Mandaeism: Ancient Gnostic Religion; Living Religious Faith

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Summary

This thesis aims to present an as yet unseen perspective on the ancient gnostic religion of Mandaeism by giving a voice to the Mandaean community living in diaspora in Australia today. The author, a committed Mandaean, seeks to redress gaps in academic knowledge and hopes to create a more open environment within scholarship and religious dialogue for this religion that, contrary to predictions, is thriving.

Scholarly literature, to date, largely approached through the lenses of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, has focused on the origins and history of the religion, and on understanding the gnostic nature of Mandaean literature. A review of this literature critically examines the perspectives and conclusions of key academics, suggesting that some have been highly conjectural in nature, the work of outsiders attempting to understand a mystical religion forced by centuries of persecution to practise secrecy in order to preserve its rich tradition. The two cornerstones of Mandaeism that have caused particular controversy are belief in one God and Immersion in running water. Monotheism is questioned most by Islamic scholars while Christian academics sometimes struggle to see the true nature and meaning of repeated baptism. As the survival and development of this religion is a key concern, this thesis examines the gnostic nature of Mandaeism as a living faith, as taught to believers, from religious sources. Gnosticism with its mystic and hidden truths is difficult for modern non-Mandaean scholars to understand. As for all Gnostics, duality of existence is at the heart of Mandaean Gnosticism.

The thesis then documents the results of an ethnographic qualitative process used to listen to eight voices (including two priests) from the Australian Mandaean community, with the author's autoethnographic reflection intertwined. In order to honour the voice of this oppressed people the thematic framework is underpinned by anti-oppressive theory and the narrative approach. After consultation with the Mandaean community, the questions presented to participants related to life before and into diaspora, Mandaean religious life and practice, and the hopes and perceived challenges for the future. The result is a vivid picture of the lived experience of Mandaean people in Australia today. The importance of this process cannot be over emphasised as it gives voice to people who have been voiceless for millennia.

A sense of liberation and joy is palpable among the members of the Mandaean community interviewed. The author and the participants now live in a free democratic society where they feel empowered to practise their faith and work at developing a positive future. It is clear from this study that the survival and development of Mandaeans in Australia is in a strong place; Mandaeans in other countries are looking to Australia for leadership.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment, any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed

Date: 06-10-2018

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Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis focuses on Mandaeans in Australia, their exodus from the Middle East, their long history of repression and persecution, and the optimism and resilience that has enabled them to survive and build a new life. To do this the untold stories of Mandaeans are shared in order to acknowledge their experiences and help find a pathway to a positive future.

As a young man somewhat separated from the Mandaean community in Australia, particularly geographically, the writer became increasingly conscious of his heritage and desire to deepen his understanding of Mandaeism – including in diaspora – and to share that more widely. Previous scholarly endeavours have invariably been presented without reference to the experience and everyday lives of the Mandaean people themselves. Misunderstandings have been caused by the inability of Western and Islamic scholars to enter into a deep understanding of this Gnostic tradition, and the arcane nature of sacred Mandaean language and mysticism, central to Mandaeism.

My Story: Our Story

In this thesis, for the first time, attention has been given to the voice of the Mandaean community. Particular attention is given to the voices of the Australian diasporic Mandaean community who share their own experience of life under, in and through persecution, as well as the experience of living in a free society. It is significant that these voices are those of practising Mandaeans, insiders, who continue to live in the shadow of persecution, while responding to the demands of life in Australia.

In the struggle to survive in an oppressive and dominant environment, our resilient, optimistic, peace-loving people adapted and conserved their religious practices and beliefs. My own earliest memories are of a community, the Mandaeans of Ahvaz in Iran, into which I was born. My recollections are of our systemic marginalisation by the Muslim majority. These early childhood memories cultivated my deep interest in my people, their history and the events that led to Mandaeans' persecution through many centuries.

In order to develop an authentic picture of the Mandaean people and their history, more specifically with particular emphasis on the past one hundred years, I turned to my grandparents, elders, parents, siblings, cousins and other members of my

immediate and extended family, to gain a deeper understanding of what it means to experience endemic persecution and how our lives have been shaped and changed by that.

My grandmother shared with me her rich wisdom and the narratives that were passed on to her by her grandparents. When I asked her what Mandaean history and persecution meant to her, she replied, “Son, there is something about what Mandaeans endured over the centuries that cannot be expressed in words easily.”

In my experience, the nexus between documented history by outside researchers and Mandaean cultural reflection does not align. Perhaps this is because history and memory are indistinguishable in Mandaeism. The Mandaean past is not understood as a series of events arranged in chronological order, but as a continuous tradition. To be part of Mandaean history is to practise the Mandaean tradition, and to find meaning in that tradition is to become part of a shared memory. Passing on oral narratives is not just the recollection of past experiences; it is also the communal memory of an entire way of life.

I recorded all the narratives I exchanged with my grandparents, parents and siblings to preserve the richness of their experience as a Mandaean and ensure nothing is lost in translation. Every time I listen to these conversations again, it is more devastating. When I am not in my grandparents’ warm and reassuring presence, I find the evil that they, their parents and grandparents encountered overwhelming and incomprehensible.

It was when I started writing that I really heard the voices of my grandparents, my parents, my siblings and community members whom I interviewed. I was seeing and experiencing history through my family and community’s eyes. I have placed a huge emphasis on systematically archiving what I learned has happened to my people since their mass exodus from the Jordan Valley in the first century CE until today’s appalling treatment of them in the Middle East. This is of course necessary for a researcher, but sometimes such research can make history look like cold, hard facts; the sounds of individuals’ suffering can be swallowed up. Every time I speak to my grandparents, my parents, my siblings, priests and elders I am constantly reminded of their testimony, and so I decided to give my own community a voice, something that so far scholarship has failed to do.

I find myself driven by a sense of responsibility to tell future generations about what has happened to our people, both past and present. I want to teach my children and grandchildren about the Mandaean way of life before the awful dark cloud presented

itself, approximately fourteen hundred years ago, with the advent of Islam. This brought fear and agony to Mandaeans and continues to this day.[1] I also hope to ennoble the idea of Mandaean continuity, and to remind the next Mandaean generation about humanity's potential for evil and for good. When I speak to both my immediate and extended family about the past and their experiences I find they talk with the caution and guardedness of individuals who have built an internal wall against extraordinary suffering. For some it is the first time they have shared the trauma experienced over the journey of their life. Their memories, experiences, resilience and optimism are striking features of the community. I often wonder if this explains my people's survival.

When I listen to my grandparents I find their narratives intertwine history and memory in one expression. It is almost impossible to interpret anything meaningful from the attempted genocide of the Mandaean people at many points in their long history; in the violence, terror, robberies, rape, forced conversion, murder and other atrocities involved. These events – typified by the massacre at Šuštar in the late nineteenth century – still loom as a break from tradition, a fracture in Mandaean history, a farewell to an entire way of life. From that time, fear was so ingrained in the Mandaean community that the Mandaic language was almost lost, and the people and practice of their rituals became hidden from the Muslim community as far as possible. This protective attitude continues today, to protect the survival of Mandaeism and shield the culture even to some extent in Western countries. It is my hope that sometime in the not too distant future the testimony of my grandparents, parents, siblings, past and present elders will become part of the Mandaean tradition, told over and over and perhaps contribute to healing and openness within the Mandaean community once again.

I remember Khūzestān as a beautiful province. It is home to iconic and historical cities such as Šuša, one of the most important cities of the ancient Middle East, and home to many Mandaeans. Important centres of Mandaeism in the past included Dezful and Šuštar, a capital for Mandaeans for centuries. Ahvaz, my birth place, is not far from the beautiful Kārūn River[2] where I was immersed for the first time and

[1] The Literature Review will show that the Mandaeans experienced persecution by Jews even before they left the Jordan Valley and after their arrival in Persia and Mesopotamia by Christian missionaries; but also that since the rise of Islam in the seventh century CE this persecution has become endemic.

[2] The Kārūn River in Iran has its source in the Zard Kuh Mountains in the Zagros Range. It has many tributaries, including the Dez and the Kuhrang, before it passes through the city of Ahvaz, the capital of Khūzestān. The mouth of the Kārūn empties into Shatt al-Arab. Mandaeans have lived in close proximity to Kārūn for over two millennia.

when my Melwaša (spiritual Mandaic name) was confirmed as I entered the world as a Mandaean.

In the first few years of my life I grew up with the luxury of having my paternal and maternal grandparents around me. My father's parents were traditional, devout and strict Mandaeans who lived a simple but spiritual life, in which all Mandaean customs, feasts, dietary requirements and Mandaean laws were followed. Sadly, my paternal grandparents departed this life when I was young. My maternal grandparents are just as spiritual and followed all Mandaean laws and customs. Even as a young Mandaean I was therefore exposed to a true way of Mandaean life with Immersion rituals at all feasts and significant events, dietary laws, legends, narratives, language and literature. This was the foundation of my identity and inspires the drive to pass on my Mandaean faith to the next generation. As a young Mandaean I recall being taught to be secretive and to guard the Manda (Knowledge) at all costs. There and then it made sense to me given the level of hatred, racism and persecution we had to deal with in our local community.

From the time I started school I experienced persecution. I realised our neighbours and those with whom I grew up and had thought were my friends not only turned their backs on us, they actually expressed a deep hatred for us, as if we were not human. At times I felt like shouting from the bottom of my heart, ‘I am just like you, a human! My grandparents were born here. We have been on this land for more than two thousand years!’ But almost as if they were programmed, as soon as Muslims found out we were Mandaeans, they suddenly learned how to hate us.

At school I began to experience deep-seated hatred from Muslim teachers and students towards me and my faith. I do not ever remember crying, but my internal world was filled with a constant and bewildered grief. I felt I had the right to be on this land as much as Muslims, yet I was treated as a second-class citizen with no legal recognition and no right to higher education or even to being a government employee. I recall Mandaean jewellers specifically being targeted, robbed and even murdered without any consequence. Sadly, this happened to my own relatives when my twenty-one-year-old cousin was shot dead in a robbery that targeted his jewellery store. For many people this might simply seem a random crime. But given our experience, Mandaeans interpret this and similar events as part of our persecution and our inability to find justice through judicial system.

Gradually it began to make sense; all the pieces started to come together like a jigsaw puzzle. Being secretive and guarding my identity and Manda was no longer a

confusing task. Nothing would be simple or calm or easy ever again. The persecution of my people has become part of the collection of facts that others now call history. I live these facts every day. They are part of my memory.

History tells us that the Mandaeans have been persecuted by Muslims since the rise of Islam, with at least five attempted genocides. This continues today, especially in Iraq, Iran and Syria from whence many Mandaeans have fled. What history does not tell us, however, is how it feels as a young Mandaean to be spat at and abused every single day, both on the way to school and at school, in shops and on the street. My parents were powerless and tended to ignore it. All of this was for a reason so hateful, so base, so inhumane – the belief that a non-Muslim is an infidel and therefore unworthy of any respect.

One day I came home from school with bruises around my mouth and a deep cut above my right eye. I carry the scar to this day. I told my parents that I would no longer go to school and that I could not cope with the abuse of teachers and students. My father who is a former teacher told me I would walk to school again tomorrow and everything would be fine.

A few days later my older brother and I were walking to school. As we turned down a narrow street we saw a group of local Muslims who knew we lived nearby. We turned around to run away but they caught up to us. They circled us, threw us to the ground and started to kick us. They then took our bags and threw all the contents around while shouting profanities. Passers-by smiled and nodded in approval. When they finally left us alone we both repacked our bags and continued to school just as my father had told us. When we told my parents what had happened, they told us things would get better.

The impact of such daily consistent persecution on Mandaean children and their families has not been examined in depth. However, in a case in the Federal Court of Australia this problem was enunciated. Their Honours Justices Madgwick and Conti stated:

> If people are, from an early age, considered by the great majority of the people in the society in which they live, to be “dirty”, are positively treated as if they are dirty, and if there is otherwise widespread and far-reaching discrimination against them, it requires no degree in Psychology to accept that this may well be very harmful to their mental well-being (SCAT -v- Minister for Immigration, 30 April 2003).

In my primary years I often asked my parents why we put up with persecution. Why were we not fighting back? Why were we not leaving the country? After all, I knew my father to be a man of principle and logic who found a solution for every situation. Of course, as I got older it became apparent that the situation was not so easy to solve. My parents often described how horrendous and painful leaving one's land would be. My mother described the journey of how people who sought refuge in overcrowded boats, were not fed properly, the sick became sicker and boats sank.

Persecution in Iran is institutionalised, woven into the very fabric of Mandaean life – at school, at work, in the shops and at sport. This persecution continues today and is reported within the community. Our cemeteries are constantly desecrated, Mandi (place of worship) confiscated, and our community has no recourse to justice. As a pacifist people, the Mandaeans over the centuries have chosen to assimilate as much as possible while continuing to be faithful to their beliefs. This attitude of submissive acceptance became very hard for me to accept as a teenager.

To the Mandaeans who have sought refuge in Australia it became obvious that the Australian government seemed to lack information about the Mandaeans and their plight. So many Mandaeans have found it difficult to establish the reality of the need to escape systematic persecution with the Department of Immigration. Often Mandaeism is labelled as an offshoot of Christianity since it is common in both Iran and Iraq to refer to Christians as “people of the book” (that is the Bible), so the alleged persecution of Mandaeans seems to lack foundation. In Australia, Mandaeans have been placed with extremist Muslims in detention centres, in many cases for years, with their persecution continuing on Australian soil (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 25 November 2010).

Hidden faith: Hidden Identity

Sixteen years ago a friend here in Australia asked me a few questions. ‘What is your faith?’ ‘What is your true identity?’ ‘Who are your people?’ I froze. I was fearful of the consequences of revealing too much of my identity, even here in Australia. I was not sure what to say. I told my friend that I am a Mandaean, my faith originated in the Jordan Valley and my official language is Mandaic. But the truth of the matter was that history and the past trauma endured by myself, parents, grandparents and their parents meant that my first instinct was to hide my identity, history and culture.

Even as a child it was apparent to me that Mandaeans tried to assimilate as much as possible while maintaining their faith. It was hoped that persecution would be

avoided by using Muslim names and adopting Muslim modes of dress and some aspects of Islamic culture. Such apparent syncretism has been commented on by scholars such as Buckley (2002, p. 4) as the effect of the influence of Persian and Babylonian culture, but was, in fact, more an attempt by Mandaeans to protect their identity. A tragic outcome of such efforts has been the loss to a large extent of the Mandaic language amongst the wider Mandaean community. Much of the knowledge is now held by priests alone. This is particularly significant for a religion that is based on Manda (Knowledge) – the ancient and central Mandaic term, equivalent to *gnosis* that appears in all parts of the Mandaean literature (Gündüz, 1994, p. 114).

As a young Mandaean I grew up learning Farsi and Arabic in school and was forced to study Muslim theology and the Quran. I was taught that all non-Muslims were inferior and as infidels would go to hell. Yet I was surprised to see that my people, known by Muslims as “Sabians,” are referred to in the Quran as a people of the book and therefore should be protected (Qur’an, 2: 62; 5: 69; 22: 17.).

Even before I began school, as a Mandaean I experienced vicious name calling – “dirty dog” and “Infidel” to name some terms used by other children in the street and at the shops. There was no recourse for us, no way to stop this. This began a process of alienation for me and a gradual growth of resentment of the treatment meted out to me and other Mandaean students, not only by my peers, but also by teachers. As a Mandaean I was expected to accept all of this quietly but increasingly I found this impossible. When I was a young teenager I rebelled in the classroom. The consequence of this was drastic, namely I had to leave Iran at the age of fourteen.

During a long and painful journey by boat, I continued to experience persecution by Muslims. For instance, as one of a group of young Mandaeans, my life was threatened with a knife in a dispute over drinking water. I suddenly realised that even in the middle of the Indian Ocean we had no means of escape from the scourge of persecution.

I was also told stories of the experience of prejudice, religious intolerance and actual persecution suffered by Mandaeans while in detention in Australia. In one, Mandaean women and children were harassed and isolated by Muslim detainees. The Muslim detainees, who were the largest group, prevented Mandaeans from mingling or using facilities and even forced the women to abide by Islamic dress codes. Food was usually prepared according to Muslim requirements, which

contradicted Mandaean food preparation. As a result, many Mandaeans suffered terrible hunger rather than break their commitment to their faith. This persecution was so bad that it was reported in the press that “an extremist religious leader in detention has issued a ‘fatwa’ that killing Mandaeans is sanctioned in Islam” (Zwartz, 2003). Stories like this made it hard for me to maintain my hope of a new and free life in Australia.

Despite all of this, my upbringing within my family has ensured that my Mandaean faith is in my very being. My faith is a living faith that I, like other Mandaeans, practise daily through Brakha (prayer), Zidqa (giving alms), Soma (fasting) Musbeta (Immersion) and an over-riding belief in Hayi (God). It was only through the strength of my faith and the example of my family that I was able to continue and indeed eventually begin this research.

The Support of My Community

As a Mandaean living in South Australia I travel to Sydney as often as possible to participate in significant feasts and events, including Musbeta (Immersion Ritual). I have gained the confidence of the priests and community and feel privileged to have the support they are giving me in this study, which includes access to current thinking and developments among the Mandaean leadership in Australia. In the initial stages of the planning of this thesis I explored: ideas with the priests; the boundaries that needed to be kept; and appropriate ways of involving the wider Mandaean community. I was given authority by the priests to work from community texts and to engage with community members. Empowered by their support, I hope to give a true and valid voice to the Australian Mandaean community.

Sources and Their Limits

In order to achieve the aims of this thesis both primary and secondary sources have been used. Four sources will be drawn upon: Mandaean sacred literature – primary resources; academic literature – secondary resources; data gathered through interviews; and my own reflection as a devout Mandaean.

Mandaeans can trace their literary heritage beyond two thousand years. In fact, Mandaeans believe that their religion is the most ancient in the world and that they are directly descended from Adam and Eve. Our heritage includes the sacred book, the Ginza, (The Treasure), the longest tractate of which, *Raza Usidra Qadmaia d-Suta Haita Qadmaita* (The Mystery and the First Book of the First Living) includes an account of the creation of Adam. From our scriptures Mandaeans learn that the first

prophet Adam was born 445,388 years ago. The nature of Mandaean writing, which is mystical, allegorical and esoteric, makes the translation of such texts very difficult for non-Mandaeans, as is acknowledged by Drower in her introduction to Harān Gawaita (1953, p. iii). This rich literature continues to be guarded by Mandaeans and in fact much of it has not yet been made available to Western academics. Some scholars have noted the way Mandaean literature has been preserved assiduously. For example, Buckley (2002, p. ix) refers to the book of John, a Mandaean sacred book found in Iran and written on lead. She further comments that "Sheikh Abdullah told us that the book was 2,053 years old and written by John the Baptist himself. There and then, it seemed a likely view".

Academic study of the Mandaean community dates back to Ignatius of Jesus in the 17th century who attempted to work with Mandaeans in Basra, Iraq (Orsatti, 1981, pp. 55-85). He noted in a letter of 1647 to Ingoli (Rome, Arch. Gen. OCD, *pluteo 241*, m, doc. 24) that it was impossible to provide translations for some Mandaean terms, since the Mandaean texts are written 'in a language understood by few of them, and these their priests…are very unwilling to explain their things.'

With the exception of Petermann (1867), almost all of the information gained before the 19th century came, however, from apostate Mandaeans or from missionaries (Lupieri, 2002, p. 8). From the arrival of Islam, Muslim historians struggled to understand or see beyond the lens of Islamic learning when researching Mandaeans. In contrast, from 1937-1963, the British scholar, Lady Drower worked closely with Mandaeans in Iraq, learnt the language and translated some of the literature. In recent years two Mandaeans have completed theses both based on specific religious writings.[3]

John Flannery in his book, *The Mission of the Portuguese Augustinians to Persia and Beyond* (1602-1747), claims that "the earliest Western Christian writer to mention [the Mandaeans] was the Florentine Dominican, Ricoldo da Montecroce, visiting Baghdad in 1290" (2013, p. 150). In his *Itinerarium,* Ricoldo da Montecroce gives an account of approaching the 'Sabians' after which he asked for missionaries to be sent to the region. In the sixteenth century Mandaeans were called "the Christians of St. John" by the Portuguese Jesuit missionary Antonio Quadro in Ormuz in the Persian Gulf in a report dated December 1555 (Lupieri, 2002, pp. 61-122). Quadro had been present in the Gulf since 1515 and had contact with the Shatt al-Arab region from 1517. Crehan (1968, pp. 623-26) provides more

[3] *The Story of Creation in the Mandaean Holy Book the Ginza Raba* by Sabah Al-dihisi - And '*A Critical Edition with Translation and Analytical study of DQRDK'* by Brikha Nasoraia.

information about the relationship of the Mandaean community to the Jesuit missions in Hormuz and Goa in the middle of the sixteenth century and concludes that past claims of Christian influence on Mandaeans at this time should be taken "with more than a grain of salt".

Thesis Outline

In undertaking this study, it was considered important for the writer – a Mandaean himself – to begin by clarifying his thoughts and feelings about what it means to be a Mandaean and how Mandaeism has succeeded in preserving its identity through centuries of persecution.

The Literature Review in Chapter Two explores Mandaeism through the work of Western and Islamic academics. The work of Ethel Stefana Drower is fundamental to the efficacy of this study, as it is based mainly on field work and material that she gathered, translated and made accessible to a broader readership for future academic examination. Most other research scholars have concentrated on the origin, language, and literature of the Mandaeans. While research undertaken by Western and Islamic scholars is important, in the view of the researcher, it does not result in an, all-embracing picture of Mandaean life. Thus, in addition to discussing current scholarship, this thesis explores Mandaeism through the lens of the writer, himself a practicing Mandaean – something that has never been done before in academic circles.

Chapter Three, entitled Mandaeism Today, begins with a critical discussion of the limitations of research conducted by outsider-scholars on the Mandaean community. It plays a significant role in shifting the focus of this study to the Mandaean people and their understanding of what it means to be a Mandaean. This chapter includes a description of the way in which Mandaeans have adapted to life in Australia with an outline of the dimensions of Mandaean belief and practice.

Chapter Four's focus is on the methodology employed to listen to the voices of Mandaean people themselves, namely those living in diaspora near the Nepean River in Sydney, Australia. Here the thesis employs an ethnographic, qualitative process, enriched by the author's autoethnographic reflection. The framework used is underpinned by anti-oppressive theory and the narrative approach to give voice to the Mandaean community through semi-structured interviews. The aim is to document a real account of the lived experiences of Mandaeans in Australia. In this way, the methodology seeks to respect and honour the Mandaean people and give

them an opportunity to speak out openly against the oppression they have suffered for so long.

In Chapters Five, Six and Seven the in-depth interviews and consultations with members of the community are analysed. Each chapter considers one of the three themes chosen for analysis: life before and into diaspora; Mandaean religious life and practice; and hopes and challenges for the future. The writer's own autoethnographic insights are also included here. The material in these chapters helps to overcome misunderstandings that have arisen from previous studies of Mandaeism. When taken together with the review of scholarly literature and Mandaean perspectives on the religion, they present a more balanced account of Mandaeism. Although not a comprehensive explanation of the religion, the researcher believes it is more accurate than previous studies.

In Chapter Eight, the conclusion, the author gives an overview of his findings. He reiterates his view of the importance of giving a voice to Mandaeans and in this way developing an understanding of their lives in diaspora where both new opportunities and challenges face the community. It is clear from this work that despite the traumas experienced by Mandaeans in the Middle East, the process of revitalisation of Mandaeism has begun, especially in Australia.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This review of academic literature will evaluate primarily modern scholarship on Mandaeism. It will identify key issues as well as analyse critical approaches used by researchers. Presenting what is already known in this field, it will identify traditional and current controversies as well as what the researcher regards as weaknesses and gaps.

While the number of academics who have written about Mandaeism is relatively small, it is an important area of study because Mandaeans are a significant, if minority, ethno-religious cultural group who practise the world's only surviving gnostic religion. In 1915 William Brandt (1915, p. 380) stated:

> The Mandaeans claim our interest not only as being a separate surviving branch of the Semitic stock, but also on account of their religion, their language and their sacred literature. Besides the records of their religious teaching and their religious poetry, the literature includes fragmentary remains and revisions of ancient Gnostic speculations and myth. Adherents of the Mandaean faith, either as larger communities or as distinct family groups, were to be found some forty years ago – and may perhaps still be found – in cities and smaller market-towns on the lower Euphrates, the lower Tigris, and the rivers which water the eastern Iraq al – arabi and the adjacent Persian province of Khuzestan (Arabistan). It is, indeed, necessary for them to live in the neighborhood of rivers, since Immersion in flowing water is an essential, and certainly the most characteristic, feature of their religious practice.

Debate on the nature of Gnosticism continues today. As Quispel in *Gnosticism and the New Testament* (1965, p. 73) states: "Gnosticism is neither the product of Greek philosophy nor a fossilized survival of old Iranian or even Indian concepts". In addition, he notes: "It is rather a religion of its own, with its own phenomenological structure, characterised by the mythical expression of Self-experience through the revelation of the Word". Mandaeism is the only ancient Gnostic religion that has survived to the present day. The difficulty of capturing a true picture of Mandaeism in the modern era has been twofold. Firstly, the very nature of Mandaean Gnosticism means that much of the knowledge is held exclusively by the priests. An understanding of gnosis can therefore be seen as "a knowledge of divine secrets which is reserved for an elite" (Rudolph, 1987, p. 56). This definition applies very directly to the understanding of gnosis by Mandaeans. Al-dihisi (2013, p. 60) a Mandaean himself explains further that:

> The Nasoraeans [the priestly group of the Mandaeans] are keen not to reveal the mysteries of the Nasiruta [priestly knowledge] to their own laity, except to those elite of Mandaeans who dedicate themselves, Nasiruta, and have proven themselves worthy in the line of priesthood. The Nasoraeans guard their holy books and scrolls intimately. Their mysteries are not imparted to the Mandaean laymen; no matter how religious they are, fearing that these mysteries might be misinterpreted.

Secondly, the secrecy at the heart of Gnosticism, within Mandaeism asserts that the secret knowledge should remain within the Nasorai circle. Throughout Mandaean literature this secrecy is emphasized when Yawar Ziwa instructs Hibil Ziwa to:

> Reveal all mysteries to thee, but do thou not reveal them to stupid 'uthras who may bring our mysteries into contempt and do not understand what they are saying. For Naşiruthra (priestly knowledge) and injunctions should not be revealed to dull or conceited people, and none should see them (i.e., the written revelations) save only seven kings (priests) in a generation: when one departeth the body one is begotten (Drower, 1960, p. 226).

In the case of Mandaeism secrecy is also a strategy to preserve the very being of Mandaeans from systemic and constant persecution by Islamic dominance in the region. This need for secrecy becomes clear when the pattern of massacres against Mandaeans is recognised. "In a massacre in 1782 in south Iran and east Iraq, when the Muslim rulers wanted the Mandaean books and the Mandaeans refused to give them for fear of destruction, leaders of the community were tortured and killed and the rest had to escape" (Mandaean Human Rights Annual Report, 2009, p. 5). The massacres of Muhamarah, in Iraq in 1837 and the massacre of Suk Al-Shiukh, Iraq in 1839 are further examples (Buckley, 1999, pp. 32-49). Buckley (1999, pp. 32-48, 2002, p. 6) refers to Yahia Bihram, a survivor of the cholera epidemic of 1831, who travelled to Šuštar where he documented in detail in a colophon[4] the massacre of 1870, in which a thriving Mandaean community was virtually annihilated. Other massacres included one led by Sultan Muhsin Ben Mahdi and his son Faiadh in Umara, Iraq during the 14th century (Drower, 1937, p. 56).

The survival of Mandaeans continues to be threatened today. 'A Memorandum of the Society for Threatened Peoples: Mandaeans in Iraq' (2006, p. 7) gives many examples of systematic persecution in recent times. One instance recorded, is

> 'The dirty unbeliever is being consumed by fire', Muslim men shouted as they burned a seven-year-old Mandaean boy alive

[4] A colophon is a list of scribes who have copied the text, starting with the current copyist and documenting all previous copyists. The colophon can also include details of the copyist's lineage.

> after Saddam's overthrow in 2003. Karam Majeed, who has set up an organization for the protection of Mandaean culture, argues that the threat of violence is very serious. In an Islamic country when the followers of a religion are described as 'unclean' that anyone associated with that religion is considered to fall outside the protection of the law. Muslims can undertake the public killing of a Mandaean and see themselves not as having committed a crime but as having acted with justification.'

In the view of the researcher such persecution has clearly contributed to the reluctance of Mandaeans to reveal their beliefs and practices. This in turn has contributed to the loss of Mandaic, the ancient Aramaic language of Mandaeans, by the majority of the community. Sadly, this has added to the scarcity of generally available knowledge of the religion within the Mandaean community. Persecution throughout their history has meant that Mandaeans have largely lost the Rasta – their distinctive dress[5] – and much of their heritage to the dominant Arabic culture of their persecutors. "This 'Arabization' process, especially in 1950 to 1960's, has adversely affected their religion" (Drower, 1960, pp. 1-2). At present, especially in Australia there is a resurgence of interest among the younger generations, and a blossoming of Mandaic studies among Mandaeans themselves.

This literature review will focus on academic studies such as books, journals and previous theses, seeking to provide a coherent and critical account of such literature. Patterns and themes will be identified, and the quality of the material evaluated from different perspectives. One of these perspectives is that of a practicing Mandaean, the researcher. For the sake of clarity most of the researcher's contributions are presented in Chapter Three. Where Western scholars have given problematic interpretations of Mandaeans sacred texts, however, the usual Mandaean interpretation has been noted. Such comments are mostly recorded in footnotes.

Origins and Significance

Much of the research by Western scholars into the Mandaeans has looked at the origins of this ancient people. There has been considerable disagreement among scholars on this issue. The researcher accepts the conclusions of those scholars who maintain that the Mandaeans came from the Jordan valley in Ancient Palestine; their migration is "discernible from the second century C.E. on, the Mandaeans perhaps [left] their Western habitat in the first-century migration" (Buckley, 2002, p.

[5] Prior to the time of Muhammad and the Muslim invasion of Mandaean territories Mandaeans dressed in their traditional clothing, the Rasta.

3). This is the view of Rudolf Macúch, although "others, such as Kurt Rudolph, still consider the third century to be likely" (Buckley, 2002, p. 3). "Macúch insists that the Mandaeans must have arrived via northern Babylonia and Media into Khūzestān...and that the religion was fully developed with texts and rituals at this time" (Buckley, 2002, p. 4). Buckley seems to think that "technical terms, including major cultic ones, point westward to the Jordan area, though strong secondary Babylonian and Persian influences on Mandaeism soon become notable" (Buckley, 2002, p. 4). Macúch himself maintains that the origin of Mandaean liturgy and doctrine found in their literature "must certainly go farther back than the third Christian century, as Mandaean hymns contain elements which can only be of Palestinian origin and as such must have been brought by the Nasoraean and Mandaean immigrants from the original homeland, Palestine" (Macúch, 1971, p. 186). He further points out that it would seem impossible that such a complex literary tradition was not written down for centuries. "The enormous complex of the most heterogeneous ideas contained in the Mandaean liturgies presupposes long centuries of development" (Macúch, 1971, p. 186).

Lidzbarski described a Mandaic migration from the Transjordan towards Parthia in the first century even before the destruction of the Jewish kingdom in 70 C.E. (Rudolph, 1969, p. 213; Lidzbarski, 1925, p. x). The Jewish scholar, Neusner (1975, pp. 184-190) supports this argument and believes "that the Mandaeans were subject to a kind of persecution in Hasmonean times, or during the war of 66-73 against Rome". "As the archaeological discovery of Mandaean incantation bowls and lead amulets proved a pre-Islamic Mandaean presence in southern Mesopotamia, scholars were obliged to hypothesize otherwise unknown persecutions by Jews or by Christians to explain the reason for Mandaeans' departure from Palestine" (Lupieri, 2010). Mandaean literature describes the Jewish persecution in detail.

It should, however, be noted that (Van Bladel, 2017) in his book *From Sasanian Mandaeans to Sabians of the Marshes,* challenges this account of Mandaean origins, by proposing the fifth century as the time when Mandaeism came to existence. In doing this, he uses fragments of the Qalasta colophon (the Canonical Prayer-book of Mandaeans), and Syriac and Islamic sources attempting to demonstrate that scholars have no basis to assign such an early date to Mandaeans. According to Jae Hee Han (2018) "lacking reliable internal evidence for dating the Mandaeans, Van Bladel looks to external sources written and preserved in Syriac…[and] turns to the *Book of the Scholion* written by the Bishop Theodore bar Konay, which mentions that Mandaeans emerged in a complicated relationship with another mysterious religious community called the Kentaeans in the fifth

century CE". Hameen-Anttila (2018, p. 129) concludes Van Bladel's "vision of how Mandaeism developed is interesting, albeit speculative". Häberl explains, in the eighth century CE, Theodore Bar Kōnay names the Mandaeans but treats them with disrespect.

> The earliest unambiguous account of the Mandaeans appears in the final chapter of the *Book of the Scholion* by the aforementioned eighth-century Syriac heresiographer Theodore bar Kōnay. Explicitly naming them Mandaeans he claims that their faith was established by a family of work-shy mendicants who settled in the southern part of Mesopotamia, sustaining themselves by demanding hand-outs from passers-by (2012, p. 267).

In her book *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran* (1937, p. xvi) Drower states:

> As for Arab observers, from the earliest time they were dependent upon hearsay, and their reports can only be excepted as such. The same may be said about the earliest account we have about the Mandaeans, that of the Syriac writer Bar Konai (in the Scholion, A.D. 792), who writes as a controversialist, ready to belittle a heretic sect. This writer does, however, give us clues which go far to disprove his own account of Mandaeans, which I shall discuss later.

Although it is not a world religion Mandaeism is of global interest because it is the only surviving ancient Gnostic religion (Buckley, 2002, p. 7). Hans Jonas (1958, p. 236) in *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*, claims that "the Gnostics were the first speculative 'theologians' in the new age of religion superseding classical antiquity" and that "this view comprised as main tenets the ideas of an antidivine universe, of man's alienness within it, and of the acosmic nature of the godhead."

Mandaeism is also an example of a relatively small religious and ethnic community that has survived a long history of persecution, especially since the arrival of Islam in the seventh century CE[6] (Neusner, 1975, p. 188). As a group isolated within virtual enclaves in Iran and Iraq, experiencing constant persecution, and today in varying degrees of freedom in diaspora, Mandaeans continue to practise their religion and beliefs in a way that permeates their everyday culture.

The belief of Mandaeans in the divine origin of the religion and its literature creates problems for non-Mandaeans; this will be considered at some length, especially in Chapter Three. As Nasoraia (2005, p. 115) suggests, however, "most scholars agree on the existence of a fully developed Mandaean religion at the time of Zazai"

[6] The earliest source which mentions the 'Sabians' is in the Quran (7th century C.E).

who lived in the first century CE. This belief is supported by the work of Buckley on the colophons in the Canonical Prayerbook of the Mandaeans (Buckley, 1992, pp. 33-49). The fact that the Mandaean religion has at its essence rituals and ceremonies for Musbeta, (Immersion Rites), Masiqta, (ceremony for departed souls), the coronation of priests, consecration of the Mandi (Holy place) and ritual meals shows a developed tradition, which according to Rudolph "had already been collected from separate scrolls and treatises into books before the Arab Muslims conquered Mesopotamia" (Nasoraia, 2005, p. 115).[7] This rich religious, literary tradition is now beginning to be explored in Western scholarship by Mandaeans such as Nasoraia (2015).

Early Studies

The earliest Western Christian writers about Mandaeism, the thirteenth century Ricoldo da Montecroce and the seventeenth century Ignatius of Jesus, were mentioned above in the Introduction. Significant scholars who followed them included Simon (1685), Peringer (1691), Norberg (1815, 1816, 1817), Chwolsohn (1856), Nöldeke (1862, 1875, 1915, 1921), Petermann (1867), Kessler (1881), Brandt (1889, 1893, 1912, 1915), Zimmern (1906, 1917, 1920), Lidzbarski (1909, 1915, 1920, 1925, 1962), Montgomery (1913), Bousset (1907), Reitzenstein (1919), Pallis (1919, 1926, 1933), Kraeling (1926, 1929, 1933), Burkitt (1922, 1928, 1932), Howard (1927), Peterson (1926), Pedersen (1940) Cohn-Sherbok (1981) and Drower (1937, 1953, 1956, 1960). The work of some of these scholars, especially the early work of Petermann (1867) and Lidzbarski (1909) is only available in German. It should also be noted that:

> 'With the exception of Petermann, up until Lady Drower's work in the mid-twentieth century almost the only information we have about Mandaeism comes from apostate Mandaeans whose stories were collected by Catholic missionaries, or from missionaries whose stories were presented to scholars and European travellers' (Lupieri, 2002, p. 8).

An example is Nicolas Siouffi, who served as French Vice-Consul in Mosul Iraq in the third quarter of the nineteenth century and set out to learn about Mandaeism. While his book published in 1880 sought to "present the reader with an understandable, 'logical' outline of Mandaeism" (Lupieri, 2002, p. 119) and "was the

[7] As this Literature Review will make clear, however, dating the origins of Mandaeism remains a controversial issue among contemporary religion scholars.

most wide-ranging and detailed work on Mandaeism ever written by a European witness" at that time, much of his material is deemed "decidedly Christianised" (Lupieri, 2002, p. 119). The limitation of this work was also pointed out by Drower (2002, p. xv) who said that Siouffi "never saw a rite with his own eyes, but was entirely dependent on the report of a renegade Subbi", the son of a Tarmida (priest).

In the study of Mandaean literature, the inability of most scholars to read Mandaic meant that they were studying the text through an Aramaic, Arabic or Christian lens rather than a Mandaean lens. Hence the importance of Heinrich Petermann (1867) and his mastery of "classical Mandaean" (Lupieri, 2002, p. 7). "The first useful Ginza[8] to be published in the West was Petermann's *Sidra Raba* (1867) which remains the only critical edition, containing a Latin translation" (Buckley, 2002, p. 11). Mark Lidzbarski's German translation of the Ginza of (1916) gives further information in his introduction to each Ginza tractate.

Lidzbarski, (1909) refers to Peterman as "one of the greatest Semitists of his time", and Lupieri, (2002, p. 123) claims that Lidzbarski, who based his work on Petermann, shows in his "work on the study of the Mandaic language" that the singularity of this language can "be explained by supposing a Palestinian origin and prolonged contact with Persian culture. Such contact would have occurred while the Mandaeans were settled in northern Mesopotamia". Lupieri further points out that the work of Lidzbarski influenced the subsequent work of Christian scholars, "both exegetes and theologians", to such an extent that "no biblical commentary from those years felt it could avoid dealing in some way with the 'Mandaean question'" (Lupieri, 2002, p. 123).

Ethel Stefana Drower

The work of Drower, from 1937 to 1963, more than that of any other scholar was based on field studies and contained many translations of Mandaean texts. Since that time virtually all subsequent scholars have relied on her studies, the most significant of which were *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran* (1937), *Water into Wine* (1956) and *The Secret Adam* (1960).

[8] Ginza Raba: This is the holy book of Mandaeans and in Mandaic means *The Great Treasure*. It is also referred to as Sidra Raba *"The Great book"*. The Ginza contains two parts: *Ginza Iamina*, the Right Ginza which is a collection of mythological, theological, cosmological and moral teachings and *Ginza Smala*, the left Ginza, is a small book of hymns.

There are, however, significant limitations to Drower's work. Of particular difficulty for Western scholars has been the layers of meaning that occur in Mandaean literature with an emphasis on allegory and symbolism. Drower herself referred to these difficulties in her translations of sacred texts such as the *Harān Gawaita* (Inner Harān) (Drower, 1953, p. iii). Rudolph explains that Harān Gawaita is a Diwan or scroll which is also known as the 'Inner Haran' and is an explanation of the Mandaeans' exodus from the Jordan Valley to "the Median Hills under the protection of the Parthian king, Artabanus" (1983, p. 364). Drower also admitted her linguistic limitations in the introduction to *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran* (1937/2002, p. xxii): "all instructions, and all the legends, were given to me in Arabic, with occasional Mandaean words". In her translation of *Diwan Abatur* (1950), Drower warns in reference to the captions accompanying the illustrations that a "guess at anything but the literal translation would be an unwarrantable liberty" (1950, p. iv). Further, in her translator's note to *Harān Gawaita and the Baptism of Hibil-Ziwa* (1953, p. ii) Drower explains that it is "perhaps the most difficult of all the Mandaean books". For her, the content abounds in ambiguous words and phrases. Further, almost all prayers in *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran* (1937) were documented by Drower as she heard them recited in rituals, which makes their recording questionable.

Despite her admitted difficulties with the Mandaean language, it is important to note that Drower spent many years in Iraq, living and working among Mandaeans, and learnt to read and write Mandaic. The *Mandaic Dictionary* (1963) that Drower developed with Rudolf Macúch has been an important contribution to the study of Mandaic documents. Further, Drower's translation of Mandaic documents such as *Asfar Melwašia* (The Book of Zodiac, 1949) and *Harān Gawaita and the Baptism of Hibil-Ziwa* (1953) has added greatly to the depth of scholarship possible for English speaking academics and for non-Mandaic speaking Mandaeans who wish to study their religion in greater depth.

In her introduction to *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran* (2002, pp. xvi-xviii) Drower looked at the influence of Arab authors and their influence on Western studies of Mandaeism. She referred, for instance, to Al-Biruni (11th century CE) who claimed that the Sabians were "tribes who remained in Babylonia when the other tribes left it for Jerusalem in the days of Cyrus and Artaxerxes" (Drower, 1937, p. xvii). Gündüz adds to this: "In fact the Arabs might have taken the term 'Sabian' from the Mandaic verb *'sb'* [meaning] to 'baptize, immerse, dip in'". To this day, Mandaeans are known by their Arab and Muslim neighbours as Sabian(s) (1994, p. 20).

Other Arab writers seemed to confuse the Mandaeans with the Harranians who were “a people with whom primitive pagan usages seem to have lingered late into the Muslim era” (Drower, 2002, p. xvi). Such pagan beliefs are in fact anathema to Mandaeans, as Drower pointed out. She wrote of a twentieth century Arab author who wrote an article about the “Subba or Mandaeans in which he described them as star-worshipers”, noting that “legal proceedings were taken against the author” by the Mandaean community led by a Ganzibra[9] (Drower, 2002, p. xvii).

Drower’s foundational work *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran* (1937) is divided into two sections. The first explores the details of the Mandaean people, their religious practice and literature, while the second is a compendium of legends, magic and folklore. Her presence in Iraq and her interest in the area led her to working with Mandaeans. She visited various Mandaean centres both in Iraq and Iran and spent time with the people. This meant that her writing had an authenticity based on her relationship with members of the Mandaean community and observations of rituals. She describes in detail the rituals of Musbeta (Immersion Rite), marriage, priesthood and lay life. She also gave a detailed description of “death and rites for the souls of the dead” (Drower, 2002, p. 178). Much of this work influenced later writers like Buckley, in her major text, *The Mandaeans: Ancient Texts and Modern People* (2002). However, some of her material is highly contentious from the perspective of contemporary Mandaean practitioners. Examples include Drower’s repeated references to magic (new edition, 2002, p. 25), which is actually taboo in Mandaeism. The researcher recognises that the term ‘magic’ is common place in scholarly writings however, for Mandaeans this term is particularly unacceptable (E.g. Bhayro et al, 2018). Her account of Mandaean dietary laws (2002, p. 48) demonstrates a real misunderstanding of Mandaean law. Some reflections about modern scholarship written ‘from a Mandaean perspective’ will be provided below.

In the latter part of *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran* (2002, pp. 259-263) Drower notes another source of difficulty for ‘outsiders’ like herself in interpreting the narratives she is told. She claims inconsistencies arise in and between a number of Mandaean legends as told to her by various people. She suggests the differences may have to do with the fact that they were given to her in Arabic, and also that stories were told to her by different narrators. For example, the ‘Mandaean Nation’,

[9] Ganzibra: In the Mandaean tradition the Ganzibra is the High priest, is sometime referred to as the ‘treasurer’. For Mandaeans this would mean the one who has the deepest knowledge of arcane and mystical knowledge of Mandaeism. The ganzibra has a higher rank than a tarmida, priest.

which deals with Noah and the aftermath of the flood, was told to her by a Mandaean priest in Iran. Drower recognised that this story came from Mandaean literature, the Drāšā d-Yaḥyā (Book of John), Ginza Raba (Treasure), and Harān Gawaita (Inner Harān). On the other hand, the story of the "Creation of Man" was told to her by a different priest, whom she described as "a good story teller but constitutionally inaccurate" (2002, pp. 257-258). This judgment by her raises questions about both the inaccuracy of this report and also Drower's comparison of the story with other sources such as the Torah. She also seems unaware of other possible reasons for different accounts. For example, as mentioned above, 'gnostic secrecy' limits the extent of what can be revealed to non-Mandaeans, likewise the effects of persecution on Mandaeans when dealing with 'strangers'.

Drower's work includes some errors of scholarship. For example, in her discussion of the scroll *Diwan Qadaha Raba d-Dmuth Kušta* (DQRDK), the Scroll of the Great Creation of the Likeness (Image) of Truth**,** Drower mistakenly holds there are two separate scrolls as she maintains in *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran* (1937, pp. 28-29). She stated that "other manuscripts which I know to exist but have yet to see are…the *Qadaha Raba*; and the *Dmutha Kushta*" (Drower, 1937, p. 28). She repeats this mistake in an article *A Mandaean Bibliography* published sixteen years later where she states: "to conclude this article and for the benefit for future collectors I give the name of two manuscripts,…they are *Diwan Qadaha Raba* and *Dmutha Kushta*" (Nasoraia, 2005, p. 19).

In 1954 DQRDK appears in the Bodleian Library Record as one manuscript, carrying the complete title, but side by side with another separate manuscript called *Diwan Razia d-Abahata*. Furthermore, the Bodleian Record stated that these two manuscripts were noted in Drower's *A Mandaean Bibliography* (1953) and reports the following:

> *Divan Qdaha Raba d Dmuth Kušta*, a Mandaean ritual text, copied in 1818 (MS. Asiat. misc. c. 12. (R)); and Divan *Razia d Abahata,* another text of similar nature, copied in 1823 (MS. Asiat. misc. c. 13. (R)). These two texts are noted in Dr. E. S. Drower's Mandaean Bibliography (J.R.A.S., 1953, p. 39) as the only two items in Mandaean literature of which no copies have hitherto reached Europe, and it is through her kind offices that the Library has been enabled to acquire these two scrolls. Both are lavishly illustrated with highly stylized drawings characteristic of Mandaean manuscripts (Batey, 1954, pp. 167-8).

It is important to note that Diwan *Razia d Abahata* is in fact a Mandaean ritual text. However, it is not similar to DQRDK because DQRDK is not a ritual but rather a

theological, cosmogonical text. Regarding the nature of the two scrolls, it seems that the record of the Bodleian depnds on Drower's description, rather than on an accurate analysis. Cf. (Drower, 1953, p. 34). This record does not state who Drower purchased these scrolls from; nor does it record the original name of the owner. The library records the scroll name correctly as one title though there are misspellings in the title of DQRDK – Qadaha is spelt Qdada, which is confusing. There is also confusion in understanding the nature of DQRDK and its relation to Razia d Abahata. Furthermore, Nasoraia, (2005, pp. 22-23) discusses the confusion found in Drower's *A Mandaean Bibliography* (1953) and suggests that this scroll (DQRDK) is of particular significance for Mandaeans as it contains the story of Creation (Nasoraia, 2005, p. 48). Nasoraia, a practising Mandaean explains the complexity of this text:

> The title contains three important words: Qadaha, Dmuth (Dmutha) and Kušta. These words have complex meanings which shift depending on the use and place used in the Mandaic sentence. Their meanings range between the literal and the deep mystical of typical Mandaean terminology (Nasoraia, 2005, p. 47).

Nasoraia explains this difference in meaning in a discussion of the term '*qadaha Raba'.*

> The name 'QADAHA' derives from the Mandaic verb…which literally means 'shoot', 'burgeoning', 'sprout', 'blossom'. Here combined with Raba, the two words form the first part of the title of this scroll. This part of the title is used metaphorically to refer to creation which was created by the Great Living One(s)/Great Life Force(s). Thus another translation of this title could be: 'The Great Blossoming' or 'The Great Explosion'.[10] For this scroll explains very briefly the idea of creation which is obviously based on the story of creation which is explained fully in Ginza Raba and other Mandaean writings (Nasoraia, 2005, p. 48).

Such complexities are further highlighted by Nasoraia for non-Mandaeans in the way:

> Mandaeans describe themselves as Bhiara (Zidqa) or Bahiraia (d -) Zidqa (the Elect/Chosen of Righteous [ness] Ones), which is parallel to another important title, that is, 'Bhiria Kušta (the Chosen/Elect of Kušta [Truth]). Further, Mandaeans know themselves as Salmania (the 'Perfect Ones'), as Bhiraia u-Salmania (Elect and perfect Ones) and as Sitlia Taba (Good Plantation/Plantation of the Pious). Furthermore, in the scriptures, the practicing faithful perfected Mandaeans are called Bhiria Zidqa

[10] In DQRDK the Great Qadaha (creation) from which all mysteries emanated and were formed. Everything was formed from "The Big Bang".

> Bnia Nhura (the Chosen Elect Beings, Sons of Light) (Nasoraia, 2005, p. 9).

Translations and Commentaries by Drower

A major contribution of Drower's work is her translation of Mandaean texts. The most important of these are *Harān Gawaita* (Inner Harān) and *Qalasta* (Praising or Collection, the Canonical Prayer-book of Mandaeans, 1959). Others include *Alf Trisar Šuialia*, (the Thousand and Twelve Questions, 1960), the Ceremony of the *Great Šišlam* (1950), the *Diwan Abatur*, (Progress through the Purgatories, 1950), the Coronation of the *Great Šišlam*, (Being a Description of the Rite of Coronation of a Mandaean Priest according to the Ancient Canon, 1962), *Sarh d qabin d Šišlam Raba* (Commentary on the Marriage Ceremony of the Great Šišlam, 1950) and *Asfar Melwašia*, (The Book of the Zodiac, 1949). These translations continue to make Mandaean literature more accessible to non-Mandaean scholars and to Mandaeans dispersed throughout the Western world.

According to Mandaeans, *Harān Gawaita*, (the Scroll of the Great Revelation, 1953) documents the exodus of Mandaeans from the Jordan Valley. It describes the journey of the Mandaeans from Palestine to Harān and celebrates the sense of freedom from domination by the Jews.

> And sixty thousand Nasoraeans abandoned the Sign of the Seven and entered the Median Hills, a place where we were free from domination by all other races. And they built cult-huts bimandia and abode in the Call of the Life and in the strength of high King of Light until they came to their end (Drower, 1953, p. 3).

Throughout this document, the scribe refers to the Mandaeans as Nasoraeans. For Mandaeans this term refers to those who have mastery of Mandaic and the corpus of Mandaean literature. As in all Mandaean literature *Harān Gawaita* begins with a prayer of praise: "My Lord be praised. In the name of the Great Life, healing, vindication, health, soundness, speaking and hearing, joy of heart and forgiving of sins be there for me" (Drower, 1953, p. 3).

For a Mandaean, this translation shows that the emphasis on Life found in *Harān Gawaita* is an intimation of the optimism which has sustained the Mandaean people through thousands of years of persecution. There are also references to the role of the Jews and their part in the exodus of the Mandaeans from the Jordan Valley.

Early in the document the scribe refers to the birth of Jesus who "called the people to himself and spoke of his death and took away some of the mysteries" (Drower, 1953, p. 3). The scribe speaks of the way in which Jesus was a false messiah who

perverted those who followed him. Prior to the birth of Jesus Mandaeans believe that another child was born who became “a prophet of the great Father of glory, praise be his name... Yahia-Yuhana the prophet of Kušta” (Drower, 1953, p. 5).

The scribe then explores the way in which the Mandaean community grew and developed until “the Son of Slaughter, the Arab went out and prophesied as a prophet in the world…he is the most degraded of false prophets” (Drower, 1953, p. 12). Consequently, he “converted people to himself by the sword” (Drower, 1953, p. 12). Because of such persecution it would seem that disagreement arose among some of the Mandaeans but the leader of such dissension, Qiqil[11], soon recanted so that once again Mandaeans were reminded to “act only [in accordance] with this writing of the Great Revelation” that is the *Ginza Raba* (Drower, 1953, p. 14). The scribe then exhorts Mandaeans to be steadfast in their faith.

Finally, the scribe explains that this is his third copy of *Harān Gawaita* and lists the names of the scribes over generations who have copied this scroll. It is interesting to note that the text breaks off during this listing of scribes and a note points out that an outbreak of cholera “which carried off the entire Mandaean priesthood” meant that “uncanonical methods were resorted to in order that a few literate members of priestly families could be ordained as priests” (Drower, 1953, p. 23). According to Drower this version of *Harān Gawaita* can be traced back to a sole surviving copy of this ancient text. For Mandaeans this scroll is regarded as an historical record of the exodus.

Qalasta (the Canonical Prayer Book) is another important book translated by Drower (1959). It is a series of liturgical texts, of which the central one is called *Qalasta*, (hymns of praise). According to Lupieri (2002, p. 54) and Buckley (2010, p. 173) the oldest manuscript of this colophon extant today dates from 1529 CE but can, in fact, be traced back to Zazai who lived in the first century CE (Nasoraia, 2005, p. 115).

It may be worth noting here that Macúch (1965, p. LXV) has divided the Mandaic literature into three historical periods: classical, post-classical and modern. The final redaction of the classical period took place in the year 272CE according to the Mandaean copyist Zazai d-Gawazta. Nasoraia (2005, p. 93) states: Zazai copied parts of Qalasta, along with many other scrolls, including DQRDK, at around the end of the first half of the first century CE.

[11] Qiqil refers to a heretic Riš ama, a religious chief who lived before the Muslim invasion.

The Nature of Mandaeism

In an article entitled 'White and Black Magic of the Mandaeans' (1933), Drower gives a short account of who the Mandaeans are and where they are to be found. Here she claims that Mandaeism is "a most curious religion of their own, in which Jewish, old Persian, Babylonian, and what appear at first sight to be early Christian elements, are blended into a pagan whole" (1933, p. 2). This description is contested by Nasoraia (2005, p. 10) where he emphasises the centrality of the worship of one God, Hayi, for Mandaeans.

> Mandaean teaching emphatically stresses the centrality and primacy of the Great Mind, Knowledge and Wisdom [Mana Raba or Hayi]. Mana Raba, the Great (Perfect) Mind, is held to be the source of all things. It works with soul Nišmata on one side, while the spirit Ruha and the human body stand on the other side. Their union contains the possibility of enlightenment and immortality. Mana Raba, the Great Mind, is viewed as a Divine Helper, Saviour and Baptizer. Mana Raba is also an intelligent mysterious Power.

For this reason, Nasoraia maintains that rather than being a pagan religion, Mandaeism must be considered a monotheistic religion. In addition, he rejects any suggestion that Mandaeism is an amalgamation of beliefs from other religions. Despite these problems, in this article Drower, preserves a "treasure trove for the student of religion and folk-lore" of ancient Mandaean customs, beliefs and practices (Drower, 1933, p. 2).

In her lecture entitled 'Scenes and Sacraments in a Mandaean Sanctuary', (1956), Drower begins with a brief description of who the Mandaeans are. Importantly she also explains something of the meaning of the five-day feast of Panja.

Parwanaiia (Panja) is the five intercalary day spring immersion period with each of the five days devoted to a supreme being of Light. These five days are a time of commemoration of brightness; no darkness is in them. Every ritual meal that takes place during Parwanaiia is linked with Dakhrany that is, Lofani, Masiqta and Zidqa-Brika. These special meals are performed to commemorate Mandaeans who passed recently as well as past ancestors. During Dakhrany it is as if the named person or spirit is invoked. At Parwanaiia when "the forces of spring and resurrection are potent and the purificatory waters are in flood redeeming rites" are especially

performed through the use of a proxy, for those who have [passed] without a proper ceremony (Drower, 2002, p. 214). This feast is a very holy time for Mandaeans.

For Mandaeans during Panja, Musbeta (Immersion Rite) has special significance and remembrance of the dead is of particular importance. Drower's references to 'sacraments' here appear to be taken from Christian practice. Similarly, she uses the word 'unction' to describe the ritual of the priest as "he passes along the row with a small bowl of sesame paste and smears this across the brow of each person in turn" (1956, p. 56). However, the use of the word 'unction' in this context has connotations of the Catholic sacrament of 'extreme unction', which was intended for those near death and is misleading here. She also refers to the Mandaean priest giving each person who is Immersed Pihtha, unleavened bread, as a sacrament. Use of this term may suggest a similar meaning to the Catholic Eucharist or Holy Communion namely the imparting of an 'inward grace' (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994, §1131). For Mandaeans a more correct interpretation of the giving of Pihtha would be an act of enlightenment.

'Mandaean Polemic' (1962), another important article written by Drower, explores the role of polemic in Mandaean literature. Drower points out that while they still lived in Palestine constant persecution of Mandaeans by the Jews explains "the violent abhorrence for orthodox Judaism which runs like an underground stream through *Nasoraean* (Mandaean) literature" (Drower, 1962, p. 439). She showed that such hatred goes back to a very early time, through a study of terms that were banned because they were associated with Judaism. Much of this discussion of the polemic is based on her work on the sacred text *Harān Gawaita*. From the rise of Islam onwards, denunciations of Muhammad and his followers are found in Mandaean literature that documents the persecution endured by Mandaeans under Islamic rule. This is particularly clear in the colophons, which are dated 'after the Hijrah' (Drower, 1962, p. 446); the absence of such a reference is an indication that a colophon pre-dates the Hijrah[12] (Drower, 1962, p. 446). Further, *Sidra d-Nišmata* (the book of Souls) lacks any mention of Islam (Drower, 1937, p. 24) and can therefore be dated prior to the coming of Islam. Throughout this article Drower indicates the determination with which Mandaean priests guarded their ancient faith.

While Mandaean scholars such as Nasoraia (2005) see some problems with the translations of Mandaean literature made by Drower, and with some elements in her accounts of Mandaean belief and practice, it is important to acknowledge the

[12] Migration of Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Yathrib, (Medina), in 622 CE.

historical value of the translations, and her work more generally, for studies of Mandaeism in the modern era.

Kurt Rudolph

Kurt Rudolph is a German researcher of Gnosticism and Mandaeism. His major work *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (1987), explores the structure and history of gnostic ideology and mythology. He also looks at the history of research in this area and the sources available concluding that it is 'a relic,' which in a sense could relegate Mandaeans to an accidental remnant of the wider spread of Gnosticism. Rudolph observes that the survival of the Mandaeans could possibly be linked to the fact that they had less contact with mainstream Christian centres in early Christianity and therefore suffered less persecution than other Gnostics from the Christians. Writing in 1987 he describes the 'current community' as dated and refers to the shortage of priests and the ignorance of the laity. "The ignorance of the laity about their own traditions is disastrous; they do not know the old language and script (even among the priests its knowledge is often deficient)" (Rudolph, 1987, p. 365). Despite this, Rudolph's total body of work would indicate the importance of Mandaeism in the study of religions.

Rudolph focuses largely on Mandaeism's Gnostic character and origins. He rightly points out that "Mandaean Gnosis occupies a special position in its ethic-moral pronouncements, for it does not make either radically ascetic or libertine demands" (Rudolph, 1987, p. 360). As will be noted later, this view is not shared by all scholars. Rudolph's account of the nature of Mandaeism seems to be more in line with Horsley's recent work: "Mandaean rituals have a more optimistic worldview than some of their ancient Gnostic neighbours. Their myths and rituals exist in a mutually supporting relationship" (Horsley, 2005, p. 95).

In an article entitled 'Problems of the History of the Development of the Mandaean Religion' (1969) Rudolph outlines the history of Mandaean studies beginning with Brandt (1889) and Lidzbarski (1925) to the twentieth century work of Drower and Macúch. He explores the emphasis placed on the study of Mandaean texts begun with Brandt and Lidzbarski and recognises with Macúch the limitation that the concentration on the "continual demand for further proofs from the Mandaean scholars" of the origins and history of the Mandaean people places on such studies (1969, p. 211).

Rudolph acknowledges that Brandt's work in the "development and historical meaning of the Mandaean religion, primarily on the basis of investigations of the Ginza or Sidra Rabba," provided the opening for further research (1969, p. 211). Rudolph and Brandt agree "that the oldest layer of Mandaean literature is pre-Christian" (1969, p. 211). According to Rudolph (1969, p. 212) Brandt maintained that Mandaeism had neither a Jewish nor Christian origin. He suggests that Brandt claimed that, "there are only a few Jewish elements, and Christian influence is not very extensive [in Mandaeism] but penetrated in many cases only through Christian-Gnostic or Jewish-Christian filters" (1969, p. 212). Rudolph also cites the work of Lidzbarski (1922) to support this position, noting that Lidzbarski "was firmly convinced on the basis of central elements of the Mandaean religion that a pre-Christian origin is to be assumed" and further that "Lidzbarski located a migration in the first post-Christian century…before the year A.D. 70" (1969, p. 213).

Rudolph agrees with Lidzbarski that even at this early stage, baptism in living water was the necessary element in order to experience "the central principle of Mandaeism light and life" (1969, p. 214). He supports Lidzbarski's contention that the Mandaeans had "presumably witnessed the activity of John the Baptist in the West perhaps even participated in it" (1969, p. 213). In this, Rudolph supports the Mandaean belief that their religion can be traced well before John the Baptist. This argument is further strengthened by Rudolph who quotes Lidzbarski to show that the literary tradition of the Mandaeans was evident from the pre-Christian era but also notes that "'from the literature of the pre-Christian period altogether, hardly anything which is cohesive is preserved – at the most, small units or individual sentences which are inserted into later compositions'" (Lidzbarski, 1925, p. x).

The next major scholarly work reviewed by Rudolph in this article is V. Schou Pedersen's *Contribution To An Analysis of the Mandaean Writings* (1940). Pedersen claims that originally Mandaeism had "a positive relation to Jews and Christians, especially to the Christian church, before it set itself in opposition to them" (Rudolph, 1969, p. 215). Rudolph points out that this thesis was put forward by Pedersen to explain some elements in Mandaeism that seemed to have their roots in either Judaism or Christianity. However, Rudolph replies that "in my first volume about the Mandaeans I expressed the view that a Jewish-Christian stage of the Mandaean religion is neither probable nor provable" (1960, p. 216).

Rudolph's position on the origins and nature of Mandaeism are closer to that of the next work he reviews, namely that of Widengren (1961, p. 89), maintaining that the Mandaean traditions "point to Palestine as their original homeland since they of

course believe that they come from Jerusalem" and, as Rudolph (1969, p. 217) points out, "the essential Jewish elements of Mandaeism (including that of John the Baptist) belong to this oldest stratum". For Widengren other influences on Mandaeism from their sojourn in Mesopotamia are a result of syncretism and relate, for example, "to a specific type of Babylonian religion, to a type of religion of redemption of a more popular character, with water purification and exorcisms" (Widengren, cited in Rudolph, 1969, p. 217). His arguments in this respect are seen by Rudolph to rest upon very weak foundations. However, he does agree with Widengren that the Mandaeans rejected "the old gods and the old, official cult of Mesopotamia" (Widengren, cited in Rudolph, 1969, p. 217). Widengren also recognised the influence of Mandaeism on Mani and the Manichaeans and, as Rudolph (1969, p. 218) points out, the use by Manichaeans of Mandaean texts is proof of the existence of Mandaeism from at least the beginnings of the third post-Christian century. Rudolph also points out that "Widengren stresses 'that without a precise knowledge of Mandaean literature and language no correct conception of the old, authentic Gnosticism (Gnosis) is possible'" (Rudolph, 1969, p. 218).

Rudolph (1969) then sketches the work of Rudolf Macúch. According to Rudolph, Macúch set out to show that the linguistic work of Lidzbarski was not of major importance but that "Lidzbarski's views about the well-known central Mandaean *termini technici – Manda(ia) Nasuraia, and iardna*– cannot be shaken*".* Certainly, for Macúch, "Nasuraia 'Nasoraeans' has been rightly designated as the 'most certain criterion of the origin and age of Mandaean Nasoraenism'" (Macúch, cited in Rudolph, 1969, p. 220). "The name leads us with certainty to the Syro-Palestinian soil of the pre-Christian period" (Rudolph, 1969, p. 220). Rudolph suggests that this understanding of Macúch, of the origin of Mandaeism, makes it clear that those who "emigrated, preserved the old Nasoraean faith but came under Babylonian, Iranian and Syro-Christian influences" (1969, p. 220).

According to Rudolph, in his study of Mandaean colophons, Macúch recognised "the connections between the Mandaean writing and the inscriptions discovered in the Tang-e Sarvak[13] from the second and third centuries" (1969, p. 224). Macúch also concluded that the colophons include the oldest portion of the Mandaean literature and he does this through an "investigation of the colophons in the first part of the Canonical Prayerbook" (1969, p. 225). Rudolph suggests that the work of Macúch

[13] Tang-e Sarvak is an archaeological site in the province of Ḵuzestān, south-western Iran, which is located in a ravine in a mountainous area north of Behbahān. The site includes four freestanding blocks with relifes carved into the surface. There are thirteen panels as well as several inscriptions on the stone. Tang-e Sarvak is known as the most important sanctuary of the Elymaean dynasty in the open air. It is usually dated around the 1st century CE.

helps to build “a good picture of the somewhat detailed tradition of the Mandaean text…especially of the liturgical texts whose existence in a collection, perhaps in its present form, is to be assumed already in the third century” (Rudolph, 1969, p. 226). Rudolph points out that this important finding of Macúch shows that the “often quoted view that the mass of the Mandaean literature was gathered together only after the invasion of Islam into the ‘Land of the Two Rivers’ was always excessively one-sided” (1969, p. 226).

Rudolph goes on to outline his own understanding of Mandaeism, referring to “the fact that in the case of Mandaeans we are dealing with a pronounced cultic community which has at its centre the rite of baptism” (1969, p. 228). He explains that since baptism is so central it must belong to the oldest stage of the religion. He argues that the use of the linguistic root sb for the baptismal procedure *Musbeta* is important. In Mandaic the verb sb means to baptise, immerse, and dip-in. A more detailed explanation was provided by Chwolsohn (1856, p. 111).

Rudolph concludes this article by pointing out the complexity of “the problems of a history of the development of the Mandaean religion” (1969, p. 234). As noted, he suggests that rather than being of later post-Christian origin the beginnings of Mandaeism can be found in pre-Christian times. He points out the difficulty of developing a chronological history of the Mandaeans and claims that “only the content of the transmitted texts themselves can be decisive as a criterion for that” (1969, p. 234). Rudolph ends this work on a pessimistic note: “The tragedy lies in the fact that this comes at a time when the last members of this religion are moving toward the unavoidable end, yet according to their faith, toward the Kingdom of Life and Light for which they have always longed” (1969, p. 235).

Rudolph’s work has influenced studies by other researchers in the areas of Gnosticism and Mandaeism; including Gündüz (1994), Buckley (2002) and Lupieri (2002).

Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley

Buckley is an historian of religions, based in the United States. Her work – much of it a direct continuation of the work of Drower – is largely concerned with interpreting the Mandaean texts within the context of the lives of modern Mandaeans. In her book, *The Great Stem of Souls* (2010, p. 1) Buckley points out that “the very format of the Mandaean books or scrolls remains established according to firm standards over hundreds of years”. She suggests that most students of Mandaean texts pay

little attention to “the lists of scribes that are appended to virtually all Mandaean documents” (2010, p. 1). Furthermore, Buckley maintains that “so far untapped historical information” is revealed in the many colophons that she has studied and that “they can be used to reconstruct, however rudimentarily, the outlines of Mandaean history” (2010, pp. 1-2).

By exploring the meaning of colophons for Mandaeans, Buckley shows that the undertaking of copying manuscripts is seen as a sacred task. The colophons appear at the end of Mandaean manuscripts and enumerate the scribes from the current one to the first recorded one. Buckley (2010, pp. 185-189) thus lists the scribes from Adam Yuhana, who lived in the nineteenth century CE, right back to *Zazai of Gawazta* who lived in the first century CE. This list included more than fifty scribes. An example of the historical information revealed in colophons is Adam Yohana’s reference to the Wahhabis, an Islamic sect that raided Karbala in Iraq, when he copied the *Musbeta of Hibil Ziwa* colophon in 1802. This confirms both the date of the colophon and the place where a Mandaean community was living at the time. It is clear then that in addition to the names of scribes, further information describing political and social conditions, persecution and even doctrinal disputes is included in the colophons.

Buckley’s work in this area is of great importance in establishing some historical continuity for Western scholars regarding the context of Mandaean life. Writers such as Lupieri (2002, pp. 122ff) are clear that determining a chronological history of Mandaeans has been difficult for Western scholars but Buckley’s work on colophons may assist in providing a more detailed history of Mandaeism in the future.

In the *Mandaeans: Ancient Texts and Modern People* (2002) Buckley recognises the debt she owes to Drower in her own scholarship. She has a particular interest in the history of Mandaeism, especially through study of the literature. In this book she writes of contemporary Mandaean belief in “the co-existence of Mandaean mythology, history and the present day” (Buckley, 2002, p. 35). Her contact with Mandaeans has enabled her to see that for Mandaeans it is possible to move “relatively effortlessly between horizons of time and space. The dynamics somehow resembled that of many Mandaean mythological figures, those who travel between realms, hard to pin down resistant to stasis” (Buckley, 2002, p. 35). Her exploration of the role of Šitil in Mandaean mythology and ritual, is an excellent example of the importance pf the dualism that is at the heart of Mandaean Gnosticism.

This is the reason Buckley's work emphasises the mystical figures in Mandaeism like "*Šitil*, the purest of all souls" (Buckley, 2002, p. 35). For Mandaeans, for whom the passing from this life to the next is very real, *Šitil* whose "soul sits on the right side of the scales where an ascending soul is tested" (Buckley, 2002, p. 35) is the balance which indicates that the Mandaean Nišmata (Soul) is ready to continue to the Light-world. Further Buckley points out that "'in the name of *Hibil, Šitil* and *Anuš*'[14] is a recurring formula in Mandaean prayers" (Buckley, 2002, p. 35). She also refers to *Šitil* in two major Mandaean rituals Masiqta[15] and Musbeta. Buckley (2002, p. 39) thus sees "Šitil's main role as that of *Utra*[16]" who "marks the ideal of purity" (Buckley, 2002, p. 39). At the same time Buckley points out that "*Šitil* whether in his human or in his Light-world aspect possesses traits associated with both realms" (Buckley, 2002, p. 39). The role of Šitil in Mandaean mythology and ritual, described by Buckley, is an excellent example of the importance of the dualism that is at the heart of Mandaean Gnosticism.

In the *Great Stem of Souls: Reconstructing Mandaean History* (2010) Buckley studies several colophons including the Canonical Prayerbook, the Left Ginza and *Alf Trisar Šuialia*. In chapter eight Buckley claims that there have been women priests in the Mandaean tradition (2010, pp. 149-168). In her interpretation of the names on colophons Buckley believes that the women who are named are "copyists, book-owners, library-owners, editors and beneficiaries of copied manuscripts" (Buckley, 2010, p. 149). She further claims that "as copyists and editors, the women can in many cases be reckoned as priests" (Buckley, 2010, p. 149). In '*The Evidence for Women Priests in Mandaeism'* (2000, p. 94) Buckley refers to the Mandaic term Tarmidata which she claims means "female Tarmidas" in the literal sense. However, she notes that Drower has translated this term as "women of priestly family" (2000, p. 94). In *Alf Trisar Šuialia* (The Thousand and Twelve Questions) (hereafter ATŠ) the following admonition can be found: "'I will instruct you concerning women of Elect Righteous (stock); women of priestly and of lay families; as to those who are perfect and those who fall short of perfection'" (Drower, 1960, p. 196). According to Buckley while Drower states "that Mandaean priestesses do not exist" she also refers to "priestesses and lay women" (Buckley, 2000, p. 94).

[14] This triad of Uthras or Celestial Revealers or Radiance are the names by which the entities of the world of Light are defined.
[15] Rising up, Resurrection of the soul.
[16] Utras (sing: Utra) Wealth, Angel or Guardian. Utras are also known as Lightworld Beings.

In support of her own view, Buckley refers to a warning given to Mandaeans:

> the Lightworld being (utra) and messenger Hibil Ziwa warns against ordaining women as priests, '…beware lest ye set the crown (of priesthood) upon a woman or upon a ganiba (a person set aside because of uncleanliness) because there can be no putting aside with the First Life'" (Buckley, 2000, p. 94).

Buckley suggests that this warning "would have been unnecessary if the idea of women priests were completely foreign in Mandaeism" (Buckley, 2000, p. 94). For a Mandaean the word Tarmidata refers to women of priestly families. Later Buckley refers to a discussion she had with "sheikh S.Choheili"[17] where she asked "why there would have been women priests". She saw his response as significant because it referred to a woman's own desire to be a priest rather than "a provocation against male-dominated views" (Buckley, 2000, p. 96). This disparity in the understanding of the Mandaic language is indicative of the struggle to understand the depth of meaning in this arcane, ancient language, Mandaic.

As part of the author's research this topic was discussed with several priests and also with the Mandaean scholar Salem Choheili himself on 19th of December 2014[18]. From a Mandaean perspective, Buckley's views on this issue suggest several misunderstandings on her part. Firstly, Buckley was surprised that "he knew of *Haiuna*, the ethnarch and frequently mentioned copyist" (Buckley, 2000, p. 96). Her surprise seems to be based on her assumption that because Haiuna was a well-known and respected theologian, she must have been a priest. She does not consider the traditional Mandaean view that Haiuna was in fact an educator, a role that women still play in the Mandaean community, and not limited to priests. Secondly her reference to "male-dominated views" is inconsistent with what Buckley herself recognises as the importance in Mandaean life of "harmonious interdependencies" (2002, p. 106). Within the Mandaean religion the roles of male and female are closely linked to the cycle of life (Drower, 1937, p. 106). For Mandaeans the limitation of priesthood to men does not equate to male domination. Thirdly Buckley's non-traditional interpretation of sacred texts and its Mandaic terms highlights the difficulties modern scholars have with these ancient and esoteric writings. For their part, Mandaeans find it difficult to see how someone outside the community can challenge the interpretations that the community itself, through its

[17] Mr Salem Choheili is a Mandaean scholar and teacher who is well respected among the Mandaean community in Iran and abroad. He is known to the researcher. It might be noted here that Mandaeans would not refer to Mr Choheili with the Arabic term 'sheikh'.
[18] It would seem that there was misunderstanding in Buckley's interpretation of the discussion with Mr Choheili, who has limited understanding of English.

priests and scholars, has established. Further reflections on this can be found in Chapter Three following.

Buckley discusses the significance of the use of tangible elements and meticulous rules in Mandaeism. However, Buckley refers to Hamara as wine. It is in fact the juice of red or white grapes mixed with water and used during Mandaean rituals (Macúch, 1963, p. 123). Mandaeans do not use wine or any form of alcohol in their rituals.

Buckley explores briefly to some of the problems scholars have in understanding "the Mandaean Masiqta as a ritual making internal sense, that is both cultically and theologically tenable" (1981, p. 158). While she continues to refer to the Masiqta as the "death mass", she also persists in the use of the term "magic" in reference to Mandaean rituals (1981, p. 157, 2002, pp. 80, 137, 150). Hence, Buckley claims "the priestly activities presented here disturbingly resemble magical procedures" (1981, p. 157). However, Buckley states very clearly that "myth and ritual are both necessary; they express the same insight, albeit on different levels. Taken together the two components display confidence in efficacious action directed across the hindering and hostile spheres" (Buckley, 1981, p. 158). She recognises that the role of the priest as a bridge between earth and the Lightworld empowers the movement from one level to another. As a consequence she is clear that

> The potency of the performance demands words paired with set actions; both words and actions carry symbolic meanings. There is no reason for looking, in a one-sided fashion at rituals as merely 'primitive acts' or, alternatively, to consider only the liturgies in total isolation from their aspect of practice (Buckley, 1981, p. 158).

Buckley has made an important contribution to the study of Mandaean Gnosticism because she recognises that both ritual action and prayers have been intertwined creatively to build "the dualistic underpinnings of the religion" (Buckley, 1981, p. 158).

Articles by Buckley

In 'The Mandaean Šitil as an example of "the image of above and below"' (1979) Buckley disagrees with Drower (1937, p. 247) and Lidzbarski, both of whom seem unable to recognise that Šitil Bar Adam and Šitil the utra could be identical. Furthermore, Buckley points out that rather than Mandaeans doing so,

> It is the scholars who have tended to separate the earthly and the heavenly realm. The religious consciousness shows more elasticity than outside inquirers often allow it. A human side of the

> revealer as well as a more elevated aspect of the earthly human being seem to be tenets less offensive to the religious group at hand. There is no decisive separation between the image above and below. The idea of *dmuta* illustrates an attempt to vitally connect the two realms (Buckley, 1979, p. 191).

In this Buckley supports Mandaean understanding of the connection between belief, myth and practice and emphasises the flexibility of the Mandaean dualistic approach. Šitil can therefore be seen as an illustration of what might seem "irreconcilable, though somehow identical, entities in Mandaeism" (1979, p. 191).

In an article published in (1989), 'Why Once is Not Enough: Mandaean Baptism (Masbuta) as an Example of a Repeated Ritual', Buckley discusses the role of ritual in Gnosticism. She argues that "in the case of Gnosticism…scholarship has tended to deny the role of ritual because Gnostics are allegedly antiwordly, purely philosophically inclined, and therefore repelled by most forms of practical action" (1989, p. 24). While the evidence of rituals in Gnosticism is often missing, Buckley (Buckley, 1989, p. 23) points out that gnostic rituals are often seen to be either "early, that is, belonging on a mythological level of Gnosis that eventually gave way to a spiritualised stage, or they are late, evidence of a Gnosis degenerated into magic". It is clear, however, that in Mandaeism the ritual of Musbeta (Immersion Rite) as still practiced today, is central to this faith and its "chief characteristic…is its repeated enactment" (Buckley, 1989, p. 25).

The fact that Christian baptism is a 'singular, initiatory' ritual made the repetitive nature of Mandaean Musbeta[19] problematic for scholars like Segelberg (1958) and Sevrin (1986). Buckley refers to Sevrin (1986) who "associates the repeated baptisms evidenced in the Nag Hammadi tractate *Zostrianos* with magic"; for him "they mark a '*decadence*'" (1989, p. 25). Further she notes that

> Segelberg asserts that in the case of the Masbuta, the idea of purification has superseded an earlier, initiatory baptism (1958, pp. 42-128). And Rudolph (1961, p. 99) claimed that the Masbuta lacks the ethical imperative because it is a repeated ritual. Magical concerns force back the older, ethical focus of Mandaean ritual (Buckley, 1989, p. 25).

Buckley then points out that Rudolph (1981, pp. 1-37) did look at Musbeta as having some justification, stating that "'because the baptism furnishes the only possibility for taking part in the Lightworld, its steady repetition is necessary'" (Buckley, 1989, p.

[19] Mandaean terms such as Musbeta are often spelt by scholars phonetically. In this document the spelling Musbeta is used as the closest to Mandaic pronunciation.

25). However, Buckley shows that Rudolph continues to hold an ambivalent attitude towards Musbeta because he saw it as magical and without an ethical dimension, while “the rite is necessarily repetitive, because of its specific salvific significance” (1989, p. 25).

In the concluding portion of this article, Buckley reiterates the point that Gnostic groups especially the Mandaeans “have a clear sense of continuing identity” (1989, p. 33). This sense of identity is confirmed in “the continually repeated baptism [which] serves to confirm and consolidate the Mandaeans in their two-world membership. Mandaeans make their Lightworld visible, tangible, and accessible through ritual work” (Buckley, 1989, p. 33). Thus for Mandaeans, the two levels of being, earthly and Lightworld, merge through the ritual.

Buckley points out that scholars who continue to assume that Mandaeism might die out have so far proved to be wrong. The current diaspora of Mandaeans has led to a dispersal of priests throughout the world and indeed “an upsurge of religious and cultural interests among [the lay people]” (Buckley, 1999, p. 48).

As with some of her books, Buckley’s articles also include interpretations of Mandaean texts that are open to question. In her article ‘Conversion and Other VIIIth Century Community Issues In Mandaeism’ (2008) she refers to four issues in Mandaeism in the early Islamic period: ‘conversion’, ‘recruitment’, ‘intermarriage’, and ‘apostasy’. She suggests that attitudes to each of these were more open in earlier periods of Mandaean history than those held by priests and the majority of lay Mandaeans today (Buckley, 2008, p. 287). Although she claims that she is investigating these four topics, she in fact spends a considerable portion of the article dealing with priestly dynasties, including her belief in Mandaean women priestly dynasties (2008, p. 293). In addition, she seems puzzled by the existence of Mandaean literature in the religious libraries of other faith communities and seems to infer from this that Mandaeans of this time were open to accepting converts (2008, p. 293). She provides little other evidence for this view.

Buckley suggests that an important impact of “the steadily increasing exilic population” of Mandaeans at this time has resulted in intermarriage and the possibility of conversion to Mandaeism. She sees this as an “urgent topic, especially because the Mandaeans fear their own extinction” (2008, p. 286). Although sympathetic to contemporary Mandaeism, it overlooks other factors which ensured their survival during centuries of persecution, such as the optimism that is at the heart of Mandaeism and the current resurgence of the Mandaean community in

Western Countries, especially Australia. Buckley 'recommends' conversion too easily. As Buckley says, "the orthodox view states that one must be born into the religion in order to be a Mandaean" (2008, p. 286). As a researcher and a Mandaean myself, I attest to this point of view being strongly held by Mandaeans today as a traditional belief. After consultation with Dr Suhaib Nashi in 2004, Buckley suggests possible sources for challenging the orthodox view. She refers to a passage in the Ginza which she has translated as:

> Keep yourself far away from anyone who worships the evil ones, idols and images. Do not be his friend. But if you have a longing for him and love him, let him hear the scriptures and speeches and adorations that your lord has given you. If he listens, becomes a believer and is convinced of the elevated King of Light – the God who was created from himself – then love him, approach him and prove to him the benefits of everything that you have. If he does not listen, does not become a witness, and not a believer, then [he] will be held accountable for his own sins (Ginza Right 1, 1 cited in Buckley 2008, p. 287).

The section Buckley quotes in support of her argument is part of a very long verse in the Ginza and one must look at the entire text in order to understand and appreciate its true meaning. If we follow the verse from the beginning, the text is clearly concerned with believers who "have 'lost their path' and wish to redeem themselves by penitence". The verse then continues stating that "if they reject the worship of idols and images, give them another chance. If they believe once again in Hayi (God) who was created from himself then love them once again" (Author's translation of the Ginza Right 19, 45). Furthermore, in the verse of Beyat Mishqal Ayni the *Book of Souls* states:

> I call to you Manda Ed Haii, Gnosis of Life, to grant my prayers and redeem those who lost their path and are kneeling and praying towards you asking for amnesty. They have deserted their statues, idols and effigies made out of wood by mankind. They bear witness to the name of the great almighty, Hayi. For them the gate of sorrow closed and the gate of light and mercy opened... (Author's translation of the Sidra d-Nišmata, pp. 62-67).

Contrary to Buckley's claim, it seems clear that Mandaean scriptures do not refer to the conversion of non-Mandaeans into their faith but are very open to giving those Mandaeans who stray the chance to return to their faith.

The researcher acknowledges that Buckley has the support of a contemporary Mandaean, Dr Suhaib Nashi, but it is an unorthodox view, which Nashi himself acknowledges: "'here it says, that conversion is possible. But our present day priests tend to deny its relevance for the modern time, saying that such was the case in the

old days, not now'" (Buckley, 2008, p. 287). Nashi has lived in Scotland and the USA since the 1980s and has been largely isolated from the main Mandaean community, including the Mandaean community in Texas. Among those contemporary priests who do not accept this reading of the sacred texts is Riš ama Sam, the leader of the largest Mandaean community in Iran, Australia and United States (Personal communication, 20th of May 2017). Furthermore, the written sources used by Buckley were Dr Nashi, the Australian translation of the Ginza by Mubaraki and Saed (1996) and Buckley's own translation of Lidzbarski's version of the Ginza. Buckley did not use the original Mandaic Ginza.

To support her position Buckley also refers to "the miracle-performing Anuš-utra [who] converts Jews to the name of King of Light. However mythological, this passage shows Mandaeism as a convert seeking religion" (2008, p. 288). Buckley does point out that this attitude to conversion is "hardly borne out elsewhere in Mandaean texts, and especially not with respect to Jewish converts". As noted above these references are not to Jewish converts but to Mandaeans who have 'lapsed'.[20] So it is inconsistent for her to claim that "if there is any historical kernel in the Anuš-utra story in GR1, one finds no concern for preserving an already consolidated ethnic or national Mandaean identity" (2008, p. 288). According to orthodox Mandaean belief this story speaks of the preservation of the Mandaean identity.

Although conversion is impossible in Mandaeism, according to Lupieri (2002) there may have been instances where conversion may have occurred. For example, he refers to the legend of Miriai (Mary), converting to Mandaeism from a Jewish priestly family in Jerusalem. In addition, Lupieri (2002), considers, the Mandaean account of the role of Abraham in their origins could be taken as implying some sort of conversion. In her book *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran* (1937, p. 287) Drower states "Miriai am I, a daughter of the kings of Babylon, a daughter of the mighty ruler of Jerusalem". In addition, the Mandaean literature have also identified Miriai as the

[20] Or Iahutaiia: Sinners, those who have been cast off/excluded/abandoned Mandaeism. Believers who turned their back on truth. In Mandaean literature Iahutaiia is a term used to describe Mandaeans prior to the establishment of the Jewish nation at the time of Abraham, as those who left Mandaeism to join Abraham who eventually fathered the Jews and started to circumcise perhaps at the time of Moses, an act condemned and unacceptable in Mandaean tradition to this date. In fact today there are Mandaeans who turned to other faiths like Christianity (who did not circumcise) and successfully returned to Mandaeism by seeking repentance.

daughter of the kings of Babylon and not 'from a Jewish priestly family in Jerusalem'.

As a contribution, the author likes to clarify that the term Iahutaiia. The word Iahutaiia in Mandaic is derived from the verb root 'HTA'. Drower and Macúch in their book, A Mandaic Dictionary (1963, p. 140) defined the verb HTA as "to sin, to injure, to fail, transgress, to lead into sin, man to cut off from". Therefore, the notion that the term Iahutaiia means 'Jews' is incorrect and so misunderstood. This point is significant to clarify; that none of the Mandaean holly books in fact reference the word 'Jews' but instead Iahutaiia. The Mandaeans believe they are Bhiria Zidqa 'the chosen righteous ones'. The following verse from GR (p. 30: 8) state "mn ama diahutaiia kulhun amamia ubabia minaihun npaq" from the Iahutaiia all nations and sects came forth. In Mandaean canon any believer that rebels from enlightenment is called Iahutaiia. The story of Abraham is explained in detail below (see footnotes 20, 28 also pp. 58, 59, 60, 61, 64, 112).

In Buckley's discussion of intermarriage, she again uses Lidzbarski's translation to show that "the practice is condemned in GR1, [page 20 section 127] in a complaint against those who take foreign women as wives. We hear nothing of these foreign women's religious identities" (2008, p. 288). To the researcher this suggests a failure to understand the nature of Mandaean marriage tradition, which is based on relationship of clans. For instance, men from 'Hallali'[21] clans tend to seek wives from within other Hallali or priestly clans. It seems clear that the term 'foreign women' in fact refers to Mandaean women who are not from a Hallali family. This is borne out when Buckley herself points out that "in postscripts a copyist will make a sad statement about intermarriages" (2008, p. 288). Such 'sad statements' are a reminder of the depth of learning among the general Mandaean population in earlier times when the copyist would have recognised the implication of the marriage of someone who is Hallali to someone who was not. This is because the next generation would not qualify to become priests or be involved in religious rituals.

In her discussion of the issue of apostasy within the Mandaean community Buckley says:

> In GR2, 1 [pages 41-42 section 97 Lidzbarski translation] a disobedient person is given three chances to re-conform to the religion. But if he refuses, even after these opportunities to mend his ways, he faces expulsion. The sinner is brought to the gate of temple (*baba d-mašk*na) in order to 'let him hear the prayers and

[21] A pure layman in a ritual context.

> books and show him the scriptures and sermons (*ašmia drašia usidria uhauiuia ktabia umimria*) (2008, p. 289).

Here the researcher would suggest that the common view of contemporary Mandaeans is that these verses are in fact metaphoric and refer to attempts by the priests to help those who are on the verge of apostasy or who have indeed abandoned their faith. This interpretation is supported by Buckley when she suggests that when such a person "repents and mends his ways, he re-joins the community and the text states that he shall not be punished" (2008, p. 289). However, Buckley maintains that such a person who persists in error "shall be uprooted, cut off, and handed over to external authorities to be killed" (2008, p. 289). Buckley seems to qualify this statement, noting that "we must assume that Muslim legal forces enter the picture" (2008, p. 289). Her overall interpretation seems to be at odds with the Mandaean commitment to the sacredness of life in suggesting that anyone would be handed over to Muslim authorities to be killed.

Buckley also makes some questionable claims when describing Mandaean attempts "to keep the number of congregants stable", such as, her claim that "another person, a 'good vine' is brought in to replace the apostate" (2008, p. 289). Buckley does not provide a source for these claims but does say that "the text gives no answer but that the new person might come from any religious community, as long as he or she is sincerely interested in becoming a Mandaean" (2008, p. 289). For the researcher, Mandaeans would understand that such 'good vine' or new person would in fact be a child born to Mandaean parents. In regard to recruitment it should be clear that since Mandaeans do not accept converts there is no recruitment.

Another contentious issue discussed by Buckley in this article is female priestly dynasties. She refers especially to the role of Haiuna daughter of Yahia and her son Bainai who lived about 700CE. According to Buckley

> We find the two Mandaean female 'heads of the people' i.e. the highest Mandaean priestly office: Hawa, daughter of Daiia and Anhar Kumraita, daughter of Simat. About the same time we have another woman priest, Marspindu Abuzdaqad, and perhaps a bit later, the priest Hawa, daughter of Nukraya (2008, p. 293).

A number of critical points need to be made about these claims. Firstly, Buckley's use of the term priestly 'dynasty' (2008, p. 294) seems inappropriate, as priesthood is not necessarily passed on from one generation to the next. Secondly, while there have been, and continue to be, women who are preservers, scribes and teachers of Mandaeism, women of high offices, Buckley provides no evidence to support her

view that there have been women priests in Mandaeism. This error here seems to be the result of conflating two different, but distinct offices. The office that Buckley terms 'head of the people' is known to Mandaeans as Riš amas, ethnarch or the leader of the people. Buckley is right in claiming that learned women of the past, such as Haiuna, were Riš amas, but she has not established that they also held priestly office. The highest Mandaean priestly office is that of the Ganzibra. Traditionally, the two roles have been combined and endorsed by the Mandaean community.

In the conclusion to this article, Buckley refers to Mandaean co-existence with other religions and claims that the relatively peaceful environment of the Umayyad period was "an indication of a recently secured religious orthodox identity" (2008, p. 295). The suggestion that an 'orthodox identity' only emerged in the Umayyad period of the 7th and 8th centuries is rejected by Al-Zuhairy (1998, p. 235) who states:

> in the 1st- 3rd centuries AD...It probably became necessary to collect and write down all inherited forms and ceremonies, myths and legends, in books, particularly also because of the appearance of Mani and his new religion.

Nasoraia (2015, p. 134) also explains that:

> Most scholars agree on the existence of a fully developed Mandaean religion at the time of Zazai. Scholars who have studied the Mandaean religion, especially the rituals, know that this religion depends mostly on the rituals and cultic ceremonies of various kinds, especially those of Baptism, the mass of the soul *(masiqta)*, the coronation of priests, consecration of the temple and ritual meals, etc. Having such a central position in the Mandaean religion, these rituals and ceremonies most certainly presuppose an inherited tradition and follow specific cultic and ritual texts, which have already been collected from separate scrolls and treatises into books before the Arab Muslims conquered Mesopotamia.

In addition, in her introduction to *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran* Drower (1937, p. xv) notes:

> This evidence, we submit, is useful, not only to the student of anthropology, folk-lore, and ethnology, but to students of the history of religions, for the Mandaeans are what the doctor calls a case of arrested development. Their cults, which are regarded by them as more sacred than their books, and older, have been tenaciously retained; their ritual, in all its detail, most carefully preserved by a priesthood who regard a slip in procedure as a deadly sin. Segregated since the coming of Islam from those amongst whom they dwell by peculiarities of cult, custom,

> language, and religion, they have kept intact and inviolate the heritage which they had from their fathers.

While Buckley's investigation of 'conversion', 'recruitment', 'intermarriage', and 'apostasy' in Mandaeism in the early Islamic period is significant research, her conclusions are not supported by the evidence. Her use of Lidzbarski's translation of sacred texts has already been criticised, and her contention that traditional Mandaeism was not so strictly orthodox as is claimed by priests today is counteracted by Drower's argument (1937, p. xv), who shares the researcher's emphasis on strict adherence to ritual. Such a strong commitment amid constant persecution and fear of forced conversion has been the main reason that Mandaeans "have kept intact and inviolate the heritage which they had from their fathers" (Drower, 1937, p. v).

Majella Franzmann

Australian scholar Majella Franzmann in her publication, *Living Water: Mediating Element in Mandaean Myth and Ritual* (1989), examines the role of the central ritual of Musbeta in the life of Mandaeans. The significance of this work lies in Franzmann's emphasis on the relationship of Mandaean myth and ritual. In this context she attempts to focus on a concern raised by Buckley (1981). As Franzmann states "...students of Mandaeism continue (more or less tacitly) to regard the myths and rituals as essentially unrelated" (Franzmann, 1989, p. 1). Franzmann also notes that "…attempts to render the rituals of Mandaeism meaningful within the frameworks of the religion's mythological thought are still scarce" (Franzmann, 1989, p. 1). With her focus on Living Water as the source of Life and the connection between the World of Light and the earthly world, Franzmann enters deeply into the Mandaean consciousness.

This connectedness between the World of Light and life on earth is recognised ritually through the use of water as a life-giving element. Franzmann uses quotations from the Ginza Raba to make her point (Ginza Raba, vx, 379, 3-8).

> Upon the world of light was life
> and from life came water.
> from life came water,
> and from water came radiance.
> From radiance came light,
> and from light came the uthras

This close association of Life, Light and flowing water is central to Mandaean belief. Franzmann goes further and shows that Mandaeans believe that the Iardna/Jordan

is transformed to become Living Water. The heavenly source of the Jordan connects between the World of Light with the earthly World, in this way there is a ready source of Life in the world.

In Musbeta the use of water through Immersion is shown to be integral to Mandaean life. This is highlighted by the term used by Muslims to describe Mandaeans – 'subba', those who baptize. The mythological aspect of the ritual of Musbeta is shown by Franzmann to provide "parallel liturgical settings in both the heavenly and earthly realms" (Franzmann, 1989, p. 3). According to Franzmann, the actual prayers of the liturgy support the "mythological commentary on the earthly ritual action" (1989, p. 3). In fact, for Mandaeans this is seen as a ritual journey into Yardana (Jordan). This interconnectedness of the spiritual, or as Franzmann says the mythological element, and the earthly liturgy, is clearly stated in "the prayer to accompany the *Kušta*, (ritual hand clasp, signifying the giving of truth)" (Franzmann, 1989, p. 3).

> Kušta make you whole my brother – uthras![22] The communion of the living hath been performed in the manner in which uthras perform it in their shkintas.[23] Fragrance is your perfume, my brother uthras, for within ye are full of radiance (Drower, 1959, p. 30).

Here it is clear that the priest sees his role as performing on earth the ritual that uthras perform in the Light World. This close link of Water, Life and Light highlights the strong connection between the world of Light and Life on earth. Franzmann is very clear in pointing out that this link is found in Yardana and she shows that "this concept is found most convincingly in the ritual prayers for the opening (ptaha d-iardna)[24] and establishing (qaiamta d-iardna) of the Jordan" (Franzmann, 1989, p. 5). According to Rudolph, in personal correspondence with Franzmann (1989), this "is a symbolic action which serves to make clear that living water must be flowing and not 'cut off'" (Franzmann, 1989, p. 5). The point is further emphasised in Drower (1937, p. 122): "flowing free is necessary in the mandi-pool, and if the priest perceives that the water is getting sluggish, he orders a better clearing of the water channels, so that the water may be 'living', i.e. 'flowing free'".

[22] An Uthra is a spirit who embodies Light and Life. On the other hand Malkia, sometimes represents good and sometimes evil, while Uthras are always pure and are always beneficial to Mandaeans.
[23] A Škinta is a dwelling place, a sacred enclosure which is used for the initiation of priests. Constructed of reeds and mud, the Škinta stands in the north part of the enclosure.
[24] For Mandaeans Ptaha d-iardna and qaiamta d-iardna are recited for the process of forming and establishing a spiritual zone in the Jordan.

In her conclusion, Franzmann raises a number of questions for the Mandaean community. In particular, she asks how Mandaeans "understand their changed status after the ritual of baptism" (Franzmann, 1989, p. 7). In the interviews conducted as part of this thesis it will be seen that it is clear that Mandaeans understand Musbeta as an opportunity to connect with the World of Light through the actual ritual and with the priest as intermediary. The sense of the intermingling of "heavenly and earthly imagery in the ritual prayers" seems to suggest, Franzmann argues, "that some kind of heavenly existence is enjoyed by the soul, if only for the duration of the baptism ritual" (Franzmann, 1989, p. 7). Such an understanding and experience she claims is made possible by the Mandaean attitude to history and time "where the primordial events of the world of light are all important and the historical events of this world of little consequence" (Franzmann, 1989, p. 8). Rudolph (1978, p. 3) makes the point more generally:

> It is not easy to speak about the origin and the history of the Mandaeans, because it is hardly discussed at all in their literature. They themselves believed that, as their religion was primordial and founded by the world of light, they were not concerned with the history of this world.

Finally, Franzmann suggests that although Musbeta can lead to "forgiveness of sins, purification, blessing and healing (CP, 7, 9, 18, 23, 24…), yet these are only corollaries surely to the binding of the soul and the world of light" (Franzmann, 1989, 8). Franzmann can be said to have a real insight into the Mandaean ritual of Musbeta.

Şinasi Gündüz

Gündüz, a Turkish Muslim theologian, gives an account of the theology of Mandaeism in his book, *The Knowledge of Life: The Origins and Early History of the Mandaeans and Their Relation to the Sabians of the Qur'an and to the Harranians* (1994). He provides a detailed, critical review of scholarship about Mandaeism with a significant focus on Muslim scholarship. Gündüz compares the work of early Muslim scholars with those who came later. Such scholars include al-Masudi "who is generally accepted as one of the earliest references on this subject [who] lived in the 10th century AD" (Gündüz, 1994, p. 15). He also refers to more modern Muslim scholars such as Abd al-Razzaq al-Hasani (1931, 1955, 1968), Rushdi Alyan (1976) and Najiyah Ghafil Marrani (1981). Gündüz (1994, p. 15), points out however, that these writers "simply summarised the opinions of medieval Muslim scholars and gave some basic information about the Mandaeans". Another notable feature of

Gündüz's work (1994, p. 17) is his account of the references to Sabians in the Quran, and to Mandaeans, Christians and Jews as those who believe in one God and are People of the Book.

According to Gündüz (1994, p. 22), early Muslim scholars identified Mandaeans with the Sabians of the Quran. But he shows that closer investigation reveals considerable confusion in Muslim literature about the exact identity of the Mandaeans. Some scholars believed that the Sabians of Iraq were members of a religious sect of Magianism, Judaism or Christianity. Others believed Mandaeism was a syncretic religion that had the characteristics of these three religions (Gündüz, 1994, p. 26). This confusion is clearly illustrated by Ziyad ibn Abihi (622 CE – 673 CE), who was a governor of Iraq during the rule of the first Umayyad Caliph Mu-awiyah. Ziyad stated that "the Sabians believe in the prophets and pray five times daily" (Gündüz, 1994, p. 23). Ziyad met the Sabians and "wanted to exempt them from the poll-tax (jizwah) but when he was informed that they worshiped the angels (mala-ikah) he changed his decision" (Gündüz, 1994, p. 23). Gündüz maintains that many Muslims believe Mandaeans worshipped the angels.

Even though there was a general belief that Sabians were monotheistic, some claimed they worshiped angels and even prayed to the sun (Gündüz, 1994, p. 27). With reference to angels Gündüz notes the use of the Mandaic term 'Malka', which is used for both good and bad spirits, but he also suggests another possible explanation for the confusion. "It is possible that the Muslims, who lived alongside the Mandaeans (known to them as the Sabians) from the seventh century CE, noted the term 'Malka' (particularly 'Malka d-nhura') in the Mandaean tradition…and that they confused this term with Malak (plural Mala-ikah), angel in Arabic. Consequently, they supposed that the Sabians worshiped the Angels" (Gündüz, 1994, p. 27). As already noted, Drower showed that such an idea is abhorrent to Mandaeans (1937, p. xviii). She also makes it clear that 'Melka' is a term for God, the Supreme Being, the King of Light whose first emanation and power is the Water of Life. "From Water, Radiance; from Radiance, Light; and from Light, Uthri" those spirits whose role is to rule natural phenomena (Drower, 1937, p. 73).

Discussion of the origins of the Mandaeans began as early as 1697 with Barthélemy d'Herbelot, who pointed out the Western origin of the Mandaeans and their connection with Jewish post-Christian sects (Pallis, 1933, p. 49). After a detailed exploration of all the arguments concerning where the Mandaeans originated from and the date of their origin, Gündüz comes to agree with Macúch (1965, pp. 93ff) and Rudolph (1960, p. 239). They were a pre-Christian, Western group that

originated in the Jordan Valley and migrated gradually to Mesopotamia. To support his thesis Gündüz refers to one of Rudolph's later studies in which he says

> The immigration of the early Nasoraean community from the Jordan valley in Palestine into eastern territories, brought about because of persecutions by 'orthodox' Jews, must have taken place at the latest during the second century AD. ...Presumably the immigrants went first to Harran, the ancient Carrhae, and the Median hills, and then entered the southern provinces of Mesopotamia (Mesene, Charakene) (Rudolph, 1978, p. 5; compare Rudolph compare 1975, pp. 112-142; Gündüz, 1994, p. 12).

On these points Gündüz (1994, p. 12) explicitly disagrees with Yamauchi (2004, pp. 86ff), who distinguishes between Eastern and Western proto-Mandaean components of Mandaeism. In this dispute about the Western origin of the Mandaeans it would seem that Gündüz is in agreement with most respected scholars in this area, such as Lidzbarski, Macúch, Drower and Rudolph.

An important point made by Gündüz in reference to Muslim studies of the Sabians is that this work is vital if we are to recognise who the Sabians of the Quran are. The authors of these studies lived in the early centuries of Islam and had an influence on later Islamic research. Gündüz concludes that since the Mandaeans lived in southern Iran and Iraq for so long it seems correct to maintain that "the Sabians of the medieval Muslim scholars...were presumably the progenitors of the Mandaeans" (Gündüz, 1994, p. 52).

Gündüz agrees with Drower (1960, p. x), Pallis (1926, pp. 19ff), and Yamauchi (1966, p. 94), that the strongest influence on Mandaean astrology was from the Babylonians and often referred to by scholars as magic (Gündüz, 1994, p. 75). It should be noted that such references to 'magic' in relation to Mandaeism are open to Buckley's criticism of Drower on this point, considered earlier in this chapter. It is important to note, however, that Gündüz shows similarities in the use "of ideas and lists of names which are quite similar to those of the Babylonians" (Gündüz, 1994, p. 75). Many such resemblances are found to be parallels in a number of religions and might refer simply to a transfer of ideas for peoples living in close proximity. He makes a similar point in relation to 'loanwords' especially in 'religious language' and some rituals (1994, 77).

With regard to 'loanwords', especially in 'religious language' and some rituals, there is again a similarity between formulas used in ancient Mesopotamia and by the Mandaeans. Several scholars addressed this issue:

> In the Mandaean liturgical texts we find a special blessing formula...of which a standard version runs as follows; 'healing, victory, soundness, speech and a hearing, joy of heart and forgiving of sins for me...' (Drower, 1959, p. 1).

Similar formulas occur in Akkadian texts, which are often used in prayers, such as: 'speaking and hearing (and favour)...' and 'health and joy of heart' (Gündüz, 1994, p. 77).

Widengren, (1968, pp. 576-77) sees a resemblance between the usage of the liturgical language of ritual directions in the Mandaean liturgical texts and that in the ancient Mesopotamian '*bit rimki'* ritual texts. Gündüz concludes that although there are similarities for Mesopotamian practice and Mandaean ritual of Immersion it is impossible to establish a direct influence since a wide range of cultures in the Middle East had similar practices.

Gündüz also explores the Persian influence on Mandaeism. Again, he sees loan words and aspects of cosmology as influences on Mandaeism. In particular he sees the Persian understanding of fire as an influence on Mandaean tradition and life. Gündüz does not seem to note that Mandaean use of fire may simply be a practical matter, for example, for baking or burning incense. It is also something that is found in many primal cultures. He (1994, p. 80) does refer to Yamauchi's claims "that there are about 125 Iranian 'loanwords' in Mandaic" (Yamauchi, 1966, p. 72). While this may be true**,** Gündüz does not note evidence of a strong Mandaic influence on the Persian language (Horsley, 2005, p. 96). This is reinforced by early Mandaean settlement and influence in Persia, as discussed more recently by Buckley:

> Characene *coins with Mandaic inscriptions dating as early as circa* 180CE are found in Media. Other coins relevant to the Mandaic alphabet derive from Pusht e-Kuh, fairly close to the upper reaches of the River Karka. Yet other coins have been found in Taq e-Bustan, situated very near Kuh e-Parou/Paran. This is only a short distance from the famous rock of Behistun, on a vital stretch of the trade route belonging to the Silk Road connecting the Near East and China (Buckley cited in Horsley, 2005, p. 96).

Western elements in Mandaeism are seen as coming from both Jewish and Christian influences. Gündüz refers to the information found in Mandaean literature, which discusses several Jewish influences (Gündüz, 2004, p, 83). He notes, in particular, that "the Jews are reviled because of their rituals and customs" (Gündüz, 2004, p. 84). The Ginza narrates the origin of the Jews with Abraham and the use of circumcision, an act which is forbidden by Mandaeans to this day. Ginza Right (p. 57) describes the appearance of 'Abraham [Ibrahim] as the father of Jews, who

separated from Mandaeans and established a new religion called 'Iahutaiia'. The following verse from Ginza Right describes the anger felt by Mandaeans upon his breakaway. "When Adonai God of Abraham will have mercy on him he will circumcise. Then he will leave his father who is Mandaean and travel alone to earth. He will then choose a new place to live and build a new temple. Do not accompany the Jews who denied their first nation and religion, Mandaeism".

Gündüz also refers to the second major Jewish influence on Mandaean literature, namely, the persecution of Mandaeans, which resulted in a mass exodus from Palestine in the first century AD (Gündüz, 2004, p. 84). The resulting resentment of the Jews is highlighted in The Secret Adam (1960, p. xv) and referred to by Drower who states:

> Nasoraean hatred for Jews must have originated at a period at which Nasoraeans were in close contact with orthodox Jewry and at a time when the orthodox Jews had some authority over them. All this points to the truth of the Harān Gawaita tradition.

Gündüz supports this position (Gündüz, 1994, p. 84). Despite this anti-Jewish polemic, Gündüz sees the Mandaean tradition as bearing a number of Jewish elements. First there are a number of Old Testament characters[25] including, Adam Gabra Qadmaia,[26] 'Adam the first Man', Seth, Enosh and Noah (Gündüz, 1994, p. 86). In Mandaean literature Adam is seen in a sense as "the cosmos in human shape" (Gündüz, 1994, p. 86). This is believed to such an extent that "in his formation the letters of the alphabet play an instrumental role" (Gündüz, 1994, p. 86; also Drower, 1960, p. 181). Some of these parallels Gündüz believes can also be found in heretical Jewish sources as well as in the Rabbinic literature (1994, p. 89).

Gündüz rightly records that Mandaean scriptures make reference to Old Testament figures such as Ibrahim, Moses, David and Solomon; however, Mandaean references seem quite different to their treatment in the Old Testament. For example, Ibrahim is just referred to in passing by Gündüz (1994, p. 89) while he has always been seen by Mandaeans as a significant figure as the leader of a group of

[25] Some of the Mandaean legends are still found in Jewish heretical sources and their rabbinic literature. For instance, Ibrahim is just referred to in passing while he is seen by Mandaeans as the father of Judaism. The researcher asks the question 'Did the Mandaeans obey Jewish Law?' I have not come into contact with any literature that attests to this. There may be some solid reasoning to assume that the Jewish Gnostics did follow Mandaean Law especially with the 'Pistis Sophia in mind'. This may be the title of another research project.
[26] The Mandaean understanding of Adam the first man is unique. For them there are two personifications of Adam, Adam Pagria the physical and Adam Kasia the spiritual. Adam Kasia dwells in Msunia Kušta which is the spiritual complement of the material world, and his children are spiritual counterparts of human beings. Adam Pagria is the first man.

iahutaiia.[27] Today Mandaeans recognise him as the father of Judaism, a group that broke away from Mandaeism as a result of the introduction of circumcision. The following verse from Ginza Right describes the anger felt by Mandaeans upon his betrayal.

> When Adonai God of Abraham will have mercy on him he will circumcise. Then he will leave his father who is Mandaean and travel alone to earth. He will then choose a new place to live and build a new temple. Do not accompany the Jews who denied their first religion, Mandaeism (Ginza Right, P. 57).

Abu al-Fath Muhammad ibn Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani, a medieval Muslim scholar, in his famous book on comparative religions and Islamic sects states:

> At the time of Abraham there were two different religious groups: the Sabians[28] and Hunafa. The prophet Abraham grew up among...Sabians...and finally announced that the religion of the Sabians was untrue and the religion of Hunafa was true (al-Shahrastani, 1842, pp. 246-48 cited in Gündüz, 1994, p. 46).

The term “Hunafa” refers to the Jews and is derived from the Arabic root ḥ-n-f which means “to incline, to decline” (Lane, 1893), as well as the Syriac root with the same meaning. The law of Ibrahim is described as ḥanīfiyyah from the verb taḥannafa which means “to turn away from” and so refers to those who denied, ran away or absconded. This accords with Mandaean belief that Abraham “ran away” from Mandaeism. In addition, Gündüz’s treatment of this issue does not support any suggestion that ancient Mandaeans were followers of Jewish law.

Gündüz then goes on to discuss the role of angels in Mandaeism, which again seem to parallel the understandings of the Jews. Gündüz does point out that most of these elements seem to show a pre-Christian influence. As Gündüz (1994, p. 92) explains, in Mandaean bowl texts and the lead amulets that contain figures such as Adam and the angels, the earliest of which goes back to the third century A.D:

> Neither Christian elements nor polemics against Christianity appear. Neither Christ nor John the Baptist appears. On the other hand in the literary texts which, except for certain liturgical texts, are dated from the post-islamic period, we see polemics against Christianity and some Christian elements. Therefore it is clear that

[27] Ginza Right, (p. 381, II); refers to “Abrahim Abuhun d-iahutaiia”; that is, Abraham the father of the sinners, those who were cast out/excluded/banned from Mandaeism.
[28] As noted in the section on Drower above, Gündüz (1994, p. 20) believes the Arabs might have taken the term 'Sabian' from the Mandaic verb 'sb' meaning to “baptize, immerse, dip in”.

> the Mandaeans had these elements before they came into contact with the Christians.

In his discussion of the way in which Mandaean prayers and psalms are influenced by the Old Testament, Gündüz ignores the possibility that at least some of these texts were in fact borrowed from Mandaeans. For instance, some prayers in the Mandaean Canonical Prayer book are, Gündüz claims, "almost a translation of Psalm 114, to which is added Psalm 29: 5, 9"[29] (Gündüz, 1994, p. 92). Other references to Jewish elements in Mandaeism referred to by Gündüz concern legal terminology, ethics and rituals. One area in which Gündüz finds a particularly strong similarity is the terminology used in divorce (Gündüz, 1994, p. 95).

While Gündüz (and others) see similarities between Mandaean and Jewish texts, they rarely comment on major differences. In particular, Mandaean literature includes a very strong command to avoid shedding blood, including the foundational Jewish practice of circumcision. At least some scholars, such as Al-Biruni cited in Gündüz (1994, p. 162) note that Mandaean animosity towards Judaism is linked to their belief that it was founded by the renegade Mandaean Abraham. In Mandaean literature the Jewish people are referred to as 'an evil nation', "a people 'who do not agree on a single utterance', who circumcise with swords and sprinkle the blood on themselves, whose husbands abandon their wives and lie down with each other" (Weinberger, 2007, pp. 77–9).

The influence of Christianity on Mandaeism has been discussed widely by scholars. Gündüz (1994) points out that the central problem has been the question of whether Mandaeism was a pre-Christian or post-Christian tradition. The origin of Gnosticism

[29] For comparison see the Old Testament Psalm 29:5, 9 in which a slightly different version of the same passage is found. The Ginza Right text reads:
"At Thy radiance the riders were afraid,
At Thy light gates and kingdoms were troubled.
On seeing Thee the Jordan turned about,
The waves of the sea rolled back
And the islands of the sea were thrown into confusion.
Chariots were overthrown and they fell on their faces.
Cedars of Lebanon were rent, mountains shook and leaped like stags.
They opened and gave praise.
Does in the desert shed their young untimely;
The highest arise and speak in (Thy) honor.
The earth trembled and was shaken.
Jordan! whom didst thou behold that thou didst turn back?
Waves of the Sea! Wherefore did ye roll back?
Isles of the Sea! why were ye thrown into confusion?
Chariots! wherefore did ye overturn and fall on your faces?
Cedars of Lebanon! why were ye rent?
Mountains! wherefore were ye shaken and why did ye leap like stags?
(Why) did ye open and give praise?"

is shown by Gündüz to be an important part of this debate (1994, p. 101). Bultmann (1971) was one important Christian scholar who accepted the existence of a pre-Christian Gnosticism and considered Mandaean texts as examples of the earliest Gnostic literature. Also, scholars such as Rudolph and Jonas compared the Mandaean gnostic tradition to that which appears in various sources, such as *The Odes of Solomon, The Apocalypse of Adam and The Hymn of the Pearl.* Such comparison is an indication of the pre-Christian origin of Mandaean literature.

Gündüz explores the ideas of scholars "such as Lidzbarski, Reitzenztein, Bultmann and Schweizer" who "argued for a pre-Christian existence of the Mandaeans...in Palestine" (Gündüz, 1994, p. 101). Further support for this belief can be found in *ATŠ (*pp. 18ff); *Alma RiŠaia Raba - A Pair of Nasoraean Commentaries* - Drower (1963, p. 9), *The Secret Adam* (1960, pp. 17-20), and Cohn-Sherbok, *The Alphabet in Mandaean and Jewish Gnosticism* (1981, pp. 227-30). Gündüz holds that this view is also supported by Drower, Macúch and Rudolph: they saw "some Mandaean Gnostic influence upon Christianity" (Gündüz, 1994, p. 101). He also notes, however, that other "New Testament scholars such as Burkitt, Petermann, Lietzmann and Casey, oppose the idea of the pre-Christian existence of Mandaeism and argued for the Christian origin of the Mandaeans" (Gündüz, 1994, p. 101).

The core of arguments about the Christian influence on Mandaeism lie in the nature and origin of Gnosticism. Within Christian tradition, Gnosticism was generally seen as a Christian heresy (Gündüz, 1994, p. 101; Jonas, 1958, p. 32). Gündüz (1994) points out that many twentieth century scholars looked at other sources for the origin of Gnosticism such as Hellenic, Babylonian, Egyptian and Iranian. Thus, they argued for the existence of Gnosticism before the coming of Christianity. In *The Gnostic Religion* (1958, p. 103) Jonas states that:

> Simon Magus 'was a contemporary of the apostles and a Samaritan, and Samaria was notoriously unruly in matters of religion and regarded with suspicion by the orthodox...Simon was not a dissident Christian, and if the Church Fathers cast him in the role of the arch-heretic, they implicitly admitted that Gnosticism was not an inner-Christian phenomenon'.

Bultmann, Rudolph and Jonas all see Mandaean Gnostic literature being similar to sources before Christ. According to Gündüz these scholars claim that the Gospel of John includes several Mandaean elements "such as the figure of a revealer, and Gnostic language and imagery" (Gündüz, 1994, p. 102). Rudolph (quoted in Gündüz, 1994, 102) goes further and claims:

> I am hence of the well-grounded conviction that the Gnostic redeemer myth is of pre-Christian origin....in my opinion Paul and the anonymous author of the Gospel of John presuppose a Gnostic-type doctrine of the redeemer; they use its terminology, but also oppose it. For them the mythological redeemer or revealer has been transcended by the historical redeemer Jesus Christ.

The other commonly held Christian influence on Mandaeism concerns John the Baptist. Gündüz notes that some scholars "such as Reitzenstein based their theories about the origins of the Mandaeans and relationship between Mandaeism and the other traditions, especially Christianity, on the idea that John the Baptist was a central figure in the Mandaean tradition" (Gündüz, 1994, p. 105). Gündüz himself suggests that for Mandaeans this is seen as "the confrontation between John and Jesus" (Gündüz, 1994, p. 105). It needs to be noted that this view is not shared by Mandaeans. For example, Nasoraia, (2005, p. 14) argues that Mandaeans:

> [Believe] that there are no earthly founder(s) of the religion; rather there are Great Teachers, such as Adam, Šitil (Seth), Ram, ŠuRabai, Šum (Sam, son of Noah) and Yahia Yuhana (John the Baptist) who are great preservers or keepers of the Divine Word of Hiia (God) and the 'Knowledge of the Holy Wisdom of Life' Manda d-Hiia, which they receive from Haiia and the World(s) of Light. These are passed on to the Mandaean generations, who are in turn inspired by the life and work of these Great teachers.

While Mandaeans see John the Baptist as an important person who revived and unified the religion, he is not the central figure that some scholars have claimed.

Another possible influence on Mandaeism discussed by Gündüz is Manichaeism. Scholars "such as Widengren, suggested that Mani was brought up amongst the Mandaeans. On the other hand, the Cologne Codex, published in 1970 confirmed that Mani had been raised among the Jewish-Christian sect of the Elchasaites" (Gündüz, 1994, p. 122). Macúch (1971, p. 189) maintained that Manichaeism was a descendant of Mandaeism and not vice versa. For his part Gündüz accepts that there were definitely "some relations between the two traditions" (Gündüz, 1994, p. 122). He argues that the Coptic Manichaean *Psalms of Thomas,* are the best indication of this. Säve-Söderbergh (1949, p. 156) demonstrated that the "Psalms of Thomas were adaptations almost translations of the Mandaean texts" (Gündüz, 1994, p. 123). In summary, Gündüz concludes that the Mandaean influence upon Manichaeism shows the earlier origin of Mandaeism. Some Mandaean liturgical texts had already been redacted by the third century AD and Manichaean writers such as Thomas were in contact with Mandaeans (Gündüz, 1994, p. 123).

In the conclusion to this book Gündüz (1994) focuses on the Western origin of the Mandaeans and their gradual movement to the East and settlement in Southern Mesopotamia. At various times, such as the Parthian period, the Mandaeans lived in great freedom in their new homeland (Gündüz, 1994, p. 234). With the arrival of Islam "the Mandaeans were treated according to the status of 'ahl al-kitab'[30] in Islamic law, since they were mentioned (under the name 'Sabians') with the other people of the book, that is with the Jews and Christians, in the Quran" (Gündüz, 1994, p. 234). Gündüz finds that

> There is a notable similarity between the characteristics of the Sabians of Southern Iraq and Iran in early and later Muslim sources and those of the Mandaeans of today, who are still called Sabians by their Arab neighbours. It is therefore quite clear that the Sabians of the Muslim sources were the progenitors of the modern Mandaeans (Gündüz, 1994, p. 235).

Gündüz disagrees with those scholars who claim to find "a religious identity or connection between the Harranians and the Mandaeans, because there are vitally important differences between them" (1994, p. 235). Harān was a key ancient town in greater Mesopotamia, near the modern community of Altınbaşak, Turkey. It is in a region of Şanlıurfa Province that is also named 'Harān'. Gündüz (1994, pp. 134-187) explains that the Harranians lived there from early antiquity. They were pagans who worshiped the moon. For a time, during their journey from the Jordan valley to Mesopotamia, Mandaeans also settled there. Under early Islamic rule Harranians claimed to be Sabians in order to be recognised as 'people of the book' rather than be forcibly converted to Islam.

These are important conclusions by Gündüz, a contemporary Muslim scholar. They have however, been rejected by the rulers of modern day Iran (Amnesty International Australia Report, 2004). As noted, this has contributed to the suffering of Mandaeans there, especially from the latter half of the 20th century, at the hands of extremist Islamic regimes. The consequent dispersal of the Mandaeans means that this study by Gündüz could, however, assist them in their struggle for survival and recognition.

Edmondo Lupieri

The Mandaeans: The Last Gnostics by Edmondo Lupieri (2002) is an Italian volume in a series of studies on religion and society. Written from a Western historical perspective and relying on the works of missionaries, travellers and Western

[30] People of the Book.

scholars, the book outlines Mandaean life, customs and religious rituals. In his preface, Lupieri explains that his book is not intended for scholars or specialized researchers but for the broad public who are interested in Mandaeism. Unlike other general works on the nature of Mandaeism, Lupieri reports the impact of constant persecution on Mandaean communities. “Memories of past tragic times” he sees as being at the forefront of the minds of the Mandaean community “for as late as the nineteenth century whole villages had been forced into apostasy and forcibly circumcised” (Lupieri, 2002, p. 4). He also reports on the impact of the wars of the twentieth century and the destruction of Mandaean lands and properties by both Iranian and Iraqi regimes.

Although Lupieri’s research is not based on field work and relies on the memories of a Mandaean man living in Italy, it is “the first attempt to reconstruct the history of the European perception of Mandaeism by collecting and discussing the documentary testimony concerning the Mandaeans from the Middle Ages to contemporary times” (Lupieri, 2002, p. xiv). Many of these documents were written by Christian missionaries who were both scholars and explorers and who met Mandaeans while in the Middle East.

An essential part of this book is a history of the interaction between Mandaeans and the West. According to Lupieri, the first known contact was with “a learned Dominican from Tuscany, Ricoldo da Montecroce…[who] came into contact with the Mandaeans around 1290” (Lupieri, 2002, p. 63). He describes them as “a very simple people” who “claim to possess a secret law of God, which they preserve into beautiful books…they detest Abraham because of circumcision and they venerate John the Baptist above all” (Lupieri, 2002, p. 65). Unfortunately, Ricoldo’s manuscripts were not published until the 1940s. During the Portuguese invasion of the Islamic world in the sixteenth century other Christian missionaries came to Mesopotamia. These Jesuits began the myth that Mandaeans were actually the “Christians of St John, apostle and evangelist” (Lupieri, 2002, p. 69). This view became quite widespread, as was the claim that Mandaeans already knew and used “all seven Catholic sacraments and the related ceremonies in their lives” (Lupieri, 2002, p. 71). Although the Jesuit missionaries confidently identified Mandaeans as Christians, they did not demonstrate the validity of this claim.

As European knowledge of Mandaeans grew, it became evident that the figure known by and important to the Mandaean people was not John the Evangelist but rather John the Baptist. It also became clear that Mandaeans are not Christians, and efforts to convert them have had little success. However, according to Lupieri (2002)

the work of the Christian missionaries made a significant contribution to the study of Mandaeism and the Mandaean people through the reports they returned to Europe.

A further notable aspect of Lupieri's work is that he uses the correct Mandaean terms to refer to aspects of Mandaean life. As has been noted, some Western scholars use Christian terms. For instance, Lupieri refers to Musbeta rather than baptism. In his treatment of the literature he describes the Diwans and explores Mandaic language, which he describes as "a type of Oriental Aramaic with features similar to those of the language of the Babylonian Talmud" as well as other external influences (Lupieri, 2002, p. 53). He also refers to the modern spoken language used by some Mandaeans which is called Ratna, and describes it as having a strong Arabic influence.[31]

Lupieri lists the main published Mandaean texts and their translation into German and English. He refers to many texts which have been found on small tablets and scrolls of lead, on vases and bowls and small strips of paper placed inside bags sewn with cloth. Like other scholars, he suggests that these texts are in fact 'magic' texts. As noted earlier, Buckley (2002, p. 25) is critical of this view. These particular writings are better seen as prayers for protection and reminders to their owners.

Lupieri touches on the "Origins of the Mandaeans" and outlines the development of studies in this area. He refers to the importance of the work of Reitzenstein (1929) who looked at this question from the perspective of the history of religion. Reitzenstein believed that "the disciples of John the Baptist that did not convert to Christianity were persecuted by the Jews before the fall of Jerusalem in 70AD and fled to the East" (Lupieri, 2002, p. 123). Lidzbarski agrees with this thesis. Lupieri refers to this thesis and reports that "The New Testament showed traces of dependence on Mandaeism, and indeed the Fourth Gospel was the consequence of a polemic against primitive Palestinian Mandaeism. Mark Lidzbarski took up a position alongside Reitzenstein's" (2002, p. 123). For Mandaeans:

> The founders of hostile or enemy religions, Abraham, Moses and Jesus are turned into demons. Their predecessors from Adam to Shem in the Old Testament and John and his parents in the New, are transformed into Mandaean figures. In this way Judaism and Christianity can be considered a deviation from a pre-existing Mandaean reality (Lupieri, 2002, p. 164).

After some discussion of the role of John the Baptist in Mandaeism, Lupieri raises a significant question concerning the origin of Mandaeism. "If the Mandaeans have

[31] The modern Ratna has more of a Persian influnce than Arabic.

always been where they are now and are not related directly to John the Baptist, why did they go and 'recycle' a saint (and only that one!) from a rival and hostile religion?" (Lupieri, 2002, p. 126).

Lupieri comments on the significance of Drower's work. He notes that Drower's studies were based on field study that led to a renewal of interest in Mandaeism, which continues today. He acknowledges that her work lacked "philological or historical preparation…and she was not familiar with the scholarly literature on the topics she was dealing with, nor was she aware, for example, of the Gnostic meaning of the work she was analysing" (Lupieri, 2002, p. 124). More specifically he notes:

> There is no scientific description of the codex or scroll. Obvious mechanical errors in the text are not eliminated, and discovering that words or entire lines have been lost (in some cases altering the meaning) is an easy task. Everything is translated in the same way, or, in other words, there are rarely any indications as to whether we are faced with additions between the lines or in the margins. Finally, noticeable oversights in the translation exist (Lupieri, 2002, p. 124).

Still, Lupieri acknowledges that Drower does show a detailed knowledge of the life and literature of Mandaeans and her writings are "invaluable instruments" for the serious study of Mandaeism (Lupieri, 2002, p. 124).

The work of Macúch is recognised by Lupieri as providing an "historical revelation of some of the information contained in the *Harān Gawaita* and in the analysis of the historical information to be drawn from the colophons of the known manuscripts" (Lupieri, 2002, p. 124). Lupieri also points out the importance of the scholarship of Kurt Rudolph, philologist and historian. It can be noted that all these writers agree on the Western origin of Mandaeism.

The final section of Lupieri's book looks at the legends of the Mandaeans in relation to their history. The peaceful nature of the Mandaean people are often reflected in their legends. As Lupieri notes, these

> are often stories of harassment and oppression, of flight, and of defeat maybe with an ending bringing salvation…yet these fables aiming to console, in which the highest happiness lies in an existence without persecution, tell us nothing of the actual facts (Lupieri, 2002, p. 127).

For Lupieri these stories may not add much to historical knowledge of Mandaeism, but they clearly helped to preserve the cultural identity of the Mandaeans. He

believes for example that the modern diaspora of Mandaeans to the West reflects the experience of the Mandaeans recorded in *Harān Gawaita*. In the extracts from this text and others used by Lupieri the impact of persecution and massacres is constantly put before the people. This is most evident in the section entitled the "Son of the Arab Butcher" (2002, pp. 254-260). Lupieri shows that experiences like this continue to have a profound impact on the lives of Mandaeans today. Lupieri (2002) is one of the few scholars to recognise this issue.

One of the problems in the study of Mandaeism by Western scholars has been the tendency to see the life of Mandaeans through Christian, Western eyes. In writing of Mandaeism, Lupieri maintains that "it is not a good idea to judge the evidence of faith by strictly historical criteria, but there are religions that deliberately invite the faithful to reflect on certain historical aspects of their past" (Lupieri, 2002, p. 161). This is certainly true of Mandaeism. As noted above, some of Lupieri's particular views on the origins and nature of Mandaeism are open to question. But in his willingness to look critically at Western scholarly studies, and to recognise the significance of the persecution of Mandaeans, his work brings some new perspectives to the study of Mandaeism.

Edwin Masao Yamauchi

Gnostic Ethics and Mandaean Origins (2004) by Edwin Yamauchi, a historian and Protestant Christian apologist, contributes to the history of religions, which has led to widespread debate about the origin of the Mandaean people. He tends to present Mandaeism as a "sect" rather than a religion; though he notes "a rather sharp contrast between the elaborate ritual of the Mandaeans and the usually sparse cult of the Gnostics" (2004, p. 21). These observations are informative; but they may also be misleading. Firstly, it might suggest that Mandaeism is not a unique religion, and secondly, that is not a true Gnostic religion. However, Yamauchi himself does later state that "Mandaeism is the only surviving Gnostic religion" (2004, p. 88). Indeed, as scholars such as the Mandaean Al-Dihisi (2013, p. 19) have commented, "the Mandaeans are the only Gnostic group who call themselves explicitly 'Mandaeans' which equals the Greek 'gnostikoi'". But it is not clear if Yamauchi regards Mandaeism as a distinct religion.

The book begins with a study of Mandaic Gnostic texts and makes the point that the Coptic Gnostic texts from Nag Hammadi may lead to a new evaluation of Mandaic Gnostic texts. Further, Yamauchi maintains that the date of the origin of extant Mandaean manuscripts and their original composition and redaction are difficult to

pinpoint, since many of the manuscripts held today are dated from the 16th century and onwards. He enters the controversy about dating the documents and agrees with other scholars such as Rudolph (1960) and Drower (1960), that many of the writings in the canon were probably collected in the early Islamic period (Yamauchi, 2004, pp. 8-11). It might be remembered here, however, as Lupieri (2002, p. 124) and others have noted, that not all Western scholars fully appreciate the process of redaction undertaken by Mandaean scholars.

Referring to earlier research by Säve-Söderbergh (1959), Yamauchi makes the interesting point that parts of the Gnostic *Psalms of Thomas*, thought by some to be referring to a disciple of Mani, were adapted from Mandaean materials (Yamauchi, 2004, p. 5). This suggests that Manichaeism seems to have derived at least some of its writings from Mandaeism. This is contrary to the understanding that had been prevalent among scholars since the 1930s (Yamauchi, 2004, p. 5). Although other authors such as Rudolph (1987, p. 364) see a connection between Mandaeism and Manichaeism, Yamauchi does not offer any other evidence of this link. Yamauchi also uses texts from incantation bowls and lead strips in order to look at dates to help clarify the origin of Mandaeism. However, Yamauchi's own earlier research throws some doubt on his choice of texts and artefacts: "most of them were probably composed during the Sasanian era and the early Islamic conquest of Iraq, although the earliest known Mandaic text is a lead amulet from the first half of the third century" (Yamauchi, 1967, p. 2). Similarly, according to Macúch (1971, p. 177) Lidzbarski, in his final article, "was quite prepared to change his assessment of the chronology of the [Mandaean] amulet, saying that 'the year 400 is rather a too late than a too early dating'". Macúch goes on to point out that the "discoveries of Tang-e Sarvak and Shīmbār do nothing to diminish the validity of Lidzbarski's judgment" (1971, p. 177).

In discussing the age of Mandaeism, Yamauchi compares the claims of Reitzenstein and Bultman that the Mandaeans could be traced back to the pre-Christian period with other scholars who argued for a later date for the foundation of Mandaeism. Peterson (1926) argued that the religion was established in the eighth century CE while Lietzmann (1930) argued that its origin was in the seventh century CE. Yamauchi himself claims that more recent discoveries have placed the origin of the religion to the second or third centuries CE (2004, pp. 8-10). At the same time, Yamauchi does note that "the three leading Mandaean scholars of today – Drower, Macúch and Rudolph – are of the opinion that the Mandaeans had a pre-Christian origin, even as Lidzbarski, the leading Mandaean scholar of the former generation, had claimed" (Yamauchi, 2004, p. 10).

In his study of Mandaean ethics Yamauchi points out some sharp contrasts between Mandaean ethics and the majority of other Gnostic groups. The ethical aspects of marriage and sex for instance are a central issue in Gnosticism generally, but particularly in Mandaeism, because it has such a high expectation on marriage. It is also significant that the Mandaean ethical structure stresses a range of commandments and the sinfulness in breaking them. This attitude is lacking in most Gnostic systems. Yamauchi (2004, p. 36) cites the example given by Lidzbarski (1915, p. 173) from "section 47 of the Johannesbuch[32], where Manda-d-Hayi gives a series of exhortations warning against thievery...usury, magic...". The exhortations against sexual sin are seen by Yamauchi as an indication of the high regard Mandaeans have for marriage.

This aspect of the religion is present from the earliest texts right through to present day practice. Yamauchi lists several ways in which Mandaeans are concerned with the protection of young children and pregnant women. He shows that marriage for the sake of pro-creation is exalted as a sacred duty, "from the earliest magical texts through the literary texts up to present-day practice" (Yamauchi, 2004, p. 38). Indeed "in the Johannesbuch the command comes from the House of Abatur to John the Baptist to get married lest he have no progeny to remember his name" (Yamauchi, 2004, p. 39). Further in this text, John the Baptist is told to marry and when he demurs lest he neglect his prayers he is instructed to share his time between both duties. This high regard for marriage is also pointed out by Drower and Macúch (Yamauchi, 2004, pp. 39-40).

On the other hand, Yamauchi disagrees with Drower, Rudolph and others who maintain that "Mandaeism evidently had a trend which very forcibly enjoined an ascetic, continent life" (Widengren, 1965, p. 25). In his discussion of this issue Yamauchi claims that Drower, Rudolph and Widengren seem to confuse elements that are not strictly speaking expressions of asceticism. The condemnation of lust and of excess and the clear rules about taboos and purification are rather rules for a way of life. Yamauchi maintains that by comparison with the ethics of other Gnostic groups, the dualistic rejection of the world in the Mandaean context does not involve an asceticism that denies all pleasure. The Mandaean promotion of marriage is strong evidence of this. In concluding his discussion of Mandaean ethics, Yamauchi argues that although Mandaic and Coptic Gnostic texts parallel each other to some

[32] A German translation *Das Johannesbuch der Mandäer* translated by Lidzbarski appeared in 1905.

extent in cosmogony and anthropogony they have widely contrasting ethics (Yamauchi, 2004, p. 47).

The question of the Jewish origins of Mandaeism is discussed at length by Yamauchi in chapter seven. In this discussion Yamauchi does not make any significant reference to any of the original Mandaean texts, rather he relies on the work of other authors. He does not give any credence to the claims of the Mandaeans of their own origins. It is perhaps odd, therefore that Yamauchi claims that "the most distinctive element of Judaism – its monotheism – is nowhere to be seen" in Mandaeism. For Gündüz (1994, p. 17) and other scholars like Nasoraia (2005, p. 13) it is clear that "Mandaeism is monotheistic". They refer to Mandaean belief in the one God, known variously as "*Hiia* 'the Living One', God creator *Hiia (Raba Qadmaiia)* 'the First Great Life' (Living One)". Despite this, Yamauchi argues for the Jewish origin of Mandaeism, supporting his claim by pointing to references in Mandaean literature to Old Testament figures, especially to Adam, Noah, and Seth. He does acknowledge that for Mandaeans these are not primary references but secondary ones. As noted earlier, Mandaeans themselves see their religion as the original one. Yamauchi does accept that common figures are the result of 'contiguity' with the Jewish people (2004, p. 66). For Mandaeans

> there are no earthly founder(s) of the religion; rather, there are Great Teachers such as Adam, Sitil (Seth), Ram, SuRabai, Sum (Sam son of Noah) and Yahia Yuhana (John the Baptist) who are great preservers or keepers of the Devine Word of Hiia (God) and 'the Knowledge of the Holy Wisdom of Life, Manda d-Hiia which they received from Hiia and the World(s) of Light. These are passed on to the Mandaean generations, who are in turn inspired by the life and work of these Great Teachers (Nasoraia, 2005, p. 14).

Yamauchi mentions an early work of Rudolph (1960, pp. 61, 85) where he refers to evidence for the Jewish origin of the Mandaeans in their high regard for marriage and procreation. However, Yamauchi (2004, pp. 40-41) argues that any similarities and even some of the differences between Mandaeism and Judaism derive not from 'consanguinity' but from 'contiguity'. Although Mandaeans reject any claims about their supposed Jewish origins, Yamauchi's account of similarities and differences between the two religions fits with the Mandaean understanding of their origins in Palestine. In his final chapter Yamauchi does make some references to primary sources from the Mandaeans and from other Western, Eastern and archaeological sources. As the early Mandaeans lived in the marshes of southern Mesopotamia and south-western Iran Yamauchi points out the difficulty of the survival of relics in such an environment. "The Mandaeans' cult huts made of reeds and mud would

certainly have left little or no traces" (2004, p. 76). While Mandaic incantation bowls and lead rolls have been discovered and have helped to broaden knowledge of Mandaean culture, other relics are very limited.

Another point on which Mandaeans and scholars such as Drower (1953, 1962), Widengren (1961), Macúch (1969) and Rudolph (1978) would disagree with Yamauchi is the denial that they were "a community in possession of their essential beliefs in Palestine in a pre-Christian era" (Yamauchi, 2004, p. 85). He uses anthropological studies of syncretism to look at three elements of Mandaeism, namely, mythology, cult and ethics to support his view that it is a fusion of beliefs and practices. For example, he considers Mandaean ethics through a comparison of "Coptic texts and the Mandaic texts" (Yamauchi, 2004, p. 24). He further argues that this fusion could only have taken place in Mesopotamia. From the researcher's perspective, this approach involves viewing different dimensions of a religion (Smart 1989), as if they are discrete elements. In addition, it ignores the lived experience of the practitioners of the religion.

Finally, in his conclusion Yamauchi poses a central question when he asks: "Why did all other Gnostic groups perish and the Mandaeans alone survive?" (Yamauchi, 2004, p. 88). Yamauchi concludes that their survival is a result of their commitment to their practices and mores. He then claims that the greatest danger to the Mandaean religion is not persecution or the problems of conversions to other religions "but the advance of Western civilization, which will make their way of life increasingly difficult and perhaps ultimately impossible" (Yamauchi, 2004, p. 89). This recognition of the various pressures on Mandaeism is not common in the literature. From a Mandaean perspective, it is a welcome aspect of Yamauchi's work. However, it should also be noted that persecution and the attempted genocides, which forced a mass exodus of this ancient people from Iran and Iraq in the latter part of the twentieth century, gave them no time to prepare for life in Western democracies.

Mehrdad Arabestani

Exotic Baptists: An anthropological study on religiousness of the Mandaeans of Iran (2004), by Mehrdad Arabestani, a Muslim anthropologist, gives a brief outline of who the Mandaeans are and points out the significance of the study of this tradition as the only surviving gnostic religion. Arabestani also suggests that an "understanding [of Mandaeism] as a living tradition may illuminate related debates in History of Religion" (2004, p. 2). While Arabestani sees Mandaeans as traditional inhabitants

of a region from which other religions have arisen and has inspired cultures and civilizations for thousands of years, his understanding of this religion is affected by his Islamic view of the world. This is shown by his preference for Islamic writings about Mandaeism.

From his anthropological perspective, Arabestani claims Mandaeism lacks a theology and suggests that Mandaean religiousness is formal in its essence. He maintains "that it is a ritualistic religiousness" dependent on objective and external rules. Further, Arabestani suggests that "such religiousness is opposed to informal religiousness that puts stress on intention and inner states rather than on ritual performance and defined behaviour" (2004, pp. 8,9). Arabestani does look at the relationship between ritual, symbols and cosmology in Mandaeism. In this he sees that the binary nature of Gnosticism can be found in the rituals and customs. For instance, he suggests that "binary oppositions like 'light/darkness' and 'earth/heaven' in Mandaean cosmology are in correspondence with 'purity/pollution' and 'creation/manufacture' oppositions in Mandaean rituals" (2004, p. 7). In this way Arabestani sees a natural harmony within the practice and living of the Mandaean religion.

The Mandaean priest and scholar Nasoraia (2005, p. 13ff) does not share this view of Mandaeism. He outlines a clear theology based on his personal knowledge of Mandaeism and reflection on Mandaean scriptures. Arabestani's claim that Mandaeism is a formalistic religion (2004, pp. 8, 9), dependent on objective and external rules is not considered a weakness by Mandaeans but rather a path to enlightenment. For Mandaeans the same appears be true of other religions, including Islam and Christianity. In addition, as a practicing Mandaean the researcher suspects the dichotomy between formal and informal religiousness is questionable. Mandaeans are concerned with intentions and inner states, but also with rules, especially those concerning rituals.

As a Muslim, Arabestani recognises that Mandaeans have been threatened "by their neighbours' pressures for conversion during their historical life" (2004, p. 8). He believes that this explains the anxiety of Mandaeans about their ethno-religious identity, which has in turn led to "rigid purity and pollution rules", as well as being motivation for their migration throughout the world (2004, p. 8). Arabestani argues that such apprehension about their identity and restrictions on the religion is the reason why Mandaeans "have not been able to develop a clear theology, and their religiousness rather is a restricted and abstract one" (2004, p. 9). He also concludes that this spreading of Mandaeans internationally as a result of heightened pressure

"may prompt Mandaeans to make some efforts for matching with new conditions and may appropriately lead to some changes in Mandaean religiousness" (2004, p. 10).

Arabestani's 'The Mandaean Identity Challenge: From Religious Symbolism to Secular Policies' (2010) outlines his understanding of Mandaean belief and practice. He "seeks to address the mutual relationship between Mandaean religious practice and their social background in regard to their identity" (2010, p. 3). While the author has been involved in "a long term ethnographic study on the Mandaeans in Iran" he points out that this particular work focuses on Mandaeans in Australia, and is still exploratory (2010, p. 3). The strength of Arabestani's article lies in his recognition of the Mandaeans as a living people and the consequent recognition of the Mandaean religion as a living tradition. He sees the protection of their group identity as the main concern of the Mandaean people, with their religion as the central reference point.

In the article Arabestani explores the cosmology of Mandaeism, which he believes "lies at the base of the Mandaic religion" (2010, p. 6). The most important ritual in Mandaeism is Musbeta or baptism, which Arabestani says is "usually preformed in certain lifestyle crises" (2010, p. 8). He notes that these crises, in fact turning points in people's lives, include the birth of a child, the purification of the mother and the marriage ceremony. He points out that "group baptism is also a common ritual in religious festivals" for Mandaeans (2010, pp. 8-9). After detailing other purification and food laws practiced by Mandaeans, Arabestani says, as in his earlier study of Mandaeans, that such emphasis "symbolises a social preoccupation with the protection of [the] political and cultural unity of an oppressed minority" (2010, p. 10). From this point Arabestani looks at the impact of moving from an enclosed, virtually self-contained community in Iran and Iraq to more open Western societies, such as Australia. He suggests that the changes consequent upon such shifts "will fade the boundaries of the distinct group identity" (2010, p. 10).

Arabestani also considers the modern diaspora of Mandaeans, its causes and effects. In Iran he sees the Islamic revolution of 1979 as causing "a revitalisation of religious discourse" in general. He maintains that this includes a renewal "of religious awareness among the Mandaeans" even though Mandaeans are not officially recognised in the constitution of Iran (2010, p. 11). This imposes limitations on Mandaean religious practice especially through the discrimination experienced by them in daily life. He implies that the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-88 not only forced Mandaeans to move from their traditional homelands but also forced them to interact

more with other people. This played a crucial role in contemporary Mandaeans' understanding of themselves, their identity and their religion (2010, p. 11). Since (1990) the wars in Iraq have led to further displacement; more severe ethnic conflict led to the majority of Mandaeans fleeing to other countries. This second major migration of Mandaeans has led to the formation of a Mandaean diaspora in Australia, Europe and North America. Arabestani argues that this has been "a turning point in Mandaean history and definitely will bring about deep changes to the Mandaean people and their religion" (2010, p. 12). While this development might have resulted in their "cultural extinction… the Mandaeans of Australia, for example, are among those Mandaean diasporas that try to use the new possibilities to keep their distinct identity alive" (2010, p. 12).

Arabestani makes the salient point that "in the homeland 'the religious' and 'the social' were unified and inseparable" (2010, p. 12). In the experience of Australian Mandaeans a separation of these two areas of life is possible, for example in organisations such as the *Mandaean Youth of Australia Committee*, which "arranges social and sport events", while "the Mandaean Synod of Australia is in charge of the religious affairs of the community" (2010, p. 13). It is clear, to Arabestani, that "Mandaean believers in Australia are developing new expectations of their religion" (2010, p. 13). He notes that "Mandaean migrants experience a free multicultural environment in the host countries" (2010, p. 13) and claims that "the main challenges of the Mandaean diasporas [are] the development of secular polices of identity protection and religious reformation according to the emerging needs of the believers" (2010, p. 14). Such developments would not have been possible under Islamic rule.

In 'Ritual Purity and the Mandaeans' Identity' (2012) Arabestani covers much of the material included in his earlier work. His work acknowledges the problems for a small ethno-religious group like Mandaeans living in Iran and Iraq.

> As a small endogamous group under the hegemony of the non-Mandaeans and exposed to epidemics, they have always been under the threat of cultural extinction. Therefore group identity protection has become one of their major concerns, which is reflected in their religious practice (2012, p. 153).

This emphasis on the struggle for survival is a strength of Arabestani's work and perhaps has enabled him to see the impact of the socio-political changes caused by the renewal of Islam and conflict especially in Iran and Iraq in the last half of the twentieth century more clearly than most other scholars.

As an anthropologist he looks at how “social conditions can affect the religious practice in different ways” (2012, p. 166). Because ritual is so important in the Mandaean religion “the Mandaeans see commitment to the rituals’ performance as the highest religious virtue” (2012, p. 166). He shows that such practices are detailed in “Mandaean liturgical scriptures, such as Enyani, Qolesta and Sidra ed nashmata [which] describe the rituals’ formal manner” (2012, p. 166). Arabestani sees the historical experience of the Mandaeans as a small group in constant danger of cultural extinction as the means they have used “to maintain and transmit their religious symbols as a vehicle for their group identity” (2012, p. 166). He suggests that such a concentration on ritual is a means employed as a “hazard – precaution system among the Mandaeans to keep and develop the rituals and modes of religiosity appropriate to their threatened group identity” (2012, p. 166).

Clearly one of the emphases of Arabestani, and also one of his strengths, is his account of the challenges faced by the Mandaean community. His studies are also notable for their anthropological approach that includes sometimes detailed descriptions of Mandaean belief and practice. These may be formally accurate, from his perspective, although they do not incorporate the way Mandaeans themselves experience and practice their religious beliefs.

Charles Häberl

Häberl is most concerned, as a linguist, with the survival of the Mandaic language, which he believes should help to ensure the survival of the culture. The struggle for the survival of the Mandaean people is seen by Häberl (2010, p. 209) as “a necessary first step towards the preservation of endangered cultures”, which “involves the preservation of these manifestations generally by recording them in books or the like”. For the Mandaeans, who already had a strong tradition of written liturgical texts in the first century CE, this sense of the need for preservation led to the gathering together of many texts from very early times. As Nasoraia, (2005, p. 120) points out, Mandaean literature was copied or edited by Zazai in the first century CE and indicated “a fully developed and organised religion with rituals and texts [and] written and oral material that clearly points to an early time, many centuries before Islam in subjects, traditions and language”. It also included “mystical Nasoraean gnostic ideas [and] major technical and cultic terms from both early Western and eastern elements and influences”.

The linguistic studies of Charles Häberl explore cultural survival. In ‘The Cultural Survival of the Mandaeans’ (2010) he looks at the link between the survival of a

culture and the survival of its language. He refers to the struggle for survival endured by Mandaeans especially in Iraq. For example, “the former leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, singled out the Mandaeans for elimination, identifying them as ‘devil worshipers’” (2010, p. 210). Häberl argues that their history of diaspora and survival from the first century CE will enable Mandaeism to survive into the future.

Häberl details efforts to bring to light the plight of this community and refers to a letter sent by members of congress to the US Secretary of State stating that “’there is an urgency to processing the Iraqi Mandaeans, as they are a distinct ethno-religious community that faces increasing threats that could eliminate their community all together’” (2010, p. 211). Häberl also raises the question of the possibility of preserving the Mandaean identity in a diaspora which spreads across the Western world. As noted, he suggests that Mandaeans will survive because within their tradition they have learnt to respond to the challenge of the constant fear of the loss of their culture through persecution. While he admits the Mandaeans are small in number he points out the power of the individual within the community and the depth of knowledge residing in small groups of individuals “such as *Anus bar Danqa* at the time of the Islamic conquest of Mesopotamia, or Yahia Bihram and his colleagues who reconstructed the Mandaean priesthood after the devastating cholera of 1831” (2010, p. 212).

In the second half of his article Häberl discusses the importance of language as part of cultural patrimony. He points out that the loss of any culture, system of beliefs or language is a loss to the shared cultural heritage of humankind. The disappearance of language is shown by Häberl to be inherently linked to the loss of cultural knowledge; as a linguist he is very aware that “each language is the unique expression of an individual culture, and the collective work of many generations” (2010, p. 213). While it is important to preserve the language of cultural groups with a literary tradition, it must be remembered that the language of such a tradition based mainly on “religious texts, particularly those of an esoteric variety such as most Mandaean religious texts, are virtually meaningless without a living community to interpret them within their proper cultural context” (2010, p. 215). Häberl suggests that within communities that have been widely dispersed and, as a consequence, have adopted different languages, there is a danger that the people might become “estranged from the texts once they have ceased to speak to the community in its own language” (2010, p. 215).

While language is basically an oral process, Häberl notes that it must be remembered that written texts have in fact risen from oral expression in the past. He claims that in the study of the history or culture of a community, scholars must always remember "that every tradition has been actualised by a living person or persons, and that each person actualises it differently" (2010, p. 217). Häberl points out that for the study of Mandaeism it is important to remember the significance of oral traditions within the community. With the dispersal of the Mandaean community from Southern Iran and Iraq and the gradual erosion of the Mandaic language this has become more complex because as Häberl states "when a community becomes divorced from its traditional language, these oral traditions are all too often lost" and so he suggests that "this makes the work of ethnographers and documentary linguists all the more urgent, especially in collaboration with communities that are in the process of language shift today" (2010, p. 217).

Häberl refers to the fact that since many of the authors of Mandaean texts are unknown this has perhaps assisted the process of scholars looking at Mandaeism as a tradition of the past rather than as a living culture. The maintenance of the traditional language is therefore essential for the continuation of the oral traditions. It is also important to remember that all human knowledge is not contained in books but is also contained in the shared memory of communities. This is particularly true for the Mandaean community with the strong 'memory' of the experience of persecution and survival.

The strength of Häberl's work as a linguist and observer is that he constantly refers to the Mandaean community as a living community rather than a 'museum'. He points out the importance of fieldwork and of recording the experience of a living community. Therefore, in this article, which explores some of the challenges facing "the cultural survival of the Mandaeans", he is suggesting a process that can be used by "members of the community who are motivated to embark upon their own documentary projects in order to preserve their own culture and traditions" (2010, p. 226).

In his article, 'Flights of Fancy: A Mandaean Folktale of Escape from Persecution*'* (2010), Häberl points out that the neglect of oral tradition in the study of Mandaeism is remarkable "when one considers the impressive strides that have been made in the study of the Mandaean literary tradition" (2010, p. 549). He shows that "reference to…folktales, legends, myths, riddles, proverbs and other forms of folklore…is an important primary source for historians" (2010, p. 550). For a community like the Mandaeans in Iran and Iraq where secrecy was required to

preserve the culture, the oral tradition became the main medium by which the tradition was passed on, especially within the family.

Häberl details his research into the story of 'The Demon and the Damsel' and compares various versions of this story found throughout the world. The uniqueness of the Mandaean version of this narrative is "illustrative of the Mandaeans' own unique customs, traditions, and institutions" (2010, p. 561). He points out that this myth in its various forms as indicated by Drower shows the way in which the Mandaean community used oral tradition to link their present situation with the past.

In 2012 Häberl published the article 'Mandaeism in Antiquity and Antiquity of Mandaeism'. In it he surveys the evolution of Mandaeism "as a religious tradition prior to and immediately following the advent of Islam" (2012, p. 262). He notes the uniqueness of Mandaeism as the only surviving gnostic religion, "the sole surviving inheritor to [Gnosticism] one of the world's most widespread and influential religious traditions" (2012, p. 262). He comments on the broad range of the literary religious texts of the Mandaean corpus and raises questions related to the sporadic nature of Mandaean studies.

A significant obstacle to the academic understanding of Mandaeism, according to Häberl, is the range of names that have been used both by this group and by outsiders to describe them. Today, they are often known as the Sabian Mandaeans, a term that refers in 'Arabic Sabi-ah or subbah' to the practice of Musbeta (Immersion), often described as baptism. The title *Mandaean* correctly aligns this ethno-religious group with the importance of *Manda* or knowledge to their faith. In some of the literature they are referred to as 'Nazarenes' or 'Nasoreans' although this term in fact refers to those who are "thoroughly schooled in the priestly craft" (2012, p. 263).

In a brief summary of the religion Häberl demonstrates some understanding of the complexity of Mandaeism. He points out that for Mandaeans the primary source of their history is *Harān Gawaita,* the Scroll of (Inner Harān) and that though much of the text is legendary, it does refer to actual historical events "such as the destruction of the second temple in Jerusalem (in 70CE) and the defeat of the Arsacids at the hands of the Sasanids in (224CE)" (2012, p. 264). Because *Harān Gawaita* refers to the Islamic conquest of Mesopotamia it is generally dated from this time. However, it is also important to remember the process of redaction used by Mandaean scribes to constantly update and put into context the work as it was copied for the next generation.

Much of this article is concerned with Mandaean literature. Unlike other scholars Häberl points out that although this literature does not show a direct chronological history it does offer "critical indirect evidence" (2012, p. 265). He points out that references to Muhammad indicate "the collation and final redaction of its scriptures" sometime during the seventh century CE (2012, p. 273). He refers to scholars who suggest that this indicates a later origin for Mandaeism. Häberl himself, however, observes that although the actual manuscripts are of late origin "the antiquity of the texts contained therein is demonstrated by considerable data, which cannot be discounted" (2012, p. 265). He points out the uniqueness of the Mandaic script and claims that "the Mandaeans must have adopted their script…between the second half of the first century and the end of the second century...The palaeographic evidence is corroborated by the colophons associated with the texts" (2012, p. 265). In line with the understanding of Mandaeans themselves he suggests that the convention of adding colophons to their texts to give information for identification and the context in which they were copied is the same practice as that continued today.

Häberl (2012, p. 266) disagrees with the hypothesis of some scholars that the Christian and Jewish figures in Mandaean literature are all a result of contact with Islam. Häberl uses his linguistic knowledge to point out that if this was the case surely those references would be identified by their Arabic names rather than the Mandaic names such as the Mandaean Miriai rather than the Arabic Maryam (Mary) or Yaḥiā Iuhana (John the Baptist); "though John indeed is given a double-barrelled name, Mandaic Iuhana and Arabic Yahia, he appears exclusively under his Mandaean name in precisely those portions of the scriptures that are most ancient, as indicated by their colophons" (Buckley, 2010, p. 277). References to Mandaeans in antiquity include the work of the Sasanian priest Kirdīr who refers to 'Nazarenes' among a number of religions who were accused of worshiping idols in the third century CE. Häberl (2012, p. 267) notes that several Iranists make general references to the baptizing communities of southern Iraq. "It is also possible that Kirdīr refers to the Mandaeans specifically under the term 'Nazarenes', even if some maintain that he intends the Christians, whom he also mentions separately" (Jullien & Jullien, 2002 cited in Häberl 2012, p. 267).

Historical records do not refer to the Mandaeans again until, as Lupieri (2002, pp. 61-113) points out, they encounter European missionaries in the mid sixteenth century CE. The Muslim scholar Al-Biruni does refer to groups of Sabians but it is unclear whether this reference is actually to the Mandaeans or to other groups with

the same name. Häberl (2012, p. 270) suggests that there is a definite reference to the Mandaeans in Al-Biruni's work when he distinguishes them from the Harranians.

In contrast with the extensive corpus of Mandaean literature, Häberl notes that

> the archaeological record seems quite sparse. The Mandaeans have not left behind distinctive architectural remains, ceramic assemblages, specie or any other examples of the plastic arts. The sole architectural witnesses to the presence of Mandaeans in the region are the incantation texts composed in the Mandaic script and either inscribed upon pottery bowls or incised into sheets of metal (2012, p. 269).

Häberl shows that such texts correspond "closely to the evidence provided by the Mandaean literature and the external witnesses during the Sasanian and early Islamic eras" (2012, p. 269). As he points out, these incantation texts "attest to a developed Mandaean theology" (2012, p. 269). A number of the formulae found on the bowls are also linked to phrases in the Ginza and other Mandaean scriptures. The incantations on some Mandaean bowls, for example, refer to a 'cosmic ritual space' which is also part of prayer five of the Canonical Prayerbook. Used in the baptismal ritual, this "establishes a cosmic ritual space through explicit reference to the Mandaean cosmology and calls it into action, according to the analysis of Buckley (2007, p. 162). 'Silence, bliss, and glory dwell in the four corners of the House and the seven sides of the firmament'" (Häberl, 2012, pp. 270-271). The incantations on the bowls give information about names used by Mandaeans, as well as the names of their mothers. The reason Häberl emphasises the incantation texts found on the bowls is that they "emphatically attest to the existence of a developed Mandaeism prior to the advent of Islam, but have not been employed to reconstruct its history as fully as might have been" (2012, p. 273).

In conclusion, Häberl suggests that Mandaeism existed from the period of late antiquity as a distinct religious tradition. He points out that it is possible to develop a picture of this tradition and the history it shared with other traditions after the arrival of Mandaeans in Mesopotamia. The adoption of their own script and their tradition of religious literature has meant that Mandaean tradition has been able to survive. Häberl also shows that the tradition developed before the arrival of Islam and the collation of their scriptures into their present form means that a rich source of study is available today.

Recent Diaspora Studies

This literature review has concentrated so far on the academic studies of major writers in the field of religion that investigate the origin, history, literature and nature of Mandaeism. Several recent studies however, focus on the challenges faced by Mandaean communities in diaspora around the world today, including in Australia, and these should also be noted. Such studies are particularly relevant since the second part of this thesis deals precisely with the Mandaean people who have settled in Australia.

In 2006 the Society for Threatened Peoples published 'Mandaeans in Iraq'. According to this article "Mandaeans are increasingly discriminated against and harassed, through arbitrary dismissal, expropriation, arrest, exclusion from government jobs and other forms of discriminatory treatments" (2006, p. 5). Although this paper refers only to Iraqi Mandaeans, the sufferings of those in Iran were no less at the time (Amnesty International Report, 2004). There is some hope for the Mandaean community where groups have established themselves in Western democratic countries, including Australia (2006, p. 8). Mandaean texts are being translated mainly into Arabic and English and the article points out that a number of other initiatives have been undertaken by Mandaean communities in various countries. In particular, "a Special Committee for the protection of Mandaeans has been set up in Syria and Jordan" and was significant at the time (2006, p. 8). The article concluded that there is a future for Mandaeism now that the people can live openly as Mandaeans and learn about their religion while living in the West.

In 2009 the Political Studies Association published an article by Suhaib Nashi and John Bolender entitled: 'The Plight of Iraq's Mandaeans and Honderich's Principle of Humanity'. In this article, along with a brief outline of who the Mandaeans are, the authors looked at the particular vulnerability of the Mandaean people, suggesting this is due to their having no identified geographical safe haven, their commitment to pacifism and their lack of recognition in Muslim countries.

In order to explore possible responses to the situation of the Mandaeans in the Middle East, the authors use Honderich's principle of humanity which "enjoins us to lead [vulnerable minorities] from bad lives into good lives, rather than simply minimising some sort of bad experience" (2009, p. 95). From this it can be seen that a concerted shift in public policy is needed for this unique and much-persecuted group to survive. The possibility of creating a safe haven in Iraq is considered but

rejected. The writers point out that “unlike Christian and Muslim refugees, the Mandaeans do not belong to a larger religious community that can provide them with protection and aid…they are the only minority group in Iraq [and Iran] without a safe enclave” (Deutsch, 2007 cited in Nashi & Bolender, 2009, p. 96). They maintain that “it is not acceptable that Mandaeans be scattered all over the world as they currently are” (ibid) yet the authors maintain Mandaeans are able to settle effectively in Western democracies because they are generally well-educated. It needs to be remembered that references in this article to Mandaeans in Syria and Jordan pre-date the current Syrian crisis. Finally, the writers suggest that the United States should give Mandaeans the opportunity to re-settle in a single area “as they constitute an extremely endangered religious and linguistic minority” (2009, p. 98). In fact, the largest group of Mandaeans is now found in Australia and other communities look to the Australian community for support (interview with Ganzibra Adam Yuhana, 21 May 2015).

Angela Nickerson, Richard A. Bryant, Robert Brooks, Zachary Steel and Derrick Silove published two articles written in 2009. They first explored the impact of diaspora on the lives of Mandaean refugees in Australia. ‘Fear of Cultural Extinction and Psychopathology Among Mandaean Refugees’ (2009) studied the impact of “globalization, mass conflict and large-scale population movements [which] pose unprecedented challenges to maintaining a sense of cultural identity in the modern world” (2009, p. 227). Although Mandaeans have been persecuted for nearly two thousand years, the article points out that the situation “of ethnic cleansing has forced many Mandaeans to flee Iraq, resulting in the displacement of the majority of the population to neighbouring and Western countries” (2009, p. 228). Following the Islamic Revolution in 1979 and the Iran – Iraq war (1980) persecution became more systematic and institutionalized. Further destabilisation during the Gulf Wars and the aftermath have led to a mass exodus of Mandaeans from both Iran and Iraq, their homelands for over 2000 years. For those who remain the situation continues to worsen. “Mandaeans have been systematically persecuted with repeated reports appearing that members are victim to murder, kidnapping, forced conversation, and forced circumcision” (2009, p. 228). As a consequence, there are renewed fears that this ancient religion will become extinct.

Although other authors have dealt with the de-stabilising atmosphere and weakening of political power in Iraq and heightened persecution in Iran, Nickerson et al, have approached this issue from a unique perspective, namely the mental health of Mandaean refugees in Australia. The diaspora to the West has created serious consequences for members of the Mandaean community. This study explores “the

deleterious effect of restrictive refugee policies on the mental health" of Mandaeans and the relationship between "past trauma, current resettlement difficulties, mental disorders such as depression and PTSD and fear of cultural extinction" (Nickerson et al, 2009, p. 228). Further, through their research the authors found that the danger of the extinction of Mandaean culture and religion was a real fear in the community. Nickerson et al found, in particular, that it would seem that there is a renewed awareness in the Mandaean community that since the Mandaean religion is not open to converts, the reality of persecution and genocide in the past is core to the experience of diaspora and resettlement. As will be seen below, the research for this thesis confirms this.

The authors conclude that the problems experienced in re-settlement and the risk of cultural extinction mean that governments need to provide services which recognise "the importance of cultural and religious values to the individual's identity and aid the person in both maintaining their cultural traditions on an individual level and coping with the possibility of cultural erosion" (2009, p. 234).

In their second article published in August 2009, Nickerson et al, in the *Journal of Psychiatric Research* explored the issue of 'The impact of fear for family on mental health in a resettled Iraqi refugee community, the Mandaeans'. In this article, one of a series of studies on the Mandaean community in Australia, the focus is on the vulnerability of this group "whose cultural identity is being put at risk as a consequence of the campaign of ethnic cleansing being waged against them" (2009, p. 229). The writers give a brief outline of the problems faced by the Mandaean community with some focus on the fact that, unlike many persecuted minority groups, the Mandaeans have had no safe support group outside of Iran and Iraq and the pacifism that is integral to their faith means it is difficult for them to defend themselves against aggression. Furthermore, the dispersal of such a small ethno-religious group across the Western world adds to the difficulty of forming communities as they resettle.

This study follows an earlier one, conducted by Steel et al, 2006, which focused on the mental health of asylum seekers and Mandaeans in particular. At the time of Nickerson's study (August 2009) most Mandaeans in Australia had gained permanent residency status, therefore the study sought to assess "the impact of fears for the safety of family remaining in Iraq on the psychological health and functioning of Mandaean refugees residing in Sydney Australia" (2009, p. 230). Focus groups were conducted in order to learn the main areas of concern within the Mandaean community. "Separation from family and fears for their safety in the

context of [the] ongoing threat in Iraq, emerged as a major theme" (Nickerson et al, 2009, p. 230). In the study, which used measures that had been applied in previous studies, the fears for family members were assessed and measured levels of concern that arose from dreams and feelings about the harm that might befall family and friends still in Iraq.

Participants were asked whether Mandaeans were the targets of genocide, about their level of concern for family safety in Iraq, and their fear for the survival of Mandaean culture and religion. The result of this study showed that 72 percent of participants believed that Mandaeans were threatened by genocide and 87 percent were concerned that the religion and culture of Mandaeans would cease to exist. "Nearly half the participants had been close to death and, had had a family member or friend murdered" (Nickerson et al, 2009, p. 233). About one fifth had been imprisoned, forced to fight in war or had their possessions destroyed (Nickerson et al, 2009, p. 233). The level of concern was higher for those with family still in Iraq. This study complemented the previous study (2009), which showed that the traumas experienced both individually and as a family are predictive of PTSD and to some extent depression.

Nickerson et al, claimed that this study published in August 2009 was "the first to examine the impact of fears for the safety of family on the mental health of resettled refugees" (2009, p. 233). The key findings of the research show a high level of the symptoms of depression, mental health disability and PTSD in those refugees with families still in Iraq. This research shows that "the contribution of fears about the safety of family to PTSD, depression and mental health disability went beyond the effects of past trauma and other domains of ongoing resettlement difficulties" (2009, p. 233). The researchers point out that earlier work on refugees has tended to ignore their fears for the future and implied that stresses facing refugees are derived mainly from past traumas and problems with resettlement. This research shows that fears for the future, especially for those family members remaining in dangerous situations, are a powerful influence on the mental health of migrants. It is evident that the influence of persecution goes far beyond settlement in a safe country. This study therefore proposes that it is important to consider the impact of concerns that traumatised people might have about their future (2009, p. 234).

The limitations of this study caused by the dispersal of the Mandaean community and the lack of genuine census information in Australia are noted. It is important to remember, as the article points out, that memories of trauma can be subject to the limitations of recall and bias. Even so, the findings from this study are significant for

service providers working with refugees and in particular with the Mandaean community. The researchers conclude “that the pervasive impact of fears for family on ongoing psychiatric symptoms and the capacity to adapt to the new environment be taken into consideration” (2009, p. 234).

‘Change in visa status amongst Mandaean refugees: Relationship to psychological symptoms and living difficulties’ (2011) is an article published by Nickerson et al, in *Psychiatry Research*. It focuses on policies of deterrence that have reflected “a trend internationally to limit the inflow of asylum seekers into developed countries by implementing restrictive immigration policies” (Nickerson et al, 2011, p. 267). The article suggests that such polices may heighten the distress of asylum seekers through greater uncertainty and fear, especially among groups like Mandaeans who have suffered persecution for generations. The introduction of temporary protection visas in Australia is seen by the authors to add to these problems with “only limited access to government services and benefits” (2011, p. 268). Earlier studies are referred to especially by Steel et al (2006), which “examined the psychological impact of temporary protection on refugees. [For that study] participants were drawn from the Mandaean community” (2011, p. 268).

This article continues the work begun by Nickerson et al, in (2009) and notes the significant impact on people’s lives when they “experienced a change in visa status from TPV[33] to permanent residency” (2011, p. 268).

> These findings support previous research suggesting that uncertainties and fears associated with temporary visa status (Steel et al, 2006), protracted asylum processes (Laban et al, 2004; Laban et al, 2008), and rejected visa applications (Silove et al, 2007) are linked to deleterious mental health outcomes (Nickerson et al, 2011, p. 271).

When Mandaeans were awarded permanent visas following a time on TPV’s, “participants exhibited decreases in psychiatric symptoms” (2011, p. 271). Thus “failure to understand the effects of adverse immigration policies may exacerbate the psychological effects of traumatic experiences, and compromise the ability of the individual to overcome resettlement challenges and function effectively” (2011, p. 273).

Rian and Hodge (2010) wrote an insightful article on the challenges of working with Mandaean refugees. ‘Developing cultural competency with Mandaean clients:

[33] Temporary Protection Visa.

Synchronizing practice with the Light World' is a case study that explores the situation of a vulnerable, displaced community, the Mandaeans. Reference to "Light World" indicates that the authors' have some understanding of Mandaean culture.

The practical implications of working with immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers with reference to the Mandaean community are then explored by Rian and Hodge. They assert that it is important to understand the unique nature of the community and as part of this process it is crucial to develop trust with community members. They suggest "caring for rather than curing people; listening emphatically and actively, third providing positive personal and community experiences that help participants deal with subsequent life stages; and fourth seeking to identify and build upon people's strengths and resources" (2010, p. 548). The authors then refer to the general literature on working with refugees and asylum seekers as part of the process of developing procedures for working with the Mandaean community.

They point out the fact that many Mandaeans have experienced "traumatic events and were at risk of ongoing post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and other mental health challenges" (2010, p. 548). Further the reader is reminded that Mandaean communities have a strong tradition of managing their own health and wellbeing in their own community and so it is suggested that "identifying and building upon these community resources can be a more effective means of facilitating health and wellness" than Western approaches (2010, p. 549). Resilience is seen as an important aspect of community strength and for Mandaeans, especially, is an aspect of their survival that is quite unique. Areas pointed out by the writers for particular concern are "orientation to local customs, medical care, education, food, language skills, employment and appropriate housing are often priorities" (2010, p. 549).

An example of the telling details of this article is the section dealing with the way in which Mandaeans respond to grief and the death of a family member. Mandaeans "may not weep after the death of a loved one as this is thought to negatively affect the journey of the departed soul to the light world" (2010, p. 549). The authors point out that such behaviour needs to be assessed in the light of the individual's own culture and that practitioners "might consider the use of culturally grounded models that seek to tap spiritual strength within Mandaean culture" (2010, p. 550). The article then addresses the problems that may be faced by families and youths due to the difference between Western secular culture and the strength of the religious nature of Mandaean culture. It is suggested that parents be given information about

such pressures in order to help adolescents adapt within the context of the family and community.

Finally, the importance of advocates for newly arrived settlers in any country such as the Mandaean community is addressed. Problems associated with language, prejudice and intolerance are highlighted as well as the impact of securing refugee status and the effect of prolonged stays in detention centres. A further important role for service providers is helping the community to become aware of local and national legislation relevant to them. For Mandaeans, the writers point out, international advocacy is critical because "the continued long term existence of the larger Mandaean community is tenuous. Due to the community's relatively small size, the persecution of its members is easily overlooked" (2010, p. 551). Importantly, they say that such advocacy can play an important part in ensuring the continued existence of Mandaeism "as a vibrant strand in the world's global cultural fabric" (2010, p. 551). Any advocacy must reflect the hopes and desires of the Mandaean community as well as collaborating with the priests, as community leaders, because doing so brings legitimacy to the work of professionals with the community. Such an approach makes the work of professionals legitimate with the community. Rian and Hodge (2010, p. 552) point out that an understanding of Mandaean culture makes them "better positioned to provide services to Mandaean clients and advocate on their behalf locally, nationally and internationally".

An article In *Religion Watch* (2013) entitled 'A future in the diaspora for Mandaeans?' refers to work by Eissler in the German monthly *Materialdienst der EZW*. He points out that the Mandaean diaspora has taken place after long years of pressure towards assimilation and conversion and suggest that these changes have "led both to tensions (even splits), due to a new assertiveness of lay people as well as a movement of renewal" (2013, p. 3). The article concludes that it is difficult to predict the future of the Mandaean religion in Western societies.

These recent studies of Mandaean communities that have become established outside of the Middle East (in diaspora) provide very helpful background material for considering the interviews with Australian Mandaeans later in this thesis. As noted, some of the above studies were conducted in Australia, and several include significant reference to the experience and impact of persecution.

Mandaean Perspectives

This Literature Review has included some critical discussion of particular points made by scholars, from the point of view of a practising Mandaean, for example, Buckley's views on female priests. However, it is appropriate and helpful to conclude the chapter with two more general points about the scholarly literature, 'from a Mandaean perspective'. Firstly, it is important to provide a general evaluation of the literature. Secondly some more needs to be said about the Mandaean traditions regarding some beliefs and practices.

There is much in the scholarly literature that Mandaeans need to acknowledge as forming the basis for a contemporary understanding of their religion. The scope of these studies is the first thing to be noted. Generally, Mandaean studies have focused on the origin of Mandaeism and Mandaean history (Kraeling, 1929; Rudolph, 1969, 1977, 1987; Gündüz, 1994; Yamauchi, 2004; Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley, 2002, 2005). On the other hand, scholars whose works have concentrated on the development of Mandaic scriptures and language include Naveh, (1970); Macúch, (1965, 1971); and Häberl, (2006). Macúch, "the foremost linguist in Mandaic studies", worked "closely with Mandaeans, mainly in terms of the language traditions, while trying to glimpse the religion's early history" (Buckley, 2005, p. 305). Häberl is a contemporary scholar also most concerned as a linguist with the survival of the language to ensure the survival of the culture.

In the last hundred years or so, a reasonable degree of consensus has emerged concerning the history, nature, language and texts of Mandaeism. However, as the Litriture Review showed, there are some contentious issues, such as the founding location of Mandaeism. Was it, for example, founded in the West or the East? Mandaean tradition believes it began in the Jordan Valley; but some scholars have argued for Mesopotamia. The date Mandaeism originated has also been the subject of major scholarly arguments. Some scholars have supported the traditional Mandaean view that it is pre-Christian, though few would view it as pre-Jewish. Many scholars are certain its true origins are much later. This issue connects with another major dispute among scholars, and on which Mandaeans have strong views, namely the relationship between Mandaean beliefs and practices and those of other religions in the region, particularly Judaism and Christianity.

Despite these particular disagreements the Literature Review shows a lot of general agreement among scholars about Mandaeism, especially its origins and place in the ancient world. Overall modern scholarship is potentially very helpful for

contemporary Mandaeans. This body of work recognises the Mandaean people and their beliefs as part of the wider community. Mandaeism is part of our shared religious history. Further it provides a base for new studies. Contemporary Mandaean scholarship, and a revival of language studies in Mandaic, may add to our understanding of this religion that is both ancient and modern.

Mandaean Traditions and Experience

As noted at several points in this thesis the bulk of the scholarly literature about Mandaeism considers it as an ancient religion, specifically a form of ancient Gnosticism. Such an approach can read like a re-construction, in which Mandaeism appears as an artefact. These studies often have an 'archaeological' feel. They often make no reference to the experience of Mandaean people, or to Mandaeism as a way of life that is developing and adapting to its environment as other living religions do. As Mandaeans have become more aware of Western scholarship they have become concerned about some interpretations and claims about their lived faith and sacred literature. The current study is an attempt to link past scholarship with the lived experience of Mandaeans today, especially in Australia.

This 'criticism' may be seen as a particular expression of a general point made by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* (1978, p. 22), which questions the view of the Near East developed by French, English and American scholars, artists and travellers over the past two hundred years. In particular, he challenges the Occidental construction of the Orient as the 'other,' describing it as a political ploy of the West or, more specifically, of Anglo-French interests in colonizing these countries. Said suggests that what the West historically has perceived is not the 'real' Orient but representations constructed through the eyes of the outsider, and that these representations are often "informed by 'strong' ideas, doctrines and trends ruling the [outsider's] culture" (1978, p. 22).

There are some exception to this criticism of the scholarly literature. In different ways the works of Lupieri, Arabestani and Häberl, for example, do refer to the traditions and experience of Mandaeans. These have been acknowledged above. There is also the literature on the welfare of present-day Mandaeans, in the Middle East and in diaspora communities. These latter studies do not, however, contribute much to the nature of Mandaeism as a religion. To some extent their focus is persecuted peoples, who happen to be Mandaeans. However, it is important to note that because of these studies, for the first time, Mandaean groups in exile, such as the Mandaean Human Rights Group (www.mandaeanunion.org/mhrg), have been

able to document and publish the impact of persecution and diaspora on the Mandaean community. These studies will also be important in situating and commenting on the Interviews integral to this thesis.

From a Mandaean perspective, there are several concerns with various aspects of the scholarly literature, that have been noted in the Literature Review above. The first is whether it is possible for non-practitioners to determine the 'esoteric' meaning of sacred texts. Another cause for concern is that for most scholars Mandaeism is explored at least to some extent through the prism of Judaism, Christianity or Islam. Lupieri, for example, admits that he relies in part on the works of Christian missionaries in Persia and Mesopotamia whose sources were often renegade Mandaeans (2002, pp. xiv, 118). Contemporary scholarship has also drawn heavily on earlier scholarly studies especially on the very influential, pioneering work of Drower. As Lupieri (2002, p. 124) points out, her lack of knowledge of textual criticism has created some limitations in the subsequent study of Mandaean literature by modern scholars.

While Drower relied on 'fieldwork' she herself raised questions around the knowledge and reliability of her Mandaean sources as well as her dependence on Arabic rather than Mandaic. As a Mandaean who has reflected on Drower's research, I question whether it was possible for her to see the world as Mandaeans do and wonder if she even attempted to do this. Did Drower mainly use her oral sources to confirm or revise her ideas about Mandaeism that she arrived at by using written sources? Buckley's discussion with '*sheikh S.Choheili'* about the existence in the past of Mandaean women priests raises a similar question (Buckley, 2000, p. 96).

There is very little published scholarship about Mandaeism by Mandaeans. Traditionally Mandaean priests spend their lives in scholarly study of the scared literature, the fruits of which they share with the Mandaean community rather than with academics. Historically it has been impossible for work to even be published in a Muslim dominated society. Further, the sensitivity with which Mandaean priests approach their studies takes into account the subtleties of interpretation and sharing what is sacred and secret and has been guarded initially from Judaism, and later Christianity and Islam. The boundary between openness and secrecy was revealed as a sensitive issue when Nasoraia, a Mandaean priest published for the first time a

translation and interpretation of DQRDK[34] (2005) an act condemned by Mandaean tradition as a breach of trust.[35]

Traditionally it has been crucial for Mandaeans that such secrets remain hidden from the uninitiated otherwise Mandaean tradition and the continuing work of preserving and protecting Mandaean sacred literature has been dishonoured. Much of the language used in the scrolls is written in what Drower describes in (*Alma Rišaia Raba,* ix) as ”haggadic”[36] in order to preserve secrecy. The researcher agrees at least that at times the language from an outsider's perspective appears to be in a code—that is, a religious code that is only understood by the initiate. The use of such symbolism within Mandaean literature means that the secret meaning of the text is more easily kept. This tradition is reflected in sacred texts themselves. For example:

> Then spake Hibil-Ziwa: “When my Lord of Majesty (Mara-d-Rabuta)[37] gave it (i.e., the scroll) to Šišlam the Great, he adjured him and administered these oaths to Šišlam-Raba. He (Šišlam) [in turn] swore in my father and gave it [the scroll] to him and my father swore me in and gave it [to me]. Then I took it and brought it down to the earth and set guardians in charge of it until world's end (Drower trans, Alma Rišaia Raba, p. 1).

Despite the criticism of it from the perspective of the tradition, Nasoraia's work does highlight the significant gap in both knowledge and understanding between Mandaean scholarship and Western academia. He outlines in detail the belief system, the theology of the Mandaean people (Nasoraia, 2005, pp. 13-16), which writers such as Arabestani claim does not exist. In addition, Nasoraia's translation shows in detail some of the problems of translation for non-Mandaeans. For the researcher, the resurgence of interest in Mandaic studies within the Mandaean community, especially in Australia, has the potential to lead to the emergence of a new era of scholarship by Mandaeans themselves. This is an indication of the change of status for Mandaeans in free democratic societies; the main focus is no

[34] *Diwan Qadaha Raba d-Dmuth Kušta* (DQRDK) the Scroll of the Great Creation of the Likeness (Image) of Truth.
[35] The Mandaean tradition condemns sharing Nasoraean secrets such as the DQRDK publicly as these secrets are reserved only for those who belong to the religious elite. Further, a number of priests have stressed that such texts are interpreted differently by each individual, according to their wisdom and knowledge and so does not necessarily represent the context in the manuscript. The researcher confirmed these views with priests and scholars interviewed for this thesis.
[36] The researcher understands Drower to be suggesting that these texts are instructional guides to the sacred texts rather than sacred texts themselves.
[37] The Lord of Greatness.

longer the survival of the religion in the face of terrible persecution but a re-awakening of the tradition of scholarship.

It is only since the recent diaspora of Mandaeans throughout the Western world that scholarship by Mandaeans themselves has begun to emerge as part of modern critical scholarship. Prior to the Islamic invasion in the seven century CE Mandaean scholarship was practiced and recognised openly. Since then constant persecution and pogroms meant that secrecy was vital to protect the identity of the community and the rich corpus of Mandaean literature.[38] Living in such a fearful environment meant that the Mandaic language was no longer taught openly and scholarship was limited. The secular Baathist Regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq enabled Mandaeans to begin the process of translating and publishing Mandaean literature into Arabic. This made it accessible to both Mandaeans and non-Mandaeans. In the same period, by contrast, the repressive regime in Iran meant that scholarly knowledge of Mandaean theology found in the literature was limited to a small number of priests. As a consequence of the diaspora to the Western world, greater freedoms are enjoyed by Mandaeans, Mandaean scholarship has begun to enter the world of Western critical scholarship and is once again giving a voice to the Mandaean people. Good examples of this are *The Story of Creation in the Mandaean Holy Book the Ginza Raba* (2013) by Sabah Al-dihisi; and *Christian and Mandaean Perspectives on Baptism* (2004) by Hathem Saed.

The different perspectives of traditional Western scholarship and of the scholarship of practising Mandaeans can lead to apparent conflicts of interpretation. The strongest example of this is found in the interpretation of sacred Mandaean texts, a matter of concern to the contemporary Mandaean community. A particular problem for Western scholars concerns the authorship of the texts. Although Mandaean literature always lists the names of the scribes, copyists and editors, none of them record the original author. This is because for Mandaeans “there are no earthly authors for the Mandaean scriptures” (Nasoraia, 2005, p. 80). The most famous and earliest known copyist/scribe is Zazai d-Gawazta, Son of Hawa, who “appears as the earliest (earthly) copyist scribe of the following Mandaean works: many parts of

[38] This is the point of view commonly held in the Mandaean community and expressed by interviewees in this thesis.

CP[39], ATŠ[40], ARR[41], ARZ[42], DM'L[43] and DMHZ[44]" (Nasoraia, 2005, p. 80). His role in "teaching, collecting, organizing, rewriting and copying most of the Mandaean scriptures" was so significant that Mandaeans today revere him as lower in rank only to the "Great Fathers" such as Adam or John the Baptist (2005, p. 94).

> "Zazai dealt with and appreciated certain mystical writings and traditions preserved in the Mandaic language. The main focus of Zazai's work appears to have been to reinstate the remnants of Mandaean and Nasoraean texts which had been preserved from ancient times, inherited before the Christian era" (2005, pp. 90-91).

Scholars such as Drower, however, sometimes assumed that Zazai was the actual author of documents such as DQRDK.[45] Drower even claimed that Mandaeism "has no theory of divinely inspired scripture"; its "immutable and sacrosanct elements" are its rituals (Drower, 1953, p. XI). From a Mandaean perspective this is seriously mistaken. Mandaeans believe their scriptures to be revealed by God. Nasoraia, for example, refers to Mandaeism's Great Fathers as "preservers or keepers of the Divine Word of Haii (God)" (Nasoraia, 2005, p. 94).

According to Nasoraia, and "contrary to popular belief," the origin of this contention, "probably means that the copyist (Zazai) had only one source, or that he was using a copy (probably fragments) which belonged to an unknown writer/copyist, maybe from the secret circles of his Nasoraean initiators and teachers (a practice which is part of the priestly – Nasoraean school to the present day)" (2005, p. 92).

Another conflict concerns the traditional Mandaean understanding of at least some sacred texts as reliable records of the origins, history and development of the Mandaean religion and people. In the modern study of religion, 'myths' are not considered false but ways of helping people understand and give meaning to their experience. For Mandaeans, however, the myths of creation and the flood, for example, have historical significance to this day, but they also inform their belief and practice. In the *Canonical Prayerbook of the Mandaeans - The Book of Souls*, the Immersion Ritual liturgy links belief and practice:

> In the name of the Life and in the name of Knowledge-of-Life (Manda-d-Hiia) and in the name of that Primal Being who was

[39] The Canonical Prayerbook of the Mandaeans.
[40] *Alf Trisar Šuialia*, The Thousand and Twelve Questions.
[41] *Alma RiŠaia Raba*, The great First world.
[42] *Alma RiŠaia Zuta*, The lesser First world.
[43] *Diwan Malkuta Laita*, The scroll of Exalted Kingship.
[44] *Diwan Musvta d-Hibil Ziwa*, the Immersion of Hibil Ziwa.
[45] *Diwan Qadaha Raba d-Dmuth Kušta* (DQRDK) the Scroll of the Great Creation of the Likeness (Image) of Truth.

> Eldest and preceded water, radiance, light and glory, the Being who cried with His voice and uttered words. By means of His voice and His words Vines grew and came into being, and the First Life was established in its Abode.

For contemporary Mandaeans their literature continues to be an inspiration. For example, the *Harān Gawaita*, which describes the ancient migration of Mandaeans from Palestine to Mesopotamia, is used as an inspiration for followers today when forced to migrate. As Smart acknowledges, however, although historians sometimes question the historical accuracy of religious myths, "this is secondary to the meaning and function of the myth", because "to the believer these narratives are often historical" (Smart, 1989, p. 16).

With greater access to academic study Mandaean scholars will have the freedom to establish or indeed re-establish their own hermeneutics of Mandaean sacred texts. Although until recently most Mandaean scholars have been priests, an increasingly educated laity will also be able to address issues raised by study of the Mandaean scriptures. The work of al-Dahisi (2013) and indeed this thesis are signs of this. Scholarship will be enhanced by the broader understanding which comes from hermeneutics where "the road to meaning is interpretation, which…is dialectic between explanation and understanding" (Schneiders, 1999, p. 17). Such study should enable Mandaean scholars to develop an "epistemological inquiry…concerned with what we can know (the object, range, and limitations of human knowledge), how we come to know (the processes such as sensation and reasoning by which we arrive at knowledge), and the criteria of true knowledge" (Schneiders, 1999, p. 18). As with the systematic study of other texts, this will assist the process of interpretation of the sacred, esoteric Mandaean texts.

It must be understood that for Mandaeans the sacredness of the literature and its interpretation is central to their very identity and existence. In comparing studies of Mandaeism by Western scholars and those by Mandaeans it should therefore be remembered that "those who peruse information and those seeking transformation [enlightenment] are concerned with the meaning of the texts, but…that does not denote precisely the same thing in both cases" (Schneiders, 1999, p. 14). In the analysis of the interviews conducted for this study this difference is clarified when the participants discuss the experience of enlightenment, especially through Musbeta. Additionally, the nature of Mandaeism will mean that there will continue to be some 'secret' knowledge held only by priests. It needs also to be remembered that as part of the historical effort to protect and preserve Mandaean belief and practice in the face of persecution some other material has been held by priests

alone. In the context of the diaspora where freedom prevails, it is conceivable that more knowledge will be shared both with the laity and even non-Mandaeans. At the same time the gnostic nature of Mandaeism implies a certain level of secret knowledge. This is not entirely unique to Mandaeism. Consider Australian Aboriginal communities, although not "gnostic", they seem to have a somewhat similar notion of 'secret and sacred' knowledge (Christie, 2001).

Some of the terms used by scholars to describe Mandaean belief and practice are problematic for practising Mandaeans. One of these is "magic". This term is still widely understood in the general community in the sense of superstition. It can suggest that mere words or actions themselves bring changes about. It is not always acknowledged by scholars that for believing Mandaeans a prayer or amulet connects the believer with Hayi who brings the change about. Such a prayer might be compared to those that Catholic Christians offer at the shrine at Lourdes; there it is God who is asked to heal the sick. Even if one is not a believer, there is a difference between the nature of belief in prayer and 'magic' (Martos, 2009, pp. 94-96). Perhaps what scholarship fails to recognise in such cases is the complex social dynamic involved, including the belief by practitioners that their involvement in certain ritual practices can change them. For Mandaeans this occurs not through the mysterious power of objects, but the actions of Hayi in their lives (compare Martos, 2009, pp. 94-96).

In Mandaean texts the rituals and ceremonies of the religion are generally

> considered the most ancient and important part in the Mandaean religion. In Mandaeism they have been practiced in the same manner, without any significant changes from the earliest times in Mesopotamia. This means that the traditional system of these rituals as found in the Qalasta may already have existed in conjunction with the liturgical texts and many priestly esoteric commentaries some few centuries before the arrival of Mandaeans in Mesopotamia (Nasoraia, 2005, p. 116).

It is worth acknowledging (again) that studies and observations of Mandaean rituals formed an important part of Drower's work. She details the central rite of Mandaeans, Immersion in water and emphasises water as a symbol of life which enables the person to move towards a new beginning or enlightenment. She describes each step of the ritual and uses photos to enrich her work. Rudolph too (1978) explores the ritual in a similar fashion while Buckley (2002) refers to the ritual in Mandaean terms as Musbeta and sees its connection to Mandaean cosmology. She also highlights the repeated nature of Musbeta and the importance of running

water, or Yardana,[46] for this ritual. Franzmann (1989) takes Buckley's study of the *Mandaean Tabahata Masiqta* (1981) as a starting point. She explores it in detail and points out the link between the mythology and the earthly liturgy as found in some of the instructions to the priests during the ritual. For instance, CP-(9)[47] refers to 'the great baptism of Light', a concept reiterated in the image of 'garment of radiance'. For Mandaeans this shows the link between the World of Light, living water and the ritual of Immersion. Prayers and rituals like this provide Mandaeans, as a gnostic people, with the very strong sense of the presence of Hayi in their daily lives. Saed (2004, 330), in his article 'Christian and Mandaean Perspectives on Baptism', makes a similar connection.

The Living Waters originate from the Worlds of Light and are sent to the Mia Siauia (black waters) of the earthly world by the command of Hiia (the Life/Living One), through Manda d-Hiia the (Knowledge of Life), to spread radiance and give Nišmata the (soul), healing and redemption through the great Living Baptism (Musbeta Haita).

This connection with Hayi is also made in the daily ablution and prayers:

> *AnA Milwa**š**a EsVina EbMusbeta Ed Bihram Raba Bar Rurbee Musbetee TeNatree O Tesaq AlRish Eshma Ed Hayi O Eshma Ed Manda Ed Hayi Medkhar Aley* (Verse Eleven of the Mandaean Rishama, daily ablution).
>
> I (Spiritual name) am immersed as Behram Raba's (Great Yardana's) Musbeta. My Musbeta is to protect, purify and elevate my spirit to the World of Light.

To a Mandaean it appears that some scholarly works may be influenced by the religious perspective of the author. In the Literature Review above, for example, the use of Christian terminology and the belief that Mandaeism lacks a theology were noted as reflecting a non-Mandaean perspective.

The final substantial issue in modern scholarship to be considered from a Mandaean perspective concerns whether Mandaeism was influenced by, or even originated in, another religion (such as Judaism). Much has already been written in reviewing the work of Rudolph, Drower, Gündüz, Yamauchi and others. Clearly Mandaeans are concerned by claims that their religion is a development of another (rival) religion. The researcher believes that such strong claims have not been conclusively demonstrated by scholars. A much more commonly held view is that different

[46] Jordan, Running water
[47] Canonical Prayer book

religions that existed around the same time and in the same regions naturally exchanged ideas and practices in the course of their development. This view is far less troubling to practising Mandaeans.

It can also be noted here that some recent scholarship suggests that the exchange of ideas included Mandaeism influencing other religions. The contemporary Muslim writer Rafat Amari argues in his study of *Islam in the Light of History,* that Mandaeism influenced Mohammed and the development of Islam.

> The close relationship between the Ahnaf and the Sabians, who were Mandaeans reveals how Mohammed incorporated many myths and rituals into the Quran…The Islamic prayers, their movements, and the ablution before each prayer were known originally as Mandaean rites (2004, p. 11).

It can be noted that the term Ahnaf, like Hunafa, is derived from the Arabic root *ḥ-n-f* meaning "to incline, to decline" Lane (1893), from the Syriac root of the same meaning and refers to Jews (see section on Gündüz above). According to Amari (2004), the Muslims adapted prayers, habits, movements and ablution from Mandaeans.

Caution needs to be exercised in this case, however, because Amari also misrepresents and misunderstands Mandaeism. He maintains, for example, that it was "a pagan Gnostic sect which worshipped a complex of polytheistic deities of Persian origin under influence of Mesopotamian polytheism" (2004, p. 11). He also claims that within the Gnostic writings of the Mandaeans Adam appears, as "one of their deities" and that "in the Mandaean sacred scriptures, John the Baptist is a deified mythological figure, elevated over many of their gods" (2004, p. 354). The falsity of such views has already been noted. So too the fact that they are used to justify the persecution of contemporary Mandaeans. Such poor scholarship suggests Amari's views on other matters should be evaluated with care.

This overview of the 'literature review', reminds us all that 'history' is written by the winners and consequently their culture, literature, worldview and way of life determine the received accounts of those peoples who have barely survived to the present day. This is true even when history is accurately recorded. The Mandaeans, as a pacifist people, have been subject to constant persecution and dislocation, and to date their account of themselves has not been acknowledged. It is possible that the current situation of the exodus of Mandaeans from their traditional homelands in the Middle East to Western democracies, especially Australia, will empower more Mandaean scholars to research and share Mandaean history, religion and literature.

They would then exert a greater influence on future study of Mandaeism, to the benefit of all. The thesis addresses this shortcoming by engaging in direct consultation with Mandaean people in Australia today. But before these findings are presented, it will be helpful to outline an account of Mandaeism today. This would not be possible without the body of scholarship on Mandaeism reviewed above.

Chapter Three: Mandaeism Today

The account of Mandaeism today in this chapter is based on modern scholarship on the religion (including critical evaluations of it) and on the research and fieldwork undertaken by the researcher for this thesis. The methodology employed in the fieldwork is detailed in the next chapter; though as noted, it is focussed on the experience of members of the growing Mandaean community in Australia.

It begins with an overview of the history of Mandaeism leading up to the emergence of diaspora communities, which the researcher maintains are reviving Mandaeism in the world today. This is followed by several sections that present two key characteristics of Mandaeism, in the light of modern scholarship and the experience of Mandaeans today, namely its form of Gnosticism and its multi-dimensional character. The chapter concludes with an account of dimensions of Mandaean life that are important for Mandaeans today, which maintain the traditions of this ancient religion.

Mandaean Revival

About 2000 years ago, according to Mandaean literature and tradition, persecution by Jewish governors was so severe that it led to the mass migration of this people (Macúch, 1973, p. 258, cited in Buckley 2002, 3). This interpretation of Mandaean history is supported by scholars such as Lidzbarski who stated that:

> Mandaeans were originally situated in Transjordan. Hence their original homeland was Syria-Palestine…Moreover Lidzbarski located their migration to the East in the first Christian century. He remarked that this migration took place even before the destruction of the Jewish kingdom, i.e. before 70 A.D[48] (Gündüz, 1994, p. 7).

"Lidzbarski's theory was adopted by many scholars, such as C.H. Krealing, R. Macúch and K. Rudolph" (Gündüz, 1994, p. 7). Prior to their exodus from Palestine, Yaḥiā Yuhana (John the Baptist), an important teacher for Mandaeans, led a revival of Mandaeism, which was needed due to the severity of earlier persecution. Yaḥiā Yuhana condemned the behaviour of the Jews, which gives some support to the

[48] Lupieri, a Christian apologist objects to the date of Mandaean persecution by Jews. But as noted here and earlier, this is supported by various scholars and is in fact the date found in Mandaean texts and tradition. As noted at various points in the thesis, however, the origins of the Mandaean people continues to be debated by scholars.

belief that he was not a Jew but a Mandaean. According to Mandaean belief Jesus was originally a Mandaean, a Nasoraean, a skilled person in the religion. However, under the leadership of the followers of Jesus and some Nasoreans, eventually two groups evolved, one following John and the orthodox Mandaean religion and the other Jesus' preaching.

The Mandaeans escaped to Harān in the Persian Empire under the Emperor of Persia, Ardavan (III) in the Arsacid dynasty of Parthia who ruled from 12-38 CE (Gündüz, 1994, p. 66). This date puts the departure of the Mandaeans from Palestine to Harān early in the first century CE. According to Gündüz "R. Macúch and Lady Drower favour identifying King Ardavan in Harān Gawaita with Artabanus III" (1994, p. 66). This offers further support for the early exodus of the Mandaeans to Harān. Once again Mandaeans migrated due to persecution from the city of Harān and to Mesopotamia.

After enjoying positions of authority in the city of Baghdad during the era of the Parthian dynasty (Arsacid), the Mandaeans were stripped of their power by the new Iranian dynasty, the Sassanid (224 to 651 CE). From that time onwards and especially after the introduction of the religion of Islam they have faced constant persecution for more than 1500 years.

Despite this persecution, the Mandaean community has survived and supported a rich culture. For example, significant intellectual contributions to learning were made by a number of Mandaean scientists, particularly in the Abbasid period of the 8th - 13th century. Perhaps the most famous of these was Ibrahim bin Sinan from Harān, a famous engineer. Others included Albutani a mathematician and astronomer; Abu Ishak Al-sabi, Minister of letters; and Thabit bin Qura (Al-Sābbi - Thābit ibn Qurah al-Harāni), a philosopher and mathematician who successfully translated the bulk of Greek mathematical and astronomical works. Their work was known as far away as Europe (Meisami & Starkey, 1998, pp. 671-673). An outstanding example in the 20th century was the distinguished physicist Abdul Jabar Abdullah (http://www.ajabdullah.com/). To this day Mandaeans are proud of these achievements, even though they are still sometimes credited to Muslims or 'pagans'.

Mandaean suffering in massacres and attempts at genocide has already been documented in this thesis, most notably, that associated with Šuštar in the nineteenth century. It has also been previously suggested that the Mandaean belief in pacifism and rejection of the shedding of blood has led at times to a seeming

submissiveness making the victimization of the Mandaean people easy. The memory of these is still alive in Mandaean consciousness.

In 1979 the Iranian revolution led to a more fundamentalist approach to Islam that in turn led to a renewal of persecution of the Mandaean people. Their suffering worsened during the Iran-Iraq war in 1980-88 and later the Gulf war in 1991 and invasion of Iraq in 2003. These led to another exodus of the Mandaean community during the latter part of the twentieth century and beyond. The international community acknowledged this. For example, in the United States the *Responsibility to Iraqi Refugees Act of 2007* was proposed by politicians and supported by Mandaean Crisis International and prominent intellectuals, such as Noam Chomsky (Kelly Manuel, June 15, 2007). It should also be noted here that the Literature Review of this thesis included a number of recent diaspora studies that investigate recent persecution of Mandaeans in the Middle East.

Mandaeism in Australia

As in other parts of the world, a Mandaean community has developed in Australia, specifically since the 1980s in South Western Sydney in the Liverpool area. Individual families settled in the area and came to see the need for leadership of the community and so in 1996 Riš ama Sam arrived in Sydney. As the community grew a Constitution was adopted and approved by the Australian Mandaean Community. Riš ama Sam was accepted as the religious leader. This process was carried out by the Australian Electoral Commission in a voting process conducted on the 16th of December 2007. The Mandaean Synod was set up as required by the Constitution. According to Riš ama Sam, when interviewed on 9th of May 2015, the community has grown to about 10,000 largely due to the impact of war and persecution in the Middle East.

Although traditionally Mandaeans were silver and goldsmiths, boat builders and carpenters, today Mandaeans in Australia are often well educated and trained in professional fields such as engineering, computer programming, medicine and education. Despite their history of persecution with the spread of Mandaeans into the Western world there has been some reinvigoration of religious education and cultural traditions. In Australia for instance a ‘Mandi’ has been built in Liverpool, New South Wales, in order to give the people a permanent structure to use for religious observances, education and social activities. Language classes are also being offered to broaden access to the unique language of Mandaic. The construction of a new Mandi was necessary in order to provide a safe meeting place for the

community. Land has been donated by members of the community near the Nepean River where a traditional Mandi with a canal of running water from the River is being constructed and will be used for ritual purposes. These developments within the Australian Mandaean community should help to build an environment conducive to the continuation and development of the long history of Mandaeans' unique culture, faith and tradition.

Today Mandaean migrants live mostly in democratic, multicultural secular societies, such as the United States, Sweden and the Netherlands, as well as Australia. The identity of the Mandaean people is thus challenged in a new way. There is the danger of complete assimilation for Mandaeans that could result in cultural and religious extinction. On the other hand, living in a more open society with virtually no religious persecution or social discrimination has created opportunities for Mandaeans to re-establish and reassert their religion. The setting up of their own associations and meeting places follows the example of many other ethnic groups such as Coptic Christians.

Other challenges confront the distinctive Mandaean culture. Mandaean culture is based on a spirituality that sees its roots going back to the beginning of creation. Such beliefs are challenged by the very nature of modern life and mainstream education. Maintaining them will require careful leadership within the community in order to build up a strong sense of ownership and belonging, especially by young people.

Secular multicultural Australian society stands in stark contrast to life

> in the homeland [where] 'the religious' and 'the social' were unified and inseparable. The constant threat of ethnocide and the priority of identity protection had confined the Mandaeans within their petrified religious rituals as the main reference of their identity (Arabestani, 2004, pp. 250-251).

A consequence of living for so long under constant threat is the sense of an unchanging religion. This has been central to the very identity of Mandaeans. Gradually groups like the Mandaean Synod of Australia are developing policies and practices to strengthen the people's sense of ethnic identity in the very different and fluid environment of Australia.

The experience of having no civil rights or legal power created enormous challenges for the Mandaean communities in the Middle East. They responded by assimilating outwardly in such things as dress and behaviour to protect their identity while

maintaining their commitment to their faith. Such assimilation is not necessarily required in a free and open society, which observes religious toleration. Despite this, as refugees, Mandaeans have had to struggle for recognition in Australia and even "encountered difficulty obtaining refugee status" (Pell, 2006 cited in Rian & Hodge, 2010, p. 543). Such long lasting and deep-seated ordeals must impact on the lives and aspirations of this peace-loving, spiritual people.

Another challenge that living in diaspora has created for the Mandaean community in Australia is the loss of the sense of permanence and security found in a tightly knit community, which had developed over millennia. Nevertheless, the way in which Mandaeans have adapted to their new environment can be seen in the actions taken to establish a Mandi and to negotiate with local government for the use of the Nepean River for the regular practice of Musbeta. This is an example of the resilience of the Mandaean people. The construction of the new more traditional Mandi on the banks of the Nepean River means that the community will have "a safe space in which community members can exercise their cultural practices" (Rian & Hodge, 2010, p. 544). This new Mandi will include a short canal so that water can flow directly from the Nepean in order to provide a safe and private environment for the practice of Musbeta. The building itself will be a permanent structure but continue to serve the traditional purpose of a Mandi. The development of such security in a relatively short time is an indication of the strength of leadership within the community.

Australian Mandaeans are creating a new chapter in the history of this ancient ethnic and religious group. The experience of this vibrant community is cited here as an example of other Mandaean communities around the world as they struggle to come to terms with life in Western democracies, but gradually revitalize Mandaeism as a way of life.

Mandaean Gnosticism

A good deal about the nature of Mandaeism was revealed in the Literature Review, however, as has been suggested already, by emphasising its historical origins most scholarly accounts are not concerned with presenting it as a living religion. Since this is one of the major aims of the thesis, it is important to note what Mandaeans themselves regard as most important about their faith. What follows is presented in two main sections: one considering Mandaeism as a Gnostic religion, and a second that outlines the various dimensions of Mandaeism as a living Gnostic faith.

Although most modern scholars of Mandaeism recognise the religion as a form of Gnosticism, they do not generally consider what this means for Mandaeans today. Yet it is arguable that understanding its Gnostic character is key to appreciating how Mandaeism is practiced. What follows draws on available scholarship, as well as the 'knowledge' of a practising Mandaean, to address this 'gap' in the literature.

Gnosticism refers to a diverse range of religious movements, generally appearing in late antiquity. Although they cover a wide range of beliefs they are usually united in an understanding that human beings come from a divine source and are trapped in a material world. Mandaeism, the only surviving ancient gnostic religion, derives its name from the term Manda d-Hayi which means 'knowledge of life'. As Nasoraia (2005, p. 7) explains:

> Mandaean (i.e. Mandaia adj. From Manda: 'knowledge') means holder of 'knowledge' or 'Knower' or 'enlightened one'. Mandaeans understand Manda as a deep spiritual truth, experienced directly and internally and viewed as a divine knowledge sought since the earliest human existence. Thus Mandaeans are Gnostics. That is to say, they believe in spiritual knowledge/enlightenment in the tradition of Gnosticism, which flourished during the later Classical, pre-Christian period, and played an important role in the first centuries after Christ.

Other modern scholars also understand this much:

> The rich traditions of the Mandaeans provide us with an opportunity for the study of Gnosticism in a specific oriental form, which still exists to-day, and for obtaining a clear impression of the inner life of a gnostic community (Rudolph, 1978, p. 16).

From the perspective of a practitioner, Mandaeism is a revealed religion with a divinely inspired code of laws and traditions. It is on this foundation that Mandaeans have developed a definitive body of knowledge from which they have evolved a unique set of beliefs to explain nature and the universe. The most central of all is belief in one God, Hayi.

As a gnostic religion "the Mandaeans believe in two universes: (i) An intangible universe which is beyond our perception, and consists of two worlds: the World of Light and the World of Darkness. (ii) The world of *mšuni kušta* and the tangible world of Tibil (earth)" (Al-Dihisi, 2013, p. 23). Death is seen as a passage from this life on 'earth' to 'the world of light'. The Nišmata (soul) must pass through seven purgatories to reach the World of Light. Because of this, scholars like Kurt Rudolph consider this religion as "a completely independent Gnostic tradition, although one which also belongs to oriental and Semitic culture...preserved by the communities of

the Mandaeans" (Rudolph, 1987, p. 30). Mandaeans describe themselves as the earthly 'sons of light', the descendants of 'Utras (heavenly) sons of light' and the 'great life'. In Mandaean scriptures practicing, faithful Mandaeans are called Bhiria Zidqa Bnia Nhura, the Chosen Elect Beings Sons of Light (Ginza II, pp. 35-45).

As a monotheistic religion the Mandaean religion stresses the primacy of Mana Raba, (the Great Mind) or Hayi (God) who is seen to be the source of all things. The soul (Nišmata) has the possibility of union with God and this union contains the possibility of enlightenment and immortality. The spirit (Ruha) and the human body contain the seeds of weakness, sinfulness and evil. The union of Mana Raba and Nišmata can lead to an awareness of reality beyond ordinary human consciousness.

The Gnostic character of Mandaeism lies in the mystical and esoteric nature of its sacred texts. In his thesis on the scroll DQRDK, Nasoraia (2005, p. 73) deals with the mystical features of Mandaeism as revealed in the scroll. According to Nasoraia (2005, p. 73):

> We must be sensitive to the inherent mysticism and the secret meanings that go beyond the literal meaning of the words. For example Gabra does not only mean 'Man', but also refers to different kinds of cosmic beings in various worlds. It becomes a title for many Cosmic Beings.

He provides a number of other examples.

> A central one refers to Hiia "with words like Hiia (The Great Living One/The Great Life) or Hiia Raba Nokraiia (The Sublime Great Living One/The Sublime Great Life), 'a royal plural is used to indicate...divine attributes" (Nasoraia, 2005, p. 76).

Such a range of titles for the one God can be confusing for non-Mandaeans. Meanwhile, other gnostic concepts also have more than one meaning.[49] Drower (1950) refers to this problem in the preface to her translation of the scroll of *Šarh d Qabin d Šišlam Raba*. She points out the difficulty of working

> with the language of mysticism. Arbitrary meanings are attached to simple words in an effort to convey the mystical and divine. Nukraiia, for instance, means more than 'strange' in the plural, it means that which is not of this world, something beyond human understanding, remote, sublime, transcendent (Drower, 1950, pp. 3ff).

[49] Scholarly discussion of Mandaean monotheism continues to this day.

It is evident from the work of Nasoraia that a clear understanding of the Gnostic elements of the Mandaean religion requires a detailed understanding of Mandaic, and the wisdom passed on by priestly teachers.

The duality of existence is at the heart of Gnosticism and, according to Mandaean teaching, "both positive and negative attributes are present in the earthly mind, because of the influence of evil which devitalizes material forces" (Nasoraia, 2005, p. 11). At the same time "the mind consists of positive attributes like insight, compassion and tolerance. These positive characteristics are ascribed usually to the secret effective power of Nišmata, the 'soul'" (Nasoraia, 2005, p. 11). Ruha represents the world of darkness with negative influences often caused by the effect of the Zodiac and the planets. To eliminate evil thoughts, Mandaeans teach prayer to awaken positive aspects of life and eliminate negativity. Rituals, especially the Immersion Rite, are used to reduce the impact of evil or negative energies in order to enhance the positive and good aspects of human life. Philanthropy or Alms-giving is also central to the life of Mandaeans as a sign of goodness, compassion and care for one another. Few if any scholarly works not written by Mandaeans comment on the Gnostic character of Mandaeism in such experiential terms.

In these ways Mandaeans set out to heal themselves so that they can connect with God, Mana Raba, (the Great Mind), Hiia Raba, (the Great Life), Almia d-Nhura, (the Worlds of Light). It is through the internalization of such teachings that Mandaeans believe they will be able to throw off the evils that can beset human life and enable them to "be empowered to transform themselves by replacing the mystery of the average human being's condition with a clarified and purified mind, heart, soul and spirit" (Nasoraia, 2005, p. 12). Such transformation can give the individual peace, as well as filling them with knowledge and understanding. For this reason, Mandaeans are encouraged to practice prayer daily, give alms regularly and undertake frequent Immersion in running water.

Individual prayers lead Mandaeans to seek the guidance of God. For example:

> In the name of the Great Living One.
> May my thoughts, my knowledge and my understanding
> Enlighten me, Adam-Yuhana son of Mahnus,
> By means of these Responses and Homilies -
> For Baptism and the Masiqta. (CP, No78, p. 88).

Those who become more enlightened are known as Nasoraeans, those who "find their own way towards the 'Ziua' Radiance of 'Nhura' the clear light of 'Kušta' truth because they already see this light of truth from within" (Nasoraia, 2005, p. 12). This

search for Kušta (truth) and Manda (knowledge) and having a path to find them, is a central aspect of Mandaean Gnosticism and gives a clue to the 'optimism' which Buckley sees as central to the survival of the Mandaean people and their religion (Buckley, cited in Horsley, 2005).

According to Rudolph (1987, p. 172) Gnostic teaching about "the path of the soul to the kingdom of light" after death is assisted by the rituals and prayers of faithful Mandaeans ...who "as the Mandaeans say, 'establish the path'". However, such a passage to the World of Light is impeded by the powers of evil in the world and so the Mandaean "must not rely only on the saving nature of 'knowledge' and the 'natural' redemption process but on palpable elements, like protective and distinguishing signs and symbols ('seals'), magical sayings and death ceremonies" (Rudolph, 1987, p. 172). As noted above in 'Mandaean Perspective', the term 'magical' is problematic for Mandaeans; it could be replaced by 'sacred' or 'ritual'.

Kurt Rudolph has written insightfully about the 'gnosis' that gives the religion its name. This can be seen as "a knowledge of divine secrets which are reserved for the elect", those who have the ability to receive such secrets. Thus this religion has an esoteric character (Rudolph, 1987, p. 56). Rudolph clearly outlines how gnosis is understood in Mandaeism.

> This knowledge freely bestowed can extend from the basic insight into the divine nature of man, his origin and his destiny. The intellectual knowledge of the teaching which is offered as revealed wisdom has here a direct religious significance since it is at the same time understood as other worldly and is the basis for the process of redemption (Rudolph, 1987, pp. 55-56).

Rudolph claims that gnosis is "in the first place a historical category, intended to comprehend a particular form of world-view in late antiquity" (Rudolph, 1987, p. 57). For Mandaeans "the content of this knowledge or understanding is primarily religious, in so far as it circles around the background of man, the world and God, but also because it rests not upon one's own investigation but on heavenly mediation" (Rudolph, 1987, p. 55). It is "the central myth...the idea of the presence in men of a divine 'spark'...which has proceeded from the divine world and fallen into this world of destiny, birth and death and which must be reawakened through its own divine counterpart in order to be finally restored" (Rudolph, 1987, p. 57).

This concept of the divine coming from the upper world to the human in the lower world is an expression of Gnosticism's dualistic view of the world. This is particularly true for Mandaeans and means that Mandaean thinking has a strong cosmological

focus. In Mandaean Gnosticism, there is a World of Light on one side and the world of darkness on the other. At the apex of the World of Light there is Supreme Being called Hayi, Great Life, the Lord of Greatness, Mighty Mana or King of Light. Around him there are many Light beings called Uthras (Angels/riches) and Malkia (Kings). In line with a gnostic understanding, Mandaeans understand the Supreme Being as an "unknown God (Hayi) beyond all that is visible or sensible and incorporates fullness (pleroma) of angels and other heavenly beings". This means that Hayi (God) is distant from human beings who require mediation through Uthras (Angels/riches) (Rudolph, 1987, p. 58).

For Mandaeans there is no escape from the dualism of darkness and light, ignorance and knowledge "unless the liberating act of the transcendent [Hayi] God and his [Uthras] helpers opens up a way on which man (strictly only a small part of man, namely the divine spark) can escape" (Rudolph, 1987, p. 58). This is the heart of Mandaean Gnostic teaching of redemption or soteriology. This teaching is central to Mandaeism because it relates to the living situation of the community. The Mandaean belief in eschatology, their belief in the last things, is closely related to the Mandaean cosmological understanding of creation and the possibility of redemption for the faithful. For practicing Mandaeans a gnostic dualistic cosmology can be seen as a tool for understanding and working within the universe, for aligning one's beliefs and practices with this, passed down through the ages.

Such understanding provides Mandaeans with an emphasis on religious life and a moral attitude based on what is believed to be good and evil interwoven with the whole concept of what is of the spirit and of the body. Implicit in this, is a sense of the intrinsically evil nature of the material world.

Both Rudolph (1987, pp. 357-358) and Drower (1937) have detailed the main features of Mandaean teaching about dualism, especially about the dualism of darkness and light. Rudolph also describes the specific soteriology and eschatology of the Mandaean religion (Rudolph, 1987, p. 359). In the Mandaean understanding "the deliverance of the soul from the perishable body and the transitory world is the centre of Mandaean soteriology" (Rudolph, 1987, p. 359). Since the material world is basically evil then "death is the 'day of deliverance'" (Rudolph, 1987, p. 359).

According to this eschatology "the soul leaves the body and begins a long and dangerous journey leading through seven or eight supernatural 'places of detention'", which are "considered all together evil and hostile to the soul" (Rudolph, 1987, p. 359). The final redemption only comes after overcoming such dangers and

"the good soul...attains the realm of light" (Rudolph, 1987, p. 359). Eventually the soul with 'helpers' or 'companions' obtains "as tokens of victory, robe and wreath to unite with its heavenly counterpart which is primarily 'Life' itself" (Rudolph, 1987, p. 359). This eschatology which refers to the individual also has a counterpart in a "more general eschatological notion, the 'great day of the end' or 'judgement' when the final decision is made on the souls which...should fall into 'the blazing fire' or the Sea of Suf...or after all be received to the pleroma like the beings of light" (Rudolph, 1987, p. 359).

Mandaean Gnostic belief and practice "is a knowledge given by revelation, which has been made available only to the elect who are capable of receiving it, and therefore has an esoteric character" (Rudolph, 1987, p. 55). Summarising the religious significance of gnosis, Rudolph (1987, pp. 55-56) has said:

> This knowledge freely bestowed can extend from the basic insight into the divine nature of man, his origin and his destiny. The intellectual knowledge of the teaching which is offered as revealed wisdom has here a direct religious significance since it is at the same time understood as other worldly and is the basis for the process of redemption.

Dimensions of Mandaeism

Given the gnostic character of Mandaeism, is it possible to provide a summary account of the religion for non-Mandaeans? The researcher believes that Ninian Smart's famous seven dimensions of religion (Smart, 1989) can serve as a useful framework for understanding the Mandaean religion and way of life by non-Mandaeans in the broader community. This highlights the fact that Mandaeism is not simply a set of ancient doctrines but a lived religion and cultural tradition. The dimensions that Smart identifies are:

I. The practical and ritual.

II. The experiential and emotional.

III. The narrative and mythical.

IV. Doctrinal and philosophical.

V. Ethical and legal.

VI. Social and institutional.

VII. The material dimension.

For Mandaeans themselves this approach may provide a clearer picture of their faith, which has for over a thousand years been largely hidden for its own protection.

Smart (1989, p. 10) helpfully suggests that it is necessary “to use imagination to enter into the lives of those for whom...the ideas and practices” of religion, in this case a living Gnostic religion, are experienced. Most scholars of the Mandaeans fail to do this because they concentrate on the external of rituals and the written word and history as well as the work of other scholars. The arcane nature of Gnosticism has also been a significant barrier to a deeper understanding of this religion. As well, the concentration on the written literature, with only limited observation by some scholars such as Drower, restricts the understanding of academics of the lived aspects of the faith of Mandaeans.

The West has helped to shape most of the major world religions either through attempts at modernization or through reaction, as is seen in both Islamic and Christian fundamentalism (Bowker, 1997, pp. 360-361). The long-term effect Western civilization has on the Mandaean religion is yet to be seen. However, in order to survive, Mandaeans anywhere in the world today will need to adapt and clarify their beliefs and practices. This necessity highlights a fundamental dilemma for both the priests and the lay people of a religion which of its very nature contains a great deal of secret knowledge, and which in its turn creates a certain conservatism.

I. The practical and ritual

The first dimension, the practical and ritual is, according to Smart (1989, p. 12), especially important for faiths of a sacramental nature, that is faiths that see ritual as “encounters with the sacred” (Martos, 2009, p. 9). Smart’s definition shows that ritual is not just an external action but, combined with faith and devotion, should lead to the development of a spiritual awareness that can become a mystical awareness.

Mandaean emphasis on ritual does not indicate human attempts to manipulate the divine, but rather a recognition by humans of the spiritual power of Hayi (God) to bring about spiritual transformation (Martos, 2009, pp. 94-96). As previously discussed, while some scholars see the emphasis on ritual as a form of magic (Drower, 1937), this is denied by Mandaeans. For Mandaeans the main ritual of Musbeta or (Immersion) is accompanied by detailed directions for dress and the

preparation of food; these are accompanied by specific prayers. As also noted previously, there are specific and important ritual practices for the dead, 'Masiqta'.

For Mandaeans the practical and ritual dimension of religion is central to life and is closely intertwined with the other dimensions. Many of the prayers that accompany rituals help to develop both "spiritual awareness and ethical insight" (Smart, 1989, p. 13). For example, the prayers in preparation of food and in dressing for ceremonies are an integral part of the ritual and help the priests or lay person to prepare their minds and hearts for the actual ceremony and remind them of their duties. The centrality of ritual in worship is closely linked to the experiential and emotional dimension of the religion. Together these dimensions give meaning to the lives of Mandaeans and provide the opportunity for developing a deeper spirituality.

The Mandaean religion is found in the daily lives of its adherents. Observance of lesser daily rituals shapes the spirit of loving devotion, especially within the family. Care in the preparation of food emphasises the sense of the necessity for cleanliness, and purity in its preparation and eating. This in turn is closely linked to the ritual of purification through Immersion. The emphasis on ritual cannot, in fact, be separated from the experiential and emotional dimension on Smart's list. Smart's wise note, that any religious "ritual without feeling is cold, doctrines without awe or compassion are dry, and myths which do not move hearers are feeble" is borne out in the lived practice of Mandaeism (Smart, 1989, p. 13).

II. The experiential and emotional

The second dimension of Smart's framework is the experiential and emotional. A study of history shows the impact and vitality of religious experience throughout the world. Smart cites the Buddha's enlightenment, St Paul's conversion and Muhammad's visions (Smart, 1989, p.13). It is thus clear that religious experience can provide a seminal moment in the lives of communities and individuals. In Mandaean literature Abraham's decision to betray Mandaeism through his circumcision, which resulted in a separation from the community with his followers who became the Jews, is one such moment. His betrayal became a theme in Mandaean literature and is still discussed today; his actions highlight essential elements in being Mandaean.

For Mandaeans terrible massacres throughout history, especially at Šuštar, Iran in 1870, have seared their minds with a fear of genocide. Such experience scarring the emotions has shaped Mandaean life, leading to the withdrawal of people into tight

enclaves and to a strict interpretation of what has been understood as the essentials of the religion.

In understanding the religious tradition of the Mandaeans it is also crucial to recognise and feel something of their experience of wonder in the presence of Hayi (God), peace in the face of adversity, or the dynamism that leads to an outpouring of love, gratitude or praise as found for instance in *Qolasta* – Collection, (the canonical prayer book) of Mandaeans.

Smart notes that "there are those such as Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) who have thought that the imageless, insight-giving inner mystical experience lies at the heart of all the major religions" (1989, pp. 13-14). It has just been noted that the whole of Mandaean ritual is geared toward the development of a spiritual awareness that can become a mystical awareness.

The Ganzibra 'high rank priest/treasurer' holds secret knowledge, which is at the heart of Mandaean Gnosticism, and it is through this knowledge that they are able to mediate with the Uthras (angels) to develop a mystical relationship with Hayi (God). Normally this happens at the moment of Immersion. For a devout Mandaean the experience of Immersion in running water at important moments in life, or when the need for a renewal of faith arises, can lead to a profound sense of forgiveness, cleansing, or the opportunity for a new start. At the same time, emotions of love, compassion and peace can lift the person's spirit to a new level of experience and understanding of faith.

III. The narrative and mythical

Smart's third dimension of religion is the narrative and mythical. This is often expressed through ritual, and the recitation of sacred readings and sacred narratives or the myths that lie at the foundation of the religion. In almost all religions there are stories of creation, the great flood and stories of great prophets and teachers from the past. For the Mandaeans this dimension finds expression in the *Ginza*, *Drāšā d-Yaḥyā* (the book of John), and in scrolls such as *Harān Gawaita* and *Baptism of Hibil Ziwa* and *DQRDK*. Such stories for the Mandaeans begin in the primordial time of creation. Manda'd-Hayi[50] delegated Uthri to participate in creation.

The Mandaean story of creation with Adam and Eve is similar to the Jewish and Christian myths. Mandaeans see Adam as their first great teacher, however, and

[50] Gnosis of Life or Knowledge of Life and the Mandaean Redeemer.

believe they can trace their people directly back to Adam and Eve. As well, Mandaeans believe that the Uthri (Angels) have a significant role in creation but that Hayi alone can breathe life into beings.

"He is the Great Hayi, the all-seeing, the all-powerful, the all-knowing, the almighty, and the wisest of all…he is Hayi, the delight of our hearts, and the forgiveness of our sins" (Ginza Raba Yamain, 2012, p. 1).

> This is the mystery. It is the first book of the first doctrine, which has existed from the very beginning …Hayi formed himself…and made a request to himself. For this first request, an Uthra whom Hayi named the Second Life was created. Then limitless and countless Uthri were also created (Ginza Raba Yamain, 2012, pp. 27-28).

> The Angels (Uthri) said "let Adam come to being" Hibil Ziwa and Ptahil were sent by God to create Adam. They created his body but were unable to place the soul within it. So Hayi said "I, Manda'd Hayi, made him stand up. I made him breathe the breath of life. His bones were filled with marrow. The glory of Hayi spoke forth within his body. Then he opened his eyes" (Ginza Raba Yamain, 2012, p. 60).

In the study of religion, myths are not false beliefs; they describe a belief in narrative form to give people an understanding, for example, of creation. As Smart notes, although historians sometimes question the validity of religious myths, for students of religion "this is secondary to the meaning and function of the myth; and to the believer these narratives are often historical" (Smart, 1989, p. 16). This understanding of religious narrative is strengthened by the fact that some documents that may have originally been longstanding oral traditions are seen as true scriptures and in some cases as truth revealed by God. As noted earlier this does not seem to be understood by Drower. According to her, Mandaeism "has no theory of divinely inspired scripture" (1953, p. XI). Mandaean scholar and priest Nasoraia makes it clear that the Mandaean scriptures are considered divinely revealed (2005, p. 14).

The strength of belief in myths for Mandaeans is heightened because they are commonly understood by them as historical records of their people. For example, today Mandaeans still commemorate with feasts the myths of creation and Noah's flood.[51] This belief gives Mandaean religious narrative its authority and is used to

[51] The meal is called Obul Heris (The remembrance of Mandaeans drowned during Noah's flood) is another traditional time of remembrance. Every year, Mandaeans remember their forebears by consuming a meal made out of seven different grains. In a way, this can be

direct peoples' lives and behaviour as well as influencing ritual. *Harān Gawaita* is also seen as an important historical document for Mandaeans. This scroll, which describes the movement of Mandaeans from Palestine to Harān on their journey to Mesopotamia, is used as an inspiration for followers today. Such religious stories are sometimes given extra authority when they are integrated into the ritual, for example, in the meal for those who died in the great flood or the journey of the soul after death. In this way "ritual and story are bound together" (Smart, 1989, p. 16).

IV. Doctrinal and philosophical

Doctrine and philosophy are the fourth dimension of religion as described by Smart. A doctrinal and philosophical basis for religion becomes a necessary focus for the leaders of religions, who are usually the most educated. In the case of Mandaeism, rather than seeking "some kind of intellectual statement of the basis of the belief," priests continue to explore the depth of their faith thorough prayer, study and reflection alone and with confrères (Smart, 1989, p. 17). For the Mandaean faithful, the historical experience of persecution led to a loss of Mandaic and to some extent of detailed knowledge of the religion.

The Gnostic nature of the religion creates a particular problem in the development of a set formula for doctrine such as the Apostles' Creed in Christianity. However, there are certain clear beliefs that all Mandaeans hold. These are Haimanotha 'belief and love of one God', Brakha 'praying', Soma 'Fasting', Zidga 'Alms-giving' and Musbeta 'Immersion'. Further, a central Mandaean belief is in the integrity of life, which forbids shedding blood, stresses the importance of purification and a commitment to the salvation of the Nišmata through the daily practice of Mandaean doctrine.

An example of Mandaean doctrine is the understanding of Hayi (God) as transcending the world. Hayi does not intervene in human life. This is why he sends his Uthras 'angels'. The Uthras, Ptahil and Ruha are shown in Ginza Raba [3] to be "the two main agents of the world's creation" (Buckley, 2002, p. 42). However, this creation by the forces of evil lacks the life principle and it is only with the intervention

considered as Lofani (a special meal for those who have passed away). Lofani can be performed as many times as possible whereas Obul Heris is a once a year occasion marked specifically in the Mandaean calendar. It occurs on the first day of the month of Sartana and lasts for one day.

of Hibil Ziwa[52] that Adam comes to life through the soul, which comes from the Light World empowred by Hayi (God).

For secular scholars the history of religion has tended to focus on the importance of written scriptures and other documents. This is because knowledge of past religions "must come from the documents which have been passed on by the scholarly elite" (Smart, 1989, p. 17). But contemporary beliefs and practices must also be studied if one is to claim an understanding of a religion today. The difference in the study of the Mandaean religion is that it is often seen by scholars only as very ancient, rather than a living religion as well.

Early in his book Gündüz (1994, p. 2) refers to the extensive literature of the Mandaeans. For practicing Mandaeans these books and scrolls, preserved for generations, and which believers are able to trace right back to the beginning of time, provide the basis for Mandaean doctrine and philosophy. While it might seem to outsiders that the gnostic nature of Mandaeism precludes philosophical inquiry, scholarly study by priests has always been important for understanding the symbolic nature of the religion. The researcher's interviews with priests and other scholars for this thesis clearly established this. So, against the views of some scholars, Mandaeism does have a strong doctrinal and philosophical dimension. It is also important within Mandaeism that the ritual, narrative and experiential dimensions are consistent with the doctrine and philosophy; a major function of the priests is to ensure this. However, it should be acknowledged, as this thesis has at various points, that the perspective of Mandaean priests and modern scholars is often very different.

A good instance of connecting ritual and doctrine is the way that Mandaean cosmic dualism has implications for each person. For example, belief in a fundamental struggle between Hayi (God) and the forces of darkness, especially Ruha (evil spirit), is reflected in the struggle between good and evil during an individual's life. Ruha draws the person to evil, while the Nišmata (the soul), which originated in the Lightworld, helps the individual aim for the good. The ritual of Musbeta, is a key means by which this occurs.

This doctrine of body and soul highlights the integral nature of the link between what Mandaeans believe and their understanding of the nature of life and knowledge. Such a link is clear in the Masiqta (ceremony for the departed soul) when the

[52] Hibil-Ziwa: a messenger of the World of Light and the son of Manda d-Hiia.

Nišmata ascends to the Lightworld. “The Mandaean *Masiqta* is preformed three days after the death of a person…It is an extremely complex ritual, focusing on *Ruha* (the evil spirit) and *Nišmata* (the soul)” (Buckley, 2002, p. 87). The Pagra (the human body) as a material being, symbolised by Ruha, cannot rise to the Light world. At the same time the Nišmata, the divine life force of the deceased person is incorporated “into the community of the Mandaean ancestors in the light world” (Buckley, 2002, p. 87).

V. Ethical and legal

The ethical and legal dimension of religion highlights the values of the tradition and underpins the worldview of the faithful. This dimension addresses “the question of ultimate liberation or salvation” (Smart, 1898, p. 17). For Mandaeans the ethical dimensions of the religion are incorporated into the daily fabric of life. The major ethical principles have been presented in the Literature Review, especially in reviewing Edwin Yamauchi’s *Gnostic Ethics and Mandaean Origins* (2004). The law also sets out the way the ritual dimension is carried out. The prescriptions for Immersion Ritual, for example, include details concerning the slaughter of rams and the preparation of meals. Many of these rules or laws are set out in the *Ginza* for Mandaeans to follow.

For Mandaeans the emphasis on ‘ritual performance and defined behaviour’ is considered the pathway to enlightenment. Saed (2004, p. 323) provides an example: “Only the power and secrets of Musbeta [Immersion] can demolish the boundaries ‘Surta’ [pollution or sinfulness] and awaken, arouse and enlighten that person’s mysteries…thus it is important for any Mandaean to be baptised after any ‘Surta’”. This is especially true at significant moments in life such as marriage or giving birth so that the individual can move to a new beginning as a Mandaean. It is clear from such studies that the Mandaean perspective on the experience of participating in the rituals comes from deep faith rather than an empty formality that some scholars suggest.

The interplay between the ethical system and the myth and doctrine of the Mandaeans is consistent in following the themes of peace and purity. The legal and ethical dimension in Mandaean life is so interlinked with ritual that during the Immersion ritual if either the priest or the person/s being immersed are not wearing the Rasta (ritual clothing) correctly then the ritual is considered invalid. Further ‘ultimate liberation’ for the Mandaean comes through repeated Musbeta from birth throughout life until death when in the Masiqta the soul rises to the Light World.

VI. Social and institutional

The sixth dimension is the social and institutional dimension of religion. This describes the structure and presence of a religious community in society and is an area largely neglected by scholars of Mandaeism, other than Drower in *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran* (first published in 1937).

Every religious movement is comprised of a body of a people organised according to the ritual and laws of that religion. Until the last quarter of the twentieth century almost all Mandaeans lived as a minority group in societies controlled by Islam. Consequently, to survive, the public aspect of their lives was seemingly "identical with society itself" (Smart, 1989, p. 18). In their private lives Mandaeans continued to live according to the structure and nature of Mandaeism. An example of Mandaeans adjusting aspects of daily life is changing their way of dressing to disguise their identity.

In these situations the community elders and priests continued to exercise leadership within the community in ritual practice, often held in secret or away from the public eye. Each clan would have an elder representing their interests. When problems arose they used their traditional role as negotiators and counsellors to avoid the necessity of using Islamic courts. Within each family the oral tradition was passed on from generation to generation and so kept the faith alive. It is the devotion and fidelity of the ordinary people in their daily lives, with the guidance of the priests, the preservers of secret knowledge, that has made it possible for Mandaean social and institutional life to be maintained, even in the face of persecution.

With the spread of Mandaeans in the late twentieth century across the Western world this unity and strict adherence to a traditional social framework has become more difficult to maintain and attempts at change are beginning to emerge, partly through expediency. For a community bound by strict liturgical rules the context in modern Australia, for example, with its rules and regulations about preparation of food, use of fire and access to water has created some problems. However, the Mandaean community has learnt to negotiate with the civic authorities. In recent years the community has been able to build a permanent Mandi on private property, with access to running water. This has given the community a strong sense of continuity with the traditions of the past. Another contemporary example of attending to the community's social and institutional dimension has been the establishment of language classes so that knowledge of Mandaic grows among Mandaean

Australians. These are enormous changes for a community that for centuries had to be constantly alert to the threat of intervention by Muslim authorities with no redress.

VII. The material dimension

Like the social and intuitional dimension, the material brings the religion to life in a way that is evident to both believers and non-believers. In some religions the material forms of buildings and works of art are very obvious. Catholic rituals have inspired over the centuries many material forms, including grand buildings and music for the performance of ritual. For the Mandaeans, however, traditional buildings were simple; the material expression of their religion has been largely through mud huts built on the banks of rivers. Rudolph in his monograph entitled *Mandaeism* (1978), and Drower in *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran* (1937) both show illustrations of mud huts in Iran and Iraq. The traditional dress for rituals, the Rasta, is another expression of the material dimension of Mandaeism. It too has been used in illustrated accounts of the religion.

As a physical expression of Mandaean faith, the Mandi's construction reflects belief in the lack of permanence of life here on earth and the emphasis on the centrality of the Lightworld. For Mandaeans, the experience of religion is inextricably bound with the concept of Yardana (Jordan or flowing water), which might be considered a naturally occurring material expression of belief. For Mandaeans the use of the natural world is central to their understanding of and participation in their religion. Natural features associated with flowing water are essential as this is seen as "the form that the Lightworld takes on earth" (Buckley, 2002, p. 80). This emphasis on flowing water links Mandaeans to their origins in Palestine and the River Jordan to such an extent that for them all Rivers are referred to as Yardana.

The lack of a lasting built heritage means that the gathering of archaeological and anthropological evidence must happen in other ways. Mandaean scrolls, sacred books, sacred bowls and illustrations provide material evidence of the way this religion has been lived and expressed over the ages. Buckley (2002, p. ix) describes a visit to Iran where she interviewed sheikh Abdullah Kaffagi the former head of Mandaeans in Iran who showed her "an archetypal book, *the Book of John,* made entirely of lead inscribed with stylus on lead pages bound together like a regular book". She pointed out that the sheikh said that "the book was 2053 years old and written by John the Baptist himself" (Buckley 2002, p. ix). This artefact is certainly a material link with a very ancient past. Other significant examples of material

artefacts belonging to Mandaeans are the work of gifted gold and silver smiths (Buckley, 2002, p. 6).

Summary

Even this brief review of the “seven dimensions of Mandaeism” provided here supports the central argument of the thesis that this ancient religion is also a living faith. This will be demonstrated further in the interviews with some contemporary Australian Mandaeans that, for the researcher, form the heart of the thesis. The above descriptive accounts of the faith will also provide useful information for understanding references to beliefs and practices made by the interviewees.

Chapter Four: Methodology

Mindful of the argument of this thesis that Mandaeism is a living religion, we now turn from the literature written in the main by non-Mandaic scholars about Mandaeism – to listen to the voices of Mandaeans themselves as they speak about their lives, their beliefs and practices, and their hopes for the future.

The methodology used in this research is an ethnographic qualitative process with the author's auto-ethnographic reflection intertwined. It is based on a thematic framework undergirded by anti-oppressive theory and a narrative paradigm in order to give a voice to the Mandaean community. The Mandaean community is heard through interviews conducted by the researcher. These are accompanied by quotations from Mandaean sacred writings provided by the researcher, showing links between Mandaean life today and the Mandaean tradition.

Anti-Oppressive Practice

Gaining access to the Mandaean community has been difficult for scholars because, as has been noted, they have suffered persecution in their homelands of Iran and Iraq for centuries. But there are opportunities for this now that the majority of Mandaeans live in diaspora, especially in Australia, a country that offers freedom of religion.

Despite this freedom, it was important for the researcher to find an approach that would respect and honour the Mandaean people, and specifically work against the oppression they have long experienced. This research has therefore been influenced by anti-oppressive theory and its practice.

> Oppression takes place when a person acts or a policy is enacted unjustly against an individual (or group) because of their affiliation to a specific group. This includes depriving people of a way to make a fair living, to participate in all aspects of social life, or to experience basic freedoms and human rights. It also includes imposing belief systems, values, laws, and ways of life on other groups through peaceful or violent means. Internal oppression is when groups start to believe and act as if the dominant belief system, values, and [way of] life are the best and exclusive reality. Internal oppression often involves self-hate, self-censorship, shame, and the disowning of individual and cultural realties (Baines, 2011, p. 2)

Anti-oppressive theory evolved from "the complexity of struggles in the world…and the need for models that advance social justice" (Baines, 2011, p. 2).

During the Victorian era in the United Kingdom groups such as the Charitable Organisations Society were constituted to provide charity in response to societal ills. “The interventions of these early professionals did little more than place leaky band aids on social problems, failing to challenge systems that exploited the poor and sustained the wealthy” (Carniol, 2010; Withorn, 1984 cited in Baines, 2011, p. 8). An early social justice practitioner and educator, Bertha Reynolds (1946, 1951, 1963) was an active socialist who continuously advocated for the marginalised, in calls for justice. Further, Reynolds “called on social work to serve people in need, while simultaneously working to fundamentally reorganize society” (Baines, 2011, p. 8). In this way she can be seen as a pioneer of anti-oppressive practice that would later gain theoretical expression.

By the early 1980’s a broad range of publications addressing oppression, in particular regarding race and gender, started to emerge. *Serving the People*: *Social Service and Social Change* by Withorn, (1984) in the United States and *Anti-Racist Social Work* by Dominelli, (1988) in the United Kingdom are examples of this evolution. “In the 1990s and into the new millennium social justice-oriented work shifted [to] anti-oppressive or critical social work, exploring a blending of critical postmodernism and intersectionist class analysis” (Mullaly, 2007; Dominelli, 2004; Carniol, 2010 cited in Baines, 2011, p. 9). Today the influence of anti-oppressive practice (AOP) is strongest in Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and, to a much lesser degree, the United States.

Anti-oppressive practice had evolved by the 1990s to “include all forms of oppression in a generic anti-discriminatory (Thompson, 1993) or anti-oppressive (Dalrymple & Burke, 1995) approach” (Payne, 2005, p. 278). It was based on the work of Norton (1978, p. 4) who saw “the individual and their family and immediate community as ‘embedded’ in a wider social system” (Payne, 2005, p. 278). Dominelli (1997) perceived that looking at anti-oppression through one lens such as racism generated “over simplified responses to complex sets of conditions” (Chenoweth & McAuliffe, 2005, p. 196). For a true anti-oppressive theory and practice “what was required was a perspective that could account for multiple differences” (Chenoweth & McAuliffe, 2005, p. 196).

Anderson (2006, p. 38) points out that during the 1990s a focus in research emerged with “a shift in power from individuals…having ‘problems’ to structural factors causing group oppression”. This has particular relevance for this study of Mandaeans in Australia who have suffered as a community for centuries. Individuals have been persecuted because of their group identity, though personality, gender,

status, geographical location, and the political and religious policies of those in power have added layers and variation to experience. “Anti-oppression discourse has emerged in an effort to address issues of diversity, difference, and inclusion” and so anti-oppressive theory provides a way “to reconcile the complexity of oppression while not privileging one form over another” (Brown, 2012, pp. 34, 35).

Key thinkers in anti-oppressive theory such as Adams, Dominelli and Payne (2009); Baines (2007, 2011); Fook (2002) and Healy (2005) have provided a framework for the practice of social work with the marginalised. “Anti-oppressive practitioners draw increasingly on the field of narrative therapy with its post-modern, social constructionist and critical approach (Brown & Augusta – Scott, 2007a, 2007b, Strong & Pare, 2003; White, 1991, 1997, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2007)” (Brown, 2012, p. 36).

Anti-oppressive principles of empowerment and partnership have been particularly relevant for this study. Ensuring the participants are “aware of their own power in the relationship” is important (Chenoweth & McAuliffe, 2005, p. 197). The Mandaean community has often been denied power. Such knowledge and understanding for people who had been alienated within society is critical for the personal development of individuals as well as for the community to move ahead within a dynamic new situation. The knowledge that “alternative social realities are always possible” opens the possibility to new ways of seeing and living in a free environment (Brown, 2012, p. 46). For the researcher, “anti-oppression discourse is sharply aware that its task is not only to challenge falsely universalized realities, but to resurrect marginalized and alternative knowledge” (Brown, 2012, p. 46).

Setting this research within the commitments of anti-oppressive theory enables Mandaean voices to be heard in ways that honestly recount their struggles and suffering. It enables us to listen to what they believe and practice in their own words rather than the words of those who have studied the community as an object of interest. It also gives space to hear their hopes of “emancipation and a formation of a more ideal society” (Carey, 2009, p. 163).

Scott, (1992, p. 37 cited in Brown, 2012, p. 42) argues that “we need to treat experience as the beginning of social inquiry” (Brown, 2012, p. 42). A person’s narrative speaks of lived experience and the meanings they derive from it need to be explored in depth. The research conducted here is unique and particular in its features because this is research on a community who are an ancient people, who are a religious minority, and who have been persecuted for centuries for their faith.

They have experienced oppression on many levels as a community and as individuals and family groups within that community. They do not belong to any particular country; they have lived within and across the borders of several different power groups – religious and political – across history. They have had to flee their homelands and now find themselves in diaspora, having not only to re-group as a people but to figure out what the future is going to look like for them in a very different context. This includes a different geographical location, a different religious context and generally a more open environment, where things that once shaped their sense of identity for centuries are no longer an issue.

Ethnography as a Qualitative Process

As the study of a community, this research uses the overarching methodology of ethnography. “Ethnography is a science that describes human social phenomena based on field work and observation” (Silverstein et al, 2009, p. 21). It is particularly interested in culture – in lived reality for those under study – and the revelation of how that culture is understood by its members.

The origins of Ethnography are traced back to the work of the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski's fieldwork among Trobriand Islanders in 1914. He lived amongst that community for several years, producing a book *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (Malinowski, 1922) that detailed for the first time cultural concepts and practices of reciprocity and exchange. Respected for his extensive fieldwork, Malinowski coined the term “participatory observation.”

Other key ethnographers include Claude Levi-Strauss whose *Tristes Tropiques* (1955) emphasized the importance of societal structures as common human experience; George Devereux, who was fascinated by psychoanalysis; Clifford Geertz who, in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973) noted that culture can be understood as webs of meaning, and Ruth Behar who, in *The Vulnerable Observer* (1996), argued for the open adoption and acknowledgment of the subjective nature of ethnographic research and against claims to objective study. Behar claimed that if researchers would admit vulnerability, “new stories are rushing to be told in languages we’ve never used before, stories that tell truths we once hid, truths we didn’t dare acknowledge, truths that shamed us” (Behar, 1996, p. 33).

Essentially ethnographic studies are committed to focused study of particular communities or subcultures, documenting their “invention and decomposition” (Parker, 2005, p. 3) and the ideologies, behaviours, relationships, and contextual

factors that define these communities (Lofland, 2002; Wolcott, 1999). The aim is to build up a picture with rich detailed data (Denzin, 1997; Holt & Sparkes, 2001; Wolcott, 1999).

Amongst much ethnographic work done over the decades since Malinowski, and relevant here, are studies of minority or marginalised peoples. One such was the study of a group of African American women in five different teacher educational programs using semi-structured interviews. Each of these women as the only African Americans in their group, felt isolated and concerned that their identity as minorities marginalised them (Dunbar, 2009, p. 1). Similar studies include *Empowering Marginalized People Recovering from Disaster in Developing Countries: An Ethnographic Study of Disaster Relief In Haiti* (2011) by Kristopher D. Young. Haitian's have been continuously marginalised and their cultural practices affected prior to and since they gained independence from the French in 1804. It is clear from this study that the participation of those affected through partnerships and community owned initiatives gave the greatest hope for the long-term empowerment of the Haitian population. *Soviet Holocaust Survivors: An Ethnographic Study* by Marina Shafran (2011) showcases the stories of five Holocaust survivors, their struggles, losses, suffering and atrocities experienced under the Soviet regime. This study demonstrated the impact of the Soviet holocaust and anti-Semitism on the lives and the importance of recognising their identity and the resilience that has enabled them to survive.

The negative experience of minorities is explained by Delpit (1995), who maintained "that there exists [in society] a culture of power, generally invisible, and most commonly owned by those who are dominant in society. Therefore, the rules of that culture are often imposed upon individuals who live outside of the power structure" (Dunbar, 2009, p. 137).

Ethnography has also been used in a number of research studies on religious communities. Examples of these studies include: Warner's (1988) study of a protestant church in a small town, Neitz's (1987) study of a Charismatic Catholic prayer group, Numrich's (1996) study of Buddhist temples, Ammerman's (1987) study of a fundamentalist religious community and Griffith's (1997) study of a women's fellowship. Each of these studies showed the importance of the researcher's participation in the religious community in order to enter as much as possible into the worldview and faith experience of the group being studied. This approach is in marked contrast to most of the scholarship concerning Mandaeism,

and considered in the Literature Review, which tends to historical, linguistic or comparative study.

Significant in these studies was the fact that where the researcher was unable to participate fully in the religious activities of the congregations, this placed limitations on the findings. As Hall (2013, p. 133) maintains “ethnography can provide insight into faith and meaning-making as they are lived out through encounters with others on a similar path, and if done well, can produce quality research findings that can increase understanding of the context”. But where there is distance, whether of language, worldview or faith understanding between the researcher and the group under study, quality will be necessarily challenged because of the potential for misunderstanding.

The commitment to close analysis of a community, its self-conception, lived practice, and the precedent for studying religious communities and marginalised peoples makes this methodology valuable for this research as it seeks to profile cultural webs of meaning for Mandaeans – a persecuted religious minority.

Behar’s work took an important step toward narrowing the distance between researcher and researched as she stepped beyond the commitment to the objectivity of traditional ethnographic work in participant observation into subjective engagement “that breaks your heart” (Behar, 1996). In this research, however, the researcher is not an outsider taking a microscope, no matter how empathetically, to his work, but an insider. This is why it is necessary to pair ethnography with autoethnography.

Autoethnography

> “Auto-ethnography is ‘an alternative method and form of writing’ (Neville-Jan, 2003, p. 89), falling somewhere between anthropology and literary studies…auto-ethnographic writing can be ‘highly personal accounts that draw upon the experience of author/researcher for the purpose of extending sociological understanding’ (Sparkes, 2000, p. 21)” (Denshire, 2014, p. 231).

The term autoethnography was described by Reed-Danahay (2002) as “a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context” (Butz & Besio, 2009, p. 1660). While “writing both selves and others into a larger story goes against the grain of much academic discourse,” the personal voice of the researcher is added to those of the participants interviewed to give strength to the overall findings of the thesis (Denshire, 2014, p. 832). The researcher followed precisely this approach in researching and writing this thesis.

The first recognised published autoethnography was *Facing Mount Kenya* written in 1953 by Kenyatta, the first president of independent Kenya. In 1975 “anthropologist Karl Heider introduced the term ‘auto-ethnography’…[in] cultural accounts of sweet potato growing by the Dani people, a Papuan culture in the highlands of Irian Jaya” (Denshire, 2014, p. 833). Denshire goes on to point out that in a study by Hayano in 1979 the term ‘auto-ethnography’ was used “in a different way to refer to the study of an ethnographer’s ‘own people’, in the context of *himself* as a card playing insider. The culture of card playing in Southern California was his ‘auto-biographical connection to the ethnography’” (Chang, 2008, p. 47).

In the 1980s, the presence or absence of the self in sociological and anthropological writing was a source of discussion and “came to be understood as the crisis of representation…in large part because of the influence of an emphasis on textuality in French philosophical thinking that informed ‘much of the critique’” (Butz & Besio, 2009, p. 1662). This criticism suggested that while writers claimed authority for their knowledge they tended to ignore “the ways that knowledge is imbricated with power and subjectivity” (Butz & Besio, 2009, p. 1662). Reed-Danahay (2002) challenged the concept of the omniscient researcher and sought to develop “non-conventional forms of representation that challenged the realist tradition of ‘been there, seen that, know that’ writing” (Butz & Besio, 2009, p. 1662).

In 1995, Carolyn Ellis published *Final Negotiations: A Story of Love, Loss, and Chronic Illness*. This established her as a key researcher in the field of autoethnography, combining tenets of ethnography with autobiography as she has studied death and dying, and health and illness. *The Ethnographic I*, published in 2005, is a key, award-winning text on the methodology of autoethnography. She has gone on to publish many articles, chapters, and essays in the field, including with her partner Arthur Bochner, for example *Fisher folk: Two communities on Chesapeake Bay* (1986), *Telling tales on neighbours: Ethics in two voices* (2009) and *Analyzing analytic autoethnography: An autopsy* (2006).

Autoethnography gives the researcher the ability to “listen as a messenger would, to self-integrate and deconstruct [his or her] own discourse” (Alcoff, 1991, p. 3). It therefore allows an insider to subjectively and objectively reflect upon their context and community, while seeking to make a contribution to scholarship. As a Mandaean I have experienced the voicelessness of my people; autoethnography enables me to be heard and thereby to validate both my own experience and that of the Mandaeans who participated in this research. Woven into the presentation of the analysed interview data will therefore be reflection that explores my personal

experience and connects my autobiographical story to the wider cultural and religious story of Mandaeans in Australia.

Collecting and Analysing Data

This study utilizes qualitative methodology partly because qualitative research "is known for being primarily inductive, emergent, and…very little is linear about it" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 66). The fact that qualitative research allows for flexibility in data analysis makes it ideal for a study that seeks insight into a question without pre-established themes.

This ethnographic study of the Mandaean community living in Australia draws from the lived experience of six lay people and two priests, rather than on large surveys and other quantitative data, with autoethnographic material woven through.

Instruments and Procedures for Data Collection

Two methods were employed to collect data from members of the Mandaean community.

The choice was made to conduct semi-structured interviews because of the innate flexibility of such a process. This meant that the questions could be asked by the researcher, but then responded to individually by each participant from their own experience. In this way they were able to shape their own story both before diaspora and into it, around belief and practice, and their hopes for the future. The priority was to hear their narratives in their own voices because the Mandaean community, particularly in diaspora, has not been heard in this way before.

The second method of data collection was the keeping of a personal diary with autoethnographic reflection, which was inspired by the interviews and participation in the wider community, recorded as field notes during the period of research. As I live in Adelaide, more than two hours flying time from Sydney, where most Mandaeans live in Australia, keeping a diary of my 'field trips' was a natural and useful discipline. Altogether I made five trips to Sydney, spending two weeks with the Mandaean community there on each occasion.

A community elders' reference group was put in place to ensure the community's knowledge and support of the research, and to act as an advisory committee when interviews raised questions needing clarification or expansion. This group was made up of priests and respected elders in the community who are educated in Mandaean

theology. Several professional community members were also included in the reference group of ten people. The first meeting took place after ethics approval was received and prior to the interviews. The second meeting was held after the interviews were completed and the third while the analysis of the interviews was being undertaken. As well, I was able to consult with individuals by Skype and phone for further clarification.

Establishing and working with this reference group enabled me to show respect and keep myself accountable to the community. I feel privileged that such open access was given to me by the leadership of the Mandaean community in Australia.

Ethics Application

The ethics application for this research was approved on 14th April 2015 – Project Number 6831.

As a Mandaean myself, I have both a personal understanding and experience of the issues that concern the Mandaean community. I come from a priestly, well respected family and have a close tie personally to the priests and the head of the community; ready acceptance was given to me by the leaders when I explained the nature and purpose of the research. While, as an insider, I had ready access to the leaders and wider community, this also raised some ethical issues that needed to be addressed.

As each interviewee was encouraged to express personal feelings and empowered to respond to the questions from their own experience, as researcher I needed to be very aware of my personal biases and my own power in the relationship. A commitment to limited intervention within the context of the interview encouraged me to value the importance of each person's life experience.

Rapport with the interviewees was essential. The advantage for me, a practicing Mandaean, as researcher was my own knowledge of the Mandaean way of life and its practice; at the same time, I needed to take an objective stance in these interviews. In order to do this, I encouraged each interviewee to speak freely by assuring them of confidentiality and the secure storage of data.

I sought and received consent from interviewees to make a digital recording of the interviews. This process was used because "taping and transcribing [can be] indispensable for qualitative interviews because all of the conversation and verbal details are likely to be captured" (Carey, 2009, 118).

I needed to be aware of power differentials within the interviews, especially since Mandaeans have lived under oppressive regimes with the constant need to protect their religion and identity. I also needed to ensure confidentiality with sensitive issues and privileged information (Bouma, 2000, pp. 199-202), a challenge in a small community. In order to safeguard the integrity of the research, interviews were conducted in a mutually agreeable place and pseudonyms were used, except for the priests who chose to be named. Throughout this whole process I kept in mind "the need for integration of" theory and research with the findings of the interviews and the goals and research questions (Maxwell, 2013, p. 72).

Those who chose to participate in the interviews were thrilled to have the opportunity to share their lived experience with an insider who understood and shared that experience. On the other hand, some potential participants demurred for fear of revealing their story to someone from within the community. This fear arises from the protectiveness of an oppressed people and the danger that has always been associated with outside knowledge of their lives, as well as the fear that their stories might be traced so that family members still living in the Middle East would be endangered. Acknowledging this fear, a copy of the transcripts was provided to each participant for final approval and the opportunity given to comment on, correct, or withdraw any aspects of the material they did not wish to be used in the study. I made it clear to interviewees that they could withdraw their consent at any time, should they change their mind.

It was anticipated that some participants might be overwhelmed by the experience of sharing their stories, so the priests were available and ready to offer care if this was the case. External counselling was also available to participants if requested. In fact, this did not happen. It seems that the potential for such problems were countered by the strong sense of optimism the interviewees felt for the survival of the Mandaean community, which the research was seen to support. As an insider-researcher, I felt trusted to understand the sensitivities involved and the nature of the experience of oppression in the past.

Locating Participants

An outline of the proposed thesis and a request for participants for the interviews was posted on the Mandi noticeboard. At the same time the priests spoke about this project at Sunday gatherings and made their support very clear. Information sessions were set up as part of the preparation, with three different age groups. In

this way young people, the middle aged, and elders were consulted and information about the project was disseminated more widely among the community.

Participants were recruited as a small but cross-sectional sample of the Australian Mandaean community in Sydney. Given their important role in the community, some priests were included in the study.

Two priests of different ages and background were approached to reflect the diversity of priests in the community. The first was Riš ama Sam the high-ranking priest and leader of the community in Australia. At the time of submission, a lower ranking priest 'Tarmida,' who in fact was promoted to the rank of Ganzibra during the research, was also approached. Similarly, "lay members" who had shown interest at the information sessions were chosen to participate in the study. The criteria needed for the recruitment of lay Mandaeans was that they reflect the diversity of the general community, by including men and women of different ages (young, middle-aged and older), country of origin, and years lived in Australia.

As a result of this preparation and consultation eight people were chosen to take part in the interviews as a broadly representative group of the Mandaean community.

Two priests, three women and three men were interviewed. The ages of the women ranged from 20 to 60, while the men's ages ranged from 20 to 80. A diverse group, the interviewees were born in Iran, Iraq, Australia and United Arab Emirates.

The two priests included:

- Riš ama Sam, (in his 70s), born in Iran, came to Australia in the 1980s. He has been chosen as the head of the community in Australia.
- Ganzibra Adam Yuhana, (in his 50s), born in Iran, who came to Australia in 2009 is a well-respected and scholarly priest.

Unlike the two priests, the six lay people chose to remain anonymous and were given the following pseudonyms.

- Maliha, female, 60 years old, community worker, born in Iraq.
- Hawa, female, 30 years old, community worker, born in Australia.
- Alex, female, 23 years old, graphic designer, born in Dubai.
- Tofiq, male, 45 years old, general practitioner, born in Iraq.
- Shadan, male, 26 years old, business owner, born in Iran.
- Zahran, male, 20 years old, student, born in United Arab Emirates.

The interviews were conducted in English, except for the priests who were interviewed in a combination of Mandaic, Farsi, Arabic and English. The researcher's fluency in these languages enabled clear communication and the fact that the transcripts were sent back to the interviewees for checking enabled further opportunity to check the accuracy of the data.

The Interviews

The decision to use interviews made narrative central to the qualitative process. Of particular interest were the stories of the participants. I was keen to give a voice to the members of this marginalised community, to hear and record their experience in their own words.

Communication scholars, especially Walter Fisher (1984, 1985, 1987, 1989, 1994) contend that humans are essentially storytelling animals (Fisher, 1987). Fisher defines narration as

> a theory of symbolic actions—words and/or deeds—that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them. The narrative perspective, therefore, has relevance to real as well as fictive worlds, to stories of living and to stories of the imagination (1984, p. 2).

As the focal point of human communication, narrative is based on values, aesthetic criteria, and common-sense interpretation. For Mandaeans the importance of narration can be found in the rich literature that they have preserved despite constant persecution and threat of destruction, but also in their oral history. It is central to Mandaean life as evidenced in the way their legends and myths are linked to their daily lives.

> The narrative paradigm is a philosophical statement that is meant to offer an approach to interpretation and assessment of human experience—assuming that all forms of communication can be seen fundamentally as stories, as interpretations of aspects of the world occurring in time shaped by history, culture and character (Fisher, 1989, p. 57).

> Within the narrative paradigm analysis is loosely formulated, intuitive, and uses terms identified by the analyst (Riessman, 1993), and its goal "is to discover regularities in how people tell stories" (Bernard, 2000, p. 441). Contemporary narrative inquiry is considered "an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches and both traditional and innovative methods—all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them" (Chase, 2005, p. 651).

The purpose of studying narrative meaning is to clearly understand “the operations that produce its particular kind of meaning, and to draw out the implications this meaning has for understanding human existence” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 6). In the past the rituals of Mandaeans have been observed by academics but the lived experience has not been captured in written narrative.

All of the interviews were conducted in the area where the participants lived, were face to face interviews and lasted for sixty to ninety minutes. As noted, audio recordings of each interview were made and transcribed by the researcher in order to preserve confidentiality as promised in the ethics application.

The following questions guided the semi-structured interviews:

Mandaean communal life

i. What are some of the important aspects of your life in the Mandaean community in Australia?

ii. Can you compare this with the experience of living in another country?

Mandaean religious life and practice

iii. Do you feel you have sufficient understanding of Mandaean religious belief and rituals?

iv. What is your experience of Mandaean religious practices, particularly immersion rituals, in Australia?

v. Can you compare this with experience of living in another country?

The future

What future developments do you see for:

vi. Communal life?

vii. Religious belief and practice?

The research questions sought to capture and document a true account of the lived experience of Mandaeans in Sydney, Australia. They were designed to give the participants a voice and the freedom to speak openly. Being open-ended they provided flexibility as to response, rather than imposed pre-conceived ideas or place imitations on participants’ narratives.

The opportunity to share their lived experience was appreciated by these people who have never had this experience before. It was also a significant opportunity to

demonstrate that, despite what is claimed by some scholars, Mandaeans do have knowledge and a deep commitment to their faith and that being a people in diaspora is not contributing to the extinction of Mandaeism.

Process of Analysis and Presentation

The data collected in this ethnographic-autoethnographic study is situated in the context of the lives of Mandaean people in Australia. Their stories offer comparison and contrast, coming as they do from differing countries of origin, and being recounted by men and women, priests and laypeople, and across a wide age range.

Data from this study was analysed through a thematic analysis approach, which is a procedure for encoding qualitative data (Boyatzis, 1988). Three main themes were framed as a response to the interview questions, namely: life before and into diaspora; Mandaean way of life; and hopes and challenges for the future.

Subthemes then emerged:

- Under “Life before and into diaspora”: Persecution; Diaspora; Freedom.
- Under “Mandaean religious life and practice”: Mandaean communal religion, Monotheism, Zidqa, Brakha, Fasting and feasts, Mandaean ritual dress, Musbeta, Sacredness of life, Priesthood, Manda; and looking ahead.
- Under “Hopes and challenges for the future”: Challenges; Hopes for the future.

General guidelines in determining themes and subthemes, suggested by Miles & Huberman (1994, p. 9, cited in Carey, 2009, p. 155), include identification of similarities and patterns, relationships, themes, differences and sequences within the research data. In this case, context is influential. For example, the lived experience and level of oppression of those interviewed from Iran and Iraq differed from each other as well as those who were born in Australia.

Thematic analysis went no further than the sub-themes, at which point the narratives were organised in such a way that a logical flow would emerge in their presentation, with autoethnographic reflection and community-held knowledge woven into the discussion.

Since there is no set format for the way in which information should be displayed in a thesis based on qualitative methodology, the findings were influenced by my “interpretation, reading, findings, objectives, values and beliefs; as well [my] ability to interact and critically engage with any pertinent issues that [were] discovered during the research process” (Carey, 2009, pp. 157 – 158). This study was a commitment

to prioritising the voices of an oppressed minority, the Mandaeans, who have long been studied and commented upon by outsiders. This meant that their narratives were heard in their own words as much as possible, so the decision was made to include a significant amount of direct quotation from the participants. In order to strengthen this particular ethnographical approach, my own reflections as an insider, through the use of autoethnography, are also heard. They are presented in the text indented and in italics, while to emphasise the normalcy of the participants' words and lives, their words are included within quotation marks as plain text in paragraphs pertinent to each person.

Listening Closely

Uniquely and for the first time, a window on this community, particularly as it exists now in diaspora, is offered by those who inhabit it. Chapters Five through to Seven present the results of this study grounded in the commitments of anti-oppressive theory and practice, focusing via ethnography on a sample of the Mandaean community in Sydney, with the data from semi-structured interviews woven together with autoethnographic material and community knowledge. Chapter Five considers life before and into diaspora. Chapter Six explores Mandaean religious life and practice. Chapter Seven asks about the future of Mandaeism in Australia.

Chapter Five: Life Before and Into Diaspora

As mentioned in the last chapter, the Mandaean community in Australia is based mainly in the Liverpool area in Sydney, about thirty kilometres south-west of the city centre. The area was chosen by the Mandaean community due to its proximity to the Nepean River. Fleeing persecution, this community has grown since the 1970s and is now the largest group of the Mandaean diaspora in the world. Despite the fear of extinction expressed in the past by some Mandaeans and academics, Mandaeism is still a living religion (Buckley, 2002, p. 3). It is manifestly alive and well in Australia.

In this chapter I will present and review the experiences, thoughts and feelings of some Australian Mandaeans on “life before and into diaspora”. Three sub-themes emerged from the interviews: Persecution, Diaspora and Freedom. I will also include some of my own reflections.

Persecution

A major conclusion of the research for this thesis is that the persecution of Mandaeans has determined much of the Mandaean way of life and the practice of the religion, particularly in Iran and Iraq and continues to have an impact on Mandaeans living in diaspora communities.

Riš ama Sam, who is now the leader of the community in Australia, was born in Iran and migrated in the 1990s in response to a request from the very small community in Sydney. At that time as a Ganzibra (high priest) he was also needed to perform the rituals of the Mandaean religion, in particular Musbeta and the marriage ceremony. Ganzibra Adam Yuhana, the second priest interviewed, came to Australia from Iran about five years ago to support Riš ama Sam in leading this growing community. They are responsible overall for the spiritual well-being of the community and to provide leadership in matters such as training of future priests, revival of language and religious education. As Riš ama Sam observes, “I would like to say that the more leaders in the community try, the more other members of the community will show willingness to participate in religious affairs and support the community”.

Shadan, now 26, was born in Iran but, moved to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) at the age of eighteen, and later to Sydney, because of limited opportunities in those countries. He spoke at length of the impact of persecution during his younger years.

For Shadan in Iran "it was very hard…We have so much pressure from Muslims…We were forced to actually hide… We were scared. In the past, Mandaeans could speak their own language but the fear of persecution and discovery, meant that it was not passed on to more recent generations. At school we were forced to study a different religion, Islam, and there was constant pressure to convert". Both students and teachers were disrespectful to Mandaean students and, as Shadan remembers, "They were referring to us as animals, which were cleaner than us. The Muslim children were told not to touch Mandaeans or they would have to go and wash themselves ten times to purify themselves.

"When I was 16 and studying we were forced to attend the Muslim religion. We had to study it, read the Quran and pass the religion exam. If I didn't pass it, I wouldn't pass the whole course. In the classroom a student asked the teacher what he knew about the Mandaean people. The teacher responded that the Mandaeans are the dirtiest people on the planet and that if you touch them you have to cleanse yourself ten times more than normal. One day when I went to catch the bus a guy put a knife to my neck and said 'If I kill you it's ok, I am really doing a good thing on behalf of my religion.' As a young person I used to get upset and angry. It's not only difficult; it actually affects your mentality".

Shadan points out that we are all humans and should have the right to do and believe in our own faith without the constant fear of persecution and abuse. I recall similar experiences from my childhood.

> *Like Shadan I experienced severe discrimination at school. When I was thirteen, even though I passed all the secular subjects, I failed Islamic studies and Quranic studies because I refused to study these subjects. My parents were told that unless I passed the supplementary exams I would fail the whole year. In order to pass I had to submit myself to studying and passing these subjects as I wanted to continue my education. During my school years I was outspoken, which often led to fights and punishment. Once, during Arabic studies - necessary in order to read the Quran - a teacher confronted me about my low grades. When I said as Mandaeans we had our own language and I would rather learn it, he told me to wash my hands in cold water and then he hit my fingers repeatedly with a hose so that for a week I could not hold a pen. Such regular prejudice made me angry, fearful and discontented, so that by the time I was fourteen it became necessary for me to leave Iran, both for my own safety and that of my family.*

While Shadan was quite vocal about his experience as a young person, the priests were more circumspect. This is in part due to a culture that does not easily volunteer information and in fact needs to be very careful of what is shared – the result of persecution. Additionally, as leaders of the community, they are ambassadors for pacifism. Pacifism is a central focus of Mandaean belief and according to Tofiq, one of the interviewees, this has made Mandaeans "a target in past history", a reality that continues today in Islamic countries. Domination by one religion in both government and daily life has meant that "the people who live in such a country have no rights to say no or whatever in the political level. It's the same in the religious part of it, so we sometimes hide that we are Mandaeans to avoid abuse," as Tofiq explains. This need to conceal identity was achieved, for example, by conforming to the Muslim dress code, using names acceptable to the system rather than traditional Mandaean names or identifying yourself as belonging to a recognised religion such as Christianity.

> *For myself, my inability to accept the limitations of life as a Mandaean in Iran meant that I had to leave the security of a loving family and move in to an unknown world at the age of fourteen. As I left I knew I would not see my family for many years, but I convinced myself that I had to be brave so that I could pursue my dream of being free to speak out about who I am as a Mandaean and learning more about my religion.*
>
> *I soon found that such freedom was not easily won. It meant at times profound loneliness and a sense of isolation from all that I knew and loved. Even in the middle of the Indian Ocean, our small group of Mandaeans, among about 300 Muslims, was denied drinking water, even though the Muslims were showering with the water. Our lives were threatened, knives were drawn, and threats were made. This was a terrifying experience and made me realise how unsafe we were, especially in such an isolated environment.*
>
> *As a young boy the frustration and anger I felt was overwhelming. I could easily have retaliated. I knew the consequences could be dire, but it was more important to me to be true to my faith and belief in pacifism as a Mandaean.*

While those born in Australia or UAE did not experience direct persecution themselves, they are aware of the persecution endured by their families in Iraq as well as the inability to practice their religion in Muslim dominated societies such as UAE. As Hawa says of her parents' experience in Iraq, "I know that due to the government we were not able to practice our faith freely…without having anxiety, without having stress, without having headaches, without having problems from the people that are surrounding you in your day to day life, including neighbours and colleagues." Hawa's situation is unique among the participants; she is a second generation Mandaean in Australia who is very knowledgeable and committed to her faith. Yet she says, "there is still a lot more that I would love to learn. I know that my religion is that of knowledge." Since Mandaeism comes from the word "Manda" (knowledge), the limitations that persecution has placed on the education of Mandaeans is significant.

> *From my own experience, even though I left home at fourteen, my parents and grandparents instilled in me a deep love and understanding of my identity as a Mandaean through our regular practice of Mandaean rituals within the family and Musbeta. During the latter, more public celebration we would be pelted with stones and broken bottles and endure verbal abuse. Such devotion and commitment to my faith imprinted itself in my very being and gave me the courage to continue my journey alone as a young Mandaean man, isolated from other Mandaeans and lacking the sense of fulfilment that comes from being able to participate in regular Musbeta.*

Zahran is very aware of his parent's escape from persecution in Iraq. He was born in the UAE and then the family sought refuge in Australia. "I grew up in a unique way. I basically come from different countries and in those countries I have been a minority in each…In the Emirates it is almost impossible to learn anything about Mandaeism. I am not even sure if there was a single river that we could have used for Musbeta. There are no priests there…You could not research on the internet and the only knowledge you have [of your religion and culture] is what your parents tell you and even what your parents know is not as strong as what their parents would have known".

Here Zahran is pointing to one of the major difficulties and dangers of living in the diaspora, namely, the loss of religious knowledge (Manda).

> *In my own family similar loss of knowledge is clear, especially of the loss of Mandaic. As a child I remember my maternal great-grandmother spoke*

> *Mandaic fluently. The language was passed on to her older children but the younger ones such as my grandmother did not learn it. In our family, therefore, this knowledge began to fade from the middle of the twentieth century. Since then there has been so much turmoil in both Iran and Iraq that life for Mandaeans has become increasingly difficult, persecution has intensified and even a devoted family like mine has had to adjust in order to survive and retain as much of their religious identity as possible. This struggle has always been for me personally a very real incentive to delve into the deeper mysteries of my faith.*

Alex, who was born in the Emirates but moved to Australia when quite young, believes that life in the UAE was very sheltered from persecution as "we had everything at our disposal, a nanny, technology and sport". However, she recognises that there "was always a contradiction between your culture and facing the world…Like you are on the sidelines between two different worlds". In fact, in the Emirates when asked about her religion Alex would say, "I was half Muslim, half Christian" in order to avoid saying "Mandaean" because no-one but her family seemed to know what that was. Her memories of stories told to her by her parents of life for Mandaeans in Iraq are that they seem to be idealised. "They paint the religion like you know it's perfect and you should be honoured and proud". She is aware of some of the consequences of persecution and displacement, for instance, "my parents never had a Mahar[53] when they got married". This highlights the impact of isolation from the wider Mandaean community due to the persecution in their homeland. Although they were unable to have a traditional Mandaean marriage ceremony, however, Alex's parents continued to live as Mandaeans.

> *Despite the almost total isolation from the Mandaean community from the time I left Iran in 1999 until I was able to go to Sydney in 2003 to participate in Musbeta, I still carried within me my identity as a Mandaean and practiced the daily rituals of Rishama[54] and Brakha[55]. The impact of isolation from the community was made clear to me when I experienced a profound sense of enlightenment when I was immersed in the Nepean River by Riš ama Sam after such a long-time.*

Maliha, a mother of three, is an Iraqi Mandaean who lived in Dubai before coming to Australia. She recalls that "in Iraq I think the only time I was baptised was maybe

[53] Mandaean wedding ceremony.
[54] Ablution
[55] Prayer.

during University studies…Then we went to Emirates. It's a Muslim country. You can't say you are a Mandaean for fear of discrimination. Everyone is supposed to read Quran and they know Mandaeans are in the Quran but they don't know who we are so you can't say you are a Mandaean…Since I came here to Australia I found what I had missed all those years…Now I know much better. Maybe I found myself, became more mature, and the chances here are much better…When you go for baptism especially during the feasts like Panja[56] and see the Darfash[57], hundreds of people are going there".

Maliha's experience was not of an active persecution but of a more passive one in that she was denied her identity and the ability to practice her religion openly. As she notes, the opportunity of practicing her faith in Australia was a revelation: "It's as if I am born here, newborn as a Mandaean. Because here I started to learn the religion, started to meet with Mandaeans". She had lived near Baghdad where there were few Mandaeans. When she had to flee to the Emirates, "there was no one there except my husband and his family". As a result, she says, "Now I am very proud to be a Mandaean and now I can say it loudly, while in Emirates I couldn't say I was a Mandaean because they would think I am a Kaffir[58], someone who doesn't believe in God". Now Maliha says "I feel I am strong".

Tofiq, married with young children, lived in Iraq and Yemen before coming to Australia. He speaks about his experience living under "a country dominated by one religion and that religion believes that the rest of religions are all infidels. So, Iraq and Yemen are countries with one party government. The people who live in a country with one government party have no rights…In politics or in religion… Sometimes we hide that we are Mandaeans because that can put us in the way of abuse…That abuse could be verbal or physical… As a child my parents didn't allow me to play soccer with my peers for fear of abuse". In Muslim countries "their religious leaders and the political leaders educate the ordinary people to feel that they are superior to other religions, so they believe that Mandaeans are infidels. A Muslim person is allowed to do what he or she wants to a Mandaean. This left an impact on our practices…At baptism in the river, they came and threw stones or

[56] These are five holy days when Musbata has special significance and will be explained further in the next chapter.
[57] Mandaean flag/symbol/emblem, standard, streamer, pennon, banner, ray or beam of light. The banner is used in ritual.
[58] Muslims use this term to describe anyone who does not believe in Muhammad and therefore is unbeliever.

empty glass bottles at us, with verbal abuse with nasty words…Sometimes parents didn't allow children especially girls to go to school for fear of abuse".

Tofiq reflects on a specific example of the impact of systemic discrimination when "a Mandaean man who went to get Iraqi birth certificates for his twin daughters didn't notice that the officer who filled out the form marked the section on religion as Muslim for the girls…When they reached the age of marriage and required marriage certificates the clerical mistake made at their birth meant they were not allowed to marry Mandaean men, so the father had to take the girls and flee to Europe to protect his daughters and their faith." Tofiq notes that he is very aware that "this wouldn't happen in Australia".

Although each of the participants were very clear about the sense of freedom they experience in Australia it was evident that they spoke cautiously in their narratives about the impact of persecution on their daily lives in Iran and Iraq and the passive persecution and fear experienced in UAE.

> *Until the rest of my immediate family was able to leave Iran, I was constantly fearful for their safety and dreaded the possibility that they would be unable to find a way to leave Iran for a safe heaven. Today my parents and most siblings live in United States while my older brother has also come to Australia.*

Constant persecution and the fear of extinction has had a profound impact on the Mandaean community in Sydney, including psychologically. Riš ama Sam recalls that "in Mandaean history, Mandaeism faced lots of hardships; there were lots of attempts to wipe out Mandaeism and Mandaeans". He suggests further that the weakening of the Mandaean community from such pressure was due to two reasons: "one is the society that we used to live in put us under constant pressure; discrimination and persecution and pogroms occurred. The other one is cholera".

> *When I was consulting within the community in order to gain support for my research I found while the majority were positive, they also feared that sharing their personal experience could lead to further persecution of family members still in their homelands. Even within the community some people were wary that their words might put others in jeopardy. For me this is clear also from constant references in the interviews, as well as in the recollections of our elders, including my grandparents, that the effect of pogroms such as that of Šuštar, in Iran in 1870, has been lasting. In my own awareness the knowledge of such pogroms is a constant reminder of*

> *the possibility of them recurring. In addition, the Islamic revolution of Iran and almost constant war in Iraq since 1980 have created an additional layer of fear of actual extinction which has led to a wide-spread diaspora.*
>
> *The ongoing disruption of life in the Middle East especially in Iraq has led to a loss of land, possessions, identity, and the wide dispersal across the Western world of the small Mandaean community. During the interviews it was apparent that the need to protect the religion and Mandaean way of life has been of paramount importance to the survival of Mandaeism. Some consequences of that protection have been secrecy, the loss of language and a certain level of compromise with the dominant culture for instance in dress.*
>
> *My own experience in Iran is clear. When I was immersed for the first time I was given my Milwa**š**a (spiritual name) but I am known by a name acceptable to Muslim society in order to keep my identity secret. As a child I was very aware of the Mandaic language used in religious ritual and by my great-grandmother. However, when I asked my grandmother why we were not taught Mandaic she said it was not passed on to younger generations for fear of repercussions and discovery by the Muslim neighbours. To be accepted within society and to forestall physical abuse as a young Mandaean, I would have felt unsafe and fearful if I had worn the Rasta (Mandaean dress) as an everyday garment.*

While discrimination has been systematic, Tofiq believes that "the laws on this in countries where Mandaeans lived have varied over the years…When Iraq was under Turkish control for five hundred years, a Mandaean man couldn't be a witness in a court case, couldn't be in school, couldn't work for the government…When the King came in 1920, they changed a little bit of the law to allow Mandaeans to go to school, but then after the first King died, the other one came and said all Mandaeans are infidels and they should be Muslims or get killed". So according to Tofiq, historically laws have changed from time to time. He also believes that the unwillingness of Mandaeans as pacifists to retaliate to physical and verbal abuse led to suffering and neglect, especially in education. In Iran such discrimination continues to this day. Tofiq is aware of at least one instance where the rights of

Mandaeans were upheld. Mandaean leaders "during the time of Ganzibra Dakhil[59] took the issue of abuse to court and they won the case".

For Zahran the consequences of constant persecution and the resulting diaspora, especially to the Emirates, are loss of identity, ignorance of his religion and the fear of the extinction of the religion. "I do not even know exactly what I believe in, it is hard to explain it to other people". Linked to this is an awareness of the impact of war and extremism on other Mandaeans especially in Iran and Iraq.

> *This awareness of the loss of identity for so many Mandaeans especially the younger generation is of concern to me personally because as a young person myself I recognise how important it is to know and understand our own faith in order to take a lead and educate our own community. That is why in this thesis I am giving a voice to Mandaeans as they move from constant persecution to a sense of freedom and opportunity.*

Hawa points out that for her the importance of Mandaeism lies in the fact that it is "a very peaceful religion; violence is not an option for us". She is aware that abuse of Mandaeans was caused often when "there were additional taxes and…There was always the fear of robberies, murder and loss of possessions and even the destruction of a cemetery. Such taxes were often in fact extortion for limited protection from local authorities. In addition, the government would not recognise our people or the culture, or the religion".

Hawa also reflects on the inter-generational impact of persecution, especially through the loss of language and knowledge of the faith. "I am aware that one way we were able to preserve the religion for such a long time despite the persecution was by not identifying with our religion. Yes, we secretly believe it, yes, we secretly practise it, but when our next-door neighbour asks we don't identify. That was the only way we could protect our culture and our way of life and making sure that we are not forced to convert to other religions or not being able to practise our beliefs. This is the reason why my parents don't speak the Mandaean language at home. This is why I was never taught the Mandaean language at home. This is the reason why it's so hard to be able to learn more about my own people…Any information that is available on the internet is not always accurate. Anybody who has ever studied our people…it's always [been] a very subjective opinion based on their own

[59] Ganzibra Dakhil was born in the Iraqi city of Amarah on14/4/1881 and passed on 24/6/1964 at the age of 83.

observations, based on what has been told to them by those who are able to communicate in the same language. [However, when] you compare that to the tales that you hear from your parents, your family and the rest of the community, it is confusing".

> *The impact of persecution becomes very clear when people move to an environment free of overt persecution. As I reflected on the interviews I realised that fear is so deep-seated – passed on to us from generation to generation – that we Mandaeans continue to suppress our identity. When I was first in Australia I was told about a Muslim imam who was in detention and placed a fatwa*[60] *on all Mandaeans there. This made me feel angry but at the same time I questioned why such people were given priority over peace-loving Mandaeans. This meant that as so-called 'infidels' my people were treated as 'unclean' and refused space in the mess; the Muslim detainees wouldn't even allow Mandaeans to touch the food. Eventually the authorities had to move all Mandaeans to a separate compound. The fear for Mandaean detainees was that the persecution would continue unabated in Australia.*

Maliha points out that both in Iraq and the Emirates if you were known as a Mandaean you were treated "as a Kaffir…You cannot say who you are". She felt the lack of opportunity to practice her faith openly both as a young person in Iraq and for many years in the Emirates for fear of persecution. This meant that she felt disconnected. "You can't say you are a Mandaean because they are Muslim countries, and everyone is supposed to read Quran". Maliha believes that in Iraq persecution by Muslims may have been so "because we are the source of all religions. If you compare Mandaeism with Islam you find Islam has adopted lots of Mandaean beliefs like the Rishama (ablution), Zidqa (alms giving) and so many other things. We are a minority. We are not supported by large churches or mosques or temples. We are peaceful people and we don't fight back...We are messengers of peace". When she came to Australia Maliha says, "it changed my life big time. Now I am a very strong believer and now I can practice freely…Now I can say I am a Mandaean, that's a huge thing".

> *It is clear from the interviews that constant persecution, lack of freedom to practice one's faith, the denial of resources to educate the younger generation and the opportunity to cultivate our own unique language and*

[60] A ruling on a point of Islamic law given by a recognised authority.

culture has led to a gap in knowledge among Mandaeans. The priests interviewed believe this has even affected some priests. At the same time, it became apparent to me as I prepared to write the literature review that scholars constantly refer to the Mandaean laity as ignorant without taking into consideration the impact of constant persecution, the secrecy imposed as a consequence and the fear of discovery. One important consequence of generations of Mandaeans like me holding our faith in secret is that it often seems to outsiders that we are ignorant when in fact as Mandaeans we are very cautious of sharing our faith and trusting others with our Knowledge. My interviewees, however, show that it would be wrong to assume this means they are ignorant about their faith and literature.

Diaspora

The modern diaspora of Mandaeans in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries are reminiscent of the diaspora from the Jordan valley as narrated in Harān Gawaita.[61] This movement from Palestine to the Median Hills and later to Mesopotamia meant that Mandaeans continued to live in a familiar climate and in relative proximity to each other. Unlike this earlier diaspora, however, today Mandaeans are found right across the world in environments and climates that are alien to their history and way of life. Such a wide dispersal of this small ethno-religious group is of real concern to Mandaeans. Enculturation in Western societies, as well as the traumas experienced by persecuted people and fear of the future are some of the concerns expressed by community members. At the same time, it is clear, that there is also a renewal, even a resurgence of this ancient faith and its customs, especially in Australia where the largest number of Mandaeans live.

The process of the diaspora of Mandaeans is complex. Within Iraq Mandaeans have been dispersed through the constant threat and escalation of violence, which has culminated in the threat of ISIS. Some displaced families from Ramadi, Fallujah and Abu-Ghraib have found shelter in the Mandi in Baghdad. Other Mandaeans fled to Turkey, Syria and Jordan. As violence escalated in Iraq (2003 – current) and later Syria (2014 – current), Mandaeans found asylum in Scandinavia, North America, parts of Asia, New Zealand, and particularly in Australia. For a small minority of about hundred thousand, such widespread dispersal could have dire consequences. However, because Mandaeans have learnt to survive oppression and retained a

[61] Harān Gawaita is a Diwan or scroll which is also known as the 'Inner Haran' and is an explanation of the Mandaeans' exodus from the Jordan Valley to the Median Hills under the protection of the Parthian king, Artabanus.

spirit of hope and optimism as well as being relatively well educated, the Mandaean community has used the tools of modern communication effectively to build connectedness and create some sense of a worldwide community.

Zahran speaks of the culture shock he experienced on coming to Australia even though he was only eight years old at the time. “Basically, just coming from a different culture, [having] different religious views [speaking] a different language, looking different…I had to start out fresh…But thankfully I learned English growing up. That is why I fit in better. But for other people born in Iraq [who] did not learn English it is even harder to fit in”. Zahran says “football was [an important way] for me to fit in to the community and to Australian ways”. Another aspect of Australian life which helped him to settle in was that, as Zahran maintains, “living in Sydney’s west where there are lots of ethnics and multiple cultures… [this] helps me fit in because everyone gets treated equally”. Even so, he does admit that to some extent, “I am an outsider wherever I go but I know what I believe in, and I know that it is what got me here and what is going to get me [ahead] in the future and Hayi has a plan for everything, so I am not worried, I am not scared, I am just waiting to do my bit”. He recognises this sense of being caught between worlds when he speaks about citizenship. “I am Iraqi by culture; I cannot get back to my own country. I was born in the Emirates, but I am not a citizen. I am an Australian citizen, but I do not fit in…I am like a lost fish”.

> *I, too, have experienced this sense of displacement, which is a consequence of the necessity to leave one’s homeland. As a Mandaean I have recognised the need to constantly protect my identity; the only connection I have to my identity has been the spiritual link to Hayi, my ancestors, my personal faith and my family. The fear of persecution continued for years after I arrived in Australia to the extent I pretended far more ignorance of Mandaeism than was in fact true.*

For Shadan, fear was predominant in his life and was the reason he left Iran. “In my country we were really scared of actually attending to our beliefs in a hundred per-cent way…We didn’t have any rights and we didn’t have support from the government”. Another aspect of life in Iran that caused fear was constant attempts to force Mandaeans to become Muslims. “We were forced to pray in a different religion…We were always under pressure and asked to come and [become] Muslims”. For Shadan, therefore, the movement to Australia has meant freedom from this fear. Now he feels free. “Actually, you feel you are human. There is no difference, [others] respect your religion and you respect theirs”. Another impact of

the diaspora of the Mandaean people is highlighted by Shadan when he speaks of the limitations of his knowledge of Mandaeism. “I can tell you I love my religion and I know from my religion it’s a very peaceful religion…There is a life after this world, so when I die it’s not going to be the end”. Thus, although he feels uncertain about the extent of his knowledge of Mandaeism, he is very clear that “Mandaean people are looking for freedom…Australia is a very free country that’s given me the right to follow my religion and to believe in what I was born to”. Although he is clear about the freedom he experiences in Australia he is still aware of the pain of being forced to leave one’s homeland, “it still hurts and it’s still very difficult. It’s very painful for me”.

> *In addition to sharing the experience of fear in Iran referred to by Shadan, I realise now that we Mandaeans have always had to struggle to maintain our unique identity. This was true when the Jews persecuted us, resulting in a mass exodus during the first century CE, just as it is today due to Islamic persecution, forced assimilation and the denial of our human rights. My outspokenness about my faith because of my pride in my identity as a Mandaean meant that my departure from Iran was necessary to protect both me and my family. Today, I feel proud and privileged to be in a situation where I am able to critique the work of academics and to give a voice to my community. As well, I am given strength by the support and encouragement of my family, community and the priests.*

Maliha is very aware that for her, diaspora began with the escape from Iraq to the Emirates. However, as she says, “It’s a Muslim country [so] you can’t say you are a Mandaean”. In order to protect her identity and to celebrate Mandaean feasts Maliha remembers that “sometimes we said we are Christians because we wanted to take a day off…We wanted to separate ourselves from them”. Since coming to Australia she realises “what I missed all those years…The chances here are much better…There are a lot of facilities…Where you go for baptism especially during the religious [feasts] like Panja, you see all the people wearing the white Rasta with the Darfash. Everyone is the same and this is the symbol of equality…You know how to renew the faith, you promise God to be faithful to Mandaeism”.

For Riš ama Sam, the diaspora of his people is a source of comfort because of the closeness of the community and the renewed commitment to the Mandaean faith. On the other hand, he recognises that “fearful, vulnerable members of the community” have been settled in alien cultures such as Australia. Further, as Nickerson (2009, pp. 231-232) points out in her study ‘Mental Health and Wellbeing

of Mandaean Refugees', fear of cultural extinction "emerged as a salient concern for the Mandaean community. Analyses revealed that fear of cultural extinction was indirectly predicted by prior exposure to trauma and current living difficulties, and directly predicted by symptoms of PTSD". However, as Riš ama Sam explains, "In Australia for the past few years the number of people who were immersed during Panja has reached up to twenty-five hundred people". He notes that "there are people from every level of the community like doctors who are interested in religious rituals such as Immersion Rites. As well their whole family participates in Immersion Rites at every significant religious event. There are engineers and others with high education qualifications who are never too busy to participate in religious rituals…They teach and encourage their children to participate in Immersion Rites".

Riš ama Sam has been in Australia since the early 1990s and remembers that "when I first came to Australia there were only about ten to twelve families here". Today there are about ten thousand Mandaeans in Australia, the largest community in the world.[62] This is evidence of the extent of the diaspora of the Mandaean people as a consequence of increased persecution – of repression as well as wars. A significant development in the Mandaean community has been the building of the Mandi and the creation of the Mandaean Association of Australia. These developments are the response of the community to life in a multicultural society. They are testament to the way Mandaeans are responding to the constant challenge to survive. These developments give confidence to the leadership of the Mandaean community. This is clear from Riš ama Sam's comment: "I hope that the Mandaean community in Australia continues to be strengthened by its members, especially the young people".

> *Prior to beginning the interviews for this thesis, I went to Sydney and consulted widely within the community and with the elders. From my observations and the narratives shared by the community members it is evident that Riš ama Sam's optimism about the community is well-founded. The younger generation of Mandaeans is connected to the Mandaean community through Mandaic language and cultural studies and Mandaean Youth Groups. Their involvement in these groups and activities help to strengthen their faith and commitment to Mandaeism and to each other. Furthermore, the creation of the Australian Mandaean Association is an*

[62] It is common knowledge among the Mandaean community worldwide that Australia currently has the largest Mandaean community in the world. This claim was confirmed to me by Ganzibra Adam Yuhana and Riš ama Sam, Mandaean leaders and priests, both of whom live in Australia.

> *opportunity to have a voice in society in general. While there are problems with adapting to a new environment, it is clear that the Mandaean community's attitude in our new home has led to a renewed awareness of the opportunities for the development of Mandaeism in Australia.*
>
> *While some individuals speak of the difficulty of fitting in, from my discussion with members of the community, it is clear that a significant number of Mandaeans have adapted very ably to Australian life. The traditional Mandaean emphasis on education and the importance of Manda, has meant that there is a high rate of professional people among Mandaeans. My own determination, and as the son of a teacher, to study to the highest level possible is a testament to the Mandaean tradition of education.*

A different perspective on the impact of diaspora on the Mandaean community is expressed by Alex who was born in the UAE. Although she felt that growing up in the Emirates she had "a pretty decent childhood, which was really fortunate", she also recognises that there "was always a contradiction between [her] culture and the world's. [It was] like you were on the sidelines between two different worlds". She also observes the generation gap between parents and young people, observing that sometimes her parents act "out of fear and protection…But they do not have any idea about repercussions or the consequences to the kids that are growing up here…When society is telling you one thing and then your parents or your community tell you another" born out of the need to protect one's identity in the homeland because "someone might recognise you". For Alex this seems to mean that her parents "are more worried about what people are going to say about you in a negative way rather than in a positive".

Her attitude is perhaps due to her life in the Emirates where she did not experience the fear and persecution that were part of the daily lives of her parents in Iraq and similarly, now, in Australia. On the other hand, when she was able to participate in the ritual of her grandfather's passing, her eyes were opened to its impact during his final days when "the priests got really involved and day after day they were there waiting and praying and performing the rituals. While they were doing that they were explaining and that was the first time that I truly understood something about the religion…[She learnt about] the circle of life…mathematical calculations about the trimesters and pregnancy and things like that. Things that you do not expect to find in a religion. It was surprisingly based on a lot of facts and that was the first experience that I was wowed by our religion, to be honest…It may have been a very

sad occasion but for me, it was definitely an eye opener". It would seem then that for Alex the experience of diaspora has enabled her to experience the importance of the religious rituals of Mandaeism and in fact "it definitely made me a lot more curious…and more interested. I had so many questions to ask".

For Hawa who was born in Australia of Iraqi parents, the impact of diaspora, though experienced through the stories of others, is quite clear. From her mother she knows of persecution endured by Mandaeans in Iraq. "The neighbours in the street always called us dirty because we were Mandaeans…My father and my uncle were all goldsmiths…There were additional taxes that had to be paid, and there was always the fear of robberies for no reason". In fact, such additional taxes were extortion by local militias and corrupt public servants, which were supposedly offering protection. Although she did not experience these difficulties herself she recognises that they were all part of the process that led to the diaspora of her people. She is also aware that in Australia Mandaeans are "able to practice freely what it is that you believe," whereas in Iraq, "due to government interference and being a minority…and non-violent, we were always facing persecution. As a result, we would not have been able to practice our faith freely – even baptism, which is an essential part of our day to day life". In Australia "it is easier because we have the freedom to practise what we believe without judgment from anybody". However, she does recognise that because Musbeta takes place in a public park on the Nepean River other people "come and swim close to you near the river bank. [This] will force you to either not get baptised or ask them to move away. It sort of feels similar…We don't have a set place for us to practise our beliefs…People would come and ask you what it is that you're doing because it is a foreign practice to them; it's not something they're familiar with. So that part of it seems very similar, which is quite sad…In a country where we had no choice we had the same limitations and the same barriers as the country that we have the choice and freedom to practise what it is that we believe".

Another aspect of life that is not so easy for Mandaeans, as Hawa explains, is the food laws, which are so different in Australia compared to Iraq. "It's harder here to have permissible meat…In Iraq it's ok. It's a cultural norm for people to go to the farm and choose the poultry or the sheep that they want…Being able to slaughter it or cook it…in the way that they are comfortable with. However here, because the laws are different it is not a cultural norm to bring poultry or sheep back home so that you can make sure it is prepared in the right way as opposed to going to the local supermarket or the local butcher".

While life in Australia brings some limitations to Mandaean religious practice, there is no doubt that persecution in the home countries, by creating fear and greatly restricting Mandaean identity, life style and even the ability to pass on the faith, was and still is a great threat to the community. Despite the grief of diaspora, the gift of a new and freer life has opened up possibilities for development and growth in the Australian Mandaean community.

Freedom

The new freedom found by Mandaeans in Australia has given them the confidence and opportunity to take initiatives and to use their voice on behalf of the community. It is this freedom and confidence that has enabled me to embark on this project. This is significant for a people who have been oppressed, whose voice has been silenced and whose very existence has largely been hidden from the wider world. Much of Mandaean history, culture and religious practice has been misunderstood and at times misrepresented by non-Mandaean academics. It needs to be kept in mind that despite the trauma of their history, Mandaeans have always maintained their dignity and faithfulness.

For Riš ama Sam the freedom found in Australia has meant that "there is lots of potential for growth in respect to religious practices, Mandaean society and culture far more than what was available in Iran…Positive results are evident…We have established a newspaper which is in its eighth or ninth year and which is published every month. There has been no discrimination by authorities". As he says he is quite clear that the freedom found in Australia creates opportunities from "a religious perspective" and this creates a better environment than was available in Iran. He goes on to give an example. In Iran it was only at the time of important feasts such as Panja that "lots of people used to get immersed, whereas we can see in Australia lots of demands for Immersion at all times". He also speaks of a greater openness as Mandaeans now feel freer to express their faith, even to the extent of using correct Mandaean terms. "When I first came to Australia there were only about ten to twelve families here. Among those families there was an elderly Mandaean, much older than me, with his wife and children. This man did not even know how to pronounce Beshmeyhoon Ed-Hayi Rabi[63]; I mean he had difficulties pronouncing such a commonly used Mandaean term, Beshmeyhoon Ed-Hayi Rabi. Fortunately this has now changed. I see this man every Sunday at the Brakha[64] ceremony. He is

[63] In the name of Great Hayi
[64] Prayer

one of the people who helped to create the Mandaean Association as well as building the Mandi".

In Iran for Riš ama Sam the lack of freedom caused by persecution and discrimination forced Mandaeans to disguise their faith and their understanding as well as their practice for protection. This affected the people's knowledge of the faith. But in Australia, he says, "we have survived, and the community is flourishing".

> *I am reminded by Riš ama Sam's words how easy it is to forget at times in this new-found freedom the depth of past abuse, discrimination and persecution. I know I no longer have to fear walking in the street and being abused because of my faith and ethnicity or being discriminated against by teachers forcing me to learn Quran and attend mosques. I am no longer subjected to systematic persecution where I have to feign ignorance about my faith or go underground in order to hide it. Employment is now no longer limited because of my Mandaean faith, because I am not a Muslim.*

Ganizbra Adam Yuhana also speaks of the new-found freedom in Australia. He points out that "in regards to beliefs and practices nothing has changed. In the country where we used to live, we were practising the same thing and people were participating". This was despite constant abuse and intimidation which led to the fear of being open about their faith and identity. Even so "we thought it would be more difficult here because it is a Western country. In a way Mandaeans would not have even dreamt of the freedom they have found in Australia. In fact, it's the opposite of what we thought. Here we can practise our faith freely". For example, the Mandaean New Year occurs in the middle of the Australian winter and yet "in the cold weather and the freezing water young and old come to do what? Come and get immersed…This means the belief has increased not decreased". So even though the belief and practices of Mandaeans in Australia are the same as they were in the Middle East, freedom has had a significantly positive impact on the open participation of Mandaeans in the practice of their faith in Australia.

> *Every year mid-July for Dhwa Raba*[65]*I travel to Sydney from Adelaide so that I can spend time with my family during this holy feast but most importantly be immersed by either Riš ama Sam or Ganzibra Adam Yuhana. On the last occasion I recall the banks of the Nepean River were filled with Mandaeans of all ages queuing, awaiting their turn to be*

[65] Great Feast. This feast is also known as Kansh O' Zahly among Mandaeans which means cleaning and shining.

> *immersed. In the two days I was present on the banks of the river with Ganizbra Adam Yuhana and Riš ama Sam, almost 1500 people were immersed with the help of other priests. I felt the sense of freedom that has made scenes like this possible, where the whole community comes together and practises one of the most important parts of their faith freely, without fear. This is in stark contrast to my experience in Iran. I remember as a six-year-old during Musbeta being hit by a broken bottle, thrown by someone shouting abuse at us. That experience continues to resonate with me even today.*

Ganzibra Adam Yuhana observes further that the impact of living in a free society "when Mandaean wisdom is in the open [they find] the way that leads to Hayi. They say, 'This path is the right path'…It is freedom that has allowed people to follow the religion openly in Australia". While there is now some freedom in Iran and Iraq to teach and preach, "in Australia you can easily publish, write and print a book. Yes, this is one of the benefits of living in Australia. It's the freedom". Further, he explains that it is possible here for Mandaeans to "have a space for bringing people together".

The Australian welfare system has also helped those Mandaean religious leaders who have reached the pension age. As Ganzibra Adam Yuhana notes, those priests who are older retired men have the freedom and time to support and serve the community. Consequently "the distance between the religious leaders and people has lessened and, if I can say, it has been eliminated. People are drawn to the religious leaders. There is an eagerness and desire to meet with religious leaders, ask questions, talk about their problems, and invite them to their homes to pray, read and answer any religious questions".

> *When I visit Sydney, I find it inspiring to see the Mandaean community experiencing and recognising the freedom where their voices can be heard. They can practise their faith openly without fear and look to a future with endless possibilities. Still, however, during the interviews I noticed some diffidence among the participants, including the priests, who would refrain from referring to their birth countries by name, rather that they would say "the country I am from" or "where I was born". At first this disheartened me because obviously they still live with some fear. On reflection, I realised that gradually, like me, they will lose this reticence and begin to understand that in fact their freedom is real. Although both my freedom and that of my*

> *fellow Mandaeans has come at a terrible cost, the opportunities for us are equal to all other Australians.*

For Hawa, "Mandaeism…is a way of life not just a belief system or a religion or a culture". As an Australian born Mandaean, Hawa's understanding of the persecution experienced by Mandaeans comes mainly from her parents. However, she is very clear that although "the belief system would remain the same" under persecution, in a free society such as Australia, the ability to practise her faith openly and without stress is a gift for her as part of the Mandaean community and enables her to live a true Mandaean life. This is particularly true because Mandaeism "is non-violent…It is a very peaceful religion". As such, the response of Mandaeans to persecution has been first to hide their identity and to assimilate to some extent. The intolerance experienced by her family in Iraq is in contrast "to the freedom to practice what we believe without any judgment from anybody". She recognises that there is hardship experienced by many people here in Australia but by "having a place that is safe enough to practise your beliefs, a place that is yours to be able to do that freely, makes a lot of difference". Hawa acknowledges that are limitations to practising Mandaeism in Australia as they were in Iraq, for example, parts of the Nepean River are near major centres like Penrith, where jet skis are used, making Immersion difficult. The difference is that in Australia "we do have the choice to practise what it is that we believe". For Hawa the major restriction on life as a Mandaean in Australia relates to the food laws, in particular the slaughter of rams according to Mandaean law. But again, despite this she points out that "obviously the good part in being in Australia is that we can practise our beliefs without having judgments from your next-door neighbour or from your colleagues at work or classmates at school".

> *While there are some limitations to our freedom in Australia, like with Mandaean food laws such as slaughtering rams, by comparison I would prefer to work around these limitations rather than endure the on-going hardships associated with being a Mandaean living in a Muslim-dominated society. In my own mind I am now quite clear that the difference made by the recognition of my true human rights as an individual here in Australia and as a Mandaean creates an environment where I can live my life fully as a Mandaean.*

For Shadan it is very clear that in his experience his rights as a human being and a member of the Mandaean community are really respected here in Australia. He says "if anyone asks me where are you from I am really proud to say I am Mandaean and

nobody says, ‘you are Mandaean we should not touch you’…There is freedom here and it’s very important…You feel like a human being, others respect you, you have rights, you have the right to do what you believe and that’s what it means to live here in Australia”. This is in complete contrast to his life in Iran where a teacher told the class that “Mandaeans are the dirtiest people on the planet” and Shadan was in fact confronted by other students one of whom threatened to kill him, saying “if I kill you I am doing a really good thing on behalf of my religion”. Shadan happily adds “now I am in Australia in a very free country that gives me the right to follow my religion and gives me the right to believe in what I believe in, believe to be what I was born to. The past still hurts and [is] still very difficult. It is very painful for me”.

> *Unfortunately, I have heard many stories like Shadan's filled with pain, grief, loss and trauma. When I reflect on my own journey as a young Mandaean who arrived in Australia as a fourteen-year-old, I revisit the sacrifices my family and I had to make in order to live in a free, safe society where my basic human rights are recognised. This means I have the right to believe in my faith without fear of persecution, the right to education where I should not have to conceal my identity in order to be considered for tertiary education. It also means access to healthcare, where health professionals no longer refrain from 'touching' you, because Mandaeans are 'unclean'.*

Maliha, 60 and originally from Iraq, does not talk much about freedom, however the idea of freedom permeates all that she says. She speaks of the ecstasy of experiencing Musbeta here in Australia after years in the Emirates. She speaks about the difference between practising her religion privately and the joy of living in a free country. As she says, “since I came here to Australia I found what I missed all those years…I found myself, I have become more mature and the chances here are much better...I openly started to say I am Mandaean and very proud of that...I have more freedom to talk about who I am and tell people, explain to people what is Mandaeism”. She speaks of the sense of the community and equality among the people when they come for Musbeta. “They come for one mission…To renew the faith, to promise God that they will be good people”. For her this freedom was most evident in the wedding of her son. She says that “coming to Australia changed my life big time…At my son’s wedding we baptised him in the river…The rest of the ceremony was finished here at the house, in my garden. I invited two hundred people here to watch. My neighbours who are Turkish and Indonesian and from Timor and India and Australia, they came. They videoed everything and my neighbour who is from East Timor he said he will show it to everyone, even he took

it to church. So I am very proud and happy I can practice my faith freely in my house in front of everyone". This freedom to practice her faith so publicly with her neighbours, including some Muslims from Turkey and Indonesia, is a remarkable experience and testimony to the impact of freedom on the lives of this Mandaean woman and indeed the Mandaean community. It also demonstrates clearly that Mandaeans and Muslims can live peacefully in the same community. This is not something any of the interviewees had experienced before coming to Australia.

When Maliha's family were still in Iraq they were a minority and persecuted, so as she points out "because we cannot fight back, we can't kill, we can't harm other people, we can't cheat, we can't steal, we can't do any of these bad things so it affects us…in a bad way…because the peace inside your soul it's in conflict with the outside atmosphere...So you have the struggle between outside where it is very tough and to challenge this you have to sacrifice a few things from your belief…For me we were really living [in a constant] crisis". The freedom Maliha experiences here in Australia means that she can "go to work full of hope…and know people [will] treat me the way I treat them. Then your reality is totally different". It truly flavours her attitude to life. As Maliha concludes "freedom of belief is very important".

Tofiq has a sense of "all religions being good and peaceful and so they came to regulate the life of human beings". He speaks in particular of the Mandaean religion as pacifist and claims that "we are proud that it is a peaceful religion…which respects the laws of the country where you live". For him then his Mandaean faith gives him "a form of freedom…and a spiritual feeling that when you talk to your God, when you pray that gives you a feeling of security". He maintains that Mandaeans are very aware of the freedom they experience here in Australia and says, "I believe we are lucky that we live in Australia because Australian people respect other cultures. We didn't have that back in Iraq and we utilize this freedom both to help us and also to help the people of Australia...We don't abuse the freedom that we are given here, we utilize it properly, within the regulations of the country". By comparison he speaks of the difficulty of life in Iraq and Yemen where he lived and experienced persecution, discrimination, abuse and loss of rights. This meant that at times "we sometimes hid that we were Mandaeans because that can lead to abuse".

Tofiq speaks of the losses experienced by Mandaeism under Islam – the denial of access to Mandaean schools, the loss of language and the inability to practice religion openly. As a consequence, he says, "we haven't had the opportunity to study the Mandaean religion as other people do in the churches or mosques. What

we know is what we have been told by our parents". Here in Australia he believes freedom of religion, human rights for all and access to equal opportunity for education and development means that Mandaeans are able to take initiatives to develop the community and their religious practice. "We are using the example of the experience of other religions here and to develop ourselves". He suggests that here in Australia the "impact of the freedom we have [compared to the persecution of the past], Mandaeans think more about work and education because of the availability of it, because of the beauty of it". He sees that the Mandaean community here in Australia is in fact merging to some extent "with the mainstream of the community of the Australian people". In fact, this is true because multiculturalism is a core part of the Australian society today.

> *When I was younger, every time I heard the word "freedom" I imagined a world where all Mandaeans, especially my own family, could experience freedom from oppression. Is this the freedom experienced by the Mandaeans that the Harān Gawaita describes in the flight from Jewish persecution? For me it seems clear that this is so. Therefore, I ask myself what does freedom truly mean? I recognise that there are some limitations to absolute freedom. Just as in Harān Gawaita, freedom was sought in the flight from home; I sought freedom in the flight from home and family. This cost has been shared by all Mandaeans who have sacrificed their home and history. As well, for many Mandaeans in diaspora there is the pain and trauma of separation from families and the spiritual connection to what has been home for over 2000 years. Personally, I still feel this loss of home, of my attachment to the tradition and the history, and of the pain and suffering of my people.*

Be Thou Free

Persecution has been a constant in the life of Mandaeans at least since the first century CE. This makes the thread of hope which runs through all Mandaean writings, prayers and hymns quite remarkable. Every prayer begins with an invocation which calls on Hayi, the Great Life for example in The Song of the Poor's Exaltation in the Book of John the prayer begins with "In the Name of Great Life may hallowed Light be glorified" (Mead, 1907, p. 67). This connection with Hayi has maintained and strengthened the Mandaean people despite the suffering, oppression and abuse that has been a part of life for Mandaeans for millennia and is further strengthened in the sense of separation from the wider world in this Gnostic religion.

> A POOR MAN am I, who comes out of the [celestial] Fruits, a Stranger to the world, who comes out of the Distance. A Poor man am I, to whom Great Life gave ear, a Stranger to this world, whom the Light-treasures made world-strange (Mead, 1907, p. 122).

Despite this history of oppression and trauma, this small community has been able to continue to re-establish itself time and time again even after terrible massacres that amounted to virtual genocide. In the latter part of the twentieth century the situation became so severe for Mandaeans that another diaspora, similar to the one described in Harān Gawaita, has taken place. The difference this time is that unrest in the Middle East has meant that eventually almost all Mandaeans have left Iran and Iraq and most are now settled in Western democracies. The hope of Mandaeans, while creating some fears about living in Western democracies, is expressed poetically in The Song of the Poor's Exaltation. In the Song, the Great Life who heard the call of the Mandaeans says “From anguish and fear be thou free!” He promises “I will set thee free from the wicked; from the sinners will I deliver thee” (Mead, 1907, p. 123).

Just as Mandaeans flourished in Ancient Persia and Mesopotamia, so too they are beginning to flourish in diaspora, especially here in Australia. Hope and a sense of security have led the Mandaean community to a resurgence of interest in religious belief and practice, the study of Mandaic and the preservation of this ancient religion and people.

“Life is exalted and is victorious, and victorious is the Man who has come hither” (Mead, 1907, p. 124).

Chapter Six: Mandaean Religious Life and Practice

The Mandaean way of life is steeped in beliefs and practices that have been handed down unchanged from the time of Adam through Mandaean sacred tradition. Within Mandaean communities this tradition is passed on from generation to generation through legends and customs held sacred both orally and in their extensive literature. For Mandaeans, belief and practice are inseparable: as Hawa maintains, "Mandaeism is not just a religion but a way of life". In this chapter, I will present a reflective account of the experience and understanding of this way of life that Hawa and the other interviewees shared with me.

As detailed in Chapter Three above, the foundations of Mandaean belief are Haimanotha (monotheism), Zidqa (alms giving), Brakha (prayer), Soma (fasting), and Musbeta (the Immersion Ritual). Manda (Knowledge) dictates practice. Priests are set apart to study, teach and guide the community. Integral to Mandaean belief is the sacredness of life: consequently, Mandaeans are pacifist. This belief is consistent with an overall understanding that Life on earth is a preparation for Life in the Light World. Unlike other gnostic religions, Mandaeism does not promote austerity and with its emphasis on life has a strong commitment to marriage, pro-creation and family life. An underlying issue is the extent to which Mandaeans living in diaspora today can remain faithful to the ancient traditions of their religion.

Historically Mandaeans have survived periods when it became virtually impossible to practise their faith, particularly in times of disasters such as massacres or outbreaks of cholera when no priests or very few survived. As noted in the previous chapter, in more recent years Mandaeans have endured continued persecution in Iran and Iraq. In fleeing to other Middle Eastern countries, they have continued to find it almost impossible to practise the central rituals of their faith, especially the ritual of Musbeta, because of a lack of community, access to running water and priests. However, from the interviews it is clear that through all these circumstances Mandaeans have maintained their faith and lived out their beliefs to the best of their ability. In fact, in countries like Australia Mandaeism has begun to flourish again. As Maliha explains, "in Iraq and in Emirates I could not open my mouth to say who I am. While in Australia I go and practise Musbeta freely and my son's marriage ceremony was celebrated openly…That's really freedom, freedom of belief".

Mandaeism: A Communal Religion

For thousands of years Mandaeans have lived and worshipped as a community under the leadership of their priests. The community life of Mandaeans is inextricably linked to the practice of Musbeta and so they have always lived along the banks of rivers, first in the Jordan Valley and then from about the first century CE on the banks of the Tigris, Euphrates and Kārūn. For these rituals to be practised the community must have priests.

One consequence of systemic persecution was the loss of the Mandaic language to a large extant. This has had a profound effect on the community, especially on the education of priests. As Riš ama Sam says, “We see different levels of understanding Mandaean theology among the priests”. It is a core part of priestly responsibility to spend time “learning, and interpreting Mandaean philosophy and religious literature and the ability to teach and explain it”. With the leadership of priests and the support of the community, Mandaeans in Australia today can remain faithful to their beliefs and traditions. As Ganzibra Adam Yuhana notes, large numbers, both young and old, come for Musbeta in the Nepean River even “in the cold weather and freezing water”.

Zahran, a young Mandaean, speaks about the sense of community in the celebration of Musbeta as “an intrinsic feeling…A holy ceremony…[with] the community around you and everyone watching you and everyone side by side with you…It is just a remarkable feeling and the beliefs go way back before any other religion”.

For Maliha, mother of three, the experience of Musbeta is both a sense of the community and of her identity as a Mandaean. She experiences “a strong connection with Hayi”. She says that “I separate totally my body, my thinking, between who I am and connect myself with Hayi, with water and with the priest”. Until Maliha came to Australia she rarely had the opportunity to participate in Musbeta in Iraq and later in UAE. As part of the Australian Mandaean community she rejoices at the freedom to practise her faith regularly. She sees her people dressed in the Rasta and moving around the Darfash (ritual flag) as part of the Musbeta ceremony, as a sign of equality and freedom. As she goes on to say; “people come for one mission to renew the faith, to promise Hayi that they will be good people…The amazing thing is that they are all wearing the same thing, the same colour, the same way, which is fantastic”.

Maliha's experience of Musbeta in Australia is in strong contrast to the experience of Tofiq in Iraq where the community was denied protection during the celebration of Musbeta. On one occasion when he "was walking dressed in his Rasta…a policeman on a pushbike abused him". Such pressure and persecution were part of daily life and intensified and even continued during University studies where Tofiq was told "you do baptism because you are dirty". He notes the difference in his experience in Australia where "freedom makes you productive because you don't have to think about protecting yourself and your children".

Alex, who was born in UAE, regrets her lack of knowledge and experience in Mandaean life during her time in there. Although she speaks about feeling stress and being self-consciousness during the ceremony of Musbeta, she does experience "some enlightenment" but cannot articulate exactly what this means to her.

Shadan, born in Iran, believes that it is "the religion that creates our community". He is able to name central beliefs and practices. As a child in Iran, Shadan was "scared of attending to our beliefs in a hundred per cent way…as we didn't have the right and we didn't have the support from the government".

Tofiq sees pacifism, a defining feature of Mandaeism, as an attribute that can make a positive contribution to Australian society. In the past "that made Mandaeans a target". He believes that the Mandaean community is "lucky that we live in Australia because Australian people respect other cultures…And we can utilize this freedom to help ourselves and also to help the host people of Australia".

Monotheism

As a monotheistic religion Mandaeism sees Hayi as the first Great Life who brought life into the universe. Hayi dwells in the World of Light and is connected to life on earth through messengers called Uthras. As a Gnostic religion, Mandaeans believe that the World of Light is where the Nišmata (the human soul) originates. The Nišmata is imprisoned in the physical human body and, in the Gnostic sense of dualism, this material existence needs to be seen as a path to liberation for Mandaeans to reach the Light World. This passage is achieved through a faithful Mandaean life and the Masiqta ceremony after death.

For Mandaeans the great teachers are Adam, Šitil and Yaḥiā Iuhana. Their teachings include a set of beliefs, ethics and morals, enshrined in symbolic language. They are passed on from one generation to another. The main holy book

for Mandaeans is the *Ginza Raba*, *Sidra d-Adam*, the Great Treasure. Priests not only perform the rituals of Mandaeism, especially Musbeta but are also responsible for teaching and leading the Mandaean community towards enlightenment.

For Maliha the connection between Musbeta and monotheistic belief is very clear: “When I come out from the water and sit and the Ganzibra or the Tarmida start to pray for me I disconnect myself from the outside atmosphere and connect myself with Hayi”.

The traditional beliefs of Mandaeism and its gnostic character are important to both Riš ama Sam and Ganzibra Adam Yuhana. To be recognised as a Mandaean, Riš ama Sam, explains that “belief in the afterlife and the teaching of our books and our prophets, which include their teachings, are necessary. One must be faithful to his beliefs, books, teachers, the afterlife and monotheism to be recognised as a Mandaean”. According to Ganzibra Adam Yuhana “All beliefs are important…We are a pacifist people…We are monotheistic and pray to one God. We believe that the first book that was revealed to Adam is our book and Mandaeans can prove this claim based on the contents of our books”. As Riš ama Sam points out, however, for those Mandaeans who are believers but are not able to practise their faith regularly due to war and persecution, “the importance lies inside the individual. It is in the essence of the person”. Even though some do “not practise Rishama and Brakha[66] regularly…in their essence their heart and soul is with Mandaeism”.

Zidqa (Alms Giving)

Zidqa is the call to share with those, especially Mandaeans, who are in need. This can be gifts in material goods or spiritual gifts through prayer and counselling. In Australia, for instance, a group of Mandaean philanthropists have bought land along the Nepean River in Sydney and donated it to the community for a traditional Mandi and a community centre, which is being built.

The generosity of Australian Mandaeans is recognised overseas as Ganzibra Adam Yuhana points out: “Those who have left their homelands and sought refuge in Syria and Jordan, are looking to Australia from a financial aid point of view…Australia is helping generously…For example, in six months $16,000 was sent for the people who live in Syria, $6,000 was sent to Jordan and $5,000 was sent to Iran…The

[66] Ablution and Prayer

priests have encouraged the community to help". This generosity comes from an understanding that sharing through alms giving is a core belief of Mandaeism.

Shadan is very clear about the importance of Zidqa. "It's giving to help poor people, anyone in need; it is not only with money. We help with food, and clothes. In this way, I do believe the Mandaean religion is always looking for peace".

Maliha explains: as a Mandaean "I am taught not to harm other people, help others, walk in their shoes and give Zidqa as much as I can…My father raised me religious and always said your belief is your behaviour and who you are…So Mandaeans are peaceful people and I am trying to be like this, to reflect who I am. And since peace is a symbol of Mandaeism this is what I am practising…I give Zidqa and I always encourage my children to do as well".

For Mandaeans giving to the poor is an obligation, a duty that cannot be forsaken even by those who are themselves in need.

> *Growing up, my siblings and I were taught that Zidqa is one of the highest acts of morality. My father always reminds me that joy is in giving. To help a fellow Mandaean in need, whether in material goods and or spirituality, is an act that has been passed down from generation to generation.*

Today in Australia, money is often collected for Mandaean refugees in the Middle East, to establish language and cultural centres, places of worship, community centres and even a Mandaean school in Sydney.

Brakha (Prayer)

For Mandaeans the *Qalasta* (Praise) is a canonical prayerbook. It contains hymns, songs and prayers, together with appropriate directions necessary for ritual practice, especially Musbeta and Masiqta. Mandaeans must face the North during prayers. This has sometimes led to a misconception that Mandaeans worship the stars. Priests are required to pray a different set of prayers each day of the week. Prayer hours are dawn, noon and dusk.

Mandaeans believe this earth and material life are evil; our focus is on the Nišmata (the human soul) as it progresses in this life towards the Light World. We believe that the gates of the Light World are in the north. At the entrance Abathur is the guard where fidelity to Mandaeism is tested.

For Hawa, a central part of being a Mandaean is “prayer, family, language and culture…We have various prayers throughout the day and we have another concept which for me represents various levels that you can be on spiritually and for women when you are menstruating you need to be away from everybody else. It’s mainly done so that the woman is able to rest. For me personally, it also comes across as being on a different spiritual level for that time”.

The equality of women in Mandaeism is sacred; both men and women hold specific roles in community and religious affairs. For example all Mandaeans, both male and female share the same sequence of prayers in their daily lives.

> *As Hawa indicates, the status of women in Mandaeism is both sacred and particular. My own knowledge of this has grown, based on discussions with a number of priests, elders and Mandaean scholars. The traditional understanding of the cycle of life means that Mandaean women cannot hold a priestly office. In reviewing some of Buckley’s views, however, I noted that historically Mandaean women have held high positions such as Riš ama (Leader of the community, which includes the religious community). This cannot be said for women in Islam, Judaism and Christianity until the twentieth century.*

Shadan has a strong sense of the role of prayer in his daily life: “Every single day we wake up, we have to thank God for the chance he gives us to actually go ahead and make the best use of our time…When we bathe, we pray…Basically we pray as the water is to be part of cleansing our body…And basically it’s to cleanse our heart and thoughts…In order to live the life God asks of us…When we eat we thank God for what he gives us and when we finish eating we also thank God because he blesses us…Before we go to sleep we pray and ask God to protect us…We have the three main prayers in morning, afternoon and evening, each prayer is in two parts…First, you have to wear your actual dress [Rasta], you have to cover your head and wear a specific belt [Himiana][67]…In the second part of the prayer we remember all of the angels and we pray to Hayi, we thank Hayi and we ask for help to guide us and help us in this world because this life is like an exam that we have to pass. We also pray when we are fasting and on important feasts like Panja”.

Maliha also expresses the importance of prayer: “First thing in the morning when I wake up, I thank Hayi that I have woken up and then when I have my shower I pray,

[67] The Himiana is a belt or girdle that symbolises the Mandaean faith. It is tubular in shape consisting of sixty woollen woven threads.

I do the Tamasha (the three-fold ablution) and pray for my whole family…Riš ama Sam told me that I have something in me. The trust I have in Hayi means that when I ask for something I receive it…I have a big problem and after we talked about it I feel enlightened".

As Shadan and Maliha indicate, Brakha (prayer) is part of Mandaean daily life. It is linked to daily Rishama (ablution) which a Mandaean must complete before he or she begins the Brakha. For ordinary Mandaeans this ritual is preformed daily; no priest is required. In the Rishama as the person approaches the water he or she says:[68]

> Beshma Ed-Hayi, Ebrkhet Yardna Raba Ed-Meiya Hayi
>
> Emshba Mari Kušta Asanikhun
>
> Beshmeyhoon Ed-Hayi Rabi
>
> Asutha Wa Zakutha Nhvilakh
>
> Ya Av Avuhon Melka Piriawis Yardna Raba Ed-Meiya Hayi.
>
> In the name of Great Life/Hayi, blessed the Great Yardana of Living Water, healing, truth and purity are yours. In the name of Great Life/Hayi, my father, their father, Melka Piriawis, Great Yardana of Living Water, may peace, healing and victory be yours.

And while washing his or her hands:

> Beshmeyhoon Ed-Hayi Rabi,
>
> Halalnin Eidan Eb-Kušta Wa-Easfan Eb-HaimaNutha
>
> Wa Melalnin Ebmalali Ed-Ziwa Wa EsHaytta Bon Eb-Osri DenHura.
>
> In the Name of the Great Life/Hayi, Purify my hands in righteousness and my lips in faith. Let them utter the speech of the Light and accept my ablutions with thoughts of Light.

As the person washes their face three times they say:

[68] Verse One of the Mandaean Rishama, daily ablution.

> Ebrekh Eshmakh Wa Emshaba Eshmakh Mari Manda Ed Hayi Ebrekh Wa Emshaba Hakh Parsufa Raba Ed-Eqara Ed-Men Nafshi Efrash.
>
> I bless your name, praised is your name, my Lord Manda d-Hayi I bless. Be praised that Great Countenance of Splendour which of itself is manifest.

Then, dipping their right hand in water and signing themselves from right-side of the forehead to the left-side three times, the person says:

> AnA (Milwa**š**a) Ershmna Ebroshma Ed-Hayi Eshma Ed Hayi Wa Eshma Ed Manda Ed Hayi Madkhar Alay.
>
> I (Milwa**š**a) sign myself with the sign of Life/Hayi. The name of Life and the name of Manda Ed Hayi are pronounced upon me.

Next, he or she dips their two index fingers in the water and cleanses his/her ears saying:

> Odnay Shamoun Ghala Ed-Hayi.
>
> May my ears hear the voice of Life, Hayi.

Then taking water into his or her right palm, holding it to his/her nose, the person repeats three times:

> Enhiray Areh Riha Ed Hayi.
>
> May my nostrils smell the perfume of Life/Hayi.

Washing his or her left hand, using the right hand, the below verse is recited once:

> Rushmay ElaVay LaHaVa EbNura Wa LaHaVa EbMesha Wa LaHaVa Ed Emshiha Emsha Roshmey Eb-Yardna Raba Ed Meia Hayi DaNesh Ebheyli Lamsee Eshma Ed Hayi Wa Eshma Ed Manda Ed Hayi Medkhar Alay. Ekvesh Ehshukha Wa Etras Enhura Eshma Ed Hayi Wa Eshma Ed Manda Ed Hayi Medkhar Alay.
>
> My sign it is not with fire (reference to Zoroastrianism), nor with oil (reference to Jews), nor with anointing (reference to Christianity), my sign is in the great Yardna of living water, which a man cannot attain by his strength alone. The Name of Life/Hayi and the name of Manda Ed Hayi are mentioned upon me.

Using their right hand the person takes water into his or her mouth washing it and says: (after the ejected water is spat to the left)

Pomay Botha Wa Toshbehtha Emla.

May my mouth be filled with a prayer of praise.

He or she then washes the knees three times, with the words:

Borkai Mabrikha Wa Saghda El-Hayi Rabi Ghadmaei.

May my knees exalt and adore the Great Life.

Washing the feet three times, the person recites:

Leghray Madrikha Eb-Darki Ed Kušta Wa HaimaNutha.

May my feet follow the right path and faith.

The next verse is recited while the person dips all fingers in Yardana (Jordan/Running Water):

AnA (Milwa**š**a) EsWina Eb-Musbeta Ed Behram Raba Bar Rurbee Musbetee TeNatree Wa Tesagh AlRish Eshma Ed Hayi Wa Eshma Ed Manda Ed Hayi Medkhar Alay.

I (Spiritual name) am immersed as Behram Raba's (Great Yardana's) Musbeta. My Musbeta is to protect, purify and elevate my spirit (one step closer in a spiritual sense) to the World of Light.

Lastly, she or he dips the right foot and then left foot once into the river, saying:

Leghray Edaihun Ed Showa Wa Etrisar La-Tieshtelat Alay Eshma Ed Hayi Wa Eshma Ed Manda Ed Hayi Medkhar Alay.

May the Seven (planets) and the Twelve (signs of Zodiac) not have dominion over my feet. The name of Hayi/Life and the name of Manda Ed Hayibe pronounced upon me.

Although it might seem quite elaborate, this particular ritual is a minor immersion performed in order to remove lesser pollution from the person and protect them from the perils of daily life, as well as reiterating belief in eternal life. It is a good example how, for Mandaeans, prayer is inextricably linked with ritual.

Another common practice which is linked with both Brakha (prayer) and Rishama (ablution) is Tomasha (purification). As Maliha indicated, this may be performed in a shower instead of a river. There are various circumstances when Tomasha is performed, particularly when a Mandaean woman is menstruating, or when a Mandaean man has a nocturnal emission. It is also performed after various forms of

contact, for example, with a woman who has recently given birth; with a newborn child; with a bride or groom within the first week of their marriage; with a corpse. It is also done before celebrating a major feast. Whatever the situation, the person immerses him or herself in water three times; each time the following prayer is pronounced:[69]

> AnA (Milwa**š**a) EsWina Eb-Musbeta Ed Behram Raba Bar Rurbee MusbeteeTeNatree Wa Tesagh AlRish Eshma Ed Hayi Wa Eshma Ed Manda Ed Hayi Medkhar Alay.
>
> I (Spiritual name) am immersed as Behram Raba's (Great Yardana's) Musbeta. My Musbeta is to protect, purify and elevate my spirit (one step closer in a spiritual sense) to the World of Light.

Fasting and Feasts

While Soma (fasting) is one of the core beliefs of Mandaeism, it is always linked to feasts and holy days. The main Mandaean feasts are the Dihwa Raba (The Great Feast), celebration of the two days of Shishyan (The Feast of Peace), Dihwa Hnina (The Short Feast), Obul Heris (The remembrance of Mandaeans drowned during Noah's flood), Parwanaia or Panja (The Feast of Creation) and Dihwa Ed Mana (The Feast of Golden Baptism). Mandaeans observe Imbattal[70] (fasting), which may consist of either a heavy or light fast. During heavy Imbattal (fasting) days, Mandaeans do not eat meat, fish or eggs; religious rituals are not performed on these days. Imbattal (fasting) days are fixed dates on the Mandaean calendar but there are also movable Imbattal (fasting) days during the year. During light Imbattal (fasting) days, Mandaeans do eat meat, fish and eggs but do not practice religious rituals.

For Mandaeans fasting is not merely abstinence from food, it is a spiritual experience where Mandaeans are exhorted to:

> Fast with your eyes from winking, and do not see or practice evil.
>
> Fast with your ears from eavesdropping at doors which do not belong to you.

[69] Verse Eleven of the Mandaean Rishama, daily ablution.

[70] Imbattal days are inauspicious days on which all rituals are forbidden. The main purpose of the Mandaean calendar is to determine the ominous and auspicious times. The Mandaeans believe in two kinds of ominous (Imbattal) days: (i) Minor Imbattal 'ominous': on these days the Mandaeans are not allowed to slaughter animals but are allowed to eat meat of animals slaughtered on the day before. (ii) Major Imbattal 'ominous': Slaughter of animals or eating meat is not allowed during these days; only vegetarian food is permitted for consumption.

> Fast with your mouths from the wanton lies and do not love falsehood and deceit.
>
> Fast with your hearts from wicked thoughts and do not harbor malice, jealousy, and dissension in your hearts
>
> Fast with your hands from committing murder and do not commit robbery.
>
> Fast with your body from the married woman who does not belong to you.
>
> Fast with your knees from prostration (or, kneeling down) before Satan and do not kneel before images of deception.
>
> Fast with your feet from going craftily after something that does not belong to you. [71]

Ganzibra Adam Yuhana is very clear about the importance of fasting in the lives of Mandaeans. “It is necessary to fast…and avoid doing the wrong thing. Wish well upon others. Do not wish evil on others. Live virtuously”.

The following table demonstrates Mandaean feasts and holy days, which include heavy and light Imbattal (fasting) days. The Mandaean calendar reserves its own order and can be difficult for non-Mandaeans to follow or comprehend. It does not follow the same order as any other religious groups. The calendar is consistent, and made of twelve, thirty-day months with an addition of extra five days of Parwanaia or Panja. Such is the importance of Soma in the daily lives of Mandaeans that it is worth describing what it involves in some detail. The complexity of the requirements is best shown in a table, prepared by the author in consultation with priests and scholars.

Table 1. Mandaean Calendar

Event	**Pure or Impure**	**Duration**	**Mandaean Calendar**	**Western Calendar**
Dihwa Raba – The Great Feast. This feast lasts for one day. However, it is followed by four impure days. The impure days lasts	Impure days	One day	Dowla	July

[71] From the Ginza Raba Yamin – Soma Raba (Great feast), exhortation section.

for five days in total. No religious rituals are performed.				
Dihwa Zuitha or Shishyan. These two days are the sixth and seventh days of the first month of the Mandaean calendar. No religious rituals are performed.	Impure days	Two days	Dowla	July
These impure days start form the seventh day of the first Mandaean month and conclude on the fourteenth day. No religious ritual may be performed during these days.	Impure days	Seven days	Dowla	July
Since this day is Impure Mandaeans do not perform any religious ceremonies.	Impure days	One day	Dowla	August
Since this day is Impure Mandaeans do not perform any religious ceremonies.	Impure days	One day	Noona	August
The feast of Fell, falls in the first day of these four days. The first day celebrates Hibil Ziwa's mission to create a habitable earth. Mandaeans do not perform any religious ceremonies during these four days.	Impure days	Four days	Tuwra	October
Dihwa Hnina – The Short Feast. Mandaeans celebrate the completion of Hibil Ziwa's mission to create a habitable earth. On	Holy day	One day	Tuwra	November

this day Hibil Ziwa returns to the Light World.				
Obul Heris – The remembrance of Mandaeans drowned during Noah's flood. Dakhrany and Lofany is prepared from grain, rice, wheat, etc. for the drowned people of Noah's Flood.	The day of remembrance.	One day	Sartana	December
Since this day is Impure Mandaeans do not perform any religious ceremonies.	Impure days	One day	Sartana	December
Since this day is Impure Mandaeans do not perform any religious ceremonies.	Impure days	One day	Sartana	December
Since this day is Impure Mandaeans do not perform any religious ceremonies.	Impure days	One day	Sartana	January
Mandaeans do not perform any religious ceremonies. No meat, fish and eggs are consumed. These five days are the days leading up to holy and pure Parwanaia. Mandaeans fast physically by consuming vegetarian food. Spiritual fasting plays a significant part during these days.	Impure days	Five days	Shumbolta	March

Mandaeans do not perform any religious ceremonies. This is the day after the five days of Parwanaia. The actual five days of Panja or Parwanaia are not included in the Mandaean calendar which is explained earlier.	Impure days	One day	Qayna	March
Dihwa Ed Mana – This is the day where Mandaeans including their teachers Adam and Yaḥiā Yohana were immersed in Yardana. Any Mandaean who is immersed during this holy and pure feast his/her spirit is (one step closer to the Light World in a spiritual sense). Mandaeans spend time with family and help the disadvantaged	Holy day	One day	Hetya	May
Since this day is Impure Mandaeans do not perform any religious ceremonies.	Impure days	One day	Hetya	May
Mandaeans do not perform any religious ceremonies.	Impure days	One day	Gadya	July
Mandaeans do not perform any religious ceremonies.	Impure days	One day	Gadya	July
Kansh O' Zahly – The eve of Dihwa Raba (New Year's Eve)	Holy day	One day	Gadya	July

Regarding the connection between feasts and fasting, Hawa notes, “We have various feasts throughout the year and some require fasting. With regards to fasting we have two types of fasting. There is a heavy fast where no meat is to be consumed, no fish is to be consumed, no eggs to be consumed. There are also light feasts where you are able to consume fish and egg…The best part about it is that unlike other religions we don’t hurt or harm your body by completely fasting from food. You can still have fruit, you can have vegetables, you can have nuts, you can have beans, legumes and nuts and seeds”.

Zahran also speaks about the relationship between fasting and feasts. He mentions the difficulty in Australia of obtaining meat that is permissible, under Mandaean law. On Sundays “I do not eat meat that is not killed our way”. He sees feasts as a time for “enjoying each other’s company and being strong as a community…There are holy feasts where you need to fast”.

Maliha also speaks of fasting on Sundays. “We don’t eat outside meat or meat that has been killed by non-Mandaeans on Sundays; at least we respect the holy day”.

For priests, as Ganzibra Adam Yuhana explains**,** the rules for fasting are especially strict. For instance, “If one needs to travel, water is needed and as you cannot take water on the air plane with you [the priest] must fast until he reaches his destination.”

For Mandaeans, fasting is a practice intimately linked to important beliefs, a spiritual process connecting the material self to the spiritual. It is a time to remind oneself of the sacredness of all life. Fasting is an important part of the spiritual journey and every Mandaean is required to participate in what Shadan speaks of as “light fasting and heavy fasting”, the determining of which signifies what is “allowed to be eaten and also where the religious rituals are permitted”. He speaks of the important feasts especially Panja, “the five days which are the holiest days in the year”. During these five days “Mandaeans commit themselves a hundred percent to Hayi through Mandaean religious beliefs with mind, heart and soul…We will live this [material] life but while we are on this earth we will be thinking about Hayi and the afterlife”.

The integrated nature of Mandaean practices, beliefs, rituals, spirituality and worldview is best seen in more detailed accounts of some of the major feasts in the Mandaean calendar. It also reveals the inherently communal nature of Mandaeism, to which the interviewees for this thesis frequently refer. The following is based primarily on the researcher’s own experience and learning as a community member.

Dihwa Raba (The Great feast) celebrates the beginning of a new year in the Mandaean calendar. Mandaeans prepare themselves for this feast through Musbeta. The last day of the year is called Kansh O' Zahly, a term derived from two Mandaic words, Kansh and Zahly, which mean cleaning and shining. Priests are busy conducting Musbeta and all faithful Mandaeans participate. Just before sunset every Mandaean performs the Tamasha (the three-fold ablution) and retires to the home. No one leaves his or her house. At this time Mandaeans must not touch living animals or plants from sundown on Kansh O' Zahly for thirty-six hours. This reflects the Mandaean emphasis on purification in their daily lives. During this time, the people read Mandaean holy books and ask Hayi for forgiveness. This is a time of spiritual fasting, of reflection and connecting with Hayi. It is also important to remember those who have passed away. During the thirty-six-hour retreat Mandaeans are without their Natri (Guardian Spirits). All of the Uthri (Angel Spirits) and Natri (Guardian Spirits) pay homage to Mana Raba Kabrina (The Lord of Greatness), for creation is completed on the New Year.

> New Year's Day commemorates the Creation for Mana Raba Kabira, The Great Mana, the Lord of Greatness, completed his work of creation on this day. Therefore all spirits of light, whatever they may be, leave their posts and go to visit him and pay their compliments. Abathur 'closes his door', Nidbai and Shilmai forsake their guardianship of the running waters; Hibil, Šitil, and 'Anush depart; the dwellers in Mshynia Kušta with Adam Kasia at their head and their guardian spirit Šišlam Raba (the dmutha of Hibil Ziwa) - all rise into the infinite World of Light. Swiftly as these creatures of light move, the long journey takes them twelve hours. They reach their goal at dawn of the New Year and spend that day in the bliss of contemplating perfection. The journey back covers the next night (Drower, 1962, p. 86).

A sequence of feasts for fourteen days celebrates creation. This shows the importance of creation and the sacredness of life for Mandaeans. During Dihwa Raba (The Great feast) the earth is unprotected; Ruha (darkness) and her disciples can influence or harm humankind, so Mandaeans take extra precaution to prevent contact with Ruha and her disciples. The day is called Dihwa Raba (The Great feast), thus is the Day of Lacking when no rituals except funerals may be performed. At the conclusion of the thirty-six hours of Kansh O' Zahly, Mandaeans visit each other, firstly the priests. It is a time of rejoicing.

Dihwa Ed Šišlam Raba or Shishyan is (The Feast of Peace), which takes place during the sixth and seventh day of the New Year. Shishyan lasts only for two days. On this day, the priests make small Klilas (myrtle wreath) shaped like rings. They bless these rings, which are then divided among the Mandaean community.

Mandaeans put one of these Klilas on the door at the entry to their houses to ask Hayi for peace and health for their family members. They also put a Klila on a Taryana (clay dish) with fruits and water from the river. The days of Shishyan for Mandaeans are the days called Imbattal (a heavy fast). The *Diwan Alf Trisar Šuialia*, (the Thousand and Twelve Questions) explains:

> From the first day of the feast of Dihwa Raba (The Great feast) fasting days continue for fourteen days which are considered as (light fasting days). The beginning days of this feast are the beginning of creation. During these fourteen days do not practice Musbeta and do not perform the ritual of Masiqta because on the sixth day of the feast of Dihwa Raba (The Great feast) the angel Epthaheal, whose deeds were unsuccessful, was created. (*Diwan Alf Trisar Šuialia,* Emhetha section, Wasutha Question, No 12).

As a result of the birth of this angel, in Shishyan (The feast of Peace), the sixth and seventh day of the New Year are considered ominous and so Klilas (myrtle wreaths) are placed at the entrance of homes and on Taryanas (clay dishes). The night "between these two days is called the night of power" (Drower, 1937, p. 87). On this night the Gates of Abatur are opened to those who are truly pious. Such a pious person will ask for spiritual gifts not material ones. The results of such requests are not immediate but will become clear in time. On this night food is given to the poor. Parishioners are visited by their priests who bless each house with a small wreath of willow and myrtle placed on every lintel. These blessed wreaths remain on the lintel for the next year to remind the family of Hayi's protection. These are the sorts of practices, all expressions of their beliefs that Australian Mandaeans can perform now that they are free to practice their religion.

The feast of Fell is the first day of creation and is followed by the celebration of Dihwa Hnina (The Short Feast), which marks the end of creation. This feast is in recognition of the first day when the angel Hibil Ziwa was instructed by Hayi to travel to earth and help to assist in creating a suitable environment for humankind and other living beings, a journey that took up eighteen days in total. While on his mission, Hibil Ziwa ate dates mixed with sesame seeds, making this a tradition to this day. Thus every year Mandaeans celebrate this special time by making and consuming dates mixed with sesame seeds. The Short Feast celebrates Hibil Ziwa completing his mission and returning to the Light World. Mandaeans celebrate this event by feasting on rice, yogurt and dates. It is considered a holy and pure day.

Obul Heris (The Remembrance of Mandaeans drowned during Noah's flood) is another traditional time of remembrance. Every year, Mandaeans remember their forebears by consuming a meal made out of seven different grains. In a way, this

can be considered as Lofani, (a special meal for those who have passed away). Lofani can be performed as many times as one wishes, while Obul Heris is an annual occasion marked specifically in the Mandaean calendar. It occurs on the first day of the month of Sartana and lasts for one day.

During religious ceremonies all Mandaeans, priests and laymen, must wear a ritual dress. The garment is made of a natural fibre, usually cotton or muslin, although silk is allowed. The colour of this clothing is always white. Modern Mandaeans call this clothing 'rasta'. In the Mandaean religious literature the Rasta is referred to as 'ustlia'. The ritual clothing is symbolic "of the heavenly dress of light, which according to Mandaean religion, is worn by the 'uthre (angels) and pure souls" (Rudolph, 1978, p. 6). The Rasta is put on before a Musbeta and is used at subsequent ceremonies.

Anyone who passes away during this feast passes without hindrance through Mataratha (purgatory) to the World of Light and a Masiqta (ceremony for departed soul) is not necessary. The Mandaean calendar divides the year into twelve months of thirty days each, so Panja or Parwanaia, constitute the five intercalary days. They fall between the thirtieth day of Shumbulta and the first day of Qaina. In the northern hemisphere this falls at the time when the rivers are flowing with the melting snows from the north. In Australia this feast falls in autumn. Each day during Panja is dedicated to a Light spirit and at this time prayers may be offered during the night because the entrance to the World of Light is open. Panja is a particularly sacred time for Mandaeans and a time of celebration for the whole community.

Parwanaia or Panja (The Feast of Creation) celebrates creation and lasts for five days. These five days are the holiest days in the Mandaean calendar. Prior to Panja there are five days considered Imbattal or days of heavy fasting. This feast is the happiest time of the year. It is held at the river and people travel long distances to participate in Musbeta and join in the Lofani, the special meal for those who have passed away. Participants are always dressed in the Rasta (ritual dress). Because of its significance, I will deal with this in the next section.

Dihwa Ed Mana (The Feast of Golden Baptism) is another holy feast. This feast celebrates the establishment of Musbeta for Mandaeans by Hayi who made the Uthra Behram Raba,[72] responsible for the practice of Musbeta. This feast also celebrates the birth of John the Baptist who revived the practice of Musbeta more

[72] The baptism of the great Behram, son of the mighty.

than two thousand years ago. Spiritually, participation in Musbeta is very significant for Mandaeans. Dihwa Ed Mana only lasts for one day and occurs in the Mandaean month of Hetya.

> *When I was really young I used to get excited preparing for Dihwa Raba every year because of the sense of community, family coming together, Musbeta, cleaning households and most importantly gifts from my grandparents and parents. I remember staying up for as long as I could to keep up with my parents praying and remembering those who passed away. For the past few years I struggled during Dihwa Raba because I did not have that sense of family and community around me. This year is a special Dihwa Raba for me as I am spending it with my wife, my brother and his family.*

Rasta/Ustlia (Mandaean Ritual and Traditional Dress)

The Rasta or Ritual clothing is an essential part of Musbeta and many other Mandaean rituals. In the Mandaean religious literature the Rasta is referred to as Ustlia – Ustlia d-Ziua “raiments (garments) of light” (Mandaean Dictionary, 1963, p. 245). The detailed requirements of the Rasta are sometimes presented, and often understood, by non-Mandaeans as incidental aspects of the religion. For Mandaeans, however, it is a very important part of their religious practice. Several of the interviewees refer to it, and how much they value being able to wear the Rasta in Australia. This is because the Rasta is symbolic “of the heavenly dress of light”, which according to Rudolph “is worn by the ‘uthre (angels) and pure souls” (1978, p. 6). “Clothe yourself in white (garments) and cover yourself in white (covering) like the garments of radiance and coverings of light. Put on white turbans like resplendent wreaths” (Segelberg, 1958, p. 120). The Rasta is worn before taking part in Musbeta and is never washed with soap. “And when you say ‘On the day when they dressed Manda d Hiia in his vestments’ — the vestment he puts on shines out” (Buckley, 1993, p. 45).

> In the name of the Great Life!
> On the day they clad Manda d-Hiia in his vestment
> His radiance shone forth over the worlds of Light
> His brilliance shone forth over the worlds of light
> And the worlds of light that beheld his radiance
> All gather to him, all flocked toward him
> And opened their mouth and blessed Manda d-Hiia Saying to him:
> Blessed is thy radiance, That shineth over the waters, How bright
> is thy radiance, Thine appearance giveth out light and becometh

> not dim (The Canonical Prayerbook of Mandaeans, trans. Drower, 1959, p. 163).

Every Mandaean, including priests and laypeople, must wear a Rasta during religious ceremonies. The Rasta is made of a natural fibre, usually cotton although silk is also permitted. The colour of the Rasta is white. A new Rasta is worn on special occasions like weddings, the ordination of priests, when a Mandaean is passing, during Zidqa Brika (Holy Oblation), when a Hallali (pure layperson in a ritual context) is a proxy, and at the feast of Dihwa Ed Mana. Prior to the time of Muhammad and the Muslim invasion of Mandaean territories, Mandaeans dressed in their traditional clothing, the Rasta, all day and not just for ceremonies. Today Mandaeans like myself generally wear a variety of traditional and Western clothing outside of ceremonies, although white continues to be the preferred colour.

The Rasta is made up of seven parts for priests and five for everyone else. The Rasta consists of Sadra or Ksuia (long-sleeved tunic), Šarwala (pants), including a takkaa (tie string) to tie the pants and the Daša (patched pocket), Himyana (ceremonial belt), Barzinqa (turban) and Nasifa (long narrow strip of muslin). In addition to these a priest has his Taqa (crown) and Šum Yawar (ceremonial ring). Once the priest is dressed in his Rasta, he checks the order of the Rasta ensuring all parts are worn correctly. The priest then recites:

> Šarwalay Etres
> I Bless My Šarwala (pants)
>
> Himyana Etres Betren TaFi Betren Gatri
> I Bless the Himyana (ceremonial belt), with two knots
>
> Daša Bay-miney, Qam-Qommay,
> The Daša (patched pocket) on my right: standing upright
>
> Gorzay Nasifay Margana Eb-SmalEy
> My Ruqza, my muslin, my Staff on my left (arm),
>
> TaQa Eb-YamnAy
> My TaQa on my right,
>
> O Isakhtha Saqta Eb-YamnAy
> And my ring on my right hand
>
> Kušta Asyakh Otresay.
> Virtue makes you whole (Drower, 1937, p. 32).

Each part of the Rasta plays a significant role in the overall ceremony and extra attention is always given to the order of which a Rasta is worn correctly. Because

the Rasta is significant in Mandaean daily life and ceremonies the following provides a short description of each part. This description is based on my own experience, together with research undertaken in writing this thesis.

Ksuia

The Ksuia or Sadra is the long-sleeved tunic. For living Mandaeans the Ksuia is roughly six times the length of the forearm from elbow to fingertip; for a dying Mandaean the Ksuia is roughly eight times this length. The Ksuia is of cotton material and symbolizes the škinta (Diwan Malkuta ‘Laita, the Scroll of the Exalted Kingship, trans. Buckley, 1993, p. 45). The word Ksuia means “to cover” (Mandaic Dictionary, 1963, p. 220).

The way one puts on the garment follows a strictly defined ritual. The priest wears the Ksuia differently to the lay people. Prior to the priest entering the water he takes the left side of the hem and tucks it into the Himyana. The priest then takes the right side and tucks it into the left side. The rest of the material is then gathered and tucked in the front. Lastly the priest gathers the material in the back and tucks it in. All of this takes place prior to the Nasifa (long narrow strip of muslin) being placed on the neck and the Pandama is sealed (Pandama is explained in detail further). The layman or woman enters Yardana with the Ksuia hanging down.

“And when you say ‘The Tunic’ that škinta in which you are sitting shines and is resplendent for the tunic covers all the mysteries” (Buckley, 1993, p. 45).

> In the name of the Great Life!
>
> On the day that they invested
> Manda d-Hiia with the tunic.
> His radiance shone forth over
> the ‘uthras and dwellings.
> The uthras and dwellings
> that beheld the radiance of Manda d-Hiia
> All gathered toward him, all flocked towards him
> Laying their pure right hands upon him
> Blessed Manda d-Hiia and saying to him:
> And blessed is he who hath
> transferred to thee these vestments.
>
> For all the worlds which behold thee
> Are awestruck by thy radiance (The Canonical Prayerbook of Mandaeans, trans. Drower, 1959, p. 164).

Daša

The Daša is a small pocket sewn onto the outside of the Ksuia (long-sleeved tunic). When a Mandaean is about to pass on to the Light World the priests place a bottle of oil in this pocket; in such circumstances the priests use a clean new bottle with freshly pressed oil. A wreath of myrtle is then twisted around the bottle. After the priest blesses the bottle and the myrtle with prayers, the bottle is covered with clay. Using the Šum Yawar (ceremonial ring), the priest recites the "'sealed letter which leaveth the world.' Using his little finger the priest then presses his nail into the clay and recites, 'a letter written in good-faith (Kušta) and sealed with the seal of the Mighty (Life)'" (The Canonical Prayerbook of Mandaeans, trans. Drower, 1959, p. 61). The priest continues:

> In the name of the Life!
> A sealed letter which leaveth the world -
> A letter written in good-faith (Kušta)
> And sealed with the seal of the Mighty (Life) -
> Righteous men wrote it, believing men tied it on,
> And suspended it about the soul's neck
> And despatched it to the Gate of Life.
> The soul, in her wisdom,
> Pressed her nail on the letter,
> Her nail she pressed on the letter;
> She imbued it with her mystic radiance,
> Wrapped it and veiled it in her light (The Canonical Prayerbook of Mandaeans, trans. Drower, 1959, p. 61).

Šarwala

The Šarwala are baggy pants worn as part of the Rasta. The symbolic message of the Šarwala are that they protect and seal the reproductive organs. Researchers such as Eric Segelberg thought the Šarwala were a foreign element to the Rasta and may have been introduced at a relatively late date. In 1958 Segelberg wrote:

> This seems to be a strong indication which, combined with the fact that the Šarwala are mentioned last among the hymns just quoted and maybe also the shape of the drawers being similar to those used by the Parthians and Indians, makes plausible that the drawers at least as items of the liturgical dress are more recent than usually thought (Segelberg, 1958, p. 119).

Drower in her translation of *Alf Trisar Šuialia* (1012 Questions, 1960, p. 152) claims:

> If he [the priest] immersed his leggings [Šarwala] by mistake, he must be baptised by seven priests, in new vestments [Rastas], because the leggings [Šarwala] symbolize kingly power in the Womb of mysteries for within it the Šarwala his treasures secrete parts are established.

As a Mandaean researcher I am persuaded by Drower's argument, which would indicate that the Šarwala has always been part of the Rasta. The insistence on a strict observance of each part of the ritual is a testament to this fact. Further, the Šarwala is a significant element of the Rasta in that it protects the sacredness of life.

Takkaa

The Takkaa is a cloth similar to the Nasifa which is used to hold and fasten the Šarwala around the waist. One end of the Takkaa is not sewn. When tying the Takkaa the unsewn end must go over the sewn end. The sewn end must hang to the right and the other end to the left side. Even something as simple as the drawstring has a symbolic purpose. "They shall see that the signing of all peoples is safeguarded by the drawstring of their Šarwalas and that their name (repute) is protected by their crown" (Alf Trisar Šuialia - 1012 Questions, trans. Drower, 1960, p. 254).

Himyana

The Himyana (ceremonial belt) is a belt that symbolises the Mandaean faith. The Himyana is made out of wool and consists of sixty woven threads.

> In the name of the Great Life!
> On the day that they tied the girdle on Manda d-Hiia,
> His radiance shone forth over the 'uthras and dwellings.
> The uthras and dwellings that beheld Manda d-Hiia's radiance
>
> Were all afraid of his radiance, at his radiance, all were in awe
> And all gathered to him, all flocked towards him
> And blessed Manda d-Hiia, saying to him
> Blessed art thou, our father Manda d-Hiia,
> And blessed is this girdle, wherewith they gave girt thee! (The Canonical Prayerbook of Mandaeans, trans. Drower, 1959, p.163).

The Himyana is explained as being the girdle of water of Manda d-Hayi (Segelberg, 1958, p. 120). "But should it happen his (ritual) clothes are silken, the himiana (girdle) (is) an exception, for it must be of wool from a male lamb. If the vestments of a priest be silken there must be no snarls therein" (1012 Questions, trans. Drower, 1960, p. 116). The tying of the Himyana has a ritual meaning. It is tied around the waist, finished with a double knot in front. The end left side of the Himyana has a tassel, which is not sewn and is called the Karkuša. The other end is called the Arwa. When the Himyana is tied the Arwa must be passed over the Karkuša. It is important that the Karkuša falls to the left and the Arwa falls to the right. While tying the Himyana the following prayer is recited:

> Himyana Etres
> Betren TaVi
> Betren Gatri
>
> I Bless the Himyana (ceremonial belt), with two knots.

"And when you say 'The girdle' that wreath which is set on the head of your heart shines" (Diwan Malkuta 'Laita, the Scroll of the Exalted Kingship, trans. Buckley, 1993, p. 45).

Barzinqa

During ceremonies Mandaeans cover their head with Barzinqa. It is made of white muslin. For women the Barzinqa is referred to as Gouba'a. For men, it is twisted three times around the head; the other end hangs down on the left shoulder, which is called Rozqa. When necessary, in the course of some rituals, the Rozqa is brought across the face in order to cover the nose and the mouth, then up over the top of the head again and tucked in at the right side, which then becomes the Pandama. The Pandama is only used by priests or by Hallali men, during a funeral. The symbolic meaning of the Pandama is to seal up those elements which are contained in the human body that might not be considered pure (Drower, 1962, pp. 30-31). "…prevent spittle or breath from polluting sacred objects, elements and rites or in the second case (i.e. at funerals) to prevent the corruption of death from entering the mouth and nose" (Drower, 1962, p. 30).

Eric Segelberg (1958, pp. 114-115) states: "The burzinqa may be distinctly Mandaean". In one of the prayers given for the burzinqa there is a directive for all Nasorians to place the burzinqa upon their heads after getting up out of bed. This lends support to the idea that the Rasta was worn at all times, not just during baptism (Mead, 1924). In the *Masiqta of Zihrun Raza Kasia* it is narrated that the Mystery of Light was great upon the lips of the First Life from where came forth Manda d-Hayi. In the *Masiqta of Hibil Ziwa* it says:

> And ye hold (your) pandama(s) and fold them over your mouths, ye seal up all the kings of darkness; a mystery of light hath awakened and it sealeth you, establishth you and blessedth you and delivereth your baptism from darkness (The Scroll of the Baptism of Hibil Ziwa, trans. Drower, 1953, p. 49.)
>
> In the name of the Great Life!
>
> Let there be light, let there be light! Let there be the light of the Great First Life! There shone forth wisdom, vigilance and praise of the First Mana, which came from its place. He who twineth the

> wreath is Yufin-Yufafin: the bringer of the wreath is 'It-'Nsibat-'utria. 'It-Yawar son of 'Nsibat-'utria set on the wreath. He brought it and placed it upon the head of the implanted mana manas.
>
> The wreath flames and the leaves of the wreath flame! Before the Mana there is light, behind the Mana glory, and at either side of the Mana radiance, brilliance and purity. And at the four corners of the House and the seven sides of the firmament silence, bliss and glory prevail. And Life be praised! (The Canonical Prayerbook of Mandaeans, trans. Drower, 1959, p. 4).

In essence, the pandama prevents the body from pollution by the powers of darkness. Here, as with other parts of the Rasta, an article of clothing symbolises important beliefs and desires of practitioners.

Nasifa

The nasifa is a narrow strip of muslin like a scarf. It is worn across the neck, hanging in the front, and situated beneath the Himyana in such a way that the left side is partly shorter than the right. The priests in particular find the nasifa useful. During the Rahmi (prescribed preliminary prayers) the right side of the nasifa is used to avoid pollution by touching the ground. After the pandama has been brought up across the face the nasifa's left side is twisted twice around the neck thus keeping the pandama in place from slippage. The end of the nasifa is secured by threading it in and out three times. The long right side is thrown up and over the right shoulder, forming a loop that reaches to the waist. The end is then taken up across the back to the left shoulder and around again to meet the mini loop. These two are tied in a double knot (Drower, 1962, p. 33).

When the priest enters the Yardana (river) the nasifa plays an important role. The priest first immerses the Margane (the ritual staff) horizontally twice in water. Next the Margane is placed through the loop made previously with the nasifa. Now the end of the Margane is struck in the bottom of the river and held quickly. The priest then can release the Margane which is now supported by the loop which allows him to wash both hands without the fear of dropping it in the water.

Another use of the nasifa is at the final Kušta. This Kušta takes place after the person being immersed drinks the Mumbuha (water). The priest then shakes the hand of the person using the nasifa. Once the final Kušta takes place, the priest changes the Margane from the left to right side and holds it with both hands using the nasifa. In the marriage ceremony the groom takes hold of the end of the priest’s nasifa. When a Mandaean, either layperson or priest, is close to leaving this world a

nasifa is prepared which is longer than the usual nasifa. A silver thread is sewn on the left side (symbolising the mystery of the Mother) and gold on the right (symbolising the mystery of the Father). At times a piece of silver and gold may be used instead of the threads.

Šum Yawar

The Šum Yawar is a gold ring worn on the smallest finger of the priest's right hand. The ring has Šum Yawar Ziwa engraved on it. Eric Segelberg in his book *Ma§buta: Studies in the Ritual of the Mandaean Baptism* (1958, pp. 110-114) states:

> Šum Yawar Ziwa, the great seal that not one of the Seven can remove. Like the Pure Oil it is blessed and a pure number is assigned to it. It is signed thrice by three fingers. It is granted to that one sealed with that signet ring and on it's owner that great sign is inscribed. On him it confers the symbol of his kingship

Taqqa

The Taqqa (Crown) is made of a strip of white silk. It is the most important part of the priest's emblem. The Taqqa is worn under the Barzinqa and is consecrated separately, being put on during the Rahmi (Devotions, prescribed preliminary prayers). Before officiating as a priest, four prayers (Buthas) are said over the Taqqa. The Taqqa symbolises Light and is a physical reminder that the priest is the earthly guide among his fellow believers. "Crown (taga) and kingliness are set on his head and he is perfected in them" (Diwan Malkuta 'Laita, the Scroll of the Exalted Kingship, trans. Buckley, 1993, p. 45).

In the four prayers that are used to consecrate the Burzinqa, the texts mention only the Klila. In prayer one the main theme of the content deals with Mara d-Rabuta giving the Klila (wreath) of light and glory to a Mandaean who has no wreath upon his head. In a later section the Burzinqa is mentioned for all Mandaeans to place it on their heads when they wake up (The Canonical Prayerbook of Mandaeans, trans. Drower, 1959, p. 164). If the prayer in The Canonical Prayerbook is compared to the same prayer in The Baptism of Adam by Hibil Ziwa, it is Hibil Ziwa who recites the prayer over the Taqqa. So here the Taqqa and wreath are interchangeable in the ritual (Drower, 1962, p. 31).

> In the name of the Life and in the name of Knowledge-of-Life (Manda-d-Hiia) and in the name of that Primal Being who was Eldest and preceded water, radiance, light and glory, the Being who cried with His voice and uttered words. By means of His voice and His words Vines grew and came into being, and the First Life was established in its Abode.

And He spoke and said, The First Life is anterior to the Second Life by six thousand myriad years and the Second Life anterior to the Third Life by six thousand myriad years and the Third Life more ancient than any 'uthra by six thousand myriad years. And any 'uthra is older than the whole earth and older than the Seven Lords of the House by seven hundred and seventy thousand myriad years. There is that which is infinite.

At that time there was no solid earth and no inhabitants in the black waters. From them, from those black waters, Evil was formed and emerged, one from whom a thousand mysteries proceeded and a myriad planets with their own mysteries.

The Seven were wroth with me, were outraged and said, The man who set out and came towards us hath not bound a circlet about his head! Then I turned my face toward my Creator who created me, the celestial Lord of Greatness, and I said to Him, O my Creator who created me, (O) Lord of lofty Greatness! As I went (my ways) the Seven were wroth with me and said, 'The man who went and came towards us hath not bound a circlet about his head!

Then that Lord of Lofty Greatness took a circlet of radiance, light and glory and set it on my head; He laid on me His hand of Truth and His great right hand of healings and said to me, Upon thee shall rest something of the likeness of Sam-Gufna and of Sam-Gufaian and of Sam-Pira-Hiwara, whose radiance gleams and whose appearance beams, for they are holy and believing beings in the Place of Light and in the everlasting Abode.

And Manda-d-Hiia, the valorous 'uthra, taught, revealed and said Every Nasoraean man who is righteous and believing, on arising from sleep, must take a white turban symbolising the great mystery of radiance, light and glory and shall recite this prayer thereon. And he shall twist it round his head and repeat the prayer secretly. It will be his praise in the house of the great Celestial Father. And all persons who behold him will be subdued in his presence: any persecutor, or one who inciteth to wrath, will stand before him in fear, terror and trembling, (their knees) knocking together. And for me, Adam-Yuhana son of Mahnus, who have prayed this prayer and (these) devotions, there will be forgiving of sins and I shall be pure in all my words

And Life is Victorious

In the name of the Life!

Life created Yawar-Ziwa, son of Light-of-Life, Hamgai-Ziwa son of Hamgagai-Ziwa. Illumined and illuminating is the Great Mystery of Radiance, Zihrun, a Crown of radiance, light and glory from whom a flow of living water streamed out to the shkintas. For he is the revealer (lit. opener) of radiance and light and displayeth his treasure which emanated from him, to eager 'uthras. All worlds adore and praise the mighty First Life in its Indwellings,

> And Life is Victorious
>
> In the name of the Great Life!
>
> Let there be light, let there be light! Let there be the light of the Great First Life! There shone forth wisdom, vigilance and praise of the First Mana, which came from its place. He who twineth the wreath is Yufin-Yufafin: the bringer of the wreath is 'It-'Nsibat-'utria. 'It-Yawar son of 'Nsibat-'utria set on the wreath. He brought it and placed it upon the head of the implanted mana manas.
>
> The wreath flames and the leaves of the wreath flame! Before the Mana there is light, behind the Mana glory, and at either side of the Mana radiance, brilliance and purity. And at the four corners of the House and the seven sides of the firmament silence, bliss and glory prevail.
>
> And Life be praised! (The Canonical Prayerbook of Mandaeans, trans. Drower, 1959, pp. 1-4).

> Manda created me, 'uthras set me up, radiance clothed me and light covered me: Haza-zban set the wreath on my head, mine, Adam-Yuhana , son of Mahnush, and on these souls who descend to the Jordan and are baptised. Its tendrils shine and its perfume is sweet, for they (the tendrils) wither not nor do they come apart, and its leaves do not fall off.
>
> And Life be praised!" (The Canonical Prayerbook of Mandaeans, trans. Drower, 1959, p. 15).

The Taqqa and Klila are represented in the *Alf Trisar Šuialia (One Thousand and Twelve Questions)* to complement one another. The Taqqa is the Gold and Ziwa (radiance) while the Klila is the silver and Dnhura (light). "Gold is the pure mystery of the Father and silver is the mystery of the Mother. The myrtle wreath is the mystery of the Mother and Nhur Nhur is her name" (Segelberg, 1958, pp. 110 -114).

Musbeta

Ganzibra Adam Yuhana speaks about the importance of fidelity to the rituals of Mandaeism. "The most important one of all is Musbeta, which is the main ritual, because if the person is not immersed he/she will not be recognised as a Mandaean.

"It is in the immersion when the Milwa**š**a (Spiritual name) of the person is recognised in the Light World. This would be a spiritual name, given in the immersion, and the name would be recorded in the Light World. Milwa**š**a is used in

all other rituals including the marriage ceremony…If any Mandaean is not immersed, the name will not be recorded in the Light World and you cannot do anything for them ritually. If a Mandaean passes away without a religious name Masiqta cannot be performed for them. You could pray for them, but you cannot perform any religious rituals. Without immersion, a couple could not get married according to Mandaean law. For example, prior to getting married if one has made a mistake the immersion can symbolise forgiveness of sins and also the start of a new chapter in life."

Belief in and the practice of Musbeta for Mandaeans is therefore essential to an individual's identity and survival as a Mandaean. As Ganzibra Adam Yuhana notes, "Musbeta means "ablution" or "spiritual immersion". When a person is born, after thirty days of being in the state of Surtha (pollution or sinfulness), one's name must be recorded in the World of Light and that is achieved by immersion…As the baby cannot respond, a godfather will be appointed, and it is the godfather who will respond in the ceremony instead of the child. When a baby is immersed it goes from being in the state of Iahutaiia or ignorance to the state of Mandiyutha[73] or knowledge, meaning from ignorance to knowledge/wisdom.

Ganzibra Adam Yuhana further explains: "Immersion has different stages and it is not only for the new born...When a Mandaean picks up or touches a Nofakha,[74] he must get immersed…Immersion is also for a person who is seeking forgiveness and repentance. One who has committed a sin could get immersed and pray to Hayi and seek forgiveness. If this person is truly sincere and does not repeat the sin, he/she will be forgiven...Another situation is if in a ritual such as slaughter or the Škanda ceremony a mistake is made, to remedy this mistake immersions will take place. In this situation immersion is about seeking penitence and forgiveness and it also symbolises the beginning of a new life and a new start".

In Musbeta, immersion in Yardana or (living water) links the person in a spiritual way with the Light World. Yardana symbolises the Great Life and is the reason Mandaeans choose to live near rivers. As Maliha says, during Musbeta "you feel as if you know you really going toward a different place. You know there is a strong connection between you, Hayi and the water. I don't know what the connection is, but for me the moment I enter the water I feel like I separate totally my body, my thinking, between who I am and connect myself with Hayi, with the water, with the Tarmida or the Ganizbra" who performs the ceremony... "You look at the sky, you

[73] State of knowledge, wisdom, Enlightenment.
[74] Corpse.

look at the water, you look at the trees, you feel that you are in heaven actually. When I talk, when I pray, I can imagine I know like people in heaven". It is clear from this that for Maliha her life on earth is linked through Musbeta to a strong sense of her journey to Hayi. She continues "I know God created me because he loves me".

> *My own experience is similar to Maliha's. Each time I enter Yardana during Musbeta I am taken to a new level of spiritual awareness, which is difficult to explain in words. However, I can say that at the time of immersion I have a strong sense of the presence of the Light World where I feel connected to my forbears who are already in the Light World. Such a spiritual experience stays with me and gives me strength to cope with the ordinary struggles of life.*

Hawa speaks about the practice of Musbeta and the requirement to wear the Rasta "which consists of five pieces, plus a very special myrtle ring that we use. We also have a very special amulet which we call Sikin Doleh[75] that is used for protection and it's got four animals on it, the snake, the wasp, the scorpion and the lion…Most of the time [this symbol] is used in marriage or for newborns". The symbol of the Mandaean religion is the "Drabsha which some people call a Darfash. It's a unique symbol" which is sometimes worn as a necklace "that symbolises the Darfash" and tells other Mandaeans that you too are a Mandaean. The Sikin Doleh is a ritual iron ring with a chain which is used to seal the navels of newborn babies. It also used to seal graves. Depicted on the seal are the four animals which are believed to be the elements of life – the encircling snake, the lion, the scorpion and the wasp.

One area of Mandaean life Maliha rejoices in is being able to celebrate Mandaean feasts, which include Musbeta, openly. Here in Australia she believes the chances to practice her faith are much better. "When you go for Musbeta especially when you go for religious feasts like Panja or Dahfa[76] there are hundreds of people. The river is down the hill…and you see that all those people are wearing the white Rasta with the Darfash standing strong". She sees this as a "symbol of equality and solidarity. People come for one mission to renew the faith to promise Hayi to be good people".

Since Musbeta is so central to Mandaean life, Hawa points out the importance of having "a place where we could practice, especially a river bank without needing to approach various councils to use the local park to access the local river".

[75] Seal on metal knife. The Sikin Doleh is used by Mandaeans for protection against evil, mischief and sedition.
[76] Mandaean Great New Year's feast.

Maliha also speaks of the importance of keeping the tradition of Musbeta alive. “I don’t like and I don’t believe [in] removing parts of Musbeta to make it shorter. I don’t believe to create a new religion to fit other people, like immersion using the tap water or wearing swimming suit while you are going for baptism…I still believe in the very old ancient way and since we survive from Adam up to now definitely we are doing the right thing”. While Mandaeans for many years now have been able to use the Nepean River in a local park this does create some privacy and problems if the weather is bad.

Sacredness of Life

For Mandaeans life is sacred. This is consistent with the overall understanding that life on earth is a preparation for life in the Light World. As Hawa explains, “during our life here on earth we see that the human body is a vessel for the soul, which you are not supposed to harm. So what I mean by that is you are not supposed to get any tattoos, you are not supposed to have any piercings, you don’t go about searching for self-harm. You try and protect this vessel and return it the way that [it] was given to you upon birth into this life”.

Another area of belief explained by Hawa are laws Mandaeans have to abide by, in regard to the consumption of food. “We have our own version of meat being permissible, so as some religions call this halal or kosher, so we have our own version of that. We do not eat pork or beef or goat, basically no animals that have hair or hooves or fur, no females either. I suppose the reasoning behind that would be so that reproduction can continue to be maintained”.

Believing that the sacredness of life must be upheld, Mandaeans, says Hawa, “don’t allow for alcohol and drug use…Males are not to be circumcised and our females are actually checked regarding virginity for marriage”. Although Hawa recognises that this is difficult for a lot of young people in Australia, she also sees it as part of Mandaean belief in the integrity of life. This belief is so strong that if a mistake is made, as Hawa points out, “it will harm the priest who is conducting the marriage ceremony regarding what spiritual level he is on”. This shows the connectedness of Mandaean belief and practice where personal dishonesty could affect the status of the Ganzibra. Since he is required for the marriage ceremony, a priest would need to be reinstated to his former spiritual level if it is lost through such deception.

> *When I got married, full participation in the Mandaean ceremony made me realise how complex our belief is. It highlighted for me the*

> *interconnectedness between marriage, the sacredness of life and the importance of priesthood. I was pleased that on my parent's request Riš ama Sam, Ganizbra Adam Yuhana and Tarmida Basam from San Antonio officiated. For me as a Mandaean it was important that the three priests were present to act as mediators for us, as a married couple, one soul in two bodies, as we began our journey through life together to the World of Light. As a single man entering marriage I set out with my wife on a spiritual journey that began with the ceremony and will last throughout life.*

Since priests are mediators of the world of Light and this world, there is a sense in which their own lives connect the material life with the spiritual life. They are essential for the rituals, like Musbeta, which lead Mandaeans to enlightenment. Hawa further explains, "We have various levels of holy men whose way of life is very austere. For the priests there are also different levels, so you have got your Škanda, you have got your Tarmida, you have got your Ganzibra and you've got your Riš ama[77]". Hawa goes on to point out that there are different ceremonies at each level of initiation into the priesthood. As she says "I could say I was lucky enough to be a part of one of those ceremonies, which is not something that happens very often, to be part of a ceremony where a priest is becoming a priest. Our marriage is also done through baptism during the marriage ceremony, so you also need to be on the river bank for that. For a marriage ceremony you need three priests, one of which needs to be a Ganzibra. We believe that marriage is one soul in two bodies so it's an eternal thing, we don't believe in divorce".

For Mandaeans to take a human life or engage in violence is to do a great wrong. The shedding of blood is taboo. Tofiq speaks of pacifism as an important part of Mandaean belief. "We are not to kill, especially in the Mandaean religion. We are prohibited to have weapons at home, we are proud that it is a peaceful religion which prohibits weapons, fighting, lies and to believe in the right way, and to respect the laws of the country where you live". However, he does point out that Mandaeans have been made "a target in past history because of their pacifism". He believes that Mandaeism "regulates our life, gives us a way to behave, to feel secure". It gives "the information that differentiates between the good and bad powers in life; the bad powers meaning the people who are prepared to cause trouble and terrorize other people. While the good thing is what God asks us to do".

[77] Ritual helper, lower level priest and High priest respectively. The Riš ama is regarded as having the deepest, arcane and mystical knowledge of Mandaeism.

Hawa, who was born in Australia, says “Mandaeism is not just a religion but also a way of life…It’s our culture”. She goes on to say that for Mandaeans “this way of life is non-violent and so, because it’s a very peaceful religion, violence is not an option”. For Hawa an important aspect of the religion is access to “meat that is permissible”, and in the Mandaean way of life there is “a certain way to prepare meat in which you thank Hayi for the animal and slaughter it in a way that is not going to be painful for them”.

> *Every time I reflect on pacifism as a Mandaean, I ask myself what it means to me in terms of the persecution that I, my family and community have endured. At times, facing genocide and pogroms we have stayed true to our pacifist beliefs and their connection to the sacredness of life. The relief of Mandaeans who fled from the Iraq invasion and sought refuge in Syria did not last as ISIS took over parts of Syria and Mandaeans once again dispersed through the Middle East. It is clear to me that when it comes to fight or flight, traditionally Mandaeans choose to get away. This commitment to pacifism and respect for life is evident in their exodus from Palestine thousands of years ago until today where Mandaeans have emigrated to Australia, North America and Europe.*
>
> *Growing up, my elders always stressed the importance of using dialogue to come up with solutions when faced with violence and threatening situations; perhaps this is one of the reasons we have survived to this day. We are committed to diplomacy, respect for life and walking away instead of fighting. This is one side. But I do struggle to come in terms with the persecution that led to me escaping a land that my forbears lived in for more than 2000 years. Because of living in exile, I did not see my parents and siblings for more than ten years. Now that they have also left Iran, it has become easier to see each other. Recently my grandfather, my teacher and inspiration, passed away in Iran. I was not able to return to pay my respects and farewell him, but I know some time in the not-too-distant future I’ll be reunited with my ancestors in the World of Light. In the meantime, we are connected spiritually until it is time for me to depart this material world.*

Priesthood

Riš ama Sam speaks at some length about the role of the priest and the importance of his knowledge of “the canon of Mandaeism”. In Mandaeism the correct

performance of rituals is essential to be valid, and so, he continues, “understanding and interpreting Mandaean philosophy and religious literature” requires in-depth study.

As Ganzibra Adam Yuhana notes “to become a true religious leader purely spiritual motives are necessary”. He speaks of the depth required in the study of Mandaean theology for instance about Musbeta. “Every time that I read further, I learnt something new. When I was reading, and writing again and again as I read, the more I penetrated the mysteries…So every time I read more closely I penetrated more and more and I became enlightened”. This attitude to study is of profound importance to the religious belief of Mandaeans especially priests, since the religion is based on Manda, knowledge.

> *For me personally my contact with both Riš ama Sam and Ganzibra Adam Yuhana has been of importance in helping me to stay connected with my faith. Spiritually they have helped me to deepen my understanding and advised me when I felt the need to challenge some of the misconceptions promoted by Western scholars. I have detailed some instances in earlier parts of the thesis (dealing with ‘conversion’ and ‘women priests’).*
>
> *As a Mandaean I understand that the priests undertake lifelong study and debate Mandaic literature. This is because at each stage of priesthood, the training for which can begin at a very early age, a wealth of knowledge is passed on to you. This knowledge is only accessible through consistent study and coaching by qualified priests. In my efforts to understand and my growing knowledge of my own faith, I have come to realise very clearly the centrality of Mandaean priesthood and the importance of listening to Mandaeans speaking for themselves.*

Training of priests takes place in stages, the first of which is the *Š*kanda.[78] Riš ama Sam explains this process. “*Š*kanda is a person who is from a hallali (pure laymen in a ritual context) family and must qualify by the rules of Mandaeism without any doubt about him being a hallali. He is someone who follows and practices Mandaean law religiously and assists the priests. While helping the priests, he will be taught and introduced to the canon of Mandaeism. When the *Š*kanda (ritual helper) is educated to a point, he can qualify to become a Tarmida. This period from

[78] A helper, assistant, acolyte: i.e. a boy or young man of priestly birth who assists at Mandaean rites. His duties resemble those of a server, or, sometimes a deacon in oriental Christian churches.

when he applies to be ordained until he becomes a Tarmida is called Šwalia (novice, a candidate for priesthood)."

The account of priestly training and ordination that follows is based on the interviews with Ganzibra Adam Yuhana. As he explained, the Tarmida is a scholar who will learn to perform important religious rituals and study the Mandaean religious cannon in depth. This entails learning to read and write the Mandaic language. During the time of candidacy if he observes the rituals correctly and is capable of performing them, then a mentor will be appointed. With the support of his mentor, other priests and Škandas (helpers) he will be ordained a Tarmida. A Tarmida must spend his time learning Mandaean theology and literature so he understands it in depth. This requires understanding and interpreting Mandaean philosophy and religious literature and the ability to teach and explain it. Greater comprehension comes from both reading and inquiry. In fact, for Ganzibra Adam Yuhana to become a true religious leader or priest "purely spiritual motives are necessary" at every level.

Training for priesthood can begin as soon as a young boy is literate. Priests must come from hallali families and be without blemish. A young candidate can act as his father's Škanda. As he matures and commits the prayers and rituals to memory he is called a Yalufa (a literate layman). The next step in the process is to become Šwalia (novice). Approval by the Ganzibra is based on the personal character and knowledge of doctrine, ritual and holy books. As in all Mandaean ritual, Musbeta takes place. A special hut, the Andiruna (reed hut), is constructed. It features with a blue cloth to represent the sky. Sacred books are placed in it including the rahmas (prayers of the day); these are prayed inside the hut while the Šwalia sits on a chair outside and receives his silk Tagha (Crown). There are Drabšas (Mandaean flag/symbol/emblem) on his right and left, as well as two kintas (Clay bowls). At this time he is publicly tested on his knowledge of the ritual of Musbeta. With myrtle in one hand and the Sidra d- Nišmata (The Book of Souls) in the other hand, the candidate recites prayers one to one-hundred and three. He then goes into the Andiruna (reed hut) where he joins the priests, and they pray together. The candidate and his initiator spend the night together in the hut.

Meanwhile a Škinta (initiation hut) is built, which symbolises the Light World and so has a white cloth on the roof. When the Šwalia emerges from the Andiruna he stands between the huts, suspended symbolically between the Light World and the earth. If he can recite the Musbeta liturgy again he is taken into the Škinta by two lay men who give him pieces of silver and gold and take him to the priests in the Škinta where the priests welcome him.

After prayers the myrtle is twisted into a tiny Klila (Myrtle Wreath) and the initiator requests permission from the priests to perform Musbeta on the candidate. After the Musbeta Kušta (Truth, hand shake) is exchanged, special prayers, numbers seventy-one and seventy-two of the Canonical Prayer book are prayed. This is followed by a meal of Pihta (Unleavened bread) and Mambuha (Water drink), which represents the completion of the events that began with the candidate's entry into Škinta. Then the candidate receives a new Rasta, and in prayer the Initiator uses both his own and pupil's names. This is a significant point in the ritual, indicating that both the teacher and the student are affected by the ceremony. Next the candidate's legs are washed and the Drabša (Mandaean flag) and Ginza are moved into the Škinta and all the celebrants re-enter it.

Following this, prayers called *Kd azil bhira dakia* (When the proven, pure one went) are recited. Acclaimed in these prayers the new Tarmida is now accepted by his fellow priests (kings). In prayer and the exchange of Kuštas (Truth, hand shake) the priests remind the new Tarmida to live by the teachings of the Ginza and to be one with the priests. After sharing prayers from the Musbeta and Masiqta liturgies the ceremony ends with a hatamta (sealing prayers) intoned by the priests.

A Tarmida who has shown the willingness to probe the depths of knowledge in Mandaean literature and is recognised as having a strong spiritual leadership in the community, may be a candidate for ordination as a Ganzibra, the next level of Mandaean priesthood. Riš ama is the title given to a Ganzibra who is the recognised leader of the community. Riš ama Sam is the head of the community in Australia, in both spiritual and practical matters.

Manda

As a gnostic religion, Manda (knowledge) is at the heart of Mandaeism. A fundamental responsibility for Mandaeans is to believe.

Zahran is very clear about the importance of belief in Mandaean life. "You have to believe it from the bottom of your heart…It is an intrinsic feeling and you just have to be humble about it. You cannot show it off, it has to be a true belief and not something that is forced". He has a sense of continuity of belief within his religion and remarks that "it is just a remarkable feeling that your beliefs go back way before any other religion. It is just good to know that we have been following it straight from the start. We have not changed anything". For Mandaeans this belief is strengthened by scriptures like the Ginza Raba and teachings of Adam.

Zahran also has a sense of the importance of knowledge for Mandaeans and rejoices that here in Australia "there is a new group called the Mandaean Power of Knowledge who are working on ways to strengthen the community and religious knowledge". He is clear that "God has a plan for everything, so I am not worried". He feels confident in "the power of a higher person, God; we have to live by the Ginza…and follow what it says". Zahran believes that it is important that there are opportunities for young people like himself to learn more about Mandaeism. He is keen "to learn the Mandaean language" and he would like to be able to explain to other people the beliefs of Mandaeism.

> *Like Zahran and most Mandaeans I am proud of our ancient history and the fact that we can trace our blood-line right back to Adam. This is why orthodoxy in Mandaean belief is so important to me personally. In my upbringing this was a central teaching emphasised by both my parents and grandparents. We were taught to be proud of who we were and the fact that our family is Hallali. I feel I have gone past the experience of persecution and separation to the fulfilment of a dream to share my faith more broadly, and most importantly to represent my faith community with openness, truth and pride in its beauty, wisdom and depth.*

For Maliha, while the core beliefs of her religion are "baptism, Zidqa and the Brakha", she recognises that her opportunities for learning about Mandaeism have been limited in the past. "We are the first people on earth…We baptized Jesus...Few months ago I was reading verses from our holy book, the Ginza Raba and a Muslim guy from Sudan said, this is exactly from the Quran and I replied it is clear who borrowed verses from whom!".

Since coming to Australia, the opportunity to increase her knowledge and to practice Musbeta regularly has allowed Maliha "to renew my faith…To ask God to help me" so that, as she says, she knows "God created me because he loves me. Hayi brought me to this earth because he loves me and I always know I can depend on him…in my life, my career with my family because God, Hayi loves me and I love him". She recognises that "unfortunately I know the basics and that is all", but she does know that "Mandaeans are peaceful people. I am practicing peace, helping others…empowering them and giving Zidqa". She believes that the freedom she has now here in Australia to learn more about her religion means that "it's as if I am born here, newborn as a Mandaean, because here I can start to learn the religion and meet with other Mandaeans".

> *As a Mandaean, I too am grateful that here in Australia I can go to the banks of the Nepean River for Musbeta without fear of abuse and harassment. The opportunity to study has enabled me to learn so much more about the faith I love and the opportunity to be enlightened through listening to the community and being mentored by the priests.*

For Alex, who feels somewhat uncertain about her commitment to Mandaeism, the experience of her grandfather's Masiqta gave her the opportunity to learn more about the beliefs at the heart of Mandaeism. As she states, "being involved made me personally more interested in the religion…I just want to go back and talk about the experience". What helped her was that the "priests were explaining the rituals as they went and that was the first time [she] truly understood something of the beliefs of our religion". She was surprised to find that the beliefs of Mandaeans are in fact based on reality. "You know the circle of life, when you are first born and then there are mathematical calculations about the trimesters and pregnancy…Things that you do not expect to find in religion, but it was surprisingly based on a lot of facts and that was the first experience that I was wowed by our religion, to be honest…it was definitely an eye opener". She also learned about the Mandaean attitude to death. "I did not know that not only are you not supposed to wear black when a Mandaean dies but you are actually supposed to rejoice because you are supposed to celebrate that they have moved on to a happy life".

That Alex was so surprised that Mandaean belief has a factual base can be traced back to her experience of growing up apart from Mandaean communities, because of her parents' experience of the trauma of persecution and the isolation of an individual family of Mandaeans living in a Muslim country like the Emirates. Through the persecution of her people and the necessity to leave Iraq, Alex and her family lost an immediate connection with knowledgeable, priestly teaching, as well as community rituals.

Hawa shows a deep awareness of the spirituality of Mandaeism. She shares her belief that for Mandaeans the purgatories are "the seven levels which lead to heaven. One of those levels is our life here on earth…we believe in providing Lofani (The special meal for the departed soul) for those who have passed on and this can be done at any feasts or special occasions or it can also be done on a day to day bases. It is usually done frequently as soon as somebody has passed, in this way the soul is assisted to reach the higher section of those seven levels...Ordinary Mandaeans also can reach one of those seven levels through the various prayers during the day, which lead you to different spiritual levels".

When asked about the core beliefs of Mandaeism, Hawa was able to give a rather brief explanation. She believes that "the Mandaean belief system remains the same even though practices may differ because of the surroundings". She is aware of her limited level of knowledge and says "I would love to learn more. I know that my religion is one of knowledge and a lot of our books have a lot of information regarding knowledge in this life. I know you cannot be converted into this religion; you need to be born into this religion through having two Mandaean parents. I know that when you are born you are given a name which we call a Milwa**š**a. I know that baptism is undergone numerous times throughout someone's life".

> *In Iran, I was not free to use my Milwa**š**a publicly. Instead we were forced to use names that were acceptable to Muslim society. The significance of the Milwa**š**a lies in the fact that it is our belief that you must be born of two Mandaean parents in order to be given a Milwa**š**a. Without a Milwa**š**a no priest can perform a Musbeta, a ritual central to Mandaean belief. In fact, we were taught as children that no religious ceremony can be performed without a Milwa**š**a.*
>
> *It is my sacred Milwa**š**a that gives me a tangible connection to my forbears and to the World of Light. One is thus born into Mandaeism; conversion is not accepted.*

Hawa goes on to maintain that, "we believe in God, we believe that there is good and bad all around us, we believe in the afterlife. Obviously, we are all aiming to go to heaven, so we try to do as much good as possible". The importance of prayer is another belief referred to by Hawa. As she says, "we thank God for the meal we just had. We pray for peace and a good life and assistance to be able to walk the right path in this life, and strength and safety and health for everybody that we care for". Hawa shows knowledge of the importance of prayer and its meaning in the life of a Mandaean. From a scholarly point of view, it is notable that Hawa, and all Mandaeans in my experience, think of Brakha/prayer as a belief and not simply a practice.

Like other Mandaean participants, Shadan has a basic knowledge of Mandaean belief. He recognises that "fasting, Musbeta, prayer, feasts and Zidqa are important aspects of the Mandaean faith". These are in fact, as noted in this chapter, the main pillars of Mandaean belief. He has a strong sense of the belief in Hayi and the fact that "we do have a better world waiting for us". Shadan knows that the Mandaean belief in peace makes "our religion so unique". He points out that fasting is meant to

bring out “the meaning of humanity, of being peaceful. You can fast every day, you don't fight, you help, you look after each other, you share love and you share happiness”. Fasting concerns more therefore than just food; it is about living a disciplined, thoughtful and kind life. In this way Shadan links his knowledge of Mandaeism with his daily practice.

For a Mandaean, knowledge of Hayi can only come through enlightenment; prayer and Musbeta are essential to this. For Shadan belief in prayer to Hayi is central to his Mandaean identity. “We normally pray three times a day; morning afternoon and evening. In addition, we pray when we wake up; we also have prayers when we take a bath; we also pray when we want to eat food and after we finish eating food. We pray before we go to bed and we wake up with the prayer of thanking Hayi for the opportunity he gives us to start our day to do something good…We ask Hayi to help us, protect us from sickness, from problems and we ask him to help us to help other people and to bring peace to our hearts and our beliefs and to make our beliefs stronger”.

> *Shadan’s words remind me that as a Mandaean my spiritual life is more important than the material. I find the experience of Panja, that celebrates creation, is a time when I realise I have been physically separated from my family for so long. This time is linked closely to my beliefs as a Mandaean.*
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> *As children we looked forward to Panja as a time when our grandparents told us narratives of our ancestors, our history and the significance of Panja. In this way we learnt the stories of Mandaean belief and creation, the role of Mandaean prophets, monotheism, the afterlife and the importance of what is taught in our books. Also, during this holy time we would go to the River as a family for Musbeta and we would be reminded of the important beliefs of our religion.*
>
> *Since beginning this thesis, I have begun to learn the Mandaic language myself and realise this is an important root to a deeper understanding of the Mandaean theology found in our rich literature.*

Looking Ahead

Tofiq believes that although Mandaeans have been subject to persecution for so long, his Mandaean beliefs have given him a sense of security. They have been for him “a form of freedom’. When you are free, you are secure and also that spiritual feeling that when you talk to God you feel secure”. He is aware of the gaps in his

knowledge of his Mandaean faith. This is because “we haven’t had the opportunity to study the Mandaean religion as an official study as other people do in the churches or mosques. What we know is what we have been told by our parents”. He recognises that here in Australia it is possible to learn more. He believes that Mandaeans “are trying to take the experience of other religions here” to establish themselves and so build up their knowledge of the Mandaean faith.

> *As I reflect on the experience of this research and listening to the voices of other Mandaeans it is clear to me that it is the strength of our belief and our dedication that has given us the ability to continue to practice our faith in whatever environment we find ourselves.*

The struggle for us as Mandaeans has been to move from an existence where we were constantly victimised by persecution. This led me personally, and most Mandaeans, to leave our homeland. An optimism lying at the heart of Mandaeism has given the community the courage and strength to move beyond the caution and secretiveness of the past and will enable us to establish ourselves in Australia and practice our beliefs freely here. The next chapter considers the form that optimism is taking in the Australian Mandaean community, and the hopes that lie within the Mandaean community as we look to the future. As with this chapter on Religious Life and Practice, it draws on the experience of members of the Australian Mandaean community.

Chapter Seven: Hopes and Challenges for the Future

For Mandaeans in Australia, adaptation to life in a society that is largely materialistic and secular brings both challenges and opportunities for development. Most of those who participated in the interviews are optimistic about the future even while they recognise the challenges the Mandaean community continues to face.

Challenges

While Hawa is positive about the future of Mandaeism in Australia, she does see some problems emerging within the community. She describes this as "separation and sub-division based on people…choosing to take the easy way out, being worried about the materialistic things in this life, especially in a Westernized culture where multiculturalism and freedom are everywhere around us".

An example of the "separation" and "sub-division" Hawa speaks of is the use of a swimming pool for Musbeta, by some in the community, for the sake of privacy. It is not clear yet how deep-seated or long lasting these differences are. In this case, it could be that once the new Mandi is built with private access to the river such concerns will, however, no longer be necessary.

Hawa fears "that the younger generation is not being taught everything about our own religion and our own way of life. [Since] all religion is based on how you read it, how you interpret it, how you relate it to your own life experience" she recognises that in a freer society "some people will interpret things in various ways so that they have the easier option available to them. As a result…it's putting a lot of pressure on community life here in Australia because it means some people are not practising things as they should be or are not aware of the most basic information regarding the beliefs or the practices or the way of life, just the simplicity of it. What I would like to see happen with regards to our community life is more focus on faith education". She also speaks of the division that comes when "some people want to use other ways to be able to make it easier to practise the religion, such as using pools for baptism instead of flowing running water".

Zahran speaks of some of his fears for the future of the Mandaean community in Australia. He says, "if nothing changes I think it will eventually die out because even if there are more people being born into the religion, there are also a lot of people being lost to it". He believes however, that some very simple changes to the religious practice could make a radical difference. "You would have to change the

culture, the religion…and many people are going to disagree, especially the priests... for example, not being checked at the wedding". Zahran is referring here to the traditional practice of males being checked for circumcision and females for virginity. He observes that "this puts a lot of pressure on young people…Living in Australia as Australians…For us who are struggling, it is fairly hard".

Riš ama Sam also speaks about marriage and its importance for the future of the Mandaean community: "after giving the Ed-Kušta hand,[79] [the priest] asks the young people to think about having children. Unfortunately, sometimes members of our community look for easy solutions. If two people are married and have only one child, when they depart they have left only one person behind…In the past there were lots of large families. We need to do a lot of work in this area so that…the survival of Mandaeans will not be endangered".

Zahran hopes that there will be "more programs for young people in schools with qualified people to teach our religion". Just as Hawa speaks of living in a materialistic society, Zahran raises issues of particular concern to young people like himself in trying to adapt as Mandaeans within Western society. As Zahran points out, he has "an ear piercing and an eyebrow piercing and it is fine with everyone in my family. But if I go to the Mandi or to see a relative then [he feels] they would look down on me".

Perhaps this attitude shows a lack of understanding of the deep-seated Mandaean respect for the human body and the sacredness of life which does not approve of any form of artificial interference with the body such as tattoos, piercing or addiction. If 'more programs for young people' are made available, as Zahran himself suggests, tensions like this might not arise.

Maliha is very positive about the future of Mandaeism in Australia but as she says "I am still worried" about the revival of the culture. As noted earlier, she feels very deeply her lack of knowledge of Mandaeism. "I want to learn Mandaic", she says. Conscious of her own responsibility, she notes: "We have survived from the time of Adam up to now, so we need to play a part in continuing" the religion. She sees this

[79] Vow, oath, pact. Kušta is the ritual of the exchange of the right hand-clasp between the Mandaeans which occurs during religious ceremonies i.e. (Immersion, Marriage, etc.). Kušta is concluded with a kiss, when each person kisses her/his own right hand when that hand is released. In Mandaeism, Kušta is an element closely related to the first creation. It is the 'heavenly' oath which every Mandaean has to take during baptism. Mandaeans consider the Kušta a communion with the World of Light.

as both a challenge and a mission and believes that doing this will bring her “peace of mind”.

For a number of participants, the most important challenge facing the Mandaean community in Australia is to have a traditional Mandi on the banks of the river that is private. This is a very real challenge for the community as Musbeta is central to what it means to be a Mandaean. As Shadan says “Musbeta is very important for us and I would love to see an actual specific place for Mandaeans to attend to our religious customs”. He points out that “it is basically the day to day difficulties that we face [in Australia] that make us slowly lose touch with our religion and then what will happen to our children”. In this way Shadan refers to the problems of settlement, which include language, employment and acculturation to adjust to such a new situation. Such distractions are common for new arrivals in Australia but through planning, support and community development, the Mandaean community is making progress. Education, development of infrastructure and advocating for the future of Mandaeans in Australia are all necessary. In all of this, leadership of the community is essential to build unity and develop confidence among people.

For fourteen hundred years Mandaeans were almost overwhelmed by Islamic culture and the struggle to survive led to some adaptation to the dominant culture. Today, in Australia, the main languages of communication are Arabic, Farsi and English. Because language is central to culture, and as noted by several of the interviewees, the revival of the Mandaic language is crucial to the revival of Mandaeism. This is recognised as an important priority within the Australian Mandaean community.

Since knowledge of Mandaic is necessary for understanding Mandaean literature, there needs to be opportunities for community members to study Mandaic. Shadan rightly says, “I would love to see people learning the Mandaic language, our actual mother language…It is very important to have classes for reading and study of the language in order to know the religion”. For Shadan it is clear that in the past he “hasn’t been in a position to be able to learn Mandaic. You need the language, you need the knowledge, skills of reading and writing Mandaic and it’s very important for me to actually know so I can understand more about the Soma (fasting), Musbeta (immersion) and Zidqa (alms giving)”. In this way he believes that Mandaeans could “get back what they lost in the last few hundred years”. In fact, Shadan believes this is so important that without a renewal in the study and knowledge of Mandaic “there is no future for Mandaeism…which is a very precious religion”. He is very happy that when he “goes to the Mandi here in Sydney our priests, our holy men are trying to

do this". However, he regrets that "there are not enough classes" and that the links for those who speak Farsi or Arabic with the culture of Mandaeism in Iran and Iraq will be lost, "for the people who actually grow up here and only have a small knowledge of Farsi or Arabic".

At present there is no one to teach "Mandaeism in [English]". Consequently Shadan fears that the next generation "will have no knowledge about Mandaeism as the only knowledge they have about Mandaeism is that they come and undergo Musbeta and have been told by their fathers and mothers to come and get Musbeta." He fears that "we will end up with nothing". He also sees the need for more educational and social activities within the community so that Mandaeism can survive. One solution that would help to overcome these problems would be a Mandaean school where "we can have the right to go and study our religion in the school as part of mainstream education". For Shadan there are therefore three main challenges for the future of Mandaeism: "A specific place for Musbeta and Mandaean customs to take place, the opportunity to get educated in a Mandaean religion at school and that Mandaeans can speak their language once more".

Meanwhile, for Alex the challenge with Mandaeism lies "not so much with the religion itself but with the community". As a Mandaean who grew up in Australia she is unable to see that the norms adapted by new arrivals from the Middle East are not necessarily Mandaean. However, she does recognise the limitations of her understanding of Mandaean religious beliefs. She notes that "most of the teachings and most of the ceremonies or any acts of religion are done in the Mandaean language, which we do not understand…I personally zone out…What is it that I am praying to…What is it that I am saying? We know so little about the religion yet we are being told to follow". Alex recognises that her parents have limited knowledge and even claims that "the community knows so little".

Alex seems frustrated by her lack of knowledge and what she sees as a general lack of knowledge within the Mandaean community. Like Shadan she points out that most explanations are in Arabic and as she explains "there are a lot of people in my generation who really struggle with Arabic". Alex is quite open about the struggle she has with the Mandaean faith, while at the same time maintaining, "I like the traditions and the stories…But for me it is more of an historic point of view as opposed to practical. I am definitely interested in knowing about the religion, but I will not necessarily practise it". She does, however, enjoy the practices during Karsa (Great Feast) and claims that this is "actually cool about being Mandaean. It is thirty-six hours of non-stop eating and partying which is the way I see it. It is definitely not

what the Karsa is made for…But we do talk at this time and our parents tell us stories about what the Karsa is and my understanding is that the Angels for this thirty-six hours go to tell God what we have done and what has been happening on earth so that the world is unprotected and only the evil spirits are around. That is pretty much my entire understanding of the Karsa".

Alex is not concerned about her lack of an adult understanding of Mandaeism, but when she learned that the Ginza was translated into English she did decide to get a copy. The experience of her grandfather's funeral led her to experience something of the spiritual aspect of Mandaeism, as well as a certain respect for the scientific knowledge embedded in the faith. This seems to have led her to a greater respect for Mandaeism.

The historical lack of access to religious education and consequent adult understanding has led to some disagreement among the Mandaean community. Ganzibra Adam Yuhana points out that some members of "the Mandaean community think that there is a division" within the community. He sees the situation differently. He suggests that "in a way those people who give in to the temptations of Satan [power of evil] do not support the unity of the community. They do not want to see all Mandaeans under one umbrella or under one roof. These people speak and think of division. These people spread rumours, yet they do not want to be a part of the solution and bring the community together…For example, in Australia there are those who practise Musbeta in a swimming pool instead of a river. The question is when did this start? This started when Iran and Iraq were at war…When the river was dammed by Saddam and it was used to clean war machinery and so became polluted with petroleum products. Those priests therefore were forced to immerse people in a swimming pool. There are priests who were ordained in a swimming pool, yet these priests know the river is necessary in performing Musbeta because the water that exist in the river is alive…It is living water and because it is living it will vivify you…Unfortunately there are those who want to be the centre of attention; there is an 'I', in this context the 'I' is Satan. Even the angels did not say 'I;' the only one who said 'I' was Satan. The emphasis on 'I' is present among many on this earth, many people follow this path. When 'I' dominates the individual, the person does not see anything but the 'self'. He is the only correct one; who knows the right path. One of the problems that exist in our community is this".

Ganzibra Adam Yuhana identifies another issue within the Mandaean community: "sadly some Mandaeans who used to live in Iraq were involved in the Baath political parties and grew up in such a way that they look at their Iranian counterparts as

enemies. They do not think that an Iranian Mandaean is their fellow believer". On the other hand, "thankfully some of those people see that 'these Iranian enemies' are working towards the prosperity and unity of the community and are willing to help the community. When this happens, and people are treated with dignity, such problems begin to disappear". It is Ganzibra Adam Yuhana's hope that all Mandaeans in Australia will work closely together for the future of the community.

Clearly community development is important for the welfare of the Mandaean community. But not all developments are helpful. As Riš ama Sam points out, "there is an official Mandaean Association which is very proactive and doing its best to address all the social affairs of the Mandaean community. However, a few individuals have come together and have created other Mandaean groups with the name of the community and convinced their families and friends to join them. These people are the reason there are some disagreements in the community…There could be a chance that they will compete with each other and self-interest might become the focus of such groups. The original Sabian Mandaean Association of Australia includes an assembly which was created with the combination of priests and community members who were voted in by the wider community".

It is hoped that this Association will continue to unify the Mandaean community through the wide range of activities it is supporting. The leadership of the priests is essential for the community and the official Association works with them to respond in a positive way to any problems that arise. As Riš ama Sam explains "no matter what actions are taken by negative people we receive them with an open heart. The work is for the good of the community".

Hopes for the Future

As members of a relatively new community in Australia, and having escaped from persecution, most Australian Mandaeans feel positively about the future. As Riš ama Sam maintains, "The future as I said is up to the efforts of the Mandaean family. If the families are those of knowledge, religious and believers in Mandaeism they must pass on all of these to their children so the future can be bright".

Maliha supports this view of the Riš ama, and points to some of the projects undertaken by women's groups in Sydney as examples of helping Mandaean families. She suggests that, "We need to work really hard with the community in order to empower them and lift them up," especially during Sunday gatherings for prayer. With a group of women she has helped "to establish a women's and

children's group which organises activities for small children…As well [they are] working with women experiencing domestic violence and supporting education". Maliha wants to reinforce pride in being Mandaean women. "I want the women to really remind themselves that they are Mandaean". As a community worker she sees the importance of "trying to limit the relationship breakdowns in families by offering pre-marriage counselling". In all these ways she is emphasising the importance of empowerment within the Mandaean community.

Riš ama Sam sees the future for the community as a positive one. "For three to four years now our young people's Higher School Certificate results have been very high. For the past few years we have awarded the students with recognition. An association called Montataer Al-Jamea was established by someone from Iraq with board members who are mainly doctors and engineers. Last year they invited twelve high achieving students to be given awards and out of the twelve, seven were Mandaeans. This year they invited eleven students and out of the eleven, six were Mandaeans". For a religious community based on knowledge, such an emphasis on education is important for the future of the community. Riš ama Sam sees the role of the priests as supporting the community in this journey. He also notes that Mandaean language classes "take place in twelve schools in Fairfield and Liverpool every week with the assistance of faithful people teaching the language and culture to our young people for one hour a session. In the past just the religion was taught. Now the sessions include culture, language and religion. Reading and writing the language, which we have made compulsory, are also required". For the future it is his hope to establish "an official school where we can teach regular subjects. If we can make this project happen, we can support the community from a cultural and religious perspective".

Ganzibra Adam Yuhana speaks of the strong sense of belonging within the Australian Mandaean community. "For example, those who are wealthier than the rest like to assist their community by donating money. We don't have this in other countries...and, Farwahakh Mari,[80] there are middle class Mandaeans in the community who help. They donate a portion of their wealth for religious purposes. [In this way] land was bought and a portion donated for religious purposes…This donated section fronts the River. Those philanthropists suggested that a place of worship and Immersion can be built on this land…Mandaeans will come together and be able to learn their own literature and culture".

[80] Giving thanks and praise to Hayi (God).

Like Riš ama Sam, Ganzibra Adam Yuhana is optimistic about the future: “We see a bright future for the Mandaean community in Australia”. It is his hope that here “every Mandaean will be enlightened about Mandaeism and all priests will be profoundly knowledgeable about Mandaean literature and ritual so that they can speak with assurance from the knowledge and wisdom they have acquired”. The Ganzibra notes that the strength of the community comes from its unity. “Religious leaders speak with one voice, walk the same path, perform the same rituals and work towards one goal. However, this does not mean that there is no difference of opinion or discussion”. In this way Ganzibra Adam Yuhana emphasises the strength of the Mandaean community in Australia.

Having lived in Iran and visited the United States, as well hearing news of Mandaeans in Iraq and Sweden, Ganzibra Adam Yuhana believes that the Australian Mandaean community “is leading in the revival of the Mandaean religion”. He has received enquiries from other countries asking about the development of the community in Australia, which is an indication of its strength. He also points out that Mandaeans who are still refugees in Syria and Jordan are being helped by Australian Mandaeans. Thousands of dollars (as mentioned earlier) have been sent overseas. The priests have encouraged the community to help in this way. Such a communal perspective urges the individual to help their Mandaean brothers and sisters who need their support. This does not happen in other places, or if it happens it is rare. Such a sense of unity with Mandaeans in other countries is a further indication of the strength of the Mandaean community in Australia and the hope for continued development in the future.

Perhaps the most important thing for the future of Mandaeism is the sense of freedom. Tofiq points out that it is “the first thing you become aware of. We can go confidently to the River. We don’t expect anybody to come and throw stones; we are respected by the people around us. Everybody is free in his belief”. Tofiq goes on to speak about the importance of freedom. “Freedom is beautiful. It makes you productive because you don’t have to think about protecting yourself and your children all the time”. While Tofiq recognises some of the problems that come with greater freedom, he sees that for Mandaeans “with freedom they can develop more quickly”. It is his hope that a Mandaean school will become available so that “the children will grow with the mainstream and with religious understanding”. One important difference he notes with “life in Australia compared with the Middle East is that people are led by law not by religion”. Here Tofiq is referring to the secular nature of Australian society, and a positive aspect of it, especially for small religious communities like the Mandaeans. For Tofiq in Australia “freedom has meant that we

are all human beings. We are all Australians, no matter what your religion, your colour or your sexuality". It is his hope that for his children they would "learn to know at least something about their religion so that they can communicate with their peers in the community".

Hawa recognises that the building of a new Mandi with private access to the river would overcome many challenges. She maintains that "we need our own place where we can go and be baptised. If this place is fitted with change rooms so we can change into our Rastas rather than using the local facilities it would be great". This would mean that "we can practise our beliefs especially in regards to Musbeta with fresh running water, which is alive. Also, if we were able to have a place where we can meet everybody else in the community and have access to translated documents [of] our own history so that we can know more about our own people. We need to have more education about our way of life, our culture, our practices, beliefs and language…Many years ago every Mandaean was able to speak the Mandaean language and communicate using Mandaean. Now the general community either uses Arabic or Farsi depending on which side of the border they come from based on the River they had settled on many generations ago. Now many of these families have migrated to other countries. We have gained other languages such as English, but we lost our own language, which is a shame, so it would be good to be able to learn our own language and be able to practise Mandaic". Hawa says, if we as a community "are educated, it would bring the community together, so that is what I hope for in the future".

Hawa "would [also] like to see the Mandaean community return to the simplicities of Mandaeism in the past". It is her hope "that the community can see beyond the materialistic things of this life and so become stronger and more united". She suggests that the Mandaean community "needs to maintain their practices and beliefs through education and empowerment as opposed to being distracted by the materialistic things of this life...And that the community can see a way of being able to look after its youth, of being able to teach future generations because if older generations don't pass on this knowledge it would be lost". Hawa [sees this] as "one way of preserving this precious ancient religion. Further [she hopes] that we would as a community move away from the things that we learnt while we were in flight mode and whilst we were in preservation mode during the times of living in Iran and Iraq so that we can move towards being able to have a more spiritual understanding". Hawa is very clear that Mandaeism "is a religion of knowledge and that it is important to share that knowledge". She recognises that Mandaeans can

take advantage of the freedoms available in this country in order to become more enlightened as the people of knowledge.

Like Hawa, Maliha sees the opportunity for Mandaeans to develop and empower their Mandaean community in Australia. As someone born in Iraq, and who later lived in Dubai, she says, “first I want them to be pure Mandaeans, to get rid of the bad habits they adapted from the cultures they lived in through the persecution and trauma. [She wants the community] to be cured from all they went through in the past and to be pure Mandaean, peaceful people”. As Maliha says she doesn’t “believe in changing any of the practices of Mandaeism,” but she recognises “the need to understand the practices better and that knowledge of the language will lead to better understanding”. Like other interviewees she sees the need “for a Mandi where we have privacy and a place where even non-Mandaean friends can come”.

Riš ama Sam speaks of his hope for the development of an official academy for “educating and nurturing those who are candidates to become religious leaders. This academy would have particular lessons and subjects the candidates would have to go through to pass the different stages of their education as happened traditionally. Successful candidates would graduate to be priests. Others might need further support and development”. Such a rigorous education is necessary because in Mandaeism absolute fidelity to the “correct performance of rituals is necessary”. Despite a lack of formal education for priests today, Riš ama Sam makes it clear that the training of priests is still rigorous; an increasing number of candidates are undergoing training. Riš ama Sam agrees with other interviewees “that people are looking forward to participation in Musbeta and members of the community have expressed their appreciation that religious affairs are progressing well with Tarmidas and Škandas (helpers) who are faithful observers of the Mandaean way of life”. Such an approach is an indication of the possibility for expansion that would come from the establishment of a priestly academy in the future.

One development that is taking place within the Australian Mandaean community and bodes well for the future is an improved relationship with local hospitals. As Riš ama Sam explains, “through an explanation of our faith and rituals hospital staff have started working with us closely and have released near death patients to be at home with their family and priests to observe their ritual obligations”. The importance of this development can be seen in the impact it had on Alex when she was able to participate in the rituals at the end of her grandfather’s life. This experience helped her “to remember how important and how embedded ritual is in our life as

Mandaeans". It also encouraged her "to become involved in the Mandaean art gallery…as a graphic designer".

Riš ama Sam sees the future in "the active participation of our youth…There are sporting and cultural activities like poetry writing and theatre as well as youth camps". In all these ways he sees "that the community will continue to strengthen".

Throughout the interviews it was clear that each of the participants appreciates the freedoms they have found here in Australia. Indeed, as Tofiq says, "we are lucky that we migrated to Australia. It is the best country for Mandaeans". For Shadan, "Mandaeans always seek peace" and they have found it in Australia. As a community that gives priority to education and knowledge in a peaceful environment, Mandaeans will surely make a positive contribution to Australian society in the years to come.

> *When discussing the Mandaean lived experience I aimed to take the readers on a shared journey. I endeavoured to remind people, especially the next Mandaean generation that for us and for our ancestors it is paramount to continue to be true to Mandaeism and to guard and cherish our beliefs, customs, history, culture, and way of life with all costs. The current living community in Australia is a testimony to this.*
>
> *When I reflect on the last massacre in Šuštar I ask myself is it really that long ago? I think about my grandmother who is in her 70s, all of the sudden I realise, she could have been talking to her grandmother about the oppression, cruelty, ruthlessness and the injustice Mandaeans experienced.*
>
> *The nature of scholarship on Mandaeism and its history is relatively young, but I don't think those who studied Mandaeism necessarily know enough about Mandaeans and their shared history and way of life today. Life is going on as normal for many people who may have a specific point of view on the Mandaean experience; however, for us, the Mandaean perspective and narrative is here to stay.*
>
> *At the time of the massacres by Jews in 70AD, Mandaean survivors were forced to leave in mass numbers and settled in the Fertile Crescent. When we look back at the treatment by Islam and later, the missionaries, not only does it add insult to injury, but it requires no degree in Psychology to work out the tragic effect these two groups had on the Mandaean psyche. In one*

hand Arabization and on the other hand forced conversion by a dark cloud made an impact on the Mandaeans, that lives to this day.

It is crucial to discuss and to understand this period because this is the period where Mandaeans like myself were shaped and our psyche was impacted forever. In particular, my reflection has been on my ancestral lands, displacement, forced conversion, Arabization and assimilation of an entire population. Today we witness the result in both Iran and Iraq.

Nowadays scholarship no longer likes to talk about these massacres which took place all over the Middle East, because it is unpalatable and difficult to digest. You see, it reminds humankind about their own behaviour. We never talked about this in schools in Iran. When I discuss shared history, it is a reminder to the reader that the Mandaean perspective has not been shared truthfully.

The mandatory curriculum for religious studies in Iran is only concerned with the particular cult of Islam. Many people in the Middle East would be ignorant of Mandaeism and what they have endured. Today we tend to talk about things like terrorism in the world; about people doing the unthinkable. There has been much blood spilled in Mandaean lands, but it is generally ignored and only linked to our shared journey by Mandaeans. The reality is, these atrocities took place. This must be acknowledged both in the academic and wider community in order to help Mandaeans come to terms with their suffering and the wider community to recognise what has happened even in recent times. Young Mandaeans like myself still suffer in terms of the loss of our language, our land, our families and our community. The recognition of these realities is important for the future of a strong, vibrant Mandaean community.

It is important to talk about these issues because it helps us to understand and make sense of the past. This is no longer about us pointing the finger, because we can't change history, we can't change our shared history, but we certainly can understand it or seek to even look into it more deeply if that is what we wish to do. There is a very good saying 'out of sight, out of mind'. This is how Mandaeans tried to avoid being on the 'Muslim radar', by going underground. When I try to make sense of the massacre of Šuštar and attempt to put a timeline on the event in 1870 it is only 148 years ago, me being the fourth generation, with my great grandparents falling victims

to this genocide. My great grandmother passed away when I was nine years old.

In Iran one group has been very privileged and another extremely under privileged with no opportunities for employment, no opportunities for education, systematic discrimination, community and legal persecution, to name just a few. The forced assimilation that Mandaeans went through had an impact on culture, language and education. This shaped every individual involved. It shaped all of us, an entire community. We're talking about generations of people who are affected. It's important for us to understand that. It's important for you as a reader to understand this, because you'll be working or studying or writing about Mandaeism.

My great grandparents, my grandparents, my parents and my life have been touched by these atrocities. We like to think that we're okay now, but our reality is that we're still touched by it. I often reminisce and talk about what the Mandaeans need to do to move forward and the answer is: to be there for each other and take care of each other, and to protect each other. This was the Mandaean community's tradition, structure and framework then and it should remain the same today. It's our responsibility to tell people the truth about where we came from, what we have been through, and why there is denial and inequity in society.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

This thesis has reviewed scholarship concerning the Mandaean community over the centuries but, more than that, it has sought to give a voice to living believers today by listening to their fears and anxieties, their beliefs and practices, and their hopes and dreams. Eight voices from the Mandaean community in diaspora in Sydney, Australia, including two priests, have been heard from, alongside the voice of the researcher, a practising Mandaean himself.

While Mandaeism is recognised as an important subject of academic study there is actually – as this thesis has shown – a relatively small corpus of research into Mandaeism. This work notes several controversial theses regarding the origin of Mandaeism, its history, and the nature of this gnostic religion. One weakness common to most of this scholarship is that it sees Mandaeism through the lens of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Another general weakness is the lack of recognition given to the impact of centuries of persecution on the community as it has endured much pain and suffering. This has led to a significant loss of the unique Mandaic language as well as some customs, especially through Arabization.

The most significant scholar of Mandaeism has been Lady Drower who, in the 1900s, made much of Mandaean literature more accessible to a wider readership through translation. Buckley has continued the work of Drower and has pointed out that perhaps a more detailed history of Mandaeism could be developed through the study of colophons. Among contemporary researchers, Häberl is one scholar concerned with the preservation of the culture, especially through language and the documentation of people's stories.

A recent development has been scholarship conducted by Mandaeans, especially the translation and explication of Mandaean literature. This study has documented a broader picture of Mandaean religious belief and practice in order to add to the evidence that this ancient faith is establishing itself in Australia as a living, vibrant community.

Aware that the Mandaean community has typically been one under study, this thesis has utilised interviews analysed thematically, accompanied by autoethnographic reflection on the part of the researcher, to give voice to Mandaeans. Because of their vulnerability as a persecuted religious minority, anti-oppressive theory was the philosophical frame adopted, and pseudonyms were used, though the two priests of the eight participants chose to be named. Of particular interest are the stories and

understanding of Mandaeans living in diaspora, where freedom of religion is offering new possibilities, as well as new challenges, to a religious community once considered by some scholars as being at risk of dying out.

The qualitative section of this thesis began by looking at the lives of the participants both before and into diaspora. Their experience of persecution either first-hand or through the experience of their parents was recorded. Each participant spoke of the terrible anguish of being treated inhumanely. They felt they had no opportunities educationally, few career opportunities, poor access to health services and the constant fear of harassment and even physical attacks. Even those who lived in more liberal Islamic countries like the Emirates were fearful of disclosing their true identity for fear of repercussions. This meant that in order to practise their faith they sometimes had to pretend to be Christian.

Even though each of the participants had a strong sense of freedom in Australia they were still cautious about sharing the impact of persecution on their daily lives. It is clear to the author that the psychological impact of constant persecution continues to have an impact on the Mandaean community in Sydney. This understanding is highlighted by Riš ama Sam, the leader of the Mandaean community in Australia. Another fear expressed by participants is that ignorance of their religion will have long-term effects on its survival. One of the strongest consequences of coming to Australia for the participants has been the freedom to admit openly to being Mandaean and to practice the ceremonies, especially Musbeta, regularly.

Living in diaspora has been a reality for Mandaeans since they were forced to move from the Jordan Valley many centuries ago to escape persecution. The current diaspora has forced Mandaeans to move into Western societies with profoundly different cultures to those of the Middle East. The necessary enculturation that followed, together with the traumas experienced under persecution and fear of the future, is very clear in the responses given by the participants. At the same time however, there is a clear resurgence and renewal of this ancient faith here in Australia.

It is clear that the process for revitalisation of this ancient faith has begun. Crucial to this development is the revival of Mandaic. Although some language classes are provided for various age groups, for a full redevelopment of this ancient language, an investment in linguistic studies by Mandaeans will be necessary. For the revival of the language a strategic framework for linguistic studies needs to be developed.

This could be done by setting up a Mandaean Scholarship Foundation to encourage further study of the history, religion and language of this ancient people.

Alongside this, Mandaean schools could use Mandaic woven into mainstream education to ensure the next generation is formally introduced to history, language, religious practice and belief. In a religion of knowledge like Mandaeism the training of priests is of the highest priority. To do this, an Academy for their training and the professional development of current priests would give them an improved status both within the Mandaean community and in the wider academic community. Such a project is currently under consideration in Australia.

For the Mandaean community in general the documentation of the stories of a representative range of individuals will hopefully strengthen and preserve the history and encourage future generations to learn from their forbears and share their own experience. The publication of such materials has the potential to strengthen scholarship and recognition of Mandaean pacifist ideals could make a positive contribution to Australian society. Within scholarship on world religions Mandaeism has a unique contribution to offer. An understanding of Gnosticism and the way it is linked to the practice of Mandaeism will be of interest both to scholars of classical antiquity as well as scholarship related to modern religious practice and history. Theological connections historically found between Judaism, Christianity, Manichaeism, Islam and Mandaeism, considered in the thesis, may provide opportunities for important new studies.

When studying a ‘minor’ religion, there is a greater danger than usual that outsiders will misunderstand or access material in ways that fail to give a full picture of its beliefs, practices and experience. By giving a voice to the Mandaean community living in diaspora in Australia today, failures and gaps in academic knowledge of Mandaeism can begin to be addressed, and a more open environment created enabling scholarly and religious dialogue with this ancient and living religion.

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Diwan Alma RiŠaia Zuta
Diwan Razia d-Abahata
Drāšā d-Yaḥyā
Harān Gawaita
Kdaba d-‘Niania.
Masiqta
Sarh d qabin d Šišlam Raba
Qalasta
Sidra d-Nišmata
Asfar Melwašia
Trasa d-Taqa d Šišlam Raba.