

A Book on Samaritanism and Mandaism

Rainer Voigt, hrsg. /ed. *Und das Leben ist siegreich!: mandäische und samaritanische Literatur. Im Gedenken an Rudolf Macuch (1919–1993) / And Life Is Victorious: Mandaean and Samaritan Literatures: In Memory of Rudolf Macuch.* Mandäische Forschungen Band 1/Vol. 1. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008. 288 pp., 68€. ISSN 1861-1028; ISBN 978-3-447-05178-1.

This book consists of papers read before the international conference on Mandaean and Samaritan studies, held at the Freie Universität Berlin in the autumn of 2003. The conference was organised on the tenth anniversary of the death of the well-known scholar in Semitic languages and cultures, Professor Rudolf Macuch (16 October 1919 –23 July 1993). I had the honour of knowing Professor Macuch, who was my host during a research stay in Berlin, from 1 April 1985 to 31 July 1986, arranged and financed by the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung. It was no secret that Professor Macuch was an authority in various fields of Semitic study: classical and modern Mandaean, new Syriac literature and Samaritan studies in general, and Samaritan Hebrew and Aramaic in particular (see his *Grammatik des samaritanischen Hebräisch* [Berlin 1969]; *Grammatik des samaritanischen Aramäisch* [Berlin 1982]). In addition Professor Macuch made such contributions to Arabic studies as translating the Qurʾān into Slovak. His doctoral dissertation, completed in 1948 under the direction of Professor Ján Bakoš, dealt with Slovak names and expressions in Arabic geographies. Yet Rudolf Macuch is best known for his remarkable achievements in the Mandaean language. In the 1950s he discovered a new, spoken Mandaean in Khuzistan (*Handbook of Classical and Modern Mandaic* [Berlin 1963]; *Neumandäische Texte im Dialekt von Ahwāz* [Wiesbaden 1993]).

Rudolf Macuch was born in the small village of Dolnie Bzince in Slovakia on 16 October 1919. Later he lived in various cities in North America as well as in Paris, Tehran, Oxford, and Berlin, where he resided from 1963 until his death on 23 July 1993. Macuch had a profound command of numerous languages: Czech, Slovak, German, Persian (he lived in Iran from 1948 until 1961), French, English, Greek, Latin, Russian, Arabic, Hebrew, Mandaean, and Syriac. He used to say that an educated person has to speak at least five languages fluently. This reminds me of the gloomy reality today when many orientalist or even professors of living languages such as Arabic and Hebrew are unable to speak these tongues or to write in them.

In all, twenty papers are presented here, fourteen on Mandaean aspects (pp. 19–216) and six on Samaritan subjects (pp. 219–282) followed by a register (pp. 283–286). Twelve articles are written in German, and the other eight are in English. Among the conference participants was one Mandaean, Sabih Alsohairy, and one Samaritan, Benyamim Tsedaka. These two scholars represent their tiny minorities (Mandaiia/Mandaeans = knowers and Šāmērām/Samaritans = Keepers of the Torah/Law) in Iraq (about 4,000 people, who are living in

difficult circumstances and who have but one choice if they wish to stay in their homeland: either convert to Islam or die). A further 3,000 Mandaean live in Iran and 3,000 in Australia. In all, approximately 70,000 Madaeans are scattered around the globe. Whereas the number of the Samaritans is 750 and they live in the cities of Nablus in the Western Bank and Ḥolon near Tel-Aviv. Thus, most of the Madaeans today live in the Madaean Diaspora, and their national and holy language is an eastern dialect of Aramaic. The Samaritans, on the other hand, whose holy language is western Palestinian Aramaic, are only to be found living near their holy place, Mount Gerizim in Nablus and in Ḥolon. The members of these two sects do not speak their old languages, but rather the languages of their environment, meaning Arabic, Hebrew, and European languages. Yet the people are neither Arabs, Muslims, Christians, nor Jews. The main body of literature of these two sects, which are made up of the followers of John the Evangelist (also known as John the Baptist, *Iahia Iuhana*) and the followers of Moses the Prophet, is basically religious and revolves around the *Ginza Rabba* (in eighteen parts) and the Torah.

The volume begins with a foreword by the editor and conference organiser, Professor Rainer Voigt (the head of the Seminar für Semitistik und Arabistik at the Freie Universität Berlin). Then follows an essay by Professor Maria Macuch, the daughter of Rudolf Macuch, about her 'wise and loving' father (pp. 9–16). In undertaking the difficult task of making a brief survey, Maria Macuch touches on various points about her father as a scholar and, in particular, as a person. Rudolf Macuch grew up in a very poor peasant family, 'brought up in a somewhat narrow-minded Lutheran environment' (p. 10). Maria tells how, on his first day of school at the age of six, the child Rudolf stood in front of his class and asked the teacher: What is the meaning of *alpha et omega*? He surely did not hear this expression at home, but rather must have come across it in his extensive reading. Studying theology at the University of Bratislava (in Preßburg) changed his attitude entirely to religion. Among his teachers were Bakoš, Blachère, Sauvaget, Dhorme, Dupont-Sommer, Février, and Virollaud. Although Macuch became a priest in 1943, for a long time he did not work in the church because he did not believe in the church dogmas and did not wish to deceive his congregation. In this regard Maria adds, '...he loved Jesus of Nazareth and Christian values, which he practised all his life' (p. 11). Macuch serves as a good example of a fieldwork researcher in Madaean in Iran and in Samaritan Hebrew and Aramaic in Nablus. During his several trips to the Samaritan community in Nablus and with the assistance of his student, Professor Zuhair Shunnar, who originally came from Nablus, Macuch succeeded in purchasing forty-two modern Samaritan manuscripts. Shunnar briefly describes these manuscripts in his *Katalog samaritanischer Handschriften* [Berlin-West 1974]. Maria Macuch asserts that her father '...managed to establish the most extensive library on Samaritan Studies in the whole world, including rare and valuable manuscripts' (p. 14); however, the basis for this claim is not forthcoming.

The section on Madaeism includes the importance of Macuch's research to the Madaeans/Sabians/Nasoraean in Iraq; Madaean origins and earliest history; the development of Madaean script: is it derived from an Iranian or an Aramaic source? the mathematics and astronomy of the Madaeans; the Islamic influence and speculations in Madaic literature and traditions; a Madaean creation report and Genesis 1, a Madaic text annotated and translated into German; preliminary remarks on an edition of rituals taken from the Drower

Collection 50; the language of Mandaic incarnation bowls in early Islam; the Mandaeans (and not Mandaans as occurs on pp. 128–143) and the myth of their origins (the Mandaean version of creation and the four ages of mankind as well as theories on their origin, either Egyptian or Palestinian). All of this study has been carried out in light of Mandaean sources. Mention should be made here that not every Arab is Muslim (as is stated, for example, on p. 138). Other themes taken up are a child from a high-level sky-birth (*emruma*) and the figure of John the Baptist (*Iahia Iuhana*) according to Mandaeans (short texts, translation, and comments); Mandaean baptismal rites in light of manuscript 27 from the Drower Collection (meaning and goal); the Mandaeans today (a survey of Mandaean Arabic publications in Iraq and in the Diaspora; and the problem of preserving identity in small groups in foreign countries); preliminary remarks on the unpublished manuscript DC 40-*Šapta dmihla* known as ‘the scroll of salt’, in particular, classical Mandaean, consisting of 1,137 lines of incantations and copied in 1832, containing a plethora of proper names. There is a discussion of Mandaean metrics and a detailed description of style and (syllable) structure of Mandaean poetry based on a sample (a prayer) taken from the work of Mark Lidzbarski (1920).

In the section on Samaritanism there are articles on the following topics: the concept of the oldest Samaritan Law: definitions of the *Terminus Thechnicus* κανόν and the oldest Samaritan concept of the Torah, which was characterised by respect for Moses’ tradition and a refusal to accept other scriptures; Samaritan cantillation, including a general description of the pure vocal music that has been passed from father to son, and two choirs and two styles – one heavy, one light – as well as an explanation of *sidrē miqrāta*. Common features shared with the Jewish Yemenite tradition; a discussion of Samaritan Passover offerings on the basis of quotations dating from the second half of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth. One of the main points is the fate of the right forelegs of sacrificial offerings: should they be burnt or given to the High Priest? There are also some words in the Torah and in prayers that are read differently by contemporary Samaritans. We find investigations into semantic fields based on the book of al-Ṭabbāḥ, a central Halachic work written in Middle Arabic in the eleventh-twelfth centuries by Abū Al-Ḥasan (Ab Ḥisda) b. Marḥīv b. Māruth the Tyrian. Gerhard Wedel, the author of this particular article, published the first half of this Arabic text with a German translation and comments in 1987 as his doctoral dissertation, written under the supervision of Rudolf Macuch. József Zsengellér, in ‘Temple and Sacred Texts: A Samaritan and Jewish Perspective’, examines the interaction between text and place as well as their effect on religion. In addition the relationship between canon and temple along with the process of canonisation are discussed. In Judaism and Samaritanism the holy place determines the holiness of the book. One may well ask doesn’t a sacred text make a place holy?

Macuch’s name is often cited, despite the fact that almost none of the presentations deals directly with purely linguistic aspects of spoken and classical Mandaean or Samaritan Hebrew and Aramaic, topics that formed the core of Macuch’s research. Unfortunately, in only four articles do we find a list of sources at the end; the remaining articles give the sources in marginal notes. And in one unfortunate instance the reader discovers that the list of sources is not identical with those mentioned in the marginal notes.

Sabih Alsohairy surveys in his short article (pp. 19–27) Macuch's contribution to the revival of the Mandaean language (mingled classic and modern features plus Arabic influence) and religion together with the contributions of other scholars such as Th. Nöldeke, M. Lidsbarski, W. Brandt, H. Petermann, L. Drower, and K. Rudolph. The author provides a list of Macuch's writings on the history and language of the Mandaeans that have had an impact on the Iraqi Mandaeans. He also touches on various ideas concerning the original homeland of his ancestors and their various societies all over the world. He says that the attitude of Iraqi Muslims towards the Mandaeans does not follow what is mentioned in the Qur'ān as *Ahl Dhimma* (cf. p. 71ff); instead, the Mandaeans are considered faithless. In addition he raises the problem of teaching and learning spoken Mandaean in the Diaspora – in Europe, the United States, and Australia – and how in some communities some Mandaean religious books such as the *Ginza Rabba* are available. An Arabic translation of this major religious work was prepared for the first time by Alsohairy himself together with Jusef Quzi in 1998 in Baghdad. Today the priests (*tarmidia*) have double roles, religious as well as educational: they must teach the younger generations both their religion and their national and holy language. Mandaeans in Iran and Australia speak a new Mandaean dialect among themselves, whereas in Iraq, Arabic is used. Mandaeans today are endeavouring to preserve their identity by learning a new dialect of their old language and adhering to their religion (see Alsohairy's dissertation, *Die irakischen Mandäer in der Gegenwart* [Hamburg 1975]).

Jorunn Jacobson Buckley pursues the topic of Mandaean origins, again on the basis of Rudolf Macuch's theories, in order to suggest a different direction, at least with regard to the trade routes of emigration and the role of Ardban II or III. Macuch had accepted the Mandaeans' tradition, which holds that Jerusalem was the Mandaeans' original home (the so-called Palestine origins thesis, the other thesis being the Babylon origins thesis). Other ideas and theses raised by various scholars such as E. Lupieri, V. Schou-Pedersen, J. B. Segal, J. Wiesehöfer, U. Kahrstedt, J. Naveh, Ş. Gündüz, and Sh. Pines are discussed and 'possible scenarios' suggested. The Mandaean source *Haran Gawaita* (inner/hidden Haran, Great Revelation) is dealt with at length in order to consider its reliability as an historical source, and various interpretations of its wording are given. The writer suggests that the Mandaeans in Babylonia in the late 1930s 'understood themselves – and were seen by others – as Jews until then' (p. 42). Finally, Buckley is inclined to view the Mandaeans as 'the earliest example ... possibly moving from Palestine to Media –creating our first evidence for Gnostic religiosity' (see his study *The Mandaeans: Ancient Texts and Modern People* [Oxford/NY 2002]).

On the origin and development of the Mandaic *Abagada* (twenty-four characters, between Syriac and Arabic), Bogdan Burtea presents a systematic summary, from Nöldeke in 1869 through Ch. G. Härbel in 2006. In other words, theories are discussed of an eastern origin on the one hand versus a western origin on the other. One opinion holds that Parthian chancery script gave rise to the scripts of languages such as Elymaic, Chalcenean, and Mandaic between the second half of the first century and the end of the second century (p. 51).

In 'Mathematics and Astronomy of the Mandaeans', Harald Gropp touches on several mathematical and astronomical points that he hopes will serve as 'a start for future

discussions...’ (p. 66). He writes, for example, that the Mandaean year is very exact, ‘up to half a minute’ (p. 67 and consider what is said on p. 68). A clear focus is lacking here, and irrelevant themes such as the discovery of the Mandaeans, European travellers, Mandaean world history, and the alphabet are interpolated into the discussion.

Şinasi Gündüz claims at the beginning of his article (pp. 71–86) that Mandaism shares certain concepts, beliefs, and attitudes with Arabic Islam, despite the fierce polemics between these religions. The Arab prophet, Moḥammad, called the ‘son of the slaughter, son of the demon Bizbat’, is continuously insulted in Mandaic literature (p. 77). A deeply negative image of the Muslims as expressed in Mandaic literature (*Ginza*, *Haran Gawaita*, *Diwan Abatur*, *Drašia d Yahia*, *Alf Trisar*, and especially in colophons) is presented in detail. The titles of both the previous article and this one do not successfully reflect what is included in their texts. Needless to say, the resemblance between the two religions does not automatically mean that one made an impact on the other. In the article’s last four pages, which deal with the so-called ‘Islamic influence’, no clear case of irrefutable influence is shown.

Erica C. D. Hunter’s paper is a pilot study that focuses on the orthography and language of three Mandaic incantation bowls excavated in Nippur in 1989. These bowls date back to the Ummayyid period of classical Mandaic works, and their textual features are compared with specimens from Khouabir and Kutha. (Cf. Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Mandaic Incantation Texts* [New Haven, CT 1967]. Several linguistic blemishes are found on pp. 251, 274, 275, 276, 279, 280, 281).

The Samaritan Benyamim Tsedaka (pp. 247–253) discusses an ordinary phenomenon that is related to different readings of certain words in the Torah and prayers by contemporary Samaritans. This situation reflects centuries of oral transmission from various sources: an Ashkelon reading, a Cairo reading, a Damascus reading, a Gaza reading, a Nablus reading, and others. It should be pointed out that the Samaritan Pentateuch, unlike the Masoretic Pentateuch, has no *Textus Receptus*, no canonisation. In the Samaritan Pentateuch emphasis is placed on the oral tradition rather than on the written text, which lacks any clear system of vocalisation in the ancient manuscripts. Contemporary editions of the Samaritan Pentateuch in Ḥolon and Nablus include vowels that can be different in controversial words. There are many words that have several pronunciations, even though their meaning is identical. The **word** ערים (‘cities’) is pronounced *ā:raṃ* in twenty-four cases, as *‘arraṃ* in thirteen cases, and as *‘ārraṃ* in one case, namely, Genesis 35:5 (see Z. Ben-Ḥayyim, *LOT*, 4, Jerusalem 1977, p. 204). Sometimes the context in which a specific word occurs determines its pronunciation. The word שם (‘name’) in a positive context is articulated as *šam* (Genesis 2: 11, 3:20, 4:17, 19, and so on), whereas in a negative context, the pronunciation is *šem* (Genesis 11:4). The verb ואהבת (‘to love’, Leviticus 19:18) is pronounced today as *waa’ibta* and *waabta*; the second version is modern, as the author shows. Sometimes such controversy leads to brawls, grudges, and dissension among various families of Samaritans. Some cantors try to avoid any dispute by reading neither *waa’ibta* nor *waabta*, but *uta’eb*. A list of eight causes is given for this contention over certain words in the Samaritan Pentateuch and prayers. The causes include misunderstanding, the refusal of dignitaries to admit their mistakes, different sources of oral transmission, the context, and a positive or negative

attitude to God and to human beings. One does not need to emphasise that the original Samaritan pronunciation of the Pentateuch and prayers is almost impossible to reconstruct. Such differences in pronunciation are affirmed in medieval Samaritan literature; המיתו (*āmītu*, ‘to urge’, and not *īmītu*, ‘to kill’, Exodus 4:24) is a well-known example. There have been some attempts to establish a Samaritan religious council in order to unify the pronunciation. An important question arises with regard to the advantage of imposing a single reading that does not reflect the entire tradition of Samaritans in their various locations in the Middle East. On the other hand, will the phonetically transliterated Samaritan Pentateuch prepared more than three decades ago by Z. Ben-Ḥayyim [*LOT*, 4, Jerusalem 1977] function as the *Textus Receptus* in the future?

This book is a useful resource for students of Semitic studies in general and for students of Mandaism and Samaritanism in particular. We now await the publication of the second volume, the proceedings of the conference held in 2008 in Berlin, on the same two themes.

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