

Introduction

Prophecy has a bad habit of dying. Consider, for example, the rabbis, who claimed that since the *ruah ha-qodesh*, the “holy spirit,” stopped visiting the people of Israel following the deaths of the latter prophets, God communicates only through a *bat qol*, an inferior form of aural revelation.¹ Or, we can look earlier to consider the shift from “classical” models of biblical prophecy to the “pseudonymous” apocalypses of the Second Temple period, a shift that some argue reflects a widespread belief in the cessation of prophecy among Jews.² We can trace this attitude to the Apostle Paul, who assured his fledgling church in Corinth that prophecy will cease sometime in the near future.³ Or, we might turn again to the *Apocryphon of James*, where Jesus declares that “head of prophecy” was cut off with the decapitation of John the Baptist. The third-century Mesopotamian prophet Mani too may have intimated that the cycle of prophets and revelation ended with his own call as the Apostle of Jesus Christ. We can even look to the second-century Greek sophist Plutarch who, in his work *On the Obsolescence of Oracles*, ventriloquizes his musings on the decline of the Delphic Oracle through a colorful cast of characters. If we read these texts as transparent windows into prophecy, we are led to conclude that the ancient world was haunted by a spirit of prophetic disenchantment. The question was not whether prophecy ceased, but when.

¹ *t. Soṭah* 13.5.

² For an exhaustive overview of the scholarly debate on the cessation of prophecy, see L. Stephen Cook, *On the Question of the “Cessation of Prophecy” in Ancient Judaism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 10–45.

³ 1 Cor 12–14.

If this were true, this book would end here. Yet I wager that we can tell a more interesting and less moribund story, one that moves beyond the teleology of cessation toward a more compelling account of prophecy in motion. Perhaps we can bracket those texts that herald the inevitability of prophetic decline and instead turn to those texts that speak forthrightly about prophethood and bear witness to novel theorizations of prophecy itself.

Our path beyond the narrative of cessation begins within it. We might as well admit our surprise at its broad distribution across many distinct communities: Rabbis, sophists, and Christians of various sorts all articulate some sense of prophetic disenchantment. Yet the very spread of this narrative suggests an alternative line of inquiry: If these distinct communities talked about the cessation of prophecy in similar ways, might they not have also articulated or theorized *other* aspects of prophecy in similar ways? If we see cessation as only one way of talking about prophecy, as only one discourse among others, how else might we reconfigure and reimagine the contexts and contours of “prophecy” itself? What might a trajectory that tracked the ways that late antique communities discussed prophecy tell us about emerging shifts particular to late antiquity, and how might we historicize these irreducibly particular expressions of revelation against their shared horizons?

This book offers one answer to these questions, one trajectory among many. While each chapter of this book proposes a discrete historical claim based on close textual analysis, its central argument is that the third- and fourth-century Near East bore witness to intense theorizations on the nature of prophethood and prophecy across individual communities in the late antique Near East. Moreover, while each theorization on the nature of prophethood and prophecy emerged from and returned to a particular context, they sometimes overflowed the immediate occasions of their utterance to amalgamate into discourse, thereby setting durable patterns of thought ripe for further appropriation and redeployment. It is this play of local articulation and its broader effects that I explore in and between the chapters of this book.

REDESCRIBING LATE ANTIQUE PROPHECY

It is an unfortunate thing for a book on late antique prophecy that there is no consensus for what constitutes “prophecy” in the first place. Of course, this problem is not at all unique to late antiquity. In fact, the traditional mode of defining “prophecy” by asserting its radical difference

from “divination” in all its varied forms has collapsed on multiple fronts.⁴ As scholars of the ancient Near East in particular have shown, the assumed opposition between respectable “biblical” or “religious” prophecy and occult “magical” divination can no longer hold.⁵ Rather, definitions of “prophecy” are always contingent. As Martti Nissinen puts it, “Both ways, prophecy is not something that is just ‘out there’, inevitably determined by the ‘nature of things’; rather, it is a *social and intellectual construct* (his emphasis) that exists if there is a common understanding about what it means and how it can be recognized.”⁶ By extension, to define prophecy as “not-divination” within a scholarly context may end up replicating the rhetoric of the ancient texts, which are often interested in creating and naturalizing differences between prophecy and divination rather than describing them. If so, accepting prophecy as a given object or a category is not as neutral as one might suppose.

Yet the problem goes deeper still. For if “prophecy” as an object of theorization is always mediated through texts that define or represent it in particular ways, then the more interesting question is not so much the accuracy of any particular representation of prophecy or even its definition, but the conditions that led to its emergence and naturalization in the first place. Instead of refining a definition of prophecy to better match an ancient phenomenon, one can also propose a context that explains the contingent factors that led to a particular definition of prophecy. Indeed, given that there are potentially as many “prophecies” as there are people invested in the concept, it makes little difference for our purposes whether prophecy should be defined in this or that way. What matters instead is the question of historically contextualizing its often rhetorical and always mediated representations in ways that make it a more coherent symptom of the multiple contexts from which it emerged.

We can unpack this issue a bit further by distinguishing between two different modes of analysis. If we were to adopt a descriptive mode of analysis that attempts to describe what prophecy actually “is” in the ancient world, then we can simply examine where and under which

⁴ For a recent overview on the construction of prophecy through its differentiation from divination in early Christian literature, see William Klingshirm, “Early Christian Definitions of Prophecy and Divination: A Reconsideration,” *SLA* 5.1 (2021): 150–160.

⁵ See, for example, Esther Hamori, *Women’s Divination in Biblical Literature: Prophecy, Necromancy, and Other Arts of Knowledge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 4–8 and 19–34. Also, Martti Nissinen, *Ancient Prophecy: Near Eastern, Biblical, and Greek Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 10–19.

⁶ Nissinen, *Ancient Prophecy*, 4.

contexts the word “prophecy” and its related terms might show up in the extant ancient record.⁷ Naturally, this means that the appearance of particular words would be the single most important criterion for determining the relevance of any particular text, at least initially. Then, by analyzing how these texts represent “prophecy,” scholars can refine contemporary definitions until it begins to approach “real” prophecy as if along an asymptotic curve. Having done so, one could go backward and forward in time to trace its supposed “emergence” or its “development” or even its “cessation.” The potential value of this mode of descriptive analysis would ultimately lie in its attempt to tell us something true about “prophecy” as the ancients conceived of it.

In addition to this mode of analysis, scholars have also opted to frame “prophecy” as a second-order *redescriptive* category, as we will see further below.⁸ This is the approach that we follow in this book. Whereas the first-order mode of analysis sought to describe ancient prophecy as it “really was,” this second-order mode of redescriptive analysis seeks to use the category of prophecy as a contemporary heuristic for sounding an archive from the vantage point of a scholar’s interests. “Prophecy” in this sense functions less as a window into any particular phenomenon and more as a tool for furnishing an interesting account of the past. For our purposes, we will ask what might happen if we circumscribed a certain set of texts as “prophetic” in some fuzzy sense. We can organize each of these texts under the rubric of “prophecy” not because we possess an a priori definition of prophecy, but simply because other scholars have already invested each of them with notions of prophethood, prophecy, and revelation (as will be clear from the chapters of the book themselves). In that sense, and for our purposes, prior use rather than a prior definition will allow us to join together this motley jumble of texts. We can thus sidestep the project of refining yet another critical category and simply appropriate this scholarly convention for our own project. Indeed, since “prophecy” now functions explicitly as a scholarly tool, the scholar remains free to sharpen, blur, or even discard the category as they see fit.⁹ The only rule for this redescriptive venture is that there must be something interesting to show for it; it must be productive by helping us see the ancient world in some novel sense.

⁷ For reflections on the limitations of this approach, see Cook, *On the Question*, 181–194.

⁸ I am largely drawing from J.Z. Smith’s emphasis on the act of comparison as a scholarly enterprise. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 53.

⁹ For a fuller account on the utility of redescription, see Michael Satlow, “Disappearing Categories: Using Categories in the Study of Religion,” *MTSR* 17 (2005): 287–298.

This book approaches prophecy through a redescriptive lens in order to bring together texts that have typically been studied in isolation with one another. Our goal in assembling these texts will be to examine how each text represents “prophecy” and to render an account for how each text might be read as a contiguous context for those other texts now registered under our category of “prophecy.” As such, it aims to exploit the inevitable gaps between these texts as the space for the creative reimagining of the past. Given that all of the texts examined in this book emerge from what we might conventionally call the late antique Near East, we can aspire to make an argument that this reimagining is not merely heuristic, but historically plausible. Thus, my goal is to compel historical knowledge to emerge through deliberate acts of juxtaposition and comparison of the items included in a capacious storage bin we simply and conventionally tag as “Late Antique Prophecy.”

For our limited purposes, recognizing “prophecy” as such scaffolds our experiment in three inter-related ways. First, a key limitation of a first-order descriptive analysis is that it allows the extant ancient materials to dictate the terms of what counts as relevant data. Yet if our goal is to go beyond definition and toward contextualization, then the mere appearance of a word is far too flimsy a criterion to be of much use. So too the absence of the word. This is perhaps best demonstrated by how one might categorize that third-century Mesopotamian healer, preacher, and “holy man” – Mani. While some scholars call him a “prophet” by convention, Mani typically addressed himself as the Apostle of Jesus Christ, never with the word “prophet.” To analyze Mani as an “Apostle of Jesus Christ” would be to allow Mani to set the terms of analysis, which would then proceed presumably through a comparative study with a set of relevant texts that feature other “Apostles of Jesus Christ,” for example, the Pauline epistles, *Acts of Thomas*, *Doctrina Addai*, and the *Acts of Mar Mari*. In contrast, to study Mani as a “prophet” or through the category of “prophetology” would place the act of setting parameters squarely back in the hands of the scholar.¹⁰ My point is that these are

¹⁰ Michel Tardieu, for example, uses the language of “prophetology” in a rather loose sense with the goal of tracing continuity from Judaism through the Elchasaites, Manichaeans, and ultimately, to Islam. While the sort of genetic continuity that Tardieu seems to have in mind is somewhat problematic, the utility of “prophetology” as a category lies in its ability to assemble an “unnatural” collection of texts that can cut across religious boundaries and different eras. See now Michel Tardieu, *Manichaeism* (trans. M.B. DeBevoise; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 13–19; idem, “La chaîne des prophètes,” in *Inde-Asie centrale: Routes du commerce et des idées* (Tachkent/Aix-en-Provence; Cahiers d’Asie Centrale 1–2, 1996), 357–366.

scholarly choices; the former is a first-order descriptive analysis, while the latter would be a redescriptive experiment. Our question, then, is to ask whether Mani's claim to apostleship interacts with the other texts in our "prophecy" dataset in interesting ways.

Second, and following closely to the first point, redescribing prophecy allows us to decenter religion as the de facto principle for organizing our dataset. In this sense, I agree with the recent assessment by Olivia Stewart Lester that prophecy "would have been more intelligible to ancient Jews, Christians, Greeks, and Romans than 'religion.'" ¹¹ Typically, scholars have studied prophecy in relation to a particular religious tradition, for example, "biblical" prophecy in relation to the ancient Near East or early Christian prophecy. I will not rehearse here the problematics of inserting or using the category of "religion" for the study of antiquity. ¹² For our purposes, decentering "religion" is especially important given the comparative nature of this project: It assumes that the texts discussed within can and should be contextualized alongside the writings of every other text circumscribed contained by our category of "prophecy," despite the fact that many of these texts were written by different religious communities. By centering prophecy instead of religion, we can populate our dataset differently and thereby aim to see discursive similarities across multiple neighboring and contemporary communities. Of course, choices of selection will differ, which only highlights the multiple ways that historical trajectories can and will be redrawn.

Finally, conceiving of "prophecy" as a second-order category helps us see that this mode of categorization is not, in fact, unique to modern scholars. After all, neither Mani nor his disciples nor Iamblichus nor the creators of the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* (Ps.-Clementine *Homilies*) nor the Jewish mystics discussed in this book had a transparent window into this thing "we" call prophecy. Their definitions and assumptions too were products of their time, place, and culture; we should not be so naïve as to think that they had any "real" answers either. Rather, they too do what I do here: Construct prophecy through available modes of representation by curating a set of examples for specific purposes. In other words, they too are "redescribing" prophecy. The question is, are they redescribing it in mutually legible ways?

¹¹ Olivia Stewart Lester, "Death, Demise, and the Decline of Prophecy," *Religion & Theology* 29 (2022): 99–109.

¹² Critiques and debates over the question of "religion" abound. See now Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

Given the historicizing slant of this book, my working parameters for “prophecy” are keyed to the usual standards of time and space; synchronicity and geographical proximity take priority over “religious boundaries.” More specifically, I will be examining those third- and fourth-century texts from the Near East that scholars have already discussed in the context of prophecy. While the principal reason for these working parameters is practical, it is also for the sake of historical plausibility. After all, it is easier to secure an argument that rests on comparing fourth-century Manichaean texts with rabbinic literature, as I do in Chapters 2 and 5, given their overlaps in time, space, and language, than comparing Chinese Manichaean texts from the late medieval period to those early rabbinic texts. For the purposes of this book, then, “prophecy” does not mean any singular thing but emerges from an analysis of the following late antique Near Eastern texts: the *Cologne Mani Codex* (CMC), the *Kephalaia of the Teacher*, the *Kephalaia of the Wisdom of my Lord Mani*, the Ps.-Clementine *Homilies*, Iamblichus’ *De Mysteriis*, and *Sar ha-Torah* unit within the Jewish text known as *Hekhalot Rabbati*. The last chapter of this book, which discusses the *Sar ha-Torah* unit, is an exception to these parameters since it emerged a few centuries after the other texts. Nevertheless, I suggest that its emergence cannot be explained without recourse to these earlier developments. In any case, this book contextualizes these texts not only with and against one another but also with other texts that fall under these parameters but are not typically seen as useful for the study of prophecy. This includes various rabbinic passages on the Oral Torah, Sasanian imperial inscriptions, Eusebius’ *History of the Church*, apocryphal Acts literature, Ephrem the Syrian, and others. After all, “There is no other primordium – it is all history.”¹³

Finally, this book draws heavily from the literature of an “alternative” form of “Pauline” Christianity, one indigenous to late antique Mesopotamia though by no means bound to it – Manichaeism. While the Manichaean corpus spans centuries, empires, and languages, we will be focusing primarily on those late third–fifth-century texts that made their way from Sasanian Mesopotamia through Syria into Roman Egypt. Yet, despite the fact that Manichaean texts loom large in this book, it is not a book on Manichaean prophetology. Rather, it is a book on late antique prophecy that centers Manichaean texts as one prominent example among others to register the broader discursive shifts in

¹³ Smith, *Imagining Religion*, xiii.

prophecy and prophethood. Its prominence here is almost inevitable, given that this voluminous corpus contains one of the richest extant theorizations of prophethood and prophecy to emerge from the late antique Near East. Its presence allows us to frame our inquiry in the way that David Frankfurter puts it, “Of what phenomenon or system in religion might this datum be an example?”¹⁴ This difference is important in so far as it renders the Manichaeans into an unproblematic fact of the ancient world. We begin with the assumption that Manichaeans were “always already” integrated into their multiple contexts, that they were “normal” facets of the broader late antique world, and, as such, can offer evidence for both developments in their own community and their wider contexts.

PROPHECY IN SEARCH OF A CONTEXT

In light of the comparative nature of this project, the manner in which I have organized my texts might chafe against the usual mode of first asserting a “proper context” as the explanatory key for the texts in question.¹⁵ They do not fit neatly within a single dominant imperial culture or religious community, but span that broad region that we might conventionally call the late antique Near East.¹⁶ One might therefore

¹⁴ David Frankfurter, “Comparison and the Study of Religions of Late Antiquity,” in *Comparer en histoire des religions antiques: controverses et propositions* (ed. C. Calame and B. Lincoln; Belgium: Presses Universitaires de Liège), 83–98, at 98.

¹⁵ On the necessity and pitfalls of comparison, see Bruce Lincoln, *Apples and Oranges: Explorations in, on, and with Comparison* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018). At the same time, my approach here is informed by two theorists in particular. First: Rey Chow, who critiques, *inter alia*, scholarly essentializations of the “local” as the *only* way at determining a context, in *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 1–22. Second: Dipesh Chakrabarty, who concludes his “Marx after Marxism: A Subaltern Historian’s Perspective,” *EPW* 28.22 (1993): 1094–1096, by saying, “Or, to put it differently, the practice of subaltern history would aim to take history to its limits to make its unworking visible.” I suggest that framing comparison as an inevitable scholarly act does precisely that.

¹⁶ Scholars of this region are often interested in the question of Syrian “identity” as a way of locating agency and influence. Fergus Millar, for example, notes the difficulty of discovering something like a distinct “Syrian” identity in the Roman Near East (*The Roman Near East: 31 BC–AD 337* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 489–532). More recently, Nathanael Andrade uses post-colonial theory to highlight “identity” as a negotiation of multiple points of intersection, including Roman, Greek, and Syrian identity, in *Syrian Identity in the Greco-Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), esp. 214–240.

read this book as an extended exercise in comparing texts across disciplinary boundaries with the goal of producing comparanda and, by extension, a historical context. Contexts, after all, are not given; they are made. They are not a historical *a priori* that explains the text, but what's at stake. As such, part of the argument for this book rests in between the chapters as much as they do within them. Scholars do not stumble upon "contexts" in the wild. Nor do we discover them in a text. We produce them to make sense out of something else, to render what seems unfamiliar and isolated into data pluggable into broader reconstructions of the past. "Contexts" are themselves the effects of texts, and the question of a "proper" context or the "real" context, where discourse is supposed to mesh seamlessly with reality, remains continually deferred. As Martin Jay notes, "We may not be able to understand a text or document without contextualizing it, but contexts are themselves preserved only in textual or documentary residues, even if we expand the latter to include nonlinguistic traces of the past. And those texts need to be interpreted in the present to establish the putative past context that will then be available to explain still other contexts."¹⁷ Perhaps if we think along these lines, we will end up with even richer contexts for our texts, contexts that are unrestrained by invocations of empire, milieu, or culture, all of which tend to function as naturalized boundaries for determining the "true meaning" of particular texts.

In each of their own ways, the chapters of this book revolve around this question of context and how discrete texts might "hang together" in some historically significant sense. Admittedly, such a question might seem "old hat" for scholars who have already read their Derrida and Foucault, yet I continue to think that the problems they raised remain quite sharp despite salutary efforts to move through and beyond them. While the parameters of time and space, that is, "Late Antique Near East," might have set the initial conditions for delimiting which texts might be most relevant for this project, they themselves are not arguments that a particular text *is* in fact relevant. As Dominick LaCapra wrote in response to the sort of originary contextualism articulated most forcefully by Quentin Skinner, "... the assertion that a specific context or subset of contexts is especially significant in a given case has to be argued and not simply assumed or surreptitiously built into an

¹⁷ Martin Jay, "Historical Explanation and the Event: Reflections on the Limits of Historical Contextualization," *NLH* 42.4 (2011): 557–571, at 559.

explanatory model or framework of analysis.”¹⁸ Indeed, contexts sometimes function within such arguments as a sort of static background against which a foregrounded text becomes visible; the text is thus positioned as different, not argued as such. Yet when the argument is already structured in this manner, then the only recourse available to scholars would be to articulate how the foregrounded “text” relates to the backgrounded “context.”

Within the modest goals of this book, LaCapra’s insight at least helps us reframe contexts as assemblages of relevant texts in the service of an argument, rather than something “out there” that scholars simply discover. If contexts are made, then they are also open to revision and debate. And, if they are open to debate, then there is no guarantee that they will build toward a progressive understanding of a text or event. Indeed, one context may end up displacing an earlier dominant context rather than building on it.¹⁹ Martin Jay frames the issue in this way, “... there is no reason to assume that the map of relevant contexts will look like a Russian matryoshka doll in which one is comfortably nested in the other. The passage from micro- to macrocontexts is by no means always very smooth. Instead, it might be more plausible to acknowledge competing and nonhierarchically ranged contexts of varying size and gravitational force, which produced an overdetermined effect irreducible to any one dominant contextual influence.”²⁰ Put simply, texts occupy multiple contexts, which means that no single context will ever exhaust all possible meanings of a text, not even the original context.²¹ We might

¹⁸ Dominick LaCapra, “Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts,” *History and Theory* 19.3 (1980):245–276. This is not to align myself too firmly with one side of the debate against another; Skinner’s general claim that original utterances must be understood for their illocutionary force within their “historical context” is still very much in play in the individual chapters of the book. See Quentin Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” *History and Theory* 8.1 (1969): 3–59. For an influential synthesis of the larger debate regarding text and context, see especially Elizabeth Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 130–155.

¹⁹ As Arthur Danto writes regarding the ironic impact of Thomas Kuhn’s historicization of the sciences, “To be sure, there now really was a unity of science, in the sense that all of science was brought under history rather than, as before, history having been brought under science construed on the model of physics,” in *Narration and Knowledge (Including the Integral Text of Analytical Philosophy of History), with a New Introduction by Lydia Goehr and a New Conclusion by Frank Ankersmit* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), xi.

²⁰ Jay, “Historical Explanation,” 560.

²¹ See Clark, *History*, 140–145. One might also consider Arthur Danto’s thought experiment of the Ideal Chronicler, who knows everything perfectly the moment it happens,

also note that texts can be disaggregated further into particular aspects, which are themselves also open to multiple contexts. What all this suggests is that “contexts” function less like stable foundations that undergird one’s analysis from below and more like mortar that scholars use to cobble various texts together as part of their argumentative strategy.

This again puts the production of historical knowledge firmly in the hands of the researcher because it demystifies “relevance” as an experimental mode of analysis. Indeed, which criteria do we use to assess “discrete” texts or events as “close enough” or “too distant” to be relevant? Which categories might we use or invent to gain purchase on a particular cross-section of a historical moment? Or, to be even more concrete, what does the Neoplatonist Iamblichus have to do with the “Jewish Christians” of the Ps.-Clementine *Homilies* or Manichaeans or the “Jewish Mystics” responsible for the *Hekhalot* corpus? Surely something, lest we are forced to admit that there are, in fact, vacuums in the world or that there is something “outside the text.” They must thus be *made* relevant to one another. When seen from this vantage point, the pressing issue lies less in descriptive matters with definitive answers, but in proposing an account of what lies “in-between” these texts and the people who produced them.

This does not mean that there are no better contexts, albeit for particular questions. Scholars present arguments that highlight perceived similarities between two discrete objects in order to make a case for their inherent contiguity in time and space and, hence, that they share a real historical context. Or, as Frank Ankersmit puts it, “Hence the fact that narrative representations of the past are ... proposals does not automatically place historical writing outside the reach of rational debate.”²² In other words, it is precisely in the *better* that one makes their case. One’s proposal for a “proper” context *is* often the matter of debate, not the assumption, in the same way that “truth” is not the criterion for scholarly representations of the past, but what’s at stake.²³ Moreover, in the absence of universal criteria for determining what exactly makes a better explanation, since one scholar’s “objective” account of the past might

but does not know the future. Since the “meaning” of an event is often discernible only after the event, and since the meaning of events continues to change as one goes into the future, one cannot exhaust all possible meanings of an event until the end of history itself. See Danto, *Narration and Knowledge*, 149–181.

²² Frank Ankersmit, *Historical Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 92.

²³ Ankersmit, *Historical Representation*, 97.

strike another as intolerably “subjective,” then perhaps it is more accurate to state that the determination of a “proper” context proceeds from what are essentially aesthetic factors. Consequently, contexts are not settled knowledge, but always up for grabs; they are the effects of webs of naturalized comparanda.

This is the argument that lies in between the chapters, that the individual articulations of prophethood and prophecy should nevertheless be seen across and against one another as comparanda that produce a historical context. The goal is to propose a narrative that encompasses the particular literary poetics of each text, thereby mounting an argument that successfully crosses the threshold of noetic similarity into historical plausibility; it is to give flesh to what begins as a ghost of comparison. I therefore prioritize scholarly acts of juxtaposition over the imposition of cultural, regional, or imperial contexts. The “context” of my late antique prophecy extends as far as I can weave a historically plausible connection between its moving parts, keeping in mind that “plausibility” too is produced by scholars through a series of knowing winks and nods.

SITUATING SCHOLARSHIP

We began by framing the metanarrative of cessation as a particular discourse about prophecy rather than a window into a historical event. To be sure, this is not a new observation. As Laura Nasrallah wrote two decades ago, “Debates over the validity of prophecy and ecstasy at a given period in history are rhetorically constructed in complex conditions of struggle, and do not necessarily indicate that prophecy and ecstasy have declined, or become marginal.”²⁴ Such an approach toward the ancient world leaves in its wake a far richer and refreshingly unfamiliar account of how ancient Jews and Christians thought about what we might categorize as “prophecy.” It demonstrates the capacious utility of the category of “prophecy” to organize a range of diverse texts for analysis. As such, they help situate our own project forward in time and with a different set of texts.

The redescriptive approach has been particularly fruitful for the study of ancient Jewish and early Christian notions of prophecy. Eva Mroczek, for example, rethinks the category of “canon” by drawing

²⁴ Laura Nasrallah, “*An Ecstasy of Folly*”: *Prophecy and Authority in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 19.

out how ancient Jews and Christians actually conceptualized the “closure” of scripture.²⁵ In so doing, she pushes back against the anachronistic assumption that “canon” marks the totality and end of revelation. Instead, she argues, ancient Jewish and Christian conceptions of “canon” see it as delimiting only those books of available revelation, not its totality, and its very boundedness points less to the finality of revelation than to the potential and presence of revelation beyond the “canonical” borders. For our purposes, her attention to how “canon” is actually represented within the ancient Jewish and Christian texts will provide a helpful point of reorientation for rethinking how literary representations of the Manichaean “canon” also function as textual objects within particular Manichaean discourses.

Similarly, scholars of the early Christian movement, especially of the Apostle Paul, have demonstrated the utility of this redescriptive approach for rendering “early Christian prophecy” a more coherent and less unique phenomenon of the first-century Roman Empire. Jennifer Eyl and Heidi Wendt, for example, have each in their own ways moved scholars away from the analysis that uncritically replicates the rhetoric of difference between “prophecy” and “divination” in the Apostle Paul’s letters toward fruitfully redescribing his social position and cultural location within the Roman Empire.²⁶ Whereas Eyl positions Paul’s advice regarding prophecy and speaking in tongues together with Roman practices of divination and wonderworking, thereby bracketing the rhetorical differentiation between “prophecy” and “divination,” Wendt uses the category of “freelance religious experts” as an analytic category to highlight the similarities in modes of self-presentation and activities shared by those marked as magicians, astrologers, and, most surprisingly, apostles. Eyl thus works laterally to use the category of “divination” to redescribe what we might call the Apostle Paul’s discourse of “prophecy,” whereas Wendt works vertically through the invented category of the “freelance expert” to reorganize the relevant data. Neither scholar redescribes for redescription’s sake, but to make strong historical arguments about the cultural location and embeddedness of the Apostle Paul within the wider Roman Empire.

²⁵ Eva Mroczek, *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 156–183.

²⁶ Jennifer Eyl, *Signs, Wonders, and Gifts: Divination in the Letters of Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). Heidi Wendt, *At the Temple Gates: The Religion of Freelance Experts in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). See also Giovanni Bazzana, *Having the Spirit of Christ: Spirit Possession and Exorcism in the Early Christ Groups* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 135–211.

At the same time, scholars have also highlighted the deeply competitive nature of prophecy and prophetic writing among both early Jews and Christians. Olivia Lester Stewart, for example, highlights the ways that prophetic texts like the Sibylline Oracles and the Book of Revelation both extend and subvert gendered expectations about what a prophet is and what prophecies should look like, especially against Greco-Roman notions of pagan prophecy.²⁷ Working with a different set of texts, Dylan Burns highlights the intense rivalry between the Sethian “Gnostic” Christians and the “founder” of Neoplatonism, Plotinus, over the nature of revelation and revelatory writing.²⁸ As already mentioned, Laura Nasrallah too has demonstrated how widespread discourses of rationality and irrationality were deployed by various Christians and philosophers invested in or against the “New Prophecy” of the “Montanists.”²⁹ Together, such studies highlight the contested nature and diversity of late antique notions of revelation, prophecy, and prophethood among both Jews and Christians, which in turn makes it difficult to trace a single trajectory for “prophecy” from the Second Temple period onward.

This book aims to carry the conversation forward into the third and fourth centuries with a general regional focus on the “Near East.” This roughly synchronic and regional approach will allow us to bring into consideration different corpora that have typically been studied in isolation with one another, especially in the fields of Manichaeism, Jewish Christianity, Neoplatonism, and late antique Judaism. Since we are interested in reading across these different texts to see how each might be co-productive of a converging form of late antique “revelation,” we will have to sidestep some of the more specialized concerns that have emerged around the study of these texts even as we draw upon them; we will not engage, for example, with the question of whether the Hekhalot corpus offers evidence for the continuation of Jewish mysticism from the Second Temple period nor do we have much to say about the ecclesiastical unity of the western and eastern branches of the Manichaean church. Rather,

²⁷ With a nod to the work of Nasrallah and going past the “cessation” narrative. See Olivia Stewart Lester, *Prophetic Rivalry, Gender, and Economics: A Study in Revelation and Sibylline Oracles 4–5* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 5–12. For a recent treatment on Sibylline Oracle 3, see now Ashley Bacchi, *Uncovering Jewish Creativity in Book III of the Sibylline Oracles: Gender, Intertextuality, and Politics* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

²⁸ Dylan Burns, *Apocalypse of the Alien God: Platonism and the Exile of Sethian Gnosticism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

²⁹ Nasrallah, *Ecstasy of Folly*.

we are interested in seeing how each text might be symptoms of a broader “event,” one indexable to the late antique Near Eastern milieu.

FROM JEWISH APOCALYPSES TO THE EARLY MANICHAEAN MOVEMENT

To better situate the first chapter of this book, which is on the role apocalypses played in the construction of prophethood among the early followers of Mani, we will first need to trace the reception of Jewish apocalypses into third-century Mesopotamia. Granted, much of what we can say will remain speculative due to the fragmentary and disputed nature of our extant materials. Nevertheless, we will begin with the production of Second Temple Jewish apocalypses and close with the late third-century followers of the prophet Mani reading and citing apocalypses in Sasanian Mesopotamia.

For our purposes, we can define an apocalypse as a literary genre initially written by Jews following Alexander’s conquest of the Near East in the fourth century BCE. Apocalypses are, as Martha Himmelfarb has succinctly put it, texts that “present themselves as revelations to a great hero of the past mediated by an angel. The revelations typically take a form of symbolic visions of history, journeys through the heavens, or some combination of the two.”³⁰ Such a broad definition helps scholars see the shared literary features of this genre, even in texts written under radically different historical circumstances. While literary antecedents for apocalypses might be found in biblical prophetic literature and the broader Near Eastern world, their initial emergence largely coincides with the rise of Hellenistic rule.³¹ The earliest extant apocalypse, known as the Astronomical Book, was probably written sometime in the late third century BCE, while later apocalypses, like 4 Ezra, were written in the period between the revolt that led to the destruction of the Jewish Temple in 70 CE and the Bar Kokhba revolt

³⁰ Martha Himmelfarb, *The Apocalypse: A Brief History* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 1.

³¹ John Collins, “Jewish Apocalyptic against Its Hellenistic Near Eastern Environment,” *BASOR* 220 (1975): 27–36. For recent scholarship on apocalypses, see now Paul Kosmin, *Time and Its Adversaries in the Seleucid Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 147–186; Anthea Portier-Young, *Apocalypse against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), esp. 223–279; Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Demons, Angels, and Writing in Ancient Judaism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

in the 130s CE. The Bar Kokhba revolt marked the end of this relatively continuous literary tradition, at least among Jews. It devastated the Jewish population and put an abrupt end to the diverse types of literature produced during the Second Temple period, including apocalypses.³² Indeed, the next extant Jewish apocalypse dates to the early seventh century with *Sefer Zerubbabel*, and even then, its author seems to have had no knowledge of apocalypses as a distinct literary genre.³³

Among the apocalypses written between the two revolts, the *Book of Revelation* differs from the others in at least one important way. Whereas other apocalypses were written by Jewish scribes and attributed to ancient heroes like Ezra or Baruch, the author of the *Book of Revelation*, supposedly a seer by the name of John, assumes the role of a contemporary prophet and addresses the seven churches in Asia. No doubt this shift had something to do with his conviction that the Messiah – Jesus – had already come. He prophesies that Jesus will return soon, this time as a triumphant warrior. The *Book of Revelation* thereby assumes that the intended audience would heed the words of a contemporary prophet and that they too were expecting Jesus' return.

The early "church order" known as the *Didache* may furnish crucial social evidence for the types of audience John may have had in mind.³⁴ After all, it bears witness to the ongoing presence of itinerant prophets in late first-century or early second-century Syria, even as it sought to regulate their roles within the local community. Like the *Book of Revelation*, the *Didache* keenly anticipates Jesus' return and warns its local flock against the proliferation of false prophets and apostles. Strikingly, the *Didache* goes so far as calling these prophets the community's "High Priests," despite the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple some twenty or thirty years earlier.

Though not often brought into the larger conversation, this early second-century "apocalyptic" milieu helps us situate the writings of the early second-century Syrian prophet named Elchasai. Elchasai is

³² Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society: 200 BCE to 640 CE* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 101–176. See also Ross S. Kraemer, *The Mediterranean Diaspora in Late Antiquity: What Christianity Cost the Jews* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

³³ Martha Himmelfarb, *Jewish Messiahs in a Christian Empire: A History of the Book of Zerubbabel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 21–27.

³⁴ On the possible relationship between the *Didache* and the *Book of Revelation*, see Alan J.P. Garrow, "The Didache and Revelation," in *The Didache: A Missing Piece of the Puzzle in Early Christianity* (ed. J.A. Jefford and C.N. Draper; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2015), 497–514.

important for our trajectory because, according to the *Cologne Mani Codex* (CMC), the Apostle Mani's home community of Mesopotamian Baptists followed the laws established by Elchasai. Unfortunately, we only know about Elchasai through those who hated him and those who idealized him.³⁵ From what we can tell, Elchasai was an Aramaic-speaking prophet who wrote a revelatory book of some sort in the years 116–117 CE for a local “Jewish Christian” community in northern Mesopotamia. Scholars continue to debate whether this book was an apocalypse like the *Book of Revelation* or a “church order” like the *Didache*.³⁶ The truth may be somewhere in the middle. After all, much of the *Book of Elchasai* may have been concerned with ritual. If we follow F. Stanley Jones' reconstruction of this book, Elchasai commands his followers to pray toward Jerusalem (despite the destruction of the Temple half a century earlier), to maintain ritual and moral purity through baptisms, and to honor the Sabbath. Elchasai's community may also have cultivated local traditions about Jewish priests from the time of the Exile and practiced circumcision. At the same time, Elchasai claimed that an angel, or perhaps Christ himself, had revealed these commandments to him. He wrote that the end of the world would arrive sometime in the year 120 CE, three years after Emperor Trajan's conquest of Mesopotamia. Indeed, Epiphanius preserves a delightful Aramaic anagram transliterated into Greek that points to Elchasai's eschatological concerns.³⁷ That Elchasai prophesied the end of the world in his own name, warned his local community against contemporary false prophets, and urged them to practice the forgiveness of sins

³⁵ For a reconstruction of the Book of Elchasai, see F. Stanley Jones, “The Book of Elchasai and Its Relevance for Manichaean Institutions with a Supplement: The Book of Elchasai Reconstructed and Translated,” *Aram* 16 (2004): 176–215. For a critical introduction and analysis, see Gerard P. Luttikhuisen, *The Revelation of Elchasai: Investigations into the Evidence for a Mesopotamian Jewish Apocalypse of the Second Century and Its Reception by Judeo-Christian Propagandists* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985).

³⁶ F. Stanley Jones, “The Genre of the Book of Elchasai: A Primitive Church Order, not an Apocalypse,” in *Historische Wahrheit und theologische Wissenschaft: Gerd Lüdemann zum 50. Geburtstag* (ed. A. Özen; Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996), 87–104. In response, see Gerard Luttikhuisen, “The Book of Elchasai: A Jewish Apocalyptic Writing, Not a Christian Church Order,” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1999 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 405–425.

³⁷ Epiphanius, *Pan.* 19.4. In Greek: ἀβάρ ἀνὶδ μωῖβ νωχλῆ δασσιμ ἀνὴ δασσιμ νωχλῆ μωῖβ ἀνὶδ ἀβάρ σελάμ. When read right to left, as one reads Aramaic, and from the middle, we get ἡνὰ μισσάδ ἐλιχών βιώμ δῖνα ράββα, which makes perfect sense when we put it back into Aramaic script – אבא מסדה עליכון ביום דינא רבא. This translates to the following: I bear witness regarding you [pl.] on the day of great judgment. Luttikhuisen, *Revelation*, 124–125.

through baptism aligns him with both John of Patmos and perhaps even more closely with the itinerant prophets mentioned in the *Didache*.

Like every other prediction about the end-times so far, Elchasai was wrong. Yet this did not stop his messengers from spreading his teachings as they fanned out both westward toward Rome and southward toward the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon. In the Roman world, Hippolytus, Origen, and Epiphanius voice their unanimous disapproval of this Elchasaite “heresy.”³⁸ Eusebius records Origen saying: “At present, someone has come thinking himself to be great for being able to act as ambassador of a godless and most impious opinion that comes from the so-called Elkasites (Ἐλκεσαϊτῶν) and which has recently become insurgent in the churches.”³⁹ Eusebius frames this excerpt by saying that it was “snuffed out as soon as it began.”⁴⁰ We will probably never know how successful these missionaries were, though it seems fair to say that the later Manichaean missionaries were far more successful in establishing durable communities in the Roman Near East and beyond.

In fact, the strongest evidence for the dispersion and entrenchment of Elchasai’s (or Elchasaite-like) teachings comes from third-century Mesopotamia. At least according to the CMC, a network of Baptist communities affiliated with Elchasai populated the banks of the Tigris, Euphrates, and beyond. For example, the CMC depicts Mani entering a “Church of the Baptists” (ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ τῶν βαπτιστῶν) in Pharat in the Sasanian province of Mesene (southern Mesopotamia).⁴¹ Mani also visits the “brothers” in Ganzak (near Lake Urmia), who must somehow be related to the Baptist communities further to the south.⁴² Mani himself grew up in a Baptist community somewhere near the Sasanian capital city of Ctesiphon. The CMC also mentions a certain “Aianos, the Baptist from Koche,” a city that stood on the opposite bank of Ctesiphon.⁴³ Of course, while one cannot prove that every local Baptist community followed the laws of Elchasai, the CMC at least depicts Elchasai as the “leader of your law” (Ἀλχασαῖος ὁ ἀρχηγὸς τοῦ νόμου ὑμῶν) of Mani’s Baptist community, referring to the laws of ritual baptism, agricultural

³⁸ Luttikhuisen, *Revelation*, 41–172.

³⁹ *Hist. eccl.* VI, 38. Translation by Jeremy Schott, *The History of the Church: A New Translation* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 318.

⁴⁰ *Hist. eccl.* VI, 38.

⁴¹ CMC 140.14.

⁴² CMC 121.12; Cornelia Eva Römer, *Manis Frühe Missionsreisen nach der Kölner Manibigraphie: Textkritischer Kommentar und Erläuterungen zu p.121–p.192 des Kölner Mani-Kodex* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1994), 5–12.

⁴³ CMC 98.11 and 155.3.

work, and food separation.⁴⁴ Ironically, the CMC portrays Mani as proving the truth of his own revelation by appealing to Elchasai. In other words, Mani's argument against his home community was that the Baptists were not Elchasaite enough.

We will dwell on the relationship between the Baptists and the early Manichaean movement in the first chapter of the book. There, I will argue that the notion of prophetology in the CMC is part of a larger argument that emphasizes Mani's continuity with the Baptist past. As a result, we cannot use the CMC as evidence for a completely independent "religion" called Manichaeism. In any case, there is a good deal of scholarship centered on the relationship between the "Elchasaite" Baptists and "Manichaeism."⁴⁵ For my part, I am prepared to see greater room for genetic continuity, perhaps less due to positive evidence, which remains admittedly paltry, and more because the "newness" of Manichaeism is overstated.⁴⁶ Indeed, if the early followers of Mani claimed to be better followers of Elchasai by following Mani, then one wonders why we should see them as an independent religious community of "Manichaeans" at all. Nevertheless, as scholars have now long recognized, the CMC, which is our richest source of evidence for Mani's life, describes Mani's youth and maturation in a community of Mesopotamian Baptists who followed the laws of Elchasai, the revelations he received as a young man, his unification with his Divine Twin, his ongoing arguments with the community's leaders, his expulsion, and his itinerant life as the "Apostle of Jesus Christ" in the Sasanian Empire. Aside from this rough outline of Mani's life, however, we must be extremely careful about using the CMC, or indeed any Manichaean text, as a window for the historical Mani.⁴⁷ The first quest for the historical Mani is still very much in its infancy and made all the more difficult due to the unfortunate fact that none of Mani's "canonical" writings survive in full. This is because most extant Manichaean texts were produced by Manichaean teachers in the centuries following Mani's death in 276 or 277 CE. And as this book argues, far from being mere tradents of Mani's teachings, they were

⁴⁴ CMC 94.10.

⁴⁵ For a critique of continuity in favor of situating Manichaeism in an "Iranian" context, see Albert de Jong, "A *Quodam Persa Exstiterunt*: Re-Orienting Manichaean Origins," in *Religious Innovations in Antiquity: Studies in Honour of Pieter Willem van der Horst* (ed. A. Houtman, A. de Jong, and M. Misset-Van de Weg; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 81–106.

⁴⁶ Jae Hee Han, "Baptist Followers of Mani: Reframing the Cologne Mani Codex," *Numen* 66 (2019): 243–270.

⁴⁷ See now Iain Gardner, *Founder of Manichaeism: Rethinking the Life of Mani* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

products of their own time and, as such, their innovative approaches toward prophethood and revelation must be contextualized against their contemporary backdrop. For the purposes of this book at least, we will decenter Mani from Manichaeism and refrain from peeling back later accretions to uncover the historical Mani. Instead of looking backward to Mani, we will go forward as his movement began to spread rapidly throughout the Near East.

What we do know about Mani from the fragments of his own writings is that he was keenly interested in Jewish apocalypses. This is perhaps not altogether surprising, given the importance of Elchasai's teachings, and presumably his prophecies, among Mani's Baptist community.⁴⁸ Mani's own *Book of the Giants* drew on an early Aramaic version of the Enochic *Book of the Watchers* similar to the fragments found among the Dead Sea scrolls.⁴⁹ Surviving excerpts from Mani's *Šābuhragān* also demonstrate his incorporation of those very themes found throughout Jewish apocalypses, especially the judgment of the dead, the collapse of the current cosmos, and the coming of a new world.⁵⁰ Later followers of Mani, especially Baraies the Teacher, whom we will discuss in the first chapter, also cite excerpts from apocalypses attributed to Adam, Seth, Enosh, Shem, and Enoch. While it is unlikely that Jewish scribes were responsible for penning these apocalypses, it nevertheless suggests that Mani's community possessed a number of such hitherto unknown apocalypses.⁵¹ If so, the Mesopotamian Baptist communities themselves used Second Temple Jewish apocalypses as their model for writing their own apocalypses, which were then transmitted throughout Mesopotamia.

⁴⁸ At least in one case (CMC 86.19), the Baptists preserved and transmitted the prophecies of their forefathers.

⁴⁹ John C. Reeves, *Jewish Lore in Manichaean Cosmogony: Studies in the Book of Giants Traditions* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1992); idem, *Heralds of that Good Realm: Syro-Mesopotamian Gnosis and Jewish Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 31–48; J.T. Milik, "Turfan et Qumran, Livre des Géants juif et manichéen," in *Tradition und Glaube: Das frühe Christentum in seiner Umwelt* (ed. G. Jeremias, H.-W. Kuhn, and H. Stegemann; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck Ruprecht, 1971), 117–127.

⁵⁰ M. Hutter, *Manis kosmogonische Šābuhragān-Texte: Edition, Kommentar und literaturgeschichtliche Einordnung der manichäisch-mittelpersischen Handschriften M98/99 I und M7980-7984* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992); D.N. MacKenzie, "Mani's Šābuhragān," *BSOAS* 42.3 (1979): 500–534; idem, "Mani's Šābuhragān," *BSOAS* 43.2 (1980): 288–310.

⁵¹ Reeves writes, "They [the apocalypses cited by Baraies] are almost certainly not authentic products of those Jewish scribal circles responsible for the manufacture and distribution of biblically inspired pseudepigraphic literature in the eastern Mediterranean world during the Persian, Hellenistic, or Roman eras of Jewish history" (*Heralds*, 210).

Such apocalypses had long afterlives among various communities, where they formed an integral part of what John Reeves has aptly called forms of “Syro-Mesopotamian gnosis.”⁵²

Given their interest in apocalypses and eschatological prophecies among third-century Mesopotamian Baptists, we might also describe the followers of Mani as an “apocalyptic community,” provided we understand the term to mean a scholarly strategy for highlighting the community’s approaches toward revelation and not as an exhaustive description of the community. Indeed, as this book argues, Manichaeans experimented with different models of revelation and did so in ways that resist harmonization into a single model. At the same time, their experiments were products of their time and place. After all, does it not make more sense to compare Manichaean notions of revelation against proximate and contemporary discourses of revelation rather than our own? To compare, for example, the “oral revelation” of Mani as found in the Manichaean *Kephalaia* alongside contemporary rabbinic notions of “Oral Torah,” rather than us presupposing what revelation or prophecy should look like? Moreover, should we not consider Manichaeans as historical agents whose practices of reading and writing revelation differed depending on each situation? This is what we set out to investigate in the opening chapters of this book. As we will see, whereas Mani seemed to have appropriated cosmogonic and eschatological elements within apocalypses into his teachings, his disciple Baraies the Teacher finds new uses for apocalypses. Writing years, if not decades, after Mani’s execution, Baraies uses snippets of apocalypses, the Apostle Paul’s letters, and Mani’s books as revelatory proof texts to demonstrate that Mani stands in prophetic continuity with the ancient forefathers. And, not unlike the ways that modern scholars “discovered” apocalypse as a genre by hunting after literary patterns across individual apocalypses, so too does Baraies sift through *his* corpus of apocalypses to “discover” within them the structure of prophethood itself.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

I have chosen to divide this book into two halves of three chapters each, with the former focusing on prophethood and the latter on revelation. While overlaps between the two are inevitable, they end up reflecting a different set of concerns. Starting with prophethood, what is striking

⁵² Reeves, *Heralds*, 209–211.

about reading early “Jewish” and “Christian” literature from the perspective of a third-century Mesopotamian follower of Mani is how few precedents there are for the question of what makes a prophet a prophet. True, both Jewish and Christian texts often feature, narrativize, or refer to prophets. Some texts, like the *Didache*, even propose criteria for distinguishing a true prophet from a false one. Yet what tends to be missing is an explicit discussion about what makes a prophet a prophet at all.⁵³ Presumably, the historical Mani too had something to say about prophets yet given how little of his actual texts we possess, it is only through careful reconstruction of later texts that we might approach the historical Mani’s own thoughts. It is perhaps not until Baraies, Mani’s disciple, that we have firm evidence for the formulation of explicit criteria for prophethood at least among the early Manichaeans. Accordingly, in the first half of this book, I focus on the emergence and continuation of this discourse on prophethood, paying particular attention to their rhetorical and potential historical contexts.

The latter half of the book explores the shifting content and contours of “revelation.” It focuses on two aspects in particular. The first centers on the emergence of a discourse that presents speech as the privileged medium of revelation. To be clear, I do not mean the narrativized oral framework found within apocalypses or in other sorts of revelatory literature. I mean the emergence of a discourse of oral revelation, at once distinct from but complementary to written revelation. To investigate this aspect of revelation, we will turn to rabbinic passages on the Oral Torah, the Manichaean *Kephalaia*, and the Ps.-Clementine *Homilies*. The second aspect we will investigate is the construction of panoptic knowledge. Using the Syrian Neoplatonist Iamblichus’ invention of “divine *prognosis*” as our prism, we will turn to see how it coheres with constructions of revelatory knowledge among Manichaeans, the Ps.-Clementine *Homilies*, and finally, with the Jewish “mystics” responsible for the *Hekhalot* literature.

As already stated above, the first chapter of this book focuses on the invention of prophethood as a dis-embedded object of discourse among

⁵³ One might consider the two Alexandrian philosophers, Philo and Origen. Yet even then, it may be more accurate to say that both describe how a prophet receives God’s revelation, not what a prophet is. Their focus is on the prophetic faculty, not on what makes one a prophet. See John R. Levison, “The Prophetic Spirit as an Angel according to Philo,” *HTR* 88.2 (1995): 189–207; idem, “Inspiration and the Divine Spirit in Writings of Philo Judaeus,” *JSJ* 26.5 (1995): 271–323. Robert Hauck, *The More Divine Proof: Prophecy and Inspiration in Origen and Celsus* (Atlanta: Scholar’s Press, 1989).

the earliest followers of Mani. It provides a rereading of homily written by a certain disciple of Mani by the name of Baraies the Teacher at the turn of the fourth century. This homily is embedded in the CMC. Whereas scholars have typically understood Baraies' homily as a faithful representation of Mani's own thoughts on prophethood and as representing a debate between Manichaeans and ex-Manichaeans, I argue instead that we must locate this homily within intra-Baptist debates about the prophethood of Mani in the years following Mani's execution. That is, it presents evidence for "a parting of the ways" not of "the already-parted ways." In his homily, Baraies argues that Mani differs from the earlier apostles and prophets only in degree, not in kind; therefore, Mani stands in continuity with the prophets that a community already held as their forefathers. In so doing, Baraies invents a typology of prophethood: Prophets must be raptured, write scripture, and choose an elect community. He makes his argument through the performance of textual expertise, drawing widely from ancient apocalypses, Paul's letters, and Mani's books. Yet the very fact that he constructs his argument through the manipulation of textual units suggests that he is not drawing from earlier notions of prophetology; he is not merely transmitting what Mani said or wrote but creating doctrine to respond to his particular situation. Moreover, the fact that Baraies connects Mani to an ancestral heritage that both Baraies and his opponents shared is strong evidence that Baraies and his opponents were members of a single, yet fragmented, community. This chapter will argue that this community was none other than the Baptist community. Ultimately, we might read this homily as evidence for the gradual ascendance of a Manichaean "scholastic" community, a network of local teachers who would act as the on-the-ground leaders of a post-Mani "Manichaean" community.

The second chapter of this book turns its attention to see how these teachers articulated prophethood as the movement spread westward toward Egypt in the late third and fourth centuries. The goal of this chapter is to make Manichaeism "normal" by contextualizing it alongside rabbinic, Syriac, and Sasanian texts. These other texts inform our reading of the Manichaean texts because they allow us to propose specific situations that can explain the emergence of Manichaean notions of prophethood. By demonstrating the embeddedness of Manichaeans within these multiple contexts, we can imagine them as historical agents in their own right. To make this argument, this chapter looks at how the prophetological discourse functions within the introduction, *kephalaion* 1 (K 1), and K 342 of the two massive codices

that make up the Manichaean *Kephalaia*. I make the following arguments: (1) The purpose of the prophetological discourse in the introduction of the *Kephalaia* is not to relate historical information about Mani's wanderings throughout the Sasanian Empire, but to justify the anthological structure of the *Kephalaia* itself. Introductions frame a reader's experience of the book; the introduction to the *Kephalaia* is no different. To contextualize this broader consideration of anthologization, I turn to certain passages within the rabbinic corpus, which make use of similar discourses that may underwrite rabbinic modes of anthologization. (2) The purpose of the prophetological discourse in the first *kephalaion* is not to transmit a doctrine of a chain of prophets, but is part of a larger textual strategy to create chains of contiguous time that connects the late antique Manichaean teachers seamlessly back to Adam. The chain of prophets is only one textual strategy for demarcating moments of contiguous time. The goal is to show that Mani had to come precisely when he did and, as a result, that his church could only have emerged when it did in the late third century. I argue that this *kephalaion* responds to early fourth-century discourses of an apostolic golden age, as articulated by someone like the Syrian poet Ephrem, who argues that the Manichaean church cannot be a true Apostolic Church because it is a late church. In response, our *kephalaion* argues that the Manichaean church is not a late church but the *last* church, and therefore, a superior church in that it will not perish like the earlier churches and that it will remain until Jesus' return. (3) The purpose of the prophetological discourse in K 342 is to write Manichaean prophetology into the broader imperial experience of an expanding Sasanian Empire. To make this argument, I compare Mani's parables about prophets with excerpts from two early Sasanian inscriptions: The *Res Gestae* of Shapur I and the Paikuli inscription of Narseh I.

The third chapter looks at the other side of the prophetological discourse. How did others respond to the malleable and urgent claims voiced by Mani's disciples of Mani's prophethood? Here, I argue that we can look to the early fourth-century text known as the Ps.-Clementine *Homilies* as a response to Manichaean discourses of prophethood. I first demonstrate that the way that the *Homilies* articulates its notion of two prophets, the True Prophet Jesus and the False Prophetess, and the nature of their prophetic words have less to do with some abstract "Gnostic" idea and more to do with contemporary embryological discourses oriented around the nature of sperm and blood. I then turn

to the *Homilies*' depiction of Simon Magus. While I agree with other scholars that the *Homilies*' depiction of Simon Magus is a flabby caricature of many heretical movements, I do not think that it dislodges its central polemic against the Apostle Paul as a false representative of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The flabbiness highlights the monstrosity of Paul's visionary experience of the risen Christ, it does not detract from it. If so, there was only one movement in the early fourth century whose putative founder rested on his own revelatory laurels and who modeled himself after the Apostle Paul, even going so far as to call himself the "Apostle of Jesus Christ" – Mani.

The fourth chapter pivots away from prophethood and toward revelation. Here, we will focus on what I call ideologies of oral revelation. These ideologies present orality as the privileged medium of revelation and explicitly distinguish oral revelation from written forms of revelation, be they the written Torah or Mani's books. Moreover, they root contemporary teachings in an originary moment of revelation, be it Sinai, Mani, or the True Prophet Jesus, and thereby function as ideologies that authorize the teachings of later disciples by framing them as continuations of that first moment of revelation. I thus retain the word "ideology," despite its complicated baggage, to suggest that these were not only discursive thematizations about teachings but also constitutive of the ways that Manichaean teachers, rabbis, and the "Jewish Christians" responsible for the Ps.-Clementine *Homilies* framed their own teaching as authoritative. We will begin this broader discussion by recontextualizing the rabbinic conception of the Oral Torah. Whereas scholars have generally sought to understand both the form and content of Oral Torah through the prisms of Roman law and Greek rhetoric, we can also contextualize it alongside other models of oral revelation, especially as found in the Manichaean *Kephalaia* and the Ps.-Clementine *Homilies*.

The fifth chapter approaches revelation again from a different angle, this time through the category of *prognosis*. Our entry point will be through the writings of the third-century Syrian Platonist by the name of Iamblichus, primarily in his response to Porphyry in the text now known as *De Mysteriis*. By first seeing how he constructs a divine *prognosis* as an effect of divine power against "mere" *prognosis*, which Iamblichus argues amounts to nothing more than human reasoning and guesswork, we can trace how other proximate communities, like the ones responsible for the Ps.-Clementine *Homilies* and the Manichaeans, also sought to articulate their own understanding of *prognosis* as panoptic and divine knowledge. We will insist throughout this chapter that Iamblichus' construction of

divine *prognosis* is built through and against Porphyry's own words against Iamblichus. Iamblichus is not merely textualizing a notion of divine *prognosis* that already existed in his head prior to his exchange with Porphyry but thinking through and against Porphyry to construct a notion of divine *prognosis*. Ultimately, what we see across each community is that *prognosis* is no longer a byte of information about a future event that a human being can produce, but a divine mode of knowing that can only be possessed as an expression of divine substance.

The concluding chapter of this book can best be seen as a deliberately provocative extension of Chapter 5. It pushes beyond the parameters of third- and fourth-century Syro-Mesopotamian texts to consider the earliest corpus of Jewish "mystical" literature, the *Hekhalot* corpus, which most likely emerged in the post-Talmudic period from the fifth to sixth century onward. More specifically, we will be looking at the "Prince of Torah" (Sar Torah) passages within the macroform known as *Hekhalot Rabbati*. Through a close reading of this Sar Torah unit within the genre of *historiola*, I argue that not only does it present the Jewish "mystic" as capable of angelic forms of contemplation, but it also frames the Torah itself as an instantaneously knowable object. Without claiming that Sar Torah unit is directly influenced by the shifts in thinking about *prognosis* in the fifth chapter, I argue nevertheless that its emergence cannot be explained without recourse to it either. To put it crudely, the Sar Torah unit "translates" divine *prognosis* into a rabbinic or para-rabbinic idiom. Somewhere in its long chain of events and shifts in both "magic" and "philosophy" that made it possible, the Sar Torah stood together with the Neoplatonists, Manichaeans, and Jewish Christians as it did with the rabbis.