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A table of contents for *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jtvi-01.php

JOURNAL OF
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CAPTAIN F. W. H. PETRIE, F.G.S., &c.

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1899.

ORDINARY MEETING.*

REV. F. A. WALKER, D.D., F.L.S., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the last Meeting were read and confirmed, and the following Elections took place :—

ASSOCIATES :—W. Mackworth, Esq., London ; E. Tydeman, Esq., M.A., India.

CORRESPONDING MEMBER :—Professor Weidemann, Bonn, Germany.

The following paper was then read by the Rev. F. A. Walker, D.D., the author being in the United States :—

THE STAR WORSHIPPERS OF MESOPOTAMIA. By the Rev. SAMUEL M. ZWEMER, F.R.G.S.

IN the towns along the lower Euphrates and Tigris, especially at Amara, Sook es Shiokh, Busrah and Mohanmerah, there dwell an interesting people variously known as Sabæans, Nasoreans, or St. John Christians. They call themselves Mandæe (مَنْدَائِي), Mandæans, and although only numbering four or five thousand they have always been and remain entirely distinct from the Jews, Moslems and Christians, among whom they have dwelt for centuries. Their origin is yet lost in obscurity, although it is traced, by those few scholars who have studied the subject, through the maze of their religion to ancient Babylonia and Chaldea. It seems to me that in this remnant of a race and religion we have still an example of the oldest form of idolatry, *i.e.*, star worship, and that many of their mysterious customs would throw a side-light upon the cult of ancient Babylonia. It is partly to stimulate such study that the following paper

* 4th April, 1898.

was prepared. Mandæism is not only of deep interest as "the only existing religion compounded of Christian, heathen and Jewish elements" [Kessler] but it affords another proof of the early spread of religious ideas in the East, and the Babylonian origin of much that is supposed to be Alexandrian Gnosticism in a semi-Christian, semi-pagan garb.

In the English Bible the name *Sabeans* is perplexing, and although used of three different tribes or peoples, none of these are any way related to the present Mandæans unless those mentioned in Job. Sabeans is also the term used in the Koran, and there it undoubtedly applies to them and affords proof that at the time when Islam arose their numbers and settlements were far from unimportant. The Koran recognizes them as distinct from idolaters, and places them with Jews and Christians as people of the book (اهل الكتاب): Surah ii. 59. "Surely those who believe and those who judaize and Christians and Sabeans, whoever believeth in God and the last day and doth that which is right they shall have their reward with their Lord, no fear on them, neither shall they grieve"; and so again Surah 22, 17. "The true believers and those who Judaize and the Sabeans (الصَّابِئِينَ), and the Christians and the Magians and the idolaters. God shall judge between them." Compare also v, 73, etc. From these passages it is evident that the so-called Sabeans could not have been, as some allege, a minor Christian sect or identical with the Hemero-baptists.

According to Gesenius, Sabeans should be *Tsabians* from *tsaboth* (צְבֹאוֹת) the host of heaven, *i.e.*, the supposed objects of their worship. Nöldeke and others say it comes from a root *subba* سَبَّ to wash, baptise, and refers to the manner of their worship. And Gibbon is perhaps correct when, on the authority of Pocock, Hettinger, and D'Herbelot, he states the origin of their other name thus: "A slight infusion of the gospel had transformed the last remnant of the Chaldean polytheists into the Christians of St. John at Bussora." Of the names which they themselves adopt—Mandæe and Nāsorāye we will speak later. Suffice it here to say that, although giving special honour to John the Baptist, *they can in no sense be called Christians.*

Isolated by a creed, cult and language of their own, they love their isolation and do not intermarry with strangers nor accept a proselyte to their faith. Nearly all of them follow

one of three trades. They raise the finest dairy produce of Mesopotamia; they build a peculiar kind of light canoe called *Mashhoof*, and for the rest, all of them are silver-smiths. No traveller should visit their villages without carrying away specimens of their beautiful inlaid-work, black metal on silver and gold. A peaceful people they are, industrious, though mostly poor and seldom affording trouble to their Turkish rulers. Both men and women have a remarkably fine physique; tall, of dark complexion, good features, and with long black beards, some of the men are typical patriarchs, even as we imagine Abraham appeared when he left their present country for Haran. On ordinary days their dress does not distinguish them from Moslems or Jews, but on feast days they wear only white. Their women go about unveiled and have a more masculine cast of features than Moslem women; they are also rather taller.

The two great things however that distinguish the Sabeans are their language and their religion. Both are remarkable. The former because of its long preservation among a dying people, and the latter as the most remarkable example of religious syncretism.

Naturally the bazaar-talk of all the river-country is Arabic; all Sabeans speak it and a goodly proportion read and write it; but beside this they have a household language of their own, the language of their sacred books, which is called Mandäitic. So closely related to Syriac that it might almost be called a dialect, it yet has an alphabet and grammar of its own, and their writing and speech is not fully intelligible to the Syriac-speaking Christians from Mosul. Wright says that their alphabet characters most resemble the Nabathean and their language that of the Babylonian Talmud. The only grammars of the language are the *Sketch of a Sabean Grammar* by Captain Prideaux and the accurate and elaborate *Mandäische Grammatik* of the indefatigable scholar Nöldeke. One great drawback of the latter however is that the *Hebrew* character is used throughout and not the Mandäitic. Accompanying is a table of the alphabet with its Hebrew and Arabic equivalents; also a few brief sentences and the days of the week to show the construction of the language and its close similarity to the Arabic. One peculiarity is the naming of the letters with the *ā* vowel and not as in other Semitic languages by special names: alif, bay, jeem, dal, etc. The oldest manuscripts of the Mandäitic date from the sixteenth century, and are in European

THE MANDAÏTIC ALPHABET.

(Adapted and corrected from Nöldeke.)

NAME.	CHARACTER.	VALUE.	HEBREW EQUIVALENT.	ARABIC EQUIVALENT.
āh	◦ 𐤀 𐤁	ā	א	آ
bā	𐤂 𐤃	b	ב	ب
gā	𐤄 𐤅	g	ג	ج
dā	𐤆 𐤇	d	ד	د
hā	𐤈 𐤉	h	ה	ه
wā	𐤊 𐤋	w	ו	و
zā	𐤌 𐤍	z	ז	ز
hā	𐤎 𐤏	hh	ח	ح
ṭā	𐤐 𐤑 𐤒	t	ט	ط
yā	𐤓 𐤔	y (i)	י	ي
kā	𐤕 𐤖	k	כ	ك
lā	𐤗 𐤘	l	ל	ل
mā	𐤙 𐤚	m	מ	م
nā	𐤛 𐤜	n	נ	ن
ṣa	𐤝 𐤞	ṣ	ס	س
'ā	𐤟 𐤠	ā (guttural)	ע	ع
pā	𐤡 𐤢	p, f	פ	ف
tsā	𐤣 𐤤 𐤥	ts	צ	س
qā	𐤦 𐤧	q	ק	ق
rā	𐤨 𐤩	r	ר	ر
shā	𐤪 𐤫	sh	ש	ش
tā	𐤬 𐤭	t	ת	ت
eddoā	𐤮 𐤯	sign of relative pronoun.	⌋ (??)	⌋

Specimens of MANDAÏTIC CURSIVE-SCRIPT with transliteration and translation.

ⲁⲥⲱⲟⲩ ⲁⲃⲓⲗⲁⲕ	=	Āssooḏa hāvilak	=	peace be to you.
ⲕⲉⲧⲕⲩⲙ ⲥⲏⲱⲉⲉ	=	kethkūm shawee	=	how much is it ?
ⲁⲛⲁ ⲗⲓⲃⲃⲁ ⲕⲁⲃⲉⲗⲁⲕ	=	ana libba kabeelak	=	I love you much.
ⲕⲁⲥⲃⲁⲩ ⲱⲉ ⲃⲁⲧⲱⲩⲁⲥ	=	kasbah we dahwah	=	silver and gold.
ⲏⲟⲑⲥⲏⲁⲃⲁ ⲣⲁⲃⲃⲁ	=	hofshaba rabba	=	great day (Sunday).
ⲁⲧⲣⲁⲛ ⲏⲟⲑⲥⲏⲁⲃⲁ	=	atran hofshaba	=	Monday.
" ⲁⲕⲗⲁⲧⲏⲁ	=	aklatha	"	= Tuesday.
" ⲁⲣⲃⲁ	=	arba	"	= Wednesday.
" ⲏⲁⲙⲥⲏⲁ	=	hamsha	"	= Thursday.
" ⲥⲏⲱⲧⲏⲁ	=	shitta	"	= Friday.
" ⲥⲏⲱⲩⲁⲥ	=	shuvah	"	= Saturday.

Libraries (Paris and Oxford). But the golden period of their literature, that is, the time when their religious books received their final and present form was, according to Nöldeke, from 650–900 A.D. At present only the few among them can read or write their language, although all can speak it, and from religious motives they refuse to teach those outside of their faith even the first lesson, except secretly.

And so it was that although meeting Sabeans for the past four years and being their guest on frequent journeys up and down the rivers, I found no satisfactory answer to the question what their real faith and cult were. The popular story that they turn to the North Star when they pray and “baptise” every Sunday was all that Moslems or Christians could tell. Books of travel on this region gave fragmentary, conflicting and often grossly erroneous statements. According to some accounts they were idolaters, others classed them with Christians. An anonymous article which appeared in the London *Standard*, and which was entitled, “A prayer meeting of the Star Worshippers,” curiously gave me the key to open the lock of their silence. Whoever wrote it must have been perfectly acquainted with their religious ceremonies or be one of themselves, for when I translated it to a company of Sabeans at Amara they were dumbfounded! Knowing that I knew *something* made it easy for them to tell me more. But let me first quote a portion of this account by way of introduction to what follows.

“Toward midnight the Star Worshippers, men and women, come slowly down to the river side. Each enters the tiny wattled hut [built of palm-branches] by the southern wall, disrobes and bathes in the circular reservoir. . . . On emerging from the water each robes him or herself in the *rasta*, that is the ceremonial garment, all white, crosses to the open space in front of the door of the tabernacle, and seats himself upon the ground, saluting those present with the customary, *Sood Havilakh*, ‘blessing be upon thee,’ and receiving the usual reply, *Assootah de hai havilakh*, ‘blessing of the Living One be upon thee.’ The sacred book, *Sidra Rabba*, is laid upon the altar folded back where the liturgy of the living is divided from the ritual of the dead. The high priest takes one of the two live pigeons handed to him, extends his hands to the polar star, upon which he fixes his eyes, and lets the bird fly, calling aloud: ‘*Bshmo d’hai rabba mshabba zivo kadmayah Elaha Edmen Nafhi Eprah.*’ ‘In

the name of the Living One, blessed be primitive light, the ancient light, Divinity self-created.' [Then] . . . the reading being in progress, they prepare the *Peto Elayat*, or high mystery, as they term their communion. One kindles a charcoal-fire in the earthenware stove by the side of the altar and the other grinds small some of the barley brought by the deacon. He then expresses some oil from the sesame seed, and mixing the barley-meal and oil, prepares a mass of dough which he kneads and separates into small cakes the size of a two-shilling piece. These are quickly thrust into the oven and baked. The fourth deacon now takes the pigeon left in the cage, cuts its throat quickly with a very sharp knife, taking care that no blood is lost. The little cakes are then brought to him by his colleagues, and, still holding the dying pigeon he strains its neck over them in such a way that four small drops fall on each to form a cross. Amid the continued reading of the liturgy the cakes are carried around to the worshippers by the priests, who themselves pop them directly into the mouths of the members with the words, 'Marked be thou with the mark of the Living One.' The four deacons inside the *Mishkena* [مِسْكِنَة] walk round to the rear of the altar and dig a little hole in which the body of the dead pigeon is then buried."

What a mosaic of ceremonies and what a mixed cult in this one river-bank service! Every minute particular of it is correctly described, I am told, by the Sabeans of Amara, and yet they themselves do not furnish the clue to the maze of their cult.

Here one sees Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, as it were, engrafted on one old Chaldean trunk. Gnosticism, star worship, baptisms, love feast, sacrifice, ornithomancy, and what not else in one confusion. The pigeon sacrifice closely corresponds with that of the Mosaic law concerning the cleansing of a leper and his belongings, Leviticus xiv, 4-7, 49-53, and is perhaps borrowed from that source. But how anti-Judaistic is the partaking of blood and the star worship! (cf. Job xxxi, 26-28.) The cross of blood seems a Christian element, as does also the communion of bread, but this again is in discord with all that precedes from a New Testament standpoint. Yet a complete system of dogma lies behind all this curious cult, and one can never understand the latter until he knows the former. *Sabeanism is*

a book religion; and it has such a mass of sacred literature that few have ever had the patience to examine even a part of it. In the collection the *Sidra Rabba*, or Great Book, holds the first place. The copy I examined (but could not read) one day, contains over five hundred large quarto pages of text divided into two parts, a "right" (Ar. *بِئَمِين*) and a "left hand" (Ar. *شَمَال*) testament; because of the manner in which they are bound together, *i.e.*, each begins at one of the two ends of the book, so to speak, and when one reads the "right," the "left" testament is upside-down. The other name for the Great Book is *Ginza*, Treasure (Arabic *كَنْز*). It is from this treasure-house that we chiefly gather the elements of their cosmogony and mythology.*

First of all things was Pera Rabba *ܡܢܗܘܢܐ* the great Abyss. With him "Shining ether" and the Spirit of Glory (*Mana Rabba*) form a primal triad, similar to the Gnostic and ancient Accadian triads. Kessler even goes so far as to say *that it is the same*. From *Mana Rabba* who is the king of light, emanates *Yardana Rabba*, the great Jordan. (This is an element of Gnosticism) *Mana Rabba* called into being the first of the æons, Primal Life, or *Hayye kadema*. (Arabic *الحيوت القديم*). This is really the chief deity of the Sabeans, and all their prayers begin by invoking him. From him again proceed secondary emanations, *Yushamim* (*i.e.*, Jah of heaven) and *Manda Hayye*, messenger of life. This latter is the mediator of their system, and from him all those that accept his mediation are called, *Mandæe*. *Yushamim* was punished for attempting to raise himself above Primal Light, and now rules the world of inferior light. *Manda* still "rests in the bosom of Primal light" (*cf.*

* The first printed and translated edition of the *Sidra Rabba* was by Math. Norberg (Copenhagen 1815-16), but it is said to be so defective that it is quite useless critically; Petermann reproduced the Paris MSS. in two volumes at Leipsic 1867. Besides the *Sidra Rabba* there are: *Sidra d'Yaheya* or Book of St. John, also called *Drasche d'Malek* (discourse of the King); The *Divan*; The *Sidra Neshmata*, or book of souls; and last, but not least, the books of the zodiac called *Asfar Malwashee*. Except for the small portion of the *Sidra Rabba* found in Brandt's recently published *Mandäische Schriften* (1895) all of the above still await critical study and editing.

John i, 18), and had a series of incarnations beginning with Abel (Hibil) and ending with John the Baptist! Besides all these there is yet a third life called 'Ateeka (Arabic عتيق ancient?) who created the bodies of Adam and Eve, but could not give them spirit or make them stand upright.— To pause here for a moment. If the Babylonian trinity or triad has its counterpart in the Mandæen *Pera*, *Ayar* and *Mana Rabba*, then *Manda Hayye* is clearly nothing but the old Babylonian Marduk (Merodach), first-born, mediator and redeemer. *Hibil*, the first incarnation of Manda, also has a contest with darkness in the underworld even as Marduk with the dragon Tiamat.

The Sabean underworld has its score of rulers, among others these rank first: *Zartay*, *Zartanay*, *Hag*, *Mag*, *Gaf*, *Gafan*, *Anatan* and *Kin*, with hells and vestibules in plenteous confusion. *Hibil* descends here, and from the fourth vestibule he carries away the female devil *Ruha* (روح) the daughter of *Kin*. This *Ruha*, Kessler affirms, is really an anti-Christian parody of the Holy Spirit, but from conversation with the Sabeans I cannot believe this to be true. By her own son *Ur* (نور) *Ruha* becomes the mother of all the *planets* and signs of the zodiac. These are the source and controllers of all evil in the world *and must therefore be propitiated*. But the sky and fixed stars are pure and clear, the abode of Light. The central sun is the Polar Star, with jewelled crown standing before the door of Abathūr, or "father of the splendours" (from עתר = to be rich). These "splendours," æons, or primary manifestations of deity, are said to number three hundred and sixty (which is only a Semitic way of expressing many), with names borrowed from the Parsee angelology (Zoroastrianism). The Mandæans consider all the Old Testament saints except Abel and Seth false prophets (Gnosticism).* True religion was professed by the ancient Egyptians, who, they say, were their ancestors. Another false prophet was *Yishu Mashiha* (Jesus Christ), who was in fact an incarnation of the planet Mercury. John the Baptist, *Yahya*, appeared forty-two years before Christ and was really an incarnation

* See the history of Gnostic teaching, especially that of the Ophites and Sethians. All the evil characters in the Old Testament, with Cain at their head, were set forth as spiritual heroes. Judas Iscariot was represented as alone knowing the truth. Only I find no large account of the serpent in the Sabean system; this may be otherwise accounted for.

of *Manda*, as was Hibil. He baptised at Jordan, and by mistake (!) also administered the rite to Jesus.

About 200 A.D. they say there came into the world sixty thousand saints from Pharaoh's host and took the place of the Mandæans who had been extirpated. Is not this a possible allusion to the spread of the Gnostic heresy and its coalescence with the then Sabean community? They say their high priest then had his residence at Damascus. That is, their centre of religion was right between Alexandria and Antioch, the two schools of Gnosticism.

Mohammed, in their system, was the last false prophet, but he was divinely kept from harming them, and they flourished to such an extent that at the time of the Abbassides they had four hundred places of worship in Babylonia.

The Mandæan priesthood has three grades; *tarmida* (تلمیذ) disciple; *shkanda* or deacons; and the *Ganzivra* or high priest; literally the keeper of the *Ginza* or Great Book. The late *ganzivra* was Sheikh Yahya, a man of parts and well-versed in their literature, who long lived at Sook es Shiookh. Their present head or high priest is called Sheikh Sahn and is now imprisoned at Busrah on charge of fomenting the late rebellion of the Arab tribes near Koorna at the junction of the Tigris and Euphrates.

The Sabeans observe six great feasts besides their weekly Sabbath (Sunday). One of the feasts celebrates the victory of Abel in the world of darkness, another the drowning of Pharaoh's army, but the chief feast is one of baptism. On it, observed in the summer, and called *Pantsha*, all Sabeans are baptised by *sprinkling* three times a day for five days; this is compulsory. The Sunday baptisms of immersion in running water are, however, largely voluntary and therefore meritorious: these latter correspond to the Moslem laws of purifications and take place after touching a dead body, the birth of a child, marriage ceremony, etc.

The moral code of the Sabeans is that of the Old Testament in nearly every particular.

Polygamy is allowed and even recommended in the *Sidra Rabba*, but not often indulged in. They do not circumcise, and have no holy places or churches except those built for a feast night at the river side, and removed the next morning. The story that they go on pilgrimage to Haran and visit the Pyramids as the tomb of Seth (see Sale's *Koran*, "Introduction") is, I believe, a myth. They are friendly to Christians of all sects, and love to give the impression that because

they honour the Baptist they are more closely related to us than are the Jews and Moslems. Of course they deny that they do not accept Jesus as a true Prophet, as they do all those other articles of their belief, which they deem wisest or safest to keep concealed.

It remains to add a note regarding the supposed origin of their name *Nasoreans*. According to Petermann they themselves give this title only to those of their number who are distinguished for character or knowledge. It doubtless is connected with the Arabic نصارى and comes perchance like it from Ναζωραῖοι, the early half-Christian sect of Syria.

So that all our investigations end as we began, by finding that the Sabeans "worship that which they know not," and profess a creed whose origin is hidden from them and whose elements, gathered from the four corners of the earth, are as diverse as they are incongruous. And who is able after all to classify these elements or among so much heterogeneous *débris* dig down to the original foundations of the structure? If we could, would we not, as in so many other cases, come back to Babylonia and the monuments?

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Votes of thanks having been accorded to the author and to the reader of the paper:—

Dr. T. CHAPLIN said:—It would be interesting to know if there is any connection between these Nazarenes and the Nusairiyeh or Anseiriyeh, a well-known tribe living in the northern part of the Lebanon range, who have almost the same name as the people on the banks of the Euphrates and Tigris, and who seem to have in their religion some Pagan, some Christian, and some Mohammedan elements. These people are said to be half Christian and half Moslem. They seem to have been originally *pagans*, and when Christianity first spread in that part of the world, they became impressed, to a certain extent, with its doctrines, but they never fully embraced it. Living in these remote mountains they retained pagan ideas and adopted Christian ceremonies, and on Mohammedanism spreading accepted certain Mohammedan practices, and so continued without any definite religious belief. It is interesting to note that authorities regard their language as being of Syriac origin, a natural supposition considering that many of their words have undoubtedly a Syrian source. They come from well-known Chaldaic and Syrian roots, *e.g.*, their chief priest or leader, said to be the guardian or preserver of their sacred books, is called the "Genizeh" or "treasure," a well-known Hebrew word. I may mention that oriental Jews have a great aversion to destroying any of their worn-out writings, and to avoid the sin of so doing deposit such in a chamber called a "Genizeh" or treasure house. I also notice the word *Sidra Rabba* which is Syriac: then the names of the days of the week are almost exactly the same as in Arabic, and, to some extent, in Hebrew. I would also refer to the origin of the word Nasorean; this word as given in the Arabic ("Nazârah") is exactly the word used in Arabic countries for Christians. It means Nazarenes—people who come from Nazareth or who are followers of Jesus the "Nazarene." I hope the author may be persuaded to continue his researches amongst the interesting people he has described, searching for accurate information respecting their antecedents.

A discussion of a conversational character ensued, during which the value of the evidence collected by Dr. Zwemer, and the unique opportunities afforded him of observing and studying these particular star worshippers and their cult during the many years he had resided among them, was specially remarked upon.

The discussion was then adjourned.

REMARKS ON THE FOREGOING PAPER.

Colonel C. R. CONDER, R.E., D.C.L., writes :—

The Star Worshippers of Mesopotamia.—Mr. Zwemer's paper on this curious sect is very interesting, and there can be little doubt that the star worship points to early Semitic paganism, though the details suggest that it may have come indirectly through the Masdean system of Persia. The Mendaïtes or Sabians resemble several other strange sects of Syria and Persia, such as the Druzes, for instance, but their system does not recognize Islam as fully as do the Druzes, Ismailiyeh and Anseiriyeh (whose name is also connected with that of the Nazarenes by some); and it is fairly clear that it is descended from the Syrian Gnosticism of the second century A.D., to which the Druzes also owe much. The Mendaïte language and alphabet are Aramean, and somewhat distantly related to the speech and script of the Nestorians. Naturally the Nabathean alphabet is related. The Nabathean "Book of Agriculture," now, I believe, only known through the Arabic translation of Kuthami, contains a curious myth of the death of Tammuz; and the Sabians are said to have preserved the rite of mourning for Tammuz down to the tenth century A.D., though ignorant of its meaning (see Baring Gould's *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages*, pp. 278-283, and Maimonides *More Nebushim*, iii, 29). The beliefs of the Sabians or Mendaïtes have been compared with the teaching of the Gnostic Carpocrates, containing a strong Mazdean (*i.e.*, Zoroastrian) element. They were also akin in their teaching to the Elkesaites of the third century—an Essene Gnostic sect accepting Elxai as a prophet, as did also the Ebionites of Bashan (Hippol ix, 13; Epiphanius xix, 2-5). Elxai accepted the Jewish system of sacrifice, and regarded Christ as a reincarnation of Adam. The Elkesaïte Eucharist consisted of bread, salt and water. The spread of Gnosticism to the mouth of the Euphrates, and into Arabia, appears to have been due to the followers of Beryllus, to the Ebionites, and to the Nazarenes of Bashan in the second century A.D. (Epiphanius, *Hæres*, i, 40; iii, 75-79).

Having carefully studied Capt. Prideaux's *Sketch of Sabean Grammar*, I venture to remark that it has nothing to do with the Sabians. It is the language of the Sabean Arabs of Yemen, about 200 B.C., written in quite a different character—usually called

Himyaritic. As regards the "Two Testaments" (eighth page of paper), they would probably represent two degrees of initiation, one upsetting the other—as among Druzes. I should suppose that *Yardana Rabba* means "Great Emanation" not "Great Jordan." The idea that Jehovah was an inferior deity (Demiurge) recalls the Gnosticism of Syria. The incarnation of Abel in St. John Baptist recalls Druze teaching. I have never been able to find any evidence of *triads* among the Babylonians, though some modern scholars have read them into the texts. Marduk was not, properly speaking, a Mediator, and certainly not a Redeemer in the Christian sense of the term. The Dualism of the Sabians is of Mazdean origin, and their allegories recall those of Basilides and Valentinus. Probably, like the Druzes, they claim relationship with Christianity when speaking to Christians, and would equally claim affinity to Islam, and to Judaism, if speaking to Moslems or to Jews.

It would be very interesting to get a full translation of their books, and to know whether—like Druzes, etc.—they have degrees of initiation, as the adoration of the pole star may be only the exoteric teaching for the vulgar, concealing an esoteric teaching of initiates, as in other cases. The *Hayye Kadema* of Sabians ("Ancient of Days") seems, as among Gnostics, to have been connected with the *Zervan Akarene* or "boundless time" of Mazdeans, and the *Ain* or "nothingness" of the Cabbalists. All these curious systems among Christians, Jews, and Moslems, appear to be based on the principle that knowledge was for the few, and that the creed taught to the ignorant should conceal a scepticism only revealed to more advanced disciples, while it should also amalgamate the dogmas of all sects—Jewish, Christian, Moslem, etc.—so as to attract many, and strengthen the leaders, who really cared nothing for any form of religion. This is known to have been the case among Gnostics, Druzes, and others, and might in the end prove true of the Sabians, if the "Two Testaments" of the *Sidra Rabba* could be translated. But to penetrate beyond the exoteric teaching might be as difficult as it was among the Druzes until 1860, when their books were obtained by De Sacy.