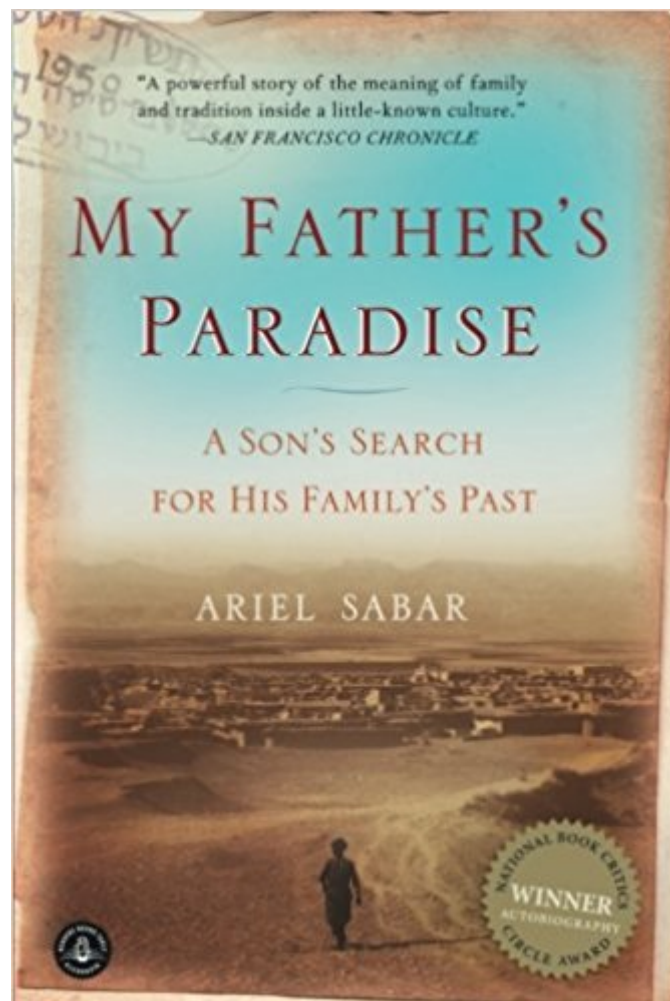




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# My Father's Paradise: A Son's Search For His Family's Past



## Synopsis

In a remote corner of the world, forgotten for nearly three thousand years, lived an enclave of Kurdish Jews so isolated that they still spoke Aramaic, the language of Jesus. Mostly illiterate, they were self-made mystics and gifted storytellers and humble peddlers who dwelt in harmony with their Muslim and Christian neighbors in the mountains of northern Iraq. To these descendants of the Lost Tribes of Israel, Yona Sabar was born. Yona's son Ariel grew up in Los Angeles, where Yona had become an esteemed professor, dedicating his career to preserving his people's traditions. Ariel wanted nothing to do with his father's strange immigrant heritage-until he had a son of his own. Ariel Sabar brings to life the ancient town of Zakho, discovering his family's place in the sweeping saga of Middle-Eastern history. This powerful book is an improbable story of tolerance and hope set in what today is the very center of the world's attention.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. For his first 31 years Sabar considered his father, Yona, an embarrassing anachronism. "Ours was a clash of civilizations, writ small. He was ancient Kurdistan. I was 1980s L.A." Yona was a UCLA professor whose passion was his native language, Aramaic. Ariel was an aspiring rock-and-roll drummer. The birth of Sabar's own son in 2002 was a turning point, prompting Sabar to try to understand his father on his own terms. Readers can only be grateful to him for unearthing the history of a family, a people and a very different image of Iraq. Sabar vividly depicts daily life in the remote village of Zahko, where Muslims, Jews and Christians banded together to ensure prosperity and survival, and in Israel (after the Jews' 1951 expulsion from Iraq), where

Kurdish Jews were stereotyped as backward and simple. Sabar's career as an investigative reporter at the Baltimore Sun and elsewhere serves him well, particularly in his attempt to track down his father's oldest sister, who was kidnapped as an infant. Sabar offers something rare and precious—•a tale of hope and continuity that can be passed on for generations. Photos. (Sept. 16) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

For almost 3,000 years, a tiny Jewish enclave existed in what is now the autonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq. The Jews and their Christian and Muslim neighbors spoke the ancient tongue of Aramaic, which had once been the lingua franca of the Middle East and was spoken by Jesus. Sabar's father, Yona, was born in that enclave but immigrated to the U.S. when the creation of the state of Israel created hostile conditions for Iraqi Jews in the 1950s. Yona, however, maintained strong emotional ties to his native language and culture even as he ascended to a prominent academic position at UCLA. Meanwhile, Sabar showed virtually no interest in his father's background; however, after the birth of his own son, he felt a desire to reconnect with his father and their shared cultural heritage. Their joint visit to their ancestral town of Zakho rekindles memories of the ancient community while strengthening the ties between father and son. An involving memoir that works as both a family saga and an examination of a lost but treasured community. --Jay Freeman --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I really enjoyed this book. Allow me to add the following: I am Assyrian. And I speak Neo-Aramaic. I understood all the Aramaic words used in this book. The book failed to mention that in North of Iraq, there are a lot of Assyrian villages who speak this language. And school in north of Iraq are teaching this language. I have family there. Also, many Assyrians in Skokie, Chicago, San Jose, San Diego, Detroit and many other cities around the world. We have many YouTube song now. The best recorded history. Just search Assyrian Songs on YouTube. Our churches are teaching this language. Maybe in it a dying language in America, but as long as we have Assyrians living in Iraq and Syrian, the language will be spoken. Also, Jewish people lived in Assyrian villages too in north of Iraq. Thank you for your work. Many Assyrian Christians related to what you said in this book.

This is one of the great first persons accounts with the correct amount of mix of history, linguistics, and colorful reporting all melted into a great book for those interested in linguistics, history, or just

simple family relationships. There is a lot of meat here in an easy-to-read complex history of a language and how it evolves and the people who spoke it. This is really a 6 Star book, but 5 stars is all I could give it. The reader will not have wasted his money.

Sabar's description of his father's history may appeal to only a restricted audience, but I found it fascinating. Sabar is an journalist and tells of his father's origins in a millennia-old Jewish community in Kurdistan, his immigration with his family at age 13 to Israel, their trials as new immigrants at the bottom of the social heap, and his eventual recruitment by a US university as a world-class expert linguist in his native language, Aramaic. But the book doesn't end there; the author is not only chronicler of his father's life; as an investigative reporter he senses a great story in an attempt to locate an older sister lost or kidnapped as an infant. The effort is in the end futile and the author is more interested in it than his father in the attempt. Sabar comes across as an honest reporter, even to the extent of sometimes presenting himself in a less than flattering light. I assume this is not unintentional which is a tribute to his honesty.

I was so happy to have found this book. It was poignant and heartfelt and gave a personal and deeply moving dimension to a slice of history that I knew in more general terms. I was particularly ignorant of Jewish life and history in Kurdistan. It is important to remember all those communities of Jews and the individual and unique qualities of their communities. Their existence and stories add much to the dynamism and colorful history of the Jewish people. I was particularly taken by the story of Aramaic and the race to save the language in a time of homogenization of cultures and the loss of languages. Finally, I appreciated the coming of age nature of the author's journey as he learned to appreciate his father and his father's mission.

I had absolutely no knowledge of the Jews of Kurdistan and their history. This book gives a very real and personalized story of the Kurdish Jews through a story of the author's father. As an immigrant myself, I could very well identify with Yona's trials and tribulations. I recommend this book to anyone interested in Jewish history, language origins and immigrant stories.

Fascinating book My husband and I both enjoyed reading this story of the author's father, who came to this country from Kurdistan, speaking the ancient language of Aramaic. Yona Sabar went on to become a professor at UCLA, specializing in his native tongue, which most linguists considered to be a dead language. His son finally came to appreciate him and his heritage and contributions. Do

read it.

Captivating book about the history of Kurdish Jews and the impact that immigration has on individuals and families as they adapt in their new lands. This book talked repeatedly about the tolerance between religions that had existed in areas of the Middle East prior to the 1950's. It also highlighted the discrimination that existed between different immigrants within the same religion. Well written, easy and enjoyable to read - an opportunity to be exposed to different cultures and religions as told by a son of an immigrant whose father's family first moved to Israel and then his father had moved to the United States.

Ariel Sabar writes a moving autobiography about several generations of his family, Jews from in Kurdistan, who move to Israel, and then to the US. After being estranged from his father, his religion, and his past, Sabar decides to research his history and by doing so, learns to reach out to his father, a noted scholar and Professor at UCLA. He learns to understand his past and why his father is worthy of his love and respect. He also gains a greater understanding of himself. It is a beautifully written book. I would recommend it to all lovers of history and for those who are seeking their roots..

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