XXXII

THE MEANING OF “MARY,” “MAGDALENE,” AND OTHER NAMES

INTRODUCTION

The idea that Mary Magdalene was a penitent prostitute became crystallized on Sept. 14, 591, when Pope Gregory the Great gave a sermon in Rome in which he identified Mary Magdalene in Luke 8:2 with the unnamed sinner in Luke 7:37, who “previously used the unguent to perfume her flesh in forbidden acts,” and with the Mary of Bethany in John 11:1.

The reason for Gregory’s identifying these three women as the same person may have been due to the proximity in sound of the name Magdalene and the Greek noun μαγδαλία, which was a later form of ἀπόμαγδαλία “the crumb or the inside of the loaf, on which the Greeks wiped their hands at dinner, and then threw it to the dogs: hence, dog’s meat [dog food].” (This custom may lie behind the Syro-Phoenician woman’s reference to the “crumbs” (= ψιχίων = ἄρνοὸν = small pieces of bread) thrown or fallen from the master’s table which the dogs ate.)

Ἀπόμαγδαλία appears in Sophocles’ Fragmenta 34 with the meaning of “dirt washed off” (Liddell and Scott, 209, 1071). With this latter definition and the shortened μαγδαλία in focus, it could be said that the sinful woman of Luke 7:37 had her “dirt washed off” (= ἀπόμαγδαλία) when Jesus forgave her, making her a “magdalene” in the Greek sense of μαγδαλία. As a result, the Greek μαγδαλία—which was at best only insinuated in Luke 7:37—became erroneously associated with the Hebrew/Aramaic Magdalene of Luke 8:2, whose seven demons disappeared—like dirt wiped off.
The uncertainty about the derivation of the names Miriam (מִרְיָם) and Maria/Mary (מִּסְרִיאָל), matches the uncertainty of the derivation of Magdalene (מִגְדָּלוֹנָה). Among the many proposed derivations of Miriam (מִרְיָם) (arranged from the least likely, in my opinion, to the most probable) are:

1. **“bitter” and חַדֶּשׁ “sea” meaning “bitterness of the sea,”** which, by reversing the word order, becomes “sea of bitterness,” and then by equating the חַדֶּשׁ “sea” with מִרְיָם “water,” Miriam could mean “bitter water,” perhaps an allusion to Exo 15:23, כְּגוֹדֵעַ מַעְלָה מֵאָרָם, יִשְׂרָאֵל, “the waters from Marah for they were bitter,” a phrase which follows the “Song of Miriam” in 15:21. In the Midrash the question was asked, “Why was she called Miriam?” and the answer was, “on account of bitterness” (*Seder Olam Rabbah*, III).

2. **“to be fat” (perhaps related to Arabic مَارَايْ [marî], “to be digestible”),** requiring the shift of the מ to the consonantal ח found in the name מִרְיָם. However, מָרָא was used only for well-fed animals, usually for sacrificial “fatlings” (BDB 597), making it very unlikely that מָרָא was the base for Miriam’s name.

3. **“to rebel, to be contentious”** (exemplified by Num 12:1, “Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses”), with the ח of מִרְיָם reflecting the original ח of this ל verb and the final מ being a noun suffix. The participle מֹרָאָל would have been an appropriate epithet for Miriam after her confrontation with Moses, but was hardly her name at birth.
Deut 21:18–20 calls for the stoning of the rebellious (מַלְאָכָה) son, precluding any likelihood that this stem would have been used for any child’s name, either before or after the introduction of Mosaic law.8

(4) the cognate of the Akkadian rimu “to give,”9 which would require a prefix מ like the מ of מִֽלְתוֹ “gift,” for it to become another noun meaning “gift.” Also, for this to be the derivation of רִֽמְו, the ר of רִֽמְו would have to be read as consonant rather than as a vowel.

(5) the cognate of Arabic مَّرَام (marām) and مَرَام (marûm) “wish, desire, craving, aspiration, longing, sought for” (Lane 1867: 1193–1195; Hava 1915: 279; and Wehr 1979: 428). Ross (1962: 402) cited مَّرَام as meaning “the wished-for child,” but there is no reference in the lexicons to a child, per se, being the object of the desire. Without the addition of a י it is difficult to equate מְרַמ with מְרַמ. If the final י of מְרַמ is not a suffix but a part of the stem, it is impossible to relate מְרַמ to Mary (מָרְפִּאָה) or to Martha (מָרְפְּתָה), which do not reflect a final י stem.10

(6) The Virgin Mary was referred to as stella maris, “star of the sea,” a title which was commonly credited to Jerome (d. 420), but Jerome actually called Mary stilla maris, “a drop of the sea,” as though it were derived from מַרְּא אָר “drop” and מָרַא “sea.” The stella maris—if not an error of stilla for stella—suggests an association of Miriam with נַרְא אָר “luminary” and מָרַא “sea,” an epithet for Mary which was used by Isidore of Seville (d. 636); Alcuin (d. 804); and Rhabanus Maurus (d. 856).11
The combination of לְשׁוֹן "luminary" and יָם "sea" may have contributed to the Talmudic tradition (Sota 12a) which gave Miriam three additional names:

[Miriam was called:] ‘Zeroth’ because she became the rival [zarah] of her contemporaries [in beauty]. ‘Zohar’ because her face was like the glistening of the sea [zēhar yam]. ‘Ethnan’ because whoever saw her took a present [ethnan] to his wife.

The "glistening of the sea" (dividing יָםְלָדָה הַיָם into two words) would be the equivalent of לְשׁוֹן יָם (תְּלֹאָה יָם). Cohen (1938: 59), following the textual tradition of having only one word here, read יָם הבֶּצֶן "noon," requiring the gloss "[beautiful]" to give meaning to the rather senseless "her face resembled noon."

(7) מרי "beloved" related to the Egyptian mri, "to love" and mrwy "the well-beloved." Zorell (1906: 356) conjectured that the -am ending in Miriam was an alternative form of the -iah ending (which stands for the Yah = Yahweh) found in Hebrew names. If so, Miriam meant "one loving Yahweh" or "one beloved by Yahweh." However, because the Canaanite sea god was named Yamm, it would have been difficult to know if מרים meant "one loving Yah" or "or one loving Yamm." Gardiner (1936: 197) expressed his serious doubts about this Egyptian derivation.

(8) מִרְיָם, the cognate of Arabic مريما (maryam) "a woman who loves the discourses of men but does not act vitiously or immorally, or commit adultery or fornication" (Lane 1867: 998, 1204). It is a proper name, perhaps
from רָמִ֫נ (ràm) “a purely white antelope,” used for a beautiful woman (in contrast to the Hebrew כָּבָּר (kàḇàr) “a fierce wild ox.”). This derivation would be a perfect fit for מִרְיָם (mir'yàm). Providing a pun on—if not the derivation of—the name מְרִית (mir'ìt). Similarly, as discussed below, Mary Magdalene, in view of her many discourses with Jesus and her fellow disciples—which were free of sexual overtones—would also have qualified her for the מְרִית epithet.

(9) מִרְיָם “man, master, lord” and מְרִית “Martha, lady, mistress” (BDB 1101; Jastrow 834). This Aramaic root is the cognate of Arabic مَرَء (mar'è) “a man or human being,”

anom, with its feminine counterparts being مَرَأ (amra'à) and أَمْرَأَة (imrat) “a woman, a perfect woman” or “an excellent woman” (Lane 1885: 2702–2703). The am ending in Miriam is a suffix like the –am/-om in the names Amram (מַרְעָם), Gershom (גֶּרְשֹׁם), and Milcom (מִלכּומ). The –am/-om suffix could be either feminine or masculine, as evidenced by the –om ending of עֲרָה (àràh “to be naked”) in Eze 16:7 (אֶתֶּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּנְתָּn

This derivation would mean that Miriam (מַרְיָמ), Martha (מַרְתָּ), and Mary (מַרְיָא = Mâriyah) have the same derivation and differ only in terms of which suffix was used to indicate the feminine gender: מְרִית or מְרִית or מְרִית. This derivation would also account

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from רָמִ֫n (ràm) “a purely white antelope,” used for a beautiful woman (in contrast to the Hebrew כָּבָּר (kàḇàr) “a fierce wild ox.”). This derivation would be a perfect fit for מִרְיָם (mir'yàm). Providing a pun on—if not the derivation of—the name מְרִית (mir'ìt). Similarly, as discussed below, Mary Magdalene, in view of her many discourses with Jesus and her fellow disciples—which were free of sexual overtones—would also have qualified her for the מְרִית epithet.

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for Mary’s being called “Notre Dame/Our Lady” and for her being esteemed by the church fathers and in the Roman Catholic tradition as the “perfect woman.”

Magdalēnē and Magdōλos

The uncertainty about the derivation Magdalene matches the uncertain derivation of Miriam and Maria, discussed above. The possible derivations of Magdalene include the following (without any significance to the order):

1. "tower, turret," used as the place name Migdol (Hebrew) and Magdala (Aramaic); and Magdalenē, used as a surname of several rabbinic scholars from Magdala (Jastrow 726).

The –ene ending of Magdalene is an adjectival ending like the –ene ending on Nazarene, corresponding to the Ἄνατολις in “one from Magdala.” Of the many places named Magdala, or having a name hyphenated with Migdol, Mary’s Magdala has been identified with Migdol Nūniya (מגידל ניניא) “the Fish Tower,” known in Greek sources as Tarichea (“Center of Fish Salting”) which was situated about three miles north of Tiberias at the place known by its Arabic name Mejdel.

Mary Magdalene’s Magdala should not be confused with the Magdala near Jerusalem from which a certain scribe “set his candles in order every evening of the Sabbath, went up to Jerusalem, prayed there, returned and lighted up his candles when the Sabbath was now coming in” (Midrash Rabbah Lamentations [Lightfoot 1658: 375]). However, the Μηδίων "Tower of
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Dyers,” also near Tiberias (Jastrow 1259), must be considered as a possible hometown for Mary Magdalene. According to the Midrash Rabbah Lamentations (Freedman 1951: 162),

There were three cities whose taxes were carried to Jerusalem in wagons because of their great weight. The names of these three cities were Kabul [south east of Acco], Shiḥun [near Sepphoris], and Magdala [near Tiberias]. Why was Kabul destroyed? Because of their discords. Why was Shiḥun destroyed? Because of their magic arts. Why was Magdala destroyed? Because of their harlotries (מג達到 ונה). If the הנייה in this midrash means “idolatries” rather than “harlotries,” and if the Magdala refers to מַגְדָּל, the disappearance of Mary’s seven demons suggests a shift in her religious practices rather than her being penitent for sinful sexual activities. Since there were many places named Migdol and Magdal, as there were other places named Tarichea (“Fishtown”), identification of her hometown remains uncertain at best, assuming that Magdalene refers to a place, and traditions must be perpetuated cautiously.

(2) נִקְרָא “governess, caretaker” (Jastrow 213, 218, 321), with Hebrew variants גֵּרֶה or גֶּרֶת, from 고ֹלֶל “to be high, to grow,” which, in the פָּלֵל, means “to rear [small children (הָרוֹאָב)], especially children of a primary class.”

(3) מִקְרָא “hairdresser,” with Hebrew variants גֵּרֶה or גֶּרֶת, from 고ֹלֶל “to weave, to twine, to plait, to dress hair” (Jastrow 213, 218). In Syriac הָיוָא (gēdal) means
“to twist, to plait, to interweave.” In the Arabic-Syriac lexicon of Bar-Bahlul (c. 953 C.E.) it was stated that Mary was called Magdalene because her hair was braided (مَمْلُكَةٌ [mêgadla']) (J. Payne Smith 60–61).\(^6\) The Arabic جَذْلَة (jadala) can also mean “to twist tight, to braid, to plait (Lane 1865: 392–393; Wehr1979: 137).\(^7\)

A Talmudic tale in Ḥagigah 4\(^b\) illustrates just how easy it was to confuse مَمْلُكَةٌ “hairdresser” and مَمْلُكَةٌ “caretaker.” On one occasion, the Angel of Death said to his messenger, “Go, bring to me Miriam Magdala [intending it to be مَمْلُكَةٌ ‘the hairdresser’].” However, the messenger went and brought Miriam Magdala [misunderstood as مَمْلُكَةٌ ‘the caretaker’]. When the Angel of Death called the mistake to the attention of his messenger, saying, “I told thee Miriam, the مَمْلُكَةٌ [‘the hairdresser’], the messenger volunteered to restore Miriam مَمْلُكَةٌ [‘the caretaker’] back to life.” But the Angel of Death opted for an easier solution, saying to the messenger, “Since you brought her, let her be added [to the dead].”\(^28\)

(4) مَمْلُكَةٌ or مَمْلُكَةٌ “a petite woman,” which would have been the cognate of the Arabic مجَدُّلَة (majdulat) “a woman of beautiful compacture, of beautiful compact make,” which is the feminine counterpart of مجَدُّل مَجِدُل (majdul) “a man of slender, slim, spare, lean make” (Lane 1865: 392–393).

(5) مَمْلُكَةٌ “a cheerful woman” (an Aramaic Pa’el participle), which would have been the cognate of the Arabic جَذْلَة (jadala) “to be glad, joyful, happy, exuberant,” and
the noun and adjective حَذَلَ (jadlān) and حَذَلُ (jadil) “joyful, glad, happy, cheerful, in high spirits” (Lane 1865: 397; Wehr 1979:139). Because the Arabic د (d) appears in Hebrew as ד but as a ד in Aramaic, בֵּיתָלָם would be the Aramaic cognate.

(6) בֵּיתָלָם “deliberator, a debater,” which would be the cognate of (1) Arabic جَدَال (jidāl) and مَجَادَة (mujādalat) “he compared evidences [in a discussion with another person . . . ] in order that it might appear which of those evidences was preponderant, and the doing of this is commendable if for the purpose of ascertaining the truth,” and (2) Arabic جَدَل (jadal) “a term of logic, a syllogism composed of things well known, or conceded; the object of which is to convince the opponent, and to make him understand who fails to apprehend the premises of the demonstration.”

The gnostic community must certainly have understood Magdalene to be derived from בֵּיתָלָם “she who discusses for the purpose of ascertaining the truth.” In the gnostic text Pistis Sophia thirty-nine of the sixty-four questions addressed to Jesus by his disciples are attributed to Mary Magdalene, who readily admitted to her persistence in questioning Jesus, saying, “I will not tire of asking thee. Be not angry with me for questioning everything,” to which Jesus replied, “Question what thou dost wish” (I: 24). In the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Phillip, and the Gospel of Mary, Mary Magdalene is depicted as the beloved disciple who had such intense discussions with Jesus that it created tension with some of the other disciples, especially Peter.
this literature Mary Magdalene received truth directly from Jesus, after which she sought to convince her fellow disciples and make them understand what they failed to apprehend.\textsuperscript{30}

On the other hand, גאַדָל (jâdal) may be quite negative, meaning “he contended in an altercation, or disputed, or litigated, by advancing what might divert the mind from the appearance of truth and of what was right” (Lane 1865: 392). With this definition in mind, the נָוְהוֹת and הָלָקְו in Psa 12:4 can be read as abstract nouns נָוְהוֹת and הָלָקְו, with negative nuances like the cognate גאַדָל (jâdal). So interpreted, the verse reads:

\begin{equation}
\text{נָוְהוֹת יִהְיֶהוּ כָּל}-\text{שֶׁשְּׁפָתָהוּ הָלָקְו}
\end{equation}

May the Yahweh cut off all lips of spuriousness (and every) tongue speaking contentiously.\textsuperscript{31}

Recognition of נָוְהוֹת “contentious and deceitful” in this Psalm—even though negative—would add support to the idea that גאַדָל “honest discursive discourse” was an available term in Hebrew which could provide a meaningful derivation for Magdala.

MARY MAGDALA AND SATDA

A very terse Talmudic tale in Sabbath 104\textsuperscript{b} was thought by many, including zealous Christian censors, to have identified Mary Magdalene with Mary, the mother of Jesus, because it speaks not only of an adulterous Magdalene,\textsuperscript{32} but identifies
her as the mother of a man who had been crucified. The uncensored text reads as follows:\textsuperscript{33}

‘And thus they did to Ben Saṭḍa\textsuperscript{2} in Lydda (לָוד), and they hung him on the eve of Passover. Ben Saṭḍa\textsuperscript{2} was Ben Pandira.\textsuperscript{34} Rabbi Hisda said: The husband (בעלה) was Stada\textsuperscript{2}, the paramour (בעית) was Pandira. But was not the husband Pappos Ben Judah?—His mother’s name was Saṭḍa\textsuperscript{2}. But his mother was Miriam, a dresser of woman’s hair [יְסָפֶדֶת נַשָּׂא]—As they say in Pumbaditha,\textsuperscript{35} “This woman was turned away from her husband” (i.e., committed adultery).\textsuperscript{36}

The names in this text require comment, otherwise the dialogue in the paragraph could be easily misunderstood. According to Jastrow (972), Saṭḍa (סַטָדָא) was a surname for Jesus of Nazareth and was probably a Greek name like Σταδιότης.\textsuperscript{37} Given the occasional interchange of ה and נ\textsuperscript{38} and the absence of a prosthetic כ, the Aramaic כֶּפָדָא is more likely to be the Persian loanword أستاذ (‘ustād), which Castell (1669: col. 28 [Persico-Latinum]) defined as “praeceptor, magister, peritus, ingeniosus.” This Persian loanword also appears in Arabic meaning “a master; a skillful man, who is held in high estimation; a preceptor; a tutor; a teacher, a craftsman...” (Lane 1863: 56, citing the “Proverbs” of El-Meydānee [d. 1140 C.E.]).\textsuperscript{39}

The Greek/Latin name Pappos “governor, tutor,” as well as “grandfather” (Lewis 1964: 725), found in the quotation above, would have been partially synonymous with Saṭḍa—the two names referring to the same person but in different languages. This interpretation of the names could well provide an explanation for the statement in Sanhedrin VII: 25\textsuperscript{d}
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(“so they did in Lydda, when they made two scholars lie in wait for him [Ben Saṭda”], indicating that Ben Saṭda was met by two of his peers or tutorial colleagues. Were Ben Saṭda a reference to Jesus, the name Saṭda would have to refer to (1) Joseph as a craftsman, which would be like the use of استاذ ('ustāḏ) in the Persian translation of the Hebrew "an ingenious worker" in Exo 26:1, “with the work of an ingenius worker you shall make them [the appliqué of cherubim for the tabernacle curtains],” or (2) to Jesus as “ingenious teacher” by recognizing بن ستخا as a descriptive modifier like بن يشیع “the son of strength,” i.e., “a mighty man” (BDB 121), rather than reading it as a patronym.

The name Pandira / Panṭira) was noted by Jastrow (1186), but no derivation was suggested. The clue for the meaning is to be found in Shabbath 104b which states:

It is tradition that Rabbi Eliezer said to the Wise, “Did not Ben Saṭda bring spells from Egypt in a cut which was upon his flesh?” They said to him, “He was a fool (יתמר), and they do not bring proof from fools.”

In light of the Arabic cognate فندار (fandar) “plump, wanting in courage, heavy, and stupid” (Lane 1877: 2449), it is obvious that شفالة / Pandira “stupid” is a synonym of فدلر “fool.” Were فدلر / Padira attested in the Hebrew text, the cognate would be فدلر “foolish, stupid, unsound intellect or understanding”(Lane 1877: 2351), which would make فدلر an equally striking synonym of شفالة “fool.”

What can be learned from this Talmudic text is summarized as follows:

(1) A certain Miriam was a woman’s hair dresser (مجدلا) about whom Babylonian Jews reported: “this one
(2) This *Miriam Magdala*, alias *Satda*, was the wife of a man named *Satda*, but his name was obviously not composed of a feminine pronoun and feminine verb like the alias of his wife. His name meant “Ingenious/Teacher/Tutor.” But the husband *Satda* also had an alias, namely, *Pappos* which also meant “Teacher/Tutor,” as well as “Papa.” The son of mother *Satda* and father *Satda*—who was obviously called *Ben Satda*—ended up with an antonym as his alias, namely, *Ben Pandira* “Stupid/Fool,” which was to say that the “Son of Ingenuity” became the “Son of Stupidity,” and perhaps for what some saw at least as stupid behavior he was crucified on the eve of Passover at Lydda.41

(3) Rabbi Ḥisda made it clear that the derogatory epithet *Ben Pandira* was not only the alias of *Ben Satda*, but it was also the epithet given to the paramour of “Miriam the hairdresser,” who was certainly not the Mary Magdalene encountered in the Gospels nor Mary the mother of Jesus.42 The Roman *Diospolis* (= Lydda = לָוד), where *Ben Satda* was hanged, was a day’s journey west of Jerusalem, precluding, on the basis of place alone, any possible association of this text with the Gospel traditions of Jesus’ crucifixion at Golgotha.

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

While the focus of this study has been on the names *Miriam* (מרים), *Mary/Maria* (מריָה), and *Magdalene* (מגדלנה),
reference has also been made in the text or endnotes to the derivation and meaning of nine other names. In summary they can be reviewed as follows (in alphabetic order):

1. **Aaron** (אֲרָבֹא) “rod, staff,” the cognate of Arabic مَلَوَى (malwi) “rod, staff, scepter,” enhanced with a prosthetic ă.

2. **Dalmanutha** (דָּלְמַנְוָתָה) “seaman’s wall,” a compound name from the Aramaic יְרָלֵא (yrala) “wall” and the Greek loanword ναύτης (nautēs) “sailor, seaman,” which appears in Arabic as ناْوَة (nawāt) “a sailor upon the sea.”

3. **Magadan** (מָגָדן) “highland,” from the stem מָלָלֶה (malalah) “to be conspicuous,” with a locative ă prefix, having the nuance of the Arabic cognate نَجَد (najd) “high or elevated land.”

4. **Moriah** (מְרוֹה) “Yahweh is my Lord,” the equivalent of מְלֹא (mēla) being equivalent to the Aramaic יְרָלֵא (yrala) “lord” and the cognate of Arabic مَرْوَة (marū‘a) “manly perfection.”

5. **Pandira/Pantira** (פָּנְדִירָה/פָּנְתִרָה) “stupid,” the cognate of Arabic cognate فَنَّدَر (fandar) and its by-form فَدِير (fadir) “stupid, fool.”

6. **Pappos** (Πάππος) “governor, grandfather, tutor.”


8. **Šihin** (שִּׁחְנָא) “small salt fish,” the cognate of Arabic صَحْنَة (sīhnā).
(9) *Saṭda* (סאתדה) “an adulteress,” from a popular etymology based upon the Aramaic שֶׁנִּתַּדְת and סַדְתֶּדִית, meaning “this one forsook [her husband].”

(10) *Saṭda* (سعدتا) “ingenious, teacher, tutor, craftsman,” the Persian استاذ (‘ustāḏ) borrowed as a loanword in Aramaic and Arabic.

Of the nine proposed derivations of מִרְיָם (Miriam) noted in this study, only the last one permits a common derivation for *Miriam*, *Mary* and *Martha*, which are simply variant feminine forms of the Aramaic cognate פֶּרֶץ (pēret) “man, lord.”

*Marta* is the Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew *Maria*, and *Miriam* is an older Hebrew form of the name having a suffixed -am, analogous to the suffixed -on on the name of Solomon (which is based on the word *Shalom*). All three can mean simply “Lady” or have the nuance attested with the Arabic أمّا (‘imrat) “an excellent/perfect woman.”

The seven possible meanings of *Magdalene* can be found in the following contrived sentence: “the petite (מַנְדָלָה) governess (מַנְדָלָה) became the cheerful (מַנְדָלָה) hairdresser (מַנְדָלָה) deliberating (מַנְדָלָה) at the tower (מַנְדָלָה) named Magdala (מַנְדָלָה).” Tradition has focused on the last two meanings, i.e., “the tower named Magdala” which has been identified with a site about three miles north of Tiberias now named *Mejdel*. But in gnostic traditions Mary Magdalene became renown for her forensic faculties when questioning Jesus and in deliberations with her fellow disciples.

While “Mary the hairdresser” of Talmudic tales received the epithet *Saṭda* “adulteress,” the Mary Magdalene of the Gospel texts and gnostic tradition deserved the epithet *Saṭda* “ingenious, tutor” in her quest for truth and her efforts to tutor
the disciples following her conversations and encounters with Jesus. It is most unfortunate that the chance similarity of the Greek *magdaliá* “dirt washed off” and the Aramaic *magdala*—with all of its positive definitions—became *intertwined* (= מודל) in Western traditions about Mary Magdalene, soiling her name and her reputation.

NOTES

1. Onesti (2000: 106–107). The effect of Gregory’s sermon has been long lasting, as Onesti noted:

   But what Gregory did in associating Mary of Magdala with Luke’s unnamed sinful woman who anointed Jesus was to set the stage for Magdalene interpretation in the West for the next fifteen hundred years. It is unclear why Gregory would make such a biblically inaccurate association between these women. Yet, despite the lack of textual support in any Greek or even Latin biblical manuscript, Gregory’s series exercised tremendous influence on the history of exegesis in regard to Mary of Magdala.

   There are now numerous efforts being made on the internet to reverse Gregory’s damage to Mary Magdalene’s reputation.

2. The verb πίπτω was used for the throwing of dice as well as for falling down or casting oneself down, suggesting that the morsels of bread could have been tossed to the dogs as well as those crumbs that accidentally fell from the table.

3. Rare words in the literature and the lexicons does not mean that the words were rare in the language, especially when they were apocopated non-literary terms. The word ἀπόμαγδαλά appears twice in one passage in Aristophanes’ *Knights* (lines 411 and 415), but something as common as a “napkin” (bread used to clean the fingers and then thrown to the dogs) must have been widely used.
4. The Shem Tob Hebrew Gospel of Matthew has two spellings of Mary Magdalene. In Matt 27:56 מרים מגדלנה (= Maria Magdalene) appears, but in Matt 28:1 it reads מרים מגדלנה (= Miriam Magdalene), suggesting that Maria and Miriam were fully interchangeable. (For the Shem Tob text of Matthew, see Howard 1995: 146–149.)


6. I am indebted to Mr. Gilad Gevaryahu for this reference and a similar passage in Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot 165, “... Miriam, because in those days the Egyptians started to embitter the life of the sons of Israel.” The equation of ים, “sea” and מים, “water” and then with באר, “well” appears to lie behind a tradition in Tànith 9° (Goldschmidt 1933, III: 432; Rabbinowitz 1938: 38), where it is noted, “when Miriam died, the well disappeared, as it is said, And Mirian died there [Num 20:1], and immediately follows [the verse], And there was no water in the congregation.” If the ים of ים מרים could suggest a באר, מרים could be associated with the cognate of Arabic مارا (marra) “it passed away, it passed along” (Lane 885: 2699). These associations could well have contributed to the traditions about the Well of Miriam roving about and eventually ending up in the Sea of Tiberias (see Ginzberg 1968, 3: 49–54).

7. Compare Maas (1912), who preferred this derivation, stating that “Orientals consider the idea of being well nourished as synonymous with beauty and bodily perfection, so that they would be apt to give their daughters a name derived from mara. Mary means therefore The beautiful or The perfect one.” According to Gardiner (1936: 195) this was Bardenhewer’s preferred derivation. But it is hard to imagine calling anyone a sacrificial “fatling.” If so,
it is easy to understand why Miriam was not a popular woman’s name for well over a thousand years.

8. The Targum on Micah 6:4 has a wordplay on מַרְאֵם and מְרִימַי, with the notation that “Miriam was a teacher (רִימְי) for women.”

9. See von Soden 1981: 986–987, where רִימַי and רִימְיָּ֥תְו are cited with the meaning “Geschenk.”

10. Note also Bauer’s preference (1933: 87, note 2) for the stem מָרָא meaning “wünschen, Wunsch, Wunschkind, gewünschter Gegenstand.” Lane (1867: 1194), Hava (1915: 279), and Wehr (1979: 428) define מָרָא (marâm) as “wish, desire, craving, sought, sought for,” with no reference to a child being the object of the desire. Ross (1962: 402) stated that מָרָא (marâm) meant “the wished-for child.” (See also note 13.)


12. See Jastrow 722 for מָרָא and 1265 for מָרָא, both meaning “light, light-hole, opening, window,” and מָרָא “glistening.” The sexual overtones associated with the מָרָא “gift, hire [of a harlot]” indicates that מָרָא also had sexual overtones, like the Arabic cognate ظُهْرَة (zuhāriyat) “coitus, a certain mode, or manner, of compressing” (Lane 1874: 1930). The Arabic مَعْرِ (ma’ir) “coitus” (Lane 1863: 136–137) could have contributed to the מָרָא of Sotah 12a, having a sexual nuance hinted at in the מָרָא of Sotah 12a.

13. Gardiner (1966:569) cited מַרְוַת “love, wish” and מַרְוָתִי “the beloved.”
14. The names מֶרֶא הָרָד (Neh 12:2), מֶרֶא הָרָד (Gen 22:2), and מֶרֶא הָרָד (I Chr 5:32) can be derived from מֶרֶא הָרָד “man, master, lord, Lord” (Jastrow 834). The names מֶרֶא הָרָד and מֶרֶא הָרָד could be the cognates of the Arabic مُرَأ (mur’at) and مُرَأ (muruwat) which are variant spellings of the word meaning “manliness, manly perfection” (Lane 1885: 2702–2703). In light of the use of מֶרֶא הָרָד in Dan 2:47, מֶרֶא הָרָד “Lord of kings” and in Dan 5:23, מֶרֶא הָרָד “Lord of heaven,” מֶרֶא הָרָד (māriyā > mōriyā) would be the equivalent of מֶרֶא הָרָד “Yahweh is my Lord.” See below, the discussion on derivation number 9 in the list. Devila stated (1985) that “the actual meaning [of Moriah] is unknown.”

15. The initial ‘alif of אָמְרָא (‘imrāt) is a “conjunctive ‘alif” (Wright 1962: 20–21), corresponding to the prosthetic א in Hebrew, which means it is not a part of the stem. The usual feminine -ât ending of אָמְרָא corresponds to the rare feminine –am ending of אָמְרָא. Just as this Arabic cognate brings clarity to the meaning of Miriam, another cognate, מְדָרָא (harâwa) or מְדָרָא (harâwat) “stick, scepter, staff, rod” and מְדָרָא (hirâ) “shoot of a palm-tree” (Lane 1893: 2889; Hava 1915: 826; Wehr 1979: 1203;) brings clarity to the meaning of מְדָרָא “Aaron.” The proverbial “Aaron’s rod” is rooted in his name. The initial א of מְדָרָא is a prosthetic א, mentioned above, which was added to the Hebrew מְדָרָא. The final א of מְדָרָא is a suffix, mentioned below in footnote 18. Thus, מְדָרָא is from the stem מְדָר הָרָא “to beat with a rod” and מְדָר הָרָא (harwon > harôn) “staff, rod, scepter.” Just as Miriam has the rare –am ending instead of the usual –at termination, Aaron has the –ôn ending found in proper names like Solomon. Aaron’s rod appears in Exo 7:8–13, 18–20; 8:5–7, 16–19; and Num 17:6–8. Another example of a “rod or staff” appearing as a noun and a proper name is מִדֶרֶא and מִדֶרֶא (BDB 596).
The Meaning of “Mary”

16. Μαριάμ / Mariamme, the variant spelling of Miriam found in Josephus (Antiquity of the Jews, II: 221 and III: 54; see Naber 1888, I: 113, 149; Whiston 1974, II: 155, 187), reflects the lengthening of the –am suffix and the use of Greek case endings. For examples of the reduplication of the final letter of Hebrew stems see GKC 84b-km.

17. Other words and names ending with -am or -om are cited in GKC 85f.

18. The masculine name Marion (Μαριόν = Μαρίων) has the same derivation, but the noun Μάριον means “rebel” (Jastrow 842). Other words/names ending with -ôn or -ûn are cited in GKC 85u and 86g. See note 14 for other names derived from פָּלַע / פָּלָה.

19. Note especially the sixth tableau, called “The Perfections of Mary,” in the famous “Tapestry of Our Lady” in Reims, France. See http://www.udayton.edu/mary/questions/yq/yq204.html. In Islam the Virgin Mary is esteemed more highly than the wife or the mother of Mohammed.

20. The Μαγδαλάνα of Matt 15:39 can be derived from פָּלַע “to be conspicuous, in front of” (BDB 616), but having the nuance of Arabic cognate نجد (najd) “high or elevated land or country, highland, . . . an elevated or mountain road” (Lane 1893: 2766–2767), which appears in the place name نجد (Nejd) for the Arabian highland. The original name, with a prefix מ designating a place and a suffix מ indicating a name (see above note 18), was probably פָּלַע מְנֵד, which became פָּלַע מְנֵד with the assimilation of the initial מ of the stem. It is probably a reference to Mount Arbel which towers above Magdala.

The Dalmanutha (Δαλμανουθά) of Mark 8:10 is a compound name of (1) the Aramaic יִדְרַלמ “wall” (Strange 1992: 4, citing Kilayim 32d) and (2) the Greek ναύτης “sailor, seaman” which
appears in Arabic as 

"a sailor upon the sea." In the Šīhāh of El-Jowharee (died c. 1015 C.E.) it was stated that "Nawatt (نوابت) came from the language of the people of Syria." Evidently, ναῦτης had become a Greek loanword in Aramaic, and from Aramaic into Arabic. If so, the אֵד לְמַנְיָה in the Aramaic/Hebrew source of Mark should have been read as the compound נָוֶתָה נוֹטָי "Sailors’ Wall" rather than as the unknown abstract נוֹטָי נוֹטָי.

All three (Magadan, Magdala, Dalmanutha) point to the same general area: Dalmanutha was the Sailors’ Wall at the tower of Magdala—that particular Magdala which was in the region of Magadan, i.e., the one near the highland of Mount Arbel. In light of Jos 12:2, where the MT מֵרָה "shore, bank" was translated by μέρος, the phrase ἡ αἰεὶ τὰ μέρη Δαλμανουθὰ in Mark 8:10 could mean simply, “he went to shore at the Sailors’ Wall.”

21. The Greek μάγδαλος “watch-tower” is obviously an Aramaic/Hebrew loanword, unrelated to the מַגְדָּל discussed above in the Introduction. The name Magdiel in Gen 36:43 was noted as follows in the Targum Yerushalmi, מִגְדַלָּא תַל בֵּית עִירֵי נֶגֶר, “Magdiel was named after his city, (for) its strong tower.” Contrary to this tradition, lexicographers generally derive Magdiel from מַגָּד “excellence” and אלה "God." (See BDB 550.)

22. See Pesahim 46a (Goldschmidt 1933: 483; Freedman 1951: 219) where Migdal Nunia was said to be a mil (= 2000 cubits) distant from Tiberias (דְּמָלִים שְׁמַמְתִּל נוֹנַיָּא תִּבְרֶה). For an internet site of interest, see http://www.ourfatherlutheran.net/biblehomelands/galilee/magdala.htm.

23. Note the Arabic صحنة (ṣihna) “a certain condiment, or seasoning made of fish, small salt fish” (Lane 1872: 1656; Hava 1915: 390; Wehr 1979: 590). Shihin (Ṣihîn) and Migdol Nuñiya, could
be identified in Greek as Tarichea, “Salt Fish Center.” For the interchange of 𝗢 implies (ص) and csrf (cf. note 2 on Nehm 3:69, 89) (BDB 683).

24. The gloss in the midrash identified this מִלְתֶּל with מִלְתֶּל הַמַּרְחֶה “Tower of Dyers” which was destroyed because of harlotry (מלכ מלח). The Arabic cognates of מִלְתֶּל are  סְבָג (סבג / סיבג) “dye, the art of the dyer” and סְבָג (סבג / סיבג) “religion, religious law, anything whereby one advances himself in the favour of God” (Lane 1872: 1648). Thus, the מִלְתֶּל הַמַּרְחֶה “Tower of Dyers” may have also implied a “Tower of Torah.”

25. Thezn “harlotries” referred to in this midrash could actually be the cognate of Arabic زון (زون) “an idol, and anything taken as a deity and worshiped beside God . . . a place in which idols are collected and set up” (Lane 1867: 1273, 1268). See also Chapter IX, page 93, above.) Idolatry at Magdala could have been a more serious problem than prostitution at Magdala. The surname of several rabbinic scholars may well have referred to מִלְתֶּל הַמַּרְחֶה with its religious overtones, “because ‘religion’ intermingles in the heart like the סְבָג ‘dye’ in a garment” (paraphrasing a phrase from Lane’s lexicon).

26. It is interesting to note how Lightfoot (1658: 3:87, 375) equated the plaiting of hair with prostitution. He stated:

Whence she was called Magdalene, doth not so plainly appear; whether from Magdala, a town on the lake of Gennesaret, or from the word מִלְתֶּל which signifies a plaiting or curling of the hair, a thing usual with harlots.

. . . The title which they [the Talmudists] gave their Mary [מִלְתֶּל] is so like this of ours [Magdalene], that you may with good reason doubt whether she was called Magdalene from the town of Magdala, or from that word of the Talmudist, מִלְתֶּל a plaiter of hair. We leave it to the learned to decide.
Lightfoot was able to equate Mary Magdalene’s demons with vices by appealing to Talmudic usage which was “wont to call vices by the name of devils: as ‘An evil affection is Satan’ [Gloss. in Joma, fol. 67.2]; ‘Drunkenness by new wine is a devil’ [Gittim, fol. 77.2, &c.] . . . by devils seems to be understood the vices to which she was addicted . . . .”

27. KBS (I: 178–180) sub voce יִדוּל cited Arabic jazula and jadaila with jadala “to twist, to plait, rope” but jazala means “to cut, to be chaste, to be generous, to be correct” (Lane 1865: 420; Hava 1915: 89; Wehr 1979: 147).


29. The Coptic Gospel of Thomas (Guillaumont 1959: 56–57) ends with Peter saying, “Let Mary go out from among us, because women are not worthy of the Life,” to which Jesus replied. “See, I shall lead her, so that I will make her male, that she too may become a living spirit, resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” Behind the Coptic ιούτι (hooit) “male,” which occurs here three times, was a Vorlage with either Hebrew זכר or Aramaic זכרין, both of which are cognates of Arabic ذكر (dakara), and all three of which mean either (1) “male, male organ” or (2) “remembrance, memory” (BDB 269–271). The Arabic ذكر (dakara) also means “repentance” and “obedience” (Lane 1867: 969, 971), with its use in the Qur’an (Sura 89:24) of particular interest. It deals with repentance which comes too late for a person to enter the Kingdom (literally, “enter among My servants, enter My Garden”).

Thy Lord shall come with angels rank upon rank . . .
On that day a man will repent (يَاذِكَرٍ [yata‘dakkaru]),
But how will repentance (أَذِكْرَى [ad‘dikri]) avail him?

With this Arabic cognate in focus, the rkz/rkd in the Vorlage of Logia 114 could have meant that Jesus would lead Mary to
“repentance” and “obedience,” promising that any repentant woman could enter the kingdom as readily as any male penitent—thereby dismissing Peter’s chauvanistic request. Given the ambiguity of Hebrew/Aramaic הָלַּיָּהוּ/רָקָד, it is easy to see how the Vorlage was interpreted to promote the widely attested Gnostic gender agenda which deprecated the feminine and females.

30. For reading Pistis Sophia, the Gospel of Mary, the Gospel of Philip, and other gnostic text including the Nag Hammadi texts online, see http://www.gnosis.org/library.html. Otherwise, note Robinson (1977: 130, 135–138, 470–474) and Mead (1921).

31. The Arabic cognate of حَالَائِه (ḥāliqat) “the cutting, or abandoning, or forsaking, of kindred, or relations . . . and mutual wrong doing, and evil speaking . . . or that which destroys, and utterly cuts off, religion” (Lane 1865: 630). Rendering בְּרֵאָלָה “contentiousness” as “contentiously” is in the interest of idiomatic English.

32. According to the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus (2:3), Mary, the mother of Jesus, was indirectly charged with fornication when the Jewish elders said to Jesus at his trial before Pilate, “. . . thou wast born of fornication.” This charge was also made by Celsus, who according to Origen, said that when the mother of Jesus “was pregnant she was turned out of doors by the carpenter to whom she had been betrothed, as having been guilty of adultery, and that she bore a child to a certain soldier named Panthera.” See Chadwick 1953: 31–32) and James (1924: 98–99) for the full text of the Gospel of Nicodemus. Verses 2:3–5 are as follows:

The elders of the Jews answered and said unto Jesus: What shall we see? Firstly, that thou wast born of fornication; secondly, that thy birth in Bethlehem was the cause of the slaying of children; thirdly, that thy father Joseph and thy mother Mary fled into Egypt because they had no confidence before the people. Then said certain of them that stood by, devout men of the Jews: We say not that he came of fornication; but we know that Joseph was
LUKE 8:2 AND RELATED TEXTS

betrothed unto Mary, and he was not born of fornication. Pilate saith unto those Jews which said that he came of fornication: This your saying is not true for there were espousals, as these also say which are of your nation. Annas and Caiaphas say unto Pilate: The whole multitude of us cry out that he was born of fornication, and we are not believed: but these are proselytes and disciples of his.


34. The Hebrew text has פֶּדוֹרָה כַּפֶּדוֹרָה לֶהוֹ (Goldschmidt (1: 564 and 7: 285), whereas the English text of Shachter and Freedman (1935: 456) reads Pandira rather than Pandira. Jastrow (1137, 1186) does not cite פֶּדוֹרָה among the variant spellings of this name.

35. פֶּדוֹרָה means “the mouth of the Bēditā.” The Bēditā was a canal along the Euphrates. A great Jewish academy in Babylon was located there (Jastrow 1142).

36. this one deserted (her husband)” is a popular etymology combining פֶּדוֹרָה כַּפֶּדוֹרָה “to go astray, to be faithless” and the feminine פֶּדוֹרָה “this one.” (The variant פֶּדוֹרָה פֶּדוֹרָה appears in Sanhedrin 67a.) Shachter and Freedman (1935: 457, n. 5) commented that “Derenbourg (Essai note 9, pp. 468–471) rightly denies the identity of Ben Stada with Jesus, and regards him simply as a false prophet executed during the second century at Lydda.”

37. See Box 1916: 201 for several attempts to force the name to mean “the son of a harlot.”

38. Note פֶּדוֹרָה and פֶּדוֹרָה “to seize” and the interchange of פֶּדוֹרָה וְפֶדוֹרָה in the various spellings of Pandira / Pantira, noted below.

39. The loanword אָסְתָּדָא (‘ustād) is used widely in modern Arabic for academic titles like “master” and “professor” and to address intellectuals (Wehr 1979: 18–19).
40. In the Soncino English edition of the text, Shachtman (1935: 457) list the names as Padira and Pandira. However, in the printed Hebrew text, Goldschmidt (1933 1: 564 and 7: 285) has הַנְדִירָה for בֵּן שְׁתַּדֶּא for Ben Ṣṭāda' and the paramour of “mother Ṣṭāda’.”


42. While the Greek/Latin πάνθηρ/panthera “panther” was, according to Diessman (1906: 871–872), a common surname for Roman soldiers at that time, it is unlikely that the hard ב of הַנְדִירָה reflects the soft θ of the Greek πάνθηρ. Consequently, there seems to be little reason to appeal to πάνθηρ as the Greek loanword which produced the name Pandira / Paṭīra. However, it would not be surprising that a derogatory pun was used for any Roman soldier named Panther—suggesting fierceness—to be called in Aramaic נְדִירָה “Chubby/Coward/Fool.”