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The Great Stem of Souls

Reconstructing Mandaean History

Jorunn Buckley



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For Lamea Abbas Amara and Nasser Sobbi

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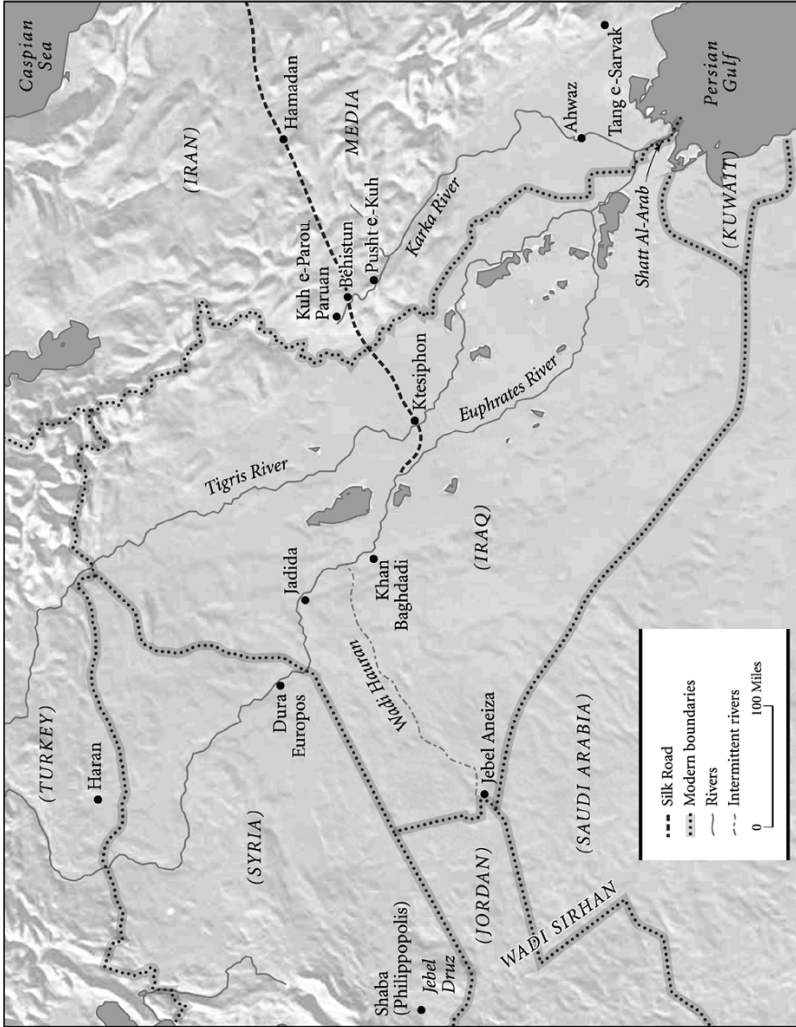
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Mandaeic sites in the Middle East. Cartography by Robert Cronan.
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The idea for this book stems from 1987, when Professor Rudolf Macuch suggested that I translate the Mandaean text *Diwan Malkuta 'Laita* (which I did). During that task, I began to take an interest in the Mandaean colophons—the lists of scribes and the scribal postscripts that are appended to almost all Mandaean documents. It became obvious that the colophons provided a way to obtain a grasp on Mandaean history, and, subsequently, my work on colophons as a source for reconstructing Mandaean history grew through the years. At some point, it became evident that the research could take the rest of my life, but I had to stop somewhere. The result is here.

First, I must credit Professor Macuch (d. 1993) with stirring my initial interest in the colophons. He had, in fact, planned to start investigating the colophons himself, but other duties intervened. Professor Franz Rosenthal (d. 2003) always showed a keen interest in my Mandaean studies, and I remain grateful to him. I also thank John E. Woods of the University of Chicago, and Mrs. Margaret Hackforth-Jones (Lady Drower's daughter) in England.

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Unavoidably, this book contains materials of a hypothetical nature and also sheer errors, which will be discovered in due time. No other book exists in this area of research, so I must take some small solace in the knowledge that my work is only a tentative beginning. But for me, it has been an exciting task, in which many of the thousands of Mandaean people mentioned here literally became alive. I end with the Mandaean formula: “may Life be victorious!”



The following chapters of *The Great Stem of Souls* have been published elsewhere. An earlier version of chapter 2 was in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd ser., 5 (1995): 21–38, as “The Colophons in H. Petermann’s *Sidra Rabba*.” A shorter version of chapter 5 was in *Gnosis und Religionsgeschichte: Festschrift für Kurt Rudolph zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Holger Preissler and Hubert Seiwert, 55–60 (Marburg: diagonal-Verlag, 1994), as “A Mandaean Correspondence.” A shorter version of chapters 6 and 7 appeared in *History of Religions* 39 (1999): 32–49, as “Glimpses of a Life: Yahia Bihram, Mandaean Priest.” An earlier version of chapter 8 appeared in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 59 (2000): 93–106, as “The Evidence for Women Priests in Mandaism.” An early version of chapter 9 appeared in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 51 (1992): 33–50, as “The Colophons in *The Canonical Prayerbook of the Madaeans*.” An almost identical version of chapter 15 has appeared in *Und das Leben ist siegreich! / And Life is Victorious*, Mandäische Forschungen 1, ed. Rainer Voigt, 29–46 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008) as “Once More: Mandaean Origins and Earliest History.”

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The Mandaeans, the last Gnostics surviving from the time of late antiquity, seem to have lived in southern Iraq and southwest Iran since the end of the first century CE. Precisely how early they originally came, and from where, is still a matter of scholarly dispute. They may have come from farther west, following the rivers from upper Babylonia; or, according to newly formulated or revived theories, they may have been more or less indigenous to Babylonia.¹ Most Mandaeans still live in Iraq and Iran, but now also increasingly in diaspora around the world.

Mandaeans have a large number of religious texts, many of them still untranslated into Western languages. Mandaean priests continue to transcribe the texts by hand in the old-fashioned way, though Mandaic fonts for printing have also become available in recent years. The very format of the Mandaean books or scrolls remains established according to firm standards over hundreds of years. Even in those texts that have artwork the art is formalized according to certain geometrical patterns, for ideally, there must be no wavering in the faithful transmission of text and drawings.² Most people who study Mandaean texts (in translations or in the original Mandaic) may pay little or no attention to the lists of scribes that are appended to virtually all Mandaean documents. Those lists, the colophons, supply the main basis for this book. The colophons reveal so far untapped historical

¹ See chap. 15 for a more detailed discussion, and the introduction to my *The Mandaeans: Ancient Texts and Modern People*, 3–6. See also Kurt Rudolph's timeline in "Der Mandäismus in der neueren Gnosisforschung," 274–77, and his article "Die Mandäer heute: Ein Zwischenbilanz ihrer Erforschung und ihres Wandels in der Gegenwart." At the ARAM-sponsored international conference "*The Mandaeans*," Oxford University, July 7–9, 2002, renewed attention was paid to the Mandaean history-and-origins question.

² A dissertation is waiting to be written on the standard Mandaean art form. This artistic tradition has never been studied.

information and they can be used to reconstruct, however rudimentarily, the outlines of Mandaean history.

WHAT IS A COLOPHON

In Mandaeism, to copy a manuscript is a meritorious act. A Mandaean copyist (usually a priest) may undertake the task as an exercise to remit his own sins, or he may be hired to perform the task for someone else. At the end of most Mandaean manuscripts, a colophon usually appears. This is a list of scribes stretching from the current copyist back to the first recorded one. Almost all Mandaean manuscripts contain colophons, excluding talismans and other short magical texts. These will, in most cases, have at least the name and lineage of the scribe himself, but seldom much more than that. In the case where the transmission of a Mandaean text spans, say, fifteen or sixteen centuries, a colophon may be very long, containing thirty to forty separate lineages, each consisting of two to fourteen (sometimes even more) names. A lineage belonging to centuries long past may consist of only two names: that of the scribe and of his or her initiator.

Some scribes are known to have been editors, and a few are careful to state their own collating endeavors and corrections of texts perceived to contain errors. Often, formulaic phrases assure the reader that a text, including the colophons itself, has been faithfully transmitted. To cut off a colophon is considered a grave sin, but such is found in a very few instances. Warnings against this practice indicate that it was not uncommon. A scribe may become tired and choose either to shorten the long lists of names, or to cut off the entire colophon in order to paste it onto another text, thus avoiding tedious work.

Not only do colophons contain information about central scribes and major priest/copyist lineages through centuries of Mandaean history, but the lists also give an impression of the geographical spread of the religion. Postscripts added to colophons may hint at doctrinal disputes, give information about persecutions and other political/social conditions, and offer portrayals of the personal life of specific scribes. Colophons written in or immediately after 1831 often describe effects on the Mandaean community of the great cholera epidemic, “the Plague of Šuštar,” in that year. In addition, the many women’s names in the colophons demonstrate that women were scribes, library-owners, and priests. Chapter 8 below deals with women priests.

Correlating dozens of colophons is like working on a huge puzzle stretching over millennia. Pieces, that is, names, fall into place and slowly produce familiarity with recurrent scribes who copied many texts and who

appear again and again. Their family relationships become known, and illustrious clans appear repeatedly. In very rare cases, we find disgraced priests. Defrocked priests do not lose their names. What is written must stand, even if the transmitted text comes via a priest who had a penchant for practicing magic. Corrections are relatively rare; the rule in Mandaean text copying is that no errors are to be erased. A line of dots under erroneous words means that the segment should be disregarded. If a scribe accidentally leaves out a whole line—or perhaps an entire paragraph—the text tends to crawl out into the margin of the sheet rather than to be squeezed between the lines.³

In accordance with the tradition of “heavenly books,” we find, in Mandaism, that the earliest recorded human scribe may claim that a Lightworld figure conveyed the text to him. Such a practice of course gives the text the highest possible status, beyond doubt and suspicion of human invention. But many colophons do not possess this feature, and a scholar is naturally attracted to the names of the earliest human scribes and to the possibility of determining their time period. Anyone intrigued by the “origins question” will find that correlating the early scribes in colophons becomes a particularly exciting task.

Usually, when I refer to early parts of a colophon, it will be clear that by “early” I mean the most ancient, “late” the most recent. Calling a scribe the “first” or “last,” likewise, means “early” or “late.” (I have tried to adhere to this rule, but I may not always be consistent, and then it is best to consult the context for the precise meaning.)

NAMES

In studying colophons, one needs to be alert to the complexities of Mandaean names. Every Mandaean has a *malwašia* name, a name given to the newborn child according to priestly calculations based on astrology.⁴ This is the same as the baptismal, *mašbuta*, name. *Mašbuta* names are relatively few and tend to be repetitive, because there are only a limited number of available names, according to the basis for the name decisions: the zodiac. Examples are: “Adam, son of Maliha” or “Šarat, daughter of Hawa.”⁵ The name is used almost exclusively in ritual contexts, and it always designates

³ See chap. 13, “Mandaean Language Games and Obstacles,” in my *Mandaeans*.

⁴ See E. S. Drower, *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran* (MII), 81–82, for how the names are calculated.

⁵ See E. S. Drower, *The Book of the Zodiac* (*Sfar Malwašia*) (*Sfar M.*), 68–69, facsimile text: 106–7.

the carrier in relation to his or her mother. A Mandaean may be reluctant to divulge his or her *mašbuta* name to outsiders. *Mašbuta* names are rare in colophons, and they appear almost exclusively in formulaic contexts where the beneficiary of a copied text is named. These names are also used in what are called *z̄baras* (“insertions”) in ritual formulas where the named person is specified. This happens, for instance, in a baptism or a death ritual. In this book, I use the expressions “*mašbuta* name” and “baptismal name” interchangeably.

In regular priest lineages in colophons, names are given in terms of the relationship between a scribe and his initiator, his *rba*. In colophons, “son” means initiate, and “father” initiator, regardless of whether a son and his biological father are meant. Often, a priest and his initiator really are son and biological father, but certainly not always. At times, a man may be initiated into priesthood by his uncle, or by someone in his own generation, or a priest even younger than the initiator himself. In the rare cases where we encounter scribe who is a learned layman, a *yaluḥa* (scribe), I have decided to assume that the scribe’s father is the “real,” biological father, because the scribe is not a priest. Women priests are designated in relation to their initiators, who may be their biological fathers. These women do sometimes have fathers or husbands who are famous priests. A woman priest with a female initiator is extremely rare, and when such a name seems to appear, it may be a *mašbuta* name.

A copyist’s own biological father’s name may appear, for instance in the common blessing formula that includes one’s own name and those of close family members and of one’s initiator. This formula is often invoked at the beginning of a scribe’s colophon. But one must be careful to note whether father and initiator are the same person. Often, they are specified as being separate men. Except when initiation relationships are indicated, the names in the blessing formulas are always *mašbuta* names.

Priests’ names are different from secular ones. A priest may be named “Adam, son of Sam,” and here Adam is part of the man’s own *mašbuta* name (but minus his mother’s name). The same holds for his initiator’s name, Sam, but a priest also has a public, “secular,” name that has nothing to do with the *mašbuta* designation. Sometimes, both a person’s secular name (if it is a layperson) and the *mašbuta* name will appear in a beneficiary formula. For instance, we find the expression “I copied this book for (the salvific benefit of) Hadaiat, whose *mašbuta* name is Adam, son of Simat,” and then the list goes on, enumerating Hadaiat’s male ancestors, beginning with his father’s name. Then it may happen that, five links down in this layman’s genealogy, priestly names suddenly show up, which means that

Hadaiat's great-great-great-grandfather (and earlier ancestors) were priests. Hadaiat and his family may be humble layfolk now, but they had priests in the past.

Clan names are a different matter yet again. So far, I have found over eighty different clan and family names in Mandaean colophons. Only a few of these are recorded in Drower and Macuch's *Mandaic Dictionary*.⁶ Often, two or even three clan names are given for a scribe. *Laqab* and *kiniana* are the technical terms for family or clan names. Mandaean tell me that the *kiniana* name is the most important. In the early parts of colophons, tribal or clan designations do not appear. It seems that such names began to be used sometime during the Middle Ages.⁷

In their regular lives, Mandaean may carry Arabic or Farsi family names, some of which are "generic," pointing to geographical or tribal links, while others tend to mark the person as non-Muslim. Many Mandaean avoid first names that are common in Islamic tradition, for instance. At times, Iranian Mandaean may favor first names that belong to the pre-Islamic, Zoroastrian era. As in other Middle Eastern cultures, honorific names are yet another form of designation, employed as a sign of respect for older Mandaean. To take two examples of Mandaean friends of mine, a name such as "father of Issa" or "mother of Zakia" identifies a man or a woman in relationship to his or her oldest son. Today, especially in Iraq, one finds that many Mandaean use three-part names, so that the well-known Mandaean poet Lamea Abbas Amara, for example, has Lamea as her first name, Abbas is her father's name, and Amara that of her paternal grandfather. This type of name has no clan indication, and it is not identifiable as specifically "Mandaean."

Scribal lists in colophons usually follow a set pattern. First, a copyist identifies himself as "son of A, son of B, son of G," etc. If a scribe is transcribing for the salvific benefit of someone else, that person's name (both secular and *mašbuta* name) and lineage are given. For instance, if the beneficiary is a woman, her *mašbuta* name is used, but the text does not continue enumerating her mother's lineage: rather, it names her father and his lineage. If he is a layman, the names are secular; if a priest, his lineage will follow.

So, it is not only scribal lineages that appear in colophons but also those of beneficiaries. Therefore, when scrutinizing a text, it is important to

⁶ I give the list of names in appendix B.

⁷ See chap. 12, "Tracking the Obscure Centuries," below.

be aware of prepositions, to note when a colophon says that a book is copied *for* somebody (i.e., for somebody's salvific benefit) or *from* somebody (i.e., from a particular text owned by a named person), because a beneficiary is not a copyist. However, when a priest is copying for his own benefit, we are dealing with *one* person—not two—and the text will say, "I copied for myself."

PLACES

According to the book *Études sur la religion des Soubbas ou Sabeens* by the Syrian official M. N. Siouffi, who came to Baghdad in 1873, the dwelling places of the Mandaeans in the Ottoman territories were: Suq eš-Šuyuk, Našoriyah, Chatra, Safha, Djezaier, Qurna, Souaib, Chourch, and Amara, and in the Persian area: Šuštar, Chach-Veli, Farjara, Despour, Kautia, Gibar, Huwaiza, Muhammerah, and Chouaiyeb.⁸ Some of these names of villages, towns, or districts are familiar, while others are not. It is not clear whether Siouffi's spellings reflect his own attempts at transcribing Arabic/Farsi, or the scholarly consensus of the day.

Suq eš-Šuyuk and Našoriyah on the lower Euphrates were well-known habitations of the Mandaeans. Chatra is north of Našoriyah, while Safha is unknown to me. "Djezaier" is probably identical to Jezira, the name of the district between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers. (Less probably, it could be a garbled form of al-Azair, a town north of Qurna). Qurna (Siouffi's "Gourna") lies at the confluence of the Euphrates and the Tigris, in southern Iraq. Souaib lies west-southwest of Basra, but Chourch is unidentifiable at present. Amara, north of Qurna, did—and to some extent still does—contain a Mandaean population. It seems odd that Basra, on Šatt al-Arab, is not mentioned in Siouffi's list. Today, Mandaeans still dwell there, but most Mandaeans live in Baghdad, which is unmentioned by Siouffi. Mandaean populations move around, in response to disasters natural or man-made. For instance, in chapter 6 we shall see that the German scholar Heinrich Petermann, in 1854, had expected to meet Mandaeans in Baghdad and was surprised that no Mandaeans could be found there.

In Siouffi's list of Persian areas with Mandaean inhabitants, the city Šuštar, on the river K̄arun, has no Mandaeans anymore, but it was a center

⁸ p. 159.

for Mandaeans in the past.⁹ Chach-Veli must be Shavali, a village between Šuštār and Dezful. (I passed by Shavali in 1996 and was told that Mandaeans of the Choheili family had lived there in the past.) Farjara is unknown to me, but Despour must be a strange spelling of Dezful, an important Mandaean town in the past. It lies on the river named Ab-i Diz on a 1956 map. Kautia may be Kut al-Sheikh in Khorramshahr, and Gībar is perhaps Jobair in Susangerd. Huwaiza, near the Iraqi border and on a river running into Iraq, was a Mandaean center in centuries past. We shall see that several important Mandaean scribes lived in Huwaiza.

Muhammerah is identical to present-day Khorramshahr (ancient Charax Spasinou), on the Šatt al-Arab, a town with a sizable Mandaean population until the Iran–Iraq war of 1980–88. The last town in Siouffi’s list, Chouayeb, probably Kuwaibdeh, is southeast of Abadan. Abadan, an important port, lies farther down the Šatt al-Arab from Khorramshahr. Abadan itself is not in Siouffi’s list, but the first Iranian Mandaeans I ever met, in 1973, lived there. Today’s Iranian center for the Mandaeans, Ahwaz, on the river Karun, did not have Mandaean people in Siouffi’s time. Siouffi ends his list by saying that the Mandaeans of Šuštār possess the best religious knowledge, enjoying the highest esteem among their fellow-religionists.

At other times in history, additional Mandaean areas and villages will emerge, based on information in the colophons. Many places are absent from modern maps and even from hand-drawn ones in now rare books. To my knowledge, no maps have been made explicitly for the purpose of showing Mandaean territories through time. Wherever a relatively safe place could be found on a river, Mandaeans of southern Iraq and Iran are likely to have lived. The destruction of the river and marsh habitats in southern Iraq within the past decade has decimated potential Mandaean territories. Occasionally, nature takes its unpredictable course, and we shall see one example of a river that, in the nineteenth century, suddenly changed its route overnight, and the Mandaeans moved away immediately. But today, due to political constraints, Mandaeans in their home countries do not always live along rivers, and they may have to travel to perform their baptisms, or resort to modern, indoor pools with vibrating currents to keep the water “alive.”

⁹ Siouffi says that it is identical to the ancient Susa, which is not strictly correct, for Susa is a different town, on the river Karkeh (I have been in both towns myself).

In a sheet of Drower's undated, typed notes, she says that a priest identified the earliest Mandaean settlements, in time sequence, as: ʿIb, Doraq (modern Shadegan), Šuštar, Suq eš-Šuyuk, and Huweiza. Today, some Iranian Mandaeans live in cities such as Tehran and Shiraz.¹⁰

A FEW TESTIMONIES

In Bat Ye'or's book on the protected religious minorities, the *dhimmi*, who are subject to a special tax under Islam, we find the following statement from Ibn al-Fuwati (d. 1323 CE):

As for the Sabians, who are outright idol-worshippers, who live in the province of al-Wasit [Iraq], they are not *dhimmis*, although they were so in the past. When the Caliph al-Qahir Billah inquired of Abu Sa'ad al-Istakhari the Shafi'i concerning their status, he declared their blood licit¹¹ and refused their poll tax. When they had wind of this, they bribed him with 50.000 dinars and he left them alone. Consequently, today they do not even pay the poll tax and nought is demanded of them even though they be under Muslim domination. May the will of the sultan be done!¹²

The 'Abbasid Caliph al-Qahir reigned from 932 to 934 (AH 320–22).¹³ The extract demonstrates that in the tenth century, the categorization of the Mandaeans is in dispute, and that the people have lost the protected status. That there still is a concentration of Mandaeans in the district of Waṣiṭ (southeast of Baghdad) at this time is illuminating, as I know of no other sources of Mandaean habitation patterns in the tenth century. (Waṣiṭ was not mentioned in Siouffi's list). As we shall see, the Mandaeans have a scribal center in the town of ʿIb in Wāsīt in the earliest Islamic era—and also in the period immediately before the rise of Islam. In al-Fuwati's own time, in the fourteenth century, the Mandaeans still do not pay the *dhimmi* tax, but obviously continue their lives. One must assume that bribery ensures relative safety.

The cholera of 1831 nearly eradicated the Mandaean religion. All the priests died. How the religion was resuscitated through the efforts of the *yalufas* Yahia Bihram, son of Adam Yuhana, of the Kamisia family, and his brother-in-law Ram Zihrun, son of Sam Bihram, of the 'Aziz and Kupašia

¹⁰ See my "Mandaean Community in Iran."

¹¹ Meaning, they can be legally killed.

¹² Bat Ye'or, *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians under Islam*, 192.

¹³ Jere L. Bachrach, *A Near East Studies Handbook*, 18, 32.

families, is a topic of one of the chapters of this book. According to Yahia Bihram's postscripts, thirteen *yaluḥas* were willing to become priests in Suq eš-Šuyuk when Yahia Bihram and Ram Zihrun arrive there in the aftermath of the cholera. The two men first initiated one another into priesthood and then made priests of the thirteen *yaluḥas*. It is likely that all thirteen were not inhabitants of Suq eš-Šuyuk, but that they had gathered there for the express purpose of becoming priests. One may assume that all of them, like Yahia Bihram and Ram Zihrun themselves, had already been trained to a greater or lesser extent by their now perished fathers/initiators. Of particular interest here is Bibia Mudalal, Yahia Bihram's sister and Ram Zihrun's wife, who was a priest herself (perhaps belonging among the thirteen).¹⁴

Disasters befalling the Mandaeans are not the only ones described in the colophons. More than one hundred years after the cholera epidemic, in Lamea Abbas Amara's *Ginza* from 1935,¹⁵ one finds the information that at that time, 1935, the Beduin tribesmen were taken captive in Suq eš-Šuyuk, their weapons confiscated, their leaders killed.

But mostly, the postscripts deal with the conditions of the Mandaeans themselves. In the document called *The Coronation of the Great Šišlam* from 1599 (*Drower Collection [DC] 54*), a priest initiation text, the colophon—which Drower does not translate¹⁶—the priest Sam Šitlan, son of Ram Bayan, of the Ša'puria clan, says that the Mandaean cult hut, the *mandi*, on the channel Šamani'a in Basra, has been torn out twice by the local Muslim leader Karam, son of Sai'id Mubarak. "May the great King of Light warn him!" Sam Šitlan exclaims. Moreover, there is thievery in the Mandaean priesthood, and "no one can stand." The latter is a Mandaean expression showing that the community is under great stress. Sam Šitlan prays for help from the Mandaean "Life" (the primary principle and force in the World of Light), and he ends with the well-known formula, "Everything is fleeting, except prayer and praise."



Here follows a sample of statements about Mandaeans in a few European books whose topics are not Mandaeism:

¹⁴ See chaps. 7 and 8 below.

¹⁵ The colophons in texts belonging to Lamea Abbas Amara are treated in several chapters of this book.

¹⁶ See her *Coronation of the Great Šišlam*, 37 n. 3.

A. Henry Layard, English traveler and archaeologist, in his *A Popular Account of Discoveries at Nineveh*, 1851, comments that the Mandaeans are “a remarkable tribe who reside in the province of Khuzistan and Susiana and in the districts near the mouth of the Euphrates, and who are probably the descendants of the ancient inhabitants of Babylonia and Chaldaea.”¹⁷

Stephen M. Longrigg, a historian of Iraq, speaks in his work *Iraq, 1900 to 1950: A Political, Social, and Economic History* of the populations in the border towns Badra and Mandali east of Baghdad. In this context, he mentions “the gentle, mysterious, scanty race of the şubba or Sabaeans, or, as they call themselves, Mandaeans. Known to travellers mistakenly as ‘Christians of John the Baptist,’ these folk, with their own Syriac-type language and their holy books in Mandaean tongue and script lived as silversmiths and boatbuilders in the riverain towns and villages of lower Iraq, wherever running water was available for their rites. Their origins and beliefs, neither Muslim nor Christian, and their distinctive ceremonies and customs had in 1900 been little studied.”¹⁸

Wilfred Thesiger (d. 2003), the last in the tradition of great English travelers, describes the Mandaeans in his well-known book about the marsh dwellers of southern Iraq, *The Marsh Arabs*: “Distinguished by their large beards and their red-and-white check headcloths, there were a few thousand Sabaeans all told, most of them in Baghdad, Basra, Suq ash-Shuyuk and Amara where they are famous for their silver work. Isolated families lived in Moslem villages round the Marshes and farmyard ducks were a sign of their presence since, for some unaccountable reason, the Moslems would eat wild but not tame ducks.”¹⁹

Jane F. Geniesse, the biographer of the English adventurer and traveler Freya Stark, in *Passionate Nomad: The Life of Freya Stark*, speaking of Stark’s friend, Lady E. S. Drower, states, “Mrs. Drower also studied the Mandaeans, or Sabaeans, a cult revering John the Baptist that was given to frequent and enthusiastic baptism ceremonies.”²⁰

¹⁷ p. 142, n. *.

¹⁸ p. 10.

¹⁹ p. 127.

²⁰ p. 96. For works giving information on the geographical locations of Mandaeans at various times, see Şinasi Gündüz, *The Knowledge of Life*, chaps. 2 and 5, with maps 1 and 2 (pp. 53–54); and Edmondo Lupieri, *The Mandaeans: The Last Gnostics*, chaps. 2 and 3, on the Mandaeans’ interactions with European missionaries, diplomats, and travellers.



Lady E. S. Drower was the foremost field-worker among the Mandaeans, and she collected a great number of texts, many of which she translated and published for decades in the mid twentieth century. Much will be said of Drower's texts in what follows, and I could not have done my colophon research without the benefit of her enormous output in Mandaean studies.²¹ Other texts that I have used are in private Mandaean ownership, some belong to university or museum manuscript collections, and yet others come from various scholarly editions and translations of Mandaean documents.



The arrangement of the material in my book aims to ease the reading of chapters focusing largely on what may seem like stultifying lists of names. Therefore, I also present chapters of a more narrative type. I begin with a section called "*Ginza* Matters." The first chapter in this part describes the contents of the Mandaean holy text, the *Ginza* ("treasure"); the second investigates the colophons in the four Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris) *Ginza* manuscripts used by Mark Lidzbarski for his 1925 edition and translation of the *Ginza*. In the third chapter, I deal with the colophons in seven other *Ginzas*, and the fourth chapter I have entitled "Mandaic Adventures in the British Library."

Moving to the section "Priests and Scholars," I first describe a correspondence between Lady Drower and her primary Mandaean informant, Sheikh Negm. Next comes a chapter on the visit to Iraq by the German scholar Heinrich Petermann in 1854, and then a chapter focusing on his primary informant there: Yahia Bihram, the cholera survivor. A chapter on women priests follows.

The four chapters in section III, "More Texts," deal first with colophon matters in Mandaean liturgies; second with prayer no. 170 in *The Canonical Prayerbook of the Mandaeans*; third with colophons in several copies of *The Book of John*, and the last chapter here attempts to trace Mandaean scribal activities during the centuries between 700–1450. Finally, in the last

²¹ A brief account of Drower's life was given by her daughter, Margaret Hackforth-Jones, at the first international Mandaean conference at Harvard University in 1999 (see "The Life of Lady E. S. Drower").

part, chapter 13 makes an argument for the importance of the earliest colophons in reconstructing Mandaean history, while the next one pursues this argument in terms of the age of Mandaean traditions and texts. I conclude with a large chapter called “Matters of History.” Here I present a new combination of arguments—some old, some new—for the enduring question of the origins and early history of the Mandaeans. Some chapters have appendices. At the very end, I add freestanding appendices on Mandaean clan names, *mabwašia* names, and a descriptive list of the documents in the Drower Collection in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

**PART 1: *GINZA*
MATTERS**

1 THE *GINZA* AND ITS CONTENTS

Be silent, be silent, Adam! You, head of the entire tribe!
We cannot prevent the world that is destined to come into being.
Arise, arise! Pray to the Great one and subjugate yourself,
so that Life may become your savior.
Life may become your savior;
And you may rise up and behold the Place of Light.
May Life be victorious!¹

The *Ginza*, the main Mandaean text and holy book, is a hefty codex (xxvii plus 619 pages in Lidzbarski's edition), divided into the *Right Ginza* and *Left Ginza* (*GR* and *GL*, respectively). Upon reaching the end of the right side, one needs to turn the book upside down in order to find the left side, which starts at the opposite end. In all the *Ginzas* that I have seen (with one exception), the two sections are arranged in this manner. Perhaps this tradition arose in order to have the text resemble buried Mandaean inscribed bowls, which are often buried in pairs, one forming a lid on the other. In this way, the text does not escape but remains within its confines.

A conglomerate, the codex had certainly reached its final, collected form in the mid seventh century. At that time, according to the tradition, Mandaean authorities presented the book to Muslim leaders as proof that the Mandaeans had a holy book and therefore ought to be exempted from forced conversion to Islam. It is quite likely, however, that the various parts of the *Ginza* had already been collected, for internal, Mandaean purposes.² Therefore, the *Ginza* may not have been produced in order to appease Muslim authorities.

Taking his cue from the predominance of dualistic versus emanation patterns of Mandaean creation mythology and from the various terms for the Lightworld and its denizens, Kurt Rudolph long ago attempted to sift

¹ Lidzbarski, *Ginza*, *GR* 16.2 (p. 388).

² See Rudolf Macuch, "Anfänge der Mandäer," 186, and the diverging opinion of Kurt Rudolph, "Die mandäische Literatur," 157.

carefully the different strata of Mandaean literature, including the *Ginza*.³ *GL* must have existed in the third century.⁴ Since 1949, we have known that the Manichaean Thomas hymns are virtual translations of Mandaean originals from *GL*.⁵ Of the eighteen tractates making up *GR*, *GR* 1 and 2—which are versions of the same book—in particular contain very old traditions.

The first useful *Ginza* to be published in the West was that of Heinrich Petermann, *Sidra Rabba*,⁶ which still remains the only critical edition. Petermann's two volumes contain first a Latin translation and then Petermann's own writing of the entire *Ginza*, in Mandaic and *with* the colophons. Lidzbarski's introduction to his 1925 edition gives valuable information, including separate introductions to each *Ginza* tractate. But Lidzbarski did not include the colophons, and anyone wishing to work on the colophons in the four Paris manuscripts of the *Ginza* (the four are dubbed *Ms. A, B, C, and D*) must turn to the original manuscripts, or to Petermann.⁷

In this chapter, I briefly list the contents of each tractate of the *Ginza* and pay attention to where the colophons occur. Lidzbarski divided the *Ginza* into twenty-one tractates: eighteen tractates of *GR* and three of *GL*. In addition, he separated many of the tractates into smaller, numbered sections. He did this on the basis of formulaic expressions indicating the start of a new story or section. Another sign of divisions is the colophons, and one must note *where* they occur. There are seven colophons in each *Ginza*. The first one occurs after the segment *GR* 1–13, which must mean that this part was at some point considered to be *one* unit. Next, there is one colo-

³ See Kurt Rudolph, *Theogonie, Kosmogonie und Anthropogonie in den mandäischen Schriften*, esp. 339–48, and see also his chart, p. 78. For more recent comments, consult “Die mandäische Literatur,” 157–59.

⁴ See *ibid.*, 158.

⁵ This is the important contribution of Torgny Säve-Söderbergh, *Studies in the Coptic-Manichaean Psalm-Book*, esp. 137–63.

⁶ Julius Heinrich Petermann, *The Great Treasure or Great Book. Commonly Called 'The Book of Adam' The Madaeans' Work of Highest Authority. Thesaurus sive Liber Magnus, vulgo 'Liber Adamus' appellatus opus Madaeorum summi ponderis: With a new Introduction by Charles Häberl*, 3 vols. Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias 2007. An international committee of Madaeans and scholars is hoping to produce an English translation of the *Ginza* in a series planned by Brepols Publishers in Belgium, *Corpus Fontium Madaeorum*.

⁷ See chap. 2 below. For a comparison of the Paris *Ginza* colophons to colophons in seven other *Ginzas*, see chap. 3.

phon after each of the rest of the tractates of *GR*: 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18. These, too, must have been separate units. *GL* carries only one colophon, at the end.

*GR*1-13⁸ comprises, first, *GR* 1 and 2, which, as noted, are basically two versions of the same work.⁹ *GR* 1 (pp. 5–30) constitutes one tractate, while *GR* 2's tractate has four sections.¹⁰ The contents of the first one, *GR* 2.1, include: praises of the Lightworld, creation stories, the sending of moral teachings to Adam, revelations about history, end-of-the-world speculations, information about the world's four epochs, and polemics—especially anti-Christian materials. *GR* 2.2 is a confession of sins, while *GR* 2.3, in verse form, offers exhortations from the messenger of light. The fourth section of *GR* 2 contains teachings on marriage.

GR 3 (pp. 63–141), by far the largest of the *Ginza* tractates, is a vast, dramatic creation-myth, a conglomerate entitled “The Book of the Living, First Teachings.” Various primordial emanations are described, and the chief savior figure, Manda d-Hiia (“Knowledge-of-Life”) is instructed to descend from the Lightworld in order to prevent the soon-to-be creators, who scheme to construct the world, from committing stupid or fatal errors. Readers will find elaborate descriptions of the demonic Ruha and her planetary sons, of the creator Ptahil, and of Adam and his wife Hawwa. These are among the most prominent mythological figures.

The next *Ginza* tractate, *GR* 4, contains a fragmentary text about the 'utra (Lightworld figure) Hibil's descent into the underworld (in *GR* 3, Manda d-Hiia performed this feat, not Hibil). Parts of the Mandaean liturgies are found in *GR* 4, such as the prayer *Canonical Prayerbook* (*CP*) 82 and also fragmentary versions of the investiture hymns *CP* 180–88.¹¹ These sections of the liturgies belong among the oldest parts of Mandaean literature.

⁸ Lidzbarski, *GR*, 3–287.

⁹ This insight was first made by R. Reitzenstein, *Das mandäische Buch des Herrn der Grösse und die Evangelienüberlieferung*.

¹⁰ *GR* 2 runs from pp. 31 to 62 in Lidzbarski's edition.

¹¹ The prayers are in E. S. Drower, *The Canonical Prayerbook of the Mandaeans*. For prayer no. 82 (i.e., *CP* 82), see Drower, *Canonical Prayerbook*, 90. This prayer's first line (after the formula) is, “At the fountainhead I came forth,” which has been corrected by Rudolf Macuch to “I went out to the waters.” The expression is based on a Persian idiom (R. Macuch, pers. comm.). For details, see my *Mandaeans*, chap. 7.

GR 5 (pp. 149–204) consists of five sections. The first one tells of Hibil's underworld journey¹² (it is related to the GR 4 tradition), and the second describes Manda d-Hiia's destruction of the demons. Its title is apt: "Destruction of all Idols of the House" (i.e., of the earthly world). Old Testament material appears here, including a twist on Psalm 114:4.¹³ GR 5.3 deals with the soul's travels through the *maṭaratas*—the "toll-stations" on the way to the Light-world. Christ appears as one of the watchers here. In tractate GR 5.4, Manda d-Hiia is baptized by John the Baptist, while GR 5.5 shows a peculiar devaluation of the otherwise positively portrayed figure Šilmai.¹⁴ Here, he is called "The Lord of the House" and is clearly a member of Ruha's coterie.¹⁵

GR 6's single section (pp. 206–12) contains the marvelous story of the Noah/Utnapishtim-like Dinanukht ("the one who speaks according to the religion"),¹⁶ a human book who goes on a journey to the upper worlds.¹⁷ The Syrian historian Theodor bar Koni refers to this text as belonging to the Dositheans.¹⁸ GR 7 also has only one section, which consists of words of wisdom from John the Baptist. Most scholars have taken his appellation Yahia, the Arabic form of his name, to speak for the tractate's post-Islamic date. GR 8's sole section has Manda d-Hiia warning believers against Ruha.

GR 9 has two parts. The first one is "The Destruction of the Seven Stars,"¹⁹ a polemical piece in which the planets are said to be the origin of the false religions. Here, Muhammad is equated with Nerig/Mars. The second tractate of GR 9 tells of "the young boy" created from the heavenly Jordan.²⁰ This section contains the concept of "the only-begotten son/the

¹² See my *Mandaeans*, chap. 4.

¹³ Lidzbarski calls this a "misunderstanding" (177). I am not at all convinced—it seems like polemics (see my *Mandaeans*, chaps. 4, 5, and 13. For a very thorough study, see Dan Shapira, "Iazraqaiia, Zoroastrians, Manichaeans and Other Heretics in Mandaean Texts.")

¹⁴ Usually, he is a Lightworld personage, one of the Jordan witnesses.

¹⁵ For the so-called "evil spirit" Ruha, see my *Mandaeans*, chap. 4.

¹⁶ In Avestan/Pahlavi; see Lidzbarski, *Ginza*, 205. See also E. S. Drower and Rudolf Macuch, *A Mandaic Dictionary (MD)*, 108b, s.v. *dinanukht*.

¹⁷ For treatment of the first part of this tractate, see also, my *Mandaeans*, chap. 4, on Ruha.

¹⁸ See, for instance, Kurt Rudolph's translation of bar Koni's text in *Die Mandäer*, 1:259.

¹⁹ Lidzbarski, *Ginza*, 223, suggests that the text belongs to the eighth century.

²⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 235, for references to the possibly Egyptian or Orphic affinities of this document.

sole son,” for which one might duly note Lidzbarki’s references.²¹ The single but composite tractate making up GR 10 is a creation story entitled “The Book of the Radiance that Shines in the *Pibta*.”²²

The title of GR 11 (pp. 250–68), “The Mystery and the Book of the Great Anuš,” would suit GR 12 better, says Lidzbarski.²³ The text shows grammatical peculiarities, and Lidzbarski thinks that it stems from a different tradition than the other *Ginza* texts.²⁴ It contains a creation story featuring Ruha and the planets battling the forces of the Lightworld. GR 12 has seven sections. Among these, one may note that in the first, the *’utra* Anuš is the speaker, while sections 2, 3, 4, and 5 are alphabetic hymns.²⁵ Of these, GR 12.4 is identical to the Mandaean prayer CP 214, which belongs among the hymns for a new priest and for marriage.²⁶ GR 12.6 describes the world of evil and its king—a counter-piece to GR 12.1, as I see it. The last part, GR 12.7, is connected to the first one in GR 12: it deals with north as the sacred direction and with the cosmic ocean. Finally, GR 13 (pp. 283–87) is a priestly exhortatory prayer for the community.

There is no doubt that GR 1–13 alone testifies to a fully developed Mandaean Gnosticism. Most of the religion’s chief literary genres are present, in prose and poetry: moral teachings, creation myths, polemics, liturgy, sapiential traditions, etc. I would especially emphasize that the first thirteen books at the very least presuppose large parts of the liturgies as found in CP. Thus, it might be possible to argue for the primacy of CP and other hymnic materials.²⁷

²¹ Ibid.

²² The ritual, sacred bread, a biscuit-like wafer.

²³ Lidzbarski, *Ginza*, 250. (Anuš is one of the *’utras*).

²⁴ See *ibid.*, n. 71, and compare with Lidzbarski’s statements about GR 6, p. 205).

²⁵ An alphabetic hymn is based on the acrostic principle: the first word in the first line starts with the letter A, the first word in the second line with B, etc., until the end of the alphabet. The Mandaean alphabet, the *abagada*, has twenty-four letters, a magically auspicious number; the A is repeated at the end. For the *abagada* and Mandaean plays on words, sounds, and letters, see my *Mandaeans*, chap. 13.

²⁶ See Drower, *Canonical Prayerbook*, 183–84.

²⁷ In my studies of Mandaean rituals, I take as my continuous lodestar Lidzbarski’s statement to the effect that the Mandaean hymns and prayers are primary, composed in the most ancient times. Lidzbarski stresses that the liturgies find their natural domain in the cult (Lidzbarski, Introduction to the *Ginza*, p. xii).

GR 1–13 is followed by GR’s first colophon, which, like other first GR colophons, ends with the Jewish-named copyist Ram Šilai.²⁸ In the oldest Paris *Ginza*, Ms. A, the colophon after the first thirteen tractates carries a strikingly long postscript, which I shall present and deal with in chapter 2. Neither here, at the end of GR 13, nor elsewhere does Lidzbarski offer any thoughts on the importance of the *Ginza* colophons, whether for historical, tradition-critical, or other reasons.

GR 14 (pp. 288–94), after which colophon 2 appears, is called “The Book of the Great Nbat,” seemingly named for the Light-world being. The *’utras* Yawar and Yušamin originate from him. The book shows the same grammatical oddities as GR 11, but its content demonstrates affinities with GR 3.

Twenty pieces of poetry make up GR 15 (pp. 295–379), in which a revealer delivers speeches and exhortations. GR 16 contains eleven poems, parts of which also occur in the GR liturgies and in *The Book of John* [hereafter *JB*].²⁹ GR 16 is closely related to GR 15; some of the hymns in it are of “unusual beauty,” says Lidzbarski.³⁰ Conflated traditions seem to be at work in GR 17, which has two sections of poetry. The speakers are the personified Mana (“vessel,” “matrix”), the Great Life (the supreme Lightworld being), and the Lord of Greatness.³¹

An apocalyptic world-history is presented in GR 18 (pp. 405–19). According to this text, the world is 480,000 years old, and the book accounts for the span of time from the beginning of the world to the coming of the Arabs. GR 18 contains information about the four world-epochs and it has Old Testament materials, including the Exodus from Egypt, with a Mandaean twist as one might expect. Political and religious prophecies figure prominently in this work. Lidzbarski dates the text to the mid seventh century,³² though GR 18 specifies that the Arabs have been in power for seventy-one years. However, the text includes among the Arab kings the last of

²⁸ See chaps. 2, 3, and 4 below.

²⁹ Mark Lidzbarski, *Das Johannesbuch der Mandäer*. For *JB* colophons, see chap. 11 below.

³⁰ Lidzbarski, *Ginza*, 380.

³¹ The Lord of Greatness is the Supreme Being, according to one of the Mandaean cosmogony traditions.

³² Lidzbarski, *Ginza*, 407.

the Sassanid rulers. *GR* 18 needs a thorough re-examination, due to its historical significance and, not the least, for comparative purposes.³³

Now, as noted, one must turn the book around 180 degrees in order to find the beginning of *GL*. This part of the codex concentrates on the fate of the soul after the death of the body.³⁴ It consists of three tractates, the first of which has four sections. The prose piece *GL* 1.1 (pp. 423–29) tells the wondrous story of the first man to die, Adam’s son Šitil.³⁴ The next section centers on Adam’s complaint at the announcement of his³⁵ death and on his ascent; the third warns against mourning for the dead and describes Hawa’s death; and the fourth describes the tollhouses, the *maṭaratas*, testing the soul on its path from earth to Lightworld.

GL 2 (pp. 454–504) has twenty-eight sections of poetry. Here, the personified Mana speaks, beginning each piece with the formulaic “I am a Mana of the Great Life.” Finally, sixty-two poems comprise *GL* 3 (pp. 505–96). These deal with the destiny of the soul. Long prayers alternate with shorter ones, and Lidzbarski thinks that this arrangement indicates a call-and-response format.³⁶

Indeed, several of the prayers belong to the category ‘*nianas*’ (“responses”). Below, I have correlated eight of the *GL* 3 poems with those in Lidzbarski’s edition of the Mandaean liturgical collections.³⁷ Seven of these (though *GL* 3.5 remains uncertain) can be equated with Drower’s full collection of prayers in *CP*. A correlation of the parallel prayers in *GL* 3, *Mand. Lit.*, and *CP* yields the following:

<i>GL</i> 3.	<i>Mand. Lit.</i> , p.	<i>CP</i> no.
2	161	96
3	159	94
4	157	92
5	158	?

³³ Dan Y. Shapira, “On Kings and on the Last Days in Seventh Century Iraq. A Mandaean Text and its Parallels” (unpublished).

³⁴ Even the first printed Mandaic *Ginza*, produced by Mandaeans residing in Australia, possesses this traditional feature (see M. F. Mubaraki, R. H. M. Saeed, and B. Mubaraki, eds., *Ginza Rba*). In terms of sheer size, this *Ginza* is even larger than Lidzbarski’s translated edition. A still heftier one is the *Ginza* catalogued as *Hunt. 6* in the Bodleian Library, Oxford (see chap. 3 below).

³⁵ See my *Mandaeans*, chap. 3.

³⁶ Lidzbarski, *Ginza*, 505.

³⁷ Lidzbarski, *Mandäische Liturgien*.

7	163	98
20	99	68
27	111	73
43	96	66

Of these, four are *'nianas* (*CP* 96, 94, 92, and 98), two are *masiqta* (“death mass”) hymns (*CP* 68 and 66), and one, *CP* 73, is an oil-prayer. The three last-mentioned prayers belong to the first of the eight colophons in *CP*.³⁸ *GL*’s colophon stretches far back in time, to around the year 200, as we shall see.³⁹ It is possible that *GL* precedes *CP* with respect to three segments: *GL* 3.20, 3.27, and 3.43. In all likelihood, *GL* is much older than the parts of *CP* whose colophons do not stretch back to the third century.



It is time to turn to the first examination of one set of colophons. As my first example, I choose the colophons of the four Paris *Ginzas*, those used by Petermann and Lidzbarski.

³⁸ See chap. 9 below.

³⁹ See chaps. 2, 3, 13, and 14 below.

2 THE COLOPHONS IN FOUR PARIS *GINZAS*

As noted, each of the four Paris *Ginzas* contains seven colophons, twenty-eight in all. Considering that a given colophon might contain between one hundred and two hundred names, it is perhaps understandable that Lidzbarski, in his *Ginza* edition and translation, would choose to omit these lengthy lists of names. But we have those of Petermann's *Sidra Rabba*.

I shall not deal with each of the twenty-eight colophons in equal measure, as to do so would expand the chapter far beyond the bounds of the present project. Using the colophons in *Ms. A* as a main pattern for the others, I deal with the next three in turn: *Mss. B, C, and D*. The following issues are especially important: the copyists themselves, their geographical settings, and other information gleaned from the scribes' postscripts; similarities and differences in the correlation of lineages in the seven colophons in each manuscript; prevalent copyist lineages throughout the colophons; specific luminaries in Mandaean priestly history; and the presence of women's names. After treating each of the four codices' colophons, I give a very short conclusion. An appendix to this chapter contains the full translation of two of the Paris *Ginza* colophons: colophons 1 and 7 from *Ms. A*. For the sake of brevity, I limit myself to these (attention is paid to other *Ginza* colophons, in whole or in part, in chaps. 3 and 4).

Ms. A comes from the *tarmida* (lower-ranking priest) Ram Baktiar, son of Bihram Šadan, of the Qūṭana family, who finished copying the *Ginza* in 1560 CE (AH 968) in the village Maqdam belonging to the greater town and district of Huwaiza, in the province of Khuzistan, Iran. Huwaiza is on the Karka river, northwest of Ahwaz. Ram Baktiar also copied the illustrated

scroll *Divan Abatur*, published by Julius Euting,¹ and Ram Baktiar appears as scribe in the Mandaean astrological text *Sfar Malwašia*.

Ms. B's copyist is Baktiar Bulbul (*bulbul*: “nightingale”), son of Ram Ziwa, of the Ram Ziwa family. Baktiar Bulbul is a *ganziḅra* (higher-ranking priest), who finished his task in 1632 CE (AH 1042), also in Maqdam—though he seems to have begun his copying work in Basra, Iraq. He appears as a copyist of *Ms. D* and of *JB*. So far in my studies, I have found him nowhere else. *Ms. C* was copied by Yahia Adam, son of Baktiar Bulbul (Ram Ziwa clan). The initiator is, as we have just seen, the copyist of *Ms. B*. Yahia Adam seems to be a *ganziḅra* in Huwaiza, and the date of *Ms. C*'s copying is 1680 CE (AH 1091). Note that forty-eight years separate the two documents *Mss. B* and *C*. Finally, *Ms. D*'s copyist, Yahia Bihram, son of Adam—of the Manduia and Kuma clans—is evidently a *tarmida* and more difficult to pinpoint. He copied the text on the channel Šamaḅnia, near Basra. The date is partially erased, and one can only discern “11...,” which, based on the colophon's information about contemporaneous rulers, puts the text somewhere in the early 1700s.²

Ms. A

When he begins to copy the *Ginza*, Ram Baktiar offers the traditional invocation, giving the names of his parents, wife, siblings, children, nephews, and nieces. He asks for the forgiveness of sins for all of these and for himself. We learn that Ram Baktiar's own father is, indeed, his initiator, Bihram Šadan.³ Ram Baktiar's first colophon reveals that he copied the text for his own salvific benefit, transcribing from a book belonging to Yahia Mhatam, the *riš ama*, “head of the people,” in Maqdam. The copyist's formula, the words with which he starts the colophon, is:

¹ Julius Euting, *Mandäische Divan*. The manuscript is in the Vatican Library. See also E. S. Drower's edition and translation, *Divan Abatur; or, Progress through the Purgatories*.

² But Yahia Bihram turns up below, in chap. 4, where we will find a precise date for his copying of another text. Mandaean years are given according to the Arab calendar, usually with the curse/pun: “according to the time-computation of the Arabs—may the world founder upon them!” This plays on the noun “Arabs,” *arbaia*, against the verb “to fall” or “to founder,” *ARB*.

³ This is not an automatic relationship, as noted in the Introduction above.

(Then) I concluded this book and the *zharas*⁴ which I copied for myself—I am) small among my brethren *tarmidas* and a slave among the *našurāiia*.⁵ I am Ram Baktiar, son of Bihram Šadan, son of Yahia Maimun, son of Adam Yahia ...⁶

Stating that he copied from the book belonging to Yahia Mhatam, Ram Baktiar then gives Yahia Mhatam's lineage, and next that of the previous copyist, and so on until the end of the colophon. The very last copyist, Ram Šilai, son of Daimir, bears a Jewish name.⁷ At Ram Šilai's name the text says that this copyist copied "from the first fathers."⁸ Based on the datability of Ram Šilai's immediate successors, 'Qaiam, son of Zindana,⁹ and his grandson, the ubiquitous Bayan Hibil, son of Brik Yawar,¹⁰ I would put Ram Šilai in or before the middle of the seventh century. Note that this colophon ends centuries before the earliest datable Mandaean scribe, Zazai of Gawazta, who flourished around 270 CE.¹¹

Among the luminaries appearing in Ram Baktiar's first colophon are: the ethnarch Anuš Ma'ilia, son of Anuš Bihdad; the master Yahia, son of Adam Kuhailia; and Bayan Hibil's two sons/initiates, Šaiar and Sam Ziwa. The second name—the master Yahia, son of Adam Kuhailia—is very well attested, for he had his manuscript copied by many scribes. Frequent copying back and forth, within generations as well as across generation lines, makes it difficult to operate with a strict, linear calculation of "generations" of scribes.¹² For instance, Yahia, son of Adam Kuhailia, appears three times in colophon 1, as does Anuš Ma'ilia, son of Anuš Bihdad. Repetitions of

⁴ *Zharas* are name-insertions (literally; "warnings"), very common in Mandaean documents, especially prayers and formulas. This device allows the tailoring of a text so that it mentions, in the proper places, the name of the person for whom the text is being transcribed, a prayer is uttered, or a ritual is performed.

⁵ The term for learned Mandaeans, mainly the priestly class.

⁶ Petermann, p. 290. See the Appendix at the end of this chapter for the continuation of Ram Baktiar's lineage and for colophon 1 in its entirety.

⁷ See *MD*, 462a.

⁸ Petermann, *Sidra Rabba*, 2:291.

⁹ In my "The Colophons in H. Petermann's *Sidra Rabba*," 24 and 36 n. 71, I thought that Zindana was a female name. This is not correct.

¹⁰ More information on Bayan Hibil appears elsewhere below, e.g., in chaps. 9, 10, and 13.

¹¹ However, as we shall see, *GL* has scribes earlier than Zazai.

¹² I calculate one generation as thirty years. When the word "generation" appears in quotation marks, it means a scribal generation, which may not always coincide with a biological one.