

Old and New Testament Figures in Mandaean Version

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The religion which is commonly called the Mandaean is certainly a most complex entity. There is no standardized doctrine. Neither anthropology, cosmogony nor soteriology have reached that stage of doctrinal clarity which in the West is regarded as desirable. In all these fields of doctrine there are a number of important differences, e.g. as regards such an essential doctrine as the kind or degree of dualism. But however great the doctrinal freedom has been, it has not been too great to prevent Mandaism from being incorporated into the great flock of Gnostic systems. (See Rudolph, Kurt, *Theogonie, Kosmogonie und Anthropogonie in den mandäischen Schriften*, Göttingen 1965, = Rudolph, III.)¹ Some basic features of Mandaean history are known and we are aware to some extent of the components making up the system. Obviously there is a large proportion of biblical, especially Old Testament material, but equally obvious are the Iranian influences. The latter seem to be partly derived from the West, together with the Old Testament and Jewish traditions, and partly incorporated in the tradition when the Mandaeans or Protomandaeans had already settled east of the river Jordan and in Mesopotamia.

The intention of this study is to show how some figures, well known from the Bible, appear in the Mandaean setting. We shall have to concentrate upon the Old Testament material and devote less attention to the New Testament.

¹ Abbreviations: The three works of Rudolph on the Mandaean religion have been frequently used:

Die Mandäer, I, is quoted I, p. ...

Die Mandäer, II, is quoted II, p. ...

Theogonie, Kosmogonie und Anthropologie in den mandäischen Schriften, 1965, is quoted III, p. ... For the sake of explicitness it is sometimes written: Rudolph, I, etc.

CP = Drower, *The Canonical Prayerbook*.

J = Johannesbuch.

ML = Lidzbarski, *Mandäische Liturgien*.

Starting with Adam we find that he is called the primal Man, *naša qadmaia* (ML, 54); he is known from the ancient masiqta hymns, ML, pp. 96, 100, etc. The Mandaean traditions here appear both in a stricter, dualistic version and a, probably more recent, monistic trend (III, pp. 248 sq., 305 sq.). In the former *Adam pagre* appears, i.e. the bodily Adam, being the result of the activity of the demiurge and the planets. Add hereto "the fall of the soul" carried out by a "light being", which the tradition has not defined more strictly. He may be called Manda *d* Hayye, one or more uthras, Hibil, who is Abel, Gabriel, Adakas-Ziwa, about whom more below (Rudolph, III, pp. 259 sq.). In his systematic account of Mandaean doctrines Rudolph regards Manda *d* Hajje as the original bearer of the soul. This soul later appears as Adam kasia—the secret Adam. At a later stage of development this Adam kasia is identified with Adakas, a separate being becoming the transmitter of *mana*, i.e. of itself.

We thus find that the Old Testament Adam, the primal man created by God from earth into whom he insufflated the spirit of life, also in Mandaean tradition no doubt is the first man. He is the work of the demiurge, but he has also acquired a new function, which in the process of development grows more and more important. It seems to be the divine act of insufflation, of transmitting of *ruach*—spirit, which is the starting point for the Mandaean reinterpretation.

In the Scriptures Adam is given a wife, Eve, Heua. In Mandaean literature she appears as Hawwā. There are various vague and confused traditions about her origin. Rudolph (III, pp. 281 sq.) has tried to sift out a more ancient stratum with an ascetic tendency depreciating womanhood. She is the image of *ruha*, the spirit, who is now the demiurge himself. Uthras say:

We arranged a wedding for Adam
 We gave him a wife.
 We gave him Hawwa for a wife ...
 (GR V 1, 106 6)

An opposition to this "positive" quotation we put GR XI where Ptahil is saying to Ruha and her angels.

I shall make the man as my image
 and your [i.e. Ruha] image as wife.

The negative attitude seems to be mostly stressed. Both types may be derived from Jewish tradition, the more ascetic most probably from late Jewish radicalism. In later Mandaean speculation Eve also has a heavenly prototype, *Anana d Nhura*, the light cloud.

Of Cain, Abel and Seth only the two last mentioned are known, under the names of Hibil and Šitil. They often appear together with other Adamites such as *Anoš*, the son of Seth (GR XI, XII) *Enoš*. They are the types of righteous Mandaeans, which are saved from catastrophes, or are safely brought through these dangers by *Manda d Hajje*, the messenger of light. Thereafter they themselves act as heavenly messengers, together with their saviour.

The three are *uthras*. Their glory is praised in hymns such as ML, p. 245, XXIII:

This is the radiance [ziwa] of Hibil
this is the light of Šitil
this is the brightness [tuqna] of *Anoš*,
the great *Uthra* ...

In the evening hymn, ML, p. 173, V (CP, 110), it is said:

The time, the time of devotions arriveth
The time of the Lord of Prayer hath come.
My awakener is Hibil
My instructor is Šitil,
Anuš lifteth up my hymns
(Lidzbarski slightly different:
mein Liedersänger ist *Anoš*).

In ML, p. 248, XXXI, Hibil alone is praised:

Lovely is thy voice, young man Hibil
who art speaking in the garden of Adam
and art reciting lovely hymns.

The conception of Hibil as the son of Adam and Eve is lost, at least in some traditions. Thus the curious fact appears that Hibil *Yawar* (GR V 1) is saying: I created for him [Adam] his wife *Hawwa*, in order that the world should be revealed and established.

According to Gen. 4:25 Seth is the son of Adam given to him in the place of Abel, who had been killed by Cain. *Enoš*, furthermore, is not the son of

Adam but of Seth. In the Mandaean texts as a rule this tradition no longer survives. The three, Hibil, Šitil, and Anoš are regarded as a group, consisting of equally important persons.

According to another interesting tradition Eve is said to have had three deliveries, all twin births, with one son and one daughter in each of them (GR 243, 3-7):

Then Adam laid himself down and had intercourse with Eve, his wife. She conceived from him a double fruit of her womb, one man and one woman. It was in her womb for nine months, according to what Ptahil had planned for her, as his father Abathur had commanded him. Eve gave birth to twins, a man and a woman.

In GR III (Rudolph, III, pp. 291 sq.) three twin deliveries are mentioned as well as the name of the children. The tradition is, however, not unanimous. The names seem to be:

- I. Hibil/Anhar Hayye
- II. Anan-Nsab/Anhar-Ziwa, probably to be identified with Anan-Nsab-Ziwa-Šitil/Inhar-Ziwa-Hawwa
- III. Bar Hayye (or Bar Anoš-Adam)/Dmut-Hayye

According to the Book of Jubilees, IV, the daughters of Adam and Eve are 'Awān and 'Azūrā and they were married to Cain and Seth. Pirke d R. Eliezer (XXXI) says that the wife of Cain was his twin sister. In a recent article Michael Strue has published the text of an Armenian book on Adam and his death (The death of Adam—An Armenian Adam book', *Harvard Theol. Review*, 59/3, pp. 283-291, 1966). There we learn that Cain and Abel were twins, that Cain was married to Cainan, Abel to Ema, Seth to Est'era (vv 5-6) and these women were also their sisters. To some it has been possible to discover equivalents in late Jewish or Christian literature. It has, however, been impossible to find either a sister to Seth in other sources, or the name of Ema (p. 287).

It should also be mentioned that the doubtless late Apocryphal Arabic Gospel of John (*Iohannis Evangelium apocryphum Arabice* (ed. Galbiati, 1957), translated into Swedish by O. Löfgren, *Det apokryfiska Johannes-evangeliet*, 1967) preserves traditions which are related to the topic here dealt with. They belong to a part of that Gospel which is preserved only in Ethiopic manuscripts. In III:11 we learn that Abel and Cain had twin

sisters. Verse 12 says that Cain wanted to marry his twin sister,—because she was beautiful—but Adam gave Cain the twin sister of Abel for a wife and to Abel he gave the twin sister of Cain. This is said to be the reason why Cain hated Abel.

This Christian Arab-Ethiopic tradition agrees with the Mandaean against the Armenian in that in both Abel and Cain were the result of twin births together with sisters. But the Apocryphal Gospel of John does not know the names of the sisters, possibly a sign of certain antiquity. (There is no doubt that fairly early traditions are preserved in that Gospel together with a majority of late material.)

In the edition of Löfgren (p. 202) we find a reference to the Syriac text, edited and translated by Bezold, *Die Schatzhöhle*, and its *Arabic* version *Kitāb al-Mağāl* which also preserves the names of these sisters. The sister of Abel is called Lebuda, Cain's Quelimā(t) or Aqlimijā. We find that the names vary both in Christian and Mandaean tradition. The Mandaean names are obviously indigenous Mandaean creations, coined on the basis of common Mandaean mythological language. The root nhura-light is preferred in some cases.

We have observed that there are obvious reminiscences of biblical circumstances. They should probably be regarded as belonging to a more ancient stratum than those which regard Hibil as the one giving Eve to Adam or those relating the wonderful birth of Hibil. He is said to be the fruit of a virgin birth. In GR X, after the creation of Adam and Eve both receive garments from Hibil. Then we learn about his birth:

A youthful young man laid himself down with Eve while Adam stayed with her as unmarried. Then Eve said. From where did this youthful young man come who was not sown from the seed of a man? The womb of a woman has not grown, and she has not become fully grown. His speech is pleasant and his voice clear. Hibil bar Adam he is called, the son of Adam and Eve.

Then it is said:

Hibil got a son, and his name was Šitil,
and Šitil got a son and his name was Anoš.

The Mandaean authors obviously had difficulties with the genealogies! In Manichaean texts Seth appears and even in a form close to the Mandaean, namely Sethel (CHÖHN), e.g. in the Manichaean Psalmbook, 142:4,

144:1, 7, 146:13, 179:22. He is regarded the son of Adam (142:4). He has become a Saviour: Let us sing together to Sethal, our Saviour (144:1). Sethel also appears in the Homilies, 61:23, and in Kephalaia, X.

In the Manichaean texts both Enos and Shem turn up, as well as Cain, who seems to be entirely unknown to the Mandaeans. So in the Manichaean Homilies, pp. 68, 16 sq.: Cain and his whole race ... Enosh, Sem, Shem (ענוש, שמ, שם) and the other ... evil ones.

The absence of Cain in the Mandaean traditions should be observed. It is rather odd and a further study of late Jewish or early apocryphal Christian or Christian Gnostic material may reveal a stream which has the same peculiarity.

The main interest for us is not to study genealogical details in their various settings. The essential is to observe that the Old Testament figures are transformed. In the Old Testament they are regarded as belonging to the first links in the human genealogy. From the point of view of the history of religion their background is not in the centre of interest at this stage. But in the Mandaean texts they have become heavenly beings, yes, in more recent traditions they may tend to become Saviours, as happened with Hibil who replaces Manda *d* Hayye as Saviour. In GR V we find the famous story about "Hibil's descent to Hades" (III, p. 224). The relation may be summed up as follows:

1. The main actors from the world of Light are: Mana rba and its image, Manda *d* Hayye. The reason is attempts to ascend observed among certain beings in the world of darkness.
2. Manda *d* Hayye, who is going to solve the crisis, visits Hibil and brings him to the Great ones.
3. Hibil is fortified for his task by a baptism through Mana rba. Manda *d* Hayye gives him *raza rba*—the great mystery. In the following there are two distinct traditions. Here we follow the one which contains the descent to Krun.
4. Hibil begins his descent, accompanied by his father Manda *d* Hayye and his brothers Šitil and Anoš.
5. Hibil passes—and as it seems in the same honorable company—the seven or eight worlds of darkness. Finally he arrives at the last one where

he finds Krun, *tura rba d bisra* “the mountain of flesh”, who is also the king of darkness.

6. In the following fight Hibil gains the victory. Krun has to give the *prudka*, the desired passport, which is a signet ring with the name and picture of the great darkness.

7. Now the ascent begins via the worlds of darkness and their sealing by Hibil with his newly acquired ring. During this journey a good deal happens. Hibil is married to Zahrel-Rba, daughter of Gaf and his wife Gafan, the enormous giant of darkness. The pair seem somewhat illmatched. We have to deal with some kind of marriage of convenience. Hibil wants to draw the secret out of darkness. It turns out to be a well, where there is a mirror. Hibil takes the mirror and thus deprives the darkness of its power.

Hibil finally, in the shape of Gaf, his newly acquired father in law, induces Ruha to accompany him to their “parents”. Together they ascend to the uppermost world of darkness, but there Ruha is imprisoned and immured.

8. Hibil ascends to the world of light, is baptized, and reports to Manda *d* Hayye the secrets of darkness.

It is difficult to find a story better illustrating the transformation of an Old Testament figure in his new Mandaean setting.

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Let us also for a moment observe what happens to another genealogically important family, that of Noah. Among the Mandaeans the pater familias is called Nu. In the literature he does not frequently occur. He appears in the name of a well-known prayer, that of Šum bar Nu, i.e. Shem, son of Noah. The name of his wife, which is not preserved in Genesis, is here Nuraita or Nhuraita. In the intercession called Abahatan (CP, p. 152) it is asked: There shall be forgiveness of sins for Šum, son of Noah and Nuraita his wife. The name Nuraita is, however, used for the wives of Noah, Šem and Denanukht (Drower Dictionary). According to the Book of Jubilees, IV 33, the wife of Noah is 'Emazara. The traditions thus are not fixed. (The apocryphal Gospel of John does not give her name.)

In other Gnostic systems she appears under the name of Noria. She is known by the Barbelognostics as the wife who did not join her husband when entering the ark, but she serves the highest God (Epiphanius Panarion,

26.1.9; Rudolph, I, 83, n. 1). The name Noria is observed also in the Nag Hammadi library. The Hypostasis of the Archonts is also called the Book of Noria.

In parenthesis I should like to mention the following. In Beirut there is a kind of *suk* behind the ancient orthodox cathedral, which is situated in the original centre of the city, now Place de l'Étoile. In these bazaars there is an interesting place of worship, προσκύνημα, proskunema, which, although in the hands of the Orthodox, is a place where the faithful of various religions assemble. Various Christian confessions, Jews and Moslems, all come to that place where an icon of Our Lady is in the centre. She is called Παναγία ἔλ Νουρία, *Panagia Al Noria*, or translated Παναγία τοῦ Φωτός, Our Lady of the Light. Such a place of worship in the Orient, common to several religions, usually goes back to pre-Christian times. Is it feasible to think that the Gnostic Noria, or that one which has become the same Noria has been the centre of worship here?

The three sons of Noah, Shem, Ham and Japhet are known as Šum, Iam and Iafeth (GR I 1, § 121). In Mandaean tradition the two lastmentioned do not play any role, whereas Šum has a growing importance. As was mentioned, he is known as Šum bar Nu. He also appears as Šum-Kušṭa, where the central Mandaean term kušṭa, truth, etc., is added to the name. In one tradition he resumes one of the functions of Hibil in Hades (J, 58 sq., especially 62) (I, p. 163). Šum bar Nu is also regarded as the head of an age, i.e. as the renewer of the world. According to one tradition, there are evil powers which are inspiring the building of the ark, thus causing the salvation of the evil Jews. In spite of the rich Jewish heritage there are obvious anti-Jewish traces. It is enough to quote from the strongly anti-Jewish hymn from the rahme of Friday (ML, p. 209, XLIV; CP, 149). We learn that the Jewish law was inspired by the Seven.

Hast thou not heard, daughter Miriai,
 What the Jews say about thee?
 The Jews say "Thy daughter is in love with a man,
 She hath hated Jewry and loved Nasirutha;
 She hath conceived hate for the synagogue-door
 And love for the door of the *maškna*.
 She hath taken dislike to the phylactery-band
 And loveth the fresh (myrtle) wreaths.
 On the Sabbath she carries on work;

On Sunday she keepeth her hands therefrom.
 Miriai hath hated the Law
 Which the Seven imposed upon Jerusalem.'

Striking is also the change of the root jahaduta, jahuduta, Judaism, to jahuṭaiia from the root jaḥṭa, abortion and to the root ḥṭa, to sin. Thus "jahuṭaiia iaḥṭia unipṣia"—the Jews, abortion and excrements (GR 231:5).

Before going on to study the very process of transformation we should also take some New Testament figures into consideration. John the Baptist plays an important rôle in some traditions, especially in the Book of John. He appears both under the Arab form Yahya, without the Koranic addition ben Zakaria, and under the traditional Hebrew or Aramaic shape Yohanan.

Exceptionally and contrary to what Rudolph, I, p. 70, says, the name Yahya br Zakria appears (e.g. ATŠ I, 29) probably Arab influence in a text of comparatively recent date:

This crown and these explanations were created for Adam, the First Man, and for the man Ram (and his successors?) then unto the man Šurbai, until it cometh to the noblest of his age, whose name is Šum-Yawar, who up to (the time of?) Anuš-' Uthra will come and will guard its secret mystery, until our eldest, dear(est), our lustrous crown Yahia son of Zachariah assumed the crown. And he (Yahia) instructed three hundred and sixty priests who were of that place (Jerusalem?) concerning that glorious rank by which it bestowed good fortune upon my sons and my plants [ATŠ = Drower, The thousand and twelve questions, I, 1, 29].

In the above-mentioned prayer called Abahatan (CP, p. 152) he is Yahya Yohanan, son of Enišbai (=Elisabeth?) and he has two wives: Quinta and Anhar.

One of his functions is to baptize Manda *d* Hayye, coming in the shape of a small boy, and then Yohanan ascends to the world of light, (I, pp. 68 sq.). The place of John in the Mandaean system has been the subject of much discussion. Are the traditions "historically" reliable? Is John, with his disciples, the founder of Mandaism? We do not have to deal with these questions here. We have but to state, that the traditions about John are not essential for the Mandaean religion, but they form a positive element.

Probably the Johannine traditions do not belong to the most ancient strata of the Mandaean literature. Except in the Book of John they appear mainly in the Haran Gawaita (I, pp. 70 sq.). In the liturgies, where Rudolph

(*ibid.*) regards them as entirely unknown, they nevertheless appear, both in Abahatan and in CP, 105, which is known under the name *Asiet Malkie*. None of these texts seem to belong to the most ancient liturgical texts, at least not in their present form.

Quite different is the position of Jesus Christ. He is known as Išu Mešihā. Some New Testament and Apocryphal material is extant: his baptism through John, his work among the Jews, which he seduced. Strong polemics against Jesus are known, sometimes reminiscent of Jewish anti-Christian texts (Rudolph, I, p. 108). Both among Mandaeans and Jews we find terms such as pseudo-Messiah and pseudo-prophet. Stauffer has shown that these terms were known before Jesus Christ ("Antike Jesustradition und Jesuspolemik im Mittelalter", *ZNW*, 46/1955, pp. 1–10). In fact it is impossible to find one single positive pronouncement about Jesus in the whole Mandaean literature.

As an illustration let us quote a Mondayhymn of the rahme (CP, 125; ML, p. 190, XX) where an expressive warning against Jesus is found:

Beware of it, my brethren!
 Beware of it, my friends!
 Beware, my friends of Jesus, the pseudo-Messiah,
 And of those who misconstrue appearances
 And alter the words of My mouth.

We have observed some figures both from the Old and the New Testaments and sketched their functions according to the Mandaean traditions. Obviously there is a great difference between their functions in Genesis and in Ginza. The transformation is the result of a long development. We have traced a development within the Mandaean sphere, but we have also to count with stages between the canonical scriptures and the Mandaeans. Such texts are to be regarded as representing early traditions, where Adam and the three, Hibil, Šitil and Anoš, are the prototypes of earthly Mandaeans and the keepers of the secrets. But soon they become messengers, revealers of heavenly mysteries (Rudolph, I, p. 152). It is especially Hibil who resumes the function of messenger.

Adam, on the other hand, remains the primal man. But as the head of the age he was influenced by the anthropos-myth (Adakas Ziwa) and became an uthra. But he does not become a messenger, probably because he is related

to the heavenly primal man. The three, however, become messengers, but unlike Manda *d* Hayye they were not originally messengers, messengers in their own right, but they have become messengers.

We are able to hint at the intermediary stages. There are various late Jewish traditions as well as purely Gnostic ones. Some of them have been mentioned, as in the case of Noria. The pseudo-epigraphs and the apocrypha of the post-Machabæan period seem to have provided a source for the Mandaeans. We should mention in particular the Jewish-heretical Adam-literature, where the Adamites are regarded as knowing secrets, which are easily rendered in a Gnostic shape.

The Genesis-genealogy and the function of its important persons, not quite accurately known by the Mandaeans, has become entirely transformed in the final Mandaean stage. Originally regarded as an historical description it has become a celestial reality. They have become living, celestial beings, spirits, carrying out essential functions in the drama of salvation. Here the Gnostic myth, with its both Jewish and Iranian elements, has proved to be the strong transforming power. Superficially understood it preserves highly treasured ancient material, but it gives entirely different meaning.

In the case of the New Testament material the ability for absorption is quite different. Unlike what is known in many other cases it was not possible to absorb and transform. *Evangelium Veritatis*, *Evangelium Philippi* and other Christian-gnostic texts, as well as Many himself, are able to accept Jesus as the mediator or one of the mediators, or prophets. But not so among the Mandaeans. One would think that they could easily have accepted him as one of the messengers or mediators besides Manda *d* Hayye and others, but it does not happen. This is the more strange as in the closely related Manichaeism Jesus is accepted among the revealers.

There must be some reason why Mandaeism on a particular point has lost its power of absorption because of fanatic hostility and polemics. From the early Church or early Christian Gnosticism many features have been accepted without any protest. The replacing of Sabbath by Sunday is a good example. Add hereto what has been observed in my study on the Mandaean ordination of a tarmida, where absolution, washing of feet, possibly also Syrian Christian formulae or quotations from the Syrian New Testament indicate Christian influence. (Rudolph, I, p. 107, criticizes Burkitt for trying

to prove some influence from the peshitta, and he thinks that Jewish targums may have been as influential. But what are we to do if we find New Testament quotations?) (A short summary of my study on the ordination ritual has been submitted for publication in the acts of the patristic conference at Oxford, 1967.) These and other examples of Christian influence are too many to be neglected. We thus have on the one hand an obvious Christian influence at an early stage of Mandaean history. On the other we find a strong anti-Christian tendency which seems also to be an ancient tradition. At this stage of research we cannot say which of these tendencies, the positive or the negative, represents the most ancient tradition.

A possible explanation is that the Mandaeans lived in a more or less close contact with some kind of Syrian Christianity during the first centuries and they have accepted a number of Christian (and anti-Jewish) traditions and customs. But as soon as the Christian mission became more conscious, more active and perhaps orthodox, Mandaean consciousness has revolted and we get the pregnant anti-Christian pronouncements about the pseudo-Messiah as quoted above.

The reason why Jesus Christ was never received and absorbed and "mandaeized" would then be that the Mandaeans or Protomandaeans from the beginning formed a strongly Jewish influenced Gnostic sect and that they were living in a close contact with conscious Syrian Christianity. The knowledge of Jesus Christ was too much alive in their surroundings to allow a Mandaean transformation.