

## Information on Genna Marias

Epiphanius writes the following about the Gnostics, and this is our only source for the contents (*Panarion*, 26.12.1 - 26.12.4)

12:1 Indeed, they have ventured countless other forgeries. They say that one book is a 'Birth of Mary,' and they palm some horrid, baneful things off in it and say that they get them from it.

12:2 On its authority they say that Zacharias was killed in the temple because he had seen a vision, and when he wanted to reveal the vision his mouth was stopped from fright. For at the hour of incense, while he was burning it, he saw a man standing there, they say, with the form of an ass.

12:3 And when he had come out and wanted to say 'Woe to you, whom are you worshipping?' the person he had seen inside in the temple stopped his mouth so that he could not speak. But when his mouth was opened so that he could speak, then he revealed it to them and they killed him. And that, they say, is how Zacharias died.

12:4 This, they say, is why the priest was ordered to wear bells by the lawgiver himself.<sup>69</sup> Whenever he went in to officiate, the object of his worship would hear them jangle and hide, so that no one would spy the imaginary face of his form.

Henri-Charles Puech, as revised by Beate Blatz, writes: "This section has been specially examined by A. Berendts. It may be enough to note: that the identification of the Zacharias here in question with the father of John the Baptist occurs also in the Protevangelium of James 23f. and in Origen (*Comm. ser. 25 in Mt.*); that the semblance ascribed to the figure who appeared to Zacharias in the Temple in the form of an ass (or with an ass's head?) conforms not only with the conception formed of the God of the Jews by certain pagan circles and by the polemic of antiquity, but also with a conception of the same God, or of the planetary archon identified with him, which was common among the 'Gnostics', the Ophites, and other sectaries (Origen, *c. Cels.* VI 30 ... VI 37 ... Apocryphon of John ... [etc.]); and more generally that if the 'Genna' thereby manifests a violent hostility towards Judaism, the title of the work appears to confirm the interest taken by the Gnostics in Mary the mother of Jesus." (*New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 1, p. 396)

A. Mayer has suggested a date in the mid-second century. Others place it, broadly, in the second century.