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MANI'S DODECADS AND SASANIAN CHRONOLOGY: KEPHALAIA,  
SHĀPŪRAGĀN, AND CODEX MANICHAICUS COLONIENSIS

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## MANI'S DODECADS AND SASANIAN CHRONOLOGY:

KEPHALAI A, SHĀPŪRAGĀN, AND CODEX MANICHAICUS COLONIENSIS<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

The following short communication attempts to chart, once again, a course out of the maze in which seemingly conflicting sources have concealed the chronology of the first two kings of the Sasanian dynasty, Ardashīr (I), son of Pābag, and Shāpūr (I), son of Ardashīr. It is hoped that the way sketched here will prove viable both in advancing beyond the current discussion of actual dates and in dispelling the mentioned semblance of contradiction between the several extant sources. The truism that 'sources' tend not to yield graciously to the queries of modern students has special bearing upon a crucial part of the evidence concerned, namely Mani's own self-statements and the various accounts of him which originated from the Manichean community. In consequence, a renewed scrutiny of the pertinent Manichean texts will form an essential part of our current endeavor. It is our assertion that the very stylization of Mani's (auto-)biography can serve as a valuable heuristic tool in an analysis and assessment of the Manichean as well as the non-Manichean witnesses for the Sasanians' ascent to power. The review of sources to be undertaken here once again will result in an unassailable confirmation of the known dates of early Sasanian history; 551 A. Seleuc./239-41 C.E., the year of Shāpūr's I accession to the throne, is the pivotal date which at the same time corroborates the other disputed dates of Ardashīr's rule. Thus 535 A. Sel./224 C.E. will be confirmed as the year of Ardashīr's victory over Ardashīr IV (V) and 537/538 Sel. Babyl./Julian./227 C.E. as that of his coronation.

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<sup>1</sup>Since this study is not meant to be more than a brief note or *Miszelle*, bibliographical references are treated with a certain latitude, even if not, it is hoped, irresponsibly; on the current state of discussion cf., e.g., R. Altheim-Stiehl, *Boreas* 5 (1982), pp. 152-59 (cf. eadem in P. Kawerau, ed. et tr., *Die Chronik von Arbela*, Louvain 1985, II 13-16 [CSCO 467f]); M. L. Chaumont, "A propos de la chute de Hatra et du couronnement de Shapur Ier," *A[cta]A[ntiqua]A[cademiae]S[cientiarum]H[ungariae]* 27 (1979), pp. 207-37, esp. 207-23, 236f; W. Felix, *Antike literarische Quellen zur Außenpolitik des Sasanidenstaates*, Vienna 1985 (SBÖAW, Phil.-hist. Kl., Bd. 456), esp. p. 25ff; A. Henrichs, "The Timing of Supernatural Events in the Cologne Mani Codex," *Codex Manichaicus Coloniensis. Atti del Simposio Internazionale (Rende-Amantea 3-7 settembre 1984)*, edd. L. Cirillo e A. Roselli, Cosenza 1986, pp. 183-204, esp. 183f., 199-202; Kl. Schippmann, *Grundzüge der Geschichte des sasanidischen Reiches*, Darmstadt 1990, esp. pp. 15-19; W. Sundermann, "Mani's Revelations in the Cologne Mani Codex and in Other Sources," *Codex Manichaicus Coloniensis. Atti ... [as above]*, pp. 205-14; idem, "Studien zur kirchengeschichtlichen Literatur der Manichäer I-III," *A[lt]o[rientalische]F[orschungen]* 13-14 (1986-87), esp. vol. 14, pp. 55, 81-84, 86; J. Wieshöfer, *E[ncyclopaedia]I[ranica]* II, s.v. Ardashīr I.

In contrast to the confusion which many authors of the Sasanian and Islamic periods shared about the duration of both the Parthian and the Sasanian empires — quite apart from the obfuscating 'Magian' chronology,<sup>2</sup> al-Bīrūnī achieved a precise reduction of dates on the basis of the synchronisms which Mani had established in his 'book for Shāpūr' (*Shāpūrāgān*).<sup>3</sup> To the extent that Mani's chronological reductions pertain solely to Parthian and Sasanian history, without bearing on events in his own life, they do not give cause for suspicion. It thus appears safe to accept al-Bīrūnī's computations; given the known Seleucid year of Yazdgird III's accession, 943, and Mani's synchronisms, he reckons the interval between 'Alexander' and Ardashīr I as 537 years — here meaning that Ardashīr's accession took place within the year 537 Sel. — and the time elapsed between Ardashīr and Yazdgird III as 406 years.

Relying on Syriac information which directly drew on the Sasanian court records, Agathias (IV 24/I 153 Keydell) dates the inception of Ardashīr's reign to the year 538 'of Alexander'. i.e., 226-27 C.E. The difference of the dates given for Ardashīr's accession, 538 Sel. in Agathias, etc., and 537 in Mani/al-Bīrūnī, can easily be resolved as the difference between the Julian-Seleucid autumn, and the Babylonian-Seleucid spring epochs — which appears to have escaped al-Bīrūnī in the cited passage.<sup>4</sup>

Given Agathias' dependence on official Sasanian registers and his agreement with Mani's — not only contemporaneous but in view of the *Shāpūrāgān*'s dedicatee hardly less 'official' — synchronisms, it can be taken for granted that in established Sasanian tradition, the dynasty's epoch fell within the year 537 Sel. Babyl.;<sup>5</sup> it has usually been seen as referring to Ardashīr's coronation in Ctesiphon.<sup>6</sup> However, it is well known that the case does not rest here. Quite apart from the Chronicle of Arbela which dates the beginning of Ardashīr's rule to his decisive victory over the last Parthian, Ardavān IV (V), on 27 Nīsān 535 Sel.,<sup>7</sup> in the Syriac Martyrs' Acts, the 'year 117 of the Persian empire' is synchronised with Shāpūr II's 31st regnal year;<sup>8</sup> Shāpūr II's contemporary, Afrahāt, in turn irrefutably

<sup>2</sup> Numerous witnesses attest that during the Sasanian period, the Zoroastrian hierarchy for ideological reasons abridged the period between 'Alexander' and Ardashīr's victory to a mere 266 years (see Shabhazi, EIr III 542f).

<sup>3</sup> al-Bīrūnī, *al-Āthār al-bāqīya 'an al-qurūn al-khālīya*, ed. E.Sachau as *Chronologie orientalischer Völker*, Berlin 1876-78, p. 117ff [= iidem, (English trl.), *The Chronology of Ancient Nations*, London 1879, p. 119ff].

<sup>4</sup> Strictly speaking, it is rather the autumn epoch of the *Persian* calendar which has to be applied here. In the period considered, it very nearly agreed with the Julian Seleucid epoch, although, given the lack of reliable records of intercalation, the exact day of *nowrūz* cannot be ascertained; see E.Bickerman, "Time-reckoning," *Cambridge History of Iran* 3(2), Cambridge, etc., 1983, esp. p. 786f (refuting Th. Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden. Aus ... Tabari ...*, Leyden 1879, pp. 406-9).

<sup>5</sup> See preceding note for the difference of the Persian *fall* and the Babylonian *spring* epochs.

<sup>6</sup> See e.g. Taqizadeh/Henning, *Asia Major* 6, 1957, 106-21 and A. Maricq, "Res Gestae Divi Saporis," *Syria* 35 (1958), esp. pp. 344-48.

<sup>7</sup> p. 30<sub>4-7</sub> Kawerau [text] = p. 50 [trl.].

<sup>8</sup> *Acta mart.*, II 128<sub>12ff</sub>, 135<sub>14ff</sub> Bedjan; Th. Nöldeke, op. cit., p. 410f.

establishes 621 Sel. Julian. as the year of this king's accession (pp. 304f, 399, 440f, 507 Wright). Thus the mentioned Sasanian era has 535 Sel./223-4 C.E., i.e., the year of Ardashīr's defeat of Ardavān, as its epoch.

In short, the literary tradition offers two conflicting dates for the inception of Ardashīr's reign as King of kings. As for its duration, the figure best attested in the texts is fourteen years and ten months (Agathias, loc. cit; -Ṭabarī<sup>9</sup>), in approximate terms, this appears, alternatively, as fourteen or fifteen years.<sup>10</sup> Regardless of the figure as such, in order to arrive at a reliable chronology, the two limits of Ardashīr's reign will have to be reduced to absolute dates; this in turn will not be possible without settling the question of whether they represent actual events or ceremonial calendar days. Moreover, it is not immediately clear which act constituted the Great King's official, or legal, accession, considering the abovementioned difference of dates between 535 and 537/38 Sel. Babyl./Julian..

For some time now, attempts have been made to resolve the noted disagreement of the literary sources by appealing to epigraphic evidence. The only such testimony to be known is contained in the inscription by Shāpūr I's 'scribe' at Bīshāpūr. Commemorating the erection of a statue of the Great King and thus of quasi-official character, it furnishes an outline of the internal chronology of Sasanian rule from its inception to the moment when the inscription was engraved; it is dated in 'the year 58', the 'year 40 of Ardashīr's fire' and 'the year 24 of the Shāpūr-Fire...'<sup>11</sup> Thus by this reckoning, Ardashīr's reign lasted sixteen years, or, to be exact, the difference between the lighting of the fires which presumably marked Ardashīr's and Shāpūr's accessions was reckoned as sixteen years.

Given the evidence provided, respectively, by Ardashīr's latest and Shāpūr's initial coinage, Shāpūr's royal fire was lit upon his accession, i.e., subsequent to his father's death, not any earlier. Ardashīr's latest issues, which include Shāpūr as heir-apparent on the obverse, still have Ardashīr's own fire on the reverse; Shāpūr's coins then replace it with a fire in his own name.<sup>12</sup> Thus it would appear that the lighting of Shāpūr's fire indeed marked the formal inception of his reign and that the same held for Ardashīr's accession. Moreover, it would but have followed accepted custom if Ardashīr had had his fire lit upon his erstwhile suzerain Ardavān's death just as Shāpūr I's fire was lit after Ardashīr's

<sup>9</sup> Annales, edd. de Goeje et al., 16 vols., Leyden 1879-1901, I 821<sub>4</sub>

<sup>10</sup> Fārsnāme-ye Ebn al Balkhī, edd. G. Le Strange et R.A.Nicholson, E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Series, N.S. I, London 1921, p. 61<sub>11f</sub>; Elias of Nisibis dated the beginning of Shāpūr I's reign to 553 Sel./241-2 C.E., i.e., fifteen years later than Ardashīr's (CSCO LXI\*, 92<sub>20</sub> [LXIII\*, 45<sub>22</sub>]).

<sup>11</sup> M. Back, Sasanidische Staatsinschriften, Leiden, etc., 1978 (Acta Iranica 18), pp. 378f, 507; cf. Ph. Gignoux, Glossaire des inscriptions pehlevies et parthes, London 1972 (Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum, Suppl. Ser. I), p. 10, no. 6.

<sup>12</sup> See M. Alram, Nomina Propria Iranica In Nummis, Vienna 1986 (I[ranisches] P[ersonen]N[amen]B[uch] IV), p. 167f and pl. 22, esp. nos. 685f); our interpretation of the transition from Ardashīr's to Shāpūr's coinage obviously depends on R. Göbl, "Die Titel der beiden ersten Sasaniden auf ihren Münzen," Anzeiger ÖAW, Phil.-hist. Kl., 120 (1983), Nr. 15, pp. 290-98 & pls. I-III (*pace* his doubts as to the relative position of the Ardashīr-Shāpūr issues in Ardashīr's coinage).

death.<sup>13</sup> Regardless, though, of the contingent moment of the lighting of a royal fire, for chronographic purposes — witness the Bīshāpūr inscription — it had to be reduced to a known calendaric date; in analogy to other royal eras, the *nowrūz* of the year during which the respective rite was performed would have been the most obvious epoch. The combined weight of the extant evidence and the inferences here drawn would seem to be sufficient to fix the epoch of Ardashīr's fire at the *nowrūz* of the Persian year which practically coincided with 535 Sel. Julian. and which hence agrees with the Syriac-transmitted 'era of the Persian empire'. Accordingly, Shāpūr's accession would be dated to the year 551 Sel./239-41 C.E. (depending on whether Julian or Babylonian reckoning is used). However, since this calculation founders on the testimony of both Mani's *Shāpūragān* and Agathias, a resolution of the conflict of witnesses thus far remains elusive. In addition, the sources are not only in disagreement about the epoch of Ardashīr's reign, but apparently also about its duration; while the Bīshāpūr inscription counts sixteen years, the literary tradition gives fourteen years and ten months — not considering the question of whether this figure refers to the actual duration of Ardashīr's reign or to fourteen 'chronographic' years (counting his portion of the civil year of his accession as an entire regnal year and adding it to the thirteen completed civil years of his reign) and the first ten months of the civil year of his death.<sup>14</sup>

Naturally, additional evidence has repeatedly been sought from Manichean texts, the only literary sources dating back to the period concerned and which (viz., Mani's own *Shāpūragān*) have repeatedly been put to good use ever since al-Bīrūnī. In fact, the relevant books, in addition to the *Shāpūragān*<sup>15</sup> the Coptic Kephalaia<sup>16</sup> and — to a lesser degree — Homilies,<sup>17</sup> the Greek Cologne Mani Codex,<sup>18</sup> and the *Fihrist's* Manichean extracts,<sup>19</sup> do contain more synchronisms between events in Mani's life and Parthian and Sasanian history;

<sup>13</sup> This hypothesis would imply that Ardashīr's 'Persid' copper issue which evidently is the earliest to show a fire-altar on the reverse (Alram, op. cit., p. 186 and pl. 22, no. 660) dates *after* his victory but before his new, 'imperial', coinage was adopted.

<sup>14</sup> cf. Nöldeke, op. cit., p. 412.

<sup>15</sup> Apud al-Bīrūnī, op.cit., esp. pp. 118<sub>21-24</sub>, 208<sub>8-11</sub>.

<sup>16</sup> Erste Hälfte, edd. C. Schmidt, H. Ibscher, Stuttgart 1940 (Manichäische Handschriften der Staatlichen Museen Berlin, Bd. I), pp. 14<sub>27-151</sub>, 15<sub>24-33</sub> (cf. pp. 183-88); E. Honigmann et A. Maricq, *Recherches sur les Res gestae divi Saporis*, Bruxelles 1953 (Académie royale de Belgique. Classe de lettres ... Mémoires, t. XLVII, fasc. 4), pp. 21-38, esp. 22-28.

<sup>17</sup> Manichäische Homilien, edd. H. J. Polotsky, H. Ibscher, Stuttgart 1934 (Manichäische Handschriften der Sammlung A. Chester Beatty, Bd I); see below, ns. 27, 37.

<sup>18</sup> pp. 18<sub>1-8</sub> (cf. 73<sub>5f</sub> (= L. Koenen and C. Römer, *Der Kölner Mani-Kodex ... Kritische Edition ...*, Opladen 1988 [Abh. d. Rhein.-Westfäl. AdW - Sonderreihe Papyrologica Coloniensia Vol. XIV], pp. 10, 12, 50; cf. L. Koenen, *ZPE* 8 [1971], pp. 247-50, and A. Henrichs-L. Koenen, *ibid.* 19 [1975], p. 77ff, ns. 40\*, 44\*)

<sup>19</sup> ed. G. Flügel et al., 2 vols., Leipzig 1871-72, I 328<sub>10, 13f, 17ff, 26f</sub> (= idem, *Mani, seine Lehre und seine Schriften ... Aus dem Fihrist ...*, Leipzig 1862 [reprint Osnabrück 1969], p. 50<sub>10-16</sub>, 51<sub>4-7, 16ff</sub>, and B. Dodge (tr.), *The Fihrist of al-Nadim*, 2 vols., New York 1970 [Records of Civilization: Sources and Studies 83], II 774ff); even though the *Shāpūragān* may well be the ultimate source of the *Fihrist's* information on Mani's life, for the time being it is perhaps prudent to treat the two as separate witnesses.

yet, excepting the synchronisms from the *Shāpūragān* which establish Ardavān IV (V)'s and Ardashīr's accessions in 523 and 537 Sel. Babyl., the reliability of such dates appears vitiated by shifting hagiographic tendencies and concomitant chronological distortions.<sup>20</sup>

To begin with Mani's birth, the question has to be raised of whether his family had indeed recorded it as he transmits it in the *Shāpūragān* — which is not inherently impossible — or whether he himself calculated it retrospectively, taking Shāpūr's accession as epochal date and imposing a dodecadic scheme on his religious development. The latter possibility appears by far the more likely, given the evident shift from the loose chronological outline of his youth in the first Coptic Kephalaion to the progressively more rigid constructs in the *Shāpūragān*, the Cologne Mani Codex, and finally the *Fihrist*. The very fact that Mani's autobiographical statements in the first Kephalaion and the *Shāpūragān* are at variance as regards chronology betrays a structural resemblance of the two texts and moreover, tends to corroborate our suggestion of a relative sequence of the mentioned works.<sup>21</sup>

In both the first Kephalaion and the *Shāpūragān*, Mani strives to establish synchronisms between turning points in his prophetic development and important stages in Sasanian history.<sup>22</sup> Thus in the Kephalaion, he emphatically dates his initial revelation in 'the very year when Ardashīr the king assumed the diadem',<sup>23</sup> without expressly indicating his age at the time; he merely says that his mortal 'image' (*eikon*) was formed 'in the years of Ardavān' and that he 'was nurtured, grew up and reached the fullness of time 'in the years of Ardashīr'.<sup>24</sup> In the *Shāpūragān*, on the other hand, he claims, in selfconscious imitation of Jesus, to have received his first revelation at age twelve and precisely dates this seminal event according to Babylonian civil and Persian — i.e. Ardashīr's, — regnal years; it took

<sup>20</sup> Obviously, here a much more negative attitude towards 'historical' references in Manichean sources is adopted than shown by W.Sundermann, *AoF* 14 (1987), esp. pp. 55, 81-84.

<sup>21</sup> Admittedly, the wording of the first Kephalaion does not suggest a date close to the beginning of Mani's public mission; rather, reference is made both to the Master's 'many years' of missionary travels during Shāpūr's reign and to numerous of his 'books' and 'writings' on the same subject at this 'precis' (*suntomia*) of *Heilsgeschichte*, which he composed, serene and assured of his success, in answer to some disciples' request. Subsequently, it was embedded in a framing narrative and titled "On the coming of the Apostle." As for Mani's authorial present in the Kephalaion, it is clearly situated within Shāpūr's reign, regardless of what the text's 'many years' actually amounted to — but that does not by itself put it at an earlier date than the *Shāpūragān*; nevertheless, it is argued here that the Kephalaion's synchronism of Mani's first revelation with Ardashīr's accession and its chronological vagueness as compared to the *Shāpūragān* prove its logical precedence, if not its anteriority (see below).

<sup>22</sup> This would seem to suggest that Mani was trying to present himself, first — without too much success? — to Ardashīr and later to Shāpūr, as the religious equivalent of their political restoration of Iran. Drawing parallels between dynastic events and his own 'prophetic career', he perhaps meant to portray the latter as a token of divine blessing for the new regime.

<sup>23</sup> p. 14<sub>31f</sub>; see below, p. 78, for an examination of the precise meaning of the phrase 'assumed the diadem'. It will be obvious that Sundermann's interpretation of this passage, based though it be on recent coptological expertise, is not shared here ("Mani's Revelations ...," p. 207 [see n. 1 for ref.]). His suggested variant readings appear to create more problems than they are designed to solve, taking no account of the sequence of events as presented in the narrative.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, ll. 27-30.

place in 539 Sel. Babyl./228-29 C.E., after two years of Ardashīr's reign had elapsed.<sup>25</sup> While this patently contradicts Mani's own autobiographical narrative in the first Kephalaion, the date of 539 perfectly fits a duodecennial scheme based on 551 Sel. Babyl./240-41 C.E., regardless of whether or not the date he claims for his birth be accepted. Indeed, without positing 551 Sel. as the 'vanishing point' of Mani's dodecadic perspective, 539 Sel. as the year of Mani's first revelation would become meaningless, given the first Kephalaion's divergent testimony. In precisely the same way in which he synchronized his first revelation with *Ardashīr's* coronation in the Kephalaion, he had his second revelation coincide with *Shāpūr's* coronation in the *Shāpūragān*; it is but for the loss of the relevant section of text that the evidence required to support our assertion cannot be found in the *Shāpūragān* itself.

However, the *Shāpūragān's* own lost testimony can be restored as the point of departure for the refinements which the asserted synchronism of the beginning of Mani's apostolate and *Shāpūr's* accession has undergone in the Codex and the *Fihrist's* account. In Mani's autobiographical statements as quoted in the Codex and the *Fihrist's* Manichean source, his public ministry is said to have begun at the age of twenty-four, in consequence of a second revelation.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, both the Codex and the *Fihrist* date Mani's first public appearance in the year of *Shāpūr's* coronation, even though the *Fihrist* does not attribute this to Mani himself. Thus it is, in any case, the Codex which confirms our inference as to the original text of the *Shāpūragān*. In the *Fihrist*, the assertion of a coincidence between Mani's first public appearance and *Shāpūr's* accession is further honed to the point of stipulating that Mani first professed his new dispensation on the very day of *Shāpūr's* coronation, 'on Sunday, 1 Nīsān, when the Sun was in Aries'.<sup>27</sup> The absolute date to which this calendaric reference can be reduced will be discussed below.

Concerning the date of Mani's first revelation, we had occasion to note the divergence of the first Kephalaion and the *Shāpūragān*; a similar, if reverse, disagreement between the

<sup>25</sup> al Bīrūnī, loc. cit.; even though the Manichean tradition which the *Fihrist* quotes concerning Mani's first public appearance on the day of *Shāpūr's* coronation may ultimately have been derived from *Shāpūragān* as well, it is, on purpose, not considered at this point since it is silent on Mani's age. It will be discussed below, together with the other reports about the beginning of his apostolate.

<sup>26</sup> On p. 164 of the Codex (p. 112 Koenen-Römer), the editors restore the badly fragmented passage to read 'twenty-five' for Mani's age at the time when the Syzygos despatched him to the king — i.e., *Shāpūr* — in order for him to comfort *Shāpūr* after his father's death; if this be a reference to Mani's second major vision of his Syzygos and if the restoration of the text be accepted, the wording is at variance with the age of twenty-four which the Codex quotes from Mani's own account of his event elsewhere (pp. 18, 73). However, the divergence may be more apparent than real if the dodecadic scheme of Mani's autobiography is taken to be a mere construct.

On the other hand, if, based on the first Kephalaion, it is assumed that Mani was absent from Babylonia at the time of *Ardashīr's* death, a difference of one year may well be considered plausible.

<sup>27</sup> See below, p. 78; here the question presents itself of whether in the Codex, p. 18<sub>8ff</sub>, the date should not be restored to read: τῆς α' ἡμερᾶς τῆς σεληνιασ, which would narrow its disagreement with the *Fihrist* (following R. Köbert, ZPE 8 [1971], pp. 244-47; also, Maricq's observations on the metaphoric character of Mani's narrative of his birth in Pharmouthi in the first Kephalaion should have been taken seriously; see Honigmann-M., op. cit., p. 33, n. 1).

Kephalaion and the Codex — and a fortiori, the *Fihrist* — obtains as regards Mani's second revelation and the beginning of his public activity.<sup>28</sup> In contrast to the Codex' and *Fihrist's* insistence on the coincidence of Mani's public appearance and Shāpūr's accession, the Coptic text places no special emphasis on the inception of Mani's apostolate — 'towards the end of the years of king Ardashīr'<sup>29</sup> — and makes no mention of a particular divine ordinance in this context; it is this very unmarkedness which would seem to deserve credence rather than the crisp synchronisms both of the Codex and the *Fihrist*.<sup>30</sup> At any rate, whatever the final verdict may be and whatever the status of Mani's second vision of his Syzygos in the various sources, the Kephalaion again presents alternative evidence regarding Mani's prophetic career, — evidence which in our opinion, invalidates the neat constructs of the *Shāpūragān*, Codex and *Fihrist*.<sup>31</sup>

Notwithstanding the sources' discrepancies, however, they do show agreement on the fact of Mani's 'appearance' as the prophet of a new dispensation in Babylonia during the year of Shāpūr's accession.<sup>32</sup> Of the three extant versions in which this event is reported, the Kephalaia's appears least stylized; Mani's exact age at the time when he began his preaching is left unmentioned. More importantly, his first missionary travels, to 'India', are said to have preceded his activity in the central provinces of the Empire by some time; although the duration of his travels is not specified, it will have amounted to months if not years.<sup>33</sup>

In conclusion, it would not seem too bold to accept the synchronism of Shāpūr's accession and a heightened public visibility of Mani in Babylonia, i.e., in the vicinity of the Sasanian court. Yet even if the fact of such a coincidence be doubted, Mani's duodecennial stylization of his youth, for which *Shāpūragān* and the Codex, both read against the foil of

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<sup>28</sup> Even though the present argument is not affected by it either way, Maricq/Lefort's emendation *in locum*, substituting 'et lui succéda' for the editors' 'sandte er nach mir', is accepted as basically correct (see Honigmann-Maricq, *op.cit.*, pp. 24-27); in either case, the Kephalaion does imply a certain synchronicity — much doubted by Maricq, it is true (see n. 31 below) — between Shāpūr's accession and Mani's public 'visibility' in Babylonia, the empire's heartland. In seconding Lefort, it may not be amiss to suggest ⲭⲓ ⲛⲓⲣⲏⲧⲉ ('and assumed the diadem') instead of 'and succeeded him', based on parallel expressions denoting royal succession and coronation in Coptic Manichaica, such as Homilies, pp. 42<sub>15f</sub> ("King Hormisad [sic] established himself and assumed the diadem in his stead"), 91<sub>8</sub> ("His son tied the diadem around his head in his stead;" cf. *ibid.*, p. 47<sub>2ff</sub>).

<sup>29</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 15<sub>24</sub>.

<sup>30</sup> In the Kephalaion, the narration of Mani's youth and first missionary activity leads up to his eventual audience with Shāpūr, without its being forced into a dodecadic scheme and into the Codex' and *Fihrist's* synchronisms.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Maricq, Syria 35, p. 345.

<sup>32</sup> Maricq appears to allow even more time for Mani's travel from 'India' to Babylonia; but regardless of what the exact date of Mani's return to Ctesiphon may have been, 'the year when ... Shāpūr became king' is used as reference in the Kephalaion (see Honigmann-Maricq, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-30).

<sup>33</sup> According to the Kephalaion, Mani successfully preached his message of 'hope' in 'India', which also implies an extended sojourn there. Furthermore, it is tempting to restore, as has repeatedly been suggested, the *Fihrist's* 'forty years' of Mani's activity before his audience with Shāpūr to a more likely 'four' — whether as a 'round' or as an exact figure — and read them as a reference to his first missionary travel (see, e.g., Honigmann-Maricq, *op. cit.*, p. 28ff).

the first Kephalaion, present the essential testimony, pivots on the year of Shāpūr's accession, i.e., 551 Sel. Babyl. — twenty-four years after the alleged date of Mani's birth.<sup>34</sup> Thus the *Fihrist's* calendaric and zodiacal dating of Shāpūr's coronation — Sunday, 1 Nīsān, when the Sun was in Aries — has to refer to the earlier of the two Julian days which fit this definition: 12 April 240 C.E., rather than 9 April 243. The argument can even be taken one final step further; whether the transmitted date of Mani's birth in 527 Sel. Babyl. be accepted at face value or be taken as a retrojective construct, the Manichean sources yield the year 551 Sel. Babyl. as the date of Shāpūr's accession. The fact that it is consonant both with the Bīshāpūr stela's chronology and with the 'era of the Persian empire' as related in the Syriac Martyrs' Acts lends added support.

The quoted Manichean texts present another problem to their correct understanding; repeatedly, a king's accession is termed his 'assumption of the diadem'.<sup>35</sup> Naturally, such a formulation originated in the well-known ancient Iranian canon of royal investiture, and during the Sasanian period, the crown certainly lost none of its lustre as a symbol of royal legitimacy.<sup>36</sup> However, this very symbolism also led to the eventual transfer of the phrase 'to assume the diadem' from its concrete, literal meaning to an idiomatic, figurative usage, merely expressing the attainment of royal sovereignty.<sup>37</sup> In one of the Coptic Homilies, this development is graphically illustrated; the meaning intended by the formulation 'since ... the Parthians assumed the diadem' clearly is 'since they achieved royalty'.<sup>38</sup> This is not to suggest that a purely figurative reading of the phrase is *per se* appropriate, especially when it is predicated of an individual subject in an historical narrative. However, to entertain the possibility of idiomatic, figurative usage largely clarifies the much debated passage in the *Fihrist* in which Mani's first public appearance is dated on the day when 'Shāpūr's became king and the crown was put on his head'. Indeed, two interpretative operations will resolve its difficulties; 'coronation' will have to be understood as the literal Arabic mistranslation of a homonymous expression which here meant 'to be acclaimed king', and the date will have to be taken as a reference to the beginning of the Babylonian civil year *during* which Shāpūr succeeded his father.

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<sup>34</sup> Subsidiary evidence, which in view of its relatively late date, cannot but be a reflection of Manichean traditions, is provided by those Syriac chronicles which date, revealingly, if erroneously, Mani's birth to 551 Sel.; see Honigmann-Maricq, *op. cit.* p. 32f (refs.).

<sup>35</sup> See above, n. 27 and Codex, p. 185.g (= Henrichs-Koenen, *op. cit.*, p. 20a).

<sup>36</sup> See, e.g., M. L. Chaumont, *op. cit.*, esp. pp. 217-22, and P. O. Skærvø in H. Humbach et idem, *The Sasanian Inscription of Paikuli*, Wiesbaden 1983, Parts 3.1: Restored text and translation, pp. 28f, 51f [text], 93 [glossary]; 3.2: Commentary, p. 26f.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. also the term 'crown-bearers' and other expressions including the term  $\sigma\pi\eta\tau\epsilon$  in Manichean psalms (A Manichean Psalm-Book, Part II, edd. C. R. C. Allberry et H. Ibscher, Stuttgart 1938 [Manichean Manuscripts in the Chester Beatty Collectio II], e.g., p. 435 and Index, s.v.  $\sigma\pi\eta\tau\epsilon$ ). (Of course, there is also the English parallel 'accession to the throne', not to mention a host of other, related idioms).

<sup>38</sup> p. 47<sub>2f</sub>; in the same sentence, a given king's actual reign is denoted by the term for 'kingship/kingdom',  $\mu\eta\tau\pi\pi\omicron$  (also applied to Shāpūr's reign, *ibid.* p. 91<sub>9</sub>).

Notwithstanding the powerful symbolism of the royal crown in the Sasanian period, a new king's 'accession' was also marked by the lighting of a new fire in his own name, as we had seen earlier. Whatever the specifically Zoroastrian nature of this rite, it was, by way of the coinage, together with a new king's crown visually promulgated throughout the empire, even if literacy in Pahlavi, which alone gave access to the accompanying legend, may have been somewhat restricted. It stands to reason that in cases of peaceful succession, such as Shāpūr's to Ardashīr, both ceremonies, the lighting of the fire and the coronation, were regularly performed as soon as feasible after the new king's actual taking his predecessor's place. On the other hand, in cases of disputed succession, such as Ardashīr's rebellion against Ardavān and as Narseh's conflict with Bahrām III, the lighting of the fire may well have preceded the actual coronation by a considerable time. Given the Sasanians' apparent disregard for a consolidated dynastic era as a firm basis of chronography, it is entirely conceivable — rather, documented by extant witnesses — that especially in the early decades of Sasanian rule, two variant eras were in competing use.<sup>39</sup> Hence Mani reckoned by coronations and Shāpūr's 'scribe' at Bīshāpūr by royal fires.<sup>40</sup> While this difference unequivocally fixes the respective epochs of the two eras under Ardashīr, 535 and 538 Sel. Julian., the conflicting computations of his reign, fourteen years and ten months versus sixteen years, would still seem to be difficult to reconcile, given that the interval between the two eras amounts to three years and that the two conflicting durations presumably converge towards approximately the same termination. However, applying the vernal epoch of the Babylonian calendar, Ardashīr's coronation took place in 537, which narrows the 'chronographic' interval to two years; secondly, if the traditional fourteen years of Ardashīr's reign were computed 'chronographically' as well, i.e., including the entire civil year of his accession, the additional ten months will have been reckoned as belonging with

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<sup>39</sup> The anonymous 'Sasanian era' which preceded Ardashīr's by eighteen years and which Shāpūr's Bīshāpūr official gave precedence to in his inscription would have provided such a unified dynastic era, equivalent to the Seleucid and Arsacid eras; for whatever reasons, though, it must soon have fallen into disuse. The historical background of its epoch, 517 Sel./205-7 C.E., has been much debated; considering both the numismatic evidence and aṭ-Ṭabarī's account of the events, it would seem most likely that this era commemorated Pābag's assumption of kingship in Persis, or rather, after his presently ensuing death, Shāpūr Pābagān's succession to his father (see Alam, *op. cit.*, p. 185 and pl. 22, nos. 653-56; -Ṭabarī I 816<sub>1-6</sub>). Remarkably enough, the figure of eighteen years is still preserved in Ebn Balkhī's *Fārsnāme* for the period during which Ardashīr subdued petty kings and united Iran under his own sway, (p. 61<sub>11f</sub>; but cf. *ibid.*, p. 119<sub>13-16</sub>, where the overall period of his rule is fixed at forty-four years).

<sup>40</sup> The Bīshāpūr 'scribe's' era of 'Ardashīr's fire', for which the Persian equivalent of 535 Sel. Julian. has been established as epoch, was still referred to by Ḥamza al Iṣfahānī (p. 23<sub>3f</sub> Gottwaldt/18<sub>3f</sub> Kaviani).

his successor's reign.<sup>41</sup> In conclusion, even on this score, nothing militates against accepting 551 Sel. Julian./Babyl. as the year of Shāpūr's accession.

Cairo/Bonn

Lutz Richter-Bernburg

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### CORRIGENDA

S. 72, Z. 13 lies „IV 24,1 p. 153 Keydell“

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<sup>41</sup> In fact, the Codex supports this conclusion, being based on the Babylonian calendar and stating that Ardashīr conquered Hatra during the year of Mani's second revelation; this automatically advances Ardashīr by more than half a year in terms of the Persian calendar (p. 18<sub>2-5</sub> [= Henrichs-Koenen, op. cit., p. 20a]).