

# Journal of Inner Asian Art and Archaeology

I/2006



BREPOLS

# From Healer to Hylē:

## Levantine Iconography as Manichean Mythology

MARTIN SCHWARTZ  
(University of California, Berkeley)

I am pleased to dedicate this article to David Bivar as a token of gratitude for the collegial kindness and the superb hospitality he and his wife Leslie have shown me on my visits to London, as well as in recognition of his broad-ranging scholarship, whereby he has often addressed issues in the history of Iranian religion through novel iconographic approaches. In keeping with the latter trait, I shall here set forth a problem of Manichean mythology, with an iconographic solution from an unexpected source.

The Manichean myth which I shall discuss takes place after the Third Messenger, emanated by the Light-realm to appear in beauteous male and female forms, induces in the Archons (the demonic forces of Hylē, i.e. greedy Matter) an orgasm whereby they shed some of the Light-element they had swallowed up in attacking an earlier Light-emanation, Primal Man. The less contaminated Light falls to earth and gives rise to vegetation, while the more contaminated Light falls to earth and gives rise to the animals (or "abortion demons"), who nibble the plants. Then ensue the events of the myth in question, which may be in effect summarized thus from the agreement of the various accounts:

Hylē, speaking inside of or through a male Archon leader of the animals, promises them counterparts of the beauteous forms which they somehow recall having seen above, and for the creation of their counterparts, the animals are bade to bring their Light-material. The animals do as requested, and their offering is gobbled up by the Archon and his consort, who copulate and produce Adam and Eve.

The accounts of this myth may be grouped in terms of local traditions into Western, most fully represented by the Coptic text of the Kephalaia, and Eastern, attested by Middle Iranian and Syriac texts.<sup>1</sup> The salient differences are:

(1) The name of the male Archon in the Coptic (as well as Greek and Latin allusions to the myth) is Sakla(s). His name<sup>2</sup> and that of his female consort Nebroël should be traced back to a text comparable with that known from the Coptic Nag Hammadi Gnostic codices as "The Great Invisible Spirit" or "The Gospel of the Egyptians," in which the two great demons, named Sakla(s) and Nebrouël, are associated with a projection of the image of Adam and Eve.<sup>3</sup> By contrast, the Syriac of the Christian author Theodore bar Qōnī, who probably knew Mani's own account in the original Aramaic, gives the Archon's name as *ʿṣqlwn*, to which corresponds the Middle Iranian *šqlwn*. Scholars usually vocalize the name Ašqalō/ūn, Šaqalō/ūn

to bring it into line with Sakla(s). However, the only phonemic equivalence between Sakla(s) and *ʿṣqlwn* is the *l*. A simple equation of *ʿṣqlwn* with Sakla(s) would leave unexplained, in an original Semitic linguistic context, the initial vowel represented by *ʿ*; the Aramaic/Syriac phonemic distinction between *š* and *s*, and between *q* and *k* (*k* in Aram.-Syr. *saklā* is a post-vocalic continuant allophone [x] of the phoneme /k/);<sup>4</sup> and the different termination *-wn* vis-à-vis *-a(s)* < *-ā*. In fact, spellings such as Sem. *ʿṣql- vis-à-vis* Mlr. *šql-* would normally be explained by *\*/VšqVl-/ > \*/šqVl-/* (V = vowel). The spelling *ʿṣqlwn*, moreover, is identical to what is found in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Syriac for the name of the city of Ashkelon/Ascalon (ʿAšqalōn) on the southern coast of the Holy Land, which was the locus of cults from the time of the Philistines down to Roman times.

(2) While the Archon in question is not described in the Western material, the Eastern texts indicate that the demon is leontomorphic. This is clearest from the Middle Persian account, in which the archontic couple are several times described as *šayrkirbend*, "lion-shaped." Furthermore, the name *nmr'yl* in Syriac (Theodore) and West Middle Iranian (alongside Syr. *nbr'yl*, cf. Nebroël) for the female Archon is also leontic, with *nmr'* = Aram. *nimri*, Syr. *nemri*, "leopard." A variant of this name is found in Mandaic, where \*Nemrūs (Namus, Nimrus) is a designation of the archdemoness Ruha. Such a name is paralleled in Manichean Middle Iranian texts not only by *Nimrā'el*/*Nemrā'el* but by another name for the consort of (*ʿṣqlwn*, i.e. *pysws*, found in Sogdian and Parthian.<sup>5</sup> I explain the name *\*/Pēsūs/* as a calque of *\*Nimrā'el*/*Nemrā'el*, in which the verb *n-m-r*, as in Babylonian Talmudic Aramaic, is denominally "to be spotted (\*as a leopard), speckled, mottled," the basic mg. of Av. *paēsa-*, MPers. *pēs*, etc. The suffix *-ūs* seems, like *-ēl*, to have designated both benign and malign supernatural beings. Benign beings with names in *-ūs* are the protective spirits *brsynws*, *qstynws* etc.<sup>6</sup> known from a Manichean Parthian amulet, and cf. perhaps in Mani's odd Middle Persian name *m'nyxyws*, which is more readily explained as Aram. *Mānī Hayy(ā)* "the Living Mani" + *-ūs* than as a borrowing from Greek *Manikhaios*. The ending *-ūs* or *-ūs'* is also common in lists of demonic beings in Arabic magical texts, for which I have shown a Manichean Middle Persian component.<sup>7</sup>

(3) Whereas the Coptic says merely that Hylē spoke in(side) the Archon, the Eastern texts stress that Āz (= Hylē) "donned"

the Archon as a "garment" (Sogd.) or as a "garment and veil" or "veil and garment" (MPers.), through which she addressed the animals in the voice of the male Archon.

(4) In the Coptic, Hylē bids the animals to bring their "Light." In Theodore and the Sogdian account, the animals are instructed to bring their young. These young are then taken and gobbled up.

The Iranian and Syriac texts, in sum, state that Āz/I Hylē, wearing the lion-shaped Archons *ʿqlyw* and *Nemrāʿel* as a veil and/or garment, seizes the young of the animals. This odd combination of details, in contrast with the bland Coptic narration, as well as the strange apparent name *ʿAšqālōn* (Ashkelon), as against the Western Manichean *Sakla(s)* (which, with the name of his consort *Nebro(u)ʿel*, are part of the Gnostic core of the tale), require explanation. /c

As it happens, a figure dressed, head and torso in lion clothing, brandishing a club, and grasping a young animal existed in the Levant in the Achaemenid period, in Phoenicia, within the areas of Sarepta and its neighbor Sidon (Lebanese findsites resp. Amrit and Bostan esh-Sheikh, sixth–fifth centuries BCE) and in Cyprus (sixth–fourth centuries BCE).<sup>8</sup> The statuary from Amrit occurs alongside inscriptions bearing the name of the Phoenician healing god Eshmun and it is from a sanctuary of Eshmun that the statuary of Bostan esh-Sheikh comes. The almost certain Cypriot origin of the iconography, with its Heracleian aspect, would proceed from the fact that the Phoenician savior-god Melqart, Hellenized as Herakles, had merged with Eshmun on Cyprus.<sup>9</sup> This iconography, expressing Herakles' victory over the Nemean lion, would also have matched an old indigenous Phoenician representation of a healing god brandishing a mace in his right hand and holding a small lion by the hind legs in his left hand.

The latter format is attested for a god whose name is spelled consonantly *šdrp'* and who is represented on a stela from the vicinity of Amrit (AO 22 247) possibly dating from the ninth–seventh century BCE.<sup>10</sup> As Lipiński notes, the stela's representation of the god as wearing an Egyptian white crown with a uraeus-serpent, bearing a mace, and, most importantly, grasping a lion, accords with the origin of *šdrp'* in an Egyptian divinity named *šd* "the Savior" (or "Enchanter"<sup>11</sup>). He had been represented in the nineteenth century BCE grasping a lion as symbol of his control over noxious beasts, was popular among Semitic workmen in Deir el-Medineh and Gizeh, and was later imported in the Syro-Phoenician area, where he was called *šd-rp'* "the healing" *šd/šdrp'* seems to have become regarded as a local form of Eshmun,<sup>12</sup> and both in the Hellenistic period merged as Asklepios.<sup>13</sup> /s

It remains to connect the foregoing iconography of the lion-clad, lion-holding god, which parallels the description of the Archon in the Syriac and Iranian versions of the Manichean myth, with Ashkelon, the toponym, seeming to designate that Archon. The spread of the worship of Eshmun throughout Palestine is attested by material from the eighth to the fourth centuries BCE.<sup>14</sup> Precisely from the period of the Heracleian

statues of the lion-holding healer-god, fifth–fourth centuries BCE, were found many pendants shaped in the symbol of Tanit, goddess of Sarepta, at Ashkelon, for which the occurrence of the same symbol on coinage of Hadrian shows the survival of the cult in the late second century CE.<sup>15</sup> It may be posited that the Achaemenid type of cult statuary of the healing god, long after its apparent desuetude in Sidon/Sarepta, persisted in Roman imperial Ashkelon—demonstrably a cultic center of the god in question.

In the fifth century CE, Marinus, a native of Nablus, Palestine, informs us that his teacher, the Neoplatonist Proclus, composed a hymn in honor of *Asklēpios Leontoukchos Askalonitēs* "the Askalonite Liongrasping Asklepios" (Marinus Neapolis, *Vita Procli* 19). This testimony has been compared with other Late Antique Levantine representations of the domination of Asklepios over lions,<sup>16</sup> one on a cup of the late third or early fourth century CE again from coastal Palestine, i.e. from Maritime Caesarea, and another a rock relief from a central Syrian village called *Bšāmūn*, "House of Eshmun."<sup>17</sup> Lipiński sees all these data as belonging to the tradition of *šdrp'*/Eshmun represented in the militant format of a Heracleian figure in lion garb grasping a small lion.<sup>18</sup>

In view of the Manichean texts, it may now be affirmed that it was such statuary at Ashkelon that Marinus mentions in connection with Proclus in the fifth century and which must have been known in Manichean circles in the earlier two centuries. Mani somehow heard of the menacing cub-holding statuary, whose face peering out of the lion headdress suggested to Mani the image of Hylē/Āz dressing in an archontic lion-shape, in which she "ragged" (thus the Middle Persian) and, speaking as the Archon, issued the commands whereby the animal young were seized. The name of the cultic center, *ʿAšqālōn*, replaced the phonically similar name of the Archon, *Sakla(s)*.

Perhaps Mani, for his easterly preaching, took up the image of the lion-garbed Ascalonite deity in ignorance of its nature. However, it is tempting instead to suggest that as a riposte against Levantine heathendom, Mani intentionally co-opted the image and subverted the valuation of the divinity. In this case, it may be further proposed that the cult-image of Ashkelon, clothed in lion-garments and grasping a young animal, was well known in the Near East and was used by Mani for his own purposes in preaching to this area, whereas in Western versions (Greek, Coptic, Latin), which had been exposed to the Gnostic figure of *Sakla(s)*, the latter name was retained.

I wish to thank Jessica Nitschke for sending me an annotated bibliography on the most recent work on the relevant statuary. The material will be discussed at length in her PhD dissertation, "Perception of Culture: Interpreting Greco-Near Eastern Hybridity in the Phoenician Homeland" (University of California, Berkeley, 2006, Graduate Group in Ancient History and Mediterranean Archaeology, Dept. of Classics).<sup>19</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Middle Persian text is found in F. C. Andreas and W. Henning, "Mitteliranische Manichaica aus Chinesisch-Turkestan II," *Sitzungsberichte der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-hist. Klasse* VII (1933), 293-363, reprinted in W. B. Henning, *Selected Papers I = Acta Iranica* 14 (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1977), 191-260, re-edited with translation and notes in Mary Boyce, *A Reader in Manichaean Middle Persian and Parthian*, = *Acta Iranica* 9 (Lehman and Liège: Brill Academic Publishers 1975), 71-73; translated in J. P. Asmussen, *Manichaean Literature* (Delmar, NY: Scholars Facsimiles & Reprints, 1975), 127-28. The Sogdian and Coptic versions of the text are accessible in Werner Sundermann, "Mani's Book of Giants and the Jewish Books of Enoch," *Manichaica Iranica: Ausgewählte Schriften von Werner Sundermann*, 2, eds. C. Reck, D. Weber, C. Leurini and A. Panzino = *Serie Orientale Roma* LXXXIX (Roma: Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, 2001), 702-3, originally printed in *Iranio-Judaica* III, eds. S. Shaked and A. Netzer (Jerusalem: Ben Tzvi Institute, 1994), 40-48.

<sup>2</sup> Derived from Aramaic *saklā* "the ignorant one, the fool."

<sup>3</sup> Shortly before the account of Sakla(s) and Nebrouēl, the Gnostic text has a section on the Adamas (= Adamant) as a being of Light; this Gnostic figure is the source of Mani's Light-Adamas. The relevant portion of the Gnostic text, featuring the Adamas, Saklas, and Nebrouēl, is readily accessible with annotated translation in Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (New York: Anchor Bible, 1987), 109-14, with analysis and bibliography of the entire text 101-4. Since this text is connected with a rite of baptism, a related Aramaic text may have been known to Mani from the religious milieu of his parents, whence Mani also surely obtained the mythological materials for his Book of Giants, on which see Martin Schwartz, "Qumran, Turfan, and Noah's Name" *Charmes et Sortilèges, Magie et Magiciens = Res Orientales* 14 (Bures-sur-Yvette: Peeters, 2002), 231 seq. The recently translated *The Gospel of Judas*, eds. R. Kasser, M. Meyer and G. Wurst (Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 2006) associates the creation of Adam and Eve (as in the Manichean myth, a demonic imitation of a divine prototype) with Sakla(s) and Nebro, the latter there interpreted as "the rebel" and identified with Ialdabaoth. Sakla(s) and Nebro, are here again preceded by a reference to Adamas. Baptism also figures in the text. The *Gospel of Judas* seems to go back to a "Sethian" strain of Gnosticism related to that of the *Gospel of the Egyptians*.

<sup>4</sup> The alternation of spellings *sglum* and *sklum* within Middle Iranian texts merely follows the Manichean Iranian orthographic variation *q/k* in words with the Iranian phoneme *k*.

<sup>5</sup> For the attestations of Sakla(s), *sglum*, Nebrouēl, *nbr'yl*, *nmr'yl*, and *pysus*, see Samuel N. C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in Mesopotamia and the Roman East* (Leiden, New York and Köln: Brill, 1994), 280-81 with bibliography.

<sup>6</sup> For *brymus*, *qftynus*, etc., see W. B. Henning, "Two Manichaean Magical Texts," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 12 (1947), 50.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Schwartz, "Qumran, Turfan, and Noah's Name," 234-35 and 236, n. 16. [A different etymology of Pēsūs has now appeared: Werner Sundermann,

"Die Dämonen Pēsūs," *Languages of Iran: Present and Past, Iranian Studies in memoriam David Neil Mackenzie*, ed. D. Weber (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2005), 207-12.]

<sup>8</sup> Amrit and Cyprus: Collette Jourdain-Aumiquin, *Héraclès-Melqart à Amrit. Recherches iconographiques. Contribution à l'étude d'un syncrétisme. Bibliothèque Archéologique et Historique, Institut Français Archéologique de Beyrouth* 142 (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1992), pls. on 48-61 (Amrit) and 62-71 (Cyprus: 68 top Amrit?); "Héraclès-Melqart à Amrit? Un syncrétisme gréco-phénicien à l'époque perse," *Transsephrutène* 6 (1993), 69-86; Katja Leimbke, *Die Skulpturen aus dem Quellheiligtum von Amrit: Studie zur Akkulturation in Phönizien; mit einem Beitrag von C. Xenophonos, Damascener Forschungen* 12 (Mainz-am-Rhein: Philipp von Zabern 2004), pls. 5-11; catalogue nos. 35-100; catalogue nos. 35-100; discussion 42-47. C. Xenophonos, 218-19, reports that a material analysis of the Amrit statues indicates that the stone came from Cyprus.

Boston esh-Sheikh: Rolf Stucky, *Die Skulpturen aus dem Eschmun-Heiligtum bei Sidon: Griechische, römische, kyprische und phönizische Statuen und Reliefs vom 6. Jahrhundert bis zum 3. Jahrhundert nach Christ. Antike Kunst, Beiheft* 17 (Basel: Vereinigung der Freunde antiker Kunst, 1993), nos. 3-7, pls. 4-5; catalogue on 68; discussion on 13-18.

<sup>9</sup> Edward Lipiński, *Dieux et déesses de l'univers phénicien et punique* (Louvain: Dép. Oosterse Studies, 1995), 161-62, 289-92.

<sup>10</sup> A. Parrot, M. Chéhab and S. Moscati, *Les Phéniciens, l'expansion phénicienne. Carthage* (Paris: L'Univers des formes, 1975), fig. 122. Exhibition catalogues *Au pays de Baal et d'Asarté: 10000 ans d'art en Syrie: Musée du Petit Palais, 26 octobre 1983-8 janvier 1984* (Paris: Ministère des relations extérieures, Association française d'action artistique, 1983), 222, no. 255; and *Art phénicien: la sculpture de tradition phénicienne*. Sous la direction scientifique d'Annie Caubet, Elisabeth Fontan and Éric Gubel (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux and Gand: Snoeck, 2002), 51-53.

<sup>11</sup> Lipiński, *Dieux*, 195, 197, 295, 329-32. Lipiński (195 and 329) has the conventional translation of *šd* as "Savior." For *šd* as "Reciter" rather than "Savior," see George Hart, *Routledge Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses*, 2nd edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 146.

<sup>12</sup> Lipiński, *Dieux*, 195-6.

<sup>13</sup> Lipiński, *Dieux*, 157-8; 161-2; 197-8.

<sup>14</sup> Lipiński, *Dieux*, 161.

<sup>15</sup> Lipiński, *Dieux*, 113.

<sup>16</sup> G. Finkelschtein, "Asklepios Leontoukhus et la mythe de coupe de Césarée Maritime," *Revue Biblique* 93 (1986), 417-28.

<sup>17</sup> L. Jalabert, "Monuments relatifs au culte d'Esculape," *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 1 (1906), 157-67, with pl. II; Lipiński, *Dieux*, 197.

<sup>18</sup> Lipiński, *Dieux*, 197-8 and 292.

<sup>19</sup> James R. Russell suggested to me (in conversation, May 5, 2006) that the demonization of the healing god of Ashkelon may have been motivated by Mani's well-evidenced self-image as a physician.

(from a purely hypothetical Middle Iranian form)