

DİNÎ 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

DİNÎ VE FELSEFÎ METİNLER
YIRMİBİRİNCİ YÜZYILDA YENİDEN OKUMA,
ANLAMA VE ALGILAMA SEMPOZYUMU
Bildiri Kitabı, Cilt: 1

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

ADRES:

Abdurrahmangazi Mahallesi Belediye Caddesi No:4
Tel: 0 216 564 13 00
Fax: 0 216 564 13 71
Mail: belediye@sultanbeyli.bel.tr
www.sultanbeyli.bel.tr

GENEL YAYIN YÖNETMENİ
MEHMET MAZAK

EDİTÖR:

PROF. DR. BAYRAM ALİ ÇETİNKAYA

BÖLÜM EDİTÖRLERİ:

YRD. DOÇ. DR. AHMET HAMDİ FURAT
YRD. DOÇ. DR. İSMAİL DEMİREZEN
YRD. DOÇ. DR. AHMET ERHAN ŞEKERCİ
YRD. DOÇ. DR. ÜMİT HOROZCU
ARŞ. GÖR. MEHMET FATİH ARSLAN
ARŞ. GÖR. BİRSEN BANU OKUTAN
ARŞ. GÖR. ADEM İRMAK
ARŞ. GÖR. EMİNE GÖREN
ARŞ. GÖR. MUHAMMED VEYSEL BİLİCİ

SAYFA DÜZENİ

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

Copyright Sultanbeyli Belediyesi

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

Mandaicism 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 (Kušta). 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 (Kušta). 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-

* Prof. Dr. University of Sydney, Australia

¹ B. Nasoraia, *The Philosophy of Mind, Cognitive Styles and Absolute Monotheism in the Sabian Mandaean Religion: Revealed Thoughts Among the Monotheistic Religions* (forthcoming 2012)

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 Naşoraean tradition and the hidden teachings within the larger frame of Mandaism. 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 Naşoraean 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 (*Kuṣṭa*), Love (*Rahma/Ruhma*) and Enlightenment or Knowledge (*Manda*).³

Literally, *manda*; γνωσις means 'knowledge.' From it derived the adjective *mandaia* (the Mandaean) means 'holder of knowledge' or 'knower' or 'enlightened one,'

² The history and origin of the Sabian Mandaean religion remains a contested debate among prominent scholars. See for example R. Macuch, "The Origins of the Mandaens and Their Script," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 16, 1971, pp. 174-192; K. Rudolph, "Problems of a History of the Development of the Mandaean Religion" (trans.) D.C. Duling, in consultation with J. Modschiedler), *History of Religions* 8, 1969, pp. 210-235; See Nasoraia "The Origins of the Mandaeans," Baghdad University, Baghdad, 1994. See also n. 37, below. For an introduction to the concepts of Sabian Mandaism, see Nasoraia 'The Esoteric and Mystical Concepts of the Illustrated Mandaean Naşoraean Scroll: *Diwan Qadaha Rba d-Dmuth Kuṣṭa* (the Scroll of the Great Creation of the Image/Likeness of the Truth) (hereafter EMC)' (Doctoral dissertation, University of Sydney), Sydney, 2010. See also n. 27, below.

³ For more details see Nasoraia, "The Mandaean Approach to Protecting the Human Soul from Defilement," *The Pathway to the Centre – Purity and the Mind*, E. Crangle (ed.), Sydney: Dhammachai International Research Institute, 2010, pp. 143-169 ; Nasoraia and E.F. Crangle, "The Asuta Wish: Adam Kasia and the Dynamics of Healing in Mandaean Contemplative Praxis," *ARAM* 21, 2009-2010 (to be appeared in the later 2011 vol.); idem., "Naşiruta: Deep Knowledge and Extraordinary Priestcraft in Mandaean Religion" (hereafter NDK), in *Esotericism and the Control of Knowledge* (ed.) Edward F. Crangle, Sydney Studies in Religion 5, The University of Sydney, 2004, pp. 306-360.

γνωστικός. *Mandaia* is the one who knows and worships the “One God.”⁴ 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.⁵ However, the roots of this religion go back deep in the ancient civilisations, especially in Mesopotamia.⁶

⁴ Cf. E.S. Drower, & R. Macuch, *A Mandaic Dictionary* (hereafter *MD*), Oxford, 1963, p. 247a-b; T. Nöldeke, *Mandäische Grammatik* (hereafter *MG*), Halle, 1875 (Reprint 1975), pp. xx, 10f. Also consult Drower, *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran: Their Cults, Customs, Magic, Legends and Folklore* (hereafter *MII*), Oxford, 1937. Reprinted with forward by Jorunn J. Buckley, Piscataway, 2002.

⁵ Cf. *EMC*, pp. 15 n. 45, 32 n. 40; Nasoraia, ‘A Critical Edition, with Translation and Analytical Study of *Diuan Qadaha Rba d-Dmuth Kušta* (The Scroll of Great Creation of the Image/Likeness of Truth) (hereafter *DQRDK*)’ (Doctoral dissertation, University of Sydney), Sydney, 2005, p. 7 n. 13. See also A.M. Al-Aqad, *Abu al-Anbia*,’ pp. 108f. For the role of Gnosis and belief in the Mandaean worldview see Nasoraia, “Do Gnostics ‘Believe’? The Role of Gnosis and Belief in the Mandaean Worldview.” In Trompf, R. Liogier and P. Morris (eds.), *Belief in all its States (Studies in World Religion 3)*, Elgin, Ill., Slough, Eng., and Delhi, 2010, (forthcoming). See also E.F. Lupieri, *The Mandaeans: The Last Gnostics* (trans.) Charles Hindley, Grand Rapids, Mich., 2002 (Italian original, 1993). For references about the Mandaeans early Gnostic thoughts see, for example, K. Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, ed. R. McL. Wilson, P.W. Coxon and K H. Kuhn, New York, 1983, pp. 344, 366, 367; E.M. Yamauchi, “A Mandaic Magic Bowl from the Yale Babylonian Collection,” *Berytus*, 17, 1967-68, p. 49; idem., *Gnostic Ethics and Mandaean Origins*, Harvard Theological Studies, XXIV, Cambridge (1970), p. 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, esp. chapter 4 (pp. 80-134). Recently, Khazaal Al-Majidi has proved that “the roots of the ancient Ṣabianism 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 Ṣabian 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 Mandaeanism 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 (*Kuṣṣa*).⁷ 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”.⁸ 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-Uthria*).⁹ 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 Mandaeanism; 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.¹⁰

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-

riage, the consecration of priests and the *masiqta*. There can be no doubt that the initial concept of the separation of heaven from earth was Sumerian in origin.

However, the Mandaean religion in its present form probably arose in Mesopotamia in the 3rd century BC. I. Al-Zuhairy, ‘A Study of the Ancient Mesopotamian Roots of Mandaean Religion’ (Doctoral dissertation, University of Manchester), Manchester, 1998, pp. 235-36.

⁷ The role and significance of *Kuṣṣa* in Sabian Mandaean religion has been discussed extensively EMC, esp. chapter three, see also *ibid.* p. 33 n. 41. Also consult NDK; DQRDK, esp. pp. 42-52; W. Sundberg, *Kuṣṣa: A Monograph on a Principal Word in Mandaean Texts, I: The Descending Knowledge*, Lund, 1953; *idem.*, *Kuṣṣa: A Monograph on a Principal Word in Mandaean Texts II, The Ascending Soul*, Lund, 1994; MD, pp. 209b-11a; S.A., Pallis, *Mandaean Studies*, tr. E.H. Pallis, London, Copenhagen 1926, pp. 168-72.

⁸ Sabian Mandaeans do not accept converts; and they married from within their community, this is an important and challenging subject in the current life of the Sabian Mandaeans as well as in their history, especially in the last two millennia. For detailed study on this subject see Saed (=Nasoraia), “al-Mandaeyah wal-Tabshir,” in *Studies in Mandaeanism: History and Beliefs* (ed.) M.F. Al-Mubarak, Sydney, 2000, pp. 142-71.

⁹ *Naṣirutha* and Nasoraean explained in many details in my EMC, esp. Ch. 1, 2 and 3. Consult also NDK; Drower, *The Secret Adam: A Study of Nasoraean Gnosis* (hereafter SA), Oxford, 1960, esp. Ch. 1; *idem.*, Drower, *The Haran Gawaita and the Baptism of Hibil-Ziwa* (hereafter HG), Studi e Testi, 176, Vatican City, 1953.

¹⁰ See EMC, p. 34 n. 45, chapters two and three. See also NDK, pp. 306-320; MG, pp. xx, 75, 129; MD, p. 247a-b.

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 (*Kuṣṭa*). There is a deeper and more secret teaching within the Mandaean religion known as the teachings of Naṣoraeans who strongly promote and endorse the inherent connection with the divine. In their view Ṣabian Madaeans 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 Naṣoraeans maintain a close relationship with *Naṣirutha* (divine wisdom) as the guiding force for all Ṣabian Madaeans. *Naṣirutha* 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 Ṣabian Madaeans believe that God *has* no beginning. For Ṣabian Madaeans, 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 Naṣoraeans 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 Naṣoraeans living tradition.

Some attention needs also be paid to the most recent diaspora where Ṣabian Madaeans are being severely challenged to maintain their identity and promote their way of life. In an earlier diaspora, the Ṣabian Madaeans were forced to migrate from Jerusalem and Jordan Valley to Mesopotamia in order to reestablish themselves. The survival of the Ṣabian Mandaean community in the current diaspora remains largely in question. This concern is a great challenge for the Ṣabian Mandaean community leaders who are striving to safeguard the Madaeans 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 Madaeans* (hereafter *CP*), Leiden, 1959, Nos. 8, 9, 34, 43, 45, 71, 77.

religion as well as their unique tradition and culture. Most Sabian Mandaean 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 Mandaean remain in poor conditions in countries like Syria and Jordan, where they have sought asylum.¹³ Many are also still facing imminent danger in continued trouble spots, especially in the Middle East. Sabian Madaeans 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 Madaeans are dispersed throughout the world, living in isolated communities.¹⁴ Persecution of the Sabian Mandaean people and the break-up of their family community are detrimental to the survival of the Mandaean society.¹⁵ 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 Madaeans.¹⁶

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:

¹³ See *EMC*, p. 27 n. 16. The Madaeans 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 Madaeans: 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. Alshairy, "B-šumainhun d-haiia rabbi – Im Namen des erhabenen Lendigen: Die Bedeutung von Rudolf Macuchs Forschungen für die Mandäer im Irak," in *Und das Leben ist siegreich! And Life is Victorious: Mandaische und samaritanische Literatur Mandaean and Samaritan Literatures* (Mandaistische Forschungen, 1) (ed.) Voigt, Wiesbaden.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* See also *EMC*, p. 27 n. 18. Also cf., E.F. Crangle's open letter entitled: "The Plight of the Madaeans," Sydney, 2004.

Yirmibirinci Yüzyılda Yeniden Okuma, Anlama ve Algılama

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَالنَّصَارَى وَالصَّابِئِينَ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَعَمِلَ
صَالِحًا فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ (2:62)

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

2:62 Those who believe (in the Qur'an!), and those who follow the Jewish (scrip-
tures!), and the Christians and the Sabians,- 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.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالصَّابِرُونَ وَالنَّصَارَى مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَعَمِلَ
صَالِحًا فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ (5:69)

*Inna allatheena amanow waallatheena hadow waalssabioona waalnnasara man amana
biAllahi waalyawmi alakhiri waAAamila salihan fala khaawfun AAalayhim wala hum yahza-
noona*

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

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالصَّابِئِينَ وَالنَّصَارَى وَالْمَجُوسَ وَالَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ
يَفْصِلُ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ (22:17)

*Inna allatheena amanow waallatheena hadow waalssabieena waalnnasara waalmajoosa
waallatheena ashrahow inna Allaha yafsilu baynahum yawma alqiyamati inna Allaha AAala
kulli shayin shaheedun*

22:17 Those who believe (in the Qur'an!), those who follow the Jewish (scrip-
tures!), and the Sabians, Christians, Magians, and Polytheists, - Allah will judge be-
tween them on the Day of Judgment: for Allah is witness of all things.

The reference of the Sabians in these verses refers, with no doubt, to a special
monotheistic religion, whose followers (i.e. the Sabians) are very well known in the
Arab regions, especially Arabia. In addition, the verses consider the Sabian religion
as an equal religion to the other monotheistic religions like Judaism and Christianity.
For Sabians came before (in al-Ma'dah: 69 and al-Haj: 17) and after the Christians (in
al-Baqarah: 62).

The Sabians mentioned in the Qur'an are the same people as the Mandaeans, 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 Mandaeans, and this is because they adopted the designation Sabian from the time of Al-Ma'mun.¹⁷ 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 Sabian Harranians and the Sabian Mandaeans.¹⁸ However, at the same time, I believe that some Sabian Harranians were actually Sabian Mandaeans 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 "Sabians" – (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 *أي التعميد بصبغة الله الحيّ / الصبغ والأرتماس ب (صبغة) الماء الحيّ* –¹⁹ is

¹⁷ Ibn al-Nadim, *al-Fihrist*, Beirut, pp. 445ff.

¹⁸ One of the most recent and important detailed study on this subject is the dissertation of Şinasi Gündüz, who proof with much evidence the differences between the two groups and that the current Sabian Mandaeans are the Sabians of Qur'an. See Ş. Gündüz, *The Knowledge of Life: The Origins and Early History of the Mandaeans and Their Relation to the Sabians of the Qur'an and to the Harranians* (hereafter Gündüz, KL), *Journal of Semitic studies Supplement 3*, Oxford, 1994. There are many other earlier studies confirming the above, see for example N. Marrani, *Mafâhîm Sabi'iyya Mandâ'iyya. Ta'rih. Din. Lughah* (hereafter MŞM), Baghdad, 1981; III, esp. ch. 1 and 2; Drower, *al-Sabi'a al-Mandâ'iyyûn* (hereafter ŞM), trs. N. Badawi & G. Rumi, Baghdad, 1969, esp. pp. 1-39; D. Chwohlsohn, *Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus*, St Petersburg, 1856; A. Sbahi, *'Usûl al-Sabi'a (al-Mandâ'iyyûn) wa-mu 'taqadâtihim al-diniyyah*, Beirut, 1996. See also M. Hamada, *Ta'rih al-Sabi'a al-Mandâ'iyyin*, Beirut, 1992; C. Buck, "The Identity of the Sabi'un: An Historical Quest," MW 74, 1984, pp. 172-86; J. Hjarpe, *Analyse critique des traditions Arabes sur les Sabeens Harraniens*, Uppsala, 1972; A. Houtum-schindler, "Notes on the Sabaeans," PRGS 13 (1891): 663-69; K.H. Nazlu, *Iran'da Sabiler Ya da Mandile Üzerine* (Enstitüsü Mezopotamya, 1998); J. Pedersen, "The Sabians", in *A Volume of Oriental Studies; Presented to Edward*; B. Dodge, "The Sabians of Harran" in *American University of Beirut Festival Book (Festschrift)* (eds.) F. Sarruf and S. Tamin, Beirut, 1967, pp.59-85; M.N. Siouffi, *Études sur la religion des Scoubbas ou sabéene*, Paris, 1880; Zotenberg, *Catalogue des manuscrits syriaques et sabéens (mandâïtes) de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, Paris, 1874.

¹⁹ In Qur'an, we read in 2:138 "صبغة الله ومن أحسن من الله صبغة ونحن له عابدون" The Muslim theologians and Mofassirin (Interpreters, who analyse and explain the Qur'an) explain that the word *sbghat* (Ar. صبغة) means here either "Islam" or "the Religion of Allah (دين الله) and Nature (الْفِطْرَة, *al-Fitrat*). The well known linguistic Arabic, Semitic and Islamic Studies, Prof. Dr.

another name for the Mandaean, 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]." ²⁰ 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. ²¹ This is matched with another term by which the Mandaean are known to outsiders, *mughtasilah*, designating those who wash or cleanse or baptize themselves in water. ²² 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-Sabi'at al-Manda'iin fi Asoor al-Nahdhat al-Arabiya, مساهمة الصابئة المندائیین في عصور النهضة العربية (presented to the Symposium: "ندوة: المشتركات الفكرية بین الصابئة المندائیین والأديان السماوية الأخرى" Amman, 16.11.2011, summarizes the traditional Muslim explanations on this verse:

"ذكر المفسرون ان المقصود بصبغة الله هي الإسلام، أو دين الله والقطرة. ذكره القرطبي في تفسيره 2/144 والسيوطي في الدر المنثور 1/340 والطبري 1 p. في تفسيره 1/732-33 وأضاف البضاوي في تفسيره لكلمة صبغة (كان النصارى يغمسون اولادهم في ماء اصفر يسمونه المعمودية) 1/90. In addition, he continues to connect that with his important linguistic analyses for the words *sba'a*, *sabi'iin*, *sabagha*, *sabighiin*, *sabghat/sabghat* (صبغة، صباغة)، etc. He states the following:

"ومن الجدير بالذكر ان كلمة صبأ تدل على معنى خرج كما تشير المعاجم العربية المعتمدة وبهذا تفسر كلمة الصابئين بمعنى الخارجين عن الديانات الأخرى وهو معنى حسب رأي لا يستقيم مع المعنى الحقيقي لطلمة الصابئين لأن هذه الكلمة تعني في اللغة المندائية الصابغين أي الذين يعمدون أو يغمسون أبنائهم في الماء الجاري ، ومازالت كلمة (صبغة) تدل على العماد في العقائد المندائية وتفسر ذلك في علم اللغات المقارن أن اللغة المندائية وهي لغة آرامية شرقية تبدل في كثير من الأحيان العين أو الغين في اللغة العربية الفا فتصبح كلمة صبغ صبأ وهذا يفسر بشكل واضح المصطلح القرآني صبغة الله التي تشير الى التعميد وليس اللون.

الصابئة (المندائية) فرقة موحدة عرفانية نشأت كما تشير المصادر التاريخية في فلسطين والأردن قبل ظهور النصرانية. وهم اتباع يوحنا الذي يلقب بالمعمدان (يحيى بن زكريا). ويطلق عليهم المؤرخون والفقهاء العرب اسم (المغتسله) لكثرة استعمالهم للماء الجاري وهو الذي يسميه الصابئة (pp.1-2). وهذا قد يشير الى نهر الأردن الذي كان يحيى بن زكريا واتباعه يعيشون في نواحيه."

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

²⁰ See MD, SBA; MII, ch.1; MSM, pp. 51-6.

²¹ *Maṣbuta d-Hiia* (the baptism of the Living One/Life, i.e. God). It is a Very common term in the Sabian Mandaean Holy Book, *Sidra d-Adam Ginza Rba* (the Scripture/Book of Adam, the Great Trouser, Arabic: (الصحف الأولى لأدم/كتاب آدم الكنز العظيم).

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 Adami' appellatus*, tom. 1, 2, Leipzig, 1867, tr. M. Lidzbarski, *Ginzá Der Schatz oder das grosse Buch der Mandäer übersetzt und erklärt* (hereafter *Ginza*), Göttingen, 1925.

²² See n. 17. See also Ibn al-Nadim, *al-Fihrist*, pp. 442-45. For more details on the water purification and baptismal Sabian Mandaean rituals see H. Saed (=Nasoraia), "Christian and Mandaean Perspectives on Baptism," VIII Symposium Syriacum, The University of Sydney, 2000, *The Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* (ed.) Rifaat Ebied and Herrman Teule, 2004, 1-4, pp. 319-347; Nasoraia, "The Mandaean Approach," pp. 144ff.; idem., "The Asuta Wish." See also MII; E. Segelberg, *Masbūtā: Studies in the Ritual of the Mandaean Baptism*, Uppsala, 1958; Buckley, "Why once is not enough: Mandaean Baptism (*Maṣbuta*) as an Example of a Repeated Ritual," *History of Religions* 29, 1989, pp. 23-34; M. Franzmann, "Living Water Mediating Element in Mandaean Myth and Ritual," *Numen*, 36, 1989, pp. 156-172.

sabi'i), 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 *saba’a* (“to change” “to convert” “to return”). The second verbal root is *saba* (“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 *sabi* “one who changed his religion.”²⁴ That is to say, “the one who became a Sabian” or “the one whose religion became like the Sabian, 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 Sabians but this inclination was chiefly meant for the Sabians of Harran or the Harranians in Iraq.²⁵

There are great religious and cultural differences between the Sabians of Harran (who lived in north of Mesopotamia) and the original monotheistic Sabians, the Sabians of the Bata’ih, *al- Mughtasilah*,²⁶ the Mandaeans (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, *Tarikh al-Hukama’*, the following:

ان ابا حنيفة وصاحبيه ابا يوسف ومحمدا قد اختلفوا في نكاح الصابئة واكل ذبائحهم فحرمهما ابو حنيفة وحللها صاحبا فقال اصحابهم انه ليس بخلاف على الحقيقة انما هو اختلاف في الفتوى لأن ابا حنيفة سئل عن الصابئة الحرائين وهم معروفون بعبادة الكواكب فاجراهم مجرى عبدة الاوثان على تحريم

²³ See (*sab’a* صبا) in the following traditional Arabic dictionaries: al-Jawhari, *Taj al-Lughat u-Sihah al-Arabiya*; al-Fairuz Abadi, *al-Qamoos al-Muhiet*; Iben Mandhur, *Lesan al-Arab*.

²⁴ Ibid. according to these dictionaries, in *MSM*, p. 53 we read that:

”أجمع اللغويون على اشتقاق هذه الكلمة من الجذر المهموز (صبا) وكتبوا: ان الصبوء يعني الخروج من دين الى آخر. وذكروا بان العرب كانت تسمي النبي، صلى الله عليه وسلم، الصابئ، لانه خرج من دين قريش الى الاسلام، ويسمون من يدخل في دين الاسلام مصبوا، لانهم كانوا لا يهزمون، فابدلوا الهمزة واوا، ويسمون المسلمين الصباة.“

²⁵ Gündüz, *KL*, p. 52. For more details see also *MSM*, pp. 51-89.

²⁶ According to Ibn al-Nadim , *al-Fihrist*, pp. 442ff.

²⁷ Consult Gündüz, *KL*. This book is devoted mostly to show these differences and to confirm that the second group is the monotheistic Sabians of Qur’an. See also n. 18, above.

Yirmibirinci Yüzyılda Yeniden Okuma, Anlama ve Algılama

المناکحة والذباحة وصاحباہ سنلا عن الصابئین الساکنین فی البطحہ وهم فرقة من النصارى يؤمنون
بالمسیح علیہ السلام فاجابا بجواز اکل ذبائحهم وماناکحتهم.²⁸

The Ṣabian Mandaeans are those who pay the *Jezyat* (Muslim tax designated to the People of the Book - Jews, Christians, Magians and Ṣabians). Ṣabian Mandaeans 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:

والجزية واجبة على جميع أهل الذمة ممن في السواد وغيرهم من أهل الحيرة وسائر
البلدان من اليهود والنصارى والمجوس والصابئین والسامرة.²⁹

Abu Yousof also mentioned that the Ṣabians exist in many places in Ardh al-Sawad, (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.³⁰

Na'eem Badawi and Gadhban Rumi discussed the importance of the old text and other evidence available from Islamic sources. They concluded that the Ṣabian of al-Baṭa'ih (the middle and south regions of Iraq, especially the Marshes areas), mentioned above, are the Ṣabians 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 Ṣabians for protection.³¹

Important evidence has been forwarded by scholars³² to point out the rightful status of the Ṣabians in Iraq as a group of people who have a "monotheistic kind of belief-system."³³ Early Islamic sources highlight a special connection between the term *ṣabi'*, used for the prophet, and his teachings. Since the polytheists used to refer to the prophet that "he has become a Ṣabian" - accordingly, the Arab pagans knowing full-well that the Ṣabians were monotheists and they clearly connected the teaching of the prophet "with the beliefs of the Ṣabians 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'qoob 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: صبأ), (Aramaic Mandaic: صبا) are similar to (Arabic: صاغ, '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 إبراهيم.³⁵ The origin of Sabian is not from the Arabic sba'a (صبا) 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 Sabian Harranians are pagans and idolaters. In fact, many of them were Sabian Mandaeans who remained in Harran and neighbouring areas when the majority of the Sabian Mandaean community migrated towards the middle and south of Mesopotamian in the first and second century Common Era.³⁷ The con-

³⁴ Ibid., p. 18.

³⁵ See Iben Mandhur, *Lesan al-Arab*, (صاغ). For more details see *MSM*, pp. 51-7. See also n. 19, above.

³⁶ See for example, the most prominent Shiite Muslim figure (Ayatollah Seyyed) Ali al-Khamene'i, "الصابئة: حكمهم الشرعي وحققتهم الدينية،" Tehran, 2008, [http://www.taqrîb.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 Sabian name (الصابئون، صبأ، صبا)، he said the following:

"ان هذه الكلمة (الصابيء) من اصل آرامي بمعنى «المغتسل» وقد سمو بها لاهتمامهم بالغسل بالماء، بحيث انه احد اركان احكامهم الشرعية؛ ولذا يسمون في عرف اهل الملل بالصابئة المغتسلة".

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 (2009), بيروت، دار الكاتب العربي، مؤسسة البديل، القاموس المقارن لألفاظ القرآن (صاغ، صبا، صبا) the following:

[p. 290]: ص ب أ:

الصابئون: من طوائف أهل الكتاب الذين ذكروهم القرآن الكريم، المائدة 5/69. البقرة 2/62. البقرة 1/66. لسان 7/267. FVQ 191f.]

العبرية ص ب ع: لون؛ الآرامية والسريانية ص ب ع: غطى، صاغ؛ AHw 1108 الأكدية ص ب / ف ي ت: صوف ملون، سقي [Md. Dict. 388].؛ السوفطرية ص ب ع: صاغ، المندائية صبا: عمد، غطس.

والأرجح عندي أن الكلمة معربة من المندائية، أو الآرامية الشرقية التي تبذل الألف من العين كثيرا، كالأكدية التي تبدلها هكذا باطراد، وبناء على هذا لا أظن أن كلمة (صابئون) مشتقة من ص ب أ، لأن هذا الجذر له معنى آخر، ويبدو أن العرب سمعوها من أهل هذا الدين بالألف فاستعملوها هكذا.

ص ب غ: [p. 292]

صبغ: ما يصبغ به، وما يؤتمد به، المؤمنون 32/20، صبغة: الفطرة والدين القويم (صبغة الله ومن أحسن من صبغة ونحن له عابدون)، [البقرة 2/138]

العبرية ص ب ع: شئ مصبوغ؛ الآرامية ص ب ع: غطس، صاغ؛ AHw 1108 الأكدية ص ب / ف ي ت: صوف مصبوغ، سقي ري [FVQ 192، أنظر أيضا.]؛ المندائية ص ب أ: صبغ، غطس، الحبشية ص ب خ: غمّس (في مرق)، وأيضا ص ب ح: أعد مرقّة.

المعنى العام: التلوين، ثم التعميد.

³⁷ For details see *SM*, pp. 1-76. The migration of the Sabian Mandaeans has been discussed extensively, see for example *DQRDK*, esp. ch. 3 and 4; *MIL*, 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.).³⁸ Scholars generally acknowledge the prominence of Sabian Harranians as the well-reputed scholars and translators of Islamic Mesopotamia. However, this is not entirely true. When the Muslims occupied Mesopotamia, many Sabian Mandaean 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-ṣabi) (309 A.H.) and his relative Thabit Ibn Qurrah (365 A.H. or 369 A.H.), and their families, were both prominent Sabian Mandaean scholars in Baghdad. We know they were Mandaean based on an observation of their genealogy and also the nature of their works.³⁹

The Sabians who are mentioned in the Qur'an and the Muslim sources were in fact the Sabian Madaeans who continue to the present day under the title of the People of the Book in Iraq and Iran.⁴⁰

Sabian Mandaean Monotheism

Sabian Mandaism is clearly a monotheistic religion but it treats the subject in its own unique way. The Sabian 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

idem., *Die Māndaer I. Prolegomena: Das Mandäerproblem*, Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments, n.F.56, Göttingen, 1960; idem., *Die Māndaer II: Der kult, Vande hoeck and Ruprecht*, Göttingen, 1961; E.F. Lupieri, *The Madaeans: The Last Gnostics* (trans.) Charles Hindley, Grand Rapids, Mich., 2002 (Italian original, 1993); J.J. Buckley, *The Madaeans: Ancient Texts and Modern People*, Oxford, 2002; idem., *The Great Stem of Souls: Reconstructing Mandaean History*, Gorgias Press, NJ, 2005 (corrected second printing, 2006).

³⁸ The second destruction of Harran was in 1032 C.E. This may contribute further for the disappearance of the Sabian Harranians, most of whom been converted to Islam. For that see *SM*, p. 16 n. 25. For recent study on Harran see Gündüz, *KL*; T. Green, *The City of the Moon God; Religious Traditions of Harran*, Leiden, 1992. See also Nasoraia & G.W. Trompf, "Mandaean Macrohistory," *ARAM* 21, 2009-2010 (to be appeared in the later 2011 vol.); J. Hjarpe, *Analyse critique des traditions Arabes sur les Sabeens Harraniens*, Uppsala, 1972; J.B., Segal, "The Sabian Mysteries: The Planet Cult of Ancient Harran", in *Vanished civilizations: Forgotten Peoples of the Ancient World* (ed.) E. Bacon, London, 1963, pp.201-20; Dodge, B., "The Sabians of Harran" in *American University of Beirut Festival Book (Festschrift)* (eds.) F. Sarruf and S. Tamin, Beirut, 1967, pp.59-85.

³⁹ For more details see Nasoraia, "Abu Ishaq al-Ṣabi'i," Basrah University, Basrah, 1984; idem., "al-Ṣabi'at fi al-'Aṣr al-Abbasi," Basrah University, Basrah, 1985; 'Abu Ishaq al-Ṣabi'i Sha'iran' (Master thesis), Baghdad University, 1976; *SM*, introduction; Ali, "Musahamat al-Ṣabi'at;" Q.M. al-Saadi, *Abu Ishāq al-Ṣabi: Durar al-Nather u-Ghurur al-Shi'er*, Arbil, 2009.

⁴⁰ Gündüz, *KL*, p. 52. Also al-Khamene'i, "al-Ṣabi'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.⁴¹ 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 Ṣabian 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.⁴²

By the word "God" Ṣabian 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 Qadmaia*) 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.⁴³ 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*).⁴⁴

The word 'Hiia' is usually regarded as a masculine royal plural. Form *Hiia* emanated 'Life' (the First Life).⁴⁵

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

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

⁴² For more details about God and the creation of the universe see Saed (=Nasoraia), "al-Mandaeyah wal-Takwin," in *Studies in Mandaeanism: History and Beliefs* (ed.) Majid Fandi Al-Mubaraki, Sydney, 2000, pp. 101-120; idem "Khalq al-Ensan- Adam wa-Hawaa," in *ibid.*, pp. 121-41, esp. pp. 121-25; *DQRDK*, pp. 13ff.; *NDK*, pp. 316f.; *EMC*, p. 37; Rudolph, *Theogonie, Kosmogonie und Anthropogonie in den mandäischen Schriften* (Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments, 88), Göttingen, 1965; idem., *Mandaism*, p. 13; S. Alshairy (ed. and trans.), *al-Neshu' ual-Khalq fi al-Nusu al-Manda'iah*, Baghdad, 1994.

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.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 37 n. 54. See also GY I-III; Saed (=Nasoraia), "Al-mandaeyah wal-takwin," esp. pp. 100-03; idem "Khalq al-ensan," esp. pp. 121-25; *DQRDK*, pp. 13ff.; *NDK*, pp. 316f.; Rudolph, *Mandaism*, p. 13. See also n. 42, above.

⁴⁵ See n.12, above.

Yirmibirinci Yüzyılda Yeniden Okuma, Anlama ve Algılama

[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

Qadmiia Nukraiaa (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*).⁴⁷ 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 is not dissimilar to the three major monotheistic views in that Judaism, Christianity and Islam too offer 'injected' elements of saving grace for the human race. 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

⁴⁶ *DQRDK*, p. 161 n. 24. See also *EMC*, p. 37 n. 55; Drower, *The Thousand and Twelve Questions*, Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Institut für Orientforschung, Veröffentlichung Nr.32, Berlin, 1960, p. 168 (I, 229).

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, 'Niania (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.

Dinî ve Felsefî Metinler

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 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 (*Kušta*) will not be ruined, and whoever puts his trust in him will not be abased [or humiliated].

It becomes apparent that the Sabian Mandaeans uphold a strict monotheism which describes God as the ultimate power of the universe. The above prayer continues to elaborate upon his infinite measure 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 (*kušta*), 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 Sabian Mandaean monotheism which talks about the “one God” who alone is worshiped and praised by all Sabian Mandaeans. God in Sabian Mandaeanism has “no anger,” which emphasises 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...⁴⁹

⁴⁹ See n. 48, above.

Yirmibirinci Yüzyılda Yeniden Okuma, Anlama ve Algılama

The above verses really the monotheistic heart of the Sabian 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 Sabian Madaeans 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 *Kuṣṭa* (Truth), i.e., God (thereby, becoming a true Sabian Mandaean and Naṣoraeen); 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 Sabian Mandaean monotheistic view of God. Most importantly, one finds, that it warns against false dualistic views.

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

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

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 Naṣoraeans are *Asuta* (healing) and *Adam Kasia* (Secret Adam).

Redemptive healing in Mandaism is extremely important in its aim to reach *Almia d-Nhura* (the Worlds of Light). In order to connect to *Almia d-Nhura*, Mandaean Naṣoraeen purification and contemplative exercises, comprising essential prayers, baptism and other meditative practices, thus cultivate *Laufa* (Union) with *Adam Kasia*. Like the Buddhist *Dharmakāya*, *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.'

⁵² For further details see Nasoraia, *The Philosophy of Mind*; idem., *The Mandaean Religion: History, Beliefs, Worship and Celebrations* (forthcoming, 2012); idem., *The Madaeans: History, Teachings and Practices*, (forthcoming, 2012). Also consult *MII*; *MSM*; *DQRDK*, esp. ch. 1; Rodulph, *Mandaism*.

2. *Sauma* (Ar. الصوم): Fasting (the little and great fast)⁵³
3. *Birukhta* (Ar. الصلاة): Prayers (three times daily)
4. *Masbuta* (Ar. الصبغة/التعميد): Baptism (full baptism and self baptism)
5. *Zidqa* (Ar. الصدقة): Alms giving

The Ṣabian Mandaean religion also ascertains the belief in paradise, which is the Worlds of Light (*Almia d-Nhura*). There is also another important realm in the Ṣabian Mandaean religion. This is an ideal world of the perfect cosmic/heavenly Adamites, i.e. the perfect Ṣabian Madaeans, 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 Ṣabian Madaeans 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.⁵⁴

Ṣabian Mandaean Esoteric Praxis: Baptism, Living Water and the Link to Yahia (John the Baptist)

The Ṣabian Mandaean 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 Qadmai*).⁵⁵

Living Water is the essential life-giving ingredient in the baptism of the Ṣabian Madaeans. The baptismal rite of the Ṣabian Madaeans predates Christian times, going back to the Sumerian, Akkadian and Babylonian eras. The Ṣabian Madaeans regard baptism as 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

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 Mandaean 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*.⁵⁶ Baptism has retained its centrality and importance among the sacred rites of the Sabian Mandaeans – the practice of ritual washing also being the foundation of their universal redemptive system.⁵⁷

As such, healing is an important component within the Sabian Mandaean religious practice. This is specifically related to the “dynamics of healing in Sabian Mandaean contemplative praxis and its connection with *Adam Kasia*.”⁵⁸ Healing is a central aspect of the Sabian 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 Sabian Naṣoraean teachers.⁵⁹ Herein lies the mystical experience of Sabian Mandaean praxis as hidden within the context of its ritualistic tradition. Therefore, every aspect of the rituals represents a deeper more esoteric understanding.⁶⁰

The baptismal of the Sabian Mandaeans is taken as evidence for the ancient origins of Mandaicism 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.⁶¹ However, the first and main holy book of the Sabian 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 Sabian Mandaean religion), down to Seth and Sham, son of Noah, and then to John the Baptist.⁶²

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.*

⁵⁸ For Mandaean ceremonies, practise rituals see Saed (=Nasoraia), “al-Ehtefalat al-Mandaeah,” in *Studies in Mandaeanism: History and Beliefs* (ed.) M.F. Al-Mubarak, Sydney, 2000, pp. 83-99; *MII*; *Water into Wine: A Study of Ritual Idiom in the Middle East*, London, 1956; For most recent and unique studies on defilement, disability and healing see Nasoraia and Crangle, “The Asuta Wish;” Nasoraia, “The Mandaean Approach.”

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* See also *NDK*, p. 335.

⁶⁰ See ns. 54-59, above. See also Drower, *Water into Wine*; SA; Buckley, “The Mandaean Tabahata Masiqta,” *Numen* 28, 2, 1981, pp. 138-63.

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

⁶² See *DQRDK*, ch. 1; *EMC*, ch. 1 and 2; Nasoraia and Trompf “Mandaean Macrohistory;” G.R.S. Mead, *The Gnostic John the Baptizer: Selections from the Mandaean John-Book*, London, 1924.

As we discussed earlier, the religion of the Mandaeans is also known as the “Ṣabians,” which literally means the “baptisers,” or the religion of the baptisers.⁶³ The Ṣabian 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.⁶⁴

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, Ṣabian 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.⁶⁵

“To help protect against defilement, there needs to be a strong relationship between God/Living One(s)/Life, nature and the human soul.”⁶⁶ The aim of the Ṣabian 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 practises is an increasingly enlightened person”.⁶⁷

Sacred Texts of the Ṣabian Mandaean Religion.

The Ṣabian 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 Ṣabian 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 Ṣabian 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.⁶⁸

⁶³ Consult my “Christian and Mandaean,”

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ For more details see my two articles mentioned in n. 58, above.

⁶⁶ Nasoraia, “The Mandaean Approach.”

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ See Saed (=Nasoraia), *al-Salat al-mandaiat*, Basrah, 1985, p. 5.

Yirmibirinci Yüzyılda Yeniden Okuma, Anlama ve Algılama

The Ṣabian Mandaean 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 Ṣabian Mandaean 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* (Ṣabian 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 (*masiqta*) 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 Ṣabian 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 Ṣabian Mandaean is the *Qulasta* (The Canonical Prayer Book). This book can be said to be the “backbone” of the Ṣabian 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 *masiqta* (the ascent of the soul). For the Ṣabian Mandaean 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 Šuialia* (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 Ṣabian Mandaean about the ritual techniques as well as prohibitions and proscriptions in the Ṣabian Mandaean religion. This scroll is primarily in the form of a dialogue be-

⁶⁹ Nasoraia, *The Philosophy of Mind*; idem., *The Mandaean Religion*; idem., *The Mandaean*. Also consult *MII*, ch.2; Drower, “A Mandaean Bibliography,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1953, pp. 34-39.

⁷⁰ Ibid. See also n. 61, above.

⁷¹ Ibid. See also Lidzbarski, *Mandäische Liturgien mitgeteilt, übersetzt und erklärt*, Berlin, 1920.

tween Light World Beings on all things concerning life, death, existence and creation – the central themes of the Ṣabian Mandaean religion.⁷²

The Ṣabian Mandaean Gnosis

Mandaeans are the “enlightened ones” “possessors of knowledge and wisdom of God.” The Ṣabian Mandaeans are distinguished from other Gnostic groups based on their rejection of ascetic practices such as abstinence and flagellation. Ṣabian Mandaeans encourage family life and taking care of the body (the vehicle of the soul). Also Ṣabian 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 (*Kuṣṭa*) who possessed full Gnosis and the power of healing. The Ṣabian Mandaeans continue to follow his teachings.⁷⁶ Preserving the quality of “mysticism” and “majesty” from within the oral and written Gnostic tradition.⁷⁷

⁷² Nasoraia, *The Philosophy of Mind*; idem., *The Mandaean Religion*; idem., *The Mandaeans*. See also n. 46, above.

⁷³ See also Nasoraia, “Do Gnostics Believe?”

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 Ṣabian 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 ušliha* (‘prophet and messenger’) and *nbiha d-kuṣṭa* (‘the prophet of *Kuṣṭa* [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.

Ṣabian Mandaean Gnosis is a revealed religion that has inspired the divine code of laws and traditions that make up the religion today. The Ṣabian 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 Ṣabian Mandaean religion as “a self-contained, unique system belonging to the general stratum of the Gnosticism of the late antiquity.”⁷⁸ 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 Ṣabian Mandaeans.”⁷⁹

The Esoteric and Mystical Tradition of Ṣabian Mandaean Religion: Naṣirutha and Naṣoraean

This section follows the basic Ṣabian Mandaean belief in *Manda* that is followed by the deeper wisdom known by Ṣabian Mandaeans as *Naṣirutha*. This wisdom is believed to be in the privileged possession of the Naṣoraean, the elite of the Ṣabian Mandaean community. However, it is also believed that the Naṣoraean do not necessarily need to be from within the priesthood. It is believed that *Naṣirutha* is gifted to “chosen” Ṣabian Mandaeans regardless of class or status. *Naṣirutha* is a Mandaic term that refers to the secret teachings in the Ṣabian Mandaean 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. *Naṣirutha* carries the metaphor of the Ṣabian Mandaean “Tree of Life” (*Lana d-Hiia*). The term represents the significant body of the Ṣabian Mandaean and Naṣoraean esoteric teaching, especially defining the mystical experience. *Naṣirutha* is a ‘Redeeming Knowledge’ and the language of the universe, of the language of science, and of ‘the Worlds and Generations/Ages.’⁸⁰

The Mandaean-Naṣoraean teachings are important to know both (i) the ancient secret teaching of this religion, known as the mysticism and esotericism of the Naṣoraean 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

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 Mandaean 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.⁸¹ 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.”⁸²

The Mandaean Naṣōraeans 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 Ṣabian Mandaean theology and rituals, looking after the community’s spiritual needs. Ṣabian Mandaeans believe that the Naṣōraeans 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

⁸¹ 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 Naṣōraean views and modern up-to-date Naṣōraean 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 Brontè,” 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.”

⁸² 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. Yamauchi, “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. Vermaseren (eds.), Leiden, 1981, pp. 467-497; D. Shapira, “Manichaeans (*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 Mandaens and Their Script,” *JSS*, 16 (1971), 174-192

Light (*'utria bnia nhura*).⁸³ Their lives are destined to the perpetual Light, which is called the *Malka (Rama Rba) d-Nhura*⁸⁴ (the (High Great) King of Light).⁸⁵

The Şabian Mandaean 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.⁸⁶ However, the Şabian Mandaean 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.⁸⁷

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-

⁸³ The term (*a)bnia nhura* ('Sons of Light') is used in various ways and Şabian Mandaean sources; e.g. *Ginza*, II 13, 246; Lidzbarski, *Mandäische Liturgien mitgeteilt*, 17-18, 24-5, 36-7, 41-2, 71; Euting, J., *Qolasta oder Gesänge von der Taufe und dem Ausgang der Seete*, Stuttgart, 1867, vol. 25, p. 24. See *DQRDK*, p. 9 n. 22

⁸⁴ E.g. *GY*, 5: 11, 6: 9; *Ginza*, II 31; *MD*, p. 244b f.; *HG* p. 3. See *DQRDK*, p. 9 n. 23.

⁸⁵ *DQRDK*, p. 9.

⁸⁶ See "Mandaean Community Consultation Report," *STARTTS*, Sydney, 2006 (Rev. 2008); A. Nickerson, E. Melhem (and others), *The Wellbeing of Sydney Mandaens: Past, Present, Future*, Psychiatry Research and Teaching Unit, Sydney, 2008.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* See many reports from UNHCR and many other Human Right groups, e.g., S. Reinke, "Mandaeans in Iraq", *Society for Threatened People (STP)*, 2006; R. Seymour, "New Constitution threatens Iraq's ethnic groups", *Middle East, Issue 364*, 2006, pp. 60-61.; UNHCR. The UN Refugee Agency (information for Iran and Iraq) (www.unhcr.org/), from 1995-2010; www.HumanRightsWatch.org/background/; www.mandaeanunion.org (many reports, e.g. 2010-2011).

verted to other religions. The Ṣabian 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 Ṣabian Mandaean community may include concerns that the community is chiefly insular and does not accept converts.⁸⁸ Also, those who can speak the ancient Aramaic Mandaic language of the Ṣabian Mandaean religion are becoming scarce – the rituals must be performed in traditional language. There is a lack of reliable translations of holy texts.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 Ṣabian 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.⁹⁰

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

It may be that the Ṣabian 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 Ṣabian Mandaean religious and cultural values. This is especially important in the wake of the new generations of Ṣabian Mandaean youth, who are affected by modernity and Western culture. There are already steps established to keep the Naṣoraean 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.⁹²

⁸⁸ See Nasoraia, “al-Mandaeyah wal-Tabshir.”

⁸⁹ It was very hard for Ṣabian 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.

⁹⁰ For many of these challenges see Nasoraia, “Do Gnostics ‘Believe’?;” idem., “Mandaean Diaspora;” idem., “A Call to Manda.”

⁹¹ See Nasoraia, “Do Gnostics ‘Believe’?.” See also idem., “The Mandaeans: Past, Present and Future.”

⁹² Ibid. See also our early discussion on the current situation of the Ṣabian Mandaeans, including our references, ns. 13-16, above.gunduz

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Şabian Mandaism is a strong community of ancient “monotheistic” believers. The unique aspects of this monotheism, however, are enriched by Gnosis. In this way the Şabian 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 Şabian Mandaeans from Sabian Harranians. I believe, it is clear, from the evidence provided, that the Şabians of the Qur’an are in fact the Mandaeans of Harran and the Mesopotamian regions. Moreover, there were many important Şabian Mandaeans living in Harran, who are generally confused with Şabian Harranians, a point which we have made clear. In brief, the sacred texts and esoteric practices of the Şabian Mandaeans are distinctly unique to the Şabian Mandaean tradition and culture and which sets them clearly apart from other ancient communities, especially the so called Şabian Harranians.

The Şabian 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 Naşoraeans who act as keepers of the divine wisdom and sacred knowledge. The Naşoraeans are also great healers and teachers who nourish the spiritual needs of the Şabian Mandaean community.

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