

Mandaean Priority: Draft Essay

The Priority of Mandaean Tropes Generally Considered Derivative of Christian and Islamic Influences

Draft Essay

Samuel Zinner
Aulla, Tuscany
23 March 2017

ABSTRACT

There are good reasons for doubting the standard model that insists Mandaean beliefs and formulae that parallel Christian and Islamic traditions are basically derivative. Mandaism's focus on John the Baptizer is not the result of Islamic influence but reflects the religion's origins in ancient Palestine as an independent group that developed at about the same time as the Jewish Jesus sect. Similarly, the parallels between some Mandaean texts and the Johannine gospel are not the result of Mandaean "borrowing"; each represents an independent trajectory based on John the Baptizer's preaching, modified according to each group's needs. Similarities between Islamic and Mandaean liturgies and prayer formulae are best explained as the result of Mandaean influence upon nascent Islam rather than the latter's influence upon Mandaism. Similarities between Mandaean and Jewish liturgies result from preservation of traditions (dynamically modified over time) from the era before Mandaeans parted ways from their Jewish or at least Jewish-related matrix.

--The author wishes to thank Charles Häberl, Director, *Center for Middle Eastern Studies*, Rutgers University, and Bernhard Lang, University of Paderborn, University of Aarhus, for reading through the essay and offering helpful comments. Any remaining errors are solely my own.

Mandaism is one of the few living religions of Gnosticism.¹ As I will argue, similarities between Jewish and Mandaean liturgies are most parsimoniously² explained if Mandaism, which eventually became a theologically anti-Jewish religious group, originated as a Jewish or a somehow Jewish-related sect. A denial of Gnosticism's origins in Judaism because of the former's anti-Judaism is not a decisive argument, because as Lester L. Grabbe observes, Christianity grew into an anti-Jewish movement

¹ The Yazidi religion is another example of a living form of Gnosticism.

² Charles Häberl added in his comments on this paper: "And charitably, in the philosophical sense of assuming that Mandaean claims are rational and made in good faith. Most mainstream scholarship starts from the assumption that Mandaeans are out to hoodwink the rest of us, but I can guarantee that the same scholars would never be so uncharitable to Jewish, Christian, and Muslim claims."

Mandaean Priority: Draft Essay

despite its Jewish origins.³ As Grabbe continues: “To get from Judaism to Gnosticism is not easy, but it is certainly not impossible. . . . One does not have to bridge the gap all in one go.”⁴ Regarding the era of Gnosticism’s origin/s, the fact that it appears already fully developed in the early second century CE arguably makes a first century origin probable, and as Grabbe writes, “the situation in Judaism after 70 was not conducive to this sort of development; it seems likely that any Jewish proto-Gnosticism was already in existence before the 66–70 war.”⁵ Grabbe concludes with the following important observations: “Many of the pre-70 strands of Judaism were cut off by the 66–70 war or disappeared soon afterwards because of the changed circumstances. Others developed in their own way, leading away from Judaism itself: the Christians and perhaps the Gnostics.”⁶ I would be more specific here, for present purposes, and say, “the Christians and perhaps the Mandaeans.”

One plausible source of Jewish traditions that later may have morphed into Gnostic notions is Qumran.⁷ As Elliot R. Wolfson contends, “one may conjecture that the priestly literati in the desert community placed at the center of their visionary landscape God’s knowledge, *da‘at ’elohim*, the ultimate object of imaginal representation and contemplative meditation.”⁸ Wolfson notes that “Davies . . . distinguishes unequivocally between the *gnosis* of Gnosticism and the knowledge of the Qumran scrolls. . . . By contrast, according to my onto-theosophic interpretation of *da‘at* in Qumran literature, the link to Gnosticism is more pronounced, for I am proposing a mythopoeic conception of the divine mind that encompasses a multiplicity of hypostatic

³ Lester L. Grabbe, *An Introduction to Second Temple Judaism: History and Religion of the Jews in the Time of Nehemiah, the Maccabees, Hillel and Jesus* (London/NY: T&T Clark, 2010), p. 123. However, Grabbe’s claim needs to be qualified. The original Jewish followers of Jesus did not become anti-Jewish. It was the Gentile movement founded by Paul, which was only indirectly rooted in Judaism by virtue of its founder Paul’s Jewish background, that became anti-Jewish.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 123. Häberl informs me that, based on a personal meeting between him and the late Cyrus Gordon, that the latter should be added to the list of scholars who have suspected some measure of Jewish origins for Gnosticism. Incidentally, cf. Cyrus H. Gordon, “Gnostic Light on Genesis 1 and 2 via Mašša’,” in Cyrus H. Gordon; Gary A. Rendsburg, eds., *Eblaïtica: Essays on the Ebla Archives and Eblaïte Language*. Volume 4 (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2002), pp. 197-198.

⁵ Lester L. Grabbe, *An Introduction to Second Temple Judaism*, pp. 123-124.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁷ Häberl added in his comments here: “In discussing the Qumran community, I’m reminded of what Jonas and Voegelin had to say about Gnostic theology, and how it relates to secular salvationist movements in the 20th century (or for that matter Harold Bloom’s work on the American Religion, which is much less charitable to Gnostics and Americans). If we look at Gnosticism not in genetic terms but rather as a potential response to a specific set of conditions or crises that is latent in any worldview (including secularism) I think we can easily get to the Essenes.”

⁸ Elliot R. Wolfson, “Seven Mysteries of Knowledge: Qumran E/Soterism Recovered,” in Hindy Najman, Judith H. Newman, eds., *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2004), p. 203.

Mandaean Priority: Draft Essay

potencies, the esoteric knowledge of which affords one salvation through a transformative experience of ascending upward by turning inward.”⁹

It might be helpful to quote Oscar Cullmann at this juncture:

It is altogether false to set Jewish Christian theology and Gnosticism over against one another as two opposite poles, so to speak, between which the theology of the early Church moved. The Jewish Christian Christology especially is usually considered the antithesis of Gnostic Docetic Christology. In reality, the sources reveal that it is precisely the earliest Christian Gnosticism, which we can trace back into the New Testament itself, that bears a Jewish Christian character.¹⁰

As Cullmann remarks, the Clementine literature is at once “Jewish Christian” and “typically Gnostic.” Cullmann explains that “H. J. Schoeps attempts to show against my thesis that there is no Gnosticism here. But we differ only in our choice of words. Schoeps seems to recognize only a narrow concept of Gnosticism. In reality, it is just the new Qumran discoveries which show that there was Gnosticism already in Judaism. Schoeps later revised his opinion.”¹¹ Cullmann supplies the relevant documentation:

In opposition to W. Bousset and to my own thesis, *Le problème littéraire et historique du roman pseudoclémentin*, 1930, H. J. Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums*, 1949, pp. 305 ff., attempts to dispute the Gnostic character of these writings. But his attempt is not successful, for his strong emphasis on the rabbinical source of the Pseudo-Clementine thought forms proves nothing against its Gnostic character. R. Bultmann, *Gnomon*, 1954, pp. 177 ff., correctly replies that Gnosticism penetrated also into rabbinical circles.¹² G. Bornkamm, *ZKG* 64, 1952/53, pp. 196 ff., also rejects Schoeps’ argument. See also my essay, “*Die neuentdeckten Qumrantexte und das*

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*. Revised Edition. Translated by Shirley C. Guthrie and Chaeles A. M. Hall (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), p. 38.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Note by Samuel Zinner: Häberl added in his comments: “Rav Tavyomi in Tractate *Sanhedrin* (97a), ends up in a place called Truth, whose people do not change (*meshanne*) their words, and never die before their time. This same place (conveniently called Meshonni Kushta) is of critical importance to Mandaeans, and of course at least twice the *Ginza* enjoins victory for the ‘Nazorene people, who do not change (*meshanni*) what Life has commanded.’ I think it may be evidence for Mandaean-Rabbinic relations in the 4th century. Re: ‘whatever is born of Truth does not die’ (*Dialogue of the Saviour*). This is in *Sanhedrin* too, and in the Mandaean tradition Truth is home to our doubles, who are pure from sin and therefore transcend directly to the lightworld when we die. In their place, we come to occupy their bodies and pass through the celestial penitentiaries to become purified from our own sins before we can rejoin them in the world of light. So in a very real (and surprisingly literal sense) both traditions offer intriguing parallels to this passage.”

Mandaean Priority: Draft Essay

Judenchristentum der Pseudoklementinen," *Theol. Stud. f. R. Bultmann*, 1954, pp. 35 ff. – Recently Schoeps, "Das gnostische Judentum in den Dead Sea Scrolls," *Ztschr. f. Religions- u. Geistesgeschichte*, 1954 p. 277, himself admits: "To me the most important conclusion to date is that 'Gnostic Judaism in the pre-Christian period,' which in both my books . . . I declared problematic and improbable, really existed." In view of this, it is strange that in his most recent work, *Urkirche, Judenchristentum und Gnosis*, 1956, he returns to his old position, which is characterized by a greatly narrowed concept of Gnosis, and explains all Gnostic features in Judaism as "pseudo-Gnostic."¹³

Not only Christianity, but even later Islam can enter this mix, for as Guy G. Stroumsa words it, in a certain "sense, one can trace a trajectory of ancient Christianity which leads it from Qumran to Qur'ān."¹⁴ From Qumran because "the Christian communities" were "originally close to the Qumran covenants."¹⁵ To Qur'ān because, as Stroumsa documents, there is good evidence that "Jewish-Christian" groups survived into the Islamic period, when they influenced, with many other groups as well, the formation of nascent Islam.¹⁶ However, we should not be overly historicist here, for as Stroumsa hastens to add in qualifying language: "The mystery of the birth of a religion cannot be solved, and neither can the alchemical transformation of religious ideas, of their passage from fluid to solid state."¹⁷ I would apply this to both Islam and Mandaism, as well as to Judaism. I would also add the theological caveat that Mandaeanism do not believe John the Baptizer founded their religion, for on the contrary their faith is considered by them to be as old as Adam. This is actually quite similar to Islamic theology, which holds that Adam was the first Muslim in the essential sense that he practiced "submission" to God. Indeed, it is my view that Islam owes its emphasis on Adam in this respect partly to Mandaean ideas. By saying this, I do not mean to detract from Islam's uniqueness (every religion is unique in its own ways, each has its own *raison d'être*). In fact, such a claim can be seen as congruent with the Qur'ānic claim to be a confirmation of the previous divine revelations. However, in all these cases there is always the dimension of history to take into account, which means that for Muslims

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

¹⁴ Guy G. Stroumsa, "From Qumran to Qur'ān: the Religious Worlds of Ancient Christianity," Charlotte Methuen, Andrew Spicer, John Wolffe, eds., *Christianity and Religious Plurality* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2015), p. 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁶ Häberl informs me of "Ginza 18, which I believe was redacted at Hira during the last few decades of the Lakhmid dynasty and immediately afterward. I presented on this topic at the FU-Berlin and it was well-received there. If we can put Mandaeanism at Hira (and I think we have pretty incontrovertible proof that this is the case), then the presence of 'Jewish-Christian' Sabians in the Arabian peninsula is no longer so farfetched."

¹⁷ Guy G. Stroumsa, "Jewish Christianity and Islamic Origins," in Benham Sadeghi, et al., eds., *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts: Essays in Honor of Professor Patricia Crone* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2015), pp. 90-91.

Mandaean Priority: Draft Essay

there is no contradiction between believing that on the one hand Adam was the first Muslim and on the other hand that Islam as one of the world's great religions was propagated in seventh-century CE Arabia. Similarly, *mutatis mutandis*, it would not contradict Mandaean theology to argue that Mandaeanism experienced various special developments in the time of John the Baptizer, thanks in part to his spiritual leadership roles.

As already hinted at, we should apply a similar caveat to the origins of Judaism. While modern Judaism bears distinctive traits acquired during the Babylonian exile and consolidated thereafter, it certainly continues in its own way some aspects of the older Israelite religion. In the heyday of the 19th-century History of Religions school, the Israelite religion was often depicted as little more than the modification or "borrowing" of ancient near eastern "paganism." Certainly the Israelite religion cannot be understood without reference to the surrounding ancient near eastern cultures and their religions, of which it was an integral member. However, scholars must not lose sight of the fact that each ancient near eastern culture, including the Israelite, had its own unique aspects which are not to be ignored on account of the many comparative similarities and mutual participations and interpenetrations.

Since the 1500s, the time of the modern western discovery of the Mandaeans, the group has been the target of Christian missionary efforts.¹⁸ Missionaries believed that Mandaeans stood in need of the light of the Christian gospel. On the opposite end of the spectrum, centuries later Mark Lidzbarski and Rudolf Bultmann were of the view that Mandaean texts could actually shed some light on Christian origins. Thus, despite Mandaean texts' late committal to writing, these preserved and transmitted many ancient ideas. Accordingly, Bultmann in his magisterial commentary on the Gospel of John copiously cited Mandaean sources throughout.¹⁹ Christian scholars reacted against this approach rather heatedly, feeling their faith's uniqueness was thereby threatened, not to mention their undoubted outrage at the suggestion that the Gnostic "heresy," especially in its Mandaean variant that in the name of John the Baptizer rejected Jesus as messiah,²⁰ could have anything to do with Christian origins.

¹⁸ See Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley, *The Mandaeans: Ancient Texts and Modern People* (Oxford/NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 5-6, 16.

¹⁹ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*. Translated by G. R. Beasley-Murray, R. W. N. Hoare, J. K. Riches (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971). To be noted is also Bultmann's earlier, "Die Bedeutung der neuerschlossenen mandäischen und manichäischen Quellen für das Verständnis des Johannesevangeliums," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 24 (1925): pp. 100-146.

²⁰ Charles Häberl refers me to his "Reading Paul out of the Book of John." <<https://philologastray.wordpress.com/2016/12/03/reading-paul-out-of-the-book-of-john/>>. The point here is that John rejects Jesus, and has nothing to say about Paul in the Book of John's passage about Jesus' baptism. Häberl adds in his comments on my present paper: "The strange thing about the Book of John is that Jesus is usually just called *mshiha*." This usage of 'messiah' for Jesus by both Mandaeans and Samaritans incidentally, is explained by the fact that in Aramaic the root MŠH does not mean 'to anoint.' See Ursula Schattner-Rieser, "Jesus in den Samaritanischen Chroniken," in Jörg

Mandaean Priority: Draft Essay

The views of such scholars, which deny spiritual authenticity and ancient historical foundations to Mandaeism, continue to influence experts (Christian and otherwise) today, some of whom also call into question virtually all comparisons between the New Testament and Qumran literature. That a relatively conservative Christian scholar such as the deservedly respected James H. Charlesworth can identify Qumran influences in early Christianity²¹ indicates to me that the denial of such influences may be described as extreme. The claim usually goes that while John and Qumran share similar language, by contrast the meaning, intention and theology of the terms are different and therefore cannot be related historically.²² The obvious answer to such objections is that of course there are dissimilarities along with the similarities between Qumran and John, but the former do not disprove a common matrix somewhere in the background, at least to some degree. The dissimilarities can be explained by varying concerns at work during the adaptation of ideas into new historical and theological contexts.

Writing on the date of the Gospel of John, Stanley E. Porter (whose work in general I respect and enjoy) writes: “Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976), whose interpreter Walter Schmithals claims Bultmann indicates ad 80 to 120 in his commentary.”²³ Why not cite Bultmann directly? Porter later writes negatively of Bultmann: “Note that Bultmann was inclined to see the influence of Mandaeism on John’s Gospel (even though it was much later), clearly imposing a later development (more akin to a later date) on John’s Gospel.”²⁴ Porter supplies no references to support his convictions here, but scholars of Mandaeism know that he is in fact referring to what are in the final analysis prejudiced sources that reflect attitudes which in spirit actually go back all the way to the 16th century Christian missionaries.

Jon Olav Ryen carefully examines parallels between John 15 and Mandaean vine symbolism.²⁵ He concludes as follows:

The Mandaean texts are considerably younger than the Gospel of John but some of the Mandaean *traditions* may be traced back to the 1st century AD (e.g., parts of the traditions about John the Baptist or liturgical traditions) and before (cf. the

Frey, Ursula Schattner-Rieser, Konrad Schmid, eds., *Die Samaritaner und die Bibel: Historische und literarische Wechselwirkungen zwischen biblischen und samaritanischen* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), p. 241.

²¹ See, e.g., his various contributions in the three volumes of James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2006).

²² For a representative example of this approach, see Enno E. Popkes, “About the Differing Approach to a Theological Heritage: Comments on the Relationship between the Gospel of John, the Gospel of Thomas, and Qumran,” in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Volume Three: The Scrolls and Christian Origins* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2006), pp. 281-317.

²³ Stanley E. Porter, “The Date of John’s Gospel and Its Origins,” in Stanley E. Porter Hughson T. Ong, eds., *The Origins of John’s Gospel* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2016), p. 16.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Jon Olav Ryen, *The Tree in the Lightworld*, pp. 304-308.

Mandaean Priority: Draft Essay

Jewish material). In the light of the relatively late dating of Mandaean texts (3rd century AD and later) compared to John (about 80-100 AD), it seems unlikely that Mandaean texts have influenced the fourth gospel directly. However, some of the striking parallels between Mandaeanism and the Gospel of John may be due to a common Gnostic (Gnostic-Jewish) tradition or source. The parallels could also be explained by a certain influence from Johannine circles (or the written gospel) on the Mandaeans and their literature. A third possibility is also thinkable. These parallels could be more accidental, so that the ideas found in both Johannine and Mandaean literature were more common in ancient thought than we have known so far.²⁶

Elsewhere Jon Olav Ryen summarizes:

The Gospel of John contains striking parallels to some of the Mandaean vine texts. These parallels were noted with great enthusiasm in the early phase of Mandaean scholarship, and the similarities were often overestimated. . . . Nowadays these parallels are only rarely discussed by religious historians or New Testament scholars. . . . There are good reasons to refresh the discussion of the relationship between the Gospel of John and Mandaean writings in general, and the vine motif in these two traditions in particular. For parallels *do* exist. . . . At the same time, there are also important differences between the Johannine and Mandaean vine images (cf. the exclusiveness of Jesus according to John 15), due to very different frameworks and mythologies of the Christian and Mandaean scriptures. Perhaps the striking parallels between the Mandaean and Johannine vine can be best explained by the presumable origin of their movements. Independently of each other, the Christian and Mandaean groups were formed in, or on the fringes of, Jewish communities. The rich vine symbol in Jewish tradition was utilised and transformed into a Christological image by the Johannine school, probably under the influence from Gnostic movements. A similar process with regard to the vine symbol many have taken place in Mandaeanism, but with other ideological preferences and in a different social and religious setting. Consequently, the vine symbol was utilised and interpreted in unlike ways in Christianity and Mandaeanism respectively.²⁷

It is often overlooked that the vine traditions in John 15 attributed to Jesus are in fact just a transformation and reworking of traditions ascribed to John the Baptizer in Matthew 3.8, 10, 12 and Luke 3.8-9, 17. The Gospel of John omits this teaching of John the Baptizer and transfers it in transformed ways to Jesus in John 15. John 15.26's teaching on the Spirit of truth likewise derives from John the Baptizer's preaching about the Spirit in Matthew 3.11 and Luke 3.16, which the Gospel of John does manage to retain in 1.32-33. The synoptic promise by John the Baptizer of the coming of the

²⁶ Ibid., p. 308; emphasis in original.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 310-311.

Mandaean Priority: Draft Essay

baptism in the Spirit is transformed in John 15-16 to a promise by Jesus of the coming of the Spirit of truth. Consequently, John 15.6's teaching on burning unfruitful branches with fire alludes to the synoptic baptism with fire foretold by John the Baptizer. Thus behind John 15 is the trope of baptism; after all, for a vine/branch to be fruitful, it must be watered, which here alludes to the water of baptism, which is the baptism of the Spirit that produces fruit, in contrast to the baptism of fire that destroys the un-watered and therefore unfruitful vines/branches.

In the overall situation that confronts us we have the gospels on the one hand which claim John recognized Jesus as messiah (although the evidence is not consistent; John's question in Luke 7:17ff. and parallels about Jesus after his arrest shows incertitude) and on the other hand the Mandaean texts that portray John the Baptizer as rejecting Jesus as messiah. A Christian scholar will not in a purportedly scholarly journal openly reject the Mandaean version on *theological* grounds. Instead, the rejection will be made on the basis of the claim that the gospels are "historical" while the Mandaean texts are not, because the gospels are "earlier" than the "late" Mandaean texts. However, even if we accept this reasoning, which really in some cases could just serve the purposes of theology and apologetics, it runs the risk of overlooking the fact that it doesn't take long at all for legendary accretions to develop. Such can take place rapidly and do not require several years' passage. Pertinent to these issues is Steve Mason's following remarks:

Yet we see an obvious and major difference between Josephus and the Gospels in their respective portraits of the Baptist. To put it bluntly, Josephus does not see John as a "figure in the Christian tradition." The Baptist is not connected with early Christianity in any way. On the contrary, Josephus presents him as a famous Jewish preacher with a message and a following of his own, neither of which is related to Jesus. This is a problem for the reader of the NT because the Gospels unanimously declare him to be essentially the *forerunner* of Jesus the Messiah.²⁸

If the earliest gospel, Mark, was written ca. 70 CE, then we have ample time for legends to have developed. However, if Mark is appreciably later, then the modification of history becomes even more plausible. An indication of a later dating of Mark not usually considered is the following. Neither Josephus nor the Qur'an says anything about John the Baptizer's beheading; for that matter, neither do Mandaean texts nor the Gospel of John. Only the synoptic gospels mention this detail. Matthew 14:1ff. tells the story of the beheading, derived from Mark 6:16ff. Luke omits the story, including only a brief mention of the beheading in 9:9 derived from Matthew and Mark. The passage on John the Baptizer in Josephus *Antiquities* 18.116-119 says nothing of a beheading. However, immediately before the John the Baptizer account, we read in 18.115 of Herod wanting the head of Aretas. In the lead-up to this we learn in 18.110 that Herod has fallen in love with Herodias and we read of Herodias demanding the divorce of Aretas'

²⁸ Steve Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), p. 155.

Mandaean Priority: Draft Essay

daughter. In 18.112 Herod sends Herodias to Macherus, to keep her hidden from his wife. The affair leads to a defeat of Herod's forces by those of Aretas. After 18.115, there follows in 18.116 the story of John the Baptizer's arrest and execution, but no beheading is mentioned.

It seems as if Mark could have transferred Josephus' mention of Herod's desire to behead Aretas to Herodias' daughter's desire to have John the Baptizer beheaded, which may have been facilitated by the proximity of the two passages in Josephus (18.115; 18.116-119). The *Jewish Antiquities* was written between 92-94 CE,²⁹ which would then mean that Mark could date to the mid-90s CE at the earliest, and easily probably somewhat later. Hermann Detering dates Mark 13's apocalypse to the time of the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132-135 CE),³⁰ which would place the gospel as a whole after 135 CE. As Detering writes: "In light of the fact that Bar Kochba is the only messianic pretender in Jewish history of the first and second centuries for whom claims can be documented which have word-for-word parallels in the Gospels, it is incomprehensible how this figure as well as the events of 130-135 have remained totally disregarded by historical-critical exegesis of the SynApoc."³¹

Svend Pallis' claim that the *Ginza Rba* 54,23-24 confuses Jesus' ascension with Jacob's ladder³² is as absurd as the Christian apologetics charge that the Qur'an confuses Moses' and Aaron's sister Mary with Jesus' mother of the same name. Why do not Christian apologists recognize that the Qur'an associates Jesus' mother with Aaron for symbolic and theological reasons? For the same reason of prejudice that Pallis could not understand that the *Ginza Rba* might have reflected a tradition that compared Jesus' ascension to Jacob's ladder. In fact, this is precisely what John's gospel does. After John 1:51's allusion to Jacob's ladder, "And he said to him, 'Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man,'" (NRSV) 3:13 alludes back to 1:51: "No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man." (NRSV) The next reference to the trope of ascension is in 6:62, which with its 'see' topos alludes back to 1:51: "Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?" (NRSV) The only remaining reference to ascension in John is in 20:17, where Jesus speaks of his imminent ascension to his father and to his God. In 20:18 Mary declares, "I have *seen* the Lord." The *Ginza Rba* therefore witnesses to an understanding of Jesus' ascension connected somehow to Jacob's ladder which is actually rooted in traditions preserved in (but not necessarily derived from) the Gospel of John, an understanding generally overlooked by Christian exegetes.

²⁹ See Louis H. Feldman, Gohei Hata, eds., *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), p. 16.

³⁰ Hermann Detering, "The Synoptic Apocalypse (Mark 13 Par): A Document from the Time of Bar Kochba," *Journal of Higher Criticism* 7/2 (Fall 2000): pp. 161-210.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

³² Svend Pallis, *Mandæan Studies* (London: Milford, 1926), p. 130. I owe the reference to Charles Häberl, which I have verified by directly consulting Pallis' work.

Mandaean Priority: Draft Essay

Specific clues to the origins of the Mandaeans can be identified. First are parallels with Jewish esoteric traditions, which have been discussed by authorities such as Deutsch and Quispel, which point to a Jewish connection of some sort, with an emphasis on esotericism.³³ Second are parallels to Christian traditions. These include especially Miriai (=Mary)³⁴ and Jaqif (=Jacob/James) as foundational figures.³⁵ Especially relevant and intriguing are the Coptic *Psalms of Thomas*, which although poetic are copied out in prose form in the manuscript, which is typical of Mandaean praxis.³⁶ The other Manichaean Coptic Psalms are by comparison quite different from the *Psalms of Thomas*, while Mandaean poetry is quite similar (sometimes identical) to the *Psalms of Thomas*.³⁷ Säve-Söderbergh argues for Mandaean priority over against Manichaean parallels,³⁸ although sometimes Coptic texts may preserve earlier and more correct readings than those extant in Mandaean manuscripts.³⁹

Säve-Söderbergh seems to suggest that the *Psalms of Thomas* constitute a Manichaean text composed probably by Mani's disciple Thomas while conducting missions among Mandaeans.⁴⁰ Whereas the *Psalms of Thomas* are generally held to be Manichaean texts, that they instead may be pre-Manichaean in origin has been ably argued by F. Forrester Church and G. Stroumsa, who assign the Psalms to the same general Syrian Thomasine trajectories that created texts such as the Gospel and Acts of Thomas and other cognate literature.⁴¹ Church and Stroumsa offer cogent answers to Säve-Söderbergh's insistence that the Thomas of the Psalms is most likely meant as Mani's disciple, and make a good case that on the contrary this Thomas is best understood as Jesus' famous disciple of that name. I would argue that the evidence of the *Psalms of Thomas* indicates Manichaeism arose partly out of a Mandaean matrix.

³³ Nathaniel Deutsch, *Guardians of the Gate: Angelic Vice Regency in Late Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), especially pp. 78-123; idem, *The Gnostic Imagination: Gnosticism, Mandaeism, and Merkahah Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1995); Gilles Quispel, "Ezekiel 1:26 in Jewish Mysticism and Gnosis," *Vigiliae Christianae*, vol. 34, no. 1 (March, 1980): pp. 1-13 (see especially p. 12).

³⁴ As Häberl adds: "The Mandaeans themselves reject this connection, claiming that two separate women are intended, and in the Book of John Jesus is indeed named the son of Miriam rather than Miriai. On the other hand, it's hard to explain what Miriai is doing in the John narrative if not as his kinswoman. I'm not sure how to adumbrate this."

³⁵ Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley, "The Mandaean Appropriation of Jesus' Mother, Miriai," *Novum Testamentum*, vol. 35, fasc. 2 (April, 1993): pp. 181-196.

³⁶ Torgny Säve-Söderbergh, *Studies in the Coptic Manichaean Psalm-Book: Prosody and Mandaean Parallels* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1949), p. 85.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 86.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 121-122, 128

³⁹ Ibid., p. 144.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 165.

⁴¹ F. Forrester Church, Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa. "Mani's Disciple Thomas and the Psalms of Thomas," *Vigiliae Christianae* 34/1 (Mar., 1980): pp. 47-55.

Mandaean Priority: Draft Essay

According to Reitzenstein, with whom Säve-Söderbergh concurs, the Valentinians borrowed a key liturgical formula from the Mandaeans.⁴² I do not see how the Valentinians would have done this had Mandaeism already grown inimical to the figure of Jesus. I would raise the possibility that the *Psalms of Thomas* may represent Mandaean compositions from a time before Mandaeans and Manichaeans may have parted ways, partly over the issue of the figure of Jesus. Thus I think Säve-Söderbergh might be too limitative when he narrows down the possible literary relationships here to either 1: both the *Psalms of Thomas* and the Mandaean parallels go back to an even earlier source that is Mandaean or pre-Mandaean, or 2: one of the two is derived from the other.⁴³

There is room in Mandaean literature for Jesus and Mary, but they are indirectly approved only via their replacement in the forms of Miriai and Anosh. Similarly, there is room for the Jewish God (Adonai is demonized in Mandaean texts), but he is indirectly present in Mandaean literature in the person of Yo, who reflects YHWH.⁴⁴ By contrast, there is no corresponding room for a positive transformation of Ahmad in Mandaean texts, neither directly nor indirectly. The reason for this is that there never was a time when there were good relations between Mandaeans and Muslims, at least as far as Mandaeans were concerned. The relationship was embittered and polemical from the beginning. This is all the more reason to interpret the parallels between Mandaeism and Islam in the Qur'ān (see below) as influences from Mandaeism upon Islam rather than vice versa. The Qur'ān may use Mandaean tropes partly as a sort of missionary outreach to the Mandaeans, but also because Islam itself arises out of a larger matrix that included Mandaean impulses, among other groups of course. Thus there was always a greater propensity for Islam to appropriate Mandaean ideas and terms in its outreach to Mandaeans. Mandaeans for their part might conceivably borrow Islamic language in order to present their own position as superior to that of Islam, but there is really no reason to suspect that this would have led to any influences that would become constitutive for Mandaean liturgy, for instance.

In light of the Mandaean-Manichaean connection, there is no need to see the Mandaean trope of John as the final messenger as a reaction created by the encounter with Islam, even though this encounter may have intensified certain concerns such as

⁴² Torgny Säve-Söderbergh, *Studies in the Coptic Manichaean Psalm-Book: Prosody and Mandaean Parallels*, p. 129.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁴⁴ Häberl remarked in his comments here: "I'm not sure whether it is possible at this point to talk of different strands within Mandaeism, but just as some texts have a much more empathetic treatment of Ruha, so too do some texts have a much more sensitive portrayal of Adonai/Shamesh. In the Book of John, the malka Yorba also gets connected to Tawoos! The story of his fall from grace and subsequent redemption seems too close to that of Melek Tawoos to discount."

Mandaean Priority: Draft Essay

this one.⁴⁵ Instead it could go back to Manichaean times, perhaps to around the time when Mandaeans and Manichaeans may have severed ties between each other.

As Rainer Voigt remarks, it is the “*communis opinio*” that the Qur’ānic Sabians (from “the Mandaic root *ṢBA*, ‘baptize’”) are the Mandaeans.⁴⁶ Voigt objects: “It is, however, difficult to assume that this small gnostic Baptist sect would have become well-known in Mecca at the time of Muhammad. . . .”⁴⁷ However, the awareness of the Qur’ān of Mesopotamian and Syrian conditions and ideas is becoming increasingly suggested in recent Qur’ānic research.⁴⁸ Voigt would find it “astonishing” were Manichaeism not referenced in the Qur’ān, since this group emphasized their literary character, which fits the idea of a people of the book better than the Mandaeans.⁴⁹ Voigt accordingly mentions de Blois’ theory that the Quranic Sabians are not baptizers but converts, from *ṣābī*, “convert.”⁵⁰

The Qur’ānic terminology “seal of the prophets” goes back to Manichaeism, but the fuller Qur’ānic formulation in *sūra* 33:40: “. . . Muḥammad . . . is the apostle of God and the seal of the prophets” (*Muḥammadun . . . rasūlal-lāhi wa khātaman-nabiyyīn*, رَسُولٌ اللَّهُ وَخَاتَمَ النَّبِيِّينَ) goes back to Samaritanism, which might somehow be correlated with the patristic trope of Gnosticism’s origins in Samaria.⁵¹ Although no Manichaean text preserves the fuller form, for all we know it may have been included in some lost Manichaean text. What we *can* know is that we read in the pre-Islamic Samaritan text *Memar Marqah* 5,3: “By your life, O apostle of God (שליחה דאלה), remain with us a little longer. By your life, O seal of the prophets (מחתם נבייה), stay with us a little longer.”⁵² The origin of *sūra* 33:40’s two titles in Samaritanism has been surprisingly previously overlooked in previous literature, at least as far as I have been able to determine.⁵³

If we step back and look at the larger picture obtained thus far we see the origins or at least early history of the Mandaeans overlapping with Judaism, Christianity, and Manichaeism. If together with de Blois we define Manichaeism as essentially an offshoot

⁴⁵ Pace Jennifer Heart, *The Mandaeans, a People of the Book?: An Examination of the Influence of Islam on the Development of Mandaean Literature*. Dissertation, Department of Religious Studies, Indiana University September, 2010.

⁴⁶ Rainer Voigt, “Mandaic,” Alan S. Kaye, ed., *Morphologies of Asia and Africa: Vol. 1* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2007), p. 149 [pp. 149-166]

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid. Voigt refers here to Fr. De Blois, “The ‘Sabians’ (Ṣābī’ūn) in Pre-Islamic Arabia.” *Acta Orientalia* 41: pp. 39-61.

⁵¹ For evidence of some overlap between Samaritan and Mandaean traditions, see Jarl E. Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: Samaritan and Jewish Concepts of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr/Paul Siebeck, 1985).

⁵² John MacDonald, *Memar Marqah: The Teaching of Marqah*. Vol. Two (Berlin: Verlag Alfred Töpelmann, 1963), p. 201.

⁵³ The first published documentation on this was in Samuel Zinner, *The Abrahamic Archetype: Conceptual and Historical Relationships between Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (Cambridge, UK: Archetype, 2012).

Mandaean Priority: Draft Essay

of Jewish forms of Christianity, so-called Jewish Christianity, then this could shed light on the specific forms of Judaism and Christianity from which Mandaeism might have originated in some way, direct or indirect as the case may be. The Christianity with which Mandaeism somehow interacted would have been an early form of what I call the Jewish Jesus sect, scholars' "Jewish Christianity." The type of Judaism with which Mandaeism interacted would have been represented by the plethora of esoteric baptizing groups such as the Essenes⁵⁴ and others which formed the remote background of both later "Jewish Christianity" and of what is called by the often equally nebulous term "Gnosticism." Since both of these had overlapping common Jewish origins the two have at times have been mistakenly identified with each other in a strict, totalizing way, such as in the equation Jewish Christianity = Gnosticism. However, just as problematic is the notion of a "Jewish Christianity" that would not from its very beginning have been characterized by at least some degree of "Gnosticism" or what might be called gnostic proclivities. Elliot Wolfson writes insightfully on this topic: "It is obviously too simplistic to identify in a one-to-one correspondence Jewish-Christianity and Gnosticism, but it is reasonable to revive the locution of Wilhelm Bousset and to speak of a 'Jewish-Christian gnosis.' In line with more current research, however, I would argue that this expression denotes a hybridity that, at once, reinforces and destabilizes the hyphen that separates and connects the two foci of identity construction, Judaism and Christianity."⁵⁵

William R. Schoedel writes on *1ApocalypseJames*: "Unfortunately our major source of information for Jewish Christianity, Ps.-Clem. *Hom.* and *Rec.*, seems to include Gnostic features in its earliest strata. Thus it is often difficult to identify Jewish-Christian elements clearly. . . ." Schoedel then goes on to list several features that are "[c]ompatible with both Gnosticism and Jewish Christianity."⁵⁶ Why does not Schoedel entertain the possibility that this very evidence suggests that Jewish Christianity possessed "gnostic" features from the very beginning? Would such a deduction really be all that radical given that the Clementine literature, as well as many of the Nag Hammadi texts' "gnostic" components actually supply us with several uncanny parallels to later specifically *Jewish* mystical ideas and formulations?⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Gershom Scholem was the first to make a connection between the Qumran Genesis Apocryphon II,4's "by the great lord, the king of all the ages" (במרה רבותא במלך כול עלמים) and Mandaean divine titles.

⁵⁵ Elliot R. Wolfson, "Inscribed in the Book of the Living: *Gospel of Truth* and Jewish Christology." *Journal for the Study of Judaism* vol. 38 (2007): p. 236.

⁵⁶ See Douglas M. Parrott, ed., *Nag Hammadi codices V, 2-5 and VI, with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, 1 and 4*, p. 66.

⁵⁷ See Elliot R. Wolfson, "Inscribed in the Book of the Living: *Gospel of Truth* and Jewish Christology": pp. 234-271. See also the comment "the Gospel of Philip" is in some respects "remarkably relevant to understanding the symbolic of medieval kabbalah and its aftermath" in Elliot R. Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism* (Oxford/NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 8.

Mandaean Priority: Draft Essay

Although de Blois' argument is flawed by his too-narrow definition of *naṣrānī*,⁵⁸ his overall thesis of Semitic-language "Jewish Christians" influencing nascent Islam by no means depends on this one particular philological nicety. If one excludes it and looks at the rest of his evidence, it remains quite weighty. De Blois fully grants that also mainstream Syrian Melkites and the Greek Septuagint influenced nascent Islam as well, but unlike Sidney Griffith, de Blois also maintains that Jewish Christians were part of the mix as well. More recently, John Jandora has brought forward intriguing evidence that not only Syriac, but Hebrew and Aramaic traditions influenced nascent Islam.⁵⁹

If the Qur'ān has been influenced by Mandaean thought and diction, then this should say something about the geographical origins of Islam. It may be that Manichaeans in Arabia could have transmitted Mandaean ideas to nascent Islam, which would then not require that the author of the Qur'ān had travelled to the main settlement areas of the Mandaeans. However, there is little reason to exclude a priori the possibility that the author of the Qur'ān had travelled widely (where do such restrictive ideas come from, anyway?).

Common scholarly wisdom dates the Mandaean text *Draša d-Iahia*, Instruction/Teaching of John, to the Islamic period, not only because this text refers to the Prophet of Islam's advent, but because it adopts the Qur'ānic Arabic form of John the Baptizer's name, Yaḥyā. Yaḥyā is an attested indigenous Arabic name⁶⁰ which was used to express the Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek forms of the name John. In Arabic Yaḥyā is generally interpreted as "he lives," which does not coincide at all with the Hebrew meaning of John. Yōḥānān (יְהוֹנָן) is formed from Yah, a short form of the divine name *Yhwh* (יהוה) and the noun *ḥānan* (חֲנָן), "gift," "favour," "mercy," "pity." However, it seems that the author of the Qur'ān was aware of the Hebrew meaning of Yōḥānān, since immediately after *sūra* 19:12's reference to Yaḥyā, *āya* 13 states that Yaḥyā was given *ḥanān* from God. Since the noun *ḥanān* is a hapax legomenon in the Qur'ān it would be perplexing were this not an indicator that the text is revealing its knowledge of the Hebrew form and meaning of the name John. Similarly, Mandaean texts, principally the *Draša d-Iahia* and the *Ginza Rabba*, use two forms of the name John, the Arabic loan word Iahia and the Hebrew/Aramaic form Yuhana.⁶¹

Why precisely would the author of the Qur'ān choose to call John by the non-cognate indigenous Arabic name Yaḥyā? I propose an inspiration partly from Mandaeanism's pre-Islamic interest in John and in the trope of the Great "Life." The

⁵⁸ François de Blois, "Naṣrānī (Ναζωραῖος) and ḥanīf (ἔθνικός): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 65, no. 1 (2002), pp. 1-30.

⁵⁹ John Jandora, *The Latent Trace of Islamic Origins: Midian's Legacy in Mecca's Moral Awakening* (Piscataway, New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2012).

⁶⁰ Lidzbarski *Das Johannesbuch* vol. 2, p. 73; Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*. With a Foreword by Gerhard Böwering and Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007), pp. 290-291.

⁶¹ The form without the terminal *-nn* is attested among Jews; see Lidzbarski, *Das Johannesbuch* vol. 2, p. 74.

Mandaean Priority: Draft Essay

liturgical formulas “In the name of the Great Life” (introductory) and “And Life is victorious” (concluding) are among the most distinctive Mandaeen markers. I propose the possibility that it could have been the Mandaeans who first chose to call their prophet Yuhana with the Arabic name Yaḥyā as a result of their initial encounters with early Muslims. The idea may have been to stress to Muslims that Yuhana was a messenger of the Great Life (cf. Mandaic ܝܚܝܐ, *lahia*, and ܝܚܝܐ, “life” *hiiq*). Although we cannot be sure of this, it is quite likely that the form Yaḥyā would have been chosen because of its similarity to Exodus 3:14’s divine name ʾehyeh, “I am/I will be.” I would thus not accept either Sprenger’s theory that Yaḥyā was derived from Mandaic, nor Jeffery’s claim that the Mandaeans borrowed it from the Qur’ān.⁶² Rather, the Mandaeans could have borrowed a native Arabic name (Yaḥyā) in order to convey to Muslims the inner significance of the prophet Yuhana whose office they found most similar to the claimed office of seal of the prophets made by Muslims for the Prophet of Islam (Muhammad). The basis would have been that the name Yaḥyā brings to mind the centrality of “Life” for Mandaeans. Both groups would have influenced each other, representing a sort of cross pollination.

What would make this scenario more likely than the simple idea of Mandaeans borrowing from the Qur’ān? For one, Mandaean liturgical texts are of high antiquity, which was demonstrated as early as Säve-Söderberg, who documented quotation of Mandaean scriptures including the *Draša d-Iahia* and the *Ginza Rabba* in the Coptic *Psalms of Thomas*.⁶³ Now on to some critical evidence, which has oddly enough been overlooked in the literature, as far as I am aware. I refer to the verbal and structural parallels between the liturgical opening of the *Ginza Rba* on the one hand and the liturgical opening of the Qur’ān (*al-Fātiḥa*) and other liturgical portions of the Qur’ān on the other hand.

al-Fātiḥa

In the name of God
Praise be
to God
Lord of the worlds / king
the merciful, the compassionate

king on the day of judgement

Ginza R, Book 2 Opening

in the name and in the strength of the Lord of greatness
Praised be your name

Lord of all the worlds / king of light
the compassionate, the merciful

king of light

Ginza

In the name of the Great Life,
may you be praised, my Lord,
with a pure heart, O Lord of all worlds.
Praised be your name,
Lord of greatness,

al-Fātiḥa

1 In the name of God, the merciful,
the compassionate
2 Praise be to God,
Lord of the worlds.

⁶² See Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur’ān*, p. 290.

⁶³ Torgny Säve-Söderbergh, *Studies in the Coptic Manichaean Psalm-Book: Prosody and Mandaean Parallels*, pp. 156-158.

Mandaean Priority: Draft Essay

in the name and in the strength of the Lord of greatness,
King of light, 4 king on the day of judgement
Lord of all the worlds,
of pure radiance and great light which passes not away,
the Compassionate, the Forgiving, the Merciful, 3 the merciful, the compassionate
the Saviour of all the faithful,
Strengtheners of all good.
The Great, the Wise, the Knower, the Decider, the Possessor of Power over all things.
The Lord of the Upper, Middle, and Lower,
the great countenance of glory,
who is invisible
and whose power is endless,
who has no partner in his crown, no sharer in rule.

In the name of the Great Life, be praised my Lord, of pure heart, O Lord of all worlds. Praised be your name, Lord of Greatness, in the name and in the strength of the Lord of greatness, Light-King, Lord of all worlds, pure radiance and great light, which passes not away, the Sympathetic, the Solicitous, the Merciful, Saviour of all the faithful,

There are a number of additional passages in *Ginza Rba* Book 1 which should be compared with their apparent Qur'ānic analogues. With folio 6, "He has no father who would be older than he, no firstborn who would have been before him," we may compare *sūra* 112:3: "He does not beget, and he was not begotten." (Both are indebted to rabbinic formulations). In folio 8 we read of the angels: "Their *inward* is revealed to one another, they know the *first* and the *last* (*utiratun galian lhdadia uqadmiata ubatraiata iadin*). They are separated from each other by a thousand times a thousand miles, and yet radiance shines to one from the other, and aroma wafts one to another. They make fraternal faithfulness with each other and reveal their interior to each other." This may be compared with *sūra* 57:3, هُوَ الْأَوَّلُ وَالْآخِرُ وَالظَّاهِرُ وَالْبَاطِنُ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ, "He is the first and the last; the outward and the inward; he has knowledge of all things," in the following manner:

Comparison of *Ginza R* Book 1 Folio 8 and *Sūra* 57:3

<i>Ginza R</i> Book 1 Folio 8	<i>Sūra</i> 57:3
And their <i>inward</i> (<i>utiratun</i>) is revealed (<i>galian</i>) to each another; (<i>lhdadia</i>) and the <i>first</i> (<i>uqadmiata</i>) and the <i>last</i> (<i>ubatraiata</i>) they know. (<i>iadin</i>)	and the <i>inward</i> the <i>outward</i> He is the <i>first</i> and the <i>last</i> , and he is <i>knower</i> of all things.

Sūra 57

Ginza I (8) (see Lidzbarski, p. 11)

1 All that is in the heavens and the earth glorified (*sabbaḥa*) Allah; 42 The angels of radiance praise (*mšabilh*) that lofty

Mandaean Priority: Draft Essay

and He is the Mighty, the Wise.

2 His is the Sovereignty (*mulku*)
of the heavens and the earth;
He quickeneth and He giveth death;
and He is Able to do all things.

3 He is the First (*al-awalu*)
and the Last (*wa al-akhiru*),
and the Outward (*wa al-zahir*)
and the Inward (*wa al-baṭin*);
and He is Knower (*‘alimun*)
of all things (*kulli shayin*).

king (*malka*) of light. . . .

45 And their *inward* (*utiratun*)
is revealed (*galian*) to each another; (*lhdadia*);
and the first (*uqadmiata*)
and the last (*ubatraiata*)
they know. (*iadin*)

In folio 12 we read of Gabriel being dispatched to the world to aid in the formation of Adam from the dust of the earth: “Through his word every single thing comes to be. From the Lord of greatness an *uthra*⁶⁴ was made and dispatched whose name was Hibil-Ziwa,⁶⁵ who is named Gabriel the Sent. When the high king of light willed, he called to me from the radiances and from the light in which he stood, from that *shkinta*⁶⁶ which he, the Great, established at his side, and spoke to him: Arise and go to the world.” This passage which associates the sending of Gabriel to the world in order to assist in Adam’s creation with the theme of creation through the divine word startlingly parallels the Qur’ānic accounts of Gabriel being sent to form Jesus, portrayed as the likeness of Adam, in Mary’s womb by means of the word of God: *Sūra* 3:47, 59: “She said: My lord, how can I have a son seeing that no man has touched me? He said: In this way God creates what he wills, when he has decreed a thing, he says only ‘Be!’, and it is. . . . In the eyes of God Jesus is like Adam: He created him from dust, saying to him, ‘Be!’, and he was.” *Sūra* 19:17, 35: “We sent our Spirit to appear to her in the form of an old man. . . . When he decrees a thing, he says only ‘Be!’, and it is.”⁶⁷

Ginza R I (14)

sūra 6:128

sūra 11:106-107

Do not honour Satan, idols, images,
the error and confusion of the world.
For whoever honours Satan
falls into the burning fire
until the day of judgement,
until the hour, the hour of salvation,

so long as the high light-king wills,
who judges all creatures.

He will say: Your abode is the fire,
and therein you shall remain abidingly

unless God wills otherwise;
surely your Lord is wise, knowing.

Then the wretched will be in the fire,
groaning and weeping in it,
to remain therein for as long as the
heavens and earth endure,
unless your Lord wills otherwise;
surely your Lord does whatever he
desires.

⁶⁴ An angel-like celestial entity, formerly understood as “wealth” or “richness,” but originally meaning “excellency.” See C. G. Häberl, “The Origin and Meaning of Mandaic ܚܝܒܝܠ, *Journal of Semitic Studies* LXII/1 (Spring 2017): pp. 77-91; see p. 87: “Samuel Zinner was the first to suggest glossing **eutria** with ‘excellencies’”

⁶⁵ “Hibil” corresponds to the Hebrew name “Abel”; *ziwa* is Mandaic for “radiance.”

⁶⁶ The Mandaic cognate of the Hebrew *shekhinah*; Arabic *sakina*.

⁶⁷ I discuss this reading (“old man”) in my forthcoming *The Praeparatio Islamica: An Historical Reconstruction with Philological-Exegetical Commentary on Selected Qur’ānic Āyāt Based on Ancient Hebrew, Syro-Aramaic, Mandaic, Samaritan and Hellenistic Literatures*.

Mandaean Priority: Draft Essay

He judges living beings, each one according
to the works of their hands.

In folio 15, we encounter the phrase “the to-be-stoned, sinking Satan,” or “the accursed, sinking Satan,” which may be compared to *sūra* 3:56’s *shayṭānir-rajīm*. Lidzbarski claims this is by no means necessarily taken from the Qur’ān: “Already with Ephrem († 373) Satan is named *daggālā rgīmā*, ‘the stoned,’ or ‘to-be-stoned deceiver.’”⁶⁸ However, this argumentation is disputed by Silverstein,⁶⁹ and should be left out of the present debate.

The following two texts are far more appropriate as comparative material:

Ginza R I (25)

Qur’ān

O you faithful and perfect!
Do not say what you do not know
and what has not been revealed to you.
For there is no one to whom the hidden things
would be revealed except
the Great, the Sublime,
who knows and sees through all.

3:5: Nothing on earth or in heaven is hidden
from God
3:7: only God knows the true meaning
3:6: the Mighty, the Wise
44:6: who sees and knows all

Further Mandaean-related tropes surface frequently in the Qur’ān:

5:116: I would never say what I had no right to say—if I had said such a thing You would have known it: You know all that is within me, though I do not know what is within You, You alone have full knowledge of things unseen— 117 I told them only what You commanded me to.

7:187: God alone has knowledge thereof

7:188: if I had knowledge of what is hidden

7: 203: I merely repeat what is revealed to me from my Lord

21:109: I have proclaimed the message fairly to you all. I do not know whether the judgement you are promised is near or far, 110 but He knows what you reveal and conceal. 111 I do not know

46:9: Say, “. . . I do not know what will be done with me or you; I only follow what is revealed to me;”

72:25: Say, “I do not know whether what you have been warned about is near, or whether a distant time has been appointed for it by my Lord.” 26 He is the One who knows what is hidden.

⁶⁸ M. Lidzbarski, M. *Ginza: Der Schatz oder das grosse Buch der Mandäer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1925), p. 17. Lidzbarski gives the citation as Ephraemi, *Opera selecta*, edited by Overbeck, p. 131, section 11.

⁶⁹ Adam Silverstein, “On the original meaning of the Qur’anic term al-shaytan al-rajim.” <<https://www.thefreelibrary.com/On+the+original+meaning+of+the+Qur'anic+term+a+l-shaytan+al-rajim.-a0337529846>>. I thank Charles Häberl for the reference.

Mandaean Priority: Draft Essay

In addition to noting the two divine titles which correspond with the frequent Qur'ānic liturgical binomial designations of God, this *Ginza Rba* passage also parallels *sūra* 3:7, and specifically according to the standard Sunnī choice of punctuation: “And who but God can know how to interpret [the ambiguous *āyāt*]?” Additionally, the *Ginza*'s “the Great, the Sublime” structurally parallels “the Mighty, the Wise” at the end of *sūra* 3:6. Lastly, the first term in the *Ginza Rba* address “O you faithful and perfect!” is matched in the common Qur'ānic formula, “O you faithful (or, ‘believers’).”

Comparison of Sabbath Blessing, *al-Fātiḥa* and *Ginza R*, Book 2 Opening

<i>al-Fātiḥa</i>	<i>Ginza R</i> , Book 2 Opening
In the name of God	in the name and in the strength of the Lord of greatness
Praise be to God	Praised be your name
Lord of the worlds / king	Lord of all the worlds / king of light
the merciful, the compassionate	the compassionate, the merciful
king on the day of judgement	king of light

That the relationship with which we are dealing here in regard to the texts in question has less to do with literary dependences in one direction or the other, and more to do with orally circulating traditional constellations of Judaic liturgical themes, may be illustrated by the following correspondences between what is presented as a private prayer in 1 En. 84 and *al-Fātiḥa*:

Comparison of 1 En. 84:2, 4 and *al-Fātiḥa*, 2, 4, 7

1 En. 84:2, 4	<i>al-Fātiḥa</i> , 2, 4, 7
2 Blessed be you, O Lord, King . . .	2 Praise be to God
Lord of the whole creation of the heaven,	Lord of the worlds
King of kings and God of the whole world.	4 King on the day of judgement
4 guilty of trespass	7 who go (not) astray
And upon the flesh of men abides your wrath	7 upon whom your wrath abides (not)
until the great day of judgement	4 the day of judgement

Sūra 19:15 is of interest as well: “And peace be upon him on the day he was born, and the day he will die, and the day when he shall be raised to life.” The blessing of John in this *āya* might be compared with *Ginza R* Book 5:4, where there is a repeated benediction which occurs during John the Baptizer's ascent to the place of light: “Praised be you, Knowledge of Life, blessed be the place whence you came, and praised and glorified and empowered (strengthened) be the great place whither you go.”