

The Sabian doctrine in the Interpretations of the interpreters of the Qur'an

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Abstract

This paper is a study for one of the most important beliefs mentioned in the Holy Qur'an, which is the Sabian doctrine. It shows the directions of the main printed sources of Islamic Tafseer books that dealt with the Sabian beliefs with a comparison amongst them, through two topics: first: the comparison between the stories or the narrations of the interpreters of the Sabian belief, and the second: the comparison between Interpreters in the method of inference on the doctrine of the Sabian.

When comparing the narrations of the interpreters, many differences among them appear through five demands: first: the comparison between the Interpreters in defining the Sabian creed, second: comparison between the Interpreters in the narration checking if the Sabian were monotheists or polytheists, third: comparison between the Interpreters in the narrations on the Sabian book, fourth: Comparison between the Interpreters in the narrations on the Sabian prophet, and the fifth: Comparison between the Interpreters in the narrations on the origin of the Sabian religion, is it heavenly, distorted, or man-made?

Regarding the comparison of the inference methods for the Sabian creed, the interpreters agreed to use some of the inference methods under the following points: first, those interpreters who relied on the language to infer the Sabian creed; second, those interpreters who relied on antiquities to infer the Sabian creed.

One of the most significant findings of the study was the ambiguity of this creed amongst interpreters, their inability to define its beliefs, and their confusion on telling stories surrounding it. This may be because the Sabians didn't spread throughout the countries so that people presumed that they had totally vanished, so there is no trace of them. As for majority of interpreters are lack of inference regarding Sabian doctrine, through Sabian sources, Sabian history, and reality, so they relied on linguistic and archaeological evidence.

Keywords: Sabian, interpretation of the Qur'an, worship of planets, Interpreters.

Introduction

Praise be to Allah, prayer, and peace be upon the Messenger of Allah and then:

Due to the Sabian religion's uniqueness and distinction from other religions, the researcher has noticed that the Holy Qur'an mentioned it more than once when comparing various religions. As a result, we find that the books of interpretation (Tafseer) discussed in several

places the Sabians, their book, their beliefs, and some of their traditions according to what Qur'an dealt the issue, as well as the Qur'an's general references to some of beliefs that might be connected in some way to the Sabian doctrines. We observe the lack of studies on the story of the interpreters through the books of interpretations, even though these books have a rich knowledge about the Sabian from the perspective of the interpreters.

(The Sabian creed in the story of the Qur'an interpreters - a comparative study -) was the topic of my research after perusing the most well-known books of interpretations as I noticed some of the encyclopediation, diversity and discrepancy between the interpreters on their speech about the Sabian creed.

Research problem:

Although modern scientific research is interested to study the doctrine of the Sabians through their sources, but the study of the differences between interpreters in the story of the doctrine of the Sabian did not attract the attention of researchers studying comparative religions as these stories are extended and scattered in the pages of interpreters' books. This difference has been highlighted by numerous Muslim scholars. Ibn al-Qayyim stated: (The people have differed greatly on them – on the Sabian- according to what they learned about their religion). Therefore, it is essential to compare the interpreters' writings on the Sabian faith to differentiate the truth from false in these crucial scientific sources and to clarify the question of whether the Sabian faith can be inferred through these sources.

Research objectives:

1. Recognizing the interpreters' writings on the Sabian faith.
2. Comparing the accuracy of the stories told by the interpreters regarding the Sabian faith.
3. Comparing the interpreters' methods for concluding and inferring the Sabian faith.

Research Importance:

1. Paving the way for experts to draw a conclusion from the compile information scattered throughout the books of interpretation on the Sabian doctrine.
2. Dragging the attention of researchers to the huge amount of scientific data that did not take the adequate interest of them.

3. The specialist in contention is required to determine what is correct and incorrect in the key explanatory scientific sources.

Research Limits:

The most prominent principal printed sources of the books of interpretation of the Qur'an were extrapolated as follows:

- **First:** The research included the explanations of the interpreters on the verses related to the beliefs of Sabian mentioned in the Holy Qur'an, and what they also quoted from the words of others.

- **Second:** The books of Tafseer or interpretation that were chosen for this study, are those which met the criteria of importance and originality (with the exclusion of the abbreviated from another interpretation) (Al-Zarqani 2/ 29-32, 65-66); (Al-Dhahabi 1/147, 205-206) .These books chosen include seven books of different times, places, Mazhab and methodology of authoring starting from Al-Tabari (d. 310 AH / 922 CE), who composed using the traditions or news narrated from the previous authorities in Hadith followed by al-Zamakhshari (d. 538 AH / 1143 CE), al-Mu'tazili, and even al-Razi (d. 606 AH / 1209 CE), al-Ash'ari. It was not the researchers' intention to study all the books of interpretations, but they dealt with the most well-known ancient sources, as one of the resources for figuring out the directions of the interpreters.

Previous studies:

Researchers in the comparison of religions note the existence of scattered studies on the Sabian such as:

- 1- Mandaean Sabian in Iraq, Ali Al-Zaidi, master's thesis in the Department of Fundamentals of Religion at Al al-Bayt University.

2- The Sabian, a historical and advocational study, by Hammoud Al-Harthy, King Saud University Journal.

3- The Sabian, their beliefs and their civilizational tole. Wafaa Jouni, Tishreen University Journal for Research and Human Studies.

4- The Sabian, their truth and the origins of their beliefs, Ihab Muhammad, Journal of the Faculty of Fundamentals of Religion and Da`wah in Assiut.

5- Mandaean, are they the Sabian? by Muhammad Ali Khattab, Scientific Journal of the Faculty of Fundamentals of Religion and Da`wah in Zagazig.

The research focused - in a preliminary manner - on the story of the Qur'an interpreters on the belief of the Sabian, to compare between them in terms of their accuracy and knowledge, unlike previous studies which studied the history of Sabian or critic their beliefs. However, what I have mentioned here are examples of those studies rather than a full extrapolation of them, and the intent is to demonstrate that all previous studies differ in their research limits from what is intended here in this study.

Research methodology:

Comparative inductive method

Research Sections:

Introduction: It includes the problem, objectives, limits, previous studies, methodology, and research sections.

The first topic: A comparison between the story of the interpreters of the Sabian faith, and it contains five demands:

The first demand: A comparison between the interpreters in defining the Sabian creed.

The second demand: A comparison between the interpreters in the story of whether the Sabian are monotheists or polytheists.

The third demand: A comparison between the interpreters in the story of the Sabian book.

The fourth demand: A comparison between the interpreters in the story of the Sabian Prophet.

The fifth demand: A comparison between the interpreters in the story of the origin of the Sabian religion, whether it is heavenly, distorted, or man-made?

The second topic: A Comparison between the interpreters in the method of inference on the doctrine of the Sabian, and there are two demands:

The first demand: The interpreters who relied on the language in inferring the Sabian creed.

The second demand: The interpreters who relied on the narrations in inferring the Sabian creed.

Conclusion: The most important results.

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The first topic: A comparison between the story of the interpreters of the Sabian faith

The first demand: A comparison between the interpreters in defining the Sabian creed:

The Sabian is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an in three places:

1. "Indeed, the believers, Jews, Christians, and Sabians—whoever 'truly' believed in Allah and the Last Day and did good, will have their reward with their Lord. And there will be no fear for them, nor will they grieve". [Al-baqarah 62]

2. "Indeed, the believers, Jews, Sabians and Christians—whoever 'truly' believed in Allah and the Last Day and did good, there will be no fear for them, nor will they grieve". [Al-Maaidah 69]

3. "Indeed, the believers, Jews, Sabians, Christians, Magi, and the polytheists—Allah will judge between them 'all' on Judgment Day. Surely Allah is a Witness over all things". [Al-Hajj 17]

As a result, the interpreters disagree on how to define the Sabian in many sayings, and this shows that unlike other religions such as Judaism, Christianity, Magi and the like, this religion is not clear to the interpreters, and from that:

A- Defining through showing the contrast

Actually, Interpretation by contrast has a great impact in clarifying the ambiguity surrounding the word, as it is an easy and brief way to reveal the veil of the ambiguity surrounding the word (Farhad Aziz, pp. 47-49.)

The interpreters who applied this method include

- Al-Tabari (3/146) narrated "The Sabian is neither Jews nor Christians," "They are neither Magians, nor Jews, nor Christians," "A people who have no religion." Likewise, Al-Thalabi (1/209); Al-Wahidi (2/618), and Ibn Attia (1/157) have transmitted the same.

B- Defining through putting in between: including:

Al-Tabari (3/146) quoted: "The Sabian is between the Magians and the Jews," "The Sabian is a sect which is between the Jews and the Magi," and similarly, that was mentioned by Samarkandi (1/59), Al-Wahidi(2/618), Ibn Attia(1/157), and Al-Razi (3/536) mentioned that the Sabian: are "a sect of Magi and the Jews" and perhaps he meant that they derived their beliefs from the Jews and the Magi, and not that it is a Jews' sects or Magi's sects at the same time due to the difference in the belief of the Magi and the belief of the Jews. This meaning is confirmed by what he said in another place (23/212) about the Sabian that

"they are another division between the Jews and the Christians"

C- Defining by the place: including:

- Al-Tabari (3/146-147) reported that they are "a tribe from the direction of the Sawad – a term used by early Arabs to point to the lands of Iraq -", and "One of the religions that was on the Island of Mosul." Likewise, Ibn Attia (1/157) reported and Al-Thalabi (1/209) transmitted that they are "a tribe from Shaam" Likewise, it was reported by Al-wahidi (2/618)

All these previous definitions indicate the ambiguity of the belief of this religion among those from whom we have quoted, and the inability of them to define their beliefs, and perhaps this is due to the lack of spread of the Sabeian in the countries till that some of them thought that the Sabian vanished and became extinct, so there is no trace " (Al-Tha'labi (1/209) (Al-Wahidi (2/619).

Nevertheless, interpreters have conveyed some other stories that attempted to define the Sabian faith by clarifying the linguistic meaning of the word Sabian as follows:

A- Leaving one religion for another:

Al-Tabari (3/145) suggested that the origin of the word "Sabiee" is from the Arabic root (so-and-so Sabaa,) which means that someone has gone out from one thing to another, and it indicates that the Sabian religion is an innovated religion from another one, and that the Sabian were upon another belief and then left it. Likewise, Al-Samarqandi (1/59) mentioned in one of his sayings, Al-tha'labi(1/208) and Al-Wahidi (2/613-614) in one of his sayings and he – Alwahidi (2/621) mentioned that this includes even those who left kufr to Islam" As for Al-Zamakhshari (1/146, he clarified that what is meant by leaving or abandoning in the meaning of the Sabian is that turning away from the religion of Judaism and Christianity to the worship of angels Abandoning does not require that the one

was on the religion of Judaism or Christianity and then left it, but rather includes everyone who deviated from one religion to another. This was clarified by his saying in another place (1/661): “And they were called Sabian only because they became devoid of all religions.” So, the reason for calling them Sabian according to Alzamakhshari (1/661) because they inclined to follow their inner wishes and lusts in their religion without following the reasons of mind and narrations “. Ibn Attia (1/157) found it enough to mention the famous linguistic meaning “He who departs from one religion to another” and in this sense, Al-Razi (3/535-536) quoted from the people of knowledge.

B- Raising one's head to the sky to worship the angels:

Al-Samarqandi (1/59) mentioned that among the sayings in the origin of the word Sabie: “Whoever saba'a is afflicted if he raises his head to the sky because they worship the angels”

The second demand: A comparison between the interpreters in the story of whether the Sabian are monotheists or polytheists:

The stories of the interpreters differed in this matter, including:

- Al-Tabari (2/147) narrated that they say, “there is no god but Allah”, but then he (2/147). transmitted the story of others that the Sabian “worship the angels”, and as for Al-Samarqandi(1/59) , it was sufficient for him to narrate that the Sabian “worship the angels” and as for Al-Tha'labi (1/209)., he said that they “believe in Allah the Almighty, and they worship the angels” and this story is more consistent than the saying that they believe in monotheism and worship the angels because it combines the two opposites, unlike the combination of acknowledgment of God and polytheism by worshipping the angels. As for Al-Wahidi, (2L614) he explained his answer to this issue by linking the linguistic meaning of

the Sabian and the idiomatic meaning: He mentioned that “the religion that they separated from is monotheism to the worship and glorification of the stars” and it was reported in another saying (2/618). that they “worship the angels” and that (5/387). they say: “The angels are our lords”. As for Al-Zamakhshari (1/608)., he said that the Sabian are of two types: a class that worships the angels, and a class that worships the stars, but in another place (1/201). he discussed the story stating that the Sabian worship or prostrate to the planets with their acknowledgment of God Almighty, saying that they claim that their purpose in prostration is to prostrate to God, but they take the planets as a mediator between them and God. As for Ibn Attia (1/157)., he reported two stories: the first tells that the Sabian say there is no god but Allah, and the second tells that they worship the angels, and that Ziyad bin Abi Sufyan was almost to put down the Jizyah imposed on them until he knew that they worship the angels, so he did not do. It is understood from the second story by Ibn Attia (4/112) that their saying “There is no god but Allah” is more famous than their worship of the angels, that the Jizyah imposed on them was almost to be put down. He combined in a third place between the two stories and said: “Sabian are people who worship angels but pray towards Qiblah and believe in one God” This is explicit text on the contradiction by Ibn Attia which indicates that the source of contradiction in the story of Ibn Attia is not due to the difference of those who are quoted from, but rather the source of it - in Ibn Attia's opinion - is the origin of the Sabian religion, which combines the saying of God's monotheism and the worship of angels. As for Al-Razi (1/210), (3/536), (24/413), (32/365), he quoted two sayings about the Sabian: the first is that they worship the angels, and the second is that they worship the planets, and it is more likely that the Sabian worship the planets and claim that happiness and bad luck are related to them, and that they have two sayings regarding the

worship of the planets according to Alrazi (3/536) (27/566), (30/657: "The first is that the Creator of the world is God, glory be to Him, except that He, glory be to Him, commanded to glorify these planets and to take them as a direction for prayer, supplication, and glorification. The second is that God, glory be to Him, created the spheres and the planets, then the planets are the rulers of what is in this world of good and evil, health and disease, and the creators of all of this, so humans must glorify them because they are the gods that govern this world, and then they are the rulers of this world and they worship God, glory be to Him". He, Alrazi (2/344) tried to go for the answer to the question: How do they worship the planets and say that God is the Creator, using a narration that the Sabian "say that God Almighty created these planets, and these planets are the rulers of this world, so we must worship the planets, and the planets worship God Almighty"

From the foregoing, it appears that the answer is not clear to the interpreters on the question of whether the Sabian are monotheists or polytheists.

The third demand: A comparison between the interpreters regarding the story of the Sabian book:

- Al-Tabari (2/147) narrated more than one story that they "recite the Psalms" Same like him , Al-Samarqandi(1/59) Al-Tha'labi (1/209 and Al-Wahidi (10/359) quoted on the authority of Ibn Abbas (RA), in an interpretation for the verse : [from those who were given the Scripture before you] " He meant the Jews, Christians, and Sabian " In that quotation, there is a proof that the Sabian have a book from God, but he(10/364). explained in another place his comment on this narration that the Sabian are from (the people of the Book), but "their way in the People of the Book is the way of the people of innovation (bidaah) in our nation. " It appears from this commentary that Al-Wahidi believes that the

Sabian do not have a book that distinguishes them from the Jews and Christians, as was reported by Al-Tabari, Al-Samarkandi, and Al-Tha'labi. As for al-Zamakhshari (1/608) , he said that the Sabian are of two types: "a class that reads the Psalms," so their ruling is the same ruling of the people of the Book, and "a class that does not read a book," and so they are not among the People of the Book As for Ibn Attia(1/157), (4/112)., he reported two contradictory narrations: the first tells that they "recite the Psalms" and the second tells that they do not have a book, so the story of Ibn Attia differs from the story of Zamakhshari, in that Zamakhshari told the two narrations, but attributed each narration to a group of Sabian, but Ibn Attiah quoted the two contradictory sayings attributed to the Sabian as a whole without elaboration.

The fourth demand: A comparison between the interpreters in the story of the Sabean Prophet:

- Al-Tabari (2/147) reported that the Sabian had no prophet, and as for Al-Wahidi (2/619), he said that the Sabian "claim that they follow the religion of Noah, and they are liars"

The fifth demand: A comparison between the interpreters in the story of the origin of the Sabian religion: whether it is heavenly, distorted, or man-made?

Al-Tabari (2/147) said that they are: "a group of the People of the Book", and this narration is different from the previous narration that Al-Tabari narrated saying that they are "neither Jews nor Christians." Likewise, Al-Samarqandi (1/59) suggested that the Sabian are "Christians," but he distinguished between the Sabian and the well-known Christian sects that the Sabian are "softer in speech than them" As for Al-Tha'labi (1/209). he narrated two narrations: the first is like what al-Tabari, narrated and added in detail that (5/28). "their way among the People of the Book is the way of the people of innovation (bidaah) in it" , so

they are the innovators of the People of the Book according to al-Tha'labi, and the second: he (1/210).mentioned that the Sabian were upon a heavenly religion "at the time of their righteousness." As for Al-Wahidi (2/619), he quoted a more accurate saying than what preceded him stating that the relationship between the Christians and the Sabian is a similar relationship in some rituals of religion, except for some differences, and from these differences is that the Sabian "claim that they follow the religion of Noah, and they are liars". Al-Wahidi (10/359) also reported in another place that the Sabian are among those who (were given the Book) from God along with the Jews and Christians, and in this narration, there is a clear statement that the origin of the religion of the Sabian is heavenly. But he (10/364) explained in another place the meaning of his inclusion of the Sabeans in the name of (the people of the book) that they are innovators of the people of the Book. As for al-Zamakhshari, (1/608), he was confused about the answer to this question, at times: he said that the Sabian are of two types: "a class that recite the Psalms" and thus their ruling is the ruling of the people of the Book, and "a class that does not read a book" and these are not from the people of the Book. It is understood from this that the Sabian, with their two types, are not from the Jews and Christians and if the first category has a religion and their ruling is the ruling of the People of the Book. But this division contradicts the generalization in the forementioned saying by Al-Zamakhshari (1/661) that the Sabian "have left out all religions" and they tended to "follow passion and desires in their religion and did not follow the evidence of reason and hearing. "Sometimes, it was reported that the Sabian are a kind of Christians. As for Ibn Attia (3/22), he had mentioned several contradictory sayings on the issue, which indicates that the answer is not clear to him on this issue. From that he narrated that they are "a group of the people of the Book" and he attributed it to the public of

scholars (Jomhour), and he narrated a second opposing saying that they are "neither Jews nor Christians." He (1/157) quoted a third saying in between of the two previous sayings that they are "a people whose religion is between Judaism and Magi " and he (1/156) mentioned a fourth saying - in another narration - from which it is understood that the Sabian religion – before coming of Islam – is a heavenly religion like Judaism and Christianity. As for Al-Razi(16/26), he mentioned that the way of the Sabian among the People of the Book is the same as the people of innovations (bidaah) among Muslims.

The second topic: A Comparison between the interpretations in the method of inference on the doctrine of the Sabeans

The first demand: the interpreters who relied on the language in deducing the Sabian creed:

Several interpreters relied on the language in their inference on the Sabian faith, and the linguistic evidence was the source of saying that the Sabeans were on another faith and then left it. From that: al-Tabari (2/145) relied on the language to prove that the Sabian creed is a new religion from another religion, such as an apostate from Islam. This is because the Arabs called everyone who left a religion a Sabiee. As for Al-Samarqandi (1/59)., he was more detailed in inferencing the language for the Sabian creed, so he narrated two sayings in the explanation of the Sabian, and he mentioned that the Sabian is from: "Sabaa, yasboo (in Arabic) which is meaning is to lean; and it is said: " it is from Saba' , Yasba' , if he raised his head to the sky to worship the angels." As for Tha'labi (1/208), it was enough for him to narrate the famous saying among interpreters that Sabian is the one who turned out and left a religion to another "Likewise, Alwahidi (2/613-616). went on details in narrations whereas Ibn Attia (1/157). and Al-Razi (3/535) preferred to put it in short.

The second demand: the interpreters who relied on the narrations in deducing the doctrine of the Sabeans:

It is the most used evidence by the interpreters, including Al-Tabari narrated nineteen sayings regarding the story of the Sabian faith. Al-Samarqandi, Al-Tha'labi (1/209), Alwahidi (2/618-619), (10/359).; Ibn Attia (1/157), Al-Razi (3/536) also narrated the same.

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Results:

1- The ambiguity of the doctrine of this religion among the interpreters, and the inability to define their beliefs, and perhaps this is due to the lack of spread of the Sabian in the countries until some of them thought that the Sabian had extinct, and there is no trace to be found of them.

2- The question of whether the Sabian are monotheists or polytheists is not clear to the interpreters.

3- Interpreters differed on the issue of whether the Sabeans had a book and what is it. They had three stands:

A- Al-Tabari, Al-Samarqandi, and Al-Tha'labi narrated that their book was the Psalms.

B- Al-Wahidi believed that the Sabian did not have a book that distinguishes them from the Jews and Christians.

C- Al-Zamakhshari narrated that the Sabian are of two types: a class that reads the Psalms, and a class that does not read a book.

D- Ibn Attia narrated two contradictory narrations: the first tells that they recite the Psalms, and the second tells that they have no book.

4- Al-Tabari narrated that the Sabian had no prophet, and Al-Wahidi narrated that they claim that they follow the religion of Prophet Noah (AS), and most interpreters did not address this issue.

5- Interpreters were confused about the origin of the Sabian religion.

6- The absence of inference among most of the interpreters on the Sabian faith depending on the Sabian sources, history, and reality, or even the books of Alkalam (the science that studies religions, sects and doctrine) , pushed them to rely on language and narrations.

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