

## Article

# Probing the Relationships Between Mandaeans (the Followers of John the Baptist), Early Christians, and Manichaeans

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**Abstract:** Mandaeism is the only ancient Gnostic religion surviving to the present day from antiquity. ‘Gnosticism’ was a block of creative religious activity mostly responding to the early Christian teachings in unusual ways of cosmicizing Jesus, and presenting a challenge to the ancient church fathers in the first-to-third centuries CE. Mandaeism, by comparison, has roots from John the Baptist rather than Jesus, although it is also important to recognize that this baptizing movement emerged in part as a survival of a very old indigenous ethno-religious grouping from Mesopotamia, its followers eventually settling in Mesopotamia’s middle and southern regions. Indeed, much of the Mandaeans’ thought and practice, especially their rituals of water ablution, have deep origins going back to Sumer, Akkad and Babylonia, reflecting regionally wide influences from right across the Fertile Crescent. Mandaean culture and the Mandaic Aramaic language was of high report in the so-called Patristic period covered by this Special Issue, even in the Arabian Peninsula up until the rise of Islam (634 CE onward), and Mandaeans were honored as a third “People of the Book”—the Sabians (*Ṣābe’un*; or *ṣobba* in modern Iraqi Arabic)—in the Qur’an (2:62; 5:69; 22:17); in the Muslim world, many Mandaic speakers switched language to colloquial Iraqi Arabic and (Arabicized) Persian. This article aims to raise some basic questions, relevant to Patristics, about aspects of relationships between Mandaeans and both early ‘mainstream’ Christians and the other large grouping, the Manichaeans. These questions *first* concern the common flight of the followers of John and Jesus just before the Roman siege and destruction of Jerusalem (66–70 CE) and the role of the woman Miriai; *second*, the extent to which John and his followers affected the direction of early Christianity, and the consequences this had for ‘Baptist’/Christian relationships into the Patristic period, with attention paid to Mandaean views of Jesus; *third*, the process of the formation of early Mandaeism as it combined Hellenistic-Palestinian and Mesopotamian elements; and *fourth*, the signs that the Mandaeans not only influenced Mesopotamian Christian baptismal sects but were crucial in the emergence Manichaeism (from the 230s CE in Persian-dominated Iraq). This article will finish by concentrating on Mandaean–Manichaean relations in the light of a little known and previously secret Mandaic text (*Diwan Razia*), best known as *Mani* or *Sidra d-Mani* within a larger collection of unnamed occult texts. On the basis of the Mandaeans’ texts, we maintain that both Jesus and Mani apparently left their fold in turn.



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<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.**Keywords:** Mandaeism; Gnosticism; Christianity; Patrology; Judaism; Manichaeism; Zarathustrianism; (Late) Antiquity; Mesopotamia; Elcesaites

## 1. Introductory Remarks

The performance of Mandaeans was exceptional in maintaining the only living Gnostic religion from antiquity. They are the last surviving representatives of Gnosticism today (Buckley 2010, p. 109). During the early centuries of Christian era, Mandaeism as both a

religion and group identity took a firm shape, and was a vital presence in the Mesopotamian region until the Arab-Muslim conquests and the collapse of the Sasanian Empire in the seventh century (633–638 CE).

According to rich archaeological, religious, and cultural discoveries from Mesopotamian cities during late antique times, Mandaeanism was very active in many places there, especially in remnant settlements of the great Sumerian, Akkadian, and Babylonian centers, but also in areas stretching down and southwards to the top of the Persian Gulf. Mandaic texts inscribed upon curled-up lead rolls and especially Mandaean incantation bowls and lead amulets have been found in large numbers at many important sites such as Abu Shahrain (formerly Eridu), Warka (Uruk), Tell Uheimir and Ingharra (Kish), Afak (Nippur/Nuffar), Tell al-Hiba (Lagash), Telloh (Girsu), Tell Jokha (Umma), Tell al-Muqayyar (Hamazi and Ur), etc. These settlements are all on the Euphrates–Tigris alluvial plain, south of Baghdad in cities of which are still called the Bābil (Babylon), Wāsiṭ, Dhi Qar/Nasriah (including Ur), Maysan (including Ṭib), Al-Muthannā/Semawah, Al-Qādisiyyah, and Basrah (including Qurnah), all now governorates of Iraq, even areas extending to ancient Iranian Ctesiphon (home to the great Sasanian palace of Taq-i Kisra) (see [Segal and Hunter 2000](#); [Müller-Kessler 2010](#), esp. pp. 454–70; [Häberl 2018](#), esp. pp. 75–79, with the information above also from community and private sources). The bowls and amulets used for incantations have become for researchers today particularly important cultural indicators (along with such objects from other traditions). Crossing religious boundaries and offering a tangible connection to their spiritual worldview, these magical items (and the texts and symbols on them) provide important insights into the mystical beliefs and spiritual practices of late antique Mesopotamian societies. The daily beliefs of the Mandaeans, Manichaeans, Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians, and pagan populations, which were expressed side-by-side and competed peacefully in many of the above-named locations prior to the Muslim conquest, can be studied from these valuable, if often fragmented sources ([Moriggi 2014](#)). And at that time, Mandaeans carefully maintained their rich heritage of philosophy, literature, art, communal life, and festivals ([Nasoraia 2022](#), e.g., pp. 1–12, 20–28).

Various ideas that we now associate with the Mandaeans were already present in diverse Aramaic-speaking groups in Mesopotamia, as has been highlighted in the recent study of the Mandaean religion by Ionuṭ [Băncilă \(2018\)](#). His book shows Mandaeanism to be a Gnostic religion that “reflected, recorded, evaluated and thus transformed various religious traditions of different identities”, and he has asked, most significantly, “whether traces of ‘Mandaic thoughts’ can be found in Manichaeism, the second major Gnostic religion in the region”, and whether the Manichaeism–Mandaeanism relationships were subject to the cultural tendencies in different epochs and relative geographical proximities ([Băncilă 2018](#), pp. 83–231).

As a complex phenomenon by the time of its eventual crystallization from the late first to third centuries CE, the Mandaean religion was producing (probably in some cases reproducing) a rich body of influential sacred writings (including magical texts and its wisdom literature) ([Drower 1937](#), pp. 20–29; [Macuch 1976](#); [Segelberg et al. 1990](#); [Rudolph 1996](#), pp. 339–41; [Deutsch 2003](#); [Nasoraia 2024](#), pp. 8–37). The texts preserved a significant amount of information as to its involvement with strands of Hellenistic and Jewish thought in the Levant and Alexandria (on the western side) and of Mesopotamian (and post-Seleucid part-Hellenized) cultures (to the east). Mandaeanism, unique to the Mandaeans and a group designating as ‘Naṣoraean’ (see below), is based on an intricate understanding of the nature of God, and the origin of life, light, water, and the universe, and of the origin of evil, matter, and death. Woven together with other mystical insights, Mandaean deep knowledge (or Gnosis) of cosmic formation and struggle is documented in an exceptional metaphorical language, terminology, and symbolism, expressed in ‘esoterizing’

spiritual wisdom, doctrines, artworks, and practices that have diverse roots in ancient Mesopotamian, Persian, and Gnostic worldviews.

The substantial corpus of Mandaean–Naṣōraean literature embraces a wide range of topics covering the religion’s cosmology, life and death, ritual (mainly baptismal) practice, special beliefs, and forms of worship. Mandaean see themselves as the divinely directed universal healers of the “Worlds and Generations” (*Almia u-Daria*), and unique practitioners of the religion of Mind (*Mana*), Light (*Nhura*), Truth (*Kuṣṭa*), Love (*Rahma/Ruhma*), and Enlightenment or Knowledge (*Manda*) (Nasoraia 2012, p. 28). The majority of Mandaic writings are pre-Islamic and also, we would argue, pre-Manichaeic, including almost all parts of the three major sacred books of Mandaean, which are as follows:

- (i) *Ginza Rba-Sidra d-Adam* (the Great Treasure, the Book of Adam) (hereafter GR);<sup>1</sup>
- (ii) *Qulasta* (the Mandaean Canonical Prayer Book). (ed. and trans. Drower) (hereafter CP);
- (iii) *Draṣia d-Yahia* (the Teachings/Book of John the Baptist), also called *Draṣia d-Malkia* (Teachings of Kings/Angels) (ed. and trans. by Lidzbarski [hereafter JB] and most recently by Häberl and McGrath). Cf. also (Nöldeke 1875; Macuch 1965a; Buckley 2010; with Säve-Söderbergh 1949, pp. 128, 137–54, 156–62)).

It is conceivable that the oldest sections in these works were composed at least several centuries before their actual final redaction, a fact inducing wild speculations concerning the first appearance of the Mandaean, whether from as far back as some centuries BCE to as late as the sixth century CE (Müller-Kessler 2004, p. 53; Al-Zuhairy 1998; Al Majidi 2014). The dating issue has been connected to the question of *pre-Christian* Gnosticism, because although most extant Gnostic reflect early Christian influences, some do not. Pre-Christian Jewish mystical insights (*merhabah*) are a case in point, because they look Gnostic (Macuch 1976; Drower 1960, e.g., pp. 14–17; Scholem 1965, pp. 4–5; Deutsch 1995, e.g., pp. 24–26, 43–46, 88–99, 119–27 [for some parallels]; 1999; 1999–2000). In this light, specialist Charles Häberl (2015, p. 297, with n. 1) has emphasized the need for persistent and open research:

As the only surviving Gnostic religion from Late Antiquity, Mandaeanism is unique among the religions of the world, and the sole surviving inheritor to one of the world’s most widespread and influential religious traditions. Its sacred texts and liturgy are recorded in a dialect of Aramaic, and comprises one of that language’s largest corpora. Its adherents have preserved both spoken and written forms of their language, as well as a complex body of rituals and a developed commentarial tradition. Despite all this, the history of scholarship on the Mandaean is one of fits and starts, separated by long periods of virtual inactivity, and many important questions about their religion remain unanswered, including the precise nature of its relationship to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

As the leading Mandaean academic today, along with other researchers, including Jorunn Buckley (esp. 2010), whom Häberl acknowledges for providing “a useful synthesis of recent scholarly activity” on the subject, it has been long-term purpose of this author to provide combined in-house and critical scholarly expositions for a wider audience’s better understanding of Mandaeanism as a ‘world religion’, with intricate, discernable connections to traditions surrounding it (Nasoraia 2022).

Traditionally, the Mandaean have always conceived their manner of life to necessitate dwelling on the banks of the rivers and wellsprings, especially the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers (flowing out of highland Turkey/Kurdistan through Iraq), the Karun (of Iran), and the Jordan (descending in the Levant from Lebanon and Syria, and flowing between Israel/Palestine and the state of Jordan). A well-known social fixture in the Fertile Crescent for the last two millennia, the Mandaean have needed to live close to the fresh running

water where they can perform their daily baptismal sacraments, which have implications for every little feature of their lives (Drower 1937, e.g., pp. 1–73, 100–45; Drower 1938–1939, pp. 435–47; Segelberg 1958, pp. 154–58; Rudolph 1965, pp. 105–7, 364–70). This is why certain scholars such as Buckley (2005, pp. 94–109, esp. pp. 94–96) support the idea that the Mandaeans are descended from the first disciples of John the Baptist (given the historical narration of the significant Mandaean–Naṣōraean scroll *Har[r]an Gauaita/Gawait[h]a*) (hereafter HG) ed. Drower [Bibl. Apost. Vat.], pp. 11–12, 14; with ed. Burtea [*Mand. Forsch.* 17, and in Deegan 2020), and propose that studying Mandaean literature would aid in both (i) the study of the historical John the Baptist and Jesus and (ii) reconstructing the works of John’s and Jesus’s early disciples (cf. Buckley 2002, e.g., iv, 24–25; 2005, pp. 94–95, 108–9; McGrath 2024). Italian expert Edmondo Lupieri basically concurs, asserting that

The possible historical connection with John the Baptist, as seen in the newly translated Mandaean texts, convinced many (notably R[udolf] Bultmann) that it was possible, through the Mandaean traditions, to shed some new light on the history of John and on the origins of Christianity. This brought around a revival of the otherwise almost fully abandoned idea of their Palestinian origins. As the archeological discovery of Mandaean incantation bowls and lead amulets proved a pre-Islamic Mandaean presence in the southern Mesopotamia, scholars were obliged to hypothesize otherwise unknown persecutions by Jews or by Christians to explain the reason for Mandaeans’ departure from Palestine. (Lupieri 2008)

These connections made to John the Baptist’s disciples are hardly unexpected. Remember that when they were ‘discovered’ by European Christian missionaries in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Mandaeans were well accepted, not considered heretics, and called the “Christians of St John”. The missionaries thought that they were the unequivocal survivors of the Baptist’s disciples, the “Followers of John” mentioned in the New Testament, as in Acts 18:24–27. And this welcoming was because they were frequently practicing unique forms of baptism, held a high regard for St John the Baptist, and were neither Protestants nor Catholics (Burkitt 1928, p. 225; Crehan 1968, pp. 623–26;<sup>2</sup> Lupieri [1993] 2002, esp. pp. 61–127).

Ongoing debates over the matter of the Mandaeans’ history and their original homeland, admittedly, will always have to account for them as valuable surviving and living sources of information as preservers of various Mesopotamian cultural heritages (Sumerian, Akkadian, Assyrian, and especially Babylonian (e.g., Häberl 2012; Al Majidi 2014; Nasoraia 2024). In their daily contact with autochthonous cultures surviving the aftermath of empires, the Mandaeans absorbed a good deal that was left over from persisting local lore, as revealed by the rich and large collections of Mandaean magical texts uncovered from the major cities once homes of old civilizations. Christa Müller-Kessler nicely summarizes the importance of Mandaeans transmitting ancient knowledge from around Babylon, the custodians of which, one tends to forget, were still trying to assert themselves during the Medo-Persian periods (e.g., Grayson 1980, p. 184):

The Mandaeans took up and transmitted knowledge which was still around when the last temples in the Central Babylonian triangle Babylon, Borsippa and Kutha were still functioning. The Pir Nukraya archive of which I selected a few passages for the Mesopotamian magic volume contains two similar demon lists with an account of mostly former demonized deities of Babylonian or Iranian provenances. . . Even a small corpus of magic texts in Aramaic square script on bowls drew their texts from Mandaic *Vorlagen*, which means that the Mandaic texts must have been finalized at the end of the Parthian Period [ca. 200s CE]. . . It seems that the Mandaean magic text corpus brings us nearer to the solving of the

origin of the Mandaeans. Apart from the Mandaeans' awareness of Babylonian magic and astronomy, their Aramaic idiom can only have developed in Central Babylonia. . . . Finally, one can now state that the Mandaeans recruited from an Aramaic population in Babylonia and therefore, could transmit information for which we still have gaps in the Late Babylonian cuneiform sources. With the help of the editions of new text material from both language areas we shall be able to close these gaps in the near future and prove far more satisfactorily the question of the Mandaeans' *Heimat*. (Müller-Kessler 2004, p. 60)

Still, what of John the Baptist? Where does he fit into all this? For he definitely has to be taken into account as a figure looming large in Mandaean texts and thought, along with early Baptist/Christian relations drawing our attention in this paper. We should start in a recognizable context, New Testament times, when Jesus and John the Baptist had their earliest dealings with each other, with Christian and Mandaean accounts sometimes complementary and sometimes divergent (Nasoraia 2004a; Mead 1924, e.g., pp. 26, 48–51, 59, 81–85, 105–10, 120–27; Jonas 1958, e.g., pp. 39, 68–73). What is of first importance for this paper is that for both groups, kernels of their followings fled from Jerusalem and the central Palestinian area at the time of the Jewish War, when the Romans reinvaded Judaea and eventually laid siege to the fortifications of Jerusalem city and its Temple. Interestingly, the Followers of John were given succor by an influential woman called Mary.

## 2. Remarks on the Flight of Christians and Mandaeans from Roman Invasion, Jewish Persecution, and on the Role of Miriai

Traditionally, the Christians escaped to Pella (now in northern Jordan) (Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 3.5.3), while the Mandaeans have their own story of receiving succor from much further afield. Interestingly, Lupieri had already addressed the comparative flight of the two groups by suggesting that

Mandaeanism has aligned itself with those religions that allocate a flight to their beginnings, following upon a persecution. In backgrounds linked to Judaism, this flight or original migration is characterized by a flight from Jerusalem before its destruction, which is then explained as a divine punishment. The motif is well represented in Judaic traditions—for example, in the so-called “Second Book of Baruch”—but it is above all in Christian or post-Christian traditions where it has found the most ample scope for its development. Already in the Synoptic Gospels there is Jesus' exhortation to flee to the hills [e.g., Mark 13:14], leaving Jerusalem and Judaea to their destiny of death but most important of all was the legend of a flight of the entire Christian community in Jerusalem from the Judaic capital to Pella, a pagan city beyond the Jordan, shortly before the arrival of the Romans. (Lupieri [1993] 2002, p. 160, with ns. 52–55)

Lupieri tests the Patristic evidence for the Christians' flight to Pella of Peraea by tracing “the most ancient literary evidence” for it back to a certain Ariston, bishop and chronicler at Pella in the second century (though this can only be a rather unsafe inference from Eusebius's *Historia Ecclesiastica* IV, vi, 3). This location detail, according to Lupieri, was then “picked up by the ecclesiastical heresiologists and historians of the following centuries” (see Epiphanius [360s], *Panarion* 29.3.7–8; 30.2.7; *De mensuris et pondibus* 15; and Eusebius [310s], *Hist. eccles.* III, v, 3). Lupieri has come to nurture suspicions about whether the flight of the Jerusalem Christians actually happened:

It was considered to be either true or realistic until only a few years ago, when strong doubts began to be raised in the criticism, whether because there was no corroborating evidence from other sources (Flavius Josephus says nothing

about it) or perhaps primarily because Pella was laid waste by the Jewish rebels, because it was a pagan city, at the beginning of the rebellion. It is therefore not easy to determine to where the Christians could have fled. (Lupieri [1993] 2002, p. 161)

But of course, various villages surrounded Pella, and the area of Peraea (part of the ancient eastern side of the Jordan River valley) was in fairly isolated hill country as a potentially good haven (Van Houwelingen 2003). There is also more recent textual information to light that another group, the followers of James, ‘brother’ of Jesus, were able to escape northward, perhaps to move as far as Edessa, helped by “a son of Levi” ([*First*] *Apocalypse of James* (esp. the version in Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 5333 [Leaf G]; see Kim’s chapter in this volume).

As for the Mandaeans, in their tradition, their flight and escape were through a (Mandaean or Jewish!) princess named Miriai (pron. Meryey, the name perhaps being a hypocoristic form of Mariam/Miriam [= the English (Christian) name ‘Mary’], which comes from the Greek *Μαρία/Μαριάμ*] (Drower and Macuch 1963 (hereafter MD), pp. 254a, 270a; JB ii. xx, 71 f., 123; yet cf. Deutsch 1999–2000, pp. 10–12). The name Miriam is a “diminutive form of the common Hebrew name Miryām (Häberl 2021, p. 66 and n. 6). It is with Miriai personal connections of influence, Mandaean–Naṣōraeans were led to “Inner Harran”, apparently in and around the Jewish-saturated enclave called Adiabene,<sup>3</sup> even further north, close to the southeastern borders of Armenia (if we can infer this from the Mandaean sacred and historical text HG, p. 10; cf. Gündüz 1994, p. 124).

The Mandaean records attest that the Mandaean–Naṣōraeans were already living around Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley in the first century BCE (e.g., HG, pp. 1–9; JB; Buckley 2005, 2010). Miriai emerges as a significant figure for the Mandaeans during the time of John (the Baptist), even from as early as the last quarter of the first century BCE. She became even more important and an eminent symbol of the Mandaeans, especially after his death: we read in JB 80:13–14 that when John spoke about his departure (i.e., death), two women were listening to him, and when “When John said so, two women cried: Miriai and ‘Nišbai (Elizabeth). . .”.

The prominent religious and social statues of Miriai, especially her apparent conversion from Judaism to Mandaism or rather to Naṣōraeanism/Naṣōraeism, perhaps inflamed Jewish reactions that affected the existence of the Mandaean–Naṣōraeans in the West. Miriai is also a significant figure in the secret Mandaean–Naṣōraean tradition. She lived during the same period as Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, but she was younger. Her “conversion” remains controversial, especially among Mandaeans, with some asserting that she has a long Mandaean–Naṣōraean lineage and never really converted from Judaism at all. In any case, the texts about the elevation of her status in the Mandaean–Naṣōraean community suggest it provoked very adverse Jewish reactions,, threatening the very existence of the Mandaean–Naṣōraeans in the West. Severe persecution by the Jewish authorities is recorded in HG (p. 8), which goes so far as to allege that 60 years after the departure of John from his body, the children of Israel then “shed their blood so that not a man of the disciples and Naṣōraeans were left”. This included the killing of 360 priests, yet the Mandaean tradition has it a little over the same number escaped of others in the hundreds. When “forgiveness of sins” (or humble recognition) is prayed for “those three hundred and sixty-five priests who went forth from the district of Jerusalem the city” (GY 332:5, 1. 6; CP No. 170; p. 152; cf. DC 34. 82 [mistakenly translated in MD, p. 131b as only 360], the implication is that over half were able to depart, with Drower (1953, p. 44. n. 1) asserting that the escape refers “to the traditional exodus of the Jewish Mandaean community from Palestine”, and the notable flight of most Mandaean–Naṣōraeans from the Levant. These incidents took place probably shortly after the death of John, who died in

the age of 64 years, according to the Mandaean records (of GY; JB; HG), not by beheading under the Herodians (as most vividly in Mark 6:14–29) (cf. McGrath 2024). If these records are correct, then the migration and re-location of the Mandaean(–Naṣōraean)s from that region probably took place at some point before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish Temple by the Romans 70 CE.

The record of HG provides important details about escaping and taking refuge in *Madai* (prob. Media), running away from all evil forces (referring to the Jews and their allies, who were strongly rejected from thereon). The text of HG, p. 5 [lines 21–22], refers to *madai d-ruha ušuba bna 'Ih lamšun* (“Media which Ruha (the evil Spirit/Queen of Darkness) and her Seven sons could not reach”); cf. MD, p. 239a]. This Mandaean tradition holds that there was (i) the migration of (around 60,000) (Mandaean) Naṣōraeans, who moved far away to a safe area, where in their picturing of things large numbers of other Naṣōraeans subsisted beforehand, at so-called *Ṭura d-Madai* or *Midai* (the Mountain(s) of the Medes/Median Mountain(s) or the “Mountain of the Madaeans” (!) (e.g., HG, pp. 3–7). This area was not under the control of the Romans or Jewish influence, but most probably under the rule of the Parthians;<sup>4</sup> (ii) then, they moved towards the (Inner) Harran (*Haran Gawaita*) and later to other Mesopotamian territories, where according to tradition, they eventually united with other Madaeans who seem to have been one of the indigenous people of the lower Tigris–Euphrates region from a long time before. These Mesopotamian Madaeans seemed to enjoy some kind of safety and prosperity under Parthian rule (Nasoraia 2022, p. 55, cf. Deegan 2020, e.g., pp. 198–221 and ns. 784–895); (iii) protection was granted to this migration by the Parthian king Artabanus (probably the II (ca 12–38 or 40) or perhaps the III); (iv) punishment by Life (through the angel *Anuš 'Utra*) was given to the Jews, which extended to destruction of Jerusalem and their Temple; (v) there was an indirect involvement of the Naṣōraeans, especially the seven leaders or *Riš-Amas* (Heads of the [Mandaean] Nation at that time) in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple; and (vi) and there was a settlement of Naṣōraean in seven episodes (HG, pp. 1–2).

Drower (1960, p. xi) speculated in this regard that

...it might well follow that after the destruction of Jerusalem, when Jewish Christians for the most part settled in East Jordan, our Naṣōraeans, hating, and hated by, both Jew and Jewish-Christians, would naturally seek harbor in the friendlier atmosphere of Parthia and the Median Hills exactly as the *Haran Gawaita* relates, and, according to that manuscript, a number of them migrated later under Parthian protection into Babylonia and Khuzistan. Did they find in the well-watered marsh districts there a baptizing gnostic sect like-or affiliated to-their own? It might explain much, but here I can only refer the reader to Chapter 10 of this book. [Drower 1960, pp. 88–106]

Referring to that chapter, Lady Drower goes on (Drower 1960, p. xiii)

the Naṣōraean fled from persecution in Jerusalem and sought refuge in the Median Hills (*Ṭura d-Madai*) and in *Haran Gawaita*, which I take to mean the city of Harran. Their persecutors were punished by the destruction of Jerusalem, which would place the flight before A.D. 70. In ‘Haran’ they found co-religionists and eventually migrated under a friendly Parthian king, Ardaban (Artabanus), to Lower Mesopotamia where they established headquarters at a place called *Ṭib* between *Waṣiṭ* and Khuzistan.

Whatever the case may be, Miriai seems to play an important role in saving and leading the Mandaean–Naṣōraean, first to a (temporary) secure and naturally protected place, and then to freedom far “northwards”. According to the Mandaean sources, that place was in a mountainous area, varying in width and located (in we may call the Armenian Highlands

of southeastern Turkey) “at the mouth/headwaters of the Euphrates River”, a place from which the Mandaean–Naṣōraean later continued their migration further eastward within the Adiabene-Parthian zone in down towards the Inner Haran (the place where HG was apparently written by the Naṣōraeans) to join other Mandaeans (or peoples readily take that identity) in northern Mesopotamia. To illustrate this, and in addition to HG, we may look for more details found in two others important Mandaean sacred books. We find Miriai attached to this unique process in some interesting Mandaic hymns recorded in CP No. 149 [pp. 129–30] and No. 162 [pp. 140–41], and in JB, one in sect. 34 (“I am Miriai, the daughter of Babylon’s Kings, daughter of mighty rulers of Jerusalem” [cf. JB [ch.] 34 [also, Häberl/McGrath, pp. 100–3]), and the other in the large section 35 (“I am Miriai, a Vine, a [Naṣōraean sacred] Tree standing at the Mouth of the Euphrates” [cf. JB [ch.] 35 [also, Häberl/McGrath, pp. 104–13]). In that latter section, we read that Miriai with Mandaeans had already gone far northwards and reached a sacred land among the mountains, with plentiful of pure waters. That land lay near the source(s) of Euphrates (Upper Mesopotamia) (lit. “standing [for them and teaching them] at the mouth/source of Euphrates River” [*d-qaiim lpum prat*]), and seemingly well after the escape from Judaea (cf. [Drower 1937](#), pp. 282–88).

As already noted in parenthesis, Miriai’s association with some important Christian figures has also been proposed. Perhaps it does not a surprise that some scholars have decided princess Miriai was none other than Mary, the Mother of Jesus, especially because Miriai or Mary was at one point referred to as the mother of *Mšiha* (‘Messiah’) (HG, p. 3) (cf. [Luttikhuisen 2006](#), pp. 179–84), and at others her name was confused with hers (JB II: xx, 71–2, 123; [Lidzbarski 1920](#), p. 282 (with *Ginza*, p. 341 n. 2); cf. [Pallis 1926](#), p. 97).<sup>5</sup>

Polish philologist Mark Lidzbarski, working early in the twentieth century but without a copy of the narration in HG, concluded that Miriam was the mother of Jesus in the Mandaean texts he edited, and was for him the heroine in legends about “the transplantation of the Mandaean religion from Jerusalem to Babylonia” (*Ginza*, p. x). In this most sacred text, the GR (GY XV: [11], 166, 167, 171, and 173), the guardian angel Anuš ‘Utra heals Miriai of the effects of her past inheritance, and she is represented as *Miriai Šalmanita* “Miriai, the righteous or perfect (Naṣōraean-Mandaean woman)” (JB 198, [lin.] 5, (Häberl/McGrath edn. 54:14, p. 245); cf. GY 332 [lin. 5]) and the Angel (i.e., ‘Utra or Anuš ‘Utra) supports, baptizes and heals her.

Some interpretations suggest that Miriai may reflect a reimagined version of Mary, due to the phonetic similarity of their names and the connection with the angels. However, Mandaean texts avoid direct association with Jesus, often criticizing him, thereby complicating this hypothesis. Some scholars have compared Miriai to figures such as Mary (mother of Jesus) or Mary Magdalene, citing phonetic similarities and shared themes of enlightenment. However, Mandaeans emphasize her distinct identity, firmly rooting her in Mandaean cosmology. She was illustrated as a priestly figure who moved away far from Jerusalem and relocated “by the Euphrates, seated on a throne, with a white banner [*Drabša*] over her and a scroll on her lap, as she holds a [priestly] staff [*Margna*] and wears a girdle [*Himiana*]. She is thus at once a royal, a priest, and teacher, preaching to and commanding the attention of even the fishes and the birds” (JB [Häberl/McGrath edn., pp. 386–87]). In JB 35 Miriai recites and sings the hymn of life, unlike the adulterated words of the others. This explicitly contrasts Miriai’s purity with perceived distortions in Christian teachings. About the story of Miriai in JB 34, Häberl and McGrath provide commentary that “while there is no reason to think that the precise details of this story necessarily reflect an historical event, it is not impossible that the conversion of a young women to Mandaism, who at some point returned home late from one of their gatherings, could have led to tensions and persecutions at some point in Mandaean history” (p. 386).



As one of the Naṣōraean-Mandaean disciples of John the Baptist, Miriai in other places appears with two other disciples, Yaqip and Bnia-Amin (Jacob and Benjamin) (e.g., JB ch. 54, cf. *Ginza*, p. 341). She initiated them and the three played an important role in initiating the 365 *Tarmidas* (disciples/priests) who arose in Jerusalem and later “went forth from the district of Jerusalem the city” (e.g., CP No. 170; p. 152) (cf. Häberl 2021, e.g., pp. 76–85; Deegan 2020, p. 35 n. 1006; see also the Mandaean *Book of John* [JB], sects. 34–35 [Lidzbarski, pp. 126–38; Häberl/McGrath, pp. 384–87]). It is significant that references to Jacob and Benjamin, and also “the 365 disciples”, are more decidedly associated with Miriai than John (cf. HG p. 4; with Häberl 2021, pp. 76–85, esp. pp. 76–77). How Mary becomes involved in Mandaean–Naṣōraean tradition, then, and also how this reflects on John/Jesus relationships, presents quite a puzzle, which needs solving.

The issues involved in untangling the Miriai traditions have been explored more recently by Jorunn Buckley (1993). According to her, Miriai is indeed the mother of Jesus, and the Mandaeans consider Miriai a convert from Judaism to Mandaism, although her son is considered to be a false prophet (*Nbiha Kadaba*) (Buckley 2002, pp. 49–56). Buckley maintains the following:

To my knowledge, Mandaism has no tradition in which John the Baptist appears as a proto-convert, like Miriai does. John, simply, is the chief Mandaean prophet, belonging to a prophetic tradition extending back to Adam, according to the Mandaean view. Carrying on the eternal message of the Great Life, John springs up as a timely counter messenger to the Jewish religion. Nowhere does he baptize Miriai, though he reluctantly baptizes Jesus, who is on his way out of Mandaism, in contrast to Miriai, who is entering it. If Miriai is baptized at all, it is by an ‘utra, the object of her love, not by a human being. One might have expected a closer connection between John and Miriai, but the two seem to belong to independent traditions, even though they occasionally appear together, as in GR 15, 11. Perhaps the Mandaean adoption of Miriai while denigrating her son reflects a historical development out of Judaism. From the Mandaean viewpoint, Jesus was wrong, an apostate from the true religion, but his mother is a Mandaean heroine. Miriai stands on her own, and her connections are all laudable. (Buckley 2002, p. 55)

Although Buckley investigated the significance of Miriai within Mandaism and the roles attributed to her, the identification of Miriai as “the mother of Mšīha” in HG remains ambiguous. This unexplained designation poses a challenging dilemma, leaving the issue unresolved and open to further interpretation (Buckley 2002, p. 49). Buckley has sought to provide an alternative perspective, pondering whether Miriai’s presence might hint at brief early interactions between Mandaeans and Christians, although this remains speculative.

In Mandaean literature, Miriai is consistently depicted as a positive figure, embodying ideals of spiritual enlightenment and alignment with divine truth. “She was born in Light” and “upheld the truth of the Great Life”, and “turning from no path to enter its gates”. From Miriai’s “lips came hymns of life”, and “her feet tread the path of the ‘Uthras”. Unlike other figures who are sometimes associated with Jesus, Miriai’s narrative remains distinct and free from such connections, reflecting her central role in Mandaean–Naṣōraean thought (Deegan 2020, p. 35, notes 1002–1005). By contrast, ‘Mary (Miriam or Mary of Nazareth) as ‘the mother of [the] Mšīha’ (a figure ironically indicating Jesus in Mandaean–Naṣōraean tradition), holds a more ambiguous position. Early portrayals of her unusual maternity were initially neutral, but grew increasingly critical as Mandaean traditions developed. The suggestion in HG that Miriai, or “Meryey”, might be identified as the mother of Mšīha is likely the result of “editorial confusion” (Deegan 2020, p. 35, note 1004). This interpretation aligns with observations in JB (Häberl/McGrath, p. 384, n. 124), where

distinctions between these figures are maintained to reinforce Miriai's unambiguously positive role. The shifting portrayal of Miriam versus the enduring reverence for Miriai highlights evolving theological and polemical currents within Mandaean tradition.

Mandaeans reject Miriam. She is identified in the New Testament and in the Quran as the "mother" of Jesus and as a "Virgin" mother through divine intervention. She holds significance holds a singularly exalted place in across multiple traditions. In the Hebrew Bible, she is the sister of Moses (Ar. Mūsā [ibn (son of) 'Imrān, موسى ابن عمران]) and Aaron (Ar. Hārūn [ibn 'Imrān, هارون ابن عمران]) (Exodus 15:20–21), and in Islamic tradition called Maryam bint 'Imrān (مَرْيَمُ بِنْتُ إِيمْرَانَ, i.e., Mary the mother of Jesus) (cf. MD 224a, 270a), as referenced in the Qur'ān (e.g., in 3:42–47; 4:157, 5, 19, 21, 23, 66). However, in Mandaean–Naṣōraean literature, Miriai is a separate figure and is not acknowledged as the mother of the Messiah or Jesus. This association occurs in the form of Miriam with soul exception only one time in HG 3 (Buckley 1993, p. 194; Zinner 2019, p. 86). In Ginza Yamina (GY) 18: [lin.] 3 recorded that 400 years after the Mandaean exodus from Egypt, Jesus ('Šu) was born—specifically not in Jerusalem (Deegan 2020, p. 35 and ns.). In JB 34 [Häberl/McGrath]: pp. 164–81 [with n. 1 and; comm. pp. 384–87]) Miriai

speaks in the first person, informing us of her ancestry as a daughter of the kings of Babylon and the rulers of Jerusalem. She is raised by unnamed priests in the Temple, which she characterizes in the most negative terms, calling it a "disturbed house", in which there is "no stability, no support for the poor, and no refreshment for tortured souls", and within which she sweeps and washes. Her parents leave her at home when they go to worship, warning her not to go out and to lock the doors behind them, lest the "sun[light] of my lord" fall upon her, possibly reflecting their identification of Adunāy, the God of the Jews, with Šāmeš, the sun. (Häberl 2021, p. 72 [and n. 23])

After encountering Mandaean–Naṣōraeanism, she renounces Judaism, cutting off her strong links to the "Kings of Babylon and the rulers of Jerusalem", enduring persecution and punishment from her father and her community. Her steadfast faith is rewarded when the Eagle (*Anuš 'Utra*) destroys Jerusalem's Jewish oppressors and elevates Miriai instead, allowing her to safeguard the Mandaeans. Similarly, in the CP Nos. 149, 162, Miriai is portrayed as a young woman who transforms to Mandaean–Naṣōraeanism despite strong familial and communal opposition (cf. JB, Chapters 34–35; Deegan 2020, pp. 35–36, ns. 1008–12; Häberl 2021; Buckley 1993).

These portrayals reflect an early Palestinian tradition, while her connection to the Kings of Babylon suggests the influence of historical migrations. The narrative may symbolize the experiences of Mandaean–Naṣōraeans fleeing Jerusalem and finding refuge in Mesopotamia, a theme analysed by scholars such as Rudolph (1996, pp. 401–5), Buckley (1993, pp. 181–96); Lupieri (Lupieri [1993] 2002, e.g., 151–53); McGrath (2010, 2021, 2024); and Häberl (2021).

Miriai's narrative underscores her theological significance as a figure of resilience and divine alignment, firmly rooted in Mandaean–Naṣōraean cosmology and polemics. Her portrayal is frequently interpreted as part of an anti-Jewish polemic, reflecting ongoing historical tensions between the Mandaeans and neighbouring Jewish communities. Through an allegorical critique of Judaism's perceived legalism and materialism, Miriai's story serves to affirm Mandaean spiritual ideals and esoteric cosmology. Scholars contend that her narrative encapsulates the Mandaean–Naṣōraeans' repudiation of external religious systems while emphasizing their unique theological identity and self-perception as a unique community aligned with the Lightworld.

### 3. Queries Concerning the Extent to Which John and His Followers Conditioned the Direction of Early Christianity, and How This Apparently Affected ‘Baptist’/Christian Relationships into the So-Called Patristic Period

It is worth drawing attention at this point to Theodore Bar Konai (Syriac: ܬܘܪܘܬܐ ܒܪ ܕܩܘܢܐܝ), a well-known ancient Syriac defender and exegete of the Church of the East, who became very active at the end of the eighth century. In his *Book of the Scholion* (*Ktābā d-eskoliyon*) (ca 792–810) (ed. Scher), ch. 11, Bar Konai provided information about the Mandaeans and their religion, including some quotations from their literature. He speaks also about a beggar called Ado from Adiabene as the founder of the Mandaean religion, and that his teaching was derived from the Marcionites and the Manichaeans (see Baum and Winkler 2003, p. 63). Crawford Burkitt (1928, p. 102), a well-known inter-war Patristic scholar of Syriac Christianity and Manichaeism, used Bar Konai’s representation of the Mandaeans, which was really rather a polemical one, as sound evidence for the origins of their teachings and literature. “We have now”, he maintained,

an account of the Mandaeans by an ancient Mesopotamian writer, writing in the year A.D. 792. He tells us that their founder was a certain Ado, a mendicant, who came from Adiabene, i.e., from the district just north of Mosul. He further tells us that his teaching was derived from the Marcionites, from the Manichaeans . . . There is no reason to reject the evidence of Theodore. . .

It is important, however, to re-consider how much his evidence amounts to. First, he leaves out of consideration here the figure of John the Baptist. Second, he rushes in and accepts that the Mandaeans *derive* from heresies in classic Patristic times. Burkitt felt assured that

The Mandaeans, then, rejected the Christ of the Catholic Church, born of a woman and crucified, but they accepted the Stranger who appeared in Jerusalem in the days of Pilate, who healed the sick and taught the true and life-giving doctrine, and who ascended in due course when his work was done to his own place in the world of Light. This Personage is called the Stranger, but he is no stranger to the modern student of Christian antiquity: it is clearly the Manichaean Jesus, a personage adopted by Mani from the Jesus of Marcion. (Burkitt 1928, p. 231)

Furthermore, in his *Church and Gnosis* (Burkitt 1932, pp. 92–122), Burkitt treated the Mandaeans as Christian ‘heretics’ (those of ‘another opinion’) who were acquainted with the Syriac Peshitta (the standard Syriac version of the Bible by the early fifth century) and that had affinities with two other heresies of Marcionism and Manichaeism. But these conclusions, or the way he arrived at them, by now look wrongheaded. Mandaean specialist Lady Ethel Drower, writing from the 1930s on, thought Bar Konai “repeats a foolish story” and that “the absurdities of the tale are self-evident”, although she conceded that the Syrian Church Father apparently did look at some Mandaean literature (Drower 1953, p. x). In any case, Jesus was not called the Stranger in Manichaeism, but rather Mani was; and in Marcion’s thinking (*flor.* 150s), the true God is the one who is the Stranger, even though Jesus is his Son (e.g., Franzmann 2003; Henrichs 1973, pp. 33, 38). The Mandaeans’ literature does commonly refer to God (*Hiia*) or to (*Manda d-Hiia*) as the Stranger/Strange (Mandaic: *Nukraia* (pl. *Nukraia*),<sup>6</sup> yet in a way integral to their own pattern of thought.<sup>7</sup> Mandaism is *not* a Christian phenomenon, and its Gnostic aspects, though eclectic, basically belong outside Christian influences (cf. Macuch 1971, pp. 174–92; Buckley 2010, pp. 14–15). As for Judaism, many scholars like Drower, Rudolph, and Buckley had noticed some persuasive similarities and parallels between the two (esp. Drower 1960, e.g., pp. 14–17), including Jewish mysticism. Yet the Mandaeans’ *Hiia* would indeed be a ‘stranger’ *vis-à-vis* the Hebrew divinity (referred as Adonai), in roughly the same way the classic Gnostic Hidden

God is to the demiurgic creator of the material world (cf. [Nasoraia 2024](#), p. 119). Originally, however, Mandaean–Jewish connections would have had to be close to explain the drawing on traditions known from pre-Christian Hebrew Biblical materials and archaic Jewish lore ([Deutsch 1995](#); [Deutsch 1999–2000](#); with [Yamauchi 1973](#), pp. 140–42). This is part of Mandaism’s ‘western’ foundations. But after the Mandaean–Jewish split, the relationship has later aspects in Babylonia, as Nathaniel Deutsch argued, after he was to identify and examine Jewish mystical sources, including the Hekhalot literature and medieval Kabbalah. Some of these traditions are similar enough to raise the possibility of extensive historical contact and cultural exchange between the two groups in Mesopotamia.

He concluded that

The question of Mandaism’s relationship to Jewish mysticism may be divided along the following lines: origins, polemics, and parallel traditions. ([Deutsch 1999–2000](#), p. 209)

By this later stage, [Müller-Kessler \(2004\)](#) wanted to add that Mandaeans and Jews also shared participation in the world of Mesopotamian magical practices.

But we cannot discount early ‘mystical’ connections as well, especially those to do with baptism. We have to remember that theories about pre-Christian Jewish Gnosticism go back to the late nineteenth century, especially in the work of Moritz [Friedländer \(1898\)](#), and off-and-on these attracted the attention of scholars before Yamauchi formulated his position (see [Wilson 1955](#), esp. p. 201). Even before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls as well, signs of baptizing movements in Palestine before John had been spotted (e.g., by [Thomas 1935](#); [Badia 1980](#)), with Jewish baptismal “tubs” uncovered still more widely afield, probably showing that water cleansing was one means by which proselytes entered the Jewish fold in Hellenistic-Roman times (e.g., [Dalbert 1954](#); [Rudolph 1999](#), pp. 471–99). From this, note that it does not follow that in Judaism, or in Jewish baptismal movements such as John’s, lie the major sources of ‘early classic Gnosticism’, as seen in Basilides, Valentinus, etc. (see [Lahe 2017](#), pp. 391–95). But it is obvious we are still left gauging the effects, initially and even ongoing, of John’s movement on early Christianity, which carried a baptismal aspect and apparently gave birth along its road(s) to some of those Gnostic groups that accentuated baptismal rites ([Trompf 2018b](#), pp. 84–87).

In any case, treating Mandaism as if it reflects Christian influences in Patristic times begs the question as whether it was the other way around, because there remains the matter of John the Baptist’s role in preparing for Jesus’s ministry, and thus of his influence and a possible constructive role of Mandaism in shaping some major characters of thoughts and practices of earliest Christianity. In an attempt to study the social history of the early Christians, [Buckley \(2005\)](#), pp. 94–109 sees the Mandaean view “turning the tables on Jesus”, and that we should look at the original disciples of Jesus as descendants of the followers of John. She accepts the possibility that the Mandaean people originated in Palestine at the period of John the Baptist and Jesus, and were the only ones surviving who knew Jesus in his initial time with John, whose followers formed a distinct religion, with its own special rites and with their own way of speaking Aramaic and writing it in their own (Characene) unique script ([Häberl 2006, 2019](#)), and referred to themselves as the Knowers or Gnostics in a pre-Christian, pre-classic Gnostic way.

Buckley holds that the *Haran Gawaita*, through the collection of myths, traditions, and history in it, supports the idea that Mandaeans were acquainted with the earliest forms of Christianity. Because of various customs, the Mandaeans (especially Naṣoraean) consider themselves to have been former Judaeans from Jerusalem and surrounding areas including Jordan Valley. The oldest features of the Mandaic (Naṣoraean) language in their scripts are taken as the most significant corroboration of this, let alone their escape from Judaea (as Christians reported of their own flight). On their own understanding, because

Mandaeans held that their rituals were meant to subdue or defeat evil, they were spared annihilation, and their continued survival kept confirming this, which perhaps refers to that well-educated peaceful Naṣoraeen–Mandaean group who originally hailed from Jerusalem, the historical and spiritual heart of the ancient Kingdom of Judah. These people have migrated or been displaced due to various historical events, such as conquests, exiles and long-suffering. Certain aspects of their identity as “former Judaeans” suggest they maintain many ‘Western’ ancient Naṣoraeen–Mandaean cultural and ancestral connections to Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley, even though they no longer reside there. The significant references to Jerusalem (as well as to other nearby cities, locations and mountains) and to John the Baptist, Miriai, the Jews and their leaders, ancient Jewish mystics, Saviour and demiurge figures, Baptism (*Maṣbuta*) in the Jordan (*Yardna*), *Ruha d-Qudša* (Holy Spirit), *Šu* (Jesus), *Mšiha* (Messiah), *Mamiduta* (Christian Baptism) and many other ‘Western’ elements in Mandaean literature, all confirm the enduring bond between these ‘peaceful’ people and their ancestral homeland. They all reflect the historical movements and diasporic experiences of the Naṣoraeen–Mandaean Judaeen people, who later migrated, and eventually even played a leading role, after they settled and harmoniously mixed with the ‘Eastern’ Mesopotamian Mandaeans, who were held to have antediluvian roots (Nasoraia 2024, e.g., p. 69 and n. 13). Interestingly, in one her conclusions, Buckley (2010, p. 311), explains why the Mandaeans “had no need for political power or statehood” or pilgrimages to any earthly sacred centres, and she states that:

Among the Mandaeans, a social structure, with priests, and a tradition of ‘rabbinic’, mystery-laden style of elaborations on myths and rituals was in place quite early. The Mandaeans had no need for political power or statehood and did not aspire to “liberate” Jerusalem or any other centre, but broke decisively with all larger religious frameworks to be only themselves, set apart from Jews, Christians, and others. The Mandaeans insisted that they came from Adam, they held on to the original revelations (which were interpreted in a Gnostic manner), and they were soon loath to mix with outsiders in marriage or to set store by converts. All others may have diluted or otherwise misunderstood the original message from the Light-world, but the Mandaeans in their understanding held on. Their writings firmly testify to this conviction. The polemical parts of the literature, as religious-political evidence, are still in need of a thorough scholarly examination, a project that might emphasize the Mandaean politics of identity and the religion’s labour of self-preservation.

Buckley’s case is hardly without merit. After all, John looks to be a more influential social and religious figure than Jesus in their time. Even Jesus honors his stature: “Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. . .” (Matt 11:11), and in Mandaean sources, John is shown to have a remarkable healing and teaching ministry (e.g., HG p. 7; *Ginza*, pp. 29–30, 341–43) that more clearly provides a precedent for Jesus’ own than the Gospels tell, though they all suggest Jesus’ ministry receives its initial impetus from John’s. In traditional Christian discourse, of course, the Baptist is honored as the forerunner, but with the discovery of scrolls near the Dead Sea (at Qumran) and an apparent monastic settlement connected to them, various theories have arisen placing John and his movement in a Qumranite context, usually as part of the Essenes, a Jewish ‘party’ more ascetic than the Sadducees and Pharisees (see esp. Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum* 2, 119–159), and various scholars consequently argue that Jesus began his work under John in these circles (e.g., Yamauchi 1973, pp. 123–26). Such theories were conditioned by earlier recognitions that John was leader of a considerable and the more prominent of the two figures in ‘high public affairs’ (esp. *Antiquitates Judaica*. 18, 116–19; cf. Matt 3: 5; Luke 2:18–20; and see, e.g., HG, pp. VI, IX, XI, 6–7; *Ginza* p. 213; JB II 70:

1–10). Quite apart from different scholarly opinions on such matters (and for more consult (Trompf 2002, pp. 127, 131–32)), the fact of the matter is that the Mandaean tradition was the first to preserve the view that Jesus originally belonged among John’s followers but broke off and went his own way (HG, pp. 3–4; JB (ch. 30) II, 104–9). Whatever we are to make of John’s and Jesus’s kin relationship and John’s priestly heritage (Luke 1:5–18), which many scholars take to be legendary anyway, the implication in the Mandaean sources is that Jesus was John’s pupil for enough time for John to instruct and initiate him, teach him the healing arts and the wisdom of the Heavenly King of Light, the Father, and baptize him before his ultimate departure, and there are suggestions of this in at least one of the Gospels themselves (John 1–3; cf. the detailed study on making the enlightened savior kings through Mandaean and Cristian Baptism by (Nasoraia 2004a, esp. pp. 332–40; Crangle and Nasoraia 2010, pp. 112–15; Nasoraia and Crangle 2010; McGrath 2024)).<sup>8</sup>

In any case, German-American Jewish philosopher Hans Jonas (1903–1993) fairly observed (1958, p. 68) that the language of the New Testament participates in a “series of metaphors referring to the human condition in the world”, including a distrust for human desires and pleasures shared by whole range of Gnostic authors, including the Mandaeans (see 1 John 2:15–16; the “Hymn of the Pearl” in the *Acta Thomae*) and the Johannine writers as obvious cases in point. Already during the first few decades of the last century, for Christian scholars who were working on the Gospels and the historical Jesus, the figure of John the Baptist could propel them to direct special attention to the Gospel of John [the Evangelist], which is quite different from the other Gospels. Significantly, it is commonly believed that the Gospel of John is the last Gospel to be written, ca. 100 CE, apparently as a special corrective to the others (note *Acta Timothei* [ed. Usener] 9–10; cf. Stauffer 1964, p. 281), and, on Jesus in general and on John the Baptist particularly, John is distinctive in reflecting a Gnostic temper. Samuel Zinner adds that

From even a cursory reading of their [i.e., the Mandaean] sacred literature, it becomes apparent that Jewish components of gnosis would have been circulating among Mandaeans from the beginning of their formation. Early Mandaean contacts with Syro-Palestinian groups of the Jewish Jesus sect [i.e., earliest Jewish Christianity] may arguably have left traces in various passages of the Gospel of John, the letters of Deutero-Ignatius. . . and the Odes of Solomon. (Zinner 2019, p. 10 and ns. 14–15 [regarding Schmithals 2009, pp. 181–203; Lattke and Ehrhardt 2009; with Rudolph 1969])

Zinner also discussed the Mandaean gnostic view about how all negative impacts of evil desire(s) or force(s) or spirit(s) are caused by *Ruha*. He explains the Mandaean view about John the Baptist *vis-à-vis* the metaphorical use of *Ruha d-Qudsha* (Holy Spirit), Jesus, and Christianity, commenting that *Ruha* literally means “spirit”. The seeming perversion of this term to denote the highest personification of evil is an interesting episode in the history of religion [in the Mandaeans’ case], all the more paradoxical in view of the fact that the full title of this anti-divine figure is, i.e., “the Holy Spirit”. But this very paradox indicates the cause; for they have come associate Jesus very much with spirit.

Now, as a Mandaean scholar, I have already expressed my suspicion that this distinctiveness owes itself to do with something in the John–Jesus relationship before their split, these relations being made clearer in a rich Mandaean textual account of Jesus, John the Baptist, and important baptismal rituals connecting them (Nasoraia 2004a). On one hand, Mandaeans honored John the Baptist.<sup>9</sup> They consider him as their own prophet of ‘Truth’ and messenger of ‘Light’ (cf. Pulver 1960) and one of their ideal disciples, a wonderful priest, the Greatest Master of ‘Healing’, and the Teacher of ‘Enlightenment’ (esp. Rudolph 1960, pp. 66–80).

On the other hand, they (reluctantly) consider Jesus as one of the disciples of John the Baptist, who lost his way after his (initial!) initiation and baptism in the Jordan River. According to Mandaean (esoteric) tradition, Jesus was ‘beguiled’ (i.e., “possessed” and “deceived”) and ultimately “betrayed” by the devil (*Ruha*, the evil spirit and her sons, especially *Nbu*). Jesus is linked directly and identified negatively with (i) the ancient (Mesopotamian) figure (Lord) of knowledge and wisdom (*Hukumta*) i.e., *Nbu*/*Nbu* (=Babylonian *Nabū*) (the malevolent/evil spirit of the planet Mercury, one of the ‘Seven Sons’ of *Ruha*) [e.g., *Nbu Mšiha d-Kadba* GY 27:18 (cf. GY 51:3) “*Nbu* (i.e., Jesus) the false Messiah”; HG, e.g., pp. 3, 4 ns. 1–9, 19 ns. 6–7. see MD, p. 287b] and with (ii) Orpheus (=Mandaic: *Auruz/Aurus*, cf. MD, p. 11b; Ginza, p. 52 n. 6, JB, p. 20). *Ruha*’s influence over him is described as fleeting; she “abandoned” him after “leading him astray”. Following this, Jesus was deceived and faced severe hardships and conquests, culminating in his isolation. His disciples abandoned him and scattered, leaving him to die alone, crucified and abandoned on the cross (*l Šaliba nišlib* GY 58:15 “He [i.e., Christ] shall be crucified on the Cross” [translated with an error in MD, p. 287b as “he [Chris]) shall be crucified”). This narrative sharply contrasts with Christian portrayals of Jesus, revealing a unique theological stance and critique of the tradition that honoured John as his forerunner.

According to Mandaeans, Jesus deceived John, misled the Jews and created his own group(s) (e.g., HG, e.g., pp. 4 ns., 5, 1–9, 19 ns. 6–7), establishing unholy practices against the Law and the teaching of Enlightenment (i.e., Mandaean–Naṣōraeanism) by his original Master, John. And so they called Jesus *Nbiha baṭla* (the false prophet) and *Mšiha kadaba* (the Deceiver or Liar or false Messiah),<sup>10</sup> whereas in direct contrast, the canonical Gospels portray John as lowering himself to be unworthy before Jesus (e.g., Mark 1:7 and ≠s) and declaring Jesus the “Lamb of God” (John 1:36). Do not be surprised, then, that in Mandaean texts, John is portrayed as teacher and Jesus as learner (also as “pupil” and annoying candidate) (e.g., JB ch. 30, see also Mead 1924, pp. 48–51). This is the impression also gained from the opening lines of a barely opened Mandaean lead roll (of as yet unknown provenance), where an (enlightened) ‘Instructor’ speaks authoritatively to Jesus (Lead rolls, private collection, Roll No. 1). Quite recently, in his book *What Jesus Learned from Women*, American New Testament scholar James McGrath (2021) challenges the assumption that Jesus only taught and did not learn, but the Mandaeans’ view is that he should not have turned his back on what he was wisely taught. John, in their tradition, is a “man of soul (i.e., *mana/nišma*)”, Jesus a “man of spirit (i.e., *ruha*)” (e.g., GY I-II, VI (also see Ginza, p. 414); CP Nos. 23 (pp. 19–20). 125 (esp. p. 119). JB ch. 30, HG, pp. III, 3–4, 12, 19 and n. 6), and even if some scholars might consider Zinner and also Jonas as going too far on Mandaeans identifying the evil Queen *Ruha* or *Ruha d-Quḏša* as the dreadful “Holy Spirit”, they rightly spot their

violent hostility to Christian doctrine, whose Founder according to [their] tradition had stolen and falsified the message of his master, John the Baptist... and their “ambivalence in the figure of the ‘Holy Spirit’, understood as female, [being] noticeable also in Christian Gnosticism, as ... seen ... with the Sophia speculation, where Spirit/Wisdom can be depicted as a demiurge figure creating our very defective world. (Jonas 1958, esp. p. 72 and n. 26)

This does not mean that John the Baptist (or Mandaeism as a developing tradition parallel to early Christianity) did not influence the Christian way. In his message, John, as a bold and outstanding figure, offered baptism as the alternative to sacrifices in the Temple (e.g., JB chs. 18–33; cf. Matt 3: 7–9) and also to circumcision (JB 54:30). Instead of the *Shekinah* or God’s Presence on earth being in the Temple, frequent baptism became that constantly circulating available connection to the Divine (e.g., JB chs., 21–22, 28, 30; cf. John 3: 23–24; Buckley 1989), the Living Water replacing the need to be continually beholden to the

Temple priesthood, and Sunday was to be the sacred day, not the Sabbath/Saturday (JB, e.g., 57: 40; cf. CP [Drower] No. 149, p. 130; No. 159 p. 136; No. 161, p. 138). All these more 'Jewish-connected' (yet anti-Judaic) teachings also look to be very important for early Christianity, as the eminent Bultmann, after he attended to Lidzbarski's German translations of GR, *Mandäische Liturgien* (1920) [cf. CP] and JB, was early to apprehend (Lupieri 2008). However, a greater Gnostic element in early Mandaeism when compared to primitive Christianity has to be accounted for, and we shall have to explore the contrast in the next section. We can fairly assert at this point that Gnostic threads were evident and affected the Palestinian world of the New Testament, from Jewry's own mystical aspects, from general Hellenistic culturo-intellectual impetuses in a colonial situation, and from the attractions of ideas in Alexandria (Philonic, 'Hermetic', Mysteries, etc.) (e.g., Quispel 1955, pp. 9–10; van Moorsel 1955, pp. 20–29).

The shadows of these different lineaments condition parts of the New Testament (especially the Johannine literature and the exegetical tendencies in the Epistle to the Hebrews), but whatever Hellenistic Gnosticizing influences were permeating in the region, they must have been soaked up in John's movement more, otherwise it is hard to explain how and why the Mandaean religion crystallized as it did after the flight from Jerusalem (cf. Rudolph 1996, e.g., pp. 363–67, 402–6, 428–36) into early Patristic times. But we cannot safely say that in its origins Mandaeism was a form of Jewish Gnosticism (see Lahe 2017, esp. pp. 391–95), because although much from the Hebrew Bible is incorporated into its lore, Mandaeans fairly quickly turned their backs on Judaism (including heavily Judaic expressions of Essenism), and only early parts of Genesis have really remained significant for them (a feature shared by other more decidedly Hellenistic Gnostic systems), especially the cosmic place of Adam, while they also paradoxically came to reject the Jewish deity (Adonai) as an evil spirit (e.g., HG, p. 4). It is really a moot point as to whether Gnosticism can be found in the Dead Sea Scrolls (see Schoeps 1954), and yet the quest seems to persist that somewhere out of Jewish thought, in its compromises with Hellenism (including newer tendencies to cosmicize Adam) and in its quest for deeper meaning in such rituals such as baptism, Gnosticism was born (e.g., Quispel 1953–1954; 1955, p. 38). Mandaeism's case makes it important to decipher which circulating cosmological notions from the Palestinian melting pot stimulated it most, and why groups following Simon Magus and Dositheus, and perhaps Alexander of Abounoteichus, look to be promising candidates of Gnosticizers preceding John and Jesus. The first two of this trio were clearly ready to latch on to the Christian movement when it emerged (Wilson 1957; cf. Wilson 1955, p. 211), and in ways indicating that "elements in primitive Christian thought which were once considered to derive from the wider Hellenistic environment were already current in Palestine itself in the First Century of our era" (Wilson 1957, p. 21; cf. Braun 1935; Albright 1964).

The earliest leaders and coteries of believers laying the foundations of Mandaeism on its 'western' side may have had something to do with the loss of hundreds of their priests, as their tradition has it, killed by Jews before the siege of Jerusalem (see Section 2), a trauma bringing in its wake a deliberate repelling of direct association with the Hebrew tradition, with the dissipation of any earlier Jewishness resulting from the loss of so many priestly custodians. Slowly, we are being forced to probe how the Mandaean religion took shape after the flight northwards from Judaea and how indelible events affected the subsequent shape of things, considering 'mainstream' early Christians are recognizable for continuing to honor the pre-Christian Hebrew Scriptures as the Word of God.



#### 4. The Process of the Formation of Early Mandaeism as It Combined Hellenistic-Palestinian and Mesopotamian Elements

What happened to bring about the peculiar configuration of Mandaeism after the Palestinian remnants migrated to the north? We are left with a difficult puzzle, because pieces of the jigsaw are (for the moment) missing. In general terms, as Lupieri aptly puts it, we have information concerning the existence, in the Syrio-Palestinian area, in the second century, perhaps at the beginning, of a group of “Disciples of John” the Baptist who proclaimed that John, and not Jesus, was the Messiah. They were also supposed to have believed that John was not really dead [i.e., not really killed by Herod Antipas, as in Josephus, *Antiq.* 18.117–9; Mark 6:16–29] but was “hidden”, which allows us to believe that they expected his return, coming back as Anush ‘Uthra in GY XVI. [They] behaved as if they really were the descendants of those disciples of John that did not convert to Christianity and that did not return simply to Judaism, (Lupieri [1993] 2002, p. 164 n. 61)

but whether we can just assume they were the Mandaeans remains an open question (cf. Yamauchi 1970; 1973, pp. 117–42, 229–33), even if their story of John’s death (GY V, with Nasoraia 2004a; Nasoraia and Trompf 2010, esp. pp. 411–16) squares pretty well with these details.

To clarify, it is important to note that the lexical equivalents to the word *Mandaiia* (the plural Mandaic-Aramaic term for Mandaeans (MD, p. 247b), does not appear in the *Haran Gawaita*, the interesting document covering the flight from Jerusalem in the first century CE. Those fleeing are generally called *Naṣoraia* (Naṣoraean, a distinguished (secret) group within the Mandaean tradition, endowed with exceptional cosmic powers, profound spiritual wisdom (*Naṣiruta*), and extraordinary priestcraft (usually associated with religious and/or priestly practices). In the Mandaean view, they excel in the sacred arts of healing, astrology, astronomy, and esoteric divine knowledge. Their abilities include foresight and insight into future events, serving as vital conduits for divine connection and as pillars of spiritual and intellectual leadership within the Mandaean community. They are also the guiding mystics of the Mandaean religion, revered as the Guardians or Custodians of the secrets of *Naṣiruta*. As truth-seekers and recognized authentic elites, they are inspired with profound cosmic insight. Naṣoraean is epithet interestingly recalling a Nazarene or Galilean connection).<sup>11</sup> (Nasoraia 2004b, esp. pp. 306–7, 312–17, 334–56; 2023, p. 251 n.7. Cf. MD, p. 285b; Drower 1960; JB [Häberl/McGrath]).<sup>12</sup>

On balance, though being very cautious, this Naṣoraean group would seem to be mainly mixed Jewish and pre-Christian Gnostics (honoring Adonai and steeped in Judaic tradition but familiar with Hellenistic ideas (HG, p. 3; cf. Gündüz 1994, pp. 86–94)), and was migrating into a much more culturally mixed region than were the Christians in Pella. Adiabene and its surroundings, the apparent first point of destination, was a small principality that had rulers of Jewish, Arab, and Persian extractions, and was also known for its residual Median cultural elements that had survived Persia’s imperial pressures (Diakonoff 1985, pp. 139–42; Stone and Topchyan 2022, pp. 30–56). What is more, over time, life in Adiabene even allowed moments of Mandaean social control (see HG, pp. x (Drower), 10; cf. Thomas 2007, p. 6). The most important primary settlement of the new grouping—which possibly began to take a preliminary form even in the first half of the first century—was acclaimed to be Haran, possibly (i) Harran/Ḥarrān, a city in (southeastern) modern-day Turkey (neighbouring the border with Syria (e.g., Drower 1960, p. xiii; Segal 1956, p. 375),<sup>13</sup> or (ii) an area surrounding Jabal Ḥawrān/Ḥaurān (Mountain of Ḥawrān) located in Syria (very close to the borders of Israel/Palestine and Jordan. Lidzbarski (1925, p. vi) mentioned that this area was known to the Romans as Auranitis, or (iii) Hauran/Haran/Hiran, as a place with a protected passageway leading to Ṭura

d-Madai, which was identified by some scholars as Midia or the Median Hills in Persian territory (e.g., King 2003, p. 140; Buckley 2010),<sup>14</sup> or (iv) Wādi Ḥawrān/Ḥaurān, a seasonal waterway in Iraq. The last is the candidate preferred by Buckley (2010, p. 293) and later supported and favored by Häberl (2018, pp. 59, 82–84; 2012, pp. 262–65),<sup>15</sup> though both Haran and Hauran are also talked of sometimes in heavenly, Edenic terms and sometimes as a good earthly realm in the “north” (cf. Drower 1953, pp. vi–ix; Macuch 1973, p. 258; Häberl 2018; Buckley 2005; 2010, p. 293; Deegan 2020, p. 198 and n. 784).

There is a serious puzzle waiting to be solved here; the newcomers were so accepted by populations in the “Median Hills” in and around Adiabene that two seemingly divergent peoples coalesced extraordinarily to enable a new (or perhaps a renewed or a revived!) tradition to be born (though in the believers’ eyes it was very ancient). The ‘indigenous’ so-called Eastern group, subjects under the Persian Empire, brought with them intense preoccupations with rituals and their mystical or symbolic significations, particularly Mesopotamian-originated water ablutions as ‘mysteries’ that complemented the teachings of John the Baptizer extolled by the more intellectually predisposed Western group. Scottish scholar Robert McLachlan Wilson actually conceived all Gnosticism to be the “result of an eruption of Oriental religious beliefs into the Graeco-Roman world”, and a trajectory of thought and practice that consequently “sought to unite in itself two diverse strains, Western intellectualism and Eastern mysticism” (Wilson 1955, p. 194). In this light, the activities we have been considering might as well be his model case, and out of the interaction what we call ‘Mandaism’ developed, a very unique baptismally focused ‘Gnosticism’. (Rudolph 1960, pp. 58–79). In this new melding, John the Baptist (Yahya Yuhana) is taken to be the new movement’s last prophet and master, who was translated out of the Median Hills to Palestine at birth and back to them to die (HG 6–8; GR VI). But in the development of a new religious group-identification, a propulsion arose (perhaps a compulsion because of persecution?) to move, and, as if signaled by Ha[u]ran as a topical gateway, to find a haven further into the Persian sphere (cf. Rudolph 1960, pp. 67–80; 1969, pp. 210–35).

The most important primary settlement in Haran has a Janus-faced aspect: it looks back towards the land of the Jordan where John baptized and forward to a journey to their eventual settling place—especially middle and southern Mesopotamia, in Babylonian territory and around the mouths of the Tigris–Euphrates and Karun rivers. In the Mandaean understanding, John the Baptist emerged as the significant figure from the holy baptizing sect called the Naṣōraeans [Nazorenes?] (the possessors of the esoteric and mystical Knowledge, also known as the (mystic) healers), with modern Mandaean researchers like myself interested to know whether they might have been Qumranites and/or Essenes. Yet, the main point here is that the ‘Westerners’ following John came to terms with the Easterners, who had (distinctive) traditional Mesopotamian ideas about ritual cleanliness and accentuated priestly ritualism. No one has fathomed it, and the Mandaeans themselves say it was miraculous, but somewhere between the late first and third centuries CE, the intricate cosmology and ritual lore of Mandaism developed basically into the recognizable system we witness today; the Mandaism we acknowledge today is the last surviving ancient gnostic religion from antiquity. In HG, p. 5, there is a mention of (the city of) “Tmar” (probably Thamara, a small town located in the South East of the Dead Sea) (see HG, p. 5 n. 1; Deegan 2020, p. 242 n. 1019), which starts the account of Yahya Yuhana (John the Baptizer); his conception was said to occur from a blessed “pure seed” in the great *Yardna* (*bazira dakia biardna rba*) (Yardna here referring not only to the holy river of fresh running water, but apparently to the River Jordan as well). Without HG clearly specifying as much, the Yardna, as the River Jordan, was first planted for John, so that he could be conceived in the waters of (that) Jordan and then seeded or implanted (mystically) into the womb of an

eighty-eight years old woman (i.e., Elizabeth or “‘*Enišbai*”). (cf. *ibid.* with [Drower 1937](#), pp. 100, 262–63). A precise dating is absent, and all we have to go on is the temporal linkage of the lives of Jesus and John the Baptist (who lived for sixty-four years, according to the Mandaean sources) and the external threat to Jerusalem, events which would have been generally known in the ancient world. At least we can say of HG’s vague narrative is that, whether for literary or historical purposes, it is disclosed to a later, congealed Mandaean readership (in early Late Antiquity times when HG was written) that, yes, John, the last prophet, ministered in the land of Yardna, but there was a Mandaean presence in the East *before* his birth (and also before that reference “*mšiha*”, who might have been referred to in that peculiar way here [as discussed above in sects. 1 and 3] because by then Christianity had grown very considerably) (cf. [Deegan 2020](#), e.g., pp. 236–39).

Now, HG (esp. 7–14) provides an important historical narrative of a Naṣoraean–Mandaean journey ‘from the West to the East’, first moving eastward to the Mandaean mountains or hills, then to Media proper, and proceeded to (i) establish (new) settlements (e.g., the seven widespread regions throughout many parts of Mesopotamia mentioned in HG, pp. 9–11) and (ii) merge and integrate with what in the tradition’s conceptualizing were other thriving and already well-established Mandaean settlements. The latter were especially in central and southern Mesopotamia (to “Khuzistan and Lower Mesopotamia”, as [Drower \(1953, p. x\)](#) puts it), including the southwest regions of what is now Iran (especially Khurzistan/Ahwaz/Ahvas), in these cases reinforcing their communal bonds and ensuring the continuity of their cultural heritage. And HG has understandably been used to support the theory of the ‘Western or Palestinian origin’ of the Mandaeans, promoted in scholarship since the mid-twentieth century, but now in competition with proposals for origins in the east in a debate currently going on, which I hope this article goes some way to resolve (cf. [Rudolph 1960, 1969](#); [Macuch 1965b](#), e.g., pp. 116–18; [1973](#), e.g., pp. 257–59). Whatever this debate’s outcome, Mandaeism, its leading adherents wearing distinctive white robes and turbans, grew unexpectedly famous in the Middle Eastern contexts of its transitions toward the great rivers region (of the Persian Gulf) by recapturing the main elements and central religious character of deep wisdom or enlightenment (*Manda* or *Gnosis*) from ‘general’ antiquity (not just Judaic or Hellenic or Mesopotamian). To be listed in the Qur’an by the seventh century as a “People of the Book” underscores this (see below), as does the archeological evidence that Mandaean (Sabian) objects (inscribed potsherds and other objects) are more widespread in Mesopotamia than similar items from other traditions or cultures ([Segal and Hunter 2000](#)). The Mandaeans had come to hold and teach, moreover, that their religion was the oldest on earth, going back to the cosmic Adam, and the divine “seed” was sown in the cosmic Jordan or Yardna long before John the Baptist (hence HG 7), conceived in both the macro-geography of the world’s river systems (DN, [Rudolph 1982](#); [Nasoraia 2024](#), accompanied by a vision of living water circulating and sustaining the connection between heaven and our lower order ([Franzmann 1989](#)), and supported by the macro-history of past ages ([Nasoraia and Trompf 2010](#)).

Looking again at the problem about the Mandaeans and the question of their origin, lexicographic data show that the Mandaic language, if it ever had touches of the Hellenistic ethos, lost them in time. To follow [Müller-Kessler \(2004, p. 57\)](#), Mesopotamian features prevail

Such lexical items dominate in the early Mandaic incantation corpus and show the influential heritage of Akkadian and of early Iranian stages on the Mandaic language. The lack of Greek loanwords noticed before is also striking, but when it came to evaluation it was judged differently. A vast lexical gap separates Syriac around Edessa and Harran, which is rich in Greek terms from the Central and Southeastern Babylonian Aramaic. A big difference is also noticeable in

the linguistic features. All this makes it difficult to explain why a group which comes first from Palestine or Transjordan, and resides then in Harran, in the neighborhood of Edessa, does not show more Greek words or lexical items in their early compiled text corpus from their former places of residence. That the essential elements of the Mandaean doctrine developed parallel to the Qumran Aramaic text corpus does not help to solve the problem either.

As for continuing interactions with, and influences upon Christianity, in our view, when Mandaeism was both migrating and congealing into a discrete and complex Gnostic system, various ancient Christian sects in Mesopotamia were already receptive to adopting eclectic Hellenistic materials into their faith (including elements of Gnostic and Mandaean thought and baptismal rituals) in what may be considered a progressive shift in Late Antiquity. We have to remember here that after the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE, the Hellenistic period brought so many changes to the eastern Mediterranean and Middle East, especially by way of city building and civic order, which were consolidated by the full emergence of the Roman Empire after the Battle of Actium in 31 BCE and the conquest of Ptolemaic Egypt the following year. Both 'East and West' were affected by these changes, even though civic developments occurring in the Fertile Crescent more slowly throughout Late Antiquity. Within these great transitions there were continual and intricate relationships between groups responding to cross-cultural encounters and, particularly in the East, there arose a rich variety of differences less restricted by the Roman aegis. The melting pot allowed for interactions and borrowings between Jewish, Christian, Gnostic, and water-purifying movements (consult first [Gero 1986](#); [Rudolph 1999](#)).

The question as to how much of Mandaeism contributed in shaping both the Christian faith and transformations in the thoughts of early Eastern Christian Fathers in their times remains a tricky question, but is very important to consider. In the Eastern Churches especially, various ancient church treatises expectedly treated John the Baptist as a miraculously born prophet, Christian saint, and martyr,<sup>16</sup> and it is obviously not untoward to look toward baptizing Christian sects and their leaders, and ask whether they were affected by the attractive presence of the Mandaeans. Pertinently, we will conclude this article by paying particular attention to the Elkasites and the Manichaeans, and suggestions of their relationships in neglected Mandaean texts.

## 5. Mandaeans and Manichaeans

Queries about Mandaean impacts on early Christianity can be turned on the case of the founder of Manichaeism, Mani (216–274/277 CE), his disciples, and the writings and practices of Manichaeism, presenting to many as a version of Christianity. The Manichaean movement, which was the largest single institutional representative of the gnostic religious principle ([Jonas 1958](#), pp. 207–8), was considered a 'heresy' by different Christian Fathers; indeed, the worst in a series of Gnostic-type corruptions (e.g., Serapion, *Contra Manichaeos* 1–2). But for the Mandaeans, this movement was initially a less rejectable deviation from their original path (or less unpleasant than Jesus turning his back on John). What we now want to stress in this article is that in the first three or so centuries after Jesus, the so-called 'Baptist' followers of John (the Baptist) strongly influenced Mani and his followers, there being much better documented evidence for this than for their influences upon early 'mainstream' Christianity. The Mandaean religion obviously had early antagonistic encounters with different Christian and Jewish groupings and also had variable interrelations with other religions, including Zoroastrianism, Mithraism, remnants of ancient (polytheistic) Babylonians, and, as a separate concern, Manichaeism. This is why such scholars as Jason [BeDuhn \(2000\)](#) and Iain [Gardner \(2021, esp. pp. 15–17\)](#) have suggested that Mani grew up in a religious community where various Gnostic texts might share or influence each

other for having similar cultural and spiritual backgrounds. This view takes in the thematic overlap between Mandaean and Manichaean views on light and darkness, concepts of salvation, divine messengers, and the dualistic view that portrays the spiritual realm as sacred while considering the material world flawed (Lang 2018). Beyond Mandaeanism's particular influence or his borrowing of their ideas, Mani's distinctive integration of these concepts may also mirror broader Gnostic discussions.

Researchers have already delved into the textual comparisons between Mandaean and Manichaean bodies of literature, seeking to identify in common motifs and ideas. As we mentioned earlier, for a start, Băncilă (2018) has recently examined the relationship between the two religions from historical, philological, and geographical perspectives, highlighting the influence of cultural trends on the interpretation of their interaction over time. Moreover, comparative studies have been conducted to understand the historical origins of Mandaeanism and its theological development, especially in relation to other contemporary religions like Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Manichaeism. These studies often focus on the authenticity of Mandaean traditions and the extent of their influence on or by other religions (Häberl 2012). In summary, the interface between Mandaeanism and Manichaeism is complex and multifaceted, with ongoing research continuing to shed light on their historical, theological, and textual connections.

In general terms, the first scholar to probe cultural interactions between both Mandaeanism and Manichaeism was the Swedish scholar Geo Widengren (1907–1996). He took seriously that most of Mesopotamia in Late Antiquity, especially before and during the time of Mani, was controlled by the Sasanian/Sassanids (224–651, successors to the Parthian/Arsacid Empire, 247 BCE–224 CE). In Sasanian times, apart from the continuing impact of Seleucid Hellenistic culture, both Mesopotamian and Iranian cultures were busily exchanging ideas and influences. In fact, for Widengren, the Mesopotamian background of Mani and early Manichaeism was very clear. In his book, *Mesopotamian Elements in Manichaeism* (1946), he focuses on the influences of archaic, surviving Mesopotamian religio-mythological elements in Manichaeism, Mandaeanism, and Syrian Gnostic traditions, and he particularly stresses the direct and indirect Mesopotamian effects on Mani. Here, of course, we may ask, why the inspirations of Mandaeanism, which came to be saturated with traditional Mesopotamian elements, are not well accounted for in his studies, and if they were indeed there, what might have come out better about their impact? Surely, Mandaean and Syrian-Christian Gnosticisms would be expected to find their way into the Manichaean forum. But at this stage of scholarship, Widengren was more predominantly interested in deep cultural roots and their conditioning of newer religious developments (Widengren 1946; cf. Furlani 1950).

Widengren found this to be evident in as many as four interconnected religious issues spinning around the core of Manichaean teachings: (i) kingship, (ii) a savior figure, (iii) enlightenment, and (iv) salvation (cf. Widengren 1951). Indeed, the religions of ancient Mesopotamia have been well known for their salvation myths and the focus on savior figures, and it was of no surprise for him that these motifs would eventually find their way back among newly successful religions in the region (Widengren 1946). The works of important traditional 'saviour' deities, such as Tammuz (or Dumuzi) and indeed Marduk (the latter a savior of souls, the sick and dying, not just of Babylon) are reflected for Widengren in the salvific doctrines of Mandaeanism, Christianity, and Manichaeism. Pre-gnostic Mesopotamian ideas of 'salvation' and the 'young (king) saviour', were already well developed in the religion of Tammuz, inspired kingly features being given to John, Miriam, Jesus, Mary, and Mani. In Persia, this is undeniably linked to the royal ideology that was constantly reappearing in the Fertile Crescent, with the king typically the earthly representative of the young god (Furlani 1950, pp. 169–71).

Turning from the general ethos to the particular, Mani and his fellow workers, Mani laid hands on a rich gnostic and technical religious language within the Mesopotamian complex. The principal focus of his discourse was the issue of salvation in this 'life' and the 'life after', a matter just as important for the Mandaeans and followers of John the Baptist. But in Widengren's view, Mani gives the various strands of belief at the time a special Iranian and Zoroastrian twist. If the king once represented the divine savior, now the savior with himself as the Apostle or the Messenger of Light (i.e., Jesus reappearing) replaces the king. The savior is no longer Tammuz, but the Great Soul, *Vohu Manah*, the divine, cosmic soul that encompasses all souls, in his way of appropriating Zoroastrianism. The same shift towards the accentuation of salvific roles was conveniently signaled by Mandaean and Christian Gnosticisms, in their own reactions to the broad Mesopotamian ethos; but Mani, growing up under Persian colonial sway (see [Quispel 1998](#), pp. 53, 55), was the one who distinctly seized upon and adapted the frame of the religious establishment of the time, and who subsequently tried to influence Persia's royal court with his new vision of things ([Widengren 1946](#); [Furlani 1950](#), pp. 170–71).

Be this as it may, our task here is to see more of Mandaism's place in Mani's story, considering newer work that puts the settling of its role in Mesopotamia by Băncilă and others. For the Mandaeans were expanding through numerous well-known Mesopotamian locations in the mid-third century at the time of Mani's emergence, proudly sitting alongside surrounding peoples with their unique language and cultural presentation, and their textual corpus showing striking familiarity and signs of interaction with a wide range of ancient Mesopotamian religious groupings, including Babylonians, Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians, and Manichaeans. Indeed, we have to account for the impact of Mandaean poetic literature in this context, and it is important to realize that some of it was re-presented clearly in Manichaean writings.

Thus, the relationship between Mandaism and Manichaeism, particularly the influence of the former upon the latter, has become a crucial subject of scholarly interest. Recent studies have explored different aspects of this topic, including the possibility of shared ideas and theological concepts. In any case, Mandaism and Manichaeism, as archeologically attested, spread rapidly side-by-side in the same region of middle and south of Mesopotamia, and continued to live together for many centuries, and so we would expect mutual influences and interactions, as well as theological, cosmological, and mystical similarities between the two over time. Scholars can fairly ask where the earlier tradition of Mandaism might sit in the foundation story of Mani's movement. Both traditions are 'gnostic' in their characteristics, (emphasizing secret knowledge or *gnosis*) and share the belief in a higher Power or Being in an ultimately divine unity. They emphasize moral and ethical conduct, with concepts such as compassion, honesty, and kindness strongly parallel in both faiths (e.g., [Băncilă 2018](#)). They are both religious syncretisms, blending or merging different aspects of religiosity and of components in varied traditions, in ways that reflect two relatable formations able to converse and apparently assimilate each other's spiritual elements. We should explore the relativities of their commonality and examples of their interaction. Whereas Mandaism has its unique aspects, particularly its reverence for John the Baptist ([Zinner 2019](#), pp. 10–15; [JB] Häberl/McGrath pp. 30–35), it shares with other Gnostics (including Manichaeans) a dualistic worldview.

Manichaeism, however, is well known for its stronger dualism, often compared to other ethical dualist systems in Persian: Zoroastrianism, Zurvanism, and Mazdakism. Mandaism should hardly be excluded from such comparisons, since it stresses the struggle between good and evil, right and left, above and below, light and darkness, male and female. It also contrasts material and spiritual realms, in an ontological dualism like Manichaeism and other 'gnosticisms'. This dualism notwithstanding, Mandaism recognizes only one

God, who exemplifies the Worlds of Light; in contrast, Ptahil, the Fourth Life emanation at the bottom of the Worlds of Light, is the creator of our earthly world. He is similar to the Demiurge in many other (Platonic affected) gnostic groups. Ruha and Forces of Darkness (such as the spirits of the “seven” planets and “twelve” zodiacs), amounted to the polar opposite to Light, and Ptahil used them to create the earthly world, resulting in its imperfection and corrupted materiality. The Forces of Light intervened in a long process to correct the false duality by bringing Soul from the Lightworlds along with all cosmic elements (including radiating Light, Life, and Living Water) needed to restore our world and establish cosmic order and balance (Rudolph 1965; Nasoraia and Trompf 2010).

Similar to various other dualistic systems (within more of a tripartite system), Mandaeism emphasizes soul salvation, which is achieved through *gnosis*, or the esoteric Knowledge of its divine *origin*. The soul is not only called *Nišimta* but uniquely called *Mana*, the spiritual, enlightened, and intelligent *mind*. *Mana* represents *gnosis* or spiritual inner Knowledge and Wisdom. It is associated directly with the mind, thoughts, consciousness, and the head. *Mana* is connected with *Mana Rba* (the Great Cosmic Mind, the ‘Source’ of all *Origins*) (CP Nos. 78: 88; cf. Nasoraia 2023). The soul ascends in a journey that emphasizes purification, enlightenment, and spiritual growth. Souls (*not* spirits) arise to leave the material world and pass through the heavenly spheres to reconnect with the ultimate Divinity and (re-)join their ancestors, the divine Lightworld beings in their cosmological superstructure. Nonetheless, the rulers of the Darkworld try to disturb the soul and hinder its journey (ibid.; Nasoraia 2004a, pp. 314–17; 2004b). For the soul’s purification, Mandaeans oppose sexual license and promote marriage and procreation within the context of marriage, in contrast to various other Gnostic systems (Drower 1960, p. xvi; Nasoraia 2004a, esp. pp. 316–17; 2004b).

The shared dualistic nature of Manichaeism and Mandaeism, along with their gnostic ‘structure’, syncretistic cosmology and comparable myth-historical frame (see Trompf 2018a, pp. 44–47), naturally entice one to ask about indications of Mandaeism’s direct influence on Manichaeism. Let us introduce some crucial pieces of evidence.

First, there is the ‘Baptist connection’. Since Mani was brought up in “marshlands community known for washing themselves” (Al-Nadim, *Fihrist* [eds. Gardiner and Lieu. pp. 46–47]), it can be anticipated that some scholars trace the beginnings of his religious framing to this Baptist sect, for the tenth-century Arabo-Persian encyclopedist Ibn Al-Nadim noted Mani’s father’s membership of these so-called “abluters” (Arab. *Mughtasilah*),

Second, there seems to be an overlapping of cosmic framing. In particular, Manichaean scholar Iain Gardner has conducted an important initial study probing how the many Mandaean ‘*Utras* (lit. ‘the powerful or plentiful or rich ones’), who are Lightworld or angelic divine beings in Mandaean cosmology [cf. MD, p. 347a-b), turn up in Coptic Manichaean texts.<sup>17</sup> He concluded from his research:

There are unmistakable traces of the ‘*utria* in the Coptic Manichaica and the early textual tradition of that community. This distinctive category of divine being, the Coptic *rmmao*, is found; as also are the other specific forms such as *Šitil/Sethel*. What is now needed is an overarching theory to explain how this occurred in historical and social terms; and this short paper has been written as one building block in that enterprise. (Gardner 2010b, p. 96)

Shortly after, Gardner continued his research towards an “overarching theory”, adding another building block to explain how this occurred in historical and social terms. He offers “a new look at Mani, the ‘Baptists’ and the Mandaeans” (Gardner 2010a, p. 321). His search tried to answer the puzzling “question of Mandaean–Manichaean origins”, but focused more on ‘Mani’s *Book of Mysteries*’, which is one of the ‘Seven Scriptures of Manichaeism’, and its links to Mandaic sources, including newly discovered secret Mandaean text. This

text, according to Gardner (ibid.), “suggests a new avenue of approach: To study Mani’s own lost *Book of Mysteries* as a site for debate between the apostle and other religious communities of the time”. In due course, we will work on this as yet untranslated text, and take these thoughts still further.

Third, there are close textual connections between Mandaean and Manichaean writings. The Greek Cologne Mani Codex (hereafter CMC) (eds. Cameron and Dewey), a tiny fifth-century book discovered in 1969 near Asyut in Upper Egypt, contains unique, relevant content. Dan Shapira’s work has significantly detected Mandaean and quasi-Mandaean prototypes behind certain expressions in it (Shapira 2006), but by concluding from this that Mandaeans and Manichaeans have common roots, he would not say the case of CMC clinched direct Mandaean influence. He contends here for the intersection of Mandaean, Manichaean, and also other religious texts (cf. Abudraham 2020) that offers a fascinating glimpse into the rich tapestry of ancient religious thought. As Shapira (2006, pp. 695–96) indicates,

Mani’s account of his revelations has clear-cut Mandaic, or rather should we say quasi-Mandaic, linguistic equivalents, with a striking similarity to the language used by the Syriac [first- or second-century] Hymn of the Pearl, which can be detached from behind the extant Greek. . . The relation of the Manichaeism and Mandaism was less direct and more complicated than is generally believed; nevertheless, in these stray notes of rather preliminary character we shall try to demonstrate some similarities and differences based on a common basis of both traditions.

Already, Kurt Rudolph had anticipated this kind of orientation by identifying significant links between Mandaean religious texts with the Coptic Gnostic body of documents found at Nag Hammadi, near the Nile, in 1945. He hypothesized (Rudolph 1975) that Gnostic-Christian groups lying behind the Coptic translations from Egypt were mainly pre-Manichaean, as were the Mandaeans themselves, and that they *jointly created the ethos* in which Mani was to emerge. This and Shapira’s positioning are quite different from making the claim, made by Jae Hee Han (2019) about the CMC, for instance, that Mani first only wanted to reform a pre-existing Baptist-type movement, leaving the question more open as to whether this movement was a Mandaean group.

Fourth and moreover, other scholars’ research has noticed many comparable features between Mandaean religious ceremonies and numerous Manichaean ceremonies, such as rituals for dying, for the dead, and for the departing and ascending souls, some involving in their presentation a poetic and distinct religious terminology (especially in relation to the salvation of the soul). Indeed, combining textual and ritual issues, numerous Manichaean hymns can be found in both the Mandaean ancient classic hymns for the souls from *Left Ginza* (GS) and numerous additional ritual hymns for the dead and souls from the CP (cf. the Coptic Manichaean *Kephalaia* [ed. Funk] 1.2, Lf. 13/14: 346–47 [=ch. 144]; with Rudolph 1961, pp. 415–18; Richter 1997, pp. 60–62). The resemblances and parallels in some cases are very special, in that one can see parts of the (Coptic-) Manichaean hymnic literature incorporating elements that are literally translated and borrowed from Mandaean–Naṣoraean poetry (Buckley 2002, p. 3; using Säve-Söderbergh 1949, pp. 128, 137–62; Colpe 1964).

Examining some influence of Mandaean texts, particularly the GS, CP, and JB, on the Manichaean Psalms of Thomas (hereafter PsTh), offers a fascinating glimpse into the theological dialog and intertextual relationships between these two Gnostic traditions. A pivotal study conducted by Torgny Säve-Söderbergh (1949) highlighted very strong similarities between these writings and concluded that PsTh drew significantly from Mandaean sources. For the most persuasive examples, Manichaean Psalm 13:1–8 clearly



parallels the prayers of CP Nos. 125 and 129, and Psalm 13:37–45 of CP No. 155; and the ending formulae in Psalms 1, 2, 6, 8, 12, and 14 closely resemble those in CP Nos. 78–103. Without providing all the details, note the highly comparable imagery of “the trembling demons” and the ‘the mocking litany’ in hymnic literature (Säve-Söderbergh 1949, esp. pp. 20–25 on PsTh 2 and 13 with GS III, 2, 15, 22, 41; CP 15, 24, 50, 55 [demons]; PsTh 12, 14, 17 with JB 12, 47 [mocking]); the sharing in the concept of “the Treasure of Life” (Säve-Söderbergh 1949, pp. 30–35 on PsTh 5 with GS II, 5 and CP pp. 60–65); the similar language of dualism and the light/dark divide (Säve-Söderbergh 1949, pp. 40–45 [cf. Buckley 2002, pp. 30–135] on PsTh 6 with GS III, 19); and why not add a common discourse on “heavenly messengers”: (PsTh 8 with GS III, 3, 22), all indicative of a conceptual transfer (see Buckley 2002, pp. 140–45; Lieu 1992, pp. 50–55) and group interaction (Säve-Söderbergh 1949, pp. 60–65; Reeves 2011, pp. 80–85).

Lastly, if we can round off surveying this evidence by reflecting on Torgny Säve-Söderbergh’s labors, a year after he published his dissertation *Studies in the Coptic Manichaean Psalm-Book: Prosody and Mandaean Parallels*, his leading reviewer Lady Drower, one of the great contributors in Mandaean studies, revealed the work’s extreme importance. As she stressed,

the author deals primarily with metrical forms used in the Coptic Manichaean psalm book recently edited by the late Professor C. R. C. Allberry [see his *Manichaean Psalm-Book: Part II*. pp. 218–20] and compares them with prosody used in similar Mandaic literature. The analysis is careful and scholarly. Dr. Säve-Söderbergh concentrates especially upon the group of poems called the “Psalms of Thomas”, for in these he finds close parallels to Mandaean *drašia* and *’niana*, particularly the liturgical prayers and hymns intended to accompany sacramental meals for the dead. . . . The psalm book belongs to the oldest Coptic poetry, and the Psalms of Thomas appear to have been composed for use at a religious ceremony for the dead equivalent to the Mandaean *masiqta*.

Dr. Säve-Söderbergh quotes extensively from these psalms, setting beside them parallel passages from Mandaic literature. The resemblance between the two is not only close in idea and in distichal meter, but some passages are actually identical, line for line and word for word. He seems justified, therefore, in concluding that the Coptic author drew freely upon Mandaean originals, explaining convincingly why he is persuaded that the Mandaic versions were prior to the Coptic. In view of the early date of the Thomas psalms, in all probability the last quarter of the third century A.D., it becomes evident that the relationship of the two religions to one another deserves fresh consideration (Drower 1950, pp. 190–91).

Drower (1960, p. xiii, n. 1) later noted how “the author suggests tentatively that the Mandaean hymns may be placed in the second century A.D. or earlier”, and, accentuating the acceptance of that finding by most scholars, stated that:

A considerable part of the surviving [Mandaic] literature may be dated back to the earliest phases of Naṣoraeanism. Most scholars now accept Professor Säve-Söderbergh’s discovery that the Coptic-Manichaean ‘Psalms of Thomas’ are adaptations, almost translations, of early Mandaic hymns’, not, as was hitherto supposed, vice versa.

Then, she ventured to make a confident identification that

Al-Nadim’s story that Fatik, Mani’s father, belonged to the Mughtasilah sect is thereby strengthened, for there can be no doubt that this baptizing sect were Sābians, that is to say, Madaeans and Naṣoraean; (ibid., pp. 21 [with n. 1], 83)

This also rebuts the older (but weakening) theory that Mandaeism was a much later post-Christian development in syncretism, ruling it out of debates about antiquity CE (Drower 1950, pp. 190–91).

So, to proceed on in with our assessment of these data, we have from Al-Nadim, a tenth-century compiler of the great *al-Fihrist (The Catalogue)*, a crucial account of Mani, his background, his disciples and movement. He records “that Mani was born in Lower Babylonia among the *Mughtasila*”, that is, among “those who practise ablutions”, a description which, like the modern Arabic *Ṣābiya* (colloquially *Ṣabba*; ‘those who dip under’), fits the Mandaeans, whose religion enjoins daily ablutions and submersion (for the Arabic, ed. Hammer, reprod. in Chwolson 1856, vol. 1, p. 126). Who were the *mughtasila*? In modern critical study, the Russian Orientalist and authority on the Sabians Daniel Chwolson seems to be the first to secure the answer: they were *Elchasai* (p. 119). Since then, it is common to find that Mani’s religion is believed to have originated from the Elkasaites/Elcesaites, a Judaeo-Christian sect believed to have flourished in Lower Mesopotamia between 100 and 400 CE, that period characterized by both cultural and religious syncretism. Perhaps it was at first a Transjordanic Jewish sect that was known for its gnostic orientation and frequent purification baptisms (Drower 1937, p. 123), with the sect’s name Elkhasai (Koine Grk: Ἐλχασαῖ in Hippolytus), Elksai (Ἐλξαι in Epiphanius), or Elkesai (Ἐλκεσαῖ in Eusebius and Theodoret), originating from the Aramaic nomenclature of a Jewish prophetic text (*Elxai*) from Trajan’s time (110s). At least, this what we can obtain from the Church Fathers and them alone in their commentaries on ‘heresies.’ However, it seems the best likely deduction to make is that Elkasaites and *mughtasila* refer to a Mandaean–Naṣoraean Baptist group in Tib of Maysan, a place where the Mandaeans historically flourished and continue even to the present day. Al-Nadim identified Elkasaites with the Sabians; it remained for Chwolson, the great compiler of Arabic texts on the Sabians (Chwolson 1856, vol. 2), to identify the Elkasaites with the Mandaeans (vol. 1, pp. 116, 118–19, 806). *We concur with his deduction*: but we need to look at Mandaean sources, especially the hitherto unavailable *Book of Mysteries*, to clinch the case.

Before doing that, however, there are a few matters needing clarification. First, one needs reminding that Mandaeans were a non-Christian and certainly not a Jewish-Christian sect, and we must presume that, when the Fathers treated the Elkasaites as a Christian heresy, they were awry, just as they were in reading certain Jewish groups, such as the Essenes (Hippolytus, *Refutationes* ix, 11, 14–22) as heretics *vis-à-vis* the Christian ‘right belief’. But Mandaeans obviously belong among non-Christian baptizing (and gnostic) Mesopotamian groups that expressed dissatisfaction with Christianity (see last section). And their discontent sat alongside the Jews, who were the main challengers and enemies of the early Christian Church in the Middle East. During the second to fourth centuries, admittedly, most early and usually small Gnostic sects were Christian, but some were not, and the largest of these latter were the Mandaeans. The main characteristic of early Christianity was its Christology (generally speaking), that is, a centring on Jesus as Christ (not just as a Jewish teacher or prophet) and on entering into the Kingdom of Heaven he promised to those believing in him. That is not to say this focus could or did not have gnostic dimensions, for some developed them in ways acceptable to the ‘mainstream’ faith (e.g., Costache 2018, pp. 259–70), but others clearly deviated, as, we must concede, was the case with Mani and his followers, who could claim to be Christians and honored Jesus as “Lord” (even if one in a line of Messengers) and as foreshadower of the coming (feminized) Holy Spirit (even if Mani “seals” his followers with the Holy Spirit, and sometimes seems to embody her special agency) (Gardner 2010c, p. 149; cf. Franzmann 2003).

As we generally assess ‘Mandaeans–Manichaeans’ interconnections, we come to realize they are sensitive ones, for we will be wondering whether, yet again, the People of

John the Baptist, or the Naṣōraeans, have once again nurtured a famed religious leader who, as did Jesus before him, ‘let the side down’ and went his own way. In one sense, this might not be so strange, because the expectations of repetitive ritualism and ascetic discipline from Mandaean leadership are extraordinarily demanding, but disappointingly for the original ‘host’, both the early Christians and Manichaeists might be said to have bounced off Mandaism in the name of freedom from ritual shackles. In any case, whether we just acknowledge that the two faiths of Mandaism and Manichaeism shared the same roots in Near/Middle Eastern culture(s) and the spread of Gnosticism, or maintain that Mani had not been a Mandaean and that the Elkasaites were actually Christian baptizers, Mani is still found to be the one refuting the traditional Elkasaitic cleansing rituals in the inauguration of his new way. When arguing against the repeated baptism ritual, he stressed that the Elchasaites’ bodies were constantly changing between a state of “disturbance” and stillness, rendering the rituals futile and ineffective for attaining salvation (Buckley 1983, pp. 400, 402; cf. Shapira 2006). It is our own contention, however, that Mani was indeed originally a Mandaean, and as Jesus left John the Baptist’s movement, so Mani left the Mandaeans who had continued it.

Mani’s departure left a rupture that became etched into Mandaic texts. There was much of Mani’s teachings focused on the issues of enlightenment, spiritual ascension, and the progression of spiritual experience, wisdom, and healing, as against descent into ignorance, like the Mandaeans. Mani worked at multiple levels on cosmogony, cosmology, theogony, beliefs system, and practice, building institutional and encouraging a culturally eclectic outlook. But the substantial differences in the system he developed with his followers shocked the Mandaeans, arising as it did from his study of other religions, including Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Neoplatonism, various Gnostic schools, and some ancient Mesopotamian polytheisms. Most shockingly, Mani viewed himself as the final successor in a long line of prophets, including Buddha, Zoroaster, and Jesus, rather than to John the Baptist, and being Jesus present again as the Apostle of Light he rejected as he had before Jewish (or Jewish-associated) purificatory rites (Koenen 1980, pp. 735–76). His teachings emphasized the interconnectedness of religions and the need for a universal message to replace all of them. Despite its later decline and repression, Manichaeism left a lasting impact on religious thought and history. Moving away from the mainstream Mandaism and traditional Mandaic Scriptures (though as we have seen incorporating some of them), Mani composed eight of his own independent works, seven of which, including the Gospel of Mani, were written in Syriac Aramaic, the eighth in Middle Persian and dedicated to the contemporary ruler of Persia, Shapur I.

In return for this eruptive deviation, Mandaeans were to reject Mani’s universal approach and considered him and his followers to be heretics who strayed from the true path of Adam and the Worlds of Light. Unsurprisingly, negative references to Manichaeans appear in some Mandaean texts: in GR (esp. GY they are spoken of depreciatingly as *Marmanaiia*; see esp. e.g., GY IX (here ed. Shapira); cf. VII. In the CP, they are called *Yazuqaiia* (Yazuqaeans or Manichaeans) and *Zandiqia* (Zandiqaeans or Manichaeans), respectively, or those “who rest on supports of falsehood” and who “cut off their seed from the world” (CP No. 357, p. 251). They are deprecated along with other religions such as Jews, Zoroastrians, “Saturn-worshippers” (or *Kiwanaiia*), Idumaeans, and Arabs, with what borders on a dirge in a hymn integrally connected to the one before it (ibid.):

Behold my oblation, behold my oblation, behold my oblation!

Who ate it?

The Jews, an evil nation, accursed and blasphemous ate it.

The *Kiwanaiia* ate it, who cut it [?] in flames of fire.

The demented *Yazuqaeans* ate it, who reverence fire

Crazy creatures who reverence fire, serving a thing that is powerless.  
 Idumaeans ate it, who destroyed their virility,  
 Cast away, destroyed is their manhood,  
 And they set up Death (or “a Corpse”), worshipping him.  
 Zandiqs [probably Manichaeans], who rest on supports of falsehood, ate it,  
 On pillars of falsehood do they rest  
 And cut off their seed from the world.  
 Arabs ate it, evil liars, a wicked race  
 Who drink blood. Naṣoraean ate it,  
 A people, a stock, a family group.  
 The faithful of heart ate it,  
 Righteous and believing people ate it,  
 Those baptized in water ate it who at their baptism  
 Arise and behold the Place of Light.  
 And Life be praised! Life is victorious! I testify to Yawar-Ziwa who quickeneth  
 us with his bounty.  
 In the name of the Great Life be there healing and victory and forgiving of sins  
 for me, Adam-Yuhana son of Sam! (Ibid., pp. 251–52)

The naming of Manichaeans as *Zandiqs* seems shared by Zoroastrians as a term deployed in the Sasanian period to mean “distorters of Zand” [or Zend, or the Zoroastrian sacred texts] (Shapira 2004).

Despite their close early relations, it is thus palpable that in their later stages Mandaeism and Manichaeism became two quite separate religions. Mandaeism is a pre-Gnostic religion that honors Adam, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Sham son of Noah, and John the Baptist, whom is considered as the last and most significant Naṣoraean Healer, Teacher of *Kuṣṭa* (Truth/Enlightenment/Righteousness), and the last prophet and Messenger of Light (of the last era, in which the fourth world destruction will occur by air pollution)—(HG 18–20; p. 31; Nasoraia and Trompf 2010, p. 405 and n. 64 [cf. *Ginza*, p. 26]). Manichaeism was more syncretic in revering Moses, Zoroaster, Gautama Buddha, and Jesus as prophets or messengers, and it focused above all on Mani as the great teacher and as the foretold (last) prophet. We follow the view that Manichaeism incorporated aspects of belief and practice not only from Mandaeism but from other Gnosticisms, and Zoroastrianism and Christianity as well (Shapira 2006, p. 692), but that it was born from a Mandaean cradle only to reject its parent as too narrowly ritualistic.

We now come in conclusion, though, to a crucial unstudied and unpublished extended Mandaic tract so-called identified as [*Sidra d-*]Mani, a highly pertinent hidden text (touched upon by some few Mandaeans and non-Mandaeans and known to Gardner but not sighted by him (Gardner 2010a)). It was among the texts that first came into my attention from within a large unnamed (and sectionless) corpus of unknown esoteric writings. Some confusions about its origins and provenance are still to be clarified, and other issues sorted out concerning restrictions placed by those with the authority over the texts involved. Here, we can make a new initial contribution to both Mandaean and Manichaean studies by suggesting a re-orientation with a brief introduction to this text (before serious future editing takes place). The centerpiece of this work, as its title alludes, is Mani, with references to his parents, wife, children, and his life journey, but in particular his funeral and burial described as being carried out by Mandaean officiants. The text refers to Mani by different endearing epithets, such as the beloved or Enlightened Mani (and comparable to the fetching Aramaic references by Manichaeans to him as M’ny) (Gardner 2018, p. 226). Mani himself, born in Tib, was subsequently baptized probably by a group of Naṣoraean, was taught the arts of healing, and underwent years of his early life studying and training, to becoming

a devoted Naṣoraeen himself.<sup>18</sup> He was very motivated by a vision for universality, and through traveling and further learning, he came into contact with other religions, including Zoroastrian, Buddhism and Indic traditions, Judaism, and Christianity, and began his own school and unusual teachings under their impact. Not that this completely excluded Mandaeanism as a result, for he subsequently deployed Mandaean cosmological elements. In the *Kephalaia* (1.2, Lf. 13/14: 337), for example, he sought the divine numbers of shepherds and guardians for his own church, by not only deciphering the mysteries of the twelve and the seventy-two chosen by Jesus, but apparently by the number of guides and angels established in the heavens in the Mandaean cosmic picturing. Mani's departure from the religion of his birth, however, was definitely radical.

Nevertheless, according to that text on *Mani*, written by those who were the leading participants in the care of Mani's body following his death, after imprisonment, he died very gruesomely, and the [Mandaean]–Naṣoraeans handled his death and burial ceremonies, so that he received the Naṣoraeen–[Mandaean] funerary “ascent” rites. If these texts are old, authentic, and the insights they convey about beliefs, rituals, and historical contexts can be sorted out, they would be very significant indeed, and further study of the texts would seem to be crucial for a deeper understanding of both the Manichaean and Mandaean religions.

## 6. Conclusions

Mandaeans do not consider John the Baptist as the founder of their faith or religion, but for them, he is nonetheless a central figure in the Mandaean religious tradition, revered as a prophet of Truth and a key spiritual leader (Buckley 2002; [JB] Häberl/McGrath, e.g., pp. 1–2, 7–9). The Mandaean Book of John provides a detailed account of his teachings, emphasizing his role as a purifier and a guide to spiritual enlightenment (Häberl and McGrath, e.g., pp. 339–448; Buckley 2002). Stemming from John's work, theological concepts that developed in Mandaeanism (particularly dualistic tendencies and emphases on purification), and baptismal practices along with ethical teachings (that cultivate purity, truth, enlightenment, righteousness, rebirth, and the washing away of defilements) apparently had some perceptible effect on early Christian communities and their baptismal theologies into Patristic times. The creativeness of the Mandaeans and their unique theology and practices (especially their baptismal rites) perhaps had an impact on Christian sacramental theology, underscoring the complex interplay of religious traditions in the ancient world. By probing the connections as we have, we may grasp better how early Christian practices could have been shaped by interactions with fraternal or related religious communities. Modern scholars continue to study the Mandaean texts to understand their unique perspective on Jesus and early Christianity (Yamauchi 1971; Buckley 2005).

We have insisted that Miriai, is a pivotal figure in Mandaean literature, representing the community's spiritual ideals of purity, enlightenment, and theological resistance to external influences. While some scholars compare her to Mary or Mary Magdalene, Mandaeans firmly root her in their cosmology as a symbol of alignment with the Lightworld (*Alma d-Nhura*) and *Manda* (esoteric knowledge). Her rejection of Judaic legalism and Christological frameworks underscores Mandaeanism's distinct identity, pointing to broader polemical and theological narratives. Further studies on Miriai's role in primary sources, such as JB, CP, GR and HG and her intersections with Gnostic, Jewish, and early Christian traditions could deepen our understanding of Mandaean self-perception and historical development.

The relationships between John the Baptist and Jesus, and between the followers of John the Baptist and those of Jesus and Mani in Late Antiquity, seem to be deeper and more complicated than what have already been claimed by many scholars of these three wide fields of studies. Some researchers suggest that the close geographical and cultural proximity of Mandaeans, early Christians, and early Manichaeans in Mesopotamia and the

Levant facilitated mutual influences and exchanges of religious ideas and practices (e.g., McGrath 2021).

This is all the more the case when considering the recent availability of hidden texts which should be critically studied to better clarify cultural-religious connections between the followers of these three great traditions, especially during the Late Antiquity.

The core of Naṣoraean/Mandaeen teachings is based on the five cosmic principles, loosely translated as Life, Light, Love, Peace, and Harmony. The followers are always aiming towards ideals of a greater universality, in purity, healing, redemption, integration, enlightenment, elevation, and wisdom that leads to cosmic Order and cosmic Truth (*Kuṣṭa*). By inclining this way, they hope to free themselves—during both this life journey in the material body and in the journey after death in the ethereal body—from all kinds of defilements and imprisoning elements of this world. During both journeys, there should be no *separation* from the Truth (*Kuṣṭa*), or from the Pure Light (*Nhura Dakia*) or the Great Life (*Hiia Rbia*). The Mandaeans have high expectations to have their Prayers (*Rahmia/Biriktas*), Baptisms (*Maṣbutas*), and Ascensions/Heavenly Connection (*Masiqtas*) fulfilled by *Hiia* (Life) and *Manda d-Hiia* (Gnosis/Knowledge of Life), believing that they are divinely appointed carers of humanity until the end of the world. This essay confirms the importance of their interactions with other traditions at their births, but it also addresses twin disappointments when the founders of Christianity and Manichaeism, two of the most influential and widespread emerging religions during the so-called Patristic period, went their own way.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> GR consists of two parts *Ginza Yamina* (hereafter GY) and *Ginza Smala* (hereafter GS). We will be using the edn. by Petermann [*Thesaurus sive Liber Magnus*, vols. 1–2 [hereafter GR], [but note most recently edn. by Al-Mubarakī, Saaed (=Nasoraia), and Mubarakī, as *Ginza Rabba: The Great Treasure*. It is translated by Lidzbarski, *Ginzā: Der Schatz, oder das grosse Buch der Mandäer* [hereafter *Ginza*].

<sup>2</sup> Crehan tracked down the earliest reference to the Mandaeans, which goes back to “a Jesuit priest from the island of Ormuz (in the Persian Gulf)” sending a note to Lisbon”, signed by three Jesuit missionaries at Goa (India) and dated 10 November 1555, about finding “the Christians of St. John”. It is strange to find Mandaeans on a far island in the Gulf, but as Crehan writes:

So successful were the Mandaeans in accentuating points of resemblance when talking to the Jesuits of Ormuz and Goa that a further report was sent to Europe at the end of 1555 in the form of a newsletter; it was translated into Italian, and this has survived, though the Portuguese original is lost. The letter says: In the past few days there has now come to Goa a Christian who belongs to those who are called Christians of St. John, wishing to see a boy related to him who is here in the school. Through an interpreter he told us that they are ready to obey the Holy Roman Church, and that they have all its sacraments and ritual. The Patriarch of Armenia sends them a bishop. They are subject to an Arab ruler and the place where they live is called Bassorā [=Basra]. The Arab ruler allows them to have churches and to say Mass, but the Turks often raid those parts and destroy their churches, so that they are forced to go into the mountains to say Mass in places where the Turk cannot come. He told us also that there are up to 40,000 married Christians there with their families.

That means the number of Mandaeans at that time may have exceeded 200,000, in contrast to later records (in 1935) counting only 4000 in Iraq. The depletion was due severe persecution, forced conversions and the brutal killing of Mandaeans by Muslims, actions continuing to the present day. Crehan puts the use of designation “Christians of St. John” to group “caution” against attacks:

The very name may have been adopted by the Mandaeans as a protection against the Turks, who would know of Christians and of the power of the Portuguese, but who would not pay much heed to a small band of sectaries. One might dismiss the whole conversation but for the one fact which has now emerged. There was an Armenian bishop amongst them. (Crehan 1968, pp. 624–25)

- 3 Adiabene was an ancient kingdom in northern Mesopotamia, located around the area between the two Zab Rivers (the Great and the Little), its capital being Arbela and its control ultimately extending Nineveh. This kingdom reached its peak under the Izates II (ruling 30–54 CE), who was allowed the territorial dominion of Nisibis by the Parthian king, Artabanus II (ca. 12–40). See (Marciak 2017, pp. 269–70 and esp. p. 447; Frye 1983, pp. 116–180; 1984, e.g., pp. 222, 279).
- 4 The term most commonly used is *madaï*, also with a frequent variant *midai* as in HG, p. 6, etc.; see *Book of the Zodiac* (ed. Drower [p.] 182, ln. 8]; HG, p. 5 n. 4; cf. Drower 1960, p. xiii; MD, pp. 131b, 239a; Häberl 2012, 2018), but note also from HG. 7, “the Median Hills (*tura d-madaï* [var. *midai*] *d-hdariun* ‘lh [or “the Mountain(s) of the Medes”, or, in another reading, “Mountain(s) of the Mandaeans [or the Mandaean Mountain(s)]”!] about which they travelled”; cf. MD, pp. 131b, 178b, 239a; Deegan 2020, p. 199 and n. 797). It is interesting to note that *Jabal Maddā’ī*, is recorded from the Mandaean oral tradition, especially by Drower (1937, p. 316). This was given more attention and discussed recently by Häberl (2018, pp. 58–59), who stated that “Drower . . . collected oral traditions situating this territory ‘to the west’ of the then current distribution of the Mandæans, in and around a legendary ‘Mountain of the Mandæans’, also known as *Jabal Maddā’ī*, ‘for Arabs call the Jebel Mandai [sic] the Jebel Maddai [sic]’”).
- 5 It seems that the Mandaic form of Miriai was developed and written in some later forms as Miriam/Mariam (cf. the Arabic *مريم* Mariam), to refer to Mary (the mother of Jesus). For example, we read that in GY 382: 10, ‘Šu br Miriam/Mariam (Jesus son of Mary). This is similar to the old Aramaic form of the (Biblical) Aramaic name Miriam (the sister of Moses, and later as the mother of Jesus) (cf. Hebrew מִרְיָם, Aramaic ܡܝܪܝܡ, Arabic مريم). Cf. MD, p. 254a.
- 6 For See MD, p. 293b.
- 7 Ibid. See, e.g., GY 110: 18, 134:1 (also *Ginza* p. 5 n. 2); JB ii p. 1 n. 1; (very frequently in) CP [e.g., Nos. 1 (p.1 and n. 1), 9 (p. 7), 17 (p. 12), 23 (p. 19 and n. 2), 35 (p. 34), 49 (p. 43), 51 (p. 47), 76 (p. 82 and n. 1), 105 (p. 106), 119 (p. 115), etc.]. We read the following passage in CP No. 163 (p. 141) [cf. No. 165 (pp. 143–46)]: In the name of the Great Life/Sublime Light be magnified!/On Sunday, on the chief of days,/Who saw that which I have seen?/Who saw Manda-dHiia who set out and came to the world?/He set out and came to the world and three ‘uthras came with him./When he had put on a robe of radiance and light/Thrown over his shoulders, An ether-wreath he set on his head/And he set it on all his kin./On Sunday, on the chief of days/Who hath seen that which I have seen?/Who saw the Stranger who went/And stayed at the house of his friends?/I, who saw the Stranger/Mine eyes were filled with His light/Mine eyes with light were filled/And knowledge (*manda*) dwelt in my heart/In my heart knowledge dwelt/And my mouth filled with his praise;/His praise filled my mouth./And I arose, and I praise my Father./I arose and (gave?) praises to my Father/From dawn until the decline of day/I praised His great radiance/And I praised his lovely light . . .
- 8 Recent Mandaean texts have very recently come to light that trace John lineage back at least six generations, and throw light on the question of kin connections with Jesus; but these documents will have to be tested for their age and reliability, and I am at liberty to discuss their contents as yet.
- 9 For relevant nomenclatures, *iahia*, in Aram. form as *iahia iuhana*, John the Baptist. See *Ginza*, p. 213. Also as *iahia br zakaria* (e.g., GY 213: 10, 218:23. See MD, p. 185a. For *iuhana*, John. John the Baptist, called also *iahia iuhana*. see JB ii 70 ff. Other references to him are as *iuhana mašbana* (e.g., GY 189:1 ff.). *iuhana mitlid b’urašlam iuhana laḡiṭ iardna*, etc. JB 70:8 ff.; *iuhana brh d-aba šaba zakria* GY 57:5; and *nbaṭ br iuhana* GY 362:8, cf. 364:9. See MD, p. 190a.
- 10 Relevant nomenclatures are as *mšiha* (pass. pt. pe. of MŠA, H. N°), Aram. Nw, Syr. Laxaro, Ar. esp.) ‘anointed one’, Messiah, Christ (in Mandaeanism an evil being), identified with Mercury. *mšiha d- kadba* GY 27:18 = *mšiha kadaba* GY 247:14, 387:4 = *mšiha dagala* GY 51:3 Christ the liar; *rumaia mšiha* and *mšiha rumaia* GY 58:1 ff. probably meaning the same, and Christ the Roman (a pun); *nbu mšiha* GY 27:18, 28:2, 56:4 Mercury the Christ; *bšum alahuta umšiha* Q 60:3 in the name of the deity and Christ; *mšiha nbiha d-iahuṭaiia* GY27:14 Christ the prophet of the Jews; *mšiha mitiglia bdmuta hurintin* GY 28:15 Christ will appear in another form; *šitūata d-ruha umšiha* GY 254:10 abominations of R. and Christ; *šitūa d-šaṭia mšiha kulh* GY 111:13 the whole abomination which Christ committeth; *mšiha baṭla*; GY 223:12 the good-for-nought Christ; *mšihaiia* (adj. from preced.) (MD, p. 280b). Also note the usage *nbu mšiha d-kadba* GY 27:18 (cf. 51:3) Nbu the false Messiah; another name for Jesus being associated with Nbu (the planet Mercury and Orpheus (Mandaic: *aurus*) in GR II.1 [Book 2, Part 1]. Through MD; GY; JB; HG; and CP, *nbu*, ‘*nbi* (Bab. *Nabi*) Nebo, or the planet Mercury, is identified with Christ; cf. MD, p. 126 on (Brandt [1889] 1912, p. 126); and p. 29 on (Bousset 1907); cf. also the MD Index on Nabu and Mercury. Jesus is also portrayed as one of the *maṭarta* guards, as he plays the role of a shepherd leading a congregation of souls resembling a flock of sheep, GR V.3.[3][4]. Other relevant verbiage has *mara* 3 (perhaps a reminiscence of *Ginza* p. 52 n. 2), the name of a hill (on which according to a Mandaean tradition Jesus was crucified); *tura d-mara* GY 58:15 (if ‘the hill of the Lord’, the name apparently being due to Christian influence) (MD, p. 251b).

- 11 Naṣōraeans and *Naṣiruta* hold a significant place in Mandaean literature. CP mentions *Naṣiruta* more than fifteen times (Nos, 58 n. 6, 83, 112, 130, 160, 181, 184, 194, 202, 241, 275, 285 n. 3, 287, 314, 316), and Naṣōraean(s) are mentioned more than eighteen times (CP, Nos. 31, 38–9, 52, 68, 71, 83 n. 8, 91, 139, 148, 154, 155, 179, 245, 248, 251, 269) (Nasoraia 2023, p. 251 n. 7).
- 12 There is a strict division between Mandaean laity and the priests. According to Ethyl Drower (1960, p. ix): “[T]hose amongst the community who possess secret knowledge are called Naṣuraiia—Naṣōraeans (or, if the emphatic <ṣ> is written as <z>, Nazorenes). At the same time the ignorant or semi-ignorant laity are called ‘Mandaeans’, Mandaiia—‘gnostics’. When a man becomes a priest he leaves ‘Mandaeism’ and enters tarmiduta, ‘priesthood’. Even then he has not attained to true enlightenment, for this, called ‘Naṣiruta’, is reserved for a very few. Those possessed of its secrets may call themselves Naṣōraeans, and ‘Naṣōraean’ today indicates not only one who observes strictly all rules of ritual purity, but one who understands the secret doctrine”. See also (Segelberg 1970).
- 13 Cf. another Haran recorded in GY XVIII: 14 (related to the story of Noah and the Flood), but not the “Inner” Haran mentioned in HG, p. 3. It reads: *uḡṭal arzia mn haran uaṣuhia mn libnan* “and cut down cedars from Haran and female cedars from Lebanon” (Deegan 2020, p. 198 n. 784).
- 14 For Haran or Hauran see HG, p. 3 n. 2. (Häberl 2018, pp. 59, 82–84). Hauran sometimes comes with another name ‘Hauraran’ (e.g., CP Nos. 14 (p. 10), 28 (p. 23), or Hauraran by itself CP Nos. 27 (23), 29 (p. 23), 49 (pp. 43 and 44). The Mandaic sources mentioned Hauraran, mostly related to a heavenly Being or Edenic (heavenly or earthly) place as in GY XV, GS III. CP No. 379 p. 298 reads: Moreover, thou wilt be blessed with the blessing/Pronounced in the Jordan and in the land of Hauraran,/The great land of light. And upon thee shall rest/Its glory and joy, that which abideth in the Innermost./On account of its magnificence they rejoice, embrace one another/And take one another’s hands in troth./Thy fragrance will be sweet like the scent/Of trees of the world of light. Thy brightness/Will break forth and thy light shine out/In the earthly world like flashings of radiance,/And beams of light, going forth to bring into existence.
- 15 Häberl (2012, pp. 264–65) stated that it “is the principle affluent of the Euphrates in the Syrian desert. Anne Blunt (1881, pp. 235–40) and Gertrude Bell (1911, pp. 131–32) both relate local traditions according to which Wādi Ḥaurān is one of three valleys that communicate between the Jabal Ḥaurān and the Euphrates, despite the fact that its source is actually Jabal ‘Anāzah (or ‘Unayzah), located where the borders of Jordan, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia converge”. The geographer Claudius Ptolemy (writing first half of the second-century CE), identifies the region of Babylonia watered by Wādi Ḥaurān as the Auranitis in Book 5, Chapter 17 of his Geography. Although the Wādi Ḥaurān does not actually begin in the Jabal Ḥaurān, the aforementioned traditions place its source there, effectively making the two Auranitides contiguous in the mental geography of the region, even if they are not contiguous in its physical geography. Although this Auranitis can hardly be identified with the “hill country of the Medians”, (as most scholars have translated, Ṭura d-Madai), it is nonetheless located in close proximity to both the Arsacid capital and the present-day distribution of the Mandaeans, making it as plausible a candidate as any thus far advanced.
- 16 As Prof. Garry Trompf has thankfully reminded me, referring to scattered works in the *Patrologia Orientalis* (e.g., vol. 4, ch.6; vol. 8, fasc. 1, vol. 55, fasc. 3) and other collections.
- 17 These Coptic texts, either written by Mani himself or descended from the first Manichaean generations (dated the late 3rd century CE or before the mid-4th century CE), were found in the codices as part of the ‘Medinet Madi library’ in the 1920s. These texts are translations from the Syriac-Aramaic originals into Coptic (Gardner 2010b, pp. 87–88).
- 18 Now, during 1993–1994 I came across important untouched and unstudied new secret Mandaean documents and lead rolls. Part of them in a private Mandaean collection and the other part found in a special section belong to the Iraqi Museum. In 1994 I managed to show some of them to Dr Erica Hunter and Dr. Michael Müller-Karpe. We discussed the possibilities of treating, opening, and recovering them. We planned to study and publish them at Baghdad University in cooperation with Heidelberg University and the Iraqi Museum. However, due to radical intimidations, threats, and political challenges, I escaped and left Iraq in 1995 to Australia, leaving them behind along with many other valuable documents and Mandaic original material, including my private collections and library (one of the largest in Iraq, comprising of more than 20,000 books). Some of these documents related to John the Baptist, early Christianity and Manichaeism, thus, from the year 1999 on (to the present day), after extensive discussions with my dearest colleague Professor Garry Trompf regarding these new findings, we considered the possibilities of reaching these documents again and organizing a proper examination of them. In 2006 Dr Edward Crangle and I made a bid for research funds under a preparatory “Research Seed Funding Scheme”. Soon after I negotiated with another colleague and Manichaean specialist Professor Iain Gardner to probe new findings on Mani and Manichaeism in newly available Mandaean secret sources. In conjunction with Gardner and Crangle some groundwork on the topic was laid, using some University and Australian Government research Grants, including the Research Infrastructure Blocks Grants Scheme (RIBG) of the Australian Government’s Department of Education. In 2007 the process of raising funds to research early Mandaean/Manichaean relations eventually bore fruit in the re-acquisition (in 2006–2007) of neglected documents. The primarily work begun under an Australian Research Council (ARC) ‘Seed Grant’ for Large Research, and carried out with Gardner and myself, and later in conjunction with Semiticist Professor Rifaat Ebied). Due to some difficulties, political challenges and lack of funding we postponed the implementation of the work. These secret Mandaean writings give us unparalleled information, especially many details related to



Mani and his followers. Very recently (during 2023–2024), a newly initiated Mandaean living in Australia, made a controversial announcement about his receiving (from secretive or underhanded non-Mandaean sources) images of many hundreds of a large range of old secret Mandaean documents previously unknown to the Mandaeans. Some of them related to social and religious issues, ritual instructions, the history of Mandaeans, John the Baptist and Jesus. He claimed that most of them were engraved on different sizes of lead plates and rolls, some holding short sections on Mani's life and teachings. After an initial examination of this matter, they were faced with strong questioning and formal rejection of his assertions from the Mandaean headship. However, the matter remains subject to debate.

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