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# Yahia Bihram's Narrative Colophons Part 1: DC 35<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*Yahia Bihram, a pivotal figure in the Mandaean community of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, composed several autobiographical texts. This article presents a new edition of one of his lengthiest works, incorporating numerous corrected readings based upon close examination of the original manuscript. With the aid of recent linguistic research into Neo-Mandaic and contemporary documents, the article proposes many new interpretations and the correct identifications of historical names and places.*

## Introduction

The life of the Mandaean *yalufa* (learned layman) turned priest Yahia Bihram and his role with his brother-in-law Ram Zihrun in saving the Mandaean priesthood after the calamitous cholera epidemic of 1831 have been described in great detail by Jorunn Buckley.<sup>2</sup> Much of our information about Yahia Bihram derives from personal accounts that he appended to some of the manuscripts that he copied or repaired.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of their great contribution to the understanding of the history of the Mandaean community, and their unique description of daily life in the area of the Persian Gulf in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by a native witness, these texts have not been published satisfactorily. In some cases, preliminary editions were published by Lady Ethel Stefana Drower accompanied by hazy photographs that did not always allow for collation.<sup>4</sup> Other colophons were never published at all. The colophons are composed in a classicising idiom but show many influences of the vernacular, and their distinct language has been discussed elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> Through collation of the original manuscripts, examination of additional sources, and the integration of

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<sup>2</sup>J. J. Buckley, "Glimpses of a Life: Yahia Bihram, Mandaean Priest", *History of Religions* 39 (1999), pp. 32–49 and in an expanded form *idem*, *The Great Stem of Souls* (Piscataway, NJ, 2010), pp. 121–147.

<sup>3</sup>For example, DC 36 was copied in 1088 AH (1677 CE) but was repaired by Yahia Bihram, who added his own narrative colophon in 1251 AH (1835–1836 CE).

<sup>4</sup>For example, the colophon of DC 35, published in E. S. Drower, *The Haran Gawaita and the Baptism of Hibil-Ziwa* (Vatican City, 1953).

<sup>5</sup>Macuch, in his seminal review of Drower's edition of DC 35 published in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 105 (1955), pp. 357–363, was the first scholar to identify explicitly the Neo-Mandaic influences on

data on Neo-Mandaic based upon the fieldwork of Rudolf Macuch, Charles Häberl and Hezy Mutzafi, it is often possible to improve upon the interpretation of the published texts and to propose a reasonable translation of those that have remained unpublished.

The present article is the first of several that will present editions and translations of all of Yahia Bihram's known narrative colophons. Since the texts themselves are lengthy, the comments have been kept brief, and not all of the new interpretations presented herein and their implications are discussed at length. Where relevant, reference has been made to previous publications where more detailed philological analyses may be found.

### The Text

At the time of its publication in 1953, DC 35 was the only copy of the Mandaic work *Maṣbuta d-Hibil Ziwa* available to Western scholars. The manuscript was copied by Yahia Bihram in 1247 AH (1831–1832 CE), i.e. in the immediate aftermath of the cholera epidemic, while the narrative colophon, added subsequently, refers to events up to September 1848 or possibly later. With the digitisation of the Rbai Rafid Collection by the present author, the source of Yahia Bihram's text of *Maṣbuta d-Hibil Ziwa* has now become available: RRC 2U, copied in 1168 AH (1754–1755 CE). DC 35 nonetheless retains its importance on account of the colophon, which was published in translation by Drower, accompanied by a facsimile of the scroll. Valuable philological observations are to be found in Macuch's review of Drower's edition,<sup>6</sup> while the colophon's contribution to our understanding of Yahia Bihram's life has been discussed by Buckley.<sup>7</sup>

The Mandaic text is presented in bold characters and transliterated according to the system developed by Rudolf Macuch, except for ʾ and ʿ (the Arabic pharyngeal ʿ employed exclusively in loanwords and proper nouns), which are represented respectively by ' and ʿ. Scribal erasures are marked with double brackets, e.g. {{a}}, superlinear insertions are marked with carets, e.g. ^a^, and line breaks with a vertical marker |. Uncertain readings are marked with round brackets, e.g. (a). Reconstructions—where the text of the manuscript is absent due to damage—are denoted by square brackets, e.g. [a].

**tum tidun ia ahan d-atitun mn abatran**

Now you should know, oh our brothers that come after us,

**bšita d-rhatia 'l šnat alpa u'matin uarbin šuba | šnia  
ata mutana rba ulatama mn ganzibria utarmidia 'niš  
unapša anašia 'npaq mn | pagraihun**

in the year of Friday, the year of 1247 the great epidemic came, and none of the *ganzibrias* and *tarmidas* remained, and many people left their bodies.

**haizak kd nha alma u'huat nihuta**

Then, when the world became tranquil and there was calm,

**ialupia qamnia biuma d-paruanaiia ubninia rah | mia  
ušarinia bumanda**

(we) literates<sup>8</sup> rose on the day of the *Paruanaiia*<sup>9</sup> and we prayed the (daily)

the language of Yahia Bihram. A discussion of this mixed idiom is found in M. Morgenstern, "Neo-Mandaic in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Colophons", *Orientalia* 86 (2017), pp. 253–273.

<sup>6</sup>See previous note.

<sup>7</sup>Buckley, *Great Stem*, pp. 134–140.

<sup>8</sup>**ialupa** (*yalyfa*) is a literate lay-Mandaean.

<sup>9</sup>See E. S. Drower, *The Mandaean of Iraq and Iran* (Oxford, 1973), p. 83.

abatar šaraita hda ialupa mraurab t<sup>r</sup>^aš tagh lhad  
mn | ialupia bškinta

ba rahmia šitin iumia uqra masiqta lrbh

had abatar had | trišiu umiša dakia had 'hab lhurina  
upsaqiu qabin

abatar tlata 'u arba šnia npil plugia binataiun  
d-tarmidia umandaia |

anin kulan 'huainin bšug šiuk bmata d-mandaia |  
lhudu mata d-margab šuma

hun trin 'ma baitauata uanin kulan atinia minaihun  
b|bašra

taminia tmania iahria

haizak bun mašin bšuštar

b'uhra d-šuštar | ġaratdan 'badiun 'uraba lhimid

mindai utaksatai uhimid 'hbalai drunu 'uraba

šuba | alpia quruš šauin mindai dilia iahia bihram br  
rbai adam ihana br sam br bihram | br adam  
zihrun kinianh riš draz ulaqab kamisia

aminṭul baita rba 'huinh bbašra

abatar | mutana lahaluai 'niš abihdai kulu zgun<sup>14</sup>

bruaha d-hiia anin kulan 'titlh d-nizal latra d-minh  
{hua}<sup>15</sup> | huainin

⊙ tum ana kimrit mn šuštar atit bpalahia šiḡ d-šafab  
hua tamir br gadban hua |

devotions (*rahmia*)<sup>10</sup> and consecrated a  
cult-hut.

After the consecration, one of the great  
literate placed the crown upon one of the  
literate in the hut.<sup>11</sup>

He prayed the devotions for sixty days<sup>12</sup> and  
recited the *masiqta* for his ordainer;  
they consecrated one after the other gave one  
another pure oil and carried out a marriage.

After three or four years, dissension arose  
between the priests and the laymen.

We were all in Suq eš-Šiuk, in the  
Mandaean's own quarter, called the  
Margab Quarter.

There were<sup>13</sup> two hundred houses and we all  
went from them to Bašra.

We stayed eight months.

Then they wanted to go to Šuštar.

On the way to Šuštar the Ḥamid Arabs raided  
us.

The Arabs took my possessions and household  
belongings and whatever I had.

7,000 *Kunūš* (were) worth my things, I, Yahia  
Bihram son of Rbai Adam Yuhana son of  
Sam son of Bihram son of Adam Zihrun, of  
the family of Riš Draz, and the clan *Ḳamiši*  
because we were a great family (lit: house) in  
Bašra

(but) after the epidemic there was no one with  
me;<sup>16</sup> they all went with the relief of Life,  
and each of us was ready to go to the place  
from whence we came.

Then I returned from Šuštar, and came to  
Fellāhiyya. The Sheikh of the Ka'eb was  
Tamir son of Ḡaḏbān.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Compare *rahem qo-bānen* "they pray the devotions" in R. Macuch, *Neumandäische Texte im Dialekt von Ahwaz* (Wiesbaden, 1993), p. 212 l. 1189 (text accidentally left untranslated by Macuch); *šitel qām rahem benā* "Šitel [stand auf,] machte sein Gebet" (*ibid.* p. 224 l. 1273) etc.

<sup>11</sup>The 17<sup>th</sup> century Leiden *Glossarium* 144:11 presents both *aškunta* and *bmandi* as translations of Arabic كنيسة, Latin ecclesia, while Drower 1959 distinguishes the *škinta*, used for the consecration of priests, and the *mandi*, a more elaborate construction used for other ritual purposes. Rabi Rafid Alsabti (personal communication) informs me that Drower's distinction is still used today. H. Mutzafi, *Comparative Lexical Studies in Neo-Mandaic* (Leiden, 2014), p. 20 notes that the cult-hut is called *mandi* in Mandaean Iraqi Arabic, while in the NM of Iran it is *bemandō*, *bemānd*.

<sup>12</sup>The sixty days during which the postulant lives alone.

<sup>13</sup>For the correct interpretation of this passage (up to **drunu 'uraba**) see in detail Morgenstern, "19th Century Colophons", pp. 265–267.

<sup>14</sup>On the language of this passage see *Ibid.*, p. 260.

<sup>15</sup>Otiöse word at the end of the line; a false start for the following word or a line filler.

<sup>16</sup>Yahia Bihram frequently employs **abihd-** 'with' in his narrative colophons, including one example NM suffix –u, **abihdu** "with them". In NM *ork-* or *mork-* is used in this meaning. See R. Macuch with K. Boekels, *Neumandäische Chrestomathie mit grammatischer Skizze, kommentierter Übersetzung und Glossar* (Wiesbaden, 1989), p. 246, Macuch, *Ahwaz*, p. 392, C. Häberl, *The Neo-Mandaic Dialect of Khormashahr* (Wiesbaden, 2009), p. 342; and M. Morgenstern: 'Neo-Mandaic in Early Mandaean Colophons. Part 1: Linguistic Features' *Aramaic Studies* 16 (2018), pp. 1–24, especially p. 22 on the use of *ork-* already in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>17</sup>Drower, *Haran Gavaita*, p. 88 translated "I came with some peasants (*fellāhīn*) belonging to the shaikh of the tribe". For the correct interpretation of **atit bpalahia** "I came to Fellāhiyya" see Morgenstern, "19th Century Colophons", p. 267. For **šafab** '(the tribe of) Ka'eb' see *Idem.*, n. 41.

šadir nukar uligtinu 'I hanik 'uraba d-girpunan  
b 'uhra d-šuštar uatinu uana 'huit bšuštar |

ušik d-šašab mn mindai 'hablan šauin tlatma quruš  
^ 'hbun kašla lbuša ubarsumaqa^ u 'ma quruš dra  
minan utrin 'ma ^quruš^ apiq mn | mindan

'hbalu tlatma quruš'in 'urk taksatan ham bidqinu  
hun tlatma quruš hablinu bnukarandi | dh.

uana 'ma quruš qarzia 'lauai bpalahia

abatar hazin ata 'alia pašah d-bagdad ata 'lau |  
'mhamra uiasirda{{i}}<sup>22</sup> 'bad uqilia bnura uahriba

uana kd atit mn šuštar diuanan napšata usidria |  
'hbalai abihdai

šbaqtinu bmhamra atit bpalahia

kd ata paša naziq 'mhamra ana nihtit | bmhamra  
uatitinu lginzia ramia uiaqiria ulamṭun b'daihun  
d-bnia akrun ṭura rba d-bisra ubnia | akrun zuṭa

uana 'martilu 'I mandaiia d-hun bmhamra npuqiun  
mn qudam iasiria  
bun d-napqin ulamṭa | b'daihun

He sent a servant and he caught those Arabs  
who had robbed us on the Šuštar road and  
he brought them when I was in Šuštar.

And the Sheikh of the Ka'eb gave us some of  
my things to the value of 300 *Kuruš*—they  
were jewellery,<sup>18</sup> clothing and copper<sup>19</sup>—  
and he took 100 *Kuruš* from us and two  
hundred *Kuruš* he removed from our  
things.

They had three hundred *Kuruš*; he also put  
them<sup>20</sup> with our household belongings.

They were three hundred *Kuruš*. He  
distributed them to his servants.

And I had a debt<sup>21</sup> of 100 *Kuruš* upon me in  
Fellāhiyya.

After that, 'Ali, the Pasha of Baghdad, came  
against Muḥammara, took it captive,<sup>23</sup> set  
fire to it and destroyed it.

And I,<sup>24</sup> when I came from Šuštar, had many  
scrolls and books with me.

I left them in Muḥammara and went to  
Fellāhiyya.

When the Pasha came to<sup>25</sup> Muḥammara I  
went down to Muḥammara<sup>26</sup> and I  
brought my precious and majestic treasures,  
and they did not fall into the hands of the  
sons of Akrun, the great mountain of flesh,  
and the sons of the lesser Akrun.

And I said to the Mandaean that were in  
Muḥammara: "Get out before its capture!"  
They sought to leave and were unable.

<sup>18</sup>For *kašla* 'ein Goldschmuck' see Macuch, "Review", p. 362 and Macuch, *Ahuaz*, p. 407 s.v. *xāšel* 'Schmuck'. Drower translated "cloak".

<sup>19</sup>For *barsumaqa* 'copper' see Mutzafi, *Comparative Lexical Studies*, p. 79. Drower translated "a son-of-red (gold coin?)".

<sup>20</sup>So grammatically and contextually, it would seem preferable to read "we had put them", which would be *bdaqnu* in these texts. Compare *qbarnu* "we buried them" below.

<sup>21</sup>Persian: قرض 'debt'. Drower translated "and he charged me a hundred *piasters* for the peasants (*fellāhīn*)".

<sup>22</sup>A final *i* has been partially erased.

<sup>23</sup>See Macuch, "Review of Drower", p. 362 (who erroneously read *asirdh*) and E. S. Drower and R. Macuch, *A Mandaic Dictionary* (Oxford, 1963), p. 186 s.v. *iasir*. Drower had translated "made an example of it",

<sup>24</sup>For the interpretation of this passage (up to *bpalahia*) see Morgenstern, "19<sup>th</sup> Century Colophons", p. 267.

<sup>25</sup>Macuch, "Review", p. 362 correctly identified *naziq* as NM *nazīq* (from Persian *nazdik*) 'near'. The preposition is extremely common in the Leiden Glossarium, translating e.g. Arabic جنب, Latin *latus* (74:10) and Arabic علي, Latin *iuxtā* (126:1). Although Macuch cited several examples of this preposition in his *Handbook of Classical and Modern Mandaic* (Berlin, 1965), e.g. "adjoin *nazīq aṯṯi*", "advance *nazīq tāmmā*" (p. 490), and "near *nazīq, neheng*" (p. 512), it is never found in his textual editions. Its absence from these editions suggests that his informants never actually used it in their speech, and it would appear to be extinct. Häberl, *Khorramshahr*, pp. 35, 42, 123, and 341 records *nazdik* for the dialect of Khorramshahr, though Hezy Mutzafi (p.c.) suggests that Häberl's informant Sobbi preferred to use Persian preposition *nazdik* rather than the form *neheng* commonly employed in his dialect.

<sup>26</sup>Drower's translation of this passage, "I sent down Akrun the younger and I said to them . . ." indicates that she accidentally skipped the entire line *bmhamra uatitinu lginzia ramia uiaqiria ulamṭun b'daihun d-bnia akrun ṭura rba d-bisra ubnia*. Although Macuch, "Review", p. 362 attempted to correct Drower's interpretation, he overlooked Drower's omission and his proposal is without worth. The omission of this line has given rise to the mistaken impression that Yahia Bihram lost his library with the capture of Muḥammara (e.g. Buckley, *Great Stem*, p. 138), while the manuscript clearly states that opposite is the case.

ḥaraš 'bad 'labu ḥi'ki^m alma d-'tbariun šaḥab  
 bmakuata d-'hualu umandaia u'nš^u^ | npaqiu  
 bmakuata

trin '^n^šia dalu tamun uhda ianqa br šuba šnia  
 drunia lhad ianqa lhudḥ t{{i}}^a^ma | luataihun  
 d-hun šarna^b^uṣ šumaihun alma d-'zgun bbašra  
 mn haka zibnunia mn 'urdu uatunia qaru |

uanin bpalaḥia mardpin atun qušin 'zgun bšamšabia

uanin himid 'hualan qbarnu batra uprudnin | bhaur  
 d-qaina biabra d-adar nuna bšita d-hamš^a^  
 habšaba 'l šnat alpa u'matin utlata ham|šin šnia  
 d-qabiliun arbaiia bhitia baḥlia

tum abatar haka atit bbašra hda lhudai hda šna tamit

uhaizak hualai bratai bu^k^r{k}ai | huat kšira umṭat  
 d-napqa mn pagra ulahua arba samraia

ana ia abda d-kulhun tarmidia ahai libai npal mn  
 samkia aminṭul napša hlita huala bginza unaširuta

b^i^rikt 'l hiia haizak | hua asuta 'l bratai

The governor<sup>27</sup> set a curfew upon them until the Ka'eb left on the rafts they had. And the Mandaean and their women departed on the rafts.

Two old women<sup>28</sup> stayed, and one child of seven years old. They took one child and he stayed alone with those called Albanians,<sup>29</sup> until they went to Bašra; from there they bought him from the camp and brought him to them.

And we<sup>30</sup> were persecuted in Fellāḥiyya.

Soldiers came, they went to Čam-Šabbi.

And we, everything that we had<sup>31</sup> we buried in a place and we fled<sup>32</sup> to the reed marshland<sup>33</sup> in the month of Adar Pisce, in the year of Thursday, in the year 1253 (1837–1838) according to the Arabs – the shameful and transitory.<sup>34</sup>

Then, after that I went to Bašra, entirely alone, and I stayed for one year.

It then befell me that my first-born<sup>35</sup> daughter was ill, and she came close to departing from her body, and (I) did not have four bier-bearers.

And I, a servant of all my brother priests, my heart fell from its support,<sup>36</sup> for she had much sweetness (?)<sup>37</sup> in the treasures and the Našorean wisdom.

I prayed to the Life, and there was healing for my daughter.

<sup>27</sup>For the interpretation of this passage (up to **npaqiu bmakuata**) see Morgenstern, "19<sup>th</sup> Century Colophons", p. 260 with previous bibliography.

<sup>28</sup>For the correct interpretation of '^n^šia dalu "old women" see Macuch, "Review", p. 362. The exact NM form is *dolú* (Hezy Mutzafi, p.c.).

<sup>29</sup>Arnaut, Arnaut, as correctly identified by Drower.

<sup>30</sup>On the interpretation of this passage (up to **bšamšabia**) see Morgenstern, "19<sup>th</sup> Century Colophons", p. 268. A more detailed examination of the location of Čam-Šabbi is found in *Idem.*, "Additional Notes on Neo-Mandaic in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Colophons," *Orientalia* (forthcoming).

<sup>31</sup>For **himid 'hualan** "everything we had" see Drower and Macuch, *Mandaic Dictionary*, p. 145 s.v. **himid**, and Morgenstern, "19<sup>th</sup> Century Colophons", pp. 266–267.

<sup>32</sup>For the root **PRD II** 'to flee' (rather than Drower's translation "dispersed") see Drower and Macuch, *Mandaic Dictionary*, p. 378 s.v. **PRD**. The verb is common in Neo-Mandaic; see Macuch, *Neumandäische Chrestomathie*, p. 249 s.v. **PRD**, *Idem.*, *Ahwaz*, p. 426 s.v. **PRD**, Häberl, *Khorramshahr*, p. 343 s.v. *p-r-d* and Mutzafi, *Comparative Lexical Studies*, p. 102–103. The spelling **prudnin** with **u** appears to reflect a pronunciation closer to that of Ahvaz *pærdni* than Khorramshahr *pærdni*.

<sup>33</sup>For the identification of Mandaic **qaina** (NM *qenə*) see H. Mutzafi and M. Morgenstern, "Sheikh Nejm's Mandaic Glossary (DC 4)—An Unrecognised Source of Neo-Mandaic," *Aram* 24 (2014), pp. 157–174, especially p. 173 n. 91.

<sup>34</sup>Or: evil.

<sup>35</sup>Yahia first wrote **burkai** but corrected his text to **bukrai**. In Classical Mandaic, the grammatically correct feminine singular form would be **bukartai**.

<sup>36</sup>A literary expression drawn from the *Ginza Rabba* (Gy 94:19, Gy 95:16, Gy 163:12).

<sup>37</sup>M. Lidzbarski, *Mandäische Liturgien, mitgeteilt, übersetzt und erklärt* (Berlin, 1920), p. 182 n. 1 proposed that **hlita** may result from metanalysis of **dihilta** 'fear, reverence', which would also suit our context.

ana tum labiḡṣit bbaṣra atit bnhirat  
 haizak atun qinai bn̄ia d-ṣamuian udrunai bkas  
 ṣiamir ṣumaihun mata bṣizair  
 haizak atun manduia ganzibra utar | mida hda ṣagur  
 hurina ṣabuṭ tarmida udrunai abihdu bṣuḡṣiuk  
 bmata d-margab  
 haizak abatar hda ṣna ṣik ṣaṣab tamir br gadban hua  
 gzarinu 'l kulhun mandaiia d-'ka | bmulk d-ṣaṣab  
 'nṣia ugubria uialdia uialdata hua 'ka 'ma niṣmata  
 zikria unuqbata  
 haizak qamiun 'lauaihun d-kul matauata d-'ka bn̄ia  
 d-nirig baiin naṣqinan mn alma  
 hiia rbia kibṣinu | uhalin niṣmata d-agazarin ṣaṣab  
 alnu abihdan bmaṣbuta uqabin  
 mn dahaltan u'hrata lamṣia 'niṣ napiq gazarilh mn  
 haka qabilnu ualnu abihdan u'niṣ minaihun 'da  
 lanaṭar hbiṭiun abihdan  
 | marai d-rab^u^ta uhibil ziua hu hazia upariṣ  
 ubahar kul d-ṣabia abid aminṭul kuṣṭa kabira hu  
 iauar kḏ ṣabia mḡqabil kul d-baiia hauia  
 asuta nihiula 'l dilia iahia bihram br | rba urama  
 uiaqira ganzibra taqna ubhira malka d-naṣuraiia  
 unatṛa d-ama rbai adam iuhana br ^sam br^  
 bihram br saḏdan br msaḏad br maṣud br ṣarar  
 laqab kamisia ukinianḥ | riṣ draz  
 uhaizak rbai utaga samlai rbai ramzihrun br ^rbai^  
 sam bihram ki{{a}}nianḥ ṣaziz ulaqab draṣia

Then I did not wait<sup>38</sup> in Baṣra. I went to Nhirat.  
 Then my kinsmen came, the children of our paternal uncle,<sup>39</sup> and took me to Kas Ṣiamir – their name – a town in the Jazirah.  
 Then came Mandowi<sup>40</sup> the *ganzibya*, and one *tarmida*, Ṣaḡur, (and) another, Ṣabbūt<sup>41</sup> the *tarmida*, and they took me with them to Suq eṣ-Ṣiuk, to the Margab quarter.  
 Then after one year the Sheikh of the Ka'eb, Tamir son of Ḡaḏbān, circumcised all of the Mandaeans that were in the territory of the Ka'eb, the women and men and boys and girls; there were 100 souls, males and females.  
 Then the sons of Mars rose against all the towns where they were, seeking to remove us from the world.  
 The Great Life subdued them, and (as for) those souls that the Ka'eb had circumcised, we brought them in with us into baptism and marriage.  
 On account of our fear, no one could go out (on) the roads; they would circumcise him. For this reason we would accept them and brought them in with us and no one stayed his hand from them; they settled<sup>42</sup> with us.  
 And the Lord of Greatness and Hibil Ziua, he sees and understands<sup>43</sup> and chooses, all that he wills he does;<sup>44</sup> for he is the great truth, he is Iauar, as he wills he receives, all that he seeks comes about.  
 And may there be healing for me, Yahia Bihram son of the great and lofty and revered one, the reliable and elect *ganzibya*, the king of the Naṣoreans and guardian of the people, Rbai Adam Yuhana son of Sam son of Bihram son of Saḏdan son of Msaḏad son of Maṣud br Ṣarar of the clan Kamisi and family of Riṣ Draz.  
 And moreover my teacher—and he set my crown—Rbai Ram Zihrun son of Rbai

<sup>38</sup>The correct interpretation of **labiḡṣit** was established by Macuch, “Review”, p. 362. Drower had translated “I made no lamentation”.

<sup>39</sup>On the correct translation of this word see Morgenstern, “19<sup>th</sup> Century Colophons”, p. 258. Drower translated “the sons of our people”.

<sup>40</sup>Translation following Macuch, “Review”, p. 363.

<sup>41</sup>The names of the two *Tarmidas* would appear to be sobriquets: *Ṣaḡur* “small” and *Ṣabbūt* “the barb (fish)”. On the latter noun see Mutzafi, *Comparative Lexical Studies*, pp. 73–75.

<sup>42</sup>**hbiṭiun** “they mingled” appears to be an unusual usage of NM *h-w-t* ‘to mix (tr. intr.); stir’, on which see Mutzafi, *Comparative Lexical Studies*, pp. 133–134. The verb also appears in a difficult narrative colophon composed by Yahia Bihram’s contemporary, Ram Zihrun br Sam Bihram, in 1277 AH (1860–1861 CE): **mandaiia hbiṭin ktinu bihdada** “the Mandaeans were settled together” (DC 51: 817).

<sup>43</sup>Compare **hazia upariṣ almia udaria mahu d-abdia** “who sees and understands that which the worlds and generations do” (*Sidra d-Niṣmata*, CP 15:8–9).

<sup>44</sup>Compare **kul d-ṣabia rbia abdia** “All that the Great (Life) wishes it does” (Jb. 21:12).

hu haia 'l širša abatar mutana usadra d-kulh malkuta  
uširša d-hiia rb[ia] |

bialupia hu hua ialupa mšalam ušališa d-'l kul šbu  
iad^i^a ulahisrat širan uginza d-hiia kd d-hua mn  
qdim

uhaizak hu tama bšuqa d-šuštar udispul uana  
bsugšiuuk  
'ka trisar šnia | d-pliginin mn hdadia mrahqinin

hiia rbia qadmaia uparšupa rba d-'qara maliplan mn  
hdadia ukabišlh 'l sanan aminṭul d-lašabqilan  
arbinin bihdada

ana ḥaraš uadiun 'lai mn banda(r) | br mhamad br  
tamir br {{ša}} sašdun šaik 'l mintipiš d-arbaia

uhua bšnia d-alpa d-tartin 'ma uhamša ušitin šnia  
aklat bdara d-arbaia

hua silṭan d-šṭambul sulṭan (ša)bdil mašid | br sulṭan  
mahmud br sulṭan šabdil {{mašid}} ^hamid^ br  
sulṭan aḥmad br sulṭan mušṭapa br sulṭan murad  
pataḥ d-bagdad ^abatar^ kd hua šah šabas ligṭa br  
sulṭan brahim br sulṭan kalbia | mahmud br sulṭan  
sulaiman br sulṭan salim p^a^tḥ 'l šam u'l ḥiṣaz u'l  
širaq taqla 'l qura^n^ br sulṭan murdaḡan br sulṭan  
murad 'l tania br sulṭan ab 'rdakan br sulṭan |  
paiiuid br sulṭan murad 'l talit br sulṭan mahamad

Sam Bihram, of the family of šaziz, and the  
clan Durraji.<sup>45</sup>

He is the life of the religion after the  
epidemic, and the order of all kingship<sup>46</sup>  
and religion of the Great Life.

Amongst the literates he is the perfect and  
master literate that knows everything, and  
our religion<sup>47</sup> and the treasure of Life are  
not lacking as it was previously.

Then he stayed in the market of Šuštar and  
Dezful and I in Suq eš-Šiuḡ.

It has been 12 years that we have been  
separated and distant from one another.

May the Great Primordial Life and the Great  
presence of Glory inform us<sup>48</sup> of one  
another and subdue our enemy, for we are  
allowed to mix with one another!<sup>49</sup>

As for me they placed<sup>50</sup> a curfew on me, from  
Bandar<sup>51</sup> son of Muhammad son of Tamir  
son of Sašdun, the Sheikh of the Muntafiq  
(tribe) of the Arabs.<sup>52</sup>

And in the year 1265 they ruled<sup>53</sup> in the  
Court of the Arabs.

The Sultan of Istanbul was Sultan (ša)bdul  
Majīd son of Sultan Mahmūd son of Sultan  
ʿabdul Majīd<sup>54</sup> Hamid son of Sultan  
Aḥmad son of Sultan Mušṭafa son of Sultan  
Murād,<sup>55</sup> the conqueror (*fattāh*) of Baghdad  
after Shah ʿabbas seized it,<sup>56</sup> son of Sultan  
Ibrahim son of Sultan ʿCelebi Mahmud son  
of Sultan Suleiman<sup>57</sup> son of Sultan Selim,  
conqueror of Syria (*Paš-Sām*), the Hijaz and

<sup>45</sup>This clan is already mentioned in the original colophon of DC 36 (see n. 3 above) in the form **durakia**, while in later manuscripts it is written **durašia** or **durašia**. According to Macuch's transcription, Šālem Čoḥeyli pronounced the name *darrāḡi* (Macuch, *Ahwaz*, p. 322 l. 1963). We may cautiously reconstruct the history of the name as \**durrāki* > \**durrāci* > *durrāji* > *darāji* (reanalysis as *CaCCāC* noun). Buckley, *Great Stem*, p. 52 notes that the Durakia lineage may be traced back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>46</sup>I.e. priesthood.

<sup>47</sup>Reading **širšan** for manuscript's **širan**.

<sup>48</sup>This would seem to be the meaning required by the context. The verb normally means 'teach'.

<sup>49</sup>Drower translated: "For He forsaketh us not, uniting us together". However, for this impersonal structure compare *lašabqonnan allenni ekkak* "we weren't allowed to go there" (Häberl, *Khorramshahr*, p. 278, Text III:13).

<sup>50</sup>The spelling **uadiun** probably represents *vadyon* < \**avadyon* with the opening syllable lost through aphaeresis.

<sup>51</sup>Drower and Macuch were unable to interpret this text, and Macuch misread the last word of the line as **mind(i)**. The first letter is clearly **b** while the last letter is blurred. However, **bandar br mhamad br tamir br sašdun** is mentioned as the Shekh of the Muntafiq in another colophon written by Yahia Bihram, RRC 4G.

<sup>52</sup>**arbaia** might be employed here in meaning of Bedouin.

<sup>53</sup>For **aklat** "ruled" see J. N. Ford "Another Look at the Mandaic Incantation Bowl BM 91715." *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 29 (2002), pp. 31–47, especially p. 34. The verb **aklat** here would appear to follow the Arabic rules of agreement, in which collectives may be construed as feminine singular.

<sup>54</sup>Erased by underscoring.

<sup>55</sup>Murad IV, reigned 1623–1640.

<sup>56</sup>Shah Abbas I of Persia, reigned 1588–1629.

<sup>57</sup>Suleiman I, reigned 1520–1566.



gazia path 'l qaṣṭanṭin d-hu 'ṣṭambul mn bnia  
d-hutman hu maḥamad mn širša d-mahamad  
arbaia

(bhazin) | lika šihiana d-šaṣam hua šah mahamad br  
ṣabasmirza br path'yalia šah qaṣar umit bñnia d-alpa  
d-'matin uarba ušitin uakandit šihiana la 'tib  
bmalkutun d-parsaia bñhr(an)n |

tum hind huat bmalkuta d-parang angriz umalaktun  
blandun malkutun rabtia bmadna

hinun 'badiun markabata d-nura hinun parzla kulḥ 'l  
bar mn tapala titaiā gauaza arzah bñmia | aitia  
umrahišla guṭla mahia lula bdulab šark ruhqa  
d-hda{{d}} iahra bhda iuma maṭia

uanin napšan hzinu atin auairin mn bašra alma  
lbagdad tlata iumia

uhaizak 'mariun | 'badiun markabata brqihā pahrin  
tlata parsia rauma salqin uana hzit 'l dmuta d-hazin  
markabta hua tlia 'luat mšaiia d-hinun marauata 'tla  
ganph<sup>70</sup> kd gapa d-šipra sukana | dila hu u'tla ham

Iraq,<sup>58</sup> ...of the Quran,<sup>59</sup> son of Sultan Murada-Khan son of Sultan Murad II son of Ab Erdaḳan<sup>60</sup> son of Sultan Bayezid son of Sultan Murad III<sup>61</sup> son of Sultan Mehmet Ġāzi the conqueror of Constantinople,<sup>62</sup> which is Istanbul from the sons of Othman. He was Muḥammad from the religion of Muḥammad the Arab.

Here is there no ruler of the Persians. There was Shah Muḥammad son of ṣabbas Mirza son of Fath Ali Shah Qajar, and he died in the year 1264<sup>63</sup> and a ruler has still not sat in rulership in Tehran.

Now India was under the dominion of the English Franks, and their queen is in London. Their dominion is great in the East.<sup>64</sup>

They made ships<sup>65</sup> of fire. They are all of iron except for the lower covering; it is<sup>66</sup> cedar wood<sup>67</sup> in the water. And smoke<sup>68</sup> striking the flange of a water wheel moves it; it reaches the distance of one month in one day.<sup>69</sup>

And we ourselves saw them coming and passing from Bašra to Baghdad in three days.

Moreover, they say that they made ships that fly in the sky, (and) ascend to a height of three *parasangs*. I have seen a picture of this ship; it was hanging at the Christians' (place), who are its owners.<sup>71</sup> It has a wing

<sup>58</sup>Selim I, reigned 1512–1520.

<sup>59</sup>The superscript **n** is written above the **a** of **qura**, and it is equally possible to read **taqla 'l qur^n^a**. I have not been able to decipher this epithet with either reading.

<sup>60</sup>I am unable to identify this name.

<sup>61</sup>Bayezid II, reigned 1481–1512, was in fact the son of Mehmed II.

<sup>62</sup>Mehmed II, reigned 1451–1481.

<sup>63</sup>He was the grandson of Fath Ali and died in 1264 AH (5 September 1848 CE).

<sup>64</sup>In the colophon of RRC 4G Yahia Bihram similarly praises the British regime in India.

<sup>65</sup>See Mutzafi, *Comparative Lexical Studies*, p. 30.

<sup>66</sup>Reading **aitia** "it is" from **ait-** (Drower and Macuch, *Mandaic Dictionary*, p. 15 s.v.).

<sup>67</sup>Drower, *Haran Gawaita*, p. 91 translated "a wooden box (?)", but **arzah** here means 'cedar'. **gauaza** is employed here with the meaning 'wood (as material)', a usage not found in Classical Mandaic but found for NM *gawazō*. See Mutzafi, *Comparative Lexical Studies*, p. 139.

<sup>68</sup>**guṭla** is interpreted here as a **guṭra**, NM *gotro* 'smoke' (Drower and Macuch, *Mandaic Dictionary*, p. 83 and Mutzafi, *Comparative Lexical Studies*, pp. 148–149). For interchanges of *l* and *r* in the vernacular see Macuch, *Handbook*, pp. 52–54.

<sup>69</sup>Yahia Bihram is certainly describing one of the two steamships, the *Euphrates* and the *Tigris*, which were built at Port William on the Euphrates near Birecik in Turkey. The ships were constructed from pre-prepared kits as part of the "Euphrates Project" under the direction of Captain Francis Rawdon Chesney in an attempt to develop a new trade route between Britain and India. The operation was described in detail in F. R. Chesney, *Narrative of the Euphrates Expedition carried on by Order of the British Government*. (London, 1868). According to N. Pauline, *The Travels of Doctor and Madame Helfer in Syria, Mesopotamia and Burmah and Other Lands* (London, 1878), p. 182, the first steamer was launched on March 16<sup>th</sup> 1836. See Fig. 1.

<sup>70</sup>The text has been corrected, perhaps to read **gapa**, but the correction is unclear.

<sup>71</sup>The interpretation of this passage proposed in Macuch, "Review", p. 363 must be rejected because Drower was correct in reading **marauata** rather than Macuch's **tiaruata**.



**dulab šark mn alai laḡta 'l ziqa mihda usaira uazla  
bkul dukta**

**tum ana ia abdaikun kd huit zuṭa br arbasar šnia ab  
dilia rbai adamihana | šadir 'lh šihiana d-angriz  
mn landun bmadna h' malkuta d-angriz pai taḡt h'  
hda padria šumḥ iuspia uilip uab dilia malil abihdia  
ukibša 'l hazin padria d-ata (haka) |**

**sid baliuz big mistar ṭilar hua ialap bqraia d-ginza  
sidra d-mara d-rabuta u' thaiman bhia blibḥ  
uqdahil mn šihiana napših lapraš ašuat hu**

**hašta hua 'gza blandun luat | malaktun hu**

like the wing of a bird. The oar is its own. It also has a wheel above that catches the wind in one swoop and travels and goes everywhere.<sup>72</sup>

Then I, a servant of yours,<sup>73</sup> when I was young, 14 years old, the ruler of the English from London in the East – that is the Kingdom of the English (i.e. the capital city) sent to my father, Rbai Adam Yuhana, one clergyman by the name of Joseph Wolff.<sup>74</sup> My father spoke with him and defeated this clergyman.<sup>75</sup>

The Consul-Bey, Mr Taylor, was studying to read<sup>76</sup> the *Ginza*, the Book of the Lord of Majesty,<sup>77</sup> and he became a believer in the Life in his heart, but feared from the ruler; he did not state explicitly; it is subterfuge.

Now it is that he has gone<sup>78</sup> to London; he is with their queen.

<sup>72</sup>Yahia Bihram may be talking about the gliders designed and produced by George Cayley (1773–1857). The model closest to the description here was Cayley's 'Governable Parachute' of 1852, drawings of which appeared on the cover of *Mechanics' Magazine*, no. 1520, dated 25<sup>th</sup> September 1852. See J. A. D. Ackroyd, "Sir George Cayley, the Father of Aeronautics. Part 2 Cayley's Aeroplanes," *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 56 (2002), pp. 333–348, especially p. 345, and Fig. 2.

<sup>73</sup>Following Macuch, "Review", p. 151, **ia** is interpreted as the apocopated numeral *ye* 'one'. Macuch's interpretation is supported by new evidence, e.g. **ana ia abda d-ansit hazin diuan** "I, a servant, who copied this scroll" (RRC 2M colophon: 8). See M. Morgenstern, "Neo-Mandaic in Early Mandaean Colophons. Part 1: Linguistic Features", *Aramaic Studies* 16 (2018), pp. 1–24, especially p. 16.

<sup>74</sup>The name underlying the spelling **iuspia uilip** has previously defied identification, and Drower questioningly anglicised it as Joseph Ayliffe or Olaf Buckley, *Great Stem*, p. 136 was similarly uncertain about its original form. The name has been corrupted by Yahia Bihram in our text, and the clue to its correct interpretation is to be found in the colophon DC 47: **ata had padria d-mn angriz d-šumḥ ualip lgriz iusip** "One clergyman came from the English, by name Wolff the English Joseph". Joseph Wolff (1795–1862) was a Jewish convert to Christianity whose extensive travels through the Middle East were described in his published missionary journals. Though German in origin, he was ordained into the Anglican church. See V. R. Emanuel, "Wolff, Joseph" in I. Singer (ed.), *The Jewish Encyclopaedia* (New York and London, 1906), Vol. XII, pp. 552–553. His encounter with the Mandaeans (Sabaeans) in Baṣra (Bassora) are detailed in J. Wolff, *Missionary Journal of the Rev. Joseph Wolff, Missionary to the Jews: Vol. II. Comprising His Second Visit to Palestine and Syria, in the Years 1823 & 1824* (London, 1828), pp. 310–326, wherein he relates that his contact with the Mandaeans was through Taylor.

<sup>75</sup>The precise nature of this subduing is unclear.

<sup>76</sup>Infinitive forms are rare in NM, but from the data in Macuch, *Ahwaz*, p. 432 the Ahvaz dialect appears to employ *qərō*, while the bound form is *qərōy-*. We may reconstruct Yahia Bihram's form as *qərōyō*.

<sup>77</sup>Robert Taylor was an important British political figure in Mesopotamia in the 1800s. Wolff, *Missionary Journal*, pp. 298–229, describes his meeting in Baṣra in May 1824 with "Captain Taylor, the resident of the East India Company", who, he reports, "understands perfectly the Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Hindostanee, Italian, French and Portuguese languages, he has moreover some knowledge of the Hebrew and Syriac". Taylor's interest in languages was also noted by H. Petermann, *Reisen im Orient* (Leipzig, 1861), p. 87, who reported that Taylor had studied Mandaic with Adam Yuhana, Yahia Bihram's father, for 12 years. Three copies of the *Ginza* were purchased from Taylor's widow by the British Museum in April 1860 (Buckley, *Great Stem*, pp. 93–98). The third copy, BL Add. 23,601 was prepared by Adam Yuhana in Baṣra in 1241 AH (1825–1826 CE) and dedicated to Taylor. It also contains interlinear English glosses in Taylor's hand. A. H. Layard, *Early Adventures in Persia, Susiana, and Babylonia, including a Residence among the Bakhtiyari and other Wild tribes before the discovery of Nineveh*, Volume 2 (London, 1887), p. 171 noted that in 1842 he was the East India Company's political agent in Baghdad.

<sup>78</sup>Following Macuch, "Review", p. 363, though rather than a scribal error, this may be a metathesised form.

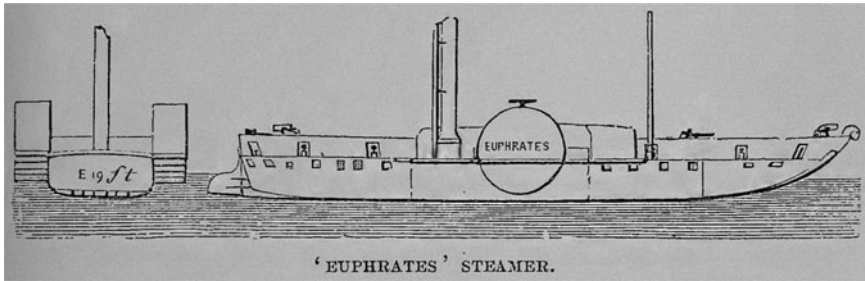


Fig. 1. The 'Euphrates' Steamer. From Chesney, *Narrative of the Euphrates Expedition*, p. 207.

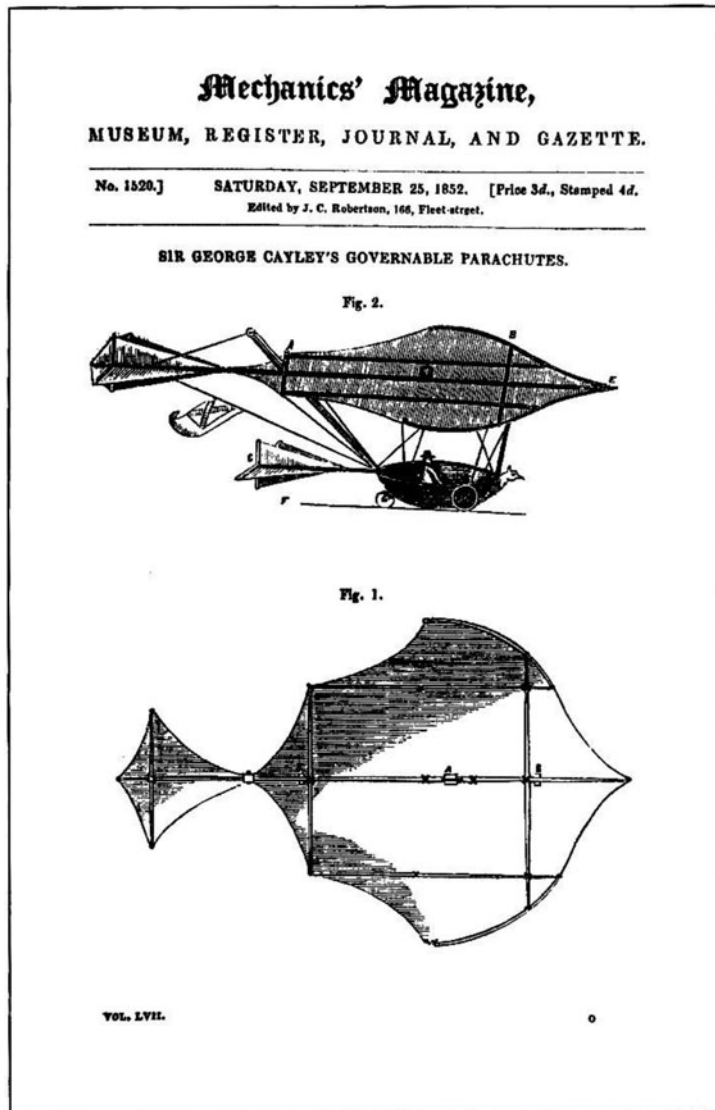


Fig. 2. The pictures of Cayley's Governable Parachutes that may have been seen by Yahia Bihram.

**kḏ hua bbašra ana alpunai lišana ḏ-parang angriz  
ulišana ḏ-armanaiia**

**hibil ziuā hu šabiqlai haṭaiā aminṭul kḏ huit bhazin  
lašanit**

**kḏ zuṭa huit abihdaiun ḏ-|mšihaiia liḡia ialpit mn  
lišanun gaunia gnia uznia znia ulašanit**

**ialupa huit ḏ-šanai umnakria ubutai utušbihtai lhiia  
ulašanit ula klit mn paturun**

**uhaizak kḏ rat mn qudam mutana 'ṣṭi | bit uhazin  
kidbit ušararit dmauata udakit napšai ḏ-hibil  
ziua hauilai pirqa umasiqlai luathḥ banhura ukabšlh  
'l hšuka minai umn rbai umn šitlai ušitlh (uahai) |  
uahuatai urahmai urahmia rahmai u' l rahmia šurba  
rba ḏ-hiia lamipsiq bdaur haṭia hiia hinun  
ḏ-labaṭia ulamaitia uzia unhura lamipsiq**

When he was in Bašra, they taught me the language of the English Franks and the language of the Germans.<sup>79</sup>

May Hibil Ziwa forgive my sins—because when I was in this (situation) I did not apostatise.<sup>80</sup>

When I was young, with the Christians, I learned words from their languages of all kinds,<sup>81</sup> but I did not apostatise.

I remained (lit: was) a lay-disciple of the Sublime and Transcendent, and my prayers and praises were unto the Life; I did not apostatise and I did not eat from their table. And at that time, when (the world) trembled on account of the epidemic, I was baptised and wrote this and copied and drew the pictures. And I purified myself, that Hibil Ziwa might be a salvation unto me and raise me up to him in the light, and subdue the darkness from me and from my teacher and from my children and his children and my brothers and sisters and my friends and the friends of my friends, and from the friends of the Great Stem of Life—it does not cease in the house of sinners. It is the Life that does not cease and does not die, and the light glory and light do (lit. does) not cease.

## Conclusion

The narrative colophons of the 19<sup>th</sup> century provide us with a unique glimpse into the lives of the Mandaean in those tumultuous times. They describe a disorderly society in which the Mandaean struggled to negotiate their way through an often hostile environment and its main players: the local Bedouin tribes, the central authorities in Baghdad, and the European emissaries. Here and elsewhere, Yahia Bihram does not hide his admiration for the British Empire and its technological accomplishments.<sup>82</sup> The colophons also attest to the interrelations of the Mandaean communities in Iran and Iraq, and the frequent (though interrupted)

<sup>79</sup>Following Macuch, *ibid*.

<sup>80</sup>On such accusations against Yahia Birham in the 1860s, see M. Morgenstern, "Forgotten Sources for Mandaean-Western Relations in the 19th Century" (forthcoming). If our text makes reference to these events, then it was composed later previously known.

<sup>81</sup>Compare **ḏ-gaunia gaunia znia znia** Gy. 74:22–23.

<sup>82</sup>Layard, *Early Adventures*, p. 171, reports that through his and Taylor's intervention, he was able to gain protection and financial support for the Mandaean communities. BL Or. 1236, a *Ginza Rabba* copied in 1826 and acquired by the British Museum (now British Library) in 1873, contains the following dedication: "The Sacred Book of the Sabaeans or followers of St. John the Baptist, Presented by Sheikh Yahya Chief and High Priest of the tribe with his petition to Her Majesty the Queen dated 10<sup>th</sup> December 1872 and forwarded to H M's Ambassador to Constantinople with dispatch no. 3 dated 29<sup>th</sup> January 1873 from Colonel Herbert Consul General at Baghdad".

movement between them. It is hoped that the publication of these colophons in more accurate and accessible editions will facilitate their use by scholars of Mandaean religion and society, and that researchers in related fields may contribute further to their interpretation. <[mmorgen@post.tau.ac.il](mailto:mmorgen@post.tau.ac.il)>

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