

Fall 2019 Arts of Asia Lecture Series
Seeking the Divine: The Lesser-Known Religious Traditions of Asia
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**The Religion That (Almost) Disappeared:
Chinese Manichean Art and Its Methods of Identification**

Zsuzsanna Gulácsi, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff
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The recent discovery of Chinese Manichaean silk paintings shook up Manichaean studies during the past decade. This small but well-preserved corpus consists of six complete and three fragmentary silk hanging scrolls, eight of which are housed in various Japanese collections and one in the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco. While the visual language of these paintings reflects the norms of late medieval Chinese religious art (best known from Buddhist and Taoist images), their unique iconography and doctrinal content positively confirms their Manichaean identification. This lecture explores the pre-Chinese antecedents of these paintings, fragments of which survive from the Uyghur Era of Manichaean history (755/762 – ca. 1024 CE), preserved today in the Asian Art Museum of Berlin.

Chinese Corpus

Wu Wenliang (1957), Statue, Shrine
51 years later 7 paintings in 11 parts
Preservation: Good condition but, in parts => Matching
Subject: - previously misidentified as Buddhist
- what they represent cannot be understood solely in light of Chinese sources

**Pre-Chinese History
of Manichaeism**

Maps with Phases of Manichaean history,
Map with Manichaean Texts (Egypt, East Central Asia)
Map with Manichaean Art: best preserved, richest, earliest
Mani's Crystal Seal housed today in the Bibliothèque nationale de France
Inscription (Baptist community, Jesus his personal savior)
Elite education (his teachings in books)

Doctrine

Canon & Cultural Roots: Mesopotamian Christian, Iranian Zoroastrian
(Dualism, Cosmogony, Cosmology)
Liberation of Light (Art)
List of Forces of Light/Good
Primary Prophets (Text & Art) - book illustrations survive only from the Uyghur era

Uyghur Era

Map, German Expeditions (5000 text & 26 art)
Uyghur corpus (110 items)
Pan Asiatic trade routes, Uyghur's control of trade (Steppe Empire)
Uyghurs in East Central Asia: Gansu & Tien Shan Uyghur Kingdoms
Uyghur Support of Manichaeism in Tang China => Map: Manichaean temples

Compendium

preservation and date of manuscript (Dunhuang, Mogao Cave # 17)
731CE = date of text in colophon
6 articles: founder, doctrine, institution
Mani's birth story allows to identify 2 scenes from a Chinese painting

Didactic Art

Salvation of the laity (judgement after death) Uyghur roots
White cloak

Jesus Image

Hymn Scroll
Identification, Hands: 2 teachings

Growing Chinese Corpus

Clues for future identifications



Chinese Manichaean Corpus 11th/12th-15th centuries

1 statue & 7 hanging scrolls in 11 fragments

(after Gulacsi, *Mani's Pictures*, Fig. 5/12)



Suggested readings:

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- Lieu, Samuel N. C., *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China*, Tübingen, 1992.
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- Russell-Smith, L., *Uygur patronage in Dunhuang: regional art centers on the northern Silk Road in the tenth and eleventh centuries*, Brill, 2005.
- Tardieu, Michel, *Manichaeism*, Urbana, 2008.
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