

**Bogdan Burtea, Das mandäische Fest der Schalttage (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005),  
in the Journal of the American Oriental Society 127.2: 208–10 (New Haven, CT:  
American Oriental Society)**

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of women within one cultural segment of the Karaites community; it is of great value to anthropologists and to those interested in learning more about contemporary Karaites.

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*Das mandäische Fest der Schalttage: Edition, Übersetzung und Kommentierung der Handschrift DC 24 Šarh d-paruanaiia.* By BOGDAN BURTEA. Mandäische Forschungen, vol. 2. Wiesbaden: HARRASSOWITZ VERLAG, 2005. Pp. ix + 246, CD-ROM. €68.

Recognizing the recent revival of interest in the Mandaeans, the Harrassowitz Verlag has initiated a new Mandaicological series, entitled *Mandäische Forschungen*, under the editorial auspices of Rainer Voigt of the Freie Universität Berlin. The present work is a text edition of the manuscript DC 24 from the Drower Collection at the Bodleian Library of Oxford University. In any case, this important development will be welcomed by Semitists everywhere.

Although relatively new to the field, the author of this edition has already distinguished himself with his scholarship on Semitics and the history of religions, spanning a vast area ranging from the Carpathian Mountains of his native Romania to the Ethiopian plateau. His most recent publication is a slightly revised version of his doctoral thesis, which was completed under the direction of Rainer Voigt and secondarily appraised by Kurt Rudolph. At the moment, Voigt and Burtea are collaborating on text editions of two more manuscripts from the Drower Collection, DC 27, **zihrun raza kasia** "Zihrun, the Great Secret," and DC 44, **zrazta d-hibil ziua**, "The Amulet of Hibel Ziwa," to appear in future volumes of this series. The two scholars should be commended not only for editing these important texts but also for this exciting new venue for Mandaean studies.

The copyist of the present manuscript, the Mandaean priest Yahia Bihram, son of Adam Yuhana, of the Kamisia clan, completed it in the Iranian city of Khorramshahr (then known as Muhammerah) in the year 1832.<sup>1</sup> Its title, **šarh d-paruanaiia**, immediately identifies it as a member of a specific genre of Mandaic literature, the priestly or ritual commentary. Although the term *šarh* from which the name of the genre is derived is Arabic in origin, meaning a kind of commentary or explanation, the Mandaean genre differs from the Arabic in several important regards. Arabic *šurūh* generally take the form of running commentaries, accompanying the text which is the subject of the commentary, whereas Mandaean analogues generally dispense with the prayers that are their subject, save for short quotations which generally only reproduce the beginning and the end of each prayer. Furthermore, unlike their Arabic analogues, most examples of the Mandaean genre are occupied not so much with explanation as with instruction. Burtea makes a very interesting observation, namely that works of this genre assume much knowledge on the part of the reader about the relevant prayers and rituals, which are only partially described, suggesting that the function of these manuscripts was primarily mnemotechnic. It would be highly instructive if some scholar were to pursue this angle, to see how the Mandaean priests themselves make use of this manuscript, and compare the instructions within it to the actual ritual praxis.

In the case of DC 24, the rituals described within the text are performed during the holiest time of the Mandaean calendar, the five epagomenal days of Paruanaiia. Like the Sasanian calendar from which it is likely derived, the Mandaean calendar is a solar calendar divided into twelve months of

1. Note that transliterations of Mandaic words are traditionally given in bold type rather than italicized. As one of the few survivors of the 1831 cholera epidemic, which devastated the region and wiped out the Mandaean priesthood, Yahia Bihram's story is remarkable in its own right; see Jorunn J. Buckley, *The Great Stem of Souls* (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias, 2006), 143–59.

30 days duration and one intercalary month of five days duration.<sup>2</sup> It is during these five days, which fall between the eighth month of Šumbulta (Virgo, lit. 'ear of corn,' cognate with the word shibboleth) and the ninth month of Qaina (Libra, lit. 'reed'), that Paruanaiia is celebrated. Mandaean gather from afar during these days to take part in the ceremonies, and particularly to be baptized, as the rivers will be swollen with fresh water from the melting snows of the north during this time of year. In 2007, Paruanaiia (or 'Panja,' from the Persian word for the number five, as the holiday is more commonly known today) began on Sunday, March 18.

The five days preceding Paruanaiia are considered to be the most inauspicious days of the year, and result in the defilement of the Mandaean cultic hut, the *mandi*, in which the most important rituals take place. This necessitates the re-consecration of the *mandi* during Paruanaiia, through a ritual involving the sacrifice of a sheep and a dove. It is noteworthy that the sacrifice of the latter but not the former is described in DC 24, indicating once again how this commentary is not intended to be comprehensive. In fact, as Burtea notes, the rituals described within DC 24 do not include those that also occur at other times of the year, but only those that are specific to the season. Given the fact that the prayers which are associated with these rituals are generally abbreviated, and that not all of the Paruanaiia rituals are included, readers hoping to acquire a full picture of the rituals should consult Drower's *Canonical Prayerbook of the Mandaeans* (Leiden: Brill, 1959) and her *Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 1962; recently reprinted by Gorgias Press) together with this text edition.

Burtea's treatment of the text is solidly philological. Even though his approach to the text is somewhat conservative in its explicit and somewhat exclusive focus upon the text itself, the presentation of the text does make one concession to modernity: each copy of the book is furnished with a CD containing images of the manuscript itself.<sup>3</sup> It is refreshing to note that this work, which is the only edition of this manuscript and will likely remain the standard reference on the subject for many years, is remarkably free of errors in its transcription and translation. The manuscript itself can be difficult to read in a few places, and several characters of the Mandaic script are liable to be confused in even the most cautious hand, as readers can see for themselves in the accompanying CD. The transliteration and translation, which occupy the bulk of the edition (pp. 14–153), follow a brief introduction (pp. 1–11), and are followed in turn by Burtea's philological commentary (pp. 155–215). His edition of the text is supplemented by a number of very useful appendices, including a full concordance of the prayers cited within the text and a limited glossary of the most important ritual and technical terms, as well as some proper nouns and other vocabulary not found in the standard dictionary. The concordance references both the standard edition of the prayers, Drower's *Canonical Prayerbook* and Mark Lidzbarski's *Mandäische Liturgien* (Hildesheim: Wiedemann, 1971).

The language of the text is described as "postclassical Mandaic," as it shares many features with the living vernacular language. The text is transcribed according to a modified version of the system employed by Drower and Macuch in their *A Mandaic Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963). Following the transliteration convention first suggested by Giuseppe Furlani and more recently adopted by Rainer Voigt, Burtea has substituted the vowel letter *e* for Drower and Macuch's ' . At first glance, this new convention has much to recommend it, as the grapheme in question never represents the voiced pharyngeal fricative /ʕ/, which is represented by a separate grapheme resembling a backwards 3, derived from the Arabic 'ayn. On the other hand, the primary use of the former grapheme seems to be the representation of a prothetic syllable inserted before an initial consonant cluster, the reflex of which

2. The date of the Sasanians' adoption of this calendar is still a matter of controversy; al-Biruni attributes its adoption to the reign of Yazdegerd I (399–420 C.E.), whereas other Islamic sources attribute it to the reign of Khosrow II (531–79 C.E.). See Antonio Panaino, "Calendars, I. Pre-Islamic Calendars," in *Encyclopædia Iranica* 4 (New York: Encyclopaedia Iranica Foundation, 1990), 658–68, for further details on this discussion. Following these sources, Panaino notes that intercalation ceased to be practiced by the Zoroastrians after the Islamic conquest until the beginning of the eleventh century C.E. when it was once again adopted; this provides us with a *terminus ante quem* for the Mandaeans' adoption of this calendar in the middle of the seventh century.

3. Unfortunately, the sleeve containing the CD is glued to the back cover of the book in such a way as to prevent its opening without sacrificing the sleeve itself or damaging the back cover of the book.

is usually /el/ in the vernacular language; other uses of this grapheme appear to be secondary.<sup>4</sup> Fortunately, there is an initiative to incorporate the Mandaic script into the next revision of Unicode, which will render all questions of the optimum transliteration of this script purely academic, as the script itself will soon be accessible to nearly all scholars.

If there is a single deficiency in this edition that bears mentioning, it would be its neglect of the contemporary community, which could contribute much to the limited picture of the rituals offered by the manuscript. Drower was, in many ways, extremely prescient in the attention she gave both to the textual descriptions of rituals and the actual rituals themselves; this has become the standard practice among anthropologists. There are a few small errors that could easily have been rectified by consulting a member of the Mandaean priesthood, such as the proper recitation of some of the formulas and ritual terminology (for example, *əṣšabbā māre eb-lebbā dakyā* “may God be praised with a pure heart,” rather than **marai mšaba b-liba dakia**), and some minor details involving the names found in the colophons. Oddly, Burtea suggests that the **maluaša** or ‘astrological name,’ which is bestowed upon every Mandaean in infancy, might be separate from the baptismal name, **šuma d-mašbuta**, and inaccurately identifies the **laqab** as the “official Mandaean name, which every Mandaean must bear as a member of a minority group in a Muslim environment.” Although the Arabic word *laqab* means a kind of nickname, in the context of the colophons the **laqab** is a clan or family name, and is often Mandaic in origin rather than Arabic.

The fact that the Mandaean community is severely endangered in its homelands and swiftly assimilating to the culture of its host countries in the diaspora lends an especial urgency to the task of eliciting data from them, before this data is irrevocably lost. Nevertheless, fieldwork among the Mandaean community would require an effort well beyond the scope of a text edition, and its absence should not detract from the value of this work in any way. Burtea’s edition, which is a remarkable work of scholarship, has contributed much to establishing a foundation for future research in this area, and is a most welcome contribution to the recent revival of interest in Mandaean studies.

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4. See my “Iranian Scripts for Aramaic Languages,” *BASOR* 341 (2006): 53–62, for further details on the vowel letters and the evolution of the Mandaic script.

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*Esoteric and Exoteric Aspects in Judeo-Arabic Culture*. Edited by BENJAMIN H. HARY and HAGGAI BEN-SHAMMAI. Études sur le judaïsme médiéval, vol. 33. Leiden: BRILL, 2006. Pp. xi + 338. €90.

This volume is an excellent collection of twelve selected papers from the ninth conference of the Society for Judaeo-Arabic Studies held at Emory University, Atlanta, in 1999. A broad variety of topics are addressed in these papers and many important conclusions advanced. Due to the restriction of space and in view of this writer’s areas of strength, however, the present review shall focus on four of the papers in this volume, three of which are concerned primarily with issues of grammar, lexicography, biblical exegesis, or text criticism.

To begin, we would venture a brief critique of one aspect of the provocative paper by David R. Blumenthal (“Philosophic Mysticism: The Ultimate Goal of Medieval Judaism”), in which he analyzes several passages in Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed* and *Mišnēh Tôrā* and concludes that the ultimate goal of human existence in the great doctor’s conception was not just the union of good praxis (*hālākā*) and correct gnosis (*dē’ā*), but in fact the attainment of a “post-intellectual mystical state” within and beyond the union of good praxis and correct gnosis, “which is the true, absolute, pure worship of God” (p. 16)—or, as Blumenthal terms it, “philosophic mysticism.” Notwithstanding Blumenthal’s obvious mastery of the material, there would seem to be some ambiguity in his presen-

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