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Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley

A REHABILITATION OF
SPIRIT RUHA IN
MANDAEAN RELIGION

The mythological traditions in Mandaean gnosticism present the female figure Ruha ("Spirit")¹ largely as a leader of the forces of darkness opposing those of the light-world. Labeled "evil" by the vast majority of scholars of Mandaeism—from Nöldeke² to Yamauchi³—Ruha is identified as a devalued Holy Spirit (Ruha d Qudša). True, she possesses negative traits in abundance; she is, for example, the mistress of the detested Jewish god Adonai as well as the mother of the evil zodiac spirits and planets.

Yet, Ruha seems also to be a kind of fallen wisdom figure, resembling Sophia in other gnostic traditions. Mandaean material testifying to such a picture of Ruha includes passages where she behaves and speaks in ways not at all congruent with one's expectations of a force hostile to the light-world. She displays ambiguous qualities, suffers, and at times utters revelatory speeches unfit for a power of darkness. Scholars have been hesitant to deal with these

¹ E. S. Drower and R. Macuch, *A Mandaic Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963) (hereafter cited as *Mand. Dict.*), s.v. *ruh, ruha*.

² Theodor Nöldeke, *Mandäische Grammatik* (Halle: Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1875), p. xx.

³ E. Yamauchi, "Some Alleged Evidences for Pre-Christian Gnosticism," *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, ed. R. N. Longenecker and M. C. Tenney (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1974), pp. 46–70, esp. p. 64.

atypical Ruha traditions since these do not suit the prevailing dualistic pattern assigned by scholars to the Mandaean religion. When figures of darkness behave in unexpectedly positive ways, scholars tend to brush these occurrences aside, anticipating more typical activities in the next paragraph. Examinations of Ruha may, in fact, have been excessively ruled by the investigators' own dualistic attitudes to the Mandaean traditions—attitudes that in advance determine the interpretation of “good” and “evil” mythological entities.

Thus, the problem is the scholarly consensus which has judged Ruha in purely negative terms. This consensus has prevented sustained examinations of the traditions in which Ruha appears in an ambiguous or even positive light. In drawing attention to these traditions, I will seek a more balanced portrait of Ruha. Four groups of mythological traditions will serve toward this end: (1) the Mandaean light-world envoy Hibil Ziwa's descent into the underworld;⁴ (2) Ruha's part in the creation of the earthly world; (3) Ruha's ambivalent relationships with Mandaean saviors and envoys from the light-world; and (4) Ruha as revealer and her identification with light-beings.

The presentation of the mythological traditions in this succession will enable the reader to trace a line beginning with Ruha's first appearance, in the underworld before the creation of the earth, and ending with her ultimate entrance into the light-world. In following this development, one may discern a coherent, far more positive portrait of Ruha than has usually been perceived. Along with these four sets of mythologies of Ruha, I will present the most important previous scholarly interpretations of these materials. Finally, as a corrective to one-sided, negative views of Ruha, which are dominated by the traditional dogma of dualism, I will draw attention to the Mandaic term *dmuta*, “heavenly counterpart” or “ideal image.” This expression offers, it seems to me, an avenue toward a more fruitful interpretation of a figure such as Ruha.⁵

HIBIL ZIWA'S DESCENT INTO THE UNDERWORLD

Right Ginza 5.1 tells of the light-world envoy Hibil Ziwa's mission in the underworld.⁶ Before the creation of Tibil, the earthly world,

⁴ The main account occurs in M. Lidzbarski, *Ginza. Der Schatz oder das grosse Buch der Mandäer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1925), *Right Ginza* 5.1. *Ginza* is separated into *Right* and *Left Ginza* (hereafter abbreviated as *GR* and *GL*, respectively).

⁵ For an investigation of the idea of the *dmuta*, see my article, “The Mandaean Šitil as an Example of ‘The Image Above and Below,’” *Numen* 26, fasc. 2 (1979): 185–91.

⁶ Roughly *GR* 5.1, pp. 150–73. (Hibil Ziwa will be referred to hereafter as Hibil.)

rumors reach the light-world that some power in the underworld, the world of darkness, plans to wage war against the light-forces. Hibil sets out to ascertain whose plan it is and to prevent such an attack. Descending from the light-world, Hibil starts a long, dangerous journey which takes him down through seven underworlds and, when his mission is fulfilled, back up through all of them to the light-world.

On the way downward, in the first underworld, Hibil sees Ruha. One hears nothing of how she arrived there or whether this is indeed her home. The envoy stays with Ruha for a thousand myriad years, though he remains hidden from her.⁷ Next, Hibil descends through the rest of the darkness-worlds, accomplishes his tasks, and returns upward. Just before reaching Ruha's abode again, Hibil steals *mrara ugimra*,⁸ one (or two) powerful objects that contain the strength of the darkness. Invisible, Hibil arrives in Ruha's world when she is about to marry her brother, the demon Gaf.⁹ Hibil now appears to the demons disguised as one of their own, and, impressed by Hibil, Qin, who is Ruha's mother, gives him her other daughter, Zahriel, in marriage. The light-envoy, however, takes care not to consummate the marriage, nor does he touch the demons' food. He tricks Qin into revealing the secrets of darkness to him—secrets hidden in a mirror. Hibil steals the mirror (its power seems similar to that of *mrara ugimra*) and then faces Ruha while taking the guise of her husband Gaf. Surprisingly, he proclaims, “‘Up, we will travel to your parents.’ . . . ‘Where are they?’ she [Ruha] asked. . . . ‘Up there in that world which lies above us.’”¹⁰

This exchange is remarkable since it indicates that Ruha's proper parents are elsewhere, “above.” Hibil, next, forsakes Zahriel and takes Ruha upward, out of the darkness. A rather Kafkaesque journey starts. Ruha, eager to see her parents, is soon discouraged, for the distance seems endless, and Hibil, her liberator, is not very enlightening in his responses to Ruha's anxious questions. In fact, the envoy appears to have lied to Ruha, since he does not bring her to her parents. Instead, after having locked the doors of the underworlds behind him, Hibil imprisons Ruha in a world which belongs to neither light nor darkness.

Ruha is already pregnant by Gaf with ^cUr, the dragon-monster, and, waiting to give birth, she spends myriads of years in her prison,

⁷ Ibid., p. 159 (lines 32–33).

⁸ Ibid., p. 158 (line 22). *Mand. Dict.*, s.v. *mrara*, says that *mrara* is “in connexion with *gimra* . . . completely obscure.”

⁹ *GR* 5.1, p. 159 (lines 16–22).

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 162 (lines 9–11). (Quotations from *GR* and *GL* are given in my translation.)

unable to find an exit. Hibil visits her now and then, only to confuse her even more. He does not answer her questions as to who incarcerated her, and he puzzles her with his account of his own ascent to his parents whom Ruha, of course, believes are her parents, too.¹¹ Hibil tells her that they do not even want to see him, their own son.¹² The precise whereabouts and the nature of the parents remain obscure for Ruha who first, on hearing Hibil's message, curses the parents, though she still yearns for them.¹³

In another Mandaean text Hibil explains why Ruha is unfit, at this stage, to see her parents: "How can we rise up towards my parents when the creatures that I brought are not like Us, nor is their appearance like that of the *uthras*, the children of Light? My Parents will not now desire to have them in Their presence!"¹⁴

Ruha, bewildered by her circumstances, hopes that her son ^cUr will eventually be able to free her from her miserable state. But she has to wait, and when Hibil is about to pay her a tactical visit for the last time before she gives birth, Hibil's father in the light-world refers to Ruha's situation by saying to Hibil, "If we had not done this and if you had not put it in order, we would not be able to cope with ^cUr and his mother."¹⁵ The message is clear: the two must be kept under strict control.

Haran Gawaita speaks of "four creations . . . two male, two female,"¹⁶ which Hibil carries away from the underworld. *Mrara ugimra* is not mentioned here, but another source identifies Ruha, "egg," and *mrara ugimra* and explains:

For the might of Darkness was lacking from the (very) day on which that Egg departed from their midst; its name was *Gimra umrara*, for within it was Dragon-seed that moved and floundered about in that well of black water. . . .¹⁷

Ruha is the entity incorporating the powers of darkness which the light-world had to conquer. The world where Ruha is consigned to

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 165 (lines 3–5). Ruha, of course, still sees Hibil as Gaf, her brother/husband.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 165 (lines 9–11).

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 165 (lines 11–13).

¹⁴ E. S. Drower, *The Haran Gawaita and the Baptism of Hibil Ziwa*, *Studi e Testi*, no. 176 (Vatican: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1953), pp. 34–35. (^c*Uthras* [correctly ^c*utria*] are angels or light-beings.)

¹⁵ *GR* 5.1, p. 167 (lines 12–13).

¹⁶ Drower, *Haran Gawaita*, p. 34.

¹⁷ E. S. Drower, *The Thousand and Twelve Questions (Alf Trisar Šuialia)*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Orientforschung, 32 (Berlin: Akademie, 1959), p. 183 (sec. 265), hereafter cited as *ATŠ*.

wait for her future liberation is called “the world of lacking.” The “Dragon-seed” refers to ^cUr.

To continue the *GR* 5.1 account: ^cUr is born, and mother and son both try to escape their unhappy state. Poignantly, ^cUr wonders why Ruha’s parents seem to close the door in the face of their own daughter.¹⁸ Ruha answers, doubt-stricken, “Am I such a one? I am searching and pondering about everything.”¹⁹ After fruitless attempts at witchcraft and incantations, Ruha shows her son a magic mirror. In it ^cUr beholds the upper and the lower worlds,²⁰ and he wants desperately to fight against the light-world that he sees in the mirror. His mother, though, who appears to have drawn different conclusions from what she sees, advises him to wage war against the underworld instead.²¹ Hibil promptly takes the mirror away from Ruha, who bewails her loss, feeling her powers of sorcery and magic waning. Challenged by ^cUr, Hibil defeats and chains him. As both the dragon and his mother lament his fate, Hibil consoles Ruha, “O Ruha, go, remain where you are, the Life sent me in anger against him.”²²

This is a significant clue: the envoy is not going to destroy Ruha, only her son. Admittedly, Ruha is still jailed, unable to proceed toward the promised parents. Awaiting further notice of liberation, she has evidently been brought up from the underworld for some crucial purpose.

Traditional scholarship has shown little interest in Hibil’s journey to the underworld as far as Ruha’s role in the story is concerned. The envoy’s colorful battles with the various demons have appealed to scholars more than the peculiar issue of Ruha’s removal from the darkness. Nobody has asked why Hibil would descend in order to free an allegedly evil figure. Untimely liberations of devils rarely happen in mythological traditions.

H. Jonas notices that Ruha’s laments in her prison resemble those of Sophia in Christian gnosticism: “. . . she longs for her parents, goes astray, searches for a path, etc.” He adds the thought, “Would this be listened to with feelings of mere maliciousness?”²³ Sundberg, who notices Jonas’s footnote, laconically responds, “Probably not.”²⁴

¹⁸ *GR* 5.1, p. 169 (lines 25–26).

¹⁹ *Ibid.* (lines 27–28).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 170 (lines 15–16, 27–29).

²¹ *Ibid.* (lines 35–37); see *GR* 3, p. 82 (lines 5–12 where Ruha tells ^cUr that the light-world is stronger than he is).

²² *GR* 5.1, p. 173 (lines 16–17).

²³ H. Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*, vol. 1, pt. 1, *Die mythologische Gnosis*, 2d ed. (1934; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1954), p. 277, n. 4 (my translation).

²⁴ W. Sundberg, *Kushta. A Monograph on a Principal Word in Mandaean Texts*, vol. 1, *The Descending Knowledge* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1953), p. 52, n. 108.

Drower unfortunately muddles the issue by theologizing about a third(?) set of parents that Ruha “must one day seek.”²⁵ Apart from Ruha’s “parents” in the underworld, there are only those in the light-world, for whom she genuinely yearns.

Rudolph shows surprise at Ruha’s and ʿUr’s capacity to see the light-world in the mirror and also at Ruha’s warning ʿUr against undertaking any battle with the light-forces.²⁶ The scholar does not, however, attempt to ask why Ruha might be interested in issuing such a warning.²⁷

Tuned to the central issue of Hibil’s descent, Drower observes that “the visit of Hibil Ziwa to the world of darkness resulted eventually in the creation of the material world and of humanity.”²⁸ So, Hibil’s journey was necessary not only to beat down the threat of an attack from the demons of darkness but to obtain some of their powers. Ruha’s removal from the darkness is explained by the fact that she does not properly belong there in the first place. Unfortunately, Ruha’s Sophia-like complaints in her prison include no hint as to how she initially arrived in the darkness. But Hibil brought her to her present level, the prestage for Tibil, the earthly world. Ruha, incorporating the power from the lower world of darkness, will furnish the earthly world as well as the human being with her own essence, that is, the spiritual element required for earthly life. This is why she is such a crucial figure in the following events.

THE CREATION OF TIBIL AND OF THE HUMAN BEING

In the Mandaean myths of the creation of the earthly world and of the human being, one finds a pattern partly similar to other gnostic systems. An ignorant creator, who originally came from the light-world, fights to accomplish his task. Hostile powers, however, incessantly intrude into his plans, and the creation itself seems gradually to imprison and enfeeble the creator. Alarmed, Ptahil, the Mandaean demiurge, realizes that he is not the master of his own house.

We find in *GR* 3 a lengthy description of the interactions between Ptahil and Ruha, the two main agents of the world-creation. Uneasy companions, they both try to remain in charge; when Ptahil feels his strength subside, Ruha gains control, and vice versa. Already on

²⁵ E. S. Drower, *The Secret Adam* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), p. 59.

²⁶ K. Rudolph, *Theogonie, Kosmogonie und Anthropogonie in den mandäischen Schriften* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965), p. 227.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 339–40. Rudolph equates the “black water” in some of the “Hibil’s mission” texts with the “chaotic” world of darkness. But this world is not chaotic; it is a well-ordered, though dismal, universe.

²⁸ Drower, *Haran Gawaita*, p. 34, n. 4.

leaving the light-world for the lower realm, Ptahil senses that the “living fire” in him changes, that is, his power abates as he descends from his home above. Unsettled, he asks, “Since I am a son of the Great One, why has the living fire [in me] changed?”²⁹

In *GR* 3 Ruha sleeps with her chained son ^cUr in order to liberate him.³⁰ After seven days she bears the seven planets, but her offspring do not please her: “When she caught sight of them, her heart fell from its support. She said, ‘I requested, but did not obtain; what I sought after, did not come about; none of them resembles the other[s].’”³¹

Ptahil, meanwhile, is doing his best to construct the earth, but at first attempt, it will not solidify.³² At the start, then, both Ruha and Ptahil are unsuccessful creators. Ruha, seeing Ptahil’s failure, lets ^cUr father the twelve zodiac spirits. But, again, they are not what Ruha had hoped: “I told myself that I would carry and give birth, and that they would become like the Lord of the world. My Lord, I have rushed, but not arrived; I have loaded pain upon myself.”³³ Events roughly repeat themselves for the third time; Ruha’s offspring are now the five planets (sun and moon not included). They, again, cause their mother grief, and she complains that she has lost her power of sorcery and that she has not obtained any part in the world rule.³⁴ Neither have Ruha’s sexual relations with her son led to his liberation.

Concerning the creation of Adam, the protoplast is unable to stand erect as long as he lacks the soul element from the light-world. The planets and Ptahil furnish Adam with “their own mysteries,” but Adam cannot be raised up.³⁵ Their “mysteries” do not suffice to make a full-fledged human being.

According to *Alf Trisar Šuialia*, the soul coming into man from the light-world was accompanied by “the Evil Spirit.” This spirit introduced its own mysteries, such as deceit, falsehood, and excitement, into the body. Importantly, this is effected “so that the Soul should not dominate her (the earthly spirit).”³⁶ Another *ATS* tradition, in keeping with the tripartite schema, says “For when the Body was

²⁹ *GR* 3, p. 98 (lines 31–32).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 99 (lines 12–17). *GR* 3 here links up, thematically, with *GR* 5.1, p. 173 (see above, n. 22).

³¹ *GR* 3, p. 99 (lines 23–28).

³² *Ibid.*, p. 100 (lines 1–7).

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 101 (lines 2–5).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 102 (lines 16–37); cf. *GR* 4, p. 147 (lines 18–20, 22–23), where Ruha and her son aspire to rule over the three worlds—the upper, the middle, and the lower.

³⁵ *GR* 3, p. 108 (lines 4–7); see also *GR* 10, p. 242 (lines 27–30).

³⁶ *ATS*, p. 216. (Does this mean that the “Evil Spirit” came from the light-world?) The spirit here and in the following *ATS* quotation is the vital element *ruha* which corresponds to the mythological entity Ruha.

formed, a Soul (*nishimta*) was formed, and when the Soul took shape in the Body, the Body formed the Vital Spirit (*ruha*).³⁷

In a *GR* tradition Ptahil creates Adam after his own image and Hawwa (Eve) after Adam's image.³⁸ But an alternative myth lets Ptahil say to Ruha and her angels, "I will form my image as man and your image as woman. We shall call the man Adam and the woman Hawwa."³⁹ Here Ruha is found worthy as a pattern for the creation of the female. This may seem remarkable, but it accords well with the Mandaean view of women, marriage, procreation, and human life in the earthly world—a view unusually positive for a gnostic religion.

At the death of Adam, Ruha tempts Hawwa into noisy mourning for him⁴⁰—behavior strongly repudiated in Mandaicism.⁴¹ Adam's death is described in the *Left Ginza*: "Adam left his body; the soul was preserved in radiance and light. . . . Ruha says, 'The soul has ascended to the House of Life.' . . . She [i.e., Ruha] said, 'Woe unto me that I did not know about their treasures which I yearned for. . . .'"⁴² Here Ruha yearns for the soul's capacity for salvation, its return to the light-world; she, herself, does not yet possess such salvific knowledge, it seems.

At Hawwa's death Ruha shows her attachment to the first woman, "Why are you leaving life, you noble one, and leave the house without masters? Where shall we go and in what shall we trust?"⁴³ As Hibil appears to lead Hawwa out of this earthly life, Ruha wails, "Everything which is desirable, you take away from us, and that which is worthless, you leave behind for us."⁴⁴

In *GR* 3 we find the story of Adam bar Adam, a son of the first man, who strays from the right path. Ruha and her planets succeed in seducing him, and Ruha, disguised as the wife/sister (called Hawwa) of Adam, Jr., furnishes him with fundamental knowledge about the origin of the separate sexes: "Then she . . . spoke to the Lying Prophet, to the faulty one full of lack and error. 'Be quiet, Adam! If there was no unevenness, then we would have only one nature . . . and they would have created us as one *Mana*. But as unevenness

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 164 (sec. 218).

³⁸ *GR* 10, p. 242 (lines 26–27).

³⁹ *GR* 11, p. 266 (lines 20–22).

⁴⁰ *GL* 1.3, p. 438 (lines 24–35).

⁴¹ See E. S. Drower, *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*, 2d ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962), pp. 180–81.

⁴² *GL* 3.14, p. 529 (lines 19–31); "House of Life" is the light-world.

⁴³ *GL* 1.3, p. 442 (lines 17–19).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* (lines 22–24).

exists, they have made you a man and me a woman.’”⁴⁵ Unexpectedly, Adam, Jr., is called a “Lying Prophet,” while Ruha is portrayed as a revealer. The temptress even states that the original inequality (that is, in the light-world, one is led to assume) explains the creation of male and female, distinct natures.

The tension between these natures is rendered in an illustrative section of *ATS*, where Earth and the Jordan (that is, running water originating in the light-world) represent the two genders:

For Earth called Jordan (living water) “My Father” when its mysteries fell into her. And she cried aloud to Jordan “Do not penetrate me” and said to it “Answer me, my father, answer me” and “Raise me up, (O) great Son of the Mighty (Life), father of a son of Life!” . . . And then the Jordan spoke: it cried aloud with its voice, and came and clothed all her mysteries, covering her aridities with green foliage. And her baser mysteries he drew upwards, he steadied her babbling tongues, cleared her vision and turned the spheres.⁴⁶

An explicit identification of Ruha with the earth occurs later in *ATS*:

For Earth is a spirit (*or* Ruha), which holdeth and entangleth all mysteries and any being who doth not seek to depart from her. . . . This is the Earth of the Parents: She raised up physical life and she is the Great Mother, from whom all swarming creatures, burgeonings and increase proceeded and (by her) were maintained.⁴⁷

The “Great Mother” takes up a considerable part of the speculative sections of *ATS*. The identification of Earth, the Mother, and Ruha also occurs in an unpublished manuscript, *Diwan malkuta ʿlaita*. Here the candidates for priesthood admit that they have been “nurtured in the lap of Ruha,” but the Pure Ether in the light-world is their father. The candidates end their long tirade against Ruha, saying, “Woe to those who . . . did not turn away from Earth, nor came forth from within their Mother.”⁴⁸ The priest-candidates are said to have passed from the Mother, that is, the Earth, to the Father, the light-world, even though, as human beings, they still remain on this earth.

⁴⁵ *GR* 3, p. 130 (lines 5–14); *Mana*: “vessel” or “garment” (see R. Macuch, *Handbook in Classical and Modern Mandaic* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1965], p. 189 [11–12], n. 94).

⁴⁶ *ATS*, p. 173 (sec. 243).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 239 (sec. 137); “the Parents”: probably the primordial Adam and Hawwa, Adam Kasia and Hawwa Kasia.

⁴⁸ Drower, *Secret Adam*, pp. 47–48.

Ruha is the personified spirit, the middle element in the human being constituted of body, spirit, and soul. The spirit wobbles between the two other components, like Ruha herself wavers between good and evil. At the body's death, the soul, accompanied by the spirit, awaits its final redemption in the light-world. Ruha, too, displaying the yearnings and insights of a capricious human being, hopes for eventual liberation. In the meantime, she rules and, indeed, constitutes the earth posited between the underworld and the light-world.

Ruha's vital role in the world-creation—her furnishing both earth and human being with her own element, the ambiguous spirit—has met with only scanty interest from commentators on Mandaean religion. Rudolph, for instance, is puzzled by Ptahil creating Hawwa in Ruha's image. To associate the two females seems, to Rudolph, "a self-evident proof for the depreciation of the woman."⁴⁹ Elsewhere in the same work, he characterizes such devaluation as part of an ascetic tradition.⁵⁰ But the Mandaean religion is remarkable precisely in its consistent lack of interest in asceticism and, therefore, in predominantly negative implications for life in the earthly world. Rudolph is unable to understand Ruha as Hawwa's image because he fails to appreciate Ruha's two-sided nature. Ambivalence, it must be remembered, always includes the positive element. At a later stage in his scholarship, however, Rudolph modifies his judgment: "There are only certain indications which allow us to suppose that there once were more rigorous features (devaluation of the female)."⁵¹

Rudolph is surprised at Ruha's appearance as Hawwa in the Adam bar Adam episode, but he is only peripherally struck by the incongruity between speaker and message. He merely reiterates Ruha's assertion of the inevitable distinction between male and female.⁵²

On the passages equating earth with Ruha, only the translator of *ATS*, Drower, tersely observes that "the earth cries out like a virgin fearing loss of virginity."⁵³ In a comment on the *Diwan malkuta laita* passage, Drower confuses the terminology of the tripartite pattern of body, spirit, and soul by calling the light-world (that is, the Father) "spiritual," as opposed to the earthly, material world (the

⁴⁹ Rudolph, *Theogonie*, p. 283 (my translation).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 346.

⁵¹ Rudolph's introduction to the Mandaean material in W. Foerster, *Gnosis. A Selection of Gnostic Texts*, vol. 2, *Coptic and Mandaic Sources* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 139.

⁵² Rudolph, *Theogonie*, p. 287.

⁵³ *ATS*, p. 173, n. 6.

Mother).⁵⁴ This terminological muddle merely reinforces the dualistic view that refuses to stress the importance of the three parts and, following the argument of the present study, the three worlds: under-world, earth, and light-world.

As a potent element brought up from the underworld, Ruha has given birth to ^cUr, to the planets, to the zodiac spirits, and, indirectly, to the human being. As earth, she is still stuck on this level but expresses longings suitable for a repentant gnostic rather than for a power antagonistic to the light-world. When she complains to Hibil about Hawwa's death, she expresses that the world she rules is worthless without the soul element. Ruha's relationship with Mandaeans will, in fact, be investigated next.

RUHA AND THE ENVOYS FROM THE LIGHT-WORLD

In *GR* 15.11 an account of Ruha is given, who, in command of her seven sons, the planets, is setting out to erect the city Jerusalem.⁵⁵ Anoš-^cUtra, one of the light-world envoys and saviors, warns Ruha that 365 Mandaean disciples will arise in the city if she builds it. Ruha, nevertheless, builds the city, erects its seven pillars, and the Jews there thrive. From high above, Anoš watches the events and then makes his way to Jerusalem, where he preaches and obtains a following of Mandaeans. The Jews, enraged, kill the offensive believers; in return, the ^cutra intends to destroy the city.

In the course of this tale Ruha seems "evil," hostile to the Mandaeans. On the other hand, she understands more than one might expect of her. In the text, it is asked how Ruha obtained the information that Anoš would thwart her plans.⁵⁶ Once he arrives, Ruha knows that she will lose unless she can work out a compromise with him. When Anoš starts to demolish Ruha's city, she bows down before him, pleading, "By your life, Anoš-^cUthra, do not destroy this place Jerusalem which I have built."⁵⁷ But Anoš does not change his mind, and the frightened Jews hide. Ruha then suddenly turns against her subjects, offering her help to Anoš: "Please give me permission; I will bring down the gates of the walls upon them [the Jews] so that they die on the spot. The Jews who sinned against your disciples shall be killed."⁵⁸ Anoš, infuriated, accepts no such offer from Ruha and he single-handedly puts an end to Jerusalem.

⁵⁴ Drower, *Secret Adam*, p. 47.

⁵⁵ *GR* 15.11, pp. 336–44.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 342 (lines 9–12).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 342 (lines 25–26).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* (lines 35–39).

In another *Ginza* tradition, Ruha asks Hibil who his creator is and how the envoy will ascend to the light-world. He tells her;⁵⁹ she, in turn, surprisingly, launches into an admonishing speech that would suit Hibil better: "The Naṣōraeans who wear a perverted garment, shall not ascend. The Naṣōraeans who testify to money and possessions, shall not ascend. . . . All souls that do evil, will become thin like a hair on the head. Whosoever denies the name of Life, will die a second death. He will die a second death and his stature will become dark and will not shine."⁶⁰ When Ruha has said this, Hibil reacts like Anōš in *GR* 15.11:⁶¹ he hits Ruha with a bolt of radiance and empowers her.

In another text, Ruha, trying to bribe Hibil, asks him to sing and preach to her. The messenger brusquely refuses, saying that he is no music-making gypsy: "I am a man from the other world; I am an iron-shoe whose word and song are cudgels and clubs for evil Ruhas."⁶² Ruha replies by blessing him: "Well then, may the Truth maintain you, you good one, and maintain the word that you have uttered."⁶³

One of the daily prayers recited by priests deserves to be quoted. Here, Ruha addresses herself to an envoy from the light-world:

"Thou camest from the House of Good Beings. (O) would that thou hadst not come into corruption. Into the evil and falsity of this world! Would that Thou hadst not come into corruption. And hadst not been seen by my eyes!" [The light-being answers:] "If I verily came, if I verily appeared, Thine eyes are eyes of falsehood, Whilst my eyes are eyes of truth. Lying eyes are darkened utterly. If thou wishest to see, Ruha, Go to the house of him who knoweth Me, Those who know Me, for I dwell amongst them, In the hearts of my friends, And the thoughts of my disciples."⁶⁴

Here Ruha bewails the fate of the envoy, but she is also attracted to him and even obtains guidelines for her own salvation.

No other allegedly "evil" being in Mandaean mythology speaks so consistently in a manner revealing knowledge properly belonging to light-beings or to pious believers. If Ruha is evil, why does she

⁵⁹ This amounts to giving Ruha the gnosis.

⁶⁰ *GR* 16.1, p. 385 (lines 3–6, 19–24). "The second death" probably means the perishing of the spirit so that it loses its chance to be joined to the ascending soul and thus redeemed.

⁶¹ *GR* 15, p. 343 (lines 1–2).

⁶² M. Lidzbarski, *Das Johannesbuch der Mandäer* (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1915), pp. 166–67 (hereafter cited as *JB* and with my translation of quotations).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁶⁴ E. S. Drower, *The Canonical Prayerbook of the Mandaeans* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959), p. 123, no. 133 (hereafter cited as *CP*).

possess these insights, and who has instructed her? This last question is raised in *GR* 15.11⁶⁵ and in *CP*,⁶⁶ but the answer occurs in *JB*. In this text, the savior is said to have enlightened Ruha, and this act has caused consternation and strife within the light-world.⁶⁷ Considering that it is dangerous to instruct reportedly evil powers in the secrets of the light-world, one might question the savior's motives for equipping the ambiguous, suffering spirit with insights intended for beings who are eligible for salvation.

Scholars have, understandably, been predominantly interested in the scenes between Ruha and the envoys that show the actors as deadly enemies. Ruha's ambivalent feelings and utterances in these contexts have stirred few scholars to comment. With regard to the conversation between Ruha and Anoš, the Swedish scholar Säv-Söderbergh merely notes the general theme of "a dialogue between the Savior and 'the Mother of the World.'"⁶⁸ No note is taken of the content of Ruha's words and change of mind. He reacts in the same vein to the exchange between Ruha and Hibil in the *JB* passage—to which Sundberg offers a little bit more, noticing that "the knowledge is exposed to some risk"⁶⁹ since Hibil is tempted by Ruha. She, in fact, promises him gold and pearls in return for instruction.

Drower is the only one to comment on Ruha's compassionate utterance to the light-envoy. Unfortunately, however, Drower states—in a note to her translation of the prayer—that Ruha's lament is meant ironically.⁷⁰ But in the *Mandaic Dictionary* (of which Drower is a coauthor), one finds no allusion to sarcasm under the entry *ḥdilma* ("if only!") in the reference to the *CP* passage.⁷¹ Finally, with respect to page 15 in *JB*, the translator, Lidzbarski, is puzzled at what he terms a "treachery of Kušṭa to Ruha."⁷² Sundberg considers Lidzbarski's note but disagrees, seeing no mention of "treachery" in the text.⁷³

Of the scanty scholarly commentaries on Ruha's dealings with the light-world envoys, only Sundberg's reveals a flicker of interest in Ruha's atypical behavior. In *JB* (pp. 166–67), Ruha wishes for the

⁶⁵ *GR* 15.11, p. 337 (lines 11–15).

⁶⁶ *CP*, p. 61–62, no. 73.

⁶⁷ *JB*, p. 15.

⁶⁸ T. Säv-Söderbergh, *Studies in the Coptic-Manichaean Psalm-Book* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1949), p. 146.

⁶⁹ Sundberg (n. 24 above), p. 49.

⁷⁰ *CP*, p. 123, n. 1.

⁷¹ *Mand. Dict.*, s.v. *ḥdilma* (341 B) "lest, if perhaps, possibly, maybe, perchance." Drower may have changed her mind about the interpretation of the passage during the time between her work on *CP* and the publication of *Mand. Dict.*

⁷² *JB*, p. 15 n. 3. *Kušṭa*: "Truth," "Knowledge."

⁷³ Sundberg, p. 49.

gnosis from Hibil but does not receive it. In the earlier section of *JB*, however, she possesses Kušta, and Sundberg sees nothing deplorable in this.⁷⁴ The information that someone in the light-world has shown mercy to Ruha by instructing her, and that this has led to tensions in the light-world, merely reflects that ambiguities belong not only on Ruha's earthly level but on high, too.

So far, Ruha has shown a wide spectrum of emotions and many a turn of mind. Increasingly, she resembles a malfunctioning gnostic longing for final liberation.

RUHA'S SELF-REVELATIONS AND IDENTIFICATION WITH LIGHT-BEINGS

In *GR 6* we find the story of a hybrid, half book, half human being, named Dinanukht, who sits between the waters, reading himself.⁷⁵ A small book, Dišai, comes to him and speaks prophetic, disturbing words. Dinanukht tries to burn and drown Dišai, but the latter remains unscathed and repeats his message. Leaving Dišai alone, then, Dinanukht falls asleep and has a vision:

Then came Ewath, the Holy Spirit, to me in my škina and says to me, "Why are you lying there, Dinanukht? Why do you like to sleep? I am the Life that was from the beginning, I am the Kušta which was even earlier in the beginning. I am the radiance, I am the light. I am death, I am life. I am darkness, I am light. I am error, I am truth. I am destruction, I am construction. I am blow, I am healing. I am an elevated man, who is older and who was there before the builder of the heaven and the earth. I have no peers among kings and there is yet no crown in my kingdom. There is not a single human being who could give me a message in the foggy clouds of darkness."⁷⁶

Ewath is another name for Ruha, and her self-predication has, in part, already been spoken by Dišai. The little book started out saying, "There is a Life that was from the beginning, and there is a Kušta,"⁷⁷ but it left out the last part of Ruha's proclamation. Dišai's assertions are thus confirmed by Ruha, with the important change that Ruha says that she *is* the various opposing elements.

Ruha's utterance runs counter to any superficially simple, logical principle of contradiction. She includes dichotomies and epithets not

⁷⁴ Ibid.; see also his observations to *GR 3*, p. 90, lines 12–13 (Sundberg, p. 118).

⁷⁵ *GR 6*, p. 206. For Ruha's role in this tractate, see my article, "Two Female Gnostic Revelers," *History of Religions* 19 (1980): 259–69, esp. 260–62.

⁷⁶ *GR 6*, p. 207 (lines 32–42); *škina*: heavenly abode; "blow and healing" is a cultic expression for ritual mistakes and their corrections.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 206 (lines 22–27).

usually found within the same personality. Full of contrasts, she appears stranded in isolation; and she also defines herself as a preexistent male.

Immediately after Ruha's proclamation to Dinanukht, the hybrid ascends to the upper worlds. He passes through the *maṭarata*, the purgatories where sinful souls are detained on their way to the light-world. The ruler of the third *maṭarta* is Ruha, here portrayed as a seductress. In the last purgatory, the House of Abathur, Dinanukht observes the various oppositional elements proclaimed by Ruha.⁷⁸ Abathur's realm is, in fact, the storage place for these entities as well as for the preexistent souls not yet sent to earth. Dinanukht would like to ascend beyond Abathur's House to the light-world itself, but he is denied access on the grounds that he must return to earth in order to preach his vision. Dismayed, Dinanukht complies, though his subsequent behavior on earth seems tainted by insanity.⁷⁹

Thus, the recurring message in *GR* 6 is seen in the sets of contradictory, though complementary, elements which seem to occur on earth as well as on high. Diṣai first presented the message, then Ruha declared herself to be the content of the message. Next, Ruha turned up in the third *maṭarta*, while the dichotomies appeared even higher above, in Abathur's House. Whether the oppositional pairs would be found in the light-world, too, remains undisclosed, though there are indications that not even the light-world is exempt from tensions and disharmony.⁸⁰

A short account of the envoy of Manda d̄Hiia's visit in the underworld is presented in *JB* (the story seems to paraphrase the journey of Hibil). In the world of Gaf, a female figure named Kanath-Niṭufta approaches Manda d̄Hiia:

She came out from the inner Eggs . . . and from the howling darkness . . . and the black water came out, too, and arrived at the seven walls that enclose the earth Siniawis. Kanath-Niṭufta sat for sixty-two years at the outer wall until the scent of Life settled, and a messenger came to her, saying, "Arise, arise, Kanath-Niṭufta, you whom Life has constructed and created. Arise, Barath-Niṭufta, whom the life has heartily loved. Arise, Piršath-Niṭufta, and ascend to your father. Arise, Šarrath-Niṭufta, and become a support for the Life. Arise, Pearl-Niṭufta, you pure pearl, whom Life loves and for whom it became a creator. Arise, Simat-Haije-Niṭufta, whom the great Planter has created."⁸¹

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 210 (lines 25–31).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 211 (lines 40–41).

⁸⁰ See above, n. 67.

⁸¹ *JB*, p. 228 (lines 7–20). *Niṭufta*: "Drop."

Keeping *GR* 5.1 in mind, one may identify Kanath-Niṭufta with Ruha. According to the *JB* text, Ruha has now found mercy with the light-world, and she is invited to ascend to her proper home. The above section seems to link up with the passage in *GR* 5.1 where Hibil leaves Ruha in limbo.

Some of Ruha's names in the above *JB* section occur in the illustrated scroll *Diwan Abatur*, which also contains pictures of Ruha. One of her names is *Drop* (Niṭufta), an epithet of Simat Hiia ("Treasure of Life"), the consort of the Great Life in the light-world. Ruha is also identified with her "mother" in the underworld, Qin.⁸²

Another reference to Ruha as Qin occurs in *ATS*, where the instructor from the light-world teaches: "And thou, Hibil-Ziwa, art (*of*) light and Qin is (*of*) darkness. Between them I . . . cast strife, (*yet*) their voice is one, degrading or uplifting, urging to good or to evil . . . Good and Evil . . . I mingled together for they are living waters and turbid waters, they are life and death. Error and truth (*or* reliability), they are wound and healing, they are Ptahil and Hibil-Ziwa, they are spirit and soul" (emphasis added).⁸³

Here, the dichotomies are equated with both elements and mythological figures. The defect demiurge Ptahil is posed against Hibil, the light-world envoy. Both Ptahil and Qin belong to the spirit side, that is, to that of Ruha. Still, the opposed figures cannot be completely separated.

In *ATS*, there is a mention of a "Sign of the Left, which is that signed by Ruha."⁸⁴ This can be linked with another *ATS* passage which explains, "Behold, Light and Darkness are brothers. They proceed from one Mystery and the Body (*cuṣṭuna*) retaineth both and for each sign in the body (*pagra*) there is a corresponding sign belonging to the Darkness. Were it not marked with the mark of Darkness, it would not be established, nor come forward for baptism and be signed with the Sign of Life [i.e., the sign of the Right]."⁸⁵ This means that the deficient spirit sign is the prerequisite for eligibility for the light-world. Eminently transferable to Ruha's own situation, this thought expresses the necessity to live the material, temporary life ruled by the spirit.

In a passage from *Diwan Abatur*, Hibil tells Ptahil that "Ruha is completely subdued, Ruha and all her creatures are brought into

⁸² E. S. Drower, *Diwan Abatur or Progress through the Purgatories*, Studi e Testi no. 151 (Vatican: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1950), p. 38.

⁸³ *ATS*, p. 211 (my emphasis). Note similarities to Ruha's pronouncement in *GR* 6.

⁸⁴ *ATS*, p. 138–39 (sec. 107).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 264–65 (sec. 307). "Body," *cuṣṭuna*, and "body," *pagra*, refer to the primordial, celestial body, and to the material, human body, respectively.

complete subjection and the seal of Life hath been placed upon them.”⁸⁶ Those considered evil have received the mark of eligibility for ultimate salvation.

In a related vein, *CP* compares the blessing bestowed on the human beings commemorating their dead with the blessing given to Simat-Hiia, that is, Ruha. The text states that “Simat-Hiia was blessed when she arose . . . (and) came from the worlds of darkness.”⁸⁷ Further, she is called the bride of her liberator, who himself remains impure from having descended to the nether worlds: “They immersed him, but he was not purified, (He was still imbued with) the hue of darkness until Simat Hiia arose” (emphasis added).⁸⁸ The *cutria*, finally, are said to raise Simat-Hiia to “the Place of Light.”⁸⁹

Identified with Simat, Ruha is clearly portrayed as belonging to the world of Light. It is surprising that she has to “rescue” her liberator by blessing him; in contradistinction to *GR* 5.1, Ruha in *CP* possesses powers lacking in her liberator.

The assurance that Ruha will find final redemption supplies a consolation to a most impressive passage in *CP* where Ruha laments, “My father, my father, why didst thou create me? My God, my God, my Allah, why hast thou set me afar off and cut me off and left me in the depths of the earth and in the nether glooms of darkness so that I have no strength to rise up thither?”⁹⁰ This lament recalls part of Ruha’s revelatory speech in *GR* 6, “The Book of Dinanukht.”

It is now necessary to turn to the scholarly comments on the passages which started with this *Ginza* section. The translator of the *Ginza*, Lidzbarski, cannot furnish any interpretation at all of Ewath-Ruha’s proclamation.⁹¹ E. Schweizer, deeply distressed by such words coming from Ruha, admits that he wishes to skip the entire section.⁹² Sundberg fatally misunderstands when he argues that Ruha is a beguiler when she calls herself “Kušta.”⁹³ He must concede, though, that “the self-characterization is anything but suitable to a spirit of darkness disguised as a spirit of light.” In conclusion, Sundberg states

⁸⁶ Drower, *Diwan Abatur*, p. 19. This recalls Ruha’s fate in *GR* 5.1; see above, n. 22.

⁸⁷ *CP*, p. 279. In her n. 1, Drower mistakes Ruha for Zahriel, though the latter never left the underworld. Again, in Drower, *Šarh q̄Qabin q̄Šišlam Rba*, *Biblica et Orientalia*, no. 12 (Rome: Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1950), Drower says that Manda q̄Hiia took Zahriel to the light-world (p. 107).

⁸⁸ *CP*, p. 281 (my emphasis).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 74, no. 75.

⁹¹ Lidzbarski offers only a few, unenlightening words in his introduction to *GR* 6, p. 205.

⁹² E. Schweizer, *Ego Eimi*, *Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments*, n.s. 38 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1939), p. 71.

⁹³ Sundberg (see n. 24 above), p. 51.

that Ruha is *both* good and evil.⁹⁴ Much more recently, G. MacRae quotes Ruha's words but is not interested in them as Ruha's own; neither does he perceive that the speaker, Ewath, is Ruha—he thinks she is Hawwa.⁹⁵

Rudolph, puzzled by Ruha calling herself “the elevated man,” assumes that this title refers to the heavenly messenger or to the primal man.⁹⁶ The scholar does not interpret the whole passage, neither does he take seriously the text's presentation of the utterance as that of Ruha. In a more recent study, Rudolph returns to the enigmatic section in connection with a scathing comment on Quispel's article, “Jewish Gnosis and Mandaean Gnosticism.”⁹⁷ Unfortunately, Rudolph's criticism includes the following: “In the Mandaean text the paradoxes are answers to questions . . . which are given by the evil Ewath-Ruha in order to lead the ascending Dišai [*sic*] astray, i.e., an unequivocally negative view.”⁹⁸

Not only does this interpretation recall Sundberg's misjudgment of Ruha as a beguiler,⁹⁹ but Rudolph mixes up Dinanukht and Dišai. As for Quispel's work, many of Rudolph's objections to it seem justified. Quispel presents some rather strong conjectures, suggesting that the Nag Hammadi text *NHC 6.2: The Thunder: Perfect Mind* (which Quispel “reconstructs” to fit his aims) forms the basic source for the *GR 6* formula spoken by Ruha.¹⁰⁰ Again, Quispel shows little concern for the passage in its own, Mandaean context.¹⁰¹

On the *JB* passage about Kanath-Nițufta, Lidzbarski briefly notes that “what is said of her . . . could also be said of Ruha.”¹⁰² But Lidzbarski does not put this clue to any constructive use. Rudolph merely affords an exclamation mark when observing the similarities

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁹⁵ In *Protocol of the Fifth Colloquy of the Center for Hermeneutical Studies*, March 11, 1973, ed. W. Wuellner (Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union and University of California, 1973), p. 11. (See my comment in “Two Female Gnostic Revealers,” p. 268.)

⁹⁶ Rudolph, *Theogonie*, p. 62, n. 1.

⁹⁷ Rudolph, “Der Mandäismus in der neueren Gnosisforschung,” *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas*, ed. B. Aland (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), pp. 265–66, n. 65. He refers to G. Quispel, “Jewish Gnosis and Mandaean Gnosticism,” *Les Textes des Nag Hammadi*, ed. J.-É. Ménard (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975).

⁹⁸ Rudolph, “Der Mandäismus” (my translation).

⁹⁹ See above, n. 93.

¹⁰⁰ Quispel, “Jewish Gnosis,” pp. 103–7.

¹⁰¹ Referring to my study, “Two Female Gnostic Revealers,” I would like to take exception to Quispel's conclusions based on Mandaean material. As he indicates (p. 102, n. 30), the major parts of his article are taken from a study I did for him as his student during 1973–74.

¹⁰² Lidzbarski, *JB*, p. 227.

between Ruha and Kanath.¹⁰³ Drower, calling Kanath “a creature of Light . . . imprisoned in the worlds of darkness,” muddles the terminology by seeing Kanath as “another form of the soul-allegory.”¹⁰⁴ This is unfortunate, since the issue here is the liberation of the spirit, not of any “soul.” It seems that *JB*, like *GR 5.1*, assumes that an earthly world—as a putative “prison of the soul”—does not yet exist.

Regarding *Diwan Abatur*, Lidzbarski is not inclined to accept unexpected identifications between Ruha and light-beings. Noticing parallels between the names of Ruha in the *Diwan* and those in *JB*, he concludes in exasperation, “Owing to the wild confusion of these juxtapositions, one should not attribute any significance to them.”¹⁰⁵ Thus resigned, Lidzbarski has robbed himself of a potential discovery.

That the earthly realm constitutes the prerequisite for salvation is lost on Rudolph. With regard to the *ATS* section about the “sign of the Left,” he expresses amazement that the “mark of Darkness” must precede the “sign of Life.”¹⁰⁶ Echoing Drower’s interpretation of Kanath as “soul,”¹⁰⁷ Rudolph ponders about the identity of the “female being sitting in the underworld” in *CP*, but he decides that she is “a symbolic reformulation of the soul, respectively, the ‘collective’ soul.”¹⁰⁸ Thus, the scholar considers the matter settled, for, “the younger texts are very interested in such themes; in these cases they often reveal a fabulating fantasy and utilize old thoughts, though confusing these by lack of understanding.”¹⁰⁹

Rudolph makes a similar judgment of Ruha’s lament in *CP*, a passage that has caused consternation among some scholars. The “Sophia-motif,” as Rudolph has called it in an earlier study,¹¹⁰ is allegedly “younger” because it includes the name Allah.¹¹¹ To assign the entire formula to a later stage of the religious tradition marks a recurrent tendency in Rudolph’s scholarship on Mandaeism—a tendency that seeks to dismiss any seemingly ill-fitting feature to a later and, one assumes, degenerate period. Early in his career, Rudolph

¹⁰³ Rudolph, *Theogonie*, p. 238, n. 2.

¹⁰⁴ Drower, *Šarh d̄Qabin*, p. 106.

¹⁰⁵ Lidzbarski, *JB*, p. 202.

¹⁰⁶ Rudolph, *Die Mandäer*, vol. 2, *Der Kult* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961), p. 157, n. 5.

¹⁰⁷ See above, n. 104.

¹⁰⁸ Rudolph, *Theogonie*, p. 238, n. 2 (my translation).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, my translation.

¹¹⁰ Rudolph, *Die Mandäer*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena: Das Mandäerproblem* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960), p. 145.

¹¹¹ Rudolph, *Theogonie*, p. 168.

observes that “the Mandaean mythos comprises all traits known to us [from other gnostic systems]—except for the Sophia-figure.”¹¹² But later he wonders about the possibility of a “fall of Ruha” in Mandaeism, too.¹¹³

Occasional early scholars quote the *CP* passage but reveal New Testament interests in doing so.¹¹⁴ The Danish theologian Schou-Pedersen, morally troubled by the utterance, calls it “a spiteful distortion of the words of Jesus on the cross.” He considers the lament a later interpolation, thereby avoiding any serious recognition of it.¹¹⁵

Importantly, Ruha’s utterance does not occur in isolation. As part of a long hymn recited by Mandaean priests, it belongs in a setting where the evil powers are overcome by and offer praise to the light-world. Ruha’s words suit the context; thus, they should not be judged facily as derivative or peripheral.

To recapitulate: Ruha shows up in a remarkably wide range of settings, from the lowest to the uppermost world. First, Hibil takes her up from the underworld because Ruha embodies vital elements required for the creation of earth and human being. Second, at this creation, she acts with hostility toward her children as well as toward the light-world envoys, yet, simultaneously, she yearns for the knowledge and company of these envoys. Finally, Ruha’s self-revelation and identifications with light-beings point to her real home, the light-world. Her insights while she is still on earth reflect a Mandaean gnostic’s own knowledge. However, her knowledge frequently becomes cloudy, it seems, and Ruha wavers between clear gnosis and destructive leanings toward her darker side. Until the material world perishes for lack of believers, Ruha must rule and impersonate the earthly world. Caught between light and darkness, she displays qualities of both realms. In the end, though, she is due to be redeemed, in accordance with Hibil’s promise at the start of Ruha’s movements upward.

CONCLUSION

The four presented sets of mythologies about Ruha have found little resonance in scholarship. The atypical, frequently positive, sides of

¹¹² Rudolph, “Ein Grundtyp gnostischer Urmensch-Adam—Spekulation,” *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte*, 9 (1957): 1–20, esp. 13 (my translation).

¹¹³ Rudolph, *Die Mandäer*, vol. 1: 145, n. 2.

¹¹⁴ For instance, H. Lietzmann, “Ein Beitrag zur Mandäerfrage,” *Sitzungsberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, philologisch-historische Klasse* 18 (1930): 595–608, esp. 598.

¹¹⁵ V. Schou-Pedersen, *Bidrag til en Analyse af de mandaeiske Skrifter* (Aarhus: Universitetsforlaget, 1940), p. 85.

Ruha have received only brief treatments, often in footnotes. Ruha's activities in the three worlds, the coherence of these activities, and their peculiar pointing toward reconciliation with the light-world have hardly been pondered by students of Mandaean mythology.

Not only have most of the above mythological sections about Ruha been treated in a piecemeal fashion, but some of them, it is interesting to note, have elicited no scholarly comments at all. Total silence rules with respect to the following passages: Ruha's disappointment in her offspring;¹¹⁶ her insights regarding the ascending soul;¹¹⁷ lament at Hawwa's death;¹¹⁸ Ruha as earth;¹¹⁹ Ruha's display of pious Mandaean knowledge;¹²⁰ Ruha as necessary element in the earthly world;¹²¹ and, finally, as recipient of the "seal of Life."¹²²

It appears that the closer Ruha seems to the qualities and the beings of the light-world, the quieter grows any scholarly concern with her. The reason for such silence, I suggest, rests with the dominant dualistic view which has exerted its force generally in past and present research on gnosticism. Dualistic dogmas decree that what is of light is "good," and what is of darkness is "evil." Therefore, depending on where a given figure shows up, an investigator has, all too often, already decided what to expect of that entity. Such standards also determine one's inclination to accept an unsuccessful light-being but not a darkness-force suddenly appearing in a positive light. Ruha's range of qualities, areas of activities, and spectrum of emotions all demonstrate, in a most unsettling manner, that she does not "stick to her place."

One of Rudolph's central concerns has been to separate the Mandaean tradition-history into an allegedly older, and therefore more "genuine," dualistic segment and a later monistic tradition with a weakened dualism.¹²³ The more positive view of Ruha, however, cannot be accommodated solely into the "monistic" phase, as Rudolph's work would indicate. Ruha's ambiguity persists in all strata of the Mandaean texts which are available to us at the present. There is no evidence for an "evolutionistic" development in the image

¹¹⁶ See above, nn. 31, 33, 34.

¹¹⁷ See above, n. 42.

¹¹⁸ See above, nn. 43, 44.

¹¹⁹ See above, n. 47.

¹²⁰ See above, n. 60.

¹²¹ See above, n. 83.

¹²² See above, n. 86.

¹²³ See Rudolph, *Die Mandäer*, 1:145, n. 2, and p. 182, n. 1; *Theogonie*, pp. 339–40; "Zum gegenwärtigen Stand der mandäischen Religionsgeschichte," *Gnosis und Neues Testament*, ed. K.-W. Tröger (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1973), pp. 121–48, esp. pp. 143–46.

of Ruha, according to which a sterner, dualistic view would precede a kinder, more recent one. Moreover, the wobbliness of Ruha corresponds perfectly to the state of indecision of the spirit ruha hovering between body and soul in the human being. An unpredictable mythological Ruha-figure may even be predicated in parts of the ritual material which belongs in the oldest scriptures of the Mandaean religion.¹²⁴

Few scholars have heeded Drower's information that the polemical title *Ruha d-Qudša* (Holy Spirit) occurs nowhere in what she calls the "esoteric writings" most treasured by the Mandaean priests.¹²⁵ These texts have not caught scholars' attention to the same extent as have *Ginza*, *JB*, and *CP*. The "esoteric writings" show little interest in issues of concern to traditional scholarship, namely, polemics against neighboring religions, notably Christianity. In addition to Drower, Sundberg makes the even earlier remark that the positive view of Ruha in *Diwan Abatur* is also familiar both to *JB* and to *Ginza*. In this connection Sundberg draws attention to the favorable image of Ruha expressed in modern legends of the Mandaeans—oral traditions undeservedly neglected by almost all scholars of Mandaeism.¹²⁶

If serious drawbacks mar the dualistic view in the interpretation of Ruha, a consideration of the Mandaean term *dmuta* ("ideal counterpart," "upper image") might, instead, prove helpful. Drower explains this term, saying "every created or expressed thing has . . . an ideal counterpart (*dmuta*) in the ideal world of Mšunia Kušta."¹²⁷ "Geographically" a part of the light-world, Mšunia Kušta contains the ideal counterparts of everything appearing in the lower realms. It forms a sort of blueprint for the earthly, material world, but because Mšunia Kušta was shaped without the participation of the dark forces, it has remained—unlike Tibil—a pure creation untainted by demonic qualities.¹²⁸

Thus, just as the earthly world has its prototype on high, so the material creature, too, possesses its ideal image in that upper world.

¹²⁴ See my Ph.D. dissertation, "Spirit Ruha in Mandaean Religion" (University of Chicago, 1978), esp. pp. 134–35; and my article "The Mandaean Ṭabahata Masiqta," *Numen* 28, fasc. 2 (1981): 138–63.

¹²⁵ Drower, *Secret Adam*, p. 47. The "esoteric writings" are, mainly, *ATS*; Drower, *The Coronation of the Great Šišlam. Being a Description of the Rite of Coronation of a Mandaean Priest according to the Ancient Canon* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962); Drower, *A Pair of Naṣoraean Commentaries (Two Priestly Documents). The Great "First World": The Lesser "First World"* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963).

¹²⁶ Sundberg, pp. 53–54. For the legends, see Drower, *Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*, pp. 264–73, 393–99. Note especially the sentence, "Ruha is the breath of Life in the created world, and our breath is from her" (p. 271).

¹²⁷ Drower, *Šarh dQabin*, p. 79, n. 1. See also *Mand. Dict.*, s.v. *dmuta*, 111B–112A.

¹²⁸ Drower, *Diwan Abatur*, pp. 13–14.

Furthermore, the *dmuta* can be understood as an expression of the fact that entities may appear as both good and evil, may display characteristics of both light and darkness. For, not only human beings, but also ambiguous mythological figures like defected demiurges, suffering ^c*utria*,¹²⁹ and Ruha herself possesses their higher image in Mšunia Kušta.

The idea of the *dmuta* furnishes a solution, it seems to me, to the dogma of static dualism. For, even if the *dmuta* is a feature of the Mandaean dualism,¹³⁰ it is nevertheless a dynamic feature, opposed to a static, deterministic, dualistic model. Ruha, for example, is not to be definitely categorized as “good” or “evil” but has a celestial as well as a dark side. Her scope of activities in the various worlds can be seen as the workings of the *dmuta*. An active principle, the *dmuta* forms the conditions for its lower images to appear in manifold ways outside of Mšunia Kušta. Therefore, the ambiguous figures and their characteristics change, depending on where they show up, at any given time, in any given world. The ideal image resides on high, its representations appearing in a variety of images below. The unpredictability of a figure like Ruha can then be explained as an inherent feature of the *dmuta*’s own dynamics. Such mobility, of course, complicates any clear-cut expectations one might harbor as to typical—that is, evil—behavior of Ruha.

Scholars have, perhaps, feared relativism, obliteration of borders, and destruction of neat categories when exhibiting an unwillingness to accept Ruha’s variegated nature. But her capriciousness is determined by her given realm and role; she may even, as in *GR* 6, surface in several places simultaneously. Here, her flexibility is reminiscent of that of Šitil in another *Ginza* account, where he is portrayed as both earthly human being and heavenly ^c*utra*.¹³¹

Thus, complications arise as mythological entities cross the boundaries between the worlds, and complexities form in these figures themselves. Scholars continue to have trouble with these figures precisely because dualistic views will not easily accommodate such elasticity of character. Consequently, scholarship has failed to take seriously the variations in the behavior of the mobile figures; also,

¹²⁹ For the ambiguity of Ptahil, see Jonas, *Gnosis* 1.1, p. 269, n. 2; on that of Abathur, see Lidzbarski, *JB* pp. 232–34; *CP*, pp. 22, 54, 56, 89, 106; *ATS*, p. 174 (sec. 245), *ibid.*, p. 233 (sec. 116), *ibid.* p. 285 (sec. 414); Drower, *Diwan Abatur*, p. 7; on that of Yošamin, see Lidzbarski, *JB*, pp. 240–41; Lidzbarski, *GR* 14, pp. 292–93; of all three, *GR* 15, p. 311, Drower, *Haran Gawaita*, p. 52.

¹³⁰ Drower, *Secret Adam* p. xvi.

¹³¹ Lidzbarski, *GL* 1.1, pp. 423–24; see my “The Mandaean Šitil,” pp. 186–88.

insufficient attention has been paid to the significance of the realm in which those entities happen to show themselves. Whether a figure appears in the underworld, on earth, or in the light-world conveys crucial messages about what sort of behavior and emotions one might expect from that figure. Again, the tensions in the mobile figures do not imply sheer negativity.

Part of the dead-end situation of the dualism-centered interpretations of Mandaeism stems from the more or less tacit assumptions that there are, essentially, *two* worlds and *two* elements in the makeup of the human being. On the contrary, tripartite systems persist in the religion: there are underworld, earth, and light-world.¹³² Correspondingly, one finds three components in the human being: body, spirit, and soul. In both tripartitions, the middle part, Ruha and *ruha*, eminently testify to the importance of the mediating—though wobbly—part which breaks the static, dualistic model dominating traditional interpretations of Mandaeism. The three parts reveal the dynamics of the interconnection between the worlds. Ruha can, indeed, be said to be the foremost image of the tripartition since she is an emblem of both separation and mediation.¹³³

The *dmuta*, too, constitutes a mediating force between the worlds. Ruha's *dmuta*, for instance, stays on high while her lower images appear in the other worlds. By sheer religious, "logical" law, her appearances in these worlds must be crooked, imperfect, and subject to change according to location. This logic of inversion determines Ruha's appearances as evil or deficient. Scholars tend to view the *dmuta* much too theoretically; far from being an airy, aloof, and disconnected principle, the *dmuta* vitally and actively joins the earthly to the upper realm.

An interpretation of the angel of death in *GL* paraphrases the idea of the *dmuta* in this way: "In the world he [the angel of death, Şauriel] is called 'Death,' but the knowers who know about him call him 'Truth.'" ¹³⁴ Likewise, Ruha may appear, on earth or in the purgatories, as evil, but, seen from another perspective, she might be the opposite.

¹³² After furnishing the creative element needed for the creation of earthly life, the underworld seems to lose its former significance. Instead, the purgatories—in terms of numbers and of their watchers—form a parallel to the ordering of the underworld. This shift in emphasis indicates that the focus is on the ascending souls and spirits, no longer on the envoy Hibil's dangerous sojourn among the demons.

¹³³ Note Jonas's pertinent point, "What the middle beings were to 'mediate,' was exactly the realization of otherwise merely abstract dualism" (*Gnosis* 1.1, p. 341; my translation).

¹³⁴ Lidzbarski, *GL* 1.1, p. 425 (lines 1–2).

Just as Ruha will, finally, merge with her *dmuta* in Mšunia Kušťa,¹³⁵ so one may, correspondingly, assume that Tibil will join its prototype, that upper world. Since Ruha is, in a certain sense, Tibil itself, the transitoriness of both earth and life-giving spirit perfectly parallel one another. As long as she appears in dispersion, Ruha forms the condition for life on earth, in the broadest sense, and she supplies links to the other realms. Incorporating the tensions between dichotomous elements, Ruha embodies these without being a static entity. In her flexible nature, the dualism is mediated, so that an “either-or” dogma of radical dualism is solved by an inclusive “both-and” of otherwise irreconcilable traits. The material conditions of earthly life are required—for human beings as for Ruha—in order to merge with their respective upper images.

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¹³⁵ In her article, “Ptahil e Ruha: per una fenomenologia del dualismo mandeo,” *Numen* 24, fasc. 3 (1977): 186–206, M. V. Cerutti fatally assigns Ruha the mythological figure to condemnation, the element *ruha* to liberation (p. 198). This judgment of Ruha is based solely on faulty readings of the texts pertaining to Ruha.