

---

*Religions du monde iranien ancien / Gnose et manichéisme*

## Contextualized Studies on the History of Manichaeian Art across the Asian Continent

Zsuzsanna Gulacsi

---

**Electronic version**

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/asr/1155>

DOI: 10.4000/asr.1155

ISSN: 1969-6329

**Publisher**

Publications de l'École Pratique des Hautes Études

**Printed version**

Date of publication: 1 October 2013

Number of pages: 51-62

ISSN: 0183-7478

**Electronic reference**

Zsuzsanna Gulacsi, "Contextualized Studies on the History of Manichaeian Art across the Asian Continent", *Annuaire de l'École pratique des hautes études (EPHE), Section des sciences religieuses* [Online], 120 | 2013, Online since 01 July 2013, connection on 08 July 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/asr/1155> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/asr.1155>

---

This text was automatically generated on 8 July 2022.

Tous droits réservés : EPHE

---

*Religions du monde iranien ancien / Gnose et manichéisme*

# Contextualized Studies on the History of Manichaean Art across the Asian Continent

Zsuzsanna Gulacsi

---

- 1 The history of the Manichaeism is increasingly better understood today in light of research published in hundreds of articles and books during the past century (see Mikkelsen, *Bibliographia Manichaica*, 1997). This religion originated in southern Mesopotamia from the teachings of Mani (216-76). From here it immediately spread to the west, where it was persecuted to extinction by the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. Manichaean communities were known in Iran and West Central Asia between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. Spreading further east along the Silk Road, Mani's teaching reached the realm of the Uygurs, whose ruling elite adopted it as their religion between the mid 8<sup>th</sup> and early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. Appearing in China during the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Manichaeism was present in the major cities in the Tang dynasty (618-907), surfacing in the historical records as *monijiao* ("Religion of Mani"). For a brief era corresponding to the zenith of Uygur military might and political influence on the Tang, Manichaeism enjoyed imperial tolerance and was propagated among the Chinese inhabitants of the major urban areas. Soon after the fall of the Uygur Steppe Empire (840/1), during the persecutions of all foreign religions in 843-845, Manichaeism disappeared from northern China. Its Chinese converts fled westwards, to the territories of the Sedentary Uygur Empire (841-1213) in the region of Dunhuang and the Tarim Basin ; and towards southeastern China, where a fully sinicized version of the religion, referred to in Chinese sources as *mingjiao* ("Religion of Light"), existed until the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.
- 2 Already in its original vision Mani's religion is intended to be universal, and thus "transcultural." From its very start the Manichaean mission relied on multifaceted (oral, textual, and pictorial) means of communication that were meant to be adapted to a variety of distinct cultural contexts. Due to their nature, most oral means of communication remain undocumented, leaving us no chance to contemplate the

culturally distinct verbal characteristics of religious speech acts. Rare exceptions to this are transcribed sermons or debates, in which case the words of the performances became texts and are studied as such. The transcultural nature of Manichaean texts is recognized today. As such, parts of Mani's original 3<sup>rd</sup> century Mesopotamian Syriac (Eastern Aramaic) prose is preserved in Coptic translations from 4<sup>th</sup> century Egypt, just as in Parthian, Middle Persian, Sogdian, and Uygur translations from 10<sup>th</sup> century East Central Asia. While the language (vocabulary, grammar, and syntax) of Mani's writings was naturally changed in the course of their translation process, their content was intended to be preserved with maximum possible accuracy. I see analogous traits reflected among the remains of Manichaean artistic sources surviving from ca. 10<sup>th</sup> century East Central Asia and ca. 12<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> century southern China.

- 3 During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Manichaean artistic remains were known almost exclusively from East Central Asia, from the area of the late mediaeval ruins of Kocho. Located near to what is today the Turfan Oasis in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous region of the Peoples' Republic of China, Kocho was a major oasis city, a fortified trading and agricultural center along the northern Silk Routes. For ca. three centuries it also functioned as the winter capital of the Sedentary Uygur Empire. German expeditions explored the site prior to the First World War and, in addition to Buddhist and some Christian remains, famously rescued about 5000 Manichaean manuscript fragments and a cache of Manichaean artistic remains. The resulting publications lead to the scholarly début of the topic of Manichaean art in art history during the 1910s and 1920s (Le Coq, *Chotscho*, 1913 ; and *Die manichäischen Miniaturen*, 1923).
- 4 During the past 25 years, a new understanding of Uygur-era Manichaean art emerged based on the identification of an Uygur Manichaean artistic corpus, the classification and scientific dating of its painting styles, the analytical study of its book medium, and the continued research of its iconography. Criteria for identifying a corpus, which doubled the number of Manichaean remains to 108, were put forward in 1997, on the basis of which a catalogue appeared in 2001, supplemented with color facsimiles and critical editions of all associated texts (Gulácsi, "Identifying the Corpus;" and *Manichaean Art in Berlin Collections*, 267–68 ; for additional identifications see Bhattacharya-Haesner, *Central Asian Temple Banners* 2003, 372, 377–79). A survey of this corpus revealed that the pictorial remains exhibit two locally produced painting styles : one with western roots (West Asian style of Uygur Manichaean art), which appears almost exclusively on remnants of illuminated books in codex and scroll formats ; the other with eastern roots (the Chinese style of Uygur Manichaean art), which was found mainly on temple banners, textile displays, and wall paintings. Contrary to assumptions held previously, carbon dating combined with stylistic analysis and historical dating reveal that both styles existed during the tenth century, confirming that artists working with distinct techniques and media were employed simultaneously in Kocho (Gulácsi, "Dating," *Arts Asiatiques* 58, 2003). The most numerous component of this corpus, the fragments of illuminated manuscripts, were subjected to a codicological analysis in 2005 (Gulácsi, *Mediaeval Manichaean Book Art*), which assessed their formal aspects, as well as the contextual cohesion of text and image. Although a monograph on Uygur-era Manichaean iconography is yet to be completed, a series of insightful studies have been appearing since the early 1980s on the Four Heavenly Kings, the Bema Festival, the Judgment after Death, the Work of the Religion, and most recently Jesus (see publications by Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, Jorinde Ebert, Gábor Kósa, and myself).

- 5 The study of Manichaean iconography has been enjoying a boost since 2006 due to the new discovery of a Chinese Manichaean pictorial corpus. The identification of this unique group of paintings forms the subject of my first lecture.
- 6 Although it requires the consideration of complex religious and cultural contexts, often relatively poorly preserved and/or understudied, the continued research of Manichaean art and iconography is important for Asian art history, as well as world art history. The Manichaean remains are rich in data. They constitute a significant group of securely identified, high-quality art objects that were used for the activities of a missionary world religion that existed across the Asian continent between the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> and early-17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Their study allows us to explore remarkable cases of visual syncretism, in which iconography and not just style is adapted to the artistic vernacular in order to communicate a religious message through locally comprehensible images.

## I. Questions of visual syncretism : Identification of a Newly Discovered Corpus of Chinese Manichaean Silk Paintings

- 7 The remarkable small corpus of Chinese Manichaean pictorial art recently discovered in Japan consists of 7 paintings, including 5 complete hanging scrolls and 3 smaller cut sections of 2 other hanging scrolls (Yamato Bunka 2009, 2011, 2012 ; *Artibus Asiae* 2009 ; and *World of Khubilai Khan*, Metropolitan Museum of Art & Yale Univ., 2010, 159-78). Although their study is ongoing, the recognition of them as Manichaean works of art produced in southern China sometime between the 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> centuries is positively confirmed. The identification of these paintings is not self evident, for they employ a visual language analogous to that of contemporaneous Chinese Buddhist art. The decoding of this visual language is hindered by not only the fact that Manichaeism is relatively little studied among the historical religions of China, but also that until now no Manichaean paintings (only a painted statue of Mani) were known from China.
- 8 The identification of this corpus began with one of the complete hanging scrolls in the collection of the Yamato Art Museum (Yamato Bunkakan) in Nara, Japan, that depicts “Mani’s teaching on Salvation.” Numerous studies have been published on this painting. Noticing the unique features of the central deity, first Takeo Izumi entertained briefly its possible Manichaean identification (Kokka 2006). Based on which, Yutaka Yoshida considered its colophon that dedicates this painting to the “temple of the vegetarians,” an expression used for the Manichaeans in China at that time ; and noted a uniquely Manichaean mark in the iconography of the main deity : a white cloak that features 4 small rectangular emblems with female heads (*Pensée grecque et sagesse d’Orient : Hommage à Michel Tardieu*, Brepols 2009, 697-705 ; and Yamato Bunka 2009). The various artistic and iconographic ties connecting this image to the Uyghur Manichaean corpus were explored by Ebert (Yamato Bunka 2009) and myself (Yamato Bunka 2009, and in *Studies for J. van Oort at Sixty*, Brill 2010, 315-337). This complex painting is organized in five registers to illustrate what I called “Mani’s teaching on Salvation” in a publication that explored the Manichaean subject matter and the didactic context of use associated with this work of art (*Studies on the Inner Asian Languages* 2008). Further publications on its iconography are forthcoming by Ebert and Kosa (2013).

- 9 The second identification essential for establishing this corpus concerns a devotional icon of Jesus as a Manichaean prophet, dressed in a uniquely Manichaean garment (a white cloak that features 4 small rectangular emblems with female heads), housed today in the collection of the Seiyun-ji Zen Temple near Kôfu, Japan. As I explored in a detailed study, this painting represents a unique case of religious metamorphosis for it has been used by three religions (*Artibus Asiae* 2009). While both an ongoing Buddhist episode and a preceding Japanese (Catholic) Christian episode are evident in the recorded history of the image, its iconography reveals yet another, even earlier, Manichaean religious affiliation connected to its origin. Based on an inventory of paintings in the possession of a Manichaean temple in Wenzhou taken 1120 CE, this hanging scroll may be titled *Yishu fo zhen* ('silk painting of the buddha ["prophet"] Jesus'). Despite the fact that it features a figure seated on a lotus pedestal with a cross statuette in his left hand, this painting is neither a Buddhist nor a Christian work of art for three reasons: first, it can be linked with contemporaneous textual and visual sources that support its creation and use in a Manichaean context; second, it displays iconographic and compositional continuity with earlier Manichaean art; and third, it depicts a Manichaean subject (the prophet Jesus) with symbols that allude to two fundamental Manichaean teachings (dualism and "the cross of Light") that are well documented throughout the history of this religion. Its attribution and identification help us to confirm that the Jesus subject had a long history in Manichaean devotional art.
- 10 An additional Chinese Manichaean devotional icon of Mani is documented on a now lost hanging scroll, which during the late 1930s belonged to a Japanese private collection and was published in *Kokka* (1937, 15, plate IV). Although at that time this image was misidentified as a depiction of a Taoist deity, this early publication is immensely valuable today since it contains a large and superb quality black-and-white photograph. The correct identification of this painting was proposed by Yoshida, based on the figure's unmistakable Manichaean garment—a white cloak with four small rectangular emblems (*Yamato Bunka* 2010, 3).
- 11 Yet another distinctly Manichaean didactic subject matter, Manichaean cosmology (that is, a diagram-like depiction of the Manichaean teaching on the universe), is featured on one complete hanging scroll and another fragmentary hanging scroll (consisting of physically matching two smaller units that feature the "Realm of Light") in an unidentified private collection. These exquisite Chinese paintings were exhibited in the Yamato Bunkakan in 2011, after being identified by Yoshida and discussed in connection with Chinese Buddhist art by Shoichi Furukawa (*Yamato Bunka* 2010).
- 12 The final subject documented among the currently known examples of Chinese Manichaeans pictorial art regard Manichaean hagiography shown on a complete hanging scroll and a smaller fragment (with the birth of Mani) of another scroll, both in an unidentified private collection. These two scenes were also exhibited in the Yamato Bunkakan based on Yoshida's identification that was supplemented with Furukawa's preliminary art historical study (*Yamato Bunka*, 2010 and 2012).
- 13 The ongoing research of these 7 Chinese Manichaean paintings undoubtedly will lead to new insights on questions of visual syncretism. Even at this early stage of their analysis and interpretation, however, it is clear that these images feature iconography and not just a painting style that was adapted to the contemporaneous Chinese artistic

vernacular in order to communicate distinctly Manichaean subjects in a fully Sinicized visual language required by their culturally and ethnically Chinese beholder.

## II. Formation of medieval book art in West Asia : Sideways-oriented Images of Manichaean, Eastern Christian, and Islamic Manuscripts

- 14 Arguably the most important artistic media of medieval West Asia is the illuminated manuscript, with equal significance in the three most important religions of the region : Eastern Christianity (Syriac, Armenian), Manichaeism, and Islam. These originally West Asian religions not only relied on the written word as the keeper of sacred knowledge, but made the book the center of their ritual practice. Integrating it into their respective liturgies, they each developed a sophisticated and luxurious artistic culture of the book. Previous studies on the early history of this medium were primarily Eurocentric in their interests and thus did not explore the critical role West Asia played in its formation. At the same time, in traditional art history, the study of the illuminated manuscript was reduced to its miniatures routinely considered in isolation from the context and function of its book medium. The combination of these two perspectives has obscured the dramatic shift in religious practice and artistic focus that occurs historically with the rise of *religions of the book* in West Asia. With the aid of a codicological/archaeological approach, however, the study of book art is gaining attention. This method of investigation provides the advantage of viewing *the illuminated book itself* as a work of art. Considering its complete formal and content analysis together with its cultural and religious context, allowing us to ask questions that have not been considered before.
- 15 In this ongoing project, I apply a codicological/archaeological approach to a body of primary sources that have never been considered together. They were created during the 8<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries by people belonging to a variety of Semitic, Indo-European, and Turkic ethnic groups, living within the territories of three major states of early mediaeval West and Central Asia : the Byzantine, Abbasid, and Uygur Empires. My study explores illuminated manuscripts produced in these contexts from the two distinct angles of shared artisanship : assemblage and decoration. By focusing on the aesthetic and material aspects of these sources, I document the considerable extent of common features manifested in the manuscripts' *physical make* (quire structure, sewing stations, binding, covers), *decoration* (calligraphy, scribal decoration, and illumination), *page design* (sideways orientation), and *overall content distribution* (book layout). This evidence suggests that despite the boundaries between these religious communities, there was an active exchange of ideas and artistic techniques among them, centering on the technical and aesthetic development of book culture.
- 16 The core of this project is formed by the Manichaean corpus. My monograph on Manichaean codicology (Brill, 2005) confirms that sideways-ness is an ubiquitous design phenomenon and that it is not necessitated by any ritual function. In that study, the currently known 89 fragments of Manichaean illuminated books are subjected to a systematic codicological analysis in order to extract their valuable data disguised by the fragmentary condition of the corpus. This previously unknown body of evidence demonstrates (1) the patterns of arranging sideways images on the illuminated codex

page and (2) the lack of tight contextual cohesion between text and image on the same page. Taken together, these facts indicate that text and image retain a certain degree of independence from one another in Manichaean book art and subsequently imply that the two could not have originated together with the Manichaean illuminated book, but were incorporated from two media originally physically independent from one another—the texts came from a Manichaean textual tradition, while the images from Manichaean pictorial art. The Manichaean origin of the two means of religious communication takes us back to Mani, who was active in southern Mesopotamia during the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, when this multicultural and cosmopolitan part of the world was under Sasanian rule. Mani was highly literate and wrote a significant portion of the Manichaean canon, which he regarded as an important point of distinction between him and the founder of other religions (such as Zoroaster, the historical Buddha, and Jesus), who either lived in pre-literature eras or were illiterate. Pictorial art was also an important vehicle of communication to Mani, as confirmed by both primary and secondary sources that note how Mani commissioned and/or painted images of his teaching, thus establishing the late ancient West Asian foundation of Manichaean pictorial art. All in all, it seems that the mediaeval practice of combining text and image in a Manichean manuscript illumination was brought about by a tradition of copying scenes from a solely pictorial work (*Mani's Picture-Book* in scroll and later in horizontal codex formats) into originally solely textual religious manuscripts of vertical codex format.

- 17 An analogous case of independence between text and image is documented in Eastern Christian manuscript illumination. Jules Le Roy's *Album of Syriac Illuminated Manuscripts in European Collections* (Paris, 1964) contains 35 sideways-oriented miniature paintings from 12 gospel-books. Although a group of 12 manuscripts is a relatively small number compared to the rest of the Syriac material surveyed by Le Roy, they represent a considerable percentage within his overall corpus, which becomes especially noteworthy since a small, but significant number of contemporaneous Armenian Gospel-books are also adorned with sideways oriented images. So far, I have found 44 examples of Armenian and Syriac illuminated gospel-books with sideways-oriented images. They date from between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and are housed in various collections in Europe, North America, and the Middle East. I have examined in person most of them, including a group of 19 manuscripts in the *Matenadaran Manuscript Library* in Yerevan, Armenia. A significant group of examples feature horizontally aligned full-page scenes that depict a harmonized narrative of the life of Christ within an independent pictorial unit shown at the beginning of the codex and separated from the texts of the four gospels. The phenomenon of divergently aligned texts and images in Eastern Christian illuminated books has escaped scholarly attention. In accordance with the methods of traditional art history, Le Roy's attention stayed on the paintings and did not consider their immediate physical settings. Besides short factual remark by Verj Nersessian (1986) and Dickran Kouymjian (1977, 1979, 1981), this unique practice has remained unnoted.
- 18 The earliest Islamic examples of sideways-oriented images consists of various vegetal motifs such as palmettes, trees, and bushes, which function as markers of the *sura* headers along the outer margins of already the earliest, so-called Kufic Qur'ans produced in Syria during the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. Although purely decorative, these representational motifs are systematically oriented with their tips towards the outer margins on their parchment folia. Sporadic examples of botanical illustrations and



landscapes are known from between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries mainly from Ottoman Turkish book art.

- 19 The origin of this curious phenomenon is my concern. Since sideways positioning does not play any ritual role, religious practice cannot provide an easy answer for its emergence. Instead, I see in it a clue indicative of an important step within the development of the illuminated book in mediaeval West Asia during the early stage in the formation of this medium, when two originally independent traditions (a tradition of religious texts and a tradition of religious pictures) were united for the first time in this part of the world. With the aid of Manichaean data, I hypothesize that the Eastern Christian examples also document a transition from a solely pictorial medium in format of a horizontal scroll to the “mixed media” of the illuminated manuscript now in format of a vertically oriented codex.

### III. Pictorial sermons : Mani’s *Picture-Book* and Manichaean Didactic Art across the Asian Continent

- 20 Didactic paintings played an integral role in Manichaeism throughout its 1400-year history. Known as *The Picture* (or *The Picture-Book*), a collection of paintings was originally created in mid-3rd century Mesopotamia with direct involvement from Mani (216-76 CE) and continued to be adapted to a wide variety of artistic and cultural norms as the religion spread across the Asian continent. Until recently, no examples of these paintings have been identified. This lecture is based on the study of a newly identified corpus of visual sources that are analyzed in light of written records and interpreted within the wider, pan-Asiatic practice of “picture-recitation,” or “story-telling with images.” To a lesser degree, teaching with images is documented from Judaism, Eastern Christianity, Iranian Islam, and Buddhism—religious traditions that were active alongside Manichaeism in 3<sup>rd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century West Asia, 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century Central Asia, and 8<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century East Asia. The Manichaean case, however, is unique, since the followers of Mani attributed a canonical status to their collection of didactic art, which is unparalleled by in any other religion that spread across the trade routes of the Asian continent.
- 21 When I started this research only a few tantalizing textual references were known that alluded to a collection of “some paintings” known as Mani’s *Picture-Book*. At that time, I thought it would be useful to find out how little was actually known about it, imagining that maybe there was enough material to write a brief article on the subject. Fortunately I was wrong. So much so that this year I am finishing up a monograph on the subject (Brill, 2013). This book will have 3 substantial sections, as reported about in a preliminary web publication (*Transcultural Studies* 2011). It will start with the study of 26 textual sources in light of their data on the (1) designation, (2) appearance, (3) origin, (4) content, (5) function, and (6) date of Mani’s *Picture-Book*. It will continue with the analysis and interpretation of about 20 Manichaean paintings, including 7 newly identified exquisitely well-preserved Chinese Manichaean paintings and 13 Central Asian images that are either actual fragments of Mani’s *Picture-Book* or copies of its scenes preserved in various other pictorial media. Finally, this book will conclude by contextualizing the Manichaean findings in light of a significant amount of (non-Manichaean) comparative examples that reveal a pan-Asiatic phenomenon of teaching religion with images.



- 22 Closest to the time and culture of Mani, the use of images for religious teaching is documented in 3<sup>rd</sup>-century Mesopotamia in both Jewish and Christian settings, suggesting that the Manichaeans were not the only religious community in the region to employ didactic art in service of their mission. About 10 days of walking distance (ca. 270 miles = 430 km) north of where Mani lived, on the Roman side of the Sasanid border, the archeological remains discovered at Dura-Europos famously preserve such art. The Synagogue at Dura presents a strong comparative example. Its mostly narrative scenes are large enough to see by all present. The meeting hall is framed with built-in benches, orienting the community towards the center and allowing for a relatively comfortable view of all 4 walls. The pictorial program of such a visual library does not have to mimic the sequence of the stories in the Hebrew Bible. The rabbi brings them up as he sees fit. He may verbally refer to, or physically point to them when necessary. The Baptistry at Dura seems to document an analogous case with scenes such as *Healing the Paralytic*, *Walking on Water*, *Woman at the Well*, and *Finding the Empty Tomb*. At this early era of Christianity, baptism was performed mostly for adults and, thus, it is conceivable that the ritual included a didactic component. In this small chapel, the scenes seem to be selected for their appropriateness for a baptism ritual. At the same time, they constitute part of a didactic visual library.
- 23 Starting from the mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century, the itinerant Manichaean priesthood employed a portable medium (a scroll according to Ephrem Syrus, see *Transcultural Studies* 2011), but they, too, had a collection of didactic paintings, analogously to the Christian and Jewish communities of Mesopotamia. Textual sources also confirm that the Manichaeans found their collection of didactic painting important enough to be added to their canon in a solely pictorial volume. While it is possible that the idea to use didactic art as a visual aid to oral instruction came to Mani as a result of seeing portable pictorial tableaux in India, it is also possible that using portable art in the context of oral performances was a broader regional, West Asiatic, artistic phenomenon widely employed in both secular and religious settings in this primarily Iranian part of the late ancient world.

#### IV. Life of Christ pictured according to the *Diatessaron* : Manichaean and Christian Visual Gospel Harmonies with Roots in Ancient West Asia

- 24 The Syriac gospel harmony from the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century, known today after its Greek title *Diatessaron* and its attribution to Tatian, was used in place of the four canonical gospels in Syro-Mesopotamia between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries. It has been long thought that this text must have had an impact on the arts of the region. This lecture identified two partially surviving pictorial cycles depicting Jesus' life, whose narrations, vignette by vignette, correlate with the events discussed in two sections of the *Diatessaron* as documented by the most accurate witnesses to the sequence of Tatian's prose, its Arabic translation (Marmarji, *Diatessaron de Tatien* ; Hill, *Earliest Life of Christ*). One of the two paintings is preserved on a folio fragment of a Manichaean illuminated manuscript from 10<sup>th</sup>-century East Central Asia. The other is found in the famous illuminated *St. Augustine Gospels*, dating from 6<sup>th</sup>-century Italy. It has been pointed out previously that neither painting is a direct "illustration" to the text of its manuscript. At the same time, they both show iconographic ties to West Asia. Based on their newly discovered

diatessaronic contents, I argue that these paintings constitute visual witnesses to the *Diatessaron* and were copied into their respective codices from earlier prototypes, which were solely pictorial renditions of the life of Christ based on Tatian's harmony. I suggest that they originated in a relatively little-documented pictorial medium present in Syro-Mesopotamia during late ancient times. Textual sources confirm that didactic paintings were used there as visual displays in a religious version of the practice that Mair in his monograph from 1988 calls "picture recitation" or "story telling with pictures".

- 25 A Manichaean painting with the diatessaronic narration originally contained a minimum of 12 individual scenes in gilded frames that narrated the life of Jesus on a folio fragment (MIK III 4967a, see Gulacsi, *Manichean Art in Berlin Collections*, 124-3) of a Manichaean illuminated hymnbook from 10<sup>th</sup>-century East Central Asia. The two adjacent scenes still discernable from this cycle show "Judas Paid by Caiaphas," and "Foot Washing" (Gulacsi, "Life of Jesus," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 22, 2012). The Manichaeans were exposed to Tatian's work most likely already during the life of Mani in the Mesopotamian phase of their history. Subsequently, they were noted for a continued use and preservation of the *Diatessaron* especially in the Latin-speaking part of the Roman Empire until the late 5<sup>th</sup> century. Direct quotations from Tatian's prose, given in Parthian translation in an East Central Asian Manichaean text, confirm a continued use of the *Diatessaron* until the early 11<sup>th</sup> century (Sundermann, "Christliche Evangelientexte," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientforschung*, 1968). Therefore, the identification of a Manichaean painting with a diatessaronic account of Jesus' life is especially relevant. Moreover, these scenes provide the very first pictorial evidence for a Jesus narrative among the Manichaeans. Although painted sometime during the 10<sup>th</sup> century in East Central Asia, these scenes do not show signs of local artistic influence. Instead, they maintain a visual language and a painting style with distinctly West Asian origin, suggesting that a tradition of making and using didactic art was preserved in these diatessaronic Jesus narratives from an earlier phase of Manichaean history that took place in West Asia between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- 26 A previously unnoted early Christian example of a diatessaronic visual narration is preserved in the *St. Augustine Gospels*—the oldest Latin illuminated manuscript, produced in late 6<sup>th</sup>-century Italy, and considered to be the westernmost example of the earliest surviving illuminated gospel-books, none of which date prior to the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. The full-page book painting narrating the early passion with its 12 scenes (including 2 divided scenes) was part of a larger pictorial cycle distributed evenly across the codex. As pointed out by F. Wormald (*Miniatures of the St. Augustine Gospels*, Cambridge 1954), this book painting was part of a total of perhaps three painted pages placed at the start, the middle, and the end of manuscript, motivated by the desire to create a luxurious "edition" of a gospel-book appropriate to be used as gift.
- 27 The fact that this collective book painting does not illustrate the text of any of the four gospels, but instead provides "a harmonized cycle from all four gospels" was noted already by K. Weitzmann (*Late Antique and Early Christian Book Illumination*, New York, 1977). I argue that this harmonized cycle is diatessaronic, since the systematic correlation between the 12+2 scenes of the painting and the text of the *Diatessaron* 37 : 46-51 :18 (ca. one third of the total prose) could hardly be a coincidence. Indeed, despite being placed at the beginning of the introduction to Luke, these scenes are not illustrations of Luke's Gospel. This is especially striking, since two of the twelve panels

(“Raising of Lazarus” and “Foot Washing”) are mentioned neither in Luke nor in any of the two other synoptic gospels. They are discussed only in John (11 :1-46 and 13 :1-17, respectively). This observation highlights the fact that these paintings constitute parts of a harmonized pictorial cycle that could not have been developed as illustration of the canonical gospels due to the irreconcilable differences between the narratives given by the canonical accounts – which is the very reason behind the need for gospel harmonies, such as the one provided by Tatian. The list below provides an overview of the events enumerated in their diatessaronic order, referenced with chapter and section numbers :

- 28 Data on didactic images and their use in the course of oral instruction is richly documented among the early Manichaeans of late ancient Syro-Mesopotamia. We may suspect, however, that Mani’s decision to have his teachings depicted (and also to add these paintings to the Manichaean canon as a standard and solely pictorial volume) indicates a more widely spread regional phenomenon that existed in Syro-Mesopotamia at that time. This phenomenon involved *paintings* displayed for a group of interested people and *explanations* given by a teacher. In order to imagine them, we may think of a more formal version of the performances of “picture-storytelling” given by folk-priests in villages in Iran and Northwest India today. While the Manichaeans deliberately adopted this practice to serve their mission, it appears that other Christian communities active in Syro-Mesopotamia between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries also made use of it. The unique features of the 14-scene illumination in the *St. Augustine Gospels* may be best explained by suggesting that it was originally designed as a “visual display” and only later copied into a gospel-book. When considered with this didactic function in mind, the Christian and Jewish murals from mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century Dura seem to preserve archaeological evidence for a version of this practice. Bringing Manichaean sources to the study of this question is essential, since they provide the only late ancient documentary evidence on didactic paintings and their religious context of use.

---

## ABSTRACTS

Upon the invitation of Prof. Frantz Grenet (Religions of Ancient Iran) in collaboration with Prof. Jean-Daniel Dubois (Gnostic and Manichaean Studies), it was my great honor to deliver a series of lectures at the École pratique des hautes Études, University of Paris, for the faculty and students of the Section des sciences religieuses during November and December 2011. These lectures were based on my publications and ongoing research and covered four themes presented with special attention to understanding the religious and cultural settings of works of art made and used by the Manichaean communities in regions of West, Central, and East Asia. To preface the summary of the lectures provided below, I would like to offer some introductory remarks, concerning the historical periods of this religion and the current state of its art historical research.

## INDEX

**Subjects:** Religions du monde iranien ancien, Gnose et manichéisme

## AUTHOR

**ZSUZSANNA GULACSI**

Directrice d'études invitée, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, École pratique des hautes études – Section des sciences religieuses