

The Last Pagans of Iraq

*Ibn Waḥshiyya and his
Nabatean Agriculture*



BY

JAAKKO HÄMEEN-ANTTILA

ISLAMIC HISTORY AND CIVILIZATION, STUDIES AND TEXTS

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THE LAST PAGANS OF IRAQ

ISLAMIC HISTORY AND CIVILIZATION

STUDIES AND TEXTS

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PREFACE

This book started to materialize after I had for several years been interested in the *Nabatean Agriculture*, an enigmatic work that has since the 19th century defied any attempts at exactly dating it. I first became interested in this book when I studied the influence of the ancient Mesopotamian culture in later Iraq. I soon realized that the book had been all too lightly pushed aside because of the problems involved in dating it and setting it into a context, partly also because of its sheer bulk. Another likely reason for its neglect is that it contains materials that are of special interest to pre-Islamic Near Eastern studies, whereas the work is written in Arabic, and thus the specialists for whom it would be easy to read the text were not always the same as those who might be most interested in its contents.

This in mind, I started to plan an annotated and abbreviated translation—the work has some 1500 large pages in the edition, much of this of interest only for studies of botany and agronomy. While preparing such a translation, it became obvious to me that the repetitive style of the text, as well as the habit of the author to come back, time after time, to the same questions in different contexts, would not favour a direct translation. What I thought, and still think, would be more useful for the reader is an analysis of the religious, philosophical and literary contents of the work with as many of the key passages given in direct translation as is practical.

This is how this book found its present form. I have endeavoured to include the most important passages in direct translations, grouped according to their contents and preceded by an analysis of the selected topics, again based on the *Nabatean Agriculture* itself. As the *Nabatean Agriculture* is, and will remain, a controversial book, I have tried to avoid taking a one-sided stance as to its authenticity and provenance, in order not to make the book of little worth for those who do not share my views on the work. Thus, my study should be useful both for those who, like myself, believe that much, although not all, of its materials do mirror a pagan reality of rural Iraq some time either immediately before or directly after the Muslim conquest, and for those who take the role of Ibn Waḥshiyya (d. 930/1) to have been much larger than he would himself admit, and who prefer to read

the book as a source for late 9th-century esoterica and a semi-learned reception of Greek philosophy. Both types of readers should be able to use this study to their profit. The latter, for example, may take the title of this book to refer to Ibn Waḥshiyya and his students who, though themselves Muslims, showed such a keen interest in things pagan that they might be seen as the last pagans themselves.

Throughout Part II, I will be speaking of Qūthāmā, Ṣaghrīth, Yanbūshād, and others as actual individuals. In many cases, though, I seriously doubt their actuality and individuality. Many, especially the less frequently mentioned ones are probably nothing more than fictitious characters whom the author—“Qūthāmā”—uses as his *personae*. Yet, some of them may have really existed and it would have been cumbersome to point out their ambivalent status each time they are mentioned. Thus, I have spoken of all of them, including Adam, Abraham and other Biblical characters, as real individuals. Instead of referring to “Yanbūshād’s opinion or the opinion of the fictitious character ‘Yanbūshād’,” I speak simply of “Yanbūshād’s opinion” to make it less complicated.

In studying the religious and philosophical views of the Nabateans, one easily finds ideas that are well known from other traditions: Harranians, Mandaean, late Hellenistic pagans, Hermeticists, sectarian Jews, Christians and Muslims, all share many ideas with the Nabateans and with each other. Thus, even a hasty comparison of the *Nabatean Agriculture* with any one of these traditions will show similarities that entice one into seeing a relation. Yet one has to keep in mind that the whole Near East shares many such ideas, from pre-Islamic times to the time of Ibn Waḥshiyya, which makes it difficult to pinpoint the enigmatic work within its exact context. I have occasionally drawn attention to such similarities, mainly in the notes, but I have consciously avoided the temptation to drive through any final truths as, in my opinion, the religious undercurrents in Iraq between 400 and 900 are not yet sufficiently studied to allow any final conclusions. My work is a contribution to this fascinating field of studies and may, I hope, contribute towards a better understanding of these religious undercurrents and pave the way for further studies which will in the end make it possible to write a history of religious ideas of Mesopotamia, or Iraq, in this crucial period.

The second part of the book has been divided into four chapters according to their topic: Ibn Waḥshiyya and the translation of the

Nabatean Agriculture; the world and the gods; religious beliefs; folklore, stories and literature. Each of these chapters consists of a study of one of these aspects in the *Nabatean Agriculture*, followed by selected passages in translation and with annotations. It should be emphasized that the main theme of the *Nabatean Agriculture* is agronomy, but these parts have, in general, been left outside of discussion here. This book discusses themes of religious, philosophical and literary interest only, and a separate study should be dedicated to the botanical and agromonomical contents of the *Nabatean Agriculture*.

The first part of the book consists of an introductory chapter in which I try to locate the place of the *Nabatean Agriculture* in the history of Arabic studies and to give some guidelines as to questions of the authenticity, textual history and provenance of the *Nabatean Agriculture*. The complex and unique nature of the *Nabatean Agriculture* makes it difficult to place the book within its original context and at present it would be premature to claim that all these questions have been answered and all related problems solved. Scholarly work has to continue for some time before we may finally be able to know precisely where, when and in which language the individual parts of the book were written. Until then, the analysis must continue according to our present knowledge and this book aims at giving some such guidelines for future studies. In giving cross-references to the texts translated in this book, I refer to them as **Text 1** etc. (in boldface).

In translating representative parts of the *Nabatean Agriculture* and in organizing the material, I have had in mind especially those scholars who are not fluent in Arabic and are thus not able to read the original. Thus, I hope that scholars in the field of Classical studies, especially the late Antique Near East, will find this work of some use. In addition, I hope that I have made the material more easily accessible even for Arabists who, until now, have had to read through many pages to find the occasional references in which they might be interested.

I thank the editors of the following journals and monographs for permission to reuse material that was first published in these journals and series:

* *Continuity of pagan religious traditions in tenth-century Iraq*. in: Antonio Panaino—Giovanni Pettinato (eds.), *Ideologies as Intercultural Phenomena*. Melammu Symposia III. Milano 2002: 89–108.

* *A “New” Source for Late Antique Paganism.* in: Robert Rollinger—Christoph Ulf (eds.), *Commerce and Monetary Systems in the Ancient World: Means of Transmission and Cultural Interaction.* Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Symposium of the Assyrian and Babylonian Intellectual Heritage Project Held in Innsbruck, Austria, October 3rd–8th 2002. Melammu Symposia V. Oriens und Occidens 6. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag 2004: 408–419.

* *Artificial Man and Spontaneous Generation in Ibn Waḥshīyya’s al-Filāḥa an-Nabaṭīyya.* Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft 153 (2003): 37–49.

* *Mesopotamian National Identity in Early Arabic Sources.* Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes 92, 2002: 53–79, and *The Oriental Tradition of Vindanius Anatolius of Berytus’ Synagōgē geōrgikōn epītēdeumatōn.* Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes 94 (2004): 73–108.

* *Ibn Waḥshīyya on substitute foods.* in: Ulrike Stehli-Wehrbeck—Thomas Bauer (eds.), *Alltagsleben und materielle Kultur in der arabischen Sprache und Literatur. Festschrift für Heinz Grotzfeld zum 70. Geburtstag.* Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes 55:1 (2005): 211–222.

* *The Nabatean Agriculture: Authenticity, Textual History and Analysis.* Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften (ed. by Fuat Sezgin) 15 (2002/2003): 249–280.

* *A Mesopotamian Corpus—Between Enthusiasm and Rebuttal.* in: Juha Janhunen—Asko Parpola (eds.), *Remota relata. Essays on the History of Oriental Studies in Honour of Harry Halén.* Studia Orientalia 97, 2003: 41–48.

* *Agriculture vs. Asceticism. Late Antique Pagan Asceticism in an Anti-Ascetic Tractate from around 900 A.D.* Asiatische Studien 58 (2004): 849–877.

It is also my pleasant duty to thank Dr. Mark Shackleton (Helsinki) for revising the language of this book.

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

IBN WAḤSHIYYA AND THE *NABATEAN AGRICULTURE*

1.1. *The history of Ibn Waḥshiyya studies*

Few texts have roused such widely differing opinions as the *Nabatean Agriculture* (*al-Filāḥa an-Nabaṭiyya*).¹ The work itself claims to be a translation by the early tenth-century author Ibn Waḥshiyya (d. 318/930–1) from “Ancient Syriac” (*as-Suryānī al-qadīm*) into Arabic. This multi-layered Syriac original was, according to the text, based on works written by a group of scholars who belonged to the ancient inhabitants of Mesopotamia and, in the last instance, put together by an author called Qūthāmā. The oldest parts of the book should reach back in time some 20,000 years (**Text 2**). Its contents are a mixture of practical advice on agriculture, theoretical speculation on the influence of stars and elements on plants, together with charms and magical procedures and a huge amount of folklore, myths, ancient stories and religious information.²

In the first reactions in the 19th century, the work was hailed as a genuine piece of Babylonian literature which had hitherto been lacking—the decipherment of the cuneiform was on its way but it had not yet opened the ancient Mesopotamian cultures to us. This Babylonian hypothesis was most vigorously defended by Daniel Chwolsohn, who wrote a series of books on the theme.³

¹ For a good résumé of the work’s reception in the nineteenth-century scholarly world, see GAS IV: 318–329. A somewhat similar case is the dating of Balīnūs’ *Sirr al-khalīqa*, see Weisser (1980): 1–10. Note that “Nabatean” does not refer to the people of Petra.

² Religious beliefs and agriculture were also felt to belong together elsewhere in agronomical literature. Cassianus Bassus joined them together in his *Geoponica*, and though Columella’s (first century A.D.) *De Re Rustica* was itself very practical, the author also planned a book on religious customs connected with agriculture (see *De Re Rustica* II.21.5–6). This plan probably never materialized. His (negative) opinion of astrological agriculture was expressed in his *Adversus astrologos* (see *De Re Rustica* XI.1.31), which has not survived. It is worth noting that Columella labelled these astrologers “Chaldaean” (*Chaldaei*).

³ Especially Chwolsohn (1859). It might be mentioned in passing that Chwolsohn (1856), *Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus* 1–2, though dated, still remains a valuable

The nineteenth-century *Bibel und Babel* controversy and the fight about Pan-Babylonism is familiar to all scholars interested in the history of Oriental studies. In the field of Arabic studies, a similar, although less commonly known and less influential controversy, centred on the Nabatean corpus, consisting of the *Nabatean Agriculture* and some related texts, such as *Kitāb as-Sumūm*, *Kitāb Asrār al-falak* and *Shawq al-mustahām*, all claiming to be translations made by Ibn Waḥshiyya.⁴

The Nabatean corpus was first brought to the attention of the scholarly world by the French scholar Étienne Quatremère in his 1835 paper in *Journal Asiatique* (*Mémoire sur les Nabatéens*). His paper, though, received relatively little attention, and it was left to Daniel Chwolsohn in the 1850s, especially in his monographs (1856, 1859), to initiate a heated debate which was to last some decades before slowly petering out after some influential and extremely critical contributions, especially by Alfred von Gutschmid and Theodor Nöldeke.

As cuneiform studies were still in their earliest phase in the 1850s, some scholars, like Chwolsohn, received this corpus very enthusiastically and saw in it a substantial source of information on Assyrians and Babylonians, known until then mainly from Biblical and Greek sources. Chwolsohn himself dated the “Ancient Syriac” original of the *Nabatean Agriculture* to the 16th century B.C. in his *Überreste* (1859: 65).

Chwolsohn did much important work in digging up references to this ancient culture from other sources and comparing them with the texts in the Nabatean corpus; he, for example, was the first to draw attention to the Tammūz ritual mentioned in these texts (**Text 24**). Yet, Chwolsohn’s enthusiasm got the upper hand of him and his fancy flew too high. He (1859: 80) brushed aside any linguistic problems there might have been in the translation process by simply referring to the supposed stability of Semitic languages,⁵ thus sug-

collection of materials and has not been replaced by any more modern, comprehensive analysis of the theme. The monographs by Green (1992) and Gündüz (1994) somewhat amend the situation when it comes to the Harranian Sabians, but they virtually ignore Ibn Waḥshiyya and his material.

⁴ In his *Hadiyyat al-‘arīfīn*, p. 55, Ismā‘īl Bāshā lists all the works attributed to Ibn Waḥshiyya and known to him, 24 in all (cf. also Fahd 1971; Levey 1966a: 10). These include variant titles for the same work, pseudepigrapha later attributed to him, as well as titles cited in the *Nabatean Agriculture*. Various libraries contain further items among their unedited manuscripts, attributed to Ibn Waḥshiyya but often of rather suspect authenticity. Thus, his production is extremely difficult to assess and it needs further studies based on all extant manuscript materials.

⁵ “(. . .) lässt sich dieser Umstand einfach durch die Stabilität der semitischen Sprachen überhaupt leicht erklären.”

gesting that the Arab Ibn Waḥshiyya should have been able to read the ancient text without problem.

After some positive first reactions, the scholarly world soon started to become suspicious and the more critical, mainly German, scholars showed inconsistencies in the corpus. They started to pile up counter-arguments to prove that the texts could not have been written in the 16th century B.C., but must have been written considerably later. Finally, the widening of our direct knowledge of the cuneiform sources showed unequivocally that Chwolsohn was wrong: the Nabatean corpus did not provide us with an Arabic translation of any ancient Mesopotamian texts.

The detailed criticism by von Gutschmid (1861) actually put an end to the Nabatean enthusiasm, despite individual efforts by, e.g., Martin Plessner (1928–1929) to defend the text—and also to the scholarly production of Chwolsohn, which soon came to an end. The biting notes by Nöldeke (1876) helped seal the fate of the corpus for almost a century. Nöldeke went as far as to say (1876: 445): “I soon saw, though, that a careful study of these writings would be an unpardonable waste of my time. The fact that I am saying something here about the last-named book [i.e., the *Nabatean Agriculture*], is only to save others from seeing this unnecessary trouble.”⁶

Yet, it is remarkable that in fact von Gutschmid’s and Nöldeke’s criticism actually touched only on the Mesopotamian hypothesis: having shown that the text could not date from the 16th century B.C., these scholars lost interest and declared it a forgery. This is despite the fact that the botanist E.H.F. Meyer had already, in his *Geschichte der Botanik* III (1856), shown the value of the work for botanical and agricultural studies, even though he admitted that the text was indeed a forgery in the sense that its author must have known Greek *Geoponica* literature and could thus not be pre-Greek. I find Nöldeke’s comment on Meyer in his article of 1876 (pp. 452–453) symptomatic: “Yet I would call also here for great caution. He who invents so impudently cannot merely have observed as a botanist.”⁷ Once the fictitious background was established, these scholars turned away from the text.

⁶ “Freilich sah ich bald, dass ein sorgfältiges Studium dieser Schriften für mich eine unverzeihliche Zeitverschwendung sein würde (. . .). Wenn ich hier einiges Weitere über letzteres Buch sage, so geschieht das, um Andere davon abzuhalten [sic!], sich mit demselben unnütze Mühe zu machen.”

⁷ “Dennoch möchte ich auch hier zur grössten Vorsicht mahnen. Ein Mann, der so keck erfindet, wird als Botaniker schwerlich bloss beobachtet haben.”

All these critics were, in a certain sense, right. The texts were not what they claimed to be. Yet this is not the whole picture. As I have endeavoured to show in a series of articles, culminating in this book, the Nabatean corpus is, on the contrary, an extremely valuable source for Late Antiquity in Iraq. Anyone who reads these texts with a critical eye will soon note that they contain much material that has to be genuine in the sense that it is not fictitious but describes the existing rituals, beliefs and magic of the population of Iraq, either in the centuries before the Islamic conquest or soon after it—the exact dating of the material is remarkably problematic (see 1.2).

The process by which this material was set aside for nearly a century may be instructive to study as it shows how the scholarly world may become polarized between unbridled enthusiasm and total rebuttal, which is precisely what also happened a few decades later in the *Bibel und Babel* controversy. A valuable corpus was set aside because it was introduced in the wrong way. Once its weak points were laid bare, the proverbial baby was thrown out with the bathwater.

In the case of the Nabatean corpus, the texts also fell victim to what Thomas Bauer has aptly called *Frühzeitversessenheit* in another context;⁸ when the relative lateness of the corpus was proven, scholars lost interest in it.

Moreover, nineteenth-century historiographical purism may have been in action here. The Nabatean corpus became, in a sense, a bastard with no known parent, or in other words a work without a proper author: even today it is difficult to say much about the author(s) of the Syriac original and it is equally problematic to assess how conscientious Ibn Waḥshiyya may have been as a translator, and how much new material he may have added to his translation. Also to be mentioned is the indignation which the text met once it was shown to be a “forgery,” i.e., something else than it purported to be. Or, to modify Nöldeke’s words, “a man, who so impudently makes things up, cannot have presented any material of any value at all.”

Since Chwolsohn, and especially after the criticisms by Alfred von Gutschmid and Theodor Nöldeke, there have been few, if any, serious advocates of a B.C. date for the text’s original. Von Gutschmid’s criticism against the Babylonian origin was devastating.

⁸ Bauer (2003): 3: “Die Maqāme ist zwar eine der wichtigsten Gattungen der arabischen Literatur (. . .), doch aufgrund ihrer späten Entstehung ebenfalls ein Opfer der Frühzeitversessenheit des orientalistischen Blicks.”

The same scholars were responsible for the belief that one should search for the “real” author of the *Nabatean Agriculture* in Abū Ṭālib Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn az-Zayyāt to whom the text was, according to the preface (**Text 2**) and later notes (esp. **Text 5**), dictated. This rather fanciful idea,⁹ last supported by Manfred Ullmann (1972: 441), seems to be based solely on the fact that Ibn Waḥshiyya is in some sources called *aṣ-Ṣūfī* which, in the opinion of these scholars, rules him out as a possible author of this pagan text. The identification of Ibn Waḥshiyya as a Sufi seems ultimately to derive from a note in the *Nabatean Agriculture* by az-Zayyāt who mentions his teacher’s interest in Sufism (p. 1132: “Abū Bakr Ibn Waḥshiyya had an inclination towards the doctrine of the Sufis and he followed their Way”). It is not clear whether the name *aṣ-Ṣūfī*, given to Ibn Waḥshiyya in Ibn an-Nadīm’s *Fihrist* (p. 311 = Dodge 1970: 731), derives from this passage or is independent.

The text of the *Nabatean Agriculture*, in fact, contains vicious criticism of ascetic Sufis by Ibn Waḥshiyya (esp. **Text 28**) and the other works of Ibn Waḥshiyya on magic, astrology and other esoteric subjects,

⁹ See, e.g., Nöldeke (1876): 455, who ends his article stating that “der wahre Verf. der Landwirtschaft und der verwandten Bücher Abū Ṭālib Azzaijāt ist, der sie, um ihnen mehr Credit zu geben und sich vor allen bösen Folgen von Seiten eifriger Muslime zu wahren, dem als Meister geheimer Künste bekannten, schon verstorbenen Ibn Waḥṣija beilegte, sich selbst nur als Copisten darstellend.” Nöldeke’s rather weak argumentation was criticized by Sezgin in his GAS IV: 213; Brockelmann, on the other hand, easily accepted this claim (GAL S I: 430: “(. . .) dem a. Ṭālib A. b. Zaiyāt diktiert, den daher Nöldeke (. . .) schon mit recht als den eigentlichen Verfasser ansah (. . .)”). Later, see GAS IV: 213, note 3, this has developed into a claim that even the identity of Ibn Waḥshiyya is fictitious—again without supporting evidence.

Stroumsa (1999): 167, note 95, while speaking of pseudepigrapha and the unorthodox ideas disseminated in them, calls reattributions such as the case of Ibn Waḥshiyya/Ibn az-Zayyāt, “an easy solution to difficult problems” and criticizes the ease with which scholars in the first half of the 20th century (in our case, though, originally already in the latter half of the 19th century) took recourse to pseudepigraphy. She also draws attention to how Abū Bakr ar-Rāzī’s unorthodox ideas were tolerated at about the same time (1999: 117), and one might well add several Sufis to the list of tolerated, unorthodox thinkers, such as Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 874). One should not think of the late 9th, early 10th century in the terms of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) or other later ultraorthodox authors. As also the later manuscript tradition of the *Nabatean Agriculture* shows, the work was not seen as scandalous blasphemy—at least not by those interested in it; Ibn Taymiyya and those of his ilk would hardly have applauded its ideas, though.

Sufis were given considerable freedom of thought as long as they did not, like al-Ḥallāj, promulgate their opinions too widely and too publicly. See, e.g., Böwering (1999): 58–59.

hardly show him as a respectable and orthodox Muslim. As Sufism in the late 9th century, a few decades before al-Ḥallāj's execution in 922, was far from orthodox,¹⁰ it is not at all difficult to combine the *Nabatean Agriculture* with an interest in the theoretical and heterodox ideas of Sufism—though not in the ascetic variant based on extreme reliance on God's generosity, *tawakkul*.¹¹ Thus, there is no reason to assume that Ibn Waḥshiyya could not have written or translated this text.

The interest in Ibn Waḥshiyya and his corpus remained minimal until the late 1960s, when Toufic Fahd started a series of articles on the *Nabatean Agriculture*. In 1993–1995, Fahd finally published an edition of the text after Fuat Sezgin had published his facsimile in 1984, thus providing the scholarly world with an easier access to the hitherto unedited text.

By Fahd's time, the Babylonian theory had, with good reason, been swept aside, but otherwise Fahd took the Arabic text to be authentic, i.e., he assumed that it was not an invention by Ibn Waḥshiyya but a translation of an older text which Fahd dated to pre-Islamic times, giving slightly different dates in his articles.¹² Fahd has modified his opinions on several occasions, and even sought for an Achaemenid origin which, according to him, would explain some of the names mentioned in the text. Yet his main weakness has been that he has not seriously discussed the question of the text's authenticity but has, in fact, taken it for granted and has not fully considered the Late Antique agronomic tradition as a potential source. Most of his articles are translations of selected passages of the text and his theoretical discussion has remained superficial.

Fahd has sought for phonetic similarities between the names in the *Nabatean Agriculture* and names known from other traditions and he has also connected certain details of religious or philosophical ideas

¹⁰ Note that, e.g., al-Bīrūnī, in his *Kūtab mā l'ʿl-Hind*, pp. 5–6 (= Sachau 1910: 8), pointed out the resemblance of the Sufis with the Indian philosophers concerning incarnation (*hulūl*) and unification (*itiḥād*, which Sachau translates as “the pantheistic doctrine of the unity of God with creation”).

¹¹ For *tawakkul*, see Reinert (1968). Obviously, the farmer, who toils hard for his living, is in sharp contrast with the Sufi, who relies on God—or often, in practice, on mendicancy, receiving his living from the same producers whose way of life he professes to despise. Manichaean and Christian ascetics, though, would here agree with their Muslim counterparts.

¹² Most of Fahd's articles have been conveniently collected in the third volume of his edition of the text (Fahd 1998).

of the text with seemingly similar ones from better known ideological systems. In all, Fahd's indisputable merit has been to edit this gigantic text and to keep up the discussion around it, but his uncritical attitude has not been able to convince many. Among his supporters has been El Faiz, who has analysed the work from the viewpoint of the Mesopotamian agricultural system in a volume which can hardly be called critical. Especially his discussion of the date and textual history of the *Nabatean Agriculture* (El Faiz 1995: 1–9) is extremely uncritical. Like Fahd, he, too, merely sweeps aside any doubts as to the text's authenticity and denies any dependence on Greek sources.¹³

Fahd and El Faiz have not been the only ones to show interest in the text, though. Rodgers (1980) has pointed out that there are remarkable similarities between the *Nabatean Agriculture* and Anatolius of Berytus' lost work,¹⁴ Morony has briefly discussed the *Nabatean Agriculture* in some of his articles and books (e.g., 1982 and 1991), and Watson (1983) has used the material in his study on agricultural innovation, yet no one has undertaken an exhaustive study of the work, not to speak of the Nabatean Corpus in general. Thus, El Faiz (1995) has remained the only twentieth-century monograph on Ibn Waḥshiyya in a Western language.¹⁵

The utterly negative view of Nöldeke has in recent times been repeated by Manfred Ullmann, who does admit (1972: 442) that the work contains genuine materials from different sources, including the Graeco-Latin *Geoponica*, but otherwise takes an extremely negative attitude towards it, and does little to hide his dislike of the work. For Ullmann, the work is a concoction of Greek agronomic lore with sheer fiction and, consequently, of little value.¹⁶

¹³ El Faiz (1995: 4), writing some fifteen years after Rodgers, about whose article see below, refers to "l'indépendance de cet ouvrage par rapport aux sources de la tradition agronomique gréco-latine." Cf. also Lehmann (1997): 118.

¹⁴ Note, however, that Rodgers does not seem to have been familiar with the Arabic tradition of Anatolius, see GAS IV: 315. These relations are studied below, 1.5.

¹⁵ I have not been able to see 'Ādil Abū Naṣr's *al-Filāḥa an-Nabaṭiyya* (Bayrūt 1958), mentioned by Ibrāhīm as-Sāmarrāʾī in his *Kūtab an-Nakhl li-Ibn Waḥshiyya an-Nabaṭī* (Mawrid 1:1–2, 1391/1971, pp. 65–70), p. 65, note 2. Incidentally, the short tractate edited by as-Sāmarrāʾī in this article is blatantly misattributed: one of the main authorities of the text is the eleventh-century Ibn al-Ḥajjāj, and the whole tenor of the work is unlike Ibn Waḥshiyya's.

¹⁶ Cf. Ullmann (1972): 442: "Neben echtem, vor allem den Geoponikern und den Neuplatonikern entnommenen Material steht der pure Schwindel."

1.2. *The textual history of the Nabatean Agriculture*

Despite the work done on the *Nabatean Agriculture*, it seems that the situation has remained unclear and the scholarly world is hardly unanimous on the date, original language and provenance of the work. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the text critically and to show the limits within which the analysis should in future move. A Babylonian provenance hardly needs any more refutation and will be ignored in what follows. I will first discuss various indicators as to the possible or probable provenance, authenticity,¹⁷ original language and sources of the *Nabatean Agriculture* and then sum up the present state of knowledge. It should be emphasized that no analysis can take it for granted that the work exhibits total consistency: on the contrary, the analysis must start with an admission that everything that is said of one passage need not hold true for others. The provenance of the different passages may prove to be different.¹⁸

The Preface of the text (**Text 2**) claims that the Arabic text is a translation from “Ancient Syriac” by Ibn Waḥshiyya, made in 291/903–4 and dictated to his student or secretary az-Zayyāt in 318/930–1. The “Ancient Syriac” original itself was a composite work, based on the work of Ṣaḡhrīth¹⁹ which had first been expanded by Yanbūshād and later given its final shape by Qūthāmā. The time schedule indicated in the Preface spans some twenty thousand years.

In the following, I shall speak of Qūthāmā as the “author” of the text and of Ibn Waḥshiyya as its translator. The first name seems to be a coded one, cf. below, but I refrain from putting quotation marks around it, yet it seems obvious that Qūthāmā is, most probably, only “Qūthāmā.” In the beginning of the analysis, we must also remem-

¹⁷ Note that in the following, I use authentic to mean “translated from Syriac”. Naturally, the whole book is pseudepigraphical in the sense that the time scale in the Preface is untenable. Authenticity is here seen from Ibn Waḥshiyya’s point of view: if the book was indeed translated from “Ancient Syriac”, then it can be considered authentic.

¹⁸ Actually, this quite nicely coincides with the textual tradition as given in the Preface to the *Nabatean Agriculture* itself: the work is a multilayered one according to the Preface. The difference between my point of view and that of the text is that I admit the possibility that not everything that is not explicitly marked as the translator’s additions need come from the (purported) Syriac original. Or in other words, passages marked by Ibn Waḥshiyya as his own words are probably his but that does not mean that other passages, too, could not be by him.

¹⁹ Note that all names in the text are open to doubt as to their vocalization and the diacritical points, see 1.6.

ber that Qūthāmā and Ibn Waḥshiyya may, theoretically, well turn out to be one and the same person. Neither their identity nor their lack of identity is taken axiomatically as the basis of this study.

It should also be noted that when speaking about the “text,” or the *Nabatean Agriculture*, I do not in the beginning of the study define my position as to whether we are speaking of an Arabic original or an Arabic translation of a Syriac—or some other—original. Thus, when speaking about the Antique sources of the “text,” I do not define my position as to whether the “text” originally was in Syriac or in Arabic.

As several works belonging to the Greek or Latin agronomic tradition are available, a comparison between these and the *Nabatean Agriculture* offers us a solid basis to start the analysis.

Much of the agricultural material in the book indicates a continuity with the Greek and Latin traditions. This has been forcefully proved for small parts of the work by Rodgers (1980), who demonstrated that one of the (direct or indirect) Late Antique sources for the *Nabatean Agriculture* was Anatolius of Berytus, whose Greek work has unfortunately been lost except for one fragment. Other passages may be reconstructed on the basis of other Greek sources. Rodgers has compared this fragment and some of the reconstructed material with the *Nabatean Agriculture* and has been able to show that in some cases the *Nabatean Agriculture* is dependent on Anatolius; what remains less clearly indicated in his study is whether there could have been an intermediate source or whether Qūthāmā might have used this source directly.

As shown below, 1.5, the Arabic text of Anatolius has, in fact, been preserved and it can be seen that the *Nabatean Agriculture* does indeed use Anatolius, either in Syriac or in Arabic translation. However, only a minor part of the material of the *Nabatean Agriculture* derives from Anatolius, and most of the passages having a religious, philosophical or literary significance derive from other sources.

Anatolius provides some materials but one can without difficulty find other parallels, too, between the text of the *Nabatean Agriculture* and the prolific agronomical and related traditions of Antiquity.²⁰

²⁰ The agronomical tradition of Antiquity was astonishingly lively. Thus, e.g., in his *Rerum rusticarum* (I.1.7), Varro is able to mention more than fifty Greek authors who have treated some aspect of the subject.

Thus, NA, pp. 63–64, resembles closely Vitruvius, VIII:1 “On finding water,” and Theophrastus’ (d. 288/287 or 287/286 B.C.) *Peri sēmēiōn* is an obvious starting point for the tradition leading to **Text 1**, whatever the exact route this passage may have taken before coming to Qūthāmā.²¹

Often, as in the last-mentioned case, the traces point to the *Geoponica*, a 10th-century Byzantine collection—thus in its final form later than the *Nabatean Agriculture*—but which goes back to the work of Cassianus Bassus in the sixth century, itself a compilation of earlier sources, including Anatolius but also many other texts. **Text 1** also closely resembles *al-Filāḥa ar-Rūmiyya*, pp. 104–107, which seems to be the translation of Cassianus’ original, with perhaps some changes. It should be noted, however, that even though the materials in the *Nabatean Agriculture* and the *al-Filāḥa ar-Rūmiyya* are in this case very similar to each other, there are hardly any verbally identical sentences and it is difficult to believe that Ibn Waḥshiyya could have used this text through the Arabic translation.²²

The passage NA, pp. 59–62, is most revealing. The passage closely resembles several works of Antiquity, especially Vitruvius VIII.1.3.²³ The plant names of the passage have been studied by Ernst Bergdolt in his *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Botanik in Orient III* (1936): 127–134, and his results are used, with some additions, by Fahd in Fahd (1998): 24–28.

The Arabic text in this passage gives most of the plant names in forms which can be consistently identified as really deriving from

²¹ There is no special reason to assume that the passage would have been taken directly from Theophrastus. Some of Theophrastus’ works were translated into Arabic (see *Fihrist*, p. 252 = Dodge, p. 607; GAS IV: 313), but Ibrāhīm ibn Bakūs’ Theophrastian translation *Kitāb Asbāb an-nabāt* has been lost. For Ibrāhīm, see also Steinschneider (1889): 129–130. Theophrastus’ *De Causis Plantarum* is of a different character from the *Nabatean Agriculture*, even though there are, of course, incidental parallels.

²² In the modern edition (1999), the text is attributed to Quṣṭā ibn Lūqā, but this seems to be the result of sheer ignorance on the part of the editor, who does not seem to know anything about the studies on the subject and has equated the author with the famous Quṣṭā ibn Lūqā, whose name sounds somewhat similar to Quṣṭūs, the form under which the author of *al-Filāḥa ar-Rūmiyya* was known to Arabs.

The theory of two traditions of the work, see GAS IV: 317–318, one a translation from Greek, the other from Pahlavi, is problematic. Both traditions exhibit very similar texts, and it seems probable that both, in fact, go back to a Pahlavi original. For this question, see the study by Attiè (1972).

²³ Cf. also Palladius IX.8, Plinius XXVI.16, Columella II.2.20 and *Geoponica* II.4–6: none of the chapters of the last-mentioned is indicated as going back to Anatolius.

Syriac, discounting the many misspellings due to later copyists: the original forms are reconstructable in correct Syriac. Some plant names are also in recognizable Persian but rather few unequivocally in Greek.²⁴ Against this background it would be hard to defend a theory that this translation would have been made directly from Greek into Arabic,²⁵ which would mean that the translator suppressed the Greek words on purpose—in fact, he is elsewhere very keen on showing off his knowledge—and, moreover, found from somewhere their exact counterparts in Syriac.

This seems to imply that the translation has, at least in this case, gone through Syriac.²⁶ The same is shown by other passages in the *Nabatean Agriculture* as well as by other works of the Nabatean Corpus; e.g., the *Kitāb as-Sumūm* contains some prayers in Syriac²⁷ which have

²⁴ There are some cases in which we can find a Greek word behind the forms given in the text but these probably go only indirectly back to Greek, through Syriac or Persian. Thus, in NA, p. 60, the author mentions that maiden's hair is *barshāwushān* in Persian. The word does come from Persian (see, e.g., Steingass 1892, s.v. *ḡarsiyā-wushān*), even though ultimately derivable from the Greek name Perseus (see Löw 1881: 279). Likewise, *karyānā* (NA, p. 60) seems ultimately to derive from the Greek *koriannon*, but may well come through Syriac, see Fahd (1998): 25–26, note 31.

²⁵ Ibn Khaldūn, in his *Muqaddima*, p. 494 (= Rosenthal 1958, III: 151), says that the work was one of the books translated from Greek, but obviously this is merely a vague impression, inspired by the “Greek” science which shines through from the text: it is extremely unlikely that Ibn Khaldūn would have had some factual basis for his claim. Nevertheless, it shows that at least he was aware of the similarity between Greek science and the work.

Note that the case of Greek plant names differs from the case of the names of Greek authors (see below): the latter may have been suppressed due to the Nabatean national spirit—there is a reason to find the authorities from among the ancestors of the Nabateans, not the Greeks—but no such reason can be found for the plant names, as the author, or translator, is usually very keen on giving variant names in different languages to identify the plants in question.

²⁶ The rather fanciful idea of a Pahlavi mediator (Fahd 1969: 87, duly disclaimed by Ullmann 1972: 441) seems to have been inspired by the similar, but better documented hypothesis in the case of Tankalūshā. In the same instance, Fahd tried to find Old Persian etymologies for some of the Nabatean names, with meagre results.

²⁷ MS, fol. 21b = Levey (1966a): 34, note 200. Levey condemns this prayer as mere “magical jargon”, but its Aramaic character is quite obvious, especially as Ibn Waḥshiyya provides an Arabic translation which helps us to clear away some of the scribal errors. Thus, one may identify LTW²N² (later in the text written KYW²N²) with the Arabic Zuḥal, “Saturn” (Syriac Kēwān; this word was, of course, also used in Arabic but Ibn Waḥshiyya himself consistently uses Zuḥal); M²RY DShTM² (sic!) DShMY M²RY ʾR²W (māryā d-shmayyā w-arā; for the latter part, one might also read West Syriac mārē arō) with the Arabic “god of the heaven and the earth”, etc. As the examples show, the text is very corrupt, but still sometimes recognizable. Cf. also Ewald (1861): 109, and Steinschneider (1862): 8, note 12. The phrase *abūn d-shmayyā* was current in Christian Arabic texts, see, e.g., *Akhbār baṭārika*, p. 108.

been corrupted by the copyists but still retain a partly reconstructable Syriac form underlying the corrupt writing. In all these cases, the simplest solution is to presume that there was a Syriac original, itself going partly back to Greek sources (the knowledge of Latin in the area being rare) and that these passages were translated from Syriac into Arabic.

There is also another reason for suggesting a Syriac original, or group of originals. The text only partly connects with the Late Antique agronomic tradition. In addition, it contains many references to local customs and conditions, all consistently situated in Northern, and Central, Iraq. Much of the pagan religious materials of the text belongs to this layer, although some charms and talismans do derive from Anatolius.

The geographical setting of the work is consistent and does not leave any other possibility than to ascribe this layer of the text to an author well aware of the locality and thus probably living in the area. This, in itself, does not indicate whether the author was living in the area at the time of Ibn Waḥshiyya or earlier, nor whether he was writing in Syriac or Arabic. It only shows that there is a redactional layer deriving from Northern Mesopotamia above the Graeco-Roman tradition.²⁸ This was a Syriac-speaking area,²⁹ later with considerable but gradual growth in the role of Arabic—it took centuries after the Arab conquest before the majority of the population spoke Arabic. Knowledge of Greek was also rather limited, which further speaks for a Syriac origin.

It is, of course, not impossible that Ibn Waḥshiyya himself could have known Greek—although then we would presume to find more evidence of that in the text—and that he somehow had access to a voluminous manuscript in that language, but this clearly seems less probable than a Syriac manuscript, the likes of which were numerous in the area.³⁰ Also translating from Greek into Syriac and only then

²⁸ It seems less probable that there were authors in the area composing such large works in Greek and, moreover, adding much material which must have been of merely local interest.

²⁹ Note that I am using the word ‘Syriac’ conventionally and in a very wide meaning, and also as a translation of Arabic *as-Suryānī*. The sources do not give us enough information to conclude whether the language would have been Syriac or Aramaic.

³⁰ It should be noted, though, that the Patriarch Photius, during his visit *ep’ Assyrious*—here meaning Arabs—“used the opportunity to gather manuscript material for his anthology” (Peters 1968: 23, with further references). There is no indi-

from Syriac into Arabic was at least as common as a direct translation from Greek into Arabic³¹ and, moreover, that evades all the problems mentioned above: If Ibn Waḥshiyya was translating from Syriac, that explains why he did not display any knowledge of Greek. Lastly, it does not seem likely that Ibn Waḥshiyya would have organized a two-phase translation, with a co-worker reading the Greek and translating into Syriac: such procedures occurred in the organized translation centres but were hardly feasible in the case of an individual working outside the centres.

The possibility remains, of course, that Ibn Waḥshiyya somehow found materials originally deriving from the Greek but already translated into Arabic, and that he compiled from these his own work, perhaps adding the redactional layers showing a North Mesopotamian setting. This seems improbable, however, for several reasons. First of all, little of the material of the *Nabatean Agriculture* coincides with what we know from other Arabic works—the passage of *al-Filāḥa ar-Rūmiyya*, mentioned above, is a rare exception and even that shows only overall similarities, not exact, word-to-word parallels. The only exception to this is the Arabic translation of Anatolius which does come remarkably close to the *Nabatean Agriculture* (see 1.5). Thus, we should have to postulate an Arabic original, or several originals, itself/themselves lost. Second, this would leave unexplained the Syriac plant names in passages such as NA, pp. 63–64, discussed above. As the Syriac plant names are real, they could not have been invented by Ibn Waḥshiyya, who thus would have had to collect these names from his informants. There is no reason why he should have collected this information, had he already had an Arabic source to hand.

Thus, it seems probable that Ibn Waḥshiyya was indeed working with Syriac material as the Preface itself claims. The community

cation that he would have found any agronomical manuscripts during his travels (but cf. 1.5) but his person well exemplifies the close connections between the Byzantine Empire and the Arabs at the time. Yet one should not think that he collected any Greek manuscripts from among the peasants and minor landowners: his sources must have been upperclass and/or monasteries.

³¹ Gutas (1998) and other modern studies have shown that the translation movement of the ‘Abbāsid period worked in a much more variegated way than the straightforward Greek > Syriac > Arabic model which we often enough encounter in older studies. Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq’s *Risāla* (cf. also Bergsträsser 1925) actually quite clearly shows that books were translated into Arabic also directly from Greek and, in a few cases, the Arabic translation preceded the Syriac one and may even have been used as an aid, if not even the original, of the Syriac translation (cf., e.g., *Risāla*, p. 27).

from which, he says, he got the manuscripts, is identified as the “Nabateans”. “Nabatean” (*Nabaṭī*) was at the time a term used by Arabs for rural population, especially those speaking Syriac or Aramaic, although with often rather fluid limits: even Armenians may be called Nabateans in Arabic texts (see 1.3). The names used by these Nabateans for themselves seem to have varied. The community with which Ibn Waḥshiyya identified himself was the Kasdānians, whence his own gentilicium al-Kasdānī. The name is obviously etymologically related to Chaldaeans, the variation -shd- / -ld- originally going back to Babylonian.

The layer of the *Nabatean Agriculture* which derives from Antiquity seems, thus, to have first gone through a Syriac translation before coming to Ibn Waḥshiyya, which incidentally lends more credence to what Ibn Waḥshiyya himself wrote both in the Preface and later, in his glosses to the translation. One should therefore not see him, as Nöldeke did, as an impudent forger, but a *bona fide* translator working with Syriac sources. This, of course, does not say that he must have been particularly faithful or accurate in his translations. As the work is a compendium going through all cultivated—and many wild but edible or medicinal—plants, its structure is, in a sense, open: one could always add new items and include plants that were not found in the original. Thus, the botanical material is prone to contain additions by many hands, perhaps also by Ibn Waḥshiyya.³²

The local geography in the North Mesopotamian layer is accurate and much of the pagan materials in these passages is unknown from Greek sources, even though the overall religious ideology obviously owes much to late Hellenistic religion and Neoplatonic philosophy. Yet in addition to this “Hellenizing” layer, there is also a layer of popular beliefs which often sounds Mesopotamian enough and in one case (Tammūz, cf. below) demonstrably goes back to Ancient Syro-Mesopotamian religion. Thus, one must assume a redactor who added local geographical details and information concerning late paganism.

The critics of Ibn Waḥshiyya have offhandedly ascribed his materials

³² An illustrative example of this is found in a marginal note by az-Zayyāt (**Text 4**), where he tells that he was uncertain whether a description of a certain plant belonged to the original or whether it derived from a piece of paper, more or less haphazardly placed between other pages. It should be noted that Ibn Waḥshiyya was already dead when az-Zayyāt was copying the end of the text.

to pure invention with no background in reality. This, though, is impossible since our knowledge of late paganism tends to confirm the information given in the book. A particularly interesting case is the description of the ritual lament for Tammūz (**Text 24**, see also 3.5). It contains materials not known from any other contemporary, or older, sources potentially available to Qūthāmā or Ibn Waḥshiyya, but coincides reasonably well with what we nowadays know, partly on the basis of cuneiform studies. This material must originate within the area,³³ and presumably no Greek author would have had similar information at his disposal, with the possible exception of Anatolius of Berytus, who could have known more pagan lore than is indicated in the preserved passages. These passages, however, do not imply that his work would have contained such material, and the extant oriental tradition of his book (see 1.5) seems to confirm this. Anatolius does mention charms and magical actions, but there are no traces of any far-reaching general interest in describing paganism in his strictly agronomic work. Thus, it remains hypothetical that such material would have been included in his work and, one should add, Ibn Waḥshiyya makes it clear that Tammūz was known even during his own time, the late ninth century, in Northern Iraq and it seems easiest to presume that the description of Tammūz in the work of Qūthāmā also derives from the same area.³⁴

The geographical details pointing to Northern Iraq are also found in passages which are more factual in their approach³⁵ and cannot easily be seen as fancifully inserted material. A particular case is the exact observations on the building techniques in ‘Aqarqūfā (NA, pp. 199–202). Thus, the final form of the work must have been written in that area, even though many passages were taken over in a modified form from Greek sources.

Even when dependent on the Greek tradition, the *Nabatean Agriculture* localizes the material. Thus, when discussing the flowing of the rivers from North to South (cf. Vitruvius VIII.2.6–8), NA, p. 105, discusses

³³ The cult of Tammūz, of course, enjoyed wide distribution and is known from many places in Syria and, even until very late times, from Harran.

³⁴ A local tradition would also explain why the Syriac work never influenced Syriac literature more generally and why Ibn Waḥshiyya was able to find the work in the same area: we are speaking about a restricted, local tradition which never reached a wider audience. The situation as described in the Preface would seem quite credible.

³⁵ *Pace* Ullmann (1972): 442.

real local rivers (and the Nile),³⁶ many of which are not mentioned by Vitruvius. The general argument of Vitruvius—or whichever text the author had at hand—is thus kept but in a localized form.

Thus, there seems to be a redactional layer, which may be located to Northern and Central Iraq, written probably in Syriac³⁷ and preserved in the area until Ibn Waḥshiyya made the work famous throughout the Arabic-speaking world, and later in Spanish and Jewish traditions, too.

Graeco-Latin agronomical literature was the dominant but not the only tradition in the area. There was also interest in agronomical literature at least in Carthage which may have derived from, or diffused to, Phoenicia. Late Antique authors themselves highly appreciated the work of Mago of Carthage, written in “the Punic tongue” in 28 books (Varro, *Rerum rusticarum* I.1.10)³⁸ and later translated into Greek in 20 books, now no longer extant. Varro is probably referring to this work when he says (I.2.13) that writers “whether in Punic, or Greek, or Latin, have wandered too far from the subject” of agriculture. Thus, one should not take it for granted that agronomical elements in the *Nabatean Agriculture* not deriving from the known Graeco-Latin tradition need to be new developments: the author may have had written, local sources,³⁹ themselves probably at least partly dependent on Graeco-Latin tradition but perhaps also contributing to it.

The redactional layer of Northern Mesopotamian origin forms the central part of the problem of the Nabatean Corpus. It is of prime importance to date, set and evaluate this material, which contains invaluable information on Late Antique or Early Islamic paganism and material which is not only the last stage of a long tradition but considerably widens our knowledge derived from other sources.

³⁶ There is also a river of this name (an-Nīl) in Iraq, south of Nahr Kūthā.

³⁷ When it comes to pagan Syriac/Aramaic texts, one should remember that many of the Manichaean texts, although preserved in Greek, Coptic or Parthian, were originally written in Syriac: Manichaean Syriac literature is a sizeable pagan corpus, later almost completely lost, and thus a close parallel to our case. Likewise, one finds pagan literature in other forms of Aramaic, such as the Mandaic books. For the “Chaldaean” books, mentioned by Ephraem and presumably referring to books of astrological contents, see Tubach (1986): 103, note 193.

³⁸ See also Columella, *De Re Rustica* I.1.10 (and I.1.6, on Punic authors on husbandry).

³⁹ “Local” here is understood broadly. It should be noted that the author does speak about Kanʿānite, i.e., Canaanite, tradition. There is nothing to exclude the possibility that he is referring to really existing sources, whether in “Punic,” Syriac or Greek.

Much of this material is given on the authority of persons bearing “Nabatean” names. The personal names of the work are mostly undecipherable and the efforts to identify them have given meagre—if any—results. The attempts to identify them have in most cases proved desperate and far-fetched. It is also clear that the languages and name-giving traditions of the area are well enough known to make it impossible to claim that names such as Qūthāmā, Yanbūshād and Ṣaghrīth are good Aramaic, or some other language, and it has not been possible to match them credibly with any existing names.

There are only a few names which really sound Aramaic. Thus, one finds in the text the name Bar-Ṣawmā *aṭ-ṭabīb* (NA, p. 138) as well as a few other names beginning with Bar (“son (of)”: Barīshā (see Fahd 1998, Index), Bar-ʿAblā (NA, pp. 1360–1361) and Barāyā (read Bar-Abbā?, NA, p. 955). In all these cases, though, there are variants in the manuscripts and the readings are, by no means, obvious.

Thus, most, if not all, of the names seem to be, for some reason, coded, either by the author or the translator.⁴⁰ In contrast to this, the place names and the plant names are mainly identifiable and, moreover, correct in the sense that the geographical names make up a logical whole and the plant names generally agree with Persian, Syriac or Arabic botanical lexicons. Nabatean divine names, on the other hand, are almost totally lacking: most of the divinities are astral and the names used for them are the standard Arabic ones.

If the personal names are, as they seem to be, coded, there remains the question who coded them, and why. Obviously, the use of pseudo-“Nabatean” names goes well with the nationalistic spirit of the work which emphasizes the role of the “ancient Nabateans” as the source of all culture,⁴¹ but that does not yet solve the problem of who invented them.

The problem is complicated but there seems to be one important passage which implies that they were invented by the Syriac author,

⁴⁰ For coding names, see also Trombley (1993–1994) I: 266.

⁴¹ In his Preface to *K. as-Sumūm* (fol. 4b), Ibn Waḥshiyya writes: “Perhaps nine tenths of sciences belong to the Nabateans and one tenth to all other nations together.” In fact, the “ancient Nabateans”, if understood as ancient Babylonians and Assyrians, do have a major share in the early cultural history of the Near East and it may well be that some vague memory of these times lingered on among the local population. Thus, while the Babylonian origin of the work itself is fictitious, the role it assigns to the ancient population of Mesopotamia happens to coincide with real cultural history. For similar ideas in Zoroastrian Persia, see Gutas (1998): 40–45.

Qūthāmā, who also hid his own name under a code. In NA, p. 298, there is an extremely interesting passage which also speaks in favour of a Syriac original. In a gloss, the translator, Ibn Waḥshiyya, mentions that even though the Sabians (one of the few occurrences in which he uses the term in the text)⁴² know the name and story of Tammūz(ā), they are ignorant of the name of Yanbūshād, who, though, should be closer to their own time than the ancient Tammūzā (see **Text 24**).

I find it very difficult to understand the motivation behind this remark if the coded name Yanbūshād had been made out by Ibn Waḥshiyya. In fact, the remark seems to undermine the credibility of the text by letting us know that Yanbūshād was unknown to the Nabateans, whose sagacious ancestor he should have been.⁴³ Thus, it seems more probable that Ibn Waḥshiyya is here using a source where he had already found the name Yanbūshād and had checked the details against local “Sabians” and “Nabateans” who knew Tammūz—a remarkable confirmation of the duration of vestiges of the cult up to the late 9th century—yet ignored Yanbūshād. Thus, the author of the Syriac version is more probably the inventor of the name Yanbūshād and, consequently, of most or all of the other coded names, too.

On the other hand, the same, or similar, coded names appear in the other works belonging to the Nabatean Corpus, and some of these other works are also mentioned, with coded author names, in the Preface to the *Nabatean Agriculture* by Ibn Waḥshiyya. If these other works were also produced by the same Syriac author who compiled the Syriac original of the *Nabatean Agriculture*, then we come to the somewhat awkward situation that not only one manuscript but a

⁴² Note that the term Sabian is found only in Arabic (see Green 1992: 103) and thus its rarity in the text gives more weight to the theory that the original was written in Syriac. Had it been written in Arabic, the author might have been more tempted to use this well-known term, but if he did not find this term in his original, he had less reason to insert it into his text. The use of the overall term “Nabatean”, also non-native as may be seen from al-Mas‘ūdī, *Tanbīh*, p. 36 (see 1.3), was, on the other hand, adopted by Ibn Waḥshiyya.

⁴³ Likewise, one may wonder at the duplicating of the original material in the passage which attacks ascetics in the original work and to which Ibn Waḥshiyya adds his own, anti-Sufi attacks (**Text 28**). It does not, of course, follow from this duplicating that there must have been two different authors, but one cannot too easily see what Ibn Waḥshiyya could have achieved by first attributing to Qūthāmā a passage against ascetics and then duplicating this by adding his own notes. It would have been much more efficient to attack only once, but with maximum venom.

whole corpus reached Ibn Waḥshiyya without leaving any traces anywhere else.

The only solution would seem to be that, as implied in the Preface, Ibn Waḥshiyya found all these manuscripts in the hands of one owner: thus the whole corpus could have been transmitted in a (family?) line from the Syriac author until the last owner of the manuscripts. This is hardly very probable if there was a large time gap between the Syriac author and Ibn Waḥshiyya. We might suggest that the Syriac author was not necessarily pre-Islamic, or that he dates from the time just before the conquest, in which case the corpus might well have stayed in the family for the intervening time, some three centuries at most, without influencing Syriac literature elsewhere.

Technically, of course, the author could also have been contemporary to Ibn Waḥshiyya, but here again the use of Greek sources makes this less probable and also the fact that, cf. above, Ibn Waḥshiyya seems rather to have acted *bona fide*. If he acted *bona fide*, his description of the manuscripts and the story of how he got hold of them should be taken seriously, and the story contradicts the possibility that they were modern.⁴⁴

Another possibility is that although the *Nabatean Agriculture* is a genuine translation of a Syriac original this need not be true in the case of all other works of the Nabatean Corpus. The *Shawq al-mustahām* seems, in any case, to be a later pseudepigraph⁴⁵ which used the names made famous by Ibn Waḥshiyya. It is also possible that Ibn

⁴⁴ Manuscripts were, of course, also forged and made to look worn and decrepit. The case of Ibn Sīnā, who forged a text to get even with a certain philologist, is well known, cf. Gohlman (1974): 68–73.

⁴⁵ Even though we know that Ibn Waḥshiyya was interested in cryptography, see Ibn an-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, p. 358 (Dodge 1970: 864). The author of the *Shawq* refers to his travels in Egypt (e.g., his visit to aṣ-Ṣaʿīd, p. 115) and is very interested in Egypt in general, whereas Ibn Waḥshiyya never refers to any visits to Egypt in the *Nabatean Agriculture*; he, in fact, has next to nothing to say about Egypt. Likewise, the grossly anachronistic reference (*Shawq*, p. 135) to “the Caliph ʿAbdalmalik ibn Marwān,” dated to 241 A.H. (!) is quite unlike the exactness of Ibn Waḥshiyya. In my opinion, the real author might be the copyist of the original, Ḥasan ibn Faraj, an otherwise unknown descendant of Sinān ibn Thābit ibn Qurra, who dated his work to 413 (p. 136). This Ḥasan is not mentioned in Richter-Bernburg (1981). In considering the text’s attribution, all its manuscripts should be studied, especially Damascus, Zāhiriyya, ʿamm 10244 (see GAS I: 934) which seems to contain this text. I am grateful to Prof. Fuat Sezgin for drawing my attention to this manuscript.

If the *Shawq al-mustahām* is, as it seems to be, a later text, the famous and often repeated “earliest” reference to the term *ishrāq* (Nasr 1964: 63, Corbin 1971: 23–24, Walbridge 2000: 192) also has to be reconsidered.

Waḥshiyya himself, or some later author, wanted to make the most out of the *Nabatean Agriculture*, which had received some popularity. This is shown by its success in agricultural manuals and in magical works, such as the *pseudo-Picatrix* and other works dealing, at least in passing, with Nabatean lore, such as Maimonides' *Dalāla*.⁴⁶

The main works of the Nabatean Corpus seem homogenous and thus, if they proved to be forgeries, it would be easiest to suggest that it was Ibn Waḥshiyya himself who authored the other works, or at least added the coded names to emphasize the homogeneity of the corpus and to create the market for the other works, too. This would have been possible, especially if we believe in the time-scale indicated in the Preface of the *Nabatean Agriculture*, which states that there was a gap of 27 (lunar) years between the translation of the *Nabatean Agriculture* and the dictating of the final text which has come down to us and to which the Preface was added. If Ibn Waḥshiyya had realized the potentials of the corpus in this period, he would have had over two decades to widen it by adding new texts to it.

Although there is no way to exclude this possibility, I still incline towards the earlier solution, viz. that the works of the Nabatean Corpus are relatively late Syriac compositions, translated into Arabic by Ibn Waḥshiyya not more than a few centuries or even a few generations after their compilation.⁴⁷ This would date the compilation of the Syriac original of the *Nabatean Agriculture* just before the Islamic conquest or at the beginning of the Islamic period. Even a very late date, more or less coinciding with the beginning of the translation movement in late 8th or early 9th century, cannot be ruled out, a period when Greek works were again being translated into Syriac, most often, but not necessarily always, under the auspices of the new rulers.

The reason for coding the names does not seem quite clear. One might think of them as a safeguard against those who would have taken offence at the open paganism of the work, either Christians or Muslims. In this case the coded names would disguise the identity of oral informants, as well as the author of the Syriac original, "Qūthāmā," as there seems to be little reason to conceal the names

⁴⁶ Cf. especially (ps.)-al-Majrīṭī, *Ghāyat al-hakīm*, pp. 350–396 (IV.7) = Ritter-Plessner (1962): 366–402, and Maimonides' *Dalāla*, Part III, especially chapters 29–30 (Friedländer 1904: 315–321).

⁴⁷ For an overview of religious communities in Iraq at the time, see Morony (1984): 277–506. For remnants of paganism, see also 1.4.

of already deceased authors; in any case, some of the material might well have been collected from oral sources.

The other possibility, of course, depends on the Nabatean nationalism of the author: the coded names may actually not hide any real names, they might merely be names invented out of nothing to compete with, say, the Greek-sounding names of the *al-Filāḥa ar-Rūmiyya*. In the case of passages deriving from Anatolius (see 1.5) we even know that this was the case: Greek authorities of Anatolius have been tacitly changed in the *Nabatean Agriculture* into Nabatean ones. It is also worth mentioning that there are no identifiable Greek names in a book so intimately connected with the Graeco-Latin agronomic tradition.⁴⁸ This does not automatically lead us to Ibn Waḥshiyya, though, because he may well have inherited the nationalistic spirit from the Syriac author. Perhaps Ibn Waḥshiyya was so nationalistic because that was the tone he found in the manuscript he translated.⁴⁹

The coded names take us to the question of the sources of the original Syriac work by Qūthāmā. According to the Preface, Qūthāmā is purported to have worked mainly with material written or compiled by Ṣaghrīth and Yanbūshād. In addition, he quotes some dozen books and authors bearing coded names, none of which is identifiable as a historical author. Are these real books, oral informants or mere fiction, or partly one, partly the other? At the present state of knowledge there does not seem to be an easy answer.

Whatever the background of the coded names, there seems to be a possible hint at the group from among which at least some of the informants of Qūthāmā might have come. There is an interesting passage in the *Nabatean Agriculture* which has not received any attention. On p. 323, l. 4, the author first mentions what Ṣaghrīth had said and then continues: *fa-inna ghayrahu min al-qudamā' fi zamāninā hādihā narāhum 'iyānan* (. . .) “we see with our own eyes others from

⁴⁸ For a possible exception, Asqūlūbiyā, see 4.1.

⁴⁹ The importance of the *shu'ūbiyya* movement of the 9th century has been exaggerated, and wrong conclusions have been made about it. The *shu'ūbiyya* may well have inspired Ibn Waḥshiyya to start his translation activities but it does not follow that he would have forged his material out of nothing. The polemical passages emphasizing the role of the Nabateans in history are few and far between and the main focus of the work is elsewhere.

Likewise, the pagan elements in the text cannot always be derived from some hidden, nationalistic agenda. On the contrary, many “pagan” details of the text must have sounded repulsive to the ears of the 10th-century audience. For nationalism in Syriac authors, see 1.3.

among the *qudamā*² in this time of ours (. . .).” The lexical meaning of *qudamā*² is, of course, “ancients” or, more freely, “ancestors”, which hardly makes much sense in the present context.

It seems possible that the word, which is very often used in the *Nabatean Agriculture*, here⁵⁰ actually means “members of the old families” (cf. the *cristianos viejos* in Castile), which in this context might refer to a class of Syriac-speaking old landed (low) aristocracy of the area who might have kept vestiges of the Hellenic religion, in secret if not openly. If so, then the references to ancient times might turn out, at least in some cases, to be references to this “old-fashioned” class, and the coded names which mainly belong to the *qudamā*² would be contemporaries of Qūthāmā. Once invented, they could also serve as replacements for Greek names, as in the case of Anatolius. The translator, Ibn Waḥshiyya, need not always have understood the expression correctly, which would have resulted in setting these *qudamā*² in ancient times.

In addition to completely coded names, there are a few more easily identifiable names of Biblical origin. The persons bearing these names in the *Nabatean Agriculture* have little to do with their Biblical counterparts (for more details, see 4.1). Adam is presented as the forefather of the Kasdānians—but not all human beings⁵¹—and Abraham is mentioned as a traveller. Such changes in the evaluation of Biblical characters are well known from several traditions in the area (Gnostics, Mandaeans, even Hellenistic magic), which does not help us in identifying any particular group as being behind these changes.

Moreover, the roles given to these persons in the text hardly fit the belief system of any religion, however syncretistic it might have been.⁵² They are more seen as masters of agriculture and wise farm-

⁵⁰ A similar meaning might also be possible in, e.g., NA, p. 412.

⁵¹ Cf., e.g., NA, p. 1264, where it is mentioned that the Jarāmiqa do not belong to the progeny (*nasl*) of Adam, whereas the Kasdānians do.

⁵² One should be wary of overemphasizing the effects of syncretism. One cannot but agree with Green, who writes (1992: 82): “At the same time, however, we must be careful not to overvalue the effects of religious syncretism, for (. . .) it was often at best an intellectual exercise on the part of a few which left untouched the actual ritual and cult.” In the case of the *Nabatean Agriculture*, we may see how philosophical astral speculation is found in the text side by side with practical magic. The philosophical layer did not eradicate the popular layer, and thus we have in the *Nabatean Agriculture* a document from which we can sift information concerning rural religious life, despite the more sophisticated philosophical layer superadded to it.

ers of the old times than as Biblical—or Qurʾānic—characters. In this sense, these names, too, are coded.⁵³

In any case, the redactor responsible for these names knew the Biblical tradition, at least by hearsay, but as that tradition was equally well known in the fifth as in the late ninth centuries, this does not much help in identifying or dating the redactor. It seems more probable that these, like other coded names, derive from the Syriac version.

Lastly, there remains the question of how Ibn Waḥshiyya worked when translating the book. By now, I hope, it has become clear that more weight should be given to what Ibn Waḥshiyya himself says, as many of his claims seem to have been to some extent corroborated by the results of our study: he most probably did translate his text from “Ancient Syriac” and so he obviously had Syriac manuscripts which he would have found among the local population and, thus far, the information he gives in the Preface is correct and accurate.

In many cases (e.g., NA, p. 585), Ibn Waḥshiyya, speaking as himself, indicates the variation of “Nabatean” words in different dialects (*luḡhāt*).⁵⁴ This is quite understandable, since in the late ninth century Arabic had started pushing Syriac/Aramaic into small pockets where the dialects must have developed in different directions—as we know from modern Aramaic. Also the semi-Arabic words given in the text as “Nabatean” are not surprising when we compare them to the situation in, e.g., Modern Assyrian, where influences and loanwords from Arabic, Persian, Kurdish and Turkish are considerable, depending on the surrounding culturally and linguistically dominant culture.

The dialectal variation also shows that Ibn Waḥshiyya did not work with one manuscript singlehandedly. Either

⁵³ Note that the idea of Adam and others as both prophets and wise men does not in fact fall too far from the philosopher-king/prophet of al-Fārābī. There is no need to assume a genetic link here, though: the idea was always close when Greek philosophy was combined with Semitic prophecy. See also 4.2.

⁵⁴ For Ibn Waḥshiyya’s way of working, see also section 2. For references to the Nabatean language in Arabic literature, see Baalbaki (1983). Most cases of “Nabatean” phrases given in Arabic literature are rather problematic from the point of view of linguistic analysis, such as that attributed to Jaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq in Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib* IV: 238 (MZ Allāh WKSʾ WLSḤH B-SʾṬWRʾ), which incites ʿAmmār ibn Mūsā aṣ-Sābāʾī to exclaim: “I have never seen a Nabatean as eloquent in his own language as you are (although you are an Arab)!”

- a) he had Syriac-speaking informants whom he consulted when he translated the manuscript: the dialectal variation would have been a problem when he asked them about the words in the text, since his informants spoke another variant of Syriac, probably differing not only from the written language but also from each other; or
 b) he collected materials from oral tradition in addition to the text he translated and added these to the text, not (at least not always) indicating that he was expanding the original.

These two possibilities are, of course, not mutually exclusive, and it seems probable that both methods were, in fact, used by Ibn Waḥshiyya. That he did collect additional oral lore, at least in some cases, we know from the additions which he gives under his own name as the translator, e.g., the above-mentioned passages where he asked people about Yanbūshād and Tammūz.

It also seems possible that his command of Syriac was less than perfect;⁵⁵ at least he often has to admit that he either does not know the Arabic word for a Syriac plant name or that he had to take recourse to his informants. As the Syriac original has not been preserved, it is not easy to assess the faithfulness of the translation; the parallels between the *Nabatean Agriculture* and the ultimate Greek sources are never, as far as I can see, exact word-to-word parallels, which makes it possible that the translation from Syriac into Arabic may have been rather loose, although it is also possible that the Syriac author is the source of this free attitude towards sources. Assuming that it was Ibn Waḥshiyya who took the freedoms in his translation, it is possible that the *Nabatean Agriculture* is not, in fact, an exact translation but perhaps more a paraphrase of the original, or an *ad sensum* translation.

⁵⁵ Ibn an-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, p. 358 (= Dodge 1970: 863), calls him *aḥad fuṣaḥāʾ an-Nabaṭ bi-luḡat al-Kasāniyyīn*, but this confidence in his linguistic abilities obviously derives from Ibn Waḥshiyya himself, or his general reputation as the translator *par excellence* from the Nabatean language. Whence his, presumably limited, knowledge of Syriac came, is not clear. Partly he may have learned it from the peasants around him, but one might also speculate on the possibility that his mother might have been Nabatean herself, which could have given him the nickname Ibn Waḥshiyya—his forefathers bore Arabic and Islamic names for several generations. Likewise, the mother of his contemporary, the philologist Abū ʿAmr ash-Shaybānī (d. 312) is said to have been Nabatean, which is implied to give credibility to his statements on the Nabatean language, cf. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab* III: 151, s.v. ḤZRQ, and Baalbaki (1983): 122.

The basic facts concerning Ibn Waḥshiyya seem rather clear: he was an Arab author, of Nabatean background according to his own words, with at least a working knowledge of Syriac, obviously both the spoken Syriac of the area and the literary language. Ibn Waḥshiyya himself was a Muslim but he was interested in the esoterica and tradition which we might call Late Hellenistic. His own rural background is obvious, which also explains why he was so little known in literary circles.

On the other hand, we know very few details about him; he is not deemed worthy of an article in any of the biographical dictionaries which, in any case, concentrate on religious scholars and poets in the urban centres. In addition to the information given in his own works, our main source on Ibn Waḥshiyya is Ibn an-Nadīm's (d. 380/990) *Fihrist*, where he is mentioned on several occasions, six to be precise.⁵⁶

Ibn an-Nadīm's first note on him is revealing in its brevity. In *Fihrist*, p. 171/377, he mentions Ibn Waḥshiyya's book on agriculture in a chapter on authors about whom he had little information (*lam yu'raf ḥāluhum 'alā stiḡsā'*). It seems that when writing this part of the book, Ibn an-Nadīm knew little about Ibn Waḥshiyya. Later, though, he became more familiar with him and, luckily, seems to have used sources which did not depend on Ibn Waḥshiyya's own works and thus contain independent evidence for his historicity.

The main articles on him come in *Fihrist*, pp. 311–312/731–732 and 358/863–865. When writing these articles, Ibn an-Nadīm had become more familiar with Ibn Waḥshiyya. Here we find the complete name of Ibn Waḥshiyya given as Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn 'Alī ibn (Qays ibn al-)Mukhtār ibn 'Abdalkarīm ibn Ḥarathyā ibn Badanyā ibn Barṭānyā ibn 'Ālātyā al-Kasdānī aṣ-Ṣūfī min ahl Qussīn⁵⁷ (and Junbulā').⁵⁸ He is credited with several books, both his own on magic and alchemy and those translated from "Nabatean" and, moreover, we are told that he was a descendant of Sennacherib (Sinḥārīb).⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Pp. 171/377, 245/590, 311–312/731–732, 317/743, 353/850, 358/863–865—the paginations refer to the *Fihrist* and its translation in Dodge (1970). Thus, e.g., pp. 171/377, read: *Fihrist*, p. 171; Dodge (1970): 377.

⁵⁷ The readings of the non-Arabic names are somewhat conjectural.

⁵⁸ The bracketed additions come from *Fihrist*, p. 358.

⁵⁹ Sennacherib, probably because of his Biblical fame, is often given as a prestigious ancestor. Even an Armenian prince bore this name in the tenth century, cf. Ullmann (1978): 43.

Ibn Waḥshiyya most probably was inspired to translate the *Nabatean Agriculture* from Syriac by several factors in the intellectual climate of his time. His Nabatean *‘aṣabiyya*, national spirit, coincides with the *shu‘ūbiyya* movement in general, and the idea of translating texts into Arabic goes hand in hand with the similar translation movement from Greek, often through Syriac. His interest in paganism temporally coincides with the general interest in the Sabians of Harran, who somewhat earlier had drawn the attention of the capital, Baghdad, where there developed a “Harranian community” of learned authors and translators. The 9th- and 10th-century interest in pagans, both those of Harran and earlier ones, is abundantly documented in Ibn an-Nadīm’s *Fihrist* (for Harranians, see pp. 308–327/725–773). Kraemer (1982): 174, even speaks of a “pagan reaction” among Muslim philosophers.⁶⁰

Obviously, Ibn Waḥshiyya would not have felt a need to translate the Nabatean works into Arabic without this background. It should be clear, though, that it does not follow from this that the texts are forgeries. It merely explains the interest he had in translating Nabatean texts.

The intellectual climate in which Ibn Waḥshiyya worked was full of interest in finding, or forging, traces of ancient wisdom and Late Antique philosophy in both its Aristotelian and Neoplatonic forms, largely fused together by now. The Harranians played a central role in this but also the Jābirian corpus⁶¹ and the *Rasā’il Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā* were in vogue, and all these show close similarity with the *Nabatean Agriculture*, as also does Balīnūs’ *Sirr al-khalīqa*. Yet, unfortunately, the sources and dates of almost all these texts are equally difficult to pinpoint with the exactitude one might wish.

It is more complicated to draw a picture of the Syriac author, Qūthāmā. He was absorbed in the Hellenistic tradition and could well have been a pagan himself, as the text claims. Whether his paganism was autochthonous or not is not quite obvious. Late, local paganism did live on even in the East Roman empire, as shown by, e.g., the studies of Trombley,⁶² and it should have continued even

⁶⁰ Cf. also Crone-Cook (1977), esp. pp. 85–88.

⁶¹ For *kutub al-filāḥa* in the Jābirian corpus, see Kraus (1942–1943) I: 153 and II: 79–84. The alchemist al-Jildakī (d. 743/1342), in his *Nihāyat al-ṭalab*, counts Ibn Waḥshiyya as one of the *falāsifat al-islām* who benefited from the work of Jābir.

⁶² Trombley (1993–1994). See also Dijkstra (1995). For the survival of paganism into Islamic times, see 1.4.

more strongly in the area ruled by the Sasanids, who did support the state religion of Zoroastrianism but who were definitely less strictly against paganism than their East Roman, or Byzantine, colleagues—and even these tolerated paganism to some extent.

On the other hand, the 4th and 5th centuries also showed a resurrection of philosophical paganism. Julian the Apostate tried to revive paganism and later Proclus (d. 485) himself worked in the same direction. Qūthāmā might also be one of these late philosophical pagans who followed suit and, perhaps, added local elements to their pagan world view: the society which he describes is, in any case, pagan. Yet the Biblical elements do show that he was already heavily influenced by either Judaism or Christianity, or both, in some of their forms. A date earlier than the fifth century is made improbable by the fact that non-Biblical Greek texts were not translated into Syriac in large numbers before this date.⁶³ It does not seem possible with our present state of knowledge to be more exact about the background of Qūthāmā.

To summarize the evaluation of the provenance and authorship of the *Nabatean Agriculture*, the analysis seems to favour the following conclusions which, I wish to emphasize, cannot be considered as final. The book contains several layers, none of which, except for the additions by the translator, explicitly marked as such, can be definitely dated. The Preface itself claims that the book consists of several layers and the analysis seems to confirm this. The question is what these layers are and how to identify them.

The most easily identifiable layer is that which contains material ultimately deriving from the Greek tradition of agronomic literature and which was translated into Syriac, probably by Qūthāmā himself, who did not leave in the text any obvious signs of the provenance of this layer, such as Greek personal names. Qūthāmā also added another level which is firmly located to Northern and Central Mesopotamia and it seems that most of the openly pagan elements belong to this layer. The work of Qūthāmā seems to have been available to Ibn Waḥshiyya in a Syriac manuscript and there is no reason to doubt the general description in the Preface of how he found the manuscript and worked with it.

The identity of the sources of the Syriac original remains obscure because of the coded names. It is possible that at least some of these

⁶³ Cf. Brock (1977).

sources may well have been oral. It is also possible that Ibn Waḥshiyya may have enlarged the text he was translating with extracts from other sources, as well as information culled from *his* oral sources.

As the moral integrity of Ibn Waḥshiyya is not at stake, I see no reason to deny that either he or Qūthāmā could have changed these, admittedly hypothetical, oral sources into written ones to enhance the authority of the book. In fact, we do know from the Preface that the author or the translator, or both, wanted us to believe in the great antiquity of the text, which would go well with creating ancient sources out of contemporary oral reports. Which of the two might have done this is not clear but it should be mentioned that, on the other hand, the author sometimes reduces the time scale by adding that the Nabateans spoke in *ramz*, symbolic language (cf. **Text 6**), so that the huge number of years sometimes signifies something quite different, thus in fact undermining the claims of the book to great antiquity. Thus, the huge time scale may not purport to be understood literally.⁶⁴

The geographical setting of the book is clear from the abundant details we have, but the date of the pagan material is less obvious. Ibn Waḥshiyya sometimes speaks as the translator and comments on the pagan rituals which, he says, still lingered on in his time, although they were obviously dying out, little by little. There does not seem to be any reason to doubt these passages—a tiny minority of all passages dealing with paganism—which thus show that vestiges of paganism did live on in the countryside until the late 9th century, though probably not much longer.⁶⁵

Yet in the community described in the main text, paganism seems much livelier and one gets the impression that there was a kind of *cuius regio eius religio* principle, which we know full well from the Eastern Roman empire after Constantine, i.e., in the fourth through to the sixth centuries.⁶⁶ As the area we are discussing mainly belonged to the Sasanian Empire such a religious freedom in the countryside would have been even more understandable—though one has to

⁶⁴ I repeat that I do not want to “clear the reputation” of Ibn Waḥshiyya. The book is immensely interesting and of great value, irrespective of whether the author and the translator were conscientious in their work.

⁶⁵ Anonymously, of course, pagan habits still live on in both Europe and the Near East but have now lost any conscious connection with historical paganism. See also 1.4.

⁶⁶ Cf. Trombley (1993–1994) I: 204; II: 72, 149.

note that this freedom grew more out of neglect than any noble principles. The Sasanids were also known to be able to persecute people when required, as the potentially unreliable Christians or the heretic Manichaeans and Mazdakites came to know.

Many other indicators point to the same time. The rural system of the text coincides with what we know of Late Antiquity—although often with what we know of Early Islam, too. The problem is that little changed, especially in the countryside, when the Arab armies conquered the area.⁶⁷ The stability of the countryside was strengthened by the restrictions on the mobility of the peasantry⁶⁸ which may further have been helped by the fact that it was the Muslim converts who tended to leave their land,⁶⁹ thus actually safeguarding the religious conservativeness of the countryside. Pagans stayed tied to their land while Muslim converts, at least partly, left for the cities. Thus, paganism had a fair chance to survive in the countryside where pagans were also permitted to practise their religion.⁷⁰

Likewise, the recurrent references to wandering magicians would fit well a Late Antique date. Wandering magicians were much feared in Late Antiquity⁷¹ and all that is told about them in the book finds parallels in Late Antique magic. The role of magicians seems particularly important in this period, which also saw the development of Mandaicism and several syncretistic or neopagan movements, beginning with Julian the Apostate and Proclus. The mixture of rural paganism, magic/theurgy, Hellenistic philosophy and Biblical elements would closely coincide with what we would presume from these movements. In, e.g., Proclus' writings, philosophy has the upper hand, of course, but once we go to the rural population and the landowners we might presume to find more popular versions of paganism. Other documents of this class, except for short epigrams, have not been preserved, and if we accept the authenticity of, and a Late

⁶⁷ The continuity of the area's culture is nowadays well recognized by scholars of Early Islam, as may be seen, e.g., in the many volumes of the series *Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (The Darwin Press: Princeton), a series programmatically emphasizing this continuity.

⁶⁸ See, e.g., Forand (1971).

⁶⁹ Forand (1971): 32, 36.

⁷⁰ Forand (1971): 36. Cf. also 1.4.

⁷¹ Cf., e.g., Trombley (1993–1994) I: 198; II: 41–42, 88. See also Vööbus (1958): 314, who describes the Christian missionaries as “ascetic–charismatic–thaumaturgic” monks—exactly how the *sahara* in the *Nabatean Agriculture* are portrayed.

Antique date for, the *Nabatean Agriculture*, we have an invaluable (though not easy-to-use) source in our hands.

It seems that we ought to seek for the text's *Sitz im Leben* in the pagan communities of the area in the last pre-Islamic or the first Islamic centuries. If the recurrent references to kings in the text⁷² are not completely legendary, as they well may be, then we might turn our attention to the small Aramaic city states of the Seleucid times and their successors, the vassal states of the Parthians and Sasanids, whose leaders obviously called themselves kings when speaking to their own people, as even such a minor vassal as Mar'alqays did in his funerary inscription of an-Namāra from 328 A.D.⁷³ The description of these kings would imply petty local rulers who were interested in husbandry, farming and livestock (cf., e.g., **Text 47**). The citizens of states such as Edessa and Hatra probably retained a memory of their kings long after the independence of the cities was lost.

In one case (NA, p. 838), there might be a reference to a sixth-century person we know, viz. Sergius of Resh'aynā (d. 536), who might well provide a *terminus post quem* for the author.⁷⁴ The reference is far from unambiguous and cannot be taken as a firm piece of evidence, but it would fit the general atmosphere. That would also fit the Biblical elements in the Syriac original, as by the sixth century syncretism must have thoroughly worked its way into pagan religions.

To sum up, I suggest that the Syriac original might stem from pagan circles not much earlier than the sixth century and definitely not much later.

Thus, the *Nabatean Agriculture* remains a complicated and problematic source but with undoubted importance for reconstructing the religious situation of Late Antiquity in Iraq. It might be added that whatever its exact date and provenance, the text is of great impor-

⁷² See section 5 and the Index of personal names in Fahd (1998): 9–17 (Arabic text).

⁷³ The inscription has been edited and studied several times. See, e.g., Altheim–Stiehl (1965): 312–332.

⁷⁴ The passage reads: “(…) in the Jazīra, in the city which has many springs (*bi'l-madīna dhāt al-ʿuyūn al-kathīra*). In this city, there was in ancient times (*qadīman*) a man from among the wise men (*hukamāʾ*) of the Jarāmiqa who had written a wonderful book on the (magical) properties of plants.”—Ibn Waḥshiyya adds his marginal note to identify the city as Ra's al-ʿAyn.—For the city, see also Yāqūt, *Muʿjam* III:13–14. For Sergius, see GAS IV: 78, 106–107, 164 and 316; Ullmann (1972): 431; Peters (1968): 58 (with further references).

tance.⁷⁵ The textual history of the *Nabatean Agriculture* may roughly be summarized as follows:

1. Free paraphrases of passages known from Graeco-Roman agricultural works.
2. Translation into Syriac either by several authors or by a single author (Qūthāmā), probably in the sixth century or soon after. The redactor(s) at this level added pagan and other materials, which probably reflect the situation of Northern Iraq before, or immediately after, the Islamic conquests. He/They may have added earlier local agronomical literary material (cf. Mago of Carthage), although even the existence of this remains hypothetical.
3. Translation of the Syriac text into Arabic by Ibn Waḥshiyya (10th c.), who added his own glosses, usually marked as such in the text.

1.3. *Mesopotamian National Identity in Early Arabic Sources*

In the physical landscape of Iraq, ancient Mesopotamia remained present in *tells*⁷⁶ and occasional cuneiform inscriptions found on ancient sites.⁷⁷ Yet the memory of the glory that was Mesopotamia had almost vanished when the Arabs conquered the area, although some authors who wrote in Syriac had kept up a certain nationalistic spirit. Thus, e.g., Severus of Nisibis (d. 666/7), who knew both Persian and Greek, polemicized against the idea that the Greeks would have a monopoly of wisdom and sciences. He drew attention to the—by now legendary—contributions of the Babylonians, known

⁷⁵ In fact, when I started working with the text I was much more fascinated with the possibility that it might have been written by Ibn Waḥshiyya, because the genuine material showed that, whoever the author was, he had access to ample and genuine pagan sources, and late ninth-century paganism was at least as interesting as, and perhaps even more intriguing than, sixth-century paganism.

⁷⁶ The major sites of Mesopotamia were known to Islamic authors. Partly this is naturally due to Biblical lore, which explains the fame of geographical names like Ninawā and Bābil. For the latter, see Janssen (1995). The large *tells* also attracted the attention of the Islamic authors. Thus, e.g., al-Qazwīnī (*Āthār*, p. 425) mentions the great mound of ‘Aqarqūf and even says that “it is like a huge *qaḥā*”.

⁷⁷ References to cuneiform tablets are found in literary contexts, such as in the works of Abū Ma’shar (texts buried from the time before the Flood, see Pingree 1968: 1ff.; the topic *sha lām abūbu* is well known already in Mesopotamian literature) and Ibn al-Muqaffā’, *al-Adab al-kabīr*, p. 8.

through Greek sources, and identified these with the ancestors of the Syrians of his time.⁷⁸

This awareness of the past Assyrian empire seems to have been at its strongest in Beth Garmai, the district of the Jarāmiqa, often mentioned in the *Nabatean Agriculture*. In Beth Garmai the term *Athōrāyē* “Assyrians” was used by the Christians as their self-designation.⁷⁹ In the south, the term Chaldaean had too strong pagan connotations to be accepted by Christians for themselves. The term Chaldaean remained pagan in tenor.

Briefly speaking, Islamic world history usually begins with the Creation and continues through Biblical history to the ancient Persian kings, mainly Sasanids, with less attention given to Arsacids and Achaemenids, extending to include Alexander and his followers, partly conflated with the Byzantine kings.⁸⁰ What little referred to Mesopotamia mainly derived from Biblical history; thus, e.g., Bukhtanaššar, or Nebuchadnezzar, was well known to Islamic authors.⁸¹

Yet there are some authors who were better informed about the existence of an ancient empire in the area. The best informed authors come from around 900, an era in which there arose a definite interest in the local population of Iraq as the offspring of a glorious culture. This interest may be connected in part with the general trend of *‘ašabiyya* (“nationalism”),⁸² the comeback of the conquered peoples, especially the Persians, after a period of Arab domination.⁸³ While the Muslim population increasingly came to be of non-Arab descent and the Persians gained political influence with the rise of the ‘Abbāsīd empire after 750, it was only natural that a national feeling rose

⁷⁸ Brock (1982a): 23–24, with further references.

⁷⁹ Brock (1982b): 16–17.

⁸⁰ Thus, e.g., aṭ-Ṭabarī, the great historian of the Arabs whose vision of history coincides with the general version, almost completely glosses over both Nabateans and the Mesopotamian empires, guiding his narrative from the creation through the Israeli prophets directly to the Persians, with only a minor note on the Nabateans and their ancestors when their history tangentially touches that of the Biblical characters.

⁸¹ Sack (1991) is very poor when it comes to Islamic texts, which seem to have been available to the author only in translations. The little importance given to Assyrians and Babylonians may be seen in reading through the first volumes of aṭ-Ṭabarī’s world history or the summaries of world histories given in Radtke (1992).

⁸² This term is identical with the terms *ta‘ašub* and *shu‘ūbiyya*.

⁸³ See the now classical study of Goldziher (1889–1890), I: 147–216. It should be noted that this interest coincides, or slightly postdates, the interest in Harranians, so clearly manifested in the authors quoted by Ibn an-Nadīm in his *Fihrist*.

among Persians, the heirs of an ancient empire. As Islam lost its strong Arab identity, the new converts were free to study their own roots, which no longer caused them to be rated as second-class Muslims.

Whereas the Persian *‘aṣabiyya* has been to some extent studied, its Mesopotamian counterpart has received less attention and was indeed less influential. Such theologians as Ḍirār ibn ‘Amr, Thumāma ibn Ashras and the polymath al-Jāḥiẓ were listed by al-Mas‘ūdī in *Murūj* §955 as holding that Nabateans are better than Arabs. For them, the Mesopotamian *‘aṣabiyya* seems more of a theoretical kind and to be closely connected with the struggle between traditionalism and rational theology, where Arabness seems to have been summarily lumped together with *naql* (transmission of revealed knowledge and *ḥadīth*) and the Persian, or Mesopotamian, *‘aṣabiyya*, its opponent, with rational theology (*‘aql*) with its universal appeal and ideas close to natural religion.⁸⁴ The Arab *‘aṣabiyya* bases itself on the Arab Prophet and his *sunna*, whereas its opposite *‘aṣabiyya* is connected with rational theology which is basically free of any national features. If religious knowledge may be transmitted only through tradition, then the Arabic language and the Arabs have had a crucial role in world history and would continue to do so. However, if religious knowledge may be attained through ratiocination, then all nations have an equal share of it.

In addition to those who used *‘aṣabiyya* for theological purposes,⁸⁵ there were others for whom Mesopotamian identity meant more than just a prop for theological arguments. Two authors stand out among

⁸⁴ A further character closely connected with the movement is Abū ‘Īsā al-Warrāq, whose interest in foreign religions later gave him a reputation as a heretic and Manichaean, see Thomas (1992): 9–30. Unfortunately, there is no exposition of the Nabatean religion among his works.

⁸⁵ One might also mention the rather surprising story, traced back to ‘Alī, the first Imam of the Shiites, where he is made to identify himself as “one of the Nabateans from Kūthā” (see Yāqūt, *Muḥjam* IV: 488, s.v. Kūthā). It goes without saying that the story is apocryphal, but it shows that among the Shiites there were people ready to identify themselves with the Nabateans. Thus it comes as no surprise that especially in the so-called *ghulāt* movements (extremist Shiites) a lot of material surfaces that is derivable from Mesopotamian sources (cf. Hämecen-Anttila 2001), and the early Shiite strongholds were to a great extent in the area inhabited by Nabateans.

Of course, as also Yāqūt notes, the identification of Kūthā as the original home of the Shiites/Muslims testifies to the Abrahamic roots of Islam. Yet the identification of Kūthā, and by extension also Abraham, with the Nabateans is remarkable.

others in matters Mesopotamian. One of them is the famous al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/956), who wrote the early parts of his *Murūj* in 332/943,⁸⁶ the other was Ibn Waḥshiyya, who wrote his main work, the Arabic translation of the *Nabatean Agriculture*, a few decades earlier. Neither of them makes it a secret where their preference lies. Al-Masʿūdī extols the fourth clime, that of Bābil (cf. *Tanbīh*, p. 35)⁸⁷ in his *Tanbīh*⁸⁸ (p. 34).⁸⁹

We will mention the fourth clime and what distinguishes it from the other climes, the sublimity of its region and the nobility of its place, since it is our birth place and we have grown up there, and thus we are the most natural people to extol it and to make its nobility and excellence obvious.

The preface of Ibn Waḥshiyya's work (**Text 2**) makes it more than clear that he wholeheartedly identified himself with the Mesopotamian rural population, despite their depressed situation at the time of his writing, in contrast to their ancient glory. In this, he resembles Severus who wrote some two centuries before him.

Before delving any deeper into the question of Mesopotamian nationalism, one should start with some notes on terminology. What is "Mesopotamian" in Classical Arabic? As references to a geographical area, one of course finds several terms (especially *al-Jazīra*, the "island," between the Euphrates and the Tigris), but as a term defining nationality the most commonly used is *an-Nabaṭ*, Nabateans.⁹⁰ This term has little to do with the Nabateans of Petra. The Nabateans of the Islamic texts refer to the local, mainly rural, population of

⁸⁶ See *Murūj* §§517, 520, etc. For al-Masʿūdī's views on the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia, see also Shboul (1979): 120–121.

⁸⁷ Al-Masʿūdī states that it is called in Chaldaean, that is to say Syriac, *Khunīrath*, actually referring to the Iranian Khvaniratha. On the same occasion he explains the name Bābil to be in Chaldaean Bābil, where the latter part is Bīl, i.e., *al-Mushtarī* (Jupiter, i.e. Bel); for this, see also Ibn al-Faqīh, *Nuṣūṣ*, p. 53. The climes are also attributed to the seven *kawākib* (*Tanbīh*, pp. 33–34); the fourth clime is, thus, the clime of the Sun.

⁸⁸ Written late in his career and containing references to his other books, including *Murūj*.

⁸⁹ Cf. also Ibn al-Faqīh, *Buldān*, p. 6.

⁹⁰ The two articles on *Nabaṭ* in EI², by Graf and Fahd, are not very satisfactory. In al-Masʿūdī, *Tanbīh*, p. 182, one finds the concise identification: "the [non-Arabic, indigenous] inhabitants of Iraq, that is to say the Nabateans." For the Nabateans of the Arabian peninsula, see Fiey (1990): 52–53. It seems to me rather clear that the historiographical problems involved in Early Islamic texts make these references somewhat dubious and one should perhaps take them as later inventions.

Iraq and it is also sometimes used indiscriminately for anyone not speaking Arabic also in Syria, and even in more distant countries, such as Armenia.⁹¹

The better informed Arab authors knew well that this was not an autochthonous term by which the people of Iraq would have referred to themselves. Thus, al-Masʿūdī (*Tanbīh*, p. 36) mentions that it was the Arabs who called them *an-Nabaṭ* (“the kings of nations from among the Nimruds (*namārida*) who were the kings of Syrians (*Suryāniyyīn*) whom the Arabs call Nabateans”). For most Arab authors, the Nabateans are a despised class of people, living on their farms more or less like animals and being mainly a nuisance.⁹²

In general, the Nabateans were a favourite target of scorn. The Arabs have always been very proud of their own historical past and their own genealogy. When the conquering Arabs came in the seventh century to the old cultural areas of the Near East they clashed with several nations who were very clearly aware of their national identity, such as Byzantines, Persians and even Jews, whose intense feeling of religious identity compensated for their lack of an independent state.

In Iraq, things were different. In a (certainly fictitious) tradition found in a genealogical work,⁹³ the second Caliph, ʿUmar, is made to say to some Arabs that they should remember their genealogy and not be “like the Nabateans of the *sawād*: when one of them is asked who he is, he responds that he is from such-and-such a village.”

In this anecdote, this is seen as the peak of shameful ignorance of one’s own roots, as the Arab writer is unable to see any patriotic feelings one might have for the agricultural land of one’s ancestors; for the Arabs, firmly rooted in their Bedouin background, fatherland is a less crucial concept than tribe or nation, which is perpetuated in the Islamic concept of *umma*, the universal and geographically undefined community of believers. The same close identification of

⁹¹ See al-Masʿūdī, *Tanbīh*, pp. 78–79 (*an-Nabaṭ al-Armāniyyūn*). Ibn Waḥshiyya (e.g., NA, p. 590) speaks of Nabatean Kurds (*an-Nabaṭ al-Akrād*), though the passage distinguishes between these and the “ordinary” Nabateans. A similarly inflated term is Sabians (*sābiʿa*), which is primarily used for the Harranians and the pagans of Iraq but is often used by extension for all pagans, including those of India and Classical Antiquity (see also Fiey 1990).

⁹² Note that, in fact, even Ibn Waḥshiyya, the main defender of their cause, admits that in their state at that time, the Nabateans were ignorant, even of their own glorious past (see **Text 2**).

⁹³ Ibn ʿAbdalbarr, *Inbāh*, p. 37.

Nabateans with their home village is a favourite topic in many anecdotes. Thus, e.g., al-Kāmil al-Khwārizmī (d. after 510/1117) parodies an unlettered Nabatean peasant:⁹⁴

I am but a foster son of dales and marshes, the inhabitant of reed-huts and shacks, grown up among Nabatean peasants and base boors, a mixed lot and a vile mob, in a region, where I would cry: “Oh, how alien I feel!” if I went past its walls or cross its bridges. If I saw a foreign face, I would cry: “Daddy!” I do not know any language except Nabatean, I have had no teacher except my father, and I live amidst people who are not used to travel and who have never sat on the back of a horse or a camel, who have never left their walls, shady places and hills.

Incidentally, in the *Nabatean Agriculture*, avoiding unnecessary travel is, on the contrary, seen as a positive feature (e.g., NA, p. 202).

One of the most hostile passages on the Nabaṭ that I have come across comes from the *Āthār* of al-Qazwīnī (p. 420) where the Nabaṭ are glossed as “the people of Iraq,” and it goes without saying that this gloss denotes the rural population who do not speak Arabic, at least not as their native tongue. In this legend, the Nabateans are represented as deriving from an eponymous ancestor, Nabaṭ, full of evil and mischief, and an anonymous prostitute. The present Nabateans, says al-Qazwīnī, have inherited the worst traits of both of their ancestral parents.

In contrast to all these scornful stories, al-Mas‘ūdī identified the Nabateans with the ancient kings of Mesopotamia,⁹⁵ who were more or less unknown to most scholars. Al-Mas‘ūdī often speaks of “the kings of Bābil from among the Nabateans” (*Murūj* §21 = §522, cf. §954) and he correctly identifies their empire as preceding that of the “first Persians” (§522), by which he means the Achaemenids. After quoting a series of their kings, the list ultimately deriving from Greek sources,⁹⁶ he adds that “some people say that these kings were

⁹⁴ Quoted from Hāmeen-Anttila (1997): 145–146. A rather devastating example of invective in its simplicity is Abū Nuwās’ line (*Dīwān* V: 57): *anta min Tayyīn walākīn/qablahū nūnun wa-bā’ū*. But cf. also Stroumsa (1999): 195, and note 8.

⁹⁵ In fact, al-Mas‘ūdī, like Šā‘id al-Andalusī (*Ṭabaqāt*, p. 143) after him, grossly overestimates the extent of the Chaldaean empire, including areas as far away as Yemen (*Tanbīh*, p. 79). This was obviously the result of linguistic considerations: Chaldaeans are here summarily equated with Semites. One has to remember that for Muslim authors the language of Adam after the Fall was Syriac, i.e., the Chaldaean language, see, e.g., as-Suyūṭī, *Muzhir* I: 30; Czapkiewicz (1988): 66–67.

⁹⁶ Cf. *Murūj* VII: 598–601 (Index, s.v. *al-Kaldāniyyūn*), which contains a comparative table of the royal names in al-Mas‘ūdī, al-Ya‘qūbī and several Greek sources.

Nabateans" (§529). He also derives his knowledge of "the kings of Mosul and Nineveh, who are called Assyrians (*Athūriyyūn*)" (§21 = §520), from the same source.⁹⁷

In actual practice, the local population of Iraq mainly spoke Aramaic dialects at the time of the Arab conquest, and it is only natural that Islamic authors could not quite understand the difference between the "Nabateans," i.e., the Aramaic-speaking rural population, of their time and their ancestors, the rulers of Mesopotamia in Antiquity. Thus, the same term, Nabatean, is also used to refer to some of the rulers of the small Hellenistic states after Alexander the Great (see al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj* §§557–558, and *Tanbīh*, p. 95).⁹⁸ It also explains why al-Mas'ūdī is not quite able to make up his mind whether the ancient kings were Syrians⁹⁹ (*Suryāniyyūn*) or Nabateans (*Nabat*), cf. *Murūj* §509. He even states that "the inhabitants of Nineveh were what we call Nabateans (*Nabīṭ*)¹⁰⁰ and Syrians; their race (*jins*) is one and their language is one. It is only that the Nabateans differ

⁹⁷ The term *Athūr* was not widely used by Islamic authors. It is known as a place name, identical with Mosul (i.e., Nineveh) to Yāqūt (*Muġjam* I: 92. Cf. also, e.g., Ibn Rusta, *A'lāq*, p. 104), but his uncertainty as to the middle consonant (*Athūr* or *Aqūr*) shows how foreign the name was to him. The Arabic usage obviously derives from Syriac, where the word remained in better use. Cf. also al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, p. 38. The term gained more ground in Arabic only when the modern Assyrians started using it.

When discussing (with reference to his own, but unfortunately lost, *Akhbār az-zamān*) the Achaemenids (*al-Furs al-ūlā*), al-Mas'ūdī (*Tanbīh*, p. 94) mentions the differing opinions as to whether they were Chaldaeans or whether the Chaldaean rule was transferred to them. On the same occasion he mentions that some say that an end was put to the rule of the Chaldaeans by Assyrians (*al-Athūriyyūn*), the kings of Mosul, after internal strife and wars.—In *Tanbīh*, p. 88, he specifically says that according to some, the Persian king aḍ-Ḍaḥḥāk was one of the ancient Chaldaean kings.

Arab geographers actually knew two cities named Nineveh. The standard classical reference to these two Ninevehs is Yāqūt, *Muġjam* V: 339, which mentions, s.v., that a) "it is the village (*qarya*) of Yūnus ibn Mattā, peace be upon him, in Mosul," and b) "in the agricultural area (*sawād*) around al-Kūfa there is a district (*nāḥiya*) called Nīnawā, to which Kerbela belongs." Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj* §520, gives a short description of the ruins of ancient Nineveh in 332/943. In addition, Ibn Waḥshiyya, NA, pp. 589–590, distinguishes explicitly between the two Ninevehs, see 3.2.

⁹⁸ Thus I also take *Tanbīh*, p. 197, which mentions a dating system according to the Nabatean kings, to refer to these *mulūk at-ṭawā'if*, the petty post-Alexandrian kingdoms.

⁹⁹ Note that etymologically this is, of course, correct (Syria < Assyria) but for Muslim authors, Syrians were, *prima facie*, Christians who spoke Syriac.—Note that Ibn Waḥshiyya mentions the Christian population of Iraq and says that all of them derive from the Nabateans, even when they themselves claim to be Byzantines (*ar-Rūm*), see NA, p. 547.

¹⁰⁰ This is a parallel form for *an-Nabat*, used by al-Mas'ūdī but never by Ibn Waḥshiyya.

in a few consonants (or words—*ḥarf*) from their [the Syrians'] language. Otherwise, their speech (*maqāla*) is one" (*Murūj* §521).

In addition, the relation in al-Mas'ūdī's writings between *Kaldānī* and *Bābilī* on the one hand and *Nabaṭī* on the other, is not simple.¹⁰¹ Both terms, Chaldaean and Babylonian, had an obvious link with Biblical lore¹⁰² and thus they are not as directly dependent on local tradition, although there may have been cases where the term 'Chaldaean' was retained locally and not borrowed from sources dependent on the Bible. For al-Mas'ūdī, Chaldaeans were primarily those Nabateans who ruled in Babylon (*Murūj* §21 = §522). He also several times equates Chaldaeans with Syrians (*Suryāniyyūn*) and both Chaldaeans and Syrians with Nabateans.¹⁰³

In *Tanbīh*, p. 78, he lists the Chaldaean peoples as follows: *Nīnawīyyūn* (Ninevites), *Athūriyyūn* (Assyrians), *Armān* (Armenians), *Ardawān* (Parthian Artabans), *Ḥarāmīqa* (the inhabitants of Bājarmā, Aramaic Beth Garmāi), and finally *Nabaṭ al-ʿIrāq wa-ahl as-sawād*, "the Nabateans of Iraq and the people of the *sawād*," obviously to be read as a hendiadys.¹⁰⁴

Al-Mas'ūdī also shows himself to be aware of the contemporary Chaldaeans, alias Babylonians. In *Tanbīh*, p. 161, he writes that the Chaldaeans "are the Babylonians (*al-Bābiliyyūn*) whose remnants live nowadays in *al-Baṭāʾih*¹⁰⁵ between Wāsiṭ and Basra in villages (*qarāyā*) there." One might tentatively identify these as the ancestors of modern Mandaean.

¹⁰¹ To add to the confusion one might mention the Canaanite (*al-Kanʿāniyyūn*) kings that now and then come up in the literature. Al-Iṣṭakhrī, *Masālik*, p. 86, mentions that they ruled in Bābil. In the *Nabatean Agriculture*, many other peoples are mentioned, most of which refer to the nearby villages. The ramification of the Nabateans, and their dialects, is an often-mentioned feature in Ibn Waḥshiyya's works (cf. section 2) and it finds confirmation both in other mediaeval works dealing with the Nabateans and in the linguistically heterogenous character of the Neo-Aramaic dialects.

¹⁰² Al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, p. 78, shows himself aware of the fact that the Chaldaeans were mentioned in the Bible. He also knows that Aristotle mentioned the Chaldaeans in his *Politeia* (al-Mas'ūdī gives both the Greek form *Būlītīyyā* and its Arabic translation, *Siyāsat al-mudun*). On the same occasion, he mentions that the Chaldaean capital was situated in Kalwādhā, which in Islamic times had become a suburb of Baghdad.

¹⁰³ See *Tanbīh*, pp. 2, 7, 78, 176–177, and 184; in the last two places he refers to the Chaldaeans, alias Syrians, "which the Arabs call Nabateans."

¹⁰⁴ *Sawād* is the rural area of Mesopotamia. For an exact definition of *sawād*, see Ibn al-Faḥīh, *Nuṣūṣ*, pp. 51–63. See also Forand (1971): 26.

¹⁰⁵ The swamp area of southern Iraq.

However, the Nabateans, to use the Arabic term, were peasants, and even though their families had lived in the area from times immemorial—with occasional Aramaic invaders who not only shed blood but also brought some fresh blood—they had, to a great extent, lost the continuous remembrance which could have extended back to the Assyrian and Babylonian empires.

This was not an unprecedented phenomenon in the area. The Persians had a keen knowledge of their ancestors and moreover a long tradition of historical writing, yet they, too, had almost complete ignorance of a major part of their own history, which tends to jump from the Achaemenids and Alexander the Great directly to the Sasanians, not only glossing over the foreign Hellenistic rulers but also most of the Parthian Arsacids.

Among native Nabateans we do not find many traces of any sense of belonging to a culture which once lived through an almost incomparable florescence. This may be partly due to the religious situation: at the time of the Islamic conquest most Aramaic- or Syriac-speaking Nabateans had converted to Christianity and their sense of history was more concerned with *Heilsgeschichte* than with their own, pagan, past. In fact, the keenest awareness of historical continuity is seen among the pagan element.¹⁰⁶

After the conquest, the ruling class, the Muslim Arabs, were in the beginning more interested in their own background than in the past of Iraq. The conquered peoples slowly regained their national pride, which was seen in the *ʿaṣabiyya* movement beginning in the eighth century, but there were few Nabateans among them: the *ʿaṣabiyya* was strongest among the Persians.

As there was no continuous tradition of historical writing among the Nabateans, the Arabs, once they started becoming interested in *Weltgeschichte*, had little material at their disposal. Thus, their main

¹⁰⁶ This is more than understandable. The Muslims identified themselves, perhaps primarily, as members of the *umma* and, secondarily, as Arabs, ultimately deriving their origin from the Arabian Peninsula; Jews and Christians had their religious identity with its roots in Biblical history, whereas the pagans could hardly advertise their religious self-identification and thus had only their local and national background to vaunt. In fact, some of the pagans, the Harranians, tried to find a place in the sacred history of the Muslims and started to call themselves “Sabians” after the Qurʾān. Although the story in, e.g., Ibn an-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, pp. 320–321 (Dodge 1970: 751–752) most probably lacks authenticity in its details, it obviously gets the main point right: Harranians adopted the term from their Muslim rulers.

source for the Assyro-Babylonian antiquity was the Biblical tradition, which had partly become Islamic tradition, and other *Isrāʾīliyyāt*, i.e., stories received from Jews and Christians.¹⁰⁷

Through these channels, the Arabs received more or less the same repertory of ideas and information which the Jews and the Christians had concerning ancient Mesopotamia. Nebuchadnezzar is a prime example of this: his character has in Islamic tradition little that would not be found in Jewish and Christian traditions. The same holds for other Biblical legends connected with Mesopotamia, such as the confusion of languages in Babel, which is well known in Islamic sources, too. Thus, Ibn ʿAbdalbarr writes in his *Qasḍ* (p. 13) that after the Deluge all people lived in the land of Babel (*ard Bābil*) and spoke Syriac (*suryānī*), reflecting the common idea that Syriac is the oldest language which had been spoken in Paradise.¹⁰⁸

The latter is also a good example of the Aramaization of Mesopotamia: as the conquered peoples spoke different variants of Aramaic (called *Suryānī* or sometimes *Nabaṭī* in Arabic), the whole past of the nation was seen as Aramaic and there was not even a word for “Akkadian” in Classical Arabic.

Al-Masʿūdī offers his own explanation in his *Tanbīh* for the lack of a national feeling among the Nabateans. Although he is aware that some Nabateans knew that they had once ruled the country (p. 37),¹⁰⁹ he also makes it clear (p. 38) that after losing their power to the Persians owing to internal schisms¹¹⁰ and after a long Persian rule the Nabateans began counting themselves as Persians:

and sought strength in them (*taʿazzazū bihim*) and derived their ancestry from them (*intasabū ilayhim*). Then came Islam and most of them con-

¹⁰⁷ The term is somewhat misleading. In fact, a considerable part of the Islamic tradition should belong to this class, yet starting in the late eighth century there is a process through which the acceptable parts of this tradition are ascribed to the prophet Muḥammad and become prophetic *ḥadīths*, whereas the unacceptable parts are labelled *Isrāʾīliyyāt* and looked askance at. See also Hāmeen-Anttila (2000): 117–119.

¹⁰⁸ Incidentally, Arab scholars were well aware of the fact that the Semitic languages were cognates, see, e.g., Ibn ʿAbdalbarr, *Qasḍ*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁹ There are no unequivocal signs in al-Masʿūdī’s works that he knew Ibn Waḥshiyya’s works. Instead, the two obviously draw from the same or similar sources. Both probably tapped the mainly oral sources, i.e., the local Nabateans, to get their information, to which al-Masʿūdī then added his literal sources, ultimately stemming from Greek historians.

¹¹⁰ Obviously a reference to the Assyro-Babylonian wars and/or internal rebellions against central authority.

tinued disdaining their Nabatean origins (*an-Nabaṭiyya*) because they had lost the glory they once had. Thus, their majority derives their origin (*intamā*) from the kings of Persia.¹¹¹

Yet there were some Nabateans who thought differently, including naturally the anonymous informants of al-Masʿūdī himself, those who did not belong to the unspirited majority he described. Most of the Nabatean nationalists, if I am allowed the modern expression, were probably local inhabitants of the countryside but they also had one mouthpiece, Ibn Waḥshiyya, who bolstered their spirit and made it his life-long task to raise the prestige of the Nabateans outside of the community, and perhaps also made a name for himself within the community.¹¹²

According to the information given by Ibn Waḥshiyya concerning himself (**Text 2**), he derives his own origin from the Kasdānians and calls himself al-Kasdānī, not al-Kaldānī, which is the usual term for Chaldaeans in Arabic sources. This variant, together with al-Kardānī attested elsewhere in his writings,¹¹³ though not as his own *nisba*,¹¹⁴ is interesting and testifies to a more complicated tradition than a simple borrowing from Biblical sources. I find it not improbable that the variety of the name implies a living local tradition.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Cf. also *Tanbīh*, p. 7.

¹¹² It is clear that he had admirers among people who counted themselves as Harranian Sabians, a cognate group which had links with the Nabateans. Thus, the colophon (p. 136) of the pseudepigraphical *Shawq al-mustahām* (for which see GAS I: 934), attributed to Ibn Waḥshiyya, identifies the copyist (who is probably the real author of the text, see above, note 45) as Ḥasan ibn Faraj ibn ʿAlī ibn Dāʿūd ibn Sinān ibn Thābit ibn Qurra al-Ḥarrānī al-Bābilī an-Nūqānī (read al-Qūqānī), writing in 413 (this manuscript was the original of the late copyist who made his copy in 1166/1753).

The whole work shows the strong influence of Ibn Waḥshiyya, although it is definitely not by him. If the author really was a descendant of the Harranian Qurra family, it shows how the scion of a once leading family of Harranian pagans readily derived material from Ibn Waḥshiyya, an outsider from the Harranian viewpoint. A hundred years after his death, Ibn Waḥshiyya was a prestigious figure for the leading members of the competing community.

¹¹³ See Fahd (1998), Index, p. 25. *al-Kardāniyyūn* and *al-Kasdāniyyūn* are variants of one name, as is clearly seen in NA, p. 407. In, e.g., NA, p. 854, Ibn Waḥshiyya says that the Kanʿānites (*al-Kanʿāniyyīn*) and the Kardānians are among the nations (*ajyāl*) of Nabateans.

¹¹⁴ Possibly to be read *al-Kazdānī* and to be taken as a simple phonological variant for al-Kasdānī, which would, incidentally, speak for the oral origin of the term.

¹¹⁵ Note also NA, p. 1238 (*al-Ḥasdāniyyūn*). Incidentally, the variation of Ibn Waḥshiyya explains the same variation in Maimonides' works which has confused, e.g., Loewenthal, the translator of Maimonides' *Letter on astrology*, who writes (1994:

Although Ibn Waḥshiyya himself often voiced his dislike for (excessive) nationalism (*taʿaṣṣub*, *ʿaṣabiyya*)¹¹⁶ his works read like a continuous eulogy of the Nabateans,¹¹⁷ who, according to him, are the fathers of much, if not most, of human knowledge.¹¹⁸

In giving precedence to Nabatean knowledge, Ibn Waḥshiyya is by no means alone. Usually, the ancient knowledge is called Chaldaean and legends about it derive from Hellenistic sources. Thus, the passages on the Chaldaeans in Ṣāʿid al-Andalusī's *Kitāb Ṭabaqāt al-umam*, pp. 142–143 and 163–166, classify them as one of the seven proto-nations and, together with Indians, Persians, Greeks, Romans/Byzantines and Arabs, as one of the nations which promoted science. Yet his Chaldaeans are the bearers of the Hermetic tradition, flavoured with some Biblical material, and he shows little understanding of the complexity of the real offspring of the Assyro-Babylonian empire.¹¹⁹

The difference between Ibn Waḥshiyya and, e.g., Ṣāʿid al-Andalusī is instructive. For Ṣāʿid, the Chaldaeans are possessors of a mysterious, esoteric learning, more a concept than a living reality—not surprisingly, for he lived in faraway *al-Andalus*, although scholars living in the big cities of Iraq were usually equally ignorant of the facts

51, note 7): “Qui come altrove Maimonide distingue stranamente fra Caldei e Casdei (. . .).” As Maimonides’ *Dalālat al-hāʾirīn* shows, the *Nabatean Agriculture* was his main source when it comes to the Nabateans (see Friedländer 1956: 315ff.) and thus his distinction between Kaldānī and Kasdānī obviously derives from the same source.

¹¹⁶ E.g., NA, pp. 108, 337, 358, 403, 548, 703, 729, etc.

¹¹⁷ And also of peasants. The *Nabatean Agriculture* is especially full of references to the nobility of peasants. Some of the clearest and most strongly expressed passages include NA, pp. 51, 252, 255, and 702. For a eulogy of Babylon, see NA, p. 338.

¹¹⁸ In addition to **Text 2**, one might add references to other prefaces by Ibn Waḥshiyya. In the Preface to his *Kitāb as-Sumūm*, fol. 4b, he writes that “perhaps nine tenths of sciences belong to the Nabateans and one tenth to all other nations together”—the expression, nine tenths, is, of course, a manner of speech in Arabic, meaning roughly “a big part.” Cf. also NA, pp. 151–152, 155.

¹¹⁹ In listing the different names used for the Chaldaeans, he does, however, show himself aware of other Chaldaean designations/peoples (*Ṭabaqāt*, p. 143):

The second nation is that of the Chaldaeans (*Kaldāniyyūn*), who are the Syrians (*Suryāniyyūn*) and the Babylonians (*Bābīliyyūn*). They consisted of many peoples (*shuʿūb*), among them *Karbāniyyūn* [with different variants, some resembling Canaanites], the Assyrians (*Athūriyyūn*), the Armenians (*Arminiyyūn*) and the *Jarāmiqa*, who are the inhabitants of Mosul, and the *Nabaṭ*, who are the inhabitants of the *sawād* of Iraq.

In contrast to al-Masʿūdī and Ibn Waḥshiyya, Ṣāʿid al-Andalusī sees Chaldaeans as the general name for all these various groups, which for al-Masʿūdī and Ibn Waḥshiyya are Nabateans. This also indicates his sources: Ṣāʿid prefers the Greek term instead of the local designation.

and more involved with the image given in Hermetic books. Ibn Waḥshiyya, on the other hand, derived a major part of his information from local tradition, which was geographically close to him, as he lived amongst the Nabateans. Thus, when it comes to reconstructing the late remnants of Mesopotamian culture in Iraq, sources like al-Mas‘ūdī and Ibn Waḥshiyya¹²⁰ are invaluable.¹²¹

The above will, I hope, have shown that there was an outburst of Nabatean national spirit around the year 900 and, inspired by this, some authors took the trouble to collect material and write it down.¹²² Our sources are not impeccable, and they derive their information from what remained of an already collapsed society. Yet this also shows that elements of Mesopotamian culture survived in the area for more than a millennium after the collapse of the empire. This should not come as a surprise, as peasant society is often very resistant to change.¹²³

Still, most of the Muslim authors ignored the rural life and wrote from an urban and Muslim viewpoint only; if they noted peasants at all, they were merely mocked and laughed at.¹²⁴ That they would have been the last inheritors of an ancient and glorious past would hardly have been believed by many of the learned authors of the Middle Ages.

¹²⁰ For the Harranian culture the sources have been better excerpted, see, e.g., Green (1992) and Gündüz (1994), the latter being, despite its obvious weaknesses, valuable as a collection of source references.

¹²¹ The Nabatean pagans, as will become clear in Part II, shared many ideas with the other minor religious traditions in the Near East. They have striking similarities with the Harranians, though late Hellenistic paganism, various Gnostic sects, Manichaeans, Mandaean and Islamic heretical sects, especially the *ghulāt*, all share features with the Nabatean system.

¹²² One should, of course, be aware of the fact that the Islamic culture in general is a continuation of Near Eastern cultures. Through Christian, Jewish and Persian elements, it contains a large amount of material that was originally Mesopotamian. Yet this material is only secondary and derivative, whereas the Nabatean Corpus offers us material that is not found in the intermediate cultures and derives from a living local tradition. For the distinction between direct and indirect influences, see Hameen-Anttila (2001): 48–50.

¹²³ Likewise, paganism cast a long shadow in Europe, and it took centuries before Christianity had weeded out pagan habits—or vested them in Christianized garb, making saints out of local pagan deities. Paganism in the Eastern Roman Empire has been expertly studied by Trombley in several studies, e.g., (1993–1994).

¹²⁴ As Humphreys (1999): 284, aptly says, “In medieval Islamic culture, the peasant seems both voiceless and invisible.”

1.4. *Continuity of pagan religious traditions in tenth-century Iraq*

It has long been known that Harran remained a seat of pagan and Hellenistic religion deep into the Islamic period. One of the leading authorities of Hellenistic religions in Syria, H.J.W. Drijvers, has written (1980: 129):

Leaving aside the whole complicated tradition about the Sabians of Harran, it can be stated that they represent a continuation of indigenous religion and that, however philosophically disguised their doctrines may be, the sources of Sabian belief and practice must be sought in the traditional religion of Harran.

It is generally accepted that the local tradition of Harran flourished, as a mixture of paganism and Hellenistic philosophy, till the 9th–10th centuries, as witnessed by authors such as Ibn an-Nadīm and al-Mas‘ūdī. Hence there is, *a priori*, no reason to doubt the existence of pagan traditions in the less accessible countryside (*sawād*) of Iraq.

Jewish and Christian communities apart, the Islamization of rural areas was a slow process,¹²⁵ and it was never completed in the swamp areas, where Mandaeans have a continuous tradition from before the Islamic conquest and ultimately leading back, at least in part, to Mesopotamian religion. Despite their efforts to appropriate the term “Sabians,” reserved in the Qur’ān for an obscure monotheistic group and thus approved of by Muslim authorities, Mandaeans were very close to pagans in the eyes of Muslim observers. Yet they could find a way to live as a separate religious community, tolerated by Muslim rulers, through to the twentieth century, which shows how theoretical the non-tolerance of Islam towards paganism may sometimes have been.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ I feel somewhat uneasy with Bulliett’s study on conversion (1979), and do not quite find it adequate to study biographical dictionaries of learned men as a basis for speculations about the total population and its conversions. The peasants of the *sawād* hardly had many offspring that were noticed in the biographical dictionaries. Thus, paganism may well have lived on for a considerably longer time than one might presume on the basis of Bulliett’s book.

One has also to remember that pagans, like Mandaeans, rarely wished to advertise their religion. Likewise, the learned authors never showed much interest in peasants, ash-Shirbīnī’s *Hazz al-quhūf* being a glorious but late exception. The occasional peasant is a stereotype to be laughed at, but even in this comic function peasants are rare.

¹²⁶ Rudolph (1960–61) II: 28, takes it for granted that Islam did not tolerate the Mandaean religion, but this view is gratuitous and not supported by any evidence.

In fact, the existence of pagans in the tenth-century Islamic world was well known to contemporaries and caused no problems to Muslim authors. Thus, even a strict theologian like al-Ash‘arī simply stated the existence of modern Sabians in his *Maqālāt*, pp. 103–104, when speaking about some Khārijites who also called themselves Sabians:

He (their leader) claimed that the religious community (*milla*) of that prophet (whose appearance they awaited) was *ṣābiʿa*—these are not the same Sabians to which some people belong *today* [emphasis added], nor are they the same as those mentioned by God in the Qurʾān (. . .).

The existence of Sabians under Islamic domination was neither surprising nor objectionable to al-Ash‘arī, and he even shows himself aware of the tenuous identification of the “modern” Sabians with the group referred to in the Qurʾān.

As concerns Harranian paganism we have some information in Ibn an-Nadīm’s *Fihrist* and other sources, and it has been established that many Mesopotamian traditions lived on in the area.¹²⁷ Likewise, it is well known, although this knowledge is often not quite internalized, that in the marsh areas of Southern Iraq there was a continuous tradition of Mandaean religion, but for the third centre of paganism, the *sawād*, we have fewer sources, most importantly the *Nabatean Agriculture*.

In his *al-Āthār al-bāqīya*, p. 206,¹²⁸ al-Bīrūnī (d.c. 1050) sets the picture for us:

The theoretical structure of Islam, created by Muslim theologians, does not tolerate other religions apart from those coming under the *dhimma* system (Christianity, Judaism, Magianism, i.e., the Zoroastrian religion, and Sabianism), but this has rarely led to any practical measures against other religions, especially in the countryside (cf., e.g., the peaceful coexistence under Islamic rule of Muslims and Hindus, who were theoretically not tolerated). Moreover, the Islamic attitude became more rigid in time, and during the first few centuries of Islamic domination in the Near East Muslims were more tolerant than in later centuries. For Mandaean evidence for this tolerance, see Gündüz (1994): 70 (< *Haran Gawaita*). The late survival of the pagan religion in Ṭīb, until the coming of Islam, is mentioned by Yāqūt in *Muʿjam* IV: 52–53 (s.v. Ṭīb). For Mandaeans in Ṭīb, see Gündüz (1994): 56–57. Cf. also Robinson (2000): 100 (“In the countryside of northern Mesopotamia, where imperial pressure—be it Christian, Sasanian or Islamic—was attenuated, syncretism was probably the rule and ‘heresy’ endemic”); Brock (1982c): 17 (“John [bar Penkaye who wrote in 687] specifically states that all the new [i.e., Muslim Arab] rulers required was payment of taxes, and that otherwise there was complete religious freedom”—one might note, though, that this religious freedom did not rise from any ideology, but out of neglect); Hoyland (1997): 196, etc.

¹²⁷ See especially Green (1992) and Gündüz (1994).

¹²⁸ The passage is duplicated on p. 318. Cf. also Gündüz (1994): 41.

It is said that the Harranians are not the real Sabians, nay they are called *hanāfs* and idol worshippers in the (holy) books. The (real) Sabians are those who stayed behind in Bābil from among the tribes (of Israel) when they (the other tribes) returned to Jerusalem during the days of Kūrush and Artaḥshast. They (the ones who stayed behind) inclined towards the laws (*sharāʿi*) of the Magians (*al-Majūs*) and had a liking towards the religion (*dīn*) of Bukhtanaṣṣar. Thus, they have selected for themselves a doctrine mixing (*muntaẓij*) Magianism with Judaism like the Samaritans did in Syria.

Most of them live in Wāsiṭ and the countryside (*sawād*) of Iraq near Jaʿfar and al-Jāmida and the twin rivers of aṣ-Ṣīla. They trace their origin back to Anūsh¹²⁹ ibn Shīth and they disagree with the Harranians and criticize their doctrines. They agree with them only in a few things; they even turn their face in prayer towards the North Pole whereas the Harranians turn towards the South.

This passage from al-Bīrūnī strikes one as being accurate. He knows the area of Iraqi pagans and there is a general overlapping with the information provided by Ibn Waḥshiyya. However, the same region is differently defined, which shows that al-Bīrūnī is not directly dependent on Ibn Waḥshiyya. Furthermore, al-Bīrūnī is well aware of the difference between the genuine Sabians of Iraq and the secondary Sabians of Harran, and even that they have doctrinal differences which, once again, finds confirmation in the *Nabatean Agriculture*.¹³⁰

Moreover, al-Bīrūnī is perfectly right in his analysis of their origin, if we remember his frame of reference. For him and for other Muslim authors, monotheistic or Biblically tinged religions derive from a

¹²⁹ One has to keep apart Anūsh and Enoch (Ar. Akhnūkh)—Green (1992): 116, makes the mistake of reading Anūsh as Enoch. In the *Nabatean Agriculture*, Anūhā is one of the main prophets, and perhaps a contamination of Noah, Nūh(ā), and Enoch, Akhnūkh(ā), as already suggested by Gutschmid (1861): 36 (see 4.1).

In al-Masʿūdī's *Murūj*, both Seth, Anūsh and Akhnūkh are given as belonging to Islamic lore, but one has to remember that al-Masʿūdī himself was under Sabian influence. In §56 Seth is called the *khalīfa* of Adam, and concerning Anūsh al-Masʿūdī writes (§58):

Seth slept with his wife who became pregnant with Anūsh. So the light moved over to her until she gave birth to Anūsh and the light wandered to him.

After Anūsh this prophetic pre-existent "light" continued until it was finally incarnated in Muḥammad. About Enoch al-Masʿūdī writes (§62):

After Yarad came his son Akhnūkh, who is the same as the prophet Idrīs, peace be upon him. The Sabians claim that he is the same as Hermes; the meaning of Hermes is 'Uṭārid [Mercury] (. . .). [al-Masʿūdī's own opinions continue:] Thirty *ṣahīfas* were sent down to him; before that 21 *ṣahīfas* had been sent to Adam and 29 to Seth, all containing glorification and praise (*tahḥīl wa-tasbīḥ*).

¹³⁰ Praying towards the North is also attested with Mandaecans (Rudolph 1960–1961, I: 136, note 4, and Green 1992: 206). Cf. also Gündüz (1994): 164–166.

monotheistic origin moulded by extraneous influences. Thus, what he actually says, translated into modern terms, is that the Iraqi pagan religion is a syncretistic religion containing elements from Judaism—or better: Biblical tradition—and the Magian religion of Bukhtanaṣṣar, which we would call Mesopotamian religion. Al-Bīrūnī did not have a term for this religion, because the Assyrian Empire had almost been forgotten and for Muslim scholars the local Arameans (the *Nabat*) and the Persian kings were the main constituents in the history of Mesopotamia. Thus, what he is actually saying is that Iraqi Sabianism contains elements both from the Biblical tradition and local paganism, i.e. Assyro-Babylonian religion. The only thing to be added to this is the strong Hellenistic influence on both Iraqi and Harranian paganism. Otherwise, one can agree with al-Bīrūnī's opinion.

The question of the identity of the Sabians described by al-Bīrūnī and others¹³¹ is problematic, and they have all too often been bluntly identified with the Mandaeans. This seems to have been done mainly because the Mandaeans are the only community which has kept its religion until today, and scholars have been aware of only Harranians and Mandaeans as the possible equivalents of the different Sabians.

Some Islamic authors, though, do seem to have thought specifically of the Mandaeans. Al-Mas'ūdī tells how Būdāsf (Buddha) originated the Sabian religion (a frequent error due to the world view of Muslim authors who tried to derive extant religions from a diminishing number of ancestors, ultimately leading back to one, Adamic monotheism) and goes on to define the area of Iraqi Sabians in terms that do fit the Mandaeans (*Murūj* §535):

It is said that this man [Būdāsf] was the first to originate (*aḡhara*) Sabian doctrines of Harranians and Kīmārians (*al-Kīmāriyyūn*)¹³² who are a group (*naw'*) of Sabians, different from the Harranians in their

¹³¹ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbih*, p. 161, writes:

The Chaldaeans are the same as the Babylonians the rest (*baqiyya*) of whom nowadays live in the lowlands (*baṭā'ih*) between Wāsiṭ and Basra in villages.

They turn towards the Northern Pole and Capricorn (*al-Jady*) in their prayer.

Then he goes on to describe "Egyptian Sabians," by which he means Harranians, as their esoteric learning was seen as the continuation of the Alexandrian school, deported to Harran in 717 by the Caliph 'Umar II:

The Egyptian Sabians are nowadays known as the Sabians of Harran, who turn towards the South in their prayer (. . .).

Al-Mas'ūdī continues with a short exposition on the doctrine of these Sabians.

¹³² Throughout *Murūj* (e.g. §§1397, 1433) there are several different variants of this name. Rudolph (1960–61) II: 56, derives this from *kamar-* and identifies the *Kīmāriyyūn* as Mandaeans.

creed (*niḥla*). They live (*diyāruhūm*) between the area of Wāsiṭ and Basra in Iraq, towards (*naḥwa*) the lowlands (*baṭā'ih*) and the marshes (*ājām*).

There are, however, few exact correspondences between the religious beliefs of the Iraqi Sabians as described in the Islamic sources and the Mandaeans as we know them from their own tradition. Naturally, there is an overall similarity between both Harranians, Iraqi Sabians and Mandaeans, all of whom exhibit syncretistic religious forms tapping Mesopotamian, Syrian, Hellenistic and Biblical traditions.—There is also a further group of Sabians, often called in modern literature the Harranians of Baghdad,¹³³ but this term is not used to refer to the peasants around Baghdad, but to the Harranian scholars and philosophers, Thābit ibn Qurra among them, who were brought, or attracted, by the Caliph to the capital. The existence of this group is relevant for the general study of Sabians, but they are descended from Harran, not a local variant of Sabians.

The term “Sabian” in Arabic sources may be seen as an umbrella term for three groups: the Iraqi pagans, who are the focus of the present study, the Harranians (with their philosophical, Baghdad branch) and the Mandaeans.¹³⁴ In Islamic literature the term “Sabian” is used rather indiscriminately for all these subgroups, as well as for almost any other pagans who possessed some credentials of belonging to a developed religion.¹³⁵

The study of Sabians has been hampered by many things, not least by a wild goose chase for the identity of the Qur'ānic Sabians, which has taken all too much attention. The monograph of Tamara Green (1992) was welcome in concentrating on the Harranians and working with material which was at least to some extent consistent, although she, too, has to admit that (p. 145) “none of the Muslim authors who purport to describe traditional Harranian religion have any first-

¹³³ E.g., Hjärpe (1972): 35ff. Cf. Ibn an-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, p. 333 = Dodge (1970): 647.

¹³⁴ The fourth group are the Sabians of the Arabian Peninsula. The information concerning them is extremely dubious. For the general historiographical situation in the studies of early Islam, see the bibliography in Håmeen-Anttila (2000).

¹³⁵ E.g., Buddha is seen as a Sabian teacher (cf. above), and the sources speak of Chinese Sabians. The pre-Christian Romans (and Greeks, as the word *Rūm* denotes both) are also often called Sabians (e.g. al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, p. 123). This means that before knowing who the author is speaking about we should be very cautious in interpreting the information he provides on (some) Sabians. Only a consistent body of material—as I believe we have in the Nabatean Corpus—can be used to build up a system with which we may start comparing other materials.

hand knowledge of what was being practised in Harran during his own lifetime.”

Internal consistency and first-hand knowledge would give us a more secure ground in analysing one “Sabian” sub-system and that would help us start building up a clearer view about who and what the Sabians were and what relation their religion had with the earlier religions in the area. Concerning Iraqi paganism we have good sources which, in my opinion, fulfil these two conditions, but which have been neglected due to problems in the dating and evaluation of the material, viz. the Nabatean corpus, consisting mainly of the *Nabatean Agriculture*, *Kitāb as-Sumūm* “The Book of Poisons” and *Kitāb Asrār al-falak* “The Book of the Secrets of the Spheres,” together with some minor works. The *Nabatean Agriculture* has only recently been edited, and the other works remain unedited even now.

For the majority of mediaeval Muslim authors, peasants were totally invisible, be they pagans, Christians or Muslims. Arabic literature is urban in character, which has contributed to a distorted view of mediaeval Near Eastern society. The cities were soon Islamized—Christian and Jewish communities excepted—and accordingly, the literature may give an illusion that the whole area dominated by Muslims was free of paganism. Ibn Waḥshiyya is one of the very few authors to write about the largely non-Islamic, or at most only nominally Islamic, countryside of Iraq.

Other Islamic sources do confirm that the *sawād* of Iraq was the main area of the Sabians. The slightly later al-Bīrūnī mentions in his *Āthār*, p. 318, that most of the Sabians lived in the *sawād*, in small local communities, separated from each other. He also mentions that they are different from the Sabians of Harran who, he says, took the name of Sabians only in 228/843.

The information given by al-Bīrūnī fits exactly the information in the *Nabatean Agriculture*, a book whose materials come from the *sawād* and describe a coexistence of several concurrent pagan communities, the majority belonging, according to the author, to the Sethians, a sect to which Qūthāmā does not belong.

Much of the material of the Nabatean corpus may thus be genuine in the sense that it is either directly observed by the Islamic author, or received from his informants, or derived from writings in some form of Aramaic. However, the Islamic filter of the author has to be taken into account. Thus, he is likely to have misunderstood things, and he clearly wishes to present the material in a form as

acceptable to Muslims as possible, which may at least partly explain the passages emphasizing the underlying monotheism of the Nabatean religion.¹³⁶

The religion, as described by Ibn Waḥshiyya (and the same holds true for Harranian paganism), consists of two separate layers, viz. popular religion and philosophical speculation. The former, often heavily inlaid with magical elements, consists of popular rites, magic, folklore, aetiologies, etc., and taps the autochthonous Mesopotamian tradition, whereas the latter concentrates on philosophical speculation on planetary movements, their meaning and influence, and is heavily indebted to Hellenistic thought—whether and to what extent itself dependent on Mesopotamian models is another question. Whether the philosophical element was completely restricted to the learned pagans or whether it had any relevance among the farmers and laity is a difficult question which has to be left open.

1.5. *The Oriental Tradition of Vindanius Anatolius of Berytus'* Synagōgē geōrgikōn epitēdeumatōn

The Greek agronomical tradition flourished in Late Antiquity, as shown by the names of authors known to have written on the subject and also as testified by the Patriarch Photius in his *Bibliotheca*. However, relatively little of this literature has been preserved, besides the 10th-century Byzantine collection published under the title of *Geoponica*¹³⁷ and going back to Cassianus Bassus' 6th-century compilation. Bassus himself used earlier sources for his work, chief among which was Vindanius Anatolius of Berytus' *Synagōgē geōrgikōn epitēdeumatōn*. The Greek original of Anatolius' work has been lost, except for a small fragment preserved in a Paris manuscript¹³⁸ and frequent quotations in both *Geoponica* and other sources, to be used with deliberation as the author lemmata in later literature are often less than accurate.

In this situation, it has only been natural for scholars to turn their attention to Oriental sources to recover traces of the lost work. A major breakthrough was the identification of the Armenian *Girkh*

¹³⁶ See 4.5., and Hämeen-Anttila (1999).

¹³⁷ Ed. Beckh (1895).

¹³⁸ Paris, MS grec 2313, fol. 49v, published by Beckh (1886): 268–270.

Wastakoz as the Armenian translation, via Arabic, of Anatolius' work. The Armenian translation became more widely known after the edition of 1877¹³⁹ and especially after Brockelmann's article on it in 1896, where the chapter headings were listed and compared to the material in the Greek *Geoponica* and the Syriac fragment described by de Lagarde in 1855 and edited by him in 1860.

As far as I know, the Armenian version has remained untranslated and thus in practice is unavailable to most scholars in the field of Greek and Arabic studies, except through the descriptions by Brockelmann and others.¹⁴⁰ Its close relation to the partly incomplete Syriac text edited by de Lagarde¹⁴¹ was realized by Brockelmann, but the lack of the Arabic mediator¹⁴² has hampered further studies. The Syriac text was later identified as a translation of Anatolius,¹⁴³ but at least the text edited by de Lagarde is obviously not an accurate reproduction of the Greek original.

The situation has been made even more problematic by some misinformation concerning the Arabic translation of Anatolius. In an article from 1931, Paul Sbath identified a manuscript in his possession as being the Arabic translation of Anatolius' *Synagōgē*.¹⁴⁴ Later, other manuscripts of the same text have been found, attributed to Balīnās¹⁴⁵ al-Ḥakīm, the famous author of esoterica, identified as (ps.)-Apollonius of Tyana.¹⁴⁶ Consequently, this text has been used

¹³⁹ Printed in Venice 1877. For details, see Brockelmann (1896) and Fehrlé (1920): 2–3.

¹⁴⁰ Not knowing Armenian myself, I, too, am relying on this description, which is accurate enough for the present purposes.

¹⁴¹ The manuscript itself dates from the 9th century (see, e.g., Oder 1890: 62).

¹⁴² The Arabic lexical influence, studied by Hübschmann (1892, esp. p. 256), made it obvious that the Armenian translation was made through an Arabic mediator, not directly from Greek nor from Syriac. The date of the Armenian translation has been a matter of controversy (see Brockelmann 1896: 386; Fehrlé 1920: 2–3), with dates being proposed between the 11th and the 13th centuries. I am not in a position to take a stance on this matter, nor is it necessary in view of the fact that we now have at our disposal the Arabic mediator, see below. It is enough to state the obvious, i.e., that the Armenian translation is without the slightest doubt later than the 10th century.

¹⁴³ Ullmann (1972): 432, note 2, also mentions another, better preserved manuscript (Mingana Syr. no. 599, 156 fols.), where the title has been preserved as *Ktābā d-akkariūtā d-Yūniyūs*. I have not had the opportunity to study this text more closely.

¹⁴⁴ The author's name in his manuscript was written as Abṭarliyūs, which is an obvious corruption of Anaṭūliyūs, cf. Sbath (1931): 48.

¹⁴⁵ MS-Gayangos actually reads Balyās, but the emendation is rather obvious.

¹⁴⁶ For the identification of Balīnās and Apollonius, see Leclerc (1869) and Steinschneider (1891). References to older literature may also be found in Kraus

by Ullmann (1972): 430–433, as the basis for his notes on the relations between Anatolius and the Greek *Geoponica*.

The work of Balīnās is, obviously enough, related to the Graeco-Roman tradition of *Geoponica*—as is almost the whole of Arabic *filāḥa* literature—but the parallels with the Armenian and the Syriac tradition of Anatolius are not very compelling. Furthermore, as the Patriarch Photius at the end of the 9th century has noted in the case of the Greek tradition, the same holding true also for the Arabic tradition, this tradition is very much self-repeating: thus, parallels are to be expected between almost any two texts, be they in Greek or in Arabic. I will come back to this text by Balīnās later.

The fact that the manuscript of Sbath is actually misattributed to Anatolius was shown by Fuat Sezgin in his GAS IV: 314–315 and V: 427–428 (Nachträge zu Band 4). He, however, was able to identify MS-Meshhed Riḍā 5762, dated 732 A.H., as the authentic Arabic Anatolius. The Meshhed manuscript was also used as the original for a relatively late manuscript in the Tehran Millī Library (no. 796 Arabic, see GAS V: 427, dated 1303 A.H.).¹⁴⁷ A comparison of the manuscripts confirms Sezgin's identification and, moreover, a comparison between them and the Armenian version, as described by Brockelmann (1896), leaves no doubt that the Armenian is indeed translated from the *Vorlage* of the preserved Arabic text. The Armenian translation, or its *Vorlage*, is abbreviated and seems to provide an inferior version. Thus, the Armenian version is reduced to a secondary position when reconstructing the original Greek text of Anatolius. The Arabic version is also ampler and in a better condition than the Syriac one, which seems to have suffered from changes and abbreviations.¹⁴⁸

According to GAS IV: 315, MS-Meshhed contains 191 fols. This information is taken from the numbering of the fols., which do in fact end with no. 191. Yet, in the colophon, there is a note by a later hand stating that the text contains 180 fols. The confusion is caused

(1942–1943) II: 271, 292. The identification of Balīnās with Apollonius was first suggested by Silvestre de Sacy (1799). The *Sirr al-khalīqa* of Balīnūs is analysed in Weisser (1980).

¹⁴⁷ For a description of the manuscript, see Anwār (2536 Sh.): 298. The manuscript contains, according to the catalogue, 182 folios and is complete, ending in the same recipe as MS-Meshhed.

¹⁴⁸ See also Fehrle (1920): 30–31.

by two major lacunae in the manuscript.¹⁴⁹ The text¹⁵⁰ lacks chapters IX: 11–15 and, more seriously, chapters XI: 18–32, XII: 1–6 (fols. 138–147) and XIII: 8–42 (fols. 169–176).¹⁵¹ The contents of chapters XI: 18–32 and XIII: 8–42 are known from the lists of the chapter headings given at the beginning of each book.¹⁵² No name of the text's translator has been given in the colophon or elsewhere, so that the documentable history of the Arabic *Anatolius* starts with the name¹⁵³ of the copyist of MS-Meshhed, who completed his work in 732 A.H. according to the colophon.

The Armenian translation does take us a few centuries back in time. However, the *Nabatean Agriculture* helps us to give a *terminus ad quem* for the Arabic translation. The dependence of small parts of the *Nabatean Agriculture* on the material found in the single Greek fragment of *Anatolius* was forcibly shown by Rodgers (1980). Rodgers also compared a few passages attributed to *Anatolius* in the *Geoponica* to similar ones in the *Nabatean Agriculture*. This comparison seemed to confirm the debt of the author of the *Nabatean Agriculture* to *Anatolius* or, as Rodgers himself admitted (1980: 5), to some other source ultimately deriving from *Anatolius*, but the extent of this debt remained uncertain.

Rodgers, however, paid no attention to the *Anatolius Arabicus*. Now a comparison between it and the *Nabatean Agriculture* does confirm

¹⁴⁹ The Armenian translation does not have any lacunae at these places (ch. 260–273, 297–312) and thus provides information concerning the missing chapters.

¹⁵⁰ Note that I have not seen the original manuscripts, but the microfilm seems to show quite clearly that the text is bound as photographed and the parts missing from the microfilm thus also seem to be missing from the manuscript itself. It should also be added that the MS-Millī was available to me only in a printout of a microfilm, where the text abruptly ends in the middle of chapter IX: 7. This does not seem to be the case with the manuscript itself (see the description in *Anwār* 2536 Sh., p. 298). Both manuscripts should in future be compared in more detail.

¹⁵¹ A later hand has also marked fols. 187–188 as missing, but this seems to be a misguided conjecture, as after fol. 186v, chapter XIV: 31, the next chapter heading is numbered as XIV: 33, implying that chapter XIV: 32 is missing. However, there does not seem to be any break in the text, only the numbering of the chapter headings has become confused: after the first XIV: 33 there comes yet another XIV: 33, i.e., the first XIV: 33 is numbered by mistake as XIV: 33 and should be corrected to XIV: 32.

¹⁵² I am translating *maqāla* as “book” and *bāb* as “chapter.”

¹⁵³ Unfortunately, this name has been somewhat stained in the manuscript and I could not read it from the microfilm. An inspection of the manuscript itself, or a clearer microfilm, would probably disclose his identity. Yet it goes without saying that his identity is of no relevance for the earlier history of the text.

Rodgers' theory and, moreover, it shows how comprehensively Anatolius is used in the *Nabatean Agriculture*. Indeed, a considerable part of Anatolius' book is taken into the *Nabatean Agriculture*, even though it is there attributed to "Nabatean" authorities.¹⁵⁴ What is more, the similarities are not only general or superficial, for they often consist of long passages which are very similar to each other. Thus, e.g., book 1, chapters 1–17, of Anatolius are amply paralleled by NA, pp. 194–213; only the reference to the Roman *brūma* feast (i.e., *brumalia*) has been left out.¹⁵⁵ In the Armenian¹⁵⁶ and the Syriac (*Geoponica* II: 15, p. 7, *brūmaliya*) translations of Anatolius this has been kept.¹⁵⁷

The material has been partly reorganized in the *Nabatean Agriculture*, with passages set into a new context and freely modified, and often expanded by much additional material. Despite this, there are plenty of examples to show that the material was taken by Ibn Waḥshiyya in blocks which are often large enough to prove that he certainly used the text of Anatolius, not some intermediate source.

The copious quotations show that Ibn Waḥshiyya used some version of Anatolius, either Syriac or Arabic, but not likely to be Greek. Lexical parallels between the Arabic Anatolius and the *Nabatean Agriculture* would favour an Arabic version but the parallels are neither definitive nor compelling, as the variation between the two texts

¹⁵⁴ It should be emphasized that the conversion has not been systematic, i.e., we cannot find any equivalences between a given Greek name and some respective Nabatean authority, i.e., no equation X (Greek authority in Anatolius) = Z (Nabatean authority in the *Nabatean Agriculture*) can be made.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. the Greek *Geoponica* I.5.3. (*hēn hoi Rhōmaioi brūma kalūsi*).

¹⁵⁶ See Brockelmann (1896): 408 (*brami*).

¹⁵⁷ Other parallels include book 2, ch. 5 (cf. NA, pp. 411–412); book 2, ch. 8 (NA, pp. 497–498); book 2, ch. 21–24 (NA, pp. 428–432); book 2, ch. 27 (NA, pp. 378–384); etc. Cf. also the passage on hailstorms, discussed below.

A typical case of the "Nabateanization" of the text may be found in book 2, ch. 15, which in the Arabic Anatolius reads: "Chapter on the knowledge of what seeds (*buzūr*) are to be sown during the year so that they will prosper. The people of Egypt are people of deep inquiry in agriculture and in the movements of the stars. They have presented the knowledge of which seeds will prosper in each year through their labours (. . .)" (my translation).

NA, pp. 214–215, however, reads: "Chapter on the knowledge of what crops (*zurūʿ*) are to be sown during the year so that they will prosper. This is an immensely useful chapter. The first to speak about these things was the Lord of Mankind, Dawānāy. He was a man of critical acumen and deep inquiry (*nazar wa-shiqṣā*) into all matters. He was a man of the stars: he believed that all generated things (*akwān*) derive from the acts of the stars and that they are generated (*tatakawwan*) by the potencies of their movements. He has described for us the knowledge of which crops will be more prosperous and successful in each year (. . .)."

leaves open the possibility of two separate—or even independent—translations. There are, in fact, some details which might be taken as indicating that the *Nabatean Agriculture* draws directly on the Syriac text, not its Arabic translation.¹⁵⁸ It seems probable, however—and this need not surprise us—that the Arabic translation of Anatolius was done not later than the end of the ninth century.¹⁵⁹ How much earlier it may have been done remains unknown.

Yet we might mention a rather curious coincidence which may help us to date, although only tentatively, the Arabic translation of Anatolius. We know that in the late 9th century, the Patriarch Photius excerpted and described the *Synagōgē* of Anatolius—which, incidentally, seems to have been the last proven case of anyone actually using the Greek original. At about the same time, we have evidence of the Syriac translation of the same Greek text—de Lagarde's fragmentary manuscript has been dated to the 9th century—and around 900 Ibn Waḥshiyya used the same text extensively, either in Syriac or in an already existing Arabic translation. Moreover, when the Patriarch made his well-known trip *ep' Assyrious* on an official mission, he was interested in the Greek manuscripts he could find in an area dominated by Arabs, most probably in monasteries.¹⁶⁰

The nicely synchronized interest in Anatolius does not, of course, prove anything at all: the Byzantine Patriarch, the anonymous Syriac copyist,¹⁶¹ the equally anonymous Arabic translator and Ibn Waḥshiyya could have been interested in the same text at about the same time quite independently of each other. This, however, may somewhat tax our imagination, and I would suggest that there may have been some relations between some of these persons. First of all, the Patriarch could have found the Greek manuscript of Anatolius during his travels and his interest could have caused someone to start translating the work into Syriac¹⁶²—we do know that the interest of the Arabs

¹⁵⁸ See the passage VI of the recipes against hailstorm, discussed below.

¹⁵⁹ Note that the date 179/795 given in the manuscript of Sbath and accepted, among others, by Ullmann (1972): 431, of course, refers to the work of Balīnās, not to *Anatolius Arabicus*. Moreover, cf. below, it seems to me that this date has been too easily accepted.

¹⁶⁰ See Peters (1968): 23.

¹⁶¹ Whether the translator had in fact worked several centuries earlier is not quite clear: the text may have to be attributed to the sixth-century Sergius of Resh'aynā.

¹⁶² The redaction by Cassianus Bassus was most probably known in Byzantium at the time, but there are few traces of Anatolius before Photius himself.

in Greek philosophy has sometimes been taken to explain the “First Byzantine Humanism.”¹⁶³ Similarly, an interest by a Byzantine Patriarch could have placed the work in the limelight also in the monastery where—if our tableau is to be believed—he found it. But of course, this remains purely hypothetical: we do not know whether Photius found a copy of *Anatolius* during his travels or at home.¹⁶⁴

Secondly, the copying of the Syriac manuscript roughly coincides with the earliest documented interest of Arabic-speaking scholars in the text: the Arabic translation most probably does not much antedate the end of the 9th century, and Ibn Waḥshiyya definitely worked intensively with the text at the end of the century. These facts also seem somehow interconnected, and in this we are on more secure ground than in the speculation concerning the Patriarch Photius. As the manuscripts of *Anatolius Arabicus* were never widely distributed—we know distressingly little about this work from contemporary sources—it needs to be explained how Ibn Waḥshiyya got hold of the translation, as he did not live in the great centres where manuscripts were more plentiful and even rare manuscripts might have been more easily available. If Ibn Waḥshiyya used the Syriac *Anatolius*, its rarity would pose exactly the same problems.

One possibility, though it remains a mere possibility, is that the translator of *Anatolius* could have somehow been personally connected with Ibn Waḥshiyya.¹⁶⁵ Again, we have to step into the realm of speculation, but it might be a hypothesis worth considering that Ibn Waḥshiyya was actually acquainted with the same Syriac manuscript which was used by the Arabic translator of the Syriac *Anatolius*.¹⁶⁶

Further research may clarify this question. The later influence of *Anatolius* in Arabic *filāḥa* literature was considerable and many-sided. After a preliminary analysis, it seems to me that it is quite possible that the Balīnās text is merely a reworked and abbreviated paraphrase of the *Anatolius Arabicus* where famous names, such as Aristotle

¹⁶³ Cf. Gutas (1998): 175–186.

¹⁶⁴ The interest in *al-Filāḥa ar-Rūmiyya* was also vivid at the time. Muḥammad ibn Zakariyyā ar-Rāzī (d. 313/925) quoted it several times in his *al-Hāwī* (for references to the Latin version of this text, see Meyer 1856, III: 156–157).

¹⁶⁵ I ignore, on purpose, the possibility that Ibn Waḥshiyya actually *is* the translator of *Anatolius Arabicus*.

¹⁶⁶ Lacking the Greek original, it does not seem possible to prove from which language the Arabic translator made his translation. Provisorily, I take it to have been from Syriac.

or Mahrārīs (the latter famous from alchemical and magical texts)¹⁶⁷ have been added to enhance the value of the text. The recycling of the same material in the *Geoponica* and *filāḥa* literature makes this difficult to prove—the same material circulated in dozens of books—but it might be a good working hypothesis to study Balīnās as an abbreviated paraphrase of Anatolius.¹⁶⁸

Likewise, the material of Anatolius had a *Weiterleben*, though an anonymous one, through the *Nabatean Agriculture*, which remained a standard manual deep into the 18th century¹⁶⁹ and influenced tens if not hundreds of manuals.¹⁷⁰ The references to Anatolius in the Arabic translation of Cassianus Bassus' agronomical work (*al-Filāḥa ar-Rūmiyya*) are also usually more or less garbled, and even where his name, usually Yūniyūs (< Vindanius),¹⁷¹ is attested, his identity has become hazy, Yūniyūs being merely a high-sounding name referring to an otherwise unknown Ancient Greek sage.

¹⁶⁷ See Sezgin GAS IV: 105–106 (Mihārārīs); Ullmann (1972): 177–178, 437. For more works by Mahrārīs, see Ullmann (1974): 183, 196–198, 212, 219–220.

¹⁶⁸ Sbath (1931): 50, 51, makes much of the use of the word *muṣḥaf* as an indicator of the antiquity of the translation, as does Ullmann (1972): 431. This word is not used in the other manuscript of the same text, MS-Gayangos, and, whichever variant is preferred, I cannot see this as a guarantee for the text's age. The pseudepigrapha do prefer antiquated vocabulary, and more research would be needed to decide the possible age of the translation.

¹⁶⁹ Cf., e.g., Ullmann (1972): 451 (on Khayraddīn Ilyās-zāde's *Kitāb Falāḥ al-fallāḥ*).

¹⁷⁰ It might be useful to remark in passing that much of this material was copied into the *Alam al-malāḥa fī 'ilm al-filāḥa* by the famous Sufi 'Abdalghani an-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731), who abbreviated the work (*Jāmi' fawā'id al-malāḥa*) by Raḍiyaddīn Abū'l-Faḍl Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazzī al-Āmirī (d. 935/1529). Especially the tenth chapter ("On Talismans," pp. 171–184) is instructive: the outright pagan talismans are repeated seemingly without any pangs of conscience by this famous and authoritative Sufi. For the Sufi relations of Ibn Waḥshiyya, cf. also 1.1 and 4.5.

A particularly intriguing talisman in an-Nābulusī, deriving ultimately from Late Antiquity, is the one (p. 174) where a naked, teenage virgin with dishevelled hair is to go around the fields carrying a cock to protect the fields.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Rodgers (1978) actually repeating what had already been shown by Brockelmann (1896): 389, and others—even though the easy but wrong identification of Yūniyūs (i.e., Vindanius Anatolius) with Junius Columella does seem to be difficult to root out. Thus, e.g., Kraus (1942–1943) II: 63–64 (note 5), and Millás Vallicrosa (1954): 133, (1955): 123, and, especially, (1958): 46–48, repeat this identification, although in the last passage Millás Vallicrosa himself draws attention to the differences between the Yūniyūs quotations and Columella's *De re rustica*, albeit to belittle them: "(...) las citas tan frecuentes de la obra de *Yunius* (...) no siempre se hallan tal cual en el texto de Columela *De re rustica* y creemos que algunas discrepancias se deben a pequeñas interpolaciones sin gran interés científico hechas en el texto árabe de *Yunius* (...)." Likewise, Fahd (1996): 846–847, though showing himself to be aware of Ullmann (1972), tries to maintain the identification Yūniyūs = Columella.

Through these three sources, quotations from Anatolius may be found everywhere in the Arabic *filāḥa* literature. But as Anatolius himself was working within an old and self-repeating tradition, there is usually no guarantee as to whether a passage really derives from one source or another.

There remains the question of how accurate the Arabic translation of Anatolius is vis-à-vis the lost Greek original. To evaluate this, it is perhaps best to tackle once again the passage which has been preserved in Greek. This passage has already been analysed, first by Fehrle (1920): 8–14, and then by Rodgers (1980). Fehrle took into account the following sources: *Geoponica*; the Greek Anatolius fragment, MS-Paris grec 2313; *al-Filāḥa ar-Rūmiyya* (i.e., the Arabic translation of Cassianus);¹⁷² the Armenian translation of Anatolius; the Syriac text published by de Lagarde; and, finally, Palladius. Rodgers was aware of Fehrle's work but he concentrated on comparing the Greek Anatolius fragment to the *Nabatean Agriculture*.

The following comparison starts with ¹⁾the text of the Greek Anatolius (MS-Paris) which is given in Rodgers' translation (1980).¹⁷³ This is compared to ²⁾the Syriac text of de Lagarde (VII: 7, pp. 40–41) and ^{3a-b)}the Arabic Anatolius (ch. VI: 7), first in ^{3a)}Arabic, then ^{3b)}in English translation.¹⁷⁴ The Armenian translation is dependent on the Arabic text and is thus left out of consideration.¹⁷⁵ This forms the direct Anatolius tradition.

In addition, the text of Anatolius is further compared to ⁴⁾Balīnās (ed. Vázquez de Benito, Arabic text, p. 18) and ⁵⁾the *Nabatean Agriculture* (pp. 1061–1064; for translation, see **Text 31**), which both seem to

¹⁷² The identity of Qusṭūs Askūrāskīnah with Cassianus Bassus Scolasticus was first shown by Ruska (1914). For the complex textual history of the text of *al-Filāḥa ar-Rūmiyya* and its versions, see Sezgin GAS IV: 317–318; Ullmann (1972): 433–439; as well as Ḥājī Khalīfā, *Kashf*, p. 1447. The text would deserve careful study. Note that the translation is still often falsely attributed to Qusṭā ibn Lūqā, as, e.g., in the latest edition by U'ḥūd (1420/1999). References to magical ways of turning away an imminent hailstorm are also found in many other Arabic sources, such as al-Bīrūnī, *Jawāhir*, pp. 361–362, and Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, *Maydān*, p. 219.

¹⁷³ When quoted, the Greek text is taken from Fehrle.

¹⁷⁴ I am quoting the Arabic Anatolius from MS-Tehran Millī; a quick comparison of that text to MS-Meshhed during my stay at the Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Sciences (Frankfurt) seemed to confirm that the copy is very accurate.

¹⁷⁵ The Armenian translation seems to be, according to the chapter headings provided by Brockelmann (1896), somewhat abbreviated from the Arabic. It also ends earlier than the complete Arabic version.

contain material taken from Anatolius though given in a modified form, not in accurate, word-to-word quotations.¹⁷⁶ The tradition deriving from Cassianus Bassus is then considered through ⁶the Arabic translation of the *Geoponica* (I: 14), *al-Filāḥa ar-Rūmiyya* (ch. I: 17, p. 125). Palladius is not discussed, as it would only serve to prove the Western extension of Anatolius and is not relevant for the Oriental tradition.

The passages are quoted in the order in which they come in the Greek Anatolius, numbered as separate items. The items of the other texts are also numbered and a table is later given to indicate the order of the material in each text. The text of the Greek Anatolius is first quoted in full in the English translation, and then the Syriac in the German translation provided by Carl Bezold¹⁷⁷ for Fehrle (1920). The original text is quoted verbatim in the case of the Arabic texts, to show their mutual dependence; only the *Anatolius Arabicus* is also translated by me into English.¹⁷⁸ Various sources have expanded the chapter with some added material which is briefly listed after the passages deriving from Anatolius.

Enumeration: 0–VI

0.

- 1 On averting hail. Very many other aids are discovered among the ancients: there is the treatment using the viper, and the one using the mole, and the one using men who chase away the hail-clouds, and many other incredible ones found among many people, but we mention those which are easier, common to all, and easy to understand.
- 2 Über den Hagel und wie er an einem Orte vorbeigeht. Auch dafür sind von den Alten viele Hilfsmittel angegeben worden, ebenso für die Heilung dessen, was von Vipern und für die Heilung dessen von Maulwürfen (kommt). Was aber durch die Leute, die

¹⁷⁶ Much of the material of the *Nabatean Agriculture* is also found in (ps.)-al-Majrīṭī's *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, pp. 368–370 (translation in Ritter-Plessner 1962: 380–382).

¹⁷⁷ See Fehrle (1920): 6.

¹⁷⁸ The *Nabatean Agriculture* inserts much additional material which I have mainly left out, indicating this with three dots in brackets (. . .).

den Hagel vertreiben,¹⁷⁹ leicht und bekannt ist und von jedermann geglaubt wird, (ist Folgendes):

- 3a fī l-barad. ammā fī difā'i al-baradi fa-qad najīdu 'inda l-qudamā'i ashyā'a nāfi'atan kathīratan mithla l-'ilāji lladhī yakūnu bi'l-jalīdi¹⁸⁰ wa'lladhī yakūnu bi-lladhīna yaṭrudūna 'anhum al-barada wa-ashyā'a ukhara kathīratan 'inda kathīrin mina n-nāsi qad¹⁸¹ jama'nā minhā mā naẓunnu annahū as'halu ma'khadhan wa-a'amma min ghayrihī wa-as'hala idrākan.
- 3b On hail. When it comes to diverting hail, we find many useful things among the ancients, such as the treatment using moles and the one using those who chase the hail away and many others (found) among many people. We have collected from among these those which we consider easiest to perform and more general than the others and easier to come by.
- 4 fī amri l-barad. inna l-ḥukamā'a qad waḍa'ū fī l-baradi wa-ṣarfihī umūran kathīratan fa-akhadhtu bi-aysarihā.
- 5 wa-ammā daf'ū ḍarari l-baradi 'an-i l-karmi fa-qad istanbaṭa qudamā'u l-Kasdāniyyīna fīhi ma'nayayni aḥaduhumā daf'ū wuqū'ihī wa-ṣarfuhū idhā takhayyalat makhāyiluhū wa'l-ākharu 'ilāju mā aḥdatha mina ḍ-ḍarari wa'n-nikāyati fa-ammā 'amalu daf'ihī wa-ṣarfihī idhā andharat bihī n-nudhuru fa-innahum qad dhakarū fīhi wa-lahū ashyā'a kathīratan mukhtalifatan ba'ḍuhā yajrī majrā l-khawāṣṣi wa-ba'ḍuhā aṣluhā ma'khūdhun min ad'iyati l-ālīhati fa-arat'hum fī l-manāmi ashyā'a kathīratan ya'malūnahā wa-ba'ḍuhā min a'māli s-saḥarati wa-ana u'addidu mā waqa'a ilayya minhā wa-adhkuru mā jarrabtu min dhālika wa-ṣahḥ (. . .).¹⁸² [p. 1061, ll. 10–14]
- 6 fī l-ḥīlati fī ṣarfi l-baradi wa'l-jarādi wa'd-dubbā'i wa'ṣ-ṣawā'iqi wa'l-burūq. [p. 125, ll. 13–14]

¹⁷⁹ Here Bezold's translation needs emendation: *l-asyūtā d-men ekidnē w-āf l-asyūtā d-men huldē w-hāy d-mettūl bnaynāshā d-tārdīn bardā* should, as the other versions show, be translated as "the treatment with vipers and the treatment with moles and the one (occurring) because of people who chase away the hail."

¹⁸⁰ The Syriac text reads *huldē*, "moles". It is obvious that we should emend the Arabic to either *khuld* or *jalīdh*, both with the same meaning as in the Syriac. Frost (*jalīd*) is described in the preceding section, VI: 6 (cf. also NA, p. 1065, ll. 6–14; Balīnās, p. 18), which is probably the origin of the confusion. The mention of *jild* "skin" in other recipes may also have contributed to the confusion.

¹⁸¹ Written twice in the MS.

¹⁸² The text continues (ll. 14–18) with a short note on the importance of experimentation.

I.

- 1 If someone takes the skin of a hyena or of a crocodile (or of a seal)¹⁸³ all around the area and hangs it up on the gate of the village, he keeps away hail.
- 2 Wenn ein Mensch die Haut einer Hyäne oder eines Krokodiles, welches auf griechisch Krokodilos genannt wird, oder von dem in Meer lebenden Tier, das auf griechisch Phoke heisst, welches syrisch Seehund ist, in der Ortschaft herumträgt und überall an den Toren aufhängt, hält er den Hagel ab.
- 3a fa-naqūl: innahū in akhadha insānun jilda ḍabuʿin aw jilda timsāhin aw jilda fūqā¹⁸⁴ fa-ṭāfa bihī ḥawla l-qaryati kullihā thumma ʿallaqahū bayna yaday dihlizāti l-qaryati manaʿa l-barada mina l-wuqūʿi fī dhālika l-mawḍiʿ.
- 3b Thus we say: If someone takes the skin of a hyena or a crocodile or a *fūqā* and goes with it about the whole village and then hangs it in front of the gates of the village, it will stop the hail from striking that place.
- 4 yuʿkhadhu jildu ḍabuʿin wa-jildu ḥirdawnin fa-yuḥmalu baʿda maghībi sh-shamsi wa-yuṭāfu bihī ʿalā jamīʿi l-karmi thumma yuʿallaqāni ʿalā madkhali l-karmi fa-innahū lā yuṣībuhā barad.
- 5 wa-qāla [i.e., Māsā as-Sūrānī] ayḍan: in akhadha insānun shābun jilda ḍabuʿin aw jilda timsāhin fa-ṭāfa bihimā aw bi-aḥadhimā ḥawla l-qaryati aw-i ḍ-ḍayʿati aw ayyi mawḍiʿin yurīdu an lā yaqaʿa ʿalayhi l-baradu thalātha marrātīn yaṭūfu bihimā thumma yaṣīru baʿda dhālika ilā dihlizi l-qaryati aw-i ḍ-ḍayʿati aw-i l-qarāhi fa-yuʿallīqu l-jilda quddāma l-bābi fa-inna hādhā l-fiʿla yamnaʿu l-barada an yaqaʿa fī tilka l-qaryati kamā hiya aw kullī mā¹⁸⁵ ṭāfa biʿl-jildi ḥawlahū. [p. 1063, ll. 16–19]
- 6 wa-min dhālika annahū in ʿumida ilā jildi ḍ-ḍabuʿi aw jildi d-dulduli fa-ṭīfa bihī ḥawla qaryatin (aw manzilin shāsiʿin ʿan-i l-qaryati) thumma ʿulliqa ʿalā bābi tilka l-qaryati aw dhālika l-manzili (ṣarafa llāhu bi-dhālika l-barada ʿan dhālika l-manzili wa-ʿan tilka l-qarya). [p. 127, ll. 2–4]

¹⁸³ This emendation, made earlier by Rodgers (1980): 2 and note 11, seems rather obvious.

¹⁸⁴ This word (Greek *fōkē*) was not understood by the copyist and it has been left without diacritics in the manuscript.

¹⁸⁵ Written together (*kullimā*) in the text.

II.

- 1 And this treatment as well has been approved by experiment: let someone take in his right hand a tortoise on its back which is found in the marshes and carry it to the vineyard, and going in let him put it down, alive, on its back, piling up a little earth around it so it will not be able, by turning itself over, to go away (for it will not be able when the earth underneath has been hollowed out, and not having a purchase for its feet it remains in place), and when this has happened, the hail does not fall either on the field or on the whole area.
- 2 Auch folgendes Mittel ist bekannt: Wenn jemand eine Schildkröte¹⁸⁶ erblickt, die am Ufer der Flüsse gefunden wird, sie in die rechte Hand nimmt, nach oben blickt und Lauge auf einen Weinberg streut und während er nach oben blickt, von der Erde ein wenig Boden nimmt und jene an demselben Ort eingräbt, so dass sie sich nicht erheben oder wenden kann und vor der Aufschüttung vor den Füßen fliehen kann und vor den Füßen keine Hilfe hat, sondern an dem Ort bleiben muss,—wenn dies geschieht, fällt dort nirgends Hagel.
- 3a wa-qad jurriba hādhā l-‘ilāju lladhī ana wāṣifuhū wa-huwa an tu’khadha s-sulaḥfātu llatī tūjadu fī l-‘ājāmi wa-yaḍa‘ahā l-insānu ‘alā yadihī l-yumnā maqlūbatan ‘alā ḡahrihā wa-yaṭūfa bihā ḡawla l-karmi kullihī ḡattā idhā farigha min dhālika yuṣayyiruhā ilā waṣṭi l-karmi ‘alā ḡahrihā wa-hiya fī l-ḡayāti wa-yahḡira ḡawlahā qalīlan ḡattā lā taqdira an tataqallaba wa-tadibba wa-in kāna l-mawḡi‘u lladhī taḡta rijlayhā a‘maqa min ḡahrihī lam taqdir ‘alā an tataqallaba min ajli annahā lā taqdiru ḡīna’idhin tastanida¹⁸⁷ bi-shay’in fa-idhā fa‘alnā dhālika lam yaqa‘i l-baradu ‘alā dhālika l-karm. wa-kadhālika ayḡan idhā fu‘ila hādhā l-fi‘lu bi’l-ḡuqūli l-mazrū‘ati wa-kulli mawḡi‘in yuf‘alu bihī hādhā l-fi‘lu lā yaqa‘u bihī l-barad.
- 3b Also the following treatment which I am about to describe has been experimented on, namely that a tortoise which is found in the marshes is taken and someone takes it in his right hand, turned on its back. Then he goes around the whole vineyard. When he has accomplished this, he puts it upside down in the

¹⁸⁶ See Fehrle (1920): 11, note 13.

¹⁸⁷ Middle Arabic *lā taqdir tastanid* for *lā taqdiru ‘alā an tastanida*.

middle of the vineyard while it is still alive. Then he digs around it a little so that it cannot turn over and start crawling. Hence, if the ground under its feet is deeper than elsewhere, it cannot turn over because it cannot then find any support. If we do this, no hail will fall on that vineyard. If this is done to sown fields or any other place, no hail will fall on that place.

- 4 wa-waṣafa l-ḥukamā'u fi dhālika ayḍan fa-qālū: yu'khadhu sulahfātun mina l-mā'i li-sitti sā'ātin maḍayna mina n-nahāri bi-yadika l-yumnā thumma qlibhā 'alā ḡahrihā ḡattā tamḍi (*sic*) sittu sā'ātin mina l-layli fi waṣṭi l-karmi wa'z-zar'i wa-sudda mā ḡawlahā bi't-turābi li-allā tanqaliba 'alā baṭnihā.
- 5 qāla Māsā: wa-ammā mā jarrabnāhu wa-shahida bi-ṣiḡḡatihī jamā'atun mina l-quḍamā'i annahū idhā 'umila, mana'a wuqū'a l-baradi fa-huwa an tu'khadha sulahfātun qad-i ṣṡīdat mina l-ājāmi khāṣṣatan lā min mā'in jārin fa-yaḍa'uhā insānun 'alā yadihī l-yumnā maqlūbatan 'alā ḡahrihā wa-yaṡufu bihā ḡawla l-karmi wa-ḡawla z-zar'i kullihī thalātha mirārin ilā sab'i mirārin ḡattā idhā farigha mina ṡ-ṡawāfi ṡāra bi's-sulahfāti ilā waṣṡi l-karmi aw waṡṡi z-zar'i fa-ḡafara fi l-arḍi ḡufayratan wa-waḍa'a s-sulahfāta 'alā ḡahrihā fi tilka l-ḡufayrati ḡattā lā taqḍira 'alā l-inqilābi 'alā rijlayhā wa-lā 'alā d-dabībi fa-innahā sa-tuḡharriku yadayhā wa-rijlayhā tilqā'a s-samā'i dā'imān fa'l-tuttrak ḡākadhā ilā nqishā'i l-ḡhaymi wa-naqā'i s-samā'i minhu fa-inna l-barada lā yaqa'u 'alā dhālika l-mawḍi'i fa-idhā nqasha'at-i s-samā'u fa-bādirū ilā qalbi s-sulahfāti li-tadibba 'alā arjulihā. [p. 1064, ll. 1–8]
- 6 wa-min dhālika annahū in 'umida ilā sulahfātin ḡayyatin fa-ḡufirat lahā ḡufratun fi l-arḍi 'amīqatun thumma quḍhifat fi tilka l-ḡufrati wa-ju'ila ḡahruhā mimmā yalī l-arḍa wa-qawā'imuhā mimmā yalī s-samā'a wa-uqīrrat ka-hay'atihā sallama llāhu bi-dhālika ahla tilka l-qaryati mina l-barad (. . .)¹⁸⁸ [p. 127, ll. 9–11]

III.

- 1 There are some who say that the carrying around and placing of the tortoise ought to take place in the sixth hour of the day or the night. But we, even without this, not observing the hour carefully, did not repent of it, and we think that this suffices, which has often been proved by experiment.

¹⁸⁸ The text continues (ll. 11–14) with a recipe involving a tortoise to be used to cure gout (*nigris*).

- 2 Andere aber sagen, das Vergraben dieser Schildkröte solle in der sechsten Stunde des Tages und der Nacht stattfinden. Wir werden aber auch ohne dieses Einhalten einer <bestimmten> Stunde uns nicht dem Tadel aussetzen, sondern glauben, dass jenes, was so oftmals erprobt worden ist, genügt.
- 3a wa-mina n-nāsi man yaz‘umu annahū yanbaghī an yuṭāfa bi-hādhihi s-sulaḥfāti wa-tūḍa‘a fī waṣṭi l-karmi fī s-sā‘ati s-sādisati mina n-nahāri wa-mina l-layli wa-ammā naḥnu fa-qad fa‘alnā dhālika min ghayri an narṣuda hādhihi s-sā‘ata fa-lam nandam ‘alā mā fa‘alnā wa-qad narā fī hādihā l-‘ilāji kifāyatan idh qad jarat umūrun kathīratun wa-mtuḥin.
- 3b There are some who claim that one should go around with the tortoise and put it in the middle of the vineyard in the sixth hour of the day and/or the night. We, however, have done this without waiting for this hour and we have not had any reason to repent because of that. We have seen that this treatment is enough as many things have happened and it has been tried.
- 4 [cf. above, II]
- 5 fa-ammā Ṣaghrīth fa-innahū qāl: yanbaghī an takūna hādhihi s-sulaḥfātu ‘aẓīmata l-kibri wa-an yu‘mala bihā fī s-sā‘ati s-sādisati mina n-nahāri aw mina l-layli in kāna saḥābun murtafi‘un aw lam yakun wa-tutraku s-sulaḥfātu bi-mawḍi‘ihā ilā ghaymi s-samā‘i thumma nġilā‘ihī (. . .). [p. 1064, ll. 9–11]¹⁸⁹
- 6 [missing]¹⁹⁰

IV.

- 1 And in fact the treatment using the mirror is also ingenious: for when clouds are hanging overhead if you display a mirror, the hail passes by.
- 2 Und nicht nur dieses, sondern auch das (Experiment) mit dem Spiegel: Wenn nämlich jemand, sobald sich Hagelwolken nähern, einen Spiegel zeigt, so geht der Hagel vorüber.
- 3a wa'l-‘ilāju ayḍan-i lladhī yakūnu bi'l-mar‘ati [i.e., bi'l-mir‘āti] wa-huwa ayḍan ‘ilājun mashhūrun wa-dhālika anna saḥāba l-baradi idhā ṣāra ‘alā l-mawḍi‘i fa-akhraja insānun imra‘atan makshūfata l-farji wa-ṣayyara wajhahā ḥidhā‘a s-saḥābi yakūnu ḥirzan min suqūṭi l-barad.

¹⁸⁹ The text continues with a note by Qūthāmā saying that he has experimented with this (ll. 12–14).

¹⁹⁰ Incidentally, this is also missing from Palladius I:35, see Fehrle (1920): 12–13.

- 3b Also the treatment with the *woman*/*mirror* is well known.¹⁹¹
 This is as follows: When a cloud of hail comes to some place and someone brings *a woman whose genitals are exposed*/*a mirror* and turns *her*/*its* face towards the clouds, that will work as a charm against the hail.
- 4 ¹⁹²wa-waṣafa ba‘ḍu l-ḥukamā’i qāla: ta’khudhu mir’ātan fī yadika wa-tamshī bihā fī waṣṭi l-karmi wa-talmaḥu bi’l-mir’āti taḥta saḥābati l-baradi yufarrijuhā fa-inna l-barada yamīlu ‘an-i¹⁹³ l-mawḍi‘i bi-qudrati llāh.
- 5 wa-qad jarrabnā ayḍan shay’an waṣafahū Yanbūshād fa-wajad-nāhu ṣaḥīḥan wa-huwa an ya’khudha insānun ṣaḥīḥu l-badani lā yakūnu fihī ‘aybun fī ba‘ḍi a‘ḍā’ihī mir’ātan kabīratan min ḥadīdin majluwwatin wa-yaj‘ala wajhahā l-majluwwa tilqā’a s-saḥābi wa-yulawwiḥa bihā lam yasquṭ mina s-saḥābi shay’un mina l-baradi l-batta. [p. 1064, ll. 14–16]
- 6 wa-minhu ayḍan an rufi‘at mir’ātun min ḥadīdin aw ghayri ḥadīdin¹⁹⁴ bi-ḥiyāli s-saḥābi lladhī yanzilu minhu l-baradu ṣarrafā llāhu dhālika l-barada bihī. [p. 126, ll. 7–8]

V.

- 1 And the skin of a seal placed around one vine in the middle of the vineyard drives away hail.
- 2 Und wenn jemand ein Seehundsfell mitten im Weinberg aufhängt, so treibt er den Hagel davon ab.

¹⁹¹ The text has here become corrupted, but most probably this happened only later during the tradition of copying the Arabic translation. The basic problem is that the word *al-mir’āt* “the mirror” is written in Arabic script with a consonantal skeleton identical with the word *al-mar’a*, “the woman”. This has been misread by some copyist in the first place, probably because the use of menstruating women to drive hailstorms away was well known in Islamic times, ultimately going back to *al-Filāḥa ar-Rūmiyya*, cf. below. After making the initial mistake, he has then read *mir’āt* (without the article) as *imra’at* and the consonantal skeleton of *yufarrij* (cf. the extract from Balīnās) has reminded him of the word *farj*, “female genitals”, probably reading YFRJ as B-FRJ (*bi-farj*) and then modifying the whole passage *ad sensum*. Thus, a few minor changes have changed one magical recipe involving a mirror into another involving a woman with exposed genitals.

¹⁹² This comes as the last item in Balīnās.

¹⁹³ Text reads ‘YN.

¹⁹⁴ It may not be superfluous to draw attention to the fact that here the *Nabatean Agriculture* and *al-Filāḥa ar-Rūmiyya* agree with each other as opposed to all other sources, which do not specify the mirror’s material. As the textual history of *al-Filāḥa ar-Rūmiyya* is still very imperfectly understood and studied, one cannot rule out the possibility that the *Nabatean Agriculture* could have influenced this text in some details.

- 3a wa-in waḏa‘a jilda fūqā ḥawla karmatin wāḥidatin takūnu fī waṣṭi l-karmi dafa‘a l-barada ‘an jamī‘i l-mawāḏi‘.
- 3b And if he places the skin of a *fūqā* around one vine which is in the middle of the vineyard, this will drive away hail from all places [i.e., throughout the vineyard].
- 4 [missing]
- 5 fa-ammā mā yakhuṣṣu l-kurūma dūna ghayrihā fa-jildu ḏ-ḏabu‘i aw jildu t-timsāḥi aw jildu l-qunfudhi, ayyuhā ḥaḏara, idhā uṭifa bihī ḥawla l-kurūmi wa-‘umila bihī ba‘da ṭ-ṭawāfi mā waṣafnā lam yasquṭ ‘alayhi l-barad. (. . .)¹⁹⁵ (p. 1064, ll. 16–18)
- 6 wa-min dhālika ayḏan annahū in qudda min jildi duldulīn aw ḏabu‘in shibrun fa-shudda dhālika sh-shibru fī aḥṣani aṣlin min (al-karm).¹⁹⁶ [p. 126, ll. 6–7]

VI.

- 1 Apuleius the Roman says that the fruit also remains unharmed when a bunch of grapes drawn on a placard is dedicated when the Lyre is setting. The Lyre begins to set on the 22nd of January, and the Lyre completely sets on the 26th of January.
- 2 Theophilus Decimus¹⁹⁷ aber sagt: man soll Trauben auf eine Tafel malen und sie im Weinberg weihen, während die Leier untergeht; dann wird die Frucht vor Schaden bewahrt werden. Die Leier beginnt aber unterzugehen am 16. des ersten Kanon, sie geht aber vollständig unter am 29. in demselben.
- 3a wa-ammā Abūliyūs ar-Rūmi fa-innahū yaz‘umu annahū yanbaghī an tuṣawwara šūratu l-‘inabi ‘alā lawḥin wa-an tuqāma l-lawḥu fī l-karmi ‘inda ghurūbi n-Nasri l-wāqi‘i fa-innahū idhā fu‘ila dhālika lam tadhkhal-i l-maḏarratu ‘alā thamarati l-karm.
- 3b Abūliyūs the Roman, however, claimed that one should draw a picture of grapes on a placard and erect this in the vineyard when the Eagle¹⁹⁸ is setting. When this is done, no harm will come to the fruits of the vineyard.
- 4 fa-ammā Abūliyūs ḥakīmu r-Rūmi fa-innahū amara an yu’khadha daffan fa-yuṣawwara fihi ‘inabun thumma yu‘allaqu fī l-karmi

¹⁹⁵ The text continues with a short note on experimentation (ll. 18–19).

¹⁹⁶ The last word is missing from the edition.

¹⁹⁷ The corruption of Apūliyūs Rhōmaiḳōs to Te’ōfilōs Deqīmōs is easy to understand in the Syriac script, cf. Fehrle (1920): 13, note 8.

¹⁹⁸ *An-nasr al-wāqi’*; see Freitag (1830–1835), s.v.: “Nomen stellae lucidae in signo Lyrae.”

- idhā ghāba n-najmu lladhī yusammā ṭ-Ṭarfata fa-innahū yaghību ba‘da sittati ayyāmin yakhlū min Shubāt.
- 5 qāla Qūthāmā: wa-qad dhakara Yanbūshād fī daf‘i l-baradi wa-jamī‘i l-maḍārri n-nāzilati mina s-saḥābi wa‘l-kā’inati mina r-riyāḥi sh-shitawīyyati wa-yadkhulu fī hādhihi r-rīḥi l-gharbiyyatu l-muḍirratu bi‘l-kurūmi wa-ghayrihā an yu‘khadha lawḥun immā rukhāmun aw khashabun, ayya khashabin kāna, wa-yuṣawwara ‘alayhi (karmun fīhi ‘inabun kathīrun wa-in ṣawwara ‘alayhi ṣūrata)¹⁹⁹ ‘anāqīdi l-‘inabi faqaṭ, ajzā. wa-yaf‘alu dhālika min-i thnayni wa-‘ishrīna yawman takhlū min Kānūni l-akhīri ilā arba‘i layālīn takhlū min Shubāta,²⁰⁰ ayyu yawmin-i ttafaqa min hādhihi l-ayyāmi yuṣawwaru ‘alayhi wa-yuqāmu markūzan fī wasṭi l-karmi fa-inna hādihā ṭilasmun li-ḥifzi l-karmi yaḥfazuhā mina l-āfāti s-samāwiyyati wa‘l-arḍiyyati wa-yadfa‘u ‘anhā suqūṭa l-baradi wa-yushghiluhā fī n-nushū‘i wa-kathrati n-numuwwi idhā ‘umila ‘alā ḥaqqihī fī ‘amali ṭ-ṭilasmāt. [p. 1064, l. 20–p. 1065, l. 5]
- 6 cf. wa-qāla Abriṭūs²⁰¹ al-‘ālim: in ‘umida ilā ‘unqūdin min ‘inabin naḍījin fa-shudda bi-‘aẓmin wa-wuḍi‘a fī wasṭi l-karmi ka-hay‘atihī fa-lam yurfā‘ (sallama llāhu dhālika l-karma min dhālika l-baradi in shā’a llāh). [p. 126, l. 12–p. 127, l. 1]

In addition to the material deriving from Anatolius, the other sources have added the following:

- a) NA, p. 1061, l. 19–p. 1063, l. 2: magical recipes involving vipers (*af‘ā*), on the authority of Dawānāy, cf. *al-Filāḥa ar-Rūmiyya*, p. 126, ll. 8–11, two recipes involving vipers.
- b) NA, p. 1063, ll. 3–6: magical recipe involving three menstruating women, on the authority of Kāmās an-Nahrī, cf. *al-Filāḥa ar-Rūmiyya*, p. 125, l. 15–p. 126, l. 2, on the authority of Quṣṭūs, i.e., Cassianus.²⁰² Quṣṭūs continues (p. 126, ll. 3–5) with a recipe involving the first menstrual blood of a virgin.²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ Missing from one manuscript.

²⁰⁰ The date might be taken as an indicator that the *Nabatean Agriculture* is drawing directly on the Syriac text, not its Arabic translation, where this is missing. On the other hand, the date could have easily been dropped in a later phase of the manuscript tradition of the Arabic translation of Anatolius, too.

²⁰¹ This seems to be a corruption from Abūliyūs; the consonantal skeletons are rather close to each other.

²⁰² Cf. also (ps.)-Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, *Kitāb ikhrāj mā fī l-quwwa ilā l-fīl*, p. 75 (a naked menstruating woman and a tortoise turned on its back), cf. also p. 76; (ps.)-Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, *Kitāb maydān al-‘aql*, p. 219 (a naked menstruating woman).

²⁰³ Cf. Fehrle (1920): 15–17. These two cases do not prove that the *Nabatean*

- c) NA, p. 1063, ll. 7–15: chasing away hailstorms through noise made by at least nine men, on the authority of Māsā as-Sūrānī, cf. the recipe which refers to “using men who chase away the hail-clouds” mentioned in the Greek Anatolius fragment (above, no. 0).
- d) *al-Filāḥa ar-Rūmiyya*, p. 127, ll. 5–8, two recipes, the first involving keys, the other the blood of a mole (*juradh aʿmā*).

Table of the Order of the Items in Various Sources²⁰⁴

| item | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|------|---|---|---|---|----|------|
| 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| I | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 8 |
| II | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 6 | 10 |
| III | 4 | 4 | 4 | – | 7 | – |
| IV | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 8 | 5 |
| V | 6 | 6 | 6 | – | 9 | 4 |
| VI | 7 | 7 | 7 | 4 | 10 | (7) |
| a | – | – | – | – | 2 | 6 |
| b | – | – | – | – | 3 | 2, 3 |
| c | – | – | – | – | 4 | – |
| d | – | – | – | – | – | 9 |

Thus, it is clear enough that the Syriac and Arabic—and, one might add, the Armenian—texts 2) and 3) are translations of the Greek Anatolius, obviously direct in the case of the Syriac text, probably indirect, through Syriac, in the case of the Arabic translation, and definitely indirect in the case of the Armenian text (< Arabic < Syriac).

Lacking the complete original, no other direct comparisons between the Oriental and the Greek texts can be made, but the close fidelity of the Syriac and Arabic versions of Anatolius makes it rather obvious that, excluding some misunderstandings, minor additions or

Agriculture would also be dependent on *al-Filāḥa ar-Rūmiyya* (or its Greek original, Cassianus’ work), as the material of the agronomic handbooks tends to be reused over and over again. As far as I can see, the parallels between the *Nabatean Agriculture* and *al-Filāḥa ar-Rūmiyya* are general and occasional, rather than systematic and specific. What other manuals the author of the *Nabatean Agriculture* may have known remains to be studied.

²⁰⁴ The numbering of the sources is the same as above.

detractions and similar changes, virtually the whole text of Anatolius can be reconstructed from the Syriac, Arabic and Armenian sources. As the Arabic version is in some cases closer to the original, it has to be used in this reconstruction in addition to the Syriac. The comparison of this Oriental tradition with Greek and Latin (especially Palladius) material, whether attributed to Anatolius or not, should form the basis for any further studies on Anatolius' original work.

There is, though, one problem, namely the number of books in Anatolius' original work. In Syriac, Arabic and Armenian²⁰⁵ the work of Anatolius is divided into 14 books (Syr. *mēmṛā*, Ar. *maqāla*), each further divided into chapters (Ar. *bāb*) of unequal length. The Greek work has been lost, but according to Photius (quoted in Oder 1890: 66) it consisted of only twelve books. The situation is, moreover, complicated by the fact that both *al-Filāḥa ar-Rūmiyya* and Balīnās consist again of twelve books, whereas the *Geoponica* contains twenty books. Fehrle, who studied this problem (1920: 35–39), though without knowledge of either *Anatolius Arabicus* or Balīnās, tried to show that both the beginning (lost in the text of de Lagarde)²⁰⁶ and the end of the Syriac version were additions made in some phase of the transmission history of Anatolius' original.

Although the existing Arabic version shows Fehrle's speculation to be wrong, it is quite possible to argue, with Photius and Fehrle, that Anatolius originally divided his work into twelve books and that there was a later redactor, or several redactors, who added new material and thus the work came to consist of 14 books in a later phase. What is clear, though, is that if such a redaction ever existed, it was completed before the beginning of the Oriental tradition, which consistently shows a division into fourteen books.

On the other hand, Fehrle's insistence on a division into twelve is partly based on his finding confirmation for this structure in the

²⁰⁵ The text of the Armenian version is divided only into chapters, without any division into books. However, the preface (see Fehrle 1920: 31, note 1) does mention that Anatolius' work was divided into 14 books, even though no further use is made of this division. Fehrle (1920): 31, note 1, hesitatingly put forward the idea that the reference to 14 instead of 12 was a scribal error in the Armenian, but the preserved Arabic version shows that this is not the case.

²⁰⁶ *Anatolius Arabicus*, where the first book is preserved in a complete form, shows that Fehrle's speculation as to the contents of the first book did not hit the mark, though this need not be counted against Fehrle as reconstructing a lost part of a text is hardly ever a completely successful task.

twelve books of *al-Filāḥa ar-Rūmiyya*.²⁰⁷ However, *al-Filāḥa ar-Rūmiyya* does not go back to Anatolius himself but only to a later redaction (Cassianus), whereas *Anatolius Arabicus* is based on an earlier version, still directly attributed to Anatolius, and this version is divided into 14 books. It is hardly feasible to claim that the division into twelve in *al-Filāḥa ar-Rūmiyya* could show traces of an earlier division which predates *Anatolius Arabicus*.²⁰⁸

There does not seem to be any ready solution to the problem of Anatolius' division of his work, but we might assume that the Patriarch may simply have been mistaken.²⁰⁹ This seems less complicated than the speculation involved in the study of Fehrle. But from the viewpoint of the Oriental tradition we may be satisfied to state that already in the late ninth century this tradition was using a text of Anatolius divided into fourteen books, not twelve. The Greek *Vorlage* of this tradition may already, of course, have been an expanded redaction of the original Anatolius, but there is no concrete evidence for this kind of claim.

The hailstorm passage shows how similar the works of Anatolius and Balīnās are. On the other hand, it also shows that Balīnās is clearly not a direct translation of Anatolius. The impression is that Balīnās is nothing more than a free, abbreviated paraphrase of Anatolius and the overall comparison between the two texts implies similar results.²¹⁰ The preface of the text of Balīnās has been accepted as an accurate description of the text's history, first by Sbath (1931): 48–50, and later by both Sezgin GAS IV: 315–316, and Ullmann (1972): 431. To my mind, this seems, to say the least, less than certain and the work does have a flavour of pseudepigrapha about it, with great names of the old times being listed to impress the reader.

²⁰⁷ Had he known Balīnās, this would, of course, have added to his conviction.

²⁰⁸ The division into twelve in Balīnās might be explained by the rather general tendency of pseudepigrapha to favour the magical numbers, 12 among them (cf. also the twelve ancient sages listed in the preface, see below). It goes without saying, though, that such an easy solution is not totally satisfactory.

²⁰⁹ This in fact is also the view of Ullmann (1972): 430, note 1.

²¹⁰ I will come back to this question in a later article concentrating on this relation. Note that Sbath himself took his manuscript to be an abbreviation of Anatolius (1930: 50: "J'ai pu constater que notre texte arabe constitue non pas une traduction, mais un extrait abrégé du text original d'Anatolius"). The difference is that Sbath obviously took this abbreviation to come from the translator who worked on the Greek, whereas in my opinion we should consider the text a later abbreviation from *Anatolius Arabicus* when it had already been translated into Arabic.

I will first give the preface of the Arabic Anatolius and then that of Balīnās:²¹¹

Kitābu Yūniyūs ibn Abātyūliyūs²¹² alladhī kāna min madīnati Bayrūta fī l-filāḥati abwāban jama‘ahā min Flūrantiyūs wa-Dhanūfanṭis wa-Lāwanṭiyūs wa-Ṭārantiyūs wa-Afrīqāwus alladhī dhakara fīhi ashyā’a ‘ajībatan wa-min maqālāti Nīqāwus al-mukhtaṣiri wa-mina l-kutubi llatī tusammā Qanṭarliyā. wa-qasama Yūniyūs²¹³ kitābahū hādhā ‘alā arba‘ati-‘ashara maqāla.

The book by Yūniyūs (i.e., Vindanius), the son of Anatolius who was from the city of Beirut, concerning agriculture. (He divided it into) chapters which he had compiled from Florentinus, Diophanes, Leo/Valens,²¹⁴ Tarentinus and Africanus who mentioned in it (i.e., in his book) wonderful things,²¹⁵ as well as from the tractates of Nikaos(?),²¹⁶ the abbreviator,²¹⁷ and the books which are called Qanṭarliyā(?). Yūniyūs divided this work of his into fourteen books.

This preface should be compared to the information given by the Patriarch Photius in his *Bibliotheca* (Codex 163).²¹⁸ Photius gives the sources of Anatolius as Democritus (who indeed is often quoted in the Arabic Anatolius), Africanus, Tarentinus, Apuleius (likewise often quoted), Florentinus, Valens, Leo, Pamphilus, and, finally, Diophanes and his (sic!) *Paradoxes*. Moreover, he continues, the work consisted of twelve books.

²¹¹ For a translation of the Armenian version of this preface, see Brockelmann (1896): 389, and Fehrle (1920): 27.

²¹² As is often the case, the Greek names appear in a more or less garbled form in this late copy. I have not radically corrected them but where the manuscript does not provide diacritical signs I have provided the correct ones. Where there are mistakes in the diacritical signs, these are left as they are and they may be compared to the translation.

²¹³ In fact, the name is here written as Būniyūs.

²¹⁴ Leontius and Valentinus are equally possible readings of this name.

²¹⁵ This obviously translates the Greek word *paradoksōn*, cf. below.

²¹⁶ In the Armenian version Nikolios, cf. Brockelmann (1896): 389–390. As the Armenian version lacks any reference to Diophanes, Brockelmann tried to explain this name as a corruption, in Arabic, of Diophanes. The existence of both names in the Arabic original makes this suggestion untenable.

²¹⁷ Instead of *al-mukhtaṣiri* one might have expected *al-mukhtaṣarati*, i.e., from the abbreviated tractates of Nikaos.

²¹⁸ Here quoted from Oder (1890): 66–69.

Photius' attribution of the *Paradoxes* to Diophanes is erroneous²¹⁹ which, incidentally, does not lend much credence to the information he gives concerning the number of books.

Anatolius' preface may now be compared to that of Balīnās (ed. Vázquez de Benito, Arabic text, p. 5, with reference to the most important variants in MS-Sbath):

[hād̥hā kitābun allafahū Balyās al-ḥakīm]²²⁰ jamaʿahū min ḥikmati l-ḥukamāʾi l-qudamāʾi lladhīna jarrabū l-umūra fī sāʾiri d-duhūri wa-waḍaʿū l-ḥukma fī t-tadbīri li-kullī amrin wa-huwa kitābun ʿarīfun wa-qaḍ nusammī laka l-ḥukamāʾa lladhīna jtamaʿū ʿalā waḍʿi hād̥hā l-kitābi wa-ṣannafūhu wa-ʿamilū bimā fīhi wa-jarrabūhu fa-ḥtafīz bihī wa-lā tumakkin minhu għayra mustaḥiqqihī. fa-inna hād̥hā qalīlun fī aydī n-nāsi wa-huwa mina l-ḥikmati llatī stakhrajahā baṭraku l-Iskandariyyati wa-makralīṭu²²¹ Dimashqa wa-Arsabaḥ ar-rāhibu li-Yahyā ibn Zamarmak²²² wa-fassarūhu mina r-rūmiyyi wa-kāna dhālika fī shahri Rabīʿi l-awwali min sanati tisʿin wa-sabʿīna wa-miʿatin.

[fol. 1v] waʿl-ḥukamāʾu thnatay-ʿashara wa-hād̥hihi asmāʾuhum: Buqrātīs, Aristātālīs, Asraṭarātus, Ardarītus, Dimuqrātīs, Jālīnūs, Aqrimānūs, Abalṭūkhush, Abūliyūs, Sarābiyūn, Asqulabiyūs, Aflātūs. wa-qaḍ naṣīfu laka mā ʿamilū ṣinfan ṣinfan wa-ajmaʿuhū laka kamā jamaʿūhu ithnā-ʿashara juzʿan wa-farraqtu mā bayna kullī juzʿin wa-ṣāhibihī li-allā yushkila ʿalayka fa-nḥur mā ūṣīka bihī mina t-taḥaffuẓi wa-lā tuḍīʿ-i²²³ l-waṣiyyata ayyuhā l-wārithu limā lam tajmaʿhu wa-lā taḥlubhu wa-iyyāka an tumakkinahū li-man [lā]²²⁴ yastaḥiqquhū wa-biʿllāhi t-tawfīqu wa-ʿalayhi l-ittikāl.

This is the book, compiled by Balīnās the Wise.²²⁵ He compiled it from the wisdom of ancient sages who have experimented on things

²¹⁹ Cf. *Geoponica*, Preface to Book A, and Oder (1890): 81.

²²⁰ This is left out of the edition by Vázquez, which also otherwise leaves much room for improvement. Neither is her translation into Spanish always accurate. The passage is clearly seen in the prints of the microfilm of MS-Gayangos which I had at my disposal. It would not need much, though, to read the beginning as: *hād̥hā kitābu l-filā[ḥati]*. The name of Balīnās is here written BLYʿS.

²²¹ Read *maṭrabulīṭu*.

²²² Probably to be read Barmak, with perhaps some contamination from Zamrak—the manuscript is written in a Maghribī hand.

²²³ Sic, pro *tuḍīʿ-i*.

²²⁴ Cf. my note on the translation.

²²⁵ Or, cf. above, note 220: “This is the Book of Agriculture by Balīnās.” MS-Sbath reads here (Sbath 1931: 50) *hād̥hā kitābun li-Abṭarliyūs*, which it was only natural to emend to Anatolius.

in all ages and who have laid down their opinion concerning the organization of everything.

This is an elegant book and we will mention to you the names of those who have jointly authored this book and experimented with (the advice) given in it. Take good care of this and do not let others than those worthy of it (see it)²²⁶ for this is (a) rare (book) among people and it derives from the wisdom which was extracted by the Patriarch of Alexandria and the Metropolitan of Damascus and Eustath(?)²²⁷ the Monk for Yaḥyā ibn Barmak. They translated it from Greek. This happened in Rabīʿ-I year 179.

The names of the twelve sages are: Hippocrates, Aristotle, Erasistratus,²²⁸ Ardarīṭus,²²⁹ Democritus, Galen, Africanus(?), Plutarch,²³⁰ Apuleius, Serapion,²³¹ Asclepion, and Plato(?).²³²

We will explain to you what they have done, category by category. I²³³ will collect it for you,²³⁴ as they did, in twelve chapters (*juzʿ*).²³⁵ I have separated each chapter and its author²³⁶ so that it would not

²²⁶ A typical esoteric ruling, although also used, for other reasons, by philosophers, cf., e.g., Gutas (1988): 33, 55, 225–234.

²²⁷ This emendation goes back to Sbath (1931): 49, who read this name as Uṣṭāt. The emendation is rather far-fetched and should be taken with extreme caution, although it has later been accepted without objection by many scholars.

²²⁸ See Sbath (1930): 49, in whose manuscript the name is written as Arasiṣṭrāṭus.

²²⁹ Sbath (1930: 51) has Adhrīṭus, which he takes (p. 49) to be Herodotus. Cf. also Brockelmann (1896): 393, no. 4. Herodotus is quoted in the *Anatolius Arabicus* only once (ch. II: 16, Athrūdūṭus), as an authority for the 300-fold profit gained in Egypt in sowing one *mudd* of seed (cf. Herodotus 1.193, on Assyria). In Balīnās, this piece of information is given anonymously (p. 26, ed. Vázquez de Benito). The editor has read *arḍ maṭar*, but the MS-Gayangos clearly has *arḍ Miṣr*. In the translation (p. 217), neither Miṣr nor the following Bābil is translated. In the *Nabatean Agriculture*, p. 218, l. 2, this is changed into hearsay from Egypt (*wa-qad dhakara lī insānun anna fī bilādi Miṣr. .*).

This stray note by Herodotus does not seem to justify taking him up as one of the ancient sages from whose work the whole text of Balīnās derives. In the Syriac version of Anatolius (II: 17, p. 7, l. 27), the name of Herodotus is still clearly recognizable.

²³⁰ Sbath (1930): 51, has Abluṭarkhus.

²³¹ Instead of Serapion, Sbath (1930): 51, has Suwābiyūn which he reads as Sotion (p. 49), emending the B to a T. Sōtiōn is usually written in *al-Filāḥa ar-Rūmiyya* as Südiyūn, with a D instead of a T (see the Index to that work).

²³² The text of Sbath (1930): 51, lacks this last name, giving only 11 authorities.

²³³ Note the change from the first-person plural to the first-person singular.

²³⁴ Sg., the reference seems to be to the reader, not to Yaḥyā ibn Barmak.

²³⁵ The manuscript of Sbath reads *muṣḥaf* (Sbath 1931: 51).

²³⁶ This seems to imply that the book is divided according to the twelve authors listed above. This, however, is not how the work is actually structured. It may also be possible to understand this as the author's rearrangement of the material, so that the division according to the sage authors of each *juzʿ* is dispensed with, thus

be too difficult for you. Now, keep in mind that I have advised you to preserve it carefully and do not forget my advice. You have inherited what you have yourself not collected nor have you toiled for it. Beware of giving this to those unworthy of it.²³⁷ With God is the success and in Him we should trust.

The preface does not sound too convincing to my ear. One should note the eagerness of the author to enlist all possible celebrities, not only Greek but also Christian and even Muslim (Yaḥyā ibn Barmak). Such eagerness is usually found only in pseudepigrapha; one might compare this to the preface of Anatolius, which is definitely toned down and sober in comparison to this text, but where (almost) all names do find their equivalents in the Greek. For the present purposes, it should be enough to show that the list has next to nothing in common with Anatolius as we know him from the Arabic translation and the Greek lists of authorities given in Photius and the *Geoponica*, so that it is not easy to claim that the text would derive directly from the Greek. What links Balīnās to Anatolius is Anatolius' Arabic translation.

To sum up, we may tentatively construct a family tree for the Byzantine and Oriental agronomical manuals which derive from Anatolius (fig. 1).²³⁸

This figure obviously simplifies the situation, which in reality is much more complicated. Fehrle (1920): 42–43, was able to show that the relations of the *Geoponica*, the Syriac Anatolius and *al-Filāḥa ar-Rūmiyya*²³⁹—and we might add to these the *Anatolius Arabicus* and Balīnās—are not without serious problems. Sometimes *al-Filāḥa ar-Rūmiyya* seems to be following the Syriac and the Armenian (or Arabic) text of Anatolius rather than the *Geoponica*.

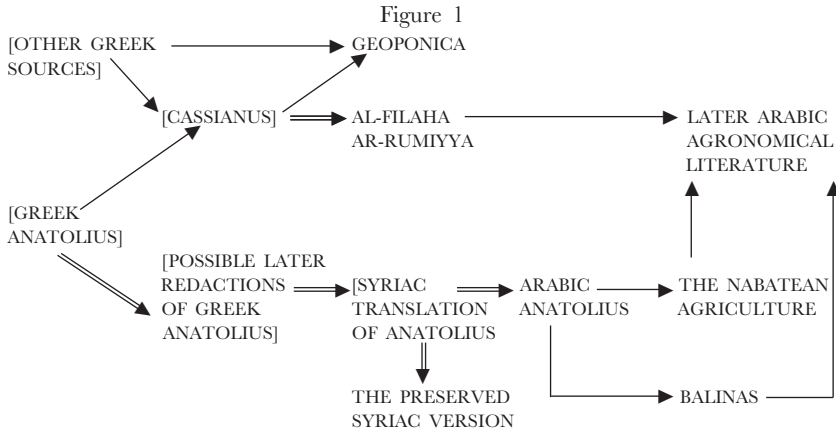
Another complication arises from the fact that the tenth-century redactor of the *Geoponica* may well have had at his disposal not only the later redaction of Anatolius by Cassianus but also the original,

dispersing (*farrāqa*) the contents of each original chapter into various chapters arranged according to the subject matter. This would, in effect, describe the text correctly.

²³⁷ I am translating this sense from the manuscript of Sbath (1931: 51). The MS-Gayangos should probably be emended here, cf. the Arabic text given above.

²³⁸ I am again leaving out of consideration the Western extension.

²³⁹ The three texts had already been compared by Baumstark (1894).

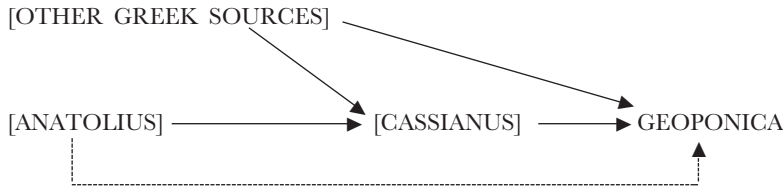


→ influence
 ⇒ translation or redaction

It seems probable that the translation of *al-Filāḥa ar-Rūmiyya* was done through a lost Syriac translation. Possible Persian (Pahlavi) versions also have to be considered (cf. GAS IV: 317–318). The *Nabatean Agriculture* draws either on the Arabic or the Syriac translation of Anatolius.

or at least an earlier redaction of, Anatolius.²⁴⁰ This would be quite plausible, since the final redactor of the *Geoponica* was not much later than the Patriarch Photius, who still had Anatolius’ work at his disposal. Thus, the Greek side of the family tree should perhaps be drawn as follows (fig. 2):

Figure 2



→ main source(s)
 ----> additional source

²⁴⁰ Cf. Fehrle (1920): 48.

This would also explain the occasional coincidences between the *Geoponica* and *Anatolius Arabicus* as against *al-Filāḥa ar-Rūmiyya*: the latest Greek redaction may contain material that is earlier than the material in the middle redaction of Cassianus because the final redactor was able to use the original text in addition to the intermediate redaction.

The cases where *al-Filāḥa ar-Rūmiyya* follows the Oriental Anatolius tradition rather than the *Geoponica* seem to be best explained by positing a redaction standing between Anatolius and the *Geoponica*, which we may conventionally call the redaction of Cassianus.²⁴¹ This redaction was obviously already closer to the *Geoponica* than to the original Anatolius, although it did remain faithful to Anatolius in certain points. This redaction, moreover, seems in a way superior to the final redaction of the *Geoponica*, where the material has in many cases been rather arbitrarily rearranged, destroying the original unity and simplicity of the line of thought in Anatolius.²⁴² The intricate relations between different redactions and translations make the whole *Geoponica* literature a most complicated field of study. The fact that the early Greek works have been lost makes the Oriental tradition extremely important in reconstructing the tradition of Greek agromonomical literature in general.

1.6. *Notes on the translation*

The translations are based on the main text as edited by Fahd, if not otherwise stated. The edition does, however, follow rather slavishly the manuscript chosen for the basis of the edition and the variants often offer clearly better readings. When the translation is based on these, or on my own emendations, this is indicated in the footnotes.

The Biblical names that are rather obvious, have been standardized in the text. These are the following (variants in brackets):

²⁴¹ It is of course possible that there were several redactions, some even along a bifurcating family tree which would add considerably to the complexity of the family tree given above. A more detailed study may necessitate drawing such a tree but until that time the simplified tree may well suffice.

²⁴² Cf. Fehrle (1920): 44–45, who does not seem to give much credit to the final redactor.

Ādamā (Ādam) = Adam
 Īshīthā (Ishīthā, Shīthā) = Seth
 Ibrāhīm = Abraham²⁴³
 ʿImmānūʿīl = Immanuel

The Nabatean equivalent of Noah is written as Anūḥā or Anūkhā. This has been simplified throughout the text as Anūḥā, irrespective of the variant actually found in the text. As there is a possible confusion with Enoch I have refrained from translating this name as Noah.

The coded, Nabatean names have been stabilized in the translation on the basis of the forms most commonly found in the manuscripts. In the edition and the manuscripts, in addition to occasional misspellings, the variation mainly concerns the diacritical points and the vocalization. There is considerable variation in all the names, and their vocalization is conjectural. Thus, the first letter of the name which I transcribe as Ṣaghrīth, is sometimes written with a Ḍ, but I have adopted the majority reading with an Ṣ. Any similarity between this name and that of Socrates (Ṣughrīth) or Democritus (Ḍaghrīth) seems accidental: to explain one coded name as a corrupt form of a Greek, or other, name would be justified only if we could explain at least part of the others in a similar way and show some consistency in their use. Yet no credible explanations have been given.

The names of the astral deities have been translated into English as follows:

ash-Shams = the Sun
al-Qamar = the Moon
al-Mushtarī = Jupiter
Ṣuḥal = Saturn
Uṭārid = Mercury
az-Ṣuhara = Venus
al-Mirrīkh = Mars

As the Arabic text of the *Nabatean Agriculture* derives from Ibn Waḥshiyya, a Muslim author having at his disposal a language where Islamic formulae came almost automatically, it is obvious that the original contains Islamic phrases and manners of speech. Ibn Waḥshiyya was not a faithful and exact translator, and the Islamic formulae do

²⁴³ On p. 750, there is an interesting variant ʾBRWHM (MS var. ʾBRHWM) which would imply a pronunciation like Ibrōhīm.

not give us any clue as to the authorship of these parts. It should also be added that the variation in manuscripts shows that the copyists were ready to add such formulae on their own.

Text 1 (NA, pp. 209–214)

Chapter on prognostication of changes in weather on the basis of signs (‘alāmāt) which can be observed and which indicate these changes²⁴⁴

The changes which we have mentioned are preceded by visible signs concerning the clarity or turbidity of air which warn about these changes. Forecasting these changes has many obvious and well-known benefits. It is needed in summer and winter so that the managers (*quwwām*) of the estates may start their labours (in time).

First of all, clear weather is known by (observing) the Moon. If the crescent is seen on the third night as tiny, small and brilliant (*barrāq*) this indicates that there will be fine, moderate (*mu’tadil*) and clear weather. Observe (*tafaqqadū*) this also on the fourth night, and if the Moon looks like it did on the preceding night it indicates that the weather will remain clear until the middle of the month.

If the Moon is, on the night of its full of radiance (*ḡaw’*), clear and shining without anything covering its face, neither darkness (*qatām*) nor anything else, this indicates that the weather will remain clear until the end of the month. If there is a regular (*mustawīya*), white and circular halo (*hāla*) around the Moon, this also indicates clear weather.

The same may also be known from the Sun. If the Sun,²⁴⁵ when rising, shines brightly without anything intervening between it and our eyes, neither any vapour nor darkness, that indicates clear weather. Observe this also when it sets. If it sets in purity with no clouds nor anything else to block our view, that indicates that the weather will be clear for some days. If there are some clouds before the rising

²⁴⁴ **Text 1** closely resembles the *Peri sēmeiōn* of Theophrastus, although the text is not a direct translation from Theophrastus (cf. 1.2). Similar forecasts are also known in Syriac, see especially *Syrian Anatomy* I: 547–549 (text); II: 649–651 (translation). This text is very similar to, but not identical with, **Text 1**. For Aramaic astrological omen texts, cf. also Greenfield-Sokoloff (1989), with further references. On weather forecasting in Arabic culture, see Burnett (2003).

²⁴⁵ Note that the text often though not regularly uses masculine forms to refer to the Sun, which is feminine in Arabic.

of the Sun which are then dissolved, that indicates clear weather.

If we see the rays of the rising or the setting Sun diminished and thick clouds around it, as if they were stairs of a staircase, that also indicates clear weather. If we see fine clouds spread around the Sun at sky while it is pure amidst the clouds, that also indicates clear weather.

All these indicators of clear weather predict a pleasant winter in the month in which these signs are seen. If the weather predicts winter, there is a warning that people may take precautions against its harm and this needs to be known in advance. We still add the following:

If a low-hanging cloud is seen quite close to the earth as if it could be touched by the hand and then this dissolves quickly (*qarīban*), this indicates cold weather after a day or two; but if this cloud grows larger, falls apart to form separate clouds and then dissolves, this indicates warm weather.

One of the best indicators that cold weather will end is the hooting of an owl at night. When you hear that it starts hooting, little by little, then you can be sure that bad weather (*hawāʾ*), winter and cold will (soon) be over. Ravens are in this respect like owls. Crows get together and croak like joyful bringers of good tidings when cold turns away and starts to recede.

Chapter on the signs of rain. This chapter belongs together with the preceding one

Observe the crescent on the third night. If you see its horns as if they were behind a veil and it seems as if it were bending outside (*wa-huwa yūmiʾ ilā nqilāb ilā barran*) this indicates that there will be rain after a day or two. The same indicator may also appear on the fourth night.

If the perimeter of the crescent appears red, as if of the colour of fire, this indicates rain together with biting west wind. When the Moon is waxing (*fī l-istiqbāl*) and there appears around it something black, this indicates several (downpours of) rain. If there is a halo or two or three halos around the Moon this indicates rain and, either together with it or after it, severe cold. The darker that black thing is, the more it will rain and the more severe the cold will be.

If the Moon rises on the night of its fullness as if there were on its face a vapour between its light and our eyes, this indicates rain in some three days. If the crescent has around it red and black dots

when it rises the night after its appearance, this indicates rain but it will be light. When the Moon is full and there appears some three hours after its rising a black cloud which spreads towards the Moon and covers it, this indicates a heavy and plentiful rain.

Thundering and lightning, following each other, indicate severe cold which will come from the direction where this was seen and heard. If the lightning is seen both in the south and in the north while the sky is clear, this indicates that there will be rain from a cloud which rises from the south and there will be cold winds from the north.

If the Sun seems to rise shining somewhat aside, this indicates that there will be severe cold. If it is intensely red when rising but then turns blacker the higher it gets, this indicates heavy but warm rain which may go on for some days. When the Sun nears its setting and there is a cloud on the left side, this indicates that it will soon rain. If when it rises the blackness of a thick, black and dark cloud can be seen, this indicates rain.

When a white bird of thickets (*al-ājāmī*) with a medium-size, yellow beak dives often into the Tigris and raises its head now and then, this indicates severe cold and rain. If bow-shaped clouds with bow-shaped stripes appear, two by two, this indicates rain. If crows line on the banks of the Tigris and dip their heads in water and croak, this indicates severe cold after rain. If a spotted bird with a broad beak swims and looks to its left and right as if bewildered, this indicates cold after rain.

If cows keep turning their head towards the south, this indicates rain. If ants appear from their nest and spread around carrying their eggs from one place to another this indicates rain. If chickens cluck a lot and cocks crow continuously at unusual times and both the chickens and the cocks shiver and louse themselves, this indicates either rain or cold. If all of a sudden many crows which continuously croak appear, this indicates severe cold. If swifts dip a lot into water and stand on the sides of (small) rivers and the bank of the Tigris, whistling and twittering this indicates cold which will soon come.

Look at the flies: if their bites are smarting and their flight is heavy, then the onset of cold is close by. If on the wick of the lamp appears something like warts of fire with sparks flying from it, this indicates cold. If sparks fly off from clay pots, this indicates severe cold. If a fire creeps below copper and stone pots and moves in the

soot which clings to the pot, this indicates cold which will soon come or rain.

Look at the hornets (*zanābīr*): if they sting slowly and fly heavily without buzzing, this indicates severe cold. If geese cry a lot and move hurriedly as if frightened this indicates severe cold. If a crow croaks at night or a cock in the first part of the night, this is a warning of heavy and cold rain. If a fire is lighted with difficulty and it often dies out, this indicates cold coming soon. If there are sparks and darkness in the light of a lamp and the wick burns less brightly, this indicates cold coming soon.

If spiders hurry out from their woven homes, this indicates cold. If livestock (*māshīya*) move a lot as if bewildered (*kaʿl-mutakhayyila*), this indicates cold in about three days' time. In cattle there is a sure sign of cold coming: when they low and lick their hooves continuously and hurry to their night place grumbling, this is a sure sign of severe cold in about two or three days' time.

When wolves take refuge in villages and try to get into houses, often attacking dogs, this indicates severe cold. When rats yelp and squeak (*saksaka*) and dance, this indicates cold weather coming soon. If dogs dig the earth a lot this indicates cold. If cats keep whining and shivering and their noses run continuously, this is a warning of severe cold which will soon fall. If bats hurry to their hiding places and stop flying around, this indicates that a cold northern wind will soon start blowing.

If at any time in spring, oaks (*ballūt*) and holm oaks (*shajār as-sindiyyān*) bear fruit, this indicates that severe cold will return and last a long time. If pigs and livestock dig the earth a lot and turn their heads and necks towards the north, this indicates cold. If pigs mount (*wuthūb*) each other a lot and try to copulate (*nazw*), this indicates cold. If dogs are eager²⁴⁶ to dig the soil and let their head hang down, this indicates cold coming soon.

If cranes appear in the beginning of the year—I mean in Tishrīn I—this indicates cold coming quickly. When you see cranes in the end of Aylūl or the beginning of Tishrīn I flying in small flocks or separately, this indicates that the rains will be late that year and also the cold.

²⁴⁶ I read *waliʿat* instead of *walaghat*, which does not make sense in this context.

We have put down these signs, and one may verify what we have said by watching. All people may observe these signs and we have put them down for the benefit of farmers and fieldworkers. Signs of this kind will not remain hidden from them nor from others, so that even women and children may observe them. Astrologers (*al-munajjimūn*) have their own signs for the cold coming early or late, or for the rain. Their signs are more reliable, although these, too, are reliable and true.

PART TWO

CHAPTER TWO

IBN WAḤSHIYYA AND THE TRANSLATION OF THE *NABATEAN AGRICULTURE*

As has been shown in Part I, there seems to be good reason to believe that the *Nabatean Agriculture* does, at least to a certain extent, go back to a Syriac original or a group of Syriac originals. Nor should we ignore the story told by Ibn Waḥshiyya in the Preface of the book (**Text 2**) as to how he came to translate the text, even though we might not consider it reliable in all its details. Ibn Waḥshiyya's own version of the process of translation is so concise and clear that there is no reason to paraphrase it here.

The motif for translating these texts and, perhaps, composing similar materials to make the text even more impressive may have, at least partly, been Ibn Waḥshiyya's wish to bring out the claims of the Nabateans to a glorious past. **Text 2** makes this clear, even though on many occasions he disclaims any exaggerated forms of national pride (e.g., NA, p. 546) and the same idea is also found in passages which should go back to the Syriac original(s). For Ibn Waḥshiyya, it is a question of giving the Nabateans their due, nothing more. He is, thus, ready to accept the Persians as a most intelligent and just nation, too (NA, p. 546).

Instrumental in the work of Ibn Waḥshiyya was his student and scribe Abū Ṭālib Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Abdalmalik az-Zayyāt (**Text 2**). His exact role and relation to Ibn Waḥshiyya are difficult to assess but it seems to be unnecessarily complicated to attribute to him more than a role of copyist, student and editor (cf. 1.1–2 and **Texts 4–5**). On a personal level, the relation of the two seems to have been close; the student is addressed throughout the text as “my son” (e.g., NA, p. 151).

The method how Ibn az-Zayyāt gave the finishing touches to the manuscript are described in two passages (**Texts 4–5**), which show that the *Nabatean Agriculture* was published after the death of Ibn Waḥshiyya. If we combine this with the information given in **Text 2**, it would seem that the book first existed for over a quarter of century as a collection of materials before receiving its final form in the

hands of Ibn az-Zayyāt. However, there is nothing to indicate that Ibn az-Zayyāt would have done more than make a clean copy of Ibn Waḥshiyya's manuscript.

Little is known of later fate of the manuscript produced by Ibn az-Zayyāt. There is an interesting reference to someone named ash-Shīshī who had instructed the copyist to leave out a passage, as it had nothing to do with agriculture, and a reference to someone who had ordered the copy (NA, p. 1246) but this does not take us very far. Only in later times did the *Nabatean Agriculture* become a most appreciated manual of agriculture and magic, and it was quoted countless times in both agricultural manuals and books dealing with magic and astrology, usually different passages being quoted in the two branches of these followers of the *Nabatean Agriculture*.¹

The lives of both Ibn az-Zayyāt and Ibn Waḥshiyya are little known. There are a few references to Ibn Waḥshiyya in Ibn an-Nadīm's *Fihrist*,² but he is mainly known through his own texts, which one has to cull for details of his life. He does not seem to have travelled too widely, and he seems to have stayed in the rural area of Iraq and its vicinity for the whole of his life. He defines the region where he lives ("our region") as the villages watered by the Euphrates, Junbulā and Qussīn (NA, p. 585)—the latter providing him with his *nisba*, al-Qussīnī.

In addition to the exact dates given in the Preface, there is little material within the text itself that would tie it to a certain date. There is a mention of the Caliph al-Muqtadir (**Text 3**) who ruled from 295/908 to 320/932, which thus nicely coincides with the dates given in the Preface.

There are some references to travels to the neighbouring countries. Ibn Waḥshiyya seems to allude to his own experience when speaking of the use of the turnip (*saljam*) in Fārs, Rayy and Isfahan (**Text 3**).³ Likewise, there are some references to travels in Byzantium (*bilād ar-Rūm*, e.g., NA, p. 585).

¹ It might be mentioned that Ibn Waḥshiyya and his *Nabatean Agriculture* also had a brief renaissance in Western esoterica in the late 19th century.

² See 1.2.

³ In the same passage, Ibn Waḥshiyya claims to have travelled far and wide in the inhabited quarter of the world. However, this finds little support in the *Nabatean Agriculture*, which is very narrow in its geographical setting—if we ignore the legendary materials—nor do Ibn Waḥshiyya's other texts exhibit any wide experience of the Islamic countries, not to speak of the rest of the world.

The language of the original is given as “Ancient Syriac” (**Text 2**),⁴ which may refer to Classical Syriac, the literary language of the Christians, or some closely related literary dialect. In addition, one must remember that Ibn Waḥshiyya worked in a context where various forms of Aramaic were spoken by the local population—the Arabicization of the countryside was still on its way and most of the peasants would have been bilingual at the time, if not monolingual speakers of Aramaic: Arabic was gaining more and more ground, but the majority was still speaking some form of Aramaic as their mother tongue.

Ibn Waḥshiyya himself refers to the linguistic situation around him (NA, p. 124):

Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn Waḥshiyya says: The dialects (*luḡhāt*)⁵ of the Nabateans differ very much from each other despite the fact that they live close together. Yet the Nabatean inhabitants of one region call things with a name different from that used by the inhabitants of another region. Thus, the translator (*an-nāqil*)⁶ has to know all their dialects and their differences.

Some people think that translating into Arabic would be easy, since the language (of the Nabateans) is closely related to Arabic, but this is not so because they (i.e., the dialects) differ from each other and because the expressions of their speakers (*ahliḥā*) differ between each other. The differences between the words (*alfāz*) which they use in their speech (*kalām*)⁷ are indeed considerable.

The complexity of the linguistic situation is also often emphasized elsewhere.⁸

In various passages, Ibn Waḥshiyya comes back to this linguistic context and he defends his habit of giving the plant names in different languages (NA, p. 173):

Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī, the translator of this book from Nabatean into Arabic, who is known by the name Ibn Waḥshiyya says: I translate (*anqulu*) the name of each tree and plant into what ordinary people (*‘āmmat an-nās*)

⁴ Occasionally, as in NA, p. 40, the original language is defined simply as Syriac (*as-Suryānī*).

⁵ *Lughā* also means ‘language’ and ‘word’ as well as ‘dialectal variant’.

⁶ The verb *naqala* is the standard expression for translating in Ibn Waḥshiyya’s vocabulary.

⁷ *Kalām*, of course, does not automatically mean oral expression, but may also refer to written expression.

⁸ E.g., NA, pp. 165 (where we have a rare mention of *luḡhat al-Fahlawīyya*), 184, 585, 634–635, etc.

know and by which it is well known. If I transmitted (*naqaltu*) its name (only) in Nabatean, no one would know what I am speaking about. This is because some plants have become famous by their Arabic name, some by their Persian name, some by their Nabatean name and some by their Greek (*rūmī*) name, according to which name has become dominant.

It is interesting to note that some Arabic names of plants are also given in the Syriac original of Qūthāmā. Ibn Waḥshiyya tells in a note that Qūthāmā used the Arabic names of some desert plants because the Arabs know these plants, whereas most other nations ignore them (NA, p. 1137). It is quite possible that there were Arabic names in the Syriac original. Desert plants were better known to Arabs and there were Arabs in Iraq and the surrounding areas as possible informants from well before the Arab conquest of the area and, moreover, the Syriac original(s) need not be pre-Islamic (see 1.2). One might even see this as evidence of Ibn Waḥshiyya's truthfulness: if he were merely forging the text, there would have been no reason for him not to invent ancient Nabatean names for these plants.

Ibn Waḥshiyya also mentions the imminent obliteration of the Nabatean language and gives vent to his desperation (NA, p. 670):

Abū Bakr ibn Waḥshiyya says: The name of fennel (*rāzyānaj*) is in Nabatean *barhalyā*.⁹ Yet in our time, *rāzyānaj*, which is a Persian word, is more commonly known than *barhalyā*, and for this reason I have translated it as *rāzyānaj* so that the reader of this book would understand it properly (*jayyidan*). Let these Nabatean names perish and be obliterated like the Nabateans themselves have (almost) perished and been obliterated! The perishing of their language is less momentous than their own destruction and obliteration!

Ibn Waḥshiyya very rarely gives Greek equivalents of Nabatean plant names. More often he gives their Persian equivalents. Thus, he identifies the laurel tree (*shajarat al-ghār*) as *bint-daqbūdīn* in Nabatean, *dahmasht* in Persian¹⁰ and *balūdāyūs* in Greek (NA, p. 151). In this

⁹ Here written TRHLY? but later correctly *barhalyā*. For this, see Löw (1881), no. 328, and von Gutschmid (1861): 32.

¹⁰ The edition reads DHShT, but the correct form (cf. Modern Persian *dah(a)mash*t, Steingass, s.v.) is found in some manuscripts. See also Löw (1881), no. 241. The Nabatean name seems to be a corruption of (*bint*)-**dafnūdīn*, also attested in the Syriac version of Anatolius (*dafnūdīn*, pp. 41, 66, 96, 102, 103) as well as in, e.g., the *Syrian Anatomy* I: 603 = II: 717, from the Greek *daphnelaion*. For the Greek *balūdāyūs*, I can do no better than suggest that it might be *platúphullos*, although one might also consider the possibility of a confusion with *plátanos*, which could easily become in the Arabic script **balādānūs*.

case, Ibn Waḥshiyya argues for his decision of listing all these names by referring to the medical importance of the tree. He also mentions that other peoples have translated Nabatean names into their own language (e.g., Persian, cf. NA, p. 546) and these translated names have later become the well-known ones. This, of course, relates to his theme of exulting the Nabateans: even dishes which have Persian names, thus turn out to be originally Nabatean, and Persian knowledge is seen as derivative.¹¹

Ibn Waḥshiyya, in general, seems to have used the local peasants as his informants and he at least gives the impression that, in some cases, also the Greek names derive from local usage, not learned books. Thus, he says that *farshūqiyya*¹² is called *asqūlānūs* by people in Byzantium (NA, p. 585)—although he does continue by giving its name in Rūmiyya (here Rome?—*kandarūsākūs*) and in al-Andalus¹³ (*kasīlthākā*), places it is hardly likely he could have visited.

The original language of the source(s) for Ibn Waḥshiyya's Arabic text sometimes shines through in the names of the plants, which are often in Aramaic. There are a few passages where Ibn Waḥshiyya, in his additions, speaks more generally about the Nabatean language. One of these (NA, pp. 372–373) comes in a passage where he endeavours to show that Ṣaghrīth referred with the words *sakā'in* and *ghīlān* to winds, not to any supernatural beings:

This, in my opinion, is the meaning of his words “*sakā'in*” and “*ghīlān*”. This is because they wanted to say “*ghīlān*” (*an yalfizū bi'l-ghīlān*) but they said “*ghīlānā*”. Some of them also call the wind (*ar-rīḥ*) 'BGhYL'N' (*ab-ghīlānā*?) in their language and some call it *rīc* and some *rīh*.¹⁴ Their lexicon (*luḡha*) is very wide and they have many different words (for things) (*mukhtalifātun fīmā yalfizūna bi'l-asmā'*). The Kan'anites and the Nabatean inhabitants of Syria call the wind *sakā'in* and this is why I have translated ghouls and *sakā'in* as wind because their ancients, as

¹¹ Incidentally, the pre-Islamic Persians had argued much in the same way to show that all knowledge originally derived from the Avesta, see Gutas (1998): 40–45.

¹² A plant similar to onion and garlic. The Nabatean name is given as *samakhayākālā* and explained in Arabic as “the one similar to testicles”. One might read the beginning in Syriac as *sam* “medicinal plant” + *akh* “as”.

¹³ Somewhat curiously, he defines the language of the Andalusians as the language of *al-Jarāmiqa*, although the *Jarāmiqa* are a group of Nabateans. There is, though, a variant, *al-ḥalāliqa*.

¹⁴ Nöldeke (1876): 450–451, saw in this word a case of pseudo-Aramaic but, in my opinion, this is a somewhat hasty conclusion. The implication of the variation *rīh/rīc* (as against the Arabic *rīḥ*) may well be that the Nabateans were unable to pronounce the Arabic pharyngeal ḥ.

far as I have heard (*ʕīmā taʕaddā ilayya ʕanhum*), did not believe that in this lower world there are ḤZ¹⁵ like the Persians, Arabs and Indians believed. Now I return to the words of Qūthāmā.

A much-repeated theme in the book is its esoteric character. This is discussed in the Preface to the *Nabatean Agriculture* (**Text 2**), but the text returns now and then to the theme.

The esoteric nature of the text is preserved by secrecy—the text is not to be divulged to all and sundry—its piecemeal character (a topic is not discussed only in one place but the necessary information is given piece by piece and to master it, one should first read the whole), and by its symbolic mode of expression.

Ibn Waḥshiyya sees the text as an esoteric way of expressing valid truths. This means that what the text says on its surface level need not always be literally true since the Kasdānians tend to suppress and conceal parts of the truth. They also mix truth with falsehood not only in this agricultural manual but in all their sciences (NA, p. 1216), to avoid common people and the uninitiated masses understanding secrets which they are not worthy of comprehending. The tales given in the text (see section 5) have a deeper wisdom and some expressions should be seen as esoteric distortions. In NA, p. 890, the habit of the ancestors to conceal their knowledge by mixing truth with falsehood is defended by referring to the rational capacities of intelligent readers who are able to see through this to distinguish between the two.

In **Text 6** Qūthāmā explains the curious notion that the aubergine will disappear (*yaghīb*) for three thousand years which, manifestly, is untrue. If someone were to argue against this notion, the explanation is that the understanding of the text is not aimed at foreigners but is only for those who know the Nabatean way of expression and who understand hidden and difficult matters (*ghawāmiḍ al-umūr*). Dawānāy, in fact, had advised his people to think carefully about his words and to search for the underlying wisdom. Finally, Qūthāmā explains the secret behind this symbolic expression. The three thousand years refer as a symbol (*ramz*) to three months, i.e., one season. The period of disappearance refers to the season when eating eggplant would be harmful for health. This is the way one should read the whole book.

¹⁵ One should probably emend this to *jinn* (accusative).

Incidentally, this might give some room for speculation on the fabulous 18,000—or 21,000—years during which the book was compiled (see **Text 2**). However, there does not seem to be an easy way to explain the number of these years but the obvious exaggeration suits well the overall symbolic mode of expression.

Text 2 (NA, pp. 5–10)

[*The Preface of Ibn Waḥshiyya*]¹⁶

This is the Book of the Nabatean Agriculture, which was translated from the language of the Kasdānians into Arabic by Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī ibn Qays al-Kasdānī al-Qussīnī,¹⁷ who is known by the name of Ibn Waḥshiyya. (He translated it) in the year 291 according to the counting (*ta’rīkh*) of the Arabs from the *hijra*. He dictated it to Abū Ṭālib Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdalmalik az-Zayyāt in the year 318 according to the counting of the Arabs from the *hijra*.¹⁸

(Ibn Waḥshiyya) said to him:

Know, my son (*bunayya*), that I found this book among other books of Kasdānians which I have found, and its title (*mutarjam*) in Arabic would be ‘The Book of Making the Soil Prosper and Keeping the Crop, the Trees and the Fruits in Order and Repelling Calamities from Them’ (*Kitāb Iflāḥ al-arḍ wa-iṣlāḥ az-zar‘ wa’sh-shajar wa’t-thimār wa-daf‘ al-āfāt ‘anhā*). I found the book too massive and too long, so it occurred to me to abbreviate it. Yet on second consideration, this was wrong, not right, as my original aim and objective (*qaṣdī l-arwal wa-gharaḍī*)¹⁹ was to bring the sciences of this nation (*‘ulūm hā’ulā’*

¹⁶ Similar, but shorter, prefaces are found in the other books of the Nabatean corpus. That of *Kitāb as-Sumūm* has been translated by Levey (1966a: 20–24). Levey’s translations are not always reliable.

¹⁷ The edition reads al-QSYTY, which is an obvious error for al-Qussīnī. For the town of Qussīn, see Yāqūt, *Muḥjam* IV: 350 and Fahd (1998), Index, p. 32.

¹⁸ Actually, Ibn Waḥshiyya dictated only a small portion of the book to Ibn az-Zayyāt; the rest his disciple got later in written form from Ibn Waḥshiyya’s widow, see **Texts 4–5**. For the “counting of the Arabs,” cf., e.g., *Akhbār baṭārika*, p. 103 (*sana . . . ‘arabiyya*).

¹⁹ Cf. NA, p. 19, where Ṣaḡhrīth gives as his aim “to benefit my people (*abnā’ jīnsī*)”.

al-qaʿam)—I mean the Nabateans and the Kasdānians from among them (*an-Nabaṭ al-Kasdāniyyīn minhum*)—to people and to promulgate them so that they [my contemporaries] would know the measure of their [the Kasdānians’] understanding (*miqdār ‘uqūlihīm*) and the favours which God (*Allāh*) (He is Blessed and Exalted) has shown them, in that they could comprehend useful and recondite sciences (*al-‘ulūm an-nāfi‘a al-ghāmiḍa*) and discover²⁰ what other nations (*umam*) were unable to.

In this way I have come to their books at (this) time, when their remembrance has faded away and what they have told has been deleted and what they taught has vanished, so that no more than a mention (*dhikr*) of them and of some of their sciences remains, just like fairy tales (*khurāfāt*), so that even those who mention them have no (actual) knowledge of them.

When I realized this, I started looking for their books and I did find (some of) them among people who were the remnants (*baqāyā*) of Kasdānians and (still) retained their religion, habits and language (*‘alā dīnihim wa-sunnatihim wa-lughatihim*). So I found some books which they had in their possession although they are extremely careful to hide them, to keep them concealed and to deny them because they are afraid to divulge them.

Before that, God (He is Exalted, Majestic and Lofty) had provided me with a knowledge of their language—which is Ancient Syriac (*as-Suryāniyya al-qaḍīma*)—to an extent which very few have. That is because I am one of them, that is to say, of the progeny (*nasl*) of one of them,²¹ and God (He is Exalted) has given me property and money (praise be to Him for that!) so that I was able to gain access to those of their books which I wanted to, thanks to what I have just explained: that I am one of them, that I know their language and that I have plenty of money. So I made use of affability, generosity and delicate tricks until I had access to all books which I could.²²

²⁰ Ibn Waḥshiyya often uses the word *istinbāt*, perhaps playing with the *figura etymologica* with *Nabaṭ*.

²¹ This clarification may have been added by Ibn Waḥshiyya in order to safeguard himself from suspicions; a few lines earlier he had identified the Kasdānians with pagans.

²² As can be seen from this passage, Ibn Waḥshiyya’s style is often repetitive and not always completely lucid.

The one who had these books²³ in his possession thought that he needed me to understand the contents of these books. This is because all these people, who are their remnants, are like cows and donkeys and they are unable to understand anything of the sciences of their forebears, except that the man with whom I found the collection of these books (*majmū'atan 'indahu*)²⁴ is distinguished from the others and is apart from the donkeyness (*himāriyya*) of all the others. I rebuked him for his excessive eagerness to keep these books hidden and these sciences in secrecy and said: “You are exceedingly careful, in fact, to wipe the name (*dhikr*) of your people into oblivion and to bury their merits (*maḥāsīn*). In your action you follow the example of those who have lived before you, but in doing so both you and they are unjust to those earlier scholars (*ulamā'*) of yours, who are also my scholars and forebears as well. By this very action you have faded the mention of our forebears and concealed their sciences and their merits from people. What if I translate these books, or some of them, into Arabic so that people can read them? They would then know the measure of our sciences and could make use of what our forebears have invented (*wada'ā*) and that would become a sort of pride (*fakhr*) for us and an indication of our excellence (*fadl*).”

That man, to whom I said all this, found my words very repugnant and answered: “Abū Bakr, do you want to argue against the way of our elders (*rasm shuyūkhinā*) and forebears and their admonitions (*waṣāyā*) to us to keep hidden our religion and habits (*dīninā wa-sunnatinā*)!” I replied to him: “Nay, it is you who are being unjust to our elders and your forebears. No indeed! They charged (*waṣṣaw*) us to keep secret the religion and the use of *sharī'a* (religious law) because they knew the opposition it would raise if it became known to others and this is why they were on their guard with their religion. By my life, it is right to keep the religion secret, but it is different with the sciences, which are useful to people and which are now being forgotten! If others would know them and know who invented them (*wādī'ūhā*), these (forebears of ours) would regain prestige and honour in their minds! The sciences are one case and religion and the *sharī'a* another! These sciences do not come under the commission of secrecy!”

²³ For *huwa*, read *hiya*.

²⁴ This may imply conscious collection or it may just mean that they had simply accumulated.

He answered me: “But what use would there be (from our point of view) to promulgate the rarities of (almost) forgotten sciences, even if they were of use to people? Go ahead and disseminate them among them; they will benefit from them, but you know how they think of our religion (*wa-dīnunā ʿindahum bi’ṣ-ṣūrati llatī taʿlam*)! Nay! It was well that our forebears concealed both the *sharīʿa* and the sciences from them, as they [the others] deserve neither of them!”

I said to him: “Even if they really ordered the sciences to be concealed, I do disagree with both our forebears and yours. Nevertheless, I do share their opinion when it comes to concealing the *sharīʿa*. If they did not order the concealing of the sciences, I agree with them, without any disagreement. Now listen to me! Can’t you see how exceedingly ignorant all people are in our present time and into what weakness and negligence these religious habits (*adyān*) and *sharīʿas*, which are now preponderant among them, have made them enter? They have become like dumb animals, and even worse than that, inferior to them in some matters! By God, it is my wish to defend them that brings me to promulgate some of our sciences to them,²⁵ so that they might stop defaming the Nabateans and would awaken from their sleep and would be resurrected for a while from their death (*wa-yaʿīshū qalīlan min mawtihim*) [of ignorance]: after all, everyone has been fashioned and made disposed to understand everything. There used to be among them (the ancient Nabateans), one after another, men of extreme acumen and lavish talent. Since they are like this, it is he who conceals the sciences from them (their descendants) and deviates their course from them, who treats them unjustly:²⁶ they have this understanding and talent, but it is left unused, and they have become what they are because they have not been taught the sciences and their ways and manners and inventions. Now obey me, my dear man, and let me translate into Arabic my selection of these books! You are not a whit more eager to obey our forebears than I am nor more persistent in keeping concealed what has to be concealed. You should also listen to these sciences yourself, as you don’t understand them because of your eagerness to obey your forebears, claiming that they have ordered them to be kept concealed.

²⁵ I.e., the descendants of the ancient Nabateans are the ones to be awakened.

²⁶ There is a grammatical mistake in the edition but the sense of the passage is obvious enough.

If you would yourself have had the opportunity to peruse some of these books, that would have profited you considerably and been most useful to you. Think of what I am saying to you and you will realize that it is as I say and your intellect will find it right.”²⁷

So he obeyed me and let me see these books. I started reading them to him and he repeated what I had read to him and tried to comprehend it until one day he said to me: “By God, Abū Bakr, you have revived me, may God reward you for my sake!” I answered him: “What use does a man have of books which are hidden and unattainable to him, so that he cannot read them nor learn from them? They are no more valuable to him than stones and mud bricks!” He approved of my words and followed my opinion.

Then I started translating these books of the Nabateans one after another and I read them to him in Arabic, so that he gained more and more understanding and he was fascinated by them. Finally he thanked me with all his heart and accepted my opinion concerning the matter (of promulgating the books). Yet this did not happen without me showering dirhams and dinars on him, so that he followed the joint lead of craving for money and accepting the argument, deeming worthy what he heard and finding the benefit within himself.

The first book which I translated into Arabic was *The Book of Dawānāy the Babylonian Concerning the Secrets of the Sphere and the Decrees over the Events, Proceeding from the Movements of the Stars* (*Kitāb Dawānāy al-Bābīlī fī asrār al-falak wa’l-aḥkām ‘alā l-ḥawādīth min ḥarakāt an-nujūm*). This is an important and valuable book, very precious, but I could not translate it completely, so I translated only its beginning (*ṣadr*): I found out that it was about two thousand double-pages (*waraqa*), of material called *raqq* (parchment) of the same size as the largest sheets of paper (*fī maqādīr atamm mā yakūn min al-kāghadh aṭ-ṭalhī*)²⁸ which is nowadays used. It was written in a most beautiful hand, very correctly, clearly and flawlessly. So, by God, my son (*bunayya*), I was unable to make a complete translation of it only because of its length, for no other reason.

Together with it, I translated their book on the cycles which is *The Great Book of Cycles* (*[Kitāb] al-Adwār al-kabīr*).²⁹

²⁷ This theme also comes up in NA, p. 1308.

²⁸ For the term *ṭalhī*, see Gacek (2001): 58, and Dozy (1881), s.v.

²⁹ For the astrological “cycles,” see 3.1.

Then I translated this book and others after (I had translated) some other books. With 'this book' I mean *The Book of Agriculture* (*Kitāb al-Filāḥa [an-Nabaṭiyya]*). I gave a complete and unabridged translation of it because I liked it and I saw the great benefits in it and its usefulness in making the earth prosper, caring for the trees and making the orchards (*thimār*) and fields thrive and also because of the discussions in it on the special properties of things (*khawāṣṣ al-ashyā'*), countries and times, as well as on the proper times of labours during the seasons (*mawāqī' af'āl fuṣūl al-azmina*), on the differences of the natures of (different) climates (*ikhtilāf ṭibā' al-ahwiya*), on their wondrous effects, the grafting (*tarākīb*) of trees, on their planting and care, on repelling calamities from them, on making use of plants and herbs, on curing with them and keeping maladies away from the bodies of animals and repelling calamities from trees and plants with the help of each of the plants, and on some uncommon qualities which can be caused by combining different things which alone do not have the same effect, either similar or different (to the effects of the components).

When I realized this, I made a complete translation of the book. Now I have dictated this to my son (i.e., disciple) Abū Ṭālib Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Abdalmalik az-Zayyāt and I have charged him (*waṣṣaytuhu*)³⁰ not to withhold it from anyone who asks to see it, wishing to make use of it. It indeed is useful to everyone, of momentous benefit to them in their lives, but I have also charged him to keep other things concealed.³¹

I found out that this *Book of Agriculture* is attributed to three ancient Kasdānian sages (*min ḥukamā' al-Kasdāniyyīn al-qudamā'*). They say that one of them began it, the second added other things to it and the third made it complete. (The book) was written in Ancient Syriac (*bi's-Suryāniyya al-qadīma*) and it comprised some 1500 double-pages (*waraqā*).

Concerning the one who began this it is said that he was a man who appeared (*zahara*) in the seventh millennium of the seven thousand years of (the rule of) Saturn. That is the millennium in which Saturn was in partnership with the Moon. His name was Ṣaḡhrīth. The one who added other things to that was a man who appeared in the

³⁰ Note that this *waṣiyya* may be taken literally; Ibn Waḥshiyya died before dictating the whole work.

³¹ Thus, one would think that Ibn az-Zayyāt was aware of the religious secrets of the Nabateans.

end of these millennia and his name was Yanbūshād, and the third who made it complete was a man who appeared after four thousand years had elapsed from the cycle (*dawr*) of the Sun in this cycle (*dawra*), I mean the cycle (*dawra*) which belonged to Saturn, i.e., the thousand years in which the two earlier men had appeared. I counted the interval between the two times³² and it came out to be 21,000³³ years.³⁴ The name of this third man was Qūthāmā. He said that he appeared after 4,000 years had elapsed from the cycle (*dawr*) of the Sun, which lasts for 7,000 years, so between them there was the period I have mentioned.³⁵

Both of the two who added to what the first, Ṣaghrīth, had composed, added in their books something to every chapter which Ṣaghrīth had written but they changed nothing from what he had said and written and spoken about the things that he mentioned, nor did they alter the order in which he presented his material. They merely added to everything that he had put down (*dawwanahu*) according to what they found out and invented after him. So the beginning and preface of the book are by Ṣaghrīth. He began the book by saying: (. . .).³⁶

Text 3 (NA, pp. 546–548)

Abū Bakr Aḥmad Ibn Waḥshiyya has said: This fluid extracted from the turnip (*saljam*) which the Nabateans have described is much used by the Persians in Fārs, Rayy and Isfahan. They extract the fluid of the turnip and call it *shalmābe*, which in Arabic means “turnip water” (*māʾ as-saljam*). They drink it like *fuqqāʿ* and use it to season meat (*yuhammidūnahu bihi*) like they also cook *sikbāj* with vinegar and other things.

I think (*atawahhamu*) that the Persians learnt this from the Nabateans and that the Nabateans discovered this first. When the Persians got

³² I read *az-zamānayn*.

³³ Var. “18,000 and the beginning of the 19th thousand”.

³⁴ This implies the following system: the end of the *dawra* of Saturn—two unspecified *dawras* (each 7,000 years) — the *dawra* of the Sun (4,000 years of which have elapsed). Total 18,000 years + a few centuries, as in the variant, see the preceding note.

³⁵ The exaggerated figures should not be taken at face value, cf. **Text 6**.

³⁶ For the continuation, see **Text 7**.

the upper hand and ruled their domain and took their books, they inherited their knowledge and extracted from the books (the recipes for) these dishes which are (nowadays) attributed to them (i.e., the Persians) and are called by a name in their language. This recipe (*sifa*) for making turnip water in this book is an indicator that what I said is true, viz. that the Nabateans discovered this before the Persians.

This has many similar parallel cases which are found in the books of the Nabateans concerning different dishes and useful drinks which I have found explained in the books of the Nabateans. By God, I do not say this, O my son Abū Ṭālib, to blame the Persians or to despise them. Nay, they are the most intelligent and just of all nations, but every people must be given its due (*yambaghī an yūrafā l-ḥaqqu li-ahlihi*) and one must acknowledge the excellence of precedence in (inventing) useful things.

To this also belongs the paste (*maʿjūn*) called *shūlthā* which the Nabateans invented and composed although most of the doctors of our times attribute it in their ignorance to the Persians and say that it was invented by them. If it were not for ignorance and carelessness, they should have known that the name derives from the Nabateans, because *shūlthā* is a Nabatean word.³⁷

By God, this paste is, O my son, much more useful than the antidote of al-Fārūq (*tiryāq al-Fārūq*) and it has effects which this great antidote (*at-tiryāq al-kabīr*) does not have. Yet because of their bigotry (*ʿaṣabiyya*) favouring Christianity the doctors wished to aid the religion of the Byzantines (*dīn ar-Rūm*) against the Persians. They believed (*tawahhamū*) that the Persians had composed this medicine and this is why they did not mention it at all and rejected it, declaring it false and saying: “It is mere non-sense and contains ingredients which we cannot understand why they are there,” referring to its medical ingredients.

They did not do this because of bigotry in favour of the Byzantines (*ar-Rūm*) as against the Nabateans but because they, in their ignorance, thought that it belonged to the Persians. This is why they despised and rejected it. Yet it actually belongs to their own forefathers, the Nabateans. (I say so) because all these Christians who live in

³⁷ One might try to compare this with Syriac *sheltā* “a clot (of blood)”, see Payne Smith, s.v. For a recipe for *shūlthā*, see, e.g., Ibn Ilyās ash-Shīrāzī, *Hāwī*, pp. 146–147 (here written ShYLYThY²). *Tiryāq al-fārūq* is discussed in *Hāwī*, pp. 142–143.

this region and in the surrounding climes are originally Nabateans (*uṣūluhum Nabat*). Yet they brag (*yumakhriqūn*) with the Byzantines and let people believe (*yuwahhimūn*) that they belong to them, because they share their Christianity and also because all people disclaim the Nabateans and reject being descended from them.

This being said, know, O my son, that *shīlthā* is superior to all other pastes in its many uses. Against poisons it is more efficient than the antidote they call “the great (antidote)” or “(the antidote of) al-Fārūq,” bragging about its (Byzantine background) in their bigotry. The *shīlthā* is more efficient in all that they attribute to their antidote, most of which is (in their case) sheer lies and falsehood. They even claim that it would have ninety different benefits!

You who read these words of mine, be my witness that I say that if that antidote has ninety different benefits, as they claim, the *shīlthā* has ninety times ninety benefits. The proof for this³⁸ is that it has more medical ingredients than the great antidote. *Shīlthā* has more than ninety medical ingredients, whereas the other antidote contains only sixty-something ingredients. All that go into that antidote are also found in the *shīlthā*, together with some thirty more.

How blind is their heart and how weak their discernment! Is something useful because of bigotry in its favour or do the benefits of something else disappear because of bigotry against it? O my son, though I have travelled through most of the inhabited quarter, I have never heard that anyone would have made *shīlthā* after Islam has appeared and the Arabian rule (*ad-dawla al-ʿarabiyya*) has come (to this area). Many of the Arabian kings have made the great antidote but they have abstained from making *shīlthā* because their doctors have prevented them from it by declaring it false and blaming it while extolling the antidote and urging them to let it be prepared.

The Arabian kings should not be blamed for this, though, because they do not know medicine themselves but have to rely on the words of those who in their time claim to be doctors (*yataṭabbab*). These are the Christians who feign this profession in ignorance and have little knowledge in religion and all matters of the world. No one has made *shīlthā*, at all, according to its recipe (*alā nuskhatihi*), though some pharmacists (*sayādila*) and some petty kings in marginal regions

³⁸ Here a critical note by a reader appears in one of the manuscripts.

(*fī l-atrāf*)³⁹ have made pastes which they call *shūlthā* but which are not it; nay, these are just counterfeit *shūlthās*.

How would one start preparing a paste of medicine with many ingredients which it is wearisome to find and to prepare while the doctors of his time blame this medicine and call it false! No one would embark on such a labour.

I have heard that *shūlthā* was prepared for al-Muqtadir-bi'llāh but when I enquired about this and asked someone who could answer me, I found out (*ṣaḥḥa 'indī*) that it was not prepared at all according to the true recipe, neither in its right procedure (*'alā siyāqati 'amal-ihī*) nor in its medical ingredients and the preparation was, thus, not perfect. All this was because the doctors who prepared it were prejudiced against it.

In short, the Arabs have done to the Persians what they did to the Nabateans, quite exactly (*ḥadhwa n-na'li bi'n-na'l*) and have revenged the Nabateans against the Persians.⁴⁰ This reminds one of God's words (He is blessed and sublime) (Qur. 3: 140): "We alternate these vicissitudes among mankind." The Arabs came to them (i.e., the Persians) with a religion which God, He is sublime, had selected for his creation and they vanquished them by this and dispersed them and ended their kingship and wealth. By God, their kingship was great and mighty, commanding and terrifying and because of this⁴¹ the Arabs had a mighty sign (*āya*) that their cause was right and their prophet true, may God bless him and his family and grant salvation.

Text 4 (NA, p. 821)

Abū Ṭālib Aḥmad ibn Abī'l-Ḥusayn⁴² ibn 'Alī (*az-Zayyāt*) says: The chapter (*dhikr*) on rhubarb (*rībās*) was found on a piece of paper added to the leaves of the book from which I copied this copy. I do not know whether it belongs to what the author of this book has said or not; I have just copied it as I found it.

³⁹ I.e., the pharmacists do this under these petty kings: obviously the making of both the great antidote and the *shūlthā* needs royal patronage because of the complexity of the recipe and its sometimes expensive ingredients.

⁴⁰ I.e., the Persians had ignored the Nabateans and are now themselves ignored.

⁴¹ I.e., because the Arabs were able to conquer such a magnificent kingdom.

⁴² In a variant Abī is missing.

The original of this book was not (bound as) volumes (*dafātīr*) with leaves attached to each other (*muttaṣilat al-waraq*). No, it was on flyleaves, jotted together (*ḡuhūr mu'allafa mutawāliya*). The enumeration of these herbs and the stories about them were on leaves of parchment (*julūd*), some of which were written, some blank. The chapter on rhubarb was on a leaf (*ruq'a*) bound together with some leaves from this book in the writing of Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn Waḥshiyya.

I did not want to leave it aside, so I copied it (into the book), but still I think that this is not the right place to mention rhubarb because the author of the book was discussing at this place hot (*hārra*) and pungent (*hīrīfa*) herbs, whereas rhubarb is not originally one of the herbs and it is sour (*hāmid*), cold (*bārid*) and thirst-quenching (*mutfīn*),⁴³ so I think that this is not its place.

Text 5 (NA, pp. 1131–1132)

Abū Ṭālib Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Abdalmalik az-Zayyāt, the narrator (*al-ḥākī*) of this book from Abū Bakr Ibn Waḥshiyya has said: In the original of Ibn Waḥshiyya, there was at this place a blank space of some twenty double-pages.

This was so because Ibn Waḥshiyya did not dictate this book to me like he dictated other books which he had translated into Arabic. Of this book I took some eighty double-pages of my writing from his dictation. Before his death he admonished his widow to give me all the books he left behind and she did so.⁴⁴

Among these books was this book of the *Nabatean Agriculture*. I copied it from his original, and in that original there was at this point a blank space of twenty double-pages. I think that this must have been for one of two reasons. Either there was something that was left away in the Nabatean book and Ibn Waḥshiyya consequently left

⁴³ For *mutfīn* see.

⁴⁴ A common topos in occult and esoteric literature (see, e.g., Weisser 1980: 156) is that the text is given as a legacy (*waṣīyya*) of the master to his disciple, often called his "son". In the case of the *Nabatean Agriculture*, the situation seems different, though, and I am prepared to take this at face value. In most esoteric texts, the legacy is mentioned in order to underline the importance of the text and to bolster the authority of the disciple. **Texts 4–5**, on the contrary, seem, in a sense, to undermine the authority of Ibn az-Zayyāt.

there a blank, as he found there to be a blank in the Nabatean original, or he found there a passage on wine and a description of its cure and its benefits and he hated to translate this from Nabatean into Arabic because there would have been there an explanation of something that is forbidden (in Islam).

Abū Bakr Ibn Waḥshiyya had an inclination towards the doctrine of the Sufis and he followed their Way, and he would have hated that after his death a long passage dedicated to something forbidden would be found and this could be why he did not translate it. This might be the reason, although it is possible that there is a third reason which I do not know of, because Abū Bakr did not mention why he had left this passage blank without writing anything on it. I did not notice it while he was still alive.

This is the last thing I found in the chapter on vines. After that, there came in the original a chapter on trees after the blank, and I have copied that as it was.

Text 6 (NA, pp. 876–879)

Some Persian or Georgian (*kurj*) or Baylaqānian or Pahlavian (*al-Fahlawiyya*) may now say to us: “You claim that the aubergine will be away (*yaghīb*) for three thousand years and then appear, you say, for the same time. Yet, we cannot see this in our country. Nay, we see the aubergine appearing for us always. We sow it and plant it and cultivate it and harvest it, eating it either raw or cooked. Likewise, the people of the country of Tatar eat it throughout the year and so do also the Pahlavians, the Georgians and the *Murj*, who eat it even more than the Tatars. They have been eating it for thousands of years⁴⁵ and it has never been absent!”

Now, we answer this by saying that in (our words) “it disappears and it appears” there is a deeper meaning which (only) the wise and clever are able to comprehend. We did not aim our words at you, O people of these nations! We aimed them at our kind among our nation (*tāʾifā*) and at people who investigate (*baḥṭh*) deep and recondite things (*ghawāmiḍ al-umūr*). You, by my life, may be intelligent and

⁴⁵ Literally: for three thousand years and three thousand years and three thousand years.

we do not want to defame you, but you do not know these recondite sciences (*al-ghawāmid min al-ʿulūm*).

When we speak about this appearing and disappearing, we do not aim at the obvious sense (*zāhir*). The proof for this is that you must realize that we know that the aubergine never stops appearing and existing in your country and that you eat it continuously without running out of aubergine. How could you then think that this would have gone unnoticed by us so that we would say that it sometimes appears and sometimes disappears while we see you having it always, without interruption! Your reason should have guided you to understand that there is another meaning behind what we say and that there is an ample benefit in it for those who understand it.

Know then that the meaning of our saying that it disappears and appears is not that there would be none of it at all on the face of earth. No, there is something which we know among ourselves and which intelligent people know who are able to invent sciences (*mustanbiṭū l-ʿulūm*) and who ponder upon them, namely those whose habit it is to think and examine things. Georgians, *Murj* and Baylaqānians, on the other hand, are not patient enough to think about anything or to study things to which they are pushed by their sensations and which they grasp (*yudrikūnahu*) by sense perception. When it comes to ratiocination (*fikr ʿaqlī*) and deducing something (*istikhrāj li-shayʿ*), this they have never attained and will never attain.

Know then, O people of reason and investigation and invention of sciences, you lovers of wisdom that the Baylaqānians and Tatars and Georgians and *Murj* are not people to whom any of the secrets of secret sciences should be revealed, nor any of its obvious meanings either, because they have weak intellects (*ʿuqūl*). When something comes to a weak intellect which does not recognize it, it will become confused and troubled. The owner of a weak intellect will find there curious meanings and states (*ḥālāt*) which he will laugh at when speaking about them, because he is not naturally disposed to understand them nor does he comprehend them through his knowledge. He does not know anything nor does he know that he does not know anything. In this, he is equal to a beast (*bahīma*).

Now, what our nation (*tāʾifa*) has said about the aubergine appearing for three thousand years and disappearing for another three thousand years is true. This disappearing and appearing contains a benefit when it comes to the harm and benefit of eating aubergine and one who eats it should know this. Now, most people eat aubergine so

most people would need to know this, but one who avoids it and never eats it at all can well do without this knowledge. Yet we must act according to the majority and when something benefits them, it is called beneficial (in general). Those who refuse to eat aubergine are like the exception (*shudhūdhi*) upon which one does not act. Thus, stories about its benefits and harms are very general in their benefit and have an important place.

The explanation of this is related to our saying that the Moon and Saturn share in the aubergine. This is an allusion (*ishāra*) to its nature (*ṭabʿ*) and its nature points to its effects. Because of this, Dawānāy, the Lord of Mankind, said: “You should repeatedly think of my words and search for what I mean with them. You should not slightly pass them by because then you will miss benefits that are (hidden) behind them.”

I, Qūthāmā, say this to those who will read this: Those who search for knowledge and wisdom should not think slightly of the words and fables (*khurāfāt*) of the Kasdānians. They present a great wisdom in the guise of fables, the major (i.e., obvious) part of which are absurdities. This is (only) their device (*hīla*) against the foolish, so that these would shy away from their sciences if they are ignorant. Yet if they (i.e., the readers) are intelligent they will not shy away like asses and other beasts (*bahāʿim*) who get startled by the slightest of sounds and movements. Nay, they will stay firm and patient, considering (what they see) and then they will find out something which makes them happy and benefits them greatly.

The three thousand years during which they said the aubergine will disappear are those attributed to Saturn and they are the period of harm because Saturn is nefarious (*naḥs*) and being nefarious means being harmful. The three thousand years during which they are attributed to the Moon are the period when the aubergine is not harmful. This harm refers to its effects on the body of the one who eats it. During this period when the aubergine is not harmful, it is beneficial for its eaters because every nourishment which is not harmful for people is beneficial to them and to be praised, not avoided.

These three thousand years are a symbol (*ramz*) for three months, which form one of the seasons of the year. You know that there are four seasons, each consisting of three months. The first season of the year is spring, which starts when the sun first comes (*nuzūl*) to the beginning of the sign of Aries (*bi-raʿs buj al-ḥamal*). Likewise, Saturn is the first because it is in the highest sphere. This is also in

accordance with it being the first thing (*awwal al-ashyāʾ*) but it would take a long time to explain this. This first season, thus, belongs to the first of the celestial bodies and it is a season when the aubergine is harmful to those who eat it. It (the metaphor of the three thousand years during which the aubergine disappears) is as if to forbid them to eat it during these three months attributed to Saturn because it is obviously harmful for those who eat it because this season is hot and wet (*ḥārr raṭb*) and the aubergine is likewise hot and wet in the beginning, though dry in its final effects. It is harmful because of its nature (*ṭabʿ*) but there is also another harm in this season because of a special property in it.

After spring (? *lam yadkhul baʿd faṣl ar-rabiʿ*)⁴⁶ comes the season of summer, three months, which are the three thousand years during which the aubergine appears. They are attributed to the Moon which is auspicious (*saʿd*), and during this time the aubergine is no longer harmful. It is as if they had said that one should beware of eating aubergine during spring, for three months, but eat it during summer, three months, avoid it again in autumn, three months, and eat it in winter, three months. Thus, the period of its disappearance is when it is harmful and the period of its presence is when it is beneficial. Thus it goes through different times.

Know that although this already was an explanation and an interpretation, yet there is another explanation and interpretation which is longer. The explanation which is the real explanation (*waʾsh-sharḥu lladhī huwa sh-sharḥ*) is that it is harmful (? *li-man ṣāra yaḍurru*) during spring, which is hot and wet, and useful during the summer, which is hot and dry, thus agreeing with the nature (*ṭabʿ*) of the aubergine which is hot and dry. There is a problem in this, yet its harm and benefit are not dependent on (*mabnīy*) the primary qualities (*ṭabāʾiʿ*) of the seasons. Nay, they depend on the humours (*akhlāt*) of the human body, viz. blood, phlegm and the two biles. We are, after all, interested in the benefits and harms to people, not in discussing the essences of things in themselves;⁴⁷ we have no need of that, knowing that our lifetime would be too short for that in any case. I wish we could even comprehend its harms and, especially, benefits: how could we think of penetrating deeply into anything else (since we cannot even comprehend all its practical benefits and harms)!

⁴⁶ The text seems corrupt here.

⁴⁷ I.e., the book has a practical orientation, not a theoretical one.

Because of this, we should study human nature (*ṭabīʿa*) and the states of the body and soul concerning these things, which may be harmful or beneficial to people. Mentioning stars and other things in these matters is only a curtain and a veil (*sawātir wa-ḥujub*) spread on things beneficial or harmful.⁴⁸ This is the truth revealed without stinginess or concealment and this is the (meaning of the) symbol (*ramz*) concerning the aubergine.

⁴⁸ This passage stresses the primacy of the balance of human nature: humours and elements are what really matters, not the stars.

CHAPTER THREE

THE WORLD AND THE GODS

3.1. *The World*

The worldview of the *Nabatean Agriculture* is based on contemporary theories of natural science, but Qūthāmā is far from being a qualified scholar, and the opinions expressed in the text are often based on only half-digested Aristotelian and Neoplatonic views on science and philosophy. Although there is no direct interdependence, there is a certain overall similarity between the worldview of the *Nabatean Agriculture* and Balīnūs' *Sirr al-khalīqa*; the latter is, though, a much more systematic exposition of cosmological doctrines. It should be emphasized that the general scientific and philosophical context of the *Nabatean Agriculture* is, thus, tightly tied together with Greek philosophy: the theory of primary qualities and elements, as well as of astral influences belong to the Greek tradition as it was received in the Near East since Late Antiquity. As this forms the background of all contemporary philosophical theories, pagan, Christian and Islamic, it does not help us much in dating the ideas of the text. I have not referred to the historical connections with Greek philosophical schools, especially since the *Nabatean Agriculture* does not belong to any school tradition but remains outside strictly academic activities and the text does not enter into a dialogue with contemporary philosophy, be it pre-Islamic or Islamic. Its worldview is also not without contradictions, which also places it outside the scholastic tradition. These internal contradictions are probably not so much due to the polygenetic nature of the text but to the semi-learned character of its author(s).¹

The world is basically divided into a supernal and a lower world (e.g., NA, p. 1327); the lower world could be defined as the space between the “end of the body of the earth” until “the lowest limit

¹ Tubach (1986): 40–41, calls Babylonia “ein philosophisches Entwicklungsland.” Though Tubach is speaking about B.C. Hellenistic times, this also holds true for later centuries, despite Jewish activities in the Babylonian academies.

of the lunar sphere” (NA, p. 673), and what is above it, is the supernal world. The Sun is the life of both worlds and also the origin of everything that is generated in the lower world (NA, p. 1327)—in the supernal world there is neither generation nor corruption, although everything that does happen there is also due to the actions of the Sun, even though the Sethians would deny this (NA, pp. 228, 244, etc.).² People disagree as to any causality affecting the supernal world. According to Yanbūshād, causality is also found in the supernal world, but others disagreed violently with him (NA, p. 755).³

According to some (NA, p. 951), Adam held the opinion that even the spheres came into being after not having existed⁴ and that only the celestial bodies themselves are eternal *a parte ante*.

The Sun is the soul (*nafs, rūh*) of everything and through it everything lives (NA, p. 244). What upholds everything is the heat (*ḥarāra*) of the Sun and its light and brightness (*diyāʿ*), the Sun being the ultimate source of all light and heat (NA, p. 244). It may be called the heater and mover of everything (*muskhin, muḥarrik*; NA, p. 244). Besides being the soul of the whole world (*nafs al-ʿālam kullīhi*), the Sun is also eternal (*sarmadī*), perpetual (*dāʿim*) as well as that which gives life to All, or the universe (*muḥyī l-kull*), and provides life (*al-mumidd biʿl-ḥayāt*) (NA, p. 757).⁵ It is also the agent and organizer of All (*fāʿil al-kull wa-mudabbiruhu*, NA, p. 874).

The role of the Sun in the affairs of the lower world will be elaborated later on (3.5). In the supernal world, the Moon receives its heat from the Sun and reflects this to the lower world (NA, p. 1053). The astrological relations between the Sun and the Moon are discussed in more detail in NA, pp. 1029–1031, and the Kasdānian system is briefly (NA, p. 1030) compared with what the Indians, Persians, Greeks and Egyptians say, although the astrological ideas of these peoples are not explained in any great detail. After all, it was the ancient Kasdānians who, more than the other nations, devoted attention to astrological phenomena (NA, p. 1043).

The worldview of the text is somewhat ambivalent, gods and natural causes being given somewhat overlapping roles. This tension surfaces in the character of Yanbūshād, who is shown as disagreeing with others about many things (see 3.5 and 4.1). He is said to have

² For the role of the Sun in Balīnūs’ *Sirr*, see Weisser (1980): 182–183, 185.

³ There is a summary of the doctrines of Yanbūshād in NA, pp. 755–759.

⁴ Cf. Balīnūs, *Sirr* I.6, and Weisser (1980): 91.

⁵ Cf. *Rasāʿil Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā* IV: 304 (*ash-shams al-muḥyīya liʿn-nuḥūs*).

derived the cause of every composite body (*al-aj̄sām al-murakkabā*) from the four elements and the primary qualities (natures, *ṭabāʾiʿ*) (NA, pp. 754–755). The same idea is found in **Text 8**, where the elements and the primary qualities are said to affect the plants, and astral influences are pushed aside (cf. also **Text 6**). Yanbūshād is also said to have discussed causality in the supernal world concerning the spheres and the states of the celestial bodies, which would explain the origins (*mabādiʿ*) of moving bodies (*jāriya*) but Qūthāmā refrains from discussing these views because they met with opposition among the Sethians, who are followed by the mob (*ghawghāʾ*), which makes Qūthāmā cautious in his choice of words (NA, p. 755). In the same instance, Qūthāmā briefly explains Yanbūshād’s system of natural sciences (NA, p. 755).

The origin (*aṣl*) of all movement is the movement of the spheres, the two Luminous Ones (see 3.5) and the (other) celestial bodies (NA, p. 244)—the movement of the two Luminous Ones is also singled out in NA, p. 1457. Heating, or fire, and movement are closely connected with each other (NA, pp. 244–245): without movement, there would be no heat—nor anything else, for that matter. Movement is the origin of life: what moves is alive, what does not move is dead (NA, p. 245). Growing, increasing and changing are also specific types of movement (NA, p. 245). What happens in the lower world is caused by the supernal world; the movements of celestial bodies have certain effects in the lower world and these effects are overlaid on top of each other so that what happens in the lower world is the result of the joint effects of all celestial bodies, not just one of them (see **Text 36**).

The supernal world consists of spheres of the seven celestial bodies and the sphere of the fixed stars is above all of them. Thus, the universe may be seen as beginning from the centre (*markaz*) of the earth (NA, p. 244), opening upwards towards the ultimate limit of the sphere of the fixed stars. The exact order of the spheres is nowhere explicitly stated, though one does learn that the sphere of the Moon is the lowest (e.g., NA, p. 673; cf. also 4.2) and that of Saturn the highest (e.g., NA, p. 878). The system is obviously the classical Chaldaean system of Ptolemy (Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, Venus, Mercury, the Moon).⁶

⁶ Cf. Balīnūs, *Sirr* II.6 = Weisser (1980): 177. Note that in *Sirr*, the fixed stars are located below the seven celestial bodies (Weisser 1980: 177), as is also the case in the Jābirian corpus (Kraus 1942–1943, II: 47). For Avicenna, see Nasr (1993): 204.

The spheres of the elements⁷ are not very prominent in the *Nabatean Agriculture*, a text which, basically, is not interested in cosmological theories. However, the spheres of the elements do belong to the worldview of Qūthāmā as may be seen from NA, p. 1055, which refers to the “world” (*‘ālam*) of fire just below the sphere of the Moon.

The beings of the supernal world are simple (*basīf*), not composed (NA, p. 1327) and the substance (*jawāhūr*) of celestial bodies is different from the substances in the world of elements and their primary qualities (NA, p. 757). Qūthāmā also refers to another of his opinions concerning this matter but leaves it unexplained because of the hardships he has had to suffer from Jaryānā⁸ as-Sūrānī and the party of Māsā as-Sūrānī (NA, p. 757).

Although the supernal beings are all simple, they differ from each other in being different celestial bodies (NA, pp. 1278–1279). This is similar to the mutual differences between the elements, one being fire, the others air, water and earth (NA, p. 1279).⁹ Composed bodies have a temporary origin, i.e., they come into being after not having existed but simple bodies cannot come into being after not having existed (NA, p. 1136).

Qūthāmā discusses a possible contrary opinion as to the constitution of the supernal world with its celestial beings (NA, p. 758): One might say that they are composed of the elements and substances but that they have a perfectly equibalanced constitution (*mu^ḥ-tadīlat al-‘itidāl al-ḥaqīqī*) so that none of the natures dominates the others and that there is—obviously because of this perfect balance—no generation, and by implication no corruption, in the supernal world. This perfect balance, one might say, is the cause of the eternity of the supernal world.¹⁰ To this Qūthāmā answers (NA, pp. 758–759) that who claims this has the *onus probandi* against him and he should first prove that absolute balance would cause eternal existence which, he implies, is not the case. The semi-learned character of the text is clearly seen in such passages where the author is unable to provide logical arguments against aberrant opinions but has to disclaim these rather offhandedly.

⁷ For the spheres of the elements in Balīnūs’ *Sirr*, see Weisser (1980): 98–101.

⁸ Read so.

⁹ Philosophically, this shortcut is by no means satisfactory. Cf. the discussion on the soul in 3.4.

¹⁰ The equibalance of primary qualities in the lower world is the origin of “laudable spirituality” (*ar-rūḥāniyya al-mamdūḥa*; NA, p. 755).

In this passage (NA, p. 758), Qūthāmā, following here Yanbūshād, takes a very “scientific” view on astral phenomena. Elsewhere in the book, celestial bodies are seen as gods, and, as we have already mentioned, there is an overall tension between the divinity of celestial bodies, whose will may be influenced through prayers (see 4.3), and the mechanical, involuntary action of the stars which, taken to extremes, would lead to a kind of astral fatalism. The tension was noted by Qūthāmā, according to whom (NA, p. 748) some of the ancient sages believed in the involuntary, others in the voluntary and deliberate action of the astral deities. Some say that their action is natural (*‘alā sabīl at-ṭab‘*) but deliberate (NA, p. 748).

Qūthāmā says that the ancients called the sphere “the Maker of Wonders” (*fā‘il al-‘ajā‘ib*) and they called it a god in relation to what is below it, calling it *maḥbūrāy* and *jābūrā* (NA, p. 757).

The theme of ascension to heaven, or the spheres, which is very common in late paganism, Christianity and Islam,¹¹ seems to be almost completely lacking in this text, which is obviously connected with the fact that the astral deities are not portrayed as actual persons but, at least often, more or less mechanical, involuntary actors. There is, however, one intriguing reference to ascension, found in the chapter discussing vine and attributed to Adam (NA, p. 917):¹²

So also is the place (*buq‘a*) on earth where vine coils on date palm and this coincides with a stream of sweet water, running so that the vine and the date palm grow on its bank. There should be a great and round lote tree (*sidra*) sixty cubits away and the soil should be either completely red or white but free of all other colours. A place like this is the mother of all other places and the basis of attaining to the favour of the Sun and the proximity of the Moon.—This is the property of that kind of place only if this happens by coincidence, not according to the purpose of someone who has made it so.

A place like this is a place for ascension (*sullāq*) to the great sphere (*al-falak al-‘aẓīm*) and this place is the place of the source of eternal and continuous life (*yanbū‘ al-ḥayāt ad-dā‘imat al-qā‘ima*) and this place is pure in a perfect way. As it is opposite the island of the satans (*jazīrat ash-shayāṭīn*), it is the beginning of manifestation (*mabda‘ az-zuhūr*) of the lights which illuminate without burning. When a human being comes there and draws the lines of the Sun (*khuṭūṭ ash-Shams*), this will provide him security when he comes into contact with the holy ones (*al-qiddīsīn*)

¹¹ Cf. Hämeen-Anttila (2001).

¹² A few pages later, NA, pp. 919–920 (see 3.4), the text discusses the ascent of the soul. Cf. also **Text 25**.

which appear there and whom none should be afraid of. Yet it is in the nature (*ṭabʿ*) of all people to be startled when something to which they have not become used suddenly appears to them and their soul (*nufūṣ*) shies from witnessing it.

The solar lines (*al-khuṭūṭ ash-shamsiyya*), through a special property, refrain from startling in an injurious way because the Sun, as we know, is the Soul of both Worlds (*nafs al-ʿālamayn*), the supernal and the lower, and the cause of the glow of all glowing ones and the light of all luminous ones and the wiping-away of all darkness. Yet we are in the world of darkness and thus, when our eyes miss the light, we need to refresh (*nuʿallil*) our soul by what takes its place so that our soul remains as it is without decaying.¹³

This passage seems to be quite unique in the text. Qūthāmā does, in effect, seem to hint at a symbolical explanation of this passage (NA, p. 918).

The lower world is the world of elements and everything in it is composed (*murakkab*) of them. The three genera, animals, plants, and minerals, are said to be the “children of the elements” (*awlād al-ʿanāṣir*)¹⁴ and the four elements themselves “like the children of the (other) celestial bodies after the two Luminous Ones or together with them” (*waʿl-ʿanāṣir al-arbaʿa ka-awlād al-kawākib baʿd an-Nayyirayn aw maʿa an-Nayyirayn*; NA, p. 704)—Ṣaḡhrīth, on whose authority this passage is given, emphasizes that the shades of meanings in these prepositions are of vital theological and philosophical importance and that there is a disagreement concerning these expressions “in our nation” (*tāʾifa-tinā*), i.e., the Nabateans. He also notes that the detailed difference between “after” and “together with” is connected with a major religious principle (*aṣl min uṣūl ad-dīn ʿazīm*; NA, p. 704—cf. 3.5).

The basic components of the sublunar world are the four primary qualities which, when mixed together, become the four elements from which everything in the world of generation and corruption consists. The primary qualities affect bodies in the same way as is usually found in Aristotelian theory, heat ascending, dryness shrinking, etc. (e.g., NA, p. 1480). The composed things may further be divided into simple compounds of the first grade and further compounds of

¹³ I.e., the souls of human beings are in need of supernal light. When taken from it and thrown into the world of darkness and matter, our souls need to be refreshed with the light of the Sun shining into our world—and with wine, as explained later in the text.

¹⁴ The elements are respectively called, e.g., in NA, p. 1278, the “mothers” (*ummahāt*) of the three genera.

compounds (*murakkab al-murakkab*), etc. (NA, p. 1280). This explains the existence of various genera and subgenera (NA, p. 1280). In this passage, the text emphasizes measures (*maqādir*) which are the same as quantities (*kammiyyāt*): the number of the parts of each element is what explains its specificity (NA, p. 1280), thus coming closer to the elaborated system of the Jābirian corpus,¹⁵ where measures are of vital importance, especially in the *Kitāb al-Miẓān*.

Of the four primary qualities, the hot and wet qualities are connected with life, the cold and dry with death: “the state of a living being when absolutely cold is called death” (NA, p. 245). The primary qualities join to become an individual body (*jism*) which may also be called substance (*jawhar*), the primary qualities being accidents of that substance (NA, p. 1327). Everything corporeal (*jismānī*) is, in its substance, cold, heavy and dead (NA, p. 245). The primary qualities are not found in abstraction in nature but only as composed into elements (NA, p. 674).

The elements provide the beings with their matter but equally central is the form (*sūra*) which defines the boundaries and limits of each being, which concern its length and width, as well as the time of its remaining and, after that, perishing (NA, p. 676).

The causes for the coming-to-be of things in the lower world are two, not four as in standard Aristotelian theory: the first, i.e. the efficient, cause is the Sun (and the other celestial bodies), the second, i.e. the material cause to use Aristotelian terms, are the four primary qualities which become mixed with each other to make a being composed of elements under astral influence (NA, pp. 677, 748, 1327). All composed beings and their movement are thus due to astral influence and the joining together of the elements (NA, pp. 755–756). All composed beings come to be thanks to the continuous circular movement (*dawarān*) of the celestial bodies and their heating of the cold and wet, earthy elements (NA, p. 676). The heating and cooling effects of the celestial bodies are the cause of the changes of sublunar beings from one state into another (NA, p. 676).

The differences in form (*sūra*), nature (*ṭabʿ*), temperament (*mizāj*), composition (*tarkīb*), acts (*ʿfʿl*), and faculties (*quwā*) as well as taste (*taʿm*), odour (*rīḥ*), colour (*lawṇ*), density (*kathāfa*), delicateness (*laṭāfa*), thickness (*ghilaẓ*), thinness (*diqqa*), lightness (*khiffa*), heaviness (*thiqal*)

¹⁵ See Kraus (1942–1943) II: 187–303.

and external measures are thus due to the elements and movements of the celestial bodies (NA, p. 677).¹⁶

According to some (NA, p. 1280), the form is as eternal (*qadīm*) as the four elements. Others, however, and these Qūthāmā calls “people of the truth,” *ahl al-ḥaqq*, say that the elements are eternal, whereas the form is only subsequent to the elements and follows from their mixture (*imtizāj*; NA, p. 1280), and thus the form is also perishable.

The manifold nature of the world and the things therein is caused by the mixing of the elements in certain quantities and the effect of the stars and their positions at the moment of the mixing. As the stars rotate in regular cycles, their effects also change regularly and the world thus returns, according to some, to its original state after the grand cycle has passed (NA, p. 25), i.e., when all celestial bodies have returned to the exact position they had earlier been in. There are also some who say that even the fixed stars do wander from one zodiacal sign to another, thus taking part in the regular change of the spheres, but Qūthāmā comments on this (NA, p. 25):

When I say that according to the school of those who say that the fixed stars wander from one sign to another, then this, by my life, is a case which can be strongly doubted. Some of our ancestors have taken this opinion while others have refuted it. Both parties have many arguments in favour of their claim. Yet this is not the right place to discuss this in detail and I will return to my discussion of the olive tree.

When something comes to be (*kawn*), there is a certain constellation (*tashakkul*) of the sphere, the celestial bodies have certain relations with each other and this happens under a certain ascendant (*ṭāli*^c) (NA, p. 302). This is the first cause (*as-sabab al-awwal*) of all accidents (*ʾaʿrād*) that befall an animal, a plant or a mineral (NA, p. 302). The constellation itself is how it effectuates its action (*wa-dhālika t-tashakkul bi-ʿaynihi fāʿilu fʿlin-mā yūjibuhu bi-fʿlihi*; NA, p. 302), i.e., it does not need any medium or means for its action.

The spontaneous generation in the beginning was caused by the original movement of the celestial bodies after which normal procreation has become the usual method of coming into being (NA, p. 676).¹⁷ This seems to be the only reference to the first creation,

¹⁶ For a French translation of the discussion of colours, odours and tastes in the *Nabatean Agriculture*, see Fahd (1998): 121–165.

¹⁷ This passage is untypically close to Balīnūs in tenor.

a notion familiar from, e.g., Balīnūs' *Sirr*. Contrary to Balīnūs, though, the *Nabatean Agriculture* does admit the possibility of later spontaneous generation, too (see 3.3 and section 5).¹⁸

The influence of the celestial bodies in the present world is technically caused by the emanation of some force through their rays falling (*wuqūʿ*) on the earth (NA, p. 302). This is the efficient cause (*as-sabab al-fāʿil*) of all changes (NA, p. 302).

This influence, however, does not work independently, but the things upon which this influence falls have to be receptive to it; otherwise the influence will not become operative (*lam yatimma l-fīlu walam yanfudh*; NA, p. 303), which explains why all species do not react to astral influences similarly at a given moment: otherwise all individuals should, of course, react in the same way because all of them are under the same constellations of the sphere.

The effects of both the fixed and the wandering (*thābita, mutahayyira*) stars have also to be analysed according to the celestial mansions in which they are located and, of course, the final results are dependent on the joint action of all these various factors (NA, p. 299). The twelve zodiacal signs are each related to an element and a primary quality (NA, p. 299), each element having a specific relation with three signs. The zodiacal signs (*burūj*) may thus be grouped according to the elements with which they have a particular relation, in the following way (NA, p. 50):¹⁹

watery (*māʾiyya*) signs: Cancer (*as-Saraṭān*), Scorpio (*al-ʿAqrab*) and Fishes (*al-Ḥūt*).

airy (*hawāʾiyya*) signs: Gemini (*al-Ḥawzāʾ*), Balance (*al-Mīzān*), Aquarius (*ad-Dalw*).

earthy (*arḍiyya*) signs: [Taurus (*ath-Thawr*), Virgo (*al-ʿAdhrāʾ*), Capricorn (*al-Ḥady*)]²⁰

fiery (*nāriyya*) signs: Ram (*al-Ḥamal*), the Archer (*al-Qaws*), Leo (*al-Asad*)

The changes in the places of the fixed stars provide a cyclical, overall frame for the existence of the universe. This grand cycle is further

¹⁸ For the difference between the original creation and later procreation, see also **Text 41**.

¹⁹ For a similar grouping according to primary qualities, see Balīnūs, *Sirr* II.8.1 (Weisser 1980: 92).

²⁰ The earthy signs are not mentioned in this passage but the system is the regular one so that the addition of these signs is certain. Cf., e.g., Table V in Nasr (1993): 155.

divided into smaller cycles, according to the positions of the seven celestial bodies and their mutual relations. Each shorter cycle is attributed to one of these astral gods. The length of an individual cycle is seven thousand years and each cycle is further divided into seven millennia, each millennium attributable to another astral deity, which shares the influence with the general ruling divinity of the cycle (cf. **Text 2**).²¹

The idea of cycles is found in a somewhat different form in another passage (NA, p. 221):

The Lord Dawānāy has told us about this change²² and said that in every 1800 years everything that has changed will return (to its original state).²³ In the first 900 years things will change and they will then return in the following 900 years.²⁴ Yet it concerns me that no one else has mentioned anything about this. In our opinion the Lord Dawānāy has spoken rightly and truly and it is astonishing that no one else has realized or known this.

The people of the talismans (*aṣḥāb at-ṭīlismāt*) say that the whole sphere (*li'l-falak . . . fi kulliyatihi*) rises and sinks. With this they mean the greatest sphere which surrounds All and has power on All (*al-falak al-a'zam al-hāwī li'l-kull wa'l-qāhir li'l-kull*). All (other) spheres change according to its change in this rising and sinking. The range of this rising and sinking is nine degrees (*daraj*), which means a change of one degree for every hundred years.

This second opinion would verify the words of our Lord Dawānāy that the perceived total change will take place in 1800 years because the sphere rises nine degrees in 900 years and then every change will return to what had been when 1800 years have elapsed. The perceived change will happen when 900 years have elapsed.

The world is eternal (NA, p. 51):

The world will never be annihilated (*laysa yantaḥī*) and it will not perish (*lā yabīdu*) nor disappear (*lā yaḍmaḥill*) but it is eternal (*dā'im*) and when there is some increase in something, there will also be a respective decrease. It will preserve its form (*sūra*) for all eternity (*abada l-ābidīna*)

²¹ Cf. also **Text 19**.

²² Viz. that in ancient times the Sun was in the beginning of Aries on the first of Nīsān, see NA, p. 220.

²³ This and the next sentence are very clumsy in the original and have been clarified in the translation.

²⁴ It is perhaps to be connected with the idea of these cycles that one may also perceive a certain idea of development in the knowledge of humankind (e.g., NA, p. 349): usually mediaeval sources, especially the occult ones, tend to look back in time to a golden period of ancient wisdom. On the other hand, though, the prophets of ancient times (4.1) were intellectually superior to people of the present time.

wa-dahra d-dāhīrīn), without cessation nor beginning or end (*bi-lā zawāla wa-lā btidā'a wa-lā ntiḥā'*), in the same way as those which support it are also without an end.

However, every individual in the sublunar world is perishable (NA, p. 656: “all composed things dissolve and become separated into what they had been generated from;” cf. also NA, p. 649). Thus, the elements are eternal but the forms they take are subject to the law of generation and corruption, the generation of one thing by necessity involving the corruption of some other thing. The corruption may concern only the form (*sūra*) or something more (*fawqa dhālika*), i.e., the loss (*dhaḥāb*) of the substance and the form, which may be called complete (*al-batta*) vanishing (*thawā*) and perishing (*buṭlān*) (NA, p. 1033), which refers to decrease and illnesses on the one hand (loss of the form) and death on the other (loss of the form and the substance). The text makes it clear, though, that perishing does not mean annihilation (*talāshī*) of things: they only lose their form while their matter, or substance, changes into something else (*istihāla*).²⁵ Complete annihilation is, on the contrary, neither intelligible nor known to have ever happened (*ghayr ma'qūl wa-lā ma'lūm*) and it would be impossible (*muḥāl*) (NA, p. 1033). As it is impossible for things to come out of nothing, it is equally impossible for them to become nothing after having existed. Matter is, in this sense, eternal and imperishable, only the form and the specific mixture of the elements in an individual thing is perishable and all things, indeed, by necessity, must perish.

Change of composite bodies in the sublunar world is eternal and it is caused by the effects of the movement of the celestial bodies and their mutual influence (NA, p. 1032) and as change is equal to movement, one may also say that everything in the sublunar world is in a constant state of movement (NA, p. 245). The supernal world, on the contrary, is free of any change or corruption. The phenomena which we may perceive of as changes and which parallel and regulate earthly changes—such as the eclipses of the Moon—do not affect the essence (*dhāt*) of the two Luminous Ones, their accidents (*awāriḍ*) or their substances (*jawāhir*) (NA, p. 1033).

The substance (*jawhar*) of all composed things “from the lowest limit of the lunar sphere (*falak al-qamar*) to the end of the body (*jism*)

²⁵ For the difference between *takawwun* and *istihāla*, see also Ibn Bāja, *Nafs*, p. 21. For the term *naql*, see NA, p. 889.

of the earth” (NA, p. 673), i.e., in the lower world, is composed of the four elements. Composite bodies (*al-ajsām al-murakkabā*) may be classified in three genera, animals, plants and minerals (e.g., NA, pp. 673–674), and these are composed of various amounts of the four elements and the primary qualities behind them. Thus, e.g., in plants water and earth dominate, yet even they are not generated without fire and air (NA, p. 674): all things need by necessity to be composed of all four elements, not merely some of them. Still, water and earth are the two heavy and cold principles (*ruknān*) on which our existence is based (NA, p. 245) whereas air and fire merely enter us (*dākkilāni ‘alaynā*) and are ultimately strangers (*gharībān*) in us (NA, p. 245). One might say that earth is to plants like a mother, water is like nourishment and their first matter—not in the sense of *materia prima*, though—and the remaining two elements like their upbringers (NA, p. 674). If the Sun did not warm our world, it would become what it really is, a world of cold (NA, p. 245), or in other words, death.

However, the Sun sets for the night and one might thus presume that our world would then relapse back to its dead state. This, as we may every night perceive, does not happen. The reason for this is that during the night the other celestial bodies take the place of the Sun and substitute for it (NA, pp. 245–246). This gives the basis for a belief in the effects of the stars, as well, and, as we shall see in 4.4, one may use star- or moon-bathing, *tanjīm*, i.e., letting something be influenced by the rays of the stars and the Moon.

The other celestial bodies, too, help animals and plants to survive through their rays (*shu‘ā‘āt*), warming the air during the night (NA, p. 246). Even the minerals would become corrupt if the Sun was not there during the day and the other celestial bodies during the night (NA, p. 246).

The eternal change in the sublunar world and the constitution of all composed bodies from the same four elements provides the theoretical framework for changing one thing into another; Qūthāmā is obviously primarily interested in grafting and producing new forms of edible plants but his interest crosses here—as so often throughout the text—the boundaries of agriculture and the text also discusses artificial generation of animals and even human beings (cf. **Texts 38, 41–42**).²⁶

²⁶ The generation of artificial man is discussed in section 5.

In addition, natural alterations may change things belonging to the different genera (animals, plants, minerals) into one another, but such changes need much time, some more than the others (NA, p. 1321). **Text 41** gives ample examples of how to use this phenomenon to produce plants which the farmer might be lacking from others (or parts of animal bodies) which he does have (see 3.3).

Change also means that things come to be. The coming-to-be of things indicates that there is something that causes (*muḥdith*) this, as there can be no trace (*athar*) without a Trace-maker (*mu'aththir*), no form (*sūra*) without a Form-giver (*muṣawwir*) nor something organized (*manzūm*) without an Organizer (*nāẓim*) (NA, p. 756, cf. also p. 676). It would also be utterly absurd (*amḥalu l-muḥāl*) to claim that something which is not in their origin (*sinkh*) would come into being out of the mixing of the primary qualities without a known maker (NA, p. 756).

The effective cause for the generation of things out of elements is the warming (*ishkān*) which the two Luminous Ones and other celestial bodies effect through their rays to which the air is receptive (NA, pp. 756–757). This warming also causes air to move in accordance with the eternal circular movement of the celestial bodies (NA, p. 757).

The origin of everything has to be derived from either an accidental action of nature or the deliberate creation by an eternal Creator (**Text 41**). The text argues that an eternal regression of causality is not possible—thus following one of the tenets of Aristotelian science—and, thus, the chain of being must ultimately lead to a cause which is dissimilar to the individual links in the chain itself and not caused by any precedent cause.

The cold and dry qualities dominate this earthly world (*al-ʿālam al-arḍī*; NA, p. 986), the main elements of which are water and earth. Yet they are connected as such with death, not life, and life is made possible only through the elements of air and fire joining water and earth. The heating quality of the rays of the Sun is thus the matter (*mādda*) of life (NA, p. 986).²⁷ This also explains the central role of the Sun in religion. On one occasion, the text mentions the variation of the seasons as a clear proof of the importance of the Sun

²⁷ We might also translate the word *mādda* in many contexts as “principle” or “basic constituent.” I have opted for the translation “matter” in all cases to retain consistency in translation—admittedly at the cost of fluency, though.

(NA, p. 244). Heating is also received from the Moon and the stars, but the heat of the Sun is the strongest of these three (NA, p. 986).

Fire, as an element, forms a world of its own, just below the sphere of the Moon, which also explains why particles of fire tend to ascend (NA, p. 1055; cf. p. 1480). When particles of air are heated and then inhaled by animals, they will mediate the fire to the animals and thus also air may be called the matter of life (NA, p. 1055). Fire, also that which is produced in the lower world by burning, is described in reverent terms which might remind one of Zoroastrianism.²⁸

Individuals are differentiated from each other by at least one difference; if they were identical in all aspects, they would be the same individual, not two different individuals (NA, p. 1281).²⁹ This idea and the whole division of the existing world into three major genera (animals, plants, minerals) and further into species and sub-species, is, of course, firmly Aristotelian, as also the division of animals into irrational (*al-ghayr-nāṭiq*) and rational (i.e. humans; NA, p. 1362).

The humours (*akhlāt*), e.g., NA, pp. 878, 1032, blood, phlegm and the two biles, are not very prominent in the book, although they obviously form a part of the physical views of Qūthāmā. This is mainly due to the point of view: the *Nabatean Agriculture* is a book on plants and their cultivation, not a book of medicine, as the author reminds us often enough, and the humours are more relevant for a discussion of the human body and its mechanisms. Thus, e.g., NA, p. 392, reminds the reader that the discussion of the medicinal effects of various plants and their primary qualities belongs, properly speaking, to books of medicine, not agriculture. The book also has a practical rather than a theoretical orientation. It seems to be for this reason that the text does not give much attention to the temperaments (*amzjā*), either, of the plants (NA, p. 1459), which belongs more to the theoretical than the practical side of botanical studies.

²⁸ It is perhaps worth mentioning that this occurs in a passage belonging to a literary debate (see section 5) exalting the palm tree in terms which resemble the Pahlavi (originally Parthian) text *Draxt-i Asūwīg*.

²⁹ In discussing the individuality of the celestial bodies (cf. above), the text ignores such theoretical problems.

3.2. *The clime of Bābil and its superiority*

Geographically, the world is first divided into an uninhabited three quarters and an inhabited quarter (*ar-rubʿ al-maskūn*, e.g., NA, pp. 360, 399). The inhabited quarter is further divided into climes, three of which (the climes of Bābil, Māh/Media and India) are often mentioned (e.g. NA, p. 399). The clime of the Sun is situated to the right of the clime of India (NA, p. 399).³⁰

The inhabited quarter also includes deserts. Deserts are “the hated land” (*al-arḍ al-maskhūt ʿalayhā*) and they are so called because Jupiter hates everything that is forlorn and desolate, while loving the prosperous and the cultivated (NA, p. 389). The opposition of Jupiter and Mars is mentioned in this legend (**Text 8**) which, however, may also be interpreted in a symbolical way (see 3.5).

The Nabateans are the best of all peoples, and their clime, that of Bābil, is the best of all climes (e.g., NA, p. 336; cf. also 1.3). The favourable conditions in the clime are seen to have a beneficial effect on the intellectual capacities of the inhabitants who thus become almost a race of their own, superior to the inhabitants of other climes. In comparison to others, they are like gods (e.g., NA, p. 107).³¹ They have a keener intellect and superior mental faculties, although the neighbouring peoples do come close to them (NA, p. 107). This is because Jupiter and Mercury share their domination on this clime³² which has an effect on the characters (*akhlāq*) and dispositions (*ṣajāyā*) of its inhabitants (NA, p. 107). In extremely favourable conditions this may lead to prophecy (NA, pp. 107–108, see 4.2).

The Lord of the Worlds (*rabb al-ʿālamīn*, an Islamic term) has preferred the clime of Bābil, which is the meeting place of two great and sweet-tasting rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, and he cares more about this land than about any other land, even though his care embraces, in general, universally all inhabited and even uninhabited lands (NA, p. 360). The water of the Tigris has a special effect on men through its effect on the blood (NA, p. 106).

³⁰ For the standard division of the world into climes, see, e.g., Ibn al-Faḳīh, *Buldān*, pp. 5–6. Cf. also Nasr (1993): 143–147.

³¹ The philosophers are often said to be like gods in comparison to ordinary people, see, e.g., Ibn Hindū, *Kalīm*, p. 236, cf. Gutas (1993): 503. Cf. also Walbridge (2000): 209, quoting Hermias’ *Commentary on the Phaedrus*.

³² NA, p. 360, though, mentions, besides Jupiter, the Sun, not Mercury, and in **Text 11**, the Sun and the Moon are given in addition to Jupiter.

The clime of Bābil is favoured with its particular special properties. Its soil is nobler than elsewhere, its fruits more tasty, its herbs give best protection against harm and have more benefits than herbs elsewhere (NA, p. 360). The grains that grow there are more nutritious and have a more balanced nature (NA, p. 360). Thus, both the animals and humans that are born and grow up there have a greater power of reason and a more balanced nature (*tibā'*), which is why we see people of other climes flocking to this clime to learn from its inhabitants and to imitate their clothing, attire and manners (NA, p. 360). The accumulation of the benefits of the clime is completed in third-generation inhabitants of this clime (NA, p. 360).

Plants are affected especially by the soil but also by water, air and the warmth of the sun (NA, p. 359). This is the reason why plants may differ from each other in various countries, even though all of them are constituted from the same four elements (NA, p. 1278). All plants are similar to each other in certain respects, yet they differ in others. Their similarity consists of the fact that they first grow, then become decrepit and finally die, and they also produce wood, roots, boughs and leaves (NA, p. 1279). Their differences are related to the species and the individuals within the species (NA, p. 1279). This is why there are plants particular to one region.³³ Plants, and animals, are also effected by the sins committed by people, see **Text 32**.

Very often, the Nabateans and their ancestors are seen as the originators of all knowledge (see also 1.3), but there are a few passages which mention the wisdom of other nations, such as the Egyptians (NA, pp. 1310–1311):

I have found this³⁴ in the book of the *Special properties of curing plants* (*Kitāb khawāṣṣ 'ilāj al-manābit*) by Yanbūshād. When I was one day with Barīshā, the head of the farmers of the city of Bābil and we were speaking about special properties, I happened to mention to him this recipe, thinking that he would not know that and wishing to let him benefit from it, and presenting something novel to him. But it turned out that he knew it quite well and he even said that he had tried it in practice. He said to me that it was not invented or discovered by Yanbūshād, but he had learned it from the inhabitants of the land of al-Wāḥāt (“the Oases”), which is a land next to the land of Egypt,

³³ For examples of such plants, cf. NA, p. 1279, and section 5.

³⁴ Recipes involving live birds that are put in a jar under open sky and kept there for a year. The putrified remains are further handled to produce a powerful paste which is then burned to ashes which are used.

known as the land of the Oases. This action they did in elaborate detail and cured their trees and date palms and plants with it and by this means they flourished. They praise this action and are satisfied with its effects. He said that Yanbūshād was a man who travelled around a great deal in various countries and when he came to al-Wāhāt, he saw its inhabitants make use of this, and he put it into his book.

According to Ibn Waḥshiyya, among the various tribes (*ajyāl*) the Kardānians³⁵ were the most knowledgeable. They, like all Nabateans, used to write in a symbolic way to keep their wisdom preserved for the élite (NA, p. 372; cf. section 2). Not all nations belong to the offspring of Adam, but all Nabateans, such as Kanʿānites, Kasdānians, Ḥasdānians and Sūrānians, do (see **Text 36**). In NA, p. 922, Nahrawānians (*an-Nahriyyīn*) are added to the list of various Nabateans: it is obvious that these lists are not thought to be comprehensive. The authors of the *Nabatean Agriculture*, Yanbūshād, Ṣaḡhrīth and Qūthāmā, are counted specifically among the Kasdānians, who are, thus, the “us” in the book (e.g., **Text 37**). The Kasdānians and the Kanʿānites have an ancient rivalry (**Text 37** and **Text 39**) but, despite this, they do ultimately feel a mutual fraternity (**Text 47**). The Kanʿānites are connected with the river Jordan (*al-Urdunn*, e.g., NA, pp. 538, 1199)³⁶ but they later came to rule Bābil, previously ruled by the Kasdānians, ruling it “even today,” as Qūthāmā says (**Text 37**).

In addition to these Nabateans, one also finds references to the *Jarāmiqa*, the inhabitants of the ancient Assyria. Harranians (*al-Ḥarnāniyyūn*; NA, p. 297) and Ḥīthāmians (NA, p. 723) are both mentioned only once. The *Jarāmiqa*, however, are often mentioned, and in one passage (NA, pp. 1264–1265), they are portrayed as being envious of the Kasdānians and are said to derive their origin not from Adam but from ash-Shāburqān the First.³⁷ In addition, the local inhabitants are often mentioned by the name of their village, such as the Qussīnians, to whom Ibn Waḥshiyya himself also belonged (**Text 2**), or the Qūqānians to whom Qūthāmā belonged (see 4.1).

³⁵ The word Kardānī is intriguing. On the other hand, it reminds one of the Kurds, but it could also easily be emended to *Kazdānī and taken as a variant of Kasdānī. Cf. also 1.3.

³⁶ One might mention in passing that Jordan (*iardna*) is the most ancient name for baptismal water in Mandaic, cf., e.g., Gündüz (1994): 78.

³⁷ The name immediately calls to mind Shāpūr and even more so the book *Shābuhragān*, dedicated to Shāpūr by Mani. Yet again, one must be very cautious with such identifications.

In many cases, such as Sūrānī (mostly in the name of Māsā as-Sūrānī, or other persons given the same gentilicium) or Nahrī (from the town of Nahrawān),³⁸ the reference is to a place well known from Islamic times, too.

A particularly interesting group of Nabateans are the Ninevites. In an addition by Ibn Waḥshiyya (NA, pp. 589–590), it is explained that when Qūthāmā is speaking about Nineveh, he is referring to a country which in the ancient times, during the reign of the Nabateans, lay between the two rivers called by the Arabs the two Zābs. The inhabitants of this area were called Ninevites (*Nīnawīyyīn*) and were counted as a group (*jīl*) of Nabateans. Their region belonged to the clime of Bābil:

These are the Kurds³⁹ who live in the vicinity of a place called Nineveh. Abū Bakr [Ibn Waḥshiyya] says:

Always when he mentions Nineveh in this book, Qūthāmā means the area which in the ancient times, during the reign of the Nabatean kings was between the two rivers which are in our own time known as the two Zābs,⁴⁰ in the area between them and on their banks, up to the mountains.

This group (*jīl*) of Nabateans was known as Ninevites (*Nīnawāniyyīn*). This area is taken to belong to the clime of Bābil and its inhabitants are Nabatean Kurds (*sukkānuhu min an-Nabaṭ al-Akrād*). They live like their⁴¹ neighbours and mix with them (*yukhālīṭūnahum*) in their business but they do not live together with them but separate themselves from them, having their own domiciles.⁴²

This Nineveh⁴³ is not the same as the Nineveh which lies opposite to Mosul.⁴⁴ That area lies in ruins and its people have perished. The reason for their destruction was a flood (*gharaq*), about which they have a long story.

³⁸ For Fahd's attempts to identify the names Māsā, Kāmās an-Nahrī and the gentilicium Qūqānī, see 4.1, notes 4, 29 and 40.

³⁹ The nation of Kurds is often mentioned by Ibn Waḥshiyya as the close neighbours of the Nabateans which, incidentally, is a further proof that he is not describing the marsh area of Southern Iraq with its Mandaeans but a more northern one.

⁴⁰ Ibn Waḥshiyya thus defines Mesopotamia (*fīmā bayn an-nahrayn*) as the area between the two Zāb rivers, not between the Euphrates and the Tigris.

⁴¹ Obviously, the difference is between the Kurds and the "other" Nabateans. For the rather fluid definition of "Nabateans," see 1.3.

⁴² Meaning that the two groups inhabit different but adjacent villages.

⁴³ *An-Nīnawā*, here with an article.

⁴⁴ See Streck (1995). The exact location of this place (32° 45' N) is given in the same source, from Musil, *The Middle Euphrates* (pp. 43–44). See also 1.3.

In addition to the various Nabateans, Qūthāmā mentions other nations which include Persians, Georgians (*kuḡ*), Baylaqānians, Pahlavians (*al-Fahlawīyya*), as well as *Muḡ* and Tatars (see **Text 6**).⁴⁵ Kurds and Persians are often mentioned, as are also Greeks (*al-Yūnāniyyūn*) and Byzantines (*ar-Rūm*).⁴⁶ The Arabs in the text mostly refer to Southern Arabs but sometimes they do include a reference to more Northern Arabs (e.g., **Text 24**); both Arabs and Persians are mentioned in very positive terms in NA, p. 1435, although in **Text 34**, Yanbūshād is said to have criticized them. For him, they were a people governed by Venus and, thus, having neither knowledge nor wisdom. Qūthāmā, on the other hand, speaks very highly of them and refutes this opinion. In NA, p. 1448, one finds an intriguing passage mentioning an Arab from MZDRW^cY⁴⁷ who mentions “our great idol in Mecca.” Mecca seems to have enjoyed some, mainly local, fame as a sanctuary in pre-Islamic times—although its fame was quite obviously exaggerated by Islamic authors⁴⁸—so that this need not indicate a post-7th-century provenance for the passage.⁴⁹ Qūthāmā also gives some occasional references to Egyptians but these are of rather rare occurrence, as are also references to “the Blacks,” and the peoples of India, China, Slavs and Sogdians (e.g., **Text 17**). Spain and some fabulous countries are mentioned in passages dealing with various wonders (see section 5).

Other countries are also occasionally mentioned. Thus, e.g., NA, p. 351, lists Egypt (*Miṣr*), *bilād al-Waqwāq*,⁵⁰ *bilād az-Zanj*, *bilād al-‘arab* and Oman (*‘Umān*), and NA, p. 362, adds India, Kābul and Armenia to the known world. In NA, p. 1280, one finds *az-Zanj*, Kalah, Qashmīr and Sharīza.

⁴⁵ Cf. also Fahd (1998): 226, note 157.

⁴⁶ For all these, see Fahd (1998), Index, s.vv.

⁴⁷ Presumably not to be identified with al-Muzdara‘ in Yemen, for which see Yāqūt, *Muḡam* V: 120.

⁴⁸ For modern criticism of the exaggerated importance of pre-Islamic Mecca, see, e.g., Crone (1987). The revisionist critique of Early Islamic historiography may sometimes be exaggerated but it seems rather clear that Mecca, little known from pre-Islamic sources, cannot have been of such importance as the Islamic texts would have us believe. The Arab prophet needed an Arab sanctuary to go with him into sacred history.

⁴⁹ Cf. also **Text 24**, which mentions Nasr in Tihāma. If we date these passages to pre-Islamic times, they are important testimonies for pre-Islamic Arab religion. However, the debatable dating and unclear textual history of the *Nabatean Agriculture* make it very difficult to use these as early testimonies independent of the Islamic tradition.

⁵⁰ For which, see Tibbetts-Toorawa (2002).

In addition to peoples and tribes that were contemporary with Qūthāmā or Ibn Waḥshīyya, there are often allusions to more ancient peoples and kings (see section 5).

3.3. *Plants and the eternity of the world*

As the world is considered eternal, the species, though not the individuals within these species, are also considered in a sense eternal, although one does come across the idea of the evolution of species, though not in any elaborate, Darwinian sense. Thus, NA, p. 1170:

Know that the nature of many fruits and animals is that they come out so that they are smaller than their fathers but some are quite like them and yet others happen to become bigger than their fathers and thicker and better, as to their mass (*imtilāʿ*).

Animals are usually similar (to their fathers), as are also trees and plants. The similarity which we are speaking about here is not accidental but is a basic similarity which causes greatness or smallness, due to the effects of time and nature upon matter and the existence of this matter, whether in large or small quantities. When an offspring resembles its father according to this similarity and is like him in all matters, both external and internal, then it is said that Nature has reached (its goal) (*iṣābat at-ṭabīʿa*). But if it is dissimilar to him in all matters, both external and internal, it is said that Nature has not reached (its goal) in this but has gone to excess, if the offspring is bigger, or lagged behind, if the offspring is smaller.

That which by Nature reaches (its goal) in animals and plants includes all the special properties of that species (*nawʿ*) of animal or plant. But there are many things among these effects which we do not know. Know this and understand it!⁵¹

This causes some problems to the worldview of the book, and as its overall worldview is static, changes in species and generalities (as against changes in individuals) are difficult to explain. On several

⁵¹ Animals receive little attention in the book, though husbandry and the keeping of poultry and bees are often included in Greek agronomical works, such as Varro, *Rerum rusticarum* II (and also in some Arabic *filāḥa* works, such as *al-Filāḥa ar-Rūmīyya*). The colophon of the *Nabatean Agriculture* (p. 1492) says explicitly that apiculture was not discussed, though some people in Bārimmā, the Nineveh of Bābil and Ḥulwān do keep bees. The other animals—cattle, sheep and various birds—are discussed, the author says, in a separate book but such a book is not among the preserved and known works of the Nabatean Corpus, and Ibn Waḥshīyya adds (NA, p. 1493) that he has never seen such a work by Qūthāmā.

occasions, the text mentions such changes, as the idea, attributed to Adam,⁵² that all cultivated plants derive from wild plants, originally growing by themselves—an idea with which modern science would agree—but this sound idea is refuted by a crude understanding of eternity: if people have always existed, there must always have been plants for them to cultivate, otherwise they would have starved. Thus, plants must have been cultivated since the beginning of time (NA, pp. 1135–1136).

The text does admit that this would be conceivable according to those who believe in the creation of the world *ex nihilo*, the world coming into being after not having been and having a temporal origin, but, the text continues, this was never Adam's opinion nor anyone else's from among the ancient Kasdānians (NA, p. 1136).⁵³ The only way the text can try to save the alleged opinion of Adam is to surmise that the cultivation of some plants might have begun like this, but that would necessitate other plants—and, although this is not openly stated, obviously the majority of cultivated plants—having been cultivated before that, since eternity (NA, p. 1136). For the opinions of the few Kasdānians who held the doctrine of creation, see 3.5.

On the other hand, the text, which is often contradictory, mentions, on the authority of Māsā as-Sūrānī (NA, p. 1341), that all palm trees derive originally from an island in the sea, on the coast of Persia, called Khārkan,⁵⁴ whence people have exported the tree to their own countries. Actually, this is similar to the question of the origin of cultivated plants. A different opinion, namely that palm trees originally derive from al-Yamāma, is quoted by Qūthāmā from an anonymous book of an ancient Kasdānian on date palms and vines (NA, p. 1343).

Individual plants may come into existence either by themselves, from seeds, pits, grains and such things through transformation (*inqilāb*). One may also bury something in the soil to produce a plant and this procedure is called *tawlīd*. In the latter way, putrefaction plays a central role, changing the buried thing under certain conditions into something else according to one's aims (NA, pp. 1327–1328).

⁵² But note that the attribution is refuted, or at least doubted, by Qūthāmā.

⁵³ For early Christian discussions of *creatio ex nihilo*, see May (1994). Cf. also Wolfson (1976): 355–465, and NA, pp. 950–951.

⁵⁴ Cf. Yāqūt, *Muʿjam* II: 337, s.v. Khārak.

The terminology of generation consists of three almost synonymous words: *tawlīd*, *taḥḥīn*, and *takwīn* (see **Texts 41–42**). *Takwīn* is the most neutral of these, meaning merely “making something come into being.” *Tawlīd* is used in reference to specific parts from which something is generated; the difference between the two, though, is not very marked as the *Nabatean Agriculture* does not admit the possibility of *generatio ex nihilo*, so that every *takwīn* has to act on pre-existing materials, the difference between the two merely being that in *tawlīd* one uses materials similar to the product (parts of plants, etc.), whereas *takwīn* seems more general and might, thus, be translated as “creation,” as long as we remember that it is not creation *ex nihilo*. Finally, *taḥḥīn*, “putrefaction,” refers to the exact way, or method, of causing *tawlīd*, i.e., through letting the ingredients putrify in order to produce something new from them.

In *tawlīd*, one may use parts of some plant which one wishes to produce, such as its wood or its leaves, or one may use only other things, not parts of the plant in question (NA, p. 1328). The text describes many such operations in detail, most deriving from an alleged *Book of Tawlīdāt* by Adam (e.g., NA, pp. 1333–1334). Most such experimentations are obviously fantastic and it is little wonder that the text refers (NA, pp. 1329–1330, 1333) to the difficulty of such *tawlīds*, where a minor fault either makes the whole experimentation futile or at least produces something else than was aimed at. Yet one should not forget that the theoretical framework of the Aristotelian worldview would actually make such operations theoretically possible and also that observations do seem to give some evidence for such occurrences: many animals (seem to) generate from the putrefaction of plants (cf. NA, p. 1322). If it is possible that some animals, such as snakes (from hairs), hornets, scorpions, worms or dung beetles (*khanāḥīs*) are generated from other materials, then it should also be possible to generate an artificial animal, even a human being (NA, p. 1322).

Pits and seeds of plants correspond to the semen of animals and they may be called the matter (*mādda*) of the existence of the tree or other plant (NA, p. 648). The seeds of plants, protected by various coverings, have been made by Nature (*aṭ-Ṭabīʿa*) with the assistance of the celestial bodies in a way that they preserve their kind, so that even when each individual (*ashkhāṣ*) must perish the whole species will survive (NA, p. 648). This is why Nature does not care about preserving individual composed things (*murakkab maṣnūʿ*) forever.

Genera and species (*ajnās, anwāʿ*) are preserved, whereas individuals perish (NA, p. 649).

Minerals, on the other hand, may be preserved eternally (NA, p. 649) which, in fact, directly contrasts the often-made claim that everything in the sublunar world perishes (see 3.1). The worldview of this semi-learned text is not always unambiguous. Qūthāmā was, however, aware of the underlying contradiction; according to the text, some of the ancients said that even the minerals, including those which may be melted (*adh-dhāʿibatu biʿn-nār*), would in time perish and dissolve into their constituent elements (NA, p. 649). Others, however, said that even some plants and animals may survive forever (NA, p. 649; cf. NA, pp. 1069–1070, translated in section 5).

Among those who believed in the final dissolution of everything, including minerals, was Yanbūshād (NA, p. 649). Also Qūthāmā himself absolutely (*alā l-ittlāq*) disclaims the eternity of any being composed of elements (NA, p. 649). The Sethians, on the contrary, call Qūthāmā a mad lunatic (*al-majnūn al-muwaswas*) and claim that there are many things that are eternal (NA, p. 649).

Each genus, as well as each of the elements from which sublunar beings are composed, has a particular form, and within the genera each species (*nawʿ*) and specimen (*shakhs*) has in addition a form of its own (NA, p. 758).

The three genera may be organized in hierarchies,⁵⁵ some species of each being higher or lower than the others. Thus, the palm tree in many ways resembles animals and even human beings and is thus also susceptible to more rapid changes than other plants (NA, p. 1358). The similarities of the palm tree and human beings are often mentioned in the chapter on the palm tree, and there is even a reference to the mutual love of palm trees (NA, p. 1360). Likewise, the palm tree is, like trees in general, similar to an inverted human being (e.g., NA, pp. 360, 759, 1396).⁵⁶ The date palms are superior to other plants in also having sensitive faculties (*nufūs hammāma ḥassāsa*; NA, p. 1388). It is specially favoured by the Moon and, consequently, it

⁵⁵ Cf. Balīnūs, *Sirr* V.3.4 (Weisser 1980: 130).

⁵⁶ In Balīnūs, *Sirr* IV.3.2 (Weisser 1980: 117), the fruit-bearing trees are said to resemble men and large quadrupeds, such as lions and horses. Plato, in his *Timaeus*, compared man with an inverted tree and this comparison was well known to Arabs even outside the limited circle of professional philosophers, as seen, e.g., in al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj* §1395. Cf. also Green (1992): 167, and *Rasāʿil Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā* II: 182.

is even more beneficial to man than the olive, which is the favourite of Saturn (NA, p. 1405; cf. **Text 51**).

Plants may be divided into six classes, each belonging specifically to one of the six celestial bodies, the Sun being the Universal Agent (*fā'il al-kull*) and thus equally involved in all sublunar things and their existence (NA, p. 874).⁵⁷ Some plants fall within the dominion of two celestial bodies, in addition to the Sun, which in such cases is the third. Thus, the aubergine falls between two categories, as it is between those plants which grow on a stalk and those which spread on the surface of the earth and thus the Moon and Saturn contend over its dominion (NA, p. 874; for the symbolic explanation for this contention, see section 2). On the other hand, it is said that the Moon is the specific ruler (*wāṭī*) of all plants whereas the Sun dominates all beings (NA, p. 915), not only plants (but cf. **Text 13**).

The vine, which belongs to the special dominion of the two Auspicious Ones, Jupiter and Venus, is a particularly blessed plant (NA, p. 915) which also explains the great benefits of wine (see also 3.4). As Kāmās an-Nahrī said in his poem on its superiority, it makes joyous all those who use its products and drinking its juice makes one forget one's sorrows (NA, p. 915). The many benefits of the vine and its products are listed in this eulogy (NA, pp. 915–916). Adam extolled it, too, as did all ancient sages (NA, pp. 917–918). Among these ancient sages are mentioned (NA, p. 922) the Kasdānians, the Kan'anites, the Nahrawānians, the Sūrānians “and others among the different tribes (*qiyāl*) of the Nabateans.”

All living beings have souls. The plants have souls or faculties by which they grow. Their capacity to attract (*yajtdhibu*) nutrition is instrumental in the process of attracting fine, earthy particles, mixed with water, which the plant uses to grow, absorbing and transforming them into itself. This capacity to attract nutrition is not named here, but it obviously refers to the attractive faculty, (*nafs jādhiba*). Growing happens due to another faculty responsible for growth (*nafs nāmiya*) (NA, pp. 359–360).

⁵⁷ Balīnūs (*Sirr* IV.3.2, cf. Weisser 1980: 117) divides plants into five classes.

3.4. *The Soul*

The soul is discussed in a long passage, almost an independent tractate, inserted within the chapter on the vine (NA, pp. 915–933),⁵⁸ the joyous effect of wine providing an excuse for this digression.

The particular souls (*al-anfus al-juz'iyya*) within us are related to the Universal Soul (*an-nafs al-kulliyya*), i.e., the Sun, and they follow its movements and are derived from it (NA, p. 918). In good scholastic manner, Qūthāmā quotes here a possible contrary opinion: everyone is unanimous that parts of a simple (*basīṭ*), not composed, being must by necessity be similar with each other and with the totality. As individual, particular souls differ from each other, they must, thus, be of varying provenances, some deriving from Jupiter, some from the Moon and only some from the Sun (NA, p. 918).

Qūthāmā answers this by saying that the differences arise from something (*amr*) that has occurred to the particular souls and from things (*ashyā'*) that have become attached to them (*qāranat' hā*) after they have been separated from the Universal Soul (NA, p. 918). These things are the bodies (*ajsām*) into which the souls have set themselves (*sakanat fihā*): the differences are due to the differences in their abodes (*maskanihā*; NA, p. 918). The bodies, further, differ from each other due to the nourishment they absorb (NA, pp. 918–919).

Bodies are susceptible to increase (*ziyāda*) and decrease (*nuqsān*) in quantity (*kammīyya*), whereas souls do not accept any change in their substance (*jawhar*; NA, p. 919). Thus, any changes in souls must derive from changes in bodies (NA, p. 919). The soul is, however, not changed in its essence (*dhāt*) but only in its accidents (*'araḍ*) which, on the other hand, are in a continuous, unavoidable process of change (NA, p. 919). In addition to the change of quantity in the body, due to nourishment, another source for changes in the soul are the five senses which are channels (*turuq*) through which sense perceptions find their way into the soul (NA, p. 919). These changes are never substantial nor essential (*jawhariyya dhātīyya*).

⁵⁸ This passage has been studied by Mr. Janne Mattila in the form of a master's thesis (Helsinki) under my supervision (Mattila 2005). The main parts of this thesis, containing a running translation of the whole tractate, will be published by Mattila in *Studia Orientalia* in the near future. For doctrines on the soul in the Jābirian corpus, see Kraus (1942–1943) II: 309–310. For the Arabic translation of Aphrodisias' *De Anima*, see Gutas (1994): 4961. See also Rowson (1988). For Ismā'īlī theories on the soul, see Walker (1992).

Souls may migrate (*intiḡāl*) from one body to another (*ajrām*), although always forgetting their previous state in another body, as they have also forgotten their existence before becoming separated from the Universal Soul (NA, p. 919)—this seems to be the only place where the transmigration of souls is mentioned in the text.⁵⁹

Individual souls may thus be of two kinds. Some have newly descended from above, some have been transmigrating in the world for some time, and the two types are not⁶⁰ alike, the recently descended ones being less receptive to change (NA, p. 919), which in this context means corruption. The souls which descend from above are more knowledgeable and wise and also better in conceiving (*aktharu taṣawwuran*) realities (*ḥaqāʾiq*) (NA, p. 919). Transmigration, on the contrary, causes thickness (*thiḡal*), not in the substance of the soul, but in its movement (NA, p. 919).

According to Adam, if the particular soul throws aside this thickness, it will also rid itself of forgetfulness and it will remember the world in which it used to be, craving it and escaping from the lower world, ascending with the help of the rays of the Sun (NA, pp. 919–920; cf. also 3.1). This ascension would be natural to the soul which would not need any accessories, were it not for the bodily defilement (*tadannus*) which has occurred (NA, pp. 919–920).

Within this theoretical framework, the text next discusses the changes in the soul caused by wine,⁶¹ coming to the conclusion (NA, pp. 920–922) that the joy caused to the soul by wine is different from any other change occurring to it, and hence wine resembles the Universal Soul and is related to it and is specially favoured by the Sun who singles the vine out (*khaṣṣa*) for a gift which it has not given to anything else and takes special care (*ʿināya*) of it.⁶² Joy and

⁵⁹ The idea ultimately derives from Plato (cf. the story of Er in *Republic* X, 614a–621a). The idea of the transmigration of souls was well known both to many Islamic sectarians (see, e.g., Halm 1982: 72–77, 222–226, and 245–265) and to philosophers. One also finds in the *Nabatean Agriculture* a mention of the revival of a dead sage after a period (**Text 19**), which is somewhat similar to transmigration, although here the soul returns to the uncorrupted body it used to inhabit.

⁶⁰ The text here (p. 919, l. 15) reads *mithla*, but one has to emend this to [*laysa*] *mithla*.

⁶¹ For the effects of wine as understood by Avicenna, see Gutas (1988): 184–187.

⁶² The discussion of joy in the *Nabatean Agriculture* resembles the discussion of *saʿāda* “happiness; bliss” in, e.g., ar-Rāzī, *Nafs*, pp. 85–95, as opposed to corporeal pleasures. The discussion in the *Nabatean Agriculture*, however, is more on a philosophical than a religious or ethical level.

rapture caused by wine have their effect only on the soul, without the body sharing in it. The philosophical argumentation behind this is not, however, very convincing and again shows the semi-learned character of the text. Wine is depicted as an almost sacred drink, and the vine as the noblest of all plants (NA, p. 922).

As our particular soul is derived from the Universal Soul, which is the same as the Sun, then the substance (*jawhar*) of our soul is the same as that of the eternal Sun (NA, p. 921). The Nabateans are not, however, unanimous about the particular soul and its source, emanation and origin, but they have various opinions (*madhāhib*) about it (NA, p. 922). They do, however, agree that the Universal Soul is the same as the Sun (NA, p. 922). The discussions concerning the particular soul go back to Ṣardāyā and Ṭāmīthrā, both Kanʿānites, who were astrologers (*ʿālimā l-falak*),⁶³ and even before them to Kāmās an-Nahrī and Adam the Babylonian (*al-Bābīlī*; NA, p. 922). They differed among themselves as to the particular souls but they did agree that they had been separated (*infiṣāl*) from the totality of the (Universal) Soul “which they call its world (*ʿālam*)” (NA, p. 923).

The text proceeds to study whether the division of the particular soul into various faculties (souls, *nufūs*) is a permanent accident (*al-ʿrād ath-thābita*) or merely a transitory one (*al-fāniyat al-bāʿidat al-muntaqila*; NA, p. 923). Ṣardāyā saw division to be a transitory accident (*al-ʿarād az-zāʿil*) because the soul, as such, is not divisible in its substance and essence (NA, p. 923). In his opinion, the concepts of appetitive soul (*nafs shahwāniyya*), irascible soul (*nafs ghaḍabiyya*)⁶⁴ and rational and intelligent soul (*nafs mufakkira ʿaqliyya*) should not be taken as referring to independent things, but they are only faculties (*quwā*) of one, indivisible soul (NA, p. 923).

These faculties are located in specific organs of the body. The faculty located in the highest member (*al-ʿuḍw al-ʿālī*), the brain,⁶⁵ works through discernment and rational thought (*at-tamyīz waʿl-fikr*), that located in the middle member, the heart, works through courage and anger (*an-najda waʿl-ghaḍab*), and that in the lowest member, the liver, works through passion and yearning and is responsible for nourishing the body and, thus, for growth (NA, p. 923). These are

⁶³ They are usually called the two astrologers (*al-munajjimān*, e.g., NA, p. 243).

⁶⁴ Read so instead of the edition's *ʿaṣabiyya*.

⁶⁵ The names of these three members are given on p. 925.

merely separate faculties, not separate souls (NA, p. 923) and they come to be only when the particular soul is joined to a body. When it leaves the body, the separatedness of these faculties ceases (NA, p. 924). The seeming multiplicity of the particular soul is, according to Ṣardāyā's opinion, thus attributable to the multiplicity of bodily organs it works through, not the soul itself, and Ṭāmīthrā, Adam and Kāmās an-Nahrī mainly agreed with him (NA, p. 924). The latter three did not, however, think that there need be specific locations to these faculties because they are self-sufficient (*qā'ima bi-naḥ-sihā*) and thus independent of place (*makān*; NA, p. 924). According to Ṣardāyā's opinion, however, body parts are the *loci* for the manifestation (*zuhūr*) of these faculties (NA, p. 924).

After discussing the faculties of the soul, Qūthāmā goes on to study whether joy and rapture are similar to the faculties of the soul (NA, p. 924). He comes to this conclusion—again through a somewhat shaky argumentation—which, further, proves that wine which causes this joy and rapture, is similar in its substance to the soul. It is not the intoxicating effect of wine as such which causes joy but a special property. Thus, Qūthāmā is elsewhere aware of fermented coconut milk being used as an intoxicant but he strictly distinguishes between its and wine's effects (NA, p. 1177).

Joy and rapture belong essentially and substantially to the soul, without the body taking any part in them (NA, p. 928). Qūthāmā's main argument for this seems to be that whereas sense perceptions come to the soul through particular channels, the senses, the joy caused by wine does not use such a channel and is thus independent of the body: "we cannot find a *locus* for joy and rapture through which the soul would perceive them or in which they would become manifest" (NA, p. 925). The author explains away in a very unsatisfactory manner the fact that wine comes into the body through the throat and the stomach (NA, p. 930). The main point is that whereas hearing music through the ears brings joy to the soul,⁶⁶ the tasting of wine in the throat is not the reason for the joy caused by wine. The inebriating effect of wine cannot be directly linked to the

⁶⁶ The joy brought to the soul through musical harmony is usually taken to indicate that music is incorporeal and, thus, related to the soul. Cf., e.g., Balīnūs, *Sirr* VI.2.10 (Weisser 1980: 137). Balīnūs also uses the relation between joy and the soul to show the incorporeal nature of the soul (Weisser 1980: 220): as joy is incorporeal, so must the soul also be, otherwise their relation would be impossible.

throat, and its effects are not perceived at the time of drinking (as the effects caused by music are perceived at the very moment of hearing) but only later. The joy caused by music is transitory (*zā'il*) as it ends with the ceasing of the music, whereas the joy caused by wine is permanent as it does not cease when the drinking stops (NA, p. 931). Phrases such as “you have gladdened my heart” the author only deems to be popular expressions and manners of speech, not valid proofs for the heart being the locus of joy (NA, pp. 925–927).

The soul is a subtle substance (*jawhar laṭīf*), subtler than anything else, but wine shares this subtlety with it (NA, p. 928). The joy caused by listening to music cannot be compared to this because that joy comes to the soul through bodily organs (the sense of hearing, dependent on the ears), just as the sight of beautiful things has an effect through the eyes, scents through nostrils (NA, p. 929). Although the joy caused by wine is *sui generis*, the text also appreciates other kinds of spiritual pleasures. Amusing oneself with reading about curiosa (*zarīfā*) is the intellectual amusement (*nuzhat al-ʿuqūl*) of the sages who prefer spiritual and psychical (*ar-rūḥāniyya an-naḥsāniyya*) pleasures to corporeal ones (NA, p. 766).

In **Text 18**, the soul is identified with natural heat (*al-ḥarāra al-gharīziyya*),⁶⁷ which would give a purely natural explanation for the soul, taking it outside the realm of religion. The distinction between *rūḥ* “spirit” and *naḥs* “soul” does not seem to play any role in the doctrines of the *Nabatean Agriculture*. The distinction is, however, made in a few places (e.g., NA, p. 107: *fā-idhā tamma dhālika liʾr-rūḥi addat minhu ilā n-naḥs . . .*). Yet the basic interchangeability of the terms is clearly visible in **Text 18**, where natural heat is explained to be the same as what others call the soul (*naḥs*), the spirit (*rūḥ*) or the divine faculty (*quwwa ilāhiyya*). When this natural heat leaves the body, the resulting state is called death. The close relation between the soul and the Sun is seen in the term “solar matter” by which the Sethians are said to refer to the soul. On the other hand, reason is differentiated from the soul and set above it. This is nowhere greatly elaborated, but only briefly mentioned (see **Texts 12** and **43**).

⁶⁷ Or vital fire, Greek *emphyton thermon*, for which see Gutas (1988): 187, note 95.

3.5. *The Gods*

The gods mentioned in the *Nabatean Agriculture* are in the first place the seven astral deities, namely the Sun (*ash-Shams*),⁶⁸ the Moon (*al-Qamar*) and the five planets known to contemporary astronomy.⁶⁹ The gods are grouped in various ways. Thus, one speaks of the two Luminous Ones (*an-Nayyirān*), the Sun and the Moon, and five other deities (NA, p. 1306). Even though the celestial bodies are simple, not composed, they have various special effects on the primary qualities and thus, e.g., Mars may be called “hot and dry,” in reference to its effects on hot and dry qualities in the sublunar world (cf., e.g., NA, p. 391).

Jupiter and Venus are the two Auspicious Ones (*as-Sa’dān*, e.g., NA, p. 915),⁷⁰ Venus being specifically connected with joy and rapture (*as-surūr wa’ṭ-ṭarab*; NA, p. 920), but also the Moon loves joy and happiness (NA, p. 1406). The Kanʿānites are said to be especially committed to adoring Jupiter, respecting him more than the other astral deities (NA, p. 1257) which, however, does not, according to Qūthāmā, form a major difference in the opinions of the Kasdānians and the Kanʿānites (NA, p. 1257).

Saturn and Mars are the two Nefarious Ones (*an-Naḥsān*). These two gods are particularly relevant for mankind since their mandate includes earth and water which tend to descend (NA, p. 108) and thus the lower world is dependent on them. The difference between the chthonic deity Saturn and the celestial Jupiter is clear: the first dominates those parts of plants which grow downwards and the latter those which grow upwards (NA, p. 727).

⁶⁸ This name is sometimes taken as feminine, sometimes as masculine (e.g., NA, pp. 210–211, 244). Similar vacillation is found in other Semitic languages, too. For the role of the Sun in late paganism, see Tubach (1986), where the intricate relations of solar theology and astrology are discussed.

⁶⁹ The attitude towards celestial bodies is one of the main points where the Harranians and the Nabateans, on the one hand, and the Mandaeans, on the other, differ from each other. For Mandaeans, as also for many Gnostic systems with their archonts, the planets are usually evil forces even though they may occasionally have somewhat more positive features, as in incantations (see Morony 1984: 411–412; Gündüz 1994: 75–76). Cf. also Tubach (1986): 283. For the strong “astralization” of gods in Hellenistic times, see Tubach (1986): 283.

⁷⁰ For the auspicious, or benefic, and nefarious, or malefic, celestial bodies in Balīnūs, *Sirr*, see Weisser (1980): 182. For the natures of the celestial bodies, see also Abū Maʿshar, *Mukhtaṣar al-Mudkhal*, pp. 60–69.

The gods love the cultivation of the earth (e.g., NA, p. 50) and they punish those who ruin even a square cubit of arable land (NA, pp. 383–384). In the same connection, the text refers to ancient peoples that were exterminated because they did wrong and ruined cultivated land.⁷¹ Obviously, the gods especially love those who cultivate the earth and toil for it (see **Text 28** and 4.5).

The gods are placed in a hierarchy, with the Sun being the ultimate source of all action. He is the spirit of the two worlds, their matter, life, subsistence, light and shining (NA, p. 1327).⁷² Adam is quoted as having called the Sun “our Father and the Father of all fathers,” whereas the Moon is here called “our Mother” (NA, p. 402); usually, though, the Moon is addressed in the masculine, which is the grammatical gender of the Moon in Arabic.

In general, as in astrology, the various gods share their influence (cf. NA, p. 727) and they are not omnipotent nor omniscient; as Qūthāmā puts it, “the Kasdānians agree that the gods do not completely comprehend the actions of each other” (NA, p. 1239, see **Text 36**) and thus they cannot know the future in any detailed manner. In the same passage, there is a reference to a higher divinity which comes close to monotheism. Usually such opinions are attributed to Yanbūshād (see below). Various countries, beings etc., are under the specific influence of more than one god, and the influence depends on the specific constellation of the sphere (see also 3.1).

The gods are seen to be in various relations with each other. Thus, Mercury is mentioned as the son of “this great God” (NA, p. 18) which in this context refers to Saturn. Among the gods, Saturn and the Moon have special roles which are important for the *Nabatean Agriculture*. Saturn has a specific influence on plants,⁷³ especially subterranean ones, and agriculture and caring for the land and plants belongs to his domain (NA, p. 18). Everything black is associated with Saturn (**Text 7**) as also everything which is permanent and long-lived, such as the olive tree (NA, p. 18).

⁷¹ Here one is reminded of the Islamic prophet stories which, however, find a parallel in earlier Christian and Jewish legends. Cf. also section 5.

⁷² In NA, p. 244, the Sun is called the ultimate (*quṣwā*) matter of life.

⁷³ For the floral roles of Jupiter and Saturn in late paganism, see Tubach (1986): 120–121. For the relation between the Moon (Selene) and plants, see Tubach (1986): 450–451.

As Saturn is the god of agriculture and plants, it is quite appropriate that Ṣaghrīth tells us he is the god who inspired him to write his book (see **Text 7**). Saturn is also the first of the stars because it is on the highest sphere (NA, p. 878). In the same connection, Qūthāmā refers to it as “the first thing” (*awwal al-ashyā*) but unfortunately he does not explain this, merely stating that it would take a long time to explain this (cf. **Text 51**).

The Moon is seen, as was common in the Near Eastern tradition, as a mediator of revelation, being the god of the lowest sphere and thus standing in between the supernal and the lower worlds. For this aspect of the Moon, see 4.2.

Just as the various astral gods have their special roles, they also have their favourites. Thus, the Moon favoured Adam by giving him special miracles (*muʿjiza*) (e.g., NA, p. 306). Asqūlūbiyā, on the other hand, is called “the Messenger of the Sun” (cf. 4.1).

The various authorities quoted in the text are depicted as having different opinions about the gods. Some of these opinions—like that of Yanbūshād who “did not believe (*kāna rajulan kāfiran*) in the acts of celestial bodies other than the Sun” (NA, p. 215)—come very close to monotheism, or at least henotheism, and one has to remember that whatever the text’s exact date, it comes from a context where monotheistic ideas were dominant. Monotheism was the most vital and fast-developing religious system and was thus likely to have an effect on all religious systems in the area: the remnants of polytheistic and pagan religions were not fossilized but they reacted to what happened around them. The “standard” polytheistic doctrine of the Nabateans and the Kanʿānites is attributed to Ṭāmīthrā, see **Text 9**. One should not, however, ignore the strong tendency of late pagan systems towards pagan monotheism.⁷⁴

According to NA, p. 216, some of his students even said that Yanbūshād “believed that there was another might above the might of the Sun, higher and more powerful (*aqhar*)” (cf. also NA, p. 402, where it is said that “he alludes (*bi-īmāʾihī*) to his belief (*īmān*) in a higher and more powerful potency (*quwwa*) than the potency of the two Luminous Ones and the stars”).⁷⁵ He did not accept the idea

⁷⁴ See Teixidor (1977), Tubach (1986), Fauth (1995) and Athanassiadi-Frede (1999).

⁷⁵ For “der hypersolare Pantheos,” a god above the solar deities, see Fauth (1995): 89–90, 92 (“... es befindet sich . . . ein noch höheres, durch eine gewisse Unbestimmtheit verdecktes göttliches Wesen”).

that Adam would have been a polytheist, but claimed that his words had been distorted (*tahrīf*) to show that he shared the idol worshipping (*ibādat al-aṣnām*) of the people (NA, pp. 402–403)—though this, as Qūthāmā tells us in the passage, was only Yanbūshād’s prudence, as he did not dare to disapprove of the words of Adam openly.

This higher power was, according to Yanbūshād, an invisible actor who was too subtle to be perceived by the senses (NA, p. 403). In another passage (NA, pp. 748–749), it is said that according to Yanbūshād the two Luminous Ones merely guide the action but are not the actors themselves, i.e., they are merely instrumental in the action. The way to monotheism was, in a sense, paved by the deterministic view on the movements of the heavenly bodies and their use in astrological predictions. If the stars followed certain rules in their movement, it was necessary to assume a higher power behind them, with the will to move the stars, if one was to escape a gloomy world where mechanical laws operated instead of personal gods whom one could influence through one’s piety and prayers.

In addition to monotheism, Yanbūshād accepted the doctrine of creation (NA, p. 1136):

There would be much to say to argue against the opinion that there would be a temporal origin (*hudūth*) for things composed of elements, even though Yanbūshād, whom I have extolled many times in this book, was of the opinion that this world does have an origin and has been generated through organizing and composing, but not through creation *ex nihilo* (*ikhtirāʿ*). The pious (*al-muttaqī*) Abraham held this very opinion. This is because Yanbūshād felt (*istashʿara*) an inclination for monotheism, that there would only be one God. After him the leader (*imām*) Abraham held the same opinion, as a number of Kasdānians and others among the tribes of the Nabateans, like Anūḥā⁷⁶ and some others whom we have mentioned. Yet their number is very small.

The monotheism of Anūḥā is mentioned in a passage (NA, p. 1069, see section 5) where he urges Ṭāmīthrā to give up the service of the seven astral deities and to serve the one god of gods. Thus, it comes as no surprise that Yanbūshād sided with Anūḥā against Ṭāmīthrā in his books (NA, p. 404). In another passage, the beliefs of Yanbūshād are clearly put forth (NA, p. 562):

⁷⁶ Here written Anūkhā.

He believed in a first potency (*quwwa awwalīyya*) which is predominant over All (*qāhira li'l-kull*) and it is a potency superior to All, according to the opinion of Anūḥā as-Sūkīdāhī, the prophet, and Immanuel⁷⁷ the Ancient (*al-Qadīm*). Yanbūshād shared their opinion. We, on the other hand, believe (*naqūl*) what the party (*shī'a*) of Seth, the son of Adam, believed about acts (*al-af'āl*), namely that they all belong to the two Luminous Ones, while the stars have a share in some acts.

[marginal note in one MS by another hand:] By saying so, Qūthāmā, the final author of this book, concealed his (true opinion) because he was afraid of the servants of the idols of the astral deities which he called “the party of Seth, son of Adam”. He always corrected the opinions of Yanbūshād. But God knows best the truth of what they are speaking about.

The monotheism of Yanbūshād is said to have angered his contemporaries and for this reason he tried—in vain—to disclaim any suprasolar monotheistic opinions and to claim that he believed in solar influence (NA, p. 216). He was called “a mad monotheist” (*majnūn muwaḥḥid*) by his contemporaries (NA, p. 216).

In another passage (NA, pp. 1306–1307), we seem to have this elaboration of the system of Yanbūshād, made to conform with the belief in the seven astral deities. Here (but cf. 3.1) we are told that Yanbūshād believed that everything depends in the first place on the two Luminous Ones who give orders, whereas the other five merely obey their commands, the Sun ultimately providing for everything through its power.

As the language of the text is Arabic, it comes as no surprise that the lexic often mirrors Islamic language, which, of course, merely reflects the fact that Ibn Waḥshiyya himself was a Muslim. Thus, we find, e.g., in NA, p. 50, the following eulogy of the god of gods (*ilāh al-āliha*):

You are exalted (*ta'ālayta*), O god of gods, the mighty and potent, the merciful (*ar-rahīm*) whose mercy and life encompass all his servants (*ibād*) both below and above (*suflan wa-uluwwan*).

The solar deity is, moreover, described in diction that resembles Islamic terminology. Thus, in one place it is said that “all action belongs to the Sun only, and he has no partner in that (*lā sharīka lahū fī dhālika*)” (NA, p. 228).⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Here written 'M'YWSL.

⁷⁸ In the same passage, associating others with the Sun is called *shirk*. In NA, p. 1184, the great and mighty god (*al-ilāh al-azīm al-kabīr*) is portrayed as omnipotent and omniscient.

There is also an aberrant notion that the astral deities have no influence at all (NA, p. 749) but Qūthāmā finds abhorrent the absurd idea that “the living, eternal, ancient gods (*al-āliha al-ahyā’ as-sarmadiyya al-qadīma*) would neither have any influence nor act in any way. This would set them in the same position as inorganic bodies (*jamād*) which neither act nor influence anything” (NA, p. 749). Qūthāmā says that the opposition met by Yanbūshād may have been due to people thinking that this was his opinion but he, so he says, definitely knows that this was not his belief (NA, p. 749; see also **Text 27**).

In addition to the seven gods, there are other astral deities, the fixed stars, such as the Southern Sirius (*ash-Shi’rā al-Yamāniyya*, NA, pp. 18, 215), but these are rarely mentioned and even though they are mentioned as gods, their divinity seems rather insignificant and there seems to be little difference between divine and standard astrological influence.

The astral deities dominate the whole book, but some other gods are also mentioned in passing.⁷⁹ The most interesting is the mention of Tammūz(ā) whose story is narrated in **Text 24**, which seems to be the best informed of any late sources on the cult which lingered on for a long time in the Near East.⁸⁰ In the same passage, there is a passing mention of the god Nasr, who is known both from the Arabic tradition⁸¹ and from the late Hellenistic Near East (Aram. Nishrā).⁸²

We know about the weeping for Tammūz (Dumuzi)⁸³ from tenth-century Harran (see Green 1992: 147–158), but in less detail. It has been suggested that the Harranian lamentation on Tāwuz⁸⁴ is a

⁷⁹ That so few divine names are mentioned in the text need not surprise us. Anonymous gods, or gods known only by their epithets (such as Māran, Mārtan, Barmārēn), are well attested in the Aramaic tradition, e.g., in Hatra. See, e.g., Tubach (1986): 255–256, 276. For other gods in a system based on astral deities, see Tubach (1986): 395.

⁸⁰ For references to the worship of Tammūz in Beth Aramāyē, see Morony (1984): 397. For the Mandaean house of Tammūz, see Morony (1984): 415.

⁸¹ In this connection, one might mention the recent book by Gerard Hawting (1999) who is very sceptical about the information we have on the polytheistic religion on the Arabian Peninsula.

⁸² E.g., in Hatra, see Tubach (1986): 269–270.

⁸³ For the Syriac and Christian sources on Dumuzi, see the references given in Drijvers (1980): 110 (+ note 115), and Schiffmann (1986): 68–70. See also the articles *Adonis* (pp. 12–17, S. Ribichini) and *Tammūz* (pp. 1567–1579, B. Alster) in DDD.

⁸⁴ This seems to be the correct reading for the form T’WZ. For this name form of Tammūz, cf. the Neo-Assyrian pronunciation of the name, see DDD, article *Tammūz*. The possible—though perhaps not very probable—connection between Tāwuz and the Yezidi Malak Ṭā’ūs was first brought to my attention by Dr. Amir

contamination from the cult of the Syrian Mot,⁸⁵ which may well be the case (but see below), but Ibn Waḥshiyya offers a somewhat different version of it—although he unfortunately tells only part of the story (**Text 24**).

In assessing the meaning of this story, we should, first of all, note the geographical accuracy and consistency; the name Binārwāyā mentioned by the author is indicative of this accuracy. Binārwāyā is an obscure village known only to the most informed geographers which, I think, speaks for a local origin of this version; if Ibn Waḥshiyya had only copied Harranian sources, he would hardly have located the story in this obscure place, which is not otherwise mentioned in the *Nabatean Agriculture*.

Ibn Waḥshiyya also openly admits that the story is told by the Harranians, too, and he does not claim any primacy for the Iraqi version; in fact, he personally disavows the whole story. This would be inconsistent if he were not working with a real, Iraqi version of the story. If Nabatean nationalism had been his only motivation, as has often been claimed, it is strange that he admits the fictitious character of the story and does not argue for its Iraqi origin. Thus, *ʿasabiyya* cannot be the driving force in telling the story which leaves us with the assumption that Ibn Waḥshiyya is describing an existing situation in Iraq, not forging a story out of Harranian materials to bolster the Nabatean national spirit (cf. 1.3).

In other words, the custom of weeping for Tammūz continued not only in Harran but also in the Iraqi countryside until the tenth century. At the same time Ibn Waḥshiyya indicates that the tradition was dying out; not only was it reanalysed in Christian terms, but in pagan circles the myth underlying the ritual started to be forgotten.

The passage also shows the general acumen of Ibn Waḥshiyya. His knowledge is wide, as he is aware of both the pagan Harranian and pagan Iraqi, or Bābilī, tradition and of the Christianized version which, moreover, he is able to connect with the pagan version, and he even manages to get the picture right: the cult of Tammūz is of pagan origin and his story has been appropriated—Ibn Waḥshiyya called it stealing—by Christians.

The transmission of pagan material to Christianity is often obvi-

Harrak (personal communication). Later, I found the same suggestion in Gündüz (1994): 152, note 255 (with further references).

⁸⁵ See, e.g., Haider (1996): 232.

ous. The mechanisms of this transmission are also relatively clear but I cannot refrain from mentioning here that, according to al-Maḡdīsī (*Bad'* IV: 42), some Christians in the vicinity of Harran had adopted Harranian doctrines (*madhhab*). What he probably should have said, is that some Harranians had converted—sincerely or not—to Christianity, bringing along with them much of their religious lore and wisdom. Instead of weeping for Tammūz they were now weeping for St. George.

Ibn Waḡshīyya's version of Tammūz has already become radically changed from the original. The idea of a missionary propagating the cult of "the Seven and the Twelve" is obviously inspired by the Christian martyrologies,⁸⁶ perhaps specifically by the legend of St. George. Thus, we have a link from the Christian version back to the pagan version—although naturally the "missionary" version of Tammūz's death may have been fabricated by Ibn Waḡshīyya himself, using the Christian version to reconstruct an explanation for the Nabatean ritual. In either case, this version is late, and the older material is found in the lamentation itself, with the gods assembling to weep for the dead Tammūz, and it is mirrored in the story of Yanbūshād.

The older version, the one not contaminated by the legend of St. George, contains motifs that are found elsewhere in Mesopotamian literature. The journey of the gods to the central sanctuary, the famine which befalls the country after the death of Yanbūshād, and the story of the inundation—I avoid the word Flood—all resemble Mesopotamian motifs.

Tammūz was mentioned in relatively few pieces of Arabic literature, which deserve to be translated here to be compared with the version of the *Nabatean Agriculture*. First, there comes another reference to the ritual in Ibn Waḡshīyya's *Asrār al-falak* (fol. 87b, from the Preface of Ibn Waḡshīyya):

When they mentioned him [Dawānāy],⁸⁷ they used to say "the Lord of Mankind (*sayyid al-bashar*), Dawānāy." He used to be called "the Lord of Mankind" (already) during his life time. When he died, the people of this clime, I mean the clime of Bābil, wept for him for a

⁸⁶ Naturally, there was also a missionary literature in Manichaeism, see, e.g., Lieu (1985): 54–90.

⁸⁷ Throughout this late copy, Dawānāy is written Rawāyāy; the copyist obviously had no idea how to pronounce the name.

whole year⁸⁸ and every day they held a ceremony (*ma'tam*) for him in which they wept and lamented for him, like the people of Syria wept for Tammūzā⁸⁹ by which they mean Hermes.⁹⁰

Some Kardānians of the clime of Bābil also wept for Tammūzā, but the Syrians wept for Hermes for thousands of years and till the end of the days of their domination (*dawla*), but the Kāsdānians⁹¹ wept for this Dawānāy for a year after his death, each day, as a ceremony.

After his death they did things to his body which it is not proper to mention. They wrote about this to all regions (*aqṭār*) and countries (*buldān*). It is said that they claim that he (Dawānāy) contrived and extracted the secrets of the spheres (*asrār al-falak*) and the wonders of the actions in this world of the two Luminous Ones and the other celestial bodies, what none before him had done.

It is conspicuous that Ibn Waḥshiyya also here only refers to the story of Tammūz but ultimately leaves it untold.

The case of Tammūz sheds more light on the schematically told Harranian feast of Tammūz as described by Ibn an-Nadīm in his *Fihrist*. The text of *Fihrist* (coming ultimately from “what we have copied from the handwriting of Abū Saʿīd Waḥb,” *Fihrist*, pp. 321–325) reads (pp. 322–323):⁹²

[The month of] Tammūz: In the middle of this [month] there is the feast of *al-Būqāt*, that is of weeping women. It is the Tāwuz, a feast dedicated to the god Tāwuz. The women weep for him because of how his master (*rabb*) killed him and ground his bones in a hand-mill and then winnowed them to the wind.

The women do not eat anything ground in a hand-mill: they only eat moistened wheat, chick-peas, dates, raisins and other similar things.⁹³

The details of the version of the *Fihrist*, connected with the Syrian Mot by many scholars, do not find confirmation in the versions of the *Nabatean Agriculture* and *Asrār al-Falak*. Moreover, in al-Bīrūnī's *Āthār*, p. 321, the memorial feast (*dhukrān*) of Tammūz with its lamentations is set on the 7th of Ḥazīrān, whereas the feast of flour (*ʿīd ʿurus daqāʿiq*) is set on the 17th of the next month, Tammūz, with

⁸⁸ Written SNT, with T instead of *tāʾ marbūʿa*.

⁸⁹ Written both here and later ThMWDY, obviously a contamination from Thamūd—the late copyist of the manuscript had great difficulties with the names.

⁹⁰ It may be interesting to note how Ibn Waḥshiyya readily equates Harranian Tammūz with the Greek Hermes. In the *Nabatean Agriculture, interpretatio Graeca* is completely missing.

⁹¹ Here written with a *Sh* (Kashdānians).

⁹² Also translated by Dodge (1970): 758.

⁹³ Obviously on this day only.

the following two days marked as *'īd daqā'iq*. Thus, it is possible that there is some confusion in the *Fihrist* between the two different feasts, the memorial feast of Tammūz and the feast of flour.

There is also a short and somewhat enigmatic reference to Tammūz in *Fihrist*, p. 325 (from “the handwriting of someone else [than Abū Saʿīd] concerning them [the Harranians]”):

From among the gods of the Harranians: (. . .), the Lady of the Killing(?) (*Rabbat ath-Thall*)⁹⁴ who *killed (*qatalat*) *Tammūz⁹⁵ (. . .)

Finally, there are two mentions of an idol called Tammūz in ad-Dimashqī's *Nukhbat ad-dahr*. The longer one reads (p. 168):

Its [the land of Ṣīn aṣ-Ṣīn] inhabitants are unbelievers who worship idols. They especially respect one idol, made of gold, which they call Tammūz. They say that he is the spouse of the spirit of Sun and they claim that there is a temple for him in the centre of the earth by which they mean Jerusalem (. . .). They also say that the name of this idol Tammūz is mentioned in the Torah, but here they utter an immense lie, may God curse them because of their words!⁹⁶ The Jews know this and they know that his name (is derived) from the name of the month Tammūz.

The second is a brief mention on p. 42:

The Sabians claim that the temple of Jerusalem was built (already) before Salomon built himself a temple and that it [the earlier temple] was dedicated to Mars and that there was an idol called Tammūz.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ The note of Dodge (1970): 766, note 107, is without foundation: there is no word *thill* in the sense of “herd” (see, e.g., Lane, s.v.; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, s.v.), despite the later reference in the *Fihrist* to goats. The reference to Dozy I: 162, is also erroneous: Dozy only codifies the variants *thulla* and *thilla*, with their plurals *thulal* and *thilal*. Reading “the Lady of the Flocks” would thus need an emendation, either to *Rabbat *ath-Thalla* or to *Rabbat *ath-Thalal*. The translation of Dodge has unfortunately been adopted by later writers, e.g., Green (1992): 158.

The verb *thalla*, from which the infinitive is *thall* also means (see Lane, s.v.) “to pour; to demolish; to take forth the earth from a well,” but these do not seem to make any better sense.

⁹⁵ In the edition: *allatū QBLT (QYLT* in the edition of Ramadān, p. 396) *TMWR*². It is possible to read *allatū qabilat Tammūzan* “who received Tammūz,” as Dodge does, loc. cit. I find it improbable that we should read *qayyalat* (“she gave a drink to Tammūz at noon;” cf. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān* XI: 375, s.v. QYL). *Tammūz* as the name of a month is a diptote in Arabic; whether we should here read Tammūzā (as in Ibn Waḥshīyya's texts, although there such names are usually written with a final Y) or as the triptote accusative of Tammūz is not clear. In any case, the edition's *TMWR*² (*tumūran* “dates”) is probably a mistaken effort to make sense of the text.

⁹⁶ Actually, this is not a lie (see Ezek. 8:14). Ezek. 8:16 could be the starting point for the solar identification of Tammūz.

⁹⁷ Cf. Chwolsohn (1856) II: 390 (with notes II: 679–681).

As these passages show, Ibn Waḥshiyya is our best source of information for Tammūz in the Islamic period. Interestingly enough, Ibn Waḥshiyya seems slightly to contradict himself in the two passages. It seems obvious that *Asrār al-falak* is an earlier text than the *Nabatean Agriculture*, and it is in the latter that Ibn Waḥshiyya, speaking as himself, the translator, says he has come by a more complete version of the story.

Also the unwillingness of Ibn Waḥshiyya to tell the whole story is remarkable. It may of course be that he knew less than he wanted to confess: after all, his informants, like Ibn Waḥshiyya himself, had forgotten the story behind the ritual weeping. What other reasons he might have had for suppressing the story are not clear: the cruelty of the story, which he himself mentions, hardly accounts for his repeated refusal to tell it.

In the *Nabatean Agriculture*, the gods are mainly described as benevolent, basically even the two Nefarious Ones. Their negative actions are not voluntary and, as the text says, it is not always clear which actions should be considered negative. *Fasād*, decay, for one form of existence is by necessity *kawn*, becoming, for another. Death and decay are unequivocally negative things only as seen through our eyes. The evil influence (*radāʿa*) of the stars is, moreover, accidental (*biʿl-ʿarḍ*), not deliberate (*biʿl-qaṣd*) (NA, pp. 299, 50).

The seeming contradiction is, thus, solved by detaching our notion of corruption from what really is corruption. As things are susceptible to change and matter is eternal, decay is a necessary prerequisite for generation: nothing can be born if something else did not decay. Likewise, what we call calamities (*āfāt*) are only what intervenes between us and our needs (NA, p. 301) but we should look at these changes as a necessary step in the overall process of generation and corruption. Cf. NA, p. 1458:

If the two Luminous Ones and the (other) stars at times corrupt some of the composed bodies, this corruption and change and transformation from one state to another is done in order to make something else out of it. Thus, they corrupt in order to make (something else) be in order. This should (not)⁹⁸ be called corruption. Even though there is a changing of the substance and form and outward appear-

⁹⁸ This emendation seems to be needed. Or else we might read this as “may be called (a kind of) corruption.”

ance (*hulā*), through this change it is transformed from one state to another, which is keeping in order, not corrupting.

One may compare this with a potter who makes jugs of clay, making their shape excellent and drying them, so that they come out exactly as they should. But then the potter wants (instead) to make out of these jugs a jar or a *tallājī* or something else and cannot do that except by breaking those jugs and changing their shape, shattering them or moistening them with water to make them again raw clay, in order to make jars of them. They cannot be made into jars except by transforming them from their previous shape, in which they had order, and corrupting their previous shape so that something else could be made of them.⁹⁹

So it is that the stars corrupt something which they had made by the permission of God, to take them through that corruption from their previous species and transform them into another species. Such is on earth the generation and corruption of all things that are under the (rule of) generation and corruption.

The power of the astral deities emanates (*yanba'ith*) from their movement neither deliberately nor intentionally (*an al-qasḍ wa'l-ikhtiyār*; NA, p. 301), and the god of gods, i.e., the Sun, is continuously working against any possibly destructive effects of the two Nefarious Ones, the Sun being helped in this by the Moon and the two Auspicious Ones (NA, p. 50). However, even the two Nefarious Ones are noble and mighty gods (NA, p. 50). The mechanical nature of their actions is sometimes emphasized when their mutual places and astrological relations are highlighted in a way which makes them quite passive and without a specific will (e.g., NA, p. 246). All actions of the stars are stated to be accidental (*alā ṭarīq al-'arḍ*), not voluntary (*alā ṭarīq al-qasḍ*) in NA, p. 757, where also the mechanism of this influence is discussed.

The rather deterministic, astrological stance is actually in contradiction with any idea of influencing the gods, either through prayers and offerings or by other means, and they cannot be angered, either. However, here the text clearly contradicts itself, a fact realized by Qūthāmā himself (cf. **Text 11**). Fate (*ad-dahr*) is also sometimes mentioned (e.g., NA, p. 18) but it is never described as an active or independent, personified force (such as Tyche) but always as a rather meaningless expression (“the vicissitudes of time”).

⁹⁹ Cf. the discussion by ar-Rāzī in his *Risāla fī t-tanbīh*, pp. 53–58, where he also quotes ‘Umar Khayyām.

The role of the gods suffers from this ambivalence. The regular and predictable movement of their astral manifestations tends to make them a mechanistic system, a giant clockwork, where the individuality and will of the gods is compromised. The text, e.g., openly says that as the gods cannot know each other's minds, even they do not know the future in a detailed manner (see 4.2). Elsewhere, however, a different ethos shines through, portraying the gods in more personal terms. Especially the great and mighty god (*al-ilāh al-ʿazīm al-kabīr*), i.e., either the Sun or the Greatest God behind the Sun, is described as omnipotent and omniscient (NA, p. 1183).

The equivocal position of gods is further emphasized by the metaphorical use of the word "god". Thus, one finds (e.g., NA, p. 106) the inhabitants of the clime of Bābil being called gods in comparison to the inhabitants of the other climes (cf. 3.2).¹⁰⁰

Gods manifest themselves on various other levels which will be discussed in 4.2. They have their unseen, true form, as well as an astral representation seen in the sky and, finally, their idols (*ṣanam*) which may refer to statues in temples but also to trees; in their true form, they are "the living and speaking gods (*al-āliha al-ahyāʾ an-nāṭiqīn*)" (NA p. 403). Their astral manifestation is ball-shaped (*kuriyy ash-shakl*, NA, p. 250, cf. also pp. 704, 1316) which is also the reason for the ball-shaped and circular forms of plants as "the object of an action is similar in its form to the cause of the action (*al-mafʿūl shibha l-fāʿil fi ṣ-ṣūra*)" and since, in this case, there is a difference in the substance (*jawhar*), this similarity must be found in the form, the supernal objects being of a different nature (*tabīʿa*, i.e., quintessence)¹⁰¹ from the things in the sublunar world, which consist of the four elements. The absolutely ball-shaped form of the sphere is clearly the noblest of forms and the elements lack this perfect form (cf. NA, pp. 758–759). This form, in its absolute purity, belongs only to the celestial bodies (NA, p. 759).

As the gods themselves are ball-shaped, they are pleased by everything which is similar to their shape (NA, p. 704). Their movement is eternal and circular (*dāʾira*) and as they move eternally, they also live eternally (NA, p. 246). In one passage (NA, p. 757), it is stated

¹⁰⁰ For the comparison of men to gods, cf. also the Greek concept of *theios anēr*, also adopted to Christianity.

¹⁰¹ The term quintessence (*tabīʿa khāmisa*) is found somewhat later in the text (NA, p. 759).

that the celestial bodies are very massive (*ʿazīmat al-ajrām*), but the passage is concerned with the celestial bodies as natural phenomena, not as gods.

In addition to gods, one finds angels mentioned a few times as mediators between men and gods (see **Text 11**), but they do not have a clear place in the hierarchy and they seem, thus, to be late-comers in the religious system of the *Nabatean Agriculture*.¹⁰² Angels (*malāʾika*) are always referred to as a group (e.g., NA, p. 108), and they are never mentioned by name. In **Text 13**, angels seem to be equated with the celestial bodies as the manifestations of the invisible gods,¹⁰³ with the Sun being here singled out from among the others (*madār ash-Shams wa-ghayr ash-Shams min al-malāʾikat alladhīna yadūrūna fī l-falak*). In **Text 19**, angels are set in a hierarchy between the Moon and people, inspiring them to piety.

The religious ideas of the *Nabatean Agriculture*, thus, come quite close to what John bar Penkāyē (who wrote in about 687)¹⁰⁴ said about pagans and Chaldaeans. According to him, they worshipped the celestial bodies, other gods such as Tammūz, sacrificed to idols, and discussed whether angels had set the world in motion or whether it moved on its own.¹⁰⁵ These features were obviously shared by several religious groups, but they do show how well the *Nabatean Agriculture* fits the late pre-Islamic or early Islamic times.¹⁰⁶

Text 7 (NA, pp. 10–12)

[*The Preface by Ṣaghriṯh*]¹⁰⁷

Glorification and exalting, prayer (*ṣalāt*) and service (*ʿibāda*) be from us, whilst we are staying upright on our feet, to our God, the Living

¹⁰² For the more developed angelology in Balīnūs' *Sirr*, see Weisser (1980): 183–191.

¹⁰³ For the identification of angels with the celestial bodies (*nujūm*), cf. al-Maqdisī, *Badʿ* I: 171.

¹⁰⁴ See Hoyland (1997): 199–200.

¹⁰⁵ See Morony (1984): 397.

¹⁰⁶ Morony (1984) gives a good overview of the religious mosaic of Iraq at the time and, especially on pp. 384–430, shows how widely pagans and pagan practices still survived.

¹⁰⁷ This long monotheistically tinged prayer is addressed to Saturn, one of the two Nefarious Ones, in order to appease him. This passage continues directly from **Text 2**.

(*al-Hayy*), the Ancient (*al-Qadīm*),¹⁰⁸ He who has always been and will always be (*lam yazal wa-lā yazāl*), the only possessor of Lordship over all things, the Great God (*al-ilāh al-kabīr*).

There is no god but God (*Allāh*) alone and there is no companion to Him,¹⁰⁹ the Great, the Everlasting in His Heaven, whose power is operative. All might, majesty and greatness (*al-jabarūt wa'l-kibriyā' wa'l-ʿuzma*) belongs solely to Him. He comprises (*al-muḥīt*) all, He has power over everything, both visible and invisible. To Him belongs everything on earth and on high.¹¹⁰ He furnished (*amadda*)¹¹¹ the earth (with life) from His life and made it alive, and it exists (*baqiyat*) through His existence (*bi-baqā'ihī*).¹¹² He furnished water with His might and His power and made it exist (*abqā*), so that it persists (*dāma*) through His persistence. He made firm (*thabbata*) the earth and it will remain firm for all eternity (*ilā l-abad*), and He made water run its course (*ajrā*) like He runs His course, so that the water runs alive like His life, cold because of the greatness of His power (*sultān*) over cold (*bard*). The earth is heavy (*thaqulat*) in addition to its existence (*baqā'*), because of the heaviness of His movement. If He would wish, He could change everything into something else than what it is. But He is wise and acts upon His wise power (*quwwa*)¹¹³ and He is knowledgeable and His knowledge permeates everything (*al-kull*).¹¹⁴

Blessed art Thou, O Lord of the Heaven and everything else. Your noble and beautiful names (*asmā'uka l-karīmatu l-ḥusnā*)¹¹⁵ be hal-
lowed. We serve You and pray (to you) because of your ancientness

¹⁰⁸ *Al-Qadīm* also includes the connotation of eternity *a parte ante*.

¹⁰⁹ This Islamic formula is lacking from several manuscripts. There are also many minor variants in this preface by Ṣaḡhrīth, some Islamizing, some not.

¹¹⁰ Variant: on the low earths and in what the highest sphere surrounds and what is between them and below the soil.

¹¹¹ In one manuscript a variant passage begins here, which emphasizes that god caused all existence through his various qualities, including his knowledge and his mercy (e.g. “He extended the existence from the overflow of His existence and made the spheres circulate the greatness of his power (. . .).”). The whole passage is full of Islamic vocabulary.

¹¹² *Baqā'* could also be translated literally as “duration,” as is done, e.g., by Wolfson (1976).

¹¹³ The text of the edition reads: *fā'ilm bi-QWTH ʿL-ḤK<Y>MH*, which Fahd emends to *fā'ilm bi-quwwatiki *l-ḥakīma*. One might as well emend this to: *bi-QWT[[H]] ʿL-ḤKMH* and read it: *bi-quwwati l-ḥikma* “with the power of Wisdom.” Nevertheless, Fahd’s emendation seems preferable.

¹¹⁴ Or: the Universe.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Q 7: 180; 17: 110; 20: 8; 59: 24.

(*qīdam*) and nobility (generosity: *karam*), and we ask You through Your names and Your ancientness and Your nobility that you would keep our reason on its course, as long as we are alive, and that you would treat our bodies gently, after life has left them, in (the state of) corruption and that you would drive away worms from our flesh (after our death)¹¹⁶ because you are an ancient and merciful Lord.

Yet you do not show your mercy because of your sternness. You are an oppressor (*‘asūf*) and do not have remorse. Your hand is long and not slow in making effective your deeds. You are the Lord: when you give someone something, there is no one who could detain it and there is no one who could give (against your will). You are the Lord and the only possessor of lordship, the sole possessor of power (*sultān*), the lord of stars and rotating stars (*rabb al-kawākib wa’-n-nujūm ad-dā’ira*) which travel there in (their) cycles (*as-sā’ira fī dawā’ir*). They flee the sound of your movement and they are afraid for fear of you.

We ask you to keep us safe from your anger and to push back your assaultive power (*saṭwa*) from us and to have mercy on us, protecting us from your great calamity (*shirra*). O God (*Allāhumma*), we push back your assaults from us through your beautiful names; you have mercy on whomever uses them as a means to your mercy. So have mercy on us, have mercy on us through your might, through your high, lofty and majestic name, O you who are high, lofty and majestic. It is upon you, O noble one (*al-karīm ‘alayka*). By my life, we ask you to have mercy on us. Amen (*āmīn*).

Beware (pl.) of the evil (*sharr*) of this god when he is angered or to the west of the Sun or veiled in its rays or in the middle of its return (*rujū’*).¹¹⁷ Pray to him this prayer which we have just given here. While you are praying this prayer give a burnt offering (*dakhkhinū*) to his idol (*sanam*) consisting of old hides, grease, strips of leather (*quḍūd*) and dead bats (*al-khushshāf*¹¹⁸ *al-mawtā*).¹¹⁹ Burn (*aḥriqū*) for him fourteen dead bats and an equal amount of rats. Then take

¹¹⁶ For the interest in burials and bodily corruption, see, especially, **Texts 16–19**.

¹¹⁷ Cf. the three daily prayers of the Sabians mentioned by Ibn an-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, pp. 318–319 = Dodge (1970): 747.

¹¹⁸ According to Lane, s.v., this is singular, but Ibn Waḥshīyya uses *khushshāf* as a collective noun with the *nomen unitatis khushshāfa*.

¹¹⁹ Maimonides seems to have misunderstood this passage, cf. Friedländer (1904): 317 (*Dalāla* III.29).

their ashes and prostrate yourself (*fa-sjudū*) on them in front¹²⁰ of his idol. Prostrate yourselves to him on a black stone with black sand¹²¹ and seek refuge from him against his evil, because, O my brethren and beloved ones, he is the cause (*sabab*) of the perishing of all that perishes, the cause of the decay of all that decays, the cause of the perdition of all that is destroyed, (the cause of) the sorrow of all sorrowful ones and the weeping of all weeping ones. He is the Lord of¹²² evil and sin and filth and dirt and poverty.

This is what he does to men (*abnāʾ al-bashar*) when he is angered, but when he is content then he gives them existence (*baqāʾ*), long life, fame after their death, acceptance in the eyes of those who look at them and sweetness of speech.¹²³ His anger is (to be afraid in situations) like I just described to you (sg.), but his contentment is to be expected when he is to the east of the Sun or in the middle of his course (*istiqāma*) or in places which agree with his actions or in the full speed of his travel (*fi surʿat sayrihi*) or in the cycle of his

¹²⁰ Read *bayna* <*yaday*> *ṣanamihī*.

¹²¹ The colour black is associated with Saturn. The whole passage reminds one of the Sabians of Harran who, when praying to one of the celestial bodies, performed actions that were in accordance with the nature of that celestial body. See, e.g., *Rasāʾil Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā* IV: 298. For Saturn's association with unpleasant things, cf. *Rasāʾil Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā* IV: 342 and 370. Cf. also **Text 51**.

¹²² The text reads: *wa-hāribu sharrin waʾl-fisq* etc., which does not quite make sense. The translation is based on the reading: *wa-ʾhuwa rabb [ash]-sharr waʾl-fisq*.

¹²³ Two of the manuscripts give here an additional passage:

Then he said: Beware opposing, disobeying and angering this (read *hādihā* for *humā*) god because nothing can stand in the face of his anger. Pray (*alaykum biʾṣ-ṣalāti waʾd-duʿāʾ*) to this great god who is the Lord of lords, and standing humbly in front of him, seek refuge from him in him and admit that all might and power belong to him, for there is no might or power except that which belongs to him (*fa-innahu lā hawla wa-lā quwwata illā bihi*).

Prostrate yourselves before him in the temples which have been erected for his service (*fi hayākilihi l-maṣūbati li-ʾibādātihi*) and offer him pure offerings, free from all filth and impurity (*wa-qarribū lahu min al-qarābīni z-zakīyyati ʾt-tāhira min al-adnāsī al-bariyyati min al-akdār*). With these you will receive his blessing (*baraka*) and may expect his mercy.

Beware Saturn because he is one of his servants and his subjects and his creatures (*min marbūbātihi wa-musakkhārātihi wa-makhlūqātihi*). His station is known and his cycles (*adwārihu*) are well preserved (*mahfūza*). Seek refuge from this god's evil and doom (*shuʿm*) in him. His actions among men are carried out with the permission of his Lord. When he is angered because his Lord is angered, then (upon men will come) wailing and crying, sorrow and lamenting, poverty and humiliation, anguish and impurity, dirt and blackness and stench. But when he is pleased because his Lord is pleased, then (upon men will come) length of life and elevation of fame after death, good name and acceptance in the eyes of those who look at them and eloquence of speech.

ascendance (*fī ṣuʿūdihi fī dāʿirati ṣuʿūdihi*).—Abū Bakr ibn Waḥshīyya says: This means: in the sphere of his zenith (*fī falaki awjihī*).

If you pray to him when he is angered, repeat your prayer and the sacrifice (*qurbān*) when he is (again) content and remind him of the earlier prayer and repeat it to him, so that you (*fa-laʿallakum*) might escape his evil. Amen.

Know that he is the one who gives (success in) cultivation of the earth and growth or its opposite to plants. He revealed (*awḥā*) to the Moon what I have put down in this book of mine and the Moon revealed it to his (own) idol, and I was taught it by the idol of the Moon, just like I now teach it to you (pl.). Preserve this because it is your life on which you rely and (on it depends) the growth of your fields and your fruits which are the matter (*mādda*) of your life and your hope, during your lifetime, of comfort, affluence, safety and complete health (*al-ʿāfiya al-kullīyya*).

Know that I have prayed to this god, Saturn, and in my prayer I have asked his idol to benefit with this book of mine everyone who reads it. The idol revealed (*awḥā*) to me: “Your prayer (*duʿā*) has been heard and your offering has been accepted.” I did this because I felt sorry for the sons of my kind because of the anguish of their poverty and the abundance of their misery.

Seek long and repeatedly refuge from that in the Sun so that he may perhaps help you because he is benign to you, and seek ardently refuge in this god [Saturn] against his (own) evil because he will help you against scant living and the sorrow caused by that.

Text 8 (NA, pp. 389–390)

The land on which these (obnoxious and useless) plants grow is what we, like Yanbūshād, call “the hated land” (*al-ard al-maskhūt ʿalayhā*). He said: Jupiter hates all deserts and (because of his hatred) has made them forlorn and desolate because he loves what is thriving.

Yanbūshād has also mentioned that the reason for the growth of thorny plants and the boxthorn (*ʿawsaj*) and all thorny trees, (is the following). He said: In ancient times (*fī sālif ad-dahr*) these plants did not have thorns but then there rose an enmity (*muḍādda*) between Mars and Jupiter due to an opposition (*muqābala*) which happened because Jupiter was in Capricorn and Mars in the sign (*burj*) of Cancer; they are then in opposition (*tadāddā*).—Yanbūshād claimed that the Sun never sees them (*lam tanzur ilayhimā*) together.

Mars caused some plants to have thorns and gave them a certain strength from his own power, so that they grow on salt marshes (*sibākhi*) and where other plants do not thrive and where there is no other growth because of the salinity, bitterness, stench and evil quality of the soil.—He mentioned the mines for sulphur (*kibrīt*) and naphtha (*naff*) and other Martian substances which we need not enumerate here.

Yet I say that Yanbūshād did not really believe that these thorny trees and other kinds of thorny plants and boxthorn had in ancient times not grown and that the reason for their having thorns would have been the enmity of Mars towards Jupiter or anything like that, or that the plants growing in the deserts would be due to the hatred of Jupiter for these places. This is what Yanbūshād (seems) to say but he said it only because he chose to follow the way of the prophets (*yadhhabu bi-nafsīhi madhhab al-anbiyāʿ*). Even many people of both his and our time believe that he was a prophet who had revelations.

Since this was so, he arranged most, or all, of his words according to the way of the prophets. He said what he said, concerning the hatred of Jupiter and how Mars made the thorns of thorny plants grow, for the reasons of instruction (*siyāsa*) and as a symbol (*ramz*), like the symbols used by the prophets in their words for the instruction of the people (*li-siyāsat al-ʿamma*), using words which please or frighten them and without which the majority of people (*kāffat an-nās*) would not stay calm (*lā yastawī*) and their matters could not be organized otherwise.

This is the meaning of Yanbūshād's words.¹²⁴ These plants have always existed since eternity and up to the present. We also deduce from his words (in general) that he believed that the celestial bodies are (only) instruments and means, such as the axe and the drill (*mithqab*) are for the carpenter. Thus, they (i.e., thorny plants) have not more than two causes, the first (i.e., efficient) and the second (i.e., material) one. The first cause is the movement of the stars together with the two great Luminous Ones. The second cause is the mixture of the elements (*imtizāj al-anāšir*) with each other in a way which is

¹²⁴ The enmity between Jupiter and Mars is also given by Ṣaḡhrīth (NA, p. 734) as the reason for plants having leaves: Jupiter would have wanted them to bear fruits and as Mars was able to prevent this, Jupiter caused them to grow leaves instead, which both adorn them and may, in case of necessity, be used as food.

receptive to the influence of the movements of the stars. The cause of this is not the pleasure of someone pleased nor the hatred of someone hating and one cannot, either, say that they sin or please (the gods) at all.

I know that the followers of Seth will regard it as lawful to shed my blood because of what I say here about the gods and the Guardian of All (*Hāris al-Kull*), but the god of gods will guard me from their evil!

Text 9 (NA, pp. 727–731)

Ṭāmīthrā the Kanʿānite has a doctrine (*madhhab*) and it is well known that this was his opinion. He was a man who spoke strongly in favour of the actions of the celestial bodies (*afʿāl al-kawākib*) and he believed in their actions in this world and his belief has been transmitted from him. All that according to us depends on the primary qualities and the elements, he attributed to the celestial bodies and related it to them and their effects. He said about this:

The Seven (astral deities) rule over (all) things (*al-mudabbirat liʾl-umūr*) and are the agents (*al-fāʿila*) of all (actions). They share with each other their influence (*mushtarika*) on all animals, plants and minerals. Some of them rule (*istīlāʿ*) some of these and dominate them, as also their (individual) parts. Although the celestial bodies share (the dominion), some of them are more dominant than others concerning some parts.

Ṭāmīthrā said: The reason for some parts of the plants growing downwards, some upwards, which are opposite directions, is the dominance of Saturn and his rule over those parts which grow downwards. Saturn makes them cold and heavy and causes them to grow downwards into the earth. That part which grows upwards is dominated by Jupiter, and these parts which grow upwards thus act contrary to Saturn.

He said: Those parts of the plant which appear (above the earth) have flowers and fruits, sweetness and good taste, whereas the base (*uṣūl*) and the roots are dominated by a taste which is bitter (*murra*) and sour (*qābiḍa*) and pungent (*ʿafṣa*), as well as other bad tastes like acidity (*harāfā*), sharpness (*hidda*), saltiness (*mulūḥa*) and acidity (*humūḍa*), although one may find these bad tastes also in the upper parts (*furūʿ*) of the plant but in roots they are frequently encountered and obvious.

He said: These are actions of Saturn who is the maker of cold or the mover of cold.—When Ṭāmīthrā says “the maker of cold” (*fāʿil al-bard*), this is his bigotry against his opponents; in fact, he should be more knowledgeable than to speak about “the maker of cold”. In fact, it becomes clear from his words that Saturn is the celestial body which sets coldness in motion (*muḥarrīk liʿl-bard*) and arouses (*bāʿith*) it to its actions.

With all his bigotry for the celestial bodies and his devotion to their service (*tadayyunihi bi-ʿibādatihā*), Ṭāmīthrā believed that no action, big or small, frequent or infrequent, can take place without a subject (*fāʿil*) which is alive, potent (*qādir*), able to fulfil the action (*nāfidh al-fʿl*) and eternal (*qadīm*). He did not attribute any action whatsoever to the four primary qualities or elements. He did not believe that heat ascends and cold descends, wetness widens and dryness contracts towards the inside of bodies which is the opposite direction to that caused by wetness. No, he believed that the actions of these primary qualities take place because the celestial bodies make them go in that direction and they direct and dispatch them.

It is also told that he used to sentence to the house of *al-Baʿbaʿa*¹²⁵ all those who were slack in their prayers to those bodies which represent the stars (*al-aḡsām al-mumaththila biʿl-kawākib*), and especially the idol of the Sun. It is told that some people of his time cried and said: “Kill us so that we can rest but do not send us to the house of *al-Baʿbaʿa* (*lā tubaʿbiʿunā*)!” This he did because of his great devotion to the service of the celestial bodies (*an-nujūm*) and his zeal for the service of the idols. It is as if some people suspect that he incited people against Anūḥā who opposed his people in the service of the idols and that he spurred them on him until they made Anūḥā undergo a severe punishment. They imprisoned him in the house of *al-Baʿbaʿa* for some time during which they tortured him (*yubaʿbiʿū-nahu*) twice every day. I am astonished by his firmness of spirit (*ṣalā-bati nafsihi*) and the strength of his vitality (*quwwati ḡayātihi*) and his great endurance (*ḡusn ṣabrihi*) which made him survive all this without dying. It happened to him as you know it happened.

¹²⁵ The house of *al-Baʿbaʿa* (with variants, including Gh for ʿ) remotely reminds one of the underground house of the Harranian Sabians described by al-Masʿūdī and the house of *al-Buḡhad(h)ārīyyīn* mentioned by Ibn an-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, p. 327. Cf. Dodge (1970): 769 (and note 121) and Drijvers (1980): 128–129. One might also compare this to Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān* I: 447, s.v. (*waʿl-baʿābiʿa: aṣ-ṣaʿālik alladhīna lā māla lahum wa-lā ḡayʿa*). Cf. also Ritter–Plessner (1962): 391.

Ṭāmithrā attributed everything that happened in this world, great or small, to the actions of the celestial bodies. He did not attribute any action to anybody else.

This was the doctrine (*madhhab*) of Ṭāmithrā about the reason why some (parts of) plants grow upwards, some downwards, which are opposite directions. We deduce from the plants and other observations and base our judgement on observation. I cannot say more than this here because of several reasons. We cannot observe in plants any action by Saturn or by Jupiter but what we do observe and see is that the elements and the primary qualities which are in them rule and govern the plants and other things. We may also observe how the warmth of the Sun and the Moon, the blowing of winds and the ventilation of air (*tarwīḥ al-hawāʾ*) and the mixing of water with earth are the origin of the existence (*kawn*) of plants and others. You know that it is not the same to observe and be (merely) told.

Know that I am not one of those who judge something on the basis of bigotry for someone's cause, whether he be right or wrong, nor do we judge something on the basis of hearsay or tales (*khurāfāt*) or without rational evidence (*dalīl min ʿaqlī*) free of bigotry. It would be foolish to swerve from what is right. In my opinion, it is right to judge everything according to what I can observe and what my senses convey to my sound reason; I act upon that which my rational deduction leads me to.

I do not say this to defame Ṭāmithrā or to declare his doctrine (*madhhab*) faulty or to deviate from his opinion. If I did so, that would mean deviating from the religion (*dīn*) of Seth, which it is incumbent on me to follow and to devote myself to it because it is an obvious obligation. It would also mean defaming not only the religion of Seth but also that of all Kasdānians, their learned men and their kings. If we would venture to undertake this great (effort/sin), I would through that set myself a target for blame.¹²⁶

Since I have become rational and started observing, deducing and thinking, I have endeavoured to obtain the doctrines (*madhāhib*) of Adam in many things which he discussed in his books,¹²⁷ but I have found hardly anything. (I have endeavoured to do this) because Adam was a man who instructed (*yasūs*) people by his law (*sharīʿa*) and

¹²⁶ The original sentence is somewhat ungrammatical.

¹²⁷ There seems to be a printer's error here, as the sentence has been repeated (ll. 15–16).

arranged their matters in a way that was beneficial to them and benefited them in many ways and his intellect flowed into theirs (*wa-yafīdu ‘aqluhu ‘alā ‘uqūlīhim*). I consider that following him is not whimsical (*‘alā sabīl al-hawā*) but is following the truth. I can see the abundance of his intellect and soundness of his opinion and his perfection in everything, yet in most, if not all, cases his words do not make clear to me what he believed so that I could believe it, too. No, in his words he avoids (*yatamallas*) showing clear preference (*mayl*) except in cases which are quite obvious. But when it comes to questions where there are differences of opinion because of their extreme difficulty and which would need to be elucidated, there I cannot find a doctrine about which we could say that he completely approved of it.

In this, we cannot do anything since we did not live in his time when we could have asked him what we would need to know and which fills our heart (with questions). Thousands of years have gone by (after him) and only his books and his law remain, people handing them over (from one generation to another).

We still read his books and learn from them but when it comes to his law, his son Seth gave people a(nother) law with which he had changed the law of his father, Adam, and the law of Seth has remained in use. I believe (*azunnu*) that it will remain forever because it has been prominent since the times of Seth until our own time. We can see every day that it just gains more power and profusion and people join it in groups (*arsālan arsālan*). Because of this I believe that it will remain whereas the other laws (*nawāmīs*) of the Kasdānians and other nations (*ajyāl*) of Nabateans will be obliterated, like those religions have been obliterated which were in the ancient times and about which we have (only) heard: none of their believers and devotees have remained.

What we can see from this makes us believe that these religions and different habits (*sunan*) which can be found in our own time will also be obliterated as has happened to similar ones before them. The reason for this is the resemblance of the state of all that happens (*yajrī*) on earth, from its centre (*markaz*) to the end of its atmosphere (*jaww*), to the state of the celestial bodies which move (*tanaqqul*) within their spheres circularly, according to their measures.

The four elements do not stop changing, one into the other, and they get mixed with each other through the celestial bodies which move them. When they get mixed, all composed bodies become com-

posed of them; these are the three genera (*ajñās*), animals, plants and minerals. The elements and all these three genera and all species (*nav*) and individuals (*shakhs*) have in their existence a beginning, a middle point and an end, just like the Sun has every day the beginning of sunrise in the east, then the middle point in the middle of the sky and finally a sundown and disappearance in the west. So it is also with every celestial body other than the Sun: beginning and growing, then the middle point which means attaining the limit and, finally, the end.

So it is also with the Moon which, during the month, from the beginning to the end, has a beginning which is waxing and growing (i.e., the crescent), then attaining the middle point of that waxing (as the full Moon) and then the decline (*inhitāt*). Just like this human beings and other animals as well as plants are first small but then they grow and become bigger until they reach the middle point which is the limit of youth. Then they start declining until the time of decrepitude and death. This is necessary for them and they reach it without doubt if something does not destroy them or cut their life (earlier). If this happens, they will perish and be destroyed (before reaching their perfection and end). But if this does not happen, they will reach these grades which we have mentioned. Yet this is something which we cannot explain because that would take too long and in this there should be enough. Now we return to our theme.

Text 10 (NA, pp. 1031–1032)

These five states of the Moon in relation to the Sun which we have described resemble the states of animals, plants and minerals. When I say “states” (*aḥwāl*), this is a comprehensive meaning (*ma'nā jam'*). By that I mean that they do not resemble these states only in their birth and growth until their limit (*bulūgh al-ghāya*) and then death and decay. Nay, I also mean all these states which are before (their birth) and after (their death).

Before (their birth, refers to the time) when they are a drop of sperm which is transferred from its place of rest to the womb and then the state of the foetus within the womb. What I mean by “after” is from the extinction of its life until the perishing of the body through decay. The final (*ākhirā*) states of the bodies differ with each other. Some decay and some go into the stomachs of different animals. The body's

state within the stomachs of these animals is just like its state in the air (i.e., under the open sky) or in the bosom of the earth as it comes to decay and annihilation (*fanāʿ*) until it becomes dust (*turāb*). Some of the bodies get into water and if a marine animal (*dawābb al-māʿ*) does not eat it, it becomes dissolved in water until it becomes subtle, dissolved particles because water changes (them to become similar) to itself just like the earth does to that which comes to it. Then the body will afterwards return to dust.

The body of someone burned becomes ashes (*ramād*) and that is the body which is honoured and preserved and its fate (*maqṣūr*) and its final (state) is the best. Ash is the same as dust because the ashes of all things that have been burned by fire are the earthy quality (*ardīyyatuhā*) which had been in them before. This earthy quality in the bodies which grow through nourishment is the very matter (*mādda*) of the bodies and it is related to the dust which it had been in the composition of its original and which was the seed whence it came.

Thus also the state of the Moon in relation to the Sun resembles the states of animals in their various ages, like childhood (*sibā*), youth (*shabāb*), maturity (*kuhūla*), old age (*shaykhūkha*) and decrepitude (*haram*). They also resemble the seasons, spring, summer, autumn and winter, as well as the four directions which are called the corners of the world (*zawāyā l-ʿālam*), east, west, north and south. Four winds blow from these four directions which we have already mentioned in this book together with other winds. All these, further, resemble the four humours (*akhlāf*) which are found in the human body, viz. yellow (bile), black (bile), blood and phlegm.

Text 11 (NA, pp. 336–338)

Know that the soil in the clime of Bābil, even though there are differences in it, is the best soil anywhere on the surface of the earth. This is because it is in the middle (between extremities), and the best and most excellent of all things is the middle one.¹²⁸ In this clime, some plants grow which do not grow anywhere else and many plants thrive better there than elsewhere. Its trees and vines produce

¹²⁸ This idea is equally well known from both Greek, Christian and Islamic thought.

fruit which (plants in) other regions do not produce. In this good and excellent soil luxuriantly grows what does not grow so in other regions, although what grows in other places may (in itself) be good. This is the special property of the soil in this clime.

The Lord of Mankind, Dawānāy, has said in his letter (*kitāb*) which he sent to Mardāyāy ash-Shāmī: Our clime produces gold and silver and our winter is not excessively cold. If it happens to be cold, it produces for us ice (*thalj*), which we may enjoy during the summer. Neither is our summer excessively hot. If it happens to be excessively hot in some years, it will dissolve from our bodies the bad, excessive remnants in the measure of natural need (*‘alā miqdār ḥājat aṭ-ṭabī‘a ilayhā*) and it also suits most of our trees and plants. The (other) two seasons are equibalanced with no disharmony.

The temperaments (*amzija*) of the people of our clime are close to equilibrium (*i’tidāl*) and this is why they have pure souls, strong reason and exceeding acumen (*fiṭna*). The air of the clime has a special property which has a beneficial and laudable effect on the heart: when it is cold, it is beneficial and when it is hot, it is also beneficial. Neither the coldness nor the heat of the air is excessive and it does not, (consequently), cause excessive and disturbing effects as it does in other regions.

When we eat the products of the soil in our clime, they cause in our souls subtlety and intelligence (*dhakā’*) so that our souls become more receptive to reason (*‘aql*) because a subtle (*latīf*) composition (*murakkab*) is more (prone to) intelligence. When we think of something, trying to discover it, the movements of our souls are similar to the movements of the celestial bodies which comprehend everything according to reality (*‘alā t-tahqīq*). With our thoughts we may comprehend everything which we start to think of according to reality or almost according to it.

Our food comes from the grains which we sow in our soil and the fruits which our trees produce, and these grow thanks to the water which comes to our clime from the Tigris and the Euphrates. They are by taste the two sweetest rivers on earth and the lightest ones (*akhaffu waznan*) and the most efficient for nourishment and the farthest from harmful thickness. (The plants which we eat) are nourished by the air which is balanced between hot and cold, wet and dry and they grow in this soil which produces gold and silver because of the goodness (*ṭīb*) of its soil and the equilibrium of its nature (*ṭab‘*) and we cultivate them and take care of them with the wisdom (*ḥikma*)

and understanding of agriculture in a way which other nations (*unan*) have not invented.

When all this comes together in our grains and plants and fruits, namely the soil, the water, and the air, (the result is) that when someone is born, the semen from which he comes contains in itself all these nourishments and it grows and is formed (*tatakawwan*) from these nourishments. (When the child is born), it grows inhaling this air, drinking this water which we have described and eating this food. So what do you think of the nature (*tab^c*) of the embryo which is formed from this sperm? This holds true for all children in our clime because of a special property with which our god, the Sun, has specifically favoured (*khaṣṣa*) them, and likewise the Moon and Jupiter.

Now, as all these subtle things (*latāfāt*) which we have enumerated and all these special properties of these celestial bodies come together in us, would it be suitable to boast in Syria, denigrating the people of the district of Shādhāy (*‘alā ahl ‘amal Shādhāy*) and say that Syria is better than the clime of Bābil? I am astonished by this. If someone else had said this, I would have pardoned him, but it is abominable that the likes of you, one of the people of knowledge and excellence, would equate Syria with the clime of Bābil!

This is an enormous mistake and most negligent! And you are not even content with this equation, for you indeed prefer Syria over this clime! I am afraid for you concerning the anger of your god Jupiter because of your boast, although it should not be said that the gods are angered or pleased: we should say that we, humankind, either come closer to or farther from them through our actions and we just call this distance anger and that closeness pleasure. You should repent, and he (Jupiter) will accept your repentance and ignore your sin (*dhanb*).

These were the words of Dawānāy, the Lord of Mankind, praising the clime of Bābil. I have abbreviated his words because he praised this clime in many ways in this passage and elsewhere in his book. He even said: We, the people of the clime of Bābil, are gods to all other peoples and mediators (*wasā’it*) (between them and the real gods) like the angels (*malā’ika*) are the mediators between us and the Sun and the prophets and sages are the mediators between us and the Sun and between the angels and the people, especially of this clime.

Then he (Dawānāy) said at the end of his letter (*kitāb*): O Mardāyāy, if you keep on claiming superiority for Syria over the clime of Bābil

or their equality and if you do not repent this enormous sin (*dhanb*), I shall curse you (*la-uḥarrimannaka*) so that after that you will not live more than a few days, two, or three, or four only, before dying.

Text 12 (NA, pp. 1012–1013)

Māsā as-Sūrānī has explained this in his letter (*kitāb*) which he wrote to Ṭāmīthrā the Kanʿānite when the letter of Ṭāmīthrā had reached him. In that letter Ṭāmīthrā had preferred Syria to the clime of Bābil and the inhabitants of Syria to the inhabitants of the clime of Bābil and he had boasted a lot. So Māsā wrote a long letter as an answer to what Ṭāmīthrā had said. He said in this letter, after many other things, the following:

You, Ṭāmīthrā, are excellent and venerable, superior to the sons of your kind, the inhabitants of your country. But that you would equal the people of our clime who are (like) gods to all humankind! This is not so! How could you equal people whose reasons are above yours and whose sagacity (*fiṭna*) is sharper than yours and whose discernment is better than yours? You are inferior to them in all these matters because your reason has been damaged by the damage which enters into your body.¹²⁹

In your knowledge and wisdom, do you really think that you would be equal to people who drink the water of the Tigris which is (also) the matter (*mādda*) for their crops and the nourishment of their trees? You yourself drink water that stands still in a dirty little lake (*buhayra*) in which the water becomes putrid. Often the pure west wind will set it into motion and corrupt it by its own corruption and its wetness will make it thick. It also corrupts your plants and your fruits by its evil quality and these corrupt your bodies by corrupting your humour (*akhlāt*) and by burning your blood and your two biles so that your humour becomes burning and hard and thick, far from mature and penetrating.

Nasty and thick diseases will then befall you, such as leprosy, cancer, boils and tumours. The origin of all this is this wind which corrupts your fruits and grains and waters and air and nourishments and the humour of your bodies and your blood.

¹²⁹ I.e., the nourishment which impairs him.

When your body becomes corrupt like this, it will also corrupt your soul which stays (*sākina*) in your body, in all those things in which the body shares with the soul, i.e., all the actions (*af'al*) of the soul, except for just one thing¹³⁰ but in all else the body shares with the soul. When the body becomes corrupted, it will also corrupt the soul because the soul stays (*qiyām*) in the body. Then reason will become corrupted by the corruption of the soul because it stays (*qiyām*) in it.

So leave this vain bragging and acknowledge that superiority belongs to its people. You are to be blamed because you have deviated from the truth. You either will have to admit this or else you have deviated from it on purpose.

What I have said to you, Ṭāmīthrā, I will also say to your Greek (*al-Yūnāniyyīn*) neighbours. If I were not loath to insult anyone, I would say that they are (in general) like animals even though some excellent men may have come from among them. They have, one after the other, boasted their superiority over the inhabitants of the clime of Bābil, even though the harm of the evil winds and especially the pure west wind is even more severe in their case than in the case of the inhabitants of Syria. The effects of these winds are in their country more numerous than in Syria.—Here end the words of Māsā as-Sūrānī.

Text 13 (NA, pp. 1025–1027)

Experimentation shows us¹³¹ in the whole clime of Bābil, its hot as well as cold regions, that when thick dust covers the leaves of the vine, this is clearly harmful to the plant. Thus, we know that dust is harmful. A little dust will be a little harmful, and thus the harm comes according to the amount of the dust: much dust is obviously more harmful than little dust.

The region of Anūḥā resembles in its heat and air the region of al-Ubulla and the lower parts of the clime of Bābil in many ways

¹³⁰ The passage seems corrupt. The idea is probably that there is only one feature in which the body does not share with the soul, whereas in all else it does (cf. 3.4). I have emended *li'l-ashyā'i wāḥidan fa-ammā ghayruhu . . . to illā shay'an wāḥidan* etc., in the translation.

¹³¹ Middle Arabic *tūrīnā*.

although it does differ from it in that it is drier and more arid than the lower parts of the clime of Bābil and this part of the clime of Bābil is correspondingly moister. Yet, when it comes to the heat of air they are close to each other except that there is a difference between the two regions which is something else than that which we have already alluded to.

This concerns the special properties (*khuṣūṣiyyāt*) of the countries, affecting the growth of various plants in them. Without doubt, Anūḥā spoke only truth¹³² and thus dust will be beneficial to vines in his country because it suits them due to a special property of the nature (*tabʿ*) of that country, but is harmful in the country of the Kanʿānites because it is very cold. Dust (*ghubār*) is the same as dirt (*turāb*) and dirt comes from the soil (*al-ard*) and partakes of its nature (*ṭabiʿa*), i.e., cold, dry and heavy. When two cold and two dry things¹³³ are combined against vines, that will be harmful to them.

This study has shown us that all three¹³⁴ are truthful in what they say, not false in the stories which they tell. Their differences, thus, come down to the differences between the climates of their countries and the natures (*ṭibāʿ*) of the plants growing there. The clime of Bābil has another special property (*khuṣūṣiyya*) and another position (*mawqīʿ*) in respect to the rotation of the Sun and the other angels (*malāʾika*) which rotate in the sphere (*al-falak*), different from that of the country of the Kanʿānites and the country of Anūḥā and thus the properties (*aḥkām*) of the plants differ in each.

Ṣardāyā and Māsā as-Sūrānī say that this difference in the special properties of the countries and the many wondrous things caused by that is the result of their position (*li-mawqīʿ mawqīʿihā*) in regard to the rotations of the two Luminous Ones and the stars, according to their proximity or remoteness and the deviations (*inḥirāfāt*) which occur among the stars when they circle in their cycles.

When they speak about stars (*kawākib*) they do not only mean the five wandering ones (*al-mutaḥayyira*) but also the fixed ones (*thābita*) which are in the roof (*saqf*) of the sphere of the zodiacal signs, as well as the rotation of the pictures (*suwar*) which are in the sphere.

¹³² Anūḥā had spoken about the beneficial effects of dust.

¹³³ I.e., the coldness of the dust and the climate.

¹³⁴ I.e., Anūḥā, and the two Kanʿānites, Ṭāmīthrā and Ṣardāyā, mentioned on p. 1023.

Since this is so—and it certainly is so—then it is possible (*jāza*) that both Anūḥā and Ṣardāyā and Ṭāmīthrā spoke the truth in what they said. What they say is thus true and it will be found to be as they have said and the differences which occur with the vines are due to the special properties of the countries caused by the rotation of the stars according to their positions and the places (*biqāʿ*) of the earth. This is so, in general, for all plants: it is not a special property of vines alone.

Yet Māsā as-Sūrānī has said concerning the influence (*taʿthīrāt*) of the celestial bodies and the manifestations (*zuhūr*) of their actions (*afʿāl*) especially in plants and their manifestations in other things, that their manifestation especially in vines is more ample and more evident. The celestial body, the action of which is most manifest in plants and especially in vines but also in other composed bodies (*al-ajsām al-murakkaba*) is the Moon.

It has become clear to us and other people that plants have different states (*aḥwāl*) which vary according to the waxing or waning of the Moon and there are other states after its eclipses so that even the most stubborn opponent cannot disclaim this, and the less so one who is merely doubtful concerning the truth of this.

The Moon and the stars also have effects (*taʿthīrāt*) on the vines and similar plants through a special property which is clear and commonly known. The ancient Kasdānians have spoken about it and distinguished between the different effects and they have named some of them plagues (*āfāt*) which befall the vines because of the celestial bodies. They also have judged the same in plants other than vines, such as date palms, other trees and subtle (*liṭāf*) plants. They have set down (*rasamū*) certain days in the month, when the Moon is waxing, for certain things which they have experimented with concerning the planting of vines.

They have mentioned accidents (*aʿrād*) which befall the vines and they have called these their diseases (*asqām*) just like they speak about diseases which befall the bodies of people and other living beings (*al-ḥayawānāt*). We have obtained (*ḥazīnā*) this (knowledge) in the days of King Badīnā, of lucky fate (*as-saʿīd al-jadd*), and because of that we will now speak more about this, according to our abilities.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ In the following, the author divides diseases which befall vines into four categories, namely *āfa*, *saqam*, *ʿarīd* and *yaraqān*.

CHAPTER FOUR

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

4.1. *Prophets and sages*

In the *Nabatean Agriculture*, prophets proceed in a similar succession as in Islam and Christianity. The religious world history is populated with sages and prophets most of whom bear Biblical names, such as Adam and Seth, yet their identification with their Biblical namesakes is made problematic by the roles they have in the text, being also farmers and cultural heroes that have brought to mankind the sciences they were given through revelation.¹

The text does not make a clear difference between sages (*hakīm*) and prophets (*nabī*, on a few occasions also *rasūl*), and the terms seem to be more or less interchangeable. This mirrors the intertangled concept of knowledge: natural science and religion are but two sides of the same reality, like the gods and the visible—and predictable—celestial bodies are two ways of speaking of the same reality. Similarly, the opposite of sin (*dhanb*, *khaṭiyya*) is reason; philosophers and prophets, each in their own way, guide people away from sin—which is caused by lack of reason, leading to the governance of lusts—towards the use of reason (cf. **Text 32**).

Moreover, even though these Biblical heroes are in the right temporal sequence—Adam coming before Anūḥā, who seems to be partly identifiable with Noah (see also section 5) and partly, perhaps, Enoch²—the Biblical heroes are both preceded and followed by other characters, though they are mainly portrayed as being earlier than the Nabatean sages, or prophets. In NA, p. 1441, there is an explicit sequence Dawānāy (whom we may, somewhat tentatively, identify with Adōnāy)³—Adam—Māsā as-Sūrānī—Ṣaḡhrīth—Yanbūshād. Here

¹ Jewish and Christian elements are rather rare in Harranian religion but otherwise late Mesopotamian paganism was affected by these vigorous monotheistic traditions, cf., e.g., Tubach (1986): 391, 393–394.

² Akhnūkhā is mentioned together with Anūḥā only in **Text 32**. Cf. also Enosh, for whose rôle in Manichaeism, see Reeves (1996): 38.

³ Note that Adōnā (written 'DWN') is found as a personal name in the inscriptions

Adam comes before the Nabatean sages, but there are also other sages who are set before him. One might compare this with the general Gnostic tendency to insert a mythological background to Biblical stories.

The Biblical characters Dawānāy, Adam, Anūḥā, Akhnūkhā and Seth are listed as prophets (*nabī*) in **Text 32**, whereas Ṣardāyā and Ṭāmīthrā the Kanʿānites, Māsā as-Sūrānī and Kāmās(h) an-Nahrī are listed as philosophers (*ḥaylasūf*) (cf. also **Text 36**). Māsā is further called “the Sophist” (*as-Sūfistāy*) in NA, p. 662. In **Text 32**, Kāmāsh is called “the Ancient” and, though with some hesitation, set before Dawānāy and all the others, being thus the most ancient of all sages.⁴ On the other hand, in **Text 36** it is stated that Dawānāy is the first man about whom the Nabateans know stories and both he, Ṣardāyā and Anūḥā are credited with having revelations: one cannot divide the characters into Biblical prophets vs. Nabatean sages.⁵ There is, in fact, no clearly drawn line between the two groups, and one finds both Nabatean prophets and Biblical sages in the *Nabatean Agriculture*. The earliest sages are also portrayed as worthy of worship.

According to Qūlūshūshā (for whom, see below), Dawānāy’s soul was even ontologically different from the souls of other people because of the extreme care taken of him by the Sun (NA, p. 992). **Text 25** even seems to imply that Dawānāy ascended to heaven instead of dying. Dawānāy did not write on agriculture; all his books were concerned with the science of the spheres (*ʿilm al-falak*) and the stars,

from Sumatar Harabesi, see, e.g., Drijvers (1980): 123–126. The Metropolitan of Elam, martyred at the time of Shāpūr, also bore the name Mār Adōnā, see Vööbus (1958): 300. Cf. also a Turfan Manichaean text which reads *pus ī adōmāy*, “son of Adōnāy,” for Jesus, see de Blois (1998): 483. Travaglia (2003): 318–319, identifies Dawānāy with Hermes and, in general, reads the *Nabatean Agriculture* in Hermetic terms. There are some undeniable similarities between the Hermetic tradition and the *Nabatean Agriculture* but they are not conclusive enough to warrant any final conclusions.

⁴ An-Nahrī refers to Nahrawān, and it does not, it might be added, mean “Mesopotamian,” as Fahd understands this in his attempt to explain the name of Kāmās(h) an-Nahrī as [Gil]gamesh (!) the Mesopotamian, see Fahd (1998): 180; cf. also El Faiz (1995): 32. Gilgamesh was, of course, hazily known until very late times, as shown by Tigay (1982): 251–255, and Schwartz (2002), but his fame waned when the cuneiform script was forgotten and there is nothing whatsoever in the Kāmās(h) of the *Nabatean Agriculture* that would resemble the Gilgamesh of the Epic or the later tradition, except for the very superficial phonetic similarity between Kāmās and Gilgamesh.

⁵ Likewise, the Harranians were prone to identify prophets with sages and the idea is found everywhere where philosophy and monotheistic tradition based on prophecy have met.

as well as the science of the primary qualities and the elements (NA, p. 992).⁶ However, some of the Sethians calumniate him (NA, p. 993).⁷ This, however, only harms themselves (NA, p. 993):

We mention this because once we took part in the memorial festival (*ʿīd dhukrān*)⁸ of Dawānāy in his temple in Bābil. When his idol (*sanam*) was brought out and we all prostrated ourselves in front of it, I happened to raise my head and I saw one man from among the great ones in the people of the religion (*sharīʿa*) of Seth—if I would give his name, you, too, would know him, yet I do not wish to do so. I saw him drawing apart (*muʿtazilan*) at the side of the temple, at some distance from the others, holding his nose with his right hand and holding the palm of the left hand under it, thus acting as if his nose were bleeding and he were not prostrating himself before the idol because of that.

Some of those present noticed this but most did not. He asked for some water which was brought to him and so he escaped from prostrating himself before the statue (*sūra*) of Dawānāy.⁹ This was because Seth did not observe this fast (*sawm*) nor attend this memorial festival (*dhukrān*) among the fasts and the memorial festivals. Indeed, he kept quiet and did not mention him nor anything connected with this; I do not know why he did so. People have interpreted this attitude (*taʿawwalahu*) of Seth in various ways.

We all considered him (i.e., the man in the temple) stupid and ignorant in his excessive partisanship (*aṣabiyya*) concerning Seth and his turning away from Dawānāy. In this, he was like the farmer about whom it is told that he sowed barley and wheat on six *jarīb*.¹⁰ When the crop was ripe and ready to be reaped, it was attacked by slimy worms (*al-kalb al-mukhāṭī*)¹¹ which come out from and are generated from the putrefaction of the soil and they devoured it all in one day, as they say, in about that time or (some) more.

When the farmer saw that, he burned the remaining straw and the next day he took a long and rough stick and started beating the soil and crying: “By the truth of the Sun, I will never sow anything in you, (O soil)! You brought out your worms so that they ate my crop

⁶ The “Chaldaean” name of Dawānāy was later used by authors of astrological works, cf., e.g., Walbridge (2001): 21. The name was, presumably, taken from the works of Ibn Waḥshiyya.

⁷ For the Sethians, see below.

⁸ Such ceremonies were common to many religious traditions of the area, not only Christianity. For Mandaean *dukra* and Parsi *yād*, see Gündüz (1994): 82. See also **Text 24**, note 154.

⁹ Here *sūra* could, of course, also be translated as ‘picture’ which would remind one not of the divine statues of Ancient Mesopotamia, but of the icons venerated in the Eastern Church.

¹⁰ *Jarīb* is a measure of arable land, according to some, 3600 square cubits.

¹¹ For *kalb*, see Dozy, s.v.

and destroyed what I have sown!” When he grew tired of beating the soil, he threw himself down, panting. Some of those present said to him: “You have exhausted yourself uselessly and now (you think that) you have taken your revenge on this overturned soil!”

The man who drew apart (*ʿtazala*) without prostrating himself before the statue (*ṣūra*) of Dawānāy is like this farmer who beat the soil until he thought that he had taken his revenge!

Dawānāy is credited with drawing pictures (see **Texts 30–31**). This feature reminds one of Mani and his later fame as an illuminator of manuscripts. Dawānāy is regularly titled “the Lord of Mankind” (*sayyid an-nās*, e.g., NA, p. 214) and occasionally “the merciful father” (*al-ab ar-raḥīm*; e.g., NA, p. 40)¹² or “the Babylonian” (*al-Bābilī*, e.g., **Text 2**). He is specifically said to have been “a man of stars” who “believed that all generated things come to be through the actions of the celestial bodies” (*anna jamīʿa l-akwāni hiya min afʿālī n-nujūm*, NA, p. 214). He was also a man of critical acumen in general (NA, p. 214).

Adam, the favourite of the Moon,¹³ is depicted as a major prophet. Like Dawānāy, he, too, is occasionally called “the Babylonian” (e.g., NA, p. 922). In addition, he is called an-Nakhlī, due to his association with the date palm (*nakhl*, see NA, p. 1441). He was the prophet of the Moon but he was sent to all human beings (e.g., NA, pp. 705–706). However, there are people who do not believe in his prophecy (NA, pp. 950–951) and they say that he claimed revelation only for instructional (*siyāsa*) reasons, in order to govern his people. Anūḥā, in fact, tried to play down the role of Adam when he thought that Adam was too highly revered by his contemporaries (**Text 36**). Although Adam’s prophecy is related to the books he wrote¹⁴—the material for them coming through revelation—the link between prophecy and books is not as close as in, e.g., Islam: the books of the prophets are not holy books in an Islamic sense but merely compilations of revelations, or apocalypses, and the revelations themselves mostly belong to the field of natural science: the gods reveal wisdom and sciences, not—at least not primarily or solely—religious

¹² Here the name is, though, given in a corrupt form (Dawāthānī) but there does not seem to be any doubt but that it should be emended to Dawānāy.

¹³ However, it was not merely the Moon who favoured Adam, for all the other gods took care of him as well, see **Text 43**.

¹⁴ For his books, see NA, pp. 356, 359. For his book on *tawhidāt*, see NA, pp. 1333–1334.

regulations. The great book of Adam has, though, later been lost except for fragments (e.g., NA, pp. 951, 1135).

In comparison to the other sages and prophets, Adam, the Father of Mankind (*abū'l-bashar*, e.g., NA, p. 108), occupies the place of honour. Thus, Yanbūshād is clearly put in second place in comparison to Adam (NA, p. 1307), although otherwise he is a most revered person (see **Texts 9**, and **44**). Adam, however, is not the father of *all* mankind. Only some peoples belong to his offspring (see **Text 36** and 3.2).¹⁵ According to genealogists, he had 64 children, 22 female and 42 male, though only 14 of the male children had offspring (**Text 37**).¹⁶ Nor was he the first human being, for he was preceded by other sages, such as Kāmās an-Nahrī. Adam is also said to have related in his books stories of earlier sages, such as Shāmāt an-Nahrī (NA, p. 706).

The great book of Adam contained the complete teachings of Adam, including the names of all things (*‘allama fīhi wa-‘addada asmā’ a l-ashyā’*, NA, p. 1135). This is, of course, a prominent theme in Islamic literature (cf. Q 2: 31) but the same idea was known from Judaism¹⁷ and was thus widely known even before Islam. This great book is elsewhere (NA, p. 705) said to have been written on causes (*‘ilal*).

Anūhā—also written Anūkhā, and bearing the gentilicia as-Sūkīdāhī (only in NA, p. 562) and al-Ḥithyānī (only in **Text 39**)—is often mentioned in the text, usually referred to as a prophet, though in a function that would fit more appropriately a sage. He, like Ṭāmīthrā the Kan‘ānite, originated from Syria (*ash-Shām*) and was an expert in the cultivation of the vine (NA, pp. 380–381)—his Biblical counterpart, Noah, was, of course, famous, as well as infamous, for his connection with the vine (Genesis 9: 20). In NA, p. 483, Anūhā is specifically called the prophet of the Moon (*nabī al-Qamar*); on the other hand, Ṭāmīthrā derives his success from Mercury (**Text 39**). Anūhā is said to have opposed the religious views of his contemporaries, especially the worshipping of idols. This is said to have led to his maltreatment and imprisonment (NA, p. 404). It was Ṭāmīthrā

¹⁵ One might also mention the *nisba* al-Ādamī, held by, e.g., the third-century (A.H.) Ibrāhīm ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Ishāq al-Ādamī aṣ-Ṣaymarī (see Yāqūt, *Muḥjam* III: 440, s.v. Ṣaymara): Adamites are only part of mankind.

¹⁶ The number of Adam’s children is not specified in the Bible (Genesis 5:4) but the apocryphal *Life of Adam and Eve* (24: 3) mentions that he begat 30 sons and 30 daughters, in addition to Cain, Abel and Seth, i.e., 63 in all.

¹⁷ Cf. Ginzberg (1998) I: 61–63.

who incited people to punish those who did not worship the idols. Yanbūshād, who is credited with monotheistic ideas, is said to have told the story of Anūḥā with pleasure, since the people of Anūḥā were wiped out by a great flood which destroyed their country and most, but not all, countries of the Greeks and Kardānians so that these great nations perished (NA, p. 404).¹⁸ Only Anūḥā survived, first finding refuge in Egypt. When he was driven away from there, a famine befell Egypt (NA, p. 404). Anūḥā is called both a prophet, a sage (*ḥakīm*) and a doctor (*ṭabīb*) (NA, p. 183)—one should remember that in the Jewish tradition, Noah is credited with medical books.¹⁹

Some Biblical characters are portrayed in a way which is not in accordance with their Biblical parallels—this reversal of roles is well known from the Mandaic religion.²⁰ Thus, Abraham seems somewhat ambivalent.²¹ He is said to have come from Kūthā-Rabbā (e.g., NA, p. 264). He was, though, of Kanʿānite origin, since his ancestors were among the leaders (*aʿimma*) of the Kanʿānites who were brought by Namrūd to the clime of the Kasdānians (**Text 37**).²²

Abraham is said to have disagreed with the majority (*al-jamāʿa*) by attributing “all actions on earth to an actor (*fāʿil*) who is more powerful, more forceful and more sublime (*aʿlā*) than the Sun,” conceding to the Sun only the role of secondary cause (*ʿilla*), the Sun merely being an instrument like the axe for the carpenter (NA, p. 264).²³ The passage continues with a completely Aristotelian discussion of

¹⁸ Cf. also the fate of Yanbūshād himself, see below and **Text 24**.

¹⁹ See Ginzberg (1998) I: 173. For Noah as an agriculturalist in Jewish tradition, see Ginzberg (1998) I: 147 (invention of tools); I: 167 (vines); V: 190.

²⁰ Cf. Fauth (1995): vii–viii, and, more extensively, Segelberg (1969).

²¹ The animosity between Abraham and the Harranians, who appropriated Seth, Idris and Noah, is well known and based, of course, on Biblical material. Cf., e.g., Green (1992): 13, quoting al-Kisāʿī through Chwolsohn (1856) II: 502–503. Incidentally, the dating of al-Kisāʿī (d.c. 795, according to Green) is mistaken: the grammarian al-Kisāʿī (d. 189/805) has been confused with his later namesake, who was interested in the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* and about whose life little is known. The oldest manuscripts of his work date from the 7th/13th century. Chwolsohn, in his notes to the passage (II: 742) remarked that this al-Kisāʿī “mit dem Grammatiker gleichen Namens (...) nicht identisch ist.”

The Harranian story about why Abraham left Harran and circumcised himself is told by al-Bīrūnī in his *Āthār*, pp. 204–205. Cf. also Hjärpe (1972): 52, and Strohmaier (1996): 125–129.

²² If we compare this to Biblical history, we see how the exile is set before the time of the patriarchs. Cf. also von Gutschmid (1861): 42.

²³ Reading *liʿn-najjār* for the edition’s *liʿl-bukhār*. This is a typically Aristotelian metaphor, cf., e.g., Ibn Bāja, *Nafs*, 23 (*kaʿl-qaddūm liʿl-khashaba*).

the effects of the rays of the Sun. The Biblical patriarch is portrayed as a sage and a philosopher. The schism finally led to the expulsion of Abraham from the clime of Bābil to Syria by the order of the king after a long debate between Abraham and his opponents (NA, p. 264).

The travels of Abraham are prominent in the text, although Adam is the archetypal wanderer (see section 5). Abraham is even said to have travelled in the “Roman” (i.e., Byzantine) area (NA, p. 774: *fi ba‘di istiṭrāqihī bilāda r-Rūm*). For legends concerning Abraham, see **Texts 23** and **37**.²⁴

Dawānāy and Adam are among the most revered characters but Seth, the son of Adam, is blamed for having deviated from his father’s teaching and having changed his doctrines (e.g., NA, p. 322: *mā rasamahu n-nabī Adamā fi muṣḥafihī sh-shar‘ī*).²⁵ The law (*shar‘a*) of Seth has been preserved entirely, contrary to the law of Adam which has, as such, been lost (NA, p. 951).²⁶ What the law of Seth contains is not very clearly indicated. One of the few concrete things we learn about it is that it prohibited forming marital bonds with liars, who should be cursed until they repent (NA, p. 162).

The Sethians, who have joined with the party of Māsā (**Text 33**) are often blamed and seen as enemies of the author.²⁷ The attitude towards Sethians varies from open hostility (e.g., **Text 43**, where there is also a description of their appearance) to a basic acceptance of them as a cognate group. They are often connected with magic, as also with a belief in the possibility of foretelling the future which, according to them, may be done by a soothsayer (*kāhin*, e.g., **Text 36**). This is, however, vehemently refuted by Qūthāmā, who denies any foreknowledge of either universals or particulars as well as the validity of any accurate astrological prognostications. The same

²⁴ Cf. also al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj* §1392, and Islamic *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* works.

²⁵ Seth, like Enoch, is revered in many Gnostic movements and also by Manichaeans who otherwise reject the persons of the Old Testament, cf. Lieu (1985): 122, and Reeves (1996): ix, 8, 11. For the bifurcation of mankind into the sons of Seth vs. Cain in Mandaicism, see Reeves (1996): 36. The terms *shar‘* and *shar‘a* are Islamic but they are also used to translate the terms “law” and “lawgiver” in Greek and Syriac philosophical texts, in addition to *nāmūs* (Greek *nomos*), see, e.g., **Text 9**. *Shar‘a* was also used by and about Harranians, cf., e.g., al-Maqdisī, *Bad’* I: 197 (*qara’tu fi shar‘i’ al-Harrāniyyīn*).

²⁶ In NA, p. 1334, this corruption of the book of Adam is depicted in terms that would imply mere negligence, not purposeful forgery.

²⁷ Travaglia (2003): 320–321, suggests identifying these Sethians with the Harranians.

ambivalence is also shown towards Māsā and his followers (e.g., NA, p. 757).

In addition to the Biblical prophets, one also finds Nabatean names used in reference to prophets and sages.²⁸ Among the most ancient ones, in addition to Kāmās(h) an-Nahrī, one finds Māsā as-Sūrānī²⁹ who is also connected with magic (see 4.4) and seems to have had a specific relation to Jupiter (**Text 33**). He is said to have been about 20 when Adam died (**Text 36**). **Text 39**, on the other hand, tells us that Māsā lived for 108 years after the death of Adam, thus dying at about the age of 128. The latter text also credits him with a book which was still in existence at the time of Qūthāmā. Besides being a magician, he was also a student of his great-grandfather Adam (**Texts 36** and **39**).

Among the Nabatean sages, a special place is reserved for Yanbūshād, one of the three authors of the book (see **Text 2**), further identified as the son of Kāmāṭā in NA, pp. 648–649, and credited with a “Book of the Seasons”, or “Times” (*Kitāb al-Azmina*, NA, p. 403).

Yanbūshād is described as a wandering ascetic, abstaining from corporeal pleasures in order to please the gods (e.g., NA, pp. 607, 1473; cf. 4.5). The reason for his asceticism and especially his unwillingness to celebrate religious festivals with others is said to have been his aversion to the manner of their worship and religion (NA, p. 403). His religious ideas are different from those of others (see **Text 19**, **25**, **27**, and **46**) but in the time of Qūthāmā his followers are said to have dwindled (NA, p. 607). According to reliable sources,³⁰ he used to stay awake during the night, and to fast, pray, give alms and do other good deeds, living a solitary and secluded life (NA, p. 216). It was obviously because of his denial of the actions of the stars and, perhaps, even the Sun that he was called by his enemies

²⁸ One may compare this with the Qur’anic addition of Arab prophets (Hūd, Šālīḥ, perhaps Shu‘ayb) to the series of Biblical prophets.

²⁹ One might cautiously try to identify Māsā/ī as-Sūrānī with Māsh/Mās the son of Nabīṭ in al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj* §509. The same name is also found elsewhere in the genealogies, see the index to *Murūj* (VII: 625, both *sub* Mās and Māsh). Fahd summarily identifies Māsā with Messos, the eponymous founder of the Messians (e.g., in Fahd 1998: 332, or his article *Nabaṭ* in EI², p. 837). There is in fact no evidence for equating the two, except for the superficial phonetic similarity.

³⁰ Ibn Waḥshiyya uses the standard Islamic terminology of *isnād*: *wa-qad akhbarānī mukhbirun thiqa ‘an thiqāt akhbarūhu ‘an thiqāt kadhālika ilā zamān Yanbūshād*. Note the continuous *isnād* leading to the authority himself, and thus fulfilling the requirements of an Islamic *isnād*.

“the unbelieving denier” (*al-kāfir al-jāhid*, NA, p. 216). The god of Yanbūshād, on the other hand, is said by some to have raised him to heaven, where he lives forever without dying, as many people in ‘Udhaybā, Būraqyā and Ṭīzanābādhā believe (**Text 27**).

Some of the details in the life of Yanbūshād remind one of similar Greek stories about Apollonius of Tyana, conveniently summarised in Hadas-Smith (1965) (see also Weisser 1980: 10–14), although one may as easily show differences between the two. The personalities of Yanbūshād and Apollonius merely stem from similar contexts. Thus, Apollonius, a sage and a prophet was an ascetic who did not eat meat (I.8/200).³¹ He used to fix his eyes on the ground (I.10/201; IV.13/213—cf. the behaviour of the ascetic in **Text 28**). He was sexually abstinent (II.13/202) and against bathing (I.16/203). He travelled among Arabs who ate the livers of snakes (I.20/204–205). He also travelled far and wide, learning from Indian sages (III.25–50/200–210). He refused to participate in the sacrifice of a white horse (I.31/205), disapproving, in general, of animal sacrifices (V.25/225), and arguing that instead of burning bulls, one ought to offer the gods a burning frankincense image of a bull (cf. also VIII.7.x./252).³² He avoided “products derived from mortal animals” (IV.40/219). Finally, according to one version (VIII.30/258), he did not die but ascended to heaven alive.

Thus, both Yanbūshād and the *Nabatean Agriculture* in general are remarkably close in tenor to the *Life of Apollonius*, which is probably due to the general context. Yanbūshād is not a coded name for Apollonius, however, they merely share the same ideological milieu.

Yanbūshād’s opinions on the gods have already been discussed (section 3). When it comes to the astrological effects of the stars, he denied that the other stars had any effect at all, conceding action only to the Sun (NA, p. 215—this was, though, in reality only prudence and pretence on his part, cf. section 3). The apparent actions of the stars can, in fact, be explained as coincidences: something may occur which coincides with the appearance of some star but it is not caused by its appearance (NA, p. 215). In Yanbūshād’s opinion, the astral effects mentioned by the sage Dawānāy are only a way of

³¹ The references here are to Philostratus’s *Life*, followed, after a slash, by Hadas-Smith (1965).

³² Cf. also von Gutschmid (1861): 65.

speaking, and this way has been chosen in order to govern the people (NA, p. 215). This culminates in claims which portray Yanbūshād almost as an atheist who worships Nothingness (*al-ʿadam*; **Text 27**).³³

Yanbūshād is also said to have been sceptical concerning the wondrous things attributed to Adam (NA, p. 402; for some of these, see section 5). Qūthāmā, however, does not agree with Yanbūshād in his aberrant doctrines (e.g., NA, p. 405) but declares himself a follower of the way (*sunna*) of Adam. Qūthāmā disapproves of the fact that Yanbūshād disagrees with Ṣaghrīth (NA, p. 405) while admitting at the same time that Ṣaghrīth—who followed the doctrine of Adam—was his teacher. However, Ibn Waḥshīyya, in a note, turns this around yet again (see **Text 25**) claiming that Qūthāmā, in fact, did agree with the monotheism of Yanbūshād although he did not dare voice his opinion openly.

In the case of prophecy, we are told that contrary to all Nabateans from among the Kasdānians Yanbūshād refuted the prophecy of both Adam and Seth and believed only in the prophecy of the Lord of Mankind Dawānāy.³⁴ For Yanbūshād, Adam was merely a man who invented things but did not receive any revelations, but because of the respect he enjoyed among people he was called “Our father” (*abūnā*) and “the god of all people” (NA, p. 356).—For Qūthāmā, the knowledge of Adam was greatly superior to anything that a mere human being could have invented by himself, and this proves that it must derive from revelation (NA, p. 358). At this point in the text, Qūthāmā dates Adam as having lived many thousands of years before him (NA, p. 359).

Another major figure and the second author of the *Nabatean Agriculture* is Ṣaghrīth,³⁵ himself something of a sage, a prophet and a farmer;³⁶ the estates owned by him are mentioned, e.g., in NA, p. 673:

³³ Here, again, one might compare him with Apollonius who (cf. Weisser 1980: 19–20) believed in an absolutely transcendental deity, Nūs. Apollonius might well have appreciated Yanbūshād whose monotheism is by no means contradictory to pagan thought patterns of the Late Antiquity, a healthy reminder to those who would see all monotheistic tendencies as necessarily Christian, Jewish or Islamic.

³⁴ Cf. also Stroumsa (1999): 145–148 (on the *Barāhīmā*).

³⁵ At one point, NA, p. 306, the text would seem to imply that besides Ṣaghrīth, there was another person, called Ḍaghrīth *al-ʿazīm*, as Ṣaghrīth is here given as quoting this Ḍaghrīth. However, the passage seems slightly confused, and more probably Ḍaghrīth is here, as often elsewhere, merely a variant of Ṣaghrīth.

³⁶ On his literary achievements, see section 5.

(Ṣaghrīth) of all people best understood agriculture. He spent all his life, according to what we have been told (*ḥasba mā ta'addā ilaynā min akhbārihi*), in acquiring estates and fields and taking care of them. He followed the plants, grasses and trees, observing, experimenting and fathoming (*sabran*). Thus, he attained an incomparable knowledge of plants, both harmful and useful.

Ṣaghrīth organized his agronomical work according to the dominions (*wilāyāt*) of the seven celestial bodies, starting with Saturn and from there downwards (NA, p. 306).—The third, and final, author of the Syriac original, Qūthāmā, later reorganized the material in his final recension.

Ṣaghrīth is said to have been originally from Barūshāyā³⁷ and, because that region was full of trees, he was particularly knowledgeable about trees (NA, pp. 169–170). He, like Seth, is credited with a following (*shī'a*) according to whom he was not only the leader of his nation (*umma*) but also “a prophet who received revelations (*nabī mūḥan ilayhi*) by the way of inspiration (*ilhām*), not by intimate conversation (*munājāt*) or visions in sleep (*ar-rū'yā fī n-nawm*)” (NA, p. 170; on the theory of prophecy, see 4.2). Qūthāmā, however, disagrees with this and holds that Ṣaghrīth al-Mamlakanātī—as he is also called—was merely a wise man, inventive and sharp witted. Yet his disagreement with the Ṣaghrīthians is not complete, since he concedes inspiration (*ilhām*) to Ṣaghrīth (NA, p. 170).³⁸

Qūthāmā, the third and final author of the *Nabatean Agriculture*, often refers to himself as being of less importance than his two illustrious predecessors. He is portrayed (e.g., **Text 29**) as a rich landowner living in the city, Bābil, taking care of his estates from there. One clearly sees how the later Nabateans become more and more clearly sages and magnates and less like prophets. As a rule of thumb, one might say that the earlier Nabatean sages have more religious authority than the later ones.

Qūthāmā is also said to have written a book on cattle and other quadrupeds, which, however, Ibn Waḥshīyya was unable to find and

³⁷ Cf. Barshāwiyā, as in, e.g., NA, p. 235.

³⁸ The opinions of the Ṣaghrīthians and Qūthāmā would, according to NA, p. 170, seem to be almost identical. With a small emendation (adding *bal*), the passage would become more understandable, changing “not by intimate conversation or visions in sleep” into “and even by intimate conversation and visions in sleep.” For the relations between the two, see also **Text 50**.

translate (NA, p. 1493).³⁹ Qūthāmā belonged specifically to the Qūqānians (*al-Qūqāniyyīn*, e.g., NA, p. 141).⁴⁰

Among sages, one often finds Rawāhiṭā (ibn Ṭūshān, NA, p. 143) who is called a doctor (*ṭabīb*) and credited with many books on medicine (e.g., NA, p. 702). Another often-mentioned character is Ṭāmīthrā al-Kanʿānī, the Kanʿānite, sometimes called a prophet but mostly portrayed as a learned man, a sage, as in NA, p. 830:

Ṭāmīthrā al-Kanʿānī was most outstanding (*jalīl al-qadr*) in the sciences of astronomy (*al-ʿilm biʾl-falak*), physics (*ṭabīʿa*), psychology (*naḥs*), elements (*anāṣir*) and all plants (*manābit*) and composed bodies (*al-ajsām al-murakkaba*), but (even) he was not infallible (*maʿṣūm*). No, he was a human being who could err and get confused. He made a mistake (concerning coriander, *kuzbara*) like other learned men sometimes do, but not like the ignorance of the ignorants. Yet the matter with coriander was obscure to him.

There still remains one Nabatean prophet worth more attention, namely Asqūlūbiyā (or Asqūlūbīnā), the messenger of the Sun (*raṣūl ash-Shams*; NA, p. 748; see also **Texts 42** and **49**). Although most of the non-Biblical names are completely opaque and the etymological speculations (see 1.2) have led nowhere, this name resembles very closely that of Asclepius and one might be tempted to speculate on the similarity. If there is a connection, it is the only Greek name found mentioned in the text more than once (for Hermes and

³⁹ Such chapters are often found in Greek agronomical texts. In NA, p. 335, there is a reference to a discussion of the care of cattle later on but such a passage never appears. This might imply that the source(s) originally contained a final section on cattle which was lost before the translation. In the same passage, cows are elevated to the position of most excellent and useful animals (NA, pp. 334–335) and the ancients (*al-qudamāʾ*) are said to have preferred them over all other animals. This reminds one of both Zoroastrianism and Hinduism, but all agricultural societies easily develop such tendencies.

⁴⁰ The identification of the Qūqānians with a sect bearing a similar-sounding name (see Fahd 1998: 327, with reference to NA, p. 275; for the Quqites, see Drijvers 1967) is unwarranted. Fahd calls Qūthāmā “chef de file de la secte des Qūqéens,” although NA, p. 275, merely calls him Qūthāmā al-Qūqānī, and there is no reference in the text to him being a chief, or the Qūqānians a sect. Nabatean gentilicia, *nisbas*, tend either to refer to a place (such as Sūrānī from Sūrā) or to a people (such as Kasdānī or Kanʿānī), not to religious groups or sects. For the equally improbable explanations of the names Māsā and Kāmās(h) an-Nahrī, see notes 4 and 29.

One might speculate that the name should actually be read as Qūfānī, which is sometimes found as a variant, with reference to ʿAqarqūf(ā); cf. Nöldeke (1876): 449, note 4. There is also a place in Irbil, called Bāquqā (see *Akhbār baṭārika*, p. 55) which could give a *nisba* Qūqānī.

Agathodaimon, see below). Asclepius was a popular god in late paganism⁴¹ and it is within the realms of possibility that his name lies behind the, admittedly rather corrupt, form 'SQWLWBY'. In **Text 49**, moreover, 'SQWLWBYN', the messenger of the Sun, is mentioned as a great doctor whose medicines never failed to work, which would speak for his identification with Asclepius.

In general, there seems to be a trend to demote gods to wise and ancient human beings in the *Nabatean Agriculture*. We find such a case in the stories of Tammūz and Yanbūshād (cf. **Text 24**) and, even more prominently, in Dawānāy, the Lord of Mankind (*sayyid al-bashar*), if we identify him with Adōnāy, changing God himself into a sage, prophet and philosopher, even a farmer.⁴²

On the other hand, the wildly corrupted parallel forms QWLWShWSh' (NA, p. 992) and 'SQW'RYTh' (NA, p. 187), both of whom are credited with the book *Asrār ash-Shams* (see NA, pp. 191 and 992) and are called "the messenger of the Sun," make one somewhat hesitant and uneasy with the identification. Perhaps the faint resemblance in roles guides us in vocalizing this name and furnishing it with the appropriate diacritical signs.

Hermes (Irmīsā) and Agathodaimon (Aghātādaymūn) who were so important in Harran⁴³ are mentioned only in one passage of the *Nabatean Agriculture* (pp. 499–500), quoted on the authority of Yanbūshād, but in fact strongly signalling that they are extraneous to the autochthonous Nabatean system. Another curious figure, Bābā, is mentioned only in NA, p. 184.⁴⁴ In addition to these, there are scores of other Nabateans who are mentioned in passing, some only once.⁴⁵

⁴¹ See, e.g., Trombley (1993–94) I: 290, 308, and passim; Fauth (1995): 158 (Julian the Apostate identified Asclepius as a messianic figure and the son of Helios). For his identification with Balimūs by the alchemist Ibn Nubāta (d. 1366), see Weisser (1980): 25–26. For the Hermetic Asclepius, the disciple of Hermes, see Travaglia (2003): 323–324, and section 5. The identification of Asqūlūbiyā with Asclepiades (cf. Ritter-Plessner 1962: 372, note 3) goes back to Ewald, see von Gutschmid (1861): 12, 47–49.

⁴² For the vacillation between gods and philosophers in the Hermetic corpus, see also Kieckhefer (2000): 26. Cf. also the Christian demonizing of pagan gods to *daimones*—with the obvious difference that for Christians these were evil powers. Also the Gnostics downgraded the Old Testament God to an evil, or at least halfwit, demiurge.

⁴³ Cf., e.g., Green (1992): 115–117, 171–174; Fauth (1995): 32.

⁴⁴ For Bābā, see Brock (1983), with further bibliography, and Bosworth (1999): 19–20 (translation of aṭ-Ṭabarī).

⁴⁵ As they cannot be identified nor any ideological systems of theirs abstracted

4.2. *Prophecy and revelation*

In the *Nabatean Agriculture* astral deities speak to men through their images, or idols (*ṣanam*). Often it is specifically the Moon who transmits the divine messages to the idols to be further delivered to men.⁴⁶

The optimal astrological conditions for prophecy presuppose that Jupiter and Mercury share an action in some part of the sphere. When the Moon, “the Nightly Luminous One and the Possessor of Intellectual Secrets (*an-Nayyir al-Laylī ṣāhib al-asrār al-‘aqliyya*)” (NA, p. 108) passes by, it receives the joint influence of these two celestial bodies and transmits it to the sublunar world. This transmission causes the respective phenomenon in the lower world, so that some person may attain the ultimate limit of knowledge and become like the god of gods, the sage of sages and the wise among the wise. However, this does not lead to a final revelation, for mankind deteriorates and, because of this, revelation must be repeated (see **Text 15**).⁴⁷

The theory of revelation (*waḥy*) is discussed in detail in **Text 36**, where it is stated that revelation comes from gods to men either through dreams when sleeping or through inspiration (*ilhām*) when awake. The intermediary role of *ṣanam* is also mentioned, e.g., in **Text 35** (the idol of the Moon appears in a dream to a man who had prayed to the idol), and NA, p. 1255 (the idol of Jupiter in a dream).⁴⁸ The various forms of prophecy are listed especially clearly in NA, p. 49:

Some of these things we have learned through experimentation (*biʿt-tajriba*), some through revelation given by the gods (*waḥy al-āliha*) to our forefathers (*aslāfīnā*), some they have revealed to us and some they have inspired (*bi-ilhāmihā*) us or their idols (*liʿt-aṣnām*) with and the idols

as a coherent whole, it seems futile to list all these names. For some magicians, see 4.4, and for some ancient kings, section 5. The Index of Fahd (1998) lists some 140 personal names. Even though some are listed twice or more times, due to minor variants, the total of the different Nabatean names clearly surpasses 120. I discuss all cases that might be identified.

⁴⁶ Cf. Tubach (1986): 386, 403. *Rasāʿil Ikhwān as-Ṣaḡā* IV: 300, speaks of Sabian prophets of the Moon, as well as prophets of other celestial bodies.

⁴⁷ But cf. the opinion of Yanbūshād, quoted in 3.5.

⁴⁸ Dream revelation was common in the pre-Islamic Near East. For Hatra, cf. Tubach (1986): 272–273. For the role of the Moon (Sin), see Tubach (1986): 403; the Moon (Selene) was also closely connected with plants (Tubach 1986: 450–451), as in the *Nabatean Agriculture*, too. The importance of dreams was, of course, well known in Islamic times, cf., e.g., Fahd (1966): 247–367, *Akhbār baṭārika*, p. 2, or Gutas (1988): 183 and note 81.

have taught it to us (*fa-ʿallamatnā*), some through dreams from the gods (*biʿr-ruʿyā min al-āliha*) although dreams may also come from the idols (themselves) (*wa-rubbamā kāna ruʿyā min al-aṣnām*).

Qūthāmā, the author of the Syriac original, claims a similar chain of inspiration for himself (**Text 2**), saying that Saturn revealed (*awhā*) to the Moon what he has put down in his book and the Moon revealed it to his idol, which taught it to Qūthāmā, who merely forwarded this teaching to mankind.

In **Text 22**, the *ṣanam* of Mercury is identified with the marsh mallow (*khiṭmī*) and similar identifications are also found elsewhere. In the *Nabatean Agriculture* *ṣanam* has a wide range of meanings including an image or idol (unequivocally a statue, as in **Text 55**: the great *ṣanam* of the Sun is to be sent to the King of Yemen), the symbolic tree belonging to an astral divinity, or the celestial body (*kawkab*, “star” which in modern terminology refers to the five planets known by the ancients, as well as to the Moon and the Sun) as well as a dream image of such a god, whether as a tree, an idol or in some other shape. What ties these meanings together is the idea of invisibility, even mental invisibility, of the gods in their true form (or, rather: formlessness). This makes it necessary for them to adopt a visible form, either physical or mental, to communicate with mortals and thus their forms may vary as none is their true form.

Ṣanam, in the wide sense in which it is used in the *Nabatean Agriculture*, is cognate to Suhrawardī’s (d. 1191) use of the same word. Walbridge–Ziai (1999: 198) define Suhrawardī’s *ṣanam* as “A sublunar existent considered in relation to its archetype.” In general, Suhrawardī is sometimes remarkably close to the *Nabatean Agriculture* and Sabian ideas, and it is quite possible that he was acquainted with some such sources.⁴⁹

Likewise, the Chaldaean Oracles, which were considered divine revelation,⁵⁰ mention the use of sacral statues, *agálmata*, as symbolic bridges.⁵¹ Naturally, on a more general level, the Neoplatonic idea of the One too sublime to be in any direct connection with the cosmos belongs to the same thought pattern.

⁴⁹ See Corbin (1971–1972) II: 144–145, and Walbridge (2000): 173–174. For the seven idols of the seven celestial bodies in al-Jildakī and Balīnūs, see also Kraus (1942–1943) I: 74, no. 302.

⁵⁰ See Lewy (1978): 6.

⁵¹ See Fauth (1995): 124–125.

In addition to trees as the manifestations of gods, one also finds other mentions of holy trees and other plants.⁵² Thus, the Kan‘ānites are said to seek blessing from the *shawḥaṭ*⁵³ and they predict safety from seeing it in the morning—the Arabs, on the contrary, consider the same tree ill-omened (NA, p. 1247). The people of Bārimmā call the endive (*hindubā*) “the Blessed” (*al-mubāarak*) and, according to some, in ancient times they used to prostrate themselves in front of it (NA, p. 768). Recurrent speaking trees (**Texts 21–22, 57**, and section 5)⁵⁴ are to be seen in the *Nabatean Agriculture* partly as a folkloristic motif, partly as reflecting this divine status of trees.⁵⁵

Prophecy is further analysed in **Text 36**. Here, the text distinguishes between a prophet (*nabī*) who receives revelation on the basis of his natural receptivity (*li-man taqaddama lahu muqaddamāt min jihatī tab‘ihī mūjibāt li-qubūl dhālika*), whereas soothsayers (*kuhhān*) use continuous solitude, seclusion and hunger to induce visions which may, however, still be true (*khayālāt ṣaḥūḥa ṣādīqa*). Here a *kāhin* is clearly more or less identical with an ascetic.⁵⁶

In addition to these two types, **Text 36** adds yet another, that of sages or philosophers (*falāsifa*) who attain wisdom on their own, without revelation. These are considered, so the text says, by some to be superior to prophets and by others as equal or inferior to them. The difference between a philosopher and a prophet is merely seen to lie in the way they express themselves (**Text 32**): the speech of philosophers is completely exoteric, whereas the prophets speak with veiled expressions.

A major means of revelation is through dreams. These dreams may be specifically sought by, e.g., sleeping in a temple to receive a divine answer. A rather obvious case of such incubation is told in **Text 22**. Not all dreams, however, are true. We also have a report of a false dream in **Text 29**.

⁵² For a reference, coming from Thomas of Margha, to the worshipping of the olive tree, see Morony (1984): 399. See also Robinson (2000): 100, note 65.

⁵³ See Lane, s.v.

⁵⁴ One tale (NA, p. 230) is attributed to a mysterious character “whom I should not name (*man lā yaṣluḥ an usammīyahū*) and who composed such tales (*fi khurāfātihi llatī waḍa‘ahā*).”

⁵⁵ In **Text 24**, *sakīna* is also used as a word for divine manifestation, more or less as a synonym for *ṣanam*. More often, *sakīna* is used in relation to devils, see section 5.

⁵⁶ For criticism on ascetic habits, see 4.5 and **Text 28**. It seems to be clear that *kāhin* is to be taken here in its Arabic sense, “soothsayer,” not in the Aramaic sense of the respective word, “priest.”

Prophecy is the basis of all knowledge. The epistemology of the *Nabatean Agriculture* is built on a knowledge ultimately revealed by the gods. This knowledge may further be expanded through the use of analogy (*qiyās*) and experimentation (NA, p. 300). Sense perception (*ḥiss*) and deduction (*istidlāl*) are the two ways of knowledge (*tarīqay al-ʿilm*; NA, pp. 812–813): here revelation is not taken into account as the focus here is on acquiring additional knowledge. It is instructive to have a look at what inspires this comment (NA, p. 812). Qūthāmā denies the existence of worms (*dūd*) which would cause toothache by being generated in the roots of molars and other teeth. For him, this is senseless jabber because, as he says, he has never in his life seen such worms. However, he goes on to explain toothache as caused by the elements, the existence of which he takes for granted—obviously enough, he would not have seen such things as elements either. Although he never spells this out, it is clear that for him, as well as for most scholars of his time, rational deduction leads necessarily into assuming the existence of the elements.⁵⁷

What is reported from the ancients may also be verified either through analogy or through further revelation (NA, p. 50). Observation (*mushāhada*) is also mentioned as a possible way of acquiring knowledge and it is attributed especially to senior farmers (NA, p. 285): the *Nabatean Agriculture* is one of the very few Arabic texts where peasants have such a positive role. Empirically acquired knowledge of the old farmers is seen, in a way, as superior to bookish lore.

Through analogy one may also deduce influences which cannot be perceived by the senses but whose effects may be perceived. Such are the effects of the stars (NA, p. 300). However, human knowledge does have its limits and we cannot know, e.g., the ultimate reason why the gods have selected a spherical shape for themselves (NA, p. 704). They have taught us only what they have preferred to teach, while leaving much untaught. This contains a profound wisdom and mercy for us because omniscience would do us major harm (NA, p. 704). It would be impossible for us to know everything (NA, p. 704). Intelligent (*ʿāqil*) people know the limits of their rational capacity and do not try to overstep their role (NA, p. 418).

⁵⁷ As an aside, one might add that the explanation of toothache by tiny animals generated in the roots of the tooth does not fall so much off the mark from a modern point of view, with the minor modification that one should speak of microscopic, and thus invisible to the plain eye, bacteria or viruses.

Dreams may turn out to be false, as shown above. Likewise, not all that is related from the ancients need be true. Thus, we learn from, e.g., NA, p. 162, that Sayādhār was not a trustworthy source of knowledge. Usually, however, like in the case of Adam, the inaccuracies are not to be explained as deriving from the sage himself but from the corruption caused by the tradition.

In a passage dependent on Greek sources, idols are depicted as messengers (*rusul*) who convey the will of God (*al-ilāh*) to the people (NA, p. 196). This is also the only place where one finds an explicit mention of what seems to be the hereafter (“the Return,” *al-munqalab*) where one may enjoy eternal permanence (*al-baqā’ ad-dā’im*).⁵⁸

4.3. Prayers

The astral deities determine our life and are the ultimate cause of all actions in the sublunar world. We may, however, try to have an effect on their action or to gain knowledge of future events which we may then attempt to change. Gods may be addressed by prayers and the world may be affected through magical operations and talismans. In this, the text is self-contradictory (cf. 3.5) but the same self-contradictory tendency is found in many other religious systems as well.

There are some prayers given in the text, all of them directed to the main astral deities (see **Texts 2** and **7**),⁵⁹ some to be performed in the temple, others under the open sky. Various procedures may be attached to the prayer itself, making the distinction between a prayer and a magical operation somewhat vague. Thus, e.g., NA, p. 43:

(Ṣaghrīth) has said: If you take seven of these (olive) stones and stand in front of (*ḥiyāla*) the Sun and throw them, one by one, towards the Sun with all your power saying: “O god of gods,⁶⁰ be merciful towards

⁵⁸ But cf. also the corporeal return, discussed in 4.6. Yet there corporeal return seems to belong to the select few, whereas here the text is referring to all and sundry, or the peasants. In the same passage, NA, p. 203, it is stated that one should not swear by the god of gods (*ilāh al-āliha*), but be content with only swearing by the idols of the gods.

⁵⁹ For *da’awāt al-kawākib* in the Jābirian corpus, see Kraus (1942–1943) I: 91, no. 376.

⁶⁰ Var. O my god. The term *ilāh al-āliha* was also used, according to later tradition, by al-Ḥallāj, see *Akhbār al-Ḥallāj*, no. 7 (p. 20).

me and make an end to my illness," then that illness will end by the permission of this god (*bi-idhni l-ilāh*), even if it had continued for years. This must be done seven times, so that you make use of 49 stones.

You may also take 117 stones and wash them well first with hot and then well with cold water and then dry all moistness from them with a clean apron (*mi'zar*) and oil them with olive oil. Stand on a bank of a running river with the stones in your left sleeve and look into the water saying: "O running water which is the opposite (*ḍidd*) of burning fire, soothe the anger of so-and-so (*fulān*) and take from his heart his hatred towards me and make me dear to him." Then throw the stones, one by one, into the running water and repeat this phrase and this seeking of refuge 117 times, and the anger of the one who was angered with you, will calm down, even if he be a mighty king who cannot be requested (to change his mind) nor opposed. Even if he had sworn to shed your blood and been thoroughly enraged with you, his hatred will disappear totally from his heart in the very minute he sees you and he will receive you most kindly, and the hatred in his heart will die out.

As another example one might give NA, p. 583:

If someone has chronic toothache or infected gums (*fasād al-litha*), or his gums bleed, he should take some of its (i.e., *qarūsyāhā*)⁶¹ leaves and pound them and mix them with *ashrās*⁶² and make small pellets (*banādiq*), smaller than hazelnuts, about half of their size. He should make seven of them and take them in his left hand and face the Moon on the fourteenth night of the month, looking towards the Moon. Then he (should take) one pellet into his right hand and say, as if he were addressing the Moon: "I made these pellets as an offering (*qurbān*) to you so that you would end the ache in my teeth and strengthen my gums." Then he should throw them towards the Moon as if he were throwing them to it. He should do this with all the pellets and the ache in his teeth will end and his gums will be strengthened.

For a longer prayer, see especially **Text 7**. In another book of his, *Kūtāb as-Sumūm*, Ibn Waḥshīyya mentions that one may read a prayer either in "Syriac" or in Arabic translation, giving the text of both (see 1.2., note 27). The power of the words, thus, seems to lie more in the meaning of the words than in their pronunciation. This attitude is, of course, to be expected from a translator of texts which include many charms.

⁶¹ Thus on p. 582, l. 5; the chapter heading, p. 581, reads WFRWṢYHY.

⁶² See Löw (1881), no. 233.

4.4. *Magic, talismans and special properties*

Whereas the prophets are depicted as completely good, the power of magic is much more ambiguous. Magical operations may be used in a beneficial way, e.g., in favour of agriculture. Yet the text keeps returning to the evil possibilities of black magic, which Qūthāmā, however, very emphatically dispels from himself (e.g., NA, p. 1045: “All the operations of the magicians are to me odious”).⁶³ Despite this, he readily admits having been taught by Barīshā who knew magic extremely well (**Text 40**).

The magicians are sometimes identified with the followers of Seth, the Sethians (e.g., NA, p. 322), and their evil is very much feared⁶⁴ (see also **Text 45**). When Qūthāmā meets the magician Katy²āmā in the temple of Mars (NA, p. 826) he is disgusted by him and refers to his intense hatred towards all magicians and their wickedness (*khubthi*). In this particular case, the magician tried to pry out of him some knowledge of plants by seemingly innocuous questions which aimed at getting to know details concerning a plant (*marū-khāylān*) which the magicians use in their operations. The wisdom of Qūthāmā is here depicted as superior to that of the magicians, at least in the matters concerning botany. The most impressive of the ancient magicians was ‘Ankabūthā (cf. **Text 41**), who was able to create an artificial man. There are also many other stories about the deeds of famous magicians (e.g., **Text 47**).

Magicians seem to have been a perpetual feature of Nabatean society. Qūthāmā is very wary of contemporary magicians, and various magicians seem to cover the whole history of the Nabateans. Thus, e.g., while ‘Ankabūthā lived a long time before Adam, Ṣabyāthā,⁶⁵ for his part, lived long after Adam (**Text 48**), and Māsā, who in many respects is close to the magicians, though not as clearly as ‘Ankabūthā and Ṣabyāthā (see below, NA, pp. 1387–1388), was a younger contemporary of Adam (see 4.1).

⁶³ The evil eye (*ʿayn*) is specifically mentioned in, e.g., NA, p. 1181. The authors of Antiquity were uneasy with magicians who have always taken their share of the agricultural production. Cf., e.g., Columella, *De re rustica* I.8.6 (referring to “soothsayers and witches,” *haruspices sagasque*).

⁶⁴ For the power of magicians, see **Text 47**.

⁶⁵ In NA, p. 1445, Ṣabyāthā is called “the Hero” (*ash-shujāʿ*). One could perhaps emend this to *as-sajjāʿ*.

Magic is seen as a major operative force in the world and magicians are able to use magical operations in a harmful way—and they are taken very seriously in the *Nabatean Agriculture*—but it is also now and then associated with mere trickery (e.g., NA, p. 322, *makhraqa*). Such deception is described, e.g., in NA, p. 487:

It (rice) is also used by tricksters (*mushaʿbidh*) who take a handful (of rice) and throw it in a bowl where there are snakes. The snakes will then rise up on their tails and dance in the bowl. This is done by magicians and the people of illusions and conjurers (*aṣḥāb al-khiyālāt wa-siḥr al-ʿayn*).⁶⁶

One also finds a mention of magicians taming animals (NA, p. 765) which seems to refer to various such show pieces.⁶⁷

The *Nabatean Agriculture* contains descriptions of many magical operations, which later found their way into compilations concerned with magic, such as the *pseudo-Picatrix* (ps.-al-Majrīṭī, *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*), and thence into later magical literature. In the agronomical tradition these elements, like references to religion in general, were usually left out.

Magic, even though it is in general abhorred by the author, is still a source of national pride to the Nabateans, who are magicians par excellence. By comparison, even the Yemenites seem less professional (see **Text 34**) and the claim of the Kanʿānites to various kinds of magic (**Text 39**) are shown to be vain in comparison to the inventions of the Kasdānians. Also the Copts have their share of magic but even their accomplishments are not comparable to the Nabatean magic and the art of their talismans (**Text 42**).

The relations between magicians and sages is also far from unambiguous. In NA, pp. 1387–1388, one sees how the traditions of prophets, magicians and sages intersect:

I have seen nothing as astonishing as the case of Jaryānā as-Sūrānī. He was a student of Māsā, and Māsā hated the works of the magicians because he was of the same opinion as Adam; Māsā had taken as a young man some of his knowledge from the mouth of Adam (*samāʿan*). When he grew older, he became excellent in inventing and deducing things until he became the most excellent person of his time. However, he often defamed magicians, being of the opinion that only people of an extremely evil character (*ṭabʿ*) could become proficient in their profession.

⁶⁶ For various performances, see Moreh (1992). For snake charmers and other charlatans, see also Lane (1895): 377–386.

⁶⁷ On taming animals, see also Graefe *et al.* (1914) and Corrao (1996): 17–19.

Jaryānā learned from the books of Māsā and received this (knowledge) from him although he did not live at the same time and they never met each other: Jaryānā merely learned from the books of Māsā, and in this way he may be called his student. Jaryānā does sometimes defame magicians and magic but with others he extols their actions in these small, particular (*al-juzʿiyya*) talismans and he describes them well, relating some of these (recipes) to some (magician) whilst relating others to himself. He mentions that he deduced them through analogy and then experimented with them, saying: “Experiment with them so that you know whether they are valid or not.”

Special properties (*khawāṣṣ*) are inherent in many things and their action takes place differently from natural action. While the latter depends on the four elements and their relations, the special properties are primarily dependent on astral configurations and they act not through their matter but through measures and relations between various things (see **Text 50**).

The artful use of special properties may produce wonderful effects. In addition to those translated in **Text 50**, it might also be mentioned that they may make one invisible, although as a result one feels anguished afterwards (NA, p. 395). One may also attract pigs and goats to oneself (NA, p. 395) which, quite obviously, is an early attestation of the motif of the piper of Hamelin. Furthermore, the special properties of broad beans (*bāqillāʿ*) may be used to cure one of “agonizing love” (*ʿishq mubarrih*) and passion (*hawā*) (NA, p. 500), which are thus seen as a sickness, or malfunction of the soul, as usual in contemporary love theory.⁶⁸

Words, moreover, may contain special properties which may be transmitted to things over which they are pronounced. Olive oil, milk and various greases are especially receptive to the special properties of the words (**Text 39**).

Talismans, on the other hand, are things that one constructs, making use of their special properties (NA, p. 381). The text makes a clear difference between natural action, i.e., the action of the elements, and talismanic action. Talismans and special properties, however, are less clearly distinguished from each other. The text even says (NA, p. 381):

⁶⁸ Sometimes the use of special properties comes very close to sympathetic magic, as in the use of wild carrot for strengthening erections (NA, p. 559).

The people of *al-Jazīra* and Syria call this talisman but we call it the special properties of actions (*khawāṣṣ afʿāl*). The meaning is the same in both, even though the name is different.

Qūthāmā repeats in NA, p. 1307, that although he himself speaks of special properties, one might as well use the expression talisman. When an action is dependent on one of the stars being in a certain astrological position, it is talismanic (NA, p. 1307). Thus, the effect of the talisman depends on the actions of the astral deities (NA, p. 1307).

Elsewhere (NA, p. 1283), talismans are defined as follows:

One may produce a property in something which did not have it or dispel something from something which did have it—which is merely another way of putting the same thing, the meaning of both expressions being the same or similar. In the second expression, there is a hint at something which was not in the first one.⁶⁹ The basic rule in this and its cause is the action of things through their special properties. This is how talismans work and what they mean; a talisman means giving dominance to a feature of some thing which has some (other) nature. The feature which has been empowered deletes the nature which the thing used to have through an action which is called the special property (*khāṣṣiyya*) and this produces something else in that entity. This action is a transformation (*istiḥāla*) which changes something and transfers its nature to something which it had not had before.

We realize that this will not be understood except in this order and this gradation, little by little. Thus, it follows by necessity that a talisman is (the same as) a special property and that a special property is a talisman. Yet, every talisman possesses a special property but not every thing possessing a special property may be called a talisman. Likewise, every change (*taghyīr*) is called transformation (*istiḥāla*) but not every transformation may be called a talisman. Understand this difference between the two!

The famous magicians ʿAnkabūthā and Ṣabyāthā, had written books on talismans and these, says Qūthāmā, are still extant which is why he has mentioned rather few talismans in his book (**Text 40**). The other reason for not explaining many talismans is that people might get accustomed to them and, perhaps, the difference between licit, white magic and illicit, black magic might get blurred (cf. **Text 45**).

Magic, magical operations and talismans are thus ways of using and controlling special properties. They are often dependent on astral

⁶⁹ The idea is that it is basically the same thing either to add something or to take away something, since adding something may in other words be said to be taking away the lack of that thing.

constellations which is why specific procedures may be needed in collecting plants to be used in the operation, and in the preparation of other ingredients. Sometimes, though, astrological dimensions are completely absent as in the following recipe, which is based on sympathetic magic, use of musical instruments and implicitly sexual procedures (NA, pp. 66–67):

We have experimented with the following: When the amount of water in a spring diminishes from what it had used to be, one takes a young and beautiful girl (*jāriya*) and lets her sit on a high platform (*shay* 'āli) opposite the spring. Then one orders her to play the flute (*nāy*) for a long time without interruption, pointing her flute towards the outlet of the water. She should do this for three hours during the day.

Then one orders another girl, of the same or similar age, to take a drum (*tabl*) and to drum and sing as beautifully as she can. The other girl should accompany the drumming or the song with a hautboy (*sumāy*).⁷⁰ The quantity of water will increase because of this, either immediately or after fourteen hours have elapsed from this or at the same time the next day. The playing of the first girl alone should take three hours and the singing of the other, accompanied by the drum and the playing (of the hautboy) four hours, in total seven hours. This is a strong method (*wajh qawī*) to increase the amount of the water. This has been experimented with and found sound (*mujarrab ṣahīḥ*).

There is also another method to increase the amount of water, viz. that you order seven beautiful young virgins to put on clothes, each wearing a different colour from the others. Then two of them take lutes (*ūd*), one takes a drum (*tabl*), one a *mīzāfa*, one a mandolin (*tunbūr*), one a flute (*nāy*) and the last one takes a hautboy. They stand two cubits from the spring, facing it, and start drumming, playing and singing. They walk backwards, away from the spring, gazing at the spring. They continue retreating slowly until they are twenty-one cubits away. Then they start approaching, playing their instruments, like we have described, until they are about one cubit from it. After this they retreat again and repeat this approaching and retreating seven times without growing weary of the procedure which we have described. The water will greatly and obviously increase, either immediately or a little later.

The text then continues (NA, pp. 68–70) with other magical cures for wells and fountains. The procedures include burning some wood of olive or some other trees, in a pit, dug around the well, and some

⁷⁰ See Dozy, s.v. *sumāy*; Steingass, s.v. *sumā*.

men throwing the issuing burning coals into the well. Then the well is tightly covered for 24 hours and then let to ventilate for a further 24 hours. Then a man descends into the well and takes the coals out together with some clay. Afterwards, the well is untouched for 48 hours, and then the procedure is repeated two more times (NA, p. 68). A burning log may also be lowered with a rope into the well, almost to the water level and allowed to burn there. After it has been burned, the well is covered with a lid (*tabaq*) and left for 24 hours, after which the well is opened and the rope removed. Then the well is drained and the procedure is repeated twice more (NA, pp. 68–69). If the amount of water in a subterranean or an open fountain, from which a river or a rivulet starts, decreases, a young standing man urinates three times into the river when the Moon is waxing (NA, p. 69). One may also take the two horns of a bull and fix them in the clay over which the water from the well runs, a cubit from the well, when the Moon is waxing (NA, p. 69). Or one takes 40 *istār* of dried cow-dung and the horns of a cow, fixes one of them to the right and one to the left of the spring. Then one daily sprinkles each of the horns with an *istār* of the cow-dung. The procedure takes twenty days and should be started on the first day of the month (NA, pp. 69–70). Or one may take some sweet salt (*makkūk milh ʿadhb kaylan*) and mix it with the same amount of sand drawn from a river. The mixture is star-bathed (*yunaġġam*) under the Moon and the stars for one night and then either thrown into the well or sprinkled at the foot of the spring (*aṣl al-yanbūʿ*), seven handfuls a day thrown with the right hand (NA, p. 70).

Magical operations often include the preparation of a figure, or the drawing of a picture (see **Texts 20, 31** and **48**). Sympathetic magic is also mentioned in contexts related to sexual matters, as in **Text 38**.

It is difficult to draw a clear line between magical and talismanic operations which make use of the special properties inherent in things. The operations described in **Text 31** (most of these derive from Anatolius' Greek work, see 1.5) might equally well be taken as magical operations.

4.5. *Ascesis and ascetics*

Asceticism⁷¹ is extensively discussed in **Text 28**, which consists of two parts, the second of which (NA, pp. 258–262) is an addition by Ibn Waḥshiyya.

This latter part gives an almost unique criticism of Sufi asceticism from an agriculturalist viewpoint. Those who criticized asceticism did it usually from a staunch Sunni viewpoint, urban and learned. Ibn Waḥshiyya's criticism, on the other hand, is connected with his tendency to exalt agriculture and the farmers who toil in their fields.⁷² In the roughly contemporary *Rasā'il Ikhwān aṣ-ṣafā* (I: 284–285), a text also in other ways closely related to the *Nabatean Agriculture* even though their exact relations are difficult to assess, there is a similar respect for labour: farming, weaving and building (*al-ḥirātha wa'l-ḥiyāka wa'l-binā'*) are given as the three basic professions, whereas in Arabic literature they are usually associated with lowliness.⁷³ The farmers are uncouth boors, and weavers are proverbial for their stupidity in the mainly urban and courtly Arabic literature.⁷⁴

Ibn Waḥshiyya, by contrast, sees ascetics as parasites in a society which lives on the toils of the rural population. This viewpoint was perhaps easier to adopt in the countryside. In cities, with their urban poor, ascetics were not as conspicuous. In urban environments, too, much of the population was, in any case, alienated from the immediate sources of food production: soldiers, the learned, even to some extent merchants, did not, after all, produce their own food. In the countryside the relation of man and the source of his nourishment was more direct and visible.

The main societal problems were not, though, caused by ascetics. As was to come clear in the latter part of the tenth century, soci-

⁷¹ I discuss the Near Eastern background of asceticism in the *Nabatean Agriculture* in Håmeen-Anttila (2004c).

⁷² The glorification of agriculture and farmers is a recurrent theme in the *Nabatean Agriculture*, see, e.g., p. 702, for a concise formulation. Farmers from Northern Iraq were still at the time to a great extent non-Arabic speakers and thus the themes of farming and the Mesopotamian heritage became entangled.

⁷³ Note that precisely the same three professions are exalted in NA, p. 254. The *Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā*, on the other hand, were, of course, clearly elitist, see Marlow (1997): 54.

⁷⁴ Cf., e.g., Marlow (1997): 33. The anti-agrarian attitude was backdated to the Prophet, see Marlow (1997): 26, note 66. The Iraqi al-Kāmil al-Khwārizmī (d. after 1117) parodied base Nabatean boors in one of his *maqāmas*, translated in Håmeen-Anttila (2002a): 435–436.

ety began to collapse, even though the Buyid period was a renaissance from the cultural point of view.⁷⁵ The alienation of the owning class from their *diyāʿ* through the system of *iqṭāʿ* was starting to devastate the agricultural basis of Iraq,⁷⁶ later to be completed by the Mongol conquests and the subsequent Ottoman maltreatment of Iraq.⁷⁷

Ibn Waḥshiyya, however, was not a far-sighted visionary who would have realized where the symptoms apparent in his time would lead. For him, the peasants were underestimated—a rare attitude in his time, or in later Islamic culture, for that matter—and he saw the anti-worldly asceticism of the Sufis as a blatant example of this.

The first part, the text of Qūthāmā, is equally antiascetic, emphasizing that the gods love the cultivation of the earth (cf. section 3), and hence farmers are their special favourites and the basis for the wellbeing of the whole society. The Nabatean ascetics are described as wanderers who subject themselves to various mortifications and take part only in the main festivals while neglecting other congregational services, preferring solitude and seclusion.

According to the Nabatean ascetics, they “are like angels” and they even “are like unto God in not caring for the world.” In the eyes of Qūthāmā, though, they are filthy madmen and the hatred of the gods will certainly fall on them. Even the two Nefarious Ones hate them, though this is not openly stated in **Text 28**, because the evil caused by these gods is not voluntary (see 3.5). Nor is it real evil, only appearing as such to our eyes (see 3.1)—whereas the self-mortification of the ascetics is voluntary. Qūthāmā finds support for his antiascetic feelings in both Adam and Anūḥā.

Antiascetic trends in the *Nabatean Agriculture* are also clear elsewhere, though they are less frequently expressed. Even though extreme mortification is clearly reprehended by Qūthāmā, he sometimes looks at moderate asceticism more favourably, especially in the case of Yanbūshād (see 4.1).

⁷⁵ See Kraemer (1992) who draws much attention to the discrepancy between economic problems piling up on the horizon and the cultural heyday.

⁷⁶ Similar developments had afflicted societies in ancient times. Columella, in his *De Re Rustica* I.1.18–20 and I.2.1–2, quoting the Phoenician Mago, criticized landowners for acquiring estates but living in a city.

⁷⁷ In a late *maqāma* by Abūʿl-Faṭḥ Naṣrallāh al-Ḥusaynī (d. 1753) (see Hämeen-Anttila 2002a: 348–349), there is some criticism of the system but it seems to me that one should refrain from taking this *maqāma* as a serious critique of the system, even though one might be tempted to do so from a modern viewpoint. It seems more probable that the author was writing in a light humorous mood. Few Arabic authors took peasants seriously.

4.6. *Burials, rituals and temples*

Burials, burial customs and the corruption of bodies after death receive considerable attention in the text; especially the preserving of bodies seems of vital interest to the author(s) (see **Texts 10, 16–19** and **39**).⁷⁸ The fate of the body is naturally of interest to the deceased himself, but magicians, too, show an interest in corpses (cf. also **Text 40**). For the preparation of a certain talisman, one may use (NA, p. 381) the remains of a body which has decayed and become dust in the jar (*khābi'a*) in which it had been buried in a graveyard (*maqābir al-mawtā*, i.e., *madāfin juthath an-nās*). Both the jar and the dust therein are used for the talisman and kneaded, together with other ingredients, to form “a figure with outspread arms in the form of the crucifix (*al-maṣlūb*),” and then it is set up on a cane (NA, p. 381).

References to temples and other features connected with institutionalized religion are somewhat problematic to interpret.⁷⁹ Read as it stands, the text would seem to imply the existence of even major temples at the time of the writing of the original. In passages deriving from Greek sources, this, obviously, would be unproblematic, but in the majority of cases, the information is tightly set in Northern Mesopotamia and Syria and derives from this layer of the text. This information is thus datable to a time when ancient paganism was still alive, but one finds it somewhat hard to believe in the existence of major temples, especially in the cities, which would still have been active during this period.

Such a temple is mentioned in the legend of King Fourfolder (see **Text 55**), which, in the context of the book itself, is located in ancient times. The legend mentions the great idol of the Sun, made

⁷⁸ For Manichaean burials, see Lieu (1985): 238. Burial customs were also an issue between Zoroastrians and Christians in Sasanid times, see Brock (1982b): 9. Syriac literary activity of the sixth century also shows interest in the question of the corruptibility or incorruptibility of the body of Christ (e.g., Wright 1894: 94). Cf. also *Akhbār baṭārika*, pp. 36, 60. For Arabic and Islamic burials and the concern for bodies, see Crow (1986): 61; Böwering (1980): 69 (quoting al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb* III:102: the bodies of the prophets are preserved uncorrupted in their sarcophagi in a mythical city in Yemen); Bravmann (1972): 288–295; and Breton (1999): 143–157.

⁷⁹ For, admittedly legendary, reference to a great number of Mandaean temples in Babylonia before the Sasanian period, see Rudolph (1960–1961) II: 18, note 4, and Gündüz (1994): 67. Mandaean *bi-mandas* remained active after the Muslim conquest though their number may have diminished even radically. For a reference to pagan temples in Beth Garmāi (Bājarmā) around the year 600, see Morany (1984): 385.

of gold and jewels. Also the story of Tammūz, narrated in **Text 24**, is unproblematic due to its historical setting. Not all the temples and festivals are situated in history, though. Thus, Qūthāmā, the final author of the *Nabatean Agriculture*, mentions as contemporary with himself the temple of Mars and his great festival and the prayers performed there (NA, p. 826), as well as the temple of the idol of Jupiter and its keepers (*sadana*; **Text 33**).⁸⁰

Individuals with particular cultic functions, such as the *sadana*, are but rarely mentioned in the text. One finds frequent references to prophets and *kāhīns* (see 4.1–2); the latter term seems to be used in both its Arabic and Aramaic meanings, namely “soothsayer” and “priest.” In NA, p. 955 (quoted in section 5), there is also a mention of the “viceregency” (*khilāfā*) of Seth and the “guardianship of his religion” (*al-qiyyām bi-dīnīhi*) which belonged in ancient times to the priest, *kāhīn*, Barāyā.

Smaller temples, chapels or altars, however, doubtlessly continued to exist deep into Islamic times and they remained active: the countryside was only much later converted to exclusive monotheism,⁸¹ either Christianity or Islam. In Christian sources, the converting of pagan temples, whether still active or already abandoned, into churches remains a favourite topos until late times,⁸² and the Mandaean cult with its *bi-mandas* survived the Arab conquest and the subsequent Islamic rule. Thus, there is no inherent reason to question the historicity of passages mentioning temples in the text—although one cannot rule out the possibility that private worship has been projected onto temples in at least some cases, the text thus telling us how the temples should have worked, not how they actually were working.⁸³

Idols in the temples, as well as holy trees, may be circumambulated (NA, p. 1290):

Qūthāmā has said: I think that the origin for this circumambulation around the tree⁸⁴ is taken from the circumambulation people perform

⁸⁰ The same word, *sadana*, is used in connection of Sabians and their temples in, e.g., *Rasāʾil Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā* IV: 299.

⁸¹ One might, though, add that individual pagan practices have naturally been preserved both in the Near East and Europe but without any link to pagan religion as such.

⁸² See, e.g., Brock (1978): 97–98.

⁸³ The enigmatic temples of the Sabians have caused much debate. See also *Rasāʾil Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā* IV: 300.

⁸⁴ Prescribed by Māsā, to be performed when grafting.

around the idol of the Moon. They say that if one circumambulates the idol of the Moon seven times, this will draw him close to the Moon and the Moon will be so pleased with him that it will take the place of the great offering.

In all obligations (*al-farā'id*), there is (prescribed) the circumambulation of all idols after a burnt offering and both before and after the supplication, but in the sevenfold circumambulation of the idol of the Moon there is a subtle special property. Concerning the prescription of sevenfold circumambulation at grafting by Māsā as-Sūrānī, it would seem that the origin of this is as we have said. When someone, or a group of people, circumambulate something, the thing which is circumambulated, will receive a subtle special property which comes to be through (the action of) people and that thing will be full of blessing towards people and there will be in their hearts a fear and reverence and respect towards that thing.

The use of incense is a recurrent theme; for the use of incense in the temple of Mars, see NA, p. 1386. *Qust*⁸⁵ is said to be one of the incenses used for idols and in temples, and it is one of the best things that can be offered to the idol of Venus (NA, p. 1251). Also hemp seeds (*shāhdānāj*) may be used as incense in temples (NA, p. 520).⁸⁶ One may also perfume one's clothes in front of the idols by the incense burning there (NA, p. 1251). An incense called *safar-fawāwamshā*,⁸⁷ which in Arabic is *ladhdhat al-aṣnām* ("delight of the idols") is also pleasing to Venus (NA, p. 1257):

The Kan'ānites say that this incense pleases Venus and they use it as a burnt offering to her. If someone wants to read the prayers (*'azā'im*)⁸⁸ of Venus in front of her idol, let him burn this incense and play music (*yuzammir*) and drum or play the lute for a while. Then he should read the prayers to Venus, mentioning what he wants to ask her, and she will answer his prayer and do as he wishes. But this will happen only if she is left to act on her own and no hindrance from the (other) celestial bodies comes in between⁸⁹ and she is not looked at by Mercury nor stands in conjunction with him, because Mercury hinders her most strongly when they are in conjunction, by looking at her.

⁸⁵ See Lane, s.v.

⁸⁶ Hemp (*qunnab*) itself may be used as writing material (*kāghad*) for books (*dafātir*), see NA, p. 520.

⁸⁷ Cf. (ps.)-al-Majrīṭī, *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, p. 392 = Ritter-Plessner (1962): 399.

⁸⁸ For the terms *'azama* and *'azzama*, see Dozy, s.v., and Pielow (1995): 40.

⁸⁹ This is a reference to the joint effects of the astral deities. Appeasing Venus is not always enough, since Venus is not omnipotent or solely responsible for events on earth. In contrary conditions, Venus cannot force her will on the other astral deities.

The use of musical instruments (*mī'zafa*, *qīthārā*, *jank*, lute, rebec and others)⁹⁰ during the festivals and in front of the idols is said to have been prescribed by all ancient sages and prophets, and music is said to please the gods (NA, p. 929).

Gods love offerings that do not cause inconvenience to people (NA, p. 1405) and they love to be mentioned by their names (NA, p. 1405). One does, also, find a reference to offering small statuettes for the gods (**Text 46**). In **Text 27**, one also finds a mention of a royal statue which is worshipped as an idol.

There are also some food regulations in the text. Thus, the eating of the flesh of small pigeons is said to have been forbidden by Seth (NA, p. 1449).⁹¹ Usually, these regulations are not given on religious grounds but have been based on medical reasons, as is also the case of the flesh of small pigeons which “burns the blood and corrupts the mind” (NA, p. 1449). Here again, we find the mixture of religion and natural science.

The most interesting passage on prohibited foods comes in NA, pp. 499–500, where the author tells how Hermes (Irmīsā) and before him Agathodaimon (Aghātādaymūn)⁹² had strictly forbidden the people of their country to eat fish or broad beans (*bāqillā*). In the *Nabatean Agriculture*, this is explained by medical reasons. The author, however, knows that broad beans were cultivated in Egypt, the country of Hermes and Agathodaimon. Elsewhere (NA, p. 497), the prohibition of broad beans is also attributed to Anūḥā, again on medical grounds.

The prohibition against beans and most seafood goes back to Pythagoras;⁹³ the case of beans was well known in Arabic sources.⁹⁴ Among other prohibited foods, the author mentions the leftovers of

⁹⁰ A few lines later, the text mentions *nāy*, *n'ā'la'ā* and *dāb'ūsā*.

⁹¹ Cf. Porphyry, *The Life of Pythagoras* §45, quoted in Guthrie (1987): 132.

⁹² Cf. 4.1. Note that Hermes and Agathodaimon are mentioned in the *Nabatean Agriculture* only here, which makes it possible that the provenance of this passage may differ from that of other parts of the book.

⁹³ See Guthrie (1987): 132 (Porphyry, *The Life of Pythagoras* §44–45). Cf. also Herodotus 2.37, where it is stated that the Egyptian priests did not eat beans or fish—Herodotus believes that the Egyptians, accordingly, did not cultivate these beans.

See also Walbridge (2000): 58 (and p. 64/241, note 27). For the bean prohibition's alleged, but unlikely, Indian connection, see Karttunen (1989): 114–115, with further references.

⁹⁴ E.g., al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh*, p. 161: the Egyptian Sabians, whose offspring—or remnant, *baqīyya*—the Harranians were, refused to eat several things, among which al-Mas'ūdī mentions beans, as well as pork, chicken and garlic, but not fish.

locusts (NA, p. 645: if the stalk is even partly eaten by them it should not be touched; if totally unharmed, the grains may be gathered and eaten), and for medical reasons the eating of too much *baṣal az-zīr*⁹⁵ (NA, p. 571) is prohibited. Fungi (*futr*, NA, pp. 602–603) are strictly forbidden, but again on medical grounds, as being lethal. Among those who have forbidden their eating are Adam and his son Seth, Enoch (Akhnūkh) and “all doctors.” In addition, Yanbūshād disliked (*kariha*) watermelons and advised people not to eat them (NA, p. 905).

In theory, the author makes a clear distinction between religiously and medically motivated prohibitions. Thus, he mentions (NA, p. 513) that Adam prohibited (*nahā*)⁹⁶ lupins (*turmus*), “not by the way of (religious) prohibition but merely because they are extremely detrimental (to the health)” (*lā ‘alā sabīli t-tahrīm bal ‘alā sabīli annahu dārrun jiddan*). In practice, however, it seems that existing food taboos have often been explained as medical by the author. Religiously motivated refusal to eat something is mentioned in the case of flesh (NA, p. 1388: *wa-yatadayyanu qawmun bi-tarkihā*). When discussing the fact that some people do not eat dates because, so they claim, they are in some cases detrimental to health, he goes on (NA, pp. 1449–1453) to show that, following their logic, everything should be banned, since all foods may have both beneficial and detrimental effects (cf. **Texts 53–54**). In the same passage, he mentions that Seth had forbidden the eating of small pigeons (*sighār al-ḥamām*). On the prohibition against eating pork, see **Text 53**.

In one case (NA, pp. 233–234), the author mentions that Adam had forbidden wheat bread for himself, but not for others. In the light **Text 52**, this is most intriguing. Unfortunately, he does not mention the reason for this and only refers to what was generally known (*innamā taraka akla khubzihā limā ta‘lamūn*).

Festivals are often referred to in the *Nabatean Agriculture* (see, e.g., **Texts 24**, and **28**).⁹⁷ The most detailed description of festivals and the rituals related to them are found in **Text 26** which discusses in

⁹⁵ For which, see Lane, s.v. *baṣal*.

⁹⁶ The word for religiously motivated prohibition is usually *harrama*. For ordinary prohibition to eat something, the verb *nahā* is used, although both may be attested together (e.g., NA, p. 602).

⁹⁷ Pagan festivals were rather openly celebrated even in cities at least into the late fifth century, see Green (1992): 77, quoting Drijvers (1980): 43, with reference to a pagan festival held in Edessa in Iyār 497 and 498. For Harranian festivals and the ritual calendar, see Green (1992): 145–159, and Gündüz (1994): 188–191. See also von Gutschmid (1861): 58–62.

an extremely interesting way some New Year rituals and beliefs which find their parallels among the Harranians (cf. below). **Text 28** mentions the festival of the Birth of Time on the 24th of Kānūn I⁹⁸ and the New Year Festival (*ʿīd raʿs as-sana*) as the two main festivals of the Nabateans. Both are related to the Sun and have religious significance. Two further festivals, the invoking of blessing from the idols (*ʿīd tabrīk al-aṣnām*), in Tishrīn I, and “the Night of the Light” (*laylat an-nūr*) are mentioned in **Text 43**. The feast of Tammūzā was, naturally, in the month of Tammūz (**Text 24**) and on the 24th of Tishrīn II was the great festival of the Moon (*ʿīd al-Qamar al-kabīr*; NA, p. 214). NA, p. 204, tells us of the two festivals of the Sun, the annual and the monthly (*alladhayni yakūnān fī sh-shahr waʿs-sana*) which seems to imply that, in addition to the annual festival of the Sun, there was another, performed every month. According to the same passage, festive days were days of rest. Ibn Waḥshiyya adds to this that all the Aramaic names of the months (e.g., the two Tishrīns and Kānūns as well as Shubāt) are derived from the names of important historical persons.

In **Text 26**, reference is made to the Servant of Venus, who is also described in Ibn an-Nadīm, *Fihrist* (pp. 324–325 = Dodge 1970: 764)⁹⁹ in a shorter version containing differences that show that the two versions are independent. According to *Fihrist*, where the date of the thirtieth of Ādhār is given, the Harranians hold their feast as follows (transl. Dodge):

The thirtieth day is the beginning of the month of al-Tamr, I mean the dried dates, and [during] this [month] is the marriage of the gods and goddesses. They divide in it the dates, putting kohl [antimony powder] on their eyes. Then during the night they place beneath the pillows under their heads seven dried dates, in the name of the seven deities, and also a morsel of bread and some salt for the deity who touches the abdomens. The presiding headman (*al-raʿīs*), moreover, takes two silver coins (. . .) from each one of them for the treasury.

⁹⁸ Cf. also Al-Bīrūnī, *Āthār*, p. 320, on the authority of Abūʿl-Faraj az-Zanjānī, according to whom the *ʿīd al-mīlād* was celebrated by the Sabians on the 24th of Kānūn I. The same term is used by Christians for Christmas, cf., e.g., *Akhbār baṭārika*, p. 24. Von Gutschmid (1861): 61–62, takes this as deriving from the Saturnalia, as a result of the name of the festival being read *Chronia* instead of *Kronia*.

⁹⁹ Cf. al-Bīrūnī, *Qānūn I*: 272, al-Bīrūnī, *Taḥfīm*, p. 148, and Hjärpe (1972): 125.—Hjärpe’s comments, incidentally, are a good example of the attitude of many earlier scholars towards Ibn Waḥshiyya: “(. . .) l’imposteur Ibn Waḥšīya mentionne, en rapport avec un rite magique chez les ‘nabatéens’, une vieille femme ‘appelée servante de Vénus’(. . .)”. Ibn Waḥshiyya is an impostor, nothing more!

Dodge understands the touching of the abdomen as follows (note 91): “This evidently refers to women who wish to become pregnant.” Yet, the fuller version of the *Nabatean Agriculture* makes it clear that the touching is to make sure that they have properly eaten, i.e., feasted on New Year’s Eve—proper eating on festive nights belongs both to Jewish and Muslim customs.

The sumptuous feasting is also implied by the fact that, according to al-Bīrūnī, *Āthār*, p. 320, the last of Ādhār marks the end of a lengthy fast. On the other hand, this thirty-day fasting is sometimes said to have started on the 8th of Ādhār (Green 1992: 157).

In the story, the meaning of the whole ritual is to ensure prosperity for the coming year. New Year’s Eve is seen as the night when the fates are fixed for the coming year, an idea familiar from Mesopotamia and later taken to almost all major religions of the area, including Islam.¹⁰⁰

The passage throws light on the tangled question of the beginning of the New Year and the festivities connected with it. Two festivities are described in these passages, first the feast of eating the *hadhartāyā*, which also involves the use of antimony paste (*kuhl*) at the end of Kānūn I, and then the New Year festivity in Ādhār/Nīsān. Both of these times have been equated with the beginning of the Harranian New Year in different Arabic texts (see Green 1992: 149–150, drawing on the *Fihrist* and al-Bīrūnī, *Āthār*). The passage in the *Nabatean Agriculture* refers to the rites of Kānūn I as a habit of the author’s own community, whereas the belief in the Servant of Venus is given as a “Sethian” belief.

Text 26 seems to imply that the eating of *hadhartāyā* and the belief in the Servant of Venus are parallel phenomena, and as both of them contain features that would fit New Year’s festivities, it gives some reason to suggest that there may have been different calendars in use, and consequently the different information provided by the *Fihrist* and al-Bīrūnī does not necessarily mean that one of them is corrupted and the two feasts should be reduced to one. Following **Text 26**, one might suggest that some pagans in Iraq held their New Year’s festivities in Kānūn I, others in Ādhār/Nīsān.

As with the information concerning Tammūz (see 3.5), here, too,

¹⁰⁰ Cf. the so-called *Laylat al-Qadr*, mentioned in the *Qurʾān* (Q 97: 1–3), although the original meaning of the passage is not necessarily identical with how it was later understood.

the *Nabatean Agriculture* proves to be an independent source. The information it and the other works of the Nabatean corpus contain cannot be derived from Harranian lore.

The ascetics' avoidance of common worship is criticized in **Text 28**, but in the case of Yanbūshād (see 4.1) his unwillingness to participate in the feasts is said (NA, p. 403) to have been on account of his aversion to the religious views of his contemporaries. NA, p. 204, on the other hand, speaks of ascetics coming to the temples only for the feasts of the Sun—just like both Christian and Muslim ascetics are told to have taken part in only major congregational services.¹⁰¹

In a passage discussed and partly translated in Fahd (1998): 71–90, and heavily dependent on Greek sources,¹⁰² the owner of the estate (*rabb ad-day'a*) and his steward (*wakīl*) are portrayed as responsible for the religious education of their peasants (esp. NA, pp. 195–196).¹⁰³ In this passage, one finds a reference to rules (*sharā'i*) sent down by the gods, which the owner and his steward must drive home to the peasants, emphasizing that the god (*al-ilāh*) supervises his servants on earth.

In the same passage, there is a reference (NA, p. 203) to fields dedicated to the upkeep (*qiwām*) of the gods, i.e., their temples, in the cities, or villages (*li-ālihat kull al-qurā*) which, obviously, derives from a source written at the time when paganism still held sway.

Text 14 (NA, p. 49)

Some of these things we have learned through experimentation (*bi't-tajriba*), some through revelation given by the gods (*wahy al-āliha*) to our forefathers (*aslāfnā*), some they have revealed to us and some they have inspired (*bi-ilhāmihā*) us or their idols (*li'l-aṣnām*) with and the idols have taught it to us (*fa-ʿallamatnā*), some through dreams from the gods (*bi'r-ru'yā min al-āliha*) although dreams may also come from the idols (*wa-rubbamā kāna ru'yā min al-aṣnām*). We have tried all these and found out that they were true in all deeds and works.

¹⁰¹ Cf., especially, Vööbus (1958): 166.

¹⁰² The passage resembles, e.g., Cato, *De Agricultura* V, though Cato is quite clearly not its direct source.

¹⁰³ NA, pp. 199–202, also dependent on Greek sources but modified to the local situation, discusses the question of where to build the peasants' houses.

So let us thank them for this as well as we can, though not as well as the gods would deserve; we will never be able to thank them enough with our words as much as is their due.

Know that the origin of how we came to know something that is revealed (*yūḥā*) to you in this book concerning the benefits or the harms of something or some use of special properties or the grafting of something to something else and such things (*wa-ghayru dhālika min funūn al-maʿānī*) is what we have just explained to you concerning the favours (*nīma*) of the gods upon us, either through their own deeds or through inspiring (*bi-ilqāʾihā*) the idols with what the idols have then inspired us with; or it has come to us through some discovery (*istinbāt*) which we have made (*wajadnāhu*) through the use of reason (*uqūl*) which the gods have given us (*wadaʿatʾhā finā*); or through what we have received (*maʾthūr*) from our fathers and our sages who themselves received it through these channels which we have just mentioned. Know this.

Text 15 (NA, pp. 108–111)¹⁰⁴

The respective event below¹⁰⁵ is the abundance of the intelligent animals (*an-nawʿ al-ʿāqil min al-ḥayawān*) and that some among them attain their ultimate limit of knowledge and intellect and all these ultimate limits are combined in one person among them and he is like the god of gods,¹⁰⁶ the sage of sages (*ḥakīm al-ḥukamāʾ*) and the wise among the wise (*ʿāqil al-ʿuqalāʾ*). He is the one who teaches the people of the Earth what they do not know¹⁰⁷ except through him and which they do not understand except because of him. Such was, e.g., Adam, the Messenger of the Moon (*rasūl al-Qamar*) and before him Dawānāy,¹⁰⁸ the Lord of all Mankind (*as-sayyid li-jamīʿ abnāʾ al-bashar*). Adam was called the Father of Mankind (*abūʾl-bashar*) and Dawānāy was called the Lord of Mankind.

This you must understand concerning these three gods, Jupiter,

¹⁰⁴ This text has been translated into French by Fahd (1998): 62–64.

¹⁰⁵ I.e., the sublunar event. The beginning of the passage is resumed in 4.2.

¹⁰⁶ I.e., these sages are like gods in comparison to other people, and this special person is among them like a god.

¹⁰⁷ Perhaps a Qurʾānic echo (*ʿallama l-īnsāna mā lam yaʿlam*, Q 96: 5).

¹⁰⁸ In the edition this is written as DWNʾY both here and in the next line, with some variants.

Mercury and the Moon. You must know that looking at these persons (who have this special temperament) causes joy (*surūr*) and from them spreads mirth¹⁰⁹ to all their time and strength to the souls and the hearts and clarity to eyesight and power to faculties. They are like the gods, the possessors of light (*dhawāt al-amwār*) in whose light people delight to be illumined and by whom they are guided in darkness.

Every one of these persons is called in his time al-Jallā' ("the Clarifier") and/or al-Māḥī¹¹⁰ ("the Eraser") and they are called "the praiseworthy offspring" (*al-khalaf al-ḥamīd*) coming after the confused ancestors (*as-salaf al-mukhtaliḥ*), or the straight offspring after the crooked ancestors. The mercy of the gods towards mankind is this that after the (gradual) obliteration of the causes (*asbāb*) (of religious knowledge) they renew for them things that profit them. There is namely in human nature (*tab'*) an inclination towards crookedness and the following of passions (*ahwā'*) by confusing (*bi't-takhlīt*) (bad things with good ones) and through this they run towards corruption (*fasād*).

This kind of action is more firmly rooted in them than the opposite, righteousness (*aṣ-ṣalāḥ*). This is caused by the action of the two Nefarious Ones, Saturn and Mars, because mankind lives specifically in the world (*ālam*) of the two Nefarious Ones: earth and water belong to the two Nefarious Ones, whereas air and fire escape from earth and water and ascend because the (direction of the) movement of these two elements (*unṣur*), air and fire, is the opposite of the movement of earth and water.

Mankind, together with all other animals and plants and minerals are the sons (*abnā'*) of earth and water, whereas air and fire (merely) enter them (*dākhilīna 'alayhim*), and because of this they incline more towards that which is more firmly rooted in them. What is dominant in them holds dominion over them (*wa-šāra mā huwa aghlabu 'alayhim aghlaba lahum wa-amlaka bihim*) and they yield to those actions which are dominant (*aghlab*) in their original composition (*fī aṣli tarkībihim*) and which is the beginning of their generation (*mabda'i takwīnihim*).

Because they yield to that and incline towards it, it being dominant in them, they easily become crooked and they follow the movement of the crooked soul (*an-nafs al-mu'wajja*) (which is) the movement of

¹⁰⁹ Reading with the variant *afrāḥ*.

¹¹⁰ Or al-Māḥā, cf. NA, p. 175, l. 3. Al-Māḥī could be associated with the Islamic term, as Fahd suggests in a footnote to his translation of this passage (Fahd 1998: 63, note 114).

corruption. This first corruption (*fasād*) is followed by a second, third, fourth, etc., until the seventh corruption, seven being the number of the people of righteousness (*ka-ʿadadi aṣḥābi ṣ-ṣalāh*). Several corruptions are thus laid one above the other (*tarakkaba*) and when number seven is completed, it will then continue endlessly (*tarakkaba baʿdu ilā mā lā nihāyata lahu*).

In mankind this becomes like a disease which needs a cure, acting against the natural inclination (*al-mayl fī t-tabʿ*) and strengthening bodies so that they may recover health. Their gaining strength and returning to wellbeing (*aṣ-ṣalāh*) derives from these people who come (*al-munbaʿūthīn*) periodically (*fī zamān baʿd zamān*) and who are aided by gods, as we have described. They are like the stars with which one is guided in darkness, whose brightness makes the terror of the fearful vanish.

The best of their contemporaries understand them, yet not all their listeners do understand them and not all those who see them grasp the essence of their message (*kunha amrihim*). They are like springs, whose waters become a great and mighty river, irrigating different kinds of fields and plants and trees, both great and small. All these receive the same water, yet their colours and tastes and odours and effects differ from each other, and this difference is followed by a difference in their effects.

So it is also with people who are born in their time—I mean (the time) of these men: people receive from them (the same) help, that is their words, but they differ in several ways in their capacity to understand them: each of them carries (i.e., understands and keeps in memory) something of what has been said.

The states of the followers of these sages are understood by learned sages (*al-ʿulamāʾ al-ḥukamāʾ*) who know their (states) and those of each of their (i.e., the original sages') followers and their capacities to understand and their potential to conceptualize (*takhayyul*) and how they drink (from the "water" of these wise men) just like plants drink. This is the state of those who see the sages (i.e., their generation). Such is also the state of the generation (*ṭabaqa*) which follows the (first) followers and companions (*al-atbāʿ waʿl-aṣḥāb*) and the succeeding generations until we come to the seventh generation. This is the end of correctness and the ultimate limit of rightness (*niḥāyat al-istiḳāma wa-ghāyat al-istiḳā*).¹¹¹

¹¹¹ The text would seem to say that the seventh generation is the best, even bet-

This comes after 7 times 50 years of the death of the sage, counting fifty years for each generation, in total 350 years. Then the teaching (*amr*) of the sage will start to be obliterated and the state of the people will become crooked. They will fall off from his way and his wisdom and fall into corruption, as we have described. After this they will increasingly err from the correct teachings (*umūr*) and the practices prescribed (*as-sunan al-mafrūḍa*) by this person who had appeared (*min qibali dhālīka sh-shakhṣ az-zāhir*) until all wisdom will have been obliterated and his legacies and practices and all his wisdom will have disappeared.

This will happen after 350 years have elapsed four times, in total 1400 years. Then there will undoubtedly be a great disaster (*nakba kubrā*) which will befall the followers (*atbāʿ*) of this person and with this disaster all his teaching or the major part of it will have been obliterated, so that little remains. After every 140 years some of their practices will have been obliterated, and things continue like this until after 1400 years ¹⁴¹¹² of their practices have been obliterated and through this all that (*amr*) this person had built will have been annihilated and demolished. Then the obliteration will continue (sic!) until instead of each legacy (*waṣīyya*), wisdom (*ḥikma*) and practice (*sunna*) there will be alterations (*ibtidāʿ*), disobedience (*ʿisyan*) and ignorance (*jahl*) and other things which are the opposites of those which the sage had legislated (*sharraʿa*). This happens in wisdom and science (*al-ḥikam waʿl-ʿulūm*) as well as in religious laws and practices (*ash-sharāʿiʿ waʿs-sunan*).

Times will, thus, change for people and their matters (*amr*) will change, and this is the beginning and the end and the change of their matters (*umūr*). Yet, it would take a long time to describe these (wise) persons who are the gods of (ordinary) people and the indications (*dalāla*) would be many, so also concerning their followers and the followers of their followers, and this is not the right place to dwell on this: we have spoken of them only because they happened to be

ter than that of the prophet. One might interpret this in the light of **Texts 9–10**, equating the seventh generation after the prophet with the ultimate limit, after which a decline starts. On the other hand, the obscurity of Ibn Waḥshiyya's style would make it possible to take a stance closer to Islam (and Christianity) in seeing the generation of the prophet as the best of generations. One should, though, be wary of reading such Islamic or Christian ideas into the text.

¹¹² Sic! Mathematically we should of course read here 10 or emend 140 years into 100 years. The first emendation seems preferable.

mentioned. There is enough in what we have said. Keep an eye on what we have said and you will find out that it is as we have said, each being a consequence (*mūjab*) of the earlier with no breaks (in the chain of deduction), no lagging and no lies. Peace (be upon you)!

Text 16 (NA, pp. 144–145)

Some of our ancestors (*aslāf*) have claimed that it (i.e., the myrtle, *ās*) preserves the bodies of the dead. One dries green and yellow myrtles, grinds them well and moistens them with fine honey until one can smear with (the paste). Then one smears the corpse with it; they claim that it will preserve the body from corruption for thousands of years.

They also say that if one takes its grains, prepared in the way I will shortly describe, together with aloe, honey and amomum (*hamāmā*),¹¹³ and swallows two dirhams of it, twice or three times a week, and does so during the whole of his life, his corpse will never decay after he has died.

(. . .) The preservation of the body will be complete if the dead one is put in a wooden (coffin) or in a stone basin (*jurn hijāra*, i.e., sarcophagus) which is closed with a stone lid; Syrian (*Shāmī*) marble has a special effect in preserving the bodies, which the other (stones) lack. If all varieties of myrtle are used in this preparation, ground and mixed together as we have described, then it will be even more efficacious.

The wooden (coffin) should be made of teak (*sāj*) or cypress (*sarw*) or of the wood called *zinjī*. These are sawed into planks and made into a coffin (*tābūt*). The planks are joined to each other with an adhesive (*liṣāq*) called *lāthā*; the planks should not be nailed together except with canes, because there have to be nails in some places. Yet in any case, marble is better for this.

The people of Takrīt and the regions (*nawāḥī*) of Bājarmā make large and spacious chests (*sanādīq*) especially of cypress wood because they say that it is the most steadfast wood against (the effects of) moisture (*nazz*) and soil, and they put (*yu'lūna*) their dead in these (chests). The dead (who are thus buried) used habitually during their

¹¹³ On amomum, see Löw (1881), no. 123.

lifetime to take these grains (prepared) in the way we have just described. They may also put the decayed bones of their dead into these chests: they believe (*yaraw*) that they will be better preserved in these wooden (chests).

Yet I cannot delve any deeper into the question of the preservation of wood in this context because it is outside our main theme. Thus, I will stop speaking about this and return to the faculties (*quwā*) of the myrtle and its useful effects.

Text 17 (NA, pp. 329–330)

If there are many corpses (*juthath al-mawtā*) in the soil, this will corrupt the soil greatly and exceedingly so that it becomes worse than the soil we have earlier discussed, namely the pungent (*hirrifa*), bitter and foul-smelling soil. This soil, too, becomes hot and pungent and extremely foul-smelling due to the foulness of the corpses.

Adam has forbidden sowing in such soil and so have also said Ṭāmārā-Karbāsh, Ṭāmithrā¹¹⁴ the Kanʿānite and Ṣaghrīth, who had profound knowledge of agriculture (*al-ʿazīm al-qadr biʿl-ʿilm biʿl-filāḥa*), and Yanbūshād, the Long-Silent, who had a piercing mind and sharp thoughts and who created profound inventions. After them, I too, even though I am younger than them (*ṣaghīruhum*, or: of less importance) forbid sowing in such soil. In addition, I forbid people to live close by a place (*ard*) in which corpses have been buried.

Such soil is bad and vile. If it becomes moist or damp or rains fall again and again on it and there develops stagnant water, this water becomes corrupt and emits vapours which are pungent (*hādd*) and vile and cause plagues and produce matter (*mawādd*) which speedily causes damage. The soil, too, produces vapours when it gets moist, even if there is no stagnant water, and it produces vapours which are even more damaging, sharp and lethal than the vapours caused by the water.

For this reason, the Indians and the people of China and the regions of the Slavs (*bilād aṣ-Ṣaqālība*)¹¹⁵ burn the bodies of their dead. It is also said that in the region of the Sogdians they used in ancient

¹¹⁴ Here written ṬMYRʿ.

¹¹⁵ For the burial habits of the Slavs and others, see *Risālat Ibn Faḍlān*, pp. 99–100, 132, 143–144, 154–165, and 170–171.

times to burn the bodies of their dead according to the habit (*madh-hab*) of the Indians but afterwards they have given this up because of something that happened, about which they have a long story.

There is a profound wisdom in burning the corpses and peace and well-being ensue for the living because of this, preserving them from the harm that would befall them if they buried their dead in the earth, as do the Arabs,¹¹⁶ Ethiopians and some of the Syrians, among them the Kanʿānites, and some of the people of *al-Jazīra* and the Andarānians (*al-Andarāniyyīn*). For the most part, they bury the corpses in direct contact with the soil, although the Arabs do as some of the people of Syria do. They prepare cisterns (*ḥiyād*, cairns?) from stones laid in rows and put their kings and the like in them. Others they bury so that their corpses come into direct contact with the soil.

The origin of this difference in the procedures concerning corpses is the difference of their religious rules (*sunan*) which have come through the words of human beings. They have forbidden some things and ordered others and the procedures concerning corpses belong to these orders and forbiddings.

When it comes to our group, the Kasdānians, their (i.e., our) prophets have in ancient times forbidden the burning of corpses and they have ordered that they be left in one part of the earth, one on the top of the other, in long and narrow-pointed ceramic cisterns¹¹⁷ the mouth of which should be closed. So do also the Persians and the inhabitants of the region of Māh (i.e., Media) and the people of Khurāsān.

This procedure is a middle way between burning corpses and putting them into direct contact with the soil. In this middle way there is an asset which does not burden people because both this middle way and the burning are better than corrupting a thousand places on earth with a thousand corpses in direct contact with the soil in which they are put.

A wisdom that would profit all people would be not to bury their dead in earth according to what we have mentioned but according to the middle way so that the corpses would not come into direct contact with the soil nor be burned by fire.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Jacob (1897): 139.

¹¹⁷ Reading *jibāb* for *hibāb*.

If one wants to cure this kind of soil corrupted by burials, it should be done in the same way as that soil which we have mentioned in the beginning and said that it is pungent and bitter and foul-smelling, but this (must be done only) after it has been well cleared from the bones of the dead which still remain in the soil. It is often improved by the cure which we have prescribed for pungent and foul-smelling soil.

When the bones of the dead are collected from this soil, they must be burned with the wood of the jujube (*‘unnāb*) or the wood of the marsh mallow or plum tree (*sabistān*) until they turn to ash. These ashes must be scattered on the soil and mixed with its dirt: men should trample it well with their feet. This will profit the (living) people and it will not injure the dead whose bones these are.

This should be done to the earth in the autumn when the winter is drawing close and the rains will fall after the cure. This will help to bring about the cure.

Text 18 (NA, pp. 722–724)

All things have their limits (*ghāyāt*), animals, plants and minerals, and they differ from each other concerning the length of time they take to reach that limit. When some (specimen of a) species reaches its limit, it begins a downward movement (*inḥitāt*) and takes the way of destruction and perishing until it perishes and its composition is decomposed and its construction broken down so that it becomes nothing and returns to dust.

It should be clear to the observer that when it starts its downward movement and perishing, it returns to (its original state) and water, oil, salt and substances (*jawhar*) other than those which we have enumerated earlier, etc., separate from it. What remains are the earthy particles which coming-to-be (*kawn*) has transferred from one state to another so that their form has changed.

This separation happens to animals and minerals, too, like we have said about plants. All composed beings in this world are in the end of their life separated into parts and finally life leaves them. Concerning animals, the first to separate from their body before death is the natural heat (*al-ḥarāra al-gharīziyya*) which had been the cause of their life, senses and movement. When this heat, which is

the fieriness of the body, dies out, it leaves the body all at one time. This is called “death” and the animal is then said to be “dead.”

This heat which dies out is what some call “the soul” (*nafs*), some “the spirit” (*rūḥ*) and some “the divine faculty” (*quwwa ilāhiyya*). Seth, the son of Adam, called it “solar matter” (*mādda shamsiyya*) and doctors call it “natural heat” (*al-ḥarāra al-gharīziyya*) and it has been given various other names as well.

Every nation and people (*umma wa-jūl min al-unam wa'l-ajyāl*) has its own doctrine (*madhhab*) and practice (*ʿamal*) concerning the bodies of the dead. Some prefer burning the corpses so that the corpse is quickly decomposed. This is what the people of India and China, as well as most of the (other) peoples of the East, do. They burn the corpses so that they instantly become ashes. They say: We (do this) so that we would not stain the earth because the damage (done to the earth) would return to the living because, especially, when corpses are buried in the earth, from their pus and decay are generated different kinds of creeping animals and insects, which are harmful to the living in many ways.

If we,¹¹⁸ the living, would see those corpses after they have been buried, we would see something appalling: their form changes and they start oozing putridity. The correct thing to do with corpses is what relieves both the living and the dead from all this, and this means burning them. When they become ashes, these ashes will disappear into the earth and they have returned to the substance (*jawhar*) of the earth because the ashes that remain after burning a body (*al-aqsād*)¹¹⁹ are their dust (*tuwāb*) from which they have originally been generated.

They also say: The corpses may also harm the earth itself by changing its nature (*ṭabʿ*) for the worse. They change it so that plants are born that are harmful to the living who get their nourishment from plants. It is thus best in all cases which we have mentioned or left unmentioned that the corpse be burned directly after someone has died or after one day, and this is for a good reason.¹²⁰

In ancient times, according to what is commonly known, the Nabateans used to burn some of their corpses, though not all. They had a procedure which it would take a long time to tell and acts

¹¹⁸ This continues the speech of the Indians.

¹¹⁹ Here probably in the sense of “something.”

¹²⁰ The speech of the Indians ends here.

(*af'āl*) in which there was wisdom, until the appearance of Dawānāy, who absolutely forbade them to do this. Instead, he ordered them to make jars (*khawābī*) from good clay and to scorch them with fire so that the clay became burned and hard. He told them to put their dead into these jars and to close them tightly and to bury them in the earth, some vertically, others horizontally (*fā'l-ba'd qā'im wa'l-ba'd mabṭūḥ*); there is a reason for this difference.

Thus, the Nabateans stopped burning the corpses and started doing this. They claim that this was the reason why Dawānāy was originally named “the one who ends people’s misfortunes” (*al-muzīl 'an an-nās al-balāyā*).¹²¹ He said:¹²² No, he was called “the one who ends people’s misfortunes” because he cured them from their illnesses and ended their diseases through medicaments in a quick and divine manner (*zawālan ilāhiyyan sarī'an*). For this, the people of his time called him “the one who ends misfortunes.” Because of the distance between his time and ours, we do not have many stories about him and his life.

I believe (*aẓunnu*) that they called him “the one who ends people’s misfortunes” just because he cured them of their diseases and saved them from their illnesses. It is less probable that he would have been called so because he forbade them to burn the corpses of their dead.

What we, in our own time, may observe is that Kan'anites and Ḥīthāmians and the Jarāmiqa and other nations (*ajyāl*) of the Nabateans bury corpses in jars. Most of them do not bury these (under the earth) but set them in sarcophagi (*nawāwīs*), either standing or lying down, some on top of others. When some time has elapsed, they open the jars and collect the bones (moving them) from one jar into another because the salt which they apply to the corpses eats the flesh and saves them from putrescence (*natn*). Thus, many bones (of several corpses) are collected into one jar. The Jarāmiqa collect the bones into large wooden chests (*sanādiq*) after they have been deprived of everything that used to cover them. The substance (*jawhar*) of the bones is an earthy substance and they do not stink or rot.

We, in the clime of Bābil, clean the corpse and wash it with water and perfume it with much perfume and put it naked into a jar. Around the corpse salt is pressed (*yukbas*) very tightly. Those who can (afford

¹²¹ Also according to the Preface to *Asrār al-falak* (fol. 87b), he was called by this title.

¹²² The speaker of this variant opinion is not indicated.

it), mix different kinds of perfumes into the salt.¹²³ Then the head of the jar is tightly closed and it is set in a sarcophagus. They do not wrap the corpse with any cloths, like the Egyptians and the Greek do: the Nabateans ridicule them because of this and say: “The living have better right to clothes than the dead whose corpses decay. Why do you waste your clothes which you need to prevent the heat and the cold affecting yourselves? A corpse does not need it: you waste clothes when you clothe corpses. It is better to put salt than clothes next to the corpse!” This is done to all people in our clime except for kings: their corpses are prepared in another way.

I am astonished by the Slavs (*aṣ-Ṣaqāliba*): despite their exceeding stupidity and their distance from all knowledge and wisdom, how is it possible that they have decided to burn their corpses so that they do not leave even a king or anyone else, but burn his corpse with fire after his death? It is curious to find such wisdom in such people.

Even more astonishing than the Slavs are the Egyptians who wrap their dead in cloths and put them (*yashuddūnahum*) into baskets (*asfāt*) which they arrange one above the other. By doing this, they deserve to be laughed at and their action deserves to be ridiculed.

Text 19 (NA, pp. 850–854)

They (i.e., the Sethians) say that if one eats it (i.e., fennel) continuously, throughout one’s life—this means that one mixes the leaves and seeds of fennel with one’s daily food—this will make the odour of his body pleasant after his death, so that no stench will be perceived afterwards, such as is usual with the corpses of dead animals (and people) (*ḥayawān*). It is, according to what they say, as if what one continuously eats during his lifetime would perfume one’s body, and it indeed is almost like this.

We have seen in our time and heard about old times that the corpses of some people were found not to emit a putrid stench after death.¹²⁴ Some of these people I am loath to mention by name, because all Kasdānians differ (from the Sethians?) about the cause

¹²³ For embalming and mummification among pre-Islamic Arabs, see Jacob (1897): 139, and in South Arabia, see Breton (1999): 145.

¹²⁴ This is a particularly common theme in Christian hagiographies.

of the pleasant odour of these bodies after their death. They say that it is an act of the Moon and Jupiter, and is not caused by any measures they have taken during their lifetime.

Yanbūshād, Abraham,¹²⁵ Qalyābā¹²⁶ an-Nahrī and I say that this is caused in bodies after death by the measures taken by the deceased during his lifetime, i.e., by mixing fennel into his food in a certain quantity so that the constitution (*tabī'a*) gets accustomed to it and the body receives its nourishment wherein is mixed the power (*quwwa*) of the fennel. One may also use aloes (*ṣabr*) and mastic (*maṣṭakā*) during the two equibalanced seasons but none of the other herbs comes even close to fennel. One should also reduce the drinking of clear (*qarāḥ*) water and drink instead water mixed with wine, half and half, or unmixed wine or wine mixed with milk. This measure will make the odour of bodily moistnesses which are generated in the body pleasant and it will make the odour of the blood pleasant, too. When the odour of the blood is pleasant, the odour of the flesh and fat will also be pleasant, as well as the odour of other homogenous parts (*al-mutashābihat al-ajzā'*) and other parts of the body.

Thus, the odour of the whole body will be pleasant, as also the odour of the two kinds of excrement (i.e., faeces and urine) which come out of the body, so that there will be no odour at all to either of them.

One may also additionally put half a dirham of camphor into a jug (*dann*) of wine after the grapes have been pressed. If the camphor is of the *qayṣūrī* type, one and a half *dānaq* is enough. This will cause in the wine good effects, as concerns the odour, the taste and the pleasure of drinking. It will also clarify the blood even more and will prevent the generation of putrid moistness in blood or in other interior parts of the body. In this lies a great benefit (*fā'ida*) and capability for beauty after death.

They say that if this camphor is mixed with wine it will prevent the vapours of wine from ascending to the brain and alleviate the vehemence of inebriation as well as hangover afterwards. By my life, this is one of the effects of camphor when it is mixed with wine and it is well known (*ghayr munkar*). We do not say so except by experiment and trustworthy report (*khabar ṣaḥīḥ*).

¹²⁵ Written 'BRHM but with variants, including the usual Ibrāhīm.

¹²⁶ Var. Qalbāyā, Falyāmā.

Ṣaghrīth thought that this and similar things (*aḥwāl*) which have been perceived after death and also during lifetime are nothing else but divine gifts, not caused by human acts or plans. According to him deviation from the natural course (*ʿāda*) is not possible unless some potent god (*ilāh qādir*) is causing this deviation. No natural thing changes its essence or nature (*jāwāhiriḥā wa-ṭibāʿihā*) through the plans and tricks of humans. Only a god who has general potency (*ʿamm al-quḍra*) and complete power (*tāmm al-quwwa*) is capable of doing this. People may imagine that something happens (for a certain reason) but it may in reality happen for some other reason than what they imagine. One of these cases is the pleasant odour of the body after death and also during the lifetime, so that what comes out of the body does not emit a stench, nor the urine nor the excrement nor vomit nor perspiration. When such a person dies, there will be no stench in his corpse, such as is perceptible in the corpses of all living beings (*ḥayawān*). So they imagine that this has happened because of some measures taken by the person during his lifetime and because he has made something enter his body with his food or also because he has made use of some arrangement and practice.

All this (i.e., the idea that this could be reached by nourishment) is impossible, nonsensical and based on mere guesswork (*muḥāl bāṭil zannī*) and there is nothing to argue for it or prove it. This will not be attained except through one's deeds and forms of worship (*ʿibādāt*), the slaying of sacrificial animals (*naḥr al-qarābīn*) and prayers to the gods, using their great and beautiful names (*bi-asmā'ihā l-ḥusnā l-ʿiẓām*), by nocturnal vigils (*qiyām al-layl*) and fasting during the day. The gods, or the one who is aspired after by these forms of worship, sacrifices and good deeds, will perfume for that person his body and what is emitted from it.

Such was Adam,¹²⁷ as (Ṣaghrīth) said, and before him Dawānāy and ʿĀʿamāy and Sūlīnā and Aqsamīnā and Ṭūlūtā and Rasātā and Karmānā and others, which Seth, the son of Adam, has enumerated, mentioning that they were pure and purified by their pious deeds and by the beautiful ways in which they approached the gods. They devoted their lives to this and they arrived to what they aspired

¹²⁷ The fate of the body of Adam became a matter of some interest in both Judaism and Christianity. According to many sources, his body was preserved in a cave until the Flood, cf., e.g., Ginzberg (1998) I: 163. Cf. also Ginzberg (1998) I: 79, 288–289; V: 184.

and the gods perfumed in them the unpleasant odours that are usually generated in living beings (*ḥayawān*). The gods raised their rank over that of other people and made them conspicuous among others and made them excel the others so that their worth would be seen and people would covet the same actions and apply themselves assiduously to that end, so that they, too, would be honoured and respected and of high rank in their life so that people would pray through them for water and search for a blessing (*yatabarrakūn*) by looking at them, living where they live (aspiring for the *baraka*). They would also hope that after their death, their body would be shown the honour of being distinguished from those of other people so that people would know that this might appeared in them (even) after their death and would then emulate their deeds.

The root of this action and what makes this complete for human beings, is avoiding one's passions (*shahawāt*) and bridling one's self (*nafs*) from all evils which it wants and following the way (*sīra*) of the noble angels who themselves follow the way of the Moon, which again follows the way of the Sun. This will cause them to stay (alive) as long as nature allows them, through the power (*quwwa*) which the gods have given them and after that the gods will honour their bodies by perfuming them and taking away the stench, impurities and dirt.

In this, people have different ranks according to their deeds. In the case of some, the gods take away from the body bad stench but let it decay. When the body has changed through a process of decay there emerges from the dust something which it would take a long time to explain. If one's rank in pious deeds is even greater, the gods perfume his body and in addition let it be preserved without decay for a certain period, according to one's deeds.

If one's rank is even higher because of his good deeds and persistence in goodness, his body will be preserved forever after his death without decay or change and no aspect of his appearance will be changed so that people may see him after his death as complete as they see the mute statues (*aṣnām*) made of gold, silver and stone, which never decay or change.

In this body which is forever preserved we and all others may see how the gods take perfect care of this world and those in it and how they help people by making these (saintly men) superior to others. When the cycle (*dawr*) of the god who has kept this body sound and without decay, starts, he will bring it alive by returning to it a soul (*nafs*) quite like his soul and by setting it into his body and combining

with it light from his own light. Thus, this person (*shakhs*) will become a god for the people of that time. Afterwards, when the time has elapsed which he was to reach, the same will happen to him concerning his death as on the first occasion. Thus, he will die and his body will be preserved, like the first time, until the cycle of that god will again come and the god may do to him as he did earlier.

This will be repeatedly done by this god (*yatakarraru dhālika d-dahra kullahu li-dhālika l-ilāh*), unless that person deviates from his pious deeds and lets loose his passions and fancies. Then the god will withdraw this deed (of preserving his body time after time) and he will die an evil death of decay and he will perish (*yabṭul*) and become dust. But if every time the god brings him to life again, he behaves as he did earlier earning the same reward, then the god will again do the same for him. So if he always does (pious deeds), he will exist forever, dying and returning to life, being a noble leader and a respected god while alive.

This is the common opinion of all our groups (*tawā'if*) and their subgroups (*aṣnāf*). The gods reward and requite people who obey them and aspire to be like them by avoiding passions and following reason and leading a life which resembles the way of the gods. This happens in the way we have just explained. People who believe otherwise are people who do not believe in the acts of the gods and who do not recognize how much the gods show their favour upon them. In their disbelief and lies and shamelessness they try (to keep the body fragrant) in different ways and by using various recipes which they describe, recipes which are false and vain. Then they say that their tricks and connivances make them achieve that which (in reality) only the living and eternal gods are able to do. This is an untrue assumption and a weak trick and a vile and despicable belief according to knowledgeable (*ʿarifīn*) believers.

Qūthāmā has said: This is what Ṣaghrīth said about this. He has shown his opinion and his doctrine (*ra'yahu wa-madhhabahu*) about this and presented his arguments and defended them. This was also the doctrine of Ṭāmīthrā the Kanʿānite and all Kanʿānites and Kardānians and others among the Nabatean nations (*ajyāl*), except for those who segregated themselves from this doctrine like those who revealed their opinion, such as Anūḥā and Abraham. These showed openly their contrary opinion. I also believe that Yanbūshād was of the same opinion as Anūḥā concerning this. He wanted to reduce all gods to one single god (*an yaʿfala l-ālīhata ilāhan wāḥīdan*) and to set this god

above all the others in power and rule (*tadbīr*), so that he would be (the sum of) those others (*fā-yakūna huwa hā'ulā'i ghayrahu*). Yet he could not reveal this openly because he feared for his life and had to guard it.

But now we have strayed too far from our main theme (‘*an ‘amūdi l-kalām*), the fennel. Let us now return to the fennel.

Text 20 (NA, p. 147)

It (i.e., the myrtle) may also, like some other plants, be used to repel magic (*izālat as-sihr*), according to some magicians. The science of magic (*‘ilm as-sihr*) is something with which I do not concern myself and I do not like to speak of what I do not know.

They say that the habit of farmers (*akara*) to carve various statues (*suwar*)¹²⁸ from it depicting different animals (which they set) in the middle of their gardens (*fī mayādīn al-basātīn*) derives from magicians and these statues have an effect on the souls of the people who look at them, but they must be only certain kinds of statues (*suwaran-mā bi-‘aynihā*).

They say: To have power (over what is represented there) one carves from its boughs a statue of a man or a woman. The name of the one represented is inscribed there, together with a picture of a lion, a large snake, a scorpion or some other obnoxious and poisonous animal, which has in its power (*muḥīṭa*) the one represented there or is tearing him to pieces or coiling around his body. This has to be done at a particular time with the stars in a certain constellation. This, they say, will cause the one named there to fall ill, or else a nightmare (*khiyāl*) or madness or something frightening (*al-makhāwif wa’l-mahāwil*) or loss of mind or delusion (*sadar*) or some other pain or damage will befall him.

I seek refuge in my great god (*ilāhī l-‘azīm*) from ever doing harm to a human being like myself or molesting any animal (*al-ḥayawān al-bahīmī*), not to speak of human beings. Magicians are people whom I cannot openly blame¹²⁹ nor encounter because I am afraid of the evil they may cause: a time when one of them appears is the worst

¹²⁸ Or: draw various pictures.

¹²⁹ Reading *bi-dhammihim*, or *bi-<ma>dhammatihim*, instead of *bi-dhimmatihim*.

of times and their time is a most painful time. They are men of misfortunes.

I entreat the good god of our clime to divert their evils and calamities from me and my loved ones and friends. The best of people, nay, everyone, have defamed (*ta'ana*) them. So have the prophets (*al-anbiyā'*)—peace be upon them—as well as pious men and ascetics (*al-'ubbād wa'z-zuhhād*) and they have considered them the worst of mankind. As for myself, I do not say anything about them that people might keep in mind, I just say that the best of men have defamed them, and no-one can find fault in my doing so. I do not blame or defame anyone. Nay, I merely implore our god to make good all corrupted ones through his mercy.

Text 21 (NA, pp. 148–149)

The prophet Adam has told a curious story about it (i.e., the laurel) in which he mentions how it spoke to the guardian of the field. He said:

It happened in ancient times that a farmer was sleeping amidst four laurel trees in the middle of a field (*maydān*). In his dream he heard how one of the trees spoke to him saying: “O human being, is there in your garden any more beautiful tree than I? Who can say that he has ever seen the like of me?” The guardian asked: “What do you mean?”

The tree replied: “It means that you have to call me by the name ‘Who has seen the like of me and does not honour me with the same attention (*ta'āhud*) as the other trees?’ You take great care of them but you do not turn your attention to me nor to those who are of my kind. If you want to know my excellence over all other trees then start taking care of me and attending (*ta'āhud*) to me. Stand up in the middle of the night with a little gillyflower (*khūrī*) oil, or some other (oil), and anoint me with it, if you like. Then turn your face towards heaven and look up to Jupiter saying: ‘O most auspicious of the Auspicious Ones (*sa'd as-su'ūd*), give me fifteen more years to live from this moment on!’ You may be sure of fifteen more years from that moment on, whatever your age might be and you will be safe from death after you have said to him: ‘I entreat you through this tree.’ Try this, O human being, and you will find it to be so and you will profit from this and know my excellence and my rank in the eyes of your god Jupiter.”

He (i.e., Adam) said: The laurel (*ghār*) tree was named ‘the One who spoke with the guardian’ (*mukallimat an-nāṭūr*) and also ‘Who has seen the like of me?’ (*man ra’ā mithlī*).

Abū Bakr Ibn Waḥshiyya adds: This story may sound a mere fable (*khurāfa*) but it conceals a good deal of their knowledge, to which they allude (*ramazū*), setting it in the guise of a fable, because they only grudgingly revealed (*kashf*) its (true) meaning, prohibiting it from the unknowing who would understand it according to their opinions and beliefs (*ārā’ihim wa-ṭiqādātihim*). This (story) is an allusion to this tree having this special property. If this may be ascertained through experimentation then it is indeed a useful piece of information.

Text 22 (NA, pp. 155–157)¹³⁰

The chapter on the marsh mallow (khiṭmī)

Abū Bakr Ibn Waḥshiyya says: Kasdānians have many tales (*khurāfāt*) about the marsh mallow in which abundant benefits and many wonders lie. I add this note before the text of the authors (*aṣḥāb*) of the book so that when they mention these tales you would be prepared for them and would not think that they are nonsense. Nay, think about these tales and consider what they say: If you understand them, you will find it to be just as I said. [end of note by Ibn Waḥshiyya]

The marsh mallow is of two kinds. One produces large red flowers, the other smaller white flowers. It mainly grows in the region of the Jarāmiqa but it also grows abundantly in our clime. It is a celestial plant (*an-nabāt al-falakī*). Celestial plants do not die or grow old and wither, nor does their condition change at any time (i.e., they are evergreen).

Shabāhā al-Jarmaqānī has said that the marsh mallow bears red flowers, and that there was in the region of Nīnawā a marsh mallow which grew for 12,000 years, bearing 27 flowers every year, that is to say thrice nine flowers, and one more solitary flower on its top, which had more petals than the other 27.

¹³⁰ This passage has been translated into Italian by Travaglia (2003): 331–334, and into German, from ps.-al-Majrīṭī, *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, by Ritter-Plessner (1962): 368–371.

Shabāhā has also told:

This particular tree used to speak to me a lot, both in sleep and in a waking condition; although mostly in my dreams. When I had heard something (or: a story, *ḥadīthan*) from her (in my sleep), I used to write it down in a volume (or: on parchment, *fī jild*) after I had woken up because I did not want to forget it.

One night she (the marsh mallow) came to me in a dream and said: “Know that I am an idol (*ṣanam*) of Mercury; yet you have been thinking that I am merely a marsh mallow. I am a marsh mallow but also an idol. A great quarrel and many disputes (*munāzaʿāt*) have fallen between myself and the mandrake (*al-yabrūh*)¹³¹ because it claims to be more deserving of my place. Yet everything on earth is set where our god set it and none of us (i.e., trees) can overstep its place and none of us has it in his power to change from one state (*ḥāl*) to another, nor can we move from one place to another. Neither can we add to our stature or size, from littleness to greatness, nor change our nature (*tabʿ*) to doing things other than what we have been doing. But the mandrake is ignorant and blind in his claim that everything about which I have spoken would be possible if one just knew it.¹³²

Now I ask you, Shabāhā, to write to the magicians of Bābil and ask them to give their verdict in the case between myself and the mandrake. You do not have their knowledge (*ilm*) so that we cannot turn to your verdict instead of theirs. You know that I cannot write letters to men nor (directly) let them know what I want and this is why I have told you this because I have chosen you from among other human beings. Because of this you will remain as long as I remain, forever.”

When she had said this, the marsh mallow (in my dream) dissolved and became vapour which ascended towards heaven and I did not see her anymore after its dissolution. When I awoke, I wrote about this to the magicians of Bābil and they replied to me as follows:

“Your letter has come to us and we are delighted to hear that you and the tree are safe and sound. In our opinion the marsh mallow is not the equal of the mandrake because in our opinion the mandrake has a mightier station and a loftier position with relation

¹³¹ Lane, s.v., mentions a *yabrūh ṣanamī*.

¹³² Instead of *naʿlamuhu* we might read *naʿmaluhu* “if we just did it”.

to its actions both beneficial and harmful to us, nay it is harmful to our enemies to our benefit.

Yet, he is, despite this, deceiving and sly and his fury (*shidda*) and power cannot be opposed or countered. So we extol him to preserve ourselves from his evil. Yet he is not dissimilar to the marsh mallow; nay, they agree in their nature (*tab^c*) which is cold, heavy (*thiqal*) and slow. Both of them are related to two strong celestial bodies which have power over them, namely Mercury and his father Saturn.

Both of these plants are wise (*‘āqil*) and we are astonished to hear that there is some quarrel between them. Usually disputes and quarrels break out between two stupid ones: how rare it is that a quarrel occurs between two wise ones! Yes, this is much rarer than between two stupid ones because quarrels and disputes do not break out between two wise ones except for a necessary reason (*sabab mūjīb*), through the action of someone who does it, but in the case of two stupid ones, it may occur between them either for the very same reason or from themselves. Thus, wise ones have only one cause for dispute, whereas ignorant ones have two and consequently a dispute will break out between them more often.

Our verdict is, thus, in favour of the mandrake and against the marsh mallow because we use him (i.e., the mandrake) much in our magical operations and he is a strong aid in our work.¹³³ We also use the marsh mallow in some cases and some states and matters, like in (creating) bonds (*wuṣṣla*), love, sympathy and favourable disposition as well as in some talismans which are meant for pure good. In the case of the mandrake, the evil (uses) predominate.”

I took this letter and went to the marsh mallow and told her that it had arrived. Then I went away and she came to me in my sleep¹³⁴ and I told her about it (the contents of the letter). She replied: “They judged in my favour against him, not the other way round, because they said that I am good and he is evil and they are (in fact) saying that they extol and prefer him (only) because of his evil (of which they are afraid).

The proof of this is that people fear evil animals like predatory animals and different kinds of snakes among wild animals because

¹³³ I read *‘amalinā* instead of *‘ilminā*.

¹³⁴ I take it that Shabāhā went with the letter to the holy tree and then retired to a room in the temple for incubation. Note that Shabāhā seems unable to tell the tree the contents of the letter except in a dream.

of their evil although they are (in themselves) troublesome wretches. The good ones, like me, (among animals) are the herbivorous ones which live happily and in comfort. Snakes are killed and hunted, whereas fishes and turtles are protected and safe. They have given their verdict concerning me that I am good and may be safe and concerning my enemy in my dispute that he is evil and feared. I am better and more auspicious, just as good men are in a much better position than evil ones, in many ways which it would take a long time to recount. Even if there were nothing else to distinguish between good ones and evil ones except that the heart of the good one is at rest and the heart of the evil one is preoccupied (that would be enough): the one with a peaceful heart enjoys his eating and drinking in a way one with a preoccupied heart can never do!”

Because of this Shabāhā, the prophet¹³⁵ of the Jarāmiqa, ordered the people of his region to draw in their temples (*ḥayākil*) a picture of Dawānāy the Lord standing, making an eight with (two) fingers of his right hand,¹³⁶ with the remaining three standing upwards. He leans on a branch of marsh mallow in which knots are depicted, which are typical of the branches of marsh mallow. In addition a great snake coils around his staff and at the top of the staff is a golden crucifix. The snake is opening its mouth wide towards the face of Dawānāy.¹³⁷

Text 23 (NA, pp. 186–187)

There is a reason why this tree is called “the Tree of Abraham” but it would take a long time to explain it in detail.¹³⁸ The main point is, briefly told, that Abraham was a leader (*imām*) of the people of his time and much revered by them. Yet he was afflicted by many

¹³⁵ Reading *nabī*, cf. Ritter-Plessner (1962): 370.

¹³⁶ For the explanation of this and further references, see Ritter-Plessner (1962): 370. Cf. also von Gutschmid (1861): 48–49.

¹³⁷ For the identification of this statue, see Ritter-Plessner (1962): 369–370; cf. also Tubach (1986): 305, 332–333, 364.

¹³⁸ On p. 186, we have been told that this tree is related to the sorb (*ghubayrā*), for which see, e.g., Levey 1966b: 310). It is said to be a blessed tree which loves solitude and avoids company. It was loved by King Ḥāmā, as well as by the people of Sūrā. The resemblance of the name Ḥāmā to the Biblical Haman is most probably accidental, even though there is a legend which connects Haman with various trees, see Ginzberg (1998) IV: 443–445.

travels and wandered around different countries because of famine and hunger which befell the people of *al-Jazīra* during the reign of King Ṣalyāmā the Inauspicious, who was inauspicious for his people; the traces of his misfortune remain to our very days because he lived not long ago (*li-qurbi zamāninā min zamānihi*).

Once Abraham fled to the clime of Bābil and another time to the land of Egypt (*arḍ Miṣr*). They say that when he was travelling in the desert (*barriyya*) called Tādūmaryā—Abū Bakr ibn Waḥshiyya adds: This desert is the one where the city of Tadmur (i.e., Palmyra) is located—and he saw a big black lion approaching him. Abraham was riding a donkey. He was seized with violent fear¹³⁹ and he quickly dismounted close to one of these trees which had large, tangled branches.

He led his donkey and bound it to the tree with a rope (*ḥabl lif*) which was around its neck, then climbed on the back of the donkey and scaled (*tasallaqa*) the tree to half of its height and remained there, sitting on a large and thick branch, hiding among the leaves. The lion came forward, looking for him. When the donkey saw the lion and smelled it, it bolted and started panicking, pulling on the rope with which it was bound, trying to shake it off in order to come to the lion (*sic?*).—This is the habit of donkeys when they see a lion; it is natural (*maṭbūʿa*) to them.

Jolting and panicking the donkey lifted its hindlegs and beat the ground with them, farted enormously and brayed loudly. When it saw this the lion was scared and ran far away. When he saw that it had gone away, Abraham descended, mounted his donkey and rode to the town (*al-madīna*). When he went by a place where there was one of these trees, he bowed down (*sajada*) to it and glorified (*sabbaḥa*) it and forbade anyone to break any of its boughs or to use it for firewood. He said: “This tree has saved me and my donkey from a lion.”

The tree became famous for this in Syria (*ash-Shām*), *al-Jazīra* and the clime of Bābil, and people started calling it “the Tree of Abraham”, abandoning its original name which was **shūktāthā*¹⁴⁰ although, (in fact), some people (still) retain its (original) name while others call it the tree of Abraham.

¹³⁹ Or, if we take the donkey to be the subject: its muscles beneath the shoulder-blades started trembling (out of fear).

¹⁴⁰ In the edition SWKX²BY (where X is one of the letters *bāʿ*, *tāʿ*, etc., without any dots). As a mere guess, I connect this with ShWKT² (NA, p. 169, l. 13).

Text 24 (NA, pp. 296–299)

The people of the time of Yanbūshād claimed that all the *sakīnas*¹⁴¹ of gods and idols (*aṣnām*) wept for him after his death, just like angels (*malāʾika*) and *sakīnas* had all wept for Tammūzā (TMWZY). Further, they claimed that all the idols came from all regions (*min jamīʿ aqṭār al-ard*) to *Bayt al-ʾShKWL*¹⁴² in Bābil and all went to the temple (*haykal*) of the Sun, and especially to the great golden idol which hangs between heaven and earth.

The idol of the Sun stood in the middle of the temple and all the world's (*ard*) idols stood around him. Closest to him were the idols of the Sun from every region, then the idols of the Moon, then the idols of Mars, then the idols of Mercury, then the idols of Jupiter, then the idols of Venus, then the idols of Saturn.¹⁴³

Then the idol of the Sun started weeping for Tammūzā and all the idols wept. The idol of the Sun read litanies (*yuʿaddid*) on

¹⁴¹ The same term is used in the Mandaean (*shkīnā*, Rudolph 1960–61, II: 21, note 4) and Manichaean religions (Syriac *shkīnā*, the five “dwellings” in the Kingdom of Light, Lieu 1985: 10). The word is used for *daimōn* in Proclus’ *Commentary* on Pythagoras’ *Golden Verses*, translated by Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib (see al-Bīrūnī’s *Kitāb Mā liʾl-Hind*, pp. 26–27; Walbridge 2001: 26 and 47, note 31). See also section 5

¹⁴² The equation with Hebrew *eshkōl*, made already by Ewald (1857): 151, note, is unwarranted and there is nothing to connect this temple with Dionysos. A connection with the ancient Mesopotamian temple Esagila is rather uncertain but worth consideration. Tubach (1986): 26, mentions the temple Eshgal of Ishtar, and, p. 27, Esagila, both still active in the early Hellenistic period. The great temple at Hatra seems to have been called Sgyl (Sagīl), perhaps from Esagila, see Tubach (1986): 259–261.

The Greek *skholē*, school, is semantically problematic, even though the word was in frequent use in both Syriac (see Payne Smith, p. 376 b, s.v. *skōl*, *eskūl*) and Arabic (*ushkūl*, *uskūl*), e.g., *Akhbār baṭārika*, pp. 13, 25, etc.; Ibn Hindū (d. 420/1029), *Miftāḥ aṭ-ṭibb*, pp. 89–90, (in a passage on the Alexandrian doctors’ curriculum, translated from Syriac, mentioning the books read *fi majālis taʿlīmihim al-maʿrūf ʿindahum biʾl-ʾSKWL*. The passage continues: *wa-hādhihi l-lafza ism suryānī murakkab min shayʿayn aḥaduhumā l-fahm waʾt-tafahhum waʾth-thānī l-mawḍiʿ alladhī fihi yutafahham mā yutafahham*, referring, thus, both to the scholastic tradition and the school, as a building); Hunayn, *Risāla*, p. 21 (. . . *kamā yajitamiʿu aṣḥābunā l-yawma min an-naṣārā fi mawāḍiʿi t-taʿlīmī llāi tuʾrafu biʾl-uskūli fi kulli yawm . . .*). See also Vööbus (1958): 317, note 137, and Endress (1987): 430, note 103, for further references.

A reading *Bayt *al-uthkūl*, from *uthkūl* “a bereft woman” (see Lane, s.v.) might also be considered. Another possibility is to connect ʾShKWL with *ashkāl*, the (celestial) forms, although it is difficult to explain how the common noun form *afʿāl* would have been deformed to the rare ʾFʿWL. Similar distortions of Arabic words are not found in the *Nabatean Agriculture*.

¹⁴³ The scene sounds somewhat similar to a story, told in Islamic lore (itself deriving from earlier models) of how the idols came to Iblīs when Jesus was born. For the version of aṭ-Ṭabarī, see Perlmann (1987): 115.

Tammūzā and told his story in detail (*yadhkuru sharḥ qiṣṣatihi*), and all the idols wept from sundown till sunrise the next morning. After that they flew back to their regions.

The idol of Tihāma¹⁴⁴ was called Nasr.¹⁴⁵ His eyes keep weeping and his tears flowing since that night when he lamented over Tammūzā with the idol of the Sun, and will do so forever. This is because of the special role (*limā yakhtaṣṣu bihi*) this idol has in that story of Tammūz. This idol which is called Nasr is the one who gave (*afāda*) the art of soothsaying (*kihāna*) to the Arabs so that they were able to tell about secret things (*al-ghayb*) and explain dreams before the dreamer had told his dream to them.¹⁴⁶

Thus the idols also wept for Yanbūshād that night in the clime of Bābil, separately in their temples, the whole night till morning. Towards the end of the night there was a great inundation, with great and heavy thunder and lightning and a great earthquake¹⁴⁷ which extended from Ḥulwān to the bank of the Tigris in the region of Binārwayā¹⁴⁸ on the eastern side of the Tigris. When the inundation started, the idols returned to their places, they having stirred somewhat from their places.

They caused this inundation as a punishment to people of the clime of Bābil because they had left the body of Yanbūshād under the open sky on the steppe of Shāmāšā, until the inundation washed his body to *Wādī al-Aḥfar* from where the body was further washed to the sea.¹⁴⁹ Famine and plague befell the clime of Bābil for three months until the living had no time to bury the dead.

These are stories which they have written down and read in their temples after the prayers. Then they weep and lament greatly. When I join the people in the temple, especially on the feast of Tammūz

¹⁴⁴ Note the Islamic focus, although also fifth and sixth-century authors were aware of a temple of Nishrā in Arabia, see Hawting (1999): 115.

¹⁴⁵ A well-known pagan god, mentioned in the Qurʾān (Q 71: 23), whose temple has been excavated at Hatra. See also Tubach (1986): 109–114.

¹⁴⁶ Obviously a reference to the recurrent *kāhin* tales, like the one concerning Shiqq and Saṭīḥ, discussed in Hāmeen-Anttila (2000). One should also note the mention of a vulture (in Arabic *nasr*) in an anti-Islamic biography of Muḥammad from Spain, see Constable (1997): 48, further discussed in Hāmeen-Anttila (2000).

¹⁴⁷ Earthquakes as signs of divine malcontent are, of course, a topos in several religious traditions. In Syriac sources, one finds, e.g., the earthquake of 363 interpreted in such terms, see Brock (1977b): 274–275.

¹⁴⁸ Written BNʾWDhRNʾ, but cf. below.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. **Text 25**.

which is in his month, and they read his story and weep, I always weep with them, helping them and feeling sympathy with their weeping, but not because I believe in what they relate. Yet I do believe in the story of Yanbūshād. When they read his story and weep, I weep with them unlike I weep for Tammūzā. The reason for this is that the time of Yanbūshād is closer to our own time than the time of Tammūz, and accordingly his story is more reliable and true. It may also be that part of the story of Tammūz is also true, but I doubt some of the story because his time is so remote from ours.

Abū Bakr ibn Waḥshiyya says:¹⁵⁰ This month of Tammūz is, according to the Nabateans as I found it in their books, called by the name of a man about whom there is a long and amazing story. They claim that he was killed time after time in horrible (*qabīḥa*) ways. In fact, all their months are called by the names of excellent and learned men of the past, who belonged to those Nabateans who lived in the clime of Bābil before the Kasdānians.

This Tammūz, namely, was neither Kasdānian, nor Kanʿānite, nor Hebrew (*ʿibrānī*), nor one of the Jarāmiqa, but one of the ancient *ḥasāsīn* (*min al-ḥasāsīn al-awwālīn*). They say concerning each of their months that they are called by the names of men who have passed away. Thus the First and the Second Tishrīn are the names of two others who were excellent in sciences (*ʿulūm*) and so also the First and the Second Kānūn. Shubāṭ was a man who married a thousand women, all virgins but who bore no offspring and no son was born to him,¹⁵¹ so they set Shubāṭ at the end of their months because of his lack of offspring, and this lack became the lack of the number (of days) in it.¹⁵²

All Sabians, both Babylonian (*bābīlī*) and Harranian (*ḥarrānī*), weep and lament for Tammūz until our days in the month called Tammūz in a feast (*ʿīd*) of theirs which is attributed to Tammūz. They read long litanies (*yuʿaddidūn*), especially the women who, both here and in Harran, weep and lament together for Tammūz and rave long ravings (*hadhayān*) about him. Yet I have noticed that neither of the

¹⁵⁰ The rest of the text is a long note by Ibn Waḥshiyya.

¹⁵¹ The passage remotely resembles the frame story of *The Thousand and One Nights*.

¹⁵² Twin prophets with the same name are also found in the material describing Sabian prophets; e.g., al-Masʿūdī, *Muwāj* § 1234, knows of two different prophets called Orpheus, namely Hermes and Agathodaimon. For the fewer number of days in February, cf. von Gutschmid (1861): 59.

two groups possesses any true information (*khobar ṣaḥīḥ*) concerning Tammūz and the reason for their weeping for him.

When I was translating this book, I read in it that Tammūz was a man about whom there is a story and that he was killed in a horrible way only once, and there is no more to his story. They have no¹⁵³ knowledge about him except that they say: “So we have known our forefathers to weep and lament during this feast ascribed to Tammūzā.”

So I say that this is a memorial feast (*dhukhrān*)¹⁵⁴ which they held for Tammūz in the ancient times and which has continued until the present although the story about him has been forgotten because of the remoteness of his time. In our times, none of them knows what his story was and why they actually weep for him.

The Christians have a memorial feast which they hold for a man called Jūrjīs¹⁵⁵ who, so they claim, was killed many times in horrible ways,¹⁵⁶ but he returned to life each time. Then he was killed again, and again returned to life, until he died at the end of the story, which is too long to be explained. It is written down in a book which the Christians possess and they hold a memorial feast for him which they call the memorial feast of Jūrjīs.

The story of this Tammūz which we already mentioned is just like that of Jūrjīs. I do not know whether the Christians heard (*waqaʿa*

¹⁵³ I read *lā* for *lī*.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Syriac and Mandaic *dukhrānā*. For Mandaean *dukhrānā* “a sacramental commemoration of a person or persons by reciting their name” (Gündüz 1994: 82), see Rudolph (1960–1961) II: 287–296.

¹⁵⁵ The name is curiously close to that of the god or demon Jirjās mentioned in *Rasāʿil Ikhwān aṣ-ṣafā* IV: 296; see also Green (1992): 208–213. For the feast of St. George, see also al-Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī* VI: 225 (ʿīd *Maryā Saḡīs*, var. *Jajīs*; further references in Elad 1995: 65–66) with a reference to the presence of women in the feast. For an Islamic version of “*Jirjīs an-nabī*,” see, e.g., al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʿrīkh al-anbiyāʾ*, pp. 396–404. His repeated killing was almost proverbial. E.g., Rūmī, *Dīwān*, v. 23465 (poem 2213), adopts him as a metaphor for true lover in a beautiful verse: *hamchu Jirjīs shavad kushṭe-i ʿishqash ṣad bār*.

¹⁵⁶ Repeated killing of other religious characters is also known from the Islamic tradition. Ayoub (1978) mentions several such cases: pp. 112–113 (< *al-Irshād*: Muslim ibn ʿAwsaja speaks of being killed and resuscitated 70 times); p. 123 (< ad-Darbandī, *Iksīr al-ʿibādāt*: al-Ḥusayn); p. 216 (eschatology: the murderers of al-Ḥusayn); p. 246 (< *al-Haft ash-sharīf*: al-Ḥusayn was not slain a thousand times, implying that the contrary is said by some). In the Christian Syriac and Arabic traditions one also finds resurrections, both as public miracles performed to impress (e.g., *Akhhār baṭārika*, p. 27) and as more private occurrences (e.g., *Akhhār baṭārika*, p. 21: the bishop Barshabbā was resurrected so that he was able to stay in his office for a further 15 years until a suitable successor was found).

ilā) of the story of Tammūz who lived in the ancient times and they changed the name of Jūrjīs at his place and then related the story of Tammūz under the name of Jūrjīs and disagreed with the Sabians concerning the time (of the feast). The Sabians hold the memorial feast of Tammūz on the first day of Tammūz and the Christians hold the feast of Jūrjīs at the end of Nīsān or a little before it.¹⁵⁷ Now we think (*waqafnā*) that the story of Jūrjīs, how he was punished and killed several times by the king, is the very same as that of Tammūz, but the Christians stole it from the Sabians and set Jūrjīs, one of the disciples of Christ (*hawārī l-Masīh*) (in his stead) and claimed that he called a king to adopt the Christian religion, and that the king tortured him by killing him these many times. Personally, as far as I know, my opinion is that both stories are lies and impossibilities that cannot be true.

This is what I found in the book of the *Nabatean Agriculture* about him. After that I happened to come upon another Nabatean book which contained the explanation of the story of Tammūz. He called a king to serve the Seven and the Twelve,¹⁵⁸ and that king killed him, but he returned to life after having been killed. Then the king killed him in many horrible ways but each time he returned to life. In the end he finally died. That story was indeed identical to the last with the story of Jūrjīs which the Christians know. The Sabians hold a memorial feast for Tammūz which they call the memorial feast of Tammūz and the Christians hold a memorial feast for Jūrjīs, which they call the memorial feast and *tadhkīra* of Jūrjīs.

Abū Bakr ibn Waḥshīyya, the author¹⁵⁹ of this book says: When it comes to Yanbūshād, the Sabians of our time do not know him and they have not heard his story as I have been told by them. I do not know how that has come about, except if it is a pure coincidence because they have stories about other Nabateans who are more ancient than Yanbūshād.

Binārwāyā¹⁶⁰ which he (i.e., Qūthāmā) mentioned in the story of the earthquake which, he said, came after the inundation—this

¹⁵⁷ St. George's feast is on the 23rd of April.

¹⁵⁸ For the combination of Seven and Twelve in Mandaean religion and in Islamic sources, see Rosenthal (1959), esp. pp. 315–317.

¹⁵⁹ Var. the translator into Arabic.

¹⁶⁰ Yāqūt, *Muḥjam* I: 496: *Binār (. . .) min qurā Baghdād mimmā yalī ṭarīq Khurāsān min nāḥiyat Barāz ar-Rūdh* (for which see *Muḥjam* I: 364).

Binārwayā is the place of the city of al-Manṣūr which is the same as *Madīnat as-salām* (i.e., Baghdad).

Concerning the vapour rising from the earth and receiving a bad influence from the stars,¹⁶¹ this is the opinion of the Kasdānians, which is like their opinion concerning shooting stars (*shuhub*) which are born in the air from vapour and disappear in a moment. The stars which are seen with tails (*adhnāb*; i.e., shooting stars) are also like this. The occurrence of a calamity (*āfa*) in the vapour which rises from the earth is caused by stars like this. There will be more about this in this book and you will come by it, O my son, in the words of the author of this book, if God, He is sublime, wants it. Here end the words of Ibn Waḥshiyya.

Text 25 (NA, pp. 405–406)

Yet the beliefs of Yanbūshād lead him to die in the steppe (*barriyya*) of al-Aḥfar, alone and miserable. A flood carried his body to the wadi that is in al-Aḥfar and from there to the sea and he was never seen again. Some of his partisans believe in Yanbūshād's words and they say that this death was what Yanbūshād had wanted. His god did with him what he did according to what he himself had wanted. (His god) revered his body so that he did not let it be buried in the earth and this is why he carried it to the sea with the flood. The surges of the sea threw his body ashore on an island where there are fragrant herbs and his body remains there until our time without having been corrupted during these thousands of years because his god honoured him.

The people of the clime of Bābil did not thrive after his death. First it happened after the death of Yanbūshād that God (*Allāh*) sent over them that destructive plague after the great flood and the severe drought. I have heard that some people near Ṭīzanābādh, who are the people of his region, say that Yanbūshād did not die but that he ascended to heaven and is like Dawānāy in this. They greatly exaggerate in this and prefer him over Adam and his son Seth and they say many things concerning him. They, too, are fools (*majānīn*), saying what they do not know in reality.

¹⁶¹ Here Ibn Waḥshiyya comments on what is discussed before the excursion on Tammūz.

Abū Bakr Ibn Waḥshiyya says: It becomes obvious to me from the words of Qūthāmā that he followed the school (*madhhab*) of Yanbūshād but could not say so openly. Can't you see how he belittles and blames him but then follows this with praise, speaking in the name of other people who spoke about him. Thus he mixes blame and praise and secretly corrects his own view.

Both Yanbūshād and Qūthāmā allude¹⁶² to the truth of monotheism (*tawḥīd*) and aid it because this was their belief. Yet they hid this with all their might (*jahdahum*), fearing that the people of their age and the kings who ruled during their time would kill them. According to what I have found in the books of the Nabateans, there have always risen in the ancient times men, one after the other, who have believed in monotheism and have renounced the worship of all except the One, the Eternal (*al-Qadīm*), and have beseeched Him. Often they have not been able to speak openly, so they have only alluded to Him. So it was with Anūḥā who is mentioned in this book, and, like him, Yanbūshād alluded to monotheism and supported it. I also think that Qūthāmā was like them.

God, He is sublime, has been merciful towards us as He has let us know Him and serve only Him, through the most noble of His creation, our lord Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdallāh, the prophet, may God bless him and his family and preserve (them). He sent him in the best of ages and the most noble of times and He helped and aided him and elevated his station and made him manifest until he won over other nations as he had promised his people and told his community (*umma*) that the end would belong to them (*ʿuqbā d-dāri takūnu lahum*). He also promised them that he would make their religion strong and let them inherit (*yastakhliḥuhum*) the earth like it was inherited before (by other nations). He told them this and promised them this when they were a minority; later it turned out to be true and his promise was fulfilled. In this there was a most notable sign and great knowledge and clear proof that his prophethood was true, may God bless him and preserve him and make him noble and great, and his family, too.

¹⁶² From here on the passage uses plurals rather than duals.

Text 26 (NA, pp. 538–541)*The chapter on hadhartāyā*

Qūthāmā has said: This plant grows on the banks of the river called Jordan (*al-Urdunn*) which runs in the land of the Kanʿānites. Some people brought *hadhartāyā* to others in Bābil and these implanted it in the region of [Bar]sāwyā¹⁶³ and it started growing well there. (. . .)

Some of the farmers (*fallāḥīn*) eat the plant itself. They reap it at the end of the first Kānūn, on the occasion of the Birthday of Time (*Mīlād az-zamān*). (. . .) This they call “eating the *hadhartāyā*” and they eat it without fail on the very night of the Birth. If some of them¹⁶⁴ cannot eat *hadhartāyā* that night, they will inevitably do so the next night. They say: “Take your purification (*barāʿa*) by eating *hadhartāyā*.”

They claim that if someone does not eat *hadhartāyā* in these two nights, he will suffer from fever the following year and his physical condition (*badan*) will collapse after the Birthday. They have a premonition of this and because of their premonition (*istishʿār*), their condition does collapse if they do not eat *hadhartāyā*.

When they eat *hadhartāyā* on the night they are accustomed to eat it, they put kohl twice on their eyes, first before supper and then afterwards because they say: “If you do not put kohl twice on your eyes, you will have problems with them the following summer.”

If one of them can afford it, he keeps *qiththāʿ* and *khiyār* cucumbers in storage from their season till the time of the Birthday to use them in this food and they give each other *qiththāʿ* and *khiyār* cucumbers as presents for that purpose. This is especially the habit of the people of Barsāwyā, Ṭīzanābādh and Sūrā, as also of al-Qurayyāt and as far as Qussīn and Junbulā. The habit has spread out to the clime of Bābil, and I have also heard that the people of Bājarmā and the banks (*saqy*) of Jūkhā make it, too, and they cannot do without it.

It has the special property that when it is eaten as we have described it, it increases the urge for coition and food. The urge for coition comes a little after it has been eaten, and the urge for food comes on the following day: who eats it (for his supper), eats an early lunch, claiming to be hungry.

¹⁶³ Correction by the editor.

¹⁶⁴ I read: *wa-[man] minhum lā . . .*

Woe, yes woe, to someone who makes fun of the people of these regions for eating *hadhartāyā*! If they hear him saying that it is sheer nonsense, they beat him until he dies. They also say that Seth, son of Adam, used to eat it; yet this *hadhartāyā* came to the clime of Bābil only after his death, but woe to he who says so, because they will call him a liar and throw stones at him and proclaim him an infidel (*yukaffirūnahu*).

I have myself seen owners of great estates, headmen and stewards (*ʿāmil*) eat it on the Night of the Birth and they have the same premonition as the ordinary farmers and fieldworkers and they believe all that is said of it and of what befalls one who does not eat it.

I have been told that once a headman, owner of a great estate from the people of ar-Raḥwatyā, sent a word to his agent that he should bring him some basketfuls of *sābirī* dates. The agent was busy and the owner of the estate forgot the whole thing until a day or two before the Night of the Birth and the following day. Then his family said to him at noon: “The agent (*wakīl*) has not yet brought us *sābirī* dates nor anything else!”

The owner became furious, because the agent had not bought him the dates and he wrote to his other agents in the countryside where his agent was and ordered them to arrest him, beat him with a hundred sticks and put him in jail for a month as a punishment for not sending him the baskets of *sābirī* dates. He also banished him from his village!

No one can speak sense to these persons! Does not their reason make them realize that before this plant came to them and before they started to eat it, all the people of this clime would have been feverish in the summer and their condition would have collapsed even before that time! Yet who could say this to them and oppose them?

This is just the same as what the people of the religion of Seth (*aḥl millat ʾIshīthā*) say about the Night of Nīsān.¹⁶⁵ Every one of them, man, woman or child, sleeps that night with three pieces of bread, four dates, seven raisins and a bag of salt under his pillow, because an old woman called the Servant of Venus comes that night and goes around visiting everyone, touching their stomachs¹⁶⁶ and searching under their pillows.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. also Ritter-Plessner (1962): 388.

¹⁶⁶ Var. mouths.

If she finds an empty belly and none of all these foods under someone's pillow, she makes the subsistence hard in the coming year and prays to Venus asking her to make that person ill in the following year.

All the people in the clime of Bābil do like this without exception, and I do not know which is more wondrous: that they say that Venus has an old servant or that this servant should go around that very night visiting everyone or that she would make their subsistence hard during the coming year? How come she would have such power so as to make people's subsistence hard or easy? Where does this lady come from and who is she?

All these prodigies (*u'jūba*) come from among the followers of Seth because they are the majority in the clime of Bābil, *al-Jazīra*, Syria and the neighbouring areas. Seth's law (*sharī'a*) has been victorious over all other laws (*sharā'i'*) and I believe it shall remain so forever, having been diffused among all nations (*jīl*) of the Nabateans and it shall remain always as I have said.

Text 27 (NA, pp. 750–752)

Some of his (Yanbūshād's) enemies have argued against his partisans (*alā shī'atīhi*), saying that he used to worship Nothingness (*al-'adam*) and that he did not worship the gods whom it is necessary (*lāzim*), according to reason, to worship, seeking their favour through the service of their idols.

I will now answer this by saying: You claim that Yanbūshād believed thus, but I know nothing about this. He did not invent this nor did he make an innovation because before him many of the ancient Kasdānians and Tannā'iyyīn¹⁶⁷ and other nations (*ajyāl*) of the Nabateans renounced the worship of the two Luminous Ones and the stars and their idols and called for the worship of One God who, they claimed, was above the two Luminous Ones and the stars.

Thus, Anūhā¹⁶⁸ after him, as well as Abraham some time ago,¹⁶⁹ made this explicit and announced it publicly. They openly opposed

¹⁶⁷ One might compare this to Aramaic Tannā, but the resemblance is probably accidental. There is also a variant *al-Yūnāniyyīn*, which does not seem to make sense, either.

¹⁶⁸ Here and below written Anūkhā.

¹⁶⁹ Literally "yesterday" (*bi'l-ams*).

(other) Nabateans in this. (It would be enough) even if there were nothing else than the stories about Immanuel¹⁷⁰ and his long tales (*aqāṣīṣ*) at his time and age and how the king imprisoned him so that he died in prison without swerving in his opposition. It was claimed that when they made his imprisonment severe and left him without food or drink or clothes, his god to whom he had called (people) fed him and gave him drink. After 35 days, they (his prisoners) found him safe and sound, just like they had left him, joyful and with a happy mien.

The king was angered by this and wanted to kill him but his viziers advised him not to do so; instead he should let him stay (in prison) until he died a natural death (*ḥatfa anfihi*). This was because his brother ruled the land of Media (*bilād Māh*) and al-Kūralyā. He was terrible because he had numerous armies and great wealth and the king was very much afraid of him so that he even wrote to him alleging his loyalty (*kātabahu biʿs-samʿi waʿt-tāʿa*) and asked him to send to him the idol which was made after the image (*sūra*) of the king so that he could prostrate himself before the idol every day for a long time.

This speech (of the viziers) sounded good in the ears of the king. The viziers advised him to let him, I mean Immanuel, remain alive because of his brother, whose name was Ibrākhyā the Tyrant (*al-Jabbār*). They said: “If you kill him, his brother will stand against you (*aṣāka*) and pursue you (with his armies) and you cannot know what will come of it. Bestow honours (*akrim*) upon Immanuel and do not (any more) leave him without food but treat him well while imprisoning him forever for the common good (*li-ajl siyāsat al-ʿamma*).”

The king did this and bestowed honours upon him and proceeded to give him whatever food he wanted. He removed him from the prison to his own city (*madīna*) where he kept him in prison in as-Sūlamyā. Thus he lived until his death and Immanuel’s brother Ibrākhyā did not say anything about him nor did he plead on his behalf, showing¹⁷¹ the king that he was angry with him (i.e., Immanuel) because he had openly opposed his nation (*umma*), (the king) acting, too, for the common good.

¹⁷⁰ Written here and below ‘Immānūbīl, with variants. For various Christian Immanuels, see *Akhbār baṭārika*, pp. 73, 74 (bishop of az-Zawābī), 83 (the Metropolitan of Hulwān), 84 (patriarch, contemporary to Ibn Waḥshiyya), etc.

¹⁷¹ Middle Arabic *yūrī* instead of *yurī*.

When he (i.e., Immanuel) died the king showed honour to his body in secret and anointed his body with different kinds of perfume and sent it to his brother, together with seventy leaders (*a'imma*) and the same number of priests (*kahana*) who consoled Ibrākhyā over Immanuel. Ibrākhyā received the body from them and bestowed honours upon them and accepted their condolences.

Then his (i.e., Ibrākhyā's) might grew so that he came to rule the clime of Bābil after the death of Shāmāyā. He came from the clime of Media with numerous armies and the people of Bābil saw it fit to hand the kingship over to him. They did this and he ruled this clime.

Since this was so, (you can see that) in earlier times there have been people who said thus and openly opposed the community (*al-jamā'a*), disowning (the religion of) all nations (*umam*), in addition to (that of) the Nabateans. The same should not be disapproved of in the case of Yanbūshād and he should not be set up as a prodigy (*ufjūba*) among all people. He was no prodigy but it is you, his enemies, who have set him up as a prodigy. Do not treat him unjustly but leave him alone and set him up in the position of one of those who have opposed the nation before him and who agree with his doctrine (*madhhab*).

Know that if you revile him¹⁷² because of this opposition which he openly showed, there are many people who will not agree with you and with what you think he believed. Nay, they say that although he did renounce the idols and their worship and the sacrifices and feasts held in their honour in their temples, yet he did not show, nor is this reported of him, that he would have called (people) to worship the one God like in ancient times Immanuel had done and in modern times Anūḥā and Abraham.¹⁷³ So why do you defame him because of your beliefs (*bi'z-zann*) and blame him because of your imaginings (*bi't-tawahhum*)?

Even if it would be like you think it is, i.e., that he would have called (people) to one god, even in this he would have been preceded by many. Yet you do not mention any of these while you continuously defame this sage in the streets and in temples and feasts and during the fast! Many people from 'Udhaybā and al-Būraqyā and Ṭīzanābādhā agree with him and swear that he did not die but his god raised him to the sphere and he lives (there) forever without

¹⁷² Middle Arabic *sabbaytumūhu* (*sabbētumūhu*) for *sababtumūhu*.

¹⁷³ Here written 'BRWHM.

dying. They also extol him in other ways which I do not mention. Whenever you lower him, these people raise his value (*qadr*). If you wished, you could refrain from what does not benefit you, though it does no harm to Yanbūshād! You should look at his knowledge and his wisdom and his writings (*rusūm*) which are useful to all people, both you and others, because he was one of the wise men and was high ranking in wisdom.

Text 28 (NA, pp. 252–262)

Now, the Sun is the actor, as we have explained, and all things are objects of his action. The owners of the estates (*arbāb ad-ḍiyāʿ*) and their managers (*al-quwwām ʿalayhā*) who help the owners and act as their stewards (*qahārīma*), as well as the farmers and fieldworkers, all these are servants of the plants and fields who make the trees and fruits thrive.

Thus, they are also the servants of the Sun (*khadam ash-Shams*) and obedient to him (*aḥl ṭāʿatihi*).¹⁷⁴ They are the best of people and theirs is the greatest rank and highest position because they make the earth prosper and take care of it. All people, different kinds of animals, birds and others, quadrupeds and all other animals live from what grows forth from the earth, thanks to the care of the farmers and the efforts of the owners of the estates and their helpers.

If all had to content themselves with what grows by itself in the steppes (*ṣaḥārā*) and the mountains, that would not suffice the least number of people, not to speak of animals (*bahāʿim*),¹⁷⁵ birds and creeping animals (*dabīb*). Even all creeping animals, despite their differences, from the least, which is the ant, to the biggest, which are various vipers and snakes, and all crawling and creeping species in between, live from the surplus of what the earth produces through cultivation. They live from the toil and travail of others.

So it is also with the great number of animals (*bahāʿim*) which—like the creeping animals and all human beings, other than the owners of the estates or their helpers—live from the surplus of the owners of the estates, farmers and managers. All people and all animals thus

¹⁷⁴ The Sun in this passage, as elsewhere in the book, is sometimes spoken of as masculine, sometimes as feminine.

¹⁷⁵ Roughly “mammals.”

need them necessarily because they stay alive through them, and the food which keeps them alive comes from them. Thus, the owners of the estates and their helpers are the best of people and their leaders (*ru'asā'*). All people and animals live from their surplus and their toil and their caring for what others neglect. These turn away from what others, that is to say the farmers and the sowers (*muzārī'ūn*), take care of.

Every group (*tā'ifa*) of people occupy themselves with some profession (*darb min at-tijārāt wa's-sanā'i'*). There are drapers (*bazzāzīn*) and money changers (*ṣayārifa*), chemists (*ʿaṭṭārīn*) and brass founders (*ṣaffārīn*) and other kinds of merchants and artisans and sellers and dealers (*al-banādīra li-mā yubandar*).¹⁷⁶ The sustenance and the matter (*mādda*)¹⁷⁷ of all these comes from the owners of the estates and the farmers.

In addition, we see that their merchandise and its matter comes from plants and from what comes forth from the earth¹⁷⁸ and farmers are the ones who bring all this out from its hiding places. Thus, for example, is the case of drapers, whose product people need most after their nourishment because they provide them with cover for the genitals (*ʿawra*) and other parts of the body against heat and cold, to protect them against the harm caused by heat and cold. Their trading articles come from the cloth woven from cotton and linen (*kattān*) which grow in the estates and which the farmers take care of. If the managers did not take care of the cotton and the linen in the estates they would not grow to provide clothes which all people use.

If the farmers do not take care of the edible grains, no (grain) merchant could proceed with his profession and thus grain is their sustenance and livelihood, coming from the farmers and the managers of the estates. This is the way of all other merchants. Brass founders need the food produced by the farmers as do all other people, too, and their merchandise comes from what the earth produces in mines, whence it is brought to them by workers (*ṣunnā'*) who are similar to farmers.

The art of pharmacists (*ṣayādīna*) is to prepare drugs and medicines which mostly come from plants and trees and from the minerals

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Dozy, s.v. *bandar*, possibly from Persian *bundār*, cf. Steingass, s.v.

¹⁷⁷ For this use of *mādda*, cf. also *ar-Risāla al-jāmi'a*, p. 86: *shajarat al-burr hiya aṣṣ qiwām al-ʿālam wa-māddat ḡhadhā'ihim*.

¹⁷⁸ Minerals and metals belong to this class, too.

which the earth produces and from what comes (*yanqaṭi*^c) from the air onto trees and other (plants). People collect these and bring them to pharmacists. The same goes for chemists in their trade, as well as for fruitsellers and greengrocers who sell plants as such, without working on them, and artisans who work on them, like cotton and linen spinners and weavers, or date sellers and those who sell seeds (*as-saqat*)¹⁷⁹ and raisins and sugar and different fruits, fresh and dried, as well as vendors of wood who sell different kinds of wood which the earth produces and which people use as firewood and for heating (ovens) for baking. If someone said that all these merchants are the slaves (*ʿabīd*) of the owners of estates and the farmers, that would not be far from the truth and if someone said that their life depends on farmers, he would hit the mark.

If one thinks about this and starts listing those who sell things that originally derive from plants and come from farms which the farmers cultivate, he will find this too much for him and he will see that this is obviously so. Or if he thinks about artisans, he will realise that they are servants of the owners of estates and the farmers: their sustenance and trade depends on them. This holds true for blacksmiths and carpenters, weavers of cloth and those who make something out of date palm (and its produce). They are numerous, and even if one would content oneself with thinking about the trades whose commodities come directly from the farms and are from the production of farmers, he would find them many and he would realize that their occupations depend on farmers and farms.

If someone would like to count those who live only by (the production of the) date palm, or the vine, or fruit-bearing, or other, trees or various edible grains, one by one, or those who get their living from aromatic plants (*rayāḥīn*) or potherbs (*buqūl*), one by one, species by species, he would find out that it comprises the majority of all people and he would find out that all their occupations and causes of living depend on farmers. If these would refrain from cultivating plants, the professions of all the others would come to nothing as would the arts of the artisans. That would further cause all human things to come to nothing, destroying the organized society and its hierarchies (*fasād niẓāmihā wa-khtilāf tartībihā*). If that would happen, everything on earth, both men and animals, would come to nothing

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Lane, s.v. *saqat*.

and no one would remain on the face of the earth. What would be on the earth would look different from what it does now.

If the sower did not sow, the builder could not build, and if nothing were sown or built, the weaver could not weave and the states of all people would come to nothing and through their nullification the animals (*bahā'im*) and what they eat would come to nothing, as would also happen to birds and creeping animals, and all living things that crawl on the earth. This is what one calls perishing (*buḥlān*), destruction (*bawār*) and perdition (*halāk*).

Thus, it has become clear that preserving people in a laudable condition depends on farmers and fieldworkers (*al-akkarūth*)¹⁸⁰ who are the root of all this and its support and matter. Because of this they are the most excellent of all people. They are the people who obey God—He is noble and mighty¹⁸¹—and they are the friends of God (*awliyā' Allāh*) and He is pleased with them. They have taken hold of the rope reaching God (*bi'l-ḥabl al-muttaṣil bi-llāh*), He is exalted, mighty and noble. They possess all the numerous virtues (*fadā'il*) which we have enumerated and ascribed to them.

This is the relationship of common people with them. Next we will speak about the king, kingship and its means of subsistence (*asbāb*). The owners of estates and farmers are also the support (*mādda*) of the king and of his subsistence (*qiwām*), and they elevate his kingship and keep intact its means of subsistence. The king is in the same relationship to the farmers as are other people and various kinds of animals. They are the subsistence of all and the means for their life, they uphold them and take care of their needs. Who confers a benefit¹⁸² on someone else is also his superior (*ra'īs*) and above him. Who is superior and eminent, to him belongs the most majestic (*ajall*) position and the highest and most noble place and through this he has rights (*al-wājib al-ḥaqq*) incumbent on the one on whom he confers benefits and to whom he gives nourishment. Thus, the one living in the shade of someone more excellent has responsibilities (*wajaba ḥaqquhū*) towards the other one and he must respect and extol him.

¹⁸⁰ Probably to be emended to <*aṣḥāb*> *al-akkarūth* in which sense the word *akkarūth* “agriculture” is found elsewhere in the book (cf., e.g., NA, pp. 198, 199, 214, 217, 314) from Syriac *akkarūthā* (see Payne Smith, s.v.).

¹⁸¹ This formula is not only Islamic but is also used by Christians, cf., e.g., *Akhbār baṭārika*, pp. 15; 84.

¹⁸² Reading *mufīlil*.

This is why we say that they are higher and more noble (than others). Even if they only deserved this praise and had this excellence because they are always intent on what pleases God—He is noble and mighty—(that would be enough), because God—He is mighty and noble—is pleased with the cultivation (‘*imāra*) of this earthly world (*hādihā l-‘ālam al-arḍī*) and He resents those who are active in ruining it or help to corrupt it.

Farmers and fieldworkers are (the cause of) the cultivation of the earth and they provide for all animals and they make the plants prosper. Their opposites are those who refrain (*yatabaṭṭalūn*) from all work (*a‘māl*) and leave all trades and professions, wandering around in the wilderness (*aṣ-ṣaḥārā*),¹⁸³ loving solitude and seclusion and calling themselves ascetics (*zuhhād*) and servants (of God) (‘*ubbād*).¹⁸⁴ They do not come to the temples except on festive days (*a‘yād*). There are even some among them who attend only the two great festivals (*al-‘īdayn al-kabīrayn*), the festival of the Birth on the 24th of Kānūn I and the New Year festival (‘*īd ra’s as-sana*). They say: “We attend these two festivals in congregation (*fī tajmī‘*) because one of them is the day of the birth and rejuvenation (*tajaddud*) of time (*az-zamān*) and the other is the New Year’s festival because it, too, is related to the Sun. Thus, they are the two most excellent festivals.” This is why, so they say, we attend them.¹⁸⁵

I say that they are disobedient towards God—He is mighty and noble—and they set aside obedience to him. Who sets aside obedience has also set aside his pleasure, and he who has set aside his pleasure moves around (*yataqallab*) in his wrath (*sakhat*), may God protect us and our beloved ones from all this!

If all people did like they do and followed their way of inauspicious mortification (*al-qashaf al-mash’ūm*),¹⁸⁶ refraining from caring for

¹⁸³ For *yahīmūna fī ṣ-ṣaḥārā*, cf. Q 26: 225 (about poets): *a-lam tara annahum fī kulli wādin yahīmūn*.

¹⁸⁴ Harsh criticism against ascetics is a marked theme in the *Nabatean Agriculture* (see 4.5). Only Yanbūshād among the respected ancients is seen as an ascetic. See, e.g., NA, p. 559: “his doctrine (*madhhab*) for the whole of his life was the doctrine of ascetic wanderers.”

¹⁸⁵ Reading *ḥaḍarmāhumā*.

¹⁸⁶ The term *qashaf*, with its derivatives, refers to mortification and extreme forms of asceticism, both in this passage and elsewhere in the *Nabatean Agriculture*, cf., e.g., p. 542 (*az-zuhhād* and *al-mutaqashshifūn*) or p. 559 (*as-suyyāh al-mu(ta)qashshifūn*). Islamic theory sometimes makes a distinction between *zuhd* “asceticism; abstinence” as a virtue, and *qashaf* “mortification” as an extreme and disapproved form of asceticism, see, e.g., Gobillot (2002): 560a.

the earth, sowing and plowing, building and weaving, everything on the face of the earth would perish and people would become like irrational animals. Thus, they want to ruin the world and bring it to nothing and they strive for this. They move around in the wrath and hatred of God and they are the followers of the inhabitants of Hell (*atbā^c sukkān az-Zamharīr*),¹⁸⁷ the people of punishment. They want us to praise them and, through them, to draw closer to God, as they claim. Their claims are false, untrue and lies when they say: “We are like angels¹⁸⁸ and we walk on water because of the purity of our intentions and because we are like unto God¹⁸⁹—He is noble and mighty—in not caring for the world.”¹⁹⁰

They tell lies about God! The proof of my words that they disobey God is that the prophets (*anbiyā[?]*) of God—He is exalted—who all are truthful have said the opposite to what these liars claim. The prophets have ordered us to care for the world and to help (others) against the miseries we have there. If we do not help one another, we will perish. That we should have pity on one another and feel compassion for one another and help one another in the trials into which we have been pushed (*‘alā jahdinā lladhī dufinā [fīhi]*) brings us closer to God and obliges him more than if we would do as these liars do, withdrawing into seclusion in deserts and fleeing from people without pursuing a profession that would benefit the sons of our kind (*abnā[?] jinsinā*) and instead would wander, like those liars about God, in the wilderness and deserts, without cleansing ourselves or taking care of our bodies, which are corpses full of stench and filth, because they are mines of filth.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ The term *az-zamharīr* “intense cold” is also used in the Qur’ān (Q 76: 13). Zoroastrian Hell was cold, as is well known. Also Manichaeans knew that the Devil was as close to ice as he was to fire, see, e.g., Puech (1995): 99.

¹⁸⁸ In Syrian Christianity monks are also called angels.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. also Orthodox *theōsis*.

¹⁹⁰ The last two phrases, of course, remind one of the New Testament: first the walking on water and then, perhaps, there is an allusion to Luke 12: 22–26, and parallel passages. One might also draw attention to the difference between the passive *Deus absconditus* and the active demiurge.

The verb in the last phrase could also be read in the first stem (*na[?]muru* instead of *na[?]mmiru*). Then the last sentence should be translated: “in that we do not live in this world,” i.e., our real life is already targeted at the world to come (or the spiritual world), not this earthly world of matter and dirt.

¹⁹¹ Literally understood, the author claims that our bodies are unconditionally filthy. This may be so in the thought of the Syriac author, which would mean that he sees the material world as basically filthy, even though his conclusions from this are opposite to those of the ascetics. For him, one should keep oneself clean to counteract the filthiness of the body.

This is not even enough for them. They go on to claim that they are pious (*abrār*) and that they are better than we are and more virtuous and that we have fallen short of their position because we are not able to reach it, so they claim, and that theirs is the good way and we are just incapable of following it.¹⁹² They are right: being wise we cannot at the same time do to ourselves things which madmen (*majānīn*) do, becoming madmen ourselves, clothing ourselves in wool (*sūf*) like madmen do and letting our hair and nails grow long like the hair and nails of madmen, without entering a bath (*ḥammām*)¹⁹³ or letting water, cold or warm, touch us or without cleansing ourselves from the dirt of our bodies.

This is what madmen do, those who have no reason! Madmen act in such a way because they do not know the measure of the mercy (*niʿma*) which God has shown and bestowed upon his servants. This is because they lack intellectual capacity (*at-tamyīz al-ʿaqlī*) with which they could distinguish between goodness and badness. Those who call themselves ascetics (*zuhhād*) and consider themselves wise, act like these madmen! Shame on them! How enormously badly they act towards themselves by making their life a misery in this world and by consuming their life in hardship and mortification. They take it on themselves to wander in the wilderness and deserts in extreme cold or heat wearing coarse clothes, eating and drinking coarse food and drink. How I pity them for this!¹⁹⁴

Once I saw a handsome young man from among them in the temple of the Sun at the festival of the birth of the time (*az-zamān*) in

On the other hand, it is, of course, possible that he refers to the uncleansed bodies of the ascetics which thus *become* filthy. This, however, would mean that we should discard the literal meaning and base our translation on an emended reading. This would not, though, need much emendation.

¹⁹² One might either take this as a general belittling of their abilities, or one might see in this a kind of predestination, an idea familiar not only from Manichaeism but also from certain varieties of Christian and Islamic thought.

¹⁹³ Bathing is a recurrent theme in the whole book. It is well known that especially for Christian authors bathing, with its Hellenistic background, was a suspect habit, just as was going to the theatre. In Islamic times, bathing had lost much of this suspiciousness, although public baths were often seen as places of dubious character, a theme which Mediaeval erotic literature used with delight (cf., e.g., at-Tīfāshī, *Nuzha*, pp. 186–187). Yet, a negative attitude towards bathing itself is clearly less typical for Islamic ascetics, to whom ritual purity is important and who, moreover, were accustomed to regular washing, if not bathing. Thus, this passage can be taken to favour a non- and presumably pre-Islamic provenance for this tractate.

¹⁹⁴ This translation is based on an emendation “*mā ashaddanī raḥmatan lahum min ajlihi.*”

Kānūn I. I felt pity¹⁹⁵ for him because of his young age and his perfection. So when the Sun had set and we had completed the second prayer, I said to him: “I want to speak with you. Come aside with me.” He withdrew with me towards the House of intelligible images (*as-suwar al-‘aqliyya*) and I asked him: “What is your name?” “Sanbādā,”¹⁹⁶ he answered, and I continued: “Why do you cause trouble to yourself and rend apart your life with this misery and hardship?”

He had kept his eyes closed like these people always do, feigning humility and deep asceticism. Now he opened his eyes which were sound¹⁹⁷ and beautiful and he let them sparkle (*barraqa*) to my eyes, answering: “Woe to you! How little you know about the bliss (*na‘im*) in which I and my like live and which you and your like among people do not know (*tuhiss*)!” I asked him: “Why do you lie? What bliss are you in? With such a body and such clothes? The dirt on your hands and feet and arms is clearly visible to everyone who sees you! What has blindfolded your heart so that you claim in your self-afflicted affliction that you live in bliss?”

He closed his eyes and tried to force out some tears but not a drop came out because of the extreme dryness and mortification and desiccation which the cold had caused him. Then he jumped up and ran out of the temple as if he were fleeing my words. I felt great compassion for him and I regretted what I had said to him. I sent after him but my messenger (*rasūl*) did not find him. So he had gone away without praying the third prayer.

I stood up and went out asking about him but I did not hear anything about him and found no traces of him. Then came the hour of the (third) prayer and I hurried into the temple where the

¹⁹⁵ Reading *raqqetu* (Middle Arabic < RQQ).

¹⁹⁶ Without making too much of this speculation, one might note that the Assyrian name Sīn-uballit proved long-lived, and we find it in later sources as Sanballat (Nehemiah 2:10.19; 13:28; also in Josephus). Babylonian Jewish texts also know a Babylonian pagan Uballit (?BLT; the first part, the divine name, is here left away, presumably to be completed as Sīn), see Greenfield-Sokoloff (1989): 213. The identification of Nabatean names is usually hopeless, and here, too, the resemblance may, of course, be accidental. A Harranian Melchite, Hārith ibn Sunbāt, is mentioned in al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj* §1391, cf. Gündüz (1994): 32, and Hjärpe (1972): 92. There is also a name Shanabūdh, an ancestor of Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad (. . .) Ibn Shanabūdh, in, e.g., as-Suyūṭī, *Iṭqān* I: 323 (and cf. note 328).

¹⁹⁷ This might be taken to mean that the young man had been feigning blindness. Crying one’s eyes out is, again, equally well known from Islamic (starting with the father of Joseph, in Surah 12) as it is from Christian, Jewish and Mesopotamian (see Parpola 1997: XXXIV) ascetic sources.

prayer had already started (*wa-qad qāmat aṣ-ṣalāh*).¹⁹⁸ I came to the temple, sad and sorry because I had not been able to catch him after having said to him what I had said.

These, O my brothers and beloved ones, are those whom Adam called the enemies of themselves and whom Anūḥā the prophet called luckless (*al-manḥūsīn*). Both of them were right in calling them by these names, yet these people think that they are above everybody else and that others should seek blessing through them and listen to their words and seek healing from them.

They even claim that they can see in wakefulness what we see in dreams.¹⁹⁹ In this they partly lie, partly tell the truth. They tell the truth in that their extreme emptiness caused by hunger and the following weakness of their constitution (*ṭabāʿiʿ*), as well as the extreme mortification and misery and exertion cause them to see false visions (*khayālāt kādhība*) and so they do see them in wakefulness even though they have never (really) seen anything.

They lie when they claim that not only the idols, but also the celestial bodies speak to them and that the idols love them and call them, so they claim, “beloved ones.” How great is their lie and how curious their fabrication and how little their shamefulness! That specifically the celestial bodies would speak (to them), as they claim, is most absurd²⁰⁰ and they are great liars in saying so. The celestial bodies have never spoken to anyone. When some of our ancestors set down in their books the speech of the celestial bodies and how they address people or some people, they did so as a metaphor and to teach and narrate about the origins of the sciences which have come (down) to people, as that was how they acquired them.²⁰¹ Thus, also some of the professions have come through inspiration (*ilhām*) to people. It has never happened and it will never happen that the celestial bodies would speak (directly) to any human being.

¹⁹⁸ This seems to be the intended meaning. We could, also, translate “the prayer had already ended” in which case one should translate the continuation as “(. . .) sad and sorry because of what I had lost of it (i.e., the prayer) when speaking with him.”

¹⁹⁹ The ability to observe the *ʿālam al-khayāl*, *mundus imaginalis*, when awake, separates prophets from ordinary people according to many Muslim theoreticians. The verb used in the text, *ʿāyana*, implies direct seeing.

²⁰⁰ For *amḥalu muḥāl*, see Dozy, s.v. MHL.

²⁰¹ I.e., the sciences ultimately derive from the gods—the celestial bodies—and this has been told by the ancestors in similes, depicting celestial bodies as the ultimate source of knowledge as if they would have directly spoken to these ancestors. Cf. also below, note 219.

They also claim that the idols call them their beloved ones and that when they come to²⁰² the idols and bow down in front of them, the idols love them. The idols have indeed spoken to some men and it may be that they have also addressed these liars at some time but that must be a rare occurrence. But that they would love them and call them beloved ones, I swear—and I am truthful in my oath—that they have never called them beloved ones. Especially the idols of the Sun, the Moon, Jupiter and Mercury [and Venus]²⁰³ should call them their enemies and their hated ones, not their beloved ones. I also swear—and I am truthful—that the idols of Saturn and Mars have never said to any of them that they would be their beloved ones and they have never greeted them with a greeting. It is only that, due to the corruption of their brains on account of hunger and continuous fasting, they imagine that some idol has addressed them and called them beloved ones.

The idols of the five (gods) which I just mentioned hate them, without the slightest doubt, according to the common opinion of all Kasdānians and even themselves (*wa-ijmā'ihim ma'ahum*). But the idols of Saturn and Mars hate them even more.²⁰⁴ If my exposition of this did not become too long and thus, because of its length, exceed too far the limits of a book (*kalām*) on agriculture, I would give a definitive (set of) argument(s) against them and I would clarify that which proves that they are liars and sinful when some of them claim that they are more excellent than the prophets, and some say that they are equal to them.²⁰⁵

²⁰² Literally: “meet” (*laqū*).

²⁰³ This emendation is necessary in the light of what is later said about the idols of “these five gods.”

²⁰⁴ The first five gods are not nefarious and thus their antipathy towards ascetics should be obvious. The nefarious Saturn and Mars (*an-Nahṣayn*), on the other hand, could be imagined to favour stern asceticism, which explains why the text emphasizes that they, too, hate the ascetics. In NA, p. 51, it is said that these two may incidentally cause damage on earth (*yattaḥfiqū lahumā 'alā ṭarīqi l-'arḍi bi-ḥarakatihimā kharābu l-bilādī wa-bawāru l-'ibādī wa-nuqṣānu 'adadi l-ḥayawāni wa'n-nabāt*), although the Sun, the god of gods, counteracts their nefarious influence to keep the world intact (cf. also NA, p. 1097, and 3.5). The same root, NHṢ, is used for the ascetics (cf. above, *manhūsīn*, translated as “luckless”).

²⁰⁵ The question of the hierarchical positions of prophethood vis-à-vis sainthood was heatedly discussed in Islam. The later standard teaching was that the status of the prophets, and especially of the prophet Muḥammad, also encompasses within itself sainthood. Despite this, Sufis have always found ways to raise Sufi saints above the prophets, by one way or another. Among Shiites, the same discussion involved the Imams.

How ignorant these people are and how insolent their lies! The civilized (*muhadhhab*) people are prevented from killing them only because they feel compassion for them and consider them madmen who should not be punished. Otherwise the correct opinion is that they should be imprisoned until they die in prison, so that they could not corrupt other people by taking them into their religion (*milla*) and by inducing them to follow their way. Yet the kings have thought that what they do to themselves is caused by loss of reason and (the imbalance of their) temperament (*akhlāt*). The reason for this is that (imbalance) has entered their brains and corrupted them.

[Note added by Ibn Waḥshiyya]

Abū Bakr ibn Aḥmad ibn Waḥshiyya, the translator of this book from Nabatean into Arabic, says: In our times and the time before it, there have been groups (*tawāʿif*) of these ascetics, (similar to those) who lived in the ancient times among the Nabateans as ascetics or (God's) servants (*zuhhādan aw ʿubbādan*). The same kind of lying people are found in India, where people call them *ar-Rashīyya*.²⁰⁶ Some of them always go naked²⁰⁷ never wearing clothes. They cover their private parts (*sawʿā*) with the big leaves of a tree which they call in India *yahrīmān*. Among Indians, they are associated with charms (*aṣḥāb ar-ruqā*).

Among them there are also others like these, many kinds of brahmins (*barāhima*)²⁰⁸ and others who mortify their lower soul²⁰⁹ and torture it with various punishments, living a most miserable life. People in India call them “servants” (of god, *ʿubbād*). They lead a solitary life on high mountains and some of them wander around in the

²⁰⁶ The word might be related to *rashi* (*r̥si*). Cf. al-Bīrūnī, *Kitāb mā liʿl-Hind*, p. 81 (*rashīn*), translated in Sachau (1910) I: 106. Indian ascetics are also mentioned in Balīmūs, *Sīr* V.3.5.1. (Weisser 1980: 166).

²⁰⁷ The naked *gymnosophistai* have always intrigued the imagination of neighbouring peoples. For Greek and Latin testimonies, see Karttunen (1997): 55–64, and (2002).

²⁰⁸ The *barāhima* are discussed in Stroumsa (1999): 145–162. Abrahamov (1987) took the *barāhima* to be connected with Sabian Ibrāhīmiyya. Cf. also Calder (1994), though his article is written in an unnecessarily polemical tone. Early on Chwolsohn (1856) II: 503, identified the *barāhima* with those Harranians who believed in Abraham. The present passage is clearly connected with India, not Harran, though. In the *Picatrix*, or *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* by (pseudo)-al-Majrīṭī, p. 228 (translated in Ritter-Plessner 1962: 241), the Harranian sage Barthīm al-Barhamī is given as the eponymous ancestor of the Indian *barāhima*.

²⁰⁹ Literally, “kill themselves”, but a metaphorical reading is preferable here.

wilderness without retreating into houses or huts and without cleansing themselves. Nay, they are like animals.

Some of them torture themselves by continuously plucking their (facial) hair.²¹⁰ Each of these carries with him an instrument similar to tweezers (*minqāsh*)—actually it is a kind of tweezer—and he plucks his hair with it his whole life, even his eyebrows! When one of us sees them from afar, he thinks that they must be apes because their bodily hair grows long and visible, veiling the whole of their body, and their nails are long like the nails of animals, such as the claws of lions or dogs.

Some of these whom the Indians call ascetics and servants scorch themselves with fire and abase themselves with different kinds of mortifications.²¹¹ But it would take a long time to describe those who in India resemble these who in ancient times lived among the Nabateans and Kasdānians.

Like them are also those Christian monks (*ruhbān*) who wander around as starving ascetics; yet few of them do this. Most of them confine themselves to hermitages (*sawāmi*^c) or cells (*qallāyāt*),²¹² staying up at night, fasting and avoiding meat. They claim that they know secret things (*al-ghayb*) and they predict things that will happen in the future; this they call *kalyānāt*.²¹³ They also make other great claims about themselves.

Some of the Muslims, our coreligionists (*ahl millatinā*), are also like them. They call themselves Sufis (*Ṣūfiyya*) and claim that they are practising abstinence (*zuhd*) from this world and that they are relinquishing the world. They also claim that they are the special friends of God (*awliyāʾ Allāh*) from among all other people and that they are higher than other Muslims and lead a more enjoyable (*at̄yab*) life and are more relaxed of heart and have less worries. They also claim that abstinence from the world is the heart's relaxation from worries.

²¹⁰ In the Islamic world, the same form of asceticism gained ground some centuries later, when some Qalandars became famous for similar feats. The Persian *chahār darb*, the shaving of the hair, moustache, beard and eyebrows, was especially spectacular.

²¹¹ Again, I prefer a metaphorical reading, although it cannot be excluded here that Ibn Waḥshiyya speaks of real suicides. The famous suicide of Calanus by burning himself impressed the Classical world, see Karttunen (2002): 135, and Karttunen (1997): 64–67.

²¹² Cf. Dozy, s.v.

²¹³ From the Syriac *gelyūnā*. This is also mentioned in *Akhbār baṭārika*, pp. 84–85, where the Syriac word is written as *jalyānāt*.

They say that they lead a more comfortable (*ahna*²¹⁴) life than kings. Yet they lie in all this, just as the Nabatean, Indian and Christian ascetics did.

It should be said to these Sufis who are our coreligionists—the others we need not address—and agree with us concerning the bipartite creed,²¹⁵ eating the meat of (ritually) slaughtered animals and facing the *qibla*: “Tell us: Is there among you anyone whom the world has approached, giving him some gifts so that he could have turned away from it and abstained from it after having had access to it, so that he left it and divested the robe of bliss from himself and gave all his property away in alms and ran away to seclusion and isolation?²¹⁶”

No, you are people from whom the world has turned away and fled, and you have striven to get hold of some of it, but you have not been able to. When you realized this, you, out of dire need, have taken it upon yourselves to wear shabby, worthless clothes and long-lasting, low-priced wool.²¹⁷ Then you took a (beggar’s) bowl (*rakva*) and carried it in your hands and took shelter in mosques so that you would not have to pay the rent because you have no money at all, and then you say that you are ascetics and servants (of God)!”

Now we say to you: “Nay, in this you are liars and deceivers (*dajjālūn*)! Abstaining (*zuhd*, asceticism) from the world is for the one who secludes himself after having had access to it, even though this, too, would be a kind of stupidity and ignorance. Yet you are no ascetics. You are people from whom the world has turned away and abstained, leaving you with the calamities which have come to you (*anākhat alaykum*). Bad luck (*idbār*) has come to you. When you have no influ-

²¹⁴ Sufis have often referred to themselves as kings. This has been especially favoured in Persian (*shāh*), but note also the Arabic title *Adab al-mulūk* for a Sufi manual. Ibn ‘Arabī, in his *Dhakhā’ir*, p. 327, explicitly says that ascetics are the kings of earth (*inna z-zuhhād mulūk al-ard*).

²¹⁵ *Shahādatayn*, i.e., the twin confessions of “There is no god but God and Muḥammad is his messenger.”

²¹⁶ The Sufis could well have answered by taking up the name of, e.g., Ibrāhīm ibn Ad’ham. The viewpoints of the authors of the Sufi handbooks and Ibn Waḥshiyya are diametrically opposed. Whereas in Sufi literature, history is always full of such pious Sufis, Ibn Waḥshiyya would obviously appreciate one actual case in his immediate vicinity. He would have been triumphant had he heard that Ibrāhīm ibn Ad’ham’s life actually only copies the legend of the conversion of Gautama Buddha.

²¹⁷ As it is usually the Sufis or people who admire them who comment on the origin of the use of wool, this is a refreshing new viewpoint on the matter.

ence on the world you claim that you abstain from it, whereas, in fact, it is the world that turned away from you! Do not try to beguile and trick (*tumakhriqū*) people; they will not make the same mistake as you did! Your case is just like people are accustomed to say: ‘When the cat did not get the meat it comforted itself, saying that it was rotten’.”²¹⁸

Now when an intelligent man considers this, he will find out that bodies cannot persist without nourishment and that they have to have a cover and a shelter from heat and cold; only this will maintain life. Now, which is better and more rational: to earn it by one’s own toil and labour or to put one’s trust in other people and seek nourishment from them by begging and mendicancy? Some of those who claim this barren (*bārid*) asceticism go even further with their tricks and deceptions and cunning and claim that they abstain from this world and desire the other world.

They say: “Earning (*takassub*) is prohibited (*mahẓūr*) and gainings (*makāsib*) are forbidden because God—He is noble and mighty—has vouched to nourish his servants; he did not say that their nourishment comes to them through earning. When people opposed him and insisted on earning, he left them in the misery and toil which they had drawn upon themselves. If they had trusted (*tawakkalū*) in God—He is noble and mighty—as they should have done, he would have given them their daily needs without them having to trouble their bodies or contrive through work or labour or misery.”

Now if these people were sincere they would find refuge in mountain caves or the shadow of trees and they would eat of the wild fruits which are not cultivated nor taken care of. One should answer them: “Tell us: is it not so that in your opinion that life which you engaged in, is right and proper?” This they must admit, and then one should continue: “Then you should consider this right for everybody and everybody should be pleased with this.” This, too, they must admit. Then one should say to them: “If everyone left ploughing and sowing and all trades, as well as progeny and seeking to have children, and if they joined you and accepted your way, what would become of all people? Would not that mean the destruction, perdition and ruin of this world? Has not God—He is noble and

²¹⁸ I have not been able to locate this proverb in the collections which, of course, are very classicizing in tenor.

mighty—said: ‘No sooner do they leave you than they hasten to cause destruction on earth, destroying crops and cattle. God does not love destruction.’ [Q 2: 205]”

Now God—He is sublime, noble and mighty—has called the destroying of crops and cattle “destruction” (*fasād*) and he has said that he “does not love destruction.” If they are so unashamed as to say that (if everyone would commit himself to *tawakkul*), God would send upon them from heaven and call forth from earth ready-made shirts and baked loaves from which they could eat and other ugly stupidities like this, then we will say to them: “So why does he not do that for you, O ascetics, who claim to trust in him and to be content with little? You and your like should seek shelter in mountain caves or wander around in deserts. Why do we see you coming naked to people, hoping that people would give you an old shirt or a woollen garment as alms?”

No, you do not know the real knowledge (*maʿrifā*) of God—He is sublime—and the way (*kayfiyya*) of his actions. If God—He is blessed and sublime—did not want his servants to (have to) earn (their living), he would not have guided them to different kinds of agriculture and trades, such as weaving and mining (*istikhrāj dhawāt al-maʿādin*) and the preparation of tools and instruments which God—He is noble and mighty—has taught to his servants, as he—He is noble and mighty—knew that his servants could not invent (*istikhrāj*) them by themselves.²¹⁹

How and with what intellect should man have come to the idea that wheat needs to be cultivated through ploughing and sowing, being covered by soil at a certain time, then at times watered evenly so that it starts growing, and that then it should be left to itself until harvesting, then harvested, threshed and winnowed, ground and kneaded and baked?

The origin of all this is with the toil of the owners of estates and the farmers and fieldworkers who labour patiently, despite severe cold or heat, through great toil and misery. The owner of the estate works hard to collect the money he needs for the upkeep of his

²¹⁹ Divine inspiration as the ultimate origin of sciences is a topos in Near Eastern literature, beginning with the Sumerian *apkallus* and Oannes, about whom Berossus tells a famous Late Babylonian legend (see Burstein 1978: 13–14, and Bottéro 1992: 246–250, as well as Greenfield 1995, with further bibliography). Ibn Sīnā made inspiration (*hads*) a central theme in his epistemology (see Gutas 1988: 159–176).

estate and he endures the heat of the Sun and the cold of the winds in order to make the estate prosper, together with his helpers, such as the farmers and fieldworkers and different kinds of artisans (*ṣunnāʿ*).

(Meanwhile), you are heedless, keeping your hands in your armpits, idle, playing and laughing in your ignorance. The owners of estates, farmers and fieldworkers toil and labour in misery until their crop has matured. Then they harvest and winnow and clean and purify, grind and bake, and you come to them like hungry eagles, saying: “Feed us and give us drink because your living comes to you through us.”²²⁰

You are lying, you deceivers (*dajjālīn*), men of little faith, tricksters! God—He is noble and mighty—is the one who feeds us from the superabundance of his mercy to us. If he wished us to withdraw from agriculture and other travails like you do, he would not have taught us the various works of agriculture, ploughing, professions, caring for and nurturing date palms and other fruit-producing trees, all that to which we would not have been guided by our own reason without him opening a door to it. If he had not wanted us to do these things, he would not have guided us to mine workable metals (*ʾajsād*) from their sources, like gold, silver, copper, iron and lead, and he would not have guided us to weave embroiderings and make different kinds of clothes from embroidered material and silk brocade (*dībāj*).

He would not have taught us how to gain access to the knowledge of the moving (*ṣayr*) of the Sun, the Moon and the stars and the organization (*tarkīb*) of their spheres and the differences of their movement, nor would he have taught us the effects on our bodies of plants and medicinal materials (*ʾaqāqīr*) which grow in both the East and the West.

All this we could not have reached by our own reason, O people, had not God—He is sublime—guided us to it, either through revelation (*wahy*) to one of his prophets or through inspiration (*ilhām*) to them. Then they (i.e., their followers and the prophets themselves) pondered upon (what God had taught them) and added by the invention of their own reason to that which God had donated them, deducing many things from what had (originally) been given to them. In this there is a clear indication that God—He is sublime—quite obviously wants his servants to earn their living and toil for their daily needs and that he never did prohibit earning.

²²⁰ I.e., through the *baraka* inherent in them.

Now tell us who is better: the man who toils²²¹ and labours, making the earth prosper, cultivating it so that both he and others may live from the surplus of what his toil has produced, thus becoming the leader of others, or the man who is idle and plays, saying in his shamelessness: “I have left the world and its cultivation (*imāra*).” Then he comes to the one who has toiled and laboured and asks from his surplus, living himself in a most ignoble state.

I could go on speaking about this, because there is more to say than just this, but what I have already said should be enough. Now we return to the words (*hikāya*) of the original author of this book on agriculture.

Text 29 (NA, pp. 1046–1047)

Qūthāmā said: I have tried it and found out that sprinkling human urine on sick vines and pouring it continuously on their roots cures them from the disease (*saqam*) and they will bear good crop, just like they used to do before falling ill. This is curious but even more curious is that this makes their odour more pleasant.

One of the women of my farmers on my estate in Ṭīzanābādh—a vineyard I have there—once came to me to the city of Bābil²²² and told that she had seen in a dream as if a woman who was, so she told, long, white and old, had said to her: “Go to Qūthāmā and say to him that when his vines fall ill and stop producing grapes, he must cure them by the liquid pressed from radish (*fijl*) and pour this on their roots and sprinkle them with it—I mean the liquid. That will cure them.”

I told her that she should return to Ṭīzanābādh and tell the headman of my farmers the same and to say him, on my behalf: “Do this to the vines which have fallen to this disease.” The man I had on that estate was knowledgeable and had good sense. He did not care about the dream of that woman and did not cure my vines in that way—three of them had fallen ill. Nay, he cured the disease

²²¹ I read *kadda*, as in the facsimile (I: 246, l. 17), for the edition’s *karra*.

²²² The city of Bābil is also mentioned in, e.g., NA, p. 518. Al-Iṣṭakhrī, *Masālik*, p. 86, mentions Bābil where the Kan‘ānite kings once ruled, although at his time it was no more than a minor village (*qarya ṣaghīra*). For Bābil in Arabic literature, see Janssen (1995).

by simply uprooting them, like Ṣaghrīth advises, and clearing (*kash*) (the soil) three times and then filling it (with new soil) until they started growing again and so forth (*fā-kāna min amrihā mā kāna*).

When I later came to my estate, I asked him about the sick vines and the dream of the woman. He started ridiculing the woman and her dream and said: “I have cured them in the way Ṣaghrīth mentions, because that is the most efficient way to cure this disease. In my opinion, that is the only right way to cure them (*lam ara ‘ilājahā bi-ghayrihi*). Now they are growing good branches.” I praised him for that and rewarded him.

These²²³ ways to cure them are all good (*sāliha*). Try that which is the easiest for you. We have told you what we know to be useful.

This dream which the woman had had was suspect (*fihī nazar*) because radish is one of the enemies of the vine and if it is sown among vines it will make them fall ill. The woman had seen in her dream that the liquid pressed from it would remedy the disease of the vines but analogy leads to the conclusion that this cannot be so. When she told me her dream, I told her to go to my (master) farmer and to tell him it because I wanted to hear his opinion, too, and to test his reason. He turned out to be intelligent and did not acknowledge the truth of the dream and did not believe in it. Nay, he cured the disease that had befallen the vines by what he knew to be right and which he had already tried, following his usual way.

Text 30 (NA, p. 1127)

Dawānāy was called in his time the Lord of Mankind. He has also been called the “Drawer” (*al-Muṣawwir*), because people have found in the temple ascribed to him in the area of ash-Shawānī in the country of Sūrā one thousand pictures which he has himself drawn. There was also a large book which was preserved in the temple in which he had written that there was a useful meaning behind each of these pictures. In this book he explained the meaning of these one thousand pictures and why he had drawn them.

²²³ I.e., the ways that have been mentioned in the passages before the translated one. Obviously the way which the woman had seen in her dream was not one of these laudable ways.

This book, though, has perished, and in our time people have at their disposal only 118 of these one thousand pictures. These pictures have an equal number of curious (*zarīfa*) and useful meanings in many (fields of) knowledge. Among the preserved pictures, there is a picture of a vine which he had called the vine of convalescence in which he listed (*addada*) many secrets and hidden things which everyone should know. There are great benefits in making them known.

We shall first describe the picture of this vine. Then we shall explain the meanings which we have found according to what its drawer has said, and give the reason why the Lord of Mankind Dawānāy drew it.

He drew a large and wide vine with many branches which have become entangled with each other, so as to become circles, 49 in all which is seven times seven. In each of these circles, there is a picture of bunches of grapes hanging from the branches of the vine. The number of the bunches is 84. The grapes are longish and pale. The meaning of this number is seven times twelve.

On the upper side of the vine he drew a fire and below it the earth, in front of it on the right he drew air and to the left water. In each circle he drew the picture of some animal which is harmful to the vine and is its enemy. With this he gave us the useful piece of information, firstly, that the vine has 49 creeping animals which are its enemies and harmful to it, O people. He also drew in it the picture of farmers and all that is needed in caring for the vine. In their hands he drew the tools with which they work in the vineyard and all other things which they need.

Text 31 (NA, pp. 1061–1065)

When it comes to averting the damage caused by hailstorms²²⁴ to vineyards, the ancient Kasdānians have discovered two ways for it, either averting and turning it away when prognostications appear, or curing the harm and damage caused by it if it has already occurred.

They have mentioned various ways to avert it and to turn it away when prognostications appear. Some of these make use of special properties, others derive from (*aṣluhu ma'khūdh*) prayers (*ad'īya*) to gods

²²⁴ The passage on averting hailstorms has been discussed in 1.5.

who have in dreams shown people many things which they can do, and, finally, some belong to the art of magicians.

I will relate what I have heard from these (various ways) and mention that which I have tried and found true. Other ways (which I have not tried), you must try for yourselves to distinguish between true and false because this and similar things belong to those whose truthfulness may be discovered by experimentation. If a mistake occurs in the work,²²⁵ the one who tries it may think that the recipe was false, not true, even though it is he himself who has not, (in fact), done it (properly), whereas the original (recipe) is true and would lead to the proper result, but when the action is not done properly, nothing will come out of it. But experimentation will show what is true and what false.

First of all, people have said that Dawānāy, the Lord of Mankind drew one thousand pictures in the temples, each picture describing something and he added a text to the pictures which showed what it could be used for. Among these pictures he drew one for averting hailstorms and turning them away, depicting in it a snake (*af^ā*). They tell that he wrote on the picture of the snake that this can be used for averting the hail from falling on fields and places where it would (otherwise) fall.

Because Dawānāy is separated from us by a long period and much time has flown between him and us, people have given, both in ancient and modern times, various explanations (*ta'wīlāt*) for what he has drawn. Some say that if you wish to avert hailstorm from a place above which clouds have risen, you should take a snake and chop it into pieces which you should then throw on burning coals, piece by piece. This should be done in a place from which wind blows. They say that the smoke rising from the snake will cut the hail clouds in pieces or divert them completely from that place.

Others say that one must take a snake and crucify it on two pieces of wood, the head on the one, the tail on the other. Then it should be tied tightly on the two pieces which should then be set up in the middle of the plantation. Then hailstorms will not fall on that place where the snake is set crucified but it will turn away from that place and pass it by.

Others say that when hail clouds rise, one must take a thick²²⁶ quadrangular piece of wood, or of some (other) shape, and pierce a

²²⁵ This sentence is somewhat corrupt in the original, but the sense is clear.

²²⁶ Read *thakhīna*.

hole in the middle with a drill. Then one takes a snake and puts its head into the hole and nails its head with a firm iron nail which goes through the head in the hole and right through to the other side of the piece of wood, which is against the earth. Then one must fix the nail tightly. The snake will wriggle and writhe, drawing the piece of wood with it from one place to another. This wriggling will cause the hailstorm to turn away from that place where you have put the piece of wood.

Others say that one should instead put canes under an open sky in a field (*saḥar*) at night. In the morning, it should be removed to a place where sunshine does not fall on it. When you want to avert a hailstorm you should take a piece of this star-bathed (*al-munajjam*) cane and burn some snakes with it in a place from which wind blows. The places where the ashes fall will not be hit by hailstorm but the hailstorm will turn away from there.

All these various actions are similar and their truthfulness will be shown by experimentation. We have not tried any of these methods but we have managed without them by other ways which we will shortly explain. Yet I do advise people to try them because averting hailstorms and hail clouds is very useful and precious. I do not know whether or not Dawānāy had explained what action went with the picture in averting hailstorms by using snakes. Because of the temporal distance between us, this (information) has not reached us. He may also have deliberately kept quiet about the explanation or concealed it, which was a usual habit of the ancient sages.

It has been related that Kāmās an-Nahrī gave orders to three women who were menstruating that they should go to the village over which clouds seemed²²⁷ to be bringing a hailstorm. They took their clothes off and turned their pudenda towards the clouds, lying on their back and opening their legs and their pudenda towards the clouds. He²²⁸ said that the hail clouds turned away from that place and not a single grain of hail fell there.

Māsā as-Sūrānī, on the other hand, mentioned the following recipe for driving away hail clouds, and he said that it had been tried. Nine men, each holding handfuls of cotton, should stand and show this cotton towards the clouds. With them, there should be four men who

²²⁷ Read *mukhayyila*.

²²⁸ I.e., the one who had related this.

clap their hands, raising them towards the clouds, clapping and shouting like the fieldworkers do when driving away birds from the fields. He said: The more people there are clapping and shouting and scolding, the better the clouds will be driven away and the quicker the weather will become clear, the hailstorm passing that place by.

He said: It is even better if the number of these cloud-scarers rises to forty but their number must be even, not odd, being either ten or twenty or forty or sixty or sixteen or twenty-eight, as long as their number is even, from four up to sixty men. This will be efficient in driving away hail clouds and preventing them from falling on that whole area (*hāra*) as well as its vicinity.

He also said: If a young man takes the skin of a hyena, or a crocodile, and goes with both these skins, or one of them, three times around the town or the village or whatever place he wants to protect from hail, and then goes to the gate (*dihlīz*) of the town or village or plantation and hangs the skin in front of the door, this action will prevent hail from falling on that village as it is or whatever places he has gone around with the skin.

Māsā has said: What we have tried and a group of ancients also testifies as sound in preventing hail is the following: One takes a tortoise which has been caught specifically in the swamps, not taken from running water, and places it in his right hand, turned on its back, and goes with it around the whole vineyard or field from three up to seven times. After having gone around, he puts the tortoise in the middle of the vineyard or the field, digging a small hole in the earth and putting the tortoise on its back in that hole so that it cannot turn on its feet or crawl away. The tortoise will continuously move its legs towards the sky. It should be left like this until the clouds have dispersed and the sky has become clear. Then hailstorm will not fall on that place. When the sky is (again) cloudless, one should hurry to turn the tortoise on its legs so that it can crawl away.

Ṣaghrīth has said: This tortoise must be a big one and this operation must be done on the sixth hour of the day or night, whether the clouds have already started rising or not, and the tortoise must be left on its place until the sky first becomes clouded and then becomes clear again.

Qūthāmā has said: We have tried this operation with the tortoise and found it sound in preventing the hail from falling. The hail clouds will not stop at that place, not even for a moment, and we can see them flying away. Not even a single grain of hail will fall on that place.

We have also tried something which Yanbūshād has described and we found it sound. A man of sound body, who has no blemish in any of his limbs, should take a large, polished iron mirror and turn its polished side towards the clouds and let it glimmer towards them. No hail, whatsoever, will then fall from the clouds.

There is a special recipe for vineyards. One takes the skin of a hyena, a crocodile, or a hedgehog, whichever one has, and goes with it around the vines and after that does what we have described. Then no hail will fall on the vines.

(There are also other ways to turn away hailstorm) besides these which we have mentioned and which we have tried, i.e., the operations with the tortoise and the mirror, both of which are sound and effective and should be used.

Qūthāmā has said: Yanbūshād has said about driving away hailstorm and other diseases that come from the clouds and wintery winds, including the west wind, which causes damage to the vineyards and other plants as follows: One should take a plate of either marble or wood, of whichever kind, and draw on it a picture of a vine with lots of grapes. If he only draws the picture of bunches of grapes that will also do.

This should be done between the time when twenty-two days remain from Kānūn II until when four nights remain of Shubāṭ, on any one of these days. The picture should be drawn and the plate should be set up in the middle of the vineyard. This talisman protects vines from all celestial and earthly diseases as well as averting hail from falling there and it also makes the vines grow and prosper when this is done properly as should be done with talismans.

The ancients have also described (*rasama*) various ways to avert the damage caused by frost (*jalīd*) from vines and others. Frost may damage only some vines. It damages the younger ones, aged from one to five years. When the vine is six years old it starts to become stronger so that frost will not harm it anymore.

The harm caused to vines by frost occurs more often in cold places, like the area of Bārimmā, al-Ḥadītha and the Nineveh of Bābil, and from there to Ḥulwān, and from Ḥulwān to Bādarāyā. These places are the cold areas of this clime and there frost causes more damage to the vines and hits them harder. On the other hand, we do not see frost ever causing damage to vines in the area of ar-Raḥāyā and Ṭīzanābādh, up to Junbulā, as much as it does in those

cold regions. In the region of al-Ubulla people cultivate very few vines or (fruit) trees. Nay, they cultivate date palms and cotton and henna. They do have some vineyards but not many.

Text 32 (NA, pp. 1094–1097)

The ancients have spoken on this and similar things in two ways, because those who spoke about these things were either philosophers or prophets.

The words of the philosophers are completely exoteric and clear without any esoteric dimensions and they should not be interpreted (*taʿwīl*) otherwise than in their obvious sense (*mā yusmaʿ minhū*). The words of the prophets, on the other hand, are mixed in their meanings and arguments with things and meanings of an instructional (*siyāsiyya*) aim. Now when instruction is mixed with demonstration this results in words whose inner meaning may differ from their outer meaning. Each listener takes from this exterior meaning according to the scope of his reason and discrimination.

For this reason those who have taken (their knowledge) from the prophets disagree with each other. Those who hand down the words of the prophets should be most intelligent and discerning so that they would understand what they are dealing with and would know how to hand it down. This is why it behooves²²⁹ every intelligent person to hand down the words of the prophet exactly in the way he uttered them, without additions or omissions, so that the meaning would not change and become reversed due to additions or omissions.

The words of the philosophers need none of this exactitude (*at-taharrī*) in transmission because they do not contain any confusion at all.²³⁰ However, one does not call the mixedness caused by instructional aims in the words of the prophets “confusion” (*labs*) because they are safe from any (real) confusion.

This is why the words of Adam, the Father of Mankind, and Dawānāy before him who was called the Lord of Mankind, as well as the prophets Anūḥā, Akhnūkhā and Seth, the son of Adam, and

²²⁹ Read so: the *mā* seems pleonastic here.

²³⁰ I.e., the words of the philosophers may be transmitted *ad sensum*, whereas those of the prophets have to be transmitted *ad litteram*.

other prophets like them, are such that the one who listens to them must ponder on them and do his best to comprehend them in order to benefit from them. But this will not come out right if one is not good in conceptualizing (*bi-jūdat al-mutaṣawwir*) their meaning because they are wisdom mingled with instruction aimed at each and all, among them both intelligent people—although these are extremely few—as well as stupid ones, sound ones as well as lunatics, slow ones as well as rapid ones, and between each pair there are further intermediate states.

If one wishes to instruct people like these, one must mix his words with instruction, flattering, correction for those who need correcting, and threatening for those who need it. If one wishes to guide all people, one must think of these meanings, conceptualize them and make use of them.

The following spoke without observing instructional aims: Ṣardāyā and Ṭāmīthrā, the Kanʿānites, Māsā as-Sūrānī, and Kāmāsh an-Nahrī, the Ancient, who lived so long ago that we do not know how long a time has passed from him until our time. Among the Kasdānians he is believed to be more ancient than the Lord of Mankind Dawānāy and more ancient than any of those we have mentioned. About him we have no information or stories (*laysa lahu ʿindanā athar wa-lā khabar*) except for his book, titled *Shayāshiq*, in which he spoke of three things, one of them agriculture and the cultivation of plants.

Their words are (to be understood) according to their exterior and their meaning is obvious to the reader; they are without any esoteric meanings nor do they have any need to be interpreted (*taʿwīl*) like the words of the prophets. The proof of this is what Adam, peace be upon him,²³¹ has said, namely that gnats are generated (*yaḥduth*) because of the acts of wantonness (*baṭar*) committed by mankind, be they many or grave, and that scorpions and lizards (*wazaḡh*) become numerous if people commit much injustice among themselves. Snakes and vipers are generated when people do much killing: when they freely kill each other, many snakes and vipers are generated among them. Many fleas, ticks, bedbugs, termites and lice are generated

²³¹ This formula of benediction is rare in the *Nabatean Agriculture*, but in Arabic literature it is often added after the name of Adam. The Adam of the *Nabatean Agriculture* was often identified with his namesake, the Islamic prophet. A particularly clear case is Quṭbaddīn al-Lāhījī's *Maḥbūb al-qulūb*, p. 150, where a passage from the *Nabatean Agriculture* and transmitted in there from Adam, is quoted in a chapter dedicated to Adam, the prophet.

from the multitude of sins (*khaṭāyā*) committed by people towards each other or towards the gods.

Different countries and climes generate different things because of the deeds typical to the people of that clime. If they sin, harmful and obnoxious vermin are generated for them and among them as a way of punishing them. All these sins (*dhunūb*) are caused by following lusts and turning towards them and following them instead of turning towards reason and following it.

If I went on to speak about how the prophets have preached and rebuked people for their deeds that would take a long time, even if I merely narrated the words of only one of them. This was a passage (*fasl*) from the words of Adam, only. His son, Seth, has spoken about this and about these meanings, even more than his father Adam. And again, others have spoken yet more extensively than Seth. But this is not our aim here.

The prophets, as we have said, are unanimous in saying that everything that damages men, such as vermin and poisonous reptiles, is generated by the action of the stars, not in order to deliberately injure them but as punishments issuing from themselves to themselves of the sins they have done as well as from their doing evil to each other (or to themselves) and their turning away from reason towards lust. Vermin and poisonous reptiles, either lethal or sickening, are generated when someone commits a sinful deed or someone else sees this taking place without rebuking the sinner for his misdeed, or fighting against him, or trying to deflect that misdeed. If, on the other hand, someone rebukes the sinner for doing such damage to his own kind and prevents him from doing that deed, then the poisonous and other vermin will be obliterated.

Also, if all people were just to each other and no one would do injustice to anyone, their troubles would fade away and their bodies would be healthy. They would not fall ill but they would prosper, there would be no famine and their crops would be sound. But as they are unjust to each other, not just²³² in their transactions, their evil causes all these afflictions of famine, poverty and illness.

Also other obnoxious creeping animals²³³ are generated by people being unjust to each other, especially the strong being unjust to the

²³² Reading *yatanāṣafū*.

²³³ The ideas put forth in the previous pages remind one of the Zoroastrians, who make a clear distinction between the good creation of Ohrmazd and the evil creation of Ahriman. However, no exact parallels can be detected.

poor whom they have in their power. Poisonous animals and others which cause damage without being poisonous come into being in this way. Likewise, poisonous reptiles do not bite anyone except on account of some sin he has committed which deserves this punishment. These animals are generated according to the number of misdeeds. The generation of snakes and vipers is not equal to the generation of flies, gnats and bedbugs.²³⁴

This is the doctrine of those whom the Kasdānians called prophets. We, too, hold this to be true because they think that there is in the world nothing obnoxious except when someone deserves it. Otherwise, the world is merely one substance which constantly does only one thing, i.e., the ultimate good (*al-khayr al-mahḍ*). The Nefarious Ones (*an-nuḥūs*) are also doing only good and they have been called by this name, nefarious, because they arouse some natural things which have evil and harmful effects on us. So they are called nefarious in relation to us and to how they affect us. This is why they are called so.

The sages of the Kan‘ānites and the Kasdānians say that all this is due to constant coincidences (*al-ittifāqāt ad-dā’ima*), ‘constant’ meaning something that does not change its course. Even if they do leave their habit for a while, they will soon return to it. These coincidences are wonderful and curious and I am not able to disclose all that I know about them since explaining all this would mean corrupting the order of the education of people by the prophets. This is why I do not say anything about this which would corrupt the general public.

The mass of people, nay, most of them in general, do not agree with this nor would they recognize the constant coincidences, which do not change their course, even if one explained this many times to them. Now, as this is so, it is better (for us) to abstain from more explanations. It is better to show the way of the instruction of the prophets to the people and to teach it because that will benefit all people and wisdom is found in giving benefit to all instead of only some, especially when these people are a minority. So we will stop speaking of these two things, i.e., the words of the prophets and the philosophers who believe in these coincidences, and we will come back again to speaking about vines.²³⁵ Our excursion has become (too) long and it remains for us to finish what we were speaking about.

²³⁴ I.e., the lesser misdeeds cause the generation of less obnoxious animals.

²³⁵ The passage seems to aim at the following. The generation of obnoxious animals is a metaphor used by prophets for instructional aims. The author does not

Text 33 (NA, p. 1106)

Some followers (*shīʿa*) of Māsā have claimed that it was he who invented this vine (of the theriaque, *karnat ad-diryāq*)²³⁶ through an inspiration (*wahy*) of Jupiter's. They say that the proof of this is that the name of Māsā is written in the entry of the temple of the idol of Jupiter which is now found in the region of Sūrā, as well as on the four sides of the temple. The offspring of the servant (*ghulām*) of Māsā act to this day as the keepers (*sadana*) of this temple.

They make great claims about Māsā, even greater and more noble than the creation of the theriaque and they deny that Dawānāy would have mentioned this vine and that they would have said the same thing about it. This, they think, is an invented story. They have strange and wonderful things to say about this, and I do not know what they actually are and I will say nothing about them because the followers (*shīʿa*) of Seth at this time have joined with the followers of Māsā, so that they have become one, helping each other and witnessing for each other what they relate, may God bless them in that! I wish all this were true and I will not deny it or call it false, even though, despite this, I have no proof or evidence for the truthfulness of this. Now, one may say about me: “Thus, you are deferring your opinion (*wāqif*), neither accepting nor rejecting this!” So it is, although it would lie a little closer to me to reject it. But we have no need to devote our efforts to this.

Text 34 (NA, pp. 1160–1161)

The Arabs pride themselves upon two plants, the Indian fig (*subār*) and the aloe (*sabr*) which protect people from maladies and postpone death; every living being has to die, though, because death is found naturally in bodies, whereas life is an accident entering them. When the accident ceases, natural death will remain in its stead. Yet what eliminates maladies will postpone death and this is an enormously great benefit and thus the Arabs pride themselves upon this. Yet they have learned this from us and borrowed it from us.

want to spell this out, because in that case people might do harmful deeds without being afraid of their behaviour's results.

²³⁶ Cf., e.g., al-Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī* XXII: 280 (Abū Ḥuzāba).

Qūthāmā has said: This is what Yanbūshād said about the aloe and the Indian fig and their benefits, and it is as he said except what he said about the Arabs, namely that they learned about its uses from us. In my opinion, this is not so. I do not want to argue with Yanbūshād nor call him a liar, yet to my mind it would be odd if something came from their country where they use it a lot and experiment on it and then we would say that they have learned its use from us. It would seem more probable that we should have learned it from them.

Now, let no one think that I would agree with Yanbūshād about the Arabs, thinking that they are a nation governed by Venus and that when Venus governs someone, he has no knowledge, no wisdom, no thoughts and no inventiveness at all. We have, indeed, seen that they (i.e., the Arabs) have intelligence, keen acumen and a fine instinctive grasp, and they have a major share in the science of magic, even though all magic (in the end) derives from the Kardānian Nabateans of Bābil. Yet the inhabitants of Yemen know a lot about magic and we have heard about the Greeks that they have a proverb concerning this, saying about someone who is extremely intelligent: “You are more intelligent than the magicians of Yemen.” They also know a lot about charms (*ruqā*) even though they do not come up to the charms of the Kardānians, which are beautiful, influential and effective. They are also good in physiognomy (*qiyāfat al-athar*)²³⁷ which indicates that they are excessively intelligent and have a sharp acumen. Yet the Indians, too, are good in physiognomy but the physiognomy of the Arabs is more accurate, and because of their innate acumen (*fiṭna*) they may instantly understand what they perceive. The physiognomy of the Indians is not such. Nay, they make their decisions only after having thought and pondered upon what they have seen. Why, then, would you deny what the Arabs have?

²³⁷ Strictly speaking, *qiyāfat al-athar* usually means tracking (e.g., Ṭāshkubrī-zāde, *Miftāḥ* I: 328–329), which hardly applies in this context. However, *qiyāfat al-bashar*, or *‘ilm al-qiyāfa* (Ṭāshkubrī-zāde, *Miftāḥ* I: 329–330, which seems to be following Fakhraddīn ar-Rāzī, *Firāsa*, pp. 99–100; cf. also al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, nos. 6770–6771, *Bāb al-qā’if*) is a science of deducing family relations on the basis of feet or other limbs, and it may also be used for more general purposes. Thus, it is a branch of physiognomy, *‘ilm al-firāsa* (see Ṭāshkubrī-zāde, *Miftāḥ* I: 327–335; see also Ghersetti 1999 and Fahd 1966: 373ff.), proper to the Arabs, or some tribes from among them. This seems to be the sense the text is after. It is probable that the *Nabatean Agriculture* does not use the term in its full exactitude, and I believe that in the present context “physiognomy” is the proper translation for *qiyāfa*.

Perhaps Yanbūshād had heard during his time that the Arabs had learned this from the Kardānians. I really cannot bring myself to call Yanbūshād a liar; people like him cannot be thought to lie. Yet the time of Yanbūshād is very far from ours, much time has passed in between and things, as well as peoples, tend to change from one state to another and from something to its very opposite. Perhaps the Arabs at the time of Yanbūshād were not like we see them today, with their intelligence and quickness of acumen, and knowledge of magic and charms and physiognomy.

Yanbūshād travelled far and wide in the steppes and took refuge in the deserts, meeting many Arabs and he came to know about them much that we do not know. It is even said that he was fluent in the two languages, Kardānian and Arabic, and knew them profoundly. This was because he used to mix a lot with the Arabs and spent a long time with them. By my life, he knew more about them than we do. It may be that there was among them someone who asked him about what he knew and Yanbūshād may have answered and the Arab would then have profited from Yanbūshād's answers and learned from him. Perhaps this was what really happened and Yanbūshād, thus, judged them according to what he had seen.

Text 35 (NA, pp. 1191–1192)

The chapter on the jujube (‘unnāb)

Ṣaḡhrīth has said that the jujube originates from the clime of Bābil, to where it was brought from the clime of Māh, from one of its cities, called Rūzbiyā, and that wherever in all climes this plant grows, it originates from Rūzbiyā and its origin there dates from the time of Manʿarīf-Qāqā. Ibn Waḥshiyya says: I found this (name written) so²³⁸ and I do not know the meaning of this name or what time this time was.

There was a truthful (*ṣiddīq*) man in this city who adhered to the temple of the idols there. He made many offerings (*at-taḡarrub*), fasted a lot and strove to serve (*al-ijtihād fī t-taʿabbud*) especially the Moon.

²³⁸ I.e., without any diacritical marks on the second consonant, here transcribed as N.

(Ṣaghrīth) said: The Moon was pleased with him, taking special care of him. A great pustule (*māsharā*) befell this man; pustules are often a symptom of plague because they originate from blood with which is mixed yellow bile (*ṣafṛāʿ*) and pungent (*ḥādda*) wetness (*ruṭūba*). This man cupped his hands, his thighs and his feet on the side from which blood had come but the blood in his extremities remained thick and he had chronic fever (*zamīna*) so that he finally had no strength to move his hand or foot and he was worried by this.

This man was a farmer (*fallāḥ*) so he ordered that he should be carried to the temple to stay there until the Moon came to the sign of Cancer and the Sun to the sign of Gemini. The Moon was to appear after its occultation (*istitār*) in the sign of Cancer. The man fasted and starved himself (*tawīya*) and strived in praying to the Moon, using his Greatest Name: when he is invoked through this name, he concedes to all pleas. He also started to make many offerings to the idol of the Moon and to pray to it and implore it.

When he was asleep, he saw in a dream the idol of the Moon in the very form which he knew (*yaʿrifuhu bi-ʿaynihi*). He dreamt that the idol stopped by him and said: “Our god, the Moon, has accepted your offering and answered your prayer and your invocation of him through his (greatest) name. But you were audacious towards him by invoking and pleading to him using his greatest name. If you had only made offerings to him, he would have cured you instantly but since you were not completely reverent towards him but had the audacity to invoke him using his (greatest) name, he punishes you by setting the cure for your disease in something which you must do in your own profession. There will be a cure both to you and to others who suffer from a commotion of the blood (*yahtāju ʿalayhi damuhu*) such as you suffer from. If you had not done like you did, he would have set your cure in a medicine in (the preparation of) which you would not need to toil. But now he makes you toil for your cure, as a punishment (on the one hand) and (on the other) as an honour. He has answered you due to his mercy.”

Text 36 (NA, pp. 1237–1246)

Adam did not mention these two trees in his book but Māsā as-Sūrānī has related this on his authority. Māsā is a reliable source, yet this information has not come to us in the book of Adam. I

think it is because of the long gap between the time of Adam and us.

I have also heard about these two trees from one of our elders (*shuyūkhinā*), the owners of estates, although I do not know whether this elder had received the description of these two trees from the words of Māsā as-Sūrānī because I did not ask him when he described them: “From where did you get your knowledge concerning these two trees?”

What I think is that Māsā as-Sūrānī had seen Adam and lived in his time (*adrakahu*) although Adam, blessed be he, died when Māsā was only 20 years old or even younger than that. It may be that he had heard this orally (*lafzan*) from Adam and that Adam had narrated it as he used to narrate and describe these things. Māsā then memorized it and wrote it down in his own book on agriculture, whereas Adam neglected to mention it in his book and did not put it down for some reason which I do not know. Knowing his enormous share of intelligence and understanding, we cannot say that Adam neglected or forgot something, even though Anūḥā has told that Adam was both forgetful and neglectful.

Yet we are not in the same position as Anūḥā so that we could say as he did. Anūḥā could cite as evidence for Adam’s forgetfulness his words when he came to the clime of the Sun. Yet Anūḥā did not want to defame Adam, he merely wanted to challenge those who claimed for Adam what they claimed, saying that he knew the secrets (*al-ghuyūb*) and that the Moon took such good care of him that he even turned away from him mistakes, errors and inattentions.²³⁹ They even said that he did not err or make mistakes nor did he ever forget. (They also claimed) that the Moon revealed to him the knowledge of everything that had until then remained hidden (*ghāba*) from him and other human beings and thus he came to know the secrets (*ghuyūb*). Anūḥā, blessed be he, wanted to refute these claims and corrupt beliefs concerning Adam and, thus, said that Adam was the most forgetful of all men; Anūḥā wanted to exaggerate this idea. Thus, he did not just say that Adam was like other human beings and like his ancestors but he judged him to be the most forgetful of all people.

²³⁹ The discussion of the forgetfulness of Adam reminds one of the discussion concerning the concept of infallibility, *ʿiṣma*, in Islamic theology, see Madelung (1978) and Walker (2002).

Anūḥā spoke the truth in this and those who claimed for Adam what they claimed, lied. It would be utter ignorance to turn down the words of Anūḥā because he was a prophet from the progeny of Adam. How could we not accept his words while accepting the words of ignorant, lying people who do not belong to the children of Adam! Adam had many offspring and he was blessed. Kan‘ānites, Kasdānians, Ḥasdānians and Sūrānians, all belong to his progeny, but this does not deter those ignorant people from claiming for Adam things he would not have wanted when he was alive. Adam was too exalted to want impossible and lying things, nor did he want to be praised for such things. Yet they have been audacious enough to refute Anūḥā’s words, saying: “We are entitled to praise Adam for his excellence but Anūḥā refutes his excellence.”

It is not only that some people among them would be afflicted by this. Nay, other people are much afflicted by them and through them! They wanted to exalt Adam but they, in fact, disparaged him through the blindness of their hearts and their inability to comprehend. They made a human being superior to the mighty gods! You know that the Kasdānians agree that the gods do not completely (*‘alā l-iḥāṭa*) comprehend the works of each other. Now if gods do not know this—and this is the cause of what happens—and they do not know the secrets, how could it be permissible to say that a human being could know the secrets? This is an utter impossibility!²⁴⁰

A secret (*ghayb*) refers to things that will happen in future times. The knowing of secrets means knowing what will happen at particular times. Now, the occurrence of these things, one after another, is brought about (*yanba‘ith*) through the actions of an actor who is both discerning and potent. This Living, Potent Agent does these things according to causes he (alone) knows. We, human beings, do not know these causes which necessitate these actions. Thus, it is not permissible or possible that we would at all know what will happen, through any means or ways because we ignore those causes necessitating the actions. We also ignore the composition of things, such as bodies (*ajsām*), accidents or forms, nor do we know what accidental actions in their manifoldness cause things to happen. That will not be laid down for any intelligence nor will any understanding com-

²⁴⁰ The knowing of secrets and various opinions concerning soothsaying (*kihāna*) are discussed in al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj* §§1233–1249, esp. §1236.

prehend it because of their manifoldness. Thus, they remain unknown.

These two ways show that all human beings are ignorant of what will happen to composite bodies. These occurrences are named particulars. Now, as the judgement on universals is the same as on particulars in their compositeness and plurality, then it follows that we, human beings, may know neither the particulars nor the universals. As this is so, we do not know anything of what will happen and come to be in future times, neither from a particular nor from a universal viewpoint.

The followers of Seth claim for Adam these false claims and say that a soothsayer (*kāhin*) will tell us something that will happen and his words may prove to be true and that we may also see some human beings (i.e., astrologers) draw conclusions about things that I have called secrets from the locations and movements of the stars and their position in their circles (*dawāʿir*). They claim that what they say will happen and that if some people do not know the secrets, this, which we can see with our own eyes, could not happen.

We answer them by saying that the celestial bodies have given this (ability) to the soothsayer. When he comes to be (*mabdaʿ kawnihi*) under a certain constellation, their movements and locations will compose in his nature something like a nature implanted in him, which cannot be separated from him. Thus, he will speak due to a nature which came to be in him through (this) constellation.

Yet what the soothsayer says does not come true in a comprehensive and accurate way, from first to last. The soothsayer does not (actually) know the secrets, he merely tells some things that will happen, not all. Thus, we say that what he tells resembles the knowledge of the secrets, but sometimes, often in fact, that which he predicts will not come out in the way he predicted. Nay, the contrary will happen, or something (merely) similar happens. When something (merely) similar will happen, it will not be (exactly) so (as he predicted). And because it did not happen exactly so (as he had predicted), the soothsayer has not accurately predicted what happened. What happens may indeed be something else than what he had predicted. This case is even clearer than the previous one: he could not predict what would happen.

Thus, we cannot say that the soothsayer would know the secrets. Concerning those who draw conclusions from the movements of the stars (*al-kawākib*) or others, and tell the future from them, (it is like this:) The natural (*maṭbūʿ*) soothsayer who produces what is implanted

in his nature does not, as we have said, know the secrets but no-one doubts that the one who draws conclusions would not err more often than he hits the mark, or he errs and hits the mark equally, even if we did not want to say that he would err more. This is the state of the one who draws conclusions and what he tells should not be called knowledge of the secrets. Thus, no human being can find the way to the knowledge of the secrets, nor does anyone know them.

If they say that the Moon used to reveal to Adam, time and again, what would happen and that Adam was able to tell (the future) through the revelation which his god had taught him, not of his own accord, we will answer that we have already in the beginning of our discussion explained that it is not permissible for the Moon to know the secrets because he does not know the actions of the other celestial bodies (*al-kawākib*) and has no way of knowing them, nor has any other god any way of knowing them.

Thus, it is not possible that the Moon could have revealed to Adam the knowledge of what will happen, because the Moon himself does not know this. Everything that happens in this lower world of ours happens through the actions of the celestial bodies through their movements. They are in a continuous movement and one of them cannot know the manner (*kayfiyya*) of the movement of another, and actions emanate from this movement. Otherwise, if one of them knew the movements of the others, he would know what these movements bring about. The actions of the celestial bodies are superadded to previous actions, both their own and others which have preceded them. Thus, an action takes place and then another action takes place and what (really) happens (in the lower world) is a composite thing, composed of the action and what precedes it.²⁴¹ Thus, neither the celestial bodies nor human beings can know what will happen in this way. If the gods cannot know this, how could a human being know it or how could he learn it from them? This does not happen nor is it possible.

The discussion of knowing the secrets has grown lengthy and is taking us outside our main topic (*sunan kalāminā*) which is agriculture.

²⁴¹ I.e., the sum of these various influences causes the incidents on earth. Though this is not explicitly stated in the text, it would seem obvious that the author is thinking about this in terms of the spheres. The influence of the celestial body in the highest sphere, Saturn, emanates downwards and each celestial body until that of the lowest sphere, the Moon, adds its influence to that.

Otherwise, I would explain that it is not possible for a human being to attain perfection (*kamāl*) so that he would not make any mistakes nor be negligent or inattentive or forgetful. Such a claim is absurd (*muḥāl*), and we could find many clear arguments to prove this, self-evident through intuitive reason (*bi-badāʿih al-ʿuqūl*). It has become obvious that it would be absurd to describe human beings as such (i.e., as knowing the secrets) and we may say to them:²⁴² Even if the gods knew the secrets and what will happen in this world, would it be wise to equate their servants, human beings, with them so that one of them would be given as a revelation the same knowledge as they, I mean the gods, have? This would be foolish, not wise. But after all, what is this revelation that you are speaking of?

You know that the ancient Kasdānians and all Kanʿānites, both ancient and modern, agree that none of the gods may reveal something to any human being. This was the cause of the enmity between Ṭāmithrā and Anūḥā. Anūḥā used to say that the Moon revealed things to him in sleep and that he had revealed to him that there is only one god. The Moon confessed that this was his god²⁴³ and the god of everything. Ṭāmithrā disapproved of this and rejected it. How can you now deem it permissible to claim for Adam revelation! Even this is not enough for you, but you go even further claiming a continuous and abundant revelation for his son, Seth? This is utter absurdity, O god! It is another case if they say that the Moon set wisdom in the nature of Adam, and likewise with Seth, and augmented their reason, restraining in them things that are the opposites of reason, such as whims (*hawā*) and lusts (*shahwa*), from overflowing the reason, in which case they would have inclined towards lusts and followed their whims. Through this they were more excellent than any of their contemporaries. If you had said thus, we would not have disagreed with you.

Concerning your claim that the Moon revealed the books of Seth to Seth and that there is in them wisdom which proves this²⁴⁴ and that they are his clear miracle (*muʿjīza*) which proves that they come

²⁴² The end of the passage is somewhat ungrammatical, but the intention is clear. The following sentence is also confused and the emendations made in the translation seem necessary.

²⁴³ I.e., there is a supreme god above the celestial deities.

²⁴⁴ One may compare this with the Islamic concept of inimitability, *ʿijāz*, (see, e.g., Martin 2002 and Grunebaum 1971) which is used to prove the divine origin of the Qurʾān.

from a wise god, (I say that) there is nothing in them to prove that they have to be revealed because it is also possible that a human being may have wisdom which emanates from a sound and copious reason and that he may compose (*yaṣnaʿ*) books in which he places something of his exceeding wisdom and with this he may dazzle the reasons of (even) wise people.

I will also say something which is even more convincing than all that I have already said in refuting the claims of the followers of Seth. The books of Adam are at our disposal and we may read them, and in not one of them does he say: “The Moon has revealed to me something.” We can only hear from you about revelations to Adam. The same goes for Seth. If you refute this, show us in which place one of them has ever said: “The Moon has revealed this book to me.”²⁴⁵

Thus, it is clear that people are lying about Adam and Seth. You lie about this, trying to obtain leadership (*riʿāsa*) and fame and to procure benefits and to make valid your commands and prohibitions. Then, in your deficiency, you think that you can forge your lies and ignominy²⁴⁶ (as valid) in the eyes of intelligent people!

They may say: “You forbid us from saying something and because of this you disapprove of us, yet you yourselves profess something similar. You concede to Dawānāy, Ṣardāyā, Anūḥā and others that they received revelation in dreams while you disapprove of us concerning the revelation through confidential talk (*munājāt*) in a waking state to Adam and his son Seth. Yet the only difference between these two is the question of being awake or asleep, but when it comes to revelation, they are equal in the knowledge received through them, given by the god who reveals to his servant what he reveals.”²⁴⁷ If you concede and confess that the gods may reveal things in sleep to souls, you must also concede the revelation in a waking state through confidential talk. If a god may reveal something in some of the ways of revelation, he may also do so in all the remaining ways because it is necessary, seeing the wisdom of gods and their mercy towards their servants, that they reveal through confidential talk as they do through dream-visions.”

²⁴⁵ It should be noted that in the Qurʾān the theme of revelation is very common (using both the verbs *nazzala/anzala* and *awḥā*). If we wished to see the Sethians as a coded name for Muslims, this passage would be rather odd.

²⁴⁶ Reading *khizy*.

²⁴⁷ For the formulation, cf. Q 53: 10.

We answer them: We refute the revelation through confidential talk in a waking state yet concede it through dream-visions only because that is necessary. You know that the most ancient stories about any man among the Nabateans which people know are the stories about Dawānāy, who was the first man among us to (receive) wisdom (*hikma*). We have learned from his knowledge and he has opened for us the doors of wisdom (*maʿrifā*). The people of his age were unanimous that he was given revelation in sleep through dreams and that he was inspired in a waking state through notions which occurred to him (*khāṭīr*): what came through occurring notions they called inspiration (*ilhām*). It has not come down to us, nor to you, that anyone would have claimed that he received revelation through confidential talk in a waking state. This proves that the people of his age conceded to Dawānāy revelation through dream-vision and through inspiration in a waking state by notions which occurred to him in thoughts (*al-khawāṭīr al-fikriyya*). Yet they did not mention at all the claims you make for Adam and his son Seth and they did not know about them.

Another proof: You know that most of the Nabateans, from among the progeny of Adam and those not from among his progeny but from the progeny of others, agree that Dawānāy was the most excellent of all people and they have called him for this reason the Lord of Mankind, and we have not found anyone coming after him who has put a piece of wisdom into any book without attributing (*asnada*) (at least) some of it to Dawānāy and calling him the Lord of Mankind. Even Adam mentioned him in his book and called him the Lord of Mankind.

Now this man who, according to people, is the Lord of Mankind and the most excellent of people, did not receive revelation through confidential talk in a waking state, nor did he claim that for himself, nor did anyone else claim this on his behalf. Dawānāy refrained from such claims, as also did the people of his time, and this is a proof that they did not think it permissible for anyone to receive such revelation. The people at the time of Dawānāy were more intelligent than you, O followers of Seth, and they did not claim for Dawānāy something which they knew was not true and they did not raise Dawānāy above his station (*manzila*) because they knew that if they did so, they would actually debase him, not raise him, and that their praise would prove to be derision. They also took care to speak what is proper and true and they forbade the speaking of what is a lie and falsehood. But you are different.

Further, there is the fact that since Dawānāy, Kasdānians and Kanʿānites have for a long time agreed, saying that revelation through confidential talk in a waking state is false. Revelation comes from the gods to humankind either in sleep as a dream or in a waking state as inspiration. There is no third way. Therefore we claim the (concept of) revelation through confidential talk in a waking state to be false, following those sages whom we have mentioned. We are certain about it in our hearts, by this agreement and the proof which we have mentioned during the discussion in this chapter. We refrain from going into things that we do not know, being intent on saying only what is proper and true.

You have dared to claim for these two men something which we know that they would not have accepted it. You have claimed on their behalf that they did not forget anything nor did they make mistakes nor were they inattentive and that the Moon gave them revelations through confidential talk in a waking state, speaking to them with words they could hear and remember, knowing and understanding them. According to us, this is absurd just as it was to those Kasdānian and Kanʿānite sages that were before us. We follow the majority (*al-jumhūr*) and agree with them, whereas you are inventing something (*mubtadiʿūn*) and contradicting the common opinion (*al-ijmāʿ*).

Now Māsā as-Sūrānī is both our ancestor (*salaf*) and yours and one of the Kasdānian sages who lived at the time of (*adraka*) Adam, saw him and learned (*tafaqqaha*) from his words. When mentioning Adam and the miracles (*muʿjizāt*) which he showed, especially in the *Book of Measures* (*Kitāb al-Maqādir*) and in other books in general, he said that attaining wisdom does not befall any man's soul through his own natural disposition²⁴⁸ nor on his own initiative, but through excessive (labour) and long exhaustion. It (i.e., the wisdom) is almost non-existent, so distant it is and so difficult to find.

Many sages have opined that the only way of reaching it for one's benefit is by apprehension (*tawqīf*) or by receiving²⁴⁹ it through (either of) the two ways of revelation that are agreed upon. When someone starts to receive (some knowledge) and acquires it, then wisdom will come continuously upon him and he will increase (in wisdom)

²⁴⁸ Reading with the variant: *al-khilqa*.

²⁴⁹ Reading *min akhdhihā*.

and rise from one state to another until the veils (*al-astār*) will be opened for him which had been veiling (the wisdom from him) and had been intervening between him and this wisdom which later came upon him. Consider what is the meaning of the words of Māsā “the two ways of revelation that are agreed upon” and you will find it to be as we have said.

It was known to all ancients that the revelation comes from gods to human beings only in the two ways which we have mentioned, namely dream visions or inspiration by notions which occur (*khawāṭir*) in a waking state. Then a prophet may tell what he has received and tell with certainty what has occurred to him in sleep and what occurring notion has come to him in a waking state. Māsā and some other Kasdānian sages have held that these two ways, or one of them, are open only to those whose nature has been appropriately prepared, making them receptive to revelation and that those who receive revelation through these two ways are to be called prophets, while the station (*manzila*) of soothsayers is below this station even though they do share with the prophets the foretelling of what will be and the foretellings of both of them may come true under the conditions which we have discussed and in this way.

They also held that the prophets have sound intelligence and discernment, they are good in instruction (*siyāsa*) and they know the benefits and the harms (of each thing) in a perceptive way, whereas soothsayers are mostly stupid, of little discipline (*riyāḍa*) and have only some knowledge (*maʿrifa*) and they use and follow to a great extent their (own) sense perceptions (or feelings: *hiss*). They often live in seclusion (*khalkwa*) and continuous, harmful hunger and adhere to poverty and solitude for long periods of times and many days. They may receive some true and right imaginings (*khayālāt*) and their predictions on this basis may turn out to be true (in reality), just like those of the prophets who predict on the basis of revelation, and it turns out to be really true, just as they predicted.

The prophet and the soothsayer are equal in this but they differ from the viewpoint of the origin of that which they have received. The way of the prophet is truer and more correct than that of the soothsayer. Both of these men, I mean the prophet and the soothsayer, must be of a sound constitution, close to equilibrium in both their nature and their body. Yet there cannot be any doubt concerning the fact that they differ when it comes to their soul and its accidents because they must by necessity always have souls that differ

in their accidents. The prophet must always be of a good character (*khulq*) whereas the soothsayer always has a bad character. They do not differ merely in their character but also in many other accidents of the soul, yet they both must be of a sound constitution, safe from the dominance (*ihdiyāj*) of one humour (*akhlāt*) (over the others), whether it be one of the two biles or phlegm or blood. The dominance of these or some of them or one of them or their corruption will cause fantasies all of which are bad and untrue. When the soothsayer predicts something which does not happen, it is because of fantasies caused by the humours. This may well happen often but not continuously. This is because the occurring notions of the prophet and his confidential talks are the traces of his wisdom and the fantasies are the traces of the wisdom of the soothsayer.

The revelation as a confidential talk in a waking state, which they claim, does not belong to anyone, it is not possible and no human being has been given it: we have not found it true in anyone's case. You merely wanted to add to the praise of those whom you wanted to praise and to raise them to a higher position (*martaba*). You described (*ṣifa*) them in a way which is absurd and untrue, but a prophet does not want to be praised for something he does not possess. You, the followers of Seth, attribute to Seth and his father things they did not possess and you are (actually) their enemies, not their true followers, know that.

Know also that there is yet a third group of people who may be described as neither prophets (nor soothsayers). They are the sages, trained in wisdom and knowledge and skilled in the fields of intricate sciences. They are called philosophers (*falāsifa*). The philosophers attain wisdom and knowledge on their own accord and by training, not through revelation or soothsaying. Some people think that they are the noblest of these three classes. Others say that they are equal to prophets, others set them below the prophets. If the discussion of this were not extremely long, overstepping our limits and becoming excessive, I would narrate the opinions which some people hold about the philosophers, the people of training, and their excellence over the prophets, as well as the opinions of those who make them equals and the opinions of those who set them below the prophets.

Abū Bakr ibn Waḥshiyya says: I have composed a large book on this where I have narrated the opinions of those who set philosophy and philosophers above prophecy and of those who set prophecy above philosophy and those who see them as equal, as well as those who see soothsayers and prophets as equal and those who set prophets

above soothsayers and those who make them equal. (In that book I also discuss) the definitions of prophecy, philosophy and soothsaying so that it would be easy for an examiner (*nāẓir*) to differentiate between them and it would become clear which of them deserve to be called sages and which must be called wise men (*‘ālim*).

In that book I followed the way of the ancient Nabateans in accordance with what has reached me from them and what they have said in the books which I have found. I used to have meetings with groups from among the Sufis (*bi-jamā‘a min ṭawā’if as-Sūfiyya*), theologians, and the ‘*ulamā*’. I told them some of the opinions of the Nabateans and they discussed these, and the notions occurring to them produced at times excellent results, at others not so excellent. Among other things I told them the differences between these various groups which I have just mentioned and how they are to be defined and divided into groups and subgroups (*fuṣūl*). Most of those whom I conferred with on this were amazed and their reason was baffled.²⁵⁰ To some, there occurred (*yakhtur*) some excellent idea about them. Most, if not all, of them told me that this question (*ma‘nā*) had not been intensively discussed (*mā khāḍa fīhi*) by any of the Muslim theologians and that it is a wonderful and curious thing.

[The copyist of this manuscript has here left away a long passage (*faṣl*) of Ibn Waḥshiyya’s discussion, saying that ash-Shīshī had said to him: “Do not copy it for me because there is nothing about agriculture in it.” Thus he claimed, saying that he left it away because of what ash-Shīshī had said. This passage discusses the Nabateans and others but there is no mention of agriculture in it. If my lord wants, I can copy it. It is about ten double-pages of this size.]²⁵¹

Text 37 (NA, pp. 1248–1250)

The chapter on the rūkhūshā tree

This tree grows by itself on the steppe and in the countryside (*buldān*). Ṣardāyā has mentioned it and praised it, saying that it is called “the ancient.” Abraham the Kan‘ānite mentioned it and praised it even more than Ṣardāyā, calling it the tree of the leaders (*shajarat al-a‘imma*). This was because Abraham was of Kan‘ānite origin, though

²⁵⁰ Reading *yandhahilu*.

²⁵¹ This addition is by the copyist.

he was born in Kūthā-Rabbā. The Kan‘ānites came to rule the clime of Bābil, after there had been many wars between them and the Kasdānians which they (finally) won and, thus, they rule us even today as kings, may God help them with his victory. Namrūd ibn Kan‘ān brought the leaders (*a’imma*) of the Kan‘ānites and settled them in this clime. The ancestors of Abraham were from among those who were brought from the land of Kan‘ān.

Abraham said that the leaders sought blessing from this tree. He said that the origin of its (i.e., the tree’s) coming (to our clime) was this: One Kasdānian king in the ancient times became angry towards one of the leaders and he gave an order to burn him because of a sin he had committed. When he had been burned, the king ordered that the ashes of his body were not to be collected but were to be left where they were. No-one dared to approach (the remains of) him.

The skull of this man had not burned with his body but had remained intact. When it rained over the skull and the ashes, the water carried them to a lowland where they became covered with soil. From this there grew this tree. When the people of Bābil saw a strange tree they did not know, they wanted to learn from whence it came. They inspected the situation and found out that it grew from the middle of this skull which had been flooded with soil and water. People said that this was a blessed tree because it had grown from the head of this burned leader. Thus, the Kan‘ānite leaders seek blessing from it because the one who had been burned had been a Kasdānian²⁵² while the Kasdānians find it ill-omened because these (the Kan‘ānites) seek blessing from it.

The strong enmity between these two tribes (*batn*) is most curious because they are from the progeny of brothers from among the children of Adam. They had the same mother who was one of the wives and women of Adam. As those who know genealogy tell, Adam had 64 children, 22 female and 42 male. 14 of the male children had progeny whilst the rest did not have any progeny that would have lived until today. The calamity of envy and its evil is seen in this, namely that when a man is close to another he will envy him more strongly and intensively.

²⁵² Thus in the text. Perhaps we should read here “Kan‘ānite”: the leaders about whom the text was earlier speaking were Kan‘ānites and though the nationality of this particular *imām* is not clearly indicated, one gets the impression that he would have been one of these leaders.

The Kanʿānites have an argument in their enmity towards the Kasdānians. They say: “You banished us from the clime of our father to the edges of Syria.” With this (i.e., the clime of our father) they refer to the clime of Bābil. The Kasdānians answer them: “You had boasted a lot and had been arrogant. By this you had wronged us, and God helped us against you and we drove you away. You had wronged us because you were envious of us.” Though I am a Kasdānian, I do not want to slander the Kanʿānites nor do I want to force them into an argument. Now that they have come to rule over us they have behaved themselves well after all that had been between us.

Abraham said that their (i.e., the Kanʿānites’) leaders seek blessing from this tree. I have seen one such tree which still remains and if one wants, one may see it in the village which lies between the cities of Bābil and Sūrā, called Sūlqāy. Afterwards people have taken branches from it and planted them so that this tree has become common in the clime of Bābil, but this has been done by the Kanʿānites after they have come to rule this clime. We (i.e., the Kasdānians) have taken none of it (i.e., the specific tree growing in Sūlqāy), not to speak of other (specimens of this tree) because it does not bear fruit which one could use and its wood is not hard but soft and of little durability. When it becomes old it becomes much worm-eaten. Its leaves resemble the leaves of the watermelon quite closely except that they are much more delicate. Its odour, when rubbed, has some pungency.²⁵³ It also has a resin which flows from it until it coagulates. It is dust-grey and its smell is slightly offensive. Abraham praised and exalted this tree much, saying that its leaves may be used instead of the leaves of the Bābilian spikenard (*sādhaj*) in medicaments. We do not know this nor have we seen it but Abraham must be trusted in what he says. But I do know that if the Kasdānian kingship returned, not a single specimen of this tree would remain.

Text 38 (NA, pp. 1288–1289)

If you want to graft a tree on another so that the grafted one would receive something which we have mentioned (above), you must take

²⁵³ Reading *dhufūra*.

a branch from one tree and graft it onto the body of another. In this action there is a subtle special property which belongs to the art (*ʿmāl*) of the people of talismans.

They say that if one wants to do this, he should take a beautiful (servant) girl (*jāriya*) who must be of outstanding beauty. He takes her by the hand and lets her stand at the root of the tree where he wants to graft the branch. Then he prepares the branch like people do when they want to graft it and then he comes to the tree onto which he wants to graft it. The girl stands under the tree. He cuts a hole in the tree for the branch and takes off the girl's clothes and his own clothes. Then he puts the branch in its place while having intercourse with the girl, in a standing position. While having intercourse he grafts the branch to the tree, trying to do it so that he ejaculates at the same time as he grafts the branch. He should avoid the girl after having grafted the branch. If she becomes pregnant, that branch will possess all the tree's odour and taste. If she does not become pregnant, the branch will possess only some features of the tree.

An example of this is that when someone wants to graft a branch of a pear tree (*kummathrā*) on a lemon (*utrujī*) tree so that the pears would receive the colour and odour of the lemon, he should act as we have explained. The girl must not be forced against her will, but she must act according to her own will, without compulsion. The farmer may do this with his wife whom he has married in that particular year,²⁵⁴ not otherwise. They must have intercourse as usual without differing in anything.²⁵⁵

This procedure is for attaining some odour or colour. The same is done when wishing to attain some taste, in addition to the odour, or only the taste, but there are minor differences in the procedures which cause subtle (*ẓarīfa*) special properties. For example, if one wants to graft a branch of an apple tree onto a sweet pomegranate, so that the apples would be as sweet as the pomegranates, he must bring a girl to the tree where he wants to graft it and he must speak pleasantries with her until she laughs, he shall kiss her and pinch her and give her the branch so that she will graft it by her own hand. When she puts the branch in its place, he must remove

²⁵⁴ Or "according to the custom" if we read: *ʿalā s-sunna al-maʿhūda*.

²⁵⁵ This seems to refer to the way described above.

her clothes from behind, while she is facing the tree and grafting the branch. He must have intercourse with her from behind and he must order her to take her time in completing the grafting—which means the planting of the branch—until he ejaculates. He should try to take care that the ejaculation and the completion of the grafting should coincide. Then he must leave the tree so that no one comes near it for a time. It will bear sweet and juicy apples. If the girl becomes pregnant, it is as we have said above.

Text 39 (NA, pp. 1297–1299)

Olive oil can be used, according to some people, in the same way as the fat and milk of animals. These people whom we are referring to, are the talisman-makers and the magicians and they perform various actions with it. They say that olive oil and liquid grease which is got from animal fat when clarified by fire, as well as the milk got by milking, are very receptive to the special properties of words cast on them.

The explanation of this is that when a charm-speller spells an effective charm on grease, milk or oil of various things, these receive it quickly and the special properties of the words penetrate into them. They say that the most receptive to these charms is the milk which is got by milking animals and that it is possible to enchant the drinker of the milk by casting a spell on the milk. Thus, he can be made sick or his body or his heart changed (in some direction). Between us, the Kasdānians, and the Kanʿānites there is a dispute about this because they claim that they were the first to invent this and to practise it, while we say that it was we who invented it and contrived it and that they learned it from us.

In his letter to Anūhā al-Ḥithyānī which he wrote to censure him for claiming to receive revelation, Ṭāmithrā the Kanʿānite and Ḥabqūshian (*al-Ḥabqūshī*) has mentioned many arguments against him when he claimed that what he did was by revelation. Ṭāmithrā wrote to him:

We have invented through our own reason things that are greater and more wonderful than what you have done, you who claim that you have learned them through revelation and the success granted by Mercury. We do not accept your claim for revelation. Nay, we derive (your deeds) from your own invention and contrivance; you

have merely wished to raise yourself by your claim into a position you do not have. What we have invented by our reason is the charm which we can cast by our spirits through our mouth on milk, making its drinker or eater fall ill. You, too, have been able to charm (*ijtahabta*) the grapes of vines growing in your country through some spell that you have cast, having invented it through your reason so that you have become able to charm the grapes of the vine, while you sit or stand up. By my life, you have made a great invention and contrived a thing with which you reach a high position and your reason has set you in a noble place but you did not content yourself with the position of inventors and contrivers but wanted to exceed your boundaries.

Qūthāmā has said: These were the words of Ṭāmīthrā the Kanʿānite, who said that the Kanʿānites invented the magic with milk and other oils, fats and greases. But we do not accept the claims of Ṭāmīthrā and his boasts against all other Nabateans, claims that his people and their close relatives were the inventors of this. Nay, we say that these charms which people cast on milk and grease and oil have been invented by the Kasdānians and the first one to contrive them was Māsā as-Sūrānī and he did this eighty years after the death of Adam.

Māsā was the first who realized this and used it. He found this out through the invention of his reason and through analogy, which he realized by his natural disposition (*qarīḥa*) and sharp wit. This is because he was descended from Adam and he had seen his great-grandfather Adam and witnessed his actions and he lived for 108 years after him. He invented the magic which uses milk and grease and oil and then he wrote a well-known book on this, which people possess even in our own time and it classifies the oils and milks in a certain way. He taught what one should do with an animal from which the milk to be charmed would be milked, how the animal should be fed and how it should be handled, as he also did concerning the animal from which the fat was to be taken, as well as the trees from the fruits of which the oil was to be taken, namely how it should be watered and handled, and when the fruits to be pressed for oil should be picked so that the oil would be receptive to what would be cast on it.

He also showed us how he came to understand the receptivity (of milk, etc.) to these charms and how he came to invent them, how he experimented with them so that he became sure of their validity. This book of his is still extant, so look in it to learn that it was he

who invented them and that no-one preceded him to this argument which is found in his book, if not, by god, Ṭāmīthrā would claim that it was their ancestor at the time of Māsā who invented and contrived this and that Māsā merely claimed the invention for himself.

If some Kanʿānites in our time might claim (the invention of this), I would have many arguments in addition to those which I have already mentioned and with which I could prove that both this and many other things are to be attributed to the Kasdānians, not the Kanʿānites. By the Sun (*wa-ḥaqqi sh-Shams*), I am not saying this to calumniate Ṭāmīthrā nor to call the Kanʿānites liars nor am I envious of them. Nay, they are of noble avuncular lineage (*banū l-ʿumū-mati l-kirām*) and our relatives, our flesh and blood. I merely reprimand Ṭāmīthrā in this even though I myself count him as one of the ancestors and (I admit that) we have benefited greatly from his sciences. I would say to him:

Ṭāmīthrā, we, the Kasdānians, do not envy you for your sagacity in preserving corpses so that you can preserve them for a long time after life has expired, without them decaying or becoming destroyed or changed in their state. This we admit and we do not claim it for ourselves. We also admit your sagacity in bringing forth the names of the gods: when they are invoked through them they will answer and the need of the invocator will be fulfilled, whatever that would be.

By my life, through this you have an excellence above all other nations from among the children of Adam and from among others. Neither do we envy you for the invention of anything else which you have been given, nor do we claim those things for ourselves. But you have envied us on account of the magic through spells cast on milk and grease, even though you have done more noble and numerous (deeds). Ṭāmīthrā, you have not been just with us, but nevertheless we praise you on account of the excellence of your knowledge and your self and your reason and your perfection. After all, the excellence you have belongs also to us and what we have, belongs also to you because there is no difference between us. I send good wishes from us to you as you should do to us! Peace!

If this book were a book on talismans and magic, I would discuss this in depth, but that would take us away from agriculture. But I have written a book specially on magic in which I discuss this theme and others more profoundly. If someone wants to know this, let him read my book on it. Now we shall return to agriculture.

Text 40 (NA, pp. 1311–1312)

Qūthāmā has said: If this were the proper place for it, I would explain what Barīshā²⁵⁶ taught me because he was a wise farmer and a magician who knew magic well; I did not see at his time anyone more knowledgeable about magic and magical stratagems (*nawāmūs*)²⁵⁷ than he. But I have explained in the *Book of the Stratagems and Art*²⁵⁸ the operation with these crows left to age in jars.²⁵⁹ If one wants to learn this or other things, let him turn to that book. Each time when seven years have passed, these crows have become good for something until they have reached the age of ten times seven years, i.e., seventy years, and then their action is not for trees²⁶⁰ and plants but they (are to be used) for things that are much greater than that. When they have reached more than forty years of age they are no longer appropriate for plants and trees but they enter the realm of talismans and wondermaking (*ʿamal al-ʿajāʿib*) until they become seventy years old. After that they attain to something which is much greater²⁶¹ than that.

Were it not that this book would become too long, I would mention here some talismans which are beneficial for each plant, species by species, but I do not want to lengthen the discussion since I would have to provide many explanations because if I did not explain what we would be mentioning, there would be no benefit for anyone. This is why I have in this book avoided mentioning talismans and cures by them, so that the book would not become a book of talismans.

I have only mentioned that which benefits plants, nothing else, or what is related to the cultivation of plants. Šabyāthā and before him ʿAnkabūthā, the two magicians, have written their two books where

²⁵⁶ For this person, see NA, p. 1310, quoted in 3.2.

²⁵⁷ For the word *nāmūs*, see Kraus (1942–1943) II: 104–105, as well as the long article in Dozy, s.v. The other meaning of the word *nāmūs*, “law,” is also attested in the *Nabatean Agriculture*.

²⁵⁸ One might expect the title to end in *al-ḥiyāl*, not *al-ḥīla*.

²⁵⁹ Live crows or other birds are put into a jar and left to decay under certain astrological conditions (NA, pp. 1309–1310). The resulting paste is burned and the ashes used for magical operations.

²⁶⁰ The text reads here *as-sīḥr* but the emendation to *ash-shajar* is rather obvious, especially in the light of what comes in the next line, where we have *al-manābīt waʾsh-shajar*.

²⁶¹ I read *akbar wa-aʿzam* instead of *akthar wa-aʿzam*. The end of the passage may suffer from dittography.

there are many talismans related to the cultivation of plants. I have not copied into this book anything from these two books because they are famous among people. If I had copied from them, I could not have been blamed, though. Yet I did not do that, nor did I mention in this book anything except some curiosa of the talismans which are beneficial to plants and which work and most of which we have tried and found out to be as they claimed. This is a vast and wide topic (*bāb*) with many subthemes (*funūn*). We have mentioned in many places of this book things which are the principles and upon which one can make analogies and they allude (*ishārāt*) to things behind them which can be derived from them. (This we have done) because we cannot explain everything.²⁶²

Text 41 (NA, pp. 1312–1314)²⁶³

A Chapter which we designate the Chapter of a Great Benefit

It was necessary for us to investigate the cause and reason for plants to grow by themselves on the steppes and elsewhere. When our investigation led us here, we studied the manner (*kayfiyya*) (in which this occurs) and when we came by it, we explained it.

Now there emerges from this a great and most useful benefit because it leads the one who knows it to the operation of generating fruit-bearing trees, the fruits of which are numerous, and to generating (*tawlīdāt*) potherbs and fragrant herbs (*rayāḥīn*) and useful drugs (*ʿaḳāqīr*) as well as harmful and poisonous drugs. This chapter is more noble and useful than (the chapter on) the grafting (*tarākīb*) of some trees on others from which there come various fruits strange and novel in their taste, colour or odour. This is because when one really understands (*ʿarafa . . . maʿrifā ḥaḳqīyya*) the manner of the growth of what grows by itself after rainfall or close to, or in, stagnant water, be they trees or others, he will understand through that how things are, and if he wants to generate some tree or other plant, (he will be able to do so).

If one lacks some common (*maʿlūf*) fruit-bearing tree, something similar may be produced through certain actions and one's ratiocination

²⁶² **Text 41** is the direct continuation of this text.

²⁶³ This is the direct continuation of **Text 40**.

may lead one to know its origin so that one can (even) generate things that are neither common nor known. This is possible for people to do, not impossible, if they come to know that origin, because generation resembles the growth of things by themselves without anyone sowing or cultivating them.

I will explain this. Rains and torrents may, and this happens often, carry with them seeds of plants or their roots or other parts to places, where they remain, while the rain or the torrent feeds them, and there will grow from them trees and other plants, growing by themselves. This is one of the two ways of growing by oneself. There is also another way, namely that plants grow out of nothing which the torrent would have carried with itself. This is the origin also for the first way of plants growing from some part (of the plant) which the torrent has carried with itself because one might say: If a plant grows from a part of an earlier plant, and that plant comes from yet an earlier one, and this goes on infinitely, it will be absurd and repulsive and repugnant. Thus, you must then by necessity say that the first of all will, when the succession ends, be an origin which grew by itself without anything at all preceding it.

I will answer: This is correct because (all) existent things which come from like ones, growing from seeds preceding them, must end in an origin which came to be by itself, without any seed. Such a thing is something which Nature has done—"Nature" being the attractive (*jādhība*) faculty—through mixing the four primary qualities with a substance or a body, which both mean the same. Here there is a point of disagreement—I mean what to call that process. The primary qualities join with a substance which has no dimensions.²⁶⁴

That power which we call "the nature of Nature" (*ṭabīʿat aṭ-ṭabīʿa*) is the effective cause (*fāʿila*) which causes spontaneous (*li-naḥsihi*) growth without an origin (*aṣl*). It is what we have taken on ourselves to study and to explain its manner (*kayfiyya*) so that whosoever wishes to generate (*takwīn*) a non-existent thing may act upon it by following the traces of Nature in its action.

It is within our abilities (*quwā*) to emulate (*natashabbah*) some of the actions of Nature, not all of them, because the gods (*al-āliha*) have given this ability to human beings but not in excess, as this would lead them to be able to emulate Nature in all of its actions,

²⁶⁴ Literally: without being long, broad or deep.

and they would cause things to grow like it does. Nay, they may (only) emulate some of its actions according to their abilities and understanding.

We have been led by our study to the conclusion that there must be an origin which grows by itself, without any origin or seed at all that would precede it. We say that that plant growing by itself, from out of nothing (*lā min shay'*) is the origin of all plants and the first plant. Its growing must by necessity be by one of two ways. Either its coming into being must be accidental through the action of Nature because everything acted upon must have something to act upon it (*lā budda min fā'il li-kulli munfa'il*). Thus, building necessitates (*yaqtadī*) a builder and the object of action necessitates an actor. Or it may come to be through the creation (*ikhtirā'*) of an eternal (*qadīm*) and potent creator and this Creator would then be the origin of that genus or species which then may generate the likes of itself forever without a(nother) similar creation which made (the first one) appear and come into existence. This eternal Creator has made it possible and permissible for some people to emulate his actions in theirs, and they have become potent to do what he has made possible and permissible for them.

Through their arts (*hiyal*) and sagacity (*fiṭna*) and by following the traces of Nature they may, thus, be able to generate (*takwīn wa-tawlid*) things similar to all plants, be they big or small. When we want to generate something similar, we must know the reason for it (the original generation) and aim at the same (as Nature).

We say that rain or water running on the earth moistens it—the rain water, though, is more subtle than the water coming from springs which gush forth from stone or something else. The rain water becomes subtle through the heat (*sukhūna*) which has touched it so that the vapours have risen upwards until they have coagulated (*in'aqada*) into clouds from which the rain falls. That water which has become subtle through heating is more receptive to heat.

Thus, also when stagnant water has remained (undisturbed) for a long time, it will moisten the earth around it. When the earth becomes wet, it will conceal the wetness in its womb and this (wetness) will water its soil. When this is affected by a mildly hot and wet air and the Sun heats it even more than the air, this causes putrefaction in the earth. When it putrifies, it will change (*taghayyarat*), and when it changes, it will change into something else (*inqalabat*). This change into something else is the same as transformation (*istihāla*). When it

is transformed through putrefaction, Nature, which is the generating faculty, will generate from the four primary qualities which are in the soil (*al-arḍ*) with the help of the two hot elements, air and the (heat of the) Sun, on the two cold ones, water and earth, something like seeds, coagulated from putridity through the transformation of the earthy particles, mixed with what we have just said, just like mushrooms become coagulated in the belly of the earth through the putrefaction of the moisture of rains and like polypodies (*basfāyqj*)²⁶⁵ coagulate and come to be and like similar things coagulate through transformation. There are many such cases but it would take a long time to enumerate them all.

Text 42 (NA, pp. 1317–1319)²⁶⁶

When people understood the manner of how Nature works, they were able to follow its traces and do the same in the measure that is possible for them and that is theirs to do. Thus, they generated many plants and called this action *tawlīdāt*—others call this putrefaction (*taʿfīnāt*), whilst yet others call it generation (*takwīnāt*). Each of the three, or some other designation of the same meaning, is permissible.

They generated many kinds of plants, as we have already mentioned, and they also generated many kinds of animals in the same way as plants because the process of generation was the same and the two kinds of *tawlīd* (i.e., of plants and animals) resemble each other. Yet they did not claim that the plants and animals which they had generated were returned.²⁶⁷ If one of the ancients has claimed this we would dispute his claim and deny it.

It is not within human power (*qudrat basharī*) to create (*ikhtirāʿ*) something (out of nothing) or to bring something out of non-existence into existence (*ijād . . . min al-ʿadam ilā l-wujūd*). Nay, these *takwīns* and *tawlīds* are cases where we add something to something

²⁶⁵ Cf. Dozy, s.v. The word comes from Persian *bas-pāyag*, for which, see Steingass, s.v. See also Ibn al-Bayṭār, *Jāmiʿ*, s.v.

²⁶⁶ This text has been discussed in section 5.

²⁶⁷ *Mā ddaʿaw rujūʿa mā kawwanūhu min al-manābiti waʿl-ḥayawānāt*. This would seem to mean that the generated plants and animals were not the same individuals merely returned to life. Still, it seems probable that we should, in fact, read, with reference to *creatio ex nihilo*, *ikhtirāʿ*, instead of *rujūʿ*, cf. below; the facsimile (VII: 12), though, also reads *rujūʿ*. The term *rujūʿ*, revivification, is used in Shiite terminology.

else and put them together and let Nature take care of the rest (*nukhallihā ma'a t-tabī'a*) until it has had its effect on them (the ingredients) and by this the generation (*kawn*) becomes complete. The real act (*'amal*) in this is through the nature of the thing (to be generated); our part in this is (merely) joining similars or dissimilars together and setting it in the same way as the act of Nature sets it. We are not able and potent enough to do more than that.

They (i.e., the ancients) generated animals in the same way as plants. The magician (*as-sāhir*) 'Ankabūthā²⁶⁸ even generated (*kawwana*) a man (*insān*) and he described in his book on generation (*tawlid*) how he generated him and what he did so that he could complete the being (*kawn*) of that man. He did admit, though, that what he generated was not a complete example of the species of man (*insān tamm an-naw'*) and that it did not speak nor understand.²⁶⁹ It had a complete outer form (*mustawī ṣ-ṣūra tammahā*) in all its limbs, yet it was like a perplexed and dazed (man) (*ka'l-hā'ir ad-dahish*) who neither spoke nor understood.

This is because the generation (*takwīn*) of animals and especially human beings from among animals is much more difficult than the generation of plants, because the one who generates them (i.e., animals or men) must exert himself in an action which we only partially grasp and the major part of which we do not understand. This is why we (usually) are not able to generate animals and especially human beings and we are not able to do with them what we can do with plants.

'Ankabūthā acquired the (recipe for) generating a man from the book of the *Secrets of the Sun* (*Asrār ash-Shams*)²⁷⁰ in which Asqūlūbiyā,

²⁶⁸ Like all names in the book, this, too, seems obscure. The name is probably connected with the word 'spider.' 'Ankabūthā is mentioned half a dozen times in the *Nabatean Agriculture* (pp. 1312, 1318, 1394, 1418, 1447, 1465–1466) as an ancient magician who wrote a book on agriculture from the viewpoint of magicians (*'alā ra'y as-sahāra*, p. 1394) and was interested in astral magic (pp. 1418, 1465).

²⁶⁹ This is also a very central theme in most Jewish stories concerning the creation of an artificial being, see, e.g., Scholem (1973): 246–247. We do, however, find occasional references to speaking Golems, see, e.g., Scholem (1973): 233, and Idel (1990): 64, 67. The inability to speak is connected with a lack of higher mental faculties (*neshamah, ruah*) in contrast to simple vitality (*hiyyuth*), see Scholem (1973): 246–249.

²⁷⁰ In NA, pp. 187 and 191, the book *Asrār ash-Shams* is described as containing *al-hiyāl an-nāmūsiyya*, i.e., ways of making use of the hidden special properties of things. Among these recipes (*hiyāl*) Qūthāmā quotes one which is of particular interest in the present context, namely the generation (NA, p. 190) of an animal in the form of a fish but with two wings such as those of a bat (*khuffāsh*), the eyes of a crayfish (*saratān*) and two hands, each with five fingers.

the messenger of the Sun, had mentioned how the Sun had generated the Generated Man (*al-insān al-kawnī*) who was not born (*mawlūd*) according to the normal pattern (*‘alā l-‘āda al-jāriyya*).²⁷¹

We have read this book and have found that passage in it but we have been unable to do the same. However, ‘Ankabūthā was able to do that because of his excessive dexterity in talismanic and magical operations (*al-a‘māl aṭ-ṭilasmīyya wa’s-sihriyya*) because the way (*ṭarīq*) of generating is quite similar to the way of producing talismans and magical (objects). Whosoever is able to make talismans may easily perform all kinds of *tawlīds* and *takwīns*.

‘Ankabūthā was able to generate a man, as we have already described, that is to say that it was not able to understand, or speak, or eat, but it is said that he managed to keep it (alive) (*baqāʾ*) for one year. He attached (*awṣala*)²⁷² to its body (something) that made it survive for one year, which it did.

This, too, is something we are not able to perform, even though ‘Ankabūthā managed to do it because of his superb wisdom and his potency to perform what we cannot do. The point is in the art of making this generated man survive for a year.

Yet, through this man he taught us wonderful special properties, which he did or which were generated from the man and which the

The recipe contains several plant ingredients in a certain ratio, which are put together in a pure (*muṭahhara*) earthenware pot made of the black soil of Bābil. Over this, one pours four *arṭāl* of cow’s buttermilk (*makhīd muḥammad*) together with some drops of pitch (*qaṭrān*). The pot is then buried and the soil above it is soaked with camel’s urine. The pot is left underground for 49 days, after which the creature is found alive in the pot. This creature is, though, left to die and its body is used for further magical preparations. Obviously, the recipe for the generation of the artificial man would have been similar in structure to this recipe.

²⁷¹ This, of course, would seem to mirror also the Jewish/Christian story of the Creation. In a Mediaeval Jewish text, quoted and translated by Idel (1990): 32, Enosh likewise creates a Golem, following God’s procedures in creating Adam.

²⁷² Either ‘Ankabūthā attached something to the body of the artificial man or the verb might also refer to some kind of nourishment. This is reminiscent of the highest name of God which, written on parchment, was inserted into the mouth of the Golem (see Scholem 1973: 236–237), or, in some versions, the word *emeth* was inscribed on the forehead of the Golem; the latter has been made famous by popular stories of Golem in the 20th century. Also the period of one year reminds one of the similar periodicity of the Golem; the famous Prague Golem was made lifeless each Sabbath. Golems of “a rather lasting existence” are rare but possibly not quite non-existent in Jewish literature, see Idel (1990): 59–60. For a time-limit of 40 days, see Scholem (1973): 256–257 (a text dating from 1682).

The talismans mentioned in various parts of the *Nabatean Agriculture* are not described as containing God’s name. Thus, the reference to them does not parallel the Jewish practice.

messenger of the Sun had not mentioned (separately) in the *Book of the Secrets of the Sun*, like also other wonderful curiosities, although this is not the right place to mention them.

He also mentioned that he generated a sheep (*shātan min al-mi'zā*) which came out all white. Its state was the same as that of the (artificial) man in that it did not make any sounds or cry and it neither ate nor drank but you could see it opening its eyes at times and closing them at others. He also mentioned the same about the man in the chapter on the closing and opening of the eyes.

After him Ṣabyāthā desired to generate a man so that he could make use of the special property in him but the king of his time prevented him from doing that and said: "People benefit more from you making them talismans²⁷³ than from you wasting your time in something from which they do not get such benefit." Thus, Ṣabyāthā stopped (working on the artificial generation of a man) and busied himself with what the king had ordered. But I think that the king prevented him from doing this only as a matter of governing (*siyāsa*) people because this artificial man and other artificial animals had been used for deeds that had baffled and confused people. Perhaps that had even caused disturbances (*fitna*) among them. This was why the king contrived to prevent Ṣabyāthā from doing this.

Now we shall return to the generation of plants which have wonderful actions, similar to those of the generated animals except that they are not quite like them. They are not merely a little below them but much below them. The generation of all species of plants happens through burying in earth things from which plants will grow. Yanbūshād turned his attention towards this and he has helped us by teaching us many things about it, more than what Adam had mentioned in the *Book of the Secrets of the Moon* (*Kitāb Asrār al-qamar*). Yet the book of Adam is the basis because he was the first to open this (branch of wisdom) to people and it was he who (originally) guided them to it. As far as we know, this did not happen before Adam to any human being and no thinker had arrived at it through his thought and no inventor had invented it by himself.

Thus, it was Adam who opened this branch (*bāb*) of generating plants. Before him the messenger of the Sun had opened to people the (branch of) generating of animals (*takwīn wa-tawhīd al-ḥayawānāt*,

²⁷³ The variant *ilā an* is to be preferred to the text's *illī*.

sic) and people had done this successfully—I mean both kinds of *tawlid*, that of animals and plants. But do not think that any of those who claim wisdom and sagacity (*al-ḥikam wa'l-fiṭan*) have ever been able to do this (on their own). It has never even crossed their minds (*lā khaṭara lahum 'alā bāl*).

Not only this but all kinds of actions with talismans and germination of trees and others, (is of our invention). Some nations may know something of this, but they all have taken it from us and learned it from us, except for the Copts, who share with us a few things about talismans and magic although their (merit) does not equal ours, they resemble it merely in some ways but not in others.

Text 43 (NA, pp. 1337–1339)

All this was in him (Adam)²⁷⁴ and it was given to him because all gods took care of him, not only the Moon, like some people from among the followers of his son Seth in our time say. They have flooded people with their wisdom or with everything that Adam wrote (*rasama*), (claiming) that it was taught and revealed to him by the Moon. Some of them go even further and say that the Moon spoke to him and gave revelations to him.

I have heard one of them, an old man in Sūrā, take most solemn oaths, saying that the Moon spoke to Adam by the word of his own mouth (*mushāfahatan*) and facing him (*mukāfahatan*) and that this concerns everything that Adam brought. He said that the Moon did not reveal anything at all to him through (merely) revelation but that he spoke to him in his own person using speech that was (physically) heard by Adam and which he then kept in his mind (verbatim).

Now, look at the difference between these and those who say that no prophet at all may receive revelation through intimate conversation, but that revelation is either by inspiration in a waking state or as a dream seen when asleep. Some of the followers of Seth say that the gods have spoken to some people using speech that was heard and understood by them. But we need to take here a stance that is between exaggeration and falling short.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ The great merits with which he deserves the title “the Father of Mankind.”

²⁷⁵ The terminology *ghuluww*—read so for the edition’s *al-uluww*—vs. *taqṣīr*, was also used by Shiites.

I think that the truth in this is the middle way, between exaggeration and falling short. Who searches for the truth with a sincere intention (*niyya*), will find it. But following one's passion (*hawā*) weakens one's reason because passion will prevail over reason and inundate it, so that it will govern reason and reason will be subjugated. Thus, passion will take in its power the soul so that it becomes a barrier between the soul and reason and the soul will become accustomed to always following the passion and it finds the calls of reason laborious and feels an aversion towards them. Thus, all actions and words of such a person will be caused by passion and his soul will become completely negligent of reason and it will hate its obligations. Thus, passion will rule over his reason and overwhelm it, causing in him negligence and stupidity so that he will become like a beast, not knowing anything, not even the fact that he does not know anything. There is no worse state than that, except for death: ignorance is the brother of death.

Know that the worst kind of fools (*juhāl*) are those who think that they are wise even though they are ignorant and that they should be emulated even though they will never prosper nor will they ever wake up from their sleep. The Sethians are just like this: they may be described as ignorant yet in their own opinion, their learning comprises all knowledge and reason because they understand the law of Seth (*fiqh sharīʿat Īshūthā*).²⁷⁶ They think that his law is the ultimate truth and that there is nothing above that, refusing to study anything else and believing that they have there everything they need. Who thinks himself self-sufficient, will not search for anything because he thinks that he already has everything that is worth searching for and that there is nothing beyond that which might increase what he already has.

There is no cure for people like these. One only has to keep aloof from them and shun²⁷⁷ them, but in such a way that they will not notice: if they do notice that someone is shunning them, they will

²⁷⁶ This is one of the rather rare passages which could be seen as polemical against Islam. Some scholars have identified the Sethians as a coded name for Muslims, but this seems rather hasty as much of what is said elsewhere about the Sethians is hardly applicable to Muslims. One has to be aware, though, that anti-Islamic polemics, e.g., in this passage, may have been added by, e.g., Ibn Waḥshiyya without this necessitating that in the whole book the Sethians should be identified as Muslims.

²⁷⁷ Or: be harsh against them.

slander and revile him. They have to be deceived and led animals, and one has to mix shunning and discarding them with (apparent) friendship; meeting them with a happy mien one must ask them now and then about the obligations of their religion, letting them think²⁷⁸ that one is really following them. One must not entrust to any of them one's secrets nor anything of that in which one must deceive them because they are like an unruly lot of deceitful wolves, as though they were hungry dogs. So run away from them, run away from them and be on your guard because of them as much as you ever can!

They are distinguished by their (external) marks: They let their beard grow long but they shave their mustache, they wrap themselves in loincloths, the fringes of which they have made long but they forbid the wearing of *ṭaylasān*²⁷⁹ and laugh at those who wear it, calling them the followers of female magicians (*sāḥirāt*). They themselves wear shoes and four (cubits) long (*al-murabbaʿat aṭ-ṭūl*)²⁸⁰ loincloths so that the fringes drag behind them when they walk. They make dots in each corner of the cloth, four dots of saffron in each corner. They also plait their hair in baths and dye it with henna, wear blue or green turbans which they wrap around their forehead. They fight with each other and vie in their discussions. When they walk or speak with someone, they try to make you think that they are not looking upwards towards the sky, being afraid of the gods, because, as they say, they are so cautious for themselves.²⁸¹ When they attend the festival of the invoking of blessing from the idols (*ʿīd tabrīk al-aṣnām*) in Tishrīn I, they cry in front of each idol: "We humbly revere the idols." They also stay up for the night of the light (*laylat an-nūr*), from the sunset to the sunrise, without sitting down or reclining or taking repose because they dedicate themselves above others to the star of Saturn. They also try to force these rulings on other people and they aim at swindling people through religion and dissimulation.

These are the really ignorant ones! It is enough for us to see their tricks in their relations (to other people) and their untrustworthiness in what has been entrusted to them.²⁸²

²⁷⁸ Middle Arabic *yūwīhim*.

²⁷⁹ For *ṭaylasān*, see Ahsan (1979): 63ff.

²⁸⁰ One might also understand this as meaning square, or quadrangular.

²⁸¹ Cf. the description of ascetics in **Text 28**.

²⁸² **Text 44** is the direct continuation of this text.

Text 44 (NA, pp. 1339–1340)²⁸³*The Chapter on Date Palms*

All the children of Adam among the Nabateans agree in calling the date palm “the sister of Adam.” Māsā as-Sūrānī has said this but he did not say what the meaning of this is and why the date palm is called the sister of Adam. Neither did anyone from among the sages who are emulated explain the meaning of this to us.

In our time people say various things about this. Some say that it came to be called the sister of Adam because there did not use to be date palms nor were they seen before the birth of Adam. They say that when Adam was born and grew up, the date palm appeared and came to be called the sister of Adam for this reason. But this is a lie.

Other people say that it was called thus because Adam loved the fruit of the date palm and kept eating dates and he was dedicated to pollinating the palms and planting them and taking good care of them. When he came back from India he told among the stories about his sojourn there that the hardest thing for him had been the lack of dates and similar things. But this, too, is a lie.

Others say that Adam had a sister whose name was Nakhla and he was very fond of her. During his time, people became accustomed to saying that Nakhla was the sister of Adam. When time passed, they forgot the explanation of the phrase but went on calling *nakhla* (“date palm”) the sister of Adam. But this is a lie as well as the first one(s). People have also told many other senseless stories (*khurāfāt*) such as these which it would take a long time to relate. And there is no use in mentioning them.

The truth is that Adam invented (*waḍʿa*) many useful things for people through the language by which he named all things on earth, even including the sounds of the voices of beasts and birds (*ḥarakāt aṣwāt al-bahāʾim waʾt-ṭuyūr*). He also taught (*afāda*) them divisions and measures and the basics of mathematics by which they became wise in their trades and mutual relations and in calculating the things they took and gave and procuring many of their things. He also benefited them in the cultivation of trees and the curing of the diseases of trees and caring for them, as he also did with all plants,

²⁸³ This is the direct continuation of **Text 43**.

both great and small. He also taught them the art of generation (*tak-wīnāt*) and useful talismans which they had not earlier known before his time even though Dawānāy had lived before him and he had written down (*rasama*) and taught people some talismans and other similar things, but he had not expressed clearly any of his teachings in the way Adam did. Neither were the teachings of Dawānāy like those of Adam in clarity and blessing.

Adam taught them the science of curing illnesses and eliminating sicknesses from bodies and enumerated medicaments and useful medicines as well as injurious poisons about which they had not previously had any knowledge at all before the appearance of Adam. He also taught them other sciences, all of which are useful and none of which they had known before nor had they even heard about them.

In addition to these sciences he taught them various professions and manual skills, the knowledge and understanding of which benefits them greatly. Moreover, he showed them how to invent (further) sciences and professions. Thus, they derived from him noble teachings and numerous benefits, and because of this they called him “the Father of Mankind.” Thus, people during his time used to call him “my father” or “O our father” in reverence, respect and glorification and in gratitude for what he had given them, providing them with things that were beneficial both for the common people and the élite.

Now, Adam was so beneficial to people in many ways which they had not learned from others, and the date palm is also very beneficial for people so that people do not benefit from any other plant as much as they do from it. Besides, there is no other fruit which would be so tasty and sweet. It is also more nutritious than any other fruit. In all parts of the date palm from top to bottom there is some benefit for people and they may use them in some way for their benefit. This is why they compared it and its many benefits to Adam and thus called it the sister of Adam, i.e., similar to him in the great number of benefits. Thus, it is his sister.

Text 45 (NA, pp. 1394–1395)

So much about what we think about this disease and its cure. We have compiled this from the teachings of Ṣaghrīth and Yanbūshād the

Sage as well as from the teachings of Māsā as-Sūrānī and his student Jaryānā who lived before Ṣaḡhrīth and Yanbūshād.

We have chosen not to mention things that were described by ‘Ankabūthā the Magician in his book on agriculture according to the opinion of magicians (*fī kitābihi fī l-filāḥa ‘alā ra’y as-saḥara*). He spoke all too long about the cure of date palms and their cultivation, much more than about other matters because, I think, he must have loved both fresh and dried dates. He mentioned the sourness of the fruit of the date palm and spoke excessively about it, describing (many cures) for it according to their doctrine but I have not included any of that here.

Later Ṣabyāthā the Magician mentioned how to make a talisman for this. (He mentioned it) among the magical talismans which he had made to stop the diseases of date palms. Neither did I mention anything of this. I even regret having narrated some of the talismans of the magicians for things which I have mentioned in this book.

My regret comes from two reasons. First of all, when people get accustomed to using talismans and magic, it will be harmful for their soul. Secondly, I do not want anyone to think that I would regard the use of magic and magical talismans as permissible. For this reason, I must say here that I forbid magic and magical talismans because they always work for harm, not good. We also forbid causing injury to animals, let alone people, the best as well the worst. This is my doctrine.

I only mention in this book the magical talismans and other actions of the magicians when they benefit the plants upon which the life of people is based; nothing is more beneficial to them (than plants). This is a benefit which is the opposite of harm and it is permissible for me to mention it here. Nay, I even deserve reward from people because I am eager to benefit them. My dislike for magic and my regret for having mentioned it is caused by my fear that people will get accustomed to using it or that they think that I would consider it (in general) permissible, and not forbid it.

What I have said here shows what I really think. Know that, if you are interested to know it. Whoever follows my example will like to follow in my footsteps and not practise magic or use talismans except when it is beneficial and not harmful. When someone speaks about something and describes it, let him continue by forbidding it (magic), blaming it and prohibiting it (in general).

Text 46 (NA, p. 1416)

If the incense in the temples is thrown on the coals of racemes (*‘arājīn*), this will be very good. When one splits racemes and makes statuettes of animals of them together with threads and rags and paste²⁸⁴ and glue (*liṣāq*), these will be the best offerings to offer for the idols in the temples. Palm branches without leaves (*jarīd as-sa‘af*) are equally good for these things we have mentioned.

These statuettes are made of branches and racemes by wandering ascetics who do not offer to the idols animals, live or dead, for they abhor and forbid that. Yanbūshād was the greatest of the people of this doctrine, and before Yanbūshād this was held by Māsā as-Sūrānī and Jaryānā and many of the notables and leaders of the Kasdānians which it would take too long to enumerate. They all thought that one should not offer any animals as burnt offerings or otherwise but they made statuettes of all animals²⁸⁵ from the bark (*līt*) of branches and from racemes. They thought that the ones made of racemes were the best and most acceptable to the gods.

Before our time and before the Kan‘ānites came to rule the clime of Bābil there used to be in many towns of this clime artisans who made these (statuettes of) animals from the bark of palm branches and from split racemes. They were skilful in splitting and forming them. When the Kan‘ānites came to rule, this (profession) ceased because the majority of people follow the religion of their kings. By my life, if one wishes to offer such a statuette and makes it with his own hands, he will receive an even greater reward from the gods. It is told in the stories about Yanbūshād that he used to make the statuettes of these animals as offerings with his own hands and that he did not buy them from anyone. He also only ate from what he had himself sown, and drank from what he had ladled with his own hand. He was one of the most excellent and noble sages.

²⁸⁴ Reading, with the variant, *ishrās*, for which see Levey (1966): 230. See also Steingass, s.v.

²⁸⁵ That used to be offered by others.

Text 47 (NA, pp. 1418–1421)

They (palm branches) have been used for *saḥḥāras*,²⁸⁶ which are attributed to (one of) the twelve zodiacal signs and the seven celestial bodies so that there are nineteen (different) *saḥḥāras*, each for the specific purpose for which it suits and in which none of the others may take its place.

One may also use branches for Bābilian *sarrāqas* which resemble the *saḥḥāras* and which were invented by ‘Ankabūthā the Magician. Later Ṣabyāthā²⁸⁷ added to these four more *sarrāqas*, which were wonderful, fine and baffled the reason. People gave preference to the work of Ṣabyāthā over that of ‘Ankabūthā, but the excellence of precedence belongs to ‘Ankabūthā for he was the first to start this (practice) and he invented it.

We have heard that there was a magician who specifically worked in the way of Ṣabyāthā and was his partisan, preferring him over all other magicians. He made a talismanic *saḥḥāra* and a magical *sarrāqa* and used it to steal cattle, thirty cows, of the king in Bākūrātā, a district of Kūthā-Rabbā, without any of the herdsmen and guardians noticing it. Had he wanted to rustle three hundred cows from people, he would have been able to do so but he merely wanted to show his skill in stealing from under the eyes of guardians and watchmen and to let them know that their keeping guard was of no consequence to him.

It was he who made lions extinct in Sūrā. The people of Sūrā complained to him that there were so many lions in the region, who

²⁸⁶ *Saḥḥāra*, and its near synonym *sarrāqa*, seem to refer to some kind of magical box, or coffin, with a double floor wherein a man can lie hidden—such as is used today in the circus for vanishing tricks. The words have, at least here, an etymological connection with the roots *saḥara* “to bewitch” and *saraqā* “to steal;” Dozy, s.v. *saḥḥāra*, should be accordingly corrected. The aspect of trickery seems to connect this word with the children’s toy *saḥḥāra* (see, e.g., Lane, s.v. and Ibn Man‘ūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, s.v.). For hunter’s ditches, see also Ahsan (1979): 227. *Sarrāqa* might be etymologically related to Syriac *shāreq* “hollow”, but *saḥḥāra* has probably nothing to do with Syriac *sāḥartā*; for both Syriac words, see Payne Smith, s.vv.

Of the following two stories, the first belongs to the sphere of magic but the second is closely connected with the real procedures of lion hunting.

²⁸⁷ In this passage, the name is written as Ṣabyānā. I have preferred the form Ṣabyāthā which is more frequently used in the *Nabatean Agriculture*, but it should go without saying that the reading is purely conjectural and the forms have been harmonized only for practical reasons.

were continually doing harm to them. He made a lion (*sabʿiyya*) *sarrāqa* in which a man could lie in ambush. He left there a place from which could be heard a voice like that of a male lion when the wind blew in.²⁸⁸ He used it to catch all the lions in the vicinity of Sūrā until the region was empty of them. They say that he used to hunt in this way some three or four lions each day, according to how many happened to fall into his trap and thus he made them extinct.²⁸⁹

Someone has told me a nice story about a great lion which fell into his *sarrāqa*. The *sarrāqa* was at that time taken care of by a man whom the magician had selected for that but whom I do not want to name. He (the magician) had ordered the people of Sūrā to give him two *dīnārs* each day while he was hunting. When that great lion fell into his *sarrāqa*, it threw the *sarrāqa* over by the force of its body and the strength of its attacks. When it continued to move, the *sarrāqa* returned to the upright position as it had been, so vehement were the movements of the lion.

When the lion was about to overturn it yet another time, the manager of the *sarrāqa* tightened the grip on its mouth and the barnacle on its throat²⁹⁰ so that when the lion wished to move, it could not do so anymore. So the lion started grumbling in a soft voice, as if it had been a human being asking another to have pity on him. It moved its tail slightly and gently as (animals) do when very fearful. Then it grumbled a bit, bellowed a little and gently swished its tail.

When the magician saw this, he was moved, had pity on the lion and let it loose. When the lion had gathered some strength and was about to escape, it could not anymore jump in the way it had been able to. It bellowed loudly and started turning around, looking at the *sarrāqa*, trying to jump but to no avail. It again turned around, looked at the *sarrāqa* and then jumped out of fear. The magician was in the *sarrāqa*, laughing, and people had gathered there, wondering at (the behaviour of) the lion. They asked the magician: “Why did you let that great lion go after it had fallen into the trap? Now we fear it even more than we used to.” He answered: “I have lessened its strength and taken away its power. You can see that it is no longer able to run. Now, shoot it with arrows and kill it (if you

²⁸⁸ Such stratagems were actually used by lion hunters, see Ahsan (1979): 229.

²⁸⁹ For later lion stories in Sufi stories, see al-Yāfiʿī, *Nashr al-mahāsīn*, p. 33ff.

²⁹⁰ For *zayyara*, see Lane, s.v. *ziyār*.

want to)! I have let it go, taking pity on it and I have liberated it for the idol of Mars and I will not reverse my decision.”

But no-one dared to draw close to it nor shoot it with an arrow even though there was a big crowd and they were well armed. That made the magician burst into laughter and he wondered at their excessive cowardice. The lion with its great claws slowly escaped until it got away from them, having saved itself from both the *sarrāqa* and the group of people. Afterwards the magician took the *sarrāqa* elsewhere because he had not yet caught as many lions as he wanted to.

Let us return to the story about the thirty cows that were stolen from the king. The herdsmen told the overseers (*ʿurafāʿ*), they told the agents (*wukalāʿ*) and these told their head, the steward (*qahramān*) of the king and the steward told the king himself. The king was furious and called the leading men of Kūthā-Rabbā to him and said: “If you²⁹¹ do not stop this trickery against me, like you did against my father, may God bless him,²⁹² I will kill you. Why did you not do such things against your (own previous) kings? But when we came to rule over you, you started being hostile and devious towards us! Give our cows back to us! You are unbearable! It would be right if I killed all the Kasdānians in this clime. By the right of Jupiter, if you do not return these thirty cows, I will kill ten of your leaders and great men for each cow!”

Sārūqā who owned many estates, slaves and slavegirls, stood up and answered: “O king, gently! By the right of Jupiter, we know nothing at all about these cows and we have not been audacious against you as regards these cows or anything else. I have my own suspicions about them. If the king allows me a day of respite, I will return the thirty cows to you.” To this the king said: “It seems that you are planning to compensate for them from your own property. By the right of the Sun, I will only accept the very same thirty cows that you (pl.) stole from my herdsmen.” Sārūqā said to him: “I will obey you, O king, and I will return them as they were but I ask

²⁹¹ The reference is to the native Kasdānians. The king himself belonged to the Kanʿānite conquerors, see below.

²⁹² Fahd’s edition reads NŠRH, as if it were the name of the father. This is also how Fahd (1998, Index, s.v.) seems to understand this. The word, of course, would bring to mind Bukhtanaššar, the Arabic for Nebuchadnezzar (on whom in later literature, see Sack 1991). However, a little later we are told that the name of the father was Namrūdā, i.e., Nimrod. The facsimile (VII: 211), in fact, reads: *abī našarahu llāh*, and the edition of Fahd should accordingly be corrected.

you a favour: Do not ask me anything about them because the magicians have operations in which we cannot oppose them.”

The king understood that this was not a case of simple rustling but that the magicians were involved. He stopped (insisting) because he was as afraid of them as was Sārūqā. He only said: “Go and do what you have to. I will not ask questions.”

Sārūqā went to his house and took a thousand *dīnārs* minted by Namrūdā,²⁹³ who was the father of this Raḥmūtā the Kan‘ānite from whom the thirty cows had been stolen. With this money he went to the magician whom I do not want to name, as I have said, and gave it to him, humbling himself submissively in front of him and apologizing to him. Then he told him that he was about to lose his property and that Raḥmūtā was about to rob him of it. The magician conceded to return the very same thirty cows to him and even wanted to give back the thousand *dīnārs*, but Sārūqā was humble and kept imploring him to keep them until he finally accepted them.

Then the herdsmen of Sārūqā drove the cows back to the herdsmen of the king. The king asked nothing and did not say a word, wishing to remain safe from the evil of the magicians. Had he wanted to kill one or some of them, others would have remained and he could not have resisted them. So he thought that it would be better for his rule and safer for himself to ignore them. Thus, he let the matter lie and ignored them.

This opposition between Kan‘ānites and Kasdānians is an ancient one, from before the time the Kan‘ānites came to rule over this clime, because they are well known among other peoples for their excessive envy. They envy the Kasdānians for the sciences which the gods have given them and which the Kan‘ānites have been unable (to invent). But now they are our kings and rulers and both they and we receive the same reward. Thus, we are thankful to them because they have ruled us well.

Text 48 (NA, pp. 1446–1447)

Ṣabyāthā has said: One makes with an iron pen on a plate a line drawing of a human being who has put his hands together, one

²⁹³ Cf. von Gutschmid (1861): 43.

above the other and then one smears the whole plate with oil and the drawing (in addition?) with honey on which one scatters some sugar and puts this into an earthenware vessel and fixes its lid on with some clay and buries this in the earth to the depth of seven feet (*aqdām*). If one does this talisman and buries it at the time we have specified, most of the palm trees that grow from the stones will prosper and thrive and all of them will grow to become the varieties that one wants, beautiful to look at because of their beauty and nobility and the abundance of their syrup (*asal*). Most of them will be safe from all accidents that could destroy them and all of them will become (trees that bear) truly sweet (dates) of a firm texture, prospering and producing good syrup (*dibs*) and other products. The sweetmeats (*nāʿīf*) that are made of them will be very good and sweet.

If one draws on this (plate) the picture of a human being and smears it with honey, this will be a talisman that combines the safety of growing with the thriving of the date palm and the excellence and extreme sweetness of the dates. Thus, we call it the talisman of sweetness for date palms. When the talisman is done in this way, with the picture on it, and buried under a date palm which is not bearing fruit well (*taḥūlu kathīran*) or whose dates do not ripen properly, this (talisman) will take all this away, make its fruit good and make the date palm bear many dates so that it will thereafter bear well and continuously, more and better than it used to (before falling ill). One should bury this talisman under the date palm when the ascendant star and the position of the sphere and the Moon is like we have described above.

We have also experimented with a talisman which ‘Ankabūthā the Magician invented for date palms. Then we experimented with this (talisman by Ṣabyāthā) and found it better and more useful for date palms, clearer and more appropriate. For this reason, we have mentioned this which we tried and which was transmitted intact but we have left unmentioned the other one because we experimented with it but it was not as good as was claimed. Yet not all the claims that were made for it turned out to be false: nay, but the smaller part of them were true, most of them were false.

This is a curious thing. ‘Ankabūthā was the leader (*imām*) of the magicians and the originator of many of their operations which he alone invented, without anyone before him having known them, nor anyone after him being able to add to what he has said. Now, if someone like him mentions a talisman and when experimented with,

that will not be found out to be as he had said, then my opinion is that this is to be attributed to the fact that the talisman as he had invented it and used it has not come down to us in order but in a confused state and this is why the operation will not come out properly. This is why it partly failed, and only partly succeeded.

This is because the time of Ṣabyāthā is closer to our own time than the time of ‘Ankabūthā. ‘Ankabūthā lived a long time before Adam, whereas Ṣabyāthā lived a long time after Adam and thus there is a long period between them. The talisman which is closer to us in time came to us intact, whereas the other came to us in a confused state and did not succeed.

Ṣabyāthā has told us an excellent thing: “We drew on a brass (*mass*) plate the picture of a human being. We did not, as we were supposed to, draw the picture of a date palm because the date palm resembles a human being in many ways.” He also said: “Know that between the date palm and human beings there are many relations and resemblances and an obvious similarity.” But he did not say more nor did he explain this. This shows that the origin of this talisman is that before burying it one draws on it (the plate) the picture of a fecundate palm tree bearing bunches of dates. Ṣabyāthā’s opinion was that the picture of a human being would be more effective although drawing there the picture of the date palm would be more obvious. He, thus, likened the date palm to a human being.

Ṣabyāthā has described in another of his books the use of human sperm in magic, saying: If you cannot get human sperm but you have a spadix of a male (palm tree), you may take some grains of the spadix from the stalk and crush them, moistening them with some running water and use that instead of sperm. In this operation, this will substitute for sperm.

Text 49 (NA, pp. 1483–1484)

After this we mentioned the potherbs, starting with the endive (*hīndubā*²⁹⁴) because our father Adam, blessed be he, started with it, putting it before all other small plants, either wild or domesticated, and he greatly preferred it, as did also Ṣaghrīth, Jaryānā²⁹⁴ and Yanbūshād.

²⁹⁴ Here written Jarnāyā.

I have heard that Asqūlūbiyā,²⁹⁵ the messenger of the Sun, prescribed them for many medicaments, but neither we nor those before us have known endive to be beneficial or a medicament. They claim that sick people (treated thus by Asqūlūbiyā) were cured from their ailments. Ancient Kasdānians and their greatest learned men have said that when Asqūlūbiyā, the messenger of the Sun, prescribed a medicine for some sick person, this medicine did help in that disease, and that the patient was cured and healed only because the messenger of the Sun had prescribed this medicine, not because that medicament itself would have been the proper cure for that disease, as they say. Had the messenger of the Sun prescribed to a feverish patient a medicament which is very hot that would have cured him and brought down his temperature.

I do not know what to say about this because such is the unanimous opinion (*ijmāʿ*) of all those who came after the time of the messenger of the Sun about him and about the prescriptions for diseases he gave. This has become a common opinion. My opinion, though, is that I would not say that the nature of a medicine or one of its ingredients would change from what it by nature is merely because some human being would prescribe it for another. I cannot believe any of this because it is essentially impossible. I think that the messenger of the Sun used to prescribe odd medicaments for people and when they were cured by them without properly knowing the names of those medicaments and what they really were, they guessed that they were something else than what they really had been.

If someone says about the messenger of the Sun that which we have mentioned, he is actually saying that the patient would have been healed by the medicament prescribed to him by the messenger of the Sun because the secret of that potency came from the messenger of the Sun, not from the action of the medicament itself. In that case the medicament would just be an intermediary without any importance and there would be no reason to use it because the potency of the prescriber would be what affects the body of the patient and cures him from his disease.

However, I do not consider it proper to say that this is merely a fable without any reality behind it because of the common opinion

²⁹⁵ In this text written as Asqūlūbinā, but here standardized in accordance with **Text 42**.

which I have mentioned. However, I am a man who belongs to the school of Anūḥā and Yanbūshād. These two refuted this story which we have mentioned about the messenger of the Sun and did not believe in it, rejecting what all the ancients had said. Anūḥā renounced it and called it a lie and rejected it most strongly, but Yanbūshād said that the common opinion of the Kasdānians about the messenger of the Sun was such for instructional reasons (*ʿalā ṭarīq siyāsat al-ʿamma*). In ancient times most of the tribes (*ajyāl*) of the Nabateans were dominated by the law (*sharīʿa*) of the messenger of the Sun and the wise men of that time said as the common people and the majority said, because they feared the anger of the people against them. Common people tend to incline towards the dominant and leading opinion whether that be true or not.²⁹⁶ By my life, this seems to be the correct opinion. I add to it that if Anūḥā and Yanbūshād did not believe in that, I do not believe in it, either, and I do not consider it true nor do I care about it.

Text 50 (NA, pp. 274–275)

I do not dare to argue against him (Ṣaghrīth); nay, I refrain from that due to my respect for him. Yet I believe in what my reason says to be correct, even when it does contradict Ṣaghrīth. It is better to follow the truth than to follow him. Still, I must say something here to affirm the effects of special properties in things, whose effects he claimed were not due to special properties.

Why, if we take exactly ten dirhams of ground saffron and let someone drink it mixed with wine, will he laugh until he dies without being able to control himself and stop that vehement laughter, nor is anybody able to avert his death? Now if we let him drink ten and a half dirhams or nine and a half dirhams (of saffron) this will not happen, neither laughter nor death. What is this action and this effect which is manifested by it? Is it the effect of heat or of another primary quality which counteracts the others? Or is that the effect of saffron through a special property of the weight because if we detract from or add a little to this amount of ten dirhams it will not have the same effect as the ten dirhams have? We say that this

²⁹⁶ Reading *bāṭilan*, instead of *bāṭinan* which does not make sense in this passage.

takes place because exactly that amount is combined with exactly that substance (*jawhar*).

Why, when oak-headed snakes (*al-afāʿi al-ballūṭiyyat ar-ruʿūs*) see pure emeralds, will they shed their eyes in less than a wink of an eye and remain eyeless?²⁹⁷ Is that caused by the primary qualities or by a special property? Or when we carry a pig on a donkey and the donkey urinates underneath it, the pig dies immediately and is extinguished on the spot. What has come to the pig from the urine of the donkey and caused it to die? What if the pig drank the urine and did not die? Because if a pig drinks it, nothing will happen to it.

What else could this be than the effects of things through their special properties? What would be the (material) cause (*ʿilla*) for the effect of the special properties? (From what should the cause) be constructed (according to Ṣaḡhrīth’s opinion)? Through the mixing of the primary qualities (*imtizāj aṭ-ṭabāʿiʿ*) or through something else?

Let us also mention to our master (*ustādhinā*) Ṣaḡhrīth what becomes manifest of the effects of the special properties of plants and fieldplants (*zurūʿ*) because this he will not deny as he knows these (phenomena) himself, even though he might deny what we have said until now (concerning things to do with fauna).²⁹⁸ Why (does the following happen): When the “grass of the lion” (*hashīshat al-asad*)²⁹⁹ which is harmful to all plants growing near it, grows plentiful, and we want to cut it and root it, this cannot be achieved by plucking it with our hands. If we order a virgin to take in her hands a white cock³⁰⁰ with a divided comb (*afraq*)³⁰¹ and she goes with it around the place where this grass is growing, shaking the bird so that it flaps its wings and she repeats this several times, this grass will wither and some of it will die that day, the rest after two or three days, not more than

²⁹⁷ This is a topos in later Arabic literature, largely dependent on the *Nabatean Agriculture*. Occurrences have conveniently been collected in Kraus (1933–1934): 138, note 1. Cf. also Kraus (1942–1943) II: 74.

²⁹⁸ In this passage Qūthāmā speaks as if he were continuing an on-going discussion between himself and Ṣaḡhrīth. This does not prove that they were contemporaries—and that Ṣaḡhrīth would have been an oral source for Qūthāmā—because the sentence, most obviously, should be taken as hypothetical: “if he were here, we would say to him (. . .).”

²⁹⁹ For the “grass of the lion,” see Löw (1881), no. 34, and al-Bayṭār, *Jāmiʿ* I: 277, s.v.

³⁰⁰ For cocks in Harran, see Green (1992): 209–212. For the use of white cocks in magic, see also Kieckhefer (2000): 162, and *Syrian Anatomy*, p. 700.

³⁰¹ See Lane, s.v.

that. From what action does this occur? Do you not think that the grass was frightened by the cock and withered and stopped growing because of this, and it is the action of special properties?

When we see a cloud which seems to bring a hailstorm, or the hailstorm has already started to fall on a field and we order a menstruating woman to take off her clothes and she lies down on her back showing her pudenda towards the clouds, this will stop the hailstorm at that place and there will be no more hailstorms on that place where she has lain down doing this up to 100 or 200 or (even) 300 cubits (*dhirāʿ*) from there. What else could this curious thing be and what could its (material) cause³⁰² be except the effect of a special property?

When a cat smells nard, Indian nard (*sunbul at-ṭīb*), she rolls over it and does not want to leave it because she finds it has a sweet odour. Often a cat may keep mewling when it smells this plant and it searches for it and follows it if it is removed from that place. For what other reason would this happen except for some special property?

We may suspend a root of melissa (*bādhranbūya*)³⁰³ on a branch of the vine when it is about to bear grapes and then leave it so until the grapes are ripe. When they are harvested and pressed, it will be found that they have (some) taste and odour of the melissa. When the juice ferments (*ishtadda*), that wine (*khamr*) will be beneficial and there will issue no drowsiness (*khafaqān*) from drinking too much of it. What could its cause be except a special property?

Finally, I say: If someone doubts what we have told, let him experiment. Experimentation is possible for everyone. I have not said all this because I would like to oppose Ṣaghrīth. This is just what in my opinion is true. In many of the special properties of plants and others there are many benefits for people. It would have been well for me to write in this book a separate chapter on special properties, yet I have mentioned these in various places whenever the topic has led me there and when we may observe them in various things. If someone wants, he may collect all these into one booklet (*daftar*). Let him then entitle it (*yutarjīmahu*) “the Book of the Special Properties of Plants, mentioned in the Book of Agriculture by Qūthāmā al-Qūqānī” (*Kitāb Khawāṣṣ an-nabāt al-madhkūr fī kitāb al-filāḥa mim mā qālahu Qūthāmā al-Qūqānī*).

³⁰² I read *al-illa* “(material) cause” for the text’s *al-ghāya*.

³⁰³ See Löw (1881), no. 18, and cf. also Steingass, s.v. *bādrangbū*.

CHAPTER FIVE

FOLKLORE, STORIES AND LITERATURE

Folklore and stories of marvels¹ are amply attested in the *Nabatean Agriculture*: stories of ancient peoples and kings; talking and thinking animals and plants; spiritual and supernatural beings, outside, or in the margins, of religion strictly taken. All are found in both this book as well as in Late Antique, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic cultures in the area, the same story or theme often recurring in various literatures and easily crossing both linguistic and religious boundaries, partly in an oral, partly in a written form.²

The folkloristic material in the *Nabatean Agriculture* is related to both religion and history and the boundaries between various fields are not easy to define. Thus, the recurring speaking trees (e.g., **Texts 57–58**) are also relevant for the religious ideas of the text, as trees are seen as idols (*aṣnām*) of the gods, their manifestations on earth. Or the fantastic magical operations may be analysed either as folklore or magic. One need not, perhaps, draw a very clear line between folklore and literature, or between folklore and history: the ancient peoples and kings mentioned in some stories could equally well be taken as (pseudo)-historical, religious or literary material.—It has to be emphasized that these ancient kings bear Nabatean, “coded” names (see 1.2.), and their historicity is more than dubious.³

Folkloristic stories (*khurāfāt* “tales; tall tales; stories”) are often mentioned in the text. Most of these stories are not, however, narrated in the book, but only referred to, and Qūthāmā often distances himself from them; e.g., in NA, p. 909, he refers to senseless tales (*khurāfāt lā maʿnā lahā*) which women and children are accustomed to tell. Yet, he does admit that, according to some, there is some wisdom in these tales. Qūthāmā says that he sometimes deviates on purpose

¹ For these, see van Hees (2002) with further references.

² On folklore and literature crossing linguistic boundaries, cf., e.g., Marzolph (1985), (1987) and (1992); Hämeen-Anttila (1994–1995).

³ The attempt of Fahd (Fahd 1998: 327–334) to discuss such stories as historical is not very convincing. Cf. also Tubach (1986): 36–37.

from his main theme, agriculture. Stories and tales (*al-akhbār wa'l-khurāfāt*) which are there to convey knowledge and wisdom (*al-ādāb wa'l-ḥikam*), he says, are told in the book for three reasons: to entertain (*tarwīḥ*) the reader, so that he may relax before coming back to the main theme (*amūd al-kalām*); otherwise fatigue would blind his soul (NA, p. 875). Secondly, some of the tales contain valid information (although their surface level narrative may be fabulous) and, thirdly, that the readers of future generations may learn how things were in earlier times (NA, p. 875)—incidentally, this is the main reason for modern scholarship being interested in the book. These, he concludes, are the reasons for crossing the boundaries of the main theme and relating stories (*aqāṣīṣ*) which people tell among themselves (NA, pp. 875–876).

All do not, however, agree on the symbolic interpretation of old stories, especially those attributed to the prophets. Qūthāmā makes it more than clear that there are people who insist on taking even the most incredible stories at their face value (NA, pp. 927–928):

When it comes to what they tell about the prophets, they claim that those who deny these stories are infidels (*yukaffirūn*) and they insult those who doubt their veracity, although they are sheer vanities and lies and obvious absurdities; that should be quite obvious. Yet they kill those who doubt these stories and they regard it as lawful to shed their blood and revile them and find fault with their reason, although one could find much fault with theirs since they accept these absurdities which cannot possibly be. They are like animals (*bahā'im*) which go on, generation after generation, without learning anything. They are like sleepers who do not wake.

(. . .) If we related what people have accepted as true and what they claim about the prophets and what they teach about them, that would take as long as would the listing of their obviously false absurdities, which no one with reason or discernment can believe. They, on the contrary, have accepted all this and taken it as their religion (*dānū bihā*) and cherished it (*waḍa'ūhā 'alā a'yūnihim*). Critical and judicious sages do not doubt that they are sheer lies and vain falsehoods. The sages, in fact, are continuously wondering about those who believe in these stories and they wonder at the weakness of their reason (*'uqūl*) as they take as true what no reasonable man would believe. One cannot base one's argument on what people like these say.

Prophets and ancient peoples are a favourite theme of fantastic tales. One finds a mention of Bābānians who used to live in al-Yamāma until they were destroyed by Arabs who lived there at the time of the writing of the text (NA, p. 1343). Likewise, in an addition by

Ibn Waḥshīyya (cf. 3.2), we are told that there is a long story about the destruction of the Nineveh (*Nīnawā*), which lies opposite Mosul, in a major flood (*gharaq*). This flood destroyed the area and the nation living there perished but, unfortunately, nothing more is told about this incident (NA, p. 589; cf. also **Text 25**).

We are also told that when people had imprisoned Anūḥā, a great flood destroyed most of their land, together with the land of the Greeks (*al-Yūnāniyyīn*) and the Kardānians, so that these nations perished in the flood while Anūḥā survived and took refuge in the land of Egypt (NA, p. 404). But when the Egyptians banished Anūḥā, a famine befell them so that they, in their turn, perished (NA, p. 404; cf. 4.1).⁴

Likewise, we are told about a nation which inhabited, in the time of Adam, the lowest parts of the clime of Bābil up to the river Bākasān, and were enemies of the Kasdānians. Adam revealed the secret of the cultivation of wheat (see also **Text 52**) to the Kardānians but withheld this secret from the Bākasānians who later became extinct and the Kasdānians inherited their regions (*diyārahum*; NA, pp. 406–407).

Most of the mentions of ancient kings are, quite understandably in a book like this, connected with agriculture and plants; an exception to this is found in the legend of King Fourfolder, *al-Murabbīʿ*, related in **Text 55**, although this text, too, is loosely connected with agriculture through the particular wind which acts as a starting point for the author to tell this story. Thus, a king named Jīnāfā imported *tharūmīshā*⁵ from the land of the Greeks (*al-Yūnāniyyīn*) called Thirtānyā⁶ and planted it in the clime of Bābil where, as an embassy of Greeks later testified, it started to flourish more abundantly than in its original country (NA, p. 517). Even though King Jīnāfā was later

⁴ The immediate references are, of course, to the Flood and the story of Moses which are known in all three monotheistic traditions of the Near East. NA, p. 384, also alludes to such stories of ancient catastrophes, yet without furnishing us with any details.

⁵ Löw (1881), no. 337, referring to this passage (through Chwolson 1859: 87, note) takes this to be a lupin (*Lupinus termis*). The identification may be correct but it is somewhat problematic because the lupin has just been discussed separately a few pages earlier (NA, pp. 511–513) under its usual Arabic name, *turmus*. Still, such a duplication would by no means be unprecedented.

Fahd (1998): 328–330, discusses this passage and takes Thirtānyā as “une corruption probable” of Thrakē, Thrace.

⁶ Cf. von Gutschmid (1861): 28–29.

disappointed with the taste of the bread baked from *tharūmīshā*, it is still said to be cultivated in some areas of the clime (NA, p. 518).

During the reign of King ‘Aṣrāwīl,⁷ the people of Hatra (*al-Ḥaḍar*) made an experiment with grafting various kinds of vines (NA, p. 955). The wine produced by this experiment turned out to be most unsalutary, and when people noticed this:

They told about this to ‘Aṣrāwīl who asked Barāyā, the priest (*kāhin*) of his time, about this and Barāyā prayed to the Moon and humbled himself in front of it, pleading that it would tell him the secret (*‘ilm*) of this vine. The Moon gave him a revelation in a dream, saying: “Forbid (*ḥarrim*)⁸ everything that comes of this vine. Do not plant it or sow it, do not cultivate it and do not touch it at all with your hand. Let no one even look at it, except from far away.”

When Barāyā forbade people to look at it, people left it until all vines (of this variety) had perished and dried up to become dry stalks which the wind drove. Thus, the whole variety came to extinction (*baʿulat ‘an al-arḍ al-batta*). This Barāyā was one of those to whom came the viceregency (*khilāfa*) of Seth and the guardianship of his religion (*al-qiyām bi-dīnīhi*).

The cultivation of garlic started, according to Ṣaḡhrīth, in the clime of Bābil during the reign of King Qarṣānā after whom, so we are told, ruled King Shamūthā, also called *adh-Dhahabānī* (“the Golden,” NA, p. 577; cf. also below). After reporting this opinion, Qūthāmā gives as his own opinion that garlic was never imported but was, in fact, indigenous to Bābil. To support this, he mentions that the king of Egypt, Saqūrbās, sent an embassy to bring garlic to Egypt for cultivation and this happened at the time of King Ṭayāthānā, who lived more than 900 years before Qarṣānā⁹ (NA, p. 577).

The cultivation of date palms prospered when in ancient times a group of people were expelled from al-Ahwāz by the king of Persia, Kāmāsh,¹⁰ and, coming to Bābil, they taught the Kasdānians that palm shoots should be planted invoking the great name of the Moon (NA, p. 1404).

⁷ Also written ‘ṢR’WY’ but ‘ṢR’WYL seems a better reading.

⁸ Or: Everything is forbidden (*ḥurrima*). The continuation, though, makes the imperative a more probable reading.

⁹ Here written ‘Farūṣānā’, but the two names obviously refer to the same person. The form adopted here, Qarṣānā, is, of course, no more probably right than the other form. For the king Saqūrbās, cf. von Gutschmid (1861): 76–79.

¹⁰ There are several references in the text to a Kāmās(h) an-Nahrī (cf. 4.1), but he seems to be another person. Von Gutschmid (1861): 55–56, suggests identifying this Kāmāsh with Jāmāsp.

As the plants also have a central role as medicaments, diseases and cures are often mentioned in these stories. King Rawāsā is said to have been deranged (*hāma*) and suffering from a feeling of desolation (*tawahḥush*) which caused him to envy the Persians because they possessed melissa (*bādhranjbüya*). The king even attacked them but was cured with the very same plant (NA, p. 799).

King Sūsaqyā loved cinnamon (*salīkhā*)¹¹ and ordered it to be planted in some of his gardens. Two kinds of cinnamon were brought to him from the country of the Arabs and they flourished in Kūthā-Rabbā. The text explains Sūsaqyā to have been “one of the Kan‘ānite kings who took the kingship from the city of Bābil to the city of Kūthā-Rabbā” (NA, p. 1252).

King Dhan²āmlūṭā loved water lilies (*līmūfār*) so much that he ordered them to be planted in his castle—finally, though, the overabundance of water lilies around him, both their odour and their sight, caused a brain disease which proved fatal to him because the doctors of the time were unable to cure it (NA, p. 133). It is not clear whether this passage comes from the “poem” (*shī‘r*) by Sūlūqū (cf. NA, p. 131) in which he, among other things, explained that if one dreams of smelling a water lily, this means that the dreamer will have intercourse with a woman (NA, pp. 131–132).—The explanation of dreams (*ta‘bīr al-aḥlām*) is, perhaps surprisingly, almost lacking in the book, and dreams are usually mentioned only in connection with prophecy (cf. 4.2).

When it comes to wisdom literature, one finds a lengthy quotation taken from a text (*saḥīfa*) admonishing (*waṣṣā*) his son composed by King Jarmāthā. The quotation concerns the behaviour of the king towards his subjects, with special reference to the owners of estates (NA, p. 410). The text resembles the popular genres of *andarz* and *pand-nāmag* in Persia, or the later Arabic *waṣīyya*, itself dependent on these Persian models.¹²

Proverbs are rather rare in the *Nabatean Agriculture*, but one does find a couple of them. “When the cat did not get the meat it comforted itself, saying that it was rotten” is given as a proverb in **Text 28**; this, of course, is a common type of proverb. “You are more

¹¹ The usual Arabic word for this is *salīkha*. See also Löw (1881), no. 295.

¹² For wisdom literature in pre-Islamic and Islamic Persia, see Shaked (1987) and Safa (1987). This genre of *Fürstenspiegel* (mirror for princes) is, of course, widely attested elsewhere, too.

intelligent than the magicians of Yemen” (**Text 34**) is given as a Greek proverb, and “You have more estates than Ṣagrīth” as a Nabatean one (NA, p. 565).

References to poems and poetry are rare but not completely lacking in the *Nabatean Agriculture*, though naturally the poems mentioned in the text are neither lyrical nor epic but have a connection with plants. The theme of the poems by Jāhūsā the Poet, whom Adam himself extolled (NA, pp. 706–707), is not specifically mentioned but one might presume that they, too, were of agricultural or botanical content. Ṣagrīth is credited with a long poem (*qaṣīda ṭawīla*) written in difficult (*munghaliq*) language, full of rare and far-fetched words (*min aqāṣī gharīb al-lughā*) which only an expert in Arabic (sic!)¹³ can understand. His book on agriculture was organized into chapters, each an independent poem (*qaṣīda*) with double rhyme (*muqaffātan min al-wajhayn*) (NA, p. 352, paralleled by NA, p. 235).¹⁴ The materials of much of this book came from Adam (NA, p. 352). Ṣagrīth is said to have spoken only in metrical form (*lam yakun yatakallamu illā bi-shīr mawzūn*; NA, p. 235), although it is not quite clear whether this should be taken to refer to his opera or to his everyday speech. The parallel passage (NA, p. 235) speaks of many poems, singling out a great poem (*qaṣīda*) and several shorter ones.

We are also told (**Text 56**) about a poem (*qaṣīda*) which Māsā as-Sūrānī extemporized (*qālahā irtijālan bi-lā rawīyya*)¹⁵ for his son Kankar, teaching him agriculture. While drinking wine in a tavern in the village of al-Bākiyānā¹⁶ in the region of Sūrā, Bādrūkā, the Poet (*ash-Shā‘ir*) lamented (*nāḥa*) in a poem (*qaṣīda*) about a vine which had been wounded by some iron tool. Part of this poem is cited in the text (NA, p. 1042). Also Ṭālā-Karnāsh wrote poems on agricultural topics, among which there were panegyrics on the olive tree, discussed below more extensively (**Text 51**). Kāmās an-Nahrī, on the

¹³ One should not make hasty conclusions about this. Usually the writer is quite unequivocal that the language used by Ṣagrīth is “Ancient Syriac,” or Nabatean, and this may well be merely a *lapsus calamae*; in the parallel passage (NA, p. 235), there is no mention of Arabic. The word *lughā* easily induces the writer or the copyist to add the word “Arabic.”

¹⁴ Ṣagrīth’s poem is also mentioned in NA, p. 372. NA, p. 237, mentions a poem by Ṣagrīth on medicine (*fī qaṣīdatihi l-kabīrati fī t-ṭibb*). Versified treatises on agriculture are already known from Antiquity, cf., e.g., Columella, *De Re Rustica* X.

¹⁵ *Bi-lā rawīyya* primarily means the same as *irtijālan*, but one might also consider the translation “without rhyme (*rawī*).”

¹⁶ Cf. Bākasāyā, for which see Yāqūt, *Muṣam* I: 327, and Vööbus (1958): 269.

other hand, wrote a poem (*shiʿr*) on the superiority of vines over all other plants, the date palm included (*fī tafdīl al-kurūm ʿalā jamīʿ al-manābit wa-ʿalā n-nakhl ayḍan*; NA, p. 915).

Many of the aetiological myths concerning plants and their cultivation are attached to ancient kings, but there are also some which are told in general terms. Thus, one finds a story about the beginning of the cultivation of garlic (NA, pp. 577–578):

Kasdānians have much to say about garlic and many stories, some of which they have in common with the Greeks (*al-Yūnāniyyūn*) who have told similar stories as the Kasdānians, namely that the origin of the garlic was that a head of garlic was found in the following way: A snake brought one head from the city known as Qarqīsyā to the bank of the Euphrates. Someone saw the snake hurrying forward with the head of garlic. When he saw that, he became curious and took a stone which he hurled at the snake. The stone hit the snake in the neck and it dropped the garlic and escaped in haste.

That man took the head of garlic and started to turn it around and wondered at it. Then he wandered down the Euphrates with it; he was coming from al-Jazīra and heading for Bābil and this happened on the way. He took the head of garlic to the land of Bābil and told people what he had seen. Some owner of an estate planted that garlic and it started to grow and produced leaves and seeds. He sowed its seeds and started to cultivate it in the way of onions. It flourished and grew numerous in the land of Bābil and ʿAqarqūfā. In the region of ancient Khusrawāyā it grew better than in Bābil and ʿAqarqūfā, and then it spread to the whole clime of Bābil.

This I have related from Yanbūshād who was most enthusiastic and prolific in the description of garlic. He mentioned that the ancient Kasdānians called it the “garlic of the snake” and said that it had been a snake which brought it (into Bābil). Yanbūshād inserted (into his book) many teachings (*fawāʿid*) and symbols (*rumūz*) which he did not tell openly. He said, however, among other things that if one habitually eats garlic according to the recipes he gave, one will live a hundred solar years.

Perhaps the most common folkloristic motive is the speaking tree or other plant (cf. **Texts 21–22, 57**).¹⁷ As trees are also manifestations and idols (*aṣnām*) of the gods, it is somewhat difficult to draw a line here between folklore and religion. Suffice it to say that the text itself

¹⁷ For speaking trees in Sufi stories, see, e.g., an-Nabhānī, *Jāmiʿ* I: 237. The theme is, of course, abundantly attested in all Near Eastern religious traditions, cf., e.g., Koenen (1979).

partly refers to these as tales (*khurāfāt*), and partly treats them seriously as religious matter. The trees often speak in a dream (cf. 4.2).

A typical story—except that the protagonist is not a tree—is the tale about a speaking watermelon (NA, p. 909):

Some of the Kasdānians (*qawm min al-Kasdāniyyīn*) have senseless tales (*khurāfāt lā maʿnā lahā*) concerning watermelons. Women and children tell such tales (*yatakharrafūna bihā*), although some people say that there is some knowledge and wisdom (*adab wa-ḥikma*) in them.

They say, for example, that a farmer (*akkār*) woke up on a moonlit night and started singing, accompanying himself on the lute (*ʿūd*). Then a big watermelon spoke to him: “You there, you and other cultivators of watermelons strive for the watermelons to be big and sweet and you tire yourselves in all different ways, yet it would be enough for you to play wind instruments and drums (*tuzammirū wa-tuṭabbilū*) and sing in our midst. We are gladdened by this and we become cheerful so that our taste becomes sweet and no diseases (*āfa*) infect us.”

(They also tell other stories) like this, but we have left them out so that we would not speak too long about something in which there is little benefit, even though there may be some benefit in it because they do not aim their tales except for the benefit of people.

Another such story concerning nabk trees is found in **Text 57**.

An extremely interesting case of speaking trees comes in the poem of Ṭālā-Karnāsh (**Text 51**) which belongs to the omnipresent Near Eastern genre of literary debate, or dispute,¹⁸ which originated already with the Sumerians, spread all over the Near East and the neighbouring regions, including Europe and Central Asia, and continues to live in various languages of the Near Eastern, and Islamic, world, especially on the Arabian Peninsula where it is still productive in oral, dialectal literature.¹⁹

The text in the *Nabatean Agriculture* is one of the earliest, at least partly preserved ones in Arabic and, if we accept its provenance from a Syriac original, an interesting piece of evidence for the existence of non-religious Syriac debates. The preserved passage is the boast of the olive. The structure of the debate would call for an invective against one or more other trees, as well as the respective

¹⁸ For the genre in general, see the articles in Reinink-Vanstiphout (1991). For Arabic tradition, see Wagner (1962), van Gelder (1987) and Hämeen-Anttila (forthcoming). Brock (1987) is extremely relevant in assessing the importance of this debate in the *Nabatean Agriculture*.

¹⁹ Cf. Holes (1995) and (1996).

answers by these and, presumably, a verdict in an epilogue by an umpire. None of these has been preserved as such, but there are throughout the book (cf. **Text 22** and below) fragments of such literary debates some of which may, or may not, come from this particular text. The poem on the superiority of the vine over all other plants by Kāmās an-Nahrī (NA, p. 915), however, should obviously be from another text.²⁰

Among the other fragments of debates, those containing the boast of the palm tree are of special interest. They may all stem from one text. One of the few preserved non-religious debates of late pre-Islamic times is the Pahlavi text *Draxt-i Asūrīg* “the Assyrian²¹ Tree,” going back to a Parthian origin, as some linguistic features in the text would seem to indicate, with due caution advised as such linguistic archaisms might also be connected with the poetic language of the text. Whatever the exact date of this text, it is definitely pre-Islamic.

Draxt-i Asūrīg is a debate between the national symbol of the Persians, the Goat, and the Assyrian Tree, the date palm, symbolizing the Mesopotamians.²² The Pahlavi text, as might be expected, ends in the victory of the Goat. The fragments of the text in the *Nabatean Agriculture* would, on the other hand, be how the Mesopotamians, Nabateans in the terminology of Ibn Waḥshiyya, would have defended their symbol. Especially the mention of the benefits of the date palm, listed in order from bottom to top (NA, p. 1340), is remarkably similar to the technique used in the *Draxt-i Asūrīg*.

Although there is no indication in the *Nabatean Agriculture* that the opponents of the Palm Tree would have been anything else than other trees, it seems obvious that the two texts belong to the same literary environment. In the *Nabatean Agriculture*, the opponent given to the date palm is, in another context, the olive (NA, p. 1406). This

²⁰ The debate between the vine and other plants is also referred to in the chapter on the vine (beginning in NA, p. 915), especially pp. 931–932. For an Islamic debate on the superiority of dates over grapes (*fī tafḍīl ar-ruṭab ‘alā l-‘inab*), see, e.g., al-Qālī, *Amālī* II: 58, claiming to go back to the time of ‘Umar but obviously much later in reality.

²¹ This has been translated by Brunner (1980) as “Babylonian”; for the text, see also the edition by Navvābī (1346 A.H.Sh). It goes without saying that for the Parthians *Asūrīg* usually referred to the area which the Mesopotamians themselves would have called Babylonia, but I find it inadvisable and confusing to translate the word so.

²² In the *Nabatean Agriculture*, p. 1341, the date palm is, however, said to have originated from Persia.

passage uses the term *mufādala*, which is one of the terms for literary debate, besides *mufākhara* and *munāzara*. In the chapter on the date palm, there are mentions of various benefits derived from it, again in the style of the *Draxt-i Asūrīg*, such as a mention of cups made of its wood (NA, p. 1414), toothpicks (NA, p. 1415), etc. What ties these—and other pre-Islamic—texts together, as against the later Arabic/Islamic texts, are also the references to cultic uses: in Arabic texts such references are obviously lacking.

The preserved Syriac debates all have Christian or philosophical content (cf. Brock 1991). This, however, is not an indication that there would not have been any other kinds of Syriac debates. On the contrary, their existence seems rather obvious but the Syriac authors tended to take good care of Christian and Greek philosophical legacy only and they were more negligent, if not outright hostile, when it came to autochthonous pagan or Greek non-philosophical literature.

According to Brock (1987): 335, “as far as we know, no Greek *synkrisis* or Syriac or Persian debates were translated into Arabic (. . .) but the genre as a mode of thought may be imagined to have lived on orally and to have passed into Arabic by way of (. . .) the *via diffusa*, the precise course of which may have differed according to the function of the genre.” The Syriac tradition provides, in fact, a necessary link between the old Mesopotamian tradition and the Arabic debate which closely resembles the Mesopotamian tradition.²³ The fragments of the debate in the *Nabatean Agriculture* would actually seem to provide us with some evidence for the existence of such non-religious Syriac debates and, at the same time, they provide us with a rare case of such texts having been translated from Syriac into Arabic in a literary form: the worth of the *Nabatean Agriculture* comes partly from the fact that it lies outside the Christian and philosophical spheres of translation and widens our perspectives as to the scope of 9th-century activities in translation. It also testifies to the variety of Syriac literature outside philosophy and Christian texts.

In addition to these debates between various plants in the *Nabatean Agriculture*, there is a text, a *risāla* by Dawānāy (**Text 11**; cf. also **Text 12**), where the clime of Bābil is favourably compared to the region of Syria and this text, too, comes close to the genre of debate.

²³ *Pace* Wagner (1962).

Another folkloristic story of some literary interest is found in **Text 58**, which tells of a courtier who is ordered by the king to kill one of the royal wives, but who spares her life and later returns her to the king and proves that he himself is impotent. This “Snow White episode”²⁴ is known from several Islamic sources, often told of the Sāsānid king Ardashīr and his courtier, and the story usually contains a reference to selfcastration by the courtier before receiving the custody of the woman to put an end to any possible gossip concerning the wife’s fidelity during the time of her absence.²⁵ The theme of selfcastration is known earlier from Lucian’s *De Syria Dea* (the story of Kombabos, 19–27), where it is told as an aetiological myth about the selfcastration of the *Galloi*. The version of Lucian, though, lacks the “Snow White episode;” here Kombabos has to castrate himself after the king has put his wife in his charge during the building of a new temple, and the courtier castrates himself, knowing that the amorous lady will bring him under suspicion if he is not be able to prove his chastity.²⁶

²⁴ Aarne-Thompson K. 512.2.

²⁵ Cf. Ritter (1978): 511, with reference to aṭ-Tabarī (see Bosworth 1999: 24–26, and Nöldeke 1879: 26–30); ps.-al-Majrīṭī, *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*, pp. 389–390 (and its translation, Ritter–Plessner 1962: 397–399; a considerable proportion of the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* is, like this passage, taken from the *Nabatean Agriculture*); al-Aḥḍab, *Dhayl Thamarāt al-awraq* II: 257–260 (here King Ardashīr has been corrupted into *malik Bahr al-Urdunn*, the King of Jordan), and ‘Aṭṭār’s *Ilāhī-nāme*, vv. 5991–6049 (*Hikāyat-i Ardashīr*, 20/4) (translated in Granata 1990: 368–371). To these one may add Firdausī, *Shāhnāma*, pp. 479–481 (translated in Levy 1985: 271–272), and ad-Dīnawarī’s *al-Akhhār aṭ-ṭiwāl*, pp. 85–86. Late Islamic variants and parallels without reference to Ardashīr are relatively easy to find, see, e.g., ‘Aṭṭār’s *Mantiq aṭ-ṭayr*, vv. 4293–4455 (translated in Avery 1998), and Chauvin (1901): 208.

In Islamic sources the story is usually told of Ardashīr-i Pāpakān and the daughter of King Ardashīr (for Artabans in Mandaean sources, see Gündüz 1994: 67). The story is found in the Pahlavi legendary history *Kāmāmag-i Ardashīr* (see Nöldeke 1878: 57–63), but without the motif of selfcastration. It may be relevant for the dating of the *Nabatean Agriculture* to draw attention to the fact that in Islamic literature the motif of selfcastration is prominent, whereas in the older Pahlavi story, as in the *Nabatean Agriculture*, it is missing. Thus, the pre-Islamic *Kāmāmag* and the *Nabatean Agriculture* seem to belong to one branch, the later Islamic versions to another.

An early, related version of this tale is found in *Ahiqar*, see, e.g., Lindenberger (1985): 496–497, which predates all other versions and provides an indigenous starting point for the development of the motif, although this version lacks any references to potential jealousy and, consequently, to selfcastration or impotence. Yet it is worth noting that the slave killed in *Ahiqar*’s stead is a eunuch.

²⁶ Note that the pre-Islamic date of the story of Ardashīr does not necessarily indicate that the story in the *Nabatean Agriculture* was taken from Persia. On the contrary, the versions of *Ahiqar* and Lucian prove that similar tales were circulating in Syria even earlier, and it may, thus, be that the story of Ardashīr itself has been

Another large group of stories are the *‘ajā’ib*, stories about the *curiosa* of foreign and faraway countries. Many of these stories are attributed to Adam, who in the *Nabatean Agriculture* is an archetypal traveller whose journeys extend to the most faraway countries.²⁷ And again, much of the interest of Adam seems to have been directed towards the flora, as is appropriate in an agronomical manual.

A cluster of such *‘ajā’ib* is found in NA, pp. 352–360, said to derive from Adam,²⁸ as quoted in a poem by Ṣaghrīth; this poem is said to have been organized so that it began with the wonders of the extreme West and proceeded thence eastwards.²⁹ These *‘ajā’ib* were told (NA, pp. 399–400) by Adam in order that the people would know the wisdom and might of the Creator (*al-Khāliq*). Some of these wonders were not, however, witnessed by him but he related them on the authority of the Indians (*ḥukiya lanā anna Ādamā kāna yaqūṣṣuhā ḥikāyatan ‘an al-Hind*; NA, pp. 519–520). Here Adam is a far echo from his Biblical namesake (cf. 3.2 and 4.1).

The reason why the curious plants about which Adam tells grow only in one place is related to the astrological conditions of each of these places (NA, p. 352). Not all curious plants grow in faraway countries, though. The special properties of the sorb (*ghubayrā’*), a common tree, include that if one makes a crown of sorb for oneself, this will cause him to be happy, or if he makes a certain talisman of it for himself, he will be favourably received wherever he goes (NA, p. 186; cf. 4.4).

In the far West, the country of al-Ankalush—which Ibn Waḥshiyya explains in a note as referring to al-Andalus³⁰—there is an island

influenced by a Syro-Mesopotamian tradition. Thus, the version of the *Nabatean Agriculture* may well be indigenous. The name Kombabos in Lucian is also highly interesting and its possible relation to either Humbaba, the monstrous guardian of the Forest of Cedars in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, or the goddess Cybele has been a matter of controversy. The version of Lucian adds a theme which is familiar from the story of Joseph—in both the Bible and the Qur’ān—itself related to ancient Egyptian predecessors. This cycle of stories exemplifies the intricate and complex web of interrelations in Near Eastern folklore and literature.

²⁷ Cf. Tubach (1986): 349–357 (the Indian excursion of Dionysus) and Ginzberg (1998) I: 174 (Aesculapius’ travel to India). The theme of travelling connects Adam also with Mani. For the travels of Adam in Islamic lore, cf. von Gutschmid (1861): 31–32.

²⁸ Adam is said to have written a thousand pages on plants growing only in one place (NA, p. 356). Cf. Androstheneas, who described foreign plants from the Indus to the Persian Gulf, see Theophrastus, *De Causis Plantarum* II.5.5 and its Preface, p. xx.

²⁹ With some passages listed in reverse order (see NA, p. 355).

³⁰ One might note that in the older, Kufi, script, *kāf* resembles *dāl*.

named Cádiz (Qādis) in the Green Sea (*al-baḥr al-akḥḍar*), where ships have never sailed. There grows a plant resembling wild rocket (*al-jūjūr al-barrī*),³¹ which is called in the local language *ashkāṭānush*. When sheep eat this plant, their milk becomes intoxicating. This milk may be used for various purposes (NA, pp. 352–353).

Near to that place, in Sijilmāthā (Sigilmassa), there is a little tree. If one makes oneself a crown of its leaves, one does not need sleep, nor does one become fatigued by sleeplessness (NA, p. 353). In Ifranja (the land of the Franks), there grows a tree which is lethal if one sits in its shade for half an hour or touches its leaves or boughs (NA, p. 353).³² On the island of the Slavs (*aṣ-Ṣaqāliba*) there grows a little plant. If its root, together with its leaves and boughs is thrown into cold water and left there for a while, the water will become scorching hot. When the root is taken away, the water becomes cool again (NA, p. 353).

In the region of Rūmiyya³³ a little tree grows. Its leaves and boughs may be pressed for their juice and the juice then left to set. When one mixes some of this with old wine and then drinks it, he will get an enormous erection and will be able to have intercourse with women as long as he wants to, without getting tired. In the case of certain symptoms, one must stop coition and if one wants the erection to subside, one must stand in cold water up to one's breast for a while so that the passion leaves one (NA, p. 353).³⁴

With this recipe, the text actually moves away from the miraculous, and continues listing recipes which do not very much differ from many of the usual recipes given in the text. The text goes on to enumerate uses of rare plants growing in a place called Ṣafānṭush in the region of the Byzantines (*bilād ar-Rūm*, NA, pp. 353–354) and in (North) Africa (Ifrīqiyya, NA, pp. 354–355). After this the geographical order of the text becomes less rigorous and one might speculate that we have here a juncture where the first source actually ends and rest of the material has another provenance.

Among the remaining wonders, one might point to an Indian plant that does not burn in fire and an Indian tree, the branches

³¹ For which, see Löw (1881), no. 66.

³² For poisons effective through sight, see Hämeen-Anttila (1999): 44, with reference to Ibn Waḥshiyya's *Sumūm*.

³³ Presumably the reference is here to Rome, not Byzantium (*bilād ar-Rūm*) which is next mentioned separately.

³⁴ Recipes for various aphrodisiacs are often given in the text.

of which squirm like snakes when cut and thrown on the ground (NA, p. 355). In the region near the origin of the north wind a tree grows which utters sounds (*hamhama*), resembling a man trying to speak, or even speaking in the language of the Indians. The roots of this plant are man-shaped, and none of them has a female shape (NA, p. 355).

In the land of al-Bākiyān, there is a tree which illuminates its surroundings like a lamp, so that the nocturnal traveller does not need any additional lights. In the vicinity, there is a major island, like the islands of Ceylon, Kalah, az-Zanj and other such large islands (NA, p. 355). There is also a brief mention of a tree that shivers during the whole winter but becomes still when spring comes (NA, p. 356).

After a deviation from the theme, the text still mentions, on Adam's authority, though without any indication of the place where it might grow, a tree of concealment (*shajarat al-khafā'*) which appears to the eye only by night, whereas it remains invisible during the day, which is due to a special property inherent in it. Qūthāmā, though, explains that this must mean that the tree leaves inhabited places during the daytime, withdrawing to the steppe. He compares this to the mandrake (*yabrūh*), which is known to grow only in uninhabited places (NA, p. 357).

Wonders related on the authority of Adam, or attributed to him, are also found elsewhere in the text. We find a mention of human-shaped pictures found on some plants, like a tree which Adam saw in India and brought back to Bābil to show to its inhabitants (NA, p. 701). In the same passage, Qūthāmā mentions human-shaped blossoms of another tree.

Another cluster of such wonder tales by Adam is found in NA, pp. 399–403. These include gigantic trees and their leaves (NA, pp. 399–400), a tree of gold in the clime of the Sun which grows near the Equator (*khatt al-istiwā'*; NA, p. 400), a tree of stone (NA, p. 400),³⁵ wood that does not burn in fire (NA, p. 401), and branches that squirm like snakes (NA, p. 401, cf. above).

Places uninhabited by men are favoured by other, supernatural creatures. These *sakā'in* take shelter in waste (*wahsha*) land which is also called the land of ghouls (*ghilān*, NA, p. 372). Incidentally, the ghouls seem rather corporeal, because the dust of such land derives

³⁵ This is an ancient folkloristic motif, first, I think, found in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, where the eponymous hero comes during his wanderings to a garden of trees bearing precious stones (XI: 170–190), in an unfortunately fragmentary passage.

special powers from the ghouls trampling on it. Ibn Waḥshiyya, though, explains this as symbolic language of the speaker, Ṣaghrīth. Thus, he takes *ghīlān* and *sakā'in* in this place to refer to winds that blow in the desert. Ibn Waḥshiyya, however, says that he has heard that the ancient Kan'ānites and Nabateans did not believe in jinnis³⁶ (NA, p. 373). In **Text 59**, ghouls³⁷ are explained as strange animals.

Adam is also depicted as a cultural hero connected with the introduction of wheat in a highly symbolic story reminiscent of Biblical themes (**Text 52**).³⁸ This legend is told in the context of a discussion of various foodstuffs and their nutritional value. The text does not only discuss the usual victuals but also gives recipes of substitute foods in case of a drought (NA, p. 587):

We mention these recipes only that they could be used in dire necessity and during severe drought and need. In the following, we will also mention what we have heard about these (substitute foods). People are accustomed to bake bread from different fruits and roots of plants, which they then eat and which nourishes their bodies. We will mention all these in their proper places, speaking about the roots of both wild and domesticated plants, some of which may be eaten after curing and preparing them, some as such, and we will also mention which of them must be cured with a long and complicated cure, which with an easy and quick one.

Partly, these substitute foods are quite rational and would obviously be valuable in the time of famine (**Text 54**), others, like some of those mentioned in **Text 52**, come closer to the *'ajā'ib* literature and the motive for discussing them is obviously to satiate the hunger for *curiosa*, rather than any physical hunger.³⁹

Whereas floral marvels are related throughout the book, animals, which fall outside the book's main theme, receive little attention. Some folkloristic notions of relations between various animals are

³⁶ The text reads HZ' but I emend this to JN' (accusative). The passage is quoted in full in section 2.

³⁷ For ghouls, see also Macdonald-[Pellat] (1965).

³⁸ These Biblical themes themselves mirror the story of Enkidu in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* where wheat is connected with wisdom. Sexuality, ale and bread not only introduce the wild man Enkidu to the society, they also alienate him from the irrational animals, in both a good and bad sense. See George (1999): 13–14, 58; cf. also Waines (1987): 257. For Adam as a cultural hero, see also **Text 44**. For the apocryphal *Life of Adam and Eve*, cf. also Dochhorn (2000) and the articles in Anderson *et al.* (2000). See also Levison (1988).

³⁹ See also Hämeen-Anttila (2005).

mentioned in the poem by Māsā (**Text 56**).⁴⁰ Another such story is told by Ṭāmīthrā (NA, pp. 1069–1070):

Ṭāmīthrā has mentioned here concerning vines that when they attain to this age⁴¹ there may be observed in them a sign of return to rejuvenation and (new) life as well as a sign of death and perishing. When Anūhā wrote him a letter, asking him to leave the service of the Seven and to serve the One God of Gods, Ṭāmīthrā answered him, arguing against him and explaining why he did not accept his view. Among his arguments was the following:

“The Sun has selected for survival one species (*shakhs*) from each of the three genera on earth or upon its face, namely animals, plants and minerals, and he has preserved them forever, rejuvenating them after having been worn away and making them return to life after having died and born again after decrepitude.”

Ṭāmīthrā said that from among animals the Sun selected for survival the snake called the adder (*thuḥbān*), which lives forever.⁴² When it becomes decrepit, it is rejuvenated and when it becomes very old, it returns to youth. After seven thousand years, it sprouts two wings and it can fly with these wings in the air like a bird. Ṭāmīthrā mentioned the reason for this and then he went on to describe how it is rejuvenated after decrepitude by something it does. We have explained this in the beginning of this book. We have also mentioned it in the *Book of the Differences of the Natures of Animals and Their Fates* (*Kitāb Ikhtilāf ṭabāʿi al-ḥayawān wa-maṣīrātihā*). The mineral⁴³ selected (for eternal life) contains a long story which we need not mention because we are speaking here about vines.

An interesting case is the story of the creation of an artificial man. In Jewish tradition there are several stories about the creation of an artificial man, and after the sixteenth century one of these stories became well known as the Golem of Prague.⁴⁴ Jewish sources also often mention the creation of a calf by different Rabbis.

The creation of an artificial man obviously has at least some

⁴⁰ Cf. also **Text 50** where these are analysed in terms of special properties.

⁴¹ Above, it has been explained (NA, pp. 1068–1069) how vines first grow for 49 (7×7) years to attain their fullness, then in the next 49 years they start declining and the following 49 years are their old age and decrepitude, after which they still remain for another 7 years. Finally, they start to wither away at the age of 154 years.

⁴² The theme of eternally living snakes is of ancient origin. Already the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (Tablet XI) explains this in an aetiological myth.

⁴³ The plant that is eternal is the vine.

⁴⁴ In the following, I am using the word Golem for all Jewish artificial men, irrespective of whether the actual sources call them so. It should be realized that the name Golem is standardized relatively late in Jewish tradition. For some folkloristic and literary aspects of the Golem tradition, see Tuovinen (2005).

Ancient pagan parallels, such as the drawing down of spirituality onto statues,⁴⁵ yet creating an artificial man obviously differs from drawing down spirituality. Likewise, a favourite theme in Christian literature, the animation of statues by various tricks⁴⁶ as a scheme by idolators, may have contributed to the theme of the artificial man, but it is again clearly distinct from the case we find in the *Nabatean Agriculture*,⁴⁷ as is also the man created out of thin air by Simon Magus.⁴⁸

The *Nabatean Agriculture* discusses the creation of an artificial man in the context of spontaneous generation, especially in NA, pp. 1318ff. Belief in spontaneous generation as such was, of course, the rather widely accepted “scientific” view of the day;⁴⁹ Aristotle readily accepts the concept of spontaneous generation and, moreover, provides examples of it in his *De Generatione Animalium*.⁵⁰ Aristotle’s examples are, of course, from the simplest forms of animal life, like oysters (763b), but the principle of spontaneous generation was a truth for Aristotelians and could easily be widened to include all generation without seed, including the creation of artificial beings. Greek authors, in general, did acknowledge the possibility of spontaneous generation but were usually not particularly keen on dwelling on the subject.⁵¹

⁴⁵ See in general Idel (1990): 3–8. One should in this context note especially the story about Prometheus (Idel 1990: 4) which, to some extent, reminds one of the creation of the first man in Jewish sources.—On the illusory raising of the dead in Mediaeval Western necromancy, see Kieckhefer (2000): 158.

⁴⁶ See Trombley (1993–94) I: 14–15. Bevan (1940) is also still valuable. Cf. also Kraus (1942–1943) II: 119–134, and Travaglia (2003): 326–327.

⁴⁷ Modern stories about zombies and, e.g., Frankenstein’s monster, also differ from the creation of an artificial man as they focus on the reanimation of dead bodies. Paracelsus’ *homunculus* (see Scholem 1973: 226, and Idel 1990: 185–186) is also too late to be considered here and may furthermore be itself dependent on Jewish tradition.

In Islamic tradition, vivifying dead bodies for a short period is almost a prerogative of Jesus. For stories about Jesus raising the dead, see Hämeen-Anttila (1998): 175–198 (in Finnish). For an interesting Norse parallel, a man made out of driftwood and then animated, see Kieckhefer (2000): 43. The lethal use of this man reminds one of a calf put to similar use in Ibn Waḥshīyya’s *Sumūm*, see Hämeen-Anttila (1999): 44.

⁴⁸ See Scholem (1973): 226, and Idel (1990): 5–6.

⁴⁹ Ibn Ṭufayl, too, mentioned the notion of spontaneous generation and actually gave it as a possible explanation for the birth of his Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān—although he partially withdraws this and offers an alternative theory. See Gauthier (1936): 20–24, translated in Goodman (1972): 103–105. For Jābirian ideas of generation, see Kraus (1942–1943) II: 97–134, and I: 96, 145, 153.

⁵⁰ See Index, s.v. *spontaneous generation*, and, especially, 761b–763a. For the Arabic history of this book, see, e.g., Ullmann (1972): 8–9.

⁵¹ Cf., e.g., Theophrastus, *De Causis Plantarum* I.1.2; I.5; IV.4.10 (plants); IV.15.4 (animals).

Balīnūs, on the other hand, explicitly denies in his *Sirr* V.1.3 (Weisser 1980: 128) the possibility of spontaneous generation of any higher animals after the initial first creation. Most animals may be generated after that only through their usual ways of procreation. Later, *Sirr* VI.2.2 (Weisser 1980: 135), he ties the spontaneous generation of lower animals together with their lack of a living soul: as they consist only of matter, they may be spontaneously generated, whereas humans cannot be generated in that way as they have a living soul. The inability of the generated man, and other higher animals, in the *Nabatean Agriculture*, to speak, seems to be connected with this idea.

In the *Nabatean Agriculture*, the author shows a strong interest in crossbreeding and grafting. In a separate chapter,⁵² he discusses cases of spontaneous generation of plants, which he attributes to the effect of nature (*tabīʿa*) (**Text 41**). The main aim of this chapter is practical; the author gives many recipes as to how the farmer may generate useful plants which he is lacking. As is usually the case, the recipes alternate between natural and magical ones; the author himself is aware of the clear distinction between the two categories (see, e.g., NA, pp. 1351, 1385–1386). In all cases of generation, the author believes in the generation of something out of something else, not *ex nihilo* (cf. 3.3 and **Text 42**).

Up to this point, the author has concentrated on plant generation—after all, despite the enormous quantity of other materials, the work is a manual on agriculture.⁵³ In NA, p. 1318, he proceeds to discuss the generation of animals and starts to discuss the case of an artificial man (see **Text 42**). The text goes on in the repetitive and slightly numbing way of the author, who often repeats himself. He says that ʿAnkabūthā added many interesting details to what was in the *Book of the Secrets of the Sun*, but the author refrains from repeating them. ʿAnkabūthā also mentioned that he had generated a sheep which had emerged totally white, and which was like the generated man: it could neither bleat nor eat, although it did open and close

⁵² There are also elsewhere many brief references to spontaneous generation, crossbreeding and the generation of new plants, e.g., NA, pp. 1070–1071, 1094, etc.

⁵³ In general, the *Nabatean Agriculture* is remarkably similar in tenor to the so-called *Wolfsthum handbook* (see Kieckhefer 2000: 2–3), combining magic with down-to-earth practicality.

its eyes.⁵⁴ In this connection, the author mentions a chapter on closing and opening eyes (*bāb taḡhmūd al-‘ayn wa-faṭḥihā*).

Later, says the author, Ṣabyāthā would have wanted to repeat the feat of ‘Ankabūthā, but the king commanded him to commit himself to making talismans because that was more beneficial for people and the generation of an artificial man was of no use⁵⁵—obviously, the technique of ‘Ankabūthā must have been less sophisticated than that of the high Rabbi Löw of Prague, who could make his Golem do his daily chores.⁵⁶ The author adds that, according to his opinion, the king was acting according to common interests as the artificial man had been used for bewildering and startling works (*li-anna hādā l-insān wa-ghayrahu min al-ḥayawān qad yu‘mal bihā a‘mālan muhawwisatan li’n-nās mud’hisatan lahum*), which had been a cause of sedition (*fitna*). Unfortunately, the author does not clarify what he means by this. Yet this does again bring the story closer to the Golem legends.⁵⁷

The first to generate animals⁵⁸ was (NA, p. 1319) the messenger of the Sun, i.e., Asqūlūbiyā,⁵⁹ whom the author dates before Adam. He also dates ‘Ankabūthā himself, whom he calls the leader (*imām*) of the magicians (*saḥara*), long before Adam (NA, p. 1447). Here one is reminded of the demiurge in Gnostic myth, who created the body of Adam but was unable to make him fully alive. One wonders what Gnostic ideas might ultimately lie behind this story.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ For the creation of a calf by Rava and Rabbi Zeira, see Idel (1990): 19; see also Scholem (1973): 218–219.

⁵⁵ Cf. Scholem (1973): 231, on the lack of any practical use of the artificial calf. Scholem, though, wished to see the original Golem as a “mystische Erfahrung” (e.g., p. 239) and he accordingly minimized any function the artificial creatures could have had in real life. His comments must thus be taken critically.

⁵⁶ The Golem as a magical servant appears for the first time among the German Hasidim of the Late Middle Ages, see Scholem (1973): 253.

⁵⁷ In Jewish texts, the creation of a Golem by Enosh resulted in idolatry, see Idel (1990): 32–33.

⁵⁸ Adam, on the other hand, was the first to generate plants (NA, p. 1319). He wrote the results down in his book *The Mysteries of the Moon (Asrār al-Qamar)*, which is preserved by the Sethians and others (NA, pp. 1325–1326). For Māsā as-Sūrānī and his recension of Adam’s *Kitāb at-Tawliḍāt*, see NA, pp. 1333–1334.

⁵⁹ It is interesting to note that the animation of statues is one of the themes of the Hermetic tractate *Asclepius* (see esp. 23–24), cf. Travaglia (2003): 324.

⁶⁰ For references to the Gnostic story of the lower beings trying to create a man, see Idel (1990): 30 and note 17. According to *Midrash Avkir*, quoted and translated by Idel (1990): 35, God himself first made Adam to the stage of Golem, but postponed blowing a soul into him until everything else was created, thus avoiding the

He further states (NA, p. 1319) that, afterward, people successfully repeated the generation of both animals and plants, but then he adds a somewhat enigmatic sentence:

But do not think that any of those who claim wisdom and sagacity (*al-hikam wa'l-fiṭan*) have ever been able to do this. It has never even crossed their minds (*lā khaṭara lahum 'alā bāl*).

The text is often polemical against various subgroups, including magicians (*saḥara*) and the Sethians,⁶¹ but whether this refers to either of these groups or is a veiled allusion to some other groups, like Greek philosophers, remains unclear.⁶² In any case, the “people” who successfully generated both plants and animals refers to “us,” i.e., the Nabateans (or the ancient Nabateans, *qudamā' an-Nabaṭ*) who are, with the exception of the Copts (*al-Qibṭ*), the originators of all talismanic and magical wisdom (NA, p. 1319).

The author proceeds by repeating his assertion that the generation of animals imitates the work of Nature (*innamā huwa ka-'amal aṭ-ṭabī'a*), which does not contradict the repeated assurance that 'Ankabūthā and others had a good knowledge of the talismanic and magical arts, as in general the magic in the text is natural magic.

The author now continues by explaining the transformations involved in generating plants and animals from other substances through natural processes, which are ultimately caused by the four primary qualities and their combinations in the four elements (NA, p. 1321), i.e., they are firmly anchored to the Aristotelian *Elementenlehre*. Ultimately, generation (*takwīn, tawlīd*) is a cognate of change (*akh li-mā'nā naql al-ashyā' ba'dihā ilā ba'd*),⁶³ which he further explains by taking up the case of the spontaneous generation of wasps, scorpions, snakes and other creeping animals (NA, p. 1322).

The author seems, however, to be somewhat on the defensive when it comes to the generation of man. He is keen to show that the gen-

danger that it could be said that Adam was His companion in the work of Creation. Also according to *Leviticus Rabba*, quoted and translated by Idel (1990): 34, God first made Adam into a Golem before blowing a soul into him.

⁶¹ One of the most interesting passages containing criticism of the Sethians is translated in **Text 43**.

⁶² The identification of the various groups mentioned in the text is, again, very problematic and great caution should be exerted not to haphazardly identify them on the basis of superficial similarities.

⁶³ Later, p. 1324, the author refers to generation as happening through change and transformation (*bi'l-istiḥāla wa'l-inqilāb min shay' ilā shay' ākhar*).

eration of man is ultimately similar to the generation of plants and lower animals (NA, p. 1322) and later (**Text 61**) he mentions legendary stories concerning the spontaneous generation of men in distant lands. In the Sea of India (*Baḥr al-Hind*), close to Ceylon (*Sarandīb*) every spring a hand (*yad*)⁶⁴ comes out of the water. This event has been reliably reported by an eyewitness for many years, the hand being each year of a different colour, which proves that the spontaneous generation occurs anew each year; the hand is not the same each time. There are also in the (same?) sea, fish which either have the shape of a woman (which is the more usual case) or a man, and the fishermen periodically catch these with their nets. This is also well known, and the bearded ones are called “the doctor of the sea” (*ṭabīb al-baḥr*).⁶⁵

In China (**Text 61**), there is a mountain and a lake from where shouts may be heard in the spring. The mountain itself produces balls of clay which, when cut in half, reveal a man and a woman inside. The mountainmen are otherwise perfect, except that they do not move, or speak or feel anything. They simply fall out like dead bodies. The local people tend to take some clay from this mountain and let it putrefy (*yuʿaffinūnahu*) until it becomes a complete man, alive and moving. After he begins to move, the artificial man will live for a day, sometimes a little longer, sometimes a little less, after which he will “die” (*yatfā*, for *yatfaʿ*) instantaneously.

The author also (NA, pp. 1322–1323, partly translated in **Text 61**) deflects any questions of disbelief because this miraculous event does not take place every day: what has not been seen, should not be rejected out of hand. When an intelligent man hears something being described which he has never seen, he should pause to consider the matter without either immediately accepting or denying the veracity of the thing described.

It may be that the story of generating an artificial man owes at least something to an extrapolation of the general theory. If plants and lower animals can be generated and if the ultimate reason for this possibility lies in the four primary qualities and the elements, then

⁶⁴ Note that the word used is *yad*, not *kaff*; the latter would lend itself easily to a wordplay in Persian with *kaf* “foam” (e.g., in Rūmī, *Dīvān* VI, verse 32529), which might create such a legend.

⁶⁵ The *ṭabīb al-baḥr* is, as far as I know, only known from the Jābirian corpus (see Kraus 1942–1943, II: 90, n. 4; translation of the passage from *kūāb as-Sabʿīn*—the original text is published in Kraus 1935: 485–488—is found on pp. 91–93; cf. also Kraus 1942–1943 I: 58, no. 182, and I: 107, no. 631).

the same should be possible in the case of higher animals, including man himself, as is rather explicitly stated in NA, p. 1322, where the author explains why it is possible to generate men, too, as well as other higher animals, such as cows, camels, donkeys and predatory animals.⁶⁶

After this, the author returns to the generation of plants and reformulates several times his basic idea of the four primary qualities and the elements, these being the ultimate cause of these changes.

What is interesting is that the generation of man is not described as a magical act, despite the reference to 'Ankabūthā's abilities as a talisman maker and magician. We are, strictly speaking, within the limits of *Naturwissenschaft*. In the case of generating plants, the author does make passing reference to astrology and the effects of the celestial bodies, as in the case of talismans (NA, p. 1331). But even this stays within the limits of *Naturwissenschaft*, as the effects of the celestial bodies are natural and they are not invoked as deities, as they are in magical actions. They merely have an effect because of their location in the sky.

The stories of artificial men and animals in the work of Ibn Waḥshiyya and the Rabbinic sources seem similar enough to warrant serious consideration of their possible genetic links.⁶⁷ Whereas the dating of the *Nabatean Agriculture* is extremely problematic, its geographic setting is more than clear. The author is remarkably consistent in naming places in the area extending from around ancient Nineveh to Southern Iraq. Sūrā, the seat of a Rabbinic academy,⁶⁸

⁶⁶ In Ibn Waḥshiyya, *Sumūm*, there is a magical recipe for creating a calf, the sight of which is lethal, see Hāmeen-Anttila, (1999): 44.

⁶⁷ Idel (1990): xxii, sees Golem as "one more example of the different results of the various encounters of ancient Jewish traditions and alien types of thought." The opinion of this leading authority on the Kabbalah is worth keeping in mind when discussing the possible influences between our text and the Jewish sources, although Idel obviously had Hellenistic sources in mind. Scholem, on the other hand, tends to see Jewish mysticism as a much more intra-Jewish phenomenon but, as later research has shown, external contacts with other Near Eastern patterns of thought should not be underestimated.

⁶⁸ It should be remembered that, e.g., the highly learned Sa'adyā (ibn Yūsuf al-Fayyūmī, the Gaon) started teaching in the Talmudic academy of Sūrā just a few years before the death of Ibn Waḥshiyya, in 928 (Peters 1968: 152 and note 75). The case of Maimonides proves clearly that Jewish authors were aware of, and interested in, the Nabatean, or Chaldaean (Kasdānian), wisdom transmitted by Ibn Waḥshiyya, as it was tied together with Abraham. Part III, esp. chapters 29–30, of Maimonides' *Dalāla* (Friedländer 1904: 315–321) shows how extensively Maimonides had read the *Nabatean Agriculture* and how seriously he took the book.—Incidentally, this was also the first source to bring Ibn Waḥshiyya and the Nabateans to the

features prominently in the text, especially in the form of personal names (Māsā as-Sūrānī is the most often quoted Sūrānian). Thus, it is clear that the book comes from an area where Jewish literary activities also took place.

The obvious similarities and the possible channel of transmission being indicated, it remains to ask in which direction might the possible influences have travelled. This, though, is not easy to answer, not least due to the problems involved in dating the *Nabatean Agriculture* itself.

The early history of Golem is not satisfactorily known, either. The oldest passage on artificial man in Jewish literature comes from the Babylonian Talmud,⁶⁹ where we are first told that the righteous might create a world and that Rava did, in fact, create an artificial man whom he sent to Rabbi Zeira. This created man, however, lacked the power of speech, and, implicitly, the higher mental faculty (*neshamah*), and when Rabbi Zeira noticed this, he turned the Golem back to dust.⁷⁰

Idel (1990): 29–30, argues very coherently for a Palestinian origin for this passage, yet his argumentation is not conclusive. In the light of the *Nabatean Agriculture*, the question might need serious reconsideration. Yet even if the passage did originate in Palestine, TB, Sanhedrin, fol. 65b, shows that it was well known in Talmudic times in Babylonia, too, and could thus have influenced the sources of Ibn Waḥshiyya—or have been influenced by them.

Thus, the links between the Golem and the artificial man of the *Nabatean Agriculture* have to be left an open question, although one cannot ignore this text in studies of Rabbinic Judaism. With the artificial man and with many other marginal phenomena of Judaism local paganism needs to be taken into account, and the Nabatean corpus is of central importance as one of the extremely few testimonies of paganism of the era.

attention of European scholars, even before Chwolsohn's activities (see 1.1). There seems to have been a mediaeval Spanish translation of the *Nabatean Agriculture* (see Travaglia 2003: 330, and note 44) but this was lost after 1626 and left no traces in literature. The names of Ibn Waḥshiyya and the Nabatean authors were, of course, known through other agronomical works quoting them, but the magico-religious contents of the book remained little known.

⁶⁹ TB, Sanhedrin, fol. 65b, quoted and translated by Idel (1990): 38 and note 3.

⁷⁰ Idel (1990): 27. Incidentally, the translation “magicians” for *ḥavayya*, against which Idel (1990): 27–28, argues in favour of “junior scholars of the Talmudic academy in Tiberias” (p. 28) would fit in well with Ibn Waḥshiyya's work. Unfortunately, though, Idel's argumentation seems rather convincing.

Text 51 (NA, pp. 51–53)

[the Debate of the Olive with Other Trees]

Ṭālā-Karnāsh has devoted many of his poems which he composed (*allafā*) about agriculture, to eulogizing (*madāʾiḥan* [sic] *kathīratan*) the olive tree. If we related (*hikāya*) all of them, it would take a long time. He has even told that this tree vied (*fākharat*) with all other trees and boasted (*iftakharat*) to all plants saying:

I live longer than you (pl.) and I am stronger than you. I can stand drought better than you and I can stand better than you the misery (*qashaf*) caused by thirst because my wood is hard and oily and my leaves are evergreen and I do not shed them like you shed your leaves. The green colour of my leaves does not change over the years; even if one of them turns yellow, I will bring forth another one, forever.

Lack of irrigation does not harm me as much as it harms you. Who cultivates and grows me will not be disappointed in my nobility, my persistence and my health. If you let fire burn some of my parts, the ashes have many uses and this compensates for losing me.

I am the oily one, whose oil resembles gold in colour and is a cure against ninety-eight different illnesses and maladies. No other oil gives strength to the heart and makes the back strong and causes joy to the soul.

I am the blessed one:⁷¹ if one acquires some of my branches, leaves or fruits and safeguards them in his house, he will not undergo any misfortunes, worries or distress; he will lead with his family a most pleasant life. I will drive away from him the feeling of desolation and melancholical whisperings and bad phantasms (*al-khayālāt ar-radīʾa*).

I am the blessed one: if one looks at me every day at sunrise and embraces me with his arms and draws me to himself, to him will I cause joy and make him happy and protect him, with god's permission (*bi-idhn al-ilāh*) for that day, from all sufferings, worries, diseases and sorrows as well bad phantasms.

I am the one who remains forever as long as I find nourishment. I am the mother of permanence (*baqāʾ*) and blackness (*waʾd-dalam-*

⁷¹ Cf. Q 24: 35 (*shajara mubāraka zaytūna*) and 95: 1.

lamātī).⁷² I am the heavy one, the stable, patient one against time itself (*as-sābiratu d-dahra kullahu*). I am the tree of Saturn, the heavy, the slow-moving, the eternal (*as-sarmadī*) and he gives me life from his life and permanence from his permanence, heaviness from his heaviness and blackness (*sawād*) from his blackness, and the fragrance of life from his fragrance in moist soil (*fī th-tharā*).

I have an abode (*mathwā*) in every climate (*hawā*²) and a home (*manzil*) in every land (*al-arḍ*). I drive away from my neighbours the violations of the *sakīnas* (*ta'addiya s-sakā'in*) and I prefer them⁷³ to human beings.

I am the greatest and grandest name of my god Saturn. I live in every holy and blessed land (*fī kulli arḍin muqaddasatin mubāraka*).⁷⁴ Because of me and my (lofty) station some countries are holy and some regions blessed. I am the one through whom all desolate ones find intimacy and I am the one who dispels the calamities of the unfortunate. I am the idol of Saturn: if one prostrates himself in front of me every day three times and prays three prayers for me and sacrifices three sacrifices to me, him I will let live with my god the life of righteousness⁷⁵ and at the time of entering into the belly of his winter residence (*al-mashtā*) I will let him enter (*adrajtuhu*) without vermin (*dabīb*) or decay and without dismemberment⁷⁶ because at the time of his burial, if I am buried together with him, a part of me with each part of his, then his body will never decay.

I make the ruins prosper and because of me the clime of the land of Persia and the abodes⁷⁷ of the *Jarāmiqa* and the Sūrānians are excellent. Through me the Colourful One, the Excellent One for people was exalted so that he became adored and glorified, treasured and revered, magnified among all nations, that Permanent and Eternal (*as-sarmadī*) One who does not vanish or perish or change for all eternity, the Everlasting (*khālid*) like I am everlasting, the Eternal like

⁷² The translation is conjectural. For the blackness of the olive, cf. **Text 7**. We might also consider emending *wā'd-dalamlamātī* (W³LDLMLM²TY) to *wālidat al-X* (W³LDT²L-). The variants show that the copyists themselves did not quite understand this.

⁷³ The text refers to the *sakīnas* in fem. pl.: *wa-akhtāruhumma*.

⁷⁴ Cf. Q 24: 35, the Verse of the Light (*āyat an-nūr*).

⁷⁵ The text reads al-KShWN², which might be a corrupt form of the Syriac *kēnūthā* "righteousness".

⁷⁶ The corruption of the body is a major cause of anxiety in the *Nabatean Agriculture*, see 4.6.

⁷⁷ I read <ma>*sākīn*.

the eternity of my god. Souls delight because of him and hearts rejoice when seeing him and the innermost hearts (*muḥaj*) yearn for him like the camel yearns for its young.

If one comes to me magnifying me and knowing my worth, him I will let live the whole of his life in delight and comfort. To me belongs the first of days and the most noble of the mansions, the most ancient (*aqdam*) of graves (? *ḥafā'ir*), the yellowest and the reddest of gold,⁷⁸ the most permanent and well-preserved of vegetables, the largest and widest of rivers, the coolest of winds, the choicest of directions, the highest of spheres, the longest of locks and the richest and mightiest of states.

Does any honour come even close to mine? Or does someone's description come close to mine? Or does one see anything on earth like me as a depositary and an asylum (*mustaqarr*)? Or is there anything that stands upright towards the sky (*fi l-hawā' dhāhib wa-mustaqīm*) like I do? I have attained all nobility and all excellence is perfect in me and perfection has become complete in me. If one worships me, he will profit, and if one turns away from me, he will become disappointed.

Text 52 (NA, pp. 448–453)

In regions far away from the clime of Bābil, some nations (*umam min an-nās*) eat lupin bread and bread made of durra only, bread made of broad bean flour, bread made of (the acorns of) evergreen oak (*ballūt*) and other similar things. Some of them dry fish, grind it, bones and all, to powder and then bake it and eat.⁷⁹ These are not city dwellers; nay, most of them live in the deserts and steppes.

Some of them also eat bread made of colocynth paste (*taḥīn*) or from other worthless herbs. Some dry truffles, so we have heard, and make flour of them and make from this bread which they eat. Some dry cotton (*quṭn*) and bake bread which they eat whereas, so we have heard, other nations in one part of the country of the Arabs

⁷⁸ *Az-zaryābāt* (with variants). Cf. Lane, s.v. and Steingass, s.v. *zar-āb*. It would also be possible to understand this in a metaphorical sense as “wine” (for which, see Steingass, s.v.). See also Dozy, s.v.

⁷⁹ This was already known to Herodotus (1.200) as a Babylonian habit. In general, it seems that there may have been some kind of link, probably indirect, connecting the author of the Syriac original to Herodotus.

which is called Yemen grind cattle and sheep hides during drought and they bake from this bread which they eat. In the country between Syria and Hijaz there are people who grind the bones of various animals. They eat them after having baked them, mixed with some plants growing in the desert.

All that we have told, and many other similar things, nourish the body, but they are different as to their nutritive value and the damage they cause. They are not suitable for the human constitution (*tibāʿ*) at all. When one eats them regularly, though, his nature (*tabīʿa*) and his stomach do get used to them, so that his body does accept them and changes them into blood which nourishes the members with suitable nourishment, because of the accustomed habit.

Yet, those who nourish themselves with what we have mentioned are lean, they have less flesh and their rational faculty is corrupt and limited. So it is also with those Indians who eat rice (as their staple diet), and that people which Adam mentioned who live around the clime of the Sun. He has said that their diet is of meat only,⁸⁰ with raisins⁸¹ and grapes; he said that vineyards are plentiful in that region.

Adam said: They dry different kinds of meat, especially bird meat because they have very big birds. They slaughter these in the legal way (*li-yudhakkūnahā biʿdh-dhabh*). Then they cut the meat into strips which they dry (*yūqaddidūn*) as they also do with sheep; they raise sheep and cattle and other animals. They cut, he said, their meat and let it dry well. Then they dry raisins well and mix them together. Then they grind it all in various mills. Adam said that they are the most dexterous people in using mills and their skill with them exceeds that of other nations.

They grind the dried meat together with raisins and bake bread of this paste without an oven, in pits dug in the earth or they may also cook them. Then they eat this with broth (*hasw*) and *kabūlā*⁸²

⁸⁰ Cf. also NA, p. 1468.

⁸¹ The author elsewhere describes quite realistically the use of raisins as substitute food and he seems to be describing real habits of people cultivating vines. He tells us (NA, p. 646) how raisins are roasted on a low fire and ground to bake bread after having been mixed with wheat, barley or some other flour. This, he continues, is of low nutritional value because of the recurrent drying of the food (grapes are dried to get raisins, raisins are roasted so that they may be ground). Vine leaves, he adds, may also be used in extreme conditions—obviously he is ignorant of the use of vine leaves for dolmas and similar dishes.

⁸² This word is not found in the WKAS. In az-Zabīdī, *Tāj* 30: 312, *kabūlāʿ* is explained as *ʿaṣīda*.

and get their nourishment from this. Due to this diet, their bodies grow stronger and more corpulent than the bodies of peoples in India and China. Adam said: If there were not between them and the region of India a wide desert they would have driven the Indians out of their country because they are exceedingly strong and powerful. Their animals graze on grasses that grow in their country. They dry these and feed their sheep, cattle, horses and donkeys with these grasses, both dry and fresh.

Adam also said that wheat and barley grow in this country to the height of trees, becoming two or three times a man's height. Yet this people did not cultivate or harvest them because in their country there are winged snakes which fly like birds.⁸³ Their bodies are big, about the size of the largest falcons. These snakes seek shelter among the wheat and barley plants and eat their grains. They also eat meat and hunt small animals and devour them.

These snakes keep the people away from most of their trees and fruits because they are lethally poisonous: their poison kills instantly, and they kill by spitting (*bi-naḥkhihā*) their poison. When someone feels the poison in his body, he knows for sure that he will die and his relatives will start preparing for the burial. They do have, however, a cure for the poison of these snakes which has to be drunk instantaneously, but it is extremely disgusting (*karīḥ*) and some of them prefer death to that cure.

As they felt compassion for him, they forbade Adam to draw close to the wheat and barley trees because of the snakes which spit (their poison) on everyone they can; the snakes also lay eggs and hatch them.⁸⁴ Their poison is in the spittle, which is generated in their mouths. If one of these snakes bites a tree or a branch or fruit, or if it touches anything with its mouth, and this object touches someone's body, he will die either instantly or after a short while.

⁸³ These poisonous winged snakes resemble very closely those mentioned in Ullmann (1994), no. 79, where Hermes tells his disciple Asqulābiyūs about them. Winged snakes are encountered already in Herodotus (2.75 and 3.107) but they are naturally rather common in other stories, too, deserving even entries in Arne-Thompson's *Motif-Index*, such as D950.0.1 (Magic tree guarded by serpent). A531.2 (Culture hero banishes snakes) is also of relevance for the present story. Flavius Josephus, *Antiquitatum Iudaicarum* II.245–246 (Moses and flying serpents) is probably ultimately and at least partly dependent on Herodotus. See also section 5.

⁸⁴ This comes somewhat abruptly. As may be seen from the translation (which has in a few places been slightly stylized for more fluency), the style of Ibn Waḥshiyya is often clumsy and repetitive.

Adam has said: When I had told them that my diet in my country was bread, baked from wheat or barley, and that my soul (*nafs*) compelled me to follow my habit and that my body would not remain strong if I ate what they did before becoming accustomed to it, they forbade me to draw close to these trees (without any precautions). They told me that I should try to find my way to this wheat and to collect some of it.

I said that I would show them how that would happen. I laid in ambush for the snakes and shot one of them with an arrow which I had made.⁸⁵ It hit it in its belly and the snake fell down, writhing until it died. These snakes never die a natural death. When it had died, I pulled the arrow out and shot another snake which also fell, writhing until it died. The arrow became intensely black from the strength of their poison which the arrow absorbed after having hit the bellies of the two snakes.

I took the arrow and buried it. Then I took another arrow and shot a third snake, and it happened as with the other two. Then I took some dates from a palm which grows in their country and extracted their stones. I burned and ground them and moistened the paste with an oil which they had. With this I smeared the bodies of the three snakes so that they became pitch-black. Then I crucified the snakes on three canes without touching them.⁸⁶ These I set around the wheat trees.

The living snakes fled far from these dead, black snakes crucified on canes because they had never seen one of their kind dead and crucified. There was an area of many (square) parasangs (*farāsikh*) where a lot of this wheat and barley grew, and numerous grains had fallen between the trees. The people wondered at seeing the snakes fleeing far from this place. They were also very happy and even started to prostrate themselves before me when they met me walking on the road or somewhere else.

I remained patient for a while until there was a great rain which washed clean these trees and the scattered grains. Now the snakes no longer stayed there or drew close to (the wheat trees) or ate their

⁸⁵ It remains unclear whether arrows were a novelty in the region.

⁸⁶ For the crucifixion, cf. *Numeri* 21: 4–9. The crucified serpent was also taken into alchemist imagery, cf., e.g., illustrations in De Pascalis (1995): 88, 110. The symbolism of a crucified snake may also have been influenced by Asclepian symbolism.

grains.⁸⁷ After three days had elapsed and the soil and the trees had become dry, I told them to collect the grains. They collected a great heap although they were afraid of the poison of the snakes, but I reassured them and encouraged them. Then I told them to grind the grains in their mills, and built them a great oven. I kneaded a dough, leavened it and baked bread which I ate together with them. They were overjoyed and happy and made that day their feast and they will hold this feast forever.

After this, they prostrated themselves even more before me and did everything I had done: they shot the snakes with arrows and killed many of them. They learned how to collect the grain after rainfall and, after I had taught them, they knew how to sow. Wheat became (a part of) their diet and they liked it and their reason came back to them; earlier they had been negligent like animals (*bahā'im*). When they started eating wheat bread, their rational faculty grew and their thoughts became clearer.⁸⁸ They had walked around naked but now they were ashamed of one another and their rational faculty changed from what it had been with their earlier diet.⁸⁹

Then I taught them to harvest cotton; in their country, there grew all the plants which grow in the other climes. I showed them how to spin and weave and they learnt this. Earlier they had used thin hides of which they had made clothes,⁹⁰ as well as great leaves, each of which was so big that it could have covered two men. When they started to spin, weave and wear clothes, they became happy, intelligent and discerning.

⁸⁷ As they were so poisonous, they would have (re)poisoned the trees, had they eaten some of the grain.

⁸⁸ For the influence of the diet on the rational faculty, see also NA, p. 1469.

⁸⁹ The theme of knowledge and shame is, of course, reminiscent of the Bible. What Adam actually does is to instruct them to eat of this Tree of Knowledge. The syncretistic tone of the story is typical of the *Nabatean Agriculture*. The author uses Biblical themes and motifs but gives them a new twist. Instead of the Fall, we actually see the great benefit of eating from the Tree of Knowledge.

Wheat as the Tree of Knowledge is known from Rabbinic sources, see Ginzberg (1998) V: 97. What is interesting is that the gigantic size of its stalks is also mentioned in Jewish sources ("which grew on stalks as tall as the cedars of Lebanon"). In Islamic sources, wheat as the forbidden fruit is mentioned in, e.g., 'Aṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, v. 2891.

⁹⁰ A few lines earlier, they were said to have been stark naked. The whole passage resembles a myth of the beginning of civilization, set in a remote scene. The difference with the version of Genesis, besides the changes in the roles of the various characters, is, of course, that this version does not claim to tell the story of the beginning of all mankind but merely of one people.

They decided to make me their (new) king, but their king was very envious and started arguing against them, saying: “Why do you depose me and make your king this man who has harmed you, without benefitting you.⁹¹ He has given you a diet which has made you intelligent and discerning so that you worry more than you rejoice and feel ashamed of one another!” They wanted to kill the (former) king but I forbade them and ordered them to drive him away to the steppe, which they did.⁹²

I had made up my mind to stay in that clime because it is the most agreeable country on earth and full of wonders. Then it occurred to me that I should return to my own country and my soul moved me to return. So I left their country but took with me many curious things from there: their country is full of wonderful animals, plants and minerals which grow for them, like trees or plants. Their people escorted me, walking before me and playing musical instruments (*ālāt*) which they have just like we do, although theirs are bigger and more wonderful.⁹³

All the nourishments which we have mentioned, said Adam, preserve the body and keep alive those who eat them, although their bodies will be more deficient, their rational faculty inferior and their

⁹¹ The word pair *ḍarra—nafā'a* is, of course, Qur'ānic in itself, but again we might see some earlier religious overtones here: the tyrant king tries to turn the tables by claiming that Adam is to be blamed, not him, for giving them the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge to eat. In the Qur'ānic context, though, the pair of words reminds one of polemics against pagan gods, thus forming an echo of the earlier hint at the allusion to the origin of pagan worship (they started to prostrate themselves before Adam).

One has to remember that, whatever the textual history of the original, the Arabic version of the Nabatean Agriculture stems from Ibn Waḥshiyya, which means that there may well be Qur'ānic overtones in the story which have been added, perhaps unconsciously, by Ibn Waḥshiyya when translating his original and using language which had already a strong in-built Qur'ānic lexicon. In order to write about religions in Arabic, one has to use a vocabulary that sounds Qur'ānic.

⁹² Again, we might see here an anti-Jahvist polemic: the king who scolded his people for eating from the tree is the one to be driven to the steppe and thus is evicted from the paradisaical country. We see Adam as a culture hero, and the tyrant king taking the place of the god of *Genesis*, similar to the demiurge.

⁹³ The voluntary journey of Adam from this paradisaical country back to his own people again recalls Gnostic themes. The messenger of the East travels to the West together with his gifts which bring a blessing to those in the West. Naturally, this is not an exact parallel with the redeeming knowledge brought by the Redeemer of the Gnostics, but the text can be made to fit the Gnostic system—or the Suhrawardian Wisdom of the East, the philosophy of illumination (*ḥikmat al-ishrāq*), for that matter. Whether it is necessary to read it so, is another thing, and I do not want to force any conclusions.

discernment confused (*mukhtalit*). They are not able to reason (*lā fikra lahu*), or if they do reason, their reasoning is defective (*mukhtall*). They only think like animals, by differentiation (*biʾt-tafrīqa*).

Wheat bread is the superior (*fāḍil*) diet and he who eats it is superior to all others.⁹⁴

Text 53 (NA, pp. 646–648)

Now, the peoples of the desert, Arabs and others like Ethiopians (*al-ḥabasha*) and different kinds of blacks (*as-sūdān*), grind hides and (date) stones and eat them. Some of them cook vicious (*radīʿa*) animals, like adders and other snakes, bellies (i.e., intestines) of animals which are usually thrown away, blood kept in intestines and things like that and then eat them.⁹⁵

We do not practise this and no one in the clime of Bābil has ever done so, as far as I know, and I have not heard about it in the stories of old (*akhbār al-māḍīn*). Yet if it is necessary because of a severe famine, then let people do as the Arabs and the blacks do because it may keep them alive. These (recipes) are of the sort about which we are speaking.⁹⁶

We have also heard that when a famine has been severe, some nations have even eaten dogs, cats and rats, and some have eaten

⁹⁴ The text continues with a list, given on p. 453, of other grains, in order of their superiority, featuring barley and spelt in second place, rice in third place, durra in fourth and common millet (*jāwars*) and small millet or sorghum (*dukhn*) in fifth. The sixth place is taken by twelve different plants, “equal in nutritive value but different in nature”. The same list is repeated in NA, pp. 1467–1468.

For spelt, the text reads here ḤLBʾ with a variant KLBʾ. This is not to be emended into *ḥulba* “fenugreek,” even though fenugreek is praised in the *ḥadīth* of Khālid ibn Maʿdān (see Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān* III: 279, s.v. ḤLB). *Ḥulba* appears later in the list. *Kulbā*, *Triticum spelta*, or spelt, is discussed in NA, pp. 424–425, here written KLTʾ but the usual writing for this word in the *Nabatean Agriculture* is KLBʾ—Fahd, in selecting the readings for his edition, has been too mechanical and has kept the variants of his main manuscripts even when they are blatantly inferior. Here *kulbā* is identified as *shāʿir rūmī*, Byzantine barley, and its similarity with wheat is discussed in NA, p. 473. The variation *kulbā*—ḤLBʾ (probably to be read *julbā*) is also to be found in NA, p. 515, on the last line, and it is to be explained on the basis of the Aramaic *gubā* (for which, see Löw 1881: 105 and 422; Brockelmann 1928, s.v.) and the two writings probably reflect an attempt to write [g].

Neither KLTʾ nor *kulbā* is to be found in the WKAS. *Kulbā* is found in Dozy, s.v., but taken from Ibn al-ʿAwwām, *Filāḥa* II: 46, itself quoting the *Nabatean Agriculture*.

⁹⁵ Cf. NA, pp. 1452–1453.

⁹⁶ I.e., food for extreme conditions.

one another.⁹⁷ This may happen in destitution and in an exceedingly severe drought. (. . .)

When it comes to what the peoples of the desert and some of the inhabitants of Yemen, Arabs or blacks, do, by my life, (know) that, in general, flesh is more nutritious and more suitable to the bodies of animals than are plants, even though all people have got accustomed to eating edible grains and because of this habit and custom vegetable food has become more nutritious to our bodies than flesh because, thanks to a power and a special property inherent in it, it is almost as nutritious or even more nutritious than the flesh of most animals. This is because we have preferred the grain over the flesh of edible (*maḥmūda*) animals: habit, custom and continuous eating have caused grain, together with the suitability⁹⁸ that is inherent in it, to be more nutritious than flesh.

Otherwise the flesh of animals is usually used for nourishment, like mutton, different kinds of birds, small cattle, donkeys, horses, gazelles and different kinds of wild game and other animals, which people are accustomed to eat: all these would be more nutritious and produce more blood than any grains, fruits or plants. Also the flesh of camels is nutritious and suitable and fitting, and much blood is produced by it, yet it is extremely heating for bodies so that if one eats it continuously, this will cause serious fever.

On the other hand, all kinds of fish are bad and harmful for the brain and stomach. It produces sticky blood. It is slow to absorb and, because of its coldness, it cannot be digested in the veins. The best kinds of fish are the most delicate and the worst kinds are the largest and coarsest.

The flesh of dogs and other beasts is drier and less nutritious and the blood produced by it is bad because of dryness. The best kind of flesh and the most suitable and nutritious one is pork. The blood produced by it is the most healthy and laudable one. If one eats it continuously, it will keep one's body healthy and it will purify one's blood and keep one's body in balanced humidity (*ruṭūba*). Despite this, Anūḥā disliked the eating of pork and so did Adam and Yanbūshād. He (i.e., Anūḥā) said many things about his dislike and

⁹⁷ Incidentally, the author elsewhere (NA, p. 1388) says, comparing it with dates, that human flesh is the sweetest (*aḥlā*) kind of flesh. He was obviously at least partly led to this conclusion by his tendency to equate human beings with date palms.

⁹⁸ The translation is based on the emendation *mulā'ama* (for *malāma*).

his prohibition (against eating it), based on its effect on souls through its special properties, because the pig is similar to human beings and eating its flesh would be like eating human flesh. Yet it is not good to repeat everything according to how he explained it because of the fear of those you know (*khawfan mimman ta'lamūn*).⁹⁹

Among different kinds of flesh, there is none better and more nutritious than pork, nor further removed from decay and corruption. If our book were not concerned with caring about plants, (we would speak much longer about this) but (now) there is no room for the mention of different kinds of flesh in this (book). The mention of nutritious foods merely led our discussion to that, and we followed the lead for a while in this small excursion (*lum'a*) of ours.

Text 54 (NA, pp. 1451–1453)

If for one year people ate nothing but that which is little harmful and easy to digest,¹⁰⁰ their bodies would emaciate and their flesh would vanish and their fat melt away and they would be all skin and bones. All their power would be gone, and most of them could not move or work in any of the hard and exhausting professions. There would be no farmers or sailors, no weavers or builders or carpenters. None of these could do their hard and tiring work. We could not even find anyone to pick dates for us, throwing them down from above or anyone to pick any other fruits, or descend into wells to dig them. The world would become corrupt and ruined and its order confused.

This would be utter ignorance and exceeding stupidity. As I see it, blaming dates and avoiding them would be like the destruction of the world and its perishing: everything would be suspended, there would be no government, no one would sire children because if people only ate those things which do not give solid nourishment, they would become weak, their powers would decrease, they would die and their sperm would dry in its vessels so that they could not get any off-

⁹⁹ The reference to precaution is now and then repeated, but it would be rash to identify those whom the author is afraid of (the magicians? Christians? Muslims?).

¹⁰⁰ After listing all the good, tasty and nutritious foodstuffs which, under certain circumstances, could be detrimental, the text ends with some absolutely harmless, yet at the same time very un nourishing foodstuffs.

spring or do anything at all. They would become lazy, their condition would be bad and weakness would take over their bodies. Only a stupid and ignorant person, immersed in his ignorance, unable to look at the results of things, would think in this way.¹⁰¹ Such a person does not know, nor does he even realize that he does not know.

If we forbid all these good foodstuffs and avoid them just because they might be harmful in some way, we could not find anything in their stead and we would perish. What proves our opinion and proves wrong the opinion of those who would avoid these good foodstuffs because of their (negligible) harm, is that we know peoples who live on dates to be of sound body and brave heart, strong in their power and good in their discernment, so that you cannot cheat them in your relations with them except in some special way. This can be seen quite plainly, and anyone with sense and sound reason cannot doubt it.

We also know people who continuously eat fish. Often they do not even have any other victuals than fish, and they eat it in various ways: both fresh and salted, recently caught and preserved and in other ways which they use to vary its taste. Eating it is good for them, so that they even feed all their beasts with it and their animals eat it and grow fat: they nourish themselves with it and remain well.

We also know peoples (*narā umaman*) who eat colocynth bread (*khubz al-ḥanzal*) and the flesh of snakes and adders and drink milk with it, yet they are healthy and in good condition, like the peoples which we have mentioned. We may see these people to be of sound reason and quite perspicacious. All this because of their habit and habitude. They have grown up on these things and their nature has become accustomed to them. Their bodies can use these foods for nourishment when the bodily heat changes them (to make them suitable).

(. . .) This has taught us that there is nothing in the world that would be purely beneficial or purely detrimental. Even some lethal poisons may be beneficial under certain circumstances. Thus, it is right to say that nothing is beneficial under all possible circumstances and in all possible ways, nor detrimental. When something is beneficial in many ways, it may be called beneficial and when its harm is greater than its benefit, it may be called harmful.

¹⁰¹ I.e., that all those foodstuffs which might be harmful under certain circumstances should be avoided.

Text 55 (NA, pp. 1002–1004)¹⁰²

A wind similar to this (disastrous west wind) befell people during the reign of the king who is called the Ominous Fourfolder (*al-Murabbi^c al-Mash^ʿūm*). He was called the Fourfolder because he ruled exactly four years, not an hour more or an hour less: this was a curious coincidence.

He was called the Ominous because (during his reign) the clime of Bābil was struck by drought and scarcity (of food) and disorder (*tahāruj*) and evil and dispute and bad luck (*idbār*) in an unprecedented way. The reason for all this, or most of it, was the conjunction of the blowing of these two destructive winds.¹⁰³ It happened that they started to blow on the very first day of his reign, which started when two days of Tishrīn I remained. In that year it happened that the beginning of the month of Tishrīn according to the lunar calendar (*at-ta^ʿrīkh li-Tishrīn bi^ʿl-hilāl*) coincided with (the solar calendar), (differing) in the number of days by only two.

This man began his rule when two days remained from Tishrīn (I) and four days from the lunar month, according to the appearance of the new moon. Both months, (lunar and solar), were unlucky, and the brightness of the Moon was on the wane (*wa ^ʿl-qamar nāqīṣ fi^ʿd-daw^ʿ*). The Moon was eclipsed in the beginning of Tishrīn II and both winds blew continuously, each in its turn, during this time or, as some say, they blew continuously for more than fifty days.

This injured first the bodies of people and caused insanity, different diseases in their bodies and corruption of the blood. People fell down like locusts and their own health diverted them from caring about their fields. That year a very severe famine befell the people and fruits were few in number because of the bad effect of the wind on the trees causing diseases. This corruption of the air coincided with that of the water, too, which was corrupted because of an increase of bad and accursed water from the Tigris, and thus both air and water were corrupted.

In the autumn, a Yemenite king marched to the clime of Bābil with about 200,000 men, as the storytellers (*ruwāt*) say. He camped in al-ʿUdhayb and sent a letter to the Ominous king, telling him to

¹⁰² This passage has been discussed and translated in Fahd (1998): 327–334. Cf. also von Gutschmid (1861): 70–71.

¹⁰³ The west and north-west winds, cf. NA, pp. 1000–1001.

send him wheat and barley and (other) food for his men and fodder for his animals because they had suddenly run short of supplies. The king answered him saying that a severe famine had befallen our country. He explained the situation to the Yemenite king (in his letter) but the Yemenite king did not accept that, because he happened to be stupid.

So the Yemenite king sent another letter, urgently, to show that he had not accepted the excuse. The Ominous king sent his courtiers (*khawāṣṣ*) and his viziers to him, swearing to him that there was a famine and that the Yemenite king was asking impossible things.

Then the Arab sent him a word saying: "If what I ask is not possible, then send me the great idol of the Sun (*alladhī li'sh-Shams*). I want to prostrate myself before him and pray to him and make him offerings so that he would help me against my enemies." The king sent him back word, saying: "This cannot be! You know that he will never leave his place; that is not permissible. You know that as well as we do and you also know that it is made of gold and decorated with jewels, which are more valuable than the tax income (*khavāj*) of all inhabited climes! How dare you demand me to send it to you? Even if I wanted to do that, people would prevent me and I do not have the strength to counter them because they are my helpers and aids against those who are hostile towards me. If the hearts of all of them were against me, I would remain without helpers. If you really want to offer to this great idol and noble god, come to his temple and do what you want to!"

The Yemenite was furious, fuming with rage, and he wanted to kill the emissaries of the king. Finally, however, he released them and sent his men all over the country and fields (*sawādāt*) and villages (to inspect). They returned to inform him about what they had seen of the destruction and famine. Then his fury somewhat abated and he quickly moved onward, leaving the place which he considered ill-omened.

This was because some priests (*kuhhān*)¹⁰⁴ who accompanied him advised him not to stay anymore there and not to eat the food of this clime and not to take anything from there. So he ran away as

¹⁰⁴ Fahd (1998): 329, takes this word, *kuhhān*, in its Arabic sense, as soothsayers. In most passages of the *Nabatean Agriculture*, *kāhin* does, indeed, have this meaning (cf. 4.2) but here, and in some other passages, it seems rather to be used in its Aramaic sense, "priest."

if escaping, without turning towards anything until he had crossed the Tigris and settled in al-Qūsān, some seventy parasangs from the Tigris and the clime of Bābil. After that he continued his march to the East.

He returned in the middle of the fourth year of the reign of King Fourfolder but did not alight in the clime of Bābil because his priests had forbidden him to do so, saying: “You remained unimpaired by his ill omen the first time, so do not alight there now that you return. We have seen that it has remained unhealthy ever since.” He accepted their advice and evaded it and King Fourfolder escaped his evil.¹⁰⁵

They say that the Yemenite king had six priests with him, five men and one woman, and they also say that the woman was more skilled than the men and that it was she who forbade him and it was she whom he obeyed in going away.

After that, this king of Bābil was named the Ominous until the end of time—if there is an end to time. I mean until the end of our time (*dahr*) and the end of the days of our rule;¹⁰⁶ yet everything must come to an end and a termination. When he died (*zāla*) and his days were gone, he was succeeded by his nephew (*ibn ‘amm*), who was called the Blessed (*al-Mubārak*). During his reign things improved again.

Text 56 (NA, pp. 1010–1011)

In his improvised poem, which he spontaneously composed (*qaṣīdatahu llatī qālahā irtijālan bilā rawiyya*) for his son Kankar, Māsā as-Sūrānī mentioned this wind. (By the poem) he intended to teach him how to live by agriculture. He said: If you know the reason and cause for the unrest of the small birds (*‘aṣāfir*) during the day and the unrest of the sand grouse (*qaṭā*) during the night then you can discern this very wind from its likes. And if you know your own nature (*ṭabī‘a*) with true knowledge (*ḥaqqā ma‘rifatihā*) then you know the reason for the agitation of the sand grouse during the night and the

¹⁰⁵ The story roughly resembles the story of Abū Karib As‘ad and his attack on Yathrib (see Ibn Hishām, *Sīra* I: 33–41 = Guillaume 1955: 6–12), yet the holy cities and their temples were, of course, a topos in the Near East and one finds equally fitting parallels from pagan, Jewish and Christian lore. The difference is, of course, that the Yemenite king avoids the region because of its ill-omened state, not its sanctity.

¹⁰⁶ “Our” obviously refers to the Nabateans: the writer is not royal.

small birds during the day. And by knowing that, you know the reason for the harmfulness of this pure west wind for plants and animals which are in the countries close to the West.

If you know the reason for the enmity of the owl (*būm*) towards the crow (*ghurāb*) then you know the reason why this wind does not harm the plants and animals which are in the countries which are closer to the East than to the West. This is because in the countries close to the East a wind often blows which is contrary to the pure West wind. Each of these two winds is the enemy of the other, just like the lion is the enemy of the bull, the cat the enemy of the rat and the owl the enemy of the crow.¹⁰⁷ Between these (two winds) there is a natural (*tabīʿiyya*) enmity which cannot abate or calm.¹⁰⁸

Stronger than any of the enmities which we have mentioned is the enmity of water towards fire. Thus also is the case of these two winds. In places far away from the West, the west wind can hardly have an effect at all, but in places which are close to the West, its power is intensive.

It is our way that we should tell the reason for that and I have now told it to you, namely the influences of the acts (*āthār afʿāl*) of things which have contrary natures (*tabāʿiʿ*). But I have told you that this pure West wind is for various reasons extremely bad concerning its quality (*kayfiyya*), (and because of this) it may dominate the contrary winds just like one of two enemies may be careless about the other and the other may seize the opportunity and conquer his enemy and dominate and kill him.

After having said this Māsā proceeded to mention the effects (of this wind) on various countries beginning with the West and proceeding in right order to the line which divides the globe of the earth (*kurat al-arḍ*) in two and which may be drawn from the North to the South and which begins from the Northern zone (*al-quṭr ash-shimālī*) and extends to the Southern zone. He also mentioned that the power (*sultān*) of this wind is severe and injurious until this line but on the other side, closer to the East, its harm, though it still is harmful, is in any case less.

Thus, the reason for the degree of its harmfulness on the other side of this line is its proximity to, or remoteness from, the West. Thus,

¹⁰⁷ For other enmities between animals, see NA, p. 750.

¹⁰⁸ This seems to mean that as the effects of these two contrary winds annul each other, nothing will be caused by their blowing simultaneously.

it only rarely happens that this wind reaches countries quite close to the East and then it hardly affects their fields and other areas.

Qūthāmā says: There is much obscurity to be studied and discussed in what Māsā as-Sūrānī said to his son about these regions and this wind, and their proximity to or farness from the East and West, but we will let that be because we do not want to invalidate an ancient man who has long since died and we do not want to argue against him now. I have said that there is much obscurity to be discussed and that should be enough.

Text 57 (NA, pp. 1196–1198)

The women of fieldworkers (*akara*) and farmers (*fallāḥūn*) in the clime of Bābil tell among themselves that in their growing places¹⁰⁹ the nabk (*nabq*) trees speak with each other during the night and ask news of each other. In past and bygone times, a man wanted to cut down a nabk tree. He had four of them on his estate (*dayʿa*), and he said to his workers (*akara*): “Tomorrow, you, so-and-so, must go with so-and-so and so-and-so, and together cut down this tree.”

On the following night it happened that one of these three men whom he had commissioned to cut down the tree could not fall asleep and spent the night close to that nabk tree—they say that this was one of the nights when the moon rises after some two hours of the night have passed. When the moon(light) spread over the whole estate, the nabk and other trees, the worker heard how the nabk tree beside the one they were going to cut down said to the one destined to be cut: “Sister, I am worried and sad because of what I heard today the owner of the estate say and I wonder at his ignorance. Did you hear what I heard? Ever since I heard that he is preparing to have you cut down I have been worried and sad.”

The other answered: “Yes, I heard that, too, and I am even more worried and sad because of that. But what can I do? The only thing with which I can console myself for being cut is that I know that a whole year will not pass from my being cut down until he will die himself. But what does his death avail me, since he has already killed me?” The other pitied her and answered: “As I told you, I am amazed at his ignorance. Has he not heard that if someone cuts down a nabk tree his own life will be cut only a few days later!”

¹⁰⁹ I prefer the variant *fi manābitihinna*.

The other replied: “By my life, an owner of an estate like him should know this and should not be ignorant about it. But since he is ignorant, his ignorance will harm him and bring him something that will not make him happy. But concerning myself, if he cuts me down but my roots remain in the earth, I will be away from you ten years and then I will return to my place, but when he dies, he will never return to this world. But I will return to it.” The other answered her: “Know that we, I and so-and-so and so-and-so,”—she referred to the other two trees—“will lament you and weep for you until we see you returning to us.”

(The man who overheard this) said: Then I heard the remaining three trees sweetly weeping and wailing and lamenting (*ta'dād*), not in the way we humans do, but as if I heard it from behind a veil. This made me even more sleepless, so that I could not sleep for the rest of the night, until daybreak. Then I slumbered a while until I was woken up by sunlight. The other two men came to me with the tools to cut the tree. I told them what I had heard that night. They were astonished and we went together to see the owner of the estate and told him the story.

He answered: “I want to spend the next night where you spent your night, to hear something similar to what you heard. We have been told that the nabk trees do pay each other visits, from the mountains and the steppes (*barārī*) to the countryside (*hādīra*) and the gardens, and vice versa, but I have not believed this. If I hear tonight something like you heard last night, this (story about the visits of the trees) will be joined to what you have told, and the one will prove the other true.”

They say that the owner of the estate spent the night at the same place and the others—I mean the three workers—spent their night with him. When it was about the same time of the night, the same nabk tree which had started the conversation the night before, broke into words and said compassionately to her neighbour: “Today I have been made enormously happy by the fact that your cutting down has been delayed. I hope this man has changed his mind.” The other answered: “If he does refrain from it, he will be lucky and prosper.” After this the trees stopped talking.

The next morning, the man stood in front of the tree they had been planning to cut down and his workers were around him. He ordered them to sprinkle the boughs and the leaves of the nabk with water and to unearth its roots and to cover them again with fresh soil and to water its roots, which they did.

Text 58 (NA, pp. 1254–1256)

The Kasdānians have many stories (*aqāṣyās*) about this tree (*aspalathus*, [*ra*] *bākashānā*).¹¹⁰ For example, they claim that in ancient times one of the Kasdānian kings became angry with a wife of his who had committed a great sin against him. She was dear to him, yet he called one of his trusted servants, left her to him and said: “Go and kill her, but do not slaughter her with a knife or cut her head with a sword.”

The servant took her and went to his house and hid her there. Then he sought for and found a lady of the same age who had died. He took her body and promised her family to return it. Then he took the body to the king and said: “If the king would like to look at that unhappy one, (he may now do so). I suffocated her until she died. Here she is with me. If the king allows me to order her to be brought in, I will do so.” The king allowed him and he let the body be carried in. The king looked from afar and saw a young dead woman. He did not take a good look at her and did not have any suspicions that the body would not be hers. So he told the servant: “Go and bury her.” The servant gave the body back to her family and gave them a thousand dirhams.

Days went by and the king started to repent deeply, he felt uneasy at her memory, and became lovesick. He could not sleep and spent sleepless nights, one after another. He sought refuge in the temple of Jupiter, praying to its idol and supplicating in front of him, making him offerings. In front of the idol musicians played their pipes (*maʿāzif*), mandolins, drums and hautboys as an offering to that idol, seeking his intercession with Jupiter.

At night he saw in a dream how the idol of Jupiter said to him: “Go to the *aspalathus* and perfume yourself with some of its wood, and perfume also your house and your room. Then take a branch of it, wrap it in some of its leaves, as many as you can, and put this below your pillows. When you sleep, take heed of what you see in your dream.”

¹¹⁰ *Rabākashānā* is identified in the text as *dār-shīshāʿān* in Persian, *aṣālātāshar* in Greek, and *fīshadnardīn* in the language of the Jarāmiqa. The Greek *aṣālātāshar* seems to be a corruption of *aspalathos*, camel’s thorn (see Liddell-Scott, s.v.), *fīshadnardīn* is obviously Syriac *qīṣā-d-nardīn*, and one might try to see in *rabākashānā* a corruption of Greek *diaksulon* (**ḏiyākshulnā*). Cf. also Löw (1881), no. 149, and, especially, no. 290.

The king did all that had been said to him. In his dream he saw how the aspalathus which was in his house—in one of his court-yards he had a garden where there was one of these trees—spoke to him, saying: “Your wife, so-and-so, lives in this world. Call so-and-so and order him firmly to bring her to you. He will bring her because he did not carry out your order and kill her.”

The king woke up rejoicing and happy and called the servant to him. The servant came with balms and shrouds. The king said to him: “Woe to you! You have taken part in shedding my blood by not letting me know that you did not kill her!” The servant answered: “Your majesty, I spared her only because I knew that you loved her. I have sinned but I did so only to find favour with you. Now the king has called me. Perhaps he is saying this only to test and to try me, so here I am with my shroud and balm. Let him do what he wants to me. If he really is satisfied with me having saved her, disobeying his order, I have already answered him, saying that¹¹¹ I did it only to find favour with him.”

The king answered: “You have indeed found favour with me and I thank you for sparing her because I was grieved and sad for having to be parted from her and losing her. Bring her now to me.” The servant went to bring her. The king knelt down, overcome with joy and gratefulness and ordered the servant to be given a great reward, but he said: “Your majesty, I will not leave this place until the king ascertains for himself the fact that I cannot do anything with women.”

The king answered him: “You are much too esteemed by us!” But the servant said: “I will not leave my place until the king lets what I have said be examined. Or else he may kill me if he wants to.” The king ordered wise doctors to examine him and they told the king that the man was definitely impotent. The king doubled his reward and sent him away. Afterwards, the king continued prostrating himself before the aspalathus for the rest of his days. He ruled for 75 years, and during this time the story spread among the Kasdānians and they started calling this tree “the curer of love.” They composed poems about it and were fond of cultivating it, so that it was common until the time of King Kāthūr, who was a wise man. He forbade people to cultivate this tree as they had previously

¹¹¹ Reading *amī* instead of *ilā*.

done or to compose poems on it.¹¹² He renamed it “the one hated by the king” and the people did as the king ordered and did not mention it anymore and stopped praising it continuously. Kāthūr did this as a matter of policy because people had spoken too much of it and had exaggerated in praising it. Kāthūr did not want them to add to that so that they would finally start worshipping it.

Text 59 (NA, pp. 1272–1273)

Şardāyā the Kan‘ānite has called the cypress (*abhal*) by a name which in their language means “the tree of the ghouls” (*shajarat al-ghūl*) because if someone either breathes its smell or looks attentively at it for a while, it will kill (*taghtāl*) him. This we are only assuming to be the reason.

Others have explained the words of Şardāyā differently, saying that the meaning of his words is that there is an animal which lives in barren lands and deserts which is called a ghoule (*al-ghūl*) and that it is accustomed to visiting this tree and loves its smell. Half of this animal is in the form of a human being, of a woman with two large breasts, to be exact, and this is the upper half. The lower half is in the form of a donkey, two legs which end, instead of feet, in hooves, like the hooves of donkeys, mules and such animals.

All the animals of the steppe hide from this animal, even lions and wolves and other strong animals with claws. None of them will stand against it. The utmost pleasure and lust of this animal is to get a human being in its power. It plays a long time with him but then rips open his belly with its two claws, which it has on each of its hands,¹¹³ two large strong claws with which to rip open the belly. Then it eats the intestines, but some say that before ripping open the belly, it eats the penis and the testicles of its victim, and only afterwards rips open the belly and eats the intestines, leaving the rest and dragging the corpse into one of its dens. The more rotten the corpse starts smelling, the more pleasurable and tasty it is to the ghoule, which keeps returning to its prey until it has eaten it all.

This ghoule seeks refuge in underground dens and dry, barren deserts

¹¹² I take this to be the intended meaning. The text reads *istash‘arū*.

¹¹³ For *fī* BDNH, read *fī yadayhi*.

where people do not travel, and there may also be some on sea islands, where they take refuge and whence they come, standing in the water up to their chins, catching big and small fish and eating them like humans do. They eat all the beasts of the land and the sea. If they cannot find anything else, they eat each other.

All that they eat is digested in their bowels, so that out of them comes only something as fine as urine because of the heat of their bodies. If one of them comes out into the sun and the rays of the sun fall upon its body, it will become sick. This is why they hide in their subterranean dens for the whole day. When the sun sets and night falls, they spread out searching for food for the whole night and until one quarter of an hour of the day has passed when they hide themselves as usual. (. . .)

This is the explanation of the common people about this being the tree of the ghouls, and this is the opinion of most people. Some people claim that this ghouls smells human beings and other animals from the distance of three parasangs and that human beings are more to its taste than any other animal it eats and that it eats all beasts of the land and all other animals as well. All animals shy away from it when they sense it, either on the sea islands where they swim in the sea to escape it or (on the steppe) at the two extremities of the day. The animals burrow themselves into deep and narrow dens where the ghouls cannot reach them. They do not come out until they are sure they cannot sense the smell of the ghouls anymore and then they know that the ghouls has left. The animals can smell the ghouls and its rotten smell before the ghouls reaches them. This is why they can run away from ghouls.

Text 60 (NA, pp. 926–927)

Thus, the followers of Seth and the people of his religion (*milla*) who follow his usage (*al-mustannīna bi-sunnatihi*) believe (*yara'una*) that in this lower world there are living beings (*ḥayawān*) which they call jinnis (*jinn*). Some of them call these jinnis satans (*shayāṭīn*) and they also believe that in deserts and desolate regions there are living beings which they call ghouls (*ghūl*). The higher part of their body has the form of a woman but the lower part that of a donkey: they have two hooves like those of a donkey on the end of their legs. If someone who is less than twenty years of age sees one of them he will

become paralyzed and will not be able to move until it takes him and cuts his throat and sucks his blood.

They also believe that there lives on one of the sea islands a living being which they call ‘*anqā*’.¹¹⁴ Its upper part has the form of a bird, with its head and beak and two wings, and the lower part is that of a human being with its thighs and legs and feet. This living being flies in one day from East to West and back again. They also believe that in the sea live snakes which speak the Indian language (*al-hindiyya*)¹¹⁵ and that in the land of China there grow speaking trees which by night may be heard telling stories (*aḥādīth*) to each other.

They believe in many such absurd and false things which intelligent people soon find absurd and impossible. They may tell among their tales stories which are full of lies and absurdities and they also tell¹¹⁶ lies and great falsehoods and repulsive invented stories about the prophets which one can hardly bear to hear.

Text 61 (NA, pp. 1323–1324)

We know that people who deny the possibility of generating a man do so only because they have not seen a man born in other ways than the normal reproduction between male and female. Yet in various climes and countries on earth human beings and other animals have been generated in a way other than procreation or reproduction. Some of these we have already mentioned. Now it remains for us to give examples concerning human beings, similar to those we have mentioned about scorpions, snakes, rats and dung beetles.

In some places of the sea called the sea of India, close to Ceylon (*Sarandīb*), there appears in the spring a hand, coming up from water, which people can see and look at. A reliable informant, who has seen this many times over the years, has told us that this hand appears every year in different colours, which shows that it is not a single hand belonging to a single individual appearing every year, but that they belong to various individuals.

¹¹⁴ For the fabulous bird ‘*anqā*’, see Pellat (1960). For a Greek version of the Phoenix, see Herodotus 2.73.

¹¹⁵ Obviously the identity of the language in question is vague: perhaps it would be best to translate it as “Hindian.”

¹¹⁶ Read *yarwūna* for YRWN.

There is much to say and many proofs for human beings being generated each year in that sea. In the sea there are also fish in the form of men and women although more frequently one sees those in the form of a woman. Fishermen tell that among the fish they catch with their nets, there are some (fish-)women whose face, brows and eyes are of human form, some of them of the size (*qadd*) of a human being, some more subtle. The males of this fish take the form of bearded men although some lack a beard because of their youth, as is also the case with (human) boys and youths. The bearded man among them is called “the doctor of the sea” (*ṭabīb al-baḥr*). This is well known. They are alive, and can feel and move.

In the East, between two water sources (*ʿaynayn*) in China, there is a river running on one side of a mountain—this is one of the two sources—and on the other side, there is the other, which is like a lake with stagnant water. In the spring, one can hear from this lake cries of human beings and a noise made by them and a shrieking which penetrates that noise, just like the shrieking of human beings, after which one may hear tumult and clamour like that of human beings, so that the one who hears this is certain that this noise comes from human beings.

In that mountain there are stones mixed with red clay, which are very delicate and bright red (*khalūqī*).¹¹⁷ One lump of that red soil after another rolls down from that mountain and when one splits those clay lumps open or they crack open by themselves, there appear from the halves two human forms with all the limbs of a human being, with no difference or lack.

In the middle of the spring, there come from this mountain people with flesh and bones and hair and hands and feet and eyes, in a complete form except that they do not move or speak or have senses, as if they were dead, falling down from the slopes of the mountain. More often they fall down on that side of the mountain where there is the lake, the water of which is stagnant. At the end of spring there appear from this lake human heads and arms and thighs, as if they had been chopped and thrown there. People see these and sometimes one of them may pick one such (part) up and when he feels it, it is just like a human limb, with bones and flesh and sinews and veins, quite like those which we see in human bodies except that these limbs are like the limbs of the dead.

¹¹⁷ See Dozy, s.v.

Some people of these countries take the soil of this mountain and let it putrefy in a moist and covered place, and a human being is generated from it, of a complete form just like other people. It is even alive and moving though after starting to move it does not remain alive for more than a day or so, after which it is extinguished in a blink of an eye.

This proves that people may be generated either by the usual procreation or in another way, through the act of Nature in some parts of the earth suitable for this.

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- DDD, see Bibliography, *sub* Toorn et al. (1995).
GAL, GALS, see Bibliography, *sub* Brockelmann (1936–1944).
GAS, see Bibliography, *sub* Sezgin (1967–1984).
NA = the *Nabatean Agriculture*, see Arabic sources, *sub* Ibn Waḥshīyya, *Filāḥa*.
Q = the *Qurʾān*.
WKAS, see Bibliography, *sub* *Wörterbuch der klassischen arabischen Sprache*.

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