In the Cologne Mani Codex (C.M.C.) a certain Baraies, a pupil of Mani himself, quotes one of the many apocryphal writings that were current among the Jewish Christian Baptists, among whom Mani was reared:

In the same way his (Adam's) son Sethel has written the following in his Apocalypse: I opened my eyes and saw before me an angel whose radiance I could not describe: for he was all lightning. He said to me: ... (3 lines lost).

When I heard that, my heart rejoiced, my mind was transformed and I became like one of the greatest angels (εγενήμενος δες εις των μεγίστων ἄγγελων).

50, 8-51, 6, Koenen-Römer, Der Kölner Mani-Kodex 32-33.

We have not the slightest reason to suppose that the Apocalypse of Seth did not exist at that time (the third century A.D.), that it was not used by the Jewish Christians and was not Jewish in origin.

C.R.A. Morray-Jones has recently argued that in the apocalyptic-Merkabah tradition the ascent into heaven and the vision of the kabod involves a transformation of the visionary into an angelic or supralingular likeness of that Glory or divine Image. As an example, he quotes the esoteric writing 3 Enoch, where Enoch's transformation into the angel Metatron or the Lesser YHWH is described:

When the Holy One, blessed be He, took me to serve the Throne of Glory, the wheels of the Merkabah and all the needs of the Shekinah, at once my flesh turned to flame, my sinews to blazing fire, my bones to juniper coals, my eyelashes to lightning flashes, my eyeballs to fiery torches, the hairs of my head to hot flames, all my limbs to wings of burning fire, and the substance of my body to blazing fire. (15:1f.)

What the esoteric Jew attributes to Enoch, the author of the Apocalypse of Seth attributes to the third son of Adam. This new evidence again shows how old these esoteric Jewish traditions are and how great
their impact was on Jewish and Gentile Christianity from the very beginning.

In origin, however, this concept of transformation through vision is Hellenic and Greek and mysteriosophic. In the Homeric Hymn to Demeter the initiated who has beheld the mysteries of Mother and Daughter is said to participate in eternal life: “Blessed is he among men on earth, who has beheld this”. (480)

The concept was imported into the Hermetic tradition in Alexandria: “He can become blessed, because he has seen Him”. (Corpus Hermeticum fr. 6:18, Festugière III, 39) “The soul which has beheld the beauty of the Good is deified by this vision, but that happens only when man is no longer in the body”. (Corpus Hermeticum X, 6, Festugière 1, 116)

The ascent to heaven and the transformation into one of the highest angels, who stand before God and see God, leads to theopoiësis according to the Poimandres:

And then, stripped of the instincts induced by the planets of the cosmic frame, the mystic enters the Ogdoad, the heaven of the fixed stars, having come to himself and nothing but himself; and with the heavenly beings there he sings hymns in praise of the Father. The angels that are present in the Ogdoad rejoice together with him in his coming. He becomes equal to his companions (ὁμοιωθεὶς τοῖς θεοῦσιν) and also listens to certain angelic Powers that are beyond the Ogdoad and hymn God with sweet voices. Consequently in due course they rise to the Father and offer themselves to these Powers. Having become Powers themselves, they live in God (καὶ δυνάμεις γενόμενοι ἐν Θεῷ γίνονται).

This is the final good, the consummation of the highest grade of initiation for those who have been granted Gnosis: to be made god.

Poimandres 26, Festugière I, 16;
cf. translation Copenhaver, Hermetica 16

In Alexandria at a very early date this concept of transformation was integrated into Jewish esoteric tradition. According to Ezekiel the Dramatist, the oldest witness of the Merkabah tradition (±200 B.C.E.) Moses saw in a dream the kabod, here called Phōs (Man), on the divine throne and was ordered to seat himself upon that throne. As a result of his vision he is transformed and becomes a god himself.

It has been a great surprise that Mani, like some other founders of a religion, was a Jewish boy. Judaism at that time, however, was pluri-form and variegated: the shade of Jewish Christianity, against which Mani reacted and to which he was indebted, was not only apocalyptic, but also visionary and esoteric, like Merkabah Gnosticism: it dared to