

»Und das Leben ist siegreich!«

»And Life is Victorious«

Mandäische und samaritanische Literatur /
Mandaean and Samaritan Literatures

Im Gedenken an Rudolf Macuch /
In Memory of Rudolf Macuch (1919–1993)

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Inhalt

Vorwort	7
Maria Macuch: “And Life is Victorious!” Mandaean and Samaritan Literature – In Memory of Rudolf Macuch (1919–1993)	9

Mandäistik

Sabih Alsohairy: <i>B-šumaihun d-haiia rabbi</i> – Im Namen des erhabenen Lebendigen: Die Bedeutung von Rudolf Macuchs Forschungen für die Mandäer im Irak	19
Jorunn Jacobson Buckley: Once More: Mandaean Origins and Earliest History	29
Bogdan Burtea: Zur Entstehung der mandäischen Schrift: iranischer oder aramäischer Ursprung?	47
Harald Gropp: Mathematics and Astronomy of the Madaeans	63
Şinasi Gündüz: Islamic Influence and Speculation in Mandaic Literature and Tradition	71
Karl Günther: Durch dein Wort ward jegliches Ding – Ein mandäischer Schöpfungsbericht und Genesis 1	87
Michael Güterbock: Vorläufige Bemerkungen zu einer Ausgabe der mandäischen Rituale in der Drower Collection 50	109
Erica C. D. Hunter: The Language of Mandaic Incantation Bowls in the Early Islamic Era	117

Edmondo Lupieri: The Mandaean and the Myth of their Origins	127
Gabriele Mayer: Ein Kind aus Himmelshöhen – Geburt und Gestalt Johannes des Täufers bei den Mandäern.....	145
Victor Rebrük: Mandäische Taufriten (nach der Handschrift DC 27).....	161
Kurt Rudolph: Die Mandäer heute.....	175
Michael Tarelko: Preliminary Remarks on the Unpublished Manuscript DC 40 from the Drower Collection of Mandaean Manuscripts.....	185
Rainer Voigt: Zur mandäischen Metrik.....	189

Samaritanistik

Magnar Kartveit: Die älteste samaritanische Kanonauffassung	219
Ulrike-Rebekka Nieten: Die Kantillation bei den Samaritanern.....	227
Stefan Schorch: Gemeindeopfer oder Priesteropfer? Die späte Deuteronomisierung des samaritanischen Passaopfers.....	237
Benyamim Tsedaka: Words in Contention in the Reading of the Law and Prayers among the Israelite Samaritans Today	247
Gerhard Wedel: Semantische Wortfelduntersuchungen an Beispielen aus dem <i>Kitāb at-Ṭabbāḥ</i> des Samaritaners Abū l-Ḥasan aṣ-Ṣūrī (11. Jh.)	255
Jozsef Zsengellér: Temple and Sacred Text – A Samaritan and Jewish Perspective.....	273
Register.....	283

Sehr geehrter Herr Dekan, meine Damen und Herren!

Es ist mir eine besondere Ehre und Freude, Sie zu der mandäistischen und samaritanischen Tagung zum Gedenken an Rudolf Macuch zu begrüßen. Rudolf Macuch, am 23. Juli vor 10 Jahren verstorben, hat von 1963 bis 1988, also genau 25 Jahre lang am *Seminar für Semitistik und Arabistik* der Freien Universität diese beiden Fächer vertreten. Von seinem Œuvre her war Rudolf Macuch, wenn man dies mit einem einzigen Begriff umreißen will, einer der großen Aramaisten des 20. Jh. Er hat Bleibendes in vier aramaistischen Teildisziplinen geschaffen, der klassischen Mandäistik, der Neumandäistik, der neusyrischen Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft und der aramäischen Samaritanistik. Hinzu kommt seine Beschäftigung mit dem samaritanischen Hebräisch.

Wenn wir heute hier zusammengekommen sind, um im Gedenken an Rudolf Macuch über die mandäische und samaritanische Literatur zu handeln, so tragen wir den Gebieten Rechnung, die ihm besonders am Herzen lagen. Wir verbinden mit dieser semitistischen Konferenz auch die Hoffnung, die Mandäistik und Samaritanistik stärker im universitären Bereich in Berlin zur Geltung zu bringen. Während die Nearamaistik – wenn auch nicht speziell die Neumandäistik – an zwei deutschen Universitäten mit Lehrstühlen vertreten ist, fristet die Mandäistik und Samaritanistik in Deutschland ein vergleichsweise bescheidenes Dasein. So können wir nur auf eine Belebung dieser Studien in Deutschland und hier in Berlin hoffen!

Daß diese Konferenz in dieser Form mit so vielen ausländische Referenten veranstaltet werden kann, ist der Fritz-Thyssen-Stiftung zu danken, die in großzügiger und unbürokratischer Weise geholfen hat.

Die Freie Universität hat für diese Tagung dankenswerterweise das Clubhaus zur Verfügung gestellt.

Für die vielfältigen organisatorischen Vorbereitungen schulde ich den Mitarbeitern des *Seminars für Semitistik und Arabistik* Dank, allen voran meiner Sekretärin Frau Simon und meinem Assistenten Herrn Dr. Bogdan Burtea.

Schließlich danke ich ganz besonders dem Dekan des Fachbereichs *Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften* der Freien Universität, Herrn Prof. Dr. Eberhard König, für seine Begrüßungsrede.

Ich freue mich, daß Referenten aus so vielen Ländern nach Berlin gekommen sind – von Norwegen bis nach Ungarn, von Rußland bis nach Australien. Besonders erfreulich ist auch die Teilnahme einiger Mandäer und Samaritaner. Die Zusam-

menarbeit mit den Vertretern der Religionsgemeinschaften selbst ist unerlässlich für eine Behandlung vieler Themen.

Sie werden mir erlauben, daß ich unter allen Referenten von fern und nah nur einen namentlich begrüße, nämlich Herrn Prof. Dr. Kurt Rudolph. Wir freuen uns sehr, daß Sie kommen konnten.

Ich wünsche uns allen eine ertragreiche Konferenz!

Nachtrag:

Für die Hilfe bei der Gestaltung des Bandes danke ich Frau Sina Nikolajew und Herrn Frank Weigelt.

Dem Harrassowitz-Verlag sei Dank geschuldet, daß er die Anfertigung eines Index ermöglicht hat. Außerdem wurden die Beiträge von Gabriele Mayer und Karl Günther aufgenommen, die leider nicht an der Konferenz teilnehmen konnten

Rainer Voigt

“And Life is Victorious”
Mandaean and Samaritan Literature –
In Memory of Rudolf Macuch (1919–1993)

Maria Macuch, Freie Universität Berlin

Preface

When Prof. Voigt asked me to talk of my father in this circle, I, of course, accepted willingly and gladly, but I must admit that preparing this contribution has been one of the more difficult tasks of the past years. It is quite impossible for me to talk of my beloved father in an emotionally detached manner, and although already 10 years have passed since his death, there is hardly a day I do not think of him and recall the time I was allowed to spend with him. I am mentioning this so that you may be prepared to hear of my father not only as a scholar and his work (with which you are already fully acquainted), but as the wise and loving person I had the incredible luck to know over a long period of time.

Rudolf Macuch was born on a sunny day on the 16th of October 1919 in a little village called Dolnie Bzince in Slovakia about 6 kilometers from the city of Nové Mesto nad Váhom (previously known as Neustädtl an der Waag). I had heard from my father that his parents were extremely poor, but I was hardly prepared for what I saw when I visited Dolnie Bzince one year after his death. The little hut in which my father was born and where he lived the first 19 years of his life with his parents and his half-brother consisted of a small room of about 12 square meters with an adjacent kitchen of about the same size. My family told me that the only place with a table was the kitchen where my father used to do his homework, and later also translated the Koran into Slovak. As a child he visited from 1926 to 1931 the elementary school of his home village where the first signs of his later vocation were to be seen. One of my father's close friends from those early school days told me that little Rudolf was extremely keen on learning and kept astonishing his teachers by his strange questions. On his very first school day he stood up in front of the class and asked his teacher as a six year old: “Please, teacher, may I ask you a question: what does *alpha et omega* mean?”. In fact, no one could explain where he had caught these words, since his parents were kind, but simple peasants who had no idea what he was talking about.

With this kind of curiosity, it is hardly surprising that Rudolf's teachers strongly recommended to his parents that he be sent to the Štefánika Gymnasium in Nové Mesto, in order to continue his studies after concluding elementary school. It was probably one of the luckiest coincidences for my father that this high-school had been opened exactly in the year of his birth, in 1919, bringing higher education into one of the remote places in Slovakia. In this excellent school, where he graduated in 1939, the foundation was laid for my father's later work. His close friend, Milan Struhárik, told me that they both set out together every week-day morning and walked or rode by bicycle the long way to school, in rain, storm and every other kind of uncomfortable weather, never missing a single day. It was a unique privilege, of which both friends were well aware, to be able to visit a Gymnasium. Milan also told me that it was at times hilarious, when they marched over muddy grounds, stumbling over roots, and falling into pits, since Rudolf always had a book in front of him, usually some kind of grammar, so that he would waste no time. On more than one occasion two completely bedraggled figures entered the venerable halls of learning. Since my father had only one suit of clothes, he was often ashamed of his appearance, as I was told later, but nothing would have kept him away from school. There he discovered his love of languages which he studied continuously, even through other lessons by hiding an open grammar or a dictionary under his desk. He was so fascinated by Latin and Greek that he even thought of studying Classical Philology. But finally he had to choose Theology, since his parents were too poor to be able to finance his studies and this was the only possibility of receiving a grant from the Church. It also gave him the opportunity to continue his study of Greek and to learn Hebrew with which he started immediately after registration in the Lutheran Theological Faculty of the University of Bratislava (Preßburg).

My father often spoke to me of this period in Bratislava and how studying theology completely changed his religious outlook. Having been brought up in a somewhat narrow-minded Lutheran environment, he was at first shocked to be confronted with liberal theological views and only gradually began to understand Bible text criticism. The teacher who influenced him most was Ján Bakoš, a learned Professor of Semitic Studies who was a direct student of Wellhausen, Littmann and Lidzbarski in Göttingen. Ján Bakoš became aware of my father on the occasion of examining him for the Hebraicum at the end of his second term. This was normally a boring affair for the examiner, since Theology students used to read and translate a few verses they had prepared in advance from the Book of Genesis. When it was my father's turn to be examined, he asked Bakoš for an unknown Hebrew text. His teacher was glad to give him a text which my father had never seen before, but nevertheless read and translated with ease. Bakoš was so enthusiastic about this pupil that he did not even examine the next candidate, but tried to learn from him as much as he could about Rudolf Macuch who knew Hebrew so well. After the conclusion of the examinations Bakoš called Rudolf to his room and told him that it had been one of the most satisfying experiences he had as a teacher and that it was very seldom that a student would show such brilliant talent for languages. He

suggested to him to study Semitic languages and offered to teach him Arabic and Syriac personally.

My father returned from Bratislava to Dolnie Bzince to spend the vacations with his parents, carrying all the Arabic, Syriac and Hebrew textbooks and other grammars he could get from the Library along with him. He was seen reading and reciting to the geese and the hens and even found time between his daily chores to translate the Koran into Slovak, sitting at the kitchen table of his beloved home. In the following years Bakoš worked with him regularly, introducing him into the study of Arabic and Syriac texts. Rudolf also gradually became a well known expert in the field of the Old Testament. He prepared his fellow students for their exams and even wrote their papers for them. This was a sin which he committed not only because of a small sum of money he would receive in return, but because he was interested in the theological problems and wanted to solve them. Many years later, after my father had left Slovakia, he confessed to his old teacher Bakoš that he had helped his fellow students to cheat, to which Bakoš laughingly remarked that he was wondering why the level of papers suddenly soared up at the time when my father was studying at the faculty.

In the course of his studies Rudolf completely changed his uncritical attitude towards religion, although he had been elected as cultural referent of the Theologian Society in the year 1940/41 and was responsible for the redaction of the specialist journal *Evanjelický Teológ*. After absolving his second state examination in Theology in 1943, he realized that it would be very difficult for him to fulfil his parents' wish and enter into Church service. But the world was in upheaval and in the year 1943 during the Second World War it would have been impossible for him to continue his study of Semitic languages abroad. Although he was accepted as a student to the theological Franz-Rendtorff-Haus in Leipzig, he had no means to finance his studies and his application to leave Slovakia was refused by the military. After his ordination on the 26th of June 1943, he worked as a vicar from 1943-1945 and had to enter military service in 1944, hoping to be able to continue his studies after the war. My father told me that he disliked working as a vicar since he no longer had the naive faith necessary to give sermons which come from the heart and he felt like deceiving his hearers. Although he loved Jesus of Nazareth and Christian values, which he practised all his life, he no longer believed in the dogmas of the Church and did not want to represent them. He longed to resign and continue his studies, which he did immediately after the end of the war in 1945.

At this period he received a grant from the French government which allowed him to continue his study of Arabic and Semitic languages in Paris for two years, from 1945-47, at the *Ecole nationale des langues orientales vivantes* and the *Ecole pratiques des hautes études*. Living in the Cité Universitaire, he came into contact with students from different nationalities with whom he could practise the languages he had learned. It was there that he met my mother from Iran who was studying hygiene at the Faculty of Medicine. Rudolf attended the courses of Professors

Blachère, Sauvaget, Dhorme, Dupont-Sommer, Février, Virollaud and other prolific scholars of the field.

In the meantime my father's former teacher, Ján Bakoš, had left the Theological Faculty and became the first Ordinarius for Semitic Studies in the Philosophical Faculty of the *Comenius University* in Bratislava. This made it possible for my father to do his PhD at the Philosophical Faculty of Bratislava, choosing the topic “Slavic Names and Expressions in Arabic Geographies”. He received his doctorate on June 30, 1948, with the grade “*Summa cum laude*”. It is typical for my father that he himself was not satisfied with his work and therefore never published it, although Bakoš and his other teachers pressed him to do so. He wanted to rewrite the work and to include different readings from manuscripts which he had not yet consulted. To this day no one has tried to solve the extremely difficult problems connected with Slavic terms and names in the Arabic sources and I am thinking of publishing a German version of this work which my father prepared himself together with his other articles in a volume dedicated to his *Opera Minora*.

In the year 1948-49, my father received the position of assistant at the Institute of Semitic Studies in Bratislava and was joined by my mother, coming from Paris. My parents were married on March 31, 1949 in Bratislava. My father realized that he would have to prepare his habilitation abroad since the library of the Institute, having just been founded, was still empty and it was extremely difficult to get books. My parents decided to travel to Iran where Rudolf could study Arabic and Persian manuscripts and also come into contact with living Aramaic languages and dialects. In order to finance the journey, he agreed to write a book on Islam and Christianity, *Islam a Kresťanstvo*, for which he received enough money in advance to pay for the flight to Teheran. His departure from Slovakia was packed with passport and visa difficulties, which were all miraculously solved in the last minute.

Little did my father know, when he left Bratislava, that he would not be able to return for many long years. Novotny's terror regime began in Slovakia in the fifties, and my father wisely decided to refuse to obey the order he received from the embassy to return to his homeland immediately. But by refusing to obey, he lost his nationality and his work at the University and became a refugee in Iran. It was a difficult period for my parents, although my mother's family helped my father receive Iranian nationality which he had by 1952. But with his blue eyes and blond hair he was obviously a foreigner and a Christian, married to my mother who, knowing her fellow countrymen, felt the resentment against this marriage very clearly.

With his experience in learning languages, my father learned Persian very quickly. He began working as a teacher in an American missionary school, Community School, in Teheran, where he taught French, Latin and German, and was soon known as the teacher “with long hair and blackboard dramatics, who thinks that every educated person must speak at least five languages fluently”. I remember the first carefree years of my life very clearly and am proud to say that my father even included me in his studies. In the beginning fifties the Prime Minister Mossadegh came to power in Iran whom I used to call “Mossandegh”. My father remarked that

even his three year old daughter had knowledge of the dissimilation of geminated consonants (a subject in which – as you know – he had a different opinion than Anton Spitaler). In 1954 he also received the position of *danešyar*, “extraordinarius”, at the University of Teheran for Semitic Languages. But the most important achievement of these years was my father’s discovery of a spoken New Mandaean idiom during his field research among the Mandaeans of Khuzistan. After having received the complete Mandaean literature on 50 microfilms from Prof. Roemer in Mainz, he began to analyse the material he had gathered during his field research. The result of his work is published in his *Handbook of Classical and Modern Mandaic* in which he uses the modern language in order to reconstruct the phonetic structure of classical Mandaic. The analysis of the new material made it possible to divide Mandaic into three periods: the classical, post-classical and modern language, a division which delivers an important key to dating Mandaic literature. Although this work was finished in 1955, it took 10 years to be published, since the Academy in East Berlin, which had accepted the manuscript, failed to publish it, until it was brought to West Berlin by Ruth Altheim-Stiehl and finally appeared in 1965.

In 1955 my father published a critical review of Lady Drower’s work *The Haran Gawaita and the Baptism of Hibil-Ziwa* in the ZDMG. Although he was extremely critical of her work, it was exactly this kind of criticism that convinced Lady Drower that he was the best living specialist on Mandaic to be found and arranged for the Faculty of Oriental Studies in Oxford to invite him to work on the *Mandaic Dictionary* she had been planning. Since my father refused to leave his family behind, we all set off for Oxford in 1956. I truly believe that this was the most exciting journey I have ever experienced in my life: we rode by train to Turkey from Teheran, sitting on the wooden benches of the third class between hoards of travellers to save money. It was extremely dramatic when my father left the train at various stations to get drinking water and it set into motion before he was back on it. I stood at the window crying desperately until he managed to hop on again. I also remember crossing the Channel very vividly. The sea was stormy, and I am ashamed to say that the inevitable happened when I added unnecessary colour to my father’s best suit. He used to joke later that I added the artist’s touch to an otherwise boring outfit.

My father often said that the two years of sleepless nights in Oxford spent in the preparation of the Mandaic Dictionary were the “most blessed” in his life. I can only agree. My father worked day and night on the Dictionary, checking the rich material Lady Drower had put into his disposition, adding missing references, combining his own lexicographical collections and establishing meanings and etymologies. But although he was immersed in work, strangely, I never had the feeling of being neglected. He usually worked at home in the living-room of our tiny flat, sitting at his typewriter and hammering away for hours and hours, but he always had time to take me to school, to walk in the park and feed the ducks, to read to me interesting books and give me the general impression that life is wonderful and worth living. He had the Midas’ touch and could change anything to gold, a magician who could turn the sun on with his smile.

After completing the Mandaic Dictionary and returning to Teheran, my mother, who had been baptised in England, decided that she could not longer live in an atmosphere of religious fanaticism and personal discrimination. We left for America, hoping that my father would be able to receive a position at one of the Universities. But there were practically no chairs for Semitic Studies and he knew no one who could have been of help. After all the savings were spent, he was forced to work as a vicar again and although he was loved by his community in Windsor, Canada, and we were treated as royalty, he decided that he did not want to spend the rest of his life in this profession.

My father's fortune finally turned after we returned to Iran. After sending an off-print of one of his articles to Ruth Stiehl, he started a lively correspondence on scholarly subjects with her colleague Franz Altheim, Professor of Ancient History of the Orient in Berlin. Altheim, who had never met my father personally, was nevertheless deeply impressed by his vast knowledge in the field of Semitic Studies and personally committed himself to bringing him to Berlin. After long years of waiting and desperation Rudolf Macuch finally received the call he had been longing for to the chair of Semitic Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin in June 1963 at the age of 43.

The call to Berlin opened all the possibilities my father had wished for over the years. He could finally dedicate himself entirely to his scholarly work and use all the privileges given to him as an Ordinarius to the fullest degree. I remember how enthusiastic he was about the work he would be able to accomplish, without having to worry about financial problems which had been threatening him all his life. Our arrival in Berlin, at that time a divided city, reminded him painfully of the family he had left behind the Iron Curtain and did not dare to visit after his flight from Slovakia. But on the other hand he was at last able to realize different projects: he began work on the two other specialities he has since become famous for: Samaritan and New Syriac Studies. He undertook several long voyages to Nablus, where he came into contact with the Samaritans and collected Samaritan manuscripts. He managed to establish the most extensive library on Samaritan Studies in the whole world, including rare and valuable manuscripts, which have since been the goal of scholars of Samaritan from the four corners of the earth, as you all know very well. The collection is so unique that even scholars from Jerusalem who are at the source of Samaritan Studies come to Berlin in order to work with the texts.

Rudolf himself began to write another standard work, the *Grammatik des samaritanischen Hebräisch*, which took five years, since he planned to present a thorough treatment of the differences between Samaritan and Jewish-Masorean Hebrew in orthography, phonology, morphology and syntax. As to the pronunciation of Samaritan Hebrew, which is interesting from the point of view of linguistic history, he did not rely on his predecessors Ben-Khayyim and Murtonen, but used his own recordings of texts which he had made in the house of the Samaritan high-priest during long months in the Near East. The Grammar was published in 1969. His next project in this field of study was the *Grammatik des samaritanischen*

Aramäisch, another feat of daring, published in 1982, which has been adequately described by my father’s students Sylvia Powels and Heinz Pohl in their laudatio to the Festschrift for Rudolf Macuch as one of the most difficult projects to undertake because of the negligent state of the written records. These two grammars have become standard reference works in the field.

My father’s third main field of research, New Syriac, is represented by two books: the *Neusyrische Chrestomathie*, which he published in 1974 together with his assistant, Estiphan Panoussi, and his monumental *Geschichte der spät- und neusyrischen Literatur*, published in 1976. This latter work was the result of decades of meticulous collecting of literary products and journals written in Syriac, a treasury of the written works of a dwindling minority, which were mostly unknown even to specialists in the field before this book was published.

Although research in these two fields absorbed many years of his life, my father never lost sight of his first speciality, Mandaic Studies. Besides numerous articles, he published a book *Zur Sprache und Literatur der Mandäer* in 1976, which was dedicated to Lady Ethel Stefana Drower, and a *Neumandäische Chrestomathie mit grammatischer Skizze, kommentierter Übersetzung und Glossar* in 1989. Towards the end of his life he returned to his first love, Mandaic Studies, and spent many months recording texts with the Mandaean Sheikh Choheyli, who came to Berlin in order to work with my father. Unfortunately he did not live long enough to see the result of these labours in print. The *Neumandäische Texte im Dialekt von Ahwāz* appeared two months after my father’s untimely death on July 23, 1993 at the age of 73.

Of course, I have only mentioned the books my father has written in the course of his life, but his work was by no means restricted to these three topics. He has dedicated numerous articles to other fields of research in Arabic and Semitic Studies, which I hope to be able to edit in the near future in a collection of his *Opera Minora*, as I have already mentioned. He has received numerous honours for his life achievement, one of which was his designation as a member of the Norwegian Academy of Sciences in 1988. I should add that my father was not only interested in the languages of the minorities already mentioned, but also especially in the culture and identities of the people he was working with. His correspondence with friends and colleagues in different languages and scripts, in English, French, German, Slovak, Czech, Russian, Persian, Arabic, Hebrew, Mandaic, Syriac fills many thick volumes. Long before the so-called *linguistic turn*, he saw language as the most important tool to achieve access to people of another culture, to understand the differences and similarities which tie humankind to each other across cultural barriers. This became very clear to me, when Sheikh Choheyli told me during his sojourn in Berlin that my father’s work has been eminently important for the Mandaean community in Iran since it not only preserved traditions vital for the identity of the people, but helped the Mandaeans survive persecution during the turbulent period after the revolution of 1979. Similar statements could be made with respect to his other branches of study.

I will have to come to an end although there is, of course, much more to be said of my father as a person and as a scholar. Those who knew him will remember his most prominent traits: tolerance, generosity and a sunny nature full of warmth and kindness. I remember his love of life and knowledge, his gentleness, and last not least, his compassion for all living beings. Many of his books he wrote with one of our cats lying across his desk, covering half of his manuscript, or on his lap or across his neck, forcing him into the typical position of the ultimate cat-lover. He loved them and they loved him in a relation based on mutual respect and complete equality of man and cat. My father lived his life completely and wisely: May the Great Life be gracious to him in his dwellings in the World-of-Light!