

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 11:1¹

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 ἀπομαγδαλία “*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” (= ψιχίωv = מִתְּבָּנִים = small pieces of bread) thrown or fallen from the master’s table which the dogs ate.)²

Ἀπομαγδαλία appears in Sophocles’ *Fragmenta 34* with the meaning of “dirt washed off” (Liddell and Scott, 209, 1071).³ 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*” (= ἀπομαγδαλία) 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.

Μαριαμ **and** Μαρία

The uncertainty about the derivation of the names *Miriam* (מִרְיָם) and *Maria/Mary* (מַאֲרִיאָה),⁴ matches the uncertainty of the derivation of *Magdalene* (מַגְדָּלָיִנָּה). Among the many proposed derivations of *Miriam* (מִרְיָם) (arranged from the least likely, in my opinion, to the most probable) are:⁵

(1) מַר “bitter” and יָם “sea” meaning “bitterness of the sea,” which, by reversing the word order, becomes “sea of bitterness,” and then by equating the יָם “sea” with מַיִם “water,” *Miriam* could mean “bitter water,” perhaps an allusion to Exo 15:23, מַיִם מִמָּרָה כִּי מָרִים הֵם, “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).⁶

(2) מַרֵּא “to be fat” (perhaps related to Arabic مریء [marīʾ] “to be digestible”), requiring the shift of the א to the consonantal י found in the name מִרְיָם. However, מַרֵּא was used only for well-fed animals, usually for sacrificial “fatlings” (BDB 597), making it very unlikely that מַרֵּא was the base for *Miriam*’s name.⁷

(3) מָרָה “to rebel, to be contentious” (exemplified by Num 12:1, “Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses”), with the י of מִרְיָם reflecting the original י of this מָרָה verb and the final ם being a noun suffix. The participle מַרְאָה 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 (מוֹרֵה) 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) מְרִים the cognate of the Akkadian *rimu* “to give,”⁹ which would require a prefix מ like the מ of מִתֵּן “gift,” for מְרִים to become another noun meaning “gift.” Also, for this to be the derivation of מְרִים, the י of מְרִים would have to be read as consonant rather than as a vowel.

(5) מְרָם the cognate of Arabic مرَام (*marām*) and مروم (*marûm*) “wish, desire, craving, aspiration, longing, sought for” (Lane 1867: 1193–1195; Hava 1915: 279; and Wehr 1979: 428). Ross (1962: 402) cited مرَام (*marām*) 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 מְרָם with מְרִים. If the final ם of מְרִים is not a suffix but a part of the stem, it is impossible to relate מְרָם to *Mary* (Μαρία) or to *Martha* (Μάρθα), which do not reflect a final ם 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 מֵר “drop” and יָם “sea.” The *stella maris*—if not an error of *stilla* for *stella*—suggests an association of Miriam with מְאֹר “luminary” and יָם “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 מְאוֹר “luminary” and יָם “sea” may have contributed to the Talmudic tradition (*Soṭa* 12^a) 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 [*zəhar yam*]. ‘Ethnan’ because whoever saw her took a present [*ethnan*] to his wife.

The צְהַר יָם “glistening of the sea” (dividing צְהַרִים into two words) would be the equivalent of מְאוֹר יָם (= מְרִים). Cohen (1938: 59), following the textual tradition of having only one word here, read צְהַרִים “noon,” requiring the gloss “[beautiful]” to give meaning to the rather senseless “her face resembled noon.”¹²

(7) מְרִא “beloved” related to the Egyptian *mri* “to love” and *mrwty* “the well-beloved.”¹³ 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 מְרִים meant “one loving Yah” or “or one loving Yamm.” Gardiner (1936: 197) expressed his serious doubts about this Egyptian derivation.

(8) מְרִים the cognate of Arabic مَرْيَم (*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 *רָאֵם* (*râm*) “a purely white antelope,” used for a beautiful woman (in contrast to the Hebrew *רָאֵם* “a fierce wild ox.”). This derivation would be a perfect fit for *מִרְיָם*. Her participation with Moses and Aaron in the early Israelite triumvirate (Mic 6:4) could well have earned her the title *מִרְיָם*, providing a pun on—if not the derivation of—the name *מִרְיָם*. 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 *מִרְיָם* epithet.

(9) *מִרְיָם* “man, master, lord” and *מִרְתָּה* “Martha, lady, mistress” (BDB 1101; Jastrow 834). This Aramaic root is the cognate of Arabic *مرء* (*marʿ*) and *امرؤ* (*ʿimrawʿ*) “a man or human being,”¹⁴ with its feminine counterparts being *امرء* (*ʿamraʿa*) and *امرأة* (*ʿimrât*) “a woman, a perfect woman” or “an excellent woman” (Lane 1885: 2702–2703).¹⁵ The *am* ending in *Miriam* is a suffix like the *-am/-om* in the names *Amram* (*עֲמֵרָם*), *Gershom* (*גֵּרְשֹׁם*), and *Milcom* (*מִלְכָם*).¹⁶ The *-am/-om* suffix could be either feminine or masculine, as evidenced by the *-om* ending of *עָרֹם* (from *עוֹר* “to be naked”) in Eze 16:7 (*וְעָרֹם וְעָרִיבָה*) “and you were naked and bare”), where the three words are clearly feminine singular.¹⁷

This derivation would mean that *Miriam* (*Μαριαμ*), *Martha* (*Μάρθα*), and *Mary* (*Μαρία* = *مَارِيَة* = *Mâriyat*) have the same derivation and differ only in terms of which suffix was used to indicate the feminine gender: *מִרְיָם* or *מִרְיָה* or *מִרְתָּה*.¹⁸ This derivation would also account

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.”¹⁹

Μαγδαληνή **and** Μαγδώλος

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) מִגְדָּל and מִגְדָּלָה “tower, turret,”²⁰ used as the place name *Migdol* (Hebrew) and *Magdala* (Aramaic); and מִגְדָּלָא, used as a surname of several rabbinic scholars from Magdala (Jastrow 726).²¹ The *-ene* ending of *Magdalene* is an adjectival ending like the *-ene* ending on *Nazarene*, corresponding to the אִתְּ- ending of מִגְדָּלִיתָא “one from Magdala.” Of the many places named *Magdala*, or having a name hyphenated with *Migdol*, Mary’s *Magadala* has been identified with *Migdol Nûnîya* (מִגְדָּל־נוּנִיָּא) “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* (مجدل).²²

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 מִגְדָּל צְבָעִיא “Tower of

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], Shihun [near Sepphoris],²³ and Magdala [near Tiberias].²⁴ Why was Kabul destroyed? Because of their discords. Why was Shihun destroyed? Because of their magic arts. Why was Magdala destroyed? Because of their harlotries (מפני זנות).²⁵

If the זנות in this midrash means “idolatries” rather than “harlotries,” and if the Magadala refers to מְגַדְלָא צְבָעִיא, 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) מְגַדְלָא “governess, caretaker” (Jastrow 213, 218, 321), with Hebrew variants גְּדֻלָּת or גְּדֻלָּת, from גָּדַל “to be high, to grow,” which, in the *Pa^eel*, means “to rear [small children (הַרְדֵּק)], especially children of a primary class.”

(3) מְגַדְלָא “hairdresser,” with Hebrew variants גְּדֻלָּת or גְּדֻלָּת, from גָּדַל “to weave, to twine, to plait, to dress hair” (Jastrow 213, 218). In Syriac ܓܕܠ (*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 (ܡܓܕܠܐ [mēgadla²⁶] (J. Payne Smith 60–61). The Arabic جدل (*jadala*) can also mean “to twist tight, to braid, to plait (Lane 1865: 392–393; Wehr1979: 137).²⁷

A Talmudic tale in Ḥagigah 4^b illustrates just how easy it was to confuse מְגַדְלָא “hairdresser” and מְגַדְלָא “caretaker.” On one occasion, the Angel of Death said to his messenger, “Go, bring to me Miriam Magdala [intending it to be מְגַדְלָא ‘the hairdresser’].” However, the messenger went and brought Miriam Magdala [misunderstood as מְגַדְלָא ‘the caretaker’]. When the Angel of Death called the mistake to the attention of his messenger, saying, “I told thee Miriam, the מְגַדְלָא [‘the hairdresser’], the messenger volunteered to restore Miriam מְגַדְלָא [‘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) מְגַדְלָא or מְגַדְלָא “a petite woman,” which would have been the cognate of the Arabic مجدولة (*majdūlat*) “a woman of beautiful compacture, of beautiful compact make,” which is the feminine counterpart of مجدول (*maj-dūl*) “a man of slender, slim, spare, lean make” (Lane 1865: 392–393).

(5) מְגַדְלָא “a cheerful woman” (an Aramaic *Pa^cel* participle), which would have been the cognate of the Arabic جدل (*jadala*) “to be glad, joyful, happy, exuberant,” and

the noun and adjective جَدْلَان (*jadlân*) and جَدِل (*jadil*) “joyful, glad, happy, cheerful, in high spirits” (Lane 1865: 397; Wehr 1979:139). Because the Arabic ذ (*d*) appears in Hebrew as ז but as a ד in Aramaic, מְדַבֵּרָא would be the Aramaic cognate.

(6) מְדַבֵּרָא “deliberator, a debater,” which would be the cognate of (1) Arabic جِدَال (*jidâl*) and مُجَادَلَة (*mujâdalat*) “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 pre-mises of the demonstration.”

The gnostic community must certainly have understood *Magdalene* to be derived from מְדַבֵּרָא “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.²⁹ In

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.³⁰

On the other hand, *جادل* (*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 *גְּדֻלוֹת* and *חֲלָקוֹת* in Psa 12:4 can be read as abstract nouns *גְּדֻלוֹת* and *חֲלָקוֹת*, with negative nuances like the cognate *جادل* (*jâdal*). So interpreted, the verse reads:

יִכַרֵּת יְהוָה כָּל־שִׁפְתֵי חֲלָקוֹת
לְשׁוֹן מְדַבֶּרֶת גְּדֻלוֹת

May the Yahweh cut off all lips of *spuriousness*
(and every) tongue speaking *contentiously*.³¹

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

MARY MAGDALA AND SAṬḌA

A very terse Talmudic tale in *Sabbath* 104^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,³² but identifies

her as the mother of a man who had been crucified. The uncensored text reads as follows:³³

‘And thus they did to *Ben Saṭda*² in Lydda (לִידָא), and they hung him on the eve of Passover. *Ben Saṭda*² was *Ben Pandira*.³⁴ Rabbi Ḥisda said: The husband (בַּעַל) was *Stada*², the paramour (בִּיעַל) was *Pandira*. But was not the husband *Pappos* Ben Judah?—His mother’s name was *Saṭda*². But his mother was *Miriam*, a dresser of woman’s hair [מְגַדֵּלָא נְשִׂיאַ]—As they say in *Pumbaditha*,³⁵ “This woman was turned away from her husband” [סְטִיַת דָּא מִבַּעֲלָהּ] (i.e., committed adultery).³⁶

The names in this text require comment, otherwise the dialogue in the paragraph could be easily misunderstood. According to Jastrow (972), *Saṭda* (סַטְדָּא / סַטְדָּא) was a surname for Jesus of Nazareth and was probably a Greek name like Σταδίου.³⁷ Given the occasional interchange of ט and ת³⁸ and the absence of a prosthetic ס, the Aramaic סַטְדָּא is more likely to be the Persian loanword اُستاد (*ustâd*), 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.]).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 *Saṭda*—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^d

(“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* (*ʿustâḏ*) in the Persian translation of the חֵשֶׁב “an ingenious worker” in Exo 26:1, “with the work of an *ingenious worker* you shall make them [the appliqué of cherubim for the tabernacle curtains],” or (2) to Jesus as “ingenious teacher” by recognizing *בֶּן־חַיִל* as a descriptive modifier like *בֶּן־חַיִל* “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* 104^b 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 (שׁוֹטֵה), and they do not bring proof from fools.”

In light of the Arabic cognate *فندر* (*fandar*) “plump, wanting in courage, heavy, and stupid” (Lane 1877: 2449), it is obvious that *פנדירא* / *Pandira* “stupid” is a synonym of שׁוֹטֵה “fool.” Were *פדירא* / *Padira* attested in the Hebrew text,⁴⁰ the cognate would be *فدر* (*fadir*) “foolish, stupid, unsound intellect or understanding” (Lane 1877: 2351), which would make *פדירא* an equally striking synonym of שׁוֹטֵה “fool.”

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

- (1) A certain *Miriam* was a woman’s hair dresser (*magdala*) about whom Babylonian Jews reported: “this one

(אָדָּא) departed (סָטָתָ) from her husband,” thus qualifying her for the name *Satda* (אָדָּא + סָטָתָ = אָסָטָדָא, i.e., a feminine pronoun + a feminine verb = a feminine name).

(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 = לִיִּדָּא), 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* (מִרְיָם), *Mary/Maria* (מַרְיָאָה), and *Magdalene* (מַגְדָּלִינָה),

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* (אַהֲרֹן) “rod, staff,” the cognate of Arabic هراوی (*harâwa*) “rod, staff, scepter,” enhanced with a prosthetic א.

(2) *Dalmanutha* (Δαλμανουθά) “seaman’s wall,” a compound name from the Aramaic דִּילְמָא “wall” and the Greek loanword ναύτης “sailor, seaman,” which appears in Arabic as نوات / نوتی (*nutiyy / nawwât*) “a sailor upon the sea.”

(3) *Magadan* (Μαγαδάν) “highland,” from the stem נגד “to be conspicuous,” with a locative מ prefix, having the nuance of the Arabic cognate نجد (*najd*) “high or elevated land.”

(4) *Moriah* (מֹרְיָה) “Yahweh is my Lord,” the equivalent of אֲדֹנָיָהוּ, with מרא / מר being equivalent to the Aramaic מר “lord” and the cognate of Arabic مرء (*murû*) “man” and مرء (*marû’a*) “manly perfection.”

(5) *Pandira/Pantira* (פַּנְדִּירָא / פַּנְדִּירָא) “stupid,” the cognate of Arabic cognate فندر (*fandar*) and its by-form فدر (*fadir*) “stupid, fool.”

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

(7) *Šabâ’im* (צַבְעִים) (1) “dyers,” the cognate of Arabic صبغ / صباغة (*šibg / šibâgat*)” and (2) צַבְעִים “religious laws,” the cognate of Arabic صبغ / صبغة (*šabg / šibgat*) “religious law, religion.”

(8) *Šihin* (שִׁחִין) “small salt fish,” the cognate of Arabic صحناء (*šihná*).

(9) *Satda* (ܣܬܕܐ) “an adulteress,” from a popular etymology based upon the Aramaic ܣܕܐ and ܫܬܐ, meaning “this one forsook [her husband].”

(10) *Satda* (ܣܬܕܐ) “ingenious, teacher, tutor, craftsman,” the Persian استاذ (*ustâd*) borrowed as a loanword in Aramaic and Arabic.

Of the nine proposed derivations of מַרְיָם (Μαριαμ) 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 מַרְא / מַר “man, lord.” *Martha* 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 امرأة (*imrat*) “an excellent/perfect woman.”

The seven possible meanings of *Magdalene* can be found in the following contrived sentence: “the petite (מגדלה) governess (מגדלה) became the cheerful (מגדלה) hairdresser (מגדלה) deliberating (מגדלה) at the tower (מגדל) named Magdala (מגדלה).” 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 *Satda* “adulteress,” the Mary Magdalene of the Gospel texts and gnostic tradition deserved the epithet *Satda* “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*²—with all of its positive definitions—became *intertwined* (= מגרללה) 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 ἀπομαγδαλιά 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 מַגְדַּלִּינָה מַאֲרִיאָה (= *Maria Magdalene*) appears, but in Matt 28:1 it reads מַגְדַּלִּינָה מִרְיָם (= *Miriam Magdalene*), suggesting that *Maria* and *Miriam* were fully interchangeable. (For the Shem Tob text of Matthew, see Howard 1995: 146–149.)

5. Bardenhewer (1895), in a book I have not seen, reportedly dealt with seventy different meanings of the names *Mary* and *Miriam*. For a shorter list, see Ross 1962: III, 402.

6. I am indebted to Mr. Gilad Gevanyahu 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 יָם “sea” and מַיִם “water” and then with בְּאֵר “well” appears to lie behind a tradition in *Taʿnith* 9^a (Goldschmidt 1933, III: 432; Rabbinowitz 1938: 38), where it is noted, “when Miriam died, the well disappeared, as it is said, *And Miriam died there* [Num 20:1], and immediately follows [the verse], *And there was no water in the congregation.*” If the יָם of מַיִם could suggest a בְּאֵר, the מַר of מַרְיָם could be associated with the cognate of Arabic مَر (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 מוֹרְהָה and מוֹרְיָם, with the notation that “Miriam was a teacher (מוֹרְהָה) for women.”

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

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

11. For further discussion see the article by A. J. Maas, available at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15464a.htm> and the article from the Marian Library of the International Marian Research Institute at <http://www.udayton.edu/mary/questions/yq/yq17.html>.

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

13. Gardiner (1966:569) cited *mrwt* “love, wish” and *mrwyty* “the beloved.”

14. The names מְרִיחַ (Neh 12:2), מוֹרִיחַ (Gen 22:2), and מְרִיחַת (I Chr 5:32) can be derived from מוֹר / מרה “man, master, lord, Lord” (Jastrow 834). מְרִיחַ and מְרִיחַת could be the cognates of the Arabic مروءة (*murûʿat*) and مروءة (*muruwat*) which are variant spellings of the word meaning “manliness, manly perfection” (Lane 1885: 2702–2703). In light of the use of מוֹרֵא in Dan 2:47, מוֹרֵא מְלָכִין “Lord of kings” and in Dan 5:23, מוֹרֵא שָׁמַיָא “Lord of heaven,” מוֹרִיחַ (*mārīyā > mōrīyā*) would be the equivalent of אֲדֹנָיִהוּ “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 ^o*alif* of امرأة (*ʿimrât*) is a “conjunctive ^o*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 ^o*imrât* corresponds to the rare feminine *-am* ending of *Miriam*.

Just as this Arabic cognate brings clarity to the meaning of *Miriam*, another cognate, هرأوى (*harâwa*) or هرأوة (*harâwat*) “stick, scepter, staff, rod” and هرأ [hirâ] “shoot of a palm-tree” (Lane 1893: 2889; Hava 1915: 826; Wehr 1979: 1203;) brings clarity to the meaning of אֲהָרֹן “Aaron.” The proverbial “Aaron’s rod” is rooted in his name. The initial א of אֲהָרֹן is a prosthetic א, mentioned above, which was added to the Hebrew הָרֹן. The final ן of אֲהָרֹן is a suffix, mentioned below in footnote 18. Thus, אֲהָרֹן is from the stem *הָרו “to beat with a rod” and *הָרֹן (*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 מִקְלָת and מִקְלָל (BDB 596).

16. Μαριάμμη/*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 84^{b k-m}.

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

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

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 Μαγαδάν of Matt 15:39 can be derived from נגד “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 י indicating a name (see above note 18), was probably מַנְגַדַי, which became מַנְדַי with the assimilation of the initial נ 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 דִּילְמֹא “wall” (Strange 1992: 4, citing *Kilayim* 32^d) and (2) the Greek ναύτης “sailor, seaman” which

appears in Arabic as *نوتى / نوات* (*nutiyy / nawwât*) “a sailor upon the sea.” In the *Ṣihāh* of El-Jowharee (died c. 1015 C.E.) it was stated that *نوات* (נורת) came “from the language of the people of Syria.” Evidently, *ναύτης* had become a Greek loanword in Aramaic, and from Aramaic into Arabic. If so, the **דלמנורתא** in the Aramaic/Hebrew source of Mark should have been read as the compound **דילם־נורתא** “Sailors’ Wall” rather than as the unknown abstract **דלמנורתא**.

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 **שֹׁפַת** “shore, bank” was translated by μέρος, the phrase ἦλθεν εἰς τὰ μέρη Δαλμανουθά in Mark 8:10 could mean simply, “he went to shore at the *Sailors’ Wall*.”

21. The Greek μάγδωλος “watch-tower” is obviously an Aramaic/Hebrew loanword, unrelated to the μαγδᾶλια discussed above in the Introduction. The name Magdiel in Gen 36:43 was noted as follows in the *Targum Yerushalmi*, **עירו נקרא מנדיאל על שם עירו**, “Magdiel was named after his city, (for) its strong tower.” Contrary to this tradition, lexicographers generally derive *Magdiel* from **מגדל** “excellence” and **אל** “God.” (See BDB 550.)

22. See *Pesahim* 46^a (Goldschmidt 1933: 483; Freedman 1951: 219) where Migdal Nunia was said to be a *mil* (= 2000 cubits) distant from Tiberias (**דמיל כממגדל נוניא ועד טבריא**). For an internet site of interest, see <http://www.ourfatherlutheran.net/biblehomelands/galilee/magdala.htm>.

23. Note the Arabic *صحناء* (*ṣihnâ*) “a certain condiment, or seasoning made of fish, small salt fish” (Lane 1872: 1656; Hava 1915: 390; Wehr 1979: 590). *Shîhîn* (*Sîhîn*) and *Migdol Nûnîya*, could

be identified in Greek as Tarichea, “Salt Fish Center.” For the interchange of צ (ס) and ש/ס, note נתץ and נתס (BDB 683).

24. The gloss in the midrash identified this מגדלא with מגדל צבעים “Tower of Dyers” which was destroyed because of harlotry (מפני זנות). The Arabic cognates of צבע are صبغ / صباغة (*ṣibġ/ ṣibāġat*) “dye, the art of the dyer” and صبغ / صبغة (*ṣabġ/ ṣibġat*) “religion, religious law, anything whereby one advances himself in the favour of God” (Lane 1872: 1648). Thus, the מגדלא צבעים “Tower of Dyers” may have also implied a “Tower of Torah.”

25. The זנות “harlotries” referred to in this midrash could actually be the cognate of Arabic زون (*zûn*) “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 מגדלאה surname of several rabbinic scholars may well have referred to מגדל צבעים with its religious overtones, “because צבע ‘religion’ intermingles in the heart like the צבע ‘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 מגדלא which signifies a *plaiting* or *curling of the hair*, a thing usual with harlots. . . . The title which they [the Talmudists] gave their Mary [מגדלא] 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, מגדלא 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* גרל 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).

28. See Abrahams 1938: 17.

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 Ⲫⲟⲟⲩⲧ (hooit) "male," which occurs here three times, was a *Vorlage* with either Hebrew זכר or Aramaic דכר, both of which are cognates of Arabic ذكّر (*ḍakara*), and all three of which mean either (1) "male, male organ" or (2) "remembrance, memory" (BDB 269–271). The Arabic ذكّر (*ḍakara*) 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 (يتذكر [yataḍakkaru]),

But how will repentance (الذكرى [addikrī]) avail him?

With this Arabic cognate in focus, the זכר / דכר 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 זכר/זכר, 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 חלק is حلاقة (*ḥâliqat*) “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 גְּדֻלָּתָא “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

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.

33. Shachter and Freedman 1935: 456.

34. The Hebrew text has **בן סטרא בן פנדירא הוא** (Goldschmidt (1: 564 and 7: 285), whereas the English text of Shachter and Freedman (1935: 456) reads *Padira* rather than *Pandira*. Jastrow (1137, 1186) does not cite **פדירא** among the variant spellings of this name.

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

36. **סְטִיתָא דָּא** “this one deserted (her husband)” is a popular etymology combining **סְטָא** “to go astray, to be faithless” and the feminine **דָּא** “this one.” (The variant **סְטִיתָא דָּא** appears in *Sanhedrin* 67^a.) 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 **הִתְּהַר** and **הִתְּהַר** “to seize” and the interchange of **ד** and **ט** in the various spellings of *Pandira* / *Panṭira*, noted below.

39. The loanword **أستاذ** (*ustâd*) 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, Shachter and Freedman (1935: 457) list the names as Padira and Pandira. However, in the printed Hebrew text, Goldschmidt (1933 1: 564 and 7: 285) has פְּנִירָא for *Ben Ṣtada*³ and the paramour of “mother Ṣtada³.”

41. Crucifixion was not uncommon. Josephus wrote of Alexander Janneus’ crucifixion of 800 Jewish fighters while still alive—after the victims watched the murder of their wives and children before their eyes—in response to the outcry of many Jews for Janneus to do the people a favor and kill himself (*Antiquities* XIII: 14: 379–383; see Whinston 1974: III, 265; Naber 1892: II, 211).

42. While the Greek/Latin πᾶνθηρ/*panthera* “panther” was, according to Diessman (1906: 871–872), a common surname for Roman soldiers at that time, it is unlikely that the hard ט of פְּנִירָא reflects the soft Θ of the Greek πᾶνθηρ. Consequently, there seems to be little reason to appeal to πᾶνθηρ as the Greek loanword which produced the name *Pandira* / *Panṭira*. 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 פְּנִירָא “Chubby/Coward/Fool.”