

Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum

8

Gerard P. Luttikhuizen

The Revelation of Elchasai



Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum

herausgegeben von
Martin Hengel und Peter Schäfer

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Investigations into the Evidence
for a Mesopotamian Jewish Apocalypse
of the Second Century and its Reception
by Judeo-Christian Propagandists

by

Gerard P. Luttikhuisen



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Introduction

A Survey of Past Research

In patristic and some other ancient sources, the name of “Elchasai” (or “Elxai”, “Elkesaios“, “Alchasaïos”) and that of a sect of “Helkesaites” or “Elkeseans” are mentioned, sometimes in close connection with an allegedly revelatory book. The evidence is fragmentary and very confused, and has given rise to quite different source-critical and historical hypotheses.

This confusion and difference of opinion also relate to the form and the meaning of the above names. In the survey of past research, which follows presently, and in the subsequent study of the ancient sources, I will follow, as far as possible, the forms used by the author/the text under discussion. My own preference would be for the forms attested by the earliest extant evidence. Hippolytus, our earliest source, has “Elchasai” (*Refutatio* IX 4.13ff; X 29: Ἐλχασαῖ). However, this text does not mention the name of the sect. Origen’s report in Eusebius, *Hist. eccles.* VI 38, speaks of “Helkesaites (Ἑλκεσαῖται)”. For practical reasons (it should not be too difficult to find the name of the sect in indices and reference books), it is better to neglect the *spiritus asper* and to use the form “Elkesaites”. There will be several occasions to discuss the meaning of these names.

We have already mentioned the earliest sources for our knowledge of Elchasai and the Elkesaites: 1. Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* (= *Ref*) IX 13–17 and X 29; and 2. a brief fragment of a report by Origen in Eusebius, *Hist. eccles.* VI 38. Three other important testimonies are: 3. Epiphanius, *Panarion* (= *Pan*) 19 and 53, and passages of *Pan* 30; 4. the Cologne Mani Codex (= *CMC*), pp. 94–97; and 5. passages of al-Nadīm’s *Fihrist*, chapter IX, 1.¹

For a long time, three of the above-mentioned sources were either unknown or they did not play a part in the discussion.

1. The text of Hippolytus, *Ref* IV–X, was found in 1842 in a codex of the 14th century, then belonging to a monastery on Mt Athos. It was published in 1851 by E. Miller as a composition of Origen’s.² In a later edition (L. Duncker-E. Schneidewin, 1859) the *Refutation* was restored to Hippolytus.

¹ The texts (along with an English translation) are given below.

² *Origenis Philosophumena sive omnium haeresium refutatio e codice Parisino nunc primum edidit* Emmanuel Miller. Oxonii 1851.

2. Only in 1856, the Lithuanian orientalist D. Chwolsohn connected the accounts of the *Fihrist* (a Muslim text of the 10th century written in Arabic) concerning Babylonian baptists who referred to “al-Ḥasīḥ” as their founder, with the Christian reports of Elchasai and the Elkesaites.³
3. In 1970, A. Henrichs and L. Koenen reported the discovery and decipherment of a Greek Manichean miniature codex of the fourth or fifth century dealing with the life of the young Mani in a community of Babylonian baptists.⁴ In essential agreement with the *Fihrist* it is stated in this text that the baptists in question referred to “Alchasaioi” as their leader or founder (ἀρχηγός).

In 1912, the Dutch scholar Wilhelm Brandt published his book *Elchasai, ein Religionsstifter und sein Werk*. As yet this book has remained the sole monograph devoted to the subject of our study. This publication along with the discovery of the new sources can be regarded as a landmark in the history of research.

A. Before the Publication of *Refutation IV–X* (1851)

Before the re-discovery and the edition of *Ref IV–X*, Epiphanius’ *Panarion* was by far the most informative source. In addition, the study of Elchasai and the Elkesaites could be based on Origen’s brief report in Eusebius, *Hist. eccles.* VI 38, and on some later and likewise summary patristic reports. At the time, scholars were primarily concerned with establishing the relation between the Elkesaites or Elkesians and, respectively, the Essenes and the Ebionites.⁵ The occupation with this issue was caused by the fact that Epiphanius dwells upon Elxai’s connection with the Osseans (*Pan* 19; it was generally believed that these Osseans were identical, or at least closely related to the Essenes)⁶ and upon his influence on the Ebionites (*Pan* 30) before he deals quite briefly with the Elkesians (also called “Sampseans”, *Pan* 53).

³ See below, pp. 6f. In scholarly literature, the designations “baptist sects” or “baptist movement” are used to denote ancient religious sects (in the main Jewish and Christian sects resident in trans-Jordan and southern Babylonian areas) which set high value upon water rites (particularly on ritual ablutions) in such a way that these rites occupied the central place in their cult. For more elaborate definitions see J. Thomas, *Le mouvement baptiste en Palestine et Syrie* (1935), esp. p. 284; K. Rudolph, “Antike Baptisten” (1981), pp. 5f and 21f.

⁴ “Ein griechischer Mani-Codex (P. Colon. inv. nr. 4780)”, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 5, 1970, pp. 97–217.

⁵ Older studies on Elchasai and the Elkesaites are discussed by W. Brandt, *Elchasai*, 1912, pp. 155–165, and S. Wagner, *Die Essener in der wissenschaftlichen Diskussion*, 1960, pp. 185–189.

⁶ Epiphanius makes a clear distinction between the Essenes (in his view a Samaritan sect, reported in *Pan* 11) and the Osseans or Ossenes (in his view a Jewish sect, reported in *Pan* 19). However, in *Ancoratus* 12,9 (an earlier work by Epiphanius) the two preserved MSS read Ἑσσαιῶτες for Ὀσσαιῶτες and in *Pan* 19,5,1 and 30,3,2 an important MS (the

From Epiphanius' report (and from supposedly Essene features in the ps.-Clementine Homilies) K. A. CREDNER concluded that at the time of Trajan, trans-Jordan Essenes had been converted to Christianity by joining with heretical Ebionites. Credner argues that this fusion of Essenes and Ebionites was ordered by Elkeseans, who in his view formed a special class of Essenes, or that this had been the work of an individual Elkesean (*Beiträge zur Einleitung in die biblischen Schriften*, I, 1832. pp. 366ff).⁷

Credner's historical construction was modified by J. K. L. GIESELER. In his widely read *Lehrbuch der Kirchengeschichte* (vol. I, 1; 4th ed. 1844), Gieseler states that in speaking of "Osseans", Epiphanius referred to trans-Jordan Essenes who had become Christians as a result of their contacts with Ebionites. According to Gieseler, "Elkeseans" and "Sampseans" were designations of these Christianized Essenes (pp. 131-134).

The name "Elxai" is explained in different ways.⁸ Already J. J. Scaliger proposed that the name meant "the Essene" (*ἡ ἔσση*, ὁ ἑσσηνός). Scaliger supposed that the putative Arabic article was added because Elxai was regarded as the Essene *κατ' ἐξοχήν*.⁹ As we have noted above, Credner argues that the Elkeseans were a class of prominent Essenes. He states that their name meant "Sons of the Hidden Power" (*bny hyl ksy*) and, accordingly, that the name "Elxai" denoted the whole class of the Elkeseans rather than an individual member (*Beiträge*, I, p. 376 n.2). Gieseler proposes that originally *hyl ksy* was a designation of God's spirit who according to the belief of the Elkeseans and the Ebionites at various times had manifested himself in human bodies as the True Prophet. He alleges that the Elkeseans honoured this hidden power as their teacher (see *Pan* 53, 1, 2). In Gieseler's opinion, Epiphanius is therefore wrong in assuming that the teacher of the Elkeseans was a historical person (*Lehrbuch*, I, 1, p. 133 n.3).

codex *Marcianus*, see below, chapter III n.8) has ἑσσηνοί instead of ὁσσηνοί or ὁσσηνοί. Already C. Salmasius, *Plinianae exercitationes*, 1629, pp. 610f, refutes Epiphanius' distinction between Essenes and Osseans, just as the majority of nineteenth century scholars do. See A. Schliemann, *Die Clementinen*, 1844, p. 526 n.2. A. Ritschl, *Die Entstehung der altkatholischen Kirche*, 2nd ed. 1857, p. 221 n.1, speaks of "Hallucinationen seiner (Epiphanius) von Ketzerrass entzündeten Phantasie, welche auch in anderen Fällen häretische Doppelgänger sah."

⁷ With reference to Josephus, *De bello judaico*, II 150 (The Essenes "are divided, according to the duration of their discipline, into four grades") and Epiphanius' reports of the Osseans and the Sampseans or Elkeseans, Credner distinguishes the following classes or grades of Essenes: proselytes, Osseans, Sampseans, Elkeseans (pp. 367f).

⁸ Cf. Gieseler, *Lehrbuch*, pp. 132f n.9.

⁹ See the quotation of Scaliger by Dionysius Petavius in the *animadversiones* to his edition of the *Panarion*, 1622, 2nd ed. 1682, p. 37.

B. From the Publication of *Refutation* IV–X (1851) to the Studies by Brandt

The publication of Hippolytus' reports of the heresy of Alcibiades of Apamea (*Ref* IX 13–17; X 29) has led to more elaborate examinations. In these reports Hippolytus describes and refutes the ideas of Alcibiades, a religious propagandist coming from the Syrian city Apamea, who appeared in Rome at the time of Bishop Calixtus (217–222) or a little later. Hippolytus states that the essence of Alcibiades' message was the proclamation of a new way to obtain remission of sins. This preaching was based on a book that, according to Alcibiades, had been revealed by an angel. He explained that a righteous man, "Elchasai", had received this book, somewhere in Parthia.

The first study based on an examination of Hippolytus' reports is A. RITSCHL's essay "Ueber die Secte der Elkesaiten" (*Zeitschrift für die historische Theologie* 23, 1853, pp. 573–594). The Elkesaites are also treated at some length in the second edition of Ritschl's famous book *Die Entstehung der altkatholischen Kirche* (1857). In his essay on the Elkesaites, Ritschl does not, as one might expect, make a separate study of the new source. On the contrary, from the outset he tries to harmonize Hippolytus' reports with Epiphanius' accounts of Elxai and the Elkeseans and with Origen's report of the Elkesaite doctrine in Eusebius, *Hist. eccles.* VI 38. In Ritschl's opinion, the sect supposedly represented by Alcibiades held the same ideas as Origen's Elkesaites and Epiphanius' Elkeseans or Sampseans.¹⁰ It is Ritschl's intention to bring together and to discuss systematically all extant information about the sect of the Elkesaites (cf. "Ueber die Secte . . .", p. 575).

To a large extent, Ritschl's essay is a fresh attempt to determine the relations between the Elkesaites, the Essenes, and the Ebionites. He arrives at the conclusion that the Elkesaites as well as the Ebionites were Essene Judeo-Christians. The Elkesaites are to be distinguished from the larger group of Ebionites chiefly on account of their belief in a special revelation: the heavenly revelation recorded in the book of Elxai.¹¹ From the new source Ritschl infers that the revelatory book had a practical and disciplinary rather than a dogmatic meaning. Its essential message was a proclamation to the effect that Christian baptism for the remission of sins could be repeated in case believers had committed grievous sins. Ritschl draws a parallel between the new remission of sins revealed by the angel of the book and the revelations received by Hermas:

¹⁰ This opinion prevents Ritschl from perceiving that Hippolytus reports the activity and the teaching of a contemporary of his, Alcibiades of Apamea, rather than the activity and the teaching of Elxai (cf. Ritschl's statement in the opening sentence of his article on the Elkesaites).

¹¹ But note that according to Epiphanius (*Pan* 30, 17, 4; 53, 1, 3; cf. 19, 5, 4), the book was also used by Ebionites and other trans-Jordan sects.

also the latter revelations were paraenetical and disciplinary in content and meaning (*Die Entstehung*, pp. 236f and 243).

Since Ritschl argues that the special authority of the Elkesaites was an allegedly revelatory book (and, furthermore, because most aspects of the Elkesaite teachings are traced back by him to the supposedly Essene Judeo-Christian background of the sect) there is no room in his interpretation for a founder of the Elkesaite religion. Ritschl suggests that originally the name “Elxai” or “Hidden Power” (according to Epiphanius, *Pan* 19,2,2) belonged to the angel who was said to have delivered the heavenly message (see Hippolytus, *Ref* IX 13,1f. 4). Later the book was called “Elxai” (Ritschl refers to Epiphanius, *Pan* 30,17,4). The author states that we have here another analogy with the Shepherd (of Hermas): in both cases we are dealing with books called after the revealing angel (*Die Entstehung*, pp. 245f).

Ritschl believes that the accounts of our sources relating to the origin of the sect are wholly legendary. This does not only apply to the part played by Elxai but also to the connection of the sect’s origin with the time of Trajan.¹² Ritschl argues that the disciplinary message of the book presupposes a situation in the Church which at that time did not exist yet. It is Ritschl’s impression (“unsere subjektive Vermuthung”) that the book was written during the last decennia of the second century.

In a book of 1854 dealing with the origin and the content of the ps.-Clementine *Homilies* and *Recognitions* (*Die Homilien und Recognitionen des Clemens Romanus*), G. UHLHORN suggests that the book of Elxai formed the basis of the development of a gnostic type of Judeo-Christianity (pp. 391 ff). The notion of gnostic Judeo-Christianity was already used ten years earlier by A. Schliemann (*Die Clementinen*, 1844) to denote the reputed Ebionitism of the ps.-Clementine literature. Schliemann stated that Credner and others had been wrong in defining this type of Ebionitism as “Essene” Judeo-Christianity. In his view we are rather concerned with a “gnostic” form of Judeo-Christianity.

It must be observed here that at that time “gnosis” was a rather unspecific and vague term. It would seem that for Schliemann and Uhlhorn, “gnostic Judeo-Christianity” was more or less synonymous with “universalistic” or “syncretistic Judeo-Christianity”. While according to Schliemann the development of gnostic Ebionitism was a result of the gradual penetration of ancient-eastern ideas into Judaism even since the Exile (*Die Clementinen*, pp. 514ff and 530), Uhlhorn regards the book of Elxai (“das Elxaibuch”) as the fountain-head of gnostic forms of Judeo-Christianity (*Die Homilien und Recognitionen*, pp. 391 ff).

It will be clear that this view of the influence of the book is at variance with Ritschl’s interpretation. Uhlhorn argues that Ritschl is wrong on two related

¹² If the time of Trajan was really mentioned in the book, Ritschl argues, we are quite possibly concerned with a mythical date (he points out that other apocryphal apocalypses of the second century are likewise antedated, *Die Entstehung*, p. 246).

points: he exaggerates the disciplinary character of the book and, as a result, reduces its content and meaning; moreover, he is wrong in assuming that the book had been the special authority of just a small group of Judeo-Christians, the Elkesaites (pp. 394f).

More in line with Ritschl, Uhlhorn assumes that originally the names “Elxai” and “Iexai” (Epiphanius reports that the Elkesians or Sampseans also referred to a brother of Elxai, who was called “Iexai”, *Pan* 19,1,4 and 53,1,3) were titles of books rather than the names of historical persons (pp. 393f).¹³ From Epiphanius, Uhlhorn concludes that we should not think of the Elkesaites as a particular sect (a sect which can be distinguished from other gnostic Judeo-Christians). Uhlhorn states that the gnosis of the book had affected several then existing sections of Judeo-Christianity (p. 395).

In the doctrine of the book, Uhlhorn discerns Jewish, Christian, and “pagan-naturalistic” features. The baptism for the remission of sins is regarded by Uhlhorn as a mixture of Christian and pagan ingredients.¹⁴ When Epiphanius reports that Elxai did not live in accordance with the Law (see *Pan* 19,1,5) this means, according to Uhlhorn, that the book condemned burnt offerings and, consequently, that it rejected certain parts of the Old Testament. Uhlhorn finds that the christology of the book was inconsistent: on the one hand, it presented Christ as an angel of enormous proportions (see Hippolytus, *Ref* IX 13,2f; Epiphanius, *Pan* 19,4,1f; 30,17,6f; 53,1,9), on the other hand, Christ was believed to have manifested himself in many historical persons (see Hippolytus, *Ref* IX 14,1 and X 29,2; Epiphanius, *Pan* 53,1,8).

Finally, Uhlhorn argues that the doctrine of the book was closely related to that of the ps.-Clementine Homilies. In his opinion, the book (of) Elxai represented an earlier stage of development. Characteristic of the ps.-Clementine Homilies as compared with the book (of) Elxai is the further consolidation of the Christian element, and, accordingly, the reduction of pagan and Jewish features (pp. 398ff).

Essentially the same interpretation can be found in Uhlhorn’s article “Elkesaiten”, Herzog’s *Real-Encyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, 1st ed. vol. III, 1858, pp. 771–774 (2nd ed. vol. IV, 1879, pp. 184–186; 3rd ed. vol. V, 1898, pp. 314–316).

In the first volume of *Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus* (1856), D. CHWOLSOHN points out that in a passage of the Arabic *Kitâb al-Fihrist* (a bibliographic work

¹³ According to Uhlhorn, a similar misunderstanding underlies Epiphanius’ accounts of the worship of two female descendants of Elxai, Marthous and Marthana (see *Pan* 19,2,4f and 53,1,2.5f). Uhlhorn suggests that in reality “Mar-Thus” and “Mar-Thana” were the names of Syrian bishops or patriarchs (p. 394 n. 32).

¹⁴ Uhlhorn does not clearly distinguish the baptism for the remission of sins (which could be repeated just once; Hippolytus speaks of a “second baptism”, see *Ref* IX 12,26 and 15,1.3) and the self-immersions in running water (which in some cases had to be repeated many times, see *Ref* IX 16,1).

composed in the tenth century by the Muslim scholar al-Nadīm), *ʾlḥṣḥ* (al-Ḥasīḥ?) is mentioned as the head and founder of a sect of Babylonian *Mughtasilah* (“baptists”) or Šābians of the Marshlands. Chwolsohn suggests that this “al-Ḥasīḥ” is identical with the Elchasai of the Christian heresiologists, and, moreover, that the Babylonian baptist sect (which he identifies with the Mandeans) had directly developed from the sect supposedly founded by Elchasai (pp. 112–116).¹⁵ Chwolsohn calls attention to the fact that previous to his account of the *Mughtasilah* or Šābians of the Marshlands, al-Nadīm reports that Mani, the founder of Manicheism, had spent his youth in a community of *Mughtasilah* (*Die Ssabier*, I, pp. 123 ff).¹⁶

Since this publication by Chwolsohn, scholars are faced with the problem of determining the relation of the Babylonian baptists to what can be known from Christian sources about a sect of Elkesaites. Apart from that, Chwolsohn’s work has given rise to another interpretation of the teaching (the book, the sect) connected with the name “Elchasai”, viz. to the view that we are concerned with a specifically baptist type of teaching.¹⁷

Apparently H. EWALD was the first to advance the latter interpretation. In his *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, VII (2nd ed. 1859), Ewald gives as his opinion that al-Ḥasīḥ (“Elchasāih”) is the name of the real founder of the baptist community reported in the *Fihrist*. The essentially new idea of his teaching was the proclamation of baptism as the sole effective means of salvation and the best remedy against all kinds of physical and psychical illness (pp. 156 f). An interesting consequence from Chwolsohn’s identification of Elkesaites and Mandeans is that the Elkesaites have flourished during several centuries and that up to the present day remnants of the sect exist in Iraq. See Ewald, *ibid.*, p. 160.

E. RENAN offers a similar interpretation (*Histoire des origines du Christianisme*, V, 1877). The author begins by remarking that baptism was a common feature of all those Jewish and Judeo-Christian groups that tried to free themselves from the Jerusalem temple and its priests. Subsequently he observes that at the time of Trajan, and for the greater part due to the influence of Elkasai, this baptist “vogue” had redoubled. In Renan’s opinion, Elkasai was the most

¹⁵ Chwolsohn believes that Elchasai was of Persian descent (the North-east of Persia) and that he was an adherent of Zoroaster. In his opinion, this can be inferred from the tradition, reported in Hippolytus, *Ref* IX 13,1, that the book had been received ἀπὸ Σηρῶν τῆς Παρθίας (which he translates as: “aus Sera in Parthien”, *Die Ssabier*, I, p. 119).

¹⁶ Chwolsohn supposes that al-Nadīm’s account of Mani’s youth stems from a Manichean source (*Die Ssabier*, I, pp. 126 ff). The recently discovered Mani Codex gives support to this assumption.

¹⁷ For a definition of “baptist sects” see above, n. 3.

important representative of a widespread Jewish and Judeo-Christian baptist movement (pp. 454ff).

Renan doubts whether Elkasai had really been a Christian teacher. He regards Elkasai as a trans-Jordan Essene who most likely had spent some time in Babylonia "from where he pretended to have brought his book of revelations" (p. 455).¹⁸ The speculations on the frequent incarnations of Christ (see Hippolytus, *Ref* IX 14,1; X 29,2) are attributed by Renan to the disciples of Elkasai. He suggests that these speculations had been inspired by Buddhist ideas (pp. 457f).¹⁹

Following Epiphanius (see *Pan* 19,1,4), Renan assumes that Elkasai had written the book and that he presented it as manifesto of his allegedly divine mission. It is worth while to quote Renan's judgment of the preserved fragments of the book ("cet écrit bizarre"): "Rien ne s'y élève au-dessus du ton d'un mystificateur vulgaire, qui veut faire fortune avec de prétendues formules d'expiation et de ridicules momeries. Formules magiques, composées de phrases syriaques lues à rebours,²⁰ puériles prescriptions sur les jours fastes et néfastes, folle médecine d'exorcismes et de sortilèges, recettes contre les démons et les chiens, prédications astrologiques, voilà l'Évangile d'Elkasai" (pp. 456f).

Ten years earlier the extant evidence for Elchasai and the Elkesaites was for the first time brought together by A. HILGENFELD ("Elxai libri fragmenta" in: *Novum Testamentum extra canonem receptum*, III, 1867, 2nd ed. 1881, pp. 229–240). The texts are presented in the original language (apart from the account in al-Nadīm's *Fihrist* for which Hilgenfeld adopts Chwolsohn's German translation). For more than a century this collection of sources has served as an "instrument de travail" to students engaged in this field of research. This does not alter the fact that Hilgenfeld's work has some obvious disadvantages. This applies first of all to his method of presenting the texts: Hilgenfeld does not present the relevant reports in the order in which they occur in the sources but according to a systematic principle of arrangement (which, however, is not explicated). Moreover, the original texts are interlarded with brief comments by Hilgenfeld.²¹ As a result, the student of the sources finds himself constantly confronted with Hilgenfeld's interpretation.

¹⁸ According to Renan, the baptist cult had originated from southern Babylonia (p. 457).

¹⁹ P. 458: "Ces rêves font penser aux avatars de Vischnou et aux vies successives de Krichna." Apparently, Renan assumes that Elkasai himself had adopted a more primitive Ebionite christology (p. 457: "Les ébionites furent les seuls chrétiens avec lesquels il eut des rapports; car sa christologie est celle d'Ebion").

²⁰ The reference is to the Aramaic anagram quoted in Epiphanius, *Pan* 19,4,3.

²¹ For instance, Hilgenfeld explains that Hippolytus quotes Elxai (cf. pp. 233 and 235), while it is equally plausible, to say the least, that he quotes Alcibiades. For Hilgenfeld's views of the traditions on Elxai and the Elchasaites see further his *Die Ketzergeschichte des Urchristentums*, 1884 repr. 1966, p. 633 (index) and particularly his *Judentum und Judenthum*, 1886 repr. 1966, pp. 103ff.

At the turn of the century, Uhlhorn's interpretation of the traditions about Elchasai seems to have found general acceptance in encyclopedias and manuals of Church history and Early-Christian literature.²² As a rule, the expression "gnostic Judeo-Christianity" is used to denote the character of the Elkesaite doctrine ("gnostic" still in the sense of "syncretistic"). It is explained that this doctrine was a mixture of Jewish, Christian, and pagan elements. Most authors assume that our sources are wrong when they refer to "Elchasai" as a historical person and the founder of a sect. They state that Elkesaite ideas (or: the ideas of the book) permeated several trans-Jordan sects.²³ It is commonly believed that Elkesaite ideas occur in ps.-Clementine literature.²⁴

The Elkesaite doctrine and the book of revelations are also dealt with in A. HARNACK's great works on the History of Dogma and on Ancient Christian Literature. But apart from some suggestions on minor points,²⁵ Harnack's views of the subject are not new. In the line of Schliemann and Uhlhorn, he distinguishes "common" and "gnostic" (or "syncretistic") types of Judeo-Christianity. Although the Elkesaites were a section of the syncretistic Judeo-Christians, their ideas affected and eventually reformed all gnostic Judeo-Christian groups (*Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, I, 1, 1893, p. 207; *Dogmengeschichte*, I, 4th ed. 1909, pp. 326f). Harnack assumes that the allegedly revelatory book purported to be a supplement to the Christian Gospel (*Dogmengeschichte*, I, 1886, p. 231; 4th ed. 1909, p. 327). Obviously this is a conclusion drawn from Epiphanius' report that Christ was said to have appeared to the author of the book (*Pan* 19, 4, 1f; 30, 17, 6f; but see also 19, 3, 4).

Harnack finds several points of agreement between the gnostic type of Judeo-Christianity, in particular the Elkesaite doctrine, and the Islam. From the *Fihrist* he concludes that the Elkesaite sect existed up to the time of Muhammed in areas

²² Cf. G. S[almon], "Elkesai" in: *A Dictionary of Christian Biography, Literature, Sects and Doctrines*, V, 1880, pp. 95–98; [X. Ph.] Funk, "Elkesaiten" in: *Wetzer und Welte's Kirchenlexikon*, IV, 2nd ed. 1886, cols. 404–407; O. Bardenhewer, *Geschichte der altkirchlichen Literatur*, I, 1902, pp. 305f; J. H. Kurtz, *Lehrbuch der Kirchengeschichte*, I, 14th ed. 1906 (revised by N. Bonwetsch), pp. 89f; L. Duchesne, *Histoire ancienne de l'Eglise*, 3rd ed. 1907, pp. 129–132; G. Barcille, "Elcésaites" in: *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, IV/2, 1910, cols. 2233–2239.

²³ See, e.g., Bardenhewer, p. 350: "Die Elkesaiten, wohl weniger eine geschlossene Sekte, als vielmehr eine durch verschiedene judaistische Parteien sich hindurchziehende Fraktion, bekannten sich zu einem wunderlichen Gemisch von Judentum, Christentum und Heidentum."

²⁴ G. S[almon], *ibid.*, p. 95, goes so far as to regard the ps.-Clementine writings as a fourth source of information about the book of Elkesai (in addition to Hippolytus, Origen's report in Eusebius, and Epiphanius).

²⁵ In *Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, II, pp. 266f n.2, Harnack makes the gratuitous observation that in speaking of a book written at the time of Trajan and proclaiming a new remission of sins, Alcibiades referred to one of the sources of the Shepherd of Hermas (the "booklet" mentioned in the second vision).

not far from Muhammed's places of abode. Harnack admits that he cannot make out if Muhammed had been familiar with the Elkesaite religion, but what matters, he argues, is that Muhammed's religion is not a new creation when it is compared with the Elkesaite form of religion (*Dogmengeschichte*, II, 4th ed. 1909, pp. 535ff; Harnack cites here an unpublished paper read by himself as early as 1877).

Before we turn to the works of Brandt, two quite dissimilar books must briefly be mentioned because they may throw some fresh light upon aspects of our study: W. Bousset's *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis* (1907 repr. 1973), a specimen of history of religions research, and A. Schmidtke's source-critical study *Neue Fragmente und Untersuchungen zu den judenchristlichen Evangelien* (1911).

BOUSSET finds in the book "Elxai" (cf. pp. 155f: "Elxai" seems to have been the name of a book of revelations), just as in the basic document of the ps.-Clementine *Homilies* and *Recognitions*, traces of contact with and polemic against the Persian religion.²⁶ In his view, the report that Elxai had received the mysterious book of revelations from the Seres in Parthia and that he had transmitted it to someone called "Sobiai" (see Hippolytus, *Ref IX* 13,1f and below, p. 61) really means that Iranian influences underlie the religious system of Elxai, and, more generally, that the Persian religion had influenced the baptist sects (Șâbians, *Sobiai*) resident in areas between the Euphrates and the Tigris, on the one side, and the river Jordan, on the other side (pp. 158f).²⁷

In connection with his study of Judeo-Christian gospel materials, SCHMIDTKE examines critically Epiphanius' use of sources.²⁸ Schmidtke remarks that the first sketch of Epiphanius' voluminous anti-heretic work, the *Panarion*, was made some five years before its completion in c. 378. He assumes that these five years were used by Epiphanius to fill up gaps with fresh reports and to insert new comments (pp. 96ff). In this way Schmidtke tries to account for the many obvious inconsistencies in Epiphanius' work.

Of special interest is his examination of Epiphanius' report of the Ebionites (*Pan* 30), more particularly of Epiphanius' combination of supposedly Ebionite and Elkesaite features. Schmidtke argues that at an early stage of the redaction of the *Panarion*, Epiphanius just surmised that Elxai had influenced the

²⁶ Bousset points in particular to the "dualistic antagonism" of fire and water in the words quoted by Epiphanius in *Pan* 19,3,7 and to the belief in two cosmic principles attributed by al-Nadīm to the *Mughtasilah* and by implication to their founder, Elchasai (*Hauptprobleme*, pp. 156ff).

²⁷ Bousset concludes from Hippolytus, *Ref IX* 15, that the Elchasaites knew a baptism of initiation along with remedial immersions (pp. 282 and 284). But in the course of his argument these therapeutical immersions are equated with daily lustrations and ritual purifications (cf. pp. 283 and 285f).

²⁸ The foundation for this critical approach to Epiphanius was laid by R.A. Lipsius, *Zur Quellenkritik des Epiphanius*, 1865.

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