

James M. Robinson. *The Manichaean Codices of Medinet Madi*. Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2015. xv + 326 pages. ISBN: 978-0-2771-7504-0.

The basic details of the story of the Medinet Madi Manichaean books are fairly well known. Allegedly discovered in a decayed wooden box in the ruins of a house in the south of the Fayum, the seven Coptic papyrus codices appeared on the antiquities market in Egypt in 1929. They were divided up and sold, with the bulk of the material being purchased by Carl Schmidt and Chester Beatty. Most of the find, then, is now split between Berlin and Dublin, with a few leaves to be found in Warsaw and Vienna. The contents of the codices are as follows:

- A collection of Psalms (LDAB 107976)
- A collection of Mani's letters (LDAB 108139)
- A collection of homilies (LDAB 108112 + 108140)
- A book of Acts (LDAB 108138)
- Two volumes of dogmatic material (*Kephalaia*) (LDAB 107977 and LDAB 108111)
- A volume of commentary (*Synaxeis*) (LDAB 108137)

The codices' poor state of preservation challenged even the skills of the great Hugo Ibscher, who performed restoration work on the books in 1930s Berlin, but World War II and its aftermath left the codices geographically scattered and only partially conserved and published. The vicissitudes that the codices have endured since that time make for interesting reading, from the stray leaves that ended up in Warsaw because, according to one story, "someone found along the railroad tracks glassed papyrus leaves that had fallen out from the transport into the USSR" (135) to an ill-timed sneeze that completely obliterated a fragile leaf of one of the codices (156).

Robinson's book appears during a period of renewed interest in the Medinet Madi codices.¹ A project to edit and translate the *Kephalaia* codex in the Chester Beatty Library sponsored by the United States National Endowment for the Humanities and the Australian Research Council is presently underway, and an initial summary of the work so far undertaken has just appeared.² Now Robinson's volume makes more widely available a wealth of documenta-

¹ The book under review was first published as an imprint of Cascade Books in 2013 (ISBN 9781597528801).

² I. Gardner, J. BeDuhn, and P. Dille, *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings: Studies on the Chester Beatty Kephalaia Codex* (Leiden 2015). See especially, Gardner's opening contribution, "An Introduction to the Chester Beatty *Kephalaia* Codex," 1-12.

tion concerning the acquisition and early efforts at conservation and restoration of the codices in Dublin and Berlin as well as the difficulties that have attended various attempts to edit and publish the codices.

In recent years, Robinson has produced two other publications providing the records of his work in the 1970s and 1980s. They track the provenance of important discoveries of early Christian codices in Egypt, namely the Nag Hammadi codices and the Bodmer papyri.³ Like those publications, the book under review conveniently collects published reports and selected archival materials concerning the history of these books since their discovery. A good deal of what Robinson presents in this book is already available to those with access to research libraries. The first two chapters are previously published summaries of the results of Robinson's research in the 1980s.⁴ The chapters that follow repeat and considerably elaborate these summaries.

The book is divided into four parts. Part One, "The Acquisition and Initial Conservation and Editing" (49-144), begins with the purchases by Schmidt and Beatty. Robinson reproduces long excerpts from Schmidt's early publications on the discovery printed in twin columns with English translations.⁵ This information is supplemented with extended references to archival material in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin (much of which was also printed in Robinson's 1992 summary; see n. 4 above). Robinson then provides documentation of the conservation efforts of Hugo Ibscher, again consisting of long excerpts from (and English translations of) Ibscher's own writings paired with a later summary published by Hugo's son and successor Rolf Ibscher. Further archival correspondence from the Beatty Library illuminates the contentious process of attempting to edit the conserved leaves. Finally, Robinson draws together a number of sources to trace the tumultuous history of the codices during and after World War II.

³ J.M. Robinson, *The Story of the Bodmer Papyri: From the First Monastery's Library in Upper Egypt to Geneva and Dublin* (Eugene 2011) and J.M. Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Story* (2 vols.; Leiden 2014).

⁴ The first chapter is simply a very brief abstract published in the *Acts of the XVIII International Congress of Byzantine Studies*, available online at: http://www.tertullian.org/rpearse/manuscripts/medinet_madi.htm. The second chapter has been the standard reference for the story of the codices: J.M. Robinson, "The Fate of the Manichaean Codices of Medinet Madi: 1929-1989," in G. Wießner and H.-J. Klimkeit (eds.), *Studia Manichaica: II. Internationaler Kongreß zum Manichäismus* (Wiesbaden 1992) 19-62.

⁵ The primary source is C. Schmidt and H.J. Polotsky, "Ein Mani-Fund in Ägypten," in *Sitzungsberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, philosophisch-historische Klasse* (Berlin 1933) 4-90.

Part Two, "The Conservation by Rolf Ibscher" (145-188), provides excerpts, again with English translations, of published and unpublished accounts by the younger Ibscher of his efforts to conserve the codices both in Berlin and London in the 1950s. The procedures he describes (such as spraying the leaves with a solution of Zaponlack) are no longer considered best practices, as Robinson helpfully shows with the inclusion of extended quotations from the handbook of Michael Fackelmann.⁶

Parts Three and Four (189-311) consist of chapters of varying length dedicated to the various parts of the codices in Berlin and Dublin. There is a great deal of repetition here, both among these chapters and with the preceding material in the book. Part of this could have been alleviated by simply devoting a chapter to each codex rather than, for example, having a chapter on the leaves of the *Synaxeis* codex in Berlin (193-197) separated by ninety pages from a chapter on the portion of the *Synaxeis* held in Dublin (288-302). Despite this quirk, this section remains a useful summary of what is known about the individual books and what special problems attach to each of them. A short glossary of the scholars, collectors and dealers involved in the story brings the book to a close.

It is without question very convenient to have all this material gathered together in a single volume, and anglophones will be pleased to have an English version of the many excerpts of earlier scholarship. The translations are reliable, if a little wooden, sticking closely to the grammar and diction of the German. One wishes that Robinson's thorough knowledge of the scholarship on the codices had been carried forward beyond 1992, the latest publication date in the Bibliography that concludes the book (aside from Robinson's own Foreword to the 2005 reprint of Crum's Coptic dictionary). Robinson notes in the preface that he has left that task for "the next generation of scholarship." Thus, the book will not be the one-stop history of scholarship resource that it might have been. Nevertheless, it will be a key resource for the study of the Manichaean materials from Medinet Madi for the foreseeable future.

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⁶ M. Fackelmann, *Restaurierung von Papyrus und anderen Schriftträgern aus Ägypten* (Zutphen 1985).