DİNİ VE FELSEFÎ METİNLER

YİRMİBİRİNCİ YÜZYILDA YENİDEN OKUMA, ANLAMA VE ALGILAMA

RELIGIOUS AND PHILOSOPHICAL TEXTS:

RE-READING, UNDERSTANDING AND COMPREHENDING THEM IN THE 21st CENTURY

CİLT - 1
DİNİ VE FELSEFî METİNLER
YİRMİBİRİNCİ YÜZYILDA YENİDEN OKUMA,
ANLAMA VE ALGILAMA SEMPÓZYUMU
Bildiri Kitabı, Cilt: 1

Sultanbeyli Belediyesi
Kültür ve Sosyal İşler Müdürlüğü
Kültür Yayın No: 8

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İBRAHİM AKDAĞ

ISBN:
978-605-89744-4-9

BASKI
Ege Basım
Esatpaşa Mh. Ziyapaşa Cd. No:4
Ege Plaza Ataşehir/İSTANBUL
Tel: 0216 472 84 01
www.egebasim.com.tr

Nisan 2012
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Sacred Text and Esoteric Praxis in Sabian Mandaean Religion

Brikhah S. NASORAIA

The Sabian Mandaean Religion and its ancient sacred scriptures present an esoteric Gnostic tradition that preserves a unique mysticism. Thus, a pure monotheistic religion began with the beginning of history.¹

Abstract

Mandaeism is known as the last surviving Gnostic religion from Antiquity. Therefore, the Mandaeans are an insular community who consider themselves as the enlightened guardians of perfect Truth (Kušţa). They deliberately separate themselves from others in order to maintain their lineage and the purity of their connection to the Worlds of Light. According to esoteric traditions of praxis, elite Mandaeans receive their revelations directly from the divine wisdom of the Lightworld Beings and Forces (i.e., Naşirutha d-Malkia u-‘Uthria), without the need of a prophetic mediator. Therefore, they do not believe in an earthly saviour. Rather, they derive their insight through means of self-knowledge – Manda d-Hiia (Knowledge/Gnosis of Life) being the main source of their ‘spiritual aspiration’ and ‘power healing.’

The Mandaeans see themselves as directly linked to Adam, the first master/teacher/prophet. In particular, this is in reference to Adam as the harbinger of the true path of enlightenment/knowledge (manda), but also the disseminator of the divine truth (Kušţa). However, in accordance with the deeper and more secret teachings of the Mandaean Naşoraean, Mandaeans rely primarily on their own sacred connection to the Lightworlds/Worlds of Light (Almia d-Nhura i.e., heavens), from whence they derive their hidden knowledge (manda). The deeper level of their tradition is found in the relationship with Naşirutha (divine wisdom) as the guiding force for all Mandaeans.

According to their esoteric and mystical heritage Mandaeans believe that the story of their religion does not begin in or from the earthly life. Rather, it is the story of every single aspect of existence in the whole universe. The Mandaean creation story ‘begins with no beginning.’ This is because the Mandaeans believe that God has no begin-

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ning. For Mandaeans, God is typically referred to as Hiia/Hiia Rabia (the Great Living One[s]), also described as the Great Life. This description refers to the ‘First Divine attribute of God.’ From Hiia (God) emanated Life (Hiia) (hiia d-hun mn hiia).

This Paper aims to provide an avenue for understanding not only the mysteries of the Sabian Mandaean religion, but also the Naṣoraean tradition and the hidden teachings within the larger frame of Mandaeism. Furthermore, this study will offer an introduction to the esoteric and mystical concepts related to the Mandaean holy texts, which are essential for the interpretation of Mandaean symbolism and theology. Through the study of Mandaeans and their literature scholars will benefit potentially from further understanding the unique Mandaean and Naṣoraean living tradition. In the most recent diaspora, Mandaeans are being severely challenged to maintain their identity and promote their way of life. Many are also still facing imminent danger in continued trouble spots, especially in the Middle East.

Introduction

The Sabian Mandaean Religion retains sacred scriptures, which reveal an ancient esoteric tradition centred on a unique Gnostic perspective. The Sabian Mandaeans are also the harbingers of a pure monotheistic religion that began in an unknown time.2

The Mandaeans see themselves as healers of the “Worlds and Generations” (Almia u-Daria), and practitioners of the religion of Mind (Mana), Light (Nhura), Truth (Kuṣṭā), Love (Rahma/Ruhma) and Enlightenment or Knowledge (Mana).3

Literally, manda; γνώσις means ‘knowledge.’ From it derived the adjective mandaia (the Mandaeans) means ‘holder of knowledge’ or ‘knower’ or ‘enlightened one,’”

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Mandaia is the one who knows and worships the “One God.” Mandaeans understand manda as a kind of deep spiritual Knowledge that reveals truth, experienced directly and internally, and viewed as a sacred knowledge sought since the earliest human existence. Thus, Mandaeans are Gnostics. That is to say, they believe in spiritual knowledge or enlightenment. Mandaeism falls within the main stream of ancient Gnosticisms. Its characteristics had formed many Centuries before Christianity. However, the roots of this religion go back deep in the ancient civilisations, especially in Mesopotamia.


6 Ibid., esp. chapter 4 (pp. 80-134). Recently, Khazaal Al-Majidi has proved that “the roots of the ancient Sabianism lie concealed in the Sumerian religion, but its beginning started with the inner development and growth of the Sumerians under the umbrella of the new doctrines of the Akkadians and Babylonians.” K. Al-Majidi, Judoor Al-deianah Al-mandaeah, Baghdad, 1997, p. 4. Furthermore, Al-Majidi focuses on the rituals and ceremonies to highlight the connection between the Sumerian religion and the Mandaean religion, more than on the theology, beliefs and mythologies. Ibid., p. 32. Very recently, Issam Al-Zuhairy has built most of his doctoral thesis on studying the comparisons and parallels between the ancient Mesopotamian beliefs and rituals and those of the Sabian Mandaean religion. He concludes that:

The conclusion we have thus arrived at is that the roots of the Mandaean religion lie in Mesopotamia and that their religious concepts and rituals have survived from very ancient times, also that much was actually inherited from the Sumerians. Particularly the idea of the separation of heaven from earth, with heaven as the Father and earth as the Mother. This idea actually became the core of the Mandaean religion. The Mandaean creation story is actually founded on this idea, as are all the instructions and rituals, i.e. baptism, mar-
Sabian Mandaeism is known as the last surviving Gnostic religion from Antiquity. Sabian Mandaean teachings is perhaps an important link between pre-Christian and post-Christian era. The Sabian Mandaeans are an insular community who consider themselves as the enlightened guardians of perfect saving Truth (Kuṣṭa). They deliberately separate themselves from others in order to maintain their ancestry and the purity of their connection to higher realms of existence which they call “Worlds of Light” or the “Lightworld”. Accordingly, elite Sabian Mandaeans continually receive powerful insights directly from the divine great wisdom of God and the “Lightworld-Beings” and “Forces” (i.e., Naṣirutha d-Hiia u-Malkia u-ʿUthria). In addition to the guidance of the Great Teachers (sometimes called prophets and or messengers, in the case of John the Baptist), however, the connection is retained in a special way in Mandaeism; that is, without the need of earthly mediator. The Sabian Mandaeans do not believe in an earthly “Redeemer” or “Messiah” (like in Christianity and Judaism), instead they derive their wisdom by gaining access to the sacred or higher self. In the Mandaean religion this is referred to as Manda d-Hiia (Knowledge/Gnosis of Life). This deep and sacred form of knowing remains the main source of the Mandaean spiritual and healing power.

The Sabian Mandaeans believe they possess a direct link to Adam who is considered by them to be the first teacher and “Great Master”. Adam is also tradition-
ally known as the first prophet or earthly “Messenger of Light” in Mandaean scripture. Adam brings the true path of enlightenment and knowledge (manda) and is also the disseminator of the divine saving truth (Kašṭa). There is a deeper and more secret teaching within the Mandaean religion known as the teachings of Našoraeans who strongly promote and endorse the inherent connection with the divine. In their view Šabian Mandaeans should rely primarily on their own sacred connection to the World of Light (Almia d-Nhura i.e., heavens), the place where they derive their hidden knowledge (manda). The Našoraeans maintain a close relationship with Naširutha (divine wisdom) as the guiding force for all Šabian Mandaeans. Naširutha is considered a deeper aspect of manda.¹¹

According to the Mandaean sacred texts the story of the Mandaean religion does not begin with the earthly life. The Mandaean cosmogony is rather more wholistic in that it considers the story of creation to involve every single aspect of existence in the whole universe. The Mandaean creation story ‘begins with no beginning.’ This is because the Šabian Mandaeans believe that God has no beginning. For Šabian Mandaeans, God is typically referred to as Hiia/Hiia Rabia (The Great Living One), also described Him as the Great Life. This description refers to the ‘First Divine attribute of God.’ hiia d-hun mn hiia (Life (hiia) created or emanated or proceeded from Hiia (God) or From Hiia (God) created or emanated Life).¹²

This paper aims to provide an avenue for understanding the mysteries of the Mandaean religion as well as the Našoraean tradition and the hidden teachings within the larger frame of Mandaean religion. Moreover, this study will offer an introduction to some of the key esoteric and mystical concepts related to the Mandaean holy texts which are essential for the interpretation of Mandaean symbolism and theology. This work may also provide assistance to better understanding the inner workings of the Mandaean and Našoraean living tradition.

Some attention needs also be paid to the most recent diaspora where Šabian Mandaeans are being severely challenged to maintain their identity and promote their way of life. In an earlier diaspora, the Šabian Mandaeans were forced to migrate from Jerusalem and Jordan Valley to Mesopotamia in order to reestablish themselves. The survival of the Šabian Mandaean community in the current diaspora remains largely in question. This concern is a great challenge for the Šabian Mandaean community leaders who are striving to safeguard the Mandaeans and to preserve their

¹¹ See above and note ns. 3-5.
¹² This important sentence appears frequently in the Mandaean sacred scriptures. For example see Qulasta, translated by E. S. Drower, The Canonical Prayerbook of the Mandaeans (hereafter CP), Leiden, 1959, Nos. 8, 9, 34, 43, 45, 71, 77.
religion as well as their unique tradition and culture. Most Sabian Mandaeans today live away from their original homelands, i.e., Iraq and Iran. The majority of the Sabian Mandaean population resides in Western Europe, followed by Australia, America, Canada and New Zealand. Today, approximately 10,000 Mandaeans remain in poor conditions in countries like Syria and Jordan, where they have sought asylum. Many are also still facing imminent danger in continued trouble spots, especially in the Middle East. Sabian Mandaeans have been compelled to flee from their homeland and have become further dislocated from the core of the Mandaean culture. The Sabian Mandaean tradition is at risk of being lost to time as Sabian Mandaeans are dispersed throughout the world, living in isolated communities. Persecution of the Sabian Mandaean people and the break-up of their family community are detrimental to the survival of the Mandaean society. The preservation of the ancient Sabian Mandaean esoteric knowledge, wisdom and mystical tradition is one of the aims of the present work, in particular with regard to its importance for the present and future generations of Sabian Mandaeans.

**The Mandaean Sabians**

The Sabians have been mentioned in the Qur’an (as a monotheistic people) among the other monotheistic religious groups, in three places (al-Baqarat: 62, al-Ma’dah: 69 and al-Haj: 17), as the following:

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13 See EMC, p. 27 n. 16. The Mandaeans recorded the early persecution and the historical migration of their nation from Jordan Valley and Jerusalem through the Euphrates river and Harran to Mesopotamia in the first Century C.E. see the scroll of HG; MII. Nowadays they return again (temporary) to the same areas, where they lived before, not to stay but to migrate again to the unknown lands.

14 See DQRDK, pp. 4-6 and ns. 5-12; H. Saed, (= Nasoraia) “A Call to Manda,” in Mandaean Thinker 5, 1996, pp. 3, 18.

15 See our discussion and n. 87, below. The Mandaean persecution is not very well documented. However, there are many important reports from the UNHCR and Human Right groups. See also Nasoraia, “The Mandaeans: Past, Present and Future,” Introduction to Mandaism, One Day Seminar, 25 September, 2009 (forthcoming 2012); also Nasoraia, “Mandaean Diaspora,” a presentation to Service for the Treatment And Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS) at the Carramar Office, Sydney, October 2009 (forthcoming). See also S. Alsohairy, “B-šumainhun d-haiia rabbī – Im Namen des erhabenen Lendigen: Die Bedeutung von Rudolf Macuchs Forschungen fur die Mandäer im Irak,” in Und das Leben ist siegreich! And Life is Victorious: Mandaische und samaritanische Literatur Mandaean and Samaritan Literatures (Mandaistiche Forschungen, 1) (ed.) Voigt, Wiesbaden.

Inna allatheena amanow waallatheena hadow waalnnasara waalssabieena man amana biAllahi waalyawmi alakhiri waAAamila salihan falahum ajruhum AAinda rabbihim wala khawfun AAalayhim wala hum yahzanaana

2:62 Those who believe (in the Qur’an!), and those who follow the Jewish (scripts!), and the Christians and the Šabians,- any who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord; on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.

Inna allatheena amanow waallatheena hadow waalssabioona waalnnasara man amana biAllahi waalyawmi alakhiri waAAamila salihan fala khawfun AAalayhim wala hum yahzanaana

5:69 Those who believe (in the Qur’an!), those who follow the Jewish (scripts!), and the Šabians, Christians,- any who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and work righteousness,- on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.

The reference of the Šabians in these verses refers, with no doubt, to a special monotheistic religion, whose followers (i.e. the Šabians) are very well known in the Arab regions, especially Arabia. In addition, the verses consider the Šabian religion as an equal religion to the other monotheistic religions like Judaism and Christianity. For Šabians came before (in al-Ma’dah: 69 and al-Haj: 17) and after the Christians (in al-Baqarah: 62).
The Šabians mentioned in the Qur’an are the same people as the Mandaean, who are in fact, one of the earliest monotheists (and true believers in one God). In later Islamic sources another group of ancient people by the name of Harranians (who lived mainly in Harran, south of Turkey) were confused with the Mandaean, and this is because they adopted the designation Šabian from the time of Al-Ma’mun. The difficult task has been to distinguish the two groups and not until recently has there been sufficient scholarly evidence to make a case for the difference between Šabian Harranians and the Šabian Mandaean. However, at the same time, I believe that some Šabian Harranians were actually Šabian Mandaean who lived in Harran (and many other places including both al-Jazirats, Kutha, Mosul and also south of Iraq/ southwest of Iran), who were likewise widely known and successful in the Islamic court and capital of Baghdad. The two groups could not be easily distinguished by dress, as they both wore white (and long beards and hair), but they were clearly separated by their diet, philosophy, and baptismal and funerary rites.

The term “Šabians” – (in Arabic called sabi’un or sabi’at or, in some locale Iraqi dialects as, Subba. This is to refer to the frequent purification and immersing of with (the colour of) the living water (أَيُّ التَّمْحِيم بِصِبَاغَةِ اللَّهِ الْحَيِّ / الصَّبِيحُ والْأَرْتَمْسَس بِصِبَاغَةِ النَّارِ الْحَيِّ.)


19 In Qur’an, we read in 2:138 “صِبَاغَةَ اللَّهِ الْحَيِّ وَمن أَحْسَن مِنِ اللهِ صِبَاغَةً وَنَحْنَ لَهُ عَابِدُونَ” The Muslim theologians and Mofassirin (Interpreters, who analyse and explain the Qur’an) explain that the word ghyat (ةِسَبَبغة) means here either “Islam” or “the Religion of Allah (دين الله) and Nature (الـفِيْض).” The well known linguistic Arabic, Semitic and Islamic Studies, Prof. Dr.
another name for the Mandaeans, usually used by outsiders (especially in Islam), and not a common self-designated name. It is derived from the Aramaic-Mandaic verb ‘SBA’ meaning “to baptize” “to dip” “to immerse [in water].”

Thus, Sabians are the Baptizers, that means the ones who baptize themselves with the name of One God and with His bless holy ‘Water of Hiia,’ the Living One, i.e. God. This is matched with another term by which the Mandaeans are known to outsiders, mughtasilah, designating those who wash or cleanse or baptize themselves in water. However, the term “Sabians” is often confused with a similar word in Arabic, sabi’un (plural of sabi’)

Khalid Ismaeel Ali, in his most recent paper “Musahamat al-Śabi’at al-Manda’a’in fi Asoor al-Nahdhat al-Arabiat, (presented to the Symposium: "مساحات الصيانة المندائية في عصور المهلههة العربية" (البناية: "المشتركات الفكرية بين الصيانة المندائية والأديان السماوية الأخرى") Amman, 16.11.2011, summarizes the traditional Muslim explanations on this verse:

In addition, he continues to connect that with his important linguistic analyses for the words sba’a, sabi’in, sgagh, sghihin, sgaghath/saghath (Sabian, sabagh, sabaghit, sabagh/sgaghit) which he states the following:

See also more details in ns. 35 and 36, below.

See MD, SBA; MII, ch.1; MSM, pp. 51-6.

20 Masbūta d-Hiia (the baptism of the Living One/Life, i.e. God). It is a Very common term in the Sabian Mandaeans Holy Book, Sidra d-Adam Ginza Rba (the Scripture/Book of Adam, the Great Trouser, Arabic: (الصحف الأولي لآدم كتاب آدم العظام). Ginza Rba (GR) is divided into Ginza Yamina, (hereafter GY) combined with Ginza Smala, (hereafter GS) and cited by Petermann, H, as Thesaurus sive Liber Magnus, vulgo ‘Liber Adam’ appellatus, tom. 1, 2, Leipzig, 1867, tr. M. Lidzbarski, Ginza Der Schatz oder das grosse Buch der Mandäer übersetzt und erklärt (hereafter Ginza), Göttingen, 1925.

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\(\text{sabii}^{23}\), which means – (according to some Arabic traditional dictionaries composed not in the very early Islamic periods) –, “to change” or “to convert,” often used in the context of “changing one’s religion.”\(^{23}\) In this sense the term carried a negative association. There are two verbal roots linked with this word. The first is \(\text{saba’a}^{23}\) (“to change” “to convert” “to return”). The second verbal root is \(\text{saba}^{24}\) (“to incline” or “turn over”) used by Arabs for a man who had left his religion. May be in this way, the pagan Arabs similarly called Muhammad a \(\text{sabi}^{24}\) “one who changed his religion.”\(^{24}\) That is to say, “the one who became a \(\text{Sabian}^{24}\)” or “the one whose religion became like the \(\text{Sabian},^{24}\) who accept and worship only One God, without (respect to) any physical mediator(s), like idols.”

The negative connotations of the term was reintroduced in the statements of later Muslim scholars as generally designation “pagans and idolaters,” in particular to define those who had “changed their religion for another or turned form the religion of prophets to false religion.” As such, the Muslims of this later period called all non Muslims, with the exception of Jews and Christians as \(\text{Sabians}^{25}\) but this inclination was chiefly meant for the \(\text{Sabians}^{25}\) of Harran or the Harranians in Iraq.\(^{25}\)

There are great religious and cultural differences between the \(\text{Sabians}^{25}\) of Harran (who lived in north of Mesopotamia) and the original monotheistic \(\text{Sabians},^{25}\) the \(\text{Sabians of the Bata’ih, al-Mughtasilah,^{26}}\) the Mandaens (who lived in the middle and the south of Mesopotamia, close to the Arabs).\(^{27}\) Some Muslim theologians noticed these differences, for example, we read Ibn al-Qifti recording in his famous extensive book, \(\text{Tarihi al-Hukama’;\}^{28}\) the following:

\[\text{ان ابا حنيفة وصاحبية ابا بوسف ومحمدا قد اختلفوا في نكاح الصابئة واكل دبائحهم فحرمهم أبو حنيفة وحللهما صاحباه فقال أصحابهم ان ليس بخلاف على الحقيقة انا هو اختلف في الفنوى لأن ابا حنيفة واحلهما صاحباه cán لا يختلف على الحقيقة انا هو اختلف في الفنوى لأن ابا حنيفة ستل عن الصابئة الحرانيين وهم معروفون بعبادة الكواكب فاجرهم مجزر ابودة السلاف على تحريم\]

\(^{23}\) See (\text{\textit{saba}}^{23}) \(\text{سـبأ}^{23}\) in the following traditional Arabic dictionaries: al-Jawhari, \text{Taj al-Lughat} \(\text{وـشـأـه}^{23}\) \(\text{الـأرـبـاـيـت}^{23}\); al-Fairuz Abadi, \text{al-Qamoos al-Muhiet} \(\text{إِمـن}^{23}\); Iben Mandhur, \text{Lesan al-Arab}.\(^{24}\)

\(^{24}\) Ibid. according to these dictionaries, in \(\text{MSM}^{24}\), p. 53 we read that:

\[\text{أجمع اللغويون على اشتراك هذه الكلمة من الجذر المهموز (سـبأ) وكبتوا: ان الصصوب يعنى الخروج من دين الى آخر. وذكرنا بالعرب كانت تسمى بـ: صلى الله عليه وسلم: الصصوب، لأن خرج من دين فريق الى الإسلام، ويسعون من يدخلون في دين الإسلام مصوبا، لأنهم كانوا لا يهمون، فابداوا النعمة واروا، ويسعون المسلمين الصصوب.}\]

\(^{25}\) Gündüz, \text{KL}, p. 52. For more details see also \(\text{MSM}^{25}\), pp. 51-89.

\(^{26}\) According to Ibn al-Nadim \(\text{الـفيـهـرـس}^{26}\), pp. 442ff.

\(^{27}\) Consult Gündüz, \text{KL}. This book is devoted mostly to show these differences and to confirm that the second group is the monotheistic \(\text{Sabians of Qur’an}.\) See also n. 18, above.
The Sabian Mandaëans are those who pay the Jezyat (Muslim tax designated to the People of the Book - Jews, Christians, Magians and Sabians). Sabian Mandaëans were paying the Jezyat from the early Islamic period and continued to do so to the present day. Al-Qadhi (the judge) Abu Yousof, in his famous book al-Kharaj, which is been composed during the time of the Caliphate Haroun al-Rasheed, states that, as follows:

وال=mince أهل الذمة ممن في السواد وغيرهم من أهل الحيرة وسائر البلاد من اليهود والنصاري والمجوس والصابين والسامرة.

Abu Yousof also mentioned that the Sabians exist in many places in Ardh al-Sawad, رأرض السواد (the land of the laity of Iraq, i.e. the original people of Iraq/ Mesopotamia before Islam, who lived mostly as a farmers in the middle and south of Mesopotamia), and al-Jazirat, including Madinat al-Salam (i.e. Baghdad), Basrah and Kufah.

Na‘eem Badawi and Gadhban Rumi discussed the importance of the old text and other evidence available from Islamic sources. They concluded that the Sabian of al-Bata’ih (the middle and south regions of Iraq, especially the Marshes areas), mentioned above, are the Sabians of Qur’an; and they are themselves the ones who payed the Jezyat, like all other “People of the Book,” “Ahl al-Zemmat”; and the Harranians had adopted the name Sabians for protection.

Important evidence has been forwarded by scholars to point out the rightful status of the Sabians in Iraq as a group of people who have a “monotheistic kind of belief-system.” Early Islamic sources highlight a special connection between the term sabī’, used for the prophet, and his teachings. Since the polytheists used to refer to the prophet that “he has become a Sabian” - accordingly, the Arab pagans knowing full-well that the Sabians were monotheists and they clearly connected the teaching of the prophet “with the beliefs of the Sabians who lived in Iraq” especially when the most characteristic aspect of Muhammed’s teaching was the idea of the Unity of God: there

28 Ibn al-Qifti, Tarikh al-Hukama’, Baghdad, p. 311. For more discussion on the subject see SM, pp. 1-27. Also consult MSM and Gündüz, KL.
29 Al-Qadhi Abu Yousof Ya’qob bn Ibrahim, al-Kharaj, al-Qaherat (Cairo), 1346 A.H., p. 145.
30 Ibid., pp. 145-47. See also MSM, p. 58.
31 See SM, p. 18.
32 MSM, pp. 51-105; Gündüz, KL, p. 18f.
33 Ibid., p. 16.
is no god but Allah.”34 In addition, the words (Arabic: صبا), (Aramaic Mandaic: صبا) are similar to (Arabic: صبغ, ‘to paint,’ ‘to baptize’). All of them have a similar meaning including the positive change, i.e. to baptize and to change to a pure and monotheistic status. This status is “al-Sibghat (of Abraham)” in Arabic it is صبغة أبراهيم.35 The origin of Šabian is not from the Arabic ʂba’a (ṣba) but it is from the Aramaic Mandaic sba (to baptize, to immerse and purify in the water). The most recent linguistic Arabic and Qur’anic studies proved this and prefer to go in this direction.36

Therefore, not all Šabian Harranians are pagans and idolaters. In fact, many of them were Šabian Mandaean community migrated towards the middle and south of Mesopotamian in the first and second century Common Era.37 The con-

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34 Ibid., p. 18.
35 See Iben Mandhur, *Lesan al-Arab* (صبغ). For more details see *MŞM*, pp. 51-7. See also n. 19.
36 See for example, the most prominent Shiite Muslim figure (Ayatollah Seyyed) Ali al-Khamene’i, “al-Šabi’at: Hukmohomal-Shar’i’u-Haqiqatomal-Diniat, الصبا: حكمة الشرعية وحقيقة الدينية,” Tehran, 2008,[http://www.taqrif.info/arabic/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=800:1389-12-17-20-16-55&catid=37:1388-06-23-07-57-41&Itemid=58]. In his conclusion, regarding the confusion about the Šabian name (الصبا, صبا), he said the following:

’ان هذه الكلمة (الصبا) من اسم آرامي يعني ‘المغسل’ وقد سموا بها اهتمامهم بالصلاة، حيث أن أحد اركان أحكام الشرعية: لو أنّم في عرف أهل الململ بالصلاة المعتادة.’

See also the most recent and important academic publication on the words of Qur’an is that of Prof. Khalid Ismaeel Ali, *al-qamos hg-Moqaran le-Alfadh al-Qura’n*, Beirut, 2009.[*كروسيوني والكتاب العربي*، مؤسسة البديل،قاموس المفاهيم للألفاظ القرآن]. We can read about these Qur’anic words (صبا) and صبغ the following:

[p. 290]{
الصبا: من طوائف أهل الكتاب الذين ذكرهم القرآن الكريم، المائدة 69، البقرة 62، البيضاء 1، فقير 267.

*FVQ* 991:


الأرجح عندي أن الكلمة مفيدة من المندية، أو الأرامية الشرقية التي تدل ألطف من الين كثيرة، كالأكدية التي تدلها هكذا، وبناء على هذا لا أؤمن أن كلمة (صبا) مشتقة من ص ب أ، لأن هذا الجدير به من آرنا، يبدو أن العرب سمعوها من أهل هذا الدين بفالم فاستعملوها هكذا.

[p. 292]{

ص ب غ: صب غ، ما أصبه، وما يؤدموه، ومن تمسكون بحبل الله، البقرة 20/32، صباغ: القطرة والدين القومي (صباغ: آلهة فهم سببهم من صباغ، ومن تمسكون به من حبل الله). *FVQ* 1992:


ضمن الفهم: الكلوين: المعمود.

37 For details see *MŞM*, pp. 1-76. The migration of the Šabian Mandaean has been discussed extensively, see for example *DQRDK*, esp. ch. 3 and 4; *MII*, esp. ch. 1 and 2; Macuch, “The Origins of the Mandaens,” pp. 174-192; Rudolph, “Problems of a History,” pp. 210-235;
nection between the two groups continued until the first destruction of Harran (932 C.E.).\(^\text{38}\) Scholars generally acknowledge the prominence of Şabian Harranians as the well-reputed scholars and translators of Islamic Mesopotamia. However, this is not entirely true. When the Muslims occupied Mesopotamia, many Şabian Mandaeans moved to the main cities (Baghdad, Kutha, Basra, Tib) during the Abbasid period, becoming renowned as great scholars of the court. For example Ibrahim, (Abu Ishaq al-şabi) (309 A.H.) and his relative Thabit Ibn Qurrah (365 A.H. or 369 A.H.), and their families, were both prominent Şabian Mandaean scholars in Baghdad. We know they were Mandaean based on an observation of their genealogy and also the nature of their works.\(^\text{39}\)

The Şabians who are mentioned in the Qur’an and the Muslim sources were in fact the Şabian Mandaeans who continue to the present day under the title of the People of the Book in Iraq and Iran.\(^\text{40}\)

**Şabian Mandaean Monotheism**

Şabian Mandaeism is clearly a monotheistic religion but it treats the subject in its own unique way. The Şabian Mandaean view of God differs from the Abrahamic religions in an important way in that God is not the creator of this earthly world but the


\(^\text{40}\) Gündüz, \(\text{KL}\), p. 52. Also al-Khamene’i, “al-Şabi’at,” confirm that clearly in his conclusions.
creator of the Light World[s] (Almia d-Nhura). God is the First Cause of the creation of everything. He creates life as the ‘First’ manifestation. This First life grows and emerges in various forms, levels and dimensions. God creates the ‘Divine Primordial Elements’ from which and by which the formation of the worlds and lives in all formed and emanated. God is worshiped alone and praised as the Supreme Force of the universe. He presides over all the worlds and all of creation. Yet the Sabian Mandaean believe that the creation of the earthly life comes about through the command of God, but it is entrusted to a lesser emanation, also known as the fourth life (ptahil) with the assistance of Gabriel (hibil ziwa) and other Beings.

By the word “God” Sabian Mandaean texts primarily refer to the first living one (Hiia) who existed before creation (and has no beginning). He is also known by many other names such as King of Light, Lord of Greatness, Great Mind, King of kings, Father of Worlds and Generations. The First Life (Hiia Qadmaiaia) is one of the most important aspects of Hiia. Within the First Life was contained all the primordial elements for creation from whom creation came forth through a series of emanations. The first wave of these emanations gave birth to three levels of primary emanations, thus forming the second (Yushamin), Third (Abathur) and Fourth Life (Ptahil).

The word ‘Hiia’ is usually regarded as a masculine royal plural. Form Hiia emanated ‘Life’ (the First Life).

Most of the opening prayers started with the name of Hiia. The translation of Hiia and His first appearance in these prayers requires clarification:

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41 The reference to ‘Hiia’ in the masculine form, however, deeper understanding of Mandaean theology will reveal that God is, for the Mandaean, beyond gender and number. See EMC, p. 38 n. 56.


43 Hiia (i.e., (First) Life) is identified with Mara d-Rabutha (Lord of Greatness). However, in many cases, Mara d-Rabutha also appears as one of the names or/and attribute of God, but less confusing than Hiia. For more details and explanation see EMC, ch. 3, p. 37 n. 53.


45 See n.12, above.
[Hiia] is usually translated ‘Life’ i.e. the ‘Great Life.’ However, in this prayer, and even in similar opening prayers, it means not the (creative) Life but rather the Living One, the creator of the (creative) Life, or God. The relationship between the Life and the Living One raises deep philosophical questions in Mandaeism. This causes much argument among scholars and the issue is not yet resolved. In addition, this word Hiia should be recited in every form of the Mandaean bašuma (e.g. bašuma d-Hiia). Every action begins and ends with the invocation of the name Hiia (god), so that the action is blessed and is part of the world of Life and Light, and is thus holy and suitable for the children (sons) of Life and Light.46

Qadmia Nukraia (The Eldest/First Alien/Strange One) is another attribute of Hiia, God, because Hiia is the ‘Greatest Unknown Mystery’ who manifests from Himself (d-mn napšH apriš). God has no father, no mother, no son, no brother. He is the First and the Last, because He is the Eternal One – the Pure Radiance and the Great Infinite Light. For the Sabian Mandaeans God/Hiia is the Creator of the Worlds of Light and the one who oversees every other aspect of creation. Although he is not the literal creator of the earthly world he nevertheless is directly involved in the process of its salvation. When the world was created it was not perfect as it was not created by the First Perfect Being (Hiia). Therefore, God (Hiia) was moved by His compassion for life to inject Light, Life and ethereal Water into the world in order that for the earthly beings to gain redemption. This can be perceived in the forms of the prophets and law (in Judaism), the Word made flesh (in Christianity) and the archangel Jibra’il and Muhammad (in Islam). Let us take a look at GY, I, which elaborates on the Sabian Mandaean view:48


47 See for example CP, 140(a):9f. (no. 104), 144:11f., (no. 108), 144:18f. (no. 109), 145:11 (no. 112). See also Saed (=Nasoraia), Al-salat al-mandaiah, Basrah, 1985; idem., and M.F. Al-Mubaraki and B. Mubaraki (eds.), Qulasta – The Mandaean Liturgical Prayer Book: Book 2, 'Niamia (The Responses) & Qabin (Marriage), Sydney, 1999, p. 105:4. See also n. 12, above. In many Sabian Mandaean sources God is described by many names/attributes/epithets, including Mara d-Rabutha (Lord of Greatness) and Mana (Rba) (the (Great) Mind. However, these are different from similar titles of the Lightworld Beings/Forces etc. For a Mandaean Nasoraean perspective that discuss many of these names/divine epithets/attributes, which define God and His divine Emanations/Manifestations including the Perfect Universal Being (Gabra/ Mara d-Rabutha) and the Lightworld Beings/Forces. See EMC, chs. 1-4, p. 38 n. 57.

48 The following verses are from GY, I (pp. 2ff.); Ginza, pp. 5ff. This translation is mainly based on Kurt Rudolph’s translation in Gnosis, pp. 148-49. See also EMC, p. 38-39 n. 58.
Praised be you, my Lord, with a pure heart...

Praised be to you! Blessed, praised, exalted [or glorified], honoured and established be the Great and Sublime praised God, the Lofty King of Light, the God of Truth (or: the True God), whose (Divine) Power is spread abroad and is infinite. The pure (Divine) Radiance/Brilliance and the Great Light which is not ended/extinguished. The pure (Divine) Radiance/Brilliance and the Great Light which is not ended/extinguished. The Gracious, the Forgiving, the King and Compassionate, the Deliverer of all believers, the Upholder of all the good. The Mighty, Wise, the Knowing, the Seeing, the Wise, and the One who has power over everything. The Master of all upper, middle and lower Light Worlds. The Grand glorious Presence, the Invisible, the Infinite, who has no associate to share his crown, without a partner in His rule. Those who commit to [or trust in] Him will not be confounded, and whoever praises His name in truth (Kušṭa) will not be ruined, and whoever puts his trust in him will not be abased [or humiliated].

It becomes apparent that the Ṣabian Mandaeans uphold a strict monotheism which describes God as the ultimate power of the universe. The above prayer continues to elaborate upon his infinite power and his merciful and forgiving attributes:

The great Lord of all (Angel-) Kings, nothing was when He was not and nothing would be were He not to be. He is under no obligation to death and destruction means nothing to Him. His light illuminates and His radiance irradiates all the worlds, and the kings who stands before Him and shine in their radiance and the great light which rests upon them. He gave them prayer and praise, which settled in their hearts, those who stand in the clouds of light. They worship, praise confess, and perceive the Lord of Greatness (Mara d-Rabutha), the Sublime King of Light, whose light and radiance and glory have no measure, number, or limit, who is full of radiance, full of light, full of brightness, full of life, full of truth (kušṭa), full of love, full of mercy, full of forgiveness, full of eyes, full of lauded faces of beauty, full of understanding, perception, and revelation, and full of names glory.

We continue to read, in the same prayer, the strong sense of Ṣabian Mandaean monotheism which talks about the “one God” who alone is worshiped and praised by all Ṣabian Mandaeans. God in Ṣabian Mandaeism has “no anger,” which emphases his absolute purity and perfection:

The great, sublime God, whose strength no one has attained or limited; no one has established His power or the power of all (His) worlds... He is the Light, in whom is no darkness, the Living One, in whom is no death, the Good One, in whom is no malice, the Gentle One, in whom is no confusion and anger, the Kind One, in whom is no venom or bitterness...

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49 See n. 48, above.
The above verses really the monotheistic heart of the Šabian Mandaean religion. The message of the religion is for its followers to achieve a state of unity with God ultimate *Laufa* (Union) through purity and made possible because the light of God’s mercy and compassion is always present in the world. For the Šabian Mandaeans this possible in both this world and the world to come. To unify with Hiia is to be eternally ‘alive.’50 This Union (*Laufa*) brings not only eternal life but also everlasting happiness. The way to Laufa is by learning the knowledge and wisdom of Kušta (Truth), i.e., God (thereby, becoming a true Šabian Mandaean and Naşoraeans); by teaching and enlightening others; and ultimately by purifying/healing oneself from any defilement, i.e., becoming enlightened and free from errors and “confusion” of the earthly world.

For example, the following verse in the prayer (*butha*) (*GY*, 11f.) explains this enlightened happiness:

Happy is he who knows you (the King of Light), and happy is who speaks in your knowledge ... Happy is he who learns your wisdom and is freed from the errors and disorder of this world.51

This beginning prayer in *Ginza Rba* (quoted above) clearly presents the authentic basis of the Šabian Mandaean monotheistic view of God. Most importantly, one finds, that it warns against false dualistic views.

As part of the Šabian Mandaean monotheistic belief, the Šabian Mandaean religion maintains five basic beliefs:52

1. *Sahdutha* (Ar. الإشهاد): Belief in God, the Angels, Great Teachers and Holy Books.

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50 Nasoraia & Crangle explained that further in “The Asuta Wish”:
Two main central concepts in Mandaean healing contemplative praxis that must be understood to fully grasp the healing practices and processes of Mandaean Naşoraeans are Asuta (healing) and *Adam Kasia* (Secret Adam).
Redemptive healing in Mandaeism is extremely important in its aim to reach Almia d-Nhura (the Worlds of Light). In order to connect to Almia d-Nhura, Mandaean Naşoraeans purification and contemplative exercises, comprising essential prayers, baptism and other meditative practices, thus cultivate *Laufa* (Union) with *Adam Kasia*. Like the Buddhist Dharmakīya, Adam Kasia makes healing and the realisation of that goal possible. See also EMC, p. 39 n. 59.

51 *Gnosis*, p. 153. There is an echo of this verse and some focus on happiness, especially to those who see by their faith, which appears the Gospels, esp. Gospel of Thomas. Cf. John 20: 29, in which, Jesus saith to him, ‘Because thou hast seen me, Thomas, thou hast believed; happy those not having seen, and having believed.’

2. **Sauma** (Ar. الصوم): Fasting (the little and great fast)

3. **Birukhta** (Ar. الصلاة): Prayers (three times daily)

4. **Mašbata** (Ar. الصبحة/العميد): Baptism (full baptism and self baptism)

5. **Zidqa** (Ar. الصدقة): Alms giving

The Sabian Mandaeans also ascertains the belief in paradise, which is the Worlds of Light (**Almia d-Nhura**). There is also another important realm in the Sabian Mandaeans religion. This is an ideal world of the perfect cosmic/heavenly Adamites, i.e. the perfect Sabian Mandaeans, and “all other counterparts (**dmawata**) of earthly creatures and objects.” At the head of this realm is Adam Kasia (Secret cosmic Adam). The name of this sacred realm is **Mšunia Kušṭa** (the world of the perfect sublimated of Kušṭa, the saving Truth). The Sabian Mandaeans believe that human beings are made in the image of Adam Kasia. The importance of this realm is the unification of the soul with its counterpart before being allowed to enter (or return) to the Worlds of Light. This unification (**laufa**) cannot occur if the soul is not pure. Hence the soul will be put through purification stations (**maṭaratha**) prior to uniting with its counterpart.

**Sabian Mandaeans Esoteric Praxis: Baptism, Living Water and the Link to Yahia (John the Baptist)**

The Sabian Mandaeans esoteric praxis is ancient and unique. The cleansing with water in baptism is centred on the idea of “revisiting” the Worlds of Light (**Almia d-Nhura**) – the worlds from which the pure soul was inserted into the body. The baptismal water (prepared and blessed) is a sacred method for not only cleansing and refreshing the body and mind but also for the task of remembering one’s origin and purpose in ‘re-connecting’ and ‘returning’ to the First Life (**Hiia Qadmaii**).

Living Water is the essential life-giving ingredient in the baptism of the Sabian Mandaeans. The baptismal rite of the Sabian Mandaeans predates Christian times, going back to the Sumerian, Akkadian and Babylonian eras. The Sabian Mandaeans regard baptism as an important element in their Quest for enlightenment, inner peace and other sacred wisdom practices. Baptism is the oldest and most crucial ceremony in their religion and must be conducted in the fresh (running) living waters of a clean

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53 The secret meaning of this important and central practice is not just to abstain from food during the sacred days. Rather it is to endure a permanent spiritual fast in order to keep purity of connection with God. See also n. 51, above.

54 Ibid. Also consult Crangle and Nasoraia, “Soul Food: The Mandean Laufani,” ARAM 21, 2009-2010, pp. 385-420 (to be appeared in the later 2011 vol.).

55 See n. 22, above.
river or spring, which is called Yardna. Baptism has retained its centrality and importance among the sacred rites of the Šabian Mandaeans – the practice of ritual washing also being the foundation of their universal redemptive system.

As such, healing is an important component within the Šabian Mandaean religious practice. This is specifically related to the “dynamics of healing in Šabian Mandaean contemplative praxis and its connection with Adam Kasia.” Healing is a central aspect of the Šabian Mandaean religious ritual practice, which many Mandaean scholars have largely overlooked and neglected. The elements of healing praxis are inherent to the teachings of the enlightened great teachers, who are all healers, such as John the Baptist and the Šabian Naṣoraean teachers.

Herein lies the mystical experience of Šabian Mandaean praxis as hidden within the context of its ritualistic tradition. Therefore, every aspect of the rituals represents a deeper more esoteric understanding.

The baptismal of the Šabian Mandaeans is taken as evidence for the ancient origins of Mandaeism rooted biblical times, the last of the religion’s representative teachers (or prophets) being John the Baptist. Draša d-Yahia (the Book of John) is their second holy book and contains most of his teachings. However, the first and main holy book of the Šabian Mandaeans is called Ginza Rba-Sidra d-Adam (see below) which contains the teaching and the esoteric praxis inherited from Adam (who is considered the founder of the Šabian Mandaean religion), down to Seth and Sham, son of Noah, and then to John the Baptist.

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56 Yardna is the holy river that flows from the Worlds of Light to the earthly world. Consult EMC, ch. 5; Saed “Christian and Mandaean.” See also Rudolph, Der Manäische “Diwan der Flüsse” (ser. cit., Philologisch-historische Klasse, 70, 1), Berlin, 1982; Trompf and Nasoraia “Reflections on the Rivers Scroll,” ARAM 21, 2009-2010 (to be appeared in the later 2011 vol.); HG, pp. 5ff., p. 5 n. 7; MII, esp. ch.4. See also ns. 19 and 36, above.

57 Ibid.


59 Ibid. See also NDK, p. 335.


61 See Lidzbarski, Das Johannesbuch der Mandäer, Giessen, 1915.

As we discussed earlier, the religion of the Mandaeans is also known as the “Sabians,” which literally means the “baptisers,” or the religion of the baptisers. The Sabian Mandaeans practice repeated baptisms in a fresh flowing of water (usually performed in public). To the present day, the ritual is recited in Mandaic, similar to the Aramaic language of John the Baptist. Baptism is basically a method of purification, healing which ultimately aims at self-transformation in order to achieve union (laufa) and enter the World Light.

However it should be noted that the ritual is the vehicle facilitating the connection (laufa) with the realms of light and God, but the enlightenment and wisdom is the driving force behind everlasting inner happiness. Thus, Sabian Mandaeans use many techniques, in addition to the Baptism. These include: prayers, meditation, chanting, fasting and kindness towards all living creatures. The purification of the mind, soul and the body is of utmost importance. In which case, their purity is achieved through the means of the methods above mentioned.

“To help protect against defilement, there needs to be a strong relationship between God/Living One(s)/Life, nature and the human soul.” The aim of the Sabian Mandaean is to protect both the ethereal aspect of an individual life, which is the soul and spirit as well as the material aspect, which is the physical body. The techniques are esoteric and incorporated into sacred rituals for to enhance moral purity, mystical contemplation and/or meditation. “The result of these practices is an increasingly enlightened person.”

Sacred Texts of the Sabian Mandaean Religion.

The Sabian Mandaean religion was initially based on secret oral tradition that was transferred from teacher to disciple from one generation to the next. Even before the early world, the Sabian Mandaeans believe, the teachings of the great treasure (Ginza Rba) were transmitted in the Worlds of Light and practiced by the Light World Beings. Following this the teachings served as a pure inspiration for Adam and his generation. In their prayers the Sabian Mandaeans bless the Ginza and say:

Asutha uzakutha nihwilikh ginza d-hiia qadmaiia yaqira

Healing and victory be yours, the (honoured) Great Treasure of First Life.

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63 Consult my “Christian and Mandaeans,”
64 Ibid.
65 For more details see my two articles mentioned in n. 58, above.
67 Ibid.
The Šabian Mandaeans refer to the *Ginza Rba* as the “Great Treasure” because it is the law of God and contains all the mysteries of life therein. Thus, the main holy book of the Šabian Mandaeans is the *Ginza Rba Sidra d-Adam* (the Great Treasure, the Book of Adam).

The *Ginza Rba* is kept in the Bith Manda or *Mandi* (Šabian Mandaean Temple – literally, “The House of Knowledge” or “The House of Knowing God”). The Ginza explains about God, creation and the universe. It is a large collection of teachings that is divided into two parts: the Right Ginza and the Left Ginza. The Right Ginza deals with all aspects of life and creation, while the Left *Ginza* deals with death of the body and the ascent (*masiqa*) of the soul to the Worlds of Light (*Almia d-Nhura*).\(^{69}\)

There are also other sacred writings in the form of books and scrolls that contain further teachings of the religion: *Draša d-Yahia* (The Book of John the Baptist). This book is also known as the *Draša d-Malkia* (Book of Kings i.e., Angels). It contains the teachings of John the Baptist and other great teachers of the Šabian Mandaean religion. The focus of the book is more on the practical life and instructions on how to understand God and how to live a pure life.\(^{70}\)

The third main book of the Šabian Mandaeans is the *Qulasta* (The Canonical Prayer Book). This book can be said to be the “backbone” of the Šabian Mandaean religion. The Canonical Prayer Book or *Qulasta* means ‘praise.’ It is a collection of several smaller books, which are made up of many hymns, songs and prayers. These are divided into sections defining various religious ceremonies but above all baptism and *masiqa* (the ascent of the soul). For the Šabian Mandaeans the *Qulasta* is an important text used especially for baptism and ascension.\(^{71}\)

Apart from the main three or codices, there are many sacred scrolls, one of which worth mentioning here is the *Alf Trisar Šualia* (The Scroll of the Thousand and Twelve Questions). This scroll consists of seven parts (kept as smaller individual scrolls), which is mainly intended for priests and novices. The scroll teaches Šabian Mandaeans about the ritual techniques as well as prohibitions and proscriptions in the Šabian Mandaean religion. This scroll is primarily in the form of a dialogue be-


\(^{70}\) Ibid. See also n. 61, above.

\(^{71}\) Ibid. See also Lidzbarski, *Mandäische Liturgien mitgeteilt, übersetzt und erklärt*, Berlin, 1920.
between Light World Beings on all things concerning life, death, existence and creation – the central themes of the Šabian Mandaean religion.72

The Šabian Mandaean Gnosis

Mandaeans are the “enlightened ones” “possessors of knowledge and wisdom of God.” The Šabian Mandaeans are distinguished from other Gnostic groups based on their rejection of ascetic practices such as abstinence and flagellation. Sabian Mandaeans encourage family life and taking care of the body (the vehicle of the soul). Also Šabian Mandaeans hold the unique belief in the combined elements of gnosis and ritual practice for the salvation of the soul i.e., that Gnosis is not the chief condition for salvation alone, as we read a clear Gnostic message in the following two verses, the first from the ritual prayer book (Qulast/CP) and the second from GS, which mostly deals with the journey and salvation of the soul:73

Manda created me. (Manda Qran)74

I have loved the Living One/Life,
And allowed Manda d-Hiia (Knowledge/Gnosis of Life) to settle in my inner thoughts.75

John the Baptist is believed to be last great Teacher, prophet and messenger of Light (Nhura) and Truth (Kušṭa) who possessed full Gnosis and the power of healing. The Šabian Mandaeans continue to follow his teachings.76 Preserving the quality of “mysticism” and “majesty” from within the oral and written Gnostic tradition.77

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72 Nasoraia, The Philosophy of Mind; idem., The Mandaean Religion; idem., The Mandaeans. See also n. 46, above.
73 See also Nasoraia, “Do Gnostics Belief?”
74 Qulasta, CP., no. 19. Also in CP, nos. e.g. 8, 9, 24, 34, 43, 45, 70, we read: Hiia d-hun mn hiia (Life that is from the Living One/Life).
75 GS, III. 19, pp. 101: 3=Ginza, p. 541.
76 See DQRDK, p. 8 n.18. The Šabian Mandaeans, called John Yahia Yuhana –br (son of) ’Nišbai Qinṭa. See, for example, CP, pp. 12-13; or Yahia br Zakria (e.g. GY, pp. 5-419, 231: 10, 218: 23; Lidzbarski, Das Johannesbuch. He is considered nbiha wšliha (‘prophet and messenger’) and nbiha d-kušṭa (‘the prophet of Kušṭa [Truth]/the true prophet’ [of the last age after Sam of the Flood]). When he was born he was called yalda nbiha d-aba rba d-’qara (‘a boy, an offspring/a prophet of the Great Father of Glory’), and also he was a great healer. See HG, pp. 5ff., p. 5 n. 7; and cf. MD, p. 288a. Apparently, there is a confirmation from some non-Mandaean sources suggested that John the Baptist left disciples to follow his path. See for example Matt. xiv. 12 and Acts xviii. 25, xix. 2. See also Abraham A. Neuman, “A Note on John the Baptist and Jesus in Josippon”, Hebrew Union College Annual, Volume XXIII, part II, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1950-1951, pp. 137-49.
77 DQRDK, pp. 7f.
Sabian Mandaeans of Gnosis is a revealed religion that has inspired the divine code of laws and traditions that make up the religion today. The Sabian Mandaeans have collected a significant body of knowledge, putting forward their own theories to explain nature and the universe. It is in this way those scholars like Kurt Rudolph rightly considers the Sabian Mandaeans religion as “a self-contained, unique system belonging to the general stratum of the Gnosticism of the late antiquity.” To quote Rudolph again: “[it is] a completely independent Gnostic tradition, although one which also belongs to oriental and Semitic culture [and] is preserved by the communities of the Sabian Mandaeans.”

The Esoteric and Mystical Tradition of Sabian Mandaeans Religion: Nasirutha and Nasoraeans

This section follows the basic Sabian Mandaeans belief in Manda that is followed by the deeper wisdom known by Sabian Mandaeans as Nasirutha. This wisdom is believed to be in the privileged possession of the Nasoraeans, the elite of the Sabian Mandaeans community. However, it is also believed that the Nasoraeans do not necessarily need to be from within the priesthood. It is believed that Nasirutha is gifted to “chosen” Sabian Mandaeans regardless of class or status. Nasirutha is a Mandaic term that refers to the secret teachings in the Sabian Mandaeans religion. The term is also taken to be the “True Source” of universal Knowledge and Wisdom from which the Great Mind (Mana Rba) is nourished. Nasirutha carries the metaphor of the Sabian Mandaeans “Tree of Life” (‘Lana d-Hiia). The term represents the significant body of the Sabian Mandaeans and Nasoraeans esoteric teaching, especially defining the mystical experience. Nasirutha is a ‘Redeeming Knowledge’ and the language of the universe, of the language of science, and of ‘the Worlds and Generations/Ages.”

The Mandaeans-Nasoraean teachings are important to know both (i) the ancient secret teaching of this religion, known as the mysticism and esotericism of the Nasoraeans traditions; and (ii) many other esoteric and mystical traditions that emerge in later stages, especially in the Middle East, such as that of the Jewish, Christian and

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78 Encyclopedia of Religion, p. 150. See DQRDK, p. 8 n. 19
79 Rudolph, Gnosis, p.30. Cf. Mandaeism, pp. 4ff. See DQRDK, p. 9 n. 20. In DQRDK, p. 9 n. 211 explained further regarding one of the Mandaeans some contents of this scroll stating that “DQRDK significantly captures the doctrines of the Mandaic Gnostic system through frequent use of specific terms and expression, which convey various theological, cosmological and theosophical concepts, including the dualisms of good and evil, truth and falsehood, spiritual and material, life and death, and light and darkness.” See for example, DQRDK, folio 3 (O, Q).
80 For more information see EMC; NDK, esp. p. 335ff. Cf. MD, pp. 285b, 286a, 306a.
Islamic. Many scholars of this field have avoided this important task.\footnote{See EMC, p. 40 n. 64, in which I noted that “There are some scholarly works that contain references to, notes on and discussions of Mandaean mysticism, mostly in comparison with some other mystical traditions including Gnostic and Jewish mysticisms. However, these works were a primary research, and most of them did not discuss or cover the deeper levels of the esoteric and mystical concepts of the Mandaean religion and literature. In addition they did not offer the deeper esoteric Naṣoraean views and modern up-to-date Naṣoraean interpretation. These works including: SA; G. Scholem, Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition, New York, 1991; idem, On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead, New York, 1991; idem, Origins of the Kabbalah, Princeton, 1987; T. Säve-Söderbergh, Studies in the Coptic Manichaean Psalm-Book: Prosody and Mandaean Parallels, Uppsala, 1949; D. Cohn-Sherbok, “The Alphabet in Mandaean and Jewish Gnosticism,” Religion 11, 1981; G. Quispel, “Jewish Gnosis and Mandaean Gnosticism: Some Reflections on the writing Bronté,” pp. 82-122; N. Deutsch, The Gnostic Imagination: Gnosticism, Mandaeism and Merkabah Mysticism, Leiden, 1995; idem, Guardians of the Gate: Angelic Vice Regency in Late Antiquity, Leiden, 1999; idem, “The Date Palm and the Wellspring: Mandaean and Jewish Mystism,” ARAM 11-12, 1999-2000, pp. 209-223.”} In addition, the Mandaean scriptures, especially the scrolls, “contain important information that can contribute considerably to our understanding of the foundation and primal formation of earliest Manichaeism and Christianity, especially Gnostic Christianity. In addition, it provides strong links to many Jewish traditions, including the Qumran sects and Samaritans.”\footnote{EMC, p. 40-1 n. 63. In this note I have also provided some more references – (see the references given in the previous note) – regarding these connections with Mandaeism “G. Widengren, Mesopotamian Elements in Manichaeism (King and saviour II); idem, The King and the Tree of Life in Ancient Near Eastern Religion (King and Saviour IV), Uppsala, 1951; E. Yamani, “Jewish Gnosticism? The Prologue of John, Mandaean Parallels, and the Trimorphic Protennoia,” in Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions Presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday, R. Van den Broek & M. J. Vemseren(eds.), Leiden, 1981, pp. 467-497; D. Shapira, “Manichaean (Marmanaiia), Zoroastrians (Iazuqaiia), Jews, Christians and other Heretics: A Study in the Redaction of Mandaic Texts,” Le Muséon, vol. 117, Fasc. 3-4, 2004, pp. 243 – 280; E. Segelberg, “The Mandaean Week and the Problem of Jewish Christianity and Mandaean Relationship,” pp. 273-286; B. Thiering, “Mandaeans and the Dead Sea Scrolls,” Mandaean Thinker 4 (1995), pp. 4-10; R. Macuch, “The Origins of the Mandaeans and Their Script,” JSS, 16 (1971), 174-192.}

The Mandaean Naṣoraean are, therefore, closely connected to the spiritual leaders and healers of the community, that is the “elect” “chosen” “proven” or “righteous ones.” They are all well trained masters in the arts of healing, wisdom and secret mysteries of the religion. They are also experts in the Sabian Mandaean theology and rituals, looking after the community’s spiritual needs. Sabian Mandaeans believe that the Naṣoraean constitute the true and ideal congregation of the Earthly ‘Sons of Light’ (bnia nhura) as direct and continuing descendants of the ‘Utras, (Heavenly) Sons of...
Their lives are destined to the perpetual Light, which is called the Malka (Rama Rba) d-Nhura\(^8\) (the (High Great) King of Light)\(^8\).

**The Şabian Mandaeán Diaspora**

Traditionally, Şabian Mandaeans were required to live close to fresh running water provided by rivers or wellspring. Mesopotamia was a perfect environment for them in the first two millennia. The landscape offered not only fresh clean water but also protection and privacy for the communities. However, after the three Gulf Wars in the last four decades the Şabian Mandaeans were forced to flee their homeland. Today they are faced with challenges of keeping the community together and keeping their ancient tradition alive in the face of modernity. Also, accessing fresh clean water for rituals is a chief concern.

The majority of Şabian Mandaeans have migrated to countries of the Diaspora, including Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Europe, Scandinavia and the United States of America. For example, currently, more than six and a half thousand Şabian Mandaeans, including nine practising priests of whom three are ganzibras (bishops) are left in Iraq, the rest have relocated to Australia. Based in Western Sydney, this major resettlement is dependent on access to the Nepean River in which all the main Australian baptisms (total immersion) are conducted.\(^8\) However, the Şabian Mandaeán communities elsewhere are living in small isolated groups struggling with many challenges. Many Şabian Mandaeans still await resettlement in poor conditions within the Middle East, especially countries like Syria, Jordan, Libya and The Yemen.\(^8\)

The community is also challenged by non-practising Şabian Mandaeans and or those who have moved away from the community (e.g., through marriage) or con-

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\(^8\) The term (a)bnia nhura (‘Sons of Light’) is used in various ways and Şabian Mandaeán sources; e.g. Ginza, II 13, 246; Lidzbarski, Mandäische Liturgien mitgeteilt, 17-18, 24-5, 36-7, 41-2, 71; Euting, J., Qolasta oder Gesäuge von der Taufe und dem Ausgang der Seete, Stuttgart, 1867, vol. 25, p. 24. See DQRDK, p. 9 n. 22.

\(^8\) E.g. GY, 5: 11, 6: 9; Ginza, II 31; MD, p. 244b f.; HG p. 3. See DQRDK, p. 9 n. 23.

\(^8\) DQRDK, p. 9.


verted to other religions. The Šabian Mandaean community in Diaspora has also been significantly affected by secularisation. Customs such as wearing white or covering the head (for both men and women), and men not shaving their beard and hair, are constantly being broken. Other factors affecting the survival of the Šabian Mandaean community may include concerns that the community is chiefly insular and does not accept converts.\textsuperscript{88} Also, those who can speak the ancient Aramaic Mandaic language of the Šabian Mandaean religion re becoming scarce – the rituals must be performed in traditional language. There is a lack of reliable translations of holy texts.\textsuperscript{89} Another factor is a limited number of well-educated priests, simply because of limited financial resources. A major concern is the severe persecution against Šabian Mandaeans in the Middle East especially, forcing them to convert to other religions. This is only to touch on some of the pressing concerns of the community in Diaspora.\textsuperscript{90}

On the positive side, Šabian Mandaeans work very hard to bring the community together, donate money, establish cultural associations, preserve the Šabian Mandaean heritage and encourage the teachings and culture of the religion. It should be mentioned, however, that the situation of the Šabian Mandaeans in Diaspora is highly critical. The future of the community is uncertain, and it requires the Šabian Mandaean leaders to unite their efforts to better serve the interests of the large Šabian Mandaean nation.\textsuperscript{91}

It may be that the Šabian Mandaean spiritual leaders will be required to adopt serious changes in order to fit in with the new worldviews of the West, while maintaining the core of Šabian Mandaean religious and cultural values. This is especially important in the wake of the new generations of Šabian Mandaean youth, who are affected by modernity and Western culture. There are already steps established to keep the Nasoraean and priestly traditions alive as well as to ensure the survival and growth of the Mandaean community in Diaspora. The hope is that there will be greater unity among the community and its leaders.\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{88} See Nasoraia, “al-Mandaeyah wal-Tabshir.”
\textsuperscript{89} It was very hard for Šabian Mandaeans to publish or produce significant publications in Iraq and Iran. This is due mainly to the long religious and political conflicts in these countries; as well as the strict roles of the authorities. See DQRDK, intro.
\textsuperscript{90} For many of these challenges see Nasoraia, “Do Gnostics ‘Believe’?”; idem., “Mandaean Diaspora;” idem., “A Call to Manda.”
\textsuperscript{91} See Nasoraia, , “Do Gnostics ‘Believe’?.” See also idem., “The Mandaeans: Past, Present and Future.”
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid. See also our early discussion on the current situation of the Šabian Mandaeans, including our references, ns. 13-16, above.gunduz
Conclusion

There is no doubt that Sabian Mandaeism is a strong community of ancient “monotheistic” believers. The unique aspects of this monotheism, however, are enriched by Gnosis. In this way the Sabian Mandaean religion can offer academics a “wider scope” and a unique insight into the ancient roots of monotheism. A chief concern of this paper has been to explain the difficulties in distinguishing Sabian Mandaeans from Sabian Harranians. I believe, it is clear, from the evidence provided, that the Sabians of the Qur’an are in fact the Mandaens of Harran and the Mesopotamian regions. Moreover, there were many important Sabian Mandaeans living in Harran, who are generally confused with Sabian Harranians, a point which we have made clear. In brief, the sacred texts and esoteric practices of the Sabian Mandaeans are distinctly unique to the Sabian Mandaean tradition and culture and which sets them clearly apart from other ancient communities, especially the so called Sabian Harranians.

The Sabian Mandaeans possess a large portion of sacred texts many of which are classified mostly with Gnostic literature. This tradition also possesses a strong component of esoteric praxis which predates the Christian era. As such, the fundamental element that is emphasised in both the sacred texts and lived through the esoteric praxis is the connection between man and God.

An important facilitator of the connection is found in Gnosis. Gnosis or Manda being a way in which the experience of the connection and faith in the monotheistic God is strengthened and deepened. The foremost experts of this art, from within the tradition, are the Naṣoraeans who act as keepers of the divine wisdom and sacred knowledge. The Naṣoraeans are also great healers and teachers who nourish the spiritual needs of the Sabian Mandaean community.

As a final reminder, the Sabian Mandaean communities around the world are currently facing great challenges in ensuring their survival. Yet this unique and ancient tradition of the Sabian Mandaeans must be preserved for future generations to enjoy the fruits of its longstanding esoteric and sacred heritage.