



Title	Wirkak : Manichaeian, Zoroastrian, Khurramî? On Bilingualism and Syncretism in Sogdian Funerary Art
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## **Wirkak: Manichaeian, Zoroastrian, Khurramî?**

### **On Bilingualism and Syncretism in Sogdian Funerary Art**

Étienne DE LA VAISSIÈRE

The discovery of the grave of Wirkak,<sup>(1)</sup> a Sogdian sartapao buried after 579 in the Northern suburbs of the former Chinese capital, Chang'an, improved our knowledge of Iranian religious iconography: Frantz Grenet and Pénélope Riboud demonstrated that Zoroastrian Priests and the Chinwad bridge were depicted on the reliefs of his stone sarcophagus while I have tried to demonstrate in an article of the *Journal Asiatique* that some part of the iconography could only be interpreted within the frame of Manichaeism.<sup>(2)</sup>

However, the iconography of Wirkak's funerary is the so far unique Iconic representant of what might have been Manichaeism as understood by an upper-level Sogdian Auditor at a quite early stage of Eastern Manichaeism. This uniqueness is a liability if we are to demonstrate its very belonging to Manichaeism: we cannot compare directly this iconography with any contemporary image and Wirkak was clearly not a Churchman, following strictly the texts of Mani, but an educated and eclectic leader interested in the current religious trends of his century. Studies on Manichaeian iconography have been based on the undiscussed assumption that the Turfan images are the touchstone of anything Manichaeian, that no production of Manichaeian iconography could escape the Church. But Wirkak was a rich and powerful man with a tomb extremely impressive by its dimension, even when compared with the tombs of members or ministers of the Yuwen dynasty of the

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(1) Yang, 2005.

(2) Grenet, Riboud, Yang, 2004, la Vaissière, 2005.

Northern Zhou.<sup>(3)</sup> He had all the means, economic and social, to display his religious interests on the stone. It has been demonstrated that Wirkak's personal history was carved on it:<sup>(4)</sup> the same is true of his faith. He showed on his grave many of the theological peculiarities of Manichaeism, not as they were produced by the Electi, but as they were received, understood, interpreted.

The aim of this article is to reassert the Manichaean character of much (but not all) of the iconography in Wirkak's grave and to demonstrate that it is a mistake to try to judge this iconography from the Church-controlled canonical Turfan images. The most direct parallels are with the commentaries and legends surrounding the canonical books, and especially the ones elaborated among the Sogdian and Chinese Manichaean communities. As much as these texts tried to insert Manichaeism within a local frame, for instance by providing correspondences between Manichaean deities and local, iconic, Zoroastrian ones, these images could be explained as bilingual, featuring here both Zoroastrian and Manichaean vocabulary, something quite frequent in the iconography produced by these mixed milieux.<sup>(5)</sup> It is with great pleasure that I return with fresh elements to this demonstration so that to pay tribute to Yutaka Yoshida, who has so brilliantly contributed to Central Asian philology and history, and recently to Manichaean iconography. I hope these remarks might be of some interest to him, especially as he has pointed some close parallels between our 6<sup>th</sup> c. iconography and the latter Manichaean paintings from Ningbo.

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(3) Dien, 2007, pp. 108-109.

(4) Grenet, Riboud, 2007.

(5) Grenet, 2007, Riboud, 2003.

I should first summarize my former arguments, some of them purely iconographical, some of them textual. On the first panel (**Fig. 1**), clear Buddhist elements are displayed: a Buddha in a monastic robe on a lotus throne, and below two rows of hunters and hunted creatures are shown praying together. But the Buddha is strange: his mudra is not recorded in the long list of the Buddhist mudras, nor is it in Iran.<sup>(6)</sup> More important, he has a full beard. Although the Buddha can be depicted with a small moustache, this bearded Buddha is totally isolated in the corpus of thousands of statues and paintings depicting the Illuminated One. Lacking also the special features of Laozi, bearded but always with a hat, this image cannot be a syncretic Buddha-Laozi, quite frequent in 6<sup>th</sup> c. China. It should be another syncretic figure, and Mani the Buddha of Light, the *Moni Guang Fo* 摩尼光佛 of the Chinese texts immediately comes

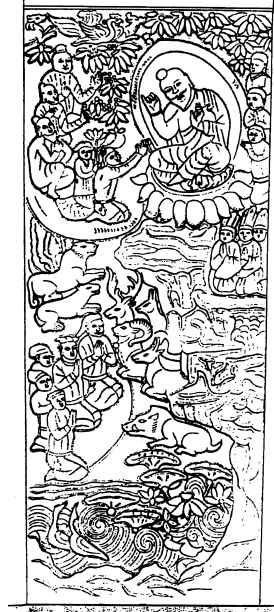


Fig. 1 Wirkak: Mani panel.  
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to mind. The beard would be a perfect mean to indicate that this Buddha is a Western one. Another element on the same panel strongly suggests that this hypothesis might be the right one: surrounding the Buddha are three groups of three supplicants, each group identified with garments and hats with a clear ethnic or religious identity. One is Sogdian, one Chinese Daoists<sup>(7)</sup>, but the three members of

(6) This mudra is close but not similar to the Sassanian one analyzed in Bromberg, 1991, pp. 49-55: the Buddha's index and thumb are forming a low circle, while on the mudra known in Miran and on the Sassanian rock-reliefs (and now coinage, too) the index is raised and separated from the thumb. In both case the little finger is raised too, but it does not allow an assimilation of both mudras, *pace* Grenet, 2007, p. 475.

(7) I cannot agree here with Yutaka Yoshida's cautious hypothesis (Yoshida, 2009a, p. 10) that it might be the three predecessors of Mani, Buddha, Zoroaster and Jesus: it would be

the third one, in loose long garments and tripartite tall hats, are without any iconographic parallel in contemporary mixed Northern Chinese society. In fact the closest parallels that it is possible to draw with this image are the groups of praying *electi* in the miniatures from Turfan.<sup>(8)</sup> I suggested that given the totally unusual beard of the Buddha and the peculiar dress and hats of some of the supplicants the whole panel should be regarded as a Manichaean one.

But two other panels can also be interpreted in this way. On one of them (**Fig. 2**) an ascetic is sitting in front of a grotto, while below winged angels rescued from a stormy sea full of monsters Wirkak and his wife, certainly an image of the Ocean of rebirth with its *makara*,<sup>(9)</sup> common to Buddhism and Manichaeism but totally foreign to Zoroastrianism, as is foreign to Zoroastrianism the renunciation to hunting on the first panel. Nevertheless, parts of the last panel (**Fig. 3**) are clearly Zoroastrian, the priests wearing the padâm and the Chinwad



Fig. 2 Wirkak: Ascetic panel  
©Yang Junkai

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very strange to show them on the same size and position as Wirkak and his wife, the Sogdians, and the *Electi*; they should have been seated around Mani as on the Turfan miniature MIK III 4947&III 5d; and there are four, not three, prophets in the Eastern Manichaean tradition, with Seth added, for instance on the Turfan miniature as well as in the Turkic Pothi Book. See Gulácsi, 2011, pp. 244-245.

- (8) Another, less certain, parallel should be added: one of the three Chinese devotees on the back of Wirkak is holding in his hand a loop of his garment, or so it seems on this very small detail. This is a striking and direct similarity to images both from Turfan and from Ningbo. It seems to be a gesture attested only in Manichaeism.
- (9) On the idea of Sea in Chinese Manichaeism, see Kósa, 2011, who does not make use of Wirkak's image.

bridge being unique to this religion.<sup>(10)</sup> However the upper part of this same panel can be regarded as Manichaean. When confronted with the text of the *Fihrist* describing the fate of the soul, the parallels are very clear, with the Daēnā bringing vessels and flowers, Wirkak and his wife crowned and dressed with new garments, the sphere of the moon with his bull chariot, and a deity, then the sun with his quadriga of horses.

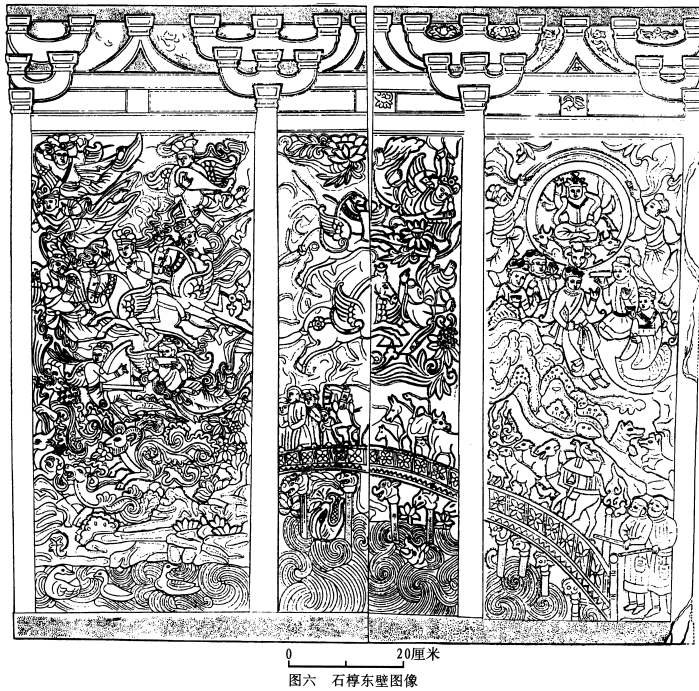


Fig. 3 Wirkak: Judgement panel ©Yang Junkai

(10) Actually there are some mentions of bridges in Turkic Manichaean texts, as in the Pothi-Book (the bridge of the True Doctrine, on v. 56, transl. Clark, 1982, p. 182), or in a Uighur fragment from Berlin, in a context of salvation of the soul, or so it seems (U 230, mentioned in 2010 by Yutaka Yoshida in his Paris conference at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes).

My hypothesis has been validated by the discovery of the Manichaean paintings in Japan: two of them are displaying Judgement of the Soul scenes, which are both strikingly similar to the one displayed on Wirkak's panel. In all cases the deceased is with three deities (**Plate VII, Fig. 4**) in front of a judge (**Plate VII, Fig. 5**), as noted by Yutaka Yoshida.<sup>(11)</sup> It can be added that on the Yamato Bunkakan Judgement scene, exactly as on the Wirkak panel, the two assistants of the Daênâ are holding the same objects, a vase and a flower (**Plate VIII, Fig. 6**). There cannot be any doubt that all this iconography is Manichaean.

In the middle of the upper part of this same panel (**Plate VIII, Fig. 7**), a crowned angel holding a small shape, vaguely human, is shown rejecting to the ground a female figure closely copied from the model of the standard *apsara*. In the *Journal Asiatique* I proposed to interpret this small scene as an iconographic assimilation between the individual path of the soul, protected from the Devil of Craving and Lust — such were originally the *apsara*, before being sexually neutralized in Chinese Buddhism — and the salvation of the last fragments of Light from Az and the demons in Manichaean eschatology which united into a human shape, *andrias*.

That this idea is entirely coherent with the beliefs of the Manichaean *auditores* can be perfectly illustrated by a *Khvastwanift*-like Uyghur text, with the same parallel and image:

Je fus défait dans le combat d'Ohrmizd qui (eut lieu) auparavant. Depuis lors,  
dans la main du Démon de Concupiscence, monter, descendre, mourir, naître.  
À l'intérieur de la Terre, Ton Dieu (m'a) soutenu (saisi/tendu la main?)<sup>(12)</sup>.

On the relief, the soul of Wirkak is in the left hand of a winged deity, the raised right hand of which is rejecting to the ground the She-Demon. The idea that the soul

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<sup>(11)</sup> Yoshida, 2009a, p. 11.

<sup>(12)</sup> Transl. Hamilton, 1986, p. 64.

is in the hand of Az or of the God, who are fighting each other so that to take possession of her is directly depicted on the stone. The text and the iconography indicate that this idea should have been quite current among the Manichaeans from Central Asia. That the God has defeated the Devil, i.e. that Wirkak is saved, actually replicates the idea depicted just below, in a Zoroastrian context, in which Wirkak and his family are represented on the Chinwad bridge beyond the entrance to Hell, i.e. saved. Wirkak is saved twice, an important point.

More precise parallels explaining the panel with an ascetic in a grotto can also be provided. I suggested that it should be Mani, described as the “Great Ascetic” in Coptic texts. There are also numerous mentions of fasting in the *Kephalaia*. However, an episode in Mani’s life can be more directly linked with the image.

It was well known that Mīrkhwānd, a late (15<sup>th</sup> c.) author described how Mani absconded in a cave, without eating and drinking during one year to paint his *Picture book*. The text is clearly polemical, to slander what is presented as a false Manichaean claim to miracle: instead of fasting, Mani would have had some food and drink secretly brought to him. However, being written by a very late author, it seemed dubious to link his text with the image. Quite recently, the same episode was discovered in a more ancient text, written at the very beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> c. by Marwazî:

He (Mani) often traveled through the wilder regions of China and its mountains, and one day he paused by a fissure in the mountain leading to a remote cave. He sent someone into it to ascertain its suitability as an abode, and he reported back to him that at its bottom was a large bright spacious area and fresh water. He endeavored to collect there enough food and clothing to last him for a year, and he also gathered there a large quantity of things for producing decorations. Then he said to his followers: ‘God Most Exalted has summoned me, and it is necessary to go to Him and remain in His presence’. He fixed a time for them regarding his



return and said: 'This fissure in the mountain will be my path to Him: I will go down it, and I will not need food or drink until I return'. He charged his followers to bring his riding animal every day to the opening of that fissure. Then he descended it, remained alone, and collected his ideas. He had taken a scroll that resembled paper, but which was very fine and completely white. He painted it with remarkable images, and he drew pictures of every (kind of) demon and crime, such as robbery, fornication, and so on, and beside the crimes the required punishments, and he drew underneath the illustration of each demon a picture of what it produces. He completed this during the time-period which he had fixed. Then he came forth from the cave with the illustrated scroll in his hand. He said: 'I have been alone with my Lord, and He has commanded me to establish His ordinances. This is a book that comes from God Most Exalted!' They looked at it and saw that a human being would be incapable of producing its like or its equal, and so they believed him. He named this (scroll) *Arthank*, and it still exists today in the libraries of their rulers under the name of *Arthank* of Mani. Its antiquity is confirmed.<sup>(13)</sup>

What is more, the whole depiction of Mani in Marwazî's book is very close to Bîrûnî's one, one century earlier, although this precise episode is omitted in the latter's chapter on the Pseudo-prophets in the *Chronology of Ancient Nations*. A comparison of both texts shows that Marwazî and Bîrûnî obviously share a common, and unknown, source. Actually, Bîrûnî seems to have heavily reworked his sources, removing the slandering or miraculous parts, and adding his own comments: in doing so he did not follow the internal chronology of Mani's life. But Marwazî's text while corresponding word for word to passages in Bîrûnî does follow a much more logical chronological order, smoothly going from one episode to another. He seems to preserve faithfully an older source, while Bîrûnî as usual wrote a much more personal text.

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<sup>(13)</sup> Translated in Kruk, 2001, p. 56.

This source, anterior to the 10<sup>th</sup> c., is unknown but clearly belongs to the polemics against Manichaeism of the Early Abbassid period. Actually, the mention of Tibet among the countries visited by Mani might point also to the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> c. or the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> c., the heydays of Tibet's involvement in Muslim history. François de Blois has demonstrated that much of the Muslim knowledge of Manichaeism seems to point to that period.<sup>(14)</sup> It is clear that in the 8-9<sup>th</sup> c. the Manichaeans were explaining at a popular level the marvels of the *Picture Book* with this legend and were explaining that Mani stayed as an ascetic in a grotto: this legend was well-known enough for a Muslim author to feel compelled to deny its miraculous character.<sup>(15)</sup> With these texts and their sources, we are much closer to Wirkak's 6<sup>th</sup> c., and it seems probable that Wirkak's ascetic panel might refer to this episode.

The panel (**Fig. 2**) means simply that the teaching of Mani, part of which was received from Heaven during his miraculous ascetic stay in a grotto, saved Wirkak and his wife from the Ocean of Rebirth. It is exactly the idea conveyed by the Great Hymn to Mani in the Turkic Pothe Book, with the same image of Mani saving the soul from the Sea of suffering:

“Miserable mortals like us  
 Came ... without being aware,  
 We ... like you...  
 Who were in the fetters of suffering,  
 in order to see the Sun-God of Prophets,  
 Were rescued from this *samsāra*.

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<sup>(14)</sup> De Blois, 2005.

<sup>(15)</sup> Reeves, 2011, p. 120 has interestingly underlined that an echo of this legend might be heard in the 8<sup>th</sup> c. Bihâfrîd story: he is supposed to have stayed one year in a grave, and to have returned back with a green silk cloth proving his ascent to heaven. This would push further back the Manichaean legend.

To those attached to transitory pleasures  
 You preached the unequalled true doctrine.  
 You led them across the sea of suffering.  
 You brought them near to good *nirvāṇa*.”<sup>(16)</sup>

The three deities flying downward to save Wirkak and his wife from the Sea of rebirth are winged and carry attributes (**Plate IX, Fig. 8**): a crown (right hand of the upper one), a vase, a flower (both in the left hand of the upper one), and a clothing (right hand of the lower left one). This is congruent with the list of attributes mentioned in the *Fihrist*: “When death comes to one of the Elect, Primal Man send him a light shining deity in the form of the Wise Guide. With him are three deities, with whom there are the drinking vessel, clothing, headcloth, crown, and diadem of light” or the Sogdian list “a drink in <the hand?> a flowery garland on the head [...] And she will be a guide for him.”<sup>(17)</sup> It seems to me that the image is closer to the distinctions of the *Fihrist*, and that the Daênâ and the Virgin of light mentioned separately in the text might be on the next panel.

None of these points can be interpreted within Zoroastrianism. Or can they? In Iran, ‘orthodox’ Zoroastrianism, as seen through the texts known to us, was elaborated or transmitted by a very small milieu of Zoroastrian priests of the 9<sup>th</sup> c. Actually, the Muslim heresiographs present us with a picture quite different, with a broad spectrum of intermediaries between this official or Priestly Zoroastrianism and various forms, theologically, locally or socially distributed, some of them quite close to Manichaeism on some points. Patricia Crone’s recently published *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran* (Cambridge 2012) is illuminating in this regard. Zoroastrianism in pre-Islamic and early Islamic Iran should not be restricted to its priestly interpretation, and it would be tempting to link the fact that the

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<sup>(16)</sup> Clark, 1982, p. 182.

<sup>(17)</sup> *Fihrist*, transl. Dodge, vol. II, p. 795 and Yoshida, 2009b, p. 701.

iconography chosen by Wirkak for his grave is part-Zoroastrian and part-Manichaean to a possible intermediary religious movement, in between the two better-known churches. Syncretism instead of bilinguism, in a nutshell, or a Khurramî tomb.

Indeed some of the beliefs of the complex Khurramî movement might correspond to some parts of the iconography: the forbidding of hunting, displayed on the first panel below the bearded Buddha is at odds with High Church Zoroastrianism, close to the hunting Kings of Iran, but does seem to have been taught or at least possible in some currents of unorthodox Zoroastrianism.<sup>(18)</sup> Similarly, the stations of the moon and the sun as stages to paradise are not restricted to Manichaeism, but seem to reflect a wider Iranian belief. The idea of rebirth is also known<sup>(19)</sup> and, if the Ocean and Makara are clearly Buddhist, this iconography can just be here a convenient, locally well-known, way of expressing the more general idea of rebirth, integrated into some Khurramî theological elaborations.

Still, on top of the fact that none of the texts known provide direct parallels for any of these specific characteristics, there are some iconographic choices that seem at odds with this hypothesis. It is especially the case with the oversized figure I identified as Mani: he is dressed and seated as a Buddha, delivering a speech, with mudras. It seems extremely unlikely, if a purely Iranian saviour, prophet or messiah would have been venerated by Wirkak and his family that he would have been depicted as a Buddha. A saviour, messiah or prophet is something different from the general idea of rebirth mentioned above: it is the apex of a precise sacred history, and for all of them, save Mani, this sacred history was an Iranian one. There is no generic saviour, nor reasons for him not to be shown in a purely Iranian setting, as are shown the Priests with padâm in front of the Chinwad bridge. Pishyotan, Saoshyant, Zoroaster, Mazdak or whoever might have been the Prophet or Savior of the Khurramî should not be dressed as a Buddhist monk, on a Lotus throne with a

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<sup>(18)</sup> Crone, 2012, pp. 257-258.

<sup>(19)</sup> Crone, 2012, pp. 354-362.

mandorla of light, and preach to Chinese Daoists. Only Mani, in a crucial part of his own theology, presented himself as Buddha, and was known as the Buddha of Light, and only Manichaeism is known to have competed with Daoism, as reflected by the Daoist texts themselves. Similarly, with the image of the ascetic in a cave saving Wirkak from the monsters of the Ocean: only Mani is known to have fasted during one year in a cave, a practice utterly foreign to what is known of Zoroastrianism, whether official or not.

A third oddity in this hypothesis would be the final, judgement, panel: as demonstrated above, Wirkak is saved twice, first on the Chinwad bridge from the mouth of the sea-monster, the entrance to Hell, and then from the Lust devil. If a syncretic unified religious system would be depicted, a single salvation should have been shown, that of this peculiar religious trend, not two of them.<sup>(20)</sup> This is a strong argument in favour of the existence in this iconography of two different religious languages, juxtaposed and not blended as in a syncretic one.

Only one scene has been read in both systems, Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism, the upper-right one of the judgement panel: I advocated in favour of a Manichaean interpretation, that of the station of the moon, due to the three cows, the usual vehicle for the moon in Iranian iconography (**Plate VII, Fig. 5**). But if I could justify the three bulls, I provided no interpretation for the trident, the scarf, and the deity seated although assigning the whole sphere to the moon.<sup>(21)</sup>

Since then, F. Grenet has advocated strongly and rightly in favour of identifying the main figure, seated as a judge in the sky, as the god of the Atmosphere Weshparkar, Vayu who acts in the Upper Region. Indeed, as he is assimilated to Shiva, the trident and the bull are his attributes. If the scarf is not one

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<sup>(20)</sup> This cannot be the second, final, judgement of Zoroastrianism, totally different as far as we can know from the texts.

<sup>(21)</sup> *Pace* Grenet, 2007a, p. 476 n. 24, I never wrote that the God was Mah. I simply identified the three bulls as indicating that the whole sphere was that of the Moon.

of them, it is an usual way to denote wind in Eastern iconography and this attribute should be interpreted as accentuating the Wind God aspect of Weshparkar, as Wat, the Sogdian God Wind is actually unknown in Sogdian iconography. That Weshparkar should play the main role in the Judgement of the Soul is at odds with the Sassanian Pahlavi texts, in which Ahura Mazda or Rashn should be seated here, but F. Grenet put forward that it might agree with the few depictions we have of Sogdian Zoroastrianism according to the Chinese sources: Weshparkar-Maheshvara seemed to have superseded Ahura Mazda as the main god.<sup>(22)</sup> If however I do agree now with F. Grenet that the trident identifies the god as Weshparkar, I am not sure that the presence of Weshparkar here is actually expected, even in Sogdian Zoroastrianism: we do have several images of the judgement of the soul on Sogdian Zoroastrian ossuaries, discovered near Shahr-i Sabz or Samarkand, none of which displays Weshparkar, but Rashn, with his scales, Mithra and Srosh.<sup>(23)</sup> The role of the good Wind is at best secondary, and he is not judging the soul in Sogdian Zoroastrianism as we know it.<sup>(24)</sup>

However in the Manichaean judgement of the soul, the leading role seems to have been played by the Light-nous. He is probably the Wise Guide of the *Fihrist*. The actual judge of the soul, the Righteous Judge, is his emanation. Yutaka Yoshida pointed that very little is known of the Righteous Judge, except that he was supposed to be enthroned in the atmosphere, an attitude which seems to be congruent with what we can see on the panel. This might certainly have been a very good reason, actually a sufficient one, for the iconographic assimilation with Weshparkar, ie here the Wind active in the Atmosphere.<sup>(25)</sup>

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(22) Grenet, 2007, p. 474.

(23) For a recently discovered one, see Berdimuradov, Bogomolov, Daeppen, Khushvaktov, 2012.

(24) Shenkar, 2014, p. 157.

(25) Yoshida, 2009a, p. 11.

On a much more tentative basis, it is to be wondered if this iconography might not reflect a series of assimilations attested among the Eastern Manichaean commentaries, both within the Manichaean Pantheon and between the Zoroastrian pantheon and Manichaean deities. We do have a whole series of correspondences, none of which precisely match the Righteous Judge — seldom mentioned at all in the fragmentary texts we have — with the Wind but which still are highly suggestive of a global movement of successive, and contradictory, assimilations, reflecting a burgeoning Central Asian school of theology, not a unified and strictly controlled thought. For instance Weshparkar is indeed mentioned in the Sogdian cosmological text M178, but as a name for the Living Spirit.<sup>(26)</sup> The assimilation of the Living Spirit to Wind is also attested by the choice of the Chinese translation Jing Feng (Pure Wind) 淨風. The Jing Feng is omnipresent in the *Traité manichéen*. The Light Nous is explicitly assimilated to it: “le Vent de la Loi Pure, c’est Houei-Ming 惠明 (使) ”.<sup>(27)</sup> If Wirkak’s iconography follows this assimilation, then the choice of the iconography of the main Wind god of the Sogdian pantheon would be logical. However, in a Turkish text, it is the Wind and the Moon, which are assimilated, while Jesus the Splendor is also assimilated usually to the Moon, so that it has been suggested by Bang and von Gabain that he might be the Wind also.<sup>(28)</sup> In another text a Sogdian author made use of *w’t* for the Sun-God, a choice utterly strange.<sup>(29)</sup> But the Light Nous is well known to be an emanation of Jesus the Splendor, so that we might have a whole chain of emanations here summarized in a single divine image of Wind.

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(26) Henning, 1948, p. 313, Humbach, 1975.

(27) Chavannes, Pelliot, 1911, p. 556. See also Bryder, 1985, pp. 117-119 who discusses the various contaminations in the Iranian Manichaean texts between the Living Spirit, the Holy Spirit and their Chinese counterpart.

(28) Bang, von Gabain, 1928, p. 251.

(29) Sundermann, 1996, pp. 109-11. Nicholas Sims-Williams tells me in a private email that he would rather read here *wntn*, i.e. “very great”, a reading which would settle the case.

It is to be wondered if, confronted with the ambiguity of the word *w't* in Sogdian and Parthian, both Spirit and Wind, the concept of wind, with its well-defined iconography, was not chosen as the global image for anybody divine in the redeeming chain. It replicates the choice of the Chinese translator who choose to translate it by Feng instead of the less expressive but more conceptual, and actually closer, Shen 神, Spirit. The double meaning of *w't* in Sogdian and Parthian seems to have been productive in Manichaeism, both in texts and iconography.

Actually, it might be worth quoting W. Sundermann's depiction of the group of Manichaean deities or concepts in charge of redeeming the individual soul: before the discovery of this iconography, and basing himself only on the texts, mainly Eastern ones, he has tried to present the third creation, among which what he calls the Moon group, especially in charge of redeeming the Soul. He wrote that the Moon group was composed of the triad "i) Jesus the Splendor [...] ii) Virgin of Light [...] iii) The Light Nous [...], who is also called Holy Spirit and Living Spirit [...], is the divine, redeeming force in the Manichean religion. The group of deities redeeming the Living Soul is rich in further emanations, which are attributed either to Jesus the Splendor or to the Light Nous. They all play their role in individual eschatology. It is worth mentioning the Great Judge, who will sit in judgment over the souls of the deceased [...], and the Light Form, who is accompanied by three angels who will approach the souls of the deceased and lead them on their way to paradise." <sup>(30)</sup>

It is fascinating to see that most of the main elements of this group actually in charge of the soul of the deceased are displayed on the stone. Only the Virgin of Light is lacking in this Group. If we have a look at all the Female deities, there are seven of them: two groups of three female deities, the first one saving Wirkak and his wife from the Sea of Rebirth (**Plate IX, Fig. 8**), the second one in front of the Judge (**Plate VII, Fig. 5**), and there is an isolated female deity rejecting to the earth

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<sup>(30)</sup> Sundermann, 2002.



Az and holding in her hand the small shape of Wirkak (**Plate VIII, Fig. 7**). The first triad does not bear crowns and has wings, while the second one does bear crowns but only the first one has wings. The isolated deity looks quite similar to the first deity of the Judgement triad, bears her crown, but does not bear her necklace. I have already mentioned the reasons to regard the first triad as the one mentioned in the *Fihrist*. The second one is most certainly the Daênâ and her two followers, exactly as on the Ningbo paintings: her attendants are carrying in both cases a vase and a flower (**Plate VIII, Fig. 6**).<sup>(31)</sup> But on these very paintings, the Virgin of Light (**Plate IX, Fig. 9**) is depicted alone as receiving the soul of the deceased in shape of a small human shape in a cloud, while trampling demons in a black cloud and saving Light from them. Although somehow differently shown — there is no direct struggle on the paintings —, there is a global correspondence with the deity defeating the demon, and holding in her hand the small shape of Wirkak. She might be the Virgin of Light, completing the group.

The date of the Wirkak funerary bed gives us a firm point in the chronology of the elaboration of the various texts usually known by later copies. It is also interesting with regard to the situation in Sogdian Manichaeism: Wirkak's life seems to have been taken place during the period of extreme development of the Manichaean communities in Transoxiana: indeed, Mar Shad Ohrmazd, their leader, seems to have been powerful enough to autonomize the Sogdian communities from the Babylon center. We know nothing of the progressive empowerment of Manichaeism among Sogdians but it certainly took place during or before Wirkak's life, to be able to reach its climax in the last quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> c. The Manichaean iconography in Wirkak's grave is a testimony to this florescence.

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<sup>(31)</sup> The difficulty is that these deities share some common attributes: in the hands of both the first and second triad the vase and flower are present. It might be possible that the two triads are only one group at two stages of the salvation process.

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