will certainly demand the attention of scholars in the decades ahead, as the finds in the Judaeen desert inspired scholarship in the 50s and 60s, and the finds of the Egyptian desert fascinated discoverers and students in the 60s and 70s. The textual and artistic materials, not only Manichaean, that have become visible already are of such far-reaching importance in terms of general religious history that they cannot be ignored by the students of Western, Gnostic, or Eastern, Buddhist traditions.

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